

# EFL Instructors' and Students' Perceptions of Online Writing Instruction During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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**Abstract**—This study identifies the benefits, difficulties, challenges, and prospects of using Moodle in writing classrooms among Saudi EFL tertiary students at Shaqra University. A sample of EFL instructors and students responded to a questionnaire of 29 five-point Likert Scale statements and 4 open-ended questions. The instructors and students viewed Moodle as an empowering tool in online writing. Moodle provided the students with feasible, accessible, and timely peer/group feedback. It created a flexible, comfortable, and student-centered learning atmosphere where the instructors and students were active in the online classroom. It also ensured interactive, smooth, and instant e-collaboration in online writing. Technical problems and Internet disconnection were the main obstacles hindering the students from sufficient interaction with their instructors and other students.

**Index Terms**—instructors' and students' perceptions, Moodle, online writing instruction, COVID-19 Pandemic

## I. INTRODUCTION

Modern communication technology has impacted the educational process at a wide scale. Nowadays, learning is conveyed via web 2.0 technologies through Learning Management System (LMS) tools such as student portals, Content Management Systems (CMS) such as Moodle, MOOCs, Blackboard, Teams, WebEx, Blackboard, and so on (Al-Samarrate & Saeed, 2018; Wang et al., 2014). Erarslan and Topkaya (2017) state, “e-learning environment, together with the widespread use and availability of internet enhanced computers and smartphones have changed the pace and boundaries of second and foreign language learning, especially on the part of the learners” (p. 82). Meanwhile, there has been an increased reliance on Web-based learning in higher education institutions due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 Pandemic that has affected all countries across the globe tremendously.

There are positive outcomes resulting from this digital transformation, including the benefits of flexibility of place and time. In Saudi Arabia, universities have resumed delivering academic programs by means of online platforms. In this regard, Shaqra University has adopted Moodle as a platform to continue the teaching and learning processes during the COVID-19 crisis. This situation is even more complex in the language classroom as learners need a communicative context for acquiring different language skills. Therefore, it is significant to explore instructors' and students' perceptions of Moodle and to what extent it is effectively employed in maintaining and promoting the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language (EFL) in the midst of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Online learning is employed through self-paced independent study units, asynchronous interactive sessions, and synchronous interactive meetings (Kashoob1 & Attamimi, 2021). Thus, learning has become flexible and accessible to university students who learn virtually both online and offline via student portals (Houlden & Veletsianos, 2020). Moodle is a free online learning platform widely used around the world as “a learning platform designed to provide educators, administrators, and learners with a single robust, secure, and integrated system to create personalized learning environments” (Moodle, 2020). It has been employed in several educational language institutions as a powerful means of incorporating technology into the classroom.

### A. Benefits of Online Learning

Online learning is a flexible approach that allows students to study wherever they are aligned with other life commitments based on digital technology tools. Suppasetsee et al. (2016) mention the following five roles for technology in promoting the learning environment: (1) enhancing instructors' and students' access to up-to-date learning e-resources, (2) boosting interaction and communication skills among instructors and students, (3) empowering

instructors to optimize the use of their time, (4) broadening students' perspective for their future work opportunities, and (5) creating new roles for instructors and students.

Online learning in tertiary institutions enhances interaction and communication among learners and thus promotes an elaborate student-centered learning environment (Wang, 2010). Several learning tools are incorporated to enhance instructional activities and tasks to meet the prospects and challenges of higher learning institutions (Hoic-Bozic et al., 2016). These versatile online resources have enabled instructors and learners to meet, exchange ideas, and communicate in innovative and fulfilling ways. Al-Samarraie and Saeed (2018) add that flexible and collaborative communication tools are specifically useful in reinforcing learners in creating, uploading, downloading, revising, and editing online documents and assignments, as well as exchanging ideas and insights concerning the course material.

### *B. Problems and Challenges of Online Learning*

The sudden transition to online instruction after the onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic required instructors to prepare themselves to carry out online education in an instant. Many previous studies have highlighted the problems and challenges of incorporating technology in the EFL classroom. For example, learners should possess knowledge and competencies on how to employ Web 2.0-based learning tools (Hursen, 2020). The use of learning portals is challenging to many EFL learners who possess insufficient competency levels of digital knowledge and culture (Vesisenaho et al., 2010). Thus, these learners should be trained in competencies of employing up-to-date technologies for learning purposes (Meyers et al., 2013). They should also be given sufficient time to get familiarized with Web 2.0-based learning, along with technological tools and competencies (Hoic-Bozic et al., 2016).

Mouchantaf (2020) stressed instructors' complaints that online learning was usually accompanied with students' missing lectures, internet disconnection, technical complications, and insufficient institutional support and training. In Saudi Arabia, Hoq (2020) found that while online learning tools saved time and energy in uploading, downloading, and editing learning materials, some teachers did not have sufficient time to manage the technical demands of online learning. Mahyoob (2020) also referred to the technical, academic, and communication challenges that hindered students' online learning.

