THE EFFECTS OF KOREAN LEARNERS' ONLINE EXPERIENCES ON THEIR ENGLISH WRITING

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ABSTRACT
This study aims to examine the effects of the online writing experiences of English as a foreign language (EFL) learners on their self-efficacy, attitudes, and performance in a computer-mediated writing classroom (CMC). Although the close relationship between students' computer experiences and class performance has been positively confirmed in many studies, it has rarely been examined in the context of an EFL writing course. In this study, two groups of Korean university EFL learners, regular (15) and non-regular (17) online writers, were compared regarding their self-efficacy, attitudes, and the extent to which they incorporated online peer feedback into revision. The results reveal that regular online writers, in comparison with non-regular online ones, are likely to have more positive attitudes towards CMC and to incorporate feedback into revision more successfully and extensively. This finding implies that the introduction of a new technology should be accompanied with extra assistance and device to those who are not familiar with the technology.

INTRODUCTION
The use of computers and the Internet is indispensable for students living in this era of information and communication technology (ICT). Students' computer-related knowledge and experiences are reported as positively influencing their attitudes toward computer-mediated learning (Chen, 1986; Levin & Gordon, 1989; Mitra, 1998; Topkaya, 2010). Students who frequently use ICT—such as word-processing, emailing, blogging, and online message posting—are likely to put more effort into accomplishing technology-related tasks and will, in the end, perform better than those who use ICT less frequently (Bandura, 1995; Karsten & Roth, 1998; Lee, 1986; Muira, 1987; Rozell & Gardner, 1999, 2000). These studies clearly demonstrate that student's experiences with computer use affect their attitudes toward the use of computers in class and even their performance.

In spite of the many studies illustrating the positive effects of ICT on learning, few studies have examined how second language writers' online writing experiences affect their self-efficacy, attitudes, and performance in second language writing. Thus far, studies have focused on the effects of computer-mediated classes (CMCs) that incorporate the use of computers into their curriculum in a variety of ways, such as local area networks, bulletin boards, email, or instant chat (Braine, 2001; Chang, 2012; Chen, 2012; Hewings, & Coffin, 2006; Ho & Savignon, 2007; Liu & Sadler, 2003; Sullivan & Pratt, 1996). While focusing on the differences between traditionally-taught classes and CMCs, these studies have not taken into account students' previous experiences using computers. As shown in classes other than a writing class, however, students' previous computer experiences may play an important role in establishing their positive attitudes toward CMC writing activities and even improving their performance in a writing class. Thus, this study aims to investigate how online writing experiences affect students' self-efficacy, their attitudes toward the use of ICT in class, and finally their performance—that is, in revising drafts in a second language writing class.

LITERATURE REVIEW
COMPUTER EXPERIENCES, SELF-EFFICACY, AND PERFORMANCE
Computer experiences seem to play an important role in establishing students' self-efficacy in ICT. Self-efficacy is "the belief about one's own capability to organize and complete a course of action required to accomplish a specific task" (Eggen & Kauchak, 2007, p. 310). After examining 288 pre-service English language teachers' perceptions of computer self-efficacy, Topkaya (2010) discovered that previous computer experiences affected their perceptions of computer self-efficacy positively. İŞman and □elikli (2009) also found that self-efficacy positively affects students' motivation as well as task performance in using computers. Furthermore, this self-efficacy seems to depend on students' years of computer use in addition to the complexity of the task.

Not only do the students who have used computers tend to have a high level of self-efficacy in ICT, but they are

also likely to have more positive attitudes toward the use of computers in class (Chen, 1986; Levin & Gordon, 1989; Mitra, 1998). While investigating gender differences in the relationship between computer experiences and attitudes toward computers, both Chen (1986) and Levin and Gordon (1989) found positive effects of prior computer experiences on attitudes. Although male high school students had more experiences and more positive attitudes with regard to using computers than their female counterparts, Chen found that male and female students seemed equally interested in computers, when their prior computer experiences were controlled for. In other words, prior computer experiences made a difference in attitudes toward the use of computers between genders. Levin and Gordon found that prior computer experiences seemed to work as a stronger predictor of attitudes among Israeli secondary students than gender. Mitra similarly found strong relationship between students' prior computer experiences and attitudes toward computers among 1,444 university students. Those who reported higher use of computers had a more positive attitude toward computers than lower users of computers.

