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# The Effect of Virtual vs. Actual Writing Instruction on Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners' Essay Writing Performance in Islamic Azad University, Dubai Branch

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**Abstract:** *This study investigated the effect of the Virtual Writing Instruction (VWI) on Dubai-based Iranian EFL Learners' writing performance of web-resource-integrated language learning. Participants were 50 students at intermediate level in two intact groups of 25; one experimental, the other, control group. The appropriate design was quasi-experimental design, yet an F test was performed for the sake of homogeneity of the groups. Statistical calculations made did not indicate any positive impact for online teaching. The findings of the research show that teaching writing virtually is not significantly more effective than teaching it in actual conventional classes. However, virtual classes turned out to be fruitful if used as an addition to the actual class to boost whatever learned in classes.*

**Keywords:** *Conventional Writing, Virtual Writing, Web-based Learning, WebQuest*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

With regard to the effect that use of Web resources has on foreign language learning, the major body of previous studies relied on self-reported and descriptive information provided by the learners. Few have focused on its direct impact on learners' achievement of specific language skills, such as writing." The relationship between learners' perceptions of the effect of the Internet use and their language achievement remains an open question as well" (Stepp-Greany, 2002). Moreover, "little empirical research exists that demonstrates how virtual classes can be integrated into foreign language instruction to yield expected outcomes" (Brandl, 2002).

The first question to begin this research with was "what happens if the learners are exposed to materials which are taught through virtual classes?" The results of the English essays in some researches and articles in which lessons were prepared and taught via Internet, namely online were explored in this regard.

Since English is considered as a foreign language in Dubai and nearly all students in Islamic Azad University of Dubai Campus are Iranians and mostly are obliged to pass numerous general and specific English courses in which a lot have problems with English writing, the researcher believed that traditional writing lessons hamper a native-like writing performance to some extent and this problem could be solved by creating virtual classes through involving learners in courses which were getting to be released by the most popular modern technology.

This study was to find that if the materials and lessons are prepared and taught via the internet, then better performance and higher IELTS writing essay score would be achieved.

### 1.2 Significance of the Study

Basically, years of experience in teaching English language learners at different levels showed the researcher that a lot of students have problems writing their school or university essays and papers. As technology entered everyday lives of people, it can be a very good advantage for language learners and teachers to benefit from this opportunity and provide a learning environment. Virtual learning setting can provide the learners and teachers with some added properties which are usually absent in actual classes, such as discussion forum, reading other students' pieces of writing anytime throughout the course and learn from the comments the instructor or other learners make, etc.

The first people who can benefit from this research will be the researcher's own students and further, all students at different educational institutions may enjoy this new way of having writing classes. Moreover, English language instructors can save their time and energy and teach online while doing handling their other activities.

This study is designed for one major purpose; to address the direct effect of the VWI program on students' writing performance and whether such a perception correlates with students' improved writing performance.

### 1.3 Related Studies

"Making use of the Internet as an informational tool, WebQuests, developed by Bernie Dodge and Tom March in early 1995, are inquiry-oriented activities in which most or all of the information used by learners is drawn from the Web" (Dodge, 1998). The critical attributes of a WebQuest activity include:

1. an introduction that sets the stage and provides some background information,
2. a task that is doable and interesting,
3. a set of web-linked information sources needed to complete the task,
4. a description of the process the learners should go through in accomplishing the task,
5. some guidance on how to organize the information, and
6. a conclusion that brings closure to the quest and reminds participants of what they have learned. (Dodge, 1997)

Dudeney (2003) recognizes the WebQuest model as a potential pedagogical tool by pointing out several advantages. They include providing a relatively easy way to incorporate the Internet into the language classroom, encouraging critical thinking, leading to more communication and interaction through group activities, and eliciting greater learner motivation through interdisciplinary studies as well as "real-life" tasks.

As suggested by Ge Stoks (2002), WebQuests benefit language learning in several aspects. Engaged in a WebQuest activity, learners have the possibility of being exposed to the target language by surfing on the web. Making sense out of the web documents, while skimming and scanning websites; is a useful exercise for learners to increase their language comprehension. In addition, the problem-solving approach of WebQuests may facilitate language learning.

