

Teaching Unplugged: Does it have the Potential to Improve EFL Students' Speaking skills in a Writing Class?

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Abstract

The present study attempted to investigate the effect of unplugged teaching of writing on EFL majors' speaking as well as essay writing skills. All level-one EFL students enrolled in the writing 1 (code: 1606110) course at the College of Education and Arts, Northern Borders University, Saudi Arabia, participated in this study. They were randomly divided into an experimental and a control group. Unplugged teaching of writing was used with the experimental group students, whereas students of the control group were taught in the usual way by using the prescribed writing book. A pre-post speaking test and a pre-post writing test were used to assess participants' speaking and essay writing skills. Results revealed that experimental group students outperformed their counterparts of the control group in both speaking and essay writing skills. Based on these findings, it was recommended that teaching unplugged, if not implemented alone, could be used as a complement, not a replacement for the coursebook-based lessons. In addition, a radical change should be made in EFL teachers' convictions, from viewing their roles as conferrers of knowledge to that of mentors, from controllers to facilitators. Moreover, EFL teachers are recommended to return to the basics of their job, to scrutinize their resources, and to realize that they do not need to depend on a coursebook or on an interactive whiteboard to be effective teachers. They need to liberate themselves from their slavish dependence on materials, and newly invented digital gadgets and to return English language teaching to its roots by using instructional practices which are more conversation-driven and materials-light.

Keywords: *Teaching Unplugged, Speaking Skills, Writing Skills.*

Introduction

In EFL contexts like in Arab countries, where students have very limited opportunities, if any, for exposure to real world

input, and for oral communication with native speakers, deliberate interaction in the classrooms becomes essential for developing their communicative language competence. Needless to say, the unquestionable value of that kind of interaction between the teacher and the students and among students themselves for the development of foreign/second language proficiency has long been emphasized by many linguists as well as classroom researchers (Long, 1983; Krashen, 1985; Van Lier, 1996; Brown, 2001; Yu, 2008; among others). Conforming with this highly recommended teaching practice, most, if not all, EFL teachers profess commitment to the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). However, classroom-based research indicates that most teachers only pay 'lip service' to the importance of communicative language teaching; In the Colombian EFL secondary school classrooms, for example, Herazo (2010, p. 47) concludes that "what constitutes authentic oral interaction is sometimes not clearly understood and some of the activities that take place in the classroom seem unlikely to generate meaningful opportunities for the development of oral interaction". In South Korea, teachers tell their principals that "they are following CLT, when in actuality they are sticking to their comfortable traditional methods" (Dailey, 2010, p. 3). In the Iranian context, "although teachers held a positive claim towards practicing CLT, the state of the practice of language teaching and learning was not in favor of the premises of CLT" (Shahin & Ehsan, 2014, p. 1905). Teachers still follow more structural approaches in their classrooms. In New Delhi, although teachers claim to be following CLT, "they seem to be following traditional approaches inside classrooms" (Jabeen, 2014, p. 69). In Saudi Arabia, Maslamani (2013) puts it very clear that EFL instruction "fails to promote classroom communicative interaction, learner-learner interaction and oral proficiency" (p. 73).

Although experts in the field of foreign/second language learning have long been warning that "slavish use of coursebooks may have destructive effects on teaching and learning processes" (Charalambous, 2011, p. 4), research indicates that teachers' over-reliance on coursebooks might be a real reason behind their

failure to engage students in a meaningful interaction (Cunningsworth, 1995; Cadorath & Harris, 1998; Charalambous, 2011; Anugerahwati, 2013; among others). Actually, the vast majority of research which attempted to evaluate English language coursebooks reveals that “all books have certain limitations and deficiencies and...there is no course book that can work in all situations or can be applied to all teachers and students” (Charalambous, 2011, p. 6). In Jordan, for example, Bani Abdelrahman, (2014, p. 148) concludes that textbooks still focus on the traditional view that “students are consumers of knowledge. Moreover, the textbooks are designed to stimulate memorizing facts and supplying students' minds with information without giving them the chance to think and create”. In Saudi Arabia, Alhamlan (2013) assured that secondary school students complain of the difficulty of the material in the textbook and that these books do not provide the opportunity for the students to interact in the classroom. In Palestine, elementary school EFL teachers complain of the large number of unfamiliar words and the inadequacy of the time devoted to delivering the materials (Hammad, 2014). In the Sudanese English language syllabus (SPINE series), Alfaki (2014) found that 89% of the reading comprehension questions in his study sample are actually low-order thinking skill questions. In Iranian senior high school and pre-university English textbooks, lower-order cognitive skills, according to Bloom's taxonomy of learning objectives, were more prevalent than higher-order ones (Riazi, 2010). In Pakistan, higher secondary level coursebooks are not designed according to the needs and requirement of students. They do not encourage student involvement in improving the basic language skills like speaking, listening, reading, writing. They are helpful only in “passing exams and getting good marks through the cramming of the materials” (Shah, Majeed, & Ul-Waheed, 2013, p. 481).

