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Using Internet in Written Production in English Language Classroom

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SUMMARY

Writing is a means of conveying information by recording spoken language through a conventionalized system of graphic signs, but it is also a thinking process that needs conscious intellectual effort. It differs from speaking in the sense that it demands knowledge of a more grammatically complete and verbally rich language. Reading plays an important role in the acquisition of such knowledge. However, there are other methods for improving one's writing skills as well. One of those is the usage of the Internet. However, even though Internet allows unprecedented access to information, it does not mean that its usage is necessarily effective for the learner. Teachers need to be well acquainted with the ways of using the Internet in an English classroom, as well as with its pros and cons. Furthermore, in teaching and practicing the writing skills through the Internet, error correction plays an important role. Every student makes mistakes and teachers should lead their students to the right path providing them with proper corrective feedback.

The aim of this research was to find out whether the usage of the Internet in English language classroom affected the quality of students' written production. No significant difference was found between two groups of participants, that is, the participants do not reach better results when using the Internet. However, the limitations of the research, students' negative attitude towards writing essays, and the fact that students were not graded for their work must also be taken into account.

KEY WORDS: writing, Internet, corrective feedback, English as a Foreign Language

SAŽETAK

Pisanje je sredstvo prenošenja informacija bilježenjem govorenog jezika uz pomoć opće prihvaćenog sustava grafičkih znakova, ali je ono također i misaoni proces za koji je potreban svjestan itelektualni napor. Razlikuje se od govorenja utoliko što zahtjeva znanje jezika koji je gramatički potpuniji i verbalno bogatiji. U usvajanju toga znanja, čitanje igra važnu ulogu. Ipak, postoje i druge metode poboljšavanja vještine pisanja. Jedna od njih je korištenje interneta. Međutim, iako internet pruža pristup mnoštvu informacija, to ipak ne znači da je njegova uporaba nužno korisna za učenika. Učitelji trebaju biti dobro upoznati s načinima korištenja interneta u engleskoj učionici, kao i s njegovim negativnim i pozitivnim stranama. Nadalje, u poučavanju i vježbanju vještine pisanja uz pomoć interneta, ispravljanje pogrešaka igra važnu ulogu. Svaki učenik pravi pogreške, a učitelji bi trebali voditi svoje učenike na pravi put pružajući im relevantnu povratnu informaciju o njihovim pogreškama.

Cilj ovog istraživanja bio je saznati utječe li uporaba interneta u nastavi engleskog jezika na vještinu pisanja kod učenika. Razlika među dvjema grupama ispitanika nije značajna, tj., ispitanici nisu postigli bolje rezultate koristeći internet. Ipak, ograničenja se istraživanja, negativni stavovi prema pisanju eseja i činjenica da učenici nisu bili ocjenjeni za svoj rad, također moraju uzeti u obzir.

KLJUČNE RIJEČI: pisanje, internet, ispravljanje pogrešaka, engleski kao strani jezik

1. INTRODUCTION

Internet-based technologies have evolved and been applied to language learning for almost two decades. Since the Internet allows unprecedented acces to information, it can be a useful tool in teaching writing to learners of English. Possibilities are numerous, but it is on the teacher to learn about them and apply them appropriately in class. Furthermore, in order for learners to acquire the needed knowledge, the role of corrective feedback is also significant. Teachers have to know which approach to choose in error correction so as to give learners a clear direction in their writing skill development. This research attempted to explore whether the usage of the Internet in the English language classroom affects students' writing.

The first part of this paper provides a theoretical framework for the problem studied. First, the skill of writing in general, and development of written communication skills in an English classroom are discussed. Then, the concept of the Internet and its features are explained. The history of applying Internet-based technologies to language learning is summarized, and a recent taxonomy of the Internet-based technologies in language curricula presented. Implications of using online technology and corrective feedback in second language writing are also discussed. Lastly, previous studies are briefly summarized in order to provide the information about recent findings on the topic. The second part of the paper reports on the experiment carried out in order to explore the benefits of using the Internet. The aims, research questions, participants, instruments, and procedure of the research conducted in the Language Grammar School in Osijek are presented and the results are discussed.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. WRITING AND DEVELOPING WRITTEN COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN AN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

Writing, or script, is "a means of recording spoken language through a conventionalized system of graphic signs" (Bussman, 2006: 1294). It is a means of conveying information in this sense, but it is also "a process of exploring one's thought and learning from the act of writing itself what this thoughts are" (Zamel, as cited in Boughey, 1997: 126). White and Arndt (1991: 3) emphasize that writing is a "thinking process that needs conscious intellectual effort, and cognitive skills". It is different from speaking because in speaking, we tend to leave out some elements which are obvious from the context (Davies and Pearse, 2008). If we did not do this, spoken communication would include many unnecessary words and would take up much more time than it normally does. In this sense, the written language is more grammatically complete. The reason for this is that readers, unlike listeners, do not have tone of voice, facial expression, gestures, or a real situational context which would help them understand messages (Davis and Pearse, 2008). Boughey (1997) similarly states that speakers and listeners prompt each other by providing or questioning links between propositions, and in doing so they help each other to construct a meaning which may not be completely shared. In other words, a written text needs to create its own context and make the references and connections of the messages clear through the language only (Davies and Pearse, 2008). This is why the sentences have to be more grammatically complete and often longer than those spoken, and a greater range of vocabulary and the use of grammatical structures that rarely occur in speech are needed. However, the fact that readers and writers can take their own time compensates for this greater complexity; writers can plan, and then edit and correct early drafts of a text, and readers can reread passages which they did not understand at first (David and Pearse, 2008). Similarly, Hedge (1998) emphasizes the view of writing as the process of "thinking" and "discovery", which involves a number of activities, and concludes that a piece of writing is the result of a series of complicated cognitive operations.

Writing is the linguistic skill which is probably the least used by most people in their native language – even in the most "advanced" societies a significant percentage of the adult population writes with difficulty (Davies and Pearse, 2008). Good writing skills usually

develop from “extensive reading, some specific training, and a good deal of practice” (Davies and Pearse, 2008: 96).

According to Davies and Pearse (2008: 96), writing involves the following basic skills: (1) handwriting or typing; (2) spelling; (3) constructing grammatical sentences; (4) punctuating. At higher levels, it involves cognitive skills such as: (1) gathering information and ideas relevant to the topic, and discarding what is irrelevant; (2) organizing the information and ideas into a logical sequence; (3) structuring the sequence into sections and paragraphs; (4) expressing the information and ideas in a written draft; (5) editing the draft and writing out a final text. Of course, the latter five skills are necessary only for formal writing, whereas in informal writing (such as informal letters), we may write as if we were speaking, writing the ideas as they come to us.

2.2. WRITING ACTIVITIES AND THEIR AIMS

Writing in an English language course can be done for different purposes. The aim of the most common type of writing practice is “to consolidate the learning of functional or grammatical items” (Davies and Pearse, 2008: 96). Raimes (1983) also supports this claim by stating that writing reinforces the grammatical structures, idioms, and vocabulary that the teachers have been teaching their students. For example, learners could be given sentence completion exercises or a guided composition which would require the writing of several examples of comparatives after they have been presented and practiced orally. This can be useful to clarify the grammar, to provide a modification or change of activity in a lesson, as well as to give extra practice outside the classroom as homework (Davies and Pearse, 2008). Other pedagogical purposes for teaching writing, apart from teaching for reinforcement, according to Raimes (1987) are: purposes of training (similar to writing for reinforcement but it differs in that it is not limited to the reinforcement of grammatical structures), imitation (using models of content or form as a stimulus for writing), communication (when emphasis on accuracy and patterns is shifted to a greater awareness of the importance of the writer’s purpose and audience for writing), fluency (emphasis on content as well as on accuracy), and learning (all the writing activities in this sense are seen as a way to learn a language as well as to learn more about the subject matter being written about).

Furthermore, another type of writing practice is intended to develop higher-level writing skills, which means the ability to “do the writing tasks in intermediate and advanced proficiency

examinations, and to do real business and academic writing" (Davies and Pearse, 2008: 97). This does not mean that work cannot be started at lower levels; quite the opposite. It can even be combined with writing which is for the most part intended to consolidate grammar.

Davies and Pearse (2008) in their book provide a couple of examples of writing tasks: (1) parallel compositions (teachers give learners model sentences on the basis of which they need to be able to write the same sentences, e.g. in the Present Simple tense, on a different topic); (2) parallel letters (teacher give learners a letter to read and ask them to write a reply to it by following the given format); (3) picture compositions (learners should tell a simple story illustrated by a sequence of pictures).