WebQuest design has proved to be a potential tool for effective web-based learning. In order to apply the WebQuest model to EFL writing instruction and evaluate its effectiveness, in this research a writing instruction program was designed and named as "Virtual Writing Instruction" (VWI). The six attributes of WebQuest activities were adapted for each lesson plan in the Virtual writing instruction program.

#### *1.3.1 Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL)*

Computer-assisted language learning (CALL) is succinctly defined in a seminal work by Levy (1997: p. 1) as "the search for and study of applications of the computer in language teaching and learning". CALL embraces a wide range of ICT applications and approaches to teaching and learning foreign languages, from the "traditional" drill-and-practice programs that characterized CALL in the 1960s and 1970s to more recent manifestations of CALL, e.g. as used in a virtual learning environment and Web-based distance learning. The term CALI (Computer-assisted language instruction) was in use before CALL, reflecting its origins as a subset of the general term CAI (Computer-assisted instruction). CALI fell out of favor among language teachers, however, as it appeared to imply a teacher-centered approach (instructional), whereas language teachers are more inclined to prefer a student-centered approach, focusing on learning rather than instruction. CALL began to replace CALI in the early 1980s (Davies & Higgins, 1982) and it is now incorporated into the names of the growing number of professional associations worldwide.

The current philosophy of CALL puts a strong emphasis on student-centered materials that allow learners to work on their own. Such materials may be structured or unstructured, but they normally embody two important features: interactive learning and individualized learning. CALL is essentially a tool that helps teachers to facilitate the language learning process. It can be used to

reinforce what has already been learned in the classroom or as a remedial tool to help learners who require additional support.

The design of CALL materials generally takes into consideration principles of language pedagogy and methodology, which may be derived from different learning theories (e.g. behaviorist, cognitive, constructivist) and second language learning theories such as Stephen Krashen's monitor hypothesis.

The recent advances in educational applications of computer hardware and software have provided a rapidly growing resource for language classrooms. The practical applications of CALL are growing at such a rapid pace that it is almost impossible for a classroom teacher to keep up with the field. Warschaucer and Healey (1998) offered the following benefits of including a computer component in language instruction:

1. Multimodal practice with feedback

2. Individualization in a large class

3. Pair and small-group work on projects, either collaboratively or competitively

4. The fun factor

5. Variety in the resources available and learning styles used

6. Exploratory learning with large amounts of language data

7. Real-life skill-building in computer use.(Brown, 2000)

This research intended to apply CALL in a different way than it is commonly used. As said before, CALL is benefited from as a tool to support teaching, while in this research CALL is used as a medium of instruction, where the class is entirely virtual and the instructor teaches, corrects, gives feedback, and does everything else not only via computer but also online. In the following parts, details of how this teaching method and tool was applied, and the statistical calculations and results will be elaborately discussed.

**1.4 Purpose of the Study and Hypotheses**

This study was designed for one major purpose. It was designed to address the direct effect of the VWI program on students' writing performance and whether such a perception correlates with students' improved writing performance.

It is worth mentioning some spectacular points of the problem here:

- In academic environments in particular and in teacher-learner's in general, little if any attention is paid to online learning which is at hand and accessible to acquire L2.
- Conventional methods have been taught for many years in Dubai which embraces English as a foreign language.

The combination of these two factors casts light upon proposing hypothesis of different values, comprising both null and substantive ones. The hypotheses were the answers to the research questions. To clarify the case, the research questions come next:

Q1: Does Virtual Writing Instruction have any significant effect on students' essay writing performance?

Q2: Does Actual Writing Instruction have any significant effect on students' essay writing performance?

Q3: Is there any significant difference between actual and virtual group performance?

To answer the posed research questions, the following hypotheses were put forward:

H01: Virtual Writing Instruction does not have a statistically significant effect on students' essay writing performance.

H02: Actual Writing Instruction does not have any statistically significant effect on students' essay writing performance.

H03: There is no significant difference between actual and virtual group performance.

These hypotheses were checked through statistical analyses which will be discussed in later parts.

## 2. METHOD

### 2.1 Participants

This research was conducted in IAU (Islamic Azad University), Dubai Branch. The University has multiple academic divisions. All students were either English majors or minors. In 4 years of Bachelor and 2 years of Master Programs are instructed under the same English language curriculum; they take exactly the same English courses with the same number of instruction hours.

