The American University in Cairo
School of Humanities and Social Sciences

The Impact of Delayed Computer-Mediated Discussion on
Grammatical Accuracy of Egyptian EFL Learners’ Writing

A Thesis Submitted to

The Teaching English as a Foreign Language Department
The English Language Institute

In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts

by

Rasha Ramzy Aly Ahmed Sengar

May 2004
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To

Mum and Dad,

My Guarding Angels
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I Thank God for Helping Me Through
ABSTRACT

EFL learners face many problems when it comes to grammatical accuracy in writing; Egyptian EFL learners are no exception. Students learn new grammatical rules by heart, but in practicing writing, they are unable to put their knowledge of grammar to work. The learners continue to make basic errors in grammar after years of studying English. The weak grammatical competence of EFL learners may hinder their academic development. Exploring innovative ways to help EFL learners acquire grammatical accuracy more effectively represents a vital need, especially in the Egyptian educational setting. Writing via Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) might create an authentic purpose and a real audience for writing. When the learners are given the opportunity to discuss topics in CMC, they might be motivated to improve their writing skills to meet the demands of that authentic task. Delayed Computer-Mediated Discussion (DCMD) is an asynchronous form of CMC, which carries the benefits of CMC while incorporating the many advantages of writing via computers. Editing output is much easier in computer than in paper-and-pencil writing. The ease with which revision can be carried out on screen seems to encourage the learners to proofread more, and hence may be improve their grammatical accuracy.

The present study researched the impact of DCMD on the grammatical accuracy of Egyptian EFL learners’ writing. The aim was to compare the effect of composing using the DCMD mode and the paper-and-pencil mode on grammatical accuracy. Grammatical accuracy was examined in terms of four grammatical features, namely subject/verb agreement, articles, prepositions and tenses. The study followed an exploratory quasi-experimental design where a sample of volunteers from second year students at the Faculty of Nursing constituted the subjects in the study. Thirty students were randomly assigned to an experimental and a control group, with 15 students in each.

The experimental and control groups were given a pretest, which included one essay prompt on a topic related to the field of nursing. Then, the experimental group participated in DCMD, which constituted the treatment in the study, two times a week for a period of three weeks. The experimental group responded to nine discussion topics. The
subjects in the control group wrote on the same topics but in paper-and-pencil discussion (PPD). After the three weeks of administration of the treatment, both groups were given a posttest, in which they responded to another essay writing task. The written products of the two groups were compared before and after exposure to these two different modes of writing to examine the effect of each on grammatical accuracy.

The results of the study showed that DCMD did not have a significant impact on the performance of the experimental group in terms of the target grammatical features. Lack of significance could be attributed to the short duration of the treatment, as well as the small number of the participants. However, a close inspection of the data through frequency analyses suggested that, even though the results were not statistically significant, the subjects who participated in DCMD showed a tendency to make fewer errors in using articles, prepositions and tenses. More research is needed to investigate the impact of DCMD on the grammatical accuracy of EFL learners.
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**Abbreviations Used in the Study**

CALL: Computer Assisted Language Learning.

CMC: Computer-Mediated Communication.

DCMD: Delayed Computer-Mediated Discussion.

PPD: Paper and Pencil Discussion.

TEFL: Teaching of English as a Foreign Language.

TOEFL: Test Of English as a Foreign Language.

AUC: The American University in Cairo.