

## EFFECT OF FLIPPED LEARNING METHOD ON THE WRITING SKILL OF EFL SAUDI STUDENTS DURING THE COVID-19

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Mohsin Raza Khan and Fozia Zulfiquar (2022) Effect of Flipped Learning Method on the Writing Skill of EFL Saudi Students during the Covid-19, *International Journal of English Language Teaching*, Vol.10, No.2, pp., 1-11

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study aimed at investigating the effect of flipped learning on the writing skill of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students during the Covid-19 pandemic. This study was conducted on level 1 students of the Department of English, Faculty of Languages & Translation (FLT), King Khalid University (KKU) during the first semester of 2020-2021. 60 students from two sections of Eng. 112 Writing 1-Course participated in this study. Students of section number 595 were chosen for the experimental group; students of section number 597 were chosen for the control group. There were 30 students in each group. The experimental group was taught writing skill using flipped learning in both asynchronous and synchronous settings, and the control group was taught writing skill only in the synchronous setting. A quasi-experimental design was employed for collecting the data. A pre-test and post-test in the form of an online written exam was administered in both synchronous and flipped learning settings. The result of the post-test showed that the experimental group performed better than the control group. A semi-structured interview with the students in the experimental group was also conducted for examining their perception of the flipped learning model. The students had a positive view of flipped learning model.*

**KEYWORDS:** *flipped learning, writing skill, students' perception, COVID-19*

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### INTRODUCTION

Writing is the manifestation of ideas, feelings, attitudes, opinions, experiences, and facts in the written form. Writing is the most important language skill. Acquiring the writing skill for the attainment of academic and professional goals is very important for EFL learners.

It has always been a challenge to learn and teach writing skill in the EFL situation. It requires a lot of effort and time for developing the writing skill of students. "Writing involves a different kind of mental process. There is more time to think, to reflect, to prepare, to rehearse, to make mistakes, and to find better alternatives and better

solutions"(Scrivener, 2011, p.235). It also requires the mastery of vocabulary, correct use of grammar, correct sentence construction, and correct use of coherence, cohesion, capitalization, spelling, and punctuation. This situation becomes more demanding in the Saudi Arabia EFL setting.

Saudi EFL students face difficulties in learning writing skill. They have problems in sentence construction, spelling, punctuation, grammar, and word choices due to different writing patterns in their mother language (L1)- Arabic. "Due to the nature of their mother language (L1), Arab EFL/ESP learners, for example, often find it difficult to adapt to the English writing system, especially at foundation levels. They also find it difficult to adjust to the linguistic, metalinguistic, cross-cultural differences, as well as the complexities of the English language syntax and grammar," (Benahnia, 2016, p. 2). Saudi EFL students also find it difficult to construct new ideas and transform them into a written text due to the lack of vocabulary.

English Language Teaching (ELT) has always witnessed new trends and approaches to support the students' learning and develop students' language skills. Any method or approach that fosters students' learning has always been welcomed by the ELT practitioners: whether it is related to classroom interaction or collaboration strategies or the use of modern technologies. During the COVID-19, when all the face-to-face classes were altered by online mode. It was a challenge for EFL instructors to carry out the teaching/learning process. At King Khalid University, we have the Blackboard learning management system. But the implementation of the pedagogical approaches for teaching English language skills, especially the writing skill, online was a challenge. To achieve the objective of enhancing the EFL learners' writing skill and to cope with the COVID-19 situation, the researchers used the flipped learning method in the writing class.

The concept of flipping the classroom became popular when two chemistry teachers Jonathan Bergmann and Aaron Sams at Woodland Park High School in Woodland Park, Colorado realized that many of their students missed their classes. In the spring of 2007, they started recording their live sessions using screen-captured software for absent students and posting these videos online giving them an opportunity to learn what they missed in the class. Over a while, they developed this idea of recording live sessions for each lesson before all their classes and asked students to watch these videos as 'homework' before coming to their classes. And they utilized the class time explaining the concept that their students could not understand (Bergmann & Sams, 2012).

