The Use of the WordBit Application to Increase English Vocabulary

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Abstract

In this era, mobile devices are considered a potential support in education, including language learning. It has been proved that students feel more motivated when their tasks include the use of technological gadgets. Moreover, cellphones have increasingly become an essential every day tool in schools presenting a diversity of options to be applied in the learning process. This paper describes how the WordBit cellphone application was implemented in San Gerardo Town high school, in Riobamba city and explains the results found after the intervention. This pedagogical intervention based on the MALL (Mobile-Assisted Language Learning) approach had the objective to increase the students' knowledge of words and their meaning. Three experimental groups were involved in this research with 69 students who presented the same academic and socio-cultural characteristics i.e. they used the same textbook, their English level corresponded to A1, their English teacher was the same, they belonged to the same community, and their family income was similar. The data was analyzed by applying descriptive and inferential statistics. The design was quasi-experimental since the groups were already assigned and chosen by availability. This was an explanatory study because the problem was identified by analyzing the effect, which was the dependent variable (Mobile Devices), and the cause, the independent variable (Lexical Improvement). For data collection and results analysis, the researcher used an initial survey to verify the problem and project feasibility; a pre-test to find out the students' level of English according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages; and a post-test to confirm the effectiveness of the intervention. The results demonstrated that students went from level A1 to A1+ and that the use of the WordBit (lockscreen) application promoted student's self-confidence and self-learning.

Keywords: WordBit, lexical improvement, MALL (Mobile Assisted Language Learning).

Resumen

En esta era, los dispositivos móviles son considerados como un recurso potencial en la educación y esto incluye el aprendizaje de un idioma. Se ha probado que los estudiantes se sienten más motivados cuando las actividades que deben desarrollar incluyen el uso de dispositivos tecnológicos. Además, los celulares se han convertido en una herramienta esencial en las actividades diarias dentro del aula pues presentan diversas opciones que pueden ser implementadas en el proceso de enseñanza. La presente investigación describe la implementación de la aplicación de celular WordBit en el colegio San Gerardo de la ciudad de Riobamba y analiza los resultados que se presentaron después de la intervención. Esta intervención pedagógica basada en el método de Aprendizaje de Idiomas con Asistencia Móvil, MALL por sus siglas en inglés, tuvo como objetivo incrementar el conocimiento de los estudiantes en lo relacionado a palabras y su significado. Esta investigación contó con la participación de tres grupos experimentales, con un total de 69 estudiantes quienes presentaron las mismas características académicas y socioculturales tales como el mismo texto, el mismo nivel de inglés correspondiente a A1, su pertenencia al mismo sector geográfico y el ingreso económico de sus familias era similar. Los datos fueron analizados aplicando tanto estadística descriptiva como inferencial. El diseño fue cuasiexperimental ya que los grupos fueron asignados y escogidos en base a la disponibilidad de estos. Este fue un estudio explicativo ya que el problema fue identificado por medio del análisis del efecto, la variable dependiente (mejoramiento del léxico), y la causa, la variable independiente (dispositivos móviles). Para la recolección de datos y el análisis de resultados, el investigador aplicó una encuesta inicial para verificar el problema y la viabilidad del proyecto; una prueba inicial para conocer el nivel de inglés de los estudiantes en base al Marco Común Europeo de Referencia para Lenguas; y una prueba final para confirmar la efectividad de las actividades desarrolladas durante la intervención. Los resultados demostraron que los estudiantes pasaron de nivel A1 a nivel A1+ y que el uso de la aplicación WordBit (pantalla bloqueada) promovió la autoconfianza y el autoaprendizaje en los estudiantes.

Palabras clave: WordBit, mejoramiento del léxico, MALL (Aprendizaje de Idiomas con Asistencia Móvil).

Introduction

Nowadays, with the advances of technology, there are many options to open new learning approaches, leaving behind the traditional educational model. One of the characteristics of this model is to consider the teacher as the main actor of the learning process. Technology around the world has created controversial points of view;

however, many studies have pointed out that technology gives a variety of benefits not only for students by allowing them access to quality education alternatives, but also for teachers by providing them with a variety of instructional methods and skills development.

