An Online Course to improve Academic Writing Skills of Undergraduates

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The rapid development of technology has dramatically affected the entire world. Since technology has influenced education, numerous scholars focus on integrating technology; Learning Management Systems, Virtual Learning Environments with education. Existing literature suggests that activities done in an online classroom reduce stress and it motivates the students to participate attentively and actively in learning (Jung & Kim, 2004) and also the online learning environment has a significant effect on the academic improvement of students (Hewagamage: 2012). Therefore, the online medium has already become an essential part of education. Thus, this study explores how undergraduates from different proficiency levels use an online learning environment to improve their academic writing skills. The online platform Edmodo was used as the method of delivery in this study. Four major areas related to academic writing; academic vocabulary, tense shift, linking words and paraphrasing were chosen and an online course was designed with four modules including extra materials and activities. Five third year students who represent different proficiency levels took part in this academic writing course. Analysis of this study indicated that students had a positive perception towards their learning environment. They engaged with all the activities given and completed the course successfully. Although a major improvement was shown in the areas of academic vocabulary, tense shift and linking words, the same level of improvement was not visible in the area of paraphrasing. Another significant finding was that although they were comfortable with the teacher and the online environment, the lack of peer interaction was clearly visible. Therefore, it can be concluded that a well-structured course and a friendly online environment were helpful for academic writing.

Keywords: online learning, academic writing, technology, education