

EFL Writing Teaching / Learning Could Go Online: Instructors' Perceptions, Students' Perceptions, and Achievement

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Abstract—In light of the COVID -19 pandemic and government policies to conduct online learning, the present study aimed to examine how EFL faculty and students perceive teaching and learning EFL writing online, whether they differ significantly in their perceptions, and to examine if the scores of the students who study face to face are significantly different from those who studied online. 21 EFL teachers and 104 EFL students voluntarily participated in this study via Google Form. Both EFL faculty and students were asked to complete a five-Likert point questionnaire about EFL teaching and learning of writing online. In addition, the scores of 54 students who studied in person were compared with the scores of 52 students who studied online regarding EFL writing. Descriptive statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS for data analysis. The results showed that EFL instructors had both positive and negative perceptions toward EFL writing online teaching. However, the positive perceptions outweighed the negative ones. In addition, students perceived online writing instruction as a useful tool to compensate for face-to-face learning during the COVID -19 pandemic. Moreover, the students preferred ODeL writing courses to traditional courses whereas the instructors did not. Furthermore, the students who studied online outscored those who studied in person. The important implications of the findings for research on teaching and learning EFL writing online are discussed.

Index Terms—EFL instructors and students, online EFL writing, perceptions, achievement

I. INTRODUCTION

A clear and specific definition of online learning does not exist in the literature, and frequently, the existing definitions show inconsistency (Rice & Gregor, 2016). "Virtual Learning," "remote learning," and "online learning" are all terms that are often used interchangeably. In the field of language teaching and learning, e-Learning is used to refer to situations in which students learn a language entirely via internet, without face-to-face interaction in the context of a formal language course (Hockly, 2015). As a result, it is viewed as an interaction mechanism that learners use to communicate with instructors either simultaneously (i.e., at the same time) or non- simultaneously (i.e., their simultaneous online presence is not required) (Tunmibi et al., 2015). In this study, the terms "eLearning" and "online distance learning" (ODL) are used reciprocally to refer to the academic means of distanced learning via the cyberspace or the web.

Because of the blocks imposed to stop the outbreak of COVID -19 during 2020, education systems around the world were forced to accustom to and embrace distance education through online platforms to assist students. Since then, researchers in the field of English language have studied the impact of the changes on the performance, attitude, and overall learning progress of language learners in both second language (ESL) and foreign language (EFL) contexts (Mahyoob, 2020; Al-Bargi, 2022; Alahmad & Alraddadi, 2020; Dahmash, 2020a; Hashmi & Shah, 2021; Dahmash, 2021). A number of nations, including Saudi Arabia, have adjusted their educational policies as a result of this unexpected and necessary shift to online classrooms.

A call for a speedy transition from in person instruction to online instruction is the most noticeable change in the Saudi education system. Despite the fact that numerous researches have been conducted in Saudi Arabia on students' perspectives of ODL (e.g., Alwahoub et al., 2020; Alfehaid, 2019), the present study is significant because it examines both faculty and students' perceptions of English eLearning writing skills courses at two major universities in Saudi Arabia. Views are a crucial component that influences how faculty and learners approach tasks and as a result, the whole learning process (Getie, 2020). Consequently, understanding students' views and opinions will help academic institutions and instructors understand contemporary practices and promote and implement appropriate types of online learning to meet students' needs.

It is important to emphasize that prior to the outbreak of COVID -19, all writing courses at these two universities were taught in-person in English language departments. There are a number of obstacles to teaching writing because there are a number of procedures and requirements that faculty must prepare for in the classroom. An effective written product in English requires complicated steps such as brainstorming, prewriting, drafting, and editing. To improve students' written outcomes, successful teaching methods and strategies most likely need to be carried out in face-to-face

classes. Given the nature of learning writing skills, it is worthwhile to explore the opinions of faculty and students about the effectiveness of virtual settings for writing subjects as well as comparing the performance of those who studied in person with those who studied online. Therefore, this study sought to find answers to the questions that follow:

