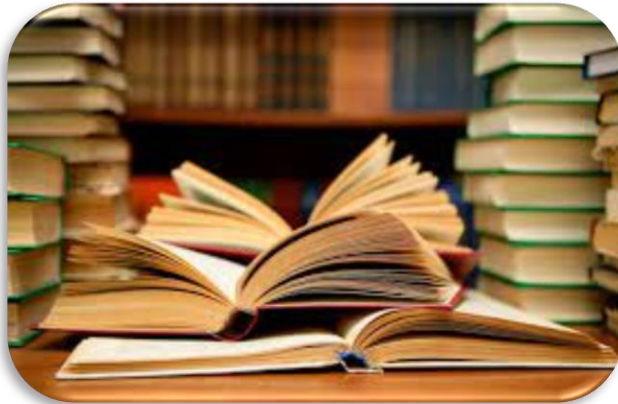


Research Paper



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Effect of Technology and Online Learning on EFL Learners' Writing Achievement and Their Self-Concept

Niloofer Salajeghe^{1*}, Samira Hasani²

¹*Department of English Language, Kerman Branch, Kerman Institute of Higher Education, Kerman, Iran
niloof.slj75@gmail.com*

²*Assistant Professor, Department of English Language, Kerman Branch, Kerman Institute of Higher Education, Kerman, Iran
Samira_nash@yahoo.com*

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ABSTRACT

The present study attempted to probe the effectiveness of online learning on Iranian EFL learners' self-concept. It also analyzed the effect of online learning on the EFL learners' writing achievement. To do this, a total number of 50 students of pre-intermediate level was selected based on available sampling. A pre-test of writing was administered to the participants at the beginning of the term to ensure that they had the same language background. Then, they were randomly assigned as experimental and control group (25 Ss in each group). Experimental group benefited from online learning through BBB, and other group with the same number of students regarded as control group and received conventional method of teaching. At the beginning of the term, pre questionnaire of self-concept published among students of EG. The research was done in eight sessions and in the last session, post-test of writing was assigned to both groups to determine whether online learning method had positively affected the EFL learners' achievement and their self-concept. Moreover, post questionnaire of self-concept was published among experimental group to analyze their self-concept in online learning context. Data analysis of tests and questionnaire revealed that online learning method had positive effect on the EFL students' writing achievement and their self-concept.

Keywords: Online Learning, Self-concept, Writing Skill, EFL Learners

تأثیر تکنولوژی و یادگیری آنلاین بر مهارت نوشتار زبان آموزان و خودپنداری آنها

پژوهش حاضر به بررسی اثربخشی آموزش آنلاین بر خودپنداری زبان آموزان ایرانی پرداخته است. همچنین این تحقیق تأثیر یادگیری آنلاین بر مهارت نوشتن زبان آموزان را تحلیل کرد. بدین منظور تعداد 50 دانش آموز مقطع پیش متوسطه بر اساس نمونه گیری قابل دسترس انتخاب شدند. یک پیش آزمون نوشتن در ابتدای ترم برای شرکت کنندگان انجام شد تا از داشتن پیشینه زبانی یکسان آنها اطمینان حاصل شود. سپس به طور تصادفی در دو گروه آزمایش و کنترل (هر گروه 25 نفر) قرار گرفتند. گروه آزمایش از یادگیری آنلاین از طریق اپلیکیشن BBB بهره مند شدند و گروه دیگر با همین تعداد زبان آموز به عنوان گروه کنترل در نظر گرفته شدند و روش تدریس معمولی در کلاس را دریافت کردند. قابل ذکر است که در ابتدای ترم، پیش پرسشنامه خودپنداری در بین زبان آموزان گروه آزمایش منتشر شد. پژوهش در هشت جلسه انجام شد و در جلسه آخر، پس از آزمون نوشتن برای هر دو گروه تعیین شد تا مشخص شود آیا روش یادگیری آنلاین بر پیشرفت زبان آموزان زبان انگلیسی و خودپنداری آنها تأثیر مثبت داشته است یا خیر. همچنین، پس پرسشنامه در میان گروه آزمایشی به منظور تحلیل خودپنداری آنها در زمینه یادگیری آنلاین منتشر شد. تجزیه و تحلیل داده های آزمون ها و پرسشنامه ها نشان داد که روش یادگیری آنلاین بر مهارت نوشتن و خودپنداری زبان آموزان ایرانی تأثیر مثبت دارد. امید است نتایج این تحقیق اهمیت یادگیری آنلاین از طریق اپلیکیشن مذکور در سیستم آموزشی را نشان داده باشد.