### **Flipped Learning Model**

Flipped learning is an emerging pedagogical approach in which typical class lectures and homework are reversed. Prior to introducing a new topic or exposing to the new knowledge in the actual classroom, learners are given opportunities (in the form of video lectures or reading materials, or the content-related activities) to learn and familiarize themselves with the topic and the new knowledge outside the classroom as homework at their own pace. And inside the actual classroom learners practice the

contents that they learned before the class and explore the topic in more detail. According to Jon Bergmann and Aaron Sams (2012), "the concept of a flipped class is this: that which is traditionally done in class is now done at home, and that which is traditionally done as homework is now completed in class." (p.13). Flipped Learning Network (FLN) (2014) defines "Flipped Learning" as "a pedagogical approach in which direct instruction moves from the group learning space to the individual learning space, and the resulting group space is transformed into a dynamic, interactive learning environment where the educator guides students as they apply concepts and engage creatively in the subject matter." The flipped learning is the amalgamation of outside-class and inside-class learning activities.

The flipped learning is a learner-centered method. It gives importance to the personalized learning. "Flipping the classroom establishes a framework that ensures students receive a personalized education tailored to their individual needs." (Bergmann & Sams, 2012, p. 6). It provides opportunities for learners to learn at their own pace. It promotes learner-learner, learner-content, and learner-instructor engagements and interactions. It gives learners a sense of "ownership of the learning process" and enhances learners' engagement (Kerr, 2020). It makes the learning environment interactive and dynamic in which instructors facilitate the learning process and provide guidance when it is needed (Ekmekci, 2017). It promotes "creativity and opportunities for higher-order learning in the classroom" (Webb et al., 2014, p.53).

The flipped learning in the writing class "improves students' writing proficiency more than the traditional lecture-based writing instruction" (Ekmekci, 2017, p.163). In EFL flipped writing class, learners can watch videos consisting of vocabulary, grammar usage, sentence construction, writing styles, and samples of writings as often as they want, using pause, rewind, or forward options. They can also read the instructional materials as often as they want before the actual class. They may also refer to an online dictionary or translation apps for understanding any difficult word. The benefit of pre-class activities is that when students attend the actual class, they are well-prepared for the class discussion and activities. In the actual class, they become more engaged in the class activities. They also get opportunities to practice their writing skill in the post-class tasks. Therefore, the researchers have decided to adapt the flipped learning method for the writing class and conduct a study to find out the effect of the flipped learning method on the writing skill of EFL learners.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Many researchers have stated that the flipped classroom has positive effects and a huge impact on the writing skill of learners (Susana & Brahma, 2021; Arslan, 2020; Ghufroon & Nurdianingsih, 2021; Bouchefra, 2017)

A study conducted by Ahmed (2016) on the effect of a flipping classroom on writing skill in English as a foreign language and students' attitude towards flipping at Qassim University, Saudi Arabia. She divided 60 students into two groups- 30 students for the experimental group and 30 students for the control group. She used pre-test and post-

test, and a questionnaire as instruments to collect the data. She finds out that "the experimental group outperformed in the post-test of EFL writing" (Ahmed, 2016, p.98). She mentions that the flipped learning has positive effects on the improvement of students' writing skill. She suggests instructors to use flipped learning for improving the writing skill of students. She concludes, "this teaching method boosted students' motivation and class engagement. Students in the experimental group demonstrated better writing attainment through the FCI and found that they became more engaged and responsible of their learning" (Ahmed, 2016, p.110).

Another research by Abu Safiyeh & Farrah (2020) mentions that flipped learning is not only effective for learners, but it "caused a radical changed in their learning process" (p. 201).

Arslan (2020) has also conducted a study to discuss the benefits and challenges of flipped learning in teaching English as a foreign or second language through a systematic review. He selected 78 studies published in journals of Web of Science (WOS), ERIC, ScienceDirect, SCOPUS, IGI Global, and Wiley Online Library databases. He mentions that "one of the most reported benefits of the use of flipped learning... is that it has positive effects on enhancing students' English language skills such as writing and speaking" (Arslan, 2020, p. 775). The research of Ghufroon & Nurdianingsih (2021), on flipped classroom method with Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) in EFL writing class, points out many advantages of the flipped classroom such as "stimulating learner autonomy, improving teaching and learning processes, providing more time for EFL writing and input during face-to-face meetings, promoting active learning, student learning responsibility, and peer collaboration" (Ghufroon & Nurdianingsih, 2021, p. 120).

