Teaching Academic Writing Using Online Tools: An Experimental Study at Imam Abdulrahman University

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Abstract: *It is presumed that there is a dearth of research on how best to acquire academic writing online at this critical juncture. To fill this gap, 126 Saudi students were surveyed online, and 20 of them were chosen to complete a semi-structured interview. Five main obstacles were identified: lack of active student-teacher communication; technological difficulties, time allotted to perform tasks, insufficient academic assistance; and issues related to feedback from the teacher. Four main mechanisms for coping with these obstacles have also been identified: flexibility regarding limiting the time allotted to complete tasks online; choosing a student in each group to present problems regarding online academic writing; making initiatives to develop students' awareness of dealing with educational tools in academic writing; activating feedback from teachers and peers. Two benefits of online writing education were found: extensive use of educational materials and online teaching platforms, and available opportunities to practice academic writing online.*

Key words: *academic writing, online teaching platforms, online writing teaching, online writing learning, online academic writing*

1 INTRODUCTION

The prevailing coronavirus (COVID-19) global epidemic has affected people's health, lifestyle, and educational system. One of the difficulties experienced by COVID-19 was the ability to adjust a learning environment based mainly on in-campus instruction to depend fully on a virtual feature. In full swing, over 188 countries were forced to close their educational campuses and stop physical education to struggle to control the virus's propagation and minimize its worldwide effect [1]. Closing influenced all learners because of the absence of the socio-emotional encouragement that academic institutions provide, and the worries about falling further [2]. As a result, online learning was adopted as the option on the same day the attendance was suspended. All academic settings around the world have transitioned their education systems to prevalent digital communication portals, which have shifted the orientation of the entire education system from physical to virtual, from lectures to online sessions, and from the classroom setting to online applications such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams. The teaching profession has been abruptly thrust into a new era of education, namely the community of virtual learning. The coronavirus pandemic has largely accelerated the growth of digital education, with active instruction taking place on the Internet [3]. Nevertheless, substantial progress has been achieved by utilizing virtual instruction and using modern teaching methods based on technology for the sake of students' benefit [4]. In a relatively short period, significant efforts have been undertaken to increase the popularity of online teaching [5] [6]. For example, meaningful learning opportunities and a variety of learning activities turned out to be processed electronically and courses were taught online. The current scenario and conditions forced the Saudi Ministry of Education to take all precautionary proactive steps to activate virtual classes and online teaching and to guarantee that the instructional process is efficient. However, a major difficulty arose as to how education processes could be maintained [7] during this critical period. In fact, the use of online learning in Saudi Arabia is not new as the Ministry of Education set up the National Center for E-learning in 2017 to cope with the 2030 vision of the Kingdom [8], but the role of this center remained supportive and complementary.

With the spread of Covid-19, Saudi universities found themselves forced to use online learning as a main aspect of the whole educational system. Lectures, instructions, presentations, announcements, and voice recordings have all been used to favorably enable learners to interact effectively through virtual learning. This novel approach to teaching and learning was assumed to improve students' capacity to cope with technology, think rationally to resolve issues on their own [9], and acknowledge learners as being more interactive, and increasingly involved. However, this abrupt transition was not without difficulties [10]. Following in the footsteps of other colleges in Saudi Arabia, the College of Engineering at the University of Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal (IAU) began to take the initiative by undertaking lessons online using various online platforms such as Zoom, Blackboard Ultra, and Microsoft Teams. Among these online courses was academic writing which differs from other types of writing as it approaches an issue from an objective, data-driven perspective. It has its own set of regulations and processes, such as using the third person, avoiding clichés and slang, and using academically sound references of data to endorse one's claims [11]. It requires writing plainly via preparing a plan to manage writing before initiating, using accurate punctuation and properly structured paragraphs, and using a good collection of technical vocabulary with correct spelling and punctuation. Academic writing is a productive skill, but it is the most challenging to be mastered by English as a Second Language (ESL)/English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. In addition, writing is supposed to be harder to learn virtually due to its complicated intersectionality. Therefore, the new trend was undoubtedly

difficult for any EFL language learner, and IAU students are no exception. Scarcity of studies in Saudi Arabia clearly demonstrates the lack of rigorous empirical research in the domain of online writing learning.

An interest in conducting a thorough study on the quality and utility of virtual learning has arisen as a result of the expanding use of online teaching as a worldwide shift and the swiftly expanding introduction of digital learning in Saudi educational systems. In the current scenario of online learning and the introduction of a novel normal of teaching-learning methods, it became crucial to study learners' opinions and inclination towards this new instructional approach, such as their degree of adaptation and, if any, amendments they wanted to propose, or their desire to dismiss it entirely.

