

MEASURING THE EFFECTS OF WEB-BASED PRE-WRITING ACTIVITIES ON EFL LEARNERS' WRITING PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT: *Adopting pre-writing activities to support and improve writing skill is widely recognized by the language practitioners as a beneficial micro-skill. Based on this, the current study aimed at finding the effect of the prewriting activities when they are done online such as diagramming, mapping outlining combined with traditional in-class writing instruction on helping EFL learners brainstorm, plan, organize and write. The study consists of two groups: experimental and control. The experimental group was taught by a combination of web-based prewriting activities and the traditional in-class writing instruction. The control group was taught by traditional in-class writing instruction based on the textbook only. The experimental design was utilized, with pre-posttest to compare the writing performance of the two groups of the study. T-test analysis results showed that there were significant differences in students' writing competency between the two groups in favor of the experimental.*

KEYWORDS: Pre-writing Activities, Web-based Activities, Writing Performance, Mapping, Diagramming, Outlining.

INTRODUCTION

As a productive skill, writing requires a combination of skills, such as brainstorming, mapping, organizing information, outlining and communicating ideas. Language practitioners recognized the importance and the support that pre-writing activities may bring to learners' writing. It is argued that prewriting is the most important skill to emphasize and practice extensively in basic writing classes (Thorne as cited in Mogahed, 2013). Some researchers had shown that pre-writing facilitates the writing process for all types of writing (Brodney, Revves, and Kazelskis, and MacMillan, as cited in Lin et al., 2004). Writing needs planning and a lack of planning may result in poor writing performance (Bourdin and Fayol as cited in Lin et al., 2004).

When pre-writing activities are associated with the use of multiple technologies in writing instruction, they will accommodate students with different learning styles, abilities and interests. Multiple technologies will also help students practice different writing skills at the same time. Web-based instruction has the advantage of combining several technologies such as e-mail, word-processing, online chat, websites that supply students with more information on some specific writing skills.

New technologies of online course have created new opportunities for language learners to develop their language skills and possess an awareness of and a familiarity with the new technology-based educational environment (Lantolf, 2007; Swain, Kinnear, and Steinman, 2011).

One of these opportunities learners can possess is to use technology as a tool for improving their writing skills. The use of technology for writing includes different forms such as

computer-based projects, software programs and word-processing that direct writing instruction and assist students in developing their own writing, emails, and websites. The use of technology in teaching writing has been supported by research findings. Firstly, to act in the electronic community helps learners create, analyze, and produce ideas easier and more efficiently. Secondly, using emails and sharing files give students the chance to collaborate with peers and teachers. Thirdly, using technology will motivate learners in their writing skill (Tsou, Wang, and Li, 2002). Fourthly, technology programs have been encouraged as effective way that could be used to replace or enhance direct human input (Ware and Warschauer as cited in Tsou, 2008).

Chuo (2007) argued that the use of the Internet and the World Wide Web has affected the educational process, the way teachers teach students, and the field of EFL. Besides exposing students to the use of web-based writing instructional activities, the Internet and the World Wide Web may change students' attitudes towards language and this may help them write coherent compositions.

Based on the above assumption about web-based instruction, the present study attempted to measure the effect of the web-based instruction accompanied with the traditional writing instruction (depending on the textbook) to find out whether the integration of a web-based course in traditional EFL in-class writing instruction significantly improves the writing skills of EFL learners or not.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Many theories and researches on the pedagogy of writing agree that this skill needs to be taught as a process rather than a product. The shift of the instructional paradigm from writing as a product to writing as a process, led to increasing attention on what students do before writing a draft, and on the discovery of what to say – often called 'invention writing' which increases a student's ability to do intellectual work (Crawford and Smolkowski, 2008).

