

# The Effects of the Online versus Face-to-face (F2F) Modes of Teaching on the Academic Achievement of EFL Learners in Writing Skills Courses

Mariam Yousef Abduh<sup>1</sup> & Mohammad Owais Khan<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of English, College of Languages and Translation, Najran University, Najran, Saudi Arabia

Correspondence: Department of English, College of Languages and Translation, Najran University, Saudi Arabia.

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## Abstract

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) practitioners regard writing as one of the most innovative discrete skills to teach. Many researchers examined the writing difficulties of EFL students and provided resolutions and guidance. Although the viability of the planned objectives was re-examined before any conclusions were made. However, this research aimed to investigate the effect of online and face-to-face (F2F) teaching methods on students' academic performance in writing skills. The participants, N=44, were divided into two groups A and B and belonged to the English department in the second semester at Najran University, Najran, KSA. The controlled group A received online instruction, whereas the experimental group B received face-to-face instruction. A quasi-experimental study design was employed using the pre-test and the post-test research instruments. A test was administered to two groups to measure their levels of homogeneity at the beginning of the semester. Another test was then administered to the same groups after the first semester of teaching. In order to analyze the data, the SPSS program was used. According to the results, the F2F intervention improved student performance over the online mode. The F2F mode of participation was more comfortable and engaging for participants than the online mode. Additionally, F2F discussion produced better writing performances from the students than online communication does. Thus, despite certain benefits associated with F2F learning, further research is required in order to fully understand how F2F teaching approaches affect English learners' academic achievement in writing.

**Keywords:** EFL learners, online vs. Face-to-face teaching, writing skills, academic performance

## 1. Introduction

Writing skills have long been regarded as one of the most innovative discrete skills to teach by English as a Foreign Language (EFL) professionals. Professionals who teach English as a foreign language (EFL) consider writing skills to be one of the most inventive separate abilities to teach. Writing techniques are perceived as a challenging subject to learn by Arab EFL students. Many students can comprehend the language even if they struggle to effectively communicate their views. The issue is a lack of appropriate vocabulary and innovation in writing. Writing skills are the greatest menace for most learners. To increase students' writing skills, numerous educational experts work hard. Nevertheless, teaching writing is a very difficult task for teachers to do creatively so that students can become active learners and greatly benefit from the creative teaching methods used by the instructor. To satisfy the undergraduate teaching and learning goals for writing skills, the current study examines undergraduate students' assessments of the degree of success or failure of employing online versus F2F teaching methods. Furthermore, the experiment of this research examined the efficiency of F2F and online collaborative settings for developing learners' acquisition of writing abilities in English as a foreign language. Rojabi (2020) demonstrated some distinctions between teaching in an online classroom and in a traditional F2F classroom when students can be present. He listed the drawbacks of F2F instruction, such as the lack of opportunities for communication, self-confidence, and response on the part of the students, and the benefits of online instruction, such as flexibility and a stimulating learning environment, which are good for students learning. Additionally, Bentley et al. (2012) facilitate teaching and learning activities via the online method, and this type of learning activity is referred to as an "online" and "e-learning" system.

Al-Khsawneh (2010) indicated the cause of weaknesses in the writing skills of the Arab EFL learners who recognized that their shortcomings in English were primarily caused by the surroundings and the pedagogical practices. Their poor performance in English proficiency is either caused by a lack of student motivation or a lack of teacher engagement. Due to the isolated society, many students interact in their native tongue. However, some techniques used to teach English included utilizing Arabic as the instruction language, writing in Arabic during English lessons, having teachers who weren't fluent in English, and not having writing assignments in schools.

