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The Effects of Output-Based Podcasts, Corrective Feedback, and Funds of Identity on Speaking Ability and Willingness to Communicate*

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Abstract

This study examines the influence of output-based podcasts (OBPs), the mediating effect of funds of identity (FoI), and teacher corrective feedback (CF) on L2 speaking of Iranian pre-intermediate learners and their willingness to communicate (WTC). The study also surveys the attitudes of the experimental groups toward OBPs and CF, as well as their probable attitude and WTC changes over time. To these ends, 60 participants were randomly divided into two experimental groups (the OBPs + CF and theOBPs – CF group) and a control group. Podcasts were created based on themes congruent and incongruent with students' FoI. The data was collected through pretest, immediate and delayed posttests, (attitude, WTC, and FoI) questionnaires, reflective journals, as well as an interview. Results demonstrated that OBPs improved the experimental groups' speaking ability. Moreover, CF pushed learners to perform better. FoI also proved to be pivotal in triggering learners' WTC. Learners had positive attitudes toward OBPs and FoI in improving their speaking skill. Furthermore, learners' WTC changed positively over time as a result of creating podcasts. Integrating FoI into creating podcasts improved learners' performance, increased their WTC, and brought them more satisfaction. As such, OBPs based on students' FoI are suggested to serve as an alternative teaching method to traditional lecturing.

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Introduction

Developing the speaking ability has always been presented as a big challenge for second language (L2) learners due to multiple disrupting factors, namely anxiety (Melouah, 2013), low self-confidence (McCroskey, 2015), low willingness to communicate (WTC), i.e., desire to get engaged in communication (MacIntyre et al., 1998), lack of adequate practice, and fear of making mistakes. In the last two decades thanks to the proliferation of educationally adaptable and user-friendly digital tools, learners have been afforded adequate outside the classroom alternatives and opportunities to mitigate the detriments of these debilitating factors. One of these ubiquitous digital technologies that can alleviate learners' stress, increase their WTC, boost their self-confidence (Hsu et al., 2008), and increase their practice hours is output-based podcasts (OBPs), i.e., podcasts created by learners themselves.

When learners are engaged in OBPs, they overcome their shyness and anxiety by speaking in their own privacy without the pressure of the teacher or peers (Hamzaoğlu & Koçoğlu, 2016; Lee, 2019; Sze, 2006). Moreover, they are motivated to engage in several processes including making mind-maps, organizing their speech, checking the accuracy of pronunciation, grammar, and collocations, listening to their own podcasts to identify any mistake (i.e., notice the gap), and attempting to modify them (Yeh et al., 2021). Built upon Swain's (2005) output hypothesis, all of these processes go hand in hand to push learners toward the ultimate goal of language learning.

Reams of previous studies have mainly investigated the role of ready-made podcasts in fostering L2 learning, specifically improving learners' listening comprehension (Saeedakhtar et al., 2021), vocabulary learning (Bueno-Alastuey & Nemeth, 2020),speaking ability (Abdous et al., 2009), and pronunciation (Fouz-González, 2019), collectively lending support to their positive effects on learning. However, they have failed to investigate the effect of creating their own podcasts on their speaking skills. As Swain (2005) rightly argues, receiving input is necessary but not enough for L2 learners to be proficient language users. In addition to input, learners should get engaged in production so that through meaningful practices, monitoring, attention, and noticing the gap they can foster the processes involved in language learning. To fill in this gap, the present study intends to scrutinize the role of OBPs in L2 learners' speaking ability.

Relatedly, discontinuity between home and school materials and practices can stymie students from making optimal investments in the classroom discussion leading to their underperformance (Volman & Gilde, 2021). To remove such discontinuity, Esteban-Guitart and Moll (2014) introduce funds of identity (FoI), which refer to knowledge, skills, and lived experiences that are formed outside the classroom walls, proving valuable and important aspects of their identity.

When homework and assignment are on a par with learners' FoI and encourage learners to share something from their own life, e.g., writing or talking on their prior knowledge, interests, and lifestyle, students feel valued at school; as a result, they enthusiastically get engaged in learning which in turn can lead to higher degrees of achievement (Veerman et al., 2023). Put

differently, to obtain desired outcomes from L2 classrooms, teachers are recommended to incorporate FoI into classrooms. The present study intends to infuse learners' FoI into OBPs to see how the integration of learners lived experiences and dispositions with OBPs can increase their WTC and motivation to grasp more practice opportunities to prompt L2 production and development.

Although studies carried out on OBPs are in their infancy (Phillips, 2017; Yeh et al., 2021), even the conducted studies have failed to incorporate FoI into OBPs to gauge the effectiveness of FoI and OBPs in improving learners' speaking skills and their WTC. The present study intends to explore the effect of OBPs along with teacher corrective feedback (CF) and FoI on students' WTC and their overall speaking ability in light of Hughes's (2003) rating scale. Further, students' attitudes toward different components of the experiment were elicited through questionnaires, reflective journals, and interviews. Learners' private speech practices, incorporating their FoI can positively influence their WTC.

Literature Review

Podcasts

The term podcast, coined by Curry (2004), is a blend of "i[Pod]" and "broad[cast]." Briefly, podcasts are audio files created primarily by native speakers for (non-)pedagogical purposes, readily downloadable to be listened to offline. Rosell-Aguilar (2007) categorizes them into existing podcasts and teachers' or students' own podcasts. Translated into more familiar L2 terminology, they might be glossed as input-based podcasts (IBPs) (i.e., those ready-made ones that we listen to) and OBPs (i.e., those generated by students themselves for learning purposes). IBPs hold great promises for providing access to rich and authentic input as well as self-paced learning (Ashton-Hay & Brookes, 2011).

Engaged with OBPs, however, learners are hypothesized to develop more awareness as to their speaking gaps, in particular in terms of pronunciation and grammar (Phillips, 2017). In addition to developing speaking, as corroborated by Dale (2007), OBPs flourish learners' creativity and critical thinking. OBPs have recently oriented the attention of practitioners toward fostering language learning (Hall & Jones, 2021; Yeh et al., 2021). Some studies have elicited learners' attitudes toward OBPs (Lee et al., 2008; Phillips, 2017), presenting promising results.

However, only a few studies have investigated the influence of OBPs on speaking ability (Yeh et al., 2021). The present study intends to explore the role of OBPs in improving learners' speaking ability. Furthermore, as a robust pillar of pedagogy and as a kind of scaffolding (Thomson & Hall, 2008), FoI has been incorporated into the current study to see if it provokes better output indices along with creating podcasts.

Underlying Theories behind Podcasts

Constructivism, as the main underlying theory of podcasting, lays emphasis on constructing unique knowledge by each individual (Dalgarno, 2001). It has been classified by Moshman (1982) into three main types, namely *endogenous*, *exogenous*, and *dialectical*. Endogenous constructivism highlights learners' idiosyncratic construction of knowledge. Equipped with their prior experiences, learners build their own knowledge which is equally valid from one

person to another. Teachers in this "philosophical shift" in psychology are encouraged to guide learners to "build on and modify their existing mental models" (Dalgarno, 2001, 184) rather than attempt to transfer knowledge. Supporting self-paced learning, creating podcasts exposes learners to new experiences and helps them construct their own knowledge as to mastering their speaking skill.

