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Dear EJAL Readers,

Welcome to our latest issue. We are proud to be releasing our Volume 3, Issue 2, thus completing three full years of hard work. Having started in 2015, we were delighted to experience an ever increasing interest in EJAL and did our best to keep the quality of papers that have appeared in previous issues. This issue is no exception. I would like to thank our editorial team members Hüseyin Öz, Filomena Capucho, Chi Cheung Ruby YANG, Gholam Hassan Khajavy, and József Horváth for their efforts. Specials are due to our editorial assistants Kadriye Aksoy, Arzu Kanat Mutluoğlu, Dilara Arpacı, and Funda Ölmez, who spent long hours preparing the issue for publication. Needless to say, without their effort, the issue would not have been ready for a timely publication in such good quality. We also need to thank authors of the articles for their efforts. They were collaborative at each step of the publication process and attended feedback from the reviewers and the editorial team. Finally, we need to acknowledge the constructive input our authors received from our anonymous reviewers. We would like to thank them all for the meticulous work they did for the journal. We are fully aware the value of their contribution. A heartfelt big THANK YOU.

This issue is more voluminous than previous ones. Due to increasing interest in EJAL, this issue contains 20 articles in total. Articles we in this issue represent diverse educational and cultural contexts with a multitude of interesting topics. They report on thoughtful research and discussions. Despite the pleasure we have had working with numerous submissions, however, we have had to limit the number of articles in this issue as we did not want to create a gigantic issue. We still have more articles in the queue for publication and do hope to publish them in our next issue in March 2018.

With such a long list of articles to appear in this issue, we did not wish to write a lengthy editorial and introduce each article here. For a speedy transition from this editorial to the articles, we would like to invite EJAL readers to visit the abstract of...
each article instead. More details about the articles can be found within the abstracts.

We thoroughly enjoyed working on the manuscripts and truly hope that our readers will find the articles equally interesting and thought provoking. Hope to welcome you once again in March 2018.

Happy reading!

EJAL Editorial Team
ARTICLES
The Causes of English Spelling Errors by Arabic Learners of English

Robert Joel Deacon a *

a Nagoya University, Furo-cho, Chikusa-ku, Nagoya 464-8601, Japan

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Abstract

This study investigates the possible cause(s) of English spelling errors by Arabic learners of English (ALEs). Studies show that ALEs make significantly more English spelling errors than other English second-language learner groups. Studies also show ALEs make more errors with vowels. The omission of short vowels in Arabic writing has been proposed to cause vowel blindness in English, resulting in the poorer spelling performance. This study evaluates this claim by comparing the distribution of short and long-vowel errors and vowel and consonant error types from handwritten texts by ALEs. While this study found more vowel than consonant errors, only the distribution of vowel graph-choice and insertion errors significantly differed from the number of consonant errors by subcategory. Graph-choice errors, not omission errors, were exceedingly the most common error type. Vowel length was not significantly associated with either vowel omission or graph-choice as expected under the vowel blindness hypothesis. The results, thus, did not indicate a missing vowel orthographic transfer effect as the primary reason for ALE orthographic production difficulty in English. Instead, this paper proposes an underdeveloped lexical-orthographic-representation hypothesis to account for both the degree and range of errors found. This study also found that low and high proficiency groups only significantly differed in consonant graph-choice and silent-graph error categories, with the advanced group performing better. These results suggest that ALE spelling skills are not markedly improving with the advancement of other writing skills and that ALEs may need explicit spelling instruction, especially to connect vowel phonemes with multiple graphemes.

Keywords: Arabic ESL; orthographic competence; orthographic transfer; spelling; vowel blindness

1. Introduction

1.1. Arabic orthographic difficulty in English

Orthographic difficulty by Arabic Learners of English (ALEs) is a topic of much discussion. ALEs reportedly have messier handwriting and poorer spelling skills than several other groups studying English as a second language (ESL) (Thompson-Panos & Thomas-Ruzic, 1983). Studies have found that ALEs perform significantly worse than other ESL groups on tests measuring spelling skill in terms of accurate graph
recognition/attention (Hayes-Harb, 2006; Ryan & Meara, 1991) and production (Dunlap, 2012; Fender, 2008). Given this problem, several studies have investigated ALE spelling error types (Bowen, 2011; Dunlap, 2012; Haggan, 1991). Studies have also tested where spelling errors are more likely to occur (Fender, 2008) and be recognized (Saigh & Schmitt, 2012). When these studies have separated vowel errors from consonant ones, the results show that ALEs make more vowel errors.

Dunlap (2012) had 88 ESL participants, who spoke either Arabic, Spanish, Korean, or Chinese as their first language (L1), record an oral response from a computer prompted question and then transcribe their recorded message. Spelling errors were then categorized and counted from the transcriptions for each language group. The results showed that ALEs created more total errors than the other groups and more vowel errors than consonants.† Haggan’s study (1991) tallied and compared spelling errors made by 1st and 4th year Arabic English majors on their end-of-the-semester handwritten examinations.‡ The results showed that selecting an incorrect vowel graph (i.e., choosing the wrong letter for vowel graphs) to be a common problem (177 cases out of 405 total errors). Bowen (2011) surveyed ALE teachers to create an error database and found that 89% of the vowel letters as compared to 43% of the consonant letters were incorrect from 250 randomly selected misspelled words. Of these vowel errors, right-vowel wrong-place (i.e., vowel transposition or misordering errors) were more common than addition, deletion, or other vowel type errors (2011, p. 92). Haggan (1991), conversely, found few letter misordering errors for either vowel or consonants: only 12 cases, which was less than .03%. Instead, choosing the wrong letter for vowel graphs mapping to the vowel schwa (64 cases) and incorrectly selecting vowel graphs for other vowel phonemes (113 cases) were disproportional, frequent errors. It is difficult, however, to compare the results of these studies directly because each study categorized spelling errors differently. Nevertheless, these studies suggest that ALE orthographic difficulty centers on vowels.

To explain some of the orthographic difficulty that ALEs exhibit, Thompson-Panos and Thomas-Ruzic (1983) suggested that the omission of short vowels in the Arabic writing system results in the omission of vowels in English writing. Ryan and Meara (1991) coined the term vowel blindness to likewise describe why Arabic students were less likely to notice words with missing vowels in their study. Adopting this hypothesis, Hayes-Harb (2006, p. 335) concluded that the results of her study indicate that Arabic speakers attempt to visually process words in English much as they do in Arabic, creating a condition whereby vowel graphs are given less attention than consonant graphs. Subsequently, this vowel blindness hypothesis is often discussed as the cause for ALE spelling difficulty (see Alsadoon & Heift, 2015; Bowen, 2011; Dunlap, 2012; Saigh & Schmitt, 2012; Taylor, 2008), and it is cited as the reason why vowel errors are more common for ALEs (Bowen, 2011; Dunlap, 2012). Alsadoon and Heift (2015), for one, specifically target vowel blindness in their research designed to

† Dunlap does not give the frequency of more discrete vowel categories.
‡ The exam papers were reported to be written “spontaneously” without the aid of dictionaries, and on a common topic (p.47).
improve ALE spelling ability, implying that vowel blindness is a major obstacle and prominent cause for ALE poor spelling skills.

The results of some studies have suggested that vowel blindness is a valid condition for literate Arabic (Hayes-Harb, 2006; Ryan & Meara, 1991; Saigh & Schmitt, 2012) and Hebrew speakers (Koriat, 1984). To examine the possible effects of vowel blindness on spelling recognition and production, Saigh and Schmitt (2012) tested if ALEs notice omitted or incorrect graphemes representing tense vowels more than lax vowels. Tense vowels such as [i] and [u] generally have a longer duration period than lax vowels, making these tense vowels more like non-omitted Arabic long vowels. They selected 40 frequent words with short vowels and another 40 words with long vowels and embedded them in sentences. Each vowel occurred in three conditions: a correct, incorrect, and omitted vowel condition. Incorrect vowels were represented by a different vowel grapheme. 24 native Arabic speaking participants were then instructed to mark each test sentence as either correct or to cross out and correct any encountered misspelled words. The results showed that the participants often failed to recognize incorrect or missing long vowels (i.e., about 1/3 of the errors were not noticed and another 1/3 were not accurately corrected), but the results also showed that the failure rate for short vowels was significantly greater (i.e., over 40% were not noticed and nearly 1/2 were not accurately corrected). While, this provides evidence that vowel quality affects ALE spelling accuracy, the ability of vowel blindness to explain the degree and range of spelling mistakes by ALEs is still largely unclear.

ALEs also struggle with capitalization (Thompson-Panos & Thomas-Ruzic, 1983) and choosing the correct consonant graphs in English (Bowen, 2011; Dunlap, 2012; Haggan, 1991). In Haggan’s (1991) study, consonant doubling errors (54 cases) and other consonant errors (47 cases), were also relatively common. Silent <e>€ misspellings were also problematic (36 cases). Furthermore, Saigh and Schmitt (2012) found that their ALE participants caught missing vowels significantly more often than incorrect vowels, suggesting that ALEs are aware of the importance of representing the vowel position. Saigh and Schmitt (2012) also found that neither the missing nor incorrect vowel-condition had a significant effect on a participant’s ability to spell the target word correctly. While ALEs paid attention to vowel graphs, they had difficulty choosing the correct vowel graph in most cases. Additionally, ALEs underperformed in comparison to other ESL groups when spelling words containing both short and long vowels (see Fender, 2008).

Fender (2008) compared ALEs’ ability to spell different word types with a group of non-Arabic ESL participants to gauge the acquisition of more complex spelling patterns. The study consisted of 37 ESL participants: 16 Arabic ESL students and 21 ESL students from Korea, China, and Japan. Three different spelling conditions were created to evaluate each group’s acquisition of English spelling rules from simple to more complex words: a within word, syllable-juncture, and derivational spelling condition. Monosyllabic words that had short, long, or complex vowels (digraphs and

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1 € <> indicates orthographic units, // phonemes, [ ] phonetic units, { // } morphemes, and | the target spelling.
or diphthongs) composed the within word condition (e.g., cut, strange, cook, train). Multisyllabic words consisting of doubled consonants, long vowels with open syllables, and short vowels with closed syllables composed the syllable juncture condition (e.g., written, babies, kitchen), and multisyllabic words with derivational affixes made up the derivational condition (e.g., responsible, education). The results showed that the non-ALE group performed significantly better in all three conditions. The results also showed that ALEs made more errors with multisyllabic words and words containing derivational affixes as opposed to monosyllabic words with both short and long vowels: “the problem [was] especially acute among the Arab ESL participants who seem[ed] to struggle with orthographic complexity” (p. 34). Inexplicable spellings are also frequently cited in the literature (e.g., “oniouns” for “audience” in Dunlap, 2012, p. 26). The problem, consequently, appears to be larger than a short-vowel omission transfer effect.

While it is possible that vowel quality contributes to some of the doubling errors in Haggan (1991) and Fender (2008) (i.e., the coda consonant in monosyllabic words with single-graph short vowels is doubled when suffixed with {-ing}, {-ed} etc… (e.g., hop → hopping), there is no known argument to the author’s knowledge explaining how vowel blindness specifically causes many of the other frequent error types reported. Vowel blindness has simply been assumed to cause short-vowel errors, and thus its outcome has not been clearly articulated. It is unclear why vowel blindness would cause more graph-choice than graph-omission errors.

In addition to not fully understanding the cause of ALE orthographic difficulty, the extent that proficiency in written English addresses the cause(s) of the orthographic difficulty is not evident. When error types were compared between proficiency groups, Haggan (1991) found that advanced ALEs performed significantly better than ALE remedial students on consonant-doubling errors following an affix (e.g., swimming {swimming}), and unnecessary silent <e> additions (e.g., with {with}). Advanced ALEs, however, made more other consonant errors (39 cases) than the remedial group (only 8 cases), but the difference was not significant.” The results mainly showed insignificant improvement with both consonants and vowels.

The depth of the English orthographic system may play a substantial role in graph choice errors (cf. Fender, 2008; Taylor, 2008) and may cause vowel blindness to appear more significant than it actually is. That is, even if vowel blindness is a valid condition, it is possible that its effect is relatively minor when accounting for the overall spelling production problem. Thus, while it is clear that ALEs have orthographic problems in English, the cause or causes of this issue remain insufficiently described and demonstrated.

1.2. The depth of the English orthographic system and vowels

The English orthographic system consists of 26 individual graphs derived from the Roman alphabet. It reads from left to right, top to bottom. The system is deep because

“Other comparisons did not reach significance or there were too many subcategories with zero counts for the chi-square analysis used.
the mapping of phonemes to graphemes is irregular (Frost, Katz, & Bentin, 1987), making it difficult for both native (Seymour, Aro, & Erskine, 2003) and non-native speakers (Haggan, 1991) to learn.

English graphemes create several difficulties for ESL learners to overcome: graphs link to many different phonemes (\(<y>\) \(\leftrightarrow\) any /i/, syllabus /ɪl/, shy /aɪ/, year /j/); some phonemes link only to a digraph (\(/ʃ/\) \(\leftrightarrow\) \(<sh>\); \(/θ/\) \(\leftrightarrow\) \(<th>\)); some phonemes link to both a graph and digraph (\(/f/\) \(\leftrightarrow\) \(<f>, <ph>, <gh>\); \(/ð/\) \(\leftrightarrow\) \(<th>\)); some phonemic contrasts have no distinguishable graph or digraph contrast (\(/ð/\) \(\leftrightarrow\) \(<th>\)); some graphs or digraphs will be assigned no value (live \(<e>\), height \(<gh>\)); some graphs or digraphs may systematically change their surface, phonetic value when obtaining a morphemic value (\(<s>\) as {plural} \(\leftrightarrow\) cats [s], dogs [z], boxes [z], \(<ed>\) as {past} \(\leftrightarrow\) tugged [d], trucked [t]). Stress placement, syntactic category, and the presence or absence of other non-local graphs can affect the value of a given graph (finite vs. infinite, live snails vs. to live, hop vs. hope). Furthermore, only 5 of the 26 letters are exclusively used to represent \(~11\) vowels and \(~8\) diphthongs.†† In contrast, 21 letters represent English’s \(~24\) consonants. Single vowel-graphs are used for long-vowels (to /u/, me /i/), diphthongs (bacon /eɪ/, bicycle /aɪ/), and short-vowels (put /u/, mat /æ/). Digraphs are also used for long-vowels (spoon /u/, feet /i/), diphthongs (trail /aɪ/, pie /aʊ/), and short-vowels (certain /u/, book /ɔ/). The English system is, thus, a deep system because of the number of digraphs and the variable mapping of phonemes to graphemes, especially for vowels.

The Arabic writing system consists of 28 primary graphs that are not derived from the Roman alphabet. It reads from right to left, top to bottom. The Arabic system is relatively shallow with more consistent grapheme to phoneme correspondences (GPCs).

The Arabic orthographic system is a consonantal script or Abjad. Its 28 graphs principally represent consonants: the short vowels /i/, /u/, and /a/ are not generally present in written Arabic. They do appear, however, in the Quran and in texts for language learners (Abu-Rabia, 1997; Fender, 2008). If present, short vowels are only indicated by a diacritic mark: the graph \(<ɔ>\), which represents the sounds [b/p], is written as \(<ɔ’>\) for [b], \(<ɔ<’>\) for [b] and \(<ɔ’>\) for [ba]. This means these short vowel sounds either have secondary status or are not indicated in writing. As Arabic learners become more proficient, though, they easily “fill in the missing vowels”, as these short vowels often reflect grammatical information that can be gathered from the greater context (Hayes-Harb, 2006, p. 2). Thus, individually, written words usually do not display their full phonemic value.

A phonemic distinction exists between short and long vowels in Arabic. Unlike the short vowels, the long vowels are not omitted. The consonant letters ‘alif \(<\alpha>\), yā’\(<\partial>\), and wāw \(<\omega>\) are also used to represent the long vowels: /aː/, /iː/, and /uː/. Despite this and the letter tā’ marbūta \(<\hat{s}>\) (which is a silent graph in modern Arabic), graphemes and phonemes in Arabic correspond very closely, almost 1:1 (cf. Saigh & Schmitt,
2012; Watson, 2007). Accordingly, because Arabic is more consistent, ALEs may not be accustomed to matching variable graphemes with a particular phoneme as is required in English.

As discussed, ALEs appear to struggle with vowels more than consonants, but vowel-graph errors are also the most common error type for several other ESL groups (Bebout, 1985; Dunlap, 2012) and for L1 English children (cf. Mullock, 2012). The reason vowel errors are more common for most groups arguably results from the depth of the English orthographic system: GPCs vary greatly with vowels in English because of the small inventory of single graphs and the large number of vowel digraphs and pronunciation differences.

Since the depth of the English orthographic system also creates an obstacle for other ESL groups who use shallow orthographies, the difference in performance by ALEs should be the result of other factors. The question, then, is whether vowel blindness or something else coupled with the depth of the English orthographic system is the cause (or a primary reason) for ALE spelling difficulties in English.

1.3. Why English spelling may be particularly problematic for ALEs

The depth of the English orthographic system should be a nearly equal problem for several ESL groups. Spelling, however, was significantly less problematic for Spanish ESL students (i.e., Spanish like Arabic utilizes a shallow orthography) and Korean, Chinese, and Japanese ESL students, who do not use a Romanized script (see Dunlap, 2012, and Hayes-Harb, 2006). Other factors, such as phonological and morphological differences between English and Arabic and the state of L1 literacy and education in much of the Arabic world (cf. Taylor, 2008), may also contribute to the English spelling problem, making the depth of the English system more challenging for ALEs.

The morphology of Arabic may play a role in ALE spelling errors. Arabic roots are identified by a consonantal pattern. The script is mostly represented with different consonant clusters that compose a particular root pattern (e.g., k-t-b = something to do with books/writing). This arguably creates a lot of repetition for Arabic readers by limiting the visual variance of a particular root. This perhaps allows Arabic readers to connect orthographic form to meaning more easily. Similarly, word length could contribute to spelling mistakes. Words in Arabic tend to be short: “less than six character long” (Randall & Meara, 1988, p. 135). This suggests the number of letters needed to be stored for accurate word recognition and production in Arabic is more limited than in English.

L1 literacy and education is another complicating factor that ought to be considered when accounting for ALE spelling errors and reading and writing difficulty in English. L1 literacy skills affect the quality of subsequent language learning (Carson, Carrell, Silberstein, Kroll, & Kuehn, 1990; Carrell, 1991; Saiegh-Haddad & Geva, 2010). Reading and writing education in much of the Arabic world has often lacked proper attention (cf. Taylor, 2008). Fender (2008) similarly suggested that many ALEs are also weaker readers in their L1. The situation of diglossia within the Arabic world
contributes to this problem, because Arabic students must learn to read and write in a language that is different from the language spoken at home (Abu-Rabia, 2000). Accordingly, ALEs are not as skilled in reading and writing in Arabic. This suggests that ALEs lack practice with word recognition and practice connecting semantic/phonological forms to orthographic forms in writing.

One or a combination of these issues may be hindering ALEs’ acquisition of GPCs in English. Without this skill, ALEs will subsequently be more susceptible to errors from orthographic depth and have weaker word recognition ability, resulting in spelling problems and slower and less accurate reading and writing ability.

1.4. The importance of orthographic competence for ALEs

In addition to poor spelling skills, ALEs have also exhibited poorer reading and writing skills than other ESL groups (cf. Fender, 2008; Randall & Meara, 1988; Taylor, 2008). ALEs, nevertheless, have performed nearly the same or better on listening and speaking tasks (Fender, 2008). Poor spelling skills likely contributed to the discrepancy between ALE reading and writing skill and listening and speaking skill.‡‡

While much ESL research on reading instruction has focused on top-down strategies, ESL learners who are weak readers in their L1 and or those who have different L1 orthographic systems may not have the ability to decode a text even after being given sufficient background information (Taylor, 2008, p. 31). Cultural gaps cause guesses and inferences to be less successful, greatly hindering comprehension: “the closer the match between their prior knowledge and the new knowledge, the more accurately [students] comprehend” (Wang, Martin, & Martin, 2002, p. 98). Clearly, there is a gap between the culture of the Arabic world and that of much of the English texts ALEs encounter. Framed as such, ALEs must utilize bottom-up reading comprehension strategies, and perhaps must do so more than other students.

Orthographic competence or awareness is a key component of writing speed and accuracy and reading speed and comprehension (cf. Fender, 2008; Perfetti, 1997; Perfetti & Hart, 2002; Saigh & Schmitt, 2012). The Lexical Quality Hypothesis (Perfetti, 1992; Perfetti & Hart, 2002) states that efficient word retrieval relies on “a fully specified orthographic representation (a spelling) and redundant phonological representations” (p.190). From a bottom-up perspective, it is believed that weak readers possess weak word recognition skills in both their L1 (Perfetti & Hart, 2002) and a second language (Fender, 2008; Nassaji, 2003; Randall, 2009). The ability to deconstruct words into phonemes and graphemes is limited. Consequently, poor spellers are likely to be slow readers and to have lower reading comprehension skills than better spellers.

Nassaji (2003) found that better graphophonic and word recognition skills (in addition to better semantic/lexical processing skill) accurately separated stronger ESL

‡‡ Different processing strategies likely also play a role in ALE reading difficulty (see Randall and Meara, 1988).
readers from weaker ones. Fender (2008), noted that this and other research support the idea that “a single orthographic lexicon serves both English word recognition and spelling production”, meaning those with poor orthographic representations have difficulty with both comprehension and production (p. 22). Accordingly, identifying the primary cause(s) for ALE orthographic difficulty may aid in the development of more effective corrective measures to improve ALE spelling skills, which may in turn improve ALE reading and writing skills.

1.5. Proposal and research design

This work argues that ALEs have a larger, more fundamental problem with orthographic competence in English than the vowel blindness hypothesis alone can explain. This general deficit may be the true cause or a contributing factor for many of the results attributed to vowel blindness because vowel graph errors should be more difficult for any learner who is weak with GPCs. Subsequently, it suggests that this problem is inherently linked with ALE reading and writing difficulty.

This study proposes an underdeveloped orthographic representation hypothesis (URH) which states that ALEs are mostly relying on phonological representations and a limited set of GPCs to spell words in English (see Fender, 2008, for a similar idea). ALEs comparatively lack orthographic representations for whole-word forms. This hypothesis places many ALEs near the partial alphabetic developmental stage of spelling described by Ehri (1997), whereby breaking words into phonemes and representing these with letters or the appropriate graph/digraph is difficult. The prediction is that ALEs will have problems with both consonants and vowels and that errors will increase as GPC and phonemic variation increases. Accordingly, graph choice errors will be the most common category overall but more common for vowels. This hypothesis does not exclude the possibility that ALEs are also less familiar with derivational spelling rules or that short-vowel omission has an effect, but claims insufficient whole word representation and GPCs are the core problem.

If vowel blindness is primarily responsible for ALE orthographic difficulty, then the following strong hypothesis may be made: pronounced vowel omission errors will be more frequent than extra vowel insertion errors, consonant omission errors, and silent <e> errors; short-vowel omission errors will be more frequent than long-vowel omission errors. Furthermore, as a weaker corollary, short-vowel graph choice errors are expected to be more frequent than long-vowel ones.

To evaluate these claims, errors were categorized into vowel and consonant graph/digraph error types and subtypes and tallied to see whether there were significant distribution differences. Pearson’s chi-square tests, as used in Dunlap (2012) and Haggan (1991), were used to show significant differences between error categories and proficiency levels and between types of error categories. If vowel type errors attributable to vowel blindness constitute a larger percentage of the overall errors, this would suggest that addressing vowel blindness (as done in Alsadoon & Heift, 2015) is a priority when attempting to improve ALE spelling mistakes in
English. If vowel length does not appear to influence spelling error rates, this suggests an alternative cause such as insufficient knowledge of English GPCs.

2. Method

2.1. Error categorization

While there is no standard method for categorizing orthographic errors, as mentioned in the introduction, some previous studies (Bowen, 2011; Dunlap, 2012; Haggan, 1991) have examined types of spelling violations by ALEs. Bebout (1985) devised a discrete system which endeavors to universally categorize spelling error types by learners of English, but only Haggan (1991) attempts to directly use it to describe ALE spelling errors. All three studies categorized errors differently and Bebout did not design the system to investigate the cause of ALE errors: Bebout’s system ignores vowel length as a variable.

This study proposes a way to categorize errors by ALEs to investigate vowels and vowel length on omission errors, and GPC accuracy. It borrows from Bebout’s system, but the organization directly contrasts consonant and vowel type errors as done in Dunlap (2012). It also deviates from Bebout’s system by not using several unattested error subcategories reported in Haggan (1991) and by focusing more on graphemes (i.e., graphs and or digraphs as a single unit) rather than letters. This study also eliminated several vague other categories, balancing error categories between vowel and consonant type errors to compare the frequency of each. This design was important under the premise that vowel blindness should effect the distribution of vowel errors differently than consonant ones, especially for omission type errors.

This study divided omission errors into silent and salient categories, unlike Bowen (2011) and Dunlap (2012). Silent omissions (e.g., <tim> {time} / hav {have}) are not the same as short-vowel omissions in Arabic, making their connection to vowel blindness less straightforward. Since silent graphs do not directly link to a phonemic value, their omission is arguably the result of incomplete orthographic, lexical knowledge.

Like other studies, this study also examined metathesis (transposition) errors to check whether writing direction in Arabic interferes with the order of graphs in English. This was to compare the effect of one orthographic variable with another: linear direction vs. omission. Unlike other studies, however, this study accounted for transpositions involving only vowel graphs, consonant graphs or a combination of two in order to examine if one type was more common.

This study also did not count form and morphological/pattern/rule type errors as done in Dunlap (2012) in order to separate punctuation, word use, and morphosyntactic grammatical knowledge from word form and grapheme knowledge. The form <musics> would not be counted as an error because the derivation of this word is possible (e.g., The musics of the world emotionally unite us. ‘types of music’) and

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Fender (2008) tested conditions where spelling errors were more likely to occur rather than types of spelling errors.
<deers> would not be counted as an error because this likely reflects morphosyntactic/lexical knowledge instead of spelling accuracy.

Vowel and consonant segment violations (graph/digraph errors) were divided into six major categories: graph choice, salient omission (a pronounced graph/digraph is missing), silent omission (an unpronounced graph/digraph is missing), insertion (a graph or digraph is inserted), and metathesis error categories. A single word could contain multiple graph errors of one or several categories (e.g., *chouc_latte* *{chocolate}* = 3 graph errors representing 3 different categories). The target word was determined by context (e.g., “when I was a small shild” *{child}* and when the target word could not be clearly determined, the misspelling was not counted.

Table 1. Examples of General Error Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Error Types</th>
<th>Vowel Error Examples</th>
<th>Consonant Error Examples</th>
<th>†††</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Graph/Digraph Choice:</td>
<td>sevgral (several), pai (pie)</td>
<td>courges (courses), plak (black)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Salient Omission:</td>
<td>inter_sted (intergeted)</td>
<td>hear_, (heart)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Silent Omission:</td>
<td>leag_e (league)</td>
<td>hai_t (height)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Insertion:</td>
<td>prefgers (prefers)</td>
<td>drivi(g) (driving)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Metathesis:</td>
<td>thir (their)</td>
<td>[ingore] ‡‡‡ (ignore)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Metathesis CV:</td>
<td>strange (strange)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 line (1) demonstrates graph choice errors. These are errors where the student failed to pick the correct graph or digraph, choosing instead the wrong graph within the correct sequence. Line (2) type errors are ones where the student failed to produce a graph or digraph that satisfied all the sound segments of the target word. Line (3) type errors consisted of failing to produce a graph or digraph that has no associated phonological value. Line (4) type errors involved inserting an extra graph. With these errors, it is impossible to determine if the student intended for the graph to be pronounced or silent. In most cases, however, the addition would result in an additional syllable. Line (5) type errors are presumably the hardest to categorize because a variety of things are involved. Nevertheless, if the produced letters appeared out of order from the target form, these errors were counted as metathesis errors, regardless if the graph was silent, salient, or a digraph. Finally, Line (6) demonstrates metathesis CV errors. Since this error type involves both a vowel and a consonant, it was categorically both a vowel and consonant type error.

This design also better accounts for the use of digraphs. It interpreted errors involving a digraph as a single error rather than as two errors or as a transposition error as done in Bowen (2011). Accordingly, this study interpreted <pai> *{pie}* as applying <ai> for /aɪ/ as opposed to <a> for <i> and <i> for <e>: two potentially separate errors. Relatedly, <fainlly> *{finally}* is both a digraph error and a short-vowel omission error in this study, instead of 1 transposition error, where <a> is moved

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††† There were only a few cases where the target word could not be reasonably determined (e.g., adure, advistar [target unknown]).
‡‡‡ All examples are ALE misspellings from this study except <ingore>. This example is from Haggan (1991) because no consonant metathesis errors were found in this study.
ahead of <i>, as done in Bowen (2011, p. 92). This approach is arguably better because the errors were generally accounted for with fewer assumptions (see Limitations section for more on this).

2.2. Error subcategorization

Vowel blindness only ostensibly explains short-vowel error types. Unlike previous studies that categorized produced spelling errors, this study divided omission errors into long /æi i øø u/ and short /ə i e æ øʊ u/ vowel errors. Another complicating factor is the different rate of vowel occurrence: short vowels are more frequent, creating more opportunity for errors. According to Cruttenden (2014), short vowels create roughly 67% of vowels found in texts in general British English (short vowels: /ə ~26%; /ɪ ~21%; /ɛ ~7%; /æ ~4%; /ɒ ~4%; /ʊ ~1.5%), a figure which is similar to general American English (p. 158-159). This percentage was used to adjust the theoretical expected outcome when comparing long and short-vowel error counts with a chi-square test of goodness-of-fit. This study likewise divided graph choice errors into long and short subcategories to examine the possible weak effect of vowel blindness. If vowel length influences graph-choice errors, we would expect short-vowel errors to account for more than two thirds of the total errors because short vowels make up approximately two thirds of the vowels.

The study also checked silent <e> errors following a short or long vowel. Silent <e> errors may be GPC errors when they change the quality of the preceding vowel (e.g., cap vs. cap). They may also be a truly silent graph (e.g., have, some, one, because) for which correct use requires complete lexical knowledge rather than correct phonology and GPCs. Nevertheless, this study examined the frequency of silent <e> errors occurring after short and long vowels to see whether fewer omission errors occurred with long vowels.

Finally, to examine the possible effect of short vowels on a spelling rule, this study, like Haggan (1991), checked whether doubling errors (i.e., errors involving two adjacent identical graphs) occurred after the affixes /-ing/, /-ed/ etc. This study also checked whether a doubling error occurred in a monosyllabic word with a single-graph short vowel (e.g., cut > cutting), digraph short-vowel (e.g., look > lookking), or long vowel / glide coda / complex coda (e.g., take > takking; say > sayying; talk > talkking). This was to see whether doubling errors were likely the product of GPC / word form errors, vowel blindness or incomplete knowledge of a derivational spelling rule. A large number of doubling errors after a short vowel could suggest a vowel blindness effect. On the other hand, if most mistakes were stem internal (e.g., occur [ocur]), this would suggest limited GPC / word form knowledge.

‡‡‡ [within a Table indicates an unattested example from this study.
§§§ Rhotic vowels were not simply categorized as long vowels but instead as a vowel and a consonant. The vowel could be short /ar or long /here.
Table 2. Examples of Vowel Error Subcategories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vowel Error Subtypes</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Graph Choice</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short Graph Error</td>
<td>geless (jealous)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long Graph Error</td>
<td>butiful (beautiful)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Omission</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short Vowel</td>
<td>inter_sted (interested)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long Vowel</td>
<td>unus_al (unusual)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silent &lt;e&gt;, Morphological</td>
<td>happen_d (happened)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silent &lt;e&gt;, Syllabic &lt;l&gt;</td>
<td>peopl_ (people)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silent &lt;e&gt;, Short Vowel</td>
<td>som_ (some)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silent &lt;e&gt;, Long Vowel</td>
<td>mistak_s (mistakes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vowel Insertion</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silent &lt;e&gt;, Morphological</td>
<td>reasons (reasons)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Root Final &lt;e&gt;, Short Vowel</td>
<td>sectore (sector_)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Root Final &lt;e&gt;, Long Vowel</td>
<td>companye (company)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Examples of Consonant Error Subcategories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consonant Error Subtypes</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Graph Choice</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Single for Single</td>
<td>televi(tion)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Single for Digraph</td>
<td>pref(tionally)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Digraph for Digraph</td>
<td>mush (much)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Digraph for Single</td>
<td>toghoother (together)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Omission</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Silent Omission Other</td>
<td>gover_ment (government)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Doubled Stem Omission</td>
<td>eag (egg)††††</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. D. O. - Affix, Multisyllabic Stem</td>
<td>financially (financially)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. D. O. - Affix, Monosyllabic, Single Graph, Short Vowel</td>
<td>[weding] (wedding)††††</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. D. O. - Affix, Monosyllabic, Digraph, Long Vowel</td>
<td>reaily (really)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Insertion</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Insertion Other</td>
<td>teachers (teachers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Doubled Insertion</td>
<td>midell (middle)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Other Doubled Insertion at Affix</td>
<td>imottion (emotion)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. D. I. - Affix, Monosyllabic, Single Graph, Other</td>
<td>[slowing] (slowing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. D. I. - Affix, Monosyllabic, Digraph, Long Vowel</td>
<td>[keeping] (keeping)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

†††† These are counted as a type of doubling error under the premise that there is no phonological cue to differentiate between one consonant or a doubled consonant: beg and egg.

†††† This was the closest example of this possible error type found. The actual spelling produced was **weeding** for **wedding**.
2.3. Research material selection

Assessment texts used to gauge ESL writing level proficiency at the end of a semester at the University of Florida English Language Institute were selected for this study's spelling error analysis. Each text was handwritten by one and only one student who had been given approximately one hour to write either a few paragraphs responding to the same, open ended prompts (e.g., describe a happy day in our life) or an essay on a similar, common prompt.

Two or more instructors at the University of Florida English Language Institute had independently rated each writing assessment on a proficiency scale of 1 (low) to 6 (high). Raters looked for writing structure, clarity, coherence, sentence complexity, grammar, vocabulary, and spelling to make their decisions. Students who had performed well on this task were placed into a higher level writing class. Since students were finishing coursework in one proficiency level, if they had performed well, they were placed into the next level or higher by this assessment. If they had not performed well, they had to repeat the previous level course.

From these assessments, 20 ALE texts were selected for this study. Each text had been written by an adult (18 years or older) ALE from Saudi Arabia. Each author had completed at least four months of intensive English study in the U.S. Each text was between 200 and 450 words long. These texts were then subdivided into two groups based upon their proficiency level rating: 12 texts were rated low (10 at level 3 and 2 at level 2) and 8 texts were rated high (6 at level 5 and 2 at level 4). All level 2 and 3 texts were paragraph responses. Level 5 and 4 rated texts were essays responses except for one level 5 text, which was a paragraph response. The possibility that errors resulted from simple, careless typos was arguably reduced because the texts were handwritten.

3. Results

3.1. Main category error results

Table 4 divides the total graph/digraph vowel and consonant errors found from the 20 assessment texts by main category.

Table 4. Main Category Consonant and Vowel Errors

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Error Type Vowel</th>
<th>Error Number</th>
<th>Error Type Consonant</th>
<th>Error Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Graph Choice</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>1. Graph Choice</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Salient Omission</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>2. Salient Omission</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Insertion</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>4. Insertion</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Metathesis</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5. Metathesis</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtotal Vowels</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>Subtotal Consonants</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Metathesis CV</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Errors</strong></td>
<td><strong>411</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. Proportion of Total Errors

A chi-square test of independence between vowels and consonants by error categories showed a significant difference, $\chi^2 (4, N = 399) = 18.771$, $p < .001$. Cramer’s V further indicated that this difference was strong ($V = 0.217$). The null hypothesis that vowel and consonant categories are independent can be rejected. Graph choice, $\chi^2 = 5.51$, and insertion, $\chi^2 = 9.06$, differences contributed most to this result as compared to salient omission, $\chi^2 = 0.28$, silent omission, $\chi^2 = 2.19$, and metathesis, $\chi^2 = 1.74$.

The difference between vowels and consonants and graph choice and insertion errors was also found to be significant: $p < .001$, Fisher’s exact test, two tailed. No significant difference, however, was found between consonant and vowel categories and silent and salient omission error types: $p = .55$, Fisher’s exact test, two tailed. A chi-square test of goodness-of-fit test did not show a significant difference between salient vowel omission and vowel insertion errors with an expected even distribution, $\chi^2 (1, N = 75) = 0.86$, $p = .35$ (corrected for continuity).

***** The value of all chi-square tests with 1 degree of freedom was corrected for continuity.
A chi-square test of independence did not show a significant difference between low and high proficiency levels across vowel categories, $\chi^2 (4, N = 296) = 4.28, p = .36$. Similarly, the results did not show a significant difference between low and high proficiency levels across consonant categories, $\chi^2 (3, N = 103) = 3.627, p = .3$. A significant difference was, however, found using a chi-square test of goodness-of-fit between low and high levels for consonant silent-omission errors with an expected even frequency, $\chi^2 (1, N = 19) = 5.7, p < .02$ and consonant graph-choice errors with an expected even frequency, $\chi^2 (1, N = 42) = 6.83, p < .01$. No significant difference was found for addition or salient omission categories $p > .05$.

### 3.2. Results of subcategories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vowel Error Subtype</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Consonant Error Subtype</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Short Vowel</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>Single for Single</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long Vowel</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>Single for Digraph</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Digraph for Digraph</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Digraph for Single</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A chi-square test of goodness-of-fit only showed a significant difference between short and long vowels with an expected even frequency, $\chi^2 (1, N = 180) = 7.6, p < .05$. When the expected rate for short-vowel errors was increased to 60%, there was no
significant difference, $\chi^2 (1, N = 180) = .023, p = .87, (\chi^2 = 0, p = 1, \text{ when corrected for continuity}). \text{ When it was increased to 67\%}, \text{ following the frequency from Cruttenden (2014), the difference was nearing significance, } \chi^2 (1, N = 180) = 3.09, p \cong .08, \text{ with more long and fewer short-vowel errors than expected, assuming a vowel blindness effect.} 

A chi-square test of goodness-of-fit between consonant single for digraph and digraph for single-graph errors was also found to be nearly significant with an expected even frequency, $\chi^2 (1, N = 11) = 3.28, p = .07$.

Table 7. Salient Omission Subcategories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vowel Error Subtype</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Consonant Error Subtype</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Short Vowel</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Word Final</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long Vowel</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Word Internal</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A chi-square test of goodness-of-fit also showed a significant difference between observed and expected long and short-vowel salient-omission errors with an expected even frequency, $\chi^2 (1, N = 42) = 12.6, p < .001$, but not at the proposed 67\% rate, $\chi^2 (1, N = 42) = 2.05, p = .15$. No difference was found between word final and internal consonant omission errors with an expected even frequency, $\chi^2 (1, N = 17) = 0.24, p = .62$. Moreover, comparing salient and silent omissions found no significant difference with an expected even frequency, $\chi^2 (1, N = 78) = 0.32, p = .57$.

Table 8. Silent Omission Error Subcategories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vowel Error Subtype</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Consonant Error Subtype</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other Vowel</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Other Consonant</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short Vowel</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Doubled Stem Internal</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silent &lt;e&gt;</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Doubled, Affix, Multisyllabic</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long Vowel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silent &lt;e&gt;</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Doubled, Affix, Monosyllabic, Short</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morphological</td>
<td></td>
<td>Vowel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silent &lt;e&gt;</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Doubled, Affix, Monosyllabic,</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syllabic &lt;l&gt;</td>
<td></td>
<td>Long Vowel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A chi-square test of goodness-of-fit between silent <e> omission and other vowel omission errors clearly showed a significant difference with an expected even frequency, $\chi^2 (1, N = 36) = 26.7, p < .001$. No significant difference was found between silent <e> errors following short and long vowels with an expected even frequency, $\chi^2 (1, N = 29) = 0.14, p = .7$.

A significant difference was found between doubled and other omission errors with an expected even frequency, $\chi^2 (1, N = 19) = 10.32, p = .001$. No significant difference was found between stem-internal doubled omission errors and doubling errors following an affix with an expected even frequency, $\chi^2 (1, N = 17) = 0.24, p = .62$. 
Table 9. Insertion Subtype errors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vowel Error Subtype</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Consonant Error Subtype</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Insertion (Other)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Insertion (Other)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short Vowel Final &lt;e&gt;</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Doubled Stem Internal</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long Vowel Final &lt;e&gt;</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Doubled, Affix Other</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morphological Silent &lt;e&gt;</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Doubled, Affix, Monosyllabic</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No significant difference was found between other vowel insertion and silent <e> insertion errors with an expected even frequency, $\chi^2 (1, N = 33) = 1.94, p = .16$. Likewise, no significant difference was found between short and long silent <e> insertion errors with an expected even distribution, $\chi^2 (1, N = 16) = 1.56, p = .21$. No significant difference was found between doubling and other insertion type errors with an expected even frequency, $\chi^2 (1, N = 25) = 0.16, p \cong .69$. A significant difference was, however, found between stem internal and doubling after an affix insertion errors with an expected even frequency, $\chi^2 (1, N = 14) = 5.78, p < .02$.

4. Discussion

This paper aimed to answer whether vowel blindness or the proposed underdeveloped orthographic representation hypothesis better explains the types and frequency of ALE spelling errors and to answer whether vowel errors decrease with greater proficiency. Subsequently, it aimed to increase our understanding of which spelling error types improve with overall stronger writing skills and to describe prominent ALE spelling errors more discretely. This study found a significant difference between the distribution of vowel and consonant errors with vowel errors being more problematic than consonants (as similarly reported in other studies). This study, however, did not find a significant difference in the percentage of consonant and vowel omission errors or a clear association between vowel length and error rates, suggesting that vowel blindness is not the core reason for ALE orthographic difficulty. These results are valuable when considering appropriate pedagogical responses for the orthographic problem, a problem that likely contributes to ALE reading difficulty.

4.1. Lack of evidence for a specific vowel blindness effect

As articulated here, the strong version of the vowel blindness hypothesis not only predicts that vowels will be more problematic than consonants, but also that vowel omission errors will be more frequent than vowel insertion errors. This was not the case. Vowel omission errors were not found to be significantly different from vowel insertions errors. As in Haggan (1991), vowel graph-choice errors were the most common error type. Salient vowel omission errors only accounted for about 10% of the total errors found. There was also no significant difference between salient and silent omission errors. In addition, no significant difference was found between short and long-vowel omission errors when the expected frequency rate of errors was adjusted to reflect that short vowels occur more often. Likewise, no significant relationship was found between long and short-vowel graph-choice errors. It is unclear why a vowel omission effect was not detected. While these findings are technically only a failure to
reject the null hypothesis, they also suggest that vowel length and error rates are independent. They indicate that ALEs are just as likely to insert an unnecessary vowel graph as they are to omit a necessary one, just as likely to omit long vowels as short vowels, and just as likely to choose the wrong graph for both short and long vowels when engaged in a writing task. Thus, these results do not support either the weak or strong version of the vowel blindness hypothesis discussed here.

The findings also failed to show that ALEs are significantly improving on the spelling of vowels. They, however, did show significant improvement with consonants on silent graphs and graph choice. The improvement on silent graphs and consonant doubling errors concurs with Haggan’s (1991) findings while the improvement on graph choice is the opposite of what Haggan found. The lack of improvement with vowels coupled with some improvement with consonants could be taken as evidence that vowels are being treated categorically different. Nevertheless, while the differences were not significant, the high level ALEs did improve in every vowel category except for errors involving silent <e>. Because GPCs are more variable for vowels, this may have contributed to this result.

4.2. URH and GPCs

As introduced, the URH posits that ALEs are not acquiring lexical orthographic representations of a similar quality as compared to other groups. The URH predicts greater vowel errors while also explaining problems with consonant graphs. The greater GPC variance of vowels is argued to cause the disproportionate number of vowel errors and make learning vowels more problematic. A vowel-omission transfer effect may also exacerbate this problem, but much like the infrequency of metathesis errors in this study and in Haggan (1991), these kinds of orthographic differences appeared to cause few errors. The URH may then better explain why the short and long-vowel distinction did not affect the frequency of graph choice or omission errors.

If ALEs have poor orthographic representations, they likely build them from phonological ones. This is accomplished via GPCs, which appear limited (e.g., chiken {chicken}) or mismatched (e.g., <sh> for [ʃ] mush {much}). Accordingly, misspelling consonant digraphs with a single graph was more frequent than misspelling single graphs with digraphs and this difference was nearly significant. Single graph for single graph errors were the most common and often reflected using a graph incorrectly while preserving the correct pronunciation: concentrare (concentrate); televiʃion (television); engjoy (enjoy). This suggests that ALEs may resort to using simpler, more common GPCs that reflect accurate pronunciation while failing to notice incorrect word shapes, even in very common words/roots (e.g., vision, much, enjoy). GPC problems can also explain many of the other consonant graph errors. For instance, an English phoneme that does not exist in Arabic caused several of the graph choice errors (e.g., /b/ vs. /p/: proplem {problem}, beʃect {perfect}).

English’s deep orthography and Arabic’s smaller inventory of phonemic vowels accounts for the prevalence of vowel graph choice errors. For example, the phoneme /aː/ can correspond with a single graph <i>, two non-local graphs <iCe>, a single
consonant/vowel graph <y>, or a digraph <ai>, <ie>. If ALEs are building from the phonological level, they may rely on 1 or 2 common graphs/digraphs for this sound (i.e., this study found that <ai> was often mistakenly used for /aɪ/: might {miight}; taɪres {tiresh}; insɪd {inside}; orgnaɪze {organize}. This contradicts the preference to use a single graph over a digraph. It may be that ALEs tend to use one graph for each sound: diphthongs perhaps are perceived as two units. There appeared to be some preference for using a single graph to represent short vowels: alrɛdy {already}; geɛless {jealous} dɪd {dead}; famʊs {famous}. Moreover, <i> was often used for the vowel [ɪ]/[i]: thɪm {them}; sevɪral {several}; thɪse {these}.

Ryan and Meara (1991) noted in their study that the position of the deleted segment within the word influenced the detection rate (i.e., deletions at word edges were detected more frequently). Similarly, in this study salient vowel omissions always occurred word internally and most often on unstressed vowels in multisyllabic words (e.g., dang_rous {dangerous}). In this position, the pronounced vowel is often reduced or deleted in speech. In addition, sonorant consonants often followed omitted vowels (e.g., sudd_nly {suddenly}), suggesting that the sonorant consonant is accounting for the nucleus of the syllable, making the omission of the vowel less obvious. Thus, while it is not clear why and how letter position would influence the effect of vowel blindness on short vowels, one may see how these results could emerge from deriving orthographic representations from phonological ones.

Poor lexical representations likely caused many of the omission/insertion silent <e> errors and omission/insertion doubled-consonant errors. The difference between silent <e> omission and other silent vowel omission errors was significant, which likely only means that silent <e> is a much more frequent silent graph. No significant difference was found between other vowel insertions and silent <e> insertion errors. Taken together, this may suggest that despite the prevalence of silent <e>, it is not part of the lexical representation. GPCs also did not seem to influence the distribution, as errors did not predictably follow vowel quality: no significant difference between insertion/omission of silent <e> and vowel length was found. Weak orthographic representations may, therefore, explain the frequency of these errors. In addition, the pronunciation of schwa after words like as and child might account for errors such as ase {as} and childe {child}.

If an orthographically doubled consonant is pronounced differently, the difference is not very salient (e.g., tomorrow vs. tummy). A significant difference was found between doubling and other omission errors with there being more doubling errors, but no significant difference was found between stem internal and doubling omission errors following an affix. This suggests that doubling is the primary reason for consonant omission errors, but that it is not associated with an affixation spelling rule. No significant difference, however, was found between doubling and other insertion type errors. A significant difference was found between insertion errors involving stem internal doubling and doubling after an affix with there being more
stem internal errors. In fact, this study did not find any cases of overapplying the doubling rule to digraphs, long vowels, glide codas, or complex codas. This suggests that doubling is not the primary reason for insertion errors and that when such errors do occur, they are not likely caused by the over-application of the spelling rule. These results are different from Haggan’s (1991) because that study found most doubling insertion and omission errors to be at the affix/stem boundary.

4.3. Limitations and suggestions for future research

It was not possible to be completely confident about the categorization of every error. For instance, it is possible that some errors counted as silent omission errors were actually metathesis errors: does achieve result from achieve or achieve? This study categorized this error as a silent <e> omission error given the evidence from clearer examples which signal a propensity to make this error type.

Sampling was dictated more by convenience than true randomness. Samples could only be taken from ALEs attending the English Language Institute who had completed the assessment. These problems, however, exist in the other studies on this topic as well.

The educational background (exact length of time studying English), L1 reading and writing proficiency, and knowledge of other languages was unknown for each author of the analyzed texts. Likewise, the other studies have not consistently reported or controlled these variables. One may wish to consider and control these variables in future research. Future study may want to examine typed errors and the use of spellcheckers. Such studies might also want to compare freely written ALEs errors with another group (such as Hebrew) whose L1 writing system also omits vowels.

5. Conclusions

The results of this study suggest that even if vowel blindness is a valid condition, it is not the core problem. The results show that both vowel and consonant errors are problematic across several categories but that vowel errors are much more frequent. While the distribution of vowel and consonant errors appeared to be significantly different, the cause of this difference was not omission errors as predicted by the strong version of the vowel blindness hypothesis. Instead, graph choice and insertion error frequencies were significantly different, suggesting that graph choice was especially problematic for vowels and that insertions were relatively problematic for consonants. Short vowel graph-choice and salient-omission errors were not significantly greater than long-vowel errors. Assuming vowel blindness more strongly affects short vowels, a larger percentage of short-vowel graph and omission type errors should have been found. Likewise, finding more salient omission than silent omission errors would more clearly indicate vowel blindness, but this study did not find a significant difference between these two error types. These findings, thus, suggest vowel blindness is not a useful hypothesis when attempting to explain the core cause of ALE spelling errors. Instead, spelling from a phonological representation may better explain the common distribution of consonant and vowel silent / salient
omission errors. GPC errors may better explain the consonant graph-choice errors and the significantly higher number of vowel errors. GPC errors are more numerous for vowels because GPCs are more variable for vowels and ALEs may lack the literacy skills/learning habits to overcome this problem easily. If this conclusion is correct, teachers should explicitly teach both consonant and vowel GPCs to ALEs but focus more on the accurate production of different graphemes representing the same vowel sounds. Improving GPC awareness in ALEs will likely not only improve spelling accuracy but may also improve reading comprehension and speed. Accordingly, more research is needed to confirm this and to test effective means for improving GPCs for ALEs.

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Constraints in Spoken Proficiency: Causes and Remedial Measures

Shantha Sambath a *, Mekala Sethuraman a

* National Institute of Technology, Humanities and Social Sciences, India

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Abstract

Spoken proficiency in English has become indispensable in engineering industry. It is expected of an engineering student to possess requisite spoken proficiency for his/her career growth prospects. The paper focuses on the impediments in the speaking skills of the engineering students and also finds the ways to improve students’ speaking skills using task-based pedagogical design. The article further investigates the factors that affect the speaking performance of the ESL learners. This article explores the pivotal role played by the pedagogical intervention in the classroom in enabling the learners to overcome the constraints in speaking. The participants of the study chosen for control and experimental group were first year civil engineering students comprising 38 in each group respectively. T-test was used to compare the performance of the students in control and experiment groups. The cross tabulation was also computed to know the scoring pattern of the spoken components in the assigned tasks. The results revealed that there was a significant level of improvement in the oral proficiency of the experimental group.

Keywords: Affective factors; engineering students; oral communicative tasks; speaking constraints; spoken proficiency.

1. Introduction

English language and communication skills have become a mandatory requisite in today's globalised world. Particularly they are essential for an engineer who aspires to be successful in his/her profession and the major pre-condition for an engineering student is to be a fluent speaker in conveying his/her thought process. An engineer needs oral proficiency in English to make presentations, conduct meetings, give instructions, and participate in discussions in his/her work place environment. The inadequacy in English speaking skill refrains the engineering graduates from getting job placements. Basically, most of the students study English for approximately 12 years before entering the tertiary level; nevertheless, they lack spoken proficiency in English. Many students entering engineering colleges have little training in speaking skills despite years of learning English during school. More emphasis could be laid on improving the spoken proficiency of students within the curriculum at the tertiary level as the primary objective for any higher learning institutions is to produce

* Shantha Sambath.
E-mail address: shantha.ravi39@gmail.com
http://dx.doi.org/............................................
employable graduates. The researcher of the study is an English teacher, who considers that it is necessary to develop the speaking skills of the engineering students for their academic excellence and career prospects. With this regard, this study focuses on constraints faced by the engineering students while speaking English and also manages to find a way to improve students’ speaking skills using task-based teaching approach. It further explores teacher’s perceptions of the problems students encounter while speaking English and the crucial role played by the pedagogical intervention in helping the learners to develop their speaking skills. It is expected that the outcomes of the study would enhance the development of the participants’ speaking performance and also provide more insight for teachers to intervene into alternative activities to develop speaking skills for ESL learners in engineering context.

2. Review of Literature

This part covers three main aspects: significance of speaking, constraints in speaking for ESL speakers, and a task-based learning approach.

2.1. Significance of speaking

Speaking English is considered as the main goal of many learners as it is the significant skill they need to acquire, and they assess their progress in terms of their proficiency attainment. According to Bygate (1987) the learners of a language are judged by this skill. Speaking is a crucial part of language learning and teaching. Nunan (1991a) wrote, “Success is measured in terms of the ability to carry out a conversation in the (target) language” (p.34). McDonough and Shaw (as cited in Jamila, 2013) indicate that a person may often be judged about his/ her language competence from his/ her speaking rather than from any of the other language skills. Reimer (2007) states that the engineering students are required to acquire a range of skills, in which speaking skills in English is a vital component to meet the expectation of academia and industry. Zaremba (2006) indicates that speaking skills are usually placed ahead of work experience, motivation, and academic credentials as criteria for new recruitment for employment. Harmer (2007) states three main reasons for getting students to speak in the classroom: firstly, speaking activities provide rehearsal opportunities; secondly, speaking tasks provide feedback for both teacher and students and finally they provide opportunities to the students to activate various elements of language they have stored in their repertoire. A regular speaking task in the classroom can improve students’ spoken proficiency. It requires teachers and students to be engaged in oral communicative tasks in real life situations. At tertiary level students require a range of speaking tasks that encourage a great degree of independence by relying on considerable oral practice mainly in the form of classroom interactions. The speaking tasks presented below take into account the above assumptions.

2.2. Impediments in speaking
Teaching speaking skills has always been a challenging task for most of the teachers in ESL context. The prime reason behind this lapse is lack of exposure to English speaking environment. Learners rarely use English for conversations among peers. Given a situation of this kind, students are not able to convey their thoughts fluently in second language as in their mother tongue. According to Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986), speaking in a second language creates a “mental block” as it is always considered as problematic by majority of students. Ur (1995) lists that commonly observed factors that affect learners’ speaking in language classroom are ‘inhibition’, ‘nothing to say’, ‘low or uneven participation’ and ‘mother-tongue use’. Horwitz et al. (1986) note that anxiety related to learning in a foreign language can be classified into three primary components: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. Nunan (1999) and Thornby (2005) argue that psychological factors such as anxiety or shyness, lack of confidence, lack of motivation and fear of making mistakes hinder students from speaking. Liu and Jackson (2009) claim that lack of vocabulary was regarded as a main obstacle for spoken communication by Chinese English learners. Juhana (2012) states three kinds of linguistic factors that affect the learners’ speaking skills are lack of vocabulary, lack of knowledge in grammar and incorrect pronunciation. In line with these issues, Shanmugasundaram (2013) in his research has broadly categorized the factors which hinder the students in performing speaking as psychological, such as inferiority complex, lack of motivation, fear, shyness etc; sociological, such as their living environment, parents’ educational level and employment status etc; linguistic, such as their poor knowledge of grammar, limited vocabulary, lack of fluency, L1 interference etc; and pedagogic, such as teaching and learning method followed in their schools and colleges, absence of role models etc. He substantiated how these factors have affected the students of Government and Private Arts and Science colleges. A similar kind of situation prevails in engineering scenario in the context of second language learning.

2.3. Speaking in L2: A task – based approach

In recent years, numerous researchers in language teaching have explored Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) approach (Ellis, 2003; Long & Crookes, 1992; Nunan, 1988; Prabhu, 1987). The TBLT approach implies that if learners are provided with a series of tasks that involve both comprehension and production of language with a focus on meaning, language development is increased. TBLT has proved itself useful in meeting learners' needs and in providing lots of interaction opportunities in ESL classes. Nunan (1991b) highlights five features of task-based approach as follows:

- An emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language
- The introduction of authentic texts into the learning situation
• The provision of opportunities for learners to focus, not only on language, but also on the learning process itself
• An enhancement of the learner’s own personal experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning
• An attempt to link classroom language learning with language activation outside the classroom (p. 279).

In TBLT, tasks are the factors which are planned for the desired outcome in pedagogical intervention. Norris and Richards & Schmidt (as cited in Van Le, 2014) have emphasized that TBLT integrates theoretical and empirical foundations for good pedagogy with a focus on tangible learning outcomes in the form of ‘tasks, and therefore, tasks are considered as the core unit of planning and instruction in language teaching. Besides, TBLT is an effective approach where speaking skills are developed by performing a series of activities as steps towards successful task completion. Tasks function as "devices for creating the conditions required for language acquisition" (Ellis, 2002, p. 226). The classroom can be an effective and congenial environment to administer oral communicative tasks for improving the English speaking abilities of the learners. Consequently, this is bound to overcome the factors that affect speaking skills of the SL learners.

3. Research rationale

In the engineering curriculum, prescribed by Anna University the students are offered two papers on Technical English-I and II in their first and second semesters. One of the objectives of the papers is to develop the students’ basic communication skills in English, with reference to the development of speaking skills. But priority is given for teaching other objectives such as grammar, vocabulary, writing skills for convenient reasons. In Technical English classes, the engineering students are seldom given opportunities to practice speaking, and speaking activities are not included as part of assessment in the end semester exam. Teachers consider spoken assessment as a laborious exercise, for they need to assess 60 students in the short schedule allocated to them. The students' inadequacy in spoken English is due to various reasons such as their regional medium of schooling, rural background, inadequate practice in speaking, fear of making mistakes, discouragement by peers, curriculum, teaching and assessment methodologies, less exposure to English speaking environment in academia and home, etc. Due to this negligence, numerous engineering students are passing out of the colleges and universities every year without acquiring the requisite speaking skills which are essential to the graduates for their career. The general employability of engineering students are affected by their lack of speaking skills. They are not able to perform well in their interview and lose their career opportunities. The Times Of India article on National Employability Report revealed the fact on Engineering Graduates of 2014 that 18.33% of the engineers were employable and 18.09% actually got a job. The article stated that 1.2 lakhs candidates were surveyed across the country, in which 73.63% lacked English
speaking and comprehension skill ("Only 18% engineering grads", 2014). The importance of this skill is felt only when they are called for an interview. For this reason, to secure a job they approach English speaking centers where most of the time is spent only for grammar. Hence there is a need to improve the speaking skills of these students during their undergraduate programme.

4. Research Questions

Keeping the aforementioned issues in mind, the researcher aims to answer the following research questions.

1. What are the constraints of ESL learners in speaking English in L2 context?
2. What are the factors that affect speaking skills of ESL learners?
3. What is the role of pedagogical intervention in improving spoken proficiency of the learners?
4. How the oral communicative tasks (OCT) enabled the learners to attain improvement in their speaking skill?

Details regarding how the questions are answered are provided below.

5. Methodology

5.1. Participants

The participants are first year B.E. students of Civil Engineering at M.A.M College of Engineering and Technology, Tiruchirapalli. The participants (N=76) were selected based on simple random sampling in which the samples were assigned to the control and experimental groups using lottery method (Kothari, 2004). The control and experimental groups consist of 38 students in each, and their ages range between 17 and 19 years. The participants comprise 22 females and 54 males. Most of them are from the same background with regard to their first language, previous educational experience and learning context. Even though the participants studied English for around twelve years, they were lacking speaking skill in English. Besides, proficiency level of the students ranged from below average to good in their school final mark sheet. Hence providing this kind of training is supposed to develop their speaking proficiency.

5.2. Tools used in the study

5.2.1. Oral communicative tasks

The oral communicative tasks are the primary instruments. Ellis (2003) states that tasks are tools for providing opportunities for learners to use the target language. For this reason, oral communicative tasks, which are the primary instruments, were designed to develop the students’ speaking ability and also to enable them to think and generate sentences on their own. Table below shows how the oral communicative tasks were used in the study (see Table 1).
### Table 1. Oral communicative tasks.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schedule</th>
<th>Name of task</th>
<th>Task type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day1 &amp; Day2</td>
<td>Ice Breakers</td>
<td>Pair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Activity 1: Point out the imaginative uses of the following things in 3 minutes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A) Shoe lace, B) ruler, C) newspaper, D) pencil.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Activity 2: Make as many words as possible from the phrase ‘SOLVING PROBLEMS’ in 3 minutes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day3 &amp; Day4</td>
<td>Pre-task  Self-Introduction</td>
<td>Individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day5 &amp; Day6</td>
<td>Initial task. Listing10 activities of given professions: Doctor, Teacher, mechanic, Cashier, Farmer, Beautician</td>
<td>Pair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day7 &amp; Day8</td>
<td>Initial task. Listing of five to do’s: To save money, To lose weight, To lead a healthy life, to score marks, To be a good citizen.</td>
<td>Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day9 &amp; Day10</td>
<td>Initial task. Mentioning associated ideas on a topic: Gold, Freedom, Dream, Mobile, Cinema, Fast food, Hobbies</td>
<td>Pair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day11 &amp; Day12</td>
<td>Initial task. Situation-based responses: A) Apologize for coming late to the class. B) Make an excuse for not submitting the assignment on time. C) Request your librarian to issue you a new library card. D) Interrupt your friends who are in a discussion and ask them to accompany you to the office.</td>
<td>Individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day17 &amp; Day18</td>
<td>Core task. Story completion - A young girl is alone at home, reading a horror novel, there was a heavy storm outside, and she heard tapping sound coming from her door.......</td>
<td>Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day19 &amp; Day20</td>
<td>Core task. Role-play Neighbourhood complaint In a shop – attending a customer The mismatched roommates Interviewing a celebrity. A fresher and a senior student at the college</td>
<td>Pair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day21 &amp; Day22</td>
<td>Core task. Group discussion Who influence you the most- parents, friends, or teachers? What do you prefer- Govt. job, private job, business? Hard work or smart work- which is important? Democracy is hampering India’s progress. Films are corrupting the Indian youth. Effects of online social networks on youth.</td>
<td>Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day23 &amp; Day24</td>
<td>Post-task. Impromptu speech: The best gift I have ever received</td>
<td>Individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginning of every class</td>
<td>Supporting task. Short answer sessions: Where do you come from? What are your favourite dishes? Which movie have you watched recently? What book have you read recently? Do you do a part time job? Where do you like to go on vacation? Do you associate yourself with any of the social networks?</td>
<td>Individual</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.2.2. Questionnaire

A pre-study questionnaire was administered to elicit details regarding the participants’ profile. Besides, a post-study questionnaire was used to collect feedback from the participants upon the implementation of the oral communicative tasks.

5.2.3. Observation sheet

The observation sheet was used to note down the students’ performance of the tasks – their ability to perform the task, their choice of diction, their sentence construction, coherence in their utterance, and correct pronunciation of words. At the end of each task completion the data from the observation sheet were transferred to the scoring sheet which includes assessing parameters – the task performance was scored as per the analytical rubrics specified in the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR).

5.3. Scoring rubrics

The pre- and post-tasks and the task performances were assessed using the analytic parameters of spoken language scoring indicated by the Council of Europe (2001) in the CEFR. It includes the assessing parameters such as fluency, grammar, idea, volume and pronunciation. The assessment criteria and weightage of marks are tabulated.

Table 2. CEFR Speaking Assessment Criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components Tested</th>
<th>Weightage of marks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fluency &amp; coherence</td>
<td>4 marks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammatical Acceptability</td>
<td>2 marks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to expand the Idea</td>
<td>1 mark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volume</td>
<td>2 marks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pronunciation</td>
<td>1 mark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum Score</td>
<td>10 marks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.4. Implementation

In this experimental study, a schedule of 24 classes with 50 minutes spread over a period of 12 weeks was conducted to develop speaking proficiency of the learners. At the outset, the experimental group was given a general idea about the importance of developing speaking skills and to be fluent in English language as prospective engineers. They were also given general idea about the OCT sessions and its significance. Self-Introduction was administered to the control and experimental groups, as a pre-task to note their entry level. In Self Introduction, almost all the students participated enthusiastically in the experimental group. The control group also performed well in the pre-task as it was an opportunity to acquaint with others, and they came forward to perform with curiosity. The oral communicative tasks were administered to the experimental group. The tasks were assigned in a graded structure, and this sequencing of tasks enabled the students to perform voluntarily.
However, Technical English (Code: H6152) course was handled to the control and experimental groups as a part of the main stream syllabus prescribed by Anna University. Though the course content deals with modules on Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing skills (LSRW), the teachers give significance to grammar and technical content. This course content was followed for the control group students. In addition, the experimental group was facilitated with OCT sessions, to improve their speaking proficiency. Subsequently, two ice breaker sessions were handled to the experimental group at the beginning of the OCT to prepare the learners to take part in the tasks actively.

The list of administered OCT is comprehensively discussed in this section (see Table 1). In initial task (see Day 5 & Day 6), the students were expected to list out the activities with reference to the given professions in words and phrases. The next task (see Day 7 & 8) was done as group task. In the third task on mentioning five associated ideas on Facebook, dream, etc., the learners seemed to be more confident and were not concerned about their friends’ negative evaluation. They corrected their mistakes from teacher’s feedback. In fourth task on situation based responses most of the students used general terms such as ‘sorry’, ‘congrats’, ‘excuse me’, etc. Only a few responded appropriately. Furthermore, the learners showed interest in long answer interview and participated with excitement, despite their speaking constraints. Their anxiety level reduced substantially in due course. Peer pressure and teacher’s motivation influenced the slow learners to interact in the class. In the sixth task on discussing the similarities and differences, the students made a sincere attempt, and many students showed steady improvement in delivering a coherent content. The duration of interaction also duly increased over time. This task turned out to be interactive, and the students voluntarily contributed, as in the case of previous task. The seventh task on Story Completion elicited instantaneous interaction and girls interacted well. In the subsequent task on Role-play, though the students had a few grammatical errors, they were able to enact their roles skillfully. Pauses and fillers reduced considerably. There was maximum participation in the following ninth task on Group Discussion. The initiators of Group Discussion had an influence on reluctant performers. The post-task on Impromptu Speech was administered to both the control and experimental groups to perceive the difference in attainment of spoken proficiency. During the final task on Impromptu speech, there was a substantial improvement in the experimental group. The post-task was assigned to the control group, and they felt reluctant. They were not able to perform the tasks, as they were not exposed to the nuances of content generation and delivery mechanism of speaking skill and strategic implication of oral communicative tasks.

6. Data analysis and findings

The focus of the study was to examine whether TBLT approach has a positive effect on first year civil engineering students with respect to their speaking proficiency. The quantitative analyses were computed using the Statistical Package for the Social
Sciences (SPSS 17). The qualitative data were interpreted from the observation sheets noted during the implementation of OCTs, in pre and post-tasks.

6.1. Independent sample t-test for spoken components in pre-task

Independent sample t-test was run to compare the mean scores of each speaking component in the pre-task scores of the control and the experimental groups. The mean and standard deviation of the scores of the participants (N=76) are tabulated in Table 3.

Table 3. Independent samples t-test for spoken components in pre-task

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test Component</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>S.D</th>
<th>T Value</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fluency</td>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idea/Content</td>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volume</td>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>4.83</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pronunciation</td>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*M = Mean, **SD = Standard Deviation

The above table reveals that there is no significant difference observed between the control and experimental groups in terms of fluency and idea/content in the pre-task score. They were not able to generate idea in the initial stage, as they were lacking in content. There is a significant difference between the groups in terms of grammatical ability, volume, pronunciation and total score (p< 0.01). The reason for this difference might be the reluctance of the control group in performing the pre-task. Moreover volume, pronunciation and grammar are considered as subsidiary parameters compared to the main scoring parameters such as fluency and content generation.

6.2. Cross tabulation

Cross tabulation was computed and tabulated to interpret the students’ scoring pattern of speaking components in tasks. As seen, it gives a clear idea on their scoring pattern.
Table 4. Cross tabulation of speaking component-Fluency in tasks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score range in Fluency</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>0.5</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total no of respondents</td>
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<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 shows the students' scoring range in fluency. In the first task on Self-Introduction 22 students scored 0 out of 4. In the consequent tasks their scoring improved, except in task 7 on Story completion. In that task, 26 students scored 0, as the learners were not able to be creative in composing a story, and their level of participation comparatively reduced.

Table 5. Cross tabulation of speaking component-Grammar in tasks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score range in grammar</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.5</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>18</td>
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<td>12</td>
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<tr>
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<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>19</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.5</td>
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<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 shows the students' range of scores with respect to the grammar aspect in tasks. It is generally observed that the students made grammatical mistakes in the initial stage which is evident from considerable number of students securing 0 in the first task. Subsequently they were able to correct their errors, and mistakes substantially reduced in the last set of tasks.
Table 6. Cross tabulation of speaking component-Idea/content in tasks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score range in content</th>
<th>Tasks</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.5</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
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<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total no of respondents</td>
<td></td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6 denotes the students’ scoring range secured with reference to generating idea/content in tasks. In the early stage the students were lacking in content and were not able to generate ideas in the initial stage. Eventually they developed in generating ideas. Their scoring in content also gradually improved.

Table 7. Cross tabulation of speaking component-volume in tasks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score range in Volume</th>
<th>Tasks</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>22</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>0.5</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>19</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total no of respondents</td>
<td></td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7 shows the students’ scoring pattern with respect to volume in tasks. 22 students scored 0 out of 2 in the first task. Later they gained confidence, and their voice level duly improved after making conscious efforts. They seemed to be slightly uncomfortable with task 7 and task 8 on story completion and role-play respectively. Their diffidence in performance was reflecting in their volume.

Table 8. Cross tabulation of speaking component-pronunciation in tasks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score range in pronunciation</th>
<th>Tasks</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>22</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.5</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total no of respondents</td>
<td></td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8 displays the students’ scoring range with reference to pronunciation in tasks. Similar to other speaking components, 22 students scored 0 in the first task. In the due course their pronunciation improved in the subsequent tasks except tasks 7 and 8. Hence it is inferred that the scoring pattern of the spoken components are
interrelated within its aspects, and it is reflected in the overall oral performance of the students in the tasks. It is observed that there is no wide deviation in the aspects of the spoken components with respect to their performance in the tasks. If the students were able to generate content cohesively, the other aspects like grammar, volume, pronunciation and fluency would be in place.

### 6.3. Independent sample t-test for spoken components in post-task

Independent sample t-test was computed to compare the mean scores of each speaking component in the post-task score of the control and experimental groups. The mean and standard deviation of the scores are tabulated in the Table 9.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test Component</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>S.D</th>
<th>T Value</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fluency</td>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>7.45</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>10.17</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idea/Content</td>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>5.16</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volume</td>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
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<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pronunciation</td>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>6.08</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>5.63</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>8.46</td>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*M = Mean, **SD = Standard Deviation

The above table reveals that there is a substantial difference between the control and experimental groups in the post-task score in terms of fluency, grammatical ability, idea/content, volume, pronunciation and total score (p< 0.01). It is obvious that experimental group has shown considerable improvement over the control group. The table explicitly indicates that the implementation of oral communicative tasks has proved to have developed the speaking ability of the experimental group and helped the group to overcome the speaking constraints. The mean scores of both groups’ performance in post-task are vividly depicted for better comprehension in the figure below (see Figure 1).
Figure 1. Results of Comparison of Speaking Components

Figure 1 indicates that the experimental group had performed better than the control group in the post-task components based on the analytic parameters of the CEFR. Therefore it can be concluded that the experimental group outperformed the control group in their speaking proficiency.

7. Discussion

7.1. Research question 1

The experimental group faced many constraints while performing the OCT. Majority of the participants were first time speakers and were affected by their fear of failure. The stage fear prevented them from speaking and comprehending the prompting cues. Aydin (2008) investigated the source and levels of fear of negative evaluation and language anxiety among Turkish EFL learners. The result indicated that fear of negative evaluation itself to be a source of language anxiety. Ozturk and Gurbuz (2014) examined the determining factors of speaking anxiety in Turkish EFL context and found that pronunciation, immediate questions, fear of making mistakes and negative evaluation as the major cause of EFL speaking anxiety. The participants of this study also were perplexed with this kind of speaking anxiety. The students could not practice and prepare for the tasks in the home environment due to incompatible sociolinguistic atmosphere, and their inability to generate sentences in English on their own.

Many found it difficult to convey a message or an idea. They seemed to be lacking in discourse ability of organizing thoughts. This was explicit when learners could not express themselves cohesively relevant to the context. This was found to be a major impediment in their oral proficiency. They either produced half sentences in their speech or had false starts. They were unable to speak clearly, and their voice level reduced due to their shyness, inhibition and lack of confidence. Few had L1
interference in their speech. Some of them mumbled, left unnecessary and unnatural pauses in their speech, as they searched for the right word. Some used fillers like, aaah, uumm, and, I, etc. The teacher focused on enabling the students to organize their thoughts, form logical progression of ideas and then the teacher focused on improving the delivery mechanism.

Many learners had poor vocabulary and lack of knowledge in grammar. The inappropriate words and incorrect sentences reflected their shortcomings in the task performance. They mispronounced the words in their presentation. Similarly, Tokoz-Goktepe (2014) inquired the speaking problems of ninth-grade high school Turkish EFL learners and found that the students' problems in speaking English were mainly due to insufficient language and content knowledge, limited contact with English outside the classroom, and the misdirected methods and materials used in the classroom.

Students' resistance to participate in oral communicative tasks was noted as another significant limitation. Some students avoided eye contact with the audience in their participation and kept their face down. They had lack of motivation to carry out certain tasks. They had no idea of performing an individual extemporaneous task. Moreover, their speaking constraints were due to their lack of exposure in the second language. Most of the learners were habituated to read academic texts in the L2. Hence the students' language was restricted to fixed diction and sentence structures pertaining to their academic context. The teacher enabled the learners to use learner strategies to overcome the constraints they faced in their task performance. They wrote in mother tongue, and approached the facilitator for L2 equivalent. They also elicited cues from their peers' speech and incorporated in their content knowledge use. They learnt to make intelligent guesses and used contextual clues in comprehension (Rubin & Thompson, 1982, as cited in Brown 2001: 132-133).

7.2. Research question 2

The factors affecting the speaking skills of ESL learners can be broadly categorized into four as: psychological, pedagogical, linguistic and sociological (Shanmugasundaram, 2013). The language proficiency of the participants varied as majority of them were from regional medium schools and others from English medium schools. Even the English medium students lacked expected language proficiency due to lack of exposure. From their body language and facial expressions it was evident that the students (participants) had high level of anxiety. For instance they were initially hesitant and reluctant to perform the tasks. MacIntyr and Gardner (1991) emphasize that the feeling of anxiety can cause many problems in the acquisition, retention and production of language. The students struggled with speaking English as their anxiety led to unintended problems such as fear of speaking in front of all, not being understood by others and inferiority problems. Discouragement by friends/peers seems to be a dominant factor in the study. As Jianing (2007) explains in her work “To protect themselves from being laughed at, the students are reluctant to
speak English….the less they speak, the less they improve their speaking skills, and the more they are afraid of speaking” (p.1), the students had fear of being insulted or teased when they tried to open a conversation in English with friends. Most of the students seemed to have inferiority complex. The students who hailed from Tamil medium schooling believed that they could not learn to speak in English, and it was possible only for English medium students. Besides at the sociological level, their home atmosphere was not congenial and helpful in practicing L2. The attitude of some students was not positive towards learning English. Furthermore, many had constraints at the linguistic level, such as lack of coherence in their utterance, problems in pronunciation, lack of vocabulary, lack of knowledge in grammar etc. Liu and Jackson (2009) claimed in their study that lack of vocabulary was regarded as a predominant impediment for spoken communication by Chinese English learners. In this study too, the participants considered their inadequacy in vocabulary as prevalent obstacle in their task performance. The factors that come under pedagogical level which affect the speaking skill of the learners are the teaching and learning methods practiced in their schools viz., teachers’ use of mother tongue in English classroom, absence of interactive sessions in English and lack of exposure etc. Although the importance of spoken proficiency in English was felt by the students, they seemed to be lacking interest in executing speaking activities as they would not be assessed in the end semester. They wanted to concentrate more time on exam-oriented exercises.

7.3. Research question 3

The teacher’s role is instrumental in training the students in OCT classes to attain L2 oral proficiency. The researcher applied the strategies specified in Dornyei (2001) in implementing the tasks. The facilitator demonstrated the tasks to the students and consistently showed personal interest in developing their speaking proficiency in English. She promoted the development of group cohesiveness and associated slow learners with their enthusiastic peers in the task on listing of five to do’s. She cultivated their interest in L2 learning and explained the utility of L2 in the real-life situations. The facilitator made learning more pleasant and provided positive feedback throughout the sessions (Dornyei, 2001). The facilitator subdued their psychological barriers by providing motivation, encouragement and maintaining conducive classroom environment. The classroom turned to be a learner-centered classroom, a kind of classroom in which the focus is on the active involvement of learners in the learning process. The teacher organized demonstrative sessions on tasks such as discussing similarities and differences to enhance the understanding of tasks by the learners and to subdue their impediments such as their fears and inhibitions. The teacher overcame the linguistic constraints of the students through her interactive classes and feedback sessions. The teacher assured that all the students would be given equal opportunity. Dornyei (2001) states that the teacher needs to understand the learners’ needs and goals, communicate trust and respect for them, acknowledge their different needs and learning style, and give feedback on
their learning and all these would help in developing their confidence and self-esteem.

