



UTILIZATION OF DIFFERENT TECHNOLOGIES AND MEDIA IN LEARNING WRITING SKILL IN ENGLISH: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract:

The present study primarily aims at exploring possibility and utilization of technologies and media into English Writing class in a university at Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Technologies include: computers, laptops, mobiles etc. while media include Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp etc. In addition, importance and use of blackboard as education software has been studied. The study is basically based on a survey especially students and teacher's observation and experience. The study is basically of qualitative type. The findings reveal that both learners and instructors exploit technologies, media, platforms and apps in order to learn writing in English. Both teachers and the students bear quite positive attitude regarding utilization and impact of various technologies, media and apps to learn how to write in English. It was also found that technology utilization basically depends on the awareness, skills and teacher's preparedness. It is very important to be appropriately trained in the technology to make teaching more interesting and effective to develop proper attitude among the target learners towards achieving the targets of writing in English.

Keywords: technology, media, apps, utilization, writing

1. Introduction

No teacher can achieve aims of writing English without proper use of interesting activities in order to create and retain motivation among the target learners. In other words, simply speaking, technology especially online platforms have created avenues

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in education sector especially in learning of English in a foreign or second language perspective.

Among other skills of a language, writing is the most productive skill as it is perhaps the best and most accurate form of expression. It has been noticed that many EFL learners develop proficiency in speaking, but they face challenges in writing. Therefore, it is important to explore deeper to find out learning needs of the writing skill with appropriate help of technology integration in and outside of an English class.

The present study conceives that following issues are key to EFL situation with special reference to writing:

1. Technology type (computers (all types), Facebook, Twitter, Blackboard etc.),
2. Preferred technologies/media by teachers as well as learners,
3. Writing skill and use of technology,
4. Availability/ feasibility of technologies/media,
5. Preparedness and training of the concerned staff for the application of technology,
6. Assessing the importance of available technology.

2. Literature Review

It is important to study what Sanders and Morrison (2000) say about the second language learners' perception on computer application and attitude towards learning English language. In their opinion, it is a significant variable when a pedagogue considers use and application of various technologies and tools important in the classrooms which are genuinely equipped with tools and platforms simultaneously with teachers' preparedness as well as learners' motivation. According to Well (2000), Holmes (1998) and Klassen & Milton, (1999), 'majority of quantitative and qualitative studies have revealed learners' positive attitude for technology in a classroom that is environment friendly.

[Bransford, Brown and Cocking](#) (1999) are of the opinion that learning is enhanced by technology because learners can be motivated to get engaged in collaborative learning. Sophisticated technologies usually have huge database useful for users, online presence of data and resources, online libraries etc. There is a relevant question if appropriate use of technology boosts learning.

Technology integration stimulates and enhances learning? In this regard, [Jonassen](#) (2000) can be referred as he says that a computer is nothing but a mind tool. The author persuades users to incorporate technology-based instruction.

Present age is digital in nature. Science- technology is fast developing these days. Sophisticated use of technology and media in language teaching has created a favorable room for reforming English curriculum and exploring teaching strategies in general and English language teaching in particular in the present cyber affected society. This trend generally is marked with the appropriate use of audiovisual resources, and even animation effects in the English language teaching classrooms. Such tools are quite effective in the process of holding the level of motivation in English classrooms. (Pun, 2013)

One of the most important reasons why one should integrate technology is its power to transformation. [Wilhelm](#) (2000) points out curriculum design evolving through technology can hopefully enable better learning. Technology integration is supposed to develop more interest among students towards making writing authentic ([Lee](#), 2000). Students can experience greater amount of enthusiasm by involving themselves in electronic learning. It is felt that the experience of online writing activity and process further thrills the learners. They may feel double joy once they receive instant feedback from peer learners and concerned instructors. Writing process online bears a distinct interactive quality" ([Stephens & Mandeville](#), 2000) which is urgently needed in students who want to acquire true writing skill.

[Abdal-Haqq](#) (1995) is of the opinion that many teachers are not interested in utilizing innovative and sophisticated tools probably due to shortcomings in the teacher education programs in computers which often focuses on traditional teaching approaches rather than innovative strategies. Teachers need to know about such software, applications and effectiveness prior to their actual classroom experiences.