In exogenous constructivism, rooted in Piaget's (1970) psychology, instructions and activities compel learners to explore the mismatch of their current knowledge and experiences urging them to adopt their knowledge in real-life tasks. Dialectical constructivism, however, drawing from Vygotsky's (1987) social interaction, argues that to construct knowledge learners need interaction along with scaffolding. Interaction, as the conspicuous tenet of constructivism, can be observed between the learner and his/her teachers, peers, and even technological tools (Dalgarno, 2011).

Empirical Studies on OBPs

To date, some survey studies have been conducted to elicit learners' attitudes toward OBPs. Lee et al. (2008), for example, examined the attitudes of learners toward the role of OBPs in collaborative construction of knowledge. They encouraged five learners to create podcasts and share them with peers. For data collection, two interviews were run. The first interview, run after the initial sessions of podcasting, intended to elicit their involvement and cognizance of the skills they would acquire through podcasting. The second one, conducted later on, attempted to examine learners' attitudes toward the extent to which results of podcasting can be in line with principles of knowledge construction. Results demonstrated that OBPs resonated with knowledge creation principles. Although Lee et al. reported positive results, recruiting only five participants devalues the experiment for generalizing its results. Moreover, the authors have not evinced precise pieces of information as to participants and data collection procedures.

Phillips (2017) undertook another survey study to gain learners' perception of OBPs. She recruited 79 intermediate and high intermediate learners to create a collaborative podcast (i.e., podcast competition task) as well as an individual podcast (i.e., digital story telling task) on researcher-given topics on the *Moodle* platform. Results indicated that podcasting developed their self-confidence and increased their WTC. However, they reported that initial podcasting was anxiety-provoking for them since they were not well-versed in creating podcasts and needed some degrees of training.

Another strand of studies has assessed the effect of OBPs on language learning. Koçak and Alagözlü (2021), for instance, explored the role of OBPs in fostering the speaking skill of 40 learners in Türkiye. Learners received instruction on creating podcasts in pairs based on the teacher-given topics within six sessions. They were then required to listen to the recording of other pairs, evaluate their point of view on the given topic, and create another podcast to comment on their viewpoint. Findings demonstrated the development of learners' speaking ability.

In a mixed methods study, Yeh et al. (2021) examined the role of OBPs in the speaking skill of 77 Taiwanese learners of English. They also elicited learners' attitudes toward podcasting

through reflective essays. Results revealed positive gains as to learners' accuracy and fluency of speech including less hesitation and mispronunciation. Results of the learners' reflective journal showed that the majority of learners embraced OBPs as a useful tool in flourishing their speaking. They acknowledged the effect of podcasting on enhancing their autonomy (e.g., by searching for appropriate words), reducing their anxiety, and pinpointing their weaknesses. They also suggested some solutions for overcoming their challenges such as checking correct pronunciation and practicing before creating their podcasts.

A common thread running through the majority of previous studies is that the topics have been primarily prescribed by teachers. To the best of our knowledge, almost no study has touched upon the effect of FoI on motivating learners to create podcasts to increase their speaking ability along with their WTC. The current study attempts to elicit learners' FoI via distributing a questionnaire and inviting them to create podcasts around the topics that are evocative of their interests and experiences.

Funds of Identity (FoI)

Learners, as Thomson (2002) asserts, come to classrooms with knapsacks filled with their lived experiences. In line with this claim, Volman and Gilde (2021) argue that "discontinuities between school and home can make children perform below their abilities" (p. 1). To alleviate this discontinuity, funds of knowledge (FoK) bring an array of learners lived experiences and outside-the-school skills and knowledge into classrooms (González et al., 2005). Drawing from Vygotsky's (1987) sociocultural theory and cultural-historical psychology, FoK as a kind of scaffolding (Gonzalez et al., 2005) make the unseen parts of learners' so-called knapsacks visible and affect their learning.

Esteban-Guitart and Moll (2014), however, leveled a criticism at FoK theory arguing that family- and community-based FoK are more oriented toward collective inclinations which are not necessarily predicted to strike chord with learners' personal experiences and interests. They instead suggested the term FoI to encompass learners' idiosyncratic skills, experiences, knowledge, and interests that can accelerate language learning. To build an inclusive learning situation for learners and to support academic learning, FoK/FoI theory suggests some home-visits, questionnaires, and interviews. Although home-visits have been proposed as an appropriate way to delve into detailed information as to learners' FoK/FoI, they have proven very time-consuming imposing a challenge on teachers. The present study adopts a practical alternate, i.e., researcher-made questionnaire, to seek learners' interests out.

Empirical Studies on FoI

Some studies (Chen et al., 2017; Moll, 2019) have concluded that if FoI leak into classrooms, there are chances that students will be more privileged in terms of learning. Chen et al. (2017) developed multiliteracies curricula by incorporating FoI. Through home-visits, interviews, questionnaires, informal observations, and field notes they gathered data on five 9–13 years old learners' FoI. Learners were exposed to iPad and Penultimate app to write about their experiences. They concluded that FoI and digital tools encouraged learners to write enthusiastically.

In a qualitative study, Álvarez (2021) investigated how biliteracy family projects created by 22 bilingual students and their families, who had migrated from Mexico to US, facilitated learners' FoK and FoI in the first-grade bilingual classroom. Through observation, home visits, student projects, and parent interview data was collected over five months. Results indicated that as a result of integrating FoI into classroom activities "pedagogical advances" ensued.

In another study, Volman and Gilde (2021) adopted a mixed methods design to examine the role of FoI in learners' personal and social functioning. Totally, 13 primary school teachers in Amsterdam along with their learners (n = 144) participated as the experimental group and 155 learners served as the control group. All learners filled in a questionnaire and teachers as well as 67 learners from the intervention group were interviewed. Results demonstrated that participants welcomed FoI-based pedagogy and admired their positive effects on learner interactions, self-confidence, and high involvement in learning.

More recently, Veerman et al. (2023) carried out a study to investigate the influence of FoI on primary school students' well-being related outcomes. Results of the mixed methods design indicated that FoI-interventions significantly improved learners' engagement and social initiative. Qualitative data gathered through questionnaires, interviews, and student and teacher logbooks lent support to the quantitative findings, i.e., high engagement, high motivation for learning, self-efficacy, and school well-being. Studies carried out on the role of FoI in language learning in particular in the context of digital technologies are still in their infancy warranting further investigation. Additionally, despite being relevant, the effect of integrating FoI into OBPs on speaking profile and WTC has remained under-researched. The present contribution intends to address these concerns.

Corrective Feedback (CF)

A large body of previous studies have substantiated the role of CF in improving language learning (Ceman & Dubravac, 2019; Ellis, 2009; Lyster, 1998). More recently, some studies (Klimova & Pikhart, 2022) have drawn teachers' attention to the necessity of teacher CF in learners' online activities. Results of a meta-analysis carried out by Mohsen (2022) on the role of computer-mediated feedback in L2 writing revealed that non-automated feedback was more influential than automated one. Furthermore, Al-Olimat and Abuseileek (2015) concluded that teacher or peer feedback was superior to comuter-mediated feedback in improving L2 writing. Another meta-analysis conducted by Klimova and Pikhart (2022) demonstrated that explicit teacher-induced CF was useful for online written feedback and the implicit one was more effective for online oral feedback. They also concluded that teacher voice message was more beneficial than online written feedback. The present study used both voice message and texting to provide explicit teacher CF on learners' podcasts.

