

Online Collaborative Writing As a Pre-speaking Task in Adult ESL Classroom

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Abstract

Numerous fruitful experiments and studies have been conducted to show the effectiveness of technology integration in second and foreign language learning. Researchers have suggested using online tasks in routine classroom practice and urged teachers to blend digital tasks with traditional teaching tasks as they have been proven beneficial in many ways. This paper aims to explore the utility of online collaborative writing, a process where adult ESL learners at the tertiary level work together to create and discuss written content using digital platforms, such as pre-speaking tasks, and their effects on learners' group discussion task preparation and performance. These pre-tasks were introduced as a prelude to face-to-face group discussion tasks to familiarize learners with the topic and build their confidence. To understand the effectiveness of these pre-tasks, learners' performance during pre-tasks and tasks was analysed. Further, learners' reflective journals and semi-structured interview scripts were analysed to determine their perceptions about the pre-tasks. The findings of the study suggest, online collaborative writing pre-tasks favour group discussion tasks by lowering learners' apprehension about participating in face-to-face dialogues and boosting task familiarity. Moreover, the pre-tasks develop learners' linguistic and content-related schema, which motivates learners to participate in complex tasks like group discussions. The study advises adopting online collaborative writing pre-tasks as a warm-up for effective group discussion task performance. This study leads to the possibility of conducting future research to discover the specific linguistic features that get transferred from online to face-to-face communication and its order of acquisition among young ESL learners.



Keywords: Second language acquisition, Collaborative learning, Group discussions, Online discussions, Adult ESL learners

INTRODUCTION

Multimedia in language education has become more prominent than ever, enabling teachers to facilitate learning in diverse ways. However, the cosmetic implementation of these facilities has remained a constant challenge in the process of language education (NCFTE, 2009). Integration of Information Communication Technology (ICT) in modern-day education can be seen both as a success and a failure. It is a success as it has modernized the ways of the educational transaction to a different level. The need for human intervention in carrying out complex tasks has been reduced to almost a negligible percentage. However, its implementation has failed to a certain extent due to technological overdependence. The availability of readymade materials often misleads inexperienced teachers to use them blindly in their classrooms without considering their suitability.

Notably, in English as a second language (ESL) education, the endless online materials bank (including PPTs, worksheets, online tests, teaching materials, etc.) often get adopted in most ESL classrooms instead of 'adapting'. Therefore, the wrong selection of materials and poor implementation quality frequently causes negative perception towards ICT. This leads to a decrease in the quality of teaching and learning.

On the other hand, with the proliferation of advanced technology, hardly any student finds using technology in the classroom an alien thing. According to the TCS GenY Survey (2014-15), Indian students spend one hour daily on social media and much more time online. Therefore, using an overhead projector, intelligent boards, and audio-visual aids alone does not mean integrating technology in the classroom. Students' increasing exposure to technology poses a

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significant challenge for teachers in making their classes innovative and engaging. The issue raised in this paper is how teachers can blend technology and traditional instructions in ESL classrooms to complement each other and bring about successful learning output. Several studies have used online tools to facilitate language learning through communication.

Chapman, Storberg-Walker, and Stone (2008) argued that the participants in their study were motivated to participate in online board discussions as they received positive comments on their posts. They felt obligated to respond to the other participants to maintain social fellowship. In the research conducted by Mitchem et al. (2008), learners were allowed to collaborate online to exchange their ideas with their peers. They used bulletin boards as a tool for discussions. The results of the study showed that there was a vast enhancement in their content knowledge due to online negotiation.

Lee (2001) suggested that online interaction is ideal for language learners to negotiate for meaning. The researcher found that the nature of the online synchronous discussion is quite similar to the natural face-to-face debate. The collaborative nature of online discussion tasks helps learners exchange ideas about content and language. The repeated exposure helps them notice not only forms but meaning as well. While negotiating for meaning and form, learners use a variety of communicative strategies such as confirmation checks, requests for clarification, etc. Using these strategies helps them modify their output to make it comprehensible for their interlocutors. The study supports Long's (1981) interaction hypothesis that interactive negotiation is crucial to second language acquisition (SLA) and fosters learners' language development. Another seminal study in online learning by Baglione and Nastanski (2007) suggested that combining online and face-to-face classroom instruction can encourage learners to build and express their ideas more than the traditional classroom setup.

