Writing Difficulties and New Solutions: Blended Learning as an Approach to Improve Writing Abilities

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Abstract

It has been said that we cannot really teach language, we can only create conditions in which it will develop spontaneously in mind in its own way (Gomaa, 2010).Writing is an intricate and complex task; it is the most difficult of all the language abilities to acquire. Teaching English writing to Arab learners has many challenges. Therefore, they are more prone to committing errors (Mourtaga, 2004). Traditional methodologies do not help a lot. Unless the teacher is able to create an interest in the minds of the learners, he can't expect the desired results. A good teacher teaches, a better teacher explains, and the best teacher inspires. If a teacher keeps on teaching following the traditional method, the classroom activities become passive and monotonous. Therefore, the teacher should try new methods other than the traditional methods of teaching and make the students better achievers. This research paper describes the teaching and learning context, and how the writing activities were integrated as part of the blended learning outcome. It discusses the extent to which students were able to achieve from the intended outcomes and the processes involved in achieving those outcomes. This paper reports findings from research into the benefits of integrating blended learning into traditional methods in developing writing abilities for second and third year undergraduates at a conventional university in Palestine.

Introduction

The use of English is more widespread because of the business-environment revolution. Nowadays, English is used by all people worldwide because of the ongoing advances in technology such as internet, and other businesses (Pakir,1999). English also plays an important role in education and students are expected to use it effectively. Flanegin and Rudd (2000) found that English is necessary for all professions. However, Teaching English in the Arab world is challenging. Many students are able to understand the language, but most of the students face the problem of communicating their ideas effectively The problem is the lack of both: the adequate stock of English vocabulary and creativity in writing. It is evident that writing is the biggest challenge for many students. Therefore, many associations exert their effort to improve learning English (Mourtaga, 2010). Still, it is a very tough mission for teachers to teach English creatively so that students could become independent learners and benefit a lot from the innovative teaching techniques adopted by the teacher (Rury, 1996).

Teaching Writing

Students do not write very often and most of what they write is classroom-bound. The most important factor in writing exercises is that students need to be personally involved in order to make the learning experience of great value. Encouraging student participation in the exercise, while at the same time refining and expanding writing skills, requires a certain pragmatic approach. The teacher should be clear on what skills he/she is trying to develop. Next, the teacher needs to decide on which means (or type of exercise) can facilitate learning of the target area. Once the target skill areas and means of implementation are defined, the teacher can then proceed to focus on what topic can be employed to ensure student participation. By pragmatically combining these objectives, the teacher can expect both enthusiasm and effective learning.

With both the target area and means of production, clear in the teachers mind, the teacher can begin to consider how to involve the students by considering the type of activities which are interesting to the students: Are they preparing for something specific such as a holiday or test? Will they need any of the skills pragmatically? What has been effective in the past? A good way to approach this is by class feedback, or brainstorming sessions.

By choosing a topic that involves the students, the teacher is providing a context within which effective learning on the target area can be undertaken.

Causes of Writing Problems

a. Al-Khsawneh (2010) indicated that the students identified that the teaching method and the environment are the main causes of their weaknesses in English. Their Weak qualification in English is either related to the lack of student motivation, or the teacher's interest. Many learners use their mother tongue because of the isolated culture. Yet, methods of teaching English included the medium of instructions, using Arabic in English classes, writing done in Arabic, teachers' low proficiency in English, and lack of writing practice in educational institutions.

b. English language learners have limited vocabulary. Therefore, students end up repeating the same words; this hinders creativity. Rabab'ah (2003), clarified that students couldn't give voice to their thoughts because lack the adequate stock of vocabulary.

c. English language learners don't use invented spelling and their written texts are restricted to words which they know.

d. The present tense is the only tense used in their writing.

e. The students' writing is difficult to understand because of the ill-structured sentences in composition.

f. Students are unwilling to share their work with other students and they don't get the suitable feedback.

g. When the learners read their writing aloud, they couldn't distinguish whether what they read or write is right or wrong.

What are the challenges English language learners (ELLs) faces in learning to write in English?

