THE EFFECT OF FLIPPED CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION IN WRITING: A CASE STUDY WITH IRAQI EFL LEARNERS

by **Ramyar O. Qader** and **Fadime Yalcin Arslan**

Gaziantep University, Gaziantep, Turkey

ramyarr86 @ yahoo.com; fyalcin80 @ gmail.com

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the effect of Flipped Classroom Instruction (FCI) on Iraqi EFL learners' writing skills. Participants included 66 students in the College of Languages English Department at Salahaddin University. The study employed a mixed method of data collection, utilizing pre-and post-writing tests as well as a questionnaire for both groups and interviews conducted with the experimental group. Findings indicated that a statistically significant difference existed between the control and experimental groups and, more specifically, the students of the experimental group performed better on the writing tests than the students of the control group. The majority of the learners' attitudes towards FCI were positive.

Keywords: Flipped Classroom Instruction; English as a foreign language; traditional instruction; writing skills

1. Introduction

During the 21st century, education has proven a topic of great interest among scholars. Every year numerous studies are being conducted for the sake of improving education and pedagogy (Glewwe & Muralidharan, 2015). Especially owing to new developments in technology, pedagogies necessarily must adapt to meet the changing needs of students and differing classroom expectations. Compared with those of the past, the aims and objectives of current teaching practice have also transformed. Nowadays, students are able to provide more input into their learning by participating in interactive, real-world learning situations rather than remaining inactive listeners. Consequently, to continue addressing the needs of students of different learning styles, teachers should consider updating their teaching approaches in order to enable a supportive and creative learning environment for their students.

Like other language skills, writing is vital for success in most careers and disciplines today, so learners are expected to improve their writing skills. It is generally agreed that writing is a difficult skill for English as a foreign language (EFL) students to acquire. According to Nunan (1999), it is difficult even for native speakers to fully master writing due to issues in

cohesion and structure. Alsamdani (2010) has also stated that "writing is a challenging process as it involves various skills of thesis statement, writing supporting details, reviewing and editing" (p. 55). According to Abu-Rass (2001), to produce a decent writing piece, the writer should be aware of various aspects such as arrangement, aim, content, audience, lexis, mechanism, punctuation, spelling, and paragraphing. Supporting learners in developing their writing skills nevertheless remains challenging for instructors; however, the use of technology might assist these teachers in successfully developing these skills. According to a study conducted by Ayoub (2006), most errors made by Iraqi EFL writing learners were due to teaching methods and other factors such as limited class time, disinterest, and demotivation on the part of students.

Considering the above, Flipped Classroom Instruction (FCI) seems a viable means for overcoming the writing difficulties experienced by EFL students in Iraq, as it can provide an enriched learning environment enabling these learners' autonomy and increasing their motivation. According to Brown (2007), a classroom is not the only place for students to learn something; rather, he believes that learning can take place outside of learning settings in environments which enable learner-centeredness and the achievement of learning outcomes. In order to create such an environment, some researchers advocate FCI (Bergmann & Sams, 2012; Burns, 2013; Weimer, 2013). This study focuses on demonstrating the potential influences of FCI on Iraqi EFL learners' writing skills.

2. Literature review

FCI is a method involving group instruction in an active, cooperative, and collaborative setting. The instructor guides learners as they practice their theories and involve themselves more effectively in class content (Sams, Bergmann, Daniels, Bennett, Marshall, & Arfstrom, 2014; Pearson & The Flipped Learning Network, 2013). According to Hamdan, McKnight, McKnight, and Arfstrom (2013), it is a learning approach in which "teachers shift direct learning out of the large group learning space and move it to the individual learning space" and "devote more time to opportunities for integrating and applying [student] knowledge, via a variety of student-centered, active learning strategies" (p. 1). FCI involves increasing class length in order for additional practice and activities to be implemented rather than concentrating on language theories. In this way, learners develop an increased ability to produce and learn. In contrast, traditional classroom instruction – which is necessarily teacher-centered – limits students to theoretical instruction during a shorter time-frame, and students must complete related assignments outside of class time. This may, in turn, discourage learners

