

## TEACHING ENGLISH WRITING REMOTELY DURING COVID-19 IN COLLEGE OF BASIC EDUCATION KUWAIT

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**ABSTRACT:** *This paper deals with teaching writing as a process at the college of Basic Education Kuwait. It talks about the changes that had to be implemented in the times of COVID-19 and any challenges needed to be overcome.*

**KEYWORDS:** Teaching English, writing, adult learners, writing as a process education

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### INTRODUCTION

The concept of teaching involves a process where there is an ability to attend to the needs of others. This may be in a particular subject or it may involve a wide range of areas. Within the College of Basic Education (CBE) in Kuwait, there are several writing classes where students are able to learn about writing in various contexts. Although most people in Kuwait speak and write in Arabic, English is considered a second language. While many of the writing classes have flourished in the past several years, there have been an array of changes due to the global pandemic of COVID-19. Many of the in-person classes have transitioned to remote learning and this has created many changes for both faculty and students. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the differences in the teaching process regarding in-person classes and remote classes. The learning of the writing processes will be indicated as well as difficulties that may arise.

#### **Overview of Teaching English Writing**

It should be known that English is widely spoken and written throughout the world. Whether individuals are native or non-native English speakers, more than 1 billion people speak and write the language, hence the high demand for students to excel in college writing courses. Educators must take the time to build applicable skills in the classroom environment and they must also understand the needs and attributes of the learners.

When teaching English writing, there are a plethora of factors that must be taken into consideration whether the classes are done in person or remotely. First, the teachers must focus on the level of

the students and the reasons for taking the course. In some cases, they may need to learn writing skills for a particular reason. For example, for young students, their parents may want them to have a push in their education. Another example includes the concept of adult learners who want to be able to transform their businesses (Selvaraj & Aziz 450). Even though the process may vary widely, it is important for all learners to fully understand the importance of writing. Even before the writing process takes place, educators should inform the students that writing is necessary for every profession, especially in today's society. Moreover, the students should also understand that writing facilitates proper communication, which is essential for people today. (Selvaraj & Aziz 450). In the CBE our learners are future teachers of English to Young Learners, so learning to write is fundamental on many levels.

### **Social Implications**

When teaching writing in person versus remotely, there are an array of social implications to take into consideration. The technical elements of writing may be very specific and in many instances, it tends to be easier to learn when the teacher and the student are face to face. The teacher has the ability to fully explain the processes of writing and the student can then practice as needed. Additionally, when practicing the writing of sentences and even larger bodies consisting of essays and other pieces of work, it is beneficial to have the direct feedback from the teacher and other students. When remote learning takes place, this is often very difficult. Although the students have the ability to practice as needed, the assistance is not always the same. There are times when students even miss out on positive social interactions with their peers because they are not able to speak to each other directly. In any classroom setting, whether it is a writing class or not, many students thrive, when they are able to share their experiences with their peers. They can get feedback and even learn from each other. However, when learning over the computer or on the phone, the peer interaction may be very difficult. This may create negative nuances in the way that learning takes place. Although this is the case, the teachers should still entertain student interaction, even if it takes place through an online setting (Batlle 1).

### **Communication**

The concept of communication is a very important factor when dealing with student learning, especially when writing takes place. For many, the ability to write words on paper or even on the computer is not a simple task, especially if it is not in their native tongue. As stated before, the first language of most students in Kuwait is Arabic, which is substantially different when compared to English. When writing in English, there are complete different variations as well, which must be learned and this must be communicated in the best manner possible. Whether a student is learning in person or through a computer, the foundations of writing are important. The teacher must communicate the different forms of writing and why they are essential. For example, the teachers must put emphasis on spelling, handwriting and even typing. These are all foundations of writing in any language.