2   CONTEXT OF THE PROBLEM

The researcher intended to investigate the upsides and downsides of teaching academic writing online from the standpoints of Saudi university students considering the unexpected and complete transition to e-learning that appeared to become the only alternative for teaching for years to come. The main research question in the current study is:

How much are engineering students satisfied with learning academic writing online at Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University during the corona pandemic?
The following questions were spawned by this main inquiry:
1- How much are engineering students satisfied with the facility of online academic writing learning?
2. How much are engineering students satisfied with Zoom virtual classes on Blackboard?
3. How much has engineering students' academic writing been improved in academic writing due to online learning?
4. How much are engineering students satisfied with the online academic support provided by their EFL Instructors?

3   LITERATURE REVIEW

The phrase "e-learning" refers to a broad range of procedures that go beyond web-based learning, digital learning, flipped classrooms, and mobile learning [12]. Given that the initial "e" refers to "electrical," this learning category includes all classroom instruction carried out by individuals or groups connecting online through networked computers. The use of online instructional methods in formal education is new, even though informal eLearning has been available for over a decade but has not been integrated into the delivery methods of schools or universities. Until this global epidemic that pushed the world to turn to online educational alternatives, e-learning had never been recognized or regarded as true learning or a formal way of education. Both supporters and critics of online learning have been doing research and debating the advantages of online instructional provisions [13]. However, since the beginning of 2020, this Pandemic introduced the most unpredictable transition to the global education pedagogy as new approaches have been adopted to enhance the process of teaching inside educational settings. It is believed that the use of technology in education contributed a lot to the pedagogical aspects since the application of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) led to more effective learning [14]. It was generally expected that online learning could have the potential to alter the system of education. Online education had many benefits, including simple access to specialists, and a great variety of learning programs. Besides, it has other advantages such as saving time and money, better retention, personalized learning, and being ecologically friendly [15]. As a result, tech-pedagogical approaches were often proposed and usually developed to help achieve these goals [16]. In fact, no one can deny that the big advancement in the field of technology and the inventions of electronic devices such as laptops, smartphones, and tablets played an important role in facilitating the sudden shift from traditional physical teaching to electronic one. At the same time, the newly adopted teaching system turned out to be successful and efficient [14]. It has been always claimed that using technology in the English language classroom could promote autonomous learning and improve EFL performance. However, practical evidence needs to be provided through research and studies in the field such as the current study. There is an academic need to investigate the extent to which technology is appropriate to be used in EFL learning and teaching and the degree of complications connected with comprehending and implementing technology in learning and teaching.

A.   Learner Satisfaction with Online Learning

The way students think about a certain course to decide on its implications for their academic experiences is essential since their positive impression of it refers to their satisfaction with the course [17]. Therefore, it is recommended that learners' positive attitudes are required when using technology in the learning process [18]. Users' perception of using new technology in learning and teaching has a significant impact on accepting it or not [19] [20] and represents a crucial act to determine the quality of any online courses [21]. According to the "Technology Acceptance Model," acknowledged utility and perceived accessibility of use are two deciding variables for technology adoption [22]. It was stated by Virtanen and his colleagues [23] that learners' satisfaction is a key indicator of their overall academic success and experience. Leaners' satisfaction with online learning can be affected by different factors, such as the following: 1) learner interaction and instructor presence [24], student engagement through discussions, collaborative working, regular announcements, and assignment grading rubrics [25], developing outstanding course content, assuring on-time and faultless lecture delivery [26], suitable course evaluation, and addressing the right information from the course material [27]. Online learning of writing is supposed to include an interesting environment that urges students to develop their writing skills appropriately.

This reflects the effective role played by the social constructivist learning design promoted by virtual learning in improving learners' writing skills [28]. This new learning design includes online chatting which makes up for physical interaction inside classes, so natural interactions among students and active learning relationships can be supported and developed [29] [30]. This led us to discuss the main factors that affect how much learners are satisfied with the virtual environment of learning. One of these elements lies in the level of students' digital literacy [31] [32]. Support provided to learners represents one of the factors as it helps them face any technical or instructional issues they might face and find abrupt solutions to them [33]. On the same hand, Abdous [34], and Yunus and his colleagues [35] referred to learners' anxiety as one of the factors that affected learners' satisfaction in terms of their readiness to use technology in their learning environment. Another factor is implied in the learning strategies used by learners [36].