### *C. Related Studies on Moodle & Online Language Learning*

Effectiveness of Moodle in promoting language teaching and learning has been emphasized in research. Al-Ani (2013) used a questionnaire to explore EFL students' perceptions of the impact of employing Moodle in a blended learning context on students' achievement, motivation, collaboration, and communication. Another aim was to identify the obstacles encountered by the students in using Moodle in blended learning. It was found that Moodle had a moderate impact on the students' language achievement, motivation, collaboration, and communication. There were no statistically significant differences in the students' perceptions in relation to their gender or college type. The biggest obstacles facing the students were computer technical problems and frequent internet disconnection.

Bataineh and Mayyas (2017) examined the impact of Moodle on promoting EFL students' reading comprehension skills and grammar competence. A number of 32 students were randomly assigned as an experiment group and a control group. The experimental group outperformed the control group in reading comprehension skills and grammar competence. In addition, the students' performance significantly improved in the two reading skills of scanning and skimming.

Zhang and Chang (2018) compared the learning outcomes of blended learning via Moodle and face-to-face learning of university English as a second language (ESL) students. A database was examined, incorporating students' gender, grade, and knowledge domain, the two learning modes, and students' performance. Collaborative writing tasks were designed via Moodle to promote writing skills. The students following blended learning via Moodle achieved better performance in their ESL courses compared to the students in the face-to-face learning mode. The Moodle-based tasks effectively drew the students' attention to writing skills and enhanced cooperative learning.

Rahmawati (2019) examined tertiary EFL students' attitudes in a blended learning course conducted via Moodle to develop their listening and speaking skills. The researcher also explored the students' preference of two learning modes: full face-to-face learning versus combination of face-to-face and online learning. The students' speaking practices on the Moodle platform significantly improved their speaking skills and reduced their speaking anxiety. As for the delivery mode that the students preferred, the majority favored a blended learning mode for their other future courses.

Zahro (2019) examined the effectiveness of Moodle e-learning media in teaching descriptive text writing. The participants of the study were 47 tenth-grade students. The researcher collected data through a pre-test and a post-test. The researcher developed Moodle e-learning media through developing a seven-step design: needs analysis, planning, developing Moodle e-learning media, field testing of Moodle e-learning media, revision of Moodle e-learning media, main field testing of Moodle e-learning media, and revision of the product. The students favored Moodle e-learning media that proved effective in their learning of descriptive writing.

Kheireddine (2020) examined the impact Moodle platform activities on enhancing EFL students' writing skills. Two questionnaires were employed: one for the teachers and the other for the students. Moodle-based activities were employed to overcome the difficulties inherent in learning the writing skill such as the lack of time and practice and low motivation in EFL writing classrooms. The teachers viewed writing as the most difficult skill for their students. They encountered several obstacles when teaching it. The students indicated that they encountered varied difficulties in

learning writing. Both the teachers and the students stated that the Moodle platform activities were useful and represented an effective solution to overcoming writing obstacles.

### III. PROBLEM AND QUESTIONS OF THE STUDY

At the onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic, almost all the educational institutions closed their doors and adopted online learning for teaching students, creating an online learning setting via digital pedagogy and technology (Kamenetz, 2020). There is scarce research on online learning platforms used in EFL classrooms during the Covid-19 Pandemic. Meanwhile, no research has attempted to explore instructors' and students' perceptions of online writing in Saudi tertiary EFL classrooms. Therefore, this study aims to identify the benefits, difficulties, challenges, and prospects of using Moodle in writing classrooms among Saudi tertiary EFL students at Shaqra University.

Accordingly, this study was conducted to answer the following questions:

- 1- What are EFL instructors' and students' perceptions of processes of online writing via Moodle?
- 2- What are EFL instructors' and students' perceptions of assessment and feedback on online writing via Moodle?
- 3- What are EFL instructors' and students' perceptions of the challenges and problems of online writing via Moodle?
- 4- What are EFL instructors' and students' perceptions of the positive and negative aspects as well as their prospects of using Moodle in the online writing classroom?