In order to be sure as to how to organize writing activities, teachers should be aware of the stages of the writing process, and be able to go through them appropriately. These are, according to Hedge (1998): (1) composing; (2) communicating; (3) crafting; (4) improving; and (5) evaluating.

Furthermore, Raimes (1983) provides seven basic questions which can help teachers in planning their writing classes. In order to make a good writing class and help the learners progress in their writing skills, special attention should be paid to these. The questions are the following: (1) How can writing help my students learn their second language better?; (2) How can I find enough topics?; (3) How can I help to make the subject matter meaningful?; (4) Who will read what my students write?; (5) How are the students going to work together in the classroom?; (6) How much time should I give my students for their writing?; and (7) What do I do about errors?

To progress in their writing skill, intermediate learners need the same kind of practice as young native speakers. They need to read plenty of examples of good descriptive, narrative, and discursive writing (Davies and Pearse, 2008). They also need to develop the higher level skills listed in the text above. As Hedge (1998:5) says, effective writing combines the following things: "the organization and development of ideas and information; the accurate meaning which cannot result in ambiguity; and a careful choice of discourse devices, and vocabulary to create a kind of writing which is appropriate to readers".

Attention should be directed first towards general organization and clarity (Davies and Pearse, 2008). The correction of grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation errors should be dealt with separately, as will be discussed further in this paper. The main purpose of writing should be seen as achieving effective communication, and not just producing correct English, although, of course, reasonably correct English is one element of effective communication (Davies and Pearse, 2008).

However, teachers should not only be evaluators. They should also be assistants to students and help them to use or extend their knowledge in writing and make sure that the text is effective in relation to purpose (Tribble, 1996).

2.3. THE INTERNET AND ITS FEATURES

According to the Oxford Dictionary (2009), the Internet is "a global computer network providing a variety of information and communication facilities, consisting of interconnected networks using standardized communication protocols".

There is no agreement as to the exact date when modern Internet came into being, but it is generally accepted that the origins date back to the 1960s when the United States government commissioned to build communication via computer networks, even though they were not the Internet (Peter, 2004). It is reasonable to say, however, that the modern Internet came into being in the early to mid-1980s. From that point on, it has experienced decades of sustained exponential growth (Peter, 2004). Figure 1 shows growth of the Internet from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s:

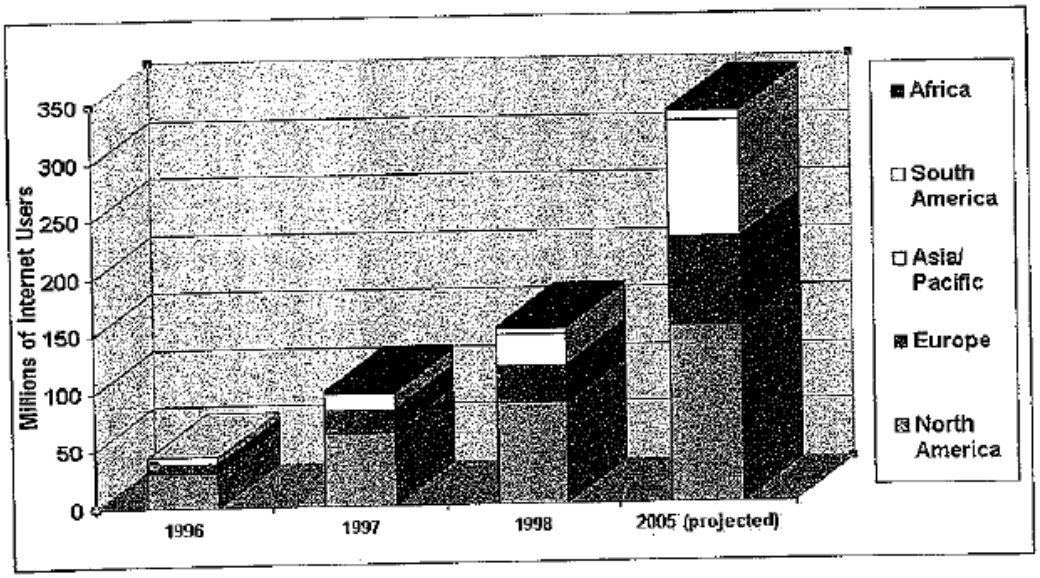


Figure 1: The growth of the Internet (Warschauer et al., 2000: 2).

The Internet offers many different ways of communicating and exchanging information. For the most part, though, they can be categorized as *asynchronous computer-mediated communication*,

synchronous computer-mediated communication, and *hypertext* (Warschauer et al., 2000). (see Table 1)

Computer-mediated communication (or CMC) refers to communication that takes place via networked computers. Asynchronous CMC refers to CMC that takes place in a delayed fashion which means that the people communicating do not need to be sitting at the computer at the same time. In other words, messages are deposited to be read later. E-mail remains the most popular type of asynchronous CMC.

In synchronous CMC, all participants must be sitting at the computer at the same exact time. Messages are sent instantly, and communication is very similar to that through telephone: it takes place live. As with asynchronous CMC, communication can be either one-to-one or many-to many (Warschauer et al., 2000).

According to Muehleisen (1997), there are a wide range of possible activities using the Internet. She describes four main types of activities and gives suggestions for teachers who wish to try them. These are: (1) surfing the net; (2) using e-mail; (3) doing research; (4) making a class web site. For example, "surfing" can involve a great deal of reading in English, and it can be a pleasurable and effective way of introducing learners to the basic functions of the browser. Reading and writing e-mail in English is more interactive and more challenging than net surfing, and it can be used in many ways, such as making a class e-mail directory, finding keypals (e-mail penpals), etc. Once students have a basic understanding of the Internet, they can begin to use it to actively learn about things they are interested in and to work on assignments for their English class, but also other classes. By making a class web site, learners can share their ideas and/or the results of their research and classwork with the world (Muehleisen, 1997).

In a nutshell, the Internet is a worldwide repository of linked multimedia documents, brought together on the World Wide Web (WWW). The WWW is based on principles of *hypertext*, "a nonlinear, linked, or layered form of information organization whereby documents in a database are connected via *hyperlinks*" (Warschauer et al., 2000: 4). The WWW does not include only textual information and links, but also documents based on graphics, audio, and video. Technically, these documents are referred to as *hypermedia*, but the words *hypertext* and *hypermedia* can be and are used interchangeably. WWW allows unprecedented access to information by computer users throughout the world – it also allows inexpensive international publishing; any classroom with access to the Internet can now publish for free its own newsletter, report, or magazine (Warschauer et al., 2000).

Table 1: Main Internet features (Warschauer et al., 2000: 3).

Feature	Examples	What You Can Do
Asynchronous computer-mediated communication	E-mail Web bulletin boards	Write a message for others to read later
Synchronous computer-mediated communication	Chat rooms Instant messaging Videoconferencing	Communicate in real time with others who are on-line at the same time
Hypertext	World Wide Web	Access and publish multimedia documents with clickable links to other documents

According to Warschauer et al. (2000: 7), there are five main reasons to use the Internet for English teaching:

1. *Authenticity:* Language is most successful when it takes place in authentic, meaningful contexts. The Internet gives students 24-hour access to vast amounts of authentic material on any topic.

2. *Literacy*: The ability to read, write, communicate, research, and publish on the Internet represents important new forms of literacy needed in the 21st century. By combining English and technology in the classroom, you will help your students master the skills they will need for academic and occupational success.

3. *Interaction:* Interaction is the major means of acquiring a language and gaining fluency. The Internet provides opportunities for students to interact 24 hours a day with native and nonnative speakers from around the world.

4. *Vitality:* The Internet can inject an element of vitality into teaching and motivate students as they communicate in a medium that is flexible, multimodal, constantly changing, and connected to their real-life needs.

