

Examining English Preparatory School Students' Perspectives on Online Collaborative Writing: A Wiki Experience

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Abstract

Wikis, blogs, and podcasts are just a few examples of the Web 2.0 technologies that have seen a significant increase in popularity in recent years among a larger user population. Significant advancements in the field of English language education have been made as a result of this trend, especially for students learning English as a foreign language. The main objective of this study was to ascertain the degree to which tertiary level English preparatory school students benefit from a particular kind of writing practice that included wiki-based peer collaboration and correction. The study adopted a mixed method research methodology. Preliminary findings showed that this style of writing help students develop their social skills in addition to their writing abilities. This is performed through peer assistance and coaching among *students* during the writing process, resulting in improved metacognitive approaches and overall writing performance. The study finishes with a discussion of the significance of the findings, constraints that were accessible for this specific study, and recommendations for more research to interested academics in the relevant field.

Keywords: Wikis, Collaborative writing, Peer-correction

İngilizce Hazırlık Okulu Öğrencilerinin Çevrimiçi İşbirliğine Dayalı Yazmaya İlişkin Bakış Açılarının İncelenmesi: Bir Wiki Deneyimi

Öz

Son yıllarda wiki, blog ve podcast gibi Web 2.0 araçlarının daha geniş bir kullanıcı kitlesi tarafından kullanımında önemli bir artış yaşandığı görülmektedir. Bu araçların kullanımındaki eğilim, özellikle İngilizce'yi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen öğrenciler için İngiliz dili eğitimi alanında bazı ilerlemelere yol açmıştır. Dolayısıyla bu araştırmanın temel amacı, üniversite İngilizce hazırlık okulu öğrencilerin wiki kullanımı yoluyla akran işbirliğini ve düzeltmeyi içeren belirli bir yazma pratiği türünden ne ölçüde yararlandıklarını incelemek olmuştur. Araştırmada karma yöntem araştırma metodolojisi benimsenmiştir. Bu açıdan bakıldığında, ön bulgular öğrencilerin sadece yazma becerilerini geliştirmekle kalmayıp aynı zamanda sosyal becerilerini de geliştirdiklerini ortaya koymuştur. Bu gelişim süreci, yazma çabası içerisinde olan öğrenciler arasındaki karşılıklı destek ve rehberlik yoluyla elde edilir ve bu da onların üstbilişsel stratejilerinde ve genel yazma performanslarında artışa yol açar. Sonuç olarak araştırma, yabancı dil olarak İngilizce öğrencilerinin yazma becerilerini geliştirmek için belirli etkinliklerin uygulanmasında wiki'lerden yararlanmanın bazı olumlu etkilerini ortaya çıkarmıştır. Çalışma, bu araştırmadan elde edilen sonuçların çıkarımlarının tartışılmasıyla sona ermekte ve daha sonraki araştırmalar için ilgili araştırmacılara önerilerde bulunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Wiki'ler, İşbirlikçi yazma, Akran düzeltmesi

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Introduction

In our contemporary society characterized by conflicting relationships and shifting moral values, often referred to as "liquid modernity" (Bauman, 2001), the act of writing in the English as a Foreign Language classroom reflects a similar fluidity due to constant variability. To navigate this dynamic landscape, learners must raise their awareness and adapt accordingly. Wikis serve as a tool that addresses this challenging situation by enabling peer correction. Unlike blogs, wikis allow learners to edit both content and organization, fostering cooperative learning in a learner-centered manner. Integrating technology into education and adopting cooperative learning strategies have gained prominence in our current educational landscape.

Cooperative and collaborative learning facilitates the acquisition of knowledge among students in group settings (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). The collaboration between students and teachers offers a challenging yet unique learning experience, where they construct and convey new meanings guided by socio-cultural approaches. As Vygotsky (1978) noted, cooperative interaction enables student progress. By encouraging learners to work together towards common goals, cooperative learning maximizes both individual and collective learning, in contrast to competitive learning approaches (Johnson, 1994).

The main objective of incorporating wikis into educational activities is to foster collaboration and collective construction of knowledge among participants. Multiple authors collaborate to edit and update the content of a document, resulting in shared knowledge (Leuf and Cunningham, 2001). Cooperative and collaborative learning approaches, which emphasize outcomes beneficial to both individuals and the group as a whole, have been shown to be valuable in language learning (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). The process-oriented approach, akin to language learning beliefs, is particularly applicable to writing development (Thornbury, 2006). By embracing collaborative learning, we empower our teaching contexts and establish a creative process of group writing that aligns with socio-cultural constructs (Vygotsky, 1978).

