The Effect of Nicenet on Learning Grammar Structures in Writing: The Case of Iranian EFL Intermediate Learners

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Abstract

This research aimed to explore the impact of administering Nicenet as one of the virtual learning environments (VLE)'s on linguistic use and grammar instruction in writing. The design of the research was quasi-experimental method having a pre-test and a post-test. The participants were chosen through the convenience sampling strategy and were assigned randomly into experimental and control groups (female = 21, male = 21) and control (female = 21, male = 21). The participants were chosen concerning their performance on the Oxford Placement Test (OPT) and were homogenized accordingly. The outcome of Mann-Whitney, depicted that there was a statistically significant variation between the accomplishments mean scores of the learners of the experimental group who learned the grammar through computer and the control group who studied the same syntactic item utilizing the traditional strategy. The results demonstrated that computer as a tool and Nicenet as an application can help students to increase their grammar learning. The findings also showed that acquiring grammar point using Nicenet can be effective in improving learners' grammar scores for both male and female learners, equally. This implies that both teachers and material developers can rely on computer software as the main platform for teaching grammar or the supplementary source of teaching grammar to EFL learners. Using established platforms such as Nicenet can even make the process of material development and instruction easier for teachers since they can provide more customized materials.

1. Introduction

Technology has undoubtedly got a unique position in language teaching-related fields. In this regard, a large number of EFL instructors are recurrently using Internet English lessons in their teaching process just due to the fact that they have seen many privileges of this learning medium. The Internet provides a great source and teaching material for EFL instructors who are keen on involving them into their existing programs as recommended by numerous supporters.

In the field of L2 acquisition, language teaching, computer assisted language learning (CALL) is often seen as an approach where the computer is utilized as a helper to the presentation, reinforcement, and evaluation of materials to be acquired, typically comprising a substantial interactive component. As stated by Levy and Stockwell (2006), CALL is "the search for and study of applications of the computer in language teaching and learning" (p. 309). Reviewing the literature reveals the fact that CALL has long been used. For example, Chapelle (2001) stated that the first ideas of CALL were triggered during the 1950s. CALL was then considered an effective instructional help during the 1960s and 1970s, and the employment of CALL in second language contexts was more seriously considered. Gradually, the use of technology in facilitating language acquisition became more complex. Among all the applications mentioned previously, virtual learning environments have gained considerable attention on the part of both L2 researchers and teachers.

Nicenet, which is a famous virtual learning environment (VLE), is a competent network simulation program that permits class members to receive their education virtually (Malmir & Aghazamani, 2019). Nicenet offers simulation, visualization, authoring, assessment, and collaboration capabilities and facilitates the teaching and learning of all areas consisting of L2 teaching and learning. This software, on the other hand, incorporates various pieces of equipment in its virtual classroom; therefore, permitting students to make a network with a fairly unlimited number of devices, encouraging practice, discovery, and troubleshooting. The simulation-based learning environment of Nicenet assists students to enhance many fundamental skills such as critical

thinking and problem-solving in the L2 context. Besides, Nicenet lets teachers easily teach and demonstrate complicated concepts and even assess their students at the end of the virtual semester" (Ahmed, 2018).

A myriad of research noticed that CALL is a fruitful environment for student-computer interaction. It permits cooperative activities (Meskill & Mossop, 2003), promotes negotiating meaning between subjects (Toyoda & Harrison, 2002), simplifies language learning (Vilmi, 2003), and promotes the learner to play active roles in communication, and be active and have control over his/her learning (Bikowski & Kessler, 2002). Gruba (2006) furthermore stated that CALL supplies interactive computer activities for language learning that assists learners to interact communicatively.

In terms of the mechanism of this software, it must be indicated that this software is downloadable for free and can be easily installed on the computer. After registering and obtaining a username and password, students and instructors may have pedagogical meetings too. Based on the syllabus defined by the instructor, the teaching materials and approaches may be specified and the total course will get started. Considering the goals of this research, which is examining the impact of Nicenet on grammar development, this software will be used mainly to teach grammatical structures in a virtual environment.

