Research article

Potential of podcasting and blogging in cultivating Iranian advanced EFL learners’ reading comprehension

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the potential of podcasting and blogging in cultivating advanced EFL learners’ reading comprehension (RC) gains, as well as their perceptions of their effectiveness in improving their RC gains. For this purpose, three intact female classes (n = 20) were selected using a convenience sampling method from Pooyesh Language Center in Borujerd City, Iran. Then, they were randomly assigned into three groups, including the podcasting group, blogging group, and control group. Afterward, they went through a pre-test, an intervention (12 one-hour sessions held twice a week), and a post-test. For disclosing their perceptions, 10 students of the experimental groups were requested to fill out a reflective written statement about the potential of podcasting and blogging in improving their RC gains. A one-way ANOVA and a thematic coding analysis were used to analyze the collected data. Findings revealed that the podcasting and blogging groups outweighed the control group at the end of the treatments. Additionally, the results evidenced that there was no statistically significant difference between the podcasting and blogging groups. The qualitative findings disclosed that the participants had positive perceptions toward using podcasting and blogging in developing RC. Finally, the implications for L2 teachers and L2 learners are discussed.

1. Introduction

One of the old concerns in education has been providing a condition in which students can learn without the time and place limitations. As Burston (2013) notes, there has been a non-stop attempt to design and invent devices to make this objective realized. It seems that the emergence and development of new social media technologies and the Internet have paved the way for such a valued objective (Burston, 2013). The potential of the new technologies in the second language (L2) has been enormous. One of these potentials is making the second language (L2) learners autonomous (Behforouz et al., 2021; Lee, 2011). In online L2 education, as Little (1996) stresses, L2 learners become autonomous as they engage actively in the learning, problem-solving, and decision-making processes. In this virtual environment, L2 teachers’ roles have changed as supporters and facilitators (Gunasinghe et al., 2018; Khan et al., 2011; Sifatu et al., 2020; Teh, 2021).

According to Grabe and Stoller (2005), the successful learning of language skills demands the engagement of L2 learners in the learning processes. In this regard, reading comprehension (henceforth RC) as one of the pillars in L2 learning requires an intentional, dynamic, and collaborative process. As Jeon and Yamashita (2014) underline, active involvement in the reading process enables L2 learners to achieve their purposes. As such, they can meet the first purpose, which is searching for important information and overall comprehension. The second purpose is reading to learn from passages. In general, as Jeon and Yamashita (2014) note, RC is a complex skill due to the need for using different unconscious and conscious strategies to find the correct meaning of the passages. One of the promising inventions that may facilitate L2 learning, in general, and L2 RC in particular, is the new social media technologies. Generally, among different teaching methods which have been built on the new technology devices to facilitate L2 learning are Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) and Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) (Chen et al., 2021; Dwijendra et al., 2021; Lee, 2005; Murphy, 2006). Podcasting and blogging as mobile technologies are broadly considered significant ways to improve learners’ learning capacity (Rosell-Aguilar, 2013; Saad et al., 2014; Seneviratne et al., 2019). The increasing interest in MALL and high-speed Internet have made podcasts and blogs more popular (Bahari 2021; Bian, 2021; Hawke,
2010). As Levy (2009) notes, podcasting is, “an audio/video file that can be broadcast via the Internet with sound files that are ‘pushed’ to subscribers, often at regular intervals” (p. 775). Also, Sloan (2005) stresses that podcasting and blogging are creative strategies to transfer information through digital content to mobile phones. Moreover, Gromik (2008) opines that podcasts and blogs offer L2 learners authentic resources that may not be accessible in non-English speaking contexts. Given the significance of RC skills for L2 learners, understanding the influence of the new innovative methods and technologies such as podcasting and blogging is worth exploring. Despite this, it is surprising that the potential of podcasting and blogging in cultivating EFL learners’ RC remains unexplored in Iran. Thus, to fill this gap, the researchers aim to disclose the potential of podcasting and blogging in improving EFL advanced learners’ RC gains and their perceptions of the effectiveness of podcasting and blogging in improving their RC gains. The researchers hope that the findings can support the effectiveness of podcasting and blogging for advanced EFL learners such that they can use them for cultivating their RC. Additionally, the hope is that the results of the study can further L2 teachers’ understanding of the effects of podcasting and blogging as new teaching strategies in L2 education.