B. Teaching Academic Writing Online to EFL Saudi Students

For most ESL/EFL students, writing is the most challenging language skill for its intricacy in syntax, articulation, lexicon, and sentence structures [37]. According to Faradhibah and Nur [38], academic writing requires students to be able to write a coherent and error-free essay in an organized way with relevant vocabulary and a logical flow of ideas to reflect their linguistic competence. Effective academic writing also requires interesting topics, the right usage of pronunciation, the use of simple and easy language, adapting writing to the reader, and engaging readers [37]. However, education policy decision-makers, English language instructors, and most crucially, students, did not give teaching writing an adequate priority. Regarding the Saudi context, students lack confidence in generating an academic essay despite years of learning English before joining university. When they are asked to write academically, they are often expected to make a lot of mistakes in terms of structure, vocabulary, and spelling [39]. The main reason behind that is the absence of creativity and their full dependence on modeled written texts. Basabrin [40] stated that lack of exposure and practice represents an important factor hampering the development of writing skills among Saudi EFL students. Among the reasons that contribute to this problem are the prescribed textbooks, the impact of the mother tongue [41], unfollowing the proper writing mechanism [39], inability to go beyond a paragraph level [42], lower motivation, and inappropriate teaching methods [43], cultural ignorance of the target language, inappropriate use of writing strategies [44], and the structural distinction between Arabic and English in terms of punctuation rules [45]. As for engineering students, the main sample of the current study, they confront a dual challenge as they must manage to learn new disciplines at university and be able to comprehend and use English, which is adopted as the medium of teaching at their college. Even though many prospective engineers have studied English at the pre-university stage and for an additional year in the Preparatory Year, they still have a problem understanding English at the university level. They need to comprehend the key themes even though most of the references are not in their mother tongue and there are several new technical key terms and vocabulary to learn.

With the spread of the worldwide COVID-19 epidemic, the issue of mastering English language proficiency among prospective engineers and learning new trends in improving academic writing online has become highly relevant. The Epidemic obliged all engineering college students to join classes online, so they started to emerge in this new digital environment and attempted to successfully handle their online classes. This new situation drove them into a new method of learning different from what they were accustomed to doing in the near past when they were more engaging and productive. The new educational condition required engineering college students to learn academic writing which is considered the most challenging and complex to be mastered by ESL/EFL learners via internet platforms which may imply some challenges or facilities. In the context of teaching academic writing online, it has been presumed that academic writing is individual-centric and necessitates an individual workflow and interaction, so it cannot be taught virtually for a group of classes [46]. One could claim that writing is one of the disciplines in which students can cheat if it is taught online [47] [48]. Others presume that learners can have their assignments and projects performed by family or colleagues, so evaluating the progress of those learners turns out to be worthless because they are not the ones providing the work [12]. Some studies showed that EFL learners could not have a positive impression in terms of using virtual classes to learn productive skills such as writing [49] [12] [50] [51]. On the other hand, the virtual environment was considered by others as a good chance for EFL learners to develop their academic writing skills [52] [53] as it provides a new type of writing that makes use of technology [54]. Also, digital technology could improve students' academic writing in terms of brainstorming ideas, drafting, proofreading, and editing [55]. With online learning, EFL Learners can check their materials and resources at their own pace to develop autonomous learning of academic writing. Rapanta and his colleagues [56] stated that incorporating more types of content including photos and videos into writing could improve performance through the clues and recommendations provided by online platforms such as Blackboard [57]. In addition, more opportunities could be available to practice different types of academic writing. Radianti and his colleagues [58] referred to this new educational environment in which visual and auditory learning styles could be used together as a good means to help students have more control over their learning and get more chances to retain information and use it productively in their writing. Ahmed [59] also stated that using free cloud-based online tools such as Google Docs was helpful to improve students' writing performance. Susanto and his colleagues [60] recommended using Facebook-aided media to develop EFL students' writing abilities. The previous debate on the advantages and disadvantages of teaching writing online needs more and more research so that further evidence and proof could be provided, and this was the main purpose of conducting the current study.

4   METHODOLOGY

A.   Study Design

In the case of the current study, using mixed methods—where more than one research approach is used—was beneficial since the methods complement one another rather than conflict. The possibility of research bias influencing the conduct and results of the study was also decreased by employing mixed techniques, as this risk was more likely to exist when only one research method is used. This also gave the researcher fresh information and made it possible to reconcile incongruent data. The two independent research instruments used to investigate the phenomenon being studied in the current study were: a survey and semi-structured interviews.

B.   Study Sample

The sample included students who studied the course entitled, "English Language Composition" at Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University, College of Engineering during the first term of the academic year 2021/2022. The process of selection was based on their willingness to participate. A total number of 124 students who were regularly utilizing e-learning platforms for their regular writing course during the COVID-19 lockout were recruited based on the convenience sampling method. Informants of the study (N = 126) fall into an array of age categories, with most of them being in the age range from 18 to 24 years enrolled in the English Language Composition course. The textbook used is entitled, Great Writing 5: From Great Essays to Research, 3rd edition.

