




Exploring the use of online educational platform in teaching writing among ESL students

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APA Citation:

Topacio, K.N.M. (2018). Exploring the use of online educational platform in teaching writing among ESL students. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 14(21), 86-101.

Submission Date: 09/12/16

Acceptance Date: 02/23/18

Abstract

In the light of Integrative CALL, this research aims to know the effectiveness of using online learning platform like a Learning Management Software (LMS) in teaching writing among ESL students in the absence of a traditional classroom instruction. Through a quasi-experimental approach, the study was able to establish that there was no significant difference between the pre- and post-essay overall writing performance of a group which received writing instruction online and a group which received classroom instruction. However, analysis of the individual scoring components revealed that the online-instruction group did not improve in their content-building skill. Focus group interviews were also conducted to know the strengths and weaknesses of the online-based instruction and it was able to reveal that students consider it to be helpful in acquiring sources and expressing opinions, and convenient for lessening issues about time and fear of direct feedback. However, when it comes to instruction and consultation, the students still preferred the face-to-face classroom dialogue. It was also found how lack of autonomous learning habits can be a hindrance to online-based instruction.

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Keywords: Online writing; computer-assisted language learning; ESL writing

1. Introduction

Due to the influx of mass media and technology in our society today, educators cannot help but think of a number of ways to integrate technology in the curriculum, methodologies and instructional materials being used in schools not only in Computer and Technology subjects but other areas of learning as well. This educational move has compelled educators to rethink the way they teach; first, there is already an increasing demand from the industry to hire workers who are computer literate, and second, because students whether they are using technology in school or not are being exposed to them anyway. The second issue regarding student exposure to different platforms of technology and social media is geared towards re-evaluating classroom teaching styles and methodologies. According to Jukes, McCain and Crockett (2010), today's learners prefer to receive information in multi-modes (rather than just textual form) from various multimedia sources, network simultaneously with other web users and receive instant gratification from such activities. These preferences may still be in contradiction to the teaching style of many educators who still prefer slow and controlled release of

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information in its usual textual form that are provided linearly, logically and sequentially. It would be logical to think that if the educators fail to adapt to the changing learning preferences that can also result in changes in the cognitive process of students, classroom lectures and activities grounded on the traditional style of teaching will soon cease to have meaning in the modern society.

Apart from technological materials, educators have to take into consideration the role of the Internet, World Wide Web and the social media in educating the youth of today. According to Pacansky-Brock (2013), "Outside the walls of the classroom, most college students learn through flat, interconnected, and highly personalized experiences. Millennials are accustomed to learning from their peers in a virtual community in which their opinions and ideas matter. This model dramatically contradicts the traditional, hierarchic, top-down model imposed in most college classrooms. If technology can deliver the same message in a better, more personalized, convenient way – that meets not only the preferences of students, but also his/her individualized learning needs – then why are we not exploring..." (p.6)

It can be noted here that there is already a gap between traditional classroom practices and actual world experiences. While students are using the World Wide Web as their primary source of information about the world, be it an academic research or extensive non-academic reading activities, there is a tendency in academic scene to refuse the use of the Internet as an integral part of the learning experience, and not just a supplementary or independent resource for learning.

1.1. Literature review

The development of the computer-assisted language instruction has been anchored on the following educational theories: Behaviorist Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL), Communicative CALL and the Integrative CALL. Language learning activities that were computer-assisted were considered to be effective in conducting drill, since, unlike the human counterpart, computers and software are seen to be patient, never grows tired nor judgmental and has the capacity to allow learners to work on drills on their own pace without the pressure of a face-to-face learning. However, Behaviorist CALL and theory of language learning from which it was based have been criticized for its very mechanical and very structural method of teaching. This resulted in the campaigning of a more communicative language teaching approach. Emerging in the late 1970's to early 1980's, Communicative CALL had been conceptualized to focus more on "using forms than on the forms" and to teach grammar as part of a wider communication context rather than just focusing on the structures of grammar itself. This language learning model has gained support among language educators as it allows expression, discovery and thus, development among language learners. More recently, with the rise of new demands in communicative skills among learners, including their awareness of the social environment in which they are communicating, task-based and project-based approaches were sought. The Integrative CALL was created to respond to this need to allow students to communicate in more authentic communicative environments, and integrating with it various language skills like speaking, listening reading and writing (Warschauer & Healey, 1998).

It can be deduced from the history of CALL that various forms of language learning through computers have been used and have evolved to answer the needs and demands of the changing society. Since there has been a significant change in the way information is distributed, and communication is done in the present society, there is already a need to engage students in tools by which they can be given access to this information and cope with the changes in communication. Several researchers in the field of language education in local and foreign contexts have discussed the effects of integrating online and web technologies in facilitating learning.

Stroia (2012) also mentioned that through new media, we can now overcome the “boundaries of time and space” (p.39) and even manipulate spoken language like never before. For instance, students have now the convenience of viewing videos as tools for language learning and take control over it by replaying, jumping to and fro, focusing on certain aspects only, and pausing as often as needed without the worries of constantly demanding repetitions which is often the case with one-on-one language tutorials. With this, Stroia emphasized that the advantages or usefulness of digital-based learning is not really the question, but when, where, how, and to what extent they can be used.

A number of literature that have discussed the importance of integrating Information Technology (IT) in the English curriculum (Yagelsky & Powley, 1996; Haranhan & Madsen, 2006; Lee, 2006; Tardy, 2010; Vilbar, 2011) and offered ideas as to how, where and how questions of Stroia can be addressed by proposing language teaching strategies and methodologies that can be integrated in the learning process and in the curriculum itself. In terms of to what extent, categories of web-based learning have already been proposed. While, some-learning activities are fully implemented online, there were some instances in which it is used as a supplement to classroom learning. This type is called blended approach.

In an article, Haranhan and Madsen (2006) mentioned that graduates more than being able to read and write with proficiency should also be able to do these skills in a critical, sensitive and ethical manner. He further discussed that integrating IT in the English curriculum helps achieve this goal since exposing students to e-literacy can help expand their notion of reading and writing, and help promote independent learning and preparation for life-long learning. In writing and communication classes, for instance, English instructors know the utmost importance for students to voice out their opinions and be able to think critically in various situations. Hence, the World Wide Web can be a potential tool for English instructors to encourage students to express themselves by sharing, retrieving and evaluating facts, opinions and various ideas if they can just find the most effective ways to maximize the features of web and integrate them in the learning process. However, while these online teaching tools are greatly available in the country, very few educators take the opportunity in maximizing them to aid students in the learning process.

1.2. Research questions

The objective of this study is to find out if an online-assisted writing platform engaging students in online lessons and communicative activities can significantly improve students’ skills in writing argumentative essays. Also, it aims to identify what writing anxieties and difficulties were encountered by the students during the writing lessons and how they were able to overcome them through the online learning tools or traditional learning tools, whichever was specifically assigned to the group where the students belong. Specifically, the following questions were answered through a quasi-experimental procedure and focus group interview:

1. Is there a significant difference in the essay writing performance of the control group after the classroom-based lessons?
2. Is there a significant difference in the essay writing performance of the experimental group after the online-based lessons?
3. Is there a significant difference of the pre- and post-test scores between the experimental and control groups?
4. Based on interviews, what anxieties, difficulties and challenges did the students encounter before and during the lessons (online and classroom-based)?

5. What were the specific advantages and disadvantages of using the online-assisted writing tool based on students' perception?

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The participants were 1st year students majoring in Electrical Engineering. The students were given a pre-survey before the treatment proper to find out their knowledge about writing process and writing using web platforms. They were also asked to indicate their 4th year high school English average. For the purpose of ensuring reliability of test results, only students with an average of 80-89 were chosen as participants of the study for both groups. It was also taken into consideration that all participants have little or no knowledge of the writing process and learning writing through web-based platforms. Initially, there were 25 participants for both groups but were decreased to 22 for the control group and 23 for the experimental group.

2.2. Instruments

To answer the questions of this research, the quasi-experimental method and focus-group discussions were implemented. The first method was used to test if there is a significant difference in the performance of the participants in their pre-writing and post-writing activities, before and after ten writing lessons were given them. Focus-group discussion was used to collect the qualitative data of the study.

2.3. Data collection and analysis

The participants were divided into two groups: the experimental and control groups. The experimental group was given ten online-based lessons using the features of the UST E-Leap, a web-based educational tool administered by the University of Santo Tomas. E-leap is a form of course or learning management software (LMS) which includes tools or functions like announcement and discussion boards, class notes, traditional assessment tools like quizzes and examination, and score sheets or books (Pacansky-Brock, 2013). With the tool, lessons were given through power point presentations, and at times video presentations are uploaded by the instructor in the class notes area. Students are asked to view announcement boards regularly to check if there is a new lesson or assignment given. Instead of a traditional classroom recitation, students were asked to discuss, give opinion, and argue using the discussion board. Assignments were submitted and given evaluation online. The final paper, however, was submitted as a hard copy to serve as data for inter-rating.

