

Evaluation of Electronic Writing Experiences of Turkish Teacher Candidates at WATTPAD Environment

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Received: July 26, 2017

Accepted: August 1, 2017

Online Published: September 13, 2017

doi:10.5539/hes.v7n4p1

URL: <http://doi.org/10.5539/hes.v7n4p1>

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to analyze Turkish teacher candidates' electronic writing experiences at wattpad.com environment. The study group of this research consisted of 53 Turkish teacher candidates who were studying at a state university in Istanbul. Teacher candidates in the study group joined Wattpad.com and wrote at least one narrative text and informative text within a month. A structured interview form was used to receive the opinions of 15 teacher candidates who experienced writing in electronic environment. The data obtained using the interview form were subjected to content analysis. The electronic writing experiences of Turkish teacher candidates were interpreted in the framework of the themes which were formed on the basis of advantages and disadvantages. Prospective Turkish teachers evaluated the writing in electronic environment as advantageous in terms of legibility and spelling check, reader and writer interaction and visual appeal, time saving and convenience, affordability, quick feedback and constructive criticism, encouragement, archiving possibilities and socialization. On the other hand, they considered the writing in electronic environment as disadvantageous in terms of unreliability of virtual world, distractibility, severe criticisms, not comparable to handwriting, character limitation, health concerns, wording concerns, asociality, copyright and plagiarism concerns, using profanity.

Keywords: Turkish teacher candidates, electronic writing, Wattpad

1. Introduction

Writing we use today as one of the four basic language skills is a product of an invention called written language (Karadağ & Maden, 2013, p. 65), which has caused tremendous changes in the history of civilization. Writing skill evaluated as a recipient skill among basic language skills can be defined as the process of expressing an individual's emotional thoughts and designs (Göçer, 2014). Writing, which is used after listening, speaking and reading skills in daily life (Ulaş et al., 2002, p. 246), is the expression of an individual's own thoughts and spoken words (Özdemir, 1987, p. 77). Writing, which is based on production and coding, is a skill composed of the processes related to the acquisition of knowledge and the expression of information (Carter et al., 2002, p. 246). Akyol (2000, p. 146) defines writing as: "to use the symbols and signs which are necessary to express thoughts in accordance with the rules and to produce legible thoughts", Gedizli (2004) describes it as: "Transferring everything that is thought in Turkish in a correct, understandable, effective and systematic way", and Arıcı and Urgan (2012) define it as the process of expressing emotions, thoughts, dreams, requests with a linguistic and grammatical, logical and semantic consistency. Writing is a kind of mental-neural muscle activity that helps conscious and subconscious to unite and integrate. Writing distills, clarifies and sharpens thoughts (Covey, 2006, p. 153). Writing skill is cognitive with its aspect of organizing information in the mental dictionary and interpreting them in a logical order; it is affective with its aspect of fluidity and attract ability of the narrative; and it is kinetic in the sense of its employing writing tools with muscle movements (Köksal, 2001). Performing an effective writing action depends on the application of these three aspects in co-ordination.

In the twenty-first century, new types of literacy such as visual literacy, media literacy, information literacy and electronic literacy have come to the fore with the impact of scientific and technological developments (Kurudayıoğlu & Tüzel, 2010; Nergis, 2011). Along with the scientific and technological developments in the twenty-first century, paper-based reading and writing has gradually left its place to the screen-based reading and writing (Hossain & Aydin, 2011). In addition to complete and selective reading, there are some types of screen-based reading: voiced/voiceless reading on screen, reading with screen tips, reading between screens,

reading by summarizing on screen, reading by revising on screen, reading by formatting on screen, reading by noting on screen, reading by asking questions on screen, reading by criticizing on screen, and music-assisted reading on screen (Maden, 2012). The rapid development of our country depends on educating individuals who read, understand, think, question and solve problems. In this process, using information technology and screen-based reading have crucial importance (Güneş, 2010, p. 18). In the context of electronic writing, it is observed that students have intensely experienced electronic writing in the forms of using office programs at school and out of school activities, expressing their thoughts in electronic mail and social media portals, communicating, preparing homework and reports. The development of writing skills is directly related to students' attitudes toward writing. Students should be encouraged to believe that writing is a skill that can be developed by a variety of studies rather than being a "talent" (Kavruk et al., 2006; Karatay, 2011). Like all skills, writing skill can be acquired by applying (Yıldız et al., 2006, p. 204). In this respect, it is possible to say that the blog sites or Wattpad-like applications that offer students opportunities to write in electronic media are very important in terms of the development of writing skills.

