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The Effect of Collaborative and Individualistic Online and Offline Writing Tasks on Undergraduate Students' Academic Help-Seeking

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Abstract

This study was conducted to examine EFL learners' use of help-seeking strategy in their writing process under two individualistic modules (individual and emailing classes) and two collaborative modules (collaborative and wiki classes). This research included a sample (N= 100) of undergraduate university students enrolled in EFL writing courses during a single semester. The data were collected separately in each module, employing online feedback for wiki and emailing modules, and conventional pen and paper type of feedback for individualistic and collaborative classroom modules. The results of the study showed that emailing module had the highest level of help-seeking among wiki, collaborative classroom, and individualistic classroom modules. In the present study, various factors that may have contributed to learners' willingness to seek help in emailing context are discussed and implications for further research and practice are also presented.

Keywords: Collaborative Learning, Help-seeking, Online Learning, Self-regulation

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1. Introduction

Academic help-seeking is a social process which is highly interactive, especially in the classroom context (e.g., Karabenick & Newman, 2009; Ryan & Shin, 2011). Ames and Lau (1982) defined help-seeking as "an achievement behavior involving the search for and employment of a strategy to obtain success"(p. 414). This behavior helps students deal with complex concepts that they may not fully comprehend on their own. Academic help-seeking behavior is associated with motivation, ego-achievement goals, classroom norms, and characteristics of helpers (Karabenick, 2004). However, students who need academic help do not always seek it because doing so may be negatively viewed as an admission of their inability to succeed without support (Ferla, Valcke, & Schuyten, 2010). This might explain why help-seeking is often avoided in academic contexts (Butler, 2006; Karabenick & Newman, 2009). It would, therefore, seem important to investigate how learners' interaction in various learning contexts affects their help-seeking behavior in a way that eventually fosters learning.

In conventional classrooms, learners can simply raise their hands to seek help from their teacher or ask their peers for help after class. However, in asynchronous online environment, students' separation from these sources of help may not only lead to learners' academic decreased levels of help-seeking but may also lead to a sense of frustration and disinterest (McInnerney & Roberts, 2004). Moreover, many students have reported their feelings of isolation from the community (McInnerney & Roberts, 2004). Some have complained about the inaccessibility of their peers (Song et al. 2004) and teachers (Vonderwell, 2003) in online contexts. Some even doubt if their peers' help is valid and reliable (Petrides, 2002).The problems just being addressed and the dearth of research on the effect of online environments versus traditional ones on the writing help-seeking strategy of undergraduate EFL learners have been the incentives to the present study.

Academic help-seeking is generally a two-staged process. The first stage is the actual feeling that one might need help and the second stage is whether or not they actually want to ask for help (Ryan & Pintrich, 1998). If seeking help is inevitable for the learner, he will go through the following steps: 1. Become aware of the need for help. 2. Decide to seek help. 3. Identify potential helper(s). 4. Use strategies to elicit help. 5. Evaluate help-seeking episode (Nelson-Le Gall, 1981).This claim originally provides a Vygotskian framework to understand help-seeking (Luckin & du Boulay, 1999). Luckin and du Boulay proposed a Vygotskian view of help and help-seeking in collaborative online environments. From their perspective,

Vygotsky's (1962, 1978) zone of proximal development (ZPD) is an essential ingredient of any instructional situation. The ZPD covers those activities that are beyond the learner's independent capability but are within what she or he can do with assistance.

Co-constructing the ZPD and targeting it requires a more able learning partner who provides appropriately challenging activities in combination with assistance. While Luckin and du Boulay (1999) do not discuss the role of proactive help-seeking on the part of the learner, it might be interpreted as one of the ways in which the learner can help the more able learning partner in co-constructing the ZPD and providing appropriate assistance. The role of the more able learning partner can be played by a teacher or peer.

Students who register in online courses may face a number of challenges which are specific to electronic environments (McInnerney & Roberts, 2004; Song et al., 2004; Vonderwell, 2003). Asynchronous online tools such as emails and wikis, unlike the traditional modes of delivery, may cause a communicative disconnect between peers and peers or peers and teachers (van Tryon & Bishop, 2009). This separation can endanger help-seeking which is a crucial self-regulatory strategy and a key to learning successfully (Dun, Rakes, & Rakes, 2014).

Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the different process writing qualities carried out through email, wiki, collaborative classroom, and individualistic classroom environments and their effect on the help-seeking strategy of EFL learners. Based on the Vygotskian theory of co-constructivism and the existing body of literature, we hypothesized that wiki environment (but not email) and traditional collaborative writing mode (but not the individualistic one), due to their interactive nature, would significantly promote learners' help seeking strategy in their process writing.