The researcher cum facilitator in this study encouraged the students and motivated them to participate in the tasks. The students were made to interact with their peers in role play tasks to overcome their constraints in speaking performance. Their participation increased their confidence level to make oral presentation. Benson (2001) indicates that learner-centered teaching is effective in generating more student participation and target language output and also in encouraging students to take more personal responsibility for their learning. Yet some of the slow learners felt inhibited to participate in the class interaction in initial task on listing 10 activities of given professionals and the facilitator paired them with enthusiastic high performance learners and shared the challenging tasks. The slow learners started to acquire the nuances of delivering content with logical progression of ideas. The facilitator enabled them to select the right word, structure a sentence, suggest an alternative word, and correct an ill-constructed sentence or their mispronunciation. The facilitator also helped the students to think in English. The learners were made to read aloud to overcome their pronunciation problems. In the due course, the facilitator enabled the students to overcome the barriers and volunteer in taking up the tasks. During the oral communicative tasks, the comments and feedback provided by both the peers and the facilitator helped the students to perform better in the subsequent oral tasks. The facilitator motivated the learners by making them work in pairs and groups and act as an audience. Majority of the students aspired for more number of OCT sessions that exhibits their interest in this interactive learning environment. Edge (1989) states teachers’ feedback should encourage students’ learning steps and pointing out the error would be too negative. The teacher never failed to appreciate the smallest effort made by the learners in the task performance. Students were the center of the learning process and were enabled to share more responsibilities in their learning of speaking skills. In this line, they were given opportunities to improve their working knowledge in English, and in turn become independent speakers. This brings about decisive change in the teacher’s role from an authoritarian to a facilitator, organizer, helper, and language adviser. This is consistent with the study of Mohammadipour and Rashid (2015).

7.4. Research question 4

Cluster analysis which was based on the students’ motivation level, performance, and enthusiasm, was computed to interpret their improvement from pre to post-task. Four clusters were arrived based on their improvement percentage and named as, high level of improvement, above average, average, low level of improvement.
Table 10. Improvement level of students in four clusters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cluster No.</th>
<th>Name of the category</th>
<th>Percentage of improvement</th>
<th>No. of students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cluster-1</td>
<td>High level of improvement</td>
<td>100%-83%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster-2</td>
<td>Above average</td>
<td>71%-55%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster-3</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>50%-37.5%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster-4</td>
<td>Low level of improvement</td>
<td>33%-18%</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the table shows a considerable number of students fall in the first 3 cluster namely, high level, above average, and average. Out of 38 students in the class, a substantial number of students (n=23) have shown improvement in their spoken proficiency after attempting the oral communicative tasks. Even in cluster-4 of low level improvement, 8 students were sustaining better performance in all the tasks. In the high level of improvement cluster, the students’ motivation level was high, and they participated in all the activities. They gradually progressed in their oral performance. Though they found it difficult to perform the tasks initially, they tried with the help of the facilitator and their peers. Participant 23 in the beginning could not speak clearly due to lack of vocabulary and grammatical knowledge. But her motivation level was high that she concentrated working on the tips given by the facilitator towards her progress. She never hesitated to seek the facilitator’s help in performing the activities. In the above average cluster, Participant 2, Participant 9, Participant 15, and Participant 16 performed well in the later activities. They looked forward to the OCT sessions and felt the need to improve their language proficiency. They worked for their progress and approached the facilitator to select a right word, or structure a sentence, or grammar correction.

In the average cluster, the participants were highly inhibited and shy. Even those who were proficient enough to speak English, felt hesitant to take part in the classroom activities. Some of them were bold enough to take part in the oral communicative tasks, but they were inadequate in vocabulary and grammar. Despite the efforts of the facilitator, they slowed down in their progress. They could not show steady improvement, as they had some difficulty in constructing sentences and expressing their thoughts.

The low level of improvement cluster has two different levels of students – the better performers in the pre-task, who felt that the task-1 of listing out activities of given profession was monotonous as they were not patient to listen to their peers’ performance and the other group of students who were reticent, did not involve in the activities due to their lack of proficiency. The proficient participants were well ahead of others in performing the tasks and moreover they took part in all the tasks as well. The reticent students were reluctant and disinclined to participate in the oral communicative tasks. When they were compelled to perform activities, they were resistant and undemonstrative. They seemed to be uncomfortable throughout the session and absented themselves deliberately for some sessions. Peloghities (2006) states that real-life interactions, a significant factor for second language acquisition
“demand a great deal of spontaneity and the ability to cope with the unexpected” (p.48). It was taken into account that practicing OCT in the class would benefit the participants to use English in real situations as the interactions that happened in the classroom is a simulation of a real life activity. Willis (1996) indicates, “tasks are always activities where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome” (p. 23). The OCT employed in this study proved to be effective in improving the speaking proficiency of the experimental group.

8. Conclusion

This study was an attempt to improve the engineering students’ spoken proficiency using oral communicative tasks. The OCT was implemented in a regular classroom atmosphere by observing and noting their impediments in speaking, recording students’ progress, interacting and reflecting on various aspects of tasks and students’ outcomes. The findings were drawn from the OCT performance of the participants, their constraints in speaking, the affective factors, and the pedagogical intervention which attempted to enable the students overcome their constraints in their speaking skill. The assigned tasks brought real life situations into the class, where students were provided opportunities to express their ideas and exchange their opinions. The students could express their ideas freely because they performed the activities in pairs and groups with their friends and the classroom had become more of a learner-centered environment. The study found that freedom of task selection encouraged the participants to feel comfortable and motivated to speak, and definitely minimized their constraints in speaking.

In the light of above discussion, it can be concluded that the constraints in speaking can be subdued and speaking proficiency of the engineering students can be developed using oral communicative tasks in the classroom. It is agreed that TBLT is particularly effective in breaking the barriers in speaking and enhancing the speaking proficiency of the learners when they are engaged in relatively similar real-life tasks. The factors affecting the constraints in speaking skills were addressed in this study. The effectiveness of the tasks implemented made the students realize their pitfalls in oral communica tion and improve their speaking proficiency. The result of the present study proved that 61% of the students had shown considerable improvement. In the experimental group of 38 students, 23 members participated in the oral tasks with involvement. The results clearly indicated that the students became aware of their constraints and improve their speaking skills gradually by involving them in oral communicative tasks. This study addressed one of the long ongoing issues of improving the speaking proficiency of the engineering graduates in the era of globalization. This experimental study explicitly indicates that the speaking proficiency of the students can be improved by devising OCT, and it also draws English teachers’ attention towards their vital role of improving language proficiency of their learners in ESL context. Finally and perhaps most importantly it is suggested to undertake longitudinal study to obtain substantial results in future studies. The
cognitive and metacognitive strategies could be devised for rectifying learner constraints in their oral communicative tasks.

9. Limitations

The researcher found less contact hours as the limitation of the study. The need to cover the syllabus and to keep pace with the rest of the topics/ portions mentioned in their course plan and to prepare the students for their periodical tests were to be considered. The researcher was also the observer in this study, she focused on improving the speaking proficiency of the experimental group by substituting an alternative for the inappropriate usage of word, or correcting an ill-constructed sentence rather than quantifying the errors. If there had been a separate observer, he/she would have quantified the list of constraints. In this study, the researcher focused on rectifying the constraints such as false starts, fillers, long pauses, mispronunciation, mother tongue usage, grammatical errors and helping the learners to overcome them in their task performance. It is also pertinent to note that errors were not persistent in the case of majority of the learners.

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Comparing Learners’ General Proficiency Levels with Their Writing Productive Ability: How Correlated are They?

Bouchaib Benzehaf a *

* Chouaib Doukkali University, Faculty of Letters and Humanities, El Jadida, Morocco

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Abstract

Since complexity, accuracy and fluency (CAF) have been suggested as measures of language development (Larsen-Freeman, 1978), a heated debate has surrounded the issue of whether they can sufficiently capture the multi-dimensional facets of language proficiency and be reliable indices of language proficiency levels. Contributing to this debate, the present study investigates the correlation between L3 English proficiency and CAF measures in writing. It recruits 88 semester-one 2nd year Baccalaureate students who were divided into nine groups of general proficiency using the 9-point Stanine scale based on their scores in a general English proficiency test. The scores for the proficiency test were obtained based on the holistic scoring method. We, then, assigned the participants a writing task which we evaluated in terms of CAF. We used the number of dependent clauses per T-unit to measure complexity, the ratio of error-free T-units to the total number of T-units to measure accuracy and number of words per minute to measure fluency. The results showed a strong correlation between proficiency levels and CAF measures, thereby proving that CAF measures serve as a framework suitable for benchmarking language proficiency development. In light of the results, some implications are made for future research targeting language development.

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Keywords: Language proficiency; CAF measures; writing.

1. Introduction

1.1. Proficiency models

Proficiency, which seems to be the major aim of language learning, defies attempts of definition since several questions arise as to what components need to be taken into consideration in determining a person’s proficiency level as well as how competent an individual needs to be to pass as proficient. It is different things for different scholars. For some, it is restricted to a person’s knowledge of grammar and lexis (Harley, Allen,
Cummins & Swain, 1990); for others, it is the knowledge of linguistic and sociolinguistic conventions (Widdowson, 1983).

One influential model of proficiency was suggested by Hymes (1972) and is referred to as “communicative competence”. This model underscores the person’s ability to use language to convey and interpret meaning. Canale and Swain (1980) further developed this model by dividing it into four components: grammatical competence (which refers to the learner’s knowledge of vocabulary, phonology and rules of the language), discourse competence (which relates to the learner’s ability to connect utterances into a meaningful whole), sociolinguistic competence (which relates to the learner’s ability to use language in appropriate situations), and strategic competence (which relates to the learner’s ability to make up for breakdowns in communication).

Canale and Swain’s (1980) model of communicative competence had dominated the field of second and foreign language acquisition and language testing for more than a decade. Later, Bachman (1990) came with a model of “communicative language ability” which was further developed by Bachman and Palmer (1996). This model comprises two broad areas, language knowledge and strategic competence. Language knowledge consists of two main components: organizational knowledge, i.e. control over formal language structures, and pragmatic knowledge, i.e. functional and sociolinguistic knowledge. On the other hand, strategic competence refers to a set of metacognitive functions which enable language users to be involved in goal setting, planning, and assessment of communicative sources. While drawing insight from the above-mentioned models of proficiency, the present study tries to bring in other aspects of proficiency which have proved efficient in testing language proficiency development, namely, complexity, accuracy and fluency (CAF).

1.2. CAF components as an index of development

In concurrence with the above-suggested models of proficiency, researchers have also been concerned with ways of assessing language proficiency. Different measures to assess and determine learners’ proficiency levels have been suggested in this regard. One such measure of learners’ language growth, which was borrowed from the field of first language (L1) acquisition, has been based on length of certain structures (Norris & Ortega, 2009). However, this measure proved to be ineffective as rote-learned formulaic chunks gave false impressions of progress (Myles, 2012), hence, the quest for a more systematic measurement of development that could yield a more precise identification of the learners’ proficiency levels and a description of their performance was initiated.

The efforts crowned with the emergence of an Index of Development operationalized as measures of Complexity, Accuracy, and Fluency (CAF). Unlike the length-based measures, CAF measures were believed to capture the pivotal aspects of L2 performance (see Ellis, 2003 & Skehan, 1998). An additional benefit of CAF is that each construct encompasses various, multi-faceted traits which can be assessed by a number of measures. CAF measures have increasingly gained significance and have
figured as major research variables in research targeting second and foreign language acquisition. Researchers have started to use them to describe oral and written performance and to measure progress in language learning.

Researchers have also used CAF to examine the development of L2 production from the perspective of its relationship to L2 proficiency. For instance, Pennington and So (1993) compared university students’ writing process with their overall linguistic product and reported positive correlations between the two. Higher proficiency level learners wrote better than lower proficiency level learners. Type of task was also found to interact with complexity and accuracy as challenging tasks induced learners to produce more complex language, while simple tasks induced them to increase their accuracy. Preparation time led to an increase in complexity but not in accuracy, thereby demonstrating a trade-off between these two constructs.

Synthesising research findings of 25 studies which investigated the syntactic complexity measures and their relationship to L2 proficiency, Ortega (2003) found that this relationship varied systematically across studies. Such a variance hinged on type of language involved (2nd or foreign) and whether proficiency was defined by programme level or by holistic rating. The researcher also reported that longitudinal evidence was limited and suggested that an observation period of roughly one year of college-level instruction be a requirement for substantial changes in the syntactic complexity of L2 writing.

Larsen-Freeman (2006) studied the development of L2 complexity, accuracy and fluency in the spoken and written production of five Chinese (higher-) intermediate learners of English. The main (quantitative) finding was that every CAF domain improved at the group level indicating that they increase according to the proficiency level. Similarly, after studying L2 Korean learners’ writing, Seo (2009) found that the higher the learner’s proficiency level is, the higher the grammatical accuracy levels are. Fluency and complexity also increased as reflected by the number of words, clauses, and morphemes per sentence. Contrary to these results, Seo and Eo (2011) found that as proficiency increased, accuracy declined due to an increase in the proportion of syntactic errors in connective endings.

Similarly, Bulté and Housen (2015) studied the development of English L2 writing proficiency of adult ESL learners as evaluated by means of objective measures targeting different components of lexical and syntactic complexity. They also compared the scores on these measures with more holistic and subjective ratings of learner overall writing quality. One of the main results obtained was that some measures, (e.g., subordination ratios and lexical richness measures), can adequately and validly capture development in L2 writing.

In the context of Morocco, Zyad, Rguibi and Bouziane (2016) investigated the relationship between objective linguistic and lexical measures, particularly CAF components, and holistic ratings in the writing of freshmen. The main finding obtained showed a significant relationship between objective measures and holistic ratings. Also, writing quality was significantly predicted by the interaction of mean
length of T-unit, number of clauses per T-unit, number of error-free T-units and lexical diversity.

1.3. Aim and research questions

Since CAF measures were suggested as measures of language development, a vigorous debate has ensued regarding their nature and their ability to capture the multi-dimensional facets of language proficiency and be reliable indices of language proficiency levels. The present study aims to contribute to the knowledge and research surrounding CAF measures and their ability to correlate with overall language proficiency. In particular, it tries to probe into the ability of L3 writing CAF components to describe the learner’s holistically scored overall linguistic proficiency. The following research questions guide this study:

1. To what extent does students’ proficiency based on Stanines relate to their writing ability as expressed in terms of CAF?
2. To what extent do CAF measures correlate with each other in students’ writing?

2. Theoretical underpinnings

The study is conducted within the framework of CAF measures. Though researchers agree on the validity and usefulness of these constructs, they do not agree about their definition and operationalization. One main reason why there is lack of consensus regarding their definition is that each construct encompasses various, multi-faceted traits, thus allowing for different operationalisations.

2.1. Complexity

Despite the interest it has generated, no consensus exists in the second or foreign language literature on the definition of complexity, and no consistency regarding its operationalization. A wealth of complexity measures is available in the acquisition literature ranging across words/T-unit, clauses/sentence, number of subordinate clauses, word types/word token, number of passive forms and number of relative clauses, etc. for Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005, p. 139), complexity is “elaborated language”. For Norris and Ortega (2009), different complexity measures exist in the literature, but the most common are global complexity measures which target the length of the unit (such as words per T-units). These measures capture complexity in a general sense since any type of embedding will increase this measurement. In her study, Larsen-Freeman (2006) used one measure for syntactic complexity which is the average number of clauses per T-unit.

Using T-units as a method of analysis, two measures of complexity have been most frequently used by researchers. The first is the mean length of T-unit (e.g. Henry, 1996; Ishikawa, 1995; Larsen-Freeman, 1978, 1983), which is the average across all T-units in a text; and the second is clauses per T-unit (e.g. Bardovi-Harlig & Bofman, 1989; Flahive & Snow, 1980; Hirano, 1991), which is the number of dependent clauses.
per T-unit (subordination). It is noteworthy that a T-unit is defined by Hunt as one main clause with all subordinate clauses attached to it. After surveying 27 studies, Ortega (2003) found that 25 studies employed mean length of T-unit (MLTU). Some researchers, however, have used this measure for fluency (Larsen-Freeman, 2006; Wolfe-Quintero, Inagaki, & Kim, 1998). Such a tendency has been vehemently criticised by Norris and Ortega (2009) who state that fluency should rather be measured by pause information.

2.2. Accuracy

Of the three CAF measures, accuracy seems to be the most easily defined construct. According to Housen and Kuiken (2009), it is “error-free” speech. However, it also poses several challenges. For instance, against which standards should we measure it? Besides, longitudinal assessment of accuracy creates challenges as learners attempt new lexical items and grammatical forms. Accuracy can also be measured specifically (accuracy of certain forms) or generally (overall number of errors or error-free units).

Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005) advocate use of general measures of accuracy, such as percentage of error-free clauses or number of errors per 100 words when data is collected from loosely structured tasks. In fact, the use of specific measures might induce participants to avoid the constructions that are targeted by the measures. Skehan and Foster (1999) agree that global measures of accuracy are more realistic and sensitive. These views are also empirically supported. Using both global and specific measurements of accuracy, Ahmadian and Tavakoli (2011) found that the global measure of error-free clauses produced the same information as the specific measure of verb forms while Michel, Kuiken, and Vedder (2007) reported that global measures were more informative. It is noteworthy that this finding applies also to complexity and fluency. Michel, Kuiken, and Vedder (2007) investigated learners’ task-based L2 performance by means of global CAF measures and specific measures and found global measures to be more informative.

2.3. Fluency

It refers to “the production of language in real time without undue pausing or hesitation” (Ellis & Barkhuizen 2005, p. 139). Fluency has also been correlated with learner’s ability to use the language with a high number of words and without extensive pauses and/or corrections within a time limit. It refers to the “delivery of speech” (Schmidt, 1992, p. 358), and it has been discussed in terms of two broad categories, temporal and hesitation. Skehan (2009b) has categorised it as repair (revisions/self-corrections), speed, breakdown in writing process, and automatization. It is obvious that most of these measures fit in with speaking but not with writing, the reason why fluency has not received much attention in writing research.

One way temporal variables have been operationalized in writing is word count. An extensive review of 18 studies by Wolfe–Quintero, Inagaki and Kim (1998)
demonstrated that 11 studies found a significant relationship between word count and writing development whereas 7 studies showed only slight increase in word number. However, word count can be rendered more reliable if it is done within a time limit. In this context, Kennedy and Thorp (2002) investigated linguistic responses to an academic writing task and reported significant differences between essays at levels 4, 6 and 8 with level 4 writers hardly meeting the word limit. Similarly, Cumming, Kantor, Baba, Erdosy, Eouanzoui, and James (2005) also reported statistically significant differences between essays at level 3 and 4 and between levels 3 and 5, though not for levels 4 and 5 in their study of differences in writing discourse in independent and integrated prototype tasks for next generation TOEFL. Other commonly adopted measures besides word count include the number of sentences and T-units produced within a certain time constraint (Godfrey, Treacy & Tarone 2014; Wu & Ortega, 2013).

In addition to studying each CAF construct separately, researchers also studied the interaction and interdependency among CAF constructs. In this regard, two hypotheses have been created: the Trade-off Hypothesis and the Cognition Hypothesis. The former makes the claim that CAF dimensions are interdependent such that they compete with each other for attention (Skehan, 1996, 2009; Skehan & Foster, 2001). On the other hand, the Cognition Hypothesis states that particularly more cognitively and functionally demanding tasks encourage the learner to produce more complex and more accurate language production (Robinson, 2001, 2005).

3. Method

This study follows an exploratory research design to explore the capacity of CAF measures to reflect students' proficiency levels. In light of the studies reviewed, we used the CAF triad in our measurement after having operationalized them as quantitative measures. Numerical values of the indices are, therefore, given and correlated with general proficiency. After feeding the data into SPSS, we obtained different results for these three different constructs, namely, fluency, accuracy and complexity.

3.1. Participants

In the present study, there are 88 participants, 37 males and 51 females. They are all high school students in second year baccalaureate, semester one. Their age ranges between 17 and 21, and they all belong to the science department. All the participants have studied English for 3 years and are in their fourth year. The reason behind collecting data from only science students is practical. They are grouped in same classes, and they constitute the type of students who can provide meaningful data, particularly data that are normally distributed and which can fit in well with stanine levels. Thus, the type of sampling we used is convenience sampling which is most common in educational settings.
3.2. Instruments

Data of the present study was collected by using two different sources and methods. First, we used a general proficiency test that consisted of five sub-parts: a reading text including sections for comprehension, grammar, vocabulary, functions and paragraph writing, and we scored it holistically out of 20. We designed the test according to the criteria used in national Baccalaureate exams in Morocco, but we reduced the number of questions to make the test doable within the period of one hour. The test was a nationally accredited Test of Proficiency in Morocco (TOPIK), which has won wide recognition for reliability and validity. Two high school teachers participated in scoring the test following a scoring rubric modelled on that used in baccalaureate national exams in Morocco. After scores were obtained, we converted them to Stanines.

A Stanine stands for “standard nine” and is a method of converting scores into a nine-point scale. Stanines allow us to assign to a student in the group a number which is relative to all members in that group, with number 5 being the mean. Stanines has the benefit of facilitating comparison of scores among different groups; and similar to normal distributions, it provides scores that represent a bell curve with 9 sliced-up pieces.

In addition to the proficiency test, we assigned the students a writing task with the topic of “students’ dropping out of school, causes and solutions”. The task was of intermediate difficulty and in line with the standards outlined in the curriculum. The participants had one hour for both planning and writing their pieces.

3.3. Data analysis

We used descriptive statistics to present quantitative descriptions of students’ proficiency levels and generate means and standard deviations. We also used Pearson correlation coefficient which is a measure of the linear correlation between two variables. Pearson correlation coefficient has a value between +1 and −1, where 1 is total positive linear correlation, and 0 is no linear correlation, and −1 is total negative linear correlation. We used it to compute the correlation coefficient between proficiency and each CAF construct, and also to test the correlation among CAF constructs.

3.4. CAF analysis

We adopted Hunts’ T-units to measure students’ writing in terms of CAF. A T-unit is defined as the minimal terminable unit into which the sentence can be broken (Hunt, 1965). It consists of one main clause and any subordinate clauses or fragments attached to it. We attempted to operationalize CAF constructs in a way consistent with the literature. We found a multiplicity of measures; some were global while others were specific. It is worth noting in this context that Wolfe-Quintero, Inagaki and Kim, (1998) also counted over one hundred measures of accuracy, fluency, and
complexity employed in thirty-nine second language writing development studies. Based on findings of various studies regarding the informative nature of global measures, we decided to use global measures. Thus, we used one global measure for each construct. For complexity, we calculated the number of dependent clauses per T-units; for accuracy, we calculated the ratio of error-free T-units to the total number of T-units, and for fluency, we calculated the ratio of words per minute. Following is a summary of the measures adopted in the study:

Table 1. Global measures adopted in the analysis of students writing products

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Complexity</th>
<th>Accuracy</th>
<th>Fluency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of dependent clauses per T-unit</td>
<td>Ratio of error-free T-units to the total number of T-units</td>
<td>Number of words per minute</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Results

The aim of this research paper is to compare the learners’ proficiency levels as scored holistically with their written productive ability as measured in terms of CAF. The study has been guided by the two research questions. Following are the results obtained for each research question.

4.1. Relationship between proficiency and written ability

To answer this research question, first we had to determine the participants’ proficiency Stanines. Thus, we delivered a proficiency test which we scored holistically. We tested the assumption of normality via examination of the unstandardized residuals. Review of the S-W test for normality (SW=.976, df=88, p>0,05) and skewness (-0.25) and kurtosis (0.46) statistics suggested that normality was a reasonable assumption. The boxplot suggested a relatively normal distributional shape (with no outliers) of the residuals. The Q-Q plot and histogram suggested normality was reasonable.

After checking for normality of data, we converted the scores into Stanines by calculating the means for each Stanine level. The Stanine score serves to show the learner’s ranking within the specific group. The lowest level within the group is assigned to Stanine 1 and the highest level to Stanine 9. The lowest three levels are below average, the next three levels are average while the highest three levels are above average. Table 2 below presents the results of the proficiency test based on Stanines.
Table 2. Students' Stanine proficiency levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stanine level</th>
<th>Student number</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Proficiency test mean</th>
<th>St deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19.12</td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16.16</td>
<td>1.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13.85</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12.23</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10.61</td>
<td>.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>1.70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participants were normally distributed across the Stanine levels, with the highest Stanine score being 19.12 which was scored by 4 female students while the lowest Stanine score was 4.25 obtained by 4 male participants. The majority of student participants came in the middle Stanine levels, namely 4, 5 and 6 scoring between 9.4 and 12.23. Thirty female students and eighteen male students were located in these levels. We also observed that girls obtained higher Stanine scores than males.

Following the proficiency test which enabled us to identify student participants' stanine scores, we administered a writing task. After scoring the writing task in terms of complexity, accuracy and fluency, we calculated the means for CAF scores for each Stanine level. Complexity was computed by the number of dependent clauses per T-unit; accuracy was calculated by the ratio of error-free T-units to the total number of T-units, and fluency was assessed by the ratio of words per minute. The results are presented in table 3 below:

Table 3. CAF measures in written production by proficiency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stanine level</th>
<th>Student number</th>
<th>Complexity Mean</th>
<th>Complexity St dev</th>
<th>Accuracy Mean</th>
<th>Accuracy St dev</th>
<th>Fluency Mean</th>
<th>Fluency St dev</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0.040</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.018</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.044</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.020</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>0.042</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.052</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.038</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>0.069</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.047</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.030</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>0.116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.051</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.025</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>0.039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.061</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.045</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>0.024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.061</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.042</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>0.034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.077</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.034</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>0.051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.081</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>0.033</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table shows that the higher the proficiency Stanine is, the higher the mean scores get for each construct. For complexity, learners at level one scored 0.20 while
learners at level nine scored 0.53. Learners at level 5, which is the average score, produced 0.44 subordinate clauses per T-unit. Thus, it is more likely that the more proficient learners use more subordinate clauses in their writing. These results indicate that a positive correlation exists between complexity and proficiency.

Similarly, students in higher proficiency stanines produced more accurate language than their counterparts in lower proficiency levels. For instance, student participants at stanine 9 scored 0.48 indicating an average of 48% error-free T-unit rate against the total number of T-units in their writing. In contrast, students at proficiency stanine level 1 had only 0.12 error-free T-units. This finding suggests the existence of a positive correlation of accuracy with proficiency. Mean scores for fluency, in turn, showed a positive correlation with proficiency. The higher the proficiency stanine is, the greater students’ fluency becomes. Students at stanine level nine produced an average of 2.91 words per minute while students at level one wrote no more than an average of 1.16 words per minute.

To check the significance of the apparent correlations, we conducted a statistical analysis of correlations between proficiency and each construct of the CAF triad using the Pearson correlation coefficient. Table 4 below presents the results.

Table 4. Correlation between language proficiency and written production

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>General proficiency</th>
<th>Complexity</th>
<th>Accuracy</th>
<th>Fluency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.763**</td>
<td>.818**</td>
<td>.874**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4 above shows that learners’ proficiency levels strongly correlate with complexity \((r =0.763, p < 0.01)\), with accuracy \((r =0.818, p < 0.01)\), and with fluency \((r =0.874, p < 0.01)\). Findings indicate that learners’ writing CAF components improve along with their general proficiency levels, with fluency having the strongest relationship with proficiency.

4.2. Correlation of CAF in writing ability

We observed that all CAF constructs increased with each proficiency stanine level. To check for the significance of that relationship, we used Pearson correlation coefficient in order to test the correlation among CAF constructs in students’ written production. Table 5 below presents the results obtained.
Table 5. Correlations among CAF in writing ability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Complexity</th>
<th>Accuracy</th>
<th>Fluency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation 1</td>
<td>.693&quot;</td>
<td>.854&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed) ----</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N 88</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation .693&quot;</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.825&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed) .000</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N 88</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation .854&quot;</td>
<td>.825&quot;</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed) .000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N 88</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 5 above shows that CAF constructs are strongly correlated with each other in students' writing. Particularly between complexity and fluency the correlation coefficient ranks highest ($r = 0.854$, $p < 0.01$), while it is lowest between complexity and accuracy but still significant ($r = 0.693$, $p < 0.01$). Correlation between fluency and accuracy was also very strong, with a significant coefficient ($r = 0.825$, $p < 0.01$). The high correlations obtained among complexity, accuracy, and fluency suggest that they interact positively with each other and develop alongside each other.

5. Discussion

This study had two aims: to investigate the relationship between general language proficiency development (as expressed through grammar, vocabulary, functions and reading, and scored holistically) on one part, and writing ability (as scored objectively using CAF components) on another part. The second aim was to investigate the correlation among CAF components. The results pointed to a positive correlation between proficiency and writing CAF components, and also among CAF components. Following is a discussion of these two main findings.

5.1. Relationship between proficiency and written ability

The results obtained show that proficiency and written production are strongly correlated with each other indicating that writing CAF components all increase with the development of proficiency. The higher the proficiency stanine level is, the higher complexity, accuracy and fluency levels are in students' written productions. This suggests that as learners improve their proficiency, they also improve their writing in terms of complexity, accuracy and fluency. This finding supports the suggestion that writing ability reflects the development of learner's language system (Verspoor & Smiskova, 2012). Thus, CAF components can be valid constructs for measuring general language proficiency.

The findings obtained are consistent with the literature as Seo (2009) also reported that the higher the learner's proficiency level is, the higher the accuracy, fluency and
complexity levels in L2 Korean learners’ writing become. Hence, we align with Verspoor, Schmid, and Xu (2012, p. 239) who suggest that “one useful way to measure general proficiency in a second language (L2) is to assess writing samples”. Ellis (2003) and Skehan (1998) also state that CAF measures can capture the pivotal aspects of L2 performance. One way we can explain this is that writing involves the active use of all facets of language, including lexis, grammar, as well as other levels of language features.

A side issue of the findings centres on the gender dimension. It was observed that most females were placed in upper stanines while most males were placed in lower stanines. For instance, stanine nine was exclusively female and stanine one was exclusively male. This supports the claim that education is increasingly being feminized with girls not only accounting for the large majority of the student population, but also performing higher than male students. Possible interpretations of female advantages at school go primarily to their good behaviours, positive attitudes to school work and attentiveness in classrooms. The literature abounds with studies that document female advantages at school. For instance, Kenney-Benson, Pomerantz, Ryan, & Patrick (2006) have drawn attention to the fact that girls are surpassing boys in school grades even in stereotypically masculine subject areas like maths and science. Interestingly, these researchers went beyond documenting girls’ academic excellence to investigate causes for it, with findings showing that girls were more likely than boys to hold mastery over performance goals and to refrain from disruptive classroom behaviour. Similarly, Geisler and Pardiwalla (2010) documented girls’ academic advantages in all courses and in all stages of education, reporting higher dropout rates, higher levels of truancy, and greater discipline problems among boys than among girls, which could account for boys’ lagging performance.

5.2. Correlation of CAF in writing ability

The main (quantitative) finding obtained with regard to the second research question is that every CAF domain improved at the group level based on stanines. CAF components for writing ability were also highly correlated with each other suggesting that they are interconnected. Particularly, fluency is the most strongly correlated with proficiency. This finding is consistent with the one obtained by Larsen-Freeman (2006) who reported an increase in every CAF domain as proficiency improved. It is also partly consistent with Robinson’s (2001, 2005) cognition hypothesis which states that it is not only possible but also natural that complexity and accuracy receive concurrent attention from the learner. However, contrary to Robinson who states that fluency develops separately, this study found that fluency increased in tandem with complexity and accuracy.

The findings of this study are different from the findings obtained in some previous studies regarding the correlation of CAF constructs. Some researchers found that CAF components do not develop concurrently and that students tend to overlook one area while concentrating on another (Skehan, 1996, 2009). Benevento and Storch
(2011) also reported significant improvements over time in language complexity and discourse, but not in accuracy. Probably one of the reasons for such inconsistency of results is the type of task and the proficiency levels of the learners. Besides, the different measures adopted in the different studies are also likely to affect the results. Whether it is a bliss or otherwise, different measures have been adopted in the assessment of CAF constructs in the literature, and that is due to the fact that each construct encompasses various, multi-faceted traits which make the construct amenable to different measures. Accordingly, different researchers used different measures, thereby making synthesis of findings as well as comparison of results across studies a complex issue. Besides, different proficiency levels of the participants may also affect the findings obtained. It is noteworthy that the proficiency levels of the participants in this study range from pre-intermediate to intermediate.

6. Conclusion and implications

This study examined the relationship between L2 proficiency and English written production. We used a general proficiency test that consisted of a reading text including sections for comprehension, grammar, vocabulary, functions and paragraph writing. We designed the test according to the criteria used in national Baccalaureate exams in Morocco after reducing the number of questions to make the test doable within the period of one hour. After scoring the test holistically, we converted the scores to Stanines. We also assigned the students a writing task with the topic of “students’ dropping out of school, causes and solutions”.

Results of the correlation analysis revealed a strong correlation between learners’ proficiency levels and their written productions. All CAF constructs increased in written production as proficiency levels increased, suggesting that as the learners improve their proficiency, they are more likely to produce more complex, more accurate and more fluent output. This finding suggests that writing can capture the pivotal aspects of learners’ inter-language as it is a skill that involves the active use of all facets of language, including lexis, grammar, and other discourse levels of language features.

One implication of these findings is that writing CAF components can serve as an effective framework within which to gauge learners’ inter-language system and its progress. The fact that CAF can be operationalized as a set of quantitative measures providing numerical values that are more objective than holistic scoring allows them to provide better perceptibility of development. Another implication follows from the new gender gap in favour of females as suggested by the proficiency test scores. These new gender differences call for the adoption of best classroom management practices that maximise all students’ achievements, males and females. Educational reforms should now give greater priority to boys’ educational difficulties.

Lastly, one of the limitations of this study is that the findings have been obtained from the perspective of group means. Given that ample individual variation exists between students, we suggest that case studies should be conducted which probe into
individual differences. Combining the quantitative approach with a qualitative approach is also bound to enrich the data by presenting information regarding how learners’ inter-language is being developed.

References


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The Effects of Receptive and Productive Learning Tasks on EFL Learners’ Knowledge of Collocation and Meaning

Zeynep Özdem Ertürk a, *

a Niğde Ömer Halisdemir University, School of Foreign Languages, Niğde 51240, Turkey

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Abstract

Collocations are one of the important components of native speaker competence. For this reason, there have been many studies investigating explicit teaching methods of them. However, most of them did not focus on receptive and productive tasks independently. This study aims to explore the effectiveness of receptive and productive vocabulary tasks on learning collocation and meaning in an EFL setting. Turkish EFL learners participated in the study and they were randomly assigned to receptive task, productive task and control groups. The receptive task group read three glossed sentences for each of the 20 target collocations and the productive task group completed a cloze task. The results showed that both tasks were effective to lead to learning gains in collocation and meaning. Although the results were not significant, the participants in the receptive task group were able to reach higher scores on receptive knowledge of collocation and meaning than on the productive ones.

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Keywords: Collocations; meaning; receptive and productive vocabulary tasks

1. Introduction

1.1. Knowledge of Collocations

Collocations, which can be defined as “word combinations” (Nesselhauf, 2003) or “a group of two or more words that occur frequently together” (Shin, 2007), have an essential role in foreign language education. As stated by Nesselhauf (2005), they have some important functions. First, since they seem to be the basis for the development of creative language in the first language, they have an essential role in language learning. Second, they are essential for fluency in both speaking and writing. If the learners of the language do not have collocation knowledge, they frequently need to use a dictionary or concordancer and this hinders fluency. Furthermore, knowledge of collocation also helps comprehension. The more pre-
fabricated units the learners have, the better they can understand and produce language.

In addition to their beneficial functions, collocations seem problematic when being produced especially by foreign language learners. They consist of at least two words, one pivot–node–word and the collocate(s) used with it; however, they have an arbitrary nature. It is difficult to translate them word by word from one language to another (Smadja, 1993). Although, it is possible to express something in more than one way, some of them do not sound natural. When foreign language learners consider their native language and translate the collocation word by word, they sometimes fail to express themselves properly. Even advanced level learners have some problems producing collocations because of their arbitrary nature (Nesselhauf, 2003). Moreover, they are also recurrent (Smadja, 1993), which means that they are not exceptions; they are often repeated in a given context. It is indispensable to learn collocations since learners frequently come across them not only in written but also in spoken language. In short, it can be said that collocations are an indispensable but problematic component of a language classroom. As a result, they should get special focus, especially in a foreign language classroom.

1.2. Previous Studies

In this paper, the studies on collocations are grouped into two groups in order to investigate the results of each group analytically. The first group of studies includes the ones which focused on identifying the most frequent collocations in spoken or written corpora and contrasting the use of the collocations between a reference corpus of native speakers of English and a learners’ corpus (Laufer & Waldman, 2011; Macis & Schmitt, 2017; Shin, 2007; Shin & Nation, 2008). In other words, the first group of studies does not aim to teach the collocations, they are just descriptive or based on error analysis. Their aim is to provide implications for teaching or learning collocations. On the other hand, the second group of studies is the ones that try to investigate the effects of different methods or tools for teaching/learning collocations (Boers, Demecheleer, Coxhead, & Webb, 2014; Chan & Liou, 2005; Kasahara, 2010, 2011; Laufer, 2011; Laufer & Girsai, 2008; Peters, 2014; Sun & Wang, 2003; Webb & Kagimoto, 2009, 2011). They aimed to see the effect of the use of corpus tools (Sun & Wang, 2003; Chan & Liou, 2005), dictionaries (Laufer, 2011), matching exercises (Boers et al, 2014), meaning-focused instruction (Laufer & Girsai, 2008), and receptive and productive tasks (Webb & Kagimoto, 2009) in teaching collocations (Pellicer-Sánchez, 2015). In addition to these features, Peters (2014) and Kasahara (2010, 2011) compared the acquisition of single words and collocations.

Shin (2007) aimed to find the most frequent and grammatically well-formed English collocations by examining both a spoken and a written corpus. He found that in the most frequent fifty items in each corpus, only fifteen took place in both lists. More than sixty of the most frequent collocations were among the top 1000 words of English. In addition to these, he also found that the most frequent fifty collocations in
spoken English were more frequently used than the written collocations. As an implication, he emphasized the importance of teaching the most frequent spoken collocations in class as it is impossible to teach all the collocations in the limited time of instruction.

In another study, Shin and Nation (2008) tried to identify the most frequent collocations in spoken English and they based their study on the spoken section of British National Corpus. They applied a set of criteria for finding collocations to be taught in a beginner level spoken course. They found a large number of grammatically well-formed high frequency collocations. They also found that if the pivot word’s frequency is high, the number of its collocations were high as well. Moreover, they realized that shorter collocations had the higher frequency. As a result of their study, they provided a list of top one hundred collocations in spoken English.

Laufer and Waldman (2011) investigated how native speakers of Hebrew used the verb-noun collocations in writing at three proficiency levels. They compiled a learner corpus and compared it with Louvain Corpus of Native English Essays (LOCNESS). They identified 220 most frequent nouns, occurring 20 or more times in LOCNESS and created concordances for the nouns and chose verb-noun collocations among them. First, they compared the frequency of collocation use between the participants and the native speakers. Then, they compared participants from different proficiency groups in terms of frequency and accuracy of collocations. They found that native speakers produced more collocations than all the participants at different proficiency levels. In addition, it was found that only at the advanced level, the number of collocations increased. However, errors were persistent even at the advanced level.

In a very recent corpus-based study, Macis and Schmitt (2017) investigated the types of 54 collocations from the Corpus of Contemporary American English; whether they are literal, figurative or duplex collocations. They described literal collocations as “combinations where the literal meanings of the words are simply added together”; figurative collocations as the ones which “have idiomatic meanings which are not derivable from the component words” and duplex collocations as the ones that both have a literal and figurative meaning (p. 50). They found that although most of the collocations seemed literal, an important percentage of them had both literal and figurative meaning, and relatively a few of them had only figurative meaning. As a result, they suggest addressing types of collocations differently by considering whether the receptive or productive knowledge of a collocation is required.

As mentioned before, the second group of the studies focused on teaching/learning of collocations. Chan and Liou (2005) investigated the use of Web-based practice units with an online Chinese-English bilingual concordance for learning English verb-noun collocations. Thirty-two Chinese college EFL students participated in the study. Of the five Web-based practice units used in the study, three included the use of concordancer. The results of the study showed the effectiveness of explicit online instruction in improving the knowledge of collocations in the immediate post-test. The results were significantly higher for the units with a concordancer. It was also found
that different verb-noun collocations resulted in different practice effects. As far as the practice effects were concerned, different prior collocation knowledge was also found to be effective in performance differences.

In another study, Laufer (2011) searched for the effect of dictionary use in teaching collocations. She gave the intermediate level participants a set of sentences containing verb-noun collocations. The verbs of these collocations were missing and the participants were asked to fill in the missing verbs by using their dictionaries. It was found in the study that collocational knowledge of the participants significantly increased with the use of a dictionary. However, Laufer (2011) also reached the conclusion that sometimes the participants found the wrong collocations and other times they could not realize that the collocation was unfamiliar to them and did not consult to their dictionaries. As a result, Laufer concluded that by focusing on words in instruction, teachers should supplement the awareness of collocations.

In a Turkish EFL context, Çelik (2011) aimed to search for the effects of web-based concordancing activities and online dictionary use on EFL learners’ collocational competence. The first experimental group studied words and prepositional phrases through concordance and corpora based activities and the second experimental group used an online dictionary to acquire them. The instruction was given through a learning management system (MOODLE). Although there were significant differences between the pre and post-test results of the two groups, the study did not reveal any significant difference between the groups. However, delayed post-test results showed that the corpora-based learning group had a higher level of retention. Çelik (2011) suggested implementing a data-driven learning approach into intensive English language programs in order to focus on lexical and collocational competence.

Boers et al (2014) also conducted a study to see the effects of different types of exercises on learning collocations. They compared the effectiveness of three verb-noun matching exercises. These exercises included connecting the verb and the noun, inserting the verb and underlining the verb with the activities in which the verb-noun collocation was given together and the participants were expected to insert the whole collocation. The results of the study reported that there was not a significant difference between the two types of exercises and pre-and post-test results showed little gains for all types of exercises in knowledge of collocations. Although they did not reach any significant difference between giving the collocation intact or separately, they give a preliminary conclusion that most effective option of studying collocations is probably supplying the collocations intact in the given worksheets.

Laufer and Girsai (2008) compared the effect of explicit contrastive analysis and translation activities on the acquisition of single words and collocations. There were three instruction groups in the study. The first one was the meaning focused instruction group and they dealt with content-oriented tasks. These tasks did not require giving attention to the target words and collocations. The second one was the non-contrastive form-focused group in which they used text-based vocabulary tasks and these tasks focused on the target items. The last one was a contrastive analysis
and translation group in which they had text-based translation tasks. A contrastive analysis of the target items and their L1 translation options were provided by the teacher in the correction stage for the last group. The results of the study showed that the meaning focused instruction group learned almost none of the target items whereas the other two groups achieved the acquisition of collocations. It should also be mentioned that the contrastive analysis and translation group outperformed the others in all tests.

Webb and Kagimoto (2011) aimed to investigate the effects of three factors on Japanese EFL learners’ learning of collocations; the number of collocates per node word (6, 3 or 1), position of the node word and synonymy. The results of the study revealed that Japanese EFL learners learned more collocations as the number of collocates per node word increased. In addition, their learning of collocations was not affected by the position of the node word. However, synonymy affected their learning negatively.

Peters (2014) and Kasahara (2011) compared the acquisition of single words and collocations. Peters (2014) found that for making an initial form-meaning connection, explicit activities on verb-noun collocations were effective. However, single words were remembered better than the collocations and it suggested that learning single words was easier than learning collocations. On the other hand, Kasahara (2011) examined the single words and collocations paying attention to known and unknown words and combinations. He used the combination of one known and one unknown words in collocations and compared them with single unknown words. There were two groups of participants. One group was asked to remember 20 collocations and the other group 20 single words. The results of the immediate and delayed post-tests showed that the group that studied collocations had a better retention rate and retrieval of the meanings than the single words group.

All of these studies provide valuable implications for language teachers and learners. However, none of them specified the types of the tasks used to teach collocations as receptive or productive. Also, they did not clearly indicate whether the tests aimed to assess receptive or productive knowledge of collocations. In addition to these, they also did not focus on the relationship between meaning and collocation. All these points were given attention in a study conducted by Webb and Kagimoto (2009). They aimed to find out to what extent receptive and productive tasks were effective for explicitly teaching collocations in the language classroom, how these tasks influence learning gains in receptive and productive knowledge of collocation and meaning and what the results showed about the nature of the relationship between collocation and meaning. To find answers to those questions, they worked with 145 Japanese EFL learners at the university level. Twenty-four verb-noun collocations were chosen and four different types of tests were designed; receptive and productive collocation tests and receptive and productive meaning tests. The receptive collocation test was also used as the pre-test. The results of the study revealed that for both the receptive and productive treatment groups, there was a significant difference between the pre and post-tests of receptive collocations. However, there was not a significant
difference between the receptive and productive tasks on any of the individual tests. They also found that the learners with higher proficiency level were significantly better at productive tests and, lower level participants were better at receptive tests.

Inspired by the study of Webb and Kagimoto (2009), the present study also aimed to find out the effectiveness of receptive and productive tasks on receptive and productive knowledge of collocation and meaning. The same study design was also used in the present study, it can be said that it is a partial replication of their study. The same number of target words was not used in the present study because of time limitation and the participants were not divided as higher or lower level because they were all at the same proficiency level. With the mentioned differences in the design, the present study also tried to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent are receptive and productive tasks effective tools for teaching collocations explicitly in an EFL classroom?
2. In what ways do receptive and productive learning conditions influence learning gains in receptive and productive knowledge of collocation and meaning?
3. What do the results show us about the nature of the relationship between collocation and meaning?

2. Method

2.1. Participants and Setting

The study was conducted in an EFL setting, at the Faculty of Engineering at Ömer Halisdemir University, in Niğde, Turkey, where university students had studied English for general purposes during a complete academic year before they started their university education at their departments. They were first-year students from the Electrical and Electronics and Mechanical Engineering departments. 134 undergraduate students participated in the study, 46 of them were assigned to the receptive treatment group, 42 of them to the productive treatment group and 46 to the control group. Their ages ranged from 19 to 22, but most of them were 19 or 20. None of the participants lived in an English-speaking country. They were at the low intermediate level when they participated in the study.

2.2. Design of the study

Two weeks before the treatments, the pre-test was administered to all of the participants. To complete the pre-test, the participants were given as much time as they needed. Then, they were randomly assigned to the receptive and productive treatment groups and the control group. Although the participants in Webb and Kagimoto’s study (2009) were assigned to groups according to the results of the pre-test, that was not the case in the present study. As all the participants were at the same language proficiency and the study did not focus on proficiency level differences, they were randomly assigned to the groups. In the receptive treatment, 46 participants read the target collocations in three glossed sentences. In the productive
treatment, 42 participants were given two target collocations with two groups of three glossed sentences. However, in these six sentences the target collocations were not given and the participants were asked to write the target collocations in the blanks. The glossed sentences were the same that were given to the receptive treatment group. The control group just completed the receptive collocation test which was administered as a post-test.

The participants were given as much time as they needed to complete the treatments and the tests. It took 90 minutes to complete the experiment. The participants did not know that they were going to be tested before the treatment. To make sure that they all took part in the treatment, they were monitored. The post-tests were administered immediately after the treatments. There were four post-tests; the receptive collocation test, the productive collocation test, the receptive meaning test and the productive meaning test.

2.2.1. Target collocations

20 collocations were used in the study. The node word in each of these 20 collocations was a verb followed by a noun as its collocate. Webb and Kagimoto (2009) reported that they used verb-noun collocations in their study because verb-noun collocations were found to be problematic for EFL learners. All of the words that made up of the collocations were high-frequency words and the participants were likely to know them.

2.2.2. Treatments

In the receptive treatment, the participants were given the target collocation and its Turkish meaning followed by three sentences. They were expected to read and understand the target collocations in the given sentences. All of the 20 target collocations were given in this way; in total there were 20 target words used in 60 sentences. The target collocations were bold-faced for grabbing the attention of the participants.

In the productive treatment, the same sentences were given as in the receptive treatment. However, the target collocations were given in blanks to this group. Two groups of three sentences with blanks were given and the participants were expected to decide which of the given two collocations were used in which group of three sentences. After they completed the cloze task, the answer key was shown to the participants in order to avoid mismatches. However, the correct answers were not explained in context.

It should be noted that these sentences used in the treatments were taken from the original study, but some of them were changed in order to make them understandable for the participants of this study.

2.2.3. Dependent Measures

To measure receptive knowledge of collocation, a pre-test was administered to choose the collocations to be used in the study. In the present study, the 24
collocations used in Webb and Kagimoto’s study (2009) were given as a pre-test. No more collocations were added because of time constraints. However, four of them were excluded as they were known by more than half of the participants according to the results of the pre-test. The pre-test was a multiple-choice format test. The node word, the verb of each collocation was given and its noun collocate was asked with four options. I don’t know was also given as the fifth option and the participants were asked to choose it if they were unsure. As it was done by Webb and Kagimoto (2009), in this study the distractors were among the 2000 most frequent words and were familiar to the participants.

Four post-tests were administered after the treatments. They were receptive knowledge of collocation, productive knowledge of collocation, receptive knowledge of meaning and productive knowledge of meaning tests. For calculating the productive knowledge of collocation and meaning tests, two scoring systems were used. The first one was sensitive — partial knowledge of collocation and meaning was accepted as correct and the second one was strict — only the full knowledge of collocation and meaning was accepted as correct.

The first test aimed to assess the participants’ productive knowledge of collocations and in this test the node word of the collocation was given and the participants were asked to write the collocate of the given node.

In the sensitive scoring system, mistakes of spelling that resembled the target collocate, plurality or singularity and wrong part of speech were marked as correct since they reflect the partial knowledge of the word. However, they were marked incorrect in the strict scoring system.

The second test measured the receptive knowledge of collocations and was a multiple-choice test. It was the same test that was given as the pre-test and the number of collocations was reduced to 20 according to the results of the pre-test.

The aim of the third test was to assess the productive knowledge of meaning and it was a translation test. The participants were given the Turkish equivalent of the target collocation and asked to write the corresponding English collocation. As it was done for the productive knowledge of collocation test, two scoring systems were also used in this test. In the sensitive scoring system, collocates with spelling mistakes were scored correct if the given answer clearly resembled the target collocation.

The fourth test aimed to assess receptive knowledge of meaning and was also a translation test. In this test, the target collocations were given and the participants were asked to write the Turkish equivalent of each collocation.

The order of the collocations was changed in all of the tests to reduce the learning effect. Before handing in the next test, the previous one was collected in order to avoid making use of the other tests.

3. Results
The first research question aimed to find the effectiveness of using receptive and productive tasks for teaching collocations explicitly in the classroom by taking participants’ pretest and posttest results of the receptive collocation test. As it can be seen in Table 1, descriptive statistics results indicated that after the treatment, the mean score of the receptive task group increased from 2.04 ($SD = 1.03$) to 14.56 ($SD = 4.80$). The mean score of the productive task group also changed in a positive way after the treatment; it increased from 1.73 ($SD = 1.66$) to 12.19 ($SD = 3.59$). As was expected, the mean score of the control group did not change like the groups under treatment. The mean score was 2.73 ($SD = 1.55$) in the pretest and 3.45 ($SD = 1.68$) in the posttest. In order to determine the effects of the learning conditions (receptive and productive tasks) the same analyses in Webb and Kagimoto’s study (2009) were employed. Welch’s robust test for differences in group means was conducted with the changing scores (post-pre score) on tests measuring receptive knowledge of collocation for the receptive, productive task groups and for control group. Welch’s robust test was used instead of an ANOVA test because Levene’s test of homogeneity results rejected the assumption of equal variances (Welch, 1951).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Pre and Post Receptive Collocation Tests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Condition</th>
<th>Receptive Task Group</th>
<th>Productive Task Group</th>
<th>Control Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretest of Receptive Collocation</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>46</td>
<td>14.56*</td>
<td>4.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posttest of Receptive Collocation</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>14.56*</td>
<td>4.80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Significant difference between pre and post-test scores ($p < 0.05$)

The results of the Welch test revealed that there were differences between the three groups in terms of improvement $F(2, 60.91) = 337.35, p = .000$. Post-hoc analyses with Tukey multiple-comparison test were conducted to see the between groups differences. It was found that the receptive ($M = 12.52, SD = 4.33$) and productive ($M = 10.45, SD = 3.20$) task groups improved their scores significantly more than the control group ($M = 0.71, SD = 0.68$) ($p < 0.05$). This meant that both the receptive and the productive tasks were effective for learning collocations receptively. The difference between the receptive and the productive task groups was also statistically significant, Receptive > Productive, $p < 0.01$. This indicated that the receptive task was more effective than the productive task. For the control group, the difference between the pretest and the posttest was not significant ($p > 0.05$). The pre and post test score differences for all the groups can be seen in Figure 1.
Figure 1: Pretest and Posttest Scores

Descriptive statistics for all the dependent measures of the study (pretest and posttest of receptive collocation, productive collocation, receptive meaning and productive meaning) are all presented in Table 2. For the productive collocation and meaning tests, both the sensitive and strict scoring results were calculated. The results show that both the receptive and productive tasks helped participants to make large gains in knowledge. The difference between the two learning conditions was very little and was in favor of receptive task group. A one-way between-groups multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed to investigate learning condition differences in collocation and meaning knowledge. In addition to the five dependent variables, the strict and sensitive scoring results for productive tests were also used as indicated before. The dependent variable was learning conditions, receptive tasks and productive tasks. Preliminary assumption testing was conducted to check for normality, linearity, univariate and multivariate outliers, homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices, and multicollinearity, with no serious violations noted. The results showed that there was not a statistically significant difference between the receptive and productive task groups on the combined dependent variables: $F(3, 84) = 1.79$, $p > .05$ Wilk’s Lambda=.86. As the model did not show any statistically significant difference between the groups, no further analysis was carried out.
Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of the Dependent Measures for Learning Conditions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tests</th>
<th>Receptive Task Group</th>
<th>Productive Task Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretest of Receptive Collocation</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Productive Collocation (Sensitive Scoring)</td>
<td>9.55</td>
<td>4.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Productive Collocation (Strict Scoring)</td>
<td>8.70</td>
<td>4.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posttest of Receptive Collocation</td>
<td>14.56</td>
<td>4.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Productive Meaning (Sensitive Scoring)</td>
<td>9.75</td>
<td>4.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Productive Meaning (Strict Scoring)</td>
<td>8.75</td>
<td>4.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receptive Meaning</td>
<td>14.64</td>
<td>3.89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Discussion

It was found in the present study that both receptive and productive tasks – reading three glossed sentences for each collocation and completing a cloze task – were effective for learning collocations receptively. Mean scores of the receptive knowledge of collocations increased from 2.04 on the pre-test to 14.56 on the post-test. The results also increased for the productive task group from 1.73 on the pre-test to 12.19 on the post-test. This shows that the receptive task group increased their receptive collocation knowledge from 10% to 73% while that of the productive task group increased from 9% to 61%. When the percentages of learning gains are taken into consideration, it can clearly be seen that the receptive task group performed better than the productive task group on the post-test, but the difference was not significant. The scores of the receptive task group were also better than the productive task group on the productive knowledge of collocation task. They were able to write 48% of the collocates of the given node words correctly in the sensitive scoring system and 44% in the strict scoring system. On the other hand, the participants in the productive task group wrote 40% of them correctly in the sensitive scoring system and 36% in the strict scoring system. The ratio of the difference between the strict and sensitive scoring systems was equal for both of the groups. It was not surprising to find that the scores on the receptive tests were higher than those on the productive tests. It was also supported by previous studies that receptive knowledge is gained more than productive knowledge (Waring, 1997a; Webb, 2008; Webb & Kagimoto, 2009).

When the results of both the receptive and productive tests are considered, it can also be said that both receptive and productive tasks are effective methods of teaching collocations explicitly in the classroom. The results support the previous studies in which some methods like web-based practice units and concordances (Chan & Liou, 2005; Çelik, 2011), the use of dictionaries (Laufer, 2011), text-based vocabulary and
translation tasks (Laufer and Girsai, 2008) and receptive and productive tasks (Webb & Kagimoto, 2009) were found to be effective tools for teaching collocations.

This study also aimed to investigate the relative effectiveness of receptive and productive tasks. As stated by Webb and Kagimoto (2009), earlier vocabulary acquisition studies reveal that productive learning activities tend to be more effective than receptive activities at increasing productive knowledge of meaning. Conversely, receptive activities are more effective than productive activities at increasing receptive knowledge of meaning (Griffin & Harley, 1996; Stoddard, 1929; Waring, 1997b). Although, the mean scores of the receptive task group were higher on the receptive knowledge of collocation and meaning tests than those of productive tests, in line with the results of the previous vocabulary studies, it was not the case for the productive task group. Their mean scores on the productive knowledge of collocation and meaning tests were lower than their mean scores on the receptive knowledge tests. Webb and Kagimoto (2009) also found little difference between the effects of receptive and productive tasks on knowledge of collocation and meaning. They stated that this little difference may be because of productive test’s not being so demanding. However, when they grouped their participants as lower and higher level learners, they found that higher level learners who had productive tasks as treatment had significantly higher scores on all of the post-tests, except for receptive knowledge of meaning. On the other hand, lower level learners who had receptive tasks as treatment had significantly higher scores on all of the post-tests, except for receptive knowledge of collocation.

In this study, the participants were not divided into groups as higher and lower level learners because they all had a similar language proficiency level. It can be said that they were all lower level learners. When the results of the present study and Webb and Kagimoto’s (2009) study are compared, it can be stated that they have similar results. As the participants of this study were lower level learners, the receptive task group had higher scores on all of the post-tests than the productive task group. First of all, the demanding nature of the productive task may have caused difficulty for the lower level participants. While trying to find which collocation was used in the given sentence, they may have just focused on completing the activity and may have not focused on the collocation and its meaning specifically. As they were given two collocations and their glossed sentences together, they may have learnt those collocations in pairs. When all of the collocations were given together in the post-tests, participants could not have discriminated their meanings because of their limited language proficiency. Second, because of the increased learning burden of the productive task, they may have spent less time on the L2 form, compared with the ones in the receptive treatment group.

The last research question aimed to investigate the relationship between collocations and meaning. As pointed out by Webb and Kagimoto (2009), there was a valid comparison between collocations and meaning on productive tests because, these tests had a similar format and they were not likely to be affected by any of the other tests. However, because of their different format (one was a multiple-choice test and
the other was a translation test) the receptive knowledge of collocations and meaning tests may not have an accurate comparison. They found that the mean scores of both groups on the productive knowledge of meaning test were slightly higher than the scores on the productive knowledge of collocation test. However, in this study the mean scores of both receptive and productive task groups on the productive meaning and collocation tests were nearly the same. The mean scores of all participants on the productive knowledge of collocation test were 7.99 using the strict scoring system and 8.77 using the sensitive scoring system. This means that all of the participants knew 40% of the collocations productively according to the results of the strict scoring system. This rate increased to 44% in the sensitive scoring system. The mean scores of all participants on the productive knowledge of meaning test were 8.95 and 7.94, using the sensitive and strict scoring systems respectively. This indicates that the participants knew 40-45% of the meaning of collocations productively. As it can clearly be seen, the rates of productive knowledge of meaning and collocation were nearly the same in this study. This may have resulted from the treatment stage. As the collocations were encountered with their L1 meanings in the treatment and lower level learners pay great attention to the L1 meanings of vocabulary items, they could remember them as well as the collocation itself.

5. Conclusions

The present study investigated the effects of receptive and productive tasks on learning collocations and meaning. The participants in the receptive task group read three glossed sentences for each of the 20 verb-noun collocations. Also, the participants in the productive task group read the same glossed sentences but, in these sentences the collocations were not given. They read the sentences and filled in the blanks with the given collocations. The results showed that learners in both receptive and productive task groups were able to get receptive knowledge of the given collocation and meaning for about 13 of the 20 target collocations. On the other hand, they were able to gain productive knowledge of collocation and meaning for approximately 8 of the target collocations. However, there was not a statistically significant difference between the receptive and productive task groups on any of the tests.

The results reveal that both receptive and productive tasks can lead to learning gains in knowledge of collocation and meaning. The findings of the study also indicated that lower level learners were not able to benefit from productive tasks as effectively as receptive tasks. This was supported by Webb and Kagimoto’s study (2009). Further research comparing higher and lower level learners’ achievement on different kinds of receptive and productive tasks would be helpful to reach a conclusion in terms of the relationship between learners at different proficiency levels and the effect of receptive and productive collocation tasks.
6. Teaching Implications

As the results of the study show, receptive and productive tasks, like reading glossed sentences and cloze tasks, can be used for teaching collocations. However, there are some points to give attention to. First of all, it should not be forgotten to give importance to noticing. Learners should be made aware of the fact that knowing the meaning of the single words is not enough for knowing the meaning of collocations. From the beginning level, students should notice that they should also specifically focus on collocations. Teachers should also allocate time for teaching them explicitly in the classroom. Secondly, students should also notice that there are differences between languages in terms of using two words together. In order to avoid L1 interference, students should be taught to consult dictionaries or concordancers to check the meaning of collocations. They should not try to use them in the way they do it in their native language. Thirdly, as the results of the study indicate, the level of the students should be kept in mind while designing receptive or productive activities for teaching collocations. In this study, as the level of the students was not high, they could not benefit from the productive task as effectively as they benefited from the receptive task. To increase the learning gains, teachers can start with the receptive tasks for teaching collocations at lower levels and try to make students learn them productively with repetition, instead of starting to teach them with productive tasks at the beginning.

References


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The Effect of Data-driven Learning on EFL Students’ Acquisition of Lexico-grammatical Patterns in EFL Writing

Maide Yılmaz a *

a Gazi University, School of Foreign Languages, Ankara 06830, Turkey

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Abstract

The present study investigated whether and to what extent data-driven learning (DDL) can improve the lexico-grammatical use of abstract nouns in L2 writing. A corpus composed of 40 graded readers was compiled to make the learners do concordance learning activities, and 30 Turkish English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students at Gazi University School of Foreign Languages were assigned to a control group or an experimental group. At the prewriting stage, both the control group and the experimental group were given a list of ten abstract nouns and wrote stories without using dictionaries. Then, the errors they made while writing were underlined. While the experimental group was taught how to use a concordancing tool and studied on concordance lines from the corpus of graded readers to correct their errors, the control group just had dictionaries to consult and worked on their errors. Afterwards, both groups wrote their second stories using the same words given in the pretest. The texts written in the pre-test and post-test were analysed and compared between groups. The results indicated that the experimental group, as compared with the control group, used a greater variety of collocational and colligational patterns and had fewer linguistic errors while using the abstract nouns. Finally, a questionnaire was administered to the experimental group and the results obtained from it showed that students were very positive about the use of DDL and concordance activities. Also, they were willing to use DDL activities in the future.

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Keywords: Data-Driven Learning; Corpus; EFL Writing; Lexico-Grammatical Patterns, Concordance

1. Introduction

EFL writers often have difficulties with limited vocabulary or with vocabulary which has been partially learned and research has shown that lack of vocabulary contributes to writing difficulty for foreign language learners (e.g. Astika, 1993). That is, vocabulary is one of the most important features that determine writing quality (Walters & Wolf, 1996).

Data-driven learning (DDL) is a teaching model in which corpus is used by learners with the guidance of teachers for language learning purposes. Learners use a computer search engine or a web tool to find the course content and to do appropriate
exercises. Recently, DDL has been considered as a way of improving English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners’ vocabulary and strengthening their lexico-grammatical knowledge. By this way, it contributes to the improvement in overall writing quality of EFL learners. This teaching model encourages students to find vocabulary in context.

DDL affects language learning in several ways (Johns & King, 1991). It helps the learner see patternning in the target language. Learners can recover the rules from the examples and reach generalizations with the aid of this teaching method. Thus, it supports bottom-up inductive language learning. The data has primary importance, and it is not possible for the teacher to know in advance exactly what the learners will discover. Thus, it creates challenge and supports discovery learning. By this way, data-driven learning process encourages students to learn self-management and self-assessment. In DDL approach the learner's own discovery of grammar is at the centre of language-learning. Mostly, that discovery is based on evidence from authentic language use and authentic language environment which can improve the efficiency of language learning. Moreover, in DDL the teacher is the director and coordinator of student-initiated research. They have to organize and guide students to carry out self-access learning.

Pedagogical corpus applications can be divided into two categories as indirect applications and direct applications (Römer, 2008). Indirect applications refer to the use of corpora by researchers and materials writers. Direct applications refer to the use of corpora by teachers and learners to explore corpus themselves (DDL). There has been more interest on the latter in recent studies.

Studies on DDL activities in writing have had different focuses. Some of them investigated student perceptions of corpus use in writing (Charles, 2012; Gaskell & Cobb, 2004; Mizumoto, Chujo, & Yokota, 2016; O'Sullivan & Chambers, 2006; Sun, 2007; Yoon & Hirvela, 2004). Yoon and Hirvela (2004) conducted a study on corpus use in ESL academic writing courses. They examined students’ corpus use behaviour and their perceptions of corpora as a writing tool. The results indicated that the students found the corpus approach beneficial to the development of L2 writing skill and they increased confidence toward L2 writing. Sun (2007) created the Scholarly Writing Template (SWT) which included the information template that gives an outline of moves commonly used in research papers, the language template that consisted of a corpus of typical phrases and sentences collected by the students themselves, and a concordancer to search the corpus. The results showed that the students had very positive attitudes toward the SWT especially for writing skill development, sentence structure, and idea development.

Some researchers preferred focusing on the effects of DDL on self-correction (Gaskell & Cobb, 2004; Todd, 2001; Tono, Satake, & Miura, 2013; Yoon & Jo, 2014). Todd (2001) investigated induction, the use of concordances, and self-correction. In the study, lexical items causing errors in writing were identified and the participants self-corrected their errors using small concordances of the lexical items from the Internet
by inducing patterns. The results showed that students were able to induce valid patterns from their self-selected concordances and make valid self-corrections of their errors.

Most studies have aimed to investigate the effects of DDL on learners’ vocabulary and grammar (Coxhead & Byrd, 2007; Huang, 2014; Liu & Jiang, 2009; Mizumoto & Chujo, 2016; Ucar & Yükselir, 2015; Varley, 2009; Vyatkina, 2016; Yunus & Awab, 2014). Liu and Jiang (2009) examined the effects of integrating corpus and contextualized lexico-grammar in foreign and second language teaching. The analysis of their data revealed that learners improved their command of lexico-grammar, increased critical understanding of grammar, and enhanced discovery learning skills. However, the study brought to light that corpus-based lexico-grammar analysis caused some difficulties for many students.

Mizumoto and Chujo (2016) examined the relationship between one type of data-driven learning (DDL) and inductive-deductive learning styles and found that the participants improved their grammar significantly after teacher-led guided DDL induction. Their findings pointed out that guided DDL type induction may be beneficial for both deductive and inductive learners irrespective of their learning styles.

Ucar and Yükselir (2015) investigated the impacts of corpus-based activities on verb-noun collocation learning in EFL classes. Their study had an experimental design and consisted of 30 participants. The experimental group was taught verb-noun collocations through corpus-based materials, and the control group learnt collocations via conventional methods. They found a statistically significant difference between the experimental and the control group which showed that corpus-based activities had a significant impact on the teaching of verb-noun collocations in EFL classes.

Also, Yunus and Awab (2014) aimed at investigating the impact of DDL instruction on the production of collocations of prepositions. 40 participants took part in the study. The experimental group was treated with concordance printouts of the colligational patterns and the DDL approach while the control group was treated with the non-DDL module and taught deductively. The results showed that the students in the DDL group performed significantly better than the students in the control group. Vyatkina (2016) also explored the effects of DDL of German lexico-grammatical constructions by comparing the effects of computer-based and paper-based DDL activities. The results showed that both DDL types were effective for learners, and overall learner proficiency increased. Moreover, learners expressed their desire to use DDL for independent learning in the future.

Similar to the present study, Huang (2014) investigated whether and to what extent data-driven learning (DDL) activities can improve the lexico-grammatical use of abstract nouns in L2 writing. He compiled a topic-based corpus to develop concordance learning activities and conducted an experimental study including 40 Chinese students. The study consisted of a prewriting stage in which both the control
and the experimental groups were given a list of five abstract nouns and wrote essays including these words. Paper-based concordance lines were given to the experimental group while the control group consulted dictionaries for the usage of the words. The written texts of the pre-test, immediate post-test, and delayed post-test were analysed and compared between and within groups. The results of the study revealed that the written output by the experimental group had a higher variety of collocational and colligational patterns and fewer linguistic errors in using the target abstract nouns. Also, post-experiment learning journals and questionnaires were administered to the experimental group and the results revealed that concordance activities helped students learn the lexical collocations and prepositional cillgations of the target words, and by this way, they contributed to accuracy and complexity in their productive language.

The present study was designed to investigate the effects of DDL on vocabulary use in L2 writing and to reveal the perceptions of EFL learners on DDL. To shed light on these issues, the following questions were asked:

1. Can DDL help EFL learners improve their lexico-grammatical use of abstract nouns in their writing?
2. What are the perceptions of EFL learners of the effect of DDL on their vocabulary learning and vocabulary use in writing?

2. Method

2.1. Setting and Participants

Thirty preparatory school students at Gazi University in Ankara participated in this study. Their overall English proficiency level was pre-intermediate according to the proficiency test conducted at the beginning of 2016-2017 academic year. The participants were chosen based on convenience sampling. They were assigned to a control group or an experimental group each with fifteen students. Of thirty students, 17 were female and 13 were male.

2.2. Procedure

Although many studies on DDL are based on a reference corpus, for this study a corpus was compiled consisting of forty graded readers on various topics and of various genres. The main reason for that was the level of the students. A reference corpus like BAWE includes texts written by native speakers and includes too much and high-level academic vocabulary. It would make concordancing much more difficult for the students at pre-intermediate level. Thus, a new corpus which included 604,074 tokens at their level of English was created. Then, based on the wordlist which was reached with the aid of the corpus analysis tool AntConc 3.4.4 (for Windows), ten most
frequently used abstract nouns were chosen (each word occurred at least eleven times). They were argument \( f = 32 \), attention \( f = 36 \), difficulty \( f = 17 \), excitement \( f = 33 \), importance \( f = 11 \), mystery \( f = 26 \), permission \( f = 18 \), pleasure \( f = 24 \), promise \( f = 14 \) and silence \( f = 97 \).

As Figure 1 shows, in the first week, the participants in the experimental and the control group were asked to write stories using the ten words without changing the forms as a pre-test. They were free to write on any topics or in any genres. They were not allowed to use dictionaries while writing. A story writing task was chosen for the study because of two reasons. First, it is a task given in Preliminary English Test (PET) which is an English language examination provided by Cambridge English Language Assessment for pre-intermediate learners. Also, the participants of the study had not known how to write an essay. They had learnt writing a paragraph, but it was very difficult to use all ten words in a short paragraph.

In week two, the students in both groups received their texts they wrote in the pre-test. No feedback related to the ten nouns used in the stories was given except for underlined errors. After that, each student in the control group studied on his/her errors using dictionaries. However, the students in the experimental group had instruction on how to use AntConc and concordancing for two hours. Then, they went to the computer lab, studied on their underlined errors using this program and the concordances from e-books and they tried to self-correct their errors. The aim of this
error correction stage was to make the students notice the sources of their errors and learn about the correct forms of the vocabulary items, collocational and colligational patterns and correct their errors with the help of concordances.

In the third week, the students in the control group and the experimental group wrote their second stories as a post-test. All the participants were required to use the same ten nouns as in the pre-test in their writing. They were not allowed to use dictionaries as in the pre-test. After the post-test, a questionnaire (Huang, 2014) was administered to the experimental group during the class to evaluate the DDL activities.

2.3. Data analysis

In this study, the effects of the DDL activities on learners’ writing were investigated by analysing student essays and the data obtained from students’ questionnaires based on their perceptions. As mentioned above, students’ stories were analysed. Two non-native English teachers evaluated the students’ use of the target nouns, and they categorized them as appropriate and inappropriate. The use of the nouns falling into the category inappropriate was characterized as errors. They agreed on 98% of the categorizations. The categorization was completed after reaching an agreement on the category of the use. In addition to the analysis of the use of the ten nouns, students were given questionnaires on their perceptions of DDL activities in writing. The questionnaire was prepared by Huang (2014). Analysis showed that the questionnaire had internal reliability ($\alpha = 0.82$). The means and standard deviations were calculated using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 20.0). The students’ responses for the questionnaire items were coded into three categories: “helpful”, “not helpful”, and “no opinion” by placing all the positive answers (5 “somewhat agree”, 6 “agree”, and 7 “strongly agree”) into the “helpful” category, and all negative answers (1 “strongly disagree”, 2 “disagree”, 3 “somewhat disagree”) into the “not helpful” category as in Huang’s study (2014).

3. Results

3.1. Accuracy

The control group and the experimental group were compared in terms of error-free ratios and the use of the abstract nouns. The control group and the experimental group had similar error-free ratios in terms of the use of the ten target nouns (54% and 56% respectively) in the pre-test. However, in the post-test, while the experimental group’s error-free ratios increased to 85% the control group’s error-free ratios only rose to 63%.

As in Huang’s study (2014), the use of the target nouns by the experimental group was investigated and categorized into three types: positive change, negative change, and no change. When the students used the nouns inappropriately in the pre-test, but they used them correctly in the post-test, their second use was described as “positive
change" and "negative change" described the appropriate use of the nouns in the pre-
test but inappropriate uses in the post-test. Also, when the nouns were used
inappropriately in the pre-test and the post-test, they were described as "no change".
The analysis showed that the instances of positive change (52) were much more than
negative change (9) and no change (14). Examples of each category can be seen in
Table 1.

3.2. Complexity

The control group and the experimental group were compared in terms of the use of
lexico-grammatical patterns of the nouns in the post-test. As can be seen in in Figure
2, nine of the target nouns were used in a variety of grammatical patterns by the
experimental group. Only the grammatical patterns of importance were equal in both
experimental and control groups. The noun was used in two patterns: 1) V +
importance (by collocating know, notice, have, attach, realize and give by the
experimental group and understand, have, think about, give and realize by the control
group) and Importance + copular verb BE as subject (The importance of this device is
that it checks if someone is at home.).

Table 1 Examples of positive change, no change and negative change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Changes</th>
<th>Pre-test</th>
<th>Post-test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S3</td>
<td>Positive change</td>
<td>This excitement can read at his face.</td>
<td>Burak’s body was shaking with excitement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S4</td>
<td>Positive change</td>
<td>He attacked my attention.</td>
<td>Everyone congratulated me, but I didn’t pay any attention to anyone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S7</td>
<td>Positive change</td>
<td>Sara was silence.</td>
<td>I looked at them in silence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S10</td>
<td>Positive change</td>
<td>I did a promise to my family.</td>
<td>Mine, as I made a promise, is to share this tale of family love and loss.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S14</td>
<td>Positive change</td>
<td>There was a importance situation.</td>
<td>Some things in life had a different importance for him.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S11</td>
<td>Negative change</td>
<td>I wanted to save him but I had no permission to do it</td>
<td>I did not give permission you to do it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S12</td>
<td>No change</td>
<td>I have been a doctor for 17 years.</td>
<td>My princess girl! I know sometimes we lived some arguments.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As for the noun argument, while there are two patterns (V + argument and copular
verb BE + argument) in the control group’s stories, four different patterns (V +
argument, copular verb BE + argument, N + argument (passive) and argument + N)
were found in the experimental group’s stories. Moreover, the experimental group
tended to use varied adjectives to modify argument (a passionate argument, a violent
argument, a huge argument etc.). Similarly, in the use of the noun difficulty, while the
control group used two patterns (V + difficulty and copular verb BE + difficulty) the
experimental group used four patterns (V + difficulty, copular verb BE + difficulty,
difficulty + PP and V + difficulty (passive)). Also, mystery was used in four different
patterns (V + mystery, copular verb BE + mystery, mystery + copular verb BE and PP + mystery) in the experimental group’s texts. However, the noun was used in two patterns (copular verb BE + mystery and V + mystery) by the control group. The nouns permission, pleasure and attention were used in three different patterns (V + N, PP + N and copular verb BE + N) in the experimental group’s texts. However, they were used in two different patterns by the control group (permission: V + N and PP + N; pleasure: copular verb BE + N and V + N; attention: V + N and N + V). For the word promise there were two patterns (V + promise and PP + N) in the experimental group and only one pattern (V + promise) in the control group.

![Figure 2 Distribution of lexi-co-grammatical patterns in the post-test](image)

As mentioned above, there were some differences in terms of variety of the use of the eight nouns between the two groups, but the greatest differences were in the use of the nouns silence and excitement. Because of this reason examples of these two nouns are presented in Tables 3 and 4. Silence was used in five different patterns by the experimental group. Mostly, it was used as a subject complement (There was a strange silence.). Furthermore, it was used in V + silence pattern with different verbs to collocate with silence such as break, wait and live. Other patterns for silence were PP + silence, copular verb BE + silence, silence + V and silence + NP. Moreover, the noun was used with various adjectives (sudden silence, awkward silence, strange silence, uncomfortable silence, breathless silence, unknown silence). Nevertheless, it was used in two patterns (PP + silence and V + silence) by the control group.

