The Effect of Authentic Weblearning on Students' Oral Proficiency

تأثير التعلم الإلكتروني المرتكز على الموارد الأصلية على مهارات التواصل

Ladjali Djamila*
University of Mouloud Maamri
Tizi Ouzou / Algeria
Djamilaalgerian@yahoo.com

Keskes Said
University of Med Lamine Debaghine
Setif 02 / Algeria
Keskaid@gmail.com

Abstract:

The modern educational systems and foreign language classes have greatly benefitted from the rapid development of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs). As it is known, the communicative language teaching was consolidated by authenticity centered approach that gave birth to authentic web learning.

This action research study seeks to investigate the effect of an authentic online learning course, via a one group pretest-posttest quasi-experimental design, on students' communicative skills in terms of accuracy, fluency, lexical complexity and syntactic complexity. The research findings show that the sample of the study (N=40) improved their level of oral proficiency and this proved the efficiency of the instructional treatment.

Therefore designing online authentic tasks and materials is a good recommendation for foreign language classes.

Key words: Authenticity, oral proficiency, Web learning.

الملخص:

استفادت الأنظمة التعليمية الحديثة وأقسام اللغة الأجنبية من التطور السريع لتكنولوجيات المعلومات والاتصالات. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، ازدادت الحاجة إلى التواصل، وكان لذلك تأثير على استخدام اللغة

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* *Corresponding author.*

الإنجليزية وتعليمها في العالم. كما هو معروف تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية يتم على أساس منهج التواصل والتحاور وقدتم تجسيده باستعمال المواد الأصلية المتواجدة على شبكة الإنترنت التي جاءت لتعزيز جميع الممارسات التعليمية وتلبية احتياجات المتعلمين للمهارات التواصلية من خلال تقديم مجموعة متنوعة من السياقات لاستخدام اللغة.

تسعى هذه الدراسة البحثية إلى دراسة تأثير دورة التعلم الإلكتروني المرتكز على المواد الأصلية عن طريق المنهج الشبه التجريبي على مهارات التواصل لدى الطلاب. تظهر نتائج البحث أن عينة الدراسة حسنت مستوى كفاءتها من حيث الدقة والفصاحة والتعقيد اللفظي والتركيبي مما يجعل هذه الطريقة البديل الأمثل لأقسام اللغة الأجنبية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المواد الأصلية، الإنترنت، المهارات التواصلية، الدقة، الفصاحة.

1. Introduction

The new digital era and the growing interest for the English language learning represent new challenges as well as new opportunities in both task design and material selection in language learning and testing. The main goal of this study is to investigate the impact of an authentic web instruction on students' oral proficiency.

Thus it explains the concept of authenticity and its relation to authentic online learning and how an authentic web learning course can help EFL learners develop their oral proficiency skills.

1. Authenticity and English language learning

1.1. The meaning of Authenticity

To understand authenticity-centred approach a wide range of explanations are provided for the term authenticity. For Nunan (1999) authentic materials are not produced specifically for language teaching and learning. Gebhard (1996) gives a list of different categories of materials as he refers to short stories, TV and radio advertisements, songs, documentaries as samples of authentic listening viewing materials; photographs as authentic visual materials; newspapers as authentic printed materials and all real objects as Realia. The term *authenticity* for Tatsuki is *Genuiness, realness, truthfulness, validity, reliability undisputed credibility and legitimacy*. Additionally authentic Language is the language (written or spoken) by native speakers for native speakers (Scarcella & Oxford, 1992:98, cited in *Day, 2004)*, it is also called *genuine discourse* (*Day& Bamford*, 1998:54), Gilmore

(2008:69). All in all authenticity criteria are needed while designing online materials.

1.2. Online Authentic Materials for EFL classes :

Many online materials can be included in EFL classes like audio books, poems, fairy tales, folktales, films, proverbs and sayings, songs, riddles, TV commercials, pictures and images as accessible audio and visual materials as a way to teach both language and culture.

With audio books Literature can be presented to EFL learners through short novels to be initiated to literary concepts and genres. Therefore simple versions of literary works can be among the best materials in oral classes (Mishan, 2005).

