

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF FIELD EDUCATION



A Web Tool to Improve the Writing Skills of Students Learning Turkish as a Foreign Language: Pixton¹

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to obtain student opinions regarding the use of Pixton in the development of writing skills in teaching Turkish as a foreign language. A case study, one of the qualitative research designs, was employed in the research. The study group consisted of 37 students studying at the B2 level at Yıldız Technical University Turkish and Foreign Languages Application and Research Center (TOMER). Data were obtained from the six-scene story creation activity prepared with Pixton and a structured interview form administered to the students. Both descriptive and content analysis techniques were utilized in the data analysis. Based on the findings of the analysis, it was concluded that the activity was well-liked by the students, found to be interesting and enjoyable, instilled a desire to write, enhanced imagination and creativity, contributed to learning new ideas, was thought-provoking and beneficial, helped illuminate important ideas and points, suggested the need for more similar activities in classes, and motivated even students who were not interested in writing. When examining the students' writings, diversity was observed. Each student interpreted the six-scene incident differently. The overall results of the research indicate that Pixton is an effective tool in the development of writing skills for students learning Turkish as a foreign language.

Key Words: Turkish education, Turkish as a foreign language, writing education, web 2.0, Pixton.

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 13.03.2024

Published online:
31.03.2024

¹ This study was produced from the paper presented at the 10th International Turkish Education and Teaching Conference (UTEOK 2017) held on September 28-30, 2017.

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Yabancı Dil Olarak Türkçe Öğrenen Öğrencilerin Yazma Becerilerini Geliştirmeye Yönelik Bir Web Aracı: Pixton

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ÖZET

MAKALE BİLGİSİ

Bu araştırmanın amacı, Pixton'ın yabancı dil olarak Türkçe öğretiminde yazma becerisinin gelişiminde kullanımına yönelik öğrenci görüşlerinin alınmasıdır. Araştırmada nitel araştırma desenlerinden biri olan durum çalışması kullanılmıştır. Araştırmanın çalışma grubunu Yıldız Teknik Üniversitesi Türkçe ve Yabancı Dil Uygulama ve Araştırma Merkezinde (TÖMER) B2 seviyesinde öğrenim gören 37 öğrenci oluşturmaktadır. Veriler, öğrencilere uygulanan Pixton ile hazırlanmış altı sahneli hikâye oluşturma etkinliğinden ve yapılandırılmış görüşme formundan elde edilmiştir. Verilerin analizinde hem betimsel hem içerik analizi tekniklerinden yararlanılmıştır. Analizden elde edilen bulgulardan hareketle; etkinliğin öğrenciler tarafından sevildiği, ilginç ve eğlenceli bulunduğu, yazmaya karşı istek uyandırdığı, hayal gücünü ve yaratıcılığı artırdığı, yeni fikirlerin öğrenilmesine katkı sağladığı, düşündürücü ve faydalı olduğu, önemli fikir ve noktaları aydınlatmaya yardımcı olduğu, benzer etkinliklere derslerde daha çok yer verilmesi gerektiği ve etkinliğin yazmaya karşı ilgisi olmayan öğrencileri bile güdülediği sonuçlarına ulaşılmıştır. Öğrencilerin yazıları incelendiğinde ise çeşitlilik görülmüştür. Altı sahnelik olayı her öğrenci farklı şekilde yorumlamıştır. Araştırmanın genel sonuçları, Pixton'ın yabancı dil olarak Türkçe öğrenen öğrencilerin yazma becerilerinin gelişiminde etkili bir araç olduğunu göstermektedir.

Alınma

Tarihi: 13.03.2024

Çevrimiçi yayınlanma

tarihi: 31.03.2024

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türkçe eğitimi, yabancı dil olarak Türkçe, yazma eğitimi, web 2.0, Pixton.

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Introduction

Foreign language teaching is a teaching field that involves different, multi-layered processes, including mental, psychological and academic, and progresses circularly (Temur, 2016, p. 35). One of the aims of this teaching area is to bring the student to the desired level in the four basic language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. However, it is not easy to bring the writing skill, which is one of the narrative skills, to the desired level. Having this skill requires a serious cognitive process as well as mastering the target language well. Writing, as the last skill learned in the language learning process, is considered the most difficult skill to develop both in the native language and in a foreign language. For this reason, there is reluctance in students towards writing activities (Erol, 2016, p. 181). In order to minimize the difficulties in writing skills, studies need to be carried out both in and outside the classroom.