5. *Empowerment:* Mastery of the Internet increases the personal power of teachers and students. It allows them to become autonomous lifelong learners who can find what they need when they need it and collaborate with others to help construct new knowledge. (see Figure 2)

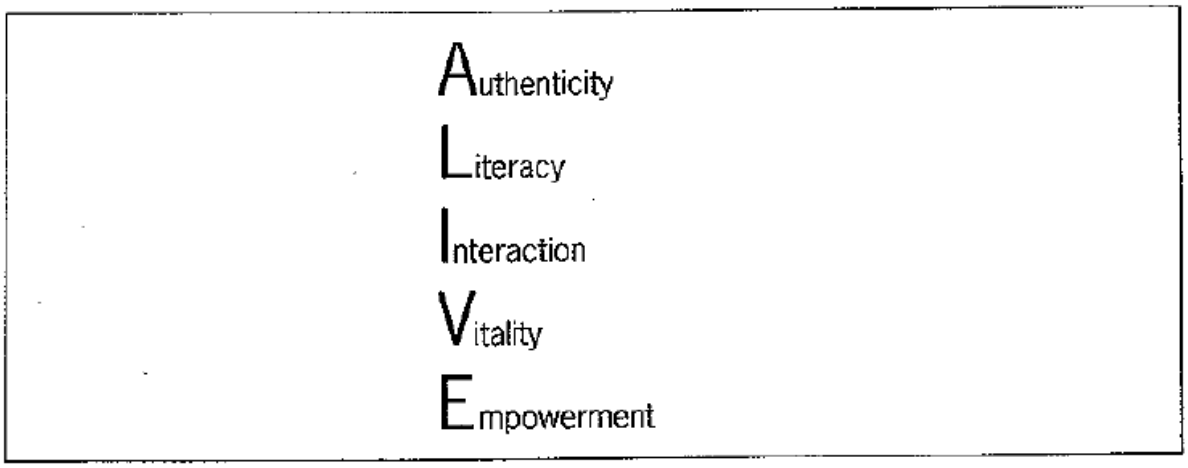


Figure 2: Help your classroom come alive (Warschauer et al., 2000: 7).

This typology confirms Muehleisen's findings from 1997, in which she states two main reasons why the Internet should be used in the English classroom, and which were two main motivations for her to start using the Internet in her English classes. First, by using the Internet, students become exposed to a wider range of English than they usually encounter in their daily lives in their countries. Second, students are also encouraged to use English for pleasure outside of class. These expectations were fulfilled in Muehleisen's (1997) project, and she also discovered many other good reasons for doing such projects. For example, learning to use computers provides a strong intrinsic motivation for learning English. Also, the Internet places English in an international context. Furthermore, Internet projects are interactive. And finally, facilities for using the Internet are often readily available.

2.4. INTERNET-BASED TECHNOLOGIES IN LANGUAGE CURRICULA: A SHORT HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Internet-based technologies (IBT) have evolved and have been applied to language learning for more than two decades now. However, computers have been used for language teaching since the 1960s (Warschauer and Healey, 1998). This history can be roughly divided into three main stages: behavioristic, communicative, and integrative CALL (computer assisted language learning). Each stage corresponds to a certain level of technology as well as a certain pedagogical approach. For example, behavioristic CALL, conceived in the 1950s and implemented in the 1960s and 1970s corresponded to the behaviorist theory, and it featured repetitive language drills. The next stage, communicative CALL, emerged in the late 1970s and

early 1980s, at the same time that behavioristic approaches to language were being rejected. Communicative CALL put focus more on using forms than on the forms themselves. By the late 1980s and early 1990s, critics pointed out that the computers were still being used in an *ad hoc* and disconnected manner, making a greater contribution to marginal rather than central elements' of the language learning process. This caused many teachers to move away from a cognitive view of communicative teaching to a more social or socio-cognitive view, which placed greater emphasis on language use in authentic social contexts (Warschauer and Healey, 1998).

The University of Texas at Austin has showed significant efforts in developing "a network-based pedagogy which re-orients computer assisted language learning (CALL) away from drill-and-practice applications modeled on print-based workbooks and toward a social-interactive model of second-language acquisition" (Slatin, 1998: 19). This pedagogical transformation is closely related to a movement which took place in writing instruction across the United States – a movement in which the Computer Writing and Research Lab (CWRLB) at the University of Texas at Austin has played a leading role. As Slatin (1998) also states, college and university writing programs are increasingly setting up networked computer classrooms, in which student writers as well as their instructors develop both increasing fluency and increasing rhetorical skill in addressing real audience by writing to and for one another over the network.

The software developed by the Division of Rhetoric and Composition, which Slatin (1998) mentions in his essay, which enables this dynamic new practice is the InterChange module of the Deadalus Integrated Writing Environment (DIWE). This InterChange is a very simple program which belongs to the genre of "real-time" conferencing software, meaning that, unlike e-mail, where communication is asynchronous, all InterChange participants are logged in to the network at the same time.

While it might sound as though classes would degenerate into collections of individual working without reference to the larger context of the class, in fact the opposite tends to be true, according to Slatin (1998: 20): "This seemingly paradoxical situation, in which everyone 'speaks' at once while 'speaking' privately, encourages much higher levels of participation than is generally possible in a traditional classroom environment". Slatin (1998) also believes that these InterChange sessions might have a more lasting effect than is possible for the typical oral session in class. He proposes that when the discussion is over, "instructors may print out and distribute complete or partial transcripts, using them as the basis of further written work or oral exercises that take their point of departure from the students' own utterances" (1998: 20). Other benefits such programs could provide include individualization in a large class, the fun factor,

exploratory learning with large amounts of language data, real-life-skill building in computer use and other (Warschauer and Healey, 1998).

When it comes to the taxonomy of all Internet-based technologies used in language curricula nowadays, Liu and Shih-Wei Chen (2007) have developed a novel taxonomy which categorized IBT applied to language learning into three types. Based on differences in locus of control, such IBT applications were classified as: (1) those integrating computer-mediated communication (CMC) tools; (2) those integrating learning management systems (LMS); and (3) those integrating Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) programs into language curricula. In the first category, CMC tools are defined as IBT without any learning content but can be used for engaging the learner in written and/or spoken communications with one or more peers in language curricula. In the second category, LMS, such as Blackboard and WebCT, are defined as virtual classrooms that provide two-way synchronous and asynchronous CMC tools for the instructor and the students, an online space for learning materials, and an online space for students to work collaboratively. CMC also offers assessment tools and resources for students to use at any time anywhere. In the third category, CALL programs are defined as online language-learning lessons such as BBC Learning English and other IBT-supported language-learning websites, tutorials, testing systems, and games in which the user can complete learning tasks alone.

2.5. PREVIOUS STUDIES: ONLINE TECHNOLOGY USE AND CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK IN SECOND LANGUAGE WRITING

In learning English as a foreign language, there are various tools that can help with the general understanding and language acquisition. Two of them, which are going to be the focus of this research, are teacher's corrective feedback and the usage of Internet.

Over the past decades, many studies have dealt with using technology in English language classroom, some of which claim that the Internet can be used in a positive way. For example, Honey et al. (2005) examined current research perspectives and findings on using technology to improve student achievements in order to acknowledge its positive and negative sides, and concluded that positive sides prevail. Zhao (2008) claims that there is a great potential for using Internet to teach English but that, however, there is a lack of direction on how to effectively use it to further education in English. Mahfouz and Ihmeidehb (2009) in their research provide evidence for other ways of using the Internet in the classroom that could help

improve learners writing skills. Their study aimed to investigate Jordanian university students' attitudes towards using video and text chat discourse with anonymous native speakers of English to improve their English proficiency. The results revealed that students' attitudes towards using video and text chat with English native speakers for improving their English language skills were higher concerning speaking skills, followed by listening skills, reading skills, and finally writing skills. Although many researchers think the use of Internet is atrocious for learners, Aharony (2006) does not agree. In his research, he states that a brief encounter with the Internet learning environment cannot change norms or habits, which were acquired in the non-Internet learning environment. There are different ways of learning the English language with Internet as additional equipment and teachers are the ones who should get acquainted with all the benefits and shortcomings of Internet use.

Furthermore, when we are talking about positive and negative sides of using the Internet in the classroom, opinions are, as was stated, divided. For example, Sullivan (1998) claims that computer classroom promotes self-esteem of minority students and it helps them in learning, because generally they feel like outsiders. The conclusion of this study was that students become much more active in classroom because of the computer assisted environment. Students improve their writing and speaking skills, also they improve expressing their opinions on topics begun by others as Raimes (as cited in Chun, 1998: 70) suggests.

Many research papers deal with positive effects of student oriented learning, where students learn the second language using computers and that kind of learning affects students positively, some of which are here presented.

