Using a Program Based on Situated Language Learning and Virtual Task Activities for Developing EFL Student Teachers' Writing Skills and Writing Self-Efficacy

Dr. Nehal Magdy Hussein Hassan
Lecturer at the Department of Curricula,
Instruction & Educational Technology
Faculty of Education, Benha University

Abstract:

The global COVID-19 pandemic has prompted an urgent move to digital learning in higher education. The most advanced higher education institutions all over the world are likely to have struggled to transition from face-to-face to online teaching and learning. In this sense, both students and teachers have had a hard time shifting to virtual classrooms. The present study aimed at developing student teachers' EFL writing skills and their writing self-efficacy using a program based on situated language learning and virtual task activities. To achieve this goal, about 70 participants enrolled in the second-year English Section at the Faculty of Education, Benha University, were randomly assigned into two groups: a control group (N= 35) and an experimental group (N= 35). The participants of the experimental group received a traditional lecture-based writing course, while the participants of the experimental group studied via virtual classes. The present study adopted a mixed research methodology; it combined both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis. The instruments of the study included an EFL writing skills test, an EFL writing skills checklist, a writing self-efficacy scale, and a semi-structured interview. Results revealed that the program based on situated language learning and virtual task activities was effective in developing participants' EFL writing skills and their writing self-efficacy. Based on those findings, the study recommended that a program based on situated language learning and virtual task activities should be integrated into writing instruction programs. The study also recommended holding educational courses and workshops for teachers in general and English teachers in particular to employ virtual classroom learning in order to enrich the teaching-learning process and develop EFL students' writing performance.

Keywords: Situated Language Learning, Task-Based Learning, Virtual Language Learning. EFL Writing Skills, Writing Self-Efficacy

Introduction

In general, studying a foreign language exposes students to four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Learning to write is a skill that is becoming more and more important in everyday life, regardless of the career one chooses. Writing is a crucial skill for language learners since it is a sophisticated social activity. It is closely related to people's roles in society. According to Koura and Zahran (2017), writing is viewed as a tool for innovation and using ideas for communicative goals in an interactive way. As a result, effectively communicating ideas from one addressee to another via text and exchanging information via writing are both effective ways to advance language proficiency. Over the years, it seems that writing has become more of a tool for acquiring vocabulary and grammar than a skill in its own right.

On the other hand, methodologists have reexamined writing and recognized its importance as a necessary skill for speakers of foreign languages. The reasons for teaching writing to EFL students include learning style, language growth, and reinforcement (Chastain, 1976). However, writing is a skill that is often neglected until the later stages of language acquisition. The literature suggests two main reasons for this. One is related to a lack of structure, vocabulary register, organization of ideas, spelling, grammar, and referencing (Koura & Zahran, 2017; Sabti et al., 2019). Another reason is due to affective factors such as attitude, motivation, and self-efficacy. Self-efficacy has emerged as a powerful indicator of students' learning, motivation, and writing achievement (Zimmerman, 2000). Mitchell, McMillan, and Rabbani (2019) defined writing self-efficacy as one's self-assessed capacity to successfully execute writing in a certain situation (Mitchell et al., 2019). A student who is unwilling or lacks confidence in his or her ability to express himself or herself in writing is unlikely to become good at producing compositions. A high level of writing self-efficacy indicates a high level of confidence in one's ability to complete a writing activity or task. Therefore, Erkan (2013) confirmed that providing chances for students to build writing self-efficacy is a crucial duty of instructors.

Moreover, teachers should use a variety of writing instructional strategies that are tailored to the needs of their students to develop their writing skills and writing self-efficacy. In this sense, the concept of teaching writing has

been changing, and teachers have been confronted with the challenge of adapting their teaching practices to incorporate technology while also rethinking writing and learning for the twenty-first century. Today, new technology and powerful Internet connections offer a variety of opportunities for the improvement of educational processes and language skills. COVID-19 has invaded almost all of the world's countries, forcing all educational institutions to transition to online or distant learning. Distance education will become a more popular and acknowledged approach to education in the modern era. Developments in the distance education field have led to a renewed interest in e-learning environments and virtual learning studies.

Virtual learning is a type of distance education in which skills and knowledge are acquired through deliberate interactions with scientific materials that are easily accessible via browsers (Lege & Bonner, 2020). The practice of e-writing has gained renewed attention when compared to more traditional learning contexts. One of its benefits is that it improves the target language abilities (vocabulary, grammar, and reading) and the quality of writing in the target language (Flynn-Wilson & Reynolds, 2021). In this sense, the researcher proposed using virtual learning based on tasks. The methodological focus of situated task- based language learning centers on tasks and situated language learning. Thomas (2010) and Mahmoud (2021) state that learning in the classroom is fundamentally different from learning in a natural setting where people are provided with authentic tasks and real contexts and then utilize constructed knowledge and apply it to new situations. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of a program based on situated language learning and virtual task activities in developing EFL student teachers' writing skills and writing self-efficacy.

1. Review of Literature

English has long been recognized as a global language. Its importance is derived from its influence on science, politics, and culture. It is an important tool for communicating with people and transferring knowledge all over the world. It is essential to master the four skills (i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing). Writing is given special significance as one of the four fundamental language skills. Writing is a means of communication that serves a crucial function in both academic environments and daily life. Messages, invitations, letters, forms, and instructions are types of writing that anyone

might have to do. Most of the time, we write to make a good impression on ourselves. Besides, excellent writing will give readers a positive impression of the author (Brown, 2001; Raimes, 1983).

Ali (2017) defined writing skills as the set of abilities necessary to produce a piece of writing, including fluency, correctness (word choice and grammar), content, organization, mechanics, stylistics, and revision skills. In this sense, Chastain (1976) assumes that writing, as a complex cognitive activity, necessitates the writer's managing multiple variables at once. These variables can include vocabulary, grammar, content, and mechanics. Others added that writing as a process consists of different stages: planning, writing drafts, revising, editing, evaluating, and publishing. The drafting stage can be affected by the planning and revision stages, or vice versa. Therefore, the writing process is a sequence of tasks that are interconnected and impact one another (Brown, 2001; Hamp-Lyons & Heasley, 2006; Raimes, 1983).

In many colleges all over the world, writing is taught as a collaborative exchange between the teacher and the student. I.e., the teacher assigns a specific writing task, and the student produces one draft. Then, the teacher provides the student with corrective feedback on it, and the student redrafts and submits it for evaluation. Many researchers, such as Ahmed (2020), Helwa (2016), Ali (2017), Koura and Zahran (2017), and Amer (2019), assert that there are many benefits to writing skills in EFL classes. It improves critical thinking, allows students to take more responsibility for their own learning, encourages reflective thinking and questioning, and assists students in making connections between people, ideas, and events. As a result, it is important to learn and use a foreign language to communicate with other people all over the world.

Based on the previous definitions, the researcher concludes that writing is a crucial skill that should receive more attention in both first and second languages, as it reflects people's personalities and thoughts. Therefore, one of the most prominent psychological factors having an immense effect on an individual student's writing in English and overall performance is self-efficacy. Self-efficacy has recently been studied as one of the affective components that directs learning. The concept of self-efficacy was introduced by Bandura for the first time in the 1970s. Self-efficacy is rooted in a larger theoretical framework known as the "social-cognitive" theory, which holds

that human achievement relies on interactions between one's behaviors or personal factors (e.g., beliefs and thoughts) and external environmental conditions (Bandura, 1997).

Self-efficacy is defined by Bandura (1977) as a person's beliefs about his or her capabilities to produce predetermined levels of performance that influence events that impact their life. Another definition of writing self-efficacy is a student's confidence and belief in his or her ability to accomplish and succeed in writing tasks at a particular level (Khudhair & Abbas, 2020; Shell, Murphy, & Bruning, 1989; Zimmerman, 1986; and Zimmerman & Kulikowich, 2016). Self-efficacy was described by Shell et al. (1989) as the generative mechanism by which people integrate and apply their social, cognitive, and behavioral skills to the performance of a task.

Bandura (1994 & 1997) identified three factors that increase one's sense of self-efficacy :improving at a task; observing others who are like oneself succeed through effort; and receiving supportive comments from others to overcome emotional states, self-doubt, and stress levels. Therefore, writing self-efficacy can be defined as an individual's view and judgment of his or her own writing abilities (McCarthy, Meier, & Rinderer, 1985; Pajares, 1996). There are three levels of efficacy addressed in self-efficacy discussions: high, medium, and low. Those who are confident in their writing abilities are deemed to have high self-efficacy, or a positive sense of self. They regard the difficult writing task as a challenge to complete and do their best to complete it by employing creative and imaginative cognitive processes (Lavelle, 2006; Pajares, 1996). Non-self-regulated pupils in writing, on the other hand, do not participate in the learning process, and as a result, they may be subjected to any form of sophomoric knowledge rather than profound knowledge, which is required for high academic accomplishment and success (Zimmerman, 1986; Zimmerman, 2000).

While several studies have focused on instructors' beliefs and attitudes about teaching (Biglar & Kaban, 2023; Dolighan & Owen, 2021; Khudhair & Abbas, 2020; Lavelle, 2006; Moore, 2000; Pajares, 1996; Zheng et al., 2009), few have examined students' beliefs about their writing abilities (Erkan, 2013; Honeck, 2013; McCarthy et al., 1985). Lavelle (2006) developed a writing self-efficacy scale as part of her work addressing the beliefs and strategies that student writers employ in their writing. High scores on the low self-efficacy

scale describe a writing approach based on doubt and thinking about writing as a painful task. Writers who have poor self-efficacy tend to focus on micro-skills, such as syntax and punctuation, and rely on social support. Similarly, Lavelle (2006) showed that low self-efficacy scale scores were predictive of writing anxiety and the quality of writing output. Moreover, the results revealed a positive correlation between EFL writing skills and self-efficacy. In this sense, creating chances for students to build self-efficacy is a crucial duty of instructors.