It is suggested that difficulties in writing skills arise from the teacher and the student. In addition to situations such as teachers' inability to provide fast and effective feedback to students, their lack of ability to motivate students, students' deficiencies in reading, writing, motivation and transferring what they have learned into practice are among these difficulties (Fareed et al., 2016, p. 83). This is also the case in teaching Turkish as a foreign language. Factors such as the differences between the alphabet of the students' native language and the Latin alphabet, the use of punctuation marks, not being able to master the grammar rules of Turkish, fear of making mistakes and low motivation for writing may be effective in this. Therefore, it is important to implement easy and fun writing activities from the beginning level to encourage students to write and to ensure that writing activities become routine in the classroom (Sarıçoban, 2015, p. 2015). The greatest responsibility in this regard falls on the teacher. The teacher should know how to draw students' attention to the subject and make them ready to write. It is important for the teacher not to rely only on the textbook, but to use various visual and audio materials and web tools in writing activities in order to motivate students to the subject. Activities that especially appeal to students motivate them to write.

By using web tools, the teacher can prepare visual and audio activities that appeal to students, thus reducing their reluctance to write. Although many of these web tools are paid, there are web tools whose basic features can be accessed for free. Web tools are user-friendly programs with easy-to-use features that enable students to actively participate and produce content (Elmas & Geban, 2012, p. 248). Research shows that the use of web tools in education provides many benefits (Karaman et al., 2008; Conole & Alevizou, 2010; Deperlioğlu & Köse, 2010; Genç, 2010; Bennett et al., 2012; Morkoç & Erdönmez, 2015; Turhan & Baş, 2017; Batıbay 2019; Göker & İnce, 2019; Tıraşoğlu, 2019; Kazhan et al., 2020; Karadağ & Garip, 2021; Tugayeva et al., 2021; İlhan & Şin, 2024).

Web tools are considered important, especially in today's conditions, as they support collaborative learning without time and space limitations. Additionally, such tools can

enhance the learning experience by connecting values and practices in the student's daily life (Maunakea et al., 2022, p. 24). Web tools have an important function in learning information rather than memorizing it. Meaningful and deep learning can be achieved through these tools that appeal to multiple sensory organs. With the web tools chosen and used by the teacher, an environment can be created where the student is at the center, which allows both group and individual studies, where individual differences are taken into account and brain-based learning is achieved. This created environment can be an alternative to the traditional classroom environment or can be carried out in a coordinated manner. İnal and Arslanbaş (2021) determined that Padlet, Lyrics Training, Google Classroom, MindMeister, LearningApps, Voki, Quizlet and Wordwall applications can be used for teaching Turkish as a foreign language. It has been stated that these applications can be used in the development of reading, writing, speaking and listening skills. It has been stated that it will be possible to ensure permanence in learning by carrying out studies based on in-class interaction with these applications, with applications focusing on communication processes in the classroom, and by determining the targeted language skills of the relevant applications. Sanjaya et al. (2020) found that the use of web blogs for writing skills in language teaching increases students' confidence in writing, improves writing skills, improves information and communication technologies experience and literacy, and encourages critical thinking. Based on this, it is thought that enriching educational environments with web tools will be an important step in achieving educational goals.

There are many web tools that can be used in education: Blog, Wiki, Podcast, RSS, Kahoot!, Voki, Powtoon, Poll Everywhere, Pixton, Jamboard, Thinglink, Mentimeter, Bitmoji, ClassDojo, Google Classroom, Padlet, Storyboard That, Facebook (Meta), Instagram, Canva, Prezi, Quiver can be listed among these. By motivating students towards the lesson through these tools, their motivation, imagination and creativity, and desire to learn can be increased. It must be said that these advantages have become more important, especially when it comes to learning a new language. One of the most common effects of web tools in language learning is to increase students' motivation and improve their attitudes and perceptions towards technology-supported learning (Luo, 2013, p. 9). The language instruction conducted through these tools has been found to positively impact students' writing skills (Akçay & Arslan, 2010; Arslan & Şahin Kızıl, 2010; Brodahl et al., 2011; Kazancı, 2012; Kavandı, 2012; Laire et al., 2012; Turhan & Baş, 2017), enhance their grammar proficiency (Kılıçkaya & Krajka, 2012; Kovacic et al., 2012; Cabrera et al., 2018), contribute to their creativity (Jarrett, 2008; Magnuson, 2013; Gündüzalp, 2021), and promote sustained learning by increasing interest, attention, and motivation (Çetin et al., 2013).

