

E-Reading of the Press Texts

Mohammad Ali Fatemi & Hamid Ashraf

E-mail: Fatemi35@gmail.com

Islamic Azad University, Torbat-e-Heidarieh Branch, (Iran)

Abstract

ICT as a significant facilitator in different fields including education has had many profound effects in the new world. E-reading as a sub-branch of ICT may have some role in language learning. This paper which is based on an experimental research elaborates on the effect of electronic news materials on the improvement of press reading skills. Reading the press text is essential for the students of English who obtain it through being trained on various strategies applicable to these texts in a specialized course offered for this purpose. The present paper attempts to investigate the effect of two types of news materials (electronic and paper-based) on the development of press reading skills of Iranian TEFL sophomores. The sample of this study consisted of two groups of 30 subjects of Iranian TEFL sophomores taking the Press Reading Course. Both groups received the same instructions based on their textbook. To practice the news reading concepts introduced in the book, the experimental group was assigned to read the soft news on the web; whereas the control group was required to read the paper-based form in the newspaper. The instruments of the study consisted of two tests (pre-test and post-test). The analysis of the data revealed that there is a significant difference between the performances of the learners in the two different groups. The group that had used electronic materials outperformed the other group in the post test indicating that these materials were more effective than the other form for these subjects. This can suggest that serious pedagogical considerations have to be given to the introduction of reading news texts through the web rather than through the traditional paper-based news to improve the news reading skill of TEFL learners. Also the findings of this study can provide syllabus designers with some fruitful ideas on the selection, gradation, and sequencing of the material from the web for teaching and practicing the concepts of reading news skills.

Key words: ICT, electronic news materials, press reading skills

1.1 Introduction

The emergence of personal computer as a significant tool for language teaching and learning in the 1990s and the widespread use of software, local area networks (LANs) as well as the internet have created enormous opportunities for learners to enhance their communicative abilities, both by individualizing practice and by tapping into global community of other learners (Hanson-Smith 2000) [2]. In this regard, Salmon (2000) [8] states that to enhance language learning with the help of computers is an inevitable trend. According to Thorsen (2009) [11], the purpose of computers for educators has not been primarily for computation, but for the presentation of information to students. Based on Sutinen and Matti (2010) [10], ICT is becoming recognized as an interdisciplinary research area as can be noted by the growing number of conferences, workshops and publications. Acronyms like ICT (Information Communication Technology), CBT (Computer-Based Training), IBT (Internet-Based Training) or WBT (Web-Based Training) have been used as synonyms to E-learning. The goal of E-learning is to guide students through information taken from the net to perform successfully in a task. For Luskin (2006) [4], "E" in e-learning is interpreted to mean exciting, energetic, enthusiastic, and educational in addition to electronic.

E-reading as opposed to paper-reading and as a sub-branch of E-learning can be taken into account in the field of education as a variable which can affect language learning. According to Luke (2000) [3], reading is a means of language acquisition, of communication, and of sharing information and ideas. Currently most reading is of the printed word on paper: a book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or notebook. More recently, text is read from computer displays, television, and other displays, such as mobile phones or E-readers. In modern society, news media have become the chief purveyors of information and opinion about public affairs; but the role and status of journalism, along with other forms of mass media, are undergoing changes. In the past, the ability to disseminate information was restricted to those with printing presses or broadcast mechanisms; however, in the modern world the internet has enabled thousands of individual commentators to communicate directly with others through blogs or instant message services.

Research shows that electronic texts introduce new supports as well as new challenges that can have a great impact on an individual's ability to comprehend what he or she reads. Although reading long passages on the computer screen is not recommended, reading skills programs can enhance reading speed by paced reading activities. (Mc-Vicker, 1995) [5].

1.2 Significance of the study

With respect to the above literature, it may be helpful to explore the effect of E-Reading on the improvement of press reading skills. Reading newspaper is a complementary tool for improving the university student's skills in reading journalistic English. There are many concepts and skills in reading newspaper one of which is reading and understanding the headline of a newspaper. A headline can be regarded as the title of the news story which is placed above the news story in large bold typeset to attract people's attention. The significance of the headline, as Shams (2004) [9] points out, lies in the functions it serves. It both summarizes and advertises the whole story. Moreover; it beautifies the newspaper page.

According to Shams (2004) [9], the constraints on space have affected the language of headlines since headlines are often printed in large typeset and take much space. In fact, the space, which is dictated by the layout of the page, makes rules about what language the headline writer can use. For these reasons, thus, the language of the headline is elliptical and compressed and often the fractured grammar will challenge the reader. Therefore, understanding the headline would require knowledge of the features involved in writing the headline. For the above reasons, the researchers found Headlines worthy enough to be studied through an experimental research.

1.3 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to compare and contrast two types of news materials - electronic and paper-based materials. The researchers want to see if there is any difference between the performances of the learners who are paper-based news readers and those who read the news electronically. Therefore, the null hypothesis of this study can be stated in the form of the following sentence: electronic news reading will have no effect on the performance of press reading skills of Iranian TEFL Sophomores as compared with learners who read the news on the paper.

