The Possible Role of the English Word Power (EWP) Program in Motivating ICT Foundation Students to Learn English at a University of Technology in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

This study reports on the possible role of the English Word Power (EWP) program in motivating ICT Foundation students to learn English at a University of Technology in South Africa. Current research indicates that computer-assisted language programs increase motivation and increase enjoyment of learning activities, but no study in South Africa has been conducted on whether this is the case with the EWP program. A qualitative approach was adopted. The sample comprised 44 purposefully selected student observations (n = 44); and five students completed journals. The findings from student observations indicate that they were enthusiastic about the program and that they enjoyed it. The findings from the journals show that students were unsure about certain instructions used in the program and they were too preoccupied with getting the correct answers. It is concluded that ICT Foundation students are positively motivated by the EWP program because, for most of them, learning by means of computers is a new experience in terms of their previous schooling backgrounds. This paves the way for further investigations in developing CALL programs that will have an impact on student learning. Future research should focus on whether similar computer-based programs like EWP do increase student learning.

Key words: CALL (Computer-assisted Language Learning), English proficiency, English Word Power, Motivation, Higher Education

INTRODUCTION

Research has proved that motivation in second language learning plays a key role. The motivation for undertaking this study was the researcher's involvement as a Life Skills lecturer for Information Communication and Technology (ICT) Foundation students at a University of Technology (UoT) in the Gauteng province, South Africa where this study was conducted. The majority of ICT Foundation students come from a disadvantaged schooling background at schools located, mostly, in rural areas. The institution provides access to education for mostly black students who come from underdeveloped and less privileged communities. At the time of the study, 480 students were registered for the ICT Foundation course at one of the campuses of the UoT; they were also registered for the English Word Power (EWP) program as an intervention for their low English proficiency skills. These students were required to do the EWP program, irrespective of their post-school English symbols or their scores from the English Language Skills Assessment test (ELSA).

The Student Development and Support Services (SDS) at the UoT functions as a unit which provides students with support in terms of their English proficiency skills (among other services), using a computer program known as the "English Word Power" program (EWP); it is believed that a lack of these skills may have a negative impact on their success rates at university. The EWP program is advertised as an "interactive" English e-learning software program developed by NDA Training Solutions and marketed by the English Word Power Solutions Close Corporation. The program is advertised as follows: "You are about to develop a powerful skill – your ability to use English more accurately and with more confidence. EWP is your partner in your quest for excellence in the world's most commonly used business language."

The program consists of two modules which start with a benchmark assessment. The assessment is a diagnostic exercise that determines students' levels of proficiency. The scores attained by students indicate whether there is a need for further intervention through a series of exercises that follow. The diagnostic assessment is not repeated as it serves as a benchmark for comparison with a final assessment. The first module of the program focuses on tenses as well as concord and word usage. The second module teaches tenses and sentence structure. The tenses are presented with the simple present tense first and the more complex ones later. Access to the program is only possible if an internet connection is available. See Figure 1 (below) for an illustration of a student's pre-test score as well as the subsequent scores for the completed assessments.

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Students need to be registered as users of the program and only facilitators from the SDS are licensed to register them. After students are successfully registered, they can create their own passwords which give them access to the program wherever and whenever they have internet access. Students are linked to the particular facilitator who registered them and that means that only that facilitator will have access to their progress. Students are able to monitor their own progress as they complete the various exercises, because the program provides immediate feedback in terms of scores and in the form of percentages that students obtain for exercises. The facilitator is able to simultaneously monitor progress as students are involved in tasks. It is also possible for the facilitator to see if students are logged on to sites other than the EWP.

The activities on the program are referred to as "assessments". Each assessment has instructions that students first have to read before they click on their chosen option. If the response given is rejected by the system, the "correct" feedback is given. However, if the students' responses are accepted by the computer, they are allowed to move on to the next assessment; the computer saves students' work as they progress. When they log on again, they start from where they left off. See Figure 2 (above) for an exemplar of a student's completed assessments and permission to proceed.

The final assessment shows the scores for all the exercises completed and the pace of the learner *per* assessment. See Figure 3 (below) for an exemplar of a student's record from the time she started the program up to when she completed it.

Figure 1. Example of a student's pre-test and subsequent assessment scores
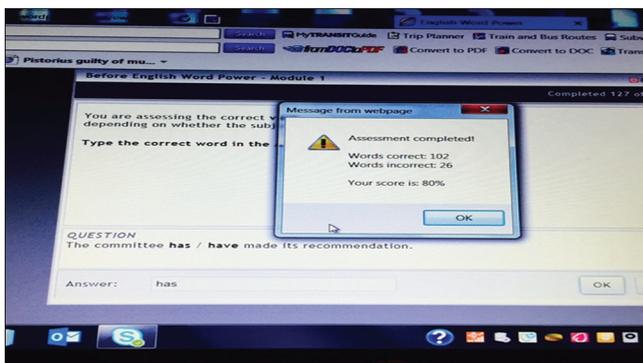

Figure 2. Example of a student's completed assessment

This example shows that it took about eight months for the student to complete all the assessments in the two modules. Where a student did not complete all the assessments in the two EWP modules, the record looks like the following: (See Figure 4 below.)

In this case, the student registered for the program in March and did the final assessment in November; he managed to get a final score of 62%.