from completing the intended practice and, thus, result in incomplete understanding of class material. Meanwhile, FCI has the possibility of permitting differentiated instruction as it changes the teaching and learning experience. Learning becomes more individualized and personalized through FCI. As a consequence, learners are more involved and motivated to learn, and they develop the autonomy to steer their learning in a positive direction. This pedagogical change enables learners to guide their own learning by relying on their mental ability, motivation, and interests (Bergmann & Sams, 2014). The aim of FCI is to encourage the use of higher-order reasoning by learners. Bloom's taxonomy (Bloom, 1965) drives FCI, as learners are involved both in lower-order (recollection, comprehension, and implementation) and higher-order reasoning (analysis, measurement, construction). The presentation of subject matter involves lower-order reasoning including basic facts and opinions, which are directed toward higher-order reasoning in the form of hypotheses and assigned work. Traditional delivery classes in which the instructor stands and presents the content regularly offer lower-order reasoning opportunities but neglect higher-order reasoning. On the other hand, in a solitary environment, learners have ample opportunity to produce and challenge new ideas (Cuban, 1983).

The main conceptual features of FCI can be summarized as technology use by instructors, shifting learning into society, and replacing face-to-face-instruction in a large group setting to more solitary learning environments (Pearson, 2013). In this way, FCI works cooperatively with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approaches, which focus on learning-by-doing, as well as task-based language teaching (TBLT) methods in which students answer assignments depending on their varied capacities. Both FCI and CLT also increase students' engagement in physical and cognitive forms with the subject matter (Butt, 2014). Beyond the boundaries of the classroom, learners can access the subject matter in the form of instructional videos, reading assignments, discussion, and small quizzes. In the classroom, learners continue to interact with the subject matter through application and practice in the form of small and large discussion groups using analytical writing, research, task-based problem solving, and scheme creation. According to Brooks and Brooks (1993), the constructivist framework requires instructors to trigger a learning atmosphere in which learner autonomy is fostered. In this situation, content-related activities are created around the use of data and essential resources, students must think critically, and open dialogue is increased among students as well as with the instructor. Kaufman (2003) specifies that teachers' role is not only to transmit but also to guide, as they design lessons to engage students in knowledge construction through learning activities. This builds on Vygotsky's premise that knowledge is

not directly "taught" to students but rather "discovered" by them though active participation in discussions and research along with guidance from teachers (Karpov, 2003). This means that learning can be well-achieved by exploring and experiencing content under the guidance of the teacher. A collaborative environment in which students are encouraged to critically analyze resources while gaining knowledge through self-discovery and instructor guidance is the backbone of the in-class portion of FCI.

Over the past few years, FCI has increased in use and widened its reach to different subjects, mostly within higher education. Nevertheless, few studies have examined the use of this teaching approach on sophomore learners' writing performance. In a study conducted by Mireille (2014) which examined the influences of FCI on high-school Emirate female learners' essay performances and explored their opinions regarding FCI, the results indicated a statistically significant difference between the test scores of learners in the controlled class and learners in the experimental class. This enhancement of learners' writing abilities was attributed to FCI. Moreover, learners' beliefs towards FCI were positive.

Furthermore, Leis, Cooke, and Tohei (2015) compared two university-level English composition courses – one implementing FCI and the other utilizing traditional instruction. The findings revealed that FCI had resulted in increased production by students (i.e., number of hours studied and length of compositions) in comparison to the students of the traditional classroom.

Sung (2015) flipped an English content-based class comprised of twelve university students enrolled in an elective course. Prior to each class, the learners previewed lesson materials such as readings and videos and engaged in diverse online activities on a Learning Management System (LMS) platform. Then, they performed collaborative class activities such as sharing their thoughts on paper, discussing questions concerning weekly online readings, and completing the final project of designing an evaluation plan. The results of the analysis of both informal and formal course evaluations and student work demonstrated that they were positive with FCI despite early integration difficulties. The results also indicated that FCI is a good alternative for modification, at least in current English language teaching.

A study conducted by Mehring (2015) investigated the influence of FCI on EFL learners in a Japanese setting and focused on students' attitudes towards the changed teaching philosophy. Based on interviews conducted with the learners, there was an increase in self-directed learning and a decrease in absence and inactivity (i.e., hesitancy to initiate conversations and lack of self-confidence to question in classroom).

Adedoja (2016) investigated Nigerian pre-service teachers' attitudes towards the flipped instruction and the challenges they confront. The study used both traditional (face-to-face) instruction and flipped instruction by utilizing the questionnaire and Focus Group Discussion. The results revealed that the attitude of pre-service teachers was positively in favour of flipped instruction.

