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Abstract. *This paper reports on a design study conducted within the Egyptian context of pre-service EFL teacher education, which implemented a Community of Practice (CoP) design facilitated by Facebook, to integrate some new forms of online writing. Based on some preliminary empirical results triangulated with literature review, a preliminary design framework was proposed to guide this study. The main aim was to investigate through some interventional tasks the possibility of integrating some new forms of online writing while participants were working as a community, both face to face and online. The tasks were intended to gradually expose participants to some online forms of writing not familiar within their education programme, and which were identified as useful to them in their context. Participants in this CoP consisted of 70 from a total number of 109 3rd-year EFL student teachers at Assiut University College of Education (AUCOE) who, based on a screening interview, were identified as possessing the basic required electronic skills. Tasks were administered both face to face and online (mainly through Facebook). In response to them, participants contributed with posts and comments, which were qualitatively analysed to inform the process of evaluating the intervention by establishing some conclusions in the form of design principles and lessons learned to be cycled back into future attempts within the same context. For reporting on the CoP, a design narrative technique was employed to capture the main learning events and weave them together into a meaningful story.*

Keywords: *Online EFL Writing; Online Writing Skills; Electronic Forms of Writing; Community of Practice (CoP); Design-Based Research (DBR); Design Narrative; Pre-Service EFL Teacher Education; Computer-Assisted Language Learning*

(CALL); Web-Mediated Learning (WBL); Web-Based Literacies; Facebook and Social Networking.

المستخلص:

العنوان باللغة العربية: "مجتمع تعلم وممارسة ميسر بالفيسبوك لدمج أشكال الكتابة الحديثة باللغة الإنجليزية على الإنترنت داخل كلية التربية - جامعة أسيوط"

يتناول البحث دراسة تصميمية أجريت مع الطلاب المعلمين في سياق برنامج إعداد معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية بكلية التربية - جامعة أسيوط، وذلك بتطبيق مجتمع الممارسة والتعلم كبيئة تعليمية تفاعلية مصممة بالاستعانة بموقع التواصل الاجتماعي 'فيسبوك' من أجل إدخال ودمج بعض أشكال الكتابة الإلكترونية الحديثة على الإنترنت باللغة الإنجليزية في هذا البرنامج. وبناء على بعض النتائج الإستطلاعية الأولية مدعمة ببعض الدراسات السابقة، تم اقتراح إطار تصميمي مبدئي للإسترشاد به في مراحل الدراسة التالية. وتمثل الهدف الرئيس من الدراسة في استخدام بعض المهام التفاعلية بالتواصل المباشر وجها لوجه وكذلك غير المباشر عن طريق الإنترنت (على موقع فيسبوك) من أجل تعرف مدى إمكانية دمج بعض أنماط وأشكال الكتابة الحديثة باللغة الإنجليزية القائمة على الإنترنت في برنامج إعداد المعلمين بالكلية أثناء عمل الطلاب المعلمين كمجتمع تعلم. وتم تقديم المهام للطلاب بشكل تدريجي في ضوء قائمة من مهارات الكتابة الإلكترونية (أونلاين) تم استخلاصها باستخدام التحليل الموضوعي لبعض النصوص الإلكترونية. تكونت مجموعة الدراسة من 70 مشاركا من أصل 109 طالبا وطالبة بالفرقة الثالثة - شعبة اللغة الإنجليزية تم انتقاؤهم عن طريق استبانة غربلة للفرقة ككل لتحديد مدى توفر الحد الأدنى من المعارف والمهارات اللازمة للتعامل مع الكمبيوتر والإنترنت. وعن طريق توظيف بعض الطرق الكمية (مثل مصفوفة الأداء الكتابي) وكذلك الكيفية لجمع وتحليل البيانات الوصفية خاصة تحليل المحتوى وملاحظة المساهمات المكتوبة على الفيسبوك وتقييم الإنتاج) تحت إطار طريقة السرد التصميمي، تم التوصل إلى مبادئ تصميم نهائية (إطار تصميمي) لتوجيه عملية دمج مهارات الكتابة الإلكترونية الحديثة على الإنترنت في هذا البرنامج مستقبلا.

1. Introduction and Background

1.1 Literature Review

Generally, employing the Web within language learning contexts is driven by the assertion that the fundamental language skills can be empowered by a group of Web-based tools such as Wikis, Blogs, and Facebook (Erben et al, 2009; Smith & Baber 2005; Warschauer et al., 2000). The Web, in this sense, provides a strong intrinsic motivation for English language learning (ELL), and helps learners with developing essential literacy skills (Warschauer et al, 2000: p7), which have become essential educational practices nowadays (Henry, 2006: p625).

Son (2008) describes the Web as a network-based learning environment where language teachers can create meaningful tasks. Hence, English teachers worldwide can share ideas and useful practices. This is highlighted by an ethnographic study conducted by Warschauer (2000), which reports that students did not only experience new technologies (i.e. the Web and online tools) principally as an aid to second language learning, but also saw themselves as developing new literacy skills in a new medium of critical importance for their lives.

Some studies addressed the impact of some Web-based tools such as: e-mail, considering it as both an instructional tool and a means of communication (e.g. Bloch, 2002; Yu and Yu, 2002); online chat (e.g. Simpson, 2005); Blogs (Chen and Bonk, 2008); and Facebook (e.g. Ellison, et al., 2007; Mazman & Usluel, 2010).

Increasing interest in the Web for education motivated some researchers to establish instructional models, such as WebQuest, which employ the Web to improve students' learning and research skills. WebQuest was empirically investigated by some studies (e.g. Gaskill et al. 2006; Ikpeze & Boyd, 2007; and Mekheimer, 2005), which concluded that tasks based on the model enhanced students' learning and motivation.

In another context, and based on a case study in North England, Burnett et al. (2006) showed that technology can be used to promote new literacy practices in the classroom through the production of new kinds of texts.

Some studies in Egypt dealt with the Internet within an ELL context (e.g. Awad, 2002; El-Maghraby, 2004; Mekheimer, 2005). They focussed on resolving specific linguistic issues (e.g. low composition skills) and enhancing certain skills (e.g. reading and writing) by employing instructional programmes that revolved around specific Web-based tools (e.g. e-mail and blogs).

Some new practices associated with the Web and other ICTs caused a potential conflict between 'foundational' literacy and 'new' literacies, which some researchers (e.g. Leu et al., 2004; Leu & Kinzer, 2003) tried to resolve by arguing that new literacies build upon and complement foundational ones rather than replace them. In this sense, more advanced reading and writing skills and strategies associated with the Web (e.g. reading critically online, collaborative writing, and connective writing) are also required.

Rapid developments of information and communication technologies (ICTs) have brought changes in various pedagogical and technological applications, uses, and processes. In particular, the effect of those new technologies and media on literacy has forced researchers to develop new repertoires of literacy practices in relation to everyday use of ICTs (Nixon, 2003). Currently, social networks are being rapidly adopted by millions of users most of whom are students with a great number of purposes in mind (Mazman & Usluel, 2010), thus leading to new literacy practices to be integrated into formal education as addressed by many studies (e.g. Andrews, 2004; Snyder et al., 2005; Coiro, 2007; Coiro & Dobler, 2007; Leu, 2007).

