Teaching Foreign Languages

The Role of E-mail Activities in EFL Writing Classes

(1) Sousan Sattar Boroujeni (2) Saeideh Shafiee Nahrkhalaji

Islamic Azad University- Najafabad Branch
sousansattar@phu.iaun.ac.ir

Abstract

Technological advances have greatly affected teaching and learning at different levels and consequently CALL is a research area that has received great interest recently. The present study aims at providing an overview of the role of e-mail activities in EFL writing classes. An assumption that is sometimes made by composition instructors is that the incorporation of e-mail writing exercises in curricula will necessarily have beneficial effects on students' academic composition abilities. However, if e-mail creates features of both written and spoken language, it is questionable that the e-mail writing will necessarily improve their academic writing abilities.

In order to address this question, this study investigates whether student-produced writing in e-mail and traditional pen-and-paper mode is similar or different with respect to factors like the length of text, produced in each medium, and the type of structures used. Forty students majoring in English as foreign language in an advanced writing class were the subjects of the study. They were first given a five-point Likert scale questionnaire asking them about their feelings and attitudes toward using computer and also their abilities and what they can do with it. The same questionnaire was given to their teachers to compare the results. The students then were randomly divided into two groups of twenty. Over the course of the semester one group and the teacher corresponded several times in the form of e-mail assignments. The other group did their assignments using traditional writing tools and submitted their papers to the teacher for correction and feedback. The findings suggested that although e-mail was proved to be an authentic communicative writing activity (Weisental & Busserbach-Lucas 1996), and that texts produced by the writers using computer and exchanging writing tasks via e-mail as a supplement to traditional writing instruction provided little or no benefits in improving students' overall academic writing skills. However, the research concluded that it could be at least as good as traditional instruction.

Keywords: