



Computer-assisted language learning (CALL): Using paragraph punch software in developing EFL paragraph writing skills

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Abstract

The study aimed at examining the effect of Paragraph Punch on developing EFL students' writing paragraphs. The participants were eighty English language students of the English Department, Al-Balqa Applied University, who had enrolled in the Writing paragraph course. They were distributed into two assigned sections: the experimental group of (40) participants who have experience in using Paragraph Punch software, was taught according to the Paragraph Punch Software; while the control group of (40) was taught according to the traditional method. The data from the students in the pre-test and the post-test were analysed by using a t-test. The researchers aimed to find out either both groups are equivalent, by analyzing the pre-test, or how Paragraph Punch affected their skill in paragraph writing by analyzing the post-test. The results of the study showed that the software enhances the students' paragraph writing ability. Thus, it is recommended that EFL instructors should use Paragraph Punch as an alternative way to improve students' writing paragraphs. The researchers encouraged other researchers in TEFL to conduct other studies about the effect of using Paragraph Punch software on improving paragraph writing skills at different levels. After applying Paragraph Punch software in the current experiment, the researchers noticed some obstacles and problems facing the teachers and students in using Paragraph Punch software to write paragraphs. Thus, he also suggested conducting different studies to handle those problems and find solutions.

Keywords: CALL; effect; EFL writing; freshman student; paragraph punch; paragraph writing skills; software

1. Introduction

Technological development has played an important role in education. Using technology at universities brings many advantages for students. They have unlimited resources to understand the material, especially through computers and the internet. Besides, computers make education more interesting, flexible, and easy to access. Many studies claimed that using technology improves students' achievement and helps them in research.

Recently, most studies have focused on the area of using computers as teaching-learning tools in language like Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) which is effective for language learners. CALL covers a broad range of activities and applications that make it difficult to be defined. A general

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flexible definition given by (Beatty, 2010) according to its changing nature is any process in which a learner uses a computer to improve his or her language.

Nowadays, several researchers conducted many studies about using technology in language learning inside Jordan or outside, and it is difficult to mention all of them. Most of these studies focused on using different CALL applications on improving language or teachers' and students' perspectives towards using these applications in language learning. Some researchers conducted studies regarding the positive role of using mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) in improving English as a foreign language (EFL). They were conducted in Jordanian universities such as the studies of (Alzubi, M., 2013; Alzubi, M. & Sabha, M., 2013). Other studies talked about the positive students' perceptions of smartphone applications in language performance in other countries (Abdullah & Tajuddin, 2019).

CALL is divided into three trends: behavioural CALL, integrative CALL, and communicative CALL (Warschauer & Healey, 1998). The beginning of CALL has been started in the 1950s and 1960s, which was used only in universities such as Stanford University, Dartmouth University, and the University of Essex. The focus was on teaching Russian, and the first materials used take the form of textbooks on the web like guided grammar exercises. The proper use of "web-based" appeared in the 80s and 90s and using simulations in language education is a basis in CALL. There are several CALL applications featuring simulations such as Word processing, Games, Literature, Corpus linguistics, Computer-mediated communication (CMC), WWW resources, and Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs) and mobile telephones (book). Other examples of CALL applications such as electronic mail, online dictionaries, blogs, and computer software are used to learn a language.

Many English teachers used CALL increasingly, and many studies were conducted about its positive role to improve performance and English learning. Using CALL applications in the classroom can motivate students, making them interested in learning because it provides students' ways of learning English through computer games and animated graphics (Ravichandran, 2000). Many researchers claim that CALL has many advantages for foreign language learning. It encourages Individualization, makes the time flexible for learning, and gives immediate feedback. CALL has key roles in the language classrooms as teachers, tester, tool, data source. Besides, CALL is considered a communication facilitator like using e-collaborative English language learning (Mohamed et al., 2020).

