



Positive Effects of E-Learning on Developing EFL Students' Writing Skills

by

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Abstract:

This study explores the impact of e-learning, facilitated by modern technological applications, programs, and electronic devices, on the writing skills of first-year students at the College of Languages and Translation at King Saud University in Saudi Arabia during the academic year 2020. The sample for this study consisted of fifty randomly selected students, and the researcher employed an experimental method. The findings revealed that the electronic applications utilized in education at the College of Languages and Translation significantly contributed to enhancing students' writing skills, enriching their vocabulary, and broadening their understanding of modern technology's applications. The research focuses on improving EFL students' writing skills through motivation-enhancing e-learning strategies. The research emphasizes the critical role of reading in the development of writing skills, highlighting how these two interconnected abilities are enhanced through the use of electronic resources. Additionally, it emphasized how personal electronic devices and social networking sites assist students in mastering writing skills through relevant tools and programs. The research underscores the advantages of utilizing trustworthy online resources, such as university and institute websites, along with reputable periodicals, dictionaries, and training programs. These resources play a significant role in enhancing the development of writing skills among students.

Keywords: Writing skills, e-learning, university students, online resources, language proficiency.

1. Introduction

Effective writing in the English language is a crucial competency for university students, especially in academic settings. It plays an essential role in their educational success and professional development. With the advent of online resources, learners now have access to a wide range of tools and materials that can potentially support their language development. This study aims to explore these online resources' impact on first-year university learners' writing abilities. Currently, technology has provided vibrant applications to non-native learners and native ones in terms of spelling. The Microsoft Office via Word system can correct spelling mistakes up to 90%. Also, many other websites offer free services in this field.

In other words, when students are not sure of the spelling of any word, they write it in the Google bar and can soon get, at least, tens of results about the meaning, pronunciation, definition, and various usages of the word.

Furthermore, social media applications such as WhatsApp, Messenger, Telegram, Soma, and Line are provided with helpful editors as far as spelling is concerned.

The speedy revolution of technology, and the development of the social media wheel, in addition to the widespread use of the Internet, give a clear indication that online learning has become unquestionable for kids, teenagers, and even adults. "The Internet has become one of the vital ways to make available resources for research and learning for both teachers and students to share and acquire information" (Richard and Haya, 2009, 183-198).

1.1. Statement of the Problem

The first-year students in the College of Languages and Translation at King Saud University, in Saudi Arabia, Riyadh City as most EFL students in the world, are not able to write rich

sentences, paragraphs, or essays correctly; they commit some spelling, and grammatical, and stylistic mistakes in their writings. Accordingly, the researcher chose the environment of this university in this research study because it is a highly ranked university regionally and globally, and the students in it reflect the real level of students in Saudi Arabia, which makes it easy to measure.

1.2. Aim of the Study

This study, primarily, aims at investigating the impact of online resources on developing 1st-year university learners' abilities to write in the English language.

1.3. Research Questions

1. How does the use of e-learning, inside and outside the classrooms, develop the learners' skills of writing?
2. How does the use of electronic devices such as the TABLET, which is provided with an interactive course, help students improve their writing skills?
3. To what extent do teachers feel equipped to implement interactive approaches in the classroom as advised by the Saudi MOE?
4. To what extent can the classroom environment positively affect helping students master writing techniques?

1.4. Hypotheses

1. The Internet, in general, and computational learning in particular, can improve the learners' skills of writing.
2. Using "TABLET", which is provided with an interactive course, can help students improve their writing skills in English.
3. Adopting rigorous strategies and modern pedagogy by qualified teachers helps learners avoid the spelling, grammatical, and stylistic mistakes they usually make in their writing.

4. The classroom environment plays an effective and helpful role in aiding students in mastering writing techniques.

1.5. Significance of the study

This study is considered very important and beneficial to everyone interested in learning English and teaching it to EFL students. The study is real, practical, and scientific. It is a result of long-term experience gained by the researcher himself, who worked for twenty years as a teacher, a trainer, and an educational supervisor in primary, intermediate, and secondary schools, plus universities in both government and private sectors.

