

Effects Of Electronic Homework-Assignments On Arabization Skill Development In Student-Translators

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Abstract

An asynchronous online discussion forum was created and used to post Arabization homework-assignments consisting of application questions and discussion threads covering the topics taught in class. The instructor gave communicative feedback on the location and types of errors. Errors were color-coded. No correct answers were provided. The participants revised their responses and re-posted them for further feedback. Tips on how to answer questions and what an answer should cover were given. The participants had access to a variety of online dictionaries and resources. At the end of the semester, participants responded to a questionnaire regarding their online homework experience. Participant views and further reflections on online homework are given.

Keywords: Arabization Course, Online Assignments, Online Discussion Forum, Online Homework, Translation

Introduction

Homework assignments are an indispensable part of the teaching learning process at all levels and in all subject areas. For hundreds of years teachers and students used pencil and paper handwritten assignments such as essays, short answer, individual and group projects, term-papers and many others. In traditional classes, there is often limited opportunity for students to contribute their own ideas, interests, and experiences as they engage with the subject matter. This situation is exacerbated in university lecture-format classes, where students may stay passive, and not feel comfortable speaking during class (Daniels, 2010).

However, latest developments in information and communication technology have made it possible for teachers and students to use new forms of technology such as PPT slides, hypertext documents, e-mail, Online Course Management Systems, blogs, wikis, e-portfolios, e-posters, online discussion forums, social networks, specially designed systems and others for course homework-assignments.

A review of the literature has shown that in many studies the integration of different types of technologies in course assignments was effective in students' learning and students had positive attitudes towards homework and the technology used. Results are reported in the following sections according to the technology used, differences between pen-and-paper and online homework, shortcomings of online homework, and factors affecting their success.

Types of Technologies Used: Email and Internet Websites

Smith (1999) utilized a series of assignments called "Internet Explorations," which were developed for an introductory public relations course. The assignments were distributed via email, and several Website links. The assignments proved to be beneficial in terms of increased classroom discussion quality and connection with current events. Publishing students' projects on the World Wide Web enabled them to share their projects with other students and researchers around the world, and to receive feedback from them (Nadelson, 1997). The World Wide Web provided an active learning environment which gave quick and accurate feedback and helped foster critical thinking skills. The World Wide Web allowed the students to re-submit homework

following feedback to a previously wrongly answered question (Hall, Butler, McGuire, McGlynn, Lyon, Reese and Limbach's, 2001). Most of the time ELT students who resorted to the Internet while doing homework had good computer skills and positive attitudes towards technology (Atamturk, 2007). In Turkey, students in grade 8 enjoyed discovering and exploiting online and offline resources through problem solving skills especially when they did this on their own. They also felt more confident, mobile and creative in cyber but socio-cultural reality (Ongun, Atlas & Demirag, 2011).

Online Workbooks

The impact of an online workbook on the attitudes of 245 second language (L2) Spanish learners toward this online workbook was investigated by Sagarra & Zapata (2008). The Results showed a significant increase in grammar scores. Student perceptions of the online workbook emphasized its benefits in terms of accessibility to the material, user-friendliness, and instant error feedback. Most students found the online workbook useful for language learning, especially in learning grammar and vocabulary.

Written Blogs

In second language acquisition, several researchers used blogs as part of classroom assignments to reinforce important skills, including critical thinking, political engagement, and essay writing (Lawrence & Dion, 2010), as an out-of-class assignment for the development of learners' language competence (Lee, 2010), to encourage students to do pre-class reading assignment and reflections after class (Al-Fadda & Al-Yahya, 2010), to engage students and require them to connect classroom knowledge and situations where it might find applications, and to encourage them to write about the physics content in a more substantive way than was previously part of the course (Daniels, 2010). Results also showed that creating blog entries on a regular basis had a positive effect on students' writing productivity and heightened their motivation to write for a broader audience. Peer feedback on the content elicited further discussions, whereas linguistic feedback from the instructor encouraged the students to focus on language accuracy (Lee, 2010).