The program accommodates self-directed learning as it gives students the liberty to decide on their own pace and where they accessed the program, which is not, necessarily, the classroom environment. Students are expected to complete all the activities *per* assessment before they can complete the program. EWP slots that appear on students' timetables are 1 hour and 30 minutes long, once a week. However, students are permitted to access the program whenever they wish to continue working. Sometimes facilitators are assisted by senior ICT students. The facilitator's main role is to ensure that the computer lab is open, that the students attend, and that they are registered on the program. No real teaching is done by the facilitator during these sessions. The average length of time that students take to complete the program is approximately eight months – if they only use the 1 hour and 30 minutes slots on their timetables. The ICT Department credits students' year marks with 10% which counts towards their predicate, provided that they complete the program within the agreed period. A predicate mark is the sub-minimum of 40%, accumulated from various assessments over a specified period of time, which qualifies students to write their exams.

The selection of software for use as an intervention to improve English proficiency skills of students at the UoT involves SDS practitioners who meet with a representative from the company that sells the software, and they work through the program for a few hours. If the SDS practitioners are satisfied with the program, arrangements are then made to purchase it. At present, there is no clear framework to evaluate software and, therefore, it is not clear what criteria are used to decide on whether or not to purchase a particular program. This could be exacerbated by the fact that there has been little research which investigates if computer-based language programs increase student language learning in the South African context.The findings of this study will provide an insight into whether the English Word Power program plays a role in motivating students to learn English.

Objective of the Study

The objective of the study was to investigate the possible role of the EWP program in motivating the ICT Foundation students to learn English. This was done through observing the students while they worked through the program, to see and record their behaviour, while they were 'in action', as it were. The students were also requested to keep journals of their experiences of the program.

Research Question

The focus of this study was whether the EWP program possibly played any role in motivating the students to learn

Date	Description	Percentage	Attemps
11/03/2015	BEFORE English Word Power - MODULE 1	75%	1
25/03/2015	ASSESSMENT 1	84%	1
25/03/2015	ASSESSMENT 2	84%	1
25/03/2015	ASSESSMENT 3	90%	1
08/04/2015	ASSESSMENT 4	77%	1
10/04/2015	ASSESSMENT 5	55%	1
10/04/2015	ASSESSMENT 6	77%	1
15/04/2015	ASSESSMENT 7	90%	1
17/04/2015	ASSESSMENT 8	91%	1
22/04/2015	ASSESSMENT 9	78%	1
06/05/2015	ASSESSMENT 10	77%	1
13/05/2015	ASSESSMENT 11 - AFTER EWP, MODULE 1	76%	1
13/05/2015	BEFORE English Word Power - MODULE 2	88%	1
13/10/2015	ASSESSMENT 12	96%	1
13/10/2015	ASSESSMENT 13	93%	1
13/10/2015	ASSESSMENT 14	94%	1
13/10/2015	ASSESSMENT 15	94%	1
13/10/2015	ASSESSMENT 16	89%	1
15/10/2015	ASSESSMENT 17	70%	1
18/10/2015	ASSESSMENT 18	95%	1
18/10/2015	ASSESSMENT 19	95%	1
19/10/2015	Review - Assessment 20	88%	1
19/10/2015	Review - Assessment 21	86%	1
19/10/2015	Review - Assessment 22	79%	1
19/10/2015	Review - Assessment 23	87%	1
19/10/2015	Review - Assessment 24	92%	1
19/10/2015	FINAL - ASSESSMENT 25	94%	1
100% of EWP completed with an average of 85%			
The average percentage does not include either of the BEFORE ENGLISH benchmark assessments.			

Figure 3. Example of record of student who completed the EWP modules

English. This led to the formulation of the following research questions (RQs):

RQ1: Does the English Word Power (EWP) program play a role in motivating ICT Foundation students to learn English?

RQ2: What are the views of the students on the EWP learning activities?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Motivation and second language learning is a widely researched area. This article examines the role played by the EWP program in motivating ICT Foundation students to learn English. Some key research is by Gardner and Lambert (1959, 1972, 1982) and most of the research in this area is based on the work done by these two scholars. Setiyadi, Mahpul and Wicaksono (2019) agree that numerous studies on motivation in language learning in different countries have been inspired by the findings of the studies by Gardner and Lambert as cited above. Kaboody (2013) contends that motivation plays a significant role in classroom language learning. This is confirmed by Gardner (1985, as cited in Ushida, 2005), who states that student attitude and motivation have frequently been reported to be the most critical factors for success in computer-assisted language learning environments. In order to explain motivation in relation to L2 learning (second language learning), Masgoret and Gardner (2003) state that motivation refers to goal-directed behaviour. They believe that the motivated individual expends effort; is persistent and attentive to the task at hand; has goals, desires and aspirations; enjoys the activities; experiences reinforcement from success and disappointment from failure; makes decisions in terms of success and/or failure; is aroused; and uses strategies to achieve goals.

