The Effect of Online Learning on Students' Achievement in English: a Comparative Study

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to find out the effect of online learning on students' achievement in English intermediate course (101). The study sample consisted of 88 English (101) students studying at Yarmouk University in the first semester of the academic year 2016/2017(44 in the control group and 44 in the experimental one). To accomplish the aim of the study, the researchers used two achievement tests (the mid and final tests).The results revealed that there are no statistically significant differences in students' achievement due to the method of teaching (online or traditional ways of teaching).The researchers recommended encouraging students to use new technological methods in learning. Moreover, more studies are needed to find out the difficulties that students may encounter while learning English using online methods of teaching and to investigate if there are any statistically significant differences in students' achievements using online learning due to gender and college.
Keywords: Online learning, Traditional way of teaching, Blended learning, Achievement.

Introduction

English is essential in interactions among nations. It is one of the most common languages in the world. It is the language of globalization. Since communication is the ultimate goal in the age of technology, learning English becomes a necessity and a basic requirement in any educational institution. Learning English is a great challenge; however, it plays a vigorous role for the future development of societies since it can create great opportunities and better chances for living.

In Jordan, English is taught as a foreign language for many reasons such as enabling students to master an international channel of communication and to cope with the world of technology and change. However, Jordanian students consider English a difficult subject to be learnt.They face many difficulties while

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learning it and their achievement is somehow poor and weak (Hijazi, 2012). The Jordanian government recognized this fact. Thus, policy makers tried their best and made a lot of efforts to improve Jordanian students' level in English. Nowadays, one of the emerged changes that is used to improve the quality of learning is the growth and spread of online learning at educational institutions. Yarmouk University is an example of such institutions in which online learning is started to be applied.

One of the centers at Yarmouk University is the language center which was established in 1979.It serves more than six thousand students from various majors every semester (Yarmouk University Online Site, 2016). It is responsible for teaching two compulsory EFL courses. One is a remedial course (99) for all newly enrolled students who fail the placement test and the other is a more advanced course (101) for students who pass the placement test. For the first time and in the first semester of the academic year 2016, Yarmouk university has experienced a new challenge since parts of 101 classes use a new series entitled (Cutting Edge) via online method. These classes are considered as an experimental group. On the other hand, other classes are taught the same series using the traditional way of teaching which is face –to –face learning. These classes are considered as the control group.

Face –to –face learning refers to "traditional classes where instructors meet and teach their students in the classroom or another in-person setting "(University of Washington, 2013). On the other hand, online learning has different programs that apply the internet services inside school contexts and outside them in order to enable students to obtain an appropriate access to the instructional materials (Bakia et al, 2011). It can be totally online or mixed with face-to-face interactions. Picciano and Seaman (2009) defined total online learning as a kind of distance education since all the instructions and assessments are executed using the internet.Graham (2006) and Watson et al (2010) said that blended learning (hybrid learning) permits students to get instructions through face-to-face and online means. However, Yarmouk University is experiencing a fully online learning not a blended one since there isn't any face-to –face interaction between the instructors and the students.

Students' needs, perceptions and learning outcomes are the ultimate goals of any educational process. Learning environment and the way of teaching affect learning outcomes. Therefore, it is crucial to raise a question concerning the efficiency of online learning in comparison with traditional classroom learning (Ni, 2013). A fundamental element of classroom learning is the organized and enlightening interactions between the students and their peers and between the students and the instructors because learners can gain a feeling of community and trust (Davies and Graff,2005).Some researchers said that in online learning,

students may feel isolated or frustrated since it is difficult to build relationships and social interactions with their classmates (Hara and Kling, 2000) and their interest in the subject may be not high enough (Maki and Maki,2002).

Online classes are flexible since students can study and do homework on their own schedule and at their own space.They are not limited by a certain time (Evans and Fan, 2002)). Also, online learning provides students with more opportunities to re-watch recorded lectures, repeat exercises and take their time to master concepts. Thus, it is better for those who need more time to understand the material. Besides, online learning can decrease pressure on university facilities by freeing up classrooms. Furthermore, it provides opportunities to learn new technologies and helps students to use the internet a lot (O'Donoghue,O'Neill and Singh, 2004).In addition, online learning encourages creative teaching since it may enhance students' critical thinking abilities and self –direction (Mandernach, Mason, Forrest, and Hackathorn, 2012). Moreover, it is helpful to those shy students who often feel anxious to express their opinions in front of their peers or instructors.