Khudhair and Abbas (2020) explored self-efficacy as an affective factor in learning EFL within a virtual world environment. Zimmerman and Kulikowich (2016) conducted a study on online learning self-efficacy in students with and without online learning experience. Results revealed that using a virtual world environment improved students' self-efficacy beliefs about their ability to use the language in a variety of real-life contexts. Zheng et al. (2009) conducted a study on learning English as a foreign language within a virtual world environment (Quest Atlantis). Findings suggest that using a 3D game-like virtual world and Quest Atlantis may provide English language learners (ELLs) with a space to increase confidence and overcome cultural barriers. So far, little research on writing self-efficacy in an online environment has been undertaken in any higher education institutions in Egypt (e.g., Diab, 2019). Therefore, the researcher intended to measure the level of online self-efficacy among EFL students in Egypt.

On the other hand, one of the most significant challenges facing learning English as a foreign language (EFL) in general is how to increase students' involvement in the target language for worthwhile purposes either in or out of the classroom (Yang, 2011) .Because of this, mastering the English language in both its spoken and written forms has become imperative (Abdallah & Mansour, 2015). Abdallah (2015) states that language learning is currently shifting from the "acquisition" metaphor that involves EFL students in cognitive activities to the "participation" metaphor, in which knowledge is considered fundamentally situated in practice. Therefore, many researchers and educators in ELL (e.g., Abdallah, 2015; Felix, 2002; Shih & Yang, 2008; Yang, 2011) believe that successful learning is anchored in cognitive apprenticeship, situated cognition, and collaboration. It is assumed that contextualized and situated practice always leads to meaningful learning.

The general philosophy of situated learning is that students are active constructors of knowledge who bring their own needs, styles, and strategies to skills and knowledge best acquired within authentic settings and realistic contexts, where students are involved in experiential learning activities (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Felix, 2002; Hayes, 2006; Mahmoud, 2021; Thomas, 2010). The teacher may design realistic learning activities that are interesting and engaging in terms of both procedures and goals and that take into consideration individual student characteristics (Bygate, Swain, & Skehan, 2013; Felix, 2002). Thus, the most effective way to learn a language is to participate in a community in which the target language is used to communicate in a real-world context. In such an environment, language learners become immersed in a natural, input-rich, and meaningful context in which they can spontaneously acquire the target language (Abdallah, 2015; Gee, 2004; Shih & Yang, 2008).

In general, situated learning is a method of extracting meaning from real-life activities in which learning occurs (Mahmoud, 2021; Nelson & Ketelhut, 2007). Situated learning refers to learning that occurs in the same context in which it is applied. It employs the social aspect of human nature to make learners feel at ease while learning. Through situated learning, EFL students can accurately use the specific skills they have learned. Also, students can gain experience by doing something, and this experience enables them to be productive in their lives after they graduate. Such learning takes place in a specific context and is anchored in a certain social and physical environment (Abdallah, 2015; Ellis, 2003; Gee, 2004).

More specifically, situated language learning focuses on the role of context and situation in language learning and knowledge construction. In this sense, our social worlds not only shape the opportunities we have to develop certain types or forms of knowledge and abilities but also affect our sense of how to use them to achieve particular ends or goals (Brown et al., 1989; Warschauer, 2000; Abdallah, 2015; Abdallah & Mansour, 2015). Knowledge is a situated stance that is constructed reciprocally within the individual-environment interaction. Therefore, it highlights social interactions as an important practice in language learning (Brown et al., 1989). Under the umbrella of "Situated Language Learning," Oura (2001) defined task-based learning as an approach to language learning in which the tasks that students

do become crucial to the learning process. I.e., it depends entirely on communicative tasks and has its roots in second language acquisition studies and the Communicative Language Teaching method. The instructor can plan classroom activities around the real-world tasks that language users will encounter when they are "out there" (Oura, 2001). In this regard, situated learning is congruent with this task-based learning approach when activities or tasks are situated, interactive, authentic, and goal-oriented (Abdallah, 2015; Gee, 2004; Warschauer, 2000; Zheng et al., 2009). The tasks' fundamental features would be that they are communicative, meaning-oriented, and take into account both a learner's cognitive and linguistic abilities.

Situated task-based language learning is a method of educational intervention that should foster an interactive environment in which some pragmatic language goals can be achieved. It is defined as a communicative teaching approach that advocates student-centered, experimental, and communicative learning (Liu & Xiong, 2016; Wen et al., 2021). TBSLT refers to teaching a second or foreign language by incorporating meaningful real-life tasks into classroom instruction (Oura, 2001; Samuda & Bygate, 2008). I.e., the teacher provides a problem that the student must solve. According to this idea, the teaching process progresses from task to task until the goal is reached or until the student exhibits the desired behavior (Alomar, 2017; Su, 2005).

Situated task-based language learning instruction has eight purposes, as defined by Willis (1996):

- to give learners confidence in trying out whatever language they know.

- to engage learners in using the language cooperatively and purposefully.

- to have learners take part in an entire interaction rather than just a few isolated phrases.

- to allow learners to benefit from observing how others express similar meanings; and

- to boost learners' self-efficacy so that they can accomplish communicative objectives.

Based on how tasks are used, the model suggested by Willis (1996), Willis and Willis (2007), and Bygate et al. (2013) consists of three phases for EFL instructors to design a task: pre-tasks, tasks, and post-tasks. The first

phase, the pre-task (preparatory), introduces EFL learners to the task, the topic, the target language, and the structures and vocabulary essential to complete the task. It can be done through small dialogues acted out by the teacher or through a pattern of sentences to illustrate the aspects of the situated language selected. The purpose of the pre-task phase is to get pupils ready to do the task in a way that will encourage learning and acquisition. Teachers can assist students in remembering old subjects that may be relevant and help them perform the task.

In the task cycle phase (interaction process and meaning-focused), EFL students attempt to perform the task that has been assigned to them in an interactive context. This stage is divided into three phases: task, planning, and report. In the task phase, students work in pairs or small groups to complete the task assigned by their teacher. They discover the vocabulary and structures of the language they have to use based on the given model. Students concentrate on fluency rather than the exact use of linguistic items. Here, the teacher is a facilitator to ensure participation from all groups and task progress. In the planning phase, learners plan how to report on the work given by the teacher. In the report phase, they report on the task either orally or in written form. Then they compare the results with those of other groups (Nurhayati, 2019; Qi, 2023). Amer (2019) claims that teachers, particularly during the planning or report stages, must provide feedback.

The last phase, the post-task (discussion and attending to form), focuses on the form or the language. Their language is analyzed under two headings: language focus and language practice. In the language focus stage, EFL students attempt to understand the usage and rules of the target language. In the language practice stage, a broad range of diverse tasks can be studied to improve the learners' comprehension. Besides, they have to notice the essential aspects of language items previously acquired or newly learned. Examples of these are simulation activities, role-playing, or even communicative tasks.

Nunan (2004) summarizes the main features of the TBL: (1) It allows EFL students to communicate in a new language; (2) it helps students realize that acquiring a new language is a prerequisite for communicating in that language. They use the language they have acquired subconsciously; (3) it integrates authentic texts into the learning situation; (4) it connects language learning in the classroom with the language outside the classroom; and (5) it

enhances students' personal experiences through assigned tasks that are similar to those they would encounter in their daily lives.

There have been various studies on TBL in FL (Alomar, 2017; Gheith, Abd-Almenam, & Mostafa, 2015; Liu & Xiong, 2016; Oura, 2001; Qi, 2023; Wen et al., 2021), but few have focused on how to design a TBLL virtual environment (Abdallah & Mansour, 2015; Baralt & Gómez, 2017; Nurhayati, 2019; Vellanki & Bandu, 2021). TBLT and learning in an online mode of education are much more difficult than face-to-face learning. Traditionally, technology seems to have a clear purpose in language learning, such as practicing grammar, making long-distance communication possible, and providing information about target countries. Technology now offers hybrid learning and creates online platforms to deliver content. It also plays an important role in giving feedback and reinforcing the material that is taught. In this sense, the technology used in language learning is not primarily an automaton or a tool but an arena for constructivist learning (Lege & Bonner, 2020; Nkemleke, 2021; Setiadi et al., 2021; Syakur, 2020; Svensson, 2003).

Therefore, the great development in the use of global information networks has had an effective impact on the efficiency of the learner and the teacher in educational fields. In this sense, educational systems all over the world have decided to cope with the current situation using the only inevitable tool available, which is e-learning or virtual learning (Frazier, Lege, & Bonner, 2021; Marrotte-Newman, 2009; Svensson, 2003).

Virtual learning refers to the participation of groups of learners in online language and collaboration with partners from other cultural contexts (e.g., intercultural interaction) under the guidance of expert facilitators and/or educators (O'Dowd & Lewis, 2016). A virtual classroom is a system that extends the physical limits of traditional classroom walls to provide the same opportunities for teaching and learning. Therefore, Al-Qahtani (2019) states that it is called virtual because it can relax both the temporal constraints (users engaging throughout time via asynchronous communications) and the spatial constraints (users in various places regardless of how far apart they are).