Writing is the most difficult language skill for ELLs to master. Gomaa (2010), indicated that "students' first language affects learning the target language". This is why students make certain mistakes and repeat them. Here are some of the common mistakes she has experienced while teaching writing:

a. Run on sentences: Run on sentences in Arabic are accepted. In Arabic we write endless sentences with no punctuation marks, and that is not accepted when writing English.

b. Arabish: When the students translate Arabic into English they sometimes use words causing misunderstanding and confusion. For example, a sentence like "Flu infection spreads by peace with hand" is grammatically correct but meaningless. The student means "Flue infection is caused by greetings and handshakes". The words greetings and peace are of the same meaning in Arabic so the student wrote one instead of the other.

c. Punctuation: several ELLs with Arabic background struggle with punctuation since Arabic has few limitations in the use of commas and periods than English. The semi-colon, and the exclamation marks aren't very commonly used in students' writings.

D.Writing Organization: The circular structure in the English essay (with the topic sentence of the same idea in the conclusion) is foreign to Arabic essay where the conclusion has to bring something new.

Blended Learning and Teaching Languages

Blended learning is an innovative teaching method that offers students with a flexible teaching environment.
According to Reid-Young (undated), blended learning is an approach to education that offers a learning environment to accompany the teaching process by adding more innovative modes of assessment. Moreover, the uploaded activities are varied. Students may get online sessions, they are asked to upload their written material online in a well-organised way. Rovai and Jordan (2004), noticed that according to Colis and Moonen (2001) "blended learning is a hybrid of traditional face-to-face and online learning so that instruction occurs both in the classroom and online, and where the online component becomes a natural extension of traditional classroom learning".

Blended learning is a flexible approach that offers a fully online course in addition to the face-to-face sessions. Blended learning adds to and enriches face to face teaching interaction. It improves learning by giving another chance for students to stay in touch with their teachers and classmates. Some of the advantages of blended learning include cost-effectiveness for both learners and the institution. Blended learning makes the online course available to other learners from other countries. Moreover, the teacher has the flexibility of editing and adapting the online course material to the needs of the students and course intended learning outcomes. Some of the disadvantages may include computer and internet accessibility, limited knowledge in the use of technology, and lack of computer labs on university campus.

Review of Related Literature

Recently a lot of studies have been conducted to investigate the effect of implementing blended learning on students' performance but few studies have ventured into how students' writing skill improves. Many researchers found that designing a blended course improves students' scores and that the students showed positive attitude towards the implementation of such a blend, (Boyle, 2003; Dowling, 2003; Dziuban, 2004).

O'Toole & Absalom (2003) contended, that uploading material online positively affects the achievement level of the students. They found that the students who read the online material in addition to the in-class lecture had better performance in a quiz than those who only depended on the in-class traditional lecture. Researchers as Singh (2003), found that the students' participating in a blended course performed 10% better than those enrolled in a section taught in the traditional approach.

However, other researchers as Carroll (2003), in a contrastive study tested the differences in learning outcomes when two courses are taught. One course was taught using the traditional way and the other was supplemented with online instruction. The results revealed that there were no significant differences in the outcomes, rather, there were equal learning outcomes for students in the two sections. Cameron (2003), added students' motivation to learn increases when the material is varied as in using interactive learning tools such as simulations and static graphics in an online environment. Reasons (2005), designed a business course in three ways: face to face, blended, and fully online. The researchers found that the students enrolled in the online course performed better than the students enrolling in other sections even though the pedagogical teaching approach was the same.

As far as writing problems are to be solved, research studies focus on the remedies and state that the continuous exposure to material is the only solution especially when a second language is taught. Researchers such as Cervero & Pichardo Castro (2000, p 99), found that "80% of the learnt material is lost in 24 hours". Therefore, blended learning could be an important learning model providing students with additional activities to reinforce the learnt material. Therefore, the online activities supported with videos from actual situations in life allow for employing reading and writing in English (Al-Jarf, 2006). Using such skills makes learning independent (Barenfanger, 2007). The accessibility of online material nearly 24 hours in addition to the face to face interaction give students more practice (O'Donnell, 2006), and this is the only solution to problems of writing since practice makes perfect.