Poems can also be introduced and students can deal with themes as love, fear, romance, together with their aesthetic aspects as assonance and alliteration and rhythm, can be used in class discussions as they portray historical, social, political, emotional and personal events *(*Mishan, 2005). These unlimited online resources can leave a strong affective impact on every learner at any learning stage.

Folktales as good literary works are also available online. They are slightly different from fairy tales as they belong to the oral local type *of* culture. Fables are one type where animals are used as main characters to teach moral values. On one hand fairy tales include magical aspects, myths (as in the case of sacred tales) (Taylor, 2000, cited in Lwin,2016:3). On the other hand folktales turn around psychological and educational topics like envy, modesty, humility, honesty, intelligence, etc. (Talyor, 2000, cited by Lewin 2016). All these types of resources can suit all levels and abilities and their use can lead to autonomy and lifelong learning.

Fairy tales are other favorable genuine materials in addition to all mystic adventures. Generally they turn around supernatural spells and extra-ordinary phenomena that are decorated with magnificent beauty and moral values and fairy creatures. As an example, many romantic fairy tales in classical literature are online *as Cinderella, Little Red Riding Hood, Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves,* and so on (zipes, 2006:1). Fairy tales highly stimulate the imagination of learners and improve their fluency and other oral skills.

Films can be used in EFL classes as they usually stimulate emotional responses and over-excitement if good tasks are designed with good pedagogical purposes. They are less demanding in terms of

preparation and they can offer elements as *suspense* and the *sense of discovery* (Mishan, 2005:216). A focus on vocabulary and grammar can only spoil the nature of such exceptional audio-visual mediums (Summerfield, 1993 :28, cited in Mishan, 2005:217). Such tasks shouldn't interfere with the learner's enjoyment while watching as asking *authentic* questions as imagining another ending to trigger good class debates at the end *(*Mishan, 2005*)*. Generally excitement and authenticity should be maintained in all stages of the sessions devoted to films and learners are oriented to include them in their daily practice.

2. Teaching speaking in an authentic web learning environment:

2.1. Developing Students Oral proficiency:

Oral proficiency and fluency are used interchangeably in some contexts but these concepts are still ambiguous and require clarification. Developing fluency, which is a great challenge for EFL learners, is to acquire the ability to express oneself with ease and confidence. Skehan explained the concept with the reference to clarity, rapidity and *facility* of language processing (1996, p.22). Generally speaking good or successful speakers or proficient communicators are also considered as fluent, knowledgeable, bilingual, competent (Iwashita, 2010:1). Oral proficiency refers to   *the* capacity *to* express*,* feeling, thoughts, information or *the ability to respond with an appropriate dialogue line if one is asked a familiar question* (Fisk, 1969: 65, cited in Garbati & Mady, 2015:1763). Therefore the ability to communicate orally and effectively is fundamentally a prerequisite form of academic success, in regard to its importance, the concept needs analysis of its main components in designing fluency building activities.

2.2. Oral Proficiency Measurement

Many studies in language assessment have investigated oral proficiency using quantitative or scientific measurements to achieve validity and reliability. Therefore complexity, accuracy, and fluency (CAF measures) are gradually adopted as three components of foreign language oral performances to quantify any language improvement. First the operational definition of complexity quantifies the sophistication of structures and vocabulary by referring to the level of subordination and counting both lexical and grammatical words ; second accuracy is

another aspect that is generally calculated by the total number of errors or error free units in an oral production; fluency refers to the easiness of the flow of language is also taken into consideration to be measured fundamentally by the totality of units of analysis in oral spoken language.

2.3. Selecting a unit of analysis:

The first stage in discourse analysis studies is the identification of units of analysis. Unlike writing that uses grammatical entities spoken language and interaction analysis uses turns and moves and other basic units as the utterance, the T-unit, the tone unit, idea unit and As-unit (*Crookes*,1990). Therefore As-unit (Analysis of Speech unit) is adopted in the present study with the following definition: It is *a single speaker's utterance consisting of an independent clause (s)or sub –clausal unit, together with any subordinate clause (s) associated with either* (Foster et al., 2000:3005). Thus the oral performances can be segmented into units for quantitative measurements.

