Advantages of Using Learning Management System (LMS) in Teaching Writing Skill in Adult English Classes in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract: It is undeniable that technology has changed our ways of living. These changes are dramatically increasing in different parts of our life day by day. The pace of using technological advances in an academic setting is faster than others. For instance, In Saudi Arabia internet usage has attracted much attention in education. This matter is more noticeable for adult learners of the English language in the country. Among the four skills of writing, reading, listening and speaking. writing is considered as the most challenging skill for the Saudi English learners. Literature has numerous studies discussing different online programs and applications for different skills, including learning how to write in English in Saudi Arabia. However, the problem is that none of them focuses on Learning Management System, LMS, to improve adults' writing skill in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate potential advantages of LMS on writing skills of adult English learners in Saudi Arabia. It can be predicted that in upcoming years, we, as teachers or educators, will be more skillful in writing since LMS is on the fast track to improve these skills.

Keywords: Learning management system- writing skill- English language- adult education- Saudi Arabia.

مزايا استخدام نظام إدارة التعلم في تدريس مهارة الكتابة في فصول اللغة الإنجليزية للكبار في المملكة العربية السعودية

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المستخلص: لا يمكن إنكار أن التكنولوجيا قد غيرت أساليب حياتنا. تتزايد هذه التغييرات بشكل كبير في أجزاء مختلفة من حياتنا يومًا بعد يوم. إن وتيرة استخدام التقدم التكنولوجي في البيئة الأكاديمية أسرع من غيرها. على سبيل المثال، جذب استخدام الإنترنت في المملكة العربية السعودية الكثير من الاهتمام في مجال التعليم. هذا الأمر ملحوظ بشكل أكبر للمتعلمين البالغين للغة الإنجليزية في الدولة. ومن بين المهارات الأربع كتابة، القراءة، الاستماع والتحدث. تعتبر الكتابة من أصعب المهارات بالنسبة لمتعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية السعوديين. يحتوي الأدب على العديد من الدراسات التي تناقش البرامج والتطبيقات المختلفة عبر الإنترنت لمهارات مختلفة، بما في ذلك تعلم كيفية الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية في المملكة العربية السعودية. ومع ذلك، فإن المشكلة هي أن أيا منهم لا يركز على نظام إدارة التعلم، LMS لتحسين مهارات الكتابة لدى البالغين في المملكة العربية السعودية. لذلك، فإن الغرض من هذه الدراسة هو التحقيق في المزايا المحتملة لـ LMS على مهارات الكتابة لمتعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية البالغين في المملكة العربية السعودية. يمكن توقع أنه في السنوات القادمة، سنكون، كمعلمين أو متعلمين، أكثر مهارة في الكتابة لأن LMS يسير على المسار السريع لتحسين هذه المهارات.

الكلمات المفتاحية: نظام إدارة التعلم – مهارة الكتابة – اللغة الإنجليزية – تعليم الكبار – السعودية.

Introduction.

One can rarely separate technology from education these days. After the arrival of computers, the internet, and online programs in human life, education has experienced various changes. The impacts of technology in education has interested many researchers to author academic papers in regards to the most updated changes. For instance, Nomass in 2013 searched about how online websites, emails, instant chats and other programs and applications are used in language learning. He concluded that these online programs are quite helpful to teach different skills in the language. Although he has a very general look at these techniques in teaching language for a case study, there are other papers which study just one specific online program for teaching English. As an example, "Skype and Skype in the Classroom: Options for Language Teaching and Learning" investigates how Skype can be used to teach English (Lee, 2012). Besides all of these successful papers, there is no research on the use of LMS specifically for Saudi adult English students to improve their writing skills.

Problem and Purpose Statement.

Problem:

Saudi Arabia has recently encountered several changes. In terms of education, the country has seen different developments. One of the most outstanding points that differ the contemporary time with the past is the use of English in schools, work places and generally the whole society. Some years ago, Saudi government did not allow to the teaching of English in elementary schools because they thought that it might intervene with students' learning Arabic, their native language. But later, they refuted this idea and so now in all levels of education, from elementary school to university, English is taught as a foreign language (Alrashidi & Phan, 2015).

