

Empowering language learners through the use of a curriculum-integrated information literacy programme: an action research project

Sahar Alzahrani¹

Abstract. This paper implements and evaluates a curriculum-integrated information literacy programme in an Arabic primary school in the United Kingdom to empower learners and develop life-long learning skills. It reports on an action research project with a reflective practice approach used at the beginning of the semester to identify potential problems before planning the action. A focus group interview and learners' written output were used to answer three research questions about learners' awareness, attitudes, and confidence about information literacy skills. Enhancement was found in these three aspects.

Keywords: information literacy skills, learner empowerment, technology enhanced language learning, language learner autonomy.

1. Introduction

In the last few decades, a large number of sources of information have appeared, and thus learning information search skills is important (Sasikala & Dhanraju, 2011). To help learners cope with this change, we need to enhance their autonomy by equipping them with the needed skills (Schwienhorst, 2008). Learners' use of information literacy skills effectively helps to improve their performance in schools (Ilogho & Nkiko, 2014). Information literacy skills are essential for the development of life-long learning (Wallace, Shorten, & Crookes, 2000). As such, helping learners to become life-long learners and more autonomous entails empowering them with opportunities for experimentation with authentic language learning material through the use of search tools (Schwienhorst, 2008).

1. University of Southampton, Southampton, United Kingdom; saharatar2@gmail.com

How to cite this article: Alzahrani, S. (2017). Empowering language learners through the use of a curriculum-integrated information literacy programme: an action research project. In K. Borthwick, L. Bradley & S. Thoušný (Eds), *CALL in a climate of change: adapting to turbulent global conditions – short papers from EUROCALL 2017* (pp. 13-18). Research-publishing.net. <https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2017.eurocall2017.681>

The context of this study is an Arabic primary school run by volunteering individuals in the United Kingdom. In this school, soft copies of the textbooks are used via technology. Learners in this school are proficient at their L2 (English) and they are learning writing and reading in their L1 (Arabic). Because information search skills are believed to be important for the enhancement of learners' awareness of, attitude towards, and confidence in information exploration (Dunn, 2002), this study presents the results for their empowerment in language learning and for the development of their life-long learning skills. It also seeks to answer three research questions:

- To what extent are learners aware of search skills on the internet after the training?
- What are learners' attitudes towards search skills after the training?
- To what extent are learners confident with looking for and using information after the training?

2. Method

2.1. Study design

“Reflective practice can be a useful precursor to action research. It is not identical to it” (McMahon, 1999, p. 163). In reflective practice, teachers do not learn how to perform actions, but they learn from their experience and they should be sensitive to the needs of their own and of their context as well as the educational philosophies adopted by their institutions (McMahon, 1999). In this study, I have adopted a reflective practice approach (a thinking approach to practice) which led to a strategic action characterising the undertaken action research. Reflective practice was used during the first two weeks of the study to identify potential problems that might suppress learners' life-long learning skills. I looked at learners' needs and the existing resources and found that printed textbooks are not available for those learners. They have limited competence at information search and are used to receiving information from teachers and textbooks. After the reflective practice, the strategic action was planned to solve this problem.

This paper reports on an action research that implements and evaluates a curriculum-integrated information literacy programme in a primary school. The planned action

was to provide eight-week training on the information literacy skills to develop learners' search skills on the internet to enhance their awareness and performance and to provide a non-graded task at the end of each class to search for a given topic (e.g. food etiquette). These eight tasks provide opportunities to explore information outside the classroom. Five search skills – appropriate for the young age of those learners – were used as the focus of the training: defining the topic; choosing a search tool; defining keywords; using search building techniques (e.g. synonyms, limiters, and refining); and knowing how to read the search results.

2.2. Data collection

An interpretive approach is exploited in this study in which qualitative data is used to explore the potential change in aspects of learning after being exposed to the training and after being given the tasks. Learners' feedback on the tasks and on the skills practiced during the course were collected at the beginning of the training and after the last task in the training.

To answer the research questions, a Focus Group (FG) interview was used at two different times (FG1 after the first task and FG2 after the last task) to collect learners' feedback on the course tasks and skills which were practiced during the course. Moreover, learners' written output was collected every week to evaluate the impact of the training and the tasks.

3. Results and discussion

The instructional methodology contributed to the development of a set of lifelong learning skills. The activity theory – in which a unity between consciousness and activity is achieved – is used to explain the findings.

3.1. Awareness

- To what extent are learners aware of search skills on the internet after the training?

This section presents evidence found in learners' data in the FG regarding learners' enhanced awareness of search skills. In FG2, steps can be identified in the explanation of the search process they used. Additionally, longer and richer description of the process was provided in FG2 and there was less mention of parents' support in FG2.

3.2. Attitude

- What are learners' attitudes towards search skills after the training?

This question was answered using the FG. The first two learners in Table 1 started and ended with a positive attitude (easy to look for information on the internet) perhaps because they knew beforehand how to use the computer and to code. It was difficult for Learner 3 in Task 1 – though he was excited to learn it – but this has become easier after the course. Five other learners started with a negative attitude. Three of them (4, 5, and 6) have enhanced their attitude as they have benefited from the training, but two others (7 and 8) were the least contributing learners and maintained their negative attitude.

