The Effect of Using a Web Quest Program on Developing Some EFL Critical Reading Process Writing Skills and Decreasing Writing Apprehension of the First Year Experimental Secondary School Students

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Abstract

The present study aimed at investigating the effect of using a Web Quest program on developing some EFL critical reading, process writing skills and decreasing writing apprehension of the first year experimental secondary school students. The study followed a pretest-posttest experimental-control group design. The study sample consisted of 60 students from Fakus Experimental Secondary School and was divided into two groups: 30 students were assigned to the experimental group and 30 students were assigned to the control group. Instruments of the study were an EFL critical reading test, writing test and a writing apprehension scale. Students in both the experimental and control groups were pre-tested on their critical reading skills, their writing skills and their writing apprehension. Then, students of the experimental group were taught the program of Web Quest Critical Reading and Writing (WQCRWP) and students of the control group were taught in the traditional method. Finally, students in both groups were post-tested using the same tools. The study showed that the experimental group outperformed the control group on post-testing of critical reading skills, their writing skills and further on the post-assessment of their writing apprehension levels. Second, there was a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the pre-and- post critical reading test, writing test and pre-and-post assessment of the writing apprehension scale for the experimental group in favor of post-testing scores on reading, writing and writing apprehension assessments. These differences can be attributed to using the program grounded in Web Questing and critical reading and writing. Hence, it was concluded that the program of Web Quest Critical Reading and Writing (WQCRWP) proved to be effective in developing some EFL critical reading, process writing skills and decreasing writing apprehension of the first year experimental secondary school student*s* (the experimental group).

Keywords: Web Quest; critical reading; process writing; writing apprehension

Introduction

One of the cutting- edges of computer technology is the use of Web Quests for language learning. Bernie Dodge developed Web Quests in America in 1995, primarily for teachers in the secondary school system and for use with different disciplines regardless of the age of their users. Dodge (1997, para.2) defines Web Quests simply as "an inquiry- oriented activity in which some or all of the information that learners interact with comes from resources on the Internet".

Dodge (1995), March (1997) & (1998), Dodge (1999), Starr (2000), Dodge (2001: 5, 6, 9), March (2004) and March (2007:1-17) stated that Web Quests are very important for the following reasons:

1-Web Quests develop critical thinking, as students are not expected to just receive information passively but rather to use it actively to achieve a certain purpose. Students indulge in critical thinking which involves problem solving, judgment, analysis or synthesis to answer a list of questions.

2-The use of Web Quests highlights the importance of the teacher in setting up the tasks relevant to the needs of the learners. The teacher is a facilitator who uses his students' background knowledge to decide on how they advance their own intellect, design, scaffold his students' learning, implement, and evaluate the Web Quests.

3-Web Quests increase students' motivation to learn through the challenge of authentic tasks, which require them to make comparison, construct hypotheses in relation to real life situations and strengthen the link between them and the task.

4-Web Quests create opportunities for collaboration as students need to work together to complete the given task. Collaborative tasks diminish the feeling of isolation among students and provide peer support through group work to achieve their goal and communicate in the target language.

Chu (2004) used Web Quest Writing Instruction to improve students' performance in writing, reduce their writing apprehension and examine their perception of Web Quest as a Writing Instruction. The sample of the study was two junior second –year classes at a college of foreign language in southern Taiwan. Instruments of the study were a writing performance test, a writing apprehension test and a post-instruction perception questionnaire. The findings of the study indicated that Web Quest Writing Instruction improved students' writing performance, reduced their writing apprehension and students had a favorable perception of Web Quest Writing Instruction.

In addition, Kocoglua (2010) examined using Web Quest in teaching EFL reading/writing. The sample of the study was 34 first year ELT Turkish university students. Instruments of the study were a reading performance test and a writing performance test. The experimental group was taught using Web Quests and the control group was taught using teacher-led tasks. The results of the study indicated that the experimental group showed better performance than the control group in the reading performance test, but the two groups showed equal performance in the writing performance test.

This study is different from the previous studies that it used Web Quests to develop some EFL critical reading, process writing skills and decrease writing apprehension. Web Quests are integrated with six units of the second term of the advanced level course of the first year experimental secondary stage students.

