



A study of the Jordanian postgraduate students' perceptions on research writing through online learning

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Abstract

Almost every aspect of life has been disrupted due to the erupting of COVID-19 pandemic; education is arguably one of the most effected fields. The shift towards online education had become the focus of many studies to examine the students' perceived learning outcomes as well as their satisfaction in virtual learning settings. This study investigates the effect of the abrupt switch to online teaching on the written production of the curriculum and instruction postgraduate students' research writing for the academic year 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The sample comprises 53 PhD and Post-Graduate students in the department of curriculum and instructions in the faculty of educational Sciences at Mut'ah University in Jordan. The data were collected using a close-ended questionnaire which elicits responses on a five-point Likert Scale. A thorough examination of the instrument's reliability and validity was conducted. Results showed that students and universities administrations have been quickly adapted themselves to the new changes, with perceptible positive attitudes among the PhD and Post-Graduate students regarding the virtual activities applied in teaching and learning writing. This study provides a source for university instructors, syllabus designer and policy makers on the importance of integrating online learning in as part on the universities conventional.

Keywords: attitudes; COVID- 19; effect; postgraduate proficiency; research writing

1. Introduction

The spread of COVID-19 globally closed many educational institutions. This challenged universities readiness to deal with the crisis that required reliance on modern technologies to enable the learning process to continue effectively. At the same time, whereas some universities did have adjunct departments for online or distance education, the suddenness and entirety of the shift was perhaps the biggest leap for education. It was also a change that accelerated the growth of online learning environments exponentially. Many institutions, in this changed scenario, have become interested to offer the best online course materials, engage learners, and evaluate performance.

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While it has been the pandemic overspread that led universities all over the world transferring towards virtual education; the massive development in information and communication technology (ICT) has contributed to the development of up-to-date education teaching methodologies for the benefit of the students (Baber, 2020; Al Kayed, 2021).

Studies in the last two decades have clearly established the superiority of E-learning over physical learning. The former offers easier access to learning facilitates accessibility so that learners can resolve space and time constraints, and offers new opportunities for the teaching process to reflect on the learners' demands and needs (Bonk & Graham, 2006; Aliyyah et al., 2020). There was expected to be just a 15 percent share of the market committed to online education in 2018 (Burquel & Busch, 2020). In this sense, on an "untested and unprecedented scale," the COVID-19 crisis has greatly intensified the shift toward the online learning space (Zaveri et al., 2020; Yasin & Hussein, 2021). Nowadays, social distancing and institutions closure policies have influenced the educational system, yet considerable efforts have been made to make the online teaching more popular within a relatively short amount time (Bao, 2020; Lim, 2020; Chiodini, 2020).

Understanding how colleges have dealt with the epidemic is becoming increasingly popular (Almansour & Al-Ahdal, 2020; Bao, 2020; Greene, 2020; Lim, 2020), a few limited studies have addressed the sudden transition to online instruction (Hazaea, et al., 2021). Likely, the major effect of such transition on both the social and teaching processes is not yet adequately understood at present (Burgess & Sievertsen, 2020). The decision to close institutions but pursue the teaching and learning process in China, the first country seriously impacted by the COVID-19 epidemic, led to a significant shift to online courses, sponsored by the government through the "Disrupted Classes, Undisrupted Learning" initiative (Schlenz, et al., 2020). A cohesive strategy at the university level in Singapore helped promote the shifting to virtual learning ensuring that the learning/teaching process continues to follow comparable quality measurement by providing teachers and students with suitable technology, and focusing on learners and their needs (Chao & Lo, 2011). In Europe, the European Commission (2020) stressed that "COVID-19 is reviving the need to explore online teaching and learning opportunities." (n.p).