The control group was used in the experiment to compare results and establish differences with the experimental group. A significant difference in their performance would mean that one method in learning could possibly be more effective than the other. On the other hand, a non-significant difference could mean that one method can perform as equally effective as the other more established method. To determine this, the same lessons on writing process were given to the control group, but without the assistance of any web-based educational platform. The lessons were given in the classroom using traditional and time-tested teaching methods including the use of available educational technology like slide presentations using laptops and LCD projector. Both groups underwent a pre- and post test essay writing activity on two different topics (What is the importance of Learning the English Language in Today's Society & What is Your Opinion about Using Nuclear Energy) but equal in the level of difficulty.

The essays underwent rating using inter-rater scoring based on expert-validated rubrics. Three inter-raters, who are also English instructors, were asked to read and rate the pre- and post essays of both the experimental and control groups. An inter-rater reliability test using correlational statistics was conducted to establish the validity of the instrument. After validity has been established, the scores underwent test of significant difference to find out if there is a difference in the performance in the pre- and post-test scores of both groups and to determine whether there is also a difference in performance between the two groups who underwent two varying treatment methods. Significant differences for each of the following components in the rubric have also been computed: content, organization, grammar and mechanics, and tone, style and word choice.

The quantitative data generated from the quasi-experimental approach has been supported by the qualitative data acquired from the focus group interviews. This type of interview allows several participants to join the same interview session unlike the usual one-on-one interview. Randomly chosen participants were put in three smaller groups for both the control and experimental groups to allow a more effective discussion and sharing of ideas. The participants who joined the interviews were allowed to speak in Filipino (L1) if they thought they are able to express their ideas more effectively in the L1. The interviews were transcribed and coded. An independent coder was asked to place data into categories to validate the researcher's data.

3. Results

3.1. Pre-and Post-test Essay Performance

The following table shows the pre- and post-test scores of the control group.

Table 1. Pre- and Post-Test Difference for Control Group

| Control Group | Mean | Std. Dev. | Computed z | Tabular z | Interpretation |
|---------------|------|-----------|------------|-----------|----------------|
| Pre-Test | 51 | 8.48 | | | |
| Post Test | 61 | 5.49 | | | |
| | | | -4.54 | ±1.96 | Significant |

It is revealed in Table 1 that a significant difference exists between the scores of pre-test and post-test of the control group. It would be seen that the data yielded a computed z of -4.54 which is far below the tabular z of ±1.96 at 0.05 level of significance. This result would mean that the students who received classroom-based writing lessons in the control group significantly increased in their scores in the post essay.

Table 2. Pre- and Post-test Difference for Experimental Group

| Experimental Group | Mean | Std. Dev. | Computed z | Tabular z | Interpretation |
|--------------------|------|-----------|------------|-----------|----------------|
| Pre-Test | 52 | 6.43 | | | |
| Post Test | 59 | 6.19 | | | |
| | | | -3.68 | ±1.96 | Significant |

As can be viewed from Table 2, a significant difference was found to exist between the essay scores of pre-test and post- test of the experimental group. This is evidenced by the computed z value of -3.68 which is far below the tabular z of ± 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance. It can be deduced based on the results that the students who received online-based writing lessons improved significantly as well as the students who received the more traditional classroom-based instruction.

Table 3. Control and Experimental Groups' Pre-Test Difference

| Pre- Test | Mean | Std. Dev. | Computed z | Tabular z | Interpretation |
|--------------------|------|-----------|------------|------------|-----------------|
| Control Group | 51 | 8.48 | | | |
| Experimental Group | 52 | 6.43 | | | |
| | | | -0.43 | ± 1.96 | Not Significant |

To compare the performance of the groups and to establish score validity, it was also found through statistical test that there was no significant difference in the pre-test scores of both groups. This is revealed by the computed z value of -0.43 which is in the range of the tabulated z of -1.96 to +1.96. at 0.05 level of significance. This could suggest that students in both groups performed in equal terms in their pre-essays. Furthermore, it could also suggest that students in both groups have the same level of writing skills.

Table 4. Control and Experimental Groups' Post-test Score

| Post Test | Mean | Std. Dev. | Computed z | Tabular z | Interpretation |
|--------------------|------|-----------|------------|------------|-----------------|
| Control Group | 61 | 5.49 | | | |
| Experimental Group | 59 | 6.19 | | | |
| | | | 1.12 | ± 1.96 | Not Significant |

On the other hand, Table 4 shows that no significant difference was found to exist between the two groups namely the control and experimental groups in their scores in the post-test. This is revealed by the computed z value of 1.12 which is in the range of the tabulated z of -1.96 to +1.96 at 0.05 level of significance. This result also revealed that although they both show significant improvement in their post essays, no group significantly performed better than the other in their post essay performance. This could suggest that whether students receive a classroom-based instruction or an online-based one, the same performance can be generated based on their essay scores.