The procedures

The Web Quest lessons in this study are developed within the theoretical framework of Web Quest: the inquiry –based approach, constructivism theory, and the principles of cooperative learning, with some modifications made to suit the students' needs and interests. The development of Web Quest is based on the predetermined objectives of the advanced level English course of first year experimental secondary stage (Move Ahead Plus) with a focus on essential critical reading and writing skills, but with little attention paid to speaking and listening skills. The first step is the design of the content of the Web Quests in terms of designing interesting tasks, assigning students' roles, finding relevant and appropriate resources' links, providing enough or suitable scaffolding, evaluating rubrics for evaluating students' writing product, and writing lesson plans. The steps of teaching are based on the Web Quest parts and approaches to teaching critical reading and process writing. Therefore, when implementing the Web Quest lessons of this study, the teaching plans are designed to provide clear steps of critical reading and writing instruction.

There are two major stages of implementing the Web Quest. The first one concerning the critical reading session which consists of 3 steps: pre- reading, reading, and post-reading stage. Then, the steps in teaching writing are followed. They include the steps of pre-writing (planning), writing (drafting), and post-writing (revising and editing). A summary of the teaching steps in the lesson plans is presented in table (1).

Table 1. *Summary of the teaching steps of the experiment (Adopted from* Suraya. ,2011) *with some modifications to suit the stages of critical reading and process writing*.

Parts of the Web Quest	Steps of Teaching	Purposes
Introduction (to gain students' attention and introduce the topic)	Pre-reading phase	-To introduce the activity -To activate students' background knowledge
Task (doable and interesting)		-To set the purpose for reading -To assign students' role
Process (to provide step by step instructions, resources and guidance for students in order to complete the task)	Reading phase	-To provide critical reading practice and feedback opportunities for students
	Post-reading phase/ Pre-writing phase (Planning)	-To check critical reading comprehension and skill mastery -To discuss difficulties& problems students encountered while reading -To help students compile and analyze information -To prepare the language needed for writing
	Writing phase (drafting)	-To complete the task
Evaluation (to provide rubrics on how the task will be evaluated)	Post-writing phase (revising and editing)	-To evaluate the task -To give feedback and suggestions on students' tasks

Conclusion (to bring closure to the activity or extend the gained knowledge to other domains)		-To draw a conclusion from the task -To provide connections to other subject areas or events to promote retention and transfer of knowledge.

As shown in the previous table (1), Web Quest is used as a tool, which is integrated with the Advanced Level of "Move Ahead Plus" of first year experimental secondary stage students. Web Quests are integrated with the first six units of the advanced level "Move Ahead Plus" of first year experimental secondary stage students. Each unit in this advanced level is divided into four parts: the first part is a reading one with two reading comprehension passages. The second part deals with grammar structures. The third part deals with the writing skill, and the fourth part deals with listening and speaking skills. This study is restricted to dealing with the first part and the third one of each unit (the reading and the writing parts). The questions of the reading passages are modified according to the critical reading skills. The Web Quests are carried out using FrontPage Program. The five steps of the Web Quest (an introduction, the task, the process (+the resources), evaluation and conclusion) are integrated with the critical reading and the writing process as indicated in table (1). The title of the Web Quest is specified according to the title of the unit in the advanced level of "Move Ahead Plus" of first year experimental secondary stage students.

The teaching steps of the experiment go as follows as indicated in table (1):

1-The introduction of the Web Quest: in which the teacher introduces the topic to the students. This step includes the pre-reading phase in which the teacher introduces the reading activity and activates the students' background knowledge.

2- The task of the Web Quest: in which the teacher sets the purpose for reading and assigns students' roles.

3-The process of the Web Quest which includes four sub stages:

a-The reading phase :which includes giving instructions, online resources, and guidance for students to complete critical reading of the textbook passages and the online resources. It also includes feedback opportunities for students.

b- The post- reading phase: which includes checking the students' critical reading comprehension and skill mastery, and discussing difficulties students encounter while reading.

c-Pre-writing phase (planning): which includes preparing the language students need for writing, benefiting from the critical reading of the textbook passages and the online resources to write. Consequently, the critical reading of the textbook passages is used as a source for writing.

d-Writing Phase (Drafting): in which students complete the task of writing.

4- Evaluation of the Web Quest (The Post- Writing Phase): in which the teacher provides the rubrics on how the writing task is evaluated and the feedback of students' writing.

