

The Role of Word Processor and Internet in overcoming Second year EFL Learners' Difficulties in Learning Writing at Chadli Bendjedid University EL-Tarf

Dr. Sana Bouras *

Université des Frères Mentouri Constantine1, Algérie

cherouana.rabah@umc.edu.dz

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*Corresponding Author

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Abstract:

This research aims at exploring the role of word processor and internet use in overcoming EFL learners' difficulties in learning foreign language writing. The study was conducted at the department of English, Chadli Bendjedid University EL-Tarf during the first semester of the academic year 2023-2024. The questionnaire was administered to 45 students enrolled in second year of English to elucidate their opinions about the effectiveness of aforementioned ICTs in promoting their writing. The findings showed significant effect and demonstrated students' positive attitude towards using ICTs to improve their writing skill.

Keywords: EFL Learners; ICTs, Internet; Word processor; Writing skill.

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Résumé :

Cette recherche tente d'explorer le rôle du logiciel de traitement des textes et de l'internet pour surmonter les difficultés des apprenants d'EFL dans l'apprentissage de l'écriture en langue étrangère. L'étude a été menée au département d'anglais de l'Université Chadli Bendjedid d'El-Tarf au cours du premier semestre de l'année universitaire 2023-2024. Le questionnaire a été administré à 45 étudiants inscrits en deuxième année d'anglais afin d'élucider leurs opinions sur l'efficacité des TIC susmentionnées dans la promotion de leur écriture. Les résultats ont montré un effet significatif et ont démontré l'attitude positive des étudiants à l'égard de l'utilisation des TIC pour améliorer leurs compétences en écriture.

Mot clés : Apprenants d'EFL, TIC, Internet, Logiciel de traitement des textes, compétence en écriture.

دور معالج النصوص والإنترنت في التغلب على صعوبات متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في السنة الثانية في تعلم الكتابة بجامعة الشاذلي بن جديد بالطارف الملخص:

يهدف هذا البحث إلى استكشاف دور معالج النصوص واستخدام الإنترنت في التغلب على صعوبات متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في تعلم الكتابة بلغة أجنبية. أجريت الدراسة في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية بجامعة الشاذلي بن جديد الطارف خلال الفصل الدراسي الأول من العام الجامعي 2023-2024. حيث تم توزيع الاستبيان على 45 طالبا مسجلين في السنة الثانية من اللغة الإنجليزية لتوضيح آرائهم حول فعالية تكنولوجيا المعلومات والاتصالات المذكورة أعلاه في تعزيز كتاباتهم. أظهرت النتائج تأثيرا كبيرا وأظهرت موقف الطلاب الإيجابي تجاه استخدام تكنولوجيا المعلومات والاتصالات لتحسين مهاراتهم في الكتابة. الكلمات المفتاحية: طلبة اللغة الأجنبية؛ تكنولوجيا المعلومات والاتصالات؛ الإنترنت؛ معالج النصوص؛ مهارة الكتابة.

1. Introduction:

Writing is a productive skill that must be learnt and mastered by the learners of English and that involves the process of thinking, drafting, and revising. Writing is a means of communication that enables students to synthesize the knowledge they have into an acceptable text. From what has been previously stated, we come to an end that the mastery of writing is a very difficult task that needs a lot of practice as it is the most greatly complex form of communication and a means of self-expression.

It is the commonly used means of evaluation. It is not surprising that many people feel being judged when someone reads what they have written. It is too hard even in the first language to write

coherently and in a way, which is appropriate for one's purpose and audience. So, the process is as difficult as in a second/foreign language.