C.   Data Collection and Study Procedure

For data collection, a survey was designed for participants. It was available online by the end of the first semester in January 2022. The current study focused on investigating students' perception and satisfaction, so the survey was available in both Arabic and English, and students were given the choice to select the language they wanted to complete the survey. This was purposely done to help them express their opinions clearly while maintaining their anonymity by assigning a number to each student. The survey included two main sections: Students' personal information (Part A), and students' perceptions and attitudes toward the use of online learning in academic writing (Part B). The survey was completed after slight adjustments were implemented in response to the pilot survey's feasibility assessment. The researcher employed proper statistical tools and techniques to verify and analyze the data received from the survey participants. The internal reliability of the variables was measured using Cronbach's alpha approach. The survey was developed for students where quantitative data were collected using mainly closed questions. The self-devised survey included 46 items distributed into five sections as follows; (a) Facility of Online Academic Writing learning (9 items); (b) Online Mode of Learning Academic Writing (7 items); (c) Virtual Classes Created by Zoom on Blackboard (6 items); (d) Improvement in Academic Writing Due to Using Online Learning (18 items); and (e) Online Support by the Instructor (5 items). Out of 241 students at the College of Engineering, 124 students completed it with a percentage of 58.22%. Applied Linguistics experts confirmed the survey's validity. After the instrument was completed, it was transmitted to an online link using the Questionpro.com platform. The answers were then followed to ensure that the appropriate proportion for the sample population was obtained within the final month of the first semester of the school year 2021/2022. The data was then converted into a raw image and statistically analyzed utilizing SPSS software. Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was determined to ensure stability, and the Pearson correlation coefficient was used to assess internal consistency. To classify the respondents, the frequencies and percentages were determined. Changes in the participants' answers were tracked by using mathematical means and standard deviations were established.

D.   The Survey's Reliability

Cronbach's Alpha equation was used to determine the survey's reliability. Table 1 shows the reliability coefficient value for each section of the survey.

TABLE I
CRONBACH'S ALPHA COEFFICIENTS

Themes	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
Facility of Online Academic Writing learning	0.971	9
Online Mode of Learning Academic Writing	0.982	8
Virtual Classes Created by Zoom on Blackboard	0.885	6
Improvement in Academic Writing Due to Online Learning	0.990	18
Online Support by the Instructor	0.971	5

The previous table indicated that the reliability coefficient values for each of the survey's sections were in the range of (0.990-0.885). This suggested that the questionnaire is extremely reliable. The internal consistency of the survey items was

determined by using the Inter-Item Correlation Matrix. Pearson's Correlation Coefficients between each item included in a specific section and the overall score of its section were measured to verify that the items are coherent with the overall score of the section to which they belong.

E. Data Analysis

The data collected have been examined, using SPSS version 23.0 of the Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS). Additionally, the results were displayed as numbers and frequencies.

F. Ethical Considerations

The participants were given the opportunity to give their informed consent before the data collection process started. The study's objective and goal were explained to the participants by the researcher.

5 FINDINGS

A. Results Related to the Survey

Part One: Demographic Details

Information about the participant's demographics is provided in Table 2 below. The findings showed that most participants, with an overall frequency of n=101 and n=23, respectively, were 18 to 24 years old.

TABLE 2
PERCENTAGE OF PARTICIPANTS' AGE

Age	Count (n)	Percentage (%)
18-20	101	80.16%
21-24	23	19.84%
Total	124	100%

The education level of the participants who took part in this study is described in detail in Table 3 below. The findings demonstrated that most students were either in the third (n=62), fourth (n=33), or fifth (n=27) semesters.

TABLE 3

PERCENTAGE OF EDUCATION LEVEL OF THE STUDENTS

Semester	Count (n)	Percentage (%)
1st Semester	0	00.00%
2nd Semester	0	00.00%
3rd Semester	62	50.00%
4th Semester	36	29.03%
5th Semester	22	17.74%
6th Semester	0	00.00%
7th Semester	0	00.00%
8th Semester	0	00.00%

The survey also asked questions about the major that engineering students were pursuing. Table 4 below indicated that, following the data collection, 58 respondents were enrolled in general engineering courses, 26 in environmental engineering, 16 in traffic and transportation engineering, 14 in construction engineering, and 10 in biomedical studies.

TABLE 4

MAJORS OF PARTICIPANTS

Major	Count (n)	Percentage (%)
General Engineering	58	64.77%
Environmental Engineering	26	20.96%
Traffic and Transportation Engineering	16	12.90%
Construction Engineering	14	11.29%
Biomedical Engineering	10	08.06%

Part 2: Four Sections of the Questionnaire

Section One: Facility of Online Academic Writing Learning

Table 5 provides findings regarding the respondents' judgment of online academic writing learning facilities. It included 9 items related directly to the section.

