

ICT's Role in improving Writing in English in the Second Cycle of Learning: A Lebanese Case Study

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Abstract

This small study investigated the role of ICT (Information and Communication Technology), as a mentor and a tool, in improving the English writing skills of second-cycle-learners relative to the traditional teacher and teaching strategies. The participants were 14 average-5th elementary class students of a private school in north Lebanon. 7 students were instructed through ICT (experimental group) and 7 through the traditional means (control group). They were given to write a paragraph about their opinion on a same topic before and after instruction. Their writings were studied based on how much they improved after instruction in mainly 11 skills in writing. The results showed that ICT plays a slightly better role, as an instructor and a tool together, than the traditional means in improving at least 9 writing skills and in engaging students to explore a studied skill's importance in a text. It is suggested that the results could have been more obvious had there been less limitations.

Keywords: Media in education, Elementary education, Applications in subject areas, Improving classroom teaching, Students learning outcomes

1. Introduction

During my² work as an English teacher at a private school in North Lebanon, my students, mainly fourth and fifth elementary graders, showed the ability to master taught grammatical skills and use them in correct sentences with the inability of transferring these written communication skills into their writings after a little while, even after several changes in my teaching strategies.

This problem turned out a dilemma that every English teacher I asked was facing.

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After researching the issue, I found out that the problem was also faced by English-native-speaking countries: The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) revealed that children “do not develop the competence in writing needed at their respective grade levels” (Graham & Perin, 2007, p. 405). Even after the latest 2011 computerized NAEP assessment, David P. Driscoll, NAEP’s governing board chairman, revealed in a press release: “We need to focus on supporting students beyond the ‘basic’ levels so that they have a solid grasp of effective writing skills” (Fleming, 2012, para. New Framework).

The importance of this issue resides in the major social role that written communication skills play in reflecting the writer’s intended meaning during communication. For example, a girl writing: “Let’s eat Mom!” reflects a dangerous girl who’s eager to eat her mom, on the contrary to: “Let’s eat, Mom!,” which suggests an ordinary girl calling her mom to eat together- the omission of the comma (simple mistake) threatened the mother’s life.

A logic beginning to solve this problem in Lebanon is at the level of second cycle learners- learners at elementary grades 4, 5, and 6- since they are supposed to have already acquired the basics of the language in the first cycle of learning (elementary grades 1, 2, and 3) and since, starting at grade 4 (the start of the second cycle), learners start learning the proper “traditional grammar”. This learning, in the upper classes, goes in a “spiral” manner where each year same lessons are given but in a slightly more complex way than the year before (Ministry of Education, 1997, p. 147).

To make sure that first cycle learners have acquired the basics in English, a diagnostic test was done on 10 random learners, from a public school in Lebanon, just entering the fourth grade. In summary, their writings on a certain topic were collected and corrected by two English teachers based on the specific and general written communication objectives that the Ministry of Education (1997) in Lebanon specifies these learners should have acquired from the first cycle of learning (p. 151-154). In general, the results reflected the learners’ almost competency in these objectives, except in the usage of correct punctuations and in the dictation of certain words for some students- topics that they will take later on in grammar and dictation. Therefore, we can say that the basics at this cycle are acquired and now it’s time to look at second cycle learners.

Therefore, this study attempted to answer the following core research questions:

In this world of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) invasion on children’s lives and games, does ICT have a major role in improving the English written communication skills for learners in the second cycle of learning? If the answer is affirmative, then what kind of help can ICT provide the learner?

More specifically, the research aimed at achieving the following specific research objective:

- To determine whether ICT (a teacher-designed and constructed offline interactive website used in this study) has a better role than the traditional means of teaching in improving the English written communication skills for learners in the second cycle of learning (average 5th elementary graders in specific)

As much as this topic has been researched in higher grades (middle school, high school, and university levels) and lower ones (first cycle of learning) with different ICT tools, fewer research has been conducted at the level of the second cycle of learning (Chapman, 2006). In addition, ICT’s role in English writing for this specific cycle has almost not been studied in Lebanon.

2. Literature Review

ICT shows that, in an educational environment, it can demonstrate the basic learning theories’ and the Action Theory’s principles (demonstrated in Appendix A tables). These tables show that even if ICT is used for a certain theory of learning, the other theories’ principles may show in the ICT device but at different proportions.

These theories have also tried to define the steps taken by a person to write. The combination of these theories' ideas about this writing process along with other researchers' ideas created the writing process (see Appendix A, Figure A.1) which was used in the study (Chapman, 2006; GreatSchools, 2010; Jones & Christensen, 1999; Olinghouse & Graham, 2009; The writing process, 2007).

Mainly the writing process consists of three phases: the pre-writing, writing and post writing phases. Each consists of stages and sub-stages that are fluid, overlapping and recursive allowing one to be at a stage of a phase and proceed or go back to another phase or stage. The more of these steps students are able to use flexibly, the better they will compose fluently and with better quality. However, these phases involve different levels of cognitive and muscular (motor) abilities which make writing a complex process that places high demands on the working memory of writers at different ages. This cognitive effort depends on the writing situation and the writer's knowledge, skills and expertise in each writing phase (Olive, Favart, Beauvais, & Beauvais, 2009).

Now, as research has revealed, 5th graders, around the age of 10 and included within Piaget's second phase of the Concrete Operational stage (ages between 9 and 12), now prefer "more expressive, interpretive kinds of activities" and organize and analyze experiences through extending, elaborating and transforming" new systems to "a sufficient variety of situations and challenges" "within the constraints of the established operating system" (Feldman, 2004, p. 211, 212). Therefore, they acknowledge the audience better than before and are "more strategic in generating ideas and planning, constructing meaning through linking ideas, monitoring the development of ideas in their writing, and reviewing and revising for meaning" rather than focusing on the written code as younger children do (Chapman, 2006, p. 28). These skills reflect the start of meta-cognitive skills in these learners which are now present because transcription "becomes more automatized" (Olive et al., 2009, p. 301) allowing them to focus more on the higher levels of thinking writing processes (Torrance, 2008). However, because the transcription stage is not totally automatized, until in grade 7 and above, "planning is not yet established in Grade 5" (Olive et al., 2009, p. 302) and revision is limited to others' writings, not their own (Chapman, 2006) because they are only cognitively able to do operations on concrete objects at this phase using only two characteristics at the same time (Lin, 2002).

