

Issues towards Learning English with Multimedia Computer-Assisted English Writing

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Abstract - This study aims to answer the research question: What are the issues of EFL students towards the use of Multimedia Computer-assisted English Writing (MCEW)? MCEW course activities; a questionnaire; and individual semi-structured interviews were utilised. The findings revealed that there were 3 issues towards learning with MCEW: 1) preference, 2) benefits, and 3) constraints of MCEW functions. 99.5% of students preferred using MCEW because it enhances more communication and collaborative writing. Using MCEW was not preferred because it is burdensome, and online system failures caused a lot of anxiety. 90% of the students thought MCEW was helpful in improving their English writing skills, whereas the other 10% thought it was not. Issues on constraints functions of MCEW reveals that there should be a course and technological resolutions. Implementing MCEW into the English curriculum, a Facebook group, support from authorities, a teaching forum, and teacher training are recommended.

Keywords - Issues, Language Learning, Multimedia Computer-Assisted English Writing

I. INTRODUCTION

In an English as a foreign language (EFL) context, Thailand is a member of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). The use of English in Thailand has been considered very important. The Thai Qualifications Framework

for Higher Education (TQF: HEd) [1] has been encouraging universities throughout Thailand to seek ways to find methods for better English learning outcomes. This can be problematic because in Thailand, English is used in an expanding circle and considered as a foreign language (EFL) [2]. The Thai language is used as the first language and the mother tongue, whereas English is used as a foreign language. Because of this, the exposure to usage of English in Thailand is limited [3]. Moreover, Kongkerd [4] asserted that current pedagogical approaches to English teaching in Thailand are not able to help learners become competent English users. More recently, the English Proficiency Index [5] reported that Thailand was ranked at a very low level of English proficiency. The reported index indicated that an average level among Asian nations was 55.94; Thailand scored 47.21. This means that Thailand was ranked below the average of English proficiency among Asian nations.

Towards the forthcoming Thailand 4.0, a new educational campaign, launched by the Commission on Higher Education. The purpose of the campaign is for putting forth on the quality measurements on the integration of technology to develop students' English skills. The use of multimedia computers for language learning has become a key to developing communication in educational fields. To serve the national purpose, universities in Thailand are required to use Multimedia Computers in teaching and learning English. Teachers have been assigned to find ways to communicate with learners in

order to help them be successful in the use of English. Teachers and learners today routinely communicate via text, for example, Facebook and Line. It will provide useful opportunities for the students if the teachers encourage them to write in English either inside or outside the classroom as daily communication in order to help them engage in an English language environment.

However, before making the right decision to integrate the multimedia computer-assisted English writing into either English classes or further possible English curriculum, issues of students towards using Multimedia Computer-assisted English Writing (MCEW) should be investigated. After having awareness of the issues towards using MCEW, the results can be shared with scholars, EFL teachers, English educators, and executives in Thailand to help solve the remaining problems towards the use of technologies used in language education.

The contribution of this study is to seek the above mentioned authorities to see the problems towards the MCEW use in order to help Thai students improve in English writing. The research question of the study is what are the issues of Thai learners towards the use of Multimedia Computer-assisted English Writing?

A. What is MCEW?

Multimedia computer-assisted English writing, based on Warschauer and Kern [6]; Meskill and Ranglova [7] is described as follows:

- Hardware: 1) Students' individual computers available in a lab room setting installed at a public university in Bangkok, Thailand and 2) Students' individual smartphones.
- Software: 1) an in-class-text chat program namely Sanako embedded in the lab room, 2) Online text chat applications prepared outside classroom communication, i.e., Facebook or Line, and 3) E-mail accounts.
- Teaching materials: 1) Youtube essay tutorial website: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qr6QQmEJUA>, 2) E-learning: <http://e-learning.rmutto.ac.th>, 3) Teachers'

PowerPoint presentations, 4) Microsoft Word, and 5) Online dictionary.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Computer applications for Second Language learning have come of age. Garrett [8] argued that language students today routinely communicate with people, e.g. through Facebook, Line, and writing activities in the second language curriculum. Further to [8-9], to take theoretical empirical based practices together, the actual pedagogy of the learning situation needs to be applied in both classroom and real life.

To find how pedagogy is applied in language learning practices, the researcher intends to seek what might be issues towards using MCEW for Thai students. This involves preference, benefits, and constraints functions regarding the use of MCEW.

In the realm of second language acquisition (SLA), Krashen [10] asserted that learners with high motivation and a low level of anxiety are better equipped for success in language learning. Some studies revealed that a multimedia computer-assisted English writing environment helps deploy language skills [11]. Essay writing helps students create more authentic English [5, 12]. Liou [13] introduced a game, 'Second Life', which was introduced into a CALL course for EFL in Taiwan. Minghe [14] found that CALL seeks to integrate the four skills of language learning and to integrate technology more fully to develop a socio-cognitive view. Moreover, Ahmad [15] revealed that 90% of EFL students agreed that multimedia and English language teaching were indispensable and 70% of them also agreed that a multimedia English writing class was better than the traditional teaching methods without a multimedia environment.