These new practices were investigated, especially within a language teacher education context, in terms of their relation to: digital and Web-based technologies (e.g., Chandler-Olcott & Mahar, 2003; Snyder et al., 2008); online distance learning environments (e.g., Goodfellow, 2004); meaning making in a context of increased cultural/linguistic diversity attached to ESL/TESOL (Mills, 2006). For example, Lee (2006) concluded that electronic literacy practices provide authentic opportunities to use the language and support the development of social networks among students.

In the same context, Doering and Beach's (2002) analysis indicated that Web-based communication with students helped pre-service teachers to develop relationships with students in the absence of face-to-face interaction. Similarly, Arnold and Ducate (2006) examined transcripts from asynchronous discussions, and concluded that student teachers engaged in a high degree of interactivity as well as all types of social and cognitive presence. They observed that learners not only progressed in their cognitive comprehension of pedagogical topics, but also employed social presence to aid their discussions.

Similarly, La Fleur's (2009) case study revealed that being electronically literate in the English classroom means having access to sophisticated forms of Web-based technologies not only inside the classroom but also outside it.

Moreover, some studies focused on specific Web-based facilities as components of Web 2.0 in terms of how they can facilitate language learning by enabling new genres of literacy and language practice (e.g. Lund, 2008; Mak & Coniam 2008; Soares, 2008). Mak and Coniam (2008) investigated using Wiki in an ELL context as a valuable tool for fostering authentic social/collaborative writing as a new writing

genre associated with the Web. They concluded that students wrote better while using a Wiki as a platform for collaboratively generating, editing, sharing, and redrafting the content to be produced.

In the same vein, using class Blogs in an English class, Soares (2008) presented a rationale behind using Blogs in language classes and concluded positively that students viewed Blogs as a learning tool that enabled them to get in touch with students in other contexts, and thus fostered the use of written language to express themselves.

Facebook is currently perceived as a favourable educational tool owing to its structure and various utilities (Mazman & Usluel, 2010). Facebook is currently used widely as a multi-purpose tool that replaces Blogs. However, few studies dealt with its educational deployment, especially for language-learning purposes. For example, Mazer et al. (2007) examined Facebook as a virtual social networking website that facilitates computer-mediated communication (CMC), and how it can facilitate interaction between the teacher and his/her students and increase learners' motivation and ability to learn. Similarly, Ellison, et al. (2007) examined the relationship between use of Facebook as a popular online social network site, and the formation and maintenance of social capital.

With the increasing use of the Web as a means of writing and social networking online, some studies were conducted, especially in language learning contexts, to investigate the changing nature of writing and the new literacy forms associated with it (e.g. Handsfield, et al., 2009; Lam, 2000; Miyazoe & Anderson, 2010; Perez-Sotelo & Gonzalez-Bueno, 2003). All these studies contend that writing has been changing both as an everyday practice required for communication and as a core language skill or component. In addition, the various tools and/or facilities enabled by the Web have been fostering writing and language practice.

For example, Guzzetti and Gamboa (2005) explored online journaling as a new literacy practice connected with the Web, which adolescents can employ for social connection and linking with school for language-learning purposes. In the same vein, Dishaw et al. (2011) explored the process of collaborative writing supported by Wikis, e-mail, and Microsoft Word, and whether those online tools would make any difference in the final production.

Similarly, Kessler (2009) addressed employing wiki as the core element of an online course that should promote writing skills for some non-native EFL teachers. The wiki was collaboratively created, developed, and revised throughout the course. Students were encouraged to focus on language accuracy while actively participating and interacting with their peers in varied ways. Follow-up interviews with participants provided insight into the perception of the importance of grammar in the context of collaborative technologies among these pre-service teachers.

However, very few studies addressed the new forms of writing (e.g., connective writing, collaborative writing, and reflective writing) associated with Facebook and other online tools. From a language-learning perspective, these new forms have become extremely important nowadays, especially because online writing is gaining ground compared with traditional paper-based writing. Hence, it is surprising that very few studies were conducted in this regard. More specifically, many research studies (e.g. Ajjan & Hartshorne, 2008; Mazman & Usluel, 2010; Lockyer & Patterson, 2008) concluded that social networking websites support collaborative learning, engage individuals in critical thinking, and enhance communication and writing skills through activating members work in personalised environments.

Currently, there is a gap between in-school and out-of-school literacy practices, which might be bridged if teachers encourage learners to engage with hybrid texts that draw on multiple modes of representation (Ware & Warschauer, 2005). This was emphasised by Bulfin and North (2007) who explored the relationship between literacy practices at home, school, and other places, concluding that youngsters' engagement with digital technologies in language-learning contexts might be approached as a dialogic negotiation of a complex range of texts and practices that flow across many spaces.

Based on my PhD study (Abdallah, 2011), it was feasible within the Egyptian context throughout many interventions to bridge this gap by gradually immersing student teachers in new reading and writing practices that they already use outside classroom. Progressively, participants could employ the computer and the Web to mediate all interactions and literacy practices, and thus replace the traditional paper-based practices. However, this acted as a temporary solution that would not work in the long run; an important component of the problem in Egypt is the nature of the courses

composing the education programme at Assiut University which do not allow for fostering new literacy practices. For example, educational technology courses delivered to EFL student teachers at the pre-service stage still focus on general computer skills without practically relating them to language learning.

Therefore, the problem of the study is represented in the fact that 3rd-year EFL student teachers at AUCOE pre-service teacher education programme experience some problems with their writing skills. An observation of 20 student teachers, followed by an open interview, revealed that those student teachers

1. exert little effort with employing the Web and other new technologies for expanding their literacy practices in general within their pre-service teacher education programme;
2. still practise writing in English from a traditional paper-based perspective that does not recognise the new reality of writing facilitated by the Web and other new technologies;
3. do not employ new literacy forms of online writing (e.g. reflective writing, connective writing, and collaborative writing) for realistic academic purposes;
4. do not regularly employ Web-based tools and facilities within their academic courses for writing communicatively online;
5. do not communicate effectively online in writing with their instructors or with their colleagues to discuss any studied topics;
6. desire to work as a community, both face to face and online, to fulfil many language learning needs, especially as far as language learning or practice is concerned;

1.2 Design Framework

A successful use of technology starts with a pedagogical view that is supported by technological tools, not the other way around (Wubbels, 2007). Therefore, a design framework is needed to guide the process of employing some Web-based tools to resolve student teachers' writing problems. It should start with a learning theory

based on which CoP becomes an ideal format for language learning that reinforces dialogue and communication, and allows for language practice. CoP is theoretically based on principles from situated learning and socio-cultural language learning that stress the role of the context and situation in learning and knowledge construction.

Thus, my design framework draws on a CoP approach to learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) as a context in which participants should be exposed on an ad-hoc basis to some new literacy forms of writing. When mediated by the Web that creates more spaces for language communication and practice, CoP turns into a social context which facilitates access to resources; this might enhance learners' participation, open their horizons, and engage them in meaningful practices (Wenger, 1998).

Along with other socio-cultural and situated learning approaches, CoP marks a shift of learning from an *acquisition* state that involves students in cognitive activities that facilitate acquisition, towards a *participation* form in which knowledge is considered fundamentally situated in practice (Barab & Duffy, 2000).

