

The Impact of the internet on the development Of students' writing

***Dr/ Khanchali Mohamed
Dr/ Zidat Ayeche
Batna University***

Abstract:

The present issue investigates “the impact of the internet on the development of students' writing”. The concerned population involved students of the English Department At Batna University enrolled in the first year 2009 / 2010. An experiment was held to verify whether the students could take advantage of the internet use to better their writing performances.

The obtained results supported our hypothesis that claims that the use of the internet can contribute in improving the students' writing outcomes. Henceforth, we recommend the generalization of this new technology in our schools and universities to allow students take a maximum advantage of it.

الملخص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تسليط الضوء على أثر استعمال الانترنت على المهارات الكتابية لدى الطلبة. وبذلك نحاول استخلاص الفوائد التي من شأنها تحسين الأداء والقدرات في التعبير الكتابي. إن النتائج المتحصل عليها أثبتت صحة الفرضيات التي طرحنا في بحثنا الذي أجري على مستوى قسم اللغة الإنجليزية مع طلبة السنة الأولى للعام الدراسي 2009/2010. وتبعاً لذلك نقترح تعميم هذه التكنولوجيا في المؤسسات التربوية والجامعات قصد الاستفادة منها.

INTRODUCTION

The new information technology provides both teachers and students very easily with myriad opportunities of teaching and learning materials. The use of the internet is a part of most of our students' daily routine, because they have grown up with computers. It is becoming a part of their daily communication habits and has become a technology as ordinary as the telephone or television for most of them. Recently, our department was equipped with internet facilities to which both teachers and students can get access freely .This made our project realizable to a great extent since we could take our students to a cyber forum available at the level of the faculty where they can use computers to get access to the web.

Teachers are always seeking for appropriate and interesting contexts where their learners can act ,react and interact to foster knowledge and communication in a collaborative way with people sharing the same concerns .In doing so , they can better their written productions. Writing is a form of expression and communication which permits learners to communicate ideas, feelings and different attitudes in English. L. Miller (2001) states that (...) even though the writing production is an expression of one's individuality and personality, it is important to remember that writing is also a social endeavor, a way of communicating with people....) p:25. This forum would certainly encourage the development of the writing skills of the English language where students and teachers alike exchange written texts in English on various topics.

Students say the internet has enhanced their education. They use the internet to communicate with teachers and classmates, to do research, and to access library materials and use it for recreational tasks ; for leisure and entertainment such as voice-chatting, messaging , down loading their preferred music and the like... . For most of them, the internet is a functional tool, one that has greatly changed the way they interact with others and with information as they go about their studies. The university experience is not only about learning in the classroom, it is also about encountering new social situations and gaining new social skills. Students use the internet nearly as much for social communication as they do for their education. But just as they use the internet to supplement the formal parts of their education, they

go online to enhance their social lives. (Charp, 2000), reviewed ninety studies from different countries on the role of the internet in education. It became apparent that this technology has a positive impact on the abilities of students to learn and increase their self-learning, and improve communication skills. In the light of the above stated arguments, we think that the internet should be included in the teaching learning process at the level of our schools and universities to enhance the writing performances of the students.

LITERATURE OVERVIEW

Technology has become a big part of today's society. The Internet has transformed our lives and expanded the ways people communicate with each other. Therefore, understanding how to use it is becoming compulsory. This starts with schools which are now being recognized as the places where students should be learning the important skills needed to use technology. When Students write for their teachers, many of them do not make the connection between writing and communication. In dealing with Email, Face book and Twitter and the like... , all of them are using writing as a means of communication. They write because they have something to say.

The use of information technology among students for academic purposes is promising. For instance, in the USA, the Institute for Higher Education Policy (1999) reported that using email for academic ends jumped from 8% in 1994 to 44% by 1998. The number of courses using the internet doubled from 15% in 1996 to 30% by 1998. A recent American survey found that 84% of college students possessed a laptop and that 99% used the internet (Student Monitor, 2003). Students seem to use the internet to interact with others and find materials and assistance. (Hu & Kuh, 2001; Student Monitor, 2003).

In a study showing the influence of technology upon the teaching / learning process, Marshall (2002) found strong evidence that educational technology "*complements what a great teacher does naturally,*" widening and deepening their knowledge out of the classroom walls. "*With ever-expanding content and technology choices, from video to multimedia to the Internet,*" Marshall suggests

"there is an unprecedented need to understand the recipe for success, which involves the learner, the teacher, the content, and the environment in which technology is used."

