

The Comparative Effect of Audio-taped Homework/Feedback and Written Homework/Feedback on EFL Learners' Willingness to Communicate

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history

Received: May 04, 2018

Accepted: August 13, 2018

Published: November 01, 2018

Volume: 7 Issue: 6

Advance access: September 2018

Conflicts of interest: None

Funding: None

ABSTRACT

Willingness to communicate emerges as a concept to account for an individual's personality orientation and readiness toward talking and entering into discourse with a specific person and a particular time (McCroskey & Baer 1985; McCroskey & Richmond 1991). This is also valued in language learning as a crucial goal and achievement. Moreover an indispensable tool for stepping forward in the subject is a form of learnt activities reactivation during out-of-class time, which is called homework (Paudel, 2012). This is considered as a vehicle through which language learners reach the planned academic achievements faster (Amiryousefi, 2016). Two well-known subcategories of homework are seen as audio-taped and written ones. The use of audio homework comments (through MP3 files) versus written homework comments have become highly focused. Thus, the present study aimed at exploring the comparative effect of audio-taped and written homework/feedback on EFL learners' willingness to communicate (WTC). The current study included 40 female intermediate language learners, learning English at a private institution. They were divided into two twenty-member experimental groups as Audio-taped homework/feedback and written. The participants mean age was about 18. Both groups received equal treatments, however the way they were asked for homework and the way to correct the handed in assignments were completely different (audi-taped ones were supposed to hand in their homework by recording their voice and also the teacher used the same technique making comments, but in written group the participants and the teacher were both required to have written homework and comments respectively). The results obviously indicated the considerable development of willingness to communicate through the application of audio-taped homework/feedback.

Key words: Willingness to Communicate (WTC), Audio-taped Homework/Feedback (ATF), Written Homework/Feedback

INTRODUCTION

Consolidating skills and learnt language is commonly acquired by assigning widespread educational activity as homework. This has been long viewed as an essential part of teaching-learning process (Xu & Wu, 2013). Homework has been defined as "tasks assigned to students by teachers that are meant to be carried out during non-school hours (Cooper, 1989, p.86). According to scholars, homework includes learners' exposure to language learning and helps them beyond the scope of class. The tenet behind homework is the contributory habits it offers to students including budgeting time, organizing material and setting goals. Furthermore, strengths and weaknesses are normally obtained by analyzing students' homework, which would enable teachers to plan instructional materials and classroom activities accordingly (Paudel, 2012). It is acknowledged that homework balance in volume is important to be observed due to loss of interest and spiritual fatigue it may cause. Most importantly,

well- designed, well-prepared and meaningful homework assignments are the most effective ones (Ellsasser, 2007). It is crucial to notice Audio-taped homework/feedback as a very useful tool for the purpose of encouraging students toward responding to feedback (Hyland, 1990). It has been asserted by Kirschner (1991) that more productivity is seen in Audio-taped homework/feedback over written ones. Additionally, Clark(1981) identifies teachers' comments as being more complete, clear and sympathetic through Audio-taped.

During the history of language teaching, a growing body of studies has been carried out with the focus on speaking skills. As MacIntyre et al (2002) states the importance of willingness to communicate is considerable as a beneficial component and ultimate goal in the field of modern language instruction. Thus, high level of language proficiency requires high level of willingness to communicate. Many recommendations for length, variety and type of homework were received by the researcher and they were all observed as the