Paltridge (2004) emphasized that writing is a skill that requires certain technical capacity which involves cognitive-psychomotor cooperation

Mapping is one of the educational tool designed for learning, and rooted in the Ausbelian assimilation theory (often termed as advance organizers or semantic maps) developed by Novak (Novak and Can~as, 2006; Novak, 1998, 2006, 2010). One of the main goals of concept maps or advance organizers is to clarify the key ideas for both students and teachers in any learning task. One method for combining these key ideas through many different examples and representations of a concept for individualizing instruction is through computer-based instruction. Learning can be enhanced through hypermedia since it provides learners with control of content that enables students to construct meaning from multiple examples, visual aids, and simultaneous instructional modes.

This study builds on prior research on the pre-writing stage and its different strategies and techniques to improve student's writing. This research has investigated the effects of hypermedia with pre-writing (Yoshimura, 2009; Kuteeva, 2010; Yang, 2010).

A study was conducted by Al-Jarf (2004) which aimed at investigating the effects of web-based learning on struggling EFL college writers. Students in the experimental group received online

instruction in which they posted their own threads, short paragraphs, stories or poems on the discussion board. They located information related to themes covered in the book from internet sites like “Yahoo movies” and “WebMD”. They word-processed their paragraphs and checked their own spelling using MS WORD. The results showed that students’ achievement in the experimental group significantly improved as a result of using a combination of web-based writing instruction and traditional in-class writing instruction.

A similar study was carried out by Zaid (2011) which investigated the effects of web-based pre-writing activities on college EFL students’ writing performance and their writing apprehension. He assessed whether multimedia-based concept-mapping and online reading before writing affected the quality of students’ compositions and their writing apprehension. Results showed no statistically significant differences overall in the writing under the three conditions. However, students were found to write longer and richer drafts in the conditions of online concept-mapping and online reading before writing, yet poorer, shorter drafts after teacher-led talk in the traditional, no treatment group. The results also revealed that both treatments had significant effects on improving the students’ writing quality; however, they increased the students’ writing apprehension.

A study carried out by Abed Al-Haq and Al-Sobh (2010) to determine the effectiveness of a web-based writing instructional EFL program on Jordanian secondary students’ performance. The results of the study revealed statistically significant differences at ($\alpha = 0.05$) in the students’ mean scores of the overall English writing achievement post-test in favor of the experimental group which was taught according to web-based writing instructional EFL program.

Sharadgah (2013) carried out a study that aimed at measuring the effect of an Internet-based instructional program (IBIP) on developing Salman bin Abdulaziz University students’ writing performance. The subjects in this study were 98 male students enrolled in a writing course during the first semester of the academic year 2012/2013. This study used the quasi-experimental design. The subjects were randomly assigned into two groups: an experimental group was taught writing via the IBIP; and the control group was taught in the ordinary method. To achieve the purpose of the study, the researcher designed an Internet-based instructional program. The website of the program was provided with useful links and learning materials. The findings of the study revealed that EFL students in the experimental group who used the IBIP showed much improvement in their writing performance than the EFL students in the control group who used the ordinary method.

Al Fageeh (2014) designed his study to explore the effects of using wikis on writing instruction outcomes and the learners' reading skills in the Blackboard environment. Findings showed improvements on the reading/writing performance of students and their performance on the reading test in favor of the experimental participants who received wiki modules on Blackboard.

Chuo (2007) investigated the effects of the Web Quest Writing Instruction (WQWI) program on Taiwanese EFL learners’ writing performance, apprehension and perception of web resource integrated language learning. The participants were college students. One class received traditional learning and the other received the WQWI program. The findings showed that the students in the WQWI class improved their writing performance significantly more than the traditional class. Also the WQWI class showed significant reduction in writing apprehension. Moreover, students had a favorable perception of the WQWI program

reorganization and more language learning progress through web resources. This study does not show that there was interaction among students and between students and the teacher. It looks into the effect of integrating web resources. It also looks into an EFL writing instruction. It does not touch on collaboration and discussion among students.

