THE INFLUENCE OF ONLINE WRITING ON EFL STUDENTS' WRITING PROFICIENCY IN UNITED ARAB EMIRATE

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ABSTRACT

Students studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in higher education and pursuing any degree programme must undertake a lot of serious academic writing in English. Writing, on the other hand, is one of the most difficult skills to acquire, and it is inherently more difficult and stressful for EFL students. Writing online, such as on Facebook and Twitter has become a popular activity for the global population as technology has advanced. Despite its numerous advantages, such as more practise, exposure, and real-time audience, this writing craze has yet to win over many EFL teachers, who claim that online projects encourage pupils to be sloppy and irresponsible. As a result, EFL teachers continue to use traditional writing approaches in the classroom. This study draws on learning and motivation theories to claim that the amount of time spent writing, the presence of a real audience, and constructive feedback are all factors that can help students overcome writing anxiety, which is a major barrier in EFL courses. The research used a quasi-experimental methodology, with 80 individuals chosen at random from Alain University in UAE. With 40 participants in each group, they were separated into two equal groups: experimental and control. Edmodo was used in the study to expose participants to one of the online writing platforms. They were taught how to utilise Edmodo's tools before writing English essays and submitting them online. Quantitative tools such as pre- and post-writing tests, as well as survey questionnaires, were used to collect data. According to the findings of this study, English writings published online utilising Edmodo were of higher quality and length. Extrinsic motivation may also play a role in affecting pupils' writing activity, according to the findings. Another intriguing conclusion of the study is that writing online such as on Edmodo, considerably decreases EFL learners' anxiety and allows them to write more freely without the scrutiny of their instructors.

Keywords: Control, Experimental, Edmodo, EFL Teachers, Writing Online.

INTRODUCTION

Writing is the hardest of the four English language skills (writing, speaking, reading, and listening) for EFL students to acquire (Cheng, 2017). Writing is a process as well as a product that is expressive and most individualised among the remaining skills and of all activities carried out in an educational setting; writing is a process as well as a product that is expressive and most individualised among the remaining skills and of all activities carried out in an educational setting (Challob, Bakar, & Latif, 2016). The ability plays a crucial part in an EFL learner's personal, academic, and professional life, and it may be used to assess a student's academic achievement. As a result, English writing ability is regarded as the most important aspect of academic life. Various studies indicated that Arab university students, especially those from the United Arab Emirates (Al-Khataybeh, 1992; Rababah, 2005), struggle with English language

competency, particularly in writing, which has an influence on their academic performance (Huwari & Noor Hasima, 2010).

According to Al-Khotaba (2010), many UAE undergraduates do not achieve the requisite EFL writing proficiency after multiple years of attending a Basic English writing course. It's gotten to the point that many students have resorted to enlist the aid of their high school English professors or more experienced peers to complete their written assignments (Al Khotaba, 2010). Moreover, according to Al Sawalha (2012), UAE students have a proclivity to ignore three critical writing processes: planning, writing, and rewriting. Furthermore, they lack English writing expertise and mechanics, which contributes to their total essay-writing ability. As a result, many people grow hesitant to write in English as a second language (Tahaineh, 2009). Arab EFL learners' inadequacy in writing has been linked to a lack of desire, weak technical skills, and fear of writing by researchers from Arab nations (Al-Shboul, & Huwari, 2015). As a result, educators and language experts have recently viewed online social networks as a viable option for EFL teaching and learning (Bani-Hani, Al-Sobh, & Abu-Melhim, 2014).

The Internet-based teaching of writing has gained popularity in which social media platforms such as Edmodo Edmodo (Shams-Abadi, Ahmadi, & Mehrdad, 2015); Tsiakyroudi, 2018; Al-Naibi, Al-Jabri, & Al-Kalbani, 2018; Kusumaningrum, 2018; Insani, Uherdi, & Gustine, 2018; Ma'azi & Janfeshan, 2018; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2019), Facebook (Yen, Ho As a result, Ku Tseng and Akarasriworn (2013) have maintained online collaboration as a viable educational technique for developing learner freedom and boosting writing abilities. Because they are aware that their written works may be seen by a real-time audience, it helps to inspire EFL learners to study and improve their writing ability. In general, studies on the use of contemporary technology or Internet-based resources in EFL writing classrooms have found that online writing provides a helpful and encouraging atmosphere for students to improve their writing abilities in terms of quality and quantity (Ali, 2016).