Just focusing on higher education which deals with adults, there are plenty of professionals either native English speakers or non-native ones, who can teach the four required skills of the language: speaking, listening, reading and writing. In spite of a number of successful students at mastering the four skills, there are some learners who have difficulties in the writing section. According to Javid and Umer, Saudi students have trouble in writing skill because of different matters, including organizing the content and ideas, vocabulary as well as grammar (2014). In the study, it is suggested that there should be more concentration on using modern techniques for teaching writing (Javid & Umer, 2014).

It is undeniable that modern techniques include technological achievements. More specifically, in this time of life that almost all parts of the life are dependent on the online world, it is hard to ignore the internet as the most significant tool to enhance writing skill. During the recent years, there have been much investigation regarding the use of online facilities to teach writing skill in Saudi Arabia. As an example, Dr. Abdelrahman conducted a study in 2013 in which some Saudi university students learnt

writing via dialogue using electronic mailing system. The result of the study indicated that the students taking part in the modern technique of e-mail for writing were far better than those who used traditional techniques (Abdelrahman, 2013). This is just an example of how the internet along with its varied sites, applications and use have facilitated writing skill in the community. Walking through the history of teaching English, especially writing skills to Saudi students, it becomes clear that the literature is full of those examples, but none has enough attention on online LMS.

The idea of online LMS came from the very fact of some popular websites, such as Facebook. In other words, as long as people are being entertained or even informed of different subjects using those online mass medias, there could be some online LMS that is specifically used for teaching writing skill. According to what was advised by Javid and Umer, traditional techniques had better be substituted by modern ones. Living in this century, we have witnessed increasing numbers of online mass media. Every day people have become members and followers of more and more online mass media. Therefore, online LMS, which is more dedicated to educational settings, might be helpful for teaching writing skill to adult students in Saudi Arabia.

Questions of the Study:

This study is concerned to find the answer of the following question:

How can online LMS help adult English learners to improve their writing skills in Saudi Arabia?

In order to answer the above question correctly and accurately, there is a need to find answers for the following questions, as well:

1- What is Learning Management system (LMS)?

2- Who are considered as adult learners?

3- Why is writing skill hard for Saudi students?

4- Which components of writing- organization of ideas, vocabulary, grammar, punctuation or spelling- can be improved using online LMS?

5- How can the result of the study be effective in changing current techniques of teaching English in Saudi Arabia?

Purpose of the Study:

What we seek in the current paper is how LMS, as an online application, can improve the writing skills of our target group, Saudi Arabian adult English learners. This can help the teachers to find improvements in their students' writing skills in the community. Therefore, the research aims at finding the possible solutions of enhancing writing skills of adult students in their English writing skills in Saudi Arabia.

The purpose of the study is to improve writing skills since most of the students in the Saudi community have difficulties in the area. As a result, the findings of the research can assist a large number

of Saudi adult English learners to write their writing assignments in school. Later, they would have fewer problems giving the formal reports in English to their boss if they find a job requiring English skills as a mean of communication in the future. Furthermore, some adult students in Saudi Arabia are dreaming of continuing their education in other countries, in particular English speaking countries. Thus, the result of the study might help them to write their own personal statement to apply for the universities by themselves. After getting the acceptance from the universities, they can be more confident of what they write academically for their teachers and professors.

On the other hand, this study is conducted to achieve a more general purpose which is about language teaching. As noted earlier, Saudi Arabia is on its fast speed lane of changing. So, it is the ultimate hope of the study to open up a new window for using modern techniques of online LMS not only for writing, but also for other skills of English language as well as other languages.

Literature Review.

The second chapter will review the literature pertinent to the use of Learning Management System (LMS) to develop writing skills in Adult English Classes and how this skill helps students to become more fluent with the writing system.