To find out whether there is significant improvement in students' specific writing skills, a test of significance was also conducted per component in the rubric. The following tables show the test results for the control group in four components: content scores, organization scores, grammar and mechanics scores, and tone, style & word choice scores.

Table 5. Pre-post test scores by component – Control group

| CONTENT | | | | | |
|---------------------------|------|-----------|------------|-----------|----------------|
| Control Group | Mean | Std. Dev. | Computed z | Tabular z | Interpretation |
| Pre-Test | 14 | 0.77 | | | |
| | | | -3.65 | ±1.96 | Significant |
| Post Test | 16 | 2.39 | | | |
| GRAMMAR & MECHANICS | | | | | |
| Pre-Test | 13 | 0.98 | | | |
| | | | -9.14 | ±1.96 | Significant |
| Post Test | 16 | 1.14 | | | |
| ORGANIZATION | | | | | |
| Pre-Test | 13 | 1.16 | | | |
| | | | -4.68 | ±1.96 | Significant |
| Post Test | 15 | 1.58 | | | |
| TONE, STYLE & WORD CHOICE | | | | | |
| Pre-Test | 10 | 1.24 | | | |
| | | | -9.57 | ±1.96 | Significant |
| Post Test | 14 | 1.46 | | | |

It can be seen in Table 5 that in all components, the control group, which received classroom-based writing instruction, significantly improved their scores in the post essay. The result could suggest that the lessons were effective in improving all important skills integrated to achieve improved writing performance.

Table 6. Pre- and Post-test Scores by Component – Experimental Group

| CONTENT | | | | | |
|---------------------------|------|-----------|------------|-----------|----------------|
| Experimental | Mean | Std. Dev. | Computed z | Tabular z | Interpretation |
| Pre-Test | 16 | 0 | | | |
| | | | 3.39 | ±1.96 | Significant |
| Post Test | 15 | 1.38 | | | |
| GRAMMAR & MECHANICS | | | | | |
| Pre-Test | 14 | 1.18 | | | |
| | | | -3.28 | ±1.96 | Significant |
| Post Test | 15 | 0.81 | | | |
| ORGANIZATION | | | | | |
| Pre-Test | 12 | 1.15 | | | |
| | | | -8.04 | ±1.96 | Significant |
| Post Test | 15 | 1.32 | | | |
| TONE, STYLE & WORD CHOICE | | | | | |
| Pre-Test | 11 | 0.94 | | | |
| | | | -9.88 | ±1.96 | Significant |
| Post Test | 14 | 1.07 | | | |

On the other hand, results for the experimental group also show that the students who received online-based lessons significantly improved their scores in grammar, organization, and tone and style. However, although the component for content shows significant difference, it has to be noted that the significance lies on the pre-test being higher than the post test in terms of mean scores. This result could suggest that in the absence of classroom instruction, online-based instruction as a substitute has improved the writing skills of students except for building content skills.

Since the quasi-experimental results can only limitedly show the difference of scores in obtained in different areas of the procedure, it cannot exactly point out the factors led to the results. In the case of content writing skills in the experimental group not having improved, it can be deduced that the limitation is based on the treatment itself, or other related factors. However, to support the data generated from statistical tests, qualitative data has also been gathered to support or verify the quantitative ones. Hence, the following presents data synthesized from six focus group interviews conducted among participants of both control and experimental and control groups. The interviews were conducted after the writing instruction stage in order to know the participants' perception about the writing tasks given to them.

3.2. Writing Anxieties, Difficulties and Challenges

The coded data from the interview revealed a number of problems the participants encountered during the writing process before and during the online or classroom-based instruction. The categories found below are themes or topics that usually arise from the discussion with the participants.

3.2.1. Causes of Anxieties

The students' difficulties and anxieties when it comes to writing are related to second language writing issues. It has been revealed by answers from interviews that the causes of these anxieties arise from a variety of problems like length and word count requirements given by teachers, complexity of data gathering (not knowing how to start or distinguishing valid from invalid data), low vocabulary repertoire, grammatical uncertainty, difficulty in paragraph formation, and even time pressure which usually limits students to write essays for only a few hours a day before deadline.