### IV. INSTRUMENT AND SAMPLE

The research instrument was a questionnaire developed by generating a list of four sections derived from the literature (Al-Ani, 2013; Almahasees et al., 2021; Bin Dahmash, 2020; Cakrawati, 2017; Kashoob1 & Attamimi, 2021; Mouchantaf, 2020). It was divided into two parts. The first part consisted of 29 statements following a five-point Likert Scale format for rating questionnaire statements. These were related to the four sections emanating from the study questions under four headings: (a) Processes of online writing via Moodle; (b) Assessment and feedback on online writing via Moodle; (c) Advantages of online writing via Moodle; and (d) Challenges and problems of online writing via Moodle. The second part of the questionnaire included 4 open-ended questions designed to reveal the benefits, problems, challenges, and prospects of using Moodle in the online writing classroom. As for the study sample, the data were collected from 11 EFL instructors and 102 students from the branches of the College of Science and Humanities, Sharqra University, in Shaqra, Dhurma, Dawadmi Thadq, Huraymila, and Quwaiiyah. The students registered in Level-5 Writing Course during the first semester of the academic 2021-2022 participated in the study.

### V. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

This section presents and discusses the results in relation to the research questions and previous literature.

#### A. Statements Following the Five-point Likert Scale

The instructors and students' responses to statements of the first research question revealed the significant impact of Moodle on the processes of online writing via Moodle.

TABLE 1  
INSTRUCTORS' RESPONSES TO PROCESSES OF ONLINE WRITING VIA MOODLE

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1- Online writing via Moodle gives students more time to practice writing skills.	3 27.27%	5 45.45%	1 9.09%	2 18.18%	0 0%
2- Online writing via Moodle helps students improve their planning strategies in writing. (e.g., brainstorm, prewriting, draft...etc.)	3 27.27%	3 27.27%	1 9.09%	4 36.36%	0 0%
3- Online writing via Moodle enables students to improve their writing ability by exposing them to digital learning materials and learning activities models and examples.	6 63.63%	1 9.09%	3 27.27%	0 0%	0 0%
4- Online writing via Moodle increases students' correct use of grammar in writing.	5 45.45%	1 9.09%	1 9.09%	4 36.36%	0 0%
5- Online writing via Moodle increases students' vocabulary repertoire and use in writing.	4 36.36%	2 18.18%	3 27.27%	2 18.18%	0 0%
6- Online writing via Moodle improves students' knowledge of different writing elements. (e.g., spelling, punctuation...etc.)	5 45.45%	3 27.27%	2 18.18%	1 9.09%	0 0%
7- Online writing via Moodle encourages Peer/group work through Moodle features (e.g., chat, forum, blog, etc.).	4 36.36%	3 27.27%	2 18.18%	2 18.18%	0 0%
8- Overall, I am satisfied with the process of online writing via Moodle.	2 18.18%	3 27.27%	5 45.45%	1 9.09%	0 0%

The instructors showed positive perceptions of Moodle as an important tool in the processes of their students' online learning of writing. Statements 1, 3, and 6 got the highest score with a percentage of (72.72%). These were followed by statements 2, 4, and 5 with a percentage of (54.54%). Then, statement 7 came with a percentage of (63.63%) Finally, statement 8 got the lowest percentage of (45.45%).

TABLE 2  
STUDENTS' RESPONSES TO PROCESSES OF ONLINE WRITING VIA MOODLE

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1- Online writing via Moodle gives me more time to practice writing skills.	30 29.41%	46 45.10%	13 12.75%	9 8.82%	4 3.92%
2- Online writing via Moodle helps me improve my planning strategies in writing (e.g., brainstorm, listing, mind mapping, freewriting, ...etc.)	26 25.49%	45 44.12%	20 19.61%	8 7.84%	3 2.94%
3- Online writing via Moodle enables me to improve my writing ability by exposing me to digital learning materials and learning activities models and examples.	28 27.45%	49 48.04%	15 14.71%	5 4.90%	5 4.90%
4- Online writing via Moodle increases my correct use of grammar in writing.	28 27.45%	47 46.08%	19 18.63%	4 3.92%	4 3.92%
5- Online writing via Moodle increases my vocabulary repertoire and use in writing.	30 29.41%	47 46.08%	17 16.67%	6 5.88%	2 1.96%
6- Online writing via Moodle improves my correct use of different writing elements. (e.g., spelling, punctuation...etc.)	32 31.37%	53 51.96%	12 11.76%	2 1.96%	3 2.94%
7- Online writing via Moodle encourages peer/group work through Moodle features (e.g., chat, forum, blog, etc.).	25 24.51%	52 50.98%	16 15.69%	5 4.90%	4 3.92%
8- Overall, I am satisfied with the process of online writing via Moodle.	32 31.37%	37 36.27%	21 20.59%	6 5.88%	6 5.88%

Table 2 showed that students had positive perceptions of Moodle as a tool of empowering them in the processes of online writing. Statement 6 got the highest score with a percentage of (83.33%), and statements 3, 5, and 7 with a percentage of (75.49%). These were followed by statement 1 with a percentage of (74.51%), and statement 4 with a percentage of (73.53%). Finally, statement 8 came last with a percentage of (67.64%).

