

Technology and 21st Century Skills: A Wiki-based EFL Writing Lesson

Athanasia Zikyri (nancyzikyri@yahoo.gr)

Department of Humanities, Hellenic Open University of Patras, Greece



Copyright: © 2022 by the authors. Licensee [JRSP-ELT \(2456-8104\)](http://www.jrspelt.com). This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the **Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial 4.0 International License**. (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>). **Crossref/DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.54850/jrspelt.6.33.006>

Abstract: *Writing is a part of continuum of language acquisition where most individuals encounter multiple difficulties. The notion of the complexity in writing is reinforced even more as it is a skill that is not natural but acquired with thorough instruction. Learners should cultivate a positive attitude towards writing as it is an integral part of life. Therefore, writing instruction is a fundamental element of teaching English and needs to be effective to have substantial results. In this light, the specific article presents an original EFL writing lesson through the integration of modern tools that promote learners' motivation and interest while having a positive impact on their performance. A wiki platform is a base for combining technology, 21st-century skills and process writing through a selection of activities that facilitate differentiation and the development of ICT skills.*

Keywords: EFL Writing, Process Writing, Technology, Wiki

Introduction

Writing is an effective mode of expression in today's technological era because it is linked to information exchange and freedom of sharing views. Nevertheless, in an English Language Teaching (ELT) school environment, writing instruction is primarily depicted as a repetitive, passive and highly structured process. This article aims to demonstrate the efficiency of integrating wikis in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) process writing teaching to promote fertile ground for active engagement, teamwork and learner autonomy while developing critical awareness of implementing digital tools.

The lesson is designed for a mixed-ability monolingual class of young learners at A2⁺/B1 level according to the Common European Framework (Council of Europe, 2001) with a good level of digital training as they are used to employing technology as part of their daily educational process. A fully-equipped computer lab with a computer for each learner, an interactive board and an internet connection are necessary for incorporating technology in the teaching process as language acquisition can be combined creatively with digital literacy.

Wikis and Cooperative Writing

A wiki is a web-based cooperative platform that enables users to build, monitor, and customize data at any moment employing any web-server (Hsu & Lo, 2018). It also encourages asynchronous cooperation, offering learners additional time to concentrate on the form, enhance the content and support each other's learning, leading to a more precise and reliable written text (ibid). In the same vein, Warschauer (2010) explains that a wiki is a setting supportive of cooperative writing and shared knowledge advancement while the instructor can monitor learner participation and assist them in raising the amount of their writing, increasing their self-esteem and experiencing motivation and enthusiasm. Similarly, working on a wiki can lower learner anxiety levels compared to the conventional mode of writing, which is usually a solitary and challenging process, while encouraging their computer-based writing abilities. Learners' innate motivation may be stimulated (Papaefthymiou-Lytra, 2014) and overcome the fear of failure due to their achievements. In addition, it fosters process writing while promoting excitement features through using original source material (Lamb, 2004).

The skills of the 21st century should be integrated into current instructional practices so that learners are equipped appropriately for real-life requirements. Collaboration, communication, critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity and digital skills have a pivotal role in learners considering themselves

'digital natives' (Prensky, 2001) in a technological era. Learners use writing to post messages and comments, either publicly or personally, search for information on the internet, and filter knowledge while having control of their acts. A wiki enables learners to connect real-life activities with language learning in the classroom. Thus, new literacies encourage multimodality, as notifications are generated and transmitted in multimodal forms employing technology, interactivity, which necessitates direct participation and reaction, and hypertextuality, as a linear and invariable treatment of texts is of restricted benefit, emphasizing, therefore, the importance of cultivating critical thinking skills (Sanders & Albers, 2010).

Process writing is a writer-based approach that places emphasis on the procedure, making learners aware of their full potential in an entertaining and non-threatening way while the final product is the outcome of this procedure. In this vein, it is facilitated through the use of a wiki, as word processing allows learners to focus on the content since the text structure is modified easily, while the possibility of a real audience adds a purpose and an element of responsibility as writers will be accountable for their piece of writing and readers for their responses and comments. In addition, developing a text for a broad audience through group work reinforces peer scaffolding and reduces the fear of making mistakes while strengthening their esteem (Cummings, 2004).