The other variable examined in this study was the writing skill. Writing has become central in many current schools and universities as a qualifying criterion for academic success. Students work hard to learn how to produce well-organized writing and obtain more skills in the enhancement of English writing. Writing teachers also make considerable efforts to enable students to write more proficiently. Despite this, university and college students see writing as the most challenging part of their English language skills. This idea is established by several studies (e.g., Bowles & Montroy, 2013; Graham & Harris, 2000). There appears to be an agreement among language instructors that careful attention must be paid to students' writing not only as an especially challenging discipline but also as the most complicated aspect of English language learning.

On the other side, grammar in writing is very essential. From a wider point of view, grammar even incorporates a significant section of the whole language and "is a device for constructing and expressing meaning, without which effective communication would be impossible" (Crivos & Luchini, 2012, p.12). "The effectiveness of teaching grammar and the necessity of learning grammar for L2 learners is now a well-established fact in second language acquisition" (Boroujeni, 2012, p.54) which has resulted in the reconsideration of the role of grammar in L2 classrooms. Grammar could furthermore be considered as a required "master" skill which incapables competence to improve listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

"Students who have acquired English imperfectly through interactions with native speakers also recognize the significance of grammar, as they may have faced misunderstandings because of their grammatical deficiencies" (Trosborg, 2011, p.11). Although there is experimental evidence for learning and teaching grammar, the query of how to improve grammar instruction has been unanswered. There appears to be a requirement of creating more novel methods to teach grammar more influentially. Putting all the above together, this proposed study plans to investigate the impact of using Nicenet as one of the VLEs on enhancing grammar in writing among Iranian intermediate learners.

Furthermore, grammar plays a vital role in the EFL classroom (Boroujeni, 2012). Indeed, "grammar is often seen as critically important in the path of learning a foreign language. Along the same line, effective second language grammar learning is particularly important for EFL learners, as they have less exposure to English language in their daily life. Still, numerous Iranian EFL learners as often as possible endure poor grammar, despite a long time of English study" (Alavinia & Sehat, 2012, p.27). One of the much-listened complaints among Iranian English learners is that they feel desperate and frantic in creating trustable grammar skills. With regard to this, it may be recommended that one of the most important worries among all Iranian instructors and researchers is how to proficiently move forward with learners' linguistic use and grammar (Farrokhi & Sattarpour, 2012). Technology has brought an impressive alter to education. Innovative and technological developments are extending the range of probable solutions that can progress educating and learning inputs, processes, and results or outcomes (Ghahari et al., 2014). Information and communication innovations offer a probability to apply modern learning and educating practices. More particularly, language teaching have been optimized by the application of VLEs and other technological progress (Beatty, 2003; Shang, 2007). It should also be added that, in the area language instruction, the application of technology has widely challenged the classical methods and put forward novel instruments, approaches, and techniques in language learning. It has thus resulted in the appearance of a sub-discipline in English language learning known as VLE. Generally speaking, VLE's demonstrates some qualities to enrich EFL. Conducting further research on these qualities can be an extremely valuable source for all those who are involved in L2 learning and teaching.

According to Nazari and Negah (2012), "there are at least three bunches of language analysts as far as their views on educating grammar are concerned" (p.12). As Rodriguez and Avent (2002) keep up, the ones who advocate Krashen's input hypothesis, known as "anti-grammarians", doubt the role grammar teaching has in language instruction; this bunch underpins "comprehensible input" by stating that this sort of input would massively assist the learner progress their fluency and accuracy (Mohan, 2019; Shen, 2012; Kamil, 2021). The second bunch, "pro-grammarians", state that "formal instruction plays

an imperative role and should not be abandoned since direct grammar instruction makes a difference altogether with exactness and speeds L2 learning" (Ebsworth, 1997, p.56). The third group argue that variables such as age, cognition, and maturation of students had better be regarded in addition to grammar instruction (Celce-Murcia, 1991; Celce-Murcia & McIntosh, 1991).

Mukhtar (2020) asserts that the global spread of COVID-19 has resulted in the closure of educational facilities. The ability of universities to handle a crisis that calls for the use of cutting-edge hardware and software to enable effective online learning was put to the test in this situation (Mollahossein et al., 2022). To prevent disruptions to learning this closure hastened the development of online learning environments (Nejati, 2022). How to effectively deliver course material online, engage students, and administer assessments is now a focus for many institutions. COVID-19 has caused institutions to invest in online learning even though it poses a risk to humanity (Ghafarpour, 2022).

