

The effects of StyleWriter towards Student Motivation in English Writing Assessments

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Abstract: This research studies the consequence of using open-source software, which is known as the StyleWriter, on learners' motivation in learning of English Writing. 60 primary students (30 in the treatment group, 30 in the control group) from a Malaysia primary school were engaged in this study. An ANCOVA analysis that was carried out in this research explained that there was a significantly better score on the group of students who accessed to StyleWriter compared to the group of learners who made used of the MS Words learning technique. Students from the treatment group were also found to be more motivated in learning of the English language. Most of the learners were paid special attention and showed extra self-confidence in learning the English writing method. Though, there was significant difference in the terms of 'satisfaction' in learning English involving the both groups. The consequences of this research propose that the combination of computer technology in the teaching and learning of English essay writing in common was helpful.

Keywords: Computer assisted language learning, StyleWriter, motivation, attention, relation, confidence and satisfaction

1. Introduction

English is a language that is broadly used in every part around the world. Undeniably, English is a language that has a role as a means of communication in both formal and informal events. In Malaysia, English language is used as a second language and the position of English in Malaysia is simply believed as English as a Foreign Language (EFL) relatively than English as a Second Language (ESL). The incorporation of computer technology in education has provided additional difference in the teaching and learning development. Language practitioners from the entire world are continually discovering approaches to teach English in an improved and more motivating setting. They attempt to create the language classes and lessons extra motivating yet significant by means of the computer technologies in the classrooms. The introduction of integrating computer in the teaching and learning practice in Malaysia started taking roots in the 1980s, whereby the computers have been a component of the school system although not as an instrument to teach and to learn.

Computers in English Language Learning are viewed through CALL or CAI since students use the computers to develop and practice their English. Computer programs were specialized and produced by a variety of manufactures to catch the students' attention and make the learning experience more successful specially to teach students in a unique learning environment. Topics are created for every skill level with a solid means of learning. The subject materials are comprehensive and allowing students to be learner-centered (Zhang, 2007). Wide ranges of software are offered to practice students in variety skills such as writing, reading, listening and speaking. In writing, students can use any kind of word-processors to practice writing. Some resourceful word-processors permit students to verify their spelling and find words in the thesaurus (Boswood, 1997). Since 1970's, computers have been long associated with writing and importantly with language learning. Computer is a gadget that can be a challenging, creative tool and a resource in ESL classroom (Procter, 2006). Nowadays, computers are well acknowledged as the tool which creates our lives much easier compare as decade ago where virtually everybody consideration computers as multifaceted and expensive device.

Studies also have been conducted by researchers to identify whether the use of this computer program could have positive effect in the language learning classroom. For example, Figueredo and Varnhagen (2006) conducted a study on the use of computer in writing found out that students were able to correct the surface mistakes with the aid of spelling and grammar checkers provided in the

computer software than they corrected with the dictionary. Therefore, these two researchers concluded that the use of spelling checker for weaker students who have poor writing abilities and are blocked by the mechanical aspects of writing was useful.

Besides performance, motivation towards learning languages is also an important factor that may influence students' tempo and achievement of second or foreign language learning (Yu-mei, 2009). Attitudes is one of the sub elements of motivation in learning a language (Gardner, 1985). Based on his judgment, Gardner refers motivation as the combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favorable attitudes towards learning the language. The investigation of language learning motivation is an important field in language pedagogy since it is seen as one of the key variables contributing to the successful acquisition of a foreign or second language (Kormos & Csizer, 2010). These studies revealed a variety of results that reflected the complexity of examining motivation in language learning. Moreover, several studies in the foreign and second language field have acknowledged the social and contextual influences on individual motivation. Most importantly, these studies were concerned with what kind of motivation led to higher proficiency achievement (Mills, Pajares & Herron, 2007).

Researches also have been conducted the effects of using computer program towards students' motivation. For example, Daniels (2004) conducted a study on the motivational effects of computer technology on writing instruction. Questionnaires were dispersed and the outcomes explained that students' had better motivation and able to write lengthy essay when computers incorporated into the writing process. An investigation about the Inspiration software was done by Eib and Cox (2003). According to the authors, this exploration was done by a language arts instructor on the consequences of technology-based prewriting tasks to identify the excellence of students' writing. The outcomes of the statistics show that there was improvement on the abilities in the group strand of writing once students employed the Inspiration program for prewriting. Besides, students gained higher marks on their writing coursework and accomplished their exercises more repeatedly (Eib & Cox, 2003). Holdich and Chung's (2003) analyzed the outcomes of the computer tutor, which is known as HARRY, in their study. Three respondents were involved whereby they wrote organized and HARRY assisted narrative. Before, during and after writing their essays, the respondents were given informal prompts as of HARRY. Stories were also written by control group respondents with no any support. It is reported that students who applied HARRY software wrote good essays and believed that HARRY in addition help them in dealing throughout a number of writing tasks. They were able to present special characteristics of the writing process as asked for.

