

The Effect of Mobile Phone Applications on Improving EFL Learners' Self-editing

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Abstract

Due to the importance of self-editing, a lot of researches tackled with the nature, the techniques, and the observable role of self-editing in creating good writers. However, very few researches were concerned with CALL and self-editing; no research could be found about using MALL in self-editing. The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of mobile phones on EFL learners' self-editing. The Self-editing application (White Smoke) was used for the purpose of the study. The participants of the study were 18 students in the 2nd level of English Department, University of Bisha, Saudi Arabia. The participants were randomly selected to participate in the study. In order to achieve the objectives of the study, a quasi-experimental study was designed, with pre-and-post test for the research subjects. The results of the study revealed statistically significant differences in self-editing in the two areas of grammar and punctuation but no statistically significant differences were revealed in the two areas of spelling and capitalization.

1. Introduction

The rapid developments in mobile technology have created new opportunities to support the language learning. Recently, mobile phones are cheaper and more powerful. With mobile phones, users can do different tasks. They can take pictures, make audio or video recording, watch videos, send and receive audio, video or text messages, access social networks and browse the internet. These tasks create new contexts for language learning. As a result, many studies were conducted to investigate the effect of mobile phones on language learning (e.g. Cavus & Ibrahim, 2009; Gromik, 2012; Motiwalla, 2007; Thornton & Houser, 2005). The results indicated that mobile phones are useful tools for language learning. To find out the effect of mobile phones on self-editing, an experimental study is needed. In the literature, a good number of studies were conducted to explore the benefit of mobile phones on teaching writing skills in general (e.g. Abedi et al., 2010; Diab, 2010; Hajimohammadi & Mukundan, 2011; Kalman, 2015). However, no single study, to the best of authors' knowledge, was conducted to explore the overall effect of mobile phones on self-editing. Therefore, the primary goal of this study was to explore the effect of mobile phones on EFL learner' self-editing. The present study was conducted to contribute to the existing literature as regards of using mobile phones for self-editing.

Writing is one of the four main skills in English. It is a productive skill which uses the orthographical system of the language. Mahendran (2012: 206) defines writing as "the creation of original text using the individual's intellectual and linguistic resources rather than copying one's text." According to Dastgoshadeh, et al. (2011: 252), writing is a "highly sophisticated skill combining a number of diverse elements, only some of which are strictly linguistic". As one of the four English skills, writing has its own distinctive features. Unlike reading, for example, a writer has the ability to select the content of the written text attentively and appropriately to accommodate what he believes in and the way he likes things to go. Though it has its distinctive features, writing should be taught integrally with the other three skills: reading, listening and speaking.

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Nation (2009: 113) assures the importance of the other three skills in teaching writing and describes writing as "an activity that can usefully be prepared for by work in the other skills of listening, speaking, and reading." On the same point, Hinkel (2006: 113) states that "in meaningful communication, people employ incremental language skills not in isolation, but in tandem."

Since writing is a process, there are some stages a writer should follow in the writing process. Nation (2009:114) identifies seven sub-processes any writer should go through: considering the goals of the writer, having a model of the reader, gathering ideas, organizing ideas, turning ideas into written text, reviewing what has been written, and editing. Morgan and others (2007: 109) claim that five stages should be followed in the process of writing: prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. Hendrix (2013: 271) names four distinct steps/roles in the writing process: madman, architect, carpenter, and judge. The madman brainstorms the main and sub ideas that can be included; the architect transforms those ideas into an outline; the carpenter connects the ideas in the outline to one another forming one or more drafts; the judge is responsible for cleaning and polishing the final draft.

Editing

Editing is the last stage of the writing process. It can be defined as "manipulating a text in such a way that it yields a product which is as correct as possible and thus contains the fewest errors possible," (DePoel, et al., 2012: 6). Mahendran (2012: 209) summarizes the purpose of editing in reducing 'ambiguities and anomalies' in a writing text and increasing its 'readability and acceptability in terms of the writer's goals and intentions'. Therefore an editor should not only deal with the features of grammar, spelling, and punctuation, but he should also go back over the writing and check its organization, style, grammatical and lexical correctness, and appropriateness. (Nation, 2008 & Neubort and McNelis, 1986)

Editing is not only a stage in the writing process but also a process in itself. Many activities can be done in editing. In the process of editing, the writer should "correct misspellings, check punctuation, search for grammatical inaccuracies, look at the paper's format, and consider any of other surface features that might weaken the paper's message," (Kirszner and Mandell, 1992: 62). According to Bates (2011: 13), the process of editing should cover these activities: getting rid of all unnecessary words, improving words that remain, putting the best words in the right places, and removing words to other places. DePoel and others (2012: 13) indicates that a text in the process of editing should go through many people: it should first be given to a content editor who focuses on content and structure; then passed to a development editor who reshapes and inserts missing information; next submitted to a text editor who is responsible for language, grammar, punctuation, style, and the clear and correct meaning conveyed by the components of the text; and finally the production editor will proofread for the final product.

