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Editorial

Insight: the *AHA!* moment

Donald G. Perrin

With the explosion of knowledge, it is reasonable to assume that the lower levels of the Bloom Taxonomy, such as knowledge, cognition and conceptualization, will be learned increasingly from audio, video and print media. We enrich one-way communications with discussions, interactive multimedia, social media, and dialog between stakeholders including learners, professors, practitioners and researchers.

Higher levels of learning involve problem solving. This involves aspects of research, exploration, discovery and creativity to achieve a unique fusion of ideas. Using the terminology of Bloom's Taxonomy, we *analyze* elements of the problem, *synthesize* possible solutions, and *evaluate* the effectiveness of each solution against predetermined criteria. This meticulous process that can be short-circuited by *insight* at any stage. Insight manifests itself suddenly and has the ability to bridge a gap, to bypass research and reasoning processes and go directly to a solution. Sometimes insight connects previously unrelated data and uses different contexts to reach a solution.

Visual insight may involve aspects of connecting-the-dots and/or pattern recognition. Embedded images in children's coloring books do not become visible until connected in a predetermined sequence. Scientific discoveries may result from experimentally changing a sequence to achieve a desired result. Chemical analysis is one example. Gene splicing is another. Visual analysis and pattern recognition were the basis of aircraft recognition used in World War II. Judging of complex behaviors such as dance competitions, dog shows, and horse riding may involve aspects of insight.

Verbal insight includes pattern recognition to complete words and phrases, as in a Jeopardy game. The game provides a context to focus the search, and works best with a number of players and big prizes. A Google search to match a phrase from literature does not fit the definition of insight. Attempts to go beyond mechanical matching using alternative spellings and word sequences are a limited attempt to bridge gaps and find meaningful solutions.

Mathematical insight is not well understood. It played a role in development of Einstein's *Theory of Relativity* ($e = mc^2$), Newton's *Laws of Motion*, and other scientific discoveries too numerous to mention. Laborious mathematical calculations can often be short-circuited by mathematical techniques such as exponential calculus, set theory, or linear programming. The latter enables the computer to simultaneously optimize a complex set of interacting variables with a single key-stroke on the computer.

Barrier to insight include ignorance, partial knowledge, and seeking in the wrong context. For example, a person with some knowledge of foreign vocabulary would not necessarily recognize an error in grammar or syntax. A scientist searching for visual information that occurred outside the visible spectrum may not know where to look, or how to make it "visible", or what it would look like!

For the educator, the question is how to develop insight. Traditional methods of education punish mistakes and risk taking. We need open and supportive learning environments where non-traditional ideas can be stimulated. Brainstorming is a technique to expand context and create accidental relationships between ideas that may result in new ideas and sometimes insights. Insight requires huge knowledge bases. In the information age we memorize less and depend more on computers. Unless we can develop computer programs with insight capabilities, we are losing a great human potential. We may have defined some aspects of the insight process for artificial intelligence programs, but whether achieved by humans or machines, the "aha" moments are all too rare.

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Editor's note: This paper studies the interaction of cultures of students, instructors, and textbooks used to teach English as a Foreign Language in computer labs in Jordan universities.

The impact of English computerized textbooks on Jordanian university instructors' and students' culture

Nedal Awwad Bani-Hani

Jordan

Abstract

The purpose of this research was to investigate the role of culture in foreign language computerized textbooks. The study was also aimed at the exploration of attitudes of instructors and students at Al- Balq'a Applied University; towards the importance of English and the inclusion of culture in TEFL. The sample of the study consisted of 300 students and 30 instructors. To collect data, two questionnaires were employed; one for the students and the other for the instructors.

The findings revealed that both instructors and students were fully aware of the importance of English as a foreign language. Both instructors and students need to be more aware of the effect of the hidden curriculum in English textbooks on the students' culture. The results further revealed that students, unlike teachers, do not like English. Additionally, both students and instructors like the western way of living. Students believe that the cultural expressions in the textbooks are not acceptable in their society. Unlike instructors, students think that learning a language implies learning its culture. Instructors strongly believe that technology can be a useful tool in teaching English. Both instructors and students think that English culture is not inferior to the students' culture. Based on the results, some recommendations were presented.

Keywords: culture, CALL, TEFL Jordan, computerized textbooks, connections series, hidden curriculum.

Introduction and background

A language is not an isolated entity. It is embedded in the culture of people and reflects their: history, beliefs, traditions, customs, identity, religion and way of life. Spolsky (1989:173) argues that "in the process of learning another language, students are not only supposed to experience the second language's culture and values, but they are also supposed to devalue their experience in learning another culture." According to this view, learning a second language implies, unavoidably, learning a second culture via a hidden curriculum. This indicates that it would be downright risky to consider any textbook without taking learners' and teachers' society and culture into consideration. The learners' intellectual, linguistic, and cultural background should determine the level of the textbooks implemented.

Moreover, any textbook constructed to teach English has two main facets; the first is the tangible one which contains the reading passages, grammar, pictures, vocabulary and exercises. The second one is the hidden facet which consists of the invisible part of the textbook that carry connotations of new culture, values, traditions, beliefs and so on. Consequently, a textbook that might be sufficient for a society may not be sufficient for another. For instance, a textbook that was constructed to be implemented in Germany may not be suitable for Egypt. This may be due to the fact that these two countries have different history, culture and religion.

However, there exists no de facto consensus about the definition of culture. Throughout history, there have been numerous attempts to define culture (Atkinson, 1999; Baldwin, Faulkner, Hecht & Lindsley, 2006; Geertz, 1973; Kramsch, 1998; Robins, 2005; Brooks, (1964); Shatnawi,

(2005); Tyler, 1881; Wilson, 1935). The recent publication by Balwin et al., *Redefining Culture*, presented over 300 definitions of culture from across several disciplines. For language learning and teaching, Omaggio Hadley (1993), Kramsch (1993) and Lo Bianco (2003) also provide definitions and valuable introductions set in an historical context. Collectively, these works give a sense of the breadth and depth of the topic and the range of definitions and interpretations that have been presented over time. Meanwhile, work to date has undoubtedly greatly enhanced our understandings of the culture concept, but, as Lo Bianco (2003, p. 11) observes, the concept of culture remains "complex and elusive" (see also Baldwin, Faulkner & Hecht, 2006).

Additionally, most practitioners, sociologists, sociolinguists, methodologists, linguists and psychologists advocate that culture is a complicated issue. This might be due to the fact that it is hidden in textbooks. The complexity and variation in our understanding of culture concept has been echoed in the range of approaches, strategies and techniques that have been advocated for language and culture teaching (e.g., Byram, 1997; Furstenberg, Levet, English & Maillot, 2001; Kramsch & Andersen, 1999; Liddicoat & Crozet, 2000; Lo Bianco, 2003; Lo Bianco & Crozet, 2003; O'Dowd, 2003; Kramsch, (2004)). These approaches, strategies and techniques have aimed to highlight points of focus for learners and teachers as they engage with a complex topic.

They have included strategies to enable learners to become more objective about their own culture and heritage, more aware of cultural aspects that are "hidden" (Hall, 1966), lists of attributes said to be representative of a particular culture, tasks that are structured to help learners examine stereotypes, and specific techniques and procedures to provide insight and perspective, among others.

Taking culture teaching into account, it is obviously not a single-faceted or an easy task for foreign language practitioners to accomplish. In the course of searching for appropriate approaches, foreign language teachers have been turning to information technology for help in delivering cultural lessons. In many ways, Computer Assisted Language Learning (henceforth CALL) and culture are inherently connected. Some researchers assert that it is impossible to separate cultural issues from devising a CALL program, because CALL is about language and language is a cultural issue par excellence (Cameron, 1998).

Over the years, efforts have been made by CALL experts to explore the capability of computer technology in supporting the teaching of culture. Similar to the changes of beliefs in how culture should be taught in foreign language classrooms, the exploration of computer technology for culture teaching has also gone through several phases. In the early stages, much computer-assisted language teaching software was developed with the purpose of teaching not only language but also culture (Levy, 2007). Unfortunately, commercial CALL software design has produced software that incorporated many cultural inaccuracies and misrepresentations and thus contradicted the goal of providing learners with a culturally authentic CALL experience (Shaughnessy, 2003).

With the advent of new technologies such as computers, culture, as a concept has been affected because technology, specially the Internet, has made our world a small village. The computer has become a significant teaching tool in language classrooms, while simultaneously the teaching of culture is deemed a very important part of language teaching, although how it should be done remains controversial. For many years, the transmission perspective with rote learning of factual knowledge of highbrow (e.g., literature and the arts) and lowbrow information (e.g., customs, habits, and folklore of everyday life) dominated the teaching of culture (Thanasoulas, 2001). Nonetheless, this approach was criticized for different understandings of the meaning of culture because it "...virtually blindfolded learners to the minute albeit significant aspects of their own as well as the target group's identity that were not easily divined and appropriated" (Huebener, 1959, p. 177).

Moreover, online groups require us to revisit questions of identity, membership and community and the ways in which individuals become members of such groups, and how their messages contribute to the groups' identity and culture. Matters of convention and behavioral norms in this environment are critical, as noted by Salmon (2004) when she discusses variations of *netiquette* for email communication and group conferencing (see also Murphy & Levy, 2006).

From the beginning of recorded human history, there exists no invention that brings about enormous changes in our values, traditions, and way of life the way the computer has. Some practitioners believe that technological innovations are the single most important source of educational changes. But just how does a technological advancement spur educational change? What are some of the changes taking place due to the proliferation of technology in our higher education institutions? What are the effects of these changes on the students' beliefs, values and way of life? These questions and many similar ones remain without clear answers.

Under the circumstances, Al- Balq'a Applied University has launched Al-Balq'a Applied University Academy for teaching EFL through computer courses in the fall semester of the academic year of 2009. These computer courses were distributed to three colleges in the north of Jordan: Ajloun, Al Huson and Irbid University colleges. Each college has been provided with three computer labs, each of which consisted of 50 computers. The textbook was computerized in the center of the university in Al-Salt city in 2008 in order to be implemented the year after. To actualize the implementation of CALL in TEFL in August 2009, Al-Balq'a Applied University issued a new decision to teach English compulsory courses (E099, E101, and E102) in the academy computer labs in all colleges of the university. Increasing funds has been spent recently on language labs, computer multimedia equipment, and on the wireless network on campus to meet administrative and teaching purposes to improve the process of teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) throughout the university.

Therefore, the major cause of concern for this study was to explore the attitudes of students and instructors of English who have used computers for either learning or teaching. The study also aimed at finding out if there was a "hidden" curriculum within the textbook. The other central focus in this research was to figure out if there were any impacts of the computerized textbooks on students' traditions, customs, values, identity and religion.

The problem of the study

Culture in language teaching is deemed indispensable. Practitioners, who are concerned with ELT in Jordan and other Arab countries, have a general cautious feeling towards the cultural aspects of English textbooks. This may be due to the fear of acculturation and alienation which can lead to Westernization (Globalization) of posterity (Zughoul, 2003). Foreign authors of English language textbooks implemented in Arab countries could not forsake their own values and beliefs even if they try to do so. Therefore, the content they select for these ad hoc textbooks reflects their own culture which may be hidden in multiple ways. The researcher, being aware of this problem, attempts to shed light on the cultural aspects of the English computerized textbook (*Connections Series*) taught at Al-Balq'a Applied University in Jordan. And since the studies conducted were to investigate the effect of teaching culture through computerized textbooks were very rare especially at the university level, the researcher believed that this study was an attempt to bridge the gap in this respect.

The purpose and the questions of the study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the attitudes of instructors and students towards the influence of hidden cultural aspects (if they exist) on their own values and beliefs. The second objective in this study was to provide universities in Jordan with some recommendations on how

to select a suitable textbook to be applied at higher education institutions. So, this study is an attempt to address the following questions:

1. What are the prevailing attitudes of university instructors towards the English culture as it is presented in the computerized *connections series* textbooks?
2. What are the prevailing attitudes of university students towards English culture as it is presented in the computerized *connections series* textbooks?
3. What is the impact of cultural aspects in textbooks on instructors' and students' identity, values, and culture?

The significance of the study

One pushing impetus behind carrying out this study was to highlight the existing cultural aspects of the computerized English textbook (*Connections Series*). Another driving motive for conducting the present study was the dire need to convince practitioners, stake holders, instructors, parents and students that learning a foreign language does not necessarily imply learning a whole foreign culture. This indicates that we can be selective. In addition, this study was deemed as an attempt to raise the awareness of negative effects on any ad hoc textbook in order to reduce the effect of acculturation, alienation, cultural colonialism and dislocation from our natural heritage.

The limitations of the study

This study will have the following limitations:

1. The material investigated in this study included only the computerized English Textbooks (*Connections Series*) implemented at Al-Balq'a Applied University for teaching the following EFL compulsory courses: E 099, E 101, and E102.
2. The sample and the population of the study were limited to students who were learning via the computerized (*Connections Series*) and instructors who have been teaching English through the computerized *Connections Series* at the three colleges in Al-Balq'a Applied University (Irbid, Al-Huson, and Ajloun) in the fall semester of the academic year of 2012-2013.
3. The results of the study are limited by the time limit for the period in which the study was conducted as technology and its applications may change dramatically in the near future.
4. Results can only be generalized at the university level.