Table 1. Learners' attitudes towards information search

St.	Before the training	Reasons	After the training	Reasons
1	Easy	Coding experience	Easy	Coding experience
2	Easy	Coding experience	Easy	Coding experience
3	Difficult, but excited	Likes to explore	Easy	Practice (he is a good student)
4	Difficult, sought parents' help	Result selection, reading, and writing	Easier, with difficulties	Reading and rewriting information
5	Difficult, sought parents' help	New kind of jobs	Easier, with difficulties	Reading and rewriting information
6	Difficult, sought parents' help	Hard job	Easier, with difficulties	Using English Keyboard to type Arabic
7	Difficult, sought parents' help	Don't know how to write	Difficult	The least contributing
8	Difficult, sought parents' help	Need to write a lot	Difficult	The least contributing

3.3. Confidence

- To what extent are learners confident with looking for and using information after the training?

This question was answered using the FG and learners' written output. The first two learners started and ended the course with great confidence which was attributed to their experience in coding. The rest of the learners lacked confidence before the

training. Four of them (3, 4, 5, and 6) reported greater confidence after it due to the practice they had. Nonetheless, two learners were the least contributing learners and they still lacked confidence after the course (Table 2).

Table 2. Learners' confidence about the use of information search

St.	Before the training	Reasons	After the training	Reasons
1	Great	Coding experience	Great	Coding experience
2	Great	Coding experience	Great	Coding experience
3	No	Lots of information	Better	Practice
4	No	Lack of skills and awareness of steps	Better	Practice
5	No	Don't know how to do it	Better	Learned
6	No	Hard job	Better	Used it
7	No	Need mum's help	Lack	Don't know how to do it
8	No	Lots of details	Lack	Scared

To ensure validity of confidence findings, FG was triangulated with learners' written output in the tasks performed at the beginning and at the end to identify evidence for the potential improvement in learners' confidence. In the last task, learners were found using longer sentences and their writing length in the tasks increased. In addition, the bullet points used in writing the first task were changed into full paragraphs in the last task.

4. Conclusions

In short, the implemented curriculum-integrated information literacy programme, designed for an Arabic primary school in the United Kingdom, seems to show effectiveness in developing learners' awareness of information literacy skills, enhancing their attitudes, and promoting their confidence about their information literacy competence, as was argued by Dunn (2002). Future research can implement a similar programme with learners in higher education.

5. Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the principal of the Arabic School in Southampton, UK and the students for helping with this study.

References

- Dunn, K. (2002). Assessing information literacy skills in the California State University: a progress report. *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 28(1-2), 26-35. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0099-1333\(01\)00281-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0099-1333(01)00281-6)
- Ilogho, J., & Nkiko, C. (2014). Information literacy search skills of students in five selected private universities in Ogun State, Nigeria: a survey. *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*. Paper 1040.
- McMahon, T. (1999). Is reflective practice synonymous with action research? *Educational Action Research*, 7(1), 163-169. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09650799900200080>
- Sasikala, C., & Dhanraju, V. (2011). Assessment of information literacy skills among science students of Andhra University. *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*. Paper 626.
- Schwienhorst, K. (2008). *Learner Autonomy and CALL Environments*. Routledge.
- Wallace, M. C., Shorten, A., & Crookes, P. A. (2000). Teaching information literacy skills: an evaluation. *Nurse Educ Today*, 20(6), 485-9. <https://doi.org/10.1054/nedt.1999.0439>

Published by Research-publishing.net, not-for-profit association
Contact: info@research-publishing.net

© 2017 by Editors (collective work)
© 2017 by Authors (individual work)

CALL in a climate of change: adapting to turbulent global conditions – short papers from EUROCALL 2017
Edited by Kate Borthwick, Linda Bradley, and Sylvie Thoušny

Rights: This volume is published under the Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives International (CC BY-NC-ND) licence; individual articles may have a different licence. Under the CC BY-NC-ND licence, the volume is freely available online (<https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2017.eurocall2017.9782490057047>) for anybody to read, download, copy, and redistribute provided that the author(s), editorial team, and publisher are properly cited. Commercial use and derivative works are, however, not permitted.

Disclaimer: Research-publishing.net does not take any responsibility for the content of the pages written by the authors of this book. The authors have recognised that the work described was not published before, or that it was not under consideration for publication elsewhere. While the information in this book are believed to be true and accurate on the date of its going to press, neither the editorial team, nor the publisher can accept any legal responsibility for any errors or omissions that may be made. The publisher makes no warranty, expressed or implied, with respect to the material contained herein. While Research-publishing.net is committed to publishing works of integrity, the words are the authors' alone.

Trademark notice: product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

Copyrighted material: every effort has been made by the editorial team to trace copyright holders and to obtain their permission for the use of copyrighted material in this book. In the event of errors or omissions, please notify the publisher of any corrections that will need to be incorporated in future editions of this book.

Typeset by Research-publishing.net

Cover design based on © Josef Brett's, Multimedia Developer, Digital Learning, <http://www.eurocall2017.uk/>, reproduced with kind permissions from the copyright holder.

Cover layout by © Raphaël Savina (raphael@savina.net)
Photo "frog" on cover by © Raphaël Savina (raphael@savina.net)

Fonts used are licensed under a SIL Open Font License

ISBN13: 978-2-490057-04-7 (Ebook, PDF, colour)

ISBN13: 978-2-490057-05-4 (Ebook, EPUB, colour)

ISBN13: 978-2-490057-03-0 (Paperback - Print on demand, black and white)

Print on demand technology is a high-quality, innovative and ecological printing method; with which the book is never 'out of stock' or 'out of print'.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data.
A cataloguing record for this book is available from the British Library.

Legal deposit: Bibliothèque Nationale de France - Dépôt légal: décembre 2017.