A sample of two intact groups with 25 students in each was selected from among IAU students with a population of approximately 500 students based on the TOEFL test results. The two selected intact groups were randomly assigned, one as the control group and the other as the experimental group. The participants in the control group and experimental group were at intermediate level of English proficiency. They had already taken a TOEFL test for the sake of homogeneity.

### 2.2 Instruments

*2.2.1 Test of language proficiency*

A TOEFL test was administered to nearly 170 students, who were studying in Azad University in Dubai branch, serving the purpose of homogeneity. The test was extracted from TOEFL PBT and sample exam book published by Longman. The test included reading, listening, and structure sections. The number of questions was 50 in reading, 50 in listening, and 40 in structure sections respectively. The results were obtained and 50 students who scored between 420 and 450 were chosen to be assigned to two groups of 25. The proficiency level of the participants was measured as intermediate.

*2.2.2 Pre-test*

A topic was given to each group members who were randomly assigned as virtual and actual class members in order for the researcher to know their levels. This topic was selected from Cambridge IELTS 7 sample question book as below:

> Write about the following topic:
>
> ***"Some people think that it is better to educate boys and girls in separate schools. Others, however, believe that boys and girls benefit more from attending mixed schools."***
>
> **Discuss both these views and give your own opinion.**
>
> Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own knowledge or experience.
>
> Write at least 250 words.

A time limit of 40 minutes was instructed to students in both groups in order to follow IELTS originality way of taking writing exam. The results of both groups were marked by two raters. As it is usual in IELTS tests, the writing maximum score was 9.

*2.2.3 Weekly assessments*

During a 10-session writing class, partial tasks were given to students to be done in the virtual and actual classrooms and some as homework. The process of teaching lessons proceeded gradually based on "Action Plan for IELTS", academic module, written by Vanessa Jakeman and Clare Mcdowel, (2006). Every session, at the end of each part the participants were asked to write a sample writing related to the material which was taught in that session and the previous ones. The writings were checked and given feedback by the instructor in order to be corrected and reviewed. The results of this step were not taken into consideration as part of the final statistical calculations.

*2.2.4 Post test*

At the end of the 10-session writing program, another topic was given to both groups in order to check their progress of writing essays based on the lessons they had taken and practiced. The same two raters who rated pre-test rated this test as well. As it is usual in IELTS tests, the writing maximum score was 9. This topic was selected from Cambridge IELTS 7 sample question book as below:

> Write about the following topic:
>
> ***"Some people prefer to live in a house, while others feel that there are more advantages to living in an apartment.***
>
> ***Are there more advantages than disadvantages of living in a house compared with living in an apartment?"***
>
> Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your won knowledge or experience.
>
> Write at least 250 words.

*2.2.5 Research Design*

Since random selection of the subjects was impossible for the researcher, so the researcher made use of intact groups; therefore, the design which could fit was quasi-experimental design with the help of pretest-posttest patterns. So the formula which was applied as a pattern is the following.

G1 (Experimental) $O_1$ X $O_2$

G2 (Control) $O_3$ $O_4$

In this formula $O_1$ and $O_3$ are the tests before applying the treatment for the experimental and control groups respectively and $O_2$ and $O_4$ are the tests after manipulating the variable again for experimental and control groups respectively, and X is the treatment.

*2.2.6 Research Procedures*

At the beginning of the research project, the Writing Performance Pretest was administered to participants in the control group, and the experimental group. Taught by the same teacher, both groups received writing instruction for 10 weeks, 5 days a week, one hour every day in the writing class. Participants in both groups were given writing tasks to produce paragraph writing. The tasks in both groups focused on the same writing modes and grammatical points.

The control group received conventional classroom instruction and met in a conventional classroom the entire time. The lessons adopted and modified for the traditional classroom writing instruction were originally compiled by the teaching staff of IAU and have been used for years. These lessons, in the form of printed materials, were handouts designed mainly for conventional classroom instruction. The experimental group received the VW lessons and had the same lessons as in conventional classroom.

The conventional writing instruction lessons taught in the control group provided students with vocabulary, outline formats, and sample written passages to familiarize them with the content and organization for the writing assignments, whereas the VW lessons used in the experimental group guided students in the same way of traditional writing instruction just online and in a virtual classroom with the same teacher and the same procedures.

