

The Effect of Storytelling via Telegram on Iranian EFL Learners' Speaking Complexity

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Abstract – The present study investigated the effect of storytelling via Telegram on Iranian EFL learners' speaking complexity. In so doing, 50 EFL learners studying English in language institutes were selected based on their performance on a proficiency test. Then, they were divided into two equal groups of experimental and control each consisting of 25 participants. In the first step, the determined words were put in a paper and the students of both groups had to study the paper. The participants of the experimental group were given the stories through Telegram. The control group received speaking instruction through institute's conventional teaching methodology. A posttest was given to the participants of both groups in order to check the students' speaking complexity. The results of independent sample t-test between the posttest scores of the two groups revealed a significant difference between the scores of the experimental group and those of the control group. It was also found that there was a significant difference between the experimental and control group regarding their speaking complexity.

Keywords: storytelling, Telegram, speaking ability, speaking complexity

1. INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization, the changing in teaching-learning process occurs quickly with the help of the modern mobile technologies. Furthermore, mobile devices are developing into important tools for education in general and language learning, in particular. In so doing, all academicians are getting used to this situation to make education as global as possible (Kukulka-Hulme & Shield, 2008, Franklin, 2011). In addition, the growth of the Internet has facilitated distance learning, and it has expanded distance learning in a short period of time. According to Franklin, (2011) the development of social networks technology is one of such advances.

Dane (2013) states that a huge number of college and university academicians are found to be using social networking sites (SNSs) in their classroom"(p. 41). Among the SNSs, What's app messenger, Telegram, Facebook, and Viber have gained more attention (Underwood, 2009). Today, educational practitioners have an opportunity to communicate freely through several messaging platforms including Telegram sharing their experiences with other users all over the

world just by a click of a button (Tawiah, Nondzor & Alhaji, 2014). Telegram is a cross platform instant messaging application. It provides users with sending and receiving location information, images, video, audio, and text messages in real-time among individuals and groups of friends. The new technology has facilitated teaching and learning of different language skills and subskills.

In fact since there have been humans, they have been seeking for procedures to connect, network and promote with one another. Hence, the concepts behind “social networking” are not anything new in the digital age. Below, some of the most important channels and tools are cited. It is necessary for human beings be aware of them. Because today’s relationships often start and develop on WhatsApp, Facebook, LinkedIn and Google+. (Milanovic, 2013).

- **Twitter.** Perhaps it is not only the simplest of all social media platform but also is the funniest and most interesting. That is enough to post a link, share an image or even trade thoughts with favorites.
- **Facebook.** It equals to the “social media” and is one site where individuals are likely to find their friends, colleagues and relatives around. It is both centered sharing photos, links, and show their support to brands or organization.
- **LinkedIn.** That is one of the only mainstream social media sites which actually geared towards business. It is excellent for meeting customers and keeping up with the least in business or industry news.
- **Google+.** It has really arrived over the past few years. It is a combination of the best of Facebook and Twitter. G+ profile takes a few minutes to be set up.
- **Tumblr.** This platform essentially hosts microblogs for its users. So, it is different from many others. Individuals and companies can fill their blogs with images and short video clips.
- **You Tube.** You Tube has become popular as a video sharing service. It is the world’s second-largest search engine. Users have the ability to share, rate and comment on what they see.
- **Instagram.** This is the answer for a quick, convenient connection but the camera feature on smart phone and all social media profiles. It will allow sharing via Twitter, Facebook and the Instagram website. It is possible to choose from a variety of photo filters and invitation friends to comment on photos or ideas.
- **Vine.** It is site and also as an app. User possesses the chance to share and view brief video clips. It offers not only virtually use but also entertainment-focused content.
- **WhatsApp.** The concept of WhatsApp is simple: share text-style messages to the others using the platform, but without paying data charges. It has gathered more than 700 million fans and this app is the world’s most popular messaging platform. (Milanovic, 2013).

- **Telegram.** It is a cross-platform instant messaging application. It provides users with sending and receiving location information, images, video, audio, and text messages in real-time among individuals and groups of friends. Telegram can be installed on both mobile (Android, iOS, Windows Phone, Ubuntu Touch) and desktop systems (Windows, mac OS, Linux). In February 2016, Telegram stated that it had 100 million monthly active users, sending 15 billion messages per-day (Sorayyaei Azar & Nasiri, 2014).