Moreover, prior computer experience seems to affect students' class performance as well as their self-efficacy and attitudes (Karsten & Roth, 1998; Lee, 1986; Rozell & Gardner, 1999, 2000). Through investigation of various factors affecting computer-related performance, Rozell and Gardner (1999 and 2000) found that students' computer experiences have a close relationship with their computer-related performance. Lee uncovered the effects of past computer experiences on computerized aptitude test performance. Karsten and Roth found a relationship between computer experiences and self-efficacy regarding students' performance in introductory computer literacy courses, showing that relevance rather than quantity of experiences is most predictive of students' performance in class. That is, whether students' computer experiences directly relate to the task in class is a better predictor of students' success in class than how much computer usage they have experienced.

While student experience with computers has been reported to have a close relationship with their computer self-efficacy, attitudes toward CMC, and eventually their performance levels, this relationship has rarely been explored in the area of writing instruction to EFL learners. Thus far, most studies on the use of computers in second language writing classrooms have examined the differences between traditional and computer-mediated classrooms regarding students' attitudes (Chen, 2012; Ho & Savignon, 2007; Sullivan & Pratt, 1996), apprehension level (Sullivan & Pratt, 1996), writing quality (Braine, 2001; Sullivan & Pratt, 1996), interaction pattern (Brain, 2001; Hewings, & Coffin, 2006; Liu & Sadler, 2003; Sullivan & Pratt, 1996), amount of feedback incorporated into revision (Liu & Sadler, 2003), task engagement, comment categories, and perception of peer review (Chang, 2012). However, no studies have investigated how the actual computer-mediated writing experiences in daily life affect EFL students' computer self-efficacy and attitudes toward computer-assisted classroom or the effects of prior computer experiences on students' actual performance in a writing class.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate how Korean students' online experiences affect their self-efficacy, attitudes toward CMC, and performances in an EFL writing class. In this study, the participants are divided into two groups; those who regularly wrote online are named "regular online writers," and those who had irregular or no experiences of online writing are labeled as "non-regular online writers." Then the differences between regular and non-regular online writers on self-efficacy and attitudes toward CMC are examined. In addition, the two groups are compared regarding their performance, which is measured by the extent to which they successfully incorporated peer feedback into revision. Peer feedback has been actively utilized in both first and second language writing classrooms, based on the theoretical underpinning that peer feedback helps build a strong sense of audience by providing students with chances to experience readers other than their teachers (Kroll, 1991; Nystrand, 1986; Vilamil & De Guerrero, 1996; Zamel, 1985). This study is designed to answer the following questions:

1. How different are regular and non-regular online writers from each other in computer self-efficacy?
2. How different are regular and non-regular online writers from each other in attitudes toward CMC?
3. How different are regular and non-regular online writers from each other in their performance, or the extent to which they successfully incorporate online peer feedback into revision?

METHODS

PARTICIPANTS

The participants were 32 Korean college learners of English (16 males and 16 females) enrolled in intermediate-level writing classes taught by one of the authors. Table 1 shows the background information of the participants. Their mean age was 23.46 with a standard deviation (SD) of 3.90. All participants had completed a basic writing course as a prerequisite, and as English majors or minors, their English proficiency levels were generally high. Twenty-four out of the 32 students had standardized English test scores. Since the majority of the students took the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC), other test scores were converted to TOEIC scores.