At the end of the research project, the Writing Performance Post-test was administered to participants in both groups. This research project was conducted over a ten-week period.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to cope with the answers to the research questions and figure out whether research hypotheses were to be accepted or rejected a set of statistical analyses needed to be done. This section deals with the statistical analyses oozed out of the test results and the treatment done.

### 3.1 Testing Assumptions

Four assumptions should be met before one decides to run parametric tests (Field, 2009); 1) the data should be measured on an interval scale; 2) the subjects should be independent that is to say their performance on the test is not affected by the performance of other students, 3) the data should enjoy normal distribution and 4) the groups should have homogeneous variances (Field, 2009). The present data are measured on an interval scale and the subjects' perform independently on the tests. The assumption of normality is also met. As displayed in Table 1 the values of skewness and kurtosis are within the ranges of +/- 2 (Bachman, 2005)

**Table 1.** *Normality Tests*

| Group | | N | Skewness | | Kurtosis | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Statistic | Statistic | Std. Error | Statistic | Std. Error |
| Virtual | Pretest | 25 | -.111 | .464 | -.526 | .902 |
| | Posttest | 25 | .071 | .464 | -1.223 | .902 |
| Actual | Pretest | 25 | .432 | .464 | -.155 | .902 |
| | Posttest | 25 | .206 | .464 | -.875 | .902 |

The assumption of homogeneity of variances will be discussed when reporting the results of the independent t-test and analysis of covariance.

### 3.2 Essay Writing Pretest

An independent t-test is run to compare the actual and virtual writing groups' mean scores on pretest of essay writing in order to prove that the two groups enjoyed the same level of essay writing ability prior to the main study. As displayed in Table 2 the mean scores for actual and virtual writing groups on pretest of Essay Writing are 4.49 and 4.42 respectively.

**Table 2.** *Descriptive Statistics Pretest of Essay Writing by Groups*

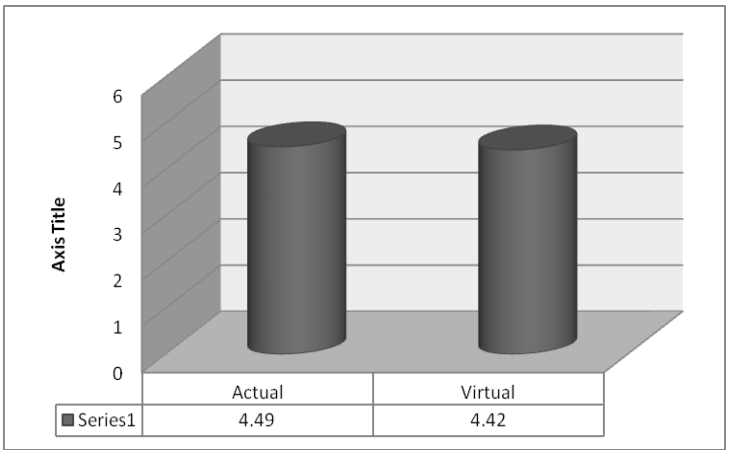
| Group | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Actual | 25 | 4.490 | .6672 | .1334 |
| Virtual | 25 | 4.420 | .7896 | .1579 |

The results of the independent t-test (t (48) = .339, P = .738 > .05, R = .049 it represents a weak effect size) (Table 3) indicate that there was not any significant difference between actual and virtual writing groups' mean scores on the pretest of essay writing. Thus it can be concluded that the two groups enjoyed the same level of essay writing ability prior to the main study.

**Table 3.** *Independent t-test Pretest of Essay Writing by Groups*

| | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | F | Sig. | T | Df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
| | | | | | | | | Lower | Upper |
| Equal variances assumed | 1.043 | .312 | .339 | 48 | .736 | .0700 | .2068 | -.3457 | .4857 |
| Equal variances not assumed | | | .339 | 46.700 | .736 | .0700 | .2068 | -.3460 | .4860 |

It should be noted that the assumption of homogeneity of variances is met (Levene's F = 1.04, P = .312 > .05). That is why the first row of Table 3, i.e. "Equal variances assumed" is reported.




**Graph 1.** *Pretest of Essay Writing by Groups*

Research Question 1

*Does Virtual Writing Instruction have any significant effect on students' essay writing performance?*

A paired-samples t-test is run to compare the virtual writing group's mean scores on pretest and posttest of Essay Writing in order to probe the effect of virtual writing on the improvement of the essay writing ability of the students. As displayed in Table 4 the mean scores for virtual writing group on pretest and posttest of Essay Writing are 4.42 and 4.47 respectively.

