The Effect of CALL-Based Instruction on Students’ Score Attainment on the TOEFL iBT in a Yemeni Context

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ABSTRACT

This article is an action research of quasi-experimental nature. It aims at investigating the effect of CALL-based instruction on Yemeni students’ score attainment on the TOEFL iBT. The sample of study consisted of 30 adult students randomly assigned to experimental and control groups. Data was collected within an 8-week period via a pretest-posttest design for equivalent groups. The experimental group participants were also interviewed to elicit data about their attitudes towards CALL. The findings of the study indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between the experimental group (trained with CALL) and the control group (trained conventionally) in the total gain scores, as well as in the section gain scores of reading, listening, speaking and writing. The findings also showed that the participants in the experimental group held positive attitudes towards CALL. Therefore, it is highly recommended that CALL should be fully integrated into TOEFL iBT preparation programmes.

KEYWORDS

Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL), EFL, Reading, Speaking, Technology, Test Preparation, TOEFL iBT, Listening, Writing

INTRODUCTION

Due to its globally valued importance as a lingua franca, Yemen has integrated English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in school education, higher education, and vocational training. Therefore, Yemeni schoolchildren are taught EFL in the early stages of schooling. It is also a requirement in the first year of all non-English majors at universities. In addition, some Yemeni public and private universities use English as medium of instruction, especially in the majors of engineering, sciences, and medical studies. The Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL)—paper-based (PBT), institutional (ITP), or Internet-based (iBT)—is a prerequisite for admission in postgraduate studies and a privilege in private-sector employment in the country.

To get high TOEFL scores, interested Yemenis enroll in TOEFL preparation programmes, offered by many local and international training institutions in the country. For instance, AMIDEAST-Yemen, a branch of America-Mideast Educational and Training Services, Inc. in Yemen, administers TOEFL iBT preparation programmes in Sana’a, the political capital, and Aden, the economic capital.

Conventional instruction in the TOEFL preparation programmes in Yemen is underpinned by Task-based language teaching (TBLT), whose concrete principle is to get students engaged in activities so that they can use the language inside and outside the classroom (Willis & Willis, 2007). In those programmes, designing task-based lessons follows the framework, proposed by Ellis (2003), which

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consists of three stages: pre-task, during task, and post-task. This framework gives a room for creativity and choice variety as Ellis (2003) pointed out, “it provides a clear structure for a lesson and it also allows for creativity and variety in the choice of options in each phase” (p. 244).

**STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

In Yemen, most teachers use conventional instruction to prepare students for the TOEFL iBT. For, they believe that CALL-based instruction, which is technology-mediated TBLT, would not make any difference on students’ achievement as long as they do on-screen TOEFL iBT tasks at home. Since previous studies exploring the effect of CALL on ESL/EFL students’ achievement yielded inconsistent findings through various contextual settings (Chen & Zhang, 2011; Hauck, McLain, & Youngs, 1999; Kilickaya, 2005), and there is a lack of such research in the Yemeni context, the need arises to study the effect of CALL-based instruction on students’ achievement on the TOEFL iBT.

**PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The study aims at investigating the effect of CALL on students’ achievement on the TOEFL iBT. The key question in the study is “what is the impact of CALL-based instruction on Yemeni EFL students’ score attainment on the TOEFL iBT?” To find answers, the researcher posited the following sub-questions:

1. Is there any significant difference in the gain scores between Yemeni EFL students trained by CALL-based instruction and Yemeni EFL students trained by conventional instruction with reference to:
   - TOEFL iBT total gain scores;
   - TOEFL iBT reading gain scores;
   - TOEFL iBT listening gain scores;
   - TOEFL iBT speaking gain scores; and
   - TOEFL iBT writing gain scores.

2. What are the Yemeni EFL students’ attitudes towards the use of CALL for TOEFL training in the TOEFL iBT preparation programs in Yemen?

**SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

This study is the first of its kind investigating the effect of CALL on Yemeni students’ achievement on the TOEFL iBT. Therefore, it provides research-based findings on the effect of using CALL in the TOEFL iBT preparation programs in the country.

**STUDY VARIABLES**

The dependent variables in this study were students’ attained scores on both pre- and post- TOEFL iBT practice tests. The independent variables were the instruction methods: CALL-based instruction and traditional instruction.

CALL-based instruction was defined as a technology-mediated TBLT, in which TOEFL iBT preparation training was done in a computer laboratory. Students did the TOEFL iBT tasks utilising CALL tools, such as a soft copy of the TOEFL preparation book, *Longman Preparation Course for the TOEFL TEST iBT* (2nd ed.); its Software package, *Longman iBT Prep 2.0*; and AMIDEAST Moodle.

Conventional instruction was defined as a paper-mediated TBLT, in which the TOEFL preparation training was carried out in a classroom, equipped with whiteboard and screen for PPT slides. Students used their pencils and hard copies of the preparation book for doing the TOEFL iBT tasks.
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