source of encouragement to do the present research study. Taken together, the researcher observes audio-taped technique as a contribution to open new inspiring doors toward the field of willingness to communicate among English language learners. Hence, the aim of the present research study is to determine if there is a significant difference between the effects of audio-taped homework/feedback and written homework/feedback on EFL learners' willingness to communicate.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Willingness to communicate could be meant as "... an individual's volitional inclination towards actively engaging in the act of communication in a specific situation, which can vary according to interlocutor(s), topic, and conversational context among other potential situational variables" (Kang, 2005, p. 291). The very first constructs on the field of willingness to communicate was organized by Burgoon (1976). It was called "Unwillingness to communicate". The role of introversion, alienation, self-esteem and communication apprehension in a person's willingness for communication in diversity of situations (Zarrinabadi, 2011). More general features of speech were considered by Mortensen, Amston and Lustig (1977). They named their model predisposition toward verbal behaviour, which is observed as predisposition and tendency toward communicating. The second related model to the concept of WTC was called "Shyness". This was firstly constructed by McCroskey and Richmond (1982) as weak inclination to talk and to be timid. there is a produced self-report scale for shyness measurement and it was considered as a valid predictor of the amount of speaking in which individuals engage. There are some effective variables in the field of trait-like WTC as "antecedents" of willingness to communicate which are in mutual causality with each other (McCroskey & Richmond, 1987), they include motivation, self-confidence, self-esteem, age, anomie and alienation, anxiety, attitudes, communication apprehension, culture, emotional stability/neuroticism, introversion/extroversion and gender.

It is worth mentioning that the relationship between WTC and age is based on gender, in that, as females age, their WTC decreases, but as males grow up, their WTC increases (Donovan & MacIntyre, 2004). Also, there is a high correlation between attitudes and WTC (Yashima, 2002; Yashima et al., 2004; Yu, 2009). Taking culture into account, it is a very important antecedent for fostering WTC (McCroskey & Richmond 1987; Barraclough, Christophel, & McCroskey, 1988; Sallinen Kuparinen, McCROSKEY, & Richmond, 1991; Matsuoka & Evans, 2005; Cao & Philp, 2006; MacIntyre, 2007).

All of the mentioned researchers included prominent shortcomings and could not operationalize what they had claimed (McCroskey & Bae, 1985). Finally McCroskey and Baer (1985) presumed that there is a personality-based and trait-like predisposition, which is consistent to some extents across a wide range of communication contexts. This concept underlies willingness to communicate. However, the two mentioned items must be observed as complementa-

ry and there is a need to investigate both in variety of research studies upon willingness to communicate (MacIntyre, Babin, & Clement, 1999). Also, it is said that the major reason why language learners communicate more or less, is the level of WTC (Willingness to communicate), in a variety of communication situations.

Additionally, the role and importance of homework have varied overtime. Prior to the 20th century homework was meant as discipline to children's minds (Cooper, Robinson & Patall, 2006). There was a significant need to memorize information since memorization was observed as to be an at-home activity. Although, by the start of the 20th century opposing opinions were posed as wasting time and energy. In the 1940s, it was normally believed that homework is useless and makes students less productive (Hayward, 2010). Hence, there are proponents and opponents who focus on benefits and drawbacks of doing homework. For proponents, doing homework is a very important vehicle through which learners achieve educational accomplishments faster and learn better (Cooper, Robinson, & Patall, 2006; Gill & Schlossman, 2004; Kartz, Kaplan, & Buzukashvily, 2011; Warton, 2001). According to what the mentioned scholars believe in, homework makes students spend more time on lessons and helps instructors find out their strengths and weaknesses. Conversely, there are arguments about drawbacks of homework. They state that homework drawbacks overweight its benefits and that homework assignments have to be limited or abandoned due to the stress and anxiety which they offer to students (Kralovek & Buell, 2001; Loveless, 2014; Mikk, 2006; Swank, 1999; Trautwein & Koller, 2003).

English homework, as the focus of this study aims to improve the quality of foreign language learning. The effectiveness of homework assignment can get a wider perspective (Tin, 2016).

METHOD

Participants

For the purpose of research, the sample of the present study included 40 female intermediate language learners (according to their text book as American File(3) in Tehran, Iran. The total number of students have been learning English at the same institution As Zabansara from Elementary to Intermediate. Their age ranged from 16 to 20 and according to the topic of the study, two experimental groups, as Audio-taped Homework/Feedback and Written Homework/Feedback were formed. 20 language learners were assigned into ATF and the remained 20 into Written. All language learners received a ten-session treatment (each 1 and a half hour).

