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The Effects and Challenges of Integrating GoAnimate Video Creator with Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in Teaching English to a Grade 11 Omani Class

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Abstract

This qualitative research explores the effects and challenges of integrating the GoAnimate web-based tool with task-based language teaching (TBLT) in teaching writing to a grade 11 EFL, Omani classroom. The literature review covers specific topics that form the basis of TBLT, such as constructivism, cooperative learning, group dynamics and the affective filter hypothesis. Moreover, it introduces GoAnimate and brings to light some current multimodality related studies as GoAnimate is part and parcel of it. When it comes to the methodology, convenience sampling is adopted and thus, the sample consists of 6 teachers and 34 students. Additionally, the instrument used to collect data is students' and teachers' focus group interviews and the researcher's self-observational notes. Furthermore, the procedure involves designing a female GoAnimate character called 'Awash' and using her to teach a writing lesson while the researcher observes and takes notes. After the lesson, the focus group interviews are conducted. After that, the gathered data is analysed and the research questions are answered. The findings of this research indicate that the integration of GoAnimate in the Omani classroom faces some challenges. Nevertheless, those challenges can be overcome if addressed properly. Additionally, the findings highlight that GoAnimate has a positive effect on students' motivation and thus, their learning. Based on these findings, some implications for practice and research are put forward.

Keywords: Multimodality and task-based language teaching, GoAnimate effects, GoAnimate challenges, students' motivation

Introduction

"Sharing is good, and with digital technology, sharing is easy" -Richard Stallman. Living in a world that constantly changes due to the dramatic developments in technology, a teacher; being part and parcel of the larger community, should consider modifying his/her teaching tools accordingly. One web-based new tool is GoAnimate. However, does it really foster sharing knowledge in the Omani classroom? In order to answer this question, and because TBLT is widely accepted and practiced in the EFL Omani classroom, the researcher integrates GoAnimate with it. Therefore, the empirical study, in hand, aims to answer two research questions, which are:

- 1) What are the effects, if any, of integrating GoAnimate with task-based writing classes in the EFL Omani classrooms?
- 2) What are the challenges, if any, faced while implementing GoAnimate in the EFL Omani classroom?

This qualitative study is organised into the following sections: Literature review, research questions, methodology, findings, discussion, conclusion, implications and references.

Literature Review

Literature review is a fundamental section in any research, as it provides a thorough review of the previous work done on general or specific aspects of the studied topic (Berg & Lune, 2012). In this study, two pertaining general topics, which are task-based language teaching (TBLT) and GoAnimate, are looked into. When it comes to TBLT, specific topics like constructivism, cooperative learning, group dynamics and the affective filer hypothesis are reviewed because these topics form its basis. As for GoAnimate, it is one tool that serves under the umbrella of multimodality. Therefore, it is crucial to review the current studies that are related to this approach.

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)

Van den Branden (2016) confirms that TBLT has become one of the most popular approaches to second and foreign language teaching worldwide. Table 1: Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), below, simplifies the ideas of different researchers on TBLT, which are presented in the studies of Cook (2013) and Van den Branden (2016).

Definition	TBLT is based on students' use of authentic language in doing some meaningful tasks in the target language		
Type of Approach	A student-centred language teaching approach		
Main Stages	Pre-Task	Task	Review
Teacher/Students Roles	TEACHER sets task	STUDENTS perform the task	STUDENTS review each other's work
		Information-gap Activity	
Types of Tasks		Reasoning-gap	
(Prabhu, 1987)		Activity	
		Opinion-gap	
		Activity	

Table 1: Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)

The bases of TBLT are elaborated in the following sections: Constructivism, cooperative learning, group dynamics and the affective filter hypothesis.

Constructivism

According to the National Research Council (2000) and Slavin (2014), constructivists believe that learning is the result of accommodation, assimilation and equilibration processes that take place in the human mind. Thus, as Slavin (2014, p.234) explains, when learners confront new experiences, each learner uncovers and processes the information differently by "checking new information against old rules and revising rules when they no longer work". As a result, constructivism calls for student-centered approaches, in which pairing or grouping students plays a great role in providing them with the proper scaffolding support of one another. Additionally, students' "ownership of their knowledge is a key aspect of constructivist teaching" (Forawi, 2015). Therefore, to get learners to experience a meaningful, invaluable learning process and to make them gain long-term knowledge, pairs or groups should share their discoveries with other learners by reporting their work. This change in the learner's role has

spontaneously led to the change in the teacher's role from that of an instructor to that of a guide and facilitator.

Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning, which is a learner-centered approach, is the implementation of some teaching techniques that help students learn the subject in hand by putting them in small groups of individuals who support each other (Slavin, 2012). Cooperative learning is based on some specific ideas as Orlich et al. (2013) affirm. For instance, in this approach, small groups of learners are required. Additionally, the interaction that takes place within the group facilitates students' learning. Moreover, a set of clear goals, as well as specific roles of each member of the group, is a key aspect that contributes to the success of the group as a whole. Recently, cooperative learning has become favourable in language classrooms. The studies of Cheng in 2014, Pan and Wu in 2013 and Tseng in 2014 declare that the learning environment improves when cooperative learning is practiced in the English classroom. Therefore, cooperative learning has become a leading approach in this area of study.

Group Dynamics

Kurt Lewin introduced the term group dynamics in 1947. As cited in Forsyth (2009), Cartwright and Zander (1968) define group dynamics as an investigation field that is devoted to the study of groups, their nature, their laws, their within interaction and their relationships with other individuals or groups. Additionally, Forsyth (2009, p.14) states that group dynamics refer to the processes through which people; whether groups or individuals, "act and react to changing circumstances". Moreover, he justifies that the interdependence between group members shapes the interactions that take place between them and influences the behaviour and attitudes of members towards each other. Furthermore, as different circumstances; be them optional or accidental, are behind the grouping of those members together, the change in one member will have an effect on the whole group, either positively or negatively. In their studies, Poupore (2016) and Wentzel and Muenks (2016) conclude that positive group dynamics increase students' motivation and thus, their production. Hence, teachers should pay attention to students' interaction in their classes, as it may reveal a lot about students' willingness to work cooperatively in their groups. Based on their observations, teachers should

modify groups to foster students' motivation to the maximum.

The Affective Filter Hypothesis

Gass (2013) explains how Krashan's Affective Filter plays a key role in second language acquisition (SLA). He clarifies that when the filter is high, it hinders the effective processing of the comprehensible input by the Language Acquisition Device (LAD) and this, in turn, prevents the acquisition from taking place. On the other hand, when the filter is low, it facilitates the effective processing of the comprehensible input by LAD and this, consequently, fosters SLA. As a result, different variations in SLA exist among individuals due to the effects of the Affective Filter. Gass (2013) and Harley (2014) reveal factors such as, motivation, self-confidence, anxiety and attitude that contribute to the status of the Affective Filter and thus, they affect students' performance. Therefore, different studies are conducted to explore the effects of those factors on students' language acquisition. For instance, the findings of Li, Gao and Zhang's study (2016), conducted in China, affirm that TED videos result in students' motivation and positive attitude towards the programme and thus, in their better performance as critical thinkers and creators. In contrast, the results of Fakeye and Ohia's study (2016) assert that writing anxiety leads to lower achievements in writing essays. Hence, teachers should reduce stress in the class to the minimum to obtain better writing results.

GoAnimate

Stratton, Julien and Schaffer (2014) explain that GoAnimate is a leading web-based software which enables its users to create customised videos. This text-to-video tool gives flexibility to individuals to design an unlimited number of videos according to their needs. For instance, when it comes to educators, Stratton, Julien and Schaffer (2014) believe that teachers can use GoAnimate in cooperation with other traditional multimodal tools to help in engaging students in different classroom activities like sharing ideas and solving problems. GoAnimate is a newly introduced tool and thus, not much research has been conducted on its effectiveness within the educational context. Yet, because it works under the umbrella of multimodality, a review of the latter, which is provided in the following section, is crucial because it reveals some aspects that relate to the use of multimodal tools; including GoAnimate, in general.