### 1.1 Teaching Writing

Today's writers can be said to engage in social interaction while they write. It doesn't only come from one individual or one kind of thought; rather, it grows out of discourse groups in social contexts. Students don't write very frequently, and the majority of their writing is restricted to the classroom. Most learners are reluctant to write because they are worried about making mistakes. Writing is particularly a challenging skill among other language skills for Arab EFL students. The most crucial aspect of writing exercises is that for the learning

process to be truly valuable, students must be personally involved. It takes a specific pragmatic strategy to encourage student participation in the activity while also enhancing and developing writing abilities. The teacher should be explicit about the abilities they are attempting to foster. The teacher must then identify which methods or exercises will best help students learn the target skill (writing).

Individual or group efforts can be made to acquire knowledge about writing processes through self-reflection or discussion. Students can work together in a variety of ways. The subject of teaching writing to EFL learners in an online learning environment has received a lot of attention in the literature. Online instruction is more advantageous than F2F instruction for students' development of EFL writing abilities. The complicated linguistic structures can be used during online learning than during F2F instruction. The effectiveness of the online learning environment as a pedagogical tool was put into doubt by the researchers after they examined the role of online teaching in producing instructions.

**2. Literature Review**

Numerous pieces of research have been done recently to determine how online learning affects students' performance, but few studies have looked at how students' writing abilities develop. Several studies have shown that creating an online course increases students' grades and that they have a favorable attitude toward its implementation. According to Landrum et al. (2020), virtual interaction in online classes provides flexibility and simplicity because of the special features of a learning management system, such as productivity tools, evaluation tools, grading rubrics, chat discussions, assignment submissions, and file sharing.

According to Tran (2021), who examined the efficacy of using Microsoft Teams for EFL learning, the students had positive opinions toward the benefits of using Microsoft Teams for their online study. Microsoft Teams effectively teaches and learns English as a foreign language. Meanwhile, she also mentions a few drawbacks of using Microsoft Teams for the online teaching and learning process.

Feng and Powers (2005) in their study used students' writing samples that had grammar and writing errors to develop mini lessons for practice and a subsequent writing assignment to demonstrate improvement. Tutty and Klien (2008), Illustrated that technology (online teaching) is very engaging for all age groups and can be used to improve learning for all performance-based training. Similarly, Majkowski (2013) delved that technology (online teaching) might give people access to an abundance of educational resources, enabling them to study anything at any level from anybody, anywhere. It involves striking the right mix between in-person and online learning.

Vander (2012) elucidated that the shift to blended learning, which combines in-person and online training, aims to increase learning productivity by providing better teaching tools, more time, and informative data. In a traditional classroom situation, it enables individualized instruction. Correspondingly, Bonk and Graham (2004) documented in the Handbook of Blended Learning, "the widespread adoption and availability of digital learning technologies have led to increased levels of integration of computer-mediated instructional elements into the traditional F2F [face to face] learning experience."

O'Toole & Absalom (2003) stated that sharing content online has a favorable impact on students' success levels. They further discovered that students who read the online content in addition to the regular in-class lecture performed higher on a quiz than those who relied solely on the in-class lecture.

On the other hand, other studies have listed the drawbacks and challenges of online writing instruction for EFL students. They provided evidence that online writing instruction had an effect on students' academic achievement. Fortune et al. (2011) indicated that online teamwork, technology, F2F communication, and the learning environment are all significant elements of online learning. These factors have an impact on the online writing instruction and learning provided by Microsoft Teams. In addition, teachers and students need to spend more time assessing the online teaching and learning process. Similar views were given by Bakerson et al. (2015), who claimed that online learning also lacks a pattern, repetitive study, and self-motivation. Sun (2014) noticed that learners' motivation, organization, and contentment are lacking in online learning. Thus, writing instruction online had an impact on EFL students' academic performance and presented challenges to students.

**3. Research Methodology**

This study compares an online language learning approach with F2F instruction to determine the effects on Saudi EFL learners' academic performance in writing skills. To evaluate the overall development made by both groups, pre-and post-tests were administered to both groups. Finally, the scores were analyzed using the SPSS program to assess the effectiveness of both teaching methods and the development of students' writing abilities.