Instruments

The material used in this study included pre and post surveys, questioning students, their willingness to communicate (WTC), once in advance of receiving the mentioned treatment and once afterward. The questionnaire consists of 20 sentences which were given scores, this questionnaire ranges from "Never" (0%) to "Always" (100%) based on the

students' inclination and preferences. Learners were asked to indicate their responses to the items across the continuum.

In addition, there were homework assignments (one assignment following each session). Both groups received the same units with the same method of teaching, however the type of homework varied in instructional materials (based on the presented material). The instructional materials were all extracted from the below mentioned books,

- Discovering Fiction (O. Henry, William Saroyan, Gwendolyn Brooks, Isaac Asimov, and Sandra Cisneros)
- Active Skills for Reading 3 (Nail J Anderson)

Ten different units were selected and applied, as the instructional material in the current study (6 texts from Active Skills and 4 texts from Discovering Fiction).

Procedure

To meet the purposes of the study a wide variety of procedures were done and the participants' language proficiency level was assessed based on the ranking criteria of the institution. The 40 homogeneous participants were randomly divided into two groups as Audio-taped Homework/Feedback and Written Homework/Feedback. Both mentioned were considered as experimental groups receiving the same classes and teaching materials presented by the same teacher as the researcher of the study. The only crucial difference was in the way the participants were assigned homework and the used technique to informing them their strengths and weaknesses.

As it has been noticed before, the level of willingness to communicate was measured twice once as a pre-test (before receiving the treatment) and once as a post-test (following the treatment). The questionnaire mainly focused on the level of students' inclination toward communicating in foreign language (English in this study). The 20 sentences in the questionnaire were all scored by percentage (ranged from 0 to 100).

Each individual session of treatment was broken down into two stages, not only limited to the classroom presence, but also out-of-class presence. Firstly, the treatment phase, including activating students' prior knowledge to the topic (chosen based on the instructional material), questioning and answering, doing the relevant exercises, silent and loud reading and highlighting the complexities in the text, which are all followed by leading students toward negotiation and discussion. So far, both experimental groups receive the same style of treatment and no difference is noticed, but the second phase concentrates on the way students are assigned homework and also the way they are corrected. No written homework is required in Audio-taped group. On the contrary, the written experimental group follows different principles for homework assignment, which is written-based and propels students toward doing written tasks assigned, designed and posed by the teacher. This can be categorized into two stages, firstly, recording voice or Writing an appropriate summary of the passage negotiated in the classroom (200 words, 5 minute talk) and secondly, expressing their ideas in audio or written form for Audio-taped homework/feedback

and written homework/feedback respectively (200 words, 5 minute talk). The participants are required to convey ideas in sheets and recorded files and hand in assignment papers or recorded voices to the teacher by the following session. Also, their assignments have to be neat, detailed and accurate as they can be. The two noticed pieces of writing in writing homework/feedback must be 200 words in size (for each individual) and in terms of audio-taped homework/feedback required to have two five-minute talks (recorded by themselves). All audio-recorded and written assignments are received in a specific period of time also they are all checked and commented. In any case, homework typically agrees on characteristics, organization, layout and length (North & Pillay, 2002; Strehorn, 2001).

Due to achieving the necessary goals, the teacher is supposed to comment received assignments. This concept is applied by two various techniques. As audio-taped homework/feedback is oral-based the comments are all recorded and sent to each student in voice and for the written group it is written on their homework sheets. Teacher's comments include strengths and weaknesses, addressing errors and mistakes and also the correct form (written or spoken). Language learners work extremely hard to meet a three-day deadline, do supposed homework and hand in hard copies (for each session and unit), moreover the teacher is fully committed to give comments and feedback to learners' assignments by the following session.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data Analyses and Results

As it has been mentioned previously, the WTC questionnaire, consisting 20 items (ranged from never 0% to always 100%) was distributed to measure students' willingness to communicate. In the piloting stage, the researcher estimated the internal reliability coefficient of the WTC questionnaire using Cronbach's Alpha through the pilot study done on 40 intermediate EFL learners who shared similar characteristics with the main sample of the study. The results showed that the reliability index turned out to be .84 which is good indicator of internal consistency.

