



The Journal of Language Teaching and Learning™

2018

Volume 8/Issue 2

Article 2

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Recommended Citations:

APA

Rachwan, L., & Nicolas, M. O. (2018). Perceptions of the effects of simulation methodology on the learning of English in a remedial level course: a case study. *The Journal of Language Teaching and Learning*, 8(2), 12-27.

MLA

Lissa Rachwan and Maureen O'Day Nicolas. " Perceptions of the effects of simulation methodology on the learning of English in a remedial level course: a case study " *The Journal of Language Teaching and Learning* 8.2 (2018): 12-27.

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The Journal of Language Teaching and Learning, 2018(2), pp. 12-27

Perceptions of the Effects of Simulation Methodology on the Learning of English in a Remedial Level Course: A Case Study

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received: June 21, 2016

Revisions completed: November 10, 2016

Published June 30, 2018

Key Words:

Simulation Methodology

Language Acquisition

ABSTRACT

This paper reports on research that investigated the perceptions of students and teachers regarding the simulation methodology used in a remedial language course at a university in Lebanon. The research aims to understand whether the students from different language backgrounds have different perceptions of the benefits of the simulation methodology on their language learning and in addition explores the teachers' perceptions of the methodology. Two data gathering instruments were used: a semi-structured interview and a survey. The research population included 8 teachers and 174 students. The findings reveal that a majority of the students, regardless of their language background, perceive positive impact of the simulation methodology on their language learning but cannot or choose not to work independently outside the classroom. Teachers are supporters of the methodology even though there seems to be some concerns about student readiness.

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Located in the Middle East, Lebanon is a multi-lingual country and is known for the interchangeable use of the three languages: Arabic, English and French. While Arabic is Lebanon's native language, French and English have become entrenched in the country's vernacular as a result of colonialism and it has become standard for Lebanese students to learn two foreign languages (Shaaban & Ghaith, 2002; Ministry of Education, 2006; Annous & Nicolas, 2014). The country's designated mother tongue, Arabic, is the language of education in public schools, while English has been adopted into the education system in about half of the private schools because of the proliferation of American and British missionary schools

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(Ministry of Education, 2006; Annous & Nicolas, 2014). The fact that the English language has become the primary international language particularly in international business and technology makes it a more attractive choice than French for many of the younger generation of Lebanese; it also has been viewed as a prestigious language in Lebanon (Esseili, 2014).

The site of this study is an English medium university located in the north of the country near the second largest city, Tripoli. This area of the country is known to favor speaking Arabic in everyday exchanges whereas other areas in the country are known to default to French or English, depending. This reality means that the students at this university, more likely than not, defer to their mother tongue in their daily interactions. Consequently, the environment can be understood to be an 'English as a foreign language', or EFL, environment. Essentially an EFL environment suggests that the target language of English is not needed beyond the classroom or academic context.

The student body is comprised of students who primarily live within commuting distance although there is a small percentage that are international students or come from further distances and need to board nearby. The student body is also comprised of a majority of students who received their education in English medium high schools although there is a small percentage who come from French medium schools where English was taught as a foreign language. An even smaller percentage of students went to public schools where Arabic was the medium of instruction and foreign language study was very minimal.

When applying to the university students are required to take an English placement exam either the SAT1 or the TOEFL English exam. Depending on the score, the students are placed in one of five remedial levels of English or can test directly into the first of the two university required English courses. The course at the center of this inquiry is the fourth in the sequence of the remedial courses leading up to the university level, required courses. To be placed in the fourth course in the remedial sequence coded as ENGL101, an SAT1 score of 380-439 is required or a TOEFL score of 527-567 or successful completion of the pre-requisite remedial course.

1.1. The ENGL101 Course at the Target University

In the academic year 2006-2007 the chair of the English department launched a complete curriculum reform initiative that targeted all courses that comprise the Composition and Rhetoric Sequence. The new syllabus for ENGL101 focuses on communicative strategies and authentic learning activities with the language skills integrated. Importantly, a decision was made to utilize an innovative simulation methodology intended to give students in this EFL environment authentic practice in the target language. The newly designed syllabus was piloted in the fall of 2008 and every subsequent semester underwent internal audit and revision. The syllabus includes modules of simulations; the modules themes are imitations of real world processes and each module includes a related oral presentation and written component. The syllabus used in the fall of 2014, at the time of this study, was the result of many semesters of evaluation, revision, and modification. Each semester the course coordinator would add and tweak content and assessment strategies based on all the experience and recommendations of teachers who have taught the course over time.

2. Simulation and EFL Learning

Simulation is an instructional method that requires a broader approach than role-play actively engaging students in their language use, requiring them to use spontaneous language and engage in on-the-spot decisions. The use of simulations, as opposed to role playing, simulates real life situations entailing the use of effective unplanned communication in English; whereas role playing involves representing a recognized character so the type of language used would be planned and known (Tompkins, 1998).

Different learning styles can be addressed through this instructional strategy nurturing the language acquisition of all types of students including extroverted as well as introverted personality types (Jing, 2006). According to Krashen (1985) learners understand language using situational indicators which allows language to emerge naturally and would suggest that language acquisition is better served when not taught directly. In their research to illustrate how simulation enables second language acquisition, Scarcella and Crookall (1990) stated that learners acquire language when exposed to comprehensible input, are proactive and develop positive attitudes and feelings. Accordingly, simulation is a way of “declassrooming the classroom” by bringing real world communication to classroom (Salies, 2002a).