Multimodality

Oliver and Pritchard (2016, p.1611) state that multimodality includes the use of different modes such as, "textual, visual, aural [and] spatial" modes in classroom instruction. According to Lotherington and Ronda (2012), many teachers hesitate to adopt a multimodal approach to teaching because they are obliged to prepare students for standardised tests and therefore, they prefer working with paper. However, Oliver and Pritchard (2016), Skains (2017) and Vandommele et al. (2017) all agree on the positive influence of multimodality in the current EFL classroom. Furthermore, the findings of Lotherington and Ronda's (2012, p.114-116) studies, in which multimodality is implemented, assure that it is fruitful to the extent that in one of those studies, the teachers admit "to astonishment at the accomplishment of children who were labeled low academic performers". Moreover, in the same study, the students' work turns to be "interpretive, research-based and creative" and their learning is "collaborative" and "self-directed". Additionally, Berk (2012) highlights that the success of multimodality has a positive effect on the degree to which students' attention is attained. Thus, a multimodal approach is suitable for the present high-tech students. Yet, it is important to highlight that like any other pedagogical tool, the proper implementation of different multimodalities, like GoAnimate, Moovly and PowToon, is a key aspect of turning them into effective ones.

Research Questions

- 1) What are the effects, if any, of integrating GoAnimate with task-based writing classes in the EFL Omani classrooms?
- 2) What are the challenges, if any, faced while implementing GoAnimate in the EFL Omani classroom?

Methodology

The present study examines individuals, students, who live or occupy a specific community, EFL Omani classroom, in order to explore a specific experience that they undergo and the integration of GoAnimate with a task-based writing class. As a result, a qualitative approach is suitable for this type of study (Berg, 1998). The participants, the instruments used and the procedure of this study will be presented in the following sections.

Participants

The study was conducted in an average grade 11 Omani EFL classroom located at a government school in Muscat. To begin with, the researcher attained the participants' written and oral informed consents. Bell and Waters (2014) assure that this is a key step in validating any research. Next, convenience sampling, which is one method of non-probability sampling, was applied to select the participants, be them teachers or students. According to Gorard (2010) and Ritchie et al. (2013), in convenience sampling, the choice of the participants depends totally on their availability. Thus, in order to inspect the effects of integrating GoAnimate with a task-based writing lesson in the EFL Omani classroom on teachers' perceptions, 10 teachers were invited to observe and give feedback on the lesson. However, only 6 of them were able to attend due to their tight timetables. When it comes to students' perceptions on the use of GoAnimate in the EFL classroom, a large class of 37 students was selected for this investigation. However, 3 students were absent, which left the researcher with 34 students only. Therefore, the total number of participants was 40.

Instrument

There are two main tools that were used to gather data in this qualitative research: focus group interviews and self-observational data. As for the focus group interviews, as suggested by its name, it is one type of interviews, in which the researcher interviews the participants in groups (Creswell, 2014). The researcher made sure that these interviews attained minimal bias by conducting them in two phases. In stage one, the students were interviewed in their focus groups of 4 or 5 at the school's resources room. This allowed them to speak their minds because teachers were not around. In stage two, the researcher invited teachers for Arabic coffee and dates during the English group's meeting period and conducted the focus group interview at the same time. Additionally, those interviews took place as soon as possible after the lesson because the immediate gathering of data should help the teachers and students in remembering the important details of the lesson. Moreover, the interviews were audiotaped to allow the researcher to transcribe them on some forms that were designed by the researcher herself. When it comes to the researcher, as she was present there and then, her observations should not be neglected. Consequently, self-observational data was also gathered. Again, the researcher took notes whenever possible during the lesson, as well

as directly after it, to obtain "more accurate and complete data" as Gass and Mackey (2007, p. 62) justify.

