WebQuests in EFL reading/writing classroom

Zeynep Kocogluа *

аYeditepe University, Istanbul, Turkey

Received October 28, 2009; revised December 4, 2009; accepted January 14, 2010

Abstract

Educators agree that writing can be a valuable tool for learning because when students read and write, they process and use that information to create a product. Educators also recognize that Internet resources can also be a valuable learning tool for students to find information and apply them in learning. Among many Web-based applications in education, WebQuests have become popular learning tool, which makes use of Internet resources. WebQuests are also increasingly becoming popular in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) reading and writing because they provide learners authentic and collaborative tasks. As students do the WebQuest tasks, they find the information, read and write about it and complete the task. With this in mind, the researcher designed a university reading/writing course to integrate WebQuest tasks into EFL reading/writing instruction. The primary purpose of this study was therefore to compare the effects of WebQuest on Turkish EFL university students’ reading and writing performance. One freshman class, as the experimental group, used WebQuest. Other class, as control group, received traditional teacher-led tasks. The findings indicated that the experimental group scored higher on reading scores than did the control group. On the other hand, both groups scored equally on writing scores.

Keywords: WebQuest; writing; reading; English-as-a-foreign language

1. Introduction

WebQuests are Internet-based technological applications in which students follow steps to complete a task on a specific subject or multi-disciplinary subject (Dodge, 2005; 2006). WebQuests were created as inquiry-oriented activities that would allow students to use the Internet to acquire new knowledge and apply it to complete the task. WebQuests have six components, commonly referred to as building blocks (Dodge, 2004). The six building blocks include an introduction, a task, resources, the process, an evaluation, and a conclusion. The introduction contains background information for the WebQuest. The task is a description of the activity that is “doable” for the students. The process provides step-by-step instructions for the learners to follow in order to complete the task. The resources include links to the Internet resources that the learners will use throughout the task. The evaluation informs the learners how their task will be assessed in the form of a checklist. The conclusion brings closure to the
task and enables the learners to reflect upon what they have learned through the WebQuest (Dodge, 2004). These six components combine into an Internet-based inquiry task that students complete either individually or in groups.

WebQuests can be used for several different instructional purposes in the classroom while helping students to acquire and transform knowledge by taking an active role in their learning and by encouraging critical thinking. Vidoni and Maddux (2002) defined critical thinking as thinking that displays mastery of intellectual skills and abilities. Based upon this definition of critical thinking, Vidoni and Maddux (2002) contend that WebQuests provide students with “an opportunity to put critical thinking skills to use” (p. 108). Critical thinking occurs during a WebQuest task because students are able to contextualize learning, form their own opinions about material, interpret material, and pursue individual interests within certain boundaries (Vidoni and Maddux, 2002).

1.1. WebQuests and English Language Teaching

Emerging new approaches in language learning, such as task-based language teaching, enhance communicative interaction and allow learners to be “engaged in trying to communicate content towards the communicative goal” (Ellis, 2000, p. 196). Stoks (2002) also argued that “WebQuests offer good internet-based language learning opportunities because they provide learners with exposure to authentic material, meaningful content and possibilities for real communication in the target language” (p.1).

WebQuest has proved to be a valuable language learning tool for students since engaged in a WebQuest activity, the language learners incorporates a reading-to-writing approach through internet. It has been claimed that technology such as WebQuests can provide opportunities for collaboration and the practice of integrated language skills such as reading, writing and speaking (Blachowicz, Beyersdorfer & Fisher, 2006). WebQuest are claimed to be beneficial for ESL/EFL learners in light of linguistic perspectives include (1) exposure to authentic materials (2) meaningful content and (3) possibilities for real communication in the target language (Simina & Hamel, 2005; Stoks, 2002). Chuo (2007), for example, designed a writing instruction program to investigate the relationship between language learners’ perception of WebQuest use and the direct impact of WebQuest use on writing apprehension among Taiwanese EFL students. She found out that WebQuest group experienced significant reduction in writing apprehension that traditional writing group. Furthermore, she also concluded that students had favorable perception of WebQuest use in writing. Based upon a review of the literature on WebQuest, there is still a need for research on WebQuests and its relation to language reading and writing in EFL. In order to fill this gap, the present study seeks to answer whether WebQuest use had an impact on reading and writing performance of EFL learners.

1.2. The study

The aim of the study was to explore whether or not using WebQuests is effective in enhancing writing and reading performance of EFL students. To answer this question, a total of 34 first-year ELT students enrolled in a Turkish university participated in the study. They ranged in age from 18 to 19 years old. One class, as the experimental group (consisted of 13 students, 4 male and 16 female), used WebQuest tasks. Other class, as control group (consisted of 14 students, 2 male, 13 female), received traditional teacher-led reading/writing tasks.

The researcher integrated the appropriate WebQuests into the syllabus. The WebQuests were not very different in terms of grade levels, topic or level of difficulty. 4 tasks from Dodge’s *Matrix of WebQuest Examples* were adopted, and integrated into course syllabus for the experimental group.

