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Enhancing EFL Secondary Stage Students' Writing Skills and Self-efficacy through The Voice-Text Chat

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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' writing skills and their self-efficacy. The participants of the study consisted of (48) first-year secondary students at Mohamed Ragab Azhari Institute, Gharbia Directorate. Instruments of the study were an EFL writing skills checklist, an EFL writing scoring rubric, an EFL pre and post writing test, an EFL writing self-efficacy scale, and a program based on voice-text chat. In this study, 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 writing was significantly better than their pretests. Also, their self-efficacy toward writing improved considerably. The research group's gains in this productive skill and the enhancement in their attitude have been attributed to using the voice-text chat based program designed and implemented by the researcher.

Introduction

Technology is evolving rapidly in the past two decades. Many are familiar with technology and gradually becoming digital natives. In this technological era, the application of technology has eased our ways in various fields of work particularly in the education field.

Writing skills has 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.

Students face many difficulties while writing in English. Gomaa (2010) stated that learners' first language affects learning the target language. Therefore, they make certain mistakes and repeat them. Some of these common mistakes are: (1) run on sentences: In Arabic language, run on sentences are accepted. There are endless sentences with no punctuation marks in Arabic, but that is not accepted when writing in English; (2) Arabish: When students translate Arabic into English, they sometimes use

words causing misunderstanding and confusion; (3) punctuation: Many ELLs with Arabic background find English punctuation difficult; since Arabic has few limitations in the use of commas and periods than English; (4) writing organization: The circular structure in the English essay (with the topic sentence of the same idea in the conclusion) is strange to Arabic essay where the conclusion has to bring something new.

Mastering EFL writing skills is important in learning English as a foreign language. It is not only a way of communication where students can participate with their views and thoughts; it is a prerequisite to master other skills. Writing as a productive skill is one of the four basic skills of the English language. It is a comprehensive ability involving grammar, vocabulary, conception, rhetoric and other parts of the EFL language learning. Bello (1997) pointed out that" writing enhances language acquisition as learners experiment with words, sentences, and other elements of writing to communicate their ideas effectively, and to reinforce the grammar and vocabulary they are learning in class."

Moreover, writing makes language learning effective by using a variety of activities inside and outside the classroom. Takrouri (2002) indicates that "writing is a psychological need in the sense that it provides learners with evidence that they are making progress."

Developing students' writing skills is thought to be one of the most essential objectives which EFL learner have to improve, such as the ability to write complete meaningful phrases and well-organized thoughts, use communicative language, select suitable words and idioms and use language mechanics in an appropriate way.

During teaching writing, teachers tend to focus on correcting mistakes and give feedback of writing assignments that focus on grammar and vocabulary mistakes so that students become concerned with structure and tend to use the product-centred rather than the process-centred approach to writing. Darayseh (2003) noted that "teaching language no longer means simply having students do grammar exercises in writing or getting writing which is free from grammar, punctuation and spelling mistakes, instead, we are after writing about what students are interested in and what they want to communicate to the reader, and how they reach their final writing products". Abdel-Hack (2002) and El-Shafie (2006) indicated that writing is the most difficult skill of all the language skills taught to EFL students. Students cannot develop their ideas when asked to write sentences and certain types of grammar mistakes.

Despite the fact that writing might seem easier to learn than speaking, it is more complex and demands much effort to master. Writing has many specific aspects and elements and teaching it is more difficult. It is, as indicated by Brown (2000), a process during which teachers try to explain to their students the right use of characteristics of writing such as permanence, production time, distance, orthography, complexity, vocabulary and formality. Moreover, students need to learn other aspects related to learning EFL writing such as spelling, punctuation, cohesion and coherence and so on.

Writing can be considered as one of the most difficult skills in EFL learning and teaching which many studies dealt with its difficulties and their causes. Bello assured (1997) that "one major failing in the traditional curriculum could be attributed to the lack of attention given to writing, which is an important avenue for thinking". Still, students' negative attitudes towards writing in English, as well as their lowest interest in learning to write, are found (Schneider, 2009; Tuan, 2010).