2. Method

2.1 Participants

A total number of 60 male and female learners of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) at Islamic Azad University of Torbat-e-Heydarieh were selected from among 100 TEFL Sophomores based on the scores they gained in the TOEFL test. In order to prove the homogeneity of the learners and to capture the differences among them, the researchers administered a general proficiency test of TOEFL (the reading section) at the beginning of the treatment. These selected subjects were those who had obtained scores ranging from 15 to 21 (out of 30) in the reading section of the TOEFL and were labeled as intermediate learners based on ETS (Educational Testing Service). Learners were all sophomores who had taken Reading Newspaper as a compulsory course. All the subjects had passed their reading courses as their preliminary credits, so they were expected to have the same background knowledge on English reading.

2.2 Instruments

Two independent instruments were used in this study. The first one was the reading section of a TOEFL as a standard test. The test was selected from a paper-based TOEFL (TOEFL PBT) downloaded from "www.eduers.com/toefl/." This reading proficiency test included fifty multiple choice (MC) items to be covered in fifty five minutes. This test was used to serve both as a placement test and a pre-test.

The second instrument was a test of reading the press text which consisted of a set of items written on the basis of concepts used in the textbook of reading newspaper. To examine if the newly-developed test was valid and reliable enough for administration, it was piloted to a group of TEFL learners similar to the subjects of the study. To check the validity of the newly developed test, the content of the new test was consulted with a testing expert, and the reading items of the TOEFL were administered along with the newly-developed test. The high correlation ($r = 0.7$) between the TOEFL and the new test proved the test's validity. Using KR-21 formula, the reliability of the newly developed test was computed. As it also showed a good level of reliability ($r = 0.6$), the test was used as the instrument to examine the participants' press reading performance in this study. The press reading test included items related to Headline and consisted of three sections based on the linguistic structure of the Headline: Deletion, Special Tense and Punctuation.

2.3 Data Collection Procedures

First of all, sixty homogenous subjects were selected from among 100 learners based on their scores obtained from the reading section of a standard test of TOEFL. Then, those subjects were randomly assigned into two different groups, the experimental and the control group, each consisting of 30 subjects. The experimental group was asked to read the press texts on the web and search the net weekly with a special focus on the concepts of reading the press text related to topics such as those headlines discussed in the class. This was considered as a part of their homework. The control group was asked to do the same kind of activity not in the web in the form of E-Reading, but to read the news in the form of papers in the newspaper.

Then, a test of reading the press text was developed. This test consisted of concepts related to Headlines of the news. After the treatment which took for a period of four months, all the participants in both control and experimental groups took the above test as their posttest. In this way, the data was collected and analyzed though SPSS software.

3. Data Analysis and Results

The data obtained from both groups was analyzed through SPSS software in the form of t-test. The total score of the test of reading the press text was twenty including three sub-sections namely; Deletion (4 scores), Special Tense (8 scores) and Punctuation (8 scores). The result of t-test analysis has been shown and interpreted in the following tables (tables 1 through 4).

The analysis of the total performance of the two groups indicates that there is a great difference between their scores. In order to check the statistical significance of the observed difference between the Means, a paired-samples t-test, as indicated in table 1, was applied to the data.

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Total Post Experimental - Total Post Control	3.1333	1.75643	.32068	2.4775	3.7892	9.771	29	.000

Table 1: Paired Samples Test

Based on the information revealed in table 1, the observed-t (9.7) is much greater than the critical t-value which is 2.04 at .05 level of significance. Therefore, the difference between the Means of the two groups is statically significant. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected, In other words, the participants in the experimental group outperformed those in the control group. This suggests that E-Reading had affected the reading skills of the press readers more positively than those who had read the paper-based news texts.

The other part of the data analysis deals with three separate sub-sections of the skills of reading the press. The following table indicates the information related to the skill of Deletion for reading and understanding Headlines of the news. In order to check the statistical significance of the observed difference between the Means, a paired-sample t-test, as indicated in table 2, was applied to the data.

Table 2: Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Deletion Post Experimental - Deletion Post Control	.2667	.86834	.15854	-.0576	.5909	1.682	29	.103

As shown in table 2, the observed t (1.6) is smaller than the critical t-value which is 2.04 at .05 level of significance. Therefore, the difference between the Means of the two groups is not statically significant. Hence, the null hypothesis can not be rejected in this respect. Therefore, it can be concluded that the differences observed between the Means of the two groups is not statistically too great to show the difference. That means the kind of homework did not make any difference in the

performance of the participants of each group with respect to the skill of Deletion in understanding the headlines.

The next table shows the information related to the other skill of reading the press- i.e., understanding the Tenses in the Headlines. The difference between the performances of the two groups has been statistically tested in the following table.

