

Challenges University Students Faced in Their Online Paragraph Writing

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Abstract

The study aimed to explore the challenges that faced Ajloun National University EFL students through their online paragraph writing course using Microsoft Teams. 40 second-year EFL students participated in the study. They completed a 10-item questionnaire at the end of an online paragraph writing course. Means and standard deviation for the type and number of challenges were calculated. The Independent Sample t- Test was applied. The results showed that they faced five challenges: inability to focus, lack of interaction, problems getting knowledge, cooperating with classmates, and placing distractions. Based on the results of the study some recommendations for teaching and learning online paragraph writing were suggested.

Keywords: Ajloun National University, EFL Learners, Microsoft teams, paragraph writing

1. Introduction

Writing is the fourth principal language skill. It is a productive skill that requires mental work as we think through the writing material we produce. It is learned with integration with the other language's main skills: listening, speaking, and reading. Language learners suffer from weakness in this skill, even though educators exerted great efforts to enhance and develop students' level in this skill (Toubat, 2003). With the introduction of technology, specifically the computer and the Internet, learners' writing levels have been enhanced. They could benefit from electronic libraries and the Internet.

Ahmad states that technology has positive effects on teaching English language. It motivates students and helps them learn effectively. It helps teachers adapt classroom activities, consequently enhances language teaching learning process. Chuo (2007) states that using the Internet affects the way teachers use and students learn in the EFL context positively.

Students all over the world studied in different schools and universities, using different online platforms due to the corona virus pandemic (Covid-19) during the previous two years. One of these courses that was taught at Ajloun National University, Jordan is paragraph writing. Microsoft Teams as an online platform for giving lectures was used.

Allen and Seaman (2017) state that the number of learners who were enrolled in online lectures in 2015 was six million, whereas it was 1.6 million in 2002. This shows that the number of learners using online writing has increased.

Online learning has advantages and shortcomings. Dorf (2019) categorized education of technology into the following: environment, resources, tools, and methods. Nguyen (2015) supports the educational process through using the Internet which he calls "Online learning". Rajabi (2020) pointed out the differences between traditional teaching and learning and teaching and learning via the internet. He states that with traditional learning, students lack the chance to communicate effectively; they also lack self-confidence and flexibility. Nguyen and Duong (2021) investigated the challenges of online learning using Microsoft Teams that faced EFL students at Van Lang University. The findings showed that the resources of the challenges resulting from the Internet connection software and machine problems and errors.

More researchers (e.g. Tsai, 2018) said that using the Microsoft Teams platform is beneficial as it provides better features, such as video conferencing, chat rooms and material discussion. Zayapragussara (2020) pointed out that online learning benefits students and enhances their self-discipline. Rajabi (2020) stresses learners' participation, autonomy, and discipline via online learning. Other researchers mention some shortcomings of online learning. Rajabi (2020) points out that learners lack face-to-face communication with teachers; the assessment process of learners take more time via online teaching.

Tran (2021) investigated the impact of Microsoft Teams on EFL learners at Van Lang University. The participants were 80 first-year students. She used a questionnaire as an instrument. The results showed that students benefited from learning using Microsoft Teams, and the students' attitudes were positive towards this application.

Rajabi (2020) investigated the students' attitudes towards learning using Microsoft Teams. The participants were 28 university students. They completed a questionnaire at the end of the course. The results showed that they have positive attitudes towards teacher students interaction.

Loan (2022) investigated the difficulties that face EFL learners via online writing courses through Microsoft Teams. The participants were

96 students from two third-year classes. They completed a questionnaire. The results showed that there were nine challenges, such as technical problems, health and psychological problems.

Although more research studies have been conducted on the benefits and challenges of online teaching and learning using Microsoft Teams on language skills, few have been conducted on paragraph writing in Jordan and none at Ajloun National University. Therefore, this study comes to fill the gap by investigating the challenges that face students at Ajloun National University in their online paragraph writing using Microsoft Teams. Universities and instructors should be aware of the challenges that students may face with online learning, such as time allotted for assignments and lecture distractions and lack of computerized materials, so that they could help students overcome such challenges and facilitate their learning process. Also universities might carry out intensive training courses on online learning for students who face such learning challenges.

1.1. Questions of the Study

The study attempts to answer the following questions:

- 1-What are the challenges that Ajloun National University EFL students face in learning paragraph writing via Microsoft Teams?
- 2- Are there any statistically significant differences between male and female EFL students in the number and type of challenges that Ajloun National University EFL students face in learning paragraph writing via Microsoft Teams?

1.2. Definition of terms

ANU: Ajloun National University, Jordan.

Microsoft Teams:

Microsoft Teams is a chat-based collaboration online platform.

Jordan uses Microsoft Teams as an online platform for giving university lectures.