Since online learning is a new experience at Yarmouk University, it is important to mention that a large number of Yarmouk university students live in villages. So, they have limited experience and sometimes no access to computers and internet. Besides, most of them are weak in English so that they may struggle using online courses while they are learning. Also, some Yarmouk university instructors (including the researchers of this study) face technical problems since they lack training courses on how to use technological tools.

Face –to –face classes can enable students to have immediate feedback whether its source is from their own peers or from their instructors. Students may have better opportunities to engage in discussions and dialogues with their peers and receive immediate answers for their questions or concerns (Serlin, 2005). Besides, face –to-face classes give students a sense of structure since the time of the class is considered as a routine part of their schedule. Also, the four skills of language are better performed in face-to-face classes. The great emphasis in online learning is on listening since students can read directly in front of their instructors who may train their students on adopting the appropriate strategies of reading comprehension and may contact with them verbally to empower their speaking skill. Face-to face classes at Yarmouk University have a large number of students in every class and the class time is limited; so, large class challenges and time challenges may affect students' learning in traditional classes since those who need extra time to understand certain concepts may be left behind. Also, some students who work at part- time or full-time jobs may find difficulties to attend everyday classes; so, online learning gives them a chance to study and work as well.

The main aim of online learning which is a new alternative is to get along with the objectives of Jordan's General Education Plan:"To produce graduates with the skills and competencies required to participate in the modern world in the 21st century" (Ministry of Education, 2003).Thus, the researchers will discuss in this paper the effectiveness of online learning and its effect on students' achievement in English as compared to the traditional way of teaching (face- to- face learning) to find out if online learning deserves to be applied at educational institutions or not.

Statement of the Problem

Jordanian students, in general, and at Yarmouk University, in particular, are weak in English and they find difficulty in learning it. Thus, the administration of Yarmouk University decided to apply online learning as a new method for teaching English courses looking forward to improving the quality of learning. The language center is experiencing a new challenge and intending to integrate computer in the teaching- learning process. As a result, an urgent need arises to study the effect of online learning on students' achievement in English as compared to face -to-face learning (traditional classes). However, the researchers are instructors of English at the language center at Yarmouk University; so, they are interested to conduct this study to find out the effectiveness of online learning and to evaluate the new experience since many researchers such as Russell (1999) indicated that the use of technology does not impact the learning process for the better or for the worse.

Question of the Study

This paper attempts to answer the following question:

What is the effect of online learning on students' achievement in English 101 at Yarmouk University?

Purpose of the Study

This study tries to find out the effect of online learning on students' achievement in English 101 at Yarmouk University.

Importance of the Study

The significance of this study may stem from the fact that it is the first of its kind at Yarmouk University. Online learning is applied for the first time in the language center. Therefore, the findings can be used as a reference for other researchers to investigate the problem of this study in other Jordanian Universities and to conduct further research. Also, this study may contribute to the educational knowledge base of those who are engaged in the process of designing online courses since the results may help in gaining clear insights

concerning the new experience to improve it overtime. Besides, it may contribute to more efficient online courses since the results of this study may reveal their points of weakness or strength. Furthermore, this study sheds light on the real effect of online learning on students' achievement in English. So, the results may enrich the area of online learning in general.

Limitations of the Study

The generalization of the results of this study is limited to English 101 online course. Also, it is limited to Yarmouk University students studying English 101 online course at the first semester of the academic year 2016/2017.

Literature Review

Despite the fact that there is a need for online learning in higher education especially at the university level, many studies (such as Kumar and Kumar, 2013.,Robova, 2013.,Bulic and Jelaska, 2017 and others) have been carried out to investigate online learning in different areas. However, few studies were conducted in the areas of teaching the English language neglecting that English is the language of communication. Unfortunately, the findings of the existing number of papers that have compared the efficacy of online learning to traditional face-to-face one have obviously contradicted each other since some of the published studies showed no differences in students' achievement whether their courses were taken online or traditionally. However, others showed advantages for using both online learning and traditional learning together (Blended learning).