These factors along with others, cognitive and social ones, may affect children's writings. They can be summarized as the following: attitudes, motivation, how much practice, knowledge and experience they have, and how much contact with language has been done. Other factors include the environment, learners' differences and age, learners' cognitive abilities and working memory, the complexity of the writing process, and time (Graham, Berninger, Abbott, Abbott, & Whitaker, 1997; Graham & Perin, 2007; Jones & Christensen, 1999; Myles, 2002; Olinghouse & Graham, 2009; Olive et al., 2009; Reynolds, 2005; Torrance, 2008; University of Exeter, 2011).

Researchers have also found some solutions to how teachers can improve learners' writings, some of which are: giving feedbacks, engaging and supporting students in class, scaffolding and explicit instruction, and giving motivating writing tasks (Chapman, 2006; Olinghouse & Graham, 2009; Torrance, 2008; "The writing process", 2007).

Another solution might be the usage of ICT in writing since research has shown how each aspect of ICT (colors, visuals, animations, videos, sounds, music, text and multimedia) improves learning (in general) in different ways if it is used in a proper manner (some references: Daggett, Cobble & Gertel, 2008; Johnson, 2007; "Learning through listening," 2011; Saha and Talukdar, 2012; UNESCO Bangkok, 2007). More specifically, some studies have shown the importance of using new technologies, such as a computer, in improving writing because they are a playful, communicative, collaborative and explorative medium or tool that intrigue the cognitive and social processes in the learners (Chapman, 2006). Also, Chapman reveals that multimedia composing programs have shown a positive ability in helping writers with disabilities.

However, she acknowledges that mixed results have been shown to whether pencil and paper or computer are better in having students make longer and better compositions in quantity.

Still, specific studies, findings and what researchers say about the role of ICT in each stage of the writing process reveal its important role in most of its stages [planning, grammar and vocabulary, drafting and writing, helping handwriting, responding and sharing, revision, and publishing (Chapman, 2006; Donso & Stichini, n.d.; Hegelheimer and Fisher, 2006; Jakobsen, 2004; Northern Grid for Learning, n.d.; Saxena, 2009; Unionlearn, n.d.)]. However, Torgerson & Elbourne's (2002) meta-analysis couldn't prove which, ICT or the conventional way, has a better effect on spelling, and research couldn't show ICT's direct effect on writing compared to handwriting (Chapman, 2006; jakobsen, 2004). Also, ICT scoop (2010) reflected German teachers' concerns in a recent survey about the decline of handwriting abilities in learners.

3. Methodology

The study was applied in Bishmizzine High School (BHS), a private school in Bishmizzine El Koura, North Lebanon, which teaches English as a first foreign language. It was applied, in the second term, on 14 average-grade-5-learners from two sections (A and B) (application was done on all students; however, 7 students from each section- the very average students- were studied).

Now, in order to choose the average graded students in class, the z-score formula³ was used: $z = (X - \mu) / \sigma$ (Equation 1)⁴. However, since we needed to find the students' English scores (taken from the first term) that are included within the average range of a normally distributed class, the following equation was derived from Equation 1: $X = \mu + z\sigma$ (Equation 2) and was used at $z \pm 0.5$. Two values for X were revealed representing the range among which the student scores, and thus the average students, were chosen.

The study consisted of three parts: a pretest (written assignment), an instruction phase [made up of 3 parts- part 1 included a lesson (about 2 punctuation marks), its revision, and 2 exercises; part 2 included listening to a text; and part 3 included reading a text related to part 2] and a post-test (same pretest assignment and given time). The pretest was done on one day while the other two parts were done on another day within the same week (the post-test was done directly after instruction). These phases were applied on both sections equally the same in everything except in the manner of instruction [section A used ICT- an offline interactive website- as an instructor and tool and was called the experimental group, while section B used the teacher and the traditional means (blackboard, reading papers and teacher instructing) and was called the control group].

The same tests (pre and post writings) were corrected by two people (first, by their English teacher and then by the author) to make sure that the children got a fair correction.

The correction was done according to two main points, which were considered the study's operatory hypotheses. The first was the exploration of punctuations' importance in a text (studied through the increase in the usage of punctuations in text after instruction). The second was the better performance in writing a paragraph after instruction based on mainly 11 studied sub-points or objectives: the use of a clear main idea, enough supporting details, a clear conclusion, correct punctuation, correct capitalization, appropriate logical

³ For more information about the equation and its application in this study, consecutively see Jackson, 2011, p. 130-139; Semaan, 2012, Chapter 8.

⁴ X represents a learner's raw score, μ (pronounced mu) is the mean (average) value of the students' grades, σ (sigma) represents the standard deviation- how widely values are dispersed from the mean (μ), and z represents the limit of deviation of X (the raw score) from μ (the mean) - the standard normal distribution.

connectors, variety of sentence lengths (simple, compound and complex sentences), few spelling mistakes, correct tenses, appropriately chosen vocabulary words, and organized sequence of sentences. However, during the correction phase, other details (mostly rising from the mistakes learners had) were studied, too. They will be discussed later.

