The Impact of Synchronous Online Flipped Learning Approach on Improving Learners' Performance in Persuasive Essays

تأثير أسلوب التّعلّم المتزامن عبر الإنترنت على تحسين أداء المتعلّمين في المقالات الإقناعيّة

Amina Mohammad Ali Kawtharani

آمنة محمد علي كوثراني

Educational Researcher

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Abstract

In the backdrop of COVID-19, the educational body witnessed an abrupt shift to distant learning leaving the teaching learning experience in a state of turmoil. There arose an urgent need for an approach that would meet the emerging demands of distance learning while upholding the quality of in-person teaching learning experiences. To this end, the researcher investigated and explored how Synchronous Online Flipped Learning Approach (SOFLA®), an eight-cycle structured, interactive and multifaceted online approach improved learners' performance in writing persuasive essays unlike students who followed a traditional method in an online setting. The study followed the sequential mixed method approach, spanning over six weeks and involving 30 students in the experimental group and an equal 30 in the control group. Findings of the primary quantitative (QUAN) results and sequential collection and analysis of the secondary qualitative (qual) data, prompted the researcher to conclude that SOFLA® is a feasible and recommended approach that enhances the teaching learning experience in distance learning. The statistical results of

p-value of 0.000 positively affirmed research question 1 and its related hypothesis proving that implementation of SOFLA® is a feasible approach to improve learners' performance to write persuasive essays unlike others who follow a traditional method in an online context. Moreover, the descriptive and computed results of the secondary qualitative data showed 90% learners' positive perception of implementation of SOFLA® substantiated with p-value 0.000, hence positively affirming research question 2 and its related hypothesis.

الملخص

في ظلّ جائحة كوفيد-19، شهدت الهيئة التّعليميّة تحوّلًا مفاجئًا نحو التّعلّم عن بُعد، ما أدّى إلى اضطراب تجربة التّدريس والتّعلّم. برزت حاجة ملحة إلى نهج يلبي المتطلّبات النّاشئة للتّعلّم عن بُعد مع الحفاظ على جودة تجارب التّعلّم الحضوريّ. ولتحقيق ذلك، عمد الباحث إلى استكشاف كيفية تحسين نهج التّعلّم المقلوب المتزامن عبر الإنترنت Synchronous Online Flipped Learning Approach (SOFLA®) وهو نهج منظم وتفاعليّ ومتعدّد الأوجه من ثماني مراحل، يسهم في تحسين أداء المتعلّمين في كتابة المقالات الإقناعيّة، على عكس الطّلاب الذين اتّبعوا الطّريقة التّقليديّة. اتّبعت الدّراسة منهج مختلط الأساليب التّسلسليّ، وامتدت على مدى ستة أسابيع، وشارك فيها 30 طالبًا في المجموعة التّجريبيّة و30 طالبًا في المجموعة المضبوطة. دفعت نتائج البيانات الكميّة الأوليّة (QUAN) والجمع والتّحليل التّسلسليّ للبيانات النّوعيّة الثّانويّة (qual) الباحث إلى استنتاج أن SOFLA® نهج عمليّ وموصى به يعزّز تجربة التّدريس والتّعلّم عن بُعد. أكدّت النّتائج الإحصائيّة لقيمة p البالغة 0.000 بشكل إيجابيّ سؤال البحث الأوّل وفرضيّته، ما يثبت أنّ تطبيق SOFLA® نهجٌ فعال لتحسين أداء المتعلّمين في كتابة المقالات الإقناعيّة، على عكس المتعلّمين ممن يتبعون المنهج التّقليديّ في سياق الإنترنت. علاوةً على ذلك، أظهرت النّتائج الوصفيّة والحسابيّة للبيانات النّوعيّة الثّانويّة أنّ 90% من المتعلّمين لديهم تصوّر إيجابيّ لتطبيق SOFLA®، مدعومًا بقيمة p البالغة 0.000، مما يؤكّد بشكل إيجابيّ سؤال البحث الثّاني وفرضيّته.

Key Words:

Flipped Learning – التعلم المقلوب; Synchronous – متزامن; Asynchronous – غير متزامن

Abbreviations:

Synchronous Online Flipped Learning Approach: SOFLA

Community of Inquiry: CoI

Introduction

With hardly any prior notice and preparations, educational institutions shut down and teachers and students worldwide found themselves in a state of quarantine, confounded with the pressing need to adjust to a change in the teaching learning process, and still uphold quality education in remote online setting. This shift from a physical in-person classroom to a virtual distance one became not only an imperative option to adjust to, but one that entailed a plethora of challenges for teachers of all disciplines and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) who grappled to implement the approaches followed in the physical classroom in an online context in order to facilitate learning of productive skills, mainly writing. There was, hence an urgent need for an apt instructional approach that would meet the exigencies of online learning, guide teachers to facilitate instruction, maintain learner engagement, foster active interaction, and maximize learning in unfamiliar synchronous and asynchronous settings.

1.2 Statement of the problem

In the backdrop of lockdown and ensuing online teaching, teachers

of EFL were confronted with the major challenge of teaching writing skill in an online context. Research conducted in a face-to-face setting affirm that writing is a demanding, complex skill for learners who study English as a second Language, and more so for those studying it as a foreign one (Kroll, 1990; Dülger, 2011; Graham, Harris and Mason, 2005; Hayes, 2012; Herrera, 2002). The process of writing requires learners to demonstrate an array of low and high-order thinking skills that include reading, researching, rephrasing, summarizing, evaluating and synthesizing. Derewianka & Jones (2012) consider it the most challenging as it involves both the receptive and productive skills. While writing, learners apply a set of sophisticated skills and a range of linguistic resources like varying word choice, sentence and overall text structure in new meaningful context (Holliday, 2010; Rowe and Edwards, 2007).