In the same vein, research indicates that despite the several undeniable advantages of educational technologies, a greater reliance on these technologies hinders student-teacher interaction (Li, 2007; Stewart, 2008; Weiss, 2009; Coyle, Yanez &

Verdu, 2010). Keeping up with the heap of newly invented digital gadgets, language teachers struggled to adopt as much as possible of these technologies for their own agenda of language teaching. However, there is a consensus among studies which attempted to evaluate the challenges and benefits of technology integration into classroom teaching that over-dependence on these technologies negatively affects genuine classroom dialogic interactions and effective learning. According to Li (2007, p. 390), seasoned teachers express their “fear that technology would take away “real learning”. Stewart (2008, p. 463) concludes that over-reliance on classroom technologies not only keeps “students apart, self-absorbed and unengaged” but it would also lead to “greater alienation”. For Weiss (2009), much is lost in today’s so-called smart classrooms; creativity and interaction among students and instructors decreased remarkably; active learning is stifled; discussions silenced; and what is emphasized is memorization.

Thus, with the notable failure to implement CLT principles in the classroom and with the commonly voiced limitations of coursebooks as well as lack of evidence that smart classroom technologies lead to real learning, a return to a less tech-rich classroom is badly needed. A classroom that challenges students to imagine rather than merely see, a classroom where knowledge, not fun, is the goal, patience, not instant gratification, is the foundation of good learning and thinking (Weiss, 2009).

In this respect, Dogme ELT or teaching unplugged is seen as the panacea for the short-falls of modern approaches. Dogme, introduced as an approach to language teaching by Scott Thornbury in 2000, is a kind of teaching which is done by using only the resources brought by teachers and students and by exploiting whatever happens inside the classroom (Banegas, 2012). It foregrounds dialogue and personal narratives of the students. According to Ghazal and Singh (2014, p. 143), Dogme ELT “promotes a pedagogy that is unburdened by an excess of material and independent of the use of technology. Instead, it is grounded in the local and relevant concerns of the people in the

classroom". In this regard, Thornbury (2000) attacks the direction taken by most English language teaching approaches accusing teachers of "hi-jacking lessons with an excess of teaching materials, technological gimmicks, and what was described as 'Obsessive Grammar Syndrome'" (as cited in Parry, 2012, p. 4). Thornbury and Meddings (2001) claim that learning a language is not like learning any other subject, like geography, history or mathematics that is best learned when it has been pre-assembled into bite-sized units. In other words, language is not an 'entity external to the learners'. Rather, language is an emergent phenomenon, the learning of which is a jointly constructed and socially motivated process, depending on the interests, desires, and needs of the users, not on pre-selected coursebook texts by an absentee writer. These texts are 'dead on the page' and the teacher uses his skills to 're-animate them for the learner'.

Context of The Problem

Keeping up with the best practices of teaching English language all over the world, EFL teachers in the Arab world, in general, and in Saudi Arabia, in particular, employed almost all methods over the past few decades. Furthermore, different types of educational resources and technologies have been integrated into EFL classrooms – textbooks, workbooks, vocabulary-building books, grammar books, phrasal verb dictionaries, photocopyable resources, charts, posters, audio CDs, videos, websites – to name just a few. However, still many students complain about the difficulty they face in an English class. Alshumaimeri (2003) assures that after learning English for many years "students leave the secondary stage without the ability to carry out a short conversation" (as cited in Elyas & Al Grigri, 2014, 76). Supporting this, Kandil (2009) puts it clear that a large number of the Arab students in the GSS of the governmental schools are not adequately prepared, from a linguistic point of view, to pursue their university education with a great deal of efficiency.

It is clear that plugged teaching fails to engage learners, trigger their imaginations, and provide them with something really useful they can retain. Hence, what students need is not just another teaching method but a critical pedagogy that allows their voices to emerge in the EFL class and connects language learning to their real-life experiences.

Statement of the Problem

Although most, if not all, methods of teaching as well as several types of educational resources and technologies have been employed in EFL classrooms, many students do not feel at ease while speaking or writing essays on their own despite having good grammatical skills and sound vocabulary banks. Hence, this study was conducted to investigate the effect of the unplugged teaching of writing on EFL majors' speaking as well as essay writing skills. More specifically, the study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. What is the effect of unplugged teaching of writing on EFL majors' essay writing skills?
2. What is the effect of unplugged teaching of writing on EFL majors' speaking skills?

Hypotheses of the Study

The researcher hypothesized the following:

1. There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores obtained by the experimental group students and those of the control group on the post-test of overall speaking proficiency favoring the experimental group.

From this main hypothesis, the following sub-hypotheses branch:

There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores obtained by the experimental group students and those of the control group favoring the experimental group on the post-test of:

- pronunciation intelligibility.
- Grammatical Accuracy.

- Vocabulary Adequacy
 - Fluency.
 - Interactive Communication.
2. There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores obtained by the experimental group students and those of the control group on the post-test of essay writing favoring the experimental group.

From this main hypothesis, the following sub-hypotheses branch:

There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores obtained by the experimental group students and those of the control group favoring the experimental group on the post-test of essay writing with respect to:

- Organization.
- Mechanics.
- Vocabulary and language use.
- Ideas and Content.

Objectives of the Study

The current study attempted to achieve the following objectives:

1. Exploring the effect of using Unplugged Teaching of writing on EFL students' overall speaking proficiency.
2. Exploring the effect of using Unplugged Teaching of writing on EFL students' essay writing skills.

Significance of the Study

The current study derived its importance from the following:

1. The study is considered one of the pioneering studies that attempted to risk using Unplugged teaching within formal classroom context.
2. The findings of this study may direct the attention of teachers and curriculum developers to the importance of avoiding the over-reliance on coursebooks as well as

educational technologies that might hinder meaningful interaction.