For the experimental group, the interactive website⁵ was designed and produced under the supervision of two education and multimedia instructors at University of Balamand (UOB). The design was based upon the literature review information about the four theories (revealed in different proportions in the website), children's abilities, the best ways to present visual information (colors, text...), the solutions found to improve writing and the importance of using ICT's features. The animated characters⁶ within represented the instructors while the teacher was a guide on the contrary of the traditional way (teacher is instructor and guide).

4. Results, Analyses and Syntheses

The data (information from the corrected written tests) were put in 4 tables (see Appendix C). Two tables were for the control group: one for the pretest results and the other for the post test. The other two tables were for the experimental group, similarly.

Students' names in these tables were concealed. The first student (based on the alphabetical order of his/her name) in section A was abbreviated as S1A, similarly the rest of the students' names in section A (S2A...S7A) and section B (S1B...S7B).

The analyses of these results were done by first comparing (individual and group comparisons), between the pretest and post-test tables of each group alone. These comparisons were presented in percentages to facilitate the analysis. After that, the two group's performances on each objective and as a whole were compared- the comparisons were in percentages, too. The results' analyses and syntheses are discussed below.

4.1 Main Idea

The experimental group showed mastery in remembering to write the main idea after instruction (from 86% to 100%) and clearer sentences (from 29% to 14% less ambiguous). The ones which were ambiguous became clear after instruction, and the text which was without a main idea, had one that was ambiguous after instruction. However, in the control group, 100% wrote a main idea before and after instruction, but there was a decrease in the clarity of the main ideas after instruction (from 29% to 57% more ambiguous).

4.2 Details

There was an improvement in both groups after instruction, with a greater increase in the control group (from 14% to 86% versus 71% to 86% in the experimental group) since there were more proper supporting details used at start with the experimental one. Yet, they ended up having the same percentage (86%) - only one student in each didn't support his details well after instruction.

More specifically, in the control group, more students used new ideas from the lesson (7/7 students) than in the experimental one (6/7 students), but one student's new ideas in the control group were questioned whether they were truly grasped or copied. Also, there were slightly more new and varied ideas taken from

⁵ To see the offline website, go to <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/w1ejqs6ywnr93kp/AABiRaJt-57QGjzRbkV5knmxa>. Download the whole package by clicking the "download as .zip" from the download menu. It may take 20 minutes.

⁶ See Appendix B for some images of the interactive website.

the lesson in the experimental group (20) than in the control one (19). However, both groups had three students with a misconception in their taken ideas.

4.3 Conclusion

Both groups showed no change after instruction in remembering to write a conclusion (the experimental group stayed 100% and the control group stayed 86%). The instruction seems to have had no effect on remembering to write conclusions. However, it seems that it had an effect on the clarity of these conclusions. The ambiguous conclusions increased in the control group after instruction (became 50%) while there was no change in the experimental group (stayed 34%).

Synthesis 1: Then, the instruction's impact was slightly better in the experimental group in the main idea and conclusion objectives. However, in the supporting details objective, both groups had a better result in certain areas of this objective: in the experimental group: the variance of ideas and number of new ideas taken from the lesson; in the control group: the number of students, who used new ideas from the lesson. It seems then that the visuals and animations in the website helped in keeping varied ideas in the memory of students from which they could benefit in their texts.

4.4 Punctuations

As a group, both groups had slightly improved in the number of students with considerably correct punctuations (3 or less mistakes) (14%= 1 student improvement). However, the experimental group showed a higher decrease in the number of mistakes than the control group (from 37 mistakes to 26 mistakes= 11 mistakes less versus from 33 to 31 mistakes in the control group= 2 points decrease).

On an individual basis, the experimental group showed more cases of improvements in the number of mistakes [the experimental group showed one student (14%) with no change in number of mistakes, 4 students (57%) with improvements and 2 (29%) students with slight declination (1 or 2 mistakes more) while in the control group there were 3 cases (43%) of no change, three cases (43%) of improvement and one case (14%) of great declination (6 mistakes more).], in the type of mistakes [43% in the control group versus 29% in the experimental one showed new punctuation mistakes that weren't seen in the pretest], and in the number of cases with punctuation mastery [2 cases, almost 3 (43%), versus 1 case (14%) in the control group], but there were also cases of over usage of commas (43%) that were not found in the control one. This excess use of commas comes from a higher acknowledgement of its importance in the text, but its role is not yet mastered well.

Synthesis 2: The experimental group showed better results in the punctuations' usage and showed higher cognition of the punctuations' importance than the control group. This reflects the role of animations and multimedia in teaching the punctuations' lesson.

4.5 Capitalization

Even though both groups ended with the same percentage of students with correct capitalizations (one or no mistakes) after instruction (71%), the control group showed an improvement to reach this percentage (from 57% to 71%) while the experimental group showed a declination to reach this percentage (from 86% to 71%). However, there were increases in the number of mistakes after instruction in both groups, but it was 1 mistake higher in the experimental group than the control one [one mistake increase after instruction (from 9 to 10 mistakes) in the control group versus 2 mistakes (from 5 to 7 mistakes) in the experimental one].

Looking closer at the learners' work, there were actually the same amount of declinations in all in both groups (2 mistakes more), but there was a 1 mistake less in the results of one student in the control group that made all this difference among the two groups. That is, the control group was able to show a slight improvement on the individual level relative to no improvements in the experimental group. The suggested reasons behind the decreases in both groups are the increase in the usage of full stops, the focus on punctuations more than capitalizations (for these students are cognitively limited to focusing on almost two points at the same time (Lin, 2002)), and the use of new words that sound like proper nouns (which students capitalized thinking they were proper).

Synthesis 3: The control group showed a slight improvement versus no improvement in the experimental group. Therefore, there was a slightly better result in the control group than that of the experimental one in this objective.

4.6 Logical Connectors

Regarding the use of logical connectors, both groups only used the conjunctions “and”, “or”, “so” and “but” among the conjunctions with the acronym “FANBOYS” (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so) that were taught in the instruction phase within one of the comma rules. Those only four-used-conjunctions were also taught previously to the learners by their own teacher.

