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## The Effects of Wikis on Motivation in EFL Writing

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### Abstract

This study presents a review of the literature concerning wiki effects on motivation in English as a foreign language (EFL) learning, as researches on the effects of wikis on writing motivation are relatively new. The paper first discusses the importance of writing in foreign language learning process and writing motivation. Then, after introducing wikis in a broader perspective, it focuses on the theoretical background behind the use of wikis in foreign language learning. Next, the paper reviews the studies on the effects of wikis on motivation in EFL writing, and concludes that wikis can be effectively used as a tool to improve motivation in EFL writing, while it underlines that the number of studies on the issue is fairly limited.

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### 1. Introduction

Language skills can be considered as receptive and productive. The receptive skills are listening and reading, as learners do not have to produce language, and receive comprehensible input. On the other hand, speaking and writing are productive skills which learners need to produce spoken and written language to communicate. In other words, as Savignon (1972) describes, communicative competence is *the ability to function in a truly communicative setting – that is, in a dynamic exchange in which linguistic competence must adapt itself to the total informational input, both linguistic and paralinguistic, of one or more interlocutors* (p.8). As one of the productive skills, writing means to express one's knowledge, ideas, plans, comments, feelings in written language, as Lenneberg (cited in

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Brown, 2000; 334) mentions:

Human beings universally learn to walk and to talk, but that swimming and writing are culturally specific learned behaviors. We learn to swim if there is a body of water available and usually only if someone teaches us. We learn to write if we are members of a literate society and usually only if someone teaches us.

Writing is usually taught in the form of a set of practices in schools or other environments (Myles, 2002), since today there is a growing trend of using writing as a productive skills in language education. Moreover, according to Çakır (2010), writing can help to control learning process, decide students' level of knowledge, consolidate the vocabularies and patterns which students learned, identify errors, teach punctuation, improve language competence, think in a creative way, transfer the information from short-term memory to long-term memory and transform the students competence to performance. To be able to perform well in writing, learners need to have an impetus to write. In this sense, motivation is an important concept related to learners' writing. According to Hashemian and Heidari (2013), learners with positive attitude towards writing have better performance in second language writing than the learners with negative attitude. Silva and Nicholls (1993) discovered that adult college learners' perceptions about the meaning of writing well were closely related to their intrinsic motivation. Motivation is generally defined as a *force, stimulus, or influence* that moves a person or organism to act or respond (Dilts, 1998). Kleinginna and Kleinginna (1981) defined motivation as *an internal state or condition (sometimes described as a need, desire, or want) that serves to activate or energize behavior and give it direction*. Gardner (1985) explained two types of motivation; the *integrative* and the *instrumental*. The former focuses on language learners' desire to communicate and interact with the members of the target language. This desire may include even becoming a member of the target culture or being assimilated. The latter focuses on more pragmatic reasons such as getting a better job, a higher salary or passing an examination (Gardner, 1985). On the other hand, Deci and Ryan (1985) mentioned about two types of motivation, *intrinsic* and *extrinsic*. Intrinsic motivation is defined as *the doing of an activity for its inherent satisfactions* (Ryan & Deci, 2000: 55), whereas extrinsic motivation is a construct that pertains whenever an activity is done in order to attain some separable outcome (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The level of motivation which learners have towards writing may affect learners' writing performance in a positive way. The more learners are interested in the subject, the better performance they have (Albin et al., 1996). Learners who have a considerable degree of motivation use writing as a powerful means of communication. Motivated learners have considerable self-confidence about writing (Boscolo & Gelati, 2007). Wiki, derived from the Hawaiian language, is a web page that can be viewed and modified by anybody who has a computer and internet connection. They permit group collaboration across the Internet and provide users with both author and editor functions (Kavaliauskienė, 2010). There are a lot of advantages of using wikis in education. They constitute an ideal tool for supporting the increasing amount of collaborative work done by learners (Doolan, 2006; Wheeler et al., 2008). They can work from anywhere and are able to contribute them at any time, which means that they are not limited to class sessions or the school day (Soloman & Schrum, 2010). According to Yadegaridehkordi et al. (2013), "*It is simply means that knowledge creation and ideation, which are the formation of new idea and knowledge through interactions between human minds, is the most important part of collaborative learning process.*" (p.293). Currently, wikis are used as powerful collaborative means of communication to assist students writing process.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

