

# EFL Writing in the Digital Age

: A Discussion on Technological Strategies to Aid L2  
Writers

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## I. Introduction

Once upon a time we lived in a land of chalkboards. They were in every classroom. Teachers were easily recognizable because of the chalk smudge on their clothing. After the age of chalkboards, came the time

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of overhead projectors. Projectors were heavy contraptions, but they allowed teachers to leave the chalk behind. They could now write with their own handwriting in a comfortable position. It also enabled educators to create transparencies of documents that they could re-use at any time. Along with the overhead projector, came classrooms equipped with whiteboards. Chalkboards and chalk soon went the way of the dodo. With the advent of computer technology, overhead projectors and white boards lost ground to document cameras, interactive smart boards, and computer projector systems. As the price of this technology grows smaller, the chances of seeing a piece of chalk, a board marker, or even a transparency becomes more and more unlikely.

While some educators rally against the coming of technologically enhanced classroom space, believing that older tools are just as sophisticated and useful, technology has in all ways proven itself to be an essential part of the learning experience. Binnur(2009) defines technology in the EFL classroom as both hardware(TV's, radios, computers, CD's, DVDs, projectors, document cameras, etc) and software(internet, presentation software, word processing programs, etc). This paper will use the same definition when using the word technology or any variation of that word. The paper will also apply the same definition when using the word multi-media.

L2 learners in particular have benefited greatly from the advent of technological advances in the area of learning tools. Jarwis(2005) points out that technology has helped spread the English language and made it easier to understand and identify with. According to Kang(1999)

technology, such as computers, allows instructors more capabilities in the classroom to reach almost any learning style and motivate individual student needs. Stepp-Granny(2000) found that EFL students are motivated by technology due to its interactive nature. Numerous other studies, Jonassen(2000),

Zengin(2007), Mayora(2006), have found similar findings on how technology motivates and brings a positive atmosphere to the classroom. A study done by Binnur(2009) has indicated that technology is seen by EFL students as being exciting and enjoyable. The study also shows that most students surveyed did not believe that technology was either useless or boring. In fact they were positively for it in almost all questions that they were asked.

The reason that technology is useful in the EFL classroom is due to the fact that language learners benefit from the use of visual organizers or visual aids in the classroom. Grave and Grave's(1994) definition of a visual aid is any graphic or visual means of organizing or visualizing written material. This is the definition this paper will use when referring to visual aids or visual organizers. Kang(2004) has found that visual organizers are useful because they can break down information into simple displays that are understood well by EFL students. Wright and Haleem(1991) argue that visual aids are critical to classrooms because they are great attention getters. They hook students into learning.

There are numerous types of technologies that work as visual organizers in the classroom. The most common is using the personal computer as a word processor. Warschauer(1996) points out in his study on computer assisted classrooms that computers have long been a

fruitful way to create more dynamic second language learners. Video has also been regarded as a great component for teachers to employ. Canning-Wilson(2000) suggests that video can possibly upgrade the language learning process by matching visual cues with audio tracks. Hernandez(2010) found that the use of video clips to teach grammatical structures in English made the acquisition of the structures easier to understand and elicited better speaking skills in the classroom.