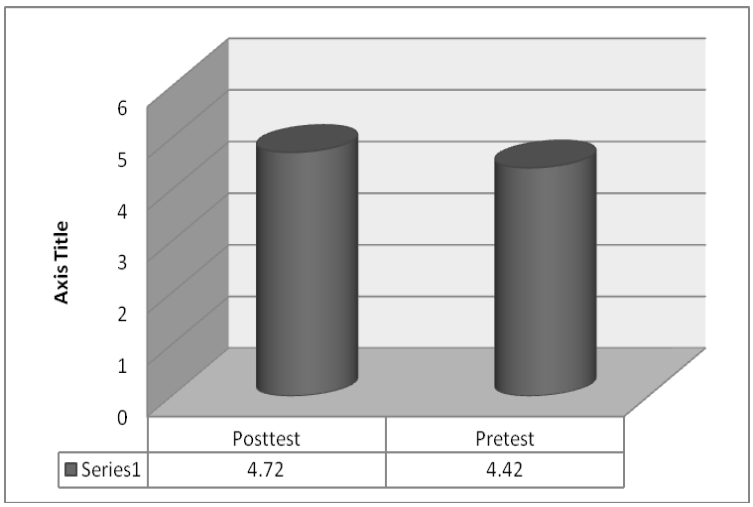
**Table 4.** *Descriptive Statistics Pretest of Essay Writing Virtual Group*

| Test | Mean | N | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Posttest | 4.720 | 25 | .8965 | .1793 |
| Pretest | 4.420 | 25 | .7896 | .1579 |

The results of the paired-samples t-test (t (24) = 6, P = .000 < .05, R = .77 it represents a large effect size) (Table 5) indicate that there was a significant difference between virtual writing group's mean scores on the pretest and posttest of Essay Writing. Thus the null-hypothesis as Virtual Writing Instruction does not have any significant effect on students' essay writing performance is rejected.

**Table 5.** *Paired-Samples t-test Pretest and Posttest of Essay Writing Virtual Group*

| Paired Differences | | | | | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | | | | |
| | | | Lower | Upper | | | |
| .3000 | .2500 | .0500 | .1968 | .4032 | 6.000 | 24 | .000 |




**Graph 2.** *Pretest and Posttest of Essay Writing Virtual Group*

Research Question 2

*Does Actual Writing Instruction have any significant effect on students' essay writing performance?*

A paired-samples t-test is run to compare the actual writing group's mean scores on pretest and posttest of Essay Writing in order to probe the effect of actual writing on the improvement of the essay writing ability of the students. As displayed in Table 3 the mean scores for actual writing group on pretest and posttest of Essay Writing are 5.66 and 4.49 respectively.

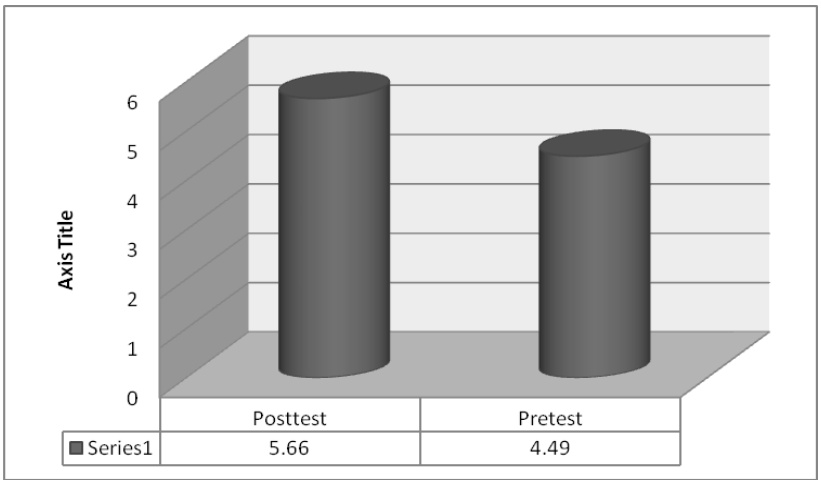
**Table 6.** *Descriptive Statistics Pretest of Essay Writing Actual Group*

| Test | Mean | N | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Posttest | 5.660 | 25 | .7461 | .1492 |
| Pretest | 4.490 | 25 | .6672 | .1334 |

The results of the paired-samples t-test (t (24) = 31.27, P = .000 < .05, R = .98 it represents a large effect size) (Table 7) indicate that there was a significant difference between actual writing group's mean scores on the pretest and posttest of Essay Writing. Thus the null-hypothesis as Actual Writing Instruction does not have any significant effect on students' essay writing performance is rejected.