2. Significance of the study

The researcher expects that the findings of this study will be useful for educational professionals as they transition to a new academic paradigm. In their writing lectures, university instructors may incorporate in the online writing practices, so their job is transformed to that of learning facilitators rather than knowledge providers. This research may also help postgraduate students develop their independent research writing skills, motivation, and confidence. Furthermore, this study refreshes the body of educational research conducted in Jordanian situation. Thus, in many ways, this endeavor lays the foundation stone to carry out further investigations. Finally, the critical need to incorporate technologies into writing syllabuses is acknowledged by administrators, textbook evaluators, and curriculum developers. So this study aims to experimentally examine the impact of Microsoft Teams, an online learning platform, on university students' research writing abilities. It also aims to measure the attitudes of Post-Graduators towards obtaining online writing activities in teaching research writing.

3. Research Questions

The current study has a central question that is hoped to be answered. The question as two parts:

1. How does the online teaching practice impact the research writing of Post-Graduate and PhD students, and

2. What are the students' perceptions about the effect of online learning' on their writing skills?

4. Literature Review

At Mut'ah University, online learning is a type of electronic learning that is employed as a form of distance learning in which a course or program is provided entirely online using Microsoft Teams, Zoom, and WhatsApp. In this study, it is Microsoft Teams and Zoom. Microsoft Teams is a platform that offers an interactive learning environment with a range of technical facilities to serve diverse educators and learners' needs. It allows users to share and utilize their institutes Learning Management Systems (LMS). Thus, it enables the continuation of the learning process. These learning resources are developed to facilitate the teaching of face-to-face and distance learning; to promote the learning process. LMS platforms provide many resources, such as collaboration, implementation, and appraisal tools. These learning resources are simple to be used and are meant to support teachers and learners with technical knowledge.

LMS platforms such as Blackboard and WebCT offer email, message forums, chat rooms, news and announcement areas, and the storing of course notes and related material (Midcalf & Boatwright, 2020). The use of LMS aims to contribute to the usefulness of web-based learning (WBL) and makes it a more productive experience. LMS platforms help institutes to manage learning materials in one central location. Institutions may also use an LMS to align individual user information with organizational human resources programs and promote and track students' academic success, including skill tests, competencies, and performance development (Kinloch & Imig, 2010). With e-technology, the nature of the teaching and learning processes shifts (Teo, 2011). Many online systems are based on constructivist learning theories, which assume that by creating learning experiences and communicating with teachers and peers to accumulate and build information, learners are fully engaged in the instructional process (Bangert, 2006). The need for multiple teaching methods are applied to maximize the virtual educational process (Dixson, 2010) and requiring the lack of personal attendance of both instructors and learners as they do in traditional classrooms.

Collaborative learning is based on the philosophy of Constructivism, which argues that learning can emerge from meaningful social experiences in which language plays a significant role (Hadjerrouit, 2013). It can best be defined as an active creation of new information through interaction, debating and, cooperation depending on learners' prior learning background experience. Meaningful learning may be possible in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which is defined as a gap between the student's current competency development and the potential development level with the proper assistance or in teamwork with more competent peers (Vygotsky, 1987). Besides collaborative experiences that can be postulated using the ZPD definition, students' interactions within the ZPD can also be classified. Within the ZPD, students can reach a higher degree of learning success than they can do by operating independently from each other. Likely, collaborative learning is much more complicated than cooperative learning, as it requires the collective participation of all students in creating and exchanging collective knowledge (Zaveri, et al., 2020). If students are able to participate more in collaborative social interaction with others in and out of classes, they are predicted to do better academically than others who do not. In EFL learning contexts, researchers and educators have a keen interest in understanding how learners communicate with each other to co-construct information or negotiate context in order to improve learners' competence in communication in the target language (Foster & Ohta, 2005). Collaborative learning encourages higher accomplishment than individual's performance, and authentic collaboration achieves a specific objective through a collaborative initiative. The emergence of new media as an enabling medium for instructional change has fulfilled in collaborative and revolutionary learning through greater communication while offering more concrete and engaging platforms for the social establishment of communal knowledge (Al-Khataybeh, 2006).

Salasiah (2016) examined students' perception of students' speech during online learning, particularly the Edmodo platform in a writing course. The study indicated that using digital learning, particularly Edmodo, in writing classes may significantly contribute to positive learning changes, such as improving students' digital learning awareness. Students can access numerous online learning writing resources that enrich their horizons. Previous studies focused on exploring students' perspectives on the Edmodo application in writing class, but the current study examined how Edmodo can enhance students' writing skills.

