

COLLABORATIVE WRITING THROUGH WIKIS: MALAY SECONDARY SCHOOL LEARNERS' EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the findings on the usage of wikis in collaborative writing. This study adopts the experimental research methodology. Eight Form two students participated in this research and they were divided into two groups; experimental and control group. The experimental group went through treatments for six weeks while the control group go through the conventional way of writing. Three instruments were used in this study namely; writing test, questionnaire and journal reflection to gather students' opinion and perception on the use of wikis in collaborative writing. The results revealed that after the students went through the treatments using wikis the students showed improvement in their scores and their writing ability. The students also expressed their interest in using wikis to write as they find the features offered by wikis are motivating. They also reported that they prefer collaborative writing than individual writing.

Keywords: Wikis, collaborative writing, writing ability

INTRODUCTION

Writing has been considered as a daunting task that requires learners to be able to think and write hence demands both secretarial and compositional skills among learners. Pifarre and Fisher (2011) reported that writing on paper individually results in overloading the students as it causes mental stress on the learners when presenting their ideas.

Hedge (1988) stated that writers face hurdles in their attempt to produce a piece of writing. Either native language learners or second language learners go through the same torturous experience in producing a composition. Byrne (1988) proposed that writers faced three types of problems when writing which are

psychological, linguistics and cognitive. As writing is a 'solitary activity', learners have to develop their own ideas and go through the process in writing a composition alone. Being responsible for his or her writing, the learners are pressured by the expectation of the product they are required to come up with. They also need to take into consideration the context of the writing and the intended audience as well as the linguistic element of their writing. The conscious mental effort involved in writing further adds pressure and anxiety to the writers and they posed cognitive problems among the writers.

In the context of Malaysian secondary learners, the Paper two of the English Language examination, PMR (Penilaian Menengah Rendah), emphasizes on students ability to produce an essay, a summary and a short essay on literature. For these students, they need to master the writing skill well in order to get good grades in English Language. However, studies have shown that Malaysian secondary school students view writing as a difficult and demanding task (Chitravelu, Sithamparam, Teh; 2005, Parilah, Wan Hamiah, Rosseni; 2011). Therefore, the onus is on the teacher to change the students' perceptions on writing. Teachers must be creative to evoke and maintain students' interest in writing. Teachers must be able to entice students towards writing.

One of the ways teachers can promote writing ability among learners is through collaborative writing using computer technology. Smaldino (2005) highlighted that online learning is a powerful way to promote learning among students without thinking of the boundary of the classroom. Teachers can get students to develop their writing ability via online outside the classroom context and promote characteristics of being autonomous learners. Besides, the 21st century teaching and learning supports the idea of creative teachers using technology to inject authenticity and promote active participation among learners (Woo, Chu, Ho & Li; 2011).

THEORETICAL RATIONALE

Three theoretical concepts are relevant to this study. The first theory is Vygotsky's Social Cognitive theory. In this theory, learning is a social process that involves members of a community who share and build second language together in order to accomplish a joint task. As using wikis to complete a writing task is a non-linear process in writing whereby learners interact and discuss their ideas and work with one another, it supports the social-constructivist view. Duffy and Cunningham (1996) in Lee (2010: p.261) stated that;

“Learning is a social, dialogic process of construction by distributed, multidimensional selves using tools and signs within context created by various communities with which they interact.”

Carrillo and Pentikousis (2010) further support that new knowledge is generated when participants interact in a group mediated by cultural artefacts that

have the impact on the development of the mind. Besides, cultural artefacts are able to link individuality with collectivism creating interactive interactions among the participants. In the context of this study, wikis can be considered as computer supported collaborative learning (CSCL). CSCL supports advancements in technological environments that promote authentic group learning.

Clearly, teachers are able to benefit from the artefacts like the internet and other ways of communication that have been introduced to students. Lund et.al (2006) in Carillo and Pentikousis (2010) pointed that wikis can be a useful alternative to enhance communications in an authentic context. Lund et al (2006) used the social constructivist theory of learning as a basic principal for designing language activities in technological rich environments. Lee (2010) highlights that wikis support critical thinking by giving learners time to reflect on their work and promote collaborative work at different stages of the writing process.

