

KÜLTÜRLER ARASI ELEKTRONİK POSTA YOLU İLE YAZIŞMANIN İNGİLİZCE YAZMA BECERİSİNDE ÖZYEKİNLİĞE ETKİSİ

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ÖZET

Bu araştırmanın amacı kültürlerarası elektronik posta yoluyla yazışmanın öğrencilerin yazma özyetkinliğini geliştirme konusundaki etkinliğini değerlendirmektir. Araştırma Çukurova Üniversitesi hazırlık yüksek okuluna devam eden 32 öğrenci ile gerçekleştirilmiştir. Deneysel modele göre desenlenen araştırma için bir deney (16 öğrenci) ve bir kontrol grubu (16 öğrenci) oluşturulmuştur. Uygulama 15 hafta sürmüştür. Deney grubunu oluşturan öğrenciler araştırmanın uygulama sürecinde yazdıkları yazılarını bilgisayar ortamında yazıp elektronik posta yoluyla Güney Koreli öğrencilerle paylaşmıştır. Kontrol grubundaki öğrenciler ise deney grubunda ele alınan benzer konulara ilişkin görüşlerini geleneksel kağıt-kalem yöntemiyle yazmıştır. Araştırmada veriler, araştırmacı tarafından geliştirilen Yazmaya Yönelik Özyetkinlik ölçeği, her iki gruptaki öğrencilerin uygulama süresince görüşlerini belirlemek amacıyla her 2 haftada bir uygulanan dönüt formları ve uygulama sonrasında deney grubu öğrencilerinin uygulamaya yönelik görüşlerini belirlemek amacıyla yapılandırılmış görüşme formu kullanılarak toplanmıştır. Bulgular kültürlerarası yazışmanın İngilizce yazmada özyetkinliği artırdığını ortaya çıkarmıştır. Öğrenci dönüt formundan ve görüşmelerden alınan bilgiler de bu bulguyu desteklemiştir. Sonuç olarak yazılanların bilgisayar ortamında elektronik posta yoluyla paylaşılmasının yazmaya yönelik özyetkinliğin geliştirilmesine olumlu katkılar sağladığı belirlenmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Özyetkinlik, Yazma Becerisi, Elektronik Posta, Elektronik Posta Arkadaşlığı, Kültürlerarası Elektronik Posta

EFFECT OF CROSS-CULTURAL E-MAIL EXCHANGE ON SELF-EFFICACY IN EFL WRITING

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to evaluate cross-cultural e-mail exchange as a means of promoting self-efficacy in writing. 32 students studying at School of Foreign Languages of Çukurova University, participated in the study. For the purpose of this study, which is a mix of quasi-experimental and descriptive one, two groups of 16 students were designated. The study lasted for 15 weeks. During the intervention, the participants in the experimental group produced write-ups in different writing genres and on different topics on the computer and e-mailed them to their South Korean key-pals. On the other

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hand, students in the control group did the same on the computer using the traditional pen-and-paper method and e-mailed their products to their South Korean peers. Data were collected through a self-efficacy scale developed by the researcher, a “reflection form” all 32 students were required to complete every other week to get feedback on the their writing experience during the experiment and through a semi-structured interview with the experimental group participants after the intervention to determine their views on the experience of exchanging e-mails in writing classes. Findings obtained revealed that, for EFL learners, exchanging e-mail with foreign counterparts boosted learners’ self-efficacy in writing and encouraged a more positive attitude towards writing and writing classes.

Key words: Self-efficacy, Writing, E-mail, Key-pal, E-pal, Cross-cultural e-mailExchange

1. INTRODUCTION

Writing is an essential component of English-language teaching curricula, particularly in the teaching of English for academic purposes (Buckingham, 2008; Hamzaoui-Elachachi, 2010); however, most language learners find writing to be one of the most difficult language skills to master. The literature suggests two main reasons for this. One is that writing is an active and rigorous productive skill that requires not only a certain amount of linguistics knowledge, but also thinking strategies. That is, to produce an effective piece of writing, the writer must use grammar, punctuation, and vocabulary correctly; must develop and present thoughts in structured form, and must use a style that is appropriate for the genre and audience (Simin & Tavangar, 2009). The other major reason why writing is difficult to master relates to affective elements, including attitude, motivation, and self-efficacy (Wu & Wu, 2008). As Wu and Wu (2008) assert, a student who is unwilling to express him or herself in writing, or who lacks confidence in his or her ability to do so, is unlikely to become proficient at writing compositions. Thus, one important responsibility of teachers is to create opportunities for the learner to develop self-efficacy.