*3.1 Research Participants*

The data were collected from 44 undergraduate students who enrolled in writing skill courses (male and female) at Najran University in the academic session 2021-22 and 2022-23. These students' test grades were selected for the analysis of the study. These participants were divided into two groups viz. A controlled group (A), students who received a writing skill course through the online method, and another experimental group (B), took the same course through the F2F learning approach. The following table 1 shows the research design:

Table 1. Displays the research design

Population	Research Sample	Groups	Measurement
Undergraduate students of Najran University	44 students were selected from the writing skills course.	Controlled Group (A)	Traditional (F2F) Teaching Test grades
		Experimental Group (B)	online teaching test grades

3.2 Research Questions

1. Do online vs. F2F teaching modes impact EFL learners' academic writing?
2. Is there any statistically significant gender difference between pre-and post-test scores for academic writing among EFL learners in online vs. F2F teaching modes?

3.3 Writing Skill Test Design

The writing test consists of two sections: one focused on written interaction such as short messages and emails, and the other concentrated on written production like reports and short essays. During the preparation phase of the writing test, the researchers relied on earlier studies in the syllabus, the advice of knowledgeable teachers, and textbooks. The researchers examined many achievement test types used in this discipline to create a test that would be appropriate for learners. To verify that the test's items were at the right level for students, the opinions of two English teachers were consulted when creating the test's items. These teachers served as the researcher's guides for the students' English proficiency. To support the test items, two additional English teachers' opinions were requested. As a result, for easier comprehension, certain exam items were changed to other terminology.

4. Data Analysis

4.1 Demographic Characteristics of the Subjects

Table 2 and Graph 2 display the Demographic Characteristics of the research subjects who participated in the present research. (1) "Gender" shows that there are 50% males and 50% females. (2) "Age" illustrates the age of the students. There are 45.5% of students in the age group of 18-20 years, 38.6% of students in the age group of 21-25 years, and 15.9% of students in the age group over 25 years. (3) "Department" there are 61.4% of students participated in this study from the department of English whereas 38.6% of students from the department of Translation. The next item in the table is "Urban/Rural," which tells us that most of the students, i.e., 65.9%, belong to urban areas while 34.1% belong to rural areas.

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of the participants

Variables		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Gender	Male	22	50	50
	Female	22	50	50
Age	18-20	20	45.5	45.5
	20-25	17	38.6	84.1
	over 25	7	15.9	100
College	English	27	61.4	61.4
	Translation	17	38.6	38.6
Urban/Rural	Urban	29	65.9	65.9
	Rural	15	34.1	34.1
Total	N=	44	100	100

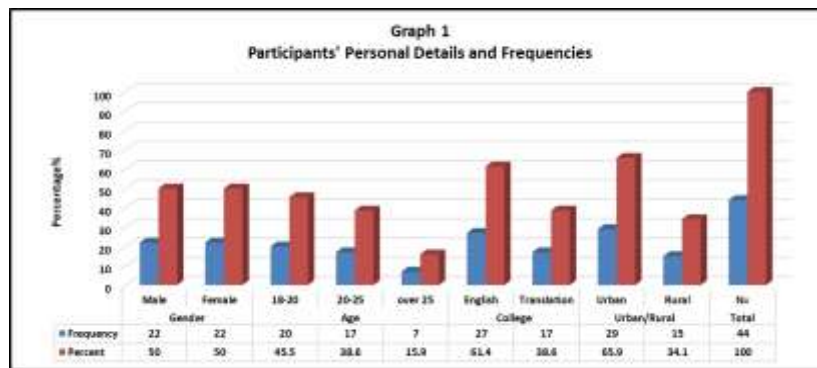


Figure 2. Demographic characteristics of the participants

4.2 Description of Data Analysis

A Pair sample t-test is a statistical procedure that compares two means from two measurements of the same sample or two related groups on the same continuous dependent variables. The purpose is to determine whether there is statistical evidence that the mean difference between group A and group B paired observations is statistically significantly different from zero, which means that the paired sample t-test is effective. This kind of experiment can commonly be referred to as a before-and-after design or paired sample design, so if the difference between group A and group B or between the paired observations is negative, then we can see that the treatment or intervention had an effect. Otherwise, no effect if the difference is positive. Therefore, the paired sample t-test takes into account this difference between the means of the paired observations to determine whether the treatment or intervention given to a sample is statistically significantly effective.

