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Enhancing Academic Writing Skills in Freshmen: Evaluating the Impact of Blackboard Platform in the Classroom

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of the Blackboard learning management system on the academic writing development of freshmen enrolled in a university-level writing course. Guided by an interpretive/constructivist paradigm, the research explores how technology-mediated instruction supports writing improvement through sustained drafting, continual feedback, and collaborative interaction. A mixed-methods case study design was employed to track eleven undergraduate students over one academic semester as they completed three major writing assignments, each requiring the submission of multiple drafts.

Quantitative data were generated through systematic error analysis of all drafts and final submissions, focusing on linguistic, mechanical, and structural errors. A Repeated Measures ANOVA was used to determine whether statistically significant improvements occurred across drafts. Complementary qualitative data drawn from discussion board posts, email exchanges, and instructor observations were analyzed to identify patterns in student engagement, collaboration, and perceptions of the Blackboard-assisted learning environment.

Findings show a significant reduction in writing mechanics errors over time, demonstrating measurable gains in writing fluency and technical accuracy. The study also highlights the value of Blackboard features such as discussion forums, peer-review tools, external resource links, and word-processing functions in promoting recursive revision, autonomous learning, and a collaborative environment. Students reported increased confidence, motivation, and appreciation for the platform's flexibility and constant accessibility. However, the platform had limited influence on substantive and cognitive writing skills, including idea development and content elaboration. Few participants also reported technical difficulties and challenges adapting to the platform.

Overall, the study concludes that Blackboard is an effective tool for fostering foundational writing skills and supporting student-centered instruction. It underscores the importance of structured guidance and consistent feedback, and it advocates for the strategic use of learning management systems as complementary components in freshman writing pedagogy.

Keywords: Blackboard Platform, Freshman Composition, Academic Writing, Technology-Mediated Learning, Error Analysis, Mixed-Methods Research

Introduction

Research on computer-mediated communication (CMC) and instruction demonstrates that technology can empower students and enhance their communicative skills, fostering confidence in their learning abilities. The growing potential for Internet interaction not only supports instructional delivery but also promotes collaborative and communicative learning, particularly for writing students. Traditional classroom settings, characterized by face-to-face interactions between instructors and students during class time, are no longer the sole "optimal" environment for teaching and learning. Modern educational technology, particularly computer software, has redefined the "optimal" classroom as a creative and flexible space tailored to the specific needs and goals of instructors and students, adaptable as those needs evolve. In such environments, communication can occur synchronously (in real time), asynchronously (at different times), or both. Educators should consider how technology can enhance teaching efficacy and bridge the gap between the classroom and the broader world.

This case study examines key factors such as teaching efficacy through technology, learning environments, access to technology, teaching styles, and self-efficacy. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study investigates how these elements influence student progress in a freshman writing course at a Midwestern U.S. University. It aims to evaluate the advantages and challenges of teaching freshman writing through the Internet-based Blackboard platform, anticipating innovative solutions to common writing difficulties, such as issues with spelling, grammar, fluency, style, vocabulary, and structures, which can be addressed through the platform's features.

Research Question

This study seeks to address the following central question: How does the use of internet-based software, particularly the Blackboard platform, influence the progress and fluency of freshman writing students, and to what extent? More specifically, it examines the effectiveness of the Blackboard platform in enhancing freshmen writing skills.

Justification and Rationale

This study aims to identify the challenges faced by freshman writers and explore how internet-based software can address some or all of these difficulties. The concept "internet-based software" encompasses tools such as word processing programs, the Blackboard platform, discussion boards, and external links. These tools will be used interchangeably throughout this research. Similarly, the terms "internet-based" and "Blackboard-assisted" classes will be used synonymously in this context.

Review of Literature

This review provides an overview of the transition from traditional writing classrooms to computer-assisted writing (CAW) environments. The integration of Computer-Mediated Communication/Education (CMC/CME) into the educational landscape, beginning in the late 1960s, has led to a significant and ongoing paradigm shift across all levels of education. By the 1990s, computer software had become a widely accepted tool in writing centers, marking a transformative period in writing instruction.

Research consistently indicates that students generally respond positively to the use of computers in language learning contexts. These technologies enable learners to monitor their linguistic development and language proficiency more effectively. Furthermore, they foster greater autonomy and flexibility in the learning process, empowering students to take control of their educational experiences. This shift underscores the potential of digital-assisted tools to enhance writing instruction and support learner-centered approaches.

Al-Mubireek et al. (2025) conducted a mixed-methods study at Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University (IAU) with 225 preparatory-year students to explore learners' perceptions of using Blackboard for EFL learning. The results indicate broadly positive attitudes toward the platform, particularly with regard to its convenience, flexibility, and capacity to support learning beyond conventional time and place constraints.

The study identifies several Blackboard features that students consider especially valuable for language development. Quizzes, graded assessments with feedback, and writing portfolios were consistently rated as the most effective tools, as they offer structured opportunities for practice and provide timely feedback—an essential element in the writing development process. Students further reported that the platform supported active learning, improved their understanding of course content, and created a more engaging and enjoyable learning environment.

However, despite these advantages, students noted challenges that moderated the strength of their positive perceptions. Even though prior orientation reduced major technical difficulties, persistent issues such as unstable internet connectivity, limited technical support, and insufficient training in using the platform's full range of functions were still highlighted. Some learners also remarked that certain Blackboard features did not align with their individual learning preferences, suggesting the need for more adaptable approaches to LMS-based instruction.

Significantly, the solutions proposed by students themselves underscore the importance of greater pedagogical and institutional support. They expressed the need for more extensive training, clearer instructional explanations, and increased encouragement from instructors to make effective use of the platform. These recommendations reinforce a

central theme in technology-enhanced language learning: the success of an LMS depends not only on its design but also on the wider instructional context. Effective integration of Blackboard requires reliable infrastructure, ongoing training, and active instructor involvement to ensure that its technological potential leads to meaningful improvements in learning outcomes.

Alsharari and Alruwaili (2025) examine the effectiveness of Blackboard in supporting writing instruction within blended learning settings. Their investigation shows that Saudi EFL instructors and students prefer a hybrid model in which online Blackboard activities are integrated with traditional classroom instruction. The findings portray Blackboard as a supportive tool that strengthens, rather than replaces, conventional pedagogy by drawing on the advantages of digital delivery. At the same time, it maintains the interpersonal interaction that remains fundamental to effective writing instruction.