Another remedy to the problems of writing is that blended learning allows students to read their classmates' writing, and therefore, they can make use of their correct modes of writing. Moreover, students can visit the lecture more than once (Graham, C.,2006).

Purpose of the Study

There is a general consensus among English language instructors at the Palestinian Universities that most EFL students are weak in writing English. This problem is invariably reflected on other courses which require assignments and examination written in English. This is an attempt to show that new educational policies can have their role in developing learners' writings since major writing problems can be caused by the employment of outdated approaches and resources. Consequently, it is important to investigate this problem and find, if possible, remedial procedures.

Research Questions

The study aimed at answering the following questions:

1. Are there any differences in students' achievement scores in paragraph writing between the experimental and the control groups in the post-test?

2. To what extent does blended learning develop students' overall performance in paragraph writing in the experimental group?

3. To what extent do students, under the influence of adopting blended learning, improve **sequence of details in writing a paragraph**?

4. To what extent do students, under the influence of adopting blended learning, improve **cohesion within sentences in a paragraph**?

5. To what extent does adopting blended learning improve students' performance in using the **punctuation marks?**

6. To what extent does blended learning improve students' performance in using accurate **grammar?**

7. To what extent does blended learning improve students' performance in **spelling?**

8. To what extent does adopting blended learning improve students' performance in using **capitalization appropriately?**

Research Hypotheses

The study aimed also at testing the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: There are no significant differences at (α=0.05) between the control and experimental groups achievement scores in the post test due to blended learning.

Hypothesis 2: There are no significant differences at (α=0.05) in students' scores in writing between the pre- and post tests of the experimental group due to blended learning.

Hypothesis 3: There are no significant differences in the students' pre- and post-test scores at (α=0.05) in terms of paragraph sequence due to blended learning.

Hypothesis 4: There are no significant differences in the exp pre- and post-test scores at (α=0.05) in terms of cohesion due to blended learning for the experimental group.

Hypothesis 5: There are no significant differences at (α=0.05) between pre- and post-test scores in terms of punctuation due to blended learning for the experimental group.

Hypothesis 6: There are no significant differences at (α=0.05) between the pre- and post-test scores in terms of grammar due to blended learning for the experimental group.

Hypothesis 7: There are no significant differences at (α=0.05) between the pre- and post-test scores in terms of spelling due to blended learning for the experimental group.

Hypothesis 8: There are no significant differences at (α=0.05) between the pre-test and post-test scores in terms of capitalization due to blended learning for the experimental group.

Methodology

The current study used the experimental approach to analyze the data, and verify the results of using blended learning in affecting students' writing abilities at the paragraph level.

Course Selection

The course selected for applying this method in teaching English as a foreign language was the general English course taken by all students regardless of their different specializations. The majority of the students were second and third year undergraduates.

Sample Selection

The instructor (the researcher in this case) selected the two sections that she was teaching in the second semester during the academic year 2009-2010 at a conventional university in Palestine. She applied the new method (Blended Learning) to one section as the experimental group and used the traditional face-to-face lectures for the other section as the control group. The number of the students who participated in the study was 60 students in two sections. 30 students of the sample studied the selected course with blended work and provided individual help. As for assessment, students in both groups were instructed to write as many paragraphs as possible in accordance with a rubric for writing provided at the beginning of the semester. Exam papers were graded, and returned to the students with comments on strengths and weaknesses, reinforcement comments were given, and answers were discussed in class and online. Garrison& Anderson (2003), showed that the asynchronous approach to blended learning is a powerful teaching strategy. Therefore, the researchers opted for such an approach in the online treatment so as to allow for more flexibility in the learning process.

Online Treatment (MOODLE)

In addition to the traditional in-class instruction, the experimental group used the online platform as MOODLE is is available to all the students who simply enrolled in the course. It was easy to use. All the material given on the MOODLE is related to writing paragraphs related to the ILOs of the course. The experimental group used the Internet at home or at the university.