According to these high percentages in tables 1 and 2, about two thirds of the instructors and students were satisfied with the processes of online writing via Moodle. This satisfaction originated from the potential of Moodle as an effective learning platform that provided the students with ample time to practice writing skills. Moodle also boosted the students' language performance by increasing their correct use of grammar and vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation in their online writing classes. Meanwhile, Moodle features (e.g., chat, forum, blog, etc.) encouraged peer/group work by empowering the students and helping them show innovation via using Moodle digital tools to generate ideas, test videos, create writing pieces, and solve authentic problems in their writings. Previous research supports these significant benefits of online learning in promoting EFL students' performance. Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) assert that what they call social technology is beneficial in developing language learning within a reflective design orientation.

Similarly, the instructors and students' responses to statements of research question 2 revealed the significant impact of Moodle on the assessment and feedback that the students received.

TABLE 3  
INSTRUCTORS' RESPONSES TO ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK ON ONLINE WRITING VIA MOODLE

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1- Students can do the assignments, download them and receive feedback from their instructors via Moodle.	6 54.54%	4 36.36%	1 9.09%	0 0%	0 0%
2- Feedback on online writing via Moodle is specific and clear that students understand what exactly to revise and edit.	6 54.54%	2 18.18%	3 27.27%	0 0%	0 0%
3- Feedback on online writing via Moodle is supported by clear examples/suggestions for improvement.	6 54.54%	3 27.27%	2 18.18%	0 0%	0 0%
4- Feedback on assignments and examinations in online writing via Moodle is timely (i.e., feedback is sent back to me quickly).	7 63.63%	2 18.18%	1 9.09%	1 9.09%	0 0%
5- Peer/group feedback in online writing via Moodle is easily accessible.	3 27.27%	6 54.54%	2 18.18%	0 0%	0 0%

Statement 1 came first with a percentage of (90.90%) which highlighted the key features of Moodle in facilitating online writing and feedback provision. Statements 3, 4, and 5 came second as (81.81%) of the instructors indicated that accessible and timely feedback via Moodle was supported by examples/suggestions and fostered their students' peer/group work. Finally, statement 2 came last as (72.72%) of the instructors indicated that specific and clear feedback on online writing via Moodle enabled their students to revise and edit their writings.

TABLE 4  
STUDENTS' RESPONSES TO ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK ON ONLINE WRITING VIA MOODLE

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1- I can do the assignments, download them and receive feedback from my instructors via Moodle.	36 35.29%	50 49.02%	11 10.78%	1 0.98%	4 3.92%
2- Feedback on online writing via Moodle is specific and clear that I understand what exactly to revise and edit.	31 30.39%	46 45.10%	16 15.69%	3 2.94%	6 5.88%
3- Feedback on online writing via Moodle is supported by clear examples/suggestions for improvement.	28 27.45%	47 46.08%	18 17.65%	5 4.90%	4 3.92%
4- Feedback on assignments and examinations in online writing via Moodle is timely. (i.e., feedback is sent back to me quickly.)	30 29.41%	50 49.02%	13 12.75%	4 3.92%	5 4.90%
5- Peer/group feedback in online writing via Moodle is easily accessible.	30 29.41%	48 47.06%	9 8.82%	12 11.76%	3 2.94%

Statement 1 came first with a percentage of (84.31%), which highlighted the key features of Moodle in facilitating online writing through enabling the students to do the assignments, download them, and receive instructor feedback. Statement 4 ranked second as (78.43%) of the students stated that feedback was timely, which was an important feature that empowered them to keep pace with their progress in learning writing skills. The third rank was taken by statement 5 with a percentage of (76.47%) as the students indicated that peer/group feedback was not only possible in online writing via Moodle but was easily accessible as well. Even the last two statements in the list of this section ranked high with percentages of (75.49%) and (73.53%) for statements 2 and 3 in order. The students' responses to these two statements affirmed their preference of immediate and accessible feedback in online writing classes. Rosell's study (2020) is in line with these results that online learning enables students to pose and answer questions. It also provides feedback on the assigned course content, tasks, and assignments.

The instructors' and students' responses to research question 3 in tables 5 and 6 affirmed the significant benefits of online writing via Moodle.