Since the introduction of computers in classrooms, there have been differing views on their role in teaching a second language. This study focused on what the role played of a computer-based English program is in motivating learners to learn English. According to Warschauer (1996), research in this field started in the 1950s and was implemented in the 1960s and 1970s based on the, then popular, dominant behaviourist theories of learning. As language approaches to second language learning evolved, so did the use of computers. Recently, multimedia and hypermedia seem to have influenced how computers are used in the classroom compared to the drill and practice that was more behaviouristic. Oncu and Cakir (2011, as cited in Crea & Sparnon, 2017) are of the opinion that online education is becoming a mainstay in higher education. However, Seale, Georgeson, Mamas and Swain (2015, as cited in Crea & Sparnon, 2017) suggest that an unequal access to internet technology still exists among the world's most vulnerable

Date	Description	Percentage	Attemps
18/03/2015	BEFORE English Word Power - MODULE 1	65%	1
08/04/2015	ASSESSMENT 1	68%	1
22/04/2015	ASSESSMENT 2	71%	1
22/04/2015	ASSESSMENT 3	77%	1
20/08/2015	ASSESSMENT 4	72%	1
03/11/2015	ASSESSMENT 5	55%	1
03/11/2015	ASSESSMENT 6 - REDO	28%	1
	ASSESSMENT 7	Not done	
	ASSESSMENT 8	Not done	
	ASSESSMENT 9	Not done	
	ASSESSMENT 10	Not done	
	ASSESSMENT 11 - AFTER EWP, MODULE 1	Not done	
	BEFORE English Word Power - MODULE 2	Not done	
	ASSESSMENT 12	Not done	
	ASSESSMENT 13	Not done	
	ASSESSMENT 14	Not done	
	ASSESSMENT 15	Not done	
	ASSESSMENT 16	Not done	
	ASSESSMENT 17	Not done	
	ASSESSMENT 18	Not done	
	ASSESSMENT 19	Not done	
	Review - Assessment 20	Not done	
	Review - Assessment 21	Not done	
	Review - Assessment 22	Not done	
	Review - Assessment 23	Not done	
	Review - Assessment 24	Not done	
	FINAL - ASSESSMENT 25	Not done	

24% of EWP completed with an average of 62%
The average percentage does not include either of the BEFORE ENGLISH benchmark assessments.

Figure 4. Average of completed assessments

populations who lack the "digital capital" to access online educational resources.

There are different views on the use of technology in language learning. Lai, Shum and Tian (2016) contend that active engagement with technology does not, necessarily, guarantee sophisticated and effective use of technology for language usage. With this challenge in mind, this study sought to establish whether or not the EWP program plays a role in motivating students to learn English.

Krashen's monitor theory seems to place an emphasis on the connection between affective variables and second language acquisition. Krashen (1982) lists motivation, self-confidence and anxiety as variables that may lead to success in second language acquisition. In his view, performers with high motivation, self-confidence and a good self-image generally do well in second language acquisition, and low anxiety is also seen as conducive to second language acquisition. In other words, if learners acquire a language in a low anxiety-provoking environment, they are more likely to do better than if they were anxious. Krashen (1982) hypothesises that the affective variables have an influence on language acquisition but not on learning. This corroborates the view expressed by Lai et al. (2016) that efficacy in learning enhances the effective use of technology for language learning. They believe that this not only helps in terms of computer literacy skills, but it also helps students to feel more confident with the CALL activities and to enjoy them more, which is more likely to increase students' motivation to learn English if they are confident using technology.

METHODOLOGY

In order to investigate whether the EWP program plays a role in motivating students to learn English, the study used a qualitative approach incorporating lecturer-student observations and the submission of student journals. Convenience sampling was used to select 44 students ($n = 44$) who were observed while using the EWP program in three different sessions. This was done to observe both verbal and non-verbal behaviour of the students while they used the program. In order to obtain a "rich picture" of the EWP program setting, the researcher was involved in the observations to see for herself what happened during the EWP sessions rather than depending solely on other participants. Fox (1998) notes that observation does not just involve vision; it includes all the senses and, critically, the interpretation of the sense data that is seen – which results in certain researcher perceptions. When we observe, we are active – not passive – collectors of data. The researcher conducted overt observations and assumed the role of *participant-as-observer* among the group of 44 ICT Foundation students who used the EWP program as part of their study program. In order to meet and adhere

to ethical guidelines, the researcher made the participants aware of her intentions. The researcher was aware of a risk of participants "acting out" because they knew that they were being observed. However, this was not a hindrance as the observations took place during normal EWP.

The observed students accessed the program from dedicated ICT laboratories which they also used for other course modules of the ICT Foundation program. The EWP slots were scheduled for 1 hour and 30 minutes, once a week *per* group. Three lecturers from the SDS and two from the ICT Foundation facilitated the program and senior ICT students, appointed by the ICT Department, assisted the facilitators. Their main function was to monitor student attendance and help out when students experienced technical problems with their computers. The lecturers were licensed by the SDS unit to access the program so that they could register the students on the program. Registration on the program expires at the end of the year in which the student is registered for ICT Foundation studies. However, students could re-register for the program the following year if they have not completed all the assessments in the previous year and, also, only if they wished to do so.

Five students, three males and two females, were randomly selected to submit journals about their own experiences of the program in order to shed further light on the phenomenon being studied and to learn what knowledge was constructed by the participants with regard to the EWP program. Both sets of data were analysed through content analysis in order to identify themes and patterns that emerged. Students were assured of anonymity and voluntary participation; they were given the right to withdraw at any stage if they wished to do so.

Content analysis was used to interpret the interaction that took place during the observation of the EWP sessions as well as to make sense of the students' journal comments. This enabled the researcher to identify themes, patterns and categories that emanated from students' comments in their journals. In this study, the researcher first read through the field notes that she had compiled during the three observations, and highlighted information that was regarded as important in terms of the research question. Comments were also recorded as she continued with the work in order to link the data to the literature reviewed, which would help her decide if more information was needed and to explain some of the themes that emerged from the data. The chunks of information that were highlighted were examined and labelled. As she proceeded, it became apparent that, in some instances, she was able to identify more than one theme; for instance, in the interviews the participants' responses to the question on integration included ideas about the curriculum of the ICT Foundation program. In the observation notes related to the theme of non-verbal communication, the researcher recorded that a number of students, particularly male students, had worked on the EWP program with their earphones on and that highlighted a new dimension in the themes.