In addition, Utecht (2007) found that blogs enhance learning and the power of blogging comes from the conversation threads that are carried on among teachers and students. Comments made by classmates or others can enhance learning and understanding. They are thoughtful discussions that continue even after the end of a lesson. Use of blogs also created positive attitudes towards pre-class preparation (reading assignments) and post-class reflections (Al-Fadda & Al-Yahya, 2010).

Furthermore, blogging satisfied the relatedness and growth needs in Maslow's "hierarchy of needs". The process of writing in blogs helped students grow as writers, even for those who have been reluctant to write. Blogging makes writing assignments personal (or self-chosen), relevant, and flexible. Knowing that others will read or hear the work motivated the students to do their best. Blogging also allowed for rough drafts and quick feedback. Writing under safe and inspiring conditions motivated middle level students (Read, 2006).

Audio-Blogs

Audioblogs were used by Hsu, Wang & Comac (2008) to manage oral assignments, to interact with ESL learners, and to evaluate performance outcomes. Learners recorded oral assignments

through cellular phones, and maintained an individual audioblog in which they submitted and archived the oral assignments. The instructor interacted with each learner through the individual audioblog to enhance his or her learning according to individual needs. The results indicated that use of audioblogs met the instructor's instructional needs, provided an efficient and effective way to evaluate students' oral performance and permitted individualized oral feedback. In addition, learners enjoyed the ease of using audioblogs and believed that audioblogs assisted their language-learning experience.

Online Discussion Forums

In a study by van de Sande & Leinhardt (2008), a sample of 176 exchanges were collected from free and open online homework forums staffed with volunteer tutors who have the time, knowledge, and willingness to help the students with specific problems in their homework assignments. The researchers found that the spontaneous participation structure resulted in contributions from multiple tutors to a single exchange and revealed ways in which tutors attended to fellow tutors' contributions including: Seeking verification, providing alternative solutions, distributing problems, and answering for one another. Tutors in these spontaneous online help sites can benefit mathematically through interactions with participants. The researchers conclude that this mode of e-help may be a viable alternative for face-to-face tutoring centers.

Lineweaver (2010) developed an online discussion assignment and found that this kind of assignment had a limited effect on exam performance. However, she found that students who completed those online discussions were more likely to read the textbook ahead of class, and reported reading it more carefully, particularly late in the semester. Students completing online discussions also reported better understanding of the lectures and better preparation for exams immediately after the lecture.

Online Homework Management Systems

Several studies implemented special online homework systems such as: (i) an online homework system to support student engagement outside the classroom by imitating the attempt-feedback-reattempt sequence of instructional events which often occurs in an instructor's presence (Butler & Zerr, 2005; Zerr, 2007); (ii) AI, an Artificial Intelligent tutoring and online homework management system (Phillips & Johnson, 2009); (iii) WebAssign, an automated online homework grading system (Allain & Williams, 2006); (iv) CAPA, a Computer-Assisted Personalized Assignments (Pascarella, 2002); (v) a series of Web-based homework and tutorial programs implemented through WebCT (Cole & Todd, 2003); (vi) CyberTutor, a Socratic electronic homework tutor (Pritchard & Morote, 2002); and (vii) WeBWork, an open-source web-based homework program used largely in postsecondary math and science courses and to deliver daily reading questions to students (Roth, Ivanchenko, Record, 2008; Lucas, 2012).

Butler & Zerr (2005) and Zerr (2007) reported that their online homework system required no additional hardware or software resources because the online homework-assignments were created with general course management software which was used all over the campus. It improved the overall student performance. The students felt that online assignments were beneficial and useful in helping them understand first-semester calculus concepts. It supported their engagement outside the classroom by mimicking the attempt-feedback-reattempt sequence

of events which often occurs in a teacher's presence. In Phillips & Johnson's (2009) study, students completing homework assignments, using the artificially intelligent tutoring system (AI tutor), had better test scores than those who completed the same homework-assignments using an online homework management system by the textbook publishers. Similarly, Roth, Ivanchenko & Record (2008) added that the open-source web-based homework software, WeBWork draws from a large library of problems to generate individual assignments and provide immediate feedback on the correctness of students' responses. It allows entries in multiple choice, formula and numerical formats. Those entries created an extensive database of student interactions with the system.