**Table 7.** *Paired-Samples t-test Pretest and Posttest of Essay Writing Actual Group*

| Paired Differences | | | | | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | | | | |
| | | | Lower | Upper | | | |
| 1.1700 | .1871 | .0374 | 1.0928 | 1.2472 | 31.270 | 24 | .000 |




**Graph 3.** *Pretest and Posttest of Essay Writing Actual Group*

Research Question 3

*Is there any significant difference between actual and virtual group performance?*

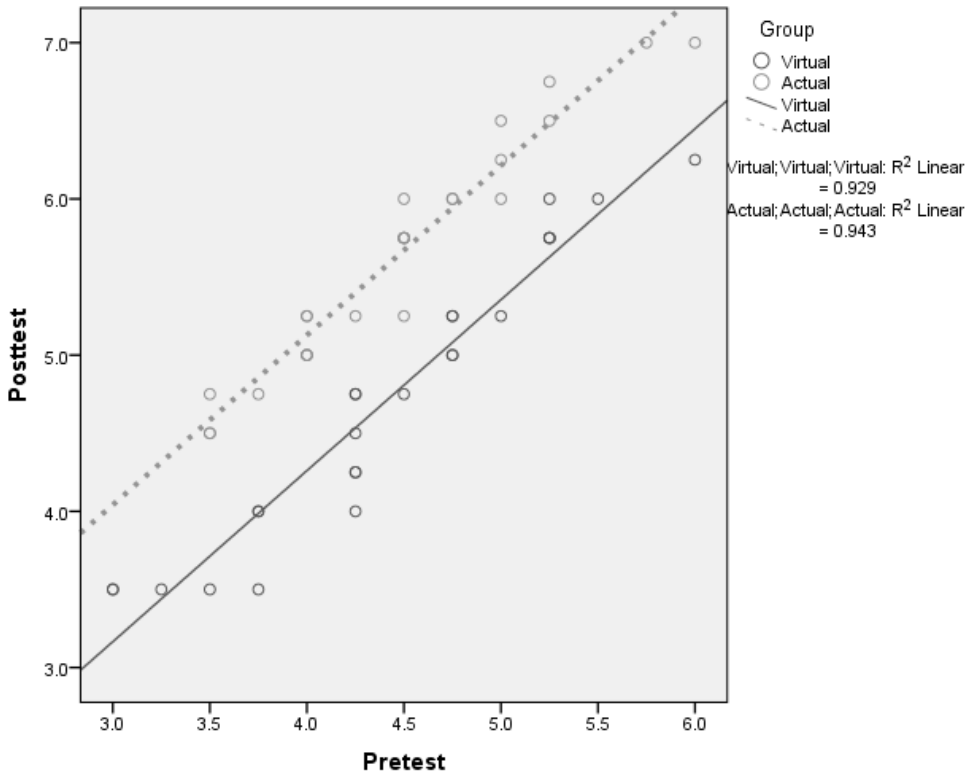
An analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was run to compare the actual and virtual groups' means on the posttest of Essay Writing while controlling for the possible effect of their entry writing ability as tested through the pretest.

ANCOVA has two main assumptions, i.e. homogeneity of regression slope and linear relationship between the covariate (pretest) and the dependent variable (posttest). As displayed in Scatter Plot 3, the assumption of homogeneity of regression slope is met. Both virtual (solid line) and actual (dotted line) show the same regression slopes.

The second assumption, i.e. linear relationship between the dependent variable (posttest of Essay Writing) and covariate (pretest of Essay Writing) is examined within the main table of ANCOVA results. The F-observed value for the effect of covariate is significant (F (1, 47) = 647, P = .000 <

.05; Partial $\eta^2$ = .93 it represents a large effect size). Based on these results it can be concluded that there is a linear relationship between the dependent variable and covariate. Thus the second assumption is also met.

