

Using Member Only Wiki Space for Collaborative Writing and Peer Interaction in the Undergraduate EAP Course

Yaoko Matsuoka

International Christian University, Japan

0432

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Abstract

The use of technology in language learning and teaching has become increasingly important during the past several decades, and effective application of CMC (computer mediated communication) to the English curriculum has permeated in higher education in Japan. This paper reports on an attempt of applying wiki writing to second-year undergraduate EAP (English for Academic Purposes) course at a national university in Japan and reflects on its benefits and deficiencies, aiming at future pedagogical improvement. To promote critical thinking and academic writing skills, collaborative writing using wiki technology was incorporated into a 15-lesson semester course through WebClass, an integrated e-learning program. Students worked in small groups cooperatively to create a passage for assigned topics. Though each wiki space was arranged for the use of group members only and not accessible by other groups during the writing phase, a teacher was able to observe the developmental process of writing to check the progress. Wiki writing activity seems to be useful from the perspectives of sociocultural theory and interaction hypothesis in that it facilitated collaborative writing by offering the environment where peer comments and more competent students' written text served as 'scaffolding' to improvement, and peer interaction was promoted. Appropriateness of the CM-based wiki writing activity was evaluated out of consideration for Instructional Design perspectives, using Simplified Motivational Design (Keller and Suzuki, 1996). In addition, results from 'jugyo hyouka', a questionnaire conducted by the university, indicate a certain degree of satisfaction of students concerning the use of wiki.

Keywords: *wiki, collaborative writing, EFL, EAP, interaction, communication, LMS*

1. Introduction

The use of technology in language learning and teaching has become increasingly important during the past several decades, and effective application of computer mediated communication (CMC) or information and communication technologies (ICT) to the English language learning curriculum has permeated in higher education in Japan. Recent Web 2.0 technology provides various web-based applications for interactive communication, such as discussion forum, oral and written chat, and wiki. Wiki is known as “a web-based software that allows all viewers of a page to change the content by editing a page on line in a browser”, and this makes wiki “a simple and easy-to-use platform for cooperative work on text and hypertext” (Ebersbach, Glaser, Heigl, & Warta, 2008). Collaborative writing can be defined as “the joint production or the coauthoring of a text by two or more writers” (Storch, 2011, pp275), and in this respect, writing tasks using wiki may appropriately support collaborative writing. Use of the collaborative writing is quite common in university L2 courses (Storch, 2011) and provides students benefits such as fostering reflective thinking and greater awareness and understanding audience (Bruffee, 1933; Storch, 2011). Though there exist relatively few studies on wiki, applicability and usefulness of wikis in language classrooms have been actively investigated with positive results in recent research (e.g., Bradley, Lindstrom, & Rystedt, 2010; Lin and Yang’s, 2011). The L2 writing with CMC tools, as Felix’s (2005) meta-analysis shows, seems to have effects as: increased participation, positive attitude and empowerment of students, decreased teacher control, wider variety of discourse functions, and mixed results regarding syntactic complexity.

This paper reports on an attempt of applying wiki writing via the learning management systems (LMS) platform called Webclass to second-year undergraduate EAP course at a national university of science and technology in Japan. LMS is an integrated e-learning system that provides teachers and students opportunities to use a variety of applications easily and meaningfully both inside and outside of the classroom. LMSs are excellent for both individual and group-based communicative tasks, for instance, collaborative learning, bulletin boards discussion, chat, and Web-conferencing (Latchem & Jung, 2010). The target course involved three classes with totally 108 students from the Department of informatics and engineering. This course can be labeled as EAP (English for academic purposes) rather than EFL/ESL (English as a foreign/second language), since the main objectives of the course are to develop students’ academic study skills (e.g., listening, note-taking, reading, and academic writing) and higher order thinking (e.g., summarizing, critical thinking, and discussing) so that they can be well-prepared for the science-and-engineering specific ESP (English for specific purposes) courses that will be offered in their third academic year. In particular, the two most important elements of this course were academic writing and academic presentation, for which students were asked to work in small groups. Wiki was selected for the group-based writing, while forum was also incorporated to the weekly opinion-exchange activity. The present paper also reflects on the benefits and deficiencies of the course design, aiming at future pedagogical improvement.