The mean score was 915.83 with an SD of 60.55, which is a highly advanced level of achievement considering the TOEIC scale of 10 to 990. Although some students did not have English test scores, they had similar English proficiency as the other students. Also, many students had experiences of living in English speaking countries, such as the USA, the UK or Australia, with a mean of 5.44 months and an SD of 11.50.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of English proficiency and online writing frequency

	N*	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Age	28	20	39	23.46	3.90
English Proficiency**	24	800	990	915.83	60.55
Living Abroad***	27	0	36	5.44	11.50

* Size varies due to number of responses
** Scores converted to the TOEIC scale
*** Months of living in English speaking countries

ONLINE WRITING EXPERIENCES

It was hypothesized that regular online experiences would affect computer self-efficacy and attitudes toward using online tutoring aid tools in an English writing class, and would further help improve their writing by their selective incorporation of good peer feedback. It was thus important to examine whether the participants were used to the practice of regularly expressing their views or opinions to other people via online media. Therefore, depending on whether they self-reported as being regular online writers or not, participants were divided into two groups. Online writing activities included personal essays such as writing or responding to blog posts, but text messages using a short message service were excluded.

Fifteen out of 32 students were categorized as regular online writers while the remaining 17 students were non-regular online writers. The effects of how often they write were not investigated, and thus only the descriptive statistics of the frequency of online writing activities per week by regular writers are shown in Table 2. The mean and SD were 5.23 and 2.41, respectively. The regular online writers wrote at least three, but up to ten, times per week.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of online writing activities by regular writers

N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
15	3	10	5.23	2.41

To ensure comparability between groups, the two groups were examined for gender, age, English proficiency, and months living in English-speaking countries. There were eight males and seven females in the regular group while eight males and nine females, resulting in no significant differences between the two groups for gender ($\chi^2(1) = .125,\ p = .723$). Table 3 shows the results of *t*-tests between the regular and the non-regular online writing groups on three variables (i.e., age, English proficiency, and the months of living in English speaking countries), and no statistically significant differences were observed. Therefore, it was concluded that the two groups were comparable except for whether they write online regularly or not.

Table 3: Results of *t*-tests on age, English proficiency, and living abroad

Variable	Mean (SD) of Regular Group	Mean (SD) of Non-Regular Group	*t* (*df*)	*p*
Age	22.93 (2.56)	24.00 (4.95)	-.72 (26)	.48
English Proficiency	900.91 (70.60)	928.46 (49.97)	-1.12 (22)	.28
Living Abroad	9.42 (14.78)	1.15 (3.36)	1.97 (25)	.06

SELF-EFFICACY AND ATTITUDE

The participants were requested to answer two sets of questions, shown in Table 4. The first five questions investigated students' self-efficacy of using the online blackboard, and the last five inquired into students' attitude toward the use of the online blackboard in class. Students responded on a six-point Likert scale anchored from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." Once evidence of reliability and validity was obtained for the

questionnaire, students' mean responses to the self-efficacy and attitude questions were used as measures of self-efficacy and attitude, respectively.

Table 4: Questionnaire items for measuring self-efficacy and attitude

Category	Question
Self-Efficacy	I can upload and download writing assignments and feedback online.
	I can provide peer feedback via online.
	I can incorporate peer feedback into the revision.
	I can see writing assignments of other group members.
	I can see peer feedback given to other group members.
Attitude	Online activities were helpful for writing and submitting writing assignments in this class.
	Online activities were helpful for giving and receiving peer feedback in this class.
	Online activities increased my motivation for studies in this class.
	Online activities in this class were helpful in improving my writing ability.
	I think positively of the online activities in this class.

QUALITY OF REVISION

The participants submitted three writing assignments during the semester, with two drafts of each assignment. After uploading each first draft, the students worked with two group members assigned by the instructor, giving and receiving feedback via the online class blackboard. Students revised first drafts, selectively incorporating feedback, and posted the final draft within one week. Prompted by the questions on the given worksheet (see Appendix for the sample worksheet), the peer comments usually included both suggestions for improvement and compliments for well-executed elements of their writing.