The existing literature, therefore, has recommended using online tasks or blending online tasks with traditional face-to-face tasks in the second language classroom. However, there is no uniformity among the researchers about which stage of second language learning online tasks should be used.

The theoretical argument for task sequencing can be taken from Prabhu's (1987) experiment in his well-known Bangalore project. In his experiment, he recommended using parallel tasks instead of giving heavy instructions and explaining to learners the logic of the main task. Presenting parallel functions before the main task helped learners gain task familiarity and confidence to participate in the main task. Prabhu (1987) suggested that organizing and presenting tasks in a logical sequence allows teachers to track the growth of the learners and adjust the input whenever required.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This review looks at the advantages of online collaborative writing (OCW) as a pre-task for in-person discussion tasks and considers learners' perceptions of OCW in improving oral performance. Recent research from 2014 onward offers insights into these two aspects of OCW in adult ESL learning. The rapid advancement of technology and its integration into educational settings has introduced innovative methodologies in language learning, particularly in English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts.

In this regard, it is important to look at the advantages of using online collaborative writing (OCW) as pre-speaking tasks and ESL learners' perceptions. The research in ESL studies in the last decade has offered several insights into using technology and its integration into language education settings. Rahimi and Fathi (2022) conducted a study to investigate how collaborative writing exercises influenced Iranian adult ESL learners' speaking performance. The findings of the study reported a significant increase in learners in the level of complexity and accuracy as the OCW gave them the practice of organizing linguistic structures, discussing meaning, and working in groups to address language programmes. Participating in OCW enabled learners to use more precise and structured language in the oral tasks. Similarly, Jeong, K. (2019) underlined the use of OCW to promote language scaffolding and idea formation, which gets transferred to speaking tasks. The researchers argued that the asynchronous nature of OCW provides learners the time to evaluate their writing and filter the language output, which enhances the organization and contextuality of their speech.

Researchers have concluded that OCW enhances content familiarity among learners which consequently improves their oral output. Bozkurt and Aydin (2023) reported that adult ESL learners showed improvement in their oral fluency and confidence after participating in OCW as a pre-speaking task. The collaborative online writing reduced learners' anxiety during the speaking tasks and provided them access to common content knowledge, ideas, and clarifying concepts. Additionally, Shofiah (2024) claimed that OCW enhances learners' critical thinking abilities, which are manifested through oral communication. To sustain collaborative writing tasks, learners are required to brainstorm, select and eliminate ideas, synthesize them, negotiate for meaning, and adjust their linguistic and content presentation. Furthermore, OCW is an effective method for promoting social interaction among adult learners on crucial topics which require a serious exchange of opinions. Chen et al. (2023) asserted that OCW facilitated a conducive environment for students to trade their ideas without fearing being judged and losing face.

Studies also show that ESL learners widely regard collaborative pre-task as a valuable method for enhancing their oral proficiency by improving their confidence, linguistic competence, and overall learning experience (Leeming & Lambert, 2024; Luo & Sun, 2025). Known for their advantage in self-paced progression, Hakim (2015) reported that the learners found OCWs to be relaxed settings where they could revise and rewrite their ideas and accommodate peer feedback. They felt less anxious and well-equipped for the oral task that followed OCW. Learners have also acknowledged that they considerably benefited from the language they used during the OCW for performing the speaking tasks and that it is transferrable from writing to speaking modality (Larouz, M., 2021). Learners used the concepts, sentence structures, and vocabulary discussed during the OCW to make speaking more structured and meaning-loaded. Collaboration for negotiating ideas in groups strengthened learners' understanding of the concepts. Özdemir, S. (2024) offered an alternative approach in their study where learners accredited OCW for improving their writing skills and interaction among peers. The adult ESL learners appreciated OCW's collaborative component because it fostered a sense of belonging and shared accountability. While OCW is seen as an

excellent tool for enabling learning, learners have also recorded their concerns about the difficulties they experienced while participating in OCW tasks. According to Alsahil (2022), learners have frequently faced problems like time restriction, the dominance of proficient learners during task performances, and connectivity issues. These are some essential arrangements that need to be made by the instructor to provide a safe environment for learners to explore and learn.

