Research paper

Role of Computer Word Processors in Learning Spelling and Grammar among EFL Learners

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Abstract

The present research aims at examining the impact of using Word Processor grammar/spelling checker on elementary learners' dictation, spelling, and grammar in Iranian context.The Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT) was administered to learners in order to uncover the level of English language proficiency before conducting the study. The test determined 50 elementary students as elementary learners who were randomly assigned to two experimental groups of spelling and grammar classes. They were pretested. After that, the participants of both experimental groups received the treatment; they were taught through computer word processor. In the spelling group, 10 laptops were available for teaching spelling through using Computer Microsoft Word Processor. Some words and sentences were read by the researcher and the students were asked to type them through Computer Word Processor in the Computer Finding of *t*-tests showed that groups had better scores of the post-test compared to their pre-test. The difference between both groups was not significant; however, there was a slight surge in the learners' spelling comparing to their pretest. Finally, implications both learners' spelling and grammar abilities can be enhanced via computer software of spelling/grammar checker**.**

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Introduction

The prominence of educational technology has increased rapidly over the past decade. There are several findings that suggest the use of computer word processing enhancing learners' language skills (Salehi & Amiri, 2019). The computer Microsoft Word processer program is a useful tool to facilitate learners' writing abilities. Eyres (2007) notes the use of Word Processors in editing texts can offer a revolutionized change in correcting learners' errors and mistakes of writing skill. There are some studies indicating that computers are not integrated with daily instruction in the classrooms and this has made frustration for students to correct their mistakes manually or with the help of teachers (e.g., Alston-Abel, 2009; Azizaturrohmi, 2019; Cristia et al, 2012; Wong, 2001).

Technology has been developed to boost all learning processes including English language writing skill (Aleven et al, 2013). For instance, learners and teachers' perceptions have shown that computer-based instruction has some achievement, especially in the elementary classrooms and for the learners with special needs (Li & Ma, 2010). The assumption is that if learners' have access to computers at schools, they will boost their own writing abilities in writing activities. Harmer (2001) has listed several advantages of the Microsoft Word spelling/grammar checker including: (1) A Microsoft Word spelling/grammar checker removes handwriting problems and indicates the learners' errors in the writing processes, (2) It allows the learers to check and correct the spelling and grammar suggested by the software while they are writing freely in the free-writing phase, (3) Spellcheckers can facilitate achieving correct spelling and grammar, and (4) It can help the learners who work in groups inside and outside the class. Thus, the software enables the learners work with each other when they are far away schools.

Word processing software helps the learners' writing, especially when they are at the elementary levels of writing. For instance, Graham (2008) emphasized seven benefits of using word processing facility in writing skill. They are: (1) spell and grammar correction, (2) having access to variety of spelling and grammar formats, (3) ease of edit and revision, (4) preparing correct choices of suggestions and production of text (while composing, not taking, editing, revising, etc.), (5) supporting computer software applications like spelling, grammar, semantic mapping, meaning, word order, etc.), (6) using computer software to replicate electronic text that is easy to share with others and getting feedback, and (7) preparing links to electronic sources and materials while writing the texts.

Using the word processor of spelling and grammar checkers for their writing make students produce higher quality writing compared with using pen or pencil in composing texts. Thus, the teachers can see many learners show a great tendency in using computer word processor to study English as a foreign language (EFL) in the countries that reading and writing are two major language skills. Since grammar is the study of words and make grammatical and meaningful sentences of the text, there is a force to guide the learners put the correct words together into sentences and make meaningful and grammatical texts. The learners who communicate a particular language, consciously or subconsciously become aware of using grammar and spelling in a correct and standardized manner (Kumar, 2013). Canale and Swain

(1980) have proposed that grammatical competence is an integral part of communicative competence that is responsible for meaningful performance in productive language skills like speaking and writing. Learners cannot communicate effectively without having the knowledge of grammar and spelling in both skills.

