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Iranian EFL Learners' attitudes toward using online coca in EFL writing instruction at advance level

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Abstract

Considering the English Language as a Lingua Franca and the increase of its language learners all around the world, new methods are entering the field of English language teaching (Eda Kaypak, Deniz Ortactepe, 2014). One of these methods that have become very popular in recent years is the use of Corpus linguistics in English language teaching. Due to the weakness of most Iranian students in writing skills in this language, this study examines students' attitudes toward using Coca corpus to improve their writing skills, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of this program as an educational tool in writing skills in online education. Statistical data obtained from this study show that students have a positive attitude towards the use of this program and the use of this program has increased students' confidence in the writing skills of this language.

Keywords: Coca Corpus, writing skill, EFL advanced learners

Introduction

The English language is one of the most popular and widely used languages among Iranians. Many people deal with English in various fields and activities every day. English is one of the most widely used foreign languages in the country and is at the forefront of teaching foreign languages as a second language. The importance of this language is not hidden from anyone so it is very important not only in Iran but also in other countries and is taught in schools and institutes of different countries. Writing is a skill that is less considered than other skills in both schools and colleges. Writing in English is a difficult task for many people. Writing is like a nightmare for this group of people. One of the reasons for this weakness is that Iranian students do not receive sufficient and valid language input (Layla Heydari, 2018). Another reason is the inability of language learners to access educational native-like content. Due to the mentioned reasons, language learners are not motivated enough in this skill, and in most cases, their writing content is similar to the essay model. However, due to the advancement of computer and Internet technology, this research has taken on a new aspect. Corpora, which has been considered by researchers in various fields in recent years, has also been studied in the field of writing skills. In this study, the use of the Coca corpus of contemporary American English in teaching writing skills to language learners has been investigated. Coca corpus provides learners with natural and authentic data so they can access qualified data and develop their writing skills.

A brief introduction of Coca

To use corpus in writing skills, we need a tool that has both comprehensive and authentic content and is easy for learners to use. For this purpose, there are various programs like Coca, BNC, etc. Corpus of contemporary American English has been available online and free since 2008. Coca is the largest English corpus and has several advantages over other corpora, and it has the largest corpus available, containing more than a billion-word corpus of American English and a combination of spoken, fiction, magazines, newspapers, academic, text, TV, movie subtitles, blogs, and webpages (Arzu Kocak, 2020). It provides knowledge of how English is used by native speakers, which will help them better understand words and grammar and how they are used by natives. Users can search for many things from the Coca corpus. They can search exact words, parts of speech, and lemmas.

Application of Coca in EFL writing

When a topic is taught to language learners in writing classes, language learners usually have a problem and have no idea how to start writing and continue it. Teachers can provide this input to learners in different ways. Common methods in writing classes include brainstormings, such as clustering, mind mapping, and brainwriting. Teachers can expand the topic with students' thinking and provide them with relevant input. Brainstorming allows learners to use their previous curiosities and knowledge of the topic and to bring their thoughts on the topic into writing. When using brainstorming, students can express their thoughts freely, without restrictions, and without fear of being judged for using grammar and spelling words (Septa Adrian, 2016). It is best to have brainstorming sessions for a limited time so that learners can focus on the topic as quickly as possible and write down their thoughts. If students do not feel judged, they will be more willing and motivated to participate in brainstorming sessions and share their ideas with their classmates. At the end of the brainstorming time, the teachers review the written ideas and with the consent of the learners, remove the irrelevant ideas, and thus the learners enter the writing stage.

With the advancement of technology, new methods have entered the educational system. One of these methods is the use of corpus language, which also includes Coca. In recent years, it has attracted the attention of many teachers in the field of education, especially in writing classes. Teachers should explain how to use the Coca program and the purpose of using this program in writing classes for language learners. Teachers can specify keywords and ask students to search for these words from the Coca program to see the appropriate collocations with them as well as how the words are used by the natives in different texts.

Research questions

1. Which problems do the learners face in using the Coca application?
2. Do the learners have a positive or negative feeling toward using coca in their writing?
3. Do the learners find coca effective in writing classes?

Methodology

The study aims to investigate EFL students perceptions of using online Coca in English courses to promote their writing skill. The participants are EFL learners at an English school in Tabriz.

Participants

The language learners who have participated in this research all are advanced level learners of one of the famous schools in Tabriz. Although these language learners passed the written and oral level test at the registration stage and entered the advanced level, they entered the research by applying another proficiency test. Due to their Islamic nature and the

laws of Iran, students are divided into two classes, male and female, by gender. The number of female students was 6 and the number of male students was 5 All language learners have been undergraduate students in various fields. The teacher in both classes was the same and a Ph.D. student in English language teaching.