Now, as a whole group, the experimental group showed no change in the number of students using appropriate logical connectors in their text (it remained 86% after instruction) while the control group showed a decrease from 100% to 86%.

On the individual level, there were trials to use more connectors after instruction in both groups with the students that need more connectors and with those that already had enough. This is due to the focus on the usage of connectors in one of the comma rules given in the instruction phase. However, there was also a rise in the usage of wrong connectors after instruction in both groups; yet, the control group had two mistakes while the experimental group had one mistake. There was no need for more connectors in the experimental group (3 students were in need before and didn't need to use connectors after- from 43% to 0%), but there was still one student (14%) with such a need in the control group after they were two in the pretest (29%).

Synthesis 4: This means that the instruction phase wasn't able to teach the learners the usage of new conjunctions rather than reminded those, who increased their usage in these 4 conjunctions, of their importance in text, and this indirect repetition helped them focus on using them more in text. However, the experimental group showed a slightly better result than that of the control group in the number of people who used more connectors and in the number of mistakes done in connectors after instruction.

4.7 Varied Sentences

Regarding the variety of sentences in the experimental group (varying sentence lengths: using simple, compound and complex sentences), there was an improvement from 71% to 86% after instruction (14% increases) versus a decrease from 86% to 71% (14% decreases) in the control group. After instruction, one student needed further variance of his sentences in the experimental group when he didn't need before. However, in the control group, before instruction, all the learners that varied their sentences in the pretest (86%) showed a need for more sentence variance (100%= 6/6), and they became after instruction 3/5 (60% of the 71% needed sentence variance).

By looking at the individual level, there were almost two improvements in varying the sentences and one declination in the control group versus almost 3 improvements and one declination in the experimental group.

Synthesis 5: Very slight better results were shown in the experimental group after instruction in this objective. It seems the increase in acknowledgement of connectors and in ideas and sentences increased the acknowledgement of varying sentences' importance.

4.8 Spelling Mistakes

In general, both groups showed a decrease in the number of students with correct spellings (with two or less spelling mistakes) [from 2/7 (29%) students to 1/7 (14%)], which could be explained by the influence of the newly learnt used-words. However, in the experimental group, there was a small decrease in misspellings in the majority of the students (4/7= 57%) and in the resulting number of overall mistakes done by the entire group (from 43 to 40 mistakes). On the other hand, in the control group, there was an increase in misspellings in 5/7 students (71%) (57% had strong increases and 14% with a small increase after instruction) and a big increase in total number of mistakes (21 mistakes became 37). However, with respect to the misspelled words that were still used after instruction, there were 7/7 (100%) in the experimental group, but 3 (43%) fixed some of their misspelled words; yet, there were 5/7 (71%) students with repeated misspellings after instruction in the control group, but 1 out of the 5 fixed some of these mistakes. The remaining two students did not use any of the misspelled words after instruction (they used new words); therefore, no comparisons could be made with these two.

Synthesis 6: There was then a great improvement in the results of the experimental group in the spelling of words after instruction compared to those in the control one (even though the improvements without the comparison seem minute). It is suggested that showing words in the animations of the reading part helped the learners focus on the spelling of some words and correct them or write new words correctly afterwards.

4.9 Tenses

Regarding the usage of appropriate tenses within the text, both groups improved similarly [increase of 14% (1 student improvement): in the experimental group from 86% (6/7) to 100%; in the control group from 5/7 students (71%) to 86%].

Synthesis 7: It seems that the instruction part did not have a special impact on a group without the other. However the experimental group reached the maximum- mastery- of the objective while the control group didn't. Therefore, from this point of view, the experimental group shows a slightly better result than that of the control group.

4.10 Appropriate Vocabulary Words

Concerning this objective, the students' vocabulary level was very weak; therefore, the level of appropriateness of word choice in the written texts was lowered less than the normal level that was expected for a fifth grader in order to detect any improvements.

Both groups showed improvements, but that of the control group was much higher in the number of students with appropriate vocabulary words [from 57% (4/7) to 86% (6/7)=28% increase in the experimental group versus 71% increase in the control group (from 29% (2/7) to 100% (7/7))] and in the number of

proper-used-words [from 13 to 19 appropriate vocabulary words in the experimental group= 6 more words, versus 15 more words in the control group (from 5 to 20 words)]. Most of the used new vocabulary words were those taken in the lesson, which means that the improvement is mainly because of the instruction. Also, and even though both groups had an increase in the number of students who used appropriate with weak words in their texts, the control group had a smaller increase than that of the experimental group (1/4 students in the pretest became 3/6 students in the post-test in the experimental group= increase in two students (29%) versus increase in 1 student (14%) in the control group= 1/7 became 2/7 after instruction).

Synthesis 8: The control group showed greater improvements than the experimental group even though both showed improvements and similar end results.

4.11 Organization

Regarding the logical organization of thoughts in students' texts, both groups improved after instruction by doubling the previous result; however, the better results were found in the experimental group [from 3/7 (43%) to 6/7 (86%)= 43% increase versus 28% increase- from 2/7 (29%) to 4/7 (57%)- in the control group]. Even at the individual level, there were no declinations in any group; the only changes were the students with improvements (3 students improved in the experimental versus 2 in the control group)).

Synthesis 9: Then, the experimental group did better on this objective. It is suggested to be due to the display of texts with animations and sounds that show the logical translation of ideas and words in sentences, creating an almost complete visual model of text for learners to copy. However, the improvements in both groups are suggested to come from the general improvements in the different prior objectives.

4.12 Other Findings

The writings were also studied for other points that could help improve the understanding of the results or give more information about them. They were the texts' length (point 1), subject-verb disagreement (point 2), incomplete and ambiguous sentences (point 3), and mistakes in singulars and plurals, pronouns, articles, prepositions and superlatives (point 4).