This paper reports findings related to methods and techniques, which have been applied with the use of a mobile phone and the Word Bit application for lexical improvement in the English language. In addition, this study determined whether the use of this application helps to improve the vocabulary of students from 1st, 2nd, and 3rd years of "San Gerardo" High School.

Teachers and students in "San Gerardo" High School struggle with many challenges in the classrooms. Some of them are related to mobile devices such as smart phones, tablets, laptops, IPhone, IPad, etcetera, which due to their rapid spread give students access to wide range of contents, but at the same time, produce distraction and take over the attention of students using these devices.

Based on these facts, the main problem was identified. The students in 1st, 2nd, and 3rd year of high school showed to use mobile devices, mostly in texting messages, playing video games, and checking social networks. They go on line so frequently that it is fair to say they have developed a kind of addiction to these digital devices. According to the Pew Foundation, "the median number of daily texts for older teens rose from 60 in 2009 to 100 in 2011." Moreover, 64% of teens who have smart phones have messaged in class, even in educational institutions where mobile phones are banned (Cooper, 2005).

Despite being such a distractor, many teachers and students support mobile devices for academic and educational purposes due to the great variety of activities that can be used for in the classrooms, giving the teachers the possibility to make the most to improve the teaching-learning process.

In addition, Colly and Becerra (2014) in their article entitled " Evolución de la enseñanza aprendizaje del Inglés a través del uso de la tecnología ", emphasize that the use of (ICT) Technology of the information and Communication in the learning of English is being supported with the use of devices and applications which call the attention and give emphasis to the great advantages of cell phones in accessing to the multimedia and applications related to learning. In this sense, it is important to highlight the increasing popularity of the use of the Wordbit application as an educational tool focused on learning vocabulary. (Demi Colli-Novelo, 2014)

An image that describes the critical analysis is shown below:
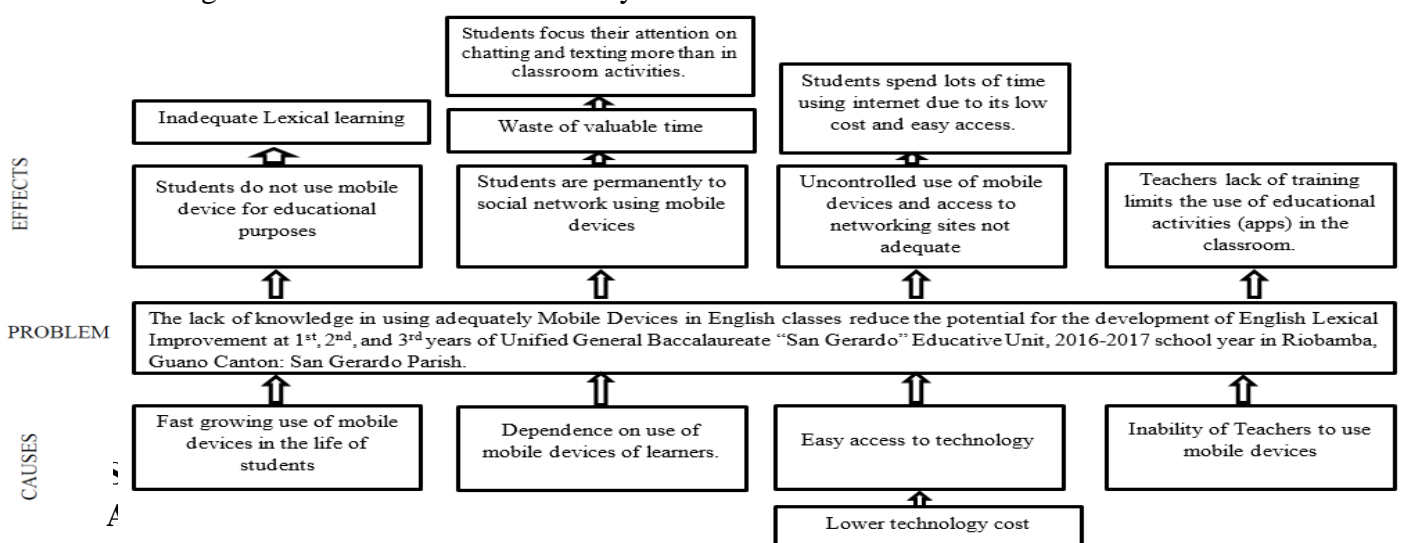
After making the critical analysis, the following objectives were set to incorporate the use of mobile device applications for lexical improvement in English in students at 1st, 2nd, and 3rd years of "San Gerardo "High School, to identify the main mobile devices used for English lexical improvement and to establish the most effective approach for English lexical improvement.