According to the results obtained from Baş and Yıldırım's (2018) research, it was determined that web tools add difference to the classroom environment in learning Turkish as a foreign language, increase the dynamics of the class, improve students' motivation and creativity, and contribute to students cognitively and affectively. One of these web tools is Pixton. Pixton is a web application that allows teachers and students to create stories through digital comics and facilitate learning and writing activities (Kır & Aytan, 2023, p. 226). Pixton, a tool that

supports group work, creativity and critical thinking, also helps students develop imagination, interaction with each other and fun (Cabrera et al., 2018, p. 56). With Pixton, activities that appeal to students can be prepared and used in writing activities. As in this research, scenes consisting of digital stories can be created with Pixton and students can be asked to write stories describing the events in these scenes. Additionally, speech bubbles can be added to the created digital stories and a section can be left blank for students to fill in based on the context of the story. Students can be asked to create digital stories and do writing exercises based on the stories they have created. It is possible to increase the examples of these activities in parallel with the teacher's creativity and imagination. It is thought that using Pixton in writing studies in teaching Turkish as a foreign language will benefit both teachers and students. Digital story-based activities that the teacher will prepare in a short time will attract students' attention and motivate them to write. Based on this, this research aimed to obtain student opinions regarding the use of Pixton in the development of writing skills in teaching Turkish as a foreign language.

Methodology

In this part of the research, the research model, study group, implementation process, data collection tools and data analysis are included.

Research Model

A case study, one of the qualitative research models, was used in the research. The purpose of a case study is to present results regarding a particular situation. The most basic feature of a qualitative case study is the in-depth investigation of one or several cases (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016 p. 73). The reason for choosing the case study model in the research is to reveal the results of the writing activity to be applied to students. Students were given a six-scene digital story prepared with Pixton and asked to create a story telling these scenes in the order they occurred. The writing works produced by the students were examined and then the students were asked for their opinions about this activity. The findings related to this situation were presented in the research.

Study Group

The study group of the research consists of 37 students studying at B2 level at Yıldız Technical University Turkish and Foreign Language Application and Research Center (TOMER).

Implementation Process

As part of the activity to be implemented in the research, the researcher created a six-scene digital story using the Pixton web tool. This digital story narrates an incident involving three friends camping. In this digital story, the three friends named Mehmet, Sinem, and Hülya are

depicted standing in the camping area in the first scene. In the second scene, they are shown exploring the surroundings. In the third scene, they are depicted getting into a boat and setting out on the water for this purpose. In the fourth scene, they are shown capsizing and sinking into the water. In the fifth scene, they are depicted rescuing themselves and reaching the shore. In the sixth and final scene, they are shown successfully returning to the camping area.

Below is the one-day adventure of three friends named Mehmet, Sinem and Hülya. The events that these three friends went through are depicted in the images starting from 1 to 6, respectively. Write a story about the events that happened to these three friends, paying attention to this order.