Another study conducted by Nouri (2016) investigated the Swedish learners' attitude towards flipped learning in research methods by administrating the questionnaire. The outcomes showed that a great number of the participants expressed a positive attitude towards flipped classroom due to increased motivation, engagement, increased and more effective learning.

Ekmekci (2017) conducted a study of FCI in a Turkish EFL context to explore its impact on students' foreign language writing skills. The study compared traditional and FCI writing classes based on the mean scores of students, and the findings indicated that a statistically significant difference existed between participants in the flipped classroom and those in the traditional delivery classroom in relation to their writing performances. This reveals that the participants in the experimental class performed better than the participants in the controlled class after applying the program. The findings of the study also indicated that many participants in the experimental group held positive beliefs toward FCI.

FCI has been explored in various fields of education from different points of views, including the attitudes of instructors and learners, implementation, advantages, and disadvantages. Several researchers have claimed that FCI is a beneficial method of instruction (Bergmann & Sams, 2012; Strayer, 2012; Mireille, 2014). Nevertheless, some researchers have viewed FCI as similar to traditional instruction in terms of learners' achievement and performance (Ford, Burns, Mitch, & Gomez, 2012; Zownorega, 2013). Technology has played a great role in developing education, but it has not been practically utilized in the 21st century by Iraqi educators for the purpose of creating a better learning environment among Iraqi EFL learners. This study attempts to illustrate the impact of a new approach on Iraqi EFL learners' outcomes at the level of higher education and learners' attitudes. It also serves as an infrastructure for developing an educational system that shifts the influence of learning among Iraqi EFL learners.

The main motivation for this study relates to the gap between practice and theory in an Iraqi educational setting as well as the ability to empower Iraqi educators to become change agents (Walie & Yahya, 2010). It is also hoped that this study will raise awareness concerning the necessity of adjusting educational methodologies in a highly technological environment, of

better preparing learners to write effectively within a restricted length of time, and of increasing learners' independence, motivation, and eagerness by addressing their various necessities.

The current study is guided by the following research questions:

1. Does FCI contribute to the development of EFL learners' writing skills?
2. Does a difference exist between the writing achievement of students who have received FCI and those who have been taught in a traditional way?
3. What are the views of Iraqi EFL learners regarding FCI?

3. Methodology

The research study employed a mixed method of quantitative and qualitative data collection. The reason for adopting a mixed method was to create the opportunity for discovering reasons that supported the impact of FCI on students' writing skills. According to Suter (2006), a mixed-method study possesses "great potential to influence ways of thinking about problems and practices in the teaching and learning process" (p.65). The quantitative analysis of the data was designed to permit the researcher to differentiate between the results of pre-and post-tests and to observe Iraqi EFL learners' attitudes towards FCI. Interviews conducted with students explored the influence of FCI more in-depth and recorded learners' insights regarding FCI. The study was quasi-experimental in nature. According to Creswell (2009), quasi-experimental research attempts to recognize the influence of a specific "treatment" or program on assigned learners. The type of quasi-experimental research employed in this study involved a non-equivalent control group, which means that a pre-test was administrated to both assigned groups to determine their writing abilities before the treatment and a post-test was administrated again after the treatment.

3.1. Participants

A total of 66 Iraqi sophomore students studying during the 2016-2017 academic year at Salahaddin University in northern Iraq participated in the current study. Table 1 below displays the demographic characteristics of both control and experimental group participants in terms of gender, mother tongue, and years of English study.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of both assigned groups

Demographic characteristics of participants		Control Group (n=32)		Experimental Group (n=34)	
		F	**%**	**F**	**%**
Gender	Male	10	31	10	29

	Female	22	69	24	71
Mother tongue	Kurdish	24	75	30	85
	Arabic	7	22	3	12
	Turkish	1	3	1	3
How long they have been studying English?	1-2 years	23	72	21	62
	3-5 years	6	19	8	23
	> 5 years	3	9	5	15