In another investigation, Bruce and Levin (1997) , looked at ways in which the tools, techniques, and applications of technology can support learning to *"engage children in exploring, thinking, reading, writing, researching, inventing, problem-solving, and experiencing the world."*

A 2000 study conducted by the Software and Information Industry Association, Sivin-Kachala and Bialo (2000) reviewed 311 research studies on the effectiveness of technology on student achievement. It revealed *"positive and consistent patterns when students were engaged in technology-rich environments, including significant gains and achievement in all subject areas, increased achievement in preschool through high school for both regular and special needs students, and improved attitudes toward learning and increased self-esteem"*.

Schacter (1999) found that students with access to any of a number of technologies (such as computer assisted instruction, integrated learning systems, simulations and software that teaches higher order thinking, collaborative networked technologies, or design and programming technologies) show positive gains in achievement .

Cavanaugh (2001) summarized some experimental and quasi-experimental studies concerning the effectiveness of interactive distance education using videoconferencing and telecommunications for K-12 academic achievement concluded that *"there is a small positive effect in favor of distance education and a greater impact for interactive distance education programs that combine an individualized approach with traditional classroom instruction"*.

Research shows that this new technology may support learning and it is really useful in developing the higher-order skills of critical thinking, analysis, and scientific inquiry by engaging students in authentic, complex tasks within collaborative learning contexts (Roschelle, Pea, Hoadley, Gordin & Means, 2000).

(Perez-Prado and Thirunarayanan 2002; Cooper 2001; Smith, Ferguson and Caris 2001) also suggest that learners may take advantage from “*technology-enhanced collaborative learning methods and the interactive learning process*”.

Roschelle, Pea, Hoadley, Gordin, & Means (2000) found out four major characteristics of how technology can promote both *what* and *how* children learn in the classroom: “(1) *active engagement*, (2) *participation in groups*, (3) *frequent interaction and feedback*, and (4) *connections to real-world contexts*”. They also signaled that the insertion of the internet in teacher development programs can be of a paramount profit for the whole teaching/ learning process.

According to leu & leu (1999), “*Students can sharpen their writing and thinking skills, increase knowledge, and broaden perspectives through e-mailing. Writing to other students using the Internet is called keypals, which is equivalent to pen pals*”.

In the *Web Watch: Writing Resources* by Denise Johnson (2002), “*Reading and ideas in a meaningful way; it urges us to compare our thoughts with those of others and to examine our own understandings and interpretations.*” E-mail gives the chance to our students to access a larger audience. This awareness of different perspectives guides students into thinking about their audience when writing. Who are they writing for? Publishing is an important and motivating step for the student writers as they see their works read by different audiences. Roxie Ahlbrecht described this motivation in terms of publishing on the Internet. “*There is nothing like looking at a kid’s eyes when they first see their work come up on a computer. It’s like magic!*” (Strangman (2001) indicated that “*traditionally, students have been able to publish their writings by making books or hanging their writing pieces in their classrooms or the hallway. These days the Internet has dramatically changed the way students can publish their work*”. The advantages of this large audience are numerous. Not only can teachers and classmates see students’ writing accomplishments, but anyone around the world can read them as well.

The results of the Web-based instruction on students writing performances are varied as claimed by (Braine, 1997; Ghaleb, 1993; Liou, 1997; Sullivan & Pratt, 1996). “*In general, the results of the comparative studies have indicated that Web-based language*

instruction produced better writing quality and more writing quantity than traditional classroom instruction”.

Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that “*educationally purposeful uses of information technology, such as emailing faculty members or other students about assignments, can promote collaboration among students*” (Alavi, 1994; Oblinger & Maruyama, 1996) as well as foster “*more frequent contacts between students and faculty*” (Hu & Kuh, 2001; Kuh & Hu, 2001; Wingard, 2004).

Kennedy (2000) suggests that the technology enables students to increase their engagement in collaborative learning or student-faculty interaction. “*Used appropriately and in concert with powerful pedagogical approaches, technology is supposed to enhance student learning productivity*” (Kuh & Vesper, 2001, p. 87).

As mentioned above it is crystal clear that the role of computers and the internet in the teaching/learning process has changed significantly. Technological and pedagogical developments now allow us to better integrate computer technology into the language learning process. The Internet allows for a variety of opportunities to communicate in the target language, access textual and multimedia information, and publish for a global audience.