There are several platforms for online classes that the researcher used to promote social presence and collaboration in a realistic environment, including Google Classroom and Virtual Writing Tutor. Google Classroom is a free platform designed to help students and teachers communicate, collaborate,

organize, and manage assignments, go paperless, and much more. Classrooms integrate with Google Docs, Sheets, Slides, Sites, Earth, Calendar, and Gmail and can be reinforced with Google Meet for live teaching or inquiries. Therefore, Google Classroom integrates with Google Meet, and teachers can set up video meetings from within Google Classroom for live, or "synchronous," instruction. Furthermore, Google Classroom can help teachers streamline summative and formative assessments. Therefore, Google Classroom, as a learning platform, provides a solution to English language teaching, particularly in writing.

The Virtual Writing Tutor is a free online essay checker and grammar check platform that helps students improve their writing. It checks spelling, gives feedback on grammar and punctuation errors, checks paraphrasing, improves word choice, and checks for target structures. It provides free proofreading training and the ability to assign tasks to students directly from the tool. According to Al-Qahtani (2019) and Dolighan and Owen (2021), these platforms meet the principles of the virtual environment and situated task-based language learning, which are: focusing on meaning, having a clearly defined goal, learning by interaction, using authentic language, supporting self-managed learning, incorporating assessment, supporting cognitive presence, social presence, and instructor presence, as well as supporting learner-instructor, learner-learner, learner-content, and learner-interface interaction. Besides, Setiadi et al. (2021) and Parmawan, Padmadew, & Utami (2022) added that these platforms also provide various benefits to the teaching and learning process, including convenient classroom management, centralized data storage, quick and easy setting, flexibility, collaboration promotion, and safety and security.

In this sense, some recent studies have shown the potential benefits of incorporating a virtual situated task-based learning environment (VSLE) into educational settings. The following are some of the advantages of VSLE over the traditional classroom model: (1) It eliminates the time and place constraints; (2) learners and teachers can attend a single live training session from anywhere in the world; (3) sessions can be recorded if learners miss a traditional classroom-based training session; and (4) learners or teachers can replay sessions afterwards (Andrew, Wallace, & Sambell, 2021; Yadav, 2016); and (5) teachers can use multimedia and sensory-rich environments,

which are highly motivating for students; (6) it provides the teachers with plenty of time to go over everything with students in depth; (7) students who feel timid in a face-to-face session can participate easily (Al-Qahtani, 2019); (8) it enables constructivist spaces of contextualized learning (Christoforou, Xerou, & Papadima-Sophocleous, 2019); and (9) it enables real-time interpersonal conversation, including text chat, video and audio interaction, instant polling, and interactive group work activities (Andrew et al., 2021).

Zhang (2021) also identified five main benefits of virtual situated task-based language learning in EFL writing contexts: (1) it enables learners to experience tasks that aren't feasible in the real world; (2) it enhances engagement and motivation; (3) it facilitates collaborative learning; (4) it facilitates contextualized learning; (5) it promotes retention and memory, critical thinking, social skills, creativity, and emotional skills; (6) it promotes self-directed learning, self-expression, and self-efficacy; (7) it increases learner autonomy, cross-cultural competence, and positive outcomes in writing acquisition, (8) it provides learners with a safe environment to experiment with the material without fear of making mistakes, and (9) it stresses the integration of formal and informal language acquisition as well as the meaningful use of language in real-world tasks. Therefore, virtual learning environments have received considerable attention in the field of EFL writing teaching.

Procedures were guided by Willis's (1996) original framework for TBLT, which was modified by the researcher for TBLT using a virtual learning environment (see Figure 1). In the pre-task cycle (preparation before the online meeting), the teacher will prepare learners by sending videos as a model and detailed task instructions. Sending them a video is the best way to provide them with a model via a Whatsapp group. A video is a means by which learners are encouraged and motivated. It is also an important first step in establishing relationships between students and teachers. Detailed task instructions are also essential for the pre-task phase. The instructions should include the technical components of the online meeting platform. The teacher explains to the students the task they are to do as well as the expected results of completing it effectively. Also, the teacher explains the objectives, offers preparation advice, and offers details on the language focus.

Next, the task, planning, and reporting are three components of the task cycle. The task and planning phases are done by the learner initially at home (e.g., writing about human migration, preparing to share this information, reviewing vocabulary, etc.), and then the report is done in the online meeting. As stated in the previous framework, the teacher should begin online sessions with greetings and a warm-up. Furthermore, the teacher can remind students of the objectives of the online meeting, its structure, and the tasks they will carry out. The time following the report is optimal from a psycholinguistic perspective because students have just completed a task. Moreover, it gives them a chance to express themselves more spontaneously in the language. This is an effective technique to push and expand their interlanguage.

Finally, the language focus cycle is conducted through two stages: analysis and practice. Analysis takes place instantly after the report in the online meeting, while practice is completed by students later and on their own time. The analysis is the perfect opportunity to draw students' attention to forms that emerge from their own composition during the report. The teacher should go over any new terms, language chunks, or grammar that came up throughout the online meeting. The instructor wraps up the online meeting by summarizing what the students accomplished and talking about the schedule for the next meeting. The practice component of the language focus is done at home as a follow-up to the task.

Above all, teachers' and students' roles shift in a virtual environment (Andrew et al., 2021; Dolighan & Owen, 2021). The teacher takes on the roles of facilitator, learning supporter, resource person, project manager, observer, director, participant, motivator, co-communicator, guide, co-learner, moderator, strategy instructor, organizer of learning opportunities, provider of assistance, and creator of the learning atmosphere (Gedera, 2014; Mahmoud, 2021; Willis, 1996; Yadav, 2016). Others added that teachers supervise pair or group work, coordinate discussions, provide immediate feedback on task performance, assign lessons, activities, and tasks to help learners, undertake assignments, and discuss and share some points in general (Alshumaimeri & Alhumud, 2021; Haroon, 2021; Willis & Willis, 2007; Yilmaz, 2015). Therefore, a virtual environment enables teachers to spend more time teaching students about various aspects of writing rather than spending the majority of their time rating students' essays and giving feedback.

On the other hand, the virtual class enables cultural learning immersions where EFL students enter an authentic community and interact. Online students are therefore more autonomous, independent, self-reliant, self-regulators, self-controllers, self-designers, risk-takers, storytellers, innovators, listeners, and speakers (Ahmed & Bidin, 2016; Aljadili, 2014; Setiadi et al., 2021). Students are active participants and leaders in their learning. They choose linguistic forms to perform different tasks, thus becoming autonomous learners. Moreover, the online virtual classroom has advantages such as learner-learner, learner-instructor, and learner-content interactions in the online environment.

Finally, many recent research studies have dealt with virtual learning environments, especially within language-learning contexts (e.g., Akbari, Tabrizi, & Chalak, 2021; Aljadili, 2014; Al-Qahtani, 2019; Alshumaimeri & Alhumud, 2021; Andrew et al., 2021; Christoforou et al., 2019; Gedera, 2014; Haroon, 2021; Khoshsima & Sayadi, 2016; Nelson & Ketelhut, 2007; Shih & Yang, 2008; Yang, 2011). Few recent research studies have dealt with virtual situated task-based learning environments, especially within EFL written contexts (e.g., Abdallah & Mansour, 2015; Alomar, 2017; Hayes, 2006; Shih & Yang, 2008; Yang, 2011).

Overall, there is still a gap in the literature regarding the effectiveness of virtual classrooms in improving EFL students' writing skills and writing self-efficacy. There is a need for more research in this area. Therefore, the researcher used the previous studies as a guide in designing the procedures and steps of the research, especially in preparing the theoretical framework, the teacher's guide, and the instruments. In this sense, the present study investigated the effect of using a program based on situated language learning and virtual task activities on developing EFL writing skills and its role in dealing with students' self-efficacy towards writing.

2. Context of the Study

Despite the importance of EFL writing skills and writing self-efficacy, second-year EFL student teachers at Benha University's Faculty of Education still struggle to write accurately and correctly after fourteen years of studying English. Several studies, including Richards and Renandya (2002), Abdullah and Mansour (2015), Ali (2017), Helwa (2016), Koura and Zahran (2017), and Amer (2019), addressed this gap. They reported that the difficulty lies not only

in generating and organizing ideas logically but also in translating these ideas into a readable text. Following the previous researchers, they proved that these difficulties may limit their ability to freely express themselves because they are uninterested in the topic assigned by the teacher. Additionally, the absence of motivating and self-efficacy components in the pre-writing activities makes students gather insufficient ideas and information necessary for writing. As a result, these students had a low level of EFL writing skills.

On the other hand, the researcher has noted from her experience teaching at the university level that second-year students enrolled in the English section face difficulties in their EFL writing skills. They struggle to choose the right words or construct meaningful sentences that are free of grammar errors. They are unable to produce a good paragraph containing indicators of writing ability (accuracy, originality, content, and organization). They lacked English motivation and had poor writing conditions. In addition, the majority of current English language programs in Egypt do not give students the chance to practice their writing abilities in a communicative context. Thus, they were unable to use English functionally in writing in simulated real-life interactions. They were unable to produce a quality product belonging to the target genre. As a result, their writing abilities were insufficient.

To document the problem of the research, the researcher conducted a pilot study to identify writing skills and writing self-efficacy among second-year students enrolled in the English language section. The participants were 25 second-year students from the Benha Faculty of Education who were enrolled in the English language section during the first semester of the academic year 2022-2023. Two instruments were used in the pilot study: an EFL writing skills test adopted from Al-Shidi and Amer (2004) and an EFL writing self-efficacy scale adopted from Honeck (2013). (see Appendix A) Using a one-sample t-test, the results revealed that second-year students did not reach the mastery level in any of them (see Table 1).