4.3 Analysis of the Pre-Test of Groups A and B

From the scores of groups A and B in the numeric expression, the researchers generated a new column of data called “difference.” This column shows the difference between the scores of the participants’ traditional and online grades after they had been administered. Under this column, there are negative and positive values; the negative values indicate that the teaching method was effective, and the positive values indicate that the teaching method was ineffective. However, generally, since there is a majority of negative values among the 44 observations, it can be tempting to conclude that the treatment is effective because the group B scores are higher at those pair of sample points, but obviously, we cannot make this judgment until we have substantial proof from the score statistics. Researchers have performed a sample t-test to obtain the infrastructure statistics. The t-test results are produced in tabulated form.

Table 3. The Pre-test statistics of controlled and experimental groups

Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pretest Controlled Group A	22	11.64	1.866	0.398
Experimental Group B	22	12.36	1.093	0.233

The pre-test analysis table shows that there are two groups (Group A Controlled Group N=22 and Group B Experimental Group N=22). According to the pre-test analysis table, the means of Group A and Group B are 11.64 and 12.36, respectively, and they are near to one another. As a result, there is little variation between the control and experimental groups' mean scores.

Table 4. The Pre-test independent samples t-test

		Levene's Test for Equality of		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Lower	Upper
Pretest	Equal variances assumed	4.363	0.043	-1.578	42	0.122	-0.727	0.461	-1.658	0.203
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.578	33.898	0.124	-0.727	0.461	-1.664	0.210

The results of Table 4, which assessed the statistical significance of the mean difference between paired observations, the standard deviations among the differences, and the standard error of the difference, as well as the boundaries of the confidence interval around the mean difference, are presented. Let us see the t-value -1.578, which is the same for both groups. The significance 2-tailed value of group A is 1.22 whereas the significance 2-tailed value of group B is 1.24. The significance (2-tailed value=0.122 and 0.124>0.05) is greater than 0.05 which means that there is no significant difference between the scores of the controlled group and the experimental group.

4.4 Analysis of the Post-Test of Groups A and B

As shown in Table 5, the descriptive statistics for each level of the variable show different mean values for the scores of Group A and Group B of 52.84 and 69.18, respectively. The values of their standard deviations (2.123 and 6.358) are not very close. In the paired-sample t-test table, the mean difference is -16.341, which has a negative sign that implies effectiveness in the results administered because Group B scores are greater than the scores of Group A, which means that we can be liable to quickly reject the null hypothesis.

Table 5. The size, standard deviation and mean of the two groups

Groups	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1 Group A	52.84	22	2.123	0.32
Group B	69.18	22	5.358	0.808

As shown in table 6, the Pearson’s correlation, and p-value, the Pearson correlation value is r=-0.464\*\* which lies between 0.3 - 0.7, which shows that the relationship between Group A and Group B is moderate and perfectly negative.

Table 6. Paired sample Pearson correlations between group A and group B

Variables	Group A	Group B	Difference
Group A	Pearson Correlation	1	-.464**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.001
	N	22	22
Group B	Pearson Correlation	-.124	.936**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.422	0
	N	22	22
Difference	Pearson Correlation	-.464**	.936**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.001	0
	N	22	22

\*\* The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Significance level →0.05 = (5%).

Table 7 discusses the result of the pair-sample t-test that evaluated the statistical significance of the mean difference between paired observations, the standard deviations among the differences, and the standard error of the difference, as well as the boundaries of the confidence interval around the mean difference. The table also shows the t-value, the degrees of freedom, and the p-value, or the

significance level, are too tight to help decide whether to accept or reject the null hypothesis.