The researchers highlight several benefits of Blackboard that contribute to writing development, including streamlined content delivery, improved plagiarism control, and constant access to learning materials. Students also value the platform's automated feedback tools—particularly grammar and spelling checks—which they believe facilitate the gradual refinement of their writing. These outcomes align with wider literature indicating that Blackboard can improve writing accuracy and foster positive learner attitudes when incorporated into writing-oriented courses.

Nonetheless, the study identifies challenges that limit exclusive reliance on the platform. Instructors report declines in student engagement, fewer opportunities for personalized feedback in large classes, and reduced face-to-face communication—elements considered vital to writing pedagogy. The researchers also note that students' prior technological experience affects Blackboard's overall impact, as digitally proficient learners tend to interact more effectively with its features.

Overall, the literature suggests that Blackboard yields the greatest benefits when used as part of a well-designed blended learning model. The system's automated feedback and flexible access to resources help create supportive learning conditions, and when combined with direct interpersonal instruction, these elements offer strong potential for enhancing academic writing skills.

Al-Shehri (2023) investigates the influence of Blackboard Collaborate, a synchronous collaboration tool embedded within the Blackboard Learning Management System (LMS), on enhancing writing performance among beginner-level students in online learning settings. The study highlights the platform's capacity to promote collaborative learning, peer feedback, and interactive engagement, which are essential for advancing writing skills. Using a quasi-experimental design, the research compared two student groups: one utilizing Blackboard Collaborate for collaborative writing tasks and peer feedback, and another relying on conventional asynchronous writing instruction. Data were gathered through pre- and post-writing evaluations, student surveys, and interaction logs

from the platform. The assessments focused on coherence, grammar, vocabulary, and overall writing fluency.

The findings indicated that students using Blackboard Collaborate showed notable improvements in writing performance compared to the control group. Features such as real-time discussions, virtual breakout rooms, and shared document editing were instrumental in increasing student engagement and motivation. Peer feedback, enabled by the platform, proved critical in helping students identify and rectify writing weaknesses, resulting in measurable enhancements in writing quality. Students reported that the interactive nature of the tool made writing more dynamic and less isolating, particularly benefiting novice writers who often face challenges with confidence and self-expression.

Despite its advantages, the study identified challenges, including technical difficulties, the necessity for stable internet connectivity, and the time required for users to adapt to the platform. Nonetheless, Al-Shehri concludes that Blackboard Collaborate is a valuable resource for improving writing performance in online environments, especially for beginners who thrive in collaborative and interactive settings. This research adds to the existing literature on technology-enhanced writing instruction by showcasing the potential of asynchronous collaboration tools to support writing development. It also stresses the importance of incorporating interactive and collaborative elements into online writing pedagogy, alongside the need for proper training and technical support.

Alzahrani and Alqurashi (2022) explore the role of Blackboard, a widely adopted learning management system (LMS), in fostering self-directed learning (SDL) and enhancing writing skills among beginner-level students. The study examines how Blackboard's features, including customizable learning paths, resource libraries, and interactive tools, empower students to take control of their learning processes and independently improve their writing abilities. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research combined quantitative data from writing performance assessments with qualitative insights from student surveys, interviews, and analyses of online interactions within the platform. Participants were beginner-level students enrolled in a writing course designed to promote SDL through Blackboard, which provided access to writing resources, self-paced modules, and opportunities for reflection and self-assessment.

The findings indicated that Blackboard significantly supported students' engagement in SDL, resulting in notable improvements in their writing skills. Students appreciated the platform's structured yet flexible environment, which enabled them to set personal learning goals, track their progress, and access resources tailored to their needs. Tools such as discussion boards, peer feedback mechanisms, and automated quizzes were particularly effective in fostering autonomy and accountability. While Blackboard offered the tools for independent learning, students benefited from clear guidance, regular feedback, and encouragement from instructors to fully engage with its features. Those who actively utilized the platform's resources demonstrated greater advancements in writing

fluency, grammar, and organizational skills compared to peers relying solely on traditional instruction.

Despite its advantages, the study identified challenges, including technical difficulties, varying levels of motivation and digital literacy among students. Nevertheless, Alzahrani and Alqurashi concluded that Blackboard is a valuable tool for promoting SDL in writing courses, particularly for beginner-level students who thrive in structured yet adaptable learning environments. This research contributes to the broader discourse on technology-enhanced learning by highlighting how platforms like Blackboard can support SDL and writing development. It also underscores the importance of integrating technology into writing instruction while emphasizing the need for instructor guidance and active student engagement to achieve optimal outcomes.

Zhang and Zhu (2023) investigate the efficacy of online peer feedback, facilitated by the Blackboard learning management system (LMS), in improving writing skills among beginner-level students. The study examines how Blackboard's interactive tools, such as discussion boards and rubric-based feedback options, enhance grammar, coherence, and overall writing quality. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the researchers analyzed quantitative data from pre-and post-writing assessments alongside qualitative data from student surveys, peer feedback transcripts, and instructor observations. Participants engaged in structured peer review activities, providing and receiving feedback on multiple drafts within Blackboard's collaborative environment.

The findings revealed that students who actively participated in peer feedback demonstrated significant improvements in grammar, sentence structure, and coherence compared to those relying solely on instructor feedback. The study underscored the dual benefits of peer review: students enhanced their writing by incorporating peer suggestions while developing critical thinking and analytical skills through evaluating other students' work. Blackboard's features, including threaded discussions, anonymous feedback, and user-friendly interfaces, were pivotal in fostering engagement and creating a supportive feedback environment.

The study identified challenges, such as variability in feedback quality and the need for clear guidelines, training and scaffolding to optimize the peer review process. Despite these limitations, Zhang and Zhu concluded that Blackboard-supported peer feedback is a highly effective strategy for improving beginner-level writing skills. This research contributes to the broader discourse on collaborative learning and technology-enhanced writing instruction, offering practical insights for educators seeking to leverage LMS platforms to create structured, interactive, and collaborative writing environments.

The previous literature review consistently highlights Blackboard as a valuable tool for supporting EFL writing instruction, particularly for novice learners. Features such as automated feedback, quizzes, writing portfolios, and discussion boards promote structured, interactive, and feedback-driven learning while enhancing engagement and

confidence. The platform is most effective when integrated into blended or classroom-based instruction. Challenges such as technical issues, the need for training, and alignment with individual learning preferences highlight the importance of pedagogical and institutional support. Overall, Blackboard functions as a complementary tool that can enhance writing skills when thoughtfully embedded in interactive, feedback-oriented learning environments (Alqahtani & Alzahrani, 2020; Al-Jarf, 2021; Al-Mubireek et al., 2025; Alsharari & Alruwaili, 2025).

Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative elements within a case study framework. It focuses on the learning experiences of eleven undergraduate students enrolled in a freshman writing course facilitated by the internet-based Blackboard platform. The study is designed to track the students' writing progress over the course of an academic semester. Participants were required to complete three writing assignments, each accompanied by multiple drafts (a minimum of three per paper), culminating in a final polished version.

The researchers reviewed drafts and final submissions, identifying, categorizing, and quantifying errors in the students' writing. These errors were systematically tabulated and analyzed to assess patterns and improvements. A comparative analysis was conducted between the students' initial and subsequent writing efforts to evaluate their progress. Statistical analysis was performed using the SPSS software package to examine quantitative data related to writing development.

The study is grounded in an interpretive/constructivist paradigm, emphasizing the participants' interactions and their engagement with the Blackboard platform. Particular attention was given to the students' use of the discussion board, which facilitated peer and instructor interactions, as well as their access to external resources and feedback. This approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of how the students' writing evolved within a technology-enhanced learning environment.

Strategies for Content Analysis

The researchers examined the content of students’ email messages and Discussion Board postings to assess the nature of interactions that occurred throughout the course. The primary focus of the analysis was on students’ written assignments and their multiple drafts. The process involved several steps: first, language-related errors in each draft were identified, coded, classified, and categorized. Second, the frequency of these errors was measured across all drafts and final submissions. Third, statistical analysis was conducted using Repeated Measures Multivariate Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to track students’

writing progress over time and determine whether significant differences existed between initial and subsequent drafts. Additionally, the 'course statistics' feature provided by the Blackboard platform was utilized to analyze user access patterns. Finally, inter-and intra-correlations were calculated to explore relationships between statistical findings and students' performance.

Instructional Strategies and Student Perceptions

The course employed both synchronous and asynchronous instructional systems. The asynchronous components, facilitated through Blackboard's utilities, included the 'Discussion Board' and 'email', which served as primary communication tools between the instructor and students. The 'External Links' feature was particularly valuable, connecting students to external resources such as writing communities (e.g., <www.inkedvoices.com>). While some students, such as Student #3, expressed a preference for face-to-face interactions with tutors or writing lab staff, others found the External Links to be highly beneficial. These links not only enriched the course content by providing supplementary materials but also enabled seamless navigation between diverse sources of information, effectively serving as a gateway to broader knowledge.

Students reported that the use of Blackboard offered significant flexibility, making the writing process more convenient compared to traditional methods. They appreciated the accessibility of essential writing tools, such as online dictionaries and grammar aids, which were constantly available. As Student #5 noted, *"I know that dictionaries and grammar helpers are there; all I need is to use them more and more."* The course syllabus, prerequisites, objectives, and materials were all accessible on the course webpage, allowing students to review and engage with the content at their convenience. This 24/7 accessibility was highlighted as a major advantage of the Blackboard platform.

Email played a crucial role in facilitating both horizontal (student-to-student) and vertical (student-to-instructor) communication, even outside regular class hours. The instructor's role encompassed directing, facilitating, brainstorming, and managing the course. All relevant course materials, including announcements, documents, and instructions, were systematically organized within Blackboard's designated sections (e.g., 'announcements', 'course information', 'course documents', and 'discussion board'). This structure ensured easy access and efficient navigation to necessary resources.

Students were required to consult a reputable college dictionary, as well as *A Writer's Reference* by Diana Hacker. Additionally, they read *Parable of the Sower* by Octavia E. Butler, connecting its themes to their personal experiences in their writing assignments. This integration of reading and writing reinforced the belief that strong and inspiring reading habits contribute to the application of improved writing skills.

Active participation was a cornerstone of the course, with students engaging in

both individual and group discussions. The collaborative nature of the class resembled a workshop, where every student was expected to contribute by reviewing, editing, discussing, and responding to peers' work. Early drafts were not graded, as the focus was on learning and improvement rather than assessing prior knowledge. Final grades were based on a cumulative portfolio of work, reflecting students' progress and development over the semester.

Blackboard Platform as a Means of Cooperative Learning

The Blackboard platform serves as an effective tool for fostering collaborative and cooperative learning. In this course, cooperative learning was implemented virtually, enabling students to exchange screens and collaboratively edit each other's writing (Jonassen, 2020). Peer reviews played a significant role in enhancing the writing process, as students provided constructive feedback, suggested improvements, and expanded on each other's ideas. The 'Discussion Board' functioned as a dynamic forum where students shared and exchanged ideas about their chosen topics and writing strategies, creating an interactive and supportive learning environment.

Slavin, R. E. (2014) provides insights into how structured group work can enhance learning. He emphasized the effectiveness of cooperative learning in improving academic outcomes. That involves students working together in small groups, engaging in meaningful dialogues while completing individual or collective tasks. When effectively implemented, cooperative learning not only enhances academic achievement but also fosters positive and supportive relationships among students, which can boost self-esteem and motivation. Research has consistently demonstrated that students who receive peer assistance tend to learn more than those who work independently, and those who act as tutors often gain deeper understanding than either group.

In this course, a variety of cooperative learning activities were employed, including brainstorming, revision, and editing. Students communicated naturally and without anxiety, sharing their creative potential with their peers. This collaborative approach helped students develop higher-order thinking skills and reinforced the idea that writing is an iterative learning process. This perspective is deeply rooted in the essential tenets of the constructivist theory, which posits that learners actively construct knowledge through interaction, reflection, and engagement with their environment. From a cognitive standpoint, cooperative learning fosters creativity by enabling learners to synthesize and expand upon shared ideas, concepts, and perspectives. As these ideas are internalized, they become foundational elements of the learners' pedagogical and cognitive frameworks.

Almost all students in this study reported that the multiple drafts they produced, the feedback they received from both the instructor and their peers, and the use of 'External Links' and 'Discussion Board' significantly contributed to their learning. They particularly

valued the flexibility of this learning system, which allowed them to engage with course materials and collaborate with peers at their own pace.