2. Background

Over the last two decades, a wealth of research has found that academic help-seeking is an active strategy that serves as an aid to achieve academic success in the face of difficult or challenging tasks (e.g., Karabenick, 1998; Karebenick & Newman,2006; Ryan et al., 2001; Webb, Ing, Kersting, & Nemer, 2006; Zimmerman & Schunk,2001). In a traditional classroom, help-seeking commonly involves a dynamic relationship between the teacher and students, with the teacher encouraging students to ask questions in some instances, requiring conferences in others, and so forth.

In a large scale survey of 2,656 Asian and European students' preferences between working in a small group and working alone, Littlewood (2001) found that most students in all these countries questioned traditional authority-based transmission mode of learning, wished to participate actively in exploring knowledge, and had positive attitudes towards working purposefully, in groups, in order to achieve common learning goals.

Sukemune (1998), in a study of Japanese students, found that the participants were more likely to seek assistance from peers outside the classroom than to seek help from their teachers, even in the face of great need. A variety of additional studies has reported similar findings for students from East Asian and Chinese backgrounds (e.g., Chan & Hayahsi, 2010; Kudo & Simkin, 2003; Smart, Volet, & Ang, 2000; Wright & Lander, 2003). One exception to this trend was a study conducted by Williams, Takaku, and Bauman (2006), who reported that the international (mostly Japanese) non-English-speaking students in their investigation displayed a high level of help-seeking behavior.

Several authors have noted the importance of help-seeking behavior in online learning (Hara & Kling, 2000; Holmberg, 1995; Mahasneh et al., 2012, Wang & Newlin, 2002a; 2002b). EFL/ESL learners will actively seek help since online environments are by nature isolating and this isolation from peers and teachers should be compensated for by asking for more help through email, chat rooms, bulletin boards, as well as occasional face-to-face meetings (Lynch & Dembo, 2004).

Henderson and Cunningham (1994), in a study, discussed if learners are to employ the technological tools effectively, first they have to be sufficiently motivated for it. In online learning, this equals developing learners' skills to use a particular technological tool or element that is a key to interaction with others and thus seeking help. However, fostering technological literacy may seem to be a solution to more help-seeking.

The confusing and modern nature of online environments may in effect discourage learners from seeking help in these environments due to the fact that the physical proximity to the teachers is limited (Yang & Taylor, 2013). Yang and Taylor (2013) maintained that if learners can only interact with their teacher through electronic mail, they may feel isolated from the teacher or they may feel that the instructor is not willing to interact with them. On the contrary, the learners who meet their teachers in class on a routine basis are more likely to develop help-seeking strategy.

However, there are some studies which corroborate the effectiveness of computer and technology in heightening levels of help-seeking. For example, Karabenick and Knapp (1991) found that computers can be a source of privacy in help-seeking. They argued, "the decreased cost of failure, in terms of embarrassment, shame, or humiliation, makes it more likely that people will feel less inhibited, try new technologies and different strategies—in general, be more flexible" (p. 461). As a result, help obtained through computers can eliminate public embarrassment, which is a threat to self-esteem, and the main reason why people in need of help do not seek it. In another study conducted by Karabenick and Newman (2009), the levels of help-seeking in two interpersonal and computer environments were investigated. The results of the study showed that students in the computer groups considered help to be more beneficial than did those in the interpersonal groups.

However, it seems that the current literature does not touch the levels of help-seeking employment in different online and offline writing modules simultaneously. Thus, the present study, in its contribution to the existing body of literature, seeks to investigate the level of academic writing help-seeking strategy that EFL learners use in wiki-based, email-based, individualistic, and collaborative classroom modules.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The participants attending this study were 100 lower-intermediate male and female sophomores and juniors passing a course of advanced ESL writing in Tehran, Iran. Their age ranged from 19 to 25. Data were collected from four classes at two different universities. Twenty five participants formed the individual classroom group; 21 the individual email group; 35 the collaborative classroom, and finally 19 participants constituted the collaborative wiki group. Since the gender of the participants was not a relevant variable in this study, there was no control for sex variable. At Karaj Islamic Azad University (N=65), males were outnumbered by females (M= 7, F=58). However, all the participants taking part from Imam Sadiq University (N=35) were males.

Prior to the treatment, a University of Tehran English Proficiency Test (UTEPT)was administered to filter out the less proficient participants. Cronbach's alpha for the UTEPT was acceptable according to Nunnally's (1978) widely accepted cut-off of 0.60. ($\alpha = .84$). As for the validity, Salehi and Rezaee (2008) used the design of multitrait-multimethod

(MTMM) to investigate the construct validity of the UTEPT where two traits-grammar and vocabulary- and two methods-multiple choice and contextualization- were used. As they stated, this test was a high-stake test and the results of this test had a kind of life-changing implications for the test takers. It was found that the test possessed both convergent and discriminant validity. The cut off score for selection was %70 of the total score and 100 participants managed to meet the criterion and then were randomly divided into the four groups: wiki, email, classroom collaborative writing, and classroom individualistic writing.

