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### Using Online Platforms to Improve Writing Shahad Saleh Al Asadi<sup>1</sup> and Nasser Al-Issa<sup>2</sup>

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#### Abstract

Due to the difficulties that Iraqi students face when writing in the English language, this preliminary study aimed to improve students' writing skills by using online platforms remotely. Sixty first-year students from Al-Furat Al-Awsat Technical University participated in this study. Through these platforms, the researchers relied on stimuli, such as images, icons, and short titles to allow for deeper and more accurate participations. Data were collected through corrections, observations, and feedbacks from the researchers and peers. In addition, two pre and post-tests were conducted. The quantitative data were analyzed by SPSS statistical Editor, whereas the qualitative data were analyzed using the Pivot table, an Excel sheet. The results have shown improvement of more than (0.5). This indicates that the study is effective and beneficial for the Iraqi students. Moreover, students were generally satisfied with the experience, as it allowed them to easily communicate, research and rely on themselves when learning to write in English as a foreign language. In addition, semiotic awareness and learning via e-learning platforms can be greatly adopted in teaching English in Iraq. The study has further concluded that there is an improvement in the performance of the Iraqi learners, and that their writing skills were enhanced after the improvement of their semiotic awareness. That is, the improvement of their semiotic awareness has deepened their understanding and enhanced their ability to analyze and criticize. It also developed their communication skills and motivated them to write better and search for details.

**Keywords:** E-Learning, Google Classroom, Interactive Writing, Online Platforms, Semiotic Symbols, Writing Improvement

### استعمال المنصات الافتراضية لتحسين الكتابة

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#### المستخلص

بسبب الصعوبات التي يواجهها الطلاب العراقيون في الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية، هدفت هذه الدراسة الأولية إلى تحسين مهارات الكتابة لدى الطلاب باستعمال منصات الإنترنت عن بعد؛ وقد شارك في هذه الدراسة ستون طالباً وطالبة من السنة الأولى من جامعة الفرات الأوسط التقنية. اعتمد الباحثان-عن طريق هذه المنصات- على محفزات مثل: الصور، والأيقونات، والعناوين القصيرة للسماح بمشاركة أكثر عمقا و دقة. تم جمع البيانات من خلال التصحيح والملاحظات والتغذية الراجعة من الباحث والأقران فضلا عن اختبارين أوليين وآخرين بعديين. وتم تحليل البيانات الكمية بواسطة المحرر الإحصائي SPSS، والبيانات النوعية باستعمال الـ Pivot Table، ورقة Excel، و أظهرت النتائج وجود تحسن بنسبة أكثر من (٠,٥)؛ مما يدل على فاعلية الدراسة وفائدتها للطلاب العراقيين. كما و أظهرت النتائج أيضاً أن الطلاب راضون بشكل عام عن التجربة، لأنها تتيح لهم التواصل والبحث والاعتماد على أنفسهم بسهولة في تعلم الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية بوصفها لغة أجنبية. كما أنه يمكن أن يكون الوعي السيميائي والتعلم عبر منصات التعلم الإلكتروني طريقة رائعة لتدريس اللغة الإنجليزية في العراق، لاسيما في مجال تحسين مهارات الكتابة؛ إذ أظهرت النتائج تحسناً في أداء المتعلمين العراقيين، وتعزيز مهاراتهم الكتابية بعد تحسن الوعي السيميائي لديهم. كذلك أظهرت الدراسة أن الوعي السيميائي يساعد في تعميق فهمهم وتعزيز قدرة الطلاب على التحليل والنقد. كما بينت الدراسة أن الوعي السيميائي يساعد رواده على تحسين مهاراتهم في التواصل مع العالم بشكل عام، وتحفيزهم على الكتابة بشكل أفضل وتمكينهم من البحث عن التفاصيل.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** تحسين الكتابة، التعلم الإلكتروني، جوجل كلاس روم، الرموز السيميائية، الكتابة التفاعلية، المنصات عبر الإنترنت



## 1. Introduction

As a universal language of finance, business and communication, English is more important today than ever before. All cultures and ethnicities in all their diversity use English language to communicate with each other; in addition to its usage as a mother tongue by native speakers (Rao, 2019).

