Gaziantep University Journal of Social Sciences (http://jss.gantep.edu.tr)
2013 12(2) Technology Special Issue: 367-373 ISSN: 1303-0094

The effects of cartoon software on developing reading skills*

Çizgi film yazılımının okuma becerisi gelişimindeki etkileri*

Dönercan DÖNÜK[a]
Mersin University

Özge KUTLU
Toros University

Abstract

Thanks to the technological advances, language teaching classrooms, along with the other classroom settings, have been exposed to a shift. Due to the fact that the contributions of technological software and Web tools to language skills are a requirement in this world of education, language teachers try various ways to use technology in their classroom settings. In this respect, the present study aims to see the effects of cartoon software on developing reading skills of A2 level students.

Keywords: cartoons, reading skill, English language teaching, visual input

Özet

Son yıllardaki teknolojik gelişmeler sayesinde dil öğretilen sınıflar diğer tüm eğitim ortamları gibi değişmeye başlamıştır. Teknolojik yazılım ve web araçlarının günümüz eğitiminin birer parçasıdır. Bu nedenle pek çok yabancı dil öğretmeni de bu tip teknolojileri sınıflarında uygulamak için çeşitli yollar denemektedir. Bu bağlamda, bu çalışmada çizgi film yazılımının A2 seviyesindeki öğrencilerin okuma beceresinin gelişimdeki etkileri araştırılmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: çizgi filmler, okuma becerisi, İngilizce öğretimi, görsel kullanımı

* The manuscript has been presented at 6th International Computer and Instructional Technologies Symposium Gaziantep/Turkey

[a] Mersin University Yenişehir Campus, 0324 341 2815, candonuk@gmail.com

Introduction

With the changing conditions in the world of education, educators and learners alike find themselves in the need for updating their teaching and learning habits, for the paradigms in education are geared to the innovations presented as the contemporary assumptions of the educational world. One of these recent novelties can be achieved with the computer technology in language teaching. Skill based teaching, which makes up an important place in contemporary language teaching methodology, takes its strength from audio visual elements in receptive skills for the internalization of language items. Out of these two skills, reading can borrow the visual elements, which play a vital role in the language learning process, from context with the help of technology.

However, although many textbooks include visuals, they do not present them in a context. Hence, the students cannot easily comprehend the linguistic components in these pieces of language, which are not organized according to a principle. The importance of context in language learning is emphasised in the recent approaches to language education (Weaver, 1996; Phipps & Borg, 2009), which can be realized only through receptive skills in the form of reading and listening. There is a great deal of research that shows the development of reading skills through the input provided by reading or listening texts in the form of written discourse (Shohamy & Inbar, 1991; Murphy, 1996; Diakidoy et al., 2005). Besides, the lack of a systematic presentation deprived of a context falters the language achievement, for the learner is exposed to linguistic items that do not bear the features of a discourse in terms of cohesion and coherence.

The unity of a context can be achieved through technological tools, which makes the input provision easy and rich. Web 2.0 tools emerging to be the most vital tools of contemporary language learning and teaching systems can serve as effective means for the creation of learning environments. Thanks to internet through our computers, as language teachers, we find it easy to create learning cycles in which it is possible for a learner to follow a language item regardless of the time and the place. As a supportive argument, Ybarra & Green (2003) states that computers may raise the level of interest as they make the text readable. They also highlight that computers can give feedback instantly, and they enable the learners with further practice, which may be of great help for the learners as there is not time restriction through them. Furthermore, Kasper (2000) points out that technology use contributes positively to the development of reading skill. It is undeniable that if not used effectively, technology does not mean a lot for any kind of learning; in our case; learning a language free of a context. On the other hand, the context, if combined with technology, serves as an ideal tool for the improvement of the reading skill of the learner; particularly reading comprehension, which uses a context in the form of storytelling in teaching young learners and young adults. As a further point, Bahrani & Sim (2012) underline the importance of storytelling stating, "Cartoons and films with good story lines seem to motivate the learners to absorb the language input better, and they have a significant effect on the language improvement." Lai et al. (2002) highlight the contribution of these

tools, stating that comic stories and strips are efficient systems for language learners.