واژگان کلیدی: یادگیری آنلاین، خودپنداری، مهارت نوشتن، زبان آموزان انگلیسی

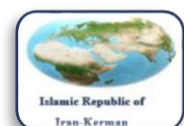
INTRODUCTION

In language teaching online learning presents an opportunity to include original texts and to update them in a simple way. Online learning provides language learners with chance of interactive spoken and written communication. Many language teachers and students focused on preparing and using online courses in second language teaching for many years. The courses are often prepared in cooperation of teachers and students of informatics subjects taught at educational context. Thus, the courses are made-to-measure, adjusted to the needs of the language teachers and learners as well. At the same time, by taking advantage of the language learners' ability to communicate and also very good technical facilities of the school, the design of the online language courses cannot be complicated (Hubackova, 2010).

In the history of language teaching, writing instruction has undergone numerous changes. Writing in classical education was limited to noncreative acts like dictations and copying. Second language writing in the foreign language classroom was mostly taught through a controlled composition method in the first half of the twentieth century (Ferris, 2016). Based on Raimes (2011), writing was observed as a secondary skill useful to support practice in reading and listening, and to reinforce speaking skills. This type of approach to teaching writing was structured in order to decrease errors, along with the "paragraph-pattern" method. In language teaching context, technology have revolutionized form of teaching, especially teaching writing skill. Recent work on teaching and learning writing skill in the online context has created and employed different systems and educational software in order to help language learners in improving writing quality (Jahangard & Norouzizadeh, 2020).

It is worthy to note that the sudden emergence of COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the education system across the world where remote learning has become necessary, and educational settings are well aware of its importance during lockdown period (Khan et al., 2021). Drawing on EFL learners' self-concept, Lau et al., (2009) noted that the four language skills could be appropriately represented by a single, global EFL learner self-concept. However, regarding the importance of conducting studies in online learning context, writing skill seems to be the least-explored one. Actually, EFL writing courses supported by computers are among the settings which might have high degrees of potentiality in language education. Recent online software can be seen as aided teaching tools to help language teachers as well as students to get over some disadvantages of the traditional methods of writing. The integration of computers may also help instructors to solve the mysteries of language learning, which are difficult to explore with predictable procedures. Thus, in agreement with linguists who consider online learning as an invaluable system, finding methods to make computer-assisted instruction in the area of EFL writing, is necessary (Jahangard & Norouzizadeh, 2020).

Several studies have investigated the effects of success and failure on learners' self-concept. Students often from their self-concept of past experiences, attributing the outcome to their own personal values. By doing this, students can commit the fundamental attribution error. In this case, the error may arise when the person falsely believes that a specific aspect of who they are determined the positive or negative result. By attributing a negative result to oneself, self-concept can be affected. However, attributing positive results to oneself can develop self-concept. Also, these attributions can have an effect on students' self-perception and their achievement. The present work made an attempt to study the aspect of EFL learners' self-concept in online learning by analyzing their language knowledge in this context. In fact, the study considered the role of technology and online learning through BBB. More specifically,



the study analyzed the effect of online learning on the EFL learners' writing achievement. It also made an attempt to highlight the effect of online learning on Iranian EFL learners' self-concept. Based on the research objectives, the researcher examined three research questions;

1. *What is the effect of online learning on Iranian EFL learners' writing achievement?*
2. *What is the effect of online learning on Iranian EFL learners' self-concept?*

LITRATURE REVIEW

Mercer (2011) claims that research into self-concept needs to be carried out in domain-specific ways. He asserted that one's self-concept in language learning may exhibit complexities. Her work aimed at making for a fuller understanding of the nature and potential dynamism of self-concept in the domain of foreign language learning. Much of the data in the study were generated using journals and in-depth interviews. The findings illustrated how language learning self-concept had a complex and multi-layered structure comprised of both dynamic and stable aspects. In the next year, Du (2012) analyzed the relationship between self-concept and language learning strategies. Participants of the study were 157 students from one University in Shandong, China. Quantitative data was collected through two questionnaires. In terms of the relationship between English self-concept and language learning strategies, by Pearson correlation coefficients and multiple regressions, it was concluded that general English self-concept, English speaking self-concept and English pronunciation self-concept had the highest correlation level with the cognitive strategy, and English pronunciation self-concept had the weakest correlation level with the memory strategy and compensatory strategy.