The following table shows some responses that revealed these anxieties:

Table 7. Causes of writing difficulties and anxieties

| Causes of Writing Anxieties | Excerpts from Discussion |
|------------------------------------|--|
| Length and word count requirements | "When I write essays, I want to express my ideas straight to the point, but... it is required that it has to be long... I am not used to it." (translated from Filipino) |
| Complexity of data gathering | "I am not fond of writing. I am not fond of gathering information." |
| Low vocabulary bank | "I am not fond of writing because my vocabulary is low and I get bored when I write essay." |
| Grammar uncertainty | "I don't write because I'm very bad at grammars and I don't like writing." |
| Paragraph formation difficulty | "I find it hard to write essays. I find it difficult to form paragraphs." |
| Time Pressure | "In the past, we have to submit essays within the day." |

It can be noted that the anxieties are primarily based on the limitation of the traditional writing education paradigm to address second language issues existing among Filipino students. Furthermore, it is noticeable how students always refer back to the kind of instruction they received in high school and their experiences in the classroom when asked about their difficulties. In the first example, the student-participant expressed that there is a requirement for essays to be long, and that it reveals that it somehow caused the anxiety to writing for not being used to it. In the 5th sample under *time pressure*, the student-participant mentioned about the *past* referring to an experience in class in which they submit a required essay within the same day it was given. It seems from other responses that some perceptions students hold about writing are products of the kind of writing instruction they have received in their basic education.

Also, it can be noticed how students are more expressive about their feelings which in turn reveal their attitude about writing itself. The frequent use of the words *not fond*, *not like*, *find it difficult* does not only reveal their perception in the cognitive level, but also reveals more psycho-emotional feelings they have built about the writing process that may explain their rejection to the activity.

It was revealed by the interview data that most student-participants have no or very limited knowledge about the L2 writing process. If they had knowledge about the process, it is often mentioned that they have exerted little or no effort in applying it in the process of writing their essays.

To know the relative effect of the lessons, whether online or classroom-based, the participants were also asked to give insights about the effective strategies and other helpful areas of the lessons they have learned or applied for the first time and which assisted them in coping with the difficulties of the writing process. Among the frequent responses were: learning the step-by-step process of writing (L2), pre-writing ideas not in paragraph form, formulating a thesis statement for an argumentative essay, outlining for an essay, and drafting.

It has been established in the quasi-experimental method that students in the experimental group performed as well as the control students expect for the skill about building content. Through the focus group interview, however, it was specifically identified what areas of the online-based instruction did the students find to be working on their advantage, and in what areas do they think the online-based instruction have limitations. The following table shows the advantages of the online platform based on experimental students' perception while they were using it during the treatment:

Table 8. Effective Features of Online-based Instruction

| | Features | Excerpts from Discussion |
|---|-------------------------------|--|
| Helpful features of the LMS (Learning Management Software) | Class notes | Example 1: “(The most helpful feature of the E-Leap is) class notes. We can view the notes anytime.” |
| | Discussion board | Example 2: “(The most helpful feature of the E-leap is) Discussion board. More confident in expressing opinions. You can think of grammar first before posting answer. We have time to think.” |
| | Less personal feedback system | Example 3: “(We are) more confident in expressing opinions in the E-leap (LMS)” Q: Why? |

| | | |
|---------------------|--------------------------------|---|
| Online/Web Features | Accessibility | A: "Because we are more shy (reluctant) to share our answers in the classroom." (translated from Filipino) |
| | | Q: Why makes you shy? A: "Someone might disagree (with the opinion shared)." (translated from Filipino) |
| | | A: "(With the E-leap), our faces cannot be seen." (translated from Filipino) |
| | | Example 4: "Even if I am absent, I can still view the lessons through the E-leap." (translated from Filipino) |
| | | "We can reduce traffic. We do not have to go to school." |
| | Freedom from time constraint | Example 5: "(The online lessons were helpful) because at home, I am more comfortable and I am not pressured, so I think can think more effectively." (translated from Filipino) |
| | Availability of online sources | Example 6: "Using the Internet, helped (me) to search information" |

The advantages of the online-based instruction can be divided into the intrinsic features of the Learning Management System used for the treatment, and the general features of using the web. The LMS chosen for the study offers alternative tools that can substitute for the absence of classroom teaching like class notes areas in lieu of the traditional black or white board or the more technological LCD projected lessons, discussion board in lieu of classroom recitation or oral discussion, and even video and article links that serve as online library. Student-participants interviewed find the features of the LMS helpful in assisting them in the writing process especially overcoming certain anxieties that can be experienced in the classroom. For instance, Examples 2 and 3 show that students were more confident in expressing their opinion through the discussion board more than classroom discussion. There was a unanimous agreement during the interviews that the discussion board was helpful way for them to express their ideas without the fear of disagreement and criticism because of incorrect grammar. It can also be noted how in Example 3, the student-participant emphasized that this confidence arises from the less personal feedback system where they can give answers and get criticisms without the anxiety of the face-to-face interaction where a mixture of positive or negative emotions may be observable.