Table 2 Lexico-grammatical patterns of silence in the post-test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Functions</th>
<th>Grammatical structures</th>
<th>Control group</th>
<th>Experimental group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Object</td>
<td>V + N</td>
<td>She was trying to <strong>hear</strong> the silence.</td>
<td>He had to <strong>call for</strong> silence.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Similar to silence, excitement was used in a greater variety of grammatical patterns by the experimental group than by the control group. The experimental group used five grammatical patterns of excitement: 1) PP + excitement; 2) V + excitement; 3) excitement + V; 4) excitement + copular verb BE and 5) copular verb BE + excitement. However, the control group used the noun in three patterns: 1) excitement + copular verb BE; 2) PP + excitement; 3) V + excitement.

The results indicated that to a large extent, the experimental group outperformed the control group in both areas of syntactic variations and correct grammar use.

Table 3 Lexico-grammatical patterns of excitement in the post-test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Functions</th>
<th>Control group Patterns</th>
<th>Experimental group Patterns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Object</td>
<td>V + N</td>
<td>I had a huge excitement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>He couldn’t hide his excitement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject</td>
<td>N + V</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(passive voice)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject complement</td>
<td>N + Copular verb BE</td>
<td>Excitement is a good thing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complement of PP</td>
<td>Prep. + N</td>
<td>She looked at my eyes with excitement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3. Learner Perceptions on DDL

The questionnaire focused on two aspects of the students’ perceptions on DDL: (1) effects on vocabulary learning; and (2) the difficulties in doing the concordance activities. Before explaining students’ perceptions on DDL, it is important to mention
that it was the first time 86.7% of them had used concordances. As Table 4 indicates, most students (80%) thought that DDL writing activities contributed their vocabulary learning. Moreover, for most of them, they helped them learn meaning of words (93.4%), collocations (86.7%) and usage of words (73.3%). The average score regarding collocation learning ($M = 6.00$) ranked top among the categories. However, they were not sure whether DDL activities were useful for learning grammatical patterns of the words (46.7%).

In addition to the findings above, the students declared their opinions about the effectiveness of DDL activities on writing. While 60% of them believed concordance activities helped them improve their writing quality, 40% did not think that they affected their writing quality in a positive way. Also, 80% of the students thought due to concordance activities they gained some ideas for their writing. Most importantly, 86.7% of them stated that they could have more concordance activities in the future.

Table 4 Perceived effects on vocabulary learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Helpful</th>
<th>Not Helpful</th>
<th>No Opinion</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary learning in general</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5.53</td>
<td>1.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning meaning of words</td>
<td>93.4</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5.66</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning collocation</td>
<td>86.7</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>1.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning grammatical patterns of the words</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>4.26</td>
<td>2.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning the usage of words in writing</td>
<td>73.3</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>1.60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*1-3 = disagree, 4 = no opinion 5-7 = agree

As shown in Table 5, there were some questions about the problems in doing the DDL activities (Table 4) in the questionnaire. 53.4% of the students had difficulty in formulating the overall rules of the usage of the words. However, 66.7% of them did not believe that studying concordances was time-consuming. Furthermore, they did not have problems about unfamiliar vocabulary while they were doing concordance activities.

Table 5. Problems in doing the DDL activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>No Opinion</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time-consuming</td>
<td>33.4</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>2.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfamiliar vocabulary</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>53.3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>1.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty in formulating the overall rules of the usage of the words</td>
<td>53.4</td>
<td>46.6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>1.71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*1-3 = disagree, 4 = no opinion 5-7 = agree
4. Discussion and Conclusion

RQ1. Can DDL help EFL learners improve their lexico-grammatical use of abstract nouns in their writing?

This study was an example of a direct application of corpora (Römer, 2008) because it intended to explore the effects of the use of corpus by the students. The results obtained from the pre-test and the post-test were in line with the results of the studies conducted by Boulton (2009), Huang (2014), Liu & Jiang (2009) and showed that DDL can have a strong effect on learners’ improvement in the use of lexico-grammatical patterns. The learners participating in this study corrected their lexical and grammatical errors through a learner based approach. They noticed the collocational patterns in the corpus on their own and also they generated more accurate and complex syntactic patterns. Although both the learners in the control and the experimental groups were familiar with the ten nouns and their meanings at the beginning of the study; they knew that they needed to use them with a noun, a determiner or an adjective, and they must be followed by a preposition phrase as a complement, their prior grammatical knowledge did not help them use the target nouns successfully in their stories. The correct use of the target nouns in the post-test by the experimental group showed that DDL provided the experimental with practical guidance and helped them improve their knowledge of lexico-grammatical patterns.

The control group and the experimental group had similar error-free ratios in terms of the use of the ten target nouns in the pre-test, but in the post-test, the experimental group had much fewer errors in their texts. Also, even though the experimental group used various patterns in the post test, the patterns used by the control group were limited. For instance, excitement was used in a greater variety of grammatical patterns by the experimental group than by the control group. The experimental group used five grammatical patterns of excitement: 1) PP + excitement; 2) V + excitement; 3) excitement + V; 4) excitement + copular verb BE and 5) copular verb BE + excitement. However, the control group used the noun in only three patterns: 1) excitement + copular verb BE; 2) PP + excitement; 3) V + excitement. Moreover, while the control group preferred using simple patterns in the post test, the experimental group used more complex patterns. For example, the noun silence was used with various adjectives by the experimental group (sudden silence, awkward silence, strange silence, uncomfortable silence, breathless silence, unknown silence). That is, the results indicated that to a large extent, the experimental group outperformed the control group in both areas of syntactic variations and correct grammar use because of the use of DDL activities as in the studies of Huang (2014), Mizumoto and Chujo (2016), Ucar and Yükselir (2015), Vyatkina (2016), and Yunus and Awab (2014).
RQ2: What are the perceptions of EFL learners of the effect of DDL on their vocabulary learning and vocabulary use in writing?

The results obtained from the questionnaire on the effectiveness of DDL confirmed the results mentioned above and showed that the participants were positive about the use of DDL activities in writing because they believed that DDL activities contributed to their vocabulary learning and use in writing. They thought DDL activities helped them learn the meaning of words, collocations, and usage of words. Thus, the results were mostly similar to the results of the previous studies on learner perceptions of DDL (e.g. Charles, 2012; Gaskell & Cobb, 2004; Huang, 2014; Mizumoto et al., 2016; O’Sullivan & Chambers, 2006; Sun, 2007; Yoon & Hirvela, 2004). Similar to the study of Yoon and Hirvela (2004) the students found the corpus approach beneficial to the development of writing skill. Also, the results were in line with Vyatkina’s study’s results (2016) which showed that learners were willing to use DDL for independent learning in the future. Also, as in Sun’s study (2007), the students had very positive opinions on the DDL activities for writing skill. However, although in Huang’s study the participants thought DDL activities were useful for learning grammatical patterns of the words, the participants in this study were not sure about their usefulness in learning grammatical patterns. As in Liu and Jiang’s study (2009), corpus-based lexico-grammatical analysis caused some difficulties for some students. In addition, contrary to Huang’s study (2014), students did not believe that studying concordances was time-consuming. Furthermore, they did not have problems with unfamiliar vocabulary while they were doing concordance activities unlike the participants in his study.

5. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The study showed that using DDL in the classroom may lead to progress in using vocabulary and improvement in lexico-grammatical knowledge. Also, the learners who participated in the study were content with the use of DDL and concordance activities. That is, the study confirmed the previous studies which had found the positive effects of DDL. However, this study included only 30 participants, so the results cannot be generalized. A bigger sample can produce more reliable results. Moreover, the learners in the experimental group had received limited instruction on the use of concordancing tool AntConc. It may be more helpful for the learners to learn how to use the tool more efficiently in a longer period. In addition, the study was a small scale experimental study and investigated the short-term effects of DDL on the acquisition of lexico-grammatical patterns in L2 writing within a fixed period of time. Furthermore, learners’ knowledge was tested through a pre-test and a post-test because of time limitation. The results were limited as they only revealed the students were able to use the acquired patterns in their writing immediately after the treatment. Yet, this is not enough to find the improvement of learners’ writing ability and retention. Thus, a longitudinal study on the effects of DDL on learning lexico-
grammatical patterns may be more informative about the gradual improvement of learners.

References


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A Comparison of Turkish-English Bilinguals’ Processing of Emotion Words in Their Two Languages

Filiz Mergen a *, Gulmira Kuruğlu b

a İzmir University of Economics, No: 156, Balçova, İzmir, 35330, Turkey
b Dokuz Eylül University, No: 144, Konak, 35220, Turkey

Abstract
There is a great deal of evidence showing that, in monolinguals, various emotional stimuli are processed by the brain in different ways. This view has found considerable support from studies conducted with verbal stimuli. In bilinguals, on the other hand, emotional processing is more complex, and is thought to be influenced mainly by two factors; age of language acquisition and proficiency. In this study, participants were forty-eight simultaneous / early bilinguals, who acquired both languages from birth, and have high proficiency in both. A lexical decision task, i.e., distinguishing real words from non-words, was used to gain insight into how the participants processed visually presented emotion words in Turkish and English. Reaction times and accuracy were recorded via SuperLab software program and were statistically analyzed. Shorter response times and higher accuracy rates were found for real words compared to non-words in both languages. Also, shorter response times were found for positive compared to negative and neutral words in both languages. An analysis of the accuracy rates revealed no statistically significant differences among Turkish emotion words, whereas, for English, accuracy rates were higher for positive words when compared to negative and neutral words. These results have been interpreted in the light of psycholinguistic models of lexical processing

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Keywords: Bilingualism, lexical processing, emotion words, lateralization

1. Introduction

It is well-established in the literature that emotional content of stimuli has a processing advantage, whether visual or auditory. Studies using verbal stimuli, mainly conducted with monolinguals, have provided supporting evidence (Kissler, Herbert, Winkler, & Junghofer, 2009). It is not clear, however, whether this applies to the bilingual population. This uncertainty is attributed to the diversity of bilinguals’ language experience, as confirmed by a majority of studies.
Bilingualism, characterized as being in a state of constant change depending on the frequency of use of each language, is a multi-faceted phenomenon. It is sufficiently common to be considered a norm, rather than an exception. In studies investigating bilingualism, the participants’ age of acquisition, frequency of use and proficiency of languages are diverse. Particularly, the proportion of those acquiring their second language after their first is relatively high. Due to the diversity in participants’ background, a variety of definitions of bilingualism has emerged. For example, based on the age of acquisition, bilinguals are labelled simultaneous, early or late bilinguals. They are categorized as proficient or non-proficient based on the proficiency level of both languages. Compound or Coordinate bilinguals are classifications according the cognitive structuring of the languages in the brain.

It is suggested that the diverse nature of bilingualism has implications for emotion word processing (Pavlenko, 2004). To start with, linguistic features of both languages should be considered, as well as structural and conceptual differences. There are some cases in which there is a complete overlap between concepts, while in others there may be striking differences (Pavlenko, 2008). Worldview of different cultures has a huge impact in the way emotion words are perceived. To be more specific, individualistic cultures and collectivist cultures differ in responses to the same emotions. For example, western cultures disapprove of dependence, while it is favored in collectivist cultures, such as Japan (Pavlenko, 2008).

Bilinguals have two languages at their disposal to express their emotions. A good deal of evidence has shown that different factors affect bilinguals’ language preference in the expression and perception of emotional language, the most important being age of acquisition (Dewaele, 2004a; 2008; Harris, Ayçiçeği, & Gleason, 2003; Harris, 2004). The prevalent view in the literature is that separate systems mediate language and emotions, and that these develop simultaneously early in infancy, which explains the more emotional nature of the native language (Pavlenko, 2004, 2012). Another view is that emotion words are more easily retrieved from the memory and more frequently used due to their richer mental representations originating with childhood experiences (Altarriba, 2006). This suggests that emotion words have deeper emotional associations (Dewaele, 2004a). Correspondingly, in the case of late acquisition of a second language, emotionality is perceived to be less, particularly if learned in formal settings (Dewaele, 2004a, 2004b; Pavlenko, 2004). However, L2 can sometimes be more emotional than the native language and preferred as the language to express emotions (Pavlenko, 2004, 2012).

Few studies investigated bilinguals’ production and perception of emotionality. One possible reason is uncertainty over the validity of the results in the literature, due to “the diversity in the language experiences of the participants” (Harris, Gleason, & Ayçiçeği, 2006, p. 258). This view is associated with the heterogeneous nature of bilingualism, revealed by conflicting results in the studies investigating emotionality in bilingual language production and perception.
As confirmed by the majority of studies conducted with monolingual participants, compared to neutral words, emotion words are processed faster and more accurately, and recalled better (Nagae & Moscovitch, 2002; Brierley et al., 2007). Bilingual literature has yielded similar results (Ferre, Garcia, Frage, Sanchez-Casas, & Molero, 2010). However, there is no consensus regarding the emotionality of each language of bilinguals. For example, Anooshian and Hertel (1994) reported better recall of L1 emotion words compared to L2. Ferre et al., (2010), on the other hand, reported no difference in the recall of L1 and L2 words regardless of age and manner of acquisition, proficiency level or dominance of languages. Another line of research based on bilinguals’ self-reports on their language choice to express emotions has provided much insight into the relationship between emotionality and the languages spoken.

Psycholinguistic research has shown that, like monolinguals, bilinguals process emotion words faster than neutral words. However, due to the diversity in the language experience of the participants, the majority of whom are late learners of L2, there have been doubts about the validity of the results obtained in bilinguality literature. In Eilola, Havelka and Sharma’s study (2007), for example, no significant difference was found between the participants’ languages in their processing of emotion words, which was interpreted as revealing equal perception of emotionality in both languages of proficient bilinguals. In contrast, Jonczyk (2013), reported shorter latencies and higher accuracy rates for negative words. This result was supported by another study conducted with late bilinguals (Jonczyk, 2014). Better performance in processing negative words were reported for Chinese-English bilinguals by Chen (2015). Late learners of L2 in Conrad, Recio and Jacobs’ study (2011) processed emotion words in their L1 (German) and L2 (Spanish) faster and more accurately than neutral words. However, these results are contradicted. Early bilinguals in Altarriba and Basnight-Brown’s (2010) study performed better in processing the emotion words in their L2 (English) than their L1 (Spanish). This result was associated with the frequency of use of their L2. L2 emotion words were found less effective than their L1 (English) by the late learners in Harris (2004), whereas no difference in emotionality was found between languages for early bilinguals. Sutton, Altarriba, Gianico, & Basnight-Brown (2007) reported that L1 (Spanish) and L2 (English) were similar in terms of their emotionality for early bilinguals. In order to provide further support to bilinguality literature, this study aims to investigate perception of emotionality in simultaneous Turkish-English bilinguals.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

48 bilinguals who acquired Turkish and and English from birth participated in the study (15 Male, 33 Female, Mean Age= 29.75, Std= 9.64). A questionnaire was used to identify whether participants were eligible for the study. They were strongly right-handed (93.33 %, Std=10.49) as confirmed by the Edinburgh Handedness Inventory
(Oldfield, 1971). The participants self-assessed their proficiency in both languages, and a Friedman Test revealed no significant difference between four language skills, \(\chi^2 = 5.21, sd = 3, p = .157 > .05\).

### 2.2. Experiment

Participants performed a lexical decision task in which they decided whether visually presented letter strings were real or non-words. They were instructed to perform the task as fast and accurately as possible. A trial session was conducted to familiarize the participants with the task.

The stimuli comprised of a total of 120 words and non-words. In the Turkish set, the real words were chosen from a pool of 300 words from *Yazılı Türkçe’nin Kelime Sıklığı Sözlüğü* (Göz, 2003), and rated by a hundred Turkish native speakers on a 5-point Likert Scale according to their valence, frequency of use and, the degree of arousal. After rating, 10 positive, 10 negative and 10 neutral words were selected from the pool. No significant differences were found in terms of frequency of use, \((F_{2,27} = 0.83, p > .05, \eta^2 = .058)\). However, they differ significantly in terms of valence, \((F_{2,27} = 98.01, p < .001, \eta^2 = .879)\). Non-words were created by exchanging the initial letters and final letters of real words, and they all complied with the phonotactic rules of Turkish. Similarly, the English set were formed from a pool of 300 words selected from *Affective Norms for English Words* (Bradley & Lang, 1999). Based on the ratings collected from 30 English native speakers, 10 positive, 10 negative and 10 neutral words were selected for the English set. 30 non-words were formed by changing one letter of English real words.

The experiment took place in a quiet, dimly-lit room. The participants sat 40 cm away from a laptop computer using a chinrest. They were instructed to indicate whether the visually presented words were real words or non-words by pressing the designated keys on the keyboard (1 for yes, 2 for no), as required by the lexical decision task. Their response times and the accuracy of their answers were recorded via a software program, and SPSS was performed to analyze the data.

### 3. Results

Table 1 shows response times of the bilingual participants to emotion words in Turkish.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Turkish Words</th>
<th>Mean (ms)</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Std</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive Words</td>
<td>695.51</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>118.93</td>
<td>-2.977</td>
<td>.005*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Words</td>
<td>746.61</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Words</td>
<td>675.51</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>122.49</td>
<td>-2.321</td>
<td>.025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral Words</td>
<td>736.55</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A paired-samples *t*-test revealed no difference in the response times for positive vs. neutral words and negative vs. neutral words, suggesting that, in terms of required processing times, emotion words were similar to neutral words. All three word types (positive, negative and neutral) were processed faster than nonwords. Also, positive words were processed faster than negative words.

A Wilcoxon test was performed on the accuracy data. Table 2 shows the differences in the accuracy rates of the Turkish words.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Turkish Words</th>
<th>Mean (%)</th>
<th>Std</th>
<th>Z</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive Words</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>-1.779</td>
<td>.075</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Words</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>-3.69</td>
<td>.712</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral Words</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>-5.820</td>
<td>.000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-words</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>-1.176</td>
<td>.240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Words</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>-1.176</td>
<td>.240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral Words</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>-5.695</td>
<td>.000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-words</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>-5.774</td>
<td>.000*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*\(p < .0083\) (\(p\) value has been adjusted by dividing .05 by the number of pair-wise comparisons, 6 in this case)

Table 2 shows that positive, negative and neutral words were processed significantly more accurately than non-words. No other pair-wise comparisons in Table 2 were found significant.

Table 3 shows bilingual participants’ response time to English words.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English words</th>
<th>Mean (ms)</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Std</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

*\(p < .0083\) (\(p\) value has been adjusted by dividing .05 by the number of pair-wise comparisons, 6 in this case)
As can be seen in Table 3, response times for positive words are significantly shorter than those for negative words and non-words. However, no significant difference was found between positive and neutral words. Neutral words are processed significantly faster than negative words. Non-words yielded the longest response times when compared to positive, negative and neutral words, and the differences were found significant.

A Wilcoxon test was performed on the accuracy data, and the results are given in Table 4.

Table 2: Accuracy Rates for Emotion Words in English

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English Words</th>
<th>Mean (%)</th>
<th>Std</th>
<th>Z</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive Words</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>-3.729</td>
<td>.001*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Words</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Words</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>-3.598</td>
<td>.000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral Words</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>-6.032</td>
<td>.000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Words</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-words</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Words</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>-0.56</td>
<td>.955</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral Words</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Words</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>-5.678</td>
<td>.000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-words</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral Words</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>-5.599</td>
<td>.000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-words</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*\( p < .0083 \) (p value has been adjusted by dividing .05 by the number of pair-wise comparisons, 6 in this case)

According to Table 4, all pair-wise comparisons, except that between negative and neutral words are significant. Positive words have the highest accuracy rate when compared to negative words, neutral words and non-words. However, no significant difference was found between the negative and neutral words.
4. Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate emotion word processing in simultaneous bilinguals. An analysis of the RT's showed that positive words were processed faster than negative words both in Turkish and English. This result is in line with the majority of studies investigating emotion word processing, which highlight The Positivity Effect, i.e. the faster processing of positive words. This idea has an evolutionary basis, suggesting that the human brain prioritises positive stimuli to exploit the resources that are potentially advantageous for the organism in order to ensure its survival. This result has previously been reported in studies which employed verbal (Briesemeister, Kuchinke & Jacobs, 2011; Kissler & Koessler, 2011; Palazova, Mantwill, Sommer, & Schacht 2011; Scott, O'Donnell, Leuthold, & Sereno, 2009) and nonverbal stimuli (Schacht & Sommer, 2009). This view has also been supported by electrophysiological (Kissler et al., 2009) and imaging studies (Kuchinke, Jacobs, Grubich, Vo, Conrad, & Herrmann, 2005).

When the response times for negative words were examined, it was seen that they were processed more slowly compared to positive and neutral words, another finding with considerable support in the literature. According to one view, negative stimulus may increase the amount of interference in lexical processing (Sutton & Altarriba, 2008), making it difficult to focus on the semantic analysis. Another view maintains that negative stimulus leads to an increased workload for cognitive processing (Estes & Adelman, 2008) by causing distraction. Also, Larsen, Mercer, Balota, and Strube (2008) argue that negative words are less frequent than positive words, and cause a novelty effect on participants, which, in turn, delays processing speed. This view has a great deal of experimental support (Kissler & Koessler, 2011; Sutton & Altarriba, 2008). Evolutionary-based research also gives considerable support. For example, Automatic Vigilance Hypothesis predicts that negative stimuli engage attention to the extent that it slows processing speed (Estes & Adelman, 2008).

Also, the lower frequency with which negative words are used is considered to account for the difference in processing speed. For example, Larsen, Kimberley, Mercer, and Balota (2006) maintained that studies that employed a variety of tasks, such as Lexical Decision Task, Stroop Task or Naming Task, reported longer latencies for negative words, which was taken as evidence for a correlation between frequency of use and processing speed. In Larsen et al.’s study (2008), longer latencies for negative stimuli were attributed to the novelty effect created by negative words due to their less frequent use. According to this view, negative stimuli attract our attention more quickly, however, it is more difficult to disengage or divert from the stimuli, causing a delay in processing. Our results regarding the processing of positive and negative words can be interpreted as supporting this view.

No significant differences were yielded by pair-wise comparisons of response times between the positive and neutral words in Turkish and English, and those between the negative words and neutral words in Turkish. However, a significant difference was found between the response times for negative and neutral words in English.
These results can be explained by the tendency of neutral words to be rated higher on the concreteness scale, suggesting stronger associations in the memory (Altarriba, 2006: 234). This is assumed to account for the ease of lexical retrieval of neutral words (Sabsevit, Medler, Seidenberg, & Binder, 2005). In our study, the English word set includes concrete words such as Ankle, Bottle, Chair, as opposed to abstract words such as Agony, Abuse, Insult in the negative word set. This accounts for neutral words in English being processed faster than negative words. Kanske and Kotz (2007) reported a similar result. Sutton et al. (2007), similarly, reported that Spanish-English bilinguals processed neutral words in both languages faster than negative words. In Eilola and Havelka’s (2011) study, Greek-English bilinguals processed neutral words with shorter latencies than negative words, but no significant difference was found between those for positive and neutral words.

The analysis of the accuracy rates for words in Turkish showed no significant differences between positive, negative and neutral words suggesting that the emotional content of the words have no particular effect on the accuracy of participants’ responses. When the accuracy of the English words was analyzed, it was seen that positive words had higher accuracy rates compared to other words, which adds support for the Positivity Effect, already observed in the analysis of response times. Unlike response times, no significant difference was found between negative and neutral words. This result can be interpreted as the so-called Speed-Accuracy Trade-off, which maintains that participants in experimental studies may sometimes choose between speed or accuracy in their responses favoring one over the other (Bogacz, Wagenmakers, Forstmann, & Nieuwenhuis 2010).

5. Conclusions

Response time data revealed superiority of positive words both in Turkish and English, in line with the literature. Accuracy rates of English words support this result. However, for Turkish words, there was no difference between the accuracy rates for positive words, and those for negative and neutral words. Also, we report faster reaction times for neutral words than negative words in English. However, this result wasn’t replicated in Turkish, and similarly, there was no difference between the accuracy of neutral and negative words in either language. This study investigated processing of visually presented words in simultaneous bilinguals. Future studies may investigate whether these results are replicated when stimuli are auditorily presented, or whether the age of language acquisition and frequency of use exert influence in lexical processing.

References


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Supporting more successful language learning: Approaches for helping post-secondary learners in three contexts

Elaine K. Horwitz a *, Lama Nassif b, Duygu Uslu-Ok c, Claire Meadows-Parrish d

a The University of Texas at Austin, 1912 Speedway STOP D5700, Austin, TX 78712, United States
b Williams College, 85 Mission Park Drive, Williamstown, MA 01267, United States
c The University of Texas at Austin, 1912 Speedway STOP D5700, Austin, TX 78712, United States
d The University of Texas at Austin, 1912 Speedway STOP D5700, Austin, TX 78712, United States

Abstract
This paper offers a number of suggestions for foreign and second language teachers who want to help their students develop more positive learning characteristics. In response to a graduate-level methods class designed to help participants develop student-centered instruction, this paper presents three approaches for helping post-secondary language learners in three contexts: Syria, Turkey, and the U.S. The approaches involve learner training projects aimed at influencing learner beliefs and expectations (Project 1), reducing learner anxiety (Project 2), and encouraging motivation and learner autonomy (Project 3). The projects target beginning and intermediate-level English as a foreign language (EFL) and Spanish-language learners. They involve hands-on teaching strategies, awareness-raising activities, and integration of instructional technology. The paper presents a rationale for each project and includes sample activities. It ends with reflections on the learner training projects and implications for the development of such projects in different language learning contexts.

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Keywords: Learner support; learner autonomy; learner beliefs; language anxiety; L2 motivation; teacher training

1. Introduction

In recent decades, the language teaching profession has increasingly emphasized the importance of supporting the development of learner autonomy while recognizing that language learning and the functioning of learner characteristics in second language (L2) learning can only be understood within specific sociocultural contexts (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Despite this reorientation of language teaching, language teaching methodology courses still tend to focus almost entirely on teacher behaviors (Grosse, 1991a, 1993; Shrum & Glisan, 2005). In an attempt to broaden the focus of

* Lama Nassif. Tel.: +1-413-597-2661
E-mail address: lama.nassif@williams.edu
http://dx.doi.org/............................................
methodology classes, Horwitz, Breslau, Dryden, Yu, and McClendon (1997) and Horwitz, Hsieh, Bonzo, Huang, Na, and Rubrecht (2004) reported on a graduate-level language teaching methods course “designed to help teachers understand the foreign language (FL) classroom from the learner’s perspective in order to prepare them better to foster learner autonomy through student-collaboration in their own classrooms” (Horwitz et al., 1997, p. 518). The course has five objectives to help language learners develop more positive learning characteristics within a learner-empowered environment (Griffiths, 2008):

The student will become familiar with recent literature and instructional approaches related to the following:
1. The relationship of individual factors to L2 achievement,
2. The experience of L2 learning,
3. Matching instruction to individual learner needs and characteristics,
4. Helping students become more effective language learners,
5. Supporting language learner autonomy.

The learner training assignment asks students to describe their learner population and give a rationale for their proposed training program. Using their experience with the target group, they are asked to address the following questions: What characteristics most impede your learners from learning your target language more effectively? What can you do to help your learners develop in those areas? The learner training project should describe the procedures the teacher will use to develop these characteristics and include the actual materials that the course participants would use with their students. The projects may take the form of websites, podcasts, lesson plans that would be implemented throughout a course, or any approach/medium that the teachers feel would be appropriate for their learner populations. Over the years, course participants have used a variety of formats including orientation pamphlets, pre-course workshops, podcasts, websites, study abroad orientations, and most recently, YouTube videos.

This paper describes three learner training projects for post-secondary learners resulting from the course. The project descriptions begin with a brief rationale, followed by a project overview and two sample activities. Two of the projects address English learning in foreign language contexts (Syria and Turkey), and the third focuses on Spanish learning in the US. (The Turkish and US projects were later implemented in the developers’ classes.) None of the student groups are majors (specialists) in the language they are studying. The student populations for the Turkish and U.S. projects are undergraduates, and the Syrians are graduate students (Table 1).

Table 1. Overview of the projects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Student population</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Master’s level non-English majors in Syria</td>
<td>Influence beliefs and expectations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Within the language teaching literature, the term learner training has generally referred to the incorporation of components in language classes to help language learners approach L2 learning more effectively. Although it would seem that learner training could address a myriad of individual characteristics that would support more successful language learning, the literature has largely addressed strategy training (Rubin, 1987; Wenden, 1987a) and focused on approaches—called “strategy awareness raising,” “strategy instruction,” or “strategy-based instruction”—to help learners become aware of and adopt more appropriate language learning strategies (see, e.g., Chamot, 2005; Cohen, 2011; Oxford, 2011; Rubin, 1987; Wenden, 1987a). Learner training focusing on other characteristics that might help learners become more autonomous has not garnered as much interest (Oxford, 2015; Rees-Miller, 1993; Wenden, 1995). This point may simply be one of semantics, as the literature on other learner characteristics such as anxiety and motivation includes many suggestions for teachers to incorporate instructional approaches that help students control their anxiety or increase their motivation (see, e.g., Dörnyei, 1994; Gregersen, 2003; Young, 1999). In addition, a number of papers have addressed the issue of preparing students to become more autonomous learners (Cotterall, 2000; Little, 2007). The course described in this paper, and consequently the learner training projects reported here, address several learner characteristics including anxiety, motivation, and realistic expectations for language learning (beliefs). While the first two projects have specific variables of focus, the third project supports a wider variety of learner characteristics given the greater heterogeneity of language learning goals and prior target language contact in that student population.

2. Project 1: Supporting realistic language learning beliefs in Syrian postgraduate English students

2.1. Target student population

This project is directed at master’s students enrolled in a six-month English course at a language institute at a large public university in Syria.† In Syria, English is primarily taught as a foreign language (EFL). The course meets for 10 hours a week and combines skill-based and content-based approaches to English for academic purposes including English for the social sciences, science and technology, and medical sciences. The students tend to be highly motivated, as English typically lies at the heart of their academic and professional goals and, most importantly, passing the course is a university requirement for completing graduate studies.

† This learner training project is based on the educational system that was in place in Syria before the recent political circumstances.
2.2. Rationale

Many English classes at the pre-university level in Syria focus on reading and writing, and new students are generally not prepared for the communicative approaches they encounter at the institute. Accordingly, institute instructors and their incoming students tend to have different ideas about the process of language learning and appropriate practices for language learning and teaching. When students find that the language learning approaches they used in the past are not leading to success in their institute classes, they often become anxious and even doubt their abilities to learn English, adding to the stress they already feel about passing the course to be allowed to continue their studies.

Hosenfeld (1978) used the term “mini-theories” to describe students’ preconceived ideas about language learning stemming from their cultural backgrounds and previous language learning experiences. Learner beliefs have been found to influence satisfaction with language classes (Dörnyei, 2005; Horwitz, 1987, 1988; Riley, 1997; Sykes, 2011), motivation (Dörnyei, 2005), and achievement (Abraham & Vann, 1987; Cotterall, 1999; Ehrman & Oxford, 1995), and consequently, many scholars have argued that teachers should promote more realistic beliefs (Benson & Lor, 1999; Cotterall, 1999; Ellis, 2008; Horwitz 1987, 1988; Rashidi & Omid, 2011; Sykes, 2011). Suggestions for helping learners develop more realistic beliefs about language learning include group discussions (Benson & Lor, 1999) and providing knowledge about second language acquisition (SLA) research (Yang, 1999).

The project described here aims to orient students to their teachers’ communicative expectations, encourage reflection on previous learning experiences, reduce anxieties associated with unrealistic beliefs, reconcile differences between teacher and learner beliefs, and generally promote more realistic beliefs about language learning. It addresses common language learning beliefs in Syria as well as some unproductive beliefs that have been reported in other contexts.

2.3. Project structure

This project is composed of three 90-minute workshops focusing on: (1) the difficulty of language learning, (2) the nature of language learning, and (3) learning and communication strategies (Horwitz, 1988). The workshops are offered during regular class sessions and begin early in the course (weeks 3, 4, and 5) in the hope that useful conversations about language learning would begin as soon as possible.

Each workshop follows a similar pattern: (1) warm up, (2) pair and small-group discussions, (3) whole-class discussions, (4) teacher presentation, and (5) final whole-class discussion. The students share information about their learning experiences and receive reassurances about their learning difficulties and concerns. Following the small-group and whole-class discussions, the teacher gives a brief presentation of relevant information from the SLA literature. Since Syrian students tend to accept teacher expertise, teacher presentations offer information in a form to which they will
likely be receptive. At the end of the workshops, the students will discuss their experiences and their plans for approaching English during the institute course and in the future.

2.4. Sample activity 1: How much should I worry about making errors?

This odd-one-out activity (Figure 1.1) during the first workshop initiates small group and whole-class discussions about the natural occurrence of errors and their importance as signs of language learning. Figure 1.2 outlines the activity procedures, and Figure 1.3 presents sample PowerPoint slides from the teacher presentation.

Workshop 1

Activity 1: Group discussion 2: How much should I worry about making errors when speaking or writing in English?

Discuss the following in groups of three. You may use Arabic when needed. Be prepared to share your ideas with the class.

Of the three opinions below, which is “the odd one out”? How is it different from the other two? What does it mean to you?

- You shouldn’t say anything in English until you say it correctly.
- It is important to speak and write in English even if I make errors.
- It is important for the teacher to correct every error I make

Similar to other activities in the three workshops, this activity employs collaboration and discussion. The examples from the SLA literature, accompanied by the class discussion, explicitly address errors, interlanguage, and language output.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Activity procedures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 10 minutes | • In groups of three, have the students discuss which of the beliefs is the “odd one out.”
  • Have students discuss each belief statement and how the “odd one out” differs from the others.
  • Ask students to relate some of their language learning experiences that reflect their beliefs about making mistakes. |
| 10 minutes | • As a class, discuss students’ answers. Ask them to justify their choices.
  • Ask students to share examples from their group discussions that reflect their beliefs about making mistakes. |
| 20 minutes | • Refer the students to the quotations in the teacher |
• Ask students to explain what they understood from each quotation. Initiate a discussion of what the quotation means to them as language learners and how they could apply it to their own learning.

Figure 1.2. Sample activity 1 procedures

1.THOUGHTS FROM SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION
- A learner’s errors “provide evidence of the language system he is using (i.e., has learned) at a particular point in the course (and it must be repeated that he is using some system, although it is not yet the right system)” (Corder, 1967, p. 167).
- Errors are signs of learning rather than indicators of imperfection.
- Practice makes perfect!

2. THOUGHTS FROM SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION
- Errors:
  - “Tell the teacher how far towards the goal the learner has progressed and consequently, what remains for him to learn.”
  - “They provide to the researcher evidence of how language is learned or acquired, what strategies or procedures the learner is employing in his discovery of the language.”
  - Most importantly, “are indispensable to the learner himself, because we can regard the making of errors as a device the learner uses in order to learn” (Corder, 1967, p. 167)

Figure 1.3. Sample activity 1 PowerPoint slides

2.5. Sample activity 2: What does it mean to know a second language?

This activity (Figure 1.4) initiates discussions on the nature of language learning. It aims to challenge any misconceptions the students hold about language learning and language competence. The activity requires the learners to rank a list of language components in order of importance. The activity aims to reinforce the idea that all language components are intertwined and must be learned in coordination to advance L2 competence. Understanding the components may also help students assess their language competence more realistically, with the possibility of boosting their motivation and self-confidence. A discussion of the nature of communicative competence might also help students better understand the rationale for the
communicative activities they encounter in their English classes. Figure 1.5 outlines this activity, and Figure 1.6 presents sample PowerPoint slides from the teacher presentation.

**Workshop 2**

**Activity 2: Group discussion 2: What does learning a language?**

Discuss the following in groups of three. You may use Arabic when needed. Be prepared to share your ideas with the class.

Add three aspects of the language learning to the list below. Arrange the statements in order of importance.

The most important part of learning English is

- learning vocabulary words;
- learning the grammar;
- learning how to maintain successful communication;
- learning about English-speaking cultures;
-____________________________________________________________________
-____________________________________________________________________
-____________________________________________________________________

Figure 1.4. Sample activity 2: What does learning a language involve?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Activity procedures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 15 minutes | • Divide the class into new groups of three.  
• Have the groups discuss the statements, add two statements of their own about what it means to know a language, and arrange the statements in order of importance.  
• Ask students to justify their decisions and to support their additions and arrangements of the statements.  
• Give students poster paper for their reordered statements and any additions. Post the lists on classroom walls.  
• Have the students walk around the classroom to read their classmates’ posters. |
| 15 minutes | • Point out several posters, raising questions about the rationale behind the belief arrangements and the choice of additional language components.  
• Have students give their reasons and respond to each other’s arguments.  
• Ask students to share examples to support their choices.  
• Use the students’ arguments to start a discussion about (1) what it means to know another language, (2) the nature of communicative competence in an L2, and (3) the idea that no aspect of language competence is superior to others and the components of language |
competence therefore cannot be learned in a particular order.

| 15 minutes | • Using PowerPoint slides 5–6 (Figure 1.6), refer to the quotations explaining the concept of L2 “communicative competence.”
|            | • Ask a student to read each quotation aloud.
|            | • Ask students to explain what they understood from each quotation. Lead a discussion of what each facet of language competence involves, what this means to them as language learners, and how these competencies could be enhanced in their language learning.
| 5 minutes  | • Ask the students to work in the same groups to reflect on what they have learned in the workshop and how they would apply insights from the workshop activities, discussions, and SLA material to their own language learning.

Figure 1.5. Sample activity 2 procedures

Figure 1.6. Sample activity 2 PowerPoint slides

3. Project 2: Reducing Turkish college-level English learners’ foreign language anxiety

3.1. Target student population

This learner project is directed at undergraduate non-English majors attending a public university in Turkey. They are enrolled in an intensive English program designed to prepare them to pass the required college-entrance English proficiency test at the university. It is common in Turkey for both public and private universities to require incoming freshmen to pass an English examination.

English is the most commonly taught foreign language in Turkey, and as was the case in Syria, English is taught as a foreign language and proficiency in English is associated with better employment opportunities and higher incomes. Following 12 years of formal English instruction, students come to university with varying levels of English proficiency. Their limited previous exposure to English—usually only four hours per week with a heavy focus on grammar and memorization—contributes to
their anxiety. Their probationary status in the English course is also an important source of anxiety.

3.2. Rationale

Reducing foreign language anxiety (FLA) is necessary for these learners for several important reasons. First, English is the medium of instruction in some public and many private universities in Turkey, and English competence is necessary for advanced study and professional purposes. Failure to attain sufficient oral ability in English is an impediment to most academic and professional goals. Second, since the students have had only limited exposure to English prior to college, they are not well-prepared for college English classes. The fact that these students are in a remedial English program contributes to their anxiety as well. Finally, in intensive English programs in Turkey, learners are expected to demonstrate high oral and aural skills on production-focused exit exams, which themselves are highly anxiety provoking (Kim, 2000; Oxford, 1990; Young, 1990).

FLA has been found to have a substantial negative impact on language learning. Students who experience anxiety about language learning are more likely to do poorly in language study (Horwitz, 2008), drop out of language programs (Dewaele & Thirtle, 2009), and be less willing to communicate in their second language (Lui & Jackson, 2008; MacIntyre, 2007). Importantly, anxiety has been found to affect other important language learning characteristics including motivation (Yan & Horwitz, 2008), perceived competence (Kitano, 2001), beliefs (Yan & Horwitz, 2008), and strategy use (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002). While it is generally believed that language anxiety cannot be entirely eliminated, it may be reduced by identifying group- or individual-specific, anxiety-provoking elements and/or incorporating anxiety-reduction activities into language curricula (Horwitz, 2013; Lui & Jackson, 2008; Oxford, 1990; Young, 1990).

3.3. Project structure

This project includes four 50-minute workshops implemented during the first four weeks of the course. To personalize the workshops, an electronic group blog was first established to elicit students’ thoughts and experiences with FLA. Forty-one students posted on the blog, and their perceptions of FLA showed that they held several beliefs about language learning that likely contributed to their anxieties. For instance, they wrote about feeling the need to understand every English sentence before participating in class activities and about not knowing enough vocabulary words to speak in English. Students also wrote about their fear of making mistakes in speaking and pronunciation as well as their fear of being laughed at by classmates.

The activities in the anxiety-reduction workshops addressed the specific antecedents of anxiety identified in the students’ blog postings. Thus, the workshops were designed to decrease FLA by (1) helping the students develop more realistic beliefs about language learning, (2) introducing useful language learning strategies,
and (3) helping them reflect on how unrealistic beliefs, lack of strategy awareness, and limited visions of successful language learners (e.g., a successful language learner must be intelligent) can lead to anxiety. Given these varied sources of anxiety, it was decided that anxiety-reduction strategies would be introduced early in the program, and since students tend to feel more confident when working with partners or in small groups (Horwitz, 2001; Yan & Horwitz, 2008; Young, 1991), each session included a partner or small-group activity.

3.4. Sample activity 1: How realistic are our beliefs?

Lack of vocabulary, worry over mistakes, and dissatisfaction with their proficiency were the major reasons students were uncomfortable participating in English class activities. The purpose of this activity (Figure 2.1), therefore, is to identify “(un)healthy” beliefs and increase awareness of the realities of language learning. Figure 2.2 outlines the activity procedures, and Figure 2.3 presents a sample slide from the teacher presentation.

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**Workshop 2**

**Activity 1: Group discussion: How realistic are our beliefs?**

You have 10 minutes to discuss the following statements in groups of four. Please decide the extent to which your group agrees with the following statements and be prepared to share your ideas with the class.

1. It is important to speak English with excellent pronunciation.
2. You shouldn’t say anything in English until you say it correctly.
3. The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning vocabulary.
4. If someone spent an hour a day learning a language, how long would it take them to learn that language very well?
   - less than a year
   - 1-2 years
   - 3-5 years
   - 5-10 years
   - You can’t learn a language in one hour a day

---

Figure 2.1. Sample activity 1: How realistic are our beliefs?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Activity procedures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 10 minutes | • Divide the class into groups of four.  
            • Students read the activity instructions and discuss which of the |
beliefs they agree/disagree with.

- Ask the students to justify their answers.
- Ask them to give examples to support their choices.

| 10 minutes | • Each group chooses a leader to share their group’s ideas with the larger group.  
| 10 minutes | • Each group has 2–3 minutes to present their ideas.
- Discuss how some beliefs about language learning can be misinterpreted by language learners.

Figure 2.2. Sample activity 1 procedures

1. Some ways to improve your vocabulary repertoire:
   - Using word families
   - Guessing vocabulary through contextual clues
   - Using a vocabulary log
   - Using a dictionary
   - Doing extensive reading

2. Making mistakes is part of the learning process.

3. Language learning takes time.

Figure 2.3. Sample activity 1 PowerPoint slide

3.5. Sample activity 2: Identifying anxiety sources and reflecting on personal language learning experiences

This activity (Figure 2.4) is designed to help learners analyze potential anxiety-provoking situations and provide suggestions to lessen the anxiety. This task helps learners understand that the factors that make them feel anxious are not unique to them and that anxiety can be reduced through increased awareness of anxiety-provoking beliefs and the use of more productive language learning strategies. Figure 2.5 outlines the activity procedures, and Figure 2.6 presents a sample slide from the teacher presentation.

Workshop 3

Activity 2: What would you advise?

These students are asking for advice about learning English. Considering what we have discussed so far, what would you advise them to do? Do you think they have any unrealistic beliefs about learning English? (Feel free to use Turkish when needed.)

Each group should choose one case to discuss. What would you advise the person to do? Be prepared to share your suggestions with the rest of the class.

- Melisa is an 18-year-old student studying English at a preparatory school in Turkey. She is very shy and rarely participates in her English class. She
wants to speak English very well but is afraid to speak because she is worried about making mistakes when speaking. What should she do? What would you say to her?

- Ali is a 22-year-old student who wants to speak English fluently and communicate with international students. He always gets high scores on grammar and reading exams, but he does not participate in the discussions in his English class. Ali thinks his vocabulary is too limited to express himself accurately in class. What should he do? What would you say to him?

- Deniz is a 20-year-old student who is very motivated to learn English because it is important for her career plans. She needs to communicate very well in English to study American literature. However, whenever she is asked to speak in class, she starts sweating and trembling. She also says she is afraid of being ridiculed by her classmates. What should she do? What would you say to her?

Figure 2.4. Sample activity 2: What would you advise?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Activity procedures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 15 minutes | - Divide the class into groups of four.  
- Students read the activity instructions and choose one situation.  
- Students discuss the advice they would consider giving.  
- Ask them to give examples/justifications for their advice. |
| 10 minutes | - The groups should take each case and discuss possible ways to help each learner. |

Figure 2.5. Sample activity 2 procedures

**Melisa:** Making mistakes is natural in language learning. Making mistakes means you are learning.

**Ali:** Even with limited vocabulary, learners can communicate. Once learners start using the language, they will naturally enlarge their vocabulary storage. In addition, there are several strategies that learners can use to widen their vocabulary depth.

**Deniz:** Language classrooms are labs where learners test drive their knowledge. Learners are expected to make mistakes, and the ones who make mistakes are usually the ones who take risks and learn faster and better. Thus, learners should take risks and participate as much as possible.

**Murat:** It is important to keep in mind that language learning takes time and requires consistent effort and devotion. Also, learners should not expect to know every word to understand the main idea of a text or conversation. Utilizing several language learning strategies will equip you with the resources to successfully understand the main ideas in a text or in a conversation.

Figure 2.6. Sample activity 2 PowerPoint slides: Example student responses
4. Project 3: Supporting American undergraduate students’ learning of Spanish as a foreign language

4.1. Target student population

This learner training project targets undergraduate students enrolled in a first-semester Spanish class at a large public university in the United States. This first-semester course is part of a required foreign language sequence for most of the students. In contrast to the first two learner populations described in this paper, these learners’ language learning goals are more diverse. Some of these learners view Spanish proficiency as economically and socially advantageous (Kubota & Catlett, 2008; Watzke, 2003), especially in light of the growing Spanish-speaking population in Texas in the US. At the same time, some students are integratively motivated and want to get to know and communicate with family members or with the growing Spanish speaking community in the southwestern United States.

Furthermore, the learner population includes both heritage and non-heritage learners in a 15-week course. Although many undergraduates in Texas have previously encountered Spanish through informal language contact (Toribio, 2004), Spanish instruction (Blake & Zyzik, 2003), or dual-language programs (Ray, 2009), the majority of students in this course are not likely to have experienced extended or consistent Spanish instruction or contact with Spanish speakers.

4.2. Rationale

This student population is more diverse in terms of motivation, proficiency, and opportunities to use their developing language skills than those described in the first two projects. Although some of these students may have personal goals for learning Spanish, many of them are simply taking the course as a graduation requirement. In addition, Spanish must be taught both as a foreign and as a second language. Some students want to use Spanish for work within the US, while others imagine using the language in Spain or Latin America. Thus, it is especially difficult to identify a single focus for this learner training project. Instructors for the first-semester course make strong cases for their students’ need for a number of characteristics including motivation, flexible learning strategies, and willingness to communicate. The website format allowed for greater individualization than was afforded by the more teacher-centered approaches designed for the English learners in Syria and Turkey. Motivation and learner autonomy are the core of this project, since it was designed to encourage learners to assume control over their language learning and provide them with the tools to do so in real life and online contexts. As noted earlier, motivation is associated with learner beliefs and anxiety (Dörnyei, 2005; Yan & Horwitz, 2008), and effective strategy use has been found to support motivation (Oxford, 2011). Motivation and learner autonomy are also intimately related (Noels, 2001; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ushioda, 2001; Wu, 2003), and motivation is an important factor in learners’ willingness to communicate (MacIntyre, Clement, Dörnyei, & Noels, 1998).
Willingness to communicate is fundamental to learner autonomy particularly in the Texas context where there are often opportunities to communicate with Spanish speakers.

4.3. Project structure

This project uses a teacher-created, four-section website that coordinates with the first four class sessions: “Your Experience with Languages,” “Your Thoughts on Foreign Language Learning,” “Real Strategies You Can Use for Success,” and “What to Expect This Semester” (Figure 3.1). The first in-class session includes an activity to help learners get to know each other and become familiar with the website. In preparation for the second class session, students complete two short surveys about their motivations, beliefs about Spanish knowledge, and existing Spanish knowledge. For example, learners are asked to indicate their main reason for taking the course: (1) To make me more competitive in whatever job I have in the future; (2) Because I want to socialize with Spanish speakers; (3) Because my degree plan forces me to take a language (ugh!), and it might as well be Spanish because we’re in Texas; and (4) Because the other language class (French, Mandarin, Arabic, etc.) I wanted to take for my degree plan didn’t work with my schedule.‡ Next there is a question on their beliefs about the importance of accuracy and fluency in language learning (i.e., “I don’t want to use my Spanish unless it’s perfect” or “I just want to get my point across”). They are also asked to consider how much Spanish they already know. Responses to these questions are the focus of small-group discussions during Class Session 2. Under “Real Strategies You Can Use for Success,” learners see a list of strategies categorized by language skill and context (Class Session 3). By Session 4, students have completed the preparatory activities on the website, and this final session focuses on any questions they may have about the class procedures listed on the site.

‡ The teacher used a casual writing style in the website to support more open communication with the students.
4.4. Sample activity: Part 3: Familiarizing learners with language learning strategies

Part 3 of the website introduces a number of language learning strategies (Figure 3.2). Under the link “How do I study Spanish,” the strategies are divided by skill and context. Learners are asked to select the skill/context that they are most concerned about: speaking face to face; speaking, listening, writing, and intercultural communication online; reading for class; reading for fun; writing; listening with video; listening without video; grammar and vocabulary; and studying for exams. Each skill/context combination is hyperlinked for clarity of presentation. Figure 3.3 outlines the activity procedures, and Figure 3.4 lists websites students can use for practice outside of class.
Figure 3.2. Part 3: Strategies for success

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Activity procedures</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| 20 minutes| • For homework, learners are directed to the link “How do I study Spanish?” under Part 3: Real strategies you can use for success.  
• Learners select any strategy from this page, read about the strategies suggested by the instructor, and compose a short paragraph in English about why they chose that particular skill/context, how they will employ it this semester, and any other ideas they might have. |
| 10 minutes| • During Class 3, learners work in small groups according to the skill/context they chose in order to present a brief summary of the strategies discussed with their classmates.  
• The instructor clarifies any learner misunderstandings and comments on effective strategy use. |

Figure 3.3. Sample activity procedures
Speaking, listening, writing, and intercultural communication online

Livemocha, Busuu, and italki are social networking sites like Facebook (you can even log in through your FB account) that connect language learners in real time over the Interwebs. You can set up a free account and immediately find native Spanish speakers online who are also trying to learn a language—English! Hey, you know that one already! So you can instant message, voice chat, or video chat with a Spanish speaker, half of the time in English and half of the time in Spanish. It’s called tandem learning, and it’s a great way to find Spanish speakers if you don’t have many in your neighborhood or if you’re too nervous to use Spanish in real life. These sites also have structured Spanish language learning content if you want to “take a class,” and there are other social networking features such as media sharing and online friends.

Figure 3.4. Strategies for speaking, listening, writing, and intercultural communication online

5. Conclusions

The learner training projects described here were representative of the projects completed in the second language learner course over the years. Many students select a workshop approach similar to the ones described here in the Syrian and Turkish EFL contexts. Websites including general information about language learning and/or about the particular language course, like the one associated with the beginning Spanish course, are also commonly used. The class blog used to elicit students’ personal experiences with FLA in the Turkish context was a particularly inventive approach that allowed the teacher to include the students’ concerns in the learner training activities.

The projects described in this paper were also typical of the kinds of student characteristics that course participants have chosen to address over the years, with strategies, learner beliefs, and anxiety being the most frequent project foci. But it is also true that in each case, the individual characteristics addressed in these learner training projects lead the project developer to focus on additional characteristics. This is logical since human traits necessarily interact with each other and do not exist in isolation. It is difficult, for example, to imagine that a completely unmotivated student would experience language learning anxiety. In the projects described here, anxiety and learner beliefs were seen as particularly related.

The issues of how much time to allocate to learner training and whether the training should take place in the target language or the students’ language are important ones. Workshops and websites are seen as time efficient and able to accommodate either language. The projects described here are meant to be implemented at the beginning of language courses rather than more systematically.
throughout a semester/course, at the same time, learner training issues are expected to come up informally from time to time.

Finally, with the exception of the class blog in the Turkish context, the projects included here tended to be teacher centered in both conception and mode of presentation. The teachers chose the student characteristics to concentrate on and the activities to develop those characteristics. Since most of the course participants were not teaching while they were taking the second language learner class, it was not possible for them to include students in determining the parameters of their projects. In addition, especially in the Syrian and Turkish EFL contexts, the students would expect language instruction to be teacher centered. Even so, the lack of student input is a major concern because the goal of the second language learner course is to help language teachers become more learner centered and especially because learners themselves are the best authorities on what they need. For that reason, it is important to identify ways to recognize and incorporate learners’ perceptions of their needs.

6. Implications and Recommendations

The developers of this group of learner training projects were members of the same cultural group as the targeted students, and the projects were designed within the educational systems of the three groups. The general question of native and non-native language teachers is a complicated one, and the literature on the topic cannot be summarized here, but the experiences of the instructor and participants in this course cause us to wonder specifically about the role of culture in learner training. Do some cultures tend to emphasize particular learner characteristics or modes of implementation? Is the concept of learner training more compatible with certain educational cultures than with others? What issues arise when teachers and students are members of different cultural groups? Clearly, from a sociocultural perspective, learner training needs to take the specific culture and learning context into account.

The question also arises as to whether language learner training should only address student characteristics. The course instructor conceptualized the projects as a means to develop individual learner factors, but her expectations were challenged one semester when a student offered an unusual project for adult ESL learners: The student prepared a Spanish-language pamphlet listing free and low-cost English classes in their city, supplemented with bus schedules and child-care options. She argued that life circumstances including finances were the primary obstacles to language learning for these students. Moreover, although free and low-cost English classes were fairly readily available, many eligible students were simply unaware of the classes. Consequently, in addition to preparing the pamphlets, the student convinced a local chain of grocery stores to reproduce and distribute her pamphlets at the checkout lines in their stores with substantial numbers of Spanish-speaking customers. Ultimately, since this student’s project made it possible for her group of adult English learners to be more successful, the instructor had to agree that the
student had fulfilled the assignment. The pamphlets could also be seen as facilitating “planning,” a metacognitive strategy in Oxford’s (1990) taxonomy.

This student’s unconventional learner training project also brought about a broader question about the term learner training. Rubin, Chamot, Harris, & Anderson (2007) use the term strategy-based instruction for teaching approaches similar to what we called learner training in this paper. Nonetheless, we feel that the term strategy-based instruction is still too limited. We suggest that the term learner support is a better way to conceptualize the implementation of learner development into language curricula. In order to address a broad range of learner characteristics in second and foreign language instruction as well as include necessary learning resources, language educators should strive to support learners in all ways possible.

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Multimodality as an Interactional Resource for Classroom Interactional Competence (CIC)

Jaeuk Park a *

*Newcastle University, Newcastle Upon Tyne, UK

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Abstract
This paper of action research discusses the emergent progress of multimodality in the classroom interaction. Despite the pivotal role of multimodality in interaction in the foreign language classroom, little attention has been paid to how embodied behaviours are used as a resource by students in relation to Classroom Interactional Competence (CIC). The study, therefore, aims to assess how multimodality influences learning from learner’s perspectives. The data for this study is based on the video-recording of an English grammar lesson for adult learners. Drawing on a Conversation Analysis (CA) approach to look into the interactional unfolding of multimodal behaviours, this study uncovered the potential impact of multimodality on interaction in a foreign language classroom. The findings have significant implications for research on CIC and language teacher education.

Keywords: Classroom Interactional Competence (CIC), learning, multimodality, CA, teacher education

1. Introduction

Recent decades have seen a rising interest in the role and function of multimodality in interaction in the field of SLA. Multimodal social behaviours engaged in by an adult and a child help interact with each other as if adult teacher helps young students through dialogue and scaffolding, according to Liszkowski (2010). This is perhaps an example of adults scaffolding infants in a multimodal way and interaction on the interpsychological plane, which the children will later internalise on the intrapsychological plane (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). Learning, from this perspective, involves dialogue, discussion, and debate as learners collectively construct their own understanding through interactions with others who are in a position to help and support the actions. Based on the support channel and interactional space that learners are given by the tutor, opportunities for learning are maximised. The learning space is created and maximised generally by multi modes of both verbal and non-verbal communication, which enable teachers and learners to see the co-
construction of meaningful classroom discourse (Walsh, 2006). In this regard, it is important to examine multimodality as a resource for interactional competence concerned with what occurs between interactants and how that communication is managed by analysing classroom discourse under explanation. However, much less empirical work that explores how multimodality influences classroom interaction from learners’ point of view has been done.

By understanding learners’ embodied behaviours, this action research, therefore, aims to examine how the use of the multimodal resources in the foreign language classroom can construct or obstruct learning-in-interaction and, based on the findings, how teachers’ pedagogical practices can be improved. Building on findings put forth by Sert (2015) that multimodal behaviours presented by teachers in L2 classroom ‘sine qua non play a key role in meaning-making processes that may be conducive to the successful management of pedagogical activities as well as to creating learning opportunities’ (p. 87), this paper contributes to previous literature by taking students’ perspectives in Classroom Interactional Competence (CIC). The following research questions guided the study: (a) what multimodal resources do students use to carry out interactional activity in response to a teacher’s grammar explanation? and (b) how does their use of multimodality influence learning when interacting with peers and their teacher?

In what follows, I will first review the literature in relation to multimodality and (classroom) interactional competence along with the relevant methodology. Then, I will analyse examples demonstrating cases of multimodal resources being used and their influences on the social action of understanding in the classroom context, and summarise the findings with respect to teacher education.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Multimodality

Stivers and Sidnell (2005) propose that ‘different modalities work together not only to elaborate the semantic content of talk but also to constitute coherent courses of action’ (p. 1). In this sense, the notion of multimodality needs to be addressed. The notion can be defined as the coordinated deployment of nonverbal resources such as gesture and body display, as well as verbal and para-verbal channels such as syntax and prosody (ibid). The multimodality helps to ‘reinstate partial elements of the reality of discourse, giving each speaker and each conversational episode a specific distinguishable identity, allowing users to explore contextual and co-textual elements of discourse in more depth’, according to Knight (2011, p. 205). Her argument shows that both resources are interrelated and have an impact on a speaker’s behaviour in relation to the particular linguistic and social context.

As well as in social context, multimodality has been known to play important roles in educational contexts, in particular, in interactions between students and teachers in several ways. To begin with, resources such as gestures, gaze and silence make a
big difference in spoken ability and communication. Houser and Frymier (2009) noted the role of those resources in the development of student empowerment and achievement, demonstrating the importance of multimodal channels in student oral development. Gullberg (1998) examined the use of gestures as communication strategies, as opposed to oral communication strategies, showing individual differences in the amount and types of gestures used. This multimodal behaviour is further studied in a different context by Sime (2006), who found that gestures and other nonverbal behaviours play a key role in the language learning process, identifying three types of functions in EFL classroom interaction: cognitive, emotional and organisational. Sert (2011) revealed that gaze and silence serve as a means by which teachers can interpret students’ lack of knowledge, offering in-depth analysis on students’ epistemic status. Thus, considering the potential impact that nonverbal channels have, it is critical that all instructors should be aware of students’ personal outward nonverbal projection, as well as observation of students’ nonverbal cues.

Interestingly, multimodality has been paid little attention in relation to CA as the main focus and interest in CA research have been on vocal conduct in interaction. That is how participants carry out and organize their social actions through talk-in-interaction. However, early researchers cover not only talk but also gaze (Goodwin, 1979, 1981), gestures (Shegloff, 1984) and bodily movements (Heath, 1986) as part of the components of social interaction. These studies have set the stage for a significant vein of research into embodied interaction, multimodal interaction or multimodality. Mondada (2006, 2007) has recently provided extensive analyses of how multimodal resource can be mobilised by participants to organise their social actions from CA perspective.

A number of studies have taken a conversational analytic investigation into multimodality in the context of second language acquisition. Mortensen (2008, 2009) showed that semiotic aspects through body orientations, pointing and nods play a role in turn-allocation in a foreign language classroom. Eskildsen and Wagner (2013) proposed that ‘vocabulary is learned and taught and accompanied by recurring gestures that have emerged from shared interactional spaces’ (p. 158). Embodied behaviours function as crucial interactional resources, by which teachers instruct as well as assess students’ performance and learners use the embodied resources to display their understanding of the pedagogical activity in the ESL grammar context (Matsumoto & Dobs, 2017). These studies indicate that meaning and functions suggested by participants in a particular context depend as much on nonverbal cues as on verbal ones. These findings situate multimodality as an interactional strategy at the crossroads of interactive concerns in the classroom interactional competence study.

2.2. Classroom Interactional Competence

Applying the notion of Interactional Competence (IC) to the classroom discourse, Walsh (2011) coined Classroom Interaction Competence (CIC), which is defined as
‘teachers’ and learners’ ability to use interaction as a tool for mediating and assisting learning’ (p. 132). He demonstrated three key features of CIC; (a) the use of pedagogically convergent language, which is appropriate to learners; (b) creating interactional space (i.e. extensive use of pause, a lack of repair, signposting in instructions, extended learner turns and echo); (c) shaping learner contribution (i.e. seeking clarification, scaffolding, modelling or repairing learner input. One of the distinct important interactional resources available is multimodality. Indeed, learners’ multimodal cues in response to teachers’ explanation are important real-time feedback that influence teachers’ subsequent interaction (Suinn, 2006), and allow teachers to alter their course of action if necessary (Davis, 2009). Webb et al. (1997) states that observing student’s multimodality enables the insightful teacher to decide whether it is necessary to ‘check for students’ comprehension, provide more or a different kind of instruction, or assign more practice’ (p. 89). Thus, multimodality can be used to see how learners show their understanding and how they shape their contribution to the classroom interaction. The way it is used in the classroom among peers, and between a teacher and a learner encourages us to reflect on the meaning of learning.

Following Walsh’s development, CIC have been studied widely from different perspectives in different settings (Can Daşkı̈n, 2015; Escobar Urmeneta, 2013; Escobar Urmeneta & Evnitskaya, 2014; Sert, 2011; Sert, 2015). Escobar Urmeneta (2013) aimed to improve teachers’ professional development in a Spanish context, using multimodal CA and content analysis. She showed how a novice teacher make progress in CIC when dealing with challenges in a content and language integrated learning (CLIL) education programme through useful tools of collaborative teaching and shared reflection. Spurred on by this research, Escobar Urmeneta and Evnitskaya (2014) conducted a study in the same context, demonstrating that multimodal resources can be employed to develop teachers' CIC. Their findings showed that teachers’ efficient deployment of multimodal resources constructs learner-initiated turns, thereby helping students to shape the contribution. This study contributed to the characterisation of CIC components. Elaborating on the feature of CIC, Can Daşkı̈n (2015) examined the interactional pattern for shaping learner contributions in an EFL context. The author showed various interactional patterns in sequential organisation in classroom contexts, contributing to building up two more features of CIC: translation to L1/L2 and the use of board. Very recently, drawing on a construct of CIC, Matsumoto and Dobs (2017) have given strong support to the dialogic and pedagogical role of multimodality as a resource for establishing intersubjectivity between teachers and students in ELF contexts.

Yet, very often, the main focus has been from teachers’ perspectives, and researchers have paid insufficient attention to non-verbal phenomena in a foreign language learning classroom. Sert (2011, 2015), in particular, revealed that multimodal resources of interaction play a prominent role in understanding pedagogical practices and that multimodality are employed for teachers and learners to display CIC. Nevertheless, little research has delved in any depth in to how
multimodality is employed as a resource by learners that contributes to CIC in the classroom interaction. The current study, therefore, seeks to contribute to such work done on multimodality and learning opportunities by evaluating and assessing the impact of multimodality as interactional resources on learning and suggesting how we, as instructors, make changes to our teaching practices in the classroom.

3. Method

The data for this study is based on one of the International House Teacher Training DVDs, the video-recording of lessons taught in English by International House London teachers for adult learners in a pre-intermediate multilingual class. A grammar lesson was chosen, in which an instructor and six students were recorded. Transcriptions were ready made available at Newcastle University, but the researcher had to observe the episodes in points for precise transcription.

What was chosen for investigation in this grammar lesson was question-answer activity between a teacher and students or peers themselves. To be specific, it was the lesson that helped students revise various prepositions of place which had already been exposed to them earlier in the course. To minimise methodological flaws and maximise the chance of examining specific aspects of multimodal behaviours in classroom interaction, the data was taken from two cameras, in two different corners of the classroom which recorded the teacher-students and student-student interactions. Each section, in which the learner’s use of multimodality was especially evident, was marked and transcribed by the researcher using the Jeffersonian transcription convention developed for researchers in conversation analysis. The transcription conventions allow for a precise notation of prosodic features and voice quality. In the extracts shown below, nonverbal cues and their alignment with verbal resources are transcribed in separate lines and by using a different font to show the evidence in the data. The transcription conventions for the analysis are listed in the appendix.

The present study draws upon a CA approach to look into the mechanism of connected discourse. It is an analytical method that offers insight into how people organise their conduct to achieve their daily affairs that occur naturally during talk-in-interaction. Ten Have (2007) insists that CA allows researchers to investigate the data with special attention given to the details of interaction represented by a detailed transcript. Furthermore, CA offers valuable understanding on the fine details of learner interaction and on how they use their language resources to socialise within the small group discussions to show ‘understanding and knowing’ (Koole & Elbers, 2014). The work will benefit from the CA’s emic perspective, a feature that Markee and Kasper (2004) define as an empirically observed conversational conduct rather than a state of mind obtained by an interview. However, the overall aim of this study is to reveal nonverbal multimodal cues that learners use as an interactional resource to perform the specific interactive activity. Both verbal and non-verbal communication channels can ‘work together not only to elaborate the semantic content of talk but also to constitute coherent courses of action’ (Stivers & Sidnell, 2005, p. 1). The CA concept
needs to be broadened to cover verbal resources as well as participants' visual displays to analyse multimodal interaction (Stukenbrock, 2009a, cited by Kupetz, 2011). CA is also ‘well equipped to study’ multimodal language learning behaviours (Sert, 2015, p. 106). Likewise, linguistic resources as well as nonverbal channels were analysed in order to account for the full cluster of resources that can be involved in social activities in the classroom.

4. Results

4.1. Spatial configuration for meaning making

Extract 1 given below is a typical example of the interactional resource learners use in a question-answer activity of learning in the classroom: the teacher encourages a student to come up to the front to match a word and a photo. It is obvious that a learner integrates verbal and nonverbal channels of gestures and space for meaning making, which in turn results in a teacher's evaluation, impacting the flow and coherence of the discussion between L1 and a teacher.

Extract 1

Lines 1 to 17

1  T  lovely okay. good. Err some more? Mm.  
2  (2.0) Uka.  
3  L1  (10.0)  
4  inside↑=  
   ((using her finger to answer the question))  
   (Fig. 1&2)←  
5  T  = where’s the cat?  
   ((having his hands around his lips to indicate he is looking forward to her answer))  
6  L1  inside (2.0) the box.  
   ((backing away from the board and looking at her teacher with
gaze with her finger orienting to the bottom) (Fig. 3)

7 T good. (2.3)

(\text{\((T \text{ points to another picture to give her another question}))\)

8 L1 outside= 

9 T =hmhm thank you Uka thank you. So everybody inside the box.

10 LL inside the box.

On the teacher's question, L1 uses the word 'inside' (line 4) with rising tone at the end, sounding like she is seeking confirmation from the teacher. However, the teacher asks her to be more precise by asking a specific question and by placing his hand around his lips suggesting he wants a clearer answer (line 5). Being aware of the need to elaborate on her answer to complete her task, she adds more syntactic words to specify her explanation in line 6. Interestingly, she relies not just on words but also on her body. She is reconfiguring the spatial arrangement (Figure 3) (Mondada, 2009, 2011) by backing away from the board and by making large arm movements to give him a more elaborated answer. This way, she creates a new, larger 'interactional space' (Walsh, 2011) which enables her to 'perform' her learning activity. Within this new interaction space, she signals her meaning by her nonverbally voluminous hand gesture and verbal description. Her confirmation checking is immediately followed by the teacher's content feedback and another question, in line 7, to double check whether or not the student got the meaning right. On her correct answer, a teacher assesses her performance by thanking and calling L1 in line 9. Her well-performed activity allows a teacher to contribute to other students' confirmation checking of the grammar by invoking a public repetition in lines 9-10.

Extract 1 shows what and how the learner depends on to reformulate her learning activity. In recognition of ambiguity, she displayed multimodal behaviours to convey the meaning by counting not only on semantic and syntactic, but on spatial resources, by which she clarifies the social activity of learning, thereby constructing a teacher' comprehension. The combination of verbal and spatial resources by a learner plays a significant role in reaching intersubjectivity (i.e. shared understanding) and alignment between participants, as well as other students. Furthermore, her use of classroom artefact of the whiteboard as a multimodal resource (Hennessy, 2011) was meaningful as it helped clarify the contribution and make public her pedagogical performance to colleagues, showing her interactional competence in the classroom. Thus, it can be claimed that it is the deployment of multimodality which enabled her to hold the floor and elucidate the meaning at a particular point in the interaction of the activity, displaying her CIC.

4.2. Deictic gestures for turn-taking

Other nonverbal signals that students may use to embody their interactional resource are gaze and head movement. Extract 2, given below, is where the teacher
encourages students to do pair work. In particular, following the teacher’s explanation, they are asked to give each other questions where they should practice prepositions. It is clear that a learner draws on diverse body movements for turn management, which influences the flow of the interaction between learners.

Extract 2

Lines 1 to 21

1. T lovely okay, in two? Take it in turns. Dilmo asks Kuntay a question.

2. and then Kuntay asks Dilmo a question.

3. five questions each, in total how many questions?

4. L1 ten?

5. T yeah ten questions. (1.0) Okay together.

6. L1 [where is ] (gazing at L2) (Fig. 4) ←

7. L2 [where is the] (gazing at the whiteboard) (Fig. 4) ←

8. L1 [hahaha]

9. L2 [hahaha]

10. L1 ((smiling widely to avoid the atmosphere, and giving L2 hand gesture to indicate L1 wants L2 to start)) (Fig. 6) ←

11. L2 where is the cat number five in the picture picture?
following the teacher’s instruction for the task (lines 1 to 5), two learners attempt to allocate turns to each other. Since there is no explicit turn allocation, they try to yield a turn by asking a question at the same time (lines 6 to 7). Recognizing overlap,
L1 seems to lead the moment as she smiles and laughs in lines 8 to 9 (Fig. 5) to avoid the awkward atmosphere and then finally gives her way to L2 (him) by showing hand gesture in line 10 (Fig. 6) to indicate that she wants him to begin to take turn. Realising the turn offered by her, he carries out the pedagogical activity both by asking her a question and by drawing on embodied behaviours in line 11 (Fig. 7). He looks at the whiteboard and then turns his eyes to her to indicate he is waiting for her answer, during which she is aware of her turn and answers the question (line 12). L2 gives her acknowledgement tokens 'aha hmm', while the duo share mutual gaze and nod their heads in agreement with the answer in line 13 (Keevallik, 2014). This is the moment where turn transition occurs and the next speaker should be selected. The next pause of 2.0 seconds shows that there is no obvious signal for the next turn following her answer, which allowed none of them to establish who should take the next one (Fig. 8). It is then that she mobilises not only linguistics resources of 'yes' but also deictic gestures of getting her right hand inward (Fig. 9) to the chest to point to herself in line 14 to ask if it is ok for her to take turn (Monda, 2007). That is, she finds herself in the same situation as in line 10, and takes action to solicit her turn (Iwasaki, 2015) by way of multimodality. Furthermore, overlaps in lines 6 to 9 demonstrate the interaction carries on smoothly. According to McCarthy (2003), the overlap is indicative of good 'listenership', showing that the channels are open and that the communication is working well. Overlaps give two learners important clues that speakers are being understood (Walsh, 2011).

Up until the turn is completed (lines 15 to 20), she keeps mobilising every necessary means such as head, facial looks, hand and a classroom artefact to show her meaning. To L1’s confirmation check, she gets the tip of her ball point pen at the bottom of her jaw attached (Fig. 10) to show she is still waiting for him to answer the question. It leads him to a long pause (5.5 secs.) where he tries to come up with the answer in line 18. To his answer in line 20, while producing agreement marker of ‘hmm’, she simultaneously moves her head dynamically up and down (Fig. 11) to admit it sounds right, during which he looks satisfied to know it was a right answer to the question (Fig. 12) in line 21. Thus, learners were seen to draw on two modes of linguistic and non-linguistic channels to show what both parties mean and to signal understanding, thereby co-constructing meanings in the interaction at the given time. Therefore, multimodal channels can be said to play a crucial role as an interactional resource in the classroom interaction. Drawing on Extract 2, some initial observations can be made with regards to interactional resource and classroom interactional competence.

Extract 2 demonstrates that when learners are required to do activity in pairs following the teachers’ grammar explanation, they tend to use both verbal and nonverbal channels to interact with each other. She explicitly uses her hand gestures, interpersonal gaze, nods and an artefact, all of which were followed by his question for her and his answer to her question along with yet another nonverbal channels. Drawing on these strategies, she knows how to manage her own turn-taking. Nonverbal channels synchronized with speech were also found to become a useful interactional resource for learners to not only demonstrate current understanding but
keep the classroom discourse. Thus, the coordination of multimodality makes their turns coherent and meaningful, displaying learners’ CIC.

4.3. Resource to facilitate or block Interactional Space

The next extract clearly shows that a learner uses multimodality as a turn-requesting device, and also indicates how multimodality influences learning by identifying two episodes, one where learner’s multimodal behaviour create learning opportunities, and the other where the mistake of teacher’s inaction for learner’s appeal to shape the contribution hinders learning. The teacher nominates a student to guess on what is shown on the board.

Extract 3
Lines 1 to 24

1  T  okay well done well done everybody.
2  (6.5)
3  now this picture (2.2) you know. yeah? Where where is this picture? any any ideas?
4  LL  kitchen.
5  T  a KITCHEN. Well done well done oh well done. how do you know? Klebe?
6  how do you know it’s a kitchen?
7  (2.5) What can you see?
8  L3  it is a sink ay err
9  T  a sink?
10 LL  no no.
11 L3  (2.0)mm mm ((mumbling to speak a word))
12 T  what’s this?

13 L3  (2.5) ((banging head with his left hand)) (Fig. 13) ←
14 T  (3.0)
When publicly nominated to answer the question (lines 1 to 12), L3 mumbles (line 11) to come up with a word banging his head with left hand (Figure 13). This suggests that he is trying to think of the right answer (line 13) while keeping his left hand on his head to think of the correct answer. Keeping his left hand on his head indicates that he is requesting his continuous turn. This subsequently prevents the teacher interrupting L3, allowing him to extend his turn for 3 more seconds (line 14). This provides L3 with an opportunity to contribute to the interaction, during which interestingly, other students help L3’s reply to a teacher’s question in line 15 by collectively suggesting a possible answer. It demonstrates that other learners take his bodily movements as a public sign for help. Then, L3 repeats after their answer in line 17 (Figure 14). In other words, embodied cues serve as a mediator to cause other students to collaboratively interact, which in turn, results in another space where a teacher can correct their answer in lines 18 to 20. In the process of this pedagogic activity, multimodality is shown to facilitate an interactional space where perceived teacher offers student-in-interaction opportunities to contribute, and other students
can be involved. The interplay of speech and body is found to play a crucial role in the interaction, enhancing mutual understanding. The embodied ‘catchment’ by all participants are evidences of interactional alignments (Matsumoto and Dobs, 2017, p. 29).

However, there is a need to note that in lines 21 to 25, a teacher blocks a space for learning. L3 conveys explicit meaning that he wants to take his turn to give it his own idea by verbally saying but in line 21. He even attempts to speak by using his direct gaze and pointing gesture as in Figure 16 in line 22. Considering his ongoing finger-pointing and gaze, he looks like he noticeably wants a teacher to yield him another chance to speak, and he even half stands up and sits down on a chair to grab the teacher’s attention but the teacher does not perceive in a video-clip. Eventually, L3 is left untouched and a teacher just chooses to move on to the topic-in-discussion (line 23) with completing the interaction with L3, during which another student comes up with another item in lines 23 to 24. His earnest desire to be engage in the pedagogical performance stays unnoticed. It is for this reason that he looks very disappointed (Figure 17) in line 25. Thus, his gaze and ongoing finger-pointing demonstrates a learner’s appeal to the next speakership. We never know what he is trying to say, but it is clear that he could’ve contributed to the interaction if a teacher noticed his nonverbal cues and handed over a turn to him. Unfortunately, it does not happen here and the teacher chose just to listen to other answer, shutting down an interactional space for L3’s learning. It ends up taking away L3’s opportunity to shape the contribution, hindering his learning.

Extract 3 also displays large hand movements and eye gaze as resources for a learner to interact with the teacher and peers. L3 employed multimodality to hold the floor at a particular point in the interaction. He helped a teacher to ask the question again by showing explicit embodied cues in line with his speech. It is significant to note how his colleagues reacted when he willingly responded to the teacher’s questions but with no proper answer. When he looked downwards with his hand on head, other students recognized his explicit uncertainty. The uptake by his friends revealed that they take his non-vocal projection as ‘in need of help’, which is why they took the floor and added a further response. This is highly compelling evidence that shows how nonverbal codes create ‘space for learning’ (Walsh, 2011) among learners. Furthermore, it demonstrates that inaction for learners’ appeal prevented learners from learning opportunity.

5. Discussion

It has been shown how learners enact and develop their CIC via the pedagogic task performance when they co-construct meanings and jointly establish understanding using linguistic and non-linguistic repertoires.

