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A CMC Approach to Teaching Phrasal-Verbs to Iranian EFL Senior High School Students: The Case of Blended Learning

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Abstract

CMC has received a lot of ink in the literature related to L2 acquisition. It is generally agreed that one of the concerns of teaching English to Iranian society of EFL learners is whether blended learning is pedagogically effective. This study investigated the efficacy of teaching phrasal verbs via blended learning to Iranian EFL senior high school students. For this purpose, two groups of Iranian EFL students, 40 each, aged 15 to 20, were randomly selected from a population of 300 students at Iranian senior high school, in Shahrekord. The criterion for selection was Oxford Placement Test. The group called "e-class" was taught by the internet through CMC approach. While the second group; namely, control group received no internet feedback. At the end of treatment, which was a full term; the two groups were tested on a phrasal verbs test. The findings of this research revealed that the online tasks can motivate students to have an active role in the phrasal verbs learning.

Keywords: Computer-mediated-communication (CMC); English as a foreign language; phrasal verbs; blended learning

1. Introduction

E-learning is also called Web-based learning, online learning, distribute learning, computer-assisted instruction, or internet-based learning. Historically, there have been two common e-learning modes: distance learning and

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computer assisted instruction. Distance learning uses information technologies to deliver instruction to learners who are at remote locations from a central site. Computer assisted instruction (also called computer-based learning and computer based training) uses computers to aid in the delivery of stand-alone multimedia packages for learning and teaching. These two modes are subsumed under e-learning as the Internet becomes the integrating technology. In this paper the term "blended learning" refers to courses that combine face to face classroom instruction with online learning and reduced classroom contact hours (Dziuban, 2004).

For most learners grammar is considered as the most important skill to master in order to ensure success in learning L2. It seems that with strong grammar skill, English learners tend to make greater progress in other areas of language learning. Grammar should be an active process to involve learners to use it in real contexts. Meanwhile, computers and the internet play an increasingly important role in the life of L2 learners around the world. Levy (1997) points out that "the Internet has entered our classrooms faster than books, television, computer, the telephone, or any other technology for information and communication" (p. 311). With the increased use of computer, it seems necessary to train language learners how to learn phrasal verbs online. This study investigated the efficacy of teaching phrasal verbs to Iranian EFL senior high school students. The main purpose of this research was exploring different aspects and scopes of the using technology based learning in high school teaching and learning.

To find out solutions for an effective application of information and communication technologies, we should answer some critical questions related to use of ICT in teaching and learning in higher education settings. Recently that the Iran's National ICT Plans has been developed to scaffold and increase the educational processes in schools, universities and governmental organizations, known as Development of Human Resources and Education Program. The National ICT Agency (NICTA) called "TAKFA" (in Persian) was established and responsible for supervising and managing ICT. This study was to answer the following question:

- Is blended learning effective in learning phrasal verbs?
- Is blended learning applicable in Iran?

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The participants in this study were pre- intermediate adult EFL Iranian students enrolled in an English online course at Setayesh high school, Shahrekord, Iran. The male and female participants (N = 30, 11 males and 19 females), aged 20 to 25. The participants were randomly divided into two groups: modern group (N = 16, 4 males and 10 females) and traditional group (N = 24, 5 males and 19 females).

2.2. Instrumentation

To collect the required data, several instruments were employed in this study:

2.2.1 Oxford Placement Test

For ensuring the homogeneity of the participant, Oxford Placement Test was administered. This test had three main sections including grammar section (20items), reading comprehension section (20 items), and language use sections (30 items). Based on the scoring guideline of the every test, participants were supposed to gain between 18 and 23 out of 70 to be considered as lower, intermediate. It is worth mentioning that the language use section of OPT instrument was regarded as the study pretest.

2.2.2 *Information Technology (IT) Inventory*

While the treatment in modern group included phrasal verbs tasks through emails, http://www.nicenet.org, the researcher must determine the participants' degree of familiarity and accessibility with the Internet. For this purpose, participants in this group were asked to fill out an IT inventory. This inventory consisted of three sections with the total number of 30 items. For avoiding to be misunderstood, the questionnaire was presented in participants' first language, Persian. Mohammadi (2012) reported a relatively high reliability for the Persian version as (r = .75).

2.2.3 *Researchers-made Posttest*

For measuring the degree of achievement during the course, a 50-item phrasal verbs posttest was employed. This test consisted of three different sections: the first section including 30 items which were exactly the language use section of OPT administered again at the end of the course in order to measure the progress of the participants' phrasal verbs learning, The second section of this test included 20 items selected from the phrasal verbs tasks practiced throughout the course. The researcher-made section of this test were piloted with 25 participants of the same level and an internal consistency of (r = .82) was estimated through Cronbach's Alpha.

2.3. Procedure

The treatment lasted eight weeks, three sessions per week. To ensure the homogeneity of the groups at the beginning of the study, 50 participants took OPT. The participants proved to be in pre intermediate level (N = 30) were asked to take an IT inventory before the treatment begins. The purpose of this stage was to select IT literate participants for experimental group. Then, control (N = 24) and experimental (N = 16) groups were formed. The same phrasal verbs tasks were practiced for the two groups. Before the study begins, the participants in experimental group were informed of the study format and their role in the e-learning class. During the course, one session per week was assigned to phrasal verbs tasks. The participants in experimental group attended two sessions and were asked to take part in phrasal verbs class online.

Each student in experimental group was given a user name and a password to log into the study website (www.nicenet.ir). To download the course materials on phrasal verbs tasks, leave a message or e-mail a question, they were free to be online anytime they wished. There were several quizzes available for the participants for self-assessment. There was also a part for the participants to leave a message for each other or update their own personal profile. Throughout the course, eight phrasal verbs lessons were introduced in the online class.

The researchers checked the class every night to reply messages, answer questions, or add more sample tasks when needed. At the end of the course the study posttest was administered to all participants in both groups. As mentioned in the instrumentation, the test included 50 items assessing the participants 'knowledge of phrasal verbs practiced throughout the course.

4. Results and Discussions

Having collected the required data based on the above mentioned data collection instruments and procedures, the researchers analyzed the data and tested the hypothesis formulated for the present study.

4.1. Results for Test of Homogeny

To check the homogeneity of the total participants (N=30), the Interchange/Passages Objective Placement Test, (OPT) was administered. As mentioned in the instrumentation section, those who obtained scores 18 to 13 were selected as the study participants (N=30). Since the participants had already registered for particular week days, the researchers came with unequal groups: control (N=14) and experimental (N=16) Meanwhile, to compare the participants' level of language proficiency during pretest and posttest, t-test was conducted.

Table 1.

Groups	N	M	ST	T	DF	P
Traditional	24	25.30	3.64	.35	38	.72
Modern	16	24.93	2.85			

As the results of Table 1 show, there is no statistically significant difference [t (38) = .35, p .72 (two-tailed)] between control (M = 25.30, SD =3.64) and experimental (M = 24.93, SD = 2.58) groups with regard to language proficiency which confirms the homogeneity of the participants at the outset of the study.

4.2. Results for Test of Structure (Posttest)

To compare participants' performances in the study pretest and posttest in both control and experimental groups, the researchers conducted a test analysis for the participants' scores in the test of structure. This test, as mentioned in the instrumentation section, included 50 items. Table 2 shows he results for this analysis.

Table 2.

Groups	N	M	ST	T	DF	P
Traditional	24	27.40	2.20	-2	38	.01
Modern	16	32.15	2.59			

As the results of Table 2 indicate, the participants in the experimental (e-learning) group (*M* 32.15, *SD* = 2.59) significantly outperformed [*t* (38) = -2.53, *p* = .01 (two-tailed)] those in the control group (*M* = 27.40, *SD* = 2.0) in the test of structure.

4. Conclusions

As the results of this study indicated, the participants in the experimental group (web-based achievement of grammatical component of the learning) outperformed language learning program. It can be more effective in enhancing opportunities for the Iranian EFL learners than those in control group to achieve structural knowledge. In addition, like 756 similar researches on technology enhanced language learning (TELL) conducted by Motallebzadeh and Babaee (2011), Volle (2005), Gonglewski et al.(2001), and Li (2000), it seems that this novel experience has been effective in accomplishing its intended goal of providing more opportunities for Iranian pre-intermediate learners to practice grammar tasks.

Besides, the findings of this study can provide background for blended programs in which traditional face to face classes and web-enhanced programs are held side by side. However, it is clear that learners who are not familiar with such a novel environment need more time to adapt themselves. Since online courses have become quite common among school and university students, the results of this research suggest that other language skills can also be practiced through online environment. Finally, due to the findings of this study, it can be concluded that IT literacy is a prerequisite for any online program; in other words, professional net users seem to benefit more effectively from the web based language programs.

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