2. Background: CMC, LMS, and L2 Instruction

Recent research indicates that the use of CMC facilitates L2 learning and teaching (e.g., Grosbois, 2011, on oral output and phonological development; Kenning, 2010, on synchronous CMC; Yu & Zeng, 2011, on collaborative dialogue interaction).

Computer programs have advantages that it can be used to develop any of the four skills of language learning and has a scope of learner control, and these strengths are available when the media are designed carefully and applied to instruction appropriately (Moore & Kearsley, 2005). Blake (2011) suggests that students who took all or part of their classes online seem to have performed better than those in traditional face-to-face learning environments, and students involved in blended or hybrid learning environments, where courses are provided both in face-to face and on-line, did better than those in purely online courses.

In formal educational settings, computer program or web-based learning system has developed remarkably since the computer mediation (CM) became available in the late 1990s. CMC tools such as computers connected to the internet, i-pad, and mobile-phones have been applied to language activities. In particular, in higher education, increasing pervasiveness of LMS, e.g., Blackboard, WebCT, eClassroom, Moodle, FirstClass and Webclass, enabled many students and teachers to access both types of on-line communication: *synchronous* (interactive communication with no time delay; e.g., written and oral chat) and *asynchronous* (communication with a delay that allows participants to respond at a different time after the message is sent; e-mail and on-line forum) (Moore & Kearsley, 2005). The LMSs provide the capabilities for the both types of communications, in addition to the learner management resources, testing functions, and access to a huge reservoir of Web resource materials (Moore & Kearsley, 2005). That is, integrated computer program is valuable in that it has functions as presentation of information, documentation and storage of data, and provides learners with online learning community.

3. Research on Wiki

Since Ward Cunningham created the first wiki in 1995, a considerable number of wiki pages have been created on the web, and application of wiki to language education has attracted interests of teachers and practitioners. There have been, however, relatively few empirical studies that applying wikis to language learning environment to improve students' interaction. Primary focus of the research relating to the use of wiki has been on the effects of collaborative work of students, especially with writing tasks and students' interaction in the process of collaborative writing.

Study on the rationalities of collaboration for a wiki-based writing by Bradley, Lindstrom, & Rystedt (2010) investigated students' written communication displayed in the wiki environment. It is reported that a variety of aspects of collaboration and cooperation are seen in majority of the groups: for instance, the level of collaboration in writing varies from mostly no visible interaction to high level of collaboration; students are giving feedback each other in peer groups as well as between groups when creating a text. Interestingly, however, they found that in some of the groups, members were contributing to their joint text by posting a full piece of text as individuals, showing no collaboration.

Applying wiki technology and peer review to an EFL writing class was also reported by Lin and Yang (2011). They explored the college sophomore students' perception about integrating the use of wikis and peer feedback in Taiwan. The results from the responses of a survey and student/group interviews indicate the significant social meaning in wiki writing project and the mitigation of instructor's authority as perceived benefits. It was reported that students seemed to have learned much from

reading the text produced by peers, for example, concerning other's mistakes in vocabulary, spelling, and sentence structures. At the same time, the challenges of wiki writing project were also shown in Lin and Yang's (2011) study. They pointed out students' perceived functional obstacles (e.g., unfamiliarity with the wiki interface) and psychological obstacles (e.g., hesitation to correct other's mistakes) to using the wiki writing tool, suggesting the need of the training of peer feedback.