1.6. Limitations of the Study

This study was conducted at King Saud University in Saudi Arabia, the Faculty of Languages and Translation, Riyadh City. The skills that need to be measured are writing skills, spelling, punctuation marks, and the rules of sentence structure. The study took place in the academic year 2020.

Literature Review

2.1 Students' Difficulties in Acquiring Writing Skills

Mastering English writing skills is a very difficult task for the learners of English as a foreign language (EFL), because it needs many stages, efforts, knowledge, techniques, and motivation. Firstly, EFL students suffer from the absence of familiarity, in the sense that the new language seems to be very strange in terms of sentence structure, function words, as well as other factors: punctuation, abbreviations, and other techniques.

In addition, EFL students are overly accustomed to their native language and are completely involved in its system and structure. That is why they need more time and intensive practice to master the techniques and acquire the spirit of the second language they are learning. The stylistic features of their first language transfer to the target language usage. The information that was stored in the learners' memories throughout twelve

years of learning established symmetry about their first language. Thus, the observer, researcher, and teacher easily find similar repeated types of mistakes made by the participants in the first-year writing course, which is presently called a foundation year. " These fundamental differences between Arabic and English cause Arab learners significant problems. Therefore, they are more prone to committing errors. (Abdelgadir& Laxmi, 2016, 223).

Again, EFL students feel confused now and then because their first language remains stable and deeply rooted in their minds.

The main challenges facing non-native speakers in writing are shown by the following points:

- a) Words with silent letters. Namely, there are letters written but not pronounced, e.g., know, debt, muscle, align.
- b) Words with letters that are pronounced not as they look, e.g., laugh, cough, yacht, weigh, colonel.
- c) Words that change completely in their plural form, such as mouse to mice, child to children, and tooth to teeth.
- d) Problems related to the differences between the Arabic language and the English language.

2.2 E-Learning

E-learning stands for electronic learning. It allows people to take courses via electronic devices such as computers, tablets, iPads, iPods, etc. It can be defined as "The business of providing courses on the Internet for students so that they can study and learn at home". (Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 3rd Edition). It can be defined as "a new way of learning which depends on electronic or digital tools more than human factors. In other words, e-learning provides an entirely new learning

environment for students, thus requiring a different skill set to be successful" (Romiszowski, Alexander, 2004, 27).

The concept of e-learning is becoming very popular, as the numbers show; the majority of the students aged fifteen and over can use a wide variety of social media, and electronic devices such as iPads, mobiles, iPods, PlayStations, Sony games, tablets, etc. In other words, they are open-minded and have a serious chance to develop their writing skills.

Contrarily, they may use these electronic machines for entertainment and waste their time. Accordingly, the teachers' and the parents' pieces of advice play a very serious and effective role.

2.3 Teaching Writing via Electronic Applications and Programs

Teaching writing via applications and electronic programs is something easy and beneficial when teachers master theoretical and practical knowledge. In addition, they should be professional not only in using the tools of technology but in using the needed alternatives when necessary.

At any rate, the new generation prefers learning via electronic applications more than learning via traditional methods. Accordingly, many ways help in teaching students who are going to join the faculty of the English language. Some of the methods are:

a) Automation: Automation helps teachers deal easily with a great number of students in the halls of universities or institutions. They can insert their notes and feedback via electronic applications. Modern applications can offer courses with many programming services that facilitate the teachers' mission.

b) Grammar and spelling check: There are many modern and useful applications, which aid students in correcting their spelling mistakes, such as:

Grammarly application: (<https://www.grammarly.com/>)

This application can edit, correct all grammar errors, offer choices, and enhance students' writings, whether they are texts or words. In addition to Google Corrector, which helps, to some extent, get the appropriate paraphrasing.