With this background, Word Bit application was selected as an intent to solve the problem of the lack of vocabulary that was found in the studied population, while attention was redirected to learn a word every time that they used their phone.

Word Bit is a free application for android that can be downloaded in every smart device. It combines the smartphone with the screen unblock and memorization, which allows students to learn words, small phrases and grammatical rules. Every time the user wants to check a new notification, or simply access to any application, Word Bit will ask the student to answer a vocabulary question. The questions will present four options and choosing one of the options, the correct one, will allow the user to unblock the device. Together with the word, pronunciation in audio and text, an illustration and an example are presented for basic levels.

This application is useful for any level, starting from basic A1 to advanced C1. The level must be chosen by the user at the time of the configuration. Another option is to change to test mode in order to practice the content learned or it is also possible to combine both modes at once. Furthermore, it also permits to share the advance made in any social network: Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, Hangouts and Messenger. Due to all these characteristics, Word Bit is a good tool to reinforce any other learning course (Universal, 2018).

On the other hand, some of the disadvantages reported by the users are that the application does not allow creating an account in order to save the advances made. Once you uninstall the app or restart the phone, the content already learned disappears. In addition, it always shows the tutorial and it is not possible to disable it. Moreover, some of the words are not so commonly used in a real context. These constraints undermine the effectiveness of the app, however compared to the benefits it presents; the app is not less worthy.

Lexis and vocabulary in EFL

The definition of lexis has changed over the years. Recently, it has shown that it implies more than a simple word that describes vocabulary. According to Scrivener in his book "Learning Teaching", vocabulary refers to words or set of words and lexis that describe the whole internal database of words, and ready-to-use phrases that we all use when we need them. It includes single words, collocations and chunks (a headphone, a chairman, mother-in-law) which Aichaoui (2005) refers as lexical elements (Scrivener, 2005).

Each language has a different set of words, which is inter-related to lexis and semantics. Jackson (1998) mentions that the knowledge and meaning of words are related to lexis, which is the base of a language. A dictionary describes the lexical definition of the word, but sometimes a word has more than one lexical definition. For example, the word "bolt" in English is a type of metal fastener; it is also used for a single ray of lightning (a lightning bolt). Finally, bolt is a verb meaning to run extremely fast. However, words can have either a lexical or a non-lexical meaning (Mindinueta, 2017).

The American Heritage dictionary describes lexis as the set of words used by learners and as the base of the linguistic competence; all four linguistic skills depends on it in order to convey an effective message. Vocabulary is usually developed through the years and implies a continuous process, which is easily acquired in L1, but specially challenging in L2 (Ley Organica de Educacion Superior, 2012).

In order to measure the knowledge of words, some aspects are considered: First, reception and production which deals with understanding when words are heard or read and production when they are written, affirmed, or followed. Second, the degree of knowledge of the words or set of words, which is determined by the gradual addition to a person's vocabulary in a period. The stages are (1) never encountered the word, (2) heard the word, but could not define it, (3) recognized the word due to context or tone of voice, (4) able to use the word and understand the general and/or intended meaning, but cannot clearly explain it, (5) fluent with the word – its use and definition. Third, depth of knowledge of a word or set of words, which is determined by how well a person uses its orthography – written form, morphology – word parts, phonology – spoken form, reference – meaning, semantics – concept and reference, register of use, collocation – lexical neighbors, word associations, syntax –

grammatical function. They can be learned simultaneously or through practice. Finally, the definition of the word, which has to do with the different meaning used in different occasions according to the context (Bauroni, 2017).

Vocabulary acquisition and learning

Imitation and association are the two first stages of vocabulary acquisition in early childhood, then it is spoken before it is read or written. Vocabulary keeps continuously growing through years, for instance: young adults by the time they get to their elder years must have learned about 6,000 more slogans. On average, a person in their twenties must use about 42,000, and on their sixties 48,200 slogans (Lin, 2008).