However, research on CALL in Iranian L2 context is very little. It is in sharp contrast with the fact that recent years have shown a boom of interest in applying computers for foreign language teaching and learning in other countries. Moreover, effective second language grammar learning is particularly important for EFL learners, as they have less exposure to English language in their daily life. Still, numerous Iranian EFL learners as often as possible endure from poor grammar, in spite of a long time of English study (Alavinia & Sehat, 2012). In fact, one of the much listened complaints among Iranian English learners is that they feel desperate and frantic in creating reliable grammar skills. Considering this, it can be recommended that one of the major concerns among all Iranian instructors and researchers is how to proficiently move forward learner's linguistic use and grammar (Farrokhi& Sattarpour, 2012). Moreover, in Iran's EFL setting, how successfully learners can utilize the grammatical structures has been among the essential concerns of Iranian English instructors. It is regularly heard that numerous Iranian learners complain about off-base and wrong use of linguistic and grammatical structures they have learned prior, which can be seemingly credited to inadequacy and ineffectiveness of instruction.

Considering what was said, this study intends to explore the impact of implementing Nicenet as one of the VLE's on linguistic use and grammar instruction in writing.To put it in another word, this study will empirically determine whether the grammatical structures which are taught via Nicenet will be better used later by them in writing or not. In addition, one of the serious problems in most of the current educational systems is time. To everyone's admittance, the fast-paced lifestyle of today's world allows little time for seemingly luxurious activities like learning a second language (Plog, 2001). Such being the case, devising some novel ways to both teach language and save time

can be highly desired. Therefore, this study will be an attempt to introduce Nicenet as an effective tool to serve this purpose .

Moreover, few can deny the fact that the attractive nature of such devices as computer or laptop has been great in attracting Iranian people especially teenager and young students. As a consequence, a huge amount of their precious time is spent on such devices. This, in turn, has created a worrying preoccupation for most of the Iranian parents across the country. This can cause a critical decline in their children's education gains. Considering this, if this time could be wisely managed as to be spent usefully on learning English, it can be viewed as a breakthrough in this regard. Simply said, if the results of this study can indicate that Nicenet can have effect on grammar learning, then students can be encouraged to use their multimedia devices such as computers or cellphones more instructively in order to improve their grammar knowledge. This, moreover, can ultimately relieve the worry mentioned above.

Considering what was said, this research intends to explore the impact of practicing Nicenet as one of the VLE's on linguistic use and grammar instruction in writing. To put it in another word, this study will empirically determine whether the grammatical structures which are taught via Nicenet will be better used later by them in writing or not. In addition, one of the serious problems in most of the current educational systems is time. To everyone's admittance, the fast-paced lifestyle of today's world allows little time for seemingly luxurious activities like learning a second language (Plog, 2001). Such being the case, devising some novel ways to both teach language and save time can be highly desired. Therefore, this study will be an attempt to introduce Nicenet as an effective tool to serve this purpose. Concerning the aforementioned goal of the research, these research questions can be stated:

RQ1. To what extend does the implementation of Nicenet have any significant effect on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' grammar development in writing?

RQ2. Is there any significant difference between male and female learners in terms of grammar development in writing when Nicenet is implemented?

2.   Review of the Related Literature

Literature Review With the nonstop advancement of online instruction and the nonstop rise of computer helped dialect learning (CALL), it is exceptionally basic to apply it to social life, particularly classroom educating. Be that as it may, for show purposes, few thinks about have methodically commented on how much it has changed social life and inquire about areas other than instruction, what

benefits or absconds it has caused to learners, and what demeanors and sees about all strolls of life have towards it. CALL has advanced the improvement of cutting edge instruction and a few other areas, and has been recognized by the society.

