Use of Dialogue through E-Mail Technology in Developing Writing Skills to English as Foreign Language Learners (EFL) at Al-Imam Mohammad Ben Saud Islamic University

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Abstract

This study aims at exploring the use of dialogue through electronic mail technology in developing writing skills of the first-year English majors at Al Imam Mohammad Ibin Saud Islamic University. The sample of the study consisted of 42 male students enrolled in two sections, which were randomly selected out of five and were randomly assigned to both experimental and control groups. The subjects of the study were pretested at the beginning of the study to make sure that they were equivalent and homogenous. Afterwards, the experimental group studied the intended material via the use of dialogue through electronic mail technology in the E- Language Laboratory and the control group studied the same material in the traditional method using paper and pencil in writing about a certain topic. At the end of the experiment, the two groups were posttested using the same writing achievement test. The means of the pre and posttests for the two groups were calculated using the t-test. The results revealed significant differences between the experimental and control groups in favor of the experimental one.

استخدام الحوار من خلال تكنولوجيا البريد الإلكتروني في تنمية المهارات الكتابية لمتعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في جامعة الإمام محمد بن سعود الإسلامية

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الملخص

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى استخدام الحوار من خلال تكنولوجيا البريد الإلكتروني في تنمية المهارات الكتابية لدى طلبة اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية (السنة الأولى) في جامعة الإمام محمد بن سعود الإسلامية. تكونت عينة الدراسة من (٤٢) طالبا مسجلين في شعبتين تم اختيارهما عشوائيا من شعب الكتابة الخمس المتوفرة في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية وبالطريقة ذاتها تم تحديدهما كمجموعتين تجريبية وضابطة، وخضعت المجموعتين التجريبية والضابطة عند بدء الدراسة لامتحان قبلي للقدرة الكتابية للتأكد من كونهما متساويتان ومتجانستان. وبعد الانتهاء من الاختبار القبلي، درست المجموعة التجريبية المادة التدريسية باستخدام الحوار من خلال تكنولوجيا البريد الإلكتروني في مختبر اللغة الإنجليزية، وأما المجموعة الضابطة فدرست المادة نفسها باستخدام الطريقة التقليدية من خلال استعمال الورقة والقلم في كتابة موضوع معين. وبعد الانتهاء من التجربة، خضعت المجموعتان التجريبية والضابطة إلى اختبار بعدي باستخدام اختبار القدرة الكتابية نفسه. وتم حساب المتوسطات الحسابية لعلامات الامتحان القبلي والبعدي باستخدام الاختبار الإحصائي (ت). وقد أظهرت النتائج وجود فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية بين المجموعتين التجريبية و الضابطة لصالح المجموعة التجريبية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: استخدام الحوار، تكنولوجيا البريد الإلكتروني، المهارات الكتابية، اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية.

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Introduction

In the last two decades, the internet has become an important tool of learning. The use of the internet by non-native speakers has become vital in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Researchers and practitioners now realize the important role that the internet plays in learning and teaching English as a second or foreign language and look for effective ways to integrate it into various types of English language courses for teaching different language skills including writing.

Due to the current shift in educational paradigm, materials for teaching writing skills vary from the conventional textbook to computer technology. The emergence of the Internet as a medium for teaching and learning is an important revolution in education. Educators are greatly inspired to apply the new technique in the teaching and learning of English Language.

The mastery of e-mail in this information-based society is considered one of the most important skills that English as foreign language instructors should have. An example is the use of the Internet in teaching and learning English in Saudi Arabia. According to Trokeloshvili & Jost (1997), the use of the Internet for this reason is gaining popularity in universities across the world. The introduction of the Internet, has brought many changes in instructors' approach to English language teaching, with the most significant changes occurring in writing instruction. At the beginning of the 1990s, many writing instructors moved their classes from the traditional classroom to the computer room.

