

Open Learning and Distance Education e-learning : A Case Study in Iranian Learners

Mojgan Yarahmadi
Assistant Professor, Ph.D in ELT
Islamic Azad University,
Arak Branch, Department of English,
Arak 38135-567, Iran
e-mail: Mojgan.Yarahmadi@Yahoo.com
m-yarahmadi@iau-arak.ac.ir

Abstract-The present study was undertaken to explore the effect of blended instruction (face-to-face instruction accompanied with online instruction) on grammar learning in Iranian EFL learners. To test the null hypothesis, two intact classes containing eighty sophomore female and male students of English translation at Islamic Azad University of Arak Branch, Iran participated. Pre-test means scores showed insignificant differences between the experimental and control groups in their grammatical knowledge. At the end of treatment period, a post-test (the same as pre-test) was administered in both groups to compare their grammar achievement. Adopting a quasi-experimental design, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Key words: *grammar, e-learning, EFL, technology*

I. INTRODUCTION

Despite the glamour of technology, its use in language teaching does not guarantee students' success in skills acquisition nor higher levels of achievement than traditional classroom environments. Studies by Grant (1998), Felix (2001), Chen (2004), Collentine (2000), Zhuo (1999), Nagata (1996), and found technology to be an effective tool in teaching and learning grammar.

As in many developing countries, use of online courses in EFL instruction in some higher education institutions in Iran is not yet known due to insufficient numbers of PC's, lack of internet connectivity in some colleges, lack of trained instructors, and lack of administrative support. A few individual attempts are now available here and there. However, the effect of such practices on Iranian college students' achievement has not been investigated yet.

II. RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

There is no significant difference between the grammar average performances of the group undergone blended learning processing and the group undergone traditional face-to-face grammar learning processes.

III. SUBJECTS

The participants of this study were all at the intermediate level (English Translation Sophomores) within the age range

of 20 to 24 years old. They were all Iranian and their mother tongue was Persian. Both male and female students participated. They were 80 in number.

IV. PROCEDURE

Before instruction, the experimental and control groups were pre-tested. They took the same grammar pretest that consisted of questions covering the grammatical topics to be studied. At the end of the semester, both groups took the same post-test that covered all of the grammatical topics studied throughout the semester. The students studied the grammar textbook *Understanding and Using English Grammar* by Betty Azar (3rd Edition). Students in both groups had to do all the grammar exercises in class and grammatical topics in that textbook. The students in both groups had to check the rules and examples. In addition to the traditional in-class instruction, the experimental group used an online course with Nicenet, because using the Nicenet course site did not require any special license or registration fees. The experimental group used their own PC's and the Internet from home. Every week, grammar websites (hyperlinks) related to the grammar topic covered in class was added in "Link Sharing". The links contained explanations, examples, exercises and quizzes and a daily grammar lessons. Teacher had to post questions and discussion topics and write model responses every week.

Validity and reliability of the test which was used as pre-test and post-test was also checked. The post-tests are believed to have content validity as they aimed at assessing the students' achievement in grammar. The tasks required in the post-test were comparable to those covered in the book and practiced in class. Concurrent validity of the post-test was determined by establishing the relationship between the students' scores on the post-test and their course grade. The validity coefficient was .78. Inter-rater correlation was estimated to be .99 for the post-test. Calculated reliability using the Kurder-Richardson formula 21 was 0.85.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As indicated in table 1, the t-observed value for the comparison of experimental and control groups on the pre-test was 0.194. This amount of t is much lower than the

critical value (2000) at .05 and (2.660) at .01 level of probability for 68 degrees of freedom. Hence, it can be claimed that there is no significant difference between pre-test of the control and experimental groups.

TABLE I. T-STATISTIC FOR PRE_TEST

T-observed	Degrees of Freedom	T-critical	Level of significance
.194	68	2.000	.05
	68	2.660	.01

The following is a table for comparing the observed t-value based on the students' post-test performance.

TABLE II. T-STATISTIC FOR POST-TEST

T-observed	Degrees of Freedom	T-critical	Level of significance
4.874	68	2.000	.05
	68	2.660	.01

Here, the "t-value" well exceeds "t-critical" values both at 0.05 and 0.01 levels of significance. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected; the two groups scored differently on the post-test, and the difference was statistically significant.

VI. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Significant differences were found between the experimental and control groups in grammar achievement as measured by the post-test, suggesting that achievement in the experimental group improved as a result of blending online and in-class instruction. This means that use of online instruction as a supplement to in-class instruction proved to be a powerful tool for improving students' achievement in grammar. The present study recommends that use of blended learning (use of online instruction as a supplement to face-to-face instruction) be extended to other language course and other college levels. Students of different college levels (i.e., lower and upper class students) enrolled in courses focusing on the same skill such as reading or writing can share the same online course together with their instructors. Administrative support is also required in order for the students to take the online course seriously. Other Management Systems like WebCT, Moodle or Blackboard may be used instead of Nicenet to enable the students to edit, upload pictures and PowerPoint presentations, use online chat, and to enable the instructor to design her own quizzes and exercises. The effect of grammar instruction delivered fully online using course materials and quizzes designed by the instructor is still open for further investigation.

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