Review of related literature

Many practitioners in the realm of education have emphasized the importance of culture in the teaching of English as a foreign language (see for example, Lado, (1957); Brumfit (1980); Byrne (1980); Patrick (1988); Prodromon (1988); and Spolsky (1989); Shatnawi (2005); Levy (2007); Khuwaileh (2000); Abu-Dalbouh (2005).

Cheung (2001) carried out research about the use of popular culture as a stimulant to motivate secondary student English learning in Hong Kong. Cheung's paper argued that English teachers' use of popular culture was a key to effective teaching and learning. Cheung maintained that if utilizing culture proved effective in motivating students to learn English, and there will be a number of implications for how teachers cater to students' needs and teachers' choice of teaching strategies and learning materials. It was reported that teachers should take note of their students' lives and takes their interests into account when designing and selecting the curriculum. In

addition, it was contended that teachers should be aware of students' social needs, personal growth, and personality development of their students as individuals.

Kreishan (2005) carried out a study to investigate the effects of religious and cultural schemata on Jordanian students' reading comprehension of English texts. The findings of the study showed that students' performance on reading comprehension tests were significantly affected due to familiar religious and cultural content of the text and the extended time of the test. The researcher recommended that teachers should help their students review their prior knowledge about the reading topic before the actual reading took place. Students were encouraged to enrich their knowledge through the Internet.

Ware and Kramersch (2005) also spoke of the risks involved in culture teaching and provide a perceptive, and extended discussion relating to a cross-cultural (miss) communication between learners of German in the United States and learners of English in Germany: they include important and poignant considerations for language teachers, notably in helping students to take an *intercultural stance* and a *de-centered perspective* during their interactions if they are to proven more reliably successful.

Moreover, the importance of teacher preparation and guidance for students is made clear as is the quest for greater objectivity of C1 and of C2. In their study, Ware and Kramersch (2005) marked the origins of the problem in uncertainty, about the genre of online activity and the identity of native speaker partners, and the need for the student to draw meaning from a text without context and the physical evidence provided by proxemics, kinetics and other paralinguistic features (see Tang, 2006). Yet, at the same time, Ware and Kramersch (2005) emphasized the value of these encounters and that with suitable preparation and debriefing by teachers and students they can lead to insights most difficult to attain by any other means.

Liaw (2006) presented findings on the efficacy of an online learning environment developed to foster EFL students' intercultural competence via reading articles on topics of their own culture, and communicating their responses with speakers of other cultures. To accomplish the objective in this study, a project was developed to offer opportunities for EFL students to use their own societal and cultural practices as the focus for EFL learning. In addition, with the help of an e-forum, the learning environment allowed the students to exchange their views with speakers of the target language. Two e-referencing tools were made available in the system while students were reading and writing.

The findings showed that all EFL participants were able to communicate fluently in the target language without much help from corpora-based e-referencing tools provided in the system. The use of the online dictionary decreased drastically after the first two readings. Despite some technical difficulties with the computers, the collaboration between the two groups of students was successful, as can be seen from the positive and complimentary comments from the participants. The students' e-forum entries demonstrated four types of intercultural competences: (A) interest in knowing other people's way of life and introducing one's own culture to others, (B) ability to change perspective, (C) knowledge about one's own and others' culture of intercultural communication, and (D) knowledge about intercultural communication processes.

Levy (2007) sought to improve approaches to the learning and teaching of culture using new technologies by relating the key qualities and dimensions of the culture concept to elements within a pedagogical framework. This study consists of two parts; in Part one, five facets of the culture concept were developed: culture as elemental; culture as relative; culture as group membership; culture as contested; and culture on an individual level (variable and multiple). Each perspective, aimed to provide a focus for thinking about culture, and thereby to provide a valid and useful point of departure for thinking about the practice of culture learning and teaching with new technologies. In Part two, however, five projects were chosen to represent relevant

technologies currently in use for culture learning: email, chat, a discussion forum and a Web-based project. Each project was used to illustrate facets of the culture concept discussed in Part One with a view for identifying key elements within a pedagogical framework that can help us respond effectively to the challenge of culture learning and teaching utilizing new technologies. Thus the goal is to align fundamental qualities of culture concept with specific pedagogical designs, tasks and technologies.

Abolghasem (2010) tried to draw attention towards the importance of culture in English language learning and give culture a new recognition and fame. The researcher claimed that the acquisition of computer skills alongside the acquisition of the English language is essential for survival in the modern world. She also maintained that it is quite obvious that the full potential of integrating computers into the ELT curricula has not yet been reached and their use is still limited. Moreover, she considered the introduction of computers into the culture of language learning in a complex fashion. She emphasized that when you teach English, you also teach a complex system of cultural customs, values, and ways of thinking, feeling, and acting.

Therefore, the main concern would be the use of culture in classes in a way to help the general English learners feel safe and secure and above all gain cultural understanding and suggesting that linguistic inquiry cannot be separated from the social reality or culture of the learners. Thus, introducing one's culture and particularly utilizing it in teaching general English materials, without embarrassment and fear, is considered essential.

Method, sampling, instruments and procedures

The researcher utilized two separate populations in this study: the students' population studying on the computerized (*Connections* series) related to English 099, E101, and E102 at Irbid, Al-Huson, and Ajloun university colleges during the first semester of the academic year 2012-2013. The second population is the instructors who have been teaching the computerized (*Connections* series) at the previous colleges during the same academic year. The students sample in the study was randomly selected. It consisted of (300) male and female students, with 100 from each college. The instructors' sample is all the population because the number is small. Two of the instructors are PhD holders and the rest (28) were M.A holders. To accomplish the objectives of this study, the researcher developed two questionnaires. Both of them were based in Al-Abed and Al-Haq's (1998). The first was the instructors' questionnaire that contained 18 items all of which were related to the existence of cultural aspects in the computerized (*Connections series*). The students' questionnaire contained 22 items all of which were related to the existence of cultural aspects in the computerized sense (*Connections series*). Since students in the sample are mostly weak in English and to avoid any obstacles brought about by the students' language ability, the students' questionnaire was translated into Arabic.

As for data collection, the researcher himself distributed the students' questionnaire in the academy labs at Irbid, Al-Huson, and Ajloun colleges. The researcher explained to students how to respond to the items on the questionnaire. Then the researcher collected the questionnaires from the students. The instructors' questionnaire was also distributed for the (30) instructors of the English programs at the three colleges. The researcher interviewed (10) students and (3) instructors from each college. The questions asked to students were: (1) Do you understand English culture? Why? Why not? (2) Do you prefer the content of TEFL to be related to American and British culture or Arab-Islamic ones? Why? Why not? To what extent do the cultural aspects that exist in textbooks affect your identity, values and culture?

Findings and discussions

In this section, the findings were presented and discussed according to the two questions posed in the study. The two questionnaires employed were distributed and collected by the researcher himself, and then the frequencies and the percentages were computed by the researcher himself to find out the impact of each item on the attitudes of the instructors and students towards the culture in computerized English textbooks. Table 1 and 2 will reveal these results.

Results and discussion related to the first question

The first question of this research was "What are the prevailing attitudes of university instructors towards English culture as it was presented in the computerized *connections series* textbooks? To answer this question, a 19-item questionnaire was employed. The results are shown in table 1.

Table 1
Numbers and percentages of instructors' responses concerning the culture existence in the computerized connections series

#	The Item	Strongly Agree		Agree		Uncertain		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
		no	%	no	%	no	%	no	%	no	%
1	I think that technologies such as computers and interactive videos are useful in teaching English culture.	12	40	11	36.6	4	13.3	2	6.6	1	3.3
2	I feel comfortable when I know the implied cultural connotations for words I use or hear.	4	13.3	9	30	8	26.6	6	20	3	10
3	It is important that the class use authentically cultural materials.	2	6.6	5	16.6	11	36.6	8	26.6	4	13.3
4	The assumed relationship between learning a language and learning the culture is theoretical	2	6.6	5	16.6	2	6.6	12	40	9	30
5	I think that it is impossible to separate learning a target language from its culture.	7	23.3	13	43.3	5	16.6	3	10	2	6.6
6	I think that greater success can be achieved in learning the English language when its culture is set aside.	5	16.6	6	20	7	23.3	6	20	6	20
7	English language is inseparable from its own culture.	11	36.6	12	40	2	6.6	3	10	2	6.6
8	The more one knows about English culture, the better he learns the language.	13	43.3	10	33.3	3	10	3	10	1	3.3
9	I think that the more exposed someone is to English culture; the easier it is to learn the language.	12	40	12	40	4	13.3	1	3.3	1	3.3
10	I think that exposure to English culture will broaden my students' knowledge.	11	36.6	7	23.3	9	30	2	6.6	1	3.3

#	The Item	Strongly Agree		Agree		Uncertain		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
11	I think that the admiration of English culture leads to the admiration of the English language.	15	50	11	36.6	1	3.3	1	3.3	2	6.6
12	I like the English way of life.	13	43.3	11	36.6	2	6.6	3	10	1	3.3
13	I feel that English culture is inferior to my own culture.	1	3.3	1	3.3	7	23.3	11	36.6	10	33.3
14	I believe that learning English spoils one's religion.	2	6.6	4	13.3	6	20	8	26.6	10	33.3
15	English is a leading foreign language.	22	73.3	7	23.3	1	3.3	x	0	x	0
16	The cultural items in the <i>Connections</i> digitized textbooks are strange to my students.	7	23.3	6	20	11	36.6	4	13.3	2	6.6
17	The cultural items in the <i>Connections</i> digitized textbooks are not acceptable in my culture.	3	10	1	3.3	10	33.3	8	26.6	8	26.6
18	The <i>Connections</i> digitized textbooks familiarize my students with the culture of the west.	2	6.6	4	13.3	4	13.3	11	36.6	9	30
19	Friendships with native speakers of English would increase my students' proficiency	15	50	9	30	2	6.6	4	13.3	x	0

The findings suggested that about 76.6% of the respondents strongly agree or agree that the computer and the associated technologies could be useful in teaching English language culture; 43.3% did not feel comfortable about words' cultural connotations whereas 30% feel comfortable with these connotations; 23.2% of the respondents agree with the use of authentically cultural materials while 39.9% disagree. Different from anything we have known, 23.3% of the respondents consider the relationship between languages and cultures to be a theoretical one while 70% consider it real; 66.6% of the respondents strongly agree or agree that it is impossible to separate learning a new language from learning a new culture.

Table 1 further revealed that 36.6% of the instructors either strongly agree or agree that culture can be set aside when teaching English whereas 40% strongly disagree or disagree which revealed that this is a controversial issue; 76.6% of respondents believe that English cannot be separated from its culture; the respondents 76.6% reported that the more one knew about the culture of a language, the better he/she will learn that language; 80% of the respondents thought that culture exposure is very important in foreign language teaching; 59.9% of the instructors believed that exposure to English culture will broaden the students' knowledge.

Moreover, 86.6% of the study sample believed that the admiration of a culture will lead to the admiration of the language; 79.9% of the instructors reported that they like the English way of living; 69.9% of the respondents emphasized that English culture was not inferior to their own culture; 59.9% of the instructors thought that learning English did not spoil their own religion; 96.6% of the respondents believe that English is a leading foreign language. Table 7 also showed that 43.3% of the respondents reported that the cultural items in the *Connections* series were

strange to their students while 36.6% were uncertain. This may be due to the fact that instructors rarely paid attention to the cultural aspects in the textbooks they teach. Surprisingly, 53.2% of the respondents believe that the cultural items in the *Connections* series were acceptable in the students' culture and only 13.3% thought that they were not acceptable. Similarly, 66.6% of the study sample did not agree that the cultural items in the computerized *Connections* series familiarized students with western culture and only 19.9% agreed. Finally, 80% of the respondents report that having a relationship with a native speaker of English would increase the students' proficiency.

To tabulate the results of the first question, most instructors advocated the existence of cultural aspects in the digitized *Connections* series. They also believed that learning a language carries the connotation of learning its culture. They, additionally, thought that learning English does not affect the students' religion or culture.