The blended course components were described and instructions on how to use certain course components were given to students at the beginning of the semester. Online instruction was posted to the MOODLE discussion forums on a weekly basis throughout the semester.

The students of the experimental group were asked to post their comments on a paragraph written by one of the students. The first writing task was error analysis. The teacher uploaded a paragraph written by one of the students asked the students to identify one of the errors to correct. Moreover, students had to read the posts provided by the other students before participating. By this way, students unintentionally learn. The deadline for the task was 2 weeks. The second task was writing a paragraph on a topic related to obsession with smoking and the visual aid was provided. The researcher uploaded a photo of two smokers and this inspired students to write so many details about bad effects of smoking. The third task was commenting on and providing opinion about two uploaded videos concerning gender differences. The students also had to answer questions related to the videos by using vocabulary items related to their course materials. The content of the three tasks was related to both the ILOs of the course and the textbook material and topics.

Throughout the semester, the researcher (the instructor at this point) had to post discussion topics by uploading photos that may help students in writing and she used to write model responses every week. She would point out the type of errors they made especially in the grammar threads and ask the students to double-check their posts. The students who agreed and welcomed the idea of participating in the blended component were included in the study. The students were given the chance to write online following a rule stating that they have to employ the vocabulary items, cohesive devices, linking words, and verb tenses they learnt during that semester.

Online Learning Activities

1. Describe a photo containing so many hints about a topic.

2. Error analysis (paragraphs) and discussions.

3. Express their opinion by commenting on photos or videos.

4. Answer questions about a topic related to the weekend activities (this was part of the social corner, a discussion forum that was optional).

Methods of Assessment (Criteria of Evaluating Assignment)

Online assignments were e-mailed to students weekly. The instructor corrected only parts of students' work in accordance with an overall scale. Three tasks were graded and upon completing each task, the students were given a grade out of 10 points. Students, who completed the three main tasks, received a total grade of 30 points which was transformed to 10%.

Because of the institution regulations for such a general unified course, the instructor allocated only 10% of the total mark for online activities, 40% for the first and the second exams, and 50% for the final exam. Other researchers (Leh, 2002), also scored students' assignments as a motivating factor to encourage students to participate in the online activities.

6. Test Validity and Reliability

As for the validity of the final exam, five instructors participated in writing the exam questions and agreed on its validity since it measured the skills of reading and writing. The questions of the test were comparable to those used on the pretest of writing. One of the researchers was the instructor of the experimental and control groups and the scorer of the pre-test and final exam essays. The reliability co-efficient of the final exam was (0.78)

Tools of the Study

To evaluate the effectiveness of blended learning in supporting teaching of writing, the researcher developed an achievement exam (a pre-test) to assess students' level in the two groups at the beginning of the course, and to indicate that any significant differences at the end of the course in favor of the experimental group are due to adopting blended learning. Another tool was the unified final exam which was developed by the teachers teaching this course. Moreover, the researchers analyzed the writing scores of the pre- and post-tests of the experimental group in accordance with a writing rubric containing the following domains of evaluation: Sequence of details, cohesion, grammar, spelling, the use of the punctuation marks, and capitalization. To answer the questions of the research, the students sat for a pre –test in both groups to ensure equivalence between the two groups; the experimental and the control. The results of the pre-test for the two groups are presented in table (1) as follows:

Table (1)
The Differences in Students' Pre-test Scores between the Experimental
And the Control Groups

Test	Means		S. D.		df	T	Sig
	Ctrl. G.	Exp. G.	Ctrl. G.	Exp. G.			
Pre-test	5.90	5.33	1.52	1.30	58	1.56	0.125

The results presented in table (1) show that there are no significant differences in students' achievements at the beginning of the course between the two groups since the t-value was 1.56 at the significance level 0.125. This result ensured the equivalence of students' level in mastering writing English between the two groups.

Data Analysis

The collected data was analyzed using the SPSS program to calculate the means, standard deviations, the percentages of the achievement scores for each group. The t-test was also used to investigate the significance between students' scores in the pre-test and the post –test.

