# The Impact of Using Online Games for Teaching Essay Writing in the Basic Stage at Jordanian Schools

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## Abstract

The present study attempts to explore the effect of using online games for teaching English writing skill for Jordanian students learning English as a foreign language. Also, it examines if these selected games could facilitate learning English writing skills, and creating a piece of writing effectively. Moreover, the study targets at exploring the effect of students' gender (male, female) as well as class level on students' performance in writing. In order to accomplish the objectives of the present study, a test (pre-post) is created in order to measure the level of students in English essay writing. The study sample is composed of (114) students from the basic stage in the first semester of the academic year 2017/2018. With proven results, the findings show an improvement on the achievement test between the groups in favor of the experimental group.

**Keywords:** Online Games- Essay Writing - Basic Stage- Jordanian Schools**.**

**Introduction:**

Teaching English as a foreign language perfectly is a challenging job, as it demands constant efforts from teachers and students as well. It demands effective and useful strategies in teaching the complex connection of interrelated ships among the four skills of English (reading, writing, and listening). Every skill reinforces the other although every skill varies in its complexity. By all counts, writing is the most difficult and challengeable skill in the world of teaching English as a foreign language.

Writing skill does not only have an important role in language acquisition, but it is also an essential skill for all students in learning the English language itself or in developing their competence level. Increasingly, writing has become a sign of success for all students during their academic years at schools or go through universities. Noticeably, students who hold and possess better English writing skills are more likely to be better at other skills (Crockett, 2016). To pass any international exam or to apply for a career, writing is considered the framework of one's English level and increase one's opportunity to obtain this career.

Although writing is a valued skill and highly needed to open pathways in the working career, it is considered a nightmare, headaches for most teachers and a challenging job. For most teachers, teaching English writing is a painful process, for it needs to be practiced regularly, needs extra efforts from the teacher, and a lot of patience. Teachers must equip their students with the essential skills needed and provide instructions through the process of writing to help students to be motivated at the same time.

Recently, researchers and educators of English as a foreign language

have been working hard to put in action many strategies in helping students to overcome and reduce the complexity of English writing. One of their fruitful efforts to shrink students' frustration is to use online games in teaching writing.

**Online games in teaching writing**

Prensky (2006) claims that nowadays students are the generation of technology whether computers or the internet because they grow up in this digital technology. He asserts that this technology affects the way the new generation learn as well as the tools used to teach them. Prensky states that most students have spent more than 10,000 hours playing videogames. This gives a strong indication that videogames might provide students with a strong opportunity to increase their written communication by using out-of-class activities to link it in classroom activities.

According to Ersoz (2000), online games spur students' motivation and problem solving skills; also, it is a unique strategy because it provides students with the opportunity to practice other language skills as well as amusements. Since access to the internet is highly practiced nowadays, the importance of online games highly burst into classrooms environment and upward interests in online games have seen. As online games are considered a valuable strategy in the teaching of writing, choosing the suitable and effective game is invaluable for its crucial role (Gee 2003; Egenfeldt 2006; Jennrich 2007; Hainey et. all 2009).

Despite the importance of using online games in teaching writing, some teachers are reluctant in integrating online games in their classrooms (Can and Cagiltay, 2006). The advocates against using online games assert that it is inconvenient to use online games in their classrooms because of certain curricular and technological limitations (Egenfeldt, 2004). Also, they state that they will not feel very comfortable in integrating this technology in the educational settings since it is very difficult for them to select the proper game. (Abdul Razak, Connolly, and Haine, 2012). On the other hand, other teachers agree on the merits of using online games in educational settings. They add that these games create an educational environment that enhances understanding of most concepts although it is time consuming (Watson et al 2012). Also, they assert that online games spur students' motivation, stimulate communication and cooperation among students, and increase their desire to participate, and facilitate learning as well as support learning tasks (Turkay, 2014; Hung, Sun, and Yu, 2015).

It is hoped that this research will bridge the gap between the aforementioned sides of the argument, and contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of online games in teaching writing to EFL students.

**Review of Related Literature**

The interest in the instructional benefits of computer games has received increased attention in recent years. For instance, in an analysis of the principles that appear in most of these games, Gee (2005) found that these principles could change learning in schools, teachers, and students as well.