Instrument

The data for the current study was gathered by a questionnaire and also a semi-structured interview with the learners. Coca corpus of contemporary American English was also used in this study.

Questionnaire

The researcher prepared a questionnaire for learners in order to gather data. The questionnaire was designed to get information about students' perception of using online Coca to develop their writing skills. The questionnaire includes 20 statements which are graded from 1-5 (1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neither disagree nor agree, 4= agree, 5= strongly agree) according to learners' satisfaction. Before administrating the questionnaire the statements were checked by two English instructors, working in the same language school.

Semi structured interview

The semi-structured interview was conducted to find out learners' views of learning Coca in their own words.

The Corpus of contemporary American English (Coca)

The corpus of contemporary American English is the first corpus of American English and it contained more than 385 million words from 1990-2008 taken from spoken, fiction, newspaper, magazines, and academic journals.

Data collection Procedure and analysis

The current research has been completed over two months and the author has used the questionnaire and semi-structured interviews to obtain the attitude of language learners towards the use of Coca in their writing.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, these classes are held on an online platform three times a week for a month, each session lasting 45 minutes. In the first session, the teacher taught the language learners how to install and log in to the application, and use it in the classroom.

The teacher used the Coca corpus program in each class and the subject of the writing was the same for both classes.

Due to the fact that the writing classes were Coca-based, in the first stage, after selecting the topic, the teacher raised the keywords related to the topic with the students' consensus and then examined them with the help of the Coca program.

For example, the topic that was raised in one of the sessions was the issue of obesity in the current era. By searching for the phrase obesity problem, the Coca program found new ideas in the minds of learners.



Fig 1

Learners can enter the phrase obesity problem in the search bar and select the collocate section to see the words or phrases related to 'obesity problem' in the window that opens. The

following pictures contain words with MI (Mutual Information) greater than 5 or 4.



Fig 2

In this example, the word 'country' reveals that the obesity problem is being studied by the division of geography.

According to the eating habits of countries, statistics of obesity problem differs in each country.



Fig 3

This example shows that one of the most frequent words that have been used with the obesity problem is 'America'. There

are a large number of studies related to the obesity problem in the United States.



Fig 4

The word 'burgeoning' refers to the obesity problem that starts at a point and grows little by little. Besides learning a new word, students will learn how to make more authentic and meaningful sentences. After language learners get enough input on the topic and

keywords, they start writing. One of the problems for Iranian students at this stage is thinking in Persian and then translating it into English, Which creates serious problems in their writing. For example:

The WHO is responsible for advocating awareness of country



Fig 5

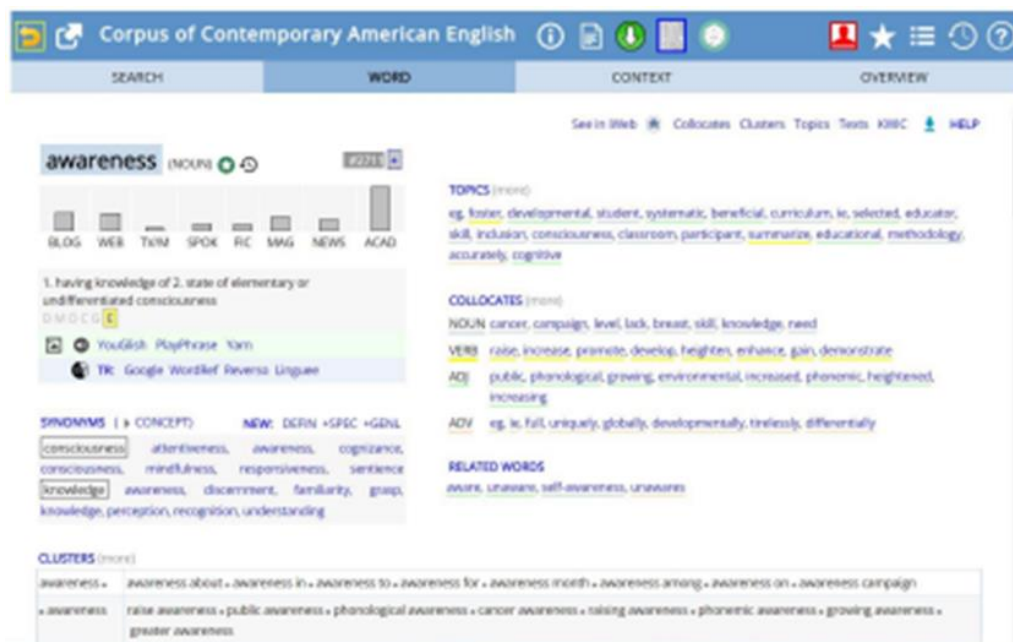


Fig 6

Searching in the Coca program, we find that there is a mismatch between the verb and the noun used. By searching in the ‘collocates’ section, we find that the verb ‘advocate’ and the noun ‘awareness’ come together very rarely. The word ‘awareness’ is used with verbs such as develop and raise, and the verb ‘advocate’ is used in most texts with words such as system, program, and use.

