Wiki: An Effective Web Tool to Develop Writing Performance and Reduce Writing Apprehension among English as a Foreign Language Learners

الويكي: أداة ويب فاعلة لتحسين الأداء الكتابي وخفض التخوف من الكتابة لدى دارسي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية

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Abstract

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Wiki is a major component of Web 2.0, the emergent generation of web tools and applications. Wikis are newcomers to the Internet and have recently been recognized as viable tools for teaching and learning. This paper includes an introduction and definition of the following terms: Wikis, writing performance and writing apprehension. It also involves an overview of historical development of wikis. Moreover, it presents a description of the researcher’s experience with using wikis to develop writing performance and reduce writing apprehension among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. It incorporates the following: problem of the study, participants, instruments, materials, treatment, conclusion, recommendations and suggestion for further research.

Key words: Wiki - writing performance - writing apprehension.

ملخص

الويكى: أداة ويب فاعلة لتحسين الأداء الكتابي وخفض التخوف من الكتابة لدى دارسي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية

تعد الويكى من أكثر النشاطات التي يكثر الحديث عنها في المجال التربوي على أنها أداة رئيسية من نظام الويب 2.0 حيث تتيح للمستخدمين إنشاء صفحات الويب وتحريرها وربطها بيسر، وتستخدم الويكى عادة لإنشاء مواقع الويب التفاعلية. تضمنت الورقة الحالية مقدمة وتعريف للمصطلحات التالية: الويكى - الأداء الكتابي - التخوف من الكتابة. وعرضًا للتطور التاريخي للكتابة. كما تناولت الورقة وصفًا لتجربة الباحثة مع استخدام الويكى لتحسين الأداء الكتابي وخفض التخوف من الكتابة لدى دارسي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. اشتمل الوصف على خلفية الدراسة، ومشكلة الدراسة، وجمعية الدراسة، وأدوات الدراسة وإجراءات الدراسة، بالإضافة إلى خالصة وعدد من النصائح والمقترحات لإجراء مزيد من البحوث.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الويكى - الأداء الكتابي - التخوف من الكتابة.
Introduction

Writing is often referred to as verbal literacy. It provides the foundation of education and the basic requirements for all academic disciplines (Herffernan, Linclon & Atwrill, 2001). It is worth mentioning that writing plays an important role in prospective English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers’ personal and professional lives. According to Haneline and Aiex (1997), the possession of writing skills can open up real possibilities in prospective EFL teachers’ professional and personal lives.

The advent of new technologies has opened up new approaches for designing courses in writing (Kroutl-Helal, 2007). Technology has added a new type of literacy which is referred to as digital fluency (Huffaker, 2004b). Some scholars pointed out that digital fluency will be another prerequisite for sociability, lifelong learning and employment opportunities (Resnick, 2002). With the emergence of the Internet, computer technology has extended its potential and possibilities in assisting language learning. Huffaker (2004a) indicated that “the Internet continues to generate new applications that not only foster individual expression, but also cohesive community development” (p.1). Hence, educators attempted to improve students’ independent use of the Internet as well as students’ Internet-based communication and interaction skills (Peng, Tsai & Wu, 2006).

Wiki is characterized by ease of use and rapidity of deployment, making possible powerful information sharing and supporting collaborative writing activities and improving student interaction (Boulos, Maramba & Wheeler, 2006). Arreguin (2004) stated that “Wikis could provide unique collaborative opportunities for education combining freely accessible information, rapid feedback, simplified HTML, and access by multiple editors, wikis are being rapidly adopted as an innovative way of constructing knowledge” (p.1). Moreover, a wiki could accumulate users’ opinions, and cultivate active on-line communities on the web (Wang, Lu, Yang, Hu, Chiou, Chiang, et.al., 2005).

Studies that investigated the direct effect of foreign / second web-based language learning on learners are still not numerous. Some previous studies revealed that web-based writing improved learners’ attitude and decreased their writing apprehension (Shen, 1999; Alia & Hussin, 2002). Besides, some previous studies revealed that web-based language instruction could help learners produce better writing quality and more writing quantity than traditional classroom instruction (Sullivan & Pratt, 1996; Braine, 1997). However, some other studies showed that web-based language writing had no significantly effect on learners’ performance and on reducing their writing apprehension (Leh, 1999; Biesenbach-Lucas & Weasenforth, 2001).