The technological applications of CALL instruction are divided into two types, software, and Internet-based activities. Software is a common application that can be used in and outside of the classroom to improve students' language skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking). Several Computer-Assisted Writing (CAW) programs and software have been presented such as blogs, e-mails, and word processors. One of the online writing software which was investigated in the current study is 'Paragraph Punch' that guides students to write sentences to develop an organized paragraph.

Paragraph Punch could be better than the traditional method (pen-paper) of writing. It provides feedback about students' word and structure mistakes because the errors are systematic and the software contains features that help the students in writing; it encourages the students to discover and invent alone and gives them multiple (Kaplan, 1996). Using Paragraph Punch allows learners to receive feedback both from the teacher and computer. Thus, students can learn not only by the teacher in the traditional method inside the class, but also via the internet. By using Paragraph Punch software, the students can write the attached sentences to produce texts. The students will also realize the mistakes they have made when they type the sentences. "Paragraph Punch" helps learners to write effective, clear, and organized paragraphs through writing by developing their topic sentence, body,

and conclusion. At the end of each step, the program asks learners questions about their writing to guide them to self-correction.

Depending on the results of the related and investigated studies in the CALL area, the researchers selected the present software because he believes that it will be effective to solve some specific problems in writing paragraphs. These problems can transfer students' ideas into clear and meaningful text, building their structures, selecting vocabularies, organizing ideas, and correcting students' mistakes in mechanics of writing. Besides, (Lee, 2020) offered many reasons for using CALL in learning such as helping the learners to gain experience, motivating the students' learning, and improving their achievement. He also claimed that CALL provides authentic material, better interactions, a broader spectrum of information, and global understanding. The major aim of the present study is to study the impact of using a computer on paragraph writing. Besides, it is to give some applications on the beneficial use of paragraph punch in improving EFL students' writing skills at the English departments of Al-Balqa Applied university colleges.

1.1. Literature Review

According to (Yunus et al., 2011), Paragraph Punch was first developed by Merit Evaluation Software in (2002) to teach students how to build paragraphs and essays by following specific steps one by one. Nowadays, there are two versions of this software. The first one is free and called "a demo version". It is used in the current study and then another one is purchased "home version".

A few studies have been done regarding Paragraph Punch. The first study conducted on Paragraph Punch was done by Merit aimed at describing the software and applications to be used in the classroom. All the studies have shown that the use of Paragraph Punch software in writing is positively effective [10,11,12,13]. (Yunus et al., 2011; Cherfaoui & Kaouli, 2019; Pujiawati, 2018 & Yunus et al., 2011).

Cherfaoui & Kaouli (2012) investigated the effect of using Paragraph Punch software on students' paragraph writing skills. The sample of the study included the first year LMD students at the department of English, Laghouat University, during the 2nd semester of April 2018. The instruments of the study were a writing test and a questionnaire. The writing test was to compare both strategies (pen-paper and Paragraph Punch). The questionnaire was to find out the responses of the students about their experience with using the Paragraph Punch software. The findings of the study showed that Paragraph Punch software improved the students' writing skills more than the traditional method did. Also, the students were happy with its use mainly because their paragraphs became more organized. Also, it encouraged the students to have a great mastery of how to write all types of sentences without grammatical, spelling errors to produce a coherent paragraph.

Furthermore, (Pujiawati, 2018), also pointed out that Paragraph Punch affected students' skill in paragraph writing positively in the process and learning products. He selected a sample of thirty participants of the English Department at the University of Singaperbangsa Karawang. They had enrolled in Writing for General Communication and had experience in using the software. The study also recommended that the Paragraph Punch software improved EFL teachers' teaching quality.

