

Chapter 19

Wiki-Based Training for the Development EFL Prospective Teachers in Egypt

Manal Mohammed Khodary
Suez Canal University, Egypt

ABSTRACT

This chapter provides a description of how wikis can be used to develop the writing performance of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) prospective teachers. Wiki has gained popularity as a frequent topic of discussion at the field of education. It has been used to provide a collaborative environment which encourages its users to engage effectively in the writing process and to develop their writing performance. This chapter involves an introduction to the importance of developing writing performance among prospective EFL teachers and a description of how new technologies based on the Internet have given new approaches for designing courses in writing. This chapter also provides background information including: the definition of wiki, characteristics of wiki, educational uses of wikis, historical development of wikis and previous studies related to the application of wikis in classrooms. Moreover, this chapter provides an illustration of the author's experience with using wikis to develop prospective EFL teachers' writing performance. It concludes with recommendations on effective use of wikis for educational purposes.

INTRODUCTION

Writing is often referred to as verbal literacy (Hufaker, 2004b). Verbal literacy remains paramount for success throughout life – from the beginnings of education to the future employment of adults. Writing provides the foundation of education and

the basic requirements for all academic disciplines (Herffernan, Linclon & Atwill, 2001). It is worth mentioning that writing plays an important role in EFL prospective teachers' personal and professional lives. According to Haneline and Aiex (1997) the possession of writing skills can open up real possibilities in EFL prospective teachers' professional and personal lives. Therefore, the

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-1984-5.ch019

development of writing performance is of vital importance for EFL prospective teachers.

The advent of new technologies has opened up new approaches for designing courses in writing (Kroutl–Helal, 2007). Technology has added a new type of literacy which is referred to as digital fluency (Huffaker, 2004b). Digital fluency will be another prerequisite for sociability, lifelong learning and employment opportunities (Resnick, 2002). New technologies could empower students when they are used appropriately. They could also provide some pedagogical suggestions for the effective use of computer in the foreign language classroom (Warschauer, Turbee & Roberts, 1996).

With the emergence of the Internet, computer technology has extended its potential and possibilities in assisting language learning. Web resources could bring about beneficial results for learning which could not be accomplished alone. Huffaker (2004a) stressed that “the Internet continues to generate new applications that not only foster individual expression, but also cohesive community development” (p. 1). Besides, educators attempted to improve students’ independent use of the Internet as well as students’ Internet-based communication and interaction skills (Peng, Tsai & Wu, 2006).

BACKGROUND

Wiki is a major component of Web 2.0 and is regarded as “a web communication and collaboration tool that can be used to engage students in learning with others within a collaborative environment” (Parker & Chao, 2007, p. 57). It can accumulate users’ opinions, and cultivate active on-line communities on the web (Wang, Lu, Yang, Hu, Chiou, Chiang, et.al., 2005). A wiki is characterized by ease of use and rapidity of deployment, making possible powerful information sharing and supporting collaborative activities and improving student interaction (Boulos, Maramba, & Wheeler, 2006).

According to Arreguin (2004) wikis could offer “unique collaborative opportunities for education combining freely accessible information, rapid feedback, simplified HTML, and access by multiple editors, wikis are being rapidly adopted as an innovative way of constructing knowledge” (p.1). Besides, Solvie (2008) stressed that wikis “are quick user-friendly web pages that allow users to create, edit, and save text collaboratively” (p.59).

Bergin (2002) wrote about the advantages of having a wiki for each of his courses and noted that wikis enabled him to communicate more easily and asynchronously with students on course topics. The students also used it to communicate with him and each other. It was also used to quickly dispel misconceptions and correct errors made in class. Prensky (2004) suggested that wiki functionality should be an integral part of the new generation of teaching software. Bruns and Humphrey (2005) noted that a wiki could encourage and enable learning in ways that many other web-based tools fail to do. Moreover, wikis could assist interactive collaboration among students (Beldarrain, 2006).

Characteristics of Wiki

Duff, Peter and Bruns (2006), Grant (2006) and Duffy (2008) revealed that a wiki has the following characteristics:

- It is essentially a database for creating, browsing and searching through information.
- It can be personal but usually open to collaboration as it can allow an individual user to edit her / his work and it can also allow multiple contributors to edit their own work and the work of others.
- It does not need detailed technical knowledge of HTML on the part of the user as it is easy to create and update individual pages and the entire wiki as well.
- It supports easy addition of hyperlinks, provides every content page with its dedi-

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