



IRAQI
Academic Scientific Journals



العراقية
المجلات الاكاديمية العلمية

ISSN: 2663-9033 (Online) | ISSN: 2616-6224 (Print)

Journal of Language Studies

Contents available at: <http://www.iasj.net/iasj/journal/356/about>



Investigation of the Impact of Technology on the Written Production of EFL Learners in Iraqi Kurdistan

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Received: 10 / 5 / 2023 , **Accepted:** 14 / 6 / 2023, **Online Published:** 31 / 7 / 2023

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Abstract

Writing is a significant manner of learning a foreign language and can be essential in facilitating second language development. Moreover, it is an essential part of language learning for L2 learners. Research has shown that many EFLs perform poorly in written language skills. Research has shown that many EFLs perform poorly in written language skills. The present study aimed to investigate technology's impact on EFL learners' written production in Iraqi Kurdistan. In this research, a single group pre-test-post-test method was utilized. The research community included Iraqi EFL learners, and the research sample included 30 intermediate-level learners. In order to measure the students' self-evaluation of their writing skills, the students completed the Self-Assessment of English Writing Skills and Use of Writing Strategies questionnaire. A descriptive writing task was used to measure students' writing performance. SPSS22 software was used for data analysis. The normality of the scores was assessed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. The Likert scale evaluation showed that Self-Assessment of English Writing Skills with an average of 69.03 ± 25.21 was evaluated at a relatively favorable level and Use of Learning Strategies with an average of 149.83 ± 69.38 at an unfavorable level. The results indicated that the average score of the students in the pre-test was 17.37 ± 2.16 , and in the post-test, it was 21.00 ± 1.96 . Based on the results, a statistically significant difference was observed between the pre-test and post-test results. In the present study, we found that Iraqi EFL learners' writing skills and practices improved significantly with the help of technology.

Key Word: EFL learners, Writing Skill, Technology, Writing Strategies

التحقيق في تأثير التكنولوجيا على الإنتاج الكتابي لمتعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في

كردستان العراق

د. فريق غازي عولا / معهد رواندر التقني الخاص

ا.م. سوزادر ريبوار سفر/ معهد رواندر التقني الخاص

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المستخلص

الكتابة طريقة مهمة لتعلم لغة أجنبية ويمكن أن تكون ضرورية في تسهيل تطوير اللغة الثانية. علاوة على ذلك، فهو جزء أساسي من تعلم اللغة لمتعلمي اللغة الثانية. أظهرت الأبحاث أن العديد من اللغات الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية يؤديون أداءً ضعيفاً في مهارات اللغة المكتوبة. أظهرت الأبحاث أن العديد من اللغات الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية يؤديون أداءً ضعيفاً في مهارات اللغة المكتوبة. هدفت الدراسة الحالية إلى التحقيق في تأثير التكنولوجيا على الإنتاج الكتابي لمتعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في كردستان العراق. في هذا البحث، تم استخدام طريقة مجموعة واحدة قبل الاختبار

والاختبار البعدي. شمل مجتمع البحث دارسين عراقيين للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية ، وضمت عينة البحث 30 متعلماً من المستوى المتوسط. من أجل قياس التقييم الذاتي للطلاب لمهاراتهم الكتابية ، أكمل الطلاب التقييم الذاتي لمهارات الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية واستخدام استراتيجيات الكتابة. تم استخدام مهمة الكتابة الوصفية لقياس أداء الطلاب الكتابي. تم استخدام برنامج SPSS 22 لتحليل البيانات. تم تقييم الحالة الطبيعية للنتائج باستخدام اختبار Kolmogorov-Smirnov. أظهر تقييم مقياس ليكرت أن التقييم الذاتي لمهارات الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية بمتوسط 69.03 ± 25.21 تم تقييمه بمستوى مناسب نسبياً واستخدام استراتيجيات التعلم بمتوسط 69.38 ± 149.83 على مستوى غير موات. أشارت النتائج إلى أن متوسط درجات الطلاب في الاختبار التمهيدي كان 17.37 ± 2.16 ، وفي الاختبار اللاحق كان 21.00 ± 1.96 . بناءً على النتائج ، لوحظ وجود فرق معتد به إحصائياً بين نتائج الاختبار القبلي والنتائج اللاحقة للاختبار. في هذه الدراسة ، وجدنا أن مهارات الكتابة لدى متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية وممارساتهم تحسنت بشكل ملحوظ بمساعدة التكنولوجيا.