Although these studies comprehensively understand how OCW helps learners in ESL acquisition, they do not offer methodological insight to integrate OCW and face-to-face tasks in adult ESL classrooms. Moreover, these studies do not provide any specific information regarding the domains and levels of language development or relate it to OCW. To address these gaps, this study investigates how ESL development is facilitated through OCWs and how learners view the growth, if there is any.

To investigate how online collaborative writing as a pre-task affects learners' overall oral task performance, this study addresses the following research questions;

- How do adult ESL learners benefit from online collaborative writing as a pre-task during their face-to-face discussion task performance?
- What are learners' perceptions about online collaborative writing tasks as a tool for enhancing their oral performance?

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a qualitative research design where 22 undergraduate students (14 males and 8 females), ages ranging between 18 and 21 years, participated in this study voluntarily. A stratified random sampling technique was used to select the participants, which ensured participants' proficiency in using social media for written communication. A self-assessment questionnaire, validated by senior researchers in the field of ESL education, was administered to understand participants' proficiency in handling multimedia tools. Through this, only the participants who were comfortable with multimedia tools were selected. All the participants had English as their second language with prior exposure for approximately ten years in the academic context. To protect their privacy, the participants were labelled nicknames like KLM, MK, SHANT, etc. To estimate their skill levels in the English language, a comprehensive

proficiency test was adapted from EFL University and administered. The test results helped categorise the participants into intermediate and advanced proficiency levels.

DATA COLLECTION

The data was collected using Facebook chat logs, reflective journals, and semi-structured interviews. At first, a Facebook chat application was used to provide an online discussion forum, and the chat logs of the groups were considered data sets for analysis. The researcher created a Facebook page and added all the participants to it. Participants were given an orientation on the roles they were required to play during the study. The researcher created online chat groups for each round of discussion and made sure that every group was heterogeneous as per their proficiency levels in the English language. For every round of

online discussion, group members were shuffled to make the debate more natural and to avoid the effect of over-familiarity with each other. Participants had a choice of discussion time at their convenience. After each online discussion, participants had to participate in face-to-face discussions inside the classroom. In face-to-face discussions, the participants were shuffled and given a topic closely related to online written debates.

Participants were also instructed to maintain their reflective journals and make entries after each round of online and face-to-face discussions. Finally, at the end of all the rounds of discussions, the participants were interviewed. They were asked to reflect on their experiences and perceptions about participating in online and face-to-face tasks.