As seen in Table 1, participants included 66 students who ranged in age from 20 to 22 years. All had willingly decided to participate in this study. They were native speakers of Kurdish, Arabic, and Turkish and had one year of experience studying English, their average level being between B1 (Intermediate English) and B2 (Upper-Intermediate). This study utilized convenience sampling, which is the most common type of sampling in L2 research and is usually employed when the characteristics of the participants are related to the purpose of the investigation (Dörnyei, 2007). There were three classes of participants, and only two sophomore writing classes were selected from Salahaddin University's College of Languages English Department to serve as the context for this study. One class was assigned as the control group, which contained a total of 32 learners (Group 1), while the other class was selected as the experimental group and included 34 students (Group 2). Both groups were taught by the same instructor who possessed four years of experience in teaching English writing and held an MA degree in TEFL, Applied Linguistics, and English Literature. Meanwhile, it was the researcher's responsibility (with the consultation of the instructor) to make the video materials and afterward upload them for students.

The control group students were instructed via "traditional" delivery in a class in which the instructor was the dominant speaker and did most of the speaking while the students played a more passive role as the receivers of the knowledge. In the control group, the teacher was the source of knowledge and input.

The experimental group students were instructed via FCI in which they were more active than the control group and tried to discover the knowledge on their own. They were more autonomous when compared to the control group students. They were expected to listen to the videos, understand the provided knowledge and then practice that knowledge in the classroom. Both groups were studying EFL and expected to advance to the next level of study (junior year). As for the interview, a total of ten participants (six males and four females) were included voluntarily, and these were also participants of the experimental group.

3.2. Data collection tools

Data were collected through the pre and post tests designed by the researchers, a questionnaire previously used by Mireille (2014) and semi-structured interviews.

Writing Pre- and post tests: A writing test used by the researcher to examine the influence of FCI on the writing skills of learners was created in agreement with the instructor and two other instructors based the on pre-selected textbook *4 Longman Academic Writing Series* by Alice Oshima and Ann Hogue. First, the students of both groups were asked to write a 100-200-word paragraph on the topic "The use of the Internet in education." The same pre-and post-tests were administered under timed conditions using pen and paper, and students were required to finish during class time. In order to evaluate and analyze the pre-and post-tests, the researcher adopted a rubric used by Paola (2011) based on the syllabus that both groups were being taught during the study. The rubric evaluated subjects' responses on five different levels: (1) topic sentence, (2) supporting details, (3) organization and transitions, (4) language use, and (5) mechanics. These features were the standards for scoring learners' writing abilities, and each of these features was marked on a scale valued from 0 to 2 points. To ensure the reliability and validity of the rubric, the researcher gave the same paragraph to four English teachers to score it based on the adopted rubric. Based on the evaluation of each teacher, the adopted rubric was proven to be reliable and valid for scoring the pre- and post-tests.

FCI Questionnaire: To investigate learners' attitudes towards FCI, a questionnaire previously used by Mireille (2014) was adopted after completion of the FCI program to gather data from the participants. The questionnaire contained two major sections: in the first segment of the questionnaire, the participants of the experimental group were asked to give demographic information while in the second segment they were asked to respond to ten items using a three-point Likert scale that ranges from "disagree" (1) to "agree" (3). The aim of the questionnaire was to gather data about Iraqi EFL students' opinions towards the FCI program. The questionnaire was employed to the experimental group at the end of the study.

Interviews: After completing the questionnaire, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 participants from the experimental group to gain deeper knowledge of their unique experiences and more input from the learners about their opinions of FCI. The interviews included four open-ended questions, and were all translated into the participants' mother tongue (Kurdish) because the volunteers were only Kurdish participants. They were interviewed individually during the class session, and interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis. The interview questions were as follows:

1. What do you think about the use of the flipped classroom instruction?

2. Did the Flipped Instruction improve your ability to write in English or did it cause no improvement? Explain.

3. How do you describe yourself as a participant in the FCI?

4. What are the drawbacks of the Flipped Instruction?

3.3. Materials and procedure

The FCI program was implemented over an eight-week duration at the research site among 34 sophomore EFL students in writing classes. The objective of the FCI program was to teach students how to identify the parts of a paragraph, including an appropriate topic sentence, supporting sentences and a concluding sentence, more importantly the unity and coherence of the paragraph. The students were instructed and prepared for class by viewing the created videos through YouTube educational channels related to the current topic of study. All the prepared videos for this research study were uploaded to a closed Facebook Social Media Community in which only experimental participants were enrolled. During the class, rather than attending the lecture to listen, the participants were involved in activities provided in the book and participated in realistic applications such as group work and pair work in the presence of the instructor. Furthermore, the same teaching schedule, textbook, and content were used for both groups, who were taught by the same instructor. For experimental group students who had no internet connection, the instructional videos were available on flash drives and DVDs, which they could borrow in order to watch at home.

