Improving Basic College English Writing through the Use of E-Mail Exchange between Taiwanese and American Students

Ai-Hwa Chen

Abstract

By the time of the advent of the global village, communicative distances between people had been reduced dramatically. Messages could be conveyed to the other side of the earth in a minute with the click of one finger upon the "send" key of a computer. Such developing technology and its widespread presence upon college campuses now make it evident that the Internet provides students with profound and varied new avenues for pursuing expanded academic learning.

The purpose for this research project placed major emphasis upon genuine English writing practice in the traditional classroom. The participants were students in their second year in the Department of Applied English in a college located in the central Taiwan. After practicing basic writing skills in the classroom for one semester, through the use of e-mail, they then officially communicated with American students who were in the Department of Humanities and Fine Arts at the University of Texas, Permain Basin. During and after the process of conducting the project, the researcher collected the participants' background information and conducted an observation on how the Taiwanese students composed their e-mail messages.

By communicating with native English speakers online, the Taiwanese students achieved more authentic English language competency, which, hopefully, resulted in a sense of achievement with regard to their overall English language learning. In addition, they appeared to obtain additional advantages in oral practice by the means of the "chatting-like" nature of e-mail correspondence. In my findings, even low-performance learners became more involved in enjoying language learning and improved their self-confidence. Although the degree to which each participant might have benefited varied, <u>all</u> of the learners undoubtedly gained some positive attitudes towards English reading and writing after using email.

Keywords: English writing, electronic mail, cross-cultural e-mail exchange.

Ai-Hwa Chen, Associate Professor, Department of Applied English, HIT.

中美電子傳書提昇四技初級英文
寫作能力之研究

陳愛華

摘　要

　　隨著地球村時代的來臨，人與人之間的聯繫無遠弗屆，僅憑一根手指，即能將訊息在瞬息間傳遞至遙遠的異地。科技的日新月異及校園網路的普及，提供學生多方面學習的管道。

　　本計畫旨在提昇學生的英文寫作能力，讓英文寫作成為生活化的實用課程。實施的方法及過程為，選擇中部地區某一技術學院應用英語系四技二年級的學生為對象，在經過一學期的課堂演練後，於第二學期正式和美國的 University of Texas Permain Basin 的人文及藝術學院研究所的碩士班學生們以電子書信方式互相傳遞訊息。計畫執行當中及結束後，蒐集雙方參與人員的學習背景資料，同時觀察台灣學生英文書信寫作的情況。

　　藉由電子傳書的方式，台灣學生的英語能力表現較過去傳統的課室學習理想，此種學習方式可望讓學生達到全語言學習的境界。而且，藉由聊天式的電子傳書，也能附帶地加強英文的口語表達能力。本研究發現英語表現較弱的學生也產生學習上的興趣和增加自信心。雖然每位參與者收穫不盡相同，以電子傳書的方式和美國學生通信，無疑地，讓所有的參與學生在閱讀和寫作能力方面有所助益。

關鍵詞：英文寫作，電子郵件，跨文化電子傳書。

陳愛華：修平技術學院應用英語系副教授

Introduction

In Taiwan, many students think that English is important, but their physical surroundings do not supply many opportunities for them to use it. They have few chances to practice and experience this foreign language. Although English is a required course in Taiwan, many teachers focus on reading and speaking improvement. In addition, they often depend on the school administration or individual departments to set educational goals, and determine the facilities that they can use. Teachers' individual fields of specialty can also be factors in how the required courses are presented. Also, many teachers are not interested in working with their students on the writing because of the heavy workload on grading. In addition, mostly, English writing classes are mainly offered in English Department. Students from other departments may not have opportunities to practice their writing skills. Thus, many schools do not emphasize writing skills so they do not offer these kinds of practical language learning classes to their students. Thus, it is not easy for students to create formal written messages because they are not familiar enough with the necessary writing skills. Because of the limitations of hardware and the emphasis on the importance of speaking skills, writing classes often are not considered an important component in language learning. Nowadays, technology has been well developed. The distance between people from different cultural backgrounds becomes closer. As such, to communicate cross-culturally presents easier and reachable than that in the old days. By using email to establish contact with international or English native speakers, students may achieve greater fluency in English reading and writing, particularly if they can be guided with skilled instruction.

