The Impact Of Smart Board on Iranian Lower Intermediate EFL learner's Speaking and Listening Skills and Autonomy

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Abstract

This study explored the effect of employing smart board in enhancement of EFL learners' speaking and listening skills. Forty lower-intermediate EFL students were selected from Kashmar, Iran. They were assigned to control and experimental groups. Participants in experimental group were provided with a smart board as a teaching tool while those in the control group were taught using a traditional white board. Smart board was found as an effective tool in educational contexts which can significantly influence learners' academic performance and autonomy. These results provide pedagogical implications for utilizing smart board as an educational tool in EFL contexts.

Key words: autonomy, test battery, smart board, digital pen.

1. Introduction

Speaking and listening are categorized as oral communicative skills which are considered of great importance in the contexts of English as a foreign language (EFL). Since the main purpose of learning a foreign language is communication, searching for new techniques which help learners enhance their oral skills, listening and speaking is important (Khosravani, Khosravani & Ganji Khoosf, 2014). Several techniques and tools have been introduced and employed in EFL settings in order to enhance students' speaking and listening.
skills. With the advent of technology EFL contexts have experienced significant changes. Technology has changed every aspect of human life in general and his/her foreign language learning (FLL) process, in specific. According to Haider and Chowdhury (2014), the emergence of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) has resulted in significant changes in the arena of language teaching and learning starting from the use of innovative learning materials to the widening of interaction patterns among a huge and diverse community of learners. There have been arguments with respect to the advantages and disadvantages of CALL, though the trend of employing computer assisted tools in language teaching is increasing throughout the world (ibid). CALL has played a key role in personalizing education (Ghalami Nobar & Ahangari, 2014). Only when learners are able to take benefit from each learning opportunity rather than simply responding to different stimuli from the teacher can they be skilful manipulators of language in their language learning process (Ying, n.d.). The situation demands the urgent need of enhancing learners' initiatives and learner autonomy (ibid). Schmenk, (2005) states that: ‘The popularity of learner autonomy may be at least partially related to the rise of computer technology and the growing importance of computers in language learning environments worldwide’ (P.177).
Hence due to the popularity of computer use in EFL contexts the present study aims at exploring the effect of CALL on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' task-based listening speaking and autonomy.

\section*{Review of Literature}
\subsection*{CALL in EFL contexts}

Haider and Chowdhury (2014) conducted a study based on a survey of the Communicative English Language Certificate (CELC) course run by the Foreign Language Training Center (FLTC), a project under the Ministry of Education, Bangladesh. Their study was done on 242 learners who had completed the CELC course at the selected four centers of FLTC. According to the findings obtained by these two authors it can be concluded that the FLTC project is doing a creditable task by offering quality English language teaching employing Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) facilities to the learners of Bangladesh. This study also manifests some weaknesses of the program delivery, teaching approaches and learning support. Some of these problems are not surprising because the program was still evolving and experiencing the changing practices during the study. These led to some of the instructors’ difficulty in getting themselves at ease with the computer based materials and technological instruments quickly (ibid).
Park and Son (2005) investigated factors influencing EFL teachers’ employment of computers in their classrooms in order to find out EFL teachers’ attitudes toward CALL and ways to improve CALL practice in schools. The results of their study indicated teachers’ positive and favorable attitudes toward the employment of the computers. They regarded computer technology as a helpful teaching tool which can improve ways of teaching through providing students with different language inputs and increasing students’ learning experiences in real and authentic contexts. It was also reported that external factors including lack of time, insufficient computer facilities, rigid school curricula, textbooks and lack of administrative support put negative effects on the implementation of CALL in the classroom. Internal factors like teachers’ limited computer skills, knowledge about computers, beliefs and perceptions of CALL also appear to significantly influence teachers’ decisions on the employment of CALL (ibid).

Barani (2011) investigated the relationship between CALL and listening skill of Iranian EFL learners. His results suggested that there was a statistically significant difference between CALL users and nonusers in favor of the experimental group (p<.05).

Ghalami and Ahangari (2011) explored the impact of CALL on enhancing Iranian EFL learners’ task-based listening as a motivating device to improve formation of positive attitudes. Their findings indicated that there was
a meaningful difference between the experimental and control groups; that is to say, the participants in experimental group performed better than those in control group and obtained a higher average. The motivation of the experimental group participants was also higher compared to those in control group.

Nachoua (2012) in a study entitled "Computer-Assisted Language Learning for Improving Students’ Listening Skill" found that CALL is a motivating method and computers are valuable instruments in second/foreign language classes to improve students’ listening skill. Also, participants in experimental group (CALL) outperformed those in control group. Students’ performance was improved in grammar, vocabulary, writing and listening. Furthermore, many parameters indicated that significant progress was attained in the group receiving a CALL teaching.

1.4 CALL and EFL Learners’ Autonomy

Edalati Shams (2013) investigated the effects of hybrid learning on Iranian EFL learners' autonomy in vocabulary learning. Hybrid Learning (HL), according to Bärenfänger (2018, as cited in Edalati Shams, 2013), is a learning approach including traditional classroom learning, computer-assisted language learning (CALL), and self-directed learning (SDL). According to Edalati
Shams' findings a few of the learners manifested a considerable level of autonomy in learning from the outset. They were used to watching movies, reading books, listening to music, surfing the net, and gaming in English and outnumbered others in posts and comments they published on the weblog. The quantitative analysis proved that these already autonomous learners obtained the most significant gains throughout this HL course regarding both vocabulary knowledge and level of autonomy. Learners, mostly, had positive views on employing modern technology for the purpose of learning. The need for learner training and the significance of computer literacy were both expressed by the learners and witnessed by the researcher throughout the course. CALL and traditional classroom learning played complementary roles and each supplemented the disadvantages of another. Drawback to the use of weblogs observed in this course was regarding the a-sychronicity of communication in a weblog. Regarding the learners' responses to the autonomy questionnaire at the beginning and end of the course, a statistically significant difference was found between the mean scores of the two sets of scores the learners got at the questionnaire which means that there was an improvement in the learners' level of autonomy after participating in the HL course (ibid). To sum up, the results of Edalati Shams (4113) indicated that learners' autonomy level and vocabulary knowledge increased at the end of HL course.