Synchronous aspects of wikis have attracted the interests of researchers and practitioners. A collection of case studies on wikis by Bruen, Fitzpatrick, Gormley, Harvey, and McAvinia (2010) have illustrated how the use of wikis supported the learning in various educational and institutional contexts. All the case studies have clear purpose to use wiki and admit that the use of wiki supports face to face meetings. It is conclusively suggested that wikis not only support but also activate community activity, afford knowledge creation, and "support knowledge management in complex collaborative projects" (Bruen, Fitzpatrick, Gormley, Harvey, and McAvinia, 2010, p. 110).

4. Theoretical Frameworks: Interaction Hypothesis and Sociocultural Theory

CMC plays a significant role in ESL/ EFL learning and teaching by providing the situation that facilitates learners' interaction with appropriate use of a target language. The web-based interaction, either synchronous or asynchronous, provides learners with 'on-line or virtual community' (Moore & Kearsley, 2005). Previous studies on wikis have employed various theoretical frameworks to account for the feasibility and effectiveness of wiki technology application. Interaction Hypothesis and Sociocultural Theory are the two most frequently used principles of second language acquisition (SLA) to promote on-line interaction. The benefit of interacting with others is described in *Interaction hypothesis* initially proposed by Long (1981). The hypothesis refers to the idea that language acquisition requires or greatly benefits from interaction, communication, and especially negotiation of meaning, which happens when interlocutors attempt to overcome problems in conveying their meaning, resulting in both additional input and useful feedback on the learner's own production (Richards & Schmidt, 1985). In the *Interaction Hypothesis*, Long (1981) proposes that, for successful second language acquisition, more attention should be put on the *interactions* which learners engage in, rather than merely depending on *input* and *output*. *Input* refers to the linguistic forms used, while *interaction* means the functions served by those forms, such as expansion, repetition, and clarification, and these interactions are not only a source of L2 input, but are rather exchanges in which the participants negotiate the meaning of the input. This negotiation results in changes to the quality and complexity of the *input*, which promotes L2 learning. Thus, interaction can have positive effects on L2 development, though it should not be seen solely as a cause of acquisition (Fang, 2010).

Learning is potentially a social process in which learners acquire knowledge and understand the nature of things through interaction with others (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky's (1978) renowned concept, *the zone of proximal development* (ZPD), refers to "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (pp.86), and this support of more capable others is called 'scaffolding'. The principle of ZPD has had considerable impact on recent pedagogical research and

instructional design of SLA (e.g., Ohta, 2005; Lantolf, 2000; Takahashi, 2001, Samuda, 2001). Applying Vygotsky's *sociocultural theory* to formal EFL education in Japanese universities, Shinjo (2008) has attempted to clarify one aspect of 'learning' by seeing it not as an individual activity but as a conversational and communicative activities based on interaction with others. In this respect, learning can be supported by different types of mediation, for instance, psychological tool such as language and codes, and technological tool such as a computer. As Shinjo (2008) argues, it seems significant to examine the use of computers or ICT from the view point that sees them as useful tools to mediate interaction between learners in building a learning environment, rather than the view point that sees them merely technological tools for transmitting information. It might not be too much to say that to investigate how language are learned in ZPD may lead us to "move toward a more holistic and process-oriented view of what it means to acquire a language"(Ohta, 2005, pp.515)