Results and discussion related to the second question

The second question of this research was "What were the prevailing attitudes of university students towards English culture as it was presented in the computerized *Connections series* textbooks? To answer this question, a 22-item questionnaire was employed. The results are shown in table 2:

Table 2
Numbers and percentages of students' responses concerning the culture existence in the computerized connections series

#	The Item	Strongly Agree		Agree		Uncertain		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
		no	%	no	%	no	%	no	%	no	%
1	I like English.	9	3	46	15.3	7	2.3	95	31.7	143	47.7
2	I feel that there is a national need for English learning in Jordan	101	33.7	83	27.7	13	4.3	32	10.7	71	23.7
3	I feel comfortable when I know the implied cultural connotations for words I use or hear	16	5.3	28	9.3	109	36.3	133	44.3	14	4.7
4	It is vital that classrooms use authentically English cultural materials	47	15.7	63	21	76	25.3	97	32.3	17	5.7
5	The assumed relationship between learning a language and learning the culture is theoretical	59	19.3	32	10.7	38	12.7	53	17.7	118	39.3
6	Living in an English culture would improve my language proficiency	122	40.7	85	28.3	26	8.7	37	12.3	30	10
7	Living with an English family would motivate me to learn more English	131	43.7	91	30.3	21	7	32	10.7	25	8.3
8	Friendships with English people would increase my level of knowledge	99	33	78	26	64	21.3	53	17.7	6	2
9	Friendships with native speakers of English would increase my proficiency.	144	48	91	30.3	38	12.7	22	7.3	5	1.7

#	The Item	Strongly Agree		Agree		Uncertain		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
10	English language is inseparable from its culture	66	22	54	18	62	20.7	72	24	46	15.3
11	The more I know about English culture, the better it is for me to learn the English language	92	30.7	83	27.7	31	10.3	55	18.3	29	9.7
12	I think that the more one is exposed to English culture, the easier it is to learn the English language	98	32.7	86	28.7	43	14.3	35	11.7	38	12.7
13	I think that exposure to English culture will broaden my horizons	119	39.7	96	32	27	9	29	9.7	19	6.3
14	The admiration of English culture leads to the admiration of the English language	100	33.3	88	29.3	81	27	13	4.3	18	6
15	I like the Western way of life.	62	20.7	15 2	50.7	45	15	24	8	17	5.7
16	I have a feeling that English culture is inferior to my own culture	62	20.7	63	21	21	7	46	15.3	108	36
17	I believe learning English spoils one's religion	45	15	33	11	87	29	34	11.3	101	33.7
18	Including aspects of English culture in language courses is helpful in learning English	31	10.3	38	12.7	107	35.7	62	20.7	62	20.7
19	English is a leading foreign language.	181	60.3	99	33	17	5.7	2	.7	1	.3
20	The cultural items in textbooks are strange	86	27.7	11 2	37.3	71	23.7	24	8	7	2.3
21	The cultural expressions in the textbooks are not acceptable in my culture.	91	30.3	10 3	34.3	69	23	29	9.7	8	2.7
22	The English language textbooks familiarize me with Western culture.	77	25.7	11 5	38.3	32	10.7	16	5.3	60	20

Table 2 revealed that 79% of the respondents did not like the English language. This may be due to the fact that the English language is taught in Jordan from the first grade to the end of the higher education, which may cause a lot of pressure on students who consider it a complex foreign language. In addition to that, there are many differences between the English and Arabic languages which may cause reluctance on the students' inclination to learn English. The results also showed that 61.4% of the students strongly agree or agree that there was a national need for English language in Jordan. This implied that there is an increasing perception of the significance of the English language among Jordanian university students. The findings further revealed that 14.6 % of the students strongly agree or agree that they feel comfortable about the implied cultural connotations of words in the digitized *Connections* textbooks whereas 49% of the respondents reported being uncomfortable about them. This might be due to the fact that nations always attempt to maintain their cultures, unaffected by any other ones.

Moreover, the results showed that 36.7% of the respondents reported on the significance of using authentic cultural material while 38% of the respondents maintained that using authentic cultural material is not important. In addition, 30% of subjects believed that the assumed relationship between learning a language and learning the culture of that language is theoretical whereas 57% of the respondents think it did not exist. This may infer that Jordanian university students are aware of the fact that while learning another language they are learning another culture. The researcher is apt to say that from above the cultural connotations in English textbooks were set to be unabated and indelible.

Table 2 also revealed that 69% of the respondents strongly agree or agree that living in an English culture will increase their proficiency in English while only 22.3% strongly disagree or disagree. This implied that our university students are aware of the importance of living in an English country in order to improve their fluency in English. Additionally, the findings reveal that living with an English family (74%), friendship with English people (59%), and friendship with native speakers (78.3%) would motivate students to learn better and increase their level of proficiency in English. It is no doubt true, however, that these are considered important factors in learning a foreign language. Moreover, it was implied that not only Jordanian university students understand the significance of these factors but also they advocated the utilization of them in the learning process.

Furthermore, 40% of the respondents thought that English language is inseparable from its culture while almost the same percentage 39.3% believe that it could be separated; 58.4% thought that the more we know about English culture, the better we learn it; 61.4% believe that the exposure to English culture might help in learning the language; 71.7% stated that it might broaden their horizons; 63.6% emphasized that the admiration of English culture will lead to the admiration of the English language; 71.4% admired the Western way of life; 41.7% thought that Western culture was inferior to his/her culture. In addition, only 26% believe that learning English might spoil his/her religion; 40.4% believed that including cultural aspects in English textbooks was not feasible; 93.3% thought that English is a leading foreign language in the world; 65% maintained that the cultural aspects in the English textbooks were strange; 64.6% reported that the cultural aspects in the English textbooks were not acceptable in their society; and finally, 64% maintained that English textbooks familiarize them with Western culture.

Results and discussion related to the third question

As for the results related to the third question, an interview of three questions was employed. The instructors and students reported that it was almost impossible to learn a language without learning its culture. Additionally, the interviewees emphasized that some of the cultural aspects that existed in the computerized English textbooks do not correspond to their culture. Different from instructors, students thought that their identity and values were being threatened. Both were content that the negative effect of cultural aspects could be avoided. Unlike instructors, students were convinced that the content of the TEFL textbooks should be related to the Arab-Islamic culture rather than American or British ones. Both admired the English culture, but want to preserve their own culture. It is obvious that instructors and students have the inclination to learn and teach the English language without being affected by any aspects that contradict with their own culture.

Conclusions and recommendations

Al-Balqa Applied University has given increasing attention to integrating CALL in all its colleges. More specifically, it has designed digitized curricula that are rapidly becoming an important component of the teaching process. The latest progress in this respect is the computerization of English textbooks (Connection series) to be implemented in the academic year of 2009-2010. These textbooks are utilized to teach English compulsory courses (E.099, E.101, and E.102). The present study has attempted to investigate the impact of the cultural expressions on the students' and teachers' culture and identity.

The results reported that instructors and students were fully aware of the significance of English as a global language. There was a dire need for both instructors and students to be more aware of the impact of the hidden curriculum in English textbooks on the students' culture. The findings further showed that students unlike teachers do not like English. In Addition, both students and instructors admire the Western way of living. Students believe that the cultural aspects in textbooks are not acceptable in their own society. Unlike instructors, students think that learning a language implies learning its culture. Instructors strongly believe that technology can be a useful tool in teaching English. Both instructors and students think that English culture is not inferior to their own culture.

Based on the results of this study, the following recommendations were put forth: (1) every new English textbook, and before implementation, should be analyzed, evaluated and modified to suite the society, customs, traditions, and values of the targeted culture, because such textbooks are usually written by foreigners who belong to other cultures. (2) It is recommended that all Jordanian universities should implement CALL in the teaching of EFL. (3) More training should be provided to English instructors on the use of computer as a tool for teaching EFL. (4) Researchers are recommended to conduct further studies concerning the relationship between language and culture, and also concerning the cultural aspects in other textbooks used in our Jordanian/Arab/Muslim schools and universities.(5) The findings of the study revealed that the Connections Series contained some irrelevant cultural connotations that should be omitted, and it was also Western culture oriented.

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Editor's Note: This study gives useful information to compare distance education programs and student satisfaction with aspects of those programs in private and public universities in Ethiopia.

An evaluation of the status of distance education program in public and private higher education institutions at Mettu centers, Ethiopia. a comparative analysis on quality issues

Feyera Beyessa

Ethiopia

Abstract:

The central intention of this research was to evaluate the status of distance education programs on quality issues of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) [Public and Private HEIs] at Mettu town Centers, Ilu Abba Bora Zone. To attain this objective, a comparative case study research method was employed.

The subjects of the study were 113[100 students, 3 center coordinators and 10 tutors] from both HEIs. To select the target HEIs, an availability sampling technique was used to select public HEI Jimma University (JU), a simple random sampling technique was employed to select the private HEIs - St. Mary's University-College (/SMUC) and Rift Valley University-College (RVUC), a stratified sampling followed by simple random sampling (lottery method) was used to select the students, and availability and purposive sampling techniques were employed to select center coordinators and tutors respectively. To gather the necessary data, questionnaire, interview, and document analysis and observation checklist were used. The gathered data were analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative methods of data analysis.

The result of the study showed that a statistical difference existed between the students' satisfaction about center coordinator services of JU and private HEIs, in addition, students of private HEIs were more satisfied than public HEI with entirely no online registration service in both groups. Students at private HEIs were relatively at a higher position in engaging with tutorial sessions and teaching-learning process than JU. In both groups the instructional interactions between the tutored and tutors (part timer from anywhere) on tutorial session seems low with the tutored group who get little opportunity to discuss except on tutorial days. Concerning modules, quality of the modules of private HEIs looks more or less at a better position than modules of JU. The study also shows that a statistically non-significant difference between the two groups, stagnantly both groups used very little technology based learning materials and instructional teaching-learning process, which inhabit the quality of distance education program. Evidence showed that students' assessments in both HEIs were only focused on assignment (30%) and final exam (70%), with poor instructional interaction and less transparency feedback/evaluation system made by non- tutors of the institutions; and the HEIs haven't made progressive shift to the current instructional implementation.

Assessment and evaluation techniques were given less emphasis to the student- centered instructional methodology, which has considerably negative impact to the quality of Ethiopian HEIs of distance education program. Thus, based on the findings of the study, implications were pointed to mitigate the aforementioned problems.

Keywords: distance education program, evaluation, quality, and higher education institutions.

Background of the study

Education is often regarded as the most determinant factor for socio-economic development of a country. It is obvious that no country have achieved developmental goals without successful education and training programs. For this reason, due attention is given to the provision and appropriate usage of educational facilities, technology, materials, environment, organization and management so as to strengthen the effective teaching learning process/quality of education and the expansion process of education (Transitional Government of Ethiopia/TGE,1994). It is also important to note that Ethiopia has placed education at the center of its strategies for development, decentralization and various learning programs with strong polices promoting quality of educational provision (TGE, 1994:3). In Ethiopia, as one learning program, the field of distance education has changed dramatically over the past 15 years so as to provide educational access and then contribute to the education of poverty-stricken people. Traditionally, distance education's structured learning in which the student and instructor are separated by place and sometimes by time, is currently the fastest growing form of domestic and international education (Educom Staff, 1996) and, the concept of delivering course material is shifting from the physical classroom, where all interactions are face-to-face, to the virtual classroom, where direct face-to-face contact between student-teacher and student-student are non- existent.

On the other hand, current developments in technology allow distance education programs to provide specialized courses to students in remote geographic areas with increasing interactivity between students and teachers (Terry, 2002). Some scholars define quality in terms of educational outcomes (MOE, 2006). Quality is also viewed in terms of the framework of 'system design' with inputs, processes and outcomes (Harvey, 1994). In postmodern society, quality is viewed in terms of facilitating a user-friendly environment (Tubbs, 2005). Quality is indeed difficult to define.

However, one important means of evaluating the quality of distance education program is analyzing the delivery of the program through the analysis of internal environments, the input and process aspects of the quality of the program (Kishore, 1998). Having various statues of quality of education, HEIs are pushing courses offering distance learning so students have opportunities to create a degree program that uses course offerings from multiple off- campus centers of distance programs. All of these emerging delivery structures bring with them questions about the quality of the education being delivered (AACSB, 2007). For this reason, the study deals with the evaluation of distance education program of both public and private HEIs in Mettu town centers.

Statement of the problem

Distance education is one of the newest players on the field of education and it is often required or expected for the maintenance of current employment positions, as well as increasing opportunities for advancement and it can be used as a means of generating learners' knowledge anytime and anywhere (Garrison, 2000).

However, many scholars in different faculties fear distance learning is just a means of reducing their ranks, or a means to solve budget problems, the dehumanization and alienation of students as well as a loss of social and critical thinking skills (Novek, 1996). In addition, the problem for distance learning is that so far there are not the same generally accepted assessments and exercises that form the evaluation process and which would then lead to generally accepted standards (Bloom & Krathwohl, 1956).

Similarly, in the study of distance education of the project 17,000 in Oromia region of Ethiopia, Kassim (2006) identifies major findings such as unwise use of technological materials, unorganized library and laboratory services, poor service delivery (orientation, counseling), poor coordination at tutorial centers, ineffectiveness of tutorial sessions, non-commitment of tutors, and a lack of checking to give feedback on distance teaching. In recent years, the Ministry of

Education has been used, on some decisions, the implementation of distance education. Consequently, from the researcher personal observation and generally accepted circulars, there are some degree programs (i.e., Law and Education) that have not been offered in private HEIs but permitted to be offered in public HEIs). This inspired the researcher to evaluate the status of distance education program in HEIs with comparative analysis between public and private HEIs on quality issues at center levels. Basic questions of the study were based on the stated problems, and the study has attempted to provide answers to the following questions:

Is there a statistical difference between the centers of study, in regards to getting satisfaction from their center coordinators?

Is there any statistical difference between the two groups in the students' engagement to the tutorial sessions?

Is there a statistical difference between the two groups concerning quality status of the modules?

What are the practices of students while they are doing assignments?

Is there a statistical difference between the two groups in the provision of instructional materials?

How have assessments and evaluations of the system been carried out?

Purpose of the study

This study aims at evaluating the status of distance education in HEIs that are currently delivered at the centers of Mettu city administrative facilities. Specifically the study is targeted to:

- Examine students' satisfaction with center coordinators.
- Identify students' engagement with tutorial sessions.
- Look at opinions about the status of the quality of the modules, assignments and the teaching learning process as a whole.
- Identify the availability of instructional materials.
- Explore assessment and evaluation mechanisms of the centers.