This section gives brief information on the theoretical framework on wikis as a tool for foreign language learning. Some of the theories which form the basis for wikis in language learning are going to be introduced in the following section. These theories are *constructivism, collaborative learning, situated cognition, autonomous learning* and *self-determination theory*. *Constructivism* claims that knowledge is not passively received but is actively constructed by the learner (Wheatley, 1991). In other words, individuals construct the new knowledge correlated with their prior knowledge. Social constructivism is, on the other hand, based on the social interactions among learners along with a personal critical thinking process (Kalina & Powell, 2009). Related to the social constructivism, the computer-based interactive environments offer the interaction which supports learning. Being

independent of time and place, learners can work with each other, and interact and collaborate with their tutors and classmates (Istifci & Kaya, 2011). By using wikis, students actively involve in the learning process and construct new knowledge in a social environment. *Collaborative learning* is a process in which learners work in small groups and help each other to learn (Açıkgöz- Ün, 1996). They construct the new information collaboratively. It aims at giving importance to various individuals who are interested in learning something not as separate learners but together (Dillenbourg, 1999). The role of the teacher is to monitor the learning process. Students need to acquire the information through social interaction with their peers. Students review and criticize each other's writing performance through wikis, which enable students to collaborate with each other actively. In *situated cognition*, according to Lave and Wegner (1990, 1991), learning normally happens during an activity that occurs in a context and a culture. It means that students acquire knowledge and learn new skills in specific contexts. The main point here is the role of culture and context. Students may become more interested in the topics which are more related to their life and culture. It is important to choose more authentic subjects. By writing on the real life situations, students' motivation may greatly be increased. Wikis may help to improve motivation if the topics for the project are chosen appropriately. According to Deci and Ryan (1991) *autonomy* refers to *being self-initiating and self-regulating of one's own actions* (p. 327). Autonomous learning, first developed by Holec (1981), means that students are responsible for their own learning. They have their own plans according to their learning needs. Moreover, students acquire knowledge actively, and then they become independent of teachers. In education, with using of wikis, autonomous learning gives opportunity to students to act individually within a social group. Finally, *self-determination theory* (SDT) is related to the learners' autonomy. According to SDT, humans have three basic psychological needs; autonomy, competence, and relatedness that must be satisfied in order for growth and well-being to be achieved (Fortier et al., 2009). SDT mainly focuses on the processes through which a person is motivated with the aim of acquiring new behaviors. It asserts that the feeling of autonomy is critical for internalization of knowledge. Wikis help to gain new information individually, the students hereby have both independency and social relatedness. Wikis help to construct new information actively, while constructing new information, learners work independently, which refers to the autonomous learning. They satisfy their basic psychological needs. In addition to independency, wikis are also considered as useful tools for fostering collaboration and cooperation among learners. They motivate students to think individually, as well as becoming a team member at the same time.

### 3 Studies on wiki effect on motivation in writing

Although preliminary studies on writing were not mainly focused on technology, and there has been a growing tendency on technology-based writing researches among scholars, fairly limited number of studies appeared on the effect of wikis on writing motivation. This section reviews the studies focused on the effect of wikis on writing motivation. The results of the studies reached positive results in terms of the effect of wikis on motivation in foreign language learning. First, Li et al. (2012) conducted a research on writing in Chinese among 59 primary four Chinese students using a *Wiki-based Collaborative Process Writing Pedagogy* (WCPWP). It investigated students' writing process and their performance on a wiki. The results revealed that students perceived WCPWP was useful in improving writing motivation and group interactions. Second, in their research, Ducate et al. (2011) examined three different wiki project (micropedia, branching story and prereading) in three different foreign language classes (French, Spanish and German) with the aim of investigating the type of collaboration which wikis improve and students' perception about this subject. Results showed that there is a positive effect of wikis on learners' motivation to use the foreign language. Third, research demonstrated that wikis have a great role to overcome negative feelings towards writing. For example, Nakamaru (2011) investigated ESL students at a community college that is a part of larger urban university system. Her first aim was to make a connection with students to new classroom experience, stimulating their motivation to participate in the course actively. Another aim of the study was to take advantage of the collaborative nature of the medium to facilitate interaction and creativity. The last aim was to take advantage of connectivity of the medium. At the end of her research, she found out that wiki was an ideal environment for documenting and sharing the collective work of a group of students over the course of a semester.

## 5. Conclusion

This study concluded that wikis are useful tools in terms of motivation in EFL writing. In other words, wikis contribute positively to collaboration and cooperation, as they are powerful, collaborative tools for stimulating writing. On the other hand, as the number of the studies on motivation in foreign language writing is fairly limited, it is nearly impossible to draw conclusions on the effect of wikis on writing motivation. However, some practical recommendations can be made in the scope of the results reviewed. First, teachers should use wikis and channel the potential of wikis into their teaching practices to motivate their students regarding writing activities. By this way, it will be possible to increase learners' motivation level in writing process. Second, learners should be well informed about how to use wikis and be familiar with their functions in writing activities, whereas the process should be monitored carefully by the teachers. To be brief, language learners and teachers should be aware of the use of wikis as a learning environment to foster writing motivation that still seem a problematic area. As a final note, further research on the use of wikis in writing classes is necessary as the number of studies on the issues is fairly limited. Future research should focus on how learners and teachers perceive wikis as a tool for increasing motivation and how wikis affect their motivation levels.

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