3. Methodology:

3.1. Statement of the problem:

Developing the speaking skill of EFL learners is the ultimate goal of language learners. Starting with a hypothesis that authentic web-based teaching would affect positively students' oral proficiency, this study is an attempt to present the results of an experimental investigation. The research subjects for the present study is a group of first year students (N=40) at the university of Biskra during the academic year 2017/2018.They participated in an indoor and an outdoor school enrichment programme. A pre-test was administered in the preliminary stage of the research to assess the actual level of the participants and determine what types of activities the students would be able to accomplish during the instruction. The final session was allotted for the final assessment or the post-test.

3.2. Aims of the Study:

This study investigates the effectiveness of using online authentic materials on students' oral proficiency in terms of accuracy, fluency and complexity. It also aims at exploring all the dimensions of the concept of authenticity and how to integrate it in an online learning environment to first year students at the university of Biskra.

3.3. Research Questions

This research aims at exploring the effects of authentic web learning on students' oral proficiency. In order to reach such an objective, the following basic research questions have been devised :
- What is meant by oral proficiency?
- How can oral proficiency be measured quantitatively?
- Can internet authentic resources and applications improve students' oral performances in terms of complexity, accuracy and fluency?

3.4. Hypotheses

The present study is carried out to verify the following hypotheses:

H1: authentic web learning would improve Students' oral proficiency as they would score better in IELT tests in terms of complexity, accuracy, and fluency (using CAF measures).

H0: authentic web learning would not improve Students' oral proficiency as they would not score better in IELT tests in terms of accuracy, and fluency and complexity (using CAF measures).

3.5. Population and Sampling

The value of any research work is completely dependent on the quality of data collection tools and analysis used and the sampling techniques (Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K., 2007). The general aim of the present study is to test an innovative teaching programme based on authentic materials to assess its efficiency. Taking into account a number of limitations as financial and time constraints this study adopted *my Class sampling* technique*, that represents a single intact class (*Griffee, 2012:61). As a teacher of the module of *listening and speaking* at the university of Biskra the researcher selected a sample of 40 students. It is significant to point out that the age range for these research participants (from 22years old to 24 years old) does not affect the final scores..

4. Findings and Discussions

The students answers to both pretest and posttest questions are recorded and transcribed for analysis and measurements using (CAF) measures. The three components (complexity-accuracy and fluency) are operationalised in the following way: For Accuracy, this aspect of oral proficiency is quantified by counting the number of errors per answer. For fluency two types need to be distinguished: the first one refers to

speed fluency and it is calculated by the total number of As units ;for the second type it is named breakdown fluency and it is measured by counting the number of unnatural pauses or the ones that exceeds three seconds generally. Moreover syntactic complexity refers to the total number of subordinate clauses per student's performance; on the other hand lexical complexity gives the total score or the number of lexical words. Therefore the quantitative measurements of accuracy, fluency, breakdown fluency, syntactic complexity and lexical complexity are displayed in the figures and tables below.

4.1. Analysis of the Pre-test and Posttest Results :

4.1.1. Accuracy

As far as accuracy is concerned, the table below illustrates a significant decrease in the number of errors. In the pre-test the participants' transcripts scored 429 errors with a mean of 11 and a standard deviation of 5.70 (the standard error is 0.91. On the other hand the total number of errors registered in the post-test is 321 and the mean changed significantly to reach the sum of 8.23 to show that students' accuracy improved considerably and thus altering the level of oral proficiency of the participants to clearly demonstrate that a continuous exposure to an authentic web learning instruction with a carefully well chosen materials and tasks offer good practices to learners and reduce their errors.

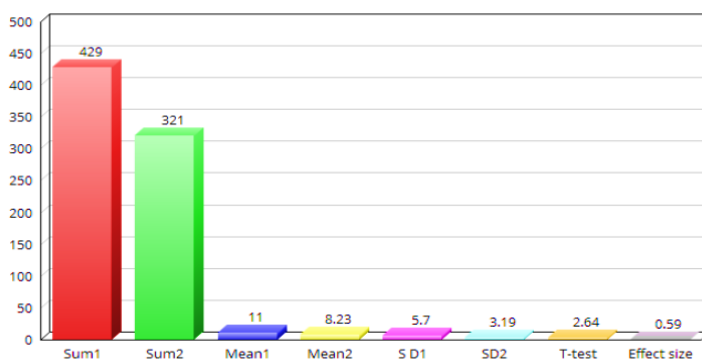*Graph 1: Statistical measurement of accuracy*

Table 1: Statistical measurement of Accuracy

Results/ Accuracy	Sum	Mean	Sample Standard Deviation	Standard Error
Pre-test results	429	11	5.70	0.91
Post-test results	321	8.23	3.19	0.51

The t-value is 2.64302. The p-value is .004987. The result is significant at p < .05.