3.2. Instruments

The instruments that were employed in this study were shared among the four participant groups. The instrument included: (a) Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ), (b) Writing processes rating scale, (c) Wiki spaces, and d) Writing tasks.

3.2.1. Motivated strategies for learning questionnaire (MSLQ)

The MSLQ consists of 81 self-report items designed to measure college students' motivational orientations and use of different learning strategies (Pintrich, Smith, Garcia, & McKeachie, 1991) and is divided into two broad categories: (1) a motivation section and (2) a learning strategies section. The MSLQ consists of 15 sub-scales, six within the motivation section and nine within the learning strategies section. The instrument is completely modular, and thus the scales can be used together or individually, depending on the needs of the researcher, instructor, or student. For the purpose of the present study, only the help-seeking section of the questionnaire was considered (items 40, 58, 68, 74). MSLQ yielded robust results both for its reliability and validity. The majority of the Cronbach's alphas for the individual sections were well above 0.70, indicating a reasonable reliability for each individual section. As per validity, two confirmatory analyses were run; One for the motivational section and the other for the learning strategies section. Results indicated that the MSLQ showed reasonable factor validity (Pintrich et al., 1991).The MSLQ was administered twice: as the pre-test which was given to the learners at the outset of the course, and as the post-test which was administered at the end of the course.

3.2.2. Writing processes rating scale

In a study, Maftoon and Akef (2007) came up with a writing processes rating scale. On their way to define this scale, four stages of writing process—generating ideas (brainstorming),

outlining, drafting, and editing—were operationally defined. In their study, 202students' writing samples were collected after a step-by-step process-oriented essay writing instruction. Each collected writing sample included student writers' scripts produced in each stage of the writing process. Through a detailed analysis of the collected writing samples by three raters, they identified the features which highlighted the strong or weak points in the student writers' samples, and then categorized the student writers' scripts into four levels of performance which were holistically defined as Very Good, Good, Fair, and Poor.

Then descriptive statements (descriptors) were made for each identified feature to represent the specified level of performance. These descriptors formed rating scales for each stage of the writing process. And finally, four rating sub-scales, namely brainstorming, outlining, drafting, and editing were designed for the corresponding stages of the writing process. In their study, the designed rating scales were used by the three raters to rate the 202 collected writing samples. The scores thus obtained were put into statistical analyses. The high inter-rater reliability estimate (0.895) indicated that their rating scales could produce consistent results.

In the present study, these writing process rating scales were employed for all of the four groups. Every student in each group was given constant feedback each session in each task module and was also rated on the described features of the writing process rating scale. There were a total of 18 sessions. The first two sessions were devoted to the course introduction, administrating the UTEPT, pre-MSLQ test, and briefing students about online conditions. In other words, session 3 was the outset of the treatment. Session 18 was the last treatment session where the post-MSLQ test was administered after the tasks had been completed in each module. However, for achieving more meaningful score differences across tests (writing essays), not all sessions were included in data analyses. Only sessions 3, 6, 10, 14, and 18 were analyzed. The reason for this every other four session sample analysis was that little meaningful score differences were expected to be observed if the analyses were run each session. Learners were unlikely to change significantly in their writing performance from one session to the other. In each task module, the writing output has been scored separately and filed for future analysis.

3.2.3. Wikispaces

A wiki is generally defined as a “freely expandable collection of interlinked web pages, a

hypertext system for storing and modifying information - a database, where each page is easily edited by any user with a forms-capable Web browser client" (Leuf & Cunningham, 2001, p. 14). A wiki allows its users to rapidly develop content in a participatory manner, as can be seen in Wikipedia, probably the best-known wiki.

Wikispaces—a brand of wiki—was used in this study. Wikispaces is a database where students can easily log into and post their pieces of writing samples. The collaborative wiki module was based on Wiki spaces. In the first sessions of the semester, Wikispaces was introduced to the collaborative wiki module and some basic features of it were presented to class on video projector. Some helpful links were also introduced to familiarize the group with wikispaces. Students did not have any prior experience of Wikispaces use.

3.2.4. Writing tasks

Each module was assigned with the same writing tasks. The teacher specified a new topic for the learners to write about each session. A total of 16 tasks were given to each module. Each module accomplished the task based on the module requirement. For example, in Wikispaces, the learners had to accomplish the task by collaboratively building upon their peers' and teacher's contributions. However, in individualistic classroom task, for example, learners were required to do the tasks on their own and the teacher was the only source of feedback.

3.3. Data collection procedure

This study was carried out in 16 sessions. In the first session, the teacher handed out the UT proficiency test and MSLQ pre-tests. The required steps were taken as follows:

1. The MLSQ was given to investigate the students' preliminary help-seeking level. This questionnaire was once again administered at the end of the course to spot the help-seeking changes that the students had gone through.
2. The teacher introduced the course which was on the processes of writing namely brainstorming, outlining, drafting, and editing. He also gave the students a topic to write on at home, pinpointing that they should observe all the stages of process writing. Their writings were collected the following session and were rated using the general writing rating scale in order to assess students' writing level in the outset of the treatment.