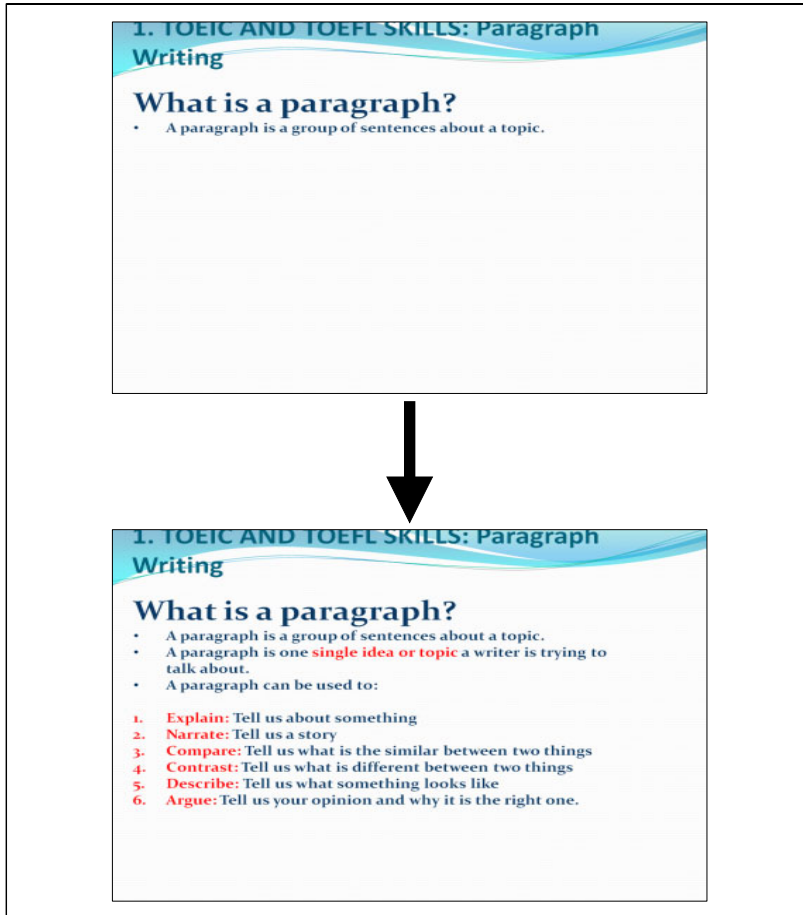
PowerPoint presentation software is over the past few years has become one of the newer trends in second language learning curriculums. Fisher(2003) points out that PowerPoint can easily be traded, exchanged, and modified to fit any classroom setting. Schcolnik(1999) found in her study of PowerPoint use that most students found it to be an item that was worth having as a learning tool. Yu(2001) conducted a study to find out what sort of results PowerPoint enhanced English lessons would have on the faculty and students of a Taiwanese university. Her findings found that PowerPoint created more positive teachers and changed the attitudes of language learners to be more positive and motivated in the classroom.

This paper will discuss the various advantages of technologically enhanced visual aids. It will also show many examples of strategies that use technology to improve writing skills in the EFL classroom.

## II. PowerPoint

PowerPoint offers one of the best ways to teach all areas that are concerned with properly educating EFL students in English writing skills. To begin with, PowerPoint offers a less time consuming way of lecturing. It can display lectures that have already been thought out and created beforehand. A teacher does not have to consume classroom time writing things on the board, and students do not have to deal with the confusing handwriting of a teacher trying to work as fast as possible. By using various tools in PowerPoint, a teacher can display lectures in numerous colors, bulleted, bolded, italicized, and many other features. Graphics and audio can also be added along with any text to enhance the experience. Also by using PowerPoint's animation features, not all the things on a slide need to be shown at once. A teacher can display whatever they want and in whatever order, by simply clicking the mouse. This not only makes it easier for students to digest information, but it allows time to have discussion or ask questions about single parts. Figure 1 shows an example of how PowerPoint was used this way when teaching what a paragraph is.