Delimitations of the Study

This study was delimited to:

1. EFL level-one male students registering in the writing 1 (code: 1606110) course, at the College of Education and Arts, Northern Borders University, Saudi Arabia. Because of sex segregation imposed in Saudi Arabia, male students were preferred to be the participants of this study since the researcher himself is the one who conducted the intervention in order to guarantee effective interaction.
2. Four main essay writing domains (organization, mechanics, vocabulary & language use, and ideas & content), in addition to five speaking sub-skills (pronunciation intelligibility, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary adequacy, fluency and interactive communication). The selection of the specified writing domains and speaking sub-skills was done in light of the description of writing 1 (code: 1606110), and Listening and speaking 1 (code: 1606112) courses in the study plan of the dept. of Languages and Translation.

Literature Review and Theoretical Background

What is Dogme (Unplugged Teaching)?

Dogme/Unplugged Teaching, a term taken from the film industry that refers to filming without scripts or rehearsal (Richards, 2013). Dogme ELT or Teaching Unplugged is based on the idea that “instead of basing teaching on a pre-planned syllabus, a set of objectives and published materials, teaching is built around conversational interaction between teacher and students and among students themselves” (Richards, 2013, p. 18). According to Chappell (2014), Dogme ELT is:

A movement that came at the turn of the millennium in response to the perceived misgivings of teachers' language lessons relying on materials rather than 'genuine' communication. Teaching materials are presumed to hinder such communication and take the focus away

from learner language (P.1).

It was instigated as a reaction against the overreliance on resources in the classroom, in which genuine communication is buried under piles of materials and photocopies (Worth, 2013). It has been mainly determined to “liberate teachers from their dependence on materials, and has developed into a methodology aiming to return English language teaching to its roots by using approaches which are learner-centred and materials light” Tomlinson (2012, p. 159). In this sense, Dogme has “brought about a radical change in the process of language learning. The teacher is not allowed to talk ‘to’ or talk ‘about’ the learners; rather, they are required to talk ‘with’ each other, engaging in a meaningful dialogue” (Ghazal & Singh, 2014, p. 148).

Simply put, The goal of the Dogme approach is "to restore teaching to its pre-method 'state of grace' - when all there was a room with a few chairs, a blackboard, a teacher and some students, and where learning was jointly constructed out of the talk that evolved in that simplest, and most prototypical of situations" (Thornbury, 2000, as cited in Ghazal & Singh, 2014, p. 149).

What are the Basic/Core Principles of Teaching Unplugged?

According to Meddings and Thornbury (2009), Dogme ELT is based on three fundamental principles; it is conversation-driven, materials-light, and it focuses on emergent language.

Conversation-Driven

According to Thornbury and Meddings (2001) language is not a subject. It is a medium and giving it subject status by basing the teaching of it around a textbook is an indisputable way of paralyzing its capacity to convey messages as the medium becomes the message and the only message. Thus, in Dogme ELT, conversation is at the heart of language learning. It grows in a natural way based on students’ interests and their needs. If the language lesson didn't include real language use, as stated by Thornbury (2011), its usefulness is questionable. Through

conversation students are making use of language; they work together to create connected sentences that build on and add to what has already been said by their colleagues; and they construct meaning which is relevant to the topic at hand (Parry, 2012; Xerri, 2012). Thus, in an unplugged teaching class, power does not exist in the teacher who “delivers the grammar to the students who learn it. Instead, discourse and learning start with the learners’ own lives. It is built on an understanding of the shared construction of knowledge” (McCabe, 2005, p. 334). Supporting this, Xerri (2012, p. 60) puts it clear that Dogme ELT “opposes the knowledge transfer model of education and does not view students as possessing a tabula rasa that the teacher is responsible for filling with learning”. For Ushioda (2011),

The Dogme approach places a premium on conversational interaction among teacher and learners where communication is authentic and learner-driven rather than pedagogically contrived and controlled by the teacher. Choice of learning content and materials is thus shaped by students’ own preferred interests and agendas, and language development emerges through the scaffolded dialogic interactions among learners and the teacher (as cited in Banegas, 2012: 1).

Based on the first principle (conversation-driven) of teaching unplugged, several assumptions are made with respect to language learning; language fluency is foregrounded for accuracy, not vice-versa; through meaningful teacher-supported dialogic interaction, communicative confidence is developed among the students; and spontaneous extensive runs of discourse, produced by students, are much more superior to short and accurate sentences.

Materials-Light

Early in his one-page article that appeared in the latest volume of IATEFL issues, Thornbury (2000) called for a back-to-basics style of language teaching; a style that simply encompasses only a room with some chairs, a blackboard, a teacher and his students. Study materials used are provoked by a conversation in class and should be resultant from students’ needs and interests (as cited in Ghazal & Singh, 2014, p. 149). “A

successful lesson need not necessarily be materials-driven but can actually be based on ‘the ‘raw materials’ provided by the people in the room” (Meddings & Thornbury, 2009, p. 7). It is the lesson during which the teacher talks with, not to, his students in a meaningful dialogue, and lessons are not ‘hi-jacked’ with an overload of teaching materials, technological devices, and what was described as ‘Obsessive Grammar Syndrome’ (Thornbury, 2011). Supporting this, Chappell (2014, p. 1) assures that “language learning episodes are claimed to have their beginnings in these social interactions, where there is a perceived or noticed need to develop the repertoire of a learner’s functional linguistic system”. This materials-light kind of teaching in which learning is collaboratively constructed by students and teachers, “frees the teacher from a sense of dependence on course books and technology” (Xerri, 2012, p. 60). For Ghazal and Singh (2014: 148), materials-light teaching is preferred because materials, especially course books, can:

Come between the teacher and the students, preventing them from any meaningful discussion suffused with the vitality of their own learning experience. Instead of becoming the facilitator of critical learning, the teacher may get reduced to a 'materials operator', separated from the learners by a screen of 'things to do' (P. 148).