The complexities were further accentuated by the absence of a clear-cut effective framework and instructional approach that would make use of best practices of in-person teaching approaches to respond to the demands of online instruction. Moreover, the approach needed would recognize teacher presence to design proactive lesson plans, facilitate the process of instruction and at the same time promote communication, collaboration and learning (Garrison, Anderson and Archer, 2000). With minimal online teacher professional development, teachers on the one hand, posted lessons on school Learning Management Systems to be done in asynchronous setting and/

or struggled to deliver instruction by trying to transfer approaches applied in face-to-face teaching to an online synchronous context (Tschida, Hodge and Schmidt, 2016). Learners, on the other, relied on some form of technology to access and interact with learning materials (Anderson, 2011).

The question as to whether online learning would take shape in synchronous and or asynchronous online learning settings arose and became another issue to address. Research has emphasized the benefits that asynchronous setting of online learning holds. It is geographically independent, learner-paced, timed and centered (Clark and Mayer,2016; Van der Keylen, Lippert, Kunisch, Kühlein, and Roos, 2020); it promotes cognitive achievement, offers flexible opportunities for personalized pace of learning, increased motivation, improved quality of equitable, supportive and collaborative learning (Nwankwo, 2018). Studies have nonetheless documented several challenges in asynchronous online learning setting. Hartnett (2015) pointed to loss of self-study and limitations of digital skills among learners; Kim, Hong and Song (2019) observed the absence or minimal motivation and readiness to achieve learning objectives; Smith and Smith (2014) saw that it hindered effective application of hands-on activities which are essential to some subjects; and Baczek, Zaganczyk-Baczek, Szpringer, Jaroszynski, Wozakowska-Kapłon (2021) emphasized that absence of active engagement and interaction in asynchronous online learning context denied acquisition of social skills. Put together,

the shortcomings of asynchronous online learning alone were a source of dissatisfaction and frustration for teachers and students alike.

Synchronous online learning setting, on the other hand, requires instructors and learners to arrange meetings in real-time for instant interactive communication and feedback. Studies have shown that this form of online learning is cooperative in nature and promotes teacher-learner and learner-learner discussions (Blau, Weiser and Eshet-Alkalai, 2017). It also boosts motivation and commitment to accomplish performance tasks (Hrastinski, 2008). Even so, researchers acknowledge that synchronous online learning setting is not devoid of constraints. Tschida, Hodge and Schmidt (2016) reveal that an impromptu shift to synchronous teaching makes teachers fall victims to lengthy lectures which inadvertently abort active participation, disrupt the flow of interaction. It also results in disengaged passive listeners, watchers and readers (Smith and Smith, 2014).

The cornucopia of studies which highlight benefits and inadequacies of online learning underscore the crucial need for "a well-thought-out strategy and a more active approach" (Baczek, et al. 2021, p. 1), that would not only include dynamic elements of current instructional strategies to guide teachers, but also "maintain their presence in robust and visible ways and help students remain engaged and motivated while learning online" in both asynchronous and synchronous settings (Marshall and Kostka, 2020, p. 2). In the past two decades, researchers

experimented and proposed models to guide online learning, yet each remained pedagogically wanting. Egbert, Herman, and Lee (2015) recommend a model for online flipped teacher education which leverages technology, procedural knowledge and instructional strategies yet mostly relies on asynchronous form online learning.

Thorough research opened the doors wide to one novel online pedagogy, Synchronous Online Flipped Learning Approach (SOFLA®), introduced by Dr. Helaine Marshall in 2017 following a trial in 2016 which integrated two modes of course delivery, flipped learning and synchronous online learning to teach a five-week pedagogical grammar course (Marshall & Rodríguez Buitrago, 2017; Marshall and Kostka, 2020). SOFLA® is an eight-step instructional approach that closely replicates an active in-person classroom wherein teaching and learning take shape through "structured, interactive, multimodal activities in both asynchronous and synchronous" setting (Marshall, and Wallestad, 2021, p.140). The instructional approach integrates best practices of two separate teaching learning paths, the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework for online teaching (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000; Garrison, 2016, as cited in Marshall, and Wallestad, 2021, p. 140) and flipped learning (Bergmann & Sams, 2012). Accordingly, the study will investigate the efficacy of implementing SOFLA® to enhance learners' ability to write persuasive essays in an online context.

1.3 Purpose of the study

The study aimed to study how implementing SOFLA® would bridge the teaching learning gaps that mostly surfaced as a result of the sudden shift to remote learning. It aimed to equip teachers with a clear pedagogical framework that would introduce and uphold active engagement learning practices that maximize learning in a remote context. In addition, implementing the eight steps of SOFLA® aimed to explore learners' positive perspective on SOFLA®. In the light of the above, the following research questions and hypotheses were postulated.

1.5 Research questions

Does implementation of SOFLA® improve learners' performance to write persuasive essays unlike others who follow a traditional method in an online context?

Do learners develop a positive perception towards SOFLA®?

Hypotheses

Implementation of SOFLA® improves learners' performance to write persuasive essays unlike others who follow a traditional method in an online context

Students develop a positive perception towards SOFLA®

Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Frameworks Underlying SOFLA®.

Two distinct teaching learning frameworks underpin SOFLA®. The first is CoI framework for online teaching which posits that

“learning occurs within the Community through the interaction of three core elements … cognitive presence, social presence, and teaching presence. (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000, p. 87). The second framework resides in the four pillars of flipped learning: flexible environment, learning culture, intentional content and professional educator (Flipped Learning Network, 2014).

2.1.1 Community of Inquiry Framework

According to Garrison, Anderson and Archer, online learning referred to as “computer conferencing” facilitated through computer communication is “a versatile medium for the delivery of educational programs “anytime, anywhere” (2000, p, 87). With the boom of ‘computer conferencing’ and ‘distance education’ at the turn of the century, Garrison, Anderson and Archer systematically studied the literature and introduced a “conceptual framework and model of a community of inquiry” (2000, p103), which has for two decades and a half become a supportive tool for designing online teaching and learning experiences. The CoI framework postulates that learning experience can best be facilitated and attained through the interrelation of three requisite elements, teaching presence, social presence, and cognitive presence each of which is sub-divided into categories and indicators (Garrison, et al., 2000).