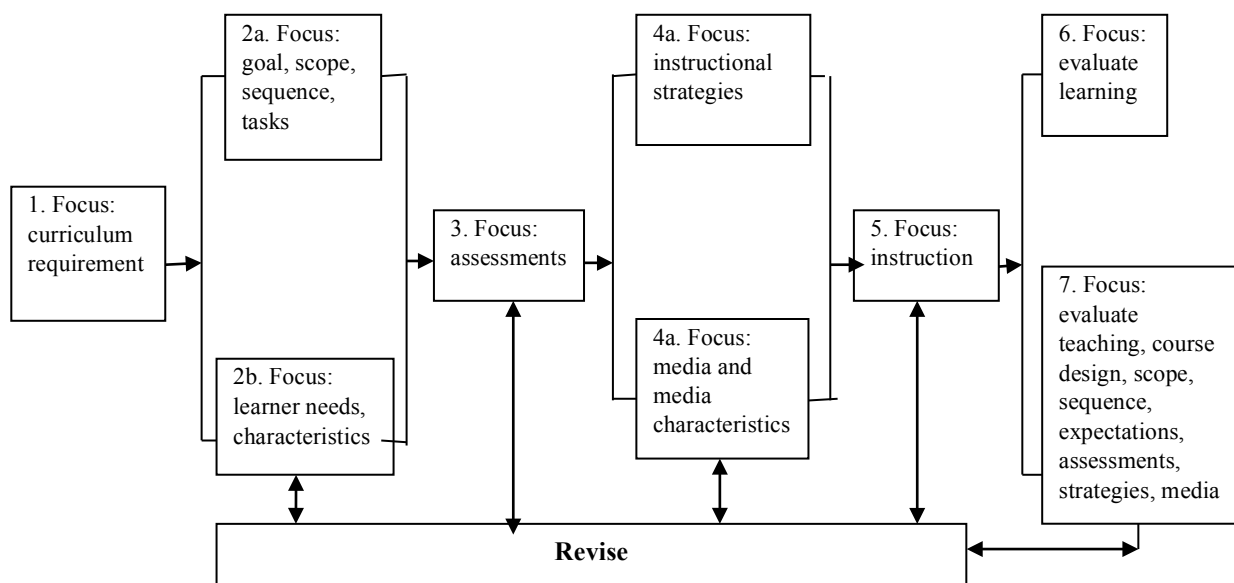
Presence of the sense of community in web-based instruction is also examined in Ko's (2012) study of *social presence* in French language learners' learning environment including the use of video/audio, audio, and face-to-face communication. Due to the fact that web-based learning embodies the nature of '*community*' when tasks and activities are utilized interactively in second language instruction, *sociocultural theory* (Vygotsky, 1978) seems to be strong underpinnings of the on-line-based interaction.

5. The Wiki Application

5.1. Blended Course Design

The fundamental objective of the target EAP course was to develop the skills of critical thinking, academic writing, and academic presentation based on acquisition of global knowledge through the news articles and videos. The course was designed as the blended learning style, which combines face-to-face instruction and web-based activities together. Blended learning has advantages that it can extend time and task of traditional face-to-face instruction, promote the opportunities of cooperative group activities, and realize easier adjustment to e-learning than adopting fully on-line courses (Garrison, 2011). *A modified instructional design model for teacher-designers* by Rogers (2002) was helpful in designing this blended-course (see Table 1). The model seems to be easy to use for teacher-designers in many respects, especially because it offers quite practical ways of designing courses in real educational contexts and fits the course design that employs technological media. It provides seven steps of design elements, starting with the focus on (1) institutional curriculum requirements, and focusing respectively on (2) goals of learning and learners and learner needs; on (3) assessments; on (4) teaching strategies and instructional media use; on (5) instruction itself; on (6) evaluation of student gains and (7) evaluation of teaching and the entire course (Rogers, 2002). In addition, it is encouraged in this model to revise every element at any stage of designing the course. The steps are shown in Figure-1.

Figure-1 : A Modified Instructional Design Model For Teacher-Designers by Rogers (2002).