The research question of this study enquired if there is a significant difference between the effects of audio-taped homework/feedback and written homework/feedback on EFL learners' willingness to communicate. Analysis of Covariance was used to investigate the research question of this study. According to Pallant (2011, p. 298), "ANCOVA can be used when you have a two-group pretest/posttest design" (e.g. comparing the impact of two different interventions, taking before and after measures for each group. The scores on the pretest are treated as a covariate to 'Written' for pre-existing differences between the groups." The descriptive statistics of WTC scores on the pretest and posttest are represented in Table 1.

In order to check the normality assumption of the scores obtained on the pretest and posttest of WTC in the two groups, Skewness and Kurtosis ratios were computed (Table 2).

Table 2 above reflects that all the WTC scores in the two groups on both pretest and posttest have normal distribution as the ratios of skewness and kurtosis over their respective standard errors do not exceed the ranges of +/- 1.96. Therefore, the present researcher was justified to apply one way ANCOVA.

A One-way ANCOVA was conducted to compare the effectiveness of audio-taped homework/feedback and written homework/feedback on EFL learners' willingness to communicate. The independent variable was Audio-taped Homework/feedback and written homework/feedback (Group), and the dependent variable was learners' WTC scores. Participants' scores on the pretest of WTC were used as the covariate in this analysis. Preliminary checks were conducted to ensure that there was no violation of the assumptions of normality, homogeneity of variances, homogeneity of regression slopes, and reliable measurement of the covariate. The following table summarizes the results of ANCOVA.

After adjusting for the WTC scores on the pretest, there was a significant difference between the two Audio and Written Groups' WTC scores on the posttest, $F(1, 38) = 27.95, p = .000, p < .05$, partial eta squared = .42 (Table 5); accordingly, the null hypothesis of the present study that states "There is no significant difference between the effects of audio-taped homework/feedback and written homework/feedback on EFL learners' willingness to communicate" was re-

jected. In fact, ANCOVA proved that audio-taped homework/feedback is more effective than written homework/feedback on EFL learners' willingness to communicate. Also the results showed that the Sig. value of the pretest of WTC (.000) was less than .05, so our covariate was significant.

A Line Chart was drawn to display the results graphically.

As the Line Chart in Figure 1 shows clearly, the means of willingness to communicate do not differ highly on the pretest though they the mean of WTC in the Audio Group is remarkably higher than the Written Group on the posttest. In other words, Line Chart indicates that the mean score rises more sharply from the pretest to the posttest in the Audio Group than the Written Group.

Discussion

This study was an attempt to focus on different perspectives and techniques toward homework and willingness to communicate. It was to some extents unique in several ways. Firstly, its focus was on English homework, which has not been sufficiently investigated (Richards, 2015), hence There is a paucity of research in this regard. Secondly, homework assignments in the form of recorded voice seemed unusual and approximately stressful to language learners, because it was a quite new experience to learners as doing homework.

As Amiryousefi (2016) has carried out a research study entitled "Homework: Voices from EFL teachers and learners", homework can be seen as a contributory tool to do the following: 1. Get prepared for exams, 2. Review learned materials and elements, 3. Understand the material better, 4. Communicatively use learned elements and structured, etc. He clearly points out the importance of voice recording in developing language learners English proficiency. Moreover, homework design based on students' needs and interests has been significantly concentrated. What's more, according to English language scholars, exposure to compre-

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of pragmatic competence scores on the pretest and posttest

	Group	N	Mean	Std. deviation	Std. error mean
Pretest	Audio	21	49.429	7.321	1.597
	Written	20	51.410	8.199	1.833
Posttest	Audio	21	54.805	8.035	1.753
	Written	20	53.000	7.962	1.780

Table 2. Skewness and Kurtosis test of normality for two groups' WTC scores (Pretest & posttest)