Since there are not many studies on electronic writing skills of student groups at different levels, it is useful to screen the literature on electronic reading. In Duran and Ertuğrul's research (2012), classroom teachers state that electronic textbooks have some advantages such as supporting electronic textbooks with voices and visuals, enabling the interactive education process, enabling the possibility of teaching without carrying a school bag, their being more appealing to students than printed-books, and preventing paper waste; and have some disadvantages such as threatening student health (vision problems, orthopedical problems, etc.), lacking of infrastructure and service, and diminishing the level of comprehensibility of the subjects.

In the study conducted by Duran and Alevli (2014) on the eighth grade students, the comprehension scores on the screen were statistically higher than the ones on the printed textbook. In the study of İleri (2011) examining the effect of screen-based reading on the level of comprehension of fifth grade students according to text types, there was no statistically significant difference between the level of reading and understanding on the screen and the level of reading and understanding from the printed material.

As the twenty-first century is the epoch of knowledge and technology, Prensky (2001) referred to the concept of digital natives. The concept of digital natives was born in the age of technology and describes a generation who can comfortably use technological tools almost without any hesitation. In this context, it is possible to state that the Turkish teacher candidates constituting the study group of the research are digital natives. Wattpad.com is an application that provides free access to e-books and has an android app. It also provides an opportunity to the story and novel writers to publish their works. Electronic reading and writing application gives chance particularly to the young and talented writers to exhibit their talents and the works of acclaimed authors have been published by various publishing houses.

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

In the study, the case study method which is one of the qualitative research methods was used. Case studies are the studies that analyze the behaviors and skills of the participants in real and natural environments, and the researcher's influence on the event or topic is very little in case studies (Yin, 2002). This study is also based on the internal case study, which is one of the case study types. An internal case study is used when it is desired to obtain more detailed information about a specific person, event, case, topic or structure (Stake, 1995). All participants in the study group were asked to register to Wattpad.com and to write at least one text which was narrative or informative.

2.2 Participants

In the research, easy accessible case sampling from purposeful sampling methods was used. The study group consisted of Turkish teacher candidates who were studying in their third year at a state university in Istanbul. The average age of participants is 21. The study group included 16 male and 37 female students.

Table 1. Study group

Gender	Number of Participants
Male	16
Female	37
TOTAL	53

The depth and width of the data to be obtained in qualitative researches are inversely proportional to the size of the sample. Due to the size of the sample, the nature of the data collection and analysis methods, the amount of data, and the limited resources, it is not appropriate to conduct the study with many individuals (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008).

2.3 Data Collection

In the case studies, one of the data collection tools is the interview. In order to reveal the experiences and meanings related to the cases, it is necessary to analyze the scuritizing characteristics which were presented to the researchers via the interview by means of interaction, flexibility and probes (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). In the study, a structured interview form was used. In order to prepare the structured interview form, interviews with experts and current literature were used. In the interview form, there have been some questions to determine the opinions of Turkish teacher candidates about their electronic writing experiences. The expert opinions were used to prepare these questions.

2.4 Data Analysis

In the research, students were interviewed face to face using the questions in the interview form. The data for the opinions of the Turkish teacher candidates regarding the electronic writing were obtained from the candidates. Content analysis method was used in the analysis of the data. In the research, the data obtained from the views of the prospective teachers were coded around certain concepts according to their similarities and the themes were formed. Codes and themes were organized. The results were presented with a descriptive narrative and the findings were descriptively explained (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). The data were coded by two investigators. For reliability, the formula of “Reliability=Consensus/Consensus+Dissensusx100” was applied on the codings obtained by both researchers (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The compliance percentage between the two encoders was calculated as 88%. Reliability has been achieved in terms of data analysis since that the compliance percentage was 70% or more was found sufficient.

3. Findings

In this section, the findings of the research results are interpreted. In the presentation of findings, the themes are presented to the attentions by quoted from student opinions.

3.1 Unreliability of Virtual World

Some students (f=4) who experienced electronic writing stated that they found the virtual world unreliable:

“People are not as serious in electronic environments as they are in real life. If you think you are a successful writer, the electronic environment is not the right place to stand out.” (S 1)

3.2 Legibility and Spelling Check

Most of the students who experienced electronic writing (f=9) stated that electronic writing has advantages in terms of legibility and correction of misspellings:

“As the text is legible, we are able to correct the error immediately.” (S 2)

“In the texts, the legibility level changes for each person. After all, everyone has different handwriting. In fact, writing in the electronic environment offers legible texts to the reader.” (S 12)

“The internet environment allows you to instantly transfer what comes to mind without interruption. The rate of making punctuation and spelling mistakes is high in paper-based writing, but it is possible to check those mistakes in the electronic environment.” (S 6)

“The fact that the mistakes of spelling and punctuation can be seen immediately in the electronic environment makes it possible to minimize mistakes in writing.” (S 8)

3.3 Reader and Writer Interactivity and Visual Attraction

Some of the students experienced electronic writing (f=7) stated that literary products' being instantly accessible to readers and their being more attractive with visual elements such as page layout, graphics and animation were the advantages.