In Iraq, teaching English language is based on teaching its four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Writing is one of the difficult skills to acquire because it involves a lot of practice due to the complexity of its phonemic, morphological, semantic and grammatical structures. Teachers rely on a variety of methods to teach writing, such as argument, description, narration, presentation, persuasion, and strive to help students reach the best possible level in writing skills (Rao, 2019).

However, teachers have noticed a slow and unenthusiastic response from the Iraqi students' writing activities at the undergraduate level despite the fact that they spent 12 years studying English as a foreign language. Though they exert good efforts in writing essays, they still cannot delve into the details very well (Nasser, 2018). Accordingly, the researchers of the present work hypothesize that this weakness might be aggravated when converting into using distant education platforms; specifically through the period of Corona virus pandemic. This is because they have no previous experience in e-learning and have not performed previously any task virtually.

Thus, the study aims to examine the level of students' writing using this time distant education platforms such as WhatsApp groups or Google meet calls. To meet this objective, the selected participants are required to decipher and conceptualize via writing a selection of semiotic signs (pictures and videos) presented virtually.

## 2. Theoretical Background

### 2.1 *The Concept of Semiotics*

Semiotics is the study of the current traditional order, and the tool of gestures and negotiations. As a science, it is concerned with

studying the role of signs as part of social life (Chandler, 2007). Saussure defined semiotics as a science that consists of signifiers and signifieds. The former, i.e., the signifiers, represent physical sounds, letters, gestures, etc., whereas the latter involves images or concepts to which the signifiers refer. Saussure further elaborated that the relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary and conventional at the same time (Sebeok, 2001, p.17). Locke and Pearce (as cited in Withalm, 2008) regarded semiotics as a formal principle of signs that are closely related to logic. Morris stated that semiotics, the science of signs, is the study of "simulations", which have syntactic, semantic, and practical levels or domains. These levels are grammar, semantics, and pragmatism.

In short, semiotics is the theory and study of signs and symbols, like elements of a language or other communication systems. Traffic signs, emoji, emoticons used in electronic communications, logos and trademarks used by international companies to sell things to people or what they call "brand loyalty" are common examples of semiotics. Semiotics is important because it studies signs and symbols that convey both spoken and non-spoken things. Language, whether written or spoken, is full of semiotic signs in the form of intertextuality, puns, metaphors, and references to cultural commonalities (Nordquist, 2020).

Nowadays, the relationship between semiotics and language learning or teaching has evolved greatly due to its woven relationship; letters are communication symbols and the cornerstone of language learning. Due to the importance of semiotics, there are now special courses, books and websites that initiate semiotics and impose its education in teaching places. Semiotics and linguistics are research areas with common and overlapping interests. The study of symbols and signs helps to understand how teaching is a means of communication by means of signs, and how it enables learners to develop their abilities to interpret signs (Semetsky, 2010).



Semiotics has educational effects in addition to its consequences for editorial and academic policies through tools of analysis in educational materials, teaching of verbal and non-verbal and visual languages, and teaching semiotics itself in classes, courses and programs. Semiotics can be incorporated into teaching in various forms such as books and websites (Semetsky, 2010).

Arnheim (1969) asserted that "thinking evokes images, and images contain ideas." For every phrase, image, or symbol a person receives, the human mind gives many interpretations of a single image, phrase, or symbol. The human mind delves into thinking about situations or experiences similar to the semiotic symbol it receives, and then comes up with a unique idea or expression to express what it receives or interpret. Houson and Yenawine (2002) confirmed Arnheim's idea, saying that when students are given an image, symbol, or phrase, they ultimately infer and extract different effects and ideas and make numerous assumptions about the semiotic symbol that was presented to them. That is why, Houson and Yenawine asserted that the use of semiotic activities is essential to develop students' imaginations and ultimately plays a major role in improving their writing skills. Thus, the development of writing and semiotic consciousness is inseparable from semiotics, as the latter represents a source of inspiration for creative writing.