An appropriate command over the grammar and spelling of a language does not mean that they are able to communicate effectively; and the learners who can speak English fluently are not considered effective communicators or writers (Kumar et al, 2015). Two domains of writing skills that should be considered by the teachers are accuracy and fluency. Accuracy is the most important along with fluency. Accuracy is the use of grammatical structures of the sentences in writing texts. But fluency can be considered as the ability to communicate meaningfully. Thus, accuracy can only be learnt by knowing the use of proper grammar. Learning grammar is one of the important ways to speak English appropriately, correctly and fluently.

Use of the computer may be an effective and efficient way of teaching spelling to English learners (Kinney et al, 2003). Spelling correct words in writing can be a challenge for elementary learners in the second language (L2). This may be due to the difference in phonological and orthographic patterns between English and their mother tongue (e.g., Persian). This difference makes severe transference of similarities in spelling and grammatical structure between two languages. English words have different sounds-to-spelling patterns, while others do not have this phenomenon. For example, the word "she" and "sure" have the same pronunciation in the onset phoneme but they have different spelling and dictation. Moreover, when an L2 word contains unfamiliar sounds or its script is not the same as the learners' mother tongue script like Farsi, learners may have more difficulty for writing the correct words. Several scholars (e.g., Crystal, 2003; Nation, 1990) also clarifies that English spelling appears to be more irregular than it actually is since many of the most frequent words are among the more than 500 words that have irregular spelling.

In sum, this study aims to uncover the effects of using computer word/grammar processor on students' spelling and grammar improvement. The quasi-experimental evaluation of the spelling/grammar checker abilities can be important for EFL teachers to enhance primary students' English language dictation.

Review of the Literature

There are several studies (e.g., Chapelle, 2003) that have emphasized the role of technology in both formal and informal learning settings to advance abilities in learning the English language. Accordingly, technology enhancing language learning may be a vital factor to improve the language ability of students both inside and outside classrooms. EFL teachers who teach English as a second language in the related contexts may recognize the students’ need to use English away from the classroom in order to improve their communicative competence. Thus, teachers may enable learners to be more motivated by using technology in the process of learning the English language, especially the writing skill.

A useful review regarding applying technology to support language learning is addressed by Gordon (2007). She has shown various reports and states that several improvements can be seen in language learning, especially in the form and content of teaching and learning enhanced by technology. Moreover, the understanding level of learners can greatly increase the role of technology in language learning (Gordon, 2007). The related literature of the use of technology in language learning noted that various advantages could be associated with technology tools enhancing the learning process. This literature explains that technology influences writing skills in many ways. For instance, it has begun with a simple computer program for word processing in spelling and grammar correction and then it has developed many tools that have advanced and applied to reading and writing English for pedagogical uses.

The Microsoft Word Processing program is user-friendly and all the users are able to use it for writing texts. Therefore, it can be the best tool to use for writing skill. Al- Harbi (2008) notes that the application of word processor software for students' writing skills using a word processor has been enhanced by technology. Kasapoglu-Akyol (2010) believes that typing texts and communication skills for the students at Michigan University could be developed through the application of computer-based learning. He concluded that these elements can be useful to learners when they are using them to carry out their tasks flexibly. Furthermore, he indicated that teachers and learners will experience progress in their daily tasks due to these elements. The importance of applying technology tools to enhance reading and writing abilities, especially for L2 learners who need to do their tasks or those who need to acquire some knowledge of English writing skill.

The writing processes for learners using word processing are also reviewed by Kasapoglu-Akyol (2010) who stated that "word processors, including some that are bilingual, are an excellent way to further writing development and motivate students to write" (p. 229). In the same vein, Peregoy and Boyle (2012) conducted a study to support this view that technology tools enhanced writing abilities of many learners because they are user-friendly, and students are able to learn at a more effective manner. Moreover, their research depicted that learners could learn more efficiently when they used technology elements instead of traditional methods since the basic language of the language teaching web sites are in English; therefore, theachers need to enhance a favorable learning environment for students.