Focus on Emergent Language

The last principle of the Teaching Unplugged approach complements its holistic nature. Being a materials-light and conversation-driven, Teaching Unplugged focuses on the language that emerges incidentally from the meaningful exchanges rather than on a pre-determined language syllabus; Language that take place in the classroom between teachers and students, and between the students themselves. Apart from encouraging classroom dynamics that lead to a dialogic and emergent pedagogy, the teacher’s main role is to maximize language learning opportunities by directing his students’ attention to the features of the emergent language (Meddings & Thornbury, 2009). This emergent language, as pointed out by Ghazal and Singh (2014), forms the basis of further dialogues,

grammar exercises, or pronunciation drills. The teacher allows the learners to choose where they want to go next; however he/she still steers the conversation towards areas which may need more attention. But there are never any prescribed grammar content or vocabulary lists that must be mastered at the end of each class (p. 147).

In this way, teaching is responsive to the language generated during the lesson and students' errors are seen as opportunities for learning to happen (Xerri, 2012). In addition, learning content is not predictable neither by the students nor by their teacher. It is, rather, something that arises as a result of the meaningful interaction taking place in the classroom events.

Ordinary/Typical Classroom Talk

Since classroom dialogic interaction is part and parcel of Teaching Unplugged, it is important to shed light on typical classroom talk in order to understand the type of talk that takes place between students and teachers in non-Dogme classes. Great efforts have been exerted by EFL/ESL classroom researchers over the past years to understand classroom talk and to describe it.

Research over the past decades indicated that EFL/ESL Teachers are very likely to own classroom interaction. Edwards and Mercer (as cited in Mohr & Mohr, 2007, p. 441) documented that "teachers perform 76% of classroom talk". Similarly, Rezaee and Farahian (2012, p. 1237) concluded "that on average, some 70 percent of the class time was allotted to teacher talk, 20 percent to student talk and about 10 percent to other activities". As far as students are willing to be taught, they are likely to concede to the teacher the right to talk first, last, and most; to control the content of what is said; and to control its transmission by allocation of turns at speaking (Delamont, 1976). Supporting this, (Edwards & Furlong, 1978) put it clearly that in the language game of teaching, the teacher, who is usually the most active player, sets the rules of communication. He usually tells pupils when to talk, what to talk about, when to stop talking, and how well they talked. He also has a virtual monopoly

of what are called structuring moves. It is he who makes the running. He speaks most frequently; and his speeches are usually the longest.

According to Mohr and Mohr (2007, p. 441), “teacher talk dominates classroom communication” and it is often “managerial rather than conversational in nature”. Chappell (2014, 2) puts it very clear that “teacher-led sets of questions that are often unrelated and require students to respond with factual answers and known information” is the most predominant characteristic of classroom talk. Supporting this, Forestal (as cited in Mohr & Mohr, 2007, p. 441) assures that “60% of teacher talk involved asking questions, primarily display questions, which expect students to recall information taught previously by the teacher”. Clarifying this, Edwards and Furlong (1978) point out that teachers cannot risk many questions to which answers are unpredictable and which give them little or no right to close down the discussion. Instead, they ask questions which entitle them to regain the floor frequently in order to comment on or evaluate students’ answers and give feedback. In this respect, Chappell (2014, 2) claims that “teacher’s feedback on the student’s response stifles possibilities for further student talk”. Cadorath and Harris (1998) attribute teachers tendency to avoid referential questions to the “emphasis on lesson planning and the dominance of a course-book as a source of classroom activities” (p. 193). They claim that teachers being restricted to the confines of lesson plans and course books had its unfavorable consequences; It leads to the inhibition of dialogic interaction between the teacher and the student and the avoidance of genuine communicative opportunities available in unplanned language. Moreover, it leads to the loss of aspects of local knowledge and experience as topics for classroom talk.

Method and Procedures

Participants

All EFL level-one male students registering in the writing 1 (code: 1606110) course at the College of Education and Arts,

Northern Borders University, Saudi Arabia, volunteered to participate in this study. They were randomly assigned either to experimental or control group. Participants shared some common characteristics as they are all of average ages ranging from 18 to 20 years old, from the same Saudi culture, and with homogeneous English learning backgrounds. After excluding drop outs the number of the students who successfully completed the experiment was 48 students equally divided between the two groups of the study.

Experimental Design

The study used a pre-test/post-test experimental and control group design. An experimental group and a control group were exposed to pre-post means of getting data (a pre-post speaking proficiency test and a pre-posttest of essay writing). Unplugged teaching of writing was used with the experimental group students (see the intervention section for more details), whereas students of the control group were taught the ordinary course, in the usual way, by using the prescribed writing book; that is, *Interactions 1 Writing, gold edition, by Cheryl Pavlik & Margaret Keenan Segal (2007)*. As stated in its description, that course aims at having students be able to; 1) describe different stages of writing an academic essay; 2) write well-developed paragraphs with an accurate use of transitions, both within and between paragraphs; and 3) practice editing and revising essays. The prescribed book includes ten chapters; namely, *Academic Life Around the World, Experiencing Nature, Living to Eat, or Eating to Live?, In the Community, Home, Cultures of the World, Health, Entertainment and the Media, Social Life, and Sports*.

