

THE EFFECT OF USING EMAIL ON ENHANCING IRANIAN EFL LEARNERS' GRAMMAR DEVELOPMENT

Seyed Jalal Abdolmanafi-Rokni

Department of English Language and Literature Golestan University, Iran
E-mail: j.abdolmanafi@yahoo.com

APA Citation: Rokni, S. J. A. (2013). The effect of using email on enhancing Iranian EFL learners' grammar development. *English Review: Journal of English Education*, 1(2).129-138

Received: 09-04-2013

Accepted: 22-04-2013

Published: 01-06-2013

Abstract: There has been much debate over the use of computers and the internet in foreign language teaching for more than two decades. Education, especially foreign language teaching, has to adapt and renew itself to be compatible with the globalized world. The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of using email on improving EFL learners' grammar development and to highlight the benefits of using email in an EFL grammar class. The participants of the study were 52 female students, aged 13-18 who were randomly assigned to an experimental and control group. Each group consisted of 26 participants. The course lasted for three weeks and was held in one of the institutes in Gorgan, Iran. The experimental group sent their assignments through emails in addition to the traditional class activities but the control group receiving a placebo had the traditional class and assignments were handed in hard copies. For measuring the grammar proficiency, a pretest and posttest was administered to both groups. The pretests and posttests were tests based on the materials covered in the class. The results of the study show that the experimental group outperformed the control group in the posttest.

Keywords: *electronic mail, EFL, grammar development, e-learning*

INTRODUCTION

Computer is the most effective pedagogical instrument which helps to enhance motivation of the students to learn language especially grammar. By using different parts of the computer, especially email, and having continuous online connection between the teacher and students, it will be hoped that the improvement of the students' grammar is demonstrated.

Alabad (2010) stipulated that using computer for language learning and teaching has an important positive effect on them. It causes to engage learners in meaningful learning activities both in and outside the classroom. He also found in his study that learners were

enjoyed and exciting when their learning was across from the use of computers in the classroom. In addition, they expressed that they were active in the class when their learning mixed with technology. He also mentioned that by using computer in the classroom, learners are able to be more exposure to the culture of the target language.

As Roberts (2005) pointed out, collaborative learning plays central role in language learning. So language learning with the help of computer in the classroom, at home, or at any place and time create an environment for effective interaction among students. It also has another effect on language learning as it can be expressed that it causes to achieve

language highly and help to reach high and positive attitude toward the subject matter.

According to Al-Ghazo (2008), technology is the best instructional tool to help learners enhancing their knowledge of the target language. He also added that technology plays an important role in enhancing the process of language learning and teaching. TTCC stated that technology has a special feature which can be expressed as it can be used in different ways in the classroom without any attention to the level of students or the subject of teaching.

Hollenbeck and Hollenbeck (2004) maintained that there are three advantages of using computer-internet in the classroom: First, teachers are able to develop students' ability in writing letters through using e-mail and to develop their fluency in target language through chatting especially with native speakers. Second, teachers are able to provide various environments which are related to instruction. And third, using internet causes to bring authentic materials. However, teachers should be careful and aware of how to use the Internet and the available resources in teaching effectively.

Clyde and Delohery (2005) mentioned that email is an asynchronous tool which can be used for different purposes and it consists of many instructional uses which help to enhance teaching and learning English. Warschauer (1995) added that it provides opportunities for EFL learners to have real life communication. Moreover, using email in teaching a foreign language can improve learner's grammar, vocabulary and writing skill (Nagel 1999 as cited in Al-Mekhlafi 2004). Similarly, the study of Edasawa and

Kabata (2007) indicated how an email exchange projector had improved ESL students at the vocabulary and syntactic levels through message exchanges.