One way of expanding this vocabulary is by reading, writing, speaking and listening. The more extensive the vocabulary is the better communication a person may have. Furthermore, a good level of vocabulary speaks about the education and background a person has.   Wilkins (1972) mentioned, "Without grammar, you can transmit very little, without vocabulary, nothing can be transmitted."

Regarding native speakers, the level of education plays a very important role on the range of words they possess. It is mentioned that a 20-years old person knows about 42,000 slogans. These slogans come from 6,100-word families and at the age of 60 the same person must know an average of 6,000 more slogans (Canvin, 2015).

On the other hand, a foreigner must know from 3000-word families and 5000 words more frequent provide the use of words of 95% but it is necessary to know families of 5000 words for 99.9% of word coverage.

Moreover, when vocabulary in a second language is learned, it implies a continuous process and many techniques to effectively acquire it, such us memorization, which is considered as one of the best methods to learn vocabulary by associating the words of the native language with the learning of a second language. According to Sagarra and Alba, (2006) adults usually gather a quantity of vocabulary with the personalized memorization method. The only thing that is needed is many repetitions established for the acquisition of new vocabulary in the learning of a language (Arispe, 2014).

When a word in the second language is phonologically or visually like a word in the native language, it is assumed that they have the similar meaning although this case is not always true. When we find a false friend, memorization and repetition are a fundamental method to learn. When we have a very limited time and we need to learn a large amount of vocabulary, when the learner wants to remember information quickly or abstract concepts or meets false friends; memorization is the most appropriate method to use (Cannas, 2009).

Hooft J. (2006) says, "Mobile devices are important instruments that make teaching relevant and meaningful thereby the students improve their lexical and numeracy abilities". Meanwhile Attwell (2005), reports that mobile devices use encourages in an independent and collaborative way and also increases the learners' self-esteem and self-confidence.

The use of devices in English classes has not only created positive benefits about the use of mobile devices but also there are several impeding factors that must be considered. Mobile devices such as: smartphones, tablets, PCs and laptops are considered the principal devices used by the students in classrooms for learning English as a Foreign Language. However, there are certain different opinions. According to analysis of data in many researches done recently, most learners have smartphones and they prefer to use them instead of other devices and printed books. Meanwhile, teachers prefer learners not to use these devices because there are certain doubts about students surfing on social networks instead of paying attention in classes; for that reason, teachers prefer the use of the traditional tools for developing classes (Lucas, 2018).

Actually, as learners gain access and use mobile devices wherever they are, there has been a growing change by educators since they have enlisted these electronic appliances as tools that learners can use freely and feel more comfortable when learning inside English classrooms (Brown .B, 2009).

In many classrooms across Ecuador, there are learners bringing and using their mobile devices among them. Incidentally, some learners may use this kind of technology for purposes related to classroom activities such as taking notes, looking up for meanings of new words and vocabulary or may be surfing on the net. However, other students may be using these mobile devices in order to communicate with friends through WhatsApp, Messenger, or any other social networking site using various applications.

The main concern is knowing and understanding what incidence this behavior has on English lexical learning. Specifically, there is a need to examine if using mobile devices in English classrooms helps or hurts in the teaching process.

James (2008) declares that the mobile device use is a strongly inappropriate tool for learning or teaching because chatting and texting instead of paying attention in classrooms produces a negative effect in education.

Method

In order to develop the present research, the following methods were considered.

Deductive Method: it provided the opportunity to obtain conclusions and recommendations, examining general statements about the use of mobile devices for English Lexical Improvement in English by reasoning, understanding and finally applying them.

Inductive Method: it helped to go from particular cases observed in the field research process and reach generalization and conclusions. It also contributed to establish similarities and differences; and specially to discover true concepts about mobile devices in improving vocabulary.

Analytical Method: it served to break down and classify empirical analogies, scientific analogies and different ways of using mobile devices as well as improving vocabulary.

Synthetic Method: it served to put the information together and relate it to the study variables while processing an appropriate proposal through the bibliography.

Hypothetical – Deductive: it provides the researcher the opportunity to develop the problem statement, literature reviews, hypothesis formulation, data collection, data analysis, interpretations, conclusions, hypothesis testing, and generalization of results to increase theoretical knowledge.

Type of research

The type of research has been divided into three criteria.