Many studies have revealed the pedagogical benefit of using simulations in an English language classroom through providing the authentic background for communication. Simulation enhances students’ communicative competence, increases their classroom participation and classroom interaction, nurtures creativity, develops experimental and life-long learning strategies, and raises students’ confidence. (Garcia-Carbonell, Rising, Montero & Watts, 2001; Salies, 2002b). Interaction with other students can increase student motivation to learn a foreign language, especially in an EFL context (Bahous, Bacha, & Nabhani, 2011). Moreover, simulations provide the opportunity for learners to practice their social skills, public speaking skills and argumentative skills (Hill & Fleonova, 2009; Salies, 2002a). In order for students to comprehend the topics being discussed, speakers need to clarify their points, speak slowly, alter their use of vocabulary when needed and repeat or reword some ideas if other students do not understand the point being conveyed. This kind of authentic communication is absent in a traditional approach to language acquisition.

Simulation is one of the few classroom activities that involves a high level of student participation (Hyland, 2002). The high level of participation gets learners engaged in the task and provides opportunities for student-student interaction (Garcia-Carbonell, Rising, Montero & Watts, 2001). Through these interactive strategies language acquisition takes place as students constantly prepare, practice and rehearse their roles before presentations using the English language and involves the use of spontaneous language that the authentic scenarios provide. Simulations also stimulate cooperative learning, which promotes higher levels of thinking (Garcia-Carbonell, Rising, Montero & Watts, 2001).

Simulation nurtures creativity as well as other valuable skills such as research in the target language (Salies, 2002b). Students need to research the context of their simulation and ways that might aid them to execute the simulation convincingly. Through the preparatory tasks, students not only improve their research skills, but also practice self-regulated learning. The teacher will not be the only source providing knowledge as in the traditional classroom. Students report that the required research and preparation enabled them to succeed in the simulations and therefore, they were motivated to use and work with English outside the classroom (Salies, 2002a; Jing, 2006). The kind of independent work required of students through simulations can develop experimental and life-long learning strategies (Tompson & Daas, 2000).

Another one of the benefits of simulations as a teaching strategy in language classrooms is the integration of the four skills in addition to the enhanced use of vocabulary (Hyland, 2002). Extensive reading is required of students during their preparation for the simulation. Students become immersed in both written and auditory texts in English. Students also develop their ability to listen and comprehend aurally and answer and negotiate convincingly during discussions (Salies, 2002a). When students orally discuss their simulated topics, their vocabulary gets exercised. Being exposed to various simulated topics and the roles the simulations involve, students learn new terms and role specific jargon (Ince, 2002). Immersion in written material provides opportunities to hone skills in summarizing and critical analysis of texts.

3. The Research Design

This exploratory research probed the perceptions of both teachers and students regarding the simulation methodology being used in a remedial English class at a tertiary English medium institution. The study was particularly interested in exploring the participants' perceptions of the effects of simulation methodology on the learning of English in relation to students' different language medium school backgrounds. This research sets out to answer the following questions.

RQ1. What perceptions do students coming from English medium schools, French medium schools and Arabic medium schools have about the simulation methodology used in English 101?

RQ2. What perceptions do the teachers in this course have about the efficacy of the simulation methodology?

RQ3. Do teachers and students have similar perceptions about how the simulation methodology impacts language acquisition?

3.1. Participants

All the students registered in the course and all teachers teaching on the course in the fall semester of 2014, were invited to participate. The entire population of students registered for the course was 227 students, and 174 of them answered the questionnaire constituting 76.65% of the total population. The participating student population is divided as follows: 95 students coming from French medium schools, 67 students coming from English medium schools and 12 students coming from Arabic medium schools. Eight of the nine teachers assigned to teach the course agreed to be interviewed constituting 88.8% of the population.

3.2. Data gathering Instruments

A survey instrument was designed using a Likert scale format for the majority of the statements. The questionnaire also included a section of close ended questions which included a list, and category questions. There was one open ended question at the end of the questionnaire (Saunders et al., 2009). The survey was administered about two-thirds of the way through the semester after the completion of two simulation modules.

The teacher interviews utilized a semi-structured interview protocol which allowed teachers to explain and elaborate on their replies providing data often beyond the scope of the initial question. The interview protocol covered the teachers' background, their experience with using simulations in English classes, the impact of students' second language on their performance in this course and the teachers' opinion regarding students' perceptions of the course and their progress. Confidentiality of the respondents was guaranteed through the creation of an audit trail (Saunders et al., 2009). The interviews were recorded, and analysis began when transcribing each interview.

3.3. Data Analysis

Analysis of the interview data involved an iterative process to inductively arrive at emergent themes. Once the commonalities and discrepancies were identified, 14 themes had emerged from the interview data.

Analysis of the responses from the questionnaire was deductive in nature and all 174 completed questionnaires were entered into the SPSS software program (Statistical Program for Social Sciences). The cross-tabs function was used to discover the relationship between students coming from schools of

different language of instruction (English, French, Arabic) and statements in each construct. Frequency analysis was also conducted on each statement. The 14 themes from the analysis of the interviews were then triangulated with the results of the questionnaire to arrive at the final learning from this study (Saunders et al., 2009).

4. Discussion of the Findings

The triangulation process resulted in five emergent themes presented in Table 1 that elucidate the perceptions of the participants towards this type of methodology in a language learning classroom and how the methodology impacts language learning. How the data led to each theme will be discussed following the table.

Table 1.