On the other hand, results of studies by Allain & Williams (2006); Pascarella (2002); Cole & Todd (2003) and Allain & Williams (2006) found no significant differences in scores, understanding of subject matter and content between groups that used the online homework system and those that did not, but there were positive outcomes in student attitudes among the two groups. The Students reported spending more time studying course materials outside the classroom when online assignments were graded.

Online Homework vs Pen-and-Paper Homework

Studies by Mestre, Hart, Rath & Dufresne (2002), Johnston (2004), Cheng, Thacker, Cardenas & Crouch (2004), Hauk & Segalla (2005), Zapataa & Sagarrab (2007), Smolira (2008) and Trawick (2010), Demirci (2007), & Demirci (2010) compared web-based and pen-and-paper homework and found that online homework assessments is superior to the pen-and-paper method for both students and instructor. The students preferred online assignments and reported that they increased their understanding of the material and the time they spent in preparing for class. However, the actual homework performance of students was comparable, regardless of the method used. Web-based homework offerings led to significantly higher overall exam performance. Graded homework increased student understanding of physics concepts. The gain was significantly higher for students taught with interactive engagement methods together with online homework. In addition, significant cost savings were realized in moving from pen-and-paper to web-based. Although pencil and paper is still an easier medium for making diagrams and equations, daily collection of paper assignments is tedious and does not allow same-day feedback. Grove (2002) concluded that online assignments helped the students come to class better prepared and showed that both the experimental and control groups benefitted from a problem-based learning approach. Hauk & Segalla (2005) concluded that even a narrow use of WeBWork, as a substitute for handwritten assignments, is at least as effective as traditionally graded paper and pencil assignments for college students learning algebra. Likewise, Affouf & Walsh (2007) found a strong relationship between achievement on the WBH assignments and achievement in the final exam.

By contrast, Zapataa & Sagarrab (2007) compared the effects of an online and a paper workbook on vocabulary acquisition by 549 L2 learners of Spanish. The Results showed no significant differences between the online and paper workbook groups after one semester of treatment. However, the online workbook group outperformed the paper workbook group in the second semester. These findings confirm the results of other studies in the literature on the usefulness of CALL in vocabulary acquisition in L2, and point to the advantages of online workbooks for large

language programs as long as sufficient length of exposure to the online learning environment is provided.

Advantages and Shortcomings of Online Homework

Several prior studies revealed some advantages of the use of online homework-assignments. For example, Riffell & Sibley (2003) described a hybrid instructional format, consisting of online homework with in-class, active learning exercises, developed and used to improve large lecture courses. They indicated that most students felt that student-instructor interaction was better than in traditional courses and that online homework aided time management and learning. Short Internet assignments in an introductory undergraduate U.S. government course fostered students' understanding of political science concepts, political behavior, and government structures while in addition to improving students' information seeking skills. The students supported these assignments (Crawford, 1998).

On the other hand, surveys used in prior studies revealed some negative aspects of the use of the online workbook, such as the amount of time needed to complete the online exercises (Sagarra & Zapata, 2008). The mean completion time of students using the Internet was 142 minutes and of those doing traditional homework, 90 minutes (Wilkinson & Echternacht, 1998). Other studies showed that although families view the Internet as a useful resource for homework, they reported other shortcomings such as the high cost of home internet access and learning the skills and competencies needed to use the Internet autonomously by the parents (Cranmer, 2006). Plagiarism and academic dishonesty on the Internet such as online term paper vendors constitute another shortcoming (Campbell, Swift, Denton & Mello, 2000).