- a. How do instructors view the use of eLearning for teaching writing courses?
- b. How do students view the use of eLearning for the study of writing courses?
- c. Is there a significant difference between the views of instructors and students regarding the use of eLearning for the study of writing courses?
- d. Is there a significant difference between the scores of the students who studied face to face and who studied online regarding writing courses?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Due to the widespread use of online learning, students are inevitably drawn to other online language learning resources (Plaisance, 2018). Web-enhanced learning, amalgam or mixed learning, and entirely virtual or online learning are all examples of online language learning. Recently, much attention has been paid to eLearning in educational settings because research has shown that it has many benefits. Some research (e.g., Cabi & Kalelioglu, 2019; Geta & Olango, 2016) has proven that eLearning effectively contributes to student learning progress and achievement. It also removes physical and time constraints (Hew & Tang, 2018), facilitates access to materials and scheduling, and saves money (Guelbahar 2012).

A very recent research that has shown the effectiveness of teaching EFL writing online during the COVID-19 Pandemic is the study by Alwaheebi and Al-Qahtani (2022). They examined EFL instructors' and students' perceptions of online writing instruction during the COVID-19 Pandemic. They point out the benefits, challenges, and prospects of utilizing Moodle in EFL writing classes among Saudi tertiary level learners and EFL faculty at Shaqra University. They have seen Moodle as an engaging instrument in online writing. It helped learners with doable, open, and instant peer/group feedback. It made adaptable, comfortable, and student-centered learning environment where the faculty and students were greatly involved. In addition, it guaranteed intuitive, smooth, and momentarily e-collaboration in online writing. However, technical difficulties and Internet disconnection were the most deterrents ruining the learners from adequate interaction with their teachers and classmates.

In addition to technical problems and interment disconnection other problems emerged. For example, academic infidelity (deceiving) and infringement were the main problems in online assessment. In fact, online assessment has a number of drawbacks that make it a controversial issue amid L2 and EFL teachers (Alghamdi et al., 2016). The current shape of education not only opened up opportunities for educators across disciplines, including EFL, to reflect on barriers, but also new opportunities in adopting best practices in ELT, as fully online learning became the global standard during the Covid 19 epidemic (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020). The main issues of online learning relate to various aspects such as teacher and student involvement, learner autonomy, teacher and student motivation, meeting curricular objectives, and new experiences gained from fully online teaching and learning.

It is critical to explore how students feel about using online learning, as their attitude is an important component that can influence their participation, for instance, their fitting and active engagement in the learning process. According to Rhema and Miliszewska (2014), students' opinions about eLearning are an important predictor of future eLearning efforts, and a positive impression of eLearning is critical to students' willingness to participate in online learning. To minimize resistance that may lead to reluctance or ineffectiveness, it is important to explore inconsistencies in instructors' and learners' views when they implement virtual Learning activities (Alfahaid, 2019).

During the outbreak of the Covid 19 pandemic, few researches were conducted to examine specific areas of writing instruction in EFL contexts generally and the Saudi EFL context particularly. Almosa (2021) conducted a study in the Saudi EFL setting in which she examined students' opinions about their online learning during the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. She concluded that the abrupt shift from face-to-face to online learning had a significant impact on students' engagement in learning and assessment as they faced multiple challenges, including adapting to the online platform, managing a large amount of assignments, and coping with family issues as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. She went on to say that it is critical for students and professors to communicate openly to ensure shared understanding and acceptance. In cases where communication is poor, faculty support and mediation between students and faculty is also important and should be a priority.

Other research addressed the advantages and disadvantages of online learning. Alahmad and Alraddadi (2020) studied the impact of online instruction on classroom engagement at a Saudi Arabian institution during the epidemic. They surveyed 90 students enrolled in an intensive English course using a questionnaire. They examined student engagement and participation in a real-time, synchronous class. They found that online classrooms encouraged students to communicate with each other as well as with their professors. Virtual classrooms were also shown to help shy students overcome their anxiety and improve their language skills by encouraging them to participate in class conversations.

A qualitative study conducted by Dahmash (2020a) at a Saudi institution further explored the benefits and limitations of virtual learning. It examined how an intensive English course offered at COVID -19 used synchronous virtual lectures, online assessments, and instructional resources distributed through Blackboard. Results showed that students'

English writing skills were improved through synchronous lessons that included spelling and grammar exercises. Students were encouraged to improve their English skills through online research on Google and YouTube, and sessions were tailored to students' needs and situations as well as their family commitments. Students indicated that they experienced technical difficulties that interfered with their learning, for instance, sound problems and the web connectivity issues.