Therefore, a wiki is an effective method for EFL writing because it offers learners a motivating environment for active, stress-free participation while engaging in multiple roles. They write, share information, make comments and reflect on their own and their peers' written work while technology instigates involvement and better comprehension during the teaching-learning process. Furthermore, wikis optimize peer interaction beyond the school setting, including a realistic online context-specific element that encourages writing through individual access and initiative by enabling asynchronous communication (Lamb, 2004).

Rationale

The main aim of the lesson is to improve learners' writing skills with the use of a wiki and web 2.0 tools through a real-life and creative procedure. Learners are anticipated to produce a book review drafting several times and engaging actively in process writing. They will be able to extract the main points of audio-visual and online reading material and use them constructively to develop a final product through collaboration, communication and critical thinking, appreciating technology and its contribution to the educational process while becoming responsible and independent learners.

Materials and tools were selected with a view to constructing a thought-provoking and efficient writing lesson, contributing to the improvement of the skill. Web 2.0 tools, the online, user-friendly digital platforms, allow learners to produce and share their work. Peachy (2019, in Kazouli, 2020) explains that they promote collaboration and socialization, encouraging the creation of networks among learners for sharing information, creativity and authenticity through the production of original pieces of work with real people.

A *wiki* platform is the lesson's primary tool, accessed by its members and enabling them to cooperate and engage in collaborative writing, upload various files (images, videos, links and documents) view, modify and share them while writing comments. This tool has some common elements with social media offering motivation and interaction in a meaningful way, while the cumulative features of wiki writing resemble authentic writing.

Google Docs is an effective web-based tool that promotes collaboration and teamwork, enabling learners to improve their writing skills (Karagianni, 2020; Abrams, 2019). Thus, multiple modifications and editing become an easy and practical procedure throughout process writing, while, as Godwin-Jones (2018) explains, changes take place in real-time as many users work simultaneously using different

colours. In addition, mistakes are immediately dealt with as part of the ongoing process without affecting the appearance of the written work. In this light, it is selected for serving the needs of process writing.

A *video* is an intriguing way to stimulate learners' interest as the power of image and sound supports comprehension, compensating for any lack of knowledge while exposing them to authentic language. More specifically, YouTube videos are highly estimated by young people while being a favourite source of entertainment for them. Since the primary objective of using a video for educational purposes is to intrigue learners' enthusiasm and attract their attention to attain language skills while being unaware that they are taught (Terantino, 2011), the particular video is a book review of a children's book and was included as an effective method to introduce the lesson's topic. Any video with similar content could be used for this purpose as long as it fulfils Arcario's (n.d., in Vlachos, 2020) criteria concerning interest and appropriateness of the content, language difficulty, clarity and density and level of exploitability.

An *email* is an authentic way of communication, while its use is easy and rapid, providing the possibility to attach files apart from writing messages. It facilitates teacher-learner communication, strengthening learners' writing and digital skills while engaging them in real-life activities. Specifically, it is employed as a follow-up for submitting their self-assessment checklist and commenting on the wiki-based lesson experience by expressing their thoughts.

Online texts increase learners' interest and motivation, are up-to-date and resemble real-life situations as learners engage in online reading. Exposing learners to authentic texts, explains Slaouti (2005), involves the implementation of aptitudes and techniques to consider the implications of inspecting and critically evaluating data. In actual situations, authentic content engages learners in an attempt to read, looking for information without comprehending every detail. The first online children's book review is selected mainly for its layout as the particular web page includes a short text, readers' comments, vivid illustrations and rating graphs, fulfilling the purpose of recognizing the type of information it provides without actually focusing on reading. The second online children's book review is selected regarding specific suitability criteria. It is relevant in terms of topic, type, content and line with the learners' interests, needs and background knowledge (Arias, 2007). More specifically, it is a review of a new release, which means it is connected to their real-life reading purposes, thus motivating them to engage actively with the task as it will contribute to acquiring new knowledge. The web page content addresses children of that age while its style, language level and structure match their needs, meeting their expectations.

