WEB-BASED LANGUAGE CLUB AFFECTING EFL LEARNERS' PROFICIENCY: A CASE OF IRANIAN LEARNERS

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Abstract: Language clubs have been reported to be effective in learning languages, increasing motivation and independence (Gao, 2009). The present study was an attempt to investigate the effect of a web-based language club on the language proficiency of Iranian EFL learners. A number of pre-intermediate learners form two universities (118) were selected among 154 through a test of proficiency (TOEFL PBL), then they were put into experimental and control groups. The participants in experimental group got on line and acted as a member of a virtual language club for a period of 6 months. They got involved with activities like emailing, chatting, and weblogging. Data were collected through TOEFL PBL. The analyzed data from the test of proficiency indicated the outperformance of those in experimental group. Consequently, it might be proposed that web-based language clubs can make language learning easier and more efficient.
Keywords*: Web-based language club, English Proficiency, EFL learners*

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, information communication technology (ICT) is regarded as a means to teach and learn. Learners can use web-based technology, mobiles, audio-video files, etc. to learn in or out of classes. There are academic degree courses in the form of distant learning through the use of extensive means of internet technology. The attempts and innovative endeavors of experts in ICT have led to the emergence of e-learning which in turn has made it possible for all learners to have access to courses, materials and even professors without bothering to go there in flesh. E-learning has also opened effective ways to learn languages. Now, there are language schools on line where learners can get live or archived lessons. There are even free classes and other various learning sources handled by individuals or institutes. However, the effective use of electronic means in learning languages may depend on lots of other factors among which are the access to appropriate materials, skillful teachers, and optimal interaction. Learners in an EFL context have only the opportunity to learn and use the language in their classes something which has made learning with less outcome than the situations where English is considered as a second language or an official language.

EFL learners' membership and their activities in language clubs may compensate for the lack of exposure and use of language in EFL environment as postulated by Gao (2009). Language clubs, as Martyn & Voller (1995) believe, can be appropriate places to develop learners' independence to learn a language. They claim that language clubs

in China have been the most appropriate situation for the promotion of English learners' independence in learning. In another study Wengberg, Lagnevik, and Hemborg (2010) reported the success of such a kind of club or cafe in increasing the students' ability of communicating, developing conversational skill sand learn how to express their own ideas in a foreign language. Furthermore, the Language Café project provided them an opportunity to meet the pupils at an individual level.

The same type of language clubs may not be easily established in Iran due to factors such as the long procedure to get the official permit to open and run such clubs, the need for a place devoted to this purpose, cultural issues, and religious restrictions. Therefore, the virtual type of these clubs, run on the internet, might be a suitable kind for Iranian learners of English. The present research is an attempt in discovering any significant effect of web-based language club (IBL club) activities on the language proficiency of EFL learners, and also it accounts for the probable significant effect of this kind of club on creating positive attitude, interest and learner autonomy in language learning.

Learning and use of English as a foreign language is mostly restricted to class time. Learners usually have the only chance to converse with their classmates and teachers. This makes the use of language a type of artificial one. Therefore, while they encounter its real use out of class or in natural setting, they find it almost impossible to continue. Language learning activities in classes are mostly restricted to the presentation and practice of language while there is almost no opportunity for the learners to evaluate their ability to use the language. The other issue in EFL situation is the fact that learners rely on their teacher to learn the language. This hinders their independence and autonomy in learning

to the extent that they may not be able to use the language outside of their classes.

As Cohen (1998) notes the use of language out of classes by learners is among the positive features of successful language learners. Therefore, language clubs, the focus of this study, could be significant in that they will provide a suitable context for language learners to practice and use language out of their classes. However, the existence of barriers in face-to-face communication such as the fear of making mistakes suggests virtual types of language clubs. Also, with regard to some other problems such as the need for official permit, cultural and religious restrictions, holding web-based language clubs might be a significant solution to these problems.

The present research findings might be limited for strong generalizations due to the fact that the members were volunteers among university students who agreed to take part in the process of research. The researchers did not have the access to the greater number of students. Also, the study is limited to the EFL context where the speakers speak Farsi as their mother tongue. The other limitation of the study is the fact that only the virtual type of language clubs was studied in this research not the real type.