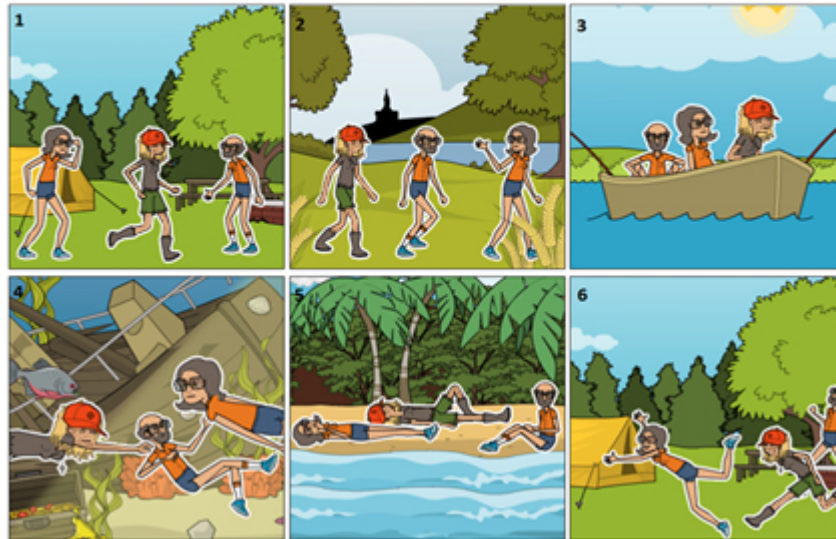


Figure 1. Six-Scene Digital Story Made with Pixton

Students were asked to narrate the given six-scene incident, paying attention to the sequence of events. To prevent the scenes from being mixed up, each scene was numbered in the top left corner. The writing works produced by the students based on the six-scene digital story created with Pixton were examined, and then the students were asked for their opinions on the conducted activity. In this context, a structured interview form was administered to the students after the activity. The structured interview form, which was evaluated by three field experts, consisted of 4 yes-no questions and 1 open-ended question.

Data Collection Tools

The data was obtained from a six-scene digital story creation activity prepared with Pixton and a structured interview form. The use of digital stories in the educational environment contributes to the development of students' skills such as communication, visual literacy, technology literacy, cooperative learning, self-expression and visual communication (Tosun, 2021). The main feature of the structured interview is that the questions to be asked to the participant are standardized and arranged in a certain order. The questions in the structured interview form are generally prepared with answer categories. It is preferred in cases where the characteristics of the research participants are largely known. The collected data is easy to categorize (Akman Dömbekci & Erişen, 2022).

Data Analysis

Descriptive analysis and content analysis techniques were used to analyze the data obtained from the writing activity. The aim of descriptive analysis is to present the findings to the reader in an organized and interpreted form. The data obtained for this purpose are first described systematically and clearly. These descriptions are then explained and interpreted, cause-effect relationships are examined and some conclusions are reached. Relating the emerging themes, making sense of them, and making future predictions may also be among the dimensions of the comments made by the researcher. In content analysis, the aim is to process the data summarized and interpreted in descriptive analysis in more detail; Similar data are brought together under certain concepts and themes and organized and interpreted in a way that the reader can understand (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016, pp. 239-242). In the research, first, a writing activity created with Pixton was implemented with the students, and then their writings were examined. Subsequently, a structured interview form was administered to the students to obtain their opinions on the activity. Care was taken to present the findings obtained from the students' views in an organized manner according to the descriptive analysis technique. The description and interpretation of the first four yes-no questions were conducted. The findings from these four questions were individually tabulated to enhance clarity. Based on the findings from the last question, cause-effect relationships were examined, leading to conclusions. The responses to the open-ended final question were analyzed using content analysis technique. Keywords were identified from the students' responses to this question, and the frequency of their usage was presented in a table format. Then, the findings from the table were interpreted in conjunction with the findings from the previous questions to reach conclusions.

Findings

In this research, student opinions were taken regarding the use of Pixton in the development of writing skills in teaching Turkish as a foreign language. The students were given the following six-scene digital story prepared with Pixton and asked to create a story telling these scenes in the order they occurred. The writing works produced by the students were examined and then the students were asked for their opinions about this activity. The findings obtained from the students' opinions about this writing activity created with Pixton are as follows:

Table 1. Distribution of Students' Answers to Yes-No Questions

Questions	Yes (N)	No (N)	Percentage Value (%)
Question 1: I liked the story creation activity with Pixton.	31	6	83,7
Question 2: Digital stories created using Pixton inspired me to write.	25	12	67,5
Question 3: The story I created contributed to the development of my imagination.	25	12	67,5
Question 4: There should be more activities like this in writing	28	9	75,6

activities.