The F-observed value for the effect of the independent variable (actual vs. virtual groups) is significant (F (1, 47) = 205.39, P = .000 < .05; Partial $\eta^2$ = .81 it represents a large effect size). Based on these results it can be concluded that there is a significant difference between the mean scores of the actual and virtual groups on the posttest of Essay Writing after controlling for possible effect of their entry ability as measured through the pretest of Essay Writing. Thus the null-hypothesis as there is not any significant difference between the Essay Writing of actual and virtual groups is rejected. The actual group (M = 5.62) outperformed the virtual group (M = 4.75) on the posttest of Essay Writing (Table 9).




**Scatter Plot 1.** *Homogeneity of Regression Slope Posttest of Essay Writing by Groups with Pretest*

**Table 8.** *ANCOVA Posttest of Essay Writing by Groups with Pretest*

| Source | Type III Sum of Squares | Df | Mean Square | F | Sig. | Partial Eta Squared |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pretest | 30.522 | 1 | 30.522 | 674.006 | .000 | .935 |
| Group | 9.301 | 1 | 9.301 | 205.398 | .000 | .814 |
| Error | 2.128 | 47 | .045 | | | |
| Total | 1390.500 | 50 | | | | |

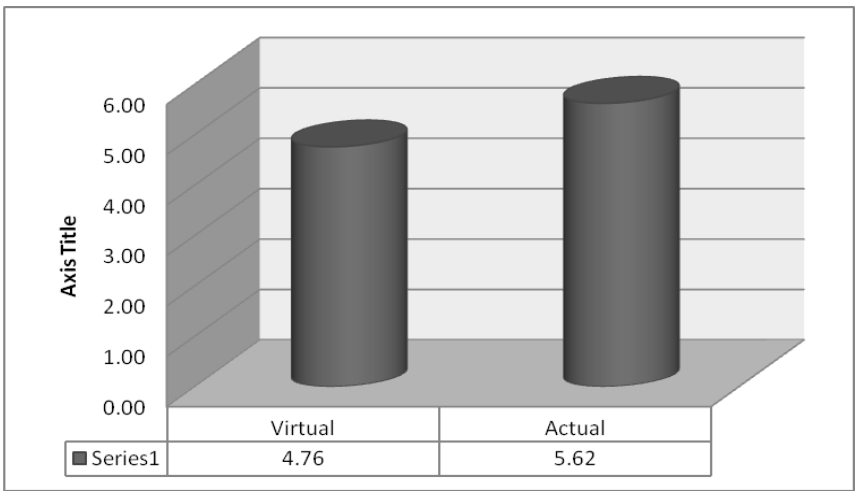
**Table 9.** *Descriptive Statistics Posttest of Essay Writing by Groups*

| Group | Mean | Std. Error | 95% Confidence Interval | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Lower Bound | Upper Bound |
| Virtual | 4.758 | .043 | 4.673 | 4.844 |
| Actual | 5.622 | .043 | 5.536 | 5.707 |

The mean scores slightly differ from ones discussed above because they are corrected for the possible effects of the pretest. It should be noted that the assumption of homogeneity of variances is met (Levene's F = 1.81, P = .185 > .05).

**Table 10.** *Homogeneity of Variances*

| F | df1 | df2 | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1.811 | 1 | 48 | .185 |




**Graph 4.** *Posttest of Essay Writing by Groups*

### 3.3 Inter- and Intra-Rater Reliability

*3.3.1 Pretest of Essay Writing*

Table 11 displays the intra- and inter-rater reliability indices for the pretest of Essay Writing. If a single rater rated the students' writings on the pretest, the intra-rater reliability would be .88 (P = .000 < .05) and if two different raters rated them on the pretest in inter-rater reliability would be .94 (P = .000 < .05). Both indices indicate significant raters' reliability for the pretest of Essay Writing.

**Table 11.** *Intra- and Inter-Rater Reliability Pretest of Essay Writing*

| | Intra-class Correlation | 95% Confidence Interval | | F Test with True Value 0 | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Lower Bound | Upper Bound | Value | df1 | df2 | Sig |
| Single Measures | .889 | .812 | .935 | 17.013 | 49 | 49 | .000 |
| Average Measures | .941 | .896 | .967 | 17.013 | 49 | 49 | .000 |

*3.3.2 Posttest of Essay Writing*

Table 12 displays the intra- and inter-rater reliability indices for the posttest of Essay Writing. If a single rater rated the students' writings on the posttest, the intra-rater reliability would be .93 (P = .000 < .05) and if two different raters rated them on the posttest in inter-rater reliability would be .96 (P = .000 < .05). Both indices indicate significant raters' reliability for the posttest of Essay Writing.