In addition, to helping to solve the grammar problems mentioned in the example above, Coca gives us the chance to

semantically choose the right words for our writing. For example, a number of language learners have used the word fatness in this regard. And a limited number have used the word overweight. By searching in the search bar and selecting the compare option, we get information about these words. In the figure below, we see a comparison table of these words. As we can see from the statistics, the word overweight is more used in texts related to obesity.



Fig 7

Finally, in the last week of the study, the questionnaire was administrated to investigate their opinions about using Coca to develop their writing skill for the analysis of this Likert-type data, and the mean scores of the student’s responses were computed. The reliability of the questionnaire was checked by Chronbach alfa. The reliability indicates a high level of reliability.

Findings

The current study investigated advanced EFL learners’ perceptions about the use of online Coca in order to develop their writing skills. The results concerning students’ perceptions of using online Coca are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

	Items	M	SD
1	I believe online coca useful for developing my English writing	3.42	1.346
2	I generally have positive attitude towards using online coca writing course	3.80	1.354
3	I believe that coca offers a good source to develop my English writing	3.84	1.195
4	I think using online coca is enjoyable	2.91	1.470
5	I like coca-based activities	3.48	1.152
6	I will use online Coca out of the class while doing my homework	3.62	1.265
7	I think that I need training to use Coca effectivity to develop my English writing	2.90	1.058
8	The searching technique was easy to learn	3.74	1.312
9	The Coca is more helpful than a dictionary for my English writing	3.69	1.246
10	Overall the coca is a very useful resource foe my English writing	2.94	1.157
11	I will recommend the Coca to other EFL student in language school	3.18	1.352
12	I will use Coca corpus for my English writing in the future	3.45	1.402
13	I use the Coca corpus when writing papers for other courses too	2.64	1.289
14	Using the Coca is helpful for meaning of the vocabulary	2.86	1.150
15	Using Coca is helpful in learning grammar	3.54	1.204
16	Using Coca improved my English writing	3.72	1.362
17	I have some difficulty in using Coca because of the internet connection	3.85	1.390
18	When I have problem in English writings I search for help in coca	2.86	1.190
19	Learning about coca has increased my confident about writing in English	3.09	1.250
20	Using Coca is helpful for learning usage of phrases	2.98	1.304

The mean scores of the respondents to the statements about using online Coca indicates that students perceive the use of Coca to be beneficial to their English writing skill and it shows that a high majority of the students find online coca useful.

In addition, the use of questionnaires semi- structured interviews were conducted to find out students' views in their own words. because of time limitations, the researcher just interviewed some language learners each student was interviewed individually and they were recorded for analysis. We conducted a face-to-face interview with some of the students to get comprehensive information about the use of the Coca-Cola program. In this interview, language learners who had a negative attitude toward using the Coca program, as well as a number of students who had a positive attitude toward the questionnaires, were interviewed. Three students who had a negative attitude towards using the Coca program in writing skills were due to the stress of not being able to use the Coca program. These learners believed that in the first sessions, they found it very difficult to use the program, and they thought that using dictionaries could help them better. However, these students believed that they would continue to use the program after completing the course. They even suggested using it for other language learners. Compared to these students, three language learners who had a positive view of using this program also participated in the interview. The main reason for their positive attitude was the use of technology in language classes. In their view, Paper Based classes were no longer attractive to them, and using the Coca-Cola program made them feel up-to-date. This group of learners also found Coca's program very effective in using the right Collocates, correct grammar, and finding relevant vocabulary.

Conclusion

In this study, the attitude of Iranian language learners towards using the Coca program in their writing skills has been investigated. Based on the statistics obtained from the questionnaires as well as the interviews conducted with the students, it is concluded that the general view of most students was positive. However, some language learners had problems using the program in the first sessions, and in their view, the number of sessions devoted to introducing the program was relatively small. According to them, if more meetings were planned to introduce the program, their performance could be faster and better.

The students believed that due to the technology-based class, they were more motivated to attend the class, and considered the benefits of attending the class to be very useful and fruitful. Writing learners have made significant progress after using this program. They found Coca very beneficial in using Collocates. As a result, we must pay attention to the fact that learners must acquire sufficient skills to use the program before using the program, and also during the teacher's training sessions, always learn the students in analyzing the words and phrases searched in the Coca program for the language. Students explain.

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