Research Instruments

A Pre-post speaking proficiency test and an essay writing test were developed and used by this researcher to answer the study questions:

Pre-Post Speaking Proficiency Test

Following the spoken English proficiency tests, and the tests developed by the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) of the U.S.

State Department, a spoken English proficiency test was developed for assessing EFL students' overall speaking proficiency with respect to the four specified speaking sub-skills. The test consisted of five parts. In the first part, which was intended to measure pronunciation, the testee was asked to read aloud a printed passage (of about 112 words). In the second part, the testee was presented with five spoken biographical questions and was asked to answer each of them orally. In the third part, the testee was presented with another five spoken but open-ended questions which was intended to elicit free and somewhat lengthy responses. In the fourth part, the testee was presented with five hypothetical situations and he was asked to tell orally what he would say in those situations. These situations required the testee to indulge in a role play with the examiner to ask for permission, make an offer, make a request, apologize and to extend an invitation. The fifth and last part consisted of a group of five pictures and the testee was asked to tell orally the story that these pictures illustrate.

Test Validity and Reliability

The validity of this test was established by showing it to six EFL university colleagues working with this researcher. They reviewed the test items as regards suitability for measuring the speaking proficiency of level-one EFL majors. In addition, reliability of this test was determined by administering it to a group of EFL majors (n=15) not participating in the study by using the test re-test method, and by calculating the correlation between the scores on the two administrations. Results of calculations indicated that the reliability coefficient for the first part was 0.84, for the second part was 0.82, for the third part was 0.83, for the fourth part was 0.81, and for the fifth part was 0.86. These coefficients indicated that the overall instrument is internally consistent and reliable.

Inter-rater reliability was also established via rating ten answer tapes, not included in the study, by this researcher and another rater, on the rubrics of the test rating scale. It was found ($r=0.82$) which indicates a high inter-rater reliability.

Scoring the Test

An analytic rubric was devised by the researcher for scoring the speaking proficiency test. The rubric consisted of five domains/dimensions against which the student's speaking proficiency was scored: pronunciation intelligibility, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary adequacy, fluency, and interactive communication. Each student's tape-recorded answer was scored by two raters, who independently rated the student's speaking proficiency on aforementioned five dimensions. Thus, a student's final score on this test was the mean score given by the two raters.

The Score Scale

The score scale is a five-point scale. Each one of the five specified domains of speaking is evaluated separately and assigned a score of "1"(lowest), "2," "3," "4," or "5"(highest). The scale is a continuum representing a range of quality. Each score-point on the continuum is defined by domain-specific scoring guidelines (See the rubrics of the rating scale). Thus, the test maximum score was 25 marks

Pre-post Essay Writing Test

In order to measure EFL students' easy writing skills, a Pre-Post Essay Writing Test was developed. The test in its final form included two writing prompts; one for the pretest and the other for the posttest. For each prompt, testees were asked to write a five-paragraph essay.

Scoring the Essay Writing Test

An analytic rubric for scoring essay writing was also devised by the researcher. Four main domains/dimensions were specified to be measured by means of the rubric. Each domain represented a main criteria of essay writing; i.e. organization, mechanics, vocabulary and language use, and ideas and content. Each student's essay was scored by two raters, who independently rated the student's writing using the rubric. Thus, a student's final score on this test was the mean score given by the two raters. The scoring system was analytic. Each dimension was scored holistically.

The score assigned indicates the test rater's overall impression of the student's command of the components of each domain.

Test Validity and Reliability

To decide content and face validity, four writing prompts and a 4-point scoring rubric were developed and shown to the same EFL university colleagues who judged the speaking test. After revising the test according to their comments, the final form consisted of two writing prompts; one for the pretest and the other for the posttest. Thus, the test was approved as a valid and appropriate tool for measuring EFL students' essay writing skills. Moreover, reliability of this test was determined by administering it to the same pilot group of EFL majors (n=15) by using the test re-test method, and by calculating the correlation between the scores on the two administrations. Results indicated that the reliability coefficient for this test was found ($r = .82$) which is considered a reasonable value for such tests.

Inter-rater reliability was also established via rating ten essays, not included in the study, by this researcher and another rater, on the rubrics of the test rating scale. It was found ($r=.86$). This value indicates a high inter-rater reliability between the two raters. The average time for finishing this test was found to be 30 minutes. Therefore, 30 minutes were decided on to be the optimum time for finishing this test.

The score scale

The score scale is a 4-point scale. Each one of the four specified areas of essay writing is evaluated separately and assigned a score of "1"(lowest), "2," "3," or "4"(highest). The scale is a continuum representing a range of quality. Each score point on the continuum is defined by area-specific scoring guidelines. Thus, the test maximum score was 16 marks.

Pre-Testing

On 1st February, 2015, this researcher started administering the speaking proficiency test and then the essay writing test in order to measure EFL students' overall speaking proficiency and their essay writing skills. This step was intended

to ascertain the equivalence of the two groups of the study. An Independent *t*-test was used to compare the mean scores of the participants of the two groups. Results of comparisons showed that there is no statistically significant difference between means of scores obtained by students of the control and experimental groups neither in the pre-measurement of overall speaking proficiency ($t=1.04$, $p<0.05$) nor in the pre-measurement of essay writing skills ($t=.15$, $p<0.05$). This result shows that the two groups of the study are equivalent both in the overall speaking proficiency and in their essay writing skills before the intervention. Administration of the instruments was done inside the classroom under the direct supervision of this researcher.