Today, the Internet is the most powerful aid available to teachers for creating authentic communication settings for students to practice writing skills. In the past 15 years, teachers throughout the world have become interested in encouraging language learners to practice writing by communicating via e-mail with native speakers or ESL/EFL learners around the world. Several pieces of research have shown that cross-cultural e-mail exchange is a powerful way to actively engage students in writing (Tella, 1991; Warschauer, 1996a,b; Shulman, 2001; Stockwell, 2003; Greenfield, 2003; Florez-Estrada [in Stockwell, 2003]; Kern, 1996; Vilmi, 2003; Alias and Hussin, 2004).

The above-mentioned studies, most of which were developmental studies that have provided anecdotal accounts of the benefits of cross-cultural e-mail exchange for language learning, suggest that cross-cultural e-mail exchange offers the following pedagogical benefits for language learning: provides a context for real-world communication and authentic interaction; establishes a purpose for writing; enhances student motivation for writing; increases student participation in the class; extends language-learning time; creates learner-centered learning environments; promotes

collaborative learning; improves skills in the target language (grammar, vocabulary, reading); improves quality of writing in the target language.

The aim of this study was to assess the efficacy of cross-cultural e-mail exchange in comparison to traditional pen-and-paper writing instruction for promoting students' self-efficacy in writing in the target language. A novel scale was used to determine self-efficacy in writing and students' individual reflections on the use of e-mail exchange were also explored.

The present study featured a mix of descriptive and quasi-experimental research design elements, with both quantitative and qualitative data collected and analyzed. A writing self-efficacy scale was the primary data collection tool; however, to obtain a valid and reliable overview of the efficacy of cross-cultural e-mail exchange as a method for increasing self-efficacy in writing, the researcher also used bi-weekly "student reflection forms" and a semi-structured interview as a final step.

Overview of the Self-Efficacy Construct

Bandura (1986) asserts that beliefs about the self are critical forces in academic achievement. According to self-efficacy theory, a learner who has high self-efficacy related to learning a new language is more likely to learn that language than a learner who has minimal or no belief in his or her ability to do so (Locke & Latham, 1990). Bandura (1997) explains that self-efficacy predicts a person's attention span, level of effort and persistence, strategies of for learning, and learning goals. People with higher self-efficacy will pay more attention, exert more effort and persistence, and be more willing to try different strategies for learning than those with lower self-efficacy (Yang, 2004 as in Li & Wang, 2010).

Self-efficacy is critical in language learning, just as it is in other forms of learning (Pajares & Johnson, 1994; Manchon, 2009), and Bandura (1997) asserts that self-efficacy can change over time depending on an individual's reaction to the task and her or his perception of self. He emphasizes that the most influential way to boost self-efficacy is "enactive mastery experience," also referred to as "performance accomplishments." To put this simply, when students experience success (when they see that they can perform a particular task), this naturally increases self-belief. In the present study, enactive mastery experience in the form of cross-cultural e-mail exchange was used to enhance EFL students' self-efficacy in writing.

Research on writing in first language has revealed that students' beliefs about their own writing processes and competence are instrumental to their ultimate success in writing composition (Beach, 1989). The relationship between self-efficacy and writing performance in first language has been explored by McCarthy, Meier and Rinderer (1985), Shell et al. (1989, as in Pajares & Valiant, 1997), Klassen (2002), Zimmerman & Bandura (1994), Pajares, Miller, and Johnson (1999), and Pajares (2003). The results indicate that self-efficacy is positively correlated with academic writing performance in native language. However, the element of self-efficacy is currently rare in the list of variables known to affect EFL/ESL writing. Work by Latif (2007), Chen & Lin (2009), Rahimpour & Nariman-Jahan (2010), and Gupta & Woldemariam (2011) has provided

only qualitative results in this area of study. All these authors found that students with high self-efficacy in writing outperformed those with low self-efficacy.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Participants

A total of 32, tertiary-level, pre-intermediate Turkish EFL students (two groups of 16 students) at the Çukurova University Center for Foreign Languages (YADYO) participated in the study. One of these groups was designated as the control group (the pen and paper group, PPG), and these students practiced writing using pen and paper in their classes during the 15-week (75 teaching hours) intervention. The other group (the e-mail group, EMG) used e-mail as an aid to practice writing in the computer-assisted language-learning (CALL) lab. The 32 participants ranged in age from 18 to 21 years. Sogang University in South Korea was chosen as the partner school for this study. Sixteen South Korean university students learning English for academic purposes were involved in the study and corresponded with their Turkish peers for the purpose of this study.