TABLE 5

MEAN AND STANDARD DEVIATION OF SECTION ONE

	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. Blackboard is easy to use for studying this course.	3.77	1.24
2. The course materials can be easily reached on the Blackboard.	3.74	1.23
3. Writing assignments can be easily submitted on Blackboard.	3.85	1.21
4. Writing tasks can be done and submitted easily on Blackboard.	3.84	1.15
5. Blackboard can be navigated easily.	3.88	1.18
6. Easy access to the course material on the Blackboard made me feel comfortable.	3.80	1.21
7. Using Blackboard to learn writing saved time and effort.	3.77	1.20
8. The chat box available on Blackboard helped me share comments and ideas with other students.	3.32	1.39
9. Blackboard facilities improved collaborative writing.	3.61	1.25
Overall	3.73	1.08

The findings of the study indicated that the arithmetic averages in each of the first seven items ranged between 3.74-3.88 and were higher than the general average of all items reaching 3.73. The data included reflected how much students were satisfied with the facilities offered by Blackboard to study academic writing online Nevertheless, the arithmetic averages of the eighth and ninth items were lower than the general overall average of the whole section as they were 3.61 and 3.32. This means that engineering students had no problem using Blackboard for studying the course (item 1) as it was easily reached (item 2) and assignments were effortlessly submitted (item 3). Also, tasks were done and sent online with ease (item 4), and the Blackboard features were navigated smoothly (item 6). Besides students felt comfortable using Blackboard (item 6) and found it saving time and effort (item 7). On the other hand, they found the chat box helpful in sharing comments and ideas with other peers (item 8), so using Blackboard facilities improved their collaborative writing.

Section Two: Virtual Academic Writing Classes Created by Zoom on Blackboard

Considering students' impressions of virtual academic writing classes created by Zoom on Blackboard, the findings of the study indicated that most of the three items (2, 3, and 6) were higher than the total average of the section which reached 3.26. Students felt happier when writing courses were taught online (item 2), and they recommended this mode of delivery to be used with all courses (item 3) as they found virtual classes an interesting platform to learn academic writing. These results may be due to the less pressure they had when they were taught online. However, the other three items (1, 4, and 5) were lower than the overall average as they reached (3.19, 3.17, and 3.18) respectively (Table 5).

TABLE 6

MEAN AND STANDARD DEVIATION OF SECTION THREE

Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. Virtual classes are less motivating than physical ones.	3.19	1.39
2. I feel happier when writing courses are taught in an online academic environment.	3.34	1.32
3. I would recommend this mode of delivery to be used with all courses.	3.31	1.35
4. Physical attendance of the course is necessary for developing academic writing.	3.17	1.37
5. Virtual classes are the best option to develop academic writing compared to other methods.	3.18	1.35
6. Virtual classes are an interesting platform to learn academic writing.	3.36	1.27
Overall	3.26	

In terms of the relationship between student satisfaction and involvement, it was found that students reported feeling more satisfied when their involvement was higher. The unusually significant correlation between the two, however, may be explained by the fact that the same feedback instrument was used to derive codes related to satisfaction and involvement.

Section Three: Improvement in Academic Writing Due to Online Learning

Table 7 below presents findings related to improvement in academic writing due to online learning. The findings of the study indicated that ten items (4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 17) were higher than the total average of the section which reached 3.47 whereas eight items (1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 15, 16, 18) were lower than the overall average. The results reflected how online learning of academic writing helped students develop their understanding of the essay structure as it helped them write a good hook (item 7), write a strong thesis statement (item 8), write a good introductory paragraph (item 9), write a good body paragraph (item 10), write a good concluding paragraph (item 11), write well-crafted essays (item 12), and avoid careless mistakes that make my writing look sloppy (item 4). This may be due to the various input provided by online academic writing in English composition (item 13), and the development they could make in terms of their knowledge of grammar (item 14) and vocabulary (item 17) for writing. Still, students' responses showed that online academic writing was somehow effective in understanding the writing process (item 1) as learning academic writing online helped them effectively generate ideas about topics by brainstorming (item 5) and write a well-organized writing and developed outline (item 6). On the other hand, the results reflected how learning academic writing online could partially improve students' comfort level with the task of writing under a deadline (item 18), develop their proofreading skills (item 2), or improve their spelling.