A study by Ekmekci (2017) investigated the impact of flipped instruction on students' foreign language writing skill. The study compared the flipped learning and face-to-face writing classes. It used a pre-test and a post-test with the experimental group and control group. The results showed "a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control group" (Ekmekci, 2017, p. 151), and it revealed that "the students in the experimental group outperformed the students in the control group" (Ekmekci, 2017, p. 151). It has also been pointed out that the "majority of the students in the experimental group" had "positive attitudes towards flipped writing class model" (Ekmekci, 2017, p. 151). A similar study was conducted by Afrilyasanti et al. (2016) to investigate the effect of the use of the flipped classroom model on the writing ability of EFL students across their individual differences in learning. The result of the post-test showed that the experimental group performed better than the control group.

Challob (2021) examined the effect of flipped learning on EFL students' writing performance, autonomy, and motivation. He concludes that flipped learning made the learning environment user-friendly and collaborative. The result of the study shows that flipped learning enhanced "students' English writing performance, autonomy, and motivation" (Challob, 2021, p. 3743).

Farah (2014) researched to examine the impact of using flipped classroom instruction on the writing performance of twelfth-grade female Emirati students in the Applied Technology High School (ATHS). She designed a fifteen-week teaching program for IELTS Tasks 1 and task 2 writing. She used instructional videos and differentiated class tasks. She administered a pretest and a post-test. The findings of her research revealed a statistically significant difference between the experimental and the control groups. She found out that the improvement in the writing performance was due to the flipped instruction method. She pointed out that the flipped learning method helped to boost students' motivation and their engagement in the class.

Jr. & Mabuan (2021) conducted a study on flipped learning approach in teaching writing in a university setting: students' experiences, preferences, and perspectives. They mentioned that "the flipped classroom approach in a writing class received an overall positive feedback from the student". (Jr. & Mabuan, 2021, p. 161). Abdelrahman et al. (2017) conducted an exploratory-implementation study to investigate the effects of flipped learning on students' writing proficiency and their satisfaction. They developed a module for teaching English paragraph-writing using flipped learning. The study result shows the improvement in the students' writing proficiency. Norazmi et al. (2017) conducted a quantitative study to examine students' engagement in writing in a flipped classroom. One hundred and eighteen students participated in the study. The findings reveal that flipped classroom approach engaged students in the writing process. The research of Nguyen et al. (2019) on the investigation into using flipped classroom model in an academic writing class in Vietnam reveals that flipped learning did not only improve students' performance, but it also had a positive effect on their learning. This study answers the following research questions:

### **Research Questions**

Q1: What was the effect of the flipped learning method on EFL students' writing skill?

Q2: To what extent the flipped learning method helps students to develop writing skill?

Q3: What was learners' perception towards the flipped learning method?

This study contributes to the literature of the language pedagogical research during emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

A quasi-experimental design was used for this research. "A quasi-experimental design aims to establish a cause-and-effect relationship between an independent and dependent variable" (Thomas, 2021). The pre-test and post-test were administered with the experimental and the control groups to measure the effect of flipped learning on EFL students' writing skill. After the post-test, a semi-structured interview was conducted with the experimental group to find out the students' perception about the use of flipped learning model. The semi-structured interview is effective for exploring the participants' "thoughts, feelings and beliefs about a particular topic" (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). In the semi-structured interview, open-ended questions were asked.

### **Participants**

The participants were the first-year Saudi EFL students who enrolled in the first semester at the Department of English, Faculty of Languages & Translation, King Khalid University. The age ranged between 19 and 21 years old. They were native speakers of the Arabic language. Two groups of first-year students of the Writing 1 course were selected for this research. The groups were divided into experimental (30 students) and control groups (30 students). Both groups were taught by one of the researchers. The experimental group received the flipped learning treatment in both asynchronous and synchronous settings, whereas the control group was taught using the traditional method in the synchronous setting only.

### **Design of Study and Instruments**

The research was conducted in the first semester of academic session 2020-2021 over a thirteen-week duration. Two instruments (pre-test/post-test and semi-structured interviews) were employed to measure the effect of flipped learning on EFL students' writing skill and their perception of flipped learning model. First, the researchers administered the pre-test with both experimental and control groups to determine the writing abilities of both groups. The pre-test was based on paragraph writing measuring students' ability to write a topic sentence, supporting sentences, and a concluding sentence, use of grammar, use of vocabulary in the context, sentence construction, correct punctuation, and capitalization on Blackboard. Then, both groups were taught the writing skill using scaffolding and process writing approach. The experimental group received flipped learning instructions in both asynchronous and synchronous settings, while the traditional method was used with the control group.