2.2. Instruments

Writing Self-Efficacy Scale:

Based on the self-efficacy construct proposed by Bandura (1977), the researcher developed a 21-item writing self-efficacy scale to determine the strength of participants' belief in their writing ability before and after the 75-hour intervention (Appendix 1). This questionnaire required individuals to rate their confidence in writing English-language compositions. Based on its robust psychometric properties, the scale was deemed a reliable and valid tool for assessing self-efficacy in foreign-language writing. The adequacy of the sample was tested with the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test, and the result was .81. The 21 items in the scale were divided into subscales that probed student's beliefs about different elements of writing skill. Five items focused on ability to provide the *content* requested for a composition, five focused on ability to *design* a composition, five focused on ability to create a *unified* composition, four focused on *accuracy* of the composition, and two focused on ability to *punctuate* correctly.

The writing-efficacy scale was administered to all 32 subjects prior to and after the intervention in order to track changes in students' self-beliefs about writing in English.

Student Reflection Forms:

The researcher required that each participant in both the experimental group and control group complete one of these forms every other week (a total of 8 forms per participant). The reflection form asked about students' impressions of the writing classes as follows:

“How do you like the writing classes? Think of the last 2 weeks of lessons and record anything about the class activity or writing portfolio work that is noteworthy (Note anything that made you feel happy, annoyed, discouraged, disappointed, etc.).

Semi-Structured Interview:

The majority of the qualitative data were gathered in a semi-structured interview that was the last step in the study. These interviews were conducted with the experimental group only, and were done to validate the data collected with self-efficacy scale assessments (two per participant) and student reflection forms (eight per participant). As well, the interviewer (the researcher) was able to clarify any ambiguous items or issues noted on the reflection forms from the experimental group.

During each interview, the researcher posed a core set of the same open-ended questions to elicit richer qualitative data. The interview items were as follows:

1. *Tell me about your experience of exchanging e-mail with your South Korean friend.*
2. *Did you benefit from the cross-cultural e-mail exchange project? Explain in detail.*
3. *What were the benefits of cross-cultural e-mail exchange for your writing ability?*
4. *Did you encounter problems during writing class in the last 4 months? If so, what were they?*
5. *Do you wish to be involved a similar project next semester?*
6. *Do you have suggestions for future implementation of the key-pal project?*

2.3. The Intervention

A 15-week writing-improvement program was set up for the two groups (an experimental group and a control group) of pre-intermediate level EFL students. The objectives for the writing classes were the same in both groups. The researcher taught all classes for both groups using the same writing philosophy and tasks. Each week, the students concentrated on a different writing genre, ranging from postcards to opinion essays.

In a typical writing class, students were first taught the subject for that day. For example, they were instructed in how to write an opinion essay. Then the control group practiced this genre using pen and paper, and the EMG did so sitting at a computer. Every student was required to write two compositions per week, completing each one in a 2-hour session. When a student felt he or she had a reasonably good piece, the student had it edited by a peer for content, grammar, word choice, and mechanics, *etc.* After the writing was peer-edited, the student revised the composition in light of the peer's feedback. Once this was done and the student believed their essay would be clear to the reader, they submitted it to the teacher-researcher and attended a scheduled meeting about the essay in her office. After this review, the student made the necessary final changes and then placed the piece of work, including all drafts, into his or her portfolio folder. Students in the EMG sent a copy of their final work to their South Korean key-pal and also placed a hard copy in their regular portfolio folder to submit for evaluation.

Concerning contact with the partner e-mail exchange group, after orientation the students in the EMG were given their key-pals' e-mail addresses and started corresponding, first sending a "Hello" letter. Students in the EMG were required to send at least two e-mails to their South Korean peers each week during the intervention period. However, they were free to correspond or chat online more often with their key-pals if they wished. Each time they did so, they were to write about their experience on the bi-weekly student reflection form. Further, students were required to copy and forward all correspondence with key-pals to the teacher-researcher so that she could monitor the exchange.

3. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

3.1. Analysis of Quantitative Data and Results:

All quantitative data were gathered using the writing self-efficacy scale. To assess for significant differences between the pre- and post-intervention results in each group, the two groups' mean pre- and post-test scores for the five scale items (content, design, unity, accuracy, and punctuation) were computed and compared using Student's *t*-test (Table 1).

Table 1. Writing Self-Efficacy Results Before and After the Intervention

Subscale	Group	Before Intervention				After Intervention			
		Mean	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>
Content (Items 6,9,12,17,21)	EMG	11.50	2.22			17.44	2.16		
	PPG	11.93	3.67	.40	.68	12.44	2.31	6.33	.0001
Design (Items 2,5,8,11,16)	EMG	10.56	1.78			16.81	2.20		
	PPG	11.18	2.28	.86	.39	14.25	2.32	3.21	.003
Unity (Items 3,4,10,13,19)	EMG	14.06	2.11			17.75	2.18		
	PPG	14.43	1.54	.57	.57	14.75	1.95	4.11	.0001
Accuracy (Items 1,7,14,18)	EMG	10.93	1.48			14.69	1.74		
	PPG	9.81	2.19	1.69	.10	13.37	1.63	2.20	.04
Punctuation (Items 15,20)	EMG	5.93	1.18			6.00	.63		
	PPG	5.68	1.53	.51	.61	5.94	.92	.22	.83

Note: EMG: E-mail Group, PPG: Pen-and-Paper Group, n = 16 for each group, significant differences identified by $p < .05$, $df = 30$

As Table 1 shows, prior to the intervention, the groups were evenly matched with respect to self-efficacy beliefs in different aspects of English writing composition. However, after the intervention, testing revealed some differences between the EMG and PPG. At this stage, the EMG mean scores for content, design, unity, and accuracy were all significantly higher than the corresponding PPG scores. The mean punctuation score was also higher in the EMG, but this difference was not significant [$p=.83$].

In summary, results from the writing self-efficacy scale suggest that cross-cultural e-mail exchange helps students' develop stronger self-beliefs related to their ability to compose writing pieces in English.

3.2. Analysis of Qualitative Data and Results:

Student Reflection Form:

Data from the forms were analyzed for content and salient themes were listed. Quotes from students were used to illustrate each of these themes. Responses related to certain features of the project were quantified to more specifically assess students' reactions to the intervention.

According to the PPG comments, the majority (11 of 16; 68.8%) found writing class to be useful because it was the only setting in which these students could actually test the knowledge of English vocabulary and grammar that they had acquired in class. Another common theme was the belief that good English writing skills are needed for academic work and for success on international English-as-foreign-language exams, which are usually prerequisites for well-paid jobs (9 individuals; 56.3%). However, the majority of the PPG (12; 75%) also viewed writing as a very difficult skill to master, and many underlined specific elements of writing that they found problematic. Numerous comments focused on the challenges posed by writing on a given topic in limited time to meet a pre-determined word limit. This group also noted difficulties with thinking of ideas to write, and problems with getting started on a given topic. Eleven (68.8%) of the PPG students stated frankly that they did not like writing. Many in this group said that they found revising and editing to be boring, tiring, and to have no real value.

Compared to the notes on the PPG forms, the EMG comments revealed very different perceptions of English-language writing during the intervention. Almost all the items the EMG mentioned focused on the e-mail project. In line with this group's statements in the semi-structured interview and their writing self-efficacy scale responses post-intervention, the items on the EMG reflection forms were almost entirely positive. All 16 students (100%) conveyed that they had enjoyed the e-mail exchange project, had found it very useful, and were keen to participate in another such project during second semester. Fifteen (93.8%) of the EMG participants expressed on the forms that they

liked writing and writing classes very much. As in the interview, students tended to use the words “speak to” or “talk to” rather than “write to” when referring to interactions with their key-pals (15 students; 93.8%). Furthermore, three students mentioned that, through the key-pal project, they had learnt about South Korean culture and also deepened their knowledge and awareness of their own culture. This comment is in line with the findings of Sanaoui and Lapkin (1992), who reported that their French-language students improved their French writing skills considerably and broadened their cultural awareness through a similar project.

The Turkish EMG group used six positive adjectives to describe their feelings about the cross-cultural e-mail exchange project: great, enjoyable, useful, interesting, exciting, and motivating. However, these students also admitted that they found corresponding with a foreigner to be difficult and tiring, since writing clear messages takes significant effort.