3. Methodology

This study was conducted quantitatively and qualitatively. Participants who were second-year EFL students completed a five-point Likert Scale questionnaire, which consisted of ten items, nine were in the form of the Likert Scale and number ten was open where students could add other challenges. The data were collected via e-mail for statistical analysis (SPSS). Means and standard deviation were calculated.

3.1. Participants of the study

Participants were 20 male and 20 female students majoring in English language and literature (just two sections) during the second semester of the academic year 2022.

3.2. Instruments of the study

To explore the challenges that Ajloun National University EFL students face in learning paragraph writing via Microsoft Teams, the researcher adopted a questionnaire that consisted of ten items, nine of which follow a five Likert scale response degree, and the tenth item was open where students can add other challenges (adopted with modifications from Loan, 2022). These include strongly agree, agree, neutral, strongly disagree and disagree. The questionnaire was delivered to students via e-mail and the data were also collected via e-mail.

3.3. Validity of the Questionnaire

The validity of the questionnaire was obtained by giving it to five professors from (ANU) English Language Department; modifications were made following their suggestions.

4. Findings and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the study. It includes descriptive statistics for participants' answers to questionnaire items. It also includes the discussion of the findings.

To answer this question, "What are the challenges that Ajloun National University EFL students face in learning paragraph writing via Microsoft Teams?", the means and standard deviation for the type and number of challenges that face Ajloun National University EFL students face in learning paragraph writing via Microsoft Teams were calculated. The tables below show that.

Table 1.Means and Standard Deviation for Challenges EFL Students Face in Learning Online Paragraph Writing

No	Items	Male (N=20)		Female (N=20)	
		Mean	Standard. Deviation	Mean	Standard. Deviation
1	I faced technical problems when I learned paragraphs in this online writing course via Microsoft Teams.	4.70	0.47	4.75	0.44
2	I could not focus appropriately while taking this online paragraph writing course via Microsoft Teams.	4.75	0.44	4.80	0.41
3	There was a lack of interaction between me, my classmates, and instructor while taking this online writing course via Microsoft Teams.	4.80	0.41	4.75	0.44
4	I could not manage time when I took this online paragraph writing course via Microsoft Teams.	4.70	0.57	4.90	0.31
5	I faced health problems when I took this online paragraph writing course via Microsoft Teams.	4.80	0.41	4.80	0.41
6	I found it difficult to gain knowledge when I took this online paragraph writing course via Microsoft Teams.	4.75	0.44	4.75	0.55
7	I was motivated during my study of this online paragraph writing course via Microsoft Teams.	4.55	0.60	4.45	0.83
8	I had some psychological problems when I took this online writing course via Microsoft Teams.	4.50	0.61	4.75	0.55
9	It was difficult for me to collaborate with my classmates when I took this online writing course via Microsoft Teams.	4.70	0.47	4.60	0.68
Total Means		4.69	0.28	4.73	0.40

Item 10 What other challenges did you face?(free answer)

Table (1) shows that:

For male students, the highest mean reached (4.80) out of (5) for item (3) “There was a lack of interaction between the students while learning this online writing course via Microsoft Teams,” and for item (5), which got the same percentage(4.80) “I faced health problems when I studied this online paragraph writing course via Microsoft Teams.” by also high agreement degree, whereas the lowest means was (4.50) for items (8) "I have some psychological problems when I learned this online writing course via Microsoft Teams." by high agreement degree. The total means reached (4.69) by high agreement degree.

For female students, the highest mean reached (4.90) for item (4) " I was unable to manage time when I took this online paragraph writing course via Microsoft Teams " by a high agreement degree, whereas the lowest mean was (4.45) for item (7) " I was motivated during my study in this online paragraph writing course via Microsoft Teams." by also a high agreement degree. The total mean reached (4.73) by also a high agreement degree.

The quantitative analysis of the findings also shows that both male and female students faced the following challenges with a high degree of agreement as the means were about the same value:

- inability to focus.
- lack of interaction.
- problem in getting knowledge.
- problem in collaborating with classmates.
- place distractions.

The researcher believes that the students who faced these challenges did not take enough online courses that ANU used to give before the COVID – 19 pandemic. These students might not receive enough training and practice. They might got used to traditional learning (face-to-face).ANU had two kinds of programs: the morning program(Sunday to Wednesday), where students receive their lectures(face-to-face) at the university; and the afternoon program, where students receive their lectures face-to-face on Saturday and online lectures on another day of the week. Moreover, some students did not have a suitable private place at home to receive all their lectures, so

they were faced with some distractions at home that affected their concentration and understanding of the main points. This is shown through their misunderstanding of some points explained and their lack of participation. These results do not conform with Nguyen and Duong’s (2021) that the challenges result from the internet connection and machine errors as students who faced the challenges did not complain about the internet transmission. There was a cooperation between the Internet companies and Jordanian universities to strengthen the internet transmission to reach every place in the country. Moreover, the university provides some students with digital devices and the necessary equipment to receive their lectures online.

Moreover, the analysis also showed that a significant number of students did not face the following challenges.