Learning with computer tools have facilitated language learning since learners are able to gain easy access to English learning lessons and writing activities software. There is not any restriction if the learners are inside or outside of the classrooms. As a result, English learning processes are improving because technology can enable learners to connect and communicate with each other when using these tools all over the world. This indicates that learners who learn English can benefit from the use of Microsoft word processing apps and online dictionaries. Following Nomass (2013), rapid advancing technology has enabled the creation of computer learning applications that can be used by learners using tasks, activities, and tools such as mobile phones, tablets, and laptops when they need to download and then install the computer

programs. The technology of spelling and grammar checker can allow learners to practice their handwriting skills and to learn alternative words and structures while writing through the use of computer programs.

The other effective tool that is used to teach writing to leaners who are not native English speakers is a blog that gives chances to learners who want to create and use their blogs. This is easily printed and shared in a simple way. Blogs can be used by novice learners and the ones who have at least a minimal understanding of computer operation. Bloch (2007) states that many college learners gain critical knowledge and receive help on how to write academically from blogs. The class blog is used during writing classes when learners are advised to read and reply to the posts made by others. Then, they would utilize the knowledge of writing gained from that exercises in their academic tasks.

The learners who are in advance classes can use emails as an opportunity to write and discuss what they have read from various sources. This is because there are ideas and perceptions of what various sources contain, and, therefore, it is a useful area to be used because learners are the communicators in emailing activities (Grandzol&Grandzol, 2010). Taranto et al (2011) note that using emailing activities and driving force of reading and writing emails are two potential activities that students need while this tool acts as a mediator. Thus, learners can interact outside of the schools and exchange their ideas and knowledge from to interact with one another about various ideas, books, sources, etc. In sum, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

RQ 1. Does computer word spelling/grammar checker significantly affect elementary language EFL learners' spelling?

RQ 2. Does computer word spelling/grammar checker significantly affect elementary language EFL learners' grammar?

Method

Participants and Setting

The present stud was conducted in at Adiban English Language Institute, Ahvaz, Khouzestan, Iran. The participants were 50 learners among 80 learners with the age ranging from 13 to 15 years old. They have been studying EFL for at least three years. Their English language proficiency was tested via the Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT) and their level of EFL proficiency was determined as elementary. The learners were randomly divided into two experimental groups (spelling group and grammar group). It should be noted that the participants of the current study were all female and their native language was Farsi.

Instrumentation

In the present research, five instruments were used. The first instrument was the OQPT that tested the learners' proficiency level since there was a need to arrive at the participants' homogeneity as a vital assumption of the study. This test helped the researcher to determine the level (i.e., elementary) of the participants. Thus, based on the results of the OQPT test, the

learners who got scores between 18 and 27 were selected at elementary level and were selected as the target participants of the current research.

There are two separate pretests were given to both groups in order to determine their grammar and spelling knowledge before receiving the treatment. The first pretest was a researcher-made multiple-choice (MC) pretest of grammar that was used at the beginning of the present study. The grammar pretest included 20 grammar items from the students' textbook. The allocated time for the test was 20 minutes and the correct choice to each item received one point in each pretest item. The validity of the pretest was measured by five English experts. The researcher piloted the test on a similar group other than the participants of the study. The test reliability was calculated through applying KR-21 formula (r=.811).

The second pretest was used for the spelling group included 20 spelling items. This research tool was a researcher-made spelling pretest. The spelling pretest included 20 MC items based on the students' text book. All items were fill-in the blank. One letter from each word was omitted and the teacher asked the test takers to add the missing letter to the word in the sentences. The allocated time was 20 minutes and the correct answer to each item received one point. The validity of the spelling pretest was confirmed by the same English experts in the grammar pretest. The second pretest was piloted like the first pretest in another context. Its reliability was measured via KR-21 formula as (r=.799).

The fourth and fifth instruments of the present study were two researcher–made grammar and spelling post-tests. They were modified versions of the grammar and spelling pre-tests that were used as the post-tests to measure the effects of the treatment on the students' grammar and spelling improvement. They were similar to the pretests and their items were changed in order to avoid the learners' reminding of the pretests.

It is worth mentioning that all items of the both post-tests were similar to the items of the pre-tests in terms of time allocation.