Intervention

This intervention was conducted from 11th February to 29th April 2015. It lasted for about 11 weeks. It was conducted in a way that is true to Dogme principles. The whole learning experience was established on what the students bring into the class -their own knowledge of language - no matter however limited. The teacher did not have a clear prepared lesson plan. Third-party externally prepared materials such as textbooks, exercises, gap-fills, scripted dialogues, vocabulary lists, photocopies, videos or audios were not allowed inside the classroom. Instead, real talk and meaningful interaction formed the lesson core. The only thing that the teacher took with him into the classroom was a set of guidelines and templates -in his head- to help students give their learning a thematic structure and not to turn to be 'much ado about nothing'.

All students were seated around one table making a circle. The process approach to writing was adopted in this intervention as it emphasizes the value of dialogue as a teaching technique, and this agrees with the objective of the current study. The whole writing process was mediated through talk. Talk that was shaped and scaffolded by the teacher. Talk that reflected natural conversation, characterized by spontaneous spoken language taking place in real time, and in a shared context. Most of the time, students talk to learn how to write, whereas the

teacher took a less direct and more facilitative role. Lessons were conducted through a five-step process as follows:

Prewriting

In their preparation for writing, students, in this step, were to figure out what they were going to write about. They were not allowed to surf the web or study literature. Rather, they were asked to brainstorm with their teacher and to come up with five topics for writing from their lives and their world activities. They were asked to give topics from their knowledge, beliefs, concerns and interests. Their contributions were being recorded in the lesson log by the teacher.

When they stop giving, they were being invited to discuss the generated topics and to select and decide on one of them to be the topic of the day. After determining the topic, students were being asked to make pairs and to design a scenario on that topic and, if possible, role-play it before their colleagues. This was to encourage classroom interaction among students.

Upon finishing role-plays, students were being invited by the teacher for a whole-class discussion of the selected topic. In that discussion the teacher asks the students some questions on the selected topic and they give answers to them. All of the teacher's questions were real questions/referential not display ones that increase student engagement. Questions the answers of which were unpredictable.

Drafting

In this step, students were asked to write a rough draft of the topic. They were encouraged to emphasize content rather than mechanics. While writing, students were asked to feel free to ask and to speak up anytime and the teacher was ready to see the dialog before it happens, guide that discourse through the students themselves, recognize the emerging language and build upon it and then set activities to utilize the emergent point/s.

Upon finishing their drafts, students were asked to work individually and say aloud a brief or a summary of what they had written. Other students were asked to comment on their

colleagues' drafts, and the teacher was always ready to provide scaffolding to the students.

Revising

In light of the comments of their colleagues and their teacher, students were asked in this step to improve their drafts by reviewing, modifying, and reordering their work through rearranging, adding, or removing content. In addition, they were also asked to check the appropriateness of the type of language and style expected by their intended readers.

After finishing their reviews, students were asked to work in pairs and to exchange reading their revised drafts aloud to each other, and to discuss their writings with their peers and to give and take feedback on them. The emergent language from the initial dialogues between the teacher and the students, and among students themselves, formed the basis of further dialogues, grammar exercises and pronunciation drills. In addition, the teacher was always ready to capitalize on students' mistakes and to turn them into group discussion activities for the whole class.

Editing

At this point of the writing process, students were asked to fine tune their manuscripts line by line. They were asked to proofread and correct errors and edit to improve style and clarity. Apart from promoting the kind of classroom dynamic which was conducive to dialogic and emergent pedagogy, the teacher was optimizing language learning affordances by directing students' attention to features of the emergent language. Students' errors in capitalization, spelling, punctuation and grammar were the sparks for discussion and meaningful interaction between the teacher and the students and among students themselves.

Publishing

In this step of the writing process, students were to check whether their writings appeal to and address their intended audience or the readers to whom they were writing. Students

were not allowed to publish their works online via personal blogs or web sites. Instead, they were asked to share their final writings with the whole group. Students were asked to read aloud, one at a time, their final products to the whole class. Other students were asked to listen to the one who reads and prepare their comments on his writing. Upon finishing reading, students start discussing their comments and their ideas with their colleague.

In the meantime, the teacher was building on students' contributions and ideas, and jointly constructing shared and developing understandings of those ideas. The teacher was doing his best in order to keep the topics of talk open and not to close off the possibilities for inquiry. This was done through guiding students to use different kinds of inquiry acts such as information seeking and wondering. Information seeking inquiry acts included clarifications, justifications, explanations and confirmations that support speaking students in understanding or making sense of something. Wondering inquiry acts in which the speaker invites speculations, conjectures, entertains ideas, considers possible words, and engages others in playing with possibilities, reflecting, considering, and exploring.

Emergent language and linguistic points that were discussed and explained to the students during this intervention included the following:

- Punctuation
- Capitalization
- Organization
- Subject-verb agreement
- Pronunciation
- Prepositions
- Time words
- Count and non-count nouns
- Transition words
- Fact and opinion

- Emergent topics, generated by the students, that were taken as topics for writing included:
- Major ritual occasions in Saudi Arabia
- Traditional ways of life of the Bedouin
- Falconry
- Hobbies of the Saudi Youth
- Merits and demerits of social networking sites
- Folk Medicine

Post-Testing

On 6th May, 2015, this researcher started re-administering the speaking proficiency test and then the essay writing test in order to measure EFL students' overall speaking proficiency and their essay writing skills after the intervention. Re-administration of the instruments was also done inside the classroom under the direct supervision of this researcher.