The first, success of teaching presence, depends on three sub-categories: the expertise of the teacher to (1) set learning goals, design learning material, assessment for learning and process of

delivery, (2) facilitate the teaching learning process in effective ways to help learners construct deep meaning and critical thinking and (3) guide and focus discussion and interaction in an online context. The second, cognitive presence, which indicates the extent to which learners in an educational "community of inquiry are able to construct meaning through sustained communication" (p. 89), encompasses four sub-groupings that rely on the expertise of the teacher presence to (1) trigger communication and set mental process of inquiry and learning rolling; (2) engage learners to explore new concept and orient their attention to make sense of new concepts, (3) integrate and connect these to acquired knowledge to gain deeper understanding of whole, and finally (4) apply the acquired knowledge and skill and verify enduring understanding in new context. The third, social presence incorporates three interrelated categories which sustain both the teaching presence and cognitive presence. The ability of the teacher to (1) establish positive environment that puts learners at ease to behave naturally and express themselves; (2) open communication, interaction which deepens (3) group cohesion. These are translated through purposeful collaborative commitment, positive interdependence, accountability, thus, maximizing both the cognitive and teaching elements of the educational experience (Garrison et al. 2000; Garrison, 2016). In short, teaching presence shapes and sustains a sense of group commitment and collaboration, the basics of social presence which in turn prompts the cognitive facets conducive to higher-order thinking and learning.

In the light of the above, SOFLA®, a novel online pedagogical model of flipped learning, demonstrates how the three elements that frame the teaching presence support teachers not only in designing the learning experience but also accentuate their dynamic presence to create a comprehensive, accessible, collaborative and vigorous teaching learning experience (Garrison, 2016). SOFLA® actively engages learners and gives them ownership of their learning (Marshall, 2017; Marshall and Rodríguez Buitrago, 2017; Marshall and Kostka, 2020; Marshall, 2021; Marshall, and Wallestad, 2021).

2.1.2 Flipped Learning

The second framework thar underpins SOFLA® is Flipped Learning, a pedagogical approach that transforms the traditional paradigm of teaching and learning through moving direct instruction of foundational knowledge to short interactive videos viewed outside the class in an individual learning space. The relocation converts the classroom from a traditional class based on direct instruction to an interactive learning venue where learners actively engage in application and analysis of concepts and skills (Flipped Learning network, 2014). Flipped learning, redirects the compass to respond to learne variance and needs via creating flexible learning environments and culture, varying and accommodating process (Tomlinson, 2001). Flipped learning fosters either group work or independent study involving learners in a variety of active learning strategies and emphasizing high-order thinking skills which culminate in ongoing

learning (Berrett, 2012) In a white paper published in 2013, Hamdan, McKnight, P., McKnight, K. and Arfstrom explain that although limited quantitative and qualitative research exist on Flipped Learning, yet a significant number has investigated "key elements of the model with respect to instructional strategies for engaging students in their learning" (p. 6). As such, flipped learning provides learners with opportunities to interact with content through reading, writing, listening, talking, and reflecting (University of Minnesota Center of Learning and Education, 2008), and revs up student engagement and critical thinking (O'Dowd and Aguilar-Roca, 2009).

Today, the literature is copious with studies that investigate the efficacy of the approach in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), nursing and the social sciences (Voss and Kostka, 2019, p. 4); but still minimal in English Language instruction whether implemented in-person or distance learning (Marshal and Kostka 2020). Nevertheless, literature in the field of English Language teaching supports the implementation of flipped learning. Studies have evidenced that students and instructors have shown positive attitudes towards different models of flipped learning (Hung, 2017; Voss and Fang, 2016). Others have indicated that flipped learning improves comprehension, interaction and critical thinking (Marshall, 2014); contributes to positive learning outcomes (Fethi and Marshall, 2018); promotes learners' motivation and engagement (Hung, 2015), and autonomy in learning (Han, 2015). Most relevant to the

current study, findings have also indicated that flipped learning is conducive to the development of writing skills (Alghasab, 2020; Ekmekci, 2009; Engin, 2014; Luo, O'Steen and Brown, 2020). To add, a body of pedagogically oriented literature has been developed to support instructors' efforts in implementing flipped learning (Marshal & Kostka, 2020).

Since its inception, flipped learning has witnessed a development of the framework into six models: Flipped Mastery by Bergman & Sams (2012), Explore–Flip Apply by Musallam (2013), In–Class Flip by Gonzalez (2014), Peer Instruction by Berrett (2012), Online Flip by Honeycutt (2014) and the latest, which the study investigates, Synchronous Online Flipped Learning Approach in 2017 (as cited in Marshall, 2019). All observe the four fundamental pillars of flipped learning: (1) Flexible Environment; (2) Learning Culture; (3) Intentional Content; and (4) Professional Educator (Marshall and Kostka, 2020), yet "apply them to according to the exigencies of a particular instructional context" (Marshal, 2019, p.1). SOFLA® has to date been investigated by Marshall, (2017), Marshall and Rodríguez Buitrago, (2017), Marshall and Kostka, (2020), Marshall and Wallestad, (2021) and recently Torres Zúñiga who examined the effectiveness of SOFLA® to enhance students' proficiency in English B1.1 in an EFL course in the second year of the degree of Primary Education in the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education at a Spanish university (2021). Hence, the opportunity to study the efficacy of this new E–Learning pedagogy to enhance learners' performance to

write persuasive essays was a promising challenge.