Procedure

Firstly, the OQPT was used to measure the participants' homogeneity level of English proficiency in terms of English language proficiency. Fifty elementary students out of 80 were selected. Then, they were randomly assigned into two equal groups of 25. One of the groups was a grammar group and the another was a spelling group. Both groups were experimental and received intervention of learning grammar and spelling via Microsoft Word spelling/grammar checker. Secondly, the pretest of grammar and spelling were administered to record the learners' scores at the beginning of the study. Then, the researcher started the instruction. The participants of both experimental groups received the treatment; they were taught through computer word spelling grammar processor.

In spelling group classroom, 10 laptops were available for teaching spelling through using computer word spelling grammar processor. Some words and sentences were read by the researcher and the students were wanted to type them through computer word spelling grammar

processor in the computer Word. The students were instructed how to correct their spelling errors through computer word spelling grammar processor. Thus, the students were provided with explicit spelling instruction. For their homework, some vocabulary and sentences were given to the students on the paper and they were asked to type them in computer Word and use computer Word spelling grammar processor whenever they write incorrectly.

Similarly, in grammar group classroom, 10 laptops were available in the class for learning grammatical points through using computer grammar processor. The sentences that were containing grammatical points were read by the teacher and the students were required to type them through computer word spelling grammar processor in the computer word. The students were taught how to correct their grammar errors through computer word spelling grammar processor. Therefore, the students were provided with explicit grammar instruction. Grammar word processing package was used to remove the problem that students faced while learning grammar. For their homework, some ungrammatical sentences were given to the students on the paper and they were be required to correct them in the computer word by using computer word grammar processor.

The intervention lasted in 10 sessions and each session took 50 minutes. The classes were taught by the researcher. In the warm-up session, the participants were homogenized and in the second session they were pretested. During seven sessions, the intervention of teaching grammar and spelling on how to use Word processor spelling and grammar checker for correcting the errors was practiced. The learners were studying the tasks and the exercises were done by the learners. They answer the questions while they were sung grammar and spelling checkers to correct their mistakes and errors in each session. In the last session, the two groups took the post-tests of grammar and spelling separately. The collected data were scored and analyzed at the end of the intervention sessions. Data were measured to estimate the normality of data. Since if the data were normal, the researcher can use parametric statistics like t-test or one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). Thus, in order to check the normality of the data, Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) test was used. As the data were normal, independent and paired samples t-tests were used to measure the impact of using the computer spelling/grammar word processor on learners' spelling and grammar at the elementary level (Creswell, 2020).

Results

The collected data were analyzed via, the SPSS software, version 22. The pretest and posttest scores of the spelling and grammar were gathered and they were analyzed via one-sample Kolmogorov -Simonov (KS) test to examine the normality of data. If the scores are distributed normally, parametric tests like t-test can be used. Results are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1

One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov (KS) Test (Pre and Post-tests)

		Spelling Pre	Grammar Pre	Spelling Post	Grammar Post
N		25	25	25	25
Normal Parameters[a,,b]	Mean	10.36	11.40	11.28	15.12
	Std. Deviation	5.14	5.06	6.04	5.40
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.145	.145	.171	.204
	Positive	.135	.122	.127	.183
	Negative	-.145	-.145	-.171	-.204
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		.725	.727	.854	1.018
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.669	.665	.459	.251

a. Test distribution is Normal.

b. Calculated from data.

As it is displayed in Table 1, the mean scores are normally distributed since the significant value is more than 0.05 in each test. Thus, the parametric tests including t-test can be utilized to compare both groups in the pre and posttests.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics (Pre-test)

	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pre-test	Spelling	25	10.36	5.14	1.02
	Grammar	25	11.40	5.06	1.01

Table 2 indicates descriptive statistics of grammar and spelling classes. The mean score of the spelling group is 10.36 and the grammar group is 11.40. In other words, both groups were close in gaining pretest mean score at beginning of the intervention.