At present almost all students have email accounts and experience on the Internet. They can write in the language and computer labs at school, at home with their own computers, or in Internet cafés to communicate with their friends. However, to most learners, learning how to write in English is a difficult job. Because of the swift technological development, however, information transmission can be accomplished in a second. As a result, written messages are a basic necessity for people to learn. Helping language learners get through the barriers of writing has drawn my attention and lead to this research. In order to help students stimulate both their reading and writing development, the research design will take many aspects into account and will contain detailed and complicated components. According to Sipe's (2000) indication, "we

wanted the email exchanges to become a source of reflective conversations that could help all of us deepen our understanding of writing and its role in our lives" (105). In this study, Taiwanese students communicated with their American counterparts through the use of e-mail. Hopefully, the students will consider writing as a means of building knowledge and as a life-long learning project.

1. Research questions

In order to realize how students improve their English writing skills, the research questions are proposed in the following:

- Does email correspondence improve writing and reading skills? And how may it improve language through cultural awareness?
- What effect, if any, does email have on students' motivation to improve their writing?
- Being from different cultural backgrounds, how will the participants understand each other via their different rhetorical composition processes?
- What will be the difference, if any, in students' attitudes toward English writing before and after joining the research project?

Literature Review

Nowadays, the computer has attained significantly greater practical and utilitarian use than ever imagined. Using the technological inventions to connect different cultures has become accessible and functional. In this study, the researcher attempted to help EFL learners to improve their English writing by the means of using cross-cultural e-mail communication. Kelm (1996) claimed that "the implementation of electronic networks has the potential to assist language instructors in reaching their goal of bringing individuals together so that they might communicate across cultural and linguistic boundaries" (19). Email can convey messages between two or more people at the same time. It also may encourage shy or slow learners to express themselves in writing. Although they may not like to talk in front of people, they still yearn to have listeners. They can obtain their peers' feedback through expressing literally and having online discussion collaboratively. Kern (2000) claimed that communicative language teaching has focused predominantly on face-to-face, spoken communication. In developing learner's extended discourse, competence and written communication is somewhat less

successful. However, Sabieh (2002) affirmed that email has positive impact on language learning. She indicates that students become "empowered learners" who are active, responsible, and motivated to communicate to enhance their language learning. In her study, Davenport (2006) also found that both students and preservice teachers all showed positive outcomes in their writing program by means of e-mail transmission. Anderson & McClard (1995) also indicated that "network systems may encourage collaboration because they make it fairly easy to exchange materials among geographically separated people" (155). Having more opportunities to communicate with e-pals by using the target language, the EFL learners may become more familiar with the aspects of syntax and semantic knowledge.

Many studies have focused upon cross-cultural e-mail interaction programs (Schueller, 2007; Lawrence, 2002; & Eastmond & Lester, 2001) Lapp (1995) investigated how e-mail cross-cultural conversation programs facilitate cross-cultural communication between Americans and Chinese students. She attempted to understand how those informants discussed and evaluated perceived cultural stereotypes, and which participants were effectively able to clarify ideas, negotiate meaning and address cultural differences. Shih (2000) conducted similar research. She investigated how Taiwanese students learn English and American culture with their American counterparts through online technologies. Her findings showed that the Taiwanese students were encouraged and optimistic about the potential of online linguistic and cultural learning.

A related study was conducted by Liaw and Johnson (2001), who investigated cross-cultural learning experiences through e-mail writing between Taiwanese students and pre-service bilingual/ESL teachers in the USA. They indicated that many non-native English speakers are likely to have a superficial understanding of American culture from mass broadcast media such as movies and television. Through the use of e-mail correspondence, the Taiwanese students obtained first hand information from their counterparts in the U.S. and gained a more accurate conception of the target culture. Cifuentes and Shih (2001) conducted a collaborative project by connecting preservice teachers of the U.S. and Taiwanese students. The principal role of the subjects of the U.S. was to provide Taiwanese students with English instruction. The outcomes indicated that the teachers infused authentic activities into their e-mails which facilitated the language and cultural learning for the ESL/EFL learners. This

study also indicated that Taiwanese students expressed nervousness about contacting their counterparts because the preservice teachers of the U.S. acted as their teachers and this consequently made them feel uneasy.