List of Themes Generated from This Research

Simulation methodology in an EFL class can lead to or influence:
T1: a learner centered course
T2: empowerment
T3: autonomous learning <u>inside</u> the classroom
T4: resistance to autonomous learning <u>outside</u> the classroom
T5: grammar practice needed

4.1. T1: A Learner Centered Course

The analysis reveals that the simulation methodology used in this course encourages students to be active participants in class, read and do research related to their simulation activities. Garcia-Carbonell, Rising, Montero and Watts (2001) assert that interaction is highly present in simulation. Through the interactive strategies, language acquisition is enhanced as students constantly prepare, practice and rehearse their roles using English (Othman & Shuqair, 2013).

Along with an engaging class, a learner-centered environment is created through the very nature of ENGL101 course content, according to the respondents. The simulations provide the opportunity to solve problems from everyday life (Othman & Shuqair, 2013). In the teachers' comments about the course, one teacher said, "the simulation-based activities make [students] more interactive as they have the chance to use English in ways they might in everyday life" (T1). Another teacher mentioned that "I think a main benefit of the methodology is independent learning as concerns the students. It teaches the student to do research, and to criticize topics from real life situations" (T8). Placing students in groups, with assigned roles and research tasks for their simulations, creates a learner-centered classroom with independent learners.

Figure 1 shows the result of the analysis of the questionnaire concerning the four statements that made the construct of 'team work'. The figure shows how the students from the three different language backgrounds reacted to the statements in this construct.

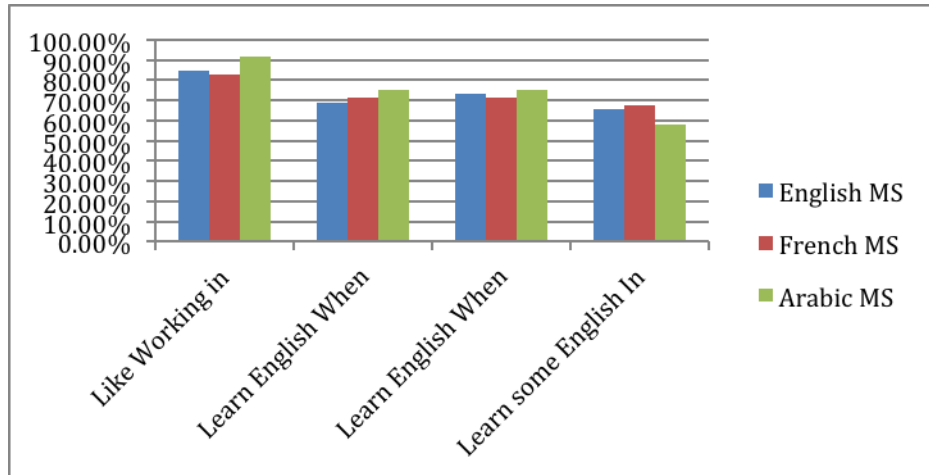


Figure 1. Impact of team work on students in this course

Figure 1 shows that 91.66% of students coming from an Arabic medium school like working in teams followed by 85.91% for students from English medium schools and 83.50% for students from a French medium school. The simulations being used in this course develop a high level of active team work among students. When participating in team work, students use the English language consistently thereby enhancing their communicative skills. The teachers who were interviewed also stated that the simulation activities used in class boost students to actively participate in pair and group work which engages students in a suitable environment for learning (Othman & Shuqair, 2013).

It can be inferred from Figure 1 that a large percentage of the students from schools using the Arabic language for instruction do improve their English when participating in the simulation activities. 75% of the students from Arabic medium schools perceive the NGO and the Poetry Club activities (two of the simulation modules) as beneficial to their language learning, followed by 72.16% of the students from French medium schools and finally 71% of students from English medium schools reporting improvement in their language acquisition through these activities. Such percentages from the students' questionnaire harmonize with the teachers' interview data. Many of the teachers stated that several of their non-English educated students exert a lot of effort to learn and improve their English through working on these simulations. For instance, one teacher stated that "basically, the French and Arabic background students put a lot of effort in improving their language and skills" (T3). Another teacher added "But I have many of the non-English educated students who showed a huge improvement after module one. They are working hard" (T2). A third teacher asserted that many of her non-English educated students did improve from the beginning of the semester. "They are better now than before, especially in writing. The students from French medium schools did improve from the beginning of the semester." (T7).

The simulation methodology employed in the course encourages students who might be reticent to use their English skills. Through using the language in relevant and realistic ways, students' language acquisition seems to improve (Tompson & Daas, 2000; Garcia-Carbonell, Rising, Montero & Watts, 2001; Hyland, 2002; Salies, 2002b). It appears that the simulations allow students from non-English backgrounds to be able to participate in activities that promote language acquisition and therefore, enhance their English language skills over a short period of time.

4.2. T2: Empowerment

This remedial English course uses materials that empower all students to engage in the class activities. According to the students and teachers, students start to gain personal control over their language learning fears and struggles about half-way through the semester as they seem to feel empowered to enhance their language skills. Figure 2 shows, in percentages, students' level of encouragement to use the English language in the course.