Leu (1997) suggests that students need to be exposed to the new composing, comprehension and response abilities resulting from new combinations of

media sources on the Internet. With the technology, students nowadays are able to experience written communication interactively with teachers and friends via e-mail. Research done by Staton et al., (2005) on dialogue journals shows the potential value of teachers' e-mail correspondence with their students. It provides the opportunities for teachers and students to get to know each other in new ways, to develop greater rapport and mutual understanding and to expand and deepen the communication they have.

El-Hindi (1998) discusses the constructivist opinion, which advocates the significant role of e-mail. In his discussion, students are given the opportunities to interact with others as they construct knowledge about the world and about themselves. This notion is supported by Vygotsky's (1978) ideas about the significance of social dialogue. He supports the dynamic social process of learning where the teacher in dialogue with a student can focus on emerging skills and abilities. In e-mailing, the teacher and students become partners in acts of cognition as they engage in meaning-making via communication. This process is a dialogic one and it benefits both teachers and students as they learn from each other in the social process.

Researchers and practitioners (Liaw, 1996; Belisle, 1996; Warschauer, 1997; Gonzales-Bueno, 1998; Beauvios, 1998; El-Hindi, 1998; Bollati, 2002; El-Koumy; 2004 and Britisch, 2011) have noted several benefits of using e-mail communication in language classrooms. They state that e-mail can promote real and natural communication. Through e-mail, students are able to communicate with native speakers or other English learners worldwide. This provides authentic context for communication. Besides, e-mail also facilitates independent learning which is essential in second language (L2) writing. Furthermore, e-mail stimulates students' interest in communicating as they feel they have an authentic audience who will respond to their writing. Over a network, using e-mail and sharing files, students have the chance to collaborate and work together with other classmates, peers, and teachers. Networking electronically can help learners create, analyze, and produce information and ideas more easily and efficiently.

Many research studies have been written about electronic writing as an instructional method and its importance for improving students' attitudes and motivation and developing their writing performance, Ellis (1995)

investigated the effect of using e-mail on the development of students' writing skill. The subjects for the study were fifty students in Montana State University. During the Fall and Spring semesters of 1994 and 1995, one group of students was asked to write compositions via e-mail, whereas the other group was asked to write on paper. Findings revealed that students who used e-mail made more improvements in the writing skills than those who used paper and pencil.

Grosz-Gluckman (1997) investigated the usefulness of electronic mail as an instructional tool for limited-English-proficient adult females who had made little progress in learning writing in English as a second language. Six subjects, aged 30-50 years, enrolled in a university ESL program, produced 25 e-mail exchanges over a five week period. These e-mail exchanges were analyzed in terms of number of words, acquisition of new vocabulary directly related to comprehensible input and syntactic complexity resulting from the use of connectors in the subordination of clauses. Results indicated that writing via email had a positive effect on the writing skills of adult learners.

Gonzales-Bueno (1998) conducted a study on e-mail dialogue journal on her Spanish students. Her findings revealed that dialogue journal writing via e-mail could serve as a tool for the students to practice using English Language and communicate without fear of making mistakes. This is because mistakes are tolerated and the emphasis is more on idea development. She reported that the students' journal entries showed improvement in the quality of the target language produced compared to the ones done on paper. The students also enjoyed the activity as they received positive feedback for each entry sent and were confident in presenting ideas, as their entries were not graded.

Wang (1998) conducted a study on the effectiveness of electronic mail as a tool for dialogue journal writing. The subjects for the study were six respondents, randomly chosen English as Second Language (ESL) students in their intermediate-level reading and writing class in the American English Institute. The six students chosen were asked to write dialogue journal to the instructor using e-mail for nine weeks while the rest of the students in the class wrote dialogue journals to the instructor using paper

and pencil. She reported that students writing e-mail dialogue journals used more request functions than those in the paper group; they produced more language functions per writing session; and their e-mail communication was more spontaneous.