2. Literature review

2.1. Reading comprehension

Reading is a fundamental skill that is viewed as the keystone for the progress of other language skills. The reason for this, as Krashen et al. (2006) state, is that to learn a language, L2 learners should receive sufficient comprehensible input through listening and reading. RC is a complicated cognitive skill that is critical to achieve information and construct meaning. However, the critical point is that, as Alfassi (2004) stresses, L2 learners should know how to construct meaning through interactive interactions with the passages. Grabe (2009) defines RC as an active procedure in which L2 readers need to get involved in information resources and use different cognitive strategies to extract meanings. That is, as Sweet and Snow (2003) note, the essence of reading is comprehension and involves extracting and making meaning from the passages. In fact, comprehension includes an interactive intellectual process requiring linguistic information, world information, and topic awareness. Additionally, Jeon and Yamashita (2014) assume that RC is a dynamic process requiring various issues such as text schema, background knowledge, lexical and grammatical consciousness that work together concurrently. Thus, it is evident that L2 readers should use reading strategies and prior knowledge to extract the correct meaning (Gilakjani and Ahmadi, 2011; Sheorey and Mokhtari, 2001; Shidong et al., 2021; Yogantari and Dwijendra, 2020).

In general, there are three types of comprehension, namely literal, interpretive, and critical (Koda, 2005; Hudson, 2007; Jeon and Yamashita, 2014). The literal comprehension is used to decode evident data from the passage. The interpretive comprehension includes using the data to analyze, synthesize, and organize the data that enable L2 readers to achieve more information by mapping the passage. Furthermore, critical comprehension deals with expectations and hypotheses inferred by L2 readers. It is beyond the explicit meaning, and the meanings are made about the accuracy of the passages (AI Ayub Ahmed et al., 2021; Ismail et al., 2015; Singh, 2021). To achieve comprehension, it is essential to explore the effectiveness of new teaching technologies, such as podcasting and blogging.

Three models to explain RC has been suggested: bottom-up, top-down, and interactive models (Brown and Lee, 2015; Kumar et al., 2019). Based on the bottom-up model, L2 readers put letters together to extract the meaning of the words. In the top-down model, L2 readers make anticipations about the text with the help of their prior knowledge and then move forward through the text to confirm those anticipations. They use their knowledge of semantics and syntax not to be dependent on the text. The interactive model views L2 readers not as passive receivers of data but as active data seekers who get the meanings by the interface of stored knowledge in the memory and the information embedded within the text (Kahraman and Subasi, 2022; Rasli and Torii, 2021; Sabri Ali, 2021; Schmitt, 2013). It is interesting to note that L2 readers benefit from all sources of knowledge, such as syntax, semantics, language patterns, vocabulary, and context, to interpret the text accurately.

2.2. Technology in education: podcasting and blogging

According to Gündüz (2005), modern technologies in L2 education trace back to the Audio-Linguinal Method. In that period, computers were used to develop L2 learners’ listening and speaking skills by urging them to drill and practice the linguistics structures. Thus, it is not bizarre to see that with the development of modern technologies such as podcasting and blogging, L2 teaching and learning be affected. In this regard, Kaczmarek and Landowska (2006) note that podcasts with different pictures and background music can help L2 learners create their own recordings and improve their knowledge. More interestingly, users can benefit from modern apps to incorporate visual aids and a midi file to generate more improved podcasts. Lazzari (2009) states that podcasting can be a valuable and worthy strategy to distribute different digital content via the Internet. Mayer (2001) used podcasting because of the availability of images and audio files in the multimedia environment. According to Apple Inc. (2011), one of the notable benefits of podcasting is its user-friendliness. It means that users can use various apps to download and upload any free and open podcasts in public and, accordingly, receive the necessary help to improve their comprehension (Ahmadi et al., 2021; Bilgic and Ataman, 2020; Mousavi-Davoudi et al., 2021; Susilawati et al., 2021).