Learning is always situated and progressively developed through activity, and hence, it is only through use and practice that concepts are fully understood. Knowledge itself differs in nature taking a situated stance which is neither 'objectively defined' nor 'subjectively created', but rather 'reciprocally constructed' within the individual-environment interaction. In this sense, situated, contextualised practice leads to deep understanding and meaningful learning (Brown et al., 1989).

Coined by Lave and Wenger (1991: p98), CoP indicates "a set of relations among persons, activity and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice". Wenger et al. (2002) defined it as a group of people who share a common concern, a set of problems, or an interest in a topic, who come together to fulfil both individual and group goals.

Owing to its emerging nature, it is difficult to pre-design a CoP in the structural sense. However, some policies or principles can be devised for the community to live

by. Therefore, I will draw on the seven design principles suggested by Wenger et al. (2002) to flexibly guide this CoP:

1. *Design for evolution*: allow for development without imposing a specific structure.
2. *Open a dialogue between inside and outside perspectives*: make members aware of the possibilities their community can achieve based on their activities and practices.
3. *Invite different levels of participation*: allow all members to participate based on their varied levels of commitment, motivation, and interest.
4. *Develop both public and private community spaces*: focus should not be on public events only, but also on one-on-one networking where individuals can develop specific skills.
5. *Focus on value*: rather than attempting to determine their expected value in advance, communities need to create events, activities, and relationships that help their potential value to emerge.
6. *Combine familiarity and excitement*: members should feel comfortable in the community, and simultaneously, new stimulating events should emerge to keep new ideas and people cycling into the community.
7. *Create a rhythm for the community*: a stable tone is useful to maintain organisation and regularity.

In the light of these general principles, I generated some local design principles to guide the use of this CoP:

- 1) Participants should be gradually exposed to some new literacy forms of writing online (e.g. connective writing) while working as a community to fulfil direct learning needs;
- 2) Participants' learning should be contextualised in real practices and associated with the input they get from other courses;
- 3) Participants should be immersed in new literacy practices related to writing in accordance with some studied topics to feel with direct utility, value, and relevance;

- 4) Participants should work as one community to support each other while doing some interventional tasks both face to face and online;
- 5) Most forms of learning and interactions should be Web mediated;
- 6) While working within a CoP, participants should be allowed to learn in both public and private spaces; and
- 7) Participants should develop three main forms of writing online: collaborative writing, connective writing, and reflective writing.

2. Objectives

The main objective of the study is to investigate the possibility of integrating some new forms of writing online into AUCOE pre-service teacher education programme.

This involves accomplishing some minor objectives:

1. Generating a list of those online writing skills required by EFL student teachers at AUCOE;
2. Establishing a Community of Practice (CoP) to work as an online space for language learning and writing practice;
3. Implementing some interventional tasks to immerse EFL student teachers in the CoP;
4. Expanding EFL student teachers' online writing performance;
5. Generating a final framework for guiding the process of expanding student teachers' online writing performance.

Design principles discussed above should serve the objectives behind establishing and developing a CoP. Since expanding learners' literacy practices is one of the main targets, 'practice' as a key element of three elements within a CoP will be given considerable focus.

3. Questions of the Study

Based on the objectives stated above, the following questions were suggested:

1. What are those online writing skills required by EFL student teachers at AUCOE?
2. How would Community of Practice (CoP) would be designed to work as an online space for language learning and writing practice?
3. What will student teachers' writing performance be like after getting acquainted with some new forms of writing?
4. What are the design principles needed for expanding EFL student teachers' online writing performance through working as community within their teacher education programme?

4. Methodology

This is mainly a design study that employs a design narrative for the dual purpose of expanding certain language practices related to writing coupled with improving the educational design itself. One of the main reasons for using this methodology is that learning events were triggered by some learning tasks administered to participants on a daily basis. Besides, this narrative description, through the rich accounts it provides, characterises the learning context by capturing many aspects simultaneously; thus, it provides useful local accounts that might be beneficial to others (Barab et al., 2008; Collins, 1999).

A design narrative is an account of critical events in a design study from a personal perspective. It focuses on design in a problem-solving sense, describing a problem in the chosen domain along with the actions taken to resolve it in the form of a series of connected events (Mor, 2011). Hoadley (2002) argues that design narrative is employed to meet the challenge of replicability by describing research adequately. Following a design narrative model utilised by Barab et al. (2008) to establish and develop a Web-supported CoP, I employed a simplified version.

This narrative form is required in a design study where the researcher is obligated to fully relate the context in which the research tools are applied, the activities/practices

offered to users, and the evolution of the context over time in response to those tools (Hoadley, 2002). Hence, I was stimulating student teachers to work collaboratively in response to some contextualised learning tasks.

This technique was employed here on a short-term basis to report on the CoP evolution within a two-month period to communicate compactly and effectively how a CoP design developed. Narrative thus was utilised as a structure for conveying a series of related events (i.e. a plot) where some details were omitted, while important agents and events were related. Therefore, the main focus was on briefly narrating the most important learning and interaction events that went on within the target community.

Under the umbrella of this main design methodology, specific methods determined by the emergent nature of CoP (Wenger, 1998) were employed. This required a mixed-method approach to data collection and analysis, so that both quantitative and qualitative methods could be employed to inform a qualitative design narrative to weave pieces together into a meaningful story. While qualitative methods were employed to analyse online documents (i.e. documentary analysis and content analysis) to inform this narrative description of the CoP development, quantitative methods (e.g. observations of number and frequency of Facebook entries) were also employed to provide numeric evidence to support the narrative.

The 'refinement' process is a main feature distinguishing a design study, whose goal is to fix the problems and weaknesses noticed in the previous implementation and provide a better design. This may involve minor changes or major ones (Abdallah, 2011).

5. Research Tools

The following research tools were employed throughout the study:

1. A *Thematic Analysis Tool* to identify the required online writing skills needed by EFL student teachers in the target context;
2. A *Community of Practice design supported by Facebook* as a social networking tool for integrating some online writing skills;

3. *Some Interventional Tasks* administered to participants on an ad-hoc basis;
4. *An Online Observation Sheet* of participants' written performance;
5. *Semi-Structured Interviews* with participants following the intervention to obtain their feedback on the CoP design so as to refine the preliminary design framework;
6. *A Rubric of Online Writing Performance* to provide numeric evidence of student teachers' actual written performance.

6. Participants

Participants in this CoP consisted of 70 from a total number of 109 3rd-year EFL student teachers at Assiut University College of Education (AUCOE) who, based on a screening interview, were identified as possessing the basic required electronic literacy skills. Those student teachers had Facebook accounts and were willing to participate.

This long period of studying together, in Sharp's terms (1997), should have developed in them a common sense of purpose and a desire to share academic knowledge. A critical advantage here was that participants were able to interact both physically in classrooms and online mainly through Facebook, especially after a Facebook page for the group was launched.

7. Procedures

The story of this CoP can be related in the light of the following three main phases: launching the CoP, sustaining the CoP and pausing the CoP.

a) Launching the CoP

As a preliminary procedure, some new forms and skills of writing based on the Web were identified through a documentary analysis process of 150 online documents (Abdallah, 2011) that lasted for 2 months (see Table 1 below).