It is the teachers' primary concern that though there are more issues towards learning with MCEW, it would be more beneficial to universities in Thailand and Thai students if the Thai educators look at the finding of this study and help find ways to solve the problems before implementing MCEW into the English

curriculum.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Criteria for Giving Initial Issues

The researcher applied a 200 student sampling method for the whole population of this study. The decision in utilizing this method is under a purposive sampling method and recognition of time constraints and manageability of the study which was during a summer semester of an academic year at a public university in Thailand. There were 3 steps of drawing samples from the whole population. First, the total number of the second year students enrolling in English courses was 725. Secondly, according to the section system currently available, these students were divided into 18 sections, and each section had approximately 40 students.

Thirdly, 5 sections out of 18 sections were selected through a simple random sampling method.

B. Criteria for Selecting Participants for a Semi-Structured Interview

The five participants for the semi-structured interview (Rote, Bua, Tawin, Rika, and Siam) were selected according to their given initial issues. First, Rote and Bua were the two

student participants who chose the options “Yes I prefer using MCEW” and “Yes, I think MCEW helps me improve my English writing skill” (see Initial issues towards using MCEW). Second, Tawin and Rika were the two students who answered respectively “No, I do not prefer using MCEW”, and “I do not think MCEW helps improve my English writing skill” (see Initial issues towards using MCEW). Finally, Siam was the participant who spent the longest time (18 hours) using MCEW in his daily life. The name of the participants are pseudonyms.

**TABLE I
THE EXPERIMENTAL PROCESS
OF MCEW ACTIVITIES**

Section (1-15)	MCEW Activities
1	The students sign the consent form.
1-7	The students study in normal English class.
9-15	MCEW activities
9	Web-based essay writing tutorial courses.
10	E-learning courseware
11	Teachers’ PowerPoint presentation.
12	Microsoft Word and online dictionary
13-14	Practising their essay writing.
15	The students fill out the questionnaire giving initial issues.
16	A semi-structured interview is conducted.

**TABLE II
QUESTIONNAIRE**

Item	Specialist Scores					Total	IOC
	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5		
Part A: Demographical Data							
1) Name	1	1	1	1	1	5	1
2) Age	1	1	1	1	1	5	1
3) Gender <input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female	1	1	0	0	1	3	.6
4) Major/Field	1	1	1	1	1	5	1
5) Fundamental English grade	1	1	1	1	1	5	1
6) Hometown	1	1	0	0	1	3	.6
7) Experience in studying English	1	1	1	1	1	5	1
8) Average daily use of MCEW including the Internet on mobile devices? _____ hours a day	1	1	1	1	1	5	1
9) Do you prefer using MCEW in your English class? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	1	1	1	1	1	5	1
10) Do you think using MCEW helps improve your writing skill? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	1	1	1	1	1	5	1
Part B: Semi-Structured Interview							
11) Reasons for 9)	1	1	1	1	1	5	1
12) Reasons for 10)	1	1	1	1	1	5	1
13) Constraints of MCEW	1	1	1	1	1	5	1

Table II, presents 13 students' demographical data and were used to conduct individual semi-structured interviews. According to the suggestions of [16], the acceptable index for Item-Objective Congruency (IOC) of content validity (where the content experts rate individual items) is .5 or above. The content validity of this part for all 13 items of the questionnaire were rated from .6 to 1. Therefore, the use of all items in this questionnaire is appropriate for use in a semi-structured interview.

IV. FINDINGS

A. Initial Issues towards Using MCEW

Initial Issues	Frequency	%
Yes, I prefer using MCEW	199	99.5
No, I do not prefer using MCEW	1	0.5
Yes, MCEW is beneficial for writing skill	180	90
No, MCEW is not beneficial for writing skill	20	10

The initial issues were obtained from the returned questionnaires (part A, Questions 9 & 10) reporting the preference and benefits of using MCEW. Interestingly, almost all (99.5%) of the students preferred using MCEW. 90% of the students thought that MCEW helped improve their English writing skills, whereas 10% found it did not.

After collecting the initial issues, five participants were individually interviewed to explain the reasons for the preference, non-preference, benefit, non-benefit, and constraints when using MCEW.

B. Preference

- 1) It is convenient and provides real time communication.
- 2) It helps clearer understanding of English and maintaining a good grade.
- 3) It allows group communication.
- 4) It saves costs for printing and calling.
- 5) It provides for more creativity, entertainment, and a better learning mood.
- 6) It reduces tension in learning English.
- 7) It is easier for completing tasks.
- 8) It is a new trend of learning English.