RESULTS

The data from student observations and student journals will be presented according to the following identified themes:

interaction; *non-verbal communication; students' preoccupation with correct answers; failure to understand instructions*; and *level of assessments*.

Data from Student Observations (n = 44)

All students had a computer in front of them and the seats were arranged in comfortable rows of four. The computer lab had a large air conditioner, a whiteboard, three large windows and two exits. The facilitator and the student assistant both had their own personal computers (PCs). It was not quite clear what the function of the student assistant was as he had been appointed by the ICT Foundation unit. It also appeared as though he had very little knowledge of, or no clue at all about, the EWP program. The facilitator asked the student assistant to help with the attendance register.

Interaction

In terms of interaction that took place, more female students seemed to talk to one another than male students: SQf1 (4), SQf15 (4), SQf16 (2), SQf11 (2), SQm39 (2), SQm40 (2). From their discussion, the facilitator learned that they were worried about giving wrong answers. It seemed as though, among the students, more females were concerned with wrong answers and displayed a competitive spirit. It also seemed as though some students struggled to understand the instructions and resorted to code-switching; for instance, one student (SQm39) commented: "**Ubhala** *the whole word*" ("I'm writing the whole word"). They also asked one another for help when they experienced logging-on problems. At this stage, none of the students approached the facilitator for assistance.

Non-verbal communication

Some male students (SQm17; SQm18; SQm19) looked at each other's computer screens from time to time and even pointed at them. Some would smile or nod (SQm10; SQm7) while looking at the screen. It was also observed that some students (eight male; one female) had earphones on while they worked on the program; in some instances, the facilitator could hear the music (SQm5; SQm6; SQm7; SQm8; SQm22; SQm26; SQm27; SQm40; SQf5). When the facilitator asked one student (SQm40) why he had earphones on, his response was: "*I concentrate better when I listen to music.*"

Observer's notes

The facilitator walked around the lab and randomly looked at the students' scores for the different assessments. It was observed that in some cases, the student would type in an answer and the computer would regard it as "wrong," whereas, it was actually the correct answer. In other instances, the program would eject the student for no reason and the facilitator was not in a position to explain why this had happened. During that first session, the internet connection was lost for about five minutes and the students had to log back on when it started working again. This caused students to experience

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some frustration because, in some cases, the program had not saved their work – which meant starting all over again.

The second observation took place two weeks after the first one. In the meantime, the students had continued working through the program.

Interaction

During this session, there was more interaction amongst the students and, this time, a few students did speak to the facilitator. One male student (SQm2) said: "*She wants me to tell her the answer. cause I've passed.*" Another male student (SQm17) remarked: "*He's challenging. I can type right.*"

Non-verbal communication

A few students – mostly female students (SQf15; SQf9; SQf11; SQf33; SQm6; SQm1) – peeped at each other's computer screens from time to time. Nine male students (SQm2; SQm19; SQm25; SQm27; SQm34; SQm35; SQm36; SQm37) had their earphones on as they worked. When one male student (SQm19) was asked about the use of earphones during the EWP session, he said: "*I listen to music because I want to enjoy this thing.*" While some female students seemed to show a competitive spirit, some of their male colleagues appeared to work through the program in an enjoyable manner, using earphones.

Observer's notes

During session 2, it was noticeable that there was a tendency for students to compete for answers and worry about getting the answers right. Generally, they were willing to help each other when they got stuck with an activity.

The final observation activity lasted for 1 hour; the facilitator remained in the venue for the whole period, even though no new data was noted. During this session, the number of students who attended seemed to have diminished. On that day, 36 students were present (23 male; 13 female).

The third and final observation took place a few days after the second one. The same group was involved at the same venue.

Interaction

There was some interaction among the students, but only one student (SQm4) approached the student assistant for help with logging onto the program. One male student (SQm15) seemed to be unsettled and when the facilitator approached him, his enquiry was: "*Are we doing the same exercise? We are tired. We had a long week.*", and "*I'm far with this thing.*" It is possible that some students were less enthusiastic about some of the assessments as they felt that some of them were repetitions.

Non-verbal communication

One male student (SQm3) stood up and went to the next row to assist another male student (SQm13) with logging on.

Two male students (SQm15; SQm20) pointed at each other's computer screens, while only one female student (SQf17) did so. During this session, only male students (SQm1; SQm2; SQm4; SQm8; SQm10; SQm13; SQm22; SQm25; SQm26; SQm27; SQm33; SQm34; SQm35) had their earphones on, and it was clear that it was mostly male students who preferred to work on the EWP program with earphones on.

Observer's notes

Once students had settled down, they concentrated on the program and the facilitator was able to monitor them by means of the classroom monitoring system to check if they were all busy with the EWP program. At this stage, a point of saturation had been reached as no new data emerged from the observations.

Data from Student Journals (n = 5)

The data from student journals will be presented according to the following identified themes: *students'preoccupation with correct answers*; and *level of assessments.*

The students were asked to share their experiences of the program with the researcher: what they enjoyed and what they did not enjoy; what worked or did not work for them; and what they learnt from the experience. They were then asked to select any six assessments that they liked and to write about those in their journals.

