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Using Multimedia to Enhance Third Year Prep Students' Writing Skills and Their interest in English

A thesis

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Teaching English as a Foreign Language

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Abstract

Title: "Using Multimedia to Enhance Third Year Prep Students' writing skills and their interest in English".

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Abstract: The current study attempted to overcome the shortcomings in teaching writing skills for third year preparatory school stage students and their interest in English by using multimedia materials based on Mayer's cognitive theory. The participants of the study consisted of two classes (72 students) enrolled in Oum-Khnan Preparatory School for girls, Monofia. The study adopted the quasi experimental design where the two intact classes were randomly assigned to either the experimental group (36 students) or the control group (36 students). Both groups were pre-tested before conducting experiment. To determine the most important writing skills to be enhanced throughout the proposed program, writing checklist was designed and approved by the jury of subject matter specialists. The researcher designed a rubric to measure the writing skills. Based on these skills, a pre/posttest was developed and used to measure the students writing skills. During the multimedia program, the experimental group students wrote with supported multimedia materials and activities whereas the control group wrote traditionally on paper.

The multimedia program was implemented during the second semester of the scholastic year 2012/2013. the multimedia program lasted eight weeks, two sessions per week. After the experiment, both groups were post-tested using the same test. The obtained data were analyzed using the t-test. Findings showed that there is a statically significant difference on the post-test in favor of the experimental group. The multimedia program worked effectively for the experimental group in terms of organization, grammar & structure, vocabulary choice, and language mechanics of writing. There is a statically significant difference on interest inventory in favor of the post one. These findings suggest that multimedia program is an effective method for enhancing some of the EFL students writing skills and their interest in English.

Keywords: Multimedia, writing skills, Mayer's cognitive theory , writing process.

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Chapter one

Background and Problem

Introduction

Language is one of the most important areas of human development. It is a vital tool for communicating thoughts and ideas. Language educators point out that language involves four basic skills, namely listening, speaking, reading and writing. The skills are related to each other by two parameters:

1-The mode of communication

Oral skills (listening and speaking).

.) Written skills (reading and writing

2- The direction of communication

.)Receptive skills (listening and reading

.) Productive skills (speaking and writing

Raimes (1983) indicated that when we learn a second language, we learn to communicate with other people to understand them, talk to them, read what they have written and write to them. "An integral part of participating fully in a new cultural setting is learning how to communicate when the other person is not right in front of us, listening to our words and looking at our gestures and facial expression.

As for the skill of writing, Banat (2007) pointed out that this skill is invaluable for helping students communicate and understand how the parts of language go together, adding that writing is one of the four major language skills that need to be mastered by language learners.

Thus, intensive efforts have been exerted by researchers and educators to study the nature of this skill as well as the best methods that can be followed to teach it effectively and communicatively.

Writing is no longer viewed as a simple linear activity consisting of several stages that are independent and sequenced. In contrast, writing is now recognized as a complex and integrated set of processes that are interactive and recursive. Al Souqi (2001) noted that writing involves the creation of ideas as well as the ability to express them logically and coherently.

Moreover, Abu- Jaleel (2001) argued that writing is a more recursive activity in which the writer moves backwards and forwards between drafting and revising, with stages of re- planning in between.

In addition, Conley (1995) pointed out that writing makes our thoughts and experiences vivid and long lasting and helps us learn things in every subject area. "In many ways, writing is the way we make sense of our world".

According to Zamel (1983), writing is a process through which students can explore and discover their thoughts constructing meaning and assessing it at the same time. Attention is paid first to the content and meaning and then to the form.

Consequently, helping learners master the skill of writing and enabling them to write effectively and interactively is one of the main objectives of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), especially that the communicative goals top priorities of the current trends in English language teaching field.

Lindsay (2000) noted that producing a coherent, fluent, and extended piece of writing is probably the most difficult thing to do in language regardless whether the language in question is a first, second or foreign. Within this framework, studies conducted in this field suggested innovative techniques and strategies for teaching English in general and writing in particular especially that the traditional English language

programs regard writing as a means of language study more than as a means of communicating ideas.