1-STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Our long experience in the domain of teaching has proved to us that learners do have a problem in the writing skill at the level of our department due to a variety of reasons such as inappropriate methods ,incongruent teaching material, lack of practice among learners and even unqualified teachers. It is true to a certain extent that the writing is a complex skill to master even for natives. It is not a very easy task to achieve because it requires hard work and lengthy steps.

Our attempt is to verify the impact of the internet on the development of students’ writing performances because we think that such technology could save time and effort (Ferguson,2001) .Besides , teachers generally find themselves short of time as far as correction of the submitted assignments is concerned.

2-THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The present work is undergone with the objective of trying to verify the impact of the internet on improving the learners writing outcomes at our department.

3-THE HYPOTHESIS AND MOTIVATION OF THE STUDY

We assume that the use of the new technology could ameliorate the learners' writing performances. In doing so, we are trying to suggest to the colleague teachers a new way by providing them with a very relaxed secure and motivating atmosphere.

4- LIMITATIONS

The present study deals with first year learners' poor written performances at the department of English at Batna University. Any conclusion drawn from the experiment will be limited to the targeted population only.

5- THE EXPERIMENT

Two groups of students were chosen randomly to undergo the experiment for the writing course during three months. The experimental group consisted of 45 students whereas the control group was composed of 49. Through the experiment, we wanted to verify the differences in the students' writing productions. In doing so, we catered for working with the same materials and assignments. Before launching the course, a pretest was administered for both groups to determine the level of each.

The control group worked with the ordinary and classical means such as the chalkboard for the teacher, paper and pens for the learners. However, the experimental group was taken to the cyber forum twice a week and the session lasted one hour and a half. The content of the course revolved around requiring students to write paragraphs of different types taking into consideration the mechanics and techniques of writing such as punctuation, unity, coherence, cohesion and the like. The core of the experiment was to measure the impact of the internet on students' writing outcomes.

The fact of being connected to the web, the experimental group would presumably have access to electronic libraries, contact with a variety of audiences including teachers, experts, friends and strangers throughout the world. All this would not be feasible without the internet. This creates a healthy atmosphere to foster writing in English beyond the scope of schools in a recorded time.

The role of the teacher would be that of counseling and providing feedback in class, and outside through e-mail. Writing is a complicated process. It is not linear; it is recursive, (Emig, (1971) expressed this in other terms and said that "*a loop rather than a*

straight line", where the writer writes, then plans or revises, and then writes again." Teachers , through the means of the internet , can help students write more effectively by getting them to examine their own creative processes. Students can be shown the different stages in the production of a piece of writing and be encouraged to discover how to achieve it and also being familiar with the basic phases of the writing process which are:

- drafting,
- pre-writing,
- revising (editing and proofreading), and
- presenting.

The experiment was based on assessing the learners' writing at the beginning as well as at the end of the course. In addition to the pre-test given before, at the end both groups were also administered a post-test. The test consisted of a piece of writing dealt with only for the first time (Topic: expressing their likes/dislikes about classical music). Both groups were invited to write a paragraph of the same topic under the same conditions .The results of the tests of the experimental and control group were compared. Besides this, a number of ten assignments performed by our learners during the whole course were corrected too.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

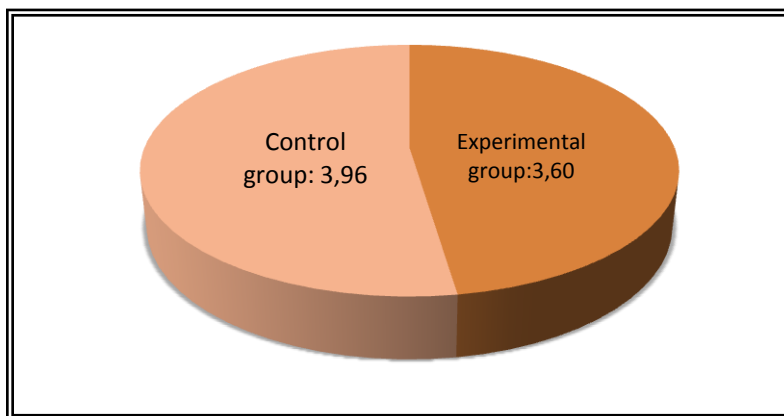
The obtained results confirmed our hypothesis and are compatible with the claims and findings of the different scholars and researchers mentioned in our literature overview, who investigated this issue and could bring evidence to the fact that the use of the internet has a prominent impact on students' writing. The experimental group outperformed significantly the control group in the areas catered for in our study .The tables and diagrams below illustrate better the differences.