Factors Affecting Successful Online Homework

Findings of prior research showed several factors that are considered important for the successful integration of technology in homework assignment such as class size, students' educational level, and the type of reading assignment (Al-Fadda & Al-Yahya, 2010). The course type, student performance in the course, their gender, problem difficulty level, and problem type can significantly change the nature of online student collaborations (Kortemeyer, 2006). Online assignments can replace traditional lectures when associated with in-class, active learning activities (Riffell & Sibley, 2003). Learners' critical thinking and technological skills are also essential for the implementation of blog projects in second language instruction (Lee, 2010). Results of a study by Peng (2009) showed that intrinsic motivation in students and computer efficacy are important factors in determining effort and whether students perceive the system to be beneficial. These Findings are important for educators and homework system designers as they recommend the implementation of online homework systems and determine which types of students benefit most from those systems in the classroom.

The Present Study

King Saud University has created online discussion forums on its portal for its colleges and deanships. Several faculty members, including the author, have their own online discussion forum for different purposes. To take advantage of the opportunities offered by e-learning, an asynchronous online discussion forum was created for the Arabization course that the author was teaching (<http://forums.ksu.edu.sa/forumdisplay.php?f=271>). The forum aimed at providing the students with an environment for posting assignment questions by the course instructor (author)

and responses by the students and receiving feedback. The present study aims to describes the Arabization online homework environment, the types of questions posted, the types of tasks emphasized, how feedback was provided, how the online homework assignments were used to facilitate students' learning and to enhance their competence and performance, and areas of improvement. It also aims to report students' attitudes towards the online homework assignments and their views of the benefits and disadvantages of their online homework, as well as the instructor's views of online homework, amount of participation in the online discussion forum, and the effects of the online homework on learning and Arabization skill development.

Participants

Twenty junior female college students majoring in translation at the College of Languages and Translation (COLT), King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia participated in the study. They were in semester 7 of the translation program and were enrolled in an Arabization course (2 hours per week) that the author taught. The subjects had completed 4 levels of listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar and vocabulary building in the first four semesters of the program. In semester 5 they took linguistics (2 hrs), semantics (3 hrs), text linguistics (2 hrs), and consecutive, liaison and simultaneous interpreting courses (6 hrs). In semester 6, they completed 16 hours of translation courses in the fields of medicine, engineering, physical sciences, media, Islamic studies, military, administration and the humanities (2 hrs each).

Assessing Students' Needs

Results of a needs-assessment questionnaire administered to the subjects at the beginning of the semester showed that the subjects almost had no knowledge of English word formation and Arabization processes. The first few class discussions, assignments and pop quizzes also showed that the students had difficulties in identifying, distinguishing and applying the Arabization strategies and Arabic and English word formation processes, and in translating English terms, lexical items and phrases into Arabic. Many students did not submit their paper homework, did not read the comments given on the assignments by the instructor, did not have a chance to view other students' responses to an assignment and the instructor's comments on the same homework. Many students had negative attitudes toward homework and were not enthusiastic about the weekly assignments given in-class, as they were used to rote memorization and studying to pass exams, not to acquire the skills needed for their career as translators and interpreters.

In-Class Instruction

Arabization is the process through which English technical terms and/or lexical items are translated into Arabic. To enable students majoring in translation to translate English technical terms, lexical items and phrases into Arabic, an Arabization course is offered in the 7th semester of the translation program. The Arabization course aimed to enable the students to do the following: (i) distinguish the different types of Arabization strategies and processes; (ii) compare and contrast the English and Arabic word formation processes; (iii) translate English lexical items and phrases with different forms (neologisms, primary compounds and compounds, acronyms and abbreviations, clippings, back formations, and others) into Arabic; (iv) distinguish correct and incorrect Arabic equivalents to English technical terms that are in common use; (v) define the way in which terms were Arabized and identify phonological and morphological

changes that took place in the Arabization process; (vi) recognize newly-coined words used in Arab media and judge their accuracy; (vii) collect newly-coined words and faulty or inaccurate uses of Arabic equivalents in common use in Arab media reports; and (viii) locate, read and summarize articles from different Arabization resources.