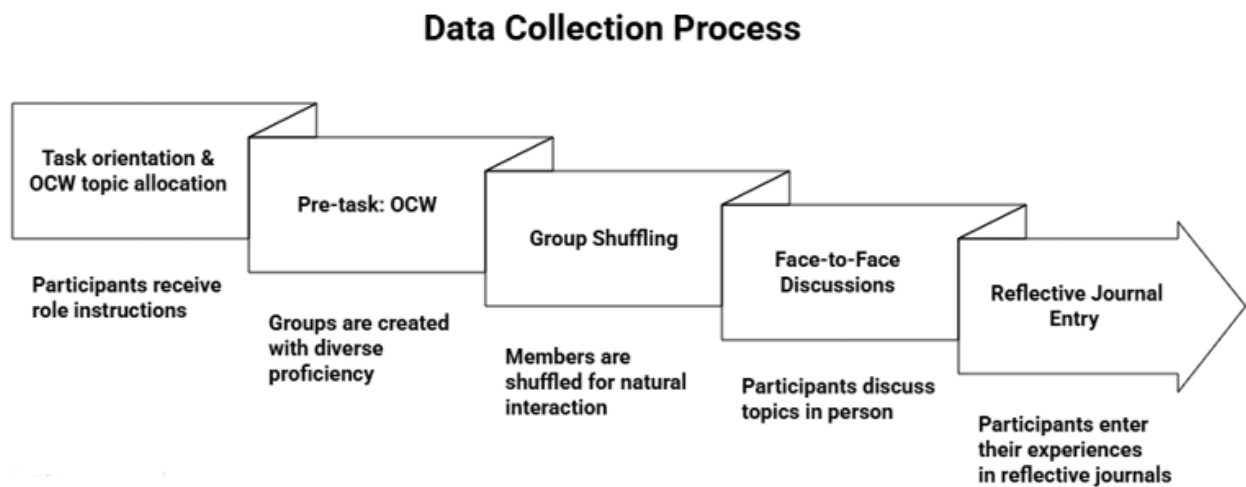


Figure 1. Data collection process

RESULTS

The data collected from the online and face-to-face discussions, participants' journals, and interviews were qualitatively analyzed. The data was coded for qualitative analysis to identify the themes and categories the participants produced during online and face-to-face tasks. The themes transferred from online to face-to-face discussions were quantified to understand how participants used them to enhance their face-to-face performance. Further, learners' perceptions about online and face-to-face discussions were also analysed to triangulate the findings from the quantitative analysis.

The qualitative data analysis showed significant content transfer from online corroborative writing tasks to face-to-face discussion tasks. For the purpose of quantifying the content transfer, the content was measured in terms of idea units. As defined by Colombo et al. (2024), an idea unit is the length of speech or text referring to a single topic, which may vary from a few words to several sentences. The content transfer was identified by tracking the keywords produced by the participants during their turns. While it was easy to track RTIs, for tracking RTOs, it was ensured that the participants were in the same group as the other participants who had produced the particular content category. In every round of face-to-face discussion, the participants referred to the content

used in the pre-task in two ways: reference to self (RTS)- the content produced by themselves in the pre-task, and reference to others (RTO)- content produced by others in the pre-task.

Table 1: Total content transfer from OSDs to group discussions

Rounds of GD	Total Idea Units (TIU)	RTS (Count (Percentage out of TIU))	RTO (Count (Percentage out of TIU))	Independent idea unites (Count (Percentage out of TIU))
Round 1	45	22 (48.9%)	14 (31.1%)	9 (20.0%)
Round 2	29	9 (31.0%)	5 (17.2%)	15 (51.7%)
Round 3	41	14 (34.1%)	4 (9.8%)	23 (56.1%)
Round 4	48	17 (35.4%)	16 (33.3%)	15 (31.2%)
Round 5	64	18 (28.1%)	32 (50.0%)	14 (21.9%)
Round 6	79	13 (16.5%)	52 (65.8%)	14 (17.7%)

As presented in Table 1, a large portion of the total ideas produced in each GD has reference to the OSD pre-tasks. The progression in RTO is a clear indicator that the participants had meaningful collaboration during OSDs. They acquired new content from each other during OCWs and utilized it for their benefits during GDs to improve their quality of participation. The growth in the total idea units toward rounds five and six suggests that the participants were able to think more fluently about the topics, relate them to the OSDs, and produce more speech to discuss the assigned topics at a

deeper level. This can be validated through qualitative analysis.

The qualitative analysis of the GDs shows that the content transfer from OSDs to GDs happened at three levels.

1. Repetition: In this kind of transfer, the participants repeated the content produced during the online pre-task without making considerable changes. This kind of transfer happened in RTS and RTO cases, mainly to emphasize the point of view. An example of repetition of RTS would be:

Task	RTS	RTO
Online pre-task	KLM: @ VMS, CHAI, ANU, PRY: Many marriages get divorced in US according to 2008 census, whereas in India it's just 1%	VMS in OSD: Today the politicians r gaining the votes with the help of reservations MK in OSD: @sairam: I think this politicians never do that. Because of their vote banks
Face-to-face discussion	KLM: Like a lot of the marriages get divorced in US because maximum there are love marriages. But in India, as we prefer the arranged marriages its about 1% divorce.	SRM in F2F: Higher class people are getting more benefits. So, they thought all should get equality, so this concept is introduced. But nowadays, politicians are misusing this by dividing by caste and getting votes for that. They are using this reservation concept and providing the schemes like ... to those castes.