In my study, I attempted to realize how Taiwanese students composed their writing appropriately so that their American counterparts could comprehend them well. The medium of e-mail connects two different cultures into one sphere. Not only does it provide the L2 learners authentic readers to practice 'online talk' in the target language, it also possesses the capability of fostering the exchange of the social concepts in both the native and target cultures.

Methodology

This study was methodologically situated within a qualitative research design. All the materials related to the study were collected, such as hard copies of the e-mail correspondence, the researcher's reflective journals, the feedback written by Taiwanese students and the American instructor, the pre- and post- survey questionnaires, and the participants' cultural encounters.

1. Research site

The research site was located in a college in Taiwan. All Taiwanese participants gathered in the computer lab weekly to receive and reply their e-mail correspondence. In addition, the researcher would collect other data sources, such as questionnaires and texts reflected by the American instructor in the traditional classroom and office.

2. Participants

This project was conducted in a regular writing class. All participants voluntarily joined the program. The participants included two groups: Taiwanese and American students. The Taiwanese students were college level and had taken one semester of basic English writing class. The American students were graduate students who were working on their Master's degree and were in a course of Rhetoric and Composition. There were only seven students taking the course of Rhetoric and Composition. However, there were twenty-one Taiwanese students in the writing class. In order not to give American students too heavy workload and provide more opportunities for the Taiwanese students to join the e-mail exchange program, fourteen out of twenty one students were selected by drawing their names from a bag. Each American student worked with two Taiwanese students simultaneously. The electronic mail correspondence was in their regular writing class hours when they had contact with their e-pals.

3. Time frame

According to the original plan, this project was intended to be conducted for twelve weeks in order that the Taiwanese students might have more practice on their English writing. Although both partner colleges were conducting similar semester systems, the time for beginnings and deadlines were different. Thus, this project lasted

for ten weeks. Aside from the Spring Break and mid-term exam, the participants exchange (at most) eight communicative exchanges.

4. Data collection

The study was divided into two stages. The first stage lasted four weeks. The participants started to e-mail formally with their American e-pals. A time schedule was set to indicate each stage's work in order that the participants would know their expected progression. The researcher earned the permission to quote participants' email passages and interview segments in her paper. At this stage, a pre- survey was conducted to obtain all of the participants' relevant background information.

The second stage took place over the course of six weeks. The participants continually emailed with their pen pals. They were required to email with each other once a week and both the Taiwanese and American students had to forward their mails to the researcher. As in the first stage, Taiwanese students tended to meet at a certain time in the lab to compose and send their emails.

When the fieldwork was completed, all the data were gathered and started being analyzed. All of the textual data were taken approximately one month to be interpreted. And another two months, the research text was composed and accomplished.

Findings

There were 7 American students and 14 Taiwanese students participated in this e-mail exchange program. Based on e-mail entries, researcher's reflective journals, and survey questionnaires, the responses are denoted in the following research questions.

1. Research questions exploration based on Taiwanese students' reflection

Does E-mail Correspondence Improve Writing and Reading Skills? And How may It Improve Language through Cultural Awareness?

Reflected in the post-survey questionnaire, Taiwanese students indicated that not only did their reading skills improve, they also could compose their writing more fluently and faster. At the very beginning of the study, they would spend hours to complete one message. Later, they used less time to finish their messages. Finally, they could read and reply to the e-mails simultaneously in less than one hour. They learned more vocabulary words and sentence structures. Their grammatical knowledge improved as well.

All Taiwanese students indicated that it was very interesting and exciting to communicate with Americans via e-mail. They would propose interesting questions to their e-pals. They attempted to convey how they felt to their e-pals and usually received the insights they'd hoped to acquire. However, when they could not comprehend their e-pals' meaning, they would ask them again. For instance, one Taiwanese students asked, "Could you explanation it for me?" when her American e-pal said that she could tell her if there were any major differences in them after she read her profile. And, her American e-counterpart did explain it again to her. Interestingly, one American student misunderstood the political environment about Taiwan and asked his e-pal, "Who is your current emperor?" His e-pal clarified his misunderstanding by saying, "We are democratic country in Taiwan. We have a President instead of an emperor."