5-Conclusion of the Web Quest: which includes closure to the activity, extending the gained knowledge to other domains, and retention of knowledge.

The semester lasted 14 weeks. The first week was devoted to the administration of critical reading and writing pre-tests and the writing apprehension scale to the experimental and the control group to assess their critical reading ability, writing ability and their writing apprehension level. The implementation of the Web Quest sessions was carried out in two hours a week. The implementation of the Web Quest instructional lessons started in the second week as an

orientation session so that the students get acquainted with the new teaching and learning styles. The control group was taught using the traditional method of teaching critical reading and process writing while the experimental group was taught using the Web Quest Critical Reading Process Writing Program (WQCRPWP). After teaching the program, the critical reading test, the writing test and the writing apprehension scale were re-applied on students in the experimental and control group (post-tests) on 9st of May 2013 as the students' final exams.

Results of the study:

This study showed the following results:

Table 2. *The Results of the t-test of the post-test of the experimental and the control group in the critical reading test.*

Group	N	Mean	S.D.	t-value	df.	Sig.
Experimental	30	104.63	2.25	62.31	60	Sig
Control	30	54.53	3.79			

It is obvious from table (2) that there is statistically significant difference at level 0.05(one-tailed) between the mean scores of the experimental group(X1=104.63) and the control group(X2=54.53) in the post-test of the critical reading test in favor of the experimental group as indicated by T-value(62.31). This difference may be attributed to the effect of the experimental treatment exemplified in the Web Quest Critical Reading Writing Program (WQCRWP) the experimental group received.

Table 3. *Results of the t-test of the post-test of the experimental and the control group in the writing test in writing evaluation.*

Group	N	Mean	S.D.	t-value	df.	Sig.
Experimental	30	50.90	1.52	60.09	60	Sig
Control	30	20.53	2.32			

Table (3) shows that there is statistically significant difference at level 0.05 between the mean scores of the experimental group(X1=50.90) and the control group(X2=20.53) in the post-test of writing in favor of the experimental group as indicated by T-value(60.9). This difference may be attributed to the effect of the experimental treatment exemplified in the Web Quest Critical Reading Writing Program (WQCRWP) the experimental group received.

Table 4. *Results of t-test of the post-application of the experimental and the control group in EFL writing apprehension scale.*

Group	N	Mean	S.D.	t-value	df.	Sig.
Experimental	30	86.40	3.11	17.94	30	Sig
Control	30	103.07	4.03			

Table (4) indicates It is obvious that there is statistically significant difference at level 0.05(one-tailed) between the mean scores of the experimental group(X1=86.40) and the control group(X2=103.07) in the post application of writing apprehension scale in favor of the experimental group as indicated by T-value(17.94). This difference may be attributed to the effect of the experimental treatment exemplified in the Web Quest Critical Reading Writing Program (WQCRWP) the experimental group received.

Table 5. *Results of the t-test of the pre-test and the post-test of the experimental group in overall critical reading test.*

Test	N	Mean	S.D.	t-value	df.	Sig.
Pre-test	30	54.30	4.23	58.62	30	Sig
Post-test	30	104.63	2.25		30	

Table(5) indicates that there is statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the pre-test(X_1= 54.30   ) and the post-test (X_2= 104.63   ) of the experimental group students in overall critical reading test in favor of the post-test . Hence, such difference may be due to the effect of the experimental treatment exemplified in the Web Quest Critical Reading Writing Program (WQCRWP) the experimental group received.

Table 6. *Results of the t-test of the pre-test and post-test of the experimental group in EFL writing test*.

Test	N	Mean	S.D.	t-value	df.	Sig.
Pre-test	30	20.13	2.35	68.92	30	Sig
Post-test	30	50.90	1.52		30	

Table (6) indicates that there is statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the pre-test(X_1= 20.13) and post-test (X_2= 50.90) of the experimental group students in overall writing test in favor of the post-test . Hence, such difference may be due to the effect of the experimental treatment exemplified in the Web Quest Critical Reading Writing Program (WQCRWP) the experimental group received.

Table 7. R*esults of the t-test of the pre-test and the post-test of the experimental group in EFL writing apprehension scale.*

Test	N	Mean	S.D.	t-value	df.	Sig.
Pre-application	30	86.40	5.50	16.88	30	Sig
Post-application	30	103.56	3.11		30	

Table (7) indicates that there is statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the pre-application(X_1= 86.40) and the post-application (X_2= 103.56) of the experimental group students in the writing apprehension scale in favor of the post-application. Hence, such difference may be due to the effect of the experimental treatment exemplified in the Web Quest Critical Reading Writing Program (WQCRWP) the experimental group received.