Swain (1995) proposes the output hypothesis theory that highlights the production of language, either spoken or written promotes language acquisition. Swain (1995) describes three ways in which output promotes second language learning. First, usage of language in context encourages usage of the linguistics resources in a meaningful way. This enhances fluency as learners practiced what they have learned. Second, when learners use the language, they move from semantic process to syntactic process. They learned to identify their mistakes and ways to correct them. Third, students can use the feedback given to them to test their hypotheses about the comprehensibility of their writing. This gets the students to edit their writing accordingly throughout the process of completing their writing.

The usage of wikis in getting learners to write essays supports the output hypothesis theory as learners are encouraged to write in context and they undergo the process from generating ideas to writing drafts collaboratively. Throughout the process, they learnt from each other's feedbacks and they edit their drafts based on the comments given.

The third theory that is related to the usage of wikis in promoting second language learning is Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis. Krashen (1988) proposed that learners learn better when learning occurs in a non-threatening environment. Hence, it is important that teachers create a comfortable and relaxed environment for learners to acquire the language. The enjoyable environment would lower learners' affective filter and facilitate language learning. The use of multimedia such as wikis may offer additional support for comprehension in a non-threatening environment and also accommodate different learning styles. For example, a student who prefers collaborative learning through the usage of computer may respond better to an assignment that requires group interaction.

EMPIRICAL STUDIES ON THE USE OF WIKIS IN ENHANCING COLLABORATIVE WRITING

Coniam & Kit (2008) conducted a study on the usage of wikis to teach English writing. The case study which was conducted in a Hong Kong post-secondary

institute explored issues related to wikis and how wikis could be used for group writing task. The findings show that wikis can be rewarding to students when they are given a task with purposeful objectives.

In the study, the participants were asked to produce a survey report in groups of mixed ability. The group members were encouraged to read and consider others' work within the group, proofread and edit the group's work by adding, deleting and modifying the drafts accordingly. Each group was given a space in wikis to compose their own survey report. The participants reported that they were happy writing their work on wikis and sharing the responsibility with one another. The students with low proficiency also felt that they were able to contribute their ideas on wikis.

Another study was carried out by Said (2011) from the University of Agder, Kristiansand, Norway. His research focused on looking at the collaborative writing approach using wikis. According to him, wikis provide several benefits such as tracking of editing done, online discussions, protected pages and inclusion of images, graphics, sounds and videos. He also suggested that wikis promote collaborative writing and it can be utilised in group projects. He further highlighted that wikis allow students to work cooperatively and share responsibilities in completing their writing task.

Wichadeen (2010) conducted a study entitled "Using wikis to develop summary writing". The study was conducted in Bangkok University with 35 students who enrolled in English 111 course (Fundamental English 1) in the first semester of the academic year 2010. The study compared the students' summaries before and after the usage of wikis in conducting the writing activity.

The researcher reported that the participants showed significant improvement in their scores after using wikis. The improvement was due to the fact that the students' work was read, reviewed and corrected by the team members. Besides that, collaboration promotes interaction among learners and they learnt from each other. It is evident from the study that the students were encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning as well as increased their motivation.

A research was carried out by Woo et.al., (2011) on the usage of wikis in collaborative writing to promote scaffolding among primary school students during collaborative writing. The study examined how wikis plays a role in the scaffolding process during the collaborative writing project. The outcome of the study showed that the use of wikis in a class of primary five students in a Chinese primary school where English is taught as a second language was perceived positively. It was reported that the students enjoyed using wikis and had the perception that wikis helped to foster teamwork and improved writing. Most importantly, through wikis, the scaffolding process was promoted to foster skills, including critical thinking and problem solving skills among the learners.

Similar study was conducted by Lina Lee in 2010. She focused on investigating the effectiveness of collaborative writing using wikis among beginning-level students at University of New Hampshire. Her findings support

the positive impact of wikis on learners' writing ability. She highlighted that wikis provide a medium for the writing process that promotes different stages of collaboration and scaffolding. The result of the study showed that students had a very productive experience with wikis assignments. 50% of the students like to use wikis compared to the traditional writing method. Wikis proved to have a positive impact on promoting self-directed learning and learners' autonomy.

Although numerous studies have shown the benefits of wikis, there have been several studies that argue its usefulness in promoting writing ability. Cole (2009) reported that students appear to favour individual work over collaboration using wikis. Carr et.al., (2007) mentioned that students were reluctant to use wikis for online coursework. Elgort, Smith and Toland (2008) stressed that a significant number of students thought that they could do the task better on their own, although wikis are designed to facilitate collaboration among learners.