The development of electronic devices and ICT especially Web 2.0 and 3.0 has led to innovations in learning and education. Internet has played a major role in this regard. According to Nunan (1999) the exponential growth of the internet since 1994 is perhaps the major cause of growing interest in revolutionizing language learning and teaching. There are endless opportunities for novelties, development and change. "Students are becoming more and more engaged, the communication and learning are less and less teacher-centered" as pointed out by Mullamaa (2009).

Online learning as a recent kind e-learning has been considered with much more benefit than any other kind of learning ever. Bowles (2004) compares the first four benefits of online learning as a kind of e-learning over other kinds of learning technologies. Learner control, ease of access, ever access, and personalized learning are the stated benefits of on line learning. Members can communicate whenever they feel there is a need. They can provide responses to the club member's requests on their own time. They can get the access from home, work place or even when they are on the move. There is no need to attend the meeting in flesh. They can join the members on line without spending time and money to transfer.

One of the major means to communicate and do the required activities in the present research was the use of email which has been placed among the most important facilities provided by the internet. E-mail has been called "the mother of all Internet applications" which is a form of asynchronous computer-mediated communication (Warschauer, Shetzer, and Meloni, 2000: 3). There are many benefits for the use of e-mail for educational purposes mentioned by Gonglewski, Meloni and Brant (2001). The advantages have been stated as: Language learning time and place is extended; a context for real-world communication and authentic interaction is provided, topics can be expanded beyond classroom-based activities; student-centered language learning is promoted; equal opportunity participation is provided and encouraged; speakers are connected rapidly and almost cheaply; and collaborative projects can be developed.

There have been some empirical studies considering the effect of emailing on the language learning. In a study by Aminzadeh and Molaesmaeli

(2009) 48 Iranian intermediate EFL learners were investigated to check their writing improvement through emailing. The researchers found out that email developed the learning process of the learners, and increased their language proficiency. Additionally, emailing promoted their positive attitude and interest, and enhanced their performance. In another study (Motallebzadeh and Ghaemi, 2009), the relationship between online reading strategies and the choice of offline reading strategies of intermediate EFL learners was examined. They noted that problem solving online reading strategies and compensation (offline) reading strategies were prioritized by language learners while they were reading in online and offline environments.

They suggested that language teachers should be aware of this phenomenon and focus their teaching reading strategies upon these types of strategies due to the fact that they are of language learners' priorities. When teachers involve their learners in online learning activities, strategy awareness and training is necessary. Motallebzadeh and Amirabadi (2011) investigated second language writing of Iranian EFL students based on e-learning.

The participants of the study were 83 EFL students. The researchers stated that using e-learning can help to teach writing provided that the EFL learners get familiar with IT and its basics. They found that the role of teacher's feedback via internet is a source of developing L2 writing proficiency which is well better than the other mode. Al-Saleem (2011) surveyed 14 EFL Jordanian students to check their ideas on the use of emails in learning English. He stated that the results showed that all students were very interesting and exciting to communicate via email. Many indicated that their vocabulary and grammar

became much better than before. Email exchange programs seemed to be positively useful and appropriate ways to improve EFL learners writing skills.

Weblog was the other instrument utilized in the present study. It has been explained as "a reflective conversational tool for self-organized learning, which best portrays the constructivist essence with which the tool can be used for fostering autonomous, self-directed learning approaches" (Fiedler, 2003). Moreover, due to the fact that writing with weblogs has an authentic nature, users are encouraged to share their feelings with their fellow bloggers. Weblogs can do many things for English language learners. According to Stanley (2005) weblogs can provide extra reading for learners, direct learners to online resources, raise the sense of community in a class, encourage shy learners' participation, stimulate out of class discussion, encourage a process writing approach, and can help build a closer relationship between learners in a large class. They also offer learners with a real audience, a chance for peer review. Weblogs also provide a range of process-based writing tasks enjoyed by learners (Raith, 2009; Ward, 2004).