Test	Group	N	Skewness	Std. error	Skewness ratio	Kurtosis	Std. error	Kurtosis ratio
Pretest	Audio	21	-0.031	0.501	-0.062	-1.018	0.972	-1.047
	Written	20	0.348	0.512	0.680	-0.779	0.992	-0.785
Posttest	Audio	21	-0.033	0.501	-0.065	-0.949	0.972	-0.976
	Written	20	0.170	0.512	0.332	-0.898	0.992	-0.905

Table 3. ANCOVA: Tests of between-subjects effects on the posttest of WTC as the dependent variable

Source	Type III sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.	Partial eta squared
Corrected model	2335.349 ^a	2	1167.674	228.570	0.000	0.923
Intercept	14.418	1	14.418	2.822	0.101	0.069
Pretest	2301.983	1	2301.983	450.610	0.000	0.922
Group	142.779	1	142.779	27.949	0.000	0.424
Error	194.127	38	5.109			
Total	121750.910	41				
Corrected total	2529.476	40				

a. R Squared=0.926 (Adjusted R squared=0.920)

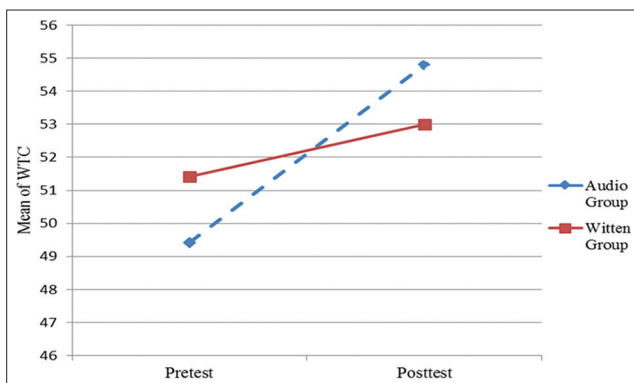


Figure 1. Line chart for means of WTC in the two groups on the pretest and posttest

hensible input (Ellis, 2005; Ellis, 2008; Loewen, 2015; Nas-saji & Fotos, 2011), review and repetition (Larsen Freeman, 2012) are considerably beneficial especially in boosting learners' processing and attentional capacities. Furthermore, willingness to communicate plays a very crucial role in English language learning. According to the analysis of the obtained data, done by Zarrinabadi (2011), it was indicated that language orientations are more correlated with willingness to communicate outside than inside the classroom. The mentioned study was done on 67 Intermediate bilingual students (36 males and 31 females) aged between 19 to 24. It is believed that successful students benefit from a higher level of WTC (MacIntyre et al. 2001). Also, the relationship between learners' Autonomy and Willingness to communicate (WTC) has been investigated by Khaki (2013). It was a study done on 77 English learners homogenized out of 100 advanced learners. At the end, based on the regression analysis concluded that there is a considerable relationship between learner autonomy and WTC.

CONCLUSION

In this study the comparative effect of Audio-taped homework/feedback (ATF) and written homework/feedback on willingness to communicate(WTC) was investigated. Homework plays a crucial role in enhancing English skills and sub-skills, considering students' needs and interests (Amiryousefi, 2016). Additionally, it is believed that students are successful, who benefit from a higher level of WTC (MacIntyre et al, 2001). Based on what was found through data analysis, the research hypothesis "There is no significant difference between the effects of audio-taped homework/feedback and written homework/feedback on EFL learners' willingness to communicate" is rejected and it was shown that ATF affects WTC much more significantly comparing with written homework/feedback. Therefore, it can be concluded that an excellent option to give students the opportunity for oral production and meaningful language can be Audio-taped homework/feedback. More specifically, how implementing homework correction is influential and constructive in students' achievement. Nowadays, there is a variety of facilities such as Internet, the media and social networking which provides language learners with authentic

and meaningful language use (Richards, 2015). Online resources and internet can be used by students to go through English materials in a stress-free environment (out-of-class learning). Understanding students' problems and attitudes toward homework and its variety is essentially recommended, because teachers and students bring their own beliefs to educational contexts (Galloway et al., 2013; Rudduck, 2007). Finally, The obtained findings of the study might be beneficial and advantageous for teachers, learners, policy makers, material developers and communicative designers.

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