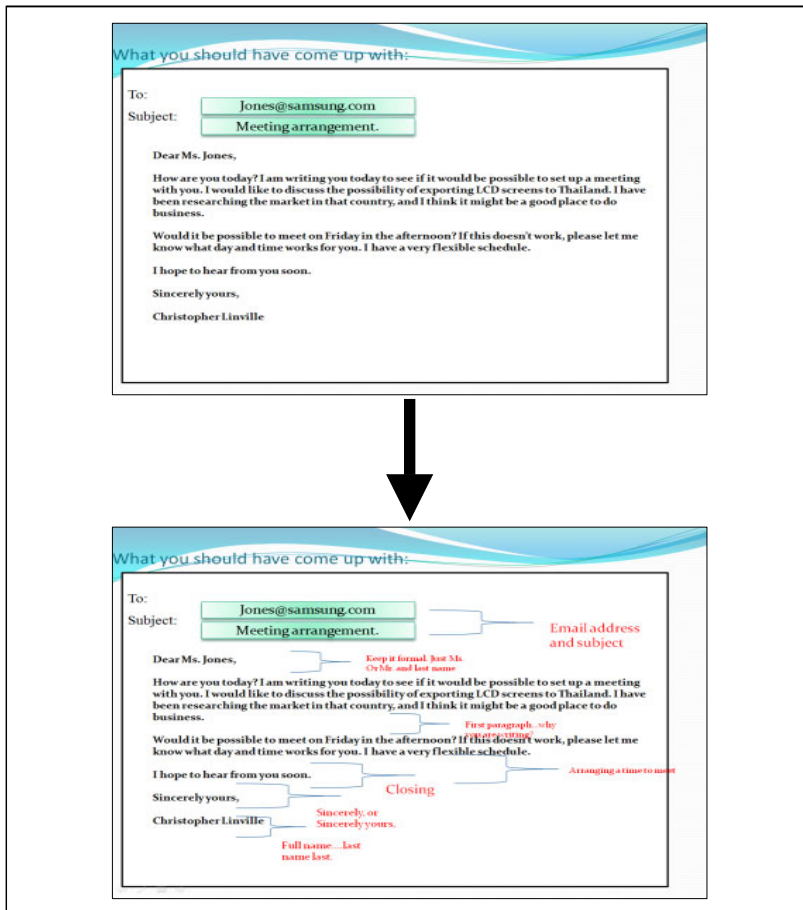
Figure 1



The second advantage that PowerPoint has over traditional teaching techniques is in the displaying of writing models. It is worth pointing out that a teacher could create hand outs for each of their students to show models. Yet PowerPoint allows you to create only one slide that you can display to everyone. They can read over the writing model. The teacher can use PowerPoint to breakdown the model and show its parts. Figure Two shows an example of this. The figure is showing

how PowerPoint was used to teach the model of a formal email to arrange a meeting.

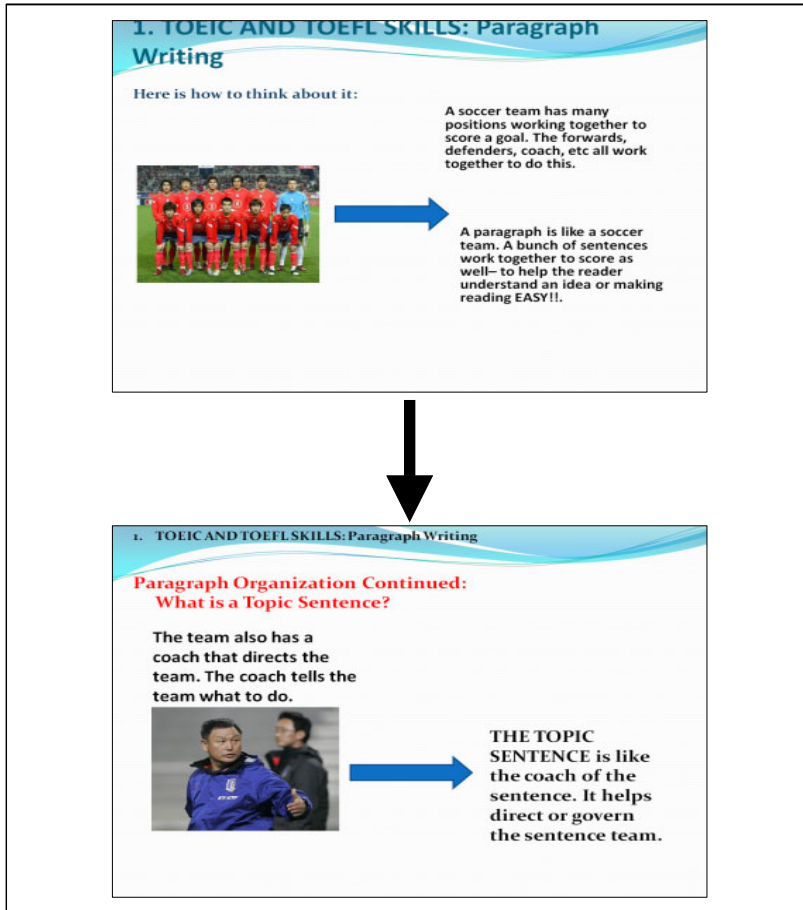
Figure 2



PowerPoint's combination of animation, text, and visuals gives it the advantage of allowing teachers to use pictures to metaphorically represent writing processes and models. In figure 3 below PowerPoint is

used to compare a topic sentence to a soccer team to allow students a better understanding of what a topic sentence is and how it works.

Figure 3



Learning how to write can at times be exhausting to students. EFL students can also easily get bored if the subject matter does not interest them. This is when it is nice to have fun activities that



reinforce or review things that have been discussed in a lecture. There are of course numerous traditional ways of doing this. For example, students might be asked to put cut up sentences fragments back together to create a paragraph. PowerPoint is a more dynamic alternative to this. It has numerous games that can be used to create a positive and fun atmosphere to review writing concepts. Figure 4 is an example of a game called “Big Board Game”. The game allows students in groups to answer questions by writing answers and speaking answers out loud. Because it uses a game board and the component of competition, it is a fun and easy way to get everyone in the class involved.