There are studies in which the focus has been the implementation of blogs in language learning. Blackstone, Spiri, and Naganuma (2007) reported on a new approach in which blogging activities were implemented in different levels of courses in English for academic purposes/composition program. They conducted an attitudinal survey involving eleven classes of 145 students over two semesters. They stated that more autonomous learning "can be encouraged through regular blogging". In situations where student's audience includes his or her classmates, the teacher and potentially anyone with an internet connection, one can witness an increase in the motivation to engage

in meaningful written communication. Their findings indicated that "they had extremely positive attitudes toward both blogging and the blogging buddy system" (Blackstone, Spiri and Naganuma, 2007: 1). The other study on web logging and language learning (Wu, 2006) attempted to find out EFL adult learners reactions to writing pedagogic techniques: peer review and teacher feedback in EFL composition class. In this study, peer review and teacher feedback were exchanged via the web to learners' blog.

The researcher aimed at finding out what effects, online peer review have on the revisions of low-intermediate EFL writers. He examined 7 first drafts, 32 peer reviews, and 8 revised drafts. The teacher feedback led to both positive and negative revisions which depended on learners' attitude and English proficiency level; however, "a significant proportion of the peer review did not serve a linguistic function to give meaningful and constructive comments but serve a pragmatic function to give complimentary praise or blessings"(Wu, 2006: 1). UsaNoytim (2011: 1127) studied the Weblog use on English language learning in an academic context in Thailand. The study examined students' awareness of Weblogs and their attitudes towards them. The data were collected through short questionnaires, interview questionnaires and student Blogs. The findings showed that the students observed "Weblog as a tool for the development of their English, in terms of writing, reading, vocabulary, and recording their learning experience". The other important findings were that the participants found Weblog providing "an opportunity and freedom for self-expression in English, writing for both a local and global audience, fostering creative, analytical and critical thinking skills, creating social interaction and good relationships between writer and

reader, and supporting the learning community".

Yu-ChihSun, and Yu-jung Chang (2012) did a study on blogging and writing skill. They examined how blogs and their interactive and collaborative features assist advanced graduate students process academic writing knowledge and make sense of their writer identity. The participants were 7 graduate students doing Master's level study in TESOL and Linguistics. The results indicated that the blog activity encouraged the participants to actively and reflectively involve in sharing and generating knowledge. It also helped them develop numerous strategies to deal with problems faced in the learning process. Blogs also provided students "a sense of authorship as the writers of blog entries and, at the same time, provide a space for them to sort out what being an author entails, their purposes of writing, and their authority in writing".

As a study in an Iranian context, Rezaee and Oladi (2008) worked on the students' social interaction in class community and foreign weblogs. Sixty participants from Medical School of the University of Tehran took part in the class community weblog, Cyberdiscovery. The data was collected in an academic year through observing the class community weblog. Data collection means included observation, questionnaire, interview and IELTS writing proficiency test. They concluded that "blogging is a meaningful medium which can improve the students' social interaction towards the class community and also promote creativity in writing". In another attempt to work on learning reading skill and blogging in the national context, Rashtchi and Hajihassani (2011) investigated the effect of blogging on the development of reading ability of some Iranian students. They came to this conclusion that "the use of weblog in classroom, although not statistically

significant, could enhance the reading ability of EFL learners as compared to the non-weblog method".

The present research attempted to investigate the probable significant effect of web-based language clubs on the learning of English by Iranian EFL university students. The research question to meet the purpose of the study is: "Does the membership of Iranian EFL university students in Web-based language clubs significantly affect their English language proficiency?"

METHOD

The data needed to account for the purpose and hypothesis of the study was collected through the administration of a standard test to a group of EFL learners. The participants of the study were selected among EFL learners at two English Departments namely: Islamic Azad University, Torbat-e Heydarieh Branch, and Aria Aviation College, Mashhad, Iran. All participants were selected among 154 learners through the scores they gained in a proficiency test (TOEFL PBT) they sat at the beginning of the study. Based on the interpretation of scores cited in ETS official site those who gain scores of 350-450 are considered as Pre-intermediate learners of English. Therefore, those whose scores were less than 350, and more than 450 were not included to be among the participants of this study. The students were almost equally from both sexes (female: 68, male: 50). The age range was 19-28. The sample under study included 118 students in control and experimental groups (i.e. 59 in each group).

This study aimed at measuring the effect of use of web-based language clubs on the language proficiency of learners of English at pre-intermediate level. The other purpose of the study was to find out how web-based language clubs might affect members' language skill. The instrument utilized to reach the

purposes of the study was TEFL PBT. It includes four modules with a total score of 677 (excluding test of written English). The score of Test of Written English is reported separately and is not part of total score.