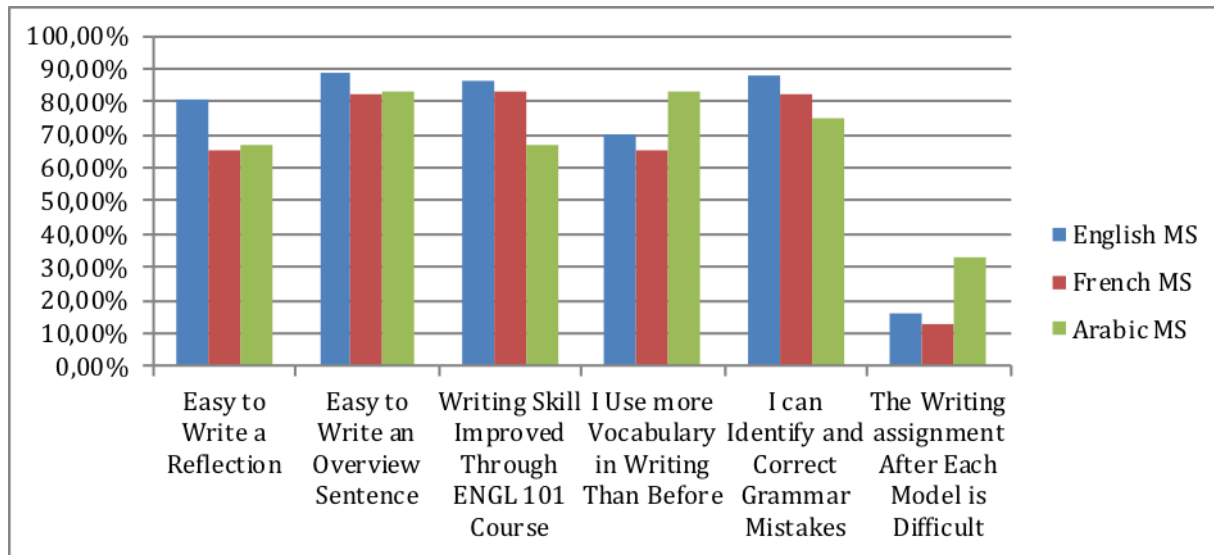


Figure 2. Impact of the writing skills on the ENGL101 students

Figure 2 shows that students from English medium schools report that it was easy to write a reflection in English. In fact, the majority of students from all three language backgrounds report that their writing skills in English improve as a result of the simulation activities. Although students from Arabic medium schools report this gain in the smallest percentage, 66.66%, it can be inferred that these students' English language skill is likely the weakest of the group and will require more time.

The data from all sources also shows that students from Arabic medium schools exert a lot of effort to improve their writing skills and these students also report the highest percentage in using more vocabulary words in their writings than before in Figure 2. Students coming from Arabic background schools reported the highest percentage of students who use more vocabulary in writing than before the start of the course at 83.33%, followed by 69.01% for students from English medium schools and 65.97% for students from French medium schools, see Figure 3. Again, the results of this construct seem logical. Students who have had more formal training in a language with little in common with the target language would be learning more vocabulary that is completely new as opposed to students coming to the target language with a background either in the target language or another language more closely related.

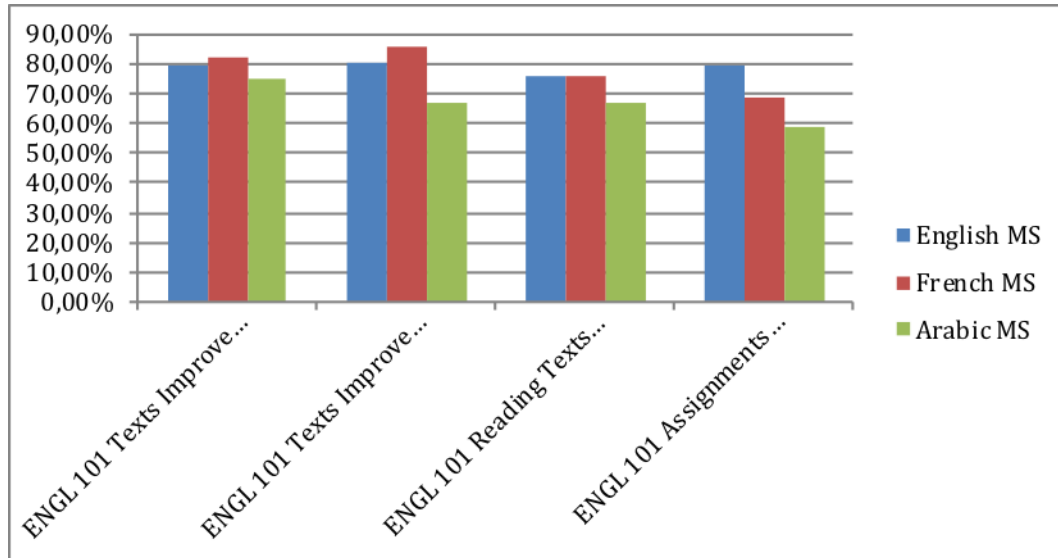


Figure 3. Impact of 101 reading materials and assignments on the ENGL101 students

Figure 3 also shows that the majority of students coming from the three different language backgrounds state that the texts used in the course improve their reading comprehension, vocabulary and their writing (Hill & Fleonova, 2009). The reading materials in the course seem to enable students to read critically in order to extract relevant information and respond to texts. Moreover, reading helps students to research and select appropriate materials for their assignments. Students will therefore use a range of vocabulary appropriate for the topic they are discussing and enhance their writing essays and paragraphs through the simulations.

However, it seems that the students from Arabic medium schools were the least to perceive the course assignments as helpful. This is evident in Figure 2 which shows that 33.33% of them state that writing assignments after each module is difficult. It can be inferred that the students from Arabic medium schools take time to adjust to such type of assignments based on independent work and research, probably because they were not used to such types of assignments in their previous school experience. The data from the teachers corroborates the students' perceptions. Particularly that "students from French and Arabic medium schools take time, because you know, a language is a process" (T2). Another teacher stated that "...the way they were taught language, how to write an essay for example at school, especially if they come from a French background or from an Arabic background is not the same. The thing is that they have difficulty following the 1-3-1 essay format for example. They have difficulty with sentence structure; they write long sentences, for example. The background is an obstacle because the student comes with a certain presumption or prejudice and then with a certain way of thinking... It's not easy to convince them to forget about something they have lived through" (T8).