Murphy-Lee (2000) conducted a study on the effects of electronic dialogue journaling on second-grade Russian students' writing proficiency. Students were required to e-mail their instructor once a week in the target language. Results revealed that e-mail dialogue journaling improved the participants' writing proficiency and that the rapport between instructor and the students had improved since electronic dialogue journals were often of a personal nature. Furthermore, an overall improvement in the quality of the participants' discourse was also noticed at the end of the academic year.

Stanford & Siders (2001) investigated the effects of pen pal and e-pal writing on the writing skills of students with and without disabilities. They paired university teacher-education students with public school students for pen pal and e-pal writing. Pen pal learners used handwritten letters to communicate with the university students. E-pal learners used e-mail to communicate with the same university students. Control group learners wrote to an imaginary correspondent and realized no feedback from their communication. The subjects for the study were 80 students in grades 6-8. All of them wrote friendly letters twice a week for an eight-week period. Results revealed that e-pal learners with and without disabilities made more improvements in the quality and quantity of writing compared to other learners.

Gonzalez-Bueno & Perez (2006) investigated the effects of electronic mail on the lexical and grammatical accuracy and quantity of language produced by learners of Spanish as a second language. Results of the study revealed that electronic mail had a positive effect on the amount of language produced by learners, but did not have a significant effect on lexical or grammatical accuracy. Results also revealed that electronic mail had a positive effect on students' attitudes towards learning the target language.

Shang (2007) explored the effects of using e-mail on EFL writing performance in aspects of syntactic complexity, grammatical accuracy and lexical density. The subjects for this study were forty non-traditional EFL

students enrolled in an intermediate reading class at a university in Taiwan. Findings revealed that students made improvements in syntactic complexity and grammatical accuracy, but not in lexical density. Moreover, findings from students' self-reports revealed that e-mail writing improved students' foreign language learning and developed their attitudes towards English.

Michaels (2008) investigated the effects of e-mail writing on children's' writing and motivation. The subjects for the study were five first-grade and five fourth-grade children. Data sources were observations, interviews and children's e-mails. Findings revealed that children were motivated to write and their writing was improved.

Karchmer (2009) investigated thirteen K-12 teachers' reports of how the internet influenced literacy and literacy instruction in their classrooms. The teachers, including ten women and three men, represented eleven different states in the USA and were considered exemplary at using technology by their colleagues. Findings revealed that these teachers noticed an increase in their students' motivation to write. They also noticed that e-mail had a great influence on the progress of their students' writing.

Colleen (2010) explored the successes that resulted when fifth grade students composed journals via the internet. Twenty-eight students participated in the study for four months. Every student was required to send at least one email a week to the teacher describing and reacting to the novel s/he read independently. The teacher responded to each student. Results revealed that students produced a variety of journal entries, formulated journals independently, improved their typing skills, and felt comfortable using the online checker to correct their spelling mistakes.

Trenchs (2011) used electronic mail as a medium of instruction to improve students' writing in Spanish as a second language. Three students engaged in e-mail transmission with her. Results revealed that these students were self-motivated to use Spanish in a new and creative way in meaningful and authentic texts.

Britsch (2011) investigated the effect of electronic dialogue journaling on children's writing abilities. Throughout a two-year project, data were collected by compiling the e-mail correspondences that took place weekly between adults (the researcher and five graduate students) and six children

from September through April of each school year. Results of the study revealed that electronic dialogue journaling had a positive effect on children's writing abilities.

As indicated from the previous literature, the studies done on dialogue journal via e-mail reveal that e-mail dialogue journal is able to serve as a tool for developing students' writing abilities and initiating their communication skills. In addition, it can be an interesting, motivating and meaningful writing activity as it exposes students to authentic discourse. The non-threatening and interactive form of writing encourages students to express their communication intents. Nonetheless, there are very few studies done on dialogue journal writing via e-mail especially in L2 writing classrooms. Most of the studies are also not done in the Saudia educational setting. Hence, more research should be carried out specifically on Saudia schools and universities to promote the use of technology specifically dialogue journal writing via e-mail to upgrade English language teaching and learning in EFL classrooms.