From a pedagogical perspective, writing requires the writer to control a number of variables: grammar, vocabulary, spelling and punctuation, organizing content at the level of the paragraph and the complete text to reflect given/ new information and topic/ comment statement, etc. Thus writing has been seen as a support system for other sub-skills rather than a skill in its own right. As such, methodologists and trainers have acknowledged the importance of writing as a vital skill for speakers of a FL. One of the effective ways used to overcome those areas of difficulties in writing is the word processor and the internet.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

It has been noticed at the University of Chadli Bendjedid, El-Tarf at the Department of English, students face a lot of difficulties when producing their paragraphs. In other words, they cannot produce a well-organized piece of writing free of errors, but when they use the word processor, they will learn grammar rules, develop their bulk of vocabulary, they pay attention to their spelling and punctuation. As well, we believe that the internet will provide them with new ideas and information for their assignments and writing in general.

1.2. Objectives of the Study

So, writing is necessary for professional communication such as proposals, memos, reports, applications, introductory interviews, e-mails and more which are crucial for academic learning or successful graduation. Thus, in this study, we are investigating the role of the word processor and the internet in overcoming EFL learners' areas of difficulties when learning writing. By doing so, help maximize students' potential and improve their productive skills.

1.3. Research Questions

In an attempt to deal with this issue, the following is our research question:

- To what extent the use of the word processor and the internet help to overcome EFL learners' difficulties in writing which in its turn can improve the writing subskills.

1.4. Hypothesis

On the basis of the main question of our research, we assume that:

- The use of word processor and the internet help EFL students overcome FL writing difficulties.

1.5. Research Methodology

The research design is a plan or an outline through which the study is conducted. Moreover, it articulates what data required, what methods are going to be used to collect and analyse these data, and how all of this is going to answer the research questions. Kumar (2008) argues that a research design is *"the basic plan which guides the data collection and analyses the phases of the project. It is the frame work which specifies the type of information to be collected, the sources of data and the data collection procedures"* (p. 30). Because we are describing facts and findings and our study is based on second year students at Chadli Bendjedid University as a case study, our research is a mixed one: qualitative and quantitative where both numeric trends and verbal descriptions are included.

1.6. Participants

Second-year students are not beginner learners, the majority were 18 and 21 years old. Besides, they acquired enough background that enables them to write in English. Moreover, this age is believed to be addicted to modern technologies like computers, smart phones, iPads, websites and phone applications. The participants in the present study are a group made up of 45 students who are enrolled at Chadli Bendjedid (EL-TARF) for whom English is a Foreign Language. These students come from different regions and belong to the same age group. It is to these students that writing poses a problem when they are instructed to write paragraphs.

1.7. Data Collection Instruments

A questionnaire is one of the most common methods used in collection data in various kinds of research as put by Griffiee (2012) *"questionnaires as data gathering instruments are popular research instruments in many fields including communication, education, psychology, and sociology"* (p. 135). In our study, and following the aforementioned plan, a questionnaire was designed to elicit data from the informants to investigate the research questions and to validate the hypotheses.

The students' questionnaire consists of ten (10) Likert scale questions which most of them were adopted from AbuSeileek (2006) and Cunnigham (2000), but the questions were modified to be appropriate for the present study. The questions were about word processor and the internet use in writing. Also, it aims to find if it affects them positively and makes their writing easier.

Likert scale is the most common used scale and it is simple, versatile and reliable as emphasized by Dörnyei (2003). This type of questions is made up of series of statements that are linked to a particular target.

McIver and Carmines (1981) described the Likert scale as:

A set of items, composed of approximately an equal number of favourable and unfavourable statements concerning the attitude object, is given to a group of subjects. They are asked to respond to each statement in terms of their own degree of agreement or disagreement...The specific responses to the items are combined so that individuals with the most favourable attitudes will have the highest scores while individuals with the least favourable (or unfavourable) attitudes will have the lowest scores (pp. 22-23).

Therefore, our participants are required to indicate to which extent they agree or disagree with the suggested items by marking one of the responses ranging from “*strongly agree*” to *strongly disagree*”. For better understanding of the scale, each response option is given a number for scoring purposes. So, the questions are devoted to ask about students’ preference: preferring word processor over pen and paper to write because it provides them with more feedback about the committed errors and mistakes. In addition, using the word processor makes them pay more attention to punctuation, spelling, organization of their writing and grammar .The last questions of the questionnaire are about the use of the internet in the stages of writing as it helps in generating ideas in the prewriting stage, by doing so; students overcome the lack of the information about the selected topic and produce a well-structured content.