TABLE 5  
INSTRUCTORS' RESPONSES TO ADVANTAGES OF ONLINE WRITING VIA MOODLE

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1- Students are satisfied with the format and structure of the learning materials of writing presented on Moodle.	3 27.27%	5 45.45%	2 18.18%	1 9.09%	0 0%
2- Online writing via Moodle is flexible and enables students to access digital learning materials, learning activities, and lectures online from any place at any time.	3 27.27%	5 45.45%	3 27.27%	0 0%	0 0%
3- Students feel motivated to participate in different online writing activities.	3 27.27%	6 54.54%	1 9.09%	1 9.09%	0 0%
4- Online writing via Moodle makes it easier and more convenient for students to study and practice writing at home.	5 45.45%	2 18.18%	4 36.36%	0 0%	0 0%
5- Interaction and discussion with students become easier and more effective in online writing via Moodle.	3 27.27%	4 36.36%	3 27.27%	1 9.09%	0 0%
6- Online writing via Moodle creates a relaxed and stress-free atmosphere.	4 36.36%	4 36.36%	1 9.09%	2 18.18%	0 0%
7- Online writing via Moodle reduces feelings of fear and tension.	3 27.27%	4 36.36%	2 18.18%	2 18.18%	0 0%
8- Online writing via Moodle helps students overcome their shyness when they participate with their instructors in discussions.	2 18.18%	7 63.63%	1 9.09%	0 0%	1 9.09%
9- Online writing enhances students' learning autonomy (i.e., self-learning)	6 54.54%	3 27.27%	2 18.18%	0 0%	0 0%

Table 5 revealed the instructors' positive responses of *Agree and Strongly Agree* for all statements. Statements 3, 8, and 9 got the highest positive score with a percentage of (81.81%). After that, statements 1, 2, and 6 took the second rank with a percentage of (72.72%). Finally, statements 4, 5, and 7 came last with a percentage of (63.63%).

TABLE 6  
STUDENTS' RESPONSES TO ADVANTAGES OF ONLINE WRITING VIA MOODLE

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1- I am satisfied with the format and content of the learning materials of writing presented on Moodle.	29 28.43%	47 46.08%	18 17.65%	5 4.90%	3 2.94%
2- Online writing via Moodle is flexible and enables me to access digital learning materials, learning activities, and lectures online from any place at any time.	34 33.33%	51 50.00%	9 8.82%	6 5.88%	2 1.96%
3- I feel motivated to participate in different online writing activities.	27 26.47%	45 44.12%	17 16.67%	9 8.82%	4 3.92%
4- Online writing via Moodle makes it easier and more convenient for me to study and practice writing at home.	36 35.29%	47 46.08%	13 12.75%	4 3.92%	2 1.96%
5- Interaction and discussion with the instructor and other students become easier and more effective in online writing via Moodle.	33 32.35%	43 42.16%	14 13.73%	8 7.84%	4 3.92%
6- Online writing via Moodle creates a relaxed and stress-free atmosphere.	35 34.31%	46 45.10%	15 14.71%	2 1.96%	4 3.92%
7- Online writing via Moodle reduces feelings of fear and tension.	35 34.31%	46 45.10%	13 12.75%	3 2.94%	5 4.90%
8- Online writing via Moodle helps me overcome my shyness when I participate with my instructors in discussions.	41 40.20%	46 45.10%	10 9.80%	2 1.96%	3 2.94%
9- Online writing enhances learning autonomy (i.e., self-learning).	41 40.20%	42 41.18%	11 10.78%	6 5.88%	2 1.96%

Statement 8 got the highest positive score as (85.30%) of the students agreed that online writing via Moodle helped them overcome their shyness when participating with their instructors in discussions. This result receives support from related research (e.g., Almahasees et al., 2021) that online learning encourages shy students to participate and improves their attendance. Statement 2 was another statement highly rated as shown in the students' responses with a percentage of (83.33%). Thus, the students felt motivated to participate in online writing activities. Ahmadi (2018) confirms this result that suitable technology for language learning significantly motivates students to master language skills efficiently. Furthermore, online writing classes offer flexibility, regardless of place and time. This result goes in accordance with Rahmawati's study (2016) that students view online learning as a flexible approach that furnishes rich resources, increases collaboration among students, and motivates them to learn language successfully.

The third rank was taken by statement 3 that online writing enhanced the students' self-learning. This result is supported by Hazaymeh (2021) that learners show innovation and autonomy through using digital technologies to generate ideas, test videos, create articles, and solve authentic problems. Next, the students rated the fourth statement with a percentage of (81.38%) that online writing via Moodle made it more convenient for them to study and practice writing at home. Clearly, the students favored this learning environment utilizing technological potential while being at home. This helped them focus on their studies and in-depth learning. The students gave the same percentage of (79.41%) for statements 6 and 7 that online writing via Moodle both created a stress-free atmosphere and reduced their feelings of fear and tension. The students viewed online learning as a productive source of information.

Statements 7 and 8 received the same ranking with a percentage of (74.51%). Statement 9 came last with a percentage of (70.59%), as the students showed motivation when participating in different online writing activities. These results go in line with Hazaymeh's research (2021) that online learning is a motivational approach that enhances self-learning and language pedagogy for today digital learners. It empowers students to develop research and information fluency, high levels language performance as well as communication and collaboration skills.

The instructors' and students' responses to the statements of research question 4 are presented in tables 7 and 8.

