

# Internet Use in EFL Writing Classes The case of an Iranian University

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## **Abstract**

**Aim.** The present study seeks to investigate the effect of Internet use on writing abilities of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students studying in an Iranian university. The participating students have been advised to use the Internet while searching for collocations and new words. They were also told to use grammar checkers while writing essays in English. After a two month period, their writing papers were corrected by two raters. Compared to scores they obtained before the class equipped with new technologies, the students obtained higher scores, showing that the Internet can be used in language learning, especially in writing classes, where students have difficulties in using native-like words and structures.

**Methods.** The participants of the present study were 28 Iranian university students studying ELT in an Iranian University in the capital Tehran. The students were divided into two classes consisting of 12 students in the experimental group and 16 students in the control group. The mean age of the students taking part in the study was 20. Additionally, according to a TOEFL iBT, the level of the English proficiency of the students was 75. To put it another way, utilising the test, the students were homogenized by the researchers of the study.

**Results.** The results of the study show that the use of the Internet in EFL classes can boost the writing abilities of EFL learners. In other words, the writing of the students is improved in the case of the checking different collocations and grammatical points in the Internet. Moreover, the use of grammar checker softwares which can be found on the net can pave the way for EFL students to be better writers of English.

**Conclusions.** To conclude, this study suggests that the use of the Internet can be beneficial to EFL learners while improving their writing abilities which can be seen by many scholars studying different skills as important.

**Key words:** Writing, Internet Use, EFL, English, Classes, Tehran

## Introduction

Writing is one of the most important skills which attracts the attention of a large number of practitioners in the realm of English Language Teaching (ELT) over the past few years (Skehan, 2003; Sawyer & Ranta, 2001). According to Emig (1977), "Writing" is regarded as "a Mode of Learning." Moreover, Brindle (2013) links academic success in different universities of the world to the writing abilities of learners. Surveying the related literature, one can say that one of the most important skills in language learning is writing as the breathtaking technologies of the 21st century call for expert writers of English (Bouck et al, 2015). Due to the limited number of studies on the use of the Internet in EFL writing classes in an Iranian context, there is a need for further analysis on examining the effect of Internet use in EFL classes.

Hence, the existing study is aimed at bridging the mentioned gap in the literature by investigating the effect of Internet use on the writing abilities of EFL learners. To put it another way, linked to other studies focusing on writing abilities of learners, this study seeks to answer the following research question:

Do EFL learners who use the Internet in writing classes write better than learners who do not use the Internet?

## Methodology

### Participants

The participants of the present study were 28 Iranian university students studying ELT in an Iranian University in the capital city Tehran. The students were divided into two classes consisting of 12 students in the experimental group and 16 students in the control group. The mean age of the students taking part in the study was 20. Additionally, according to a TOEFL iBT, the level of the English proficiency of the students was 75. To put it another way, utilising the test, the students were homogenized by the researchers of the study.

### Design

Quasi experimental design was used as the design of the current study in which two classes or groups were used. More specifically, the two groups of the study were control and experiment ones. The use of the Internet was regarded as the independent variable and the scores obtained by students while completing their writing assignments were witnessed as the dependant variable. Using SPSS, the researchers of the study used T-test statistical analysis to determine the differences between the two groups of the learners working on writing in two different classes at the same university.

The main course book of the term was *The Practical Writer with Readings* written by Edward P. Bailey and Philip A. Powell. The book was published in 2015. Seven chapters of the book were supposed to be taught in the classes

during two months. One professor was assigned to teach both classes. In one class the students were permitted to use the Internet, while in the other class they were not permitted to use the Internet while writing.

### Procedure

The students in both the experimental group and the control group completed different writing tasks extracted from the book mentioned above. The students in the experimental group were briefed about the use of the Internet while completing the tasks. In other words, they were free to use the Internet while searching for collocations and new words. They were also told to use grammar checkers while writing essays in English.

### Results and Discussion

An independent t-test was run by the researchers of the current study in an attempt to see whether there was a statistically significant difference between the mean scores obtained from the groups. The results of the test using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences version are as follows:

*Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for experimental and control groups*

<b>Groups (Experimental &amp; Control)</b>	<b>Number of students</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation (SD)</b>
Experimental	12	12.21	1.29
Control	16	7.82	1.56

An independent-samples t-test was run to compare mean scores for both groups after completing the final writing tasks following the two months of studying writing. Based on the information shown in Table 1., we can say that there was a significant difference in scores for the Experimental group ( $M = 12.21$ ,  $SD = 1.29$ ) and the Control group ( $M = 7.82$ ,  $SD = 1.56$ ),  $t(26) = 7.98$ ,  $p = .001$ . To put it other way, students who used the Internet while completing their writing tasks could obtain a better score in the final task completion activities, showing that the use of Internet can be an important factor while learning writing in an EFL context like Iran.

Furthermore, the results of Table 1 can demonstrate that the null hypothesis of this study was rejected, saying that EFL learners who use the Internet in writing classes can write better than those who do not use the Internet.

The results of the study show that the use of the Internet in EFL classes can boost the writing abilities of EFL learners. In other words, the writing of the students will be improved in the case of checking different collocations and grammatical points in the Internet. Moreover, the use of grammar checker softwares which can be found on the Internet can pave the way for EFL

students to be better writers of English. The results of the present study are in line with a number of other studies like Top (2007), Russel et al. (2003), Oz (2015), Semiz and İnce (2012) and İnce and Ok (2005) carried out in different countries. A matter of caution is the fact that teachers should not be ignored while using technology in EFL classes. As Top (2007, p. 40) states, "only those teachers who believe that technology use will lead to significant benefits for their students will undertake the associated challenges."

To conclude, this study suggests that the use of the Internet can be beneficial to EFL learners while improving their writing abilities, which can be seen by many scholars studying different skills as important.

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