In the light of the facts mentioned above and considering the important role of writing for
prospective EFL teachers and the benefits regarding the growing use of wikis as collaborative web tools that could be implemented in writing classrooms, a greater emphasis should be given to using wikis to develop writing performance and reduce writing apprehension among prospective EFL teachers. Therefore, this study aims at investigating the effect of using wikis on developing writing performance and reducing writing apprehension among prospective EFL teachers.

Definition of terms

1- Wiki

Solvie (2008) defined wikis as “quick user-friendly web pages that allow users to create, edit, and save text collaboratively” (p.59).

The present study defined a wiki as a web based tool that can be used by users to collaboratively create, edit and publish written products.

2- Writing Performance

The present study defined writing performance as the production of a writer’s ideas on a certain topic in a written form with clear organization of ideas, adequate and relevant content taking the audience into consideration and demonstrating appropriate mechanics.

3- Writing apprehension

To Daly and Wilson (1983) writing apprehension is defined as “a situation and subject specific individual difference associated with a person’s tendencies to approach or avoid situations perceived to potentially require writing accompanied by some amount of perceived evaluation” (p. 327).

The present study defined writing apprehension as a condition that writers have when they write and sometimes leads them to avoid writing.

Review of literature

Historical development of wikis

The term “wiki” was adopted from the Hawaïin language where ‘wiki wiki’ means ‘quick’ to represent that a wiki web site could be quickly created for a collaborative team (Lamb & Johnson, 2007). The term is generally attributed to Ward Cunningham, who, in 1995 created and conceptualized the first wiki. It was used as a composition system, a discussion medium and a collaborative tool. Cunningham and Leuf (2001) described it as “a freely expandable collection of interlinked web pages, a hypertext system for storing and modifying information—a database, where each page is easily edited by any user with a forms-capable Web browser client” (p.14).

Wikis have been successfully used in education as early as 1999 (Guzdial, 1999). Their educational uses were first pioneered by computer science academics. Most publications about the educational uses of wikis have originated from fields related to computer sciences (Gabrilovich & Markovitch, 2006). Nowadays, the wiki technology is starting to penetrate all the academic fields of academia and the use of wikis for educational (and other) applications is increasing (Schwartz,
Clark, Cossarin & Rudolph, 2004). Besides, wikis are gaining ground in higher education (Choy & Ng, 2007). According to Lamb (2004) “wikis are already making their mark in higher education and are being applied to just about any task imaginable. They are popping up like mushrooms, as wikis will, at colleges and universities around the world sometimes in impromptu ways and more often with thoughtful intent” (p. 36). Schwartz et al. (2004) indicated that it is difficult to estimate the number of wikis currently used in university settings, and the range of ways in which they are being used.

The most popular and well known wiki is Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. It is considered an online encyclopedia created by users from all over the world. It has been successfully used and edited by millions (Farmer, 2004). There are number of wiki tool providers on the web where teachers and students can create their wikis for free, example is Wikispaces. Other examples of public wikis are Wikevent which is a worldwide calendar of public events, e.g. lectures, classes and sporting events and Wiktionary which is a collaborative project to produce a free dictionary with definitions, pronunciations, synonyms, antonyms and translations.

- The researcher’s experience with using wikis

This section is intended to provide an overview of the researcher’s experience with using wikis to develop writing performance and reduce writing apprehension among prospective EFL teachers.

Statement of the Problem

Fourth year prospective EFL teachers at Suez Faculty of Education in Egypt suffered from weaknesses in their writing performance and from writing apprehension. These weaknesses might be attributed to the inappropriate approaches of teaching writing provided to them. Using wikis is, therefore, suggested to develop writing performance and reduce writing apprehension among prospective EFL teachers.

- Question of the Study

How far will wikis help prospective EFL teachers in developing their writing performance and reducing their writing apprehension?

