Field: Writing, EAP

A Computer-Assisted Writing Course

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Computer literacy has become a necessity for university students, but both teachers and students commonly regard it as simply a convenient skill for gathering a vast amount of information from the Internet for academic purposes. This study focuses on a communicative use of computer technology in the classroom and reports on an English writing course designed to make use of the learning management computer software Blackboard.

All students in the College of Business Administration at Tamagawa University in Tokyo are equipped with laptop computers; teachers are encouraged to make use of Blackboard not only as a course management system but also as a course component. Although the primary objective of my proposed course is to develop the students' English writing skills, it goes without saying that the process of writing will eventually improve the students' oral communication skills.

With that in mind, I designed and carried out an English writing course using Blackboard as a tool to add variety to the environment for communicating in English during classroom lessons. This is based on the idea that classroom tasks should require the students to use more than one skill, which would then contribute...
to more balanced acquisition of comprehensive English language skills.

I also expected that computer-assisted classes would have behavioral and psychological effects on the students' English learning process. Behavioral effects included the motivation to engage in classroom tasks (out of curiosity about using the computer software), and inducing more written communication in English not only inside but also outside the classroom. Psychological effects included facilitating the students' elaborative processing, and developing their autonomy for English learning.

This Blackboard-assisted writing course was conducted with eighteen sophomore students in the College of Business Administration at Tamagawa University. The class met for 100-minute classes once a week for one semester; the students brought their computers to every class. Using Blackboard, class blogs were regularly used for discussions; some uploaded audio files were also used for listening and speaking tasks, followed by writing tasks such as note-taking, paraphrasing and summarizing.

To investigate the effects of this course, I conducted pre-course and post-course questionnaires asking how the students perceived this course of study and their expectations and experiences regarding its behavioral and psychological effects on the development of their English language learning. The results indicate positive effects from these computer-assisted English writing classes.