In the second session, the teacher elaborated on the first two stages of writing processes (brainstorming and outlining) with a plethora of examples and exercises in order to dispel any doubts on the topic. In the third session, drafting and editing were taught to and elaborated for

the students. It should be noted that the above-mentioned steps were common for all groups. From the third session on, the participants in each group provided a writing sample for each session.

As it was mentioned earlier, there were four groups or modules under investigation in this study: collaborative classroom writing, individualistic classroom writing, collaborative wiki writing, and individualistic email writing. In the following section, each module and the approach undertaken is fully elaborated.

3.3.1. Collaborative classroom module

This module was conducted in a public classroom constituting of 35 participants which were selected based on their English proficiency test score. The participants were randomly divided into dyads or at times groups of three due to the odd number of participants. The nature of the task in collaborative classroom module was not different from the other modules; however, the only difference was that the tasks were done in an interactive and collaborative way for 16 treatment sessions. Students sat in pairs and groups and found their ways through the challenges of the tasks. In each session in the first stage of process writing, the participants had to collaboratively think about the topic that the researcher had assigned to them. Then, they had to provide a brainstorming in either the word web or the listing form. Figure 1 shows a sample of brainstorming created by one of the pairs.

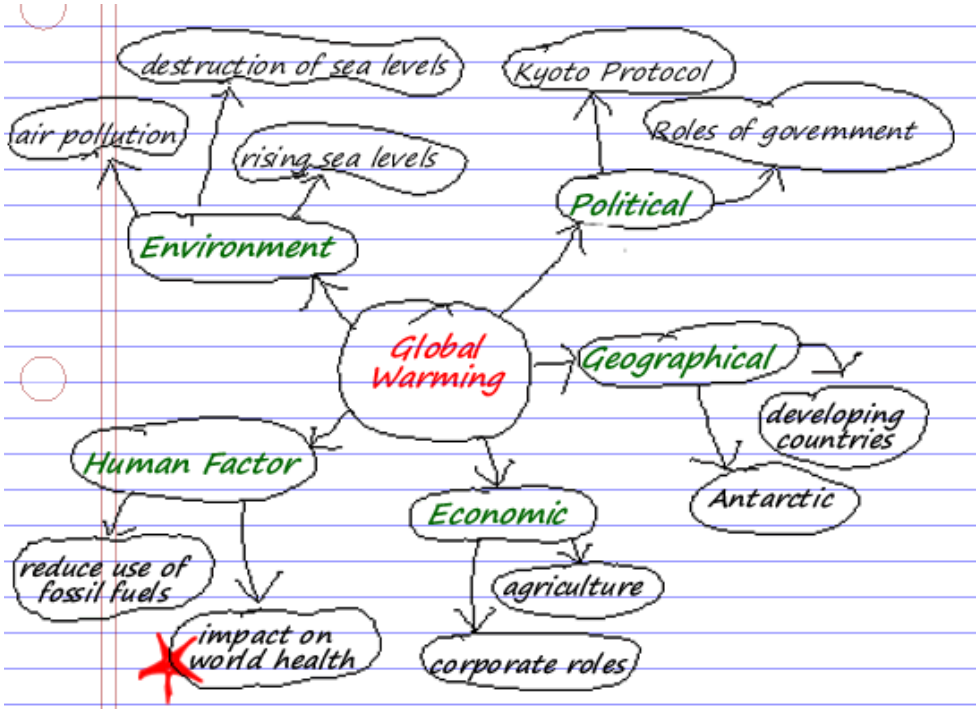

Figure 1. Word Web Brainstorming Sample

In the outlining stage, the participants had to prioritize the most relevant and important ideas provided in the brainstorming stage. Naturally, the participants had to reach a consensus on the priority and importance of ideas, a feature which is non-existent in individualistic approaches.

In the drafting section, the participants helped each other in structuring of the sentences, choice of words, punctuation and mechanics, organization or simply put cohesion and coherence. The editing section was usually done by a more proficient student. However, a group consensus had been reached before any type of correction in the text took place.

3.3.2. Individualistic classroom module

This module was different from the collaborative classroom module in that the participants carried out the writing tasks all by themselves. There were 25 participants in this module; thus, 25 samples were corrected and delivered back each session. All the stages of the process writing (brainstorming, outlining, drafting, editing) were carried out individually.

3.3.3. Collaborative wiki module

This module differed from its classroom counterpart to a great extent. First and foremost, this module was practiced on Wikispaces—one of the various brands of free wikis on the internet. In this module, participants did not sit together in one place and perform the tasks, but rather exercised collaboration from far distances through virtual environment. Wikispaces makes this remote give and take practical.