TABLE 7
MEAN AND STANDARD DEVIATION OF SECTION FOUR

	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. Learning academic writing online helped me understand the writing process.	3.46	1.26
2. Learning academic writing online helped me develop my proofreading skills.	3.38	1.24
3. Learning academic writing online increased my writing self-confidence.	3.39	1.27
4. Learning academic writing online helped me avoid careless mistakes that make my writing look sloppy.	3.49	1.26
5. Learning academic writing online helped me effectively generate ideas about topics by brainstorming.	3.44	1.21
6. Learning academic writing online helped me write a well-organized and developed outline.	3.44	1.24
7. Learning academic writing online helped me write a good hook.	3.54	1.23
8. Learning academic writing online helped me write a strong thesis statement.	3.56	1.15
9. Learning academic writing online helped me write a good introductory paragraph.	3.50	1.21
10. Learning academic writing online helped me write a good body paragraph.	3.48	1.23
11. Learning academic writing online helped me write a good concluding paragraph.	3.48	1.26
12. Learning academic writing online helped me write well-crafted essays.	3.50	1.22
13. Learning academic writing online provided me with more input in English composition.	3.48	1.23
14. Learning academic writing online helped me develop my knowledge of grammar for writing.	3.51	1.19
15. Learning academic writing online helped me develop my punctuation.	3.46	1.25
16. Learning academic writing online helped me improve my spelling.	3.43	1.24
17. Learning academic writing online helped me build a better vocabulary.	3.53	1.21
18. Learning academic writing online improved my comfort level with the task of writing under a deadline.	3.38	1.33
Overall	3.47	1.13

This may be due to the use of an electronic system of writing where spelling and editing are both automatically corrected, so their writing self-confidence was not highly increased (item 3) as expected.

Section Four: Online Support by the Instructor

Table 8 below shows students' responses to the last section entitled, Online Support by the Instructor". Only two items (2, and 3) were higher than the overall average while the other three items (1, 2, and 5) were lower than the overall average of the section. The results stated in the table indicated that students were moderately satisfied with their instructor's management of the process of online teaching of academic writing (item 1) as the electronic feedback provided by the instructor was helpful but not sufficient to improve their academic writing (item 5). This may be due to the large size of classes as the number of each online session combined more than 80 students each time. The data included in the table illustrated that the instructor could convey the main ideas and information to students through online teaching as he was more cooperative in enhancing students' adaptation to online learning of academic writing. However, there were often some problems in regard to the online communication with the instructor (item 4) because of technical issues. Since some students voiced dissatisfaction when the tutor's help was insufficient, it was also noted that tutor support was crucial in determining the students' degree of contentment.

TABLE 8
MEAN AND STANDARD DEVIATION OF SECTION FOUR

	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. The instructor could manage the process of online teaching of academic writing.	3.42	1.41
2. The instructor was more cooperative in enhancing my adaptation to online learning of academic writing.	3.46	1.36
3. The instructor could convey the main ideas and information to me through online teaching.	3.57	1.37
4. Online communication with the instructor happened without difficulties	3.42	1.38
5. The electronic feedback provided by the instructor was helpful to improve my academic writing.	3.40	1.47
Overall	3.45	1.28

B. Results Related to the Interview

Virtual semi-structured interviews were used to ensure consistency of responses and get more knowledge about challenges and solutions. Six questions were virtually directed through the Zoom platform to 20 students who completed the questionnaire about the following; a) challenges they encountered in learning academic writing online; b) the stage they found more challenging in learning academic writing online; c) the reasons that made online academic writing difficult; d) the impact of the educational system adopted by their college on developing their academic writing; e) strategies they followed to develop their online academic writing; and f) the solutions they suggested to overcome the problems they faced in online academic writing.

As for the first question about **the challenges they encountered in learning academic writing online**, students' responses were different. Some of them referred to the inability of meeting the instructor physically as one of the main challenges that affected his academic development in writing. Other students stated that technical problems represented a big challenge as they caused them trouble in following or attending some classes. Even using the blackboard to write essays or do assignments was among the problems that they encountered when learning academic writing online as they were not accustomed to the writing frames provided by it. On the other hand, some participants claimed that the time assigned to do tasks was not enough and the timing of class was not well scheduled due to the overload imposed upon them.

Concerning the second question about the most challenging **stage in learning academic writing online,** some students found brainstorming the most difficult because they were unable to suggest ideas that could be discussed in their writing. This may be attributed to their poor reading and lack of concentration during discussing their colleagues' proposed notions. Some of them stated that selecting the correct structure and using the appropriate punctuation rules represented the most difficult stage in the process of writing their academic essays. This may be attributed to their low level in terms of grammar and punctuation rules. They used to complain about the absence of sound preparation in such fields during their pre-university education. On the other hand, some of the participants referred to the stage of looking for sources and information about the topic as the most difficult stage because they did not use to do that in their pre-university study, and they missed the experience to look for sources and find what they need.

Regarding the third question about the reasons that make **online academic writing difficult,** some of them believed that physical contact with their instructor was missing, so they could not have immediate feedback, and motivation was lost as well. Some of them found it harder to follow up on the information being presented during the online lecture as a virtual delivery mode was completely new and different to them from a face-to-face one. Some of them referred to unauthenticated online references represented a big hindrance and made learning academic writing online more difficult.

Also, specific details and supporting ideas were highlighted as reasons for making online academic writing difficult as they missed doing that correctly when learning academic writing online.