Results of the Study

To investigate the effectiveness of adopting blended learning in teaching writing in English as a foreign language in higher education and to answer the first question, the researchers calculated the differences in students' achievement scores in the post tests between the two groups as follows:

Hypothesis 1. There are no significant differences at (α=0.05) between the control and experimental groups achievement scores in the post test due to blended learning.

Table (2)
The Differences In Students' Achievement Scores Between The Two Groups

Test	Means		S. D.		df	T	Sig
	Ctrl. G.	Exp. G.	Ctrl. G.	Exp. G.			
Post-test	5.85	7.27	1.31	1.52	58	3.86	0.000*

This table shows that there are significant differences between the control and experimental groups in favor of the post test results. This suggests that blended learning was effective in improving students' writing abilities in general. This could be due to the fact that students' motivation to learn increases when they are given the same material in different ways using technology and simulation, (Cameron, 2003). Moreover, the significant difference in the writing scores might be attributed to the teachers' employment of more writing tasks since all the online tasks are additional ones related to the same topics discussed in class. As a result, the students were given more activities and this could be one of the reasons why the experimental group significantly improved writing performance, (Al-Khasawneh, 2010).

Hypothesis 2. There are no significant differences at (α=0.05) in students' scores in writing between the pre- and post tests of the experimental group due to blended learning.

To investigate the effect of blended learning on students' performance in writing, the differences between the pretest and the post-test were tested, and the following table clarifies the results:

Table (3)
Total Result Frequencies for the Experimental Group

		No.	Percent
Pretest	**Pass**	19	63.3 %
	Fail	11	36.7 %
Total		30	100.0%
		No.	Percent
Posttest	**Pass**	28	93.3 %
	Fail	2	6.7 %
Total		30	100.0 %

This table shows the percentages of the failing students in the experimental group before and after the treatment. It is evident that the number of the failures is highly reduced in the post test results. This could be related to the excessive exposure to the online material as it was proven that constant exposure to the material solves many problems, and students will store more information, (Myles, 2002). Moreover, the high grades could be attributed to the students' high learning goals (Klein et al., 2006) and readiness to accept the blended learning activities which were related to the course ILOs, and were also carefully selected to meet students' level.

Table (4)
Students' Differences in Performance between the Per-Test and the Post-Test
For the Experimental Group

Test Type	Grade	Means		S. D.		Df	t	Sig
		Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest			
Total	10	5.32	7.27	1.30	1.52	58	5.28	0.000*

This table indicates that the total score mean of students' performance in writing improved from 5.32 in the pre-test to 7.27 in the post-test. This difference was significant since the significant value is less than 0.05 in favor of the post-test. The means of the post test scores are higher than those of the pre-test scores of the experimental group. The following table clarifies the total grades' differences:

This table shows that there are significant differences in the pre-test and post-test total grades in writing for the experimental group. This shows that the more exposure to the online material leads to an effective employment of the language writing abilities. Moreover, employing the flexible asynchronous approach could be another reason why students' writing abilities improved. The Research has proven that online communication increases when the course content is uploaded online (Johnson, 2002). This could be another factor why students' results in the post-tests were significantly better than in the pre-tests. The researcher also investigated meaning links and thought links forming coherent paragraphs that are logically arranged and ideas which clearly relate to each other in orderly sequence. The following hypothesis was tested, and the results of data analysis are presented in the following table:

Hypothesis 3: There are no significant differences in the students' pre- and post-test scores at (α=0.05) in terms of paragraph sequence due to blended learning.

Table (5)
Students' Differences in Performance between the Per-test and the Post-test
In Terms of Paragraph Sequence

Test		Means		S. D.		df	t	Sig
Type	Grade	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest			
Details	2.5	1.54	1.96	0.54	0.42	58	3.34	0.001*

This table shows that students' writing abilities in terms of coherence in paragraphs significantly improved. One reason for such improvement in the scores of the sequence of details in writing a paragraph could be the fact that students had the chance to read their peers' answers online. Therefore, they were able to read, comment and add to their own knowledge. This mode of collaborative learning made the students unconsciously motivated to read more and write more, (Storch, 2001). Moreover, the asynchronous approach to teaching writing made the mission of writing easier to accomplish as the flexibility of the blended learning environment and the teacher's continuous instructional material given in-class or online made the process of practicing writing easier and better (Hyland, 2002: 78) The researcher also investigated meaning and thought links forming coherent paragraphs containing sentences that are logically arranged and ideas which clearly relate to each other in orderly sequence, and arrange the details of the paragraph according to the subject-matter. The following hypothesis was tested, and the results of data analysis are presented in the following table:

Hypothesis 4. There are no significant differences in the exp pre- and post-test scores at (α=0.05) in terms of cohesion due to blended learning for the experimental group.