Students can use the feedback to make changes before handing in a paper and breaking it down into more manageable chunks so that they won't be overwhelmed. While programs like these are still evolving, they will undoubtedly become a go-to tool to help tutors teach students how to write in the coming decades. (<https://www.teachthought.com/literacy/using-technology-to-teach-writing>).

c) Producing visual data and reporting: Writing-focused software is also available to help teachers keep an eye on students' progress as they produce a paper or complete an assignment. This kind of data can make it possible for students to get help from start to finish from their teachers as they write each word of an assignment.

d) Collaboration: Electronic applications help students interact spontaneously and easily with the learning process in general. They are filled to the brim with excitement, especially when there is interactive content ideas such as photos, videos, entertainment, and new information. Teachers can provide feedback or watch students provide one another with feedback as they go, then step in during summative assessment to assess the final product (i.e., the piece of writing) and the feedback, and the use of the writing process itself.

e) Using personal mobiles: Students nowadays have mobiles with high capacity so that they can download many applications that help them improve their interaction during class or out of the official learning period.

To put it in another way, they can write notes or ideas, get information, search for pictures and locations, and use the spelling corrector.

f) Helping students publish and promote their ideas: Teachers ask students to create blogs because they encourage students to create writing that is geared toward a wider audience, which can give quite different results than asking students to craft an essay or a journal that will be read by the teacher alone. <https://www.teachthought.com/literacy/using-technology-to-teach-writing>)

Several education-centered blogging sites can help to address any security and safety issues parents might have and still allow students to craft publishable writing.

On these sites, students can work together to craft a classroom blog or work independently to develop a blog on a given topic. Much of the writing students will do in their future work may be digitally based, so learning to write in the digital sphere is a key skill to develop.

Most students love getting the chance to share their writings through a blog and then promote that content on social media or even promote their social media through a blog! –so it can be a great motive for reluctant writers.

g) Social media: social media plays a very significant role in helping EFL students improve their writing skills, because they chat with their friends, and write some notes and comments.

Generally, interacting with social media empowers EFL students to comprehend the techniques of reading and writing skills simultaneously. Namely, writing is a lame skill that can't

stand by itself. Moreover, they become well-trained and familiar with the target language.

2.4 Previous Studies:

Many studies were conducted to analyze errors made by Arabic EFL learners in their writings. Other recent studies show similar findings concerning Arab EFL students, that is, serious problems in writing English that would hinder their ability to express their thoughts on paper.

At the same time, many studies discussed the impact of E-learning on developing EFL writing skills.

Factually, I have benefited from a series of previous studies that tackled some topics similar to this study.

The first study of the benefit theme was done by Ruwaida Abu Rass, which is entitled: (Challenges Facing Arab Students in Writing Well-Developed Paragraphs in English)

The participants in this study are first-year students: and EFL learners. They come from the same geographical area, aged 19-21 years.

This study aims to investigate the problems facing Palestinian Arab students in learning English as a foreign language (EFL) in developing well-woven paragraphs in English. Otherwise stated, the stylistic features of their first language, Arabic, transfer into the target language, English. For example, they tend to write long sentences with coordinating conjunctions, repeat themselves, argue through presentation and elaboration, and often beat about the bush and repeat phrases before stating the main points.

The data of this study have been collected for the last fourteen years and include samples of 205 students, which show similar repeated types of mistakes made by the participants in the first-year writing course. The collected data shows that students

face many problems in writing good pieces of writing, as well as concluding sentences, and supporting details by adding examples and reasons. To help these learners write good samples of paragraphs in English, a variety of approaches such as contrastive analysis, error analysis, and the process approach have been employed.

The findings of this study clarified that by the end of their first school year at the college, most of the students succeeded in writing good topics and concluding sentences. However, there are many common notes:

1. Giving supporting details, including examples and reasons, is not fully mastered.
2. The English writing style is not completely mastered and still needs much practice: some students keep on transferring the style of Arabic writing and developing a cohesive paragraph by using the right coordinators and transition words.

The most important thing that the researcher benefited from this research was the fact that EFL students are very close to and very impressed by their first language, which is why they need a lot of time and very intensive training, especially in writing, to raise their writing skill level.

The second study is entitled: (Effects of E-learning on Language Learning). It was done by three researchers: Neda Mohammadia, Vahid Ghorbanib, and Farideh Hamidiab, in 2010.