In the first point, in general, no results could be taken even though the results show to be better in the experimental group (43% length increases and 29% decreases versus 29% increases and 28% decreases in the control group) since one child's writings in the control group was jotted as outline ideas more than a paragraph in the pretest, which shows a decrease in the length compared to her paragraph after instruction- hadn't she done that, the results could have turned better for the control group.

In point 2, subject-verb agreement, both groups showed at the students' level same declinations (4 students (57%) increased their mistakes) and same improvements (2 students (29%) improved). Yet, the range of declination was slightly more in the experimental group (8 mistakes became 13 in the experimental group-5 more disagreements, versus 4 more disagreements- 2 became 6- in the control group).

In point 3, incomplete and ambiguous sentences (It should be noted that the incomplete sentences are those with a missing word or more that make a thought incomplete. They may be ambiguous or not.), there was no change in the incompleteness of the texts' sentences after instruction as a group in the control group (10 incomplete sentences before and after instruction) while in the experimental group, there was an increase of 1 more incomplete sentence after instruction (13 became 14). However, at the individual level, the experimental group showed better results than the control group (4/7 (57%) students with a decrease in sentence incompleteness in the experimental group versus 2/7 (29%) in the control group). Also, with

respect to sentence clarity, as a group, the experimental group showed a better result than the control group (2 ambiguous sentences less versus 4 more ambiguous sentences in the control group) because even though both groups showed the same decreases at the individual level [4/7 (57%) students increased their sentence ambiguity- no difference in the amount of declinations] there was 1 student (14%) with an increase in sentence clarity at the control group versus 3 (43%) at the experimental one.

In the fourth point, the combination of smaller studied-5-points, both groups declined similarly in the singular and plural usage (3 students with declinations), but there were learners with improvements in the control group versus no improvements in the experimental group. In the pronouns' usage, both showed almost no change (but there was one less mistake in the control group than that of the experimental group- 1 mistake versus 2 in the experimental group). Also, both had no mistakes in articles and prepositions after instruction (experimental group kept mastery and control group improved till mastery), but the control group showed a slight better result than the experimental group in the usage of superlatives in the text (no change relative to 1 mistake becoming 2 in the experimental group -1 mistake increase).

Synthesis 10: Then, it couldn't be proven which group was better in the texts' length. Even though both groups showed a similar declination in subject-verb agreements and in sentence clarity and completeness after instruction, the control group had a slightly better result in the former (almost null) while the experimental group had a better result in the latter. The latter's result is due to the better performance on the previous objectives, which are due to the animated display of sentences with the sounds. However, the declinations in subject-verb agreements could be due to the focus on the details and punctuations and the increase in details and the text's length. There were also declinations in both groups in the singular and plural and pronoun's usage while a slight declination occurred in the superlatives of the experimental group only. Those decreases explain partially the increase in the ambiguity of texts in both groups. However, the control group showed a slightly better result in these three points. Also, both groups reached mastery after instruction in the article and preposition's usage in text. Then the difference in the instructor between the two groups slightly affects the learners' writings in these 5 last sub-points since both groups reacted almost in the same way with a very slight difference.

4.13 General Synthesis

Looking at the results, we can see that there were changes after instruction in the students' writings of the same topic because of the instruction itself. However, there were also some extra changes or different results between the two groups due to the difference in the instructor and tools in each group.

Even though the students in both groups were chosen to be average students in the fifth grade, and so they should have almost the same capabilities, the experimental group showed better results, and thus capabilities, at start in most objectives. The suggested reason is the choice of average students by applying the equation on each section separately rather than as a group. Therefore, the results were mostly studied based on the changes that happened after instruction rather than the higher rank.

In general, the difference in the instruction phase between the two groups seemed to show the experimental group better than the control group in the following: writing clearer main ideas and conclusions and varied and more new ideas, using punctuations and acknowledging their importance, using logical connectors, varying the sentences, writing less spelling mistakes, using tenses correctly, organizing the sentences and ideas more logically (that is, better in about 9 out of the 11 studied objectives), and writing clearer sentences. However, the control group was seen better than the experimental group in the number of students who used new ideas in text, in the number of capitalization mistakes, in the number of appropriate

vocabulary words used and the number of students with appropriate vocabulary words (almost 3 out of the 11 studied objectives) and slightly better in the usage of less subject-verb disagreements and singular and plural, pronoun, and superlative mistakes after instruction (some of the extra studied points).

In general, the difference between the two groups was slight, except in the case of spelling mistakes (much better results in the experimental group) and vocabulary (much better results in the control group).

5. Conclusion

This small Lebanese case study examined ICT's role in improving second cycle learners' English writing– for 5th graders, in particularly- relative to the traditional teaching. 11 major communication skills were studied mainly, and the increase in a studied skill's importance- punctuations- was studied and compared, too. It was hypothesized that ICT would play a better role than the traditional means in these two main points, which were considered the operatory hypotheses.

With respect to the first operatory hypothesis, it was considerably met by both groups; there was more focus on the importance of punctuations seen with the increase in its usage in most students. However, there was an over-usage of punctuations in the experimental group that was not seen with the control one (even though not all were used in the correct place) revealing a better role for ICT in revealing this importance; and thus, the first operatory hypothesis was met.

With respect to the second point, the writing of a better paragraph based on at least 11 objectives, in general, the difference in results was minute between the two groups. Still, the experimental group showed better results than the control one in 9 out of 11 objectives plus in one point of the extra studied points in the study- clarity of sentences. The control group was better in 3 out of 11 objectives and barely better in 4 of the extra studied points.

Therefore, it is obvious that the experimental group scored higher as expected; however not in all the dedicated objectives, but in most of them. My hypothesis then was mostly proven. ICT showed to slightly improve several English writing communication skills of the second cycle learners more than the traditional means.