Through the use of cross-cultural e-mail, the Taiwanese students said that their writing became more meaningful and authentic. They indicated that they had genuine partners to listen to their voices and they could obtain responses as well. Moreover, by means of giving or acquiring the cultural information, the Taiwanese students could learn effective strategies to apply to reading and writing skills. Therefore, cross-cultural e-mail exchange programs seem to be positively useful and appropriate ways to improve EFL learners' reading and writing skills.

What Effect, if any, does E-mail Have on Students' Motivation to Improve their Writing?

For most Taiwanese students, it was their first time to communicate with American students via e-mail. They felt anxious and nervous because they were afraid that their e-pals could not understand their written language. When they received their e-pals' encouraging and supportive messages, they knew they could trust their e-pals and would make efforts to better their composing and their efforts on subsequent e-mail messages. For example, one Taiwanese student said, "I feel a little nervous." Her e-pal replied, "I'm a little nervous too! But I am sure that we will get along very well."

Because of the feeling of being comprehensible and of anticipation of receiving e-mails, Taiwanese students might gain more motivation to conduct their English e-mail messages through such programs. Gradually, their writing abilities very likely would be improved.

Being from Different Cultural Backgrounds, How will the Participants Understand each other via their Different Rhetorical Composition Processes?

Many Taiwanese students were wondering if their American counterparts could understand their Chinglish. However, undoubtedly, all American students gave positively comments that they could understand them well. Thus, although the different cultural backgrounds might be a factor in blocking the Taiwanese students (especially those less skilled in English performance) from conveying their meaning in English well, they still could be understood.

However, some minor miscommunication did occur. There were two frequent misused terms appearing. One was to use the term 'spring vacation,' instead of using 'Spring Break.' Almost all Taiwanese students preferred using 'spring vacation' instead of 'Spring Break.' When their American counterparts indicated that they would have Spring Break, confusion sometimes occurred. For Chinese/Taiwanese people, spring vacation means the Chinese New Year holidays. It will last about a month. But, the appropriate term for that in English should be 'winter break.' Then, why did the Taiwanese students use 'spring vacation'? One reason may be that their English composing was quite influenced by their Chinese syntax; another, possibly that they did not know how to refer to the American break that occurs in April. Although the miscommunications mentioned above were not clarified, they did not hinder the overall cross-cultural exchanges.

Some American students would search for information about Taiwan on the Internet in order to explore more topics with their Taiwanese e-pals. Likewise, some Taiwanese students would send pictures of Taiwan to offer more information about their homeland, or send their own pictures to their American e-pals. Other students would exchange their web page address with one another. As such, this generally helped their American e-pals to understand their counterpart's lives and the regions in Taiwan where they were from. Thus, cultural differences can generally be seen not as barriers blocking both sides from understanding one another, but in many cases, completely the reverse. By means of the Internet medium, people from different

cultural backgrounds became more understanding of and sensible to one another. At least, I didn't see any "geese and ducks'" talk (cultural misapprehension) in this study.

What will be the Difference, if any, in Students' Attitudes toward English Writing before and after Joining the Research Project?

At the very beginning, although many students felt excited to have American e-pals to compose an authentic English writing, they always felt very stressful about their English proficiency. However, when they found that their American counterparts could understand them, they felt pleasant and wanted to write more. One student stated that she could not compose a complete writing piece before because her English was not good enough. After joining the program, in order to learn more about her e-pals, she had to force herself to write more. Later, she overcame her problems with incomplete writing. Many students indicated that their vocabulary became much better than before. They used their dictionaries a lot in order to understand their e-pals' messages or convey their meaning more appropriately. In addition, some American e-pals would correct Taiwanese students' grammatical problems and tell them how to compose using better grammatical structures.

After joining the program, most Taiwanese students became confident on their writing. And, they felt easier to write in English. Hopefully, they could become accustomed to reading the English version textbooks and magazines instead of the Chinese translation versions. In this, their English, ideally, would progress remarkably.