Most researchers consistently emphasize that utilizing computer and web can encourage learning, especially learning the moment dialect. Next to a few of its downsides. The consolidation of web exercises and classroom administration frameworks within the English teaching/learning prepare has expanded notoriety among instructors and learners of these Data Communication Innovations (DCI) since computers got to be cognitive apparatuses to upgrade learning. As a result, instructors as well as learners are regularly utilizing these mechanical devices for distinctive purposes such as information administration, communication, interaction, interest, collaboration and participation when they are individuals of on-line English learning situations. Schmidt (1990) keeps up that thought is essential for learning. In considering the portion of mindfulness in L2 learning, Schmidt (1990) displayed three levels of mindfulness: 1) awareness as mindfulness, 2) mindfulness as deliberate and 3) mindfulness as information. He pronounces that mindfulness as mindfulness has three levels: acknowledgment, taking note and understanding. At the essential level, Schmidt clarified that acknowledgment included mental organization and inward representations of outside events. In any case, these discernments are not ceaselessly cognizant, in this way subliminal acknowledgment is conceivable and conceivable (Schmidt 1990). Park (2013) tested Japanese and English native speakers learning Korean under "no knowledge" and "some knowledge" conditions. The "no-knowledge" members have no information about L2, although the "knowledgeable" group receives very little information about L2. This second group learns six Korean words, before reading the content. Questions created by learners after reading a text form the basis of the method and process. The researcher asked the members to ask questions about the content after reading it. Learners in the "no-knowledge" condition asked more questions regarding the formal attributes of L2, such as verb endings and the meaning of a few lexical terms repeat often. The "some knowledge" group's observations are different. This group asked more meaningful structured questions. Thus, Park (2013) concludes that "the initial input perceived propensity and propensity for amateur and novice learners in general to turn out to be form oriented" (Park, 2013, p. 94). The emphasis on form or center on the frame was first suggested by Long (1991), then re-conceptualized by Doughty and Williams (1998). According to Long (1991), "emphasis on explicit form draws students' attention to linguistic components that happen to appear in lessons where the emphasis is on meaning or communication" (p. 184). The focus on form must happen unexpectedly because the student's consideration and attention need only be briefly drawn to the forms (Long, 1991; Doughty, 2001; Doughty & Williams 1998). According to Ellis (2001), the emphasis on form can be deterrent. In the process of focusing prevention on form, the educator or learner delays the act of communicating in order to manage to focus on a form

that is perceived as risky. This happens, despite the fact that there are no build errors when using the framework or message comprehension problems. This happens when the teacher does a quick check to make sure their stuntman understands the meaning of a word and then gives the definition. Leveling the entrance can also be an illustration of a word prevention center. As early as the 1960s, CALT programs for language learners appeared (Fotos & Browne, 2004). At first, the use of CALT was mainly limited to training and practice programs as a supplement to classroom instruction (Fotos & Browne, 2004). In the 1970s, more communicative approaches that considered meaning-centered cross-dialect learning challenged earlier behaviorist approaches (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). In the mid-1980s, CALL began to grow with the establishment of important knowledge organizations such as the Computer Aided Language

Nicenet ICA (Internet Classroom Assistant) is one of the popular LMS in the e-learning industry. This is evidenced by the latest information from Nicenet.org sharing that in the last month of January 2016, there were 9,956 users logged into ICA, which is 1,941 active classes. Classes in more than 25 countries of various ages and fields use the ICA weekly. Nicenet also receives more than 100,000 page views per day. Nicenet is also a web-based tool for running educational programs of all levels: a college course, a sophomore class, or a medical course. This suggests to us that there are no limits or boundaries for anyone from any field who wants to use Nicenet as their online learning platform. In addition, it is capable of two-way communication between the members; schedule announcements and schedule changes; to remind you of tasks; to share useful web links with other members; and send electronic text information. This implies that Nicenet strives to provide its best services regardless of the user (Mohamed & Dzakiria, 2005; Healey, 1998).

Nicenet's brings powerful tools to virtually any classroom, even those with modest resources. 1. Nicenet offers ICA for free and without ads. 2. No HTML knowledge is required. 3. Teachers can create their own lessons by topic and allow students to create their own topics. Teachers are more facilitators than controller. 4. Students and teachers can publish their materials on the website. Messages don't disappear when you log out like they do when chatting. 5. Private messaging is a great way to communicate with and between individuals in the class, teachers can comment privately on lesson messages or give private feedback. This option enables communication between instructors and students, and helps and encourages shy people to open up about their learning and more. 6. Students can see their friends in the classroom and occasionally interact with their messages**.** Appendix 1 represents the outlook and layout of the application.

3.   Methodology

3.1. Design

The design of the research was quasi-experimental method with a pretest and a post-test. The participants were chosen through a convenience sampling strategy and were assigned randomly into experimental and control groups. It is noteworthy to indicate that the nature of the sampling will limit the generalizability of the finding to other contexts, thus this will limit the external validity of the findings and care must be given in reporting the outcomes. The independent variable in this research was the teaching of linguistic use (grammar) through Nicenet. The dependent variable was the participants' linguistic use (grammar) as reflected on the writing test.

