E-learning in EFL classes: a facilitator for the learner or the teacher?

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Abstract

This study aimed at bringing into light the various aspects of the impact of e-learning on the EFL learners and Teachers and the level of their satisfaction with the outcome of their implementation of e-learning in their classes. The participants consisted of EFL students and teachers that they selected randomly from ELT teachers and learners of Shokoh institute in Zanjan. 100 students and 20 teachers were selected randomly. 60 students were female and 40 male and 12 teachers were female and 8 of them were male. The range of the students' age was 19-21 years old and teachers' was 27-45 years old. In order to meet the criteria of the present research according to the research question, two instruments were used, questionnaire and written protocol. Having done the administration of the questionnaire and written protocol in form of semi-structured interview, the researcher gathered the questionnaires and transcribed the interviews and then the data was analyzed. The results show that the teachers have a more positive perception toward e-learning. So, e-learning is more facilitator for EFL teachers than students. According to the results of this study and previous studies reported in literature, it can be said that e-learning is accepted by students and the teachers in online learning environment.

Key terms: E-learning, technology, perception, facilitator

1. Introduction

In the age of communications and technology, it is no wonder to see teachers make use of computers and the Internet to enhance their students' learning. Since the beginning of the 1990s, the use of computers connected to the Web in language learning has increased explosively. The birth of the World Wide Web and its growing applications has made Web-based learning feasible and its distinctive features attainable (Wu & Hiltz, 2004). The first reason behind the application of Web-based instruction is that it creates both independent and collaborative learners who try to acquire and practice a new language. Using the net, the learners can enjoy hypermedia, multimedia, and drill and practice programs to foster their knowledge of language.

The Web gives the chance to teachers to take adaptive strategies based on their learners' personal needs, and its collaborative use helps learners receive more feedback than they would get in class (Arroyo, 2008).

The Web provides immense opportunities for both language teachers and learners to make use of a variety of sources available to them (Mirzaeian, 2009). It also makes different kinds of computer-assisted language learning tools available (Cushion, 2005; Galloway & Peterson-Bidoshi, 2008) and helps language learning take place in an appropriate environment (Stockwell, 2007).

Meeting the needs of today's learners requires instructors and administrators to rethink delivery strategies and instructional methods. Many organizations are turning to distance education, because of its effectiveness, to help learners develop and improve their knowledge, skills, and abilities. E-learning and E-teaching continue to grow at the tremendous rate. E-learning is an opportunity emerged recently to improve the learning process by using more modern, efficient and effective teaching and learning based information technology (Selim, 2003). The main objective of the present study was to bring into light the various aspects of the impact of e-learning on the EFL learners and Teachers and the level of their satisfaction with the outcome of their implementation of e-learning in their classes.

2. Review of the related literature

2.1. Definition of e-learning

The origins of the term e-Learning is not certain, although it is suggested that the term most likely originated during the 1980's, within the similar time frame of another delivery mode

online learning. While some authors explicitly define e-Learning, others imply a specific definition or view of e-Learning in their article. These definitions materialize, some through conflicting views of other definitions, and some just by simply comparing defining characteristics with other existing terms. In particular, Ellis (2004) disagrees with authors like Nichols (2003) who define e-Learning as strictly being accessible using technological tools that are web-based, web-distributed, or web-capable. The belief that e-Learning not only covers content and instructional methods delivered via CD-ROM, the Internet or an Intranet (Benson et al., 2002; Clark, 2002) but also includes audio- and videotape, satellite broadcast and interactive TV is the one held by Ellis. E-Learning is a term that means something different to almost everyone who uses it. Some use the term to refer to packaged content pieces and others to technical infrastructures. Some think only of web-based self-study while others realize eLearning can encompass real-time learning and collaboration.

2.2. Types of E-Learning

Falch (2004) classifies e-learning into four types: e-learning without presence and without communication, e-learning without presence but with communication, e-learning combined with occasional presence, and e-learning used as a tool in classroom teaching (Negash and Wilcox, 2008:4). Negash and Wilcox (2008) have extended the classification to six:

E-learning with presence and without e-communication (face to face)

E-learning without presence and without e-communication

E-learning without presence and with e-communication: 'asynchronous'

E-learning with virtual presence and with e-communication: 'synchronous'

E-learning with occasional presence and with e-communication:

'blended/hybrid asynchronous'

 E-learning with presence and with e-communication:

 'blended/hybrid synchronous'

* Presence is defined as real-time presence where both instructor and learner are present at the time of content delivery; it includes physical and virtual presence.

This role that e-learning has attained is considered as a means to respond to society's educational needs, which have shifted from traditional training of full-time on campus learners to more unconventional forms of education.