Social networking has influenced all features of modern society specifically the educational realm (Mason & Rennie, 2008). One of the aspects of social networking is the facility to enable appointment between characters. In an educational setting, connection between a student and scholar is of indispensable importance and social networking may be capable of facilitating this engagement between human beings. Another matter that connects to social networking is the large number of technologies that can be worked but some of these technologies may be better adapted to an educational situation than the others (Leitch & Warren, 2015). For example, the 21 most influential instruments and channels consist of Facebook, linked in and G+ in which connecting and learning occur significantly (Milanovic, 2013). Using the social learning theory which assumes people in society learn from each other, the 32 Thai university students joined the Facebook. The participants' writing assignments on Facebook was collected. The analysis of data revealed that the use of Facebook in the teaching and learning of writing English has to a certain extent been effective. It needs to do more research to find ways to make it more effective though.

Speaking skill is one of the most crucial core components of language proficiency. Different methods are used to improve all English skills such as speaking for adult learners. The integration of technology in language teaching is suggested to facilitate learning processes. Recently online learning is facilitating learning process. Speaking is a major purpose for both Language learners and teachers all over the world. Wongsuwana (2006) argued that speaking Skills can be taught and it is not related to the talent. Wongsuwana (2006) further argued that speaking is regarded essential for oral communication. Staab (1992) noted that in order to teach second language learners how to speak in the best way possible, some speaking activities are provided that could be applied both in ESL and in EFL classroom settings. They include discussion, role-play, simulation, information gap, brainstorming, storytelling, interview, reporting, and playing cards (Staab, 1992).

Razmi, Pouralib, and Nozad (2014) investigated the use of digital storytelling in an Iranian undergraduate EFL classroom among sixty learners to see whether using computer based tools affect the improvement of learners' narrative skills. Participants were divided into two groups and took part in an activity organized by researchers. One group created their digital stories of the given stories selected from Perrine's literature course book to be presented in the classroom. Other group was asked to read the given stories and then present them. Both groups were tested for their oral production and competence. The results showed that by the use of digital storytelling techniques students develop better oral skills and this technique can be considered as an essential tool in foreign language learning and teaching.

As Robin (2008) said the first application of multimedia technology in the classroom for educational purposes is introduced by Lambert and the Atchley who helped the advent of the digital storytelling movement in the late 1980s as cofounders of the Center for Digital Storytelling (CDS) in Berkeley, California. The CDS developed the seven elements of Digital Storytelling. According to Robin “[This] combination of powerful, yet affordable, technology hardware and software meshes perfectly with the needs of many of today’s classrooms, where the focus is on providing students with the skills they will need to ‘thrive in increasingly media-varied environments’”(Robin, 2008, p. 222).

Speaking skill in both native and second or foreign language involves acquiring proficiency. It has its own skills to become proficient. According to Upsher (1979) proficiency or language ability views as a pragmatic ascription (someone is proficient) and as a theoretic construct representing human capacity (someone has proficiency). Teachers have to stress on the fluency and accuracy of their learners in teaching speaking skill. Essberger (2000) proposes that speaking is not occurring without opportunity of talk with the interlocutors the same as other skills, and then teachers should prepare an area for learners to speak. Brown and Yule (1983) argue that, "In the production of speech, [...] each speaker needs to speak. He needs to speak individually and he needs someone to listen to his speaking and to respond to him" (p. 25). According to Brown (2007) who could speak in a language means that he can communicate proficiency while Thumbury (2005) proposes that speaking in the real time is one of the important aspects of speaking.

Teaching and learning to speak need to learn information of how native speakers use language in the context of structured interpersonal exchange, in addition to grammatical and semantic rules (Richards & Renandya, 2002). According to Lingzhu (2003), top-down is very important for listening process. Prior knowledge, questioning, making a list of possibilities/ idea/ suggestions and looking at pictures strategies before listening have crucial effect in top- down process for listening comprehension.

The purpose of the present study was to explore the impact of online storytelling via Telegram on improving Iranian EFL learners' speaking complexity. The following research question was posed to serve the purpose of the study:

- Does online storytelling via Telegram application improve EFL learners' speaking complexity?