Moreover, the studies done on dialogue journal via e-mail differ from the current study, due to a variety of factors: First of all, some of the previously mentioned studies have been conducted on different samples such as middle and upper school students whereas the current study has been conducted on college EFL students. Second, few experimental studies on the use of electronic writing have addressed the issue of teaching writing skills in EFL environments. This is especially so in Saudi Arabia as there seems to be no experimental studies at all (to the best knowledge of the researcher) on the usage of electronic writing as a tool conducted among EFL students in writing classrooms. Therefore, this study aimed at filling this gap.

Statement of the Problem

The majority of EFL learners in the college of languages and translation face great difficulty in their writing abilities. In fact, to them writing is a great problem and they exhibited low writing performance. A very important reason that causes such a problem is the fact that English writing courses lack both inappropriate and ineffective teaching methods used by English instructors. Smadi & Al- Abed Al-Haq (1995) assert this point saying "It

is our convention that the students' inability to write a comprehensive, acceptable English passage is due to the method used in EFL teaching in general and composition in particular." Thus, students do not have enough chances to practice writing via e-mail communication and free interaction. It is the researcher's belief, that if our students are given the opportunity to learn how to perform the writing skills through appropriate methods and communicative activities, such as e- mail communication, their writing abilities will improve, and consequently they will be better English writers. Therefore, the present study introduces the internet approach which is based on an internet-assisted writing course for teaching writing skills to EFL learners. Moreover, Adair-Hauck, Willingham-McLain, and Youngs (1999) pointed out that students who use the internet technology in learning the skill of writing are usually able to improve their writing skills more significantly than other learners do because they have an access to feedback about their errors in grammar, style and spelling.

Purpose of the Study

This study aims at exploring the effect of using dialogue through e-mail communication in developing writing skills to EFL learners in an attempt to find a solution to EFL students' low writing proficiency. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to assess the value of incorporating e-mail communication for the enhancement of EFL students' writing performance.

Question of the Study

This study was concerned with answering the following question:
1) What is the effect of dialogue via e-mail communication method of teaching on the achievement of the subjects in the writing skills of the experimental group which studied via e-mail dialogue communication and the control group which studied in the traditional method?

Statement of the Hypothesis

On the basis of the theoretical and practical literature reviewed in the study, the researcher hypothesizes that there would be a significant difference in the EFL learners' writing performance between the experimental group

who used electronic mail communication and the control group who used the traditional method in favor of the experimental group.

Importance of the Study

To the researcher's best knowledge, this is the first study in Saudi Arabia about using dialogue through e-mail communication for teaching the skill of writing to EFL learners at Al Imam University. The results might be useful for different groups of people for different reasons. Firstly, the study would be useful for EFL instructors because it might provide them with the different applications of the internet approach. Secondly, the study might be helpful for EFL learners, as it would shed light on the different uses of dialogue via e-mail communication and its benefits for them. Finally, this study can be of great support for curricula designers, as it might list a number of the functions of e-mail technology, and their applications for EFL learners.

Limitations of the Study

1. The findings of the study were restricted to EFL learners in the college of languages and translation at Al Imam Mohammad Ibin Saud Islamic University.
2. The writing achievement test and the measuring scale criteria were designed by the researcher to collect data of the study.

Definition of Terms

Electronic mail dialogue: For the present study, electronic mail dialogue is defined as a written conversation in which a student and a teacher communicate regularly via e-mail. Learners write as much as they choose on a wide range of topics and in a variety of genres and styles by focusing on content rather than form. The student then reads and responds to what has been written by the teacher. The teacher writes back regularly, responding to questions and comments, introducing new topics or asking questions. (Peyton, 2000).

Writing performance: For the present study, this term is defined as expressing oneself on a certain topic through the written word with good

quality and enough quantity.