If the P-value>0.05 the relationship is said to be insignificant if the P-value <0.05 it means that the relationship is significant. In the following table, the sig. (2-tailed) value is 0.000, which is less than 0.05. Therefore, the relationship between Group A and Group B is significant.

Table 7. Paired samples test experimental and controlled groups

Variables	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Paired Differences		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
			95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
			Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 Group A-Group B	-16.341	0.905	-18.166	-14.516	-18.055	43	0.000

Table 5 above has different mean values that are for the scores of Group A mean value is 'μ'=52.84 while the mean value for the scores of Group B is 'μ'=69.18. In the paired-sample t-test table 7, the mean difference is -16.341 which by the presence of the negative sign implies that there is effectiveness in the results administered because Group B scores are greater than the scores of Group A, which means that we can be liable to quickly reject the null hypothesis. Here the researchers make the judgment in three different ways from the pair-sample t-test table of results: by the t-value, the p-value, and the 95 percent confidence interval of the difference to reach the judgment.

If the t-value > the critical value, then the mean difference is statistically significantly different from 0. But from the influential statistics, the (t-value = -18.055) negative sign here is an indication that Group B scores are greater than Group A scores. It indicates that the t-value is greater than the critical value. Therefore, the mean difference of 'μ'=-16.341 is statistically significantly different from zero. On the other hand, the larger the t-value the more pronounced the difference between the pair samples, and the smaller the probability that this difference is called by chance, the t-value is large, and consequently, the difference between the pair samples is large. This difference could not have happened by chance but did happen because the treatment was effective.

If the p-value < 0.05, then the mean difference is statistically significantly different from 0. From the inferential statistics, the p-value, or the calculated significance level at 2-tailed is 0.000, which is p-value=0.000002<0.05. Therefore, the mean difference of 'μ'=-16.341 is statistically significantly different from 0. Now we can conclude that there is a statistically significant difference between the pre-test and the post-test. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis because the results administered were effective.

Finally, the results of the paired sample t-test show that mean scores differ from Group A ('μ'=52.24, σ=2.123) than Group B ('μ'=69.18, σ=5.358) at the 0.05 level of significance, t=-18.055, (df=43)= -6.004, n=44, p<0.05, 95% CI for mean difference: -5.358 to -2.123, r=-0.464. On average, the scores of Group B were about -16.341 points greater than those of Group A.

Table 8. Descriptive statistics of pre-and post-tests based on gender

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pre-test	Male	22	53.32	2.750
	Female	22	52.36	1.093
Post-test	Male	22	64.36	2.172
	Female	22	74.00	2.330

Table 8 provides the descriptive statistics, which tell us the sample size, the mean, the standard deviation, and the standard error mean for each of the groups: males and females. The 'μ'=52.67, and σ = 1.969 for males, whereas 'μ'=52.9, and σ = 2.205 for females indicated that there was not any significant difference between the male and female participants in the pre-test because the means of both genders were very close to each other. On the other hand, statistics in the table shows that 'μ'=68.67 and σ = 5.883 for males, 'μ'=69.38, and σ = 5.235 for female in the post-test revealed that there a significant difference based on gender.

Table 9. The independent sample test (pre- and post-tests)

		Levene's Test for		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence	
									Lower	Upper
Pretest	Equal variances assumed	8.979	0.005	1.513	42	0.138	0.955	0.631	-0.319	2.228
	Equal variances not assumed			1.513	27.476	0.142	0.955	0.631	-0.339	2.248
Posttest	Equal variances assumed	0.006	0.939	-14.189	42	0.000	-9.636	0.679	-11.007	-8.266
	Equal variances not assumed			-14.189	41.795	0.000	-9.636	0.679	-11.007	-8.266

The table above contains the inferential statistics. We have the t-score, the degrees of freedom for our two groups, and the p-value that corresponds to that t-score at those degrees of freedom, which we use to determine if there is a significant difference or not. The researchers want to compare the t-value to a critical value that they look up in a table called the students' t-table. So, the degree of freedom df=42 of the

critical value is 2.018. This will be the same critical value for both tests. For the pre-test, the t-value is 1.513, which is smaller than our critical value of 2.018. But the t-value for the post-test is 14.189, which is larger than our critical value of 2.306. When the t-value exceeds the critical value, then the means are different.