1. I was not motivated.
2. I had some psychological problems.
3. I faced health problems.
4. I was unable to manage the time.
5. I faced technical problems.

The findings show that students received enough motivation as their instructors were trained to motivate students at ANU. Students also did not face health, psychological or technical problems. Concerning health and psychological problems, students were instructed to use and deal with this kind of learning in a way that may keep them away from health and psychological problems: they received some training videos, they got teachers' kind treatment and motivation, and had previous experience of online learning preceded the COVID-19 pandemic. So this way of teaching was not new to them. For the technical problems, there was cooperation between the Internet companies and Jordanian universities to strengthen the internet transmission to reach every place in the country. Moreover, the university provides some students with digital devices and the necessary equipment to receive their online lectures.

Concerning the challenge of managing the lecture time, the analysis shows that students did not face this challenge, means were (0,31) for both males and females respectively. They had an accurate timetable, well-prepared and supervised by ANU computer engineers and faculty officers.

Concerning item ten of the questionnaire, **'What other challenges did you face when you learned this online paragraph writing course via Microsoft Teams?'**, students faced the following challenges:

Table 2. Other Challenges Students Faced in their Online Paragraph Writing

No	Items	Male Frequency	Percentage	Female Frequency	Percentage
1	Time was not enough to answer the assignments.	14	70	14	70
2	Study distractions around me.	6	30	7	35
3	Poor understanding.	3	20	3	20

For item ten of the questionnaire, both male and female students faced three challenges with almost the same means. The reason is that both male and female students studied at the same university, in the same department, and were taught by the same instructor using the same online platform. Slight differences were among their responses that are not statistically significant, table 2 shows that. The challenges are the following:

- Time was not enough to answer the assignments
- Study distractions around me
- Poor understanding

The analysis shows that the means and percentages of these challenges are low, except "time required for assignments." This is because students have three or four courses a day and this requires a lot of time for preparation and research for assignments, so they feel that such assignments need more time to prepare and submit.

The second challenge is related to noise at home and the inability to receive an online lecture without distractions from around them or from other classmates. It may be because of the unavailability of suitable private study rooms, as mentioned above, but the analysis shows that only a small number of students faced this challenge (27.5). Students mentioned this challenge again, in spite of the fact that it was mentioned in the previous items of the questionnaire. Students might repeat this challenge as a kind of focus to stress a quick solution to this challenge. They may want to show that this problem really affected the overflow of the lectures and hindered their understanding and concentration.

A small number (7.5) of the participants had a poor understanding of the lecture because they did not get used to this kind of learning as they did not register and study more online courses at university, like other classmates who did not face such challenge (82.5). Students who faced this challenge used to receive traditional (face-to-face) learning. They ask, discuss and receive answers directly from instructors and classmates.

The second question: **'Are there any statistically significant differences between male and female EFL students in the challenges that face Ajloun National University EFL students face in learning paragraph writing via Microsoft Teams?'**

To answer this question, the Independent Sample t. Test was applied to explore significant differences between male and female EFL students in the challenges that Ajloun National University EFL students face in learning paragraph writing via Microsoft Teams; table (3) shows that.

Table 3.Challenge Differences between ANU Male and Female EFL Students Due to Gender

gender	N	Mean	Standard. Deviation	"t" value	Sig
Males	20	4.69	0.28	-0.303	0.764
Females	20	4.73	0.40		

Table (3) shows that there were no statistically significant differences between male and female EFL students in the type and number of challenges that Ajloun National University EFL students faced in learning paragraph writing via Microsoft Teams. ("t" value reached (0.303) by sig (0.764). These students studied at the same university and in the same department. They were taught by the same instructors. Moreover, they live in similar living and educational environments.

5. Conclusion

This study investigated the challenges that Ajloun National University EFL students faced in paragraph writing via Microsoft Teams. Students shifted from traditional (face-to-face) learning to the online one that affected their learning. Some students faced challenges that affected their paragraph writing, so their paragraphs might not reflect their real writing level, due to reasons, such as time required for the assignments, interaction, study distractions and poor understanding of the lectures. At the same time, ANU students did not face challenges, such as health, psychological and technical problems. Students benefited from online learning via Microsoft Teams in paragraph writing.

6. Recommendations

The researcher suggests the following recommendations:

1. Instructors should be aware of the challenges that students may face with learning via Microsoft Teams, such as time allotted for assignments and lecture distractions.
2. Intensive training on online learning via online platforms should be carried out for students who face online learning challenges.
3. Other studies should be conducted at other universities for the small number of participants included in this study.
4. Other instruments can be used to conduct similar studies, such as tests and interviews.

Biography

Dr. Mahmoud A. Al- Sobh was born in BeitYafa, Jordan in 1959. He is currently serving as an associate professor at the Department of English Language and Literature. His Ph.D. is in English Instruction as a Foreign Language. His research interests include: Applied Linguistics and Computer Assisted language learning.

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