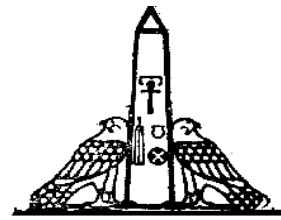


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Using suggested linguistic activities via social network sites (SNSs) for developing language proficiency for prep stage students

A thesis Submitted in Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Master's Degree in Education (Curriculum and Instruction, TEFL)

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Abstract

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Abstract: The aim of this study was to investigate the effect of using some suggested linguistic activities via Facebook on developing writing proficiency (WP) for prep stage students. Through reviewing literature and previous related studies, the researcher investigated the theoretical framework of using the suggested linguistic activities via social network sites (SNSs) represented in Facebook, and writing proficiency. This study followed the quasi-experimental design where one-group pre/post design was employed. A group of randomly selected 36 students, second year prep stage at Al- Morshedy Omar governmental School in Tanta in 2017 participated in the study. Instruments of the study were: an online pre/post writing proficiency test and a rubric. Some linguistic activities via Facebook were adopted. The group has taken the pre/post-test. Results were statistically analyzed using t-test and the effect size was calculated. Results showed that there was a statistically significant difference at the (0.05) level between the mean scores of the participants in the writing proficiency pre and post-test administrations regarding writing proficiency as a whole and in each writing proficiency component in favor of the post-test scores. According to these results, the study presented several recommendations and suggestions for further research.

Key Words: *linguistic activities via social network sites represented in Facebook, writing proficiency.*

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Chapter One

Background and Problem

Chapter One

Background and Problem

Introduction

In this age where all sorts of information are attainable in a split second, educators and teachers have the need to help students regarding how they should learn. Currently, the emphasis in education should be placed on self-learning. Hence, students should learn to be self-directed and have analytical minds.

Many researchers, for example, Narita, Sato, and Sugiura (2004) see it is difficult to define the concept of “proficiency” in writing. The standard to assess proficiency can be based on the form of the linguistic performance of an individual learner. Alternatively, some linguists define language proficiency as language ability or ability in language use. Some researchers link writing proficiency to elements of linguistic proficiency: to the form of vocabulary (Read, 2000), while others to the influence of L1 in EFL (Uzawa, 2002), syntax (Kuiken and Vedder, 2008), or grammar (Purpura, 2004).

In general, though, writing proficiency is an individual’s general level of ability to understand and write in the target language while remaining conscious and clear of the relations and combination of numerous sets of language elements, such as grammar, vocabulary and sociolinguistic and communicative skills with the objective of achieving accurate text.

Writing is one of the basic areas in EFL. Graham and Perin (2007) stated that “writing well is not just an option for young people – it is a necessity”. They added, “along with reading, writing proficiency is a

predictor of academic success and a basic requirement for participation in life”. It is considered in the viewpoint of Hansen, K&Hansen, R(n.d.) as the ticket to better college grades and greater academic achievement.

Writing is a means of communication. The main goal of ELT is to develop the EFL learners’ ability to communicate with others in English in real-world situations and to express themselves in this language as if it is their native tongue. Thus, the ultimate purpose of language learning is basically to get learners use it to communicate with others who use the language orally and in writing.

Mandal (2009) asserted that language is an important instrument, which enables man to communicate with others in many ways. Agreeing with this, Brown University and University of Missouri (2011), confirmed that writing is extremely important, and Pillai (2012) also affirmed that writing components are essential for achieving career and business goals. It is an important tool of communication which helps students to determine what they know and what they do not know.

Another dimension of writing importance is that it can enhance the student's thinking. Thinking is so closely linked with writing. People who write well are regarded as substantive thinkers. For example, the composition of an extended text is recognized as a form of problem-solving. The problem of content is what to say, and the problem of rhetoric is how to say it, consume the writer's attention and other resources of working memory. All writers should make decisions on their text and at least argumentative texts call upon their reasoning skills as well (Ronald, 2008).

Although many researchers agreed on the importance of writing, this area is not being given due importance. Unfortunately, as Pillai (2012) mentioned, today, this area is being neglected. The United States National Commission(2003,2004) cited in Kellogg, and Whiteford (2009), also confirmed that the development of advanced writing has been neglected in schools where as Deqi (2005) stated that “although writing is one of the four skills, it has been the most neglected skill”. Deqi also added,”writing has considered either not important enough, compared with speaking, to deserve any special treatment or simply a too difficult skill to teach”. Furthermore, Lewin (2003)asserted that until recently the teaching of writing has been largely neglected. Yet, EFL students do not write as good as teachers think they should, although they know the grammatical rules and lexical items of language.