Writing can be approached from two perspectives: the product approach, which focuses solely on producing a text, and the process approach, which emphasizes the creative process involving planning, drafting, revising, reviewing, editing, proofreading, and publishing (Thornbury, 2006). Advocates of the process approach argue that classroom activities should follow a more natural course that mirrors this creative process. It begins with brainstorming ideas, writing a first draft, going through subsequent drafts, redrafting, and ultimately engaging in a collaborative review process with the teacher for final modifications.

The effective planning and development of tasks in wikis are crucial for successful implementation and optimal utilization (Beatty, 2003). It is essential to ensure that learners have a clear understanding of the tasks to avoid any misapplications (Beatty, 2003). Collaboration, peer feedback, editing, refinement, and clarification are among the implications associated with using wikis as a learning tool. Additionally, participants must comprehend their roles and responsibilities clearly to foster a considerate and productive collaboration. Wikis provide learners with significant autonomy, enabling responsible and sensible content editing and publication. However, adapting to collective editing and contributions in wikis requires time for both teachers and students to become comfortable with the process.

Numerous research studies have examined the viewpoints of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students regarding online collaborative writing, specifically focusing on the utilization of wikis as a collaborative tool. In a global setting, researchers have investigated the advantages and difficulties associated with online collaborative writing employing wikis. For example, Zhang and Kenny (2010) conducted a study exploring the impact of wiki-based collaborative writing on the writing skills development of EFL students in China. The results indicated positive effects of online collaboration through wikis, such as improved writing quality and increased engagement. Likewise, in Turkey, Özdemir and Ekşi (2017) conducted a study to examine EFL students' perceptions of wiki-based collaborative writing. Their findings demonstrated that students considered wikis to be a valuable platform for collaborative writing, which enhanced their motivation and language learning experience. Another research (Aydın & Yıldız, 2014) found that collaborative writing fosters both a feeling of community and reflective thinking in EFL students. These studies offer a certain degree of understanding, within their particular settings, regarding the perspectives and encounters of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students when it comes to engaging in collaborative writing through online platforms like wikis.

However, further research is needed to explore the potential connection between online collaborative activities facilitated by wikis and the development of writing skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, considering the evolving perspectives of EFL students and changing conditions, despite the existing body of research. This study seeks to contribute to filling a gap in the literature in this area, particularly because there is a scarcity of research concentrating on A2 level students in a university English preparation school. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate the perspectives of tertiary level English preparatory school students regarding the utilization of wikis after engaging in a three-week online collaborative writing application on a wiki platform. The study specifically aims to respond to the following queries:

1. What do tertiary level English preparatory school students think about how useful wikis are in improving their writing abilities?
2. What are the perspectives of tertiary level English preparatory school students regarding the use of digital collaboration for improving their writing abilities?

Methodology

The purpose of this research was to investigate how tertiary level English preparatory school students view the impact of wikis on improving their writing abilities and their experiences with collaborating in a digital setting. To accomplish this goal, a mixed methods research design was used. Hence, a combination of questionnaires and interviews were engaged, guided by the principles of collaborative learning, the process approach to writing, and the socio-cultural approach.

Participants

The research participants consisted of twenty A2 level students aged between 17 and 25, attending a private university English preparatory school in Istanbul. All participants shared Turkish as their first language, with 8 females and 12 males among them. The primary goal of their English learning was to effectively comprehend and engage with their coursework

through reading, writing, and listening to lectures in their respective majors. Similar to many students their age, they devoted a significant portion of their time to online activities such as socializing with friends, listening to music, and browsing the internet. Although classified as an Elementary (A2) group, their proficiency levels varied, with some students demonstrating stronger writing skills while others requiring improvement in this area.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the participants

		f	%
Gender	Male	12	60
	Female	8	40
Age	17	1	5
	18	10	50
	19	6	30
	Over 20	3	15

Procedure

In the conventional approach, students would typically write paragraphs on a particular subject individually as homework, using an A4 paper. Afterwards, they would present their work to the teacher for assessment and make any necessary changes. The subjects for these tasks were typically given in their course materials. Nevertheless, in this particular situation, students were urged to collaborate with their peers on a wiki platform, joining forces to create knowledge and understanding while writing a paragraph. Throughout a span of three weeks, students employed wikis to complete three distinct assignments assigned by their instructor. The desired outcomes during this process included meeting deadlines, fostering a greater interest in writing, and encouraging voluntary feedback on their classmates' written work. Furthermore, the teacher had the opportunity to supervise the students' group work and issue warnings to those who did not actively contribute to the collaborative efforts through the system.