TABLE 7  
INSTRUCTORS' RESPONSES TO CHALLENGES AND PROBLEMS OF ONLINE WRITING VIA MOODLE

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1- A large number of students in online writing classes negatively affects the learning outcomes.	5 45.45%	5 45.45%	1 9.09%	0 0%	0 0%
2- Students make more effort than usual when it comes to doing writing activities via Moodle.	6 54.54%	2 18.18%	2 18.18%	1 9.09%	0 0%
3- Students' interaction with instructors is more difficult and less convenient when studying online.	0 0%	2 18.18%	5 45.45%	4 36.36%	0 0%
4- Miscommunication between instructors and students often happens in online classes.	1 9.09%	4 36.36%	5 45.45%	1 9.09%	0 0%
5- Students don't have enough opportunities to interact with other students.	1 9.09%	4 36.36%	3 27.27%	2 18.18%	1 9.09%
6- Poor network connection causes problems with students' interaction, participation, and communication.	6 54.54%	2 18.18%	2 18.18%	1 9.09%	0 0%
7- The time allocated for online writing, quizzes, and exams is insufficient.	3 27.27%	2 18.18%	2 18.18%	3 27.27%	1 9.09%

The instructors expressed significant views on these issues that might hinder their online learning of writing with a percentage of (90.90%) for statement 1. Next, statements 4, 5, and 7 were highly rated by the instructors with a percentage of (45.45%). Finally, statement 3 came with a percentage of (18.18%).

TABLE 8  
STUDENTS' RESPONSES TO CHALLENGES AND PROBLEMS OF ONLINE WRITING VIA MOODLE

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1- A large number of students in online writing classes negatively affects the learning outcomes.	15 14.71%	33 32.35%	23 22.55%	17 16.67%	14 13.73%
2- I make more effort than usual when it comes to doing writing activities via Moodle.	19 18.63%	34 33.33%	25 24.51%	18 17.65%	6 5.88%
3- Interacting with instructors is more difficult and less convenient when studying online.	22 21.57%	26 25.49%	13 12.75%	26 25.49%	15 14.71%
4- Miscommunication with instructors often happens in online classes.	20 19.61%	25 24.51%	22 21.57%	21 20.59%	14 13.73%
5- I don't have enough opportunities to interact with other students.	33 32.35%	43 42.16%	14 13.73%	8 7.84%	4 3.92%
6- Poor network connection causes problems with interaction, participation, and communication.	31 30.39%	37 36.27%	17 16.67%	10 9.80%	7 6.86%
7- The time allocated for online writing, quizzes, and exams is insufficient.	30 29.41%	28 37.45%	17 16.67%	20 19.61%	7 6.86%

The students stated their views on the inhibiting issues that might hinder their online writing. Statement 5 came first with a percentage of (74.51%) that they did not have enough opportunities to interact with other students. This result goes in accordance with previous research (e.g., Almahasees et al., 2021) that lack of interaction is considered a challenge for online students and is negatively reflected in their progress and personalities. Next, the sixth and seventh statements were highly rated by the students with a percentage of (66.66%). This affirmed the students' concern about the problems of poor network connection that hindered their interaction, participation, and communication. In addition, the students were worried about the insufficiency of time allocated for online writing, quizzes, and exams. Previous research affirms these problems of slow connections and lack of time (Erarslan & Topkaya, 2017). In addition, a little more than half the students with a percentage of (51.96%) expressed the great effort they exerted when doing writing activities via Moodle. However, this idea is natural in writing classes that are loaded with activities and assignments (Ho & Trinh, 2019; Warni, 2016).

The fifth and sixth ranks were taken by statements 1 and 3 with a percentage of (47.06%) that the large number of students in online writing classes negatively affected their learning and made interaction with instructors more difficult and less convenient. Again, this situation is found in all types of classrooms, whether in-class or online learning, as teaching quality is adversely affected by the increase in the number of students attending the class. This problem is even more aggravated in regular writing classes. Finally, less than half the students with a percentage of (44.12%) expressed that miscommunication often happened in their online classes with their instructors. Gautam (2020) affirms the same idea that students might suffer from lack of social face-to-face interaction in online classes.

*B. Open-ended Questions*

As for the first open-ended question concerning the positive aspects of online learning on the students' writing, the instructors mentioned that both teaching and learning became easier and more flexible than before. This flexibility covered both place and time of online writing classes via Moodle. They also emphasized their students' easy access to Moodle features, materials, resources, and dictionaries. A related advantage was that Moodle offered the students a relaxing atmosphere and enabled them to learn at their own pace. In addition, there were more opportunities for quality teacher-student interaction. Meanwhile, online writing via Moodle reduced the students' feelings of fear, which helped them interact and communicate with their instructors.