Table 1: *The findings of a one-sample t-test of student teachers' level of EFL writing skills and writing self-efficacy*

	N.	Mean	S.D.	t-value	D.F.	Sig.
EFL writing skills test	25	22.440	4.464	58.887	24	0.01
Writing self- efficacy	25	51.800	10.798	10.798	24	0.01

The results of the writing skills test revealed that the student's paragraph has a poor topic sentence, poor related examples, and poor support points. A topic sentence is ineffective as it lacks an appropriate controlling idea and is a fragment. The related examples are ineffective as they lack minor transitional expressions and do not have specific details to make them lively and convincing. They are aware of the words they want to use, but they are unable to correctly spell those words. Students frequently use incorrect sentence structure (grammatical errors) as well as ignore capitalization and punctuation. The support points are ineffective as the student writer changes keywords, leaves out important keywords, adds irrelevant information, and combines them with related examples.

The results of the writing self-efficacy scale revealed that second-year students lack all five dimensions: the ability to provide the content requested for a composition, the ability to design a composition, the ability to create a unified composition, the ability to create composition accuracy, and the ability to punctuate correctly. All these indicators confirmed that second-year students had low levels of writing self-efficacy. Therefore, EFL student teachers did not reach the mastery level in any of them, either in writing skills or self-efficacy.

As a result, the positive link between writing skills and writing self-efficacy serves as an implicit cue for EFL teachers to make use of this correlation to help students become better writers. EFL student teachers need to be engaged in an input-rich, natural, and meaningful learning environment in which the target language can be used functionally and spontaneously. EFL student teachers need to be exposed to realistic input in the form of tasks that include some everyday life situations throughout this interactive, virtual, and situated environment. It is supposed that a program based on situated language learning and virtual task activities might improve EFL student teachers' writing skills and writing self-efficacy.

3. Statement of the problem

The problem with this study is that, despite the importance of writing skills, second-year English language section students have a low level of EFL writing skills, which may have a detrimental influence on their writing self-efficacy. Thus, the present study aims to investigate the effectiveness of a suggested program based on situated language learning and virtual task

activities in developing EFL student teachers' writing skills and writing self-efficacy.

4. Questions of the Study

To overcome this problem, the following questions address the problem of study:

1) What are the EFL writing skills required for second-year students at the Faculty of Education?

2) What is the form of a program based on situated language learning and virtual task activities that can be used to develop EFL writing skills and writing self-efficacy among second-year students at the Faculty of Education?

3) What is the effectiveness of the program based on situated language learning and virtual task activities in developing second-year students' EFL writing skills?

4) What is the effectiveness of the program based on situated language learning and virtual task activities in developing second-year students' EFL writing self-efficacy?

5. Hypotheses of the Study

Following a review of the literature and related studies, the following six hypotheses are formulated:

5.1. The program based on situated language learning and virtual task activities is effective in developing EFL writing skills among second-year English language section students at the Faculty of Education, Benha University.

a. There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups in their performance on the post-assessment of the overall EFL writing skills in favor of the experimental group.

b. There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups in their performance on the post-assessment of the EFL planning skills in favor of the experimental group.

c. There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups in their performance on the

post-assessment of the EFL fluency skills in favor of the experimental group.

d. There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups in their performance on the post-assessment of the EFL accuracy skills in favor of the experimental group.

e. There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups in their performance on the post-assessment of the EFL content skills in favor of the experimental group.

f. There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups in their performance on the post-assessment of the EFL organization skills in favor of the experimental group.

g. There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups in their performance on the post-assessment of the EFL mechanics skills in favor of the experimental group.

h. There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups in their performance on the post-assessment of the revision skills in favor of the experimental group.

5.2. The program based on situated language learning and virtual task activities is effective in developing EFL writing self-efficacy among second-year English language section students at the Faculty of Education, Benha University.

a. There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups in their performance on the post-assessment of the overall writing self-efficacy in favor of the experimental group.

b. There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups in their performance on the post-assessment of the ability to provide the content requested for a composition dimension in favor of the experimental group.

c. There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups in their performance on the post-assessment of the ability to design a composition dimension in favor of the experimental group.

d. There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups in their performance on the post-assessment of the ability to create a unified composition in favor of the experimental group.

e. There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups in their performance on the post-assessment of the ability to create composition accuracy dimension in favor of the experimental group.

f. There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups in their performance on the post-assessment of the ability to punctuate correctly dimension in favor of the experimental group.

6. Methodology of the study

This part of the study provides information concerning the procedures followed to investigate the effectiveness of using a program based on situated language learning and virtual task activities in developing EFL student teachers' writing skills and writing self-efficacy. It introduces a complete description of the study design, the participants, instruments and materials, program construction and structure, and the statistical treatment of the study findings.

6.1. Design of the Study

The present study used a mixed research technique that combines quantitative and qualitative research approaches to give a more complete picture of the problem under consideration. It also broadens the interpretation of the findings and improves their generalizability. This was due to the nature of the research, which aimed to determine the effectiveness of using a program based on situated language learning and virtual task activities in developing EFL writing skills and writing self-efficacy among student teachers at Benha University's Faculty of Education.

In addition, the present study is a pre-posttest quasi-experimental design. Two groups were chosen: a control group and an experimental one. The control group was taught to write using the traditional method, while the experimental group was taught to write using virtual classes. Both groups got the pre-post application of the writing skills test and the writing self-efficacy scale to assess students' progress in these areas.

The study includes four variables: situated language learning is the first variable, and virtual task activities are the second variable. EFL writing skills are the second variable, and writing self-efficacy is the fourth variable. The experiment lasted for seven weeks.

6.2. Participants of the study

The participants of this study were 70 second-year students enrolled in English language departments at the Faculty of Education, Benha University, during the second semester of the 2022–2023 academic year. The participants were randomly chosen and divided into two groups: group (1) served as the control group [N= 35], and group (2) was the experimental group [N= 35]. The control group studied via the traditional method, while the experimental group studied via virtual classes. Thus, the experimental group needed a network connection to complete their tasks. The same topics were presented to both groups but with different tools. The age range of the participants was between 20 and 21 years old. It was decided to focus on EFL majors at this stage because they would be the EFL instructors of the future, whose preparation will pay off in the long run for their EFL students. Besides, their writing abilities are poor.

To ensure that both groups (control and experimental) are equal (homogeneous) in terms of the overall EFL writing skills and writing self-efficacy, an independent sample t-test was conducted on their scores to find whether there is any significant difference between the two groups. Table 2 summarizes the results of the independent sample t-test regarding second-year students' EFL writing skills (both groups before the experiment).

Table 2: *Results of the independent sample t-test between the mean scores of the experimental group and the mean scores of the control group in the pre-assessment of the overall EFL writing skills*

	Group	N.	Mean	S.D.	t-value	D.F.	Sig.
Overall	Cont.	35	36.97	2.63			
					1.661	68	.993
EFL writing skills	Exp.	35	38.03	2.69			

This table showed that there was no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the two groups in the overall EFL writing skills pre-test, where the t-value is (1.661), which is not significant. Therefore, the

two groups were equivalent in their writing skills. Moreover, any changes in the students' level of EFL writing skills might be attributed to the use of the program.

On the other hand, the researcher also administered the EFL writing self-efficacy scale before the experiment (treatment) for both groups in order to make sure **that** both were equivalent. The independent sample t-test was conducted on their scores on the writing self-efficacy scale. Table 3 summarizes these findings.

Table 3: *Results of the independent sample t-test between the mean scores of the experimental group and the mean scores of the control group in the pre-assessment of the writing self-efficacy scale*

	Group	N.	Mean	S.D.	t-value	D.F.	Sig.
Writing self-efficacy scale	**Cont.**	**35**	**40.57**	**3.31**	**.137**	**68**	**.695**
	Exp.	**35**	**40.69**	**3.68**			

This table showed that there was no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the two groups on the pre-application of the writing self-efficacy scale, where the t-value is (.137), which is not significant. Therefore, the two groups were equivalent in their level of writing self-efficacy. Moreover, any changes in the students' writing self-efficacy might be attributed to the use of the program. Accordingly, it may be claimed that the two groups were homogenous before the experiment.

6.3. Instruments of the Study

To achieve the aim of the research, the researcher used several study instruments for collecting data, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

6.3.1. EFL Writing Skills Test

The writing skills test was prepared by the researcher to measure the effectiveness of using a program based on situated language learning and virtual task activities in developing EFL writing skills among student teachers in the Faculty of Education at Benha University. It also aimed to test the research hypotheses. The researcher relied on many sources in designing the writing skills test, such as related literature, the opinions of supervisors, juries, and experienced teachers. The writing skills test, administered as a pre/post-test, was designed to test students' writing skills regarding seven aspects: planning, fluency, accuracy, content, organization, mechanics, and revision.

The test, in its final form (see Appendix C), consists of three main sections (writing essays) suitable for students' background knowledge. Part one focused on pre-writing skills, part two on writing skills, and part three on post-writing skills. **There are some points to consider when writing the questions:**

1. Each question was designed to assess student's performance on one criterion for writing skills that are specifically described in the writing rubric.

2. Each question is suitable for the students' levels and interests.

3. The questions can be scored using the writing rubric.

The participants were asked to participate in this test to check their writing ability. Before the test started, the questions were given enough time for students to think about the answers. A time limit of 90 minutes was given to students in both groups. It was calculated by averaging the test-question responses from the quickest and slowest students. The researcher prepared an analytical rubric to score the test (see Appendix D). After the students received the treatment, the researcher re-administered a writing test on the same topic to ensure whether the treatment had any effective effects on the students or not.