The present study, based on the study by Gao (2009) on the role of language clubs in learning English, initiated to measure the use of e-learning in the same area. Therefore, some of available means like emailing, chatting and weblogging were utilized to check their effect on the language proficiency of a group of learners joining a web-based language club designed specifically for this purpose. There was a pre-test session through which 118 participants of the study were selected among 154 pre-intermediate learners. They were in different classes without being randomly assigned.

The researcher conducted an orientation session for the participants in the experimental group to make sure they were familiar with internet activities. They were informed on various internet activities to be used in the internet language club: getting online, signing up for emails, sending emails, chatting, joining the internet club, using the designed weblog, and using other sites and weblogs active in language learning and teaching. It was also made sure that the participants in the experimental group had the sufficient access to computers and internet lines.

A weblog was designed by the researchers of this project specifically for the internet club members. It included sections related to language learning such as: introduction of other language learning sites. The researchers acted as the moderators of the club. They directed the various activities done through the weblog, emailing and Google group. Also, they facilitated the probable problems the participants faced while using the technology.

Each participant in the experimental group had signed up for an email ID to get connected to other members. They were directed to chat with the members online on specific time through the week. Also, based on an agreed schedule, all members were on line in two occasions in each week to discuss the assigned materials. They discussed various topics mostly related to their education and daily life. The moderators of the club sent them articles mostly extracted from newspapers. Then, the members were asked to study the article and get ready for an online discussion on the topic. In some cases, the members were asked to suggest the topics for discussion. As another activity they were forwarded podcasts to listen to and get ready for expressing their ideas on the included content. They also exchanged emails on life and academic topics they were interested in. As an ongoing activity they were required to get connected to the suggested language learning weblogs and websites. They were asked to express and share their opinions on the visited sites. Furthermore, they stated what was interesting and new to them, and also expressed their probable questions or problems on the content of the visited sites.

The participants in the control group were not involved in such kinds of activities through the web. Some English books and audio-visual materials were introduced to them. They were asked to study the books, and listen and watch the audio-visual materials. The research method was a quasi-experimental since there was not a random selection of participants in experimental and control groups.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The present research project was to investigate the effect of Web-based language project on the language proficiency of Iranian EFL learners. The

participants of the study took TOEFL PBT as pretest and posttest to have valid data for quantitative analysis the result of which would account for the significant statistical rejection or acceptance of designed hypothesis. The data were entered into SPSS 17 to be analyzed for study purposes.

TOEFL PBT

Pretest

To ensure the homogeneity of groups with regard to language proficiency and check the participants' probable progress, TOEFL PBT was administered to both groups as the pretest and posttest. The first analysis was done to check the normality of data from TOEFL PBT administered as pretest.

Test of Normality of Data of TOEFL PBTas Pretest

To investigate the normality of the data obtained from TOEFL PBT as pretest in both control and experimental groups, One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test was applied. If the null hypothesis of this test is accepted, then we have to use non-parametric methods for analysis of the data. Table 1 indicates the result of the test run on the data.

As indicated in Table 1, the results of One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test revealed that the data obtained from the TOEFL PBT were normal in both experimental (p = .419 > .05) and control (p = .206 > .05) groups. Consequently, to determine the statistical significance of the data, Independent-Samples T-Test and Paired-Samples T-Test were applied.

In the first analysis, to select the participants at the same level of language proficiency, 118 participants were selected among others based on the scores the got in exam. Table 2 illustrates the result.

The means of scores they gained in the TOEFL exam were 403-407. Based on the interpretation of scores cited in

ETS official site those who gain scores between 350-450 are considered as Pre-intermediate learners of English. Therefore, the ones whose scores were less than 350 and more than 450 were excluded from the study. There were 59 participants in each group. As indicated in Table 2, minimum scores gained in experimental group and control group are 375 and 365 respectively. The maximum figures are 435 and 443 in experimental and control groups.

Experimental/control Groups Pretest

To make sure on the homogeneity of the participants, the TOEFL scores from both experimental and control groups at the outset of the study were analyzed further. Table 3illustrates the descriptive statistics of both groups at pretest.