In addition, Hashmi et al. (2021) conducted a study using surveys to capture the perspectives of 265 language instructors at four universities during the pandemic. Eighty percent of the instructors used Blackboard to teach English in a synchronous lecture mode. According to Hashmi, students reported limited access due to technical issues. Students were not trained in online learning and said they missed classroom interaction and found it challenging to navigate the Internet and find study materials on Blackboard. Their students were also increasingly dissatisfied and discouraged in their efforts to learn English.

Most of these previous studies examined teachers' and students' views of eLearning in teaching and learning English as a foreign language in general. However, there are very few studies that have investigated the dimensions of eLearning for teaching English writing courses in Saudi universities/colleges. Therefore, the current study is an attempt to investigate both the concerns of EFL teachers/learners and the positive outcomes that have resulted from the conversion of writing classes from face-to-face to cyberspace teaching platforms.

III. METHODS

A. Participants

The participants in this study were faculty and students at two major Saudi universities. The faculty members were male and female in the English department and their academic positions ranged from teaching assistant to associate professor. They had previously taught online writing courses (i.e., Writing 1, Writing 2, Writing 3). In these courses, students learn how to write short paragraphs to five-paragraph essays. A total of 104 students who studied Writing 2 participated in this study. Because of the closure of the college after the epidemic COVID -19, all participants used online learning for writing courses in the first semester of the academic year 2020- 2021. In addition, scores of 52 students who studied online and 54 who studied face to face were taken from the system of the one of the two universities for the purpose of comparison.

B. Data Collection Instruments

Two questionnaires were used in this study: 1) the teacher questionnaire with 25 questions and 2) the student questionnaire with 25 questions. The first questionnaire was divided into two parts: a) demographic information (six questions) and b) teachers' views about teaching writing courses online (19 questions). A five-point Likert scale was used to answer the items (5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neutral, 2 = disagree, and 1 = strongly disagree). The same five-point Likert scale was used for the second questionnaire, and it contained the same number of items as the instructor questionnaire. However, some questions were tailored to students' experiences of using eLearning in writing courses.

C. Procedures of Data Collection and Analysis

Two groups of EFL instructors and students were sent the links of the questionnaires via Whatsapp and email so that they could google and fill them out. It turned out that there were 21 instructors and 104 students. The data were analyzed with Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software, version 20, using descriptive statistics with the help of means and standard deviations and independent sample t-test and then compared with the research questions of the study.

IV. RESULTS

The purpose of Research Question 1 was to investigate how teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) view the use of eLearning for teaching writing courses. A questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale was used to elicit these perceptions. Internal consistency of the results was checked using Cronbach's alpha. The internal consistency of the questionnaire was ($\alpha = .89$). The Pearson correlation coefficient was used to check the validity of the questionnaire. 17 and 19 were not valid as they were not statistically significantly different. .75 and .26 were their p-values, respectively, while the remaining questions were valid as their p-values were .000. Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations of the instructors' ratings. As we can see, instructors disagreed with questions 9, 10, 21, 22, 23, and 25, while they agreed with the remaining questions.

TABLE 1
MEAN AND STANDARD DEVIATION OF INSTRUCTORS' ITEM SCORE

Item	Mean	SD
7. ODeL is beneficial for writing courses.	3.05	1.284
8. ODeL promotes students' learning autonomy (i.e., independent-learning).	3.38	1.117
9. I prefer ODeL writing courses to traditional courses (i.e., in person instruction).	2.76	1.300
10. ODeL increases students' motivation to learn writing.	2.80	1.281
11. ODeL enriches students' writing.	3.00	1.000
12. The tasks given are easy to understand and promote students' writing skills.	3.19	1.209
13. In ODeL, students receive feedback on tasks given quickly.	3.62	1.244
14. Presentation methods and delivery of content are appropriate for learning to write.	3.57	1.326
15. Learning writing online helps students understand the content easily.	3.05	1.203
16. It is easy to contact the course instructors in ODeL.	3.33	1.155
17. It takes time to respond to student inquiries in ODeL.	3.38	1.161
18. In ODeL, students have many opportunities to complete tasks in collaboration with peers.	3.43	1.207
19. In ODeL, social interaction is lacked whether between students and instructor or students themselves.	3.48	1.167
20. It is hard to participate in class discussions in an ODeL writing course.	3.14	1.062
21. I intend to offer more online writing courses.	2.95	1.284
22. Students' actual language skills are reflected by their written work submitted in online writing exams.	2.33	.966
23. Feedback from the online writing instructor is more convenient to receive and discuss than in-person evaluation.	2.95	1.024
24. Face to face writing assessment is more stressful than online writing assessment.	3.19	1.030
25. Face-to-face writing assessment can be as real life as online writing assessment.	2.33	1.017