According to Wikipedia (2010), email or electronic mail can be termed as a method which exchange digital messages and cause to communicate by personal computer, mobile phone, or other tools. It also expressed about the content of email which includes form, message, picture, photo or video clip. Similarly, it indicated how an email works for the purpose of learning and teaching a language. E-mail systems are based on a store-and-forward model in which e-mail computer server systems accept, forward, deliver and store messages on behalf of users, an e-mail server, with a network-enabled device for the duration of message submission or retrieval. An electronic mail message consists of two components, the message header, and the message body, which is the e-mail's content. The message header contains control information, including, minimally, an originator's email address and one or more recipient addresses.

As Nagel (1999) pointed out, how to use e-mail in the classroom, how to be most effective and to get optimal results are the focus of the paper "E-mail in the virtual ESL/EFL Classroom". Moreover, he explained in his study the difference between email and traditional grammar assignment. He discussed about the effect of computer-email functions- on language learning and teaching and more specifically, how much it effects on promoting language ability of language learners.

Chan and Kim (2004) maintained that nowadays sentence-based and grammar-oriented tasks are used commercially by the help of CALL software but it is tried to use in a

communicative context. Hubbard and Siskin (2004) also found in their study that there are some grammar-focused activities which are used in some Web Sites such as English Town, <http://www.englishtown.com/online/home.aspx>. In addition, these activities focus more on both form and meaning.

Chhabra (2012) propounded that internet actually is a source of information in the form of courses, articles, conferences and etc. Teachers send their assignments to the students through email and parents can view their children's work online at any time. Schools are also linked in a network and prepare materials online. There is lots of free software which are available on internet and students can use them. One of the software is named as Spelling Bee which helps the students to spell English words.

According to Brown (1980), second language education has changed considerably, pointing out the importance of the use of an "electric enlightened approach" to theory building but cautions that classroom contact is still very necessary for second language learners to give real-world validity to their theory building. Brown's theoretical comments about the classroom vignettes contribute to the attainment of this goal as major methodological approaches and current issues in language teaching are depicted in these vignettes, first with the direct method, grammar translation and the Audio-Lingual method (Viatonu & Kayode 2012).

Similarly, Randall (2006) has admitted that technology has become a major component; a must-have in many homes around the world, with its concomitant influence permeating all facets of human lives, including

education. This is a welcome development by many as it shows the direction in which language instruction will be driven by new advancements in technology (Viatonu & Kayode 2012).

Information and communication technology helps the students to perform better in language learning than with regimented traditional classroom teaching. Online learning has the potentials to offer anyone with an internet connection access to a wide expanse but inexpensive education just as e-learning and computer allow schools to deliver classes to students anywhere in the world (Educause, 2010).

In their study, Mestre *et al.* (1997) concluded that classroom communication technologies provide useful feedback to students and the teacher on how well the students understand the concepts being covered and whether they can apply them in novel contexts. In a 2000 study commissioned by the Software and Information Industry Association, Sivinkachala and Bialo (2000) reviewed 311 research studies on the effectiveness of technology on student achievement. Their findings revealed positive and consistent patterns when students were engaged in technology-rich environments, including significant gains and achievement in all subject areas, increased achievement in preschool through high school for both regular and students with special needs, and improved attitudes toward learning and increased self-esteem.

Roschelle, Pea, Hoadley, Gordin and Means (2000) identified four fundamental characteristics of how technology can enhance both what and how children learn in the classroom: (1) active engagement, (2) participation in groups, (3) frequent interaction and

feedback, and (4) connections to real-world contexts.

Ghabanchi and Anbarestani (2008) conducted a study concerning the effects of CALL program on expanding lexical knowledge of EFL Iranian intermediate learners. It was found that learning via typical system has better short term results, but learning via computerized facilities is more beneficial in long term situation; and the rate of forgetting is much lower in technological vocabulary learning.

Bordbar's (2010) study explored the reasons and factors behind teachers' use of computer technology in the classroom. His study also explored teachers' attitudes toward computer and information technology and how they apply their practical computer-assisted language learning experience and knowledge to their language teaching. The results of his study showed that the majority of the respondents had positive or highly positive perceptions about the relevance of Information and Communication Technology to Iranian society and schools.