Cohen and Riel (1989) conducted a quantitative study to examine the quality of students' writing in two seventh-grade classrooms. The results indicated that the papers written to communicate with peers on the network were scored higher than those written to the teacher for grades, regardless of the order in which the papers written to peers were written in both classrooms. Furthermore, Lindblom-Yanne and Pihlajamaki examined whether a computer supported learning environment enhanced essay writing by providing an opportunity to share drafts with fellow students and receive feedback from a draft version. The results showed that the students deepened their understanding, elaborated their own ideas, improved critical and independent skills, and developed self-regulative skills. Kern (1995) examined the use of Deadalus InterChange, the application mentioned earlier in the paper, to facilitate communicative language use through synchronous, written classroom interaction. This study found that students had more turns, produced more sentences, and used a greater variety of discourse functions when working in InterChange than they did in their oral discussions. There

were more student-to-student interactions and it resulted in more peer learning, reducing students' reliance on the instructor. Yanli Liang (2010) stresses the importance of integrating information technology, as it is expected to train students' lifelong learning ability and make them know how to apply information technology with the discipline learning. Zhao (2008) states that the potential for using the Internet to teach English in China is significant – students are anxious to make practical use of the Internet, but lack direction in how to effectively use it to further their education in English. This emphasizes the importance of teachers' inclusion in developing Internet-based English writing classes. Another study by Shenghui Huang (1999) investigated the use of the Internet in writing instruction in English as a foreign language. The results indicated positive student attitudes toward the use of the Internet for writing instruction, with access to computers and the nature of assignments seen as significant factors in Internet use. The author recommends that the schools make Internet-access facilities more accessible and reliable, and that teachers modify assignments to take advantage of student enthusiasm and communication and research needs. Furthermore, Alias and Hussin (2002) conducted a quantitative study to investigate the degree of helpfulness of E-learning activities in students' writing processes. The findings revealed that e-mail and online discussion raised the students' motivation, confidence, and reduced their anxiety level. Throughout all these studies, we can notice a few things which recur. One of them is a general positive attitude towards using the Internet technologies in English classrooms, or more specifically, in writing tasks. With all the possibilities that the Internet provides, it definitely can be a useful tool in the classroom. Also, the learners' positive attitude towards using the Internet in class should be taken into account while creating writing tasks. This could be a good motivation which could possibly lead to learners' more successful accomplishment of the aims of writing tasks. One of the most important findings are also the benefits brought by the implementation of the Internet technologies in English classrooms. In short, using the Internet can have cognitive, sociocultural, and psychological advantages, including enhancing writing skills, critical thinking skills, independent skills, self-regulative skills, and knowledge construction, while increasing the students' confidence, their interaction, motivation, and reducing anxiety.

Negative attitudes towards the usage of the Internet in the English language classrooms are generally rare, but they do occur in a couple of studies. For example, Kern (1995) in his work briefly mentions that networked computer environments do have problems, such as giving less attention to grammatical accuracy and less coherence and continuity to discussions. Also, Anderson and Kanuka (1997) conducted a mixed method study to evaluate the output, level of participation, and perceptions of effectiveness and value among participants in a virtual form.

The results revealed that most participants felt that it was more difficult to socialize with other participants than in a face-to-face interaction. They also felt that the quality of information exchanges during the on-line forum did not match the quality of information that would have been exchanged in a face-to-face forum, and they felt more limited in their ability to communicate. Curtis and Lawson (2001) report on a mixed method study they conducted to investigate the extent to which evidence of collaborative learning could be identified in students' textual interactions in an online learning environment. The findings revealed that there is a lack of observable challenge in online interaction because most participants like to share ideas which they agree on, but if an idea threatens their world view they skim over it and do not want to communicate about it.

However, as can be seen, all the negative attitudes concern the actual *interaction* and *communication* of participants through the Internet which occurs in writing. When it comes to writing essays or compositions of any kind, there are almost no negative sides to the usage of the Internet, as long as it is integrated into the class with the right idea and aim.

In a nutshell, the literature review suggests that online collaborative learning can have cognitive, sociocultural, and psychological advantages, including enhancing writing skills, critical thinking skills, and knowledge construction, while increasing participation, interaction, motivation, and reducing anxiety (Mei Lin and Griffith, 2014). The most frequently mentioned advantages are cognitive achievements and the least frequently mentioned advantages are psychological benefits. However, a few studies also reveal that online collaborative learning environments can have cognitive, social, psychological, and technological disadvantages, including mechanical errors, conflict, fear, discomfort, and time wasted on technological problems. Most studies, however, argue for the potential benefits of online collaborative writing (Mei Lin and Griffith, 2014). For example, e-mail was perceived to have helped students in gathering ideas, peer editing, and revising, and forum discussions were perceived to have allowed students to contribute ideas and to stimulate their thinking process. Online discussion was perceived to have enhanced social skills, including social interaction, interpersonal relationships, communication, and collaboration. According to this study, positive psychological effect included reducing threatening feelings and enhancing motivation. Cognitive disadvantages were less prominent, and they included giving less attention to grammatical accuracy and less coherence and continuity to discussions. Social disadvantages included the lack of immediate or appropriate feedback, a sense of detachment which led to misunderstandings and other. Psychological disadvantages included students feeling uncomfortable with communicating

online because of the lack of non-verbal cues, and the difficulty of expressing emotion through text.

The Internet does allow unprecedented access to information. However this does not mean that the use of the Internet is necessarily effective for the learner. Teachers must be aware of a variety of material available for improving students' language skill, and they also need to know how to teach learners to use that material effectively (Warschauer and Healey, 1998). According to Forsyth (2001: 33), the use of an alternative method of delivery such as the Internet only addresses "the reality of education and training when the rigor in the course materials and the possibility for the learners to interact with the teacher are similar to the rigor and interaction in a face-to-face delivery of a course". The position is only supported because face-to-face teaching is seen as the norm. However, "a real expectation for the use of the Internet in course delivery is that, contrary to an expectation that the role of the teacher will diminish with the Internet or computer-based course delivery, the demands of the teachers' time remain the same and may increase" (Forsyth, 2001: 33). The types of demand, however, change. This is where the teacher must change in order to be helpful for the learners. One of the most important and initial changes is that the teacher becomes a monitor and mentor, meaning that the teacher's role becomes less instructional and more supportive. Simultaneously, the Internet changes the role of the learner from one of recipient to participant (Forsyth, 2001: 33).

Here, error correction plays an important role as well. According to Truscott (1996:329), error correction is "correction of grammatical errors for the purpose of improving a student's ability to write accurately". This definition also includes "lexical errors, including word choice, word form, and collocations, and mechanical errors such as spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and typing convention" (Ferris, 2009:42). Teachers are the ones who provide corrective feedback to the students so that they would acknowledge what their errors and mistakes are. When students write essays, teachers should give them corrective feedback concerning various criteria used for grading essays. Corrective feedback is characterized as a contribution to language learning. Feedback can be positive or negative and they both influence further learning, as Ellis (2009: 3) explains "feedback is viewed as a means of fostering learner motivation and ensuring linguistic accuracy". Every student makes mistakes and teachers should lead their students to the right path providing them with proper corrective feedback or error correction. When it comes to essays in particular, the teacher's feedback on individual composition work should take a communicative approach – they should say what they found interesting in the composition and how easy they found it to understand before they start commenting on the errors (Davies and Pearse, 2008). Davies and Pearse (2008) state that it is usually best to limit error correction to a

manageable number of major errors only, and also to get learners to correct their own errors as far as possible. Depending on the individual ability of learners and the complexity of errors, teachers can help learners correct their own work in different ways, such as: (1) simply underlining easy-to-correct mistakes, or even putting an exclamation mark in the margin by very obvious mistakes; (2) for errors which are more difficult to correct, adding a code for the type of error, which the teacher has explained to their learners, such as G for grammar, V for vocabulary, etc.; (3) partially making the correction for the learner to complete; (4) writing in the correction for the very hard-to-correct errors, especially with weaker learners (Pearse and Davies, 2008).

Another approach is offered by Silva (1990) who suggests that the teachers could evaluate the learners' written production by considering what is involved in L2 writing, characterized as "purposeful and contextualized communicative interaction, which involves both the construction and transmission of knowledge" (1990: 18). The basic elements that need to be addressed, according to him, are (1) the L2 writer as an individual; (2) the L1 reader, that is, the audience addressed; (3) the L2 texts in terms of genre, aims, discourse structures etc.; (4) the contexts for L2 writing (cultural, political, social, economic etc.); and (5) the interaction of these elements in a variety of authentic ESL settings (Silva, 1990: 18).

3. EXPERIMENTAL STUDY: USING INTERNET IN WRITTEN PRODUCTION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

3.1. AIMS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The whole research was done with a few ideas in mind. The first one was to theoretically explore the vast possibilities of the Internet use in the English language classroom, and to point out its advantages and disadvantages. The second idea was to see, in a realistic situation, how learners would use the medium, particularly in writing, when given the possibility. The third idea was to find out whether the learners have or lack the motivation for the use of the Internet in the English language classroom, and if there was a possibility it could help them with the difficulties they had with essay writing in general.