As a result, it's not unexpected that internet-based writing instruction is seen as a solution to a variety of issues in writing instruction, including time constraints (Aliweh, 2011) and a lack of motivation (Mohammad & Hazarika, 2016; Challob, Bakar, & Latif, 2016). Students understand the value of editing, minimise writing stress, and create a good attitude toward writing through online collaboration (Dewaele & Dewaele, 2017; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Saito, Dewaele, Abe, & In'nami, 2018; Ali, Malek, Abidin, & Razali, 2018). Information and communication technologies (ICT) are currently being employed in the classroom to educate writing because of their promise and noticeable influence on student writing (Deore, 2012; Mohamed & Ayeche, 2011; Warnock, 2009). Furthermore, Internet-based writing instruction fosters future partnerships and critical thinking abilities. Such Internet-based collaborative activities, in particular, allow students to generate ideas, discuss opinions, and write together in a meaningful and independent manner (Blackstone et al., 2007; Eady & Lockyer, 2013).

Due to the availability of numerous useful sources from the Internet, kids are educated to critically examine and pick significant and relevant information by putting down their opinions (Deore, 2012; Mohamed & Ayeche, 2011; Ali, Malek, Abidin, & Razali, 2018; Alsamadani, 2018). As a result, Internet-based writing instruction will benefit both teachers and students. The literature, on the other hand, suggests that internet-based resources are not without drawbacks (Karami, Sadighi, Bagheri, & Riasati, 2018). Scholars are usually split on whether or not ICT should be used in EFL writing classes. Some experts (e.g., Nobles & Paganucci, 2015) have suggested that online projects encourage students to adopt a casual attitude and to take their work for granted. Furthermore, ICT tools have diverted students' attention in the classroom, causing

them to employ short forms and informal abbreviations in their writing assignments (Yunus et al., 2013). Others, however, believe that online assignments increase writing (Al-Naibi, Al-Jabri, & Al-Kalbani, 2018; Kusumaningrum, 2018), owing to their function in increasing student involvement in a virtual classroom (Al-Naibi, Al-Jabri, & Al-Kalbani, 2018).

Edmodo, for example, is an online learning platform that allows students to connect with their professors and engage in class activities. They have been able to be self-sufficient, study and exchange ideas, and cooperate thanks to the virtual environment. Working together rather than alone, according to Holland and Muilenburg (2011), minimises anxiety and uncertainty as these learners navigate new or challenging activities. Decreased student motivation and satisfaction with the learning process are common outcomes of reducing such sentiments. Therefore, this study investigated the influence of online writing on EFL students' writing proficiency in UAE

Empirical Studies using Edmodo in Learning Writing

Ekmekci (2016) used a descriptive technique to look into the unique integration of Edmodo within FL classrooms as an assessment tool. As a result, its primary goal is to showcase Edmodo as a platform for implementing various assessment applications and to provide some recommendations. 62 students' descriptions of prior experiences and reflections have been provided to this end. They were students who were enrolled in English preparation classes at a Turkish public institution and took part in different Edmodo assessment activities throughout the 2014/2015 academic year.

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with students to get their thoughts on using Edmodo as an evaluation tool. The findings revealed that the majority of them regard Edmodo to be amusing, inspiring, user-friendly, and useful. The platform application has significantly decreased their exam anxiety, and they prefer to be tested using Edmodo rather than traditional assessment methods (i.e. pen-and-paper tests). As a result, there are some similarities between the two studies in terms of specific characteristics, such as motivation, anxiety, and the use of Edmodo. They do, however, differ in terms of the setting and theoretical framework that they are based on. Meanwhile, Bahrami, Dariush, and Gholami (2015) used a quasi-experimental approach to look at the impact of Edmodo on the writing performance of EFL students. The participants were 40 female intermediate-level students from Islamic Azad University in Iran who were taking advanced writing lessons.