Applied: it was used in a basic sense, not to create new laws or principles but rather to apply the knowledge in the research areas, in the use of mobile device and their impact on English lexical improvement among the students in 1st, 2nd, and 3rd years of "San Gerardo" Unified General Baccalaureate Education Unit.

Place: it is directly related to the field research since the researcher applied surveys and observation in the place where the intervention took place and the proposal was presented.

By the method: this research responds to the qualitative and quantitative methods because its development determined indicators of the qualitative characteristics and numerical data with quantitative indicators; therefore, the study was based on the deductive-inductive methods, which allowed analyzing the data, accepting the research hypothesis, and obtaining conclusions.

Research design

This is an experimental research since the population took part of an intervention, the WordBit application to observe its effects in lexical improvement. As an experimental research this study aimed to explain and demonstrate the changes of the dependent variable as a result of the independent variable i.e. a cause-effect

relationship is established. Another important characteristic of this design is to select homogenous groups, in this case the students from 1st, 2nd, and 3rd years of "San Gerardo" Unified General Baccalaureate Education Unit. The basic pre-experimental design was applied because there was a pre-test, an intervention, and a pre-test. As far as the group selection, it is considered a quasi-experimental design because the researcher chose the whole population once the groups were already formed.

Research level

This research work dealt with the use of mobile devices and their impact on English lexical improvement among the students from 1st, 2nd, and 3rd years, in "San Gerardo" Unified General Baccalaureate Education Unit and based on this background the following levels were taking into consideration.

Applied: it allowed using knowledge of theoretical researches focused on cell phones and their impact on English lexical improvement.

Descriptive: its purpose was to gather detailed information regarding the use of cell phones and their impact on English Lexical Improvement among the students in 1st, 2nd, and 3rd years, in "San Gerardo" Unified General Baccalaureate Education Unit, and analyze the variables changes.

Transversal: it took place during the first term of the second fifth-months period in the 2016-2017 school year, using a survey in order to gather information.

Correlational: it established the relationship between the dependent variable (Mobile Devices), and the independent variable (Lexical Improvement).

Research hypothesis

The main goal of this study is to increase students' vocabulary by using the WordBit cellphone application; then the research hypothesis is

The use of the Word Bit cellphone application in different class activities increase students lexical.

Research instrument

The research instrument was a questionnaire. The pre-test was applied at the beginning of the intervention and the post-test at the end. The test is divided into three sections: translation, sentences, and word definition with a total of twenty items graded over ten points. The section, which is directly related to the use of the Word Bit application, is translation.

Population

The population are students from 1st, 2nd, and 3rd years of, "San Gerardo" Senior High School, there are 25 students in the first group, 25 in the second, and 19 in the third one and due to the number of students the whole population 69 was considered the sample. It must be mentioned that the characteristics of the sample are related, the students have the same academic and socio-cultural characteristics i.e. they used the same textbook, their English level corresponded to A1, their English teacher was the same, they belonged to the same community, and their family income was similar.

Table Nº 1: *Population*

TABLE OF POPULATION	
POPULATION	**QUANTITY**
1st year	25
2nd year	25
3rd year	19
TOTAL	**69**

Source: San Gerardo Senior High School – Secretary's office.

Author: Wilson Rojas

Considering the size of the population, their characteristics and variables, the entire universe was considered sample in order to get results that are more reliable.

Analysis and interpretation of data

The results produced in this research were analyzed both descriptively and inferentially. The descriptive statistics was used to identify the problem and the main characteristics of the population. The first objective was to gather information regarding students' background knowledge of vocabulary, the use of mobile devices, internet access and familiarity with applications, which could be handled for educational purposes.

The inferential statistics helped to prove the research hypothesis and establish the level of improvement students presented after the intervention. With the purpose of presenting reliable results, the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) software was utilized. The ANOVA (Analysis of variance) was considered to compare and establish the differences of the population variables mainly how the age affects in the results. At the same time, the T test was used to prove the research hypothesis, this means if the implementation of the Word Bit application influenced in the students' lexical improvement. This level of improvement took students from level A1 to A1+.

Results

In order to measure students' improvement regarding words they learnt, the evaluation was formative and progressive since students had to develop the different activities presented in the student's book related to vocabulary. The following table shows students' progress and outcomes after the intervention.