Concretely, the main aim of this experimental study was to find out whether the use of the Internet in the English language classroom affects students' writing, and to what extent. In other words, this study tried to examine whether there was an improvement in writing when using Internet access in the classroom and whether Internet influences students' writing significantly. Another aim was to find out whether there was significant difference in writing between male and female participants to see whether gender plays significant role in the interest they take in using the Internet for educational purposes. Furthermore, the research also strived to find out what learners thought about the usage of the Internet, and if they personally found it useful at the given moment. Finally, the research tried to look into the problem of essay writing in English in general, and to point out what learners found to be the most problematic areas of essay writing.

The main research questions were:

1. To what extent does the use of the Internet influence students' writing?
2. What is the difference in writing between female and male participants?
3. What are the students' attitudes towards the use of the Internet in the English language classroom?
4. What are the most problematic aspects of essay writing in general?

3.2. PARTICIPANTS

The anticipated sample consisted of 59 participants. However, due to their inability to complete the task of essay writing, 5 of them were excluded from research. For this reason, the final sample consisted of 54 participants. All participants were students of Language Grammar School in Osijek. All of them were in the third grade, and their English language knowledge is upper-intermediate. They were all taught by the same teacher.

The sample consisted of 42 female participants, which is 77.8% of the sample, and 12 male participants which is 22.2% (see *Table 2* and *Figure 3*). They were divided into two groups, one of which was allowed to use the Internet, and the other, which was not. As it can be seen in *Table 3* out of 54 participants in all, 31 did not use the Internet, which is 57.4% of all participants, and 23 did use the Internet, which is total of 42.6% participants. It is important to mention that 9 out of 32 learners who were allowed to use the Internet in their essay writing chose not to use it at all, and they were, for statistical reasons, observed within the margins of the other group.

Table 2: The percentage of male and female participants.

	Frequency	**Percent**
male	12	22.2%
Female	42	77.8%
Total	54	100%

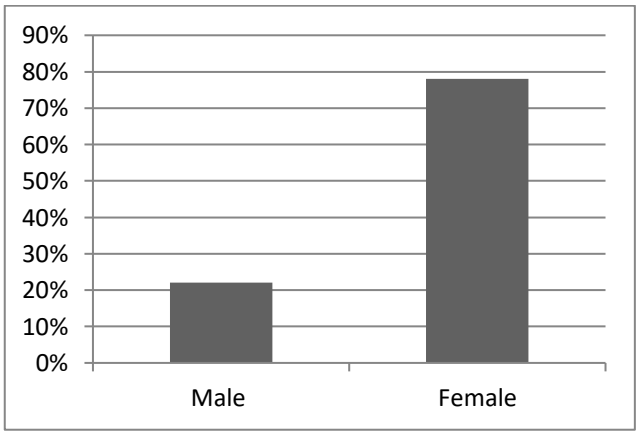


Figure 3: The percentage of male and female participants.

Table 3: Use of the Internet.

	Frequency	**Percent**
No	31	57.4%
Yes	23	42.6%
Total	54	100%

3.3. TASKS, MATERIALS, AND INSTRUMENTS

In order to conduct the research, the learners had the task to write an essay on the following topic: "Animals Used in Experiments for Medical Purposes". The written essay had to consist of introduction, main part, and conclusion. It had to be between 200 and 250 words in length, and all essays which did not meet these requirements were discarded. The essay was graded according to the state exam criteria. This means a certain number of points was given according to the following four criteria: *task completion, coherence and cohesion, vocabulary,* and *grammar.* The criterion *task completion* looked into the development of the parts of the essay, and whether the ideas were consistently supported. The criterion *coherence and cohesion* looked into the flow of ideas, and the use of paragraphing and cohesive devices. The criterion *vocabulary* looked into the range of vocabulary knowledge the student used. Finally, the criterion *grammar* looked into grammatical correctness and the usage of structures and verb forms. For more details, see Appendix 1.

Furthermore, a questionnaire of 5 items was developed and used to differentiate between the students who did or did not use the Internet, and to see, for those who did use it, what the most frequent thing they had to check on the Internet was, as well as if they found it useful in their writing. The questionnaire also looked into the most problematic areas of essay writing, according to the learners. Moreover, it questioned their attitudes on the use of the Internet in the English language classroom. For more detail, see Appendix 2.

3.4. PROCEDURE

Participants were first asked to write a short essay of 200-250 words. The instructions were given orally by the researcher. It was announced that the essay should have three main parts: introduction, body, and conclusion. Introduction had to consist of short general information about the topic, the body had to consist of objective pro and con arguments and the conclusion had to summarize the general idea of the essay and include the students' opinion. Participants were students of two different classes. One class had the access to the Internet, and one class did not, which was the only difference in the procedure. Participants had 45 minutes or one school period for writing essays.

The aim of the second stage was to grade the essays. This was done by two persons in order to avoid subjectivity. Furthermore, these grades were compared and finally a grade which was an average of the two was chosen. The essays were graded by using the four state exam criteria: *task completion, coherence and cohesion, vocabulary,* and *grammar*, using points from 0 to 5. After the essays were graded, they were again analyzed in order to compare the two groups in terms of the errors they made, to see which errors occurred most often in the two groups and altogether, and to look into the most prominent problems in essay writing.

The aim of the third stage was to interpret the questionnaire data. This was done by generalizing the students' answers and assigning them to certain categories which seemed to recur in certain items. For example, the answers to the question "*What was the thing you checked the most on the Internet?"* appeared in the areas which could be put into four categories: *vocabulary/spelling, information, translation,* and *grammar.* For the question "*Do you consider that the use of the Internet was helpful to you?",* all the answers were put into two categories: *yes* or *no.* For the fourth question, "*What is the most difficult thing when you write an essay in the English language?",* the answers were distributed into the following categories: *word count, vocabulary/spelling, ideas/information, cohesion,* and *grammar.* For the last question, *"Do you think that the use of the Internet could be useful in the English language classroom?",* answers are again put into the categories of *yes* or *no.* The students' opinion on why they thought the use of the Internet could or could not be useful in the English language classroom was also looked into, and some examples were singled out as the most significant ones.

Statistical analyses were conducted by means of SPSS software using descriptive statistics, and t-test.

3.5. RESULTS

The results are shown in three parts. The first part provides descriptive statistics of criteria used in grading, and mean values concerning gender achievement. The second part concerns the impact of the Internet usage on the students' writing. The third and the last part provide the information acquired by the questionnaire.

3.5.1. MAIN CRITERIA

Table 4 provides the mean values and standard deviations of four criteria used for grading written essays. Grading criteria presented in this table are: *task completion* with a mean of 2.833, *coherence and cohesion* with the mean of 3.42, *vocabulary* with a mean of 3.64, and *grammar* with the mean of 3.53. The variable *total_essay*, which combines all the above mentioned criteria, exhibits the mean of 3.36. Unlike all the other criteria, whose minimum seems to be 1.00, *vocabulary* has the minimum of 2.00.

Minimum and maximum columns show the strongest and the weakest points of written essays.

Table 4: Mean values of criteria used in grading.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
task completion	54	1.00	5.00	2.83	1.37
Coherence	54	1.00	5.00	3.43	1.21
vocabulary	54	2.00	5.00	3.65	.87
grammar	54	1.00	5.00	3.54	.93
total_essay	54	1.50	5.00	3.36	.91

In order to compare the results of male and female participants on the four criteria, independent t-test was conducted. The results are presented in Table 5:

Table 5: Mean values concerning gender-achievement.

	Gender	N	Mean	SD	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
task completion	male	12	2.25	1.48	-1.072	52	.095
	female	42	3.00	1.31	-1.583	16.194	.133
Coherence	male	12	3.17	1.59	-.841	52	.404
	female	42	3.50	1.09	-.684	14.087	.505
vocabulary	male	12	3.75	1.06	.455	52	.651
	female	42	3.62	.82	.397	15.054	.697
Grammar	male	12	3.83	1.27	1.264	52	.212
	female	42	3.45	.80	.986	13.617	.341
total_essay	male	12	3.25	1.22	-.474	52	.638
	female	42	3.39	.82	-.383	14.020	.708

In the table above, we can see the mean of 2.25 for *task completion* in the male group, unlike the mean of 3.00 which was accomplished in the female group of the participants. For *coherence*, numbers again vary. The mean accomplished by the male group is 3.17, whereas the one accomplished by the female group is 3.50. The criterion of *vocabulary* shows slightly different results. Here, the male group accomplished the mean of 3.75, while the female group accomplished a slightly lower result of 3.62. The criterion of *grammar* again shows a similar difference in the results, the mean of the male group being 3.83, and the mean of the female group of the participants being slightly lower – 3.45. Similarly, the female group accomplished slightly better results on the essay as a whole, with the mean of 3.39, in contrast to the male group who accomplished the mean of 3.25. However, the independent t-test showed, as can be seen in the last column, that the differences are not statistically significant.

