The Effect of Online Task-Based Language Teaching on EFL Writing

Tusino[1], Abdurrachman Faridi[2], Mursid Saleh[3], Sri Wuli Fitriati[4]
tusino_1982@yahoo.com[1], pakdur@yahoo.co.id[2], mursids@hotmail.com[3],
sriwuli.fitriati@mail.unnes.ac.id[4]

Universitas Negeri Semarang, Jl. Kelud Utara III, Semarang 50237 Indonesia[1234]

Abstract. The advancement of technology provides language teachers to create innovative learning environments for their students. This study aims at describing the effect of online task-based language teaching on writing performance and revealing the students' perceptions towards its implementation in EFL writing course. This study employed a mixed-methods study with explanatory design. Twenty six undergraduate students majoring English program participated in this study. The instruments used were writing tests and semi-structured interviews in the writing course. Writing tests were executed two times to measure students' writing performance. The interviews consisting of five items were assigned to describe students' perceptions towards the implementation of online TBLT in writing class. Data collections were taken from the results of writing tests and interviews. The quantitative data were analyzed using paired sample t-test. A thematic analysis is used to process qualitative data. The results reveal that there are greater improvements of post-test compared to pre-test in terms of overall writing skills, and the subscales of grammar, mechanics, and vocabulary. Students perceive positive attitudes towards the implementation of task-based language teaching mediated with a Google Classroom tool. Online learning promotes material delivery and assists writing processes in terms of idea construction and revision. Online task-based language teaching is an alternative for teaching online writing integrating between technology and task-based learning.

Keywords: mixed methods study, online task-based language teaching, writing

1 Introduction

Writing plays a vital role in language production and academic success [1], [2]. Writing, however, is a complex process for EFL students. Students face a lot of writing problems when they are asked to write compositions in English. Writing ability covers not only linguistic tools such as sentence variations, word choices, punctuation choices, and but also strategies to build and extend arguments at the micro and macro levels [3]. For those reasons, English teachers need to teach both micro and macro writing skills to guide their students become proficient writers. Also, teachers are suggested to employ current learning models to facilitate language learning in writing skills.

One of the learning models which maximizes students' writing achievement [4], [5] is task-based language teaching (TBLT). TBLT refers to approach to language teaching research and practice that uses task as a unit of analysis for research and practice in communicative language teaching [6], [7]. Delivering task to be a comprehensible and meaningful input for learning activities is an essential element in TBLT practices. Indeed, task currently has developed into a central place in language acquisition research [8], [9], [10]. Therefore, language teachers are required to increase task complexity when applying TBLT model to

improve dimension of the syntactic and lexical complexity, content, organization and writing quality.

The rapid advancement of technology creates innovative learning environments in language classroom settings. Technology-mediated TBLT is the merger between technology and TBLT [11] and is currently an imperative for language education. However, implementing TBLT during real-time learning is fundamentally different from face-to-face learning. Preparing students to do tasks online must be part of teachers' professional development. Consequently, online TBLT can be an alternative to maximize language learning [12].

Online learning with cooperative activities also has the strengths to develop writing quality significantly [13], [14]. Online learning accommodates flexibilities and allocates greater access for learning rather than traditional learning for students [15]. Google Classroom as a learning platform is believed to offer a solution in English language teaching in particular to teaching writing. Online TBLT is a learning model where the college teacher integrates technology in language learning in terms of giving series of tasks. In this study, online TBLT is providing pedagogical tasks which comprise pre-task, during task, and post-task cycles in online learning environment assisted with a Google Classroom tool.

It is obvious that most TBLT studies are not conducted in assistance with internet technology within ESL contexts. It is, as a result, vital to investigate the application of online TBLT in EFL writing settings. This study aims at describing the effect of online TBLT on writing performance and revealing the students' perceptions towards its implementation in EFL writing classes. The results of the study can provide language teachers the crucial requirements needed to set up students towards the implementation of online TBLT model. The online learning atmosphere also provides students with the opportunity to socially interact with their peers and college teachers using online classroom discussions.

This study is mainly intended to describe the effect of online TBLT on EFL writing performance. Research questions formulated, thus, are the following:

a. Is there any significant effect of online task-based language teaching on writing performance?
b. What are students' perceptions towards the implementation of online task-based language teaching in EFL writing?

Based on the research questions, therefore, objectives of the study are to find out the effect of online TBLT on writing performance and to describe the implementation of online TBLT in EFL writing.