Table (6)
Students' Differences in Performance between the Per-test and the Post-test in Terms of Cohesion

Test	Means		S. D.		df	T	Sig
Type	Grade	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest		
Cohesion.	2	0.98	1.46	0.32	0.47	58	4.61	0.000*

It is found that the students' scores in cohesion improved due the implementation of blended learning. This could be attributed to the fact that students were given the chance to participate in errors analysis and then they were given the chance to engage in active writing decisions by involving the students and decentralizing the teacher's roles, (Hyland 2002: 129-131). By doing so, the students talk more and pay attention to their cohesive ties by using the correct transitions, reference, collocations, conjunctions and terminology in terms of using correct transitions, pronoun reference and parallel structure. The effect of blended learning and online activities on the proper use of the punctuation marks was investigated for the experimental group, and the differences between the pre-test and the post-test are presented in the following table which answer the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 5: There are no significant differences at (α=0.05) between pre- and post-test scores in terms of punctuation due to blended learning for the experimental group.

Table (7)
Students' Differences in Performance between the Per-test and the Post-test
In Terms of Punctuation

Test		Means		S. D.		df	T	Sig
Type	Grade	Pre test	Post test	Pre test	Post test			
Punctuation.	1	0.52	0.76	0.26	0.25	58	3.66	0.001*

This table indicates that the total average of students' scores of adequate use of the punctuation marks improved from .52 in the pre-test to .76 in the post-test. This difference was significant in favor of the post-test. Correcting mistakes by themselves and being exposed to additional written forms helped the students pay more attention to the proper use of the language, and printed in their memories the frequent use of some punctuation marks of less frequent in Arabic.

The effect of blended learning and online activities on the students' performance in grammar was investigated for the experimental group, and the differences between the pre-test and the post-test are presented in the following table which answer the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 6. There are no significant differences at (α=0.05) between the pre- and post-test scores in terms of grammar due to blended learning for the experimental group.

Table (8)
Students' Differences in Performance between the Per-test and the Post-test
In Terms of Grammar

Test	Means		S. D.			df	t	Sig
Type	Grade	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest			
Grammar.	2.5	1.23	1.55	0.37	0.45	58	3.04	0.004*

Table (8) shows that the students' grammar scores improved from 1.23 in the pre-test to 1.55 in the post-test. The difference between the two tests was significant and students' scores improved due to the fact that blended learning provided students with more writing activities. This goes in line with other researchers (Al-Khasawneh, 2010; Myles, 2002)) as they stated that students' writing abilities improve if they are exposed to additional activities.

The effect of blended learning and online activities on the students' performance in spelling was investigated for the experimental group, and the differences between the pre-test and the post-test are presented in the following table, which answers the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 7. There are no significant differences at (α=0.05) between the pre- and post-test scores in terms of spelling due to blended learning for the experimental group.

Table (9)
Students' Differences in Performance between the Per-test and the Post-test
in Terms of Spelling

Test		Means		S. D.		df	T	Sig
Type	Grade	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest			
Spelling	1	0.46	0.66	0.20	0.29	58	3.12	0.003*

Table 9 shows that the mean of spelling scores in the pre-test is lower than that in the post-test for the experimental group. Students scores improved from 0.46 in the pre-test to 0.66 in the post-test The difference between the two tests is significant in favor of the post-test, which indicates the importance in reading a lot and integrating students in frequent visual activities to imprint spelling of words in students' memories. This result ensures the assumption that the eye of the student imprints in the memory the spelling of the words if frequently seen. The photographic memory enables students with the ability to identify misspelled words and recall the spelling of words when writing. This is something that blended learning activities can provide.

