



Online Task-Based Language Teaching Using Google Classroom in Writing Class: How does It Affect EFL Learners' Writing Performance and Attitude?

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Introduction

Writing plays a significant role in language learning. For university levels, writing is required to express ideas and thoughts for academic purposes (Bailey, 2011). Despite its importance, teaching writing for student writers seems to be a complex matter (Cheung, 2016; Hidayati, 2018) and needs more attention from language teachers. This is due to a lot of writing problems faced by EFL learners covering linguistic, cognitive, and affective aspects (Fareed, Ashraf, & Bilal, 2016; Wellington, 2010; Zabihi, 2017). In line with this idea, university teachers are in need of more innovative teaching strategies to solve learners' writing problems and to enhance their writing skills.

A rapid development of internet technology forces language teachers to apply language tools for their teaching (Hockly, 2015). Several studies proved that internet technology promotes language achievement (Hockly, 2016; Sharma, 2008). Currently most learners use smartphones in their daily activities. University teachers, thus, can employ this device to help teach language skills by applying mobile-assisted language learning (MALL). In language learning, many scholars have provided evidence that MALL improves English achievement (Dudeny & Hockly, 2012; Jarvis, 2015; Liu, Zheng, & Chen, 2019).

Prior studies (Baralt & Gomez, 2017; Park, 2012) reveal that most online TBLT strategies are implemented in ESL settings. Only a few studies applied web-based TBLT in EFL classrooms. Moreover, the number of studies which integrate TBLT with Google Classrooms in EFL contexts are very scarce. It is, accordingly, essential to conduct research on the effect of online and face-to-face TBLT strategies on writing performance and attitude among EFL learners. The present study is concerned with the



application of task-based language teaching (TBLT) with different methods: online learning with Google Classrooms and face-to-face learning in teaching writing.

Literature Review

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) considers a task as the central component in language learning (Ellis, 2017). For many years TBLT has attracted many researchers in language learning contexts (Calvert & Sheen, 2014; Long, 2016; Skehan, 2016). TBLT strategy generally consists of three phases, namely pre-task, during task, and post-task (Willis, 2012). Based on prior studies, TBLT enhances learners' language performance (Adiantika & Purnomo, 2018; Jurčenko, 2015). Furthermore, TBLT has been implemented for teaching writing skills (Rahimi & Zhang, 2017) and it has been found that learners' writing proficiency can develop well as teachers apply TBLT strategy for teaching writing.

Online learning is seen as a form of distance learning or distance education through the internet (Bartley & Golek, 2004). Several studies reveal that online learning promotes language learning achievement (Al-Maqtri, 2014; Sharma, 2006). Google Classrooms has become popular in use for online learning due to a free collaboration tool for teachers and their learners. Google Classrooms also facilitates language teachers with online material delivery and task management facilities. Learners may communicate with their peers and teachers online within Google Classrooms and it could enhance learner participation in online settings (Heggart & Yoo, 2018).

Online TBLT refers to giving tasks to the language learners through a Google Classroom tool. A number of studies report that internet-based TBLT enhances language achievement especially for writing skills (Adams, Amani, Newton, & Alwi, 2014; Oskoz & Elola, 2014). In this study, online TBLT focuses on a strategy of teaching writing in terms of online task delivery assisted with Google Classrooms. Online classroom activities are applied during pre-task, during task, and post-task teaching phases.

The objectives of this study are to highlight the effects of online TBLT and face-to-face TBLT on writing performance among EFL learners and to describe their attitude toward online TBLT practices. The learners' attitude, perceived benefits and challenges of implementing online TBLT are also discussed further. This study will attempt to answer the following research questions:

1. Is there any significant difference in writing performance between groups of learners taught through online TBLT classes and groups of learners taught by face-to-face TBLT classes?
2. What is the learners' attitude toward online TBLT activities?

Method

Participants

This study employed an explanatory mixed-methods design. Two classes containing sixty-two undergraduate learners (aged 19-21) participated in this study. A private university in Central Java, Indonesia was used as the research site. A genre-based writing course in fall semester was used to collect the data. All learners had previously taken three writing courses. The two intake classes were assigned into two groups: one taught through online TBLT and another group taught through face-to-face TBLT.

The English teacher (the first author) had been teaching writing courses in this university for more than nine years. Moreover, he taught the two groups at the same period to minimize bias during the intervention stage.

Instruments

To obtain quantitative data, writing tests were used while semi-structured interviews were employed to gather qualitative data. Writing tests were employed to reveal students' writing proficiency before and after getting treatments of online and face-to-face TBLT strategies. Before being used with groups of learners, writing prompts were piloted for information on their validity and reliability. All groups of learners were assigned to write an expository text with given topics. Learners' writing products were scored based on five-criterion on the following aspects of their writing: consisting of organization, content, grammar, mechanics, and vocabulary (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010).