Willingness to Communicate (WTC)

The term WTC is defined as "readiness to enter into the discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using a L2" (MacIntyre et al., 1998, 547). The construct is intimately associated with interaction which is the backbone of language learning processes (Long, 1985). Interaction holds a central place in reinforcing learning by providing opportunities for negotiation of meaning and noticing the gap. The steering effect of interaction on language

learning has been substantiated by both cognitive (Swain, 2005) and sociocultural (Vygotsky, 1987) perspectives. Asian L2 learners, however, have been reported to enjoy less degrees of WTC (Alrabai, 2014). It follows that they prefer to take less advantage of the prominent role of interaction in their learning.

A host of learner-related as well as environment-related factors have been attributed to learners' WTC. Speaking anxiety (Liu, 2018), low self-confidence (Reinders & Wattana, 2014), and motivation (Saeedakhtar et al., 2018) relate to learner/personality factors that influence WTC. Included in environment-related factors are lower group size (Cao, 2011), familiarity with group members (Cao & Philp, 2006), and familiarity with the topic (Riasati, 2014).

Topic familiarity was identified by Kang as a situational factor that mainly influences learners' security while communicating. As Kang asserts "lack of topic knowledge adds one more burden to the non-native students, in addition to the burden of speaking a nonnative language that they have not yet mastered" (Kang, 2005, 283). In her study, she concluded that students felt more secure and comfortable when talking about the topics which were familiar to them. The present study intends to examine the role of topic familiarity and interest in increasing learners' WTC by incorporating FoI into creating podcasts.

As already elaborated on, both FoI and OBPs can positively increase learners' WTC. When learners are required to speak on topics which are compatible with their FoI, their motivation, engagement, self-confidence, and self-efficacy can increase. At the same time when learners are asked to create podcasts, practice and edition opportunities on the one hand and low degrees of anxiety, embarrassment, shyness, and fear of mistakes on the other hand can foster their language learning in general and speaking skill in particular. However, some traces of anxiety, namely unfamiliarity with steps involved in creating podcasts and not knowing how to work with podcast creation application to record and edit their speech, can arise when learners are asked to create podcasts (Acevedo de la Peña & Cassany, 2024). To alleviate this cognitive load, the present study asked learners to use *voice recorder application* with which they were acquainted well.

It is hypothesized that by creating podcasts beyond classroom walls, students can gain power to alleviate their speaking anxiety, allay their fear of making mistakes and losing face, thanks to edit options available in creating podcasts, and build their self-confidence. Secondly, it is predicted that granted with FoI–as an important environment-related factor of WTC–learners would stand a chance of better speaking and a higher degree of WTC in OBPs. To the best of our knowledge, previous empirical studies have failed to address the mediating effects of FoI and OBPs on increasing learners WTC in general and speaking ability in particular. To address the afore-mentioned gaps the following research questions are formulated:

1. Would OBPs improve pre-intermediate learners' speaking ability?
2. Does teacher CF mediate the role of OBPs in improving learners' speaking ability?
3. Does FoI mediate the role of OBPs in improving learners' speaking ability?
4. Would podcasting and FoI increase learners' WTC?

5. What are the attitudes of learners toward podcasting, CF, and FoI? Do they change over time?

Method

Participants

A total of 60 (25 male and 35 female) Iranian pre-intermediate learners of English were recruited from an institute in Talesh. Their age ranged between 19 and 23 years. They had attended English language teaching institutes for about 3−6 years. As reported in the questionnaire, none of them had the prior experience of podcasting. Learners were randomly split into three groups: two experimental groups including the OBPs + CF (n = 20), the OBPs – CF (n = 20), and a control group (n = 20).

Materials and Instruments

Proficiency Test

To ensure the homogeneity of the groups, Key English Test (KET) was administered. It includes 55 items to measure the pre-intermediate learners' vocabulary knowledge (n = 15), conversation skills (n = 10), reading comprehension (n = 7), cloze test (n = 8), listening comprehension (n = 5), and grammar (n = 10). The listening part was omitted owing to practicality concerns. So doing, the total score for KET was reduced to 50. In the present study, those who obtained scores between 34−44 were chosen as pre-intermediate learners. The test was designed online via *Google Forms test-maker* and the link was sent to all learners on *WhatsApp*. Learners were instructed to take the test within one-hour time limitation.

WTC Questionnaire

The WTC questionnaire, including a 40-item five-point Likert scale, consisted of two sections. The first section (n = 7) was adapted from Simić (2014). It elicited learners' attitudes toward the effect of friendly atmosphere, topic preparedness, self-satisfaction, self-confidence, and relationship with peers on their WTC. The second section included 33 items of which 31 were adapted from Gol et al. (2014) and two from MacIntyre et al. (2001). It elicited learners' perception of seven variables, namely students' self-perceived communicative competence, external pressure, classroom climate, teacher immediacy, student's perceived self-efficacy, group size, and topic of discussion.

To begin with, the questionnaire was piloted on 10 learners other than the focus participants. However, no modification was required. It was designed online and its link was also sent to learners on *WhatsApp*. They responded to the questionnaire asynchronously without any time limitation; they could edit their responses if they elected to do so.

FoI Questionnaire

A 20-item questionnaire was designed by the authors in English to obtain information about learners lived experiences, interests, daily activities, likes, and dislikes. The questionnaire included eight multiple choice and 12 short answer items. Some instances include: "How do you spend your after-school and weekend time?" and "Which topics are more interesting to you to talk about with your friends?"

Before its administration, the questionnaire was piloted on 10 learners with the same level of proficiency to assure its comprehensibility. Results showed that learners had no challenge in comprehending the items. The questionnaire was also designed online and the link was sent to them on *WhatsApp* in session 3.

Attitude Questionnaire

A 30-item attitude questionnaire was designed to elicit learners' opinions on podcasting. One item was adapted from Walls et al. (2010), 9 items from Bamanger and Hassan (2015), and 20 items were researcher-designed. To localize those 10 adapted items, some modifications were made. It also included an open-ended question which requested learners to share their experiences in creating podcasts. The attitude questionnaire elicited the learners' previous experiences in podcasting, their familiarity with podcasting in general, their attitudes toward podcasting, and the influence of FoI on their speaking. To assure its reliability, it was piloted on 10 learners. Results of the pilot study signaled that the items presented no challenge for the learners. It was also designed online and the link was posted to learners. They completed the questionnaire without any time limitation having permission to edit their answers.

Pretest and Posttests

Three tests were designed to serve as the pretest, immediate, and delayed posttests to measure learners' speaking ability before and after the treatment, respectively. The pretest included five prompts (e.g., *What have been the best moments of your life so far? Talk about your last trip.*) to be answered orally by learners for measuring their initial speaking ability. The second set of similar oral prompts was given to learners as the immediate posttest. It consisted of five open-ended questions (e.g., *Talk about a vacation that you enjoyed a lot. What sport do you like more? Why?*) to measure their speaking ability soon after the treatment. All participants were also asked to respond to another set of five prompts (e.g., *Who is your best friend? Why? Do you like eating at a restaurant?*) as the delayed posttest two weeks later.