Technology facilitates in all the dimensions of education/learning/teaching. An area that technology especially supports very effectively is the project work carried out by the students themselves, which we may call as self-learning strategy. Teachers in general try to motivate students to learn about things using a language as a tool of communication. In the same way, getting learners to undertake project works on a topic or a title work about topics are related to other parts of the curriculum. Such an issue can be dealt with Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) which is an instructional strategy to improve the learners' skills. Teachers and learners can go online to read or listen to interesting contents, and can then write or speak about what they have learnt. (Gary Motteram, 2013).

Cyrus (2004) shared his significant views on utilization of electronic media including computers and other technologies. In short, studies in the area of 'technology use' show that by doing so EFL/ESL teachers/instructors are exposed to different writing pedagogy integrated with technology, Apps, software and platforms. Once

experienced, instructors/teachers can muster self-confidence to be able to further exploit the opportunities in the area of technology use. (Knezek, Christensen, & Rice, 1996). However, such aspiring teachers will ultimately require proper and right level of attitude and motivation towards equipping them with technology and its application in writing classes in particular. (Lam, 2000).

2.1 Factors affecting technology integration

A lot of factors can be identified that directly or indirectly exert effect on use of educational technology. Debski's (2000) study revealed that teachers opted to undertake a project related to computer enhanced teaching. They did not do due to internal motivation rather they were administratively pressurized to enhance their awareness of technology and its use. If this is the case, motivation factors will negatively affect the skills of technology utilization. It is a fact that not all the teachers are aware not interested in using technology as this affects their routine, and sometimes their skill may be exposed to the supervisors or administrators.

Reed et al (1995) state in agreement that a course in computer programme can exert positive effect in the development of attitude toward computers. However, internal motivation is also an issue. Fisher (1999) noticed that teachers' attitudes and success in using technology are quite interdependently associated.

Lam (2000) and Smerdon et al. (2000) are of the opinion that Educators are not able to utilize technologies in various ways. Time pressure is one important factor that hampers sufficient utilization of electronic tools. On the other hand, lack of resources and materials were reasons of failure in integration of technologies, as stated by (Loehr, 1996; Smerdon et al, 2000). In addition, Langone et al., (1998) contend that there are insufficient or inflexible guidelines and standards.

It is a fact that technology integration largely depends on environment and technology friendly setting. Else, the efforts may not be that successful. In this regards, Cuban (1996) feels that the supporters and advocates of technology integration perhaps could not realize that social organization and its setting can be one factor of inhibition in the process of technology integration.

3. Importance of Apps, platform and media

3.1. WhatsApp

Most people think that WhatsApp is only an App of instant messaging or communication, and it is a really difficult for them to believe that WhatsApp can be utilizes as an important tool of learning, teaching and even training. The overall

purpose of WhatsApp is to mainly facilitate communication. On the other hand, teaching and learning solely depends on communication and effective delivery of information. Therefore, WhatsApp offers a communication channel through which teachers can deliver information to the target students.

3.2. Utilisation of WhatsApp as a teaching strategy

Following are some strategies that pedagogues/instructors can utilize to take benefits of WhatsApp as a tool:

- 1) create chat group to communicate with the group members regarding the subject being taught,
- 2) share important information on the lesson,
- 3) forward audio/video lessons,
- 4) assign task to enhance self-learning,
- 5) get connected with students outside the classroom and remind them of pending tasks and upcoming units,
- 6) keep a detailed records of students' participation for their portfolio records/update,
- 7) stay in contact with parents especially when a student is not in class or not turning in class/ homework just to cross check what is wrong.

3.3. Twitter

Twitter is a valuable as a communication and broadcasting tool. Twitter is generally used to send a message straight to your audience to get content delivered.

Twitter offers and facilitates communication between different parties in a public forum. It allows the user to get instant feedback from target audience/clients. As the communication on Twitter is open for everyone else to follow, it follows transparencies and responsibility required for public communications. Twitter communications reach a larger audience instantly therefore some users prefer twitter as a tool of communication on other tools.

3.4. Facebook

Facebook is perhaps the most exploited social site. Apart from general networking, Facebook can also be used for learning English especially the practice of writing: short messages or a story.