**Table 12.** *Intra- and Inter-Rater Reliability Posttest of Essay Writing*

| | Intra-class Correlation | 95% Confidence Interval | | F Test with True Value 0 | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Lower Bound | Upper Bound | Value | df1 | df2 | Sig |
| Single Measures | .934 | .886 | .962 | 29.130 | 49 | 49 | .000 |
| Average Measures | .966 | .940 | .981 | 29.130 | 49 | 49 | .000 |

*3.4 Construct Validity*

A factor analysis was run through the varimax rotation method to probe the construct validity of the pretest and posttest of Essay Writing. The SPSS has extracted only one factor which accounts for 92.96 percent of the variance.

**Table 13.** *Total Variance Explained*

| Component | Initial Eigenvalues | | | Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Total | % of Variance | Cumulative % | Total | % of Variance | Cumulative % |
| 1 | 1.859 | 92.966 | 92.966 | 1.859 | 92.966 | 92.966 |
| 2 | .141 | 7.034 | 100.000 | | | |

As displayed in Table 4 the pretest and posttest of Essay Writing load on a single factor. These results indicate that the two tests are measuring the same underlying construct, i.e. they enjoy construct validity.

**Table 14.** *Component Matrix*

| | Component |
|---|---|
| | 1 |
| Posttest | .964 |
| Pretest | .964 |

The researcher was well aware of the limitations hindering this research. The first one was the limited geographical area. Since this research was done in a certain area, then the results should be cautiously used and generalizing the findings is not an easy job. The second limitation was the number and the selection of the participants. Institutions' authorities did not easily allow the researcher to administer the tests and the whole research process in their institution; therefore, random selection of the participants was not possible and the number of the participants was not large enough to allow generalization of the findings. The next limitation was the curricula of the institutions; they had their own curriculum and it was a barrier for the researcher to apply her method in their classes. Time was another restriction. This research was conducted in a semester time and based on the institutions' schedule, so the time limit was imposed on the researcher. The participants of this research were only university students studying English as a pre-requisite to their major courses. Dubai was the geographical area where the research was conducted. All participants were Iranian students living in Dubai and no other nationalities took part in this research. Among the four language skills, writing was only under investigation in this research.

As the above said analyses and discussion show, both the virtual and actual classes have significant impact on the learners' essay writing ability, yet the difference between the two, i.e. virtual vs. actual is not significant; therefore, it can be figured out that the virtual teaching of writing to learners is not as much effective as the actual one.

Through this study it was attempted to detect the impact of virtual vs. actual teaching of writing on the writing performance of the learners.

The main pedagogical purpose of applying virtual teaching of writing is to escalate the level of concentration of the learners and hence elevate their performance on writing skill.

The present research indicated that although it may save some money, energy, and time for the learners and the instructor, which are of course of high importance, but there was no significant difference between the two method of teaching, i.e. actual teaching vs. virtual teaching of writing. Therefore, it can be concluded that language teachers may benefit from virtual classes to boost their actual classes. They can provide their learners with some tasks, practices, notes, guidelines, and feedbacks, which due to the time shortage, cannot be done in their actual physical classes.

For those who are eager to work in the field of virtual teaching and learning, the following suggestions may pave the way and be helpful:

1. Virtual teaching can be included in the writing syllabus as supplementary material or additional tasks to the main actual classes.
2. Virtual teaching can be helpful if included in the plan of instructors' classes such as listening. Listening materials can be available to the learners with their instructor available at some real time online to help them improve their listening.
3. Virtual teaching can be beneficial in other classes such as reading classes. Extra material and task can be provided to the learners to bridge their reading gaps.

4. Virtual teaching can also be helpful in speaking classes. Through drills and patterns, learners may be able to learn different patterns, structures, and vocabulary necessary for speaking at various levels.

The researcher suggests that virtual learning can be used as an addition to the conventional regular classes to boost what has been taught in the instructors' actual classes. The present study showed that virtual classes, on their own, cannot make a significant difference in learning process and result of the learners' performance in writing.

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