

Jordanian EFL Eleventh- Grade Female Students' Attitudes towards Using Online Discussion Forums in their Writing

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Abstract:

This study aimed at examining Jordanian eleventh- grade female students' attitudes towards using online discussion forums in their writing performance. To achieve the aims of the study, a quasi-experimental research design was used in which the participants of the study consisted of 52 eleventh - grade female students who were randomly assigned as one control group (n= 27) and one experimental group (n = 25) who enrolled at Howwarah secondary school for girls in the first semester of the academic year 2017/2018. To collect data, the researchers adapted an attitudinal questionnaire from Ghorbanpour (2013:224-229) that was distributed to the students at the end of the treatment.

The findings of the study indicated that students had positive attitudes towards using online discussion forums on improving their writing performance. In light of the results of the study, the study recommends to integrate using online discussion forums into the EFL curriculum in Jordan in teaching language skills in general and teaching writing skill in particular to improve students' writing performance.

Key Words: Jordanian EFL, students' attitudes, online discussion forums.

اتجاهات طالبات الصف الحادي عشر الاردنيات متعلقات اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية نحو استخدام منتديات النقاش عبر الانترنت في أدائهن الكتابي

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ملخص:

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى الكشف عن اتجاهات طالبات الصف الحادي عشر الاردنيات متعلقات اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية نحو استخدام منتديات النقاش عبر الانترنت في أدائهن الكتابي. لتحقيق أهداف الدراسة، تبنت الدراسة التصميم شبه التجريبي وقد تكونت عينة الدراسة من اثنتين وخمسين طالبة من طالبات الصف الحادي عشر تم توزيعهن عشوائياً إلى مجموعته ضابطة (27) ومجموعة تجريبية (25) في مدرسة حوارة الثانوية للبنات خلال الفصل الأول من العام الدراسي 2018-2019. استخدم الباحثون استبانة قوربانبور للاتجاهات (229-224:2013) إذ تم توزيعها على الطالبات المشاركات في المجموعة التجريبية في نهاية التدريب من اجل جمع البيانات. وقد أظهرت نتائج الدراسة أن طالبات الصف الحادي عشر لديهن اتجاهات ايجابية نحو استخدام منتديات النقاش عبر الانترنت في تحسين أدائهن الكتابي. وفي ضوء نتائج الدراسة الحالية، أوصى الباحثون باستخدام منتديات النقاش عبر الانترنت في منهاج اللغة الانجليزية لتدريس مهارات اللغة بشكل عام ومهارة الكتابة بشكل خاص من اجل تحسين الأداء الكتابي لدى الطلبة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الطالبات متعلقات اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية، اتجاهات، منتديات النقاش، الأداء الكتابي.

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Introduction and Background of the Study

English language is an international language and the primary goal of learning a foreign language is to communicate with others using that language (Lee, 2002; Omaggio, 2001). Inevitably, students should be taught how to use communication skills to express their ideas and exchange information (Yang & Chen, 2007). One of those skills is writing. Writing is considered a channel, flexible tool, and a medium of communication with others (Graham & Perin, 2007).

In the educational context, Writing is not writing things down (Brown, 2001), but it is a complex, multifaceted skill (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996) and a problem-solving activity (Massi, 2001) in which the writer should make a great effort to join sentences and even paragraphs to produce a piece of writing (Abed Al Haq & Al-Sobh, 2010).

Specifically, in EFL contexts with the advent of communicative language and a process approach in 1980s; writers should pass through several steps in which they are nonlinear, recursive, generative process, including planning, composing, drafting, revising and editing (Brown, 2001; Flower and Hayes, 1981; Harmer, 2004; Hyland, 2003; Kroll, 2001; Tribble, 1996). Thus, students should not be asked to write, but rather they should be taught and trained enough on strategies and sub-skills of writing that enable them to compose well-developed written text in terms of content, syntax, grammar, organization, vocabulary, and mechanics of writing (Archibald, 2001; Raimes, 1983).

One of the most significant factors that affects students' writing is their attitudes toward writing. Generally, Brown (2007) defined students' attitudes towards language learning as a set of beliefs, which students have towards the target language. Specifically, whether students do not have positive attitudes towards what they are learning, they will have a weakness in that language or skill. Also, Rose (1984) defined attitudes towards writing as "evaluation orientation towards the act or result of composing" (p.7). In other words, students' attitudes are a nonlinguistic factor, which determines the success and failure in L2 writing activities.