Wooley (2007) examined the effects of web-based peer review on students' writing within an online, asynchronous peer review system. Participants included 114 students selected from 10 sections of a sophomore-level educational psychology course at Midwestern State University. The course is usually taken by all education majors during the second year of the four year program. The study sought to illuminate distinctions between different types of reviewing and reviewer preparation, namely the effects of feedback elaboration and the effects of providing examples of helpful and unhelpful feedback. Results indicated that students who provided elaborate forms of feedback with free form comments performed significantly better on writing than students who provided numerical ratings only. The results also indicated that review-first groups did not perform better than write-first groups. Using video and text chat discourse gave higher speaking skill results, followed by listening, reading and finally writing skills.

Ahmad (2016) investigated the effect of Facebook on grammar discussion and writing skill in English as a foreign language for university students. The study sample consisted of 60 students at Oklt Al Sqoor College of Science and Arts in Saudi Arabia and was divided into two groups: 30 students for the experimental group and 30 students for the control group. Students in both the experimental and the control group were pre-tested using the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) grammar and writing test. After that, the experimental group was taught using Facebook while the control group was taught using the traditional method. Finally, students in both groups were post-tested using the EFL grammar and writing test. Results of the study showed that the experimental group outperformed the control group in the post-test of EFL grammar and writing. This difference can be attributed to using Facebook.

Based on the research studies reviewed, the following may be inferred:

1. These studies stress the positive effects of using the web and computers in teaching writing.
2. The use of the web-based, computer programs and internet may produce higher achievement than the current technique.
3. The use of the web or internet may result in positive students' attitudes towards technology and school.
4. The Internet is a rich source of information where students can benefit a lot in learning writing.
- 5- It may provide EFL teachers with a suitable way that they can employ technology to teach writing skills effectively.
- 6-Multiple technologies will also help students practice different writing skills at the same time.
- 7-Web-based instruction has the advantage of combining several technologies such as e-mail, word-processing, online chat, WWW resources and websites that provide additional information on specific writing skills.

Given the above assumption about web-based instruction, the present study attempted to use a web-based as a pre-writing activity such as mapping, outlining, and diagramming in combination with traditional writing instruction (depending on the textbook). The study tried to answer the following question: Is there a statistically significant difference in writing achievement between EFL students exposed to a combination of web-based instruction and traditional in-class writing instruction and those exposed to traditional in-class writing instruction only?

Statement of the problem

Throughout the researcher's field work at the University of Hail in Saudi Arabia, she noticed that students have weak writing skills, and they need to develop their linguistic abilities. In Saudi Arabia, teaching writing at universities focuses on having writing that is free of mistakes in grammar, punctuation and vocabulary. But nowadays, this way of teaching writing is no longer acceptable. Although the number of universities and classrooms using technology in instruction is increasing, exploring the effect of educational technology on students' achievement becomes a necessity in this technologically advanced world. Evidence that use of technology in instruction is useful, necessary, and cost-effective is also required by educational administrators, policy and decision makers.

Therefore, much more attention should be given to the process of the writing itself and to the students' problems in writing. Web-based instruction along with the textbook based instruction has been seen as one of practical solutions to the students' problems in writing. This approach allows students to manage the complexity of the writing task as they go through different stages of writing, prewriting, drafting, revising, editing using multiple technologies as this study aimed to examine.

The purpose of the study

The main objective of the current study is to investigate the direct effect of a web-based writing technique on students' writing performance. This study aimed also to achieve the following objectives:

- a-to provide opportunities for the students to demonstrate their understanding of a topic or subject through web-based pre-writing activities.
- b- to help students think about subject and express their thoughts creatively.
- c-to encourage students to organize their thoughts before writing.

Hypothesis

There are no significant differences in students' writing performance between the student who were taught by web-based instruction combined with the traditional in-class (using textbook) and those who were taught by the traditional in-class instruction based on textbook only.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The participants were 70 second year undergraduate students enrolled in compulsory EFL writing course (Composition 2: short essay based course) taught by the researcher at the University of Hail in KSA. Therefore, writing essays for second year students was their major challenge in English since it is their first experience in writing essays.

Instrument of the Study

In this research, a pre-posttest based on essay writing was used to evaluate the students' quality of writing before and after the experiment. This research was conducted by using a quasi-experimental method with two groups: Control and experimental to compare between the two methods used (web-based instruction combined with traditional in class instruction and the traditional in class instruction based on textbook only).