Table 1: Online Writing Forms & Skills

<p><i>Student teachers should be able to:</i></p>
<p>1. Membership of online communities and knowledge society:</p> <p>1.1 employ appropriate Web-based communication tools to communicate cross-culturally;</p> <p>1.2 utilise the diverse modes of Web-based communication (e.g. synchronous vs. asynchronous modes) appropriately;</p> <p>1.3 show respect and consideration to others during online interactions;</p> <p>1.4 practice roles and responsibilities effectively in an online collaborative learning community (e.g. being critical online readers);</p> <p>1.5 participate effectively in online boards and forums (e.g. bulletin boards and discussion forums);</p> <p>1.7 join online e-mail discussion groups (e.g. Yahoo groups and Facebook groups).</p>
<p>2. Composing and writing online:</p> <p>2.1 identify ways of composing, revising, and editing online (e.g. using Microsoft Word and Facebook);</p> <p>2.2 understand the interactive relationship between many components while composing an online message: e.g. the audience, purpose of writing and medium;</p> <p>2.3 show some consideration for their online audience while writing: e.g. their</p>

Student teachers should be able to:

interests, age, cultural background and educational level;

2.4 reflect on the quality of their own writing and the language they use while using online writing tools;

2.5 employ a range of online writing tools, whether synchronous (e.g. real-time chat) or asynchronous (e.g. e-mail) for creative writing;

2.6 be selective of sources during online writing (e.g. choosing online resources appropriate to the writing purpose, and adapting them properly to the task at hand);

2.7 express in their own words new knowledge derived from online resources to convey to others their personal understanding;

2.8 share ideas with specialists and attain feedback from them (e.g. through email communication);

2.9 practise cooperative/functional writing online to promote the exchange of ideas, viewpoints, and perspectives;

2.10 employ online tools of written communication (e.g. e-mail and Blogs) to practise online writing activities (e.g. answering others' questions and/or responding to others' posts).

2.11 compose and send effective online messages to influence, convince, and/or orient others;

2.12 embed some visual, hyper-textual, and/or multimodal elements (e.g. smileys and links) in their messages;

3. Meaning negotiation and idea sharing:

3.1 employ the Web as a publishing vehicle to express ideas and to share viewpoints as well as reflections with others;

Student teachers should be able to:

3.2 transfer meaning across the different multi-dimensional systems enabled by the Web (e.g. hypertext, sound and video);

3.3 investigate Web-based conversations and attract collaborators to construct ideas and valuable knowledge;

3.4 engage themselves in discussions with experts in the field of English language teaching/learning;

3.5 exchange ideas and negotiate meaning through online collaboration with others by providing and receiving feedback;

3.6 engage themselves in an online open dialogue by using free online question/answer services (e.g. Yahoo Answers) to share their experiences with others and make use of others' experiences.

4. Synthesising information and constructing knowledge:

4.1 engage in a self-directed text construction process (i.e. building texts based on personal motivation and direction) to construct meaning from disparate online texts;

4.2 transform disconnected pieces of information into an original text;

4.3 use a variety of tools and techniques to analyse, synthesise, translate, and manipulate digital content from the web in order to add value to the information;

4.4 participate in and contribute to ongoing content-building conversations over the web;

4.5 generate new perspectives and viewpoints by integrating information and synthesising ideas while employing multiple online resources;

4.6 make use of various Web-based electronic formats (e.g. WebPages, Blogs, audio sources, interactive diagrams, and discussion boards) and unlimited resources

Student teachers should be able to:

to synthesise information and construct knowledge.

This table was employed under the CoP approach as a background to fuel some interventional tasks in which participants were gradually immersed. Thus, a series of tasks in the form of naturally-sequenced learning events were administered online through Facebook on an ad-hoc basis to reflect the new forms and skills of writing needed by participants. These tasks were mainly employed to trigger and organise learning activities within the community, and therefore, they were improvised in response to participants' central needs or problems and the ideas they brought the community.

In what follows, I will chronologically present a list of those interventional tasks abstracted from original posts on Facebook, which were administered within a two-month period running from 20 February to 20 April, 2012 and as addressed to participants:

1. Reflect on the principles and rules that should govern our CoP and consider them in all future correspondences;
2. Join our Facebook group page as an online space for the community;
3. Reflect on the academic courses you are studying to find ways in which the Web in general, and Facebook in particular, can help you;
4. Write a short paragraph on 'The English Language Nowadays' and post it online;
5. Compose some posts based on the collaborative writing tasks that you have already conducted face to face in the Writing 3 workshops;
6. Read this article on 'netiquette' and the rules that should govern online behaviour;

7. Search the Web for resources on 'how to teach English to students with special needs', as part of the 'TESOL for special needs' course I'm teaching to you, and post your conclusions and/or ideas online;
8. On our Facebook page, create online some useful documents related to the 'TESOL for special needs' course;
9. Try to employ along with Facebook other facilities (e-mail, Blogs, YouTube, and Wikis) to exchange ideas and facilitate online interactions. If you need any assistance, please chat with me after 9:00 pm;
10. Reviewing some online English dictionaries, look up some new words you have already encountered in the new courses of this semester, and finally report on the extent to which the process has been useful;
11. Check original sources of some written pieces by Googling exact phrases from them to understand plagiarism and how to avoid it;
12. Finding online (especially on Wikipedia) definitions of some new concepts and terms, especially those related to the 'special needs' and 'Writing 3' courses;
13. Spend 10-30 minutes online everyday practising 'reflective writing' by sharing your reflections as online posts on our Facebook page, and commenting on posts made;
14. Practise 'connective writing' online by developing an argument based on a new post;
15. Watch a YouTube movie on *Animal Farm* (the novel you are studying this semester) to write down your own reflections and impressions on Facebook;
16. Share these accounts with your colleagues online employing 'collaborative writing';
17. Read a summary of the story of '*Animal Farm*', and then comment on it, add to it, and/or edit it;
18. Check Google definitions and Wikipedia to see what 'collaborative writing' means and write your reflections as comments on a post;
19. Use some Web-based resources, especially www.onelook.com, to check accuracy of language and locate exact English phrases when in doubt about correct form, and then, report this experience to the whole group;
20. Use 'Yahoo! Answers' as an online service to know something new and share what you already know with the online community worldwide; start with

asking some questions related to the courses you are studying and check answers given by others;

21. Write your own reflections and ideas about what you have learnt throughout working in this community.

To launch the CoP, the 70 student teachers identified as having similar interests, attitudes, and IT basic levels, and who agreed to work as a community during formal study, were ideal participants. Thus, based on arguments of Wenger (1998) and Wenger et al (2002), this CoP composed of them was feasible for the following reasons:

- a) participants had known each other for a quite long time and shared common goals, attitudes, needs, and interests since they were studying the same courses;
- b) participants were mastering the basic IT skills needed for working online, and each of them had a Facebook account; and
- c) an online platform was needed to complement participants' face-to-face interactions and allow them to support each other and exchange useful resources easily.

Participants were e-mailed a link to a newly created Facebook group page entitled, 'English Lovers' to act as an online space for the CoP. Soon, some rules/principles were assigned and written down on the main interface of the page to govern all work and interactions within our CoP. Participants were then asked to reflect on these rules and consider them in all future correspondences. However, the main challenge, after settling on participants, was to create, in Wenger's (1998) terms, a 'shared domain' to tie them together. This was in part met since participants were sharing the broad domain of English language learning. Nevertheless, it was necessary to intervene with some tasks based on their existing needs and evolving academic duties.