The students pinpointed the advantages clarity of writing texts via Moodle, mastery of grammatical structures, and fast comprehension of texts. All these features enabled them to write effectively. Some of the students' responses were: "Moodle improved writing and reading, and it provided good help in language development." and "Now, I can speak and write easily." Moodle also enhanced the students' writing through promoting their overall language performance. One student stated, "We learned more vocabulary in comparison with in-class learning." Another student mentioned, "There is a chance to make less spelling mistakes because of the presence of the spelling checker as well as availability and easy access to online dictionaries." The students valued the features of speedy search for information, accuracy in data entry while using Moodle, and having access to a lot of information.

Moodle provided a safe learning environment where all information was completely secure and not in danger of being infected by viruses. Meanwhile, it was also easy for the students to write, delete, and modify their writing pieces. They were able to go back to the online lectures and revise unclear points any time and in the way that suited them. They wrote the same piece of writing as many times as they needed till they reached their best writing product. One student said, "I can write many versions for the same paragraph. I feel safe and I write better."

Moodle furnished a learning atmosphere full of concentration away from the usual classroom distractions for practicing writing. It offered the students the advantage of learning at one's pace in comparison with the large number of students in regular education. Meanwhile, it helped the students save time and effort through enhancing self-learning and fast-learning. One student highlighted, "It fostered learning speed, while grasping all aspects of information and writing skills".

The students appreciated the comfortable and convenient learning atmosphere available in the Moodle classroom. They became familiar with writing and felt free to participate. It provided ease of interaction and information sharing. One student stressed, "Online learning is more comfortable because all I need is logging on the Moodle and using the online soft copy of the prescribed writing textbook uploaded on Moodle." Another student added, "I feel more comfortable because I am very shy in reality, and online learning enables me overcome my shyness." A third student mentioned, "There is no tension or stress and I feel free in writing my answers and assignments."

Finally, communication was fast among the students and between the students and their instructors. One student said, "I have better communication skills with teacher and students." Easy and speedy communication was also boosted with the instructor outside university regular works hours. Co-operative work was also encouraged. The students referred to the Moodle features as being convenient for coping with the age of technology, especially in the field of language learning. Online writing via Moodle encouraged the students' desire for further learning and writing. A student stated, "When writing the assignments, I am no longer satisfied with the information of the syllabus. This learning makes me surf the internet for references and extra information."

These results are in line with Al Zumor et al. (2013) who state that using technological tools in teaching English promotes students' overall language performance. Cakrawati (2017) affirms that online learning platforms are effective and significant tools in EFL teaching and learning, especially in helping students develop language skills and acquire new vocabulary and grammar. Hazaymeh (2021) adds that online learning promotes students' creativity and writing performance as they use language to analyze and paraphrase written paragraphs and essays.

The instructors expressed important issues concerning open-ended question two on the negative aspects of online learning and students' writing. These included bad network connection. They added that cheating prevention in online quizzes, exams, and assignments was a complicated problem that was difficult to control. In addition, they mentioned that online writing exams were suitable and manageable in the form of multiple-choice questions, but they were not feasible for examining writing holistically in the form of whole paragraphs and essays. Another problem was that some students might be out of control as a result of being away from the instructor, which affected classroom management.

Due to lack of proper computer and typing skills, the instructors stated that some students' online writing was slow and could even interfere with their thinking processes and slow them down. Alongside, there was also the problem that some students might plagiarize in online writing activities, assignments, and quizzes. The instructors also highlighted the need for their students to be trained in how to plan before online writing and the later processes of online writing, revising, and editing. Finally, correcting students' writings online took time and effort on the part of instructors, especially that online writing feedback was supported with detailed feedback. These problems have some evidence in previous research such as Rahmawati's study (2016) that online learning increases the probability of cheating among students and requires more efforts from instructors.

The students' responses to this question also reflected technical problems related to internet disconnection as well as some students' low technological and computer competence. A student said, "Internet disconnection is a problem, and there isn't enough time allocated for exams." One student put it clearly, "Passivity can happen when there is a problem with the internet, and we can't have access to the lessons." Altunay's study (2019) affirms that a large percentage of EFL learners have encountered technical problems and internet disconnection that restrict their ability to go online and attend their English classes.

Some students needed to develop better technological and internet skills. A student said, "I haven't enough experience in using technology and the internet." Another student added, "Some students don't even have a computer. Some don't understand the instructors' online explanation." In addition, some students took a long time in doing and uploading their writing assignments. A student stated, "I need more time to cover all materials on Moodle and write all the assignments. Sometimes, it's tiring."

As the internet might sometimes disconnect or might not work properly, the students were not able to hear the instructor's voice properly. Unfortunately, the students' responses revealed that some instructors were even intolerant with these problems. One student mentioned, "Some instructors don't consider the consequences when there are problems with the internet." Some students even referred to problems related to the instructor's physical absence and being available only during online sessions. This sometimes led to weakness in communication between the instructor and the students.