The Reliability and the Validity of the Instrument

First, to establish the reliability of the essay writing test, the test was tried out to another group of 30 students which was not assigned in this research. These students were asked to answer the test. After two weeks, they were asked to answer the test for the second time. Their papers were corrected by the researcher. The reliability of the test was established by using Cronbach Alpha. The result was found to be (0.81). The reliability coefficients for the instrument used in this study showed that the study instrument was satisfactorily reliable. To ensure the validity of the research instrument, the instrument of the study was given to a jury of three specialists at Hail University in KSA. They suggested replacing, deleting and adding. They also suggested the scoring rubrics to be used in checking students' writing. Their suggestions and comments were highly considered; scoring rubrics was established and the instrument of the study was modified accordingly.

Procedures

This research was conducted to find out whether the students who were taught by using web-based instruction combined with traditional in class instruction have any kind of improvement in their ability of writing short essays. The sample of the study was from the second year students of the English Department who registered in Composition 2 in the academic year 2017/2018 at the University of Hail. A pre-posttest design was used. The pretest was administered to the two groups of the study (experimental and control) on several topics given to see their ability before having treatment.

Each group was treated in different way; the experimental was taught according to the web-based instruction combined with the traditional in-class instruction (based on the textbook) while the control group was taught according to the traditional in-class instruction which was based on the textbook only. After the treatment, the two groups were given the post-test which was essay-based test to measure their achievement after the treatment.

The researcher followed the following procedures to carry out the treatment:

- 1- Students in experimental were trained to use multimedia-based diagramming, outlining and mapping before writing their first draft.

- 2- The teacher in this pre-drafting activity used leading keywords to get students think about the topic or idea being considered, and generate different types of maps using the multimedia facilities available.
- 3- Students in the experimental group were taught three components: basic computer skills, multimedia production skills, including the use of specialized software and integration of multimedia production with the classroom curriculum.
- 4- For mapping and outlining, students were taught to brainstorm ideas, structure their thoughts and visually communicate concepts to strengthen understanding with the diagrams and map views. In this way, using the software's concept map as a browser functioned to provide an inherent organizational structure that is more useful to the learner for navigating information in a hypermedia environment than more typically used interfaces such as web pages and linked text
- 5- Students then transform their diagrams, mind maps and outlines into polished presentations that communicate ideas clearly and demonstrate understanding and knowledge.
- 6- Once a first draft of their composition is ready, the students critique their own works together with their teacher and other participants who have special knowledge of the topics involved. Students create a list of what they want to do differently.
- 7- Students share their multimedia compositions with other students in the class and record their revised presentation. Students answer questions and lead discussions regarding their work.
- 8- Students can present their work in other classes, in other computer graphics and applications.
- 9- For the control group, the researcher did not teach any pre-drafting activity in class. The topic was written on the board, and the students were asked to write about it following the instructions given in the textbook. In this class, however, teaching any pre-drafting activities was ignored. Teaching following this approach continued for the whole semester.
- 10- Similarly with pretest, the posttest was administered by using the same topics. The researcher analyzed students' product of writing based on the rubric of scoring writing which contains five indicators: content, organization, vocabulary, grammar and mechanics (See Table1).
- 11- The data of this research were collected through students' products of paragraph writing which were scored by two scorers. Furthermore, in this research, the correlation of the scores from two scorers was calculated and proved reliable.