McFarland and Hamilton (2016) conducted a study to investigate the successfulness of online learning as compared to traditional one. The sample consisted of senior-level undergraduate MIS students who were enrolled in an E-Business course. The results showed that there are no differences in students' achievement between those who studied online courses and others who studied the traditional way.The researchers recommended using different new methods to enhance students' performance and satisfaction in online courses.

Besides, Ni (2013) conducted a study to compare students' achievement in both online and traditional ways of teaching in public administration classes. The sample of the study consisted of 152 students. 81 in three online classes and 71 in three face – to- face classes. All of them were taught by the same instructor in the MPA program at the California State University–San Bernardino. The university offers a fully online program that parallels the traditional MPA program. He proved that students' achievement as measured by grades is independent of the medium of instruction which means that there were no

differences in students' achievement due to the way of teaching whether by using online instruction or traditional one

However, Lim et al (2008) investigated the effects of three different ways of instructional delivery (online method, traditional face-to-face method, and a combination of both of them) on students' achievement in wellness at a Midwestern university. The sample of the study consisted of 153 (71 males and 82 females). A one-way ANOVA and Post hoc Scheffé multiple comparisons were used to compare the upshots of the three different methods of instructional delivery on students' levels of achievement and satisfaction. The findings showed that students in the online learning group and the combined one had statistically significant higher levels of achievement than students in the traditional one (p<.01). Students in the combined learning group had significant higher satisfaction levels with their total learning experience than students in the traditional learning group (p<.05). However, there were no significant differences found between the online learning and traditional learning groups. Most students expressed their preference to see an online alternative when registering for the course in the future. These outcomes recommended that a well-prepared online course and a web enhanced residential course can be advantageous in teaching.

Other investigators found negative effects of online education; in addition, students in the online medium of instruction were less convinced. (McAlister, Rivera and Hallam, 2001).However, some researchers asserted the positive effects of online learning. Schacter (1999) analyzed a five large scale studies on online learning.The sample consisted of fourth and eighth grade students who represent the entire state of West Virginia. The results indicated positive effects of using technology in education.

Also, Zhang (2005) conducted two experiments to assess online learning versus the traditional one. 155 undergraduate students took part in the experiments (104 students for one experiment and 51 for the other one).The instrument of this study was based on LBA system (Learning by Asking) which represents an interactive multimedia-based e-learning system (Fully interactive LBA and less interactive LBA). The results revealed that the group of online courses accomplished better performance and higher levels of satisfaction than that of the traditional classroom.

In addition, many researchers encouraged the use of online learning alongside the traditional face –to –face instruction (blended learning).They studied the positive effects of using such method of teaching rather than using online learning alone. Nuno (2005), for example, investigated if computer-aided teaching is an effective tool in the teaching of reading and writing skills in the

classroom. The researcher prepared software and tested it. The program was special for sounds of the English language and covered 42 Audio clips in the language. The study tested this program through teaching it to 60 students (two sections in the kindergarten stage, 30 students in each section). The results of the study clearly supported the value of teaching face –to –face alongside computer-assistance in modern classrooms.

Besides, Guy and Lownes –Jackson (2015) conducted a study to examine if students studying via a computer-based instructional simulation whether in hybrid or fully online environments learned more efficiently than traditional classroom learners. A casual-comparative design was used for this study. 281 undergraduate business students participated in a 200-level microcomputer application course comprised the population of the study. The outcomes supported the earlier studies in terms of that computer simulations are most helpful when used as an adjunct to face-to-face lectures and in hybrid situations.

Finally, the researchers noticed that the issue of online education is controversial since studies of the literature review showed contradictions concerning the effectiveness of using online instruction in the classroom instead of traditional one. In fact, few studies were conducted to find out whether the online learning is effective in teaching English especially when it is taught as a foreign language. However, Jordanian students' needs and difficulties in learning English are of critical importance and should be taken into consideration since the main focus nowadays is on the learner - centered approach. As a result, this study investigates the effectiveness of using online learning in the classroom and tries to find out if it is one of the modern ways that can be used to overcome students' weakness in English.