Peer Editing

Editing can be done by the writer himself or there may be some kind of peer editing. Simply, peer editing is a kind of feedback given from one learner to another. It refers to the dynamic process of reviewing peer texts and writing comments where necessary. In peer editing, learners should participate in critical evaluation of peer texts by sharing their drafts for the purpose of discussing them and receiving helpful feedback. (Tessema, 2005: 24; Wakabayashi, 2013: 177). Ozarska (2008: 31) suggests another way to achieve peer editing, that is, by dividing the class into groups, each of which will focus on one aspect of language; organization, logic, vocabulary, or grammar. Peer feedback does not mean the learners can replace the teacher in the process of error correction. Instead, they play the role of agents which "provides the ground upon which learners scaffold each other's' learning," (Wakabayashi, 2013: 179).

Self-Editing

Self-editing is the second form of the editing process. Epting (2003: 14) indicates that writers, in self-editing, work as self-listeners, reacting and editing their own verbal behavior. Due to the nature of writing, writers may have a better chance to edit their work, taking into account the expected behavior of their audience. In its simplest meaning, self-editing demands the writer to revise his work before submitting it for publication.

According to Hendrix (2013), the most important points that should be revised by the self-editor are: the necessity to move a specific paragraph up or down in the piece of writing, the clarity of its sentences and paragraphs, and the relevance and accurateness of its citations.

Cresswell (2000: 236) states that a self-editor needs not to concentrate only on grammar rules and spelling but also on "more 'substantive' or 'global' aspects of content and organization, such as checking logic, relevance of single ideas to the global argumentation pattern, and appropriateness of content to the given reader." Saver (2006) insists on four components a self-editor should take care of: clarity, conciseness, correctness, and compelling. Clarity means to check whether you choose the right words and craft them carefully into your sentences and paragraphs. To achieve clarity, a writer should better avoid long words where simpler words can be used, passive voice, jargon and acronyms, and ambiguous wording. Conciseness can be achieved by checking the use of headings and sub-headings in organizing your article and graphics in presenting information. You can also make your piece of writing concise by omitting 'extraneous words' that can slow the reader down; you can only focus on the 'need to know versus nice to know'. Correctness refers to checking the facts in your piece of writing to ensure their accuracy. Facts include numbers or statistics, references, grammar and spelling, etc. Compelling can be achieved by looking for gaps in logic and anticipating readers' questions.

Self-editing has two main theoretical perspectives: structural and behavioral perspectives. The structural perspective views 'self-editing' as an attempt to understand the mechanisms of speech production whereas the behavioral approach views 'self-editing' as a behavior of interest which is subject to manipulation and study. In the behavioral perspective, the primary function of self-editing is avoidance of, or escape from, unwilling conditions such as a punishment. To avoid a punishment such as reducing marks, a student writer, for example, will edit his piece of writing to avoid committing mistakes, and thus to avoid being punished by his teacher. (Epting, 2003: 7-16). Thus it can be concluded that the followers of the structural perspective pay more attention to speech than the analogous processes in writing. However, the followers of the behavioral perspective pay more attention to writing than to speech. To summarize it can be said that studies related to the application of self-editing in speech can be adhered to the structural perspective whereas studies related to writing have tended to follow the behavioral perspective.

Hughes (2003) suggests many pieces of advice for self-editing, the most important of which are:

- Read your editorial aloud: Reading aloud helps the self-editor to spot flows, errors, holes in logic, word problems, missing words, wrong homonyms, misspelling, grammatical errors, and confusing words.
- Know your weaknesses: You should keep a list of the most frequent problems you always suffer from; either in vocabulary, grammar, or anything else.
- Use spelling checker programs: Use such programs but do not depend on them. They do not tell you whether the used word is the right word or not; they just make sure of the word spelling.
- Make a printout: Print your editorial and revise it with a pencil.

Previous Studies

Several studies were conducted to examine the effect of CALL on EFL writing; others aimed at comparing the effectiveness of peer editing compared with self-editing. For example, Cresswell (2000) carried out a study to investigate the effectiveness of a three-stage program of procedures (raising awareness of process and product, demonstrating annotations, and evaluating annotations) on developing students' self-monitoring. The results showed that the program was effective in developing students' responsible self-monitoring.