The procedure in this module was that the researcher (who is called an administrator in wiki environment) had sent an invitation from the Wikispaces website to all the participants' emails. Then, the participants had to accept the invitations through their emails at home and choose a username and password to be able to log in.

Each week the researcher posted a topic on the wiki and the participants were required to post their essays in all the four stages of process writing on the web. This module was collaborative in a way that each participant could build on his essay or comments based on the previous post. That means, the participants were required to carefully read what their peers had posted on the Wikispaces before they can put their own piece of writing on the wiki. In other words, the participants progressed through a chain-like collaborative written dialogue with an observer monitoring the whole process from above. However, although Wikispaces had the feature of uploading files and pictures when it came to posting mind map

brainstorming and structuring, participants seemed reluctant to put time on the brainstorming and structuring sections of the writing processes and instead showed themselves more interested in drafting and editing other posts.

3.3.4. Individualistic email module

Individualistic email module differed from individualistic classroom module in that participants went through all stages of process writing via internet and email at home or from anywhere else. In this module, participants were required to prepare and send their essays via email every week (session). The brainstorming and the outlining sections were completed using online software called "bubbl.us". A sample of a brainstorming done by a participant in emailing module is illustrated in Figure 2. The participants simply copied the mind map and pasted it to their email file.

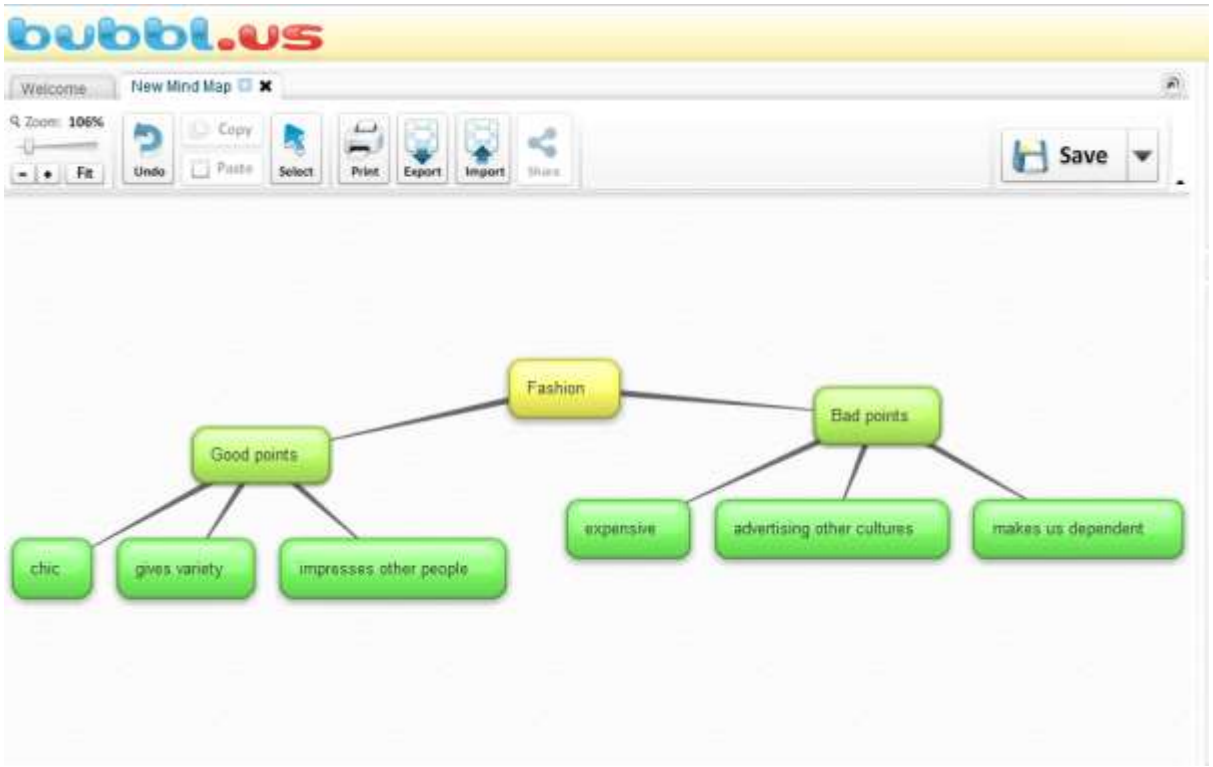

Figure 2. A Sample of Brainstorming Created in Email Environment

The researcher then received the attached documents individually and gave feedback on each using the "track changes" feature of Word Office Tool. Track Changes is a feature that allows the editor to edit or add comments on any part of the text. The edited version is then sent back to the participant to see and check his/her mistakes. Figure 3 illustrates a sample of individualistic emailing module and the form of feedback provided each week. Three more sessions were later added to the treatment, compensating for the possible time shortage.