To achieve those objectives, the students received in-class instruction in the following: (a) Definition of Arabization; (b) difference between translation and Arabization; (c) a brief history of Arabization; (d) the need for Arabization; (e) Arabization strategies and processes; (f) English and Arabic word formation processes and how English terms and lexical items coined according to each can be Arabized; (g) Coining, standardization of terms, usage of a new term, and characteristics of a good Arabic term; (h) Examples of loan words in Arabic; (i) Arabic equivalents of Greek and Latin roots; (j) Who coins Arabic terms (individuals, Arabic Language Academies, Arabization organizations, role of translator/ interpreter in Arabization); (k) Arabization problems/difficulties; (l) dictionaries and terminology databanks such as the Saudi Terminology Databank, Ajeeb and problems of Arabic bilingual dictionaries.

Lectures were delivered in both Arabic and English using a smart interactive board. Extensive English and Arabic examples were given. English examples were translated into Arabic. The students had to do weekly assignments, write a term paper on an Arabization topic and give a PPT presentation about it in class.

Online Instruction

An asynchronous online discussion forum was created and used to post assignment questions related to the Arabization course topics covered in class. Since the Arabization task is very complex, homework assignments focused on helping students do the following: (1) understand the basic Arabization concepts, terms, and strategies; (2) develop students' awareness of the differences between English and Arabic word formation processes, accuracy of newly-Arabized terms and faulty forms; (3) identify the linguistic units to be translated (abbreviations, acronyms, back formations, primary compounds, secondary compounds; (4) connect what they learn about Arabization in class with Arabization problems, practice and translation equivalents used in daily life, latest language developments; (5) find Arabic equivalents to English terms and expressions in common use. (6) develop students' awareness of faulty Arabic equivalents in common use or of borrowed terms that are more common than Arabic equivalents, borrowings that are in common use; (7) raise students' awareness of the Arabization literature by requiring them to locate, read and summarize articles related to the Arabization topics studied in class; (8) develop logical systematic thinking and expressing their point of view; and (9) receive instructor and peer feedback; and (10) share knowledge and expertise with other forum participants.

The online homework forum was process-oriented and learner-centered, i.e., focusing on the needs of the students, and students' active participation in discovery learning processes. The students spent time constructing a new understanding of the material being learned. A variety of tasks that accommodate different learning styles were provided. The students were in full control of their learning. The online homework-assignments also utilized social constructivist methods, where students construct knowledge for one another, collaboratively creating a small culture of shared artifacts with shared meanings. The students were required to interact and work together to construct knowledge. The author served as a facilitator and encouraged student-instructor and

student-student interaction and communication. Instruction was geared towards developing students' Arabization competence and performance. The instructor and students the shared information regarding sources available in book and digital forms.

Tasks

Every week the author posted one or two questions or a discussion threads related to the Arabization topics covered in class. The assignments were based on media reports covering political, economic, technological and medical topics selected from the BBC, CNN, and Aljazeera websites in addition to Google news. The online assignments focused on the following: (1) English word formation processes and how English terms coined on the basis of each could be translated into Arabic; (2) identifying problems of translating English terms encountered in media reports and common language use into Arabic; (3) highlighting Arabized words and/or mistranslations; (4) locating certain linguistic units and giving their Arabic equivalent; (5) searching for information such as finding examples, making a list of Quranic words of foreign origins and classifying them according to the doner language; (6) locating English and Arabic news headlines and Arabization articles; (7) finding Websites where the students could locate information related to the question to be answered; and (8) The students could post English and Arabic news headlines, Arabization articles and illustrative terminology of their choice. In addition, Online Arabization homework provided guidelines on how to prepare a term paper and how to give an in-class presentation about it. The students could also ask question.

Online Homework Forum Policies

The author set some policies for using the online Arabization homework such as: Students must use their real names; no nicknames were allowed. Copying and pasting articles were not allowed. They had to give the source of their information. They had to summarize each article in their own words, comment on and give their opinion of the article. They had to use Standard Arabic; use of colloquial language and slang were not allowed. The author set the minimum number of examples, articles and news headlines to be given and specified the length of the articles to be read and posted. She told them how She will comment on the answers and give feedback. She gave credit for participating in the online homework forum. Marks given depended on the frequency of posts. No deadline was set for answering each question.