3.4. Data analysis

After receiving the completed pre-tests, the researcher and the instructor individually scored the students' responses based on the created rubric. When the difference between the two assessors was more than 3 points, another English instructor was asked to grade the same pre-tests to obtain an average score. Subsequently, the same process of evaluation was also conducted at the end of the treatment with completed post-tests. An independent-sample *t*-test was conducted to examine whether any statistically significant difference existed between the control and experimental groups' test scores.

The questionnaire was only employed to the experimental group at the end of the treatment to find out their attitudes towards FCI. The questionnaire items including Likert-type responses were analysed by calculating the percentages for each item.

According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2007), for the analysis of qualitative data, a five-process technique is required that involves "preparing the data for analysis, exploring the

data, analyzing the data, representing the data analysis, and validating the data" (p. 129). Once interviewees' responses were verified and confirmed, inductive content analysis was conducted for the classification of the data. In this type of analysis, "the general issues that are of interest are determined prior to the analysis, but the specific nature of the categories and themes to be explored are not predetermined" (Ezzy, 2002, p. 80). Subsequently, coding was executed. Ezzy (2002) defines this process as "disassembling and reassembling the data process" (p. 94), which means breaking the transcribed data into smaller items of text. After data was disassembled, emergent themes were identified and categorized. The qualitative data enabled the researcher to explore students' unique experiences in a more in-depth manner.

4. Findings

As stated earlier, the first research question probed the contribution of FCI to the development of EFL learners' writing skills. Hence, the mean, standard deviation, maximum and minimum scores were calculated to describe each group's scores.

4.1. FCI contribution to the development of EFL learners' writing skills

Table 2 gives descriptive statistics of the control and the experimental group in pre-and post-writing scores.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for experimental and control groups

Groups		Mean	N	Minimum	Maximin	Std. Deviation
Experimental	Pre-test	4.35	34	2.0	8.0	1.85
	Post-test	6.17	34	3.0	9.0	1.72
Control	Pre-test	4.64	32	2.0	8.0	1.72
	Post-test	5.31	32	3.0	9.0	1.76

As seen in the table above, the students in the experimental group performed better on the post-test than the students in the control group. Examining the results more closely, it can be seen that there is a remarkable improvement in the mean test scores of students who had received FCI in comparison to the small-change results of students who had received traditional in-class instruction. For example, students in the experimental group had a mean average that increased from ($\overline{x}$ =4.35, N=34, SD=1.85 to $\overline{x}$ =6.17, N=34, SD=1.72), whereas the mean average of students in the control group only slightly increased from ($\overline{x}$ =4.64, N=32, SD=1.72 to $\overline{x}$ =5.31, N=32, SD=1.76).

4.2. The difference between FCI and traditional instruction among Iraqi EFL students

In order to identify differences in writing skills between the control group and the experimental group prior to the FCI treatment, an independent-sample *t*-test was conducted. The results are presented in Table 5 below.

Table 3. Difference between experimental and control groups before the FCI program

Groups	N	Mean	SD	t-value	P-value
Experimental	34	4.35	1.85		
				-.653	0.51
Control	32	4.64	1.72		

Table 3 shows that the scores of the pre-tests did not vary much before participants received FCI, which indicates that no statistically significant difference existed between the pre-tests of the experimental ($\overline{x}$ =4.35, N=34, SD=1.85) and control groups ($\overline{x}$ =4.64, N=32, SD=1.72) and (T=-.653, P=0.51). In other words, students in both groups exhibited similar writing abilities before the application of the study.

In order to examine the difference between both groups after the FCI treatment, an independent-sample *t*-test was employed, and the results are displayed in Table 6 below.

Table 4. Difference between experimental and control groups after FCI program

Groups	N	Mean	SD	t-value	P-value
Experimental	34	6.17	1.72		
				2.013	0.048
Control	32	5.31	1.76		

As demonstrated in Table 4, an independent-sample *t*-test revealed that at the end of the FCI program there was a significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group ($\overline{x}$ =6.17, N=34, SD=1.72) and the control group ($\overline{x}$ =5.31, N=32, SD=1.76). This indicates that there existed a statistically significant difference between the two groups on the post-tests (T=2.013, P=0.048). In fact, the results of the post-tests indicate that the difference between the mean scores is largely attributable to FCI: the t-test helped to demonstrate that the post-test results of students in the experimental group (P<0.05) showed significant improvement.