Abedi et al., (2010) tried to compare the effect of error correction to that of error detection on the improvement of students' writing ability. The results assured that error detection led to better improvement in the learners' writing than error correction. It will be more useful to encourage your students to detect and correct errors by themselves than to give them immediate correction. Diab (2010) carried out a research to compare the effects of peer-editing to that of self-editing on students' correction of specific language errors in revised drafts. The language errors under study were two rule-based errors (subject-verb agreement and pronoun agreement) and two non-rule-based errors (wrong word choice and awkward sentence structure). Results revealed that peer-editing is more effective in reducing rule-based errors than self-editing. For the non-rule-based errors, both methods of correction have the same significance. Hajimohammadi & Mukundan (2011) conducted a research to investigate the impact of self-

correction method as an alternative to the traditional teacher-correction method. The research results showed that self-correction method proved to be more effective in writing progress than the teacher-correction method.

Pishghadam et al (2011) worked on the Iranian EFL learners' preferences of the corrective feedback type for their written texts. The obtained results suggested that Iranian EFL learners prefer self-correction to teacher and peer correction to correct their pieces of writing. Wakabayashi (2013) conducted a research to determine which is more beneficial to improving learner writing: reviewing peer text or one's own text. The research results revealed that the students who focused on reviewing their own texts showed more improvement than did the students who focused on reviewing peer texts.

Kalman (2015) carried out a research to examine how younger and older adults approach simple and complex computerized writing tasks: writing tasks that were completed on a computer. Typing speed, quantitative measures of outcome and process, and self-corrections were recorded. The results suggest that the approach to the task was different across age groups, either because of age or because of cohort effects. Older adults who typed fast also edited more, whereas younger adults edited their texts regardless of their typing rate; younger adults who took more time to complete the tasks used more delete keys compared to the other keys and edited more.

Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL)

With the rapid development of mobile device, mobile learning has recently become a focus of attention in education (Cho, 2009; Kukulska-Hume, 2009). Moreover, mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) has also attracted much attention with its perceived advantages over traditional computer-assisted language learning (CALL). Mobile learning can be defined as any educational provision where the sole or dominant technologies are handheld or palmtop devices (Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2008). The term covers any portable device such as PDAs, smart phones, and handheld computers with wireless internet access. The possibility of language learning anywhere and anytime has made mobile learning attractive to many researchers of language learning. Therefore, there have been a number of attempts to investigate the effect and preferences of mobile learning and learners using mobile phones (Dia, 2002; Levy & Kennedy, 2005; Stockwell, 2007, 2008; Thornton & Houser, 2005), PDAs (Thornton & Houser, 2003), and handheld computers (Samuel, 2003).

As mobile technologies provide many advantages: flexibility, low cost, small size and user-friendliness, researchers are exploring how to use mobile technology to support language learning. Thornton and Houser (2005) shows that mobile devices can indeed be effective tools for delivering language learning materials to the students. Kukulska-Hulme & Shield (2008) offer an overview of MALL asking whether and how mobile devices support collaborative practice in speaking and listening. The study presented the two main approaches to MALL, content-related and design-related studies.

Currently, there is a good perception of MALL. However, few empirical studies have focused on the effect of mobile devices on writing in general and self-editing, in particular. Most existing studies related to MALL have considered vocabulary-related research (Godwin-Jones, 2011). For example, Song and Fox (2008) conducted a case study to investigate how advanced undergraduates at a university used their Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs) for vocabulary learning. They found that mobile devices were used in various ways for this task. Lu (2008) conducted a quasi-experimental study on the effectiveness of English vocabulary learning through mobile phone short message service (SMS) lessons for a group of 30 high school students.

After a two-week treatment, the SMS lesson group showed more gains in vocabulary recognition as reflected in the comparison of pre- and post-tests of target word recognition. Shafiee, et al., (2015) examined the effect of teaching prewriting strategies through different methods of input delivery (i.e. conventional, web-based, and hybrid) on EFL learners' writing quantity. The results of this study revealed that writing quantity was indeed under the influence of different treatments, with the learners in the hybrid group outperforming their counterparts in all the other groups. Stockwell (2010) compared the vocabulary learning performance and vocabulary gains from pre-intermediate learners of English when using mobile platforms and computers/laptops. His study's results indicate that there were no consistent differences on vocabulary activity scores or vocabulary learning improvements between the two groups.

Very few studies were concerned with mobile phones and writing. One example is Li and Hegelheimer's study (2013) which examined the development and implementation of a web-based mobile application, Grammar Clinic, for an ESL writing class. The results indicated that the learners' performance on Grammar Clinic was positively correlated with their score gains between pre- and post-tests of grammar.