Another learning device to enhance L2 learners’ language skills is blogging. As Blood (2000) and Kajder and Bull (2004) note, a blog is considered an online journal that is published for informational purposes on the World Wide Web (WWW). Moreover, Conejo (2006) states that a blog can be updated regularly and the entries are arranged chronologically as a website. Blogs might share a definite theme and content collected and posted by an author or more who can organize links to other web pages that may host videos and podcasts (Conejo, 2006; FreiERMuth and Zarrinabadi, 2020). Mutum and Wang (2010) claim that blogs can be classified into two groups: First, web-based journals that are easily linked or cross-linked in online communities. And second, according to Goodwin-Jones (2003), second is as posts or discrete entries created by small groups, multi authors, or even single individuals. The most important advantage of blogs is that they are not time-consuming, and the posts are published instantly (Campbell, 2003, 2005; FreiERMuth and Zarrinabadi, 2020). In this regard, Dieu (2004) remarks that blogs are available to all interested people without the limitations of time and place. Many L2 learners can benefit from blogs because of diverse images, songs, podcasts, and videos that can help them improve their learning and comprehension (Alosaimi, 2021; Carney, 2009; Grewiling, 2004).

2.3. Effects of podcasting and blogging on L2 learning

A range of studies has investigated the effects of podcasting and blogging on EFL learners’ learning in the literature. In a study, Hsu and Wang (2010) examined the effects of digital texts with blogging on college students’ RC. They found that using digital texts with blogging significantly improved the participants’ RC. Further, Yakut and Aydin (2017) scrutinized the effects of blogs on EFL learners’ RC. Their results revealed that blogs significantly improved the experimental group’s RC. Faramarzi et al. (2019) scrutinized whether video podcasting tasks significantly improve Iranian intermediate EFL learners’ listening comprehension. Their results documented that the video podcasting tasks significantly promoted the participants’ listening comprehension. Furthermore, Taheri and Abdollahi-Guilani (2019) investigated if three pre-task activities, including podcast, short video programs, and topic preparation, affect the listening comprehension of EFL learners in Iran.
Their results evidenced that the participants receiving instructions based on podcast and video programs performed better on the post-test listening comprehension. Finally, Saeedakhtar et al. (2021) explored if using collaborative listening to podcasts affects the vocabulary learning and listening comprehension of Iranian intermediate EFL learners. Additionally, they tried to disclose the participants’ perceptions of the efficacy of the treatment through a questionnaire. Their findings revealed that the experimental group gained more listening comprehension and vocabulary learning at the end of instruction. Further, they found that the EFL learners enjoyed positive perceptions toward the potential of the treatment in boosting their listening comprehension and vocabulary learning.

As may be inferred from the reviewed studies, they suffered from two noticeable limitations. First, the potential of podcasting and blogging on advanced EFL learners’ RC gains are under-researched in the Iranian context. Second, the EFL learners’ perceptions of the efficacy of podcasting and blogging have remained unexplored. To bridge these gaps, this study aimed to explore the potential of podcasting and blogging in cultivating the advanced EFL learners’ RC gains along with their perceptions of the effectiveness of podcasting and blogging in improving their RC gains in the Iranian context. For these purposes, the following research questions were posed:

Q1: Do podcasting and blogging lead to cultivating the reading comprehension of Iranian advanced EFL learners?
Q2: What are Iranian advanced EFL learners’ perceptions of the potential of podcasting and blogging in cultivating their reading comprehension?

3. Methodology

3.1. Design

The quasi-experimental design was used in the present study. As the design of the study aimed to establish a cause-and-effect relationship among the independent and dependent variables but did not use random assignment of the participants, it was considered a quasi-experimental design. In exact words, three intact classes were selected and randomly assigned into the podcasting group, blogging group, and the control group and went through a pre-test, interventions, and post-test procedures (Riazi, 2016). Besides, some of the participants completed a reflective written statement to disclose the participants’ perceptions of the effectiveness of the podcasting and the blogging in cultivating their RC gains. Overall, the present study purported to further our understanding of the potential of podcasting and blogging in improving Iranian EFL advanced learners’ RC gains along with their perceptions of the effectiveness of podcasting and blogging in improving their RC gains in the Iranian context.