When students are taught in person, the teacher can take the time to facilitate several different writing assignments during the course of one class and the writing can be monitored. This is especially important for communication since the teachers can visibly determine where the strengths and weaknesses lie. When students are learning writing online, it may be hard to communicate these factors since the individuals are not learning in person. Moreover, the teachers do not have the ability to edit forms of writing frequently. This can only be done remotely and it is hard to determine if the students are indeed the individuals who have completed their assignments. Even though the teachers can create well-defined goals for all of their students, this becomes a difficult task when the students are not learning right in front of them. In some instances, there may be a discrepancy in learning as well, if the students are only learning on a remote basis. Communication is essential for any teacher to have and this must be emphasized when students are learning online. Instructions must be clear, concise and the goals must be stated in a logical manner. If the communication is not relayed in an effective way, there is a chance for the students to perform poorly (Silver 2).

### **Action Based Learning**

Action based learning is a process that is imperative when teaching writing. This involves educational training that creates optimal learning for students. Essentially, teachers must take the time to prepare the environments of their students so that they are able to have the best experiences possible. This is often seen within in-person classrooms where students have the ability to interact with the teachers and other students. They are able to learn from each other and progress as they learn new steps. This is very important when learning about the writing process since there are many steps to take into consideration. For many people, action based learning is not very easy when online courses take place. The teacher may try to create an environment that is conducive to an interactive nature, but it may be difficult for students to focus, especially if they are not in an environment with other students. Based on this implication alone, it is essential for teachers to utilize the skills that they have learned and try to implement them if they find that they have to transition their classroom to an online setting (Bowlen 3).

Action based learning is one of the most effective ways for students to learn how to write since there are opportunities for them to want to learn more. It has been found that constant online learning may become a tedious option for many people and there is a chance that they will not be as engaged as they should be. Unfortunately, the environment is greatly different, but the teacher must take the time to create a platform that is conducive for all students.

### **Technical Skills**

When learning how to write, there are many technical skills that must be taken into consideration. The first one includes an understanding of proficiency within the English language. When learning to write for children, there is a need to for them to understand how the English language works

and how it can be applied to paper. If there is a lack of understanding, this can make it very difficult to proceed with writing. For adult students, there may be a need for the individuals to learn how to write a variety of writing forms such as essays, reports, summaries and letters to name but a few. The teacher may assign sample forms of writing whether it is on a professional or personal basis.

Another technical skill that should be taken into consideration when learning English writing includes the ability to understand how to properly formulate sentences. This can be relayed to the example above since all individuals need to be proficient in the English language. Especially for the adult learners, it may be beneficial for them to learn the differences in parts of speech such as noun, verb, adjective, etc. This will definitely help towards formulating sentences and then larger bodies of work. This is a task that can be learned remotely, but again, it becomes easier if the teacher is in person and is able to use direct examples when face to face.

Another technical skill that is important for students to have when learning how to write in English includes the ability to actually choose writing topics. While the teacher may take the time to choose assignments, it facilitates critical thinking skills when students can pick their own topics. There is hope that this can lead to enthusiasm and that the students will actually enjoy writing whether they are younger or older. Fortunately, this type of skill can be relayed even if a student is not learning in person. The teacher can delve into these types of assignments via online learning and it will give the students a chance to have their own sense of autonomy, which is very important when learning how to write. The teacher can also ensure that there are visuals to go along with the assignments as well, which will create a lot more enthusiasm.

### **Course Structure**

The course structure of an English writing course will vary depending on the students who are enrolled in the class, but there are certain standards to take into consideration. For example, the main goal is to identify and practice the different writing styles that are seen throughout English and within academic/professional writing. Moreover, whether the class is remote or in person, the teacher should be able to express ideas as needed, even if this is done through a computer screen. First, the students will have to obtain required texts. In some situations within CBE, the texts may be provided to the students.

