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Newspaper Headlines in EFL Classes: Development of Reading and Writing Skills

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ABSTRACT

Newspapers do not only carry the role of spreading news nation or worldwide but also serve as an educational tool in foreign language contexts subsidiarily. Consisting of as few words as possible yet to define a lot of ideas, newspaper headlines were considered to form a fruitful base for promoting reading and writing skills of pre-service EFL teachers. With this thought in mind, a news story prediction activity was implemented with 45 pre-service teachers at the English Language Teaching (ELT) Department of a state university in Turkey. Completed through two semesters (20 weeks), this study required the participants to keep newspaper portfolios in which they put a) the news story that they found, b) their written prediction based on the headline before reading the content, and c) written comparison of their prediction with the original news story focusing on matching and/or mismatching points of their guesses after reading the news story. The researcher assessed students' performance by giving them two headlines at the end of each semester. In addition, a questionnaire was distributed to the students to gather their thoughts about reading and writing skills improvement and also the appreciation of the utilized technique. Together with the portfolio process evaluation and a final interview, this study underpins the contribution of newspaper headlines for facilitating the reading and writing skills of pre-service teachers of EFL.

INTRODUCTION

The first and foremost objective of the newspapers is to disseminate news about local and/or international politics, sports, industry, education and so forth. The most crucial part of news stories lies in the headlines which hook the readers' attention by summarizing the important points. Dor (2003:720) states the function of the headlines as "negotiators between stories and readers" and underpins the difficulty of producing an appropriate headline. On the same issue, Williams (2013) suggests eight grammar rules for writing a headline: use present simple tense for past events, leave out auxiliary verbs, use infinitives for future events, leave out articles (a, an, the), leave out "to be", leave out "to say", replace conjunctions with punctuation, and use figures for numbers.

The aforementioned interplay of the words in newspaper headlines resulted in the emergence of "headlines" (Mårdh, 1980) which simply means the language used in headlines. Numerous studies were conducted on the aspects of headlines, such as article drop (Weir, 2009), phraseological meaning and conversational humor (Feyaerts, 2006), historical account of the changes in headline formation (Bell, 2003), corpus based analysis of headlines (Ju & Yeon, 2015), translation of rhetorical figures in headlines (Monsefi, 2017), linguistic analysis of errors in translating the headlines (Al Karazoun, 2016), and various syntactic structures causing ambiguity (Iljina and Prikule, 2016).

Brône and Coulson (2010) dealt with the cognitive and aesthetic effect of double grounding which is "a form of intentional ambiguity often used in the construction of headlines" (p. 212). In their study, they found that the participants spent longer reading times for headlines with double-grounded metaphors compared to single-grounded ones. In addition, participants' ratings were high for double-grounded metaphors on a wittiness scale, which proves the aesthetic effect of them. Despite spending longer time on comprehending them, participants seemed to have enjoyed the resulting situation as double-grounded metaphors were thought to be witty.

Ambiguity in headlines causes difficulty in comprehension and White (2011) mentions the difficulties for language learners in comprehending headlines as prosodic, syntactic and semantic patterns. Similarly Watanabe, Hare and Lomax (1984) state problematic areas for comprehending headlines as background knowledge (prior knowledge), specialized or uncommon vocabulary, and telegraphic syntax.

In addition to ambiguity, wordplay in headlines is another stumbling block for language learners. For instance, Roberts (1998) studied on the wordplays in headlines of British press and focused on how foreign language learners of English come to comprehend those wordplay examples in the headlines. By presenting a list of headlines, he asked the learners to match the headlines with the texts. Aimed at seeing how foreign language learners extract meaning from the headlines, his study also touched upon the culture-bound side of headlines. He concludes that wordplay in the headlines causes a barrier for foreign learners of English "unless that learner is culturally-aware and informed of significant events" taking place in that nation (p.115).

Despite all the ambiguity and wordplay they embody, newspaper headlines offer numerous opportunities within a language learning context. For instance, Watanabe, Hare and Lomax (1984) stated that by scanning a headline, students' inference-making skills improve. Besides, they would be more inclined to explore new material, and a few stalwart readers of comics, movie pages and sports may try other sections of newspapers. The researchers arrived at that conclusion after testing the effect of headline reading instruction and prediction-making practice. Watanabe, Hare and Lomax (1984) formed four groups of eighth graders: a control group with no specific training related to newspaper headlines, a group that received instruction as to headline reading, a group that received prediction-making practice only, and a group that received both instruction and practice. Based on participants' post-test scores, they found that two treatments (instruction and practice) contributed to students' performance separately; both of them were more efficient making the mean scores the highest.