According to Gonye et al (2012), writing skills is of great importance to every language learner. This skill helps students to become more fluent language users. When students become familiar with the writing system of a language, they can comprehend reading and even listening materials better. Although some people believe that the two production skills of a language, speaking and writing, have great impacts on one another, it is proved to be wrong; "This seems to confirm the view that oral fluency does not spontaneously translate into written fluency." (Gonye et al, 2012, p.72). This is why many learners who are fluent speakers feel disappointed in high education while learning writing skills. Fluency in writing skill helps one student to know about vocabulary, grammar, punctuation rules and above all organization of ideas. Each of these elements can assist one to understand a reading or a lecture better. In addition to that, as stated by Gonye et al (2012), besides the importance of what students present in their college or university classes, it is important to know how they present them in written forms to be attractive enough for the readers. Also, they feel discouraged in their technical subjects because for each of them, there are many writing assignments (Gonye et al, 2012).

Moreover, fluency in writing increases the chance of getting proper and desirable career positions (Morreable, Osborn, & Pearson, 2000). Writing, similar to speaking, helps people to create interpersonal relationships. These relationships are critical for better opportunities in their professional lives. Therefore, one of the most significant functions of language teachers should be to have enough attention and concentration on enhancing learners' writing skills.

Traditionally, language learners attend classes specified for writing in which there are blackboards, books and posters to show grammatical points. Teachers in those classes explain tools needed. For example, in the text (Morreable, Osborn, & Pearson, 2000) the teacher asked students to write about a topic in a limited time. Afterwards, all papers were collected and corrected by the teacher using a red pen.

Now, in the technological society, there is a method known as Information and Communication Technology (ICT). The 21st century has brought several changes, but the most outstanding one is using computers and the internet in all parts of human life, including in education (Buabeng-Andoh, (2012). Thus, as it is obvious, more and more English teachers are using ICT programs and applications to improve all skills, particularly writing skills of the learners. Language teachers are trying to use this new method of teaching in order to help students more in enhancing language proficiencies. ICT has shown much progress in students' educational path, much so that many governments have invested a lot of money on the program (Buabeng-Andoh, 2012).

Considering the big impact of information technology in language teaching, schools have adopted new forms of teaching writing skills to students. In contrast to many limitations of traditional classes, at the time of ICT any writing class can run while teachers and students are in different places and time. Academic interactions regarding different aspects of writing between the students and the teacher is not distant. Previous studies have indicated "laudable outcome" using ICT in teaching different skills, including writing (Drigas, & Charami, 2014). ICT has changed the way of teaching writing skills; the traditional face-to- face classes have been replaced by integrated classes and eventually web-based teaching. The most distinguishing point among the three methods of teaching writing skill is the amount of integration of the computer and the internet into the program. In the first program, there was no trace of technological influence; however, in the last one all and every matter depended on technology, in particular online program (Drigas, & Charami, 2014).

Among thousands of online programs and applications, learning management system (LMS) can help students to develop their writing skills. LMS creates the background for high or unlimited interactions between the teacher and the students. LMS allows learners to face continuous learning and interact with several writing resource and materials (Kulshrestha et al, 2013).

In reference to the participants of this research paper, it is understood that learning to write English is a challenging task for Saudi students. The above noted fact is the principle motivating forces to promote writing skills of Adult English learners in Saudi Arabia through LMS. In the following section, there is going to be a short look at writing skills in Saudi Arabia, some computer based tools for language teaching and finally LMS in teaching writing skills.

Writing skills in Saudi Arabia:

Ankawi (2015) mentions and discusses the problems of Saudi students in terms of writing skills from a thought-provoking perspective. He noted some points which in general causes Saudi students to lack enough abilities in English writing skill. Although more time of English classes in Saudi Arabia is for writing and reading, "Saudi students perform extremely poorly in English in Saudi Arabia" (Ankawi, 2015, p.9). This issue is mainly related to the few numbers of English classes for students. Every week, students only take one or two English classes in which teachers have to cover all skills. This lack of time results negatively on the performance of the students when they are required to actually use the language. For instance, a majority of them have problems in writing academically. Organizing ideas, citing properly and using formal language to write academic papers are what most Saudi Students fail to do when they are in foreign countries (Ankawi, 2015). Also, Saudi students do not have the chance to read academic papers or articles in English. Some websites have the option of choosing language, yet many of the students feel more comfortable and faster to directly go through Arabic language.