2.2 Synchronous Online Flipped Learning Approach

Developed by Helaine Marshal (2017) and refined by Marshal and Rodriguez Buitrago (2017), SOFLA® is a pedagogical approach which repositions the settings of flipped learning yet maintains teacher presence in a learner-centered online environment through proactive planning: curating content and tasks to promote higher-order thinking skills, tailoring instruction to respond to students' needs, promoting dynamic in-depth discussion, upholding application via independent then collaborative learning experiences to deepen learning (Marshal and Kostka, 2020),

2.2.1 Frameworks of Synchronous Online Flipped Learning Approach

The big question that poses itself is how SOFLA® encompasses CoI and Flipped learning to make the most of online teaching learning experience. To commence, Marshall and Wallestad (2021) recommend four main questions that would highlight teacher presence and guide them through planning and facilitating instruction: First, it is requisite that teachers pre-determine the content to be addressed in each of the asynchronous settings and the synchronous ones along with the objective of each. Second, they must design and execute the introduction of the key concepts or skills in the asynchronous setting, and proactively plan how the asynchronous learning will support and maximize the teaching learning process in the subsequent synchronous steps. Third, it

is essential that teachers consider how the material and process of instruction in the synchronous class would maximize student–student interaction, instruction and collaboration which in turn respond to the needs of diverse learners. Last but not the least, teachers ought to consider how they would build accountability and peer feedback to give learners ownership of learning in both settings. An umbrella framework encompassing four strategies – Equity, Enrichment, Engagement and Empowerment (4E's) – stipulate the implementation of SOFLA® to create fertile spaces for learning all through the eight–step learning cycle that align with and inform the other for adjustment of the teaching learning process (Marshal and Kostka, 2020).

2.2.2 The Eight–Step Learning Cycle of SOFLA® within the 4E Strategies

The eight–step cycle call for interconnectedness and alignment which inform and foster active engagement and learning in both asynchronous and synchronous settings. Step One, Pre–Work of SOFLA®, forms the basis of flipped learning (Bauer–Ramazani, Graney, Marshall and Sabieh as cited in Marshal and Wallestad, 2021). The pre–set launches the learning process through delivery of explicit structured, interactive and multifaceted instruction of course concepts via short videos or shared reading with focused embedded questions and activities posted on a learning platform. In this step, every student is able to access, view or read any number of times as need be, and then complete and post the assigned work which the teacher

refers to in order to pinpoint areas of learning or lack of it, and accordingly design and adjust instruction in the next step, The Sign-In Activity. Although teachers may easily find myriads of videos online, Voss and Kostka (2019) suggest that tailoring one's videos renders them more "individualized" and "personalized" (p. 16) since the content, narration and clarifications are purposely planned to meet predetermined learning objectives, respond to students' needs and stimulate motivation through language and variation of tone. Flipping learning whether in the actual classroom or online does not entail over reliance or use of state-of-the art technology since "pedagogy should always drive technology, never the other way around," the pioneers of recommend (Bergman and Sams, 2012, p. 21). In Step 2, The Sign-In Activity, learners meet synchronously for the first time to respond to a question or more which teachers purposely design to activate learning by triggering every learner to actively participate, share understanding of key concepts introduced in the Pre-Work, review key points and clarify misunderstanding if found. Practice and application ensue in Whole-Group Application, Step 3, becomes the Enrichment stage where the teacher facilitates a collaborative activity that entails group application and peer instruction of the concept introduced in the Pre-Work. Learners share, discuss ideas and exchange feedback to reinforce and deepen learning of key concepts using an interactive tool as Google Document, Jam board, padlet or others. Step 4, Breakouts and Step 5, Share-Out, are student-structured and centered, and foster active engagement,

interaction and peer instruction manifested in collaborative tasks and shared product, first done in breakout rooms, and later on reported and shared in the mainstream room of the online platform. Learners partake in the Share Help Ask and Comment (SHAC) protocol (Fethi, 2015). They share the collaborative product, raise questions, provide constructive feedback, and self-conduct reciprocal discussions and justifications (Fethi and Marshall, 2018) which ultimately promote positive and supportive learning environments. In this context, "meaning is constructed and shared" (Garrison, 2011, p. 10) in a social context through interaction, observation, among more-abled peers within small groups, and subsequently independent application (Vygotsky, 1978). Moreover, collaboration and active communication towards attainment of a shared goal build a sense of group commitment in an online community, give learners a sense of ownership, hold each learner accountable for the success of the shared task, goal and cognitive aspects of the learning experience (Garrison, 2009), thus replicating positive interdependence, individual accountability, face-to-face conducive interaction, social skills and group processing in physical cooperative learning. The teaching learning process in SOFLA® culminates in Steps 6, 7 and 8, Preview and Discovery, Assignment Instructions and Reflection which lend learners a sense of Empowerment to take ownership of learning. Teachers revisit and review key concepts introduced in the Pre-Work step, assess learners' ability to apply and explain new-founded knowledge in new context in order to either confirm understanding or show the need for personalized

support before embarking on a briefing of upcoming Pre-Work, and finally learners round up with an exit that requires them to reflect on the learning experience, new skill, strategy or understanding gained from the synchronous session which is a "legitimate form" of the new information gained and the level of learning after practice (Schon, 1983, p.69). SOFLA® sets a systematic plan for learning demonstrated in the rubric template designed by Heather Rubin which guides teachers and learners to be cognizant of the indicators of each step of the learning cycle and so, rate the level implementation of each (as cited in Marshall, and Wallestad, 2021).

Figure 1.The eight-step cycle of SOFLA®

Hence, in the backdrop of lockdown and the need to adapt to change in pedagogy, SOFLA® offered an opportune model to transfer the dynamic face-to-face classes classroom to a virtual one in order to promote students' performance in writing persuasive essay.

2.3 Related Studies

The literature evidences that teaching writing in an online context is feasible and effective. Lin and Griffith (2014) conclude that online collaborative learning environments develops learners' cognitive and writing skill, Carolan and Kyppö, (2015) indicate that process writing in a digital environment facilitates students' acquisition of writing skills while Cleary, Rice, Zemliansky, Amant, and Borgman (2019), assert that online forums are purposeful ad productive in that they allow teachers to model writing practices and "observe peer-supported writing taking shape 'live'" (p 11) as learners review, reflect share, collaborate and allocate work. The above-mentioned studies fall short of expounding the pedagogy followed in online learning, accordingly, SOFLA® offered an opportune remote learning model to adapt to change in education in a post-pandemic time. The approach adheres to the pillars of flipped learning, maintains the teacher's presence in a learner-centered and structured approach which focuses "on the learner and learning" (Bergman and Sams, 2012, p 11) through active engagement and opportunities for every learner in an online context.