While White (2011) proposes that foreign language learners can comprehend the message of headline by singling out each difficulty posed by headlines and working on them, Tafida and Dalhatu (2014) also put forward that newspapers can be used at all levels of language proficiency and present some ways of implementation. They stated that newspapers can be used to enhance reading, writing and speaking skills of language learners by means of various activities, which was supported by other scholars as well (Correia, 2006; Mehta, 2010).

There are several studies focusing on the benefits of using newspapers with the aim of enhancing language skills in Turkish context. For instance, Karadağ and Kayabaşı (2011) asked first year university students (enrolled at Turkish Language and Social Sciences Teaching Departments) to choose a columnist and read three news articles of them and write a report about those. The study aimed at improving writing skills of students in Turkish. The outcome of the study proved that the students improved not only their writing skills but the other language skills as well. In addition, students expressed they developed themselves personally through an enjoyable process. Akdemir, Barin and Demiröz (2012) also utilized newspaper articles in order to enhance Turkish university students' speaking skills in English. Systematic assessments justified the improvement in students' speaking skill. Authors concluded that students benefitted from exposure to various language patterns and cultural practices by reading the newspaper articles. Such an outcome was also present in Özkan's study (2015) in which she used news stories with freshman ELT students in grammar courses. Collected through a questionnaire and an interview, her data demonstrated that the students benefitted from newspaper articles as authentic texts since the texts helped them build a schemata and it led to a creative language study among all the other stated benefits.

Within this framework, the present study aims at answering the following research questions:

- 1) Does newspaper headline prediction activity improve reading skills of pre-service EFL teachers?
- 2) Does newspaper headline prediction activity improve writing skills of pre-service EFL teachers?

3) Does newspaper headline prediction activity cause reading and writing course atmosphere to be more enjoyable?

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Participants of the present study were 45 Turkish pre-service EFL students (33 females and 12 males) aged between 18 and 21. They all enrolled at Advanced Reading and Writing Course I and II given at both semesters of the first year of English Language Teaching Department and the researcher was the lecturer of the course. Demographic information survey showed that majority of the participants (31%) read newspapers written in Turkish everyday; nevertheless, most of them (38%) rarely read newspapers written in English. They did not receive any newspaper related training before.

Context

English Language Teaching Department at Cukurova University in Adana, Turkey forms the context of the study. The Department gives a five-year education together with a preparatory class. Those who pass preparatory exam successfully begin their first year education at the department. Students at the department are educated to be English Language teachers; thus, upon completing their studies, most of them apply for state exams to be appointed by the Ministry of Education. The aforementioned course- Advanced Reading and Writing Course- is delivered at the first year of education since the initial step for reading and writing skill is given at preparatory stage. This course also forms the baseline for further courses since achievement at this course eases the comprehension and analysis of language teaching related tasks in the following years.

Data Collection Procedure

The study lasted for two semesters (20 weeks), and newspaper headline activity was used supplementarily in addition to the regular reading and writing course curriculum. At the beginning of the first semester, the researcher explained the procedure to the students and brought two headlines one of which was easy to guess the content while the other could lead to various interpretations. The reason for those preliminary examples was to make the participants understand that the desired headlines are not those whose content can easily be guessed but the ones which are open to predictions. The students were free to choose whatever topics they are interested in.

Students searched through newspapers (mostly via Internet, central library at the university, and the bookstores) and chose two headlines for every week. After writing the headlines into their portfolios, they wrote a paragraph (4 to 10 sentences) guessing the content of the news story. They could use the pictorial clues for their predictions as well. Next, they read the news story and compared it with what they had written previously again by writing a paragraph concentrating upon similarities or differences with what they guessed. They put all

those predictions together with the news story into their portfolios. Below example clarifies the process:

Participant (henceforth P) 21: *Headline: Cheap oil could kill, not cure our economy*

Prediction: I guess that this headline relates to oil's harms. For example, consumption of cheap oil may damage our health. It may cause several diseases in our bodies.