The figures in the table show that the difference between means of TOEFL scores in experimental and control groups is 4.249. The significant statistical difference between means of experimental and control groups is tested via Independent samples t-test (See Table4).

As the data in Tables 3 and 4 indicates, there is no statistically significant difference [t(116) = 1.782, p = .077 (two-tailed)] between experimental (M = 407.7119, SD = 13.47322) and control (M = 403.4322, SD = 12.60250) groups in connection with language proficiency at the beginning of the study(at 0.05 level of significance). Therefore, it can be concluded that all participants were at almost the same level of language proficiency at the outset of the study.

Posttest

To check the participants' probable progress, TOEFL PBT was administered to both groups as posttest. The first analysis in this section was done to check the normality of data from TOEFL PBT administered as posttest.

Table. *One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov (TOEFL PBT pretest)*

		Pretest Experimental	Pretest Control
N		59	59
Normal Parameters(a,b)	Mean	407.7119	403.4322
	Std. Deviation	13.47322	12.60250
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.115	.139
	Positive	.115	.139
	Negative	-.071	-.086
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		.881	1.065
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.419	.206

a Test distribution is Normal.

b Calculated from data.

Table 2. *The Minimum and Maximum Scores of both Groups at Pretest*

		Pretest Experimental	Pretest Control
N	Valid	59	59
	Missing	0	0
Minimum		375.00	365.00
Maximum		435.00	443.00

Table 3. *Groups Statistics (Experimental and control Pretest)*

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pretest Experimental	407.7119	59	13.47322	1.75406
	Pretest Control	403.4322	59	12.60250	1.64071

Table 4. *Results of Independent Samples Test for TOEFL PBT as pretest*

		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Total	Equal variances assumed	.631	.429	1.782	116	.077	4.2797	2.40180	-.47741	9.03673
	Equal variances not assumed			1.782	115.486	.077	4.2797	2.40180	-.47763	9.03696

Table 5. *One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov (TOEFL PBT posttest)*

		Posttest Experimental	Posttest Control
N		59	59
Normal Parameters(a,b)	Mean	449.4068	430.8559
	Std. Deviation	22.26089	15.20522
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.127	.068
	Positive	.127	.051
	Negative	-.063	-.068
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		.978	.523
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.294	.947

a. Test distribution is Normal

b. Calculated from data.

Test of Normality of Data of TOEFL PBT as Posttest

One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test was applied to calculate the normality of the data obtained from TOEFL PBT as posttest in both control and experimental groups. Table 5indicates the result of the test run on the data.

As illustrated in Table 5, the results of One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test indicated that the data obtained from the TOEFL PBT as posttest were normal in both experimental (p = .294 > .05) and control (p = .947 > .05) groups. Consequently, to determine the statistical significance of the data, Independent-Samples T-Test and Paired-Samples T-Test were applied.

Experimental/control Groups Posttest

The data from posttest (TOEFL) have been analyzed through comparing of means and also the use of cross tabulation (contingency tables) to check the probable relationships. Table 6 shows the results of the group statistics analysis of the data.

The figures in Table 6 indicate that the difference between means of TOEFL scores in experimental (N = 59, M = 449.406) and control (N = 59, M = 430.855) groups is 18.509. To check on its statistical significant difference, data were analyzed through Independent paired t-test (see Table 7).

As the data in Tables 6 and 7shows, there is statistically significant difference [t(116) = 5.286, p = .000 (two-tailed)] between experimental (M = 449.4068, SD = 22.26089) and control (M = 430.8559, SD = 15.20522) groups in their language proficiency at the end of the study (at 0.05 level of significance). As a conclusion, the participants in the experimental group who received treatment through being a member of Web-based language club gained a higher means of scores (449.4) in the

posttest in comparison with those in the control group (430.8). Therefore, it can be concluded that the null-hypothesis stating that 'there is no significant difference between the participants in control and experimental groups after receiving treatment" is rejected.

Experimental Group Pretest and Posttest

To account for the probable progress of the participants in experimental group, the means of scores of these participants collected in two occasions (pretest and posttest) have been analyzed through the same procedure. Table 8 illustrates the result.

The figures in the table indicate that the difference between means of TOEFL scores in experimental group in two occasions of data collection is around 41.6.The significant statistical difference between means of pretest and posttest in experimental group has been tested via paired samples t-test (see Table 9).