One of the quietest EMG students made a very interesting comment. The student reported feeling positive and more authentic because he shared more with his key-pal than he did with his family or friends. The researcher has encountered similar impressions from other students engaging in e-mail correspondence. Her experience suggests that cross-cultural e-mail exchange is a good way to involve introverted students in the class. Even the quietest students will often begin speaking English in the class when the topic is their key-pals. Statements that EMG participants’ made during their semi-structured interviews indicated this as well. These findings also correspond with those of Alias and Hussin (2004), who conducted a study to assess the efficacy of Internet tools, including e-mail. These authors stated that they believed their students’ writing performance improved mostly because e-mail exchange boosted their confidence greatly and helped diminish their negative self-perceptions and attitudes about writing.

Semi-Structured Interview:

The data obtained from Semi-Structured Interview were subjected to content analysis and then coded and grouped under three headings:

- i. Reflections on the positive experience of cross-cultural e-mail exchange (Interview items 1, 2, 3)
- ii. Problems encountered during the exchange program (Interview item 4)
- iii. Suggestions for future implementation of cross-cultural e-mail exchange (Interview items 5, 6)

i. Positive Experience of E-Mail Exchange: All 16 of the EMG participants spoke favorably about e-mail exchange during the personal interview. Examination of students’ views of the writing-related benefits they had gained through cross-cultural e-mailing (views under the heading of Positive Experience of E-Mail Exchange) revealed 11 main themes:

- Category 1. Increases motivation
- Category 2. Enhances writing skills
- Category 3. Increases care and attention to detail
- Category 4. Contributes to general English proficiency
- Category 5. Takes learning beyond classroom borders
- Category 6. Improves self-confidence
- Category 7. Makes English real; fosters genuine communication
- Category 8. Fosters speaking skills
- Category 9. Increases attention to writing tone
- Category 10. Fosters intercultural understanding
- Category 11. Initiates lasting friendships

Representative student statements related to each of the categories above were listed and frequencies were noted as well.

As its name implies, the first category “Increases Motivation” encompassed students’ comments about the motivating effects of cross-cultural e-mail exchange. Research on second-language acquisition has emphasized the importance of motivation in language learning (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991). It has been observed that long-distance exchanges shift the focus from language form to language use in meaningful context (Kelm, 1992; Meskill & Krassimira, 2000, Warschauer, 2001), and thereby increase student motivation. The findings in this interview category of positive reflections on e-mail exchange are in line with those of Warschauer (1996b) and Kaufman (1998). Warschauer conducted a survey study that investigated attitudes related to the use of computers for writing and communication in the language classroom. Data analysis revealed that EFL students were highly motivated to write when they used e-mail, and this result was consistent across a number of variables, including sex, typing skill, and access to a computer at home. Kaufman (1998) analyzed the discourse contained in ESL students’ e-mail correspondence and came to the same conclusion; that is, use of e-mail in writing classes promotes motivation. According to the interviews in the present study, all the EMG students enjoyed being involved in a cross-cultural e-mail exchange project. “Great,” “fun,” “exciting,” and “beneficial” were the adjectives they used to describe their experience.

The second category, “Enhances Writing Skills,” included the EMG participants’ impressions of how e-mail exchange contributed to their writing skills. In short, the students reported that the process of communicating with their key-pals prompted them to write longer pieces and write faster, and also helped them generate ideas and supportive text more quickly and easily. Two noteworthy representative statements were “*Now, even when I write in class with pen and paper for the teacher, I feel like I am writing to my key-pal. I am fluent, really fluent*” and “*Now I think faster, I write faster ... thoughts fly into my head and then onto paper so fast.*” A total of 12 (75%) participants in the group made these comments, and they are important because they refer to writing with pen and paper, signaling a transfer of writing ability from the word processor to pen-and-paper mode. Although the computer was used to type the e-mail

messages, the benefits the students received from exchanging e-mail were transferred to traditional pen-and-paper composition writing as well. This is very positive since all EFL exams in Turkey currently require that students write with pen and paper. Moreover, another statement in this category, one also made by 12 participants, suggests that the ease of making necessary changes and reorganizing writing on the computer prompted more willingness to write multiple drafts after editing and revising. These data correspond with the observations of other researchers, such as Tella (1991), who conducted an ethnographic investigation of a semester-long exchange between high school students in Finland and England. Tella found that, as opposed to writing compositions only once, the Finnish students edited and revised their compositions, poems, and other messages without being asked to do so because they wanted to ensure they were appropriate for their English peers.