In their answer to the fourth question about the impact of **the educational system adopted by their college on improving their online learning of academic writing,** they stated that the educational system was optimized effectively for online learning, and it made the learning process easier. Some of them emphasized the need for adopting an online system during Corona Virus as it saved time and effort and forced students to learn independently. They believed that this new system developed autonomous learning. On the other hand, some students found it freakily useless and needed to be improved as there were some problems related to the infrastructure upon which this new system relied. Also, some of them found it demotivating as it depended more on the instructor rather than the students. It can be concluded that institutional policies must put a heavy emphasis on online learning and technology-enabled practices if the implementation of e-learning is to enhance students' experiences in both teaching and learning [61]. This is consistent with the idea that student involvement should center on the complete development of competencies [62].

In their answer to the fifth question about **strategies they usually followed to develop their online academic writing,** they referred to different methods. Some of them said that they preferred searching for the best videos on the best strategies to write a good academic essay. Their instructor's YouTube channel was among the options they selected to develop their academic writing as they indicated that it presented valuable material and good practice. Some students stated that the most important strategy to develop academic writing was to improve vocabulary and writing techniques through reading more articles and essays written in English on different topics. One of the strategies adopted by some students was to write different essays on different topics and review them with their instructors. It was noted through the interviews that some of them found that writing a mind map of every topic was necessary to develop academic writing. On the other hand, some of them were not satisfied with online learning, and they expressed their dissatisfaction and highlighted the importance of focusing on their individual skills and abilities since they considered teaching academic writing online hard and useless. It can be said their answers revolved around three main strategies: reading more, doing more practice on writing, and getting feedback from instructors.

Regarding the six question about **their suggested solutions to overcome the problems they faced in online academic writing,** they stated that the time assigned to the lecture should be shortened as they had many courses to study in their college, and they needed more time to spend on doing assignments and tasks required for other courses that they believed they are more important. Some of them referred to the importance of direct communication with the instructor when learning academic writing as they did not think that academic writing could be taught effectively online. Developing more skills in academic writing and trying new methods and new strategies to get more connections between students and instructors were among the solutions suggested by some students. Quizzes, assignments, and tests represented big obstacles for most of them, so they suggested having one quiz, one assignment, and one final exam would be more helpful to them. On the other hand, some of them proposed assigning one of them to be responsible for giving initial feedback before submitting assignments. Using more educational websites that majored in academic writing was among the proposed solutions.

6   DISCUSSION

The results of this study agree with the findings and claims of other researchers and scholars that considered web-based technology turned to be one of the ideal methods for, instructional delivery, and evaluation [57] [54] [58] [6] in English language teaching in general, and academic writing in particular [52] [53]. Gradually, web-based education promotes itself to become a crucial component of the learning process even after the pandemic is over. The advantages of online education motivate scholars to assess this novel substitute for the conventional teaching approach that is currently being outmoded. In this study, the Internet primarily served as a tool to change how teaching and learning were conducted. The results demonstrated that regardless of the students' overall achievement, most of them valued the educational experience and the learning design, but perhaps not necessarily the fact that it was online. As a result of such strategies, institutional officials should think about how to create online courses that effectively involve learners to increase their satisfaction and overall achievements. Considering this, it is essential to make sure that learning design principles form the core of all e-learning-related initiatives. The current study further identified additional issues that hinder the high degree of satisfaction with the adoption of technology for learning academic writing online as reflected in the students' responses to the five sections of the questionnaire as well as in the interviews, such as the following: 1) choosing learner-centered strategies rather than teacher-centered ones; b) learner support must be provided in the proper proportions; c) learner assistance is a crucial component of quality verification to be accounted for in technology-enabled learning guidelines [63].

The findings of the current study are consistent with the claims of Dziuban and his colleagues [21] who asserted that learner satisfaction is considerably correlated with the quantity and quality of learner engagement. To improve students' performance in academic writing and encourage more interactions between instructors and learners as well as between students and students, instructors should introduce themselves as open and friendly, encouraging individuals and fostering cooperative learning. The competence, productivity, and satisfaction of learners are influenced by appropriate academic assistance [64]. A strong positive association between perceived satisfaction and both continuous learning marks

and final performance marks was found in this study, despite the literature's typical conclusion that student satisfaction is unrelated to performance.

As the researcher was the course instructor, he used the chat box to receive students' answers to questions during online lessons and found that students were motivated to share ideas on the chat box to get prompt feedback from peers and instructors. Collaborative writing was highly promoted with the use of Blackboard facilities and it saved time and effort for both instructors and students. However, one of the challenges was represented in the due time assigned to write on the chat.