4.3. Iraqi EFL learners' attitudes toward FCI

In order to identify the attitudes of Iraqi EFL pre-service teachers toward FCI, the frequency and percentage of item scores were calculated and the results are displayed below:

Table 5. **Learners' opinions of FCI according to the questionnaire**

N	Items	Disagree		Undecided		Agree	
		F	**%**	**F**	**%**	**F**	**%**
1	The flipped instruction allows me to prepare for my class in advance.	3	8.8	8	23.5	23	67.7
2	Through the prepared videos, I have enough time to acquire the sentence structures.	5	14.7	12	35.3	17	50
3	I feel more confident to ask for clarifications after watching the prepared videos.	5	14.7	8	23.5	21	61.8
4	I feel more confident about my learning due to flipped instruction.	15	44.1	1	2.9	18	52.9
5	Flipped instruction made it easier for me to answer and write the test.	10	29.4	15	44.1	9	26.4
6	My writing strategies are better as I have more time to apply the learning in class.	8	23.5	2	5.9	24	70.6
7	I feel I am more in charge of my learning through flipped instruction.	15	44.1	7	20.6	12	35.2
8	I feel that flipped instruction has not helped me at all.	18	52.9	8	23.5	8	23.5
9	I understand more when the teacher explains in class.	12	35.3	5	14.7	17	50
10	I like to write in class to get instant feedback from my teacher.	8	23.5	7	20.6	19	55.9

The findings in Table 5 are elaborated together with the findings gathered from the interviews and displayed in Table 6 below. Ten students from the experimental group were interviewed, and the themes and topics discovered when students were asked to explain their attitudes about the use of FCI are presented below:

Table 6. Students' views about the use of FCI

Questions	Themes	F
The use of the FCI	Providing more time for practising daily	4
	Providing easily accessible learning	8
	Being interesting, motivating	6
Improving students' writing abilities	Getting immediate feedback from teacher	5
	Improving more interaction between peers and teacher	5
	Increasing quality of teaching	3

Students describing themselves in class using Flipped Instruction	Active and engaged	6
	Motivated	4
	Self-independent	5
The drawbacks of FCI	Slow internet connection	7
	The quality of videos	6
	Social factors	3
	Unawareness of using technology	4

As demonstrated in Table 6, when responding to Item 1, about 68% of students believed that *FCI allowed them to prepare for their class in advance*. This finding is supported by some students (N=4), as seen in Table 3. One participant stated the following:

> "It makes me concentrate more, it makes learning easier and it saves time for study and practice." (S1)

As demonstrated in Table 6, in reference to Item 2, half of the students believed *that through the prepared videos, they had enough time to acquire the sentence structures*. This belief is supported by interview responses (N=8), as one participant explained:

> "It helps me to be prepared well before taking exams; I can watch the videos anytime and anywhere." (S10)

On Items 3 and 4, when students were asked about their *level of self-confidence*, almost 62% of the students believed that FCI had increased confidence, and approximately 53% expressed an increase in involvement in their learning. These findings are verified by the interview as well (N=6). Two of them claimed as follows:

> "I feel more focus on my learning and I feel responsible and active in my learning during the class time and at home." (S2)

> "I am trying more to participate and depend on myself to learn not even in classroom but also outside of classroom." (S6)

As shown in Table 6, when responding to Item 5, about 27% of students believed that *FCI made it easier to write the test*, while almost 30% of students disagreed. In reference to Item 6, almost 71% of students reported that *if they had more time to apply their learning in class, their writing strategies would be better*. As previously mentioned, FCI utilizes class time more for practicing real-world skills rather than focusing on the theoretical components of language. This finding proves that FCI even increases the quality of teaching for better learning through more practice, which is verified by three of the interview responses (N=3). One participant commented as follows:

"It can provide more information than traditional way, it is like a tutor for every student at home." (S9)