One example of these principles is the active and critical learning

principle. According to Gee, this principle is achieved by setting up all the aspects of the learning environment, which in turn encourages active and critical learning. When students use computer games, they are engaged in the assignment at hand. The "Regime of Competence Principle" is another games principle of Gee (2005) where the learners are expected to become active in the game and face challenges to move ahead in the task. This idea is similar to the Zone of Proximal Development of Vygotsky (1962). According to Vygotsky's Zone, if students fail to accomplish what they learned, they will remain in their actual level until they succeed and move ahead to a potential development. This adapting environment is highly provided in computer games, making it a valuable tool to be used by teachers in teaching students English writing.

According to Prensky (2001), computer games share many principles that teachers struggle to implement them in the classrooms when teaching students writing. Some of these principles are namely; goals and objectives, outcomes and feedback, challenge, competition, presentation of a story, and interaction.

Many researches (Hall, Wall, Higgins, and Edwards, 2006; Verenikina, 2010) are concerned in the area of developing effective strategies to be used by English teachers in helping students on how to write a good essay in English. One preferable strategy to the above researchers is the process approach. The process approach has received extensive acceptance by educators, researchers, and teachers (Okoye and Obi1991, Duruamaku-Dim and Duruamaku-Dim 2006, and Jibowo 2009). They tried out to use learners' errors in teaching creative writing, composition, and essay.

Janienne (2007) and Morris (2009) have recently added additional literature in the area of teaching creative writing and essay writing skills through using games. The advocates of using games and the process approach to teaching writing share common views. They assert that writing is an on-going process with multi-stage processes with an importance given to each stage of it. Duruamaku-Dim and Duruamaku-Dim (2006) list the stages as pre-writing (organization), composition, revision and post-writing (i.e. presentation of the write-up). Janienne (2007) and Morris (2009) view writing as teaching a sequential activity-based as the advocates of using games to teach creative writing and essay writing skills Egenfeldt (2004). Teaching writing skills by using games is in procedures process from preparation, introduction, variation, and evaluation. The basis of this study is a mixture of Janienne (2007) ideas on teaching writing skills to students and Morris (2009) group and whole class activities for teaching academic writing.

## Purpose of the study

This study attempts to trace the effect of using online games on students' performance in English writing due to the online game strategy and class grade as well as gender.

## Methodology
## Sample

The sample of this research is (56) male students from the fifth grade and (58) female students from the fourth grade. The sample was selected randomly from two governmental schools in Amman Directorate of Education.

### Design of the study

In each school, students were divided into experimental and control groups. The control group (n=58) in both schools were taught using the traditional way of teaching writing whereas the experimental group (n=56) in both schools were taught by using games. The traditional method in this study depended on exercises and drills with an explanation of the steps on how to write from the teachers. Since the experiment lasts for six weeks only, the researcher has covered some writing topics. The students were taught by their teachers. The study was conducted by the researcher and the help of English teachers of the selected schools.

### The instrument

The instrument of the study is a test designed by the researcher based on the English textbook and the instructional material of fourth and fifth grades. The instructional material was taken from their English which includes many topics. Before submitting the exam, the reliability and validity of the test were examined, and notes were taken into consideration.

### Online games

Group of online games were selected from an internet resource specialized in writing games.

https://www.education.com/games/?cid=11.2144

## Statistical treatment

To achieve the objectives of the study, the SPSS program was run to calculate the mean and standard deviations of the pre/post test score for the groups (experimental and control groups). T-tests were then performed to compare these means and determine how significant the differences, if any, were. Statistical significance was set at an alpha level of 0.05.

## Findings of the study

After the experiment was accomplished, the researcher analyzed the data using the mean and standard deviations.

**Table (one)**

**The achievement of the groups on the pretest.**

| Group | N | Mean | Std. deviation | t-stat | df | p-value (2-tailed) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Experimental | 56 | 61.511 | 9.692 | 1.036 | 94 | 0.303 |
| Control | 58 | 59. 901 | 6.348 | | | |

Table one shows how the experimental and control groups achieved on the pretest. When compared using two-sample t-test, the differences in pretest scores were not statistically significant between the two groups. This indicates that these two groups are equivalent.