Second, there will be a wide array of assignments that will be delegated throughout the course. The students will have to write two major papers, one at the beginning of the course and one at the end of the course. The papers will be examined for grammar, spelling, plagiarism etc. and they will be compared to determine the student's overall progress. The students will learn about the different citation styles whether they are APA or MLA. Aside from the two major papers within the class, the students will also be expected to complete different assignments. The range of

knowledge may be different for some students, but this will be determined before the class begins. For example, the students will be expected to complete weekly readings, since this is necessary in order to assist with the writing process. They will also be encouraged to write in their notebooks on a weekly basis, since this can assist with the academic writing process as well. One of the most important aspects of this course is to encourage collaboration with other students. If the course is remote as it has been during and post-COVID, the students will break out into separate digital teams and discuss the writing assignments with each other, they will then have to present their findings to the class.

### **Pace**

Since the students will be learning remotely, the pace of the class will be structured differently, which may be concerning to some teachers. Prior, when in-person classes took place, the teachers were able to gauge the pace of the course and how the students were performing. When they are learning online, it may be difficult to determine if there are any struggles and/or if they are grasping the material that is being taught to them. For English writing classes, the students will be expected to attend classes at specific times, but there will be self-paced materials for them to read through. This will help to provide a great deal of autonomy, which can hopefully help them to succeed. Additionally, there will be live lectures and the teachers will do their best in order to ensure that the pace of the course is structured in a conducive manner.

The students will be encouraged to speak out if they feel that they are not able to comprehend the material that is being taught to them within the allotted timeframe. Additionally, they will be taught the importance of interacting among the online course through the use of different technological functions. Examples of this may include remote hand raising and discussion forums. This allows for a high standard of communication among all of the individuals involved (Naidu 149).

While it is important to understand the pace of an online English writing class, there are concerns around those individuals who may have disabilities. The student-teacher interaction may have to be more direct when compared to other students. Additionally, the utilization of certain technological functions may be challenging as well. When the students are in-person, they are able to write directly with the teacher's input and guidance. When they are learning from a distance, this may become problematic and it may decrease the overall pace of the course.

### **DISCUSSIONS**

When students are learning in an in-person environment, it is easier to initiate discussions with students since they have the encouragement from their peers. Additionally, it is easier for the teacher to work the room and facilitate those who may need more assistance compared to others. When learning how to write in an online setting, the discussion aspect of a class may become slightly more challenging. This is why it is important for the teachers to set the tone of the class

and encourage collaboration whenever possible. The first step that should be taken is to make sure that there are clear expectations set from the beginning of the course. This means that the teachers should enforce that all students are expected to write in the discussion forums at least once a week and they are expected to write a certain number of posts within the course of the class. For those who may be transitioning to remote learning, it is also necessary for the students to properly adjust. The teachers should give them time to adjust to remote learning so that they can learn how to properly use discussion boards as needed.

Regarding discussions, teachers should also take the time to provide feedback as needed as well. When an in-person class is in session, the teachers are readily available for the students, however in an online setting, there are students who may feel disconnected. This is why it is important for the teachers to respond to the posts of students and even ask them questions, if relevant. This will encourage the students to feel more engaged and it will also help them develop their writing skills. Based on this implication, it may also be necessary for the teachers to ensure that participation is being tracked as well. This can boost the morale of the students and it will allow them to communicate with each other, even if they are learning from a distance. Based on the initial discussions, the teachers may find it necessary to encourage live discussions, which can help the students with the overall writing process as well (Naidu 149).

### **Assessments**

Even if students are learning online, they should be expected to be assessed based on their interaction with others and the writing that is being taught to them. According to Graham (2019), teachers should ensure that students are writing as frequently as possible, regardless of their level of fluency. It has been determined that those who are constantly writing tend to perform better within assessments compared to those who do not write as much. For any student, whether they are children or adults, it is recommended to have them write at least one hour per day. When this is done, the teachers are able to provide the most effective assessments possible (Graham 56).