6.3.2. The Analytical Rubric for the EFL Writing Skills Test

A writing rubric is designed to determine the students' scores on the writing skills test (pre-and post-test) and to identify the efficiency of a program based on situated language learning and virtual task activities in developing EFL student teachers' writing skills. This rubric covers the seven main domains of EFL writing, with 19 sub-skills. A four-point Likert scale was used to score the writing skills test. Each skill on the rubric was assigned a rating ranging from "4" to "1." When students produce accurate writing, they receive "4" marks; when they make a few errors that do not significantly affect the meaning, they receive "3" marks; when they make a lot of errors that may affect the meaning, they receive "2" marks; and when they consistently make errors that have a major impact, they receive "1" mark (see Appendix D).

6.3.3. EFL Writing Self-Efficacy Scale

The researcher adopted Erkan's (2013) self-efficacy scale. Erkan developed a 21-item writing self-efficacy scale based on Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy construct. The scale's 21 items were divided up into subscales that examined students' beliefs about various elements of writing skills. Five items focused on the ability to provide the content requested for a

composition; five on the ability to design a composition; five on the ability to create a unified composition; four on composition accuracy; and two on the ability to punctuate correctly.

The purpose of the scale was to assess participants' belief in their writing ability before and after the intervention (see Appendix F). On this scale, participants were asked to rate how confident they felt about their ability to write essays in English. There is no right response to any statement. What they see is the best answer. Students respond to statements with the following options: (1= I cannot do it at all; 2= I can't do it well; 3= I can do it; and 4= I can do it very well). The scale was judged a valid and reliable tool for assessing self-efficacy in foreign-language writing based on its robust psychometric properties. A time limit of 20 minutes was given to students in both groups. After the students received the treatment, the researcher re-administered the scale to ensure whether the treatment had any effective effects on the students or not.

6.3.4. The Reliability of Study Instruments

During the second term of the academic year 2022-2023, 27 student teachers from the English section of the Faculty of Education at Benha University were randomly selected to participate in a pilot study of the EFL writing skills test and the writing self-efficacy scale. The 27 student teachers had the same characteristics as the study participants, but they were excluded from the experiment. The purpose of piloting the instruments is to investigate: (1) clarity of instructions; (2) appropriateness of the language level for the participants; (3) comprehensibility of the test and scale items; (4) suitability of time required for responding to the various sections of the test and scale; and (5) calculating their validity and reliability. The following methods were used to determine the reliability of the instruments:

a. Test-Retest Method

The test-retest method was used by the researcher to estimate the reliability of the EFL writing skills test and writing self-efficacy scale. The study instruments were administered to a random sample of 27 second-year English language section students at the Benha Faculty of Education at the beginning of the application. After two weeks, the same instruments were re-administered. According to the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Formula, the EFL writing skills test is **.856[**] and .797[**]** for the writing self-efficacy scale, both of which are statistically significant at the level of 0.01. Moreover, this indicates that these instruments are consistent and reliable.

b. Alpha-Cronbach method

Cronbach's alpha was also used to estimate the instrument's reliability. The alpha coefficient of the EFL writing skills test was .894, whereas it was .751 for the writing self-efficacy scale. These values reveal that the instruments are reliable and have internal consistency since "it is desirable [with an alpha coefficient] to have a reliability coefficient of 0.7 or higher (Wells & Wollack, 2003).

c. Split-half method

The split-half method was also used to estimate the instrument's reliability. The split-half method of the EFL writing skills test was .922, whereas it was .704 for the writing self-efficacy scale. These values reveal that the instruments are reliable and have internal consistency since "it is desirable [with split-half coefficient] to have a reliability coefficient of 0.6 or higher (Wells & Wollack, 2003).

6.3.5. Validity of Study Instruments

a. Face validity

To estimate the face validity of the study instruments, they were administered to five TEFL jury members to verify their validity (see Appendix H). According to the jury members' feedback, the instruments were appropriate for the second-year English language section students, had clear instructions, and were appropriate for measuring what they were intended to measure. It could be said that the instruments have face validity.

b. Content validity

To identify the content validity of the study instruments, a panel of EFL jury members was asked to determine whether the instruments were representative of what they were intended to measure (see Appendix H). They concurred that the instruments could be interpreted as valid and having content validity.

c. Internal consistency

To estimate internal consistency, the Pearson correlation coefficient between the scores of the study participants in each main skill of the test and the total score was $.386^*$ for planning skills, $.402^*$ for fluency skills, $.656^{**}$ for accuracy skills, $.695^{**}$ for content skills, $.388^*$ for organization skills, $.708^{**}$ for mechanics skills, and 614^{**} for revision skills.

The Pearson correlation coefficient between the scores of the study participants in each subscale of the writing self-efficacy scale and the total

score was $.389^*$ for the content requested for a composition, $.458^*$ for designing a composition, $.674^{**}$ for creating a unified composition, $.530^{**}$ for composition accuracy, and $.389^*$ for punctuating correctly.

6.3.6. Instrument for collecting qualitative data

To validate the results of the qualitative analysis, the researcher developed the following instrument to get a more detailed picture of the effectiveness of the program in achieving its goals:

- **Semi-structured interview**

It was applied one-on-one with 10 students before and after implementing the program to gain a good understanding of the students' EFL writing skills. The researcher began the interview by greeting the students and asking them to relax while they answered the questions, saying that there were no right or wrong answers and that all responses would be kept secret. Then she explained to them the reason for the interview and their roles. If students had trouble understanding any question, she might clarify or change it. To avoid answering yes-or-no questions, the researcher employed open-ended questions (see Appendix G). One hour was allotted for the interview. These interviews were tape-recorded so that she could use the information for further analysis. At the end of the interview, the researcher expressed gratitude to the students for their effort, time, and participation.

6.4. Program of the Study Based on SLL and VTA

This section provides an in-depth description of the study program, including its objectives, content, framework, processes, and assessment approaches (Appendix I).

6.4.1. Objectives of the program

The program was designed to enhance the EFL writing skills and writing self-efficacy of second-year students enrolled in the English language section of the Faculty of Education at Benha University. Based on reviewing the related literature, the required EFL writing skills were determined. The EFL writing skills consist of seven main dimensions (planning, fluency, accuracy, content, organization, mechanics, and revision) with 19 sub-skills (see Appendix E). These skills, along with the five dimensions of writing self-efficacy, are considered the objectives of the study program.

6.4.2. Content of the Program

The program included EFL writing skills and self-efficacy activities and tasks that were suitable for second-year students in the English section of the

Faculty of Education at Benha University and adopted from various sources such as Raimes (1983); Al-Shidi and Amer (2004); Knapp and Watkins (2005); Hamp-Lyons and Heasley (2006); Ahmed and Bidin (2016) (see Appendix I).

6.4.3. Framework of the Program

During the second semester of the 2022–2023 academic year, 35 second-year English section students from the Benha Faculty of Education participated in the present study. The researcher met with the students for seven weeks at a rate of three sessions a week. Every session lasts for 90 minutes. The program consisted of 13 sessions. The first two sessions were orientation sessions (i.e., the introductory phase) regarding the concept of task-based learning and situated language learning based on virtual learning applications, its importance, procedures, and importance of EFL writing skills, and writing self-efficacy.

The other sessions that followed the program's introduction served as instructional ones, where participants practiced and improved their writing skills and self-efficacy in writing. Each session began with the researcher explaining to the students the goals of the session, the student's role, the researcher's role, the activities they would perform, the instructional materials that would be used, virtual interactions, and ways of evaluating their progress. After that, the researcher provided students with some activities relating to what they had learned to ensure that they mastered the skills in each session (formative evaluation). After implementing the program, the study instruments were re-applied to the study participants (summative assessment) to determine the program's effectiveness (see Appendix J).