Table 3:

Comparing Groups' Pre-test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F	Sig.	*t*	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.014	.907	-.720	48	.475	-1.04	1.44	-3.94	1.86
Equal variances not assumed			-.720	47.98	.475	-1.04	1.44	-3.94	1.86

Table 3 displays that t-test was run and shows the mean scores of both groups are not significantly different on the pre-test. This is because the significant value (.457) is greater than 0.05. Thus, the difference between both groups' means in the pretests is not significant.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics (Post-test)

	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Post-test	Spelling	25	15.28	6.04	1.20
	Grammar	25	15.12	5.40	1.08

As it is shown in Table 4, there is descriptive statistics of both groups' means of the post-test. The spelling group's posttest of the mean score is 15.28 and the grammar group's mean score shows 15.12. In other word, both groups' mean scores are similar to some extent.

Table 5

Comparing Groups' Post-test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F	Sig.	*t*	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	1.653	.205	-2.368	48	.062	-3.84	1.62	-7.10	-.57
Equal variances not assumed			-2.368	47.4	.062	-3.84	1.62	-7.10	-.57

T-test statistics of the posttest in both groups indicates that the difference between the groups' mean scores is not significant since the significant value of the table is p=0.062 which

is less than p<0.05. Thus, the spelling and the grammar groups' mean scores are not significantly different on the post-test.

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics of Pre and Posttest of Each Group

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Spelling Pre	10.36	25	5.14	1.02
	Spelling Post	15.28	25	6.04	1.20
Pair 2	Grammar Pre	11.40	25	5.06	1.01
	Grammar Post	15.12	25	5.40	1.08

Based on the descriptive statistics in the table above, the mean scores of the spelling group on the pre and post-tests are 10.36 and 15.28, respectively. The grammar group's mean scores on the pre and post-tests are 11.40 and 15.12, respectively.

Table 7

Comparing Pre and Posttest of Each Group

		Paired Differences			95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	*t*	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	Spelling Pre – Spelling Post	-.9200	5.90	1.18	-3.35	1.51	-.779	24	.044
Pair 2	Grammar Pre – Grammar Post	-3.720	3.34	.66	-5.10	-2.3	-5.555	24	.000

T-test in the paired statistics indicates the significant value of p=0.044 is less than 0.05. Thus, the difference between the pre-test and post-test is significant in the spelling group. Similarly, since significant level is p=0.000 in the grammar group and it is less than 0.05, the difference between the pre-test and post-test of the grammar group is significant too. In other words, both groups significantly performed well in the posttest; however, the spelling group shows a slight surge comparing the grammar group in the posttest.

Discussion

The results of the study were reported in the above sections regarding the comparison between the pretest and posttest of the experimental groups of spelling and grammar. In this section, the research questions are answered. The results of the t-test analysis are discussed concerned with the comparison between the pre and posttests in both groups. Moreover, the results of the study are compared with the scholars' findings of the elated literature.

RQ 1. Does computer word spelling/grammar checker significantly affect elementary language EFL learners' spelling?

Findings of the study showed that the participants in the spelling group had better performance on the post-test compared to their pre-test but there was not significantly different. In other words, Microsoft Word spelling and grammar checker could enhance both groups' performance significantly in the posttest. Thus, it can be concluded the response to the first research question is positive. Moreover, computer word spelling grammar processor helped Iranian EFL learners' dictation.

As the results observed, the learners of spelling group performed similarly comparing to the spelling group. This was manifested that using computer while learning was very effective in learning spelling in the classroom. The learners listened to the teacher eagerly while the teacher was teaching spelling. The effectiveness of using computer was obvious in the students' post-test. In fact, computer helped the participants to enhance their English spelling. This result agrees with those findings noted in the Li and Cumming's (2009) studies investigating the effect of word processing on the writing skill of learners of English as a second language (ESL) and their writing tasks. They worked on the speakers with advanced English proficiency who were studying ESL in Toronto. The participants in that study worked with computers and their performance were recorded. Then they work on the recorded writings to edit or revise them. One group did the revision via computer and the other group did the edit manually. The findings showed that participants did well when they work on the activities evaluated in the computer session. They also showed significant progress when the worked with computer. Thus, results of this study are in line of other scholars (e.g., Zainia&Mazdayasnab, 2014) who believe that computer-generated essays help learners who receive higher scores in computer-edited texts than the hand-written ones.