To obtain deeper findings, qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews. The interviews were developed to obtain information on the learners' perceptions of the implementation of online and face-to-face TBLT in writing activities. The interview guide contained five questions related to attitude, benefits, and challenges of online TBLT practices.

Procedures

Research data were collected through qualitative and quantitative procedures. The interventions were conducted in sixteen meetings in the writing course. To collect quantitative data, participants were initially asked to write an expository text on the topic of "Single-sex education". The learners were given sixty minutes to individually produce a text. After that, both groups got interventions with different treatments.

In the online TBLT group, the learners practiced writing in small online groups with Google Classroom facilities. Learning activities were based on the three teaching phases. In the pre-task, the teacher provided the learners activities before starting the task such as introducing interesting topics, essential vocabulary, and grammatical structures. Afterwards, learners were asked to compose a text under the given writing prompts in the during task phase. Groups of learners wrote the drafts, and their peers responded by giving online feedback. In the post-task phase, the learners rewrote expository texts for online task discussions. The class teacher discussed writing aspects focusing on the content, grammar, and vocabulary.

In the face-to-face TBLT group, EFL learners experienced similar activities to the online TBLT group, but the teacher taught and gave tasks to the learners in class. The learners worked together to accomplish the tasks in pairs or small groups. In the last meeting, a writing prompt on the topic: "Death penalty for drug dealers" was given to both groups.

To collect qualitative data, several learners (six persons) were interviewed to explore their perceptions toward the activities of online TBLT. The learners were chosen as representatives based on their participation during online classroom discussions. Fifteen minutes were given to each respondent to express their opinions about their attitude, and the benefits, and challenges of learning writing with online TBLT. The interviews were audio-recorded for further data analysis.

Data Analysis

This study employed two kinds of data analyzed: quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data were processed through statistical measures by employing a t-test. Learners' writing results were scored based on genre-based writing criteria. A statistical program, SPSS 22, was also used. For qualitative data analysis, learners' responses were analyzed using thematic analysis. Learners' statements were transcribed and coded based on themes and indicators in the utterances. All data collected were concurrently analyzed through multiple procedures to answer the research questions.

Results

The descriptive analysis showed that the mean and standard deviations in the online TBLT group were 58.96 and 13.99; meanwhile, the scores of the face-to-face TBLT were 57.96 and 15.19.

TABLE 1

Pre-test Result in the Online and Face-to-face TBLT Groups

Groups	Mean	SD	t	Sig.
Online TBLT	58.96	13.99	.247	.806
Face-to-face TBLT	57.96	15.19		

The results of independent-samples t-test reveal that there was no significant difference in pre-test writing results between online TBLT and face-to-face since the significance value (0.806) was higher than 0.05. This means that the learners' writing performance of both groups was equivalent before the interventions.

TABLE 2

Pre-test and Post-test Results in the Online and Face-to-face TBLT Groups

Groups	Mean		SD		t	Sig.
	Pre-test	Post-test	Pre-test	Post-test		
Online TBLT	58.96	74.08	13.99	12.86	39.198	.000
Face-to-face TBLT	57.96	72.08	15.19	16.92	28.753	.000

The results of paired-samples t-test shows that there was a statistically significant difference in writing results between pre-test and post-test scores for the online TBLT group since significance value (0.000) was lower than 0.05. Also, it could be seen from the mean scores of the pre-test (58.96) and post-test (74.08). This means that the online TBLT strategy was effective for enhancing writing performance. Similarly, the face-to-face TBLT strategy was also effective for teaching writing as can be seen from the significance value of 0.000, and the mean score of the post-test was higher than that of the pre-test ($72.08 > 57.96$).

TABLE 3

Normality Test Results in the Post-test

Groups	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Online TBLT	.108	31	.200	.938	31	.122
Face-to-face TBLT	.144	31	.175	.924	31	.054

After being compared to levels of significance, all significance values of normality tests were higher than 0.05 through employing a Shapiro-Wilk test. Table 3 depicts that the data had normal distributions for online TBLT (0.122) and face-to-face TBLT (0.054) groups.

TABLE 4

Homogeneity Test Results in the Post-test

Groups	Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.	
Strategy	Based on Mean	2.491	1	60	.121
	Based on Median	2.167	1	60	.147
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	2.167	1	56.129	.148
	Based on trimmed mean	2.421	1	60	.126

A Levene test was used to reveal whether the data were homogeneous or not. Table 4 showed that all significance values of homogeneity tests were higher than 0.05. This implies that the data in the post-test scores were homogenous with significance values of 0.121.

TABLE 5
Post-test Results between Online TBLT and Face-to-face TBLT Groups

Groups	Mean	SD	t	Sig.
Online TBLT	74.08	12.86	.480	.121
Face-to-face TBLT	72.08	16.92		

The descriptive analysis revealed that scores of mean and standard deviation of the online TBLT group were 74.08 and 12.86, while the scores of the face-to-face TBLT group were 72.08 and 16.92. Table 6 revealed that there was no statistically significant difference in post-test writing results between the online TBLT and the face-to-face TBLT groups since the significance value (0.121) was lower than 0.05. It depicted that there was no significant difference in writing performance between groups of learners taking the online TBLT classes and groups of learners taking the face-to-face TBLT classes.