These students perceive a positive impact of the course methodology on their confidence in oral communication (refer to Figures 4 and 5). The majority of the students from English medium schools perceive that they are able to orally summarize (73.23%) and respond to texts (77.46%). Respectively, 59.79% of students coming from French medium schools think they are able to summarize English texts orally and 64.94% think they are able to respond to texts in English. As for students coming from Arabic medium schools, 50% of them perceive that they are able to summarize and respond to texts orally in English. In addition, the highest percentage of students who reported that oral presentations and class discussions improved their English vocabulary were students coming from Arabic medium schools (above 75%), followed by a high percentage of students from English medium schools and finally the

students coming from French medium schools respectively. It can be interpreted that the simulation methodology successfully managed to enhance the oral skills and vocabulary of English and non-English educated students (Hill & Fleonova, 2009).

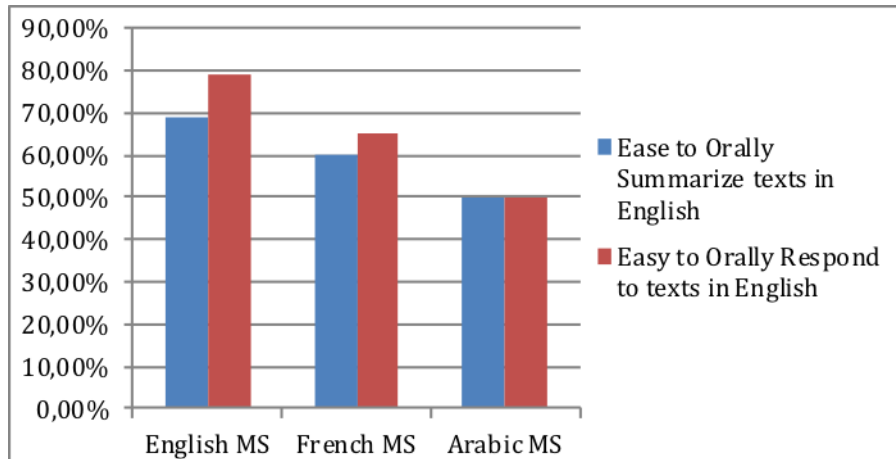


Figure 4. The ease to orally summarize and respond to texts in English

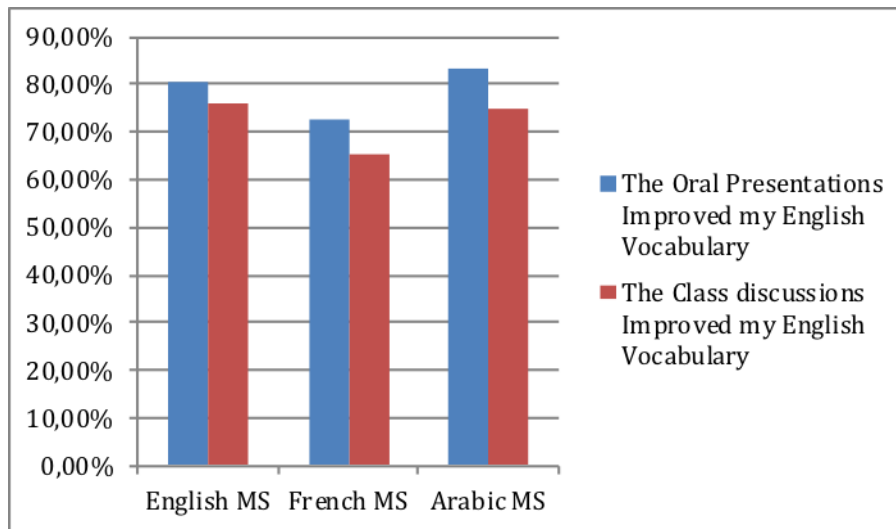


Figure 5. Impact of oral presentations and class discussions on improving vocabulary

Teachers believe that the use of simulation in the learning of English in ENGL101 enhances students' oral communication skills. One of the teachers mentioned that "the positive thing is that the course focuses on all the language skills. Students have to work on reading articles which enhances the reading skills and speaking is enhanced because they speak all the time in class and also during the presentations. The listening skill is enhanced because they need to interact" (T6). Another teacher asserted that the simulation methodology used in the course "teaches the students to do research, to criticize topics from real life situations, to be selective, to be able to assess themselves and also to be able to reflect on the course" (T8). The simulation activities empowered students to discuss and to deal with daily interactive topics which ultimately boost their oral language competence. (Tomkins, 1998).

4.3. T3: Autonomous Learning *inside* the Classroom

Although the majority of teachers revealed that they believe that many of the students are still not ready for a course that is built on autonomous learning, students do in fact perceive to have attained a certain level of self-regulated learning. The course emphasizes the ability to develop self-regulated learners through the simulation methodology and research suggests that self-regulated learning is an advantage of this instructional strategy (Tompson & Daas, 2000). Analysis of the questionnaire revealed that 67.13% of the total student population in this study perceives research for class assignments as beneficial for their English language acquisition. Researching for class assignments and using the target language empowers students to prepare their roles, thus paving the way for becoming independent learners. Moreover, teachers in this study assert that among the benefits of the simulation methodology is that students need to carry out some reading and research in order to be able to mimic their roles in simulations using communicative English language mechanics. Therefore, engaging in simulations raises students' responsibility and guides them towards independent learning. Simulation activities provide the students with the two principal elements of autonomy: responsibility and decision making.