The data in Tables 8 and 9 indicate, there is statistically significant difference [t(58) = 17.532, p = .000 (two-tailed)] between experimental pretest data (M = 407.7119, SD = 13.47322) and experimental posttest data (M = 449.4068, SD = 22.26089) in their language proficiency at the end of the study (at 0.05 level of significance). Therefore, the participants in the experimental group showed progress in posttest. This proves that they have been affected by being a member of Web-based language club. Regarding the changes in language proficiency, a further analysis is done on the data. Table10 illustrates the maximum and minimum of means of the participants in the posttest.

The minimum mean of scores at the posttest (Table 10) is 410 while it was 375 at pretest stage. The maximum mean of scores is 502.5, but it was 435 at the beginning of the study.

Table 6. *Group Statistics (Experimental and control Posttest)*

	GROUPING	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Total	Posttest Experimental	59	449.4068	22.26089	2.89812
	Posttest Control	59	430.8559	15.20522	1.97955

Table 7. *Results of Independent Samples Test for TOEFL PBT as posttest*

		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Total	Equal variances assumed	7.774	.006	5.286	116	.000	18.5508	3.50966	11.59952	25.50218
	Equal variances not assumed			5.286	102.446	.000	18.5508	3.50966	11.58981	25.51188

Table 8. *Paired Samples Statistics (Experimental group, pretest and posttest)*

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pretest	407.7119	59	13.47322	1.75406
	Posttest	449.4068	59	22.26089	2.89812

Table 9. *Paired Samples Test (Experimental group, pretest and posttest)*

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference					
				Lower	Upper				
Pair 1	Pretest - Posttest	-41.694	18.26789	2.37828	-46.4556	-36.9343	-17.532	58	.000

Table 10. *Statistics (Minimum & Maximum of means: Experimental Pretest & posttest)*

		Pretest	Posttest
N	Valid	59	59
	Missing	0	0
Minimum		375.00	410.00
Maximum		435.00	502.50

Experimental Group Pretest and Posttest: Language Proficiency Level

As it was indicated, the participants in both groups did not differ in their language proficiency based on the data collected at the beginning of the study. However, based on the data collected from TOEFL scores as posttest, the participants in the experimental group acted much better than what they did at the beginning of the study. As stated in ETS official site, those who get 450 to 520 in PBT TOEFL are labeled as Intermediate learners. A further analysis (cross tabulation) will show how many participants have moved to the Intermediate level of proficiency. Furthermore, the relationship between the means gained in pretest and posttest would be illustrated.

Table 11. *Experimental Group, Pretest Level * Posttest Level Cross tabulation*

			Posttest Level				Total
			Pre-intermediate1	Pre-intermediate2	Intermediate1	Intermediate2	
Pretest Level	**Pre-intermediate1**	Count	1	6	13	1	**21**
		% within Total Pretest Level	4.8%	28.6%	61.9%	4.8%	100.0%
		% within Total Posttest Level	100.0%	100.0%	27.7%	20.0%	35.6%
		% of Total	1.7%	10.2%	22.0%	1.7%	35.6%
	Pre-intermediate2	Count	0	0	34	4	**38**
		% within Total Pretest Level	.0%	.0%	89.5%	10.5%	100.0%
		% within Total Posttest Level	.0%	.0%	72.3%	80.0%	64.4%
		% of Total	.0%	.0%	57.6%	6.8%	64.4%
Total		Count	1	6	47	5	**59**
		% within Total Pretest Level	1.7%	10.2%	79.7%	8.5%	100.0%
		% within Total Posttest Level	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	1.7%	10.2%	79.7%	8.5%	100.0%

Table 12. *Chi-Square Tests*

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	14.487(a)	3	.002
Likelihood Ratio	16.386	3	.001
Linear-by-Linear Association	10.164	1	.001
N of Valid Cases	59		

a. 6 cells (75.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .36.

To make the analysis more precise, the participants' scores have been labeled as "Pre-intermediate1" (350-400) and "Pre-intermediate2" (401-450) based on the scores they received. A similar classification has been made to Intermediate level. Those who gained 450-480 are named as "Intermediate 1", and those with 481 to 520 labeled as "Intermediate 2". The classifications designed for the scores have been used in the cross tabulation in Table11.