A study carried out by Lin, Kajita and Mase (2007) was to examine the viability and efficiency of employing a narrative, story-based computer assisted language learning (CALL) method. This method was used on learners to learn Japanese kanji lettering. An experimental assessment outcome points out that there was a statistically significant on students' motivation and learning method. The approach used on students for a two-week period had increased and enhanced students' motivation as well as learning approaches for learning kanji, as calculated by the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire. Criterion by Educational Testing Service and MyAccess by Vantage Learning are Taiwan two of most popular computer-based writing tools in. By using these tools, student are able to get instant comments in the form of both holistic score and analytic explanation on grammar, theme, usage, organization, and content improvement, select from a choice of essay topics and to perform multiple drafts. Elliot and Mikulas (2004) concluded that after using MyAccess, more than 85% of the learners rated their satisfaction with the automated comment on their essays as both helpful as well as accurate. Students felt motivated and felt comfortable in employing the computer-assisted writing program, MyAccess, as a writing tool.

Based on the earlier studies on CAI/CALL usefulness studies in academic performance indicate that an instructor should find out more resourceful methods to progress learners' success in English classes, as students are extremely more adapted to computer individually. It has been accomplished that the majority of the computer programs make teaching and learning language easy by the appearance of sound, images and interactive settings and offering a variety of exercises and information. For that reason, learning via the computer software builds students confidence, they become more self-governing of their teachers and more accountable to their individual learning. In this case, the students are being motivated to use more hard work that facilitates them to learn intensely.

2. Research Objectives

The main aim of this study was to identify the effectiveness of using StyleWriter software in writing assessments compared with the Microsoft Word. The study also investigated the effect on students' motivation in learning English Language writing.

3. Methodology

A pre-post-test quasi experimental design was used in this study. In order to allow the collection of the statistics, a quantitative study technique was carried out. This experiment was conducted in seven weeks involving the students of experimental group and control group whereby the StyleWriter software was exploited by the students from the experimental group and the Microsoft Words by the control group students. 60 students of year five from Sekolah Kebangsaan Taman Universiti, Seri Kembangan were involved in this study. The respondents were chosen from two different classes to represent the control and experimental groups. The most important instrument employed in this research during the pre-test and the post-test sections is the worksheet writing test. The components of this writing test were grammar, spelling, vocabulary, sentence structure and overall performances. The pre-test was conducted in order to find out the students' writing ability in connection to the teaching purpose intended for this investigation.

A pre-test was given to the students in the first week. They were then given a post-test and survey subsequent to the completion of the experimental process. At this stage, students from both groups were given a brief explanation on the purpose of this study as well as on the methods of filling up the questionnaire form. In this research, to measure the students' motivation in learning English, the researcher had made used the Instructional Materials Motivation Survey (IMMS), which was developed by Keller in 1987, based on the ARCS motivation model. This first dimension measured in this model is the students' attention (ATT) which calculated the level to which the technique employed in both groups could initiate and maintain learners' motivation throughout the experimentation process. The subsequent scale measured is the relevance (REL). This scale helps to examine if students are able to recognize the importance as well as the usefulness of what was trained. The third degree, confidence (CON), measured the level to which students believe that they can effectively achieve the objectives and jobs set out throughout the lesson. Lastly, the satisfaction (SAT) dimension measured the reactions of achievement and inherent feelings of the respondents through the lecture. A total of 24 items from the IMMS were made used based on the 4-point likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 4 (Strongly agree). A pilot study has been conducted to a group of students which were not involved in this study to examine the reliability of the motivation questionnaire. Analysis shows that all motivation dimensions achieved more than 0.800 (Attention = .826; Relevance = .877; Confidence = .848; Satisfaction = .869)

3.1 StyleWriter Software

StyleWriter software is an influential script editor that directly hooked on all edition of Microsoft Word. It is said to be the World's prime approach as well as English Usage Checker. This software instantaneously make over ones writing into a simple English that is short and snappy, understandable, and legible. The writing software has only one of its kind whereby this software is not only intended for students but writers of all age in either kind of writing assignment such as legal documents, editorials, employee handbooks and so forth (refer Figure 1). StyleWriter seeks out for thousands of writing blunders by appearing the recommendation box unexpectedly by giving simple explanations how one is able to correct every sentence (refer Figure 2). The writing mistakes consist of terminology and conceptual words, difficult vocabularies, hidden verbs, wordy expressions, lengthy sentences as well as inactive verbs.



Figure 1. Screenshot of spell checker.

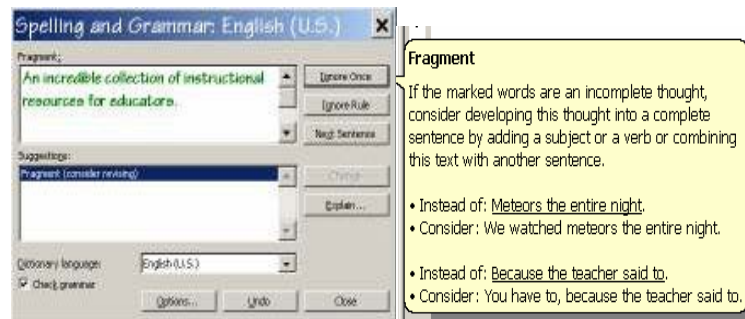


Figure 2. Screenshot of Grammar Checker.