Furthermore, Bangert (2006) conducted an evaluative study on the effectiveness of online teaching wherein the Seven Principles of Effective Teaching strategies were discussed. The sample of the study consisted of (807) randomly selected students joining the WebCT courses in the Western United States. The findings of this study showed that the evaluation of online learning effectiveness is affected by the summative and formative feedback about the quality of the students' online learning efforts. Likely, Al-Khataybeh and Al-Awassa (2016) studied the impact of using Web Quest on enhancing the writing skills 7th grade female pupils. The research sampled 100 seventh-grade female pupils at random from three schools. When two groups of identical strength were compared, statistically significant differences in favor of the experimental group were seen. Wieland and Kollias (2020) completed a classroom action analysis in the EFL classroom at Arab University. It was noticed that the students' writing had significant gains by using Edmodo to incorporate into the writing class.

5. Methodology

In terms of methodology, this study pursued a quantitative research design in which a closed-ended questionnaire was used to ascertain participants' perceptions about the usage of online learning in the classroom setting for teaching research writing.

5.1. Sample of the study

The researcher selected the sample participants randomly and set the number of students to be 53 which comprised 74.64% of the study's overall population. The students enrolled in PhD and Post-Graduate programs in the Faculty of Educational Sciences, Department of Curricula and Instruction at Mutah University, Jordan, enrolling at the first semester for the academic year 2020 /2021. They were both males and females and shared the same background knowledge. As mentioned above the study recruited both Postgraduate and PhD students. Postgraduate are those students who are studying in the faculty of Educational Sciences, Department of Curricula and Instruction, whereas PhD students are those students who are registered in the PhD program. Their specialization is English, Arabic, Social Studies, Science and Technology.

5.2. The Instrument of the Study

To achieve the study's purpose, the researcher designed a questionnaire based on the five-point Likert Scale. The questionnaire comprised of (31) items with response options ranging as follows: strongly agree (S.A., 5), agree (A., 4), undecided (U, 3), strongly disagree (S.D., 2), and disagree (D., 1). To make certain of the validity and reliability of the instrument, the questionnaire was referred by requesting eight senior professors with experience of guiding at least four PhD theses each to validate the items. Their comments were taken into consideration in modifying the items, and the discrepancies pointed out by them were rectified. Moreover, a pilot study with (21) post graduate students was conducted. These were excluded later from the actual analysis of the study. The reliability of the questionnaire was ensured in which Cronbach alpha test of the modified version was computed and

showed a value of ($p = 0.91$) which is considered a high reliable questionnaire. SPSS 21st version was used for data analysis to determine the quantitative values of the survey findings.

5.3. Data Analysis and Results

The collected data were descriptively analyzed, (see appendix Table.1) in which the mean, standard deviation, frequencies and the percentages of the postgraduate and PhD students' perceptions of the effects of online learning on research writing.

6. Results and Discussion

This study aims to find out Jordanian Post-graduate and PhD students' perception on the impact of online learning on their research writing.

