

# **Exploring Students' Perceptions of Using Wiki-based Collaborative Activities in the EFL Classroom**

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# **Exploring Students' Perceptions of Using Wiki-based Collaborative Activities in the EFL Classroom**

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to investigate students' perceptions of wiki-based collaborative activities on the development of language learning in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) class at a Taiwanese university. A convenience sample of 44 Taiwanese undergraduate students voluntarily participated in the study. A questionnaire survey was utilized to investigate whether wiki activities can bring about positive experiences and perceptions regarding collaborative EFL learning. Results indicated that a high percentage of students' satisfaction showed positive perceptions of the Wiki-based collaborative activities. Results also indicated that the students expressed positive attitudes to the wiki activities, as these were interesting, easy to use, and interactive. Furthermore, the time students spent on language learning increased when they used the wiki, as they self-reported spending more time on task during free time. Overall, the students' devotion to the wiki activities brought about effective language learning.

**Keywords:** wiki; EFL; grammar; time on task

## 協同共筆的英語教學活動及學生感知探討

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### 摘要

本研究的目的是調查學生對協同共筆英語教學活動的感知探討，根據研究目的，四十四位大學生以方便取樣的方式自願參加了這項研究，進行問卷調查，分析協同共筆活動是否能夠對於英語學習產生積極經驗和看法。結果顯示，學生的滿意度相當高，且對於協同共筆的英語教學活動具有積極的看法。結果同時也顯示，學生們對於共筆的英語教學活動表達了積極的態度，因為他們認為這些活動很有趣，易於使用和互動。結果亦發現，學生參與英語共筆教學活動使得他們願意投入更多學習語言的時間，學生表示他們能夠不受時空環境限制地將更多空閒時間用於協同共筆的專注學習上。總體而言，學生對協同共筆英語教學活動的熱愛能帶來有效的語言學習。

關鍵詞: 共筆; 協作平台; 英語教學; 文法; 專注學習時間

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background

The development of Web 2.0 has created new ways for teachers to communicate with students. Web 2.0, such as facebook, blogs, and wikis, have also been called “social media”, Safko (2010) stated that: “wikis are websites that allow people to collect and edit their intelligence in one place at anytime. These web sites truly represent the social media foundation of user generated content and the wisdom of the crowds.” (p. 159). Many language teachers have adopted the use of Wiki sites into their traditional teaching mechanisms as part of a blended-learning approach (Evans, 2009).

Ideally, the best way to enhance motivation and to make English come alive for EFL learners is through authentic interactive communication in the manner of intensive exposure to the target language. It is also the best way to improve attitudes towards EFL, and to enhance achievement (Salaberry, 1996). Research studies show that one of the most effective ways to foster L2 development is through verbal interaction (either face-to-face or computer-mediated) with the target language speakers or learners (Warschauer, 1996). However, face-to-face interaction is not always possible, especially for the EFL students who rely on their time in classrooms to learn English that is not the typical language of communication outside the classroom, and who do not have the opportunity to participate in exchange visits.

With the development of wiki software and its increasing prevalence within the educational system, the questions then became, do wikis really aid in the language learning process by providing learners with positive attitudes and perceptions, including the majority who have no out-of-classroom contact with English?

### 1.2 Wiki

The development of wiki software has created new ways for teachers to communicate with students, and it has been an asset from which many have profited. According to *Britannica Online Encyclopedia* (wiki, 2012), a wiki is a website that can be edited or contributed to by users. “Wikis can be dated to 1995, when American computer programmer Ward Cunningham created a new collaborative technology for organizing information on web sites” (para. 1). The best-known use of wiki software is Wikipedia, an online encyclopedia. In addition to encyclopedias, wikis are used in a wide variety of circumstances to expedite interaction and cooperation in projects of different aspects. Owing to some negative media broadcasting, many people hesitate to learn about and use wikis. Teachers especially may be hesitant as they are responsible for students' safety and copyright infringements (Chapelle, 2003). This is unfortunate because there are many wiki sites that are not only suitable for academic use, but also have the potential really to enrich a curriculum. The study that follows sought to construct a framework for this author's on-going research into the effect of applying online

computer-mediated communication (CMC) tools, particularly wikis, in EFL classrooms.

### **1.3 Wikis in Second Language Learning**

Several studies have depicted how wikis are being used in the L2 classroom to develop language skills (e.g., Bradley, Lindstrom, & Rystedt, 2008; Chen, 2008; Kessler, 2009; Lee, 2009; Mak & Coniam, 2008; Woo, Chu, Ho, & Li, 2011), strengthen collaborative learning and enhanced creative writing (e.g., Bradley, Lindstrom, & Rystedt, 2008; Castañeda & Cho, 2012; Coyle, 2007; Kessler, 2009; Kessler & Bikowski, 2010; Lee, 2009; Mak & Coniam, 2008; Woo, Chu, Ho, & Li, 2011), especially in terms of college students' L2 grammatical knowledge and language accuracy (Castañeda & Cho, 2012; Kessler, 2009; Lee, 2009), and facilitate peer feedback (Lee, 2009; Mak & Coniam, 2008). Additionally, studies have highlighted positive perceptions using wikis, and students self-reported that wikis are useful and helpful for language learning (Castañeda & Cho, 2012; Kessler, 2009; Lee, 2009; Woo, Chu, Ho, & Li, 2011).