2. METHOD

2.1. Participants

To conduct the study, 50 Iranian EFL learners were selected to participate in the experiment. They were studying in an IELTS preparation class in an English language institute in Shiraz. The participants were selected based on their performance on English language proficiency test: Oxford Placement Test (OPT). They were randomly assigned to two groups of experimental and control. The participants’ age range was between 18 and 28. The participants' native language was Persian. All of the participants were learning English as a foreign language. They had been

learning English for more than four years and were upper-intermediate EFL learners. The participants of the study received speaking instruction along with other language components in their general English course.

2.2. Instruments

The instruments employed for data collection consisted of OPT, pretest and posttest, telegram application and short stories. The detailed description of the instruments is as follows:

Oxford Placement Test (OPT)

The first instrument used in this study was the Oxford Placement Test (OPT). The validity of the test is self-evident. OPT has been used to assess the participants' language proficiency. It also enabled the researcher to have a greater understanding of what level (i.e., elementary, pre-intermediate, intermediate) their participants were at. This test consists of 70 items, including 10 multiple-choice and true-false items for reading, 10 items for writing, and 50 multiple-choice language use items. The time limit for answering the 50 multiple-choice questions and the reading task is 45 minutes and the time limit for the accomplishing writing task is approximately 20 minutes.

Pretest and Posttest

The speaking section of IELTS was selected for the pretest and posttest of the study. It contains three parts, which takes 11-14 minutes. The first part is introduction and interview, which the examiner introduced herself, and asked the participants to introduce themselves and confirm their identity. The questions include general ones on familiar topics, such as home, family, work, studies and interests.

The second section is individual long turn, which the examiner gave a task card, which ask the participants to talk about a particular topic, such as points to include in their talk. The participants had one-minute for preparation and making notes and then talk for 1 to 2 minutes on the topic. Afterwards, one or two questions on the same topic were asked.

In the third section, which is a two-way discussion, the examiner asked further questions, which were related to the topic of the second section. These questions were designed to give opportunity to discuss more abstract issues and ideas.

Speaking complexity was measured by calculating the percentage of dependent clauses to all clauses, which measures the degree of embedding in a text (Wiglesworth & Storch, 2009). The posttest was similar to the pretest, which was administered at the end of the study in order to compare the participants' speaking fluency and complexity after the treatments.

Short Stories

Short stories were selected in order to stimulate EFL learners' speaking ability in English language. They were selected from the book entitled 'can you believe it'. A three-level reading series that combines highly unusual news stories with high-frequency idioms, phrasal verbs, and fixed expressions. Students read and listen to a story (which progresses in length and difficulty

throughout each text) as they look at a sequence of comic-strip style illustrations. The titles of the stories are face to face after 56 years, man ties the knot with stranger, out on a limb, man eats out and gets more than he ordered, engineer is enthusiastic about odd new home. The stories corresponded to the participants' level of language proficiency. Furthermore, 5 short stories were selected based on learner's interest so that it made learners able to find common experience and foster their self-assessments.

Telegram Application

Telegram is an instant messaging service. It enables users to send and receive location information, images, video, audio and text messages in real-time to individuals and groups of friends at no cost. Telegram clients exist for both mobile Android, IOS, Windows Phone, Ubuntu Touch) and desktop systems (Windows, OSX, Linux). Users can send messages and exchange files of any type even they can call through Telegram.

2.3. Data Collection Procedure

In order to investigate the effects of storytelling using the telegram application on Iranian EFL learners' speaking ability, a structured procedure was designed to collect the data. The treatment was conducted in 10 sessions during the summer term in 2017. The research method used in this study was a quasi-experimental one with the pretest-posttest control design.

At the beginning of the study, OPT was administered in order to manifest the participants' homogeneity in terms of English language proficiency. Sixty EFL learners were invited to participate in the proficiency test. Every correct answer in multiple-choice and true false questions was awarded +1 point and every incorrect answer was given 0 point. No penalty was considered for wrong answers in this test. The total score of the test was 70.

Fifty EFL learners could attain in the study and they were then randomly assigned to two equal groups of experimental (N = 25) and control (N = 25). The groups took the pretest in order to test participants' speaking ability before treatment sessions. Two raters scored the pretest.