Images are not a web 2.0 tool but visual stimuli, which are pleasant for the learners and assist them in evoking prior knowledge while combining clues differently and attempting to negotiate meaning. In the same vein, an *online dictionary*, *grammar* and *corpora* are suggested for the editing stage as they provide learners with immediate feedback in an easy and time-saving way compared to printed dictionaries and grammar books.

Procedure and Stages

The wiki-based writing lesson is designed at PB-works online educational platform, while only its members can have access to the page. The original lesson could be connected to any curriculum if a book review is one of its requirements enhancing the teaching process digitally. It consists of three 45-minute sessions in a computer lab, while the wiki page can be accessed from home to work on incomplete activities apart from working in the classroom. The process writing approach is implemented and incorporates the planning, structuring, revising and editing stages while integrating the four skills. In addition, blended learning, the integration of face-to-face teaching in an EFL setting and web-based instructional approaches designed to improve language learning (Vlachos, 2009) is also the approach adopted in the specific instruction, as according to Parker and Chao (2007), asynchronous and synchronous collaboration foster learners' social skills. Last, a collaborative approach with learners

functioning in mixed-ability groups to empower the achievement of each member (Parker & Chao, 2007) is also entailed by the use of the wiki, while teamwork prevails in the lesson.

The planning stage consists of six activities and aims to trigger learners' interest and prepare them adequately for the next stage. Learners are divided into mixed-ability groups to promote peer scaffolding and are reminded of the wiki concept. Then, they use their codes to reach the lesson's page. First, they are directed to the 'Welcome' page, which attempts to motivate learners and adds the fun and exploration element through some questions while describing the main goals of the lesson. They move to the 'Planning' page and do the first brainstorming activity in which they view some images (a bookcase, a child reading and rating stars), interact and try to make predictions which may or may not be verified at a later point, activating their background knowledge and content schemata and creating expectations for the lesson that follows. They simultaneously practice online writing while sharing their ideas as they should write their predictions in the corresponding wiki comments box, a task similar to real-world social media instant messaging, which is entertaining and within their interests.

The second activity requires them to reach a web page with the first online book review and look through it quickly to confirm or disconfirm their initial predictions while interacting with their peers, as in reality, when they explore an unknown web page trying to discover what it is about from its layout. The open-ended questions of the first two activities show a lack of restraint on the teacher's part in that new knowledge is acquired unconsciously in the absence of regulated feedback.

The third activity guides learners to watch the above-mentioned video meaningfully, focusing on its content and trying to locate the elements of a book review. Collecting information from a video is a real-life activity which encourages discovery learning while equipping learners with skills for their future. In activity four, learners discuss and reflect critically in order to determine the roles (writer, audience, purpose) concerning a book review, exploiting new knowledge from the second and third activities. In both activities (three and four), learners apart from practising listening either through the video or speaking to each other, also engage in online collaborative note-taking as groups write down their ideas using colour-coding at specific tables in Google Docs. When learners are prompted cognitively, they do not merely learn the language, but they use it to interact (Tschirner, 2011). Importantly, they are able to see the answers of all the other groups and reconsider their own.

In activity five, learners are provided with the rubrics of their writing activity, thus having a complete task environment for their piece of writing. Then, they proceed to the sixth activity in which each of them chooses a book they have read, visits their own wiki page and engages in quick-writing, which according to Jacob (1986), involves taking down their spontaneous ideas disregarding misspellings or other negligible errors and concentrating on the information transmitted as improvisation, refining and creativity are emphasized. Thus, it assists them to overcome the 'writer's block' and generate new ideas through collaboration and fruitful interaction. Last, learners exchange ideas and add missing points, enhancing their own notes. Activities five and six assist learners to practice cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies, developing 21st century skills while working on a shared goal.

