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The efficiency of online English language instruction on students' reading skills

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Abstract

Internet is the most important technological innovation which can easily be integrated into every field of people's lives. Web is a new technology which is used as a communication facilitator and an instructional delivery medium. Today, web-assisted teaching and learning is replacing traditional teaching and learning methods and thus, I aimed to determine if Faculty of Law students in Eastern Mediterranean University (EMU) are learning better when the reading instruction is assisted by the web. The result showed that Law students are more successful in web-assisted instruction. This study has a vital significant since the result affects the curriculum of the English courses. EMU should have web-based teaching and learning, as today it is the growing educational tool for future teaching and learning styles.

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Keywords: Educational technology; students of law; web-assisted language instruction; reading skills.

1. Introduction

Internet is the most important technological innovation of today, which can easily be integrated into every field of people's lives. The reason of its rapid improvement is its usefulness and easy access. Web, WWW, is a new technology which is used as a communication facilitator and it is an instructional delivery medium, as defined by Uzunboylu (2005).

The Internet is a necessity today in the field of education to be used as an important tool both for students and teachers as a guide for learning and teaching. As Hackbarth (1997) suggests, web sites provide digital educational activities and network-based courses for all grade levels in a large number of subjects. Considering the objectives of courses and level of students, the Internet is mostly used in the university environment as the tool to learn foreign language. As Isman and Dabaj (2005) suggest, "with the developments in the Internet and the global network

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system, the universities immediately took the advantage of using World Wide Web to deliver instruction, regardless of the physical distance and time.”

In the field of education, particularly language learning and teaching can easily be assisted by the Internet since there are many highly developed web sites which offer speaking, reading, listening, and writing activities. Grammar is also accepted as another skill and according to Cunningham (1998), grammar translation method is the starting point of using technology in teaching and learning foreign languages. The Internet provides an easy access to four skills, which are necessary for language learning. It is known that English language is the most used common language in the world and nobody can argue with the importance of foreign languages, especially English [4]. Therefore, it is vital to learn English and it becomes easier when you use the Internet as a tool for learning in the virtual learning environment.

When the native language is not English, learners in Higher Education usually have fears and worries about not succeeding to learn. However, it is the students themselves who motivates themselves with the help of their institution and lectures to overcome their anxieties. Besides, Internet is now acting as another motivator for students in higher education. Higher education institutions, mainly university level institutions, are more involved in online teaching and learning in this 21st century. My institution, Eastern Mediterranean University (EMU) is one of the developing universities in a new developing country, North Cyprus, which follows the technological innovations continuously and tries to offer an international education for its students. Eastern Mediterranean University is established in 1979 as the Institute of Higher Technology, offering education only to 105 Engineering students. In 1985, it is transformed into Eastern Mediterranean University with the full support of Middle East Technical University in Turkey. In 1999, the number of faculties reached 8 and it owns unprecedented campus facilities, and creates a multicultural environment with students coming from 68 countries and highly qualified faculty members from 35 different nations. With the help of the modern understanding of education shared by all, students are trained as individuals thoroughly learned and endowed with excellent research skills, who can generate new knowledge, who are aware of and meticulous about environmental issues, who are creative, confident and ready to compete with the world youth.

As I mentioned, EMU is seeking world wide recognition with the education it is offering to its students. The purpose of the study is to figure out how effective the web assisted reading skills in Eastern Mediterranean University (EMU), Faculty of Law are. The research is conducted in the Faculty of Law because it is one of the faculties in the university in which the medium of instruction is Turkish. However, students are involved in English language courses, both EAP and ESP related, in order to fulfill the requirements of the credits in the bylaws. The study answers the question “Is there a significant difference between the test results of the experiment group and control group, which are instructed in two different methods?” In today’s world, web assisted teaching and learning is replacing traditional teaching and learning methods and thus, I aim to determine if Faculty of Law students are learning better when the reading instruction is assisted by the web. This study has a vital significant

internally since the results may cause a change in the curriculum of the English courses in the Faculty of Law.

2. Methodology

In this study, experimental study model is used. There are two experimental groups of students. The experiment group students practice reading skills activities on the web. Students in control group practice the same activities using the traditional methods, guided by the teacher in class. Both groups are given pre-test at the beginning and post-test at the end in order to compare the achievements of the two groups. The experiment took place in one month. At the time of the experiment, the English language reading activities are done with the experiment group in the Faculty of Law computer laboratory. The control group did the same activities in classroom. During the experiment, quizzes are given to both groups in order to figure out and follow their progress.