Following is a long list of how Facebook can be utilized for learning/teaching English in general and writing in particular: [Learning games](#), [News gathering](#), [Ask students to create content](#), [Brainstorming](#), [Exam practice](#), [Reading summaries](#),

[Broadcast education news](#), [Import your class blog to Facebook](#), parents' involvement, explore questions, [archive discussions](#), posting educational content, [practice foreign language with native speakers](#), [Encourage online participation](#), [Take classroom polls](#), Discuss classroom ideas with other teachers, [Homework help](#), [Staying in touch with old students](#).

3.5 Blackboard

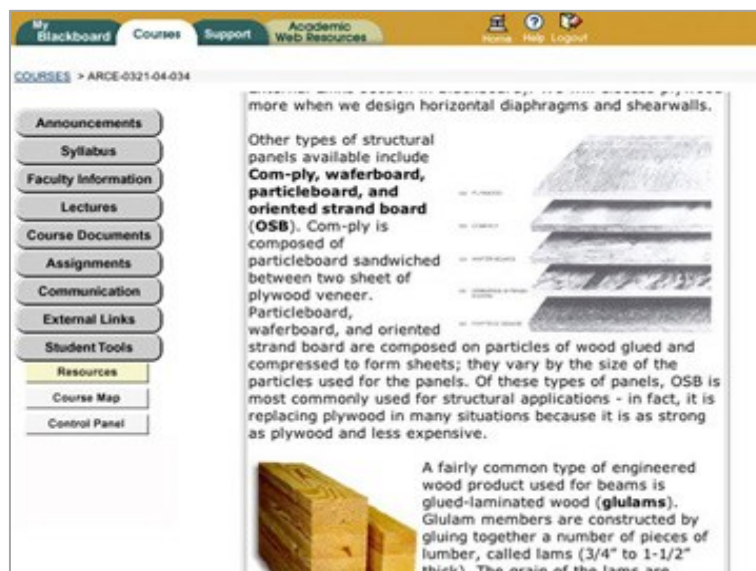
3.5.1 Benefits of the Blackboard Learning System

Both teachers and learners are surely benefitted from course management systems such as the Blackboard Learning System. Some advantages follow: a systematic place of contents, fast sharing process, quick feedback, follow up, improved communication, skill building. (Bradford et al, 2007)

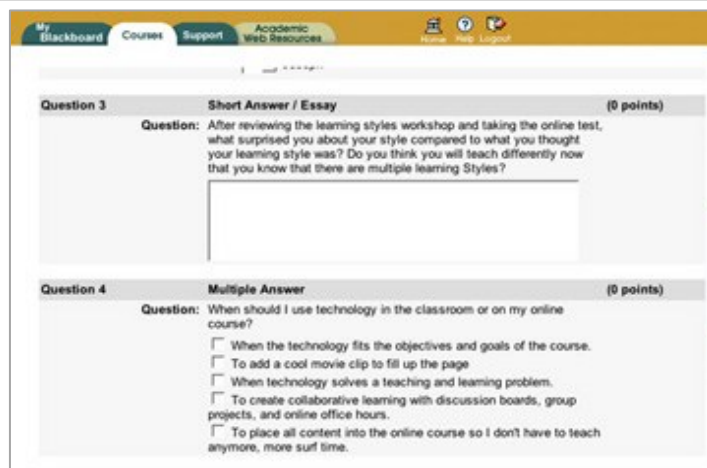
3.5.2 Blackboard Learning System

Blackboard (Bb) can provide access to the users to utilize multiple content formats. The contents may include some of these: images, animations, text, audios, videos and useful graphs.

There are many tools and programmes within blackboard as under:



Apart from teaching, Blackboard can be used as an effective assessment tool.



Source: <http://blackboardsupport.calpoly.edu/content/faculty/images/tests2.jpg>

4. Methodology

4.1. Participants

Total 91 English language learners (from one college at KAU-Jeddah, KSA) constitute the sample of the participants. Their participation was purely voluntary.

4.2. Instrument

Qualitative research methodology was used in the present study. Questionnaire was chosen to collect required data, therefore the researcher used a self-made questionnaire which validity and reliability was tested via a pilot study much before the actual data collection process started. In addition, content validity was tested by consulting 8 experts in the concerned field of research.