2. Discussion and suggestions

After sending the second e-mail messages to their American e-counterparts, Taiwanese students were requested to describe their feelings about cross-cultural e-mail communication. All students had positive comments on this means of practicing English writing. Although most Taiwanese students claimed that their English was kind of poor in their first message, they were positively encouraged by their American e-pals. It illustrates that EFL learners can conduct self study to compensate their weaknesses. They can perform two things to develop their potential in writing.

2.1 Students' aspects on conducting the e-mail exchange program
2.1.1 Connecting known information

Many students have the abilities to connect their knowledge to the topics proposed by their American e-pals. When one student learned that her American e-pal is from Texas, she inquired, "The Texas Chainsaw Massacre, is it true or just a legend?" By doing this, she not only learned this story, but also saw how to create a subject to talk about in English. Normally, Taiwanese students would write a short message and their e-pals would reply with a long one. However, when the project moved on, they became familiar with each other and each would describe the things surrounding them more freely and in greater detail.

2.1.2 Applying the Internet as a communicative tool

One American student talked a lot about the issues proposed by his e-pals about Taiwan, such as pop bands, singers, politics, and so on. He spent time surfing on the web in order to get information useful for chatting with his e-pals. In addition, many groups would send pictures to one another, such as photos of the Taipei 101 building, pictures of their pets, and photos of art pieces to supplement their descriptions. Thus, the e-mail program not only possesses the function of sending written texts, it can also link other technical functions to make the English writing activities become rich and varied.

In this project, many cultural issues were proposed in the e-mail forum. However, different cultural values may cause some cultural misunderstanding. Teachers can integrate some of the popular issues to the teaching materials. Thus, while students are learning the language, they also become immersed in new cultural knowledge. Two factors which can be conducted by teachers are described as follows.

2.2 Teachers' aspects on conducting the e-mail exchange program
2.2.1 Cultural values imparting

Cultural misunderstanding and stereotyping occurred occasionally, especially Taiwanese students. They usually obtained their information about the United States from the media, such as Hollywood movies and magazines. Therefore, they would discuss/ask some interesting subjects. Likewise, one question raised by an American student that might cause conflict or perhaps embarrass his e-pal. This happened when one Taiwanese student told her e-pal that her father was a businessman who sold betel nuts. Her e-pal gained the information about the betel

nuts selling in Taiwan from the Internet and asked her, "Do you wear bikini tops and short skirts when you sell betel nuts?" Of course, he did not receive the answer from his e-pal. In fact, the dress style of the girls who sell betel nuts at roadside stands is not approved by the public in Taiwan. In addition, because of different cultural values, one American student told her instructor that she was afraid that her e-pals were judging her because she had a child and got divorced at an early age. She didn't know if it is OK in Taiwan to be a young mother with no husband. In addition to these cultural misunderstandings, some Taiwanese students made interesting mistakes as well. They would convey incorrect information about Chinese culture. For example, one said, 'Kimchi is a Chinese pickled vegetable.' Actually, it is typical Korean food. However, sometimes, Americans would correct the wrong comparison. For example, one Taiwanese student indicated that Chinese New Year is "similar to Halloween in America" Her e-pal replied, "It sounds a little bit more like Christmas than Halloween to me." and then, kindly described what Halloween was like.

One cultural issue discussed on the forum relevant to personal identity. When one Taiwanese student said, "My eyes are black, I don't like the color of my eyes," her e-pal questioned, "why don't you like the color of your eyes? I think black hair and eyes can be very beautiful." The Taiwanese student replied, "In China, most people have black eyes and hair. But many people don't like their hair color, they like brown and gold color that looks like a foreigner." "I can't believe that people are changing how they look because they want to look like foreigners. I think you should be proud of who you are," the American e-pal said. Likewise, another student talked about a movie she watched and said, "the leading man Jake Gyllenhaal…has blue eyes… What color are your eyes?" "I must admit that I did not notice Jake Gyllenhaal's eyes. My eyes are brown. What color are yours?" American students might be surprised by their e-pals' answers and questions. In the light of the myth of identity, teachers may raise it as an issue and add it in the public forum. When more students discuss about it, they not only will have more thorough idea about his topic, they also gain more opportunities to express their opinions in a written form.