Table (1): Soring Rubric

Aspect of writing	Indicator	weight
Content	The expressions clearly show the points of the message.	4
	The expressions partly indicate clear points of the message.	3
	The expressions indicate a little clear points of the message.	2
	The expressions do not indicate clear points of the message.	1
Organization	The generic structure is complete.	4
	The generic structure is almost Complete.	3
	The generic structure needs more Components.	2
	The Generic structure does follow the pattern.	1
Vocabulary	Effective choice of words.	4
	Adequate choices of words but few misuse of vocabulary.	3
	Adequate but many misuse of Vocabulary.	2
	Very poor knowledge of words choices and verb form	1
Grammar	No errors, full control of structure	4
	Few errors, good control in structure	3
	Many errors, fair control in structure`	2
	Dominated by errors, no control of structure	1
Mechanics	No errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization and paragraphing.	4
	Few errors in spelling, punctuation, capitalization and paragraphing.	3
	Frequent errors in punctuation, spelling, capitalization and Paragraphing.	2
	Dominated by errors in punctuation, spelling, and capitalization also paragraphing.	1

In Diagram view, students will do the following procedures as:

- Add symbols and images in multiple ways. Point and click to place them, use the Create tool, or drag and drop from the Symbol palette. Choose the method that works best for them and their topic.
- Show relationships between ideas with links.

- Explain the relationship between ideas with linking phrases – choose from a list of common phrases or write their own.
- Organize ideas effortlessly using the Arrange tool or to create various tree charts and webs.

In Map view, students will do the following steps:

- Expand their central idea by adding new topic and subtopic branches.
- Rearrange and connect ideas easily by dragging branches into place.
- Use the Relationship tool to show connections among branches and topics.
- Branches and their sub-branches automatically maintain the same color to visually keep related thoughts together.

Plan & Organize Written Work

Organize ideas and think through projects and assignments more effectively using Inspiration's Outline View. Structure their work for planning and writing. Learn how to brainstorm and create essay outlines to support the writing process. Gather and keep track of research information and develop a logical flow for written and oral communication. With Outline View, they can quickly develop main and supporting ideas and add detail helping them write to a purpose. Outlining, paired with the integrated visual views, lets students move seamlessly between visual and written expressions of their thinking to expand and refine ideas and produce quality work.

In Outline View:

- Transform diagrams and mind maps to outlines with one click.
- Continue the writing process by adding topics, subtopics and notes text.
- Organize ideas and information with power outlining tools.
- Rearrange topics simply by dragging. Subtopics and notes move automatically.
- Change idea hierarchy, split or combine topics, transform lists to topics and subtopics, and demote and promote groups of subtopics to fine tune their work.
- Manage their outline structure and order by hiding or showing subtopics and notes.
- Keep visual connections intact.
- Meet word and page count requirements with Word Count.

FINDINGS

To find out whether there are statistically significant differences in PRE-TEST due to GROUP variables, t-test analysis was conducted and the results are shown in Table (1).

Table (1): T-test Results of PRE TEST due to Group Variable

GROUP	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig.
Experimental	36	10.67	2.928	-.529	68	.598
Control	34	11.00	2.283			

Table (1) shows that there are no statistically significant differences at ($\alpha= 0.05$) in pre-test between the experimental and the control groups.

To find out whether there are statistically significant differences in POST-TEST due to method variables, t-test analysis was conducted and the results are shown in Table (2).

Table (2): T-test Results of POST TEST due to Method of Teaching

Method	GROUP	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig.
Web-based writing method	Experimental	36	14.14	2.738	4.312	68	.000
Traditional in-class instruction method	Control	34	11.68	1.950			

Table (2) shows that there are statistically significant differences at ($\alpha= 0.05$) in the post-test due to method variable in favor of web-based writing method.

Discussion of the Findings

The present study aimed to find out how the implementation of web-based instruction combined with the traditional in-class instruction (based on the textbook) enhanced the students' skill in writing. And thus, the current study aimed to test the following hypothesis:

There are no statistically significant differences in students' writing performance between the experimental group which was taught by web-based instruction combined with the traditional in-class instruction (based on the textbook) and the control group which was taught by the conventional method.

The research hypothesis was tested by using t-test. The data of this research were taken from the result of pretest and posttest. The test assigned the students to show their ability to develop their writing performance. The results of students' writing product were analyzed by using rubric of scoring by assessing five indicators, namely, content, organization, vocabulary, grammar and mechanics. The highest score for each indicator was 4 and the lowest score was 1. The maximum score was 20. The students' product of writing was scored by two scorers.