The speaking prompts were adapted from *Intro Interchange* by Jack C. Richards (2013) appropriate for the pre-intermediate level. The tests were posted to learners. They were required to record their voice spontaneously and send their recordings on WhatsApp. There was no time limitation for responding them.

Speaking Topics

Every session, learners received two topics (one congruent and one incongruent with their FoI), throughout the 9-session treatment, on the basis of the information they had provided on the FoI questionnaire to create two podcasts. Totally, each learner created 18 podcasts. The topics were on different genres including *sports, politics, the Internet, career, vacations, crime, travel,* etc. The most commonly congruent topics were *travel, free time, food, music, movies, soccer, English, Internet*, … and incongruent ones included *war, politics, geography, swimming* …. Of the participants, 32 received similar topics and 28 received idiosyncratic ones. For example, a learner who reported that he had recently joined a soccer team enthusiastically was asked to elaborate on soccer as the congruent topic. Some learners stated that they disliked talking on politics so politics-related prompts were given to them as incongruent topics.

Reflective Journals

To elicit learners' attitudes, feelings, experiences, and problems in podcasting and the role of FoI in their WTC, learners were asked to keep reflective journals. Each session, two hours after posting their podcasts, learners were required to send two oral or written reflective journals, one for the congruent topic and one more for the incongruent one either in Persian or English on *WhatsApp*. To guide them reflect on the objectives of the study, they were provided with four predetermined prompts to elaborate on. The prompts included their attitudes toward the effectiveness of OBPs, teacher CF, incorporations of FoI, and the influence of OBPs and FoI on their WTC.

Interview

A structured interview was given in session 13 to elicit the experimental groups' opinion about the treatment. Five open-ended questions were posted on *WhatsApp* in English and participants were asked to send their text or voice messages either in Persian or English. It was conducted asynchronously with no time limitation.

Procedure

This study adopted a mixed methods design to investigate the role of OBPs with/without FoI and CF on learners' WTC and attitude. It was carried out over a two-month period. For triangulation, different data collection techniques were used including tests, questionnaires, reflective journals, and interview. All materials were given online through the WhatsApp application. Upon its start, the study was explained online for all participants in Persian through voice messages and they were assured that their information would be kept confidential.

In the first session, a total of 74 learners took the proficiency test online, 14 were excluded as outliers because of their low (below 20) or high (above 44) scores. Sixty learners were then randomly divided into two experimental groups: the OBPs + CF group (n = 20), the OBPs – CF group (n = 20), and the control group (n = 20). Through voice messages, the experimental groups received a 15-min online instruction in Persian on how to create podcasts.

In session 2, to measure their initial speaking skill before the treatment, learners received the link of the pretest. In the third session, they responded FoI and WTC questionnaires asynchronously. The WTC questionnaire was distributed in initial- and final-experiment intervals to observe the probable effect of the treatment on WTC index change. They were also required to take the attitude questionnaire once in the first session of the treatment and a second time in the last session to measure their probable attitude changes. There was no time limitation for responding the questionnaires. The last author was the teacher of all groups. If they had any problems, they could ask him for help. They were allowed to edit their answers. From session 4 to 12, learners received two topics, extracted from their FoI questionnaire, to talk about them under three different conditions to which we turn below.

The OBPs + CF Group

Each session, the OBPs + CF group received two topics (one congruent and one incongruent with their FoI), to create their podcasts using the *voice recorder application*, to which they were already accustomed although not in L2, and send them to the teacher. Because of the user-

friendliness of the *voice recorder app* and in order to decrease cognitive load that might be high while working with a new podcast creation application, learners were encouraged to create their podcasts using the *voice recorder app* and after edition send them to the teacher through *WhatsApp*. There was no time limitation as to the duration of podcasts; however, they mainly lasted for around 2 min for the congruent topics and 1 min for the incongruent ones. The teacher listened to their voices and provided direct CF either by text or voice messages. They were required to apply CF, recreate their podcasts, and resend them to the teacher. A sample of the teacher's CF is presented in Figure 1.

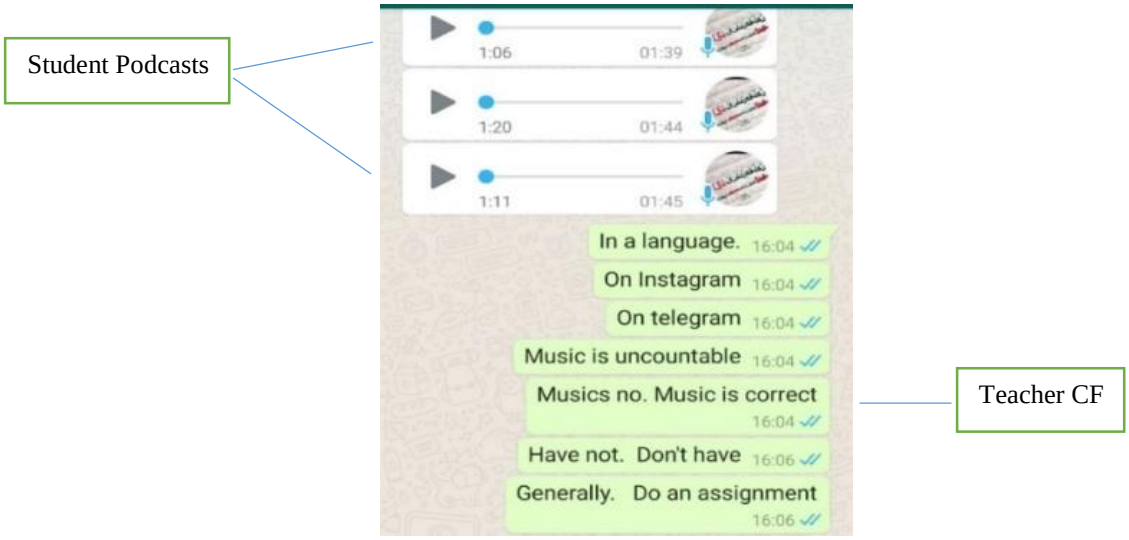

Figure 1. *Samples of Teacher CF*

Upon receiving their revised podcasts, learners were requested to send their reflective journals. Two samples of reflective journals are presented in Figure 2.

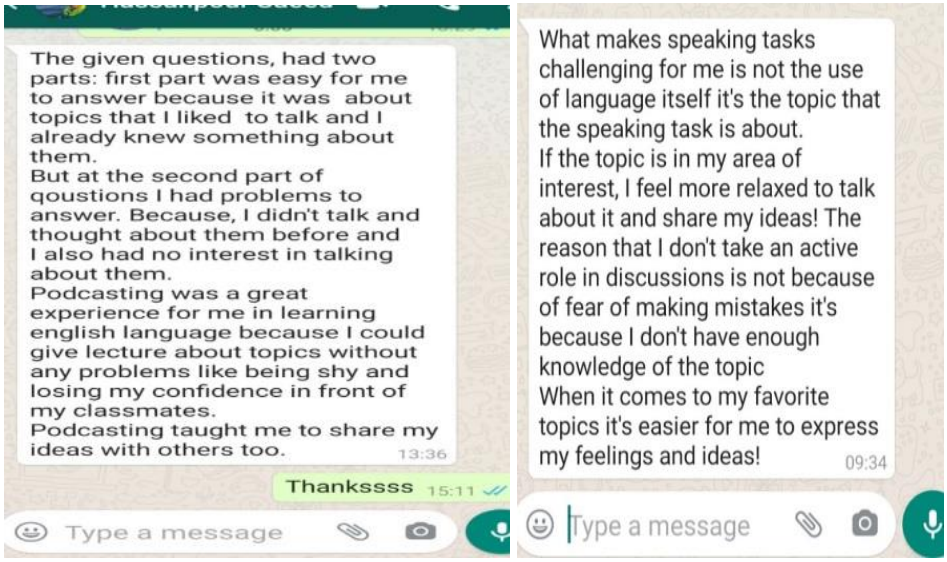

Figure 2. *Samples of Reflective Journals*

The OBPs – CF Group

The second experimental group followed the same procedures as the first group except receiving CF. Like the first experimental group, their podcasts lasted for around 2 min for the

topics congruent with their FoI and around 1 min for the topics that were incongruent with their FoI. Interestingly, some learners of this group declared that they had doubts as to the accuracy of their podcasts and expressed their desire for receiving some teacher CF.