2. Literature Review about EFL Learners’ Major Difficulties in Writing

Seely (1998) summarized the main difficulties that may face EFL learners when writing. He related the major problems to grammar, spelling, punctuation, vocabulary and language transfer or native language interference.

2.1. Grammar

To learn English grammar is the most difficult part of the language for most EFL learners. Accordingly, Seely (1998) noticed that EFL learners have the idea that grammar appears to be difficult or impossible to master because of the way it has been introduced in schools. Furthermore, he claimed that learners have persistent problems with sentence structure. In other words; sentences are incomplete or syntax is incorrect disassociated. More precisely, the verb, object, adverbials, coordinating conjunction and word order are the major problems in the sentence that may inhibit learners’ achievements in writing.

- **The Verb:** learners may forget to put a finite verb in their sentences. Also, another problem that learners face is the subject-verb agreement.

- **The Object:** the common shared problem concerning the object is when pronouns change according to whether the word is the object or the subject of the sentence.
- **Adverbials:** the problem that may face the learner with adverbials is where to place them. There is no fixed rule where to put the adverbials within the sentence, they can appear or pop anywhere.
- **Coordinating Conjunction:** coordinating conjunctions are used either with two clauses or with two phrases, if learners do not use coordinating conjunctions for this purpose, errors will occur.
- **Word Order:** learners should know that the meaning of the sentence in English is conveyed via its word order.

2.2. Spelling

Students also face difficulties in spelling area as claimed by Seely (1998). He also claimed that the problem with English spelling is because of its linguistic history, specifically, lies within its sound-system. That is to say, English letters do not collocate with their sounds and for that reason students must remember series of conventions. Moreover, Seely (1998) stated that *"there are over forty sound in English (...) and we only have the same twenty-six letters in the alphabet. So, we have to combine letters in different ways to represent the missing sound"* (p. 209). He went further justifying why EFL learners have poor spelling skills; spell phonetically and cannot remember patterns, spell words differently in the same document or reverse letters in spelling by telling that many words which are derived from other languages kept their original spelling yet changed their pronunciation.

2.3. Punctuation

Students demonstrate inconsistent memory for sentence mechanics. They may mix capital and lower-case letters inappropriately. Seely (1998) had explained the reason behind students' lack of punctuation and capitalization. He referred to punctuation as rules and agreed upon conventions that facilitate reading the written English. These rules are not used for decoration but they are used to dissect texts into sections that readers can understand the text. Another reason for students' problem with punctuation as claimed by the author is that punctuation marks change over time; some marks are fixed but others a matter of the writer own style.

2.4. Vocabulary

Seely (1998) said that *"English is not static but dynamic, its vocabulary and grammar continue to develop and change, as they have done for centuries"* (p.150). Automatically EFL learners find difficulties in understanding English vocabulary because it changes through time and develops at the same time.

Accordingly, Seely (1998, pp. 185-6) has classified the English vocabulary as follows:

- ❖ **Active Vocabulary:** contains all the words that we know and use in our daily life confidently; especially when doing more serious writing.
- ❖ **Passive Vocabulary:** includes the words that we can grasp when reading, but we do not remember them most of the time when writing, although we understand them well enough in reading texts.
- ❖ **Vocabulary in the Process of Moving from being Passive to being Active or vice versa:** it includes words that we use after a lot of thinking, or sometimes even checking their correct meaning in a dictionary.
- ❖ **Vocabulary that is beginning to enter the Passive Vocabulary:** which consists of words that we have been seen before, but their meaning is not clear.
- ❖ **Vocabulary that we have never dealt with before:** includes words that we have never encountered before.

So, learning or mastering the FL vocabulary is not an easy task for EFL learners to do because each word has its meaning, form and usage.

