EFL written production through blogging: computer versus mobile insights

Salvador Montaner-Villalba[1]

Abstract. Following up on Montaner-Villalba et al. (2020), this research focuses on written competence in the English language. The huge advance in technology permits teachers to use mobile applications. This quantitative design research investigated WordPress, in its mobile version, on written competence in English as a Foreign Language (EFL). One treatment group (12 students) and one control group (12 students) of A2 (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) EFL learners at a secondary school in Valencia (Spain, N=24) participated during the 2018-2019 academic year. While, on the one hand, learners from the treatment group utilized WordPress in its mobile version, on the other, learners from the control group used WordPress in its computer-based version. The outcomes proved that the learners from the treatment group significantly improved their level of written competence in comparison with the learners from the control group. Accordingly, this research recommends utilizing WordPress in its mobile version in secondary education.

Keywords: mobile blogging, computer-based blogging, written competence, EFL, WordPress.

1. Mobile-assisted language learning

WordPress is an open-source content management system platform featured by plugin architecture and a template system. WordPress can also be utilized in its mobile version. This platform has similar options to the computer-based version. This research aims to analyze blogging to practice EFL written competence both in its computer-based and mobile versions. Some empirical research (Gonulal, 2019; Montaner-Villalba, 2019; Ramos, 2018; Sánchez Ambriz & Martínez Balboa,

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2018) focused on the possibilities given by mobile devices. Ramos (2018) focused on WhatsApp as a tool to enhance French written competence. Results showed that learning was successful. However, the author recommends a longitudinal research to check learners' motivation. Similarly, Sánchez Ambriz and Martínez Balboa (2018) explored WhatsApp in EFL to promote both oral and written competence. Outcomes proved that learners achieved better outcomes in the post-test. Gonulal (2019), in his mixed-method research, explored Instagram as a tool to enhance EFL vocabulary and communication skills. The findings showed that learning was significantly positive. Montaner-Villalba (2019) focused on Instagram as a tool to promote EFL written competence. In this quantitative research, the author concluded that learners from the treatment group improved notably at the end of the research. However, it could not be confirmed that there was a notable improvement in learners from the control group. Moreover, outcomes proved to be slightly higher in the control group, without being initially expected.

Regarding mobile blogging, it must be highlighted that no empirical research on blogging in its mobile version has been published. In this sense, Jung Jee (2011) offered a short introduction to a huge variety of emerging Web 2.0 as well as mobile technologies which can be utilized not only in foreign language learning but also in second language learning. This makes this current research important in the field of study related to mobile-assisted language learning and, particularly, to EFL learning in secondary education in Spain.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Two different groups of A2 level EFL learners participated in this research. They were chosen randomly. The first group consisted of 12 students in the treatment group (m-blogging). The second group was composed of 12 learners in the control group (computer-based); 24 learners, aged 14-15, participated in this research. They were studying their fourth year of secondary education at the time of this experiment at a state secondary school in Valencia.

2.2. Materials

This study utilized a quantitative research design including a pre-/post-written task group design for both the treatment group and the control group. Four different

written tasks were administered to the learners participating in this experiment. The two initial written tasks were aimed at checking students' level before the experiment commenced. The two post-written tasks assessed learners' improvement of EFL written competence.

2.3. Procedures

The initial digital written task was administered at the beginning of the year, 2018-2019, during the fourth week of September. Before commencing the experiment, we considered it adequate to offer learners three sessions to teach them how to utilize WordPress. These sessions were developed in the three weeks before the initial written task was given to learners. The learners' outcomes were recorded for further correlation to the scores of the final written online task, which was given in the last week of May 2019. Table 1 clarifies the stages of the experiment.

Table 1. Procedures

Procedures	When	Description
Initial written task	Beginning First Term	Initial digital written task takes place
Presenting experiment	Second week September	Teacher introduces experiment, explains aims, and methodology
Beginning experiment	Three first weeks of September	Three sessions are focused on explaining how WordPress functions
Final written task	End of the academic year	Final online written task develops

The outcomes of both the initial and the final online written tasks were analyzed to verify the research hypothesis.