According to Quan-Hasse, Cothrel, and Wellman (2005), the introduction of computer technologies such as the Internet, e-mail, chat, etc., into educational environments has made it possible for learners to communicate ideas, information, and their feelings without any limit on time and space. Similarly, Zhao (2006) refers to the application of the Internet saying that it is the first significant medium of communication providing people new social contacts outside the face-to-face contexts. Carter (1997) also states that the emergence of faxes, e-mail communications, and word-processed texts has changed the ways in which written language can be utilized to

maintain interpersonal interaction among different interlocutors within their social, cultural, and learning context.

According to (Warschauer 2001), CMC or "on-line communication refers to reading, writing and communication via networked computers" and it comprises of:

- a) Synchronous computer-mediated communication, whereby people communicate in real time via chat or discussion software, with all participants at their computers at the same time;
- b) Asynchronous computer-mediated communication, whereby people communicate in a delayed fashion by computer, e.g. by e-mail; and
- c) The reading and writing of on-line documents via the internet.

As Levy (1997) pointed out, the internet has been supplemented with books, television, computer and any other technology in the classroom faster than ago. He also stated that by increasing use of computer, language learners must learn how to use it to learn grammar online.

According to Jones (1986), e-learning is a type of educational content via any electronic media such as the internet, intranet, extranet, satellite broadcast, audio/video tape, interactive TV, CD-ROM, interactive CD, and computer-based training which is sent to the language learners. E-learning has many different forms of educational programs including online courses, web enhanced learning and distance education.

Iranian students have many grammar mistakes by the existing of many useful methodologies in the world. In addition, there are many computers in each house and most of the people know

how to work with a computer and its different part. So, I thought that it will be better to connect technology with language learning, especially grammar to enhance such proficiency. Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine the effects of E-mail on improving EFL learners' grammar skill and to show the benefits of using email in an EFL grammar class for students.

The research questions addressed in this study were:

1. Does emailing have any effect on enhancing EFL learners' grammar proficiency?
2. What are Iranian EFL learners' attitudes about the efficacy of using email for enhancing their grammar development?

METHOD

To answer the research questions, 44 female lower-intermediate EFL learners, aged 13-18, learning English at Abrar English Language Institute in Gorgan, Iran in 2013 took part in the study. In order to homogenize the participants and to make sure about their level of general proficiency, a Nelson test was administered to the participants. After analyzing the data, participants were selected and randomly assigned into experimental and control groups, each 26.

For the purposes of the present study, three instruments were utilized: *Nelson Test of Proficiency*. It consisted of 50 multiple-choice items in three parts of grammar and structure, vocabulary and reading comprehension. The time allotted was 40 minute. The reliability index of this test was estimated through Kuder-Richarson formula 21 as 0.82.

As the aim of this study was to examine the effect of emailing on grammar development, a test including

grammar was developed by the researcher (researcher-made test). The source for making the test was a lower intermediate book entitled "InterchangeIntro" (Richards, 2005). This researcher-made test was piloted on 25 students of the same level in another English Language Institute. Having analyzed the data, the result showed that the reliability calculated through Kuder-Richarson formula 21 was 0.79. Then, the item analysis was done and poor items were discarded and some others were modified. The grammar test consisted of 40 items.

Since the time interval between the pretest and posttest was long enough, the same pretest was used as posttest too (Hatch & Farhady, 1982). Thus the grammar test was conducted again as posttest at the end of the course in order to measure the progress of learner's grammar skill.

At first, a Nelson test as a homogenizing tool was administered to 65 lower-intermediate EFL participants. Those participants who were located one standard deviation above and below the mean were selected to participate in this study. Having analyzed the data, 52 participants were randomly chosen for the purpose of this study. They were randomly assigned into experimental and control groups with 26 in each group.