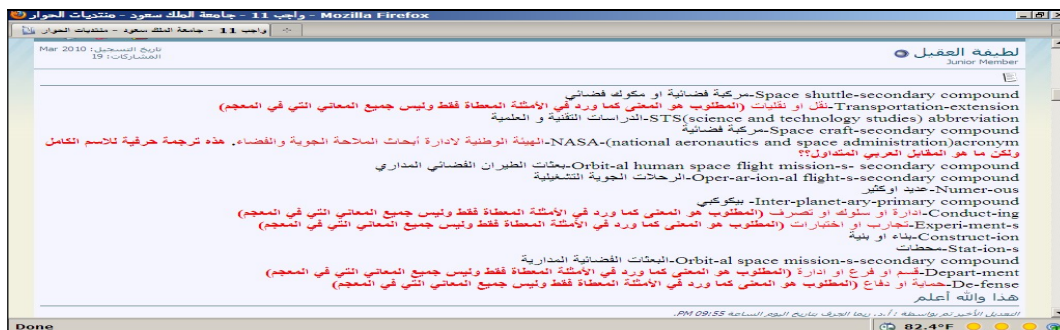


Figure (1): A Sample Assignment with Instructor's Feedback in Red

Feedback

To develop participants' Arabization competence and performance, the following strategies were used: Thanking each student for her effort and praising good and comprehensive answers. Errors and comments were color-coded. Communicative feedback on the location and types of errors was always given. No correct answers were provided for most questions. The author gave individual comments, i.e. highlighted errors and weaknesses in each student's post and inserted comments. When several students made the same error, had the same weakness or something missing in an answer, she gave a general comment. Spelling and linguistic errors were highlighted as well. She gave oral feedback in class regarding errors made in the Arabization Homework Forum, and displayed some answers using the interactive smart board. Types of corrections to be made were prompted by me.

Data Collection

At the beginning of the semester, the students were given an Arabization pre-test and at the end of the semester, they were given a posttest. They also responded to a post-treatment questionnaire regarding their online Arabization homework experience and online homework environment, reporting views on its effectiveness, management, feedback and communication. The author also kept a daily log of the difficulties she had looking for media reports and preparing discussion questions based on them, following up the online homework instruction and the differences between online and in-class face-to-face homework correction. Results of the tests and questionnaire-surveys are reported qualitatively below.

Data Analysis

A total of 22 discussion threads, i.e., homework-assignments were posted. Students' responses to each discussion thread were analyzed, then frequencies, percentages, the median and range of the number of students participating in the online assignments, number of students responding to each discussion thread, and number of threads to which each student responded were computed. How many threads each student responded to, the median and range of threads responded to by the whole group. The percentage of students who answered each online assignment question and the median and range of assignments answered by the whole group were computed.

The frequency of discussion thread views for each assignment and the range and median of views for the 22 assignments.

To find out whether there was a significant difference in understanding of the course material, ability to identify, distinguish, and apply the English and Arabic word formation and Arabization strategies, students' pre and posttest mean scores were compared using a dependent single group T-test.

To find out whether there was a relationship between the frequency of posts and achievement level, the correlation between the students' scores on the Arabization posttest, and frequency of responses posted to Arabization assignment questions was computed.

In addition, qualitative analysis of students' responses to the Arabization posttest test to find out whether improvement in identifying Arabization errors, distinguishing Arabization processes, and translating English terms with a variety of word formations into Arabic.

Results

Amount of Participation

Results of the present study showed that 80% of the students participated in the online Arabization assignments and posted responses to the online questions, 20% did not participate and did not post any assignment due to technical problems. The percentage of students who answered the online assignment questions ranged between 10% and 75%, with a median of 45%. The typical question was answered by 45% of the students as in Questions # 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 1, 13, Arabization readings, English and Arabic news headlines (See Figure 2 and the Appendix). = The frequency of responses posted by the students ranged between 0 and 22 posts with a median of 14 posts, i.e. the typical student posted 14 responses (64% of the questions and discussion threads). The discussion thread views ranged between 154 and 856 with a median of 544 views (see Figure 3).