3.1 Research design

The study followed a mixed method design comprising qualitative and quantitative research methods for data collection to mitigate the limitations of both designs if conducted separately, and in so doing provided a more comprehensive understanding of the aforementioned research questions postulated (Creswell &

Plano Clark, 2018).

3.1.1 The type of research

The study specifically adhered to the explanatory sequential design which is a two-phase mixed method design that begins with the collection and analysis of dominant quantitative data (QUAN) in the first phase and is followed by collection of secondary qualitative data (qual) in the second. The researcher built on the results of the quantitative findings to build on and follow-up the secondary quantitative data in order to explore students' perception on SOFLA®. The design intent of the sequential explanatory mixed method design is "to explain the mechanisms or reasons behind quantitative result" (Plano Clark, and Creswell, 2015, p. 391). The study gave dominant priority to quantitative data over qualitative ones (QUAN qual), with sequential (→) timing for collection of both sets, and distinct interaction and interpretation of analysis of both (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The quantitative data collected in the first phase from the pretest and posttest were analyzed using SPSS 25 to inform and structure the qualitative data collection which were garnered in the second phase from an interview with a subsample of focus group of 10 students. The connection between both sets of data was established right from the onset through the research questions that included both data sets components, then through using the dominant quantitative results to form the focus group and generate the core questions asked, and finally through the interpretation of the dataset.

3.1.2 Data Collection, Instruments and Implementation

The study investigated whether SOFLA® would improve learners' performance in writing persuasive essay (RQ1) and explored learners' perception of the SOFLA® experience (RQ2). The study was implemented in a private school in Lebanon in the academic year 2021-2022, over a span of 6 weeks from 19th April within 14 sixty-minute-synchronous sessions. The participants in the study comprised sixty 17-year-old second secondary students who study English as a Foreign Language and as medium of instruction. 30 participants in the control group learned the elements of persuasive writing in synchronous online sessions following the traditional method while the thirty participants in the experimental group learned the skill through implementing the eight-step learning step of SOFLA®. Prior to launching the study, a pre-test was administered to all participants in order to document an initial record of students' performance in writing a persuasive essay. In this phase, both groups were equal and any difference later observed in the analysis of results must be attributed to the intervention the experimental group received. The researcher assessed students' essays as per an adapted grading rubric. Two days before the intervention was launched, the researcher and the experimental group held a synchronous Google Meet session during which the teacher-researcher communicated the objective of the study and clarified the 8-step learning cycle of SOFLA®. The researcher then proceeded to record two videos about the elements and techniques that

make up persuasive writing. The videos and two embedded interactive assignments were posted on Google Classroom, and students were instructed to submit the worksheets on the same platform for the teacher to review and garner evidence of areas of strengths and shortcomings in order to tailor and adapt the content of upcoming steps. To facilitate instant communication and feedback to students' clarification questions during the pre-work, learners expressed their preference for a WhatsApp group which learners find user-friendly, easily accessible, conducive to interaction (Sari and Putri, 2019), particularly when the group includes the presence of the teacher (Baishya, 2020). The seven synchronous sessions proceeded as scheduled during which learners experienced a replica of the active in-person classroom where teaching and learning took form at times via teacher-structured as opposed to centered, and mostly through learner-structured and centered classes which included collaborative, multimodal activities and interaction conducive to higher-order learning. The exit from the intervention in step 8: Reflection, required learners to ponder, reflect and write brief notes on their experience with SOFLA®, a practice which Dewey (1938) asserts is as significant to students' growth as the experience itself since it offers learners the opportunity to think of what they had leaned and about the process of learning. As students reflect, they take time to "focus on the cognitive aspects (thinking, problem solving and so on) that led to particular actions, the outcomes and lessons learned from those actions, and how these inform what they might do in

the future" (Mair, 2012, p. 14). The eight-step learning cycle accented the teaching presence which played a pivotal role for successful online leaning through setting and communicating the learning objectives, setting and following up deadlines, facilitating the teaching learning experience for the purpose of making meaning through guiding and redirecting discussion and interaction, encouraging sharing, participation and constructive feedback, posing probe and guiding questions and building collaboration, intervening to reinforce relevant discussion all of which maximize meaningful teaching and learning (Garrison, Anderson and Archer, 2000).

Done with the implementation of the intervention, researcher proceeded to collect the quantitative data for analysis. A posttest was administered requesting students in both control and experimental groups to write a persuasive essay as per the same criteria of the adapted rubric followed in the pre-test. The dominant quantitative results were analyzed and relied on to form a focus group of ten students who were invited to freely communicate their feedback and viewpoint in response to four semi-structured questions which aimed to explore their positive perspective of SOFLA®. Zohrabi (2013) suggests that semi-structured questions are "flexible and allow the interviewee to provide more information" (p.258). In real-time, the students typed and posted their feedback on Google Classroom so that the evidence remained private to the researchers.

4.1 Analysis of the Primary (QUAN) and Secondary (qual) Results

The results of the primary quantitative data sets (QUAN) were collected sequentially (→) and analyzed according to SPSS 25. The computed findings set the ground for collection and analysis of the secondary qualitative data (qual). The results of data sets are shown below. f

4.1.1 Analysis of Primary Quantitative Findings

After computing the results of the pre-test and posttest, administered to both the control and experimental groups, the researcher compared and studied the differences in mean, t-statistics, p-value and 95% confidence intervals of both groups. The purpose was to answer the first research question and hypothesis which posited that implementation of SOFLA® would improve learners' performance to write persuasive essays unlike others who follow a traditional method in an online context. Based on the explicit significant differences in results of experimental group as table 1 below indicates, the researcher concludes that the results are significant and that implementation of SOFLA® is an effectively significant feasible strategic online approach that can improve learners' performance to write persuasive essays.