3.5.2. THE IMPACT OF THE INTERNET

Table 6 presents the differences between participants with and without access to Internet on the four criteria as well as on the essay as a whole.

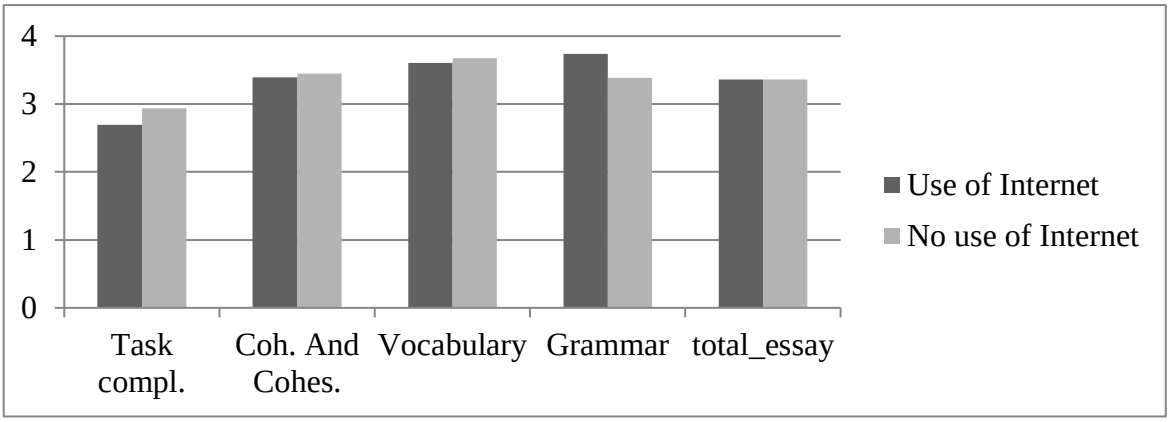


Figure 4: The impact of the use of Internet.

In the *Figure 4* above, the group who did not use the Internet had the mean of 2.94 in *task completion*, whereas the group who did use the Internet had the mean of 2.70. The two groups exhibited similar results on the second criterion, *cohesion and coherence*, The group who did not use the Internet scored 3.45, whereas the group who did scored 3.39. As for *vocabulary*, the group who did not use the Internet scored 3.67, whereas the one that did scored 3.61. The analysis of the criterion *grammar* yielded a slightly different results: the group that did not use the Internet scored a lower, mean (3.39), while the group that did use it scored a higher mean (3.74). Interestingly, the mean value for the whole essay and all the criteria included amounts to 3.6 for both the group who did use the Internet and the group who did not use it. This data can be seen in *Table 6*, which also shows that the differences between the two groups are not statistically significant.

Table 6: The impact of the use of Internet.

	Use of Internet	**N**	**Mean**	**SD**	**t**	**df**	**Sig. (2-tailed)**
task completion	no	31	2.94	1.24	.632	52	.530
	yes	23	2.70	1.55	.612	40.977	.544
coherence	no	31	3.45	.96	.180	52	.858
	yes	23	3.39	1.50	.169	35.049	.867
vocabulary	no	31	3.68	.79	.284	52	.778
	yes	23	3.61	1.00	.275	41.087	.785
grammar	no	31	3.39	.95	-1.394	52	.169

	yes	23	3.37	.86	-1.415	49.886	.163
total_essay	no	31	3.36	.81	.017	52	.987
	yes	23	3.36	1.06	.016	39.661	.987

3.5.3. THE QUESTIONNAIRE DATA

A questionnaire was administered to students who used the Internet to find out more about their use of the Internet in writing essays. *Figure 5* shows which areas they checked most frequently.

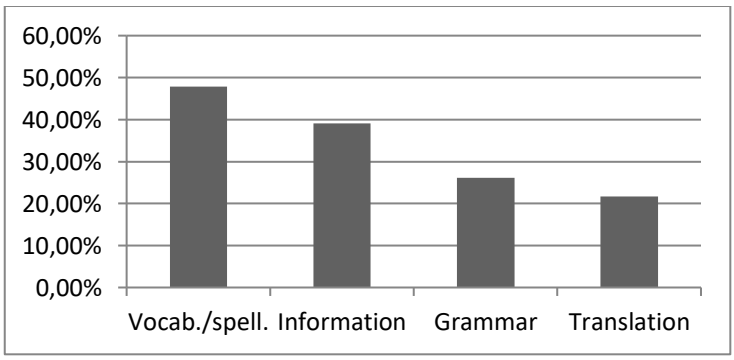


Figure 5: The percentage of the most frequently checked areas during the essay writing.

Of all the students who used the Internet (n=23), 47.83% stated that they used it the most to check unknown vocabulary or spelling, 39.13% used it for checking the information and arguments for the topic, 26.09% checked their grammatical uncertainties, and only 21.74% checked translation of certain words and phrases they were going to use in the essay. This data can be seen in *Table 7* below. The reason why the percentage and frequency numbers do not add up to 23 or 100% is because some of the students named more than one problematic area.

Table 7: The percentage of the most frequently checked areas during the essay writing.

	Frequency	**Percent**
Vocabulary/spelling	11	47.83%
Information	9	39.13%
Grammar	6	26.09%
Translation	5	21.74%

Figure 6 shows the relationship between students who found the Internet useful in their essay writing, and those who did not. It can be seen that the majority of the students found it useful (91.3%), while the minority of the students said that it either was not very helpful or it was not helpful at all (8.7%).

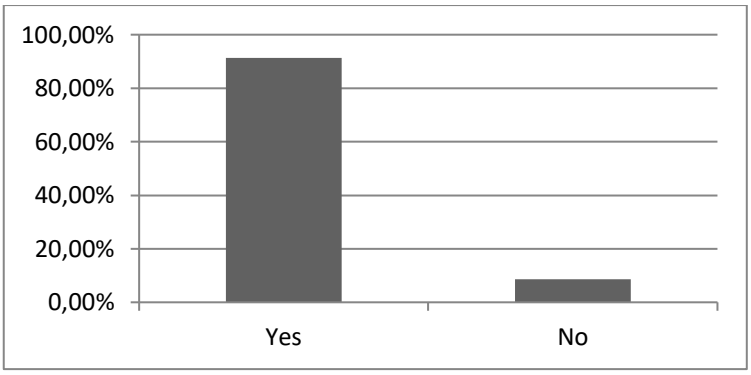


Figure 6: Usefulness of the Internet during essay writing

This data can be seen in the *Table 8.*

Table 8: Usefulness of the Internet during essay writing

	Frequency	**Percent**
Yes	21	91.3%
No	2	8.7%
Total	23	100%

Figure 7 shows some areas which seem to be the most problematic for students in essay writing in their English classes.

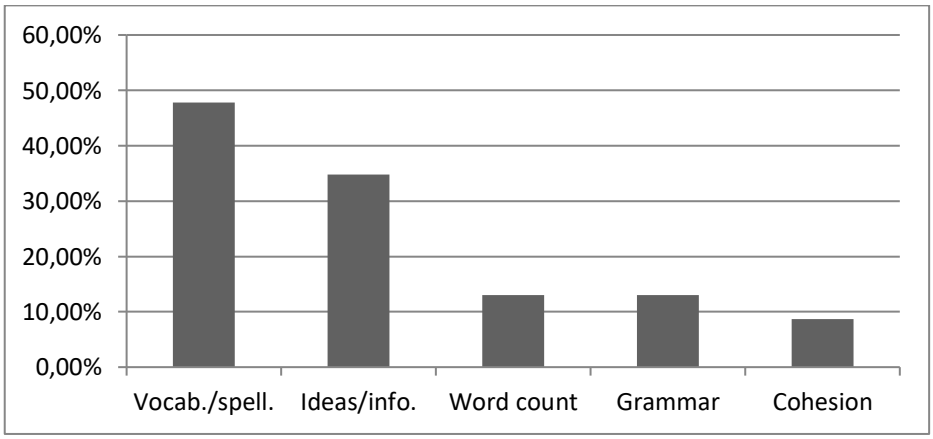


Figure 7: The most difficult areas in essay writing in English according to students

47.83% of students listed spelling and vocabulary as the biggest challenge. 34.78% of the students said that they often have difficulties with finding ideas, especially if they are not familiar enough with the topic or if the topic is not interesting. 13.04% of the students found word count the most problematic. They stated that they have difficulties with estimating the length of the essay, and said that counting words takes up a lot of their writing time, which sometimes affects the quality of their writing. 13.04% said that grammar presents the greatest challenge, and only 8.7% of the students said that the greatest difficulty for them is to connect their ideas into a coherent whole. This data can be seen in *Table 9* below.