The Nature of Course Interaction

Student-Content Interaction

In Blackboard-assisted courses, instructional interactions include learners' interaction with content, instructors, and peers to achieve learning outcomes (Martin, F. & Bolliger, D. (2022). In this course, students were expected to construct their own knowledge through engagement with the materials provided on the course webpage. While optional readings were accessible via External Links, the primary content for this writing course consisted of students' own writing. The time spent on thoughtful, focused, and authentic writing represented genuine engagement in the learning process. Active participation and immersion in the study material are essential for effective learning. In this course, student-content interaction primarily involved journals, peer reviews, summaries, drafts, and papers produced both in and outside the computer lab. The following chart illustrates the frequency of student-content interactions, showing the number of writing acts completed by each student:

Student number	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**
Acts of writing	**29**	**21**	**42**	**20**	**22**	**21**	**34**	**35**	**13**	**23**	**18**

Student-Instructor Interaction

In addition to electronic communication, the instructor provided support both face-to-face during class and office hours, as well as online through the Discussion Board and email. This ensured prompt responses to student inquiries. Instructor messages on the Discussion Board typically included guidance and feedback on written drafts, fostering a sense of security, self-confidence, and motivation among students. These factors encouraged consistent and meaningful interaction between students and the instructor.

Interaction through the Discussion Board

Throughout the course, the Discussion Board served as a central hub for interaction, facilitating communication between students and the course content, students and the instructor, and among students themselves. Activities on the Discussion Board

were driven by both in-class and out-of-class writing assignments. A total of 179 messages were posted, all directly related to the course. Each message represented a short act of writing and contributed a new thread to the course content. When evenly distributed, the average number of messages per student was 17.2. Over the duration of the course, students accessed the course website 4,577 times to read updates, participate in discussions, or stay informed about course developments.

Accessing the Course Website

Table (1) shows that there was no significant correlation between the number of visits to the course website and either the number of writing acts (such as journals or initial drafts) or the students' grades in the course.

Table (1): Students' total number of accesses, total number of acts of writing and final grades as illustrated in the following table

Student Number	*Grade*	*Total Accesses*	*Acts of writing**
1.	C+	273	29
2.	C-	280	21
3.	B-	504	42
4.	C	100	20
5. ESL	IP (Fail)	669	22
6.	C	290	21
7.	C+	556	34
8.	B	212	35
9.	A	432	13
10.	B-	307	23
11.	B	90	18
		Grand Total (3713)	Grand Total (278)

* Each time a student writes a material related to the papers 1, 2, 3.

Student-Student Interaction

Students in this course engaged in continuous interaction, both in class and through online forums. These interactions took various forms, including idea generation, brainstorming, editing, reviewing, and proofreading. Participants reported significant benefits from this informal and cooperative learning approach. While participation

appeared voluntary, no student could avoid active involvement without feeling isolated or left behind. Each student was expected to contribute new threads to the discussion board, fostering a cycle of constructive feedback and collaborative learning.

Student comments on the Discussion Board reflected their belief that they gained valuable insights from peer interactions. Through these exchanges, they collectively developed essential writing skills, which led to measurable improvements in their writing capabilities.

While learning is inherently an individual endeavor, the informal support provided in a cooperative learning environment can be highly enriching, diverse, and productive. Such environments expose learners to different writing styles and approaches, enabling them to refine their own skills and knowledge. Many educators view collaborative learning as a worthwhile goal, not only for its intrinsic value but also for its ability to enhance learners' efficiency in acquiring new knowledge and problem-solving skills. Collaborative learning helps students monitor and improve their writing styles, while also reducing anxiety, frustration, and lack of confidence.

Students' Motivation and Attitude Towards Blackboard Software

Students enrolled in this course primarily due to its convenience, as the essential tools traditionally required by writers, such as dictionaries and other resources, are readily accessible at their fingertips. Statistical data revealed that 61.74% of the participating students "Strongly Agree" that the pedagogical components of this Blackboard-assisted writing course were practical, effective, beneficial, comfortable, and efficient. For instance, Student #7 commented:

"...if you miss the class discussions, you will not miss any content posted on the discussion board, class announcements, or course documents on Blackboard."

This student, like the majority, appears to have internalized societal perceptions regarding the value of computer technology, viewing it as a transformative force that has positively and enduringly shaped her journey as an independent learner. The students' inclination aligns with the widely held belief that Blackboard-assisted learning is an indispensable component of quality education. They reflect the educators' emphasis on the significance of this technology in fostering literacy within the context of our modern world.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Course

With the exception of a few isolated cases, students' personal experiences with this freshman writing course revealed distinct areas of strength and weakness, as outlined below:

Strengths

- Flexible Communication: Students valued the ability to engage with materials and communicate at their own pace.
- 24/7 Resource Access: Course materials were available anytime, supporting continuous learning.
- Revision & Hard Copies: Students appreciated revising materials independently, without relying solely on digital access.
- External Resource Links: Supplementary resources enriched the learning experience.
- Instructor Accessibility: Timely support, including weekend availability, was highly appreciated.
- Personal Growth: The course fostered independence, responsibility, and personal development.
- Talent Showcase: Students had opportunities to highlight and expand their unique skills and talents.
- Immediate Feedback: Prompt feedback from instructors and peers supported continuous improvement.
- Collaborative Learning: The course provided an effective platform for cooperative learning.
- Draft Management: Easily recording, modifying, and building on drafts streamlined the writing process.
- Word Tools: Features like spell check and grammar check improved written work quality.
- Text Manipulation: Easy editing and text manipulation were significant advantages.
- Online Knowledge: Access to online resources and writing communities enhanced learning.
- Dual Modality: A blend of face-to-face and Blackboard-assisted learning offered a balanced experience.
- Task-Oriented Approach: Students felt engaged and immersed from the start.
- Self-Paced Learning: The course accommodated individual learning speeds.
- Tech Exposure: Extracurricular technological experience enriched education.
- Enhanced Writing Output: Students produced more extensive and higher-quality written work.

Weaknesses

The reported weaknesses were minimal, largely due to the course's integration of both synchronous and asynchronous teaching methods. These weaknesses can be summarized as follows:

- Language Barriers: One ESL student faced challenges related to language proficiency, which impacted this experience.
- Adjustment Period: A small number of students required additional time to adapt to the course's technological systems.

Overall, the course's strengths significantly outweighed its weaknesses, contributing to a positive and productive learning environment for the majority of students.