Item 7 is also noteworthy as it relates to *students' independence through FCI*. 44% of students did not believe that FCI made them more responsible for their learning. Only 32% of students believed this to be true. This phenomenon could possibly be related to the age of the learners, who were still in the process of developing maturity. In reference to Item 8, 53% of students rejected the view that *FCI had not helped them at all*, which means that more than half of students' writings had been improved due to FCI and, according to them, it was a useful method of teaching. Additionally, when responding to Item 9, which regarded the *awareness of learners' comprehension when the instructor gives an explanation in class*, 50% of students preferred the instructor to give an explanation in class despite whether or not they favored FCI on the other questionnaire items. A probable reason for this is associated with the Iraqi community and tradition in which students have always been taught with the presence of a teacher in class rather than via technology use, which is still new to the country. In reference to Item 10, almost 60% of students intended to *utilize class for writing to get direct corrections from their instructor*, while nearly 23% disagreed. This finding also verified the notion of FCI that advocates more time to improve interaction between teachers and students and among students as well. This finding is also supported by the participants in the interview (N=5). For instance, two participants expressed the following views:

"Because I can get feedback right from teacher when I make a mistake, not from my friends. They might be wrong." (S8)

"I had more time to practice and communicate with my classmates and my teacher." (S4)

Moreover, six of the students commented that FCI enabled interesting and easy learning. It was also motivating and encouraging. One student explained it in the following way:

"It assists me to understand easily, it's useful method to understand the lessons, it is fun and exciting." (S7)

Furthermore, four students defined themselves as being motivated, and they believed that FCI had increased their motivation and enthusiasm toward learning. One student claimed the following:

"I define myself as motivated student, I am excited about learning activities with my classmates and my teachers, and I don't feel shy to answer when the teacher questions." (S3)

Moreover, some students commented that slow internet connection was a problem (N=7) as one student explained it in the following way:

"Internet connection in Iraq is very slow and I cannot even have access to the internet within the campus in all Iraqi universities." (S7)

Additionally, six students reported that the quality of the videos was a problem. For example, some of them were grainy and unclear, which made FCI boring for them. One participant stated the following:

"Maybe it is related to the videos, if it is too long or not clear, then the method would be boring." (S2)

In addition, three students thought that social factors were a barrier which might source from the culture and tradition of the community. Students at that age still depend on their parents in Iraq. One student explained it as follows:

"I am restricted to use internet at home, my parents would not let me to be online most of the time" (S5)

Furthermore, four students reported that little knowledge of technology use was a barrier. One student explained it in the following way:

"I don't know how to use the internet for education, especially this method of knowledge needs training before" (S3).

As demonstrated by the interview responses, FCI has advantages due to its allowance of classroom time for more practice and easy access to subject matter whenever needed; therefore, FCI may increase students' motivation and excitement toward learning. Students felt that having access to the videos 24 hours a day was quite advantageous. They emphasised instant feedback from their teacher but not from classmates. According to them, FCI increased their interactions among their teacher and their peers due to prior knowledge of subject matter, which helped them to build their confidence and improve their understanding of the content while increasing their levels of motivation, engagement, and self-independence as well. FCI also urged them to challenge the subject matter, raise awareness of their needs at their own pace, and strive to participate in classroom activities without being worried, embarrassed, or shy. It also provided them with opportunities to work collaboratively and cooperatively in order to improve engagement and their learning**.**

5. Discussion

Based on the data obtained from students' responses to the questionnaires and interviews, it can be determined that most learners had positive opinions of FCI, and a remarkable number of students described themselves as more motivated, self-confident, active, engaged in classroom activities thanks to FCI. There was a clear reflection of learner engagement and a better interaction among students who felt better confidence in their achievements and abilities through FCI. These characteristics, which were stated by many students who received FCI, were not only reflected by the questionnaires and interviews but also by an improvement in their grades on the writing test. These findings align with Adedoja (2016), who found that the

attitude of pre-service teachers was positively in favour of flipped instruction and FCI promoted active learning strategies and provided more opportunity for deep interaction not only with the learning materials but also with classmates and instructor due to prior knowledge of content. Similarly, they are in line with the findings of the study conducted by Nouri (2016), who witnessed the effect of FCI on promoting student engagement and a more active approach to learning.