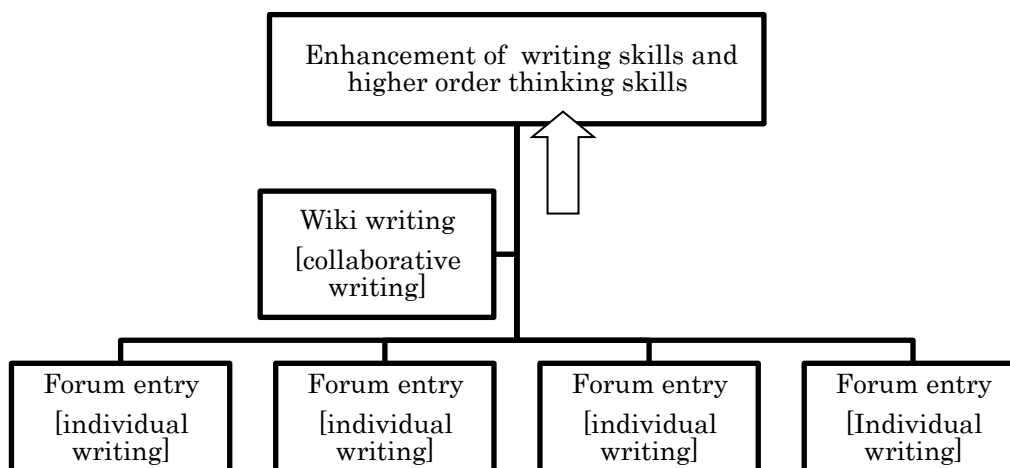
Applying Rogers' model, the course was organized under the institutional requirement of genre-based pedagogy (e.g., Swales, 1990), setting the goal as development of writing and presentation skills, and selecting topic contents with consideration to the needs and characteristics of science-and-technology majoring students. Accordingly, a student's argumentative writing, the final product of academic writing activities, and its presentation were included in the assessment stage. Selecting instructional strategies was intertwined with the selection of media. Under the premise that Webclass LMS would be used, wiki and forum were chosen from the three options of interactive function of Webclass, since it was assumed the third option, chat, would be hard to implement due to the limited class time, predicted difficulty in time management and a relatively big size of class. In the fifth stage, instruction was considered and revised in relation to other elements.

In this blended course, wiki writing was implemented on the LMS environment called Webclass, which was developed and operated by the university where the target EAP course was taught. The use of this institutional LMS helped students overcome administrative issues such as creation of new accounts and security problems and provided a safer and more familiar e-learning environment than other free open soft-wares. A course textbook titled ABC World News 14 (Kinseido, 2012) was adopted to provide students with a wide range of information through texts, CD, and DVD, all of which offered students with valuable resources for global, social, and scientific knowledge and information, and other authentic L2 input through news contents in English. Two different writing activities were designed to enhance students' academic writing skills: collaborative writing on assigned topics using the wiki spaces and individual writing of a short paper on the topic selected. Both writings were to be presented as a group presentation with a power-point slide in front of the classroom.

Besides them, students were encouraged to enter comments in weekly discussion forums to present their opinions and thoughts about the issues they studied in class.

Consequently, each student had to create one wiki text cooperatively in a group in addition to entering comments in the forums as an individual. The two types of on-line writing activities in the blended course is visually presented in Figure-2.

Figure 2: Visualization of wiki writing and forum entry in a blended course design



5.2. ARCS Model and Simplified Approach

While Rogers' ID model offered systematic, teacher-designer-friendly assistance to designing the course, final evaluation of the course design (and decision making in some part of the design process) was done following the concepts of Keller's ARCS Model of motivational design. ARCS stands for Attention (capturing the interest of learners; stimulating the curiosity to learn), Relevance (meeting the personal needs/goals of the learner to effect a positive attitude), Confidence (helping the learners believe/feel that they will succeed and control their success), and Satisfaction (reinforcing accomplishment with internal and external rewards) (Keller, 2010). The model was first to have focused on the affective domain of instructional design and provided instructional designers a systematic process of incorporating motivation to the instructional systems design (ISD) (Shellnut, Knowlton, and Savage, 1999). According

to Keller (2010), it is not sufficient for designing instruction to focus only on processes and techniques for producing efficient and effective instruction as the traditional view of instructional design used to do, but it is important to consider how to make instruction appealing; appealing without becoming purely entertaining. This time, Simplified Motivational Design Process Matrix (Suzuki & Keller, 1996) was employed to evaluate the course. While the original ARCS Model proposes ten steps for motivational design process, Simplified Motivational Design Process Matrix provides much simpler process involving fewer four design factors: learner characteristics, learning task, medium, and courseware characteristics. The matrix also has spaces for a teacher to fill in by considering a summary of those design factors and motivational tactics for the lessons.