3.2. Participants

The present study was run at Pooyesh Language Center in Borujerd City, Iran. The researchers selected three intact classes using a convenience sampling method. The intact classes mean that the entire classes, as already-formed groups, were assigned to specified treatment groups. Each class included 20 male and female students. They aged from 17 to 42 years old and were advanced in language proficiency. The classes were randomly assigned as podcasting group, blogging group, and control group. The participants were learning English for four to 5 h per week in an EFL context. In the institute, all the language skills were taught, and classes were run based on communicative approaches by professional teachers. It is worth noting that the researchers recruited two teachers who held M.A. in Applied Linguistics to run the experimental groups’ treatments. The first researcher met the institute manager at her office to meet the ethical requirements and explained the study objectives. The institute manager allowed the researcher to run the study in the institute setting and directed the researcher to the classes. With the teachers’ permission, the researcher was led to the classes and detailed the study’s objectives for the learners. Then, she asked if they were willing to participate in the study. The participants willing to participate in the study signed written consent (in Persian). The researchers ensured the institute manager, teachers, learners that their performance during the study would be kept confidential and they could withdraw the study as they wished. In the end, the researchers shared the final findings with the institute manager, teachers, and learners. Of particular note is that the ethical committee at the department of Teaching English of Ayatollah Borujerdi University monitored the study to make sure that the ethical considerations were met.

3.3. Instruments

The researchers used some instruments to conduct this study. The first instrument included a homogeneity test. The researchers used the Quick Oxford Placement Test (QOPT) to make the learners in the classes homogenized. Oxford University Press and Cambridge ESOL (2005) designed and developed QOPT to measure L2 learners’ language proficiency with different levels and ages. The researchers used the paper-pencil version of QOPT in the present study because of its administrative ease. QOPT contains 60 multiple-choice questions that should be answered in 60 min. It comprises reading, grammar, and vocabulary and is classified into two main parts. The first part includes 40 questions for students at or below advanced level, and the second part entails the next 20 questions for participants who score more than 35 out of 40 in the first part. It is scored out of 40 or 60 using a simple overlay. Of particular note is that to examine the reliability and validity of QOPT, the researchers piloted it on 20 students featuring the main participants. The calculated reliability was 0.95, which was acceptable for the present research. The validity was assessed through an experts’ judgment strategy. For this purpose, the researchers invited two well-experienced EFL teachers to assess the face and content validity of QOPT. They confirmed that the validity of the instrument is acceptable.

The second set of instruments was designed by three professional EFL teachers. They consisted of two parallel teacher-made RC tests. The panel designed and developed the tests according to the content of the students’ Coursebooks. They comprised four passages followed with different questions measuring the learners’ comprehension in terms of literal, interpretive, and critical comprehension. To determine the reliability and validity of the tests, they were piloted on a sample of 20 students. Based on their responses, the calculated reliability for the pre-test was 0.85 and for the post-test was 0.84, in order. The researchers used an expert’s judgment strategy to examine the validity of the tests. In doing so, the researchers gave the test to two well-experienced EFL teachers. They examined them meticulously and offered some comments. Scoring the tests was in such a way that for each error, one score was subtracted from the total 36.

The next instrument was a reflective written statement. The researchers invited five EFL learners of the podcasting group and five EFL learners of the blogging group to write about their perceptions of and experience with podcasting and blogging in their mother tongue (Persian). They were invited to write down a report in response to the following prompt:

Dear students,

You are kindly invited to write about your perceptions of and experience with the potential of English learning blogs and podcasts in developing your reading comprehension. Your report is supposed to revolve around your views on how blogs and podcasts affect your reading comprehension. A report with 300-400 words in length would be enough.