2.1 Participants

The participants under investigation include second year students, who are taking ENGL 254 English IV Course in fall 2007-2008 school year in Faculty of Law at EMU.

2.2 Sample

The sample will be chosen randomly among ENGL 254 students. I have chosen students from this course because it is the 4th and final English course in the curriculum of Law students.

2.3 Instrument

Triangulation is used in this study. I observed the students in managing their learning both in web-assisted or traditional methods of learning. I also interviewed some randomly selected students in order to learn their psychological and emotional attitudes towards using web-based and traditional paper-based activities in learning English. Finally I delivered a questionnaire to the students.

2.4 Reading comprehension tasks

Students' reading proficiency and comprehension are measured in pre-test and post-tests administered before and after the experiment. The test measured reading skills of students focusing on reading skills with Referencing and Comprehension Questions. The test measures vocabulary development and comprehension on the intermediate level which is the level of Law students in ENGL 254. The comprehension passages are drawn from widely used intermediate level texts, and the test has been carefully designed to avoid racial and gender bias.

2.5 The interview

The semi-structured format of the interview allowed students to express themselves freely about their experiences in the class and their experiences with the web-based reading activities, make suggestions about them, identify any perceived benefits or advantages of this experience, and describe any difficulties they have encountered during the instruction. Students also asked to comment on whether this experience affected their reading and writing.

2.6 Data collection

The data is collected through a questionnaire, interviews, and observations. The design of the questionnaire is to collect quantitative data on investigating how effectively web can assist English language instruction at EMU. Students' responses to questionnaire are statistically analyzed according to the education level, English level, having computer at home, etc. Semi-structured interview is designed to collect qualitative data.

2.7 Data analysis procedures

In this study quantitative research methods (frequencies, t-test, and ANOVA) is used to investigate the research question that is about the effectiveness of web assisted reading skills. At the same time, qualitative research methods are used to ask open ended questions to figure out if students are happy with web assisted activities or traditional activities. The data is analyzed while collecting it

3. Findings

The results showed that the score of pre-test mean before the experimental procedure of the experiment group was $M=19.06$ and control group was $M=19.28$. When the experiment took place and the post-test is given, the average of the post-test of experiment group was $M=43.73$ and the control group $M=41.08$. The results also showed that the web-assisted English language instruction is more effective and successful than that of the traditional teaching of English reading skills. Therefore, there is an increase in students' achievement of reading skills when it is web assisted. As a final remark, it can be said that web assisted learning provides students with a higher-level learning.

In the interviews, it was obvious that the students who are involved in online reading activities have positive feelings and attitudes towards the reading activities online. Although couple of students mentioned that they have

difficulties in handling online activities, majority is fond of the process they are involved in. One of the students said:

I liked the activities because everything has a meaning and there is a need to read in order to discover it. I had fun while practicing and I think computer is an effective tool for learning. I usually get nervous about reading in class and do activities but by the assistance of computers my ideas flow better than usual.

Some students on the other hand said that they had difficulties:

One day my computer didn't work properly and I could not save or submit what I did almost the whole day.

Another student who is affected positively from the online activities said:

I can easily recommend this class to my friends who don't have reading strategies and have difficulties in critical readings.

4. Conclusion

From the study, it is indicated that there is an improvement in the reading comprehension skills. It is concluded that the experimental group who are involved in online reading skills achieved higher level of learning. This would be a reason for a change in the curriculum of English courses in the Faculty of Law. The changes should be done accordingly and necessary researches should take place for analyzing the effectiveness of other skills of writing, listening, speaking online. Online activities also provide students with the advantages of other online skills like chatting, etc. It is high time to mention that before adopting and practicing online activities, students should be able to use computers, have computing skills and literacy. This could be the first step. Then follows the strategies of study skills, students should be able to be trained on computer-assisted strategies since they have a positive effect on reading comprehension of ESL learners. The results show that there's a significant difference in reading comprehension scores achieved on the reading comprehension tasks before and after online English language instruction on students' reading skills. Some studies in the area of web assisted instruction and reading have also found an increase in student motivation and confidence Adler -Kassner and Reynolds (1996). It is concluded that students believe in the effectiveness of online reading activities and that they enjoyed participating in the online activities since they are exposed to variety of tasks to complete.

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