For the qualitative interview data in this study, a thematic analysis was employed to interpret learners' responses to the interview questions. The data were coded under certain emergent themes of perceptions, namely attitude, benefits, and challenges as seen in Tables 6 and 7.

TABLE 6
Learners' Attitude toward Online TBLT Practices

Perceptions	Coding results
Attitude	Improving motivation
Benefits	Building up interest
	Facilitating material delivery
	Maximizing writing drafts
Challenges	Improving revisions
	Poor participation
	Confusion

TABLE 7
Examples of Learners' Attitude toward Online TBLT Practices

Perceptions	Coding results	Examples of statement
Attitude	Improving motivation	"I was motivated to study because this strategy was new for me." "I had high motivation to write since teacher always gave online feedback on my writing."
	Building up interest	"I was interested in writing activities since I could study at home." "I was keen on learning because of using mobile phones for writing."
Benefits	Maximizing writing drafts	"Peer drafting was easy by Google Classroom due to facilities in it." "Writing drafts was easier because of online discussions with my peers."
	Improving revisions	"Revising my writing was directly done after getting feedback from my teacher and peers. As teacher chose a sample of writing, it could become a good example for whole-class students to revise their writing."
Challenges	Poor participation	"I was lazy to participate in class discussions because teacher did not observe directly the classroom activities." "I do not need to take part actively in class. I only need to finish all tasks given by teacher."
	Confusion	"I was confused to comprehend materials in texts. Teacher never explained clearly during online discussions due to written explanation only." "I felt isolated in writing activities. I needed a teacher in person to clarify certain information in the tasks given."

Discussion

The results of the t-test analysis depicted that there was no significant difference in writing performance between learners taking online TBLT and learners taking face-to-face TBLT. The first finding was shown by the results of the t-test where the t-value (0.480) was lower than t-table (2.000) with a significance value of 0.121. The descriptive test results also revealed that the mean scores were also similar (74.08 > 72.08). This finding supported previous literature (Nguyen, 2015; Vendityaningtyas & Styati, 2018) exploring the effect of online learning and face-to-face learning on writing skills. It revealed that learners had difficulty in sharing ideas during online discussions. Also, working on tasks with online communication was time consuming and burdensome for learners.

Unlike the results of post-test scores, both groups could achieve better writing performance. Writing improvement in the groups of learners taking online TBLT was 15.18 points with a significance value of 0.000. Similarly, there were 14.12 points of writing improvement with a significance value of 0.000 in the groups of learners taking face-to-face classes. This idea was in line with several studies investigating the effects of online TBLT with collaborative learning (Bailey & Judd, 2018; Cullen, Kullman, & Wild, 2013) and face-to-face TBLT (Chen, 2018; Sundari, Febriyanti, & Saragih, 2018) on writing performance. Both online and face-to-face TBLT groups could further develop their writing performance by working in pairs or groups on the tasks given by the teacher.

Consistent with previous literature (Andrew, 2019; Ardiasih, Emzir, & Rasyid, 2019), the results also showed that the learners had positive attitudes toward online TBLT practices. Most learners were interested and motivated to learn writing with a Google Classroom tool. They viewed that this strategy provided a flexible time and place for learning. Working on and submitting tasks to their teacher was easy due to mobile facilities.

The results revealed that online TBLT promotes better writing drafts and revisions. This finding supported prior studies (Haro, Noroozi, Biemans, & Mulder, 2019) exploring the effects of online TBLT on writing processes. Learners comprehend writing contents by getting examples and peer feedback from online class discussions. Such activities facilitate understanding about their writing problems related to the texts produced.

This finding also showed that online TBLT had some challenges in terms of poor participation and confusion on the part of the learners. They had problems taking part in online classroom discussions. This was in line with a previous study (Iveson, 2015) which was conducted on the problems of applying the online TBLT strategy. This study found some obstacles, namely that learners are reluctant to participate in class because their peers in groups tend to dominate online discussions. Indeed, classroom interactions are still negotiated and focus more on form rather than meaning.

Conclusion

The results of this study reveal that there is no significant difference in EFL writing performance between learners taught by online TBLT and learners taught by face-to-face TBLT. However, it reveals that online TBLT using Google Classrooms can enhance EFL learners' writing. Online TBLT using Google Classrooms can be an alternative to teaching writing. Although sometimes learners experience confusion and their participation is often poor, most of them have positive attitudes toward the implementation of online TBLT since it supports helping them write better drafts and revisions.

The results are beneficial for EFL learners to comprehend procedures of online TBLT and face-to-face TBLT strategies in writing classes. Learners are recommended to participate actively during both online and face-to-face learning discussions. Also, language teachers need to pay more attention to suitable topics and allocated time when giving online tasks to their learners.

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