In Iranian context, Vatankhah, Daryabari, Ghadami, and Naderifar (2013) investigated the efficacy of communication skills on self-concept, self-esteem and assertiveness on students at the city of Rasht. The statistical society consisted of all girl students from Shahed secondary schools in Rasht. After monitoring the sample group, consists of 40 students, they were divided into two groups randomly. The type of design was before- after test design with control group. The communication skill training was done in the experimental group. After the ending of training programs, all the groups participate in the post test. Finally, Data were analyzed using descriptive methods (Anova covariance analysis) as well as inferential statistics methods. The result showed that there is a significant difference between experimental and control groups. Moreover, Asadi (2014) analyzed the relationship between self-concept and reading comprehension achievement. The participants of the study included 92 EFL learners (68 female, 24 male, Mage=30.06, age range: 15-53) from Iran Language Institute in Tehran. In this study, the research made use of Self-concept Attribute Attitude Scale (SaaS) and reading comprehension TOEFL test. It was found that the relationship between self-concept and reading comprehension scale (Spearman's $\rho = .65$, Sig. = .01) was significant. Overall, this study confirmed that the reading comprehension grades were affected strongly by students' self-concept.

In another study, Alrajhi and Aldhafri (2015) analyzed peer tutoring effects on English students' self-concept. 125 Omani university students were selected and their English Self-Concept Scale (SESCS) and the Tutorial Programs Factors Scale (TPFS) were utilized to collect the data. The findings demonstrated that peer tutoring has a positive influence on English self-concept. Three tutorial program factors were found to positively predict English self-concept. Also in foreign context, Sponcil and Gitimu



(2016) examined social media use among college students and how it affects communication with others, and college students' self-concept. Students completed a questionnaire which assessed personal use of social media, communication skills with friends and family, and effects on self-concept. Results indicated that all of the sampled college students were using at least one form of social networking website. There was a correlation between usage of social media and communication with family and friends. Also, a significant relationship was found between usage social media and self-concept.

METHODOLOGY

Fifty pre-intermediate English learners were the participants of this study. That is to say, two intact classes (25 Ss in each) were chosen based on the available sampling to participate in the present work. The participants of this study were EFL learners of Iran Zamin Language Institute. They were teenagers of both genders whose age ranged from 15 to 17 and they had already studied English for about 2 years in the mentioned language institute. Selecting the participants was based on available sampling in which the participants (EFL learners) were chosen based on their availability. It is one of the major forms of nonprobability sampling which was applied in the current research.

Three instruments were employed in the current study in order to gather data; a proficiency test, pre and posttest of writing, and pre and post self-concept questionnaires. This study targeted students' writing as an important skill along with their self-concept. For conducting this study, at first two intact classes of 50 students (pre-intermediate level) were chosen by the researcher from the language institute where she was teaching English for some years. After that, all the students participated in OPT to ensure that all are in the same level. Regarding the obtained scores, all were selected as the pre-intermediate ones. Next, the researcher randomly put them in two groups as control and experimental groups (CG & EG). During Covid-19, the students were able to receive online learning, so one group (EG) attended in online class through Big Blue Button (BBB) application which is created in 2020. BBB is open source software with all the features users expect from a commercial video conferencing solution, built specifically for online learning platforms. Students do not need to install an application to join webinars. Teachers can share their screen in real time, and participants can collaborate using a range of tools like virtual whiteboards and shared notes. BBB is designed for educational settings looking to facilitate remote learning.

Pre-test administered to the students and all had to participate in it. Also, the pre-questionnaire was distributed among the students of the experimental group in order to achieve the effectiveness of BBB on students' self-concept. BBB is a platform where members expressed their ideas, raised questions, and discussed matters related to the topics. It is also a platform where the lecturer regularly uploaded documents such as handouts and Power Point slides. It is worthy mentioned that participants of the experimental group experienced a technology-mediated language learning during a term. Treatment as one of the most important steps of the present work, started after administering the pre-test and pre-questionnaire. The treatment implemented in 8 sessions and the timing of each session for writing was 40 minutes. As mentioned before, one group consisted of 25 students served as experimental group benefited from online learning through BBB, and other group with the same number of students regarded as control group. BBB is a web-based tool facilitates communication among students and teachers and suggests rich resources of peer feedback and teacher feedback simultaneously. The researcher modeled



the strategies of writing for the students and gave them enough practice on how to use them in the language class. On the other hand, the control group received conventional method of teaching. In fact, they were taught and learnt under the supervision of the teacher in classroom condition. They followed the traditional teaching practices to write about the topics appearing in their textbook.