Despite the arguments on the usage of wikis in enhancing writing ability, numerous studies have shown wikis is a dynamic tool that has great potential in promoting writing ability, interaction among learners and it is authentic as well as engaging.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study attempts to find out whether the use of wikis might help students' collaborative writing, particularly in developing ideas and writing longer with fewer errors. The tasks assigned focus on narrative writing especially note-expansion kind of essays. Content and elaboration are vital aspects of narrative writing. Hence, this study investigates the Malay learners' experience in using wikis and how wikis is utilized by the participants to work collaboratively in developing, organizing and editing their ideas for the text and produce one final draft.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study specially aimed at seeking answers to the following research questions:

1. Is there any difference between the scores of pre-test and post-test results of the essay writing by the students?
2. Does wikis technology enhance students' collaborative writing?

METHODOLOGY

An experimental design was adopted in this research. Eight form two students from a secondary school in Selangor were chosen for the study. These students were divided into two groups; the experimental group and the control group. The students' are of intermediate to low level of proficiency.

All the students were given pre-test whereby they have to write a composition. The students were given the pre-test without any input from the teacher. After the pre-test, the experimental group underwent 6 activities using wikis while the control group did not. The experimental group was given access to the computer lab an hour each week to work on their writing task and they were encouraged to continue working on the task at home. The control group were taught using the conventional writing strategies that involved brainstorming and group discussion.

After 6 weeks both groups were given a post-test whereby they were asked to write a composition. A set of questionnaire was given to the experimental group after the post-test. They also have to write a journal after they have completed their questionnaire.

Students' pre-test and post-test compositions were marked based on PMR 2004 marking scheme. However, the priority was given to generation of ideas, word choice and organization of ideas.

FINDINGS

Pre-test and Post-test Results

The following table 1 shows the marks for pre-test and post-test obtained by the experimental group.

Table 1: Pre-test and Post-test marks for the Experimental group

Respondent	Pre-Test	Post-test	Difference
A	47 %	67%	20%
B	50%	83%	33%
C	40%	73%	33%
D	37%	63%	26%

Comparison of the results of the pre-test and post-test presented above show that all the 75 students improved in their marks. Student A increased in marks obtained from 47% in the pre-test to 67% in the post-test. Student B and C increased in marks by 33% when scores between the pre-test and the post-test are compared while student D showed an increase of 26% in marks.

Table 2: Pre-test and Post-test marks for the Control group

Respondent	Pre-Test	Post-test	Difference
E	37 %	40%	3%

F	27%	23%	- 4%
G	33%	40%	7%
H	33%	37%	4%

Table 2 above shows the marks obtained by the control group. It can be seen that the difference in marks obtained between pre-test and post-test is very small. Student E obtained 37 % for the pre-test and 40% for the post-test. Student F scored 27% for the pre-test and the scores reduced to 24% in the post-test. Student G showed improvement in scores by 7% while student H improved by 4%.

Clearly, the comparison in the difference of scores between the pre-test and posttest of both experimental and control group shows that the students in the experimental group scored better than the students in the control group.

Questionnaire

The questionnaires were administered to gather the respondents' opinion about wikis.

Table 3: Students' perception regarding the writing mode

Statements	Frequency	Percentage
I prefer writing using wikis	3	75
I prefer writing on paper	1	25

Based on the students' responses presented in table 3, a majority of the students (75%) prefers writing using wikis than writing on paper.

Table 4: Students' view regarding peer corrections

Statement	Frequency	Percentage
I do not mind my classmates correcting my writing	4	100

As presented in Table 4, all the respondents reported that they do not being corrected by their peers when using wikis.

Table 5: Writing collaboratively in wikis helped students to generate more ideas and improve writing skills

Statement	Frequency	Percentage
CW in wikis helped to generate more ideas and improved my writing skills	4	100

Based on the results in table 5, it can be concluded that all of the respondents (100%) agreed that wikis helped them to improve in their writing ability. They were able to develop more ideas using wikis through collaborative writing.

Table 6: Students' perception regarding the usage of wikis in collaborative writing

Statements	Frequency	Percentage
Wikis enabled development of cooperative learning with others	4	100
Using wikis in collaborative writing gives me more responsibility	4	100

All of the respondents (100%) agreed that wikis promote cooperative learning with one another. They share ideas and correct each other throughout writing their drafts. They also felt that they become more responsible towards their writing when writing in a group using wikis.

Journals

The students reported on their experience using wikis in collaborative writing through their journals.