Obviously, all peer comments do not necessarily lead to improved revision; some, in fact, may worsen the manuscript. It was thus important that the students first selected "good" feedback and then improved their draft by incorporating the good feedback. In order to see to what extent each of the participants successfully incorporated peer feedback into their revision, the participants' first and revised drafts were compared and contrasted with the peer feedback received. Although, drawing on Wolcott (1994), the number of comments incorporated into the revision was often calculated in the studies that investigated students' revision processes (Liu & Sadler, 2003), this study measured the number of words triggered by peer feedback. As seen in the Appendix, peer feedback was conducted in a controlled fashion, meaning that only certain types of feedback (clarification and suggestion) were used, resulting in a limited number of peer comments. Instead of categorizing the types of feedback and the frequency of its incorporation into revision, this study concentrated on the amount of revision tried by a particular peer feedback: out of the total number of revised words, the percentage of the number of effectively-revised words triggered by peers was calculated for each writing assignment of each participant.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis procedures were as follows. First, Cronbach's alpha was computed as a reliability estimate of the questionnaire, while a factor analysis (FA) was conducted to check validity (Crocker & Algina, 1986). The two groups (regular vs. non-regular online writing groups) were then compared for comparability of age, English proficiency, and experiences of living in English-speaking countries. After confirming that the two groups were similar, the groups were compared for self-efficacy and attitude. Finally, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to compare the two groups on the quality of revisions for the three writing assignments. All statistical analyses were conducted in R (R Development Core Team, 2013).

RESULTS

RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

Table 5 shows Cronbach's alpha for self-efficacy and attitude (.874), which indicates that the questionnaire was reliably measuring self-efficacy and attitude.

Table 5: Cronbach's alpha

Section	Cronbach's alpha
Self-Efficacy	.874
Attitude	.874

To check the construct validity of the questionnaire, an FA was conducted. Since the number of participants was not sufficient for a confirmatory FA, an exploratory FA was conducted by fixing the number of factors at two. Factor loadings after promax rotation are shown in Table 6, where factor loadings larger than .3 are highlighted. All factor loadings of self-efficacy on Factor 1 are larger than .3, while those on Factor 2 are smaller than .3. Also, all attitude items on Factor 2 are larger than .3 with only an exception of Item 2, whose loadings are larger than .3 on both factors. Therefore, Factor 1 can be labeled as "Attitude" and Factor 2 as "Self-Efficacy," and construct validity of the questionnaire can be confirmed.

Table 6: Factor pattern matrix with Promax rotation

Section	Item	Factor 1	Factor 2
Self-Efficacy	No. 1	.48	.27
	No. 2	.46	.22
	No. 3	.99	-.22
	No. 4	.97	.02
	No. 5	.91	-.11
Attitude	No. 1	.16	.79
	No. 2	.53	.44
	No. 3	-.15	.84
	No. 4	-.00	.78
	No. 5	-.06	.84

SELF-EFFICACY AND ATTITUDE

The means and SDs of self-efficacy and attitude by both regular and non-regular groups are shown in Table 7. Note that the measures of self-efficacy and attitude were mean responses to the five items on the six-point Likert scale. It can be seen that self-efficacy was very close to the highest category (Strongly Agree) for both groups.

In order to separately investigate whether the two groups differed on self-efficacy and attitude, two *t*-tests were conducted instead of a MANOVA. The nominal type I error rate was modified to .025(=.05/2) for Bonferroni adjustment. Results showed that the regular online writing group had a significantly higher attitude score than the non-regular group ($t(30)=2.59$, $p=.01$). Although the difference of self-efficacy between the two groups was not significant ($t(30)=-.08$, $p=.94$), such results could easily be expected because both groups showed high levels of self-efficacy (see Table 7).

Table 7: Results of *t*-tests on self-efficacy and attitude

Variable	Mean (SD) of Regular Group	Mean (SD) of Non-Regular Group	*t* (*df*)	*p*
Self-Efficacy	5.56 (.57)	5.58 (.59)	-.08 (30)	.94
Attitude	5.20 (.89)	4.49 (.64)	2.59 (30)	.01

QUALITY OF REVISION

A MANOVA was conducted to examine whether the two groups were significantly different from each other in the extent to which they successfully incorporated online peer feedback into their revisions. The result was significant (Wilks' Lambda= .56, $F(3, 17)=4.38$, $p=.02$), indicating the regular online writing group was significantly better than the non-regular group in incorporating "good" peer feedback into their revised drafts (Table 8).