2.3. The E-learning Classroom Environment

Technology advances have provided, and still do, many tools for e-learning. New technology enhanced learning environments (online environment) are created instead of the traditional ones. The environment, the learning theory and the way in which technology is used dictate a change in activities, techniques, roles and learning experiences.

Hence for creating a successful e-learning environment within e-learning decisions need to be done about the use of specific technology.

2.4. Developing E-learning Courses

Developing e-learning courses is not an easy task; it takes too much time in terms of research, design, development and learner support (MacDonald & al: 2009). According to MacDonald & Thompson (2005) cited in (ibid), the most important incentives for online courses creation are the professor's determination, his aptitude and capacity to organize and mobilize the necessary

resources as well as his willingness to take risks.

Bates (2005) identifies three key areas of interest in e-learning: quality standards, teacher and student work load and costs.

The common aims behind e-learning integration into schools and universities fall into three Categories: improving the efficiency of instruction, reaching new students, and making programmes more effective Rayburn & Ramaprasad (2002). In order to achieve these goals, Rayburn & Ramaprasad (2002) proposed three strategies which are:

1. Guest Lecture Strategy for improving the efficiency of instruction

2. Automated correspondence course strategy for reaching new students and

3. Large Lecture Hall strategy for making programmes more effective.

Adrian (2002) has established a three step course development and implementation process. The first step is determining the course objectives and also the principal objectives concerning course design. The second step is designing the course structure which depends primarily upon an adequate incorporation of synchronous and asynchronous teaching. The last step is transferring the quality philosophy to the classroom.

One essential ingredient in course design is the provision of four kinds of support for learning: guidance, coaching/training, teaching and mentoring Diltz & Delzier (2000) cited in Kenning (2007). In terms of language learning, the place of the four forms of support will depend on the objectives of language learning and the relative importance of the individual aspects (grammar, fluency, accuracy, pronunciation …) (ibid). Furthermore the designed course should mirror the pedagogical orientations and philosophies of the faculty.

3. Method

3.1. Research method

The present study is a mixture of qualitative and quantitative. This mixed method approach is employed in which both qualitative and quantitative analyses are used to gain the individualized standpoints and views of EFL learners about e-learning.

3.2. Participants

The participants consisted of EFL students and teachers that they selected randomly from ELT teachers and learners of Shokoh institute in Zanjan. 100 students and 20 teachers were selected randomly. 60 students were female and 40 male and 12 teachers were female and 8 of them were male. The range of the students' age was 19-21years old and teachers' was 27-45 years old.

3.3. Instrumentation

In order to meet the criteria of the present research according to the research questions, two instruments were used.

3.3.1. Questionnaire

The research was done a board study on e-learning issues of Iran in order to comprehend the noticeable factors which have influence on the Iranian EFL classes.

The questionnaire was designed from the current E-learning questionnaires and it is a Likert scale questionnaire and consisted of 19 questions.

 The questionnaire was given to both selected EFL learners and teachers of Shokoh institute in order to find out their behavior, attitude and communication toward e-learning.

3.3.2. Written protocol

Many researchers use questionnaires to collect data; while they overlook other data collection tools such as secondary sources, observation, semi-structured interviews and profound interviews (Mackey & Gass, 2005). The protocol was consisted of open-ended questions conducted individually. Both groups were encouraged to express their ideas to a set of open ended question on the programs.

The protocol was composed of a number of items enjoying the highest frequency among the items of the questionnaire. The advantages of using the written protocol lies in the fact that triangulation of data gets to be possible since the participants can express their ideas freely and the data can be approached from both qualitative and quantitative perspectives.

3.4. Procedure

 The following phases have been taken for this study in order to meet the objectives of this study:

Phase 1: sample selection as explained in 3.2.

Phase 2: instrument construction

Since no prefabricated questionnaire already exists for this study, the researcher studied the literature, extracted major e-learning themes, and listed them, conducted a number of experts. Then, the themes were converted into a number of Likert-based items that is consisted of five items ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The questionnaire was piloted to the

similar participant, and the reliability and validity of the questionnaire was assured (see pilot study). Then, it was administered for the actual purpose with the actual participants.

Phase 3: written protocol in the form of interview

In order to triangulate the data, a number of general items from the questionnaire were selected such that they can relatively cover majority of the points of the questionnaire. The items were given to the participants in order to get their explanatory ideas on e-learning factors.

Phase 4: questionnaire administration

Administrating the questionnaire was done through two ways: the first way was giving the questionnaire to the students and teachers in institute and the second way was sending the questionnaire to their email.

Phase 5: protocol administration

Interviews usually took 45 minutes to an hour. They were audio-taped and transcribed in further detail as in-process notes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). Casual discussions were employed as a less-structured type of interview as well. These discussions were documented in the form of sketches and were also considered in-process notes.