5.1 Limitations and Recommendations

It is suggested that the study was limited by the scarce number of students in the author's population. Therefore, further studies, which could be done as a continuation of this one, should include data taken from several schools and, if it is applicable, from different grades of the second cycle of learning rather than from 5th graders only, to provide a better representation of the second cycle learners.

A second limitation believed was changing the experimental group's class to present the instruction phase through ICT (change of environment is a factor) and having technical problems considering the malfunctioning of speakers and electricity going out, both remind us of the necessity to have schools equipped with necessary resources and updated ones.

A third limitation was the time given for the instruction phase, which was the same in both groups but a little fast for these learners' ability to grasp the given information. Therefore, I recommend that further studies give enough time for each part, which includes slowing down the animations and the heard instructions in the website especially that the experimental students were not used to hearing fast English speaking as such (over the ICT) which could have created the misconceptions seen in the results. This could also be done by slicing the reading part in the website into more pages with navigation buttons that would allow direct revision of the misunderstood line rather than waiting for a whole selection to finish in order to review a certain part.

The website's design could be further improved by increasing the vocabulary words' appearance in the reading part's animation section so that learners can directly link the shown words with their meaning in the animation shown beside it (to decrease the pressure on the cognition of those learners). As such, learners can better visualize how those words are written (spelled) and use them in their writings.

Another recommendation for further studies is to apply Equation 2 on both sections together as a group to choose the average students with more equal capabilities.

5.2 Future Implications

Further studies could research the following ideas: ICT's effect on long-term memory relative to the traditional way (if the post-test was done after a long while from the instruction phase), the impact of the consecutive usage of ICT as an instructor and a tool at the same time in class (how learners would react if they get used to studying over ICT), the impact of one-to-one instruction through the website (if learners were equipped each with a laptop/computer and a headphone and were given the session to learn on their own) since in this study the experimental learners shared the same screen and source of sound (the school was not well equipped for such studies), or the role of ICT as a tool, rather than an instructor and a tool at the same time, in improving English writing, which could, in my opinion, make use of the combination of the benefits that both, the traditional way of teaching and the features of ICT, could lead to in writing, specifically.

Based on these findings, the study, in general, reveals at least a simple role for ICT in improving English-writing for second cycle learners nationwide better than the traditional means in different parts of the written text at the same time. Locally, it also represents a base for future studies in Lebanon and developing countries regarding the use of ICT in education. Those limitations then provide new and better ways of approaching future studies to reach a better and more specific understanding of ICT's role in education and writing, specifically.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the two educational technology instructors at UOB who supervised the website's design and production along with the administration and the 5th grade English teacher and students of BHS who participated in this study.

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APPENDIX A: Tables and Figures of the Literature Review Section

Table A.1: The Intersection (\cap) of ICT with Three Basic Learning Theories

Theories	Behavioral Theory	Cognitive Theory	Socio-Constructivist Theory
<p>Learning Theory \cap ICT : ICT presents an environment of:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • direct stimulus-response relation with learners • vast and different types of practice • different types of reinforcement s • self-controlled repetition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • huge, worldwide, new information for different ages presented in different ways (pictures, sounds, graphs, animations, models..) that facilitate understanding and stimulate thinking and problem solving (mental processes) • easy editing and reflecting upon action; for example, through the Microsoft Word program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • social interaction • simulations that put learners as if in the real situations • knowledge that is far more greater than what a learner knows; and thus presents a large zone of proximal development (ZPD) • interaction with great numbers of knowledgeable people from different places across the world • language development as a tool for further learning

Note: (cited from Kanselaar, 2002; Shuell, 2001; Chapman, 2006)

Table A.2: The Intersection (\cap) of ICT with the Action Theory

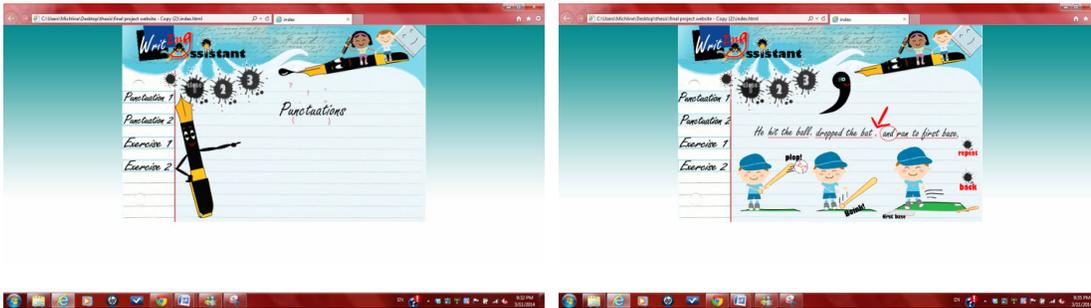
Another Theory	Action Theory
<p>Theory \cap ICT</p>	<p>ICT:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is considered one aspect of the external action field that represents different cultures and where an agency's (subject's) action can be exerted based on rules and the agency's goals, intentions and affection towards what ICT presents • presents animations, colors, shapes, sounds, text, social and other information, etc., which increases ICT's validity in the agencies applying to it; thus, attracting their actions upon it more than other external action field's aspects • interacts with its agencies in ways that can have predictable or not outcomes (example getting new unexpected information on the web) leading the agency to further act upon it (search more about the topic) because it became more valid for him

Cognitive skills		Cognitive & Motor skills				
Pre-writing (Getting ready to write)		Drafting & Writing				
Planning	↔	Translating				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decide on a topic • Identify the audience & purpose of writing • Setting goals • Brainstorm 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generate Ideas • Lexical knowledge & retrieval • analyses & evaluation • organize ideas 	Semantic coding	Phonological coding	Syntactic structures	Transcription	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on communication of meaning (drawing...) 	Spelling	Punctuation & Grammar	Orthographic coding	Orthographic-motor integration
			Capitalization & sentence structure (Mechanics)			