Besides, because still many participants had not joined the online Facebook page yet, efforts were required to attract more participants and persuade them to willingly participate and contribute to the development of the community. Results of my PhD study (Abdallah, 2011) indicate that the main motive that stimulates Egyptian students to participate in any research study or informal learning community is

finding direct and concrete benefits/gains related to their formal academic study. After all, a "community is driven by the value members get from it" (Wenger et al., 2002: p71). Therefore, locating material online relevant to some English courses they were studying was the starting point.

Based on a review of the college bylaws along with some discussions and arrangements with other colleagues at the College of Arts, and who were teaching some English courses (e.g. Reading, Novel, Drama, Grammar, Poetry and Translation), some topics were chosen. Participants, as indicated in their feedback messages on Facebook, started to appreciate the real benefits of exchanging relevant materials online; after seeing some tangible results, many participants started to approach the idea more seriously and more requests to join the page were sent.

No sooner had some new participants joined us on Facebook, than they started voluntarily to upload useful language-learning resources and documents including useful presentations and CD's. A few days later, many participants sent me 'friend requests' which I accepted; some of them requested advice on the best thing to do to improve their English and write proficiently; hence, I drew on this impetus to push them to participate effectively in the CoP in order to write effectively and thus improve their language skills. Thus, many private discussions took place on Facebook Chat with the main goal of individually guiding new participants and allowing them to catch up with the whole group. Later on, many relevant posts and comments were made on the page, which brought life into the community online and thus extended our lively face-to-face interactions/exchanges in the lecture.

It became quite clear that a 'shared domain' started to progressively develop from the mere exchange of relevant materials and resources online to enhancing the main language skills, especially writing. In the lecture, members were briefed on what a CoP is, and then were asked to do simple tasks on our Facebook page; for example, they were required to write a simple paragraph on 'The English Language Nowadays' and reflect on their personal means of learning English as a foreign language.

Moreover, a link needed to be created between face-to-face interactions and online ones within the community. Therefore, participants were asked to compose some

posts online based on the collaborative writing tasks that they had already conducted face to face in the Writing 3 workshops. In this regard, they were asked to share with the whole group pieces of writing composed in the workshop by each small group to allow for peer feedback. The main goal here was to extend the face-to-face language learning activities beyond the classroom, and thus to allow for further discussion and reflection online.

Shortly, I faced some organisational difficulties as new members started to join the community online. To resolve the time gap between existing members and new ones, I held an orientation session in which new members were briefed about the community and how to work together, both face to face and online (i.e. domain, purpose, value, and rhythm).

Because the CoP needed some rules to govern online interactions between members, a netiquette was created in the form of a post that explained the rules that participants should abide by (e.g. no offensive or rude post/comments are allowed; irrelevant contributions are prohibited; respecting others' privacy is an essential practice; and using smileys is encouraged to indicate real intentions and attitudes).

To indulge participants more into direct benefits related to some other studied courses so that they would feel with CoP utility, I asked them to locate online resources on 'how to teach English to students with special needs', as part of the 'TESOL for special needs' course I was teaching to them, and post their conclusions and/or ideas online. Also, to launch on our online page a useful database that participants might refer to, I asked them to upload some useful documents related to the 'TESOL for special needs' course.

b) Sustaining a CoP

Sustaining members' liveliness in a community, the next step in a CoP development, would be to address the challenge of creating a balance between building relationship and trust between members, and the early need to demonstrate the value of the community (Wenger et al., 2002). This involves nurturing in two spaces: partly in the public space of the community by facilitating interactions, managing the website and online tools, or organising documents; but mostly in the private space when I, as a

coordinator and tutor, interact with participants individually online about their emerging needs and guide them into solutions (Abdallah, 2011).

In this regard, some procedures were followed with the goal of maintaining the needed balance and nurturing the community. For example, I had to add some members as friends on Facebook to make private communication easier; I also asked members to invite new members who had just created Facebook accounts. Moreover, I asked them to use other facilities (e-mail, Blogs, YouTube, and Wikis) to exchange ideas. Many replied asking for private guidance online, and consequently, I assigned specific times to chat with them online. This way, I managed to nurture the community in both public and private spaces.

However, many new members were reluctant to contribute online using their Facebook accounts simply because they were new to the field. Therefore, I had to arrange synchronous online tutorials to guide them step by step into the whole process. I also asked the co-admins of the group to help other colleagues in private face-to-face sessions. Then, I soon started to motivate those who were experts in using Facebook to start posting useful accounts relevant to their studied courses in the form of personal reflections.

I knew from participants that they were studying in the novel course a famous novel entitled, *Animal Farm*. Drawing on my background, I composed a paragraph that explained the main theme and posted it along with a link to a YouTube narrating the story. The main task for participants was to read this, watch the video, and then write down their personal reflections as comments below the main post. Many participants provided many reflective remarks such as: "It is good to learn a lesson from animals in this interesting way!" "I think that George Orwell is a very clever author; he made a very intelligent political allegory throughout his novel".

I contributed to the discussion by applauding contributions, giving feedback, and encouraging others to share their ideas and reflections. Then, many new members tried to convey their opinions and personal understanding, and thus opened new threads of discussion.

In addition, I tried my best to link this novel with the three writing types addressed by the 'Writing 3' course, namely: connective writing, collaborative writing, and reflective writing. First, to practise 'connective writing', participants were asked to comment to posts on the novel in a way that develops ideas and foster threaded discussions. Similarly, to practise 'collaborative writing', participants were asked to use an online collaborative writing tools (e.g. Google Documents and Wiki) to compose together a summary of the main themes in *Animal Farm*. Finally, to practise 'reflective writing', participants were asked to jot down their personal reflections on the novel based on provisional accounts composed in their reflective diaries.

Besides my active participation on Facebook, I was carefully monitoring online interactions among all group members; when anything arouse that needed my intervention, I immediately interfered by providing assistance in the form of a solution, a teaching tip or a tutorial depending on the type of problem or difficulty encountered. Some of my tips, tutorials, and pieces of advice helped many of them, as reported in their reflections, to learn some useful points.

To make the online community active, I kept posting new tasks on an ad-hoc basis. For example, I asked participants to assign some time everyday at home to practise reflective writing online. Also, I asked them to use some online tools such as 'Google definitions' and 'Wikipedia' to find definitions of some new terms studied in their courses and report on this experience online. Similarly, I asked them to connect themselves with the online world by using an online 'asking-and-answering questions' service, such as: Yahoo! Answers. Participants posted some useful accounts that they shared with their colleagues on Facebook reporting on how they benefited from this self-directed learning process online.

Meanwhile, I encouraged participants to use some Web-based resources (e.g. online dictionaries and encyclopaedias) for the purpose of independently identifying accurate English language words/phrases and verifying some personal uses of English by comparing them against Standard English online.

c) Pausing the CoP

Student teachers' rhythms of participation decreased significantly towards the end of the two-month period. This was mainly attributed to getting more busy with many study obligations and academic work. Therefore, I had to temporarily pause the CoP until participants had finished with their final semester exams and become less involved in their studies. Afterwards, this CoP was resumed as a basis for other future correspondences among participants to share their ideas and reflections regarding English language teaching/learning, and thus continue working together as an online CoP after graduation. Being Web-mediated, this CoP was expected to continue, even when physical interactions among group members ceased after graduation.