With regard to the subjects illustrated above, in the English writing class, teachers not only need to teach their students how to use appropriate written language, they also need to teach

their students to respect different cultural values and impart their students both native and target cultural knowledge. Therefore, they can have more sensible and legible writing. Another factor which can help students enforce their English writing performance involves asking questions.

2.2.2 Learning how to extend questions

American students read the e-mails carefully and would answer all the questions proposed by their e-pals. When they asked questions, they would give examples to explain what they meant in detail. Conversely, the Taiwanese students tended to ask plain questions, or they would skip some of the questions raised by their e-pals. Why did they adapt this fashion of one way inquiry in the e-mail forum? Is it because they could not understand the questions or because they possessed less ability to provide more information to their e-pals? Or, did they think it was more polite to ask questions instead of answering them? It is worthwhile for the researcher to have further investigation.

Many American students used a lot of encouragement and compliments to describe things. For example, one student admired Ang Lee very much and expressed appreciation of his talents. She would like to learn more about him, so she inquired, posing many questions about And Lee to her e-pal. In such situations, Taiwanese students can learn how to appreciate world renowned American people. Of course, they can gain this information from the Internet and then discuss such celebrities with their e-pals. Unfortunately, many Taiwanese students did not apply this reciprocity to acquire knowledge from their e-counterparts.

One final fact observed was that it was possibly because of the deficiency of their language or knowledge that the Taiwanese students seldom asked open-ended questions.

Conclusion

This study focused on exploring the cross-cultural e-mail exchange. All of the participants who joined the program were taking their required courses. Therefore, they had to complete the program until it reached its conclusion. It is important to note that most students in their feedback indicated that they had pleasant communication with their e-counterparts and would like to make friends with one another. As such, the program was a success, and both the Taiwanese and the American students learned a lot through the exchanges they made with each other. In order to have an overall realization about cross-cultural e-mail exchange program, the advantages and disadvantages for Taiwanese students and the teacher's role in this program will

be examined. Also, the popular topics proposed by both parties need to be discussed thoroughly in order to foster holistic understanding during the e-mail project. In addition, the difficulties occurred in the process of conducting the e-mail exchanges will be included.

1. The advantages and disadvantages for students who communicate with one another through e-mail transnationally

1.1 Advantages

There were two out of fourteen participants who studied abroad a year before the project was conducted. Most Taiwanese students never experienced the target culture in person. Thus, by means of e-mail exchanges, these students could gain genuine communicative skills with the native English speakers. When they learned that their e-pals could understand their written messages and gave them encouragement, support and feedback, they became confident and were motivated to do more. Thus, they agreed that their reading and writing skills had improved. Warschauer (1995) also proposed that the advantages of e-mail include: "using English for an authentic purpose, making new friends, and learning about a new culture" (p. 47). In addition, the learners might acquire different sentence patterns, word expressions, and vocabulary selection when their e-pals from a different cultural background provided them with reflections on their email correspondence.

Most EFL learners may not have the opportunity to go abroad because of various financial problems. The cross-cultural e-mail exchange program is an affordable way for them to put their English learning into practice.

1.2 Disadvantages

In this study, one American student worked with two Taiwanese at the same time. It was kind of heavy load for them, especially, when they were busy with completing their Master's degree. Thus, each Taiwanese student might not obtain sufficient assistance on their English writing. In addition, many Taiwanese students expected their e-pals could work hard on their sentence structure and correct their grammatical errors. It seemed that American students paid more attention to the contents of a message. That is why although many Taiwanese could compose their writing much faster than before, they were still not satisfied with their writing performance.

2. The teacher's role in computer-based instruction

Many students worried that their e-counterparts might not understand what they were saying. Therefore, at the beginning, teachers should orally tell students the purpose of the e-mails and gave them constant support. Teachers can also give students useful information about their e-pals and American cultural information and encourage them to discover more by themselves.

The teacher needs to stay nearby, but not too close, when students are composing their messages. Thus, he/she can provide the immediate assistance, such as how to spell a word or explain their e-pals' messages for them. When students feel secure, they will possibly work on their writing more carefully.