Table 1. Students' responses (percentages) to the questionnaire items

Item	D1 %	S.D.2 %	U 3%	A 4%	S.A 5 %
1. There is a positive effect of COVID-19 confinement on my performance	13.2	17	32.1	28.3	9.4
2. There is a negative effect of COVID-19 confinement on my performance	7.5	2.5	37.7	22.6	11.3
3. There are no references because the library is closed	26.4	11.3	35.8	20.8	5.7
4. The students are not well trained on using e-Learning activates	3.8	11.3	30.2	35.8	1.8
5. Closing the campus affects my writing research	15.1	15.1	30.2	32.1	7.5
6. I find it difficult to collect data related to my research.	17	17	30.2	28.3	7.5
7. I have to delay the start of my new research project	18.9	9.4	39.6	26.4	5.7
8. I have a survey study including interview observation to apply my study.	7.5	11.3	50.9	22.6	7.5
9. I'm unfamiliar with the new types of assessment on the e-learning plat- form	15.1	15.1	34	18.9	17
10. I find that assessment methods are unfair	11.3	11.3	32.1	28.3	17
11. I feel that my teacher is unfamiliar with correcting researches through the electronic platform.	15.1	13.2	32.1	28.3	11.3
12. The teacher doesn't know how to write on the body of the research.	11.3	11.3	50.9	20.8	5.7
13. The number of the students in the section does not allow the teacher to read and correct the handed research paper.	7.5	24.5	22.6	26.4	8.9
14. Students attitudes toward e-Learning activities is negative	9.4	15.1	37.7	20.8	17
15. The teachers are not convinced with teaching through e-Learning act ivies	3.8	13.2	39.6	30.2	13.2
16. Students are unfamiliar with writing researches	9.4	15.1	30.2	34	11.3
17. The teacher who teaches design and methodology course did not teach students efficiently	18.9	15.1	30.2	26.4	9.4

18. I am familiar with attending classes face to face	1.9	9.4	35.8	26.4	26.4
19. E-Learning activists will affect on my future job	5.7	11.3	37.7	28.3	17
20. Infrastructure affects my writing research.	7.5	15.1	29.3	34	15.1
21. E-Learning activates give me the chance to improve my writing research	5.7	13.2	34	34	13.2
22. E-learning is easy	13.2	17	24.5	30.2	15.1
23. E-Learning gives me enough time to do my research	7.5	17	24.5	37.7	13.2
24. I can always write my research from E-earning activates	9.4	15.1	41.5	20.8	13.2
25. My teachers don't reply my Emails quickly	17	13.2	35.8	24.5	9.4
26. E-learning activities are frustrating to use	11.3	15.1	49.1	15.1	9.4
27. E-learning activities help me to master the research	7.5	18.9	35.8	28.3	9.4
28. I find E-learning activates difficult to do	9.4	13.2	39.6	30.2	7.5
29. e-learning activities is less than class room knowledge	9.4	18.9	26.4	24.5	20.8
30. E-learning activities motivated me to succeed	13.2	15.1	28.3	28.3	15.1
31. We need e-learning activities training	5.7	5.7	32.1	41.5	15.1
Total average	10.8	13.7	34.5	27.5	11.8

Students' responses to the questionnaire items reflected by large concentration of the responses in favour of 'U' which indicates that 34.5 % of the respondents are undecided in their perceptions. Twenty-seven and a half of the participants showed positive agreement while 11.8 % of them reflect strong positive attitudes towards online learning. Nearly about 14% and 10.8 % of them are against the online learning showing their disagreement or strongly agreement respectively.

Items 1 and 2 pertain to the respondents' general outlook to the effects of online learning, with more than 20% of them reporting that Covid-19 related confinement has had a positive effect on their performance as against only 10% of the participants who reported this to be a negative influence. As many as 37% reported that they did not face problems with reference to work even though the library remained closed whereas a little more than 25% appeared to have found this part of their research challenging in the new circumstances. However, the poor exposure to non-physical learning seems to be a setback for the respondents as more than 36% reported that online learning adversely affected their research in this period. A comparable number of respondents agreed or disagreed about difficulties faced in data collection during the period. Since many studies are just doctrinal, and given the availability of access to information in this knowing age, this may be to blame for the disparity; it is possible to conduct research remotely. This is also corroborated by the negative response of more than 18% of the participants who refuted that they needed to administer surveys in their research. The respondents are generally satisfied with the assessment policy and practices as they reported that they were both familiar and satisfied with such experience. On the contrary, the number of students per class seems to worry the respondents in terms of the teacher's finding of sufficient time to devote to each paper handed in for feedback. Similarly, students' unfamiliarity with the methodology of research writing was reported by as many as 45% to be a problem area. Yet 45% of the respondents reported that they found e-learning easy to follow, affording them better opportunities to learn/ practice research writing (47%), and encouraging to attempt research writing (33%). Satisfaction with the e-learning medium in research writing has been reported by more than 24% of the respondents as opposed to 19% who showed their dissatisfaction of online learning. However, some challenges were

still perceptible in respondents' answers with more than 44% who reported their lower efficiency in online learning than face to face training in research, lack of training as a drawback (more than 56%).