The Control Group

Each session, the control group was also required to talk about two topics (one congruent and one incongruent with their FoI) orally through *WhatsApp* voice call or videocall. It took around 5−10 min for each individual to talk. They had no access to the topics before calling. However, they had time to ponder over questions within the call time. They also sent their reflective journals.

In session 13, the immediate posttest was given to all groups to measure their progress in speaking. Moreover, they received five interview questions to respond either by text or voice messages. There was no time limitation in responding the questions asynchronously. In session 14, two weeks later, the delayed posttest was administered. The experimental groups were also required to take the attitude questionnaire for the second time. Moreover, to quantify the participants' WTC at the end, they were asked to complete the WTC questionnaire for the second time too. In Table 1 the outline of the study has been sketched out.

Table 1. *The Summary of the Study*

Sessions	OBPs + CF	OBPs – CF	Control
Session 1	Proficiency test (all three groups)		
Session 2	Pretest (all three groups)		
Session 3	WTC, FoI questionnaires (all three groups)		
Session 4−12	• Creating podcasts • Receiving CF • Revising podcasts • Recreating podcasts • Writing reflective journals	• Creating podcasts • Writing reflective journals	• Face-to-face online speech • Writing reflective journals
	Attitude questionnaire (at the end of session 4 for the experimental groups)		
Session 13	Posttest (all three groups) WTC questionnaire (all three groups) Attitude questionnaire (the experimental groups) Interview (the experimental groups)		
Session 14	Delayed posttest (all three groups)		

Data Analysis

The pretest and posttests contained five questions. To score the students' speaking ability, Hughes' (2003) rating scale was adapted. Central to the scale are six components namely 1) content, 2) grammar, 3) pronunciation, 4) vocabulary, 5) fluency, and 6) native-like speech. As setting native-like speech as a measurement standard for the interlanguage of learners runs the risk of comparative fallacy, the sixth criterion was excluded. Each component has five indicators and each indicator's score ranges from 1 to 5. Then, the total score is 25. To reduce subjectivity in assessing the students' speaking ability, inter-rater scoring was used.

The WTC questionnaire contained 40 items and was scored on a 5-point Likert scale. The highest degree of WTC received 5 points and the lowest one received 1 point. The scores ranged from 40–200. Higher scores meant higher degrees of WTC. A mixed-design ANOVA,

a one-way ANOVA with their corresponding post-hoc analyses, and an independent-samples *t*-test were run to analyze the data obtained from the tests via SPSS version 26. The qualitative data was calculated manually.

Results

RQ1: Results of OBPs

The primary goal of the current study was to assess the effect of OBPs along with FoI and CF on Iranian EFL learners' speaking ability. To answer this research question, quantitative data was gathered through tests and qualitative data was collected through reflective journals and interviews. In the quantitative part, a mixed-design ANOVA was used to analyze the data. Results of the qualitative part were analyzed manually. The results of both parts are represented below.

Quantitative Results

To this aim, three groups homogeneous in terms of their proficiency level, $F = 2.75$, $p = .072$, took the pretest before the treatment and the posttests at the end.

To compare the performance of the three groups on the speaking tests, a mixed-design ANOVA was run. Results of the descriptive statistics (Table 2) indicated that the groups performed similarly on the pretest. However, the experimental groups had higher mean scores compared with that of the control group on the immediate and delayed posttests.

Table 2. *Results of the Descriptive Statistics for the Pretest and Posttests*

	Groups	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Pretest	OBPs + CF	3.85	1.089	20
	OBPs – CF	3.45	1.276	20
	Control	4.20	1.361	20
Posttest	OBPs + CF	17.00	2.248	20
	OBPs – CF	15.30	1.922	20
	Control	14.35	1.927	20
Delayed posttest	OBPs + CF	17.05	1.317	20
	OBPs – CF	15.45	1.432	20
	Control	13.25	1.070	20

The results of the test of between-subjects effect (Table 3) revealed that there was a statistically significant effect for time among the three groups with a large effect size index, Wilks' Lambda = 0.25, F (2, 57) = 1092, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = .975$.

Table 3. *Tests of Between-Subjects Effects*

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Intercept	23989.36	1	23989.36	8201.08	.000	.993
Groups	125.91	2	62.96	21.52	.000	.430
Error	166.73	57	2.95			

Values obtained for both the time main effect and the time and group interaction appeared to be statistically significant; therefore, the three groups' performance was significantly different. Results of the Bonferroni post hoc test revealed a meaningful difference between the

OBPs + CF group and the control group, $p < 0.00$, as well as the OBPs – CF and the control group, $p = .039$.

Qualitative Results

Results gathered through reflective journals and interviews are presented here, respectively.

Reflective Journals. Results of the qualitative data gathered through reflective journals to analyze the first research objective also corroborated the promising effect of OBPs on learners' speaking ability, notwithstanding the fact that in earlier sessions creating podcasts presented challenges for learners. They complained about some challenges that they faced while creating podcasts. A learner of the OBPs + CF group reported "*I didn't know how to start; I searched the net and downloaded some podcasts and attempted to learn about podcasting. I finally created my first podcast; I didn't know how to keep my attention because of stress and embarrassment."*

Another learner of the OBPs – CF group stated *"At first, I didn't know how to find suitable words for creating podcasts. When I created my podcasts, I was not sure they were grammatically correct or not."*

With the passage of time, learners felt more comfortable with podcasting. They reported that OBPs improved their speaking and pronunciation. The OBPs + CF group also appreciated podcasting for enhancing their accuracy. A learner of the OBPs + CF group highlighted that

> *"Creating podcasts was a useful tool for improving my speaking and recognizing my mistakes. I wanted to use appropriate vocabularies for my favorite topics, so I searched the dictionary for them."*

Interview. The results of the first interview question, *to what extent do you think OBPs can improve your speaking ability?* also lent support to the effectiveness of OBPs in developing the speaking ability. Results revealed that nearly all learners acknowledged OBPs as an effective tool for offering opportunities for improving vocabulary and pronunciation (100%), being a good replacement for face-to-face interaction during COVID-19 quarantine (45%), a stress-free learning situation (40%), ubiquitous learning (30%), learning at home (20%), and a novel learning experience (10%).