The second division of helpful features is comprised of the general attributes of the online system itself. The accessibility of the World Wide Web in terms of defying constraints of time and space were advantages enjoyed by the students as seen in Examples 4 and 5. It was emphasized in the responses that students can view lessons even if they are physically absent in the classroom which points out a convenience that does not exist in traditional classroom instruction. It is also noteworthy how one student mentioned about an economical and environmental advantage of using online learning systems by reducing traffic congestion. The online platform also assisted the students in finding sources for their essays.

However, it was also important to identify the limitations of the online-based instruction. It was found in the quasi-experimental method that although students in experimental group significantly improved their scores in the overall essay performance, the statistical results per component revealed that they did not improve in content-building skills. The focus group interview might be able to shed light on this result. The following table shows the disadvantages or limitations if the online-based writing instruction as perceived by the students in the experimental group:

Table 9: Limitations of Online-based Instruction

| Limitations | Excerpts from Discussion |
|---|--|
| Limited access to the Internet for dormitory-based students | Q: What difficulties or challenges did you encounter while doing the online-based learning? A: Access to Internet. We rent computers in the computer shop. |
| Distractions caused by working at home | “When we are at home, there many distractions (translated from Filipino). We become lazy.” |
| Online-related distractions (social media, computer-gaming, multimedia, etc.) | “Yes, we cannot only focus on the topic in the internet. But we cannot focus because of Facebook, twitter...” |
| Lack of autonomous study habits | Student A: It is better if there is more teacher interaction, not unlike at home where there are many distractions. (translated from Filipino) Student B: Also, you become lazy. (translated from Filipino) |
| Lack of teacher guidance and communication | “Maybe. Because we want more guidance from the teacher that we can’t get from E-leap lessons.” |
| Lack of academic atmosphere and focus | “The students are more comfortable when there is a teacher teaching them.” (translated from Filipino) |

While students did not mention anything about the limitation or difficulties of using the online-based instruction the writing process itself, they were able to share several difficulties regarding the use of online learning platforms for general instruction. It has been expressed that accessibility is an advantage for most students when it comes to overcoming the boundaries of space and time, but it has also been expressed that the same advantage can be a difficulty for some especially when students are living in dormitories where access to the Internet may not readily be available. Although only a minority expressed this concern, it is still a very important issue to look into since any educational method or platform should not disenfranchise any student in the process of implementing it.

It is also noteworthy that while students expressed the convenience of working at home because it frees them from the pressure of time and direct criticism, they expressed concern about the distractions present in the same environment. Also, they expressed concerns regarding distractions in the internet like the temptation of browsing their social media accounts, viewing videos for entertainment and even online-based gaming instead of focusing on their lessons. Another disadvantage is what they perceive to be the lack of teacher guidance, and academic atmosphere, which disable them to focus on their lesson. This lack of focus and overreliance to teacher’s lecture may suggest the lack of autonomous learning skills among students.

4. Discussion

It has been revealed through the results of the study from both quantitative and qualitative sources that the students as participants in the experiments were able to increase their overall writing performance through the effective application of the L2 writing process. This result is seen regardless the type of platform used (online-based or classroom-based). In the first part of the interview, the students were questioned regarding their writing difficulties as source of their low motivation before the lessons were implemented. The sources of anxieties like grammatical uncertainty, low vocabulary, difficulty of forming paragraphs, content production and even time pressure are challenges often encountered by writers of English in the second language.

While it has been observed in the interviews that students experienced second language writing anxieties, they also expressed that they were able to overcome them through using the process writing approach and with the help of some online-based features and tools. The LMS features like discussion board, video and articles links, class notes and announcement board was able to compensate for the absence of a physical classroom environment allowing students to access the lessons anytime and at any place where they can get the Internet connection. It is especially important to emphasize the role of online interaction platforms in lowering students' anxiety in expressing their arguments, and opinion with the other participants of the discussion board. The online-mediated writing was observed to be effective on lowering students' anxiety in expressing their opinion in the second language. While some students can think critically about an important issue in the society, their reluctance to express them in the second language due to grammar mistakes was hindering them. The pressure of classroom time and putting oneself in the 'spotlight' are found be source of anxiety during recitation. An online classroom is, therefore deemed helpful in helping students resolve such anxiety problems. This was supported by Blythe (2001), when he discussed that online sites offer unlimited access to dialoguing, asynchronous features allow them to post and comment at any time without the pressure of time, allowing students to carefully weigh their opinion first before engaging in arguments.