Yunus (2012) conducted a study investigating the pre-service teachers' perspectives towards 'Paragraph Punch' as a technological device for assisting beginner writers. The sample of the study was selected from third-year TESL students in a state university in Malaysia. The instrument of the study was a questionnaire survey to elicit participants' views on the use of Paragraph Punch as an effective writing tool. The findings of the study showed that teachers' perceptions were positive towards using Paragraph Punch, and it was suitable for beginner writers. A similar study conducted by

[10], showed that the pre-service teachers have a positive view towards using Paragraph Punch in teaching ESL writing.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Most of the studies approved that using a computer in language learning classrooms enhances students' writing skills and solves different learners' problems in writing. The students do not build their paragraphs gradually, and they do not have sufficient knowledge about the steps and elements of writing paragraph skills. They do not have an enough amount of vocabulary. They make grammatical, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization errors. Besides, they cannot organize their ideas to be a perfect paragraph. From the researchers' experience, all students could not make self-correction or guided by the teacher in the traditional method (paper-pencil). To overcome the problems found in writing a paragraph, the students need to use CALL to solve the problems they face in writing. Unfortunately, based on the observation of the researchers, computers are not used in writing learning. As a result, the present study investigated the effect of Paragraph Punch software on developing EFL students' writing paragraphs.

1.3. Question and Hypothesis of the Study

The study tried to answer the following question: "What is the effect of Paragraph Punch software on developing EFL students' writing paragraphs?". To answer the question, the researchers tried to test the following hypothesis: "When the instructor uses Paragraph Punch software in paragraph writing, his students' writing performance would be improved."

2. Method

2.1. The sample of the Study

A sample of eighty freshmen students who studied (Paragraph Writing) course was selected from Al-Balqa Applied University. To find out whether Paragraph Punch software is positively effective on the students' ability in writing paragraphs, the researchers distributed the sample as follows. The students were distributed into the experimental group who used Paragraph Punch software and the control group, which used the conventional way in learning how to write a paragraph. The experimental group included (40) students, whereas the control group included (40) participants.

2.2. Instrument of the Study

The researchers designed a writing test comprising pre and post-tests to write a perfect paragraph about one of three topics based on the high, average, and low students' levels. Those topics are novel and related to real-life issues (See Appendix A). The correction of the test depends on two rubrics designed by the researchers who focused on the key elements of the paragraph and mechanics of writing. (See Appendix B & C). The test and the rubric were judged by a group of experts in education and research to produce the final draft after adopting and following their comments.

2.2.1 The Teaching Methods

The control group and the experimental group are taught by using the following teaching methods:

2.2.1.1 Paragraph Punch

The current study used a demo version (Paragraph Punch version 4.2) to fulfil its aim. Through using Paragraph Punch, the students can write perfect paragraphs by emphasizing the writing process. They practice pre-writing, while-writing, and post-writing based on the following steps:

1. The learner selects his/her topic.
2. The pre-writing stage begins with adding related words or phrases on a notepad.
3. Several questions were raised to stimulate students.
4. The learner adds his/her topic sentence, and the software gives him/her a sample.
5. The learner uses the words and phrases written in notepad to make and generate a few sentences.
6. The learner arranges the added sentences to complete the paragraph, and the software allows the learner to delete or add transition words.
7. The software provides a sample of concluding sentences to prepare the students to write their own.
8. The screen of the software shows the student how to review the draft.
9. The software introduces editing, adding, removing, and moving options to edit style, grammar, and sentence structure.
10. The student may use the Proofreading choice.
11. The students can print the paragraph or transfer it to a word processor.
12. The software gives the students the chance to repeat the review process.

2.2.1.2 *The traditional Teaching Method*

During paragraph writing activities, the teacher used the three stages of writing (pre-writing, while-writing, and post-writing). The purpose of the pre-writing stage is to think about what the students are writing about or to organize ideas and gather information about the topic. In the while-writing stage, the students started writing depending on the elements of the writing paragraph. In the post-writing stage, students should edit and make corrections and proofreading to produce the final draft. To teach the students how to write a paragraph, the teacher uses the following procedures:

1. The teacher asks the students to select their subjects and limited topics depending on the characteristics of a suitable topic.
2. Students gather information about their topics and set outlines before they write.
3. The teacher directs the students to adopt one of the pre-writing techniques for limiting their topics and gathering information about them such as brainstorming, freewriting, clustering. The teacher allows the students to select their preferable technique.
4. The teacher provides the students with helpful restrictions on the number of sentences they are required to write, the number of words. The teacher may guide them to suitable verb tense and supply them with the keywords they need.
5. Students should follow the elements and principles of writing a good paragraph such as (topic sentence, supporting sentences, concluding sentence, unity, coherence, and continuity).