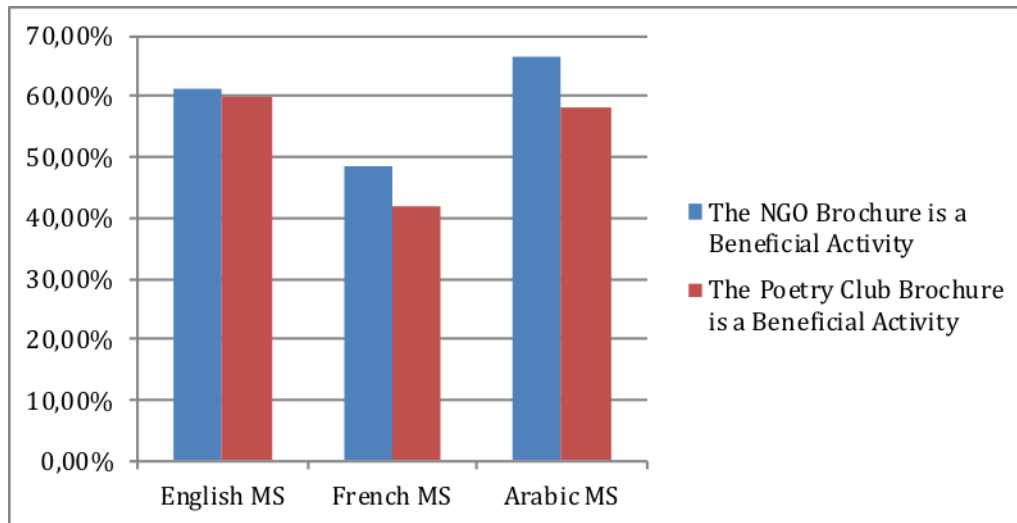


Figure 6. Impact of the brochure's activities on the ENGL101 students

Each simulation includes a task of producing a brochure of some kind and Figure 6 reveals that the majority of students who thought they benefitted from making a brochure were the students from Arabic medium schools with a percentage of 66.66% for the NGO simulation module and 58.33% for the Poetry Club simulation module. The students from English medium schools have the second highest percentage followed by the students from French medium schools with less than 50% thinking they benefitted from the production of a brochure. It can be inferred that the students from Arabic medium schools perceive to have benefitted from participating and engaging in such activities more than the rest of the population perhaps, because these simulations are the first time that they work in the English language classroom with such consistency and in an authentic activity.

The simulation methodology employed in this course encourages students coming from the three different language backgrounds to develop confidence and a sense of autonomy towards English language learning. A range of 54% to 66% of students claims to use a dictionary to look up unfamiliar words. 80.28% of students from English medium schools perceive to have become better at guessing the

meaning of a word from context or the text, followed by 72.17% for students from French medium schools and 66.67% for students from Arabic medium schools. Above 80% of students from English medium schools reported that they are confident during exam preparation, 72.17% for students from French medium schools and 66.67% for students from Arabic medium schools. Similarly, above 80% of students from English and French medium schools report that they became better at summarizing main ideas and 58.33% for students from Arabic medium schools.

4.4. T4: Resistance to Autonomous Learning outside the Classroom

Triangulated data from the questionnaire and the interviews suggests that students do not take the course as seriously as they should. Perhaps since students know that this is a remedial course and not a university required course they do not give it the attention it needs. Many students, from all three different language backgrounds, answered on the negative side of the Likert scale (Irregularly and Never) that they do not read the English texts any additional times on their own. 48.45% of students from French medium schools mentioned that they 'irregularly' or 'never' read the text another time outside of class, followed by 41.67% of students from Arabic medium schools and 39.44% of students from English medium schools. This data also speaks to the concept of self-regulated learning; of students not knowing how to be autonomous learners, perhaps.

In order to achieve a higher level of autonomous learning, students from French and Arabic medium schools especially, should reread class texts in order to fully comprehend them. Moreover, 25% of the students from Arabic medium schools stated that they are 'Not Sure' about reading the English text another time on their own in order to comprehend it well. The teacher interview data corroborates this data with most of the teachers reporting a lack of seriousness from students toward the course. This theme suggests that students are not fully aware of their own responsibility for their language acquisition (Salies, 2002a).

Moreover, Figure 7 "Impact of the Vocabulary & Expression List on the English 101 Students" and Figure 8 "Reviewing the Course Materials before the Exams" support the analysis that many students are not serious towards the course in general and the course material in particular. Figure 7 reports that although a high percentage of students perceive that making their own vocabulary and expression list is helpful for enhancing their English vocabulary knowledge, only about 30% of students review the vocabulary and expression list before exams. Similarly, Figure 8 shows that a high percentage of the students do not review the course material provided before each exam. From these responses it can be concluded that many students do not take responsibility for the course material outside the classroom nor study on their own. Similarly, referring to Figure 8, a very high percentage of students coming from the 3 different language backgrounds are more likely to review the course materials "sometimes" and not "every time" before each exam. The questionnaire reveals that although many students perceive benefits from the course materials, a small percentage of all students coming from the three different language backgrounds review course material before exams, with 31.68% for English educated students and 32.47% for non-English educated students. Such a lack of seriousness towards the course material hinders the accomplishment of the desired learning outcomes of the course (Bahous, Bacha & Nabhani, 2011).