According to Graham, Berninger, and Fan (2007) writing attitudes are an affective tendency including how the writing process makes the writer feel after completing their writing tasks either happy or unhappy. Besides, students have positive or negative attitudes towards writing; this means that students' performance could be affected by their attitudes. Based on their views, Likert - type scales can be used to measure the students' attitudes.

In the same trends of research, McKenna, Kear, and Ellsworth (1995) claimed that students who have positive attitudes perform well, rather than the students with negative attitudes when they are asked to compose a piece of writing. Moreover, students' writing skill could be improved if they override their negative attitudes towards L2 writing.

Recently, the continued growth and developments in information and communication technologies (ICTs) have affected the teaching and learning strategies. Actually, the incorporation and utilization of technology in education is regarded as a new method. Undoubtedly, students are digital natives and they are familiar with using technology, this means that web 2.0 technologies tools and platforms should be integrated in curriculum and classroom practices in which they create online virtual environment that allowed students to express their ideas and feelings with each other (Mccarthy, 2010; Taranto, Dalbon & Gaetano, 2011; Younus, Saleh & Chenzi, 2012).

Interestingly, Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) is an essential teaching approach, which made language learning and online communication easier specifically in EFL contexts in which it provides students with contextualized and authentic materials that develop students' language skills (Omaggio, 2001; Warschauer, 1996; Warschauer & Healey, 1998). In this regard, there are a variety of CALL programs, one of them is Computer-mediated communication (CMC); it is classified into two types: synchronous communication (i.e. telephone, voice conferencing, instant messaging, and board meeting) and asynchronous communication (i.e. discussion boards and e-mails).

One of the simplest forms of CMC is online discussion forums, which this study is concerned with. They are known as discussion board, message board, bulletin boards, discussion group, and world's wide web forums (Rouse, 2002). The online discussion forum might be a beneficial tool for foreign language learning as it encourages students' communication beyond the classroom walls. Furthermore, it is password protected that enabled students to express, share and post their experience, ideas and knowledge freely, so it enhances students' interaction and allows shy students who do not participate in classroom discussion to be active students, not passive ones (Erben, Ban, and Castaneda, 2009; Khami-Stien, 2002).

To achieve the purpose of this study, many researchers (i.e. Erben, Ban, & Castaneda, 2009; Aileen, 2008; Callen, 2006; Kadagize, 2014; Krasnova & Ananjev, 2015; Quing, 2004) believed that online discussion forum is an

important platform since it helps students improve their writing performance. This is properly because it gives students the opportunity to read, analyze post, share and write comments and eventually write their topics in a friendly environment without time constraints. Accordingly, the writing tasks should be appropriate, clear and in line with course objectives to maximize the students' participation in the thread discussions (Holmes, 2005; Guldberg & Pilkington, 2007)

Some of empirical studies indicated that students had positive attitudes towards using online discussion forums in teaching writing. Sholihah (2013) investigated the effect of using discussion boards on twenty-seven students' writing recount text. The researcher used classroom action research to solve the teaching and learning problem in the eighth grade. For data collection, observation checklist, taking notes, a questionnaire, and writing test were administrated. The results of the study showed that discussion board had an effective role in enhancing students' writing in which it helped students in gaining higher marks, increasing their contributions in writing tasks, and having positive responses towards using the discussion board in teaching writing.

Nielsen (2013) examined the impact of using the discussion board on twenty-three Japanese EFL students. He used a questionnaire, Advanced Text Analyzer to analyze the online writing and survey. The results showed that there was not any relation between online discussion boards and the quantity or quality of the student is writing, but they had positive attitudes toward using it as a beneficial way for expressing their ideas.

Ghorbanpour (2013) carried out a study to find out whether the online forum contributions had a role in Iranian EFL students writing performance. Furthermore, he examined students' attitudes towards learning English. The participants of the study were thirty intermediate students. To collect the data, one writing test only was used at the end of the course for both the control and the experimental groups as well as the questionnaire. The results showed that the use of online forum had an effective role in enhancing students' writing performance. Moreover, students had positive attitudes towards using online forums to learn English in general and in writing skill in particular.

Qureshi (2017) investigated the influence of using online discussion board on Korean university students' writing and communication. He also explored their various perspectives toward using it in writing courses. A pre-post module questionnaire, analyzing of essay writing and interviews

were collected and analyzed. The results showed that online discussion board had a significant influence on promoting the students writing skill. Also, the students had positive attitudes towards using it in writing courses.