In both instances of content transfer, the participants merely repeated the content without much addition. However, this repetition helped them maintain their stance on the topic and hold the floor with is an important condition in interaction tasks.

however not in the same words as seen in the repetition category. Showing their presence of mind and linguistic abilities, they modified the language in which these themes were presented. At this stage of the content transfer, learners are exposed to the situation that they have content resources and are free to use their focus on the choice and structure of their language output. Here is an example of RTS in paraphrasing.

2. Paraphrasing: In this type of content transfer, the participants used the themes that were discussed in the online pre-task discussions,

Task	RTS	RTO
Online pre-task	VMS : ...but parents will choose better matches for us & there will be time for them to think of whether their decision is right or wrong before marriage	SRM: In present situation most of the parents are not supporting love mrgs me also support arrange mrg

Face-to-face discussion	VMS: ...yeah KLM, you have said right but aa... before the marriage there would be aa time span there of one month for marriage. So, in that, what is my opinion is, in that time period the ... we can better understand us partner in that time. It is also one option for us so we aa... May be right at that time	MK: doing a love marriage then aa ..the parents may be anti.. so they have to start a new life, there is no back up to.. backup for them, no supports for them.. so in arrange marriage, if there is any problem between the couple, parents are there to ..aa.. help them
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In the examples of both RTS and RTO the ideas produced in the online discussion have been rephrased or paraphrased to suit the context of the task. In RTS the theme of ‘decision making during marriages’ has been repeated but with variations in the choice of words and structures. Similarly, in RTO, the theme of ‘approval from parents’ has been repeated in face-to-face discussion tasks by MK, which is with several variations however

retains the theme as the central focus of the argument.

3. Expansion of content: Expansion of the content is the next type of content transfer which indicates that the participants used the themes from the online pre-tasks however this time they did not just repeat or paraphrase the ideas. Instead, the participants added more details to the content taken from the pre-task.

Task	RTS	RTO
Online pre-task	KLM: but the parent that chooses it's just a prediction by their experiences in they had in their lives we never know that every time the parents can be correct.	CHAI: and i say that more exams should be conducted practically than theoretical
Face-to-face discussion	KLM: Yes, I agree with you but MK see there are many things we have to consider in life. Like we can't just go with the parents only. Since parents choose the correct partners with their experience and do good things for us but they can't be always correct. Like aaa as you said clashes and problems, in any relationship. it happens and it should be good or bad. It depends on the partner that how he reacts or how she reacts about this partner. Then it will not be much problematic if we choose love marriages also.	ANU in F2F: I think the education system for example our ... in our India the education system is totally dependent on theoretical, they won't do practical aa people doesn't have any practical knowledge. When we compare to USA there every subject, we have to do some practical, like project. So here we are only writing the exams, they only concentrate on exams percentage. They won't concentrate on how students are and how they are up to the mark...

In the example of RTS during the pre-task, KLM talks about how parents influence the children’s decision to choose a life partner based on their experience. While participating in the face-to-face discussion task, he made use of the theme produced in the pre-task and expanded it further by adding the context to the situation and another theme of ‘understanding between the couple’. Similarly, in RTO, CHAI produced the theme of ‘importance of practical education’, which was later used by ANU and expanded by comparing the education system of the USA. These are perfect examples of learners trying to make their language more accessible and understandable to others to make the conversation faster and more meaningful.

Therefore, to answer the first research question in this paper, *How do adult ESL learners benefit from*

online collaborative writing as a pre-task during their face-to-face discussion task performance? The data shows that the participants greatly benefited from the content transfer from pre-tasks to task performance. Learners could use the knowledge gained during online collaborative written discussions to sustain their turns in the group discussion tasks and elaborate on their thoughts. The instances of RTO indicate significant collaborative learning happening during the pre-tasks. This further suggests that online collaborative discussions allow participants to learn new content related to the topic and use it for their benefit during the task performance.

The answer to the second research question - *What are learners’ perceptions about online collaborative writing tasks as a tool for enhancing their oral performance?* validates these claims

made above. Participants' reflective journals and semi-structured interviews were analysed to find the instances where they mentioned how online collaborative writing pre-tasks helped them.