Student A reported that the features wikis offers such as the selection of font, colour and graphic made writing interesting. He also felt more confidence to write as it was a group work as the responsibility was shared by all members of the group. He also liked the fact that his friends corrected him when he made mistakes.

Student B shared that writing online was an interesting experience to her. She was able to read her peers' ideas and this gave her some ideas to develop further the ideas. She liked her team members to correct her mistakes and helped her to understand why she made such mistakes. She would like to continue to work collaboratively using wikis.

Student C highlighted that the best feature of wikis that she liked was that she could comment on her classmates' compositions and receive their comments. She

was happy that she could compare the difference between before and after the corrections and the comments were made. She loved to work in a group and she wanted to continue to write in wikis.

Student D liked to write in wikis as she liked to give comments on her students' writing. However, she preferred to write on paper as she wanted to mark her composition. She liked wikis as she can upload pictures and create hyperlink in her wikis. She did not mind writing together but she felt more secured writing on her own.

DISCUSSION OF KEY FINDINGS

The findings from the study supported past findings that highlighted the potential of using wikis in collaborative writing to help students improve in their writing ability. Scores obtained by the respondents in the experimental group clearly show that the students improved significantly in their writing ability. They wrote longer composition with more ideas.

The findings support Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory that proposed learning takes place not through interaction but in interaction. When learners are able to perform tasks collaboratively with the assistance of his or her group members, they internalized the learning process and they would be able to perform it on their own. Therefore, social interaction is able to mediate learning. The students in this study helped each other while using wikis especially in task one as wikis was a new learning tool to them. By interacting socially, students were able to get ideas to expand their writing. In addition, it helped the students to generate more ideas for their writings. The post-test results which basically focused on the content of the writing, word choice and organization showed good improvement from the students. Therefore, it proves that by interacting socially and collaboratively through wikis students were able to improve on their writing ability.

The result further substantiate Swain's (1995) Output Hypothesis as students write collaboratively through wikis, their language production did take place in written and spoken form. As the students practiced their writing collaboratively using wikis through each task, language production took place, consequently language acquisition occurred. The findings of the students' perception which were collected from the questionnaire proved that students do take their peers' comments and tried to improve their writing based on the comments as it can be considered that they do play an active role in their own learning.

The students were not confined in a rigid classroom atmosphere when they were attempting to carry out the tasks. The non-threatening environment as proposed by Krashen (), lowered the students' affective filter and they were able to complete the tasks given. The students carried out the study in a small group and in the school's computer laboratory. They like to use wikis as a tool for collaborative writing as they stated in their journal writing. This shows that they were not pressured and had comfortable feelings while carrying out their task.

Therefore, the non-threatening environment enabled the students to lower their affective filter and pave the way for more meaningful learning. The findings of this study indicates that wikis is an effective learning tool which enables the students to improve their writing skill by writing collaboratively in a wikis. It agrees with previous studies (Mark & Coniam, 2008; Wichadee, 2010) that collaboration is a necessity as students learn from each other and they become responsible for their own learning.

Based on this study, wikis proved to be a potential tool for collaborative writing. Noel and Robert (2004) in Tal and Gorsky (2010) described several requirements for the ideal collaborative writing tool. Among them, it should allow an immediate access to the document, access to all previous versions, ease in viewing all previous modifications, comments and feedback. Based on these requirements, it can be implied that wikis meet all these criteria and therefore is an ideal instrument for collaborative writing.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

Based on the findings of this study, wikis could be utilized as an alternative tool in second language teaching and learning. Teachers should incorporate the use of technological advancement in their teaching in order to gain students' interest in the writing process. Wikis can be considered as an ideal instrument that enhances students' writing through collaboration. Teachers could view students' writing regularly in school and at home at the convenience of his/her time. By using wikis, teachers are seen as facilitators as they monitor and guide the students throughout the tasks given.

Students also would benefit from the usage of wikis in class. The students can learn through social interaction with the group members. Besides they are given the responsibility to take charge of their own learning. They may develop their writing ability throughout the process of collaborative writing in a non-threatening environment. For students who lack confidence in writing individually, wikis enable them to write with their peers.

In addition, curriculum developers should take advantage of this situation by incorporating wikis into the curriculum of primary and secondary schools. The use of wikis could be integrated in the English Language syllabus enabling the teachers to vary their teaching methods.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study have delivered a valuable insight in understanding the use of wikis in collaborative writing. The use of wikis has helped the students to be a problem solver, critique and facilitator of each other's learning. They were able to learn from each other and become autonomous learners.

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