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Using technology for developing writing in an ESP class

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Abstract

As English is a popular language currently, it is being taught according to the specific needs of the students. In this case study, the very specific problem with the writing skills of a business English class students is dealt with, and to solve this problem, technology is used. Thus, the aim of the present study is to search for the effect of technology on the writing skills of the ESP students.

1. Introduction

Throughout the past decades, there has been a growing interest on the usage of technology in the field of foreign language teaching. Via the application of these technological tools, language classrooms have become more effective than it used to be. Zhao (2003) did meta analysis of nine previous technological empirical studies. The result of it indicate that technology based language instruction may be called effective equally when compared with teacher-based language instruction.

On the other hand, as English is a popular language currently, it is being taught according to needs of the students. This situation has contributed to the development of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). It deals with the materials that gather their input via the students' proposed study courses (Hutchinson & Waters, 1981). Hutchinson & Waters (1981) describe the basis of ESP curriculum as underlying conference and target conference repertoire. Due to the fact that ESP students have underlying conference repertoire, their language skills are affected by them. Among these skills, Kroll (2001) points out the

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importance of writing skill, and emphasizes that writing is the hardest one to get success when compared with other skills like reading, comprehending and speaking.

Many suggestions have been drawn to find the ways to teach writing. Producing a successful piece of writing can be accomplished on condition that one has a concurrent control in language systems (Kroll, 2001). At that point, Hinkel (2006) suggests that to have success in L2 writing, learners need to have their grammar taught via explicit ways, and they require the knowledge of lexicon. Hinkel adds that L2 writing instruction programs need to be consisted of grammar and vocabulary. Frodesen (2001) states that learners need to attach importance to the form for developing writing proficiency, and adds that "…form is not just about error but about resources for communicative goals." Moreover, Frodesen & Holten (2003) also state that "…ESL writing instructors have a role to play in making writers aware of language form."

In addition to teaching through form, Warschauer (2007) also highlights that computers can be used to teach new types of writing considering the online age that we live in today. Warschauer (2010) states that new technologies can help us teaching writing in second language. Furthermore, Sullivan & Pratt's (1996) study demonstrates that:

> Students in the computer-assisted classroom demonstrated not only more interest in discussions, and, subsequently, more practice writing English, they were also more focused on the task at hand than students in the oral classroom. (p. 500)

Along with the use of technology, e-mails started to be used as asynchronous communication tool. This tool has also been used in developing writing skills. Torii-Williams (2004) used e-mail as an exchange tool between native speakers and foreign language learners. The study illustrated that e-mails make the students use the language for authentic purposes; moreover, they can use it to make new friends, and learn new cultures. In Liaw (1998)'s study, students stated that they used the drafting, editing, and revising options through e-mail writing, and they claimed that it contributed to their English proficiency level improvement. In a similar vein, Gonglewski et al. (2001) points out e-mail between the teacher and the foreign language learner and states the importance of this process as "the secure environment through one-on-one e-mail exchange with the teacher helps learners gain self-assurance as well as experience using electronic media in the foreign language." Furthermore, Gonglewski et al. (2001) claims that e-mails provide "much more valuable communicative interaction in the target language than was ever possible in the traditional foreign language classroom."

Considering the importance of form, vocabulary and grammar in developing writing skill, the present study combines these language areas with technology. The research questions of the study are as follows:

1. Is there a change between the attitudes of ESP students towards learning writing via technology?

2. What are the views of ESP students about learning writing via technology?

2. Methodology

2. 1. Method

As for the method, "case study" has been used. Hartley (2004) points out that a case study is the combination of detailed investigation, data gathered in a period of time in line with context. In order to gather ideas in context qualitatively and considering the change quantitatively, participants have been wanted to take part in this present case study.