الكلمات الدالة: متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، مهارة الكتابة، التكنولوجيا، استراتيجيات الكتابة

1. Introduction

Technology is used in almost every aspect of life and has become increasingly associated with teaching and learning (Belmahdi et al., 2022). The use of technology in education means the practical use of knowledge, especially in a specific field (Isman, 2012). One of the practical tools for learning new languages is technology. Students should employ technology as an essential component of their learning procedure. The use of technology can increase the cooperation of learners, which is one of the essential tools in learning (Keser & Özdamlı, 2012). Technology provides many alternative methods that make learning more exciting and productive regarding progress (Patel, 2013). For example, technology can create a learning environment with an inclusive focus instead of the teacher, creating positive changes (Dawson et al., 2008; Gilakjani, 2013). It inspires students to learn individually and develop responsible behaviors; the self-dependent benefit of technology leads to self-directed learning and changes learning from teacher-centered to student-centered. Advances in technology play a crucial role in preparing learners to apply what they have learned in the real world (Ahmadi & Reza, 2018).

Using technology has significantly changed the methods of teaching English (Ahmadi & Reza, 2018). Technology integration in language learning can be understood as using technology to support the language learning process (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). Technological tools provide more effective learning by replacing the teaching method and making it possible for language learners to have easier access to learning lessons (Ahmadi & Reza, 2018). Teachers should model the use of technology to support the curriculum. So that students can improve their actual use of technology in learning their language skills (Costley, 2014). With technology, numerous resources can be supplied to language learners

and encourage them to learn. Another effect of technology in language classes is increasing cooperation between teachers and learners (Gilakjani, 2013).

According to Hennessy, using technology motivates teachers and learners to work in new ways (Hennessy et al., 2005). Baytak et al. indicated that integrating technology in the classroom improves learners' learning. The researchers stated that one of the ways to make learning enjoyable is to use technology in school (Baytak et al., 2011). Clement et al. stated in their study that the appropriate use of technology can benefit learners (Clements & Sarama, 2003). Bull et al. believe that technology can provide unlimited resources for language learning (Bull & Ma, 2001).

Technology can be used to improve English language skills. One of these skills is writing. Writing is a significant manner of learning a foreign language and can be essential in promoting second language (L2) development (Williams, 2012). Moreover, it is an essential part of language learning for L2 learners (Xu et al., 2019). Research has demonstrated that many EFLs perform poorly in written language skills (Dussling, 2020). Research has shown that many EFLs perform poorly in written language skills. For example, Zailaini et al. describe writing as complex, especially for EFLs (Zailaini et al., 2015). Given that writing has many aspects, such as purpose, content, audience, vocabulary, organization, spelling, and writing principles, it is a difficult language skill to learn among EFLs (Mohammad et al., 2020). Research has shown that writing in teaching English can increase motivation, increase awareness of the writing process, produce more text, and improve language use and formation (Hsu, 2014; Liu & Tsai, 2013).

According to Rasheed Mohammad's study, Iraqi language learners have difficulty writing in English, and writing is a challenge for them (Mohammad et al., 2020). Iraqi language learners have little exposure to the English language and its use (Sabti et al., 2019). Sabti stated that most EFL students lack academic English writing skills (Sabti, 2013). Given that English in Iraq is only used in formal EFL classes, where the teachers are native Arabic or Kurdish speakers, English learning is limited. This is why Iraqi EFL learners' English language skills are often at beginner levels. Iraqi learners may face many problems when writing in English, such as choosing grammar or vocabulary and organizing ideas, which affects the overall quality of their writing (Sabti et al., 2019). However, using new learning methods can help improve writing. However, despite the evidence based on improving the quality of writing by using technology tools, more research should be done (Howell et al., 2021). Therefore, the present study aims to investigate the impact of technology on the written production of EFL learners in Iraqi Kurdistan.

2. Method

In this research, a single group pre-test-post-test method was employed. The research community included Iraqi EFL learners, and the research sample included 30 intermediate-level learners. This study was conducted between February and April 2023. In order to measure the students' self-evaluation of their writing skills, the students completed the Self-Assessment of English Writing Skills and Use of Writing Strategies questionnaire. This questionnaire has 106 Likert-type questions and deals with multiple dimensions related to the self-evaluation of language learners. The components of the questionnaire included General Writing Strategies and General Learning Strategies. Participants were required to rank their abilities for each item on a 5 Likert-type scale. The range of scores in this questionnaire is between 106-530. First, a pre-test was taken from EFL learners. A descriptive writing task was used to measure learners' writing performance. In this writing

assignment, learners were required to write essays of 200-250 words, the topic of which was the same for all language learners. The pre-test was a writing task where learners were requested to write an essay regarding their favorite place to travel. The learners were asked to comply with the following structure:

Paragraph 1: Introduction

Paragraph 2: Body and supporting details

Paragraph 3: Conclusion

The writing task was evaluated using a rubric provided by Vaezi et al. for writing evaluation. Writing scores based on this rubric were evaluated as a minimum of 9 and a maximum of 36. Also, each essay was evaluated based on nine elements: narrative voice, characterization, story, setting, mood and atmosphere, language and writing mechanics, dialogue, plot, and image. The score of each element was in a range of 1-4. After the pre-test, in the next step, activities were conducted to analyze the effect of technology on enhancing writing skills. The experimental phase consisted of 5 sessions. In each of the sessions, an exercise was done to use technology. Then again, the learners were requested to write an essay on the same topic of their favorite place to travel. The students' writing scores were compared before and after the educational intervention. Table 1 shows a summary of the activities performed.

Table 1. A summary of the activities performed

| Activity | Type | Tool | Aim |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Students should listen to one of the podcast episodes of You Should Have Been There and summarize it. | practical | Podbean | Getting to know how to describe places and words related to travel |
| Students should play a word game related to travel. | practical | https://wordwall.net/ | Acquaintance with words related to travel |
| Each student must find 10 pictures of their favorite place to travel on social media and share them with their classmates. | practical | Instagram | Strengthen visual skills and become more familiar with the place of interest |
| The teacher should download a travel vlogging video, and play it in class. Students should watch the video carefully and talk about it in class. | practical | YouTube | Getting to know how to make a vlog and describe a travel |
| The teacher should find a travelogue blog, provide it to the students, and teach all its grammar points and vocabulary. | theory | Travel blogs | Strengthening knowledge of grammar and familiarity with words related to travel |

SPSS22 software was used for data analysis. The normality of the scores was assessed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. Paired t-test was used to compare scores.

3. Results

The current study examined the role of technology in enhancing Iraqi EFL learners' writing skills. Thirty intermediate-level language learners participated in this investigation. In this research, a paired T-test was used to compare the pre-test and post-test scores of EFL learners in the field of writing skills. Since the data displayed normal distribution using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test ($p > 0.05$). Table 2 indicates the descriptive results of the questionnaire.

Table 2, the descriptive results of the questionnaire

| | N | Min | Max | \bar{X} | SD |
|-------------------------------------------|----|-----|-----|-----------|-------|
| Self-Assessment of English Writing Skills | 30 | 36 | 110 | 69.03 | 25.21 |
| Use of Learning Strategies | 30 | 70 | 330 | 149.83 | 69.38 |

The Likert scale evaluation showed that Self-Assessment of English Writing Skills with an average of 69.03 ± 25.21 was evaluated at a relatively favorable level and Use of Learning Strategies with an average of 149.83 ± 69.38 at an unfavorable level. Table 3 displays the results of the pre-test and post-test analysis.

Table 3, the results of the pre-test and post-test analysis

| | N | \bar{X} | SD | t | p |
|-----------|-----------|-----------|------|--------|------------------|
| Pre-test | 30 | 17.37 | 2.16 | -10.66 | <0.001 |
| Post-test | 30 | 21.00 | 1.96 | | |

Based on the results, the average students score on the pre-test was 17.37 ± 2.16 , and on the post-test, it was 21.00 ± 1.96 . Likewise, a statistically meaningful difference was observed between the pre-test and post-test results. Thus, it can be deduced that the benefit of technology has had a positive effect on improving writing skills. Essays were evaluated in 9 different dimensions of the rubric. Table 4 shows the evaluation results of essays based on dimensions.

Table 4, the evaluation results of essays based on dimensions

| | | N | \bar{X} | SD | t | p |
|--------------------------------|-----------|----|-----------|------|-------|--------|
| Narrative Voice | Pre-test | 30 | 1.47 | 0.51 | -6.59 | <0.001 |
| | Post-test | 30 | 2.07 | 0.45 | | |
| Characterization | Pre-test | 30 | 1.67 | 0.61 | -4.39 | <0.001 |
| | Post-test | 30 | 2.06 | 0.58 | | |
| Mood and Atmosphere | Pre-test | 30 | 1.76 | 0.63 | -4.09 | <0.001 |
| | Post-test | 30 | 2.13 | 0.57 | | |
| Language and Writing Mechanics | Pre-test | 30 | 1.80 | 0.48 | -3.52 | 0.001 |
| | Post-test | 30 | 2.20 | 0.48 | | |
| Dialogue | Pre-test | 30 | 2.07 | 0.58 | -3.25 | 0.003 |
| | Post-test | 30 | 2.33 | 0.55 | | |
| Story | Pre-test | 30 | 2.27 | 0.64 | -3.52 | 0.001 |
| | Post-test | 30 | 2.67 | 0.54 | | |
| Setting | Pre-test | 30 | 1.83 | 0.69 | -4.96 | <0.001 |
| | Post-test | 30 | 2.40 | 0.49 | | |
| Image | Pre-test | 30 | 2.20 | 0.66 | -4.09 | <0.001 |
| | Post-test | 30 | 2.57 | 0.50 | | |
| Plot | Pre-test | 30 | 2.30 | 0.70 | -3.25 | <0.001 |
| | Post-test | 30 | 2.57 | 0.51 | | |