5.3. Students' Perception

5.3.1. University-oriented questionnaire

Though this attempt was reviewed based on the teacher's (author's) reflection and evaluation, students' perception of the instructional effects was also grasped through the 'Jugyo hyouka', a questionnaire conducted to the students by the university's educational affairs at the end of every term in order to evaluate instructional effects of each course. The same questionnaires were conducted to all the courses, and their results were to be opened to each teacher and university faculty members. Following the questionnaire guideline that suggests teachers to add more questions if necessary, four simple questions concerning the use of wiki and *Webclass* were added to the list of my course. The simple questions include:

1. Was the use of Web Class effective for your English study?
2. Was the use of wiki effective for the group writing for the project?
3. Was the use of Discussion Forum effective for your English study?
4. Do you think understanding other people's opinion through on-line writing is useful in improving your critical thinking skill?

Respondents' levels of agreement to the questions were presented in five items of Likert

Scale: strongly agree, agree, not decided, disagree, and strongly disagree.

5.3.2. Student Perception about the use of LMS, wiki, and forum

According to the University's official report on the questionnaire results sent to me after

2012 spring semester, following results were indicated. As shown in Table-2 below, about 65.5 % of students think that Webclass LMS was used effectively in the course, and 17.8 % of them selected *Not Decided*, though 8.8 % showed disagreement and 1% showed strong disagreement about the LMS effectiveness. In terms of the effectiveness of wiki in group writing activity, totally 65.2% (32.2% of strong agreement and 33% of agreement about its effectiveness) admitted that the use of wiki was effective. The figure far outstripped that of forum, which was 56.2% in total with 17.1% of strong agreement and 39.8% of agreement. For the question about the acquisition of critical thinking skills, nearly 29 % answered that on-line writing, where they were able to understand other students' opinions, was effective in promoting critical thinking skills.

Though there were approximately 17 to 29% of people who did not make their decision, quite a few people, 0.9 to 8.8%, expressed their disagreement and few, mostly below 1%, showed strong disagreement concerning the use of Webclass LMS, wiki, and forum, and the development of critical thinking.

Table-2 Results of the University's Questionnaire

	SA	A	N	D	SD	
LMS effectiveness (%)	27.8	37.7	17.8	8.8	1.0	
Wiki effectiveness	32.2	33.0	20.0	6.9	0.9	
Forum effectiveness	17.1	39.8	29.2	5.0	0.9	
Critical thinking skill gained	28.9	34.1	28.0	0.9	0.9	

[Scale: SA: strongly agree, A: agree, N: not decided, D: disagree, SD: strongly disagree.]

6. Reflection and Discussion

The web-based interaction, either synchronous or asynchronous, provides learners with 'on-line or virtual community' (Moore & Kearsley, 2005), and the blended learning style often seems to be more appropriate in Asian contexts (Latchem and Jung, 2010). The attempt of applying online writing tool to EAP course was reviewed based on the teacher's (author's) reflection on how wiki technology played a significant role on the development of students' collaborative writing. The course was designed using *a modified instructional design model for teacher-designers* by Rogers (2002). In the final evaluation stage, Simplified Motivational Design Process Matrix developed by Suzuki & Keller (1996) was used to evaluate the course by analyzing design factors: learner characteristics, learning task, medium, and courseware characteristics (see Appendix-1). By putting the + (positive) and - (negative) signs to the ARCS categories respectively from factor to factor, it was found that wiki was applied to a large extent effectively to the blended course design. For instance, in respect of Attention, the section of learner characteristics has one (+) (learners' attention is high because it is part of the course requirement) and one (-) (learner's attention is not high because additional time and effort are needed for the wiki task). To sum up, learners afford characteristics suitable to utilize the wiki technology but their lack of confidence in English writing might hinder smooth implementation of collaborative editing. To sustain *attention*, it is needed to emphasize the effect of longer exposure to the target language and try to include new sources as much as possible. A high degree of *relevance* was shown, as collaborative writing task seems to fit one of the course objectives to improve writing skills. It was also found that while the course design enabled learners to be *confident* to use the system, anxiety for the unstable connection or faults of system cannot be completely discarded, suggesting the importance of face-to-face instruction. As for *satisfaction*, increasing exposure to English and sense of task involvement seem to lead to positive perception of learners. Prominently, it was observed that few students corrected other member's mistakes in language and structure, and no one deleted sentences others had written. When editing the passage, students acted very carefully not to change the sentences written by other people, and tended to express an excuse in Japanese when they had to edit or modify the sentences already written.