To investigate the effect of mobile phones on EFL learners' self-editing, four research hypotheses were proposed:

1. There was no statistically significant difference between the pretesting and post-testing mean scores of the targeted students regarding grammar.
2. There was no statistically significant difference between the pretesting and post-testing mean scores of the targeted students regarding spelling.
3. There was no statistically significant difference between the pretesting and post-testing mean scores of the targeted students regarding punctuation.
4. There was no statistically significant difference between the pretesting and post-testing mean scores of the targeted students regarding capitalization.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

This classroom-based study was conducted in two intact writing 3 classes. The participants in this study were 18 native speakers of Arabic enrolled in EFL courses in the second semester of the English Department at University of Bisha, Saudi Arabia. Due to university rules and the cultural values that support gender segregation in classes, all of the participants were male students. Of the two sections of students enrolled in Writing 3, 18 students were randomly selected for the study. The writing class met three times a week for the 16-week second semester of 2016. The participants were considered as upper-intermediate learners because they had studied English for six years at schools. All students were competent users of mobiles applications. All of them owned a smartphone and/or internet-enabled mobile devices, such as iPad or other tablets.

3.2 Material and apparatus

The researcher downloaded a program called "White Smoke" from the Google Play. The White Smoke Mobile App is an application which can be fixed on smartphones. It has a lot of good features that can certainly help writers to reach a good version of their writing. The first feature of this application lies in the grammar checker. White Smoke Writer's grammar checker helps writers to investigate grammatical errors such as incomplete sentences, run-on sentences, comma splices, sentence fragments, subject-verb disagreements, double negatives, tense shifts, incorrect punctuation, and capitalization, missing words, and fused sentences. Any grammar error that is detected by White Smoke's grammar checker comes with an understandable explanation of the rule behind the error, in addition to the suggested corrections.

The second feature of White Smoke is the spell checker. White Smoke Writer's spell checker helps writers to get the correct spelling of possible misspelt words. Style checker is the third feature of this application. White Smoke's writer's style checker concentrates on making sure that a text flows and sounds good by identifying the stylistic errors in this text such as sentence variation and tense agreement. It enables ESL/EFL students to ensure that their work is not just technically accurate, but that it flows well and contains no stylistic mistakes.

The fourth feature of White Smoke is the punctuation checker. White Smoke's Writer's punctuation checker has the ability to find and correct obvious errors such as missing punctuation marks, and also less-obvious punctuation errors, like a colon that should really be a dash or an apostrophe that was put in the wrong place. It will not just correct your punctuation errors without showing your mistakes; rather, it will highlight your errors, offer possible solutions, and even provide writing tips that will help you avoid making those same punctuation errors in the future. Translator is the final feature of White Smoke application. White Smoke's translator was designed to translate either a full text or word-to-word translation. It is provided with a dictionary and Thesaurus, alongside with usage examples for every translated word, displaying how it is used in a sentence.

3.3 Design

This research followed a quasi- experimental design in order to investigate the effects of mobile phone applications on EFL learners' self-editing. The research, also, involved a pre-test and a post-test. This study was incorporated into the participants' regular course content.

3.4 Procedures

Before the treatment, the participants were introduced to self-editing: definition, merits, and how to self-edit. After that, they were given an introductory idea to White Smoke, the used MALL application. Besides, the way to use this application and the different types of feedback expected by it were explained to them.

The treatment lasted for one month. During the treatment, the students have one session with two hours every week. Each of the four selected areas of self-editing was taught in one week.

In the first week, the participants were taught how to edit grammatical errors. In the second week, they were taught how to edit spelling errors; in the third, how to edit punctuation errors; and in the final week, they were taught how to edit capitalization errors.

In the fifth week, the participants were asked to write a paragraph and then they were encouraged to edit their own paragraphs by using the traditional way of self-editing. In the sixth week, they were asked to write a paragraph and then they were encouraged to edit their own paragraphs by using the selected MALL application, the White Smoke. Each participant was asked to submit two drafts (first and last) of his paragraph for the traditional way and two drafts for the MALL application. At the end of the treatment, the total paragraphs of the participants were 72 paragraphs: 18 first drafts and 18 last drafts for the traditional way and 18 first drafts and 18 last drafts for the MALL application.

3.5 Data analysis

Self-corrections of each student are classified and categorized. First, a comparison of first and self-edited draft is conducted for each student. Second, the total errors of the first draft of each group were compared. Third, the total corrections of experimental group were compared to the total corrections of control group.