As a final task, participants were requested to review their personal reflective journals to present a personal reflective/evaluative report on the main benefits they got out of this community (e.g. academic benefits, development of their writing skills, language learning benefits), and how this community could be improved. These reports were qualitatively analysed later on to inform the results of the study, especially as far as CoP assessment was concerned.

8. Results

In this section, in the light of the main objectives of the study, design principles guiding this CoP, and the list of online writing skills (see Table 1 above), I will address the following main issues:

1. Integration of some new forms of writing into the target contexts;
2. To what extent the community was successful; and
3. Expanding EFL student teachers' literacy practices related to writing;

Generally, it was feasible to integrate some new forms of online writing, namely: connective writing, collaborative writing, and reflective writing into the target context. Participants' posts and contributions which indicated those three types of online writing were a concrete indication of this integration.

A qualitative analysis of participants' contributions on the Facebook page indicated that participants (with reference to Table 1 above) developed many new forms of writing as follows:

1. All participants became members in the online community by creating and using Facebook accounts;
2. All participants employed Facebook as an online space for language learning purposes such as: a) sharing language learning resources; b) posing questions and providing answers; c) writing personal reflections on studied material; d) writing cooperatively to accomplish a specific learning task; and e) developing discussions online.
3. Some participants (n=25) could negotiate meaning online and practise creative writing;
4. Most participants (n=57) practised online writing both individually and cooperatively;
5. Some participants (n=30) contacted famous academics in the field of language teaching/learning to ask them questions and utilise their feedback in learning;
6. Many participants (n=40) could compose and send online messages to influence and convince others;
7. Some participants (n=38) could express in their own words new knowledge derived from online resources;
8. Many participants (n=60) could employ different online tools for composing, revising, and editing their written content.

To provide an objective evidence to support qualitative results, a rubric of writing performance was also employed (see Table 2 below) to assess student teachers' writing performance. In particular, the rubric involved five main writing performance standards; each of which received a score between 0 and 5 (with 5 the highest). The total score was determined by adding each individual standard's score obtained by each participant, and then dividing the whole score obtained by 5. The rubric was submitted to some jury members to ensure appropriateness and validity of the tool.

Table 2: Rubric of Writing Performance

<i>Standards</i>	Appropriacy to the Task	Organisation & Development	Relevance	Fluency	Accuracy	Total
<i>Score rate</i>	0-5	0-5	0-5	0-5	0-5	25

To ensure objectivity while scoring student teachers' performance, along with my scoring, another scorer was asked to review their written performance and assign scores to each participant. Finally, means of scores were obtained for all the 70 participants, and the final scores were classified into categories or ratios ranging from highest to lowest, in each of which a specific number of students fell (see Table 3 below):

Table 3: Ratios of Rubric Scores with Participants' Numbers

<i>Ratios of Scores</i>	20-25	15-20	10-15	0-10
<i>No of students</i>	35	20	15	0

These numeric results indicate a reasonable written performance, especially because half of participants (n=35) got scores ranging from 20-25.

Second, I will deal with the extent to which the community was successful. Throughout the design narrative technique employed for reporting on the established CoP, it was evident that the main elements constituting a community were established but in varying degrees. Based on Wenger et al. (2002), any CoP is defined by three main structural elements: domain, community, and practice. Applying this to my CoP to determine the extent to which the community was successful, it was evident that

the 'domain' was undoubtedly obvious, and the 'practice' component that centred around some new forms of online writing was quite realizable. However, the 'community' component took some time to adequately develop; at the beginning, many participants (as indicated in their feedback reports) were reluctant to participate. That is why at the beginning the main activities of the CoP revolved around sharing useful material related to studied courses. At this stage, most interactions were centred on me as a group administrator in spite of my efforts to orient participants towards peer and group interactions.

Interactions among participants took two forms: (1) physical interactions that represented roughly 30% of the total interactions; and (2) online interactions mainly through Facebook, which represented approximately 70%. Some difficulties with using Facebook were reported by participants, which include slow Internet speed and delayed rhythms of communication due to system hang-ups.

At the beginning, merely co-administrators and other active 5 members were interacting with each other, who, as indicated in their feedback reports, could quickly grasp the relevance and utility of the community and its positive effect on their language learning. One of them was very enthusiastic about the community, reporting:

I feel very happy to work in this community!...Whenever I do a task as an admin, I feel that there's something new coming to my head. I totally feel that these tasks are helping me so much with my language learning and study. Everyday, I feel that I'm changing and getting better. This CoP is a good opportunity to use and practice English and write communicatively online.

An observation of Facebook entries revealed that activities were characterised by being high towards the middle of the period. At the beginning of March, while many new members were still joining the group, some participants started to exchange material, contribute with posts online, comment on posts made, and chat with me on an individual basis to request assistance and support. Co-administrators were always launching these activities from start to end, while other members were participating occasionally.

Third, I will report on the process of expanding EFL student teachers' literacy practices related to writing. Generally, participants were involved in new literacy practices that were new to them, especially within their formal teacher education programme. Those practices took the paper-based practices participants were familiar with a little bit further. Gradually, electronic writing practices replaced their traditional paper-based writing practices. Based on a qualitative content analysis of participants' contributions and interactions online along with a thematic analysis of their feedback reflective reports, the following indications were concluded:

1. All participants could employ Facebook to publish their written work and share their ideas online with their colleagues, instead of just keeping their accounts in notebooks;
2. Some participants could employ Google Documents and Wikis to write collaboratively online by editing written contents, adding to them, and deleting and replacing certain sections. This process, they reported, was much more flexible and enjoyable than writing together face to face;
3. All participants could write in connection with each other's accounts by commenting on each other's posts and subsequent comments, something that was difficult to do face to face. Many participants reported that the 'connective writing' process was extremely flexible, handy, and practical online;
4. Many participants were able to employ many online tools for different writing purposes and in different tasks;
5. All participants could keep an electronic journal online to report their reflections on a regular basis. This helped them, as some reported, to quickly monitor their learning and add personal reflections.

9. Discussion and Conclusion

The results of the study were obtained through a qualitative analysis of participants' online documents on Facebook triangulated with their feedback reports and some classroom observations. Based on the results reported above, the following conclusions were made:

As a preliminary design, the CoP was partially successful in reaching some objectives. There were some observed strengths and weaknesses that could be addressed by subsequent designs. For example, it was effective to immerse student teachers in a learning community, but this immersion need to be gradual so that they can shift from the competitive mode to the social mode.

On the positive side, participants were gradually involved in new online writing practices (e.g. reflective writing, collaborative writing, and connective writing), especially as far as their studied courses were concerned. A qualitative analysis of participants' feedback reports and classroom observations revealed the following positive points:

- 1) Many participants (n=45) enhanced their English by being exposed to new vocabulary and regular interactions;
- 2) Most participants (n=65) employed within their academic study the online resources exchanged among all members. Most of them reported that such resources enabled them to understand the novels they were studying, and a participant reported that he relied only on these resources while preparing for some tests;
- 3) Active members (n=20) reported positive changes in their language skills owing to regular contributions;
- 4) Many members (n=30) reported enhancement in their social skills following face-to-face and online interactions;
- 5) Some participants (n=35) reported that working within the community enabled them to employ new ways of writing online;
- 6) Some participants (n=30) felt enthusiastic and motivated after keeping in touch with each other through Facebook.