One simple way to assess the writing of a student, especially when learning a second language is to understand if the message quality is being relayed. For example, it is important for the students to understand the concept of the different parts of writing. Additionally, it is also important for the students to have directional knowledge about the message that they want relayed. If this is not clear to the teacher, they can take the time to mark the errors and have the students try again. These tasks may be tedious, but it is important for teaching writing effectively. As stated before, these tasks become slightly easier when the classes are conducted in person. When the assessment are done online, it may be difficult to determine if the students are in fact writing their assignments or if they are being done with someone else's help. This is why it may be necessary to have a few live classes a week where students are able to write in congruent with each other, even if it is done remotely. The teachers can then assess how well the students are able to write under specific



scenarios. Even though there may be challenges that are faced, the teachers must come up with a proper solution in order to help the students grow and thrive.

### **Current Trends**

Since the current English writing classes are taking place online, there is a need to understand the current trends of distance learning education. Fortunately, a rampant explosion of technology has allowed this to be possible, even if there are some difficulties that are faced along the way. One trend that should be taken into consideration includes virtual micro learning. This means that students are able to learn in small segments so that they are not overwhelmed. When learning how to write in a second language, this is often necessary so that the students can fully understand the concepts that are being taught to them. As a whole, more students are able to utilize their time wisely when micro learning takes place so that they do not feel inundated and sometimes bored when they are dealing with similar concepts on a daily basis.

Another trend within the virtual world of learning includes learning that involves games. Even though the idea of writing is often looked at as an individual activity, teachers can take the time to turn the process into a fun activity, which can be beneficial for all participants involved. The students have the ability to learn the writing concepts through the use of games and they can also win virtual prizes in some cases. This will promote the learning process and it will also guide them towards actually wanting to write. This is important, especially when trying to promote success among the students. An additional trend that should be taken into consideration when dealing with remote learning includes video based learning. Unlike the other two trends, this concept may be more suitable for virtual learning since the teacher and other students will not be in-person with the learners. With the use of video learning, the teachers can develop pre-made lectures prior or they can use interactive videos, which will most likely promote more interaction. During live streaming, that should be done as well and students may actually look forward to the writing process (Palvia 233).

### **Learning Environments**

As students and teachers shift into an online learning environment, they must be aware of all of the factors that may be involved. As a whole, the college and faculty must design an environment that is conducive to the learning needs of the students. Since most students are learning English as a second language, there may be challenges regarding language barriers. This is why, there is a need to develop an environment that is supportive. This means that the teacher should encourage all of the students to ask questions when they feel the need to and the teacher should also listen intently. In many cases with online learning, there are many students who do not feel heard. Even when learning English writing, all students need to feel as if they are being heard so that they can get positive results.

The teachers should also help to create an environment that is interactive. Even though many people view writing as an individual concept, people can actually learn a great deal when they are interacting with each other. The teachers should take the time to enforce interactive learning so that they can feel as if they are face to face with their peers. If necessary, the students can use the technological tools to speak to their peers and assist each other with their writing as needed. When this takes place, the teachers can offer encouragement and they can also offer tips on how to write better as time progresses.

Fortunately, online learning allows for flexibility, but if the teachers do not promote an engaging environment, there will be many students who will not feel supported. When this takes place, it may be necessary to offer individualized projects and assignments so that students can feel as if they are making a difference with the progress of their learning. There is also hope that online learning will prepare them for further classes that may branch outside of writing in the future.

### **Writing Process**

As the students begin to learn English writing, the process may vary. Since there is an online platform, the teachers will have to adjust accordingly. The first step to take into consideration is to plan. The teachers should introduce the assignment and/or topic so that the students have adequate time to plan. This can be done via a live lecture or a pre-recorded video. The teachers should plan and create syllabi so that the students are aware of all of the due dates. This is imperative so that they can plan the allotted time that is needed for reading, writing, researching, etc. If the teacher does not provide this, it may be difficult for students to plan how they want to spend their time, especially when dealing with an online course. If necessary, there are certain times in which students may also request online tutors, depending on how well the college is functioning or how well the teacher is functioning.