The first student (SQm13) wrote positively about some of the assessments despite the fact that he had obviously experienced problems with the others. While he had found "sound-alikes" easy, he told a different story about "singular possessives":

"*Sound-alikes. It was simple. You just add -i, -e and -c and -a to words that sound the same*" (SQm13).

This student seemed to have had difficulty with singular possessives:

"*Possessives, singular. So, so difficult. It is not easy to get it correctly. Possessives, plural. Is bad, even when you are choosing between to words you get it wrong*" (SQm13).

The second male student (SQm29) did not seem to have any positive story to tell. Unlike the first student (SQm13), he appeared bothered that there were no correct answers provided as examples for corrections. He made the following comment about one of the assessments that he had done: "*Hyphens. They should have correction. I need to know why I am wrong.*"

Regarding words ending with in *-ise* or *-yse*, this male student was unhappy with the instructions given. He said: "*Instructions should be easily understood,*" and in connection with hyphens with compound adjectives, he focused on the instructions, saying: "*Give corrections; make easy examples. Give easy instructions*" (SQm29).

The third student (SQm18) shared the sentiment of male student 2 about the computer failing to give them the correct answer:

"*Plural and possessive plurals, not helpful because if the answer is incorrect, it doesn't show the correct answer*" (SQm18).

However, he seemed to have enjoyed hyphens as he felt that they were very interesting and helpful and that they were not boring. The fourth (SQf6) and fifth (SQf25) students summarised their views in two words – for them, most of the assessments were either "simple," or "confusing".

From the students' comments in their journals, it appears that they had issues with understanding instructions; problems with the computer not giving them the correct answer when they had not answered correctly; and a preoccupation with getting the right answers rather than learning new information from the program.

DISCUSSION

The main themes related to the student observations and student journals are discussed in terms of interaction, non-verbal communication, students' preoccupation with correct answers, failure to understand instructions, and level of assessments.

Theme 1: Interaction

The focus of the student observations was interaction that took place between the learners and the facilitator; between the learners and the student assistant; and between the learners themselves. In all three observation sessions, minimal interaction took place with the facilitator. In the few instances where the students interacted with the facilitator, it was mostly when they had technical problems, like passwords or a loss of the internet connection. There was not a single instance when the students asked the facilitator for help with the answers.

Ellis (2000, as cited in Fahim & Haghani, 2012) argues that the sociocultural theory is based on the assumption that learning emerges not *through* interaction, but *in* interaction. He further asserts that social interaction facilitates or mediates the learning process. It is possible that a certain impression may have been created that the students were being "tested," rather than "learning". The few student comments that were heard, such as: "*Ma'am, this thing says I'm wrong.*" (SQm13) may be seen to support this assertion. The Vygotskian view of interaction between learners and "experts" did not seem to take place during the observations as the students did not seek help from the "knowledgeable other" (Saville-Troike, 2012). According to Gündüz (2005), it is no surprise that no real interaction took place because in a CALL environment, learners tend to work in isolation. It would appear that today's computer technology and its attached language learning programs are not yet intelligent enough to be truly interactive (Warschauer, 1996, as cited in Lai & Kritsonis, 2006). Many researchers of CALL agree that CALL programs encourage interaction among the learners. However, in this case some students only spoke to their peers if they were stuck for an answer and it was evident that the students' main preoccupation was to get the answers correct. There were incidents when some students used code-switching; for example: "***Ubhala the whole word.***" ("She is writing the whole word.") (SQm30). Gündüz (2005) explains that learners tend to revert to their mother tongue in discussing their strategies and responses in a CALL environment.

It is possible that because the EWP mark would count towards the predicate, this may have contributed to the students' preoccupation with the answers and not with what they had learnt. The comment from SQm29 drew my attention to this: "*She wants me to tell her the answer, cause I have passed.*" If one carefully considers this comment, the message is about answers and passing – which has the connotation of a "testing" situation. This was problematic as it points to unclear objectives of the EWP program for these students. Field (2002, as cited in Wiebe & Kabata, 2010) advises that students' awareness of the instructor's goals is beneficial for student learning. The CALL curriculum and pedagogical objectives should be explicit so that students can make informed choices and utilise the language and educational opportunities made available in a CALL-based EFL (English as a foreign language) university programme (Field, 2002, as cited in Wiebe & Kabata, 2010). Furthermore, students need to recognise and understand the objectives and they may need regular reminders. As the participants are ICT students, there may be a danger that they may lose sight of the objectives and begin to believe that the objective of CALL is the development of ICT skills (Field, 2002, as cited in Wiebe & Kabata, 2010). From the student's comments, one may draw the conclusion that the objectives of the EWP program are not verbalised to the students, and this leads to a misunderstanding on their part.

During the student observations, the researcher was surprised that there was very limited interaction between the students and the student assistants. It remained unclear to her what role the student assistants were supposed to play; they had been appointed by the ICT Foundation unit without the involvement of the SDS unit. In most cases, she would ask the student assistant to circulate the register and, sometimes, to assist with opening the venue.

