Chapter 5
Enhancing Writing Skills via Mobile Learning and Wikis

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ABSTRACT

This chapter reports on how a group of advanced EFL students in a private language school in Spain employed their smartphones and wikis to create a learning environment outside their classroom context to enhance their writing skills. Twenty-one participants of C1 level downloaded the Google application on their smartphones with a view to performing their reading and vocabulary tasks prior to writing their essays on a wiki learning platform, with subsequent peer editing and feedback. The findings suggest that the participants' general overview of this novel learning experience was positive and that collaborative work on the wiki fostered negotiation of meaning and sharing knowledge, which can benefit the writing process. The smartphone was deemed a convenient tool for reading and completing vocabulary exercises as its portability permits ubiquitous learning. Peer editing and feedback are crucial for developing linguistic proficiency, thereby improving writing skills.

INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the skills that EFL learners have to develop since it is a medium for learning other subjects and for communicating with their tutors (Kassem, 2017). However, it is a challenging skill to master for both first and foreign language students (Umar & Rathakrishnan, 2012). To assist students in developing this crucial skill, social technologies such as wikis are becoming increasingly popular in the language classroom (Kurt, 2017). As a form of computer-mediated communication, wikis can support writing instruction (Lamb, 2004), bringing renewed attention to collaborative learning (Aydin & Yildiz, 2014; Bikowsky & Vithanage, 2016) and the joint construction of texts and meaning making (Li & Zhu, 2011; Kessler & Bikowski, 2010). Students work in pairs or small groups to construct written texts such as a narrative or a class wiki (Li, 2012) after going through various stages of drafting, revising, editing and publishing. Other wiki-based studies have concentrated on students' perception of teamwork (Elola & Oskoz, 2010; Li & Zhu, 2011) and its impact on their writing (Chao & Lo, 2009). Another advantage

of using wikis, as reported by Chen and Brown (2012), is that students can assess, comment on their peers' writing and provide feedback, which may not be possible in face-to-face classroom settings on account of time and space constraints (Matthew & Callaway, 2009). Recently, peer feedback has become an important pedagogical tool in EFL writing (Ai, 2017), and wikis allow students to provide feedback through peer interaction, thereby fostering communication and discussion.

Despite the vast amount of research conducted in the use of wikis in second language classes, further investigation to fully examine the affordances of wikis to develop language learning would be beneficial (Li, 2012). Research involving reviewing via wikis "has just begun to scratch the surface" (Ducate *et al.*, 2011, p. 515). Consequently, in an attempt to contribute to wiki-based research, this paper describes a cross-platform blended learning approach, that is, the application of smartphones and a wiki in an EFL class project in a private language school for a semester. The purpose of this research is to give some insight into the use of wikis to enhance students' learning in an EFL context by investigating students' perceptions of learning from smartphones and wikis, as well as considering whether peer editing and feedback can help towards grammar and vocabulary accuracy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Mobile-Assisted Vocabulary Learning

Mobile phones are regarded as "particularly useful computers that fit in a (student's) pocket, are always with (students), and are nearly always on" (Prensky, 2005, p.2). Their portability (Chen & Desnoyelles, 2013; Kukulska-Hulme, 2013) and immediacy permit ubiquitous learning (Darmi & Albion, 2014; Dashtestani, 2015), that is, students can access, share and retrieve information at their preferred time and place (Chen & Desnoyelles, 2013), thus facilitating exposure to the target content (Thornton & Houser, 2005; Chinnery, 2006).

Thornton & Houser (2005) reported that their students' knowledge of vocabulary whilst learning via the mobile phone improved more notably than that of students using paper materials. The same authors concluded that sending regular messages by mobile phone could generate the spacing effect (studying is spread out over time) (Greene, 1989), which enabled vocabulary retrieval. Additionally, Lu (2008) who explored the effectiveness of SMS vocabulary lessons on mobile phones in an EFL class in Taiwan, remarked that generally, the students adopted positive attitudes to learning in that way. Correspondingly, Hsu (2013) claimed that the majority of his students from different cultures reacted positively towards MALL, whilst Qian and Tang (2018) stated that their students used mobile devices to support formal course learning. Additionally, a designed-based research study has reported that students in China prefer to learn vocabulary on their mobile phones rather than their computer (Barth *et al.*, 2019).

Mohd Asraf and Supian (2017) examined the benefits of mobile-assisted vocabulary learning out-side the classroom. Their findings revealed that the students employed online dictionaries to assist with understanding the meaning of lexical items, and video features on their phones to practise speaking and the pronunciation of new words. The students noticed an enhancement in their metacognitive skills, leading to increased learner confidence and deeper gains in vocabulary learning. Further research (Ahmad, Armarego & Sudweeks, 2017) based on MALL found that a group of migrant women's acquisition of language learner vocabulary improved, thereby increasing their confidence in communication. Furthermore, Gürkan (2018) claimed that mobile assisted language learning techniques might enhance

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