Post-reading: After reading the news, I understood that I guessed wrong things because this news mentions how the oil price affects economy. This news says that "the plummeting oil price reflects a world in which production exceeds consumption".

Every other week, the students brought their portfolios and the teacher chose four or five headlines that may lead to an in-class discussion, which stimulate their reading and comprehension skills, and speaking skills as well. Once a month, the researcher gave feedback on their portfolios and also discussed on the predictions which urged the students to focus on every word in headlines thus facilitating the activity.

The students were submitted two headlines both for the first and second term final exam. At the end of two-term study, a questionnaire was submitted to the participants with the intention of gathering their own feelings as to possible development in their reading and writing skills together with their feeling of enjoyment out of the activity. The researcher also took notes as to the feedback sessions with the participants. Face-to-face individual interviews formed the last source of data of the study.

Data Analysis

This study adopted mixed method research design; it involves collection and analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data. Data of this study was gathered from: the scores for predictions based on newspaper headlines, end questionnaire, the researcher's notes about regular checks of students' portfolios within one to one monthly feedback sessions, and a final interview. The analyses of each data are presented under separate headings below.

1- Scores for Newspaper Headlines

At the end of each semester, students were given two headlines as a part of their final exam. The first criterion behind choosing those specific headlines was that newspaper articles should come from the newspapers of the countries where English is a native language- American and British press were utilized in this study. Another criterion is that one of the headlines would be rather easier to comment while the other one would be difficult and lead the participants into focusing on every word by concentrating on extracting the most possible stories. Participants were scored in accordance with a rubric researcher designed specifically for this study (see Table 1 below).

Table 1. Rubric for assessing predictions based on newspaper headlines

Criteria	Percentage of the Score- Scores were given on weak- acceptable-moderate-good- very good scale
Does the written prediction focus on every word in the headline or not? (One or some words are left out or not?)	10%
Is the prediction close to the original news story or not? If it is not close to the real story, is the prediction probable or not?	40%
Are writing conventions (spelling, grammar and word choice) used appropriately or not?	40%
Is sentence length appropriate or not? (At least five sentences should be written. Each simple and complex sentence is accepted as one sentence while compound sentence is regarded as two sentences)	10%

As it is demonstrated in the above table, half of the scores (first two) are given for reading skill and the other half for the writing skill. After the implementation of final exams, the same rubric was given to another colleague of the researcher working at the same department. At the end of individual scoring process, inter-rater reliability was found 92% (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The headlines chosen for the exams (1a and 2a were accepted rather easier than 1b and 2b) and the mean scores - obtained from predictions based on headlines- of the participants are demonstrated in Table 2 below (see Appendix for the links of the headlines).

Table 2. Headlines asked at the exams and the mean scores of the students

	Headlines	Mean Score
1 st Term	1a) Sudan's cinema lovers dream of better days 1b) In China, projects to make Great Wall feel small	77
2 nd Term	2a) Should California water wasters face jail? A drought debate 2b) At pet-happy Stephens College, some dogs and cats come with a scholarship	88

Headlines used during the exams and two example responses for those headlines are given below:

1a) *Headline: Sudan's cinema lovers dream of better days*

P 35: *Sudan's cinema is probably in a bad situation. There is a lack of cinema saloons in the city. Because of this, you may walk lots of kilometers to reach and watch a film. And also,*

maybe the quality of cinema sector is not good enough. Actually, I don't remember that I have watched a film that comes from Sudan.

In the above prediction, the participant concentrates on what might be the negative things experienced by cinema lovers upon focusing on "better days" in the headline. She mentions "lack of cinema saloons" and "quality of cinema sector" as two possible problems. She concludes by adding her personal experience in order to support what she stated before.

P 39: *In Sudan, people who are enjoying watching movies are expecting to make their own films. Local artists were too passive for Sudan. The governor started the campaign of opening cinema schools in Sudan. Sudan will build its own film industry soon. There are speculations about its name which can be "SULLYDOOD".*

Here, the participant uses the jargon for movie sector (local artists, film industry) by writing skillfully in a newspaper style. Taking on a news reporter standpoint, he even announces the "speculations" as to the name of that film industry: SULLYDOOD. This excerpt shows that he thinks critically by combining "Sudan" and "Hollywood/Bollywood" which are famous film industries in the world and creates a new name. By writing it with capital letters, he also tries to attract the attention of the readers.