Figure 4

**Big Board Facts**

Topic Sentences	5	10	15	20	25
Paragraph Types	5	10	15	20	25
Unity	5	10	15	20	25
Coherence	5	10	15	20	25
Sentence Fixing	5	10	15	20	25

**Team Scores**

55	Team One	35	Team Three	85	Team Five
80	Team Two	50	Team Four	55	Team Six

Big Points Question

**Sentence Fixing**

Because the tide went out the jellyfish were stranded on the beach.

Show Answer

**Answer:**

Because the tide went **out, the** jellyfish were stranded on the beach.

Back to Board

A major issue I run into in the EFL classroom is that many

students have a hard time taking notes on lectures presented in English. PowerPoint is an ideal way around this problem. A PowerPoint presentation can be saved to a computer where it can be uploaded onto a website. Students can then visit that website and review the lectures anytime. Students can also print out the PowerPoint lectures and use them to take notes with in class or simply to have another way to see the lecture. Not only is this solution greener than other ways, it also means that teachers can save time in the future. Once they create a PowerPoint lecture, they can use it again and again for future classes. This frees up time for them to possibly tweak lectures more, enhance them, and also to add more components to the classroom experience, such as more hands on activities.

Lastly, PowerPoint will make any teachers lectures much more organized. A teacher will not have to think as much about what to say, and PowerPoint has the added feature of allowing the teacher to make notes for themselves that are displayed underneath each slide. These notes do not project on the screen that the students see. In this way, a teacher never has to forget what he or she is talking about in class.

### III. Video Clips

While it is nice to have PowerPoint for lectures and displaying writing models, video is another medium that can be used in great

ways to help in the teaching of writing models and processes. Video offers the teacher a chance to create fun films that bring another dynamic to teaching. Video can be a humorous hook to peak student's interest in a writing subject. It allows a teacher to discuss the act of writing anywhere he or she chooses to bring the camera. Thus a video becomes another visual aid that a student may draw upon when working on their writing. I will discuss two examples in which I used video clips to model essay formats to a sophomore level EFL writing class.

**1. Example one:**

Before using PowerPoint to lecture on the organization of a descriptive essay, I showed a zany and fun video clip I created to explain what a descriptive essay was exactly. Since descriptive essays depend on writing about all four senses, I used the video to discuss this. I explained in the film what a descriptive essay was by demonstrating all four senses. For example, in the film I told the students a sentence like, "The banana was sweet and juicy." I then proceeded to eat a banana. I did this for each of the senses using a different sentence each time. I made sure to use adjectives with each of my descriptive examples. In this way my students were able to have a better understanding of what a descriptive essay was. It also focused them and gained their attention for the lecture on how to write and organize a descriptive essay.

**2. Example two:**

To introduce my students to the narrative essay, I created three separate video clips that discussed the introduction, body, and conclusion of a narrative essay. I embedded each of the clips into my PowerPoint slides. I began by using PowerPoint to discuss the organization of an introductory paragraph in a narrative essay. I then showed a video clip of me acting and doing a monologue of an actual introductory paragraph that I wrote. I proceeded to do the same thing for the body paragraph and concluding paragraph. The video clip had the advantage of me being able to use acting to teach my students what a narrative essay was and each of its parts. Acting in a video clip was a very appropriate choice when teaching the narrative essay.