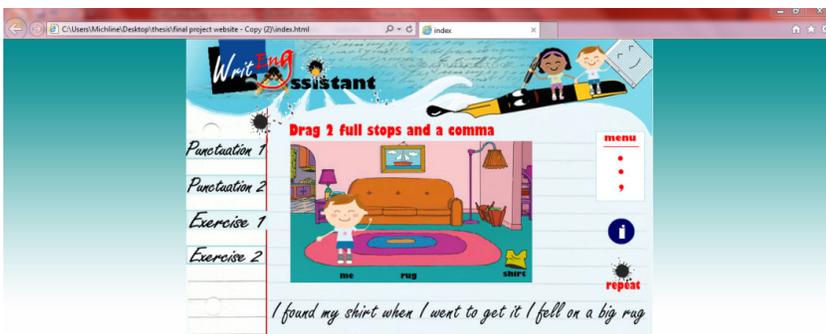
Meta-cognitive and Motor skills		
Post Writing		
Sharing & Responding	↔	Revising & Editing Publishing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share work to gain feedback • Peer editing • Writing Workshops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self monitoring • Revise content • Proofread for writing conventions • Editing: adding, deleting • Text reorganization • Evaluating 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Celebrate and showcase finished products • Build confidence in student writers

Figure A.1: Combination of Theories: The Writing Process

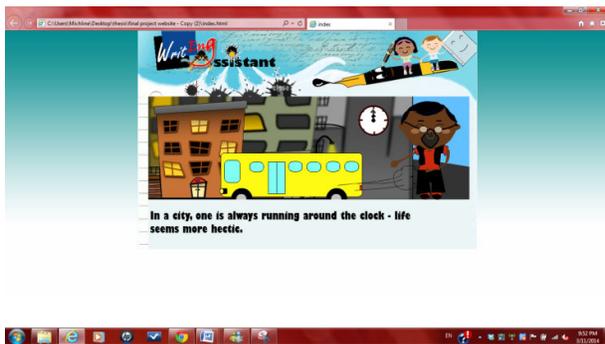
APPENDIX B: Website Images



a) Different characters instructing (the pen, on the left and the comma, on the right)



b) An interactive Exercise



c) A scene from the animated-reading part

Figure B.1: Selected Scenes from the Website

APPENDIX C: Tables of Results

Table C.1: The Experimental Group's Pretest Data

Correcting (Objectives)	System	Students							Results
		S1A	S2A	S3A	S4A	S5A	S6A	S7A	
1	Main idea (clear: +; not clear: ~+; no main idea: _)	+	~+	+	+	+	~+	_	6+; 1_ (86%) (29%: not clear)
2	Enough supporting details(+ or _)	+	_	+	+	_	+	+	5+ 2_ (71%)
3	Concluding sentence (+:clear; ~+:not clear; _: no conclusion)	+	+	~+	~+	+	+	~+	7+ (100%) (43% not clear)
4	Correct punctuations (≤ 3 mistakes:+, more than 3: _)	_ (6 mistakes)	+(1) (1 mistake)	_(8) (8 mistakes)	_(4) (4 mistakes)	_(6) (6 mistakes)	+(2) (2 mistakes)	_(10) (10 mistakes)	2+; 5_ (29%) (37 mistakes in all)
5	Correct capitalizations (+: if 1 mistake, or else:_)	+	+(only title)	+(1)	+	+(1)	_(2)	+(1)	6+; 1_ (86%) (5 mistakes in all)
6	Appropriate logical connectors(+ or _) (~+: need more)	+	_	+(only in-text)	+	+	+	~+	6+ 1_ (86%) (14%: ~+)
7	Varied sentences (tall+ short)(if +, or else: _, and state which one(s) was/were used)	+	+(simple and complex)	_(complex and compound) (tall sentences only)	+(all)	_(complex and compound)	+(one of each)	+(all)	5+ 2_ (71%)
8	Had 2 or less spelling mistakes (+, or else: _)	_(10)	+(1)	_(4)	_(7)	+(2)	_(4)	_(15)	2+; 5_ (29%)(43 mistakes in all)
9	Correct tenses (+or _)	+	+	+	_(1 mistake)	+	+	+	6+ 1_ (86%)
10	Appropriate vocabulary words (How many)	+(4)	_(1)	_(2)	+(1)	_	+(2)	~+(3)	4+ (57%) ^a 3_ (43%) 1~+ ^b
11	organize ideas in a logical sequence (+ or _)	_	_	+	_	+	+	_	3+ (43%) 4_ (57%)

^a 13 appropriate words were used in all^b 14% had a mixture of weak and appropriate words

Table C.2: The Control Group's Pretest Data

	Correcting System (Objectives)	Students							Results
		S1B	S2B	S3B	S4B	S5B	S6B	S7B	
1	Main idea (clear: +; not clear: ~+; no main idea: _)	+	+	+	+	~+	+	~+	7+ (100%) 2/7 ~+ (29% were unclear)
2	Enough supporting details(+ or _)	_	_	_	_	~+	_	_	1+ (14%) 6_
3	Concluding sentence (+:clear; ~+:not clear; _: no conclusion)	+	+	+	~+	+	_	+	6+ (86%) 1_
4	Correct punctuations (≤ 3 mistakes:+, more than 3: _)	+(2)	_(4)	_(8)	_(4)	_(6)	_(4)	_(5)	1+ (14%) 6_ (33 mistakes in all)
5	Correct capitalizations (+: if 1 mistake, or else: _)	_(4)	+	+	+(1)	_(2)	_(2)	+	4+ (57%) 3_ (9 mistakes in all)
6	Appropriate logical connectors (+ or _) (~+: need more)	+	+	+	+	~+	+	~+ (needed a lot)	7+ (100%) 2~+ (29%) ^a
7	Varied sentences (tall+ short)(+ or _ and state which one(s) was/were used)	+(all) But not enough	_(~all are simple)	+(all) But not enough	+(simple and complex)	6+ (86% but not enough) 1_			
8	Had 2 or less spelling mistakes (+ , or else: _)	_(3)	_(3)	_(3)	_(5)	+(2)	_(3)	+(2)	2+ (29%) (21 mistakes in all) 5_ (71%)
9	Correct tenses (+or _)	+	+	_(1)	+	_(1)	+	+	5+ (71%); 2_ (2 mistakes in all)
10	Appropriate vocabulary words (How many)	~+ (~3)	_	_	_(1)	_	+(1)	_	2+ (29%) ^b , 5_ (71%)
11	organize ideas in a logical sequence (+ or _)	_	+	_	+	_	_	_	2+ (29%) 5_