Writing Strategies Applied in This Course

The 'Discussion Board' served as an effective platform for brainstorming in this course. Students utilized this tool to post and exchange ideas, which in turn became valuable resources for generating and elaborating on new concepts. The Blackboard platform facilitated the review of 'old documents,' such as earlier drafts, which acted as both sources of inspiration and organizational templates for new assignments. The researchers observed that students frequently built their papers upon previous works, developing a habit of retaining old documents on their computers for reference when tackling related topics. Additionally, browsing the web allowed learners to explore how other writers approached specific topics and stay informed about recent developments in the field. Electronic mail exchanges further enriched the process, as students posed questions like, "What do you think?" to gain diverse perspectives and stimulate new ideas. Reading messages on the 'Discussion Board' served a similar purpose to reviewing old documents or browsing the web, fostering a continuous flow of ideas.

Students in this course were required to write a minimum of one journal per week. These journals primarily served as reflections on conversations and explorations of new ideas for upcoming papers. Some students maintained running lists of notes or saved ideas as they occurred, ensuring a steady stream of material for future assignments. Beyond the utility of external links, students actively encouraged one another to compile lists of useful writing websites and/or links enhance their writing resources.

The writing process in this course typically began with planning, during which Blackboard proved invaluable. Students jot down notes from various sources, streamlining the organization of ideas. The next step, drafting, involved transforming thoughts into coherent sentences and paragraphs. Digital-assisted platforms were found to be faster, more practical, and more accessible. Students benefited from the ease of writing, erasing, cutting, pasting, modifying, and saving multiple drafts. The availability of word processing tools allowed them to reuse or 'recycle' old texts and employ strategies such as color coding, outlines, divided screens, multiple windows, and varied fonts to distinguish elements within their work. Drafting also became a collaborative endeavor, with students engaging in 'round-robin' activities where they reviewed and revised each other's writing. This

process involved writing a page or so, exchanging seats to edit peers' work, and eventually publishing drafts on the Discussion Board for further peer review. Through this iterative process, students refined their drafts until they were satisfied with the final product. Word processing programs further supported this by enabling document comparison, tracking changes, and adding annotations.

The researchers noted that peer review activities helped students recognize that their peers faced similar challenges in composing ideas. This collaborative process also allowed students to assess whether their own points were being communicated effectively. The third step, organizing, involved structuring initial writing efforts. Blackboard facilitated this by allowing students to easily move and rearrange text within documents. Editing was another area where the software tools were advantageous in assisting, checking spelling, grammar, and style, as well as ensuring consistency, variety, and error-free writing.

Overall, the integration of Blackboard in this course provided students with a robust framework for planning, drafting, organizing, and editing their work, while fostering collaboration and continuous improvement through peer review and resource sharing.

Editing for Spelling, Grammar, and Style

Blackboard-assisted writing alleviates recurrent spelling challenges, allowing students to concentrate on developing their ideas, addressing their audience, and fulfilling their purpose rather than being preoccupied with spelling accuracy. Word processing software offers an efficient means of reviewing drafts for basic grammatical, mechanical, spelling, and stylistic issues. However, like spelling checkers, these tools possess both strengths and limitations. Frequently, the software overlook certain grammar and style errors due to several factors: (1) the numerous exceptions to grammatical rules, (2) the inability of grammar and style checkers to account for all possible language structures that may arise in specific contexts, (3) the wide variation in acceptable usage across different fields of expertise, (4) differing interpretations of linguistic rules among specialists and stakeholders, and (5) the ongoing evolution of the English language (Curzan, 2014).

In this course, students regularly reviewed their texts, making grammatical and stylistic adjustments as needed. When uncertain, they leveraged the External Links features for clarifications, explanations, or guidance. The integration of Blackboard also enabled students to address lexical challenges, enhance their writing speed, organize lists and references, and self-correct efficiently. Students effectively employed thesauruses to refine their diction, frequently incorporating synonyms to enhance consistency, coherence, variety, and stylistic richness in their writing. Additionally, they utilized commands such as 'Find' and 'Replace' to make swift corrections, further streamlining the editing process.

Overall, Blackboard-assisted tools not only facilitated the technical aspects of

writing but also empowered students to refine their work with greater precision and efficiency, ultimately contributing to the development of more polished and effective written communication.

Format, Layout, and Web Browsing

Students in this course effectively utilized the formatting and layout tools provided by Blackboard to enhance the presentation of their assignments. All submissions adhered to the established academic guidelines outlined in the course, including specifications for font style and size, spacing, margins, page numbering, and the inclusion of student names and course titles. Additionally, students leveraged various features such as document viewing, text insertion, cut-and-paste functions, bullet points, line spacing, indentation, alignment, and the incorporation of tables and figures, all of which were readily accessible on-screen. The application of these features significantly improved the effectiveness, professionalism, and readability of their documents. The writing and computer skills acquired in this course served as a strong foundation, preparing students for the demands of more advanced academic work.

The researchers anticipated that students progressing to higher-level courses would further develop their ability to perform advanced tasks, such as gathering information online, identifying credible online sources, accessing online library catalogs, and utilizing specialized databases like ERIC (a comprehensive database on educational issues) and MLA Online. The software offers a wealth of valuable resources, including online books, writing centers, dictionaries, style guides, glossaries, thesauruses, encyclopedias, grammar guides, citation manuals, and instructional texts on writing processes and genres, among others. These resources provide students with extensive support for their academic and writing endeavors.

Furthermore, students can engage with online writing communities, participate in newsgroups, explore websites, contribute to weblogs, and join chat channels. These platforms enable learners to exchange ideas, collaborate on projects, and seek information on specific topics, fostering a collaborative and interactive learning environment. By integrating these digital tools and resources, students are better equipped to navigate the complexities of academic writing and research in an increasingly digital world.

Findings

Most Recurrent Categories of Errors in Students' Papers:

Table 2 below presents a detailed overview of the most frequently occurring categories of errors identified in students' papers and drafts. The categories are organized in descending order based on their frequency of occurrence.