The spatial configuration created an interaction space which can allow them more enriching interactional resources like on-going finger-pointing to make the meaning more precise in line with the speech. The entwined resources enabled a learner
extended space for reformulation and clarification, which helped interact with a teacher, thereby establishing intersubjectivity between participants (Extract 1). Other multimodal cues such as gaze, large head nodding and classroom artefact functioned as a mediator, by which learners take cues to decide the speakership of turn-taking in interaction (Extract 2). Through multimodal interplay, students were able to manage to hold the floor, recognise key signals that mark a transition relevance place, solicit and yield turn at a particular point in the activity. This is indicative of multimodality as a resource for learners to use to show their sufficient CIC. The final extract displayed that multimodality can either facilitate or block an interactional space from the learner's perspective. A learner's reliance on paralinguistic channels could elicit other students to interpret it as a sign for help, which promotes interaction among peers, whereas ‘passing it over’ by a teacher led to interactional breakdown, frustrating a learner, which ends up closing up ‘a window for learning’. Learners that demonstrate CIC use multimodal interface that is both convergent to the teacher’s pedagogical goal of the moment on-task and that is appropriate to the teacher. However, the simple moment that the teacher neither perceives a learner's appeal, nor shows proper CIC, using a language that is divergent to the pedagogic goal of the moment prevents learners from learning opportunity.

Thus, what learners are doing in the classroom with peers and a teacher can be made clear through modal complexity (Norris, 2004), the learner’s finely tuned coordination of multimodal resources. We do things with things. That is, we express our opinions with resources we can employ. According to Streeck (1996), we should use whatever material comes our way when symbolizing something. It is the communication that counts because ‘it is what we call ‘making sense” (p. 383). It might be a valuable strategy in particular in the classroom interaction context. If learners use verbal and nonverbal resources together, they may have better chances to help one another learn what should be learnt. Indeed, this study has demonstrated what multimodal resources learners rely on, how multimodality influences learning in relation to classroom interactional competence. Furthermore, it has shown how teachers should interpret learners’ multimodal behaviours as Matusumoto and Dobs (2017) argued.

This calls on us as teachers to pay keen attention to classroom observations of multimodal cues to shed more light on our teaching practices in a way we can help learners make their learning more interactive and effective. It is because a failure to observe and recognize that a student wants to take a turn can lead to bored and frustrated students. According to Matsumoto and Dobs (2017), we can learn much about how students learn and how they respond to particular teaching strategies through close observation of learners in the process of learning. Thus, we need to monitor and react to student questions, comments, especially nonverbal projection, and facial expressions while teaching because students’ every single movement provides us with a chance to interact. The perception on multimodality as an interactional resource enhances CIC in the ways in which both parties’ interactional decision and subsequent actions in the classroom enhance learning and learning
opportunity. A case in point could be typical perceptive tutors taking cues through multimodal behaviours to successfully interact and communicate with students in the classroom. They instinctively detect students who want to voice opinions. Students’ simple gaze or movements alone, other than hand-raising causes them to negotiate meaning, which make the students reach understanding. They spot the moment in an almost automatic fashion, which looks like it is almost a subconscious and implicit process. Of course, it is not always the case but their perceived teaching practice do help students contribute to the class, having a tremendous impact on students’ learning. Put simply, we can create space where learners shape contributions just by giving them a turn. Just as teachers’ minimal response tokens such as ‘mmhh and right’ as evidence of their CIC (Walsh, 2011) help maintain the flow of the interaction, the multimodality between learners serves as evidence of learners’ CIC to oil the wheels of the interactions.

Nevertheless, it seems that not every teacher is able to spot the moment, due to differences in teaching experience. Classrooms can be quite a busy environment to an inexperienced teacher in terms of noticing learners’ nonverbal cues. It is demanding for the novice teacher to develop an ability to deal with multi-dimensional interaction occurring in the classroom, such as reacting, interacting and facilitating their learning as they are only preoccupied with explaining the relevant materials at hand. This prevents a learner from taking an opportunity to shape their contribution. The final extract shows a typical example of interactional breakdown where a learner obviously signals his wish to add on by depending on multimodal resources, but a teacher overlooks his turn-solicitation. The learner clearly displays his CIC in terms of his ability to hold the floor, whereas the teacher does not show his CIC when it comes to his skill to interact. Of course, it cannot be claimed for sure that the tutor’s insufficient CIC impedes learning as it is hard to decide whether the teacher either intentionally ignored the learner’s appeal or did not see the learner wishing to take a turn behind his back as the camera did not show the recording from teacher’s perspective, but it can be said for sure that whatever reason, the student was trying to create his own ‘space for learning’ to no avail. That is, it is the teacher that both ‘orchestrates the interaction’ (Breen, 1998) and breaks the interaction.

This has two implications. First, we need training, in particular for classroom observation, which is an individual teaching skill that needs to be learned (Radford, 1990; Matsumoto & Dobs, 2017; Walsh, 2006; 2011; 2013). There is no doubt that it will not only raise awareness of the intricacies of multimodality, which we have taken for granted in the classroom interaction, but certainly help teachers give and take multimodal channels instructively, developing professionalism. It was found by both teachers and learners that multimodal behaviours such as gestures, gaze, postures, and facial expressions had critical impacts on learning. Nonetheless, foreign language teachers are less likely to use nonverbally visual devices during lessons in the classroom: not many teachers turned out to help learners understand specific points (Sime, 2006). This clearly shows that teachers should be aware of the importance and how big a role multimodality plays in the classroom interaction but they do not know
how to use the one. It is for this reason that much care should be taken to develop education program where the teacher can improve the multimodal communication abilities. Thus, by developing an understanding of what role multimodality plays in classroom interaction, both teachers and learners might facilitate CIC which makes a big difference in learning.

The other is related to Self Evaluation of Teacher Talk (SETT). The SETT framework allows teachers to develop deeper understandings of the dialogic nature of classroom discourse (Walsh, 2006). The framework, however, does not claim to account for all aspects of classroom discourse-in-interaction. The interaction patterns are only teacher-fronted, without showing learner-learner interaction pattern and strategies. In other words, it is incapable of describing aspects where learners work independently of the teacher. In this sense, the findings might contribute to understanding in part how students themselves interact in the classroom, identifying one of features of students’ CIC (SCIC); multimodality serves as valuable resources for 'opening a window for learning'.

6. Conclusions

This paper is limited in that it does not explain the full cluster of multimodal behaviours used and how they influence learning in the classroom context with small number of participants in analysis. It only covers part of multimodal resources and their impacts on learning. However, it is significant in that much attention has been paid to multimodality as an interactional resource among peers and their teacher in the classroom for CIC, and it can be a stepping stone to explore more features of SCIC that have potential influences on learning. Indeed, many researchers are known to have currently characterized interactional competence as the fifth skill in addition to four skills. Multimodality has also been taken and conceptualised as an important marking criteria in oral proficiency interviews (Briegel-Jones, 2013), and the IELTS research committee all over the world acknowledge there is much work to be done in terms of taking nonverbal behaviour in a speaking test into consideration.

Clearly, it is important for teachers to raise awareness of the intricacies of multimodality, understand how it functions and how it influences learning, and put their lessons into practice to improve their CIC, as well as students’ one. That explains why attempts have been made in this paper to demonstrate what multimodal resources are used by learners, how they impact learning in the classroom and how teachers can make changes to their teaching practices. There is no ‘one-fits-for-all’ to change and improve, like any other professional development. However, understanding a specific context and developing skills appropriate to that context play a key role in our endeavour towards growing up to be a better teacher. Understanding multimodality as CIC resources in the classroom interaction and improving how it is managed are central to improving our teaching and feeding our students.

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Use of plural in spoken English in an EFL context

Yusuf Şen a, Mesut Kuleli b *

a Duzce University, Hakime Erciyas School of Foreign Languages, Düzce, 81100, Turkey
b Duzce University, Hakime Erciyas School of Foreign Languages, Düzce, 81100, Turkey

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Abstract
The aim of this study is to determine students’ use of plural in speaking in an EFL context. To this end, 48 students’ speaking exams, which were recorded during the oral exams in 2014-2015 academic year, were transcribed by the researchers and the students’ use of plural was analyzed. It is important to note that not all the input was obtained from only one exam, but rather a progressive use of plural in English was analyzed with the data obtained from three different exams. As a result of the analysis, it was found that while students can use the plural appropriately with high-frequency words, they were found to use the singular form of an item in contexts where the plural form would be more appropriate. Considering the issue from a progressive perspective, it was found that this tendency did not persist in the long-run. While students from the ELT department were found to use plural appropriately, early level students were found to use plural “s” inappropriately. It was concluded that students’ L1 (Turkish) and overgeneralization of rules in L2 might interfere with their use of plural in the early level, but the effect of L1 diminishes in the upper levels.

Keywords: Spoken English; plural in English; EFL context; L1 interference

1. Introduction
Corpus studies in English have been popular recently. The general purpose of those studies is to ensure that foreign language learners are directed to learn English as a foreign language in the order that native speakers of English learn it. While there are native use corpus studies, it is also possible to see non-native use corpus studies in the related literature. These corpus studies do not only provide a guidance for teachers of English as a foreign language, but also for publishers that take native and non-native corpus studies as the basis in material design.

This study was conducted to investigate whether foreign language learners of English conform to the corpus studies in spoken English in terms of their speaking skill. There are not only general corpus studies but also specific studies on written...
and spoken English. Aijmer and Altenberg (2014) state that a corpus study on spoken English conducted by a team led by Jan Startvik in 1975 has been the inspiration behind many spoken corpus studies of English since then. Despite all corpus studies and learning materials designed based on these studies, foreign language learners of English still have problems in speaking. These problems are not only about fluency but also have a lot to do with accuracy in speaking (Housen & Kuiken, 2009). Use of plural was determined to be one of the leading problems of accuracy in speaking in an EFL context. In their study, Luk and Shirai (2009) argued that while English learners of Spanish origin can learn plural -s in the order that native speakers of English learn, those of Korean or Japanese origin learn this morpheme later than the natural order as suggested by Bailey, Madden and Krashen, (1974). This finding brings the issue of L1 interference into the limelight assuming that while English and Spanish are in the same language family, Korean and Japanese are in a language family different from English.

1.1. Use of “Plural” in Native Corpus Studies

There are some rules governing the use of plural suffix –s in English. Biber, Conrad and Leech (2002) state that despite some irregular nouns and those borrowed from other languages, most of the nouns in English are made plural with the suffixes -s, -es and -ies. DeCapua (2008) states that native speakers of English add the plural inflection -s, -es and -ies to regular nouns, however there are some irregular nouns for which only vowels change to make them plural besides certain nouns that do not change form or do not take any inflection in making plural such as sheep. DeCapua (2008) further adds that some nouns borrowed from other languages such as curriculum cannot be added the plural inflection, but rather they are made plural with the change of the last letters –um into –a sound (curriculum-curricula). However, says DeCapua (2008), because these exceptions are few in number, it should not pose any difficulties to speakers and learners of English either in ESL or EFL contexts.

It was in 1973 that Brown conducted a corpus study on the acquisition of grammatical morphemes. Brown (1973) found that English plural –s is learned when native speakers of English are somewhere around 30 months old. According to Brown (1973), native speakers of English first learn to use the present progressive morpheme “ing”, followed by the prepositions “in” and “on”. Of the 14 grammatical morphemes put forward by Brown (1973) to be learned by native speakers of English in a sequence, the regular plural morpheme -s is learned on the fourth rank, and Brown (1973) adds that those grammatical morphemes are learned in a sequence by native speakers regardless of their family background. Villiers and Villiers (1973) confirmed Brown’s findings further suggesting that learning the regular plural -s at an early stage of language development cannot be attributed to the ease of using this morpheme or frequency of use by parents, but rather there is a natural sequence in learning morphemes by native speakers of English.
Berko (1958) conducted a study on young children between the ages of 2,5 and 7. In this study, participants were shown some low-frequency nouns besides high-frequency nouns and asked to make them plural and pronounce the words in their plural form. There was no difference in the results gender-wise, however, first graders performed better than pre-school children in low-frequency nouns. Berko (1958) reported that no matter how familiar nouns may sound to children, they can correctly add the –s, -z and –ız sounds to the nouns to make them plural, showing that native speakers can make overgeneralization of rules that they have learned and acquired to survive in conditions they are not familiar with.

1.2. Use of “Plural” by Non-native Speakers of English

While there are certain underlying rules as regards the accurate use of plural –s in native speaker corpus, it is not uncommon that non-native speakers of English cannot use this suffix accurately in speaking. Mauranen (2012) states that non-native speakers of English tend to forget to add the plural suffix to a noun or they add -s to irregular nouns even in academic contexts. This finding makes it imperative that EFL learners should be explicitly taught to use plural in English while it is also possible for them to learn to use this suffix implicitly. Başöz and Aydın (2001) report that EFL students’ misuse of plural forms in writing can be regarded as mistakes rather than errors. This finding shows that even in writing, which is less spontaneous than speaking, EFL learners have problems in plural forms of nouns.

The problems with plural –s suffix are common, and the reasons for this cannot be attributed to a single cause, but there are various reasons for the inaccurate use of this suffix by non-native speakers of English. Peyman (2014) found that one of the inaccuracies in EFL contexts stems from plural use of nouns. Peyman (2014) identified two types of errors in the use of plural, one of them using a singular noun where plural form would be more appropriate, and the other one using a plural noun where a singular form would be more appropriate. Bailey, Madden and Krashen (1974) found that there is a natural sequence in adults’ learning English, and the mistakes adults make also follow this natural sequence, with plural form being one of the earliest learned forms. This, however, does not guarantee that adults do not make any mistakes in plural forms in their conversations. Ting, Mahadhir and Chang (2010) analyzed the oral skills of university students in an EFL context and found that mistakes in plural forms are one of the most frequently observed problems with foreign language learners at university level, particularly among less proficient users of English; however, they also came up with the suggestion that accuracy in oral skills developed as the students’ English level developed towards the end of the academic year. In another EFL context, Jing, Tindall and Nisbet (2006) found that Chinese students had great difficulties forming plural nouns in English and the authors attributed this phenomenon to L1 interference.

As can be seen in these findings, even though plural nouns of English are taught at the very beginning based on course books, users of English still have difficulties in
plurals. Even though it cannot be the sole reason, this can be partly attributed to what learners of English in an EFL context already bring to the learning environment with themselves; the role of L1 interference. Pallotti (2010) states that deviation from L2 rules cannot simply be explained by L2 itself, but rather learners of L2 tend to develop an interlanguage in L2 learning process. Lado (1957) posited the term Contrastive Analysis stating that when the notions in two languages are similar to each other, L2 forms and functions can be learned more easily, however, when two notions between L1 and L2 are dissimilar, they cannot be learned so easily. Turkish and English do not belong to the same language family, and formation and function of the plural are different in those two languages. Demir (2006) put forward that all singular nouns are made plural with the same plural suffix in Turkish. However, unlike Turkish, there are certain irregularities in English nouns to make them plural. Eker (2003) states that in Turkish when a number is used as an adjective before a noun, the plural suffix cannot be added to the nouns. This is also contrary to the process in English, in which the plural suffix is added to the nouns after numbers as adjectives. When English learners of Turkish origin try to learn English in an EFL context, they may develop an interlanguage, with some forms from Turkish and some forms from English. Considering this interlanguage from contrastive analysis perspective, English learners of Turkish origin might have difficulties in plural forms in English.

2. Method

In this part of the study, participants, data collection procedure, and data analysis are given.

2.1. Participants

The participants of this study were prep school students at Düzce University, Turkey. The total number of students was 255 in 2014-2015 academic year. These students received 24 hours of English classes per week for 17 weeks in the first semester and 16 weeks in the second semester as part of the preparatory school curriculum. In this curriculum, students are taught basic English through a course book that integrates four skills for the first 17 weeks of the academic year. From the second semester onwards, students are given separate skills courses, namely Reading & Writing and Listening & Speaking for ten hours per week for each course. Therefore, while students are taught speaking skills in a course book in the first semester, more emphasis is put on this major skill in the second semester with the Listening & Speaking course. The first oral exam was given at the end of the 9th week; the second oral exam was given at the end of the 17th week; and the third oral exam was given at the end of the 25th week. Of those 255 students, 48 of them were chosen purely randomly to collect data from. In the first oral exam, 16 students’ speech was chosen for analysis. Students finished only the first level of a course book, so they were supposed to have mastered A1 level in English in accordance with the
guidelines of CEFR. In the second oral exam, another 16 students’ speech was chosen for analysis. By the time of the second oral exam, students had finished the second level of the same course book, and so they were supposed to have mastered A2 level in English. Another 16 students were chosen for the third oral exam analysis. After the second oral exam, besides 4 hours of course book instruction per week, 10 hours were allocated to reading / writing, and another 10 hours were allocated to listening / speaking skills, therefore students used skills books besides a main course book in the eight weeks between the second oral exam and third oral exam. 16 students for analysis of each oral exam were chosen purely randomly. It is important to note that prep school is a must for only English Teaching Department students while all other students choose to study at prep school optionally. 3 students were chosen from ELT department to collect data from. The remaining 45 students were from the classes that took English preparatory lessons optionally. While the students from ELT department were in upper level of English, 6 of the students from other classes were in pre-intermediate level, and 39 of them were in the beginner level based on the placement exam results administered at the beginning of the academic year.

2.2. Data collection procedure

The oral exams in preparatory school were video-recorded in 2015-2016 academic year with students’ consent. As stated in section 2.1, 16 students’ oral exam records were chosen purely randomly for analysis of their improvement in oral skills in each speaking exam. It is important to note these 16 students were not the same students in three different oral exams on the grounds that the aim of this study was not to observe individual improvement but rather a structural improvement of a group considered to be representative of the universe in the study. The records of the oral exams were transcribed by the researchers of this study. The data obtained through transcriptions were divided into three parts: the first part was the data from the first oral exam; the second part was the data from the second oral exam; and the third part was the data from the third oral exam to determine the improvement of students in the use of plural in spoken English in a clear manner.

2.3. Data Analysis

A qualitative approach was adopted in data analysis in that the aim was to describe a situation and gain insight to a practice from individual responses, and the data was explained from a small sample group. The reason behind the qualitative design of this study was that a single unit was investigated in-depth over a period of time. The mistakes of students with the use of plural forms of nouns were found from transcriptions. The findings were divided into categories based on the nature and level of the mistake, for which percentage statistics was used. The findings were reported based on whether these mistakes occurred in the first, second or third oral exam.
3. Results

This section of the study is divided into three parts. The first part is concerned with the common mistakes students made in the lower level; the second part deals with the mistakes students made in the pre-intermediate level; and the third part covers the mistakes students made in the upper level. The reason for dividing the findings in this way is to show whether students developed their accuracy in plural use in spoken English or if the mistakes persisted to upper levels in their learning process.

The results of this study point to the fact that while learners of English in an EFL context made a lot of mistakes with plural form of nouns in spoken English in early levels of their learning process, these mistakes were reduced as the learners advanced to pre-intermediate level. Upon reaching an upper level, learners or English made the fewest number of mistakes in the use of plural in speaking. Table 1 shows the distribution of those mistakes according to level.

Table 1. Distribution of mistakes according to level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Number of mistakes</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early level</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>58.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-intermediate</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper level</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.34%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen in Table 1, of the 24 cases in total, 14 (58.33%) cases were found to include mistakes with plural form of nouns in the early level; this number was 8 (33.33%) in pre-intermediate level, and it was only 2 (8.34%) in the upper level. Besides levels, the distribution of mistakes according to English grammar rules was also found. Table 2 shows the distribution of mistakes according to grammar rules.

Table 2. Distribution of mistakes according to grammar rules

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grammar rule</th>
<th>Number of mistakes</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>After numeral adjectives</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>41.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After determiners or quantifiers</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generic meaning with zero article</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20.83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irregular nouns</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen in Table 2, of those 24 cases, 10 (41.67%) were related to using the singular form of a noun inappropriately after numeral adjectives. Of those 10 misuses of plural form, 9 (90%) were observed in the early level while only 1 (10%) of them came out in the pre-intermediate level. Of the 24 mistakes found in this study related to use of plural in spoken English, 8 (33.33%) of them turned out to be after determiners or quantifiers. Of those 8 mistakes, 4 (50%) were in the early level; 3 (37.5%) were in the pre-intermediate level; and finally only 1 (12.5%) was in the upper level. 5 (20.83%) mistakes in total were related to inappropriate use of a singular form of the nouns with generic meaning with zero article. Of those 5 mistakes, 1 (20%) was found in early level; 3 (60%) were found in pre-intermediate level; and 1 (20%) was
found in the upper level. Finally, only 1 (4.17%) mistake was related to misuse of plural form with irregular nouns and this appeared only in pre-intermediate level. Therefore, while the number of mistakes with plural use in spoken English decreased as students' level improved, the nature of the mistakes also changed. While students in early level tended to make mistakes with inappropriate use of a singular form of the noun after numeral adjectives and quantifiers or articles, students tended to make mistakes with plural use in generic nouns with zero article as their level improved.

3.1. Findings in the early level

The analysis showed that students tended to make frequent mistakes in plural use of nouns in spoken English in the early level. Below are some representative findings of the analysis of transcriptions in the early level:

Case 1: Student: Once in two. A week. Yok two week*.
Case 2: Student: I know Bilge. We are. Same course. Last year. I know Alper er. I guess. We are same high school. Two year*. But I don't me. I didn't meet Alper.
Case 3: Student: Yes I have two sister*.
Case 4: Student: Yes. But yesterday it is not really problem, just I couldn't do two question*.
Teacher: Two questions [in the exam,]. The writing one?
Student: [yes, yes].
Case 5: Student: My mother is housewife and my father is retired. I have a brother and I have four sisters. I have got eight nephew*.
Case 6: Teacher: How long does it take to go to Istanbul from Düzce? How long does it take?
Student: Four month*.
Case 7: Teacher: Did you go to Akçakoca?
Student: Yes. Four year*.
Case 8: Teacher: When?
Student: Two day*.
Case 9: Student: I want, I really want two child*.

As can be seen in the 9 cases above, the most frequent mistake in plural use of nouns in spoken English in an EFL context turned out to be using the singular form of the nouns after numeral adjectives. Biber, Conrad and Leech (2002) state that numeral adjectives are followed by plural forms of nouns in English. Swan (1995) also exemplifies that plural forms of the nouns follow numbers used as adjectives. While the plural form of the nouns should have been used after numeral adjectives, learners tended to use the singular forms. In case 1, “two week*” should have been used as
“two weeks”; in case 2, “two year*” should have been used as “two years”; in case 3, “two sister*” should have been used as “two sisters”; in case 4, “two question*” should have been used as “two questions”; in case 5, “eight nephew*” should have been used as “eight nephews”; in case 6, even though the answer of the student does not fit in with the discourse, “four month*” should have been used as “four months”; in case 7, “four year*” should have been used as “four years”; in case 8, “two day*” should have been used as “two days”; and in case 9, “two child*” should have been used as “two children”. It is important to note that in some of these cases, students’ using singular nouns inappropriately where the plural form would be appropriate is not the only element that disrupts accuracy, but because of the scope of this study, only misuse of plural forms in spoken English has been covered. Below are some other cases from the early level learners of English:

Case 10: Teacher: What is bad about your friend? Is he always good?  
Student: No . She - He have other friend*.

Case 11: Student: OK. I like big shopping because it's easy. It's have all company*.

Case 12: Student: Have speed neighborhoods but not always sometimes bad. Its good people. They are helpful. We have a lot of park*. We we are playing football match.

Case 13: Student: After I child, we don't have big build. Everywhere tree* and flowers but now no any tree*. I was school by bus but after we go to, we want to, we went school.

Case 14: Student: I love literature because I love poem*.

Teacher 2: Do you read poems?

Student: Yes. Love poems.

Even though the mistakes in these cases above may not seem as striking as the ones in cases from 1 to 9, they still disrupt accuracy in speaking. In case 10, “other friend*” should have been used as “other friends” because Biber, Conrad and Leech (2002) state that after determiners such as other, plural forms of nouns follow. In case 11, “all company*” should have been used as “all companies” since Biber, Conrad and Leech (2002) suggest that if the quantifier all is followed by a countable noun, that noun is used in plural form. In case 12, “a lot of park*” should have been used as “a lot of parks”. Swan (1995) states that quantifying expressions are to be followed by plural forms of the nouns. In case 13, “no any tree*” should have been used as “no trees”. The inaccuracy in case 12 is not only about the plural use of the noun, but because of the scope of the study, we will only deal with the misuse of plural forms. Biber, Conrad and Leech (2002) state that if the quantifier “no” is followed by a countable noun, that noun is used in plural form. There is a different misuse of plural forms in case 14 compared to the other 13 cases reported in this section. In the student’s utterance “I love poem*”, the plural form of the noun poem could have been
more appropriate. It is important to note that when the teacher asks a corrective question “Do you read poems?” the student corrects himself saying “Love poems”. According to Biber, Conrad and Leech (2002) when a generic countable noun is used with zero article referring to the whole class, this noun is used in plural form. Swan (1995) indicates that while generalizations can be given both in singular and plural forms, when there is no article before the noun, it is used in plural form.

3.2. Findings in the Pre-Intermediate level

The analysis showed that students also made mistakes with the plural use of nouns in spoken English in the supposedly pre-intermediate level. Below are some the findings of the analysis of transcriptions in the pre-intermediate level:

Case 15: Student: Because there are. er. a lot of old building*. 
Case 16: Student: There are a lot of natural place* in Bolu. yeah. so beautiful. 
Case 17: Student: You have two option* to change your university, one of them, you can go with your university point Yes, I don't have but I [have two option*.] Yes, yes, yes, I don't need because I have two option* to change my university. One of them it's with university point, YGS. One of them with the transcript. 

In cases 15 to 17, students used the singular form of the nouns where the plural form would be more appropriate. In case 15, “a lot of old building*” should have been used as “a lot of old buildings”, and in case 16 “a lot of natural place*” should have been used as “a lot of natural places”. Biber, Conrad and Leech (2002) state that the quantifier “a lot of” is followed by a plural form of the noun if that noun is countable. According to Swan (1995), when a quantifying expression is followed by a countable, that noun is used in plural form. In case 17, the student repeated the same misuse for three times successively in the same discourse. In this case, “two option*” should have been used “two options”. Below are some other cases found in supposedly pre-intermediate level:

Case 18: Student: Yes, Unfortunately true. The womans*.
Teacher: What's unfortunate? Should the women like it or should the men not like it.
Student: ((Laughs)). Men should be like womans*. They shouldn't use the bad words. I'm feeling very bad. For example, it's not really big problem for me but someone, girls or womans*, womans* in the bus they are hear too, they hear, too. So it's problem. It's not really big problem for me because I'm using sometimes for example, when I'm happened angry. So I'm using bad word but womans* not like that, womans*, so it's.
In case 18, the student used the plural form of the irregular noun woman as “womans*”. It is important to note that the teacher asked a corrective question using the appropriate form “women”, however the student persisted in using the inappropriate form “womans*” five more times in the discourse after the corrective question of the teacher. Biber, Conrad and Leech (2002) state that a limited number of nouns are irregular in English and rather than adding the regular plural suffix, they are made plural with a change in a vowel in the noun and give the example of woman—women for these irregular nouns. Swan (1995) states that the plural form of the irregular noun “woman” is “women”. Below are some other cases found in supposedly pre-intermediate level:


Case 20: Teacher: What makes a city boring? Why is it boring?
Student: Because, it’s don’t have café*, or shopping center*.

Case 21: Teacher: Do you read any books about your major?
Student: No. I read hip hop magazine*.

These cases include mistakes in the use of plural different from those in cases 15-18. In cases 19-20-21, students used the singular form of nouns where it would be more appropriate to use their plural form. In case 19, “read book*, watch movie*” should have been used as “read books, watch movies”. In case 20, “it don’t have café, or shopping center*” should have been used as “cafés or shopping centers”. In case 21, “I read hip hop magazine*” should have been used as “I read hip hop magazines”. The nouns in these cases are used in generic meaning with zero article. According to Biber, Conrad and Leech (2002) when a generic countable noun is used with zero article referring to the whole class, this noun is used in plural form. Below is the last case of mistake with the use of plural found in pre-intermediate level:

Case 22: Teacher: What’s your plan in Erasmus? if you go?
Student: I go Erasmus, hmm, I can see other culture* and I can see new place*. I can learn all related language*.

As can be seen in case 22, the first mistake with a plural form was found after a determiner. While a plural form of the noun culture would be appropriate here, the student used the singular form after the determiner “other”. Biber, Conrad and Leech (2002) state that after determiners such as other, plural forms of nouns follow. Biber, Conrad and Leech (2002) also suggest that if the quantifier “all” is followed by a countable noun, that noun is used in plural form, therefore, the student’s utterance “all related language*” should have been used as “all related languages”. Another mistake with the use of plural can be seen in “I can see new place*”. According to Biber, Conrad and Leech (2002) when a generic countable noun is used with zero article referring to the whole class, this noun is used in plural form, hence the student
should have used the plural form of the generic noun place in this discourse as in “I can see new places”.

3.3. Findings in the upper level

The analysis showed that students, though very few in quantity, also made mistakes with plural use of nouns in spoken English in the supposedly upper level. Below are the only two findings obtained from the analysis of transcriptions in the upper level:

Case 23: Student: Let me think. Sometimes people talk on the phone loudly and it’s really noisy. People don’t like that, other peoples* but I don’t have experience for this but it can be, if we don’t follow the rules, it can be, you can other peoples* maybe.

As can be seen in case 23, the student used the plural form of the irregular noun person as people appropriately in two instances, but that student misused the plural form of the same noun when it followed the determiner other. Biber, Conrad and Leech (2002) state that after determiners such as other, plural forms of nouns follow. Biber, Conrad and Leech (2002) further state that some plural-only nouns such as people or police can be confusing because they may seem to be singular but indeed they are plural nouns. In this case, the student used “other peoples*” which should have been used as “other people”. Swan (1995) states that the plural form of the irregular noun “person” is “people”. Even though it is also possible to use the noun people in plural form as peoples, it takes on a different meaning referring to a race, yet the context here makes it clear that the student is not referring to people of a race but rather to the plural form of the noun person. Below is the last case of a mistake with plural use found in upper level:

Case 24: Student: Thirty-five. I usually use shopping websites, social media website*. I love cars and motorcycle*. I look motorcycle and car picture* and options.

As is clear from the case 24, the student supposed to be in the upper level misused the generic nouns “social media website*, motorcycle* and motorcycle and car picture*” in this context. It can be understood from the context that the student is referring to the generic meaning of these nouns with zero article, which is used in plural form according to Biber, Conrad and Leech (2002). Therefore, the student should have used the plural forms of these nouns in this case.

4. Discussion

The mistakes students made with plural nouns after numeral adjectives in spoken English can be attributed to L1 interference. As aforementioned in section 1.2, Eker (2003) stated that nouns are not added a plural suffix after numeral adjectives in
Turkish, which is contrary to the rule in English. The most common mistake was found to be using a singular noun after a numeral adjective particularly in the early level. This brings the issue of L1 interference (Turkish in our study) to the limelight. Selinker (1972) states that native language transfer is one of the components that shapes the interlanguage. Tarone (2012) states that while native language transfer may be a contributing factor in interlanguage as contrastive analysis hypothesis puts forward (Lado, 1957), it is far from being the sole reason. Therefore, native language transfer can be seen only in the mistakes after numeral adjectives, suggesting that learners transfer from their L1 more in early levels of learning English. Jia (2003) found that Mandarin speaking children who immigrated to the US learned to use the plural morpheme in English much later than their native speaker counterparts, and this was attributed to L1 interference. The findings by Jia (2003) are compatible with the results of this study in that the participants in this study also transferred from their L1 in using the plural morpheme after numerical adjectives. Another study confirming the results of this study as regards L1 interference was conducted by Scott and Tucker (1974) who analyzed Arab students’ errors in English both in writing and speaking skills and concluded that the errors in grammatical morphemes may have stemmed from L1 interference. As can be seen, L1 interference is not limited to speaking skill only, but it can manifest itself even in writing skill. Su Feng (2012) investigated English writings of learners from Hong Kong and found a strong relationship between the grammatical errors students do and L1 interference. Bhela (1999) also found a strong L1 interference in students’ English writing. Nemati and Taghizade (2006) came up with the conclusion that when L1 and L2 are not similar to each other, L1 interference leads learners to make up inappropriate L2 discourses.

The mistakes found with regard to using singular forms of countable nouns after quantifiers or determiners were also quite a few in number. This can be attributed to overgeneralization of target language rules as suggested by Selinker (1972). Because uncountable nouns are not added a plural suffix after the quantifier a lot of as suggested by Biber, Conrad and Leech (2002), learners might have overgeneralized this rule and extended this to countable nouns. It would be plausible to think that students hear and learn “a lot of money” much earlier in a classroom setting as compared to “a lot of parks, a lot of buildings”. Seeing that “a lot of” is followed by a singular noun as is the case with “a lot of money” without any consideration of whether it is a countable or uncountable noun, students may overgeneralize this even in countable nouns if they do not have a good command of countable and uncountable nouns in English. Overgeneralization of target language rules can also be shown as the reason for inappropriate use of the plural suffix –s with an irregular noun like woman. Even though EFL learners are explicitly taught these limited number of irregular nouns, they can still make mistakes in making those nouns plural on grounds that most of the time they add the plural suffix to regular nouns, which are fairly high in percentage in English. Berko (1958) when students learn English morphemes, they may “consciously or unconsciously generalize those rules in other contexts” (p. 150). While this ability to generalize morphemes can be to the advantage
of the learners, it may turn out to be a disadvantage if they overgeneralize. In an experimental study on learning English morphemes by non-native speakers, Palermo and Eberhart (1968) found that the errors in irregular pairs stemmed from the overgeneralization of regular forms. Marcus (1995) states that learners of English tend to overgeneralize the morphological structures and overgeneralization of the past forms of irregular verbs in English is governed by the same rules applying to the overgeneralization of the plural forms of irregular nouns. Some other studies in literature found similar results to this study stating that learners of English, not only in EFL contexts, but also even in ESL contexts, have a tendency to overgeneralize the morphemes in English. Taylor (1975) stated that learners tended to overgeneralize the rules of the target language and transferred learning strategies even in ESL contexts. This shows that overgeneralization of morphemes is not uncommon even in ESL contexts.

Another group of mistakes found in this study turned out to be using the singular form of a noun in generic nouns with zero article. As suggested by Biber, Conrad and Leech (2002), if a countable noun is used in generic meaning, it is generally used with a / an articles. If this noun is used with zero article, then it is used in plural form. This can also be attributed to L1 interference because in Turkish it is most frequent to use singular form of a countable noun with zero article.

In this study, the term “mistake” rather than “error” was used for inappropriate use of plurals in speaking. Ellis (1997) states that when an inappropriate use stems from a gap in learners’ knowledge, it can be called an “error”; however, when this inappropriateness comes out once in a while, then it can be called a “mistake”. From the cases given in section 3 in this study, it can be seen that while students can use a plural noun appropriately after numeral adjectives or quantifiers in some instances, they make mistakes in some other instances.

5. Conclusion

Language learners in an EFL context are already deprived of the opportunities to practice the target language in their daily lives. Therefore, learners develop an interlanguage, a language made up of their mother tongue and the target language. When L1 and L2 are dissimilar to each other, this inevitably brings about a disadvantage caused by L1 interference, as was the case in this study. Besides L1 interference, learners in an EFL context may also try to benefit from overgeneralization of rules. These both issues lead to lack of accuracy in spoken English. Despite the long-held controversy of accuracy versus fluency, the analysis of video-records and transcribed texts showed that in early level, when students made most mistakes in plural form, they were already far from fluency, which implies that lack of accuracy is accompanied by lack of fluency. This study showed that students’ mistakes in plural forms in speaking decreased as they improved their English level. This, however, did not bring about accuracy in other grammatical forms of English in speaking.
In this study, 48 samples were analyzed for data collection. Further studies on the issue can be conducted with a larger sample group. While there are extensive studies in literature on students’ improvement in writing or listening skills, the number of studies dealing with the improvement of accuracy in spoken English is far from being adequate. It is hoped that this study will enable English teachers in EFL contexts to gain insights into learners’ problems with plural nouns and approach these problems more consciously based on the factors leading to such problems discussed in this paper. More extensive studies covering general grammar accuracy rather than only one morpheme can be conducted, which would serve as a guide not only to teachers of EFL contexts but also to material designers and curriculum developers.

References


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The Effectiveness of Implicit and Explicit Cognitive Processing in Incidental Vocabulary Acquisition

Kübra Örsdemir a*

a Osmaniye Korkut Ata University, Osmaniye, Turkey

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Abstract

This article tends to investigate the lexical processing strategies adopted by 12 elementary level participants while doing reading-for-comprehension activities together with the effectiveness of these strategies on the retention of new vocabulary items in incidental vocabulary acquisition. The participants who took part in the research studied at an English Preparatory School in Turkey. Through these procedures, incidental vocabulary acquisition through reading for-comprehension tasks were aimed to be investigated since the Input Hypothesis suggests that incidental learning of vocabulary can be attained through reading. During the reading process, the adopted strategies were investigated through the introspective data gathered by the researcher. Later, the participants attended to a reading comprehension process and finally the participants participated in a post-test which is known to be the ‘Vocabulary Knowledge Scale’. Through this scale the rate of retention of the participants for each vocabulary item was identified in accordance with related scoring procedures. The adopted strategies were then categorized in relation to the cognitive processing styles. Through this treatment the effectiveness of retention through implicit and explicit processing in incidental vocabulary acquisition was examined. The findings suggest that implicit processing strategies result to be more effective in terms of incidental vocabulary acquisition.

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Keywords: Incidental vocabulary acquisition; input hypothesis; lexical processing strategies; retention

1. Introduction

Vocabulary acquisition has been a challenge for language learners since improving vocabulary knowledge is vital in language learning. As a result, learners and language teachers are well aware of the importance of the development of the lexicon. Various methods, techniques and styles have been applied in language classrooms in order to achieve this goal. One of the major methods of vocabulary expansion is thought to be the assumption that words are learned incidentally or indirectly in reading and that this learning is of vital importance in vocabulary acquisition.

* Corresponding author name.
E-mail address: kubraorsdemir@hotmail.com
http://dx.doi.org/............................................
Incidental or indirect vocabulary learning is the process in which the learning of the vocabulary occurs without the specific intent to focus on vocabulary itself (Joe, 1998). In other words, it is an effective way of learning word meanings from context and it can also be a by-product of other cognitive exercises involving comprehension (Gass, 1999). In this study, incidental vocabulary acquisition has been aimed to be researched upon in a more detailed way through reading-for comprehension activities. As a result, it is aimed to notify how the participants grasp vocabulary through explicit and implicit processing by reading.

1.1. Implicit/Explicit Processing – Incidental/Intentional Learning

Krashen (1989) suggests in his ‘Input Hypothesis’ that we acquire language by understanding messages through comprehensible input and also through a richly specified internal language acquisition device (p. 441). He makes a distinction between two types of processing, in one of which the acquisition is done subconsciously through the language acquisition device, and in the other the knowledge is consciously learned and it is quite limited which entails a higher frequency of monitoring. These two types of processing can be linked to implicit and explicit processing. He also argues that, the most effective way to acquire spelling and vocabulary is by attaining comprehensible input through reading.

Ellis (1994) states that explicit learning of vocabulary is encompasses selective attention and the use of strategies to comprehend the meanings of a lexical unit. Similarly, Hulstijn (2005, p. 131) states, “explicit learning is input processing to find out whether the input information contains regularities and if so, to work out the concepts and rules with which these regularities can be captured” (as cited in Brown, 2000), whereas implicit learning is learning without conscious awareness. Brown (2000), on the other hand, states that attention, which is a psychological state of focusing on certain stimuli, can occur under both conditions. According to Ellis (2005), implicit and explicit knowledge can be distinguished in seven ways. These are listed below

- Awareness: There are two types of awareness; the unconscious awareness associated with epilinguistic behavior (as when we can recognize instantly that a sentence is ungrammatical) and the conscious awareness evident in metalinguistic behavior (as when we demonstrate understanding of why a sentence is ungrammatical) (p.433).

- Type of Knowledge: Declarative knowledge of grammatical features is identified to be encyclopedic since it consists of ‘facts’ about the grammar of a language, on the other hand, Procedural knowledge is represented in such a way that it can be easily accessed. This dimension of the implicit/explicit distinction, then, assumes that how the two types of knowledge are represented relates to how they are processed. (p.433)

- Systemacitvity and Certainty of L2 Knowledge: While Implicit knowledge is produced systematically in the learners’ interlanguage, explicit knowledge is generally
imprecise and inaccurate. As a result, implicit knowledge can be identified to be more structured than explicit knowledge and can be held with greater certainty.

- **Accessibility of Knowledge:** It is suggested that deeply embedded knowledge which can be referred to as implicit knowledge allows for automatic processing, the more weakly held knowledge, which can be referred to as explicit knowledge requires more controlled processing.

- **Use of L2 knowledge:** The use of the two types of knowledge differs in terms of identifying under which circumstances the learners are asked to perform tasks. For instance, if the learners have less pressure with lower affective filters they are their speech becomes more accurate since the learners have the chance to access their explicit knowledge. Whereas, learners who are asked to perform tasks rapidly under pressure, are less accurate since they rely only upon their implicit knowledge.

- **Self-Report:** Explicit knowledge is defined to be verbalized. For instance, a student can explain why he/she used a specific grammatical form in a specific situation.

- **Learnability:** It is generally assumed that while explicit knowledge can be learnt at any age, implicit knowledge cannot at all ages.

According to Ellis (2005), while the first three ways of the differentiation of explicit and implicit knowledge is defined to be ‘Representation Dimensions’, the remaining four ways can be classified to be ‘Processing dimensions’. It can be assumed through these definitions that, while examining implicit and explicit knowledge different strategies and different tasks should be applied since they are different in terms of representation and processing.

Incidental and intentional learning, on the other hand are closely linked to implicit and explicit learning. While intentional learning is deliberately focusing on thousands of words (their meaning, sound and spelling) and various grammar rules, incidental learning involves the “picking up” of words and structures. Krashen (1989) states that in incidental learning, the language acquisition device is active during which your conscious focus is on the message, not on the form. Also, by engaging in a variety of communicative activities, especially through reading and listening activities since the learner's attention is focused on the meaning rather than on the form of language, these kinds of activities facilitate incidental learning (Hulstijn, 2008). Paribahkt and Wesche (1997) also state that even though aural language experience is important written language generally contains a higher proportion of difficult or low frequency words, as a result they further state that reading is a vehicle for further developing both L1 and L2 vocabulary knowledge. According to Krashen (1989), children who perform better on vocabulary tests are noticed to be the ones who prefer to read more especially in out-of-class environments. This statement can also notify how reading can promote vocabulary learning incidentally, implicitly or even intentionally, a method to measure can be the Incidental Read and Test studies in which the participants focus on the comprehension of the whole passage rather than on individual words, hence through comprehensible input it can be possible to infer meanings from a whole text (Krashen, 1989). Similarly, Paribahkt and Wesche (1999)
state that “both first and second language development supports the conclusion that most vocabulary learning occurs naturally when learners attempt to understand new words they hear or read in context” (p. 196). As a result, it will not be wrong to say that vocabulary growth and reading comprehension can be linked very strongly since each of the variables affects one another. The comprehension and the intake of new lexical knowledge while reading involves inferencing, which is a cognitive process that involves making informed guesses as to the meaning of a word in light of all available linguistic cues in combinations with the learner’s general knowledge of the world (Paribahkt and Wesche, 1999).

According to Hulstijn (2008), incidental and intentional learnings are mainly dominant in the area of vocabulary and spelling, and only exceptionally in the area of grammar (morphology and syntax); the reason why intentional learning is valid in vocabulary learning but hardly in grammar learning, whereas incidental is valid in both areas is due to the fact that incidental learning can apply to abstract and to factual declarative knowledge, on the other hand, intentional learning can be applicable to factual knowledge.

As for the difference between implicit/incidental and explicit/intentional, Paradis (1994) states that implicit learning entails more than what is meant by incidental learning since incidental and implicit are distinguished through implicit competence, knowledge which is acquired incidentally (not by focused attention), stored implicitly (not available to conscious awareness), and used automatically (without conscious control) (cited in Hulstijn, 2008). Similarly, Ender (2014) states that the unintentional retention through incidental learning should not be equated with implicit learning, since implicit learning is the counterpart of explicit learning and it is defined as input processing with the conscious intention to find out whether the input conformation contains regularities, and if so, to work out the concepts and rules with which these regularities can be captured. The difference of intentional and explicit learning is, while explicit learning involves awareness at the point of learning, such as trying to understand the function of a language form, intentional learning, on the other hand, involves a deliberate attempt to commit new information to memory, such as applying rehearsal or memorizations (Hulstijn, 2008).

![Figure 1. The relationship between incidental/intentional and implicit/explicit processing (Ender, 2014)](image)

As can be seen in Figure 1, while intentional and incidental vocabulary acquisition is about learning the vocabulary in a specific task, explicit and implicit vocabulary
acquisition deal with the processing which takes place while accomplishing a task. Also it can be seen that while intentional learning can only result from processing, since there is an intention to learn a certain from, incidental learning on the other hand, can result from both explicit processing, since processing with the conscious intention to discover the form and meaning relations can still occur without the intention to retain the findings in the long term (Ender, 2014, p.538); Krashen (1989) also states that acquisition can also occur without learning and implicit processing.

1.2. Lexical Processing Strategies

Laufer (1990, p. 2) states that a word comprises complex features (phonological, orthographic, morphological, syntactic, semantic) and also a word is related to other words in a language, hence, the knowledge of a word is related to familiarities with these features and with the lexical relations of the word. Similar to this statement, in order to acquire vocabulary Fraser (1999) suggests lexical processing strategies (LPSs) which refers to three strategic options, these are: ignore and continue reading, consult a dictionary or another individual, or infer word meaning on the basis of linguistic (these can be sub-divided as interlingual and intralingual) and contextual cues. Ender (2014) states that, apart from ignoring, the remaining lexical processing strategies take an explicit aim at determining the word’s meaning, and also she states that these strategies can easily be combined. These can be linked with top-down and bottom-up strategies; as Qian (2004) suggests while consulting a dictionary or another person, together with interlingual and intralingual inferences, is more bottom-up strategies, guessing a meaning on the basis of extra-lingual or contextual cues is more top-down. Explicit vocabulary learning strategies can also be linked with what Oxford (1999) classifies as ‘direct strategies’ which is learning the target language directly, including cognitive strategies, memory strategies, and compensation (guessing and inferring) strategies. As a result, it can be stated that the elaboration of the newly acquainted word can promote its retention (Anderson, 1985). In Fraser (1999)’s study, it has been shown that inferencing was preferred to be the primary strategy used by the participants (44%) and they were seen to be generally successful in the post-tests. It is also indicated that the participants were more successful in their retention rates when both inferencing and consulting strategies were applied. This can suggest that a combination of strategies from both implicit and explicit processing can result to be efficiently. Similarly, in Paribahkt and Wesche’s (1999) study, the results indicated that the most important strategy adopted by the participants was ‘inferencing’ (almost 80% of strategy use), and they also suggest that each participant generally used the same types of strategies in all conditions, which suggests that, when dealing with lexical problems for comprehension, learners apply the same means for solution. Apart from this, they state in their study that participants used several knowledge sources together while inferring a meaning. On the other hand, the research done by Ender (2014) suggests that even though the results indicate that there is significant evidence for the potential of unintentional learning of vocabulary, it has been notified that the participants adopted inferencing only to a minor degree (10%). She also
stated in her study that strategy use affected retention significantly and also that
different strategies have importantly different effects on learning. According to her
results, unknown words that had not been explicitly treated by a processing strategy
can be recalled in 11 per cent of the cases, meanings determined by using a dictionary
are recalled in 27 per cent of the cases, whereas the retention rate for inference is 57
per cent and that for recall after a combination of the two processes is only 47 per
cent. Consequently, the cognitive processing strategies (implicit and explicit) applied
while confronted with an unknown vocabulary can give insight to how and to what
rate the acquisition was achieved.

1.3. Research Questions

This study focuses on the lexical processing strategies adopted by the participants
in the study while doing reading-for-comprehension activities together with the effect
of these strategies on the retention of the new vocabulary items. As a result, the
following two research questions are aimed to be investigated;
1. How do the effectiveness of implicit and explicit processing strategies differ when
   considering the retention or learning of incidental vocabulary acquisition?
2. How do different implicit processing strategies differ in terms of their effectiveness
   in incidental vocabulary acquisition?

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

This experimental study focuses on the effectiveness of implicit and explicit
cognitive strategy in incidental vocabulary acquisition. In experiments which
investigate incidental vocabulary acquisition, the participants are generally required
to perform a task involving the process of some information without being told in
advance that they will be tested in terms of identifying their retention of the target
word (Laufer and Hulstijn, 2001). A similar methodology was adopted in this study in
which the participants were exposed to reading comprehension tasks without being
aware of the focus of the study which aims to measure their retention rate of the
unknown words they came across during the reading process. Hence the participants
were not aware that the focus was on their incidental vocabulary acquisition and they
were not aware that a post-test (Vocabulary Knowledge Scale) would be required after
the reading comprehension tasks.

2.2. Participants

The number of participants who took part in this study is 12 and they were all
students from Osmaniye Korkut Ata University-School of Foreign Languages. The
participants were taking English courses at the preparatory program. It should also
be stated that the preparatory program is based on voluntariness in which the
students, who are newly accepted to the university, fill out a form at the beginning of
the year in which they state whether or not they would like to take English courses before moving on to their courses at their own departments. There were four different courses in total. This study was conducted in the ‘Reading and Writing’ course. The enrolment of the students to their classes was based on the placement test results which were conducted at the beginning of the year. As a result, since the study was only conducted in one specific class, the students who took part in this study were approximately around the same level of English proficiency level. According to the Oxford Placement Test, which was conducted at the beginning of the 2016-2017 fall semester, the class which took part in the study comprised of A1-A2 level students and their age range was in between 18-21.

2.3. Materials and Procedure

Three different data collection tools were applied during the research process. These tools were; Reading session sheets, the Reading-for-Comprehension Exercise and the Follow-up Vocabulary Test. Before applying the tests and the exercises, Informed Consent Forms were handed out in order to inform the students and also to get their approval before conducting the study. During the reading session, the participants were asked to read a text and underline or highlight any unknown word. The main aim here was to identify the unknown vocabulary for each participants in order to identify what strategies they used to deal with the meaning of the same unknown words in the following Reading-for-comprehension exercise. The text used in this process was chosen from the supplementary tasks of ‘Q-Skills for Success’ of Oxford University Press. As a result, it can be stated that the students were familiar with the topic of the text from their Reading and Writing courses. It should also be stated that the proficiency level of the text was suitable for the participants, hence, it didn’t create grammar difficulties. The aim for this was to avoid any language difficulties apart from dealing with vocabulary.

After a few days later, the reading-for-comprehension exercise was conducted. During this process, each student was asked individually in the researcher’s office to read the whole text, which was the same text that they had read during the reading session, summarize each paragraph in order to enable the participants to use the words in each paragraph and to ensure comprehension and finally answer the comprehension questions about the reading text. During the summarization, the participants were required to read the text in paragraph by paragraph and give a summary at the end of each paragraph. The participants were also asked to verbalize what they were thinking especially when they came across an unknown words. It should be stated that the students also used their mother tongue during the think aloud process in the Reading-for-Comprehension period. This enabled the researcher to grasp the strategy that the participants adopted while encountering an unknown word. Through these feedbacks the researcher had the chance to achieve immediate retrospective protocols while audio-recording the participants, hence, the researcher was able to identify which cognitive processing strategy the participants adopted while encountering an unknown word. The researcher also took notes throughout this
process. While keeping notes, questions for clarifications were asked in order to prompt the students, such as ‘you seem like you have a problem, tell me what you’re thinking,’’ or ‘Why have you put your finger on that word?,’ or ‘You look puzzled.’ (Paribahkt and Wesche, 1999, p.202). Throughout the process the participants were aware of the fact that they could also use their online dictionaries when they thought it was necessary.

Finally, the follow-up vocabulary test was conducted a week after the reading-for-comprehension exercise. The participants were tested on their retention of the new words which they accounted in the previous reading session and exercises. They were asked to complete the Vocabulary Knowledge Scale (VKS) (see Appendix 3) by Wesche and Paribakht (1996), which was personalized for each of the participants in accordance with their own number of unknown words from the text which the participants had expressed in the reading session, in order to express their level of knowledge for each previously unknown word. As a result, this helped to measure the number of lexical items learned during the treatment.

2.3.1. Analysis

Four basic lexical processing strategies of Fraser (1999), was taken into consideration in order to identify the strategies adopted by the participants during incidental vocabulary acquisition. These were; ignoring a word, using an electronic dictionary (explicit processing strategy), inferring the word’s meaning from context (implicit processing strategy) and also inferring the word’s meaning and later using a dictionary to check it (implicit + explicit processing strategy). See Table 1 for displaying information.

Table 1. Categorization of Fraser’s (1999) lexical processing strategies in terms of implicit and explicit cognitive processing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cognitive Processing Strategies</th>
<th>Explicit</th>
<th>Implicit</th>
<th>Explicit and Implicit</th>
<th>none</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consulting a dictionary or consulting the researcher.</td>
<td>Inferring the meaning of word through contextual or intralingual and interlingual cues.</td>
<td>Adopting both strategies while encountering an unknown word.</td>
<td>Adopting neither type of strategies.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The analysis for the think-aloud protocols was done through transcribing the recorded utterances of the participants. The transcripts and the researcher’s notes, which were taken during the reading-for-comprehension period, were taken into consideration while analyzing the lexical processing strategy the participants had adopted. The analysis of the Vocabulary Knowledge Scale (VKS) was done through the procedures (see Table 2) suggested by Wesche and Paribakht (1996).

Table 2. The meaning of scores of the VKS scoring categories (Wesche and Paribakht, 1996)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-Report Categories</th>
<th>Possible Scores</th>
<th>Meaning of Scores</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>The word is not familiar at all.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>The word is familiar, but its meaning is not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>A correct synonym or translation is given</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>The word is used in a semantic appropriateness in a sentence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>The word is used with semantic appropriateness and grammatical accuracy in a sentence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The main aim of the self-reports was to identify the depth or the level of the knowledge of the newly acquired vocabulary. As for the scoring of the self-reports, as can be seen in Table 2, the first category, which indicates that the participant does not know the word at all, has a score of ‘1’. The second category of the self-reports, which indicates that the word is familiar but the meaning is not, has a score of ‘2’. In the third category, if the participant manages to write the correct synonym or the translation of the required vocabulary, he/she receives a score of ‘3’, on the other hand, if the synonym or the translation is incorrect, the participant receives a score of ‘2’. In the fourth category, if the participant manages to use the word in a sentence semantically appropriate, it was scored as ‘4’, otherwise, the scoring will be done accordingly in other cases. As for the fifth category, it remains at its original level if the word is used semantically and grammatically correct in a sentence. On the other hand the scoring will be done appropriately as ‘2, 3 or 4’. Another factor which was taken into consideration in the VKS scoring categories is to identify the groups in which the participants have shown some type of growth or haven’t proceeded at all. In order to achieve this, the first two self-report categories were grouped together as ‘meaning not recalled’ and the third, fourth and fifth self-report categories are grouped as ‘meaning recalled’.

3. Results

The results of the study indicate that there were 105 instances in which the participants came across unknown vocabulary, ranging from 9 to 11 unknown vocabulary per participant (M=8.5, SD=1.93). among these instances, the participants used lexical strategies ‘95’ times and aimed to ignore the unknown words in ‘10’ instances. As can be seen in Figure 1, the most frequently observed lexical strategy adopted in incidental vocabulary acquisition has resulted to be ‘consulting’ (44%) which is followed by ‘inferring’ (25.7%), ‘infer and consulting’ (20%) and ‘ignoring’ (9.5%). As a result, it can be inferred that while 44% of the participants adopted explicit processing strategies, 25.7% adopted implicit processing strategies and 20% adopted both types.
As for the implicit processing strategies which has been categorized among three different subgroups (interlingual, intralingual and contextual), the results of the study state that while the most frequently observed strategy is contextually inferring the meaning of an unknown word (37.5%), this was followed by inferring meaning from interlingual cues (35.42%) and intralingual cues (27.08%) (see Figure 2 for visual representation).

Apart from the frequencies of occurrences; in terms of effectiveness in L2 vocabulary retention in incidental vocabulary acquisition, which has been induced from the Vocabulary Knowledge scale scores (Min=1, Max=5) (see Table 2), it has been seen that among the four lexical processing strategies, inferring has resulted to be the most effective in terms of learning new vocabulary in incidental circumstances (M=4, SD=1.02). Inferring was followed by ‘inferring and consulting’ (M=3.4, SD=1.3), ‘consulting’ (M=2.7, SD=1.32) and ‘ignoring’ (M=2.2, SD=1.32) (see Figure 3 for visual representation).
The 5-point Vocabulary Knowledge Scale was sub-grouped into two categories as ‘meaning recalled and meaning not recalled’. While the first two scores were given to participants who did not recall the target vocabulary item, the remaining scores (3, 4 and 5) were given to participants who recalled the meaning of the target vocabularies in accordance.

As can be seen in Table 3, 80% of the participants who ignored the target vocabulary did not recall the meaning in the Vocabulary Knowledge Scale (VKS), but surprisingly 20% of the participants recalled the meaning of the ignored target vocabulary. Consulting the researcher or a dictionary on the other hand was observed the most frequent. Among these observations, 58% of the participants who consulted unknown lexical items did not recall them in the VKS, while the remaining 42% was able to recall the meaning of the words they consulted during the reading-for-comprehension exercise period. 7% of the participants who inferred the meaning of the target vocabulary through contextual cues or intralingual and interlingual components, did not recall the meaning of the lexical items, whereas a majority of 93% did recall the meaning of the unknown words in the VKS. Among the subgroups of inferring, it has been observed that 15% of the participants who used intralingual cues did not recall the meaning of the target words, whereas 85% of the participants who adopted this strategy resulted to recall the meaning of the target word in the VKS. As for interlingual inferrencing, while 6% of the participants did not recall the meaning of the words, the remaining 94% recalled the meanings. on the other hand,
33% of the final subgroup of inferring, which is inferring from contextual cues, resulted with not recalling the meaning of the target vocabulary, while 67% recalled the meaning of the lexical items in the VKS. Going back to the lexical processing strategies, the final strategy which is a combination of both consulting and inferring resulted to be effective in terms of retention (93%).

4. Discussion and Conclusion

In the present study, among the lexical processing strategies defined by Fraser (1999), which are ignoring, consulting, inferring and both inferring and consulting, it has been found that ‘consulting’ strategy has been adopted the most during the 105 instances in which the participants used a lexical processing strategy. This result is similar to Ender’s study (2014) in which consulting a dictionary was seen to have occurred the most frequently. This suggests that the majority of the participants employed an explicit attempt to figure out the meaning of a word in incidental vocabulary acquisition circumstances. These results differ in similar studies, for instance in Paribakht and Wesche’s (1999) study the most frequently observed strategy had been inferring (80%), similar to Fraser’s (1999) study in which inferring was observed to be adopted 58% of the total instances. The varying results may be due to the context of the study. Taking into consideration the level of the participants (elementary) together with their learner background, which consists of multiple-choice-question based learning, memorization and also in which possessing information is rather easy due to social media and the internet, it is not a surprise to see that the participants adopted ‘consulting a dictionary or researcher’ in order to gain the required information. But it has still been notified that despite ‘consulting’ being the most frequently adopted strategy, ‘inferring’ has been observed to be the following most frequently adopted strategy in the present study. Another surprise in the study which was different from similar studies was the frequency level of ‘ignoring’. In the present study it has been seen that participants ignored the unknown words 9.5% of the total instances, whereas Paribakht and Wesche (1999) state that the participants ignored half the unknown words and Fraser (1999) also state that his participants adopted ‘ignoring’ in 32% of the total instances. This may be due to the fact that in the present study the researcher put emphasize on the unknown words during the reading-for-comprehension period by asking questions whose answers contained information requiring the meaning of the unknown words. It has been notified that inferring the meaning of an unknown word resulted to be more effective in terms of retention based on the Vocabulary Knowledge Scale. An Example from the audio-records from the Reading-for-Comprehension treatment can be seen in Extract 1.

Extract 1: “While they are sleeping their bodies..digest..sindirim galiba, çünkü uyrken yiyecekleri sindiririz.” (I think it means ‘digest’ because we digest our food when we sleep)
The effectiveness of the lexical processing strategies is similar in relevant studies. For instance, Fraser (1999) states that generating word meaning from linguistic or situational elements through sense creation results better in the retention of vocabulary since a context-centered, more deliberate and effortful process takes place. He also states in his study that 78% of the inferring attempts resulted to be effective in terms of retention in the posttest. This can also be related to Hulstijn’s (1992) study in which it is stated that information which has been gained with more mental effort can later be better retrieved and recalled much easier than information that has been attained with less mental effort. He also stated in his study that, when the participants were required to infer the meaning of a word through the context, the retention of these words were better than the retention of those words in which the participants were only given synonyms to learn their meanings. Paribakht and Wesche (1999) also state that inferring the meaning of a word was regarded to be the most important strategy in identifying word meaning. Similarly, in Williams’ (2005) study, it is stated that implicit processing can lead to successful learning and retention. As a result, it can be stated that processing new lexical information more elaborately by paying attention to its pronunciation, orthography, grammatical category, meaning and semantic relations to other words, can lead to better retention than processing new lexical items which don’t cover similar involvements (Laufer and Hulstijn, 2001).

As for the implicit processing strategies, it has been seen that ‘contextual inferring’ had been adopted the most (37.5%), which was followed by ‘interlingual inferring’ (35.4%). The example can be seen in Extract 2 for contextual inferring and Extract 3 for interlingual inferring.

**Extract 2:** “Immunization is important..but I don’t know immunization..but ‘hastalıklara karşı bağışıklık kazanabilir, bağışıklık olabilir.’” (but we immunize against illnesses, it may mean ‘immunization’.)

**Extract 3:** “Impossible..korumak, çocuklarını korumak..infectio..enfeksiyon galiba, enfeksiyondan, hastalıklardan korumak.” (impossible.. to protect, protect the children..’infection’. I think it means ‘enfeksiyon’, protect the children from infection and diseases.)

In Ender’s (2014) study, it was found that inferring through extralingual and contextual cues was observed to be the most frequent, but differing from the present study it had been reported that inferring through intralingual cues was observed to be greater than interlingual cues. As for the effectiveness of the subgroups of these implicit cognitive strategies, Ender’s (2014) study found that inferring through linguistic associations resulted better in retention in contrast to inferring through contextual cues. So, in other words bottom-up strategies in this instance resulted better than top-down strategies, since as Qian (2004) states while interlingual and intralingual are more bottom-up strategies, guessing meaning on the basis of extra lingual or contextual cues are more top-down. As for the effectiveness of the subgroups of the implicit processing strategies in the present study, it has been observed
that interlingual inferring resulted more effectively in terms of retention, which was
followed by contextual inferring. However, certain instances, in which intralingual
inferring occurred, did not result effectively in terms of retention in the vocabulary
Knowledge scale. This is intriguing since as mentioned before, in similar research it
was found that intralingual inferring resulted effectively in the posttest. The reason
for this may be due to the level of L2 of the participants. It may be assumed that they
still lack the ability to deduce forms and meanings from the target language since
they are not acquainted enough. The example can be seen in Extract 4 in which a
participant infers a meaning through intralingual guesses.

Extract 4: “..build up the hormones..hormonları inşa..yani geliştirdi, oluşturuyor
değil mi?” (build up the hormones.. they 'build' the hormones, I mean they develop, they
form right?)

As a result, it can be assumed from the present study that similar to what
Paribahkt and Wesche (1999) state both in first and second language development
most vocabulary learning can occur naturally when learners try to understand the
meaning of the new words they hear or read in context. The findings of this study also
support this idea since in 58% of the instances; the participants were noticed to have
achieved to recall the meaning of the intended vocabulary. Furthermore, among these
instances the attempt to infer the meaning of the word has resulted to a better
retention in the VKS, suggesting that implicit cognitive processing strategies can be
more beneficial in terms of incidental vocabulary acquisition in the present study.
This can be linked to what Ellis (2005) states as the accessibility of knowledge in
which it is stated that implicit processing of newly acquired knowledge can lead to
being deeply embedded knowledge which allows for automatic processing. Apart from
this it has also been noticed that, while investigating the subgroups of implicit
processing strategies, applying interlingual inferring strategy has resulted to be of
greater benefit in regard to inferring from context or intralingual cues. This can be
linked to Fraser’s (1999) statement: “Inferencing through word identification is
characterized as a fast, automatic, data-driven process in which the form of the
unfamiliar word activates an L1 or L2 association in the learner’s mental lexicon.” (p.
231). The surprising fact, however, was how intralingual inferring didn’t result to
be as effective as the other subgroups. This fact can be a recommendation for further
studies in related research areas.

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Bring the Action! Involving Technical Preparatory Students in EFL Reading Classes: An Action Research Study

Gizem Akçor a *

a Sakarya University, Department of Foreign Languages Education, Sakarya 54300, Turkey

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Abstract

During my two-year teaching experience in a university setting one of the biggest problems I faced was to motivate my students at a private (mostly) technical university for the reading classes. It is an undeniable fact that reading classes require EFL learners to have enough skill, confidence, and motivation. However, this requirement is hard to be fulfilled especially for many EFL technical students because their exposure to English is very limited and they have difficulty in meeting some necessary requirements of reading such as critical thinking and use of some strategies and techniques. Consequently, the action research was conducted to involve my technical preparatory students in EFL reading classes. Through this study, I also aimed to develop a deeper and better understanding of my teaching and grow professionally. The question guiding this study was: What happens to my students’ attitudes towards reading classes when I integrate visuals, hands-on activities, and competitions into my lessons? After planning the procedures, the action research process involved a pre-test, 4-week intervention, and a post-test to measure the improvement. The statistical data did not show any significant difference in their achievement, but qualitative data taken from observation, field notes, and interviews revealed that integration of visuals and interactive activities into reading classes motivated the students and engaged them more in the classes.

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Keywords: Action research; reading; EFL; motivation

1. Introduction

Today, reading is one of the most problematic areas in education (Dreyer & Nel, 2003). A significant number of students try very hard to deal with complex reading texts, but as Levine, Ferenz, and Reves (2000) express, “the ability to read academic texts is considered one of the most important skills that university students of English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) need to acquire” (p. 1). Reading comprehension is the “essence of reading” (Durkin, 1993);
therefore, acquiring reading comprehension skills is a must not only in academic learning but also in professional life and in lifelong learning (as cited in Levine et al., 2000). Even though reading is a very complex process, the importance of reading comprehension cannot be undervalued. Also, Gambrell, Block, and Pressley (2002) state that “the most important thing about reading is comprehension” (p. 3). Comprehension is beyond the literal meaning of a text and involves a complicated set of other skills and many processes such as using many strategies, cognitive and metacognitive skills. However, many students enter universities unprepared for the demands required by the process of reading. It can be said that reading classes pose problems especially in technical universities’ preparatory classes because of students’ low self-esteem and engagement in English learning, which has been a typical problem in technical universities for a very long period of time (Shen & Huang, 2007). Motivating the students in technical universities to engage in the learning process and getting them to participate in reading classes are among the biggest challenges that teachers have to face. One major reason is that these students take fewer hours in learning English, and that these courses are mostly replaced by other courses taught to be more useful. These high school students almost forget English until they become freshmen at universities, which is a frustrating factor because the first year of university require them to study in one-year English preparatory program. They are mostly demotivated and frustrated when attending English courses in preparatory programs since their knowledge of English is very limited. In an attempt to solve this problem, the teacher researcher decided to conduct an action research in her class to get her students to engage in the reading classes actively.

1.1. Statement of the problem (Initial Reflection)

1.1.1. Selecting an issue

Many EFL learners do not have the skill, confidence, and motivation to be involved in reading classes because their exposure to English is quite limited and reading requires critical thinking and use of some strategies and techniques. As Cheng (2010) suggested for Taiwanese freshmen university students, my students’ knowledge of English texts is unsatisfactory and their efficacy in reading is problematic as well. I observed that they are not able to handle the large amount of text, and that they diligently depend on word-by-word reading. Instead of inferring the meaning of the words from context, they rely on their friends or me as their teacher but mostly on bilingual dictionaries or translators, which make them move away from the essence of reading. Soon, they start to moan and groan about the difficulty and dullness of the text or some of them doze off at their desks and some use their mobile phones to check their social media accounts. These kinds of attitudes make both teaching and learning more difficult. The problem mentioned above cause to an urgent concern –how to help struggling EFL technical students read the texts in their course books willingly.

1.1.2. Collecting information about the issue
After selecting an issue to examine in more detail, I started to self-observe my own reading classes and talked to my colleagues about the issue. Most of them had the same problem. Over time I realized that I was not offering any variety in my reading classes. Most of the time, because of time and classroom management issues, I was avoiding competitions or games. Generally, I followed a routinized program. After asking students to close their books and take a piece of paper, I got them to take notes of important points they caught while listening to the text. Then, we discussed their notes, analyzed the text in detail, and answered the comprehension questions, which was a very boring process for my students and also for me. Their moans and groans demotivated me as well and I was afraid of coming up with some creative ideas in case they may not show any interest. Luckily, I came to my senses and asked my students the reason why they are demotivated and do not pay any attention to the reading texts. The reading texts were boring and long with lots of unknown vocabulary, they answered with one voice. Thus, I decided to review the related literature about motivation and reading comprehension. My starting point was how to motivate my students for reading, and I decided to integrate some visuals, hands-on learning activities, and competitions into my lessons.

1.2. Purpose of the Study and Action Research Question

Some of the purposes of this study are to investigate my own practice as a teacher-researcher, bring about some changes in my classroom teaching and learning, to develop a deeper and better understanding of my teaching process, to grow and learn professionally by making use of my own experiences, and to gain a better control over my own teaching practice (Farrel, 2007). My primary purpose, on the other hand, is to help my struggling students read the texts in their course books willingly, which led me to ask the following question to guide this project: What happens to my students’ attitudes towards reading classes when I integrate visuals, hands-on activities, and competitions into my lessons?

1.3. Significance of the Study

This study is an action research explained by Burns as a study which “involves teachers taking ‘action’, often in the form of an intervention to systematically investigate, through ‘research’, a classroom issue they feel is worth exploring in order to better understand or enhance an aspect of teaching or learning” (as cited in Edwards & Burns, 2016). Developing a ‘reflective mindset’ (Goodnough, 2011; Seider & Lemma, 2004) and also better and deeper knowledge and personal theories about and out of their own teaching process, increasing awareness and empowerment (Atay, 2008; Wyatt, 2011) are among the benefits of action research to the teacher researcher. Furthermore, Edwards and Burns (2016) remarked that classroom practitioners become more self-confident, reflective, empowered, and flexible in their way of teaching thanks to action research they conducted. The benefits listed above show the significance of the action research per se.
1.4. Literature Review

Reading is one of the most crucial skills for students to acquire in their daily life to keep being updated about the latest issues and in their academic life because many universities require students to study in English preparatory programs for a year. Reading is highly important especially for preparatory students at University of Turkish Aeronautical Association (UTAA) because they are going to continue their departments in English and reading their subject matters in English will be unavoidable. However, I noticed that technical preparatory students in my class faced a lot of problems while reading in English because of their low motivation and engagement. When asked, they claimed that this was mainly because of the dullness of long reading texts with full of unknown vocabulary.

Being an interactive process, reading is defined by Alderson (2000) as a “process of interaction between a reader and the text” (p. 3). Nuttall (1996) believes that reading is not looking at sentences and words and checking for the meanings one-by-one, but going beyond them and understanding them intellectually. Jiménez's definition (2000) for reading as “the learners’ ability to interpret or work out the meaning of a written text and react towards it as a result” (as cited in Castillo & Bonillo, 2014, p. 70), on the other hand, leads us to the fact that reading comprehension is necessary in this process. Reading comprehension is a very complex process, though. Since it has been found that teaching reading strategies results in better reading comprehension, many studies have been conducted to see the effect of teaching reading strategies on reading comprehension skills (Blickenstaff, Hallquist, & Kopel, 2013; Cadena, 2006; Chou, Wang, & Ching, 2012; Küçükoğlu, 2013; Song, 1998).

This complex nature of reading comprehension process may demotivate students easily. Therefore, it is important to motivate the students and to keep them eager and enthusiastic for reading. Motivation is one of the most effective things to shoulder the reading process (Grabe & Stoller, 2002; Castillo & Bonilla, 2014) especially for my students who are particularly demotivated to read and engage in the reading classes. Many studies revealed the great impact of motivation on reading comprehension (Cox & Guthrie, 2001; Guthrie, Wigfield, Metsala, & Cox, 1999; İçmec, 2009; Knoll, 2000; Morgan & Fuchs, 2007).

Researchers have claimed that highly motivated students can overcome reading challenges easily. Guthrie et al. (1999) argued some instructional practices that might be helpful in boosting reading motivation and comprehension: promoting social interactions related to reading, enhancing a friendly and non-threatening teacher-student(s) relationship, and using hands-on activities are among these practices. Use of visuals, hands-on activities, and competitions in reading classes may increase the students' motivation.

As Bowen (1982) and Bellver (1989) suggested, teachers can create a strong connection between student and the reading text by using visual aids and encourage them to read the texts enthusiastically, which helped them to get the abstract ideas
easily (as cited in Yunus, Salehi, & John, 2013). The visuals, just like metal frames of
a building (Carney & Levin, 2002) and as a bridge between the native language and
English, support the students during the reading process and help them understand
the texts without needing any translations or excessive and long explanations
(Brinton, 2001). Likewise, competitions can be used to engage students. As Gordon
and Gillespie (2006) suggested, making students into enthusiastic, flexible, adaptable,
and collaborative individuals are among some positive results that can be attained
thanks to a competitive environment.

2. Method

2.1. Planning

After selecting the issue I wanted to touch upon, I did some research on the related
literature and decided to integrate three practices into my lessons: use of visuals,
hands-on activities, and competitions. I hoped these practices to motivate my students
to engage in the reading classes.

After observing what was going on in my classes and getting the opinions of my
students, I planned my action and decided on the intervention procedures. The action
will take place in the treatment process. Students will get a pre-test on reading just
before the treatment process and a post-test just after the treatment to measure the
improvement and to see if there is a positive change in their achievement. The
treatment process will be 4 weeks. The teacher will make a lesson plan for each week
appropriate for the aim of the research. These plans will be designed for the reading
lessons in the course book ‘Top Notch 2 and 3, 3rd edition.’ in which each unit consists
of preview and review sections and four lessons, and Lesson 3 or Lesson 4 is for
reading texts. After the treatment process, the students will be given a post-test and
at least 5 students will be interviewed on a volunteer basis. After each week’s
intervention lesson, the teacher-researcher will take notes of what she observed.

2.1.1. Setting and Participants

I was an instructor in Foreign Languages Department at UTAA, and I, as a
teacher-researcher, conducted the action research in my own class which included 21
students. Most of the students were technical students, which means they are going to
study in either engineering or flight training departments. My claim is that being
technical students might be the primary reason of low motivation and engagement in
reading classes.

2.1.2. Instruments

As for data collection tools, pre and post-tests, observation, field notes, and
interview will serve as the tools for gathering data. The statistical analyses of the pre-
test and post-test data will be conducted by using the Statistical Package for Social
Sciences (SPSS) version 21.
2.2. Action (Data Collection Procedures)

In the beginning of my research I gave my students a pre-test based on the reading text in Unit 9 Lesson 4 in the course book Top Notch 2 to measure their performance before implementing the intervention. This test consisted of the reading text (Top Notch 2, U9 L4) with three parts. The first part is a matching the word with the appropriate definition activity with 7 options. The second part consists of 9 true-false questions. Lastly, the third part includes three multiple choice questions. Students were not informed about the quiz. Later on I used these results to record the change.

In the following four weeks I practiced the activities for the reading text of each week I had planned beforehand. I especially tried to integrate some visuals such as pictures, photos, or videos into my each lesson to get my students’ attention. The program of intervention was just like this:

Table 1. Implementation of the intervention

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1st Week</th>
<th>Top Notch 2/ Unit 10 – Ethics and Values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lesson 4 – Discuss acts of kindness and honesty</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before reading the text (see Appendix A), discuss the title of the lesson 4. Show the power point presentation that includes some photos showing some acts of kindness and honesty and get the students to guess the context and to talk about their feelings and opinions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watch the related videos and talk about the students’ feelings and opinions:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PT-HBl2TVtI">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PT-HBl2TVtI</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oeph_eX_pVw">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oeph_eX_pVw</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KMYrI_Mt8A">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KMYrI_Mt8A</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students read the text individually and silently in the given time.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teacher shows a PPT for unknown vocabulary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition Time! – The class is divided into two groups. On the walls at the back of the class the printed versions of the reading texts are hung. For each question one student from each group comes to the teacher desk on which a bell is placed. The students see the question from the PPT, and the student who has rung the bell first has a chance to answer the question. If s/he answers correctly, the group gets one point. If not, the other student will have a chance to answer the question. The group which collects more points will be the winner. (for the questions: see Appendix B)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teacher puts emphasis on the parts the students have difficulty in, and finally the class answers the questions in the book.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2nd Week</th>
<th>Top Notch 3/ Unit 1 – Make Small Talk/Lesson 4 – Discuss how culture changes over time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before reading the text (see Appendix C), discuss the title and get students to give some examples from their lives.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For the warm-up part, go to the website with the title ‘Remembering being a child in 90s with 200 photos’. The photos on the website are good examples of cultural changes over time. Students express their feelings and opinions about the photos.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students read the text individually and silently in the given time.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition Time! – The class is divided into four groups. Each group gets a piece of paper and a pen. They close their books and put them aside. The teacher reads the questions which are True-False or short answer, and the groups write their answers on their papers in 15 seconds and raise them up. Each correct answer is 1 point. The group which collects more points will be the winner. (for the questions: see Appendix D)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
After implementing intervention, I gave my students a post-test based on the reading text in unit 5 Lesson 3 in the course book Top Notch 3 to measure the change. This test included the reading text (TN3, U5, L3) with three parts. The first part is a matching the word with the appropriate definition activity with 7 options. The second part consists of 7 true-false questions. Lastly, the third part includes 5 multiple choice questions. Students were not informed about the quiz. Later on I used these results to record the change. The level and the type of the test were the same to get more reliable results.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1. Quantitative Data
After the intervention these were my results. For analyzing the gathered data, Paired T-test from SPPS was used. Pallant (2010) suggests that this technique is suitable for pre-test/post-test experimental designs.