The third category, "Increases Care and Attention to Detail," comprised participants' statements about greater precision in writing as an effect of cross-cultural e-mail exchange. The majority of the students reported that they had started to take more care with organization and grammar as a result of the project. It seems the students came to view grammar as "a tool for successful communication," which is exactly what King and Orton (1999) noted in their action research study that investigated motivation in a group of EFL students who were key-palling. Of the 16 EMG students in the current study, 12 (75%) stated that they tended to revise more when writing e-mail messages than when writing to an imaginary person or writing about random topics. Seven (43.8%) said that they found they could support their ideas better after the e-mail exchange program, six (37.5%) said that they cared more about coherence, and six (37.5%) said that they made their best effort to avoid being misunderstood. Similarly, students in King and Orton's study also reported that they "... negotiated and clarified meaning often so as not to be misunderstood" (1999, p.5). Two of the EMG students made the same interesting comment: "*Even if my key-pal didn't reply to me every time I wrote, I always thought there was a chance she would reply so I did my best each time.*" This was intriguing because both these students actually had problems with their key-pals. In one case, the key-pal was very slow to reply, and in the other the first key-pal would only reply with very short messages ("*Thanks, I got your mail*") and a new key-pal had to be arranged. These students both reported that they had benefited from the project despite some communication breakdowns.

Category four was "Contributes to General English Proficiency." All 16 (100%) of the EMG students stated that the project had helped enrich their vocabulary and learn proper word usage. A majority of students (13 total, 81.3%) also stated that they believed e-mail exchange had enhanced their general English proficiency. Moreover, 5 (31.3%) of the EMG students said they used both bi- and monolingual dictionaries to learn the meaning and usage of new English words. One explained how he had expanded his vocabulary by providing an example: "*I learned a lot of new words that I can use in daily life. For example, I used to say I 'controlled' my mail; now I say I 'checked' my mail. My key-pal uses the word 'check' a lot.*" It is clear from this statement that authentic contexts motivate students to learn vocabulary, and we know from research done on memory that vocabulary learned this way is easily coded and stored in long-term memory.

The fifth category of reflections on the positive aspects of e-mail exchange was “Takes Learning Beyond Classroom Borders,” and these statements emphasized how cross-cultural e-mail exchange enables learning independent of time and place. Briefly, almost two-thirds of the students expressed enthusiasm about the flexibility of e-mail exchange; they noted that this process offers the ability to practice English after school hours, at home or in an Internet café, to learn a foreign-language and to maintain or refresh skills after graduation.

“Improves Self-Confidence” was the sixth theme of the statements. Fourteen (87.5%) of the 16 EMG participants made the same remark, “*Now I can write good compositions.*” One of these 14 students gave a notable example: “*Exchanging e-mail has given me self-confidence. I started to surf the Web and join discussion forums. For example, the day before yesterday, Galatasaray’s game [a soccer team] was postponed. I navigated to the UEFA [soccer association] Web site and sent a long e-mail to vent my frustration.*”

The comments in the seventh category, “Makes English Real/Fosters Genuine Communication,” were about the benefits of the authenticity of cross-cultural e-mail exchange. The statements revealed that the students were very enthused about using English for genuine purposes. In fact, there was a definite element of fascination about the e-mail exchange process, with 12 (75%) of the 16 students indicating that they read the messages from their key-pals “over and over again.” Some of the EMG students’ statements gave direct indications that they were pleased to use English as a tool to communicate with living, breathing people from another culture. Other less direct comments also implied that e-mail exchange fosters genuine communication.

Category eight was “Fosters Speaking Skills,” and a majority of the students indicated that cross-cultural e-mail exchange has the potential to do this. Twelve students (75%) said: “*When I write to my key-pal, I don’t feel as if I am studying or practicing English. I feel like I am just talking to a friend.*” This finding is also in line with the assertion by Gonglewski and coworkers (2001, p. 5) that “Interaction via e-mail lends a feeling of reality to students’ communicative efforts that may seem artificial in a classroom setting. This communicative interaction is much like spoken language because of its informal and interactive nature.” Murray (1991) notes that, while e-mail is an exclusively written medium, it is accepted that e-mail discourse is a combination of written and spoken discourse.