In addition, the challenge of learning writing skills is mainly because of numerous differences that exist between the two languages, Arabic and English. One of the main reasons for this hardship is that almost all Saudi students do not use English except in their class time and with their classmates and English teacher. In other places, such as home and stores they are more willing and comfortable to use their native language. Relying on several changes in educational purposes, in the recent years, academic authorities have planned and targeted new curriculum regarding writing skill, according to Alam Khan (2011). He also noted that the materials, such as books as well as teachers have faced dramatic changes. However, "writing achievement is below the expectations". (Alam Khan, page, 2011, p.1248).

These challenges are the main reasons of choosing LMS as an action research project. The result of this paper might be the need of an alternative method of teaching writing to adult Saudi learners in English classes.

Computer-Mediated Communication Tools in Language Teaching:

Computer meditated communication or CMC has been into different academic fields for some years. CMC has been defined in several research papers. Among them, the definition brought by Correa (2014) seems to be the most straightforward one as, "any human communication achieved through, or with the help of, computer technology" (p. 146). It is obvious that this computer technology has faced dramatically increasing changes in the last few years. For instance, design, system or even the speed of computers nowadays are not comparable to those of some years ago. This is why CMC has been under dramatic changes during the years. Also, the word CMC was once just used for the device of computer, yet now it has a broader scope, including all devices that could be connected to the internet. For instance, smart phones, tablet and even smart watches are considered as some tools of CMC.

In language teaching, CMC has been able to gain a specific position and attention among both learners and teachers. CMC facilitates the way of communication. There is no limitation for the numbers and frequency of communication among language learners and the teacher. This is important for both speaking and writing. There is nothing that can limit this communication except some personal choices. Some students, or maybe teachers, are not as active as others in online participations. They do not have much imagination and creativity which is the core of activities and practices of CMC (Romiszowsk & Mason).

One advantage of using CMC in writing skill is the chance of accessing all writings in later time. In traditional face to face classes, the possibility of losing papers is high, or at least it is difficult to take it out from an archive. Writing language teachers know how time and energy consuming it is to refer back to a paper of one student's among hundreds or even thousands of them. On the other hand, this archive is more organized and accessible in computers and filing them requires less effort. Therefore, both teachers and students prefer using CMC for keeping track of their writings (Romiszowsk & Mason).

Although in this fast changing world, some learners prefer using pens, pencils and physical papers, CMC has become quite popular among many. This is because in CMC, almost all features, colors and effects of working and typing by hand are given, so the user should not be worried about deleting or adding one or some points. In addition, any online applications require its users to be faster than what they write on papers. In short, the advantages of CMC are multidimensional, as stated by Thompson (2010) "By giving us greater control over information, we, as teachers and learners, can be released from many of the daily mundane tasks in order to pursue more complex tasks, by using the computer as an analytical and synthetic medium." (p.1). The most noteworthy benefit of CMC is "The ability to think, study, participate and initiate conversation without the restrictions of time or place" (Thompson, 2010, P.1). Although these advantages are absorbing to many, they can function as threats to others. Opponents of CMC support face- to-face interactions in traditional classes. What they seek is actual collaboration between the teacher and the students.

From a more specific point of view, CMC has helped students to improve their writings because of the electronic platforms that are available, including forums, blogs, wikis, and shared documents, such as "Google Docs". This gives the chance for students to write as much as they wish and as creative as they would like to. Besides them some social media tools, such as Facebook and Twitter to encourage and develop writing skill. In contrast to those electronic tools and applications, some people are worried about writing in English. In active way of learning to write, includes students start from analyzing the topic, designing the outline, developing the ideas, implementing strategies for good writing and eventually evaluating the whole product (Blake, 2016). This stage requires some levels of cognitive development because it needs the student to think and be active in each stage of the writing process.

This concern of educators in traditional face- to- face a interaction is what makes some people come up with the idea of using various tools available in online LMS. Therefore, among long lists of online tools and applications, LMS is selected to improve educational skills of adult English learners in Saudi Arabia.

Online LMS in Education:

According to Belton & Caul (2004), LMS is one of the most effective systems to let teachers and educators control and manage their tasks. The learning processes in LMS is like a cycle that guides both the teacher and the students to know where to start and where to finish. Although LMS might look a little bit confusing at the first glance, a few sessions after its use and implementation, the students are happy with their learning process. Some of the benefits of online LMS in education can be summarized as follows.