Students should make proof-reading and correct mistakes related to the mechanics of writing such as (spelling and grammatical errors, punctuations, capitalization, and format). While correcting students' writing, the teacher makes a list of common errors and discusses them with his or her class, and then the student rewrites the paragraph in its correct form.

2.3 *The Procedures of the Study*

The study followed certain procedures to be achieved. After determining the problem of the study; the study reviewed the literature review and the related studies that investigate the effect of using paragraph punch software on developing paragraphs. Then, the researchers of the study designed the

instrument of the study and established the validity and reliability of the instrument to produce the final draft. The researchers selected a sample of (80) freshmen students and he distributed those into (2) groups. The pre-test applied to both groups (experimental and controlled) then the experiment was started according to paragraph punch software in the experimental group. After finishing the experiment, the post-test was administrated for both groups (experimental and controlled) to find out if there was a difference between learning to accord both strategies. Based on the gained data when the exam sheets were corrected, the study discussed the results and suggested some recommendations.

2.4 The Study Design and its Variables

The study used a pre- test and post- test control group design. Forty students were taught by using the classical way in the control group and forty students were taught by using Paragraph Punch software in the experimental group. The researchers applied the test twice; before the study as a pre-test and after the study as a post-test. The pre-test was done to get sure that both groups are equivalent. The post-test was done to find out if Paragraph Punch software is more or less effective than the traditional way used in writing a paragraph.

3. Results

The T-test was used to find out whether the mean scores of the experimental and control group are equivalent in the pre-test.

Table 1. T-test results of experimental and control group students based on the pre-test scores.

	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
PRE.	Experimental	40	18.45	6.013	-.244	78	.808
	Control	40	18.77	5.903			

Table 1 shows that the mean scores of the experimental group on the pre-test is (18.45) which is slightly similar to the control group's mean score (18.77). The t-test value is also not significant at ($\alpha \leq 0,05$). The t value of the pre-test is (-.244) which is not statistically significant at ($\alpha \leq 0, 05$) because it is higher than 0.05. Thus, it implies that the two groups are equivalent.

The data gained via the post-test was analyzed by using a t-test to find out the statistical difference between the results of the post-test of both groups. Table 2 shows the t-test results of both groups to decide if there is effectiveness or not while using Paragraph Punch software on students' writing paragraph skills.

Table 2. T-test results of experimental and control group students based on the post-test scores

	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
POST	Experimental	40	23.75	4.629	4.232	78	.000
	Control	40	19.18	5.033			

According to Table 2, the mean score of the experimental group (23.75) is higher than the scoring average of the control group (19.18). As seen in the table, the T value (4.232) is statistically significant at ($\alpha \leq 0.05$). This result determines that the Paragraph Punch improves students' writing paragraph skills more than the traditional way used in the control group. The students, who applied Paragraph Punch when studying, got a high mean score according to the post-test. However, the students who applied the traditional method got a low mean score.

4. Discussion

According to the results of the study, the students' ability to write paragraphs by using Paragraph Punch software was improved. Paragraph Punch software significantly improved paragraph writing ability from side aspects of content, organization, vocabulary, language, and mechanics usage.

When the students used Paragraph Punch software in writing their paragraphs, they developed the topic sentences, supporting sentences, and concluding sentences into paragraphs. They follow the linear instructions (step-by-step) of the software; the suggested topic sentence via software included a topic and a controlling idea. Also, the supporting sentences (details) were clear enough and relevant. Besides, every paragraph has unity and coherence because Paragraph Punch software offered multi signals and cohesive devices. Finally, the students have benefited from using Paragraph Punch software to choose their concluding sentences for their paragraphs.