6.4.4. The Procedures of the Program

After reviewing the fundamentals of TBLT, the researcher showed how to modify Willis's (1996) original framework for TBLT using a virtual learning environment. The researcher implemented task-based learning sessions through Google Classroom by following three cycles: (1) the pre-task cycle, (2) The task cycle, and (3) the language focus cycle. Also, it was implemented both synchronously and asynchronously, utilizing several features on Google Classroom and other Google platforms. Figure 1 depicts the researcher's suggested methodological framework for conducting the program via the Google Classroom and Virtual Writing Tutor platforms.
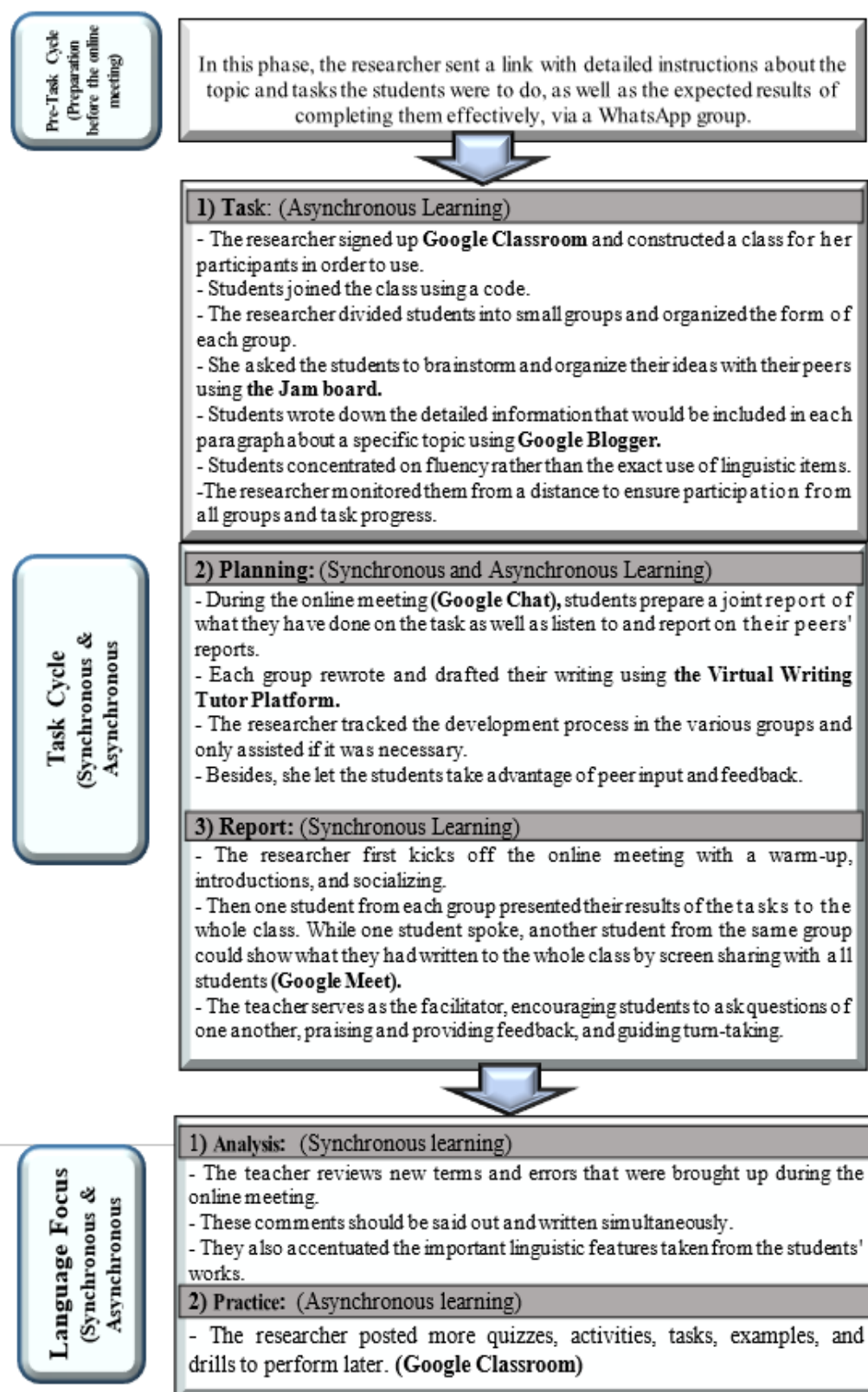
Pre-Task Cycle (Preparation before the online meeting)

In this phase, the researcher sent a link with detailed instructions about the topic and tasks the students were to do, as well as the expected results of completing them effectively, via a WhatsApp group.

Task Cycle (Synchronous & Asynchronous)

1) Task: (Asynchronous Learning)
- The researcher signed up **Google Classroom** and constructed a class for her participants in order to use.
- Students joined the class using a code.
- The researcher divided students into small groups and organized the form of each group.
- She asked the students to brainstorm and organize their ideas with their peers using **the Jam board.**
- Students wrote down the detailed information that would be included in each paragraph about a specific topic using **Google Blogger.**
- Students concentrated on fluency rather than the exact use of linguistic items.
- The researcher monitored them from a distance to ensure participation from all groups and task progress.

2) Planning: (Synchronous and Asynchronous Learning)
- During the online meeting **(Google Chat),** students prepare a joint report of what they have done on the task as well as listen to and report on their peers' reports.
- Each group rewrote and drafted their writing using **the Virtual Writing Tutor Platform.**
- The researcher tracked the development process in the various groups and only assisted if it was necessary.
- Besides, she let the students take advantage of peer input and feedback.

3) Report: (Synchronous Learning)
- The researcher first kicks off the online meeting with a warm-up, introductions, and socializing.
- Then one student from each group presented their results of the tasks to the whole class. While one student spoke, another student from the same group could show what they had written to the whole class by screen sharing with all students **(Google Meet).**
- The teacher serves as the facilitator, encouraging students to ask questions of one another, praising and providing feedback, and guiding turn-taking.

Language Focus (Synchronous & Asynchronous)

1) Analysis: (Synchronous learning)
- The teacher reviews new terms and errors that were brought up during the online meeting.
- These comments should be said out and written simultaneously.
- They also accentuated the important linguistic features taken from the students' works.

2) Practice: (Asynchronous learning)
- The researcher posted more quizzes, activities, tasks, examples, and drills to perform later. **(Google Classroom)**

Figure 1: *A framework for doing TBLT via a virtual learning environment (adapted from Willis, 1996, p. 155).*

6.4.5. The Evaluation Techniques of the Program

Several forms of evaluation are employed in the program. These forms are:

▪**Formative evaluation:** To ensure that students had acquired the skills in each session, the researcher provided students with some exercises related to what they had learned at the end of each session.

▪**Summative evaluation:** At the end of the program, the researcher used an EFL writing skills test and a writing self-efficacy scale to measure the student's progress after implementing the program.

7. Findings of the Study

The data of the present study were collected in two phases (quantitative and qualitative); hence, the findings of each phase are presented separately. Using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), the findings are presented as follows:

7.1. Findings of the Quantitative Analysis

7.1.1. Quantitative Findings Concerning EFL Student Teachers' EFL Writing Skills

The first hypothesis stated that the program based on situated language learning and virtual task activities is effective in developing EFL writing skills among student teachers at the Faculty of Education, Benha University. This hypothesis had eight statistical sub-hypotheses that addressed both the overall writing skills and seven of its sub-skills. To test this hypothesis, an independent sample t-test was used to compare the mean scores of the control and experimental groups on the writing test. The findings of this independent t-test are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: *Results of the independent sample t-test between the means of the control group and experimental groups' scores in the post-assessment of the overall EFL writing skills and its seven sub-skills*

EFL writing sub-skills	Groups	N	Mean	SD	T-Value	Df	Sig.	η2
Planning to Write	**Control**	35	6.08	1.14	14.767	68	0.01	0.76
	Experimental	35	9.37	.645				
Fluency Skills	**Control**	35	3.94	.968	12.585	68	0.01	0.69
	Experimental	35	6.11	.322				
Accuracy Skills	**Control**	35	5.37	1.16	17.472	68	0.01	0.81
	Experimental	35	9.25	.610				
Content Skills	**Control**	35	6.62	.942	13.725	68	0.01	0.37
	Experimental	35	9.20	.584				
Organization Skills	**Control**	35	3.51	.742	18.048	68	0.01	0.82
	Experimental	35	6.22	.490				
Mechanics Skills	**Control**	35	4.68	.963	21.677	68	0.01	0.87
	Experimental	35	8.97	.663				
Revision Skills	**Control**	35	6.40	.945	14.154	68	0.01	0.74
	Experimental	35	9.14	.648				
Overall writing skills	**Control**	35	36.62	2.50	44.385	68	0.01	0.96
	Experimental	35	58.29	1.43				

Table 4 shows that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the control and experimental groups in the post-assessment of the overall EFL writing skills and its seven sub-skills. All the t-values are significant at the 0.01 level in favor of the experimental group. This indicates that the experimental group's EFL writing skills have been developed. Therefore, the first main hypothesis and all its seven sub-hypotheses are confirmed. Figure 2 shows these differences in visual form.
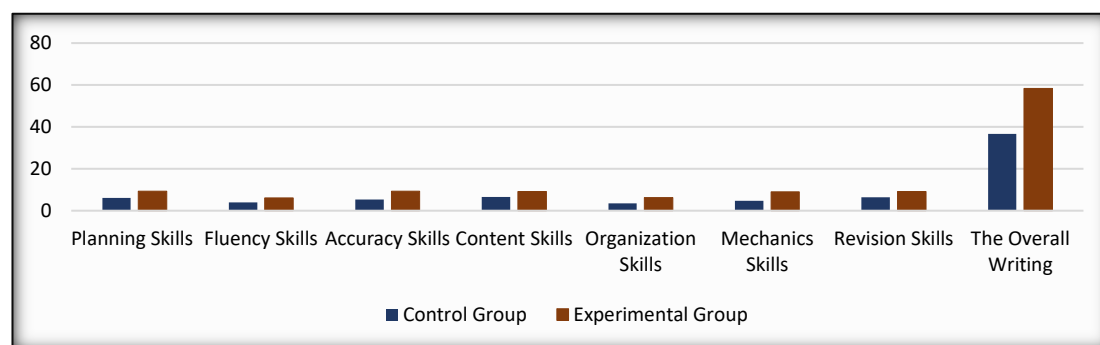
Figure (2): *The mean scores of the control group and that of the experimental group in the post-assessment of the overall writing and its seven sub-skills.*

7.1.2. Quantitative Findings Concerning EFL Student Teachers' EFL Writing Self-Efficacy

The program based on situated language learning and virtual task activities is effective in developing EFL writing self-efficacy among student teachers at the Faculty of Education, Benha University. This research hypothesis had six statistical sub-hypotheses that addressed both the overall writing self-efficacy scale and five of its sub-scales. To examine this hypothesis, an independent sample t-test was conducted on the control and experimental groups' scores on the writing self-efficacy scale with its five dimensions. Table (6) summarizes these findings.