The importance of interaction should not be overlooked in language instruction. In this attempt, collaborative writing using wiki technology was incorporated into the course activities as part of the blended course design. Wiki facilitated collaboration by constructing safe spaces (Howard, C. D., 2012). The results from the university-oriented questionnaire including additional questions indicate a certain degree of satisfaction of students involved in the targeted EFL course I was teaching. As for future improvement of course implementation, it would be suggested that more opportunities to apply CMC tools could be provided in foreign and second language learning. In the use of technology in language learning classrooms, the focus of the research has recently begun shifting from on the efficacy and effectiveness of transmitting learners information to on the communicative and interactional effects of on-line community. Though the conveyance, processing, and storage of information are still the prominent features of CMC, it would be of benefit to examine how the use of these technologies promote individual learner's spontaneous learning and development in knowledge acquisition. Using CMC technology as a pedagogical tool seems to have significant advantage in instruction: to provide broadened discourse

options and opportunities for performance and practice in meaningful interactions (Belts, 2007).

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Appendix-1: Simplified Motivational Design Matrix for Wiki application in EAP				
Course				
Based on Suzuki & Keller, 1996				
Design Factors	ARCS Categories			
	Attention	Relevance	Confidence	Satisfaction
1.Learner Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪Part of a required course (+) ▪Additional time /efforts are needed (-) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Experience of using the same tool for other subjects(+) ▪ interest/desire to improve writing (+) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪Unconfident in writing English(-) ▪Have knowledge of digital devices/ source (+) ▪be fond of online-communication (+) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪Get more information (+) ▪Understand course contents(+) ▪Access possible at home (+)
2.Learning Task (Wiki writing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪Similar to (+) (-) ▪Additional/ new contents (+) ▪New task (+) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪Relevant topics (+) ▪Contain up-to-date materials (+) ▪Fit the course goal (+) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪Collaboration (+) ▪Become able to write a longer passage (+) ▪Unconfident writing (-) ▪Peer support available (+) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪Increasing exposure to English (+) ▪Sense of involvement (+) (-)
3.Medium (computer/ cellphone)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪Not a new medium (-) ▪Accessible on cell-phones (+) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪Widely used medium (+) ▪Convenience to present digital data/ information (+) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪Possibility of unstable connection (-) ▪Familiar with using a computer (+) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪Effects of asynchronous communication (+)(-)
4.Courseware Characteristics (LMS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪Already familiar with the system (+) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪Developed for educational purposes (+) ▪Pervasiveness of e-learning tools (+) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪Familiar with its operation (+) ▪A certain degree of trust to the system (+) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪Share opinion/ materials with others(+)(-)
5.Summary	Greater attention	Minimal tactics required	Minimal tactics required	Support learners to build satisfaction
6. Motivational Tactics for the Lesson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪Emphasize the effect of longer exposure to the target language. ▪Include new sources as much as possible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪Give feedback or talk about it sometimes in class 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪Support on-line failure (e.g., by allowing paper-based submission; provide user manual) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪Encourage and support interaction through wiki/ forum