1b) *Headline: In China, projects to make Great Wall feel small*

P 24: *As we all know, Great Wall can be seen even from space. This demonstrates how massive structure it is, and many Chinese are proud of it. But according to the headline, China is making very important and big projects that even the Great Wall will be nothing compared with them.*

This prediction focuses on Great Wall and how massive it is. The participant uses his world knowledge in the first sentence and then comments on that by including Chinese people and their feelings about the wall. Depicting such pieces of information as "given", he then moves to "new" information, which establishes a logical transition. By focusing on better and bigger projects at the end, he gets closer to the real news story.

P 40: *Chinese government makes a plan to make Great Wall feel smaller. It is understood that Chinese people complain about Great Wall such as too long to walk, so the government decides to take precautions and make this project. People can travel with their own car on Great Wall, so it is felt smaller.*

This participant focuses on the massive structure but from a different perspective. Being aware of the difficulty of walking on the wall, he predicts a new project which will ease the task of pedestrians. This situation may make the wall "smaller". This prediction goes far from the real news story but presents a probability of such projects.

2a) *Headline: Should California water wasters face jail? A drought debate*

P 3: *I think there is a lack of water in California and there are lots of people who waste the water. And also there is a debate among the people, and in this debate people want the ones*

who waste the water to face or to go to the jail. And I think they believe that if something is not done immediately, in the future there will be a draught.

In the above prediction, Participant 3 touches upon every word in the headline and creates the connection among them step by step. First, she states the presence of water shortage in California and a group of people wasting water. Then, s/he takes the word "debate" and the question mark into consideration and discriminates between the ones who are in favor of facing the jail and the ones who are not. The concluding sentence is her remark on what might be the outcome in the future in case of not taking any precautions.

P 22: These days, water resources are our main topic because our world is warming day by day and water sources are limited. In California, the government may take some steps to preserve water, so they will punish the water wasters by sentencing them to jail. Also they may think that this kind of punishment can be useful. Good luck California!

The participant starts the prediction by concentrating on "limited water resources" issue which is shared throughout the world. Then she narrows down the subject to California. By merging her own opinion and the debate, she expresses that the government may vote for sentencing those wasting water to jail. The participant concludes with a wish, and with that wish and the exclamation mark, she creates a close bond with the reader as if between a columnist and her readers.

2b) *Headline: At pet-happy Stephens College, some dogs and cats come with a scholarship*

P 17: There are a lot of homeless animals outside. They don't have shelter and they are suffering. To prevent this situation, Stephens College may start an organization about pet-happiness. The college encourages students to look after pets. If students take care of pets and slow down their bad situations, college may reward them with a scholarship. Thanks to the scholarship, pets become happy.

Going from "general" to "specific" strategy or "top-down" technique is used in the above prediction. The participant centers her ideas on dogs and cats without shelters first. Then focusing on that specific college, she combines the happiness of the animals (pet-happy) and the "scholarship". Looking after pets brings the students a scholarship. This win-win situation establishes happiness on both sides: pets are happy and the students receive scholarships.

P 7: When I read the headline, I thought that there is an animal college named as pet-happy Stephens College. I guess some people who have pets send their pets to that college in order to educate and prepare them to some animal intelligence tournaments and some clever dogs and cats that pass the entrance exam with a good point go with a scholarship.

This participant thinks of the college as belonging to pets, and this thought might arise from the increasing number of pet-caring facilities and pet contests. As a result, he assumes that pet owners send them to such colleges for training sessions. By naming the assessment system as "animal intelligence tournaments", he puts forward a basis for obtaining a scholarship.

The researcher also applied paired samples t-test on the scores of the students for the finals. The results of the test proved that there is a significant difference ($p= 0.019$, $p\leq 0.05$) between the scores of the first final exam and the second final exam.

	N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1 test1 & test2	45	,348	,019

Thus, p value of the t-test also approved the meaningful progress of the students in their exam scores for the news story prediction.