Scope of the study

The scope of this research is restricted to Mettu town administration of Ilu Abba Bora Zone, Oromia region, where there are a lot of distance education centers. This is in close proximity to the researcher so as to get resourceful information by contacting more than one time. Out of many aspects to be considered in the evaluation of the status of distance education programs of HEIs, this evaluation was considered as an assessment of the status of two major internal environment (input and process) aspects of the quality of distance education. The input aspect focuses on students' satisfaction for center coordinator services, the status of quality of modules and availability of instructional materials (hard and soft copies) and library services. Whereas, students engagement for tutorial session/teaching-learning/assignment activities, and assessments and evaluation techniques of the program were considered as process aspects of the quality of distance education. Nevertheless, assessing the external environment (output aspect) of the quality status was not considered for it is very tiresome to assess and analyze the students' grade point average (GPA) and the effectiveness of graduated employers at work place.

Significances of the study

It is believed that the findings of this study would have immense contributions to the improvement of effective teaching-learning process of distance education programs particularly at centers, so as to enhance the internal quality. Therefore, the findings of the study may have the following significance:

- It could help HEIs to develop students' services before preparing distance learning programs;
- This study may help Ministry of Education to identify ways to improve modes of delivery of distance education and formulate policies pertaining to appropriate instructional technologies and assessment choices that help to improve the internal quality of HEIs;
- It may give possible directions to universities to improve quality distance learning that requires careful attention to learning design, effective faculty/school training, organizational commitment to adequate program support, selection of appropriate delivery technology, and a focus on the quality of student learning outcomes;
- It may shed more light on universities' development of a pedagogy that fits the chosen delivery of technology and directing sufficient resources to assessment issues; and
- The study will show directions to the Ministry of Education to set/improve standardized assessment components and evaluation procedures that enhance the quality of distance education.

Review of related literature

Prominent educators in the field of distance education have considered the following fundamental concepts that convey the quality of distance education programs in line with the current teaching learning process. They will be discussed in the next pages, one after another.

According to the Association of Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB, 2007), learning experiences will greatly influence the success of distance learning program. Universities must articulate clearly what is to be taught and the content should be delivered to students through different approaches of pedagogy and various technologies. The quality of distance learning programs may include a mix of interactions, including one-on-one tutorial meetings/workshops and residential programs; plus a variety of interactive sessions utilizing a range of technologies (Boyd, 2002).

Instructional interaction approach

Garrison (2000) notes that more recently the focus in the study of distance education has shifted to educational issues associated with the teaching-learning process specifically concerns regarding real, sustained communication, as well as emerging communications technology to support sustained communication anytime, anywhere. Therefore, issues that involve the learner, the instructor, the technology, and the processes of teaching and learning are becoming increasingly important. Because distance education has moved away from the independent learning or industrialization of teaching to learner-centered instruction, distance educators must move ahead to investigate how the learner, the instructor and the technology collaborate to generate knowledge. Similarly, Moore (1989) examines learner-instructor interaction is the basic approach that provides motivation, feedback, and dialogue between the teacher and student. This type of interaction is regarded as essential by many educators and highly desired by many learners.

Student support services

Delivering education beyond the campus environment imposes upon an institution a concomitant responsibility to provide off-campus students and faculty with sufficient support services to facilitate convenient participation. In line with this, the support services include access to library materials facilities, delivery of course materials (quality modules), counseling, tutoring provision of information and access to technology (Garrison, 1989) that enhances the quality of the global world of teaching and learning in distance education. Distance learning program requires collaborative group learning activities and technology that supports those activities, and students should be provided with an interaction in the collaborative technologies so that they can participate and learn effectively (AACSB, 2007). Moreover, the provision of online advice regarding the range and content of courses, the application and registration processes are important for first contacts with the administrative system (Boyd, 2002).

Assessments and evaluation

Nowadays, distance education is a concept that covers learning-teaching activities in the cognitive and/or psycho-motor and affective domains of an individual learner and a supporting organization. It is characterized by non-contiguous communication and can be carried out anywhere and at any time, these makings are attractive to adults with professional and social commitments (Holmberg, 1989).

The choice of assessment methodologies is an important decision in an instructional design, which fundamental affects students' behavior and achievement of learning outcomes. In distance learning, assessment choice should support intended learning outcomes, but they also should be consistent with desired learning approaches, formative assessment of students, and summative assessments through formal examination or testing, to measure the attainment of knowledge and skills at specific points of the program (AACSB, 2007) so as to enhance the quality of distance education.

Research design and methodology

Research method

In this study a comparative case study research method was used. Because in this investigation the main aim was to evaluate both in breadth and depth the status of distance education programs with comparative analysis between the public and private HEIs centers in Mettu town Administration.

Sources of data

Primary data sources include students, center coordinators and tutors. The secondary data sources were modules, assignments, reports, and student records with respect to activities done at the centers.

Samples and sampling techniques

To keep the fair distribution of sampled centers, the researcher used the simple random sampling (lottery method) technique to select two (40%) centers (SMUC and RVUC) from five private HEIs, and availability sampling was employed to choose one public center HEI (Jimma University) for it is the only public University that offers a distance learning program in the town of Mettu). First, stratified sampling was used to divide the total students of each center into two groups (public HEI and private HEIs). Second, equal proportion of sample size (40%), 100 third year students of public HEI and 60 third year students of private HEIs were identified from each group from the institutions. This is because of their stay for three years in the institutions so that they can provide resourceful information about the program.

Further, purposive sampling was used to select 10 tutors, for they are part-timers and not regularly found at the center area, and availability sampling was used to select 3 center coordinators for they are the only administrative representative and key persons of the centers. Thus, the number of subjects for the study result in 173 participants.

Data gathering instruments

The questionnaire, having both close-ended and open-ended items was used; the close-ended items of the questionnaire were based on the Likert-type opinion of five scales. In addition, 7, 5 and 4 set of interviews for center coordinators; tutors and tutored/students respectively and unstructured observations were used to investigate activities relevant to answering the research questions. Furthermore, document analyses were carried out on tutors' portfolios, annual plans, assignments, modules, exams, schedules and other documents.

Procedure and data analysis strategy

The instruments were constructed by the researcher on the bases of theoretical knowledge from the review of related literature and their relevance to acquire the necessary data. After developing the data collecting instruments, the researcher gave them to two instructors at the Mettu College of Teacher Education so as to improve the validity of the questionnaire and interviews. Then, a pilot test of those instruments was made in both groups of 20 students/respondents to make the instruments dependability rise and to be finally used in the actual study with the overall Cronbach's Alpha 0.87.

The data obtained from close-ended questionnaires were first edited, categorized, tabulated, and finally described by using various statistical techniques. Data gathered through the close-ended questionnaires were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Mean, frequency distribution percentage was used to describe categorical data regarding students' responses about assignment, assessment and evaluation. Standard deviation, mean and t-test were used to describe the comparative analysis of statistical significance relationships between public and private HEIs at 0.05 confidence levels. Finally, data gathered through interviews, document analysis, open-ended questionnaires and observation techniques were analyzed qualitatively.

Analysis and research findings

This next portion of the paper deals with the presentation and analysis of data collected from the respondents to address the basic research questions.

Table 1
Students' satisfaction about center coordinators service

No	Items	HEIs	Mean	St.dev	t-value	p-value
1	Registration and scheduling	Public	2.19	.73	29.6*	.00
		Private	5.00	.00		
2	Getting academic advisement	Public	2.62	.788	23.3*	.00
		Private	5.00	.00		
3	Fee payments	Public	2.01	1.12	20.5*	.00
		Private	5.00	.00		
4	Availability of various courses	Public	2.29	.76	27.2*	.00
		Private	5.00	.00		
5	Communication effectiveness	Public	2.17	.81	26.7*	.00
		Private	5.00	.00		
6	Getting full information	Public	2.16	1.04	16.8*	.00
		Private	4.58	.49		
7	Well organized management	Public	1.53	.50	38.0*	.00
		Private	4.00	.00		
8	Effectiveness of the managerial skill of the coordinator	Public	1.78	.41	39.8*	.00
		Private	3.98	.12		
9	Facilitating tutorial session	Public	1.99	.65	26.3*	.00
		Private	4.58	.49		

* $p < 0.05$, $df = 158$

As can be seen from table 1, the t- test result ($t < 39.8$, $df = 158$ and $p < 0.05$) shows that there were statistical significant differences between two groups of activities done by center coordinators.

Similarly, from the mean values of the groups it is possible to understand that students of private HEIs have gotten better satisfaction in getting advice, well organized management, necessary information and managerial skills of the center coordinators than JU. In line with this, the observation result also realized this fact. That is, private HEIs have assigned young center coordinators, who have better managerial activities so as to manage the centers effectively, whereas, JU has assigned the retired or an aged man as a coordinator, who may show less managerial activities than private HEIs. However, in postmodern society, quality is viewed in terms of facilitating a user-friendly environment (Tubbs, 2005). This does mean that less managerial activities may reduce the quality of the institution. The observation results show that both groups of institutions stagnantly used face- to- face registration. Nevertheless, the provision of online advice about the range and content of courses, the application and registration processes are important for first contacts with the administrative system (Boyd 2002).

Table 2
Students' engagement on tutorial session/teaching-learning

N o	Items	HEIs	Mean	St.dev	t- value	p- value
1	I attend tutorial session regularly	Public Private	3.37 3.40	.48 .49	.37**	.70
2	Tutorial section is satisfactory	Public Private	1.53 2.51	.80 1.1	6.4*	.00
3	Tutors ability to present learning materials	Public Private	2.12 2.51	.68 .50	3.8*	.00
4	Interaction between tutees and tutors	Public Private	2.60 2.68	.69 .72	.72**	.47
5	Course coverage during tutorial session	Public Private	2.52 2.55	.50 .50	.36**	.71
6	Adequacy of tutors' subject mastery	Public Private	2.47 3.21	.50 .78	7.3*	.00
7	Tutorial section is fixed	Public Private	3.92 3.70	.39 .80	2.3*	.02
8	Counseling and guidance service	Public Private	2.09 3.73	1.19 1.35	8.0*	.00
9	Getting time and opportunity to discuss with tutors	Public Private	1.16 1.88	.48 .99	6.1*	.00

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p > 0.05$ and $df = 158$

Table 2 of the t-test result ($t < 0.72$, $df = 158$ and $p > 0.05$) indicates that there were no statistical differences between the two groups in engaging students on tutorial sessions of the teaching learning process. This implies that students of both groups were relatively at almost similar positions in attending the tutorial session and getting chances to cover the courses through the tutorial session and to interact with their tutors.

On the other hand, the result ($t > 2.3$, $df = 158$ and $p < 0.05$) of table 2 points out that statistical differences between the two groups in engaging students on tutorial sessions of the teaching learning process did exist. This does mean that students of private HEIs were at a higher position in getting an opportunity to discuss with their tutors who may have subject mastery and ability to present the learning materials than students of JU. From the overall mean score, it is possible to say that students of private HEIs were at a better position to engage in the tutorial session and teaching learning process than JU. On the other hand, Moore (1989) examines learner– instructor interaction as the basic approach that provides motivation, feedback, and a dialogue between the teacher and student so as to help learners engage new knowledge in order to be competent in the world. Hence, effective students' engagement on tutorial sessions in the process may enhance the quality of teaching /learning in the institution. Furthermore, from the researcher's personal observation and interview conducted at both centers of HEIs, the tutorial sessions were given by tutors, who were not from the main campus. Particularly, at JU center, some of them have been teaching unrelated courses (for example, the one who has Bachelor Degree in Geography can be invited to teach sociology or Civics with less or no ability and skills to present the learning materials). Such kind of institutional experience may have negative impact on the quality of the distance education program being delivered.

Likewise, from observational analysis, JU has no regular attendance during the tutorial sessions to check student presence. When interviewed, some students from JU said that, they have been registered and paid fees per credit hours so as to get satisfactory subject matter knowledge from tutorial session of the program; however, the delivery system of the tutorial session was below our expectation in obtaining useful teaching-learning experience (Interviewed on 22nd April, 2012).

Table 3
Tutored/students responses about the quality of modules

No	Items	HEIs	Mean	St. Dev.	t-value	p-value
1	Contents were written with clear learning objectives	Public	4.00	.00	1.29**	.19
		Private	3.93	.51		
2	Modules have been readable	Public	2.22	.78	7.67*	.00
		Private	3.00	.00		
3	Modules are attractive and written precisely.	Public	2.67	.47	11.36*	.00
		Private	3.71	.69		
4	The contents were easily understandable	Public	3.18	.38	5.48*	.00
		Private	3.56	.49		
5	Activities were relevant to contents in the module	Public	3.00	.00	4.70*	.00
		Private	3.18	.39		
6	Assignments were relevant to contents in the module	Public	2.91	1.08	6.36*	.00
		Private	3.83	.37		
7	The language of the modules is simple and easy	Public	3.00	.00	12.60*	.00
		Private	3.61	.49		

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p > 0.05$ and $df = 158$

From table 3 results of the analysis ($t = 1.29$, $df = 158$ and $p > 0.05$) indicates that there is statistically no significant difference between the two groups in writing the modules with learning objectives. That means, both groups have written the contents of the modules with clear learning objectives above expected standards as the mean scores indicated.