By using the options of Paragraph Punch software, the students have the chance to use and select a sufficient amount of vocabulary. Although several words were available in the Paragraph Punch software, some readers did not select the words in writing their paragraphs. The software is still better than the classical way because the students do not have enough amounts of words to use in writing their paragraph. Thus, they have the chance to use many words from the lists given by the Paragraph Punch software.

Paragraph Punch software helped the students to develop the mechanics of writing. They wrote their paragraphs without spelling errors, and the software gave them the right punctuations and capital letters. Through using Paragraph Punch software, the writer can write his/her paragraph easily. The writer will not think about the possible errors made, by adopting the classical way, such as the format of the paragraph, using numbers and numerals, indentations, using contractions. Also, the software provided a grammar checker, so it helps the students to write a clear language without errors.

There are other reasons why Paragraph Punch software improved students' ability in writing a perfect paragraph. First, the Paragraph Punch software supported the pre-writing, while-writing, and post-writing stages. Thus, when contrasting Paragraph Punch software with the classical way, we find most of the students did not classically use the pre-writing stage. In contrast, they used the pre-writing stage via Paragraph Punch software. Second, Paragraph Punch software is a way for the study sample because they are freshmen who take (writing paragraph) course. Thus, the current way is suitable for them since they can follow the linear instructions in writing their paragraphs. Besides, they could learn the basics of paragraph writing such as writing the topic sentence at the beginning of the paragraph, using the paragraph perfect structure and linking words. Third, using the software enhance the writing creativity as their train of thoughts are not disrupted by putting much focusing on spelling and grammar. Finally, the students also can practice writing paragraphs more by using Paragraph Punch software because they had their laptops at home.

As for the control group, the mean scores of the control group on the pre-test are (18.77). It is slightly similar to the control group's mean score on the post-test (19.18). Hence, the difference of the results between the pre-test and the post-test is quite slight. For the knowledge of the researchers, the traditional teaching group was ineffective because of some factors. The teacher in the control group did not have enough time to provide all of his students with signals and unfamiliar vocabulary or correcting their spelling and grammatical mistakes. As mentioned anaphorically, the teacher did not focus on the pre-writing stage, which is very important for the students. It allows them to think about what they are going to write about, gather information about the topic, and organize information. Besides, it was hard for the teacher in the control group to help the students selecting their topic sentences and details or conclusion. As a result, when the researchers used the writing paragraph

rubrics under the study to correct the students' paragraphs, he noticed that the students did not get high scores.

5. Conclusions

To sum up, the outcomes of the data was very positive and encouraging by implement such creative way of learning, the software tool. It was crystal clear that utilizing the Paragraph Punch Software by the subjects had endorsed their writing skills. The researchers, by applying the current study, urges conducting future studies about the perspectives of advanced writers towards using Paragraph Punch software. Also, the researchers encourage other studies to tackle the problems the teachers and students encounter via using Paragraph Punch software to write paragraphs and essays. It is hoped that the finding of the current study will add to the field and serve as ground for further investigation on the use of Paragraph Punch Software by EFL learners.

6. Ethics Committee Approval

The author(s) confirms(s) that the study does not need ethics committee approval according to the research integrity rules in their country.

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Appendix (A)

The Writing Test

Choose one of the following topics to write a paragraph about:

1. The problems faced the educational system in Jordan.
2. Your opinion on what governments should do about preventing Corona COVID-19.
3. Using e-learning in universities instead of the lecture method.

Appendix (B)

The Writing Paragraph Rubric based on the main elements of paragraph

No.	Item	1	2	3	4	Total
1	The topic sentence					
2	The supporting sentences					
3	The concluding sentence					
4	Vocabulary Cohesive devices					
Total						16

Appendix (C)**The Writing Paragraph Rubric based on the mechanics of writing**

No.	Item	1	2	3	Total
5	Content and its organization				
6	Grammar and spelling				
7	Punctuations, capitalization, and format				
Total					9