The effect of blended learning and online activities on the students' performance in **capitalization** was investigated for the experimental group, and the differences between the pre-test and the post-test are presented in the following table which answers the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 8: There are no significant differences at (α=0.05) between the pre-test and post-test scores in terms of capitalization due to blended learning for the experimental group.

Table (10)
Students' Differences in Performance between the Per-test and the Post-test
in Terms of Capitalization

Test	Means		S. D.			df	T	Sig
Type	Grade	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest			
Capitalization	1	0.60	0.88	0.28	0.22	58	4.44	0.000*

Table 10 shows that the mean score of using proper capitalization in the pre-test is lower than that in the post-test for the experimental group. Students scores improved from 0.60 in the pre-test to 0.88 in the post-test The difference between the two tests is significant in favor of the post-test, which indicates the importance in reading a lot and exposing students to frequent visual activities to get used to using capitalization. Integrating students in the process of correcting their peers' mistakes and exposing the students to additional written forms helped the students to pay more attention to capitalization, and printed in their memories the proper use of capitalization which is not found in Arabic.   This is something that blended learning activities can provide.

All the results tables show that there are significant differences between the pre-test and post-test total writing grades in favor of the experimental group. This shows that the excessive exposure to the online material leads to an effective employment of the language writing abilities. Moreover, employing the flexible asynchronous approach could be another reason why students' writing abilities improved. The research has proven that online communication increases when the course content is uploaded online (Johnson, 2002). This could be another factor why students' results in the post-tests were significantly better than in the pre-tests. The results of the differences between the pre-test and the post test for the whole items of students' writings are illustrated in the following diagram, where we can clearly see improvement in all aspects used to assess students' writings and the total score:

Diagram1

Improvements in Students' Performance in Writing
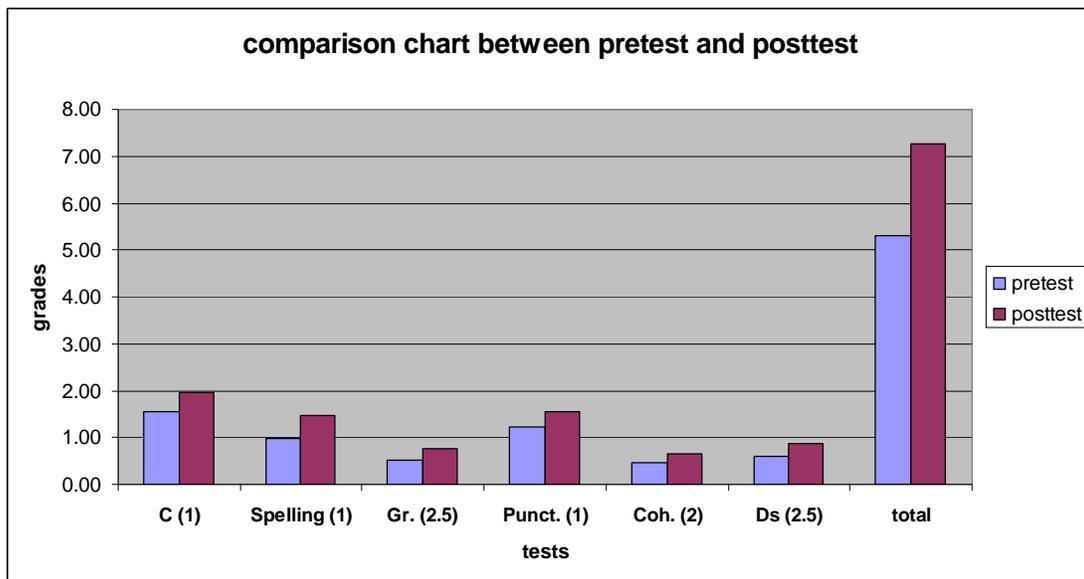
The diagram illustrates development in students' performance in writing and this is an indication of the usefulness of using blended learning as a supportive aid for face to face lectures when teaching writing.