4.1. Advantages of Using the Online Platform

One important feature that has been highlighted in the interviews is the Internet's advantage to provide unlimited access to information. The LMS itself already has a feature in which the instructor can provide links to related articles that students can just click and read. However, it was not also very difficult to skip from a website to another in search of other articles not provided in the suggested reading. With this, the students had a plethora of information readily available as references for their argumentative essay. Stroia (2012) already mentioned the ability of the Internet to defy the limitations of time and space providing the access people need anytime and anyplace where the Internet is available. He also mentioned that an added quality is not just its ability to provide more than adequate information but also to provide the same information simultaneously to more than one person. Also, the "updatability" of information from the web is an advantage not observed in the textbooks.

Also, the Internet has a rich potential to allow students to retrieve information and share their own, contributing to a conscious effort to build knowledge through interaction with authentic texts and interaction with people they encounter in the World Wide Web. According to Hewett (2006), "From a theoretical perspective, online dialogue, like its oral counterpart, presumably can foster collaboration, a concept common to social constructivist epistemology, which holds all knowledge to be socially developed and relative to the group to which it applies. Such dialogues seem natural to developing ideas and discussing writing process to student writers." With this, the second language learners, who are usually timid and shy, can explore the boundaries outside the classroom and have their voices heard.

In writing, the use of Internet as a medium of expression among students cannot be left unrecognized. According to Hyland (2003), students gain satisfaction and pride in their written works for having discovered the Internet as an alternative way to publish them. Also, according to Pennington (2003), “All types of network arrangements have the potential for motivating L2 students to write and to revise in response to a real audience, for helping them gain more input on their writing, and empowering them to seek out the resources they need for developing their ideas.” (p. 294). This is very important to note if writing has to be viewed as a truly communicative activity. Students, in the past, probably had low motivation in writing since they view it simply as an academic requirement with no impact in their social activities. With the introduction of the second language writing, students are now encouraged to write within their own communicative contexts.

Another important consideration in second language writing instruction is individual learning styles. According to Reid (2005), each learner has his/her own style of learning, and that these specific styles are more effective in certain situations. While learning styles differ from one individual to another, it is important therefore, to teach students to learn based on their own style through metacognitive awareness. Here it is recognized that the Internet is a potential tool in aiding students to learn according to their own pace, therefore, making them aware of their own individual learning styles and meaning-making process.

4.2. *The Disadvantages Explained*

4.2.1. *Teacher Reliance and Lack of Autonomous Learning Ability*

It is evident from the interview that while students see the advantages of using online learning as a supplemental instruction (discussion board for recitation and source of information) some students display reluctance for full online learning because they feel more comfortable when a teacher is actually teaching the lessons. They also mentioned their tendency to be “lazy” or unmotivated, and the distractions of home and other online-related activities as impediments to online learning success. This kind of response shows an overreliance to classroom lecture or the “spoonfeeding” technique. While this may be categorized as a learning style or preference, the long-term effect of this reliance should not also be overlooked. The tendency of students relying on teacher’s lecture alone for instruction may impede the development of autonomous learning skills.

Autonomous learning technique has its roots on Constructivism, which “holds that knowledge is not acquired through teachers’ teaching. But in a socio-cultural context, with others’ help during the learning process, the necessary materials and by the way of meaning construction” (Zhu, Tang & Pan, 2014, p. 1401). In this orientation, the teacher now becomes mere facilitator or organizers of knowledge instead of its ultimate source. According to Holec (as cited by Smith, 2008), he first described learner autonomy as people’s ability to “take charge of their own learning.” (p. 396). Students are expected to develop skills that make them produce knowledge on their own or synthesize from other sources. The question is to what extent are students autonomous when making decisions about their learning?

While learning autonomy has positive effects on lifelong learning, the teacher has to be seen as an important guide in the process. It goes back to training students in the metacognitive fashion in which the teacher lets the students discover how their minds work and find specific strategies in learning that works for themselves. Also, the teacher still has to make certain decisions regarding content, methods and techniques, time and place, and evaluation process (Smith, 2008).

Due to the absence of learner autonomy techniques in the local classroom, especially in the field of Engineering, which is a highly content-laden subject area, students are more used to the lecture technique. Learner autonomy skills are not automatic; rather, they need to be honed and it's the

teacher's and the institution's initiative to do so. According to Trebbi (2008), much of the reluctance of educators in different levels is caused by the need to adhere to established curricula. The "loss of control" and the possibility of "inefficient learning" caused by new techniques are hindering them to practice learner autonomy. (p. 34).