The ninth theme was “Increases Attention to Writing Tone.” Comments made by seven (43.8%) of the students revealed concern about ensuring that their writing conveyed their true message. These individuals clearly viewed cross-cultural e-mail as a positive thing in their lives and did not want to lose contact with their key-pal. They cared not only about the text they wrote, but also about the nuances in the messages. It was clear they had taken special care not to offend.

Category 10 was “Fosters Intercultural Understanding,” and the two statements on this theme were made by half of the EMG students. These participants seemed to have enjoyed exchanging cultural information, learning about South Korea and its people,

and telling about Turkey in return. Sociocultural learning theory emphasizes the educational value of creating cross-cultural communities of practice and critical inquiry. Extensive previous research on e-mail exchange suggests that task-based cross-cultural communication has the potential to improve students' language skills and cultural awareness (Gray & Stockwell, 1998; Kern, 1996; Lunde, 1990; Sanaoui & Lapkin, 1992; Warschauer, 1995), and to foster student autonomy (Barson, Frommer & Schwartz, 1993; Soh & Soon, 1991). The findings of the current study also correspond with those reported by Leh (1997). Leh's experimental research examined the potential of e-mail in foreign-language learning, and also looked at cultural aspects of e-mail exchange. The results indicated that e-mail exchange helped the students learn about the foreign culture (that of the target language) and enhanced their social presence. A follow-up study by Leh conducted 1 year after the original investigation revealed that one-fourth of the e-mail participants had continued the electronic communication after the experiment.

The statements in the eleventh category, "Initiates Lasting Friendships," highlighted one more noteworthy detail. Three students stated, "*I feel that my key-pal will be my friend forever. We write to each other several times a week. We get along very well and share lots of things.*" One student even made a closer connection during the experience: "*I actually fell in love with my key-pal. She is [romantically] interested in me, too. We'll see what happens. I told her about Bodrum and Istanbul, and sent some photographs. She is interested in visiting Turkey.*" Both these statements suggest that cross-cultural e-mail exchange creates opportunities for connections that can evolve into lasting relationships. This finding is also in line with the observations of Kim and Bonk (2002). Kim and Bonk matched their Finnish and American students for e-mail exchange in order to examine cross-cultural differences in online collaborative behaviors among undergraduate pre-service teachers. The results showed that the students had a strong desire to use e-mail not only while the research study was conducted, but also after the study was completed.

ii. Problems Encountered: Although the EMG participants reported that they found e-mail exchange valuable for practicing writing, they also discussed some problems they experienced during the project. One issue was loss of Internet connections, especially when sending e-mail. In fact, this was the main pitfall of the technology that was highlighted on the student reflection forms throughout the intervention. The researcher proposed a practical solution for this within the experimental period. She advised students to write their messages offline using a word-processing program, then copy and paste into an e-mail message, and finally go online to send.

The second problem mentioned was that some students from the partner class stopped corresponding before the Turkish students' projects were completed. This is one of the inevitable drawbacks of cross-cultural e-mail exchange that cannot be controlled by either of the partner teachers/researchers. Even if it is the student's personal project, and even if there is a penalty for failing to correspond regularly, the student may still be lazy

or even choose to fail the course. If it is possible to achieve, matching or being prepared to match students with two or more key-pals is one way to avoid this problem.

Warschauer (1995) also discusses lack of response and drop-outs in his article entitled, "E-mail for English Teaching," and offers similar suggestions: allowing students to have multiple partners from the same class, exchanging with several classes in different countries, setting up a mailing list to group two or more classes together, and having students join an international discussion list.

iii. Suggestions for Future: At the end of the interview, the EMG participants were asked if they had any comments or suggestions about future implementation of cross-cultural e-mail exchange. Every single student in the group indicated that they wished to be involved in such a project the following semester as well. This enthusiastic response is in line with the findings of Greenfield's (2003) qualitative case study, which examined secondary ESL students' attitudes toward collaborative e-mail exchange. Greenfield reported that the students in his study viewed cross-cultural e-mail exchange as something they would like to repeat in future.