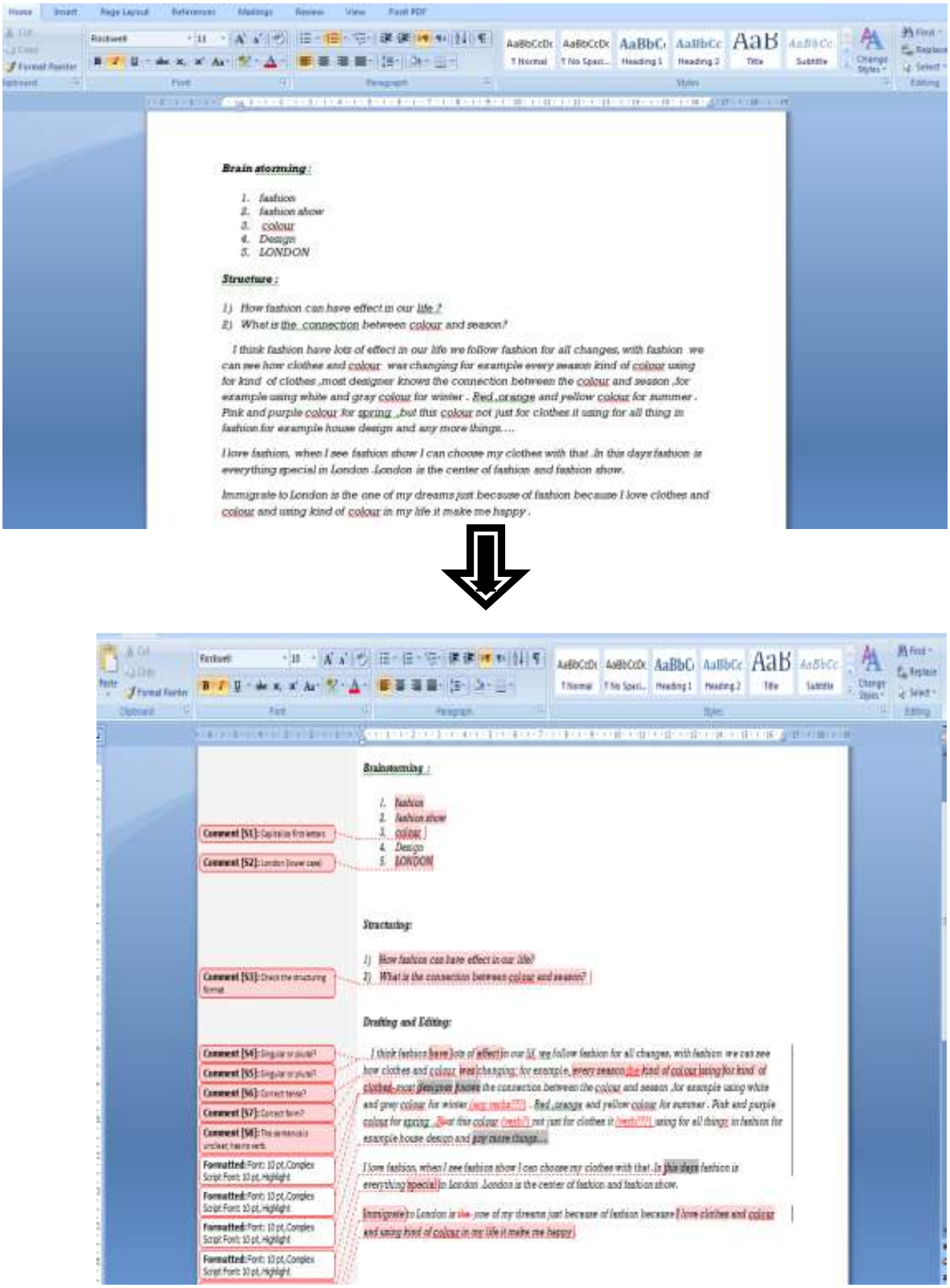

Figure 3. The Form of Feedback Provided by Track Changes

4. Variables

The independent variables in this study were: the collaborative classroom module, the collaborative wiki module, the individualistic emailing module, the individualistic classroom module, and the pre- MSLQ. The dependent variable was the post-MSLQ.

5. Results

Before reporting the main results, it should be noted that the assumption of homogeneity of variances as tested through the Levene's F-values – and the assumption of homogeneity of covariance – as tested through the Box's test – were met. As displayed in Table 1, the probabilities associated with the Levene's F-values were higher than .05. Thus the assumption was met.

Table 1. Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances

	F	df1	df2	Sig.
Gained Help-seeking	2.186	3	96	.095

Besides enjoying homogenous variances the groups should enjoy homogenous covariance matrices. In Table 2 the Box's M-value of 33.37 was not significant (p> .05). Thus this assumption was also met.