The obtained results from the pre-test of both groups are displayed in the table/diagram one below which represents a summary of the means.

Pre-test results	Control group	Experimental group
Mean	3.96	03.60

Table one

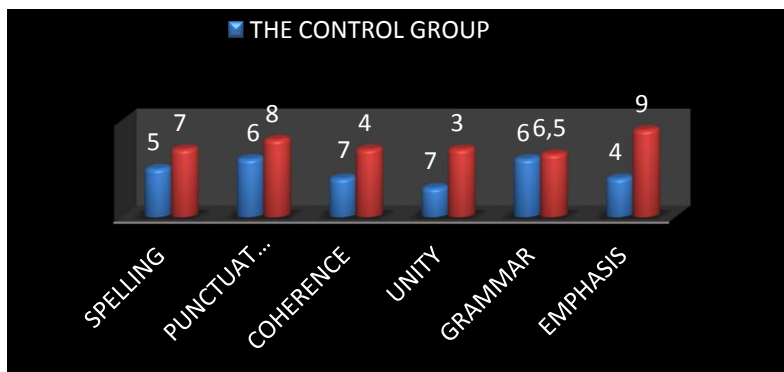
Diagram one



Looking at the *means* it is quite clear that there is a slight difference between the two groups regarding their initial writing skill.

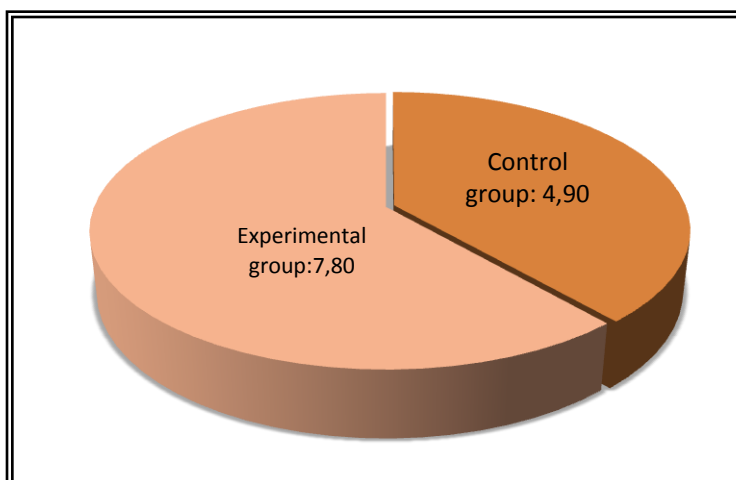
Table /diagram two illustrates clearly the average scores of the students through the different assignments of the three months course.

THE TARGET WRITING ASPECTS	THE CONTROL GROUP	THE EXPERIMENTAL GROUP
	AVERAGE SCORES	AVERAGE SCORES
Spelling	5	7
Punctuation	6	8
Coherence	4	7
Unity	3	7



The scores of the post-test, which was administered at the end of the course, were analyzed in the same way as the pre-test. Table/diagram 3 represents a summary of the means.

Post-test results	Control group	Experimental group
Mean	4.90	7.80



Comparing the means, one can deduce that the experimental group did better than the control group due to the treatment and the new approach as it is advocated in our literature overview.

CONCLUSION

In teaching the writing skill, using the information technology has a great impact not only on language education but preparing students for today's information society. *“Computer technologies and the Internet are powerful tools for assisting language teaching because web technology is a part of today's social fabric, meaning language learners can now learn thorough writing e-mail and conducting online research.”* (Wang, 2005). In this modest research, the findings proved in applying the new approach in both teaching and assessing the writing skill is likely to get some positive results but surely, it is not the only way that teachers should follow or adopt. As a result, we can claim that the use of the internet has a great impact on students' writing performances. It is a means we have tried and found worth being applied in our classes since it is really motivating.

The teacher -as being the ever-only reader of the students' productions- is a psychological handicap for the learners; for it is said skilled writers are sensitive to their audiences. When using the new way in teaching the writing skill, our students were somehow at ease because most of the psychological obstacles such as “one audience teacher”, fear and lack of confidence were all eliminated during the conduct of the experience which made the learners work in a secure and relaxed atmosphere. In this way, the development of digital technologies and their use offer new forms of interaction, and communication which allows students to interact and function beyond the constraints of time and space

We believe that it is high time we thought about bringing the necessary amendments to the teaching materials with regard to the written expression at the level of our universities so as to fit and meet our learners' expectations. According to (Kay and Honey, 2005) *“Information and Communication Technology (ICT) literacy reflects the need for students to develop learning skills in order to enable them to think critically, analyze information, communicate, collaborate...”*. For being able to communicate effectively, our learners should possess a wide range of skills to express themselves

not only through paper and pencil, but also audio, video, design software as well as a host of new environments (e-mail, Web sites, message boards and the like... .

Many different types of technology can be used to sustain and enhance learning (Marshall, 2002). Various technologies deliver different types of content and serve different purposes in the classroom. For example, *“word processing and e-mail promote communication skills; database and spreadsheet programs promote organizational skills; and modeling software promotes the understanding of science and math concepts. It is important to consider how these electronic technologies differ and what characteristics make them important as vehicles for education.”* (Becker, 1994).

Students can learn from the internet use to increase their basic skills and knowledge, and can use this information technology for a variety of goals in the learning process and can serve as a resource to help them develop their writing performances.

REFERENCES

1. Bruce, B. C., & Levin, J. A. (1997). Educational technology: Media for Inquiry, Communication, Construction, and Expression.
2. Cavanaugh, F. (2001). "Teaching On-line: Internet Research. Conversation and Composition". Harper Collins. New York.
3. Cavanaugh, C. S. « The Effectiveness of Interactive Distance education technologies in K-12 learning: A meta-analysis », *International Journal of Educational Telecommunications*, vol. 7, no 1, 2001, p. 73-88.
4. Cooper, L. « A Comparison of Online and Traditional Computer Applications Classes », *The Journal*, vol. 28, no 8, 2001, p. 52-56.
5. Ferguson, R. & Caris. (2001). E-mail Activities in the ESL Writing Class". *The Internet TESL Journal*. (12). December.
6. Hu, S., & Kuh, G.D. (2001). Computing Experience and Good Practices in Undergraduate Education: Does the Degree of Campus "wiredness" matter? *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 9(49). Retrieved April 10,2009 from <http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v9n49.html>.
7. Johnson, Denise (March 2002). Web Watch: Writing

- Resources. *ReadingOnline*,5(7).Retrievedfrom:
http://www.readingonline.org/electronic/elec_index.asp?HREF=webwatch/writing/index.Html
8. Kauffmann, R. (1996). "Writing to read and Reading to Write .Teaching Literature to Foreign Language Classroom". *Foreign Language Annals*. 29(3). 396-401.
 9. Roschelle, J., Pea, P., Hoadley, C., Gordin, D. & Means, B. (2000) Changing How and What Children Learn in School with Computer-Based Technologies. *The Future of Children Children and Computer Technology*, 10 (2). Retrieved September 8, 2009, from (1) Rosenberg,R.(2004).The Social Impact of Computers. Third edition California: Elsview Academic press,ISBN0125971214
 10. Schacter,J. (1999).The impact of Educational Technology on Student Achievement: What the most current research has to say. Milken Exchange on Educational Technology, Santa Monica, CA. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 430 537
 11. Sivin-Kachala. & Bialo, E. (2000). Research Report on the Effectiveness of Technology in Schools. (7th ed.) Washington.DC: Software and Information Industry Association.
 12. Strangman, Nicole (2001, December/January). An interview with Roxie Ahlbrecht about writing, technology, and the “Apple Bytes” project. *Reading Online*,5(5). Retrieved from:
[http://www.readingonline.org/articles/art_index .asp?HREF=voices/ahlbrecht/index.html](http://www.readingonline.org/articles/art_index.asp?HREF=voices/ahlbrecht/index.html).
 13. Smith, G. G., D. Ferguson et M. caris. « Teaching On-line Versus Face-to-Face », *Journal of Educational Technology Systems*, vol. 30, no 4, 2002, p. 337-364.
 14. Sullivan, Jane E. & Sharp, Jean (2000). Chapter 5: Using Technology forWriting Development of Linking Literacy and Technology: A Guide for K-8Classrooms. *International Reading Association*, Newark, Delaware.
 15. Thirunarayanan, M., et A. Pérez-Prado. « Comparing Web-based and Classroom-Based Learning: A quantitative study », *Journal of Research on Technology in Education*, vol. 34, no 2, 2002, p. 131-137.