It should be underlined that the researchers recruited two professional translators to translate their reports into English.
3.4. Data collection procedures

The researchers went through some steps to conduct this study. The first step was ensuring the homogeneity of the participants in terms of their language proficiency. The students whose scores were 1 SD above and 1 SD below the mean were chosen for the main study. The second step was training the instructors. The first researcher ran two sessions with the instructors to familiarize them with the tenets of podcasting and blogging. The third step involved running the pre-test to gauge the participants’ RC prior to the treatments. The fourth step was offering the treatments. The treatments were run in 12 1-h sessions held twice a week. The instructors used podcasting and blogging systems as the primary reading source materials. In doing so, the researchers collaborated closely with the instructors to design and develop the podcasting and blogging activities. They did so in line with the literacy-and-technology integration model (Durrant and Green, 2000). Concerning the operational domains, the instructors emphasized the learners’ competence to use podcasts and blogs, use new network technology, and read multi-modally. The instructors assured that the participants could use and establish their own podcasts and blogs, compose and edit their podcasts and blogs, integrate multimedia, interact with instructors and peers through the commenting features, and hyperlinked elements into the podcasts and blog entries. The podcasts and blogs were used as the primary learning materials where the learners could read the given materials and discuss their understanding of the meanings with their teachers and instructors. The podcasting and blogging reading tasks were assigned in line with the intended curriculum, where the learners were encouraged to ally the reading strategies to achieve the correct comprehension. In exact words, the instructors implemented a four-phase procedure. In the first phase, the instructors introduced the topics of the passage, and the learners were encouraged to find the meaning of unknown words and phrases (10 min). In the second phase, the instructors presented the follow-ups comprehension questions about the passage, and the learners were grouped up to answer the comprehension questions (20 min). In the third phase, the learners were asked to recheck their answers to the questions and upload them as podcasts and blogs on the Internet such that other peers could see and use them (15 min). In the fourth phase, the instructors check the learners’ responses and share the correct answers (10 min). For the control group, the curriculum, textbook, and assignments were the same. The participants had to read the passages in the form of hard copies without submitting the answers to the comprehension questions to the instructor. However, the experimental groups had to submit their assignments in the form of a personal podcast and blog entries where they could integrate multi-media elements into their podcast and blog entries. For instance, the podcasting and blogging group had to read a passage, identify and organize the main points, and produce a summary via a podcast or blog. Afterward, they had to share it with their teachers and peers, and they could comment on it from their points of view. The fourth stage entailed administering the post-test to measure the participants’ RC at the end of the instructions. The last stage was distributing the reflective written statement, where 10 participants were invited to reflect upon their learning experiences via podcasting and blogging.

3.5. Data analysis procedures

As the present study gathered both quantitative and qualitative data, the researchers used different analysis approaches. Concerning the quantitative data, they used SPSS version 22. In addition to calculating the basic descriptive statistics, such as mean (M) and standard deviation (SD), they used a one-way ANOVA. In exact words, to determine the potential of podcasting and blogging in cultivating the EFL learners’ RC gains, a one-way ANOVA was used. It should be underscored that the researchers used the one-way ANOVA rather than an independent sample t-test because it is a more powerful statistical test for some independent groups (Altakhtaneh and Shahzad, 2020).

Regarding the qualitative data, they use a standard thematic coding analysis. It is a method used to analyze qualitative to identify common themes and patterning in a set of written and oral texts (Riazi, 2016). In line with the suggested framework of Braun and Clarke (2006), the first researcher analyzed the data. The first step was familiarization. The first researcher tried to know the data. For this purpose, she read the transcripts so much so that she could understand them. The second step was coding. She tried to code the data by highlighting sections and phrases within the transcripts. She came up with labels or codes to describe the content. The third step was generating the themes. She looked over the created codes to identify their patterns, and then she started reaching the themes. The fourth step was reviewing the themes. She tried to ensure that the extracted themes were accurate representations of the data. In doing so, she returned to the data set and compared the extracted themes against it. The fifth step was defining and naming themes.

The first researcher tried to name and defines each theme. She tried to define the extracted themes in such a way they exactly represented their contents. The last stage was writing up and reporting the qualitative findings. It should be underlined that the researchers gauged the reliability and validity of the findings. In relation to the former, they recruited two coding analysts. They coded the data independently, and their inter-rater consistency was 0.79. The researchers used a member checking strategy in which they invited 6 learners to examine whether the extracted excerpts represented their indented meanings. They all reported a high level of representativeness of the extracted excerpts.