Data Collection and Analysis

Both qualitative and quantitative methods were employed for data collection and analysis in this study. The objective was to assess the impact of collaborative learning strategies on wikis on learners' writing skills. To draw conclusions regarding the effectiveness of peer-correction through wikis, students were asked to complete an online questionnaire. The survey questions used in this study were modified from Wichadee's (2010) research and comprised ten multiple-choice questions written in Turkish, which was the native language of the students. To ensure the study's reliability, semi-structured interviews were carried out with a group of five students who willingly agreed to take part. The interview questions, which were generated from the survey questions, sought to learn more about the students' experiences with cooperation and peer-correction on the wiki platform.

Findings

The main goal of this study was to look at how A2 level EFL students perceived the impact of wikis on improving their writing skills and their experiences with group collaboration online. The researchers used a combination of surveys and interviews to achieve this objective, guided

by ideas from the socio-cultural approach, process approach to writing, and collaborative learning. The study's results may be summed up as follows.

Primarily, it was investigated in the demographic section of the questionnaire whether students have access to the internet and how often they access the internet so that they can do a study on the online platform. Table 2 presents descriptive statistics regarding the frequency of students' internet access and its corresponding location.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics on the students' location of internet access and its frequency

		f	%
The location of internet access	Home computer	5	25
	School computer	1	5
	Dormitory computer	1	5
	Smartphone or iPad	13	65
Internet use frequency	every day	20	100

According to the data presented in Table 2, the majority of participants (65%) have convenient access to wireless internet connectivity through their smartphones or iPads. Additionally, alternative means of internet access for participants include personal home computers (25%), school computers (5%), and dormitory computers (5%). It is evident that locating internet connectivity has become increasingly effortless in contemporary times. Consequently, the entire participant pool (100%) reported engaging online activities on a daily basis, as demonstrated in Table 2.

The first research inquiry explored the viewpoints of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students regarding the efficacy of wikis in augmenting their writing proficiency. The students who took part in the study were given 10 statements to rate on a likert scale. These statements were related to their opinions about working together on writing projects using wikis. The participants' attitudes towards collaborative writing were measured using descriptive statistics on a 5-point scale. In this scale, a score of 1 indicated strong disagreement, while a score of 5 indicated strong agreement.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics about the perspectives of EFL students about the effectiveness of wikis in enhancing their writing skills

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. I received valuable guidance and recommendations from my classmates through this learning experience.	20	1	5	3,60	,94032
2. I gained a deeper understanding of writing by receiving suggestions and advice from my peers.	20	2	5	3,70	,73270
3. This experience of learning enabled me to gain access to my classmates' written pieces, thereby providing me with a valuable resource to enhance my own writing.	20	3	5	3,80	,69585

4.	This educational encounter allowed me to be more efficient with my time as I no longer had to physically meet up with my friend in order to collaborate.	20	3	5	3,90	,788
5.	The students assist one another in their learning process during this educational experience.	20	2	5	3,55	,82558
6.	This educational experience increased the level of accountability placed upon me.	20	1	4	2,75	1,01955
7.	This learning experience has allowed me to enhance my ability to work collaboratively with others.	20	2	5	3,20	,89443
8.	I am interested in carrying out my upcoming writing endeavors using a wiki platform.	20	1	4	3,20	,95145
9.	Collaborating on wiki web pages enhanced my learning experience.	20	1	4	3,15	,74516
10.	I experienced unease when it comes to receiving corrections from my peers.	20	1	5	1,95	1,14593

(1=totally disagree; 2= disagree; 3= Neutral; 4= agree; 5= totally agree)

Table 3 presents the results indicating the level of agreement among students regarding the impact of using a wiki platform. The findings reveal that students generally expressed a moderate level of agreement regarding the time-saving aspect of utilizing a wiki (M=3.90). Additionally, students acknowledged that observing their peers' writing had a positive influence on their own writing skills (M=3.80). Furthermore, they expressed a somewhat favorable perception that suggestions provided by their peers enhanced their understanding of writing (M=3.70), and this collaborative learning approach offered valuable advice from both peers and teachers (M=3.60). Moreover, students recognized the collaborative learning environment facilitated mutual learning among peers (M=3.55). However, their views were relatively neutral regarding the development of cooperative skills through the use of wiki (M=3.20), the preference for future writing assignments through the wiki platform (M=3.20), and the perception that wiki enhanced the overall interest in learning (M=3.15). Notably, there was a tendency for students to disagree that this learning experience increased their sense of responsibility (M=2.75). Furthermore, students strongly disagreed with the notion that they felt uncomfortable with peer correction (M=1.95).

