



EXPLOITATION OF TECHNOLOGY TO ENHANCE WRITING EFFICACY IN EFL CLASSROOM

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Abstract

In Teaching English as a foreign Language there is a paradigm shift in the progression of the process of writing skills. The last few decades have maneuvered English language educationalist towards assessing various language learning opportunities with the advancement in the use of technology in language classroom. A web 2.0 technology promotes innovative possibility for both teachers and students to integrate technological affordance like blogs twitter etc. The present study explores the effectiveness and exploitation of technology in enhancing EFL students' writing skills at the tertiary level. This research was conducted for three weeks at the English Language Department at Mustaqbal University, Saudi Arabia in the first and second semester of the academic year 1440-41 H. The sample of this study consists of 28 students (14 from each semester) out of 50 students both at male and female section. Pre and post tests were done to evaluate the writing skills. The findings of the study revealed that there were statistically significant differences between the means of Pretest of the experimental group which achieved better results in the post-test. Finally, the data analysis showed that technological affordance was very effective in improving the participants' writing skills.

Keywords: Writing, Technological Affordances, Web 2.0, Language Classroom.

1. Introduction

The technical platform has transformed dramatically over recent decades. "Students today are functioning in an age where technology drives almost every aspect of their lives, so they feel comfortable using digital writing tools," said Paterson, speaking at the recent 21st Century Learning Conference in Hong Kong. The accessibility of technology has extended the toolbox and the teachers use technology by incorporating the new forms of technologies integrated in English Language classroom curriculum to enhance the learning process. As Gordon (2000) says: "Whether or not we choose to be, we are actors in the drama of technological progress. As the Internet takes up residence in our offices, homes and schools, we no longer have the prerogative to view technology as optional." More ways of using technology in teaching and learning contexts especially in language skills, are being developed and explored. Recent studies have proved that, the integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in English language educational settings often improves teaching and learning (Tinio, 2016). According to Nelson D (2019), "Writing as a means of creating and forming ideas, and working with their peers required them to be engaged in multiple-intellectual levels". By integrating technology in the EFL curriculum more strategies and tools are incorporated to increase the learner's abilities to write effectively. The use of technology environment advances idea generation, research within learners who are accustomed to the social media. The digital age generation find that using electronic devices are preferable. These tools suit their way of learning and doing their activities (Mahdy, Samad & Mahdi, 2020; Al-Shammari, 2020)

Moreover, the interference from the first language into a foreign language can cause a lot of anxiety for Saudi students and this hinder them from becoming confident writers in English. New technology is being introduced daily; teachers have a lot of opportunities to implement strategies that help learners who have difficulty with writing. According to second language researchers, EFL writing pedagogy should include a large amount of writing practice, several varieties of texts and motivating tasks, opportunities for revision and feedback, and models of acceptable texts (Grabe and Kaplan 1996; Raimes 2002; Grabe 2001; Kroll 2001; Reid 2001; Seow 2002; Sokolik 2003; Nation 2009). Social Networking platforms are multimodal by nature allowing learners to collaborate through the application and tools of Web 2.0 like blogs, wikis, podcasts, Facebook and You tube. However, it can be challenging to select the right tech tools for student to develop effective writing skill. The researchers main aim is to explore the effect of technical tools to improve students writing skills at the tertiary level.

1.1 Statement of Problem

The advent of Digital innovation has given English a new status in the virtual world where learners spend a lot of time communicating through the technological tools. However, there are draw backs for the non-native speakers when it comes to writing effectively as the traditional classes hardly motivates them to develop their writing skills. Writing, for various reasons, has come to be the most challenging skill for both, students to learn, and teachers to impart (Abedi, Namaziandost, & Akbari, 2019; Kardena, Syarif, & Zaim, 2020; Sukmawati & Nasution, 2020). As per the researchers experience the learners do not care about writing as its time consuming. To overcome this gap the research focuses to explore how technology enhances the learners' writing skills.

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1.2 Research Questions

What is the effect of using Web 2.0 technological applications and tools to improve the writing skill of EFL learners at the tertiary level?