Traditional method is the students' use of paper and pencil in writing about a certain topic. The teacher then reads and corrects each student's mistakes. Each student then receives his own composition to rewrite it, incorporating corrections.

EFL: English as a Foreign Language.

Methodology

This section discusses the methodology which the researcher followed in the present study. It includes setting and context, research design, subjects, instruments, variables, and procedures of the study.

Research design

This study utilized a quasi -experimental design. In this design the researcher used an experimental group and a control group. Both groups took a pre-test to measure their writing performance before conducting the experiment. During the experiment, the experimental group wrote dialogue journals via the internet and the control group wrote compositions using paper and pencil. After the experiment, the same test was administered as a posttest to investigate any significant differences in writing performance between the two groups.

Setting and context

This study was conducted in the department of English language, college of languages and translation, Al Imam Mohammad Ibin Saud Islamic University during the first semester of the academic year 2011/2012. The experimental group studied in the E-learning Language Laboratory which has 35 PCs connected with local and global networks. The PCs in the laboratory are provided with the most up-to-date CALL software packages.

Sample of the Study

The sample of the study consisted of 42 subjects enrolled in two sections. The two sections were randomly selected out of five English writing sections

available in the English language department at Al Imam Mohammad Ibin Saud Islamic University during the first semester of the academic year 2011/2012. The two sections were randomly assigned to experimental and control groups. The experimental group consisted of 20 male students, while the control group consisted of 22 male students.

Instruments of the Study

To achieve the aim of this study, the researcher used the following instruments:

1. A Writing Achievement Test

A writing achievement test was developed by the researcher to measure students' writing performance before and after conducting the experiment. This test required students to write about fifteen lines about cheating on school exams. To ensure the validity of this test, it was given to three EFL professors at the college of languages and translation to referee the content validity of the test. All members of the jury agreed that the topic was understandable and suitable for the first-year students' level of writing proficiency. Students' papers were corrected by two EFL instructors according to the following criteria: content, organization, word-choice, grammar and mechanics. To ensure its reliability, the writing achievement test was administrated to a sample out of the sample of the study during the first semester of the academic year 2011/2012 and repeated fourteen days later on the same sample to assess its stability over time. Pearson correlation coefficient was found to be 0.82 which indicated that the test scores were stable over time.

2. A Scale for Measuring EFL Students' Writing Proficiency

To answer the question of the study, the researcher developed a measuring scale for assessing students' writing performance based on El-Koumy's (1991) scale for marking EFL students' writing proficiency as well as its instructions. This scale consisted of five components which are the major items in El-Koumy's scale, they are follows: content, organization, word-choice, grammar and mechanics. The measuring scale was given to the

same three EFL professors in the college of languages and translation. They were requested to check the suitability of the measuring scale and clarity of its instructions. They suggested introducing new items to the mechanics of writing such as using indention, capitalization, spelling, and punctuation errors. They also suggested deleting items, as they were not necessary in the measuring scale. Their suggestions and comments were considered by the researcher.

3. The Instructional Material

The instructional material was taken from Reason to Write: Strategies for Success in Academic Writing by Miller & Cohen (2001) which was taught for the first level of EFL students in the college of languages and translation. The researcher overviewed the prescribed writing book and its supplementary materials. Then, he developed a list of eight open-ended writing topics. These topics were used with both the experimental group and the control group. To ensure the validity of these topics, they were given to three EFL professors in the college of languages and translation. They suggested that three of the topics should be reworded to be clear and understandable for the students. Their suggestions were taken into consideration and the topics were changed accordingly.

Variables of the study

The present study included the following variables:
1. Independent variables:
a. Electronic dialogue communication
b. Traditional method
2. Dependent variable:
The dependent variable of the study was EFL students' writing performance.

Procedures of the Study

The researcher followed the following procedures to conduct the experiment:
1. Getting the approval of the dean of the college of languages and translation

to conduct the experiment.