Methods and Procedures

Design of the study

The researchers have used the experimental method through applying the instrument of the study on two groups of Yarmouk University Eng 101 students.

Population and sample of the study:

The population of the study consisted of 290 students studying at Yarmouk University in the first semester of the academic year 2016/2017. They were distributed in six Eng 101 classes (150 in three online classes and 140 in three face – to- face classes) Out of these, two classes were selected randomly: one class was taught via online instruction (44 students who represent the experimental group) while the other class was taught via face – to –face instruction (44 students who represent the control group). Table (1) shows the distribution of the sample.

Table 1: Distribution of the sample of the study

Group	Number
Experimental	44
Control	44
Total	88

Instrument of the study

To achieve the objectives of the study, the researchers applied two achievement tests on the students during the semester. The first test (40 items) was a mid -term test and it was out of 40 while the second one (40 items) was a final test and it was out of 50.The two tests consisted of multiple-choice items that measured reading, grammar and vocabulary. These items were chosen randomly from the questions' bank prepared previously by a qualified and experienced group of instructors at the Language Center. The total mark of the two tests was 90. The participation mark which was out of 10 was excluded for the purpose of the study. Students who got a mark of 45 or more passed the course; otherwise, they failed.

Validity of the two achievement tests

For the purpose of validating the two achievement tests, a group of specialized referees were kindly asked to judge whether the items were enough, appropriate and in line with the purpose of the study. The researchers made some modifications in response to the referees' suggestions.

Reliability of the mid – term test

The reliability of the mid – term test was measured by applying

Kuder Richardson formula (KR-20) and it was (0. 74). Also, the test was administered on a pilot sample consisting of 27 students from outside the sample of the study. Discrimination coefficient was computed and it was between (0.50 - 0.87) and difficulty coefficient was computed too and it was between (0. 44-0.66).These percentages are considered acceptable for the purpose of the study.

Reliability of the final test

The reliability of the final test was measured by applying Kuder Richardson formula (KR-20) and it was (0. 74). Also, the test was administered on a pilot sample consisting of 27 students from outside the sample of the study. Discrimination coefficient was computed and it was between (0.50 - 0.87) and difficulty coefficient was computed too and it was between (0. 39- 0.71).These percentages are considered acceptable for the purpose of the study.

Variables of the study

1. Independent variable:

    - Teaching methods:

        a. Online instruction

        b. Face –to- face instruction

2. Dependent variable:

    - Students' achievement in the two tests

Procedures of the study

In order to achieve the purpose of the study, the following procedures were used:

- Determining the purpose of the study

- Using the results of both the mid and the final achievement tests

- Conducting the statistical analysis and finding out the means, standard deviations and the T- test to find out the effect of online learning on students' achievements.

Results and Discussion

This study aims at investigating the effect of online learning on the achievement of the students of the English language (101) compared to the traditional method.

To find out whether there are statistically significant differences in the mean scores due to the method of teaching, T-test analysis was used and the results are shown in Table (2).

Table (2): T-Test results of students' grades related to the method of teaching

	GROUP	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
2nd	Control	44	17.09	4.136	-1.487	86	.141
	Experimental	44	19.30	8.925			
Final	Control	44	26.73	10.513	-.331	86	.742
	Experimental	44	27.50	11.382			
Total	Control	44	43.82	11.962	-.893	86	.374
	Experimental	44	46.80	18.604			

Table (2) shows that there are no statistically significant differences at (α= 0.05) in students' grades due to the method of teaching (online learning/ traditional) neither on the mid exam nor on the final one. The T-value for the mid exam for both groups was (-1.487) and (Pr=0. 141), while the T- value for