The following research question was posed by the researcher:
Q:\ Does the employment of smart board have any significant effect on lower-intermediate EFL learners' speaking and listening?

Q\:\ Does the employment of smart board have any significant effect on lower-intermediate EFL learners' autonomy?

The following research null-hypotheses were formulated by the researcher:

HO\:\ The employment of smart board does not have any significant effect on lower-intermediate EFL learners' speaking and listening.

HO\:\ The employment of smart board does not have any significant effect on lower-intermediate EFL learners' autonomy.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

A sample including 24 lower-intermediate and learners EFL students learning English in Imam Hossein Elementary school in Kashmar, Iran was selected. Their age ranged from 14 to 42. Only males took part in this study. None of these participants have traveled to an English speaking country. The participants' homogeneity was confirmed using Quick Placement Test.
3.0 Instrumentations

3.0.1 Quick Placement Test (QPT)

To make sure that the participants were at the same level of language proficiency this kind of test developed by Oxford University Press and University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (multiple-choice items; grammar, vocabulary, cloze test) was administered to a population consisting of EFL learners.

3.0.2 Listening Speaking test battery

Participants' speaking ability was assessed via an interview between the researcher and the respondents. Also, an audio-CD was employed to assess the participants' listening comprehension. These assessments were done at the start and at the end of the study, but the materials employed as the assessment instruments were different.

3.0.3 Learner autonomy questionnaire

In order to assess EFL students' autonomy in learning a Learner Autonomy Questionnaire developed by Zhang and Li, was administered to see how autonomous the participants were in learning English as a foreign language. The content validity and reliability of the questionnaire have been already confirmed. The questionnaire has two parts: Part 1 includes multiple-choice items on a 5-point Likert scale. The choices range from 1 (never) to 5.
3. Part 4 includes multiple-choice self-reporting items and students had to choose one option from the five alternatives.

3.3 Procedure

Forty-eight lower-intermediate EFL learners selected as the participants of the study, based on QPT, were randomly assigned to control (N=42) and experimental (N=42) groups. Listening-speaking materials adopted from interchange were taught to both groups by the same teacher. Smart board was employed in experimental class. Smart board works with a computer, projector, digital pens, and software called Notebook. The computer screen is projected to the smart board. Also using digital pen the teacher and the student alike can annotate. The quality of displaying materials on the screen was very high allowing the students to watch and hear effectively. On the contrary, participants in control group were not provided with a smart board and traditional white board was employed in order to teach new materials. Finally students in both groups sat for the posttest. Also participants in the experimental group were asked to complete the learner autonomy questionnaire before and after the treatment so that the effects of using smart boards on enhancement of EFL learners' autonomy were explored.
.Data Analysis

This section summarizes the data obtained from the instruments given to the participants; also the null-hypotheses already proposed are tested.

.1 Results of the pretest

Table 1 shows data related to the participants' performance in the pretest (listening and speaking).

Table 1:

Results of pretest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>12.26</td>
<td>2.24</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>experimental</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>16.12</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 1 shows there is no statistically meaningful difference between mean of control group (M=12.26; SD=2.24) and that of experimental group (M=16.12; SD=2.21) because p-value is greater than .12 (sig=.11; t=1.36). Therefore, the homogeneity of the participants was confirmed at the beginning of the course.
4. Results of the posttest

Data in Table 4 show the results obtained from the participants' performance in the posttest.

Table 4:

Results of posttest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>11.42</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>experimental</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>41.41</td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data in Table 4 show the effects of the treatment (employment of smart board) on EFL learners' speaking and listening. Based on these data, participants in experimental group (M=41.41; SD=2.16) had significantly better performance than those in control group M=11.42; SD=3.11) in the posttest. Accordingly, the significant effect of employing smart board is confirmed (p=.14<.05).


4. Results of learner autonomy

To explore the effect of employing smart board on EFL learner's autonomy paired-samples t-test was employed since the questionnaire was given to the participants in experimental group as pre and posttest (Table 3).

Table 3:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pair 1</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>62.61</td>
<td>13.22</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>14.11</td>
<td>.111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 2</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>11.24</td>
<td>12.22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 shows that the mean of experimental group in the pretest is 62.61 and its mean in the posttest is 11.24. Since p-value (.111) is less than .05 it can be concluded that using smart board in EFL speaking and listening classrooms can improve learners' autonomy.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aims at exploring the effects of smart board on enhancing lower-intermediate EFL learners' speaking and listening skills and their autonomy. Findings confirmed the significant effects of employing smart board as an effective learning tool in order to enhance EFL learners' speaking
and listening skills. This finding was in agreement with Ghalami and Ahangari's (2014) who explored the impact of CALL on enhancing Iranian EFL learners’ task-based listening. Also these findings supported the effectiveness of smart board in improving EFL learners' autonomy.

References