2. Pre-testing the experimental group and the control group, in the first semester of the academic year 2011/2012, to measure their writing abilities before conducting the experiment.

3. Conducting the experiment from the first week of November to the end of January, during the first semester of the academic year 2011/2012. For the experimental group, the researcher accompanied the students to the computer lab in each writing session. He made sure that every student would be able to use the internet and has an e-mail account before starting the experiment. He also gave students the e-mail address they are going to use for writing their paragraphs. After that, the researcher and the students interacted electronically by using the e-mail for three months. The students first wrote to the researcher who responded to their entries by focusing on content rather than form. The give- and- take on each topic took about two weeks. As for the control group, the researcher asked students to write about each topic using paper and pencil. After that, he collected the students' compositions, corrected mistakes and gave the compositions back to the students to rewrite them, taking corrections into consideration. Each topic took about two weeks.

4. Post-testing the experimental group and the control group at the end January 2012 to measure their writing performance after the treatment.

5. Analyzing the collected data using the t-test.

Statistical Analysis

The t-test was used to analyze the findings of the study. It was used to test the pre-test and the post-test at the ($\alpha = 0.05$) level of significance for the two groups: the control group and the experimental group.

Findings of the Study
Equivalence of the Subjects in the Pretest

A pretest was used in order to ensure equivalence among the two groups in their writing performance at the beginning of the experiment. The results of the pretest concerning the mean scores of the two groups are shown in Table 1.

Table 1
The T-Value of the Difference in the Mean Scores between the Experimental Group and the Control Group on the Pre-Test

GROUP	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	DF	Sig. (2-tailed)
Experimental	20	14.70	1.53	0.609	40	0.546
Control	22	14.41	1.56			

Table (1) shows that the mean score of the experimental group was 14.70 with a standard deviation of 1.53, and the mean score of the control group was 14.41 with a standard deviation of 1.56. It also shows that the difference in the mean scores between the experimental group and the control group was not statistically significant at (α= 0.05). Therefore, it can be indicated that the experimental and control groups were homogeneous and equivalent before conducting the experiment, and they were almost similar considering the students' social and economic status. All of them had been taught English as a foreign language for eight years before conducting the experiment, and that the change in the students' writing performance would be attributed to the effect of using e-mail dialogue procedure.

Findings of the First Question

1) What is the effect of dialogue via e-mail communication method of teaching on the achievement of the subjects in the writing skills of the experimental group which studied via e-mail dialogue communication and the control group which studied in the traditional method?

After conducting the experiment, a posttest was administered to the two groups of the study to measure their writing performance. The results of the analysis of the post-test scores are shown in table 2 below.

Table 2
The T-Value of the Difference in the Mean Scores between the Experimental group and the Control Group on the Post-Test

GROUP	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	DF	Sig. (2-tailed)
Experimental	20	21.80	1.51	10.564	40	0.000
Control	22	16.95	1.46			
* Significant at $\alpha = 0.6$						

Table (2) shows that the mean score of the experimental group was 21.80 with a standard deviation of 1.51, while the control group's mean score was 16.95 with a standard deviation of 1.46. It also shows that the difference in the mean scores between the experimental group and the control group was statistically significant (t= 10.564, p= 0.00). Therefore, the hypothesis of the study was accepted.

Discussion of the Findings

This study is concerned with developing EFL students' writing proficiency through the use of e-mail dialogue journal technology. The findings of the study proved that there were statistically significant differences between the achievement of the experimental group and the control group on the writing proficiency test due to the e-mail dialogue journal procedure. This result was clear by comparing the mean scores of the pretest and posttest of the two groups. The overall mean scores of the two groups proved to be almost the same in the pretest. The mean of the experimental group was 14.70 and the mean of the control group was 14.41in the pre-test.