The structuring ideas stage consists of three activities leading to learners writing their first draft. In activity seven, learners study a table with the main parts of a book review and reflect on their quick-writing notes. Learners' formal schemata are activated, providing conceptual connections and preparing them for the following activity. Activity eight engages learners in reading and assessing an authentic book review while keeping notes in Google Docs. They are expected to think critically in order to deconstruct the original review into its constituent parts and amend its content in case of any inconsistencies or omissions. The online text constitutes a latent form of knowledge as learners are expected to make a critique rather than copy it. Bottom-up and top-down processing are instigated as learners look for meaning based on newly acquired knowledge. The activity encourages analysis and synthesis, leading to

the evaluation of online material through active negotiation of meaning, a skill necessary for real-world situations. Learners become active thinkers and constructors of knowledge, being responsible for their progress, scaffolding knowledge with their peers' support, learning-to-learn and, as Seitzinger (2006) points out, thriving through 'online constructivism'. In addition, refining the published text instills the concept of ongoing writing, leading to a further understanding of process writing. Granted that learners internalize the new knowledge acquired at this stage while exploiting the ideas gathered at the previous stage, they proceed to the synthesis of their first draft using their own wiki page. They focus on fluency and content, putting emphasis on the readers while practising digital writing through an original and communicative procedure.

The revising stage consists of activity ten, in which learners work in pairs and visit their partner's page, read the first draft and evaluate it in terms of content. To this end, they are given a table with evaluation questions to guide them through as they are required to leave explicit comments. The activity promotes critical thinking and collaboration while emphasizing the importance of peer feedback. It is an authentic task as comments represent the views of a real audience, empowering their autonomy and responsibility while practising their meta-cognitive strategies emphasizing the diversity of ideas. In addition, peer-feedback assists them to enrich their first draft in a non-linear manner to make it comprehensible to the audience attempting to achieve a satisfactory level of communicative effect. Technology supports and facilitates immediate feedback and authentic interaction, improving both writing and digital skills more practically. Also, evaluating each other's written work leads them to a more effective self-evaluation through meta-cognition if compared to receiving passively only teacher feedback. Therefore, this task guides them to become active knowledge creators, having long-lasting effects as it leads them to reshape their attitudes.

The editing stage (activity eleven) engages learners in producing their final draft individually, as their writing skills were enriched at the previous stages, creating an online portfolio with the stages of their work. Apart from the content, learners should refine vocabulary, grammar and punctuation and correct structure inconsistencies. To this end, they are given online sources (dictionary, grammar, corpora) to check areas of uncertainty and a table with useful language to scaffold their writing. They also consult a self-assessment checklist that highlights the main aspects they should check before submitting their work, reinforcing autonomy through meta-cognition and self-confidence through their achievements. Learners are also presented with the evaluation rubrics (content and communicative effect, organization, language, cooperation, use of technology and tools), which do not refer exclusively to the final product but emphasize the procedure leading to it, facilitating learners' self-reflection while making them aware of their strengths and weaknesses.

The twelfth activity engages learners in e-mailing their self-assessment checklist to the teacher and writing a brief message expressing their thoughts concerning their wiki experience. The protected setting formed by one-on-one e-mail interactions with the instructor allows learners to gain confidence while employing digital media in L2 (Gonglewski et al., 2001). Learners use technology in a real-world situation, providing informal feedback to the teacher for the lesson and its impact. In addition, they practice writing in a stress-free manner while strengthening the relationship with the teacher through private messaging.

As a follow-up activity, learners should visit some of their classmates' wiki pages, read their reviews and post comments. Thus, they have the chance to enhance through reading and reflection their knowledge of composing a review while inducing excitement as their work is appreciated by a real audience in an authentic communicative task.