The experimental group was provided the instructional materials consisted of YouTube videos, instructor-created videos, reading materials, vocabulary, model sentences, samples of paragraphs, and rubric for writing a paragraph on Blackboard in the asynchronous setting before the actual classroom as pre-class activity. The discussion forum was also used for engaging students in the pre-class activities. In the actual class on Blackboard Collaborate Ultra in the synchronous setting, students spent time brainstorming ideas, discussing the topic of the writing task, selecting appropriate vocabulary and sentence structures for writing a paragraph, preparing the first draft in the class, and sharing it with their pairs for the pair-correction in the breakout group tool of the Blackboard Collaborate Ultra. The instructor (one of the researchers) facilitated the learning activities, observed the breakout groups, and provided feedback using the delayed error-correction technique. After the class, the students were asked to upload their final drafts to Blackboard for receiving individualized feedback as the post-class activity. The researchers assessed the students' writing drafts and provided feedback. Before starting the flipped learning treatment, the students in the experimental group were introduced to the flipped learning method and provided the Blackboard training.

The control group was introduced to the instructional materials in the synchronous classroom only on the Blackboard Collaborate Ultra using the traditional method. The

students were taught paragraph writing in the class and asked to write a paragraph after the class as homework.

At the end of the semester, the post-test was administered with both the experimental and the control groups to find out the differences between the pre-test and the post-test, and the effect of flipped learning on the performance of EFL students' writing skill. The same pre-test was used for the post-test. It was based on paragraph writing measuring students' ability to write a topic sentence, supporting sentences, and a concluding sentence, use of grammar, use of vocabulary in the context, correct punctuation, and capitalization. The pre-test and the post-test were evaluated by a rubric created by the researchers. The rubric was based on 1) Topic Sentence, 2) Supporting details, 3) Grammar & Vocabulary, 4) Coherence, 5) Mechanics.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

The data were collected through the scores of the pre-test/the post-test and the semi-structured interviews. The scores of the pre-test and the post-test were analyzed using an independent sample t-test in SPSS.

### Findings of Pre-Test

The pre-test was conducted to measure the level of writing skill of both the experimental and the control groups before the flipped learning treatment. The scores of the pre-test were analyzed using an independent sample t-test in SPSS. The result revealed that there was no statistically significant difference existed between the experimental group ( $\bar{x}$ = 7.3667, SD= 1.54213) and the control group ( $\bar{x}$ = 7.3333, SD= 1.56102); ( $t$ = .083 and  $p$  > .934) in terms of writing proficiency as it can clearly be seen in Table 1 below. The P-value is higher than 0.05. It proves that the writing skill of the experimental group and the control group is almost at the same level.

Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	P-value
Experimental Group	30	7.3667	1.54213	.083	.934
Control Group	30	7.3333	1.56102		

### Findings of Post-Test

After the thirteen-week flipped learning treatment, the post-test was conducted with the experimental and the control groups. The post-test was aimed to measure the effect of the flipped learning method on the performance of EFL students' writing skill and to find out the differences between the pre-test and the post-test of both groups after the flipped learning treatment. The scores of the post-test were analyzed using an independent sample t-test in SPSS. The result revealed that there was a statistically significant difference existed between the experimental group ( $\bar{x}$ = 17.1667, SD= 1.93129) and the control group ( $\bar{x}$ = 14.4000, SD= 2.11073); ( $t$ = 5.297 and  $p$  < .000) as it can clearly be seen in Table 2 below.

Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	P-value
<b>Experimental Group</b>	30	17.1667	1.93129	5.297	.000
<b>Control Group</b>	30	14.4000	2.11073		

### Findings of a Semi-Structured Interview

After the post-test, a semi-structured interview was conducted to find out the students' perception of the flipped learning method. Ten students from the experimental groups were selected and they were asked the following questions:

Q1: What do you think about the flipped learning method?

Q2: How did the flipped learning help you to develop your writing skill?

Q3: What did you most like about the flipped learning method?