Findings of the study:

   The discussion of the findings included:

1-The effect of Web Quest Critical Reading Writing Program (WQCRWP) on students' critical reading.

2- The effect of Web Quest Critical Reading Writing Program (WQCRWP) on students' process writing.

3- The effect of Web Quest Critical Reading Writing Program (WQCRWP) on decreasing students' writing apprehension as follows:

1-The effect of Web Quest Critical Reading Writing Program (WQCRWP) on students' critical reading:

The effect of WQCRWP on students' critical reading was investigated and determined in comparison with that of traditional critical reading instruction. As shown by the results of the study, students in the experimental group improved their critical reading significantly (See table 2) and figure (1) and (2)**.**

Figure 1. *Shows the mean scores of the experimental and the control group in the post-test of critical reading and its skills.*
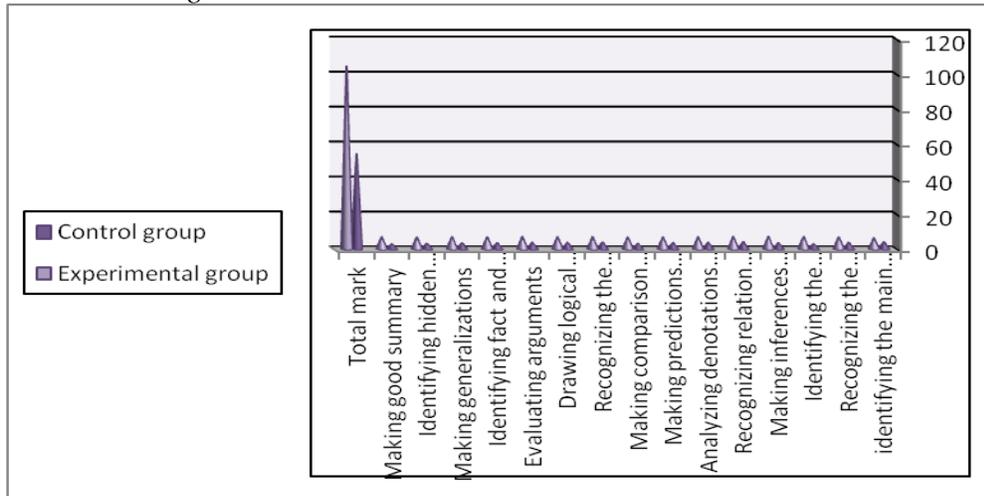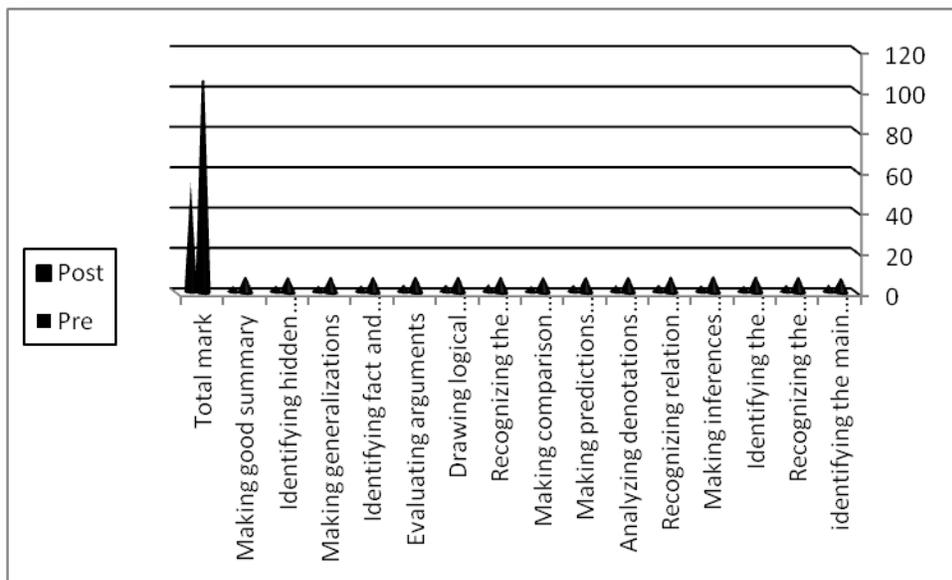

Figure 2. *shows the mean scores of the experimental group in the- pre and the post- test of critical reading and its skills.*

To the knowledge of the researcher, there is no study which dealt with the effect of Web Quest on critical reading but some studies have dealt with the effect of Web Quest on reading skill such as Puthikanon (2009), Kocogula (2010), and Chen (2011) who proved that Web Quest has a positive effect on EFL students' reading skill.