^a but 1 student (14%) needed a lot- he had only 1 connector^b (5 appropriate words were used in all)

Table C.3: The Experimental Group's Post-Test Data

Correcting System (Objectives)	Students								Results
	S1A	S2A	S3A	S4A	S5A	S6A	S7A		
1 Main idea (clear: +; not clear: ~+; no main idea: _)	+	+	+ (but should be set alone)	+	+	+	~+	100% had a main idea ; 14% not clear (1/7~+)	
2 Enough supporting details(+ or _)	_	+	+	+	+	+	+	86% +; 14% -	
3 Concluding sentence (+:clear; ~+:not clear; -: no conclusion)	+	+	+	~+	~+	+	~+	100% had a conclusion 43% were not clear (3/7~+)	
4 Correct punctuations (≤ 3 mistakes:+, more than 3: _)	+(2)	+(2)	_(4)	_(4)	+(3)	_(4)	_(7)	3/7 + (43%); 4/7 _ (57%) (26 mistakes in all)	
5 Correct capitalizations (+: if 1 mistake, or else:_)	+	+	_(2)	+(1)	+(1)	_(2)	+(1)	5/7 + (71%); 2/7 _ (29%) (7 mistakes in all)	
6 Appropriate logical connectors(+ or _) (~+: need more)	+	+	+	+	+	_ (one was wrong)	+	6/7 + (86%) 14% _ (had 1 inappropriate connector)	
7 Varied sentences (tall+ short)(+ or _ and state which one(s) was/were used)	+	+(all)	+(all)	+(all)	+	(but needed more simple sentences)	_ (all are tall)	+(all)	6/7 + (86%); 1/7 _ (14%)
8 Had 2 or less spelling mistakes (+, or else: _)	_(11)	+(1)	_(3)	_(4)	_(4)	_(3)	_(14)	1/7 + (14%) (40 mistakes in all); 6/7 _ (86%)	
9 Correct tenses (+or _)	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	7/7 + (100%)	
10 Appropriate vocabulary words (How many)	+(6)	+(4)	~+ (3)	+(1)	~+(3)	_	~+(2)	6/7 + (86%) ^a ; 1/7 _ (14%);	
11 organize ideas in a logical sequence (+ or _)	_	+	+	+	+	+	+	6/7 + (86%) 1/7 _ (14%)	

^a (19 appropriate vocabulary words were used in all) and 3/7 (43%) had weak words too

Table C.4: The Control Group's Post-Test Data

Correcting System (Objectives)	Students								Results
	S1B	S2B	S3B	S4B	S5B	S6B	S7B		
1 Main idea (clear: +; not clear: ~+; no main idea: _)	~+	+	+	~+	~+	+	~+	7/7 + (100%); 4/7 ~+ (57%) are unclear	
2 Enough supporting details(+ or _)	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	6/7 + (86%)	
3 Concluding sentence (+:clear; ~+:not clear; -: no conclusion)	+	+	+	~+	~+	-	~+	6/7 + (86%) but 3/6 + were ~+ ^a ; 1_ (14%)	
4 Correct punctuations (≤ 3 mistakes:+, more than 3: _)	_(8)	+(2)	_(5)	_(4)	_(6)	_(4)	+(2)	2/7 + (29%); 5/7 _ (71%); (31 mistakes in all)	
5 Correct capitalizations (+: if 1 mistake, or else:_)	_(3)	+	+	_(5)	+(1)	+(1)	+	5/7 + (71%); 2/7 _ (29%); (10 mistakes in all)	
6 Appropriate logical connectors(+ or _) (~+: need more)	+	+	+	+	_(2)	+	~+	6/7 (86%) +; 1/7 (14%)_ (2 mistakes); 1 (14%) needed more	
7 Varied sentences (tall+ short)(+ or -, and state which one(s) was/were used)	+(simple and compound)	_(all are tall)	+(all)	_(all are tall)	+(all needed more simple sentences)	+(all can have more simple ones)	+(simple & complete x) (needed compound sentences)	5/7 (71%) +; 2/7 _ (29%) (60% -3/5- needed more simple ones)	
8 Had 2 or less spelling mistakes (+ , or else: _)	_(6)	+(1)	_(3)	_(10)	_(6)	_(4)	_(7)	1/7 (14%) +; 6/7 (86%) _; (37 mistakes in all)	
9 Correct tenses (+or _)	+	+	+	+	_(1)	+	+	6/7 (86%) +; 1/7 (14%) _ (1 mistake)	
10 Appropriate vocabulary words (How many)	~+(4)	+(1)	~+(3)	+(2)	+(1)	+(3)	+(6)	7/7 (100%) + ^b	
11 organize ideas in a logical sequence (+ or _)	-	+	+	+	-	+	-	4/7 (57%) +; 3/7 (43%) _	

^a 50% of the 86% were unclear

^b 2/7 (29%) had a lot of weak ones too; (20 appropriate words in all)