Pence and Cunningham (1977) considered that an individual's perception of the curriculum is influenced by education in relation to knowledge as a process and not as a structure or a remembering learning process. They further (1977) suggested that since sign theory can be perceived, develop a cognitive process for learners of all sensory modalities, and provide a general view of communication and the media needed for teaching methodology, semiotics is a fundamental principle in pedagogy (Pence & Cunningham, 1977).

Speaking of the role of teaching EFL students using virtual classes, Al-Bahrani (2020) stated that they have pros and cons on the part of both students and professors. In this regard, Rajput (2019) asserted that the technological revolution has a great contribution in improving the status of e-learning. It is clear that the educational process has witnessed enormous differences in itself through the continuous development of technology. Internet helps greatly in taking the entire learning and development process to the virtual world. Ease of access to e-learning platforms encouraged young people to participate and engage in the process of learning and scientific research, and it is clear that e-learning has a bright future. Gupta (2017) noted that e-learning platforms have completely changed the environment in which learning is imparted to students. E-learning platforms have made the learning process simpler, easier and more effective.

## **2.2 Related Studies**

In this section, the researchers reviewed the related literature and similar studies conducted in this regard. For an organizing purpose, these studies have been grouped into two parts. Part one is concerned with studies conducted on enhancing the Iraqi foreign language learning skills. The second part, on the other hand, is concerned with studies conducted on images and videos, as illustrated below:-

Speaking of the first type of the studies, Aajami (2020) found that improving English language competence can be achieved via an organized usage of English inside and outside classroom environments Aajami conducted an experiment on 20 participants and the data were collected qualitatively and quantitatively. The results showed that Tomasello theory, which is based on testing the applicability of the cognitive linguistic approach to second learners, can also be applied to adults FL learning. This research is one step in many attempts to develop the reality of the English language in Iraq.



Chaqmaqchee and Haji (2020) analyzed and taught participants using a face-to-face online writing approach. The study was conducted at Soran University in the Kurdistan Region of Northern Iraq. Data were collected from 100 male and female students from the second and fourth year through the questionnaire. The questionnaire was a comparison of online learning, and of its advantages and challenges with the traditional or the so-called face-to-face learning. The data showed that students wanted to participate in the online courses because they made it easier for them to have a lot of opportunities in their academic life. They provided online education that saved time, place and cost. However, another section of students preferred the traditional way of learning because it provided interaction, social status, academic rigor and communication. The study further revealed a recent expansion in terms of distinction, speed of learning, enrolment rate, and success in education in favour of distant education. The results also indicated that students preferred the online writing style in the learning and teaching curricula. Remote education also increased students' awareness of writing online and assured its sustainable growth in academic fields to ultimately create a critical learning generation.

Saleh (2020) conducted a study on improving writing for Iraqi students through e-learning platforms. This study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of the intercultural awareness and writing by using WebQuest in helping Iraqi learners improve their writing skills. The study also aimed to alert Iraqi learners that increasing intercultural awareness helps improve their writing skills. The researcher believed that it is important for Iraqi learners to understand the similarities and differences between their own culture and that of the target language, English language. The experiment was conducted on forty-three participants from the first year of Al-Furat Al-Awsat Technical University. The results showed an improvement in students' understanding of the use of some

multicultural concepts in their writing. It also revealed a great enthusiasm on the part of the Internet surfing participants to place their homework around the pillars of intercultural awareness. Since Iraqi learners are EFL learners, the need to raise their awareness of the English cultures has become an important and indispensable issue. Younes (2019) proved that the multiple intelligence theory is effective in developing the literary thinking of Iraqi students.

Aajami (2019) further examined Iraqi EFL students' ability to comprehend the polysemy of the English preposition "in" from the cognitive linguistic point of view (CL) using Evans and Tyler's model (2003). This study was conducted due to the importance of using prepositions in speech and writing in general and to the difficulties this particular preposition poses to Iraqi students. Thus, the pilot study was done on a number of seventy-six second-year undergraduate students. Then, the data gained from the pre- and post-test data were analyzed using SPSS statistical editor. The results revealed that there is "a progression of more than (0.05) regarding students' understanding of the multiple uses of the preposition in". Besides, there was an outstanding and "positive change in the students' attitude towards the CL approach". Moreover, the difficulty of this preposition is because its semantic diversity. Finally, it was accentuated that cognitive linguistics as an approach is highly effective and accurate if adopted in the process of understanding and explaining the usage of the preposition under study.