2- Questionnaire

In addition to the exam scores based on the predictions, the participants were submitted a questionnaire at the end of the second semester in which they were asked to respond to three questions. The students were requested to circle the option -Yes or No- which fits into their situations best and then explain the reason(s) behind. First question was about whether they improved their reading skill or not. Thirty eight participants (84%) responded affirmatively while seven of them (16%) circled the opposite option. Improvement in writing skill was the next question, and 82% of the participants (n: 37) were of the opinion that the headline activity improved their writing skill while 18% (n: 8) of them disagreed on the issue. The last question focused on the enjoyment received from the headline activity. The majority of the participants (n: 39, 87%) stated that they enjoyed the headline activity whereas a small number of participants (n: 6, 13%) reflected the opposite situation. The answers given for the questionnaire can be summarized in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Responses for the questionnaire

Participants ...	YES (n- %)	NO (n- %)
Improved their reading skills	38 (84%)	7 (16%)
Improved their writing skills	37 (82%)	8 (18%)
Enjoyed the headline activity	39 (87%)	6 (13%)

Overall, the questionnaire proved that the participants felt that they improved their reading and writing skills through an enjoyable activity. Participants who stated they improved their reading skills were asked to give reasons why they felt so. Analysis of the reasons put forward by the participants yielded seven themes in Table 4 listed from the most frequent to the least.

Table 4. Reasons for the improvement in reading skill

Areas of improvement	f	%
Critical reading/critical thinking	13	21
Learning new words	12	19
Guessing the meaning of unknown words from the context	11	17
Exposure to an authentic text	8	13
Exposure to newspaper style	6	10

Learning new information	4	6
Skimming skill	4	6
Reading faster	3	5
Scanning skill	2	3

Most of the participants (21%) reflected that their *critical reading* and also *critical thinking* abilities improved via the headline activity. The second most frequent reason is that the participants statements of *learning new words* (19%). *Guessing the meaning of unknown words from the context* is the third most frequent reason (17%) expressed by the participants. The rest of the reasons given for the improvement in reading skill are "*exposure to an authentic text, exposure to newspaper style, learning new information, skimming skill, reading faster, and scanning skill*".

Following statements exemplify the reasons for reading skill improvement:

P 13: *Newspapers are very important source of good language examples so they help us to understand easily what we read day by day. Also if we read newspaper very often, we improve our vocabulary. We learn new words everyday and we understand what we read faster. All these improved our reading skills.*

P 36: *When we did this kind of activity, we looked every meaning of a word in the headline so it helped me to learn new words. It also helped me to focus on not only the thing that is written but also the other possible meanings of words.*

P 43: *Headline activity helped me to think what it is about and ask myself questions critically.*

The questionnaire also showed that majority of the participants (82%) felt that they improved their writing skills as well. Reasons given for the improvement can be easily seen in Table 5 below.

Table 5. Reasons for the improvement in writing skill

Areas of improvement	f	%
Writing faster and more easily	22	35
Using new words in writing	14	23
Thinking critically while writing	9	15
Exposure to various writing styles/language patterns	7	11
Learning new information to write about	4	6
Being motivated to write	4	6
Writing creatively/ writing new stories	2	3

Most of the participants (35%) stated that they can *write faster and more easily* compared to their previous writing attempts. They also expressed that they *use new words* from the news stories in their writing (23%). Critical thinking plays a major role in writing as well, which was indicated by the participants' expressions (15%). They stated that they began to think critically while writing in English. The other reasons for writing skill improvement

are "exposure to various writing styles/language patterns, learning new information to write about, being motivated to write, and writing creatively/ writing new stories". Some of the example sentences expressed by the participants are:

P 7: *This activity pushes me to express what I think about the headline. At the beginning, I had to write but later on I realized that it is beneficial, and I wanted to write. I do not feel that I have to write, I feel that I like writing.*

P 14: *Newspapers include both daily language and also formal language. So we can see new words, new collocations and phrases. All those are the keys for qualified writings and they extend our vision, which is important while writing. It helps us to write easily what we think.*

P 27: *While writing, I am trying to find the most suitable word for my sentences because a word has various meanings. I have learned to choose the most appropriate one for me. Thanks to this activity, I am trying to learn all meanings of every single word.*

The third section questioned whether the participants enjoyed the headline activity, and 39 out of 45 participants stated their enjoyment through seven emerging themes listed in Table 6.