The study's focus was on composition writing abilities, and students were randomly allocated to one of two groups: experimental or control. Accordingly, Edmodo was used in the experimental group. The usage of Edmodo in writing is more effective on the EFL learner's writing performance, according to the findings of the Mann-Whitney U test used for data analysis. As a result, while certain factors and technique are similar to those used in the current study, the overall variables, such as motivation and anxiety, are restricted. In addition, the current study broadened its scope by looking at the elements that influence undergraduate students' online writing performance. In a similar spirit, Angelo (2014) used a mixed-methods approach to assess the efficiency of Edmodo as a supplemental tool for social science course learning. This was evaluated from the standpoint of the students, with data obtained from 200 college students who completed a questionnaire designed to examine student perspectives of the major study questions.

From the aforementioned sample size, 35 students volunteered to engage in focus group discussions and interviews on their Edmodo experiences. Generally, the data show that the

majority of participants see Edmodo as a useful learning supplement. However, the previous study focused on the effectiveness of Edmodo in general, but the current study focuses on writing by EFL undergraduates specifically. Thongmak (2013) claims that social networks provide a variety of educational benefits, but that a popular social networking platform like Facebook is unsuitable for the classroom owing to worries about privacy. Edmodo's potential effect as a private social network claiming to provide a safe learning environment for both learners and instructors has also been recognised by him. Despite the fact that it is a Facebook-like application, it is nevertheless widely used for instructional purposes.

As a result, the study looked at Edmodo as an antecedent of its acceptance as a classroom collaboration tool, comparing the influence of the antecedents to investigate university student perspectives on Edmodo in Thailand. The findings have been used as guidance for instructors on how to use the platform effectively in the classroom. Two perception elements, an instructor factor and a student component, were the subjects of the research. As a result, Edmodo acceptability is strongly influenced by perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and teacher traits. Considering that, the current research seeks to identify the characteristics that influence UAE EFL undergraduate students' online writing performance. Zain, Sahimi, Hanafi, Halim, and Alias (2015), on the other hand, studied the interaction that takes place on the Edmodo social learning platform's forum board. It was investigated as part of the IMK 209 - Physical Properties of Food course at Universiti Sains Malaysia's School of Industrial Technology.

The number of postings by individual students, forms of interaction, types of exchange, and distribution of exchanges among different types of interaction were the four factors evaluated in this study, which included 42 students enrolled in the course. The maximum number of postings reported among 42 students was 118, while the lowest number was one. The total number of postings by all students was 1201, with an average of 28.6 postings per student. Expository postings accounted for 325 of the total postings (27.1%), whereas higher-order interactions (i.e. explanatory and cognitive) accounted for 35.5 percent of all postings. Student-to-group/class (S-G/C) exchanges were the most common kind of communication, accounting for 40.3 percent of all postings.

The expository interaction, on the other hand, was found to be the most common style of student-to-group/class interaction, in which the findings sparked a debate on the lecturer's role throughout the interaction in order to encourage a deeper degree of knowledge of the course materials. Tsiakyroudi (2018) wanted to see how efficient Edmodo is as an educational social network in terms of motivating Greek high school EFL students to write. An Edmodo-based writing project was created and implemented with students in a 3rd grade junior high school classroom for this aim. Data was collected by giving students a pre- and post-questionnaire before and after they used Edmodo. During the project, they focused on the Edmodo learning platform and a study of the students' posts on it.

Meanwhile, semi-structured interviews were undertaken to get further information on student perspectives of Edmodo's use in writing classes. The findings show that implementing the project has a beneficial impact on the dimensions of writing motivation studied. As a result, there has been an increase in student participation and engagement in the writing process and assignments, as well as a shift in student attitudes toward writing and their writing habits. Al-Naibi, Al-Jabri, and Al-Kalbani (2018) conducted another study to assess the impact of a social networking website (i.e. Edmodo) on students' writing performance in an EFL classroom at Arab Open University (Oman Branch). The group comprised of 25 students enrolled in the Foundation Programme who were studying English. They took tests, debates, and exercises on Edmodo in

addition to three lesson modules that taught them about the writing process. An inspection of the students' second writing revealed a statistically significant improvement, while the post-treatment questionnaire findings revealed good student impressions of Edmodo as a language learning tool.