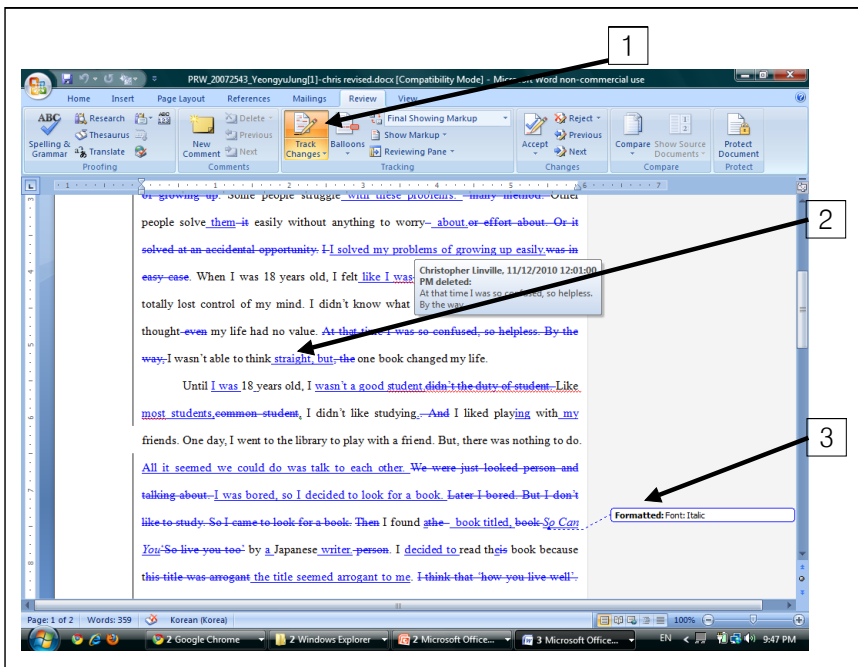
#### IV. Microsoft Word: Track Changes

Long before PowerPoint, computers were used simply as word processing machines. It is now a requirement at the college level that at home writing assignments should be

typed. While some EFL students might find the act of typing in English difficult, the word processing programs of today allow another advantage to both student and teacher. My discussion in this section will concern the use of Microsoft Word's track changes tool. This tool is a way in which corrections or changes on documents are displayed to the writer in a very organized and easily understandable manner. Figure 5 shows an example of the track changes tool and what it looks

like when fixing a document using Microsoft Word. Arrow one indicates the actual tool display in the Microsoft Word menu. Arrow two shows an example of the text in which track changes has taken into account deletions and the addition of new text. Arrow three shows track changes displaying a change in formatting to the text.

Figure 5



This type of tool is perfect when helping EFL students edit and revise their essays. Not only does it allow the teacher the ability to clearly display what he or she wants the student to fix, add to, or change in a written document, it also is great in showing and displaying the act of revision to EFL students.

The example I want to use concerns a student working on his descriptive essay in my sophomore level English writing course. The student essay had numerous grammatical errors and was highly disorganized. He also was having trouble with using the correct format (MLA). I had him email his paper to me before he came to my office for an appointment to discuss the essay. While he sat next to me, I used the Microsoft Word track changes tool on his essay. I would make a correction on the page, be it a grammar problem, formatting, or a revision of some sort. He then examined what I did. We would quickly discuss it and then move on. After it was over, I emailed the Word document to him with all of the changes still displayed. He was then able to accept or reject any changes I made on the paper.

The track changes tool in Microsoft Word is highly useful not only for one on one discussion with students. It also can be projected in the classroom to show clearly to students how to edit and revise their papers. It also has the advantage of fixing problems in an essay in a very clear and straight forward manner. EFL students do not have to wonder about a teachers hand writing or strange marks on the page. The teacher can easily teach the student how track changes works and then simply email edited papers back to students.

## V. Combined Technology Use

There are many different forms of technology in the classroom. One effective way of using that technology is combining it together. For

example, the best way I have found to teach a writing process is to show and explain that process to them in a variety of ways. To demonstrate how combined technology can enhance this idea, I will explain how it was used in a sophomore level EFL university class. The class had previously to

this point been instructed on paragraphing, the organization of a short essay, and more specifically the organization of a descriptive essay. The following strategies were used to help students understand the concept and use of brainstorming to generate ideas.

### **1. Step one: PowerPoint Presentation**

With my EFL sophomore class, I first used PowerPoint to introduce the use of brainstorming in the classroom. Through various slides, I discussed what brainstorming was, and I also discussed the step by step process of how it works. After explaining it step by step, I showed an image of a finished brainstorming session.

### **2. Step two: Video Representation**

After showing a PowerPoint presentation about brainstorming, I decided to enhance the classroom experience more by showing a film of myself brainstorming in the real world. In the film, I go to a restaurant I like and explain in the film that I am frustrated because I need to come up with an idea for my descriptive essay. This is done for the humorous effect it will have on students and also to relate to the



problems they might encounter when having to do the activity on their own. The video then cuts to me eating a burrito and I slowly realize that I would like to do my paper on the restaurant I am in. I get out a piece of paper and begin doing the brainstorming activity. As I do the activity, I again talk out loud explaining what I am doing. The video clip proceeds to show my whole brainstorming session. Students will later relate to my activity when having to perform it outside of the classroom as homework.