What was interesting in all three observations was that some students, particularly the male students, preferred to work on the EWP program with earphones on. It is likely that they wanted to have fun while learning. Gündüz (2005) believes that the "fun factor" motivates language learning. During the student observations, the researcher was also able to see some interesting learning styles; for example, some students preferred to listen to music from their earphones while they worked on the EWP program. The reasons given for this behaviour varied slightly as some said that they listened to music for enjoyment while others said that the music helped them concentrate. Many researchers consider music to be an enjoyable stimulus which increases concentration and decreases stress (Bashwiner, 2010; Kazee, 2010). Other researchers have identified a relationship between music and language learning. Kang and Williamson (2012) maintain that there is an interactive relationship between the way that music and language are processed in the brain, and they further assert that music boosts enjoyment and a sense of achievement. It may be concluded that music may influence the affective mode of a second language learner – which confirms the assertion that CALL helps to decrease a second language learner's anxiety. This seems to relate to one female student's comment in the questionnaire that "*spelling*

and multi-choice grammar exercise, aside from being fun, they boost my confidence in English. They make you want to learn more" (SQf24).

Theme 2: Non-verbal communication

Some of the non-verbal communication to which my attention was drawn was some students smiling at the computer screen every time they got the correct answer; they even pointed at the screen with excitement. However, when the answer was incorrect, some students would point at the computer screen in frustration and even peep at the screen next to them – possibly as a way of checking what the correct answer should be.

Researchers suggest that a CALL environment is anxiety-free as it allows the learner to make mistakes without being judged by the next person. In this case, some students seemed to be bothered by what they read on the screen. Another source of student frustration could be linked to the fact that with the first benchmarking assessment if a student did not complete all the exercises at once, the computer did not save the work and the student had to start all over again. Also, if the student attempted to jump to the next assessment before completing the one before that one, the computer would refuse access. Once the students completed the first benchmarking assessment and obtained a score above 50%, they could then proceed to the next one. The computer would automatically save the work and all subsequent assessments would be saved – even if the student had not completed it. As has been illustrated before, the scores of the work done are recorded and saved by the computer.

The findings from the student journals are related, predominantly, to their preoccupation with correct answers; failure to understand instructions; and level of assessments. In order to access the EWP assessments, the researcher had to register herself as a student so that she could work through the program herself. She randomly selected assessments that linked with the students' responses in the questionnaire as well as in the journals they submitted. As can be seen in the following picture, there is a promise of a "specially designed learning path" to "improve your English language skills". It is further stated that "once you have completed this program you will write and speak English with grammatical integrity; you will be confident that your sentence structure is of a very high standard." This seems to be in line with the idea that, usually, designers use "buzzwords" that will appeal to the user. In the following screenshot, the user is given instructions on how to begin with the EWP learning path. See Figure 5 below.
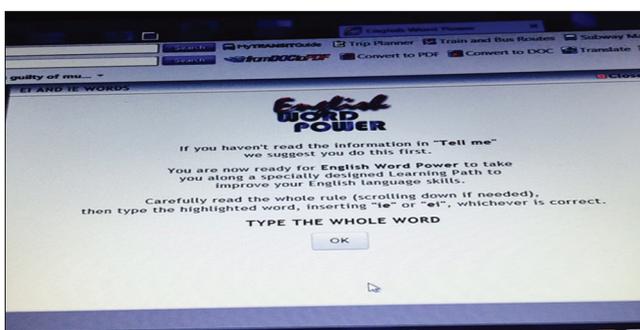

Figure 5. Learning path to EWP

This type of assessment, which involved typing, might have been challenging for some students, considering that a majority of respondents to the questionnaire had considered typing as one of the problems they experienced with the EWP program.

Another activity was an assessment on the use of figurative language, specifically metaphors and similes. The student is given rules for the use of metaphors and similes, which could be helpful at this level of study. This useful language concept is at the right level for a university student. However, the researcher noticed that there was a silence on this type of assessment, both in the questionnaire as well as in the students' journals. Some researchers in the area of metaphors and second language learning report that L2 learners tend to avoid figurative language, either because they are worried about communication breakdown or because their metaphorical language is unnoticed or inactive in their mental lexicon (Hoang, 2014). In some instances, learners find it difficult to grasp metaphors in the target language. Littlemore and Low (2006a, as cited in Hoang, 2014) believe that L2 learners have problems processing figurative language due to their lack of "native speaker competence". In a way, metaphors become another load of language knowledge that learners have to bear (Holme, as cited in Hoang, 2014). A number of researchers agree that there is a correlation between metaphor production and proficiency (Littlemore, Krennmayr, Turner, & Turner, 2012, 2014, as cited in Hoang, 2014). Danesi (1986, 1993, as cited in Hoang, 2014) considers the ability to metaphorise in the target language as a true sign of proficiency.

It would have been expected that a concept, like a metaphor, should be properly scaffolded by the teacher. The silence of the students on this assessment may indicate that they might have kept quiet because they saw this as a test rather than a learning experience. It is also possible that the students may have found this assessment challenging, considering their dislike for reading – as mentioned in the responses to the questionnaire. Working with metaphorical language requires learners to understand and make meaning from it. According to Hoang (2014), activities that draw learners' attention to metaphors benefit their reading comprehension.

Theme 3: Students' preoccupation with correct answers

Some students were reluctant to complete the journals when they were told that this would not be for marks. It is possible that because they were aware that the ICT Foundation lecturers would only use some of the EWP scores as part of their year mark, they preferred to channel their energies to tasks that would give them marks. The students' comments in their journals pointed to a perception that some of the "assessments" took a great deal of time to complete and that they were viewed as "time-consuming" by some students. The example below indicates that the student had to complete the entire assessment before the score could be recorded. It is possible that the students' concern about the length of some of the activities made them consider this as time-consuming. In the example below, there is no suggestion that the student

could choose the activities he might have wanted to do; instead, the reward, in terms of marks, would only be given if the whole assessment was done. See Figure 6 below.