This study aimed to show the effects of e-learning and compare it with traditional forms of language learning. They try to mention these matters explicitly. They try to explain different parts of e-learning and their effects on language learning and finally try to answer the raised questions.

As the world progresses, the use of e-learning, electronic devices, the internet, and computers in teaching and the learning

process increases too. We have to naturalize ourselves to it and improve our abilities to use technology to expand our knowledge. The more teachers and learners get familiar with technology, the more they can integrate it with teaching, which provides teachers with practical and creative ideas and makes them create their eclectic approaches.

This study aims to organize some programs to teach educators and learners how to use electronic devices in learning, such as the Internet, the computer, and other applications, and increase their knowledge about multimedia and other devices that can be used for language learning, so that they can keep up with the world.

The useful content that the researcher benefited from this study is:

1. EFL learners should familiarize themselves with using electronic devices and invest in them completely in improving their writing skills. Also, EFL students should have ideas and skills to overcome emergency breakdowns.
2. Online games help EFL students improve their skills not only in writing but in all other skills: reading, listening, and speaking for language are considered interdependent and one unit. Namely, games are interesting and attract more attention from children and learners- they can directly affect the following parts of language learning: vocabulary, pronunciation, and the techniques of writing.
3. Internet and multimedia technologies are the basic enablers of e-learning, with content, technologies, and services being identified as the three key sectors of the e-learning industry. Additionally, using the internet empowers EFL students to choose their methods, read their preferred magazines, and join chat rooms.

4. E-Learning activities: The most beneficial activity is chatting, in the sense that it provides lots of conversations and discussions that develop students' fluency and exchange ideas and experiences. On the other hand, the choice activity module enables a teacher to ask a single question and offer a selection of possible responses. It is useful when teachers want to stimulate students' thinking via a poll or would like to test their understanding. This again allows them to use the language and to be exposed to their peers' views through votes. Moreover, the database activity module enables participants to create, maintain, and search a collection of entries (i.e., records). The structure of the entries is defined by the teacher as several fields. The Hot Pot activity allows teachers to distribute interactive learning materials to their students via Moodle and view reports on the students' responses and results.

At the end of the study, the researchers summarize the advantages of the E-Learning Moodle as follows:

1. It is an interactive and appealing mode of instruction and learning.
2. It motivates students and increases their global awareness.
3. It encourages learners to work independently, as each student can work on different tasks in the integrated learning environment.
4. It improves students' language skills by practicing reading, listening, speaking, and writing via the different e-learning resources and tasks.
5. It increases human sustainability as students acquire skills, attitudes, and attributes that benefit themselves and others and live in the long-term future.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

This research is applied to the first-year students at King Saud University, College of Languages and Translation, in Riyadh City for the academic year 2020. The researcher took permission from the authority to apply the tests.

The students are fifty males who represent various social, material, and cultural backgrounds. The participants were divided into two groups.

The scientific level and the mental powers of the participants, necessarily, are not the same concerning the skills of writing. They are divided into three levels: primary, intermediate, and advanced.

That is to say, the intermediate level students represent about 65%, the primary level students represent about 10%, while the advanced level students represent about 25 %.

All the participants have good communication with social media, and electronic devices such as iPhones, tablets, iPads, mobiles, iPods, PlayStations, Sony games, etc. In other words, they are open-minded and have a serious chance to develop their writing skills.

Correspondingly, the halls where they learn are provided with electronic programs. Namely, the courses they depend on are generally interactive.

3.2 Instrument

The researcher used the pre-tests and the post-tests to measure the students' writing skills in the groups. That is to say, he chose them as samples. As for measuring the writing skills, the researcher prepared seven main valid and reliable questions that suit the mental, educational, and social backgrounds of the

participants. As for measuring writing skills, the researcher has selected attractive, various, and comprehensive questions.

3.3 Procedure

The researcher has already prepared the pre-test according to the content of the previous curricula they studied in the primary, intermediate, and secondary stages, and sent it to four reviewers. After that, he got feedback about the questions and comments from the reviewers. They advised the researcher to identify the purpose of every question concerning the skill it measures.