3.2. Participants

For data collection, a total of 64 Iranian students at an intermediate level of language proficiency, maturing 14 to 19 years, studying at an English language institute, were opted through a convenience sampling method. The participants were female and male. All of them were included in learning English as a foreign language on and off in the past few years at distinctive language institutes. These participants were taking part in courses to cover the book American File 3. The participants were assigned into two groups of experimental (female = 21, male = 21) and control (female = 21, male = 21) through randomization. The participants were chosen concerning their performance on Oxford Placement Test (OPT) and were homogenized accordingly. It must be reiterated that the participants had no previous familiarity with such technology in language acquisition and they all had acquired English using the traditional break-and-mortar educational system of Iran.

3.3. Instruments

3.3.1. Oxford Placement Test (OPT)

Oxford Placement Test (2020), as a test of proficiency homogeneity, was performed at the beginning of the semester. This test contains 60 multiple-choice items on grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. They were permitted to take it in 40 minutes. This test was utilized to homogenize the learners of the two groups in this research. Before using the OPT test, its reliability was measured using alpha Cronbach r = .84 which according to Cohen's table of reliability measures is highly reliable.

3.3.2. Pretest and Posttest

Two parallel researcher-made tests of writing were used both before and after the course. The tests contained essay-type questions. There were 25 items on each test which was based on the grammar points covered in American File 3, their current course book. To ensure that the target structures were new to the learners,

the researcher adopted two criteria; first, she made sure that the structures were presented in American File 3 for the first time. To do so, she consulted the previous volumes of the textbook as well as their teacher's book. Second, she consulted with the teachers who presented the previous levels to make sure that her judgment was true and they had not gone around presenting the target structures in their classes before. Besides three experts in English language teaching reviewed the tests to ensure the content to ascertain its content validity. The test was developed based on the Assessment Package of the book and a table of specifications. They were piloted on a similar group of male learners in the same institute before administration. The validity of the test was approved by a group of professionals in terms of face validity and content validity. The reliability for both the pretest and the posttest were measured using alpha Cronbach r = .81 and r = .87 respectively which according to Cohen's table of reliability measures is highly reliable.

3.4. Procedure

Having assigned the participants into Experimental and Control groups, they were given an OPT and were homogenized. The participants were then requested to do a writing test as the pre-test. As their treatment, the Experimental group received grammar input enhancement by choosing examples adopted from their course book on an online platform (i.e., Nicenet) while the Control group was offered with the same items on an offline platform, PowerPoint, which were presented to them via input enhancement in the class and a duplicate of which they could have at home. Moreover, the Experimental group underwent a process of computer-assisted instruction via Nicenet– an interactive application that is available online to learners via their computers and smartphones. This software was developed to help the learners master grammar points and was user-friendly in terms of practicing target forms and using them in practice time. The software develops automatic tests of the items in different formats and holds timed quizzes. Following the treatment sessions which took 8 weeks, both groups took a post-test. It is noteworthy to mention that the pretest and post-test were parallel.

Once the pretest was done, the eight-week treatment started according to the previous study on displaying new structures on Nicenet done by (Dizon-Ross, 2016) and (Rashtchi & Aghili, 2014). The course started with the learners accepting a brief explanation and demonstration of Nicenet features for two sessions to extend their familiarity. Except for the final lesson in which the posttest was held, 15 examples were presented to the learners on Nicenet for each session. The content was created by the researcher and the instructor together to meet the level of the learners. The examples were chosen based on their course book (American File 3) so that the important ones as prompted by the educator were included. This might help the balance between the topic and the number of

examples drawn from each unit. The learners were given 15 minutes at the start of each lesson to cover the tests and content on Nicenet from the past sessions. Students were told that they could use their computers or their smartphones, or a combination of both to get to the list on Nicenet and practice at home. They were not pushed to use it regularly (i.e., the learners were encouraged to consider the structures outside of the lesson but were not required to do so). In this way, other learning activities were conducted during the rest of the session.