Discussion

Process writing is a creative and effective method for instructors and learners, while technology employment in the teaching-learning procedure introduces enthusiasm and active engagement. As the accuracy in language forms is not emphasized, learners are welcomed to neglect evaluation in its traditional form and invest in the process in which inconsistencies are accepted as an essential part of their development. The writing lesson includes various prospects to express different perspectives and achieve reflective practice through constructive use of technology, authentic material and learner cooperation. Thus, weaker learners are benefited from composing worthwhile written work while more efficient ones can reach their full potential. Although the teacher is a central character during the lesson, as instruction does not depend on a software program of its own but instead on how the teacher chooses to employ it (Jones, 1986), learners' independence is supported in the particular wiki lesson, assisting them to function by themselves. In addition, a major benefit is that the teacher embraces the role of a facilitator, providing learners with support and space to verbalize their views and develop as writers.

Li and Zhu (2017) support that cooperative activities do not immediately result in a joint effort and collaboration in a given context of individual freedom but rely on team members' attempts and capacity to connect, discuss and establish aims, partnerships and attitudes. In the same vein, Koufadi (2014) argues that despite learners' positive attitude towards using a wiki, there are difficulties concerning time management and their willingness to abandon traditional writing modes to this end. Admittedly, the deployment of process writing through a wiki necessitates meticulous planning and organization, as its integration with technology could be challenging and requires a significant amount of time for the teacher.

However, the distinctiveness of the method illustrates the real-life process of writing as the multiple redrafting of the same tasks gives learners the chance to investigate their writing abilities thoroughly, rendering it even more beneficial through the integration of web 2.0 tools. This way, a situated learning environment through authentic context and activities, various perspectives and constructive collaboration, coaching and scaffolding, reflection and authentic assessment (Herrington & Oliver, 2000) is achieved, having multiple benefits and outweighing any impediments to its implementation.

Conclusion

The article attempted to present thoroughly the integration of a wiki platform in an EFL lesson for teaching process writing in order to improve learners' writing and digital skills. It seems that a wiki is an efficient tool that supports collaborative writing, building the sense of belonging to a learning community whose members can support each other by exchanging knowledge, scaffolding their learning, enriching their skills and achieving their goals.

References

- Abrams, Z. I. (2019). Collaborative writing and text quality in Google Docs. *Language Learning & Technology*, 23, 22-42.
- Arcario, P. (n.d). 'Criteria for selecting video materials'. In S. Stempleski&P. Arcario (eds) Video in Second Language Teaching: Using, selecting and producing video for the classroom. *TESOL*.
- Arias, I. J. (2007). Selecting Reading Materials Wisely. *LETRAS*, 41,131–151.<https://doi.org/10.15359/rl.1-41.7>
- Council of Europe (2001). Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR), at <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/level-descriptions>, accessed 28 April 2022.
- Cummings, M. C. (2004). "Because We Are Shy and Fear Mistaking": Computer mediated Communication with EFL Writers. *Journal of Basic Writing*, 23(2), 23–48. <https://doi.org/10.37514/jbw-j.2004.23.2.03>
- Godwin-Jones, R. (2018). Second language writing online: An update. *Language Learning & Technology*, 22(1), 1–15. <https://dx.doi.org/10.125/44574>
- Gonglewski, M., Meloni, C., & Brant, J. (2001). Using e-mail in foreign language teaching: Rationale and suggestions. *The Internet TESL journal*, 7(3), at <http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Meloni-Email.html>, accessed 7 May 2022.