4. Findings and analysis

Since the quasi-experimental approach is used in this research, pretesting and post-testing scores of the targeted students on a self-editing activity were compared. The comparison aims to know whether there is an impact of using mobile phones applications on the process of self-editing. Table 4.1 below sums up the results of self-editing treatment in the two performances.

Table: 4.1&4.2 pre- and post-test of (traditional way and MALL of self-editing)

Paired Samples Statistics					
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	grammar1	2.1667	18	1.68907	.39812
	grammar2	1.9444	18	1.58938	.37462
Pair 2	spelling1	.7222	18	1.01782	.23990
	spelling2	.6667	18	.68599	.16169
Pair 3	punctuation1	2.8333	18	2.57248	.60634
	punctuatin2	2.3889	18	2.40438	.56672
Pair 4	capitalization1	1.0556	18	1.10997	.26162
	capitalization2	.8333	18	1.04319	.24588

Paired Samples Correlations				
		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	grammar1 & grammar2	18	.924	.000
Pair 2	spelling1 & spelling2	18	.365	.136
Pair 3	punctuation1 & punctuatin2	18	.867	.000
Pair 4	capitalization1 & capitalization2	18	-.042	.868

By employing the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 14 for analyzing tabulated data, descriptive statistics (means and standard deviation values) were reported for the research subjects by comparing pretesting scores with post-testing scores.

The mean scores for the targeted students in their first performance (using the traditional way of self-editing) were compared to the mean scores of the same students in their second performance (by using the mobile phone application in self-editing).

Table 4.1 and table 4.2. Sum up the results. They show statistically significant differences between mean scores of the targeted students in some self-editing areas, in favor of the post-testing quality and no statistically significant differences in some other areas. The results shown in the two tables indicate that:

- 1- There was statistically significant difference between the pretesting and post-testing mean scores of the targeted students regarding grammar; consequently, the first hypothesis is rejected since the treatment of using mobile phone applications shows improvement in students' ability to self-edit.
- 2- There was no statistically significant difference between the pretesting and post-testing mean scores of the targeted students regarding spelling; consequently, the second hypothesis is accepted since the treatment of using mobile phone applications has indicated that there was no difference between using mobile phones or the traditional way in improving students' ability to self-edit spelling.
- 3- There was a statistically significant difference between the pretesting and post-testing mean scores of the targeted students regarding punctuation; consequently, the third hypotheses is rejected since the treatment of using mobile phone applications shows improvement in students' ability to self-edit punctuation.
- 4- There was no statistically significant difference between the pretesting and post-testing mean scores of the targeted students regarding capitalization; consequently, the fourth hypothesis is accepted since the treatment of using mobile phone applications has indicated that there was no difference between using mobile phones or the traditional way in improving students' ability to self-edit capitalization.

5. Conclusions and implications

The mobile phone application used in this treatment showed that the student's ability to self-edit is improved in the two areas of grammar and punctuation. This may be due to the apparent weakness in learners' ability to deal with the different grammatical rules and their carelessness of using the punctuation marks accurately in their pieces of writing. This goes commensurately with some few prior researches such as Li and Hergesheimer's research (2013) which proved the positive effect of using one of the mobile phone applications, namely Grammar Clinic, in improving students' performance in writing grammatically correct sentences.

The treatment also showed no significant improvement in student's ability to self-edit the two areas of spelling and capitalization. Besides the good performance of the targeted students in grammar and punctuation, this may be due to the design of the mobile phone applications themselves. Most of these applications are not provided with the sufficient amount of different alternatives for different new words; nor they contain all the capitalization rules, Grammatical and punctuation rules that should be considered in writing a neatly piece of writing. Such shortcomings do not make them competent enough as those of CALL applications. This may seem to have some contradiction with some studies such as Lu's research (2008) which assured the effectiveness of English vocabulary learning through mobile phone short message service (SMS) lessons.

Li and Hergesheimer (2013), for example, proved the positive effect of using one of the mobile phone applications, namely Grammar Clinic, in improving students' performance in writing grammatically correct sentences. However, this does not mean that mobile phone applications are not effective in developing students' ability to self-edit spelling and capitalization since the design of mobile phone applications and the students' performance will be revised regularly. These results stress the importance of mobile phone applications in the process of self-editing. They also highlight the significance of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) in the development of students' ability to self-edit their own pieces of writing. This study, like many other studies, encourages teachers to engage students in as many self-editing activities as possible, employing MALL technology.

Consequently, such activities will participate in creating better writers by helping students to overcome different probable difficulties and making them acquainted with using their daily-used technological devices in the learning process.

In the end, for increasing MALL participation in language acquisition, more significant research about self-editing and MALL devices, including other variables such as sex and document type, is needed to investigate any other possible factor causing the expected improvement.

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