4. Data Analysis

The seven writing skills being investigated in this study include Comprehension skills, Sentence-combining skills, spelling skills, Punctuation skills, Memory skills, Grammar skills, and Composition writing skills. The data collected were entered and treated using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The researcher employs various statistical techniques or methods to analyze the data, taking into consideration the research questions and testing the research hypotheses. Among the most important statistical methods used were descriptive statistics including mean and standard deviation, in addition to a pair-sample t-test used to examine whether there are statistically significant differences between students' scores in the pre and post-tests to evaluate the effectiveness of using a tablet as a tool of learning for teaching English language to non-native speakers.

Table1 Results of the t-test in the pre-test

Skills	Groups	Mean	SD	T-test	Df	P-value
Comprehension Skills	Group1	10.24	2.85	-0.641	48	0.53
	Group2	10.80	3.32			
Sentence-Combining Skills	Group1	5.36	1.78	-0.760	48	0.45
	Group2	5.76	1.94			
Spelling Skills	Group1	5.66	1.80	-0.633	48	0.53
	Group2	6.00	1.78			
Punctuation Skill	Group1	6.00	1.61	-0.618	48	0.54
	Group2	6.28	1.59			
Memory Skill	Group1	6.36	1.91	1.047	48	0.30
	Group2	5.80	1.87			
Grammar Skill	Group1	3.68	1.75	-0.390	48	0.70
	Group2	3.88	1.88			
Composition Writing Skill	Group1	4.96	3.23	-0.729	48	0.47
	Group2	5.64	3.37			
Overall Results	Group1	42.28	11.73	-0.578	48	0.57
	Group2	44.16	11.25			

The results of the t-test show that there are no statistically significant differences between the two groups of scores of writing skills, as all the p-values are greater than the (0.05) significant level. This result indicates that the two groups are similar in the level of writing skills in the pre-test.

Table 2 Students' Post-test Scores.

Skills	Group 1		Group 2	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Comprehension skill.	14.16	2.94	14.48	2.84
Sentence- Combining Skill	7.16	1.52	7.32	1.86
Spelling Skill.	7.04	1.49	7.64	1.50
Punctuation Skill.	9.24	2.59	8.84	2.32
Memory Skill.	8.40	1.87	7.48	1.29
Grammar Skill.	5.80	1.61	5.80	1.61
Composition Writing Skill.	9.32	6.37	8.40	3.71
Overall Results	59.12	15.27	59.96	9.19

When comparing the total scores in Table 4.2 with the total scores in Table 4.1, it is clear that there is a difference between the scores, i.e., it is on the positive side of the post-test scores. This means the implementation of technology devices for teaching students who are non-native speakers of English improved their level of ability in writing.

Table 3 Students' Improvement in Percentage

Test	Post-test mean	Pre-test mean	Mean difference	% of improvement
Comprehension Skill	14.32	10.52	3.8	36.1%
Sentence-combining Skill	7.24	5.56	1.68	30.2%
Spelling Skill	7.34	5.84	1.5	25.7%
Punctuation Skill	9.04	6.14	2.9	47.2%
Memory Skill	6.94	6.08	0.86	14.1%
Grammar Skill	5.80	3.78	2.02	53.4%
Composition Writing Skill	8.86	5.30	3.56	67.2%
Test	Post-test mean	Pre-test mean	Mean difference	% of improvement
Comprehension Skill	14.32	10.52	3.8	36.1%
Sentence-combining Skill	7.24	5.56	1.68	30.2%
Spelling Skill	7.34	5.84	1.5	25.7%
Punctuation Skill	9.04	6.14	2.9	47.2%
Memory Skill	6.94	6.08	0.86	14.1%
Grammar Skill	5.80	3.78	2.02	53.4%
Composition Writing Skill	8.86	5.30	3.56	67.2%
Overall Results	59.54	43.22	16.32	37.8%

The most important improvement has been in composition writing skills, which reached 67.2%, while in second place came grammar skills at 53.4%, whereas punctuation skills came in third place at 47.2%. In fourth place came the comprehension skill at 38.1%. The results also show that the least improvement is in memory skills at 14.1%.

