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The Effect of Voice-Text Chat in Improving Speaking Skills of EFL Secondary Stage Students

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of a program based on voice-text chat in enhancing EFL 1st year secondary students' speaking skills. The participants of the research consisted of (48) first-year secondary students at Mohamed Ragab Azhari Institute, Gharbia Directorate. Instruments of the research were an EFL speaking skills checklist, an EFL speaking scoring rubric, an EFL pre and post speaking test, and a program based on voice-text chat. In this research, pre post-test was used with two groups (Experimental and control, 24 students each). Results of the research revealed that the research group posttest score in both speaking was significantly better than their pretest.. The research group's gains in this productive skill attributed to using the voice-text chat based program designed and implemented by the researcher.

Introduction

Language is a means of communication for expressing one's thoughts, hopes, ideas, ambitions, and feelings etc. It is a means for people to transmit information and messages in order to satisfy the human need for communication in different fields of life.

Speaking skills have a basic role in helping EFL learners develop their creative skills and thinking using the language in various processes such as, connecting, commenting, communicating, analyzing, synthesizing, evaluating and solving problems. Furthermore, writing plays an essential role in promoting language acquisition as learners experiment with words, sentences, and paragraphs to convey their ideas effectively and making use of grammar rules and vocabulary they learn in class.

Speaking skill is assumed as a vital part of English language teaching and learning as a second or a foreign language. It represents other vital EFL skills on which teachers should support their students to be able to use the language to explore and express thoughts and to communicate ideas clearly. What they do in class to achieve those goals depends on their expertise, taste and outlook; on students' knowledge and abilities and objectives; and on the context in which they are reading.

Although speaking is an important skill, S. Zhang (2009) argued that it remains the most difficult skill to produce for the majority of English learners. EFL courses include many speaking activities; however, students are still incompetent in communicating orally in English. There are many factors that cause difficulty in speaking: (1) Inhibition: Students are worried about making mistakes, afraid of criticism, or simply shy; (2) nothing to say: Students have no motives to express themselves; (3) low or uneven participation: Only one participant can talk at a time because of large classes and the tendency of some learners to dominate classroom activities. That is why most learners speak very little or do not speak at all; and (4) mother-tongue use: Learners who share the same mother tongue tend to use it in their communication because it is easier. In addition, they feel less tensed if they are speaking their mother tongue.

Mastering speaking skills facilitates communication with others both interactively or non-interactively. Accordingly, human communication becomes a vital process which people require when they need to convey something, tell a message or want to speak in a foreign language. Speakers need to communicate when they want to express feelings or tell someone about something. They use language depending on their purpose and it is important for them, as indicated by Harmer (2007) to be good listeners and speakers to be able to pronounce correctly, use appropriate stress and intonation patterns and speak in connected speech as well as speak in a range of different genres and situations.

People need speaking in various situations, such as speaking to someone face to face, answering questions, communicating through the phone, asking for directions, in shops, meeting or chatting with their friends, etc. People spend a relatively long time interacting with other persons, and each situation needs a specific language style according to the formality of the moment. As Lindsay and Knight (2006) indicated that we speak for many reasons – to be sociable, because we want something, because we want other people to do something, to do something for someone else, to respond to someone else, to express our feelings or opinion about something, to exchange information, and so on.

Despite the importance of EFL speaking skills, teachers often do not spend sufficient time to teach this skill as it is supposed to be. After all, they do not have enough time to integrate such skills into the curriculum taking into consideration the usual setbacks in the classroom and most of the time is used to go into grammar because it represents a basic part of the language. Furthermore, the student is in a social, cultural and linguistic context where

the English language is not usually used or needed in his/her daily life activities. Therefore, these are not suitable conditions to improve the required EFL level. Teachers may think that the ability to speak a language refers to knowing that language. Thus, speaking in a foreign language had often been seen as the most challenging of the four skills (Savage, 2006).