Additionally, Ali, Malek, Abidin, and Razali (2018) looked at the usage of Web 2.0 in supporting tertiary students with their writing, using four different resources (Edmodo, YouTube, Prezi, and Padlet) to help them with essay writing. The study's goals were to see if there was a substantial difference between students' pre-test and post-test essay writing scores utilising Edmodo, as well as to find out what students thought about using YouTube, Prezi, and Padlet to prepare for their writing work. The study used a mixed-method research approach, in which quantitative data was collected from student performance on a pre-test and post-test writing test. Furthermore, qualitative data was gathered from student replies in the 'Type a reply' part of Edmodo on their perceptions of utilising YouTube, Prezi, and Padlet. The results showed a substantial rise in pre-test and post-test scores, as well as positive impressions of YouTube, Prezi, and Padlet among the students. They've also received great feedback on YouTube, Prezi, and Padlet usage. As a result, the study suggests that Web 2.0 resources like Edmodo, YouTube, Padlet, and Prezi, which were used in the study, may be used to teach and learn writing online.

Moreover, Kusumaningrum (2018) looked into the impact of Edmodo-based instructor and peer feedback on student writing performance. The challenge is primarily concerned with determining the impact of online instructor and peer feedback supplied through the platform, using a quasi-experimental approach. A total of 55 students from Universitas Negeri Malangwere's Department of English were chosen to be the study's subjects. They were then divided into experimental and control groups. Following that, students in the experimental group received Edmodo comments from their teachers and peers, whereas students in the control group received traditional instructor input. The information was gathered based on the students' writing performance in the pre- and post-tests, as well as the findings of a questionnaire on the experimental condition. The data analysis was carried out in stages, beginning with a comparison of the pre-test scores and ending with a comparison of the post-test scores. The study found that students who received instructor and peer evaluation via Edmodo did not fare any better in writing than those who received traditional teacher input. This could be due to a variety of factors, including fear of embarrassment from other students, the tendency for indirect feedback, student reliance on the feedback given, and longer time to obtain feedback, difficulties in locating the essay that becomes the student's responsibility, unclear comments, poor internet connection, and the lack of two-way interaction.

In a similar vein, Insani, uherdi, and Gustine (2018) used mixed methods to study the usage of Edmodo as an Educational Social Network by undergraduate students at a university in Bandung, Indonesia. Closed-ended and open-ended questionnaires were used to collect data. As a consequence, the undergraduate students' reactions and attitudes about using Edmodo in their learning process have been good. In addition, various challenges in utilising Edmodo are revealed, such as a lack of technological competence and time management. Finally, Edmodo should be used in college EFL classes, according to the researchers. Ma'azi and Janfeshan (2018), in particular, looked at the impact of the Edmodo social learning network on Iranian students' writing skills, as well as student views regarding the site. A total of 40 participants were randomly assigned to experimental and control groups, with both groups undergoing an initial writing exam as a pre-test to ensure homogeneity and future comparisons.

The control group was given a standard class of writing compositions, whereas the experimental group used the Edmodo programme to practise. Each group received therapy for ten sessions, with the last session consisting of the teacher giving both groups of learners the identical topic and asking them to compose sentences and short paragraphs. A Likert-type questionnaire was then used to analyse the participants' sentiments regarding the Edmodo application. SPSS was used to analyse the data acquired from the pre-test, post-test, and questionnaires. It was discovered that using Edmodo as a social learning network had a substantial impact on the writing skills of Iranian EFL students, particularly those at the intermediate level. Furthermore, the students' opinions about the application in the classroom were reported to be good. The results can bring about pedagogical implications for Iranian English language teachers.

Students' impressions of Edmodo utilisation in writing classes at a Vietnamese institution were also reported by Nguyen and Nguyen (2019). This study used data from a broader mixed-methods investigation that included exams and interviews over the course of a fifteen-week semester in an ESP writing class. The findings from interviews, which studied how students viewed the effects of Edmodo use in their writing learning process, are the topic of this research. Students' good opinions of this supporting learning delivery technique in writing classes are revealed by the data. The implications for teachers and school administrators in terms of using Edmodo as a possible tool are also highlighted.