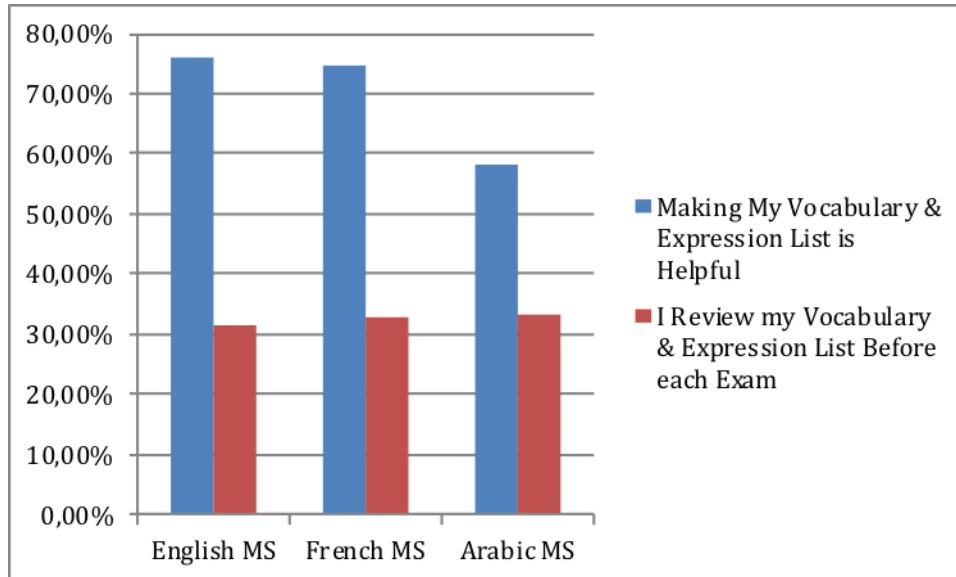


Figure 7. Impact of the vocabulary & expression list on the ENGL101 students

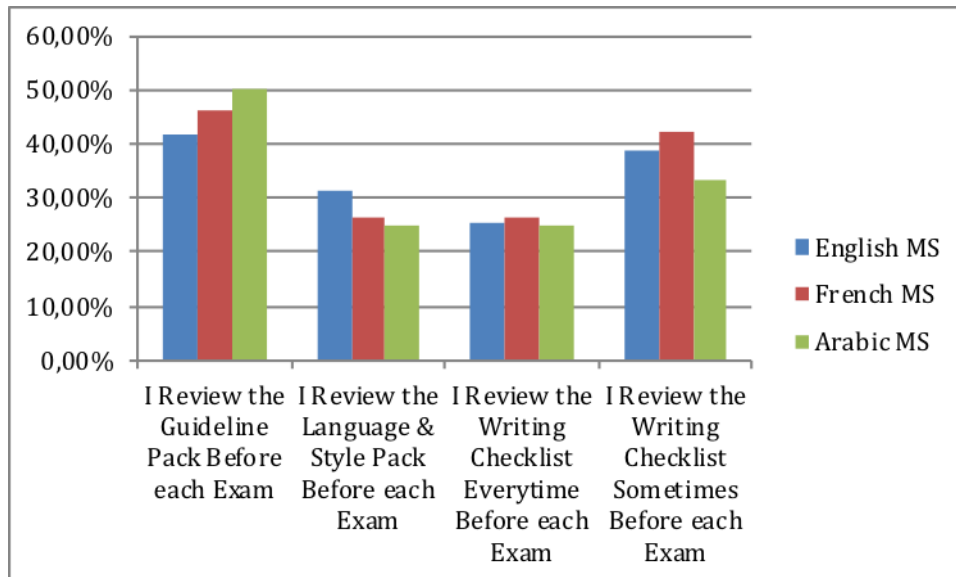


Figure 8. Reviewing the course materials before the exams

4.5. T5: Grammar Practice Needed

The questionnaire reveals that the majority of the students coming from the three different language backgrounds perceive a need for more grammar practice before exams. Figure 9 shows that 91.66% of students coming from Arabic medium schools ask for more grammar revision, followed by 67.01% for students from French medium schools and more than half of students from English medium schools, 57.74%, perceive a need for more grammar revision before exams. Such a perception on the need for more grammar practice seems to be a concern for some teachers who proclaim that students do ask grammatical questions. One teacher respondent claimed to give extra grammar help to her class since they

commit a lot of grammar mistakes (T7). Another teacher said, “They have difficulty in grammar... they write long sentences. The choice of words is sometimes weak, and punctuation is wrong.” (T8). Another teacher commented on her students coming from English medium schools saying “some of my students who are English educated still have some major mistakes such as sentence fragments, sentences that run-on, and so on. They also make many verb-tense errors and have punctuation problems” (T3). Although the majority of all the students coming from the three different language backgrounds agree that their English teachers always and regularly explained grammar well as shown in Table 2 below, students still perceive a need for more grammar practice before each exam.