The purpose of Research Question 2 was to investigate how students of English as a foreign language (EFL) perceive the use of eLearning in writing courses. A questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale was used to determine these perceptions. The internal consistency of the students' questionnaire was ($\alpha = .93$). Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to test the validity of the students' questionnaire. All questions were valid because their p-values were (0.000). Table 2 shows the means and standard deviations of the students' scores. As we can see, students agreed with all questions.

TABLE 2
MEAN AND STANDARD DEVIATION OF STUDENTS' ITEM SCORE

Item	Mean	SD
7. ODeL is beneficial for writing courses.	3.51	1.141
8. ODeL promotes students' learning autonomy (i.e., independent-learning).	3.68	1.017
9. I prefer ODeL writing courses to traditional courses (i.e., in person instruction).	3.37	1.270
10. ODeL increases students' motivation to learn writing.	3.44	1.164
11. ODeL enriches students' writing.	3.52	1.024
12. The tasks given are easy to understand and promote students' writing skills.	3.76	.950
13. In ODeL, students receive feedback on tasks given quickly.	3.77	1.072
14. Presentation methods and delivery of content are appropriate for learning to write.	3.75	.983
15. Learning writing online helps students understand the content easily.	3.50	1.239
16. It is easy to contact the course instructors in ODeL.	3.80	.979
17. It takes time to respond to student inquiries in ODeL.	3.44	1.087
18. In ODeL, students have many opportunities to complete tasks in collaboration with peers.	3.55	1.087
19. In ODeL, social interaction is lacked whether between students and instructor or students themselves.	3.58	1.129
20. It is hard to participate in class discussions in an ODeL writing course.	3.11	1.198
21. I intend to offer more online writing courses.	3.44	1.276
22. Students' actual language skills are reflected by their written work submitted in online writing exams.	3.44	1.148
23. Feedback from the online writing instructor is more convenient to receive and discuss than in-person evaluation.	3.51	1.070
24. Face to face writing assessment is more stressful than online writing assessment.	3.74	1.106
25. Face-to-face writing assessment can be as real life as online writing assessment.	3.45	1.198

The purpose of research question 3 was to see if EFL instructors and students differ significantly in their perceptions of using eLearning for teaching writing courses. An independent sample t-test was used to detect such a difference, if any. The *t*-Test revealed that the difference between the instructors' and students' scores of their perceptions about using eLearning for teaching (EFL) writing courses was statistically significant, $t = -2.550$ $p = .012$ (Table 3).

TABLE 3
T-TEST SUMMARY OF INSTRUCTORS AND STUDENTS SCORES

Group	<i>n</i>	mean	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Df</i>
Instructors	21	59.0000	12.73578	-2.550	.012	123
Students	104	67.3558	13.87316			

Table 4 shows the differences between instructors and students item scores. As we can see from the table, the students agree with the items (9, 10, 21,22,23,25) ,their means are 3.37,3.44, 3.45, 3.44, 3.51,and 3.44 whereas the instructors disagree with those items, their means are 2.80, 2.76, 2.33,2.33,2.95,and 2.95. In addition, the degree of agreement of the students is bigger than that of the instructors' for the rest of the items. For example, for items 7 ,12, 18, the students overscored the instructors (3.51 vs. 3.05; 3.76 vs. 3.19; 3.55 vs.3.43).