Nasser (2018) studied the causes of the difficulties in the skill of constructive writing, particularly academic writing, that English language students face in Iraq. These difficulties have negative effects on students' examination results, and lead to have incompetent first-year EFL learners in writing at the College of Education for Women, University of Baghdad. The researcher enhanced students' achievement through some writing activities that were repeated weekly. Students were asked by the researcher to write descriptive and practical





opinion, and factual paragraphs. The researcher found that students' mistakes can be categorized into grammatical errors, punctuation, spelling, and handwriting errors. The researcher believed that the solutions suggested involve: mastering the arrangement of paragraphs using a good technique for word structures and correct associations, and using competitions, repetition, visual aids, group work, and effective feedbacks to help students improve their writing.

Al-Bahrani and Al-Azzawi (2017) conducted a study to investigate the role caricatures play in highlighting creative ideas. A caricature image was selected to address one of the popular issues in Iraq, the early marriage. The researchers submitted the image to (76) participants who were at the second stage of the department of English language at the college of Education for Women-University of Baghdad. A conceptual framework was used that was represented by the concept of descriptive and expressive meaning by Lyons (1977). The study concluded that only 19% of the participants managed to access the meticulous meaning of the image. However, the rest was creative in highlighting other possible meanings. The level of visual literacy of the respondents was approved of though it needed much more enhancement.

Al-Bahrani and Al-Rubaye (2017) examined EFL learners' semantic range on the preposition *at* within three broad categories: sentences, expressions and phrasal verbs. To meet this objective, a test was designed to cover the overall usages (i.e., the cognitive domains) of the preposition *at*. Croft's (1993) cognitive linguistic model of Domain Highlighting was adopted in the quantitative and qualitative analysis of data. The study revealed that "cognitive theories can be applied to many language-related studies" (p.1). The used model "managed to provide a miniature image to the different usages of the preposition *at*". Besides, it was found that the participants had a severe weakness in the semantics of the preposition *at*. Their wrong choice of prepositions was either

due to the "semantic overlapping between the correct and incorrect ones; lack of knowledge, or to the limited frequency of usage" (p.1).

Mahmood (2016) assessed the writing skills of EFL learners using error analysis (EA) as an investigative tool. For the researcher, the problem lied in the fact that English as a foreign language is an incomplete field in Kurdistan, especially with regard to writing skills and writing errors. Thus, the researcher's aim was to examine, describe, analyze and evaluate writing errors, their causes and sources, as well as discuss the role of EFL material in the errors committed in writing English as a foreign language. Therefore, the Cambridge Standardized Test was used to examine the writing skills of EFL learners. The results of the study showed that Iraqi Kurd EFL learners have serious problems with writing in general, and have weaknesses that led to errors in grammar, spelling, vocabulary, and punctuation - especially grammar.

Speaking of the second type of studies that are concerned with images, it was noticed that Al-Bahrani, Al-Saadi and Yousif (2016) investigated how images can be double edged weapon, a source of ambiguity and creativity at the same time. To meet this objective Langacker's (1987) model Domain Analysis together with Barthes' (1957) semiotic concepts of denotation and connotation were used in analysing a detextualized Caricature image taken from the Iraqi monthly published magazine, Nargis. The study revealed that only (19%) of the participants were able to fully access the proper denotative meaning of signs. That was because for them:

Textless images and words out of context have something in common. They can sometimes be polysemous and other times be homonymous; and the denotative meaning of detextualized images might be ambiguous or somehow vague, as they are susceptible to the reader's cognitive understanding. (p.87)



Al-Fatlawi and Al-Bahrani (2019) investigated the role of number and type of the figures identified in images in accessing caricatures' meaning. Tolman's theory of Mental Maps was used in data analysis. The study concluded that the full identification of the figures in a single panel is important. However, it is much more important to know how to link among these figures to ultimately derive the intended meaning. Besides, there is no one to one correspondence between the highlighted concept in the mind of the participant and the figure being identified, and that was why, there was multiple and numerous construes.