Table 5: *Results of the independent sample t-test between the means of the control group and experimental groups' scores in the post-assessment of the overall EFL writing self-efficacy*

EFL writing self-efficacy sub-scale	Groups	N	Mean	SD	T- Value	Df	Sig.	η2
Provide the content requested for a composition	Control	35	9.800	1.91	15.971	68	0.01	
	Experimental	35	15.08	.445				
Design a composition	Control	35	10.48	1.29	18.419	68	0.01	0.38
	Experimental	35	14.85	.550				
Create a unified composition	Control	35	8.828	1.85	17.550	68	0.01	0.81
	Experimental	35	15.31	1.16				
Create composition accuracy	Control	35	7.885	1.67	14.044	68	0.01	0.74
	Experimental	35	12.62	1.08				
Punctuate correctly	Control	35	3.514	1.01	15.199	68	0.01	0.77
	Experimental	35	6.485	.562				
Overall writing self-efficacy	Control	35	40.51	3.31	35.785	68	0.01	0.94
	Experimental	35	64.37	2.14				

Table 5 shows that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the control and experimental groups in the post-assessment of the overall EFL writing self-efficacy and all five dimensions. All the t-

values are significant at the 0.01 level in favor of the experimental group. This indicates that the experimental group's EFL writing self-efficacy has been developed. Therefore, the second main hypothesis and all its five sub-hypotheses are confirmed. Figure (3) shows these differences in visual form.
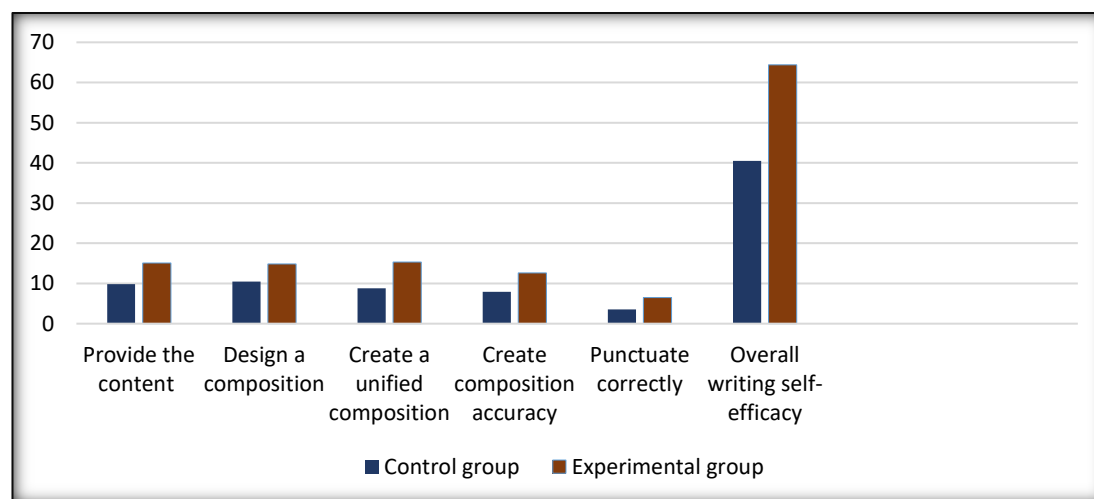
7.2. Findings of the Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative analysis was used to: (1) obtain a much more detailed picture of what the participants in the current study did before, during, and after writing; and (2) validate the quantitative analysis data. To collect the data needed for this analysis, the researcher used a semi-structured interview (SSI).

7.2.1. Findings of the Semi-Structured Interview (SSI):

Before the experiment, the majority of the students' answers revealed that they struggled with their EFL writing abilities. These students lacked the essential knowledge of EFL writing that would have helped them as EFL prospective teachers. They are unable to coherently organize their ideas or link sentences into cohesive paragraphs. They have difficulty selecting appropriate words or constructing coherent phrases that are devoid of grammar problems. They are unable to write a good paragraph incorporating writing ability markers (accuracy, unity, content, and organization). They were unmotivated to learn English and had inadequate writing circumstances. They did not get the opportunity to practice their writing skills in a communicative context. As a result, they were unable to write in English in simulated real-life interactions. As a result, their writing skills were inadequate.

After participating in the program, students became more confident and started interacting with their peers. They were able to brainstorm to get as many ideas as possible about the topic. They also began to express ideas and opinions on a variety of topics, clearly and simply. They began to have the ability to choose words that are precise, clear, and highlight the meaning. They also write a suitable introduction, body, and conclusion that are relevant to the content of the topic and attract the reader's attention. In addition, they use suitable transitions, logical connectors, and adequate coherence markers to ensure smooth flow and a logical sequence of ideas.

In the interview data, seven students assured me that participating in the program helped everyone work together, collaborate, and cooperate to make progress. The qualitative analysis of the students' answers to the interview questions yielded the following results:

Student (1): Using situated language learning and virtual task activities, I was able to produce writing quickly and effectively to understand and recognize the main idea of the written text.

Student (2): I learned how to pick words that are clear and highlight the meaning. Furthermore, online activities pique my interest in learning due to their flexibility in terms of time and place.

Student (3): I participated in various tasks that assisted me in developing a topic sentence and subordinate sentences for each essay.

Student (4): It helped me proofread to identify and rectify errors in sentence structure, grammar, vocabulary, spelling, mechanics, and usage.

Student (5): It helped me write an introduction, body, and conclusion that are appropriate for the topic at hand and grab the reader's interest.

Student (6): It enabled me to communicate confidently and without fear about when and how to learn. I truly became a self-directed learner.

Student (7): It enabled me to write different essays in simulated real-life interactions. Also, online pair discussions have improved my ability to formulate thoughts.

8. Discussion and Interpretation of the Findings of the Study

This study aimed to develop EFL writing skills and writing self-efficacy among student teachers enrolled in the English section at the Benha Faculty of Education. Qualitative and quantitative analyses revealed that the program based on situated language learning and virtual task activities has an impact on developing student teachers' EFL writing skills and writing self-efficacy. This may be due to several factors, including situated language learning, task-based activities, and a virtual classroom. I.e., incorporating virtual learning allows learners to experience situations that merge the real and digital worlds in an authentic context. The program emphasizes meaning and real-world activities that require students to process language in real-world situations. Therefore, the program highlighted how different activities contribute to developing EFL writing skills and writing self-efficacy. These results are consistent with Hayes (2006), Yang (2011), Abdallah and Mansour (2015), Liu and Xiong (2016), Alomar (2017), and Christoforou et al. (2019).

Concerning the first hypothesis of the study, the findings revealed that there was a statistically significant difference in mean scores between the control group and the experimental group on the post-assessment of EFL overall writing skill and its sub-skills in favor of the experimental group, as the T-value was 44.385, which is significant at 0.01. This implies that the experimental group improved better in terms of EFL writing abilities and sub-skills. This result statistically supported the first hypothesis.

The program based on situated language learning and virtual task activities proved to develop EFL overall writing skills and sub-skills for the experimental group. This progress is attributed to a variety of factors. The researcher developed students' writing skills by placing them in authentic contexts. She piqued the curiosity and concerns of the students about the object skill. Besides, there has been an increase in the number of tasks administered to participants. The researcher gradually increased the degree of difficulty during the sessions as the subjects demonstrated performance improvement. The researcher also emphasized the social dimension, allowing

participants to engage in real-situated learning while studying and working on faithful tasks in an appropriate learning environment.

Within the program sessions, the researcher formulated a question based on the specific topic and provided the students with correlated lexical items and expressions that helped them perform the task. She urged the students to use the Jam board to brainstorm and arrange their thoughts with their peers. She facilitated the cognitive processes of her students through discussions in pairs and groups. In this way, the researcher acts as scaffolding for the students, allowing them to take on whatever portion of the task they can complete. As the participants gain experience, the researcher steps back, assigning the function of a monitor and providing particular indications or comments.

Moreover, the researcher observed the advancements participants made in their EFL writing abilities during the program based on virtual task activities and situated language learning. Students participated actively in the program's regular accomplishments and learned from their mistakes and those of the group. Besides, students collaborate through discussion groups, which allow them to interact, hold discussions, and send recordings, pictures, and other media. The WhatsApp group chat and Google chat helped participants learn from each other. Furthermore, the students utilized Google Blogger to jot down the specific details that will be included in each paragraph. Students can use WhatsApp to exchange resources that are relevant to their courses with other students.

Throughout the study sessions, the participants enumerated the benefits of learning in a virtual classroom. The Google Classroom platform helps students develop their EFL writing sub-skills (such as identifying the main ideas and supporting details; expressing opinions and ideas on a range of topics simply; developing a topic sentence and supporting sentences for each essay; providing content and linguistic knowledge that help them write effectively and freely; providing enough reasons, descriptions, examples, facts, or personal experience to make ideas clear; writing an appropriate introduction and conclusion for the essays; developing a body with one central idea and enough supporting details to ensure the logical sequence of ideas relevant to the main idea of the essay; using appropriate transitions, logical connectors, and coherence markers; using proper capitalization and

punctuation, and refining ideas to ensure that the main idea and supporting details are understandable). These results are consistent with Syakur (2020) and Parmawan et al. (2022).

The Google Classroom also provides them with opportunities for peer-to-peer learning and gives them access to English beyond the classroom. The students stressed that Google Chat gives them a platform to write in English and encourages them to learn from one another. They firmly agreed that the chats and tasks they completed throughout this work had an enormous impact on improving their overall writing abilities. Moreover, Google Classroom was chosen as the platform to facilitate the learning process as the teacher found it to be easy to use and suitable for the implementation of the task-based learning model. This is consistent with the findings of the empirical studies, which revealed that Google Classroom was beneficial for online learning. Also, it can assist the learning process effectively, facilitate communication and interaction, and make assignment submission more straightforward (Ahmed, 2020; Parmawan et al., 2022; Syakur, 2020).