Table (2): The frequency of recurring errors in the students' papers and their drafts

Type of Mistake	Frequency Paper (1)	Frequency Paper (2)	Frequency Paper (3)	Total
1. Grammar & Syntax	325	174	243	742
2. Punctuation mistakes	280	104	138	522
3. Missing word or wrong choice of word/phrase	189	114	128	431
4. Alternative word/expression; rephrasing or addition by the instructor	173	92	119	384
5. Awkward, vague or incomplete structure	148	106	98	352
6. Redundant word/sentence	121	67	78	266
7. Lack of specifics and details	119	74	68	261
8. Spelling mistake	92	52	54	198
9. Transitions/connections between ideas	78	48	48	174
10. Clarifying question (input that requires more clarity)	66	25	39	130
11. Proofreading (Students should proofread their writing)	48	34	46	128
12. Fragment	49	29	38	116
13. Lack of clarifying/supporting example	46	29	26	101
14. Paragraphing (students should consider a new paragraph)	33	48	20	101
15. Lack of topic sentence	23	5	7	35

While digital platforms proved to be valuable tools in certain aspects of writing, a closer examination of Table 2 reveals that they were ineffective in addressing specific categories of errors, such as those numbered 7, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, and 15. This indicates that the application of Blackboard-assisted tools had a neutral impact on these particular areas, underscoring the limitations of technology in addressing more nuanced or complex writing

challenges.

As previously noted, each student in this study was given the opportunity to write and revise each paper three times, resulting in a total of nine drafts per student over the course of the study. This iterative process allowed for a comprehensive assessment of students' progress. Statistical analysis using Repeated Measures Analysis (RMA) with ANOVA (a one-way analysis of variance used to determine significant differences between the means of three or more independent groups) demonstrated an overall improvement in students' writing abilities across all papers and their multiple drafts. Over time, the analysis revealed a significant reduction in the number of errors, highlighting the effectiveness of the revision process.

Figures 1, 2, and 3 provide visual representations of the estimated marginal means, illustrating the trajectory of students' writing performance over time. These figures depict a consistent and steady decline in the number of errors across the three drafts of each paper. In these figures, "D" represents the draft number, while the values on the vertical axis correspond to the number of errors committed by students. The downward trend in these graphs clearly reflects the progress made by students in minimizing errors and enhancing the quality of their writing.