Then, the participants of each group received a series of stories and speaking instruction. The same amount of time was spent teaching speaking in each class. In the experimental group, the materials were presented through the Telegram application. In order to motivate the participants to take part in the on-line classes, they were informed that the classes were held free. The study utilized Telegram, which is one of the most popular social media's applications for smart phones in Iran. The researcher created a Telegram channel and after observing the ethical issues, all the participants of the experimental group were added to the channel. The experimental group received the teaching material, feedback through the social networking site of Telegram. The instructional module consisted of three different phases including the pre-teaching phase, the teaching phase, and the post-teaching phase. The content for each phase was provided as follow:

In the pre-teaching phase, based on a short story, the information was provided for the learners. In their Telegram channel. In teaching phase, during each class day, the students were

asked to use Telegram to respond to a daily story, and in the post-teaching phase, the learners' speaking complexity was measured by posttest. The participants in the experimental group were taught through the use of Telegram application and practiced them outside of the classroom by their cell phones, tablets, laptops, or computers. The participants in the experimental group were asked to keep the thread of their conversation.

The participants in the control group received speaking instruction from the stories inside the classroom and repeated, practiced, and did the exercises in their classroom. Variety in storytelling activities for a communicative class is remarkable factor. Storytelling in control group engaged learners to be involved in activities, remove anxiety, reduce affective filter, and in long term encourage silent learners to participate in activities. To achieve this goal, different types of storytelling structures were applied during this study:

Reveal story name and ask learner to guess subject of it. This can be done by pointing to some cues or keywords.

3. RESULTS

The Pretest was administered to the participants of both groups in order to check their speaking complexity at the beginning of the study. Two experienced teachers according to Wigglesworth and Storch (2009) scale scored each participant independently. The descriptive statistics related to the pretest scores are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: *Descriptive statistics of groups' performance on pretest (complexity)*

		N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	
Pretest	Control	Rater 1	25	0	13	6.17	3.302
		Rater 2	25	1	13	6.13	3.371
	Experimental	Rater 1	25	1	11	5.70	2.891
		Rater 2	25	1	12	5.87	3.014

A Pearson-product moment correlation coefficient was performed in order to test the inter-rater reliability of scores on pretest obtained by two raters in two groups of the study.

Table 2: *Inter-rater reliability of the experimental group on pretest (complexity)*

		Pretest (Rater 2)	Pretest (Rater 1)
Pretest Experimental (Rater 2)	Pearson Correlation	1	.985**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	25	25

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results of correlation for experimental group, as the Table 2 shows, confirmed that there is a significant relationship ($r = 0.98$, $p < 0.01$) between the scores of pretest obtained by two raters in experimental group. Thus, the inter-rater reliability of scores is highly significant.

The results of another Pearson correlation for experimental group are provided the Table 3. It was revealed that there is a significant relationship ($r = 0.98, p < 0.01$) between the scores of pretest obtained by two raters in control group. Thus, the inter-rater reliability of scores is highly significant.

Table 3: *Inter-rater reliability of the control group on pretest (complexity)*

		Pretest control (Rater 1)	Pretest control (Rater 2)
Pretest control (Rater 1)	Pearson Correlation	1	.966**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	25	25

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The mean of two sets of pretest complexity scores for both experimental and control groups was calculated and was considered in this study. Table 4 provides this information.

Table 4: *Descriptive Statistics of control and experimental group on pretest (complexity)*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pretest control (Mean)	25	.50	13	6.15	3.325
Pretest experimental (Mean)	25	1	11.5	5.78	2.941

As mean of the scores in Table 4 shows, little differences were found between the scores of three scorers of pretest. In order to prove the normality of the scores of the pretest, another statistical procedure, namely, one sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was performed. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: *One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov of pretest (complexity)*

		Pretest experimental (Mean)	Pretest control (Mean)
Normal Parameters ^{a,b}	N	25	25
	Mean	5.7833	6.1500
	Std. Deviation	2.94104	3.32480
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.105	.078
	Positive	.105	.069
	Negative	-.074	-.078
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		.575	.426
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.895	.994

a. Test distribution is Normal.

b. Calculated from data.

As the Table 5 shows, the extreme differences between the scores is not significant. The measured significance level for experimental and control groups were 0.89 and 0.99; it was higher than the assumed level of significance (i.e., 0.05), so it can be concluded that there was no significant difference between the observed distribution of selected scores of proficiency test and the scores are normally distributed.

In order to ensure that there is no significant difference between the experimental and control groups regarding their scores on pretest, an independent sample t-test was performed. The results are shown in Table 6.