Despite the fact that there is a considerable collection of literature that has discussed the creation and use of wikis in both formal and informal educational settings, scientific research literature regarding actual recognition of correct English grammar usage and its relation to the time on task, barely exists. This study aims to investigate the effect of wikis on students' EFL grammar achievement by comparing the use of wiki-based activities to traditional face-to-face (FTF) activities.

### **1.4 Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study was to assess students' perceptions about wiki-based collaborative activities to determine their level of satisfaction.

The research questions examined in this study were:

1. What demographic characteristics exist for the participated students?
2. What are the student perceptions of the wiki-based collaborative activities?

## **2. Method**

### **2.1 Participants**

College students from a suburban area of Taipei participated as intact groups in this study. The participants who represent the population were young adult male and female college EFL students who have received at least seven years of English as a required course. Therefore, one existing classes, with 44 sophomores majoring in English, were recruited as subjects in the study; these students were selected to participate the wiki-based collaborative activities. The researchers had informally requested the instructor to ask the students if they had used a wiki heretofore. While many students responded that they had heard of a wiki, very few had ever used it, and none had utilized it as a collaborative learning tool.

## **2.2 Instruments**

The instrument used for data collection in this study was a student survey. At the end of the treatment period, the students completed a survey that includes demographic questions, and retrospective questions about how students viewed the experience of using wiki-based activities as measured by a Likert-scale post-survey with a four point scale: strongly agree, a value of (4), agree (3), disagree (2) and strongly disagree (1) were included (see Appendix A).

The survey in this study was integrated from previous studies (Chen, 2011; Liaw, 2007), and was re-created by the researcher. The survey was translated from English to Chinese (see Appendix B) and was given to all students who participated in this study. The researchers asked the students to record honestly how many hours they spent on the wiki sites and practicing English exercises. Therefore, students recorded the hours they spent on wiki activities, read and commented or edited other students' online postings, and practiced exercises on the wiki sites.

The instrument was administered face-to-face to the students who enrolled in one of the college sophomore EFL courses through the assistance of the instructor. Descriptive statistical analyses were conducted using Statistical Package for Social Sciences.

## **2.3 Procedures**

The study took place over a four-week period in one semester. In terms of course content, this time frame corresponded to the time period of Unit 5 Chapter 3 and Unit 7 Chapter 2 of the textbook *Reading & Vocabulary Development 3: Cause & Effect*, for which the target grammar structures were taught, as scheduled in the course syllabus.

During the intervention period, the instructor taught the targeted grammar points. These grammar points were presented in the traditional face-to-face setting. Before technology training took place, the instructor divided the class into 11 small groups. Each group had a leader, and he or she encouraged group members to post, edit, and comment on the wiki. The instructor oversaw the participants' work and gave comments throughout the intervention period.

Students in the wiki group were trained on how to use the wiki. The instructor explained what the students will be creating on the wiki site. The instructor handed out written instructions for each participant. After all students have accessed to their wiki sites, the instructor provided directions for the activities. Students posted their assignments outside class time by using their own computers or the ones in the college libraries or computer labs. By the end of semester, the student survey and was administered by the instructor.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1 Sample Demographics

A convenience sample, consisting of 44 undergraduate students enrolled in a sophomore-year EFL class at a Taiwanese university, was used.

The students (100%) were solely applied-foreign-languages majors and were sophomores. The majority of the sample was females (70.5%), with 29.5% being males. The majority of participants (52.3%) were 19 years old and 45.5% had been learning English for 6-10 years. A detailed breakdown of the sample demographics can be seen in Tables 1.

Table 1

*Demographic Information of Treatment Group Participants (n=44)*

Demographic Variables	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	13	29.5
Female	31	70.5
Age		
18	0	0
19	23	52.3
20	19	43.2
21	2	4.5
22	0	0
23 and above	0	0
Year learned English		
2-5 years	10	22.7
6-10 years	20	45.5
11-15 years	12	27.3
16 years and above	2	4.5

Note: Totals may not equal 100% because of rounding.

#### 3.2 Student Experience Survey

For a comprehensive understanding of the students' responses to the use of wikis for collaborative English language learning activities, an end-of-project questionnaire survey was administered. The questionnaire survey was divided into three sections. The first section included questions concerning students' experiences using wiki activities.

The second section contained questions about students' satisfaction levels. The third section included three questions regarding collaborative learning using wiki activities.

The findings for Section 1 revealed very positive responses from the participating students. Most of the mean scores were above 3.50, and many of them approached 4.00. The average score for Section 1 was 3.59 (see Table 2).