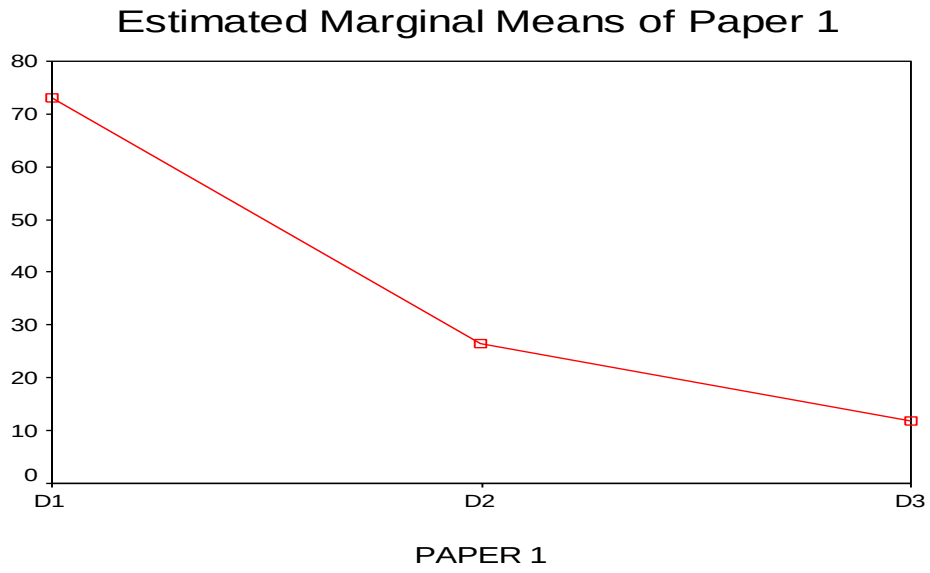


Figure 1: Estimated Marginal Means of paper 1

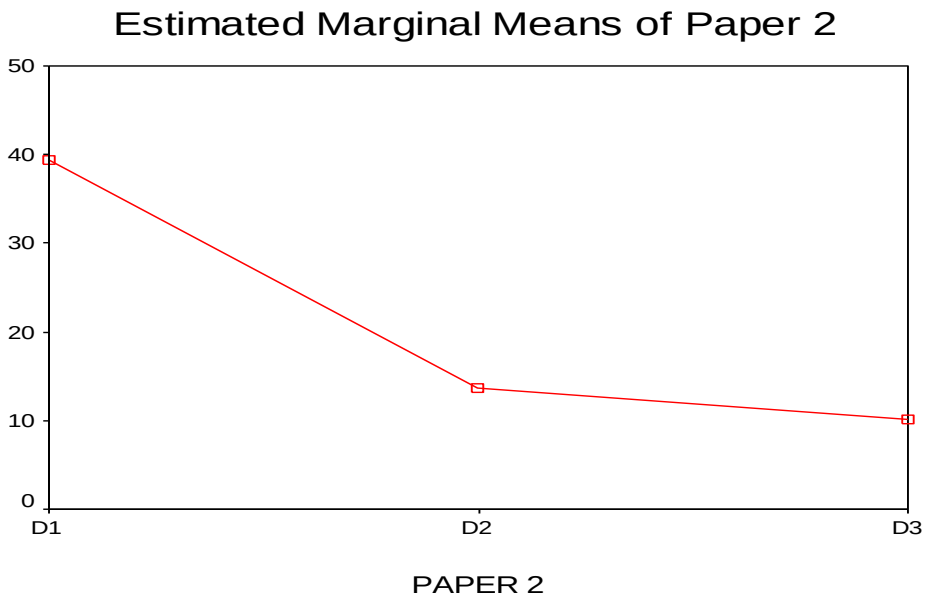


Figure 2: Estimated Marginal Means of Paper 2

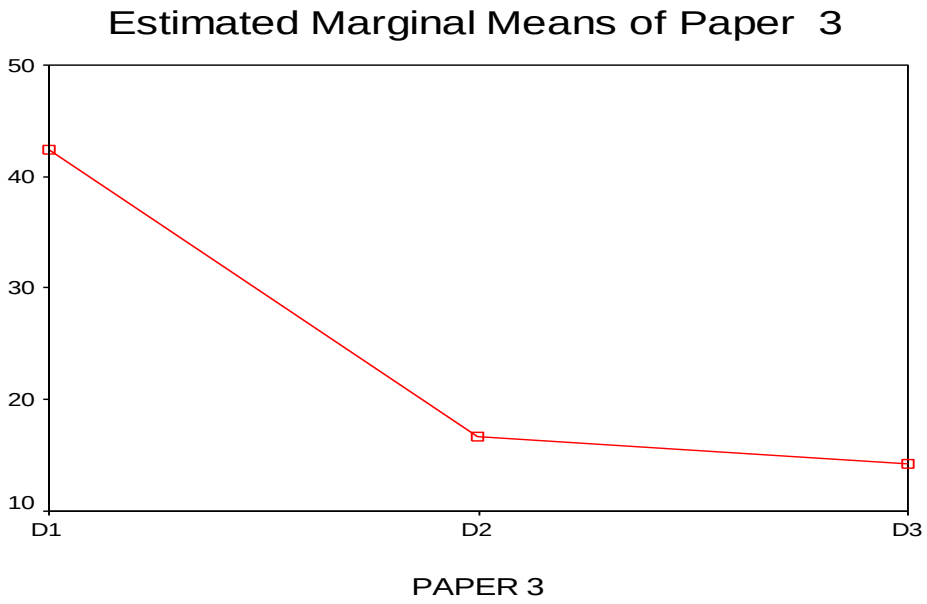


Figure 3: Estimated Marginal Means of Paper 3

As illustrated in the pictorial trace of students' writing progress over time, the slopes of the repeated measures across the three papers demonstrate a consistent and steady improvement in both drafts and final submissions. This trend raises an important question: to what extent can this improvement be attributed to the use of Blackboard?

As previously noted, there were specific areas in which Blackboard provided limited assistance, functioning as neutral tools rather than active aids. However, in other areas, the software proved effective in alerting writers to potential errors and offering valuable support. This platform served as gateway to a wealth of resources, providing students with access to extensive guidance and reference materials. By transforming the writing process from a burdensome task into an engaging and enjoyable activity, such platform acted as facilitators of learning. Its use aligns closely with the principles of constructivism, enabling learners to continuously build upon and expand their technical and pedagogical knowledge.

That said, it is important to recognize that such platforms are not magical devices capable of transforming poor writers into skilled writers. Rather, they are tools that provide writers with essential resources and functionalities, making the writing process more efficient and accessible. The widespread adoption of Blackboard and similar platforms worldwide underscores the perceived efficacy of such tools across various educational levels. This global shift reflects a collective acknowledgment of the value that technology brings to the writing and learning process.

Discussions, Summary, and Conclusions

The integration of Blackboard platform in writing instruction offers a transformative approach to the writing process, enabling students to create, revise, modify, store, edit, and publish texts with ease. In today's digital age, strong writing and computing skills are no longer optional but essential prerequisites for nearly every professional and academic endeavor. A Blackboard-assisted writing course (BAWC) must transcend the limitations of traditional classrooms by leveraging the unique capabilities of technology to enhance learning outcomes. As demonstrated earlier, internet-based platforms, particularly the discussion board, provide asynchronous communication tools, sophisticated question-and-response features, and collaborative learning opportunities that traditional classrooms cannot replicate.

It is important to clarify that computer software alone does not inherently make users better writers. Rather, they function as facilitators, much like a well-equipped playground enables athletes to perform more effectively. Platforms streamline the writing process by allowing students to revise, reorganize, and refine their work efficiently. Features such as omitting, adding, inserting, cutting, pasting, and accessing external links empower students to revise their work without starting from scratch. These tools not only

make the editing process faster and more efficient but also encourage students to focus on content and ideas rather than mechanical errors. Furthermore, the availability of editing commands—such as "select," "move," "delete," "cut," "copy," "paste," "undo," "redo," "find," and "repeat"—provide students with a virtual editor at their fingertips, significantly reducing the burden of manual revisions.

The Blackboard platform also fosters a collaborative and student-centered learning environment, extending the boundaries of traditional instruction. By enabling asynchronous communication and resource sharing, it enhances students' ability to manage their time effectively, and take responsibility for their learning. This dynamic interaction between instructors, students, and technology cultivates motivation, enjoyment, and confidence in the writing process. Additionally, the platform improves students' typing proficiency and computer literacy, skills that are increasingly vital in the modern world.

One of the most significant advantages of Blackboard-assisted writing is its capacity to save time and effort. Students can create and store multiple drafts, ensuring that lost files can be quickly retrieved without the need to start over. This efficiency allows learners to focus on refining their ideas and improving the quality of their writing.

The effectiveness of this course can be measured by the improvement in the quality of students' writing and the reduction in errors across their three papers. As evidenced by the data, *papers 2 and 3* exhibited fewer errors and higher quality than *paper 1*, with similar improvements observed across successive drafts. This trend suggests that the course had a positive impact on students' writing abilities.

In conclusion, the Blackboard platform represents a paradigm shift in modern education, offering tools and opportunities that enhance traditional teaching methods. By fostering collaboration, improving efficiency, and encouraging student-centered learning, it equips learners with the skills and confidence needed to excel in their writing endeavors. While this study does not claim to encompass all the functions and merits of Blackboard-assisted courses, it highlights the transformative potential of technology in shaping the future of writing instruction.

Implications

A. For Teaching

The integration of Blackboard platforms in writing instruction fosters a collaborative community of writers within the classroom, promoting skills such as idea exchange, peer review, and critical thinking literacy. In the digital age, the accessibility of information has eliminated barriers to knowledge acquisition, enabling students to independently explore and address their academic needs. A Blackboard-assisted learning approach is particularly effective because it accommodates learners at varying skill levels, guiding them from foundational concepts to advanced proficiency. This method

emphasizes the development of writers rather than merely improving individual pieces of writing. Instructors, in this context, assume the role of facilitators, guiding students from the peripheries rather than dictating the learning process. It is important to clarify that this approach does not support the misconception that such platforms will replace instructors; rather, it highlights the complementary role of technology in enhancing teaching and learning.

B. For Classroom Practice

The study revealed that student interaction is a critical component of a successful Blackboard-assisted writing class. Collaborative activities, such as publishing written work or creating class web pages, exemplify the advantages of internet-based learning in fostering a student-centered environment. Unlike traditional classrooms, where instructors are viewed as sole authorities, software-assisted learning empowers students to take ownership of their education. This shift aligns with contemporary pedagogical theories that prioritize student-centered learning. Students recognize that they are communicating with a knowledgeable audience, and each contribution to digital discussions serves to share and refine ideas. Innovative applications of Blackboard platform in writing instruction lies in providing students with opportunities to publish their work, thereby creating a communicative, collaborative, and task-based learning environment.