1.3 Methodology

Mixed method research was employed for the study, by using an experimental design where the independent variables were manipulated (as treatments), participants were randomly assigned to different treatment levels (random assignment), and the results of the treatments on outcomes (dependent variables) were observed. This research included the writing skill pre-test, the implementation of the experiment on the treatment group and then the post-test to explore the effect of web 2.0 technological tools/application on improving the EFL learners' writing skills at tertiary level. For validating purpose semi structured interview questions were constructed to learn about the different technological applications the teachers employed in their teaching. This research was conducted for three weeks at the English Language Department at Mustaqbal University, Saudi Arabia in the academic year 1440-41 H. The Independent variable used was Blog as well as WhatsApp chat. While the Dependent variable was Blogging skill in accomplishing the learners' writing ability, the sample of this study consists of 28 students and 2 teachers.

1.4 Significance of the study

A challenge to contribute in enlightening teaching writing in English language classrooms by using technological applications and tools to improve the writing skill of EFL learners. This study can be beneficial to teachers, researchers, curriculum developers who are concerned in integrating technology in the teaching methodologies as it provides with recent development which benefits its users to have innovative skills that can appropriately be used in their daily life.

2. Literature Review

A review of the literature supports the idea of using technological platforms to enhance the writing skill is discussed below.

2.1 Writing and its significance: The term writing is defined in several ways; According to Wikipedia writing is a medium of human communication that involves the representation of a language with written symbols. Tarigan (1994:3) stated that writing is activity to produce or draw graphic symbols which represent a language that is understood by people, so the other people can read the graphic symbols presented. Taki & Fardafshari (2012), stated that Writing is not only a way of expressing ideas and feelings and exchanging information or a way of using words to express oneself, but also it is a social activity in which people interact with their partners. Therefore, writing is a tool for communication.

It is a major challenge for non-native learners to express their ideas logically. Nelson (2019) states that, "In this modern hi-tech world, writing is a skill that plays an increasingly important role in success across academic and professional disciplines; word processing and other forms of electronic communication help students learn and practice writing in and out of the classroom". Also, Farrah (2012) stated that Arab university students face serious difficulties when they are asked to write essays. He relays this for students' inability to express themselves because of the lack of practicing writing skills and the lack of knowledge and planning. Later Rao (2019) addressed to the fact that "Writing is the most difficult skill among the four language skills for many learners of ESL/EFL learners because of its complexity in spelling, pronunciation, vocabulary and grammatical structure." Language learners often focus on other skills rather than writing. Whereas writing skill is one of the most important as it enhances the language learning process exponentially. In discussing the significance of writing, Suleiman (2000) also stresses that writing is an essential factor of language.

2.2. Technology and its use in writing skills: Rapid development in the Digital writing has transformed the way we study, work, socialize, communicate, and share knowledge, although the medium has advanced, but the skills required to transcribe well has not. Brown (2007) argues that writing is a skill that is the exclusive domain of scribes and scholars in educational or religious institutions. In the recent years, great advancement has been made in finding ways to incorporate technology into the academic curriculum. Spell checking, grammar checking, and plagiarism recognition tools have all significantly become a major part of teaching. However, some criticize technology for spell- and grammar-checkers that lessen students' reliance on their own capabilities, research shows that students who use word processing programs to develop writing skills can write better compositions (Kulik, 2003).

The language learners have got the opportunity to express and share their ideas to the unlimited internet community in the World Wide Web. Nelson (2019), "Expresses that the greatest benefits of technology integration in education is the ability it offers for autonomous learning", Learners when access and utilize Wikis, Blogs, twitter and Watts app to express their feelings are not apprehensive about what others may think in the class. Such features of technological advancement have opened a domain for learners to contribute and improve their language skills especially writing.



Web 2.0: It enable teachers and learners to share ideas and collaborate in innovative ways. It provides several prospects for social interactions and collaboration among students, teachers, experts, professionals etc. According to Hurlburt (2008), there are “invisible aspects” to facilitating learning in the social network environments. Also, Learners’ critical thinking skills can be enhanced through the opportunity to regularly compare their own contributions to those of their peers, and the affirmation of their relative standing in the class may be powerful motivation for learning. Hence by social networking sites such as, Wikis, Facebook, My-Space, YouTube, Blogs, twitter have entered the curriculum of EFL teaching and learning, especially writing skills.

Blogs: (a blend of the words web and log) It is a web page on the world wide web with regular diary entries consisting of discrete often informal postings by authors and responses to these posts by an audience. The use of a blog enhances learning in the EFL classroom, and it also improves writing skills by encouraging students to be more prolific writers. Campbell (2003) and Hiler (2002) suggested that blogs can be used by teachers and students as a forum for students to express opinions, co-produce ideas and share interesting information in order to communicate in an environment of English as a second language (ESL).