Interestingly, all learners (100%) agreed that engagement with OBPs improved their speaking. Many learners (80%) reported that to create podcasts they had to check for accurate pronunciation, appropriate words, and accurate structures. So, this pre-task preparation enhanced their speaking ability. In addition, some learners (35%) appreciated the benefit of sharing podcasts with their friends in developing their ideas and enhancing their speaking ability. The following excerpts extracted from learners' interview echo the view of almost all those who were interviewed at the end of the treatment.

> *I believe that creating podcasts is a useful tool in language learning because when we want to create a podcast, we need to practice a lot. So, it can improve our speaking and pronunciation and we can learn new words and idioms, even grammar.*

I like podcasting. When I create podcasts, maybe I don't talk face-to-face, but I save my time and money and also podcasting reduces my stress. Now in Iran because of COVID-19 lock-downs we can't go out and we must stay at home. So podcasting is a good way to practice and improve our English speaking. We can also share our podcasts and learn from each other.

RQ2: Results of Teacher CF

The second aim of the study was scrutinizing the effect of teacher CF on learners' speaking ability. Results of the mixed design ANOVA (Table 2) demonstrated the outperformance of the OBPs + CF group over the OBPs – CF group. Moreover, the results of the reflective journal lent support to the superiority of CF in encouraging learners to create podcasts. In their reflective journals, the OBPs– CF group stated that they were doubtful about the accuracy of their sentences and it disappointed them. Some samples of the OBPs – CF groups' reflective journals are presented in Figure 3. Results of the second interview question, *did you need teacher CF on your created podcasts?* revealed that most learners appreciated teacher CF. Most of the learners from the OBPs – CF group complained about creating podcasts because they were not sure about the accuracy of what they had produced. A learner from the OBPs– CF group declared "*If a teacher does not correct my sentences, I become worried and I don't like … to produce podcasts."*

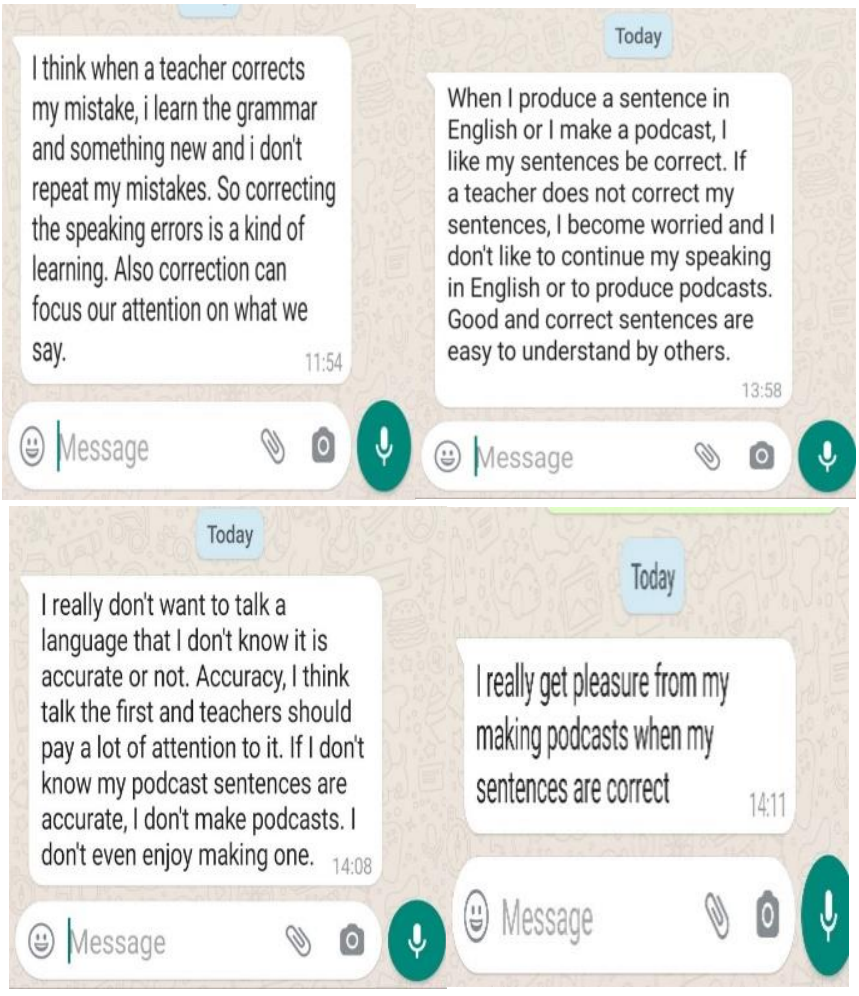

Figure 3. *Sample of the OBPs – CF Group's Reflective Journal*

RQ3: Results of FoI

The third objective of the study was exploring the mediating effect of FoI on learners' WTC and their speaking ability. To this end, the qualitative results were analyzed based on data gathered through reflective journals and interviews.

Reflective Journals

FoI was significantly embraced by almost all learners. They reported that topics congruent with their FoI were more exciting, motivating, interesting, and convenient for talking about. Learners proclaimed that they had a lot to share on topics that were congruent with their FoI while the incongruent topics made them feel empty-minded.

A learner from the OBPs – CF group stated that *"Favorite topics made me search the Internet for more information and spend a lot of time on the Internet to gather related vocabularies and expressions. I never got bored of searching for new vocabularies for my favorite topics."*

Another learner from the OBPs + CF group stated that *"My favorite topics made me search the Internet for more information and I spent a lot of time on the Internet to gather related vocabularies and expressions to elaborate on my favorite topic. I never get tired of searching for new expressions and vocabularies for my favorite topics".* Some instances of learners' reflective journal kept for FoI are presented in Figures 4 and 5 along with their translation in English.

For the topics that I was interested in, the materials related to them came to my mind easily and I talked about them more easily; however, for the topics that I wasn't interested in, I didn't like to think about them at all let alone talking about them.

Figure 4. *Samples of FOK Reflective Journal (from the OBPs – CF Group)*

In my opinion, the topics of speaking were good in general and it was easy to find answers for them; however, for some topics, for example, working in a newsstand or fire station, unfortunately nothing special came to my mind to talk about them.

Figure 5. *Samples of F (from the OBPs + CF group)*

In addition, FoI was significantly effective in learners' WTC in both experimental groups. Familiar topics motivated learners to talk and express their ideas with alacrity. Teacher investment on learners' background knowledge and lived experiences made them engage enthusiastically in speaking. A look at the duration of learners' podcasts reflects that those

created on congruent topics were longer (e.g., 2:05 or 2:30 min, as shown in Figure 6) than the incongruent ones (e.g., 0:59 or 0:48 min).