Procedure

The researcher designed a female GoAnimate character called 'Awash', whose role is to co-teach a narrative writing lesson along with the researcher herself. 'Awash' took the responsibility of introducing the lesson's aims, telling a lead-in story, setting the groups, distributing roles among group members and giving instructions to students. This character was interactive as she addressed the researcher by her first name and asked her about the students' performance as well. Additionally, a GoAnimate video story was created and shown to students in the pre-task activity. Students' narrations depended totally on their understanding of this story. Prezi was used to deliver the lesson because it was easier having all the GoAnimate videos gathered in one file¹. Yet, the researcher only focussed on her analysis on the GoAnimate videos as this was the target of the study in hand. As 'Awash' was doing most of the teaching, the researcher's role was more as a guide and facilitator who made sure that students understood 'Awash' well. The class was taught in two continuous lessons; around 90 minutes. During the lessons, the researcher observered the teachers and students and took notes. which was possible because 'Awash's' role was dominant. After the class, two sets of focus groups' interviews were conducted. To begin with, the researcher interviewed the students in focus groups of 4 or 5. Then, she interviewed the English teachers, who had attended the GoAnimate lesson. Audio recording of students' and teachers' focus group interviews was important in order for the researcher to have access to these recordings later on and to write notes. These notes along with the researcher's notes were a rich source of data for the researcher to analyse.

Findings

By colour-coding the gathered data, specific aspects that can be grouped according to specific themes stand out (Creswell, 2014). As a result, the analysis section in this study is built thematically to cover the most distinguished aspects from the

¹ Please check the following link for the GoAnimate videos: http://prezi.com/ysl5o4mi5tjv/?utm_campaign=share&utm_medium=copy

collected data. Table 2: Colour-Coding Categorisation Reference, below, illustrates the colour-coding categorisation that is used in this study for the different analysed aspects.

Cate	Colour	
Teache		
Cooperative Learning	Setting Group Work	
	Group Dynamics	
The Learning		
Students'		
Class		
Possible C		

Table 2: Colour-Coding Categorisation Reference

Teacher's Role

During the focus group interview, the teachers highlighted that GoAnimate helped in minimising the teacher's talk time (TTT). One of them said that GoAnimate "reduces the teacher's effort in speaking". Another teacher added that GoAnimate "reduces the teacher's talking time and makes the students more attentive". On the other hand, none of the teachers and almost none of the students saw in GoAnimate a possible substitute for the human teacher in the EFL classroom. However, what is the teacher's role as perceived by the interviewed teachers and students? Well, teachers stated that the teacher's role should be one of a "guide" who "assists the students" and "helps clarifying things if needed". As for students, they affirmed that the "human teacher" is crucial because he/she "understands them and their feelings", "discusses" with them, "makes sure that they understand the lesson", "checks students' mistakes and checks the programme as well".

Cooperative Learning

Setting Group Work

The interviews revealed that all teachers had an agreement that GoAnimate helped in setting the groups efficiently and quickly. Additionally, the teachers found the distribution of roles using GoAnimate "interesting" and "clear". The researcher's self-observational notes, also, brought to light that by the time the GoAnimate character 'Awash' counted till 10, 6 groups of fours and 2 groups of fives were successfully formed.

Group Dynamics

During the focus group interviews, two of the students declared that the most interesting part of the lesson was watching the videos "then discussing together" or "then writing the stories". Additionally, a teacher stated that GoAnimate "encourages the students to work in groups and help each other". Furthermore, she assured that the process through which 'Awash' assigned the roles to group members was effective because students knew exactly what they needed to do in their groups; whether leading, recording, reporting, timing or facilitating others.

The Learning Environment

Self-observational notes highlighted that students seemed happy and excited about presenting their writings. Moreover, students were eager to predict the other groups' narrators. Laughter and giggles took place in the production part of the lesson. When interviewed, the students positively described the lesson as "fun", "interesting", "new", "different", "unusual", "wonderful", "nice", "stressless" and "creative". Furthermore, different students confirmed that their learning was "better" and "faster" and that they "have learnt a lot in this lesson without even noticing". Additionally, different students' responses in the focus groups' interviews revealed that GoAnimate contributed positively to grabbing their attention. One of the students commented that GoAnimate "doesn't allow us to daydream". Another student explained that this was due to the fact that GoAnimate made the lesson "interesting" and not "boring". Thus, it was different from the traditional lesson in which the teacher "just keeps talking". Moreover, teachers confirmed that GoAnimate "draws students' attention to all details and keeps them attentive".