In his reflective journals, one participant expressed his experience of participating in an online discussion for the first time:

[Episode 1: SRM]

"Online discussion sounds interesting and the topic was also interesting. This was a different experience that I never had before in my life. This was a great place to overcome the problems that you face in f2f (face-to-face) discussions. Like thinking time"

From his perspective, online discussions offered him extra time to plan and present his output. The same participant during the semi-structured interview extended how he felt comfortable during online discussions:

[Episode 2: SRM]

"In my first f2f discussion, I was little afraid about how to start and proceed and also because of eye contact, people around me. But in online discussion, I could write anything and there was no eye contact, no time limit, and I had my own space"

In this response, the participant compares the task conditions in online and face-to-face discussions and expresses the benefits of online discussion task conditions for him to participate. Learners often feel shy, conscious or afraid of making mistakes in front of their peers. In the online discussion, learners can overcome these factors and perform better in a more natural condition. While asked about the effect of online discussions on their face-to-face discussion performance during their interviews, the participants said:

[Episode 3: KLM]

"On online discussions we have enough time to think. We could understand the mistakes that were made in online discussions and corrected them in f2f. Also I understood how to use connecting phrases while talking."

[Episode 4: RAJ]

"I could remember the points that I had used in OSD while I was in f2fd. Since the topics were very similar, I could get a very good start from my earlier discussion....In OSD another benefit is that you can take help of online resource for something you don't

know. Therefore understanding of the topic becomes better.."

[Episode 5:VIJ]

"I was very tensed initially as this was my first F2F discussion. Many points from online discussion were recollected and everyone in the group was giving their contribution. We concluded same as in online that understanding plays a vital role in any relationship. This discussion was good and a different experience for me.."

In this set of responses, the participants mentioned that the online discussions helped them in avoiding the affective factors that obstruct their face-to-face communication in English. They talked about not having to see the teacher or other peers during online discussions, allowing them to express themselves without worrying about criticism. They did not feel obligated to participate in the group discussions before they were ready. Another essential benefit of online discussions mentioned by one of the participants was that he could avoid mistakes in face-to-face talks that he had made during the online discussions. Lastly, due to the similar topics and nature of the discussion, participants could recall the points they discussed during online discussions, giving them a good start in face-to-face discussions.

While mentioning the benefits of online collaboration a participant wrote in his reflective journal:

[Episode 6: MK]

"When we start the discussion we have limited points, but when different people come up with different points, it adds to my understanding of the topic. Initially I had limited point but gradually I started understanding the topics better. And therefore it helps me performing better .."

[Episode 7: VIJ]

"We get inspiration from others. Both in online and face-to-face discussions, many people were doing better than me, so I tried to follow them. For example Kaleem, he has been using better comments and sentences than me. So I learned how to use the comments. I followed him and he also gave me suggestions how to take turns.."

Through these reflections, participants expressed how others motivated them to perform better through peer feedback and observation. Online collaboration's reading and writing feature caused

noticing of meaning and form. Therefore, the participants could understand the input and tended to make it a part of their output. Thus, online discussions helped learners reach their zone of proximal development (ZPD, Vygotsky, 1978) through collaborative scaffolding by their peers.

In sum, online discussion tasks before face-to-face discussion tasks prepared learners to participate in the main task by providing task familiarity. It also helped learners overcome the communication hurdles they faced earlier in English. Therefore, with the responses provided by the participants, it can be said that giving online discussion tasks before actual discussion tasks positively impacts learners' performance.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings of the study show how OCW has an overlapping effect on the speaking performance of ESL learners and in which areas of speaking skills ESL learners benefit from participating in OCW pre-tasks. The implications of these findings offer a variety of possibilities for solving speaking skills-related problems in ESL classrooms. The findings present three distinct types of content transfer from OCW to the speaking performance of the participants. These types differed in terms of the levels of cognitive engagement and linguistic complexities. Firstly, the fundamental kind of content transfer was repetition, used mainly by the participants at all proficiency levels to solve different kinds of communicative problems. While the low proficiency learners repeated the OCW content into speaking tasks to sustain their turns and contribute to the discussion, the intermediate and advanced level learners used it for reiterating their stance and highlighting what they believed after they had elaborated their perspectives. In both cases, the strategy to repeat the OCW content helped learners stay meaningfully engaged in the speaking tasks. Secondly, learners paraphrased the content from the OCW while participating in speaking tasks, which has helped them show their linguistic flexibility and increase mastery of their speaking skills. This type of content transfer also indicated that learners could retain the content from OCW in long-term memory, access it during speaking tasks based on related topics, and present it with appropriate modifications. The third category of content transfer, expansion, indicates learners' holistic understanding of the topic and awareness of the socio-linguistic relevance. They