Participants in both experimental and control groups took a pretest. The researcher explained the project to the participants of the email group, introduced the possible use of email in foreign Language learning, and expressed the hope that the students would choose to participate. The participants of experimental group received step-by-step instructions on using email. The control group only

received place. Finally, a posttest was administered to both groups and then data were analyzed by SPSS version 18.

During the 10 sessions of treatment, fifty English sentences were given to students. In the experimental group, the researcher sent five new sentences via email three times a week. Totally, 10 email messages were sent during three weeks. In the control group, the participants were given a list of five sentences on paper three times a week. Simple present and present progressive tenses were chosen in this study as target forms for two reasons. First, pre intermediate EFL learners were already familiar with the basics of these structures. Thus, in this study, the emphasis was put on increasing awareness over the correct use of present tenses rather than on instructing the learners how to use them. Second, these structures are known to be problematic as learners frequently fail to use them properly. Therefore, this study attempted to enhance the learners' ability to correctly apply simple present and present progressive tenses through email corrective feedback.

The participants of the present study were presented with their regular course books the pre intermediate course book (Interchange intro). It comprised of five units and each unit is further divided into two sections. Every grammar section was covered in two sessions lasting for 45 minutes. Session one was devoted to conversation, grammar, and vocabulary. Session two covered reading, grammar, and listening. Classes were held twice a week. The total of ten sessions covered the part of a term for each of the two classes.

The participants in the experimental class were required to submit an email and the modified version of the same email after receiving corrective feedback from the second session on as home assignment every week after covering every unit, using computer or laptop out of the classroom. All the participants in two groups received the same assignment every week but experimental group received them via email. The experimental group received corrective feedback via email, i.e., the instructor indicated that an error had been made, identified the error and provided the correction, to which repetition was required by the participants as modified output. In the control group no modified output was required. The teacher provided corrective feedback for the experimental groups mainly focusing on the correct use of simple present and present progressive tenses. Other grammatical deviations were corrected without bringing the participants' attention to them.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the present research, based on the type of data, some techniques including paired samples t-test and independent sample t-test were used to compare the output of the two tests (pretest and posttests).

In order to answer the first research question, descriptive statistics regarding the experimental and the control groups was calculated first. As Table 1 displays, both control and experimental groups had almost the same mean score on the pretest and there was no significant difference between the two groups.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics related to both groups' performances on the pretest

Groups	N	Mean	SD	Sig	T
Experimental	26	7.577	3.431	0.719	0.361
Control	26	7.923	3.474		

As the findings in Table 2 show, there was a highly significant difference between the experimental and control groups in the posttest-pretest total gain scores ($t=7.637$, $p<.001$). The result shows an increase from the pretest to the posttest and improvement in learning

occurred more significantly in the experimental group than in the control group. Thus, the experimental group performed significantly better than the control group by showing significantly higher gain scores from the pretest to the posttest.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics related to both groups' performances on the posttest

Groups	N	Mean	SD	Sig	T
Experimental	26	26.731	4.779	0.000	7.637
Control	26	16.7695	4.624		

One outstanding factor that made the two groups different was motivation. The control group seemed to have a weaker motivation in learning, compared with the email group or experimental group. This could be seen from the number of participants in the experimental group who managed to complete all the grammar tasks. This was not so in the control group. This, of course, does not mean that the English training programmed via the traditional classrooms cannot be recommended.

With regard to the first research question, the findings of the study are congruent with those studies done by Quan-Hasse, Cothrel, and Wellman (2005), Zhao (2006), and Carter (1997). According to Quan-Hasse, Cothrel, and Wellman (2005), the introduction of computer technologies such as the Internet, email, chat, etc., into educational environments made it possible for learners to communicate ideas, information, and their feelings without any limit on time and space. Moreover, Zhao (2006) refers to the application of the Internet saying that the internet provides people to have new

social contacts outside the real context, although it allows them to have physically presence during the process of communication among the people. Further, Carter (1997) also states that the emergence of faxes, email communications, and word-processed texts has changed the ways in which written language can be utilized to maintain interpersonal interaction among different interlocutors within their social, cultural, and learning context. Similarly, this study complies with the one conducted by Randall (2006) who admitted that technology has become a major component; a must-have in many homes around the world, with its concomitant influence permeating all facets of human lives, including education. This is a welcome development by many as it shows the direction in which language instruction will be driven by new advancements in technology.