Furthermore, the researcher and participants were able to initiate online discussions and several other activities through the use of Google Meet, which might potentially contribute to the findings. Also, paperless writing activities are stimulating for students. Besides, pair-work online writing allows students to gain experience as both a reviewer and a student. In addition to reporting on their work, students often collaborate to write a joint report that summarizes what they have done on the task and report on their peers' reports. Then, one student from each group showcased their assignment outcomes to the whole class. While one student talked, another from the same group might show what they had written to the whole class by screen sharing with all students. Additionally, the researcher read and commented on each group's writing. Therefore, the researcher established a reciprocal relationship with her EFL student teachers and considered them friends. This gives students a sense of ownership over their learning and allows them to share roles flexibly. Furthermore, the program helps students write freely and motivates them to participate in different discussions held in the program. Therefore, there was a significant improvement in the participants' overall and sub-skilled EFL writing abilities, which was in line with Syakur (2020) and Tusino et al. (2021).

Besides that, the researcher used both synchronous and asynchronous models of learning. In contrast to asynchronous learning, which does not allow for real-time interpersonal conversation, synchronous learning provides students with real-time interpersonal interactions that enable them to utilize natural language and receive rapid feedback. A pre-task cycle was carried out asynchronously before synchronous learning. In the asynchronous pre-task, the researcher provides students with clear and comprehensive instructions on the topic and their tasks. In order to aid students in understanding the task, she also supplies relevant pictures or videos. For the asynchronous task cycle, the researcher assigned students to do a task in the form of a leaflet, brochure, or pamphlet using Google Jamboard. Students then used Google Blogger to write down the specific details that would be included in each paragraph about the specific topic. At the report stage, students would be asked to present their reports via a live video conference (Google Meet). Finally, the two-stage language focus cycle—analysis and practice—was carried out synchronously through task repetition by responding to lesson-related questions and asynchronously through quiz responses.

Concerning the second hypothesis of the research, the findings revealed that there was a statistically significant difference in mean scores between the control group and the experimental group on the post-assessment of the overall writing self-efficacy and its dimensions in favor of the experimental group, as the T-value was 35.785, which is significant at 0.01. This indicates that EFL writing self-efficacy and its dimensions have developed more in the experimental group. These results statistically supported the second hypothesis.

The program based on situated language learning and virtual task activities is beneficial in helping the experimental group's overall EFL writing self-efficacy and its dimensions develop. There are several reasons for this progress. The researcher used authentic materials that piqued students' interest in learning new skills and were appropriate for their level. During the pre-task phase, the researcher conducted an activity that allowed students to see and create a mental model of the steps needed to complete the task. They also take responsibility for their actions to achieve communication purposes. Through synchronous learning, participants improved both their collaborative and individual work capabilities, and that affected their interpersonal skills.

Besides, virtual classes provide EFL students with a convenient and comfortable environment for practicing their writing skills.

The current research's design did away with the idea of grades and established a guilt-free environment. As a result, participants are encouraged to participate and engage with their instructor and one another without fear of criticism or evaluation. Writing with classmates in online classrooms increased their level of engagement and confidence. Additionally, this gets rid of the emotional reactions to dread and worry. This is considered to be another factor behind its success and is consistent with several researchers such as Thomas (2010), Abdallah and Mansour (2015), Baralt and Gómez (2017), Biglar and Kaban (2023); Nurhayati (2019), Meri-Yilan (2020), and Vellanki and Bandu (2021). These findings might encourage EFL instructors to take advantage of virtual classrooms to develop their students' writing skills.

In addition, the program increases students' writing self-efficacy by presenting tasks and activities that encourage participation and interaction among students. They can provide the content requested for a composition, design a composition, create a unified composition, provide an accurate composition, and punctuate it correctly. Also, the ability to learn a language increases as students gain confidence and independence. During the study, students were instructed to download and install the Google Classroom and Virtual Writing Tutor platforms to help them write their essays. With such an experience, students become more focused and pleased. As their level of confidence increased, they started using the platforms more frequently. In this sense, students' enthusiasm for English language study grew, and they were more motivated. They also realize that English will be crucial to them in the future. In light of this, these results are consistent with Zheng et al. (2009), Erkan (2013), Abdallah and Mansour (2015), Khudhair and Abbas (2020),

Through participating in the suggested program, students may also experience situational activities that allow them to use the English language contextually and creatively. In line with the statement, students were exposed to authentic language use across practical activities, which they can find and do in their daily activities. It also aided students in practicing their English and achieving the tasks in a classroom without stress. Additionally, the goal of each task-based activity phase was to emphasize to students the necessity of

using language authentically in real-life situations to complete the task quickly and effectively.

On the other hand, the participants felt more at ease and flexible in discussing their errors because of the researcher's friendly manner. Therefore, subscales of vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics show significant improvements as students receive immediate online feedback from the researcher and their peers after submitting their writing. Following each task-based learning session, the researcher observed that the students were enthusiastic and excited by the diversity and difficulty of the class activities. The participants showed interest in the online courses, paid attention to the instructions, and finished all of the tasks given by the teacher. The realistic use of language in the task-based activities was relevant to students' everyday life routines, and these topics pushed them to share their opinions with their friends. Moreover, students expressed high levels of satisfaction with the proposed program. They asserted that the 3D TBL learning environment is beneficial for English learning.

To sum up, using the program based on situated language learning and virtual task activities provided students with a secure and supportive environment where they were able to communicate with each other, brainstorm ideas, and provide feedback on different compositions. Due to the extremely short lecture hours, these activities gave the students more opportunities to practice English beyond the classroom. Additionally, students felt sufficiently at ease and self-assured.

9. Conclusion

The main objective of this research was to establish the specific impacts of using situated language learning and task activities within the virtual environment in teaching and learning EFL writing skills and writing self-efficacy. According to the research results, these two approaches are better than traditional ones because they focus more on the principles of language use in real-life situations. Besides, several features on Google Classroom and other Google platforms, such as Google Form, Google Jamboard, Google Blogger, Google Chat, Google Meet, and Google Drive, were used to facilitate the learning process. So, the program was implemented synchronously and asynchronously. Using Google Classroom allows students to share ideas, discuss, and learn with their peers anytime and anywhere.

Another significant conclusion from the research is that the suggested program increases students' writing self-efficacy. Participatory activities connected with TBLT boost student morale, making learning simpler and faster. The program works well for teaching sociocultural skills, which are hard to teach in a traditional classroom setting. Thus, integrating reality and strengthening the communicative focus in English language instruction may be achieved naturally through the tasks. Communicative tasks demand students have the ability to comprehend, negotiate, and convey meanings to attain a communicative objective.

Because of this, online task-based language learning is becoming more popular. Students take part actively in online learning activities. Furthermore, language learners can receive information in a democratic and pleasant environment where they can decide whether or not to amend their mistakes and learn to accept the comments of others. This is considerably different from the traditional teacher feedback approach, which gives students no alternatives. According to the implications of this study's findings, Google Classroom and Virtual Writing Tutor are good tools for creating an online learning environment. These implications provide capabilities that are not readily replaced by any other language instruction approach in a regular classroom setting. They include rapid worldwide access at any time with Internet access, integration of audio, text, and graphics, and simple, low-cost publication. As a result, they enable the development of the ideal task-based language learning environment, which is motivating, interactive, highly contextualized, and realistically task-oriented.

Besides, the varied activities, tasks, and tactics the researcher gave to the students may have contributed to the success of contextual language acquisition and online task activities. Utilizing their mobile phones for learning enabled them to perform tasks quickly and in an engaging manner. The study's key conclusions focused on the students' opportunities for learning by doing and the development of enjoyable and interesting learning skills. They developed their writing self-efficacy and became increasingly eager to communicate. In light of this, it can be concluded that the STBLL may be considered effective in meeting the goals of the present study.

Finally, the interactive environment provided by this program, in the end, allows people to connect and fulfill the primary function of language, which is

successful communication. According to the results of the study, it can be said that the study participants' EFL writing abilities improved as a result of taking part in the program, which in turn raised their writing self-efficacy. They became more motivated to communicate more and more. Besides, they have positive attitudes toward the implementation of a situated task-based language learning program using Google Classrooms and a Virtual Writing Tutor since it helps them write better drafts and revisions. Therefore, the study verifies the assertion that situated language learning and virtual task activities are among the most successful language teaching approaches.

10. Recommendations of the study

Based on the results of this research, the researcher finds that it is crucial to give some recommendations for curriculum designers, teachers, and students to develop students' writing skills and writing self-efficacy. The following recommendations can be recorded:

- Curriculum designers must take the nature of virtual classes into account and provide the curriculum with models of good writing strategies and activities.
- Curriculum designers can also use the results of the research to create virtual texts that can replace books. These materials can be supported with 3D environments, documents, videos, power points, and PDFs.
- EFL teachers should encourage their students to use technology to develop their language skills.
- Teachers should use different activities in their online classes to encourage shy students to participate. These activities are designed to fit the nature of the subject matter, the specific context for learning, the learner's environment, and goals, as well as instructional technology methods.
- Virtual classrooms provide a wide range of opportunities for students to improve their writing self-efficacy skills, so students should use this as a practice tool.
- Students should practice writing in their daily activities, especially before enrolling in virtual classes.

11. Suggestions for Further Research

The traditional methods of teaching English do result in effective learning of writing skills. There still needs to be a lot of research done on the

educational process, which should cover all aspects of the system, including the teacher, the students, the curriculum, the strategies, and the local community. The researcher suggested the following ideas for further studies:

- The effectiveness of using a situated task-based language learning model in developing students' speaking skills.

- The effectiveness of using virtual classes in developing the students' pragmatic writing skills.

- Investigate the effectiveness of other technology applications on the writing skills of EFL learners.

- A comparative study of the effects of using virtual task activities on both sophomore students and higher studies students.

- Using situated task-based language learning for oral communication in English as a foreign language.

- The effectiveness of using situated learning and online task activities on linguistic competence.

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