Table 2. Paired T-test results of pre and post tests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pair 1</td>
<td>PreTest</td>
<td>12,0952</td>
<td>3,93579</td>
<td>.85886</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PostTest</td>
<td>13,6190</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4,52190</td>
<td>.98676</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Paired samples test results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pair 1</td>
<td>PreTest</td>
<td>-1,52381</td>
<td>3,78971</td>
<td>-.82698</td>
<td>-1,843</td>
<td>.080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PostTest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To be able to interpret the data correctly, we need to look in the final column ‘Sig. (2-tailed)’ in the table labeled ‘Paired Samples Test’. If the value in this section is less than .05, we can conclude that there is a significant difference between pre-test and post-test. However, my value ‘.080’ is bigger than .05, which shows that there is no significant difference between two scores. This might be resulting from the difference in the number of questions or from the time limitations. I might have gotten different results if the intervention process had been longer and I had taught reading strategies for comprehension.

3.2. Qualitative Data

3.2.1. Observation

Even though numerical data says the opposite, my observation is completely different. After each lesson, I wrote down my observation which shows that I reached my aim. Integration of visuals, hands-on activity, and competitions changed the atmosphere of the class and the attitudes of my students. Starting each reading lesson with visuals and interesting videos attracted their attention, and they were more motivated in the rest of the lesson and had something to say about the topic. The interactive activities kept their eagerness alive. Their urge to win the competition made them read the text. After each lesson, they left the class with a big smile on their face, which is quite motivating for me. I remember the times when all the students left the class with moans and groans. The most interesting thing I observed happened during the fourth week of intervention when we did a hands-on activity. When I explained the activity and gave the instructions, most of the students complained about it since they were not kindergarten students. However, they were so absorbed in the activity that they even forgot the break time. They put their works
on the wall carefully and presented them successfully to the class. They actually enjoyed it.

3.2.2. Interviews

In order to reach more rich data and provide more answers in depth, I wanted to support my study with a qualitative method. Therefore, I interviewed nine of students. The interviews helped me “to gain insight into things such as people’s opinions, feelings, emotions and experiences” (Dörnyei, 2007, 173). During the interview, I asked my students to compare the reading activities we did before and the ones we did during the four weeks. Some of my questions: Which technique was effective for you: reading the text silently and answering the questions one-by-one or reading within a group and doing interactive activities? How did you feel during the interactive activities? Were they useful? Do you prefer silent reading by yourselves or group work?

During the interview, my students complained about the dullness of the reading texts again. One of the female students suggested that they can try to read some texts about their departments because they study at a technical university. Most of the students found the interactive activities and visuals enjoyable and useful stating as following:

Student 1:

“Interactive activities are better for us. They help us remember the things easily. With my partner we really tried to understand the text. We found the main idea. I really liked the poster presentation activity, maybe because I like doing handwork. It really helped me to understand better. Both watching videos and reading the text were very effective for me, especially the videos we watched about the festivals in the last week. I do not like reading by myself in the class because our paces are different, and some people finish reading quickly and start talking, so I cannot focus. The video about festivals helped me a lot. While reading the text, I took a note of important points. When I see them on the video, they stuck in my mind”.

Student 4

“I do not find reading individually effective because we get distracted after a while. Some of my friends start to talk or I see lots of unknown words, which make me not to understand the text. The most efficient one for me was poster-presentation because I could ask my friend the words I do not know. Competitions are very useful especially in the last hours, but sometimes we lose lots of time. For example, I learned the word ‘moral dilemma’ from the video that we watched. It helped me a lot. In fact, I did not read alone, but I had to read the texts within a group”.

Student 5

“I really like competitions especially when I do not have energy because competitions help me to come to my senses. I do not like preparing posters because these kinds of
activities are at a level of kindergarten. On the other hand, they helped me to discover my ability at these handcrafts things. I did not know I was good at them before”.

Student 6

“I prefer reading in groups because I can get help from my friends. I am not good at reading alone. Interactive activities and visuals help me remember better. When I read all by myself, I do not remember anything because my basic knowledge of English is not very sufficient and I cannot focus easily because of not being able to understand most of the things in a text. Normally I cannot tell anything about Bolivar in English, but thanks to video I have some things to say”.

Student 7

“I definitely prefer interactive activities because my English is bad. These kinds of activities are more useful and enjoyable for me because I can get help from my friends. While studying alone, I tend to sleep or use my mobile phone”.

Student 9

“My basic knowledge of English is not good, so when I encounter many unknown words, I easily get distracted. The competitions and activities help me spread positive energy. I get motivated. The videos and visual helped me learn many words and remember the context easily. I can get help from my friends during the interactive activities”.

One of the male students remarked his opinion with these words:

Student 2

“As a class, we are not ready for the group work. Some problems arise when the group is formed with a lot of people. For example, some people do not take over the responsibility. When we are groups of two or three, I enjoy more. That’s why, I enjoyed the poster presentation more. Interactive activities are more useful for us. When studying individually, we can get distracted very easily, but group work helps us take over the responsibility to have a clear conscience and participate in the lesson”.

Two of the male students enjoy the competitions in terms of fun, but they prefer to study individually. This point of view is illustrated by following words:

Student 3

“I like reading alone. When there is a competition, the feeling of winning dominates the atmosphere of the classroom, so we do not focus on the text. Likewise, when we are doing a hands-on activity, we focus mostly on the drawing, cutting the papers, which drifts us away from the subject. Competitions help us to have fun during the lesson”.

Student 8

“I really enjoy competitions, but studying individually is more useful for me. I do not find true false activities very useful, but giving short answers were quite useful. I learned many things”.
With the help of interviews, I was able to see that my observation corresponds to students' points of view. Most of them enjoyed the interactive activities and found visuals and videos very useful especially in remembering the unknown vocabulary. They expressed that they participated more compared to studying individually because they easily get distracted while studying alone. They tend to use their mobile phones or sleep. However, with a group, they take over their responsibility and act accordingly. They help each other as well. At the same time, they have fun. Even students who like self-study stated that they had fun during the activities.

4. Conclusion and Reflection

The present study explored if the integration of visuals, hands-on activities, and competitions into EFL reading classes changed the attitudes of technical university students. Even though statistical data says the opposite, my qualitative data shows that I achieved my goal. I was pleased to see the improvement and to see that I managed to involve my technical students in reading classes. Looking at the post-test results, half of the students progressed, but the difference is not significant. I believe this study could have yielded better results if I had more time for the intervention process since I could integrate a range of interactive activities and teach my students reading strategies.

In conclusion, visuals and interactive activities such as hands-on group works and competitions help me involve the low motivated technical students in the reading classes. Visuals attracted their attention in the first place, and then they came to their senses with the help of positive effect of group work. These activities prevented most of the students from using their mobile phones and sleeping. Instead, they took over the responsibility and made sufficient efforts to engage in the text. They asked their peers' help as well.

Pachtman and Wilson (2006) expressed that giving our students a chance to select what to read is a great motivator to read the material. However, what are we supposed to do if we do not have an opportunity to be selective about the reading materials? This study helped me realize that we can offer our students a range of activities even if we cannot provide them with a choice of texts. We, as teachers, need to discover the alternative ways of involving these students in the classes. We expect our students to be intrinsically motivated, but in reality it is mostly our responsibility to motivate and lead them because most of them are demotivated and avoid reading.

I will continue to utilize this strategy in my future classes in order to improve my students' study skills and prepare them for college and the working world.

Surely this study has some limitations. The present study was conducted with only one class, which might make generalization of the results difficult. In fact, this results from the nature of action research which is “empowering teachers to monitor their own practices in a more autonomous manner with a vision of challenging improving their own techniques of teaching through their own participatory research” as Kayaoğlu (2015, p. 140) reported. Still, similar studies in different and larger EFL
reading classes might be carried out to investigate if the practices mentioned in this study work for other students, too. Other practices thought to be useful might be tried to motivate students to read their assigned texts and the results can be shared.

As Biesta and Burbules (2003) argue, educational problems are unique, and we can only manage to reach at unique responses by examining our own educational practice rather than top-down enforcements. It is highly suggested that teachers in action will bring some action to their own classes by conducting their own studies.

Acknowledgements

The completion of this study could not have been possible without the expertise of Prof. Dr. Arif Sarıçoğan. A debt of gratitude is owed to him for his guidance. I would also like to express my gratitude to the University of Turkish Aeronautical Association for letting me conduct this study and thank my well-beloved colleagues and dear teachers for their invaluable comments on this study.

References


### Appendix A. TN2 U10 L4 Reading Text

**Homeless Man Returns Wallet with $900**

SANTA ANA, Calif. – A homeless man searching through trash bins for recyclable cans found a missing wallet and returned it to its owner. Kim Bogue, who works in the city, realized that her wallet was missing last week and doubled she’d ever get back the $900 and credit cards inside. “I prayed that night and asked God to help me,” said Bogue, who was saving the money for a trip to her native Thailand.

Days later, a homeless man found the wallet wrapped in a plastic bag in the trash, where Bogue had accidentally thrown it away with her lunch. He gave it to Sherry Wesley, who works in a nearby building. “He came to me with the wad of money and said, ‘This probably belongs to someone that you work with. Can you return it?’” Wesley said.

“He has a very good heart,” said Bogue, who gave the man a $100 reward. “If someone else had found it, the money would have been gone.”

**Man Risks Life to Save Another**

Many people who ride a busy urban subway wonder, “What would happen if I fell off the platform and onto the tracks? What would I do?” Others wonder, “What would I do if someone else fell?”

That question was answered in a split-second decision made by “subway hero” Wesley Autrey, a fifty-year-old New York City construction worker on his way to work. Autrey jumped onto the tracks to save a fellow passenger from an oncoming New York City subway train.

The passenger, Cameron Hollopeter, 20, a film student at the New York Film Academy, had fallen between the tracks after a seizure. Autrey pulled Hollopeter into a gap between the rails and covered him with his own body just as the train entered the station. Both men survived.

“I don’t feel like I did something spectacular; I just saw someone who needed help,” Mr. Autrey said. “I did what I felt was right.”

**An act of honesty by airport screener**

NEW DELHI: In a display of honesty, a security agent at the Indira Gandhi International Airport handed over a small plastic bag with US$1,000 in cash to a passenger who had completely forgotten the bag after it passed through the airport screening machine. Noticing that the bag had been left behind, Dalbir Singh made an announcement asking passengers to come forward to claim it. However, when no-one claimed it, Singh inspected the baggage tag and guessed it probably belonged to a passenger on route to Mumbai. An announcement was made on the next flight to Mumbai, and the owner of the bag came forward to collect it.

Singh was given a cash reward for his honesty.

### Appendix B. Competition

1. The man who returned Kim Bogue’s wallet was homeless.

2. Kim Bogue was saving her money to go to New York.

3. Bogue believed that whoever found her wallet would return it, including the cash and credit cards inside.

4. Wesley Autrey was saved from an oncoming New York City subway train.

5. The passenger fell between the tracks because he wasn’t paying attention.

6. Autrey didn’t think of himself as doing anything special
7. The security agent at an airport in India handed over a wallet with US $3,000 in cash.
8. The passenger who lost the money was taking a flight to Mumbai.
9. The security agent was given a cash reward.
10. Why did Kim Bogue give the homeless man a reward?
11. Why did Wesley Autrey risk his life to save a stranger?

Appendix C. TN3 U1 L4

Appendix D. Competition
1. Ms. Hartley is in her forties.
2. When Ms. Hartley was growing up, children were less polite.
3. When Ms. Hartley was growing up, the main meal was dinner.
4. Both Ms. Hartley and her brother were allowed to date at the age of sixteen.
5. Ms. Hartley didn’t use sir or madam with adults; she used Mr. and Mrs
6. Ms. Hartley’s upbringing was liberal.
7. The family enforced table manners and etiquette for interacting with adults.
8. Ms. Hartley’s parents believed in disciplining their children if they broke rules.
9. Ms. Hartley didn’t date as a teenager.
10. Ms. Hartley’s brother had more freedom than she did.
11. The interviewer doesn’t think Ms. Hartley sounds a little old-fashioned.
12. How old do you think Ms. Hartley to be today?
13. Does Ms. Hartley prefer the culture of the past or the culture of the present?
14. Is the change in the role of mothers positive or negative?
15. Does she approve of the differences in child and teen behavior that have taken place?

Appendix E. TN3 U2 L3
Appendix F. Hands-on Activity

1. **An ancient treatment that uses needles to relieve pain**
2. **A method of treatment that uses the mind or religious faith to treat illnesses**
3. **A treatment that uses herbs to treat illnesses**
4. **A method of treatment designed to get the body to heal itself**
5. **A treatment based on the scientific study of the human body and of illnesses**
6. **A method of treatment that uses the mind or religious faith to treat illnesses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Treatment</th>
<th>What does it use/what is done?</th>
<th>Where did it start?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>This type of treatment is based on scientific study of the human body and illness.</strong></td>
<td><strong>This type of treatment had its beginnings in ancient Greece.</strong></td>
<td><strong>This type of treatment began in China over 5,000 years ago.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>In this type of treatment, the patient’s symptoms are treated with remedies that cause similar symptoms.</strong></td>
<td><strong>This type of treatment began in Germany in the late 1700s.</strong></td>
<td><strong>This type of treatment uses the mind or religious faith to treat illness.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>80% of the world’s population uses this type of treatment.</strong></td>
<td><strong>In this type of treatment, patients take herbs, often as teas or pills.</strong></td>
<td><strong>This type of treatment is also known as mind and body connection.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Needles are inserted at certain points on the body in this type of treatment. | | |
Appendix G. The works of students

Appendix H. TN3 U7 L3
Appendix I. Competition

1. True or False: People usually eat when they have a picnic.
   (True)

2. A holiday that celebrates a certain time of the year is a ______ holiday.
   (seasonal)

3. True or False: People around the world wish each other well at midnight on New Year’s Eve.
   (True)

4. Name a holiday on which people send each other cards.
   (Answers will vary)

5. In which country did mariachi bands begin?
   (Mexico)

6. True or False: In some cultures it’s appropriate to bring a small gift when you’re invited to someone’s house for dinner.
   (True)

7. True or False: What one holiday when people watch fireworks?
   (Answers will vary)

8. In which country is the hank traditional clothing?
   (Korea)

9. True or False: Different countries celebrate different holiday traditions.
   (True)

10. True or False: If you get engaged to someone, then you agree to marry that person.
    (True)

11. True or False: The Harvest Moon Festival is a religious holiday.
    (False)

12. True or False: Some people pray on religious holidays.
    (True)

13. What is a woman called at the time she gets married?
    (bride)

14. What do you call a large formal party after a wedding ceremony?
    (reception)

15. What do you call a vacation taken by two people who just got married?
    (honeymoon)

16. What is the traditional Thanksgiving food in the United States?
    (turkey)

17. True or False: During the month of Ramadan, what don’t Muslims do during the day?
    (eat or drink)

18. What do you call a formal marriage ceremony?
    (wedding)

19. What is the name of the world-famous holiday celebrated in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil?
    (Carnaval)

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An action research on the development of self-regulated writing strategies of Turkish EFL students

Nihal Göy a *

a Gebze Technical University, Gebze, Kocaeli, Turkey

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Abstract

Writing is one of the most difficult tasks with multiple challenges for students learning a foreign language. An important element in helping students develop their writing ability is the identification of the problems they face while writing and the use of pedagogical interventions which raise their awareness and help them use their own learning strategies to handle. Zimmerman and Riesemberg (1997) suggest that higher levels of self-regulation are important to skilled writing because composing is an intentional activity that is quite often self-planned and self-sustained. This study aims to explore the effectiveness of strategy instruction on foreign language learners' writing skills and self-regulation abilities through an action research perspective. The data were collected via learners' diaries, reflections, essays, questionnaires and checklists. The project was carried out in a classroom of 18 students within three cycles of action for three weeks, each cycle evolving on the previous one. In the first two cycles, students were given self-regulation strategy instruction and modelling, then assigned writing tasks. Their strategy use was investigated through a questionnaire, diaries and reflections. In the third cycle, students' errors and difficulties were the focus and their opinions were taken via reflection paragraphs. The results showed that strategy training could help students improve their writing skills but further instruction and feedback were needed as they used a small number of strategies and only a slight improvement was seen in their writings.

Keywords: Self-regulation strategies; writing skills; action research; strategy training

1. Introduction

1.1. The problem

Writing, an active and productive skill, is seen as one of the most arduous task with multiple challenges for students learning to write in a foreign language. It is a complex activity that requires a certain level of linguistics knowledge, strategic skills, vocabulary and grammar. For years, an enormous amount of research has been conducted to search for interesting and practical methods to enhance student writing, but an action research study carried out at Cukurova University (YADIM) (Yavuz &
Genç, 1998), students are likely to continue to have negative attitudes towards writing towards writing no matter what methods are used. They are usually afraid of making errors and they lack self-efficacy in writing. An essential element in helping students develop their writing ability and increase their motivation is the identification of the problems they face in their writing and the use of pedagogical interventions which raise their awareness and learning strategy use. However, these are not enough. As approved by a number of research, self-regulation skills are crucial to write well. Zimmerman, Bonner and Kovarch (1996) claimed that “many students who have knowledge of a learning strategy will not continue to use it unless their knowledge leads to appropriate goal setting, accurate strategic process and outcome self-monitoring and greater self-efficacy” (p. 10).

There are a number of different definitions and models of self-regulated learning strategies (SRL), but a general working definition is provided by Wolters, Pintrich, & Karabenick (2003) which is “an active, constructive process whereby learners set goals for their learning and then attempt to monitor, regulate and control their cognition, motivation and behavior, guided and constrained by their goals and the contextual features in the environment”. In short, students who are metacognitively, motivationally and behaviorally active participants of their own learning process can be ascribed as self-regulated learners. They can understand the strategies and environments necessary for their learning, and feel capable of performing to their personal standards. Most of the research on learning strategies focused on cognitive and metacognitive strategies. However, in social cognitive theory of academic self-regulation, students regulate their motivational, affective, social processes as well as cognitive aspects (Zimmerman, 1986).

Instruction in writing strategies and verbal self-guidance has been proved to be effective on the enhancement of self-efficacy perceptions and improvement of writing skills in terms of schematic structure and quality of compositions. In their study, Nguyen and Gu (2013) found that strategy-based instruction in the form of training learnings in task-specific metacognitive self-regulation improved both learners’ autonomy in learning and their writing ability. Therefore, the present study sought to clarify how self-regulatory mechanisms through which instruction in strategies for essay writing fosters writing skills. Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons (1986) found the evidence of 10 self-regulated learning strategies which are highly correlated with the academic achievements of students which will be the basis of the current action research project.

1.2. Review of Literature

Drawn upon sociocognitive and sociocultural approaches, definition of self-regulation in second language acquisition context is taken from Wang, Quach and Rolston (2009) as “a person’s continuous adjustment of the use of language-learning strategies to achieve the self-set goals through interactions with their peers and adults across social and cultural contexts”. Research indicates that there are several

Studies also suggest that academic achievements are highly correlated with SRL strategies, so teaching students how to use these strategies effectively has a significant impact on students’ performances and self-efficacy beliefs which in turn helps them become more self-regulated and autonomous. (Paris & Paris, 2001; Travers & Sheckley, 2000; Wang, Quach & Rolston, 2009; Wood, Bandura & Bailey, 1990). A great deal of literature reports pedagogical interventions and effective instructional strategies to promote self-regulation for students including direct instruction and modeling, monitoring and feedback, reflection and guidance. (Boekaerts & Corno, 2005; Cleary & Zimmerman, 2004; Graham, Harris, & Mason, 2004; O’Malley, 1987; Pintrich, 2000; Schunk & Ertmer, 2000; Tonks & Taboada, 2011; Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994).

Although there has been a great deal of research on SRL strategies in academic context, limited research can be found on their benefits for specific language skills of English as a foreign language (EFL) learners with task-specific instruction in real classroom context. As for the particular concern of the present article, many instructional recommendations to increase the quality of EFL students’ writing have included teaching writing strategies, developing motivation and modeling, and promoting active engagement and higher-order thinking (Hammann, 2005). A combination of all these recommendations for the improvement of students’ writing performances brings about the umbrella term SRL which “integrates learning behaviors or strategies, motivation, and metacognition” (Hammann, 2005).

Instruction in self-regulatory strategies for writing, therefore, is highly recommended in the literature (Boekaerts & Corno, 2005; Hammann, 2005; Zimmerman, 2008; Zimmerman & Risemberg, 1997). Students who have the knowledge about SRL strategies may become well-organized, generate content, use materials like technology or library more effectively, and reflect on their own performance leading to improvement. Based on the recommendations about direct instruction of SRL strategies, this study was designed in a way to see how students benefit from task specific SRL strategy instructions to improve the quality of their writing tasks within a real language classroom setting.

1.3. Research Questions

Students of Architecture Faculty in Amasya University take a one-year English education before they start their own program. These students take a placement test at the beginning of the school year and streamed into different classes based on their levels. The situation described here is for an elementary level preparatory class with 20 students who take 26 hours of English a week.
When the students first took the placement test, most of them could hardly introduce themselves and others or talk about their families, hometowns. Their grammar and vocabulary test scores were also very low. The situation was worse for writing. Almost none of the student wrote anything for the writing tasks which were just about their lives and personal details. However, in six weeks they made a great progress as could be seen on their mid-term exam scores. In the first mid-term exam, they could make conversations with their peers, do well on the test and understand a reading passage. However, there was little or no progress on their writings. Mean scores of their writings in the mid-term exam was as low as 3.6 out of 10. The writings given as homework were also very poor in terms of structure, content and organization of ideas.

Their failure in writing tasks can be attributed to several factors. First of all, most of the students confess that they firstly write in Turkish and then try to translate it to English usually with the help of a translation website. Secondly, the four English instructors who teach different skills admit that they do not give any writing instructions or do exercises. Instead, they choose and give writing tasks from the course books as homework, then only check for mistakes in students’ writings as feedback. In an attempt to help students with their writings, this action research seeks answers to the following questions:

1. Does training in self-regulation strategies lead to improved writing in English?
2. Do learners adapt and use these self-regulation strategies for new tasks?

2. Method

2.1. Procedure and Participants

This is an action research with an aim to bring about change and improvement in practice as Burns (1999, p. 30) describes. Rather than dealing with the theoretical, action research allows practitioners to address those concerns that are closest to them, ones over which they can exhibit some influence and make change. (Ferrance, 2000). Educational action research can be engaged in by a single teacher, by a group of colleagues who share an interest in a common problem, or by the entire faculty of a school. Action research projects consist of seven-step process. These seven steps, which become an endless cycle for the inquiring teacher, are the following:

- Selecting a focus
- Clarifying theories
- Identifying research questions
- Collecting data
- Analyzing data
- Reporting results
- Taking informed action
In this article, a small-scale action research project was conducted with eighteen undergraduate students who are learning English as a foreign language in an elementary level preparatory class at Amasya University during 2014-2015 school year. The project lasted for three weeks with two-hour classroom interventions each week. The primary aim of the project was to help students improve their writing skills through task-specific instruction on self-regulation strategies.

2.2. Data Analysis

Three cycles of enquiry and reflection were carried out, in which one cycle influenced the next. In these cycles of investigation, it was expected that students would be able to use writing strategies more effectively and write better-structured opinion essays with higher motivation and self-regulation skills. Data were collected through various resources such as students’ task diaries, a self-regulation strategy questionnaire, organizing sheets, self-checklists, reflections and class discussions and interviews.

Table 1. Data collection procedures during the cycles of the action Research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cycle 1</th>
<th>Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The intervention: 2-hour self-regulated learning strategies instruction</td>
<td>Student Diaries, Writings, Self-evaluating questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cycle 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The intervention: 2-hour self-regulated learning strategies instruction, writing strategies, Modelling, more interesting topics</td>
<td>Self-checklist, Writings,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cycle 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The intervention: 1-hour Class discussions about strategies.</td>
<td>Reflections</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Results

The results of the data were analyzed and discussed within each cycle.

3.1. Cycle 1

The research started with a short class discussion in the class about how the students studied on their writing homework and how they perceived their efforts and progress and class notes were taken. Almost all of the students accepted that they used translation websites to do their homework and the main reason was that it was easier and they did not feel that they could write well enough in English. So, they first wrote in Turkish then translate it to English. However, they were fully aware of that writing via translation websites did not help them at all. This class discussion showed
they were really willing to learn to write good paragraphs in English but they did not know how.

As the first intervention, in a two-hour class time, students were trained on the steps of self-regulated learning strategies with possible examples and models and their importance was stressed. These steps are:

- Goal-setting and planning
- Seeking information
- Keeping record and monitoring
- Environmental structuring
- Organizing and transforming
- Rehearsing and memorizing
- Self-consequating
- Seeking social-assistance
- Reviewing records and revising
- Self-evaluating

After strategy-instruction, a sample opinion essay (Appendix D) was handed out and analyzed with a focus on some writing strategies as well such as brainstorming, organizing ideas with a mind map, outlining, sentence structuring and revising. The students were also given notice of L1 use illustrating the results of bad translation and how they could benefit from their native language. Then students were assigned an opinion essay writing task on various topics written on a sheet including writing steps taught and a mind map. They were grouped into four to have classroom discussions about their work. They were supposed to write their essays in four days and on the fourth day they had classroom discussion to talk about their works and reflect on each other’s essays. They were also asked to write a task-diary in L1 in which they wrote about their efforts and feeling about the task and whatever they did for it. Then they submitted their essays and diaries two days after they made their final changes according to their peers’ reflections.

As the main objective of the research is to see how training on self-regulation strategies will affect their writing skills, firstly we looked at the students’ diaries to see if they used these strategies or not. In their diaries and post-writing reflections, there were some important points that need attention for the next step. In general,

- Students did planning and research. They tried to get help from their friends.
- They found the task very difficult and they lost their motivation. Their self-efficacy beliefs were quite low as they thought they had not enough linguistic knowledge to write these essays.
- When they had difficulty in writing English, they returned to write in Turkish and translate.
- Class discussions helped them revise their essays and see some of their mistakes.
They complaint that they did not do any writing in the classroom and did not know how to do it.

They wanted to write about more interesting topics.

Writing mean scores were improved to 6.2 / 20 with a %31.3 increase.

Overall, it is clear that students tried to use some of the strategies taught. However metacognitive aspects of self-regulation like goal setting, planning and self-evaluating were not common strategies. Also, students had a really big problem with organizing and sentence structuring in English. It was upsetting that some of the students did not give up translation and submitted their translated writings without using any self-regulation strategies.

![Figure 1. Self-regulated learning strategies used in Cycle 1](image)

3.2. Cycle 2

After discovering that although students tried to use self-regulation learning strategies, they could not use these strategies effectively. So, the second cycle of the project continued with more instruction on self-regulation strategies and by taking students' demands into account, a sample essay was written on the board.

Firstly, a brainstorming activity was done about the topic by drawing a mind map. After talking about how to organize ideas, use dictionaries to choose the right word, sentence structuring and how to write without translating, a sample paragraph was written by using strategies instructed. They were more convinced that without translating they could write easy paragraphs by planning well and using these strategies. Then students were again assigned to write an opinion essay on a topic they chose among more interesting topics written on the sheet they were handed. But this time they were also asked to follow the steps on the sheet (Appendix C) and tick the strategies they used while doing the task.

As seen on the figure, more students used target strategies to complete the writing task as gathered from their checklists. What is encouraging is that the students
handed in highly improved articles in terms of organization of ideas and content as they used more self-regulation. Mean scores of writing tasks were 9.3 with a 46.9 percent increase. However, they still had problems with sentence structuring, which needs further attention.

![Figure 2. Self-regulated learning strategies used in Cycle 2](image)

3.3. Cycle 3

After the first two cycles of the project, the aim of the third cycle was to see if students would use self-regulation strategies without any further instruction and guidance. Therefore, Cycle 3 started with the assignment of a new writing task. After they handed out their essays, they were asked to write a reflection on this process. Some common entries from the reflections showed that:

- Students’ self-efficacy beliefs changed into that if they study well they could write really good paragraphs without Google Translate.
- They felt more motivated and autonomous.
- Writing scores were higher.
- They started to learn from their mistakes.
- Even without instruction most of the students continued to use some self-regulation strategies.
- They believed that when they did good planning, researching and checking, they wrote better paragraphs and that now they knew better how to form their opinions and turn them into writings.
- Mean scores of writing tasks were similar to the previous cycle, as 8.9.
4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study was an action research project which lasted for three weeks in three cycles. The purpose of the project was to develop self-regulation strategies of learners and therefore to gain improvement in their writing skills. In the first two cycles, students were instructed about self-regulated learning strategies and asked to use them while doing their writing tasks. In the third cycle, the focus was on the students who failed to write their essays and their opinions were taken.

As an answer to the research questions, the project yielded some positive outcomes in learners’ self-regulation skills and writings, but they still needed more improvements in their writings especially in terms of sentence structuring and linguistic inefficiencies, which shows that further actions are needed but it was out of the scope of this research. While some learners who had not often exercised any self-regulation skills previously started to plan and monitor and seek help from friends for a writing task, others who were familiar with these skills improved their organizing, revising and evaluating skills. At the beginning, their self-efficacy beliefs were quite low and they did not have any motivation to try. They had believed that they were poor writers and did not have enough linguistic knowledge to write better essays. Through the SRL instructions, modeling, planning, peer support and reflections, they became more eager to use whatever they have just learnt instead of just writing in Turkish and translating online. Besides, the quality of their essays improved significantly within the course of actions. This conclusion is in line with Hammann’s statement (2005) that with an effective strategy instruction, students will attribute their writing difficulties to the lack of appropriate strategy use rather than the lack of the writing ability. When they believed that they could learn to learn, they became more encouraged to try harder instead of just giving up because they did not have the “gift.”

The study was limited to three weeks of intervention with a small number of participants. The only focus of the research was on writing performances and students’ backgrounds, individual factors and motivational impacts which are highly related with SRL strategies (Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992) were not taken into considerations. Many further studies need to be carried out to understand long-term effects of SRL strategy instruction for different language skills for EFL learners. Still the findings of the research remarked some important key points. Firstly, instructors should be aware of that students’ failures may be not because of their lack of knowledge but their inappropriate strategy use and helping them to be aware of their potentials would provide them with more self-efficacy beliefs and motivation, in turn higher academic achievements. In other words, instructors should incorporate writing strategy instruction in their classes by supporting self-regulation, encouraging goalsetting and scaffolding (Hammann, 2005; Wang, Quach & Rolston, 2009). Secondly, instructors need to monitor students’ SRL practices regularly to help them adapt and improve these newly learnt strategies continuously for their own further studies. Finally, reflective practices of instructors focusing on difficulties
learners face while processing new language skills may be helpful to find solutions to change their own instructional techniques through such action research based on theoretical knowledge.

Overall, the results of the research indicate that with continuous instruction and feedback, learners would be able to improve their ability to self-regulate for a writing task and that increased strategy use would yield better engagement in writing, therefore as their linguistic knowledge improves, they will be better engaged in writing. However, the first emphasis should be on increasing learners' motivation and their beliefs that they can do better if they develop self-regulation skills.

References


Appendix A.

Self-regulated Learning Strategies Taught (Zimmerman, 1989)

Categories/Strategies Definitions

1. Self-evaluating
   Statements indicating student-initiated evaluations of the quality or progress of their work; e.g., "I check over my work to make sure I did it right."

2. Organizing and transforming
   Statements indicating student-initiated overt or covert rearrangement of instructional materials to improve learning; e.g., "I make an outline before I write my paper."

3. Goal-setting and planning
Statements indicating students’ setting of educational goals or subgoals and planning for sequencing, timing, and completing activities related to those goals; e.g., "First, I start studying two weeks before exams, and I pace myself."

4. Seeking information
Statements indicating student-initiated efforts to secure further task information from nonsocial sources when undertaking an assignment; e.g., "Before beginning to write the paper, I go to the library to get as much information as possible concerning the topic."

5. Keeping records and Monitoring
Statements indicating student-initiated efforts to record events or results; e.g., "I took notes of the class discussions"; "I kept a list of the words I got wrong."

6. Environmental structuring
Statements indicating student-initiated efforts to select or arrange the physical setting to make learning easier; e.g., "I isolate myself from anything that distracts me"; "I turned off the radio so I can concentrate on what I am doing."

7. Self-consequating
Statements indicating student arrangement or imagination of rewards or punishment for success or failure; e.g., "If I do well on a test, I treat myself to a movie."

8. Rehearsing and memorizing
Statements indicating student-initiated efforts to memorize material by overt or covert practice; e.g., "In preparing for a math test, I keep writing the formula down until I remember it."

9. Seeking social assistance
Statements indicating student-initiated efforts to solicit help from peers, teachers, and adults; e.g., "If I have problems with math assignments, I ask a friend to help."

10. Reviewing records
Statements indicating student-initiated efforts to reread notes, tests, or textbooks to prepare for class or further testing; e.g., "When preparing for a test, I review my notes."
Appendix B. Paragraph Organizing Sheet (Cycle 1)
Appendix C. Strategy Guidance and Checklist (Cycle 2)

Choose one of the topics below and write an essay about what you think.
Is fashion important?
Is a lottery good idea?
Is cheating a good idea?
Is smoking good?
Is going to space a good idea?

Follow these steps
1. Brainstorming / think about the topic
2. Gather information about the topic
3. Take notes and write your main idea
4. Organize your ideas and your paragraphs, make an outline
5. Write a topic sentence for each paragraph
6. Write an introduction and concluding paragraphs
7. After you finish your writing revise and check for mistakes.
8. Ask a friend to read it
9. Use an English-English dictionary to check if you use right words.

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<table>
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<th>No.</th>
<th>Step Description</th>
<th>Yes: ✓</th>
<th>No: x</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>1.</td>
<td>Ödevi ilk aldığında nasıl yapacağımı düşünmeye başladım.</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Konuyu tam olarak anlamak için bazı kaynaklardan araştırma yaptım.</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Ödevi nasıl yapacağımı dair kendime bir çalışma planı yaptım.</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Aklıma gelen fikirlerin bir listesini yaptım.</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Kaynaklardan bulduğum bilgilerin bir listesini yaptım.</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Nasıl ve ne konuda yazacağımı dair bir taslak hazırladım.</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Hazırladığım taslağa göre yazımı yazdım.</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Ödevi hazırlarken çalışabileceğim bir ortam hazırladım.</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Daha rahat konsantrasyon için kullanılabilen bir yer buldum.</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Notlarımdan gözden geçirdim.</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Yazarken hatalarını kontrol etmek için tekrar tekrar okudum.</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Yazıyı bitirdikten sonra kendimi ödüllendirdim.</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Yazıyı bitirdikten sonra arkadaşlarınızla eğlenceli bir şeyler yaptım.</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Sınıfta arkadaşlaşmamı sunmak için yazımı tekrar kontrol ettim.</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Tekrar okuyup arkadaşlaşmamı anlatabilecek için çalıştım.</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>Yazdiğim yazının iyi olduğunu düşündüm.</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>Yazdiğim yazında birçok hata olduğunu düşündüm.</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Using *Etherpad* for Online Collaborative Writing Activities and Learners with Different Language Learning Strategies

Erdal Ayan a 1, S. Sadi Seferoğlu b

a Hacettepe University, Department of Computer Education and Instructional Technology, Ankara, 06800, Turkey
b Hacettepe University, Department of Computer Education and Instructional Technology, Ankara, 06800, Turkey

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Abstract

The current study is a research on use of *EtherPad* platform for online collaborative writing tasks. There are lots of reports and research dealing with these platforms, the integration of technology and its use for online educational purposes. Many of them showed that online education is very new for the learners and there is little contribution to their learning process in terms of changing their traditional educational behaviors. Furthermore, the teachers are still focusing on using technology for their own sake but there is very little attention on in-class or out-class activities since most of the time, their in-service training including appropriate technological tools, syllabus integration and consultation are disregarded. It seems that there's very little interest on synchronous collaborative online writing by the language learners with different language learning strategies. Therefore, this study investigates how the learners with different language learning strategies behave in online platforms while they are using online materials and particularly writing over *EtherPad*. Voluntary participants could easily integrate into online platforms and spent remarkable effort and time to cooperate and complete all given tasks and especially synchronous online collaborated writing tasks. As a result of the research, it was observed that performance of two groups of participants with different language learning strategies have significantly differentiated, which suggested that such online writing activities can be implemented to diagnose such differences among the learners and be useful to manipulate their learning process in order to assist them to improve their certain learning skills and motivate them according to their needs.

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Keywords: online learning, synchronous learning, language learning strategies, online collaborative writing

1. Introduction

Use of online platforms for language teaching has enormously increased in today’s English language teaching literature in accordance with technological advances in computerized educational methods and techniques. Personalized language teaching designed according to learner needs and existent language proficiency over online environments has also contributed to the field a lot. Lynch (2004), for instance, says
that learners are expected to be more independent since education over technological tools is now providing huge amount of information, which making it possible for teachers to guide and advise online. Even though there are huge amount of online materials by leading publishers and news agencies (i.e. BBC, VOA News, The Guardian, etc.) available on the Internet, serving for millions of users, these supplementary and open educational resources may not always correctly and efficiently meet the needs of certain number of learners. What is more, there are very few studies on efficacy of online materials produced after data collection processes on learning strategies of the learners. On the other hand, there are serious criticisms towards using online contents since they have very little contributions to radical changes in the traditional habits of the usual learners. Many of the online platforms are designed according to the desires and perspectives of their creators by disregarding learning strategies and level of knowledge of the learners.

Oxford (2001) clarifies that “if there is harmony between (a) the student (in terms of style and strategy preferences) and (b) the instructional methodology and materials, then the student is likely to perform well, feel confident, and experience low anxiety.” (p. 359). The studies by Oxford (1990), Hismanoglu (2000), Hsiao and Oxford (2002) and Özmen (2012) just provide general categorizations of Language Learning Strategies (LLS) and instruction of LLS but it seems that some further research is highly needed to clarify how learners with different LLS behave in an online environment to automatize and use their LLS preferences for particular skills like online collaborative writing. The current study is a work running online platforms for writing skills of the learners with different language learning strategies and English language knowledge. The purpose of it is to figure out if EtherPad platform and collaborative writing tasks function well for the participants. The platform and tasks are designed according to learners’ language knowledge. It also aims at observing and defining their language learning processes and exploring to what extent their learning strategies contribute to their collaboration. In this paper current trends and studies in the literature concerned will be reviewed first. This is going to be followed by declaring research questions and hypothesis. The following sections are going to clarify methodology of the research. Finally, findings and discussion sections will identify consequences of the study. Conclusion part is going to sum up underlying results and points of the study.

2. Literature Review on Online Collaborative Writing and Language Learning Strategies

Writing, and particularly assessing writing, has gained some new and important roles to play in language teaching within last decades (Behizadeh & Engelhard, 2011; Raimes, 2000; Yancey, 1999) despite the fact that the acceptance of writing as a separate skill and discipline took a long time. Yancey (1999) defines that process as “the most important change in 50 years” in education (p 485). As a result of that process, writing assessment has become “a new expertise and a discipline”, which should be “social specific, purposeful, contextual and ethical” (p. 486-500). She
describes that process as “overlapping waves” even though there occurred certain radical changes in the perspectives within years (p. 483) (see also Raimes, 2000: 153-163).

She categorizes these waves into three; the first wave is in 1950s-1970s and writing assessment was in “the form of objective tests” including multiple choice tests and focus on grammar. In the second wave (1970-1986), it was appeared as “holistically scored essay”. And in the last one (1986-present) it was in the form of portfolio and programmatic assessment and collaborative scoring was essentially required for grading. Savignon (2000) has reported that “teachers, under pressure to make their students do well on [large-scale, standardized, multiple-choice] tests, often devote valuable class time to teaching test-taking skills, drilling students on multiple choice items about writing, for example, rather than allowing them practice in writing.” (p. 78). Writing as a cognitive process in social and sociocultural contexts (Behizadeh & Engelhard, 2011) currently has got a new status. Traditions in writing have shifted from form-dominated sentence drills, controlled compositions to content [context]/task-based peer collaborated activities as Raimes (2000) notes.

![Figure 1: Improvement of writing as an assessed skill](image)

Admittedly, technological developments and particularly online platforms have significantly contributed to teaching writing and assessing written texts. Specifically, online collaborative writing tools recreate all those ideas represented in the aforementioned studies. These tools have been improved and evolved in a very short time, and they enable learners to practice and learn more effectively. For example, a qualitative research conducted by Selçuk (2016) reveals that high school students using Facebook for online collaboration report peer collaboration is of “positive impacts on their writing development and self-confidence in writing English.” (p. 5). The participants also find feedback from the group leaders are “instructional and motivating” (p. 5). In contrast to detailed studies on online collaborative or asynchronous joint writing (Ellis, 2006; Guasch, Espasa, Alvarez, & Kirschner, 2013;
Kim & Eklundh, 2001; Limbu & Markauskaite, 2015), it seems there is still very little emphasis on synchronous online collaborative writing (SOCW) in teaching English as a foreign language.

Integration of online collaborative word processors such as EtherPad, Goodle Docs and web collaborative authoring tools like Sweetie as part of blended writing environments for teaching and researching purposes has been gaining importance and popularity among the researchers (Gleason, 2014; Leeder & Shah, 2016; Miura, 2016; Yadollahi & Rahimi, 2015). Leeder and Shah (2016) summarise the advantages of collaboration in learning environments. For example, collaboration positively contributes to “critical thinking, better learning outcomes, deep learning, knowledge construction, sharing information resources and ideas, explore different viewpoints, evaluation of information and blending useful skills” (p. 203). The study by Leeder and Shah on collaborative information seeking via Coagmento plugin with EtherPad explores how university students collaborate for library researchers and the challenges they face during their efforts to find appropriate resources. Yadollahi and Rahimi (2015) find out that using EtherPad for collaborated writing tasks and peer feedback mechanisms positively affected writing skills in English for Iranian students.

Gleason’s (2014) research on classroom ethnography and writing developments in blended environments for Spanish writing course has come out with positive results in terms of integration of synchronous web tools into writing processes and engagement of students into blended writing practices. Gleason argues that participants can “keep their thoughts more organized” in the virtual environment used. Outcomes from the research support the idea that it is advantageous to use online editors in accordance with blended writing environments. Gleason also comments that:

By supporting students and facilitating the teacher's feedback on students' particular weaknesses and challenges, technology permitted students to engage with the course material, to take maximum advantage of their in-class writing time, and to exploit expert feedback. In light of the ways that a third-year FL course needs to unite students' knowledge of grammar principles with their applications in real texts, students connected their reflections about language to their active applications of linguistic principles.

On the other hand, the research on language learning strategies have seriously attracted attention of the researchers in the late 20th century despite the fact that the relevant terminology and categorization of the strategies have often been under dispute for a long time. The studies in the early 1990s by Rebecca L. Oxford, J. O’Malley and A. Chamot are of leading positions to explain the role of LLS and

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2 Online Collaborative Writing (OCW) is mostly used by the researchers in the literature but it seems that this does not meet what the author wants to mean in the current study because OCW can be managed by different users at different durations by means of other soft-wares and cloud technology like Dropbox, SpiderOak, etc. Therefore SOCW was purposefully preferred in order to emphasize the strength of a real-time editor for synchronous online collaborative writing activities.
categorization of LLS types even though they have suggested various taxonomies and definitions (Ellis, 2008). According to Oxford’s (1999) theoretical framework, LLS are of a lot to do with becoming proficient, autonomous, self-regulated and responsible learners. She has defined LLS as “specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques (…) used by students to enhance their own learning” (p. 109-110). She has also described six language learning strategies like cognitive, mnemonic/memory, meta-cognitive, compensatory, affective and social strategies (Oxford, 1999, 2001, 2003). These strategies are basically of diverse functions and meanings from the learning styles such as visual, kinesthetic, auditory and tactile, which refer to general tendency of choosing specific ways to learn (Lynch, 2004; Pashler, McDaniel, Rohrer, & Bjork, 2008; Reid, 1987). That is, these LLS refer to the abilities and willingness summarized in Figure 2.

![Figure 2: Types of Language Learning Strategies (Oxford, 1999, 2001, 2003)](image)

Oxford (1999) has also called memory, cognitive and compensatory strategies as direct strategies and the rest as indirect strategies. Such strategies seem to help the learners take responsibility and position in problem solving and experience positive performance and success. Oxford (2001) states that “styles and strategies help determine a particular learner’s ability and willingness to work within the framework of various instructional methodologies” (p. 365). However, these notions are not always clear cut and easy or simple to observe due to the fact that non-stop changes in behaviors, attitudes and experience of the learner as they find out and internalize new notions, and integrate themselves to novel conditions such as online environments. Some recent studies on LLS have focused on the categorization and instruction of the strategy types (Chamot, Meloni, Gonglewski, Bartoshesky, & Keatley, 2011), however, there are informative studies which touched on problematic and some several contradictory points of such categorizations, which is beyond the content of the current study (Ellis, 2008; Rose, 2012).

All in all, obviously, the relevant literature is focusing on changing responsibilities, needs, perspectives and positions of the teachers and learners as well as categorization of LLS in the digital world as mentioned earlier and it is away from
responding how personalized learning can be achieved considering learners with certain LLS in online environments.

3. Research Model and Hypothesis

Online environments and contents can be used as 'consciousness-raising device for learners' (Raimes, 2000) and to know learning strategies of the learners may considerably help both teachers and learners to find and create new paths to deal with the challenging learning tasks which need utmost problem solving and creative thinking skills. Similarly, to encourage learners for online collaborative learning over various web tools may come up with more positive results in term of successful completion of the tasks. Accordingly, there are many online platforms and multimedia tools such as key-pals, web-quests, and course management systems available to enjoy for that purpose (Pitler, Hubbell, & Kuhn, 2012). On the contrary, there is very little research on the efficacy of online materials on the learners with different language learning strategies even though there are relatively more on strategy use in face-to-face teaching/learning environments, which are mostly quantitative studies to define strategies and literature reviews (Griffiths & Parr, 2001; Hismanoglu, 2000; Özmen, 2012). In this regard, the following research questions were formulated for this study:

- a) Could the learners build up a collaborative discourse while writing in English in an online platform?
- b) How efficient are online materials on language learning processes of the students having different LLS?
- c) Could learners use their superior LLS for specific collaborative writing tasks in an online environment?
- d) Could learners with different LLS transfer knowledge over different tasks and skills?
- e) Is there prominent difference among the participants with different LLS in terms of their SOCW performance?

In this study, it has been hypothesized that online environments can be enjoyed by the learners with different LLS more efficiently on condition that they study in a learning environment without a grading system and are allowed to work collaboratively. Also, their LLS can be contributing to the achievement levels, which can clearly be diagnosed by means of online educational platforms. To put it differently, SOCW can contribute a lot to language development of the learners with different LLS as long as they are encouraged to use their LLS for a particular skill like online writing by means of peer works.

The research was conducted at a vocational school and took one month. The participants attended online courses in a computer laboratory with Internet access once a week. The scope of the current study was planned to promote their skills such as creative thinking, questioning, reading/listening and comprehension, and SOCW skills. The emphasis of the content of the online courses was on producing appropriate
vocabulary, building background information and constructing cohesive paragraphs in a given context. The role of the language teacher was assigned as online moderator and facilitator. The participants of the research were expected to work collaboratively to produce paragraphs in a certain context in around two-hours-long sessions. The reasons behind requiring the learners to work together online was to assist them build their own mutual learning frameworks with new knowledge. By that way, a) they could “get additional ideas from their peers”, b) they could “identify their mistakes”, c) they could “encourage each other to do better”, d) they could “share the work and complete the task more quickly” e) they could “share their thoughts and feelings” with lower anxiety, f) they could take advantage of “teamwork and (different) experience with unique brainstorming and thinking processes” to deal with learning difficulties (Lynch, 2004). In addition, the learners were not expected to attain any grades which would affect their motivation and learning process negatively, because, admittedly, the grades may not always reflect correctly if the learners have experienced real and permanent learning. In this sense, the current study did not focus on any exam-based success but attempt to clarify the efficacy of online learning through SOCW.

4. Methodology

In this study, both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies were integrally used in three phases. Before introducing the online courses, a questionnaire was formed in order to describe participants’ demographic and educational profiles. A version of Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) by Oxford (1990) was used to diagnose the LLS of the participants. Oxford’s six dimensional categorization was used in this study since it was more consistent, valid and comprehensive descriptor for the research when compared to other theories and models (Ellis, 2008; Hsiao & Oxford, 2002). The participants also took a paper-pen Quick Placement Test which helped to figure out their level of language knowledge. Hitit.Moodle was employed as the online learning platform for this study.

The online contents were merely available for the selected group including voluntary students from the Vocational School. The online courses were composed of warm-up questions, listening, reading and comprehension questions and essay writing questions which required collaborative writing over a separate online platform called EtherPad. Responses from the participants to the essay questions were evaluated and corrected according to the following points: a) grammatical correctness, b) using appropriate vocabulary, c) organization of the paragraph, and d) using correct context. At the end of each session, paragraphs with appropriate

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3 It was also published online over Olenka Bilash’s web-site: <http://www.educ.ualberta.ca/staff/olenka.Bilash/best%20of%20bilash/SILL%20survey.pdf>

4 Quick Placement Test Version – 1 was improved by Oxford University Press & University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES) in 2001. The test is a trustful placement tool for institutions and but it was used as a proficiency test in order to describe and define language knowledge of the participants.

5 See: <www.moodle.hitit.edu.tr>
corrective and suggestive feedback were sent back to the participants. Frequencies of active participation, number of sentences produced and time spent were calculated and compiled in a LibreOffice excel file, and averages of each aspects per session were calculated in order to diagnose differences between the participants with certain LLS in terms of their performance.

4.1. Participants

Students (N=45) enrolled at the vocational school filled up the questionnaire for profile and SILL before participating in the research. Voluntary participants (N=22, females=18, Males=4) were assigned to take part in this research. They were first year students, who were registered at various departments. They were all native speakers of Turkish and learning English as a foreign language. The age of the participants changed from 18 to 26. They completed their high school education at vocational high schools (N=13), regular high schools (N=4), Anatolian high schools (N=4) or religious vocational high schools (N=1). Almost all of the participants were of educational experience in Turkey rather than only one female participant who lived and took education at university level for several terms in Germany. Some of the participants (N=8) took an English preparation class during their high school education. They took and passed a face-to-face English course in the Fall 2014 term before joining in the research at school. They used a learning management system, Oxford English Language Testing⁶, to practice English as part of their formal English course and language curriculum at school for almost six months. Online activities in the LMS were including practice items for reading, listening, speaking and individual writing.

According to data from SILL conducted for these participants, their LLS were described as social strategies (N=7), compensatory strategies (N=4), memory strategies (N=4), affective strategies (N=3), cognitive strategies (N=2), meta-cognitive strategies (N=1) and meta-cognitive and social strategies (N=1). The level of their language knowledge were A1 (N=15) and A2 (N=7) according to language test. Overall superior LLS was defined as affective strategies (AS) (3.6) even though the most frequent LLS was determined as social strategies (SS) (seven participants with SS). As it can simply be figured out from the table, none of the participants always or almost always use a particular LLS, but most of them (N=13) enjoyed them in medium or just above medium levels (See Table – 2 in Appendix – 1).

4.2. Data Collection Instruments

A questionnaire for profile description and SILL survey were designed and formed over Google Drive by the researchers. A pen-paper language test, Quick Placement Test-Version 1 (Part 1), was used as a proficiency test in order to clarify their level of language knowledge. The online courses were created over Hitit.Moodle and forum, chat, lesson and quiz modules were mostly employed. Question types such as

⁶ The name of the LMS is Oxford English Testing Service, see: <http://www.oxfordenglishtesting.com/>
description, true-false, multiple choice, matching and essay writing were set inside those modules (See Screen-shots – 1, 2, 3, in Appendix – 2). Reading materials and listening records with zero level of English were adapted from Breaking News English web-site. These materials were particularly designed for those participants regarding their levels of language knowledge as well as their potential learning styles like visual and auditory. The participants were encouraged to use chat module in order to promote their lexical faculty, level of comprehension and cooperative skills. EtherPad, web-based collaborative real-time editor, was intentionally used for this study. Separate EtherPad links were given to each randomly selected peer who was defined in different colors in the system (See Screen-shot – 4 in Appendix – 2). The peers could chat and write simultaneously over EtherPad’s editor and chat-box. The peers were provided with writing questions and they were expected to collaborate to respond and write paragraphs with at least ten sentences in 45 minutes. All the writing processes were recorded over EtherPad’s system for teacher’s evaluation, analysis and feedback (See Screen-shot – 5 in Appendix – 2).

4.3. Instructional Design

Synchronous online learning was taken as the leading teaching method in this research. The online courses were generated by regarding lower anxiety levels and higher intrinsic/extrinsic motivation, and so they were independent of any formal grading system as part of their formal English language course. By this way, the participants were encouraged to make as many mistakes as possible since the mistakes were idealized as unique opportunities for getting detailed feedback from the teacher and their peers for further collaborated learning. Perhaps, it is more influential for learners to get feedback from the teachers in especially asynchronous studies but it was estimated that corrective feedback from their peers could be more encouraging and less time taking in this study. The reading topics used in online courses were contextually in parallel with those for writing performance. The grammar topics were more or less the same as in the face-to-face courses. However, any new grammar topic was not taught or repeated over and over during online learning processes. The content of the online courses was designed by following steps: a) warming activities with 3 or 5 individual writing questions, b) listening activities with 4 or 5 multiple choice questions, d) reading activities with comprehension questions, and e) essay questions based on the contexts represented in the reading part.

The writing activities were presented over EtherPad’s web-site and the peers were asked to complete the writing tasks by collaborating in given time. Traditional teaching methodology, in which the teachers are in an active role and only in a non-stop talking position, and the learners are in passive listener roles, was not employed in this study. The teacher only helped to the peers when they asked questions over chat module and particularly when they lost their way in the web sites. The peers

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7 See: <http://breakingnewsenglish.com/>
were supported to work together and ask any questions to each other over chat-box of EtherPad but the teacher did not check and intervene in the process while they were constructing their texts. The peers were allowed to use online dictionaries and web sources in order to learn new words and get information and produce paragraphs by enjoying their own words and sentences.

4.4. Procedure and Data Analysis

The level test in the pen-paper format was held in classroom environment and took around 30 minutes. With the test, the purpose was to create a homogeneous group for the project in terms of language knowledge. Online materials were represented only for voluntary participants with certain level of English knowledge and those who did not take the test were disregarded. Learning strategies of the learners were defined online by SILL presented over Google Drive. As a result of the diagnosing questionnaire and definition of the learning strategies, those participants who did not have any interest to the research and use any specific strategies were not included in the group. The participants took the online courses in a computer laboratory located inside the school. Twenty-one of the participants attended at least two sessions of the courses and one participant visited the course just once. Four course sessions were completed in a month. The courses took around two hours for them to complete all the tasks. Just after completion of the warming up activities, listening and comprehension questions, the participants were randomly grouped into peers composed of two learners to write collaboratively over EtherPad. Forty-five minutes were given for them to do independent collaborated writing task, but the duration limit was not strictly obeyed in order not to influence their motivation negatively. The peers were allowed to use other web-sites and online dictionaries to take information and enrich the content of their paragraphs.

The participants were asked to write a paragraph with at least ten sentences in a certain context regarding the question(s) given. Writing topics were limited to argumentative topics like advantages and disadvantages of technological devices, increasing use of computer and internet, extinct animals, using online materials for education. These topics, which were contextually close to each other as well as to the reading topics, were intentionally chosen in order to help the participants memorize appropriate words and grammatical structures while sharing their ideas with their peers and structuring, revising their paragraphs. The teacher did not intervene in the process of writing over EtherPad’s chat-box but responded questions of the participants by means of chat blog of the LMS. The written and recorded paragraphs over EtherPad were later evaluated and corrected by the teacher, and then they were all both sent into participant’s accounts and uploaded into forum module in order for all the participants to see the written and corrected paragraphs. They could also see their earlier productions when they entered into their EtherPad accounts. The paragraphs were later statistically evaluated in terms (a) participants’ participation in paragraph production, (b) number of produced sentences and (c) time spent for
5. Findings

Personal writing is not a simple process but it is a result of set of cognitive processes benefiting from personal ideas, competence, creativity, imagination and further abilities like critical thinking. It becomes more difficult when it comes to online collaborated writing since the peers should necessarily produce language patterns; improve/use strategies and ideas to support the main ideas specifically written in a certain context. The data including responses to warming questions, listening, reading and comprehension questions collected by means of Hitit.Moodle indicated that the participants have noted utmost willingness to learn over online materials. Although it was discernibly a big challenge for each peer to write the very first words and sentences, taking turns, correction of the mistakes and spending effort for clarification of the ideas, the peers could improve a successful online collaboration. They could integrate themselves to the online environment and use the tools for the sake of language learning. Interestingly, they could internalize the tasks in a very short time and did not ask many directing questions after the first week’s session. They encouraged each other to take turns and responsibility to complete the tasks within the given duration. Some further findings were summarized under two main titles below.

5.1. Collaborative Discourse

The first research question of the study was dealing with if the participants come up with a collaborative discourse while writing in English in an online platform. They mostly attempted to learn the unknown vocabularies and syntactically correct sample sentences to improve their writing skill even though the language they enjoyed to communicate over chat-box was mostly in Turkish. For example, a peer of participants noted the following dialogue in the very first session of the course:

[14:25] P1: aslında :D [name of the peer]
[14:25] P6: what banu [name of the peer]? :D
[14:27] P1: zmankaybi ne demek? [What does “waste of time” mean in English]

The peers spent considerable time to find out new vocabularies, build up syntactic frameworks to express their ideas and appealed to some interchanging questions to plan what they wanted to mean before starting to write. For instance, following peers produced the following sentences:

[14:24] P5: kanka ne yazalım [buddy, what shall we write?]
[14:24] P5: I think diye başlayalım [let’s begin with “I think”]
[14:24] P10: okey :)

A value (1) was given for each attempt of the participant to produce a sentence, a produced sentence, and the time was calculate as minutes that they spent on the work.
As it can also be observed in the dialogues above, the participants could build up a collaborative discourse over the EtherPad in spite of the fact that they had a great challenge to produce well organized paragraphs. They actually experienced difficulties in writing coherently and cohesively correct paragraphs having logically fluent and accurate sentences. For instance, occasionally, some of the participants could not notice how to start a paragraph, where to introduce topic statement, when to provide supporting examples. On the other hand, some of the participants however tended to produce their paragraphs separately without intervening in each other’s blocks of paragraphs while some others learned how to benefit from each other’s knowledge, correct mistakes and give positive feedback (See Screen-shots – 7 and 8 in Appendix – 2).

It is also worth having a close look at the level of writing skills beforehand. Collaboratively produced paragraphs showed that the participants had certain level of (but still improving) writing skill, which is actually between intensive and responsive writing according to Brown and Abeywickrama’s (2010) four-dimensioned categorization but not certainly above that. The participants could write appropriate words in a certain context and use collocations (e.g. spend a lot of time, fast food, waste of time, away from, financial problems, adverse effects etc.) and quasi-correct grammar to convey the meaning for the situational context. They could connect sentences to each other and write paragraphs, and engage to each other’s ideas to build up further supporting examples despite the fact that they noted many mistakes in terms of spelling, punctuation, sequence of ideas.

Separate chat activities were initiated for the participants to communicate with each other and the teacher for each session over Hitit.Moodle, but most of the participants tended to use the chat-box of EtherPad. The participants noted entries in order to ask for Turkish or English meaning of certain words and phrases. Most of the time, the participants preferred using chat-boxes over EtherPad so that they could mainly build up their paragraphs and produce appropriate discourses to initiate new ideas and suitable components. They could write at a slow rate of speed and use appropriate word orders in English grammatical systems. They could express particular meanings in different grammatical forms. Interestingly they could become aware of other grammatical rules such as comparative forms of adjectives and new syntactical orders in sentence level like passive voice, when clauses, modal verbs (e.g. be able to, need to, will, would, should, must, etc.), relative pronouns/clauses (e.g. who, that, etc.) and learn how to combine them without any grammatical explanation from the lecturer. They could enjoy using cohesive devices (such as because, but, and, therefore, due to, because of, thanks to, such as, etc.), adverbs (e.g. early, sligh[t]ly, especially, very often, before, previously, initially, really, commonly, usually, etc.) and
conjunctions (*e.g.* both ... and, and, etc.) which they did not exactly learn during the face-to-face courses in the content and scope of the formal curriculum.

In the macro level, the learners could use rhetorical forms and conventions of written discourses such as description and argumentation to support their ideas. They took advantage of communicative functions of the written texts. They could convey links and connections between the main ideas, supporting ideas and new information by means of linking words like *such as*, *also*, *and*, etc. They could distinguish between the literal and implied meanings. For example, one of the participants wrote that “*People in the future go wrong ways.*” They could use culturally specific references. For instance, a participant attracted attention to a common belief for the use of Internet by noting that “*Because evil thoughts can appear harmful information causes harmful habits [habits].*” They could develop writing strategies such as using paraphrases, synonyms and feedback for revising. For example, one of the peers paraphrased information dealing with extinction of animals by writing that “*Many animals were extinct before the appearance of the first generation of people. The causes of both people and nature is located. For example, Anatolian tiger is extinct killed in 1970.*”

The participants noted numerous grammatical and syntactical mistakes such as subject-verb disagreements, tense disagreements, misspellings, missing punctuations, sentences without subjects or verbs, etc. It was frequently realized that they focused more on negotiations to find out the information and meaning appropriate for the content/context which helped them express their ideas effectively. Therefore, it seems that finding correct forms became of secondary importance for the peers.

Vocabulary and knowledge transfer from the earlier reading passages were dramatically very limited and the peers preferred to find out new ways and information to improve their writing. The transfer from Turkish language was however little visible. For example, some of the language transfers by the participants are listed below.

> “The age limit should be.”
> “People doing asosyel.”
> “People in the future go wrong ways.”
> “[...] can suggest; Facebook, Twitter, Oyyla, Messenger, Digg, Myspace, tumblr, sour dictionary, Moodle, oxford İngilizce testing, gmail, yahoo, skype [...]”
> “Çetles to enter the sites we find new sites to new places.”

One of the participants, who lived in Germany for some time, used German counterparts such as follows below for English words.

> “people speaking out their family mıt mobıle phone mıt computer”
> “The people think is teginology for selfbest lıves”

5.2. Close Look at Aspects of LLS

The second question was about to what extent online materials are efficient on language learning processes of the students having different LLS. The participants with different LLS evidently spent prominent effort to deal with the learning problems and completion of the tasks on time. The participants with AS noted an
average, which is not less than 11.67 for each aspect and those with MEM S recorded not less than 9.00 while the participants with SS scored not less than 6.29. All of the participants spent 8.61 minutes to complete the writing tasks on average (see Graphs – 1 and 2 in Appendix – 3). As it can be inferred from the Graphs on LLS and session based averages, the participants got different averages depending on their numbers, which provided promising idea about their real performance of collaborated writing during the online course.

The third question was investigating whether participants could use their superior LLS for specific collaborative writing tasks in an online environment. Although it was comparably challenging to diagnose these strategies in the written plain texts in a short time, it could be determined in the dialogues that they produced while producing the language patterns in English. The peers noted real engagements to plan and organize the paragraphs together. For example, the participants with SS wrote the following sentences in the chat-box of EtherPad:

\[14:23\] P15: nasıl yapıcaz fatih [how shall we do that fatih]
\[14:24\] P20: ben sen cumleleere a baktım yanlış bıse yok ki [I have checked your sentences, there is nothing wrong]
\[14:25\] P15: dur anladım 1 dakika biz cevapları kendimiz sıra halinde yazmışız ya öyle olmuyacak senin 1. Sorunla benim 1.Sorunu birleştirmecez galiba [stop I got it, a minute we wrote the sentences in an order, it is not like that, apparently we should combine your and my responses for the first question]

They supported each other to produce meaningful and useful ideas to use in their paragraphs. More importantly, they frequently asked questions to understand each other and introduce their own knowledge. The following dialogue between peers with SS shows that they did not tend to move forward without being certain about what is asked.

\[15:07\] P11: 2. Soru nesli tükenmekte olan hayvanlar içim neler yapabiliriz diyo demi [the second question asks that what we can do for extinct animal, doesn’t it?]
\[15:12\] P15: evet [yes]
\[15:13\] P11: 3 soruda ne diyo [What does the third one ask?]
\[15:15\] P15: 4. Soruyu anladın mı ? [Did you get the fourth question?]

The fourth question was on the transfer of knowledge by the participants over different tasks and skills. The platform allowed them to benefit from peer learning for certain contexts. They were able to organize, plan and write what they thought about the writing topics by cooperating to each other. It seemed that the LLS supported participants to transfer their knowledge. The participants often visited other websites and online dictionaries such as Google-translate, Tureng, etc. to find out new information and potential words suitable for the context. They enjoyed writing collaboratively when especially they built up the correct and full sentences to share and brainstorm their ideas. For example, a peer of the participants came up with the dialogue below in the third session of the course:

\[15:07\] P18: Başlığın Türkçesi nedir ? [What does that title mean in Turkish?]
\[15:07\] P6: Nesliiniz tükenmesin gibi birşey :) [something like "no extinction"]
\[15:07\] P18: Hayvanlanların nesi tükenmesin diye gibi birşey . [something like "no extinction of animals"]
The participants evidently did not always tend to use the information belonging to the online course contents and prior face-to-face courses but interestingly tried to use new meanings, forms and data that they found out over Internet. It was also observed that they divided some tasks into parts and tried to perform individually particularly when they found out new information to construct the paragraph. The participants tended to use particular language patterns to encourage their peers to take turns. By that way they decreased the level of anxiety and stress while working collaboratively to arrange and exchange information. They strictly followed a sequential way while completing the tasks. Also, they checked their productions and provided positive feedback for each meaningful pattern. One of the examples by the participants with SS for that condition is as follows:

> Nesli tükenen hayvanları korumak, ilk olarak yalnızca belirli kuruluşların, kurumların görevi değil; dünyayı seven ve doğasına sahip çıkmak isteyen her bilişli kişinin yapması gereken bir şeydir [Initially, to save extinct animals is not only the task of definite institutions but also it is something that every conscious person, who loves the world and wants to protect nature, should do.]

The last question was seeking if there is prominent difference among the participants with different LLS in terms of their SOCW performance. The analysis proved that those participants with MEM S dramatically decreased their performance in participation in paragraph production and number of produced sentences as well as the time spent while the ones with SS notably increased their performance in all aspects and particularly in participation and time spent. Most of the other participants with AS and MET S noted very fluctuating results but the ones with COG S and COM S had almost very low and stabilized averages in participation in paragraph production and the number of produced sentences (See Graphs 3, 4, and 5 in Appendix – 3).

As a consequence of the data by the participants, it is undoubted that their four-week-long experience with online materials helped them become aware of their
potential learning strategies. Clearly, they had positive tendencies towards the online learning environment and took promising positions to each other to create encouraging dialogues. Particularly they attempted to learn by themselves and work together to come up with better performance for each task. They markedly tended to realize learning processes based on exploration of new knowledge and structures, curiosity and willingness to cooperate.

6. Discussion

It seems that new technologies always put new burdens both on the teachers and learners. Both sides should now pay much more attention to support each other outside the classrooms, and take responsibilities to teach and learn independent of exams and certificates. There are serious arguments about the efficacy of the online learning, which was mentioned by Vardi (2012) and Herold's (2015). However, as a result of detailed observations and data from the current study, it can be inferred that integrating collaborative online materials is efficient on language learning processes of these participants with different LLS. The volunteered participants made a considerable effort and time to complete the online tasks and collaborate with their peers to learn further.

It became obvious that the language that the participants used to communicate to each other and to build up linking paths between their ideas and possibly learning strategies was very informative in terms of visualizing their superior LLS. The data from the participants' performance supported definition of LLS in Oxford's classification table, in that the participants with SS noted visible online collaboration and an increasing performance during the research. It seems that it is a promising idea and teaching strategy to make learners with different LLS to work together and to enable them to improve their LLS through SOCW activities. Therefore, some learners could use their superior LLS for SOCW in the online environment.

The analysis of the texts by the participants inferred that the participants often focused more on linking appropriate 'meaning' with 'forms'. They could express their ideas and form their paragraph planning and organizations by means of these new forms that they needed to convey what they wanted. Lynch's (2004) foresights about using online materials is reportedly correct, and the participants noted a lot of learning processes, which directed them to be as autonomous as possible by working together. Presumably, online learning is of a unique role to play in being autonomous learners because it creates a short and visible path for them to go beyond learning over “classically and ideologically standardized or ready-made curricula designed by the state and curriculum developers” (Apple, 2012, p. 188-200) who may not know enough about students' individual needs and LLS.

As Ellis (2008) and Ellis and Widdowson (2003) report, the personal and situational factors such as individual differences (e.g. age, gender, attitudes, personality types, earlier educational experience), motivation, the type of task given had determining parts to play in the use of LLS among the participants, and indeed the observations
showed that the peers effectively transferred specific knowledge through online collaborative tasks. The participants often managed to employ their superior LLS and reconstruct the system of their thoughts according to their needs.

The correlation between second/foreign language proficiency, success and LLS was highlighted in the study. Also, online collaborative learning without any ground for formal grading, stress and anxiety provided an autonomous learning experience with higher motivation. Admittedly, the participants made various grammatical and lexical mistakes due to perhaps their low level of language knowledge and missing adequate educational experience; however, they cooperated to overcome these mistakes and encouraged each other.

 Needless to say, learning how to write may take very long time and need a lot practice for usual learners as Howe (2000) clarifies. Unlike, EtherPad’s synchronous platform enabled adequate flexibility for the participants to collaborate, think over and over before producing words, sentences and paragraphs in a short time. The data came up with the idea that the learners with different LLS could simply use their LLS according to the learning tasks and their needs depending on the conditions. The active interaction between the peers developed initial engagements on the online platform. As a result, the participants spent considerable effort to learn new words, investigate and practice new grammatical rules through EtherPad’s chat-box and real-time word editor.

Savignon (2000) states that “communication cannot take place in the absence of structure, or grammar, a set of shared assumptions about how language works, along with willingness of participants to cooperate in the negotiation of meaning” (p. 79). Moreover, Nunan (2001) remarks that acquiring a language goes through engaging in communication. Savignon and Nunan’s arguments cannot evidently be dissociated from a) learning environment, b) teaching materials used, c) position of the teacher and, more importantly, d) LLS which should necessarily and consciously be considered. The participants got positive feedback from each other and invested on improving their LLS in every session of the online course. Actually, they both cooperated and combined their LLS to deal with the learning problems and to write proper responses according to the given questions. The graphs provided some significant hints about the participants changing performance within sessions even though the initial graphs may not seem that informative. The data from their average scores indicated that certain participants with MEM S and SS behaved in different ways and SS came up with increasing performance levels when compared to other participants. This may refer that the participants with SS can integrate themselves into online environments and benefit from learning process in a more effective way. Also, the average scores showed that the participants with other different LLS may need more support in order to improve their skills and knowledge.

Vardi (2012) and Herold’s (2015) allegations about the efficacy of online materials, exam and certificate based programs fail to notice if the online course contents are designed according to learners' needs, learning strategies or not, which will evidently
cause changes in traditional learning habits in a short-term application as the current study proves. Even though tests and exams are taken as encouraging and motivating assessing tools for learners, they might also cause negative wash-back on future learning if the learners internalize and remember incorrect answers as free of error items (Howe, 2001). Additionally, in his study on the perspectives of foreign students enrolled as full time students without any needs analysis and professional assistance at a Turkish university towards distance education platform and tools, Coşar (2015) reveals that foreign students face many challenging situations including, integration problems, absence of curricula in their mother language or in English and real 'interactions with their peers' while using distance education system of the university. Blackboard and Project Tomorrow's report alleges that “the ultimate innovative learning environment for today's student is therefore not predicated on the availability or access of emerging digital tools, but more importantly on the effective utilization of those tools to fulfill this student vision”. Integration of online contents and digital tools into teaching is not an 'event' but a very 'sophisticated process” (p. 12).

Savignon (2001) mentions that the teaching programs, which have been successful, always considered affective and cognitive aspects of language learning, and they covered psychological and intellectual capacities of the learners. Responses from the participants, their positive attitudes towards the learning environment and goal-oriented self-regulation considerably espoused what Savignon means. In their study on students' conceptions of OCW Limbu and Markauskaite (2015) conclude that “a large number of participants saw OCW as a task to produce a written document, that is, to demonstrate what they already know or are capable of doing rather than learning.” (p.404). However, task and skill based SOCW in the current study substantially provided an important ground for scaffolding and enabled the participants strengthen their motivation for coordination and learning over collaboration.

Various studies just focus on user attitudes and other aspects such a design of collaborative writing environment and feedback issue (Guasch et al., 2013; Kim & Eklundh, 2001; Limbu & Markauskaite, 2015) but language learning outcomes of the participants remain comparably unclear. These studies are also limited to user conceptions and perspectives, experimental research on what the learners actually learn through collaborative writing are missing. By the current study, the participants were put at the center of learning processes and particularly encouraged to use their LLS. The study largely clarified the link between the efficacy of online materials, especially SOCW, and quantity and quality of learning outcomes.

In their study, Kim and Eklundh (2001) observed the collaborated documents were mostly under control of a single person. It was also a situation what the participant tended do but was not that frequent because of the design of EtherPad’s editor in the current study. Mostly the participants managed to produce their works in an appropriate mutual context that they attained while doing practices. The participants mostly shared some very new phrases, collocations and verbs with prepositions (such
as to be under danger, in danger of, harmful for, dangerous for, make it easy, do research) with each other according to the topics. All these may indicate that they can transfer the knowledge from skill to another under the conditions they were provided during the online courses.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

All in all, there happens a boom in the integration of technology into learning environments in the last decades. Several issues such as collaboration, communication, creative and critical thinking over technologically supported tools are on the agenda of the learners, teachers, researchers and curriculum developers. For that purpose, increasing numbers of learners are getting into contact with different online contents on the Internet.

However, there are still ongoing discussions about the use of online materials. Some of the researchers criticize the way of representing online contents without regarding learner's needs and motivation. Nevertheless, supply and demand equilibrium came up with radical changes in terms of the positions the teachers, learners and design of the curricula. The studies on LLS have also contributed a lot to the field and the current study has been a research on the efficacy of online materials and LLS used for particular tasks over the online environment. According to the results mentioned in detail above it supported the idea that online materials and platforms can effectively be implemented by the learners with different LLS. In addition, the learners could particularly improve certain LLS and benefit from autonomous learning while experiencing SOCW tasks but it obviously needs more experimental studies to prove whether learners with certain superior LLS could switch on the other LLS depending on type of the tasks and activities while learning language via online platforms. However, the difference in the performance of certain participants with different LLS illustrated that such attempts for online learning can simply be used to diagnose changes among LLS and manipulate their learning processes in order to help them improve their particular language learning skills.

Perhaps one way to cope with these non-intended outcomes and low performance from learners, called as digital natives nowadays, is to let them use their learning strategies flexibly and cooperatively by means of creating online platforms presenting challenging, problem or topic-based tasks that they could work together to think critically and organize accordingly. To put it differently, the learners should be encouraged to take advantage of specific and superior LLS by their peers and teachers as their partners while learning English because without no doubt there is a close link between strategy use and learning processes. The learners may also benefit from such online systems encouraging them for cooperative learning process as well as transferring knowledge interchangeably in different skills and learning new language structures without facing negative face from the lecturers and classmates in any classroom atmosphere. In this sense, we think that the study may contribute to the field and provide new perspectives for potential learners and teachers.
Acknowledgements

We hereby declare that this study is our unaided work and that this paper has not been submitted for any other degree or award before. This research was financially supported by TÜBİTAK in scope of National Scientific Meetings Grant Programme. The paper is an open access study and can be accessed by all interested researchers, teachers and learners. All participants of the study were signed a consent form confirming their voluntary contributions, and their demographic data and ID were anonymously kept in the paper. The participants were not given any grade or reward for their attendance. For all materials including SILL survey, EtherPad platform, and course materials by Breaking News English necessary information about the scope and aim of the research was given for the owners of original works, which were mentioned in the bibliography. Permissions were taken for SILL survey and course materials by Breaking News English. And those materials were not used for commercial purposes but for only the current academic research. We hereby thank all voluntary participants and Çetin Kolkaya, M.A., Deniz Büyüker, B.A. and Adriana Ferreira R.S. Silva, B.A. for their unique contributions, feedback and comments about the paper.

References


Appendix A.

Table – 1: The List of the Participants with Different LLS and Language Knowledge

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Num.</th>
<th>PART A</th>
<th>PART B</th>
<th>PART C</th>
<th>PART D</th>
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<th>PART F</th>
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<th>Level of English Knowledge</th>
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<td>Affective</td>
<td>Social</td>
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<td>2.2</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Appendix B.

Screen-shot – 1: Warm – up Questions
Screen-shot – 2: Pre-Reading Activity

Screen-shot – 3: Reading Activity

Galapagos tortoises out of danger

Giant Galapagos tortoises were in danger. There were only 15 of them in the 1960s. They were dying because wild goats ate their food. Conservationists helped them. Now, there are over 1,000 living in the wild. It is a success story for nature. Many tortoises can now live without our help.