7. Conclusions

Despite all the difficulties that may impact e-learning experience during the current global crisis, academicians, student communities and administrations in Jordan have considered e-learning positive and practical and students' engagement to be strong. However, the majority of participants decided that it could not replace the conventional method of learning. Instead, they recommended integrating e-learning practices into the original curriculum to enhance students' performance. The flexibility of time and place were the most significant advantages of e-learning, and the lack of e-learning expertise was the primary concern of the majority. They ultimately decided that e-learning would play an essential part in the development of the educational process.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A. presents the mean, standard deviation, frequencies and the percentages of the postgraduate and PhD students' perceptions of the effects of online learning on research writing.

Itemgr	Disagree				Strongly Disagree				Undecided				Agree				Strongly Agree			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
	N	%	M	Std	N	%	M	Std	N	%	M	Std	N	%	M	Std	N	%	M	Std
There is a positive effect of COVID-19 confinement on my performance	7	13.2	0.132	2.82	9	17	0.170	6.24	17	32.1	0.321	11.79	15	28.3	0.283	10.41	5	9.4	0.094	3.47
1. There is a negative effect of COVID-19 confinement on my performance	4	7.5	0.075	2.86	11	2.5	0.208	7.63	20	37.7	0.377	13.88	12	22.6	0.226	8.33	6	11.3	0.113	4.16
2. There are no references because the library is closed	14	26.4	0.264	2.89	6	11.3	0.113	4.16	19	35.8	0.358	13.18	11	20.8	0.208	7.63	3	5.7	0.057	2.08
3. The students are not well trained on using e-Learning activates	2	3.8	0.037	2.47	6	11.3	0.113	4.16	16	30.2	0.302	11.10	19	35.8	0.358	13.18	10	1.8	0.189	6.94
4. Closing the campus affects my writing research	8	15.1	0.150	2.42	8	15.1	0.151	5.55	16	30.2	0.302	11.10	17	32.1	0.321	11.79	4	7.5	0.075	2.78
5. I find it difficult to collect data related to my research.	9	17	0.169	2.42	9	17	0.170	6.24	16	30.2	0.302	11.10	15	28.3	0.283	10.41	4	7.5	0.075	2.78
6. I have to delay the start of my new research project	10	18.9	0.188	2.36	5	9.4	0.094	3.47	21	39.6	0.396	14.57	14	26.4	0.264	9.71	3	5.7	0.057	2.08
7. I have a survey study including interview observation to	4	7.5	0.075	2.20	6	11.3	0.113	4.16	27	50.9	0.509	18.73	12	22.6	0.226	8.33	4	7.5	0.075	2.78

apply my study																				
8. I'm unfamiliar with the new types of assessment on the e-learning platform	8	15.1	0.150	2.235	8	15.1	0.151	5.55	18	34	0.340	12.49	10	18.9	0.189	6.94	9	17	0.170	6.24
9. I find that assessment methods are unfair	6	11.3	0.113	2.20	6	11.3	0.113	4.16	17	32.1	0.321	11.79	15	28.3	0.283	10.41	9	17	0.170	6.24
10. I feel that my teacher is unfamiliar with correcting researches through the electronic platform.	8	15.1	0.150	2.24	7	13.2	0.132	4.86	17	32.1	0.321	11.79	15	28.3	0.283	10.41	6	11.3	0.113	4.16
11. The teacher doesn't know how to write on the body of the research.	6	11.3	0.113	2.19	6	11.3	0.113	4.16	27	50.9	0.509	18.73	11	20.8	0.208	7.63	3	5.7	0.057	2.08
12. The number of the students in the section does not allow the teacher to read and correct the handed research paper.	4	7.5	0.075	2.24	13	24.5	0.245	9.02	12	22.6	0.226	8.33	14	26.4	0.264	9.71	10	8.9	0.189	6.94
13. Students attitudes toward e-Learning activities is negative	5	9.4	0.094	2.29	8	15.1	0.151	5.55	20	37.7	0.377	13.88	11	20.8	0.208	7.63	9	17	0.170	6.24
14. The teachers are not convinced with teaching through e-Learning	2	3.8	0.037	2.36	7	13.2	0.132	4.86	21	39.6	0.396	14.57	16	30.2	0.302	11.10	7	13.2	0.132	4.86