The final phase of the present research was conducting a post-test and the participants of both groups participated in post-test to compare the achieved scores. They had to write about the second topic in 45 minutes. At the end of the project, to explore the students' self-concept in the EG, post- questionnaire published among the experimental group. Then, the questionnaires and tests scores were gathered for analyzing and interpreting. In data collection stage, the scores of the tests and questionnaires were taken for analyzing and all data were inserted into SPSS software for analyzing and interpreting. Descriptive statistics was used in this study and the data from the questionnaires and tests were analyzed quantitatively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Pre and posttests Results

After implementing online and conventional teaching methods, the students' scores of the two groups highlighted different mean scores. In other words, the means of pre-test and post-test in the control group are 16.35 and 16.80 respectively (Table 1), so the difference between the two means is 0.45, which indicates a slight difference between two mean scores (Table 4.2). However, considering EG, the difference between the mean scores is observable. Based on the careful analysis, the mean of the pre-test is reported as 16.30, and the mean score of posttests is 17.65 in the experimental group. Therefore, a remarkable difference between the mean scores of the experimental group is highlighted, which is 1.35. Furthermore, p-value in CG is 0.38, but in the EG is 0.00 which shows the mean scores of the experimental group has changed significantly.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of T-Test

		Paired Samples Statistics			
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Control Group	Pre-test	16.35	25	2.121	0.211
	Post-test	16.80	25	2.154	0.230
Experimental Group	Pre-test	16.30	25	2.130	0.371
	Post-test	17.65	25	2.167	0.398

Table 2

Paired Sample T-test

		Paired Differences				t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower Upper			



CG	Pretest - Posttest	-0.45	.033	.07	-0.72	0.31	-1.24	24	0.38
EG	Pretest - Posttest	-1.35	.037	.021	-2.53	-1.18	-5.21	24	0.00

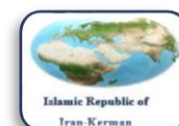
Pre and Post Questionnaire Results

In order to investigate the students' self-concept of the experimental group, frequency, percentage and mean score of each item were used. The items of the questionnaire measured in a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "Totally disagree" to "Totally agree".

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics of Pre-Questionnaire

N	Pre-Questionnaire Items	TD (1)	D (2)	U (3)	A (4)	TA (5)
1	I can easily follow the lessons in my English class.	5 20%	9 36%	5 20%	4 16%	2 8%
2	I usually dream a lot in my English class.	6 24%	8 32%	3 12%	5 20%	3 12%
3	I am able to help my classmates in their English coursework.	10 40%	6 24%	0 0%	5 20%	4 16%
4	I often do my English homework with thinking.	8 32%	7 28%	0 0%	5 20%	5 20%
5	I believe that if I work hard, I am able to achieve the academic goals I have set for myself.	8 32%	6 24%	3 12%	4 16%	4 16%
6	I pay attention to the teachers during my English lessons.	6 24%	7 28%	0 0%	7 28%	5 20%
7	I think that I am smarter than most of my classmates.	4 16%	10 40%	5 20%	1 4%	5 20%
8	I always study hard for my English tests.	6 24%	9 36%	0 0%	5 20%	5 20%
9	My English teachers feel that I perform poorly in my coursework.	3 12%	5 20%	5 20%	6 24%	6 24%
10	I am interested in English schoolwork.	9 36%	9 36%	2 8%	3 12%	2 8%
11	I don't forget what I have learned in my English class.	8 32%	5 20%	1 4%	6 24%	5 20%
12	I try hard to pass all English tests.	10	5	0	4	6



	40%	20%	0%	16%	24%
13 I never feel like quitting the English class.	7	11	1	3	3
	28%	44%	4%	12%	12%
14 English is one of the subjects I am good at.	6	7	3	4	5
	24%	28%	12%	16%	20%
15 I always want my English lessons to end soon.	4	3	3	10	5
	16%	12%	12%	40%	20%
16 My English test scores are satisfactory.	7	8	0	4	6
	28%	32%	0%	16%	24%
17 I do not give up easily when encountering difficulty.	9	9	2	3	2
	36%	36%	8%	12%	8%
18 I have better performance in English coursework than most of my friends.	8	8	2	4	3
	32%	32%	8%	16%	12%
19 I want to put in more effort in my English coursework.	6	7	3	5	4
	24%	28%	12%	20%	16%
20 I am satisfied with what I have achieved in English.	6	7	2	5	5
	24%	28%	8%	20%	20%