The instruction used for the control group was adapted from previous studies on CALL (Khodabandelou et al., 2017; Zarei et al., 2016). The contrasting group received treatment based on PowerPoint presentation and the stages containing pictures, bold types, italics, and colorful presentation of target structures depending on the activity together with their examples from extra sources in case the example from the book was not considered suitable for presentation. 15 participants were nominated for the experimental group and they were given examples which were all the same taking about 20 minutes of class time. These presentation activities were part of the practice done in the class to develop students' target structures. Each presentation contained three stages according to presentation–practice-production (PPP) instruction in class. It started with the introduction of the new structure together with meaning and/or examples. Then, they were practiced via further examples from the textbook or other sources. Finally, some exercises were presented to the students to help them since they contained the target form structure.

3.5. Data Analysis

Data comprised OPT, pre-test, and post-test scores. The data were first organized, and the mean and standard deviation were calculated using SPSS (Mann-Whitney). Mann Whitney was used due to the fact the collected data were non-parametric. At that point, the inferential measurements matched the Mann-Whitney test, and independent samples t-tests were employed to test the hypothesis.

4. Results

H_{01} = Implementing Nicenet has no significant effect on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' grammar development in writing.

Before testing the hypotheses mentioned earlier, the researcher had to confirm that the learners who have taken part in this research were homogeneous concerning their proficiency. Accordingly, the scores collected via OPT were used for further analysis, the outcomes are demonstrated in Table 1.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for the OPT Scores of the Experimental and Control Groups

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
OPT	Experimental	32	17.3750	2.39287	.42300
	Control	32	17.2188	2.40610	.42534

As shown in Table 1, the observed mean scores for the experimental group, 17.37, and the control group, 17.21, were very close. The same is true for their standard deviation indices, 2.39 and 2.40, respectively. Further analysis was done to see if the distribution of the OPT scores was normal. The outcomes are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Normality test of Distribution of OPT Scores for the Experimental and Control Groups

		Kolmogorov-Smirnova			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Group	Statistic	Df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
OPT	Experimental	.187	32	.006	.922	32	.024
	Control	.194	32	.004	.924	32	.027

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Concerning Table 2, the observed *p* scores from the Kolmogorov-Smirnovrun for the OPT scores obtained from the experimental (.00) and the control group (.00) were below .05 which implied that the distributions of scores in these groups were not normal.

To assure the homogeneity of the groups concerning English proficiency, a Mann-Whitney test was administered, since the distribution of the OPT scores was not normal in the experimental and control groups. The outcomes are presented in Table 3.

Table 3
Mann Whitney test for the OPT Scores Collected from the Experimental and Control Groups

	OPT
Mann-Whitney U	488.000
Wilcoxon W	1016.000
Z	-.325
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.745

a. Grouping Variable: Group

As shown in Table 3, the observed results from the Man-Whitney test (U= 488.00, *p*= .74 > .05) run for the OPT scores showed that the groups were identical regarding their English proficiency prior to starting the course.

H_{02} = There is no significant difference between male and female learners regarding grammar development in writing when Nicenet is implemented.

Since the second research question accounted for the variation between the male and female students' performances after the course, the same procedure was followed to confirm their homogeneity concerning English proficiency prior to participating in the course. The outcomes are depicted in Table 4.

Table 4
Descriptive Statistics for the OPT Scores of the Male and Female Participants

	Sex	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
OPT	Male	34	16.9706	2.18098	.37404
	Female	30	17.6667	2.57753	.47059

As depicted in Table 4, the observed mean scores for the male learners, 16.97, and the female learners, 17.66, were very close. The same is true for their standard deviation indices, 2.18 and 2.57, respectively. The normality of the distributions of the scores for the male and female students was also tested. The outcomes are presented in Table 5.

Table 5
Normality of Distribution of OPT Scores for the Male and Female Learners

	Sex	Kolmogorov-Smirnova			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
OPT	Male	.171	34	.013	.945	34	.085
	Female	.174	30	.020	.921	30	.028

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Considering Table 5, the observed p scores from the Kolmogorov-Smirnovrun for the OPT scores obtained from the male (.00) and the female (.00) participants were below .05 which implied that the distributions of scores in these groups were not normal.

To ascertain the homogeneity of the groups concerning English proficiency, a Mann-Whitney test was run, the outcomes are shown in Table 6.