Nevertheless, table 3 analysis ($t > 4.70$, $df = 158$ and $p < 0.05$) shows that there were statistical differences between the two groups on quality of modules. This directly implied that modules of private HEIs were more or less at a better position to be readable, attractive, motivating, written with simple language and easily understandable content and more assignments were related to the modules than those of JU. Yet, provision of course materials (quality modules), will enhance the quality of the global world of teaching learning in distance education (Garrison, 1989). Thus, one can say that, the quality of modules may have a positive impact on the quality of the teaching-learning and success of distance learning program. Similarly, from my personal observation, particularly and relatively SMUC modules have been written as book standard with hard cover and is more attractive for everybody to read than the modules, which look hand out of JU and RVUC.

Chart 1
Students' responses about assignment

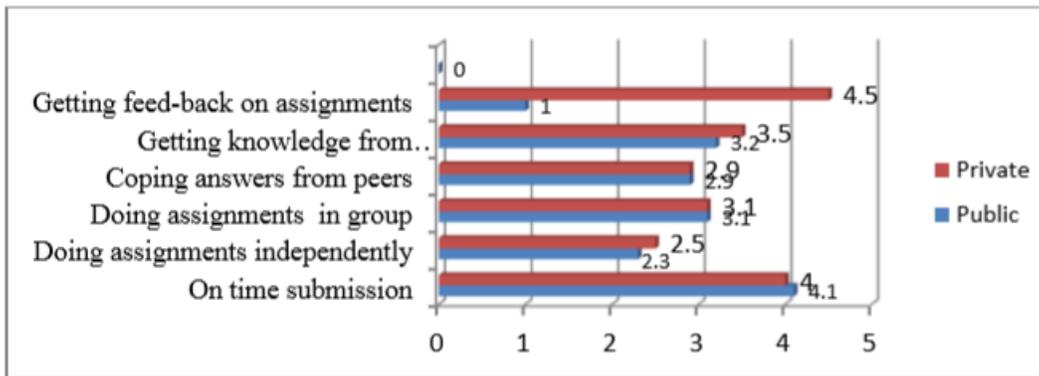


Chart 2 illustrates that students' responses about assignment ($M < 3.0$) are below the average result of the five scales of Likert. Students of both groups showed fewer efforts in doing assignments independently and to some extent they have focused on copying answers from peers. They also considered their assignments as group work. The students of both groups have replied as they engaged in some subject matter knowledge in relation to the assignment given per courses. Private HEIs have given feedback on assignment ($M = 4.5$), whereas JU has less concern about feedback ($M = 1$) of the assignments from their students. In the same way, result of interview analysis revealed this fact. Yet, the quality of distance learning program may include various interactions with clear feedback, which provides strong motivation for learners. In assignments, mean score results show students of two groups were not focused on independent practice.

In line with this, the document analysis showed that particularly SMUC has used the strategy that the previous year assignments gave per courses, were completely changed by another per-semester/year to year so as to minimize copying of answers from previously completed assignments. Whereas, both JU and RVUC have used the same type of assignment for the given course repeatedly, this may invite students not to do assignments individually, but they have been practiced to copy from drafts of the previous year students. Hence, relatively, it is possible to say that SMUC has been at a high quality status in using effective mechanisms in assessing their students through assignments as one component of assessment techniques.

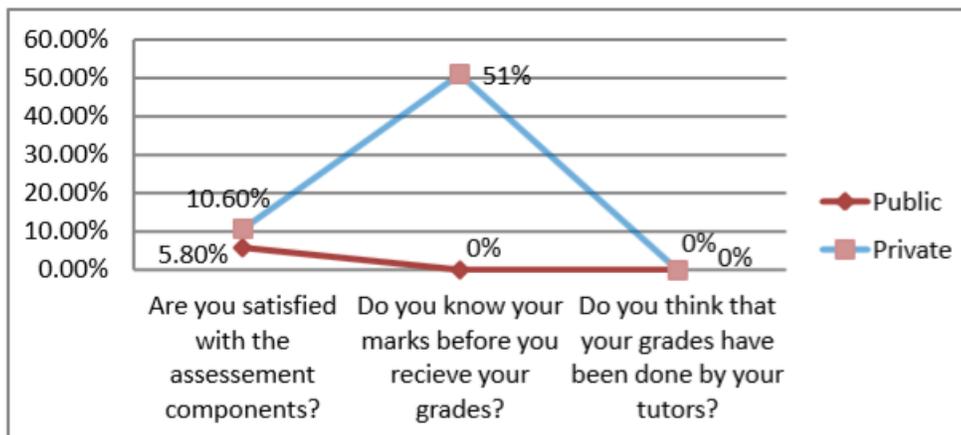
From Table 4, the results ($t = 2.28$, $df = 158$ and $P < 0.05$) show there were statistical differences between the two groups of HEIs. This implies that JU has adequate modules and learning materials than do private HEIs. On the other hand, the analysis results ($t < 0.52$, $df = 158$ and $P > 0.05$) indicate that there were statistically non-significant differences between both HEIs in availability of instructional materials. This showed that both groups have inadequacy of Information Technology (IT) support; video conferencing television broadcast library and online communication as instructional materials to implement the program. In addition to the response of the target population, the observation made on both HEIs shows those facilities such as the provision of library, utilization of teleconferencing, videotape, interactive television courses, internet access and the above listed facilities except modules; are totally absent. Yet, the support services include access to library facilities, delivery of course materials (modules), and access of technology, which enhance the quality of the world of teaching and learning in distance education (Garrison, 1989). Thus, one can say that using only modules as an instructional material may lead to less quality delivery of distance education at the center of both groups.

Table 4
Availability of instructional materials

N ^o	Items	HEIs	Mean	St. dev.	t-vale	P-value
1	Modules	Public	1.00	.00	2.28*	.02
		Private	.95	.21		
2	Library/ book store	Public	.00	.00	1.84**	.06
		Private	.03	.18		
3	IT support /internet access	Public	.02	.14	.52**	.60
		Private	.03	.18		
4	Recorded audio/ video	Public	.01	.10	.36**	.71
		Private	.01	.12		
5	Video conferencing	Public	.01	.10	.36**	.71
		Private	.01	.12		
6	On-line communication	Public	.01	.10	.36**	.71
		Private	.01	.12		
7	Television broad cast	Public	.01	.10	.36**	.71
		Private	.01	.12		

*p< 0.05, **p>0.05 and df= 158

Chart 2
Assessment and evaluation system



From the document analysis and interview result of the respondents both groups of HEIs have used the same approaches of assessment techniques with 30% assignment and 70% final examination so as to evaluate their students. However in distance learning, assessment choice should support intended learning outcomes, but they also should be consistent with desired learning approaches (e.g., individual vs. group-based learning and integrated vs. isolated subject approaches) formative assessment of students (e.g., projects and individual assessments and encouraging students to learn through application), and summative assessments through formal examination or testing, to measure the attainment of knowledge and skills at specific points of the program (AACSB, 2007), so as to enhance the quality of learning program.

Regarding the marks of the students, none of the respondents (0%) from JU replied they get and know their marks before they receive their grades. Whereas, respondents (51%) from public HEIs were able to know their marks to some extent before they received their marks. Hence, private HEIs are at a higher position to show marks of the assessments before the students receive their marks than JU. Concerning the evaluation system, the result of Chart 2 indicates that all student respondents from both groups replied that their grades were absolutely not done/awarded by their tutors (from anywhere), who were carried out the tutorial session on the tutorial day but, assessment and an evaluation system were done by other bodies (non-tutors of the main campus). Indeed such activity may reduce the quality of assessment and evaluation system of HEIs as a whole.

Generally, from the other side, assignments and examinations were not prepared by tutors of both groups, which are not pedagogically supported. Hence, it is possible to say that there is a gap that shows less quality of assessment and evaluation system at Mettu town centers of the HEIs under which the study is investigated.

Conclusions and implications

Based on the analyses, the following conclusions and implications were made:

Regarding students satisfaction about center coordinators' services, private HEIs' students have gotten better necessary information, advice, effective administrative communication, and the administrative service given by JU center coordinator. Strengthening the administrative service of the center coordinator will improve quality of support service in the institution, because the effectiveness of administrative services is one of indicators of input aspects of quality of education.

The research finding showed that student engagement to the tutorial session and teaching/learning of JU seems at lower position than private HEIs. Hence, quality of education may not come without effective student engagement in tutorial session with subject matter instructors. Engaging students in tutorial session and teaching learning process by making effective instructional interaction between tutors and students will bring significant change in the quality of education being delivered. Also inviting tutors with subject mastery during tutorial sessions should improve the quality of the teaching-learning process.

Concerning the students' responses about the modules, the quality statuses of modules of SMUC were relatively at a higher position than that of JU and RVUC. Less quality of learning materials may affect the effectiveness of the teaching learning process. However, the provision of quality modules would enhance the quality of teaching/learning in distance education (Garrison, 1989). Indeed providing attractive, readable, easily understandable modules to the learner, and also improve the quality of the teaching learning process.

The result of the study showed that JU and RVUC have used repeatedly the same types of assignments from semester to semester. And JU has not given any feedback regarding assignments and examinations. This may have negative impacts on students' psychological learning, which leads to less effectiveness of the learners. In reality, if students get any feedback, they will be motivated and given opportunity to increase their performance in the learning process, which may improve quality of education at the institution. Similarly, using various types of assignment components per course, students may minimize the duplication or coping of answers from previously completed assignments. That is to some extent why students tried to do their best in completing assignments, which can give moderate contributions to the quality of education.

Regarding instructional materials, JU was at higher position in distributing sufficient modules than private HEIs. The study also reveals that both groups have used only modules as instructional materials for their teaching learning programs. However, support services include access to library facilities, delivery of course materials (modules), counseling, tutoring provision of information and access to technology based teaching/learning which enhances the quality of teaching/learning in distance education (Garrison, 1989). If they use IT based instructional materials for their teaching/learning process with various modes of delivery and online registration process, they may be able to meet the needs of distance learners, and indeed they should add a great value to their quality of education and they should be definitely competent in the world. Similarly, if RVUC and SMUC provide adequate modules, students should be timely benefited and engaged in an increased quality of teaching learning process of distance education.

The finding of the investigation showed that assessment and evaluation systems were made by non-tutors. Students of both groups were getting less satisfaction to restricted assessment component [assignment (30%) and final examination (70%)] which contradicts with the fundamental choice of formative and summative assessments. These kinds of assessments are pedagogically not supported to bring the expected quality of education. In doing the assignment, the result of the mean score shows students of two groups were not focused on practicing independently. Besides, the evaluation of all students of both groups was done by non-tutors of the main campus. Furthermore, all respondents of JU replied that they did not know their marks before they received their grades. On the other hand, if assessment policy which supports the intended learning out comes is set by Ministry of Education, the students may get necessary satisfaction and they will become well educated, productive and competing people in the country. Hence, using the strategy that tutorial session, assessment and evaluation system made by subject matter instructor, and caring proper evaluation through different approaches of assessment techniques would greatly improve the quality of teaching learning process of both groups. This is because if both formative and summative assessments carried by the subject matter instructor, it will be able to measure the attainment of knowledge and skills at specific points of the program so as to enhance the quality of distance education program.

In general, since Ethiopia has been moved to the industrial zone, the quality of distance learning requires careful attention to learning design, effective faculty learning, organizational commitment to adequate program support, selection of appropriate delivery of technology, and focus on students learning outcome. Definitely the country needs well trained manpower in the fields of distance education program. Thus, instead of using off and on systems in systematic evaluation and guidance systems being performed by Ministry of Education in the input and process aspects of distance learning program (e.g., preparation, delivery and assessment of learning experience etc.) progressively, the quality of distance education in Ethiopia will effectively be improved to the expected status.

Since the study primarily depended on self-reported respondents of the respondents, the quality status of the modules of both groups can be further investigated by applying text analysis as a research type.

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Editor's Note: This paper clarifies the definition of collocation and explains its importance in language learning. In this study, learning is enhanced when students control the time for learning using email instead of in-class learning. This information has special value in areas such as Applied Linguistics, especially in Teaching English as a Foreign/Second Language, Instructional Technology and CALL.

Collocation learning through CALL: Comparing in-class and out-of-class instructions

Farzaneh Solgi and Dara Tafazoli
Iran

Abstract

Knowing collocations is one of the most important parts of knowing a word. It seems that using collocations is evidence of native-like speaking and writing which leads to fluency in language use. Knowing collocations also reduces learners' difficulty while reading and listening. Using out-of-class instructions such as email may improve the collocation knowledge of learners. This study tries to compare the effect of in-class paper-and-pencil instruction with the out-of-class e-mail instruction in promoting English collocations of intermediate students at Alzahra University in Iran. The obtained results revealed that out-of-class email instruction is a more effective tool than in-class paper-and-pencil instruction in improving intermediate students' collocation knowledge both in short and long term.

Keywords: Collocation, in-class paper-and-pencil instruction, out-of-class e-mail instruction,

Introduction

Richards and Renandya (2002) consider vocabulary knowledge as an important component of language proficiency. They claim that without a vast repertoire of vocabulary including collocations, second language learners cannot often achieve their complete potential. Carter (2001) states that "knowing a word involves knowing its spoken and written contexts of use; its patterns with words of related meaning as well as with its collocation patterns; its syntactic pragmatic and discourse patterns" (p. 43). In the words of Shokouhi and Mirsalari (2010) collocation is "an expression consisting of two or more words that correspond to some conventional way of saying things" (p. 2). Many learners are interested in learning collocations because as Shin and Nation (2007) state, "it helps learners to develop their fluency as a native-like selector" (p. 2). Fahim and Vaezi (2011) note that lack of collocation knowledge makes learners sound odd and not competent in using language.