Phase 5: data collection

Having done the administration of the questionnaire and interview, the researcher gathered the questionnaires and put the information in Excel program in order to be ready for data analysis and transcribed the interviews in further detail as in-process notes in order to support the results of the questionnaire analysis.

Phase 6: data analysis

Having gathered the necessary data (responses to two sets of questionnaire and answers to the semi-structures interview), the researcher analyzed the data by SPSS 21.0 (Statistics Package for the Social Science). The survey data were analyzed using an independent-samples t-test for comparing teachers and students' perspectives with each other. SPSS 21.0 was used to support with the data analysis. This software program was chosen on the basis that it is among the most widely used programs for statistical analysis in the social sciences, its simplicity and ease of use for educational research.

4. Results

4.1. The results of questionnaire

The research question and hypothesis of the study were as follows:

RQ: Is there any statistically significant difference between students and teachers' perception of e-learning?

H_0: There is not any statistically significant difference between students and teachers' perception of e-learning.

In order to test the hypothesis an independent-samples t-test was implemented and the effect size was calculated using the following formula. The following tables depict the results of data analysis.

- Eta Squared: $t^2 / t^2 + (N1+N2-2)$

The guidelines proposed by Cohen (1988, pp. 284–247)[1] for interpreting this value are:

.01=small effect

.06=moderate effect

.14=large effect

Table 4-1

Frequency of the students' raw scores on the questionnaire

Score	Frequency	Percent
62.00	7	7.0
63.00	1	1.0
64.00	3	3.0
65.00	5	5.0
67.00	1	1.0
68.00	9	9.0
69.00	6	6.0
71.00	4	4.0
72.00	2	2.0
73.00	3	3.0
74.00	13	13.0
75.00	8	8.0
76.00	3	3.0
77.00	2	2.0
78.00	8	8.0
79.00	5	5.0
84.00	4	4.0
85.00	5	5.0
86.00	2	2.0
87.00	5	5.0
89.00	4	4.0
Total	100	100.0

Table 4-2

Frequency of the teachers' raw scores on the questionnaire

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[1] Cohen, J.W. (1988). *Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences* (2nd edn). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Score	Frequency	Percent
82.00	1	5.0
83.00	1	5.0
84.00	2	10.0
86.00	4	20.0
87.00	2	10.0
88.00	1	5.0
89.00	1	5.0
90.00	3	15.0
91.00	1	5.0
92.00	1	5.0
93.00	1	5.0
94.00	1	5.0
95.00	1	5.0
Total	20	100.0

Table 4-3

Group Statistics

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Teachers	20	88.1500	3.68889	.82486
Students	100	74.4100	7.59864	.75986

Table 4-4

Results of Independent-Samples T-test

					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
			Mean	Std. Error		
t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Difference	Difference	Lower	Upper
12.251	57.046	.000	13.74000	1.12151	11.49425	15.98575

t-test for Equality of Means

- Eta Squared: $(12.251)^2 / (12.251)^2 + (100+20-2) = .55$

Results: As seen in Tables 4-3 and 4-4, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare

the perception of e-learning for the teachers and the students. There was a statistically significant

difference in scores for the teacher (M = 88.15, SD = 3.68) and students (M = 74.41, SD = 7.59; t (57.046) = 12.251, p = .000, two-tailed). The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = 13.74, 95% CI: 11.49 to 15.98) was very large (eta squared = .55). Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis stating "there is a statistically significant difference between students and teachers' perception of e-learning." is confirmed. This indicates that the teachers have a more positive perception toward e-learning. So, e-learning is more facilitator for EFL teachers than students.

4.2. The results of the written protocol in the form of semi-structure interview

In order to triangulate the data, a semi-structured interview was conducted among teachers. The interview was held in 2 sessions. They were audio-taped and transcribed in further detail as in-process notes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). Casual discussions were employed as a less-structured type of interview as well. These discussions were documented in the form of sketches and were also considered in-process notes.

To investigate the effects of the use of this technology on students' perceived motivation towards educational activities, firstly teachers were asked that "How did the use of this technology effect the motivation of the students towards their educational activities? Positively, negatively or not effected?" Answers of all teachers were positive. The following is one of the teachers' responses to the question:

"First of all, for the reason that the students use computer too much, we have to use the tool in our educational activities too. This may create diversity and may increase our learning tools.

When we use this technology in education I can say that the students are being motivated more than classical ways."

To investigate perceptions of the teachers about the usefulness of E-Learning, firstly teachers were asked that "What do you think about the usefulness of this technology in educational activities? Was it useful or not?"