4.1.2. Speed Fluency

Speed fluency was quantified by the total number of As-units per performance. Therefore the amount of As units in the pretest is 1598 thus the mean is 40.97;however the overall number of AS-units in the post-test shows a good improvement to attain the sum of 2548. For that reason the resulting statistical measures as the standard deviation achieved (20.63) and for the posttest the following number was scored (16.72) to admit the benefits of an authentic web-based instruction on the language production of the learners.

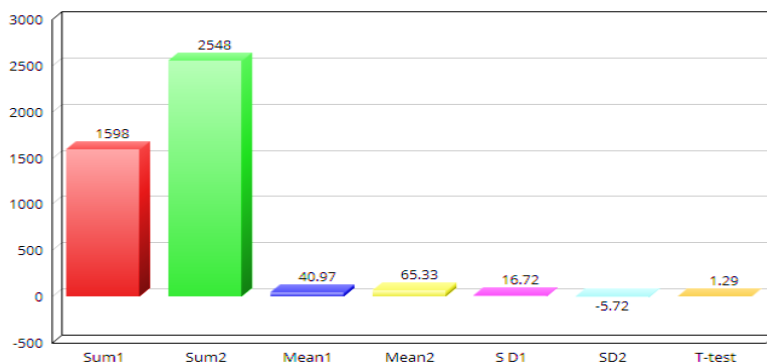*Figure 2: Statistical Measurement of Speed Fluency*

Table 2: Statistical Measurement of Speed Fluency

Results/ Speed fluency	Sum	Mean	Sample Standard Deviation	Standard Error
Pre-test results	1598	40.97	20.63	3.30
Post-test result	2548	65.33	16.72	2.67

The t-value is -5.7265. The p-value is < .00001. The result is significant at p < .05.

4.1.3. Breakdown Fluency

A noticeable progress is also manifested in the number of pauses or breakdown fluency aspects in the pretest compared to the posttest . It is worth mentioning that important modifications occurred as the length and the frequency of pauses became smaller and less frequent than the ones scored in the pretest . The informants made 571 pauses and thus the deduced mean is 14.64, the resulted standard deviation is 8.68 and the standard error is 1.39. Moreover the participants' level of oral proficiency clearly changed as they became aware of the importance of reducing pauses and their length so the sum of pauses is 365, the mean is 9.35, the standard deviation is 2,91 and standard error is 0.46.Therefore this demonstrates the good effects of authentic online learning .

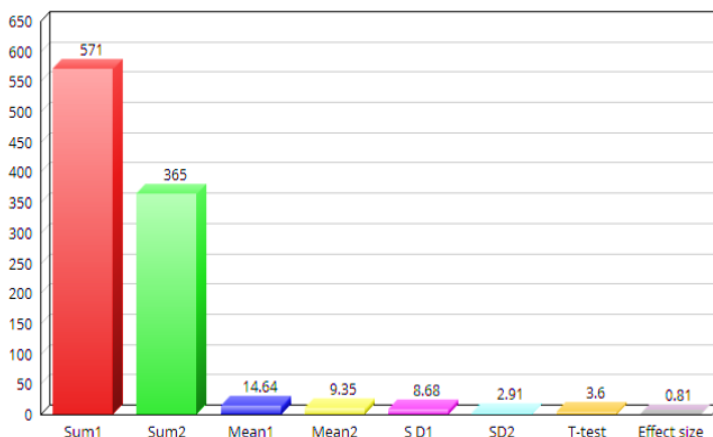*Figure3: Statistical Measurement of Breakdown Fluency*

Table3: Statistical measurements of Breakdown Fluency

Results Breakdown Fluency	Sum	Mean	Sample Standard Deviation	Standard Error
Pre-test results	571	14.64	8.68	1.39
Post-test results	365	9.35	2.91	0.46

The *t*-value is 3.6014 he *p*-value is $< .00001$. The result is significant at $p < .05$.