Table 2. Box's Test of Equality of Covariance Matrices

Box's M	33.379
F	1.022
df1	30
df2	18055.198
Sig.	.432

Table 3 displays the mean scores of the four groups on the help-seeking component of resource management strategies.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics: Help-seeking Strategy Use by Groups

Group		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Collaborative Classroom	Pretest Help-Seeking	35	50.10	6.787
	Posttest Help-Seeking	35	44.36	4.939
	Valid N (listwise)	35		
Collaborative Wiki	Pretest Help-Seeking	19	52.63	8.648
	Posttest Help-Seeking	19	44.08	5.478
	Valid N (listwise)	19		
Individual Classroom	Pretest Help-Seeking	25	48.27	9.913
	Posttest Help-Seeking	25	43.70	7.743
	Valid N (listwise)	25		
Emailing	Pretest Help-Seeking	21	51.27	11.760
	Posttest Help-Seeking	21	46.31	4.976
	Valid N (listwise)	21		

As illustrated in the table, all modules showed a decreasing trend from pretest to post test in their means. The gained mean scores of the four modules on help-seeking are displayed on Table 4.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics; Gain Scores Means, Resource Management Strategies by Groups

Group		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
CollClass	GainHelp	35	-2.71	9.381
	Valid N (listwise)	35		
Collwiki	GainHelp	19	-2.11	7.466
	Valid N (listwise)	19		
Indivi	GainHelp	25	-.10	9.995
	Valid N (listwise)	25		
Emailing	GainHelp	21	5.24	6.610
	Valid N (listwise)	21		

As Table 4 shows, all modules except emailing had a negative mean gain indicating a loss of help-seeking. Emailing module with a 5.24 mean gain from pretest to posttest presented an increased level of help-seeking strategy in writing processes.

The results of MANOVA indicated that there were significant differences between the gain scores of the four modules on the help-seeking strategy ($F(3, 96) = 4.01$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .11$) representing a moderate to large effect size) (Table 5). Thus the null-hypothesis that learners' help-seeking has not differed through the sessions of process writing in the collaborative/individualistic tasks was rejected.

Table 5. Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Group	GainHelp	910.946	3	303.649	4.011	.010	.111
Error	GainHelp	7266.742	96	75.695			
Total	GainHelp	8185.250	100				

As displayed in Table 4, the emailing group (Gain M = 5.24) showed the highest gain score on help seeking strategy. All the other modules showed a loss of mean score: individual classroom (M = -.10), collaborative wiki (M = -2.11), and collaborative classroom (M = -2.71).

The results of the post-hoc comparison tests (Table 6) indicated that there was a significant difference between the collaborative classroom and emailing groups' gain scores on help-seeking strategy (MD = 7.95, $p < .05$). The collaborative classroom group showed a highest loss of mean score (-2.71) while the emailing group showed the highest gain score on help-seeking (5.24).

Table 6. Post Hoc Multiple Comparisons

Dependent Variable	(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
GainHelp	CollClass	Collwiki	-.61	2.479	.996	-7.66	6.45
		Indivi	-2.61	2.278	.726	-9.10	3.87
		Emailing	*-7.95**	*2.402*	*.015*	*-14.79*	*-1.12*
	Collwiki	CollClass	.61	2.479	.996	-6.45	7.66
		Indivi	-2.01	2.648	.902	-9.54	5.53
		Emailing	-7.34	2.755	.075	-15.18	.50
	Indivi	CollClass	2.61	2.278	.726	-3.87	9.10
		Collwiki	2.01	2.648	.902	-5.53	9.54
		Emailing	-5.34	2.575	.238	-12.67	1.99
	Emailing	*CollClass*	*7.95**	*2.402*	*.015*	*1.12*	*14.79*
		Collwiki	7.34	2.755	.075	-.50	15.18
		Indivi	5.34	2.575	.238	-1.99	12.67

Based on observed means.
The error term is Mean Square(Error) = 75.695.
*. The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

6. Discussion

Academic help-seeking is a self-regulatory strategy which plays an essential role in learners' academic success (Ryan, Gheen, & Midgley, 1998). This role is found to be even more essential in online classes (Mahasneh et al., 2012), because some aspects of an online course can be unfamiliar and even confusing to students who are new to it. Emailing module in the present study was the only module that had a significant increase in help-seeking strategy throughout the term. Emailing module participants seemed to have felt the need for help. This was evident in author's personal correspondence with his students through emails where they asked for his help on how to attach their files or brainstorming/structuring sections of their process writing.

This finding is in line with Mashek and Hammer's (2011) study on 212 undergraduate math students. They found that the students who delivered their assignments via email sought more help from their teacher than those who delivered their assignments in person. Melrose (2006) also found that students in an online graduate program in nursing sought assistance from their online fellow students more often than from any other source. The present study also aligns with Kitsantas and Chow's (2007) study that asked students in face-to-face courses, "blended" classes (partially email and partially face-to-face), and fully emailing

courses about their preferences for seeking help. They found that students in blended and fully emailing courses had a greater preference for seeking help from formal sources than learners in face-to-face courses.