In Iran, where English is a foreign and not a second language, the English language classrooms may be almost the only place of learning and practicing English, particularly learning English vocabulary. However, most of the time, due to the limited time in classes teachers do not have sufficient time to thoroughly cover and practice all dimensions of vocabulary learning, including collocations (Derakhshan and Khodabakhshzadeh, 2011). The rapid development of technology has created new opportunities to enhance the efficiency and quality of education in general, and language learning in particular. Among many forms of e-learning, learning through using email is a concept in education that has not been used so much in teaching and learning collocations. It's estimated that there are more than 1 billion email users in the world (Mark, 1995). So how to make good use of e-mail in college English teaching has become one of the heated topics

The significance of this study can be justified on the grounds that the importance of collocations, one of the challenging aspects of vocabulary learning, in achieving communicative competence and general language proficiency, has been widely acknowledged (e.g. Guenette, 2007; Lewis,

2001; Nesselhauf, 2003; Noonan & Duncan, 2005; Truscott, 2007). Also the explosion of interest in using computers' tools such as email for language teaching and learning motivated the researcher to compare collocation learning through in-class paper-and-pencil instruction and using email as an out-of-class instruction.

Review of the literature

One of the most difficult parts of vocabulary learning is learning collocations. A major type of lexical error found in EFL learners' speaking and writing is related to their collocation knowledge (Jing, 2008). Zinkgraf (2008) believes that collocations are one of the most difficult aspects of foreign and second language to acquire. There is no general consensus among linguists on what a collocation is, and different definitions have been proposed for the notion of collocation. Lewis (1997) defines collocation as "the readily observable phenomenon whereby certain words co-occur in natural text with greater than random frequency" (p. 8). Lewis (2000) has provided a pedagogical and practical view of collocation which is adopted from the point of view of learners. He suggested that collocations are groups of words which "students will not expect to find together" (p. 29). In the words of Shokouhi and Mirsalari (2010) collocation is "an expression consisting of two or more words that correspond to some conventional way of saying things" (p. 2). Hill (1999) claims "students with good ideas often lose marks because they don't know the four or five most important collocates of a key word that is central to what they are writing about" (p. 5). Hyland (2008) points to multi-word expressions as a major component of fluent linguistic production and a key factor in second language learning.

Benson et al. (1986) categorized collocations into two major groups: Lexical collocations and grammatical collocations. Lexical collocations do not contain preposition, infinitive or relative clauses but consist of various combinations of nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs. Grammatical collocations consist of the main word (a noun, an adjective, a verb) with preposition.

However, the present study aims to focus solely on lexical collocations. One main reason is that grammatical collocations are "more deterministic and more often found in dictionaries" while lexical collocations are "more problematic" for L2 learners and also "more difficult to find in dictionaries" (Čeh, 2005). Besides, the number of grammatical collocates is always limited while lexical collocates would seem impossible to be listed. Wei (1999) supports this view, arguing that lexical collocations encompass a wide range of data.

Technology-enhanced instruction and the integration of new technologies into foreign language curricula have become a growing and significant component of foreign language instruction. Much research has been carried out to describe the impact of these new technologies on students' foreign language development. Therefore, collocation learning, like other parts of language, in relation to CALL tools has been under-researched by different researchers.

Ferraro et al. (2011) presented their work in which they developed algorithms that did better in that they used the sentential context of the erroneous collocation to suggest a correction and in which they assessed how crucial the use of Lexical Functions in the sense of the Explanatory Combinatorial Lexicology was in the context of MUST as a CALL tool. Çelik (2011) conducted research to investigate the effects of data-driven learning on EFL learners' achievement and retention of lexical collocation competence through MOODLE (a learning management system) comparing to dictionary use. Tsao et al. (2009) proposed an error-driven incidental language learning framework and a movie player which was created within such a framework. This movie player was designed to offer users a chance in learning the correct usage of collocations which they previously produced erroneously, i.e., mis-collocations. Pirmoradian and Tabatabaei (2012) examined the effect of applying Collins Collocation Dictionary as a concordance tool on learning lexical collocations of Iranian EFL university students.

As Warschauer and Healey (1998) said, communication through the Internet can be either synchronous (with all users logged on and chatting at the same time) or asynchronous (with a delayed message system such as electronic mail).

Asynchronous communication is carried out most frequently via email; other tools include bulletin boards, newsgroups, and web-based conferencing systems. Email is most direct in that messages go directly to individual mailboxes. The other systems, which require persons to log-on to sites to read messages, lack the convenience of email; they do, however, allow messages to be threaded, thus facilitating more easy access to particular parts of long, complex discussions among many people (Warschauer and Healey, 1998).

From among all CALL tools, email, because of its special advantages, has been used by many researchers for teaching different language skills. As Wang (2010) said, email can send large amount of information easily and conveniently and can provide a real and natural environment for the students to study English. It can improve students' ability to independently learn. Many students who might hesitate to ask questions in person are much more forthright via email (Mark, 1995).

Teachers at all levels, from primary to tertiary, have used long-distance email exchanges to give students greater opportunities for authentic communication (either with native speakers or with other learners of the language) and for carrying out collaborative projects, such as comparisons of film and literature (Soh & Soon, 1991), compilations of folklore (Gaer, 1995), business simulations (Feldman, 1995), and survey-based research (Kendall, 1995). Tella (1992) followed several Finnish high school classes as they carried out exchanges, within classrooms, through email in England. He found that, compared to the ordinary English classes in Finland, these classes became much more learner-centered, with learners' time and effort devoted to authentic reading and writing tasks related to the authentic communication with partners in England. Warschauer (1997) looked at the use of email between a teacher and her students in a graduate ESL writing class; he found that email was a powerful medium for apprenticeship learning, with the teacher able to provide students with detailed and rapid feedback on the immediate problems and questions that they had. Also a study by Wang (1993) compared dialogue journals written with paper-and-pencil (by one group of ESL students) and transmitted over email (by a second group). She found that the email group communicated more frequently, asked more questions, responded to more questions, and used a greater variety of language functions than did the paper-and-pencil group. Mark (1995) conducted a study on the informal working time via email and the result showed that his students not only consulted him more often, they also became more open and better at communication. Wang (2010) did a similar experiment in the class he taught in 2004. In the last semester, he asked his students to hand in their English composition via email instead of the traditional exercise book. He made it clear that they should draft and edit their composition with an Office Word processing tool. The result was that the quality of the composition turned in via email was greatly improved.

Due to the fact that on one hand, according to Nesselhauf (2003), teaching collocations as well as learners' difficulties with collocations have not been investigated in detail by EFL practitioners so far, and on the other hand, email has not been used as a tool for teaching collocation yet, this research has tried to compare the effect of teaching collocation through in-class paper-and-pencil instruction and out-of-class email instruction on intermediate Iranian EFL learners' short and long term retention.

Research question

The present study aims to investigate the effectiveness of teaching collocations via email in comparison with paper-and-pencil instruction. The following research questions will be addressed in this study:

- Is there any significant difference in the collocation learning between the participants who receive in-class paper-and-pencil instruction and those who receive out-of-class email instruction?
- Is there any significant difference between learners who receive in class paper-and-pencil instruction and those who receive out-of-class email instruction in their long-term retention of collocations?

Methodology

Participants

The Participants of the present study were initially 80 students at Alzahra University, Iran. Participants were female students, ranging in age from 18-24. They were undergraduate students from different majors, with the exception of English majors. Thus, their educational background was not the same. So, in order to homogenize them, all participants were given a Preliminary English Test (*PET*). Students with very high and low proficiency level were eliminated from the study. As a result, 60 students remained, who constituted the participants of this study and were randomly assigned to two groups of in-class paper-and-pencil instruction and out-of-class email instruction.

Instruments

For homogeneity of learners and dividing them into two groups of intermediate language proficiency level, a PET test (2010) was conducted. To see whether or not the students had any prior knowledge of the 60 collocations selected from *Oxford Collocations Dictionary*, a teacher-made pre-test was used. It was in fill-in-the blanks format. The results revealed that 48 collocations were not familiar to students. After conducting the treatment, both groups were given a post-test including a collocation test made up of 20 collocations randomly selected from those taught during the treatment, to check their short-term retention (See Appendix). The test content was validated by a TEFL specialist. For measuring the effect of passing time on retention of the collocation items, the same above mentioned test (as a delayed post-test) was used two weeks (Mackey & Gass, 2005) later.

Procedure

First of all, the reading, writing and listening parts of a PET test (2010) were administered. Then 60 out of 80 learners were selected based on the results of the PET test: 60 learners whose scores were between one standard deviation above and below the mean were classified as intermediate language proficient, and the other twenty learners whose scores were one standard deviation above or below the mean were classified as high and low language proficient. Thus 20 participants were excluded from the test. Then the intermediate learners were randomly assigned into two groups in which they were supposed to learn target collocation through two different ways of in-class paper-and-pencil instruction and out-of-class email instruction. All of the participants took the pre-test including 60 collocations selected from *Oxford Collocations Dictionary*. The Persian (native language of learners) meaning of these collocations were given to the learners and they were asked to write their English collocations in the sentences given. At the end of this test, 48 collocations were not known by either group. Both groups participated in speaking classes and some conversational points, in addition to the collocations of treatment were taught to them to improve their speaking and provide a better situation for motivating them to

participate in the class. In in-class paper-and-pencil instruction group the target collocations were taught in six sessions; each time 8 new collocations were introduced based on Gairns and Redman's (2006) suggestion for presenting 8 new items each time. The collocations were taught to them through English and Persian definitions and example sentences. They were supposed to make sentences with these collocations and deliver them to the teacher in the next session. The participants in the out-of-class email instruction group received each collocation through a picture followed by English and Persian definitions and example sentences through email. These emails were sent to them after each class session. In total, 48 messages were sent during six sessions of treatment. Students were supposed to study these emails, and then they had to make sentences with these collocations and send them back to the teacher. Two days after receiving the treatment, a test, made up of 20 fill-in-the-blank sentences, was administered to both groups as the immediate post-test. The Persian meaning of the collocations needed for completing sentences were provided in parenthesis. In scoring phase each correct answer had one point. After two weeks (Mackey & Gass, 2005), the same test was administered again as a delayed post-test to check the retention of the target collocations (See Appendix).

Results

The normality of distribution of the scores of PET test was checked through one K-S test. The results demonstrated that scores of PET had a normal distribution ($Z = .943$, $p = .531$). The descriptive statistics of two types of in-class and out-of-class instructions in the post-test are provided in Table 1.

Table 1
Descriptive statistics of in-class and out-of-class instruction in post-test

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Post-test, in-class instruction	30	20.28	3.100	15	26
Post-test, out-of-class instruction	30	24.33	2.748	19	29
Valid N (list-wise)	30				

Comparing post-tests of both groups, it was found that the mean of in-class instruction group was 20.28, and that the out-of-class email instruction group was 24.33, which shows the difference. To check the degree of this difference, an independent samples t-test was used.

Table 2
Independent samples test of in-class and out-of-class instruction in post-test

		t-test for Equality of Means						
		T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
							Lower	Upper
Post-test	Equal variances assumed	8.564	57	.000	4.050	.723	-7.783	-4.546
	Equal variances not assumed	8.564	56.213	.000	4.050	.723	-7.313	-4.546

The results of Table 2 indicated that the mean difference between in-class and out-of-class instruction groups was significant ($t_{58} = 8.564$, $p < .05$). There is, in fact, a mean difference of 4.050 points between the means of the two groups. It shows that out-of-class instruction group outperformed in-class instruction one in the post-test.

For answering the second research question, the descriptive statistics of in-class and out-of-class instruction groups in delayed post-test is provided in Table 3.

Table 3
Descriptive statistics of in- & out-of-class instruction groups in delayed post-test

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Delayed post-test, in-class instruction	30	18.24	2.024	14	22
Delayed post-test, out-of-class instruction	30	22.63	3.146	15	28
Valid N (list-wise)	30				

Based on Table 3, the mean of in-class instruction group in delayed post-test was 18.24, and that the out-of-class instruction one was 22.68, which shows the difference of means between the two groups. For comparing the degree of these scores' difference, an independent samples t-test was conducted.

Table 4
Independent samples test of in-class and out-of-class instruction groups in delayed post-test

		t-test for Equality of Means						
		T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
							Lower	Upper
Delayed post-test	Equal variances assumed	7.213	57	.000	4.390	.587	-5.725	-2.780
	Equal variances not assumed	7.213	48.867	.000	4.390	.587	-5.764	-2.985

The results of the t-test shows statistically significant differences ($t_{58} = 7.213$, $p < 0.05$) between in-class and out-of-class instruction groups with regard to the delayed post-test scores. It means that out-of-class instruction group had a better performance than in-class instruction one.

Discussion

As it was shown in the review of the previous literature, on one hand all studies have been done on the improvement of collocation knowledge through other CALL tools except email, and on the other hand email has been used for improving other skills except collocation knowledge. So, as there has not been any exactly similar study done before, in the discussion part the results of the studies which are related to this study from one or another aspect are investigated.