Table 6: *Independent samples t-test between experimental and control groups on pretest (complexity)*

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig.	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper	
Pretest	Equal variances assumed	.576	.451	.452	48	.653	.36667	.81043	-1.255	1.98892

It was found that there is not any significant difference between experimental and control groups ($t = .45, p > 0.05$) in their performance on pretest. In other words, the speaking complexity of the participants was similar at the beginning of the study.

In order to find the effects of treatments on the learners, both experimental and control groups received posttest. Like pretest, the same systematic statistical analyses have been done in order to test the null hypotheses of the study. The descriptive statistics of both groups' performance on posttest are provided in Table 7.

Table 7: *Descriptive statistics of groups' performance on posttest (complexity)*

			N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Posttest	Control	Rater 1	25	3.00	15.00	6.33	4.373
		Rater 2	25	3.00	16.00	6.80	4.536
	Experimental	Rater 1	25	9.00	22.00	11.50	4.150
		Rater 2	25	9.00	22.00	11.53	4.049

The inter-rater reliability of the control group's performance on posttest was calculated by means of Pearson correlation. The results of statistical analysis are provided in Table 8.

Table 8: *Inter-rater reliability of the control group on posttest (complexity)*

		Posttest control (Rater 1)	Posttest control (Rater 2)
Posttest control (Rater 1)	Pearson Correlation	1	.989**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	25	25

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results of Pearson correlation confirmed that there is a strong and significant inter-rater reliability ($r = .98, p < .01$) of posttest scores of experimental group participants. The same procedure was performed for testing the inter-rater reliability of experimental group. The results are provided in Table 9.

Table 9: *Inter-rater reliability of the experimental group on posttest*

		Posttest R (Rater 1)	Posttest R (Rater 2)
Posttest R (Rater 1)	Pearson Correlation	1	.993**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	25	25

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results suggested that there is a strong and significant ($r = .99, p < .01$) correlation between two raters' scores on posttest of experimental group. The mean of two raters' scores on posttest of each group was considered for final analysis.

In order to verify the research question of the study, an independent sample t-test was performed between the scores of learners' speaking complexity on posttest. The results are shown in Table 10.

Table 10: *Independent sample t-test between task type and concrete vocabulary learning*

		Independent Samples Test								
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Posttest	Equal variances assumed	.015	.904	-17.33	48	.000	-5.4320	.28837	-5.583	-4.416

The results showed that there is a significant difference ($t = 17.33, p < .05$) between the speaking complexity of the experimental and control group in a way that the experimental group outperformed the control group. In other words, online storytelling has a significant effect on EFL learners' speaking complexity and the research question of the study was verified.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings of the present study acknowledge those of Muhammed (2014) who found that smartphones were considered as an effective mobile resource in the process of English language learning by 99 percent of the participants.

The outcomes of the present study provided a support for Rahimi and Miri (2014) who illustrated that the experimental group outperformed the control group while controlling for the entry level language ability. The vital role of mobile phones playing in improving learning out of the classroom anywhere and anytime is underscored by the findings of the study.

The findings of the present study confirm those of Chachil, Engkamat, Sarkawi, and Shuib (2014) who investigated the effect of multimedia-based mobile application promoting language learners owing to its influence in culture and language. By adopting controversial method and constructivism learning theory providing learners a different approach in learning language on the basis of various environment and situations, the application, I-MMAPPS, was designed and developed.

The outcomes of the present study provided a support for Pirasteh and Mirzaeian (2015) who explored the efficacy of a subset of MALL, SMS, on learning phrasal verbs among university students in Iran. The role of gender was also considered in this study. During the study, the participants of control group received phrasal verbs, which exist in the booklet, and the participants of experimental group received phrasal verbs via SMS. The pre-test and post-test scores showed that although the experimental group outperformed control group, there is no relationship between gender and learning phrasal verbs.

Finally, this study support Burmark (2004) who introduced digital storytelling as a high-quality technology for gathering, creating, examining, and merging visual images with the texts. He believed integrating visual images with written texts both expand and accelerate student comprehension by boosting the students' interest in discovering new ideas.

The general results, confirming the previous research indicated that mobile applications were beneficial to EFL learners' language learning. The overall results also revealed that the storytelling via Telegram could enhance learners' speaking complexity. To conclude, this study might have clarified some issues attributable to mobile applications in terms of speaking ability. However, it might also have given rise to more issues regarding the matter. Mobile applications in their learning activities and provided conditions for learners to take more advantages of classroom time by involving in fruitful and interesting tasks. This fact confirmed the effectiveness of program.

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