Although classrooms using technology in instruction is increasing in number, many researchers are concerned about the effect educational technology has on student achievement. Al-Jarf (2004) indicated that, since the effective use of technology requires significant investments in hardware, educational software, infrastructure, staff development, and technical support provide evidence that the use of technology in instruction is useful, necessary, and cost-effective is also required by educational administrators, policy and decision-makers.

Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) which is "the communication that occurs between humans via some forms of computers, such as desktop, mobile phone or similar media" (Johnson, 2007: 612) is one of new teaching approaches which allow students to spend more time interacting with the others instead of lecturing. The major goal of CMC is to help learners to be involved in interactive language learning activities.

In this study, the researcher tries to use the two modes of chats; voice and text, in an attempt to develop speaking skills of first year secondary school students. English education focused on reading comprehension and grammar skills essential to the exam questions. For many years, such test-oriented teaching methods were part of the English education system in Egypt. Also, students feel uncomfortable speaking English in class. As they generally have little opportunity to practice English outside the classroom, they often fail to recognize the need for English communication inside the classroom.

Due to the importance of EFL speaking skills, many researches and studies were conducted to investigate new strategies for developing both speaking and writing skills using various strategies and methods such as Baniabdelrahman (2013); Zitouni (2013); (Pulsa) 2015; Tuan (2010); and Alodwan and Ibnian (2014).

Many studies investigated and dealt with employing online (ELL) environment such as Yang's study (2011), Jauregi DeGraff and Canto, (2012), Munro (2010). They attempted to involve students in the target language and culture, and subsequently improve their language performance, through an online situated language learning environment that

employed both synchronous and asynchronous online communication modes in and after class.

Other studies investigated the personality effect using CMC on learning a language such as Ahn (2006) who conducted a study to investigate the extent to which the factors such as personality types, amount of participation and previous experience using chat contribute most to the development of oral skills, focusing on the individual, affective variables that could affect the effects of CMC on spoken language development among beginning learners of English. Also, Rulík (2006) conducted a study that provided characteristics of the language used in the SCMC environment. It tried to identify specific features of synchronous CMC which distinguish it from more traditional types of communication, such as face-to-face and telephone conversations.

Through reviewing literature and related studies, it is obvious that today's students are active learners rather than passive ones, in that they view themselves as participants in creating new ideas (Leadbeater, 2008). Accordingly, this study aims at examining the effectiveness of using voice-text chat to develop the speaking skills of EFL secondary stage students and their self-efficacy.

Review of Literature

In fact, some previous studies have confirmed that the use of synchronous CMC in English classrooms could be beneficial to improving students' production in various linguistic and non-linguistic aspects (Chang, 2002; Chang, 2003; Han, 2004; Han, 2006; Hwang, 2008; Jung, 2005; Kim, 2003). However, the participants in most previous studies have been college students, as the studies at the secondary level have many practical problems, such as a lack of computer labs or preparation of university entrance exams. Therefore, this study aims to explore the applicability of synchronous CMC to Egyptian high school English classrooms that are fully equipped with computer lab systems. Given the purpose of the current study, high school freshmen who are relatively free from the university entrance exam requirements are selected as the participants.

According to Simin and Heidari (2013), the integration of technology can also limit other skills such as speaking communication. Technology may be a great medium for online interacting; however, it will decrease the speaking communication among students and teachers. The introduction of technology may include audio, visual, textual effect which fully meets the audio and visual requirements of the students and can increase their interest.

However, it also results in poor communication among students and teachers (Shyamlee & Phil, 2012).

Difficulties with EFL Speaking Skills

Developing speaking skill is a challenge for EFL learners. Al-Khuli (2000) and Beheery (2008) agreed that developing learners' speaking skill is a real challenge for teachers due to the following reasons:

- 1- Learners receive insufficient input.
- 2- Finding realistic situations that encourage learners to communicate in English is difficult.
- 3- Most teachers focus on teaching grammar instead of focusing on communicating in meaningful situations.
- 4- Learners lack opportunities to speak English outside the classroom.