Over the past few years, the internet has been known as an important technology which can be used in language teaching situations. Although during the long history of English teaching a great deal of materials and many activities as teaching aids and techniques in teaching productive skills have been proposed by many instructors, little attention is paid to the effectiveness of using educational technologies as compared to the advances and changes those technologies have brought to the field of education in general and EFL in particular. Najjari and Ghaemi (2011) indicated that the transformation from a traditional to an information-based society is occurring rapidly throughout the world. The transformation is also occurring in education and the world is witnessing the globalization of education.

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.

CMC has been recognized as one of the most facilitative means of learning and teaching foreign languages today though, few educators have attempted to apply this method to the actual English classroom (Han, 2006; Na & Park, 2003).

In this research, the researcher tries to use the two modes of chats; voice and text, in an attempt to develop both speaking and writing skills of

first year secondary school students and their self-efficacy. 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.

Although there are differences between text chat and voice, both offer many advantages for language fluency. On the other hand, Young & Edward (2013) pointed out that text chat promotes consciousness of grammatical and lexical accuracy, ability to study both form and communication skills within the same task. The ability to check utterances before sending them may enhance language confidence and create a low stress environment. The sense of anonymity enhanced participants' abilities to correct partner mistakes, give opinions more willingly, and foster and environment of equal participation. Less use of native language, with more time afforded to check meanings and words. The collaborative nature of the activity lead to learner output (in terms of quantity of written work) being sizeable. Participants stay on-task due to the positive pressure not to leave their partners waiting. On the other hand, the voice-chat offers benefits such as high dependence on listening skills, particularly as gestures and facial expressions cannot be used to convey meaning (Young & Edwards, 2013: 447).

Due to the importance of EFL writing skills, many researches and studies were conducted to investigate new strategies for developing 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.

Accordingly, there has lately been a change from the cognitive and developmental theories to a more social view of learning in CALL (Darower, 2000). It is in this communicative language teaching era, where context is a vital element, that computers have apparently made a greater contribution than was previously possible (Beatty, 2003). Accordingly, CALL proponents argue that, thanks to computers, language learners are exposed to larger amounts of text, images, and materials; that they can increase time and efficiently involve in a given task; and that they can show more responsibility for their learning. Some studies dealt specifically with SCMC to examine its potential for acquiring a second language, for instance, Chang (2007); Sahin (2007); Sequeira (2009); Liang (2010) and Tsai (2017).

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 wring skills of the EFL secondary stage students and their self-efficacy.

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 writing skills. Thus the current study examines the effect of using an voice-text chat in developing learners' EFL writing skills. The researcher will use voice-text chat to help the study sample improve their writing skills.

Questions of the study

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

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

2- To what extent will using voice-text chat enhance the self-efficacy of EFL secondary stage students?

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 writing test in favor of the experimental group.
2. 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 writing test in favor of the post-test.
3. 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 self-efficacy scale in favor of the post-test.
4. There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the control group and the experimental group in the post administration of the self-efficacy scale in favor of the experimental group.

Procedures of the study

The following procedures were followed to answer the questions of the study and to fulfil the purpose of the study:

1- Reviewing the related literature and previous studies to set the theoretical background of the study and build its instruments.
2- Extracting checklists of speaking and writing skills from literature.
3- Presenting the checklists of speaking and writing skills to jurors for validation.
4- Designing instruments of the research.
5- Checking the validity and reliability of the instruments.
6- Administering the instruments to the experimental and control groups students.
7- Administering the treatment of applying the voice-text chat program on the experimental group students while the control group students only receive the traditional face to face method in teaching speaking and writing skills.
8- Administering the post-tests, post self-efficacy scale.
9- Analyzing the data using the appropriate statistical techniques.
10- Interpreting the results of the statistical data analysis.
11- Presenting conclusion and recommendations.

Design of the study

The current research follows the quasi-experimental design that aims at investigating the effectiveness of voice-text chat on enhancing writing skills where two groups of the secondary stage students were chosen from a governmental Azhari Institute to apply the proposed voice-text chat based program and the instruments of the study on the experimental group while the control group received the traditional face-to-face method in learning writing skills.

Experimental and control groups were exposed to a pre-posttest in writing skills. They were exposed as well to a pre-post self-efficacy scale to measure their self-efficacy towards learning FL English skills.