TABLE 4
INSTRUCTORS AND STUDENTS ITEM DIFFERENCES

Item No	Item content	Instructors / Students	Mean
7	ODeL is beneficial for writing courses.	Instructors	3.05
		Students	3.51
8	ODeL promotes students' learning autonomy (i.e., independent-learning).	Instructors	3.38
		Students	3.68
9	I prefer ODeL writing courses to traditional courses (i.e., in person instruction).	Instructors	2.76
		Students	3.37
10	ODeL increases students' motivation to learn writing.	Instructors	2.80
		Students	3.44
11	ODeL enriches students' writing.	Instructors	3.00
		Students	3.52
12	The tasks given are easy to understand and promote students' writing skills.	Instructors	3.19
		Students	3.76
13	In ODeL, students receive feedback on tasks given quickly.	Instructors	3.62
		Students	3.77
14	Presentation methods and delivery of content are appropriate for learning to write.	Instructors	3.57
		Students	3.75
15	Learning writing online helps students understand the content easily.	Instructors	3.05
		Students	3.50
16	It is easy to contact the course instructors in ODeL.	Instructors	3.33
		Students	3.80
17	It takes time to respond to student inquiries in ODeL.	Instructors	3.38
		Students	3.44
18	In ODeL, students have many opportunities to complete tasks in collaboration with peers.	Instructors	3.43
		Students	3.55
19	In ODeL, social interaction is lacked whether between students and instructor or students themselves.	Instructors	3.48
		Students	3.58
20	It is hard to participate in class discussions in an ODeL writing course.	Instructors	3.14
		Students	3.11
21	I intend to offer more online writing courses.	Instructors	2.95
		Students	3.44
22	Students' actual language skills are reflected by their written work submitted in online writing exams.	Instructors	2.33
		Students	3.44
23	Feedback from the online writing instructor is more convenient to receive and discuss than in-person evaluation.	Instructors	2.95
		Students	3.51
24	Face to face writing assessment is more stressful than online writing assessment.	Instructors	3.19
		Students	3.74
25	Face-to-face writing assessment can be as real life as online writing assessment	Instructors	2.33
		Students	3.45

The purpose of research question 4 was to see if EFL students who studied face to face and who studied online differ significantly in their scores regarding writing courses. An independent sample t-test was used to detect such a difference, if any. The *t*-Test revealed that the difference between the scores of the students who studied face to face and who studied online regarding writing courses was statistically significant, $t = -3.708$ $p = .000$. (Table 5).

TABLE 5
T-TEST SUMMARY OF FACE TO FACE AND ONLINE SCORES OF STUDENTS

Group	<i>n</i>	mean	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Df</i>
Face to face	54	78.8519	10.26885	-3.708	0.000	104
Online	52	86.5962	11.22717			

V. DISCUSSION

The first aim of this study was to investigate English as a foreign language (EFL) instructors' perceptions of using eLearning for teaching writing courses. A five-point likert scale questionnaire was used to find out those perceptions. The descriptive statistical analysis showed that the instructors did not prefer ODeL writing courses to traditional courses (i.e., in person instruction). Also, they thought that ODeL does not increase students' motivation for learning writing. In addition, they did not intend to offer more online writing courses, and they did not believe that actual language skills are reflected by their written work submitted in online writing exams. Moreover, they did not agree to the view that online writing teacher's feedback is more convenient to receive and discuss than onsite assessment. Furthermore, they thought that face-to-face writing assessment can not be as real life as online writing assessment. These results are similar to Al-Bargi (2022) results in that the vast majority of teachers questioned the accuracy of online writing assessment, indicating the need for a more developed model for the post Covid-19 era. However, they thought that ODeL is useful for writing courses in many other respects. For example, they believed that face to face writing assessment is more stressful than online writing assessment. This is similar to previous research in this area (Al-Bargi, 2022) in that instructors shed light on considerable amount of advantages of teaching L2 writing online.

The second aim was to investigate the perceptions of English as a foreign language (EFL) students about using eLearning for teaching writing courses. A five-point likert scale questionnaire was used to find out those perceptions. The descriptive statistical analysis showed that the students agreed to the all items of the questionnaire in that ODeL is useful for learning writing. The results are the same as Hazaymeh (2021) result in that the participants had a positive attitude of online distance learning. In another study by Dahmash (2021) it was discovered that students were offered real-time communication and were provided prompt evaluation in online classes.