METHODOLOGY

The participants in this study were 80 EFL first-year undergraduate students from Alain University's ELT Department of English. There were 30 ladies and 50 guys among the pupils. The participants were all university students studying English as a foreign language. The individuals were divided into two groups: experimental and control, with both groups undergoing pre- and post-testing (s). A sample, according to Creswell (2012), is a subset of the target population that the researcher intends to investigate in order to generalise about the target population. In a perfect world, a sample would be drawn from people who are representative of the entire population. The study's participants were chosen using a convenience sampling approach.

All of the participants were Alain University's ELT Department of English undergraduate EFL students. Convenience sampling in research is a type of non-probability sampling, as the name indicates. It is a statistical approach for obtaining data by selecting samples depending on their willingness to volunteer, availability, or convenience of access. Purposive sampling is used interchangeably with theoretical sampling in qualitative research, according to Dornyei (2007). In qualitative research, the number of people to be sampled should not exceed 16-60 (Creswell, 2008). The purposive sampling procedure, which necessitates a small sample size, was used in this work as a quasi-experiment design. Purposive sampling is a qualitative research sampling approach that involves selecting a sample based on the common experience, qualities, or characteristics they share (Dornyei, 2007).

In terms of sample size, Borg and Gall (1983) advise that a minimum of 30 participants for correlational studies and 15 subjects per group for experimental research is sufficient for comparisons with the target population. At the time of the survey, there were 120 students registered at Alain University's ELT Department of English, with 35 males and 54 females ranging in age from 19 to 22. Due to the refusal of several students to engage in the experimental investigation, this number was lowered to 80. Only 80 data points were considered in the

analyses as a result of this exclusion. After then, the pupils were separated into two groups. The students completed the consent forms. Furthermore, 40 students (16 males and 24 females) were assigned to the treatment group, while the remaining 40 students (21 males and 19 females) were assigned to the control group.

To confirm that the samples were homogeneous, participants were given a writing proficiency test, which revealed that they all had the same level of written English competence. The data was acquired using two data collection techniques: quasi-experiment (pre-test/post-test) and survey questionnaires, which were analysed in SPSS using various quantitative analysis units. To begin, the data from the pre-test and post-test were analysed in order to answer the study's first research question. Furthermore, the Mann-Whitney U test is used in this phase to compare students' total results to gauge their performance between groups. To measure a difference in the median scores between the two independent groups, descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) and inferential statistics – independent t-test (a parametric test) are utilised in this work (McKnight, & Najab, 2010).

RESULTS

To begin, quantitative analytic methodologies were used to analyse the data on the students' writing performances acquired using pre-test and post-test from both the experimental and control groups. To measure a difference in the median scores between the two independent groups, descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) and inferential statistics – independent t-test (a parametric test) were utilised (McKnight, & Najab, 2010).

Table 1
FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTIONS OF EXPERIMENTAL AND CONTROL GROUPS PERFORMANCES IN THE PRE-TEST (MEANS, MEDIANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS)

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pre-test	Experimental	40	4.88	0.66
	Control	40	4.12	0.87

Table 1 showed that the mean score discrepancies between the two groups of individuals are slightly different. The control group had a mean score of 4.88 in traditional paper and pen writing, whereas the experimental group received a mean score of 4.12 in online writing. The results indicated that there is a little difference in the gain score of the participants in the pre-test between the experimental and control groups. The revealed that the mean scores of the two groups were practically identical.

Table 2 presented the results of an independent t-test that was used to see if there was a significant difference in writing performance between the experimental and control groups in the pre-test.