Results of the Study

This section presents the results obtained from this study. Results are presented in terms of the study hypotheses.

Testing the First Hypothesis

Independent Sample t-tests were used to test the first hypothesis of the study. To obtain specific information on individual speaking skills, students' scores on of the five speaking sub-skills were also compared. Findings are presented in table 1 .

The results in Table 1 indicate that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores obtained by participants of the control and experimental groups in the post-test of speaking proficiency, in favour of the experimental group. The experimental group got higher mean scores than those obtained by control group. They obtained a mean score of (3.0000) in pronunciation intelligibility; (3.0417) in grammatical accuracy; (3.0833) in vocabulary adequacy; (2.6667) in fluency; (2.8750) in interactive communication; and they obtained an overall mean score of (14.6250) in speaking proficiency.

Conversely, control group students obtained lower mean scores for each evaluated speaking sub-skill. The overall result of the t-test shows that the t-value =(-7.94) and the difference is significant at (0.001) level. Thus, the first hypothesis is affirmed.

Table 1 "T" value of the Control and Experimental Groups in the Post-Test of Speaking Proficiency

Speaking Sub-Skills	N	Mean Score		SD		"T" value
		Control	Experimental	Control	Experimental	
Pronunciation Intelligibility	24	2.3333	3.0000	.482	.780	-3.56**
Grammatical Accuracy	24	2.5833	3.0417	.584	.751	-2.36**
Vocabulary Adequacy	24	2.5000	3.0833	.780	.504	-3.08**
Fluency	24	2.1250	2.6667	.448	1.049	-2.33**
Interactive Communication	24	2.3333	2.8750	.637	.947	-2.33**
Overall Speaking Proficiency	24	11.8750	14.6250	1.035	1.345	-7.94**

Testing the Second Hypothesis

Independent Sample t-tests were used to test the second hypothesis of the study. To obtain specific information on particular aspects of the writing, students' scores on the four individual domains/dimensions of writing were also compared. The findings are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2 "T" value of the Control and Experimental Groups in the Post-Test of Essay Writing

Writing Domains	N	Mean Score		SD		"T" value
		Control	Experimental	Control	Experimental	
Organization	24	2.0000	2.7083	.590	.690	-3.82**
Mechanics	24	2.0833	2.4167	.408	.584	-2.29**
Vocabulary and Language Use	24	1.4583	2.7500	.658	.532	-7.48**
Ideas and Content	24	2.1250	2.5833	.537	.654	-2.65**
Overall Writing Ability		7.6667	10.4583	1.007	1.503	-7.56**

The results in Table 2 indicate that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores obtained by participants of the control and experimental groups in the post-test of essay writing, in favour of the experimental group. The experimental group got higher mean scores than those obtained by control group. They obtained a mean score of (2.7083) in organization; (2.4167) in mechanics; (2.7500) in vocabulary and language use; (2.5833) in ideas and content; and they obtained an overall mean score of (10.4583) in the general writing ability. Conversely, control group students obtained lower mean scores for each evaluated writing domain. The overall result of the t-test shows that the t-value = (-7.56) and the difference is significant at (0.001) level. Thus, the second hypothesis is affirmed.

Discussion of the Results

Although it is notoriously difficult to prove “cause and effect” in educational intervention research, the findings of this study does indicate that teaching unplugged is promising in an EFL context. According to the mean scores of the experimental group students on the post-test of overall speaking proficiency, teaching unplugged is capable of improving students’ speech production skills. Experimental group students became better able to achieve intelligible pronunciation and adequate intonation with a relatively effective use of grammatical rules. They also became better able to use relevant, adequate and correct vocabulary in expressing themselves fluently and smoothly. Moreover, they became better able to contribute effectively throughout the interaction, and maintain conversation through showing understanding and expanding on responses.

These high gains shown by the experimental group students could be attributed to the effect of the teaching unplugged approach used with them in this study. Being conversation-driven and emergent language-focused, conversation and meaningful interaction which grows in a natural way, based on students’ interests and their needs, were at the heart of language learning. These results are quite in agreement with the theories of Krashen’s (1985) exposure to

comprehensible input, Long (1983), Van Lier (1996) and Brown's (2001) meaningful interaction. In this respect, Harmer (1998, p. 87) maintains that students should be given "speaking tasks which provoke them to use all and any language at their command". Supporting this, Celce-Murcia and Olshtain (2000) state that:

The most important feature of a classroom speaking activity is to provide an authentic opportunity for the students to get individual meanings across and utilize every area of knowledge they have in the second or foreign language. They should have the opportunity and be encouraged to become flexible users of their knowledge, always keeping the communicative goal in mind (p. 176-177).

According to Lazaraton (as cited in Celce-Murcia, 2001, 105), "what academic ESL students need most is extensive authentic practice in class participation, such as taking part in discussions, interacting with peers and professors, and asking and answering questions". Thus, it is clear that all these teaching practices recommended by those researchers are exactly the principles upon which teaching unplugged is based, and which it stresses and seeks to achieve in EFL classrooms.