1=Totally Disagree/ 2= Disagree/ 3=Undecided/ 4=Agree/ 5=Totally Agree

The results of post-questionnaire are indicated in the following table. Frequency, percentage and mean score of each item were used in order to investigate the students' self-concept of the experimental group after participating in online writing classes.

Table 4

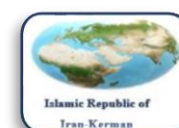
Descriptive Statistics of Post-Questionnaire

N	Pre-Questionnaire Items	TD (1)	D (2)	U (3)	A (4)	TA (5)
1	I can easily follow the lessons in my English class.	5	5	2	7	6
		20%	20%	8%	28%	24%
2	I usually dream a lot in my English class.	4	5	2	7	7
		16%	20%	8%	28%	28%
3	I am able to help my classmates in their English coursework.	4	4	0	8	9
		16%	16%	0%	32%	36%
4	I often do my English homework with thinking.	6	4	0	6	9
		24%	16%	0%	24%	36%
5		5	2	1	9	8



	I believe that if I work hard, I am able to achieve the academic goals I have set for myself.	20%	8%	4%	36%	32%
6	I pay attention to the teachers during my English lessons.	2	5	0	9	9
		8%	20%	0%	36%	36%
7	I think that I am smarter than most of my classmates.	5	6	1	7	6
		20%	24%	4%	28%	24%
8	I always study hard for my English tests.	5	5	1	6	8
		20%	20%	4%	24%	32%
9	My English teachers feel that I perform poorly in my coursework.	8	7	3	2	5
		32%	28%	12%	8%	20%
10	I am interested in English schoolwork.	5	3	1	10	6
		20%	12%	4%	40%	24%
11	I don't forget what I have learned in my English class.	5	4	0	10	6
		20%	16%	0%	40%	24%
12	I try hard to pass all English tests.	5	4	0	8	8
		20%	16%	0%	32%	32%
13	I never feel like quitting the English class.	3	4	2	6	10
		12%	16%	8%	24%	40%
14	English is one of the subjects I am good at.	6	4	2	7	6
		24%	16%	8%	28%	24%
15	I always want my English lessons to end soon.	8	9	1	2	5
		32%	36%	4%	8%	20%
16	My English test scores are satisfactory.	5	4	0	8	8
		20%	16%	0%	32%	32%
17	I do not give up easily when encountering difficulty.	5	4	1	7	8
		20%	16%	4%	28%	32%
18	I have better performance in English coursework than most of my friends.	5	5	1	8	6
		20%	20%	4%	32%	24%
19	I want to put in more effort in my English coursework.	3	5	1	8	8
		12%	20%	4%	32%	32%
20	I am satisfied with what I have achieved in English.	4	6	0	8	9
		16%	24%	0%	32%	36%

1= Totally Disagree/ 2= Disagree/ 3=Undecided/ 4=Agree/ 5= Totally Agree



The following table (Table 5), analyzed the items of pre and post questionnaires. According to careful analysis, Sig is 0.03 and t-value is 3.02 which is more than 0.05. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a significant difference between the two samples (pre- and post-questionnaire).

Table 5
Paired Samples Statistics of Pre- and Post-Questionnaire

	Paired Differences				t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
			Lower	Upper			
Pre-Q & Post-Q	1.95	-0.5799	0.22134	2.25432	3.02	19	0.03

Based on the achieved results of the post-questionnaire, more than half of the students of EG had dream a lot in their English class and they could easily follow the lessons. Also, they thought that they were smarter than most of their classmates and studied hard for English tests. Moreover, students said they were good at English with a good performance. Most of the students were interested in English and did not forget what they had learned. In their ideas they tried hard to pass all English tests with satisfactory scores, and did not like quitting the English class. They were able to help their classmates and wanted to achieve the academic goals set for themselves. Based on their notes, they did not want to finish their English lessons soon and did not give up easily when encountering difficulty. Additionally, most of wanted to put in more effort and were satisfied with what they have achieved in English. In their words, they did not perform poorly in English coursework and they paid attention a lot to their teachers. Also based on the careful analysis, the amount of Sig which is more than 0.05, proved a significant difference between pre- and post-questionnaire. Considering the above discussion, online learning via BBB had a remarkable effect on Iranian EFL learners' self-concept which is an important psychological issue.

