

TESTING WRITING WITH INTERNET ACCESS: EFFECT ON TASK COMPLEXITY?

BACKGROUND

The Danish written exam in Foreign Languages at the end of lower secondary school is composed of four sections: listening, reading, language use and free writing. For the free writing section of the exam, the students write short texts using a word processor (e.g. Word document) on their computers. In the recent years, it has been proposed to introduce Internet use in the free writing section of the exam. The purpose of including the Internet is to make the exam closer to real life writing and encourage use of digital tools in class. However, there is a need for an improved understanding of writing with Internet resources. The present PhD project aims at understanding the response processes behind writing with Internet use to help with test development and teaching of writing.

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Writing with Internet access seems to have an effect on writing processes and cognitive processes (Åkerfeldt, 2014; Leijten, Van Waes, Schriver & Hayes, 2014; Stapleton, 2012). The PhD project should help answer the following questions:

- Does Internet access make a writing task in an assessment setting more or less challenging?
- Can a less proficient writer use digital tools and strategies to compensate for language proficiency?
- Does Internet access actually make the task more difficult for students of lower writing proficiency level because the digital environment adds a layer of complexity to an already complex task?

PARTICIPANTS

100 students (N=75 for English; N=25 for English and French) aged 15-16 from one, two or three Danish lower secondary schools.

A COUNTERBALANCED TEST PROCEDURE

In both test conditions, students write on a computer. For one of the tasks they will have Internet access, for the other only given documents.

RESEARCH DESIGN

A mixed methods convergent design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

QUANTITATIVE DATA

- Log files (keystroke and window logging)
- Written responses
- Scores
- Answers to surveys



Statistical analysis with R or SPSS

QUALITATIVE DATA

- Stimulated recall interview with some students
- Group interviews



Thematic content analysis with NVivo



The results are merged, compared and interpreted

POSSIBLE WRITING TASKS

A]

You are part of an international forum of animal enthusiasts who share information about animals that can be seen in their natural habitat. You have decided to write a post about an animal that can be found in your country (Denmark). Find the relevant information on the Internet, so that in your post you can

- Describe the animal
- Explain where, when, and how you can find it
- Explain why you find that animal interesting
- List the links to the sources you have used to find the information

B]

Your class is doing a collaborative project in English with a school in Spain and a school in Hungary. Together, you are making an online database of different places to visit in your countries. Each student has to write a short article about a place to visit of his/her choice in his/her country following the template given by the teachers.

Find the relevant information on the Internet, so that in your database entry you can include relevant information about the place. Your article must include:

- A title
- The name of the place in English (if available) and in your language
- A description of the place (where it is, when it was built/made/appeared, etc.)
- Your opinion about the place
- A list with links to the sources you have used to find the information

A TRADITIONAL EXAM SET-UP



A traditional exam set-up at a Danish lower secondary school without Internet access, but with computers and access to an online dictionary.

REFERENCES

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