2 Method

A mixed-methods study with explanatory design was conducted. One class containing twenty six EFL students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Purworejo, Indonesia participated in this study. Twenty students are female, and six students are male. Most students are at the age of 19-21 years old. Before joining this writing subject, they have learned three writing courses previously. All students were equipped with mobile phones and notebooks used for online learning activities. Students attended writing lectures everywhere or at their home.

This study employed quantitative and qualitative phases respectively. A quantitative phase was initially conducted by using pre-experimental research. Writing tests (pre-test and post-test) were executed two times to measure students' writing performance. Students were asked to write exposition texts with different topics for thirty minutes before and after treatments. Face-to-face lectures were conducted in the first and the sixteenth meetings. In the treatment, they followed online writing classes for fourteen meetings in terms of pre-task,

during task, and post-task cycles with a Google Classroom tool. Writing products were scored by considering writing criteria, namely organization, content, grammar, mechanics, and vocabulary. After that, parametric statistics with SPSS was used to reveal whether online TBLT has a significant effect on writing performance.

A qualitative phase used a semi-structured interview as a research instrument. The interviews consisting of five items were assigned to describe students' perceptions towards the implementation of online TBLT in the genre-based writing class. Of twenty six students, only six of them were asked to give their comments for interview guides. Each student was given fifteen minutes to explain their attitudes and benefits of online TBLT practices. Furthermore, interview results were audio-recorded and translated since the interview was conducted in students' native language. The students' native language was employed in order to minimize language barriers for data collections. A thematic analysis, then, was conducted to figure out the qualitative data. Finally, all data gathered were simultaneously processed through quantitative and qualitative analyses to find out research results.

3 Results and Discussion

Based on quantitative data analysis, the students' writing indicates that there are statistically significant differences between pre-test and post-test results. However, the detailed differences of writing criteria (organization, content, grammar, mechanics, and vocabulary) reveal different significances among the scores. Descriptive statistics is used to find out mean scores and standard deviations of pre-test and post-test; meanwhile, paired-sample t-test was employed to analyze the effect of online TBLT on writing performance (see **table 1**). SPSS computations are utilized for descriptive and inferential statistics.

Table 1. Paired sample t-test results of writing performance

Writing criteria	Mean		SD		t	Sig.
	Pre-test	Post-test	Pre-test	Post-test		
Organization	13,31	14,69	2,50	2,80	1,95	0,062
Content	13,54	13,69	3,18	2,17	0,45	0,658
Grammar	12,58	14,46	2,89	3,87	3,10	0,005
Mechanics	15,96	16,27	3,03	3,01	3,64	0,001
Vocabulary	11,18	14,96	2,79	4,07	4,74	0,000
Overall score	65,31	74,08	12,41	12,86	3,62	0,001

From **table 1**, it shows that all scores of post-test are higher than pre-test for organization, content, grammar, mechanics, vocabulary, and overall score. There are greater improvements of post-test compared to pre-test; from the smallest to the largest points respectively are the following: vocabulary (3,78 points), mechanics (3,10), grammar (1,88), organization (1,65), and content (1,50). However, there are no significant differences for organization and content scores since t-test scores are lower than t-tables scores, and both writing criteria have higher significance scores than 0,005.

Detailed descriptions of students' writing scores show that the highest improvement (3,78 points) of writing subscales lies on vocabulary, while aspects of content remain the lowest improvement (0,15 points). Furthermore, there are no significant differences of organization and content indicating that online TBLT does not give any effect for students' writing products due to their low improvements. Subscales of grammar, mechanics, and vocabulary

show significant improvements because students get online direct feedbacks from peers and college teachers after submitting their writing.

Discussions of the above data reveal that there are greater improvements of post-test than pre-test seen from results of mean scores. There are 8,77 points of improvement from means of pre-test to post-test for overall scores. Results of t-test and significance scores convince the significant effects of online TBLT on writing performances (sig. $< 0,05$). Consistent with previous studies [13], [14], this study indicates that online TBLT has a significant effect on holistic writing performance, and the writing subscales of grammar, mechanics, and vocabulary. However, organization and content subscales show no significant differences.

For qualitative data analysis, the students' perceptions towards the implementation of online TBLT in EFL writing class are shown in **tables 2** and **3**.