- Herrington, J. & Oliver, R. (2000). An instructional design framework for authentic learning environments. *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 48 (3), 23-48, at <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.93.6362&rep=rep1&type=pdf>, accessed 5 May 2022.
- Hsu, H.-C., & Lo, Y.-F. (2018). Using wiki-mediated collaboration to foster L2 writing performance. *Language Learning & Technology*, 22(3), 103–123. <https://doi.org/10.125/44659>
- Jacobs, G. (1986). Quickwriting: a technique for invention in writing. *ELT Journal*, 40(4), 282–290. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/40.4.282>
- Jones, C. (1986). It's not so much the program, more what you do with it: The importance of methodology in call. *System*, 14(2), 171–178. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0346-251x\(86\)90006-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/0346-251x(86)90006-0)
- Karagianni, V. (2020). 'ICTs and writing skills-Part II, Study Material for Week 10'. In K. Vlachos, E. Karagianni, V., Kazoulis, V. (2020). The Use of Educational Technology in Teaching English as a Second/Foreign Language, Module Agg31, Master in TESOL, Hellenic Open University.
- Kazoulis, V. (2020). 'Web 2.0 tools, Study Material for Week 4'. In K. Vlachos, E. Karagianni, V., Kazoulis, V. (2020). The Use of Educational Technology in Teaching English as a Second/Foreign Language, Module Agg31, Master in TESOL, Hellenic Open University.
- Koufadi, E. (2014). 'Integrating Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) and online networking in the teaching of English as a foreign language in high school'. *Research Papers in Language Teaching and Learning*, 5/1: 199-222, at <http://rpltl.eap.gr/images/2014/05-01-199-Koufadi.pdf>, accessed 16 May 2022.
- Lamb, B. (2004). Wide Open Spaces: Wikis Ready or Not. *EDUCAUSE Review*, 39(5), at <https://www.learnlib.org/p/98261/>, accessed April 29, 2022.
- Li, M., & Zhu, W. (2017). Explaining dynamic interactions in wiki-based collaborative writing. *Language Learning & Technology*, 21(2), 96–120, at <http://ilt.msu.edu/issues/june2017/lizhu.pdf>, accessed 5 May 2022.
- Papaefthymiou-Lytra, S. (2014). 'L2 lifelong learning/use and new media pedagogies'. *Research Papers in Language Teaching and Learning*, Special Issue: The evolution of CALL and current research; Patras 5/1: 16-33, at <https://rpltl.eap.gr/images/2014/05-01-016-Papaefthymiou-Lytra.pdf>, accessed 5 May 2022.
- Parker, K. & Chao, J. (2007). Wiki as a Teaching Tool. *Interdisciplinary Journal of E-Learning and Learning Objects*, 3(1), 57-72. Informing Science Institute, at <https://www.learnlib.org/p/44798/>, accessed April 29, 2022.
- Peachey, N. (2019). *Digital Tools for Teachers*. Nik Peachey Publications.
- Prensky, M. (2001). Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants Part 1. *On the Horizon*, 9(5), 1–6.
- Seitzinger, J. (2006). Be Constructive: Blogs, Podcasts, and Wikis as Constructivist Learning Tools, at <https://www.learningguild.com/pdf/2/073106des.pdf>, accessed 25 May 2022.
- Slaouti, D. (2005). Exploring text through technology. In D. Slaouti & P. Bourboureka, *Educational Technology in English Language Teaching Using the Internet and Computer Technology in EFL Classes* (Vol.2, pp. 165-240). Patras: Hellenic Open University.
- Terantino, J. M. (2011). YouTube for foreign languages: You have to see this video. *Language Learning & Technology*, (15)1, 10–16.
- Tschirner, E. (2011). Video clips, input processing and language learning. In W. Chan, K. Chin, M. Nagami & T. Suthiwan (Ed.), *Media in Foreign Language Teaching and Learning* (pp. 25-42). Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Mouton. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781614510208.25>
- Vlachos, K. (2009). 'Comparing face-to-face with blended learning in the Context of foreign language education.' In M.W. Eugenia (Ed.), *Comparative Blended Learning Practices and Environments*. USA: Information Science Reference, 250-276.
- Vlachos, K. (2020). 'Using video for language skills development and selecting videomaterial, Study Material for Week 8'. In K. Vlachos, E. Karagianni, V., Kazoulis, V. (2020). The Use of Educational Technology in Teaching English as a Second/Foreign Language, Module Agg31, Master in TESOL, Hellenic Open University.
- Warschauer, M. (2010). 'Invited commentary: New tools for teaching writing'. *Language Learning & Technology*, 14(1), 3-8.

About Author: Athanasia Zikyri, an English Language Teacher has been teaching since 2000. She started working in public education in 2006 and continues teaching there ever since. She holds a bachelor's degree in English Language and Literature (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece) and a Master of Education in The Teaching of English as a Foreign/International Language (Hellenic Open University of Patras, Greece).