Looking at Table 1, it can be seen that 31 students answered "Yes" to the first question, "I liked the story creation activity with Pixton." The remaining 6 students responded negatively. When evaluated proportionally, the fact that nearly 84% of the students responded positively shows that the students liked this activity. To the second question, "Digital stories created using Pixton inspired me to write." 25 students answered "Yes" and 12 students answered negatively. Nearly 70% of the students answered this question positively. Based on this, it can be said that Pixton motivates students to write. To the third question, "The story I created contributed to the development of my imagination." 25 students answered "Yes" and 12 students answered negatively. Again, nearly 70% of the students answered this question positively. Based on this, it can be said that Pixton contributes to the development of students' imagination. 28 students answered "Yes" to the fourth question, "There should be more activities like this in writing activities." The remaining 9 students responded negatively. Nearly 76% of the students responded positively. Based on this, it can be said that such activities should be included more in lessons.

Table 2. *Distribution of Students' Answers to Open-Ended Questions*

Question 5: How did you find digital stories created with Pixton as a writing activity? Explain in a few sentences.

Keywords	Number of Students (N)	Percentage Value (%)
Interesting	7	18,9
Important ideas and points	6	16,2
Imagination	4	10,8
Entertaining	4	10,8
Creative	3	8,2
Tell stories	2	5,4
New ideas	2	5,4
Tell with pictures	2	5,4
Thought-provoking	2	5,4
Useful	1	2,7
Visualize	1	2,7
Children activity	1	2,7
Confusing	1	2,7
Limited	1	2,7
Total	37	100

Looking at Table 2, 18.9% of the students said that digital stories created with Pixton, which was used as a writing activity, were interesting, 16.2% said they helped illuminate important ideas and points, 10.8% said they contributed to their imagination, and 10.8% said they were entertaining, 8.2% said it contributed to creativity, 5.4% said it helped tell stories, 5.4% said it contributed to learning new ideas, 5.4% said it was thought-provoking, 2.7% said it was

useful, 2.7% said it helped visualize the text. While 2.7% stated that the content of the activity was more suitable for children, 2.7% stated that it was confusing, and 2.7% stated that the content was limited.

The findings obtained from the interview form show that students generally liked this writing activity created with Pixton. Even students who were stated by the instructor to be uninterested in writing stated that they enjoyed doing this activity. The writing activity with Pixton, which is different from the classical writing activities in the books, was interesting and fun for the students. This enabled the students to do the activity willingly and with pleasure in order to produce effective and creative writings without worrying about writing. This activity also contributed to the development of students' imagination. When the students' writings were examined, it was seen that each student interpreted the six-scene event differently and that there was diversity in their writing works. In other words, students created different products by using their imagination. Students stated that they wanted to encounter more activities similar to the writing activities they attended. In addition, digital stories created with Pixton allowed students to see important ideas and points and use them in their writings. It can be stated that this situation may have contributed to the students' liking of the activity and their desire to do similar activities.

Result and Discussion

In this study, opinions regarding the use of Pixton for the development of writing skills of B2 level students learning Turkish as a foreign language were obtained. Looking at the findings, it was concluded that the activity was well-liked by the students, found to be interesting and enjoyable, instilled a desire to write, enhanced imagination and creativity, contributed to learning new ideas, was thought-provoking and beneficial, helped illuminate important ideas and points, suggested the need for more similar activities in classes, and motivated even students who were not interested in writing. When examining the students' writings, diversity was observed. Each student interpreted the six-scene incident differently. This implies that Pixton is also a tool that contributes to creative thinking skills. The overall results of the research indicate that Pixton is an effective tool in the development of writing skills for students learning Turkish as a foreign language.

When the relevant literature was reviewed, a limitation was identified in the use of Pixton in teaching Turkish as a foreign language. Therefore, in this part of the research, in addition to the use of Pixton in teaching Turkish as a foreign language, research results related to its use in teaching other foreign languages were also included. Tekin and İlhan (2021), in their study investigating the use of comics in foreign language teaching, found that they were mainly used in teaching English as a foreign language. They stated that these tools should also be used more in teaching Turkish as a foreign language. Indeed, in this study, the use of Pixton, a digital comic tool, in teaching Turkish as a foreign language was investigated.