Furthermore, the students' reluctance to use an online-based instruction is a product of slow-changing methods in instruction, especially in the college level. Without the widespread introduction of techniques and institutional support, learning methods that adhere to autonomous learning may only be considered as an option of secondary importance to students.

4.2.2. Overreliance on Internet Sources

While the negative improvement of the experimental groups' content building skills can be explained with a number of reasons, it can be assumed that the overreliance on the Internet sources can be one of them. One difference in instruction between the experimental and the control group is that the first were given suggested reading in through online links posted to the students' LMS accounts. However, the experimental group was not limited only to consulting the articles in the suggested reading list. Both groups are encouraged to look for articles from other sources. It is assumed that the suggested reading list result in the tendency of the students to rely only on readily available sources, unlike the control group searched for them from all possible sources. What was at first deemed to be an advantage became a disadvantage in the end.

Another problem that can be considered is the ability of the students to distinguish valid from invalid sources or references. Although, no one mentioned in the interviews about it since most students only focused on their convenience, it was observed during the intervention period that many students cite or refer to websites or sources (personal blogs and wikipedias) that may not be appropriate to the kind of essay they are writing. Since the experimental group are more exposed and encouraged to use the online tools, they may have been more exposed to this kind of mistake compared to the control group.

5. Conclusions

Online-based writing instruction and classroom-based writing instruction following the second language writing process paradigm both improved the overall writing performance of students in both groups. Therefore, online-based instruction can be considered as an effective alternative to classroom instruction where time and distance may be seen as impediments to instruction, and as supplemental learning tool for classroom-based teaching.

Students experienced the advantage of online-based instruction as an effective medium through which they can express their ideas and arguments without the pressure of classroom time and fear of criticism which they usually encounter in the classroom. The online instruction was also deemed to be effective due to its accessibility since students can view notes and lessons several times and where sources are readily available. However, they see the absence of the teacher as a disadvantage and still prefer the lecture method rather than autonomous research activities in which they were provided with sources and they are encouraged to synthesize information on their own. Therefore, in the initial stage of implementing online-based learning it is suggested that a blended or partial online instruction be implemented in the curriculum.

Online-based writing was observed to be effective in addressing second language learning issues such as classroom and writing anxiety, learning style differences and cultural background. It is based on the ability of the Internet to provide students platforms for authentic communication where their

voices can be heard and appreciated without the fear of being judged based on physical/racial characteristics that may be experienced in face-to-face communication. It was also found to be effective in addressing issues concerning economics and environment. However, institutional and social support is crucial in achieving the benefits of it.

The lack of learner autonomy skills and overreliance on Internet materials due to convenience may also be seen as impediments for the full success of online learning. Without appropriate learner autonomy skills, students will find it difficult to establish effective study habits and time management, which are important in online-based instruction. Therefore, it is important that educators and institutions start training students' autonomous learning skills that can contribute later on to lifelong learning. The implementation of blended learning model can contribute to trainings students develop autonomy.

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İngilizceyi ikinci dil olarak öğrenciler arasında yazmayı öğretimde çevrimiçi eğitim platformunun kullanımını

Öz

Bütüncül bilgisayar destekli dil öğrenimi ışığında, bu araştırma, geleneksel bir sınıf öğretiminin yokluğunda İngilizceyi ikinci dil olarak öğrenen öğrenciler arasında yazma öğretiminde bir Öğrenme Yönetimi Yazılımı (LMS) gibi çevrimiçi öğrenme platformunun kullanılmasının etkinliğini ortaya çıkarmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bununla birlikte, tek tek puanlama bileşenlerinin analizi, çevrimiçi öğretim grubunun içerik oluşturma becerisinde iyileşmediğini ortaya çıkarmıştır. Odak grup görüşmeleri, çevrimiçi temelli öğretimin güçlü ve zayıf yönlerini ortaya çıkarmak için yapılmıştır ve öğrenciler, çevrimiçi öğrenmenin kaynak edinme ve fikirleri ifade etmede konusunda yardımcı olduğunu, ayrıca zamanla ilgili sorunları ve doğrudan geri bildirim korkusunu azaltmak için uygun olduğunu belirtmiştir. Ancak, eğitim ve danışma söz konusu olduğunda, öğrenciler yüz yüze sınıf diyalogunu tercih etmişlerdir.

Anahtar sözcükler: çevrimiçi yazma; bilgisayar destekli dil öğretimi; ikinci dilde yazma

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