On the negative side, however, not all participants (as indicated by the above numbers) were contributing equally; besides, classroom and online observations indicated that most contributions made by participants were in response to some tasks, not totally self-initiated. Although my interventional tasks were meanly meant to be stimulators for participation and contribution, participants were also expected to contribute more and share their ideas.

Some participants attributed weak participation to lack of time, irregular access to the Internet, inability to entirely understand the tasks, and cultural difficulties (especially for female participants who felt too embarrassed to express themselves freely on online public spaces). However, with time and with the rapid developments in ICTs, those setbacks are not expected to continue.

As for the CoP design, the 'community' element needed much improvement. This CoP was a mixture of work both face to face and online. Thus, the community (as indicated above) was mainly a local physical one where members met face to face in the college, but was linked to the virtual world by means of Facebook so that discussions could be extended and developed. Consequently, the Web was the main platform or space that organised the language practices made by learners. As a result, participants were encouraged to work in both modes to fulfil the desired goals.

Face-to-face interactions among participants were weak as indicated in classroom observations; it seemed obvious that student teachers were not sufficiently trained in teamwork within their undergraduate study.

Many participants (n = 12) suggested some techniques to improve learning within this CoP, which are represented in the following:

- 1) Working within an interactive and engaging learning environment, both face-to-face and online (e.g. in a blended mode);
- 2) Resolving technical difficulties that might hinder participants' contributions online, especially at the beginning;
- 3) Contemporary real-life events need to be employed to stimulate discussions in English and foster participation;
- 4) Amusing and interesting material (e.g. photos, videos, and quizzes) might be added to the Facebook page to attract learners and promote their participation.

Based on these results, a group of lessons were generated to inform any potential subsequent designs in the future. One of those lessons is that when all interactions are based on pragmatic purposes such as excelling in academic courses, student teachers tend to participate and take things more seriously. As some participants report,

student teachers feel more motivated when they find tangible results right from the start.

Another lesson is that participants need to be gradually emerged into new forms of writing facilitated by the Web. Sometimes, student teachers reject new activities or tasks regarding them as time consuming. Later on, and after they have developed the new skills needed for accomplishing those tasks/activities, they feel that they have become part of their everyday routine. In this regard, one of the participants reports:

"At the beginning, I thought that I was exerting much effort and time...Facing many obstacles while learning and writing online...I suffered a lot till I got familiarised with what I was doing...At the end, I felt that I learned many things while working online with many of my colleagues."

Many participants regarded working as one community as one of the best learning opportunities they have ever had. They could be active members of the whole online community. Some of them reported that they could link the already established physical community with the wider online world, and thus extend their writing practices to include new online practices in which more skills were needed.

A third lesson is that learning, in both its individual and social forms, needs to be considered. While individual-reflective learning was effective in certain circumstances (e.g. writing down reflective accounts, composing personal posts, and studying independently using online tutorials), social-interactive learning was effective in others (e.g. commenting on others' posts and contributions, writing collaboratively with each other, and sharing ideas with the whole group). Moreover, effective interactions among group members were fostered both face to face (e.g. in the form of cooperative learning groups and interactive learning teams) and online (e.g. in the form of collaborative writing online and extending the face-to-face groups they work in).

A fourth lesson is that realistic learning needs and goals should be exploited as a point of departure; student teachers should start any intervention from some concrete needs that are based on a preliminary investigation (e.g. in the form of an interview or a questionnaire). Otherwise, they are unlikely to take things seriously. Many participants were reluctant to work hard unless they found the topics closely relevant

to their study. These aspects should be utilised as a starting point at least to attract target participants.

A final lesson is that technical assistance should be addressed as part of any potential course. Participants reported facing many challenges while working online; for this reason, I assigned some time for individual tutorials online to be conducted on an ad-hock basis.

Therefore, reviewing the local principles stated above along with the results of the study and the lessons learned from this iteration, I will shed some light on the new design framework that includes some final design principles which are more detailed than the preliminary ones. The main goal of stating these principles is to help future researchers with similar research objectives to use them as background for launching new projects within the same context.

1. ***Participants should be exposed on an ad-hock basis to some new literacy forms of writing online (e.g. connective writing) while working as a community to fulfil direct learning needs:*** A link needs to be created between the physical existence of the community and the virtual one (mainly through Facebook). The online (virtual) community should be treated as an extension of the physical one that takes learning and reflection further throughout the online spaces it enables.
2. ***Learning should be constructively contextualised in real practices and associated with the input they get from other courses:*** This involves employing a blended learning approach that combines between both face-to-face learning and online learning; moreover, collaborative learning should be combined with individualised/reflective learning. Both modes need to be utilised for accomplishing the desired learning goals.
3. ***Participants should be immersed in new literacy practices related to writing in accordance with some studied topics to feel with direct utility, value, and relevance:*** Topics from studied courses should be utilised as a food or fuel to feed learning and create a rationale that convinces student teachers to participate.

4. ***Participants should work as one community to support each other while doing some interventional tasks both face to face and online:*** Collaborative learning that fosters communication and learning as one group should be the dominant practice that must replace the competitive learning mode that student teachers got used to. After all, student teachers need to feel that they are working as one team and that the social aspects of learning (e.g. peer teaching, group discussions, providing help and support, guiding others, etc.) are always in the forefront.
5. ***Most forms of learning and interactions should be Web mediated:*** The Web should be employed as the main medium of learning. Consequently, Facebook as a Web-based application is considered a platform that connects together all student teachers.
6. ***While working within a CoP, participants should be allowed to learn in both public and private spaces:*** Public spaces refer to the platforms visited and seen by everyone (e.g. the main group wall and the class wiki), while private spaces refer to those personal spaces that involves private interactions not seen by everyone (e.g. Facebook chat and e-mail communication). Both modes need to be employed depending on the specified learning goals and the nature of the assigned tasks.
7. ***Participants should develop three main forms of writing online: collaborative writing, connective writing, and reflective writing:*** Those three forms involve most of the new forms and skills of writing stated in Table 1. For example, connective writing involves: (1) reviewing each other's written accounts; (2) devising pieces of writing in response to some stimuli; (3) employing some Web-based tools to communicate a message; and (4) connecting together different pieces of writing to creatively compose a new piece.
8. ***Technical assistance and support sessions in using online learning facilities are needed to help new participants/members to catch up with the group:***

This assistance can take the form of: (1) weekly face-to-face sessions in the computer lab; (2) one-to-one tutorials online; (3) private chat; and (4) e-mail communication.