Table Nº 2: *Comparison between Level A1 and A1+*

	A1	A1 +
CONTENTS	• Introductions (formal and informal) • Greetings and farewells (formal and informal) • Common classroom expressions. • Classroom items and supplies. • Adjectives (size, shape, length, etc.) • Numbers 1 -100 • Alphabet • Countries • Nationalities • Occupations	• Expressions of Quantity • Count and Non count nouns • Questions: How many How much • Quantifiers: Many, much, so, too, neither. Either. • Verbs (like, love, prefer, make, have) • Adverbs of frequency • Time expressions • Adverbs: before, after, then. • There is, there are (Affirmative and Negative statements) • Prepositions of place • Conjunctions: or
OUTCOME	Uncomfortable with vocabulary from the studied Units (1-3) course when completing tasks; incorporates very basic vocabulary only.	Demonstrates very good knowledge of vocabulary from the studied units (1-4) course to complete the tasks; elaborates well.

Source: Ministerio de Educación: National Curriculum Specifications

Author: Wilson Rojas

The results based on the Pre and Post Test showed the effects of using the Word Bit cellphone application; in students from 1st, 2nd, and 3rd years of "San Gerardo" Unified General Baccalaureate Education.

The media or average regarding the Pre-Test in each group is:
1ST School Year: 1, 6 out of 5, 0
2nd School Year: 1, 5 out of 5, 0
3rd School Year: 1, 8 out of 5, 0

The media or average regarding the Post Test in each group is:
1ST School Year: 2, 0 out of 5, 0
2nd School Year: 2, 0 out of 5, 0
3rd School Year: 2, 3 out of 5, 0

Table Nº 3: *Average Comparison of School Years*

School Year	TEST	
	PRE	POST
1st. School Year	1,6	2,0
2nd. School Year	1,5	2,0
3rd. School Year	1,8	2,3

AVERAGE COMPARISION SCHOOL YEARS

Source: Pre and Post Test
Author: Wilson Rojas

The hypothesis in the present study was "the use of the Word Bit cellphone application in different class activities increases students' vocabulary." Then, the results indicated that the use of WordBit was excelled.

The graphic below demonstrates the obtained results from the Pre and Post Test related to "Translation" in three different questions, which were evaluated in the 1st, 2nd and 3rd years of high school.
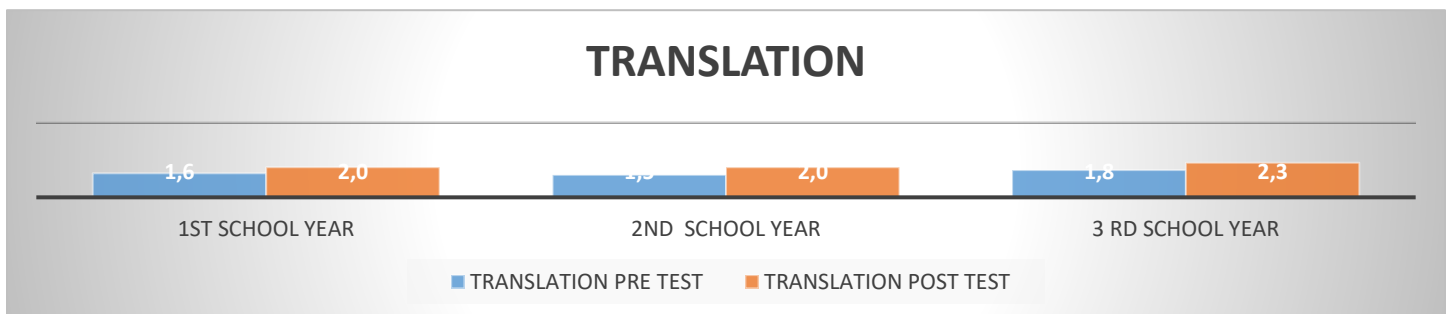
Graph Nº 2: Translation results from Pre and Post Test
Source: Pre and Post Test
Author: Wilson Rojas

The 1st school year shows an average of 1, 6 in the Pre-Test and the average of 2, 0 in the Post Test; these values show a difference. On the other hand, the 2nd school year displays an average of 1, 5 in the Pre-Test and the average of 2, 0 in the Post Test which means that there is a marked difference.