Some of the findings of this study are similar to those of previous ones (Çelik, 2011; Ferraro et al., 2011; Pirmoradian and Tabatabaei, 2012; Tsao et al., 2009) in that they, like the present study, put emphasis on improving learners' knowledge of collocations for communicating easily and fluently. But the main difference of the present study with the above mentioned studies is that they emphasized improving learners' knowledge of collocations using various technological tools other than using email. For example, in the study conducted by Ferraro et al. (2011) they assessed the use of Lexical Functions in the sense of the Explanatory Combinatorial Lexicology in the context of MUST as a CALL tool and found how effective CALL was in improving collocation knowledge.

The findings of the study revealed that teaching new collocations through out-of-class email instruction as a CALL tool resulted in better learning than in-class paper-and-pencil ones. This result is in line with that of Tsao et al. (2009) who investigated the role of movie player, as a CALL tool, on improving collocational learning of the learners. They found it beneficial. Also, this result is in line with that of Pirmoradian and Tabatabaei (2012) who found that applying Collins Collocation Dictionary as a concordance tool was useful for learning lexical collocations of students. It confirmed the results of Feldman, 1995; Gaer, 1995; Kendall, 1995; Mark, 1995; Soh & Soon, 1991; Tella, 1992; Wang, 2010; Warschauer, 1997. In their studies the learners who benefited from email instruction had improvement.

Another finding of this study was that learners of both groups in post-test had a better performance than in delayed post-test. This amount of forgetting was in line with Baddeley (1990, cited in Schmitt, 2008) who stated forgetting occurs within a short time after the learning phase. Schmitt (2008) has also emphasized that learning is a cyclical process in which more involvement with new items would lead to better mastery of them. Moreover, he has pointed out that partially learned items would probably be forgotten if the learner failed to fix them in the mind by deliberate repeated exposure and principled recycling. Therefore, the finding that the scores were decreased in delayed post-test was because of natural forgetting that resulted from not recycling the collocations during the interval between the two tests. The results of this research question also confirmed Schmitt et al.'s (2001) statement that ignoring recycling would cause forgetting many partially-known items and wasting all the efforts already put into learning them.

Compared with all of the above mentioned studies, this study was the first research which investigated the effect of out-of-class email instruction on collocation learning of the intermediate learners in comparison with in-class paper-and-pencil instruction both in short term and long term.

Conclusion

The research findings indicated that out-of-class email instruction, in comparison with in-class paper-and-pencil instruction, contributed considerably to the improvement of students' collocation knowledge both short and long term.

As in-class paper-and-pencil instruction is believed to be the major and vital component of the classroom events in EFL context and is favored by most Iranian students, the outcome of this study does not devalue it, but suggests its importance and value more when it comes in the form of out-of-class email instruction along with students' contribution. Therefore, it is fruitful to design additional classroom activities in which students engage themselves in the process of out-of-class e-mail instruction.

Undoubtedly, the biggest change brought about by online education is that the cooperation between teachers and students is strengthened more and more (Greg, 2000). We can draw a conclusion from the above analysis that students' initiatives and interests will be greatly aroused

if the teachers make good use of email in the English teaching. But we have to acknowledge that nothing can take the place of teacher in the teaching activities. Teachers should catch up with the development of the technology by acquiring the modern teaching methods so that they can help the students benefit as much as possible from the use of e-mail.

The findings of the present study can have implications for textbooks and syllabus designers. By knowing the benefits of out-of-class email instruction in learning and teaching collocations, textbooks and syllabus designers can prepare textbooks and exercises in which teachers can provide out-of-class email instruction for students.

The paper has also presented an important issue; the role of technology in bringing a more systematic technique to collocation instruction and learning. As Sökmen (1997) mentions, in the following years we will get more help from technology in developing and implementing more ways of explicit vocabulary practice. We will then need to train both teachers and learners so as to enable them to take a more principled and systematic approach to vocabulary and collocation instruction and learning.

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Appendix

Post-test and delayed post-test

Write the correct collocations.

- I've got to **do the laundry** this afternoon. (لباس شستن)
- It was such a **heavy rain** that we couldn't go out. (باران سنگین)
- Children have **a bunch of fun** in this place. (یک عالمه شادی)
- This is the issue that made them **argue heatedly**. (بحث داغ کردن)
- She has anxiety and cannot **hold a conversation**. (گفتگو کردن)
- This is the final step. Try not to **make a mistake**. (اشتباه کردن)
- He showed his indifference by **shrugging his shoulders**. (شانه بالا انداختن)
- There was a **rancid butter** in the refrigerator. (کره مانده)
- This morning I oiled my **bicycle chain**. (زنجیر چرخ)
- Driving in the wrong road, we found out that we needed a **change of direction**. (تغییر مسیر)
- Why doesn't she **get a divorce**? (طلاق گرفتن)
- The police detector is **collecting evidence** about the murder. (مدرک جمع کردن)
- There is a small **food market** in our neighborhood. (فروشگاه مواد غذایی)
- I think using artificial cosmetics puts one's **natural beauty** in danger. (زیبایی طبیعی)
- We must open our minds to **positive recommendation**. (پیشنهاد مثبت)
- After a hard day using a **warm bath** looks necessary. (حمام گرم)
- After the last round the fat man **admitted defeat**. (به شکست اعتراف کردن)
- Yesterday I **made a demand** from the professor to re-check my exam. (تقاضا کردن)
- The workers of the factory **raised an objection** about low wage. (اعتراض کردن)
- They were both **falling sound asleep** in their room. (در خواب عمیق فرو رفتن)

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Editor's Note. According to B. F. Skinner, stimulus-response-reward is a basic learning model. In most animal training you begin with tangible rewards which transition to more symbolic rewards. In human learning, compliments and how they are used play an important role in motivation and in reinforcement of desired behaviors or learning. This online learning study adds to an extensive bibliography of research on compliments in learning and teaching English language.

Compliment Speech Act in an Online Learning Environment

Mahboubeh Taghizadeh and Maryam Najj
Iran

Abstract

This study aims at investigating how compliments are manifested in an online English language class. A corpus of three online undergraduate classes at the Iran University of Science and Technology was analyzed. With ninety students enrolled in the online General English course, studying Information Technology and Industrial Engineering. In this study, some examples were reported for (a) Compliments on the performance and knowledge of the teachers, (b) Students' compliments on classmates' performance, (c) Compliments on issues other than the subject of the study, (d) Compliments returned by teachers to the students, (e) Strategies used for complimenting. The findings of the study revealed that a) In GE classes, students showed a greater tendency to compliment the performance and knowledge of the teachers; (b) Girls paid more compliments than boys; (c) Due to the individual characteristics and some other factors, some students gave more compliments than others; (d) Teachers did not pay any compliments in response to students' compliments when they found them flattering; (e) Boys use tools such as repetition of the alphabet, bold writing, and capitalization more often than girls in giving compliments, while girls prefer using emotions and effects; (f) Male students use more humor in their compliments than their female counterparts; (g) In terms of praise or flattery, it was revealed that male students tended to praise their female teachers' voice, fluency of speaking, ability to teach, etc. more so than female students.

Keywords: compliment speech act, compliment response speech act, computer-mediated interaction, online learning environment

Introduction

In any language learning environment, as Montazeri and Allami (2012) state, successful interaction between the instructor and the student is a predominant objective. With the integration of technology to most of the fields of education, online learning has become a growing trend among students. In recent years, researchers (e.g., Clark & Kwinn, 2007; O'Neil, 2005, 2008; Reiser & Dempsey, 2012) have attempted to find some ways to improve the effectiveness of this method of instruction.

For those who prefer online learning and are involved in this learning environment, an important issue is to know how to communicate and make themselves understood, since in contrast with traditional classes, in online classes there is no face-to-face interaction between the instructor and the students, and this may sometimes make students experience "lack of social connection" with the instructor and other students (Sung & Mayer, 2012, p.1738).

To overcome this problem and problems alike, Sung and Mayer (2012) suggest that online learners have to be provided with resources to enrich their learning experience and flexibility, while strengthening them in sustaining interaction with others.

Given the contextual conditions of computer-mediated interactions which are different from those in the face-to-face interactions, one important issue is to investigate how participants in online classes perform and respond to online compliments (Arevalo, 2013). A compliment speech act, as Hobbs (2003) suggests, is an expression which positively or negatively gives value to the addressee because of his/her characteristics, possession, or some skills which are positively valued by both parties. Researchers have shown interest in investigating Compliment Speech Act (CSA) in educational settings in order to analyze how instructors and students interact in online classes, and further to critically observe them in terms of formality, intimacy, effectiveness, and so on.

Given the literature on pragmatics, complimenting is one of the well-studied speech acts (e.g., Allami & Montazeri, 2012; Arevalo, 2013; Cheng, 2012; Jucker, 2009; Farghal & Al-Khatib, 2001; Lin, Woodfield, & Ren, 2012; Miller, 2011; Mustafa, 2011; Tang & Zhang, 2009). A number of studies have been carried out investigating the CSA in face-to-face classrooms (e.g., Byon, 2004; Farghal & Al-Khatob, 2001; Ghobadi & Fahim, 2009; Golato et al., 2008; Huth, 2006; Lorenzo-Dus, 2001). However, very few studies (Goertzen & Kristjansson, 2007; Sung & Mayer, 2012; Taghizadeh & Mahjourian, 2012) have focused on Compliment and Compliment Response (C-CR) speech act in online classes. Therefore, more studies need to be carried out investigating the CSA in the online learning context. This study thus aims to investigate how Compliment Speech Act has appeared in the instructors and students' utterances in the online English language classes at the Iran University of Science and Technology.

Review of the related literature

Compliments

As Hobbs (2003) defines, a compliment is a positively evaluated speech act, which donates credit to the addressee for some reasons such as possession, beauty, ability and characteristic. Similarly, Mustapha (2011) asserts that compliments are “speech acts or performative utterances that perform certain social actions and that these actions leave conventional effects when issued in appropriate consequences” (p.1336). Holmes (1988) notes that for an utterance to be considered as a compliment, it must be valued positively by both the speaker and the addressee. Downes (1988) also states that compliments are supportive actions related to offers, gifts, and congratulations, which imply an acceptance or rejection on behalf of the pair part. As Schegloff and Sacks (1973) suggest, C-CR speech act is “an adjacency pair operation” (p.296) or is an “action chain event” (Pomerantz, 1978, p. 109). Apart from having other communicative goals, compliments are also generally viewed as means of unity within the expression and acknowledgement of admiration (Herbert, 1989; Wolfson, 1983).

There are also different points of view about C-CRs' function and use. According to Holmes (1988), the most obvious function is to “oil the social wheels” (p. 462) and to boost unity between the speaker and the addressee. Compliments can be used to show disapproval or sarcasm (Jaworski, 1995) as well as to congratulate or to possibly request the addressee (Herbert, 1991). Pomerantz (1978) effectively suggests a three-fold system for compliments: (a) accept/reject compliment; (b) agree/disagree with compliment assertion; and (c) self-praise avoidance.

To date, a number of taxonomies on various types of C-CRs have been suggested by different scholars (e.g., Boori, 1994; Chiang & Pochtrager, 1993; Herbert, 1968; Holmes, 1988, 1993; Yu, 2003). For instance, Herbert (1986) suggests three categories: (a) agreement, (b) non-agreement, and (c) other interpretations, each of which has several sub-types of reasons. Agreement includes appreciation token, comment acceptance, praise upgrade, comment history, reassignment, and return. Non-agreement contains scale down, question, disagreement, qualification, and no acknowledgement. Request interpretation is the only subcategory offered for the other interpretations.

According to Holmes (1986, 1993), CR strategies consist of accept, reject, and evade categories. However, considering ability, appearance, and the possession of speaker and hearer, Chiang and Pochtrager (1993) suggest that CRs include acceptance, positive elaboration, neutral elaboration, negative elaboration, and denial groupings. Yu (2003) also adds three more categories to Holmes' (1988, 1993) taxonomy and classified CRs into six subtypes: acceptance strategies, amendment strategies, non-acceptance strategies, face relationship related response strategies, combination strategies, and no acknowledgement.

Boori (1994) classifies Persian CRs into the following 18 types: (a) Appreciation token, (b) Appreciation token plus a politeness formula, (c) Appreciation token plus comment/reassignment, (d) Non-verbal acceptance, (e) Comment acceptance, (f) Comment, (g) Offering, (h) Praise upgrade, (i) Comment history, (j) Reassignment, (k) Return, (l) Entreaty, (m) Scale down, (n) Question, (o) Disagreement (p) Qualification (q) No acknowledgment, and (r) Request interpretation.

Studies on compliment speech act in Iranian context

Some researchers have analyzed CSA in an Iranian educational context (e.g., Allami & Montazeri, 2012; Taghizadeh & Mahjourian, 2012; Razi, 2013). However, only Taghizadeh and Mahjourian (2012) investigated C-CRs in virtual classrooms. For instance, Allami and Montazeri investigated Iranian EFL learners' compliment responses, taking learners' age, gender, and educational background into consideration. A quasi-TOEFL test was administered to 40 students, and they were divided into low, intermediate, and high proficiency levels. A discourse completion task and a questionnaire were also used to elicit the compliment responses. Results showed that C-CRs were classified in terms of six major classes: (a) Acceptance: Appreciation token and comment acceptance; (b) Positive elaboration: Politeness formula, Comment, Offering, Praise upgrade, Comment history, Return, and Entreaty; (c) Neutral elaboration: Question, Reassignment; (d) Denial: Disagreement; (e) Smiling (laughing): No verbal acceptance/smiling; (f) No response: No acknowledgement. The results of the study also demonstrated that appreciation token and comment acceptance at the micro-level and acceptance and positive elaboration at the macro-level were the most highly used strategies. In addition, among three groups of participants, intermediate learners were the most self-confident in using the C-CRs.