the final exam was (-.331) with statistically significant (Pr =.742). Finally the T-value of the total was **(-.893)** with statistically significant (Pr =.374). This result may refer to the fact that online learning instruction applied at Yarmouk University is full of quizzes which are more than the instructional material itself. Therefore, students may feel that they are overloaded with online homework. In addition, the online program may need a better preparation to be well designed to enhance students' motivation and to raise their engagement with content since it is a new experience in the language centre at Yarmouk University. Another point to be added is that such a program lacks the social part such as group projects and open discussion forums among students themselves or between them and their instructors. It should also be mentioned that learning a language is essentially based on communication. However, most students are not competent enough in using such new technological methods in studying in general. Besides, learning English is a challenging subject for students since they do not practice it outside classrooms in real situations. Therefore, students face many difficulties while learning English and this goes in line with Hijazi (2012) who asserted that students are weak in English in general due to difficulties related to the content and to the students themselves. In conclusion, students and instructors in a context where English is taught as a foreign language (EFL) may face challenges that prevent recruiting the maximum advantages of online learning.

However, the researchers noticed that the grades of the experimental group on the final exam were better than their grades on the mid one which may indicate that the students are getting used to the new method of teaching; so, they may get better results in the future.

Finally, the results of this study are in line with the results of some studies in the related literature and support them such as the studies of McFarland and Hamilton (2016) and Ni (2013) since all of these studies asserted that there is no difference in students' achievement due to the way of teaching whether electronically or traditionally.

Conclusion

Online learning is considered as one of the current major trends that represents the use of technology for educational purposes. Concerning its effectiveness and its impact on students' achievement, the results of this study revealed that it is not significantly different from traditional way of learning. In fact, both teaching methods have their merits and demerits. However, the researchers encourage the use of online learning in Jordanian universities because of its cost-effectiveness from the economical perspective. In fact, educational institutions need to cope with the world of technology and to adopt

innovative approaches in their contexts but there are two main points that should be taken into consideration. First, policy makers should find solutions to overcome the obstacles that may hinder achieving the full benefits of online learning. Second, the designers of online programs should prepare the material appropriately and should adopt strong methodology that engages students with content and provides them with opportunities to interact as language is a channel of communication.

Recommendations

In the light of the previous results, the researchers recommend the followings:

- Developing the material of online learning to better motivate students and enhance their abilities to use technology such as presenting movies and audio aids.

- Giving students the choice to determine the way they prefer to use in learning whether it is online or traditional.

- Asking the authorities at universities to use the blended way of learning since it does not ignore the role of the instructor in directing and supervising the process of teaching- learning and to give students the chance for face to face interaction with their instructors and peers.

- More studies are needed to find out the difficulties that students may encounter while learning English using online method of teaching.

- More studies are needed to find out if there are any statistically significant differences in students' achievements using online learning due to gender and college.

أثر التعليم الإلكتروني في تحصيل الطلبة في اللغة الإنجليزية: دراسة مقارنة

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تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى الكشف عن أثر التعليم الإلكتروني في تحصيل الطلبة في مساق اللغة الإنجليزية (101). تكونت عينة الدراسة من 88 طالبًا وطالبة مسجلين في مساق 101 في جامعة اليرموك في الفصل الدراسي الأول للعام الدراسي 2017/2016 (44 طالبًا وطالبة في المجموعة الضابطة و44 طالبًا وطالبة في المجموعة التجريبية). ولتحقيق هدف الدراسة، استخدمت الباحثات اختبارين تحصيليين (وهما اختبار منتصف الفصل، واختبار نهاية الفصل، وهما من إعداد مركز اللغات). وقد أظهرت النتائج عدم وجود فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية في تحصيل الطلبة تعزى لطريقة التدريس (تقليدية وإلكترونية). وتوصي الباحثات بتحفيز الطلبة لاستخدام أساليب التكنولوجيا الحديثة في التعليم. كما توصي الباحثات بإجراء المزيد من الدراسات للكشف عن الصعوبات التي قد يواجهها الطلبة في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية عند استخدام نظام التعليم الإلكتروني في عمليه التعلم. وأخيرا، توصي الباحثات بإجراء المزيد من الدراسات التي بإمكانها أن تكشف عن وجود فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية قي تحصيل الطلبة عند استخدام التعلم الإلكتروني تعزى لمتغيري الجنس والكلية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التعلم الإلكتروني، الطريقة التقليدية في التدريس، التعليم المزيج، التحصيل.

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Biography

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