Students' Learning

In their responses to the interview questions, students assured that GoAnimate fostered understanding of the lesson in hand due to different reasons. First, it gave clear instructions that were easy to follow. Second, it simplified the information and new vocabulary introduced in the lesson. Third, it engaged more senses in the processing of the given information, which led to gaining long-term learning. Teachers' opinions on the effect of GoAnimate in increasing understanding agreed positively with those of the students, as they stated that GoAnimate made the lesson's content clearer to students.

Additionally, two of the teachers related the quality understanding of students to the fact that students "are involved". Additionally, according to the researcher's self-observational notes, all groups presented their stories to the rest of the class and thus, they were able to achieve this goal successfully within the time allocated.

Class size

According to the teachers' responses in focus groups' interviews and the researcher's self-observational notes, GoAnimate worked well in this large classroom of 34 students. Some teachers affirmed that GoAnimate works even better with such large classes. They claimed that GoAnimate is effective with large classes because it gets "students to work together", it "draws their attention to all details and keeps them attentive" and it "helps the teachers to organise their work". According to those teachers, it was clear that the class size did not hinder GoAnimate from "achieving the aims of the lesson".

Challenges

The teachers and the researcher pointed out different challenges that may confront them when implementing GoAnimate. The most important challenge was that teachers "do not know how to design GoAnimate videos". Therefore, all teachers wished to get training on GoAnimate. Some other challenges included "lack of time" and that "it [GoAnimate] needs hard work and creative ideas". Hence, teachers admitted that they may "do it twice a semester or three times". Another challenge was that "classrooms are not well-equipped to utilize GoAnimate". The last challenge, which was declared by teachers, was that "supervisors might see that we don't talk enough"

Discussion

Based on the research questions, the discussion of the study's findings is arranged into two sections: GoAnimate effects and GoAnimate challenges. The first section brings to light the effects of integrating GoAnimate with a task-based writing lesson in a secondary level EFL Omani class. On the other hand, the second section highlights the challenges that are faced during this integration.

GoAnimate Effects

The findings of this study bring to light different aspects that are worth highlighting. To begin with, it is evident that GoAnimate adequately encourages the current role of teachers as guides and supports the vanishing of their traditional role as instructors by two means. They reduce TTT and get the students to become more involved in their own learning. One way of achieving effective involvement of students is by getting them to work in groups. Again, GoAnimate helps, beautifully, in meeting Orlich et al. (2013) and Slavin's (2012) specific ideas on the effective setting of cooperative learning because the GoAnimate character succeeds in forming students' small groups efficiently. Additionally, it assigns specific roles to each group member effectively because it keeps giving instructions to students based on their roles in the groups. Furthermore, the data analysed reveal that GoAnimate leads to positive group dynamics, which totally agrees with Poupore (2016) and Wentzel and Muenks's (2016) studies' results on the importance of promoting positive group dynamics as this leads to increasing students' motivation and thus, their production. Therefore, the learning environment turns to a relaxing one in which students are highly motivated and engaged. Additionally, students learn "without even noticing" and this, in turn, implies that they are acquiring the language naturally. This, in itself, is of great value to language teachers. Thus, as the levels of motivation and interest are high and the levels of stress and anxiety are low, GoAnimate has led to similar positive results as Li, Gao and Zhang's (2016) study on TED videos. Additionally, this agrees with Gass (2013) and Harley's (2014) ideas on the importance of considering the different factors; like motivation in this study, which contribute to the positive status of the affective filter. Furthermore, students realise that listening carefully to the GoAnimate character is fundamental to their understanding of the lesson. Otherwise, they will, most probably, miss some important information. Therefore, it can be said that the proper use of GoAnimate contributes, adequately, to grabbing students' attention and this agrees with Berk's (2012) study's results. Moreover, when it comes to students' understanding of the lesson, GoAnimate facilitates it in two ways. First, it helps students in understanding the given content by providing visuals that clarify new vocabulary. Second, it makes students more involved. It is worth mentioning that the success of the lesson depends, to a great extent, on students' understanding of the tasks assigned by the GoAnimate character along with their effective cooperative work. Additionally, by presenting their

own work to the rest of the class, the students' learning experience turns to an enjoyable, meaningful and invaluable one. Therefore, it is clear that the use of GoAnimate in the EFL classroom aids the proper implementation of constructivists' ideas (Forawi, 2015). Finally, when it comes to class size, GoAnimate works well with large classes for several reasons. First, it gets the students to work enthusiastically in small groups. Second, it involves all students by assigning specific roles to them within their groups. Third, it saves time and thus, students have more time to share their work with the rest of the class.