As it is shown, the difference between the previously conducted works and the present study is that it links between the first and second type of studies. It is concerned with using pictures and submitting them to Iraqi EFL learners for the purpose of diagnosing not their comprehension, but their writing skill for the purpose of improving it. That is, the present work is purely applied linguistics in the narrow sense.

### **3. The Practical Part of the Study**

#### **3.1 Methodology**

##### **3.1.1 The Experiment**

This study aims to improve Iraqi students' awareness of the importance of semiotics and its role in improving writing through the use of e-learning platforms. The Internet is an essential means of exchanging symbols, signs and suggestions. It can be positively and usefully used in the classroom in a way that reflects the use of English language to communicate in new and creative contexts. The educational process can be promoted and supported using e-learning platforms as a communication tool between teachers and learners. Via such platforms, the researchers selected pictures and videos and sent them to the participants to analyze them in a written form and to send their feedbacks to the researchers after that. It is a pilot study that has been designed to improve writing through the use of online platforms. The data were collected through observations, feedbacks, pre-test and post-test. Twenty-seven students contributed to

this research as an experimental group. The researchers believed that the semiotic symbols constitute an excellent incentive in stimulating students and urging them to participate and express their thoughts in written forms. It is so, especially when the participant knows that he is fully free to write what he conceptualizes based on the data being presented to him. The participant was also given the freedom to use poetry or prose in the form of a story or an article in his analysis, as shown below:-

1. The first stage was an introduction to the main points of this study; it contained definitions of semiotics and of e-learning. It also showed the importance of being aware of semiotics and its role in improving the writing skill of the Iraqi EFL learners. During this stage, the researchers and the students studied the history and origin of semiotics and its uses in various fields. The researchers explained further to them the importance of semiotics as a strategy to motivate students to write, analyse and criticize. This is because understanding the semiotic symbols needs to know the cultural context from which they emerge.
2. The second stage was the pre-test stage. It was the time to delve into the task of selecting semiotic signs, such as images, words, sounds, gestures and symbols. Here, the participants were divided into two groups; each group conducted in-depth research into one of the semiotic signs displayed. Then, they were required to separate the symbols, colours, and objects behind these pictures to show the intended meaning of these pictures before sending them via the platform under use.
3. The third stage was the post-test. It was designed to test the semiotic awareness of the participants by analysing the intended meanings of certain images or videos that contain different semiotic symbols, colours, and objects. The test was conducted via distance learning platforms.



### 3.1.2 Participants and Procedures

The participants were sixty first-year students most of whom were of pre-intermediate level in English. Some students did not know much about semiotic symbols and their importance in communication among people, cultures, discourses, and advertisements. Before their participation in this experiment, none of the participants was familiar with semiotics. In this stage, all of them started watching cartoons and critical videos that were full of supportive or critical symbols using such platforms. The procedures were carried out as shown below:

1. The researchers presented PowerPoint slides in their dashboard where they defined and explained semiotics in-depth to push the participants to know how to focus on the details and significance of symbols. In addition, they gave them some hints on how to conduct this study and get a feedback on it.
2. Participants were assigned a simple homework to start analysing the symbols to further delve into the topic of this study. They had to capture the nuances of symbols, such as: cartoons, videos, and photos. Participants were also given the opportunity to be informed while analysing these symbols.
3. Participants worked in groups during the pre-examination period to derive the meanings and connotations of semiotic symbols. In order to achieve a high level of participation, online education platforms were used. The researchers selected a group of photos and videos for the students to analyse and construe the communicated meaning.
4. The researchers asked the students to get acquainted with the semiotic symbols and their cultural dimensions. They should explain the interrelated meanings behind the use of semiotic symbols and state the context in which they were used. After that, the post-test was arranged via analysing some photos and videos.
5. The researchers in this study used the six-point evaluation model which was defined by

Martin-Kniep (2000) as “a rating scale that identifies and characterizes the levels of performance. Moreover, it identifies all the mistakes that need to be improved” (p. 34). However, students' writings should be divided into categories and teachers were required to correct and score each category individually. In this way, students were able to clearly see the weaknesses and gaps in each category, fix these gaps, and work on them accurately. Thus, students' writing will be developed rapidly and remarkably.