Table 2.
Teacher Explaining Grammar Well

	Always	Many Times	Not Sure	Few Times	Never	Total
English MS	39	20	3	5	0	67
French MS	63	22	8	2	0	95
Arabic MS	6	3	2	1	0	12

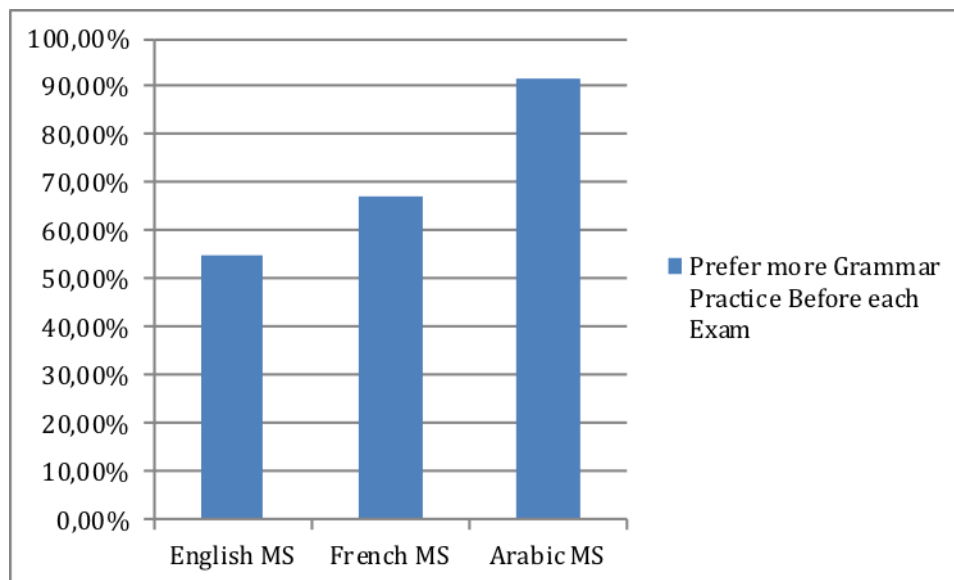


Figure 9. Percentage of students who prefer more grammar practice before each exam

There is logic in students from Arabic medium schools perceiving that they require more attention to English grammar than students from French medium schools. The latter were exposed to a few hours of English language learning during middle and high school unlike the students from Arabic medium schools who were not and, therefore, possibly lack confidence in the fundamental grammar basics. The fact that students from all backgrounds claim to want this skill emphasized before testing is interesting and can perhaps be understood in the context of their past educational experience. Testing in a typical Lebanese school would be summative in nature, focusing on grammar rules, fill in the blanks, etc. Students likely are not only comfortable with that type of assessment given their previous experience, but also assumed that is how they were going to be assessed in this course as well.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The research reported in this paper attempted to answer three research questions concerning perceptions of the efficacy of simulation methodology on the learning of English in a particular remedial course at an EFL tertiary English medium institution. The paper will offer answers to these research questions as way of concluding and of sharing the learning.

RQ1. What perceptions do students coming from English medium schools, French medium schools and Arabic medium schools have about the simulation methodology used in English 101?

Overall the students' backgrounds seemed to have an influence over their perceptions of different aspects of the course. Students from English medium schools were the most encouraged to use the English language in the language class from the start. This part of the population reported the most positive results towards the efficacy of the course material and benefited the most from the listening, speaking, reading and writing tasks. The questionnaire also revealed that no matter what background the student came from, they perceive a positive influence on their language learning from the use of the English language in everyday type interactions.

The writing activities in each simulation module were perceived as beneficial by students coming from the three different language medium schools. The English educated students seemed to perceive the most benefit from these writing activities. However, the students from both French and Arabic language backgrounds also report perceived benefit from the writing activities on their language learning in high percentages. Students from French medium schools reported the highest percentages in thinking that their English vocabulary increased as well as their reading comprehension during the course (see Figure 3).

The questionnaire also revealed that more than half of the student population perceived that they would benefit from more grammar practice in class before exams, with 57.74% for the students coming from English medium schools and a larger percentage of students, 79.33%, coming from non-English medium schools answering those related statements in the positive. Students expressed this point of view about two-thirds of the way through the course. Given the prevalence of traditional grammar teaching in a typical school in Lebanon, this attitude may be a result of wanting to experience a language learning approach with which they were more comfortable and familiar.

The data also seems to highlight the fact that many students do not seem to know how to take responsibility for their own language learning, especially non-English educated students. Most of the students seem to be motivated to practice autonomous learning inside the classroom but not outside of the classroom.

RQ2. What perceptions do the teachers in this course have about the efficacy of the simulation methodology?

The data analysis revealed that although there seems to be a lack of common understanding among the teachers regarding the benefits of the course, teachers do view the simulation methodology as a beneficial strategy for English language acquisition in this EFL context. Teachers perceive the course as interactive, as nurturing creativity, self-assessment, research skills, and autonomous learning as a direct result of the simulation methodology.

Some teachers observe that many students hold different attitudes and perceptions towards the course at the beginning of the semester than they do at the end of it. Many teachers mentioned that towards the end of the semester, many students, regardless of the language of their prior schooling, change their previous perceptions of the course and improve their language. This finding corroborates data presented in the study conducted by Othman and Shuqair (2013). Many teachers agree that non-English background students are more anxious in the course and take time to adjust to the course and to feel confident. The teachers claimed that many students are not aware of the benefits of the simulation methodology for their language acquisition at the beginning of the semester but most of the students catch on to the strategies by the middle of the semester.

RQ3. Do teachers and students have similar perceptions about how the simulation methodology impacts language acquisition?

The triangulated data resulted in similar perceptions regarding how the teachers and the students perceive the simulation methodology used in this course as represented in the five themes discussed above. The themes to emerge from this study build a picture of a language course that has enormous potential for the language learning of students in this EFL context who come from three divergent language backgrounds. The simulation methodology seems to provide language learners with a quasi-immersion experience that could lead to more effective and possibly faster language acquisition.

This study also raised some interesting questions that deserve some follow up. Particularly, further research could attempt to discover why some students in this context fail to develop autonomous study habits, and motivation toward their own language acquisition.

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