Table 9: The most difficult areas in essay writing in English

	Frequency	**Percent**
Vocabulary/spelling	11	47.83%
Ideas/information	8	34.78%
Word count	3	13.04%
Grammar	3	13.04%
Cohesion	2	8.7%

Finally, the last figure (Figure 8) shows students' attitudes towards using the Internet in the English language classroom on a regular basis.

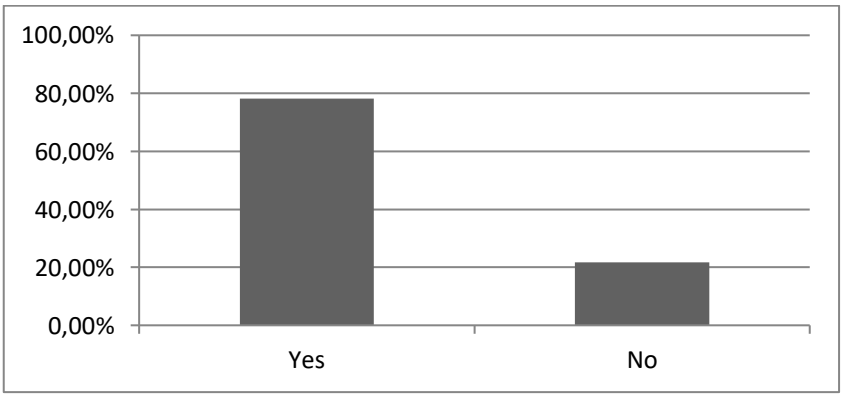


Figure 8: The attitudes towards using the Internet in the English language classroom

As it can be seen from the figure 8, the majority of the students (78.26%) thought that the use of the Internet in the English language classroom would be useful, stating that it could help them learn more, and provide access to larger amounts of data to which they would otherwise have no access. However, some students (21.74%) also answered negatively to the question, stating that the Internet would be "the easy way out", and that they should learn how to write on their own, and practice on their own, without the additional help in this sense. This data can be seen in *Table 10* below.

Table 10: The attitudes towards using the Internet in the English language classroom.

	Frequency	**Percent**
Positive	17	78.26%
Negative	5	21.74%
total	23	100%

3.6. DISCUSSION

We can see from *Table 4* that the criterion of *task completion* seems to be the most problematic in general, both for students who did and for those who did not use the Internet. As the mean values show, most of the learners either had ideas which they did not support sufficiently, some did not develop the two parts of the prompt, their errors in places caused difficulty in understanding, or the layout of the essay was somewhat inappropriate. The criterion of *cohesion and coherence* was also problematic, meaning that most of the students had difficulties with forming a clear flow of ideas, or they had problems with paragraphing and cohesive devices. The two least problematic criteria seem to be *vocabulary* and *grammar*, although the results are not fully satisfactory. Both *vocabulary* and *grammar* are somewhere between being good and very good, where errors did not impede understanding. Interesting, however, is the fact that the minimum mean for *vocabulary* was higher than for the rest of the criteria, which could mean that it is one of the best functioning areas in learners' English knowledge. This could be possibly due to the fact that learners are generally more exposed to new vocabulary input, which they most often have to check in order to understand the meaning of the information they are getting (through their personal usage of the Internet, watching movies, playing video games, and other). The *total_essay* variable shows that students' general achievement on essays is average, which means that they have a good background, but that there is a lot of space for improvement.

Furthermore, the grades show that female participants achieved better results in structuring the essay, and they seem to have followed the rules of essay writing and paragraphing better. They also seem to have had fewer issues in expressing their ideas in a clear way. Male participants achieved higher grades on vocabulary and grammar. They seem to have a wide range of grammar and vocabulary for the task making only minor errors. Even though both groups have their strong and weak spots, the overall results showed that female participants were generally better at essay writing, although the difference seems to be rather insignificant. As the independent t-test has shown, the difference between the groups is statistically insignificant.

Concerning students who used the Internet and those who did not use it, no significant difference can be seen in the results. If we look at *Figure 4*, we can actually see that the group who did not use the Internet showed slightly (although statistically insignificantly) better results. The reason for this could be the fact that students are not used to this technique and did not adapt well to this new situation. Since the use of the Internet is not very common in our schools, the results might have been different if students were more used to it and if they already had experience in using the Internet as their helping tool in this sense, especially when they have to

focus solely on the given task. The Internet seemed to be a slight distraction, which could be attributed to the fact that students are not used to using it in this context. However, slightly better results can be seen in the results on grammar in the group who did use the Internet. This could be due to the fact that they managed to find correct phrases and sentences related to the topic which they then modified to suit their own needs.

Furthermore, concerning the students who did not use the Internet in their essay writing, there are some errors which recur, and which should be pointed out. The following errors (and the errors made by the group who did use the Internet) are provided only in order to give a better picture and to corroborate the results provided in the previous chapter. Since the paper's main aim was not to provide a systematic description of all errors, only the most significant ones are described and discussed.

For example, some of the most prominent grammatical errors were those in tense formation, verb patterns, plural (especially irregular plural forms, but another very prominent error was not differentiating between the singular and the plural of the pronouns *this* or *that*), and the lack of articles. Interestingly, the use of tenses was not generally problematic, but inconsistency in their formation was. Some prominent vocabulary errors came mostly in terms of spelling, but there were a few examples of complete misunderstanding of certain words or phrases. The later ones, however, came in a significantly lower number. Some examples of the above mentioned errors are the following:

"animals can continue live <u>happily ever after</u>" – an error in verb pattern (*continue to live*); inappropriately used phrase *happily ever after*

"it could provide new <u>informations</u>" – wrong plural (*information*)

"most of animals used in experiments continue to live good, healthy life" – missing articles (*most of* the *animals;* a *good, healthy life)*

"they are human <u>been</u>" – misspelling, *beings*

"we have to test <u>this</u> products somehow" – misuse of the singular form (*these products*)

"we can't hurt them by <u>that</u> experiments" – misuse of the singular form (*those experiments*)

"it's good to know that something <u>has try</u> and <u>survive</u> it" – wrong tense formation (*has tried and survived it)*

"no one can choose who will be <u>hurted</u> or used in experiments" – wrong passive formation; irregular past participle (*who will be hurt*)

In addition to common errors, there are some other significant findings concerning the group who did not use the Internet. For example, it can be noticed that students who are generally better at vocabulary and grammar are also better at structuring their essays. They are better at producing a clearer flow of ideas as well. It seems that students who lack general knowledge of English have problems with essay development and with making sense of their ideas, which is why their essays were sometimes difficult to understand. Furthermore, it was obvious that most of them have satisfactory paragraphing and contained pro and con arguments, although the formula sometimes seems to have interfered with making the essay coherent and its flow of ideas clear. This was the case especially with students whose language skills are not on a high level (according to the overall assessment of their essays). Another prominent problem concerns cohesion/coherence and task completion. The general problem lies in students' lack of arguing capabilities. For example, if a person felt strongly either for or against the given topic, they had difficulty finding arguments contrary to their beliefs; one argument seems to be overly represented and more elaborated on while the other one remains merely mentioned. This emphasizes the fact that essay writing in general should be practiced more in the English language classroom.

Concerning the group who did use the Internet in their essay writing, the errors which recur seem to be almost exactly the same as those made by the group who did not use it. However, these students made fewer grammatical errors, and they were not as prominent as those made by the group who did not use the Internet. Spelling errors were also less common, though they did occur. However, there were slightly more word or phrase choice errors. The examples of some of the errors made by this group are:

"they anguish in pain ache with loneliness" – error in vocabulary, use of possibly unknown expressions which makes the sentence incomprehensible

"if we want something we have to do risks" – verb combination (*take risks*)

"using animals as a field of experiments includes a huge argue inbetween opponents and scientist in the medical and cosmetic field" – overuse of the word *field*, wrong use of the preposition *in-between* (*among*), misuse of the verb *argue*

"animals are used in experiments for medicines" – wrong plural form (*medicine* or *drugs* in this sense)

"animals are also living beans" – again, misspelling of the word *beings*

"the sientist use them instead the peoples" – misspelling (*scientists*), missing preposition (*instead of*), wrong plural (*people* in this sense)

"humans lifes are more valuable than animals" – possession wrongly expressed, missing apostrophe (*humans'/animals'*); wrong plural formation (*lives*)

"it is more humain to test drugs on the mice than humain" – misspellings of the words *humane* and *human(s)*; wrong article use (should be without); missing preposition *on humans*

Other findings concerning this group correspond to the findings concerning the group who did not use the Internet, and again concern mostly the skill of essay writing, unrelated to the use of the Internet here. In a nutshell, the problems with producing their ideas were more or less similar, as were the errors in structuring. Some students felt so strongly about the arguments they were giving (regardless of whether they were for or against the topic) that they completely discarded the necessity of being objective and giving pro and con arguments. They wrote essays which turned out too subjective. Finally, as it was the case with the previous group, general essay structuring again seems to have depended on students' language skills, but also on their personal standpoints.