WIKIS: Wikis are very effective tool for academic purposes and for enhancing ESL writing skill. Wheeler, Yeomans and Wheeler (2008) stress on implementing Wikis as a beneficial means in ESL classes because it is a collaborative online tool which teachers and the students can work together consistently.

A lot of researchers have contributed on the importance of the technological platforms, Wikis and Blogs, in effectively learning and developing writing skills. As well stated by Blackmore-Squires (2010: 41) that Blogs had ‘a big impact on the students and their writing skills’ in second language classroom. Whereas Shu and Chuang (2012) also emphasize on mass collaboration offered by Wikis. To conclude, that applying Web 2.0 service in EFL motivates the learners to improve the academic writing skills and how Web technologies are a great aid to develop the writing skills.

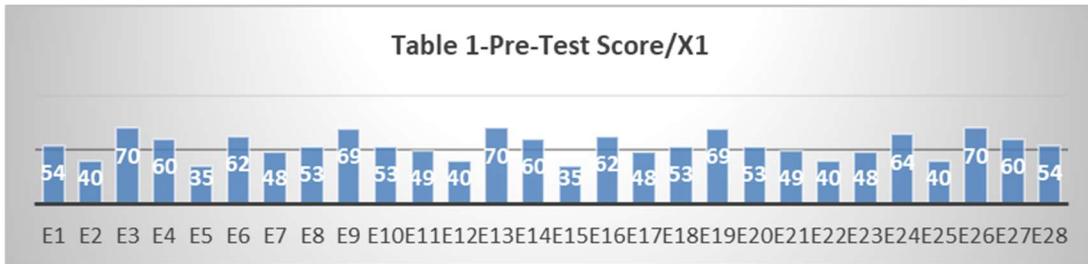
3. Result and Discussion

3.1The effect of using Web 2.0 technological applications to improve EFL learners writing skill.

Teachers at tertiary level must be carefully about the use of technologies as well as evaluating their efficiency in the classroom. The contemplation of what learning will be achieved and how the technological applications will help is essential to its effective deployment. The researchers made the learners aware of the different technological applications like Podcasts, twitter, Wiki, where students can improve their language skills. According to Nelson (2019), “learners may not be aware of the ways technology can be used in language learning and therefore educators are challenged to illustrate their students the potential that technology provides for them”.

The researchers gave a paragraph writing Titled “Saudi Arabia and Its Culture” as blogging test to the learners prior to the treatment. The responses received from the blog test. The scores in Pre-test as shown in Table 1. below shows that if the students are given right training, they can improve their writing skills. As rightly said by Davis (1986) that the ease of use and usefulness of a technology affect users’ intention to use it.

Table 1-Pre-Test Score/X1



For three weeks the treatment was conducted. The students were educated on using blogging as well as other technological applications. Weekly Lesson plan topics were used as to practice. After conducting the experiment, the researcher administrated a post-test in order to evaluate their English writing performance. The scores in Post-test as shown in Table 2. indicates a slight

Table 2-Post-Test Score/X2


variation in the scores of the learners. It's because the learners were excited to use the Digital technology platform as it offers a potentially more engaging alternative. Although some learners were less confident in learning with technologies like Wikis, twitter, blogs. Although steps need to be taken to ensure equality of access. Regarding the Saudi context, and their relationship with technology, this study is consistent with Al Lily (2011), who stated that technology opens new channels for Saudi students to overcome some of the challenges they face in regard to integrating technological application in improving writing skills.

Result of the interview from the teachers were teacher T1, said that “**technological applications like watts app combined with appropriate instructional strategies creates a good learning environment that not only leads to effective language learning but also is highly motivational and especially Wikis and blogs is highly influential in helping language students improve their writing skills when its second language learners**”. T2 teacher, had a different version of her experience with the students she shared a quirky list which offers the learners a different perspective on how podcasts can help them boost their writing skills, for example **The Guardian book podcast which keeps one updated about the new books in English etc... apart from this she makes them listen to variety of podcast which has been beneficial to many learners to improve their writing skills**. Creative writing is considered as a unique combination of sharing the students' experiences and expressing their thoughts through social networking tools. The study is aligned with Shih (2011), who stresses on teachers and learners to use peer assessment process to give feedback on Facebook. Shih conducted research aimed at investigating how blending learning combines between peer assessment and using Web 2.0 or social networking services, Facebook, to improve their writing standards. The results showed that the students learned a lot of skills such as organization, grammar, content vocabulary and spelling.