4.3. Procedure and Method

As mentioned above data were collected through students' questionnaire (Appendix-A). It was used to study English language learners' perception regarding the utilization of different technologies: mobiles, desktops, laptops/tabs/ipads, other tools and platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and Blackboard in the process of English language learning. The questionnaire included 15 items on access to tools/machines and utilization of apps/social sites etc. Following were the items included for data collection related to different uses of different technologies:

A:

- 1) Computer (desktops)
- 2) Mobile phones
- 3) Laptops

B:

- 1) WhatsApp
- 2) Facebook
- 3) Twitter

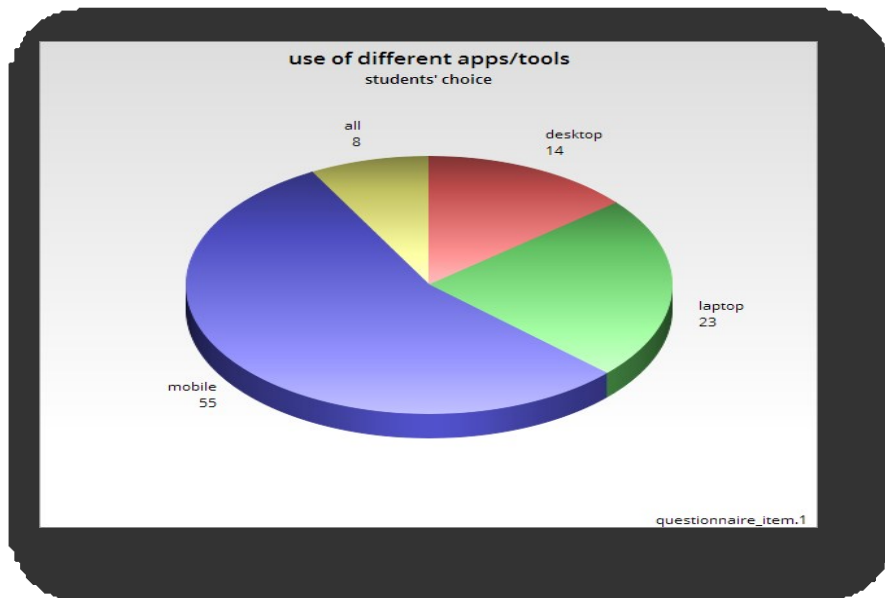
C:

- 1) Blackboard (Learning Management System platform)

5. Analysis of data

5.1. Item analysis

1. 55% students responded that they use mobiles, 23% said they use laptops, 14% said they use desktops while remaining 8% said they use all.



2. 92% confirmed they have internet at home.

3. 94% affirmed they are on Facebook.

4. Only 18% are on twitter according to their responses.

5. 97.5% confirmed that they use WhatsApp.

6. 100% affirmed that they use blackboard (because it is essential).

7. 98% agree that they attended proper blackboard training conducted by the college staff.

8. 89% said that they have already joined a WhatsApp group for learning English.

9. 89% confirmed that some teachers are added to their WhatsApp group for learning English.

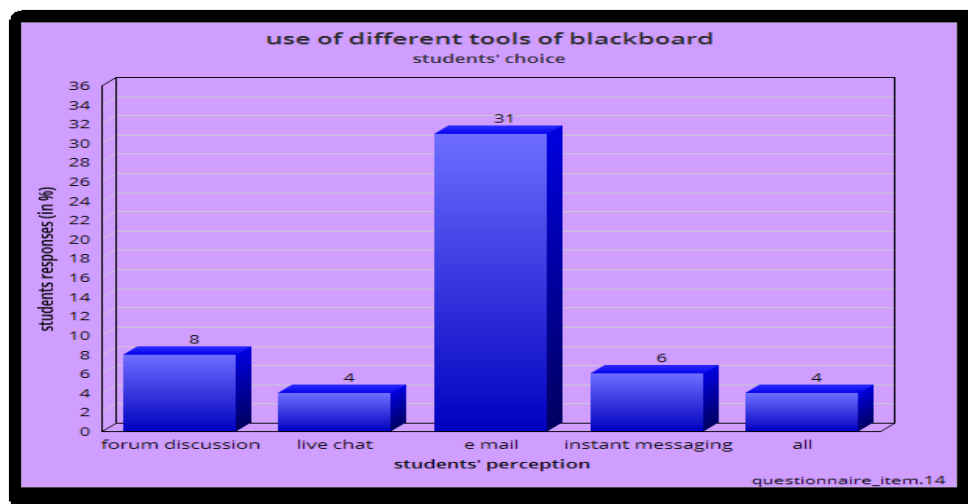
10. 74.5% are of the opinion that their teachers send feedback.