Table 6

Mann-Whitney Test for the OPT Scores Collected From the Male and Female Groups

	OPT
Mann-Whitney U	440.000
Wilcoxon W	1035.000
Z	-.951
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.342

a. Grouping Variable: Sex

As shown in Table 6, the observed results from the Mann-Whitney test (U= 440.00, *p*= .34 > .05) showed that the male and female participants were similar regarding their English proficiency before starting the course.

The initiative analyses of OPT scores showed that the learners' proficiency was similar in the experimental and control groups. In addition, the results of the Mann-Whitney test conducted above displayed that the male and female learners were comparable concerning their proficiency levels. Consequently, the English proficiency of the participants was controlled before the course and the variations in their grammar achievement test scores may be attributed to the intervention designed by the researcher.

The researcher calculated the descriptive statistics and tested the normality of the distributions of pretest and post-test scores in the experimental and control groups. The outcomes are presented in Table 7.

Table 7

Descriptive Statistics of Pretest and Posttest Scores of the Experimental and Control Groups

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pretest	Experimental	32	9.5312	1.56544	.27673
	Control	32	8.5625	1.38977	.24568
Posttest	Experimental	32	16.6875	1.65466	.29251
	Control	32	14.9375	1.96645	.34762

The outcomes shown in Table 7 determine that both the experimental and control groups made huge improvements after attending English classes for one term. This is because both groups received grammar lessons containing the same topics. However, a closer look at the Table indicates that the learners in the experimental group scored higher than the ones in the control group. To further test the

hypothesis, the normality of the distribution of the scores was tested. The outcomes are given in Table 8.

Table 8
Normality of Distribution for the Pretest and Posttest Scores of the Experimental and the Control Groups

	Group	Kolmogorov-Smirnova			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Pretest	Experimental	.227	32	.000	.923	32	.026
	Control	.188	32	.005	.896	32	.005
Posttest	Experimental	.130	32	.184	.953	32	.181
	Control	.144	32	.092	.917	32	.017

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Concerning the results in Table 8, the distributions of the grammar pretest scores for the experimental group ($p= .00$) and the control group ($p= .00$) are not normal, because the observed p levels are below .05. By contrast, the distributions of the grammar post-test scores for the experimental group ($p= .18$) and the control group ($p= .09$) are normal because the observed p levels are above .05.

Accordingly, the Mann-Whitney test was employed to compare the pretest scores and the independent sample t-test was utilized to compare the grammar post-test results scores. The outcomes are depicted in Table 9.

Table 9
Mann-Whitney Test for the Pretest Scores of the Experimental and Control Groups

	Pretest
Mann-Whitney U	332.000
Wilcoxon W	860.000
Z	-2.470
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.064

a. Grouping Variable: Group

As shown in Table 9, the observed results from the Mann-Whitney test (U= 332.00, $p=.06 > .05$) demonstrated that the experimental and control groups were similar concerning their grammar knowledge prior to starting the course.

Table 10
Independent samples t-test for the post-test scores of the experimental and control groups

	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Posttest Experimental Group vs. Control Group	.018	.892	-6.951	62	.045

As demonstrated in Table 10, the observed results from the Levene's test (F=.01, p= .89 > .05) showed that the experimental and control groups were similar regarding their variances of post-test scores. Besides, the outcomes of the t-test (t=6.95, p=.04< .05) depicted that the groups were significantly different concerning their grammar knowledge after the course.

5. Discussion

The outcomes of inferential statistical examinations demonstrated that there was a statistically significant difference between the accomplishments mean scores of the learners of the experimental group who examined the grammar through the computer and the control group who studied identical syntactic item utilizing the traditional strategy. This distinction was advantageous to experimental group. A glance at the learners' grades on the pretest, indicates that there were no measurably noteworthy contrasts between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups. This outcome demonstrates that the participants had identical backgrounds regarding their information on the themes included in the test prior to administrating the experiment. This furthermore shows that both groups scored identically accordingly. The statistics also postulate that any achievement in language structure knowledge might be related to the computer-assisted method using Nicenet.

The results also showed that the accomplishment in the post-test for the experimental group is related to the treatment. It may be simply observed that the additional achievement in the experimental group's mean scores is more than the additional achievement in the control group's mean scores. This increase is related to the computer-assisted (Nicenet) method used which indicates that the application of the software program has significantly improved the capabilities of the students of the experimental group concerning their grammar.