Table 6. Reasons for the enjoyment behind the headline activity

Reasons	f	%
Similarity to a guessing game	28	49
Personal development	8	14
Freedom on expressing opinions	7	12
Providing an enjoyable classroom atmosphere	6	11
Learning new words	6	11
Reading new materials	1	2
Reading headlines	1	2

Majority of the participants (49%) likened the headline activity to a *guessing game* which they really enjoyed playing. They verbalized their enjoyment by expressing that they were so willing to exercise the headline activity. Participants also stated they *developed themselves personally* (14%) and that they enjoyed their *freedom over expressing opinions* (12%). In order to exemplify the participants' enjoyment, following statements can be presented:

P 8: *Sometimes we guess so different and interesting situations that it makes our lessons funnier. Moreover, thanks to this activity, I learn new information in every single lesson.*

P 11: *This activity is like a game that we don't know what will be at the end. Also, we focus on every word given in the headlines. Whatever we did was so enjoyable.*

P 25: *Sometimes my predictions about newspaper headlines were not true, so I enjoyed this situation. Sometimes in class, my friends and I laughed at the comments because they were so funny and wrong. I learned thinking through various dimensions.*

3- Feedback Sessions on Students' Portfolios

The researcher used the same rubric (see Table 1 above) in evaluating the portfolios of the students -without giving scores- with the aim of familiarizing the students with the important points and enhancing their reading and writing skills as well. Regular checks of students' portfolios and one to one monthly feedback sessions proved the following points about students' improvement.

Despite the fact that the researcher brought two example headlines and made it clear from the onset of the study that the selected headline should not be so clear but open to various discussion points, the participants had a tendency to choose headlines that clearly indicates their subject matters. Systematic checking of the portfolios and feedback sessions caused students to be more careful and selective in both choosing the headlines and writing their predictions upon them. The students' improvement was apparent from their portfolios: the very first headline choice and prediction was disparate from the last headline choice regarding the simplicity of the headlines and the length of the predictions. The following excerpts demonstrate those differences:

Excerpts from the initial stage of the study:

P 16: Selected Headline: *Ebola serum supply reaches Liberia*

Prediction: *I have been told about Ebola that it is an infectious disease. As I understood from this headline, the methods that were improved for treatment, the Ebola, reached Liberia. The scientists may have been studying for preventing this disease.*

Post-reading: *My guess about news is correct because in this news doctors' hopes about treatment to combat the virus were expressed. Doctors in Liberia will monitor how safe and effective the serum treatment being given at Elwa Hospital in Monrovia is.* (Here, apart from choosing a headline which is easy to understand, the participant wrote the same sentence from the news story)

P 23: Selected Headline: *Beşiktaş looking for revenge against Liverpool*

Prediction: *I think Beşiktaş football team lost the match against Liverpool and they try to do their best and want to win the game.*

Post-reading: *I read the news and I got surprised because Beşiktaş lost the match with 8-0. This is so disappointing. My prediction is correct.* (Here, the participant chose an easy-to-guess headline and did not seem to give effort into scrutinizing the article)

P 37: Selected Headline: *Battery charging units for wheelchairs to be in İstanbul metro stations*

Prediction: *I think government is trying to help disabled people who use metro stations. The government may want to increase the use of metro stations by disabled people. Therefore, they started a new organization for wheelchairs* (Here, the second sentence seems like the

reiteration of the first sentence, and the participant did not focus on the word "battery" in the title).

Post-reading: *I almost thought the same thing with the news story because it is a new initiative to aid disabled persons in city life.*

P 3: Selected Headline: *As robots grow smarter, American workers struggle to keep up*

Prediction: *Because of the fact that robots growing widespread and doing almost everything, American workers have been losing their works.*

Post-reading: *My prediction and the news match each other* (Here, the participant chose a very clear headline that can easily be guessed and she wrote brief statements).

Excerpts from the final stage of the study:

P 10: Selected Headline: *Why are the most of us right-handed?*

Prediction: *As human beings, we generally don't love using our left hands. Mostly, we prefer using our right hands. I think this situation is related to our brain's lobes. In that, brain has two lobes: right and left. In the right hemisphere, we use our imagination, writing and words, but left lobe is more arithmetical and numerical than the right lobe. I think this is related to our brain's lobes. We use our right hands as we are prone to right hemisphere.*

Post-reading: *I couldn't guess this time correctly. This news story tells us that if someone uses the left hemisphere then s/he generally uses the right side of the body or vice versa. Thus, someone using left part of the brain generally uses his/her right hand* (Although her/his knowledge about brain lobes is not correct in the "prediction" part, the participant used longer sentences and technical jargon. "Post-reading" part demonstrates that the participant reflects what new information s/he received and that s/he tries to reflect it in a paragraph style- more or less).