Improving EFL Speaking Skills

To overcome the previous problems, researchers suggested some strategies, techniques, and approaches to improve learners' speaking skills:

Lin (2002), Sato (2003) stated that because of the great effect of learners' affective factors on developing their speaking skills, it is necessary to achieve relaxing atmosphere inside the classroom. Learners should feel comfortable, motivated and confident. They should take risks and have sufficient opportunities to speak. Abdul Hack (2002) stated that there is another way of fostering greater speaking and enhancing motivation. It is the use of cooperative learning that incorporates the use of group work and pair work activities. The purpose of Hamed's study in (2003) was to investigate the effect of two cooperative learning strategies: the group investigation strategy and the jigsaw strategy on developing oral communicative competence (vocabulary, grammar, and oral fluency). Results indicated that the two adopted strategies were more effective than the traditional method in developing oral communicative competence among first year secondary school students.

Torky (2006) designed a task-based program to develop secondary students' speaking skill. This program was based on the meeting points between the cognitive approach and the communicative approach. The study results proved the effectiveness of the program in developing students' speaking skill. El-Basel (2008) designed a multimedia program based on the use of animation to develop primary pupils' speaking skills. The study results indicated that the program appealed the pupils and developed their speaking skills.

Statement of the Problem

According to the researcher's observation in the field of English language teaching and the review of the related literature, the problem of this study can be stated as follows: the first grade secondary students have a low level in speaking and writing skills. Thus the current study examines the effect of using an voice-text chat in developing learners' EFL productive skills. The researcher will use voice-text chat to help the study sample improve their writing and speaking skills.

Questions of the study

The present study attempted to find answers to the following question:

What is the effect of voice-text chat on improving speaking skills of EFL secondary stage students?

Purpose of the study

The present study attempts to achieve the following:

Investigating the effect of voice-text chat in improving speaking and writing of EFL secondary stage students and their self-efficacy.

The current study aimed at:

- 1- Identifying speaking skills needed for first secondary students in EFL.
- 2- Developing first secondary students' speaking skills in EFL.

Significance of the study

This study provides some knowledge for teachers and curriculum designers about the positive influence of technology and its integration in classrooms. The significance of this study stems from the fact that it presents a new program of teaching speaking skills of English by using the voice-text chat environment.

Consequently, this study is expected to help in the following areas:

- 1- Supervisors and curriculum planners: providing them with students' writing and speaking skills needed to be taken into consideration while planning EFL curriculum.
- 2- EFL teachers: helping them use suitable technological techniques and activities for enhancing students' speaking skills in EFL.
- 3- Students: enhancing students' speaking skills in EFL.
- 4- Researchers: paving the way for other researchers to conduct future studies on enhancing students' speaking skills.

Hypotheses of the study

In order to answer the questions of the study, the following hypotheses were formulated:

1. There is a statistically significant difference at the .05 level between the mean scores of the control group and the experimental group in

the post administration of the speaking test in favor of the experimental group.

- There is a statistically significant difference at the .05 level between the mean scores of the experimental group's pre and post administration of the speaking test in favor of the post-tests.

Table (1) Comparing the Control and Experimental groups' performance on the EFL Speaking Skills post-test

Skills	The group	N.of cases	Means	S.D	df	t.Value	Sig.
Pronunciation	Control	24	2.00	0.29	46	11.63	0.01 Sig.
	Experimental	24	3.21	0.41			
Fluency	Control	24	1.71	0.46		12.22	0.01 Sig.
	Experimental	24	3.42	0.50			
Accuracy	Control	24	2.00	0.29		11.57	0.01 Sig.
	Experimental	24	3.33	0.48			
Vocabulary	Control	24	1.75	0.53		7.75	0.01 Sig.
	Experimental	24	3.08	0.65			
Grammar	Control	24	2.00	1.02		5.64	0.01 Sig.
	Experimental	24	3.29	0.46			
Total score of Test	Control	24	9.46	1.41		18.37	0.01 Sig.
	Experimental	24	16.33	1.17			