The EWP program's drill-and-practice exercises seemed to bother the students, especially where they had to add only a syllable to "*more than 40 words*" (SQm29). Some students felt that some of the exercises were difficult for them to answer as they struggled to give the correct answers. What seemed to bother the students was the fact that even when the computer marked them "wrong," it did not provide them with the correct answer. SQm29 remarked: "*It is not helpful at all because if the answer is incorrect, it doesn't show the correct answer.*"

Gündüz (2005) describes CALL as a means of "presenting, reinforcing, and testing" particular language items. The learner is first presented with a rule and some examples and then expected to answer a series of questions which "test" his or her knowledge of the rule; the computer then gives appropriate feedback and awards a mark, which may be stored for later use by the teacher. The same applies to the EWP program.

Figure 7 (below) is an example of an assessment where students had to add -i or -e to a word as shown in the picture. In this case, the student was required to add -ie or -ei to complete the word "weightlessness", but apparently there was an oversight on the use of capital letters as the word was at the beginning of a sentence, therefore, the computer marked it wrong. SQm13 commented: "*First exercise is quite difficult as one example is not enough for me to understand the exercise.*" The problem here is that the computer marked the answer wrong but failed to explain why it was wrong. Even though the student is given a chance to try again, it might not have been obvious that the problem was with punctuation. The students emphasised the need to be given corrections. One student said: "*We need to see corrections*" (SQm29). The following screenshot illustrates an example of an EWP assessment on the use of *-ie* and *-ei*.

Warschauer (1996, as cited in Lai & Kritsonis, 2006) mentions that a program should ideally be able to understand a user's spoken input and evaluate it, not just for correctness but also for "appropriateness". This is where the facilitator could have explained the context as a way of teaching the concept to the students. Another example of an EWP assessment is an activity on word pairs. This is where the student was expected to choose the correct word between "therefore" and "therefor". Even though a correct choice was made by the student, the computer rejected the answer without any explanation or correct option given. This is a confirmation of what SQm13, who pointed this out as a concern, said.

Theme 4: Failure to understand instructions

There seemed to be a problem with students understanding the instructions; yet, they did not ask the facilitator for assistance. One may conclude that there might have been a mismatch between the students' understanding of learning and assessment that was provided by the program and the role that was supposed to be played by the facilitator. Many researchers in CALL believe that the teacher still has a role to play in a CALL environment. Önsoy (2004) maintains

that computers cannot guide students directly and cannot assume the role of a teacher as classroom manager. In his opinion, computers should rather be used as complementary to what teachers do in the classroom. Failure to understand the instructions could have contributed to getting answers wrong and adding to students' frustration with the program. The instruction for the next assessment illustrates the importance of understanding the instructions, and typing correctly, as failure to do so would have negative consequences. In addition to that, there seems to be an emphasis on assessing for correct answers rather than pointing out errors and assisting students with ways of avoiding the same error in future. See Figure 8 below.

This assessment shows that there are 56 responses, and these have to be completed in full. The instruction for this assessment emphasises getting the answers right, which could have contributed to the panic about correct answers. Added to this is the possibility that the students had different learning styles; hence, they seemed to find it difficult to understand some of the instructions. Second language learners' learning situations are various and ever-changing; computer
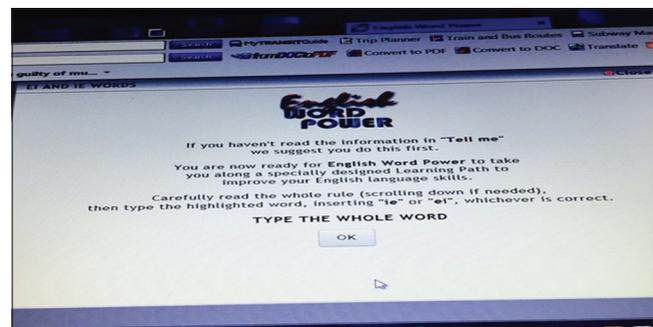
Figure 6. EWP instruction on completing assessments and progress report
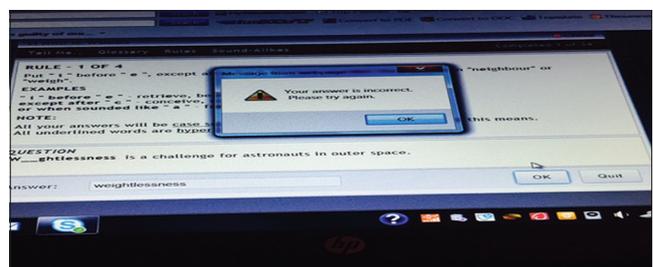

Figure 7. EWP assessment on the use of *-ie* and *-ei*
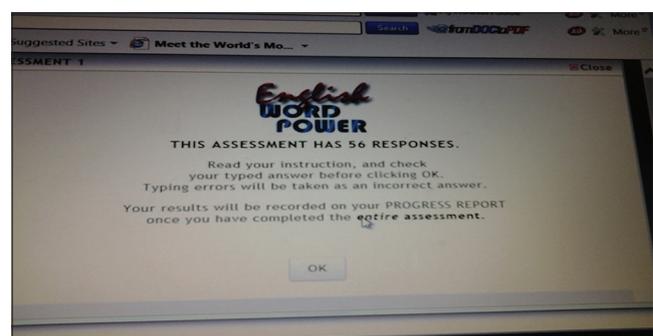
Figure 8. Example of an instruction with 56 questions