P 22: Selected Headline: *Magic mushroom in Queen Elizabeth II's garden*

Prediction: *In my opinion, this mushroom which grows in Queen Elizabeth II's garden has some special features. For example, it can cure some illnesses and it is beneficial for health so it is called "magic mushroom".*

Post-reading: *After I read the news, I realized that I was wrong. The news was about a kind of mushroom which has hallucinogenic properties. It can be harmful for human beings and nobody knows why they were cultivated in Queen Elizabeth's garden* (Here, the selected headline might be easy to understand, yet at least the participant tried to figure out what that "magic" stands for. "Post-reading" part also focuses on the properties of the mushroom).

P 34: Headline: *Libraries without physical books find a niche in San Antonio*

Prediction: *The news is about a new technological product. People may produce new technological library. This library doesn't have any books which are printed although it has computer, iPad, etc. People may be more comfortable thanks to this invention. They can*

easily reach a lot of information but they have to make an effort if they want to read a book. In addition, the article may give some opinions about this production. The writer may explain why and how this production was invented.

Post-reading: *My prediction and the topic of the article are similar. That is the second library to be exclusively digital in San Antonio. This library has a lot of visitors and reading is easier compared to reading printed books. For example “We never have any complaint about ‘why don’t you have any printed books’” said Bexar County judge. (Here, the prediction part is supported by longer sentences, and the participant tries to visualize what kind of library the headline refers to. "Post-reading" part keeps the same track and the participant even refers to the news story to support her/his opinion.)*

The examples above are indicative of the fact that as time passed, students got accustomed to the newspaper style, and regular readings and writings into their portfolios facilitated their reading and writing skills, which validates the exam scores and the responses given for the questionnaire. Students voiced their improvement in reading and writing skill during one to one feedback sessions as well.

4- Interview

At the end of the study, the researcher conducted face-to-face individual interviews in order to gather the participants' overall feelings regarding the newspaper headline activity. The students were all asked the same question: Please share your opinions and feelings about the newspaper headline activity. The interviews were conducted at the researcher's office within five days, and they lasted for approximately 90-100 minutes. During the interview sessions, the researcher took notes of the students' comments. The opinions of the students were analysed through content analysis and the researcher counted the frequency of each theme as well. The analyses of the interviews yielded the themes depicted in Table 7 below.

Table 7. Opinions of the participants about the headline activity

Headline activity	f	%
Provides enjoyment and motivation	19	28
Improves reading and writing skills	13	19
Facilitates critical thinking skills	13	19
Expands our vocabulary	4	6
Expands our world knowledge	4	6
Expands our vision	3	4
Exposes us into seeing various opinions (especially for in-class discussions)	3	4
Forces us to read newspapers	3	4
Improves speaking skills (especially for in-class discussions)	2	3
Makes us creative	2	3
Improves commenting skills	1	1
Improves grammar knowledge	1	1
Improves study skills	1	1

As it is illustrated in the above table, the students reflected their positive opinions about the process. The most frequent opinion of the students is that the newspaper headline activity provided *enjoyment and motivation*. For instance, one of the students pointed that the activity forced him to read, think and write all in English through an enjoyable process. Following that, the other frequent themes are about *the improvement of reading/writing and critical thinking skills*. One supportive statement was voiced by the student who stated that she does not like reading but the activity motivated her into reading, and she felt she improved her reading skills. The students expressed their positive comments about *expanding their vocabulary and world knowledge* as well before the less frequent themes such as the *improvement of speaking skills and grammar knowledge*. One of the students supported that expansion of world knowledge by saying that he began to read newspapers more and become aware of world issues which replaced the time he spent being busy with his mobile phone. All the students expressed their positive views, yet two of them also stated negativity regarding the activity. One of them verbalized that when the news are about politics or economics, the activity becomes boring. The other student shared that she becomes sad when her prediction does not match with the news story.