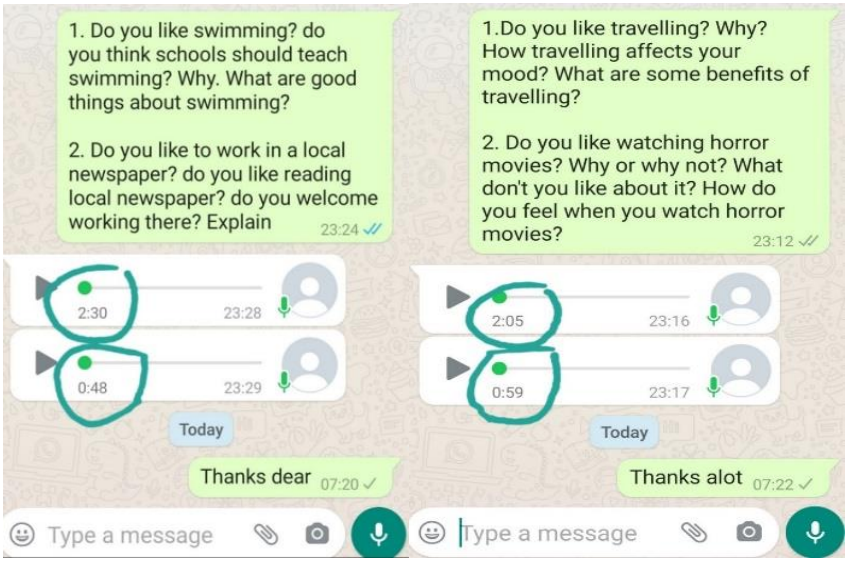

Figure 6. *The OBPs + CF Group (left hand) the OBPs – CF group (right hand)*

Interview

Results obtained from the third interview question indicated that learners enthusiastically embraced talking on topics congruent with their FoI. A learner from the OBPs – CF group reported *"Interesting topics provoked my inclination to speak. When you like a topic, you like to listen and talk about it. I hate topics that I don't like or I am not interested in them."*

RQ4: Results of WTC

The fourth objective of the study was examining learners' WTC improvement as a result of OBPs and FoI. Like the previous research questions, to answer this question both quantitative and qualitative data was gathered. For quantitative part, another mixed ANOVA was run to compare the three groups' WTC in initial- and final-experiment questionnaire. The descriptive statistics for the responses of the three groups is provided in Table 4. All groups had almost similar mean scores before the treatment (the OBPs + CF: M = 57.75, SD = 6.72, the OBPs − CF: M = 55.16, SD = 4.02, the control group: M = 55.65, SD = 5.28). But after the treatment, the OBPs + CF group's mean scores were higher than the other groups (the OBPs + CF: M = 188, SD = 4.38, the OBPs − CF: M = 170.9, SD = 6.06, the control group: M = 75.85, SD = 5.93).

Table 4. *Descriptive Statistics for the Three Groups' Performance over Time*

	Groups	Mean	SD	N
Initial-experiment	The OBPs + CF	57.75	6.72	20
	The OBPs –CF	55.16	4.02	20
	The control	55.65	5.28	20
Final-experiment	The OBPs + CF	188	4.38	20
	The OBPs –CF	170.9	6.06	20
	The control	75.85	5.93	20

Results of the mixed-design ANOVA indicated that the interaction effect was significant indicating learners' WTC improvement throughout the treatment period, Wilks' Lambda = 0.025, $F(2, 57) = 1092$, $p < .00$, $\eta^2 = .975$. The results of the test of between-subjects effect showed that the main effect for the group was significant and the three groups were significantly different in their WTC with a large effect size, Wilks' Lambda = 0.61, $F(2, 57) = 1092$, $p < .00$, $\eta^2 = .975$.

Results of the mixed between-within ANOVA revealed that there was a significant interaction between the OBPs + CF and OBPs – CF groups, Wilks' Lambda = 0.61, $F(2, 57) = 1092$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .975$. There was a substantial main effect for time, Wilks' Lambda = .008, $F(2, 57) = 7219b$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .992$, with both groups showing an improvement in WTC scores across the two time periods. The main effect comparing the two types of intervention was also significant, $F(2, 57) =. 979$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .979$, suggesting a difference between the OBPs + CF and OBPs − CF groups. To determine the exact location of the differences, the Bonferroni post hoc test was run. Results showed that all groups were significantly different from each other, $p < 0.001$.

Results of the qualitative data, gathered through both reflective journal and interview, indicated that learners embraced both OBPs and FoI as motivating and attractive factors for increasing their WTC. One of the learners from the OBPs + CF group in reflective journal reported:

> *So far, I had not thought how much the topic itself can reinforce my tendency to speak more willingly. During this study, I obviously came to this conclusion that topics that were attractive to me triggered my WTC more.*

Results of the fourth interview question, Did OBPs and FoI increase your WTC at the passage of time? showed that mainly all students (100%) had positive attitude toward OBPs as well as FoI as effective and novel ways in increasing their WTC. One of the learners from the OBPs + CF group stated:

Interestingly, I was more eager and willing to create podcasts on topics within my interest and prior experiences. Even the duration of my podcasts was longer as to topics I preferred more.

RQ5: Results of Attitudes

The last aim of the study was to elicit learners' attitudes toward the impact of OBPs and FoI on improving their speaking, increasing their WTC, and exploring any attitude changes over time. A paired sample *t*-test was run to compare learners' attitudes toward OBPs in initial-experiment and final-experiment questionnaires. As shown in Table 5, the mean score of the final-semester, $M = 103.18$, was higher than that of the initial-semester, $M = 91.75$. It can be concluded that groups' attitudes toward OBPs changed from the initial-semester to the final-semester intervals.

Table 5. *Descriptive Statistics of Learners' Attitudes toward Podcasting*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Initial-experiment	40	83.00	98.00	3670.00	91.75	3.477
Final-experiment	40	96.00	108.00	4127.00	103.1	3.24
Valid N (listwise)	40					

Results of the paired sample *t*-test showed that there was a significant difference between the experimental groups' initial- and final-semester attitudes toward podcasting, $t = .000$, $p < .001$.

Results of the attitude questionnaire showed that no learner was familiar with creating podcasts prior to the study. In the initial semester questionnaire, none of the learners of the experimental groups (0%) considered creating podcasts as an engaging language learning tool. Interestingly, 95% of the OBPs + CF group and 87% of the OBPs – CF group appreciated OBPs as an attractive and engaging tool for language learning.

In initial semester questionnaire, 5% of the OBPs + CF group and 0% of the OBPs – CF group did not prefer to listen to their voice to recognize and edit any mistake. In final-semester questionnaire, however, 90% of the OBPs + CF group and 75% of the OBPs – CF group developed this habit gradually toward the end of the treatment.

In initial semester questionnaire, 85% of the OBPs group and 80% of the OBPs – CF group needed the teacher's help in creating podcasts while in the final semester questionnaire no learner needed such a help.

Discussion

OBPs and L2 Speaking

Two podcasting conditions manipulated as creating podcasts with/without teacher CF proved more effective than the non-podcasting condition in improving the speaking ability of students. Quantitative analyses presented evidence in support of the prediction that creating podcasts is likely to enhance L2 learners' speaking ability as it harbors more engagement with the process of L2 production. This result corroborates the findings of experiments conducted under almost similar conditions (Hamzaoğlu & Koçoğlu, 2016). Collectively, these findings can be explained against different psycho-cognitive backdrops. As podcasts are created "behind the scenes," their creators produce the language with more confidence (Hsu et al., 2008).

Differently stated, while face-to-face interaction places students under real-time pressure and stress, behind the scene engagement with L2 production instead affords some stress-free space for attending to different components of L2 production (Gardner et al., 1992). This practice in production under less stressful condition is argued to make the passive knowledge (gradually) become active, trigger some new knowledge, and make learners construct/test hypotheses about grammatical structures (Swain, 2005). Others (de Bot, 1996) fashion the role which output practice might play in the automatic processing of linguistic knowledge.