According to the results of this study, FCI can contribute to developing EFL pre-service teachers' writing skills. This finding is in line with a study conducted by Mireille (2014), who found that FCI can contribute to improving learners' grades on English writing proficiency tests. Accordingly, a study conducted by Ayoub (2006) indicated that most errors made by Iraqi EFL learners were due to teaching methods and other additional factors such as limited class time, enthusiasm, motivation, and independence on behalf of students, all of which led to their boredom. Therefore, productive instruction approaches are essential to improve the writing skills of Iraqi EFL learners. In this context, FCI positively impacts learners' writing abilities in a collaborative environment. Instruction can either be an obstacle or a chance for learning. Class preparation and instructional videos deliver opportune time for learners to comprehend the ruling concepts that control their writing.

The findings also demonstrate that the current study is consistent with the theoretical assumptions of cognitive language learning and the role of attention and noticing in second language acquisition (Saville-Troike, 2012; Schmidt & Ellis in Robinson, 2001). The improvement of learners' writing skills is largely accredited to the influence of noticing, without which "there is little if any learning" (Robinson, 2001, p. 11). Students' mental input increases when methodological instruction is changed and enhanced to fulfill their necessities and demands. In this case, language becomes easier, more recognizable, and more overt for them. In addition, the results of the research are also parallel with the theory of constructivism. Experimental group participants could form their long-lasting memories more effectively by using inductive instruction techniques to advance their writing abilities.

This study is also consistent with studies conducted in Turkey that investigated FCI in the Turkish EFL context (Ekmekci, 2017). The findings indicated that those students who studied under the new model of teaching outperformed those who studied under the traditional teaching method. The current results also are in accordance with a study conducted in Japan by Leis et al. (2015), who flipped their English writing composition classroom to investigate the effectiveness of FCI. Overall, it has been proven that FCI results in substantially greater enhancements in the writing abilities of students.

6. Final conclusions and implications for the future

Throughout the recent years, technology use generally has been at the core of education, especially for linguistic instruction. The analyses of this study's findings prove that FCI improves students' writing abilities more than does a traditional method of instruction. It is obvious that the flipped classroom creates a more student-centred atmosphere and increases learners' autonomy, which is necessary for meeting the demands of 21st-century students (Marchionda, Bateiha, and Autin, 2014). The outcomes of the study have also verified the hypothesis that learners are more involved and active during FCI compared with lecture-based instruction. According to participants' views, FCI enabled them to become more motivated and more autonomous in their language acquisition. FCI allocates class duration for activities by having students preview the lesson prior to class and employs various instructional strategies rather than theoretical explanation. In this manner, students have the opportunity to preview class content several times to comprehend key features. In FCI, students devote a great quantity of in-class time to practicing what they have been instructed via instructional videos. This promotes active, independent, and collaborative learning in the classroom. Similarly, the teachers feel more confident and direct students without being frustrated or worried about the time aspect, which is always an issue in traditional instruction. More in-class time is created in which the teacher can give individual feedback, correct mistakes, and explain misconceptions. In fact, the policy behind FCI makes it clear that flipped learning is more than just recording video-lectures. Classroom duration can be employed more efficiently and profitably by dealing with each student individually.

The outcomes of the study indicate that implementing FCI in writing classes is an effective way of improving Iraqi EFL learners' writing skills. Future research into this topic should seek to examine the impact of FCI on the role of class feedback and students' motivation in writing skills. The findings of the questionnaire and interviews confirm that FCI is more engaging than traditional methods, and students are more in favor of FCI as well.

This study has several implications for the future of writing instruction. The creative method utilized has not yet been followed in university writing classrooms in Iraq. It encourages educators to employ learner-focused approaches in which students have more chances to participate equally in the content being presented and practiced. During the FCI treatment of this study, it was observed that the learners experienced growth in their class participation, which is an additional benefit of this approach.

This study also urges a reconsideration of university funds and structure to enable such a teaching method at universities. Similarly, it suggests a more prominent and directed use of

technology among university EFL students as well as students of other disciplines. There is a necessity for more conferences and opportunities for EFL instructors to acquire knowledge regarding FCI and similar approaches.

This study also has some recommendations for future research. It has introduced some interesting findings regarding the effect of FCI on developing writing skills. However, it was conducted only in one department in a university. Thus, future studies might involve additional departments, more universities, or more levels of education. Since this study focused on sophomore EFL learners in an Iraqi setting, future studies might consider different levels of students and a larger number of participants to address variations in writing.

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