Speculation can be made to explain why the WQCRWP was more effective than the traditional critical reading instruction. The fundamental distinction between these two instruction

methods was found in the effective features of the Web Quest as the tasks are authentic that motivate students to be actively engaged in the instructional process, and the abundant Ahead Plus for the first year experimental secondary stage students and the web materials presented on given websites. Students received the reading input by surfing these web materials in the multi-media language lab. In other words, students read an abundance of relevant material about a topic and then wrote about it. The web materials in the WQCRWP offered the kind of language input that Chen (2011) described as possessing "linguistic complexity, quality, quantity, variety, genuineness, and relevance" when he commented on the capability of computer technology in providing input to language learners. The traditional critical reading instruction was reading comprehension passages in the book of Move Ahead Plus for the first year experimental secondary stage students and teacher-directed oral discussion held in a regular classroom.

Improvement in students' critical reading comprehension ability could be due to the knowledge of vocabulary and content that the students gained from the Web Quest lessons. The students stated clearly in their sessions the usefulness of the Web Quest sessions in providing them opportunities to learn new vocabulary and content knowledge when they were exposed to a lot of reading materials. This is supported by the view of Nation (2002: 267) in that "reading has long been seen as a major source of vocabulary growth." Moreover, both L1 and ESL/EFL research studies have provided evidence showing the possibility of incidental vocabulary learning through repeated exposure (Pigada & Schmitt, 2006). Besides, practice is necessary for improvement in reading. According to Ranandya & Jacobs, (2002: 300), "people learn to read, and to read better, by reading." The more chance of reading practice the students have, the more chance of reading improvement they are likely to get.

Sufficient scaffolding and support can be an important issue for explaining the significant results of critical reading ability improvement. Theoretically, the design of scaffolding is at the heart of the Web Quest model (March, 2000). It can be noted that when reading authentic texts from the Internet, students always find it very difficult to cope. Although the World Wide Web provides the opportunity for language learners to access authentic materials in the target language, this very authenticity can be problematic due to the level of the language they encounter or the genres with which they are unfamiliar (Murray, 2005). Unlike textbook materials, authentic texts that students read from the Internet cannot be simplified to suit the students' proficiency level. In doing Web Quest, the students have to deal with a lot of authentic materials that can be overwhelming and discouraging for them. Therefore, scaffolding was needed to help students overcome such difficulties.

The significant role of scaffolding in enhancing critical reading was supported by the research findings of Tsai (2005). Most of the students were able to comprehend the authentic texts due to the inclusion of abundant and firm scaffolding which was provided to support them in the implementation of the task. The students also found that the prepared scaffoldings were very useful and could help them improve their reading and writing performance. Without such guidance, they might have been discouraged when they had encountered difficult texts.

2-The effect of Web Quest Critical Reading Writing Program (WQCRWP) on students' process writing:

The WQCRWP was more effective than the traditional process writing instruction See table (3) and figures (3) and (4) for many reasons:

Figure 3. *Shows the mean scores of the experimental and the control group in the post-test of writing and its sub-skills.*
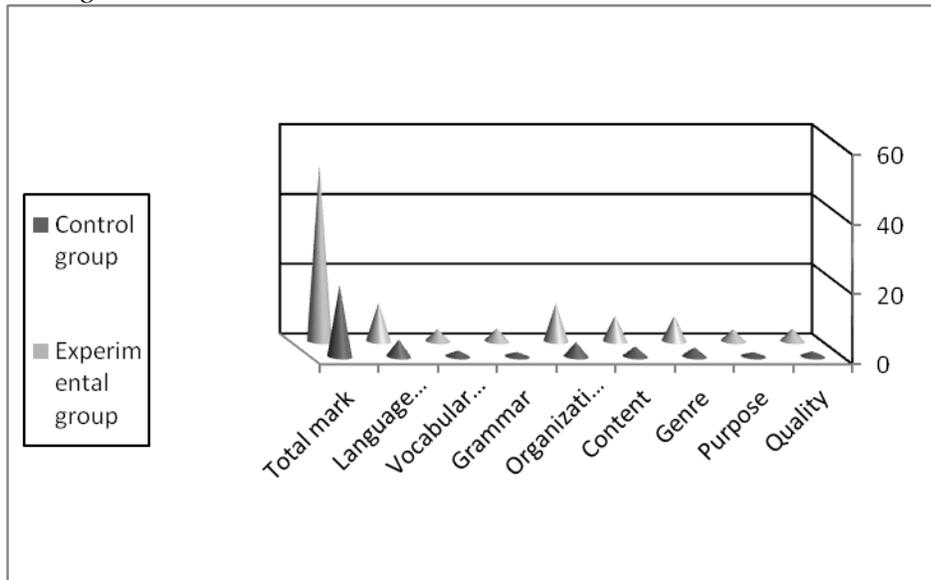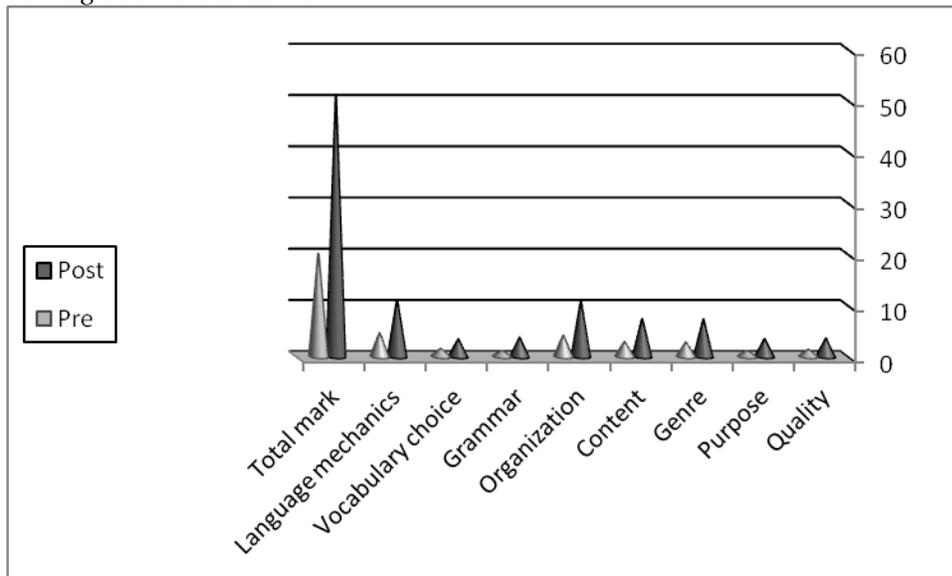

Figure 4. *Shows the mean scores of the experimental group in the pre and the post- test of writing and its sub skills.*

1-The writing input in the traditional process writing instruction was printed material and teacher-directed oral discussions held in a regular classroom. The process writing input in WQCRWP was the printed materials in the book of Move Ahead Plus for the first year experimental secondary stage students and the web materials presented on given websites. Students surf the web materials, critically read them and then write about them using the reading to writing approach. Critical reading was used as an outside source. Research on second language reading and writing connections also suggested that learners may improve their writing ability if they are exposed to reading texts in a process of communication (Leki, 1992; Abu Rass, 2001; Elley, 1991 and Ghawi, 1996). Thus, students in the WQCRWP probably outperformed their counterparts in the traditional process writing instruction because the former spent a

substantial amount of time skimming, scanning and deciding relevant web materials for the purpose of commenting their ideas in their writing.

2- WQCRWP was effective for improving students' writing skill and this was shown by the writing test. Students also perceived that WQCRWP was effective in relation to their reading skill as reading to writing approach was employed in the WQCRWP. Exposure to abundant and varied resources in English was one of the advantages most often mentioned by the students. Students felt that accessing and surfing the web materials relevant to the writing topics benefited them a great deal for their actual writing process. Accessing and surfing web materials primarily involved the act of reading, which may lead to students' perception that they improved their reading skill in addition to their writing skill.