### 3.1.3 Target Subjects

The topics were chosen by the researchers, and the participants had to have rich semiotic background. Each subject had a clear hint of semiotic symbols. Starting with simple clear practices while researching a few keywords on the topic of the caricatures could help students understand the basis of this research. Next, they had to think freely about the other examples to devise and explain the symbols in different contexts.

### 3.1.4 Limitations of the Study

This study is limited to first-year pre-intermediate level students in Al-Furat Al-Awsat Technical University during the academic year 2020/2021. Sixty students were selected through the Google Form survey to be participants in this study. Participants were selected following the ethical consideration conditions, and were provided with the necessary research tools.

### 3.1.5 Pre-Test Results

The researchers collected sixty scores in the initial examination of students' abilities to understand and analyze the meanings of the caricatures, cultures, magazine fronts, advertisements, smoking, and national symbols, in addition to the videos related to instruction and media propaganda. It turned out that the participants had a limited ability to give a deeper and accurate analysis to the figures in these images and videos. However, they understood the goal behind using semiotic symbols though they could not accurately determine the necessary tools and their meanings. Most of the



participants wrote sentences that were void of any structural and grammatical errors. Sentences sometimes lacked logical sequences, especially in articles. Most of the essay sentences were loose and contain no clear statements. Their limitations were mostly apparent when developing ideas and closing paragraphs. Besides, they used generic sentences and showed inability to delve into describing the details of the target topic. The results of the pre-test showed that all students have an acceptable improvement in dealing with semiotic symbols. However, they were unable to get an in-depth analysis of the symbols being displayed. Their writing were good, but it lacked sentence cohesion to ultimately have a coherent essay.

### **3.1.6 Treatment**

The treatment phase began after the pre-test results. The targeted topics were distributed with pictures and videos. A number of photos and videos were devoted to each topic. Participants were asked to write a comment about the topics presented with the photos. These captions were written by the participants after giving them the freedom to write about these signs in form of an essay, short story, poetry or speech. Besides, they were given the freedom to surf the net and read more about semiotics to obtain the most related information of semiotics, and its analysis mechanism. After the participants were able to write a short description explaining and analysing the semiotic symbols, the participants began to work on expanding their writing more while preserving the unity and coherence of the topic. Since coherence is important in any essay, students had to work individually to search for the properties and elements of coherence under the researchers' supervision. The researchers also helped the participants in dividing the article and in specifying the function of each part in order to

overcome the technical problems that they fell in. The main sentence is the most important sentence in the article or topic. This is why, researchers should train their participants on writing sentences and on knowing their locations. After the main sentence, work was done on the supporting sentences and the linking mechanism that achieved the unity of the written texts. Transitional sentences were very important because they linked the paragraphs of the article together. Moreover, the participants had to work on grammatical aspects, such as the subject-verb agreement, punctuation and capitalization, and the syntax of the sentence, and on avoiding missing sentences, and run-on sentences. Finally, the participants were divided into groups. Each group had to work on writing an essay about an image and video highlighting, as a result, a specific topic to be selected by the participants themselves. Teamwork enhanced students' ability to share information and analyse semiotic symbols more broadly.