There were 250,000 giant tortoises 500 years ago. Hunters almost killed them all. Giant tortoises can weigh 250kg and live for 100 years. One lived for 170 years. Giant tortoises live very simple lives. They can nap for 16 hours a day. Next year, a small island will get 200 tortoises. This could be another success story.

Adapted from: http://www.breakingnewsenglish.com
Screen-shot – 4: Listening Activity

Screen-shot – 5: EtherPad Links for Groups
Screen-shot – 6: SOCW Task, Corrective and Suggestive Feedback

Week 3:
Question: There are lots of animals in danger and will soon disappear. Should people help them survive? How can you help them live? Think about the following points, give some examples and details about these animals, and work with your partner and write a paragraph including at least 10 (ten) sentences. You have 45 Mins.

- What animals are in danger?
- What can you do to help them?
- Do you agree that all animals live long on the world?
- How can technology help people to survive animals?

Corrected Paragraph and Feedback

DONT LET THE ANIMALS DIE
Natural habitat of animals is disappearing because people restrict the habitats of animals. Many of them are killed by people. For example, gorillas, sumatran tiger and black-footed ferrets now are the extincted these animals. Therefore they do not live long because they are seriously damaged by people. These animals that are endangered should be taken into legal protection. I think those people, who do harm to the animals, should be given heavy penalties to stop that. Also, we need to educate people for the endangered animals. Technology can be used for the benefit of animals. For example, programs can be written to educate people. Information about such endangered animals can also be shared over the internet.

Feedback: Good and informative paragraph. Pay attention to use the correct form of passive voice. For example, "auxiliary verb+ed" can be done, can be used, can be written, should be done, etc.

Screen-shot – 7: Sample of Separately Written Paragraph

Week 3:
Question: There are lots of animals in danger and will soon disappear. Should people help them survive? How can you help them live? Think about the following points, give some examples and details about these animals, and work with your partner and write a paragraph including at least 10 (ten) sentences. You have 45 Mins.

- What animals are in danger?
- What can you do to help them?
- Do you agree that all animals live long on the world?
- How can technology help people to survive animals?

Name & Surname: P17
Name & Surname: P4
Date: 22.05.2015

DONT LET THE ANIMALS DIE
Disappearing natural habitat of animals killed by people. The harm to the animals should give heavy penalties. They do not live long because they were damaged by people. Technology used for the benefit of animals. For example programs can be done to educate people. Cross river gorilla, sumatran tiger, black-footed ferrets the extinction of these animals are sold out today. Animals that are endangered should get legal protection. We have to hunt them. We need to educate people for the endangered animals. I dont think no, because people restrict the habitats of animals. We need to educate people from the pupilch. Information about the animal world should share the internet.
Screen-shot – 8: Sample of Collaboratively Written Paragraph

Think about the following questions and points, and write a paragraph with examples and at least 10 sentences. You have 45 min.

Do you think on-line materials are really useful for students and teachers? Why?
- What type of web-site do you use most to learn something?
- What topics do you frequently search on web-sites?
- Do you know any useful web-sites to recommend your friends?

Name & Surname: P12
Date: 39.05.2015

I think applying the theory also allows the rest of the information allows the practice becomes easier and quicker pouring education. This enables quick access and benefits due to the convenience. I use to be aware of current events. I benefit from following the blog author. Watch the volleyball match, investigate my homework, keep track of school sites, watch movies, listen to music as I do many things. Research is done on the news on the Internet. History to access information about. Follow the course Artistic utilizing to read articles from blogs. Investigate the area of the city, investigate issues related to the Project are available to do research on health issues. Social internet networks can suggest, Facebook, Twitter, Oyyla, Messenger, Digg, Myspace, tumblr, sour dictionary, Moodle, oxford ingilizce testing, gmail, yahoo, skype, instagram, whatsapp. Pp of such pages and applications can be provided with the necessary surveys and communications.

Appendix C.

Graph – 1

LLS Based Averages

Graph – 2
Graph - 3

Session Based Averages

Graph - 4

Session Based Number of Produced Sentences
Graph - 5

Session Based Time spent for Paragraph

AS  MEM S  COG S  SS  COM S  MET S

Session – 1
Session – 2
Session – 3
Session – 4

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Students' Perceptions of the use of a YouTube channel specifically designed for an Academic Speaking Skills Course

Seher Balbay a *, Selcan Kilis b

a Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey
b Giresun University, Giresun, Turkey

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Abstract
Advancements in information and communication technology have revolutionized the notion of teaching and learning in terms of strategies, context, and methods. One of the most remarkable tools used in teaching and learning in the 21st century is YouTube, especially in language education. The literature demonstrates the need for elaboration of the use of YouTube in university level language skills education settings. In the 2016-2017 academic year a YouTube channel with a variety of supplementary material videos, was used in the Academic Speaking Course offered to all departments at Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey. The channel has course-related content input, sample presentations and tasks displaying the expectations of the course, in addition to conversation opening content. This study aims to investigate students’ experiences and perceptions towards the use of this YouTube channel. The study was conducted on 70 students taking the compulsory Academic Speaking Skills course offered to students from varying disciplines in Middle East Technical University. Students were asked to fill out a Google Sheets survey at the end of the course on their perceptions on the benefits and drawbacks of the aforementioned YouTube channel. The data was analyzed based on both descriptive statistics and deductive content analysis. The results indicated that the majority of the students benefited to a large extent from the videos on the playlists of this specifically-designed supplementary material YouTube channel. The findings can contribute to further guiding university language instructors by suggesting the abundance of alternative ways to benefit from YouTube and similar online video source platforms.

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Keywords: YouTube; tailor-made playlists; online videos; academic presentations; language education

1. Introduction

1.1. The wind of change in education

Technology has entered every walk of our lives. In most of the revolutionized classrooms of today one can observe smartboards, or at least projectors and computers becoming indispensable. Moreover, teaching and learning is not limited to physical
schools and classrooms today. We are in an age where smart phones are the source of either information directly, or guidance when needed for our digitally-oriented young adult students at universities. This being the case, in this digital era, it is not surprising that the literature has repeatedly focused on the motivational effects of the uses of online technology, in language classrooms, as well as the practical solutions of giving feedback on students’ performance or progress especially through the use of Web 2.0 tools. So, today, the responsibility of a language teacher is to make the most efficient use of these tools, this technology in general, that is available. Among these tools, videos play a major role in language classrooms. The use of videos became popular in the beginnings of the 21st century as students started spending more time with audiovisuals than with printed material. To supply videos, YouTube was and still is the most used website ever, since the spread of the internet in the 1990s. In this context, the use of videos in the English language classroom has long been the focus of many research projects.

Although using YouTube videos in the English classroom is not uncommon, a course-specific channel with playlists created to supplement the course book and the curriculum is unprecedented in the literature. This particular study focuses on the use of a YouTube channel specifically designed for the Academic Speaking Skills course, which is offered to about 1200 students every semester at Middle East Technical University. The study aims to find out the reflection of students on the use of the extra course material on this channel. The Academic Speaking Skills course is offered by the Modern Languages Department (MLD) to students of all departments as a required course. The idea of launching a channel first came up as a result of the questionnaire sent out to the instructors teaching the course which was investigating the weaknesses of the already available Academic Speaking course materials and the course in general. This mini-scale needs analysis revealed a need for video materials to supplement the course. Hence, to compensate for the missing video materials component of the course, a YouTube channel with 15 different playlists was launched to be used as supplementary course material in Academic Speaking Skills. The videos comprise course-related content input, sample presentations and tasks displaying the expectations of the course, listening and note taking practice exercises, in addition to conversation opening content. Throughout the two semesters that the instructors were asked to use the material on the channel, instructors were given guidance as how to incorporate the channel into the already existing course content on a regular basis during departmental meetings. The video input that students could also access, that is the animated input videos, listening soundtracks, brainstorming or schemata-activating videos were created parallel to the themes of the course book, ‘The Compass’ by Nuans Publishing House. The primary aim was to meet the needs of the students who were expected to present in a specific predetermined structure, which is unprecedented in the already available videos online. Thus, when preparing the videos and developing the channel, the intention was firstly, to clarify the expectations of the rubrics used to evaluate the presentations. The assumption was that the expectations of the presentations required in the course were better
understood by the students when example presentations were played and analyzed in class, and evaluated with a critical perspective in classroom discussions. It was considered to be much easier to clarify the expectations from the students with the sample presentations available on this course specific channel. The secondary aim of the channel was to provide input and content-related videos which are likely to initiate and facilitate debate and discussions in this speaking-oriented course. This paper focuses on students’ perceptions on the effectiveness of the creation, selection and use of these supplementary course material videos in the Academic Speaking Skills course. In this paper, firstly, an overview of the use and perception of videos, and specifically YouTube in the language classroom research will be given; next, the methodology of the research of this study will be described; and finally the results of the research will be discussed. This research is especially significant since the educational literature has an abundance of research on the use of videos or YouTube, yet, it lacks studies on YouTube channels designed to supplement course material in a language skills course. This unexplored area will be the main contribution of this study to the existing literature.

1.2. Videos in language classrooms

The prominent role of information technology in education on a large scale is undeniable. Information technology applications in education are diverse. Online video sharing platforms are becoming more pervasive every day, especially in language education. The European Commission, in its report that dates back to even 2013, states that the number of schools that make active use of online networks is increasing steadily. Not surprisingly, this progressively acquired role of educational technology has captured the attention of practitioner teacher researchers. The study that dwells on the effect of these new online applications on achievement reports that although such technology, per se, would not suffice to enhance student achievement, with the right practice of incorporating technological tools, a positive difference can be made in the quality of education (OECD as cited in Comi, Argentin, Gui, Origo, & Pagani, 2017).

Video strips were used in language education as early as World War II (Hovland, Lumsdaine & Sheffield, 1949). Ever since then, videos have become a major technological tool in language education. For example, Perez, Peters, and Desmet’s (2017) study focuses on the effect of exposure to YouTube videos on L2 vocabulary acquisition. In their research on vocabulary learning through video viewing they report that participants’ vocabulary size was directly related to the inferencing skills they developed by using the context in the videos they were exposed to. Similarly, Chun and Pluss (1996) studied the effects of multimedia annotations on vocabulary acquisition, bearing in mind that vocabulary acquisition has revealed that ‘words associated with actual objects or imagery techniques are learned more easily’, in their study in which 160 German students participated by using a program which helped students with guessing the new words by videos in addition to pictures. The positive effect of the visuals effect on learning vocabulary was and has been undeniable.
Although vocabulary is the mainstream focus of much English Language teacher research, comprehension in general is enhanced when using videos in the language classroom. Mohsen (2016) elaborates on the use of video simulations to examine the students’ comprehension and incidental vocabulary learning. Forty-three Arab adult learners, in their study, participated in a virtual knee surgery simulation by dragging various surgery devices, which were shown in the clip, over the knee of a patient. Interactive video ‘games’ are found to be significantly influential in the participants’ comprehension in addition to vocabulary learning.

Studies have also focused on the relationship between using videos as educational tools and public speaking, which is directly relevant to the focus of this current study. Lee and Liang (2012) investigated the effect of great speech footages (available online) in relation to students' cognitive speech difficulties in public speaking. They state that videos do play a significant role in teaching public speaking, since today, literacy comes in varying forms, and is not limited to text-based literacy only. Even more, it is reported in their article that observation of presentations helps students understand the constructs of public speaking, such as ‘hand and arm movements, head nods, head gestures, facial expression, dress, posture, the details of the environment’. Speech delivery, too, can be discussed by students through these videos. About half of the playlists of the Academic Skills Course YouTube channel are allocated to student presentations, bearing in mind the same rationale. They also emphasize the importance of the selectiveness of the instructor when choosing videos, in their words: ‘when used at the right time and place, audiovisuals exert positive contributions to language learning’. Today, the selection of videos can be categorized in playlists which also helps students and teachers to make reference to the videos easily, since playlists can be given self-explanatory names of their content, such as ‘Discussion Videos for the Mind Theme’ or ‘Science and Technology Presentations’, or ‘Presenting Numerical Data’ in the Academic Speaking Course YouTube channel (http://bit.ly/211youtube).

In their article about YouTube and language learning, the researchers refer to some weak features of the videos available online, such as poor sound quality and pronunciation mistakes and slang language used (Ghasemi, Hashemi, & Bardine, 2011), which makes it clear why a channel with supplementary materials can benefit students much more than making use of already available videos on YouTube. The instructor can prepare the channel with decent and good quality videos that are directly relevant to the course being taught. Ghasemi, Hashemi, and Bardine refer to the ease of adaptability of sources on YouTube, which is very significant since the profile of students at any educational institution is changing with the penetration of new information technologies to educational centers every day.

Another characteristic of YouTube videos is that they can be co-creative. Jenkins and Dillon (2013) report their study in which they have students explore a concept through student presentations broadcast on YouTube and have their students do peer critique. The students were expected to work in groups of four and present for 1-4 minutes. It is reported that the collaborative knowledge they created by receiving constructive feedback from each other regarding their presentations proved to be very
beneficial. Similarly, some of the videos in the Academic Speaking Skills course channel were co-created. Students either worked in groups to shoot commercials, to add voiceover on the muted movie scenes, or presented in groups.

Yet another asset of YouTube is that it is cost-effective. There is no limit as to the memory one can use online and viewing the videos is for free. Yagci (2014) in his article refers to this feature, and adds that YouTube is also a ubiquitous portal that is accessible anytime and anywhere. That is, for students to access the videos is very cheap and easy.

Although this paper studies the perception of a course-specific YouTube channel to serve a speaking course, the literature refers to its benefits to develop other skills, as well. Styati (2016) analyzed the effects of YouTube tutoring on developing students’ writing skills and found out that there is a significant difference between the students who were taught by using YouTube videos and those who were taught by using pictures. Interestingly, according to this research, the video-tutored students were found to have a lower writing performance. Apparently, visual and oratory skills are directly relevant to videos, and can be enhanced via YouTube, yet the same may not apply to other language skills, depending on the context and the practice.

YouTube videos can accommodate different learning styles, too. Depending on the abundance of strategies they are used with, they can appeal to students who have an infinite number of individual differences from one another. Duffy (2008) in his article explores how instructors can incorporate YouTube-like tools into the shifting pedagogical paradigm by emphasizing the changing nature of students as stakeholders. Duff defines students today, as ‘absorbing information quickly’, even at ‘twitch speed’. YouTube meets the need for on-demand access to the media of the ‘Nintendo generation’, accommodating to different learning styles in its social space because repetition of viewing the videos, using the free-frame technique, or developing listening or note-taking techniques at one’s own pace is possible with online videos. The ‘sound off’ technique lends itself to focus on body language, gestures, and visuals, as the videos can be ‘segmented’ and used to draw attention to the pronunciation of particular words; that is, varying teaching techniques are possible to address different needs. These techniques sit well with the understanding of the profile and context of the young generation in the digital age. Hwang (2010), too, dwells on the most and least used strategies by students when note-taking information, while watching YouTube videos. In Hwang’s study, the videos were mostly used to empower students’ listening proficiency. The results revealed that pause and rewind buttons on YouTube sites serve as functional and effective tools for learners when they need to make use of the concrete facilities in order to pick up particular details in a video.

Apparently, the positive spin-off of the ever-changing technological advancements is hardly a novel concept. Yet, in the literature, the research focusing on designing a channel to supplement a course is rare. Kelsen’s (2009) research is actually, one of those rare studies. Kelsen (2009) reports, that in the university English language course, the supplementary materials used from YouTube were found to be interesting.
relevant and beneficial. However, the students in Kelsen’s study rated YouTube supplementary materials less motivating when used in class compared to when used outside class. While the supplementary use of YouTube videos is limited, referring to these videos for content is more common. To provide solutions to the increasing demand for learning resources, YouTube has proven to be very effective. Alwehaibi (2015) in his research compared the difference between giving traditional content instruction in the classroom and giving it via YouTube, investigating ‘the impact of integrating YouTube technology into EFL instruction on enhancing EFL college students’ content learning’. He concluded that the outcome of the group of students who were given instruction via YouTube videos is promising for the integration of video technology.

As can be gathered from the literature review above, YouTube is a viable tool in education, and it seems to have penetrated into the classroom of the language teacher already as a motivational and inspiring tool both to develop strategies or to convey content.

There is no study in the literature which has analyzed the perceptions of the students of a course-specific YouTube channel with supplementary material videos for an academic speaking skills course. Therefore, this study is expected to make a significant contribution to the literature discovering students’ experiences and perceptions towards the use of the aforementioned channel. Moreover, this study opens new horizons for researchers, educators and instructors by triggering thoughts on new possibilities of using videos in the English classroom.

With this aim, this study revolves around three research questions which are:
1. What are the students’ experiences and opinions on the use of a YouTube channel used in the Academic Speaking Skills course?
2. What are the students’ insights on the effectiveness of videos used in the YouTube channel which is used in this course?
3. What are the students’ suggestions and comments about using this YouTube channel/ these videos in the Academic Speaking Skills course?

2. Method

2.1. Purpose of the study

This study aims to investigate students’ experiences and insights on the use of YouTube videos in a language education setting, in the Academic Speaking Skills course at Middle East Technical University. With this aim, it was designed as a ‘survey study’. The research was conducted with 70 students enrolled in the compulsory Academic Presentation Skills course offered by the Department of Modern Languages to students from varying disciplines. They were asked to fill out a paper-based survey and/or an online survey through the Google Forms at the end of the course to investigate their experiences and perceptions on the drawbacks and benefits of the aforementioned YouTube channel.
2.2. Context of the study

The study was conducted in the Academic Speaking Skills course in the 2016-2017 Academic year at one of the most prominent universities in Turkey, Middle East Technical University. The course in which this study was conducted is a compulsory speaking-oriented course designed with the aim of equipping students with the essential speaking skills they need to cope with the English language as a medium of instruction. The course revolves around two main focuses: academic speaking and presentation skills. To this end, the course offers a theme-based approach where all four skills are integrated to foster various speaking opportunities. Since the main focus of the course is on speaking, the listening, reading and writing tasks serve as a springboard to either generate or to complement speaking tasks. The emphasis is put on variety, language skills and the balance between input and practice throughout the course aim to help students become more confident, autonomous and competent speakers of English. The course is offered by about 20 instructors each semester based on the same course syllabus.

2.3 Research design

This study was designed as a survey study in which investigators administer a survey to a sample or population to describe the attitudes, opinions, behaviors, or characteristics of the population (Creswell, 2012). Its focus is directed more toward learning about a population and less on relating variables or predicting outcomes. It is used to describe trends, determine individual opinions, and provide useful information to evaluate course materials (Creswell, 2012; Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). This study is a type of survey study since it examines the participants’ experiences and opinions about the use of a YouTube channel in a language course. Specifically, this is a type of cross-sectional survey research design in which the data is collected at one point in time. Throughout the semester, a YouTube channel was used as a course supportive tool. The presentations, speaking task samples, animated videos, and extra listening practice material were prepared by the course instructors and students, and were uploaded to the channel. This specifically designed channel on YouTube in this study can be reached at https://www.youtube.com/user/seherbalbay.

2.4 Participants of the study

The set of participants in the study were mostly second year students from various departments who were taking the required course offered by the Department of Modern Languages (Freshman English) at Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey. The participants included 70 students (28 females, 42 males). They were selected based on the convenience sampling method, a type of nonprobability sampling method based on the criteria of being readily available, accessible, and willingness to participate (Creswell, 2012). The participants were informed that their participation was voluntary.
In accordance with the demographics of the participants, their age distribution is visualized in Figure 1. As can be seen in the figure below, they were mostly between the ages 21-24, followed by 17-20.

![Age distribution of the participants](image)

Of the 70 students, the majority of them were males (70%, n=42) while 28 of them (40%) were females. They were from different disciplines; the majority (69%) were from the Faculty of Engineering, followed by Arts and Sciences (16%), Economy and Administrative Sciences (10%), and lastly the Faculty of Education (6%). The subject characteristics including age, gender, and faculty information were presented in detail to provide and enhance external validity.

2.5 Data collection and analysis procedure

The participants were asked to fill out a paper-based survey (see Appendix) and/or online via Google Docs at the end of the course on their perceptions on the drawbacks and benefits of the YouTube channel specifically designed for the Academic Speaking Skills course. The data was collected from 70 volunteering students, and then analyzed with both descriptive statistics and deductive content analysis. The descriptive statistics were conducted via IBM SPSS version 23. Deductive content analysis was conducted by two researchers together to provide the correct interpretation.

Regarding the trustworthiness of the study, ethical rules were followed throughout the study in that, all of the participants were informed about the aim of the study, treated with respect, and their identities were kept confidential. The instrument used to collect data was reviewed by subject matter experts to ensure content validity. The following section presents the findings of this study.
3. Results

3.1 Students’ experiences and opinions on the use of YouTube channel

The findings of this study indicated that 41% of the participants (n=29) used YouTube/YouTube channel before in some course other than the Academic Presentation Skills course, while the remaining did not use it class at all. Students also added that they used YouTube before other than this course in the following courses: Calculus (n=12), Physics (n=9), language courses (n=2), computer programming courses (n=2), mechanical engineering courses (n=4), chemistry (n=3), industrial engineering courses (n=1), and aerospace engineering courses (n=1). 77% of them stated that they watched YouTube videos every day outside class, 16% stated ‘rarely’ and 7%, ‘only at weekends’. Their reasons to watch YouTube videos varied. Of those students, 58% of them watched YouTube videos for entertainment, 37% for educational purposes, 26% for improving their English level, and the remaining 8% for other purposes which includes listening to music (n=3), watching videos (n=3), being updated about news (n=1), and other educational purposes (n=3). The majority of the students (90%, n=63) think that the YouTube channel used in the Academic Presentation Skills course was beneficial. The descriptive statistics about the items in the survey are provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Students’ Experiences and Opinions about the Use of YouTube Channel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Likert-type Items</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1- Discussing the YouTube videos made class more interesting.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2- The YouTube videos used were relevant to course content.</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3- Using YouTube in class has been more effective than looking at slides.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4- The YouTube videos in class motivated me to practice presenting.</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>1.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5- The YouTube videos in class motivated me to watch more presentations than the ones in the playlists.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6- The YouTube videos used in class increased my participation in the classroom.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7- Using YouTube videos increased my comprehension of the lesson content.</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8- Watching 211 related YouTube videos in class had beneficial effects on developing my presentation skills.</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>1.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9- YouTube videos are a good source for practicing listening comprehension.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10- The videos we were asked to watch helped me improve my pronunciation and intonation.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11- If I were a teacher, I would use a YouTube channel/videos in my courses.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the results, as seen on table above, descriptive statistics indicated that students’ perceptions of the YouTube videos making the class more interesting has a mean score of 4.00 over 5.00 and standard deviation of 1.00. The findings also showed that their perceptions of the YouTube videos used was relevant to the course content (M=4.1, SD=1.13), the efficiency of YouTube videos over slides (M=4.00, SD=1.1), the motivation factor of the videos to practice presenting (M=3.8, SD=1.22), the motivating factor of the videos to watch more videos on the playlist/channel (M=4.00, SD=1.1), the increase in their participation in class by the videos (M=4.00, SD=1.22).
In addition, the findings indicated that according to their perceptions of the videos, the increase in their comprehension of the lesson content has a mean score of 4.10 over 5.00 and standard deviation of 1.16, whereas the benefit of the videos on the development of their presentation skills was (M=3.90, SD=1.12). Being a good source for practicing listening comprehension was (M=4.00, SD=1.00), the support by the videos to improve their pronunciation and intonation (M=4.00, SD=1.10), and the intent to use YouTube channel/videos in the courses if they were the teacher (M=4.00, SD=0.90).

3.2. Students’ insights on the effectiveness of videos used on the YouTube channel

Regarding students’ insights on the effectiveness of videos on the YouTube channel used in the Academic Presentation Skills course, in relation to the second research question, both most favored videos and overall evaluation of the videos were examined. The findings about the most favored five videos were presented in Table 2 with the percentage values.

Table 2. Students’ opinions about the most effective five videos/playlists

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Videos</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discussion videos</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 1 - Speech anxiety</td>
<td>%9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 1 - Magic Pill Erases Bad Memories video</td>
<td>%5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 2 - Good and bad examples of Graffiti on METU campus</td>
<td>%8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 2 - Preparing slides</td>
<td>%13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 2 - Life after death by PowerPoint</td>
<td>%13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 2 - Graffiti of Banksy</td>
<td>%10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 3 - Introduction and Conclusion examples from TED videos</td>
<td>%4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Presentations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 3 - Expensive wine is for suckers</td>
<td>%7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing presentations playlist</td>
<td>%12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science and Technology presentations playlist</td>
<td>%8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final presentations playlist</td>
<td>%10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In terms of their opinions about the five most effective videos/playlists, students’ responses varied. Among discussion videos, the videos titled ‘Presenting Slides’ and ‘Life After Death by PowerPoint’ were the highest percentages. Similarly, the video titles Marketing Presentations Playlist among student presentations was a higher percentage of all the student presentations. The findings clearly indicated that, there is no consensus about the most effective videos among the students.

With regard to overall evaluation of the videos on the YouTube channel, Table 3 displays the findings retrieved from 63 students’ responses.

Table 3. Students’ opinions about the videos used in YouTube channel
According to descriptive statistics, students’ opinions about the effectiveness of the video titled Unit 1 - Speech Anxiety has a mean score of 4.2 and standard deviation of .87, Unit 1 - Magic Pill Erases Bad Memories (M=4.1, SD=.84), Unit 2 - Good and bad examples of Graffiti on METU campus (M=4.6, SD=.83), Unit 2 - Preparing slides (M=4.4, SD=.89), Unit 2 - Life after death by PowerPoint (M=4.3, SD=1.1), Unit 2 - Graffiti of Banksy (M=4.5, SD=.9). The findings also indicated students’ opinions about the effectiveness of the video titled Unit 3 - Introduction and Conclusion examples from TED videos has a mean score of 4.7, and a standard deviation of .86, Unit 3 - Expensive wine is for suckers (M=4.4, SD=.93). Among the videos of students’ presentations, the video titled Marketing presentations has a mean score of 4.4 and standard deviation of .85, Science and Technology presentations (M=4.5, SD=.89), and Final presentations was (M=4.4, SD=.84).

3.3. Students’ suggestions and comments about using YouTube channel/videos

In order to have a better understanding of students’ insights on the use of YouTube videos, students were asked about their extra suggestions and/or comments in relation to the third research question. Of the participants, only 8 students made extra suggestions and/or comments. Their positive feedback or comments included “I liked it a lot. It’s a good idea.”, “I think usage of YouTube is relaxing”, and “It was so beneficial. I hope teachers should use it more recently.” In regard to their comments or suggestions, one student suggested that “Videos can be more professional. Final presentations can be filmed with professional cameras so that they can be analyzed easily.” On the other hand, another student wrote “Examples can be divided into good models and just sample presentations.” Other comments or suggestions included “More student presentations may be uploaded.”, “There can be more presentations which are presented by students that can be videotaped”, “Examples can be divided into examples and non-examples.”, and “It would be nice if there were more examples of presentations (especially about average presentations)”. Overall, the findings indicated that students mostly liked and benefited from the use of YouTube channel/videos in the Academic Presentations Skills course. They further asked for
the categorization of professional and average student presentation videos as 'models' and 'examples', etc. The next section of this paper includes the discussion and summarization of the results of this study.

4 Discussion and Conclusion

Although the literature includes a great deal of research reporting the benefits of using YouTube videos in the language classroom, studies on the perceptions of teachers and students are rare, and a study on custom-made playlists and a channel devoted to a course is unprecedented. The results of the study prove that it is an undeniable fact that university students today are already very familiar with YouTube, they watch videos for entertainment reasons and even when not required by instructors for learning and self-development reasons. The results of the research in this paper, too, agree with the general overview of the ‘digital generation’ whose resource for learning is primarily the online websites. Apparently, it is not uncommon for university students today to use YouTube videos in their courses. For the Academic Speaking Skills course, students definitely benefited from the videos because they helped bring about discussion topics in class by adding variety into course material which used to be merely the course book or slides. Moreover, the channel’s videos encouraged students to participate in class discussions. Motivation is one of the major contributions of the online material in general, which applies to the context of this study, too. Also, the videos clarified the course content and enabled user-friendly access to the new listening material prepared for the course. Last but not least, the student presentation videos were very helpful in clarifying the objectives of the expected presentations in the course.

One of the most important benefits of course material that is accessible online is that it helps students become autonomous. The results of the study clarify that students actively utilize this particular technology for learning outside the classroom too, which may change the teachers’ role in language and skills classrooms. In the context discussed, teachers still have a critical role to play. They make use of the YouTube playlists mentioned or refer their students to those playlists, hence promote autonomous learning with technology outside the classroom. Medaukali (2015) emphasized the importance of the availability of the online video material. Especially for extra listening and note-taking practice, the open access listening materials on the channel were welcome by the students, too. This is actually, the aspect of YouTube videos that appeals to different learning styles, lending itself to be used at students’ own pace (Duffy, 2008), to enhance different skills, even to promote writing as mentioned by Styati (2016).

Yagci (2014) emphasized the importance of low costs of using online videos too, which is what made the channel not only user-friendly but also ‘owner-friendly’. The channel was perceived to be accessible easily by students due to the fact that they were not required to log in to YouTube or subscribe to the channel. The channel is open to all. Ma (2017) refers to this feature of mobile learning technologies by defining
them as a ‘lens’ for students with which they capture the ‘personalized, unique, contextual and ubiquitous nature of mobile language learning’.

According to students’ perceptions, the most effective videos vary. There are animated input videos and there are moviemaker videos made up of pictures and music only, there are student presentations, and there are also already available videos on YouTube that are not created for the course. This implies that no single genre of videos stands out as being the most effective, and all the types were perceived to be beneficial, relevant and interesting by the students. They were motivated especially by the ‘student presentations’. The channel lets students see other students present thanks to the ‘collaborative and co-creative’ nature of online videos (Jenkins & Dillon, 2013). Some of the videos on the channel are of group work tasks, such videos are called ‘participatory videos’ in the literature (Yan, 2012). They are the products of a process in which participants work together. This contributed to the students’ team building and community building which are of utmost importance in a speaking skills class.

Mobile technologies are no longer a new form that mediates people’s language learning, but their tailored use to develop certain skills or to develop new course material is an emerging advance in education. The channel is becoming even more popular every day and more videos are being added. Its content is shaped by the constant feedback received from students and teachers of the course. Overall, the channel provided effective course material that the participants of the study appreciated. This study may open new horizons and trigger creative thought for future uses of YouTube in the language classroom.

One limitation of the current study may be that it was conducted in the first year the channel was launched. In the coming years, with more innovative ideas the channel will most probably serve its purpose to a greater extent. Further study may focus on making use of the properties that YouTube lends itself to, such as designing a task in which students can write comments about each other’s performances or products. Future research can also focus on the effectiveness of online training platforms to enhance both language skills and willingness of learners to engage in self-directed use of technology. How to make use of such supplementary material YouTube channels in language teaching and skills developing, can be explored to a greater extent in future research.

References


**Appendix A. Survey on the use of 211 YouTube Channel**

D1. Which department are you studying at?

D2. How old are you?
D3. What is your gender?
☐ Female  ☐ Male

A1. Have you used YouTube before in any course other than this one?
☐ Yes  ☐ No

A1.1. If YES, in which course(s)?
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................

A2. How often do you watch YouTube videos outside class? *
☐ Every day  ☐ Only at weekends  ☐ Rarely  ☐ Never  ☐ Other:

A3. Why do you usually watch YouTube videos? (You may choose more than one answer) *
☐ For entertainment  ☐ To improve my English  ☐ To improve my English  ☐ Other:

A4. Do you think the YouTube channel used in this course was beneficial? *
☐ Yes  ☐ No

A4.1. If YES, in which ways? (You may choose more than one answer)
☐ It made the expectations of the tasks clear in my mind.
☐ It made me aware of what not to do in the required tasks.
☐ It gave me ideas about possible topics for the required tasks.
☐ It gave me ideas about possible organization patterns for the required tasks.
☐ I was motivated thinking that my performance was not much different from the examples on YouTube.
☐ Other:
A4.2. If the YouTube channel was not beneficial for you, why not? (You may choose more than one answer)

- I was not sure which playlist to look at.
- I wasted my time looking at examples.
- I thought all the examples were good examples.
- Other:

Section 2: Please rate the following statements based on your agreement/disagreement level considering your experiences and opinions on the YouTube channel you were referred to in 211 (1: Strongly disagree, 2: Agree, 3: Neutral/Undecided, 4: Agree, 5: Strongly agree).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S1. Discussing the YouTube videos made class more interesting.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2. The YouTube videos used were relevant to course content.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>S3. Using YouTube in class has been more effective than looking at slides.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S4. The YouTube videos in class motivated me to practice presenting.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>S5. The YouTube videos in class motivated me to watch more presentations than the ones in the playlists.</td>
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<tr>
<td>S6. The YouTube videos used in class increased my participation in the classroom.</td>
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<tr>
<td>S7. Using YouTube videos increased my comprehension of the lesson content.</td>
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<tr>
<td>S8. Watching 211 related YouTube videos in class had beneficial effects on developing my presentation skills.</td>
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<tr>
<td>S9. YouTube videos are a good source for practicing listening comprehension.</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S10. The videos we were asked to watch helped me improve my pronunciation and intonation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S11. If I were a teacher, I would use a YouTube channel/videos in my courses.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

S12. Put a check next to the most effective five videos/playlists.

- [ ] Unit 1 - Speech anxiety
- [ ] Unit 1 - Magic Pill Erases Bad Memories video
- [ ] Unit 2 - Good and bad examples of Graffiti on METU campus
- [ ] Unit 2 - Preparing slides
S13. Please rate the YouTube videos you were referred to in 211 based on how effective you find them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit 1 - Speech anxiety</th>
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<td>Unit 1 - Magic Pill Erases Bad Memories video</td>
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<td>Unit 2 - Good and bad examples of Graffiti on METU campus</td>
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<td>Unit 2 - Preparing slides</td>
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<td>Unit 2 - Life after death by PowerPoint</td>
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<td>Unit 2 - Graffiti of Banksy</td>
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<td>Unit 3 - Introduction and Conclusion examples from TED videos</td>
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<td>Unit 3 - Expensive wine is for suckers</td>
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<td>Student Presentations - Marketing presentations playlist</td>
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<td>Student Presentations - Science and Technology presentations playlist</td>
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<td>Student Presentations - Final presentations playlist</td>
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<td>How NOT to make a presentation</td>
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S14. Finally, do you have any suggestions about using YouTube channel/ videos in this course?

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Effects of Retrieval Vocabulary Instruction on Academic Reading Comprehension

Kubra Saygili a *

aIstanbul Şehir University, Istanbul, 34662, Turkey

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore the effects of retrieval vocabulary instruction on academic reading comprehension of 40 participants at the School of Foreign Languages at Istanbul Şehir University. According to Barcroft (2015) retrieval vocabulary is defined as the learners’ ability to recall the words when they need to produce or use them accordingly. The independent variable is retrieval vocabulary instruction and the dependent variable is academic reading comprehension. A pre-test was administered in the first week of module in order to see the academic reading comprehension level of the participants. A treatment of retrieval vocabulary instruction was given for seven weeks. Later a post-test was administered in week eight so as to observe whether retrieval vocabulary instruction has any positive effect on academic reading comprehension or not. SPSS was used in order to analyze the data, and graphically detailed analysis of the reading comprehension tests are shown at the end. A Pair Sample statistics was used. The findings of the current study indicated that according to significance levels and the means of the both of the groups, it can be said that there is a significant change between two test scores taken at different times from the same groups of participants. Thus, it can be concluded that the treatment of the retrieval vocabulary instruction was beneficial for the participants since it increased their reading comprehension scores.

Keywords: Retrieval Vocabulary Instruction, Academic Reading Comprehension, Vocabulary Teaching, Vocabulary Instruction, Reading Comprehension

1. Introduction

1.1. Statement of the problem

This study aimed to explore the effects of “retrieval vocabulary instruction” on academic reading comprehension of 40 participants of the School of Foreign Languages at Istanbul Şehir University. The independent variable is retrieval vocabulary instruction and the dependent variable is academic reading comprehension. According to Grabe (2007), reading is defined as a perplexing ability to interpret, infer and construct sense or understanding from a text. Reading is the
combination of reciprocal procedures between the reader and the text. Reading is a number of interactive processes between the reader and the text, in which readers are required to utilize their insight to work, to make, and to build meaning (TESOL, 2017). Vocabulary has also different definitions in the literature of applied linguistics. According to TESOL, vocabulary can be defined as the expressions of a dialect which consists of single items and phrases or chunks of several words which convey a particular meaning.

Reading comprehension for C1 proficiency level of students is that ‘students can understand in detail lengthy, complex texts, whether or not they relate to their own area of specialty provided they can reread difficult sections (Council of Europe, 2001). Thus, the theoretical definition of the current study will be based on the above-mentioned definition. As for the theoretical definition of the vocabulary for C1 proficiency level of students the following definition will be considered; “Students have a good command of a broad lexical repertoire allowing gaps to be readily overcome with circumlocutions; little obvious searching for expressions or avoidance strategies. Good command of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms” (Council of Europe, 2001). As it can be understood, above mentioned are theoretical definitions of the current study. These are mentioned to define the variables of the study in a detail way and also to familiarize the reader with C1 reading proficiency level of students since the participants’ level is C1. As seen above, the significance of these operational definitions for the study is that it helps identifying theoretical constructs and develop multiple operational definitions of each. Illustrating the operational definitions also shows how the process is done.

There are different theoretical definitions for retrieval vocabulary instruction in the literature. Thorne (2016) states that there are some retrieval strategies that can be followed by language teachers. The strategies are as follows; Encoding and Retrieval Practice, Retrieval Cues and the Encoding Specificity Hypothesis, and Mnemonic Methods. The first one includes retrieval practice along with engaging in activities that are helpful for the recall of the stored words. To illustrate, using the previously learnt vocabulary in a sentence. The second one is related to the visual images along with the associations of the words. The last one, Mnemonic Method is related to the both visual imagery and verbal elaborations that will enable the learner to recall the vocabulary easily. The other recommended retrieval strategies; Association Strategy-Same-Sounds Cue, Familiar-Word Cue, are proposed by; German and Schwanke, (2009). Laufer (2005) suggested that note cards consist of part of speech, synonyms, antonyms, sample sentence is also beneficial for retrieval vocabulary instruction. Removal of the written input shared and split information tasks are thought to be found effective in retrieval vocabulary instruction (Nation, 2001).

There are also other notions related to retrieval strategies. According to Baddeley (1990), retrieval strategies help learners to enhance their vocabulary strategies in order to call for the production of words which are currently learned. Baddeley (1990) also discussed the types of retrieval words by defining them as receptive or productive. Baddeley emphasizes the significance of retrieval by stating that
simultaneous presentation of form and meaning do not help retrieval at all. Another
definition is put forward by Min (2013) suggesting that efficient input is always before
the efficient output. As it is cited in Barcroft (2015) retrieval vocabulary is defined as
the learners’ ability to recall the words when they need to produce or use them
accordingly. Barcroft (2015) also holds the opinion that retrieval is a cognitive entry
process for information which already exists in the individual brain. Furthermore,
this definition is related to the previous experience or knowledge of the learner.
Therefore, as mentioned before the significance of input and output are worth
discussing here once again. Lastly, as Takac (2008) states it is very important to
clarify retrieval vocabulary strategies for the knowledge of vocabulary since there is a
strong connection between the vocabulary knowledge and retrieval words. Another
significant issue worth mentioning is related to factors affecting the retrieval of
lexical items. Thus, Takac (2008) also notes that there are various factors that affect
the lexical item retrieval and its efficacy such as; acquiring time, cognitive abilities of
the learners, L2 level, and learning styles.

With regard to the reading comprehension theoretical definition, Grabe (2007)
claims that reading comprehension is the combination of various sub-components or
skills in order to identify the words effectively along with the word recognition. Grabe
(2007) also states that reading comprehension has a range of strategic processes and
underlying cognitive skills (e.g., setting goals, changing goals flexibility, and
monitoring comprehension) by interpreting and evaluating the text. Perfetti and
Stafura (2014) divided reading comprehension into two levels which are; situational
and text level. Previous literature attempted to define reading comprehension with
the same terms, but different interpretations of situation model and text model.
According to Grabe (2009), text model is defined as a combination of the information
with active meaning elements whereas situation model includes both explicitly
learned knowledge along with the prior knowledge. Thus, it can be said that situation
model has more engaging interpretation since it involves mental representations of
the reader. Another important theory for reading comprehension is the C-I
(Construction-Integration) theory which is about consolidation of both top-down and
bottom-up processes of reading (Kintsch, 1988).

1.2. Justification

It is known that reading comprehension and teaching vocabulary have been a
subject of many previous research. There are many studies in the literature on
reading comprehension/reading strategies and vocabulary but to date, there are not
many studies on academic reading comprehension along with retrieval vocabulary
instruction. To illustrate, Williams (2010) conducted a study with EFL learners in
Saudi Arabia to see if certain reading strategies are effective in terms of reading
comprehension. The findings of the study illustrated that there was no significant
relationship between the reading strategies and the level of reading comprehension.
As Chaury (2015) points out in meta-analysis study, strategy instruction on reading
comprehension for L2 was found to be significantly correlated regardless of the length of the treatment.

Numerous studies have also attempted to explore the effects of vocabulary learning through extensive reading. In Nation’s (2015) study, the significance of extensive reading was emphasized, thus the article aimed to explore the different set of vocabulary learning principles that affect extensive reading by indicating much informative knowledge regarding extensive reading. Senoo and Yonemoto (2014) conducted a similar study with Japanese participants in order to explore vocabulary acquisition via extensive reading. According to the findings of the Senoo and Yonemoto’s study, extensive reading was found to be beneficial when it is taught with specific vocabulary acquisition strategies. What makes this study unique is that it focuses on non-western languages rather than English or other western, European languages. Such studies, however, fail to address the academic reading comprehension along with retrieval vocabulary instruction. Thus, the reason why I wanted to conduct such a study is that most studies on reading comprehension are generally focused on general comprehension rather that academic. Hence, another important reason regarding why this study is conducted is to fill the gap in this field. Most of the previous literature generally focused on ‘vocabulary size, input and their effect on reading performance’ or ‘vocabulary acquisition and extensive reading’. The study that contributed to the field in the literature is conducted by Schmitt (2011). Schmitt’s (2011) study mainly focused on the size of vocabulary and its relationship with the text comprehension. Schmitt’s study was conducted with a large sample (611) who were from different educational contexts. The findings of Schmitt’s study indicated that there has been a continuous correlation between the known vocabulary and the reading comprehension. It can also be concluded from Schmitt’s (2011) study that when the percentage of known words in a text increases the level of reading comprehension increases as well. All these things considered above, these studies support the notion that reading comprehension is highly related and integrated with vocabulary learning.

1.3. Significance

The present study would hopefully be particularly valuable to both researchers and teacher-researchers whose educational context has a curriculum of teaching English in an academic context. The present study would also make several noteworthy contributions to the field by involving participants from a different educational background including both Turkish Arab students. Although thorough research has been carried out on reading instructions, reading comprehension, and vocabulary input, no single study is reported which explores the relationship between both academic reading comprehension and retrieval vocabulary instruction. Much of the current literature on reading comprehension paid attention to the specific reading strategies, learner styles, and their influence rather than academic reading comprehension and retrieval vocabulary instruction. As Brown, Waring, and Donkaewbua, (2008) presented in their papers, English vocabulary was closely related
to different learning strategies such as reading, while listening, story listening and so forth. The study also indicated the significance of incidental vocabulary learning which is tested via unprompted recall teaching techniques. Another similar study is conducted by Gürses and Bouvet (2016) in order to investigate the learning styles and reading comprehension of the students with regard to reading strategies. The Kolb Learning Style Inventory was taken into consideration in this study. Surprisingly there has been a negative correlation between learning strategies and reading comprehension both for Australians and Turkish participants. However, large sampled studies can be conducted related to the investigation of these two variables. It has commonly been assumed by many vocabulary experts (Hirsch, 2003, Chall & Jacobs, 2003) that readers should have knowledge of 90% of the words in the reading passage in order to have a high level of reading comprehension. That is to say, reading comprehension and the vocabulary levels are highly integrated and correlated with each other. Thus, the above-mentioned studies clearly indicate that there is a significant level of positive relationship between vocabulary and reading.

As previously mentioned, the existing literature on different reading strategies is detailed, but failed to address both academic reading comprehension and retrieval vocabulary instruction. The study to address to show the relationship between L2 reading comprehension and newly learned lexical items was conducted by Pulido (2004). In this detailed investigation of L2 reading comprehension and vocabulary, Pulido (2004) concluded that lexical achievement via written recall in their L1 had a positive role and relationship with regard to reading comprehension. However, it is important to clarify here that there was an effect of topic familiarity as well. A more comprehensive study by Hu and Nation (2000) included a different variable to their studies called 'unknown vocabulary density'. The purpose of Nation’s study is to make an attempt to illustrate the effect of unassisted reading for pleasure which means, the learners would not be interrupted to check the meanings of the unknown words during the reading process. The cue is given to participants via multiple-choice tests and written recall texts. Nation’s study has broken the tradition by including different concepts to the current study as mentioned above. The findings of the study showed that participants need to know 3% of the words in the passage so as to benefit from the unassisted comprehension of a text. Having mentioned the effect of assisted reading, Shen’s (2013) influential paper on the effect of dictionary use in EFL reading and vocabulary knowledge is worth discussing. In this study, Shen (2013) questioned and touched upon many significant things; such as vocabulary size, word knowledge, dictionary use and reading performance. The findings of the study indicate that the size of the vocabulary along with knowledge of vocabulary is positively correlated with reading comprehension, however according to his paper; knowledge of vocabulary has more positive impact than vocabulary size has with regard to reading comprehension. All studies reviewed here, clearly indicate that there is a relationship between reading comprehension and vocabulary knowledge/ vocabulary size.

1.4. Research Questions
This study aimed to explore the effects of retrieval vocabulary instruction on academic reading comprehension at the School of Foreign Languages at Istanbul Şehir University with the following research question below;

1. Does retrieval vocabulary instruction have an effect on academic reading comprehension?

1.5. Research Hypotheses

Retrieval vocabulary instruction has a positive effect on academic reading comprehension.

1.6. Limitations and Delimitations

The potential delimitation of this study could be related to the participants and sampling since there may be mortality at the end of the seventh week during the post-test.

2. Method

2.1. Participants:

Participants are 40 students at Istanbul Şehir University. They are selected following convenience sampling procedure from different sociocultural backgrounds. Their age ranges between 18 and 23 and their language proficiency is considered to be around C1 within the CEFR. In addition, STEP (Şehir Test of English Proficiency Exam), TOEFL are administered while assigning the students’ level at the beginning of the semester. There are also accepted exams by the School of Foreign Languages such as; TOEFL IBT, Cambridge ESOL, Cambridge BEC, Cambridge BULATS, TOEIC, SAT, ACT, U Michigan, GRE, CEF, PTE.

The detailed score range in these exams are as follows;

TOEFL IBT: 79 (no requirement for the band scores)
Cambridge ESOL: FCE-A
Cambridge BEC: Vantage-B
Cambridge BULATS: 70
TOEIC: 735
SAT Read&Wri.: 550
ACT Read&Wri.: 22
U Michigan: ECCE-C-650 (low pass)
GRE Verbal: 450 (old system) - 150 (new system)
CEF: B2
PTE Academic: 55
See Table 1 for clear and detailed background information of the participants.

Table 1: Background Information of the Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Related Information</th>
<th>Experimental Group (N=20)</th>
<th>Comparison Group (N=20)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Language</td>
<td>Turkish 18</td>
<td>Arabic 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department</td>
<td>Science/Technology 8</td>
<td>Social Science 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>School of Law 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.2. Procedure

The research for the current study lasted eight weeks. The pre-test is administered in the first week of the module in order to see the academic reading comprehension level of participants. Treatment of retrieval vocabulary instruction is given for seven weeks. The retrieval vocabulary instruction is given regarding the techniques given in the literature review. Laufer (2005) suggested that note cards consisting of part of speech, synonyms, antonyms, sample sentences are also beneficial for the retrieval vocabulary instruction. Removal of the written input shared and split information tasks are thought to be found effective in retrieval vocabulary instruction (Nation, 2001). Thus, the above mentioned techniques are used in the current study.

The PPTs or the flash cards are prepared before the class from the list of target Vocabulary. The PPTs have a wide range of information on them including synonyms, antonyms, sample sentences and part of speech. The PPTs are shown to the students at the beginning of the lesson every Friday, and students are required to make up sentences by using these words on the board. Another requirement is related to producing their own sentences via using a context or paragraph. When participants learn the words from the PPTs they are required to form groups or pairs and create their own sentences within a context. The retrieval vocabulary instruction procedure lasted seven weeks. Later post-test is administered in the week eight so as to observe whether retrieval vocabulary instruction has any positive effect on academic reading comprehension or not. (See Appendix A for detailed information on the Vocabulary Instruction and Appendix B for the targeted words.)

2.3. Instrumentation

Pre-test and Post-test is administered to the participants. The pretest and posttests are reading comprehension tests which consist of 13 items. The reading passage is about ‘Money and Happiness’. The items are as follow; matching the headings, T/True, F/False, NG/Not Given, reference questions, and multiple questions. After the treatment part, the post test was in the same format as well.
2.4. Data Analysis:

SPSS is used in order to analyze the data, and graphically detailed analysis of the answers was shown in the result section of the study. Pair Sample statistics was used.

3. Results

The findings and the result of the current study will be illustrated in this section along with the framework of the research question. Sample Test was used in order to answer the research question due to several reasons. Firstly, the population of both classes from which the samples is drawn are normally distributed. Secondly, the populations have the similar variance and standard deviations. Lastly, the samples of the current study are from different populations which are random and independent. (Below see the frequencies for detailed information of the Experimental and Control Groups' Pre and Post Test.)

Table 1. Table of Frequency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ExperimentalPretest</th>
<th>ExperimentalPosttest</th>
<th>ComparisonPretest</th>
<th>ComparisonPosttest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N Valid</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>55.75</td>
<td>66.75</td>
<td>56.00</td>
<td>56.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>55.00</td>
<td>65.00</td>
<td>55.00</td>
<td>55.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>55.00</td>
<td>65.00</td>
<td>50.00</td>
<td>55.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Devia.</td>
<td>7.65</td>
<td>5.91</td>
<td>8.04</td>
<td>8.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variance</td>
<td>58.61</td>
<td>34.93</td>
<td>64.73</td>
<td>68.68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 indicates the frequency both for ExperimentalPretest ExperimentalPosttest and ComparisonPretest ComparisonPosttest. The mean value is 55.75 for the ExperimentalPretest and 56.00 for the ComparisonPretest. However, the mean value for ExperimentalPosttest is 66.75, whereas the mean value for Comparison Post test 56.50.

Table 2. The Table of Paired Sample Descriptive Statistic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pair 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ExperimentalPretest</td>
<td>55.75</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7.65</td>
<td>1.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ExperimentalPosttest</td>
<td>66.75</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5.91</td>
<td>1.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ComparisonPretest</td>
<td>56.00</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8.04</td>
<td>1.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ComparisonPosttest</td>
<td>56.50</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8.28</td>
<td>1.85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 illustrates the Mean, Std. Deviation and the Std. Error Mean of the four scores for the both groups. As it can be easily understood from the above tables, the mean, median, mode, standard deviation and the variance of the both populations are quite similar. Table 2 has included more statistical value than the first table.
Since the research question of the current research aimed to explore whether the retrieval vocabulary instruction has an effect on academic reading comprehension or not, Paired Sample is used.

Table 4: Paired Samples Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Paired Differences</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean n</td>
<td>Mean Std. Error</td>
<td>Lower Upper</td>
<td>t df</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 1</td>
<td>ExperimentalPretest - ExperimentalPosttest</td>
<td>.11 .00</td>
<td>.68 - .12 .44 - .95 .55 - .15 .98</td>
<td>19 .00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 2</td>
<td>ComparisonPretest - ComparisonPosttest</td>
<td>-.50 3.20</td>
<td>.71 - 1.99 .99</td>
<td>.69 19 .49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 helps distinguish the significance and the mean differences in the participants’ scores. The number of participants in each condition is (N) 20. As it can be inferred the Sig (2-Tailed) value is 0.00 in the experimental group whereas the Sig (2-Tailed) value is 0.49 in the comparison group. These values are less than .05. Thus, it can be concluded that there is a statistically significant difference between the means which are not likely due to chance, and not likely due to the IV manipulation but due to the retrieval vocabulary instruction treatment. The Paired-Sample Statistics table indicated that the mean of the ExperimentalPretest – ExperimentalPosttest is greater than the mean for ComparisonPretest – ComparisonPosttest, since the values are -.11.00 and -.05.00. When we look at the significance levels (0.00 - 0.49 and the means ( -11.00 - 0.50. ) for both groups it can be said that there is a significant change between two test scores taken at different times by the same groups of participants. Thus, we can conclude that the treatment of ‘the retrieval vocabulary instruction’ was beneficial for the students since it increased their reading comprehension scores.

4. Discussion

The result of the current study is in accordance with the previous studies exploring the relationship between reading comprehension and vocabulary. To illustrate; in Nation’s (2015) study, the significance of the extensive reading was emphasized, thus the article aimed to explore a different set of vocabulary learning principles that affect extensive reading by indicating much informative knowledge regarding extensive reading. The results are also consistent with those of Schmitt’s (2011) studies that when the percentage of known words in a text increases the level of reading comprehension increases as well. Taken together, these studies support the notion that reading comprehension is highly related and integrated with vocabulary learning. Lastly, the findings of the current research confirm the association between vocabulary and the reading and also support the previous research. The findings of the research corroborate the ideas of Hirsch (2003) and Chall and Jacobs (2003) who
found that readers should have knowledge of 90% of the words in the reading passage in order to have a high level of reading comprehension.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Restatement of the problem

This study aimed to explore the effects of retrieval vocabulary instruction on academic reading comprehension of 40 participants at the School of Foreign Languages at Istanbul Şehir University with the following research question; Does retrieval vocabulary instruction have an effect on academic reading comprehension? The independent variable is retrieval vocabulary instruction and the dependent variable is academic reading comprehension. The participants are selected following convenience sampling procedure from different sociocultural backgrounds. The procedure for the current study lasted eight weeks. The pre-test is administered in the first week of the module in order to see the academic reading comprehension level of the participants. The retrieval vocabulary instruction treatment procedure lasted seven weeks. Later post-test is administered in week eight so as to observe whether retrieval vocabulary instruction has any positive effect on academic reading comprehension or not. Paired T-Test is used with the help of SPSS in order to analyze the data. The findings of the current study indicate that when we look at the significance levels and the means for both of the groups, it can be said that there is a significant change between two of the test scores taken at different times by the same groups of participants. Thus, we can conclude that the treatment of ‘the retrieval vocabulary instruction’ was beneficial for the students since it increased their reading comprehension scores.

Regarding the contribution of the current study as previously mentioned, the existing literature on different reading strategies is detailed, but failed to address both academic reading comprehension and retrieval vocabulary instruction. Thus current study succeeded to fill the gaps in the filed in terms of academic reading comprehension. Although thorough research has been carried out on reading instructions, reading comprehension, and vocabulary input, no single study is reported which explores the relationship between both academic reading comprehension and retrieval vocabulary instruction. Much of the current literature on reading comprehension paid attention to the specific reading strategies, learner styles, and their influence rather than academic reading comprehension and retrieval vocabulary instruction.

Lastly, the result of the current study is in accordance with the previous studies exploring the relationship between reading comprehension and vocabulary.

6. Implications

The implications of the study differ since reading comprehension and teaching vocabulary has been a subject of many previous research. There are many studies in
the literature on reading comprehension/ reading strategies and vocabulary; but to date, there have not been many studies on academic reading comprehension along with retrieval vocabulary instruction. Therefore, the current research is thought to be beneficial for the following theories regarding academic reading comprehension and retrieval vocabulary instruction. It is also helpful specifically for the retrieval strategies; Association Strategy- Same-Sounds Cue, Familiar-Word Cue, proposed by; German and Schwanke (2009). Laufer (2005) suggested that note cards that consist of part of speech, synonyms, antonyms, sample sentences are also beneficial for retrieval vocabulary instruction. Removal of the written input shared and split information tasks are thought to be found effective in retrieval vocabulary instruction (Nation, 2001).

There are few applications of the current research. Firstly, language teachers may use the ‘retrieval vocabulary instruction’ in their EFL classes to promote both the reading comprehension and the reading strategies of their students. The ones who are interested in teaching vocabulary with different techniques may also benefit from this study while preparing for their classes (PPT's and strategies). This study is conducted at a private university but this does not mean that state school teachers, public high school teachers or other educational institutions’ teachers cannot benefit from this study.

7. Limitations

Despite the promising results, there are a few limitations of the study and several questions may remain unanswered at present. Firstly, gender was not taken into consideration since the retrieval vocabulary learning techniques might change due to gender differences, attention span and the retrieval memory of each individual. Secondly, the sample could be from different educational contexts since the current study is conducted in Istanbul Şehir University.

Another limitation is that the proficiency level of the participants might have affected the results since their language proficiency is considered to be around C1 according to the CEFR. One cannot assure if the result would be same when their level was different.

Lastly, it is not fully known whether it is the ‘treatment of retrieval vocabulary instruction that has had an effect on reading comprehension or not. The increase in the reading scores for the experimental group may be due to other reasons that were not taken into consideration. Also, the current study is conducted with 40 students regardless of the participants’ L1 since there were not only Turkish students in the research. It can be inferred that the findings would not be identical if all the participants were Turkish.

8. Suggestions for Further Research
Further research is required and another research should be undertaken to investigate the gender differences because of ranging retrieval long term strategies. There might be several differences in their vocabulary input along with the size.

There is an abundant room for further progress in determining how bilinguals would perform with different levels of proficiency regarding their long-term memory. In future investigations, it might also be possible to select the participants from different educational contexts to have more reliable results.

References


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Shen, Z. (2013). The effects of vocabulary knowledge and dictionary use on EFL reading performance: English Language Teaching; *Canadian Center of Science and Education, 6*(6).


Appendix A. Vocabulary Flashcards/ PPT’s (Some Samples)
Appendix B. The List of Target Vocabulary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Conventional</th>
<th>Satisfaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assume</td>
<td>Conventional</td>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obsession</td>
<td>Shortcoming</td>
<td>Willing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judge</td>
<td>Approximately</td>
<td>Demand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense</td>
<td>Impression</td>
<td>Convince</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectation</td>
<td>Overwhelming</td>
<td>Sufficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy</td>
<td>Contradict</td>
<td>Investment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C. Reading Comprehension Test

A. What is the answer to the eternal question, "Does money buy happiness?" from people who practice what's called the deceptive science. When economists tackled the question, they started from the observation that when people put something up for sale, they try to get as much for it as they can, and when people buy something they try to pay as little for it as they can. Both sides in the transaction, the economists noticed, are therefore behaving as if they would be more satisfied, even happier if they ended up receiving more money (when the seller) or holding onto more money (when the buyer). Hence, more money must be better than less, and the only way more of something can be better than less is if it brings you greater happiness. The economists' conclusion, therefore, is that the more money you have, the happier you must be.

B. 'Psychologists have spent decades studying the relation between wealth and happiness,' writes Harvard University psychologist Daniel Gilbert in his best-selling 'Stumbling on Happiness,' and they have generally concluded that wealth increases human happiness when it lifts people out of complete poverty and places them into the middle class. However, this does little to increase happiness thereafter. That contradicts the conventional not to mention economic theory. According to standard economics, the most important commodity you can buy with additional wealth is choice. If you have $20 in your pocket, you can decide between steak and peanut butter for dinner, but if you have only $1, you had better hope you already have a jar of jelly at home. Additional wealth also lets you satisfy additional needs and wants, and the more of those you satisfy, the happier you are supposed to be.

C. The trouble is choice is not all it's claimed to be. Studies show that people like selecting from among maybe half a dozen kinds of pasta at the grocery store, but find 27 choices overwhelming, leaving them chronically on edge that they could have chosen a better one than they did. And wants, which are nice to be able to afford, have a bad habit of becoming needs. We need only look toward the modern obsession of continuously upgrading cellphones as an example of this. Of course, this latter trend is a result of an advertising and media-saturated culture creating endless demand. Satisfying needs brings less emotional well-being than satisfying wants.
D. The nature of how much happiness money can buy is difficult to measure. It buys lots more happiness when it moves a person from being poor and into middle-class comfort, but hardly any more joy when it elevates you from, for example, millionaire to billionaire. This fact comes through clearly in global surveys that ask people how content they feel with their lives. In a typical survey, people are asked to rank their sense of well-being or happiness on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 means ‘not at all satisfied with my life’ and 7 means ‘completely satisfied.’ Of the American multimillionaires who responded, the average happiness score was 5.8. Homeless people in Calcutta came in at 2.9. However, before you assume that money does buy happiness, the others who also rated themselves around 5.8 should be considered. The Inuit of northern Canada, who do not exactly lead a life of luxury, and the cattle-herding Masai of Kenya, whose grass huts have no electricity or running water also rate themselves at this level of happiness. This helps to prove Gilbert’s point about money buying happiness only when it lifts you out of poverty. In homes made of garbage in Calcutta the people surveyed rate themselves at 4.5.

E. International studies monitoring changes in reported levels of happiness over time have also been shown to be false when looking at the ‘money buys happiness’ claim. Since World War II, the gross domestic product per capita has tripled in the United States. Despite this people’s sense of well-being, as measured by surveys asking some variation of ‘Overall, how satisfied are you with your life?’ has barely moved. This is strange because due to economic boom, one would expect to see an increase in happiness of three times, as well. Moreover, Japan has had an even more meteoric rise in GDP per capita since its postwar misery, but measures of national happiness remain unchanged. Western Europe too, during its long postwar boom, according to social psychologist Ruut Veenhoven of Erasmus University in Rotterdam, has seen the same trend. A 2004 analysis of more than 150 studies on wealth and happiness concluded that “economic indicators have glaring shortcomings” as approximations of well-being across nations, wrote Ed Diener of the University of Illinois. Although economic output has risen steeply over the past decades, there has been no reported rise in things like satisfaction and furthermore, there has been a substantial increase in depression and distrust. Therefore, as indicators they remain insufficiently strong.

F. If money doesn’t buy happiness, what does? Grandma was right when she told you to value health and friends, not money and stuff. Or as Diener and Seligman put it, once your basic needs are met, ‘differences in well-being are less frequently due to income, and are more frequently due to factors such as social relationships and enjoyment at work.’ Other researchers add fulfillment, a sense that life has meaning, belonging to civic and other groups and living in a democracy that respects individual rights and the rule of law. If a nation wants to increase its population’s sense of well-being, says Veenhoven, it should make ‘less investment in economic growth and more in policies that promote good governance, liberties, democracy, trust and public safety.’
Name: ____________________________
Class code: PFAC __________

Time: 30 mins
Total: 20 pts

TOTAL: __________ /20
TOTAL: __________ x5: __________ /100

Questions 1-3: Match the best headings (i-v) on the right with paragraphs B-C of the text. There is one extra heading. (2ct each)

1. ______ Paragraph B
   i. – Overwhelming selections not always beneficial
2. ______ Paragraph C
   ii. – Contrasting statistics on money and joy globally
3. ______ Paragraph D
   iii. – Opposing traditional economic viewpoint
   iv. – Introducing mistaken reasoning by some experts

________ /6

4—7: Are following statements TRUE (T), FALSE (F), NOT GIVEN (NG) according to the reading (1 pt each).

4. ______ According to the general conclusions of psychologists, after a certain point people
   are no more happier by an increase in wealth.

5. ______ Research indicates that a narrow range of options increases the anxiety which is felt
   by consumers.

6. ______ More millionaires and billionaires took part in one survey than was expected by the
   researchers.

7. ______ In Japan, before the end of the Second World War, people were happier than after
   the misery.

________ /4
Questions 8-9: What do the following words refer to? (No more than two words) (1 point each).

8. they (Paragraph A) __________________________

9. it (Paragraph D) __________________________
   ______/2

For questions 10-13, choose the best answer a-d. (2 pts. each)

10. After World War II, ____________
    a. there was an economic explosion globally.
    b. the level of happiness rose three times.
    c. economic and happiness trends unchanged.
    d. many international regions remained stable.

11. According to paragraph E, the word shortcomings is closest in meaning to
    a. outputs
    b. strategies
    c. weaknesses
    d. statistics

12. Diener and Seligman DO NOT mention ____________ as a factor for happiness.
    a. basic requirements
    b. civic membership
    c. friends and family
    d. professional satisfaction

13. The main idea of the text is ____________
    a. Self-fulfillment affects happiness
    b. Predominant paths lead to happiness
    c. Happiness was in decline after World War II
    d. Money doesn’t necessarily buy happiness
   ______/8

2016-2017
Pre-Faculty M4Q1
Reading Quiz

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The Art of Argumentation: A Sociolinguistic Approach to Developing Thesis Statements (The Case of Kosova High School Students)

Donika Elezkurtaj Bërveniku

* University of Prishtina “Hasan Prishtina”, Prishtina 10000, Kosova

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Abstract
Living in a world of globalization, communication of various forms has become crucial. Should it be of a colloquial or formal use, language plays a vital role in our lives. As in every other area, communication is the “lifeblood” of academia as well (Becher & Trowler, 2001). Academia cannot be separated from its discourse and could not exist without it. Therefore, argumentative discourse is of an essential nature to both scholars and students. This sociolinguistically oriented research study reports on Kosovan, high school students’ problems in the process of argument building and the effectiveness of class activities that promote critical thinking and argumentation. Aiming for original and reliable results, corpus linguistics has been chosen as a means of collecting naturally occurring source corpora. The data obtained from two observed debates, 40 essay evaluations and a focus group, reveal that students are not aware of certain linguistic patterns present in spoken and/or written argumentation and that they do not feel comfortable when required to take a decision that demands systematic evaluation of their thinking in search for new answers. It is obvious from the study that in order for students to create warranted arguments, which is an inevitable skill in academia, Inquiry-based Learning should be integrated across the educational system in Kosova. The results have implications for syllabus and course materials.

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Keywords: Argumentation; critical thinking; sociolinguistics; corpus; syllabus

1. Introduction

A teacher’s decision to work towards the students’ progress can be of crucial influence to the whole educational cycle. However, switching from the position of a teacher to that of a researcher can be said to be complicated. The difficulties lie in identifying the students’ problems and deciding upon a method to approach them. The teacher researcher’s awareness of learners’ needs implies that the sociological aspect cannot be separated from the linguistic one (in the situation of argumentative discourse).
By assembling a learner corpus (from both spoken and written discourse) the local researcher of this study aspired to identify learner barriers with second language argumentation and provide directions towards better acquisition of argumentation skills. The combination of spoken (debate) and written (essay assignment) analysis with learner perceptions (focus group) aim to provide original and reliable data as research results.

Academic discourse is rightly considered to be central in the world of education and research. No investigation or discovery could be made available to others lacking proper communicative transmission, which occurs both in spoken and written form. Academic discourse, much like any other kind of discourse, is only effective when users custom conventions that other members of their community find familiar and convincing (Hyland, 2009). Thus, this study would not proceed and progress without considering the following vital aspects of academic discourse: Academic Genres, Argumentative Discourse, Second Language Aspect, Study Approaches and Pedagogical Approaches.

1.1. Academic genres

When students begin their studies, they enter an academic community that shares certain ways of thinking, valuing and producing texts (spoken and written). Despite this, students are brought in contact with different types of texts; and being conscious of their genres will aid the understanding and interpretation of those texts. In these academic communities, there are certain commonalities among academic discourse; so core skills can and should be present (Bloor & Bloor, 1986). Thus, Hyland (2007) states that genre is the term which is used to refer to grouping those texts together and representing how academics use language to respond to recurring situations.

Being of a community based nature and suggesting that features differ across disciplines, genre encourages scholars to research the features of the texts their correspondents need so that they become aware that when we produce academic pieces, we follow conventions for organizing messages so the correspondent can organize purpose and follow ideas. Atkinson (2003) emphasizes that theoretical interest in, especially, writing instruction shifted to a genre approach that considers discourse as a purposeful act and focuses mainly on the analysis of the contextual situation (enabling students to make sense of the world around them and to become aware of discourse as a useful and manipulatable tool (Kay & Dudley-Evans, 1998)).

One will only be able to produce a successfully acceptable composition by taking the context of a text into account. Thus, considering the importance of academic genres, the knowledge of a language can be said to be intimately attached to a social purpose as more focus is on the correspondent’s viewpoint than on that of the composer.

1.2. Argumentative Discourse
The key term in academic discourse is argumentation. Academic discourse is an argument itself. Argumentation is the act of forming reasons, making inductions, drawing conclusions and applying them to the case in discussion (Hyland, 2004). It can be said to be an analysis on its own. Being a carefully arranged and supported presentation of a viewpoint, it mostly leads to earning the audiences' consideration of one's perspective (Irvin, 2010).

As a mode of academic discourse, argumentation constitutes an important part of learners' academic experience. Because of the widespread presence of this genre in the academic curriculum, a common component of language classes consists of instructing argumentative speaking and writing skills (Braaksma, 2002).

The difficulties faced by language students when asked to produce a piece of text are often due to inadequate understanding of how texts are organized, which is also the case with Argumentative Essays (Swales, 1984) and Debates. As via gaining argumentation skills, students start to accept the existence of others' positions, get ready for high stakes assessments and get prepared for the real world, argumentation is said to be the number one for students in academia. As argumentation requires investigation and collection, generation and evaluation of evidence, it is thought to be one of the genres the features of which are applicable to many others (Hillocks, 2010).

1.2.1. Spoken and written argumentation

Being essential in academic circumstances, argumentation occurs in both spoken and written form. Debates and Argumentative essays have gained high prominence for students in academia. Considering the means of production, they obviously use two different channels (speaker-listener; writer-reader). On the other hand, what makes them similar in means of composition is their structure. Should it be preparation vise (investigating, collecting, generating and evaluating evidence) or final product vise, debates and argumentative essays follow a comparable if not identical pattern. Krieger (2005) even emphasizes the necessity of compiling an argumentative paper in preparation for a debate; hence putting forward their common features, particularly in structuring the arguments.

1.2.2. Thesis statement

An inevitable term when being confronted with academic and specifically argumentative discourse is the thesis statement. Aaron (1989) very briefly describes the thesis statement as the take-home message you want the reader/listener to remember. Unfortunately, this concise definition of a thesis statement is not in concord with its complexity in form and meaning.

A primary goal of academic discourse is the communication of ideas to contribute to a growing body of knowledge. Because a thesis statement clearly states what the essay is about, it guides the listener/reader through the manifestation of ideas in order to help make sense of what the speaker/writer is saying (Waddell, 2004).

Without the thesis statement, the speaker/writer will wander through incoherent thoughts and will lose the audience. Thus, the more precise the thesis statement is,
the more organized and clear the supporting evidence will be. Requiring such a precise structure and nature, sometimes the thesis statement needs to be reorganized while the research work evolves, as the original ideas may change in the process (Karper, 2002).

1.3. Second language aspect

With regard to the Kosovar setting, it should be emphasized that one cannot speak of English as a first language but rather consider the factors deriving as a result of English having the featuring status of a second language.

1.3.1. Second language acquisition and teaching

Second Language Acquisition is a field of study which comprises a set of complex issues. When it comes to education, an important aspect is the age factor. According to many researchers, the learners' age is not only relevant in the acquisition of basic linguistic patterns but also in the acquisition of more advanced academic skills (Birdsong, 1999). It is also the adults, rather than youngsters, who seem to find it harder to understand L2 communication as a cultural process which should be compared to their own culturally based communicative behavior (Baker, 2009).

Despite students' cultural awareness, there is also linguistic awareness which speaks for understanding L1 and L2 differences in order to make correct judgments in using language (Ammar, Lightbown, & Spada, 2010). This does not speak for constant usage of L1 in the process of L2 acquisition; but rather for L1 support in L2 acquisition (Littlewood & Yu, 2011).

On the other hand, avoiding L1 environment and being under L2 educational medium has also proven to result in acquisition progress (Storch, 2009). All these lead to the fact that both learner characteristics and learners' conditions have a great impact in the process of second language acquisition (Lightbown & Spada, 2006).

Despite the students' acquisition perspective, there is the teaching perspective as well. Second Language Teaching is an extremely sensitive field to be dealt with. From experience, everybody can speak of different teachers' and students' voices arguing about education. It is a well-known fact that there are certain discrepancies between these two parties' perceptions (Eslami, 2010). Nevertheless, both sides, especially the teachers, should start to understand, analyze and ideally adapt to learners' specific requirements (Bracaj, 2014). The analysis of these specific needs result in the necessity for multidisciplinary means of study - a way to enhance student engagement (Stebleton, Jensen, & Peter, 2010).

1.3.2. Second language speaking and writing

The most complex skills to be acquired in second language acquisition are speaking and writing. When it comes to them, various questions arise in order to understand the areas of study: How can an utterance differ from L1 to L2? How is L2 writing different from L1 writing? Is there any sociolinguistic role in the process of L2
acquisition? What is the role of these skills in the classroom? What is the purpose of student product in class? (Reichelt, Lefkowitz, Rinnert & Schultz, 2012). When it comes to L2 users of English, they can be obviously distinguished from L1 users of English mainly because of lexical and structural differences between L1 and L2 (Crossley & McNamara, 2009). Considering these differences, learners tend to use L1 during L2 production, a fact which is negatively related to L2 text quality (Weijen, Bergh, Rijlaarsdam, & Sanders, 2009).

In the whole process of acquisition, second/foreign language context (Manchon, 2009) and forms (Cook & Bassetti, 2005; Flowerdew, 2009) appear to be pivotal. As far as the context is concerned, focusing on the purpose of usage (Harmer, 2004) is inevitable. Speaking of forms, the priority of spoken language over written language as well as language internal contradictions should be taken into account (Kaufman & Kaufman, 2009). Thus, the role of previous experience in both L1 and L2 is closely related to acquiring speaking and writing from learning the language itself. Despite the linguistic differences, we should also consider learners' knowledge, personality and environment as factors influencing L2 products.

1.4. Study approaches

What all the above mentioned share is the common interest to identify learners' existing competence in order to set a base for better acquisition. It is important to know that classroom research is not a library research. It involves people in order to improve their skills, techniques and strategies. As important it is to know why we do things, the more important it is to know what we do and how to do them better - in order to impact students positively (Ferrance, 2000). Thus, teachers need to think systematically and implement new views where improvements are possible (Burns, 2005). The attitude of inquiry a teacher-researcher should possess in order to follow a process of gathering information, analyzing and using the outcomes of analysis to take some action (Stinger, Christensen, & Baldwin, 2009) is a leading feature towards the development in the field of acquiring academic discourse. Pedagogical research is always focused on students and understanding students' understanding. It emerges from teachers' worries. The professional knowledge gained from this research allows teachers to be autonomous researchers rather than follow prescribed traditions (Castle, 2006).

The present study draws on the research practice of Sociolinguistics with application of Corpora and consequently Discourse Analysis in order to provide a theoretically and methodologically sound framework for the examination and reflection of students' problems in the light of experience and theoretical knowledge.

The sensitive nature of this study makes the selection of research methodology extremely delicate, as well. This research project in the setting of high school education will require analysis of various perspectives. Not only will the scenario of product be investigated but that related to the student/teacher as well. This demands, of course, a complex research design which suits both settings appropriately. Starting
from a more quantitative view and proceeding to a more qualitative one, this study will engage different approaches in order to obtain reliable and valid results.

1.4.1. The sociolinguistic approach
In order to have a more objective view of language (Krieger, 2003), corpora (which is a databank of naturally occurring texts) is the new term to revolutionize language learning/teaching. According to Leech (1997), corpus analysis can be illuminating in almost all branches of linguistics or language teaching. Corpus linguistics is a method which carries out linguistic analysis of systematic collections of naturally occurring texts. With systematic, Nesselhauf (2005) describes corpus as following certain extralinguistic principles of certain text types and a certain time span. Klimova (2014) sees this as a method to obtain and analyze data quantitatively and qualitatively rather than a theory of language. As language cannot be invented but only captured, using language product as evidence for the process of production is the only practical way for finding about the process in the context of language acquisition.

Thus, a particular type of corpora which represents language as produced by learners (Kennedy, 1998) is the now very prominent learner corpora. As a collection of written or spoken data produced by language learners who are acquiring a second or foreign language (McEnery & Xiao, 2006), the results of local learner corpus can be directly integrated into the process of acquisition.

1.4.2. Discourse analysis
In ideal scenarios, teachers are also researchers, who support professional research and work towards solving the theory-practice problem (Elliott, 2001). It is the aim of Discourse Analysis to analyze students’ spoken and written texts. It has been chosen as a consequent methodology to the initial sociolinguistically oriented corpus based research for the fact that it covers a variety of areas necessary to analyze thesis statements of both spoken and written texts.

According to Trappes-Lomax (2006) discourse analysts do what people in their everyday experience of language do instinctively and largely unconsciously: notice patterning of language in use and the circumstances (participants, situations, purposes, outcomes) with which these are typically associated.

It does the analysis of spoken and written language over and above concerns such as the structure of the clause or sentence (McCarthy, 2011). Discourse Analysis is the linguistic analysis of naturally occurring connected speech or written discourse. Roughly speaking, it refers to attempts to study the organization of language above the sentence or above the clause, and therefore to study larger linguistic units, such as conversational exchanges or written texts. It follows that discourse analysis is also concerned with language use in social contexts, and in particular with interaction or dialogue between speakers (Swann & Ussher, 1995).