In their research, Baş and Yıldırım (2018) concluded that Pixton provides motivation and creativity, particularly in the development of writing skills, in teaching Turkish as a foreign language. Similarly, this research also found that activities prepared with Pixton positively contribute to students' writing motivation and creativity. Yalçın (2020) noted that comics created with Pixton could enhance students' writing skills in teaching German as a foreign language. These statements align with the results obtained from this research as well. Solano et al. (2019) investigated the use of Pixton in improving writing skills in teaching English as a foreign language. The research revealed that students developed positive perceptions towards the use of Pixton and improved their writing skills. These findings regarding foreign language learning are also consistent with the results obtained from this research.

In Topkaya's (2016) study, it was emphasized that instructional materials of this kind play a crucial role in achieving desired behavioral changes, enhancing academic achievement, maximizing motivation towards the lesson, and fostering curiosity, as evidenced by the studies conducted by Haugaard (1973) and Koenke (1981). These findings align with the results obtained from this research. Cabrera et al. (2018) investigated the effects of using Pixton in teaching grammar and vocabulary to students learning English as a foreign language. The research concluded that Pixton is an effective instructional tool that motivates students in grammar and vocabulary teaching. This result demonstrates that Pixton is not only effective in writing but also in teaching grammar and vocabulary.

In Hava's (2021) study measuring students' motivation and satisfaction levels through digital storytelling, significant progress was observed in students' self-confidence and personal development following the digital storytelling activity. Additionally, positive effects on vocabulary acquisition, writing, and speaking skills were noted. These findings are consistent with the results obtained from this research. In this study, it was found that Pixton, as a digital storytelling tool, contributes to students' development and enhances their writing skills. Churchill (2020), in his study investigating the impact of digital storytelling on the development of digital literacy skills, concluded that digital storytelling enables students to test their assumptions and think critically, thus contributing to the development of digital literacy skills. These findings are similar to those obtained from this research. In this study, a writing activity using Pixton as a digital storytelling tool was implemented, and then students' opinions were collected. The results indicated that the digital storytelling tool improved students' writing skills, facilitated enjoyable learning experiences, enhanced their creativity, and contributed to their critical thinking.

The use of new technologies brought by web 2.0 in education provides alternative learning environments to traditional classroom settings (Genç, 2010). In this research, digital story scenes were created using the Pixton tool for students' writing skills, and students were asked to write a story narrating the events in these scenes. Similar activities can be prepared using tools such as Voki, Padlet, Kahoot, and BeFunky to create alternative learning environments for students. The availability of web 2.0 tools and the ease of publishing also increase the possibility for students to receive feedback on their work (Atıcı & Yıldırım, 2010). Students

share their work in the online environment, allowing their peers to be aware of what they have done. This not only enables students to be aware of what their classmates are doing but also allows the teacher to see and review the work collectively. Thus, the teacher is also provided with the opportunity to give feedback to all students.

Web technologies not only provide different ways of acquiring knowledge in education but also offer various options for improving language skills through applications. Therefore, it is believed that the use of innovative tools and applications in the classroom by teachers can bring many benefits (Özdemir, 2017). The results obtained from the research also support this idea. Effective use of technology in education not only motivates students but also provides them with the opportunity to unleash their creativity and engage in effective work.

Recommendations

Based on the results obtained from this research, the following recommendations have been developed regarding the use of Pixton in improving the writing skills of B2 level students learning Turkish as a foreign language:

- Since writing is the most challenging skill and often the last one to be learned, teachers should capture students' attention and prepare them for writing.
- Writing activities should be designed to capture students' interest and motivate them to write while also helping them manage writing anxieties.
- Writing activities in textbooks may not engage students with different interests, needs, and intelligence types. Furthermore, encountering similar writing tasks may lead to boredom and negative attitudes toward writing. Therefore, it is crucial for students to encounter age-appropriate, innovative writing activities.
- Teachers should utilize various visual and auditory materials and web tools in writing activities to motivate students. Activities that appeal to students' interests can encourage them to write. By utilizing web tools, teachers can create visual and auditory activities tailored to students, breaking their reluctance to write. The research has found that Pixton web 2.0 tool is successful in this regard. Pixton can be used to improve students' attitudes toward writing and enhance their writing skills.
- In this research, students were asked to create a story by narrating the scenes of a six-scene digital story created with Pixton. The writing works of students were examined, and their opinions on this activity were subsequently sought. To explore the relationship between writing education and technology from different perspectives and ensure the success of this education, similar research should be conducted.

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