3. Outcomes

In this section, the different outcomes of both the initial and the final written digital tasks are analyzed considering quantitative methods. The collecting data was made through WordPress in its computer-based version (control group) and via WordPress in its mobile version (treatment group). The means of the various variables were calculated through Excel.

3.1. Treatment group[2]

Firstly, Figure 1 addresses the outcomes of the initial online written task; secondly, Figure 2 shows the average of the post-writing.

Figure 1. Average outcomes of the initial writing digital task, treatment group

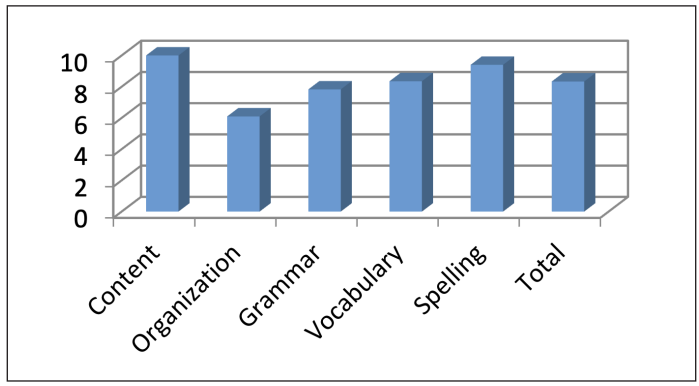
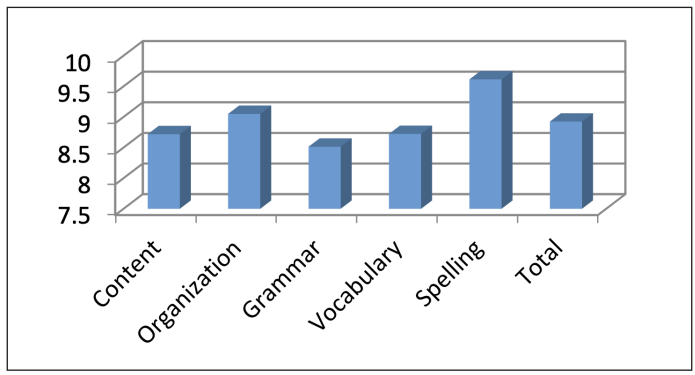


Figure 2. Average outcomes of the post-writing online task, treatment group



3.2. Control group

Next, the quantitative results of the control group are analyzed. Figure 3 addresses the results of the initial digital written task and Figure 4 shows the average of the post-writing.

2. The meaning of the numbers in Figures 1, 2, 3, and 4 are related to the grades which are used within the Spanish educational system. The grades or marks from 0 to 4 imply failure. Next, the grade of 5 means 'Pass', the mark of 6 implies 'Good', the grades of 7 and 8 mean 'Very good' and, finally, the grades of 9 and 10 imply 'Very excellent'.

Figure 3. Average outcomes of initial writing online task, control group

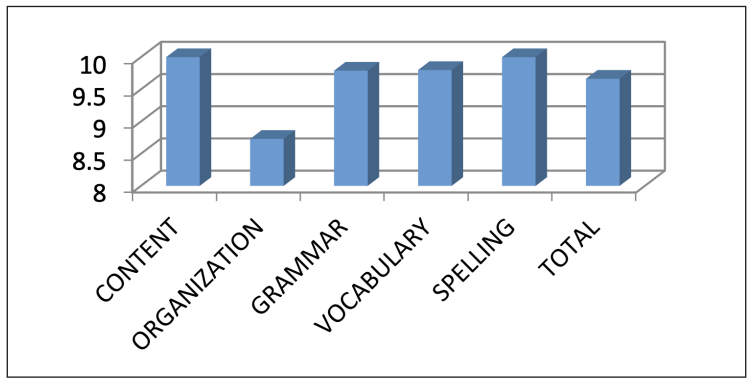
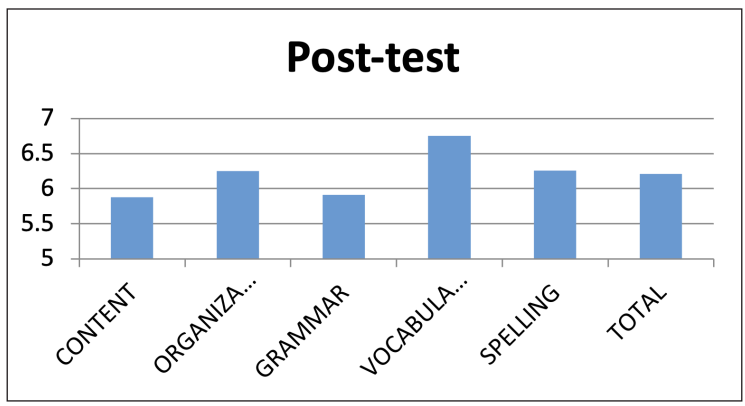