"It appeals to large masses, and is a better way to advertise. Graphics and animations can be added on it and visuals can be captured in the text." (S 3)

"The written materials' accessibility to a lot of people in a virtual environment can be very beneficial in terms of the development of the writer as well as connecting with private individuals and directing large reader masses." (S 11)

"The product's being able to reach millions of users at the same time. Our sharing it with more people." (S 12)

"For example; We could add the covers we imagined to the stories we wrote on wattpad.com." (S 2)

"Our ability to adjust the page layout as desired. I think this is one of the most important advantages of it." (S 3)

3.4 Distractibility

Some students experienced electronic writing (f=5) stated that distractions were disadvantageous in the electronic environment.

"I can encounter some distractions while writing in the electronic environment. A few websites can be used at the same time, a Facebook sharing or a direct message can be distracting for me." (S 4)

"We can see many things that distract us from writing in the electronic environment." (S 12)

3.5 Time-Saving and Convenience

A large number of students (f=12) who experienced electronic writing have noted that electronic writing saves time and allows copying and pasting where necessary.

"Writing in the electronic environment is easier and takes less time." (S 5)

"Electronic writing saves time, and adding or subtracting takes less time. It is easier to reach masses in electronic writing environments. We lose a lot of time while we are searching for the place we are looking for with paper, but we find the place we are looking for faster on the computer. We can write words and sentences that we want to attract attention in bold or italic. Electronic writing is less tiring, for example, I can copy the name of the hero in the story and use it in a few places." (S 7)

"It is easier than writing on paper and with pencils. It is not tiring." (S 9)

"As everyone knows, it saves time." (S 12)

"But not holding the pen is ideal for people who swell their fingers while writing like me." (S 13)

"Writing in the electronic environment is not exhausting and there is no need to write the texts on a computer again ..." (S 14)

"Hand writing is more difficult and more tiring than writing on a computer. In this sense, Wattpad is more advantageous." (S 15)

"Even though, it is more tiring for people to be in front of the screen for a long time when writing on a computer, it is easier than hand writing ..." (S 6)

3.6 Afford Ability

Most of the students who had electronic writing experience (f=13) stated that electronic writing is affordable in terms of stationery or consumable materials.

"In terms of savings, writing in electronic environment is simpler, because paper and pen consumption is not the case." (S 5)

"When we write a story at Wattpad, we do not waste paper. When we make mistakes while writing, we throw away the paper. Whereas, we can delete what we write at Wattpad and edit it again." (S 10)

"We can convey the same story to thousands of people at the earliest time without cost on paper, printing, etc." (S 1)

3.7 Quick Feedback and Criticism

Some of the students experienced electronic writing (f=6) stated that the opportunity to get a quick feedback while writing in electronic environment was positive since constructive criticisms repaired the text, but some criticisms were extremely ruthless.

“Being able to see instant comments provides criticism.” (S 5)

“In this sense, we can say that what is most needed by those who approach the writing issue in a serious way is criticism.” (S 11)

“Since the text has reached so many people, anyone with or without knowledge can make a ruthless criticism about what you write. This can diminish a person’s enthusiasm for writing.” (S 6)

“On one hand, writing at Wattpad excites people for their works’ being read by others, on the other hand, negative comments may upset them. These negative comments sometimes come to extreme points, especially if the wattpad is thought to have a smaller population.” (S 13)

3.8 Using Profanity

Some students (f=3) who had experienced electronic writing stated that some commentators in the electronic writing environment use some vulgar words and curses in their comments and this has a disadvantage.

“... it is also a disadvantage that some comments contain vulgar words and curses.” (S 5)

3.9 Encouragement

Some of the students experienced electronic writing (f=6) state that writing in electronic environment is encouraging at point of writing.

“People are encouraged at the point of writing by seeing things written on the Wattpad environment.” (S 6)

“People who write something but can not show them to other people for the fear of not to be approved may exhibit what they wrote to people they do not know at Wattpad, thus their fear will have been eliminated.” (S 9)

3.10 Copyright and Plagiarism Concerns

Most of the students who had electronic writing experience (f=10) state that writing in electronic environment also brings problems of copyright and plagiarism.

“Writing is nice, but there’s the copyright issue, it needs to be resolved. Plagiarising is easy, because writing materials are open to sharing and copying.” (S 8)

“Some quotes can be used without specifying the source and this is unfair to the author. People easily can quote your writings on which you thought a lot for a long time and individualize them without any hesitation.” (S 10)

3.11 Health Concerns

Some of the students who had electronic writing experience (f=4) think that writing in electronic environment will bring some health problems along with it.