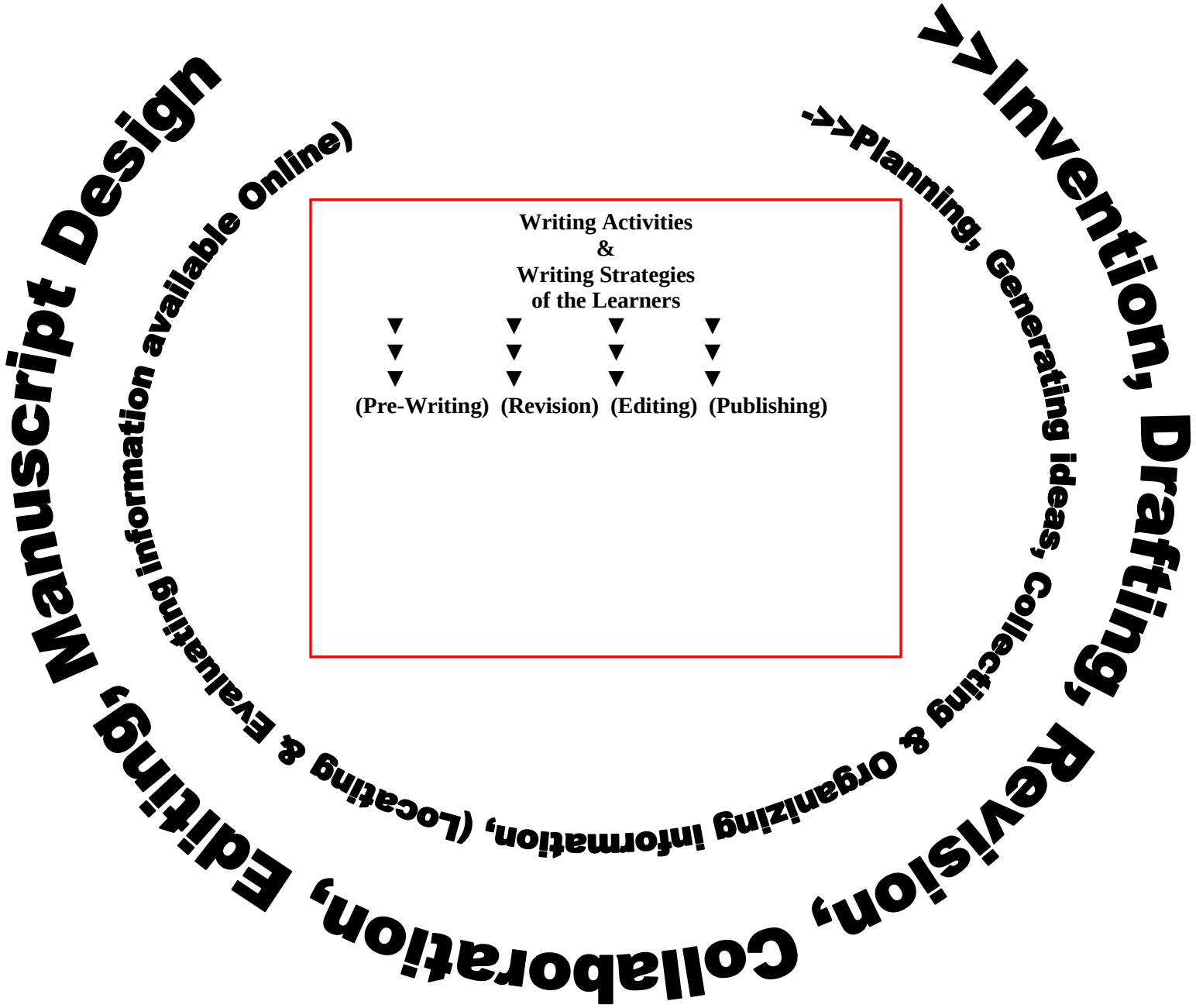
C. For Instructors of Similar Courses

While this study demonstrated a significant reduction in errors across multiple drafts, it also revealed limited improvement in the depth and elaboration of content. Content elaboration usually occurred when instructors or peers posed clarifying questions or suggested new ideas, prompting students to expand their thinking. This suggests that some students focused primarily on correcting surface-level errors rather than engaging deeply with the content or exploring new dimensions. The ability of software to store and retrieve previous drafts, while beneficial, can also lead to contentment if not supplemented with strategies to encourage critical thinking and creativity.

Instructors should recognize that, just as there is no one-size-fits-all approach in traditional teaching, diverse methods and techniques are necessary for success in a Blackboard-assisted environment. Instructors must remain flexible, continuously adapting their strategies based on observations of students' abilities, motivation levels, and learning progress. By doing so, they can maximize the potential of technology to support and enhance the writing process.

An Illustration of the Writing Process in This Course

The following diagram provides a visual representation of the key writing activities and strategies employed by students throughout this course:



Most educators admit that writing is both a product of innate talent and sustained practice, reflecting a level of individuality comparable to our physical characteristics. Writing is inherently non-linear, with writers frequently transitioning between various stages of the process. At times, they generate ideas; at others, they revise, draft, organize, or discard entire texts. The core stages of writing typically include idea generation (brainstorming or invention), information gathering, planning, drafting, reviewing, and editing. These processes can be undertaken independently or collaboratively, depending on the context and objectives of the writing task.

Recommendations

Given that this study was limited in scope to a single Blackboard-assisted writing class, the following recommendations are tailored to similar courses. Based on the quantitative and qualitative data collected, and the researchers' professional judgment, the following suggestions may prove valuable for future research and practice:

- Emphasize Computer Literacy: A strong foundation in computer literacy is essential for fostering positive attitudes, motivation, and effective performance among students in digital-assisted writing courses.
- View Writing as a Recursive Process: Instructors should approach writing as a dynamic, iterative process rather than a static product. By emphasizing the importance of drafting and revising, educators can help students develop a deeper understanding of the writing process.
- Provide Constructive Feedback: When evaluating student papers, instructors should focus on the writing process and offer clear, actionable feedback. On initial drafts, it is advisable to provide positive reinforcement and limit comments to two or three key areas for improvement. This approach increases the likelihood that students will engage with and address feedback effectively. As writing improvement is itself a process, feedback should be iterative and supportive (see Sommers, N. 2013).
- Promote Multiple Drafts: Blackboard-assisted writing inherently discourages single-draft assignments or last-minute submissions. Instead, it encourages students to engage in continuous writing and revision, fostering a culture of writing to learn.

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