2.5. Language Transfer or Interference of the Native Language

In addition to grammar, spelling, vocabulary and punctuation, students face another obstacle that hinders their abilities to write. Interference of the mother tongue or language transfer is a crucial cognitive factor that affects the writing process. According to Daulay (1982) interference is automatic because of surface structure transfer of the first language onto the surface of the target language. Therefore, interference results from the similarities among the target language and the

mother tongue. L1 interference refers to the speaker or the writer applying knowledge from his native language to L2 or FL.

It is the effect of the learner's first knowledge on his/her production of the second or foreign one. The transfer can be in any aspect of language: grammar, vocabulary, speaking and listening among others (Bhela, 1999). Since those linguistic elements can be phonological, grammatical, lexical and orthographical, learners believe that they can take advantage of those rules and use them when writing in the target language.

In the support of this idea, Beardsmore (1982, p.3) claimed that *"many of the difficulties in a second language learner has with the phonology, vocabulary and grammar of L2 are results of the interference of habits from the learner's native language"*. That means the elements learnt from the L1 used within L2 context result in errors as the structures of both languages are different. So, the errors that are committed by the learner when learning the FL may traced back to the learner's mother tongue. In order to solve such problem of language transfer, Shen (1988, as cited in Weigle, 2002) said *"in order to write good in English, I knew that I had to be myself, which actually meant not to be my Chinese self. It meant that I had to create an English self and be that self"* (p.37). In other words, learners need to change their own identity and create a self that can write well in the target language. Any given language has its conventions of writing that is why not any person is a naturally gifted writer.

2.6. Other Factors

Harmer (2007) noticed that teachers can be seen as a source of demotivation in the sense that learners prefer to learn with some teachers rather than others. Regarding preferences, students understand quickly with some teachers and may get bored with others. In that Harmer (2007, pp. 41-2) stated that teachers can be a source of demotivation if they:

- Do not enhance learning;
- Do not incite learners to write confidently;
- Do not encourage them to write inside/ and outside classrooms;
- Do not use appropriate methodology in teaching writing;

Accordingly, teachers should motivate learners and intervene effectively to help them have ideas and enhance them with the value of the task. As such students overcome difficulties when engaged in writing. Another factor noticed by Harmer (2007) was the lack of teachers' corrective feedback and reinforcement.

In fact, students feel frustrated when they see the negative marks and therefore despise writing. When teaching large size classes, teachers sometimes cannot provide comments. In this way, they cannot teach writing perfectly nor evaluate their students effectively. Without teachers' feedback, students cannot correct their mistakes in writing and rewrite their pieces again correctly which is the main aim of correction (Harmer, 2007).

It is generally believed that motivation is essential factor for better achievement in the learning process. In other words, motivation makes writing pleasant and enjoyable. In this context, Harmer (2007) argued that there are several of hidden factors that demotivate students improve their writing. Some of these factors are: the fear of failure; to be afraid of not to achieve one's goals or being afraid of making serious mistakes, so that they become haunted by failure.

All in all, the reasons behind students' poor writing are numerous and endless. But the major factors are lack of motivation; in which they are not motivated to write and once they engaged in writing, their ultimate purpose is just to get good grades. The other major factor is that they suffer from mother tongue interference; they think in L1 and write in L2.

3. Results

Before displaying the results, we need to code our answers as such we can present and calculate the students' scores.

Table 01: Data Coding

Item	Statement	Code
1	I prefer word processor to pen and paper to write	A1
2	The word processor provides me with more feedback about my errors and mistakes.	A2
3	Using word processor makes me pay more attention to Mechanics	A3
4	Using word processor makes me pay more attention to spelling?	A4
5	Using word processor makes me careful about grammar	A5
6	The more I edit and modify my work on the word processor, the more I learn about the writing process.	A6
7	Using word processor makes me pay more attention to organization of my writing	A7
8	The internet helps overcome the lack of the information about the topic in the prewriting stage through using websites, online encyclopaedias and libraries	A8
9	The Internet helps producing worthy content when writing an academic piece of writing	A9
10	The internet helps me in enriching my vocabulary	A10

$$A10*10/40=2.5$$

After coding the answers, the preliminary results will be discussed as follows:

Table 2: The Total of Students' Scores

Item	SA	A	D	SD	Total score
A1	100	30	6	2	138
A2	60	45	12	4	121
A3	28	57	16	6	107
A4	88	45	6	1	140
A5	16	45	36	3	100
A6	84	21	20	2	127
A7	16	15	38	12	81
A8	152	6	00	00	158
A9	96	30	10	1	137
A10	156	3	00	00	159

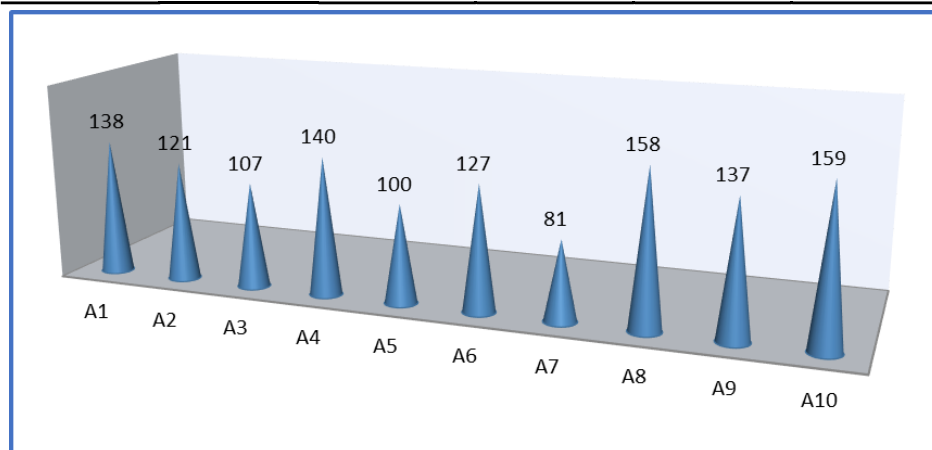


Figure01: Students' Total Scores.

After calculating the students' sum of the scores, we need to know the means' scores which to be demonstrated in the following table:

Table 3: The Mean of the Students' Scores

Item	Statement	Mean
1	I prefer word processor to pen and paper to write	3.45
2	The word processor provides me with more feedback about my errors and mistakes.	3.02
3	Using word processor makes me pay more attention to Mechanics	2.67
4	Using word processor makes me pay more attention to spelling?	3.50
5	Using word processor makes me careful about grammar	2.50
6	The more I edit and modify my work on the word processor, the more I learn about the writing process.	3.17
7	Using word processor makes me pay more attention to organization of my writing	2.02
8	The internet helps overcome the lack of the information about the topic in the prewriting stage through using websites, online encyclopaedias and libraries	3.95
9	The Internet helps producing worthy content when writing an academic piece of writing	3.42
10	The internet helps me in enriching my vocabulary	3.97

In a visual picture, the following figure demonstrates the mean of students' scores:

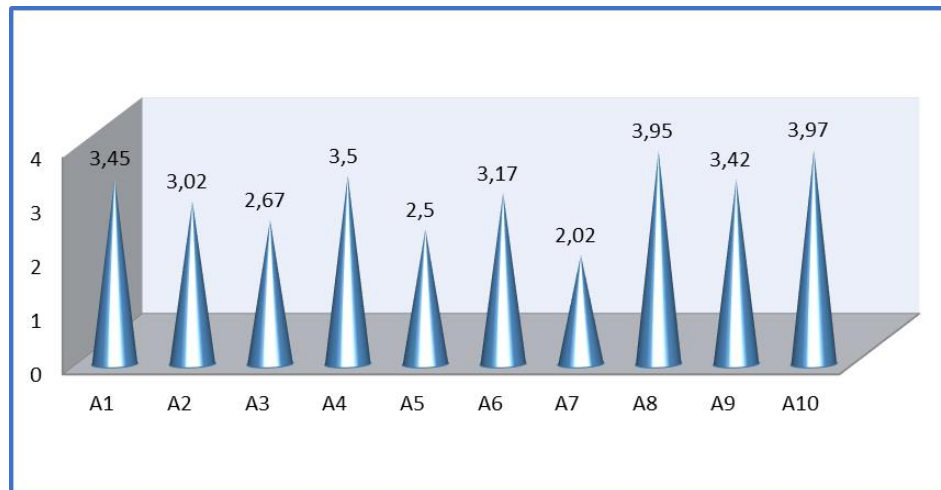


Figure02: The Mean of the Students' Scores

The standard deviation SD measures the dispersion; in other words, to which extent a set of the scores varies in relation to the mean.

Both of the mean of the total students' scores is 2.77 and the standard deviation is 1.66 indicate that the scores are above the average; the majority of students hold a positive attitude towards the use of the word processor and the internet and confirm their benefits in developing students' written achievements. 159 scores and 3.97 as a mean in the last item where the students high scores where they strongly agree on the idea vocabulary is a great source for them to develop their register and enrich the bulk of vocabulary.

Based on the total of students' scores 158 and a mean 3.95, it is noticed that students strongly agreed on exploiting the internet in the prewriting stage as it helps them to generate ideas and formulate an effective preliminary outline about the given topic. The internet can be an important tool in assisting students to overcome the lack of information about the topic in hand. Additionally, it provides them with the necessary ideas which later on are paraphrased in their own style.

Students scored 140 and a mean 3.50 in the fourth item, as they were asked if the computer makes them pay more attention to spelling. In fact, they strongly agree on that where the computer underlines in red to mark the mistake of spelling as it would suggest the correction. Students strongly prefer to write their lectures and assignments with the computer rather than writing with a pen and a paper with a score of 138 in favour of strongly agree and the mean within 3.45.

Besides, students strongly agree with 137 scores and a mean of 3.42 that the use of the internet helps in producing a worthy content as they collect the needed information in no time and use the computer to modify the piece they produced. Considering the sixth item about the use of the word processor in modifying the written piece, students scored 127 and a mean of 3.17. Students prefer

to use the word processor when making the necessary changes rather than rewriting the whole work again. In doing so, students get to know the writing process and learn more about each stage.

As they also add that the word processor makes them aware of the mistakes they commit, scoring 121 and 3.02 as a mean. So, the computer underlines the mistakes in red for example to point that the word is wrongly written. Thus, the student is going to pay attention how the word is written correctly and learn from the word processor. In this way, the student does not wait the feedback of the teacher but he has an immediate feedback and even without going to printed dictionaries as it is there. In this item, students scored 107 with a mean 2.67 in favour of agree clarifying that when writing in a word document, they see if they miss a punctuation mark or they are making mistake in its placement as the computer is asking for revision of the fragment.

In the fifth item, students scored 100 and a mean 2.50 agreeing that they are more careful about the grammatical mistakes when writing with the computer. However, we can see that there are considerable scores denying this fact. The reason behind this disagreement is that students do not have this application in their computers where the grammatical mistakes are underlined with green to indicate subject-verb agreement mistakes, missing of the sentence main verb, sentence structure, the apostrophe, etc.

Finally, 81 scores have been marked within the seventh item and a mean 2.02 where students' points were shared between all the answers. Students cannot see how the word processor can help them in organizing their writing and this is due to the fact that second year students at Chadli Bendjedid University do not have this habit of using the computer in their daily writing. But, the majority of the students agree on the word processor benefits in organizing their written works.

4. Interpretation and Discussion of Questionnaire Results

If we look across the answers of the students represented in the questionnaire, we can picture the kinds of the contribution that students saw in the use of the word processor and the internet in promoting their paragraph writings. In fact, second year students of English at Chadli Bendjedid University have pointed out how the word processor and the Internet are effective in their tasks and how these tools enabled them in carrying out assignments easily and rapidly to present clear and attractive written products. In addition, the majority of the students were satisfied when their professors use ICTs in the courses.