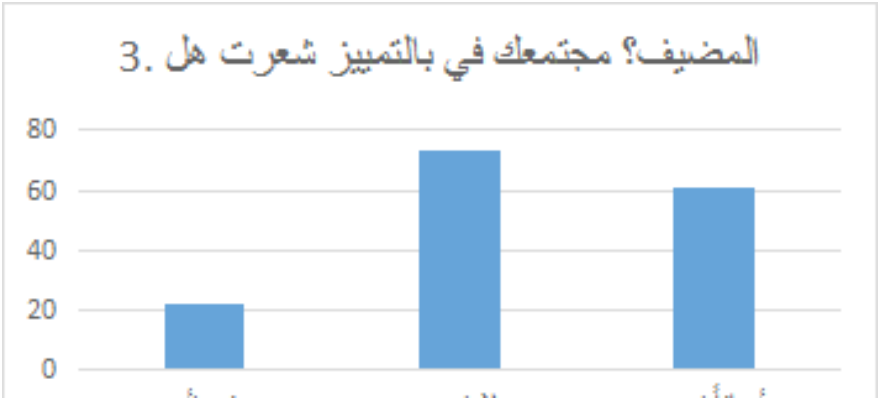
Descriptive characteristics of control group N=15								
Persuasive Essay	Mean		Difference in Means D	t-statistic	Standard error Sd	P-value	95% Confidence Intervals	
	Pre-test	Post-test					Lower	Upper
	4.20	4.10	-0.10	-0.902	0.111	0.375	-0.327	0.127
Descriptive characteristics of Experimental group N=15								
Persuasive Essay	Mean		Difference in Means D	t-statistic	Standard error Sd	P-value	95% Confidence Intervals	
	Pre-test	Post-test					Lower	Upper
	4.07	6.90	2.833	14.735	0.192	0.000	2.440	3.227

Table 1. Differences between Results of Control and Experimental Groups

Table 1 above and figures 2 and 3 below show the statistical differences in mean and P-Value between the control group and experimental group. Starting with the control group, the mean difference between the pre-test and posttest registered -0.10 with no significant difference as seen by P value 0.375, the t-value registered -0.902, which likewise showed no statistically significant differences in average between the pre-test and the post-test, and finally the differences in mean and 95% confidence intervals recorded was 95% CI [-0.327, 0.127]. The findings in the control group showed that the traditional online teaching method did not improve the performance of learners to write persuasive essays. On the other hand, a reading and analysis of the computed differences in mean, t-test, p-value and 95% confidence interval of the experimental group gave solid ground

for the researcher to conclude that implementation of SOFLA® improved learners' performance in writing persuasive essays unlike learners who studied the same writing form in traditional ways. The numerical results indicated 2.833 positive difference between the mean, t-test 14.735 p-value of 0.000 and 95% confidence interval [2.440, 3.227], thus, affirming hypothesis 1 that implementation of SOFLA® improved learners' performance to write persuasive essays unlike others who follow a traditional method in an online context.

Figure 2. Mean Difference Between Pre-test and Posttest of Control and Experimental groups



4.1.2 Difference in P-value between Control Group and Experimental Group

Furthermore, to quantify the strength of evidence that proved the hypothesis that the implementation of SOFLA® improved learners' performance to write persuasive essays unlike learners who followed a traditional method in an online context, the researcher used a standard level P-Value P < 0.05 (5%

significance). P-value less than 0.05 is statistically significant. The P-Value figure below, thus reads as follows. p value<0.05 is significant

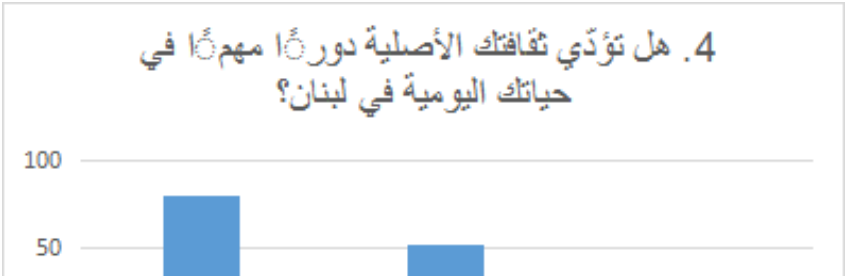
Figure 3. Difference of P-Value Between Experimental and Control Groups

In general, P-values less than 0.05 designate an improvement or deterioration in students' performance in pre-test and posttest. First, in the control group, the results showed a decrease in writing persuasive essays as indicated in the p-value of 0.375 pointing to the negativity and drawbacks inherent in the traditional method. However, a reading of the p-value results of the experimental group showed significant enhancement in students' writing. The p-value indicated (0.000) and $(+2.833)$ mean difference which signified a notable improvement in students' performance in writing persuasive essays. SOFLA®, therefore contributed to significantly improving and maintaining students' performance to write persuasive essay throughout the term of the intervention.

4.1.3 Difference in T-value Between Control and Experimental Groups

In general, t-value greater than 2 indicates that there is either an improvement or deterioration. First, as indicated in table 1 above and figure 4 below, the t-value of the control

Figure 4. Differences of t-Value between Experimental and Control Groups



group indicated −0.902, which is less than 2 with a slightly negative mean difference between pre-test and post-test. Therefore, it can be concluded that there are no statistically significant differences in students' performance in persuasive writing in the control group between the pre-test and the post-test. While the mean difference of the experimental group was higher between the pre-test and the post-test. This increase was statistically significant as t-value registered 14.735 indicating a prominent improvement in the students' persuasive writing after implementing SOFLA®. **t value >2 is significant**

4.2 Analysis and Discussion of Secondary Qualitative Result (qual)

In the light of the dominant quantitative results of the pre and posttest, the researcher invited ten students and had a virtual Google Meet session during which a semi-structured interview was conducted to collect secondary qualitative data to respond to research question 2 and its related hypothesis and accordingly affirm that students developed a positive perception of SOFLA®. The following four questions were posed. (1) What specifically appealed to you in the Synchronous Online Flipped Learning Approach (SOFLA®.)? (2) Did the online teaching learning approach, deepen your understanding of persuasive essay writing? (3) What would you improve or modify any step in SOFLA®? Why? (4) Would you recommend SOFLA® to other teachers in other subjects? Why?