Table 2
DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE EXPERIMENTAL GROUP AND CONTROL GROUP (PRE-TEST)

Variable	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Group	Control	40	4.88	0.66	-0.432	78	0.243
	Experimental	40	4.12	0.87			

Note: *P< 0.01

There was no significant difference between groups (t=-0.432, p=0.243, df=78) as shown in Table 2. This showed that in the pre-test, students in both the experimental and control groups performed at a comparable level of competency in terms of writing quality and quantity. In the post-test, more analysis was done to see if there were statistically significant variations in writing ability between the control and experimental groups. A post-test was used to determine if there

were statistically significant variations in the participants' performance between the control and experimental groups. The frequency distributions for the post-test analysis between groups were shown in table 3.

Table 3 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS: FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTIONS OF EXPERIMENTAL AND CONTROL GROUPS PERFORMANCES IN THE POST-TEST (MEANS, MEDIANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS)				
	Group	**N**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**
Post-test	Experimental	40	13.65	1.44
	Control	40	8.54	1.12

The descriptive result of the post-test was shown in Table 3; it displayed a comparison of the scores, showing that the experimental group performed better (m=8.54) than the control group, which had a mean score of 13.65. The results demonstrated that the experimental group's mean value is higher than the control groups, indicating that the online writing training had an influence on the students' writing abilities. An independent sample t-test was used to evaluate the differences in the mean scores of both groups in the post-test of control and experimental groups.

Table 4 DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE EXPERIMENTAL GROUP AND CONTROL GROUP (T-TEST)							
Variable	**Group**	**N**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**T**	**df**	**Sig. (2-tailed)**
Group	Experimental	40	13.65	1.44	-21.87	88	0.000
	Control	40	8.54	1.12			

Note: *P< 0.01

According to Table 4, the experimental group's mean is higher than the control groups. Furthermore, the value of t is equal to -21.87, with a p-value of 0.000, indicating a degree of significance of less than 5%. As a result, this conclusion indicates that the variance sample in this study is unique. Furthermore, the result of the independent t-test revealed that the performance of the control and experimental groups differs significantly. This clearly shows that students in the experimental group outperformed students in the control group in terms of total online writing performance.

CONCLUSION

In this study, students indicated that using Edmodo to complete various activities helped them better understand themselves, including what factors influenced their learning performance and their learning preferences. Working on the online writing using Edmodo also allowed students to have a better grasp of the projects they were assigned, including the task's relevance, requirements, and difficulty. Furthermore, the results of the study of students' strategy knowledge demonstrated that the online writing activities improved students' comprehension of effective techniques for improving academic writing abilities. It was plausible to assume that the low performance of university students in terms of EFL in online expository writing, notably in UAE, had not been thoroughly investigated in prior research. This research bridged the gap by giving useful information that might have important policy consequences for the minister of higher education.

The findings of this study will also help UAE students develop their writing skills and capacities in a competitive atmosphere. UAE students have had a severe difficulty with online writing in general and in particular with assignments, project reports, and investigations. As a

result of this study, students were able to get experience in online writing and enhance their desire to learn English as a foreign language. There are numerous more elements that might make learning EFL via online writing difficult, such as distractibility during writing tasks, mental status instability, and sloppy online learning attempts. As a result, the majority of students do not fully utilize their writing abilities, preferring instead to get everything ready-made by others and avoid receiving any form of critique in return (So & Lee, 2013).

This research investigated the factors that influence EFL undergraduates' online writing performance in UAE. It is suggested that more research be done on such possibilities in other parts of the Arabian Peninsula. In addition, as suggested by the current study, a mixed-method approach should be used to analyses student performance and competence based on advancement in new E-learning software. Instead of utilizing EFL learners, a sample of native speakers' judgments can be administered based on pre-test and post-test to identify improvements.

In addition, additional languages should be researched in terms of inter-language transfer with English. This would assist to mitigate the detrimental impacts of data transmission. It would also assist ESL students in achieving the appropriate level of fluency in all areas of language usage. Furthermore, using a quantitative research technique, more researchers should explore the reasons of the editor's mother tongue interference in the pattern and the current system of learning and ESL learners, so that a more rigorous analysis may provide more generalizable conclusions. In English grammar, research should also be undertaken to determine the best appropriate system approach. Future study should also do a contrastive investigation of other topics (e.g., instructors' vs educational teaching method) in order to get insight into writing patterns and determine if the functional organization of language is impacted by different types of users.

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