Recently, technology has brought a drastic change in the world and now is revolutionizing education. Technological innovations are providing a range of possible solutions that can develop teaching and learning English as a foreign language. The incorporation of recent technologies in traditional face to-face classrooms has changed the way people teach and learn. Consequently using multimedia-based programs in traditional EFL classes has revealed to be a powerful teaching medium (Harstell & Yuen, 2006; Shephard, 2003) as it proved to be a successful technological medium to grab the students' attention and motivate them to learn, in addition to be able to present authentic situations that the students will not have the opportunity to see in real life situations.

The infusion of multimedia in EFL instruction has considerably changed the way teachers teach and students learn. According to Kurt (2011, p. 185), the incorporation of multimedia programs in traditional learning environments has widely benefited learning and teaching. This incorporation has increased active participation among students, fostered the quality of the learning outcome and offered opportunities for learners to have control over their learning time and place.

Some teachers use traditional-based activities to promote the students' writing skills, rather than incorporating multimedia with its online or downloadable as a powerful tool for developing writing skills and students' interest in EFL (King, 2002; Lin, 2000). New learning and teaching approaches have suggested that teachers of English as a foreign language should encourage their students to use technological innovations within EFL writing classes using every available technique

such as: cell phones, digital cameras, computers, projectors, and televisions.

Recently, English language courses that combines face-to-face traditional learning with the applications of technologies, in particular computer – assisted language learning (CALL) have been found to promote foreign language learning effectively. These courses can give students flexibility to work independently, at their own pace in order to promote English language acquisition. (Graham, 2006; Singh, 2003). With the use of multimedia –based programs in EFL writing classes, the availability of a variety of media technologies allows users to use certain multimedia instructional materials such as: online and offline instructional videos available at different educational sites, download certain videos and audios, as well as record audio and video files in a reasonably short amount of time leading to increased use of multimedia instructional videos in learning environments.(Odhabi & NicksMcCaleb, 2009, p. 330).

Context of the problem

In Egypt a governmental English language curriculum is taught in primary, preparatory, and secondary schools starting at first primary year. Students study English in three 45-minute classroom periods per week in the primary school. This goes up to six periods in the preparatory and secondary schools.

Based on the researchers' own experience as a preparatory school English language teacher, the teaching methods used would be described as grammar- based , especially a mixture of the Grammar Translation and the Audio-lingual Methods. In Egyptian educational system, writing is an essential component in the learning process not only as an important skill that should be measured but also as the only assessing instrument used to measure students' progress. To meet exam requirements, in this context,

most English teachers give their students lists of vocabulary and sets of grammatical rules. Thus, the students learn English not for communication but for the ability to pass exams. Despite the fact that the goals of the English language curriculum aim to developing language skills , most teachers main concern is to teach students how to pass final exams with high scores (Salem , 2007 ;p44).

Previous research on writing in Egyptian schools reveals the persistence of actual problems in teaching and learning writing for both teachers and students:

Abdu (1993) confirmed the persistence of actual problems in teaching and learning writing for teachers and students. Teachers frequently complain of the big workload of students poor writings, which they have to correct As far as students are concerned, they mostly prefer the teacher to assign other types of written work, i.e., comprehension, grammar and vocabulary exercises, and view composition writing as a kind of punishment. They hardly have any organized and disciplined instruction in writing. Writing is included as part of the prescribed textbook content, usually as a summary of a given text, giving a very limited chance for students to exploit their own linguistic resources and ideas. This denies students the chance to experience real writing.

Helal (2003) indicated that first year secondary school students have weaknesses in the organization skills of the paragraph on their writing or the opportunity to revise their piece of writing. The usual practice is to correct the grammatical errors. If teachers give feedback, it focuses mainly on spelling and grammatical errors, being satisfied with marking in red these errors in students' written pieces. In addition, the teacher is the sole audience for students' Writings. Regarding the difficulties students face when writing, most teachers confirmed that

when they assign a topic for writing, they do not know what to write about, some of these students write down only the title; others write meaningless pieces: its meaning is unclear. Teachers guess the meaning rather than understand it; they cannot link sentences in a coherent whole, nor can they express their thoughts in a lucid and organized way. Moreover, students exhibited a limited writing vocabulary, over-concentration on mechanics and inadequate writing skills.

According to (Helal,2003,P:55) the EFL teachers need to step out the restricted and traditional role, which has been to evaluate the learner's first draft as if it were the final product. They should assume the role of a consultant facilitating the learner's step-by-step creation of the text.