take the lead from OCW content and expand it in the speaking tasks by adding examples and related themes to the existing theme. This type of content transfer is mainly found among learners at intermediate and advanced proficiency levels. This also demonstrates the learners' ability to synthesize information from multiple sources and use it to strengthen their arguments in discussion tasks. This illustrates learners' critical thinking ability and the most independent use of ESL as learners get the appropriate content support from the OCW tasks.

Through learners' reflections, it is suggested that they benefited mainly through OCW as their level of anxiety was lower. As their cognitive load was lowered due to the content familiarity and linguistic accessibility from OCW, learners felt more at ease, and their speaking performance improved. Anxiety during speaking tasks is a common problem in ESL classrooms, and it can be effectively solved by employing OCW as a pre-task. Additionally, OCW allows learners to modify their output before they post it, ensuring their language and content accuracy. The artificial intelligence (AI) tools in the gadgets learners use for participating in OCWs help learners rectify baseline linguistic errors, such as spelling and punctuation. Learners may also browse additional information about the topic to make their argument more fact and meaning-loaded. All these practices leave a positive washback effect on learners, which gets transferred to speaking tasks. Peer learning and feedback are other added advantages during OCW that reduce the competitive environment in group tasks and make learning more collaborative. Learners have the same spirit while participating in group speaking tasks, which makes the environment less competitive and more supportive. These factors add to the qualitative enhancement of learners' performance during class activities and, ultimately, while participating in real-life situations.

Looking at the pedagogical implications of the study, OCW as a pre-speaking task provides supportive and accommodating learning conditions for the ESL learners of all proficiency groups. Moreover, it promotes constructive collaboration and facilitates team learning, which is highly required for developing interaction competence among adult learners. The structural alignment of OCWs and group discussion tasks makes it easier for teachers to conduct group tasks

with more ease and to effectively utilize technology. In OCWs, the classroom power structure is decentralised, and learners can provide feedback to each other without teachers' intervention, which is again a sign of a learning-centric classroom.

CONCLUSION

The study results revealed that OCW tasks are ideal pre-speaking tasks with features similar to natural communication. They prepare learners to deal with the challenging task conditions of face-to-face group discussions as they reduce learners' anxiety about participating and being encountered with other participants. With their natural communicative features, online collaborative writing tasks create ideal conditions for novice language learners to participate without being affected by social factors. They do not feel intimidated by the non-verbal elements of spontaneous communication, such as face-to-face communication. The writing mode in online tasks provides learners sufficient time to think and plan their input before contributing. This leads learners to gain confidence in face-to-face discussions and rely on the knowledge they negotiated during the pre-task. Above all, the collaborative nature of online discussions provides a threat-free practice for ESL learners to practice and activate their language and content schema before they participate in complex face-to-face discussion tasks. Online collaborative writing pre-tasks enable peer learning and feedback and provide a natural environment for learners to communicate for meaning. Online support, such as Google searches during pre-tasks, helps learners strengthen their factual knowledge about the topic for discussion and build perspectives based on factual information. The tasks create the optimum conditions for second language acquisition.

Limitations and scope for future research: the study is based on qualitative data and provides directions for teachers to replicate this practice in their classrooms. The future research in this field can be based on quantitative analysis. Researchers may also examine the impact of OCWs as pre-tasks on ESL learners' writing skills.

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