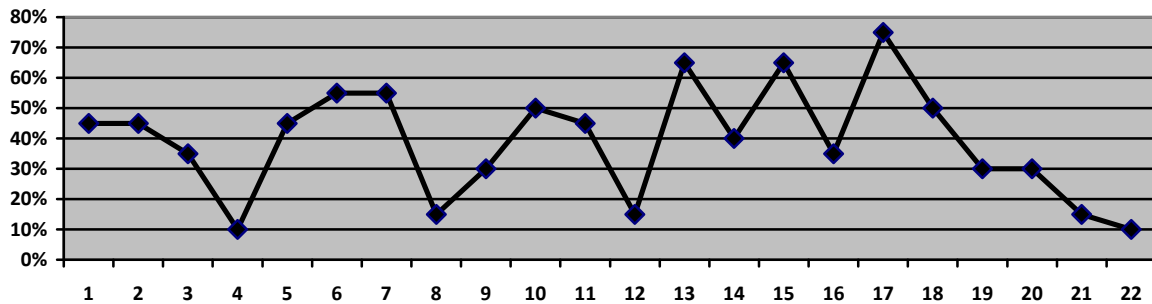


Figure (2): Percentage of Students Who Responded to Each Question

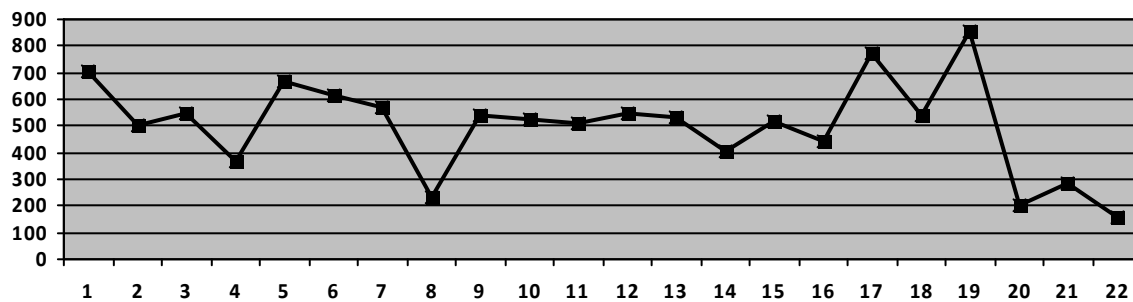


Figure (3): Total Views of Each Assignment Questions

Effect of Online Homework on Learning and Skill Development

Examination of the students' pre and posttest scores showed significant differences in understanding of the course material, ability to identify, distinguish, and apply the English and Arabic word formation and Arabization strategies ($T= 19.23$; $p< .01$). The correlation between the students' scores and frequency of responses posted to Arabization assignment questions was also significant ($r=.49$; $p<05$), showing that students who posted more responses had a better performance on the posttest and made significant improvement in their Arabization knowledge

and skills, as a result of the online home-assignments. Qualitative analysis of students' responses to the Arabization posttest test showed great improvement in identifying Arabization errors, distinguishing Arabization processes, and translating English terms with a variety of word formations into Arabic. Answers became more accurate, more detailed and more comprehensive. It was noted that the students became more active and posted better and more efficient answers to the Arabization questions towards the end of the semester. They also developed critical thinking skills.

Students Views

Analysis of the participants' responses and comments revealed positive attitudes towards the Arabization online homework. Although it was the students' first experience with online homework, they reported several benefits such as: They found the online questions and answers useful as they provided extra practice, gave instant feedback and provided them with an opportunity to improve their ability to analyze, scrutinize, translate, identify errors and weaknesses and correct them. Assignment questions helped the students' prepare for their exams. They benefitted from the different kinds of feedback and comments given to the different students. They acquired terminology translation skills, learned to overcome difficulties in translating terminology with different types of structures. They were allowed to participate at their own convenience and everyone was able to see everyone else's contributions. Reading other students' answers to the same question was enlightening. They were able to compare, discern strengths and weaknesses in each, and see for themselves how other students think, analyze, synthesize information and translate terminology. The students benefited from the variety of online resources available. They had a chance to improve computer skills related to document manipulation and formatting. The participants found the online homework environment supporting, encouraging and secure to make mistakes and to continue revising their responses enthusiastically. The online homework discussion forum created a warm-climate between the students and instructor and among the students themselves. All of the students were appreciative of the time and effort the instructor spent in revising their responses and providing them with written feedback. They found her tips very helpful.