As a further remark, Baker (2011) points out that comics and graphic novels are of great help for language learners to develop their literacy skills as well as language acquisition. In the studies mentioned, and in many others, it is possible to pinpoint the vitality of visual aids, for they can be said to be the cornerstones of language learning as they fortify the input and facilitate a longer and more permanent retention of the input in the memory. In addition to the visual features, comic strips or cartoons also provide storylines for the reader, which enables the learning or acquisition of the linguistic items in a sequence without any interruption, corruption or the change of point of view. Additionally, the context provided for young learners also serves as a field, in other words, as the environment for the young learner, who learns more easily in a context as a field dependent learner. In this sense, the reader is able to follow the linguistic input without any fault line, thus building up a kind of sense to infer the form, function and meaning of a specific linguistic component. For the reasons given above, this study, unlike many others, offers a discourse, a written text, which is provided through visual contexts in a storyline, and the effect of the visuals as cartoon software on the development of reading skills is tested.

2. Methodology

2. 1. Participants

Participants of this study were 24 students who attended a private language course in Mersin/Turkey. The participants of the groups, at elementary levels, were randomly appointed among others, just on the principle of equal success rate and equal language proficiency. The participants were divided into two as experimental and control groups.

2. 2. Research tools

The researchers designed and implemented a Web 2.0 program (see the References) as the cartoon that had a context of situation (In our study, İrem at school), in which there was a storyline in terms of the continuity of an episode (See Figure 1). This served indirectly as the research tool, for the researchers used it to see whether it increased the achievement levels of the students, or not.

Figure 1. The Cartoon of the episode: İrem at school

The second research tool was the language achievement test which evaluated and assessed the reading skill achievement levels of the learners in both groups. The last tool was a semi structured questionnaire that was given to the students asking about their opinions of the cartoon.

2. 3. The Procedure

Having designed the research tool, the researchers appointed the participants randomly only considering their linguistic proficiency levels. In the experimental group, the researchers used reading comprehension passages in the form of cartoons with episodes, supported by visual materials, thus, enhancing the effect of the context on the memories of the learners. On the other hand, in the control group, the researchers reverted to more traditional approaches towards reading comprehension, simply reading the book, and answering the questions.

The implementation was repeated at intervals with different comprehension passages accompanied by questions to elicit the success rate of the students. Moreover, the cartoons, prepared for the students to be used as an extra-curricular activity as a follow up, were shared by the researchers via a social network. At the end of the implementation, the success rate of each participant was statistically processed, and a semi structured questionnaire was applied to the learners in the experimental group to find out what they thought of the cartoons.

3. Findings and Discussion

Once the data had been collected, the results were processed by using the mix-methods research design. For this reason, the present research used both quantitative and qualitative research paradigms (Dörnyei, 2007). The numerical data was processed by using SPSS statistical pack, and the responses of the participants (statements of the participants received in the mother tongue for the ease of expression, and translated by the researchers) to the implementation in the semi structured questionnaire were analysed through content analysis "to obtain descriptive information about a topic" (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003).

The results of the statistical findings showed that the achievement of the learners increased to a considerable degree in the experimental group, (see Table 1 & Table 2) which could be interpreted as that learners made use of the visual input provided for them. On the other hand, the achievement of the control group remained almost the same. Moreover, the views of the experimental group in terms of the benefits of the program indicated that the visual supported learners. Thanks to the cartoons, their cognitive engagement in the task provided for them in the form of reading comprehension increased.

Table 1. The pre-post results of the experimental group

Pre-post test scores	Test	$\overline{X}$	t	Sig.(2-tailed)
Experimental	Pre Test	2.4096		
	Post Test	4.0812	-3.986	.003

The variation between the pre test (M=2.4096) and post test results (M=4.0812) of the experimental group illustrates the significant difference between the two results (p=0.003). This statistical difference highlights the importance of using cartoons for increasing the achievement levels for reading skill.

Table 2. The pre-post results of the control group

Pre-post test scores	Test	$\overline{X}$	t	Sig.(2-tailed)
Control	Pre Test	2.2938		
	Post Test	2.5537	0.754	.384

The variation between the pre test (M=2.2938) and post test results (M=2.5537) of the experimental classes illustrates that there is not a significant difference between the two results (p= .384). This finding illustrates the fact that traditional reading techniques do not contribute to an increase in the reading achievement levels of the students. This result is consistent with the previous studies in the literature (Willing & Willing, 2000; McGlinn & Parrish, 2002; Shen, 2006).