“The light on the screen may be uncomfortable and it may tire the eyes.” (S 8)

“As a result of the concentration on the screen for a long time, the authors may experience various eye problems or suffer headaches.” (S 11)

“When writing in electronic environment, back and waist pain can be experienced especially because of sitting positions. Light is another factor that affects the eye.” (S 13)

3.12 Archiving Possibilities

Most of the students who had electronic writing experience (f=11) state that writing in the electronic environment is advantageous in terms of archiving.

“Archiving in Wattpad is an advantage. What we write on the paper can get lost, it can get torn or even burn, but what we write on WattPad will not get lost.” (S 10)

3.13 A/Socialization

More than half of the students (f=8) who experienced electronic writing think that writing in electronic environment will improve social skills, while the rest of them state that it will asocialize the individual (f=7).

“To me, writing in the electronic environment makes people asocial. And it makes them dependant on a machine connected to electricity.” (S 5)

“... It is a useful application for the people in terms of being able to meet many people who think and write like them on a platform and follow their writings.” (S 13)

3.14 Wording Concerns

Some students experienced electronic writing (f=2) have reported that writing in electronic environment negatively affected the originality.

“The originality and wording features are getting out of hand. The person conveys what s/he wants to say using short sentences, because she/he wants to convey more accumulation in a shorter time.” (S 7)

3.15 Character Limitation

Some students experienced electronic writing (f=6) think that character limitation in electronic environment (wattpad.com) is a negative feature.

“Character limitations prevent me from forming what I would like to write.” (S 15)

3.16 Handwriting Romanticism

Some students expernced the electronic writing (f=2) find it more meaningful for a person to write using his/her own handwriting.

“The negative side of electronic writing is that a story written by handwriting is more meaningful. It is more specific because it is written by the person’s own efforts and his/her own peculiar writing.” (S 3)

“Even though writing in the electronic environment is now seen as one of the advantages of the modern world, I think that handwriting is much more effective in terms of transfer and expression of feelings.” (S 6)

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Thinking skills of the twenty-first century can be listed as creativity, cooperation, critical thinking and communication. Especially, in parallel with the development of technology, communication tools have been extremely diversified and the reading and writing habits of the individual have begun to change in the spectrum ranging from desktop computers to laptops, tablet computers to smart phones. Electronic reading have begun to substitute the paper-based reading, while electronic typing substituted the paper-based writing. It cannot be imagined that education technologies and curricula remain insensitive to those developments in the world. Almost all of the curriculums in Turkey have included the ability of using information technology as a basic skill. Electronic reading and writing has already begun to be included in educational activities.

According to the results of this research which analyzed the electronic writing experiences of the Turkish teacher candidates in the Wattpad.com environment, it is seen that Prospective Turkish teachers evaluated writing in electronic environment as advantageous in terms of legibility and spelling check, reader and writer interaction and visual appeal, time saving and convenience, affordability, quick feedback and constructive criticism, encouragement, archiving possibilities and socialization (Aydin, 2013a). On the other hand, they considered the writing in electronic environment as disadvantageous in terms of unreliability of virtual world, distractibility, severe criticisms, not comparable to handwriting, character limitation, health concerns, wording concerns, asociality, copyright and plagiarism concerns, using profanity.

According to the study of Tüzel and Tok (2013), prospective teachers who were studying at the Faculty of Education preferred digital writing because of the reasons such as (1) physical comfort, (2) time saving, (3) economical issues, (4) easy sharing, (5) the use of visuals, (6) legible writing, (7) reduction of spelling and punctuation problems, (8) pagesetup, (9) archiving in their daily and academic lives and they stated that digital writing had four different disadvantages: (1) distractibility, (2) individualization, (3) laziness of thinking, and (4) plagiarism. The results of this research largely coincide with the results of the Tüzel and Tok’s (2013) research. Additionally, the themes of encouragement, quick feedback and constructive criticism are among the advantages and the themes of unreliability of virtual world, its not being comparable to handwriting, severe criticisms, character limitation and Using profanity are placed among the disadvantages.

Writing skill, a powerful tool of thinking, is an important skill in the context of an individual’s ability to perceive and comprehend the World, and try to make a difference there (Şahin, 2010). The writing skill in the framework of curriculums from primary school to university has been developed with theoretical and practical studies. At the point of teacher roles today, the teacher is aimed to participate in teaching and learning process as a

researcher, a co-learner, an intellectual, an agent, an observer, and an educator exhibiting largely liberal attitudes rather than authoritarian attitudes ones (Yayli, 2009). No education system wants students who do not understand what they read, can not tell what they think, find themselves inadequate and do not have self-confidence, do not speak, do not write, give up their democratical rights instead of discussing, criticizing and researching (Aydin, 2013b; Demir & Yapıcı, 2007). Prospective Turkish teachers' conceptualizing and evaluating the information about writing education in their undergraduate programs, their being equipped with special field knowledge, their implementing both paper-based and screen-based writing exercises practically have great importance in terms of their guiding the students who will build the future with writing.

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