In general, the interview's findings were consistent with studies on college-level internet-based instruction, which revealed that students' perceptions of web-based learning towards using Blackboard during COVID-19 were negative [65] [50]. Their responses reflected that they found "no substantial difference" between how well students performed in virtual classrooms and in conventional face-to-face classes as findings concluded by other studies such as [66] [49] [51]. However, the answers provided by some other students to the interview questions showed that online learners can perform "evenly well or better" than their counterparts using conventional teaching media. It can be concluded that technology integration must be supported in EFL language instruction as recommended by some EFL scholars and practitioners [67] [52]. It is supposed to increase academic achievement, enhance motivation, and facilitate learning. However, interactivity is often missing when learning or teaching online as claimed by other EFL/ESL scholars and researchers (such as [68] [69].

7   CONCLUSION

Considering the COVID-19 pandemic and any other unanticipated crises that may stymie efforts to develop the education sector, the findings of the current research paper have offered key factors for higher education institutions, e-learning developers, and decision-makers to consider when utilizing an e-learning strategy and approach for teaching academic writing to college students. When comparing online academic writing classes to in-person instruction, teaching academic writing online offers several chances and advantages. First, assistance is needed with academic writing abilities at all levels of education. From this perspective, one of the key advantages of teaching online is having the possibility to record online classes. All phases of learning academic writing will be guided by the students' access to recordings of previous classes, which will allow them to catch up on any sessions they miss. Second, examples are crucial in improving academic writing abilities. The use of virtual learning portals like Blackboard makes the learning course materials available to students at any time and preserved online. Aside from this, developing academic writing abilities takes time because it actively involves creation. Instead of physically going from one building or one room to another, students can learn more quickly through online instruction. With the time saved, academic writing abilities can be improved, and there will be more time for online practice. However, the advantages may vary depending on the situation and the accessibility of technology tools and equipment. With practice and time, as EFL students become accustomed to the online methods being used, several difficulties in online academic teaching may be resolved. However, some difficulties demand a lot of work and can be overcome by including various sources and instruments in the teaching and learning process. The research's findings add to the corpus of knowledge by providing novel perspectives on what factors influence students' participation in online writing courses that employ an activity-based learning design strategy. This study found that learning conceptions, such as reported engagement, perceived satisfaction, and student feedback aspects, could be valuable facets to add to a creative teaching system in order to enhance student learning experiences with the aim of shifting to competency- and outcomes-based learning models. This finding is consistent with other research in the field. This research showed that the satisfaction and involvement of students are crucial factors in determining their educational experiences.

8   LIMITATIONS & DELIMITATIONS

1. The fact that the study is restricted to one term and two classes may be insufficient for learners to obtain the required data and writing experience.

2. The study is limited to one university (Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal), so the range of opinions and responses is narrowed, while other universities may be encountering different challenges

3. The capacity of participants to self-assess is doubtful since biases could develop owing to hyperbole given in appraising talents or, on the other side, distortion in degrading them. A tenuous grasp of students' research queries and aims may have led to imprecise responses to the survey items.

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BIOGRAPHY

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ARABIC ABSTRACT

تدريس الكتابة الأكاديمية باستخدام أدوات الإنترنت: دراسة تجريبية في جامعة الإمام عبد الرحمن

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الملخص:

من المفترض أن هناك ندرة في الأبحاث حول أفضل السبل لاكتساب الكتابة الأكاديمية عبر الإنترنت في هذه المرحلة الحرجة. ولسد هذه الفجوة، تم استطلاع آراء 126 طالبًا سعوديًا عبر الإنترنت، وتم اختيار 20 منهم لإكمال مقابلة شبه منظمة. تم تحديد خمس عقبات رئيسية: الافتقار إلى التواصل النشط بين الطلاب والمعلمين؛ الصعوبات التكنولوجية، والوقت المخصص لأداء المهام، وعدم كفاية المساعدة الأكاديمية؛ والقضايا المتعلقة بالتغذية الراجعة من المعلم. كما تم تحديد أربع آليات رئيسية للتعامل مع هذه العقبات: المرونة فيما يتعلق بتحديد الوقت المخصص لإنجاز المهام عبر الإنترنت؛ اختيار طالب في كل مجموعة لعرض المشكلات المتعلقة بالكتابة الأكاديمية عبر الإنترنت؛ القيام بمبادرات لتنمية وعي الطلاب بكيفية التعامل مع الأدوات التعليمية في الكتابة الأكاديمية. تفعيل التغذية الراجعة من المعلمين والأقران. تم العثور على فائدتين لتعليم الكتابة عبر الإنترنت: الاستخدام المكثف للمواد التعليمية ومنصات التدريس عبر الإنترنت، والفرص المتاحة لممارسة الكتابة الأكاديمية عبر الإنترنت.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الكتابة الأكاديمية، منصات التدريس عبر الإنترنت، تعليم الكتابة عبر الإنترنت، تعلم الكتابة عبر الإنترنت، الكتابة الأكاديمية عبر الإنترنت