4. Results

4.1. Quantitative results

The first research question investigated if podcasting and blogging improved Iranian advanced EFL learners’ RC gains. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics. As reported, the calculated M and SD for the podcasting group were $M = 13.35, SD = 3.77$, for the blogging group were $M = 12.20, S = 3.50$, and for the control group were $M = 11.60, SD = 3.36$, respectively.

In the next phase, the researchers examined if the data were normally distributed using a One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. As reported in Table 2, since the significance values were both above the critical value (0.05), they concluded that the data were normally distributed.

Having assured about the normality of the data, the researchers ran a one-way ANOVA to examine if a statistically significant difference existed among the groups’ means on the pre-tests (Table 3).

As seen in Table 3, there was no statistically significant difference among the groups concerning their pre-tests’ scores, $p. > 0.29 > 0.05$. After implementing the instructions, the researchers administered the post-test. Table 4 reports the descriptive statistics for the three groups. The calculated M and SD for the podcasting group were $M = 22.80, SD = 6.47$, for the blogging group were $M = 23.75, SD = 4.39$, and for the control group were $M = 14.05, SD = 3.66$, respectively.

Then, a one-way ANOVA was run to examine if a statistically significant difference existed among the groups after the instructions (Table 5).

As displayed in Table 5, there was a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups on the post-test, $p. > 0.02 < 0.05$. It may be argued that the effects of the different instructions resulted in this difference.

| Table 1. Results of descriptive statistics of the participants’ reading scores on the pre-test. |
|-----------------------|-------|-------|----------------|----------------|
| Group                 | Tests  | N     | Mean       | Std. Deviation |
| Podcasting            | Pre-test | 20    | 13.35       | 3.77           |
| Blogging              | Pre-test | 20    | 12.20       | 3.50           |
| Control               | Pre-test | 20    | 11.60       | 3.36           |
However, to determine the significant difference among the groups, a Tukey test was run. As presented in Table 6, since the calculated p-value (0.02) between the podcasting group and the control group was less than the significance of error (p < 0.05), it was concluded that there was a statistically significant difference between the two groups. Similarly, since the obtained p-value (0.02) between the blogging group and the control group was less than the significance of error (p < 0.05), it can be said that a statistically significant difference existed between the blogging group and control group.

However, to disclose whether there was a statistically significant difference between the podcasting group and blogging group, the researchers ran a Scheffe test (Table 7).

As presented in Table 7, a statistically significant difference did not exist (p > 0.83 > 0.05) between the podcasting and blogging groups regarding their RC gains. That is to say, the podcasting and blogging strategies were equally effective in improving the participants’ RC gains.

### 4.2. Qualitative results

The third research question explored the Iranian advanced EFL learners’ perceptions of the potential of podcasting and blogging in cultivating their RC. The qualitative findings, which complement the quantitative ones, documented that the participants had positive perceptions of using podcasts and blogs to foster their RC. In this regard, one of the EFL learners underlined:

"Using blogs promoted my reading comprehension. Moreover, they offered enjoyment, compatibility, and ease of use while I was trying to comprehend the passages. These advantages had the greatest influence on students’ reading comprehension."

In support of the previous statement, another EFL learner who was satisfied with using podcasts quoted:

"Well, podcasts were a great source of learning. They were easy to manage and enable me to publish forward my assignments chronologically. In actual fact, they helped me to engage in online exchanges and promoted my autonomy. In this regard, to handle the challenge of comprehending the passages was not too hard."

In congruent with the previous remarks, another EFL learner quoted:

"I really found the blogs comfortable. This was due to their multimedia features, simple web publishing, interactivity, and ability to support cooperative and autonomous learning. They enabled me to interact with other peers and cooperate with them to come up with the correct meanings of the passages at hand. Accordingly, they were really helpful to improve my reading comprehension in an effective way."