Table 3: Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences				t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Tense Post Experimental - Tense Post Control	2.0000	.94686	.17287	1.6464	2.3536	11.569	29	.000

As shown in table 3, the observed t (11.5) is much greater than the critical t-value (2.04) at .05 level of significance. This means that the null hypothesis is strongly rejected, In other words, the participants in the experimental group performed much better than those in the control group in the skill of understanding Tenses of the Headlines. This suggests that the kind of homework (E-Reading) the participants had positively affected their reading skills of the press texts in the case of Headlines.

The final part of the data analysis has to do with the skill of Punctuation in understanding the headlines of news. In order to check the statistical significance of the observed difference between the Means, a paired-samples t-test, as indicated in table 4 below, was applied to the data.

Table 4: Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences				t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Punctuation Post Experimental - Punctuation Post Control	.8667	.93710	.17109	.5167	1.2166	5.066	29	.000

Based on the information in table 4, the observed t (5.06) is much greater than the critical t-value (2.04) at .05 level of significance. Therefore, the difference between the Means of the two groups is statically significant. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected. In other words, the participants in the experimental group outperformed those in the control group in respect to the skill understanding the meaning of punctuation in the Headlines of news. Therefore, it can be concluded that E-Reading has positively affected the reading skills of the press texts in the case of punctuation of the Headlines.

4. Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications

The results of the present study support the idea that both forms of practice in reading news whether newspaper or the internet can help learners improve their press reading skills, however, if the TEFL learners use the internet to find and read the English texts related to news, they will be able to improve their knowledge of press reading skills at the end of the course much better than practicing on the published newspapers. In other words, E-Reading of the news can help Iranian TEFL learners improve their press reading skills much more than paper-based news.

The outperformance of the experimental group in the skills of reading the press texts (Headlines) could be attributed to the fact that the accessibility to the electronic news is much easier and higher than the paper-based news, especially in places such as Iran where there is a rarity of news in the form of paper. Moreover, the convenience of anytime and anywhere of the E-material for Iranian learners might have caused this difference, whereas to get the paper-based news, learners have to purchase it from the market or may get the chance to have an access to a library if available.

The other reason could be related to the cost-effectiveness of the E-material. The news material on the web is usually free of charge, and if learners are supposed to pay, it is much cheaper than the paper-based news.

All in all, the above reasons might have caused the participants in the experimental group to read more, the result of which might have led to their outperformance in the skills of Reading the Press texts.

The results of the present study can be applied to other classes where the instructors usually insist on using only the available textbooks or newspapers in their classes to work on. If the TEFL learners are given the chance to find English texts related to news on the net, they can improve their news reading abilities. Introducing useful web sites besides the Google and the Yahoo News and asking the students to look for the press concepts discussed in their books can additionally raise their interest and motivation to update their knowledge and learn more reading skills of the press texts.

References

- [1] Chapman, J. (1999). *Reading Development and Cohesion*. London: Heinemann Educational.
- [2] Hanson-Smith, (ed.) (2000) *Technology-Enhanced Learning Environments*. Alexandria, VA: TESOL Available: www.tesol.edu
- [3] Luke, A. (2000) *Critical Literacy in Australia: a matter of contexts and standpoint*. *Journal of Adulscent and Adult Literacy*, 43, 2: 5-8.
- [4] Lusk, B. (2006). *E learning essentials*. WorldWideLearn: The premier online directry of education. [http:// E LearningEssentials. What-is-Elearning-All About/online learning.htm.8](http://E LearningEssentials. What-is-Elearning-All About/online learning.htm.8).
- [5] Mc-Vicker J. (1995). *New Reader (Computer software)*. Athens, OH: Hyperbole Software: Demonstration available from mcvicker@ohiou.edu .
- [6] Ratner, A. (2009). "'Wikipedia Revolution' United Users on Internet". *The Baltimore Sun*. <http://www.baltimoresun.com/entertainment/bal-to.ratner17mar17,0,1115467.column>.
- [7] Saba, J. (2009). *"Specifics on Newspapers from 'State of News Media' Report"*. *Editor & Publisher*. http://www.editorandpublisher.com/eandp/news/article_display.jsp?vnu_content_id=1003951616. Retrieved 2010-03-17.
- [8] Salmon, G. (2000). *E-Moderating: The key to teaching and learning online*. London: Cogan Page Limited.
- [9] Shams, M. R. (2004). *Reading English Newspapers*. Jangale, Tehran, Iran.
- [10] Sutinen, Erkki; Tedre, Matti (2010). *"ICT4D: A Computer Science Perspective"* (PDF). *Algorithms and Applications*. *Lecture Notes in Computer Science*. Springer-Verlag. pp. 221–231. <http://www.springerlink.com/content/j7j5n6731k616075/?p=4b1e36801fc3478ea9fd2ee59a42f2e3&pi=1>.



[11] Thorsen, E. (2009) *News, Citizenship and the Internet: BBC News Online's Reporting of the 2005 UK General Election*, PhD Thesis, Bournemouth University [[Bournemouth Library](#) | [Abstract and full text PDF at BURO](#)]