The findings of the study indicate that the treatment had a significant effect on EFL students' writing proficiency between the experimental and control groups and in favor of the experimental one. This means that students in the experimental group, who were instructed according to the e-mail dialogue procedure, were much better than those in the control group who were instructed according to the traditional method. However, the overall mean scores of the two groups in the posttest was a clear sign of the e-mail dialogue procedure's effect on the students' writing proficiency. The control group's mean was 16.95, while the experimental group's mean was 21.80. There was significant differences between the mean scores of the two groups and it was in favor of the experimental group. This finding supports the value of social interaction that is fostered by e-mail communication. El-Hindi (1998) provides an excellent discussion on how Internet connections are compatible with constructivism. E-mail partnership gives the students opportunities to build reality as they come to know themselves and the world of others. E-mail is one of the many technologies that promote internet-mediated communication. Therefore, the hypothesis of the study

was accepted.

In support of these interpretations, the preceding result is in line with the findings of (Ellis, 1995; Wang, 1998; Murphy-Lee, 2000; Shang, 2007; and Trenchs, 2011) and whose results provided evidence in favor of the subjects of the experimental groups who utilized dialogue journal via e-mail communication in writing. This finding is also in harmony with the several views raised by different writers such as Liaw (1996), Warschauer (1997), Beauvios (1998), El-Hindi (1998) and Bollati (2002).

Members of the experimental group benefited a lot from internet-mediated learning. This is attributed to the instrument used in the study which is accessed with a huge amount of linguistic information. It enabled students to learn different sub-skills of writing, like grammar, spelling, style, and punctuation. Furthermore, the linguistic information in the program is arranged in an-easy-to-use manner which allows the user to process it in a straightforward way.

This is in harmony with what was reported by other studies. For instance, Gonzalez Bueno & Perez (2006) found that the internet-writing lesson was easy to follow, the subjects enjoyed it, and the internet helped them with their writing. Similarly, Shang (2007) and Karchmer (2009) said that students were amazed at the amount of linguistic information made available to them by the internet, and were happy and excited about the ease of finding and incorporating information, using internet-aided writing facilities.

As for the control group, their mean scores showed that there was little progress, but it did not have any statistical significances between the pretest and posttest scores. This means that the group that went through the traditional procedures of teaching, gained little progress in their writing proficiency compared to the experimental group. The little progress of the control group could be due to the natural process in the traditional classroom.

The use of dialogue-assisted writing in this study created an interesting and nonthreatening atmosphere which motivated the student to depend on himself and work with other students to do many internet-based activities with his classmates' writing. This also created an atmosphere of cooperation among the subjects who could work together via chatting to write about a

certain topic. They could also exchange viewpoints and receive new ideas about the subjects they discussed. Trenchs (2011), Karchmer (2009), and Gonzales-Bueno (1998) reported that dialogue assisted writing enabled students to interact in authentic situations with a variety of audiences, increase their levels of linguistic input and output, and enhance motivation for working and willingness to learn collaboratively.

The high scores of the experimental group could be attributed to many reasons. First, the excitement of using technology combined with intimate and genuine communication might have built students' motivation to write in English as a foreign language, which could in turn make EFL writing a motivating activity. In support of this interpretation, some of the previous studies (Beauvios, 1998; Trenchs, 2011; and Karchmer, 2009) found that electronic mail dialogue fostered students' motivation to write in both L1 and L2 and built positive attitudes towards learning the second/foreign language. Second, the teacher's tolerance of mistakes might have built students' self-confidence and self-esteem, which could in turn encourage them to express their own points of view. In support of this interpretation, (Gonzalez-Bueno's, 1998) observation during her study revealed that electronic dialogue journals encouraged students to write without fear of making mistakes and to pay more attention to idea development. Third, individualizing instruction through electronic mail dialogue might have helped the teacher address specific needs, current knowledge and learning style of each student in the experimental group. In support of this interpretation, El-Koumy (2004) states that individualized instruction via e-mail communication might have helped the teacher diagnose the writing difficulties of each student and suggest remedies for overcoming these difficulties. Fourth, the interaction between the teacher and each student might have improved students' thinking skills which are necessary for writing because writing is putting thoughts on paper. Moreover, this interaction might have motivated students to broaden their linguistic competence to meet its requirements. Fifth, students' use of spelling and grammar checkers might have improved the accuracy of their writing and given them the opportunity to attend to ideas while writing. In support of this interpretation, Murphy-Lee (2000) found that electronic dialogue improved the rapport between the instructor

and the students. Finally, electronic mail writing might have developed the relationship between the teacher and the students which could in turn make writing an enjoyable activity.