4.2.1 Descriptive Results of Interview

To maintain the ethical considerations that govern any research study, the researcher clarified that their identities will remain anonymous and that their feedback will be used for research purposes under pseudonyms not disclosed to anyone even themselves. Students were also instructed to type their feedback to avoid influencing each other's thoughts and perspective. Then each question was read and posted on the chat box at a time. Finally, the participants posted their documents on Google Classroom. The researcher followed Creswell and Poth's (2018) Data Analysis Spiral approach, a five-step process to

analyze students' response and accordingly made conclusions about each question explored. The first two steps in the spiral process entailed organizing the responses of each core question under correlating headings followed by a meticulous reading of the categorized data in order to sort the data into categories relevant to the second research question and hypothesis which postulated that students would develop a positive perception towards SOFLA®. Third, the researcher proceeded to the coding process, which entailed using different colours to take note of recurrent and rephrased words and ideas, and accordingly track emerging ideas which clearly distinguished connections across the data and annotations, ultimately pointing to students' positive perception of SOFLA®. The alike coloured codes were at that point organized into common themes and patterns under new headings, which formed the basis to develop interpretations in concise finding statements in the subsequent and last step of the Spiral approach. The interpretive process explored the common themes and the connections made for deeper insights to answer research question 2, which postulated that students would have positive perspectives of SOFLA®. To complete the final step of the spiral, the researcher listed and described the five common patterns in a descriptive form and presented them in a table which provided a comprehensive overview of the common positive perspectives of the students. Five common them emerged from the four questions as seen in tables 2, 3 and figure 5 below.

Secondary Qualitative Data: Interview N=10		
Common Themes Identified from students' Responses	**Frequency of recurrence of Common Themes**	**Percentage of Recurrence of Common themes**
1. Efficiency of asynchronous videos to watch at ease and pace	8/10	80%
2. Essential for Teamwork, communication and interaction	9/10	90%
3. A Boost to learn from personal and peer mistakes	9/10	90%
4. Enhancement of writing Skills	9/10	90%
5. Recommendations to: • implement SOFLA® in other subjects • limit time allotted to some steps in SOFLA® • conduct further research in SOFLA®.	10/10 • 8/10 • 2/10 • 1/10	100% • 80% • 20% • 10%

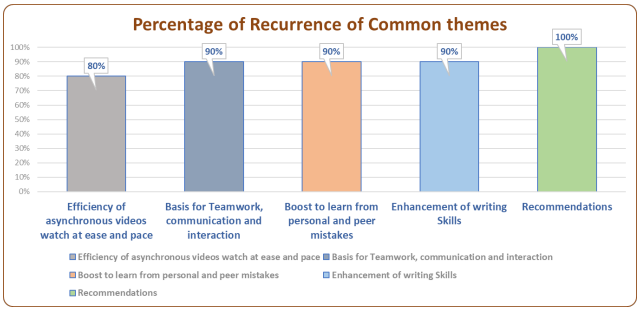


Table 2.Frequency and Percentage of Common Themes Identified

	Common Themes Identified from students' responses & frequency of recurrence					
Student	Efficiency of asynchronous videos watch at ease and pace	Basis for Teamwork, communication and interaction	A Boost to learn from personal and peer mistakes	Enhancement of writing Skills	Recommendations	Percentage (1)
Hani	1	1	1	0	1	80%
Lana	1	1	1	1	1	100%
Lena	1	1	1	1	1	100%
Majid	1	1	1	1	1	100%
Nagham	1	1	1	1	1	100%
Rama	1	1	1	1	0	80%
Sama	1	1	1	1	1	100%
Zima	1	1	1	1	1	100%
Dana	0	0	0	1	1	40%
Madi	0	1	1	1	1	80%
Percentage (2)	80%	90%	90%	90%	90%	88%

Table 3. percentage of recurrence of common themes Identified from students' Responses

The first, theme 'Efficiency of asynchronous videos to watch at ease and pace' was identified from the responses of 80% of the students. Nagham wrote that the videos "allow us to take notes without missing ideas since we can always replay or rewatch … [they] are always there". The second common theme recognized from 90% of the responses perceived SOFLA® basically necessary for team work, communication and interaction which led to a cause effect pattern with the third theme, 'a boost to learn from personal and peer mistakes.': Lena's response

sums up the two themes , “Most of the work and discussion depended on students themselves which I personally find truly advanced and beneficial to learn from mistakes which is a life skill” The fourth theme also detected from 90% of the answers showed the impact of SOFLA® to enhance students’ persuasive writing skills. According to Sama,

writing has never been this fun. I genuinely enjoyed writing persuasive essays, thanks to SOFLA, for I learned it in a different, unusual way. This way of learning creates space for creativity in writing since it engraves the basics of persuasive writing in our brains which makes writing smoother and swifter

Finally, three different recommendations formed the fifth theme. First, 80% of the responses recommended implementing SOFLA® in other subjects. Zima perceived that it would be “intriguing” to implement it in philosophy and in the sciences, while Sama recommended it to all subjects “especially the least liked and most difficult subjects” naming math and physics in particular. Moreover, Sama invited researcher to test SOFLA® “on a larger number of students and different subjects”. However, two students proposed limiting the time allotted to some steps. To conclude, tables 2 and 3 alongside figure 5 show the distribution of the students’ responses and percentage of the five common themes indicating positive perception of the approach and positively confirming research question 2 and its related hypothesis. 80% of the responses emphasized the effectiveness of SOFLA® to allow them to watch at their

ease and pace. 90% of the students accentuated that the approach enhanced their writing skills, promoted learning from personal and peer mistakes, and formed a fertile ground for teamwork, communication and interaction; and recommended the implementation of the online approach in other subjects.