The third aim was to see if instructors and students differ significantly in terms of their perceptions about using eLearning for teaching (EFL) writing courses. An independent sample t-test was used to detect such a difference, if any. The descriptive statistical analysis showed that the instructors and students are significantly different from each other. The students preferred ODeL writing courses to traditional courses (i.e., in person instruction), thought that ODeL increases students' motivation for learning writing, welcomed the idea of having more courses taught online, believed that students' actual language skills are reflected by their written work submitted in online writing exams, thought that online writing teacher's feedback is more convenient to receive and discuss than onsite assessment, and believed that face-to-face writing assessment can be as real life as online writing assessment, but the faculty did not. These results partly conform to Alwaheebi and Al-Qahtani (2022) study. The students in both studies have shown the usefulness of teaching ELF writing online whereas the instructors have shown differences. In Alwaheebi and Al-Qahtani (2022) study, the instructors totally agreed to the usefulness of teaching EFL writing on online whereas the instructors in this paper partially agreed.

The fourth aim was to see if there is a significant difference between the scores of the students who studied face to face and who studied online regarding writing courses. An independent sample t-test was used to detect that difference if it is found. The descriptive statistical analysis showed that the scores of the students who studied face to face and who studied online are significantly different from each other. The students who studied online over-scored those who studied face to face as is shown in the means difference in table 5. These results align with Dahmash (2020a) results in that there were improvements in the students' writing skills particularly spelling and grammar. In addition, instructors encouraged students to improve their English skills via online research on Google and YouTube, and tailored the sessions to cope with students' needs and situations as well as their family commitments.

VI. CONCLUSION

The present study contributed to previous studies on virtual learning of writing skills in the context of EFL from teachers' and students' viewpoints. EFL teachers and learners have given responses to some questions about the usefulness of teaching writing classes online. Various areas ranging from comparing face-to-face writing learning with online learning to some sub-areas of teaching writing are discussed. As a result, instructors did not give preference to online writing teaching. However online writing teaching should be put in practice because of the real needs for it

during some conditions and circumstances, such as Covid-19 era. The instructors must be informed about the importance of online writing learning and encouraged to apply it. Students welcomed online writing teaching. Therefore, they should be helped to practice online writing learning through training sessions and workshops. The integration of online teaching and learning should be included in teachers' education and training since the needs of online teaching and learning integration in language learning is inevitable.

APPENDIX. PERSONAL INFORMATION AND QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Instructors' Personal Information

1. Gender	2. Nationality	3. Rank	4. Age	5. Years of Experience	6. Training workshops on any online platforms (Blackboard, Zoom, etc) for learning?
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2. Students' Personal information

1. Gender	2. Nationality	3. Age	4. Academic Level	5. Years of using online platforms	6. Training workshops attended on any online platforms
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3. Main Questionnaire

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
7. ODeL is beneficial for writing courses.					
8. ODeL promotes students' learning autonomy (i.e., independent-learning).					
9. I prefer ODeL writing courses to traditional courses (i.e., in person instruction).					
10. ODeL increases students' motivation to learn writing.					
11. ODeL enriches students' writing.					
12. The tasks given are easy to understand and promote students' writing skills.					
13. In ODeL, students receive feedback on tasks given quickly.					
14. Presentation methods and delivery of content are appropriate for learning to write.					
15. Learning writing online helps students understand the content easily.					
16. It is easy to contact the course instructors in ODeL.					
17. It takes time to respond to student inquiries in ODeL.					
18. In ODeL, students have many opportunities to complete tasks in collaboration with peers.					
19. In ODeL, social interaction is lacked whether between students and instructor or students themselves.					
20. It is hard to participate in class discussions in an ODeL writing course.					
21. I intend to offer more online writing courses.					
22. Students' actual language skills are reflected by their written work submitted in online writing exams.					
23. Feedback from the online writing instructor is more convenient to receive and discuss than in-person evaluation.					
24. Face to face writing assessment is more stressful than online writing assessment.					
25. Face-to-face writing assessment can be as real life as online writing assessment.					

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