Answers of the teachers were positive. To get detailed indicators of their observations, they were asked to explain the indicators which they observed to support their positive opinion. The following is one of the teachers' responses to the question:

"I find it helpful for students to do their work by using technology. They like to use computers; it does not matter whether it is for playing games or for studying lessons. They can observe their work better if it is in a visual environment. For many reasons I think that this system is very useful. The students not only take notes, they also do research, be in touch with their teachers on the same learning portal, take feedbacks in a very short amount of time, they can improve their work at home. When a teacher sees an incomplete work or mistakes he/she can want her/his students to complete and save it at home. It is easier for teachers to follow the course of a project."

All of the teachers stated the E-Learning as useful tool for their courses in terms of different advantages they have observed.

To investigate the teachers' perceptions about the ease of use of E-Learning, they were asked "Was learning to use E- Learning easy for your students?" As it is seen from the statements of the teachers, they define E-Learning as an easy-to-use tool and their perceptions are quite

positive about this tool in terms of its easy-to-use aspect. The following is one of the teachers' responses to the question:

"Sure. I can even say that they learn better than me, you know they are all students of technology time."

To investigate the teachers' perceptions about skillful usage, they were asked that "Was becoming skillful at using E-Learning easy for your students?". Some teacher stated that not for all the students but for the ones who can use computers efficiently it was easy to become skillful. The rest of the teachers reported their positive observations and perceptions.

"Not for all the students but for the ones who can use computer efficiently it was easy. It is not difficult to understand; it does not have a complicated language, so if a student uses it regularly he/she can easily be an expert."

5. Discussion

In an era of rapid developing educational technologies, the e-learning has become a powerful tool to provide learners with an alternative learning environment worldwide. The e-learning and distance education have notably affected the ways in which we communicate and learn (Leh, 1995). E-learning fosters learning and teaching in a variety of ways. One of the many advantages of e-learning is that it offers instructors and students a flexible learning setting in terms of time and location. Learning does not require students to being physically present in the same place with the instructor (Walker, 2005) nor at the same time. E-learning might be used for different purposes such as supported learning, blended learning (combination of face-to-face and online learning), and entirely online learning (Pearson & Trinidad, 2005). However, sometimes all those

discovered opportunities are being insufficient to solve problems of some circumstances in providing some facilities in online environments. One of these problem areas is teachers' and students' interacting in a professionally designed sharing platform. Although, e-learning provides highly efficient, effective and widely used communication tool for users' interacting with each other, the number of special technology which provides effective e-learning environment for educational activities are limited.

The object of this study is to investigate the effects of the integration of E-Learning as a new technology in learning environments of students. To obtain information about effects of the use e-learning, perceptions of students and the teachers were investigated in terms of its perceived effects on students' perceived motivation towards educational activities, its usefulness and its ease of use.

The results indicate that the teachers have a more positive perception toward e-learning. So, e-learning is more facilitator for EFL teachers than students. The results correspond to the results of the study conducted by Bennett & Monds (2008) in which they reported positive effects of the online learning applications on students' perceived motivation in their findings from teachers' point of view.

The results of this study are also supported by results of the investigation made by Liu et al. (2008). Parallel with this study, the researchers supported in their study that there is a significant positive relationship between perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use and intention to adopt e-learning applications. (Liu, Chen, Sun, Wible, & Kuo, 2008).

According to the results of this study and previous studies reported in literature, it can be said that e-learning is accepted by students and the teachers in online learning environment. Also, the high number of indecisive students can be minimized by providing longer usage period in future

researches.

6. Conclusions

In this study, the researcher investigated perceptions of the e-learning in teachers' and students' educational activities in terms of its effects on students' perceived motivation towards the educational activities, the usefulness and the ease of use of the e-learning, the advantages and disadvantages of the technology and the suggestions for the usage of e-learning system.

The results show that e-learning provides highly efficient, effective and widely used communication tool that teacher had a more positive view regarding using this tool in their classes than the students and according to this, it was proved that e-learning is more facilitator for EFL teachers than students. The findings tend to suggest that students are, on the whole, open to innovation. While most of the students use computers for a variety of purposes, they use them extensively for social networking and communication. Students have a limited experience of e-learning strategies but the expected usefulness of using these strategies is high. Students mildly relate e-learning strategies to many different kinds of learning benefits. They appear to be more able to relate e-learning to benefits in the learning process, such as the use of e-communication strategies.

Lastly, more experiences with e-learning lead to higher perceptions of e-learning benefits. In other words, students who used e-learning tend to like them and find them useful.

To a certain extent, this is evidence that eLearning on the whole are positive experiences for students. Once students have a good first e-learning experience, there is a high likelihood that they will appreciate and seek similar engaging experiences.

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