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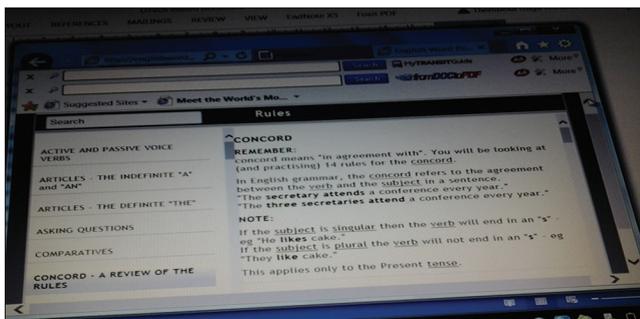
Figure 9. EWP assessment on concord

technology is unable to deal with learners' unexpected learning problems and respond to their questions immediately as teachers do (Warschauer, 1996, as cited in Lai & Kritsonis, 2006). Beatty (2003) points out that one of the problems with CALL is how to ensure that the input for the program is neither too easy nor too difficult. It would appear that CALL materials rely heavily on behaviourist methods of instruction, making use of behaviour modification principles in their design (Beatty, 2003).

Theme 5: Level of assessments

According to some of the students' comments, there seemed to be an imbalance in the levels of the EWP program assessments. While some of the assessments appeared to be simple, others appeared to challenge the students. For example, the assessment on concord could have been presented in a way that would assist students to deal with sentence construction. In the questionnaire, the students had said that after reading they disliked sentence re-ordering. It is possible to conclude that the students disliked anything that required them to read longer sentences. The following Figure 9 is an example of an assessment on concord:

If one looks at the rule for concord, it is presented with an assumption that students already know this. The rule is introduced with the word "remember", and this creates an impression that the students would have encountered this before. Qf4 referred to final consonants as being "*simple*", while possessives were regarded as a "*little bit challenging*".

From the students' comments, it appears that they understood this to be learning through assessment. It is possible that some of the assessments may be too easy for the students, while others are made to appear a little more difficult. This may be done deliberately by the software designers to increase students' motivation as they obtain a high score. Zarei and Hashemipour (2015) suggest that positive feelings give learners a good sense of achievement and high self-efficacy, while negative moods cause stress, tension, fatigue and low levels of self-efficacy. Hill and Hannafin (1997, as cited in Zarei & Hashemipour, 2015) state that in CALL-based instruction, computer self-efficacy is one of the most important and noticeable factors in determining the success of an individual's performance.

IMPLICATION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The results of the study indicate the positive role played by the EWP program in motivating the students to learn

Table 1. Profiles of students observed (n=44)

Gender	No	%
Male	25	55.8
Female	19	43.1
Age		
18-21 Years	32	72.7
22 Years and more	12	27.2
Language		
Sepedi	10	22.7
Setswana	08	18.1
IsiZulu	06	13.6
Xitsonga	05	11.3
IsiSwati	05	11.3
Others	10	22.7

Table 2. Profiles of students who submitted journals (n=5)

Student labels	Gender	Age range	Home language
SQm13	Male	22-25	IsiNdebele
SQm29	Male	18-21	IsiZulu
SQm19	Male	18-21	Sepedi
SQf6	Female	22-25	IsiZulu
SQf25	Female	18-21	Xitsonga

Table 3. Observation schedule 1

Date: 15 April 2015	Group: A
Location: Lab 248	No of participants: 44
Observation start time: 12:30	Observation end time: 13:30

Table 4. Observation schedule 2

Date: 6 May 2015	Group: A
Location: Lab 248	No of participants: 42
Observation start time: 12:30	Observation end time: 13:30

Table 5. Observation schedule 3

Date: 3 May 2015	Group: A
Location: Lab 248	No of participants: 42
Observation start time: 12:30	Observation end time: 13:30

English. Even though the study was conducted in a specific context with a particular group of ICT Foundation students, it may assist policy makers at the UoT to use similar computer-assisted language learning programs that may possibly increase student language learning.

CONCLUSION

This study examined whether the EWP program played any role in motivating students to learn English. It also sought to understand the views of the students on the EWP program

learning activities. Limited research exists in South Africa about the role that CALL programs play in motivating students to learn English since very little has been done in developing local software for teaching English in universities. The findings of the research indicate that the students experienced problems with the EWP learning activities, like failure to understand the questions and they seemed too pre-occupied with the correct answers. However, what became evident was the increased students' enthusiasm and enjoyment of the program. This concurs with what many scholars in the field of CALL, such as Golonka, Bowles, Frank, Richardson and Freynika (2014), have said – that learners prefer using technology to more traditional methods and materials to learn a foreign language. It may, therefore, be concluded that ICT Foundation students are positively motivated by the EWP program because, for most of them, learning by means of computers is a new experience in terms of their previous schooling backgrounds. This may be an indication that the EWP program does play a role in motivating the students to use the language during these sessions. It is expected of an ESL (English as a second language) learner to be competent in at least the four skills of language learning: speaking, listening, reading and writing. Schulze and Lemmer (2017) contend that at South African universities, where most students are ESL speakers, poor academic writing competence in English is well documented. What would be more helpful is to use CALL programs that increase student language learning.

FUTURE RESEARCH

The findings of the study confirm the main research question: That the EWP program does play a role in motivating ICT Foundation students to learn English. More research should be conducted on other similar CALL programs used in other universities to determine if these CALL programs increase student learning.

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