Traditional teachers collect the students' papers at the end of each class. A traditional teacher spends several hours, either at work or at home, correcting and scoring homework as well as providing feedbacks for each assignment. This is a process which is both time and energy consuming; therefore, the teacher in a traditional education setting has no time for searching about some creative classroom techniques or for some more interesting materials. LMS has facilitated the work of teachers as they can tell all students what to do for homework, their assignments and projects, plus their due dates and their requirements online. Also, they can track if students need some help doing them. In other words, they can give feedback on the students' work faster, easier and promptly. This helps teachers to better evaluate learning performance, as stated by Belton and Caul (2004).

Secondly, LMS is a platform of collaboration between students and teachers, students and students, and students and some other people. Although some online educators still miss the face-to-face interactions of traditional classes, it should not be forgotten that LMS, compared with many other online applications, creates the highest possible chance of collaboration besides communication (Belton & Caul, 2004). Thompson expresses that high levels of satisfaction of traditional students is due to students' learning processes which comes from different kinds of classroom communication (2010). So, when in an online education, the same or similar amount of collaboration and communication exists. The authorities should not worry about the satisfaction of using the application. Belton and Caul note that collaboration in LMS is quite unique among many online educational applications which focus on communication, but not on collaboration. Collaborative systems, such as LMS, engage students in almost all steps of their learning and this is exactly the key to success.

Thirdly, according to Belton & Caul (2004), students can join or create different user groups in LMS. Thompson and other supports of traditional face- to- face classes emphasize on students' community. In their belief, students learn better when they can choose their friends or close peers to

discuss the materials with and study with. Online LMS gives high flexibility in choosing and creating groups. In fact, this is the very basic nature of all educational online LMS; to have a variety of user groups. This variation overweighs what is seen in traditional classes. As noted above, limitation is a nature of traditional face- to- face learning settings, while in most of online applications and tools, in particular in LMS, this limitation does not exist at all.

With the reference to the facts having been discussed, in order to improve the writing skills of Adult Saudi students. The target is to use online LMS; therefore, before reaching the conclusion in this paper, it is essential to take a brief look at what previous studies have conducted regarding using online LMS in writing.

Online LMS in Writing Skill:

Mohammad & Hazarika noted that motivation is one of the most challenging aspects of writing skill for Saudi students (2016). This motivation is too low so that Kingdom SA students are not willing to write any papers, including academic, professional or even personal. One part of this low motivation is due to outdated materials that are used in teaching writing. These materials include grammar, vocabulary or writing books and articles. Although there are some changes in using more up-to-date materials in the whole education in Saudi Arabia, these changes need time. In addition, according to Mohammad & Hazarika, students need for the kind of instruction in which they can ask their questions in each step of their writings. As mentioned above, analysis is the first stage and evaluation is the last stage of writing skill. Students lack being in contact with their teachers in traditional classes with two steps. In other stages, including designing students are alone. Therefore, "they cannot achieve what is expected of them" (Mohammad & Hazarika, 2016, p. 106).

Referring back to the benefits of online LMS, many of the potential problems of traditional writing skill in face- to- face classes can be solved, so students can have higher motivation, and can improve their skills. Teacher's availability as well as peers' responses at any time can help students to make sure of what they are doing in their writing process. Also, there are more accessibilities to a variety of materials, so students can refer to the ones that are more interesting for them. This is how online LMS can increase motivation and the ability for Saudi students to learn writing skills.

Conclusion.

Overall, there are more advantages than disadvantages in using LMS to improve the writing skills of adult Saudi English students. LMS is a helpful online application that students can use to improve all skills, particularly their writing skills. The more teachers are familiar with LMS, the better they can use it to improve adult Saudi English students. Also, besides the benefits of LMS in writing skills, the levels of improvement of students' writing skills depends on their motivation, passion and free time, so some

individuals in a group of Saudi English students might develop their writing skills more than others because they have more time, or they are more motivated to write or use LMS. In short, introducing and using LMS in English classes for adult Saudi students at institutes and schools can improve their writing skills.

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