CONCLUSION

The use of newspapers for the development of foreign language skills was advocated by many scholars (Iljina & Prikule, 2016; Khorsheed & Rassoul, 2018; Tafani, 2009; Tafida and Dalhatu, 2014). Aiming at better furnishing the pre-service students with the necessary reading and writing skills, the present study accomplished its objective since headlines encouraged the learners into puzzling out the information first by reading in detail and then trying to formulate their writing with the aim of convincing the teacher or the students in class. Trying to convince the interlocutor requires the use of language -by writing in this case- which is the primary aim of reading and writing courses in ELT Departments. Utilized in addition to the regular reading and writing course requirements, newspaper headline activity supported the improvement of those skills. Skill development was evident from the improvement at headline prediction scores, t-test results, the participants' remarks on the questionnaire, one-to-one feedback sessions and regular controls of the portfolios along with the interviews.

Besides reading and writing skills, the study showed that the students improved their critical thinking skills as well. Included in the 21st century skills, definition of critical thinking goes back to Dewey (1933) who commonly called it as reflective thinking, and it was defined as "active, persistent, and careful consideration of a belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds which support it and the further conclusions to which it tends" (p. 9). Watson and Glaser (2002) relates the critical thinking concept to the ability of a) discriminating between the truth and the inference, b) comprehending the unstated assumptions, c) determining conclusions are warranted or not, d) arriving at the right interpretation, and e) evaluating the arguments as weak or strong.

One of the key goals of the educators in language teaching contexts should be the development of critical thinking skills as many scholars such as Davidson (1998) believes that

critical thinking skills carry quite more importance for L2 learners than L1. Critical thinking can be fostered based upon the tasks and the activities assigned by the teacher and the feedback given to the students (Meyers, 1986). In the light of the aforementioned information, facilitation of critical thinking skills must be an imperative priority of educational contexts.

The use of newspaper headlines in this study helped to improve reading and writing skills of the participants on one hand while stimulating and supporting their critical thinking abilities on the other. As the activity forced the students to scrutinize every word in the headline, they learnt that they needed to be vigilant for the details and they comprehended the importance of every word. Even this kind of awareness makes the study beneficial and valuable for the learners in terms of the critical thinking skills.

In addition to the improvement of reading, writing and critical thinking skills, the participants were motivated to read and write about the news stories and they also enjoyed the process. Even most of them viewed the activity as a guessing game. Both personal and in-class enjoyments were quite apparent from the personal observations of the researcher and the participants' statements in the questionnaire and the interviews. During the course of one to one feedback sessions, majority of the students expressed that they liked the activity so much that during the exam they wanted to answer newspaper headline section as a first question rather than the remaining sections. All the data are the evidences which confirm the promotion of reading and writing skills of pre-service teachers of English while confirming the incentive aspect of newspapers in furnishing them a fun and a motivating classroom atmosphere.

Suggestions

This study focused on only paragraph writing yet another study might research about the facilitation of essay writing based on newspaper headline activity. Students might even be encouraged into writing a newspaper article or any other genre. In-class discussions of the headlines aimed at providing good examples for portfolio keeping process; nevertheless, few students pointed at the improvement in their speaking skills through that discussion process. Thus, the same activity could be suggested to be utilized within speaking classes as well.

Limitations

There are two limitations that the researcher should express and one of them is about selection of the headlines for the portfolios: the students had the tendency to choose headlines whose content is so apparent. Likewise, although it was not a desired thing, the students brought so many "negative" headlines focusing on death, murder, rape, burglary, and so forth. Aforementioned situations took place especially during the first term; nonetheless, they decreased in the second term as a result of recurrent warnings of the researcher. Another limitation is about the course curriculum. Newspaper headline activity was not the only thing covered during the reading and writing course. For this reason, the effect of the curriculum agenda onto the reading and writing skills of the participants cannot easily be singled out in such studies.

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APPENDIX: Links of the Headlines used for the Exams

1a) <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/afp/article-2892160/Sudans-cinema-lovers-dream-better-days.html>

1b) https://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/13/business/international/in-china-projects-to-make-great-wall-feel-small-.html?_r=0

2a) <http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-california-jail-water-wasters-20150330-story.html>

2b) <http://www.kansascity.com/news/local/article17059661.html>

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