It is clear from the results of the table that there are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups in all skills of the speaking test and the total score of the test in the post administration in favor of the experimental group (the highest mean), where all the values of (t) were statistically significant at the level of significance (0.01), degree of freedom = 46. These results are consistent with the first hypothesis and confirm its validity. The researcher attributes these differences to the program used.

Participants

Participants of the study were two groups of 1st year secondary Al Azhar students who were selected from Mohamed Ragab Azhari Institute for boys (No = 48), where the researcher works as a teacher of English language. The participants of this study constituted a homogeneous group in terms of their schooling and English language proficiency. This number of participants was divided equally into two classes (two groups) enrolled in the 2nd term of the school year (2022/2023). Participants were divided into two groups: the control group (n=24) and experimental one (n=24).

Instruments and Materials

To achieve the purposes of this study, the researcher developed and made use of the following instruments:

1. An EFL Speaking Skills Checklist for determining the Speaking skills to be included in the speaking skills test.
2. An EFL Speaking pre-posttest to assess the students' level in speaking before and after the treatment.
3. The EFL Speaking Skills Scoring Rubric to measure students' speaking on the pre and post EFL speaking skills test.

Validity:

Content Validity:

To ensure validity of the SST, it was submitted to a panel of jury (see appendix A.). They were eleven. They were requested to judge and give recommendations to the following points:

- 1- Test sections are suitable to students' level.
- 2- The sections represent the target skills.
- 3- Time assigned to each section is appropriate.
- 4- Number of sections cover the target skills.

5- Test instructions are clear.

The jury members approved the test, but with few modifications:

- (1) Changing the time allotted for the test implementation from thirty minutes into ten minutes.
- (2) For section (2) part (1), it was recommended to add some words and/or expressions that may help students generate their ideas.

Finally, the modifications agreed by the juries had been done.

Statistical Methods

To verify the psychometric characteristics of the study tools, the data contained in the responses of the sample were extracted, and these data were processed statistically on the twenty-fifth version (Ver.25) of the (SPSS) program using the following statistical methods.

Findings

The study revealed that the experimental group outperformed the control group in both speaking skills. Moreover. These positive differences in speaking and in addition to the statistically significant differences between the research participants in the two groups could be due to the efficiency of the voice-text chat program.

The voice-text chat program was found to be effective in developing the participants' speaking, writing and self-efficacy which was highlighted in the following results:

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- 1- The experimental group students mean scores were better than the control group students' mean scores in both speaking and writing tests. This was clear through the significant differences between the means of the two groups.
 - 2- The experimental group students mean scores were better than the control group students' mean scores in the self-efficacy scale.
 - 3- The experimental group ranks in the speaking and writing self-efficacy scale were higher after applying the voice-text chat program.

Conclusions

Based on the results of the study, the following conclusions were reached:

- The voice-text chat program was effective in enhancing students' speaking and writing Sub-skills.
- The voice-text chat program was also effective in boosting students' self-efficacy towards EFL speaking and writing.
- Voice-text chat program is an efficient technique that can be used in different contexts.
- The experimental group students outperformed the control group students in speaking and writing posttests.

To conclude, it was clear that there was a gap in research regarding using voice-text chat based programs in teaching and learning which provided the researcher with an opportunity to investigate the voice-text chat based program on students' speaking and writing and find out whether it has positive effects on students and their self-efficacy. Thus, the present research emphasized that the voice-text chat based program was effective in enhancing learners' EFL speaking and writing skills in addition to their self-efficacy.