### **3.1.7 Post-Test**

After ten weeks of work on the semiotic awareness, its features and its role in motivating learners to write, analyse and criticize, participants sat for the post-test. Since this experience was virtual using online education platforms, the test was conducted on the same platform. Participants were able to choose the best time to submit their articles at the predetermined time and adhere to the specified time. They were then asked to write two articles about semiotics: the first is about a commercial advertisement in signposts and on television, whereas the second was an announcement on the dangers of violence against children, such as bullying at school. These two subjects were selected by two specialist experts in this field, as it mentioned in the Table 1:





Table 1  
*The Academic Ranks, Names, Fields, and Locations of the Jury Members*

No.	Academic Rank	Name.	Fields	College.
1.	Asst. Prof. Dr.	Rana Hameed Al-Bahrani	Cognitive linguistics	College of Education for Women, University of Baghdad
2.	Asst. Prof. Dr.	Shaima M. Saalh	EFL	College of Education for Women, University of Baghdad

The pre and post-tests reliability were measured by Alpha-Cronbach formula. The reliability coefficient was 0.78 and 0.83, respectively.

### 3.1.7 Data Analysis

Results of both pre and post tests were analyzed using the statistical editor SPSS. Each

test compared the performance of all students when addressing their semiotic writing awareness. Table 2 displays the basic statistics of students' pre-test scores. In this table, the number of students and their average scores are described along with other statistical variables.

Table 2  
*The Mean, Standard Deviation, degree of freedom and Paired T-test values*

Paired Groups	Mean	Sample Numbers	Std. Deviation	D.F	Computed t-value	Tabulated t-value	Level of Sig. 0.05
Pre-test	11.68	60	6.76	59	6	1.67	significant
Post-test	16.88	60	3.55				

Table 2 shows that the number of participants is 60; their pretest mean and standard deviation were 11.68 and 6.76, and in the post-test the mean and standard deviation were 16.88 and 3.55. The results are significant at  $P > 0.05$  and  $df$  59, since the computed t-value (6) is higher than tabulated value (1.67).

After analyzing the results of the post-test, the participants showed an outstanding improvement in their writing style and semiotic awareness. They have achieved a remarkable awareness in determining the specificity of semiotics. In this test, the participants were better able to understand semiotic symbols and convey clear and underlying messages that serve the goal for which they were sat. Participants further developed abilities to write clear topic sentences, connect sentences, explore details, and maintain the unity and coherence of the essay well. They were able to avoid many technical, grammatical and structural errors. This means that semiotic awareness and learning via distant learning

platforms can make a remarkable positive change in the participants' writing skills.

### 3.1.8 Discussion and Results

According to the analysis of the study, the performance of Iraqi learners improved, and their ability to improve their writing skills was enhanced. Semiotic awareness can help deepen their understanding and enhance students' ability to analyse and criticize. More so, semiotic awareness helps its pioneers improve their communication skills with the world in general. Semiotic signs motivate students to write better and enable them to search for details. To be aware of them helps learners a great deal to learn more about the social and cultural cues in the target language. These symbols also enhance the cultural acquisition of the foreign language learners. For a better understanding of the target language, students and teachers must not only undergo language training, but also the social experiences as well.

As for distance education, it is considered an effective method because it is very flexible.



This flexibility allows participants to choose the right times for study and research. Distant education is less expensive at the level of individuals and institutions, but it reduces social interactions, which are necessary to build people's personalities, especially students. Students can also use the Internet as a great aid in their scientific journey. It is clear that online learning provides teachers with an effective way to deliver lessons to students. Students are allowed to attend classes from anywhere they choose and can record and listen to them later whenever needed. Online education is more affordable compared to physical learning. This is because online learning eliminates the cost points for students' transportation, meals, and most importantly, their real estate. There are fewer chances that students will miss lessons in online education. The online learning system, with its range of options and resources, can be customized in many ways. It is the best way to create the perfect learning environment that fits every student's needs.

#### 4. Conclusions

Semiotic awareness and learning via e-learning platforms can be a great way to teach English in Iraq, especially in improving writing skills. This study is very limited because the number of the participants and the examples discussed are limited. Good results for the participants could inspire more research studies about the use of semiotic awareness in improving communication within the Iraqi society and with other societies abroad.

#### 5. Recommendation

Based on the conclusions of the study, the following points are recommended:

1. The use of e-learning and semi-awareness can improve students' performance and broaden their writing skills.
2. The inclusion of some chapters in school curricula which teach semiotic symbols, their role in communication, and their impact on people's lives in different contexts.

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