3-As for the enhancement of the participants' writing abilities, with teacher's assistance, this process of learning could effectively enlarge the amount of vocabulary in the process of reading and provide ideas and background knowledge for writing. After the students had sufficient information, they learned how to plan their writing, how to use the gathered information to support their ideas, how to write the first draft, and how to come up with the revised and edited version with appropriate coherence in their writing. Throughout the entire teaching and learning process repeated in every lesson, the participants in this study gradually gained more confidence in reading and writing in English and shared similar perceptions of the reading and writing improvement.

4- Most students accept using Web Quest: the students' language improvement, positive perceptions and attitudes, and their increased participation could be considered as indicators of their acceptance. The central focus of investigating the effectiveness of this type of Web-based learning activities is to promote student learning and to create changes in terms of encouraging students to be highly engaged in learner-centered instruction.

5-Based on the findings, the change may be due to the following factors: the use of computers in the classroom can lead to higher motivation and higher levels of student engagement. Most students agree that computer technology suits their interest and their lifestyle. Besides, online activities are more attractive to students than the traditional ones (Urtel et al, 2006). Moreover, the cooperation among group members could help low achievers to gain more confidence when they had to read and write in groups and this was able to lead to more learning. The findings of this study have showed the importance scaffolding has for EFL learners, especially for those with low proficiency. The assistance could result in more favorable reading and writing improvement, more positive perceptions, and active participation in the learning process.

6-Students also perceived a positive effect of the WQCRWP on specific writing components in their writing. They believed that the WQCRWP improved their content, choice of words and organization in their English writing.

3-The effect of Web Quest Critical Reading Writing Program (WQCRWP) on decreasing students' writing apprehension:

   The effect of WQCRWP on decreasing students' writing apprehension was investigated and determined as shown by the results of the study; students in the experimental group decreased their writing apprehension significantly (See table (4) and figures (5) and (6).

Figure 5. *Shows the mean scores of the experimental and the control group in the post-application of the writing apprehension and its axes.*
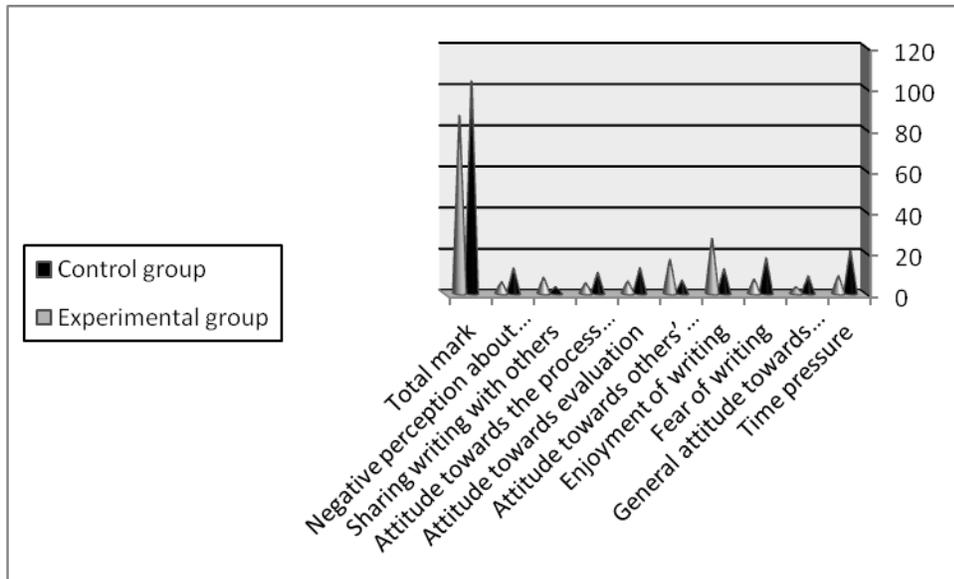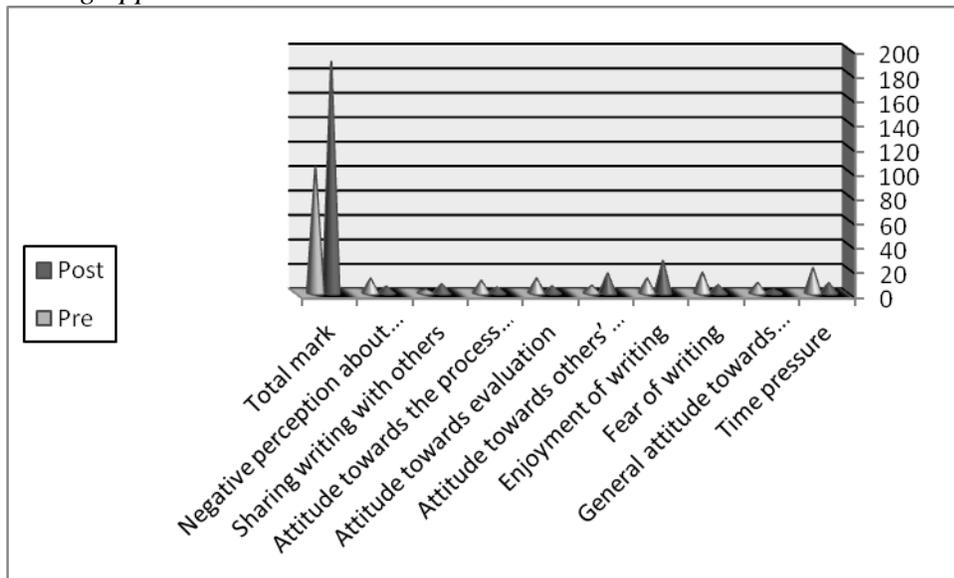
Figure 6. *Shows the mean scores of the experimental group in the pre and post application of writing apprehension scale and its axes.*