All in all, it is clear from the findings of this study that all participants, be them the students, teachers or researcher, have positive perceptions towards integrating GoAnimate with task-based writing classes in the EFL Omani classroom. Additionally, it is evident that GoAnimate web-tool works adequately with task-based teaching in establishing successful cooperative learning that works effectively under the umbrella of constructivism. Therefore, the findings of the study in hand totally agree with the results of Oliver and Pritchard (2016), Skains (2017) and Vandommele et al.'s (2017) studies that highlight the positive role of multimodal tools in the EFL classroom. Thus, it can be said that GoAnimate can play a great role in the current EFL classroom if used properly.

GoAnimate Challenges

Generally, the findings of this study are in favour of using GoAnimate in the EFL Omani classroom. Nevertheless, they imply some possible challenges that may affect this implementation negatively. To begin with, it is fundamental that teachers integrate GoAnimate appropriately to achieve their goals completely. Otherwise, GoAnimate will lose its main value as a facilitator of students' learning. Moreover, some teachers may depend totally on GoAnimate and, thus, play their role as facilitators inadequately. Furthermore, designing GoAnimate videos is time consuming. This makes it difficult for the Omani teachers, especially with their tight timetables, to find spare time to design those videos. This may result in those teachers giving up GoAnimate for the sake of preparing other materials that help in preparing students for their standardised tests. As for those teachers who are willing to devote their time and effort in preparing GoAnimate videos, they may fall into the trap of the inappropriate designing or implementation of those videos in their classrooms. Another challenge that teachers face is a technical one. GoAnimate is a web-tool and therefore, connection

to the Internet is needed in designing and presenting the GoAnimate videos. This narrows down the number of rooms that can be used in the school to two or three. Unfortunately, those rooms are usually busy and difficult to book. Finally, with GoAnimate, teachers' worst nightmare can be traditional supervisors, who are still attached to their traditional perceptions of teachers as instructors.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of this study give adequate answers to its research questions. The integration of GoAnimate in the EFL Omani classroom, if applied correctly, increases students' motivation and, thus, fosters their learning. Additionally, the study highlights some of the challenges that teachers face in the implementation of GoAnimate in the Omani classrooms. Based on this knowledge, the following section suggests some implications for practice and research.

Implications

This study brings to light different implications for practice and research. When it comes to practice, there are implications for teachers, trainers, supervisors and principals. Firstly, on the level of the teachers, it is essential for them to understand that their role in the classroom is as crucial as ever and that this role is not to be replaced by GoAnimate. Thus, their support and affection are invaluable to students and a core aspect of the success of the EFL class. Additionally, teachers' training centres should play an effective role in designing programmes that cover the essential steps for designing GoAnimate animated characters and videos as well as the basic procedures for using GoAnimate effectively in the EFL Omani classroom. Moreover, on the level of supervisors, they should understand that from now on, actions speak louder than words in the Omani classroom. Thus, they should tolerate the fact that the teacher's role has changed from that of an instructor to that of a guide and that the students' role has become dominant. Furthermore, school principals should allocate some of their schools' budgets, provided by the Ministry of Education, to secure Internet networks at their schools and to provide some portable projectors that teachers can use alternatively in their classrooms. In addition to these implications for practice, the study implies some invaluable implications for future research. To begin with, it is worth mentioning here that this study is done on a small-scale and therefore, its results cannot be

generalised unless further investigations are conducted. Therefore, researchers are encouraged to explore the effectiveness of integrating GoAnimate with other skills, such as reading, listening and speaking. Additionally, the same study should be applied in other schools in different parts of Oman because teachers' and students' exposure to technology varies according to their areas and thus, their perceptions on the use of GoAnimate may vary accordingly.

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