Moreover, they emphasized how much these tools were of great help in facilitating the writing process; mainly in searching for ideas, writing the first draft and editing the written work. This is in line with Mills (2006) who had pointed how the internet can provide an infinite number of sources

in generating, organizing and structuring the information. As such, it helps in building knowledge and understanding. Also, they clarified how the computer assisted in refining their writing which corresponds to Bangert-Drowns (1993) view that emphasized writing with the computer making students engaged in more revision and developing their attitudes towards writing.

More than this, it is how the word processor corrects the mistakes and makes them aware of these mistakes compared to the traditional writing. This result is also in consistency with Beck & Fetherston, 2003; VanHuss, Forde & Woo, 2011) who emphasized how the word processor software is beneficial in indicating the mistakes and provide correction. In other words, they are not anymore waiting for teachers to correct their mistakes or waiting for their feedback like the view of Kumar and Tammelin (2008). The authors indicated that the computer provides a fast feedback to students' answers through error correction. As it also, provides an appropriate advice like to revise the sentence, provide the correct verb tense, mechanics, etc. When tackling writing, there was a unanimous agreement about the difficulties they find in producing a piece of writing. More, they claimed that grammar, vocabulary, language use and punctuation are too much to concentrate on simultaneously, and they make mistakes in all of those areas.

The answers of the students confirm that they cannot construct a well-structured piece of writing because they lack the appropriate language and vocabulary as well as find so much difficulty in generating ideas and writing their first draft. The students' answers are in accordance with (Frei, Gammill & Irons, 2007; Harmer, 2001; Smith, Paris & Kahn, 1991) results that maintain that the use of the ICTs namely the word processor and the internet supports the process of teaching/learning the writing skill as well as enhancing students' writing level. In the sense that the documents generated by the computer can be reviewed and are preferred by both teachers and students as they are neater and error free.

Conclusion

In fact, writing should be taught within formal situations as it is a new form of expression. Recently writing has been an interesting issue thanks to the emergence of new technologies that have an important role in motivating and enhancing EFL students' learning. Two examples of these new technologies are the computer and the internet which changed the way of learning a FL and increased the desire of acquiring it. From the obtained results of the students' questionnaires and from the discussion, we can say that writing in the foreign language requires time and practice to be enhanced. We can conclude also that the use of word processor during the writing process helps students in discovering and learning more about their mistakes.

Moreover, the obtained data confirms students using the internet while their thoughts are still fresh on the topic they are writing about, facilitates generating ideas and producing worthy content. Second year students reported that they face difficulties in writing obviously with grammar and vocabulary mainly; however, they are recommended to continue practise writing in classes and at home; they sometimes try to produce some special pieces of writing like poems letters short stories other than home works and the assignments given by their teachers.

Also, students are required to practice writing outside using computers as they encourage students to do extra work outside the classroom, play language games and, hopefully, gain extra exposure to the language and improve their progress in the language and support the student-centred concept. Via the computer and the internet, the students will be able to communicate with others in different places. Moreover, ICTs help the shy or the quiet students who sometimes are embarrassed from asking questions or challenging information to communicate and ask questions. Using digital technologies in the learning environment has been shown to make learning more student-centred and improve the learning process by stimulating teacher/student interaction.

Furthermore, ICTs enhance collaborative learning which results in higher self-esteem and student achievement. They promote critical thinking and student-student interaction and get rid of teacher centredness. In a technology-based classroom, students have the opportunity to choose the element/s of language which they want to focus on meeting their learning strategies or learning styles.

In conclusion, ICTs provide a rich environment and motivation for teaching by offering new possibilities for teachers which in their turns affect students' performance especially their writing achievement. Besides, ICTs affect the delivery of the lectures and increase the flexibility of the teaching process.

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