After implementing online learning method and activities, the students' scores of the two groups highlighted different mean scores. As the related table showed, in the control group, the mean of pre-test was reported as 16.35 and the mean score of the post-test was 16.80. However, the mean scores of the pre and post-test in the experimental group were achieved as 16.30 and 17.65 respectively. Therefore, a remarkable difference between the mean scores of the experimental group is remarkable, which is 1.35. Moreover, p-value in the control group was 0.38, but in the experimental group was 0.00 which shows the mean scores in the experimental group has changed significantly.

Results of the present study are compatible with some of the previous studies. For instance, Baz (2016) investigated EFL students and teachers' views towards the use of technology and findings indicated that students and teachers had highly positive attitudes towards online learning. Moreover, results of the study by Sabti and Chaichan (2014) showed positive perception of usefulness of using computer technologies in English learning processes. Furthermore, the findings are similar with a study



by Ahmed (2015) who examined whether the use of Twitter had a positive impact on the writing skills. The study showed that the experimental group outperformed the control group in the post-test writing task. Also, the researcher observed that the Experimental group were more conscious of their task and more inquisitive, whereas the control group showed little involvement and remained silent in class most of the time. However, the results of this study are not in line with Moser et al., (2021) that they explored any substantive change in the practices and perceptions of language teachers' instruction. Teachers and those without prior experience with online teaching were least confident that instructional goals were met despite having reported well-designed courses. Besides, in Altunay's (2016), EFL students noted that the traditional classroom was more effective than online environments to learn English. Also, Özüdoğru and Hişmanoğlu's (2016) research demonstrated that most of the students preferred face-to-face instruction to distance education.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

By conducting this study, it was found that online learning via BBB had a significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' self-concept. Also, the effect of online learning on students' writing achievement was found as the experimental group outperformed the control one. This was proved through the higher mean score that the experimental group obtained in the post-test. Additionally, the students' views of the experimental group have considerably changed in the post-questionnaire of self-concept. In fact, they have illustrated their positive views toward the items of self-concept in the online learning context. It can be said that the growing use of online technologies for teaching and learning is renewing the demand for better understanding of student characteristics which affect learning and the effective design of online instruction. Moreover, the aim of the instructional online learning method is to increase the knowledge and wisdom of students; in other words, its goal is to impart knowledge and develop a high-quality learning process characterized by flexibility and wisdom. Therefore, using technology in language classes can provide students with valuable knowledge and increase the power of knowledge, which can be considered as a source of learning motivation and high-quality study. It is worthy to note that online methods prove to be a key feature of effective teaching and learning. Teachers should be invited to shift from the traditional methods and adopt the new ones with required support and assistance.

The findings of the study imply that there are some pedagogical implications for English learning and teaching. The researcher gathered information about the impact of online learning on EFL learners' writing achievement and also their self-concept at the language institute. These outcomes may be used to redesign the writing activities at language institutes and other educational environments. The results can assist teachers, managers and material developers to design materials, syllabuses, textbooks and software in the area of language teaching. The results can prove the fact that the learners really enjoy using different forms of technology and this can really assist them to improve their language skills. More importantly, findings of the project may be used to suggest teachers use classroom management applications in their classes since participants' performance and views were positive towards working with new online applications. At the same time, teachers should attach importance to enhancing students' English self-concept level in training their language learning strategies.



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Biodata

Nilofar Salajeghe is M.A. in TEFL at Kerman Institute of Higher Education, Kerman, Iran. She has been involved in teaching English for some years at language institutes and high schools. Her main areas of interests are techniques of language teaching, psychology of language learning and innovative methods.

Email: *niloof.slj75@gmail.com*

Samira Hasani is assistant professor of TEFL at Kerman Institute of Higher Education, Kerman, Iran. She has been involved in teaching English for more than ten years at universities. She has authored some papers in academic journals and presented in some conferences. Her main areas of interest include methods and techniques of language teaching, collaborative learning, language testing and research, and innovative methods.

Email: *Samira_nash@yahoo.com*