Mohammadi, Jabbari and Fazilatfar (2018) investigated the effect of using asynchronous online discussion forums on Iranian students' ability in writing. Also, they examined the students' attitudes towards using them in English. The participants of the study were sixty undergraduate students. A pre- post - writing test and a survey were used. The results showed that students in the experimental group outperformed the control group in terms of lexis and grammar planes attributed to exchange feedback and use self-assessment strategies. In addition, they had positive attitudes towards using asynchronous forums in writing.

Thus, this study investigated the Jordanian EFL Eleventh- grade female students' attitudes towards using online discussion forums in their writing performance.

Statement of the problem

Through the researchers' experience in the field of education, they noticed that eleventh- grade students had weakness in writing in terms of organization, vocabulary, cohesion in sentences, coherence in ideas. Moreover, they got low scores when they were asked to write a paragraph or an essay in their exams.

Writing is a problematic skill and it needs a lot of effort to be acquired. Furthermore, it is noticed that Jordanian teachers still use the traditional and inadequate methods in teaching writing skill (AL-Abed Al Haq & Sobh, 2010; Bataineh & Salah, 2017; Rababah & Melhem; 2015). Therefore, this study attempted to implement online discussion forums as a primary tool to teach writing activities to examine students' attitudes towards using them.

Purpose and Question of the study

This study aimed to examine the eleventh- grade female students' attitudes towards using online discussion forums in their writing performance. It attempted to answer the following question:

- What are the eleventh-grade female students' attitudes towards using online discussion forums in their writing performance?

The significance of the study

In their review of the related literature, the researchers could not find any studies examining the students' attitudes towards using online discussion forums in the Jordanian context. Hopefully, this study will fill up this research gap. Additionally, the results of this study may encourage

curriculum designers and methodologies to incorporate a variety of computer platforms and materials in the *Action Pack* series in general and writing activities in particular.

Furthermore, students' attitudes may be a good indicator to make writing activities more interesting, so it will be able to encourage teachers to implement online discussion forums as a novel technique to solve students' weakness in writing.

Design, Participants and Instrument of the Study

The research adopted the quasi- experimental design. The participants of this study were 52 students Eleventh- grade female scientific stream students purposefully chosen from Howwarah secondary school for girls , and then were assigned randomly into one experimental group(n=27) and one control group (n=25) in the first semester of the academic year 2018/2019.

An attitudinal questionnaire from Ghorbanpour (2013:224-229) was adapted by the researchers (See Appendix A, p. 25 - 26). A five Likert - scale consisted of 21 items (i.e. Strongly disagree, disagree, undecided, agree, and strongly agree) was used to measure the students' attitudes in three parts (i.e. learning English by online forum, students' writing performance and students' evaluation of the effectiveness of online forum).

Validity and Reliability of the instrument

To achieve the purpose of the study, the researchers designed their instructional program based on online discussion forums, particularly, ProBoards forum following the process approach, which was taught to the experimental group to examine their attitudes towards using them, while the control group was taught per the guidelines of the Teacher's Book. The researchers used a content analysis checklist to analyze the writing activities in the Pupils Book and Activity Book of *Action Pack 11* in the modules 1, 2, and 3 (e.g., starting out, celebrations, and sport) then redesigned them.

The instructional program concerned of writing activities that asked students to write a paragraph or essay. Every week, a writing topic was covered in which the students passed through the three stages, namely pre writing, while writing, and post writing stages, they had to click on respectively. In the pre writing stage, students had to watch videos and photos suggested by the teacher, click on and read the recommended links to brainstorm students' ideas and answer questions about the topic. After that,

the researchers gave their feedback on the students' answers and ask them to move to the next stage.

In the while writing stage, students had to use free writing strategy to organize their ideas generated from the previous stage and write their first draft. In the post writing stage, students had to work in pairs to share their second draft with each other and give their feedback on peers topics in terms of grammar, word choice, spelling, capitalization, punctuations, then the researchers gave their feedback on students' feedback and asked them to edit and send their final drafts to the researchers in which they used Anderson's writing rubric (2003: 92) in terms of ideas and development, organization, vocabulary, sentence structure, and mechanics of writing to mark and grade the students' final drafts.

To ensure the content validity of the instructional program and the questionnaire, they were given to fourteen juries of EFL supervisors and EFL professors were all their comments and suggestions taken into consideration in the final version.

To achieve the reliability of the students' questionnaire, Cronbach's Alpha was used to check the internal consistency index for the questionnaire items; it was found to be 0.83, which is appropriate for the purposes of this study.

Data Collection

To collect the data, the student's questionnaire was distributed to the participants in the experimental group at the end of treatment that lasted 8 weeks in the first semester of the academic year in 2018/2019.