The results of this study are also in line with those of Yu (2008) and Zhang (2009). Yu (2008) recommended that classroom environment should offer students a context where learning opportunities are co-created by both the teachers and students in a creative and friendly atmosphere. That context draws their attention to different discursive language interactive practices reflecting the social reality surrounding them outside the classroom. This interaction and cooperative negotiation of meaning leads to both language and self-development of the students. Zhang (2009, 98), concluded that comprehensible input, meaningful interaction and the effort-generated output that turns to be sources of input for other speakers play a crucial role in the development of oral fluency in the EFL classroom. He justifies his conclusion by assuring that "when input is negotiated and learners produce output in interaction, they

selectively “take in” portions of comprehensible input and choose correct linguistic form to express themselves (p. 92)”.

It is clear that by using the unplugged teaching approach, the EFL teacher becomes free from overdependence on course books and technology and this allows him to engage his students in a meaningful interaction with the teacher as well as with their colleagues. Students became more able to assume a more positive role in their learning process rather than being often on opposing side with the teacher, or as Aljumah (2011, 85) put it “teachers babble all the time, whereas students mumble and swallow their words, or say nothing”.

As for essay writing skills, experimental group students’ mean scores on essay writing posttest indicate that teaching unplugged is capable of improving students’ essay writing skills as well. Experimental group students became better able to logically organize their essays in a skillful format using transitions effectively and logically. They also became better able to write complete sentences that vary in structure and length, with correct spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Their writing tones became clearer and more consistent and appropriate for their intended audience than before. Their essays reflected well developed main ideas and clarity of purposes with vivid and specific evidences and examples while focus is still tight.

These remarkably high gains shown by experimental group students in the essay writing posttest could be also attributed to the effect of the unplugged teaching approach used with those students. Being material light, teaching unplugged did not keep students within the confines of a specific prescribed textbook by an absentee writer, that might not be designed according to their needs and requirements, or encumber them with a heap of photocopies. Moreover, it did not entangle them with piles of digital gadgets that would put down discussions and stifle active learning. Instead, writing materials was co-created by students themselves in a pleasant atmosphere, depending on their interests, desires, needs and real life experiences. These results assure Harmer’s (1998) claim that the type of writing we get

students to do should “depend on their age, interests and level....it’s all a question of what language the students have at their command and what can be achieved with this language (p. 80)”.

These results indicate that by using this critical pedagogy, students’ voices emerge clearly in the EFL classroom. Knowledge is collaboratively and enthusiastically constructed by students and teachers. Teachers assume their basic role as facilitators of critical learning not just materials operators. Nothing stands between the teacher and his students and prevents meaningful discussion. However, these results does not mean that this study sees unplugged teaching as being opposed to technology as such. Instead, the results of this study is in opposition to using technology that does not enable learner-centered teaching which is based upon authentic communication.

Recommendations and Suggestions for Further Research

Based on the findings of this study, some important recommendations related to EFL teaching and EFL teachers are presented. The results of the study indicate that teaching unplugged is capable of improving students’ speech production skills. This is an indication that in appropriate EFL contexts, similar to those of the present study, teaching unplugged could be integrated with great success in EFL classes. Since commonly used pedagogical practices are deeply entrenched into Egyptian culture and any attempt at innovation is seen as an outrage against traditions, teaching unplugged, if not implemented alone, could be used as a complement not a replacement for the coursebook-based lessons; teaching unplugged for speaking practice, for example, and coursebook-based lessons for grammar.

In addition, in order to promote the development of language for our students, a balance of talk that contains more exploratory, information-seeking, and inquiry-based dialogue, on the one hand, and less unnecessary rote, recitation and

elicitation, on the other hand, needs to be strategically managed in our EFL classrooms. That balance of talk offers the potential for opening up genuine opportunities for language learning, where students are involved and consequently susceptible to new linguistic features that emerge during mutual interaction.

In the same vein, EFL teachers themselves need to make a radical change in their convictions, from viewing their roles as conferrers of knowledge to that of mentors, from controllers to facilitators. Pre-service teachers need to be trained in establishing a dialogic pedagogy and how to exploit the genuine situations inside classrooms for creating more knowledge, and in understanding and analyzing their learners' needs. EFL teachers are recommended to revisit the basics of their job, to scrutinize their resources, and to realize that they do not need to depend on a coursebook or on an interactive whiteboard to be effective teachers. They need to liberate themselves from their slavish dependence on materials, and newly invented digital gadgets and to return English language teaching to its roots by using instructional practices which are more conversation-driven and materials-light.

Further research is needed to provide empirical evidences through practical application on of the success of teaching unplugged in the Egyptian context. It would be interesting to try teaching unplugged with other subjects on an experimental basis. Moreover, future descriptive studies are needed to identify EFL Arab students' as well as teachers' attitudes towards the integration of teaching unplugged into our classrooms.

In conclusion, one needs to re-iterate the limitations of the study reported on here. This remains a small scale study that does not enable generalizing results beyond this population. Furthermore, since it is not possible to prove beyond all doubt that there were no confounding variables that influenced the enhanced performance of the experimental group in this study, it remains difficult to claim "cause and effect". However, the similarities of the control and experimental groups on the measures reported on before the intervention, and the

differences in scores after the intervention, provides some indication that it is possible that the intervention contributed to the improved abilities of the experimental group students. These empirical findings in the EFL teaching setting at least indicate that teaching unplugged could be potentially useful in this context.

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