11. Only 26.5% reported that they use English for Facebook messages.

12. 11% told that some teachers are their Facebook friends.

13. 94.5% told that they mostly use WhatsApp to communicate.

14. 8% reported that they utilize 'Forum discussion', 4% told they use 'Live Chat', 31% use E-mail, 6 % Instant messaging, and 7% confirmed they have used all the facilities of the blackboard.



15. Around 85% said that use different technologies in their classrooms. 79% students are of the opinion that tools, apps and technologies are very effective and useful in learning English process. 55% confirm that they don't require a lot of printed materials to carry with them because online contents are available any time and everywhere. Around 39% agree that they can improve their overall comprehension in English. 57% confirm that they can improve their writing ability (due to online platform/apps/social networking etc).

6. Findings, Results and Discussion

Based on data analysis and interpretation, following is the summary of the interpretation of the results:

More students use mobiles as tool. 92% confirmed they have internet at home. Most of them are on Facebook. Only 18% are on twitter according to their responses. The data also revealed that nearly all use WhatsApp as communication tool. All the respondents confirm that they use blackboard, and nearly all of them have already attended proper blackboard training conducted by the college staff. They also revealed that they have joined a Whatsapp group for learning English. Some teachers are part of the group to facilitate learning process. It was also found that their teachers send feedback. It was strange to note that only 26.5% reported that they use English for Facebook messages. The study reveals that some teachers are students' Facebook friends. Around 95% students mostly use Whatsapp to communicate. Technologies

have been found as very important tools for classroom learning, and even at home while making an online access to different software and programmes.

Since most of the learners have access to different types of computers and other facilities, it is inevitable not to ignore technology utilization in education sector.

6.1 Conclusion

It can be concluded that the learners' perception towards use of various technologies for learning English is positive. The study reveals that technologies can be especially useful for learning and practising writing in English. The use of technologies and apps/platforms such as mobiles, Facebook, WhatsApp and blackboard learning system can be extremely beneficial in learning English.

About the authors

Dr Intakhab Alam Khan, an internationally acclaimed educationist and trainer, is currently associated with King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah-Saudi Arabia. He has almost 25 years of experience in teaching/training/research at various universities. An author of a dozen of academic and research books, and around 65 papers in different international online and print journals, Dr Khan has taught medical/health/business English in Saudi Arabia. His presentations at international conferences have already been published in ISI indexed proceedings. He is honorary chief editor/associate editor/asst. editor of many online educational journals published worldwide.

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Appendix A

Questionnaire for the students of English

Name & ID:

Course :

Name of your college:

Email:

Part-A:

- 1- What do you use? (a) desktop (2) laptop (3) mobile (4) all
2. Do you internet at home? Yes/No
3. Do you have an account on Facebook? Yes/No
4. Do you use twitter? Yes/No
5. Do you use WhatsApp?
6. Do you have access to blackboard at your college?
- 7 Did you receive any training for using blackboard in your college?
8. Have you joined a WhatsApp group for learning English?
9. Are your teachers also added to the group?
10. Do you receive responses from your teachers via WhatsApp?
11. Do you use English to send Facebook messages?
12. Is your teacher a Facebook friend?
13. Which tool/app do you mostly use to learn English?
14. Which communication tools can you utilize in the blackboard?
 - i. Forum discussion
 - ii. (Live Chat
 - iii. E-mail
 - iv. Instant messaging
 - v. all
 - vi. any others
15. What are your previous experiences with e-Learning?
 1. I utilize different technologies in my class. Yes/No
 2. Different technologies are useful for learning English. Yes/No
 3. I do not need to carry lots of printed materials because I can access online material. Yes/No
 4. I can improve my over all comprehension in English. Yes/No
 5. By technology utilization, I can improve my writing ability. Yes/No

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