Students have a positive perception of the writing tasks assigned in the WQCRWP. They thought that these writing tasks are related to their real-life experiences. In addition to their real-life relevancy, students reported most of the writing was fun, imaginative, and appealing to their interest. Fun factor seemed to be an especially important element for this group of teenaged students in deciding whether they liked a certain writing task or not. In addition, most of the students thought that WQCRWP was helpful to them in generating ideas for their writing. This finding is likely to relate to the advantages students perceived about the web materials; students explicitly stated that the abundant and relevant web materials made writing easier , enabling them to come up with better ideas and richer content for their writing.

Students showed strong preference for the WQCRWP over traditional writing instruction as students found that WQCRWP was more interesting and they felt that the class atmosphere was more relaxing. Students also recognized how the learning situation in the WQCRWP benefited their learning efficacy and autonomy. They reported that working on a personal computer in a lab made them more focused and less distracted and enabled them to learn at their own pace and gain more personalized experience.

More essentially, the results revealed that Web Quest Critical Reading Writing Program (WQCRWP) proved to be effective in developing the experimental group students' critical reading skills (identifying the main idea, recognizing the author's purpose, identifying the author's bias, making inferences properly, recognizing relation between reasons and effects, analyzing denotations and connotations of words, making predictions properly, making comparison and contrast, recognizing the author's tone, drawing logical conclusions, evaluating arguments, identifying fact and opinion, making generalizations, identifying hidden assumptions and making good summary, writing skills (quality (length), purpose, genre, content, organization, grammar, vocabulary choice and language mechanics) and decreasing students' writing apprehension. This result is consistent with many previous studies that found that Web Quest proved to be effective in developing students' ability to read, write and decrease their writing apprehension:

Goodwin-Jones (1993), Gonzales-Bueno(1998), Chu (2004), Termsinsawadi (2009), Puthikanon (2009), Chen (2011) and Sauraya (2011).

This development might be attributed to several factors, which might have helped the experimental group students' progress in EFL critical reading, writing skills and decreasing writing apprehension.

Conclusion:

The purpose of this study is to use Web Quest to develop critical reading, process writing skills and decrease writing apprehension of the first year experimental secondary year students. The development of the Web Quest was carried by following the Web Quest framework whose main principles are based on the constructivist theory of learning, inquiry-based learning, scaffold learning, higher order thinking skills and cooperative learning. Critical reading and process writing lessons of the advanced level of Move Ahead Plus of first year secondary school students are molded into the critical elements of Web Quest specifically designed for teaching in an EFL classroom.

Talking into account that both the experimental and control groups were homogeneous in the level of critical reading skills and writing skills in the pre-tests, therefore, any difference that occurred between the two groups in the post-tests after the application of Web Quest Critical Reading Writing Program (WQCRWP) can be attributed to the use of the program.

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