4. Finding

A one-way between-group analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted to compare the effectiveness of two different types of computer software for English language writing assessments. In this study, the independent variables were the two groups (StyleWriter group and Microsoft Word group) while dependent variables were the post-test scores using pen and pencil after conducting the experiment for 7 weeks. The pre-test scores were used as the covariant in this study. Preliminary checks were conducted to ensure that there was no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, homogeneity of variants, homogeneity of regression slopes and reliable measurements of the covariate. After adjusting for pre-test scores, there was a significant difference between the two intervention groups on post-test score on writing assessments [$F(1, 57) = 146.014$, $p = .000$, partial eta squared = .719).

Students taught using StyleWriter scored an average of 3.38 marks as compared with 2.0 marks for students who underwent using Microsoft Word (see Table 2). This finding indicates that, after controlling the pre-test scores, students who had been exposed to the use of StyleWriter achieved significantly better scores as compared with those who had been taught using the Microsoft Word for English language writing assessments

Table 1. Levene's Test of Equality of Error

F	Df1	Df2	Sig
.139	1	58	.711

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

Group	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
MS Word	2.00	.402	30
StyleWriter	3.38	.444	30

Table 3. Test between Subjects Effects

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	28.509	2	14.255	81.978	.000
Intercept	9.117	1	9.117	52.433	.000
Pre-test	.493	1	.493	2.834	.098
Group	25.390	1	25.390	146.014	.000
Error	9.911	57	.174		
Total	473.125	60			
Corrected Total	38.421	59			

R squared = .742 (Adjusted R Squared = .733)

The next section of the findings examined whether there were any differences in students' motivation during the experiment using StyleWriter compared to those taught by conventional methods. Findings indicated that students exposed to StyleWriter were more highly motivated across all the scales (Attention, M = 4.83; Relation, M=4.79; Confidence, M=4.78; Satisfaction, M=4.83; and Overall Motivation, M=4.81) than Microsoft Word (Attention, M=3.74; Relation, M=3.77; Confidence, M=3.72; Satisfaction, M=3.76, and Overall Motivation, M=3.75). In order to determine the statistical significance of each item between the two groups, an independent sample t-test was conducted (refer Table 4). The results showed statistically significant differences at the $p < .05$ level in all motivation dimension (Attention, Relation, Confidence and Satisfaction). Overall, the finding shows that students were taught using StyleWriter not only better in their assessments writing score but also they were more motivated in the class compared to those exposed in Microsoft Word

Table 4: Independent Sample T-Test for Students' Motivation between StyleWriter group and Microsoft Word Group

	Microsoft Word Group		StyleWriter Group		P (significance value)
Attention	3.74	.379	4.83	.180	.000*
Relation	3.77	.344	4.79	.161	.000*
Confidence	3.72	.318	4.78	.171	.000*
Satisfaction	3.76	.324	4.83	.182	.000*
Motivation	3.75	.163	4.81	.099	.000*

5. Discussion

The integration of computer software such as StyleWriter in teaching and learning in the classroom offers prospects to keep students engaged in new, creative and innovative approaches of learning. Using technologies in proper in the classroom allows students to widen their mind in order to think and give reasons linguistically. In this study, the results explained that in mastering the writing technique and the components of the linguistics namely grammar, vocabulary, spelling and sentence pattern, the students from the treatment group did better than the control group. This gives an idea that making use the StyleWriter in classroom modules can develop the students performance in English essay writing and also in learning English in all-purpose. The outcomes of this study are constant with those from previous studies (Holdich & Chung, 2003; Eib & Cox, 2003).

An additional characteristic studied in this study is the learners' motivation level when learners' were exposed to the usage of StyleWriter software in the classroom. It is believes that, in order to have a successful learning, students' motivation is significant requirement. Based on the study done by Monteith (2004), the collision of technologies in teaching and learning can be determined from reliable reports obtained on students' motivation to learn when computer is in use. In this study, learners who made use of the StyleWriter felt more motivated in learning the English language contrast to those students in the control group who only employed the Microsoft Words. This result was supported by a study done by Daniels (2004), Lin, Kajita and Mase (2007), Elliot and Mikulas (2004) reporting similar results where by students who utilized the information technology had effectively motivated learners in the learning process.

6. Conclusion

The combination of technology in learning English ought to be supported. English language teachers in Malaysian schools play an important role in their daily teaching process. Teachers should make the best use of whatever suitable software that is obtainable, including the open-source software which is accessible with no charge. With the use of computer technology in teaching and learning process in a classroom gives confidence to students to be more active in their contribution, thus supports the learning. Even though the current study was carried out in one of a primary school in Malaysia, there are no excuses or explanation should be given on why the advantages of computer utilization in classrooms would not be an advantage in the learning of English at all stages, from the elementary school to the higher education level. At institution of higher education as well as teacher training academics, lecturers who are teaching the English Language courses should integrate the usefulness of employing computer software in teaching English.

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