Impacts of Using Microsoft Word (MS) Software on Iranian EFL Lecturers' Spelling Skill

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the impacts of using Microsoft Office Word on Iranian EFL lecturers' spelling skill. To this end, 14 Iranian EFL lecturers, who had M.A. degrees in TEFL, containing eight males and six females took part in this study. The participants were divided into equivalent groups of control and experimental in a random way. The members in the experimental group worked with Microsoft Word and the members in the control group worked with pens and papers throughout the study. A complicated academic text with several difficult vocabularies was read for the participants and they were requested to write the text. The outcomes demonstrated that Microsoft Word was indeed advantageous to the spelling of the participants of experimental group because they made significantly less spelling mistakes in comparison with the participants of the control group.

Computer-assisted Language Learning (CALL), EFL Learner, Spelling, Microsoft Word (MS), ICDL test

Introduction

From the beginning until today, the efficiency of numerous CALL materials was dependent on instructional designs, and the techniques that teachers use for practicing these materials. When computers are properly applied, they will progress the learning method in different ways (Warschauer & Healey, 1998). In line with the progresses in technology, computer, and instructional technologies are becoming a necessary section of the learning and teaching processes.

English as a Second/Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) writing has been considered as one the most significant issues, which has been studied by many authorities, in foreign language teaching (Mozaheb, Seifoori, & Beigi, 2013). Most EFL learners also have a fear of writing, and they suspect that everything they write is full of mistakes. These worries would only make them withdraw and often make their writing development even stagnant and inefficient. As a result of these concerns, they favor applying a program to be certain that their writing is correct concerning grammar, sentence structure, spelling, and punctuation (Prvinchandar & Ayub, 2013).

Computer gives particular consideration to the language learner. It operates as an instructor, indicates errors and provides descriptions, leads the learner towards the true response, suggests interactive learning, evaluate the learner's answer, and handles an enormous volume of interaction and deliver feedback to the learners (AbuSeileek, Sa'aleek, & Odeh, 2012). Since in the modern world the computer-based technology is linked to the life of people, consequently studying the usage of this kind of technology by the experts to have correct and comprehensive writing can be critical.

Review of the Literature

Iravani and Tajik (2012) investigated the effect of software-assisted grammar teaching on learning the grammar of Iranian male junior high school learners. In their study, a quasi-experiment was conducted to determine whether computer-assisted grammar, teaching affects students' grammar learning. The results of the study revealed that software-assisted grammar teaching was more beneficial than the traditional method.

In another study conducted by Akhlaghi and Zareian (2015), the impact of PowerPoint presentations on improving grammar and vocabulary knowledge of Iranian pre-university EFL learners were investigated. The outcomes of the research revealed that PowerPoint presentations could prove effective for the development of the Iranian EFL learners' grammar and vocabulary knowledge and the learners' attitudes towards using PowerPoint presentation were positive.

Research Question

The present study intended to address the following research question:

1. Does using Microsoft Word have any effect on Iranian EFL lecturers' spelling in writing?

Methodology

Participants

The participants of the study were 14 university instructors in the field of TEFL who had M.A. degrees in this field. The participants consisted of eight male and six female instructors who were classified into two groups of control and experimental, 7 each.

Instrument

An ICDL test was conducted to the participants to estimate their familiarities with Microsoft office word. The test was a multiple-choice test that contained 30 multiple-choice questions where the participants were supposed to select the correct answer among the alternatives.

Procedure

Before conducting the study, the ICDL test was conducted to the participants to estimate their familiarities with Microsoft Word and all participants replied more than 50% of the questions correctly. After that, the participants were randomly divided into two groups of experimental and control consisted of three females and four males. A complicated academic text with several difficult words was read for the participants and they were requested to write the text. The participants in the control group applied papers and pens to write the text and the participants in

the experimental group applied Microsoft Word to type the text. After writing the texts, they were collected to be perused for the possible spelling errors and for comparing the results.

Results

To find a suitable answer to the research question, the spelling errors of the experimental group (EG) and control group (CG) participants were compared by means of an independent-samples *t* test. Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics for this comparison:

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Comparing the Spelling Errors of the EG and CG Participants

Groups	*N*	Mean	*Std.* Deviation	*Std.* Error Mean
EG	7	2.36	.87	.65
CG	7	7.58	1.03	.71

It can be seen in Table 1 that there was a difference between the spelling errors of the EG ($M = 2.36$) and the CG ($M = 7.58$) participants. In order to find out whether the difference between the spelling errors of the participants in the two groups was statistically significant or not, the researcher had to check the following *t* test table (Table 2):

Table 2

Results of the Independent-Samples t Test Comparing the Spelling Errors of the EG and CG Participants

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		*t* test for Equality of Means			
	F	*Sig.*	*t*	*df*	*Sig.* (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Equal variances assumed	1.45	.37	-3.51	12	.000	-5.22
Equal variances not assumed			-3.51	11.57	.000	-5.22

Table 2 revealed that there was a statistically significant difference in spelling errors for EG ($M = 2.36$, $SD = .87$) and CG ($M = 7.58$, $SD = 1.03$) members, $t(12) = -3.51$, $p = .000$ (two-tailed). Hence, it can be concluded that the two groups were significantly different in terms of their spelling errors, and this difference could be at least partly because of the conditions under which they composed their required text. The difference between the spelling errors of the two groups of participants is clearly seen in in Figure 1 below:
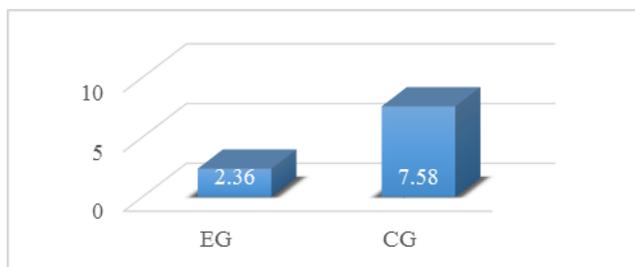
Figure 1. *Spelling Error Mean Scores of the EG and CG Participants*

As it could be seen in Figure 1, the EG members had far less spelling errors in their written productions than did their counterparts in the CG, which could be accounted for by the way through which they completed the task.

Discussion and Conclusion

Figueredo and Varnhagen (2006), examined the utilization of the computer in teaching writing. The learners could correct errors with the assistance of grammar and spelling checkers by using computers. Consequently, the two scholars revealed that the usage of grammar/spell checkers was beneficial for weaker learners who have decreased writing skills. A study by Hartley, Sotto, and Pennebaker (2003) showed that there were remarkable variances between the mean letter length, the number of paragraphs written, and the number of sentences used by learners who applied computers and those who did not. There were also main differences concerning readability or typographical and grammatical mistakes.

The current study was intended to examine the effectiveness of one of such programs, Microsoft Word, that seemed to have positive impact on spelling ability enhancement of Iranian teachers and learners. So many EFL learners do not consider their spelling mistakes while writing in English. When they use Microsoft Word, their mistakes become underlined by this software and they can learn the correct spelling forms of the words more efficiently.

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