Figure 4. Average outcomes post-writing digital task, control group



4. Discussions and conclusion

Firstly, the outcomes of the initial digital written task are discussed from a comparative perspective between the treatment group and the control group. This task aimed at measuring the initial level of EFL written production by learners. The total average of the treatment group is 8.33 while the total average of the control group is 9.68. This does not fulfill the initial expectation. When comparing both the initial online written task (8.33) and the final one (8.92) in the treatment group, there is a slight improvement between them, implying, thus, that treatment group learners slightly improved their level of written production in WordPress in its mobile version.

Secondly, the results of the control group learners are justified by explaining the differences between the treatment and control group regarding the initial online written task. Concerning *vocabulary*, the control group (9.8) is slightly higher than the treatment group (8.35). In this task, both groups were required to write about their daily actions. Regarding *grammar*, the control group (9.79) is significantly much higher than the treatment group (7.82). The control group learners possibly scored better results because they correctly identified grammatical issues required in this task. It is curious to observe here that the control group shows better results than the treatment group. This was not initially expected before commencing the experiment.

As for the *organization*, the control group (8.73) is notably higher than the treatment group (6.09). This huge difference between both groups can possibly be explained by the fact that control group learners were more aware than the treatment group of the relevance of writing cohesive and coherent texts and using well-structured paragraphs; also taking into consideration that writing in computer-based WordPress is easier than in mobile version. This was not initially expected.

Thirdly, the outcomes of the final online written task are discussed by comparing the initial and the final tasks. The *content* is notably higher in the treatment group (8.7) than in the control group (5.1). In the final task, learners wrote about their experience in this experiment. It is obvious that the outcomes of the treatment group are better since they understood what was required. As for the *organization*, the results of the treatment group (9.05) are higher than the control group (6.25). Learners from the treatment group managed to write well-structured texts satisfactorily while learners from the control group did not.

In relation to *grammar*, the results of the treatment group (8.5) are better than the control group (5.9). Control group learners confused the conditional form *would* + infinitive and, instead, they utilized the future form *will* + infinitive. The complete lack of connectors was key in their low marks. As for *vocabulary*, the treatment group (8.7) is higher than the control group (6.7). Learners from the treatment group utilized more varied and richer vocabulary than learners from the control group.

Related to *spelling*, the treatment group (9.6) is higher than the control group (6.2). While treatment group learners paid more attention to spelling, learners from the control group did not obtain good marks in the final written digital task. The outcomes proved that the treatment group improved slightly whereas the control group decreased significantly. As a whole, the total average of the treatment group

is notably higher than the control group. These results were initially expected before commencing the experiment.

From the outcomes given through the tool Excel, we can clearly state that the results improved significantly at the end of the experiment in the treatment group in comparison with the control group. This means that the participants in the treatment group improved their level of EFL written competence through WordPress in its mobile version while the outcomes from the control group in the final written online task decreased notably if we compare them with the results from the initial digital written task. For this reason, it is recommended that learners practice EFL written competence through WordPress and, particularly, in its computer-based version. Moreover, we would encourage scholars to do further research on m-blogging related to enhancing other linguistic skills.

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