In another study, Taghizadeh and Mahjourian (2012) examined how the use of CDA as a research tool can be employed to examine politeness in a virtual educational context. They used frameworks suggested by Fairclough (1992, 1993, 1995), Fowler (1996), Brown and Levinson (1987), Leech (1983), and Grice (1975) in their study. An interpretivist qualitative approach was used focusing on the naturally occurring discourse of three virtual classes at the undergraduate level. The C-CRs paid by the participants of the study were critically analyzed based on some politeness strategies suggested by Brown and Levinson (1978). The results of the study revealed that (a) politeness can help participants achieve their instrumental goal and minimize face threats; (b) Approbation and Tact maxims were the most common maxims used by the instructors, while Modesty and Agreement maxims were the most common maxims among the virtual students.

Recently, Razi (2013) analyzed CRs among Australian English and Iranian Persian speakers through DCTs, which consist of four situational settings (i.e., appearance, character, ability, and position) as well as using a framework proposed by Chen-Hsin Tang and Grace Qiao Zhang (2009). Holmes' (1988, 1993) taxonomy of CRs was also used for a contrastive analysis between Persian and Australian speakers. The results showed that both Iranians and Australians used CRs evade and reject strategies at macro-level. In addition, Iranians used accept strategy less than their Australian counterparts. At micro-level, four strategies were found: (a) CRs for appearance, (b) CRs for character, (c) CRs for ability, and (d) CRs for possession.

Studies on compliment responses in other contexts

A number of studies have been conducted on CRs in contexts other than in Iran (e.g., Arevalo, 2013; Byon, 2004; Cheng, 2011; Chen & Yang, 2010; Dus, 2001; Farghal & Al-Khatib, 2001; Goertzen & Kristjansson, 2007; Golato et al., 2008; Huth, 2006; Jucker, 2009; Lin, Woodfield & Ren, 2012; Miaz- Sifianou, 2013; Mustapha, 2011; Sakirgil & Cubukcu, 2013; Sung & Mayer, 2012; Tang & Zhang, 2009; Wu, 2011; Yuan, 2001). In an exploratory case study, Goertzen and Kristjansson (2007) investigated the amount of social presence in the online learning participant's context through systematic functional linguistics. Participants were MA TESOL students whose interactions with each other and with their instructor were carefully analyzed. The findings revealed that the social presence of the participants in an online educational environment is far more than a usual chat, and that it is mostly because of the interpersonal engagements among participants.

Employing naturalistic role-plays and retrospective interviews for obtaining samples of C-CRs, Cheng (2011) explored Chinese ESL/EFL speakers' CRs as well as CRs produced by American native speakers. Results of the study showed that acceptance was the most frequent CR; however, among the CRs for ability/work at micro-levels, appreciation was the most frequent one. The results of retrospective interviews also showed that culture and the limited L2 linguistic forms influenced the ESL participants' CRs.

Sung and Mayer (2012) examined the amount of social presence in an online learning environment. The participants were 612 undergraduate students at two online universities in South Korea. The researchers reported social respect, social sharing, open mind, social identity, and intimacy as the five facts of social presence in the online distance education.

Very recently, Arevalo (2013) analyzed the computer-mediated C-CRs in a social network versus face-to-face context. A close analysis of 137 conversational exchanges, 1004 conversational returns, and 177 compliments in an online context within a Netnography methodology was done. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted. It was suggested that factors such as disembodiment, asynchronicity or relative lack of privacy have a crucial impact on how online users respond to compliments.

Methods

An interpretivist qualitative approach was employed in this study for both data collection and data processing. In other words, the naturally occurring discourse of four online undergraduate English language classes at the Iran University of Science and Technology was analyzed with the goal of describing how compliment speech act was performed in this online setting.

Site and participants

In order to explore how politeness is manifested in this virtual learning environment, a corpus of three online undergraduate classes at Iran University of Science and Technology was analyzed. Ninety students enrolled in the online General English course, which was a compulsory subject offering fourteen session of instruction during a semester. The participants' majors were Information Technology and Industrial Engineering, and their textbook was General English for Engineering Students.

Data sources and procedure

The researchers could have access to the written discourse of the participants' postings and the recordings of the three virtual classes occurred during winter 2010. The researchers transcribed the participants' talk for further and detailed analysis. In other words, content analysis of the students' and instructors' postings and utterances was done to investigate how participants in this virtual learning environment manifest CSA in their interactions.

Results and discussion

After analyzing C-CRs uttered by the instructors and students in the online English language classes in the Iran University of Science and Technology, the following results could be suggested.

Compliment on the performance and knowledge of the teachers

(1) خداييا گهيهاستاد با معرفتتو اينمركز باشه شمائي

(Male student to teacher): I can swear you are the wisest teacher in this faculty.

(2) استاد ما با صدايش ما هيچوقت نميخوابيم

(2) (Female student to teacher): We never fall asleep with your voice.

(3) هر چي شما بگي تشنگه

(3) (Male student to teacher): Whatever you say is beautiful.

In the online educational environment of the present study, the instructors and the students shared the same L1 in most cases. In this paper, the subject of the study was General English and both the students and teachers were supposed to speak English. However, it was observed that this was not the case in all occasions. Instructors mostly teach English language using Grammar Translation methods. Students also used their L1 to take part in the process of learning although the subject matter was English. In addition, the students tended to use English alphabet to write their L1 sentences, questions, and compliments. The instructors, on the other hand, were not as strict with the students as are their counterparts in the face-to-face classrooms. It is suggested that the points stated above are used in order to make online learning easier and less boring.

Students' compliments on classmates' performance

(4) ماشاءالله همي حواسها جمعه

(4) (Male student to his classmates): Thank God everybody is careful!
(About what is going on with the lesson).

(5) بعضيها خيلي سر يعجبوا ب ميدن! خيالي فعاله هستنند، بيشمطالعه ميکنند

(5) (Male student to his female classmate): Some students answer very quickly! They are so active, they have a pre-study!

It is evident that the students are trying to be polite by offering various compliment statements; however, sometimes to avoid boredom or to change the atmosphere of teaching, students pick up strategies such as exaggeration in teachers' positive way of teaching or his/her native-like accent. In the cases noted above, the teacher didn't respond to any of them probably because she considered them as flatterers. She may well have thought it is better not to deviate from the aim of the class, which is learning and teaching. Also, some compliments returned by a male student to his female teacher might be viewed as flattery by the teacher and this can be the reason why the teacher did not pay any compliments in return.

Students return a number of compliments to each other with various topics. They even answer instead of their teacher and their wordings are very friendly. As indicated in the examples, students in virtual classes are not only aware of their teachers' performance, but also attentive to

their fellow classmates' activities. They are actively involved in the process of the class and easily compliment on how ready other students are in answering other subject related questions. It is interesting to note that male students are more attentive to their female classmates' activities and tend to compliment on their performance more than they do for their male classmates. This action might be considered unusual in face-to-face classrooms but as can be seen, it happens quite naturally in a virtual learning context. The teacher showed no acknowledgements to this kind of compliment response and kept to her teachings.

Complimenting on issues other than the subject of the study

(6) هو اعاليه فقط جايد وستا خالي

(6) (Male student): The weather is perfect, but we miss our friends who aren't here!

(7) استاد قطع و صل مېشه صدا يقشن گونر و نميشنويم

(7) (Female student): It goes on and off, we can't hear your nice voice.

(8) مجاز يها كلا" باسواد ترند

(8) (Male student): Students of virtual classes are generally more knowledgeable.

In virtual classrooms, there is no visual tool for them to see and compliment on. This is while students in face-to-face classes have plenty of subjects to pay compliments to. This might sometimes be the reason for why students in virtual classes get away from the subject of the study, and compliment on other things in order to refresh their minds or in some occasions, waste time in class.

Compliments returned by teachers to the students

استاد از ظهر سر کلا سی

(9) - م

(9) (Female student to teacher): We have been in the class since noon.

(Teacher to student): More power to you my hard working student.

(10) (Teacher to student): I know you are so quiet and ACTIVE students.

Instructors in face-to-face classes might be less eager to reply to all of the compliments uttered by students. However, the analysis of the teachers' compliment in virtual classes showed an opposing result. Here, the teachers are willing to compliment their students' performances for many reasons. By using strategies such as agreeing or appreciating for compliments, instructors may want to encourage and support what their students have done in order to get better results in the process of online teaching and learning.

Strategies used for complimenting

In face to face interactions, factors such as body language, increasing or decreasing the voice, facial expressions, etc. can help participants make themselves understood better. It is evident that such factors are absent in virtual communication environments. Therefore, in order to have appropriate interactions and easy understanding of topics raised, some strategies such as use of

emoticons, appreciation token, use of mixed languages, bold writing, repetition of the alphabet, and capitalization are used. Below some examples are presented for these strategies.

Use of emoticons

(11) مثالشخیلیباحالبود 😊

(11) (Male student to others): It was an interesting example! 😊

(12) از الان منیها استادم 😊

(12) (Male student to female teacher): From now on, I am a teacher myself! 😊

(13) حالمون گرفته شد نمره ها رو دیدیم 😞

(13) (Female student): We were quite upset when we saw the marks 😞

For the students to express their feelings more effectively and for the addressees' better understanding of what is going on, it was of great help to use such tools as well. In face-to-face learning contexts, it is very easy for students to get themselves understood or have their problems solved by asking others for help. Use of facial expressions such as surprise, boredom, enthusiasm, smile, etc. by students also helps teachers understand the students' level of comprehension of the taught materials. In an internet-mediated course, great number of those aids is lacking and the students are supposed to tackle with their problems through other ways such as emoticons.

It seems that the online students use thanking formulas far more than their counterparts in face-to-face learning environment. It might be due to the fact that in a virtual class, students thank for every single thing that they are provided with, mainly because they lack tools such as facial expression or body language to express their feelings.

Appreciation token

(14) ممنوناستادخیلیجالببود

(14) (Female student to teacher): Thank you teacher it was very good.

(15) مرسیکهگذاشتیداولخودمونحلکنیم. شما استاد دلسوز و توانمندیهستید

(15) (Male student to teacher): Thank you for letting us do the tasks first. You are a very caring and skilled teacher.

Use of mixed languages

استادشما خیلی fluent صحبت میکنید (16)

(16) (Male student to teacher): You speak so fluently, teacher.

انقد سخت همغز آدم stand by همیشه (17)

(17) (Female student to her classmates): It is so difficult that the mind goes blank.

Both instructors and students are sometimes willing to choose an easier way to communicate with others. Sometimes, they choose an English word to compliment on various issues.

Bold writing, repetition of the alphabet, and capitalization

(18) (OSTAD kelas kheili jalebeeeee!)

(18) (Male student to teacher): It is so interesting!

(19) (Vaghti ostademoon shomaeid maloome lezaaaaaaaaaaaaaat mibarim!)

(19) (Male student to teacher): When you are our teacher we definitely enjoy!

(20) (Khaste nistiiiiiiiiim, KHEILI ham aaaaaaliye kelas!)

(20) (Female student): We are not tired. The class is so perfect!

Because students or teachers cannot raise their voice in class, it was seen that in their typings, they tended to repeat some letters or even write some of them in uppercase for more emphasis. In English online classes of this study, students tend to compliment teachers' performance, e.g. their accent, way of teaching, fluency in translation, etc., since they do not have access to any other clues such as teachers' clothing or handwriting. In comparison to boys, girls pay more compliments in general. This might be due to the fact that they want to attract the instructors' attention or even to show that girls are more attentive to what is going on during the lesson. It was also observed that during the process of teaching and learning, some students paid more compliments than their classmates, which can be the result of some individual characteristics (e.g., being sociable), weakness in the lesson, or wasting the time of the class.

Conclusions

This study aimed at investigating how compliments are manifested in an online English language class. In this study some examples were reported for (a) Compliments on the performance and knowledge of the teachers, (b) Students' compliments on classmates' performance, (c) Compliments on issues other than the subject of the study, (d) Compliments returned by teachers to the students, (e) Strategies used for complimenting. The findings of the study revealed that: (a) In GE classes, students showed a greater tendency to compliment on the performance and knowledge of the teachers; (b) Girls gave more compliments than boys; (c) Due to the individual characteristics and some other factors, some students paid more compliments than others; (d)

Teachers did not pay any compliments in response to students' compliments when they found them flattering; (e) Boys use tools such as repetition of the alphabet, bold writing, and capitalization more than girls in paying compliments, while girls prefer using emotions and effects; (f) Male students use more humor in their compliment speech acts than their female counterparts; (g) In terms of praise or flattery, it was revealed that male students tended to praise their female teachers' voice, fluency of speaking, ability to teach, etc. more than female students.

In online classroom environments, due to the lack of some aids such as actual presence, facial expressions, and topic-related face-to-face conversations, it is very important for students to be aware of the ways they compliment their teachers and other classmates. It can be suggested that online teachers, and more importantly, students gain insight into the appropriate use of speech acts so as to have successful interaction in online educational context.

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