It is the particular problems or dilemmas raised by the Sociolinguistic Research which are systematically addressed by means of Discourse Analysis in order to improve an unsatisfactory state or situation.
1.4.3. Pedagogical approach

Insights gained from learner corpus research have huge potential for academic discourse research. However, the overwhelming majority of corpus-based academic discourse studies are exclusively based on native corpora. Analyses of L2 learners are not absent but they tend to focus on the writing process rather than the writing product.

There are many pressures that are pulling research and teaching apart. Britten (2002), for example, states that “the twentieth century saw the university change from a site in which teaching and research stood in a reasonably comfortable relationship with each other to one in which they became mutually antagonistic” (p. 157).

However, learner corpus (in contrast to other types) requires a different methodological approach which is realistic to the students' purposes, achievable to the students' abilities and acceptable by the teachers of those institutions (Hüttner, 2007). Hammond (1992) proposed a three-phased-wheel model of a teaching-learning cycle which comprises modeling, joint negotiation of text and independent construction of text. Hyland (2004) also emphasizes the advantages of this approach to teaching by naming them as being explicit, systematic, needs based, supportive, empowering, critical and conscious-rising.

Putting greater emphasis on actively engaging students and teachers with research, suitably adapted to recognize the variation and complexity of constructing knowledge in different disciplines, is one way of re-linking them in this century.

Thus, any learner-based corpus study would indirectly have indications for syllable and course material development.

2. Identification of the research gap

Considering the fact that the way we grasp the world is quite rooted in our culture, Kosovar students tend to fail to acquire the complexity of an issue and identify alternative/optimal perspectives (Chaffee, 2006). As a result, they produce relatively deficient arguments and face large obstacles in synthesizing grasped information and evaluating/processing them. In these cases, teachers should create learning environments which intellectually challenge learners’ thoughts by presenting them how to think rather than what to think (Paul & Willsen, 1993). Students should also be brought to the point to experience the situation of changing their stand on a particular matter in response to evidence (Browne & Keeley, 2004).

As the researcher of this study has also experienced a traditional way of learning and has been imposed how to think and act, it is crucial to work on a research that proposes to investigate and confront students' barriers in academic discourse. Encountering graduate high school students' deficiency in structuring texts, synthesizing ideas and thinking independently (providing warranted arguments) asks for investigation, confrontation and evaluation of certain data.
The researcher’s observations of students’ reactions, preferences and authentic spoken and written products will be of extensive relevance to the reliable and original nature of the research and resulting data. These findings aim to contribute to the whole teaching and educational setting in Kosova and ergo actively prepare students for a critically and intellectually rich environment which shall change the approach to academic writing to a qualitative one.

Investigating and confronting students’ barriers would be lacking in quality and functionality if students’ attitude, teachers’ standpoint or the students' writings were not studied in relation to each other. Consequently, because of numerous differences in socio-cultural, historical and educational spheres, there is constant demand for research in the field of academic discourse, particularly in the setting of Kosova.

3. The study

The aim of the study was to discover learners’ barriers in the process of argumentation (spoken and written).

3.1. Course background

The English Language course is a mandatory course for all graduate students of the Sami Frasheri high school in Pristina, Kosova. The aim of the course is to enable students to communicate more effectively in an academic context (in preparation for university studies), with a particular focus on speaking and writing. Nevertheless, the teacher uses only a particular course book for delivering classes and exercises.

3.2. Participants’ background

The study was conducted with high school students aged 17-19. They were enrolled in a four-year high school program and were homogenous in their educational and cultural background and had no previous experience in conversing argumentatively. So far, they have studied English for eight years; their education was characterized by limited resources, large classes, obedience to authority and rote-learning.

3.3. Data collection and procedure

Case study data was collected through debate observation, essay analysis and a focus group.

3.3.1. Debates

Two debates have been conducted in two different classes respectively; which have been assigned the same argumentative topic “Should Marihuana be legalized?”. The debate involved three groups in each class (the affirmative team - consisting of three students - supporting the statement, the opposing team - consisting of three students - challenging the statement and the judging team - consisting of four students - evaluating the evidence and arguments together with the researcher). Students were
given one week for preparation and were finally assessed using a simple debate evaluation rubric (CSUN, 2013). After the debates had ended, an open discussion was initiated. The whole task aimed at evaluating students’ oral argumentation skills.

Table 1. Debate evaluation rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>Grade:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Organization &amp; Clarity: Main arguments and responses are outlined in a clear and orderly way.</td>
<td>Completely clear and orderly presentation</td>
<td>Mostly clear and orderly in all parts</td>
<td>Clear in some parts but not overall</td>
<td>Unclear and disorganized throughout</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Use of Argument: Reasons are given to support the resolution</td>
<td>Very strong and persuasive arguments given throughout</td>
<td>Many good arguments given, with only minor problems</td>
<td>Some decent arguments, but some significant problems</td>
<td>Few or no real arguments given, or all arguments given had significant problems</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Use of cross-examination and rebuttal: Identification of weakness in Negative team’s arguments and ability to defend itself against attack.</td>
<td>Excellent cross-exam and defense against Negative team’s objections</td>
<td>Good cross-exam and rebuttals, with only minor slip-ups</td>
<td>Decent cross-exam and/or rebuttals, but with some significant problems</td>
<td>Poor cross-exam or rebuttals, failure to point out problems in Negative team’s position or failure to defend itself against attack.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Presentation Style: Tone of voice, clarity of expression, precision of arguments all contribute to keeping audience’s attention and persuading them of the team’s case.</td>
<td>All style features were used convincingly</td>
<td>Most style features were used convincingly</td>
<td>Few style features were used convincingly</td>
<td>Very few style features were used, none of them convincingly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The groups can take a maximum of 16 and a minimum of 4 points.

3.3.2. Essay assignment

A week after the debate, 40 students of two classes (including the debating groups) were given a short essay assignment with the topic “Do people who commit heinous crimes deserve the death penalty?”. Having in mind the examination-oriented practice at high schools in Kosova, the researcher evaluated the writings of a minimum of 250 words each after a time scale of 40 minutes given to the students. This type of assignment had been experienced several times during their studies. The essays were evaluated using a simple essay evaluation rubric.
Table 2. Argumentative essay evaluation rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus &amp; Structure</strong></td>
<td>Essay maintains a clear, relevant and logical organization. Essay is organized into multiple sections that creatively and intelligently build up to support a unique and complex argument.</td>
<td>Essay maintains a clear, relevant and logical organization. Multiple sections (groups of paragraphs) work together to form an argument.</td>
<td>Essay maintains a mostly clear and logical organization. Simple paragraphs are used (rather than multiple sections).</td>
<td>Essay does not maintain a clear and logical organization. Simple paragraphs are used in a disorganized manner.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
<td>Introductory section provides a strong opening, context and a complex and original thesis statement. The thesis includes details that preview the rest of the essay.</td>
<td>Introductory section provides a strong opening, context and a thesis statement. The thesis includes details that preview the rest of the essay.</td>
<td>Introductory section provides a strong opening, adequate context and a clear thesis statement.</td>
<td>Introductory section contains some context and an unclear thesis statement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evidence</strong></td>
<td>Student supports thesis statement with multiple clear and relevant examples from credible sources using quotes and citations. Evidence acknowledges and refutes alternate or opposing points of view using quotes and citations.</td>
<td>Student supports thesis statement with multiple clear and relevant examples from credible sources using quotes and citations. Evidence acknowledges and refutes alternate or opposing points of view.</td>
<td>Student supports thesis statement with some clear and relevant examples from credible sources using quotes and citations. Evidence attempts to acknowledge and refute alternate or opposing points of view but does so unclearly.</td>
<td>Student supports thesis statement with few clear and relevant examples from credible sources using quotes and citations. No alternate points are discussed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conclusion</strong></td>
<td>Essay provides a concluding statement that summarizes the major points, explains their significance, and builds new ideas and insights. The conclusion continues to use quotes and sources to support its claims.</td>
<td>Essay provides a concluding statement that summarizes the major points, explains their significance, and builds new ideas and insights.</td>
<td>Essay provides mostly summary and explanation but offers few new ideas and insights.</td>
<td>Essay provides mostly summary and offers little explanation and no new ideas and insights.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Style</strong></td>
<td>Uses strong words, transitional phrases and complex sentences throughout. Grammatical conventions are followed successfully (95% accuracy)</td>
<td>Frequently uses strong words, transitional phrases and complex sentences. Grammatical conventions are usually followed with success (85% accuracy)</td>
<td>Sometimes uses strong words, transitional phrases and complex sentences. Grammatical conventions are sometimes followed (75% accuracy)</td>
<td>Rarely uses strong words, transitional phrases and complex sentences. Grammatical conventions are rarely followed (65% accuracy)</td>
<td>TOTAL SCORE: ____</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.3.3. Focus group

In order to gain a more detailed understanding of the students’ perspective, the researcher conducted a focus group with six participants (one from each debating group). The discussion took place at a bookshop/café and lasted an hour and fifty minutes. The whole discussion was conducted in English (having some occasional switches to the students’ native language, Albanian). With the participants’ approval, the discussion was recorded and notes were taken. The taped discussion was transcribed verbatim where the names of the students have been changed.

4. Findings

The findings from the debates and essay assignments are aimed at shedding light on the students’ production of ideally warranted arguments (spoken and written) – thesis statements. The focus group, on the other hand, will provide insight into students’ perceptions of instructional methodology they have gone through so far in their classes.

4.1. Debates

The debate data obtained from the twelve respondents in total (three in each debating group for two debates) regarding the usage of a thesis statement as means of providing warranted arguments is shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Student argumentation during debates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occurrence</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inexistent Thesis Statement</td>
<td>Information separated into different sentences rather than in one statement</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late Thesis Statement</td>
<td>Essential information provided too late</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visible Indication</td>
<td>Obvious indications made</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obvious Fact</td>
<td>An obvious fact stated</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Conviction</td>
<td>Personal conviction used as a fact</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conventional Wisdom</td>
<td>Conventional wisdom as reason</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vague Vocabulary</td>
<td>Unacceptable word choice</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

More than two thirds of the respondents failed to construct a thesis statement made of synthesized information and instead recalled information in separate statements. Most of the debaters used certain phrases to show that an indication for the point of the debate is being made (‘The point of our position is that ...’). In half of the cases, the thesis statement got lost in time and words after being introduced too late. 70% of the students used obvious and general facts in order to support their position (‘Drugs are dangerous ...’). More than half of them presented claims supporting them by personal opinions (‘Relaxing with friends is wonderful...’).

Conventional wisdom was applied as a reason by one fourth of the respondents (‘Time cures all wounds...’). A phenomenon present throughout more than half of the debates was the use of vague vocabulary (‘always’, ‘never’, ‘believe’, ‘need’, ‘feel’, ‘perfect’; including adverbs used as modifiers of verbs).
4.2. Essay assignment

The researcher has evaluated the students’ essays by using a simple essay evaluation rubric. For the sake of the research results, the findings from the essay analysis were fortunately in concord with those of the debates.

Table 4: Student argumentation in essay

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occurrence</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inexistent Thesis Statement</td>
<td>Information separated into different sentences rather than in one statement</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late Thesis Statement</td>
<td>Obvious indications made</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visible Indication</td>
<td>Essential information provided too late</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obvious Fact</td>
<td>An obvious fact stated</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Conviction</td>
<td>Personal conviction used as a fact</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conventional Wisdom</td>
<td>Unacceptable word choice</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- informal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- unsophisticated</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- vague</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- exaggerated</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- subjective</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- generally unnecessary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- generally correct</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- jargon, cliché, abbreviations, slang, not gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vague Vocabulary</td>
<td>Information separated into different sentences rather than in one statement</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Less than half of the respondents failed to construct a thesis statement made of synthesized information and instead recalled information in separate statements. 80% of the debaters used certain phrases to show that an indication for the point of the debate is being made (‘The aim of my position is that …’). In contrast to the debates, in the essays, the late thesis statement was less distinct. Obvious facts and personal convictions also made a great part of the thesis statement construction. More evident, on the other hand, was the unacceptable word choice made by the students.

4.3. Focus group

The transcripts of the focus group have shown the matters below as pivotal:

- supporting a position
- critical thinking
- cultural differences
- educational traditions
- linguistic competence
5. Discussion

5.1. Supporting a position

The biggest challenge students face when it comes to argumentation is the arguments itself; or simply saying supporting their own position. This occurrence was mostly present in the situations where students used personal convictions, conventional wisdom and vague expressions in order to make their point. It was also Kay (1998) who put forth the importance for students to make sense of the world around them rather than making account only of their own beliefs.

5.2. Critical thinking

This fact is closely related to the phenomenon of critical thinking. The most common cases where the lack of the ability to think critically was detected were statements with no claim and statements providing obvious facts rather than an analysis of the particular situation. Observing the debates and conducting the focus group have also seconded this problematic issue as the respondents claimed that the moment they were asked to defend an opposing position they felt ‘unnatural’ in doing so and thus lacked the capacity to go beyond their views.

5.3. Cultural differences

Being complicated in its nature, argumentative discourse becomes even more complicated when it is used as a second/foreign language. The younger the learners of the language are the easier they become acquainted to the second language community (Baker, 2009). This cultural aspect of language acquisition is an inevitable part of the competence to argument precisely in a language other than the native one. Cultural differences transmit their problems mostly via language.

5.4. Educational traditions

Argumentative discourse is only effective when the conversations are familiar to the community (Hyland, 2009). These familiarities can only be brought closer to students via education. Sticking only to traditional educational approaches will keep L2 students far from L1 perfection. Thus, in the case of academic discourses, genre specific and inquiry-based approaches result in triggering necessary argumentative features closer to the learner in the best way possible (Hillocks, 2010).

5.5. Linguistic competence

One of the most evident occurrences has derived from both debate and essay analysis, which have again proven to be closely correlated to each other in the means of argumentation (Krieger, 2005). Concerns with the correct use of vocabulary have taken a great part of structuring warranted arguments into a complete thesis.
The constant need for reorganizing thesis statements (Karper, 2002) according to changing needs and views seems to be the greatest difficulty for students.

6. Conclusion

This study shows how important it is to consider new educational approaches when it comes to second language academic discourse. Being of a vital nature, introducing argumentative communication early in education aims for a better understanding of the world beyond the students’ personal views.

The revealing form of learner corpora this study provides, combining both forms of argumentation a student can be in contact with, delivers cultural, educational and linguistic aspects to be concerned about. The fact that students are aware of these issues and their significance speaks for a positive attitude towards changes, which is a promising stance (as no change could be possible without the students’ willingness to do so). Creating an environment challenging for the students and their studies definitely depends a lot on the teachers who are to refine future teaching practices and viewpoints towards academia.

The study aspires to encourage teacher-researchers with similar challenges in teaching argumentative discourse to explore both learner and text perceptions so that education can better meet the learners’ academic essentials.

References


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Research into pronunciation learning strategies of pre-service English teachers

Ramazan Yetkin a *

a Hacettepe University, Ankara, 06800, Turkey

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Abstract

Pronunciation, as being one of the core components of a language, plays key roles in language learning and language use. Many studies have already been conducted regarding pronunciation learning and its importance; yet, satisfactory attention has not been given to strategies and strategy use until recently. In line with this objective, this study aims to reveal pronunciation learning strategies of EFL learners in comparison with variables such as gender, age, grade level and years of learning English. A total of 27 pre-service EFL learners took part in the study. A strategic pronunciation learning scale was used to unearth most frequently used strategy types and strategy groups as well as effects of individual variables. Descriptive analysis was used to investigate the results. It was striking to see that there is a significant difference of pronunciation strategy use based on gender, and females use strategies more frequently. Another important factor was to see that even if there is statistically no difference, length of time for learning English can have a positive effect on pronunciation learning strategies.

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Keywords: pronunciation learning strategies, strategy use, gender, age, EFL learners

1. Introduction

Over the last decades, there have been a great amount of emphasis on pronunciation, and many research studies have been conducted so far on pronunciation and its relevant aspects (Derwing, Munro, & Wiebe, 1998; Jones, 1997). One of the prominent aspects of pronunciation is pronunciation learning strategies. Strategies of pronunciation learning have been given little attention to teach specifically, and also quite few, but pivotal studies were undertaken to date exclusively give attention to that aspect, namely to the pronunciation learning strategies (Akyol, 2012; Derwing & Rossiter, 2002; Hismanoğlu, 2012; Peterson, 2000; Vitenova & Miller, 2002).

* Ramazan Yetkin. Tel.: +90-312-297-8587
E-mail address: ryetkin@gmail.com
http://dx.doi.org/............................................
Strategies of language learning as inclusively defined by Oxford (1990) as “specific action taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations” (p. 8). Language learning strategies can be taken as an umbrella term for all language relevant aspects of learning, but there are some context-specific needs and differences as they are seen in pronunciation strategies. Pronunciation learning strategies are defined by Peterson (2000) as “the steps taken by students to enhance their own pronunciation learning” (p. 7) and by Hişmanoğlu (2012) as “an attempt to enhance phonetic and phonological competence in the target language” (p. 248). Moreover, Hişmanoğlu (2012) pointed out that “every pronunciation learner utilizes pronunciation learning strategies either deliberately or undeliberately when focusing on segmental and/or supra-segmental phonemes in the target language trying to do tasks given by the teacher in the pronunciation class” (p. 248).

2. Relevant Literature

Peterson’s (2000) work was the first study exclusively dedicated to pronunciation learning strategies to the best knowledge of the researcher. The participants were 11 adult native-speakers of English taking Spanish course but none of them were from Spanish origin. It was an exploratory study; self-report diaries and interviews were used for data collection. From the analysis of diaries and interview outcomes, 43 tactics, 21 of which were not even in the literature to date, were detected. These tactics were condensed and formed basic 12 pronunciation learning strategies according to Oxford’s strategy classifications. The largest number of strategies and tactics was in cognitive part mainly because of its specificity and breadth nature. It was an important and pivotal study because it was the first study to solely focus on pronunciation matter and lead the literature accordingly and by adding many new tactics to the pronunciation learning. However, according to Peterson, there does not seem to be any particular qualitative difference between pronunciation learning strategies and other language learning strategies except that they aid specifically with pronunciation.

Vitenova and Miller (2002) did a pilot study to see their students’ needs and hear their voices based on reflective practice. Participants were graduate pronunciation course students who were from different backgrounds, and from diverse language competences. They were asked to reflect their prompts from their pronunciation class. Outcomes unearthed that detailed phonetic/phonological instruction boosts metacognitive strategies which help learners to employ those strategies in larger communicative contexts. Another important result was that the importance of socio-affective factor in pronunciation learning was understood.

Derwing and Rossiter (2002) carried out a study to examine pronunciation needs and strategies of learners from an adult’s perspective. 100 adults from 19 different native language groups, different ages and different proficiency levels participated in the study. Individually designed interviews with statements and questions about
communication problems faced by participants were conducted over a period of six
weeks. It was reported that one third of participants faced with pronunciation
difficulties, and they were mostly asked to repeat themselves to be understood with
the rate of 37%. It was also reported that paraphrasing was the favorite strategy for
dealing with communication cuts. Importantly paraphrasing strategy differs the
results of the study from results of similar studies and Oxford’s categorization in that
respect.

Hişmanoğlu (2012) conducted one of the latest studies on pronunciation learning
strategies. Thirty-eight pre-service English teachers participated in the study, and all
of them already took a pronunciation specific course. His purpose was to see frequency
counts of strategies used by participants based upon Oxford’s strategy categorization
as well as to see and compare successful and unsuccessful students according to the
types of strategies they used and frequencies. A pronunciation strategies
questionnaire with 42 items was used and it was revealed that meta-cognitive
strategies were used by the majority of participants to improve their pronunciation.
Self-evaluation was the most frequently used meta-cognitive strategy. Affective
strategies such as using humors to decrease anxiety were also frequently used by
participants. Regarding strategy use and frequency of successful and unsuccessful
students, it is striking to see that there was no significant difference of strategy use
besides meta-cognitive and affective strategies between the two groups.

Similar to Hişmanoğlu’s study, Akyol (2012) also conducted a study to see exclusive
pronunciation strategy use of Turkish EFL learners. A quasi-experimental study
design was used and 82 pre-service English teachers participated in the study.
Experiment and control groups were assigned according to whether they took a
pronunciation-specific course beforehand. Data were collected through a
questionnaire and an interview. Even if the results had many similarities with
preceding studies in terms of strategy use (Berkil, 2008; Peterson, 2000), it was
interesting to see that participants mostly use cooperative strategy to improve their
pronunciation. The most frequently used strategy item also was making association of
English pronunciation with Turkish pronunciation. Another striking result was to see
that most popular strategies were used by students taking no pronunciation course.
She concluded that more emphasis on pronunciation strategy learning and strategy
studies should be given to take more steps ahead.

Although few but prominent studies were conducted to date on pronunciation
learning strategies, no studies were exclusively conducted to reveal the effect of
individual variables on pronunciation learning strategy use. The purpose of this paper
is to examine what kind of strategies do learners use while dealing with
pronunciation, and what are the effects of individual variables especially on
pronunciation strategy use. In this line, following research questions were formulated;
1. Which groups of strategies are used most frequently by the participants?
2. Which are the specific pronunciation strategies used most frequently by the
   students?
3. Do male and female students’ pronunciation strategy uses differ significantly from each other?

4. Is there a significant difference in students’ pronunciation strategy use based on grade level?

5. Is there a significant difference in students’ pronunciation strategy use based on years of learning English?

3. Method

3.1. Research Design

Quantitative research design was applied in order to conduct the research. Pekrun, Goetz, Titz, and Perry (2002) state that “quantitative measures are needed for more rigorous tests of hypotheses” (p. 94). So, a similar approach was preferred in the study to detect the results more meticulously. A total of 28 statements made up of learning experiences presented on the scale and participants’ ideas on pronunciation strategy use were gathered by using survey method.

3.2. Setting and participants

The current study was conducted at a state university in Ankara, Turkey. Twenty-seven students from the English Language Teaching Department of the Hacettepe University took part in this study. The majority of participants were female (n=21) because of the dominance of the female students in language departments. The age range of the participants was between 18 and 23. All grade levels—freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior, were represented in the study. Convenient sampling method was used for the selection of participants and selection process was random in terms of age, gender, grade and years of learning English. All the participants participated voluntarily. Demographic information of participants is shown in Table 1 in detail;

Table 1. Demographic variables and individual differences of the participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>77.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.3. Data collection

Strategic pronunciation learning strategies scale (Eckstein, 2007) was used as the main instrument of this study with slight changes. The scale was used to detect the frequency counts of strategy usages of participants while dealing with pronunciation.

The scale was a five-point Likert scale ranging from as never or almost never, usually not (rarely), sometimes, usually and always or almost always. It includes 28 items in total; of all the statements include pronunciation strategies and tactics. The purpose of the scale was to gather frequency counts of pronunciation learning strategies under six activities and seventy-five corresponding strategies. The subcategories were categorized as; input, practice, noticing/feedback, hypothesis testing, hypothesis forming, and motivation.

A web-based survey program was used to collect data. Twenty-seven EFL students participated and return rate was %100. All the variables, age, gender, grade, and years of learning English, were taken into consideration in data collection process.

3.4. Data analysis

After collecting the data, participants’ pronunciation learning strategies were investigated by using descriptive statistics. It was decided to use non-parametric tests because of the size of the sample ($n= 27$). First of all, most frequently used strategy categorizations, and specific pronunciation strategies were found out by looking at the mean scores. Then, a Mann-Whitney U test was carried out to examine the differences between females and males in terms of their pronunciation strategy use. Thirdly, a Kruskal Wallis test was applied to find out the differences among grade levels. As a last analysis, a Mann-Whitney U test was conducted to investigate the difference in the length of English learning (less than ten years and more than ten years).

4. Findings

4.1. Which groups of strategies are used most frequently by the participants?

In order to see the frequency of strategy groupings by the participants, descriptive statistics were used and mean values and standard deviation were provided.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade level</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Mean score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>40.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>29.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of learning English</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Mean score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 10 years</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>51.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 10 years</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>48.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. Mean values of used strategy groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups of Strategies</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis Testing</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Input</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis Forming</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noticing / feedback</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>.82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As displayed at the table above, the mean values of strategy groups are ranging from 3.22 to 3.82. Even if there are similar values among all the strategy groupings, it was seen that hypothesis testing strategies were used most frequently as a pronunciation learning strategies by the participants ($M= 3.82$ $SD= .71$). Even if input and motivation strategy groupings had similar mean values, input strategies come in second after hypothesis testing ($M=3.57$ $SD= .7$).

4.2. Which are the specific pronunciation strategies used most frequently by the students?

The mean values and standard deviations were calculated with descriptive statistics to find out which strategy was used mostly by the participants.

Table 3. Which are the specific pronunciation strategies used most frequently by the students?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S27</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>.847</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S16</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>.934</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S15</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>1.091</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S13</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>1.055</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S22</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>1.013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S19</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>.770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>.949</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S20</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>.921</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S21</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>1.023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S6</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>.859</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S28</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>1.074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S7</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>1.074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S3</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>.742</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S17</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>1.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S1</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>.971</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S23</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>1.050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S14</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>1.311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S24</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>1.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S26</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>.912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S25</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>.953</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As demonstrated at the table above, pronunciation learning strategies numbered S27 (When I study English pronunciation, I look for a good environment.) and S16 (When I find a word I don't know how to pronounce, I am willing to guess the pronunciation) were mostly used by students when they had problems with their pronunciation (S27 M = 4.11, SD = .847; S16 M = 4.11, SD = .934).

4.3. **Do male and female students’ pronunciation strategy uses differ significantly from each other?**

The differences of male and female participants regarding pronunciation strategy use were investigated with a Mann-Whitney U test.

Table 4. Difference between female and male students’ pronunciation strategy use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>Mean Rank</td>
<td>Sum of Ranks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>15.79</td>
<td>331.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As displayed in Table 4, it was revealed that there is a significant difference between female and male students’ pronunciation strategy use; female students (MD = 3.65, n = 21) and male students (MD = 3.12, n = 6), U = 25.500, z = -2.190, p = .029. It was understood that female students outweigh male students in pronunciation strategy use.

4.4. **Is there a significant difference in students’ pronunciation strategy use based on grade level?**

The differences of pronunciation strategy use by participants according to their grade level were examined by using a Kruskal Wallis test.

Table 5. Grade level and pronunciation strategy use difference

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Success</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>MD</th>
<th>Mean Rank</th>
<th>χ²</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>12.73</td>
<td>2.166</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.539</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>11.75</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>11.58</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As it is clear from Table 5, the Kruskal-Wallis Test revealed no significant difference in pronunciation strategy use according to grade levels; freshman (MD = 3.54, n = 11), sophomore (MD = 3.64, n = 2), junior (MD = 3.25, n = 6), and senior (MD = 3.55, n = 8); $X^2(2,166)$= 3, $p=.539$.

4.5. Is there a significant difference in students’ pronunciation strategy use based on years of learning English?

The length of learning English and its implications for pronunciation strategy use were also investigated via Mann-Whitney U test.

Table 6. Years of learning English and pronunciation strategy use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Less than 10 years</th>
<th>More than 10 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>Mean Rank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>13.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As revealed in Table 6, it was understood that there is no significant difference regarding students’ years of learning English; less than ten years (MD = 3.39, n = 14) and more than ten years (MD = 3.64, n = 13), $U = 25.500$, $z = -2.190$, $p = .029$. Students with more than ten years of English experience showed more frequent strategy use (Md. =3.64), even if it is not statistically different.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

Although pronunciation is one of the core areas of learning, pronunciation learning strategies were ignored till 2000. Peterson (2000) conducted the first study in the on pronunciation strategies and leaded the literature (Akyol, 2012; Derwing & Rossiter, 2002; Eckstein, 2007; Hişmanoğlu, 2012; Vitenova & Miller, 2002).

This present study aims to reveal pronunciation learning strategy use of participants and effect of variables such as age, gender, grade levels, and years of learning English on pronunciation strategy use. Firstly, it was found out that gender has a significant effect on pronunciation strategy use. None of the previous studies revealed the effect of gender on pronunciation strategy use, but this paper unearthed that there is a significant deference between females and males and females outweighs males in strategy use.

Secondly, it was seen that hypothesis testing strategies (correcting/clarifying self, avoiding frustration, circumlocution, altering volume or speed of speech) were used by participants mostly. As a specific strategy and tactic, it was interesting to see that participants mostly either look for a good environment or try to guess the pronunciation as most frequent strategy type(s). These results can be linked to previous studies in the literature. Akyol (2012) similarly found out that participants mostly preferred to use cooperation strategy (can be linked to good environment) and
memory strategies (can be linked to guess the pronunciation). Moreover, Derwing and Rossiter (2002) detected that participants were eager to use self repetition and volume adjustment as their common strategy when they did not understand.

Lastly, participants grade level and years of learning English were investigated to reveal possible effects of these variables on pronunciation strategy use. Although statistically no significant difference was found out, it was understood that years of learning English has a positive effect on pronunciation strategy use. This can be explained by experience. Hişmanoğlu (2012) unearthed metacognitive strategies as mostly used group. In this line, it can be said that the more experienced the learners are, the more strategy types they will benefit such as self-evaluation.

All in all, it was revealed in this study that gender has a significant effect on pronunciation learning strategy use. Although age and grade level of participants make no difference, length of time for English learning can have a positive effect on pronunciation strategy use.

References


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The Role of Essay Writing Course, Given along with Comprehension-based Instruction, on the Writing Skill Development of High School Students

Şule Yüksel Ertuğrul Seçer a *, Nadir Çeliköz b

a Air Academy, National Defense University, Yeşilyurt, İstanbul, 34148, Turkey
b Educational Sciences, Yıldız Technical University, Davutpaşa, İstanbul, 34220, Turkey

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Abstract

This paper aims to analyze the effect of Essay Writing Course, given as specific writing skill instruction along with comprehension-based instruction, on the writing skill development of high school students. The paper is based on a quantitative study conducted in true experimental design. According to the Comprehension Hypothesis (Krashen, 1994, 2003), a comprehension-based instruction with an emphasis on reading and listening practice as receptive skills, will eventually lead to students’ improvement in writing and speaking as productive skills, and to their overall language development. Besides, specific writing skill instruction and effective writing practices have a proven record of success in enhancing students’ writing (Graham, 2018). Within the scope of this study, to determine if there is a meaningful difference in between the writing skill development of the students who take Essay Writing Course and of those who do not take any rhetorical course, apart from the comprehension-based instruction, the first and final writing exam scores and achievement levels of two groups of students are compared by a series of paired sample and independent t-tests, analyzed in SPSS and discussed in the scope of the study. It can be concluded from the results of the analysis that the experimental group, given the Essay Writing Course as writing skill instruction is significantly more successful than the control group, not given any writing skill instruction apart from comprehension oriented instruction. Within the analysis, done in the study, it can be also claimed that Essay Writing Course has a positive impact over the writing skill development of high school students.

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Keywords: Writing skill; comprehension-based instruction; writing skill instruction

1. Introduction

Writing is critical to student success in education in all grades and levels. Generally, students’ competence in writing skill aids their performance on achievement tests not only in writing, but also in other learning domains as well (Reeves, 2000; Graham & Hebert, 2011). In addition, writing skill also serves as a key for employment and promotion in the workplace all over the world (Smart, 2008).
Furthermore, writing also serves many purposes in today’s social life, even in the form of electronic personal communication such as text messages and emails for daily social interaction and self-expression. Together, these facts make writing have a central role in today’s world of communication society. Despite its importance for the benefit of component writers in education, work and social life, writing still remains as a struggle for a large segment of the world’s population, including the students, employees and professionals as well (Gökalp, 2001). Every year large numbers of adolescents fail to meet the requirements of the high school curriculum (Kamil, 2003; Snow & Biancarosa, 2003). Even worse, many of the high school graduates unable to write at the basic levels required by universities or business owners (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2006). This intensifies the importance of writing skill improvement as an educational issue and loads the educators and instructors of writing with a huge work and responsibility to do their best to help improve learners’ writing skills at high school level.

On the issue of language acquisition and skill development in second language, there can be said to be various viewpoints. Among all, a widely held view on second language acquisition is the comprehension-based hypothesis, according to which language learners acquire all kinds of language knowledge through direct and intensive exposure to comprehensible oral and written texts. The comprehension-based approach, focusing on the acquisition of language knowledge through meaning-focused listening and reading comprehension activities, has initiated basically from the empirical research (Krashen, 1994, 2003). Gradman and Hanania (1991) study on the role of reading-based practice in second language acquisition, and conclude that reading outside the class is the major factor determining success in second language acquisition among a number of factors affecting second language development such as formal learning, intensive English activity, and communicative oral use. In parallel, extensive reading is claimed to have a crucial role in language acquisition and proficiency (Smith, 2003; Hitosugi & Day, 2004). Furthermore, “reading recreationally” or “reading for fun” is reported to be positively correlated with reading competence (National Center for Education Statistics, 1997). Language acquirers also show dramatic gains from “free voluntary reading” and “pleasure reading” (Beglar, Hunt, & Kite, 2011; Mason, 2006). Sustained silent reading (SSR) is also shown to be an effective technique of second language development as “reading aloud’s natural partner” (Trelease, 2013). Moreover, some studies demonstrate that deliberate grammar instruction, and grammar correction have no lasting impact on language acquisition, but only influence conscious learning (Truscott, 2004, 2005). Bozorgian (2012) also contributes to the view that comprehension-based activities facilitate second language acquisition by indicating a high correlation between listening skill instruction and overall language proficiency.

In light of comprehension-based approach, receptive skills, listening and reading can be also claimed to have a positive effect over productive skills, writing and speaking. In comprehension-based approach, where learners concentrate on understanding, the development of listening comprehension ability precedes the
development of speaking ability, and fluent reading of age and level appropriate texts facilitates the development of composition skills (Paribakht & Wesche, 1993). In other words, receptive knowledge and development in receptive skills, which are listening and reading, will form the basis to produce utterances and result in development of productive skills, writing and speaking in the language. In his study on the effect of listening skill instruction over the improvement of composition, Berninger (2000) points out a high correlation between the improvement of narrative and expository composition through listening instruction since the participants between 1st and 6th grades show a significant improvement in spelling through aural skill instruction. Moreover, Shanahan (2006) emphasizes the relationship between listening and writing skill improvement in his discussion on the impact of listening skill instruction on writing development.

In addition to the research on behalf of the positive effect of receptive skills practice over productive skills improvement, Fountas and Pinnell (2001) put the emphasis on “the interconnectedness of reading and writing” and claim it to be “profound and inescapable” (p. 6). According to them, using reading and writing together in a harmony can enable learners to improve in the complementary processes of reading and writing as they work to reflect themselves through the meaning they construct. Along with the positive effect of comprehension-based instruction in language acquisition, does specific writing skill instruction play any role on writing skill improvement on upper intermediate or advanced level students? When it comes to improving writing skill, according to A Guide to Effective Instruction in Writing (2005), specific instruction on writing can be said to be the basic instrument to teach students “to use to express their thoughts, feelings, and judgements about what they have read, seen, or experienced” (p. 12). As students continue to develop an understanding of the writing process, different text forms and genres, teachers should provide explicit instruction that will support students to express themselves more confidently and effectively. To teach students to communicate thoughts and experiences by writing clearly and creatively, writing teachers need to provide effective instruction in understanding the writing process, understanding the elements of writing, understanding audience, purpose, and form for writing and applying higher-order thinking skills (p. 13). Besides, Graham (2008) emphasizes that effective writing practices and specific writing teaching techniques have a proven record of success in enhancing students’ writing on multiple occasions and he provides recommendations for teaching writing dedicating time to writing, with writing occurring across the curriculum, and involve students in various forms of “writing over time, increasing students’ knowledge about writing, fostering students’ interest, enjoyment, and motivation to write, helping students become strategic writers, teaching basic writing skills to mastery, taking advantage of technological writing tools, and finally using assessment to gauge students’ progress and needs” (p. 2).

In addition, Graham and Perin (2007) present 11 elements of effective writing skill instruction as a result of their meta-analysis, performed to determine which elements
of existing instructional methods, used in adolescent writing skill instruction are reported to be effective by research, and identify them as follows:

- **Writing Strategies:** teaching students strategies for planning, revising, and editing their compositions
- **Summarization:** explicitly and systematically teaching students how to summarize texts
- **Collaborative Writing:** using instructional arrangements in which adolescents work together to plan, draft, revise, and edit their compositions
- **Specific Product Goals:** assigning students specific, reachable goals for the writing they are to complete
- **Word Processing:** employing computers and word processors as instructional supports for assignments
- **Sentence Combining:** teaching students to construct more complex, sophisticated sentences
- **Prewriting:** engaging students in activities designed to help them generate or organize ideas
- **Inquiry Activities:** engaging students in analyzing immediate, concrete data to help them develop ideas and content for a particular writing task
- **Process Writing Approach:** interweaving a number of writing skill instructional activities in a workshop environment that stresses extended writing opportunities, writing for authentic audiences, personalized instruction, and cycles of writing
- **Study of Models:** providing students with opportunities to read, analyze, and emulate models of good writing
- **Writing for Content Learning:** using writing as a tool for learning content material (p. 11).

Among these 11 key elements, process writing skill instruction serves as the backbone for effective writing skill instruction. Process writing skill instruction should also be characterized by extensive opportunities for writing, writing for authentic audiences and purposes, engaging in cycles of planning, translating, and reviewing, personal responsibility and ownership of writing projects, self-reflection and evaluation, supportive writing environment; and individualized assistance and instruction (Troia, 2014).

In light of the research on behalf of the effect of comprehension-based instruction and of specific writing skill instruction over writing skill development, the present study aims to assess the role of Essay Writing Course, given along with a comprehension based program, on the writing performance of the foreign language learners at high school level. In other words, the present research basically focuses on this central question: Along with the positive effect of comprehension-based instruction in language acquisition, does specific writing skill instruction play any role on writing skill improvement of upper intermediate or advanced level high school students? Investigating the effect of Essay Writing course on the writing skill
development of high school students, the present research also intends to prove the following hypothesis:

- Comprehension-based instruction has a positive effect on the writing skill improvement of high school students who do not take any writing skill instruction. (There is an increase in between the pre- and post-tests of control group; 12th graders of 2014-2015 academic year.)

- Essay Writing Course, given along with comprehension based instruction has a positive effect on the writing skill improvement of high school students. (There is an increase in between the pre- and post-tests of experimental group; 12th graders of 2015-2016 academic year, before and after taking Essay Writing Course.)

- Essay Writing Course, given along with comprehension based instruction contributes more to the students’ writing skill improvement than a mere comprehension-based instruction with no emphasis on writing skill instruction. (Experimental group is more successful than control group in terms of post-tests’ and achievement levels’ comparison.

2. Method

This study is a quantitative research conducted in true experimental design. The study was carried out on all sections of 12th grade students and the former graduates of a state boarding high school. One experimental and one control group each containing 202 12th grade students formed the subjects of the study. The experimental group consists of 12th grade students in 2015-2016 educational year whereas the control group were the former graduates in the previous academic year of 2014-2015. The subjects in both experimental and control groups all came from standard state secondary schools where they took three hours of English education for three years in which the lessons were done as grammar rule teaching and memorization of the vocabulary. In parallel, members of both groups had similar educational background from the previous grades in this high school. The same number of hours of education per week (18 hours per week) was allotted for both groups. Besides, the educational facilities at the school were at the service of both groups. In addition, they also studied and lived in similar environment during and after the lessons. The ages of the group members were identical too; they are all 16-17 years old. The researcher herself was the instructor of both experimental and control groups. As a common procedure, all students were given a test of proficiency at the beginning of the year. All the classes in both groups can be said to be formed homogeneously.

Working as an instructor of English at this state high school, the researcher prefers to narrow down the population to this state high school as it is impossible to reach all high school students. The researcher and the facilitator of the study carries out the research on 12th grade students who undertake Essay Writing Course, specified on writing skill instruction and practice. Being an instructor of 12th graders, the researcher can easily get in touch with and carry out the experimental research on her own students. The researcher’s using convenience sampling technique in selecting
the subjects of this experimental research to eliminate the difficulty of time may be considered as the only limitation of the study.

For the validity and reliability of the study, several tests are applied on the pre-test conducted on the experimental group. To test face and content validity of the writing exam employed as pre-test, three instructors of English who are also experienced in teaching writing are asked to fill out a short questionnaire in 5 point Likert scale form. The questionnaire consists five questions about the validity of the exam which are as follows: “The exam is comprehensive enough in measuring the objectives of the course.”, “Each question in the exam reflects the writing objectives.”, “The time given in the exam is adequate.”, “There is adequate number of questions.”, and “I feel the assessment is an adequate measure of writing ability”. A basic statistical study based on correlation among three experts’ views shows that there is a high correlation among three experts’ views (p=0.78), therefore the exam can be said to be highly valid. To test intra-rater reliability, Essay Writing Exam, applied as pre-test is evaluated again by another instructor of English. The initial results from the evaluation of the Essay Writing course instructor who is also the facilitator of the study is compared with the results from the second evaluation of another instructor of English, and a high correlation is found in between (p=0.71) which proves that the achievement test has intra-rater reliability. To test predictive validity as criterion-related validity, linear regression analysis is applied on pre-test and OPT-Oxford Placement Test which is a proficiency test in English. As the result of the relation analysis high regression is found (r=0.74) which means that the Essay Writing exam is a meaningful predictor of the general English proficiency test, OPT (R=0.859, R²=0.738, p<0.01).

In the state high school, where the present study is conducted, Foreign Language Department principally and basically puts the emphasis on comprehension-oriented instruction, based on comprehensible input in the form of listening and reading practices in all four grades’ English lessons. Mere rhetorical lessons on writing skill instruction, which are “Composition Writing” and “Essay Writing” are given in two terms, only in 12th grade. In the control group, a complete comprehension-based approach is applied in language teaching. In other words, the purpose of English course in control group is to present as much comprehensible input as possible in a completely stress and anxiety free environment. Therefore, the control group took 12 hours of listening practice, usually in the form of listening comprehension exercises or in natural conversations about daily matters. In addition to these listening activities in class, the teachers of the control group give the students 6 hours of free reading in class which is called as sustained silent reading sessions. Apart from all these, writing practice was totally absent in the language classes of control group. Thus, students had no formal writing practice or writing skill instruction. The pre-test was conducted on control group in the beginning of the 2nd term of 2014-2015 academic year whereas the post-test is conducted at the end of 2014-2015 academic year in which the students receives no writing skill instruction, apart from comprehension-based instruction. In the experimental group, the researcher assumes that language
learning is a conscious process of rule learning through practice and applies an explicit and intensive instruction of writing in 8 hours per week. The instructor and the researcher goes over each Essay Type, explained in the textbook, “Writers at Work”, gives sample essays to demonstrate and explains the process and principles of essay writing. The instructor applies process writing through writing cycles. In each essay type, the instructor presents the principles in the main stages as preparing outline, forming the thesis statement, determining the scope of the essay, organizing the essay in three parts as introduction, body and conclusion, forming the first draft, peer check, forming the final draft, and progress check. Throughout the lesson, the instructor also gives the students the chance of discovering the features of the objective essay type in group work, revising the newly learned essay writing principles through their friends’ writing mistakes in peer work, and of assessing their own progress in between first and final draft of writing. During all writing process, the instructor also provides guidance for the students to write accurately. The writing skill instruction is carried out along with comprehensible skill practice with sustained silent reading sessions and listening practices in 4 hours each. In addition, she focuses on form and correct production of the structures in students’ writings in a separate 2-hour grammar course every week. This treatment is carried out in 17 weeks all throughout the 2nd term of 2015-2016 academic year. The pre-test on experimental group is conducted before any writing skill instruction is given in the beginning of 2015-2016 academic year whereas the post-test is conducted after the experimental group students undertake Essay Writing Course at the end of the academic year. Table 1 summarizes the difference in treatment between the two groups.

Table 1. Average Amount of Activities during Classes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities (18 class hours/week)</th>
<th>Control Group</th>
<th>Experimental Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>During Classes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustained Silent Reading</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for the analysis of the data obtained during the research. T statistics (t-test) were computed in accordance with the objectives of the study. Independent sample t-tests are used to test if two pre-tests are equal according to the mean scores or if there is a significant difference in between. In addition, paired sample t-tests are conducted in between the pre- and post-tests applied on experimental and control groups, to calculate the achievement
levels of the groups. Finally, to compare the achievement levels, a final independent t-test is conducted in between the achievement of both groups. All the results are interpreted according to the level of significance (p<0.05). The experimental design employed through the study is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. True Experimental Design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Groups</th>
<th>Pre-test</th>
<th>Treatment</th>
<th>Post-test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experimental Group</td>
<td></td>
<td>Essay Writing Instruction</td>
<td>3rd Essay Writing Exam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12th grades in 2015-2016</td>
<td>1st Essay Writing Exam</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Group</td>
<td></td>
<td>Comprehension-based Instruction with no Writing Skill Instruction</td>
<td>3rd Writing Exam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduates of 2014-2015</td>
<td>1st Writing Exam</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Results

In the first phase of the research, an independent t-test is conducted to find out if the pre-tests applied on both groups in the beginning of each academic year are equal or if there is a significant difference in between. The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Independent T-test Results related to the Comparison between 1st Writing Exam Scores (Pre-tests) of Experimental and Control Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>sd</th>
<th>X1-X2</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>62.58</td>
<td>10.57</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>-0.23</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>62.92</td>
<td>13.45</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the results of independent t-test conducted in between the pre-tests of experimental and control groups, as it can be clearly seen in Table 3, the pre-test score of control group on writing achievement is $\bar{x}_1 = 62.58$ and that of experimental group is $\bar{x}_2 = 62.92$. The difference in between the writing scores of control and experimental group students $\bar{x}_1 - \bar{x}_2 = 0.34$ is not found significant at a confidence level of $\alpha=0.05$ [t (274) = -0.23; p<0.05]. As there is no significant difference in between the writing scores of control and experimental groups, it apparently means that the pre-tests applied on control and experimental groups can be said to be equal. So, further research can be applied to test the indicated hypothesis.

The first hypothesis in the research is “Comprehension-based instruction has a positive effect on the writing skill improvement of high school students who do not take any writing skill instruction”. In other words, “There is an increase in between the pre- and post-tests of control group (12th graders of 2014-2015 academic year)”. To test this hypothesis, a paired sample t-test is conducted between pre- and post-test which are the 1st and 3rd Essay Writing exams of control group students, the 12th
graders of 2014-2015 academic year, who do not undertake any writing skill instruction, apart from comprehension-based instruction. The results of the analysis of paired sample t-test on control group are shown in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Paired Sample T-test Results related to the Comparison between the 1st and 3rd Essay Writing Exam Scores (Pre- and Post-tests) of Control Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>(\bar{x})</th>
<th>sd</th>
<th>(\bar{x}_1 - \bar{x}_2)</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pre-test</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>62.58</td>
<td>10.57</td>
<td>-5.56</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>-3.42</td>
<td>0.0007*</td>
<td>P&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>post-test</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>67.24</td>
<td>12.92</td>
<td>4.66</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the results of paired sample t-test conducted in between the pre-test and post-test of control group, the pre-test score of control group on writing achievement is \(\bar{x} = 62.58\) whereas post-test score is \(\bar{x} = 67.24\). The difference in between pre- and post-test scores \(\bar{x}_1 - \bar{x}_2 = 4.66\) is found significant at a confidence level of \(\alpha = 0.05\) \([t (137) = -3.42 \ p<0.05]\). This result, indicating an increase in the writing scores of control group students proves the first hypothesis. The significant increase in between the first and the last writing exam scores of the students who do not take Essay Writing Course can be said to indicate that regular comprehension-based instruction with no specific emphasis on writing skill instruction or writing skill practice has also a positive effect on the writing skill development of students.

The second hypothesis of the study is “Essay Writing Course, given along with comprehension based instruction has a positive effect on the writing skill improvement of high school students”. In other words, “There is an increase in between the pre- and post-tests of experimental group (12th graders of 2015-2016 academic year, before and after taking Essay Writing Course)”. To test this hypothesis, a second paired sample t-test is conducted in between pre- and post-test which are the 1st and 2nd Writing Exam applied on the experimental group students, the 12th graders of 2015-2016 academic year, who undertake the Essay Writing Course, along with comprehension-based instruction. The results are demonstrated in Table 5 as follows.

**Table 5.** Paired Sample T-test Results related to the Comparison between the 1st and 3rd Essay Writing Exam Scores (Pre- and Post-tests) of Experimental Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>(\bar{x})</th>
<th>sd</th>
<th>(\bar{x}_1 - \bar{x}_2)</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pre-test</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>62.92</td>
<td>13.45</td>
<td>9.42</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>-5.56</td>
<td>&lt;0.0001*</td>
<td>P&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>post-test</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>72.34</td>
<td>14.66</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the results of paired sample t-test conducted in between the pre-test and post-test of control group, the pre-test score of control group on writing achievement is \(\bar{x} = 62.92\) whereas post-test score is \(\bar{x} = 72.34\). The difference in
between pre- and post-test scores $\bar{x}_1 - \bar{x}_2 = 9.42$ is found significant at a confidence level of $\alpha=0.05$ [t (137) = -5.56; p<0.05]. This result, showing an increase in the writing scores of experimental group students can prove the first hypothesis. It can be concluded that the treatment, the Essay Writing Course based on writing skill instruction which is carried out in between pre- and post-tests leads to a significantly positive effect on writing skill development and success of the students.

The third hypothesis is “Essay Writing Course, given along with comprehension based instruction contributes more to the students’ writing skill improvement than a mere comprehension-based instruction with no emphasis on writing skill instruction”. In brief, “Experimental group is more successful than control group in terms of post-tests' and achievement levels' comparison”. This hypothesis also means Essay Writing Course, along with comprehension-based instruction contributes more to the students’ writing skill improvement than mere comprehension-based instruction with no writing skill instruction does. Therefore, it is the core hypothesis of the study which is basically focused on. In the research, this very important hypothesis is tried to be proven in two procedures; an independent t-test between the post-tests of experimental and control groups and another independent t-test in between the achievement levels of both groups. Table 6 shows the results of the independent t-test conducted in between the post-tests of experimental and control groups.

Table 6. Independent Sample T-test Results related to the Comparison between Final Writing Exam Scores (Post-tests) of Experimental and Control Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>$\bar{x}$</th>
<th>sd</th>
<th>$\bar{x}_1 - \bar{x}_2$</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pre-test</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>67.24</td>
<td>12.02</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>-3.15</td>
<td>0.0017</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>post-test</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>72.34</td>
<td>14.66</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the results of independent t-test conducted in between the post-tests of experimental and control groups, the post-test score of control group on writing achievement is $\bar{x}_1 = 67.24$ and that of experimental group is $\bar{x}_2 = 72.34$. The difference in between the writing scores of control and experimental group students $\bar{x}_1 - \bar{x}_2 = 5.10$ is found significant at a confidence level of $\alpha=0.05$ [t (274) = -3.15; p<0.05]. The results show that the post-test scores of experimental groups are significantly higher than the post-test scores of control group. Therefore, it can be said to prove that Essay Writing instruction which is the mere difference in treatment on both groups leads to a better improvement and an apparent success in writing skill.

As an independent-t test between the post-tests of the groups cannot be meaningful enough to indicate that experimental group is significantly more successful than control group, a second independent t-test in between the achievement levels of the groups is conducted along with the comparison of the post-test scores. This second t-test between the achievement levels of the groups also attempts to prove the core hypothesis of “Experimental group having Essay Writing instruction is more
successful than the control group receiving a comprehension-based instruction, but no specific instruction on writing”.

Table 7. Independent Sample T-test Results related to the Comparison between the Achievement Levels of Experimental and Control Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Procedures</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>$\bar{x}$</th>
<th>sd</th>
<th>$\bar{x}_1 - \bar{x}_2$</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>9.42</td>
<td>19.52</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>4.66</td>
<td>10.74</td>
<td>4.76</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>-2.50</td>
<td>0.0012</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

P<0.05

According to the results of independent t-test conducted in between the achievement levels of experimental and control groups, the achievement of experimental group is $\bar{x}_1=9.42$. Achievement of control group is $\bar{x}_2=4.66$. The difference in between achievement levels of experimental and control group students $\bar{x}_1 - \bar{x}_2=4.76$ is found significant at a confidence level of $\alpha=0.05$ [t (271) = -2.50; p<0.05]. The results show that the achievement of experimental group is significantly higher than the achievement of control group. This final comparison between the achievement levels of the groups apparently indicates that the experimental group is more successful than the control group in terms of the students’ achievement level in writing exam scores. Thus, it can be said to prove for the second time that Essay Writing instruction along with comprehension-based instruction leads to a better improvement and success in writing skill rather than mere comprehension-based instruction with no special emphasis and instruction on writing skill.

4. Discussion

Writing skill is one of the key components of language learning not only in educational but also in social life for lifelong learners (İnal, 2006). However, many researchers indicate the unfortunate fact that teaching and learning writing skill is rather a struggling period in the world and our country (Deniz, 2000). The challenging nature of learning and improving writing skill has led to numerous educational researchers on how to teach writing and maintain writing skill improvement. Two distant viewpoints on the issue of writing skill development are presented within the scope of this research. The control and experimental groups, as the representatives of these views are compared and analyzed in true experimental design in the present study.

The first view claims that a comprehension, and receptive skill (reading and listening) based instruction is the way to success in language acquisition and proficiency (Bozorgian 2012; Gradman & Hanania, 1991; Hitosugi & Day 2004; Krashen 1994, 2003; Smith, 2003), including writing skill improvement (Berninger 2000; Paribakht & Wesche, 1993; Shanahan 2006). In the study, this first view is represented by the control group students, who were the graduates of the state high school, where the study takes place, in the previous academic year of 2014-2015, and
who did not receive any rhetorical instruction on writing, apart from comprehension-based instruction with listening and reading practice. In accordance with the view of Mason (2006), Beglar, Hunt and Kite (2011), and Trelease (2013) on behalf of the positive effect of free pleasure reading on overall language proficiency and skill improvement, control group is subjected to excessive amount of reading for pleasure, in 2-hour silent reading sessions. Control group did not receive any instruction on grammar or writing skill, apart from comprehension-based instruction, emphasizing excessive comprehensible input in the form of listening and reading skill practice, completely free from any deliberate teacher or peer correction (Truscott, 2004, 2005). In the scope of the present study, the paired sample t-test, applied on pre- and post-tests of control group indicates a significant increase, therefore contributes to the studies on behalf of the positive effect of comprehension-based instruction over writing skill improvement.

The second view puts the emphasis on writing skill instruction and teaching writing rules for writing skill improvement, (Graham, 2008; Graham & Perin, 2007). In the study, this view is represented by the experimental group students, who are the 12th graders of 2015-2016 academic year and who take the 8-hour Essay Writing Course along with the school’s comprehension-based policy in foreign language teaching. In parallel to the studies of Pantier (1999), Saddler and Graham (2005), a supplementary Grammar Course, which is based on sentence combining, to teach students construct more complex and sophisticated sentences in upper levels, instead of traditional grammar, is given in a separate 2-hour lesson, along with the Essay Writing Course. The experimental group undertakes Essay Writing Course as specific writing skill instruction, along with comprehension-based instruction and reading skill practices in parallel with the view of Fountas and Pinnell (2001) who believe in the “interconnectedness” of reading and writing skills in language development. In the beginning of each Essay Writing lesson, the instructor, the researcher as well, teaches her students the objective essay type writing strategies for planning, revising, and editing their writings, in accordance with the studies of Walser (2000), Troia and Graham (2002), De La Paz (2005), and Graser (2005). All through out every Essay Writing lesson, she also employs process writing approach, supported by the work of Reimer (2001) and Troia (2014), according to which she renders writing activities in a way to create a workshop and supportive writing environment in which the students get the chance of having personal responsibility of their own writing projects, making self-reflection and evaluation, and receiving individualized assistance and instruction. Within process writing approach, she also guides her learners write independently and form their first draft of writing on their own with direct grammatical or organizational correction when needed as it is suggested by Fearn and Farnan (2005). Beside this individual type of instruction, with which each student can have the chance of writing, and then evaluating his progress on his own, the instructor also gives her students the opportunity to work in peers or groups, to revise, to edit, and to learn from each other’s writing mistakes under a collaborative writing instruction, recommended by Yarrow and Topping (2001), and Boscolo and Ascorti (2004).
5. Conclusions

In the scope of the present study, a series of independent t-tests and paired sample t-tests are conducted to make a comparison in between the writing scores and achievement levels of the experimental and control groups before and after the treatment of Essay Writing Course, along with comprehension-based instruction. As a result of all the independent and paired sample t-tests carried out through the study, it can be concluded that the experimental group, given the Essay Writing Course is significantly more successful than the control group, not given any specific writing skill instruction, apart from comprehension-based instruction. Within the analysis of paired sample and independent t-tests, as the central focus and the basic conclusion of the study, it can be claimed that Essay Writing Course has a positive effect over the writing skill development of high school students. In addition to a regular instruction, based on writing strategies and process writing in Essay Writing Course, the researcher's constant effort to create a writing workshop and a friendly and supportive writing environment that provides students with the opportunity of working individually, and collaboratively in peers and in groups in which they can brainstorm, plan, organize, write, assess, evaluate, and observe their overall progress, can be said to be the key factor that leads to success in experimental group students' writing performance.

According to the results, derived from the analysis of the tests, the most important points that can also be concluded are listed as follows:

- The high school students who are high-intermediate or advanced level learners of English can benefit from Essay Writing Course for their writing skill improvement.
- The high school students who are high-intermediate or advanced level learners of English can benefit from a constant comprehension-oriented instruction, based on and reading-listening skill practices instruction for their writing skill improvement.
- The high school students who are high-intermediate or advanced level learners of English can apparently progress more in writing when subjected to Essay Writing Course along with comprehension-oriented instruction.
- Comprehension-oriented instruction, based on reading and listening skills practice can have a positive effect over writing skill development throughout four-year high school education period. However, additionally, a writing course, based on understanding and learning different writing purposes, rules, principles, processes, styles and genres, is crucially needed to polish and improve writing skill in high-intermediate and advanced levels.

6. Recommendations

After all the conclusions, derived from the analysis of the tests, conducted in the study, the following recommendations about writing skill instruction can be given as follows:
In beginner, elementary and intermediate levels of English, comprehension-based instructional approach can be beneficial in providing the learners with as much as possible amount of constant and comprehensible reading and listening input. In overall language acquisition, writing skill improvement can be partially achieved by the positive transfer from reading and listening skill practices. However, in high-intermediate and advanced levels, comprehension-based instruction should be enriched and reinforced with writing skill instruction to achieve a real progress in writing skill.

As writing skill has a key role in educational, professional and social life, a rhetorical course on writing should be designed and placed in the curriculum of high schools, specifically in 12th grade, just before university education.

While designing and implementing the writing course, the course designer and the instructor should always follow the cycles of planning, translating, and reviewing, individual, pair and group work in writing projects and assignments, and self and peer reflection and evaluation.

Within this cycle of writing lesson, the instructor should aim to involve his students in various forms of and extensive opportunities for writing during the time, he dedicates to writing skill instruction.

The instructor, while increasing students’ knowledge about writing, should not neglect to foster his students' interest, enjoyment, and motivation to write.

The instructor should teach basic writing skills to mastery.

The instructor should never hesitate to spare his time to focus on form and to correct production of grammatical structures, when needed.

In addition to the course book, the instructor should also take advantage of technological writing tools, which today’s young learners are more interested in.

At the end of each piece of instruction, focusing on a specific topic, writing type or genre, the instructor should use constant and regular assessment, evaluation and feedback to gauge students’ progress and needs in writing skill.

In addition to explicit and intensive instruction of writing, sustained silent reading sessions and listening practices should be given place in English lessons, as well.

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Vocabulary Retention and Concordance-based Learning in L3 Acquisition

Irina Rets a*

* Sakarya University, Education Faculty, Hendek, 54300, Turkey

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Abstract

Vocabulary knowledge is considered to be key to language comprehension and speech production. Although there is considerable research literature on vocabulary learning, there is no consensus on which vocabulary teaching/learning strategy is the most successful. The article describes the findings of an experimental research study aimed at analysing the effect of concordance-based learning on L3 vocabulary acquisition and retention. L3 is understood in the present research as a chronologically third language acquired by a speaker (Mayo, 2012). The study features 48 participants learning German as a second foreign language subsequently to English who were divided randomly into experimental and control groups. While the experimental group learnt words with the help of online concordance, the control group worked with conventional vocabulary worksheets. A pre-test, a post test, and a delayed vocabulary recall test were conducted with both groups. The study showed that the experimental group outperformed the control group in both post- and delayed tests. The aspect of vocabulary knowledge that was acquired and retained more successfully with concordance-based activities was making up sentences and building collocations with the given key words. The study also demonstrated the usability of concordance-based learning with A1 language level students within the framework of L3 acquisition.

Keywords: Concordance; corpus linguistics; vocabulary learning; L3 acquisition; data-driven learning

1. Introduction

Traditionally teaching vocabulary takes the central role in language lessons as it is believed that without sufficient vocabulary knowledge, little can be expressed and understood in any language. In fact, this idea is justified by my inquiry in online feedback service ‘AnswerGarden’ that I launched before conducting research. In this inquiry I asked Internet users to define language and provide answers up to twenty characters in length. Most generated replies appeared to focus on the notion of vocabulary: ‘words’, ‘communication’, ‘sense’, ‘name’, ‘concept’, ‘expression’ etc., which means that vocabulary command is recognized by the respondents as the notion that
takes the primary role when it comes to language. The fact that we need vocabulary to define language phenomenon itself is another evidence of its significance in daily communication and language teaching. As Schmitt and Schmitt (2014) observed, ‘learners carry around dictionaries and not grammar books’ (p. 4).

There can be different focal points on analysing vocabulary in language teaching research: the size and type of vocabulary that should be taught to students, methods and scales of assessing vocabulary knowledge, and not least of all the strategies of vocabulary teaching. In the latter case the choice of a particular teaching strategy may depend on the understanding of what it means to ‘know’ a word. When I asked my students who I carried out my research study with, what they understand by ‘knowing’ the word, most of them considered a word learned if they know its primary meaning. A closer look on vocabulary knowledge shows that the understanding of the word is multi-level in nature. By knowing the word one may imply the knowledge of its semantic meaning(s), written and oral form, its grammatical function and potential position in a sentence, collocations which it forms, the register(s) in which it is used, the frequency of its usage in a language, the possible derivations it may have or semantic relationships it may build with other words (i.e. synonyms, antonyms, hyponyms).

Besides the depth or quality of vocabulary knowledge mentioned above, there have been initiatives to analyse vocabulary knowledge as a receptive-productive continuum: “we should think of vocabulary knowledge as a continuum between the ability to make sense of a word and the ability to activate the word automatically for productive purposes” (Faerch, Haastrup, & Phillipson, 1984, p. 54). Both parts of the continuum can be extended even further: the initial part to no awareness about the word, when we don’t know the word exists and the final part – to the integration of the word to the general linguistic competence of the learner.

Although there is considerable research literature on vocabulary learning, the best way to achieve profound vocabulary knowledge is still unclear as it depends on a diverse range of factors such as the context of learning, the aim of the language course and type of the syllabus, personality of the learner, his/her preferred learning style, motivation etc.

In this study, I reviewed the strategies of vocabulary teaching presented in research literature and focused on a particular one – concordance-based learning, described the analysed usability of this strategy in vocabulary teaching and retention within the framework of L3 acquisition.

2. Literature review

2.1. Vocabulary teaching strategies

Literature review on L2 vocabulary teaching strategies shows that this issue has a highly multi-dimensional character which manifests itself already in different views on its taxonomy. Some studies propose to classify vocabulary teaching strategies by
function and distinguish metacognitive strategies that involve planning and evaluating of learning done by the students, cognitive – involving reasoning analysis and functional practice and social – encouraging learning through cooperation with other people (Schmitt & Schmitt, 2014). Language teaching research has developed respective techniques for each of the strategies. Thus, for example, contextual guessing, creating a semantic map of a word or note-taking are methods of cognitive strategies’ replication. There have also been suggestions to classify these strategies by language use or way of engaging with language material. Here we have such categories as retrieval strategies or methods of memory searching and rehearsal – strategies that help learner store new lexical information into memory (Gu, 2002). Another classification differentiates between situations when students are consciously aware of a certain vocabulary learning strategy employed in class and when they have little awareness about the strategies used by the teacher. The latter taxonomy is closely related to the concept of explicit vs. implicit instruction. Explicit vocabulary teaching is defined as instruction aimed directly at helping the learners commit new lexical information to memory. In contrast, implicit vocabulary teaching operates with incidental vocabulary learning, a side product of any language activity not specifically aimed at vocabulary acquisition (Hulstijn, 2001).

In this research, I expanded the existing taxonomy to include the mode of vocabulary teaching: computer-assisted/online vs. traditional offline vocabulary instruction. Literature review showed that although there has been a lot of attention towards vocabulary studies through the means of computer mediation, such mode has not been included in the classifications of vocabulary teaching strategies.

2.1.1. Corpus linguistics and data-driven learning

A corpus is traditionally defined as ‘a systematic collection of naturally occurring texts (of both written and spoken language)’ (O’Keeffe, McCarthy, & Carter, 2007). Corpus technologies have been employed in language teaching since 1990s as part of data-driven learning approach (DDL). The latter term, coined by T. Johns (1991), within the framework of language teaching describes the process of how language learners become language detectives while exploring language data autonomously with the help of the corpus. It is based on the ideas of learner-centred language teaching, constructivism theory which views learning as an active process, discovery learning, communicative approach to language learning and, partly, lexical grammar theory positing that lexical meaning cannot be isolated from grammatical meaning as they always co-occur together.

The key tool that corpus linguistics and DDL operate with is concordance, which O’Keeffe et al. (2007) describe as a way ‘to find every occurrence of a particular word or phrase’ (p. 8). With rapid advances of technology, the times of manual concordance are long gone and students can obtain hands-on experience on language from real life communication context with only one click.

Since DDL represents an innovative mode of language teaching there are several issues that differentiate it from traditional teaching. These characteristics can be
considered at the same time as the advantages or contribution of this approach to the field of teaching.

First, DDL in itself embodies learner autonomy or learner independence as learner becomes the researcher and the control of knowledge acquisition shifts from the teacher to learner, making the classroom as a result more student-centred. Learners are not passive recipients of information, but take on active roles to work through extensive language data to discover rules and patterns embedded in them, they self-regulate their own learning (Guan, 2013). Student-centred environment involves learner as a whole person, and so is potentially motivating.

Secondly, DDL exposes students to highly authentic language input since it is collected from real communicative situations. Outside of DDL framework, authentic materials can be defined as written or spoken texts with the unaltered language data, produced for non-teaching purposes by and for native speakers to convey a message (Beresova, 2015). Authentic materials are opposed to non-authentic artificially simplified texts that are designed to illustrate a certain grammatical topic or vocabulary item. The key arguments that the proponents of authentic texts put forward are that such materials expose students to ‘real’ target language, provide cultural information about it, relate more closely to learners' needs and support a more creative approach to teaching (Ibid.). Authenticity of corpus data has a potential to improve students’ language intuition and make them more sensitive towards language variation.

Thirdly, as mentioned before DDL is based on the ideas of discovery learning which means that the students acquire knowledge through problem-solving activities using their critical thinking skills as opposed to being explicitly instructed by the teacher.

Finally, DDL represents a bottom-up approach to knowledge acquisition as learner first comes into contact with language input and then arrives at the understanding of vocabulary patterns and grammar rules.

2.1.2. Concordance-based learning and L3 acquisition

L3 acquisition is a relatively new field of language research. As it happens with most emerging disciplines, L3 acquisition until recently was not considered a separate area of study but was rather embraced by second language acquisition phenomenon. Although there is still no consensus as to what constitutes L3, following the work of García-Mayo (2012, p. 130) in this research I define L3 as ‘a non-native language acquired by learners who have previously acquired or are acquiring two other languages’. Most research studies on L3 acquisition are aimed at investigating the cross-linguistic influence of L1 and L2 on L3 (Cenoz, 2001; Foote, 2009; Mayo, 2012) and other issues of multilingualism. Literature review showed that there have been no studies so far aimed at researching the efficiency of data-driven approach on L3 acquisition.

Research studies on concordance-based learning and language learning can be generally divided into three categories: evaluation of the attitudes (what do
participants think about DDL?), practices (what classroom activities can be conducted with DDL?) and efficiency (can learners gain benefit from DDL?) (Gilquin & Granger, 2010).

Empirical studies with experimental research design that fall within the third category and the framework of my research – efficiency – are rather limited in number. In the long-term study of T. Cobb (1997) an experiment was carried out with Arabic-speaking students learning English in which vocabulary of approximately 240 words was taught to the students either through concordances or through other sources of lexical information. ‘In a series of tests involving transfer of word knowledge to novel contexts, a small but consistent gain was found for words introduced through concordances’ (p. 301). Another study investigated the effectiveness of corpus-based activities for learning verb-adverb collocations compared to traditional activities usually found in course-books (Daskalovska, 2015). The participants of the study, English learners whose native language was Macedonian, showed better results in all parts of the test when learning the collocations with the help of the online concordance. The experimental group demonstrated a gain of 28.24% on the post-test, while the control group had a gain of 7.72%.

As for vocabulary retention, a study investigating the effect of enriching the vocabulary instruction with the printouts of concordance lines on ability to recall vocabulary was conducted with Iranian EFL students (Jalilifar, Mehrabi, & Mousavinia, 2014). In this research, the experimental group that dealt with concordance also outperformed the control group in the delayed vocabulary recall test.

The theoretical significance of the present research study is its emphasis on L3 rather than L2 acquisition, the employment of a vocabulary scale representing different levels of vocabulary recognition and, respectively, a detailed view on which aspect of vocabulary - semantic meaning, written form, grammatical function, collocations or the knowledge of semantic relationships vocabulary units build with other units - is learnt and recalled more successfully with concordance-based learning.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research questions

This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of concordance-based learning on vocabulary learning and retention in L3 (German) acquisition as opposed to traditional explicit vocabulary instruction.

The research questions addressed in the study are as following:
1. Is concordance-based learning more effective in immediate short-term perspective than traditional activities when teaching L3 vocabulary?
2. Is concordance-based learning more effective than traditional activities when recalling L3 vocabulary?
3. Which aspect of the quality of vocabulary knowledge is learnt more successfully with concordance as opposed to traditional teaching?

4. Are concordance-based activities effective with A1 language level students?

3.2. Participants

The participants of the research were 48 students in the third year of their undergraduate study in English language teaching department of Sakarya University, Turkey. They were A1 language learners and had been learning German for 2,5 months as part of their second foreign language university course before the initiation of the study. The participants’ native language was Turkish and they also had an advance command of the English language as they had received about 9 years of language instruction on secondary school level and 3 years – on university level prior to the study. The experimental and control group consisted of 24 students each respectively, 9 males and 15 females in the experimental group, 7 males and 17 females in the control group. The assignment of the groups to experimental or control conditions was random, the students who had smartphones available to access the online corpus were assigned to the experimental group.

3.3. Instruments

Pre-test and post-test as well as delayed vocabulary recall test were identical and were based on a variation of vocabulary scale developed by the author (see Appendix 1). The parts of the scale represent the multi-level nature of vocabulary knowledge described in the introduction. To calculate the results, one point was given for each item in the vocabulary scale if the participants supplied a suitable answer. Since the focus of the exercises was the acquisition of meaning, points were not deducted for the grammar, syntactic or spelling mistakes unless it affected the intelligibility of the overall meaning. The amount and type of mistakes were later analysed for both groups.

3.4. Procedure

The experiment took place during the regular periods of the second foreign language class at the ELT department of Sakarya University. The vocabulary units included for the pre-post- and delayed tests were selected from the glossary of the class course textbook Studio d A1 Deutsch als Fremdsprache (Funk & Kuhn, 2010) and had not been covered in any of the previous classroom sessions. The chosen vocabulary units were basic and belong to A1 German.

Before the pre-test which showed that the students in both groups had identical knowledge of given vocabulary units as these words had not been discussed in any of the previous classroom activities, the class was first introduced to corpora and concordances. The teacher demonstrated the use of German DWDS Core Corpus (https://www.dwds.de/r) and the participants searched for the words of their own
choice, analysed and generalized the information from the concordance lines. The pre-
test was immediately followed by the treatment. The participants of the control group
worked with worksheets on conventional vocabulary learning in which (1) they were
introduced to 10 key word definitions in English and did exercises (2) on matching the
key words with their definitions in German, (3) matching these words with their
synonyms and antonyms, (4) as well as an exercise on filling in the blanks with the
correct key words they have learned. The experimental group was provided with the
same list of 10 key words as the control group and was asked to do the following four
tasks: (1) generate and analyse concordance lines for the key words, (2) guess the
meaning of each key word from the context in the concordance lines, (3) identify the
part of speech of the key words, (4) identify vocabulary units that are used with the
key words in their immediate context.

The participants in both groups completed all the tasks individually without the
interference from the teacher. Each group was given an hour to do the exercises
before the immediate post-test, however, the control group finished 20 minutes earlier
than the experimental group.

4. Results and Discussion

Since the selected vocabulary items were novel to the participants which was
confirmed by the pre-test, the main focus of the research was on the immediate and
delayed post-tests. The results of these tests show that, overall, the experimental
group gained more knowledge of the given lexical items than the control group,
although the results were not evenly distributed across the six sections of the tests.
The results of the immediate post-test show that experimental group outperformed
control group in four sections of the test (English meaning – by 6.9%, part of speech by
1.5%, sentence making by 32.6%, making collocations by 22.2%). Control group
outperformed experimental group in two sections of the test – making synonyms by
46% and making antonyms by 48.5%. Table 1 shows the difference between the
experimental and control groups in the percentage of people who provided correct
answers in the immediate post-test. The Roman numbers correspond with the
sections of the vocabulary scale.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>I</th>
<th>II</th>
<th>III</th>
<th>IV</th>
<th>V</th>
<th>VI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>82.3</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>72.7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>42.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control group</td>
<td>75.4</td>
<td>95.5</td>
<td>40.1</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results of the delayed post-test showed a decline for both groups in the score of
all six sections of the test, although similar to the immediate post-test the results
were not evenly distributed across the test. The last three sections of the test -
producing synonyms, antonyms and building collocations accounted for the biggest loss in both groups. Such big loss (above 40%) might be explained by the fact that the participants needed to remember more lexical information per each vocabulary unit such as immediate context and the relationships the word builds with other units for these sections of the vocabulary scale.

Apart from the loss, the experimental group again outperformed the control group even to a bigger extent in the same four sections of the delayed post-test as compared to the immediate post-test (English meaning – by 10.1%, part of speech by 2.8%, sentence making by 36.3%, making collocations by 18.5%). Control group outperformed experimental group in two sections of the test – making synonyms by 29% and making antonyms by 31.5%.

Overall, the experimental group retained more vocabulary knowledge in the four sections of the test than the control group as the percentage of loss between immediate and delayed post-tests is smaller than in case of the control group. Table 2 shows the difference between the experimental and control groups in the percentage of people who provided correct answers in the delayed post-test. Table 3 shows the percentage of loss between immediate and delayed post-tests of the experimental and control groups.

Table 2. Percentage of people who provided correct answers in the delayed post-test

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>II</th>
<th>III</th>
<th>IV</th>
<th>V</th>
<th>VI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>70.5</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>66.3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>20.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>60.4</td>
<td>90.2</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Percentage of loss between immediate and delayed post-tests of the experimental and control groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>I</th>
<th>II</th>
<th>III</th>
<th>IV</th>
<th>V</th>
<th>VI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>25.2</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although, the points were not deducted for the grammar, syntactic or spelling mistakes that did not affect the overall understanding of the meaning, the mistakes made in the III and VI sections of the test (sentence making and collocations building, respectively) were analysed. Table 4 shows the types and number of mistakes that were made by the two groups in the immediate post-test.

Table 4. Types and number of mistakes made by of the experimental and control groups in the immediate post-test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of mistakes</th>
<th>Control group</th>
<th>Experimental group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>agreement (pronouns-nouns / articles-nouns)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Taking into account that experimental group produced more output than the control group, it does not seem plausible to conclude whether it is through concordance-based or traditional method of vocabulary learning that the students make fewer mistakes. In the present study the biggest problem the experimental group had concerned verb conjugation and correct tense form of the verbs. Some examples of the mistakes made in regard to this type were ‘sie hattest’, ‘ich schäfte’, ‘ich komme gestern’ and other examples. Since verb conjugation is not a common process in English, it might need more practice and automatic rather than controlled processing of the grammar meaning for the students to produce correct answers. The major problem the control group faced was spelling besides verb conjugation as in the case of the experimental group. In most cases the participants forgot to capitalize the nouns (‘bruder’, ‘buch’ etc) or were influenced by the English spelling (‘Theatre’). A brief error analysis also gave an insight into the nature of word order mistakes that were made in roughly same amount in both groups: ‘gestern ich war in der Schule’, ‘ich glaube sie ist freundlich’ or ‘ich keine habe Zeit für meine Studie’. It seems that the participants followed an English sentence pattern in these examples as in their native language the position of the verb is always at the end of the sentence. A preliminary conclusion can be made that a high level of L2 proficiency has an important activation role on beginner levels of L3 acquisition. Thus, it is important for the L3 instructor to be aware of the students’ L2 and to draw their attention to grammar, syntax or spelling issues that are different from L2 while employing any methods of vocabulary teaching.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>4</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>agreement (verb-prepositions)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>verb conjugation and tenses</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>negation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>collocations</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>word order</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spelling</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on these results, the answers to the research questions of the present study are positive. In relation to the first and second research question, since the experimental group demonstrated better results in most parts of the two tests and the percentage of loss was smaller with the experimental group in the delayed test, it can be concluded that in this study the concordance-based activities were more effective for learning and retaining German A1 vocabulary units than the traditional activities.

