

Close Analysis: an Activity for Using Mobile Phones in Teaching Ungraded Writing Tasks for University Students

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Abstract

Most students nowadays carry wireless mobile phones, small computers graphics, iPads and many other technological aids. Many of the students panic of the writing tasks especially when such tasks are pen and paper task because of the linguistic complexity of these tasks. Moreover, some of the students frequently complain that as soon as they pick up their pencils, their minds go blank. Also some of them fear of the mistakes that they might make in spelling, grammar, mechanics or vocabulary when start writing their tasks. Now it is chance for the students to enjoy ungraded classroom writing in English using their small electronic devices i.e. mobile phones. A teacher of language should encourage his/her students to SMS each other formally and informally.

The subjects for this study were native speakers of Arabic. They were not studying English as a major subject of specialization. They were third year university students, studying economics at Alsmaria University, during the academic year of (2013/2014). The total number of the subjects was (30) students.

The tool used in this study was an open questionnaire. This questionnaire consisted of two versions. The former included two questions while the latter consisted of three questions. The mode of the questionnaire used in this study was a paper-and- pencil questionnaire administration.

The results showed that such techniques help students overcome their anxiety about writing, particularly at the initial stage. It also revealed that using mobile phones in writing ungraded tasks help students to use English in both inside and outside classroom. Findings have also indicated that 70% of the students find this technique (SMS) more helpful and it makes them enhance the linguistic features.

1. Why using mobile phones in the language classroom

Most of the teachers' instructions to their students were to switch off mobile phones before starting the lessons. Now it is time for teachers to change their style of teaching and make their lessons more enjoyable and interesting by saying ". Switch on mobile phones and start writing SMS letters"

There are many reasons that make teachers of English ask their students to use mobile phones in the language classroom. First these electronic devices are available and cheap nowadays in all over the world. Second, such small mobile phones are easy to carry and use in the class and also students find writing SMS letter on their mobiles more interesting than on the white board (WB) or on their note books. Another important reason that encourages teachers to make the students use mobile phones in learning is that most of the schools in Libya are not equipped by laboratories or other visual aids. Also some of the students fear of the mistakes that they might make in spelling, grammar, mechanics or vocabulary when start writing their tasks. Now it is chance for the students to enjoy ungraded classroom writing in English using their small electronic devices i.e. mobile phones. Finally using mobile phones in teaching and learning may help students enjoy writing and reading the graphics on mobiles screens rather than on their note books or WB.



2. Literature Review

Many studies have been conducted on the use of cell phone in developing both education and economics. Libya, as a developing country in the north west of Africa is progressively turning to cellular to provide basic telephone services. Wireless telephony is now available to millions of people in this country. Even the lowest- income population can own such cell phones. There are of course two net services, namely: Libyana and Almadar. People can subscribe to receive both of them. A better use of these cell phones in the classroom is becoming worthwhile for the academia which leads to develop the economics as well.

Thus cell phones have become a central technology associated with both education and effective business communication practices. As a result, utilizing these small devices as an effective methodology in teaching process may meet the students' needs. For these reasons, introducing an activity on how to use these cell phones in the classroom when teaching writing for students who study economics may enhance students' performance in understanding business corresponding. Researchers in the area of teaching and learning work to improve the education process by applying information and communication technology (ICT) in this field. Of course teaching and learning writing usually takes three stages which are: (1) prewriting stage, (2) writing stage, and (3) editing stage (Tribble 1996) A teacher of writing can make use of this process by applying mobile phones instead of note books

3. The Activity

1. In the first step, the teacher has to prepare his students to the topic which is writing a business letter.
2. Then the teacher should ask his students to switch the language mode of their mobile phones into English language mode.
3. In the third step, the teacher has to ask his students to exchange their mobile phone numbers.
4. After that the teacher has to encourage students to write their SMS messages. Then students send these SMS messages to each other.
5. The teacher asks the students to read their classmate messages.
6. The last step for the teacher is to make the students write their sent messages on the whiteboard. Then the mistakes have to be checked and analyzed. Thus, applying this activity will be as follows:

Task (1) The prewriting stage

The prewriting stage is the stage that helps students to think carefully and organize their ideas for their SMS letters before they begin writing. (Savage and Mayer 2006) Before students start writing their SMS, the teacher should prepare them and help them to answer the following questions orally. This technique helps students to be ready for their writing and it also enhances students' ability to speak and express themselves. These questions will be as follows:

- a) How can I make a topic sentence (or thesis statement) from the most important part of my answer?
- b) What facts or ideas can I use to support my introductory sentence?
- c) How can I make this letter interesting?
- d) Do I need more facts on this topic?
- e) Where can I find more facts on this topic?

Task (2) The writing stage

The writing stage is the stage when students are ready to turn their ideas into sentences. This stage takes five steps: The first step for teachers is to ask the students to switch on their mobile phones and select message mode. **Then** a teacher of English should make the students think of a letter they really

like to send. Students of course will start creating messages and write about the letter they really like and the best time for that letter to be sent. The teacher should give his students ten minutes. Students then have one minute to self-edit. If they have a spelling question, they may ask the teacher to write the word on the chalkboard. The teacher then should ask the students to exchange their numbers and enter them to their phones. The teacher ask the students to press the confirm key to send the message. Finally, the students start reading their classmates messages.

Task (3) The editing stage

In the editing stage, it is time for the students to exchange their mobile phones messages to check their paragraphs for mistakes and correct them. The types of the mistakes that should be checked are as follows:

A. Grammar and Spelling

1. Check the spelling and grammar.
2. Make sure each sentence has a subject.
3. Check the verb tenses of each sentence.
4. Make sure that each sentence makes sense.

B. Style and Organization

1. Make sure the paragraph has a topic sentence, supporting sentences and closing sentence.
2. Check that all the sentences focus on the main idea.
3. See if the paragraph is interesting.
4. Make sure of the register of the letter.

4. The Objectives and the Questions of the Study

This research aims at investigating the value of using the mobile phones (hereafter MP) in language classroom. Thus, an activity for MP in teaching process is introduced to a group of students who study economics at Alsmaria University. It also seeks to find answers to the questions which are raised to examine the actual utilization of the mobile phones in teaching writing in the language classroom:

1. Do students find the technique of using MP as good learning tools in writing?
2. Can the use of the MP in the language classroom enhance students' academic writing skills?

The study was conducted in Libya, an Arabic speaking country located in the north west of Africa. The participants of the study were not studying English as a major subject of specialization. They were third year university students, studying economics at Alsmaria University, during the academic year of (2013/2014). The total number of the subjects was (30) students.

5. Research Tools

The tool used in this study was an open questionnaire. This questionnaire consisted of two versions. The former included two questions while the latter consisted of three questions. The mode of the questionnaire used in this study was a paper-and- pencil questionnaire administration. The purpose of these questions in the first version was to examine both the number of the students who own touch - screen cell phones and the number of the students who use mobile phones in learning. However, the purpose of the questions in the second version was to examine students' feedback towards their attitudes on using mobile phones in their learning in the classroom. For reliability the questionnaire was calculated by the computer programmer. For validity the questionnaire was given to a number of professors of English language to examine them and to give comments on the questionnaire statements.



6. Findings and discussions

6.1 The first version of the questionnaire

1- Do you have a smart phone with touch screen?

90% of the participants have mobile phones with touch screen, while the other 10% have traditional ones. As shown in fig (1). This gives the possibility for the students to use their smart phones in the class.