The second step of the writing process for remote learners is to understand the assignment that the teacher is granting. Even though there will be a number of assignments spread out throughout the course, it is important to know each of them before starting to actually write. The students should think about what they already know about the topic and brainstorm other ideas regarding how they can write further. Depending on the genre of the assignment, it may be necessary to continue to brainstorm and even create a writing map in order to determine the best layout for the assignment. This is beneficial because if there is a certain aspect of the assignment that a student may not understand, they have the time to ask the teacher for assistance. If necessary, the teacher can offer virtual one on one assistance so that the student can fully understand the directions of the assignment (Srinvas 20).

The third step of the writing process involves the development of drafts. Since this is an English writing course and many of the students have learned English as a second language, there is bound



to be multiple drafts that are created. Even before an assignment or paper is graded, it may be beneficial for the teacher to mark up what the student has submitted so that they can take the time to make any edits. If needed, the teacher may also schedule a virtual conference in order to go over the strengths and weaknesses of the assignment. Even though these conferences have been found to be very successful in person, it can also create positive feedback virtually. The students can learn from their mistakes and turn in assignments that they are confident with.

An additional step of the writing process, which may involve drafting includes the concept of peer review. Even though many people are accustomed to in-person peer-review, this can be done virtually as well. The teacher can assign each student a partner and the individuals can take the time to learn from each other. The students can read the assignments and respond as needed. When the students are actively participating, this can help them to learn and grow as time progresses. There may be times in which students can feel uncomfortable with peer reviewing, but the teachers must set the tone for the class and ensure that each person is comfortable. There is hope that if a student does not feel comfortable sharing his or her work, that they will speak out and inform the teacher. Fortunately, most students have learned English as a second language, so the fluency of writing may be similar across the board. Even if there are just a few mistakes within the assignments, it may be beneficial for peers to point these out as opposed to the teachers since it offers a different type of critique. One last step of the writing process includes the idea of research. Prior to the global pandemic, students could venture into the library and read about the topic at hand. Now, the students, must have access to a virtual library so that they can perform the research necessary for their assignments (Safa 15).

### **Difficulties that may be Faced**

Even though most students are accustomed to in-person learning, they will have to take the time to transition to virtual learning and this may create an array of difficulties. One factor to take into consideration includes technological failures. There is a need for the CBE to ensure that they have invested in the right types of technology so that the students can effectively learn. If the educational technology does not exist, this can be a significant deterrence in the way that the students are able to learn. Moreover, the college must take the time to evaluate if the students are able to access virtual learning from their homes. If they are not, proper accommodations must be put into place to make sure that the classroom environment is as supportive as possible.

An additional difficulty that may be faced is the lack of support that may be faced by teachers. While these individuals take the time to try and support all of their students, the school must take the time to ensure that the educators are not overwhelmed and that they have the right types of resources in order to conduct the classes. When teaching English writing, there are many times in which teachers may feel frustrated simply because they do not have the right types of resources in order to perform their jobs. The college should grant them the right type of technology and even

offer guidance if they want it. As a whole, if a supportive network is not created, the educators may feel as if they are not making a difference. This can take a toll on the learning abilities of the students and the overall morale. The concept of community is very important whether it involves students or teachers. Each person must feel confident to use the tools that are available to them.

An additional difficulty that must be mentioned includes the concept of keeping students safe while they are online. One last difficulty includes dealing with distractions. Since the students are now learning virtually, they have many distractions that can pop up when trying to learn. When in person, the teachers can monitor those distractions, but when learning virtually, this becomes very difficult. If needed, students must have prior conversations with their teachers to ensure that they will remain focused. If this does not take place, it will be beneficial to have weekly meetings in order to rectify this issue (Smith 20).

## CONCLUSION

Overall, there have been a great deal of changes that have been made throughout the past few years due to the global pandemic. Fortunately, students are able to learn how to write virtually, however they must overcome many challenges. There is hope that in-person classes will return back to normal sooner than later in order to increase the level of interaction in education, but there are still many unknowns. As time progresses, it is beneficial to set up effective processes for the future.

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