Table 8: Results of MANOVA on Quality of Revision

Variable	Mean (SD) of Regular Group	Mean (SD) of Non-Regular Group	Wilks' Lamda	*F* (*df*)	*p*
Assignment 1	26.77 (18.49)	10.17 (13.09)	.56	4.38 (3, 17)	.02
Assignment 2	22.16(17.74)	3.19(8.11)			
Assignment 3	17.82 (26.11)	2.10 (3.57)			

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of online writing experiences on self-efficacy, attitude, and performance. To that end, participants, divided into regular and non-regular online writing groups, were shown to be comparable in all tested parameters except for their online writing experiences. Participants' self-efficacy and attitudes were measured using a questionnaire, with the regular online writing group showing significantly higher levels of positive attitude than the non-regular group. Although the results may not show a causal relationship between online writing experiences and attitudes toward ICT, this study confirms the positive effects of frequent online experiences on attitude in a second language writing classroom (Chen, 1986; Levin & Gordon, 1989; Mitra, 1998).

The differences between the regular and non-regular groups regarding self-efficacy were not significant, but the effects of online experiences on self-efficacy should be explored further. The insignificant results may be explained by "ceiling effects." Since the Internet is now ubiquitous, almost all participants showed full self-efficacy in using the web. , Nonetheless, further research is needed to examine the relationship between self-efficacy and mobile technology, which is less common but is being increasingly used in classrooms (Franklin, 2011).

Finally, by comparing regular and non-regular online writing groups, it was found that regular online writers were more active in improving their writing drafts with peer assistance. Students selected "good" peer feedback and incorporated it into their revision. Growth in second language writing is affected by many factors, and it is difficult to show that regular online writers grew more than non-regular writers in every aspect of writing. However, it is certain that regular online writers are likely to pay attention to peer feedback provided online and, as a result, be more likely to incorporate it into their revision for improvement of their drafts. This positive effect of students' online writing experiences on their willingness to accept peer feedback confirms the speculations of several scholars who argue that online environments foster a greater sense of audience by enabling learners to acknowledge that they have other audiences in addition to the teacher (Hawisher, 1992; Schriner & Rice, 1989; Spitzer, 1990).

In this study, the use of computer strengthens the original purpose of peer feedback, that is, to enhance the sense of audience, by enlarging the community of writers in a second language writing classroom. However, the finding of this study—that students' online experiences play an important role in establishing this sensitivity to audience among students—implies that students may not automatically benefit from CMC. Whether students can benefit from the incorporation of a particular technology in class depends on their previous experience with that technology. The more experience the students have, the more attention they can pay to the activity itself. Those who have not experienced the technology may need explicit instruction not only of the technology itself, but also positive effects or expected results. For example, supplementary devices, such as a program that enables students to see all the peer comments made on the original draft in one computer, may make peer feedback visible so that it increases the probability of incorporating the feedback into revision. Further studies are needed to investigate whether these types of additional assistance can make a difference in students' attitudes toward the use of technology in class and eventually increase their knowledge of class content.

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APPENDIX
PEER EDITING WORKSHEET 1

Peer Editor:_____ Date: _____

1. What do you like best about this paragraph/essay? In other words, what is this writer's best writing skill?

2. Do you understand everything? □ Yes □ No
Circle or underline anything that you do not understand, and write a comment about it.

3. Copy the main argument here, and underline the topic sentence of each paragraph.

4. What examples and details does the writer provide to support his/her argument?

5. Would you like more information about anything? □ Yes □ No
If your answer is yes, write down what you would like to know more about.

6. What suggestions or changes would you make for a better argument essay?