3 The kinds of e-mail topics which will enhance students' reading and writing motivation

The most frequently proposed topics by Taiwanese students were: visiting Taiwan, Chinese food, movies, hobbies, pets, and music. However, the Taiwanese students tended to describe things using only a few sentences. Thus, their e-mail messages were short. It seems that they did not know how to extend their original topic to other areas, although they were interested in those topics. For example, with regard to a movie title, people in Taiwan are more familiar with Chinese instead of English. Thus, if Taiwanese students are really eager to discuss a movie with their e-pals, they should learn the English title out by themselves and then share their opinions with their American e-pals.

Chinese food was the most popular subject for Taiwanese students. Interestingly, almost all Taiwanese students would ask their e-pals, "do you like Chinese food?"

This sentence is like greetings that can make two acquaintances start their conversation.

4. The difficulties of conducting an e-mail exchange program technical problems

When one American student did not send her e-mail messages regularly for weeks and received a reminder from the researcher, she replied, "Every time I attempt to open an e-mail from either you or your students, my e-mail program (Microsoft Outlook Express) asks me to install a language pack in order to read the Chinese character. I am not sure if I did this correctly on my first attempt; I will try again, and I do look forward to getting a reply from

your students." Also, one Taiwanese student got hurt when her e-pal had not sent her e-mail for three weeks. And, another Taiwanese student got mad at her e-pal for not responding frequently. Although the technical problems are unavoidable, it did cause many misunderstanding or unhappy situations.

4.1 Missing one lamb

At the beginning, eight American students joined the project. However, one American student seemed to forget to send her e-mail messages to her e-pals regularly. Although the researcher sent a reminder to her, she did not give any responses. Her instructor said that she was in the hospital. At the end of the project, she had in fact quit the class. Of course, the students paired with her got hurt seriously.

4.2 Discomfort about exposing the e-mails

The American students indicated that "they were not as open as they could have been because they knew the teacher was reading the emails." Therefore, their instructor suggested "if we did not read the emails and just had students keep a log that they did it, that way they could be freer in their communications." However, if teachers do not read the emails, how will they be able to know the students' progress in English writing? At this point, the researcher may need to have both groups understood the purpose for conducting the e-mail exchange program.

4.3 Less tutors and more tutees

As noted earlier, seven American students joined this research project. There were 23 students in the writing class. In order not to give a heavy load to American students, only 14 students were allowed to participate in this project. Thus, those who were not permitted to join the program felt very upset.

4.4 Sampling size

This was a qualitative research. Thus, the sampling size could not be large in order to have a thorough realization on each student's writing difficulties and progress. Findings from of small size cannot represent the whole writing situation in order to result in objective conclusions. Although the results specified in my study indicated specific phenomena affecting the college student's writing, hopefully, these can serve as indicators to those teachers who face both similar <u>and</u> opposite teaching situations.

4.5 Reduced enthusiasm

All participants participated in the program voluntarily. Although this project was conducted in a regular writing class, most Taiwanese students indicated that this program was their favorite work to do in the class. However, few weeks later, a few students seemed to be a bit lazy, unconcerned, and less interested about their e-pals' messages than others, and often skipped reading the mails or ignored answering the questions proposed by American students.

In this study, many Taiwanese students had no confidence in their English composition initially, but they successfully completed the project. It demonstrated that, at the end of the project, they got a lot of progress in their English writing since their writing texts were totally understood and had pleasant communication with their American e-pals. The cross-cultural e-mail exchange program can be considered as a preparatory stage for those students who are planning to go abroad one day or for those who cannot afford the large amount of funds needed to live in the target culture. It is practical and worthwhile to continue such programs in the future. At present, by means of effective technology development, people have more opportunities to contact people from other cultural backgrounds. By communicating with their e-pals, Taiwanese students had opportunities to practice English writing and reading comprehension simultaneously. If such demonstrations succeed, the school administration can take note of the importance of writing classes and cultivate gifted students and to provide supplementary learning directions.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ai-Hwa Chen is an associate professor of Hsiuping Institute of Technology. She has been teaching English at different levels for fifteen years. Her research interests include discourse analysis, collaborative English learning, and English writing instruction.