Finally, the 3rd school year interprets an average of 1, 8 in the Pre-Test and the average of 2, 3 in the Post Test, the last value shows an increasing improvement in translation.

Thus, these averages between Pre and Post Test show and increasing level of lexical regarding translation. It clearly shows that there was a vocabulary improvement.

With the purpose of presenting reliable results, the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) software and the ANOVA (Analysis of variance) for paired samples were used to compare and establish the differences of the population variables, mainly how the different in age affected the results. At the same time, the T-test was applied to prove the study hypothesis.

Therefore, the ANOVA test showed two principal factors: the age of the population did not affect in the results obtained and the implementation of the WordBit application did influence in the students' lexical improvement.

Discussion and Conclusions

Since the use of mobile technology occupies a big space in education, especially in language learning and in addition in the development of the language, the WordBit application, which provided a combination of a number of words which support vocabulary acquisition for L2 learners of English was applied. Considering that mobile technology is defined as any device with internet capability that is accessible from anywhere the user is.

In this study, the effect and influence that the use of mobile technology with the WordBit application had in lexical improvement in students from 1st, 2nd, and 3rd year of, "San Gerardo" Senior High School was analyzed. Interestingly, a preliminary study demonstrated that widespread use of mobile and wireless devices in education has led to revolutionary changes in the way teachers teach and learners learn. Due to their pervasiveness, mobile phones are considered potentially valuable learning tools. In this way, the three groups that participated in this study had considerable changes before, during and after the intervention process.

The intervention was implemented using the free open WordBit application. This application is compatible with android cellphones and it was installed along with android system. According to the data and characteristics collected from some sources, WordBit has great content of words ranging from a basic level A1 to an advanced level C1 under the standards of the Common European Framework of References for Languages, which allows learning vocabulary in a fun way and it also has audio to listen to the correct pronunciation of the vocabulary in English. All these boundaries allow students to reach from A1 to A1+ which was noticed thought the statistical process done with the data obtained in the Pre and Post Test results at the end of the intervention.

In this study, it is important to point out that the process of mobile learning through WordBit (lockscreen) arose the academic interest of students. The implementation of mobile phones and applications foster full interest in the classrooms to develop interesting and diverse activities to improve students' vocabulary and language skills.

Moreover, WordBit has more than 20,000 phrases and expressions totally free and vocabulary used in the IELTS, TOEFL, and even SAT examinations. Word Bit also has phrases and expressions most used for any type of occasion such as: romantic and business phrases, colloquial expressions.

The difference among this study and other studies are mainly focused on the results obtained in motivation, at the beginning of the intervention the students felt unmotivated since their English activities were monotonous and concentrated more on the traditional use of physical dictionaries for the learning of new vocabulary and this activity did not contribute to positive academic development. Taking into account that in English classes the acquisition of lexicon is so important for acquiring L2 developing different activities. Whereas, WordBit is an educational application created by education experts that allowed them to engage and develop their minds in fun and dynamic ways.

During the intervention, the researcher faced one constraint which was the risk of the applications taking away time from student's classroom activities. Nevertheless, the selective use of the WordBit application put students on the best road for learning vocabulary.

However, this study also found that the acceptance of the technology for some teachers plays an important role in this process because today's teachers and classrooms are unlikely they were many years ago.

Today's classrooms are different, they are equipped with computers, mobile devices and other types of technology; teachers and students are learning the same lesson but using different methods and strategies to get better results.

WordBit offered us the digital education as a tool to improve vocabulary where the teacher became a guide and facilitator, and the students were the protagonist of their own learning.

On the other hand, the limitation of internet in schools is a big problem because internet has taken a big integral part in our daily routine, but fortunately WordBit application does not need internet connection.

In general, there will be hundreds of applications, methods or tools which influence in the students' lexical improvement but WordBit application helped to achieve the grail of transforming teaching and learning in lexical improvement in students from 1st, 2nd, and 3rd year of, "San Gerardo" High School.

It is also important to look at the appropriate role of technology in the classroom. Technology can be a powerful tool, but it must be implemented with the intention of enhancing educator-facilitated learning, not replacing it. It must also be paired with real professional development for educators, not a "just add water" program of handing students a device and expecting positive results (Weingarten, 2016, p. 15).

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