### **3. Step Three: Live Modeling**

After the video finished, I used PowerPoint again to show an image of the finished brainstorming session that I did in the video. I then proceeded to do a brainstorming activity live with my class on the white board. While the whiteboard works fine to demonstrate this, I would have done the third step a lot differently if I had the use of a document camera in my classroom. If the classroom was equipped with such a thing, I would use that to show a live brainstorming session. The document camera has advantages over the white board. First of all using the document camera and projecting it on to a large backdrop would allow everyone to see what I am doing very easily (sometimes the whiteboard can be hard to see when the teacher is writing on it.) Secondly, the document camera allows me to use the same instruments my students will be using when they brainstorm. Unlike the white board with its dry erase markers, I can use a piece of paper and pencil and show the brainstorming session. Thirdly, not only can students

participate easier by giving me suggestions during the brainstorming session, but I can encourage a few people to come up and add to the brainstorming session themselves. The audience will then be allowed to see one of their peers use the correct instruments while doing a brainstorming session. This enforces the act of brainstorming in their minds.

The three step method discussed with brainstorming can easily be applied to any number of writing processes. Outlining for example could be shown using the three step method. Although it is important to note that some writing processes might employ one step a lot longer than another. A teacher should tweak to make sure presentations are not too long or too short to teach the use of various writing tools.

## VI. Conclusion

Technology is with us everywhere we go. Everyone seems to have some sort of new gadget an Iphone, an mp3 player, or a Kindle. Everyone has a TV, and many people in developed nations have a computer at their house. Even though technology is everywhere, many teachers still do not wish to embrace what it can offer to the classroom experience. They hold on to old myths and traditions. They continue to use old teaching techniques. They fear that technology is making us dumber and lazier. While it is true that technology has its disadvantages, this paper was hoping to show that it has major

advantages in the area of motivating students and creating a fun and exciting classroom experience.

In the EFL classroom, technology is even more important. It allows us to seamlessly make things clear through the use of numerous simplified models that can be displayed and manipulated on PowerPoint, shown as examples with video clips, and performed as live shows using document cameras. Lectures and discussions are also simplified, slowed down, and improved by the use of PowerPoint with its ability to display text in different manners, provide audio, video, and pictures that can be embedded right into slides, and stored easily for students to look back at anytime they want. Word processing can also be projected or used one on one with a student to better explain the act of editing a paper.

It is important to note that many of the strategies discussed in this paper would not be possible without a human being working with that technology in the classroom. Technology like the dry erase marker, the overhead projector, and chalk is essentially a tool. Yet it is a tool that allows teachers to be more creative than ever before. It is an attention getter that can be used to reach numerous learning styles and individual student needs. It is also a dynamic connector and enhancer for other types of class room activities such as working out of the book, doing handouts, playing games, and performing in-class writing assignments.

I hope that some teachers who had turned against technology read this paper and possibly open up more to the idea of using it in their own classrooms. I hope school administrators read this and think more

about adding money to their technology budgets. I hope that chalkboards do actually disappear from all classrooms eventually. It is no longer the age of chalk or marker or overhead projector. It is the digital age, the computer age. It is an age in which the teaching of English is now easier and more exciting than ever before.

〈국문초록〉

## 디지털 시대에 EFL의 쓰기

- L2를 쓰는 사람들을 돕기 위한 기술적 전략에 관한 논의

기술을 주변화 시키거나 전혀 사용하지 않는 구식의 교육 방식을 고수하는 언어 교육자들이 여전히 많은 가운데, 수업 중에 기술을 사용하는 것이 더 긍정적인 분위기를 만들고 학생들에게 동기를 부여하며 수단과 모델을 단순화시킴으로써 L2 학습자를 돕는다는 연구가 늘고 있다. 기술은 특별히 읽기, 쓰기, 말하기와 듣기라는 네 영역의 언어 획득 영역을 연관시켜 발전시키는데 효율적이라는 사실 또한 발견되었다. 이 논문의 초점은 EFL 수업에서 쓰기 능력을 돕기 위한 기술적인 다양한 전략에 대해 소개하는데 있다.

**주제어** : 시각적 도움, 시각적인 조직책, 기술, EFL, L2

〈Abstract〉

## EFL Writing in the Digital Age

: A Discussion on Technological Strategies to Aid L2  
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While there are still many language educators that hold onto the old ways of teaching in which technology is sidelined or barely used at all, growing research suggests that using technology in the classroom creates a more positive atmosphere, engages and motivates students, and helps L2 learners by simplifying methods and models. Specifically, technology has also been found to be very useful in engaging and improving all four areas of language acquisition: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. The focus of this paper is to present various technological strategies to aid writing ability in the EFL classroom.

**Key words** : Visual aid, Visual organizer, Technological, EFL, L2

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