Challenges met by the Researcher:

In conducting this study, the researcher faced a number of challenges:

- 1- The computer literacy. A small number of students were either hesitant or confused at the first encounter with the electronic program. The researcher illustrated the procedures and steps of using the computer to log into the program from their mobile phones, tap or computer. The researcher used a number of students who are well acquainted with using computer to help other students. It took only one session to get all participants to interact well with the program.
- 2- Lack of electronic sources which deal with the subjects accurately and flexibly for the students' level, this forced the researcher to design a voice-text chat format for the program material and activities online and make use of the students' resources of their mobile phones and

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- online application to finish the remaining part of the program activities.
- 3- The interruption of teaching because of the slow internet speed and frequent internet failures, the researcher could overcome this problem by using a mobile Wi-Fi router for the Institute laboratory was set up to supply the program with faster internet access.
 - 4- The participants' busy schedule interfered with their tasks required by monthly evaluation exams and quizzes required by the voice-text chat program. The researcher had to give extra time for implementing the remaining activities by the end of the term and before the involvement of their final exams.
 - 5- Some students had some difficulties in other skills such as basic grammar, vocabulary and reading skills which might have hindered their progress in the program activities. The researcher had to explain in detail the problematic grammar and vocabulary sections before the session providing them with an online material available for them online at any time that they can have access to any time.
 - 6- The researcher found little difficulty in the selection of speaking and writing tasks and activities in which he wanted to include varied material in the program that some students levels was low to engage in. The researcher stuck to the aim of each voice-text chat and its resources provided by the MOE and the students' course book close up and added some extra material to enhance low achievers.
 - 7- The individual differences between students. Some need extra care, attention and encouragement. Some were enthusiastic and overactive and some were distracted. The researcher used varieties of learning strategies. So, students were highly motivated and active in class. The auditory students were listening to native speakers and the visual students were watching cartoon movies and the kinesthetic students were acting out songs and short dialogues. Moreover, the researcher encouraged students to work in pairs and in groups. This atmosphere in program sessions attracted students' attention and satisfied their needs, desires and interest.
 - 8- The ongoing assessment for students' oral productive skills. It was difficult to conduct the ongoing assessment to assess students' productive skills. Therefore, the researcher created a whatsapp group for all the participants. Students had to practice at home at their own pace and when satisfied with their performance, they send their recordings on the whatsapp group. Students who send their recordings

were rewarded and appreciated. In fact, rewarding students had positive impact on their performance.

Recommendations

Based on the results of the study, the following recommendations should be considered when teaching EFL:

- 1- Teachers should train their learners so that they learn by themselves, using different techniques or strategies, manage, control, monitor, and evaluate their learning processes. Students' need to be motivated and excited about the learning tasks, materials and communication techniques related to their learning.
- 2- EFL teachers should give a due care to the students' self-efficacy side, which plays an important role in the students' learning process.
- 3- Educational experts and MOE should familiarize teachers and instructors with the importance of knowing and practising learning strategies in general and voice-text chat programs in particular.
- 4- The voice-text chat program can be adopted by secondary school teachers for teaching English in general and EFL speaking and writing skills in particular.
- 5- EFL teachers should encourage students to make use of the internet and social networking sites in learning useful skills.
- 6- Teachers should use multiple teaching strategies and resources that can cope with students' new needs and learning styles.
- 7- Giving much care to speaking activities in the EFL courses.

Suggestions for Further Research

The following points are recommended to be considered for further research:

- 1- Examining the impact of voice-text chat based program on developing speaking and writing skills of other educational stages such as the primary, preparatory and university students.
- 2- Using the voice-text chat based learning in teaching other EFL skills; listening and reading.
- 3- Investigating the effect of voice-text chat based Program on enhancing students' critical thinking and higher-level thinking skills.
- 4- Investigating EFL teachers' attitudes towards using voice-text chat based Program in teaching.
- 5- Examining the impact of voice-text chat learning on enhancing other psychological aspects (e.g., motivation).

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