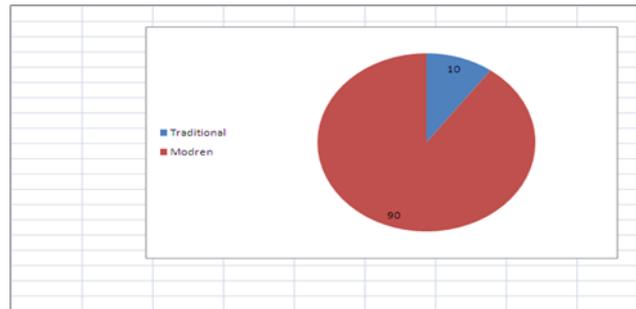


Fig. 1 shows the types of the cell phones

2- How often do you use your cell phone in learning?

80 % of the participants used their MP in learning rarely, while 20% used them as a dictionary sometimes. This gives an indication that the majority of the participants were not accustomed to use their smart cell phones in their learning. (see Fig. 2)

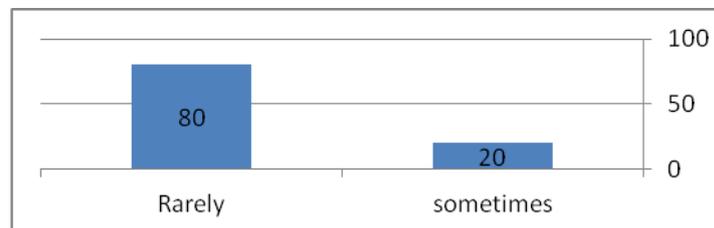


Fig. 2 The use of cell phones in learning

6.2 The second version of the questionnaire

1- Do you find the use of SMS in the writing tasks more helpful?

In responding to this question, 70% of the students insisted that the use of SMS makes them understand the writing tasks more. They commented that such technique (SMS) make them enhance the linguistic features. However, 30% of the students still have problems with writing tasks.

2- Do you think that the technique of using SMS helps students overcome their anxiety about writing, particularly at the initial stage?

Findings of this part have indicated that 90% of the students find this technique (SMS) more enjoyable and it makes them not fearing of the linguistic features. This is because the use of (MP) makes the environment of the classrooms enjoyable and motivating. This technique also helps students to use English outside classroom. (see Fig. 3)

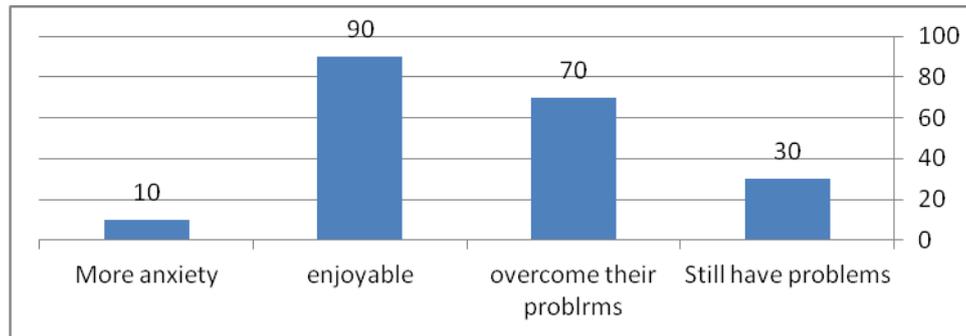


Fig. 3 The use of SMS in the writing tasks

3- Which do you prefer, the use of SMS, the traditional techniques (i.e. the note books and white board tasks), or both of them?

It is interesting to note that 60% of the participants preferred to use both SMS messages and white board activity in the language classroom; whereas, 40% of them preferred to use SMS activity.

7. Conclusion

The technique of using SMS messages in the language classroom helps students to be engaged in a never-ending process of learning writing. For example, students will have chance to practice writing tasks both in the class and at home. This technique also makes the classroom task more enjoyable. Thus, the approach to teaching writing in a language classroom should focus on certain features of language in order to generate an appreciation of writing style, effects and techniques of writing in addition to carrying out language activities that help develop language competence.

8. References

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