Resonating with former statements, one of the learners asserted:

"Podcasts could help me to change my studying style such that I could improve my reading comprehension. In a sense, they could change my role as a user to contributor of information. Using them was the easiest way to get engaged with the texts and comprehend their contents. Moreover, they allowed me to share my experiences with other peers to gain a comprehensive comprehension of the passages."

In consistent with the previous views, another EFL learner remarked:
“According to my experience, I should inform you that the positive effects of blogging was that they raised my motivation to keep reading. As I knew that my comprehension of the passages was assessed by other peers, I got motivated to understand it compressively. Moreover, as my peers asked for help, I did my bests to read meticulously the passages to offer them a correct answer.”

In line with the previous statements, the participants pinpointed that one notable advantage of using podcasts and blogs was their durability. In this regard, one of the participants quoted:

“One of the biggest advantages with the podcasts was that they were durable for an unlimited time. I mean that I could refer back to previous podcasts to review the materials and remove my problems. For example, when I forgot how to use skimming and scanning strategy, I easily turned back to the former podcasts and consolidate my learning.”

In agreement with the former excerpts, the participants underlined that podcasts and blogs offered this valued opportunity for the participants to reflect on their performance. The excerpt below shows this clearly:

“I believe that the effectiveness of the blog entries in improving my reading comprehension is associated with the opportunity to reflect upon my performance. I mean that after producing my blog entries, I could read them over and over to rectify and correct my problems. This assisted me to fill in my lacks and gaps over the time.”

The above-mentioned excerpts clearly showed that the participants had positive perceptions toward the potential of podcasting and blogging in cultivating their RC.

5. Discussion

As noted above, the first research question investigated if podcasting and blogging led to improving Iranian advanced EFL learners’ gains of RC. The findings evidenced that the two experimental groups significantly outperformed the control group on the post-test. Additionally, the results documented that there was no statistically significant difference between the podcasting group and the blogging group concerning the gains of RC at the end of the treatments. Based on the findings, it may be argued that the significant gains of the experimental groups may be ascribed to the effects of the given instructions. In other words, it may be argued that the participants within the experimental groups could benefit from the podcasts and blogs to achieve a comprehensive literal, interpretative, and critical comprehension of the passages. In line with the findings of the study, it may be argued that the experimental groups found the podcasts and blogs very comfortable to learn, and they could consolidate the learning strategies. As the findings demonstrated, the podcasting and the blogging group gained somehow the same RC gains. The results indicated that both podcasting and blogging treatments might have promoted the EFL learners’ speaking progress and their perceptions of podcast-making. Finally, the findings of the study lend credence to those of Faramarzi et al. (2019), revealing that the Iranian EFL learners’ listening comprehension significantly improved due to the positive effects of podcasting.

To explain the findings of the study, we can refer to the distinguishing features of podcasts and blogs. It might be argued that the podcasts and blogs could be archived and achieved after the classes, they could be set for both public and private uses, and they could be reviewed later over and over. These noticeable advantages might have made way for the EFL learners to improve their RC (Wang and Hsu, 2008). Another possible explanation for the findings may be associated with this advantage of the podcasts and blogs, which allowed the participants to generate and share their productions and understanding of the passages with their peers. This might have created a collaborative learning environment and provided the participants the opportunity to learn from each other. A further discussion for the results may be ascribed to the flexibility of the podcasts and blogs (Kaplan et al., 2007). This unique feature which is absent from the traditional classes, might have provided a richer learning setting for the students.

A further discussion for the findings may be attributed to a principle of the communicative approach, claiming that knowledge is constructed through collaboration and cooperation with other students. And this is in complete agreement with the tenets of teaching via podcasting and blogging. Thus, in line with Faramarzi et al. (2019), it may be argued that using podcasts and blogs might have provided an online venue for the EFL learners to get engaged in distance language learning. A further explanation for the findings may be that using podcasts and blogs might have promoted the EFL learners’ social interactions and provided a fruitful setting to create a sense of community among the learners. As such, they might have been motivated to spend time and energy comprehending the intended passages. Moreover, in light of the findings, it may be argued that the EFL participants might have benefited from the input provided by other students. That is, due to the negotiation of meaning between the EFL participants, they might have adjusted the input to their inter-language systems and might have changed it into the intake. Finally, align with Hsu and Wang (2010), the outperformance of the experimental groups over the control group may be related to this view that the EFL participants might have found using the podcasts and blogs more comfortable and easy to use to get engaged in the comprehension processes than traditional classes with confined interactions and limited audience.