4.2.2 Testing Students' perceptions of the implementation of SOFLA®

Finally, the researcher used the Binominal Test to see whether students' responses showed positive perceptions of the implementation of SOFLA®. The test was based on the consideration that the null hypothesis is that students develop a positive perception (till 90%) towards SOFLA, and the alternative hypothesis is the opposite.

Null hypothesis(H0): The percentage of positive perceptions of implementation of SOFLA® is less than or equal to 90%.

Alternative hypothesis(H1): The percentage of positive perception of implementation of SOFLA® is higher than 90%.

Binomial Test						
		Category	N	Observed Prop.	T e s t Prop.	Exact Sig. (1-tailed)
positive aspect	Group 1	<= .9	4	.4	.9	.000[a]
	Group 2	> .9	6	.6		
	Total		10	1.0		
a. Alternative hypothesis states that the proportion of cases in the first group < .9.						

Table 4. Proportion Test (Binomial test) of students' perceptions of SOFLA®

To conduct the test, the researcher formed two groups based on the percentage of five themes recognized from the students' answers to the four semi-structured questions. As shown in table 3 above, the first group comprised the four students who did not voice their opinion in the positive common themes, thus constituting 40% of the total number of students interviewed. The remaining six students expressed positive perspectives in more than 90% of the five positive common themes, thus forming 60% of the total number of students interviewed for the sequential collection of secondary data (qual) to respond to research question 2.

The result showed that p-value is 0.000, which is less than 0.05, designating that the null hypothesis is rejected. It can therefore be considered that the percentage of positive perception of implementation of SOFLA in online learning is higher than 90%.

5.1 Results and Discussions

In conclusion, the study followed the sequential mixed method approach to address two research questions. The first, a primary quantitative one investigated whether implementation of SOFLA®, an eight-cycle online approach that is based on two theoretical frameworks, community of Inquiry and Flipped learning, would improve learners' performance to write persuasive essays unlike others who follow a traditional method in an online context. The second research question was the secondary qualitative question which explored students' positive perception of SOFLA®. The results of both the primary quantitative and secondary qualitative results prompted the researcher to conclude that SOFLA® is a feasible and recommended approach to promote the teaching learning experience in distance learning. The statistical results showed 2.833 positive difference between the mean, t-test 14.735 p-value of 0.000 and 95% confidence interval [2.440, 3.227], thus, affirming research question 1 and its related hypothesis that implementation of SOFLA® is a feasible approach to improve learners' performance to write persuasive essays unlike others who follow a traditional method in an online context. Moreover, computed results of the secondary qualitative data showed the percentage of positive perception of implementation of SOFLA® in online learning is higher than 90% with p-value is 0.000, which is less than 0.05, likewise positively affirming research question 2 and its related hypothesis.

5.2 Limitations

Although SOFLA® framework facilitated remote learning through asynchronous learning in the pre-work phase stage, the rest of the stages stipulated real-time active engagement. It was in these stages that that the technical constrains surfaced. This limitation was a general problem in Lebanon as verified by Abed Kataya who mapped out the telecom outages in Lebanon during quarantine days (https://smex.org/mapping-the-telecom-outages-in-lebanon/).Oscillating between low-bandwidth and unstable connections, on one hand, and power outages on the other, active participation of some students was impeded which called for more sessions to be held in order to maintain the flow of learning in all the eight steps of the intervention. The extended the time span of the study was, thus a limitation as perceived by two students who recommended limiting time allotted to some steps in SOFLA®. Another limitation resided in the fact that a few students had to march through the whole eight-cycle steps of SOFLA® using old devices which restricted them from sharing their screen and independent activity for discussion.

5.2. Recommendations and Implication of study

The eight learning steps of SOFLA® framework offers school administrators, professional development trainers, teachers and learners a promising pedagogical foundation to brace the challenges of online learning. The significant dominant quantitative results of the study alongside the positive perceptions of the secondary qualitative results were in harmony with

findings and recommendations of studies that investigated and explored the efficacy of SOFLA® in different skills, and those that emphasized the benefits of asynchronous and synchronous learning context. The current study consolidated the effectiveness of implementing a structured multifaceted active framework that guided and enhanced distance learning in both synchronous and asynchronous settings (Baczek, et al. 2021; Marshall and Kostka, 2020). It also supports Tschida, Hodge and Schmidt's call for a reliable model that would spare teachers the act of posting assignments on online platforms for students to merely do (2016). Accordingly, school administrators could work in accordance with professional developments trainers to facilitate workshops as a proactive step that would equip teachers with knowledge and skill to smoothly transfer to online teaching settings if need be. Second, the commendation of 90% of the students about the benefits of Pre-Work which allowed them to complete assigned tasks at their pace and ease goes in accordance d with the conclusions of researchers (Clark and Mayer 2016 &Van der Keylen, et al., 2020). In the same vein, the video worksheets also created fertile grounds for active interaction and learning in the subsequent phases which is a core tenet in the model as stipulated by Helaine Marshall (2020). Third, the multimodal activities carried out in the ensuing seven steps within synchronous settings reflected a positive experience that warded off boredom, promoted interaction within the synchronous classroom community. Likewise, thefostered collaboration, peer instruction, and gave students ownership and responsibility for

learning, thus aligning with findings of Marshall and Wallestad, (2021); Smith and Smith, (2014). Fourth, the study accentuated the essential role of the teachers' presence in online learning in the context of proactively planning, and ensuring that each phase informed the next to keep productive communication, collaborative practices and constructive feedback prevalent in every strep, which served the essence of CoI (Garrison, Anderson and Archer, 2000). In short, Synchronous Online Flipped Learning approach is recommended as an effective organized framework that enhances the teaching learning experience in online settings.

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