As the qualitative data, the gathered data of the semi structured questionnaire showed that students found the Web 2.0 tool an effective way for their betterment in reading comprehension. One of the students remarked that visuals could boost her language learning skills, and that she could remember linguistic rules easily with the pictures (P. 1). Another participant wished to learn with such a tool in the classroom, stating;

> "I think I can get the benefit of visuals if I have the opportunity to study them in the classroom. Otherwise, I may not learn easily with them." (P. 5)

Besides the entertaining face of the cartoons embodied in reading passages, they seemed to impress students while enabling them to guess some words in context as it is pointed out by some participants:

> "Reading is a boring skill as I don't easily understand the meaning due to some words. If I get the chance to practise a warm up reading with cartoons, I think I will be good at this skill." (P. 12).
>
> "Reading is hard for me, because I don't like memorizing words to understand the passage. I need to guess them. Cartoons may give me the chance to guess them through visualization." (P. 8).

On the other hand, some students pointed out that as reading was a hard skill, cartoons might not be a solution for higher level texts:

> "Cartoons are good for me to improve reading, but I don't believe it is good for me to understand all the meaning." (P. 14).
>
> "I have never had a reading activity with cartoons. It is better to read a text embedded in dialogues, but I think all texts cannot be transformed into cartoons." (P. 1).

The participants mostly used the term, 'interesting', 'enjoyable', and 'boring' as the key themes emerging from the responses to the questionnaire.

This can be construed on the grounds that a new outlook towards teaching skills could be of tremendous value to the world of education, for it has changed course towards teaching through technology, and the learner profiles, styles and strategies have been shaped in line with the contributions of the technology (basically the computer and the Internet) to individual development. The contemporary approaches to language education locates the learner everywhere for the learning to start as opposed to traditional approaches which sets strict limits to the learners to be confined to classroom environments.

4. Conclusion

Skill based teaching, and teaching a foreign/second language by using a skill has proven to be an effective way, and there is a great deal of research in this field. As an extension to these studies, with a more specific application, the research conducted in this study produced fruitful results and implications for language teaching practices. Using cartoons for improving the reading skills could be an effective way of teaching a language, for it appeals to the senses of the learner. Thus, language learning becomes a more enjoyable process, and this type of learning is more long-lasting, for the retention of the knowledge in the memory is longer than any kind of temporary learning. If used wisely and within a system, technology in its broader sense, and computer, the Internet, and Web 2.0 tools in the narrower sense could change the dynamics of language teaching, and skill based teaching.

References

Baker, A. (2011). Using comics to improve literacy in English language learners. *Research paper submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Library Science and information Services in the Department of Educational Leadership and Human Development University of Central Missouri.*

Bahrani, T. & Sim, T. S. (2012). Audiovisual news, cartoons, and films as sources of authentic language input and language proficiency enhancement. *The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology, 11 (4),* 56-64.

Çakır, İ. (2006). Yabancı dil öğretiminde görsel-işitsel ders aracı olarak videonun kullanılması. *The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology, 5 (4),* 67-72.

Diakidoy, I. A. N., Stylianou, P., Karefillidou, C., Papageorgiou, P. (2005). The relationship between listening and reading comprehension of different types of text at increasing grade levels. *Reading Psychology, 26 (1),* 55-80.

Dörnyei, Z. (2007). *Research methods in applied linguistics: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methodologies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Fraenkel, J. R. & Wallen, N. E. (2003). *How to design and evaluate research in education* (5th edition). New York: McGraw Hill.

Kasper, L. F. (2000). New technologies, new literacies: Focus discipline research and ESL learning communities. *Language learning & Technology, 4 (2),* 105-128.

Lai, C. H., Bjornerud, P. M., Akahori, K., Hayashi, S. (2002). The design and evaluation of language learning materials based on comic stories and comic strips. *Proceedings of the International Conference on Computers in Education.*

Murphy, J. M. (1996). Integrating listening and reading instruction in EAP programs. *English for Specific Purposes, 15 (2),* 105-120.

Phipps, S. & Borg, S. (2009). Exploring tensions between teachers' grammar teaching beliefs and practices. *System*, 37, 380-390.

Shohamy, E. & Inbar, O. (1991). Validation of listening comprehension tests: The effect of text and question type. *Language Testing, 8 (1),* 23-40.

Weaver, C. (1996). *Teaching grammar in context.* Portsmouth: Boynton/Cook Publishers, Heinemann.

Web 2.0 tool. Retrieved on 10.05.2012 from http://www.makebeliefscomix.com/Comix/

Ybarra, R. & Green, T. (2003). Using technology to help ESL/EFL students develop language skills. *The Internet TESL Journal, 9 (3).*