Conclusion

Comparing in the results of the experimental group to those of the control group, the researcher found significant differences in students' achievement scores in favor of the experimental group. Students in the experimental group performed better than their peers in the control group because the students stated that they enjoyed a lot relating inside instructions and illustrations to outside activities using technology. They improved significantly their writings using a topic sentence, improved their spelling and grammar, used the punctuation marks and capitalization better than in the pre-test, and developed better coherent paragraphs.

General Learning Outcomes

At the end of the course, the students in the experimental group were:

1. Communicating clearly and correctly using mechanism of writing as a result of reviewing written, spoken, visual media appropriate to the activity and students' needs.

2. Demonstrating interpersonal skills by listening effectively, and supporting rapport between students.

3. Learning by doing' active learning'. Students use high levels of thinking : analysis, synthesis and evaluation rather than being passive, listening and digesting (memorizing) knowledge and comprehension.

4. Emphasizing group effectiveness skills that will support the notion of a collaborating culture using technology by:

5. Using technology to participate in group tasks and support group   effectiveness

6. Communicating effectively in a group setting by listening actively and giving and receiving feedback appropriately

At the end of the course, the instructor was able to

1. Develop students' understanding and use of some related points and writing mechanism.

2. Emphasize group effectiveness skills using technology.

3. Emphasize communication skills that encouraged students to share ideas and opinions.

4. Facilitate learning the foreign language easily in informal settings among the students in their free time.

Recommendations

Depending on the results, the researchers can make the following recommendations:

1. Working on supporting the notion of blended learning among both teachers and students.

2. Training both teachers and students on blended -learning techniques and strategies to facilitate the process.

3. Improving the facilities and the technical infrastructure by providing higher internet speed, wireless internet, and stronger servers

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Appendix
General paragraph Rubrics

Date:_____ Class___ Writer:_____

Title:_____

Rating Scale: 1- 5=Very poor/ 5-7= Good/ 8-10= Terrific

.	Criteria	R	Comments
1	First sentence contains appropriate idea from thesis. Details are ordered in a coherent way. Conclusion rephrases, sums up, or expresses a result, advice.	2.5	
2	Cohesion is used in a correct way (conjunctions, linking words, redundancy is reduced)	2	
3	punctuation	1	
4	Grammar : Subject/verb	2.5	
5	Spelling	1	
6	Capitalization	1	

Date_____　　　Class_____　　　Instructor:_____

Writing difficulties and new solutions: Blended learning as an approach to improve writing abilities. International Journal of Humanities and Social Studies., 3(9), 254–266.Google Scholar. Ahmed, A. (2010). Â The relationship between English writing ability levels and EFL learners' metacognitive behaviors in the writing process. The International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development, 1(4), 154–180.Google Scholar. White, R., & Arndt, V. (1991). Requires the instructor to have or to learn effective writing and speaking skills. Â Figure 2: shows blended learning as a combination of e-learning and face-to face learning. The e-learning includes both network-based (online learning, Internet-based learning, and Web-based learning) and non-network-based learning (computer-based learning). Â Blending not only offers us the ability to be more efficient in delivering learning, but more effective (Singh,2003). Â 5- Blending Learning, Practice, and Performance Support Perhaps the finest form of blended learning is to supplement learning (organized prior to beginning a new job-task) with practice (using job-task or business process simulation models) and just-intime performance support tools that facilitate the appropriate execution of job-tasks. Writing difficulties and new solutions: Blended learning as an approach to improve writing abilities. International Journal of Humanities and Social Science, 3(9), 254-266. Banditvilai, C. (2016). Â Blended learning: An institutional approach for enhancing students' learning experiences, Journal of Online Learning and Teaching, 9(2), available from http://jolt.merlot.org/vol9no2/poon_0613.htm. Roehl, A., Reddy, S.L., Shannon, G.J. (2013). The flipped classroom: An opportunity to engage millennial students through active learning. Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences, 105(2), 44-49. Soliman, N. (2014). Using e-learning to develop EFL students' language skills and activate their independent learning, Creative Education, 5, 752-757.