In response to question 1, all the students said that they found the flipped learning method effective for improving their writing skill. They stated that watching videos and reading the instructional materials before coming to the actual class helped them to prepare well for the class. They, furthermore, mentioned that the flipped learning method gave them confidence and helped them to get rid of shyness, hesitation, and anxiety. It made them motivated and engaged in the class activities. They also pointed out that before the actual class, they had an idea of what they were going to discuss in the actual class. They have also stated that the flipped learning method gave them enough time to practice the writing skill at their own pace and made them independent learners.

In response to question 2, all the students mentioned that accessing the instructional materials before the class and participation in the main and the post-class activities gave them opportunities to improve their writing skill. They said that they used to watch the recorded videos, read the instructional materials, refer to the writing samples, and complete all the pre-class activities before coming to the class. They used to actively participate in all the class activities and complete after-the class tasks. It helped them to develop their writing skill. They have also stated that they used to pause, rewind, and forward while watching the videos to understand the recorded lectures. When they were practicing the writing skill, they used to refer to the provided writing samples. They also said that sharing their written draft on the discussion forum and getting feedback from both classmates and the instructor also helped them to develop their writing skill. In response to question 3, all the students said that getting access to the instructional materials before the actual class in the flipped learning method was a fascinating thing. They stated that they liked the variety of the instructional materials in different forms such as videos and reading tests. They also liked the pre-class and the post-class activities in the flipped learning method.



## DISCUSSION

This study was conducted to investigate the effect of the flipped learning method on the writing skill of EFL students. The post-test was administered to examine the research questions 1) *What was the effect of the flipped learning method on EFL students' writing skill?* and 2) *To what extent the flipped learning method helps students to develop writing skill?*. The result of the post-test reveals that the experimental group performed better than the control group. After the flipped learning treatment, the score of the experimental group has increased from  $\bar{x}= 7.3667$ ,  $SD= 1.54213$ (the pre-test) to  $\bar{x}= 17.1667$ ,  $SD= 1.93129$  (the post-test). The flipped learning method has affected the writing performance of the students, and it has improved their writing skill.

In the flipped learning treatment, the experimental group had more time to learn the writing skill. They also had more opportunities to acquire the writing skill through the pre-class, the main class, and the post-class activities. This resulted into the performance improvement of the students.

The results of this study are consistent with the previous studies. This study is aligned with the studies conducted by Susana & Brahma (2021); Abu Safiyeh & Farrah (2020); Arslan (2020); Ghufron & Nurdianingsih (2021); Bouchefra (2017); Ahmed (2016) in terms of finding the positive effects of flipped learning method on the writing skill of learners. As the post-test result of this research finds out a statistically significant difference between the experimental and the control groups, the studies by Ekmekci (2017), Afrilyasanti et al. (2016) also have similar findings. The result of the present study shows the improvement in the writing skill of students due to flipped learning method. It is similar to the research findings of Challob (2021); Abdelrahman et al. (2017); Ahmed (2016) and Farah (2014). This research is in accordance with the studies of Jr. & Mabuan (2021); Ekmekci (2017); Nguyen et al. (2019) in terms of having a positive view about the flipped learning method.

To measure the third research question: 3) *What was learners' perception towards the flipped learning method?*, a semi-structured interview was conducted with the experimental group. The students' responses towards the flipped learning method were positive. The students found the flipped learning method effective. They felt confident and independent in learning the writing skill. They were motivated and engaged in the pre-class, the main class, and the post-class activities. Watching and reading the instructional materials before the class helped them to improve their writing skill. Student-student and instructor-student interactions in the discussion forum also helped students to develop their writing skill.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of the study reveal that the flipped learning model has positive effects on the writing skill of EFL students. The post-test result of the experimental group clearly shows that the flipped learning treatment has improved the writing skill of students. The students' responses to the interview questions point out their positive views towards the flipped learning method. It can be concluded that the flipped learning method is

effective for improving the writing skill of EFL Saudi students. It promotes self-learning and students' engagement in learning activities. It also improves students' motivation.

The study recommends implementing the flipped learning model in teaching writing skill, especially in situations like the COVID-19 pandemic. As this study is limited to a small group of students, there is a need to conduct similar research consisting of a large group of students for investigating the effect of flipped learning in the EFL context.

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