Data Analysis

The researchers used Cronbach Alpha to check the reliability of the students' questionnaire in addition to the descriptive analysis, namely, means scores and standard deviations were calculated after the treatment in which the 21 items ranked in descending order in addition to their agreement degree.

Results of the Study

In order to answer the question of the study, *what are the eleventh-grade female students' attitudes towards using online discussion forum in teaching writing?* The researchers calculated means and standard deviations of three domains of the students' attitudes as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Rank Order, Means and Standard Deviations of the Three Domains of the Students Attitudes toward Learning Writing by Online Discussion Forum

Rank	N	Domain	Mean	Std. Deviation	Agreement Degree
1	2	The effect of online forum on students' writing performance	4.10	.443	High
2	3	Students' evaluation of the effectiveness of the online forum	3.93	.593	High
3	1	Students' attitudes towards learning english by online forum	3.91	.413	High
		Attitudes towards Using Online Discussion Forums	4.00	.389	High

Table 1 shows that the Eleventh- grade female students had positive attitudes towards the three domains; "*The effect of online forum on students' writing performance*" topped the domains as achieving the highest mean score (4.10) and a standard deviation of (.443). mean and standard deviation of each item in each domain were calculated, as shown in the following Tables 2, 3, and 4.

1. The Effect of Online Forum on Students' Writing Performance

Table 2: Rank Order, Means and Standard Deviations of Students' Attitudes towards Teaching Writing by Online Forum

Rank	N	By participating in the online forum, I became more attentive in writing a well-organized essay in terms of :	Mean	Std. Deviation	Agreement Degree
1	13	Capitalization.	4.30	.657	High
2	12	Punctuation.	4.25	.639	High
3	6	Grammar.	4.15	.875	High
4	9	Cohesion in sentences.	4.10	.718	High
5	11	Spelling.	4.05	1.050	High
6	8	Coherence in ideas.	4.00	.725	High
7	10	Vocabulary.	3.90	.788	High
8	7	Organization.	3.80	.696	High
		The effect of online forum on students' writing performance	4.10	.443	High

The students had positive attitudes toward all the components of writing skill, which were taught, through the online discussion forum as shown in Table 2. Item 13 "*Capitalization*" scored the highest mean (4.30) and a standard deviation of .657. While, item 7 "*Organization*" scored the lowest mean (3.800) and a standard deviation of .696 and it was ranked last. This Table also shows that "*The effect of online forum on students' writing*

performance” mean as a whole is (4.10).

2. Students' evaluation of the effectiveness of the online forum

Table 3: Rank order, means and standard deviations of students' attitudes towards Effectiveness of the online forum

Rank	N	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation	Agreement Degree
1	14	It provided me with an opportunity and time to think effectively.	4.35	.671	High
1	15	It enabled me to interact with my classmates and see their writings before I posted my postings.	4.35	.813	High
3	16	It established social relations between my classmates and me.	4.15	.813	High
4	17	It enhanced my learning experience in writing.	3.80	1.056	High
5	18	It helped me overcome my fear and weakness in writing.	4.15	.933	High
6	19	It created a safe and convenient environment for discussion.	4.20	.834	High
7	20	I had a difficulty in doing the writing activity.	3.75	.910	High
8	21	I had a problem in handing assignments.	3.10	1.165	Moderate
		Students' evaluation of the effectiveness of the online forum	3.93	.593	High

Table 3 shows that the students' evaluation was high except for item 21, which was moderate, Item 14 "*It provided me with an opportunity and time to think effectively*" scored the highest mean (4.35) and a standard deviation of .671, so it came first. While item 21, "*I had a problem in handing assignments*" scored the lowest mean (3.10) and a standard deviation of 1.165, so it came in the last. This Table also shows that "*Students' evaluation of the effectiveness of the online forum*" mean, as a whole is 3.93 and a standard deviation of .593.

3. Students' attitudes towards learning english by online forum

Table 4: Rank order, means and standard Deviations of Students' Attitudes towards Learning English by Online

Rank	N	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation	Agreement degree
1	2	I was enthusiastic and motivated to participate and learn more.	4.30	.571	High
2	3	I benefited from participating in the online forum.	4.25	.851	High
3	5	Online forum is a valuable instructional tool	4.05	.887	High

Rank	N	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation	Agreement degree
		to learn English language.			
4	4	I expected to increase my academic achievement in writing.	3.95	.759	High
5	1	I enjoyed learning English by online forum.	3.00	.000	High
		Students' attitudes towards learning English by online forum	3.91	.413	High

The students had high positive attitudes towards all the five items as shown in Table 4. For example, item 2, "*I was enthusiastic and motivated to participate and learn more*", scored the highest mean (4.30) and a standard deviation of .571 and was ranked first. While, item 1 "*I enjoyed learning English by online forum*", scored the lowest mean (3.00) and a standard deviation of .000, was ranked high, and came at the last.