In conclusion, this study is matched with Azizaturrohmi (2019) who examined the effect of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) on the development of EFL learners' writing abilities. The post-test of the learners' means showed that the learners in the computer-based instruction were better outperformed their counterparts in terms of using appropriate articles and tense. The findings support the claim that computer-based instruction helps students to improve their writing skills.

RQ 2. Does computer word spelling/grammar checker significantly affect elementary language EFL learners' grammar?

Data analysis showed that the learners in the grammar group significantly performed in the posttest. In other words, they did effectively in learning grammar after the treatment sessions using grammar checker. The findings showed that the learners who used word processor checker instruction through had better performance on their post-test compared with their pre-test. Moreover, results revealed that grammar group significantly did better on the post-test. Therefore, the answer to the second question is positive since computer word grammar processor does have significant effect on Iranian elementary students' grammar improvement.

The findings of this study are consistent with Esmaeilifard and Nabifar (2011) who found CALL does impact reading comprehension in Iranian EFL context. The findings also showed that the experimental group outperformed the control group regarding reading comprehension in that study. In addition, the results of this study are supported by GhalamiNobar and Ahangari (2012) who realized CALL improve Iranian EFL learners' task-based listening as a motivating device to enhance learning positive attitudes. In the experimental group, learners had access to a computer in an English lab where the participants received task-based listening comprehension. They did some tasks and comprehension questions through their e-mails while the control group did work with computers and participated in face-to-face sessions. The findings indicated that the experimental group outperformed the control group.

Conclusion

General findings of this study address the use of computer-based instruction, especially the use of Microsoft Word spelling and grammar checker. The present study measured the impact of the word processor in writing correct words and sentences among Iranian EFL learners. After the intervention, both groups of spelling and grammar significantly progressed in their post-tests. In this case, it may be concluded that this progress can be attribute to the computer word spelling grammar processor. Such results showed a positive effect of the using digital programs in writing tasks in which correct spelling and grammar are two main factors language learning.

The use of computer may increase the students' linguistic knowledge in learning English. The lack of this knowledge may promote their language abilities what lack in the traditional and face-to-face classes. The problem of self-study and self-monitoring can be minimized in the learners who work with computers. These two abilities may remove lack of interest among Iranian students toward learning English. When materials that are used by English language teachers are mostly traditional, the learners may be frustrated since almost all of them have access to new technology and mobile apps. They use these new advances in their life every day and the use of these new apps is one of their daily activities. The use of technologies such as computer might increase Iranian learners' motivation in learning English as a foreign language.

The teachers' role in using appropriate computer-based instruction is more important. The computers are not enough by themselves since the teachers should be competent in using new apps and programs as part of the teaching process. They help students with new information and let teachers free from hard work since teachers can use computers provide the learners with valuable feedback and offer always good information to their students. Learners may use these programs to improve their self-efficacy and good monitoring since computer can give them appropriate feedback to correct their errors. Learners' autonomy is the other outcome of the CALL programs. It gives the chance of independency in learning and outside the class activities. In other words, computers are valuable teacher assistants that remove the burden on the teachers' shoulder in the learning process. They are good potentialities during language learning and teaching while teachers should not forget the fact that human being is an important factor in using these computer facilities. That is the teacher who play the role of guide in running the class and comes to provide feedback when computer fails to do that. Pedagogical implications of the study suggest that EFL teachers may use computer word processor for

assisting the learners who are studying writing courses to develop their writing abilities. Spelling and grammar checkers may be useful when the teachers are going to save time for checking organization of writing and coherence of the essays since the learners are able to solve their own spelling/grammar problem and become independent in correction their errors and mistakes. Since working with the spelling/grammar checker is very easy, students at the earliest stages of learning English can use it inside and outside of the classroom.

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