We can also look at the probability value to see if it is smaller than .05. The p-value for the pre-test is 0.138, which is larger than 0.05, but the p-value of 0.000 for the post-test is smaller than 0.05, which means that there is a statistically significant difference between the two genders. And we can look at the confidence interval to see if it crosses zero. For the pre-test, the lower value is negative and the upper value is positive, so it crosses zero. 95% confidence lower=-0.319 and upper=2.223. Not different. For the post-test, both values are negative, so it does not cross zero. The confidence values are -11.007 upper and -8.226 lower, respectively, which means there is a significant difference in the post-test based on gender. We can check the actual means in the descriptive statistics for more clarity. The mean value of the pre-test is 52.84 and the mean value of the post-test is 69.18 on average. So, the mean values of the post-test were significantly higher than the pre-test, but the pre-test means were not statistically significantly different.

## 5. Discussion and Suggestions for Improvement

Based on the analyzed results using various statistical methodologies, it is evident that there is a statistically significant difference identified if the students are taught via a face-to-face teaching method. According to many experts, F2F instruction and online instruction are completely dissimilar. It could be challenging for both instructors and students to adjust properly to the new learning environment because the resources used in conventional instruction might not be appropriate for online instruction. As claimed by Mundy-Henderson and Callie Martin (2020), the new system is distinct from F2F writing resources and deviates from what students desired or intended. It is one of the main issues with using online teaching techniques. Because writing is individual-centric and involves an individual-specific process, the majority of instructors even claim that it is difficult to teach writing skills to a group of students online. As stated by Garbe et al. (2020), who disagreed with the idea of online education, parents should bear more instructional responsibility for their children's education when they participate in online education with them. They must have taken on new, strange responsibilities. Hence, parents typically struggled to understand their role in their children's online learning. Since traditional resources are not well suited for online learning and there is not enough content to adequately train students online, it is not always optimal to strictly transfer offline conduct to online behavior. For teaching writing online, there aren't many resources available. Finding an online writing curriculum is not always simple. It should be exclusively designed for online writing instruction and the pedagogical techniques that go with it. Finally, according to the authors' opinion or recommendation, blended learning should be used whenever possible to overcome social barriers, and camera surveillance should be used during exams to prevent cheating.

## 6. Conclusion

The current study's findings revealed that face-to-face instructions improve EFL students' writing skills as opposed to online instructions, as indicated in the literature review section, that students encounter a number of obstacles when taking writing classes through online mode. The difficulties included: technological issues, an inability to focus, a lack of interaction, time management, health issues, a lack of motivation, psychological issues, and a lack of collaboration. The study's findings are expected to benefit EFL instructors and students in identifying obstacles and working out how to navigate them when teaching writing online. Additionally, the study did not assess the effects of the difficulties on students' academic success in the online writing course using other tools like interviews. Future studies could examine how students navigate the difficulties in their online writing classes and should utilize the other research tools to reveal the topic of this research deeply. It is proposed that EFL writing teachers consider these challenges to support their students' online writing abilities. To overcome the difficulties of studying writing online, Rojabi (2020) proposes that teachers should give students access to non-linguistic expressions (such as facial expressions or body language), practical learning materials, and online learning instruction. The findings of this study were remarkably similar to those of Fortune et al. (2011) in terms of several aspects of online learning, including F2F communication, the learning environment, technology, and teamwork. Similarly, Imran et al. (2023) discovered in their study that online learning among undergrad students caused a decline in reading and writing abilities. The majority of students claimed that reading content from books that teachers display in online classes is distracted by online learning. They further stated that online learning affects the physical and mental health of students such as eyesight problems, back pain, ear-problem from using headphones.

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