To ascertain whether both strategies, the traditional and using games, effectively improved the writing performance, the mean score of both groups

on pretest was compared to the mean score on posttest using a paired t-test. As expected, the mean posttest score of both groups was statistically significantly higher than the mean pretest. This indicates that both strategies proved to be effective strategies to improve writing performance. The results of the paired t-test are shown in Table two.

**Table (two)**

**The results of paired t-test**

| Group | N | Mean score on pretest | Mean score on posttest | t-stat | df | p-value (2-tailed) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Experimental | 56 | 61.511 | 80.192 | -12.040 | 55 | <0.001 |
| Control | 58 | 59. 901 | 72.651 | -6.400 | 57 | <0.001 |

determine which strategy was more effective, a two-sample t-test was performed to ascertain whether the mean posttest score of the two groups were statistically different. The results of the two-sample t-test are presented in table three, which shows that, the mean score on posttest was overall significantly higher in the experiment group (80.192 compared with 72.651 for the control group, p-value < 0.001). This indicates that the use of online games has a positive effect on students writing on the achievement test. This result is consistent with the study of Mubaslat (2012) and Dumrique and Castilo (2018) on how online games affect students' performance writing test.

**Table (three)**

**The results of two-sample t-test**

| Group | N | Mean | Std. deviation | t-stat | df | p-value (2-tailed) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Experimental | 56 | 80.192 | 7.235 | 3.817 | 90 | <0.001 |
| Control | 58 | 72.651 | 12.970 | | | |

To examine whether the effect of using games on writing performance was sensitive to the grade of the students, subgroup analysis by class (fourth and fifth grades) was performed on the students of the experimental group. The results of subgroup analysis are presented in table four.

**Table (four)**

**Subgroup analysis by class**

| Grade | N | Mean | Std. deviation | t-stat | df | p-value (2-tailed) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4th grade | 28 | 73.123 | 11.972 | -2.280 | 54 | 0.027 |
| 5th grade | 28 | 79.710 | 9.065 | | | |

As shown in Table four, the mean score of the posttest of the fourth grade was (73.123) whereas the score of the fifth-grade group on the post test was (79.710). The two-sample t-test revealed that the difference between the mean scores of the two grades was significant (p-value = 0.027). The subgroup analysis demonstrates that there is a strong evidence to suggest that the performance of the two grades on the achievement of the posttest was different in favor of fifth grade group. This indicates that using online games is affected by the class level.

**Table (five)**

| Gender | N | Std. deviation | t-stat | Df | p-value (2-tailed) |
|--------|----|----------------|--------|----|--------------------|
| Male | 28 | 10.136 | 0.417 | 54 | 0.678 |
| Female | 28 | 11.975 | | | |

**Subgroup analysis by gender**

Table five shows that the mean score on the posttest of the male students within the control group was (77.01) while it was (75.75) for female students. The subgroup analysis demonstrates that there is no statistical difference between the mean score of posttest among males and females. This result is in inconsistent with the study of Kolo and Baur (2004) on how online games have a strong influence on the writing performance test of male students.

## Conclusion

Writing is an essential skill, yet it is difficult to be achieved. Over years, English teachers in Jordan had been used different methods trying to discover the best method in teaching writing. On line games strategy was questioned by many educators and researchers, and there is a strong agreement of using on line games to enhance students' academic writing. Based on the results of this study, using games had, to some extent, solved this problem. Students of the sample were highly engaged and motivated while using on line games during writing in English. They preferred using games in teaching them writing, for it

can be used in ant time and anywhere. Although some teachers were against using mobile games, for they are not familiar in such games.

Online games will be an important element in teaching writing in the future. Teachers have to make use of games and to take the merits of the multiple roles of games because it appears completely an effective strategy. The heads of public schools have to hold workshops for their teachers of English language to familiarize them with the importance of using games and train them to use these games as a useful strategy in teaching students writing. More studies needed to be investigated in depth on online games in order to push this strategy a step forward to be used in most schools.

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