5. Discussion and Findings

The findings of this study shed light on the effectiveness of online resources in enhancing writing skills among first-year university learners. The discussion will explore the specific aspects of online resources that contribute to improved writing abilities, such as interactive exercises, writing prompts, grammar and vocabulary resources, and peer feedback platforms. Additionally, potential challenges and limitations associated with the use of online resources are discussed. The findings are as follows:

1. Watching English programs, reading stories, and joining live conversations with native speakers via social media tools, as well as school activities, develop the students' oral skills.
2. Listening to English native speakers helps non-native learners develop their writing skills.
3. The aptitude for learning English is principal and helpful to EFL students.
4. Self-trust helps EFL learners express themselves better.
5. Encouraging students to express and speak without interruption or correction to the mistakes they make is a helpful factor in acquiring English skills.
6. A good relationship with students is vital and helps students love the teacher alongside the subject.
7. Encouraging students to be attentive helps them improve their writing skills.
8. Oral skills need awareness and focus because they are difficult.
9. TABLETS motivate students' autonomy and confidence and may motivate students' motivation to learn how to write formally and informally.

11- TABLETS and Electronic applications have different and/or various activities that attract the students' minds.

12- TABLETS and electronic apps provide a great deal of learners' exposure to a variety of written authentic discourse.

13- E-learning is not a panacea for enhancing literacy; e-learning should be used in an equal balance with other traditional methods.

14- Arabic-speaking EFL learners do not usually use linking verbs in their mother tongue Arabic. Hence, they tend to drop the linking verbs as well when they use English.

15- E-learning is a beneficial tool for students, but we should not overuse it as students need verbal and face-to-face communication to develop their cognitive and social skills through interaction.

16- Teachers can directly observe how students individually perform, while students can receive direct feedback from their teachers.

17-The classroom environment is crucial in fostering students' attention to the subject being taught, and writing is one of these skills that can be better taught in an environment rich with teaching aids.

18- New and modern pedagogy helps learners overcome their mechanical and overall writing quality.

19- Educators should devise a wide range of pedagogical strategies to fill in the gaps of learning differences and meet the learners' various preferences and learning styles.

6. Conclusion

This study aims to provide valuable insights into the impact of online resources on the development of writing abilities in the English language among first-year university learners. The findings inform educators and curriculum designers about the potential benefits and challenges of integrating online resources

into writing instruction. Ultimately, this research enhances the quality of language education and supports the academic success of university students.

7. Recommendations

In light of the findings, the following recommendations can be made:

1. English language teachers should allocate two hours per week to practicing lengthy writing techniques with students.
2. Private school administrations should provide students with interactive CDs in addition to the curriculum to give the students real chances to speak, listen, and communicate with native speakers.
3. English teachers are supposed to encourage students to learn school radio broadcasting in English.
4. English teachers can go with students on trips to various places: archaeological sites, fields, supermarkets, oases, and factories to help students acquire new vocabulary.
5. University students should have personal booklets to write their daily activities, express feelings, and authenticate the most important incidents.
6. Labs are something basic in schools to develop listening comprehension skills, which lead, in turn, to the development of writing and reading skills.
- 7- Encouraging students to listen to English programs and cartoon films through TV and the Internet.
8. Providing school libraries with short stories and novels to help students become more familiar with English.
9. Motivating students helps them be more active, more enthusiastic, and more confident.
10. Aiding students in being part of the lesson, to help them participate, answer, negotiate, and express themselves freely.

11. Teachers are asked to adopt indirect learning strategies when teaching grammar.

7. Suggestions for Future Research Studies

1. Conduct a very specific study regarding the factors that help EFL first-year university students develop their skills in writing concerning both formal writing and day-to-day writing.
2. Conduct a study about the micro and macro skills in writing and reading.
3. Provide a study concerning the specifications of the communications and dialogues that help students acquire a lot of new vocabulary and encourage them to practice their spelling confidently.
4. Provide a very specific study about the abbreviations used in electronic applications and social media in general.

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