With regard to the second question, it can be stated that learners in experimental group expressed satisfaction about the positive effect of the use of email. They stated that the

treatment had an effect on the enhancement of their grammar proficiency during and at the end of the course. They cited that the use of email and having constant contact with the teacher were all really beneficial and motivating to them.

In sum, there are many advantages of using email for enhancing grammar skill of EFL learners. Analysis of the data has indicated that there is a positive relationship between the usage of email and improvement of grammar skills. Learners had been engaged to use email to enhance their grammar skills and learn many factors that is related to English grammar structures.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research objectives, the researcher undertook the present study to determine the effectiveness of the email facility to help students to improve their grammar skill. This was done by comparing the improvement gained by the experimental group. Both groups were given several grammar tasks at the low level of intermediate level.

The analysis revealed that the achievements obtained by the two groups were, to a certain degree, different. The number of mistakes associated with certain aspects of the language decreased as students worked with email. Most students believed that sending assignments via email provided excellent opportunities for them to ask their writing or grammatical problems whenever they need, so it is apparent that the number of mistakes decreased in some certain areas.

Where the advantages of the email facilities in relation to the rate of student participations are concerned, it is necessary to conduct further research involving other subjects within the

context of EFL learning. It is nevertheless to be expected that these findings will be beneficial to EFL learners.

Findings of the study showed that the use of technology for enhancing language learning proficiency, especially grammar proficiency was effective. There are many reasons why using email is advantageous for the student and the teacher and education.

First, by using email students become familiar with a communication tool that is vital to their survival in the 21st century. In the world of business, education, politics, and technology, electronic mail is quickly taking the place of voice, paper, and fax communication.

Secondly, a teacher can interact with a student or a group of students working on a project at times that are more convenient to the student, group, and the teacher. The vital interaction and feedback that take place between a teacher and student (or group of students) over a writing task is not limited to the confines of a classroom.

Finally, using email can also save class time for some assignments. Teachers can send assignments and announcements electronically to the group. For example, if a teacher has to remind the students of a certain assignment due or of a particular procedure, the teacher can send one message to entire group. This can save valuable class time.

REFERENCES

- Alabbad, A. M. (2010). Interactive computer/network-based program for teaching English as a foreign language in the elementary levels in Saudi Arabia. *doi: 10.1109/ICMCS.2011.5945699.*
- Al-Ghazo, A. M. (2008). *Technology integration in university teacher's education programs in Jordan:*