Equally, the qualitative outcome regarding the role of podcast production in speaking found strong support in views students patently expressed in reflective journals and interviews; they celebrated the stress-free condition catered for L2 practice in production over the experiment period in their journal and interviews as well. These views lend support to the findings that creating podcasts provides a learning milieu which relieves stress significantly (Hamzaoğlu & Koçoğlu, 2016), on the one hand, and to the arguments that learning correlates negatively with stress (Hall & Jones, 2021), on the other.

The participants assigned to the experimental groups commonly reported their search for the correct pronunciation, appropriate vocabulary items, and checking accuracy throughout the

experiment for creating podcasts which cumulatively account for students' better performance in terms of speaking. These views are in line with those elicited in Turkish (Koçak & Alagözlü, 2021) and Taiwanese (Yen et al., 2021) contexts. In broad strokes, this much commitment in their search for finding the appropriate words, correct pronunciations, and accurate structures which entailed (re)visiting their already-existing knowledge and (re)formulating their hypotheses finally leading to their outperformance in speaking can be illustrated by recourse to the involvement load hypothesis (Hulstijn & Laufer, 2001).

OBPs, Teacher CF, and L2 Speaking

CF afforded by the teacher came to be of assistance in enabling learners to evaluate their progress and overcoming their uncertainties regarding different linguistic elements. As evident in the data gleaned through interviews and reflective journals, feedback generated more confidence and lowered students' stress down leading to more speech formulation. Not accidently, the individuals assigned to the podcast – CF condition consistently lamented about being kept in the dark as to (the accuracy of) their podcasts.

Such a finding approves the claim that feedback affords invaluable opportunities for L2 learners to be aware of "their progress, mistakes, and other important language issues" (Klimova & Pikhart, 2022, 1). Specifically, learners in both groups underlined the importance of CF in the accuracy of the podcasts created: while the group treated with CF appreciated its encouraging and guiding role in producing podcasts, the second group was to a significant extent dissatisfied with the lack of CF along with their podcasting. It is not unwise to claim that faced with a new task as demanding as podcasting, learners need to be intimately involved in the evaluation process to be ushered to the right direction in their production. Stimulated by such an ongoing evaluation, learners could apply the correction to their subsequent tasks and make more accurate speeches consolidating their L2 development. The positive views expressed as to the role of CF confirm the findings of studies which have reported CF to be of significance for language learning through emerging technologies (Klimova & Pikhart, 2022).

Finally, it makes sense to argue that synthesizing podcasts to be presented to the teacher made the individuals in the focus group endeavor to activate and use more of their cognitive resources. This line of argumentation has already been presented by Hanson et al. (2023) based on the data they obtained from the participants in their study.

OBPs, FoI, and L2 WTC

With the quantitative and qualitative data juxtaposed, WTC ratings appeared to fluctuate significantly across the groups over time. While the three groups displayed approximately equal rates of intention to speak for creating podcasts in the initial-experiment questionnaire, this trend underwent salient changes over time for all groups, on the one hand, and across the groups on the other. Drawn together, OBPs was of significant influence in improving the WTC indices of the relevant groups. Comparisons conducted and opinions elicited revealed that FoI, as a within-group variable, had a bearing on different groups' WTC ratings.

Contra classroom communications where L2 learners are under the real-time pressure falling short of finding the appropriate linguistic elements for fluent communication and being afraid of making mistakes before their peers, in the present study learners assigned to the

experimental groups presented a strong intention to speak. These findings lend support to Hsu et al.'s (2008) assertion that creating podcasts invoke more WTC in addition to higher levels of self-confidence and lower levels of stress. Crucially, OBPs freed learners from "peer pressure and fear of losing face in public" (Lee, 2019, 11). As such, the experimental conditions let learners, as it was the case in Hsu et al.'s (2008) study, produce at their convenience in their own privacy which could enhance their perceived competence and decrease their anxiety to some significant extent. Perceived competence and low level of anxiety are perceived to entail a good deal of confidence on the part of learners compelling them to commit themselves to the course of action (MacIntyre et al., 1998).

Further, the topics which were congruent with their FoI were reported to modify WTC indices for better. In light of the set of qualitative and quantitative data obtained, it is fair to argue that students took advantage of the topics in line with their FoI. Conformity of the themes opted for creating podcasts and their out of school lives and practices (Llopart & Esteban-Guitart, 2018) led to higher scales of WTC in the context of OBPs. Positive attitudes developed toward podcasts are hardly unprecedented. There seems to be some conformity between the attitudes obtained in the present study with those found by some previous studies (Lee et al., 2008). Satisfaction with OBPs which was reported to increase as a result of FoI integration correlated positively with students' WTC. This finding corroborates the assertion that continuity between home and school dispositions and practices are deemed to end in more WTC and investments in L2 classroom activities (Volman & Gilde, 2021) and scaffold L2 production and development (Thomson & Hall, 2008).

Attitudes of Students toward OBPs and FoI

Quantitative data triangulated with qualitative pieces of evidence obtained through interviews and reflective journals showcases some general patterns of findings regarding attitudes of students toward OBPs and FoI integrated podcasting. While podcasting, more like the findings of the previous studies (Lee et al., 2008; Phillips, 2017), was appreciated as an effective method of improving speaking, FoI inclusion was judged to bring some extra motivation for students' engagement with their speaking. As expressed by the majority of the focus group, podcasting, compared to face-to-face speaking, afforded more comfortable, stress-free, ubiquitous opportunities for L2 production during which they had pre-task planning time to search for the correct pronunciation, more appropriate words, and more accurate structures. These views lend support to Phillips' finding that the time students have at their disposal prior to initiating oral production in OBPs might lead to more accurate grammar and pronunciation.

When accompanied by FoI, OBPs turned to generate more excitement, motivation, and convenience. OBPs about the themes congruent with their FoI increased their WTT having them make more investments on speaking. Creating podcasts was reported to make the materials sought, engaged with, and employed in L2 production more meaningful and memorable. The positive views students came to express regarding podcasting through the interviews they gave and reflective journals they shared with the teacher consistently join up with the quantitative data obtained.

Conclusion

The obvious implication of the body of data obtained throughout the present experiment is acknowledging OBPs as an effective alternative to traditional classroom lecturing. To help students develop their speaking ability, L2 teachers can encourage students to engage in outside-the-classroom podcasts creation and consistently monitor their progress to provide tailored guide and scaffolding. Additionally, integrated with podcasts, FoI of students can afford learning possibilities which cannot become available otherwise. Continuity between home and school practices in the context of OBPs can drag students into deeper involvement in creating podcasts which is likely to stretch the speaking ability.

The unfamiliarity of the learners with the processes engaged in creating podcasts can undoubtedly serve as a source of fear and intimidation for students; notwithstanding this fact, we did not address it in the present study. This relevant and important concern could have been dealt with through providing learners with a checklist to guide them step by step in terms of how to create their podcasts, serving as a moderator variable. This substantial limitation has been unanimously voiced by students in their reflective journals and interviews. Despite their appreciation for the effective role of creating podcasts in enhancing their WTC and speaking, students unambiguously alluded to the challenges creating podcasts presented. As such, in the future studies, a teacher-designed checklist as to how to create a podcast episode is recommended to be given to the learners for assessing its effect on alleviating their challanges in creating podcasts.

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