4.1.4. Syntactic Complexity

Syntactic complexity is measured by counting the number of subordinate clauses; therefore students uttered the total sum of 389 subordinate clauses in their pretest (mean =9,97, standard deviation =5,34,standard error=0,85) ; but the total amount of subordinate clauses produced in the posttest is: 886 (thus the mean =22.71, standard deviation =6,79,standard error=0.99).This proves the improvement of this main aspect of oral communication skills.

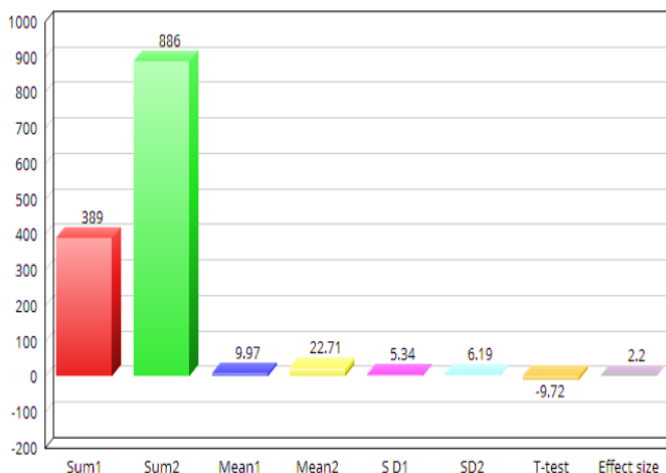*Figure 4: Statistical Measurement of Syntactic Complexity*

Table 4: Statistical Measurements of Syntactic Complexity

Results/ Syntactic complexity	Sum	Mean	Sample Standard Deviation	Standard Error
Pretest results	389	9.97	5.34	0.85
Post-test results	886	22.71	6.19	0.99

The t-value is -9.72 The p-value is < .00001. The result is significant at p < .05.

4.1.5. Lexical complexity

The results displayed also show the lexical complexity of the participants' pre-test and post-test performances. Consequently the first sum is 2849 and the second one is4471 that signifies an increase of 1622. Furthemore the two means are also different (73.05-114.64) and the same difference is also seen in the two standard deviations (28.03-22.39) and the two standard errors (4.48-3.58). All these quantitative measures and the final scores validated the achievements of the participants and confirmed the value of authentic learning on the level of learners' lexical words.

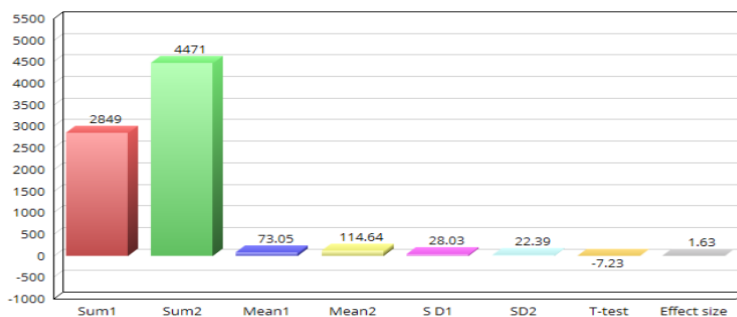*Figure 5: Statistical Measurement of Lexical Complexity*

Table 5: Statistical Measurement of Lexical Complexity

Results/ Lexical complexity	Sum	Mean	Sample Standard Deviation	Standard Error
Pre-test results	2849	73.05	28.03	4.48
Post-test results	4471	114.64	22.39	3.58

The *t*-value is -7.23963. The *p*-value is < .00001. The result is significant at *p* < .05.

5. *Conclusion*

This classroom-based research aims at improving some teaching practices in the Algerian universities. The quantitative results validated the efficiency of authentic web learning as the students 'scores in IELT tests improved considerably. Therefore the T-test was obtained from the data of the pretest and posttest, means, standard deviations. The *t*-value is 2.64 with accuracy (speed fluency t= -5.72 breakdown fluency t=3.60, Syntactic complexity t=-9.72, lexical complexity t=-7.23)and the *p-value* is estimated at 0.5. Accordingly these results are significant in regards to the p. value. Therefore the hypothesis of the study is confirmed and the null hypothesis is thus rejected. The results demonstrate the great benefits of an online authentic instruction on students 'oral proficiency. Therefore teachers are advised to encourage students to explore the real world of the English language through the internet.

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