Table 2. Student Experience Survey: Section 1

Questions	M	SD
1. I gained English language skills through the learning process using wiki activities.	3.63	.61
2. I gained content area knowledge about the topics using wiki activities.	3.77	.57
3. I gained a deeper understanding of the concept when involving in the wiki activities.	3.52	.63
4. Learning English through using wiki activities was interesting.	3.43	.79
5. The wiki activities had increased my motivation to learn English.	3.43	.66
6. The wiki activities made English learning meaningful.	3.68	.67
7. The wiki activities gave me opportunities to think.	3.88	.62
8. Overall, I thought that taking part in the wiki activities helped me to gain confidence in my own English language ability.	3.45	.63
Average	3.59	

The students' responses to Section 2 of the questionnaire survey revealed further insights. Overall, the participating students had very positive responses toward learning using wiki (see Table 3).

Table 3. Student Experience Survey: Section 2

Questions	M	SD
9. I fulfilled the requirements of the wiki activities.	3.16	.83
10. I will recommend wiki activities to other students.	3.70	.73
11. I feel positive about the wiki activities in this class.	3.89	.65
12. My experience of practicing wiki activities in this class makes me want to take more English classes.	3.57	.59
13. The wiki activities contributed a lot to my learning of the target grammar structures.	3.75	.53
14. Compared to the other activities in this course, the wiki activities were more influential to my learning	3.45	.79
15. I consider the wiki activities enjoyable learning experiences.	3.70	.67
16. I consider the wiki activities more enjoyable than the other learning activities in this course.	3.43	.85
Average	3.58	

In Section 3 of the satisfaction survey (see Table 4), the participating students had very positive responses toward collaborative learning using wiki overall. They agreed that the wiki activities provided opportunities to interact with their classmates. The interactions with their group members/partners deepened their English grammar learning, and they were confident that their contributions to the wiki activities influenced their peers in their learning of the target grammar structures.

Table 4. Student Experience Survey: Section 3

Questions	M	SD
17. The wiki activities provided opportunities to interact with my classmates	3.61	.84
18. The interactions with my group members/partners deepened my English grammar learning.	3.68	.67
19. I am confident that my contributions to the wiki activities influenced my peers in their learning of the target grammar structures.	3.54	.59
Average	3.61	

#### 4. Conclusion and Recommendation

The results of this research have provided statistical evidence that positive perceptions existed among Taiwanese college EFL students toward wiki-based collaborative language learning activities. These statistical findings were supported by other research studies which have highlighted positive perceptions using wikis, and students self-reported that wikis are useful and helpful for language learning (Castañeda & Cho, 2012; Kessler, 2009; Lee, 2009; Woo, Chu, Ho, & Li, 2011). These researchers agreed that wiki activities enhance students' abilities to increase their learning and performance of the correct English usage. Students not only helped each other organize the content but also made error corrections for language accuracy and, as a result, they concluded that a collaborative wiki task is a rewarding experience for language learners.

This study provides a valuable starting point for wiki-based collaborative language-learning research. It gives teachers a tool for changing the classroom from transferring information through lecture to a classroom of interactive communication between students and teachers. It has been shown that, when a collaborative learning environment is supported by computer-mediated communication (CMC), its potential success for foreign language learning is remarkably enhanced (Levy & Stockwell, 2006). Furthermore, when the students engaged in collaborative patterns of interaction, they were more likely to perform better in foreign language learning. Today's Taiwanese college students are very comfortable using social media. It is important that foreign language teachers become more comfortable with social media to acknowledge the value of integrating it into their instruction.

Wiki-based social media has opened a new horizon for foreign language learning and teaching. The present study showed that the ways the students used the wikis for collaborative and interactive language learning was pedagogically effective. Teachers should increase out-of-class opportunities to help students by bring about

discussions that are related to correct usage.

When analyzing this study, areas were found that could be further researched in the future. First, the present study took place over a total period of 4 weeks and used 44 participants in one class from one university in Taiwan. Further research could be conducted with larger samples and over a longer period of time to determine if findings can be generalized. It is also recommended that future studies include different types of social media, such as podcasting or videoconferencing, so students get chances to practice listening and speaking skills during the activities.

Finally, it is believed that the addition of qualitative data could have enriched the present research study, for it would have allowed further insights into the students' achievement and satisfaction levels. Future research should be conducted to study the quality as well as quantity of the interaction between learners. A mixed-methods study would be ideal for future research.

Lastly, future studies should follow up on issues raised by Coyle (2007), who reported that there was no significant difference in students' achievement and perceptions between a wiki group and a traditional face-to-face group. Further research is needed to see how these results might have occurred and whether they hold true in subsequent research. The overall conclusion from this study is that collaborative wiki activities can bring about positive perceptions toward learning a foreign language. More research is needed to see if these findings can be replicated in other settings with different populations.

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