Overall, the data from the interviews revealed that the EMG students gleaned many personal and English-writing-related benefits from the e-mail exchange program. Interestingly, the process of e-mail exchange even proved to have positive impacts on students who did not (or could not) correspond with their key-pals regularly. Only one of the 16 EMG students reported that he did not write more than the required set of pieces for the writing portfolio; in fact, this individual neglected to submit two of the required portfolio pieces. One other student reported that his key-pal did not reply to some of his e-mails. Of the 16 total EMG students, these two were the ones who seemed to benefit from e-mail exchange the least. However, both expressed a wish to engage in another key-palling project and both said they would recommend this type of activity to other learners of English because they felt they had gained a lot through the process.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study provides information about the effects that cross-cultural e-mail exchange has on EFL students' learning of writing composition. No previous investigation has specifically examined the relationship between cross-cultural e-mail exchange and writing self-efficacy using pre-post measurements. Thus, the main aim was to investigate the potential benefits of cross-cultural e-mail exchange with respect to student self-efficacy in writing, and to compare results to those achieved with the conventional pen-and-paper method of writing to an imaginary person or a teacher. Prior to the self-efficacy scale used in this study, there was no valid or reliable scale that would assess the value of a language-teaching tool for reinforcing self-efficacy linked with EFL students' writing. Thus, one of the researcher's first tasks was to develop and validate a scale to detect and characterize changes in EFL students' writing self-efficacy after exposure to cross-cultural e-mail exchange. The quantitative data obtained with the scale revealed that, for EFL learners, exchanging e-mail with foreign counterparts results in higher writing self-efficacy. As for qualitative findings, comments on the student reflection forms and the EMG responses during the semi-structured interviews

all confirmed that exchanging e-mails with foreign peers boosted learners' self-efficacy in writing and encourages a more positive attitude towards writing and writing classes.

5. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The researcher views this investigation as part of a continuum of studies that will hopefully be conducted on the effects and value of cross-cultural e-mail exchange for language learners. This research suggests that language teachers who incorporate cross-cultural e-mail exchange, which is a valuable, practical and reasonable activity that helps students raise self-efficacy by providing real-life communication experiences as they learn a language, into their classes will provide their students with excellent writing-related outcomes and benefits. The value that these EFL study subjects placed on cross-cultural e-mail exchange for enhancing writing skill is of particular importance, and the researcher hopes that this will establish a case for a wider use of the Internet in writing classes in Turkey. With today's modern computer technologies, it is simple to organize cross-cultural e-mail projects in which EFL learners correspond with foreign counterparts or native speakers of the target language. These schemes are easy to implement in educational settings that have the necessary equipment. As well, with information on how to implement e-mail exchange is readily accessible on the Internet, there are virtually no barriers to starting such a project.

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APPENDIX 1

Self-Efficacy in Writing Inventory

Read each numbered statement and use the scale below to indicate how you assess your ability in writing in English. The purpose is to get your personal view and there are no right or wrong answers so do not spend too much time on any one statement and just select the answer that best applies to you. Thank you for your cooperation.

Dilek Yavuz Erkan

1 = I cannot do it at all	2 = I can't do it well	3 = I can do it
4 = I can do it very well		

	1	2	3	4
1. I can use the grammar rules that I learned in class easily and correctly.				
2. I can match style with topic easily. <i>E.g.</i> If I am asked to write an essay, I can use the appropriate conventions to write a good essay. When asked to write a story, I can write according to the conventions of story writing.				
3. I can express and support my opinion easily.				

4. I can choose and defend a point of view.				
5. I can write very-well-organized compositions.				
6. I find it easy to start writing on a given topic.				
7. I can write grammatically correct sentences in my compositions.				
8. I can use a style that is appropriate to the task.				
9. When given a topic to write about, I can think of ideas quickly.				
10. I can write paragraphs that flow well.				
11. When writing a composition on a given topic, I find it easy to decide which style I should use. <i>E.g.</i> If I am asked to write a report, I can use the appropriate conventions to write a report.				
12. When given a topic to write about, I can think of ideas easily.				
13. Although I occasionally make mistakes when writing, I generally write good compositions.				
14. I can use nouns, verbs, adverbs, and adjectives in the right position in a sentence.				
15. I can use punctuation correctly.				
16. I find it easy to include all the information that should be dealt within on any given topic.				
17. I can locate and use suitable sources of information for any writing topic.				
18. I can write error-free sentences in my compositions.				
19. I can write coherent compositions.				
20. I can edit my compositions and correct mistakes in punctuation, capitalization, paragraph structure				
21. When given a topic to write about, I can think of ideas quickly.				