The second research inquiry centered on examining the perceptions of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students regarding their engagement in a digital milieu as a means to augment their writing proficiency. In order to achieve this objective, data were procured via conducting interviews with a cohort of five self-selected students who willingly expressed their perspectives on this matter.

Qualitatively, during the interview phase of the research involving five students, one student conveyed, *"Initially, I experienced discomfort with the utilization of wikis; however, this hesitation later transformed into a positive outlook"* (IB). This observation highlights the students' need to

cultivate a practical habit of employing wikis. Another student asserted, *"I already possess a proclivity for utilizing technology, and I firmly believe in the advantages of collaborative writing facilitated by wikis, given that wikis offer a more versatile platform than traditional pen and paper writing"*(KA). This statement underscores the benefits associated with pre-existing technological inclinations.

Nevertheless, one student expressed reservations, stating, *"Despite acknowledging the benefits of utilizing wikis for collaborative writing, I still prefer the conventional approach of pen and paper"* (SK). This viewpoint demonstrates the challenge students face when attempting to depart from deeply ingrained habits. Regarding the question concerning corrections, one student articulated, *"Receiving feedback and corrections from my peers does not make me uncomfortable, as they are my classmates after all"* (MU)

To conclude, despite the students' initial hesitancy, it can be inferred that with appropriate introduction and sufficient practice opportunities, they may develop a favorable disposition towards utilizing wikis. Furthermore, it appears that a supportive classroom environment encourages students to more readily engage in peer correction.

Discussion and Conclusion

The primary aim of this research endeavor was to examine the perspectives of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students at A2 proficiency level regarding the influence of wikis on the enhancement of their writing abilities, as well as their encounters with collaborative work within a digital environment. Research findings indicate that wikis have a positive impact on students' writing skills. Multiple previous studies support this finding (Chen, 2008; Mak & Coniam, 2008; Lee, 2010; Lin & Chien, 2012) and emphasize the significance of wikis in enhancing students' writing abilities through collaborative efforts.

The results of this research demonstrate that technology enables learners to become less reliant on their teachers and share responsibility with their peers. When providing feedback to their peers, students often explore new writing approaches and must make choices, thereby granting them a certain degree of autonomy. This digital context enhances students' motivation and fosters moderate self-directed learning and the development of effective writing strategies. The notion of wikis fostering moderate responsibility may stem from the challenge of transitioning from traditional pen-and-paper writing.

Nonetheless, wikis can be regarded as valuable web-based tools for process writing and collaborative learning. This is due to their ability to facilitate interaction among peers and cultivate students' autonomous learning skills. Most students acknowledge that viewing their peers' writing and engaging in online discussions have had a positive impact on their own improvement (Teng, 2013; Wang & Chen, 2016).

Wikis serve as beneficial tools for engaging learners in the learning process, particularly in the context of digital learning. Additionally, process writing and student-student interaction in this digital environment align with socio-cultural constructs as discussed in the literature (Warschauer, 2002; Lai, 2009). The study findings support the effectiveness of utilizing wikis in English learning and the improvement of writing skills among learners.

To promote collaboration among students through wikis, it is recommended to provide instructional applications. However, challenges may arise that hinder the effectiveness of wikis. First, the specific usage and platform for the wiki must be determined, and a template can be developed accordingly. Given the variety of wiki sites available, careful consideration should be given to selecting the appropriate platform. In this study, PB wiki was chosen due to its cost-effectiveness and the availability of user tutorials. Second, clear directions for the project and the use of wikis need to be provided, along with expectations for the content. Finally, the assessment criteria should be explicitly communicated, and students should be informed about the correction process. Additionally, teachers should be prepared to address any technical difficulties that may arise during the implementation. It is important to note that even with thorough planning, unforeseen challenges may still arise. Considering these questions in advance can facilitate the successful implementation of wiki software (Yang & Chang, 2011; Demouy et al., 2013).

As for limitations, this study has a small sample size, which limits its generalizability. Conducting future research with a larger sample would provide more consistent results. Furthermore, a longitudinal study would be beneficial in assessing the actual application of wikis in classroom instruction and the potential challenges teachers may face when integrating this technology (Liu, 2014; Cheng & Lai, 2017).

In conclusion, students exhibited a positive attitude towards using wikis. Students with weaker writing skills benefited from peer correction, which helped them become more aware of their mistakes. Collaboration among students replaced competition and contributed to the development of their social skills. Web-based tools such as blogs, wikis, and podcasts have experienced rapid growth in educational settings. However, teachers should introduce these tools to learners effectively and carefully consider their benefits in order to maximize their potential applications (Yu et al., 2015; Tseng & Kuo, 2018).

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