In relation to the third research question and the aspect of vocabulary knowledge that is learnt more successfully with concordance-based activities, the results showed that this approach was especially effective in terms of sentence-making and collocation-building as opposed to traditional vocabulary teaching. It can be illustrated through the percentage difference. The experimental group outperformed the control group by 32.6% in sentence-making and by 22.2% in collocation-building in the immediate post-test and by 36.3% and 18.5% respectively in the delayed post-test. It can be explained by the fact that in concordance-based activities, the learners are
exposed to real-life authentic input as well as larger context and example sentences which they discover independently. The fact that the participants had to look at the words surrounding the key words to be able to fill in the table, they had to focus on the key words again which gave them an opportunity for repeated exposure and learning more information about them. The control group had one exercise on filling in the blanks with the correct key words, thus, they were exposed only to one example sentence for each given key vocabulary item.

However, the study showed that synonyms and antonyms were learnt more successfully through traditional instruction as, again, there was a significant difference in results (46% and 48.5% respectively in the immediate post-test and 30% and 31.5% respectively in the delayed post-test) in which the control group outperformed the experimental group. This can be explained by the nature of traditional vocabulary learning tasks that is often aimed at translating the lexical items and positioning the word on the synonym-antonym continuum.

The two other sections of the vocabulary test – providing English equivalents of German vocabulary items and identifying the part of speech showed a slight superiority of concordance-based activities (outperformance by 6.9% and 1.5% respectively in the immediate post-test and by 10.1% and 2.8% in the delayed post-test) although the difference in these sections was not as sharp as in the remaining sections of the two tests.

Finally, in relation to the last research question, the effectiveness of concordance-based activities with A1 language level students, the results of the study are confirmatory. Since the percentage of the participants who explained the items correctly in the experimental group was quite high (above 70% in the three sections of the immediate post-test and above 60% in the delayed post-test), it can be concluded that concordance-based instruction can be used with A1 language level students as well. However, one should take into consideration the fact that the nature of the taught vocabulary should correspond with the language level of the students. In the present study the vocabulary units were taken from the glossary of the course-book, thus, the students’ capacity to learn these units was not exceeded.

5. Limitations and suggestions for further research

One of the limitations of the study is that it was conducted in one setting, and the number of participants was not large enough to be able to generalize the results of the study to the whole L3 learner audience. Further studies are needed that would be conducted in other settings and that would include more participants.

In future experimental research studies on concordance-based instruction, SPSS programme can be used to calculate reliability and enhance the strength of the results. The experiment can also be supported by qualitative data that would include participants’ perceptions on learning L3 vocabulary with concordance as well as rating of their motivation towards this approach. In informal conversations I had with the participants after the experiment, some of them stated that they had problems...
with the comprehension of the authentic sentences in the German corpus and, thus, had to look through more example sentences to arrive at the understanding of the meaning of each key word.

6. Conclusions

The study revealed that concordance-based instruction can be an effective tool to learn and retain L3 vocabulary even on the beginner level of L3 acquisition. As research literature suggests (Beresova, 2015; Daskalovska, 2015; Guan, 2013) and the present study supports, this approach has several advantages for language learners among which are learner autonomy as learners take an active role in working through an extensive language material independently from the teacher; exposure to highly authentic language input which makes learners more sensitive towards language variation; discovery learning as using corpus is an inquiry-based activity and opposes explicit instruction by the teacher which also leads the learners to a bottom-up approach to knowledge acquisition. When using a corpus, the learners have to make their own judgment about the meaning of vocabulary items, thus, the present study showed that concordance-based activities are especially effective in developing learners’ ability to use vocabulary in the correct immediate context. However, as the study demonstrated, synonyms and antonyms are learned and retained more successfully through traditional mode of teaching (key word and synonym / antonym matching exercises) since the learners have direct access to this language material in conventional exercises.

References


Appendix A. Vocabulary scale employed in pre-post and delayed post-tests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>I know the meaning of this word in English</th>
<th>I know the part of speech of this word</th>
<th>I can make a sentence with this word in German</th>
<th>I know synonyms for this word</th>
<th>I know antonyms for this word</th>
<th>I know collocations this word builds</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>richtig</td>
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<td>verlieren</td>
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<td>gestern</td>
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<td>Zeit</td>
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<td>freundlich</td>
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Synectics as a prewriting technique: Its effects on writing fluency and lexical complexity

Nalan Bayraktar Balkır a *, Ece Zehir Topkaya a

a Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Çanakkale, 17020, Turkey

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore the effects of synectics as a prewriting technique on writing fluency and lexical complexity in the written texts of 20 tertiary level Turkish EFL learners. To this end, a mixed research design was adopted combining both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Repeated measures design was employed to examine the differences in participants’ writing fluency and lexical complexity over time, and to gain a deeper understanding of learners’ experiences, semi-structured interviews were conducted. The learner-written texts were analyzed using VocabProfile (VP), an online text analysis program, with respect to fluency and lexical complexity. Descriptive statistics, Friedman test for repeated measures, and Wilcoxon Signed Ranks test were carried out as data analysis procedures. As for the analysis of the qualitative data, inductive content analysis was performed. The findings revealed that the participants’ writing fluency increased significantly at the end of the program. On the other hand, their lexical complexity remained the same during the study. In terms of the results of the qualitative analysis, the participants had mostly positive perceptions about their synectics experience in terms of vocabulary learning, improvement of writing skills, and attitudes to writing.

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Keywords: Attitudes to writing; lexical complexity; prewriting techniques; synectics; writing fluency.

1. Introduction

Although writing is an important component of communication, its instruction in foreign language education (henceforth FLE) has not received as much attention as it deserved, especially with a comparison to the teaching of other language areas or skills. In addition, the features of product approach to writing still appear to dominate the writing instruction in many FLE contexts. The common second language (henceforth L2) writing instruction generally reflects the features of controlled composition model whereby learners are directed to practice grammatical patterns through guided writing activities. On the other hand, with the effect of process approach derived from experiential philosophy (Nunan, 1999), language learners have
started to be considered as writers and creators of texts which are products of highly complex cognitive processes (Raimes, 1991). As a result, the process of creating of a text has come to the foreground in L2 writing instruction, which led to an increase in the amount of research investigating various dimensions and stages of this process (see for example Açıkgöz Karakaş, 2011; Diaw, 2009; Hashempour, Rostampour & Behjat, 2015).

Of the studies implemented, it can be seen that a variety of prewriting techniques have also been examined. Most studies focused on the effects of such techniques on learner related factors like motivation, attitudes, interest, awareness, self-discovery, etc. (e.g. Diaw, 2009; Özbek, 2006); and few explored their effects on writing skills or improvement in writing rhetorical modes (e.g. Öncü, 1999; Özçelik, 1996). However, there appears to be a lack of investigation on the influence of prewriting techniques on language development in written language. Furthermore, despite the fact that a variety of prewriting techniques have been explored in those studies like video films, reading texts, brainstorming, storytelling, creative drama, comparatively novel techniques such as synectics have not been investigated much. In this regard, this study holds considerable significance as it intends to bridge the gap and be a pioneering study in researching the role of synectics as a particular prewriting technique in language development in L2 writing.

2. Background

2.1. L2 writing: from product to process

The main approach to L2 writing was process approach to writing with an EAP (English for Academic Purposes) focus within the context of the present study. Therefore, this paper will take L2 writing into account from a process approach perspective. As mentioned in the introduction briefly, process approach originated from the experiential philosophy or learning by doing in the 1970s (Nunan, 1999), which might be considered to be evolved as a reaction to product approach. By the emergence of this approach, the focus on the product shifted to focus on the process. Consequently, L2 writing instruction started to reflect the underlying principles of the approach and involved classroom applications such as idea generation, drafting, and revising and editing. Furthermore, learners were provided with a positive and collaborative environment to go through the stages of the writing process. In addition, formal accuracy was not a matter of concern at least in the initial steps of the process.

Although conceptualizing the construct of writing varies a lot, Silva and Matsuda offer a rather clear definition for it:

[Writing is] one of the modes of linguistic expression and communication – along with speaking and signing – rather than secondary or subservient to speech. It is a manifestation of, as well as the process of manifesting, sociolinguistic, strategic, and grammatical competences mediated by the use of orthographic systems. (2002, p. 253).
Writing is also a multidimensional construct as it involves “text analytic, composing processes, and sociocontextual perspectives; components (i.e. texts, writers, and contexts); the participants (students, instructors, policy makers, etc.), and basic educational functions (curriculum, instruction, and assessment of L2 writing” (Cumming, 2001, p. 214).

In terms of general characteristics, L2 writing is assumed to be a challenging and demanding skill because creating a fluent, clear, and effective piece of writing requires a number of factors to consider. These factors involve audience, purpose, word choice, content and organization, mechanics, and syntax and grammar (Raimes, 1983). Furthermore, writers are expected to go through recursive and non-linear stages of the writing process and employ particular strategies to maximize the effectiveness of their written text (Raimes, 1983).

Within the context of process approach to writing, the role of the teacher should be one of facilitator, guide, consultant, and judge or provider (Brown, 2001), and additionally, of motivator, resource, and feedback provider (Harmer, 2001).

As shown above, writing is a crucial component of communicative competence, so second language learners’ writing skills should be improved through principled approaches and practices.

2.1.1. Stages of the writing process

Process approach to writing requires learners to go through a number of stages and employ various strategies until they develop the final product. The terms and number of stages differ in the attempt to describe the writing process in the related literature, which might due to the factors such as teacher preferences or way of instruction, contextual differences like curriculum goals, learning preferences, styles, strategies and the like. However, for the sake of simplicity, a four-stage writing process as described by Oshima and Hogue (2007) will be referred in this paper: prewriting, organizing, writing, and polishing.

Prewriting is the idea generation step in which a variety of techniques could be used to choose a topic and gather ideas to develop it. Actually, it is the stage whereby students experience considerable difficulty in the writing process (Cormack, 1980) since many students feel frustrated or anxious in the beginning phase of writing. Therefore, prewriting appears to be an important stage as it prepares students to form the foundation of their writing. Some common techniques that could be applied in this stage are listing, brainstorming, freewriting, clustering, reading passages related to the topic, doing research, discussing the topic in pairs or groups, drama, etc. Synectics technique which was implemented in the intervention program of the present study could also be used to generate interesting ideas or make connections about the topic.

Organizing is the second step in which the ideas are organized through an outline. It can be a simple outline including a topic sentence (i.e. the sentence that includes a topic and a controlling idea and indicates the subject of the paragraph) and main
ideas to support the topic sentence. The outline can also be a detailed or a formal one. Its format depends on a set of conventions like letter and number use and indenting. Making an outline before starting to write is essential for building an effective, coherent, and well-developed piece of writing.

Writing is the third stage, whereby a rough draft is written using the outline as a guide. Learners are encouraged to get their ideas developed in the previous stages onto paper without worrying too much for grammar, spelling, or punctuation mistakes in the fastest way possible.

Polishing is the fourth step which involves both revising and editing. Revising is to do with considering the bigger issues of content and organization. It is also about checking the written text in terms of appropriate use of discourse markers and rhetorical conventions. At this point, peer-editing might work well especially if there is a guideline or a checklist for the peer to revise the paper. In editing phase, the writer him/herself checks the paper in terms of the smaller issues of grammar, punctuation, and mechanics to detect and correct the errors if any exists. At last, the final copy is written to be submitted to the instructor; and the instructor checks, evaluates, and gives feedback to the writer of each paper in turn.

As could be noticed from the description of the stages above, writing or the composing process is “a complex, cognitive process that requires sustained intellectual effort over a considerable period of time” (Nunan, 1999, p.273) and has a social, collaborative nature as a result of which learners are expected to gain skills of self-revision and editing and become autonomous and competent writers in time.

2.1.2. Research on Prewriting Techniques

A survey of research on L2 writing reveals that different prewriting techniques have been examined in several studies. For example, Öncü (1999) explored the effects of video films as a prewriting activity on a group of intermediate level learners’ argumentative compositions. The findings of the study indicated that there was a significant improvement in writing argumentative composition. In another study, Özçelik (1996) investigated the influence of the use of reading texts as a prewriting activity in low level EFL learners’ writing. The results showed that this prewriting technique led to a positive effect on students’ writing in the experimental group. Furthermore, Diaw (2009) conducted a case study to examine the impact of storytelling as a prewriting activity in learners’ narrative writing in a language arts classroom. The findings revealed that participants enjoyed storytelling; they were also motivated to involve in the constructivist writing process; in addition, interactive storytelling allowed the learners to discover their knowledge of self and the world. In another study, the influence of creative drama as a prewriting strategy on the content and the process of short story writing was explored (Cormack, 1980). One group were given drama, and the other one received a lesson/discussion prewriting instruction. The findings indicated that drama students got higher scores from the first story but significantly higher from the third story with respect to specific categories. Besides, drama students wrote longer stories, used more dialogue, and wrote more frequently
in the first person. In terms of attitudes, drama students were generally positive about prewriting activities and evaluated their experience as being enjoyable.

There is a scarcity of research investigating the effects of prewriting strategies on language development indicators like fluency and lexical complexity. To the authors’ knowledge, there are only two studies available. The first study was undertaken to seek the effects of pre-task planning (idea generation, organization, and goal setting) on learners’ essays with respect to writing fluency, grammatical complexity, and lexical complexity (Johnson, Mercado & Acevedo, 2012). The findings showed that there was a small significant effect of pre-planning condition on writing fluency, but no influence was seen on lexical complexity and grammatical complexity. The second study explored the influence of online student blogs on writing fluency and lexical complexity, and the results revealed that there was a significant increase in fluency and lexical complexity levels (Fellner & Apple, 2006).

As this review shows, most of the studies given above focused on learner related factors such as motivation, attitudes, interest, awareness, enjoyment, self-discovery, etc. (e.g. Cormack, 1980; Diaw, 2003) while very few of them explored the effects of using prewriting techniques on writing skills or improvement in writing rhetorical modes (e.g. Öncü, 1999; Özçelik, 1996). In this respect, there appears to be a lack of research investigating the effects of a prewriting technique on writing skills in terms of developmental measures like fluency and lexical complexity. The present study is an attempt to bridge this gap.

2.2. Synectics Model

2.2.1. Background of the Synectics Model

The word ‘synectics’ has been derived from Greek roots syn (bring together) and ectsics (diverse elements), and it basically refers to a structured technique for problem-solving or idea-generation. The creator of the Synectics Model (henceforth SM), Gordon, defines the term as “joining together of different and apparently irrelevant elements” (1961, p. 3). Weaver and Prince also define it as “a creative problem-solving process that carries participants from the analysis of problems to the generation and development of new ideas” (1990, p. 378).

The origin of synectics goes back to the invention meetings of a group of individuals who created metaphors for developing new industrial products. Tape recordings of those meetings were examined by Gordon and his team (Gordon, 1961). Through this examination, they were able to discover the psychological states of the creative process that promoted divergent and metaphorical thinking (Seligmann, 2007). Consequently, this research led to the development of the synectics process (Weaver & Prince, 1990).

According to Gordon (1961), synectics research is based on three hypotheses. The first hypothesis predicts that creativity is a potential human capacity which could be developed through certain processes or techniques. The second hypothesis assumes that emotions and irrationality are essential in promoting creativity; and the third
one suggests that understanding the problem is as significant as solving the problem and producing a creative outcome. Based on these hypotheses, the SM is a means to support the promotion of creativity and problem-solving capacity.

Connection-making element is central to the synectics process, which is achieved with the help of metaphor building. Metaphor which includes “all figures of speech (e.g. simile, personification, and oxymoron) that join together different and apparently irrelevant elements through the use of analogy” (Estes, Mintz, & Gunter, 2010, p. 147) is the backbone of the synectics process.

Synectics process includes the implementation of systematic use of three forms of metaphor. A direct analogy, known also as simile, is “a direct comparison between two objects, ideas or concepts” (Estes et al., 2010, p. 147). An example for this kind of metaphor could be the comparison between the veins in our bodies and a plumbing system. The second form of metaphor is personal analogy (personification) which lets learners to feel empathy with the object or idea in hand. The third form, “symbolic analogy (oxymoron), or compressed conflict, involves descriptions that appear to be contradictory but are actually creatively insightful”. In the authors’ words, it is like a ‘fight’ among words. This metaphorical fight allows learners to adopt a new viewpoint about the idea which is being explored as a result of group interaction.

To conclude, synectics is a structured technique designed for generating ideas, solving problems, and producing novelty through activation of psychological, conscious, and systematic mechanisms that are stimulated by making connections between seemingly irrelevant elements using different forms of metaphor.

2.2.2. Synectics in education

Synectics was originally developed for industry based environments while its use has been extended into a range of contexts. In education, synectics is an instructional model aiming to stimulate learners’ problem-solving and creative thinking skills by making sense of new information through specifically planned techniques.

In terms of theoretical underpinnings, it appears to be in accordance with the constructivist learning theory and reflective thinking (Seligmann, 2007; Walker, 2009). The view that learners construct their own reality or knowledge by making personal connections between what they know and what they are to learn rather than solely storing the knowledge transferred by a teacher is truly in line with the underlying principles of the SM, which is achieved through the use of metaphor.

The model also shares some principles of social-interactionism whereby learning is considered as a problem solving process taking place in interaction with other people in a cooperative and collaborative manner. Although synectics is a technique that could be used individually, working in groups might help learners see situations differently with the use of alternative viewpoints (Seligmann, 2007).

The SM also inherits several features that tend to support the principles of democracy education by letting learners listen to and appreciate each other’s ideas respectfully, try to understand others’ points of view, or vote for doing some selections.
as a class at different points of time during the sessions through constructive peer interaction.

As for the final features underlying the SM, it lends itself to the accommodation of diverse thinkers and various learning styles as it has the tools of three kinds of metaphor to gap the bridge between the right and left brain hemisphere, thereby tapping all kinds of learners with different multiple intelligences and Mindstyles (Seligmann, 2007).

In sum, synectics appears to be an innovative instructional model that could be employed to enhance learners’ creative thinking capacity and problem-solving skills. It also provides the base for cooperative and collaborative learning. Furthermore, the use of synectics in education makes it possible to reach a variety of learners with different learning and thinking styles, and intelligences. Last but not least, it might be possible to obtain various educational gains by the implementation of synectics in different curricular areas.

2.2.3. Versions of the Synectics Model

There are two main versions or operational mechanisms of the SM as identified by Gordon (1961): Making the Familiar Strange (henceforth MFS) and Making the Strange Familiar (henceforth MSF). The first version is more like an analytical step because it first requires individuals to understand the problem. It should also be noted that this understanding is apt to change in the course of the process. This version “helps students to see new patterns and relationships from previously learned knowledge and understandings” (Estes et al., 2010, p. 150). In other words, it is a bridge between the known and unknown. The second version, MSF, becomes the focus of the problem-stating, problem-solving process by “help[ing] make new knowledge more meaningful by bridging new and familiar information” (p. 150). Both of these versions are essential in the synectics process as they lead individuals to involve in the psychological states basic to the creative process. However, depending on the nature of the subject matter to be taught or the aim of a particular research study, a specific version is preferred and utilized. In this study, MFS version was used.

2.2.4. Research on the Synectics Model

Even though there are plenty of resources explaining theoretical features of the concept of synectics and main steps involved in its implementation, the number of the research studies exploring the use of the model is comparatively limited.

The review of research on synectics could be grouped into two. The first group presents a review of studies investigating the influence of synectics in FLE, and the second one includes a review of research on its effects in other curricular areas. Only two studies are available in the former group. The first study investigated the use of the SM on vocabulary learning performance, attitudes, and desire to learn English of a group of B1 level 8th graders in the Turkish context (Asmali & Dilbaz Sayın, 2016). The findings obtained from the post-tests revealed that there were no statistically significant differences between the students in two groups in terms of attitudes and
desire to learn English; however, the students’ vocabulary learning performance improved significantly in the experimental group. The second study sought the influence of synectics and journal writing techniques on a group of EFL students’ creativity (Fatemipour & Kordnaeej, 2014). The results showed that both synectics and journal writing techniques had a significant effect on the promotion of creativity. On the other hand, the synectics group outperformed the journal group. In addition, the participants had generally positive attitudes towards synectics technique.

The second group of studies have mainly been carried out in English Language Art classrooms and science courses. The studies implemented in English Language Arts courses involved the study of variables such as teacher attitudes towards the use of synectics, and learners’ creative writing growth (Burk, 2005; Keyes, 2006), analogical and divergent thinking ability, and attitudes toward writing (Heavilin, 1982), and vocabulary and reading skills development (Brown, 1980). As for the studies undertaken in science courses, they explored the impact of the model on students’ potential in developing original products, identifying problematic situations, and offering practical solutions to them (Ercan, 2010), creative thinking ability, academic achievement, and achievement motivation, achievement in the science course (Kleiner, 1991; Paltasingh, 2008; Pany, 2008; Patil, 2012).

As could be inferred from the review above, although synectics has proved to promote creative thinking in different curricular areas and vocabulary learning in an EFL context, there seems to be a scarcity of research investigating its effects with respect to language development in L2 writing.

2.3. Research questions

The main objective of this study is to explore the effects synectics as a prewriting technique on learners’ writing fluency and lexical complexity in a tertiary level English course. In addition, this study intends to discover learners’ perceptions of their experience with respect to language development. Based on these objectives, the following research questions were sought to answer:

1. Is there a significant change in learners’ writing fluency throughout the program?
2. Is there a significant change in learners’ lexical complexity throughout the program?
3. How do the learners perceive their experience in relation to language development in their writing?

3. Method

3.1. Research design

The present study adopts a mixed research study design that combines both quantitative and qualitative approaches during the data collection and analysis phases. In order to ensure triangulation and to interpret the results from different
perspectives, both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods were made use of. The specific design of the quantitative part of the study is the repeated measures design. The reason for using this design is to observe participants’ progress in writing fluency and lexical complexity over time. Qualitative data were collected from the participants as the main program shareholders by carrying out semi-structured interviews.

3.2. Participant characteristics

The research site of the study is the School of Foreign Languages at Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University in Turkey. The present study was carried out in the English Language Teaching and English Language Literature Preparatory Program, which serves students instruction in English for one academic term or year. The students enrolled in this program are expected to reach a level of C1 by gaining skills and competence to meet academic English requirements in their future studies and also to use the language effectively in professional and social spheres. It offers four courses (i.e. Listening and Speaking, Reading, Writing, and Basic English), and writing course component was chosen for the conduction of this study. The total number of weekly course hours is 28, and the size of the program is around 80 students.

The sampling was convenient sampling. The implementation of this study was realized with one intact group involved in this program during the spring term of academic year. It consisted of 18 female and 2 male students. Their age ranged from 18 to 21. All of them were native speakers of Turkish. Their consent was obtained prior to the implementation of the program.

With respect to the participants’ academic achievement, they had a moderate level of achievement in writing and Basic English courses. More specifically, they had a mean of 67.5 for the writing course and a mean of 71.3 for the Basic English course by the end of the fall term.

As for the aspects regarding writing, the students did not have considerable L2 writing instruction experiences in their previous education. More specifically, only 7 students reported that they partly had writing instruction in high school. Furthermore, they had a moderate level of anxiety in writing in English (M= 2.8). Finally, they had a fairly high level of comfort in self-expression in writing in English (M= 3.4).

In terms of the participants involved in the semi-structured interviews by the end of the study, 9 students volunteered to be interviewed. In order to preserve the anonymity of the students, they were given codes from S1 to S9 while reporting the findings. All the students were female. Their age ranged between 18 and 21, and their grade point averages (GPA) were between 63 and 87.

3.3. Data collection instruments

3.3.1. Writing tasks
In order to seek the effects of the synectics program on the developmental measures of fluency and lexical complexity in written language, the participants were required to write paragraphs about specific topics at three points of time during the course of the study. The topics of the writing tasks were determined by the participants during the synectics sessions through voting. The participants were instructed to write the paragraphs in line with paragraph writing rules covered in the writing course during the academic year. They were asked to write a paragraph of 150-200 words in approximately 40 minutes.

3.3.2. Semi-structured interviews

To elicit the participants’ evaluation of their experience of being a part of the program, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a volunteering group of students. With this reason in mind, a set of interview questions were prepared in line with the objectives of the study. After the questions were written by the researchers, they were examined and evaluated by an expert in terms of face and content validity, wording, clarity, and whether they were in line with the objectives of the study. Subsequently, required alterations were made on the questions.

3.4. Data collection procedures

After the official permission was received, the participants were informed about the purpose, content, length, and procedures of the study. Before the real program started, a pilot session was held with another group of students to see the lacking points of the implementation of the program and what could be changed. The implementation of the intervention program covered a period of seven weeks. During the program, six synectics sessions were held with the participants. Finally, semi-structured interviews were held with a group of voluntary participants. The outline of the program is illustrated in Table 1:

Table 1. The Synectics Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing task 1</th>
<th>Pre-program</th>
<th>The synectics program</th>
<th>Post-program</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing task 2</td>
<td>1st session</td>
<td>Topic: Falling in love</td>
<td>Topic: Dreams</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2nd session</td>
<td>Topic: Racism</td>
<td>Topic: Responsibility</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3rd session</td>
<td>Topic: Freedom</td>
<td>Topic: Justice</td>
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<td>4th session</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5th session</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6th session</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The synectics program including six sessions of synectics used as a prewriting technique began with the introduction of the technique to the participants. Then an exemplary lesson was demonstrated before the first session. After that, the participants were told to form groups to work together during each session. As a
result, there were totally five groups with four students in each, and the students remained in their determined groups throughout the program.

A synectics session began with greeting and establishing rapport and proceeded with lead-in and main activities. Giving the participants a right to determine the topic of the writing task and also the categories for direct analogies was one of the aims of the study so that they could have a sense of ownership of the task and involve in the activity more willingly. Some examples for those categories were plants, animals, sports, nature, occupations, space, etc.

The main activity was composed of seven main steps (see Appendix A for detailed explanation).

In order to simplify the complicated nature of the activity for the students, a graphic organizer was used by the researchers, which displayed each stage of the activity in different columns, and each stage is represented with a simpler term such as definition, similar, feels like, opposite, similar, and synthesis. In this way, the students could follow the stages more comfortably and confidently (see Appendix B).

3.5. Procedures for data analysis

In order to determine the participants’ writing fluency and lexical complexity, an online text analysis program was used. The program is called Vocabprofile (VP), which was based on Laufer and Nation’s Lexical Proficiency Profile (1994), and it serves research and teaching purposes about vocabulary development (http://www.lextutor.ca/vp/comp/). VP includes several text analysis tools. For this study, VP-Compleat (Classic) version, which analyzes texts through parameters such as tokens (words in text), types (different words), type-token ratio, and word families, was utilized. In this study, the number of tokens was considered to account for writing fluency, and type-token ratio was for lexical complexity. More specifically, fluency refers to “access of more words and more structures in a limited time” (Wolfe-Quintero, Inagaki & Kim, 1998, p. 14) and lexical complexity means “availability and quick access of a wide variety of basic and sophisticated words” (p.101). The data obtained from the analysis of the texts were subjected to non-parametric Friedman Test for repeated measures and Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test for pairwise comparison since the data did not show a normal distribution. For the statistical analysis, SPSS 20 was used.

As for the qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews, inductive content analysis technique was employed. After the interviews were recorded, they were transcribed, and codes, themes, and categories were identified. To ensure the interrater reliability of the analysis, nearly 30 % of the data were analyzed in a verbatim fashion by two independent raters, and the parallelism between the two sets of analyses was found to be 93 %, which pointed to a high level of consistency between the raters. After the entire data were analyzed, a table was formed to display the categories and themes, and quotations from the transcripts were also included while presenting the findings.
4. Results

4.1. Results for the writing fluency and lexical complexity

In order to seek the effects of synectics on the participants’ writing fluency and lexical complexity, the texts written at three intervals (pre-, mid-, and post- synectics program) were analyzed through Vocabprofile (VP). The data obtained from these procedures were analyzed through statistical tests like descriptive statistics, Friedman Test for repeated measures and Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test for pairwise comparisons. First of all, descriptive statistics was performed in order to find out the mean values of fluency and lexical complexity measures from the texts written at three intervals (see Table 2).

Table 2. Pre, Mid, and Post-test Scores for Writing Fluency and Lexical Complexity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing fluency</td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>118.55</td>
<td>35.91</td>
<td>Mid</td>
<td>136.30</td>
<td>45.23</td>
<td>Post</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lexical complexity</td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>Mid</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>Post</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The findings in Table 2 indicate that the mean values of pre, mid, and post-test fluency measures appear to have increased, but the mean values of pre, mid, and post-test lexical complexity remained fairly the same. In order to see whether these changes point to statistically significant differences, a non-parametric Friedman Test was run. Table 3 displays the findings from the test.

Table 3. Differences among Pre, Mid, and Post-tests for Writing Fluency and Lexical Complexity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>X²</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing fluency</td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>118.55</td>
<td>35.91</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.70</td>
<td>.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mid</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>136.30</td>
<td>45.23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>151.95</td>
<td>28.83</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lexical complexity</td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>.06887</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.228</td>
<td>.892</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mid</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>.07867</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>.06221</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Table 3, there was not a significant difference among the three measures of lexical complexity ($X^2_{(2)} = .23, p = .89$). In contrast, a significant difference among the three measures of writing fluency ($X^2_{(2)} = 9.70, p = .008$) was detected. In order to identify which measures of fluency in particular differ from each other, a Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test for pairwise comparisons was run as post hoc, and a Bonferroni adjustment on the results from the test was used (see Table 4).
Table 4. Pairwise Comparisons of Pre, Mid, and Post-test for Writing Fluency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fluency test Pairs</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Rank</th>
<th>Sum of Ranks</th>
<th>Z</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre and Post</td>
<td>4a</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>18.00</td>
<td>-3.248</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16b</td>
<td>12.00</td>
<td>192.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0c</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre and Mid</td>
<td>5a</td>
<td>9.80</td>
<td>49.00</td>
<td>-2.091</td>
<td>.037</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15b</td>
<td>10.73</td>
<td>161.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0c</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid and Post</td>
<td>8a</td>
<td>7.56</td>
<td>60.50</td>
<td>-1.661</td>
<td>.097</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12b</td>
<td>12.46</td>
<td>149.50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0c</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results of the analysis, as shown in Table 4, indicate that there was a significant difference only between fluency pre-test and post-test, and also the effect size for this analysis was found to indicate a medium to large effect size which shows that the result has a practical significance. \( z = -2.09, p = .001, r = -.51 \).

However, the differences between fluency pre-test and mid-test \( z = -2.0091, p = .037 \), and mid-test and post-test \( z = -1.66, p > .05 \) were not statistically significant. These findings show that although there did not appear to be a significant increase in participants’ writing fluency in shorter periods of time, it increased significantly in the long term.

To summarize the findings in relation to the first two research questions, the participants’ development in writing fluency increased significantly at the end of the program. However, their improvement with respect to lexical complexity remained the same during the study.

4.2. Results for the participants’ perceived experiences

The results of the qualitative data analysis revealed that the participants had mostly positive perceptions about their synectics experience. The three categories with respect to positive issues were *vocabulary learning, improvement of writing skills, and attitudes to writing* (see Table 5).

Table 5. Positive Issues about the Use of Synectics as a Prewriting Technique

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Participant Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Vocabulary learning</td>
<td>Learning new vocabulary items</td>
<td>S2-S3-S4-S5-S6-S7-S9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Retention of new vocabulary items</td>
<td>S1-S3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Improvement of writing skills</td>
<td>Contribution to paragraph writing</td>
<td>S1-S3-S4-S6-S9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comfort in writing</td>
<td>S3-S4-S6-S7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Attitudes to writing/the</td>
<td>Positive attitude to writing</td>
<td>S1-S2-S4-S6-S8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The most frequent category reflecting a positive perception was *vocabulary learning*. The first theme in this category was *learning new vocabulary items*. Most of the participants stated that the synectics technique offered them an opportunity to learn more new vocabulary items. For example, S7's response points out the effectiveness of synectics and also the use of group work in vocabulary learning.

“We learned new words. When the others shared different words that we didn’t know, we learned what they knew.”

S6 pointed to the contribution of dictionaries and other groups' ideas in learning new words.

“In the preparation (initial) stage of the activity, we learn new words from the dictionary and the other groups.”

The quotations above signal the importance of being individually active through the use of dictionaries and other sources, and also the power of interaction with the group members or classmates in vocabulary learning. As a result, it is possible to state that the synectics technique is conducive to vocabulary learning as it inherently necessitates being both individually and collectively active in each stage of the activity.

The second theme within vocabulary learning category is the *retention of new vocabulary items*. For example, two participants made the following comments.

(S9) “I believe there is an improvement in my vocabulary because when we write, we need words, and as we use them we retain them more.”

(S3) “Everybody utters different adjectives that I don’t know. When this happens, I learn new words. Most of these words become permanent as we use them while writing.”

These comments indicate that students did not only learn new vocabulary items during the synectics activity, but also retained them because they used most of these words in their texts. Another factor that might help them remember many of the words could be the fact that those words were repeated throughout the activity as the teacher tried to summarize the groups’ suggested ideas, and the students vote for the best ideas. Moreover, all the ideas and vocabulary items were projected onto the board so that the students had also a visual reference to them throughout the session.

*Improvement of writing skills* is the second category. Some of the students reported that the synectics technique contributed to their paragraph writing; and some of them said they gained comfort in writing. The following quotations from the interviews reflect this theme:

(S3) “Since we work in groups, more ideas come out; in this case, writing becomes much easier for me... I normally have difficulty in writing the introduction and the ending of a text. However, this becomes easier for me when we use the synectics
technique. I know how to start and end it because I get inspired from the ideas that came out during the activity.”

(S4) “I don’t spend time thinking how to begin the sentence; I start to write comfortably.”

(S6) “Using the data that emerged from the synectics group work makes our writing easier... It’s a complicated technique, but it makes my individual writing easier.”

These findings could be interpreted with regard to the importance of the prewriting stage of the writing process. As discussed previously, prewriting appears to be an important stage since it prepares students to form the foundation of their writing through using certain techniques or activities to generate ideas. In this respect, it could be suggested that the synectics technique as a prewriting activity seems to fulfil this function in that students in this study appeared to have gained comfort and a sense of improvement in writing in English.

Attitudes to writing/the writing course, the third category, was another positive issue about the use of the synectics technique. Positive attitude to writing and higher motivation are the themes under this category. Some of the corresponding excerpts from the transcripts are presented below:

(S1) When we have a synectics activity, I participate in the lesson more eagerly. In a way, I have a more positive attitude to the course.”

(S5) “I have a rather positive attitude to writing. In fact, I started to like writing more with synectics.”

(S6) “I had a negative attitude to writing at the beginning of the academic year. I couldn’t write at that time, but now I can write. I can say my attitude turned into a bit more positive. I can produce more ideas thanks to this technique.”

It could be drawn from these responses that the implementation of the synectics technique in this study had a positive effect on participants’ attitude to writing and the writing course, and motivation to write.

Although the participants’ perceived experiences were mostly positive, there were also a few negative issues which revealed two categories, i.e. the length of the synectics session and disagreement (see Table 6).

Table 6. Negative Issues about the Use of Synectics as a Prewriting Technique

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Participant Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Length of the synectics session</td>
<td>Time-taking</td>
<td>S1-S2-S3-S6-S7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Disagreement</td>
<td>Difficulty in deciding at ideas in group</td>
<td>S1-S9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dominance of some peers’ ideas</td>
<td>S4-S9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 6 indicates, the participants thought that the synectics activity tends to be very time-taking as a prewriting activity. This could be stemming from the fact that a great deal of time is needed to accomplish each successive stage of metaphor building
to complete the whole task. Therefore, some adaptations regarding the timing could be made in order to overcome this drawback. In addition, although much more positive responses were elicited about the advantages and effectiveness of group work, a few students pointed to a drawback of group work in terms of disagreement during the idea selection in groups.

4.3. Discussion of findings for the writing fluency and lexical complexity

The results of the findings from the quantitative data indicate that the participants’ writing fluency increased significantly. The measurements carried out at three intervals showed a continuous rise. However, only pre-test post-test difference found to be statistically significant. The finding in relation to the increase in learners’ writing fluency was also reflected in the qualitative analyses. As a result, it could be concluded that the synectics technique had a positive effect on the improvement of writing fluency, i.e. the number of words in a text. This might show that synectics activates learners’ idea generation capacity, which results in acceleration in the number of words. On the other hand, the findings revealed that the synectics programme did not lead to a statistically meaningful increase in lexical. Although the participants generated a wealth of vocabulary items through certain strategies peculiar to the synectics technique, they did not seem to have used the new or distinct ones emerged during the sessions. This might show that learners might have preferred to use the items from their active vocabulary instead of the ones produced during the activity, which might indicate the importance of using new vocabulary all through the learning process.

To the authors’ knowledge, no other study is available that investigated the effects of synectics as a prewriting technique on developmental measures of writing fluency and lexical complexity in written language. However, the results of several studies implementing various prewriting techniques have also indicated some educational gains. For example, Öncü (1999) found out that the use of video films led to an improvement in writing argumentative compositions. Furthermore, Özçelik’s (1996) study pointed that the use of reading texts resulted in a significant increase in learners’ scores regarding content, organization, vocabulary, and language use. However, the results of a study on the impact of brainstorming as a prewriting strategy revealed that there was not a significant influence of the strategy on learners’ writing development (Hashempour, Rostampour & Behjat, 2015), which might be taken as an indicator of the effect of certain learner and/or contextual factors that may have an impact on the successful and effective implementation of these prewriting techniques. On the other hand, one of the few studies investigating developmental measures of fluency and lexical complexity which was carried out by Fellner and Apple (2006) showed that the participants’ fluency and word frequency levels increased significantly at the end of the program.

In conclusion, despite the limitation of the group size, the results of this study appear to prove that synectics might be effective in improving writing fluency in the
long term. Therefore, it might be concluded that synectics could be applied in the writing process as an alternative prewriting technique.

4.4. Discussion of findings for the participants’ perceived experiences

The analysis of the qualitative data gathered from the semi-structured interviews yielded three broad categories, namely vocabulary learning, improvement of writing skills, attitudes to writing/the writing course. Most of the participants stated that the technique helped them learn and retain more vocabulary items, which also supports the results of the quantitative data on writing fluency. They also emphasized that their writing skills improved considerably. Although this study did not primarily focus on the development of general writing skills of the learners, the qualitative data analysis revealed considerable gains in this area as well. This result coincides with those of other studies (e.g. Cormack, 1980; Öncü, 1999) where positive correlations were found between language proficiency and writing competence. Thus, it can be argued that the significant difference in writing fluency detected in this study might be related to learners’ language proficiency. To sum up, the participants' opinions regarding their experience with the synectics technique were generally positive in terms of both linguistic and writing skills development, and psychological constructs such as attitudes and motivation.

4.5. Limitations

Like any educational sciences study, this study also comprises several limitations. First of all, the findings of this study are limited to the size of the sample group, which was composed of 20 students attending the English preparatory class at the School of Foreign Languages at a Western Turkish university. In addition, not all the students were present in each synectics session during the implementation of the program, which means there were a few absentees who could not receive the instruction at some points of the synectics program. Because of these two reasons related to the sample, the results of this study cannot be generalized for all population of learners and contexts where English is instructed as a foreign language. Second, the data collection process and implementation of the program covered a period of only six weeks, which might be regarded a short period of time. Therefore, it is questionable whether different results could have been obtained if the length of the study had been longer or shorter.

5. Conclusions and Implications

The primary goal of this study was to explore the effects of synectics as a prewriting technique on developmental measures of fluency and lexical complexity in written language. The results of the study indicated that learners’ writing fluency increased significantly between pre-test and post-test measures, which comes to mean that synectics seems to provide more positive effects in the long term. This finding could be attributed to the fact that the synectics technique involves primarily a vocabulary...
activation and expansion activity. In this respect, the finding in relation to the increase in learners' writing fluency might be regarded as an expected outcome as the technique appears to present learners a large repertoire of vocabulary items to use while composing their texts. In other words, since the nature of the technique lends itself to generating plenty of ideas throughout its implementation, it is not surprising that there was a significant growth in learners' writing fluency. In contrast, learners' lexical complexity appeared to remain fairly the same throughout the programme. This result could be explained by the fact that although the vocabulary items that were produced by the learners in the sessions showed great variation, they might have used the items from their active vocabulary instead of the new or distinct ones suggested during the activity while composing their texts.

From the participants' point of view, some conclusions worthy of consideration related to the findings of the qualitative data could also be drawn. As explained above, the participants tended to have mostly positive opinions regarding their experience. This is actually an expected result as the features inherent in the SM make it appealing to learners. First of all, the design of the technique, which basically involves connection-making through metaphor, may appear to be what makes their experience positive for the students. In addition, the mechanisms of synectics process require participants to work in a cooperative and collaborative manner when they are producing analogies to improve their understandings of new concepts, and this is likely to produce educationally valuable results. Moreover, as discussed in the background, the SM appears to tap all kinds of learners with different multiple intelligences, various learning styles, and diverse thinkers as it has the tools of three kinds of metaphor to gap the bridge between the right and left brain hemisphere. It also helps build a more learner-centred classroom atmosphere whereby learners actively engage in learning (Seligman, 2007).

These results also carry several important implications for the implementation of the SM in the classroom. First of all, based on the findings and researchers' experience, it was realized that synectics could be used as a prewriting technique despite a couple of drawbacks or points to be cautious about. An important educational implication arises from the result regarding the lexical complexity. It has been seen that lexical complexity is not a trait in the language production of learners that can develop automatically. Therefore, it seems essential for foreign language educators employing the synectics technique to take a couple of instructional moves to help learners improve this trait. One way to ensure this could be through distributing the vocabulary lists produced during each session to students and directing and motivating them to use especially the distinct vocabulary items from the lists in their texts so that those words could become a part of their active vocabulary. In addition, students could be given a minimum number of those items to use in their texts. Another way to make learners to use those words is to project the word lists onto the board throughout the activity; therefore, when the writing action starts, they can have a continuous visual reference to the lists and use the words actively in their texts. Alternatively, those lists could be shared with the students through
photocopying or downloading them into an online sharing programme. In short, teachers need to make it sure that the student-generated lists from the synectics sessions are actively used.

Another significant educational implication is about the timing of a synectics session. As each session tends to last long, students might show signs of fatigue and boredom. With the purpose of overcoming this problem, some adaptations could be made. For example, teachers should set time limits for groups for brainstorming and idea generation so that the planned lesson time should not be exceeded. Alternatively, the groups could be kept fixed for a determined period of time in order not to lose time for arranging groups in each session. Teacher monitoring is also required and a set of rules for choosing ideas to offer to class during in-group idea generation processes should be established.

It could also be suggested that the SM be implemented in various educational contexts, with different age groups and proficiency levels, and also in different courses such as speaking, vocabulary, reading, etc. In addition, the results obtained from the study might interest the curriculum developers of English Language Teaching Departments as the synectics technique might be included among prewriting techniques in training pre-service English teachers to teach writing skills. Furthermore, foreign language teachers could be informed and trained about the use of the synectics technique in FLE through in-service teacher training courses.

There are also a couple of implications arisen for researchers. The effect of other learning environments which were a part of the large preparatory programme running at the time of research might have affected the results of the study. This calls for an important implication for future research. Such an instructional model could be experimented with a group of participants who are enrolled in a single course on which other courses or learning environments might not have an effect. For example, it might be conducted in a non-formal and non-assessed setting such as a private language course so that the effect of other external factors could be minimized. In addition, in order to draw more confident conclusions regarding the effects of the SM, true experimental design with a control group could be employed in future research.

On the whole, this study points out that synectics as a prewriting technique can be used in the English language classrooms at tertiary level as it causes a significant development in learners’ writing fluency. Furthermore, the technique can be refined by letting students get exposed to a wide range and number of lexical items through certain instructional moves to induce the development of lexical complexity as the researchers experienced in the class.

References


Appendix A. Synectics lesson plan.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Justice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aims</td>
<td>Students generate ideas for the writing task through using different types of metaphor in group interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration</td>
<td>60 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Ss</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials</td>
<td>Computer, projector, dictionaries, and student reflection forms (Appendix F)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities</td>
<td>1. Describing the topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Creating direct analogies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Describing personal analogies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Identifying compressed conflicts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Creating a new direct analogy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Evaluating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. Re-examining the original topic and writing a paragraph about it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedures</td>
<td>1. Greeting and establishing rapport:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The teacher and the students greet each other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Lead-in:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a) The students are shown a list of topics for writing tasks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) Then they vote on the topic they like, and the topic voted by the most of the students is chosen as the topic of the session.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Main-activity:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a) The teacher asks the students to describe the topic chosen in the previous stage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>They work in pairs or small groups and write words or phrases to describe the topic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Next, all of the descriptive words or phrases are written on a word document and projected on the board.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) The students are asked to create a direct analogy between the descriptive words on the board and the an unrelated category such as machine, plant, or food. Next, they are asked to describe how those words are like an item in the chosen category, and also explain the reasons for their choices. When the class is ready, they vote on one specific analogy that they would like to study on in the next step.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c) The students choose one of the direct analogies and create personal analogies. The teacher asks the students to become the object and describe how it feels and works and writes down the words used by the students to describe their feelings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>d) The students are told to match the words from the previous step that seem to conflict or fight with each other. In other words, they create a series of compressed conflicts and explain why they think the paired words seem to be compressed conflicts. Finally, the students vote on the best pair of compressed conflicts.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>e) The students create another direct analogy using the compressed conflict chosen by the class.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>f) The students re-examine the original topic by returning to the last direct analogy chosen by the class and compare it to the original topic. Then they start to describe the original topic in writing making use of the list of analogies produced during the exercise.</td>
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<td>4. Reflection:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The students react to the process by completing a reflection form that asks them to indicate how the activity makes them feel. The teacher might interview the individual students for further student evaluation when necessary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Wrap-up:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The teacher and the students discuss some of the interesting or unusual ideas generated during the activity.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B. Graphic organizer for synectics sessions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Similar</th>
<th>Feels like</th>
<th>Opposite</th>
<th>Similar</th>
<th>Synthesis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Taken from http://www.writedesignonline.com/organizers/synectics.html

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Awareness of Critical Discourse Analysis Underpins Learners’ Sociolinguistic Competence and Language Use

Fawzi Al Ghazali a *

a Al Hosn University, P.O. Box38772, Abu Dhabi, UAE

Abstract

As a special approach in discourse analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) aims to study the discursive conditions and consequences of power abuse practised by dominant groups or institutions (van Dijk, 1995). It contributes to raising awareness of the discursive strategies employed by elite groups in order to control the minds of minor ones. It permits them to free themselves from the compulsions and limitations that deprive them of their right to think critically and have the freedom of choice. In the discipline of language learning, learners’ awareness of CDA enables them to read critically and produce language in more logical manner. It is one way to empower them with adequate reading and writing strategies and to enhance their consciousness of using speech acts in meaningful context. This paper analyses a text following the framework of text analysis proposed by Fairclough (1992). The authentic text was selected reflecting one aspect of the British culture that does not have the common agreement of the ruling parties in the British community. It holds significant debate between representatives of the Conservative Party and the Labour Party that was taking over at that time. The analysis shows how the lexical and syntactic connotations reflect the attitudes of each Party and the newspaper publishing this article as well. The paper provides insights into how CDA can enhance learners’ sociolinguistic competence and language use.

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Keywords: Linguistic Competence; CDA; Language Use, Language Register; Sociolinguistics

1. Introduction

1.1. Scope of the Topic

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) construes normal discourse as a form of social practice in produced language that is socially influenced and influential. It aims to understand the relationship between language register, power, and ideology (Cots, 2006). It is a creative and disciplined enterprise based on a speech act theory that says that language is used not only to describe things but to do things as well (Brown and Yule, 1985). It focuses on language as it is used by real people with real intentions, emotions, and purposes. People are members of the society and their speech is a reflection of a set of experiential, relational, and expressive values.
(Fairclough, 1992: 110). According to this approach, there is a correlation between linguistic production and social variables. For Fairclough, CDA is an orientation towards language which associates linguistic text analysis with a social theory of the functioning of language in political and ideological processes. Identifying these processes helps not only to identify the internal blocks of discourse described by Gee (2001: 92) but also to identify the connotations it implies. Integrating CDA in language courses permits learners to develop their capacities so as to examine and judge the world around them and possibly change it through intended discourse. Learners’ awareness of CDA also allows them to use language in a pragmatic way for fulfilling different language purposes.

To signify the merits of CDA over normal discourse analysis, Van Dijk (1995: 17) outlines that CDA goes beyond the direct description of language used in texts. Rather, it is a problem – oriented approach that studies all forms of social inequality such as sexism, racism, or colonialism. It focuses on group relations of power, dominance, and inequality that are reproduced or resisted by social group members through text and talk. It therefore aims to uncover, reveal, or disclose what is implicit or what is not explicitly expressed in the discourse of the dominated group (ibid: 18). It permits oppressed or marginalized groups to formulate, develop, and enact counter-power and counter-ideologies in practices of challenge and resistance. Expressing the discursive conditions, components and consequences of power abuse of dominant elite groups or institutions is not the mere aim of CDA. Another perspective is the revealing of bias and prejudice in the discourse of certain groups over other groups affected by some ideologies that drive them to take up an attitude for or against an institution like the government, for instance.

Like van Dijk, Wodak (2007) clarifies that the term ‘Critical’ means not taking things for granted by being more reflective and sometimes ‘skeptical’ on verbal and written discourse. This particularly happens in situations when the writer or interlocutor maintains less neutral or more prejudiced views on some issues. The critically analyzed text in this paper reflects the viewpoint of the British Conservative Party (CP) against the measures taken by the Labour Party (LP) on drug use, dealing, and trafficking. The text carries claims and counter-claims from both parties and shows the ideology underlying the production of claims in comparison to the counterclaims of the other party.

1.2. Significance of the Topic

This study investigates the fact that the composition of spoken and written discourse is driven by certain philosophies, ideologies, and doctrines. Knowledge of CDA allows for understanding the sociolinguistic implications of discourse and for enhancing language use accordingly. From a sociolinguistic perspective, it raises the awareness of language users of the many discursive strategies employed by writers to impose a certain idea or to get audience satisfied with a certain doctrine or ideology. The selection of lexical expressions along with the way phrases and sentences are
structured all consolidate the viewpoint of the writer. From a pedagogic perspective, learners’ awareness of CDA enables them to read critically and produce language in a more logical manner. It empowers them with adequate reading and writing strategies and to enhance their consciousness of using speech acts in meaningful context.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Definition of CDA

According to Tenorio (2011), CDA is naturally embedded within critical theory that was originated to critique and change society and help actors to emancipate themselves from domination and authority of other dominated groups. It reveals structures of power and ideologies behind discourse by making visible causes that are hidden. It sometimes questions the status quo by resisting power abuse as transmitted in private and public discourses. He (2003: 428), in addition, argues that the word ‘discourse’ involves a big ‘D’ and a small ‘d’. The big ‘D’ relates to the general ways of viewing the world and general ways of behaving (including speaking); whereas the small ‘d’ concerns actual language use. CDA accordingly is used to clarify how sociocultural knowledge is related to the performance and use of speech acts. It is given without saying that various approaches have been developed for applying CDA. They aim to investigate the production, interpretation, and explanation of everyday action through conversation. Unlike CDA, discourse analysis is non-critical, for it is concerned with the description of discursive practices and forms of oral and written interaction (2003). Halliday (1978), taking his inspiration from the work of Firth, adopts another approach in which he proposes that language is a social semiotic and that linguistic form is affected systematically by social circumstances. He points out that every cultural group has its home-based discourse which marks its identity. Hence, people may have different identities due to their different discursive practices.

Gee (1990: 81) and Sampson (1980: 62) argue that CDA is the process in which various discourse types are encoded and interpreted particularly in the context of their formations and social semiotics. Van Dijk (1996: 86) claims that discourse types are influenced by social power exercised by a dominant group over the actions and minds of another group. Such power limits their freedom and influences their knowledge, attitudes, ideologies and speech. Fowler (1996: 4) argues that the goals of discourse analysts should be defamiliarisation and consciousness-raising. They should provide a ‘critique’ rather than a ‘criticism’ in order to help the reader understand the social background and motives influencing the composition of discourse. For example, Coulthard (2001: 5) argues that femininity is misrepresented in sex narratives which hinge on paradoxes and social asymmetries, such as a women’s magazine.

Fairclough (1992) asserts the relationship between language and power. He claims that discourse is a social practice. His framework is critical in that it depends not only on the description of discursive practices but also on the interpretation and explanation of how discourse is shaped by relations of power and ideologies. According
to this view, critical discourse analysis demonstrates the constructive effects discourse has upon social identities, social relations and systems of knowledge and belief, none of which is normally apparent to discourse participants.

2.2. Discourse Analysis and Language Teaching

Before considering discourse analysis as a core branch of linguistics, language teaching has been concerned with grammatical rather than communicative competence. The situations created for language delivery are more pedagogic, adapted, and less authentic bearing little resemblance of natural, automatic language use. Following on from the work of Canale (1982), communicative competence has been largely regarded as a quadrilateral figure composed of four areas of knowledge and skill. The first of them is grammatical competence which is concerned with the learner’s ability to express the literal meaning of utterances. The second is the sociolinguistic competence which is concerned with the ability of the learner to select the appropriate form and appropriate meaning to convey a message or express an idea using the most appropriate speech acts. The third component is the discourse competence which keeps the coherence and cohesion in the structure of a text and allows the learner to identify the appropriate organization of ideas in a text. Lastly, it is the strategic competence which is concerned with the employment of verbal and non-verbal strategies when expressing an idea.

It is then evident that knowledge of discourse analysis goes beyond the skill of guessing the implicit ideas or identifying the tone, attitude, and bias of a writer. It has more constructive function in permitting the learner to identify the optimal organization of ideas in a speech or a report. A learner can resort to the claim-counterclaim textual organization when reflecting on two different viewpoints of the same topic. The problem-solution textual organization can be also applied in case the topic has a cause-effect nature. Learning a foreign language moves from just being a medium of reporting and describing things to a medium of classifying the functions utterances can perform in different situations with different audience. In classical classroom language instruction, language use normally takes the form of citation (repeating or combining sentences), simulation (role playing), or replication (creating similar situations to use certain speech acts, for instance).

Furthermore, raising learners’ consciousness and awareness of discourse analysis allows them to use anaphoric and cataphoric references more effectively and reduces unnecessary repetition and redundancies in a text. It also enables them to use substitution is situation when there is no need to literally repeat the same nominal, verbal or clausal items. Ellipsis is another skill foreign language learners can acquire through knowledge of discourse analysis. In spoken and written forms, some utterances can be deleted in situations when they are easily guessed or figured out through the overall context. The use of cohesive devices like coordinating conjunctions or (FAN BOYS), conjunctive adverbs (however, therefore, nevertheless, etc.), and subordinators (while, although, because, etc.) is also indicative of appropriate
communicative competence. Lastly, lexical ties are other devices used to eliminate monotony in spoken and written discourse. Having a good wealth of vocabulary is not enough unless the speaker or writer knows how to manipulate them in discourse. Using synonyms, near synonyms, antonyms, or metonymy are different forms of lexical devices. Knowledge of how a text is composed, how ideas are organized, and which lexical items are appropriate indirectly underpins learners’ skill of using language in more pragmatic manner. Using Fairclough’s framework for CDA, I provided a practical critical discourse analysis of a text to show how the choice of lexical items and grammar formations is influential.

2.3. Framework for CDA

According to Fairclough (1992: 110-12), the critical discourse analysis of a text should pass through the three stages of description, interpretation of the relationship between text and interaction, and explanation of the relationship between interaction and social context. In this approach, he distinguishes between three types of value that formal features of a text may have. The first is the experiential value in which the text producer’s experience of the natural and social world is represented through the content in the form of personal knowledge and beliefs. The second is the relational value in which the social relationships are enacted via the text in the discourse, and the third is the expressive value in which the producer of a text evaluates an aspect of reality or social identities. Fairclough points out that the choice of vocabulary, grammar and textual structures to make up the formal features of a text is determined by these values. Though Fairclough is not the only writer to assert the social nature of language, his key insights are that discourse is shaped primarily by power relations in society, and that discourse shapes social relations, as well as being shaped by them. He argues that language serves to construct particular political positions which entail unequal relations of power.

Hence, the CDA framework applied in this paper goes beyond investigating the lexical and grammatical relations of a text. Rather, it acts as a possible agent of understanding the attitudinal and social interactions underlying the composition of a certain discourse and as a means of social change, especially in its use in the classroom. Gee, (2001: 92-94) and Halliday (1978), on the other hand, have dissimilar approaches to CDA in that they give equal focus to the internal building of a text where lexical and grammatical cohesion is also scrutinized.

3. Text Analysis

The text (appendix 1) is a news story from (The Daily Telegraph) newspaper and is 434 words long. It demonstrates the current statistics of drug use, particularly cocaine, among the urban middle classes. The figures show that cocaine use has shot up within the past ten years. The text lays much blame on the government on the grounds that the rigidity it maintains in reclassifying drugs participates in increasing
the number of illegal drug users and traffickers. This text, however, involves different points of view which are discussed in the sections below.

3.1. Text Headline and Underlying Ideology

The text headline (Home Office resists reform of drug law as cocaine use doubles) implies a critical point of view. No wonder that the Daily Telegraph draws an unpleasant picture of the precautionary measures taken by Labour government in its war on drugs since the newspaper represents the right-wing (Conservative) viewpoint which expectedly challenges the Labour government. The headline reflects the ideological background of the writer and the newspaper as well. It appears as an ‘active’ sentence to give prominence to the Home Office as the agent resisting reform and the main factor behind the multiplication of cocaine use accordingly. Passivizing the headline (Reform of drug law is resisted by the Home Office) could hardly convey the same message. The use of ‘doubles’ indicates the failure of the government in dealing with the problem. If the same story were published in ‘The Guardian’ or ‘The Independent’ newspapers, for example, the headline might be less prejudiced such as (Home Office considers reform of drug law) showing that the government is willing to reconsider the current drug system. This headline is a clear example of the relation between language and power claimed by Fairclough (1992) since it reflects the relational and attitudinal values of text producer.

3.2. Analyzing Contexts

In investigating the context of culture, the text reflects a side of British culture which views the use of drugs, particularly alcoholic drinks, as part of people’s social life. It tries to increase pressure on the government for the reclassification of drugs, as suggested in 1971, in terms of what should be assigned for personal use and what should attract higher penalties. According to the text, the current classification system is viewed by concerned organizations in the UK as out-of-date, both in terms of new patterns of drug use and new information about their effects. The government alleges that the present system of classifying drugs has proved effective, and is unwilling to review the drug classification system as a whole; however, it has agreed to make some specific changes – such as adding crystal meth to the class A (most dangerous) list. It seems that the government is willing to make changes that move towards more strictness but not changes that would lead to more leniency.

The writer has enriched the text with claims and counterclaims that help create a context of situation implying that drugs are the most dangerous threat to community cohesion and that the Labour government is always wrong. The statements made by representatives both of the government (Vernon Coaker) and of a drugs-related charitable organization (Martin Barnes) reflect a certain ideological and attitudinal background. Coaker views that the current system works effectively and the government has achieved remarkable progress in its war on drugs; whereas Barnes’ point of view is that the government’s unjustified inflexibility to reform the drug
classification system doubled the number of drug users in the past eight years. The writer's social power is expressed through the careful selection of vocabulary and statement formation whereas enhancing the text with many claims in comparison with the few counterclaims provided only by Coaker reflects a certain satisfaction. Examples of this are analyzed in the following sections.

3.3. Ideational Meaning and Transitivity: Process Types

A particularly marked transitivity feature of the text is the high proportion of show/report relational processes. Since the text is mainly argumentative involving claims and counterclaims, enhanced by the statistics revealed by the British Crime Survey, it is full of reporting relational processes which make up about 50% of all verb groups like show, indicate, reporting, estimated, confirmed, etc. Below are some examples from the text:

| The latest official figures show ... |
| The British Crime Survey indicates ... |
| The government ... claimed yesterday that ... |

The awesome use of ‘copula’ verbs is another example of relational processes found in the text.

| Cocaine use is on the rise among ... |
| Drug treatment providers ... are under financial pressure ... |
| I believe that the existing classification system does this effectively ... |

Mental processes are signaled in the text in very few examples like:

| Overall drug use ... appears to have declined ... |
| The door seems to have been left open to ... |
| I believe the existing classification system ... |

The text, however, incorporates no examples of physical or material processes because the issue is of an abstract and expositional nature more than a concrete one.

3.4. Ideational Meaning and Transitivity: Participants and Nominalization

The writer manages to assure his absence in the text. His retreat into individual invisibility is probably in order to make his authority more impersonal, and thus more difficult to question. His views are implicitly expressed, but his political orientation could be noticed in sentence 7 where he gives a negative evaluation of the government policy. In sentence 8, the use of decided and or shows that the government is too rigid to accept making necessary reformation and that its decision is non-negotiable regardless of the bad consequences this strictness may create. The counterviews
conversely show that the government is really working, yet according to a different plan.

(7) But figures also show little progress on Class A substances, such as cocaine. (8) The Home Office has decided not to reform the drugs classification system or to introduce new thresholds for possession of illicit substances.

The writer’s exposition is foregrounded by human participants like Vernon Coaker and Martin Barnes, in addition to the survey carried out by the BBC to give credibility to the source. The text also involves non-human active participants such as cocaine use, drug classification system, and illicit substances. The nominalization of cocaine as getting the highest percentage putting it at the top of other drugs indicates how this substance has become popular; whereas the nominalization of cannabis and Methylamphetamine or Crystal meth raises the alarm about the bad effects of these substances on community cohesion. Moreover, there are two other prominent nominalizations in sentences 1 and 3:

(1) Cocaine use is on the rise among the urban middle classes (3) …cocaine has shot up since Labour took office ...

The nominalization of the urban middle classes as cocaine users could have some implications as:

a. cocaine is popular among urban classes and probably not the rural ones;
b. cocaine is popular among urban classes because they can afford it;
c. the rural classes, if they are drug users, use other inferior substances;
d. the poorer classes, whether urban or rural, do not use cocaine because it is costly.

The nominalization of the Labour Party could also have more implications as:

a. the government failed to reduce the percentage of drug use within the past eight years;
b. drugs reclassification is a necessity because the current system is not working;
c. the government is always inflexible in the face of any threat or alleged danger.

3.5. Interpersonal Meaning and Modality

The interpersonal meaning of language maintains social relationships between people and includes forms of address, speech function and modality. It is one of the three functions Halliday (1978:35) considers as available in any language namely ‘the ideational function’ and ‘the textual function’. Modality, on the other hand, includes any unit of language that expresses the speaker/writer’s affinity with propositional and evaluative structures. It has different types and degrees because modal verbs imply different degrees of affinity. The clearness of the issue gives predominance of unmodalized polar statements and forces the writer to obviate the extensive use of
other markers of modality. In the text, there are few examples that can be said to reflect the writer’s own attitude. His use of illicit indicates that he views all illegal drugs with an equal degree of disapproval, regardless of the amount of damage they may or may not cause. In addition, describing the 500 joints considered for personal use as being the most liberal is given as an example of a liberal proposal that would horrify the average Telegraph reader. Other modality types are found relating to Coaker and Barnes reflecting their appreciation of the problem.

(11) There is a **coherent system** in place to categorize … (Coaker)
(13) We are extremely **disappointed** that the government has reversed… (Barnes)

The above sentences reflect Coaker’s contention that the current drug system is effective and strict penalties are determined for drugs’ manufactures, possession and supply; whereas Barnes’ argument is that the increase in drug use and in drug-related problems within the past few years is due to the ineffective current system which was produced 35 years ago, and this explains his disappointment. This text is rich in attitudinal epithets and adverbs that are considered necessary for the enhancement of either point of view such as:

(12) I believe that the existing classification system does this effectively.
(14) … we have significant increase in levels of drug use and drug-related harms.

3.6. **Interdiscursivity**

The writer draws upon a variety of discourse types in the composition of the text. Though the whole text is designed in a form that maintains a semi-formal style which is expected in this genre, he switches freely between informal spoken style and language that might be considered academic. The use of spliffs, for example, in sentence (9) to refer to young drug users is informal the same like the use of crystal meth in sentence (15) instead of methylamphetamine which is academic. The writer’s neutral language keeps him out of interrogation and also offers a release from expectations of rigour and precision that a more formal style may evoke in the readership, thus giving the topic more popularity.

3.7. **Reiteration**

According to Winter (2001: 46), reiteration is the repetition of certain lexical items used either for the confirmation of the discussed idea or because they relate to the same lexical set of the discussed topic. It can be carried out explicitly using the identical item in many sentences or implicitly using synonymy, near-synonymy or antonym of the original items. Fairclough lays much interest on the ideologically significant meaning relations in a text. In this text, there are several examples of reiteration. The writer resorts to ‘over-wording’ to give prominence to the issue and to
indicate that it is a focus of ideological struggle; whereas synonyms and antonyms are other means of implicit ‘rewording’. This clearly appears in the table below.

Table 1: Implicit reiteration in the text

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Reiteration</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Reiteration</th>
<th>Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>show, indicate</td>
<td>synonymy</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>illegal, illicit</td>
<td>synonymy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>appear, seem</td>
<td>synonymy</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>strategy, plan</td>
<td>synonymy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>rise, increase</td>
<td>synonymy</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>categorize, classify</td>
<td>synonymy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>figures, numbers</td>
<td>synonymy</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>rejected, reversed</td>
<td>near-synonymy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>previous, earlier</td>
<td>synonymy</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>doubled, shot up</td>
<td>near-synonymy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>supply, provide</td>
<td>synonymy</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>report, claim, said</td>
<td>near-synonymy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>existing, current</td>
<td>synonymy</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>shot up # declined</td>
<td>antonym</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The text has three examples of explicit reiteration where some items are used as verbs and in other sentences as nouns, but it has no examples of echoic emphatic items.

(1) The latest official figures **show**…
(7) Figures also **show** little progress on Class A
(9) A **significant** tightening where…
(13) … **review** the system of drug
(14) We have seen a **significant** increase in…
(17) Others are under **review** (N) and beds are…

3.8. Other Constructive Features in the Text

Fairclough (1992: 120) concentrates on the relation between the choice of language and the social power underlying it. In the text, the writer’s choice of words and tenses reflects a certain ideology and a social background. Here are other relevant points:

Most of the sentences are active and the agents are clear. The nominalization of cocaine use, use of cocaine, overall drug use sets these up as processes with no clear human agent – though linked by implication with Government mismanagement by tying the figures to the period since Labour took office. The absence of non-human agents probably arises from the writer’s contention that not only is the government the responsible agent behind the complication of the drug problem, but that people are also true participants in creating it.

The text contains both positive and negative sentences. The positive sentences refer to the latest figures besides the government’s advocacy of the current system; whereas the negative ones display the counterviews. Negation in the text is expressed explicitly through the negative article ‘not’, and implicitly through items that imply negative meaning such as disappointed, rejected, reversed, and refused. In addition, words of contrast (but, however, etc.) are the most common clause relations to cope with the claims and counterclaims.

The writer used two main tenses in composing the text that may help convey his message. He used the ‘present simple’ to express a permanent fact – the increasing number of drug users – and the ‘present perfect’ to indicate recent events which could
have some effect on the situation as a whole, e.g. the government’s refusal to undertake an overall reclassification exercise.

The issue of drug use is an area of ideological contest (Fairclough, 1992: 117) especially when it is linked to young people indicating the possible corruption of the young, and a future vision of British society as one in which drug use would be acceptable.

Excessive evaluative words are used only in Barnes’ counterclaims, and are attributed to him, not to the writer. In the text, no titles or addresses are used before Vernon Coaker or Martin Barnes. I think this is just in keeping with current usage in British journalism.

The text is not a florid piece of writing because the seriousness of the topic does not give much space for obvious rhetorical and metaphorical strategies but the overwhelming use of figures gives the writer’s argument clarity and credibility.

Finally, the main information is placed at the beginning of the text. The first three sentences show the horrifying figures of cocaine use among the urban middle classes with reference to the British Crime Survey to enhance these figures and to give authority and prominence to the issue. The writer attributes this catastrophe to the Labour government in sentence (3).

4. Patterning in the Text

According to Francis (2001: 83) and Hoey (2001: 26), textual patterning is the ability gained by the writer to organize the text into meaningful paragraphs and cohesive clauses. Structuring a text using one pattern; however, does not preclude other forms of patterning. It is perfectly possible to find a general-specific structure embedded in a problem-solution pattern, or following on from it in the same text. This text represents an example of a multiple-pattern text. It is organized according to the claim-counterclaim textual patterning which is very common in political journalism and in letters-to-the-editor pages, and the stock-in-trade of many ‘Compare and Contrast’ academic essays. It can also be noticed as signaling a problem-solution pattern because the issue is so controversial. In the next section, I try to schematize these two patterns in the text to show how the textual structure asserted by Fairclough reflects the writer’s ideational background.

4.1. The Claim – Counterclaim Pattern

According to McCarthy (1991: 81), the claim-counterclaim pattern is used to show two contrasting points of view. Uncovering the figures and statistics that show the rise in drug use in the UK within the past eight years with implicit reference to Labour government has paved the way for a set of claims and counterclaims. Moreover, the huge number of claims signaled by the writer in comparison with the counterclaims expressed by the current government members not only reflect his ideational background but also aims to satisfy ‘The Daily Telegraph’ readership.
Below is a diagrammatic representation of the text from a claim-counterclaim point of view.

Figure 1: The claim-counterclaim textual patterning of the text
4.2. The Problem – Solution Pattern

According to Hoey (1996: 150), the problem-solution structure consists of four categories: situation, problem, solution, and evaluation. The increasing number of drug users is a serious problem which gives space for these four categories to be found in clear text organization.

![Figure 2: The problem-solution textual patterning of the text](image-url)
5. The Implications of CDA in ELT Classrooms

Analysis of the above text is indicative that language use has a functional aspect, and knowledge of it facilitates and enhances spontaneous, fluent communication. Knowing a list of glossaries is not enough unless accompanied by skill of how to use the appropriate vocabulary in certain situations. Awareness of using the same language expression in different discourses with different connotations and meanings is a merit maintained by skilled and competent learners. Erton (2000, p. 206) lists a number of examples of the functional analysis of conversation. He shows how the tag question, for instance, can be used to reflect different meanings. In the mini-dialogue “Gary: It’s cold, isn’t it?” and “Brian: Yes, it is not very warm”, the tag “isn’t it” is not really a request for confirmation but an invitation to the hearer to continue the conversation. In the second mini-dialogue, “Sue: He is Tom, is he?” and “Ellen: Yes, he is”, the tag “is he” not only asks the hearer to agree that the statement is true, but also suggests that the speaker has just learnt, realized or remembered the information. In the third mini-dialogue “Colonel: Sit down, will you?” and “Lieutenant Gary: No, I won’t.”, the tag “will you” is not an expectation from the Colonel that Lieutenant Gary confirms or denies the information; it is rather an order, and that something bad may happen if Lieutenant Gary rejected it.

The tenet hereby is not rejection of teaching grammar, yet how grammar can be taught functionally by allowing learners to understand that a certain form can be used in different situations in different meanings. The deductive approach to teaching grammar does not offer opportunities for using the language forms functionally. Instead, teaching grammar forms inductively allows learners to see the situations in which these forms carry their different meanings. Whether through citation, simulation, or replication (Canale, 1983), those learners can understand the discourse in which these expressions are used with this exact meaning. The extensive studies in discourse analysis (text, context, conversation analysis, function) and pragmatics (speech acts, psychopragmatics, sociopragmatics, and pragmalinguistics) paved the way for such a change in the approach of teaching a foreign language. This movement encouraged approaches that combine teaching forms with functions to provide accuracy and fluency in the target language. Knowledge of vocabulary and grammar and being able to speak, read, and write sentences is not evidence of communicative competence unless accompanied with knowledge of why to use a certain expression and why to use it in this particular way. Analysis of discourse then can be a tool through which language teachers help learners to understand the different functions of language.

It is only through discourse analysis that learners can understand why they should say “fast car” but not “quick car”, “fast food” but not “quick food”, “quick glance” but not “fast glance”, “quick meal” but not “fast meal” although “meal” and “food” have the same connotation, and “blonde hair” but not “blonde car” even if the car has the same blonde color. It is also through discourse analysis that language learners can understand the different textual organizations and the appropriate templates for each
type of writing. The organization of a cause-effect essay surly differs from that of argumentative or persuasive essays. In addition, even within the cause-effect essay, there could be different internal textual patterning. In the chain organization pattern, language learners mention of each cause and its effect before moving to another cause and its effect. However, in the block organization, they write all the causes in one or two block paragraphs followed by the effects mostly in situations when the causes and effects are not directly related.

Critical discourse analysis, on the other hand, is an advanced step that necessitates higher levels of linguistic competence. Teaching it goes beyond raising learners’ awareness of purely linguistic issues. It necessitates highlighting the effect of social power(s) on text composition accordingly. According to Richards, Platt, and Platt (1993: 343), CDA helps learners develop an ability to interpret speech acts that goes beyond understanding the propositional meaning of utterances to the illocutionary meaning, through the effect a written text may have on them as listeners or readers. Acquiring the skill of CDA enables learners to answer inferential questions whose answers are guessed because they often correlate with the writer’s beliefs and ideologies. Gaining awareness of CDA, moreover, helps learners build a shield against extreme ideological opinions imposed – intentionally or incidentally – by teachers or other friends.

A language teacher can take some of these insights for the consciousness-raising of learners of the relation between language and power along with more general methods of discourse analysis to achieve a modified approach to CDA for use in ELT. This gives them strategic guidance for the improvement of discourse production through identification of discourse patterns, clause relations and genres (Dudley-Evans, 2001: 220). The acquisition of such a skill promotes the logical organization of ideas and reinforces communication. However, the level of analysis depends on the linguistic level of learners. Wallace (1992: 61), for example, points out that CDA can be used to develop a reading methodology which addresses ideological assumptions as well as developing general reading comprehension. This definitely includes (i) the encouragement of reflective critical reading; and (ii) the extension of a ‘pre-reading’ / ‘while-reading’ / ‘post-reading’ procedures. This approach encourages learners to move away from focusing on form for its own sake to reinforcing the sociolinguistic competence and the use of language to explore and provide evidence of the text’s ideological positioning.

6. Conclusion

The introduction of discourse analysis in language teaching is not optional should we need foreign language learners to use naturally-occurring language forms and lexical items functionally in an appropriate way that goes above the sentence level. Teachers, in addition, should encourage learners to study the discourse of language in a way that form and function should not be separated since they represent the two dimensions of the language. In many cases, there could be differences between
functional interpretations of the same form in English. The communicative competence then goes beyond the normal verbal and written production of English; rather it covers the sensibility in using language forms and items in expressing a certain idea in the most effective way. While the appropriate selection of grammar forms and lexical items represents the elementary knowledge of language use, knowledge of word combinations or collocation is another merit of fluent, competent users of language.

An additional benefit of increasing learners’ knowledge of CDA is that it allows them to understand that the production of discourse is not isolated from the existing social power, but affects and is affected by it. Competence in CDA deepens their understanding of the topics they read and promotes an ability to investigate the maneuvering some writers tend to employ in composing texts. This ability adds to understanding the mentality of writers whether they are capitalists, socialists, or religiously-committed persons (Gee, 2001).

My choice of the text from ‘The Daily Telegraph’ is not random. The Telegraph, which is a right-wing paper, tends to support the Conservative Party in most political views and is expected to oppose and challenge the Labour government. The writer, making use of the authority of the newspaper, managed to promote the view that drug use is bad and the government is to blame regardless of the efforts exerted to overcome the crisis. I think if the Conservative party were in power, the policy on drugs might be similar to that of the current Labour administration. The text clearly reflects the writer’s commitment to the attitude of the newspaper. His exaggeration is expected to match the psychology of the newspaper’s readership as well as the Conservative views.

References


Appendix A. The Text

'The Daily Telegraph', Saturday, October 14, 2006, No. 47,077, Page 4

Home Office Resists Reform of Drug Law as Cocaine Use Doubles

By Philip Johnston. Home Office Editor

(1) COCAINE use is on the rise among the urban middle classes, the latest official figures show. (2) Trends uncovered by the British Crime Survey indicate the numbers using the drug since 1998 have doubled. (3) Among young people, use of cocaine has shot up since Labour took office, from 1.4 per cent of 16- to 24-year olds reporting that they used the drug in the past 12 months to nearly six per cent. (4) At the same time, however, overall drug use – including that of cannabis – appears to have declined or remained stable. (5) It is estimated that some two million people used illegal drugs in the past month and 11 million have indulged at some stage in their lifetime. (6) The Government, which is eight years into a 10-year drug strategy, claimed yesterday that the figures showed it was working. (7) But figures also show little progress on Class A substances, such as cocaine. (8) The Home Office has decided not to reform the drugs classification system, or to introduce new thresholds for possession of illicit substances. (9) Officials have consulted over the past year on options ranging from the most liberal; where up to 500 joints could be considered for ‘personal use’ to a significant tightening where only 10 ‘spliffs’ were allowed. (10) The government has rejected criticism of the classification system, introduced in 1971, from a Commons committee earlier this year. (11) Vernon Coaker, the Home Office minister, said: ‘It is important that there is a coherent system in place to categorise drugs and determine the penalties for their manufacture, possession and supply. (12) I believe that the existing classification system does this effectively, allowing for clear and meaningful distinctions to be made between drugs.’ (13) However, Martin Barnes, the chief executive of the charity Drug-Scope, said: ‘We are extremely disappointed that the government has reversed the previous Home Secretary’s decision to review the system of drug classification, although the door seems to have been left open to return to the issue in the future. (14) The current system was introduced 35 years ago and during that time we have seen a significant increase in levels of drug use and drug-related harms.’ (15) The Home Office also confirmed plans yesterday to reclassify the drug methylamphetamine, more commonly known as crystal meth, from a Class B to a Class A substance, attracting heavier penalties for possession and trafficking. (16) It was also reported yesterday that at least half of the more expensive residential drug treatment providers in England are under financial pressure because of a lack of referrals. (17) According to the BBC some centres have been closed, others are under review and beds are not fully occupied.

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