In the present study, since learners in emailing module were in direct one to one contact with their teacher, they could experience a kind of on-call and private scaffolding which was not present for all the other modules. As a corroborative reference to literature, Blocher et al. (2002) and Puzziferro (2008), in their studies of graduate level students using the MSLQ, found that students were likely to interact with the instructor but less apt to engage in peer collaboration activities. The findings of Blocher et al.'s, Puzziferro's, and this study are in contrast with Pellegrino (2014) study on online learning that showed that when students in online courses do ask for help, they tend to approach "informal" sources—friends, relatives, or classmates—rather than "formal" sources, such as instructors or librarians.

Moreover, the finding for emailing module diverges from some other studies that found online environments as an inhibitor to help-seeking (Yang & Taylor, 2013). Yang and Taylor believed that online environments such as email, isolate learners and give them the feeling that the instructor does not want to interact with them. They argued that on the other hand, student-teacher face to face meetings provide the learners with a more intimate atmosphere that encourages them to seek help.

Quite paradoxically in this study, although the classroom modules had the teacher in front of them as the source of help, neither the individualistic nor collaborative modules experience any gain in help-seeking strategy. One reason may be that as the course proceeded, the participants in collaborative classroom module felt needless of seeking help because they were already in pairs and could collaboratively overcome their problems. As for individual classroom, the learner might have felt insecure to ask for the teacher's help due to the stigma of being judged poor by peers next seat. That said, emailing seemed to be the most secure and non-threatening way of help-seeking.

Needless to say, the role of culture should not be neglected in any educational settings or treatment. Interestingly, the present finding might seem even more decent when it comes to specific contexts such as Iran. Iranian people are not typically known to be team players (Chamani, 2014).

Chamani observed that most of Iranian students seem to be quite comfortable with the traditional authority-based transmission mode of learning; they were reluctant to participate in the interactions going on in the classroom; and avoided working in groups. She claimed students mostly prefer to do their tasks on their own because they believe they have more

dominance on the task when done all by themselves and prefer to get feedback directly from the teacher. From this angle, Iranian EFL learners' preference of email writing and increased help-seeking in this module over other modules gains credence and significance. It might be the case that Iranian learners prefer to seek help from the most knowledgeable source, known as the teacher rather than their peers. It seems that emailing provided them with an easier and more private way of help-seeking. Other modules by nature have the capability of revealing the learners' weak spots and illiteracy if the learners seek help in front of their peers.

7. Limitations, suggestions for further research, and conclusion

As with all experimental research, there are limitations to this study, which need to be addressed. First, although the total number of the participants was large enough, the sample size in each module did not exceed 35 students. However, the researcher could not employ more participants because the maximum number of students allowed in each class was 35. Therefore, the results gained in this study in each of the modules should be interpreted with care. These findings may not be generalizable to other majors, contexts, ages, or ethnicities.

The other point is that the results of this study might be affected by extraneous variables; including learning style, self-efficacy, attitudes towards online or traditional collaborative or individualistic tasks, lack of technology literacy, etc. Therefore, in future studies these variables should also be taken into account.

The present study adds to the existing literature on help-seeking strategy use by EFL learners in collaborative and non-collaborative contexts. However, the following suggestions about expanding the scope of help-seeking research deem necessary.

The level of help-seeking can be in direct relationship with test anxiety as a component of motivated strategies for learning (Lavasani & Khandan, 2011). That means when the test anxiety increases, the need for help may also increase. This relationship can be examined in both collaborative and non-collaborative contexts. If further research corroborates a positive relationship between help-seeking and test anxiety in modules investigated in this study, we can foster learners' autonomy and self-esteem by reducing or controlling test or other forms of anxiety.

Also, Roussel et al (2011) argued that learners with low self-efficacy are less likely to seek help. Therefore, it seems interesting to examine their claim in email, wiki,

individualistic, and collaborative classroom modules. Findings of this new approach to self-efficacy can open new ways towards implementing teaching methods that can enhance learners' self-efficacy and help-seeking level in writing processes in various collaborative and non-collaborative settings.

Moreover, a couple of researchers pointed out that learners with low levels of intrinsic motivations and values are less likely to seek help (e.g., Bong, 2009; Linnenbrink, 2005). Further research deems necessary to investigate the level of intrinsic motivation in online and conventional environments and its relationship with help-seeking in each of these settings.

Help-seeking is a beneficial learning behavior that may be enhanced by the nature of online learning environments. The willingness of students to seek help has been positively associated with academic achievement (Kitsantas & Chow, 2007) and course satisfaction (Karabenick, 2004). The literature related to help-seeking in collaborative and non-collaborative online and conventional learning environments is currently limited (Rakes, Rakes, & Dunn, 2011). The current study expands the understanding of the influence of various writing modules on help-seeking. Although the current research findings and research-based recommendations for practice are important, they also highlight the need for further research related to increasing this important learning behavior in various learning contexts.

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