The results of this part possibly show that students lack interest for the development of their writing skills. The indicator of this is that the group who used the Internet did not show any significant difference in contrast to the group who did not use it at all, contrary to one's expectations. Giving the access to every accessible web page where students had the possibility to skim through any critical text was not enough to raise their motivation and improve the quality of their essays. Although the values were not critically low, the statistics strongly suggest that students should get more acquainted with the skill of essay writing.

The questionnaire data shows interesting results, and the connection with the final essay results is obvious. However, we can also see the connection between the information students checked most frequently on the Internet and the areas which present the most difficulty in their essay writing. For example, majority of students said that vocabulary was what they checked the most. We can see that they scored well on vocabulary, which could be for this reason. However, the group with no access to the Internet scored well on vocabulary too, so this might not be an indicative result when it comes to the use of the Internet in essay writing. Interestingly enough, a large number of students claimed vocabulary and spelling to be the most problematic in general while writing an essay. High scores on vocabulary could be attributed to learners' awareness of their problem and assumption that they work on it the most. It can also be assumed that they pay

a lot of attention to new vocabulary when they come across it, especially since they are exposed to large amounts of new vocabulary in their everyday lives, as was stated before. The second most commonly checked area was information on the topic. The learners named this the second hardest area in essay writing as well, and the relation to the essay results is obvious. The lack of knowledge on the topic as well as the inability to express their ideas appropriately could be the cause of low scores on the criteria of *task completion,* and *cohesion and coherence.* Information on grammar was the third most frequently checked area. In *Figure 4* we can see that the group who used the Internet scored better than the one who did not. In this sense, the access to the Internet does seem to have been helpful. Grammar is the fourth area mentioned in *Figure 7* as one of the 5 categories which students mentioned as presenting the greatest issue. It not presenting such a big issue could point to the fact that students have quite a good knowledge about it, and that it is well covered in schools. A number of students also reported to have used the Internet for checking translations of certain phrases and sentences. However, these students generally scored somewhat lower on their essay. Students who scored higher seem to have recognized it as not a completely reliable method, since the translations which are offered by Internet services such as Google Translate do not seem to be grammatically or pragmatically correct. The role of the teacher is to warn students concerning unreliable sources which these learners seem to have been aware of, and to point out what sources are more reliable. Finally, some students also said that word count and cohesion (that is, cohesive and paragraphing devices) was the most problematic for them in their writing. They claimed that these technicalities affect the quality of their writing. This is definitely one of the indicative results, since all the data point to the need of further developing of students' essay writing skills. Their obvious lack of skill is most likely the reason why they showed negative attitudes towards writing when the task was introduced at the beginning of their session.

If we look at *Figures 6* and *8*, we will find an interesting phenomenon. A significant number of students said that the Internet was very helpful to them in their essay writing, while only a few students said that it was either not very helpful or not helpful at all. This is interesting because, if we look at *Figure 8*, we will see that, in relation to the students who found the Internet useful, a smaller amount of students thought that the use of the Internet should be included in the English language classroom. This means that even some of those students who did find the Internet useful in their writing, claimed that the Internet should not be used on a regular basis. The reason for this was mostly that they thought the Internet affects badly their independence in the sense that they would rely on the Internet data and not their own knowledge.This way of thinking could be due to the traditional way of teaching and learning,

and if the new technologies were included in the classroom more often, their possibilities could, with a proper introduction and guidance, help make learning more versatile and use of the information could become more extensive.

4. CONCLUSION

This research was conducted in order to find out whether the use of the Internet in the English language classroom affects students' writing. Additional aims were to find out whether female participants show better results than male participants in essay writing, as well as to explore students' attitudes towards the use of the Internet, at the moment of their writing for the research purposes, and in general. Another aim was to look into the problems that students have in essay writing in general, and too see if and how they interfere with their performance of the task at hand.

The results showed that the use of the Internet does not influence students' writing significantly; no significant difference were found between the two groups of participants. In other words, the study yielded neutral results, but it did point to certain problems which occur in the students' writing production. Furthermore, the results show that female participants achieved slightly higer overall scores, although the difference was rather insignificant. As for students' attitudes towards the use of the Internet in the English language classroom, positive attitudes are by far more numerous. There are, as this research has shown, a few problematic aspects of essay writing, but the most problematic one is definitely essay structuring: students showed significant problems with paragraphing and the use of cohesive devices, as well as with a clear development of their ideas and arguments. This problem also seems to have affected the success of students' written production the most.

However, these conclusions have to be taken with caution, because the testing was done on a small sample of participants. Other factors, such as the fact that students expressed negative attitudes prior to starting their tasks, and the fact that they were not graded may also have influenced the results. Still, the research showed the necessity for paying more attention to the problem of essay writing. It also pointed out the positive sides of implementing the Internet in the English language classroom. Teachers are the ones who should put more emphasis on teaching students the basic rules regarding the structure of essay writing, and are those who should educate themselves about the possibilities of modern technologies in order to introduce a new dimension to teaching and learning.

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APPENDIX 1 – THE GRADING SCALE USED FOR GRADING SCHOLARLY ESSAYS

POINTS	TASK COMPLETION	COHERENCE AND COHESION	VOCABULARY	GRAMMAR
5	-All parts of the prompt fairly equally developed. -Main ideas consistently well supported.	-Clear flow of ideas. -Effective use of paragraphing and cohesive devices.	-Wide range for the task. -Minor errors.	-Wide range for the task. -Minor errors.
4	-All parts of the prompt developed but unequally. -Main ideas generally well supported.	-Generally clear flow of ideas. -Good use of paragraphing and cohesive devices.	-Very good range for the task. -Errors do not impede easy understanding.	-Good range for the task. - Errors do not impede easy understanding.
3	-One part of the prompt not developed. -Main ideas sufficiently supported./ Not all main ideas relevant.	-Flow of ideas sometimes unclear. -Sufficient use of paragraphing or cohesive devices.	-Good range for the task. -Errors sometimes impede easy understanding.	-Generally uses simple structures. - Errors sometimes impede easy understanding.
2	-Two parts of the prompt not developed./The essay is largely irrelevant. -Main ideas insufficiently supported. -Errors cause difficulty in understanding in places. -Inappropriate layout.	-Flow of ideas often unclear. -Limited use of paragraphing or cohesive devices. -Errors cause difficulty in understanding in places.	-Sufficient range for the task. -Errors sometimes cause difficulty in understanding.	-Relies on simple structures. -Errors sometimes cause difficulty in understanding.
1	-Insufficient prompt development./ The essay is irrelevant. -No clear main idea. -Errors frequently cause difficulty in understanding.	-Flow of ideas generally difficult to follow. -Inadequate use of paragraphing or cohesive devices. -Errors frequently cause difficulty in understanding.	-Inadequate range for the task. - Errors frequently cause difficulty in understanding.	-Range is severely restricted. - Errors frequently cause difficulty in understanding.
0	-Generally unintelligible./ Less than 50 words.	-Errors generally prevent understanding.	-Errors generally prevent understanding.	-Errors generally prevent understanding.

APPENDIX 2 – QUESTIONNAIRE

Student's Perception of Internet Usage in English Language Classroom

The Internet has become an all-pervasive technical invention which is being increasingly used in the classroom. The purpose of this questionnaire is to inquire the students about their opinion on the usage of Internet in essay writing or in the English language classroom in general. Directions: read the questions carefully and answer using the maximum of one sentence

1. Did you use the Internet while writing your essay?
2. What was the most frequent thing you had to check on the Internet?
3. Do you think/consider that the Internet was useful/helpful in your writing?
4. What is the most difficult thing for you when writing an essay in English?
5. Do you think that the use of the Internet in the English language classroom is useful? Why?