Instructor's Views

When the participants started using the Online Arabization Homework Forum, it was difficult for most participants to analyze, apply, discuss, summarize and express their opinion. They did not pay attention to all of the requirements of a question and answers were brief and incomplete. They would give few derivatives or examples although they were required to give all. Answers lacked specificity, justification, explanation, and were not written using the Arabization terminology studied. They also had many linguistic weaknesses in Arabic as well as in English and insufficient background knowledge as they do not watch news about current events and do not read newspapers and media reports. They needed to develop advanced reading comprehension and summarizing skills. At first the students copied and pasted articles from the same sources without even reading them and without documenting them, without summarizing them. They would post responses that contained the same weaknesses and same errors that other students' responses contained and which the instructor had already marked and pointed out. They did not even read other students' responses and my comments on their posts. Some students had

word-processing problems such as using a very small form size, did not organize in a clear manageable way.

As the semester progressed, with the posting of more assignments and provision of detailed comments, guidance and feedback, the participants became more careful, more specific and more efficient in their responses.

Contrary to the author's experience with discussion forums in online courses that she has used in the past 10 years, Arabization students participating in this online homework discussion forum did not respond, comment on, nor correct each other's posts or the instructor's comments. They only thanked the instructor when she posted an answer to one of the assignments. Lack of interaction is probably due to the fact that they were apprehensive of making comments as the forum was open to the world and thus lacked privacy as anybody could browse through the posts and comments, although only KSU students and staff can post comments.

Some shortcoming were due to the structure of online discussion forums such as the absence of a tool for compiling references, for showing class members only, and an announcement tool as in an online course.

The author found grading the online homework to be more challenging especially finding an efficient way to provide the students with feedback and comments, especially at the beginning of the semester. The process of providing detailed feedback on each and every response posted by each participant was time consuming as well. It is much less time-consuming for me to give oral comments than to highlight errors, and insert written comments in the revised version of an electronic text. In a live in-class discussion, she can simply gesture to point out the relations under discussion or mark parts on the smart board.

Discussion and Conclusion

Use of an online discussion forum for doing homework in the present study was an experiment that the author carried out in an Arabization course for students majoring in. It proved to be effective and successful in enhancing the students' acquisition of the target Arabization skills and their positive attitudes towards online homework. Findings of this study are consistent of findings of prior studies that integrated other technologies such as e-mail, internet resources, blogs, and online homework systems due to the continuous support guidance and feedback provided by the instructor. The Online Arabization Homework Forum used in the present study proved to be more effective than traditional pen-an-paper homework. As Jia's (2005) indicated, collaborative learning in a Web-based environment may give as good learning outcomes like in-class learning or even better.

To trigger more interaction among the participating students, and to become a very lively forum for debate and exchange of information, more visual resources such as videoconferencing, webcams, Skype or Eluminate may be integrated in Arabization pedagogy, and if synchronous online homework is used through videoconferencing, Skype, video or voice chatting in order to have live discussions of participants' responses. Pym et al also (2003) suggested that a combination of face-to-face teaching and web-based teaching is the best mix. Based on the findings of the present study, use of a closed online course discussion forum, like those in online courses, in which postings are only viewed by class participants is highly recommended to initiate and enhance student-student interaction and communication.

Finally, an interactive Arabization questions database, which provides immediate feedback for Arabization students and instructor, may be created for translation students to practice and apply the Arabization processes. An Arabization Homework System which includes homework policies, practices, specific assignments, list of homework assistance Websites and provides a format for interactive assignments, feedback and communication can be developed and implemented. Arabization students can post their responses and queries and receive feedback from participating instructors and tutors. Other forms of technologies such as blogs, wikis, e-portfolios can be tried out in Arabization instruction in the future as well.

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