9. ***Needs analysis needs to be conducted as an essential procedure before delivering any courses, interventions or learning tasks:*** The main background I drew on before launching the CoP was mainly participants' IT skills and their common interest to succeed and get high degrees. However, if a needs analysis was conducted, it would help a lot with reaching more learners by catering for their individual needs.
10. ***Working within the community should be linked with contemporary life-events, especially as far as authentic English language use is concerned:*** This link is useful for learning and practising English as a foreign language, especially because participants will feel with an authentic language learning atmosphere that might encourage them to participate effectively.
11. ***Fun needs to be integrated as a way to create an optimum English language learning environment:*** Working within the community should include some fun: e.g. sharing comic material and cartoons; watching interesting clips; playing some games; and doing formal things in new ways.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Observation Sheet Used in the Pilot Study

<i>Themes</i>	Specific Aspects to be Observed	Rating Scale (0-4)*				
		0	1	2	3	4
<i>1. Employing New Online EFL Writing Forms</i>	1.1 Using 'connective writing' (e.g. on Facebook and Blogs).					
	1.2 Using 'collaborative writing' (e.g. using Wikis).					
	1.3 Using 'reflective writing' (using online diaries).					
<i>2. Efforts Exerted with Employing Online Technologies for Writing Practice</i>	2.1 Employing Facebook and other social networking websites.					
	2.2 Employing Blogs and writing forums.					
	2.3 Preferring and/or prioritising technological means of writing over traditional paper-based ones.					
	2.4 Writing together and exchanging written materials online.					
<i>3. Employing written communication online</i>	3.1 Communicating online through e-mail and Facebook with course instructors.					
	3.2 Communicating online through e-mail and Facebook with colleagues and classmates.					
	3.3 Communicating in writing online with native speakers.					

****Interpretation of the scores in the Rating Scale:***

0= The observed behaviour is not at all existent or apparent;

1= The observed behaviour hardly exists or applies;

2= The observed behaviour exists to some extent;

3= The observed behaviour exists to a moderate or reasonable degree;

4= The observed behaviour exists to a high degree and is strongly evident.

Appendix 2: Open Interviews for Identifying Research Problem

Introduction

The aim of this open interview (free chat) is to elicit informally from 3rd year EFL student teachers some ideas about their experience with online writing that reflect real practices so as to support data obtained from the administered observation sheet.

The interview is to be conducted individually with a group of EFL student teachers (n=20) for 15-20 minutes. Participants need to feel at ease during the interview, and are free to choose to do it directly face to face, or indirectly in writing (online) through e-mail or Facebook.

There is no specific, unified format of the open interview to be conducted with each participant; it is nothing more than a free chat that is mainly directed by the chief goal of identifying, based on participants' actual experiences, the problems and/or difficulties that they experience with online writing and its new forms.

Sample Questions

1. Which do you prefer: traditional paper-based writing or online writing?
2. Tell me about the difficulties you might experience while writing online.
3. How do you use the Internet in your academic study?
4. Are you good at using social-networking websites, such as Facebook and Twitter?
5. Would you prefer to work as a community, both face to face and online, to fulfil your writing needs in English?
6. How frequently do you employ the Web for language writing purposes?
7. Do you feel that the Web might make a difference?

Appendix 3: Semi-Structured Interviews and Survey Questions for Eliciting Participants' Feedback

Dear student,

Here you're going to provide your final feedback on the learning community we employed this semester. Please try to be as much sincere as you can, keeping in mind both advantages and disadvantages so that we can improve this design in the future. Please treat the following headings by writing down your personal reflections/viewpoints, and send your answers in an e-mail or Facebook messages: (This will be followed by follow-up questions based on your responses below)

A-There are things I liked about this Community of Practice, such as:

- 1-
 - 2-
 - 3-
 - 4-
-
-

B-There are many things I disliked about this community, such as:

- 1-
 - 2-
 - 3-
 - 4-
-
-

C-I learned many things from the face-to-face activities, such as:

- 1-

2-

3-

4-

.....
.....

D-I learned many things from the online activities, such as:

1-

2-

3-

4-

.....
.....

E-I'd like to continue/stop being a member in this community because....

1-

2-

3-

4-

.....
.....

F-I suggest the following tips for improving this learning community:

1-

2-

3-

4-

.....
.....

You can add any necessary details as appropriate!

Best regards

Mahmoud

Appendix 4: Statistics of Group Logs & Interactions

Days / Activitie	E-mail Communication	Uploaded Files	Face-to-face activities	Posting	Commenting	Total
15/11/2011	2	0	2	1	1	6
16/11/2011	1	1	2	3	3	10
17/11/2011	2	2	1	4	5	14
18/11/2011	4	1	2	2	3	12
19/11/2011	1	0	0	4	3	8
20/11/2011	2	1	1	2	4	10
21/11/2011	3	2	2	2	3	12
22/11/2011	2	2	3	1	3	11
23/11/2011	4	0	5	1	0	10
24/11/2011	3	2	2	2	4	13
25/11/2011	1	2	3	2	6	14
26/11/2011	1	2	3	2	4	12
27/11/2011	2	2	4	2	2	12
28/11/2011	3	2	2	2	3	12
29/11/2011	1	3	2	3	3	12
30/11/2011	4	4	2	2	5	17
01/12/2011	4	4	3	3	6	20
02/12/2011	5	3	5	5	1	19

Days Activitie	E-mail Communication	Uploaded Files	Face-to-face activities	Posting	Commenting	Total
03/12/2011	2	3	6	4	5	20
04/12/2011	4	2	9	8	10	33
05/12/2011	5	5	10	9	5	34
06/12/2011	11	4	5	10	10	40
07/12/2011	10	6	4	12	13	45
08/12/2011	12	8	5	5	15	45
09/12/2011	10	10	15	15	10	50
10/12/2011	12	14	6	12	8	52
11/12/2011	16	4	13	7	15	55
12/12/2011	8	12	17	13	10	60
13/12/2011	18	12	10	15	15	70
14/12/2011	19	11	12	13	20	65
15/12/2011	15	15	10	20	15	75
16/12/2011	11	9	15	18	15	68
17/12/2011	13	17	15	7	19	71
18/12/2011	15	20	15	25	5	80
19/12/2011	11	19	17	13	20	80
20/12/2011	13	20	0	0	0	33
21/12/2011	8	0	0	0	0	8
22/12/2011	4	0	0	0	0	4

Days Activitie	E-mail Communication	Uploaded Files	Face-to-face activities	Posting	Commenting	Total
23/12/2011	3	0	0	1	0	4
24/12/2011	5	0	0	0	1	6
25/12/2011	11	5	0	0	4	20
26/12/2011	13	0	0	0	0	13
27/12/2011	19	0	0	3	9	31
28/12/2011	13	0	3	1	0	17
29/12/2011	16	61	0	4	1	82
30/12/2011	9	21	17	13	20	80
31/12/2011	18	12	13	12	15	70
01/01/2012	18	12	9	11	14	64
02/01/2012	13	7	15	5	30	70
03/01/2012	13	7	15	5	15	55
04/01/2012	14	16	20	10	2	62
05/01/2012	14	12	12	13	12	63
06/01/2012	10	10	15	10	10	55
07/01/2012	14	16	3	7	5	45
08/01/2012	6	0	3	2	3	14
09/01/2012	8	0	3	2	0	13
10/01/2012	7	0	3	2	0	12
11/01/2012	15	0	0	0	0	15

Days Activitie	E-mail Communication	Uploaded Files	Face-to-face activities	Posting	Commenting	Total
12/01/2012	1	2	0	2	2	7
13/01/2012	8	1	1	2	0	12
14/01/2012	1	2	1	0	0	4
15/01/2012	1	1	1	2	2	7
16/01/2012	1	1	1	1	1	5
17/01/2012	1	1	1	1	0	4
18/01/2012	1	2	0	0	0	3
19/01/2012	0	0	0	0	0	0
20/01/2012	0	0	0	0	0	0