Discussion of the Results

The question examined the effect of students' attitudes towards using online discussion forum in English language learning. The findings revealed that eleventh- grade female students had positive attitudes about using online forums in English language learning in general and students' writing performance in particular . They agreed that online discussion forum had an important role in improving students' writing and motivating them to be good writers.

As aforementioned above in the results of the study, student's questionnaire was classified into three parts, as follows:

1. Online discussion forum positively affected students' writing performance

Students' writing performance improved as a result of using an online discussion forum. These positive attitudes are likely attributed to online discussion forums that give students an opportunity and time to get multiple viewpoints from peers, which, in turn, enabled students to write their topics after reading, analyzing, and commenting on their peers' posts and use them more than once in further discussions. This result is in line with (Lea, 2010) who reported that students can go back to their and others topics anytime they need

Another possible explanation of the positive attitudes is relevant to using the directive feedback by the researchers. This is an agreement with those Ellis(2009), Hyland, (2003) , and Sanders (2005) who reported that directive feedback is a successful strategy to improve students' writing in which the teacher tells and identifies the students' errors in addition to

providing them with comments or suggestions that help them correct and revise their errors.

2. The effectiveness of the online discussion forum

The students expressed positive attitude towards the effectiveness of using online discussion forums. The results of the current study are consistent with the results of previous studies which asserted that online discussion forum has a variety of benefits that enhanced students' progress in writing (e.g., Callen, 2006; Kadagize, 2014; Quing, 2004; Yang, Newby, & Bill, 2005; Yunus, Salehi & Chenzi, 2012).

3. Students' attitudes and motivation towards learning English by online discussion forum

The students had positive attitudes and motivation towards using online discussion forum to learn English language. This could be attributed to online discussion forum engaged students with convenient environment and high quality discussion in which students were motivated to interact more with students and researchers.

Another possible explanation of the positive attitudes is relevant to students expected to get a high mark in their writing test because online discussion forum enabled them to construct adequate knowledge through easy navigation of the internet websites to find enriched materials about any topic.

Conclusion

This study confirms that students expressed positive attitudes towards using online discussion forum as a significant platform that help them improve their writing performance. Consequently, the results of the current study are consistent with the results of other studies(e.g., Ghorbanpour, 2013; Mohammadi, Jabbari & Fazilatfar, 2018; Nielsen, 2013; Qureshi, 2017; Sholihah, 2013)

Pedagogical Implications and Recommendations

Based on the results of the study, the following recommendations are put forth:

1. Teachers are encouraged to use online discussion forum in teaching the language skills in general and teaching writing skill in particular.
2. The Ministry of Education should train pre-service and in- service teachers to teach writing via technological devices, applications and platforms, one of them is online discussion forums.

3. To achieve more generalizable and reliable findings, further research should be conducted in other streams, both male and female students, and in other parts of Jordan.

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Appendix (A) Student Questionnaire

Dear Student,

This questionnaire is an instrument used towards a doctoral degree at Yarmouk University, entitled **Jordanian EFL Eleventh- Grade Female Students' Attitudes towards Using Online Discussion Forums on their Performance in Writing**. According to your experience this semester, please rate the extent to which you strongly agree or strongly disagree with the following statements regarding the learning English by online discussion forum, writing a well-organized essay, writing performance and the effectiveness of the online forum.

No	Items	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	I enjoyed learning English by online forum.					
2	I was enthusiastic and motivated to participate and learn more.					
3	I benefited from participating in the online forum.					
4	I expected to increase my academic achievement in writing.					
5	Online forum is a valuable instructional tool to learn English language.					
By participating in the online forum, I became more attentive in writing a well-organized essay in terms of....						
6	Grammar.					
7	Organization.					
8	Coherence in ideas.					
9	Cohesion in sentences.					
10	Vocabulary.					
11	Spelling.					
12	Punctuation.					
13	Capitalization.					
14	It provided me with opportunity and time to think effectively.					
15	It enabled me to interact with my classmates and					

No	Items	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	see their writings before I posted my postings.					
16	It established social relations between my classmates and me.					
17	It enhanced my learning experience in writing.					
18	It helped me overcome my fear and weakness in writing.					
19	It created a safe and convenient environment for discussion.					
20	I had a difficulty in doing the writing activity.					
21	I had a problem in handing assignments.					