3.2 Technological tools to improve the writing skill of EFL learners at the tertiary level

The researcher used Web 2.0 technologies- Blog to enhance EFL student's language skills so that they become proficient in writing. Integrating the teaching of writing skills with technology makes the writing process easy for learners. Blogs help learners to communicate extensively without any limitation, indicating that it is an effective strategy in the language-teaching. According to Aljumah (2012) who studies the learners' attitudes towards the use of blogging in English language writing, posits that blogging helps students to improve their writing skills in Saudi Arabia. The results of the Pretest and Post test Scores in Table 3 show that there is an improvement of 24% in the learners writing Skill which clearly indicates that motivation and interest generate creative writing when EFL learners are involved in social networking sites. It is the teacher's responsibility to guide and prepare them how to work independently on these techno platforms.

Table3: Improvement in Writing Ability

Variable	Paragraph Writing	Pre test	Post test	Improvement
a. Substance		54.14		
b. Unity			67.07	
c, Coherence				24%

Table 4 One Sample Test

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean		Std. Deviation	Variance	t
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Statistic	
Pretest	28	35	70	1516	54.14	2.085	11.031	121.683	25.972
Posttest	28	51	79	1878	67.07	1.587	8.397	70.513	42.265



The details of Test scores in Table 4 above clearly indicates that the overall mean of the pre-test was 54.14 and Std Deviation was 11.03, while the overall mean of the post-test was 67.07 and the Std Deviation was 8.397, the results revealed that there were statistically significant differences between the achievement of the learners score after the experiment evidently proving that technological application like blog indeed enhanced the writing skills. This showed that the overall scores of the pre-test and posttest were highly correlated. This result is in accord with the views of different researchers such as Al-Ahaydib 1986; Al-Saggaf 2004; Al-Shehri 2012 ; Yunus, Salehi and Chenzi 2012 .

The View of teacher T2 is that “Using technology to enhance teaching in writing is very essential in the digital age, as it motivates those learners who are struggling to share their ideas in writing. The interviewee said she gives electronic mapping - genre-specific content that contain embedded content prompts and cues, which assist in structuring a pre-writing brainstorm. To develop editing and revising she has adapted spell checkers, so that learners comprehend the reasons for probable errors and find strategies to select a right word from the list”. As the technologies are progressing so are novel ways of communicating, hence foremost readjustment of existing pedagogies. The teacher T1 said that the use of Web 2.0 technologies help students become more skillful in writing and in the use of technology as it provides a more flexible learning environment giving the learners the opportunity to create content and collaboration. When asked what technology is used. The response was -For combined writing assignments Wikis are generally used, very recently to develop the sense of peer review, Blogs are been implemented for collaborative reflections and feedback. Aptly said by Reynard (2009) that “New technologies can help us improve our teaching and learning only when they are used effectively with clear goals and proper methods”

4. Conclusion

We the teachers – learners are all in the techno age. The advancement of technology has influenced teaching and learning methods in the EFL classrooms. Blending technology with the traditional teaching makes the lesson more efficient and the learners are motivated to improve their language skills. According to Wang (2005), “Technology integration in foreign language teaching demonstrates the shift in educational paradigms from a behavioral to a constructivist learning approach”. The study explored the effectiveness and exploitation of technology in enhancing EFL students’ writing skills at the tertiary level. It showed how using of web 2.0 especially Blog could enhance the writing skills of the EFL students. The results of the study showed that the learners after the pretest treatment on using web 2.0 technological application -Blog in writing, had a significant difference in the post test result as the learners enhanced their writing ability. Therefore, integrating Blog in teaching and learning language (writing) skills has shown a significant enhancement in EFL student’s writing skills and they became proficient in writing. In view of Omar, Miah, and Belmasrour (2020), “Through technology, written communication has been seen to flourish enormously”. Applying suitable technological applications indeed can enhance the ability of second language learners to improve their cognitive skills. Therefore, its recommended that EFL teachers and learners need to be aware of blending Web 2.0 technological applications/ tools in the language classroom and benefit from it to enhance their language skills.

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