As indicated in Table 11, 61.9% of participants who were labeled as "Pre-intermediate1" in Pretest phase have moved up to "Intermediate1" in Posttest phase. The next stands for those participants labeled as "Pre-intermediate1" who are now in "Pre-intermediate2" (28.6%). It is also indicated that 4.8% of "Pre-intermediate1" participants' status has changed to "Intermediate2". The degree of changes in this group (Pre-intermediate 1) is considered desirable since only 4.8% of them remained in the same group in Posttest phase.

The figures in "Pre-intermediate2" in pretest phase (Table 11) shows a stronger trend witnessed in "Pre-intermediate1". Majority of participants in "Pre-intermediate2" (89.5%) have moved to

"Intermediate1" in posttest stage. The rest (10.5%) even had a better progress by being placed as "Intermediate2".

Based on the figures in Table 11, it is apparent that only 4.8% of participants have not changed their group for the better. Therefore, it can be assumed that almost all of the participants have been affected by the treatment they received. The data from PBT TOEFL administered in two occasions have been analyzed further to indicate the significance of the relations shown in variables of the study. Chi-Square Tests, Table12 indicates the result of this analysis.

Based on the data revealed in Table 12, the significance value (2-sided) =.002 which is much lower than Pearson Chi-Square value (14.487) which means that the two variables are, indeed, related. Therefore, it can be concluded that the changes displayed in the Cross tabulation Table are significant with respect to the existence of relationship between variables and the changes witnessed. As an important finding of this study it is indicated that the set of analysis done on the data from PBT TOEFL as pretest and posttest confirms the idea that being a member of Web-based language club can help learners improve their proficiency in English.

CONCLUSION

The present study was an attempt to investigate the effect of web-based language club on the language proficiency of Iranian EFL learners. The design chosen for the study was a quasi-experimental one in which 118 pre-intermediate learners form two universities were selected among 154 through a homogenizing test (TOEFL PBL). They were put into an experimental group and a control group. The participants in experimental group were required to get on line and act as a member of a virtual club designed for the purpose of the study for a period of 6

months. They were mostly involved with activities like emailing, chatting, and weblogging.

The research question of the study accounted for investigation of the effect of web-based language club on the language proficiency of Iranian EFL learners. The result of analysis on the data from pretest administered to both groups indicated that there was no statistical significant difference between the participants in both groups at outset of the study. The analysis of the data from TOEFL PBL test administered to both groups as posttest (independent sample t-test) statistically rejected the null hypothesis which suggested the lack of effect of treatment on the language proficiency of the participants. The participants in the experimental group who were the members of web-based language club outperformed in their language proficiency those in the control group. The other analysis done on pretest and posttest data of experimental group (paired sample t-test) also proved the fact that the participants in the web-based language club group made some significant development in their language proficiency.

The further analysis on the data form pretest and posttest, done through Cross-tabulation and Pearson Chi square, accounted for the probable development of participants in the experimental group which lead to results indicating the change of proficiency level. Almost majority of the participants (88.1%) moved from the lower level to the next level of proficiency. Therefore, it can be concluded that the membership of these students in the web-based language club as a kind of e-learning and getting involved in activities like emailing, blogging, and grouping on the net has been effective on their language proficiency. The finding of the present study that is in line with the development of language proficiency

and language skills is partly supported by other previous studies in e-learning such as: Corio and Meloni (1995), Spiri, and Naganuma (2007), Rezaee and Oladi (2008), Aminzadeh and Molaesmaeli (2009), Motallebzadeh and Ghaemi (2009), Al-Saleem (2011), Blackstone, Rashtchi and Hajihassani (2011), Motallebzadeh and Amirabadi (2011), Noytim (2011), and Sun and Chang (2012). These studies have reported the success of students in the development of at least one of language skills through the use of one form of e-learning.

The present research aimed at investigating the effect of web-based language clubs on the language proficiency of Iranian EFL learners. Researchers interested in the field can work on both types of clubs (virtual and real ones) in the form of experimental research. There could be studies with the inclusion of participants speaking other languages in other contexts as EFL or ESL. Similar types of language clubs could be developed for language teachers to maintain their professional development.

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