(Aly, 2001,p:98) Previous researchers proved that EFL students face some writing problems, those problems might hinder their ability to express themselves freely, as they are not interested in the topic that the teacher asks them to write about They cannot link sentences into a coherent paragraph, nor can they express their thought in a lucid and organized way.

Abdel-Hack (2002,p:24) and El-Shafie (2006,p:13) stated that writing is the most difficult skill of all the language skills taught to EFL students and some sort of punishment for students. Students cannot develop their ideas when asked to write simple or compound sentences, and certain types of grammar mistakes dominate their writings (e.g. sentence structure, conjunctions, tenses , adverbs, adjectives, voice, prepositions, word-order, spelling, paragraph development, vocabulary choice, and punctuation). In addition, their sentences are almost Arabic structures literally translated. Their writing is unsatisfactory and poor and they are unable to express themselves in writing appropriately and correctly.

Research identified some other reasons for the problems of lack of EFL writing skills. These reasons can be summarized in the following points:

- 1- Devoting less time to teaching writing rather than reading, speaking and listening, as many teachers regard writing as a secondary, solitary, non-interactive, less crucial and time consuming activity (Abdel-Gawad, 2003).
- 2- Students feel uncomfortable when having to write on topics chosen by the teacher, boring topics that they do not know well. These topics are selected without clear specific objectives in mind for each topic, some of them are not clearly worded, are not related to students' life, and do not elicit varied kind of writing (Madylus, 2002). Thus, students misunderstand these topics and spend most of their time analyzing and thinking about them rather writing (El-koumy, 1991).
- 3- Systematic and planned writing courses, which take into account students' actual level of proficiency, interests and future needs, are almost non-existent. Writing exercises in the workbook do not focus exactly on the development of all composition skills, since these exercises do not deal with such skills as spelling, punctuation, capitalization and organization (El -Koumy, 1991).
- 4- Large numbered classes that make it difficult for students and the teacher to communicate effectively in an authentic way (Bown, 2002).
- 5- Insufficient teaching strategies followed by English language teachers in teaching paragraph (Aly,2001),) and the absence of motivating pre-writing activities that can enable learners to collect enough ideas and information necessary for writing or the lack of due time and attention devoted to developing writing skill and its different sub-skills(Helal,2003).

6-Teachers who lack sufficient training in the teaching of writing process often use past ineffective practices, and use the traditional approach for teaching writing which view writing as just asking students to write sentences using vocabulary and punctuation marks correctly (Madylus,2002).

Thus, a need for a program for incorporating all these factors appeared. Hence, multimedia may provide a useful framework for constructing this program and consequently overcoming the problem of lack of EFL writing skills. The present study aims at investigating the effect of using multimedia to enhance writing skills for third year preparatory stage students and their interest in English.

Statement of the problem

Based on the previous discussion, the problem of this study is that in spite of the importance of EFL writing, there is poor achievement in EFL writing skills among third year prep school students and they have negative attitude towards writing in English. These problems can be attributed to some factors such as: First, the limited time devoted to teaching writing in English language and lack of attention given to develop writing skills. Second, the methods used for teaching writing in English language which neglect enhancing their writing skills and their interests towards English language.

Research Questions

The current study attempted to find an answer to the following question:

"What is the effectiveness of using multimedia to enhance students' writing skills and their interests in English?"

This major question branches out into the following questions:

- 1-What are the required EFL writing skills that should be enhanced for the third year preparatory school students?
- 2- To what extent do preparatory stage students master these skills?

3-What is the effectiveness of using multimedia on enhancing some of the third year preparatory stage students' writing skills (organization, grammar & syntax, vocabulary choice and language mechanics)?

4-What is the effectiveness of using multimedia on developing third year prep school students' interest in English language?

Research hypotheses

1-There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the control group and the experimental group in the post test of overall writing test in favor of the experimental group.

2- There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the control group and the experimental group in the post test in writing sub-skills test in favor of the experimental group.

3- There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the pre test and the post test in overall writing skills test for the experimental group in favor of the post test.

4- There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the pre test and the post test in writing sub- skills test for the experimental group in favor of the post test.

5-There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the pre interest inventory and the post one for the experimental group in favor of the post test.

Significance of the study

This study suggests using multimedia to enhance prep school students' writing skills and their interest in English. It lies in what it offers to the following groups:

1-For preparatory school students:

a) Enhancing their EFL writing skills which are highly needed in third year prep school.