Consequently, one of the main objectives of the curriculum for the college of languages and translation at Al Imam University is to develop the students' writing ability to think critically and creatively as well as to make decisions and solve problems. Thus, investigating the effect of e-mail communication may lead to fruitful conclusions and pedagogical implications for Saudi EFL instructors and students. Sorcinelli (1995) states that when students and teachers interact with each other through e-mail communication, they develop their critical thinking skills, explore their ideas, strengthen and develop greater imaginative powers, and gain self confidence through original writing. As Silva (1996) has also proved, putting students in contact with audiences and providing them with authentic reasons for communicating in the target language offers a more satisfying foreign language learning experience. She maintained the efficiency of e-mail communication in providing immediate feedback and allowing students to discuss and communicate directly and cheaply with key pals around the world.

The findings of the study also showed that the use of dialogue journal via e-mail has an effect on the process of teaching and learning the skill of writing in writing classroom. EFL learners have a facility that provides a chance for self-learning, which helps them to be more independent on teachers. They are also able to discover and correct their errors because the internet enhances language learning, makes writing more organized, and aids in the mechanics of language. Not only can students use the internet in the classroom under the control of the teacher, but they are also able to utilize it anywhere or anytime outside the classroom.

It has also become possible for EFL learners to use a wide range of internet based activities and applications such as checking grammar, style, and spelling errors, and using punctuation marks. By using these practical language-learning activities, it has become possible to practice the sub-skills of writing in convenient contexts. The use of instructional dialogue journal in a friendly non-threatening atmosphere encourages the use of the

language skills as writing.

Finally, it can be concluded that EFL learners' performance in writing improves a lot through using dialogue journal via e-mail compared with the traditional procedures, techniques, activities, and methods used by EFL teachers. That performance will definitely help them use English more properly and effectively, especially in an age where the main goal of learning English in Saudi Arabia is to equip learners for better communication in all fields of life; because of more interdependence among countries, increase in international travel and the chance to meet people from other countries rises.

Recommendations

In light of the results of the study, the researcher recommends that EFL writing should be taught through electronic mail interaction and that EFL instructors should emphasize the content rather than the form of writing and adapt instruction to meet individual needs in writing. Moreover, the Saudi Ministry of Higher Education is recommended to make internet facilities more accessible and reliable in all public schools and universities.

Suggestions for Future Research

Depending on the results of this study, future researchers are recommended to:
1. Carry out further research concerning the effect of dialogue via e-mail communication on other language skills such as reading, and speaking skills.
2. Conduct further studies concerning the effect of dialogue through electronic mail in teaching writing skills, but with more subjects of different levels of different colleges in different districts in Saudi Arabia.
3. Some points for further research may include the following: using techniques like individual and cooperative learning in internet-aided writing, and finding their effects on students' writing achievement.

Pedagogical Implications

In light of the study's findings, EFL instructors are recommended to do

the following:

1. Put in mind when dealing with your students that they are not dealing with a machine, but rather with a complex mixture of thoughts, beliefs, emotions, and even imagination.

2. Try to be creative and innovative in the use of various EFL teaching techniques. EFL instructors should try to be up-to-date in their knowledge of EFL technological teaching techniques and activities.

3. Instructors should believe in the usefulness of the different technological activities in the syllabus, whether written or oral. They should believe that such activities build students' personalities and confidence, which in turn help them to be better communicators of the language outside the class.

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