When asked in the third open-ended question to list ways that they thought would improve online writing, three instructors proposed no further modifications. They thought that everything was going well with online writing via Moodle. Five instructors proposed some ideas to improve students' online writing experience via Moodle. For example, they suggested including some face-to-face classes and communication to be integrated with Moodle online writing sessions. They suggested that there be live connection with the students in all Moodle online writing classes. Another suggestion was including YouTube videos and similar applications to expose students to different ways of writing

activities and exercises. A similar innovation was incorporating some applications to train students in note-taking and fast typing.

Overall, most students were completely satisfied with their learning experience via Moodle. For instance, one student highlighted, "I don't think there are other ways to improve Moodle." Another student said, "Learning via Moodle is much better than in-class learning." Those students recommended online learning in all courses, and not just writing. On the other hand, a number of students favored continuing online writing, yet they proposed some modifications to improve the experience. A student mentioned, "If online learning is to continue, exams should be online as well." They recommended more training in using Moodle, more opportunities to exchange their writing with other students, and smooth access to all Moodle features without internet disconnection. Several students favored recording all sessions for later learning and reference. They also recommended watching videos on Moodle as one student suggested, "Making the feature of opening videos available on Moodle as well as providing a larger space for video captions and presentations and solving the problem of hanging."

Still, a third group of students proposed modifications so that they could fully exploit the potential of Moodle. The first idea was increasing time for writing practice and exams. A significant modification was consolidating better communication and interaction with instructors as well as enhancing group work. In addition, some students stressed the importance of adhering to the set dates and times of lectures and not changing them. Other recommendations were related to improving the online learning environment. For example, some students recommended having a smaller number of students in Moodle writing classes.

When responding to open-ended question four, the instructors expressed the desire to continue using online writing classes via Moodle after the COVID-19 Pandemic ended. On the other hand, only one instructor disapproved continuing using online writing classes, and another instructor was neutral about the experience of online writing via Moodle. Overall, the instructors agreed that the majority of their students were satisfied and comfortable with online writing via Moodle. In addition, they referred to technology as being an integral part of everyday life; they would probably continue online writing whether via Moodle or other learning platforms. One instructor said, "I strongly recommend it as it helped my students improve their English. I want online learning to continue."

The students' responses to this question crystalized their views of online writing, and whether they wanted to continue using it in the future. The majority of students favored employing Moodle in online writing classes. A student summarized significant issues related to online writing via Moodle by stating, "Moodle arranges the lessons for me, which saves time. However, it depends on the instructor, and some instructors don't give due care to the Moodle platform." Another student added, "I want online learning to continue, and Moodle should continue." Overall, the results revealed that using Moodle in online writing increased the students' achievement and self-regulated skills. These results are in accordance with those of Al-Saleem et al. (2010) that online learning provides a non-threatening, comfortable, and cooperative environment that lessens the psychological barriers such as stress, shyness, and anxiety. On the other hand, few students did not favor continuing online learning and stated their reasons as well. These students thought that the outputs of online learning were less than those of regular learning.

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

Online learning is a flexible process that helps learners to study wherever they are aligned with their life commitments due to digital learning tools. Therefore, online learning has become increasingly employed in educational language settings as it effectively addresses learners' needs and enhances processes of language learning and teaching. Thus, integrating technology in the EFL classroom has become indispensable. It can be concluded that online learning empowers EFL students to be independent learners, to build knowledge in language content areas, and to promote collaboration and communication skills with instructors and other students.

As a free, open-source, e-learning, cross-platform course management system, Moodle can effectively be employed in the tertiary EFL writing classroom. Moodle is one of the most operative web-based tools to promote EFL writing. It provides authentic language learning experiences in the form of multimedia language lessons and engaging e-activities. It also ensures interactive, smooth, and instant e-collaboration in online writing tasks, activities, and assignments. Thus, Moodle is invaluable in developing EFL learners' writing skills via provision of sufficient feedback and improvement of the learning environment by means of realistic communication between students and their instructors and among students themselves.

Finally, success of online writing development is conditioned by real interaction between instructors and their students as well as providing optimum learning conditions. While some students might face difficulty in online writing classes, the overall level of stress-free comfort that they enjoy, being capable of staying in their living quarters or homes, outweighs whatever obstacles or difficulties experienced from the lack of having an instructor in the same physical space. Meanwhile, more research should be conducted to provide practical solutions to the problems that Saudi EFL students encounter in online writing classes such as poor internet connection, insufficient student-student and student-instructor interaction, low technological and computer competence, as well as the subsidiary issues of cheating and direct copying and pasting from internet sources.

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