Most of these students are not able to write in an acceptable way. In the researcher’s opinion, this problem is due to the fact that teachers and students do not devote enough care for writing. Therefore, writing is not acquired spontaneously; however, it requires more effort. Writing is mainly a construction process, i.e. students have to formulate meaning according to a topic, ideas, style of writing and self-expression.

It is necessary then to improve the students’ writing, to teach writing more often and more effectively, and to encourage students to write more often, so that they can get the practice needed. So, in the researcher’s viewpoint, there is an urgent need to use a"non-traditional approach" while teaching EFL in order to attract students' attention and to create an active learning environment.

Recent learning theories suggest that learning is an active process of constructing meaning rather than acquiring information. For example, constructivism emphasizes the importance of using constructive mental activity.

It views the learner as an active processor of information who generates meaning and establishes relations between the ideas of a text, integrates new information with previous knowledge, and organizes them into a coherent whole. Bonwell (2000) confirms that active learning, as the name suggests, is a process whereby learners are actively engaged in doing rather passively absorbing lectures. He adds that active learning involves writing, discussion, student engagement in solving problems, evaluation... etc.

Learners are central to this meaning construction process. They should have ownership of the learning process, as well as the problem itself. Therefore, "students should be given autonomy and responsibility for their own learning ", (El-Taib, 2010)

Active learning aims at focusing on learners and considering them the core of the learning process. Active learning philosophy, according to El-Taib(2010), can be summed up in the following points:

- Relating Education to students' needs.
- Relating learning to the students' attitudes and abilities.
- Increasing students' interaction with the environment.
- Connecting learning process with home, club, or even online activities.

Hence, there is a need for active learning which involves providing opportunities for students to meaningfully read, write and reflect on the content, ideas, issues, and concerns of the academic subjects. Accordingly, when students are engaged in purposeful writing activities, teachers should provide support for them through explicit teaching. Teachers should also guide students by demonstrating how to achieve particular aims.

Depending on what is explained, the researcher adopted active learning represented in using network sites and Facebook to relate the learning process to

the students' abilities and needs for developing 2^{ed} prep stage students' writing proficiency.

The Internet is an amazing context for applying active learning. It can be used to search, communicate, sell and now for learning. In the past few years, students have been spending more time than ever in front of their computers. So, rather than fighting the influence of social networking sites such as Facebook, educators are now looking for new ways to integrate social websites into an educational arena.

Zemanta (2012) emphasized that "within the past ten years, education has changed drastically". This is due to the fact that education has become virtual, technical, and computer generated. Also, Paul (2012) declared that participatory digital media- such as the Internet, social network sites and cell phones that allow users to interact-are ubiquitous among today's youth. Among teens ages 12-17, 95% have access to the Internet; about 70% go online daily, and 80% use social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter. Facebook and Twitter have become important media for schools and universities. Mike (2011) mentioned that with such a prominent place in today's society-especially in the lives of students-social media sites are a tool that schools and universities cannot ignore as they strive to provide a better learning environment for students and to manage schools more effectively. Elinda (2012) also asserted that "we live in a society where the internet is a major part of it". Facebook, for example, has more than 800 million active users and more than 350 million users carry Facebook wherever they go through their mobile phones.

According to a recent article in E school News (2008), teachers were asked about what their students wanted from their learning. The responses boiled down to five main things:

- Interactive technology,

- Teacher mentors,
- Innovation,
- Choice,
- And real-world application.

Facebook and other similar media can provide all of these privileges. As a result, Mike (2011) asserted that “educators could take advantage of students’ interest in Facebook by integrating it into learning”.

To sum up, schools that fight or block Facebook are missing out a great opportunity to use the social network to inspire students to learn and share using technology in a transparent manner.

In the light of the previous discussion, it is clear that the majority of the studies showed positive effects of Facebook (Kennedy, 2011; Marcin, 2011; Patricio, and Goncalves2010; Wayan, 2010). This encouraged the researcher to adopt Facebook to develop writing proficiency.

Context of the problem

Although many researchers agreed on the importance of writing, this area is not being given due importance. As Hamdi (2015) mentioned, in spite of the importance of EFL writing, there is poor achievement in EFL writing skills among prep stage students and they have negative attitudes towards writing in English. These problems, in her point of view, can be attributed to some factors such as the limited time devoted to teaching writing, the lack of attention given to developing writing, as well as the methods used for teaching writing in English. Mohammed (2010) also confirmed that the problem appears in the low level of writing among second prep students. This might be due to the lack of clarity regarding the image of the curriculum as a whole, and the lack of the comprehension visions of the curriculum resulting in weakness in students’