"One possible explanation for the effect of using Nicenet for teaching English grammar is that computers enable each individual to work according to his own pace. The user may move freely from one component to another as he/she wishes and according to his/her needs" (Abunabah, 2012, p.43). This trait makes CALL programs cater to individual variation and therefore act better in the post-test.

"Another possible explanation is the novelty of the experience which may have contributed to pupils' eagerness to learn and consequently to perform better" (Kamil, 2021, p.70). Moreover, "the self-paced nature of the computerized

activities and the superior visual representation of the material in the software motivated the pupils in the experimental group to perform significantly better in the post-test" (Alharbi, 2019, p.18). In addition, computerized methods such as Nicenet, unlike the traditional method, incapables the learner to receive feedback simply, which enhances self-reliance skills. Employing the computer gives the student the opportunity to utilize numerous feelings during the learning procedure (Assiddiq, 2019; Kilickaya, 2004). The use of the computer screen which comes along with multimedia effects get the attention of the students and empowers faculties of retention to them. The investigators reckon that learners may acquire more efficiently by themselves with extra resources that technology makes accessible. Furthermore, using software programs applies the "Learning by Doing" approach, because learners "employ the keyboard and the mouse to click or print their answers. Computer instructional programs are interactive. Learners can easily go forward or backward according to their needs and requirements according to Damavandi et al." (2018, p. 22).

Through comparing the outcomes of this research with relevant literature in the past, we learn that this research is in line with numerous practical studies done formerly. It is in line with Nutta (2001) and Khodabandeh and Soleimani (2018) who confirmed empirically that computer-based teaching may be an influential approach of teaching the grammar of a second language. The outcomes are consistent with Abu-Seileek (2004) and Nagata (2007) who maintain that "the processing group performed significantly better than the classical group." (p.15) The research is furthermore in line with Al-Qumoul (2005), Al Bataineh et al. (2019), Christopher (1995), Zaini and Mazdyasna (2015), and Ebadi and Rahimi (2019) who reiterate that the computerized approach is more advantageous for learners than the traditional method. Similarly, the outcomes of the current research are consistent with McEnery et al (1995) and Amiryousefi (2016) who noticed that computer-based grammar teaching may be as influential as or more influential than traditional teaching.

6. Conclusion

As the outcomes of this research depict, the computer as an instrument and Nicenet as an application could assist students to boost their grammar acquisition. As the Nicenet can be used simply in certain times, it could be used for later recovery. The outcomes further demonstrated that learning grammar points using Nicenet could be influential in enhancing learners' grammar scores for both male and female learners, equally. Because the application of computers and the internet is increasing quickly in Iran, EFL instructors may be promoted to use computer-assisted methods such as Nicenetas as an accessible maintaining acquisition device to simplify language instruction. This can occur due to the increasing enthusiasm of learners for the utilization of technology like Nicenet. In case Nicenet is applied suitably, instructors may allocate the limited class time to other fruitful skills.

The research indicated that learners in the computer-based group made higher achievements than the ones in the traditional group. This outcomes supplies proof advocating the influence of computer-based methods such as Nicenet in teaching grammar, specifically verb tenses. This result is in line with Nutta's study (2001) demonstrating "significant differences in favor of computer-based grammar instruction. Moreover, as it has been documented in CALL research, the use of the computer in language teaching has more advantages over traditional teaching." (p.16). For instance, the computer supplies learners with opportunities that are inaccessible in classical L2 classrooms, learners may get immediate feedback for their responses and correct their mistakes, CALL also permits every student to work at its own pace, and learners are encouraged to employ the computer for all kinds of activity (Gruba, 2006; Kedrowicz et al., 2006).

This result is due to the fact that students in the experimental groups were instructed by an interactive program, Nicenet. Students studied and practiced the lessons, and when they faced a trouble, they only clicked a button to get appropriate feedback about the answer and grammatical regulations. Such feedback is not typically accessible in the traditional context.

Based on the findings discussed above, the researcher suggests the following areas to continue work:

1. It is suggested that future researchers employ new technologies in teaching English language skills and other elements of language and encourage students to work by themselves and create language activities.

2. It is also suggested that forthcoming researchers incorporate new technologies in the syllabi and teaching practices and cite websites related to language skills.

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Appendix 1
Nicenet's outlook representation

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