Table (1): *Design of the study*

	Groups	N	Pretest	Treatment	Posttest
Students are randomly assigned to	First Exp. Group	24	A test of writing skills & A test of writing skills	Voce-text chat Learning	A test of writing skills & A test of writing skills
	Control Group	24		Regular instruction	
	Total	48			

Participants

The participants of the study were two secondary classes from Mohamed Ragab Institute. One class of about 24 students represented the experimental group that received the voice-text chat based program training and the other class of about 24 students will serve as a control group that only will receive the regular teaching.

Instruments and Materials

For the purpose of the study, the following instruments will be designed and used:

1- A pre-posttest of writing suitable for the EFL first year secondary stage students.
2- A writing skills checklist suitable for EFL first year secondary stage students.
3- A pre-post scale of writing self-efficacy

Definition of Terms
Writing Skill

Nunan (2003) defines writing as a physical and mental activity at the most basic level, it is the physical act of committing words or ideas to some medium whether it is hieroglyphically inked onto a computer. In addition, it is the mental work of inventing ideas, thinking about how to express them and organize them into statements and paragraphs that will be clear to a reader.

In the same context, Writing is seen as a means of communication that should be learned. Written words frequently have to express meanings in absence of speaking (Kose, 2005 p 15).

Sokolik (2003) defined writing as "*the mental work, which involves inventing ideas, thinking about how to express them, and organizing them into sentences and paragraphs that will be clear to readers*" (p. 35).

For this research, the researcher defined writing as the ability of EFL first secondary students to develop their ideas on paper in an accurate, organized way, using correct sentence Construction, and mechanics of writing.

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to the person's belief in his or her ability to organize and execute the courses of action required to achieve goals (Bandura, 1997). Bandura (1982) refers to self-efficacy as the individual's conviction of being able to master specific activities, situations or aspects of his or her own psychological and social functioning.

Kristen (2009) defined self-efficacy as "a person's own judgment of capabilities to perform a certain activity in order to attain a certain outcome". Glanz, Rimer and Viswanath (2008) defined that "self-efficacy is a person's beliefs about his or her capacity to influence the quality of functioning and the events that affect their life".

So, the current study defines self-efficacy as first-year secondary school students' beliefs in their abilities to speak and write in English in the correct way.

Voice-Text Chat

Chat modes are defined as the ability to produce oral or written discourse that show how ideas and large chunks of information are represented with the use or online conversation (Shin, 2007). Hirotani (2009) has highlighted the fact that the CMC environment affects the communicative interaction between language learners and allows them to play a greater role in managing the discourse.

Chat is a broad term describing internet-based communications where messages are sent in real-time between the sender and the receiver. These communications can be text-based, voice-based, and/or video-based and can include multiple participants. (Kat Austin, 2016).

Operationally, voice-text chat may be defined as the best use of both oral and written modes of chat to improve first-year secondary school students' speaking and writing skills besides their self-efficacy.

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.

Table (2) Comparing the performance of the experimental and control group on the post-administration of the EFL Writing Test

Skills	The group	N.of cases	Means	S.D	df	t.Value	Sig.
Mechanics of Writing	Control	24	1.17	0.38		17.29	0.01 Sig.
	Experimental	24	3.33	0.48			
Organization	Control	24	1.25	0.44		15.66	0.01 Sig.
	Experimental	24	3.25	0.44			
Development of Ideas	Control	24	1.54	0.51	46	12.83	0.01 Sig.
	Experimental	24	3.42	0.50			
Accuracy	Control	24	1.33	0.48		14.63	0.01 Sig.
	Experimental	24	3.17	0.38			
Sentence Construction	Control	24	1.71	0.46		12.04	0.01 Sig.
	Experimental	24	3.38	0.50			
Total score of Test	Control	24	7.00	1.61		23.90	0.01 Sig.
	Experimental	24	16.54	1.10			

Table (2) shows results concerning the third hypothesis focusing on the differences between the mean rank scores of the control group and those of the experimental group on the post administration of the writing test.

Results shown in table (2) reveal that there are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental and the control groups in all skills of the writing 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) and degree of freedom = 46. These results are consistent with the third hypothesis or confirm its validity. The researcher attributes these differences to the program used.

Findings

The study revealed that the experimental group outperformed the control group in both speaking and writing skills. Moreover, the experimental group students had also high self-efficacy to learn EFL speaking and writing skills than the control group counterparts. These positive differences between the targeted dependent variables, i.e. speaking, writing and self-efficacy 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:

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 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 and writing 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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