The results on the pre-test indicated that the experimental group and the control group were almost the same in the mean scores: (10.67) (11.00) respectively. On the other hand, the post-

test showed that the mean scores of the two groups (experimental and control) on the variables of the study differ in favor of the experimental group: (14.14) (11.68) respectively.

Based on the results, the effect of web-based instruction combined with the traditional in-class instruction (based on the textbook) on students' writing ability is positive although the effect was not very high but it can be considered as an indicator of a change in students' writing development. Therefore, further research is needed. It is expected that by having such kind of research, the effectiveness of using web-based writing strategy can be more explored and students' product of writing will be better.

The results indicated that web-based instruction as a supplement to traditional in-class writing instruction was significantly more effective than writing instruction depending on the textbook alone. From this research, it was also found that the students who were treated by using web-based method had active role in participating during the teaching and learning process. Although, this result was not supported by Chuo (2007) who found out in his study that it does not touch on collaboration and discussion among students, but many researchers' studies revealed that students created a good atmosphere in the classroom through web-based instruction as in (Al-Jarf, 2004; Wooley, 2007; Abed Al-Haq and Al-Sobh, 2010; Zaid, 2011; Sharadgah, 2013; Ahmad, 2016).

Moreover, the findings of this research indicated that web-based instruction combined with the traditional in-class instruction (based on the textbook) enhanced direct human input and thus their writing skill as supported by Tsou, Wang, and Li (2002) and Ware and Warschauer as cited in Tsou (2008). It helped the students to understand their role as a writer and learn how to communicate their ideas effectively and clearly in order to make the readers understand about what have been written.

Web-based instruction proved to be an important factor in enhancing the writing quality of EFL students specially when they are used in the pre-writing stage and resulted in a significant improvement in their post-test (achievement test) scores. This result goes in line with a study conducted by Zaid (2011) who concluded that students were found to write longer and richer drafts in the conditions of online concept-mapping and online reading before writing, yet poorer, shorter drafts after teacher-led talk in the traditional, no treatment group.

EFL students throughout the treatment revealed very positive attitudes while using internet; they were very enthusiastic, energetic and engaged in the pre-writing task. This result was argued by Chuo (2007) that exposing students to the use of web-based writing instructional activities, the Internet and the World Wide Web may change their attitudes towards language and this may help them write coherent compositions.

Besides, the researcher in the present study found out that students overall vocabulary and grammar got improved; this finding was emphasized by Ahmad (2016).

In light of the results of the study, the researcher can maintain that the use of the Internet may support the process of teaching and learning the writing skill. Moreover, the students' writing ability and their involvement throughout the implementation of web-based method progressively improved. Although the effect of using web-based method on students achievement scores were not very high but it gives positive indicator for the students' engagement and motivation through the process of teaching writing.

Implications to Research and Practice

Based on the results of the study, the following implications can be drawn:

- 1- The Internet could be a useful tool in TEFL in teaching the writing skill.
- 2- The Internet might help learners by facilitating the process of learning through communication, interaction, and direct feedback.
- 3- Instructors should be trained to teach writing via Internet at universities.
- 4- Universities should provide a writing course via Internet.
- 5- Universities should provide computerized material for teaching writing via Internet.
- 6- Research should be conducted to investigate the effect of the Internet on the other English language skills (Listening, Speaking and Reading).

CONCLUSION

These differences in the students' achievement may be attributed to the utilization of the web-based method as for the following reasons:

- 1- The method was easily and interestingly implemented. It does not require advanced computer skills so students enjoy using the web.
- 2- Technology provides the students with more extension activities that they enjoyed. They used writing as a means of communication in favorable authentic everyday-life situations.
- 3- Web-based instruction has the advantage of combining several technologies such as e-mail, word-processing, outlining, diagraming, online chat, websites that supply students with more information on some specific writing skills.
- 4- The direct feedback given to students had motivated them.
- 5- Using web-based writing method in writing was a new experience to EFL students, so they exerted their efforts to learn through this method.
- 6- The interaction and communication among students themselves and with the teacher might influence students' writing positively.

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