- Comparison of competencies, attitudes and perceptions toward integrating technology in the classroom.*
Unpublished doctoral dissertation.
Retrieved from Pro QuestLLC. (UMI No: 3310999).
- AL-Mekhlafi, A. (2004). The internet and EFL teaching: the reactions of UAE secondary school English language teachers. *Journal of Language and Learning*, 2(2), 88-113.
- Bordbar, F. (2010). English teachers' attitudes toward computer-assisted language learning. *International Journal of Language Studies*, 4(3), 27-54.
- Brown, H. D. (1980). *Principles of language learning and teaching*. Eaglewood Cliffs NY: Prentice Hall.
- Carter, R. (1997). *Investigating English discourse*. London: Routledge.
- Chan, W.M., and D. H. Kim. (2004). Towards greater individualization and process-oriented learning through electronic self-access: project "e-daf." *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 17(1), 83-108.
- Chhabra, P. (2012). Use of e-learning tools in teaching English. *International Journal of Computing & Business Research*, (2229-6166). Retrieved from <http://etec.hawaii.edu/proceedings/2010/Kiriakidis.pdf>.
- Clyde, W., and A. Delohery. (2005). *Using technology in teaching*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Edasawa, Y. & K. Kabata. (2007). An ethnographic study of a key-pal project: Learning a foreign language through bilingual communication. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 20(3), 189-207.
- Educause. (2010). Horizon report. Retrieved from Http://www.educationworld.com/a_t ech. January 15, 2012
- Ghabanchi, Z., and M. Anbarestani (2008). The effects of CALL program on expanding lexical knowledge of EFL Iranian intermediate learners. *The Reading Matrix*, 8(2), 86-95.
- Hatch, E., and H. Farhady. (1982). *Research design and statistics for applied linguistics*. U.S.A: Newbury House Publishers Inc.
- Hollenbeck, J. E., and D. Z. Hollenbeck. (2004). Technology to enhance learning in the multilingual classroom, *East Lansing, MI, Eric document ED490629*. Retrieved from: <http://eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/contentdelivery/servlet/ERICServlet?accno=ED490629>. March 2nd, 2012.
- Hubbard, P., and C. Bradin Siskin. (2004). Another look at tutorial CALL. *ReCALL Journal*, 16(2), 448-461.
- Levy, M. (2009). Technologies in use for second language learning. *The Modern Language Journal*, 93, Focus Issue, (2009)0026-7902/09/769-782.
- Mestre, J. P., W. J. Gerace, R. J. Dufresne, et al. (1997). *Promoting active learning in large classer using a classroom communication system*. In *The Changing Role of Physics Departments in Modern Universities: Proceedings of International Conference on Undergraduate Physics Education*. Woodbury, NY: American Institute of Physics.
- Nagel, P.S. (1999). E-mail in the virtual ESL/EFL classroom. *The internet TESL Journal*, V(7). Retrieved from <http://iteslj.org/Articles/Nagel-Email.html>. (Accessed 13/03/2011).
- Quan-Hasse, A., J. Cothrel, and B. Wellman (2005). Instant messaging for collaboration: a case study of a high-tech firm. *Journal of Computer Mediated Communications*, 10(4). Retrieved from <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol10/issue4/quan-haase.htm>. May 9, 2010
- Randall, D. (2006) The impact of technology on Language Teaching USA. *TESL Journal*, xii (II). Retrieved from <http://www.iteslj.org>.
- Richards, J. C. (2005). *Interchange Intro (3rded.)*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Roberts, T. S. (2005). Computer-supported collaborative learning in higher education. In T.S.Roberts (Ed.), *Computer-supported collaborative learning in higher education* (pp. 1 -18). Hershey, PA: Idea Group Pub.

- Roschelle, J. M., R. D. Pea, C. M. Hoadley, et al. (2000). Changing how and what children learn in school with computer-based technologies. *The Future of Children*, 10(2), 76-101.
- Sivin-Kachala, J., and E. Bialo (2000). *Research reports on the effectiveness of technology in schools*. (7th Ed.). Washington, DC: Software and Information Industry Association
- Viatonu, O., and E.T. Kayode. (2012). *Improving the teaching and learning of English language through the use of information and communication technology: prospects and challenges*. International Conference "ICT for Language Learning" 5th edition.
- Warschauer, M. (1995). *E-Mail for English teaching*. Alexandria, VA: TESOL Publications.
- Warschauer, M. (2001). On-line communication. In R. Carter, and D. Nunan (Eds.), *the Cambridge guide to teaching English to speakers of other languages* (pp. 207-212). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wikipedia. (2010). *Email*. Retrieved from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Email>. December 2, 2010.
- Zhao, S. (2006). Do internet users have more social ties? A call for differentiated analyses of internet use. *Journal of Computer Mediated Communications*, 11(3), 844-862. Retrieved from <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol11/issue3/zhao.html>. May 9, 2007.