act ivies																				
15. Students are unfamiliar with writing researches	5	9.4	0.094	2.32	8	15.1	0.151	5.55	16	30.2	0.302	11.10	18	34	0.340	12.49	6	11.3	0.113	4.16
16. The teacher who teaches design and methodology course did not teach students efficiently	10	18.9	0.188	2.40	8	15.1	0.151	5.55	16	30.2	0.302	11.10	14	26.4	0.264	9.71	5	9.4	0.094	3.47
17. I am familiar with attending classes face to face	1	1.9	0.018	2.05	5	9.4	0.094	3.47	19	35.8	0.358	13.18	14	26.4	0.264	9.71	14	26.4	0.264	9.71
18. E-Learning activists will affect on my future job	3	5.7	0.056	1.825	6	11.3	0.113	4.16	20	37.7	0.377	13.88	15	28.3	0.283	10.41	9	17	0.170	6.24
19. Infrastructure affects my writing research.	4	7.5	0.075	1.80	8	15.1	0.151	5.55	15	29.3	0.283	10.41	18	34	0.340	12.49	8	15.1	0.151	5.55
20. E-Learning activates give me the chance to improve my writing research	3	5.7	0.056	1.84	7	13.2	0.132	4.86	18	34	0.340	12.49	18	34	0.340	12.49	7	13.2	0.132	4.86
21. E-learning is easy	7	13.2	0.132	1.779	9	17	0.170	6.24	13	24.5	0.245	9.02	16	30.2	0.302	11.10	8	15.1	0.151	5.55
22. E-Learning gives me enough time to do my research	4	7.5	0.075	1.80	9	17	0.170	6.24	13	24.5	0.245	9.02	20	37.7	0.377	13.88	7	13.2	0.132	4.86
23. I can always write my research from E-earning activates	5	9.4	0.094	1.85	8	15.1	0.151	5.55	32	41.5	0.604	22.20	11	20.8	0.208	7.63	7	13.2	0.132	4.86

24. My teachers don't reply my Emails quickly	9	17	0.169	1.98	7	13.2	0.132	4.86	19	35.8	0.358	13.18	13	24.5	0.245	9.02	5	9.4	0.094	3.47
25. E-learning activities are frustrating to use	6	11.3	0.113	1.41	8	15.1	0.151	5.55	20	49.1	0.377	13.88	8	15.1	0.151	5.55	5	9.4	0.094	3.47
26. E-learning activities help me to master the research	4	7.5	0.075	1.48	10	18.9	0.189	6.94	19	35.8	0.358	13.18	15	28.3	0.283	10.41	5	9.4	0.094	3.47
27. I find E-learning activates difficult to do	5	9.4	0.094	1.63	7	13.2	0.132	4.86	21	39.6	0.396	14.57	16	30.2	0.302	11.10	4	7.5	0.075	2.78
28. e-learning activities is less than class room knowledge	5	9.4	0.094	2	10	18.9	0.189	6.94	14	26.4	0.264	9.71	13	24.5	0.245	9.02	11	20.8	0.208	7.63
29. E-learning activities motivated me to succeed	7	13.2	0.132	2.82	8	15.1	0.151	5.55	15	28.3	0.283	10.41	15	28.3	0.283	10.41	8	15.1	0.151	5.5
30. We need e-learning activities training	3	5.7	0.056	1.82	3	5.7	0.057	2.08	17	32.1	0.321	11.79	22	41.5	0.415	15.26	8	15.1	0.151	5.55
Total	5.74		0.108		7.613		0.144		18.42		0.348		14.61		0.276		6.74		0.127	