Table 2. Summary of statement per category

Perceptions	Coding category	Frequency (%)
Attitude	Building interest	6 (19%)
	Enhancing motivation	4 (12%)
Material delivery	Facilitating delivery	3 (9%)
	Improving comprehension	2 (7%)
Writing assistance	Building idea construction	5 (15%)
	Maximizing writing drafts	2 (7%)
	Improving revision	5 (15%)
Problems	Confusion	3 (9%)
	Budget expenses	2 (7%)
	Total (%)	32 (100%)

Students' perceptions show that building interest results in the highest percentage of the perceptions (18%). Students also perceive that building idea construction and improving revision (15%) have become more benefits while practicing online TBLT in writing classes. Only two students (6%) consider that online writing classes are able to improve comprehension and maximizing writing drafts. However, students believe that confusion becomes the biggest challenge when online TBLT is being applied in writing class. Technology support and budget expenses also hinder the implementation of online TBLT learning.

Table 3. Examples of statement per category

Perceptions	Coding category	Examples of statement
Attitude	Building interest	*"Online activities make me interested in learning due flexible time and place."*
		"Google Classroom tool makes writing processes easier."
	Enhancing motivation	*"I have high motivation to learn."*
		"Paperless writing is motivating by Google Classroom."
Material delivery	Facilitating delivery	*"I can read and download materials directly with my mobile phones."*
		"Reading materials with laptop is easier than reading lecturer's slides.
	Improving comprehension	*"Material delivery can be well-understood."*
Writing assistance	Building idea construction	*"I can construct ideas better due to online pair discussions."*
		Writing thesis of the text needs pair work.

	Maximizing writing drafts	*"Online writing makes writing drafts manageable."*
	Improving revision	*"I can get direct feedback from the teacher and revise my writing."*
		"Peer revision is beneficial for writing products."
Problems	Confusion	*"I get confused about having online class only."*
		"I also need face-to-face teaching for explaining materials and direct feedback."
	Budget expenses	*"I need more money for doing online class."*
		"I have to spend some money for online connections."

Perceptions towards the implementation of online TBLT cover four questions related to students' attitude, material delivery, writing assistance, and problems faced by them. Students perceive positive attitudes towards the implementation of online TBLT [15]. Most students have interest in online learning due to flexible time and places. They enjoy learning at their home with the use of internet connections. Also, paperless writing activities are motivating for students. Pair-work online writing can lead students to learn simultaneously as both a student and a reviewer. However, students state they need at least several face-to-face lectures in the beginning for online classes in the entire semester to minimize their confusion.

Consistent with previous literature [16], [17], this study shows online TBLT facilitates material delivery. Most students agree that delivery of writing materials is easier and faster to students by clicking on their mobile phones. Indeed, they can download materials directly with facilities provided by Google Classroom. Students are able to read and study learning materials at home or other comfortable places for them. These conditions assist to develop students' comprehension to the materials given by the teacher.

Results of the study show online TBLT facilitates writing processes in terms of idea construction, drafting, revision. This finding is supported by previous literature [18], [19] exploring benefits of online learning in writing classes. Building idea construction and revision have higher percentages to the benefit of TBLT compared to maximizing writing drafts. Peer activities improve the process of idea construction. Meanwhile, direct teacher feedbacks enhance a revision phase. This disclosure indicates direct impacts of the integration between TBLT and internet technology on language performances in particular to writing skills.

In relation to problems of implementing online TBLT, this study shows that confusion and budget expenses are faced by students in writing classes. Some are confused when they join online writing courses without face-face lecturers. This finding is supported by previous literature [20] investigating benefits and challenges of online TBLT in writing contexts. Furthermore, students state that they still need face-to-face teaching for material explanation and direct feedback from the college teacher. This result indicates that online TBLT needs to get more concerns and attentions from the teacher about systematic procedures to apply the model effectively.

Relevant to previous literature [21], this study shows online TBLT learning spends much money for students. The expenditure is mainly used to buy internet connections at home. Daily meeting needs internet, so the students have to provide it unless they cannot join the lectures. It indicates that face-to-face courses are more economical for students since they do not need more expenses for online activities. This finding discloses more considerations from the faculty related to students' ability to implement an online learning model.

4   Conclusion

This study employs mixed-methods study to assess the effect of online TBLT on writing performance and to describe students' perceptions towards its implementation in EFL writing classes. The results of this study underline that online TBLT has significant effects on writing performance for EFL learners. Writing criteria for grammar, mechanics, and vocabulary also show significant differences in detail. However, organization and content have no significant differences before and after treatments. Students perceive positive interests and high motivation to learn writing using online learning. Furthermore, students comprehend materials better due to online delivery. Online TBLT help enhance writing processes for ideas construction, drafting, and revision. However, online learning problems faced by the students are in terms of confusion and budget expenditure.