The last line of discussion for the findings may be linked to the advantages of learning through podcasting and blogging. Because they were available for the participants anytime and anywhere, they could save their money, time, and energy to use them at their convenience. Another vital advantage of podcasting and blogging might have been personalization. That is, they might have provided this opportunity for...
the participants to match their learning styles and strategies to the given learning materials. Along with McRae (2010), it may be argued as the participants might have personalized their learning by assessing and addressing their strengths based on their specific needs and learning styles. More importantly, as Farangi et al. (2015) note, using the podcasts and blogs might have made the learning faster, easier, and more instating to the participants. These advantages might have led to creating a more fruitful learning environment for the participants.

6. Conclusion

This research purported to investigate the potential of podcasting and blogging in cultivating RC of Iranian EFL learners. Findings revealed that the podcasting and blogging groups outweighed the control group at the end of the treatments. Additionally, the results evidenced that there was no statistically significant difference between the podcasting and blogging groups. Complementary qualitative findings disclosed positive perceptions toward using podcasting and blogging in developing RC gains. According to the results of the present study, it may be concluded that the participants could improve their RC due to the positive effects of podcasting and blogging. In other words, the findings of the study offered this conclusion that podcasting and blogging might have exerted positive effects on the learners’ interactions with peers and the passages, leading to a significant comprehension.

Based on the findings of the study, some pedagogical implications are presented. First, the language institutes owners and school principals should equip their educational organizations with modern technologies such that EFL teachers and EFL learners can use them to enrich their teaching and learning. For example, they can equip their classes with enough computers and technology devices to allow EFL teachers and students to utilize podcasts and blogs. Second, materials developers should adopt reading materials with multimedia-based instruments such as podcasts and blogs. For this purpose, they need to design the materials to facilitate interactions among peers, design a system to monitor the EFL learners’ development regularly, and establish new assessment practices to measure EFL learners’ learning accurately. Third, EFL teachers should adopt new strategies like podcasting and blogging. To this end, not only should they learn about technology adaptable skills and present the intended materials through technology to their students, but they also need to make students aware of the benefits of podcasting and blogging in L2 learning. Finally, the EFL learners should improve their digital literacy to know how to use new technologies such as blogs and podcasts in L2 learning. To do so, they should embark on experiencing the new technologies to make the required digital literacy.

With respect to the limitations imposed on the study, a range of suggestions for further research is suggested. Firstly, as the present study was cross-sectional, a longitudinal study can be conducted to disclose the effects of podcasting and blogging on EFL learners’ RC over a period of time. Secondly, since the current study was confined to the language institutes, interested researchers can examine the effects of podcasting and blogging on high school students and university students’ RC. Thirdly, owing to the limited focus of this study on RC, further studies are needed to examine the potential of podcasting and blogging on other language skills and components of communicative competence. Fourthly, as the findings of the study revealed that there was no statistically significant difference between the podcasting group and the blogging group, further quantitative and qualitative studies can be conducted to uncover the reasons behind this. For example, observational data can be gathered to disclose how podcasting and blogging result in the same results. Last but not least, as the present study was limited to the reflective written statements, more studies are required to use microgentic development approaches to disclose how podcasting and blogging lead to the improvement of EFL learners’ RC. In this way, it can be assured to see the moment-to-moment development of EFL learners’ RC.

Declarations

Author contribution statement

Zeinab Azizi; Ehsan Namazianidost & Afshen Rezai: Conceived and designed the experiments; Performed the experiments; Analyzed and interpreted the data; Contributed reagents, materials, analysis tools or data; Wrote the paper.

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Data availability statement

Data will be made available on request.

Declaration of interest’s statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Additional information

No additional information is available for this paper.

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