The WebQuest lessons were implemented during the first four weeks (four classes, 60 minutes each). The first WebQuest used was Viva Las Vegas / New York City. This WebQuest was for EFL students. They are going to make travel plans for Las Vegas and New York city and compare them; then, decide which city they are going. The second WebQuest was Take-off into Space. The students were members of an enterprising team that will be leading a guided tour of a specific planet. The third WebQuest was Dictionary, Schmictionary in which students evaluated four online dictionary sites, wrote a memo to the principal recommending one for school and design a poster encouraging peers to use it. The last WebQuest used in the course was Splish! Splash! Can I Take a Bath? which was developed as an introduction to an interdisciplinary unit on water. Students worked in partners to investigate a water shortage problem in their community and in the process make a presentation to town council advocating water conservation. The control group also read passages on the same topic.
The data came from reading performance test, writing performance test and reading and writing scores. The reading performance test was given as pre-and post-test in which students were asked to read a passage and answer reading comprehension questions. Another test, which was on the same topic was given as the post-test at the end of the semester. The writing performance test consisted of pre-test and post-test was given where students performed a writing task.

The variables WebQuest use, reading performance and writing performance were analyzed via descriptive statistics and independent sample t-test.

2. Results and Discussion

Prior to beginning the research, a reading pre-test were given to the students to test their prior knowledge of WebQuest topics. The mean score for the WebQuest group on the pre-test was 60.77 and 62.64 for the traditional group. Thus, both groups were considered homogeneous before the course. An independent samples t-test was used to determine if there was a difference in their prior knowledge of the WebQuest topics. There was no statistically significant difference in the reading scores of the two groups before the research (t(25) = .855, p = .401). The average scores indicated that the students had the same level of reading knowledge. Using an independent samples t-test, the scores for the reading post-test were also compared. The mean for the WebQuest group was 77.31, and 59.64 for the traditional group. There was a statistically significant difference in the scores (t(25) = -7.62, p = .000). The WebQuest group scored higher on reading post-test than did the traditional group. This statistically significant difference was an indication that the students benefited academically from the WebQuest use in reading.

<p>| Table 1: independent sample t-test results for reading performance scores |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
|                             | Reading Pre-test            | Reading Post-test           |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>n</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>df</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>62.64</td>
<td>6.75</td>
<td>.855</td>
<td>.401</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>59.64</td>
<td>4.73</td>
<td>-7.62</td>
<td>.000*</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WebQuest</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>60.77</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>77.31</td>
<td>7.14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The obtained pretest scores showed homogeneity of the two groups. At the end of the course, even though both groups showed improvement in their reading performance, experimental group performed better than the control group. The students in the control group were receiving traditional reading instruction and doing traditional reading comprehension exercise. This may increase the anxiety and lower the motivation and apprehension of the students in reading. This result supported the findings of Lipscomb (2003) and Snider and Foster (2000) such that the WebQuest learning environment was beneficial to ESL/EFL learners for improving their reading.

A writing pre-test was also given to the students to test their writing performance before the research started. The mean score for the WebQuest group on the writing pre-test was 63.46 and 61.57 for the traditional group. Results indicated that the writing pre-test scores were not significantly different from one another. An independent samples t-test was conducted to analyze the difference between the writing pre-test scores of the traditional and WebQuest group. There was no statistically significant difference in the writing scores of the two groups before the research (t(25) = -.938, p = .357).

The post-test scores were also not significantly different from one another. The mean score for the WebQuest group on the pre-test was 77.46 and 77.36 for the traditional group. At the conclusion of the course, all students took the writing post-test. The scores for the WebQuest group were compared to the scores for the traditional group using an independent samples t-test. The results indicated that there was not a significant difference in both groups’ writing scores. This statistically non-significant difference (t = (25) = -.026, p = .980) is an indication that the students did not benefit academically from the WebQuest use in writing.
Table 2: independent sample t-test results for writing performance scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instruction</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>df</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>61.57</td>
<td>5.74</td>
<td>-.938</td>
<td>.357</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>77.36</td>
<td>9.07</td>
<td>-.026</td>
<td>.980</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WebQuest</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>63.46</td>
<td>4.61</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>77.46</td>
<td>12.01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The finding of a non-significant result of writing performance might be explained because of writing difficulties of EFL learners. The students in both groups had limited vocabulary and structure to write a fully-developed paper on given topics. This finding contradicted Chuo (2007) finding that students in the WebQuest writing class improved their writing performance significantly more than those in the traditional classroom writing class.

3. Conclusion

Research studies proved that technology and Internet-based resources has impacted language instruction. One of these resources, WebQuest, was effective learning tools through which language learners use multimedia and computer-generated web-based instructional activities (Goodwin-Jones, 2004; Marco, 2002; Snider and Foster, 2000). Several implications could be drawn from the results of this study. The use of WebQuest in EFL reading instruction improved reading comprehension; therefore, integrating WebQuest into reading curriculum increases reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition. To cope with the demands of technological developments in education, EFL/ESL teachers might be encouraged to integrate WebQuest in their reading instruction to supplement vocabulary and reading performance of their students.

On the other hand, the use of WebQuest did not increase EFL learners’ writing skills. These students were used to linear essay writing in which they followed certain steps such as introduction, development and conclusion. The writing practice in WebQuest class was totally different such that students first surfed the Web materials, found the material and then carried out various types of writing tasks through Web exploration. Teachers, therefore, should provide writing input that “were rich in quantity and relevant and elaborate in quality for the intended study content” (Chuo, 2007).

References