- Participants

The participants were fourth year prospective EFL teachers at Suez Faculty of Education in Egypt. They were randomly chosen and assigned into two groups, an experimental group (30 students) and a control one (30 students). The two groups were equivalent in their writing performance and writing apprehension before conducting the experiment as the researcher pre-tested them by using the WPT and the EFL WAT. Then, the t-test was used to test the significance of the differences between the two groups. No statistically significant differences were found on the pre- WPT and the pre- EFL WAT between the two groups.
- **Instruments**

1- **The Writing Performance Test (WPT)**

The researcher designed the WPT to be used as an assessment tool to assess the experimental and the control groups' writing performance before and after the application of the experiment. She assessed the validity and reliability of the WPT and found out that it is valid and reliable for the study.

2- **The English as a Foreign Language Writing Apprehension Test (EFL WAT)**

The researcher designed the EFL WAT to be used as an assessment tool to assess the experimental and the control groups’ writing apprehension level before and after the application of the experiment. She assessed the validity and reliability of the EFL WAT and found out that it is valid and reliable for the study.

- **Materials**

1- **A list of persuasive essays**

The researcher developed a list of six persuasive essay topics. They were assigned for the experimental group and the control group. She assessed the validity of these topics and found out that they were valid for the study.

2- **A program based on using wikis to develop writing performance and reduce writing apprehension among prospective EFL teachers**

The researcher designed a program that based on using wikis. It was constructed to train the experimental group on using wikis when they write essays. The researcher assessed the validity of the program and found out that it is valid for the study.

- **Treatment**

To investigate the effect of using wikis on developing writing performance and reducing writing apprehension among prospective EFL teachers, the researcher trained the experimental group by using a program that based on using wikis when they write essays.

- **Results of the study**

The results showed that statistically significant differences were found between the mean scores of the experimental group and the control group on the post-WPT in favor of the experimental group. The results also revealed that there were statistically significant differences in the mean scores of the experimental group between the pre- and post- WPT in favor of the post- WPT. Besides, the results showed that statistically significant differences were found between the mean scores of the experimental group and the control group on the post-EFL WAT in favor of the experimental group. The results revealed that there were statistically significant differences in the mean scores of the experimental group between the pre- and post- EFL WAT in favor of the post- EFL WAT.
Discussion of the results

The results revealed the effectiveness of using wikis to develop writing performance and reduce writing apprehension among prospective EFL teachers. Wikis provided a collaborative environment that encouraged the experimental group to engage effectively in writing and thus they developed their writing performance and reduced their writing apprehension. Wikis proved to be ideal for collaborative writing assignments as they enabled the experimental group to review rough drafts, post comments, and publish a final essay. This indicates that wikis enhanced the participants of the experimental group to collaborate with each other as well as learn from each others’ work. Majority of the experimental group indicated that they enjoyed working with wikis. They stressed that the wikis were effective in helping them develop their writing performance and reduce their writing apprehension.

The results of the present study agreed with previous studies which revealed that wikis could provide a flexible user friendly atmosphere for collaboration, knowledge creation and interaction. Examples of these studies are studies conducted by Alia and Hussin (2002), and Mak and Coniam (2008).

Conclusion

It can be concluded from the present study that using wikis supported peer review and reflections among the experimental group as the easy editing process enabled them to contribute in collaborative work. Therefore, they easily shared and exchanged ideas. Besides, wikis enabled the experimental group to effectively participate in writing their essays as they allowed them to publish content with ease. This helped the experimental group develop their writing performance and reduce their writing apprehension.

Recommendations and suggestion for further research

- Training programs should be provided to EFL teachers to help them know how to utilize using wikis in teaching and learning all language skills.
- Published materials about using wikis in teaching writing should be available to teachers and students.
- It is recommended that curriculum designers, teacher-trainers and textbook writers have to focus on providing strategies based on using wikis in teaching writing to EFL learners.
- A study is needed to investigate the effect of using other web 2.0 tools such as blogs on developing writing performance and reducing writing apprehension among prospective EFL teachers.

References

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