The results showed that all the evaluated elements in the pre-test and post-test had a statistically significant difference, and the language learners obtained higher scores in all the elements after using the technology. The lowest score in the pre-test was related to the narrative voice and the highest was obtained in the plot element. In the post-test, the lowest and highest averages among the elements were related to characterization and story, respectively.

- Voice examines the use of rich and flexible language and vocabulary appropriate to situations, and technology improved it by 0.6.
- Characterization means revealing characters indirectly, which technology was able to strengthen by an average of 0.39.
- Mood and Atmosphere, which presents the actions, thoughts, dialogues of characters, events, and environments of the story using appropriate vocabulary, was improved by 0.253 in this study using technology.
- Language and Writing Mechanics shows compliance with rules of punctuation, capital letters, correct spelling and grammar, and in the present study, it could be improved by 0.40 by technology.
- Visualization of scenes by dialogues improved by 0.26 by technology.
- Language and Writing Mechanics shows compliance with rules of punctuation, capital letters, correct spelling and grammar, and in the present study, it could be improved by 0.40 by technology.
- The simultaneous transmission of information and emotions and the expression of the story's primary purpose, which was examined in the setting element, were improved by using 0.57 technology.
- The image examined concrete, significant and attractive details and was improved by 0.37 by using technology.
- The plot examines the logical order of content arrangement and was enhanced by 0.27 using technology.

Based on the results, technology had the most significant impact on Voice improvement and the most negligible impact on Mood and Atmosphere. The overall results showed that using technology could increase the average essay scores of language learners. Table 5 compares the students' self-evaluation results with the real results.

Table 5, the comparison of the students' self-evaluation results with the actual results

| | N | Correlation | Sig. |
|------------------------------------------------------|----------|--------------------|-------------|
| Self-Assessment of English Writing Skills ~ pre-test | 30 | 0.520 | 0.003 |
| Use of Learning Strategies ~ pre-test | 30 | 0.418 | 0.022 |

The results showed that both sections, including Self-Assessment of English Writing Skills and Use of Writing Strategies, had a statistically significant correlation with the pre-test scores. In other words, language learners who scored higher in self-evaluation performed better in the pre-test.

4. Discussion

In the present study, we found that Iraqi EFL learners' writing skills and practices improved significantly with the help of technology. Other studies, like the present study, have confirmed using technology's effect on improving EFL learners' writing skills (Hsu, 2014;

Lin et al., 2017). In other words, because of its attractiveness for language learners, technology helps them learn the language in a meaningful context and build their knowledge. Studies have confirmed that their learning increases when students use the technology environment (Lan et al., 2015). In addition to strengthening the basic knowledge of language learners, technology can help them have new ideas and write more creatively.

The technology strategy should be in harmony with the curriculum standards. Teachers must understand the most effective instructional method for integrating technology into the classroom (Gilakjani, 2013). The technology strategy should be in harmony with the curriculum standards. Teachers must comprehend the most effective instructional procedure for integrating technology into the classroom. Lingo teachers should encourage students to employ technology to expand their language skills.

Also, the results of the present study showed a positive and significant relationship between the Self-Assessment of English Writing Skills and the Use of Writing Strategies by language learners and their writing skills. In this regard, Nurharjanto et al. observed a positive and significant relationship between language learning strategies and writing skills among EFLs (Nurharjanto & Widyantoro, 2020). Mistar et al. also stated that students with more learning strategies have better writing ability (Mistar, 2014). Manham et al. also confirmed that language learning strategies improve students' writing ability (Mahnam & Nejadansari, 2012). Based on the results of the mentioned studies and also the present study, the use of learning strategies to strengthen writing skills was confirmed. For this, it is essential to provide arrangements for teaching learning strategies to language learners.

Conclusion

The present study aimed to investigate technology's impact on EFL learners' written production in Iraqi Kurdistan. The study results revealed that technology improved students' writing skills by providing an attractive and diverse educational environment. Also, the results showed that technology positively affected using rich and flexible language and vocabulary relevant to situations. Based on the study results, students who obtained a higher average score in Self-Assessment of English Writing Skills and Use of Writing Strategies average score of writing skills were also higher. Therefore, using learning strategies has a positive impact on improving writing skills.

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