C. Benefits

- 1) It enhances collaborative writing.
- 2) It helps learning how to write faster.
- 3) It helps improve the use of authentic English.
- 4) It helps writing accurately.
- 5) It helps discover new vocabulary.
- 6) It improves reading and listening as well as typing skills.
- 7) Learners find less opportunity to communicate in English.
- 8) It is more helpful for listening skills.
- 9) Limited background knowledge (esp. vocabulary) discourages writing in English.

D. Constraints of MCEW Functions

- 1) Uncontrollable messages can cause loss of concentration.
- 2) Unexpected jammed e-learning network happens when submitting online.
- 3) Limited internet access was found in some areas of the university.
- 4) The cost of internet use is high.
- 5) Chatting sometimes causes miscommunication.
- 6) It is not suitable for those who lack typing skills.

V. CONCLUSION

A. Course Issues and Resolutions

The results suggest that practising writing English via MCEW outside the classroom is burdensome. Thus, flexible writing practices should be considered, since there is no one best way of practising English for all situations. Some students encountering time constraints might be able to practise writing inside the classroom instead of outside. In this case, Tawin (non-preference) was the only student who said that writing homework outside the classroom was burdensome. It is undeniable that MCEW can be used anywhere and at anytime, however Tawin is not free to choose to practise writing whenever he/she wishes. Thus, the teacher can add extra time, from 90 minutes to, for example, 120 minutes (in addition to a normal 180 minutes of class time) for in-class practice so that the student can finish his/her writing in class.

Secondly, a lack of listening practice is important and needs to be discussed in the suggestions.

Thirdly, the students need more opportunities to practise writing in their daily lives, so a writing platform is recommended in the suggestions.

B. Technical Issues and Resolutions

Students face technical problems via the use of MCEW. Firstly, Table VI shows that when the writing assignment is almost due, the students cannot submit their online writing assignment on time because an e-learning help-desk is not available.

Secondly, the problem of lack of opportunity to communicate and type in English can be solved because students find it useful to write and communicate in English while corresponding by e-mail with their teacher. This can turn the non-benefit into a benefit if the collaborative writing approach is maintained outside the classroom through, for example, e-mail, in-class chat rooms and chat applications for communicating outside the classroom.

Finally, from the students' suggestions, free Internet access at home, a more ergonomic lab room and facilities, and a 24 hour help desk to fix internet access problems are needed as a matter of emergency.

VI. CONTRIBUTIONS AND SUGGESSTIONS

According to the preference and beneficial reports from the students, MCEW should be implemented to further English curriculum especially in writing. However, it is apparent that the critical issues of using MCEW requires support from the government and university executives to solve the emergency issues, as follows:

1. Listening Courseware and a Facebook Group

According to the conclusion of course issues. Students found themselves lacking listening skills. Therefore, listening practice should be added to e-learning and multimedia instruction. In doing so, the teachers should create more

e-learning courseware that provides more listening exercises. Most importantly, the course should add a Facebook group for the students to write their daily routine in English starting with small sentences, then expanding further into paragraph writing. Meanwhile, their friends can see the daily posts and give comments and writing feedback.

These activities not only create more opportunities to write collaboratively in English, they also motivate the students by making English writing easier than what they practiced during the MCEW course in which the assignment required one-page essays.

2. Encouraging Authorities' Support

A 24 hour help desk support team should be established. The help desk should be settled in helping technical support when the students and the teachers need technical help. For example, whenever submitting online exercises, the jammed network problem should be fixed. This includes a larger and a more modern server for submitting exercises outside the classroom.

3. Establish a Teaching Forum

There should be a venue where the teachers and researchers can discuss, research, and make decisions on the integration of MCEW into the English curriculum and publish the issues of teaching and learning English via the use of technology. This is because not all Thai and other EFL teachers and educators realize the need for teaching and learning with technology. Therefore, there should be an EFL teaching forum in order to let them know the possibility to help EFL students improve their English writing. In the forum, teachers and educators can bring up the feasibility of integrating MCEW into English writing courses in order to help their students improve their English writing skills and develop learning motivation.

4. Teacher Training

Some teachers who have never used technology in teaching before may feel reluctant to use MCEW. This issue can be solved by providing opportunities for teachers

and educators to attend technological courses for language education. For example, a university workshop can be a vital strategy in the implementation of collaborative writing. A workshop can be an ideal format for preparing teachers for the change. A workshop is additionally aimed to enhance teachers' technological skills and help resolve their problems in the technical use. Teachers attending a workshop should; therefore, receive hands-on experiences, ideas, strategies, techniques, and materials that can be applied in their classrooms [17].

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(Arranged in the order of citation in the same fashion as the case of Footnotes.)

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