We suggest that EFL teachers adopt this strategy to assist students with their writing skills. Students also need to take part actively during online learning activities in order to develop their writing competences. It is underlined that one of the limitations of this study may be the influencing variables of the teacher and student aspects. Similar studies, therefore, involving other factors such as critical thinking, efficacy, anxiety, and motivation are conducted to reveal more comprehensive results.

References

[1]   Saberi, E., & Rahimi, R.: Guided writing tasks vs production writing tasks in teaching writing: The impact on Iranian EFL learners' paragraph writing. Modern Journal of Language Teaching Methods, Vol. 3 No. 2, pp. 129-142 (2013).
[2]   Silva, R. D.: Writing strategy instruction: Its impact on writing in a second language for academic purposes. Language Teaching Research, Vol. 19 No. 3, 1-15 (2015).
[3]   Cheung, Y. L. Teaching writing. In W. A. Renandya, & H. P. Widodo (Eds.): English Language Teaching Today: Building a Closer Link between Theory and Practice. New York, NY: Springer International (2016)
[4]   Purnawarman P., Susilawati, and Sundayana, W.: The use of Edmodo in teaching writing in a blended learning setting**.** Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics, Vol. 5, pp. 242-252 (2016)
[5]   Rahimi, M., & Zhang, L. J.: Effects of task complexity and planning conditions on L2 argumentative writing production. Discourse Processes, Vo. 8, pp. 1-17 (2017)
[6]   Moore, P. J.: The TESOL Encyclopedia of English Language Teaching, 1st ed. Oxford, England: John Wiley & Sons, Inc (2018)
[7]   Bygate, M., Noris, J. & Van den Branden, K.: Task-Based Language Teaching. The Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics. John Wiley & Son, Ltd (2015)
[8]   Ellis, R.: Position paper: Moving task-based language teaching forward. Lang. Teach. Vol. 50 No. 4, pp. 507-526 (2017)
[9]   Long, M. H.: In defense of tasks and TBLT: Nonissues and real issues. Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, Vol. 36, pp. 5-33 (2016)
[10] Skehan, P.: Tasks versus conditions: Two perspectives on task research and their implications for language pedagogy. Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, Vol. 36, pp. 34-49 (2016)
[11] González-Lloret, M., & Ortega, L. Technology and tasks: Exploring technology-mediated TBLT. Amsterdam, Netherlands: John Benjamins (2014)

[12] Baralt, M. & Gomez, J. M.: Task-based language teaching online: A guide for teachers. Language Learning and Technology, Vol. 21 No. 3, pp. 28-43 (2017)

[13] Aghajani, M. & Adloo, M.: The Effect of online cooperative learning on students' writing skills and attitudes through telegram application. International Journal of Instruction, Vol. 11 No. 3, pp. 433-447 (2018)

[14] Tai, H., Lin, W., & Yang, S. C.: Exploring the effect of peer review and teachers' corrective feedback on EFL students' online writing performance. Journal of Educational Computing Research. Vol. 53 No. 2, pp. 284-309 (2015)

[15] Ardiasih, L. S., Emzir, & Rasyid, Y.: Implementing constructivism approach in online writing course. English Review: Journal of English Education, Vol. 6 No. 2, pp. 127-138 (2018)

[16] Smith, N. V.: Face-to-face vs. blended learning: Effects on secondary students 'perceptions and performance. Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences Vol. 89, pp. 79-83 (2013)

[17] Jarvis, H.: From PPP and CALL/MALL to praxis of task-based teaching and mobile assisted language use. The Electronic Journal for English as a Second Language, Vol. 19 No. 1, pp. 1-9 (2015)

[18] Challob, A.. I., Bakar, N. A. & Latif, H. Collaborative blended learning writing environment: Effects on EFL students' writing apprehension and writing performance, English Language Teaching, Vol. 9, No. 6 (2016)

[19] Haro, A. V., Noroozi, O., Biemans, H. J. A., & Mulder, M.: The effects of an online learning environment with worked examples and peer feedback on students' argumentative essay writing and domain-specific knowledge acquisition in the field of biotechnology, Journal of Biological Education, Vo. 53, No. 4, pp. 390-398 (2019)

[20] Saadatmand, M. & Kumpulainen, K.: Participants' perceptions of learning and networking in connectivist MOOCs, MERLOT Journal of Online Learning and Teaching, Vol. 10, No. 1, pp. 17-30 (2014)

[21] Kinash, S., Brand, J., & Mathew, T.: Challenging mobile learning discourse through research: Student perceptions of Blackboard Mobile Learn and iPads, Australasian Journal of Educational Technology, Vol. 28, No. 4, pp. 639-655 (2012)