

Insights into the effects of Online-based Writing Mock-Tests on EFL learners' writing skills

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ABSTRACT

This quasi-experimental study primarily aims to examine the effects of online-based writing mock tests (OWMT) on Vietnamese EFL learners' writing skills and their attitudes toward OWMT. Thirty-six learners at an English center in Ho Chi Minh City participated in a ten-week course. Nineteen experimental learners participated in an OWMT platform called Cambridge English Write & Improve (CEWI), whereas 17 learners in the control group studied with the traditional teaching method. Quantitative data were collected from pre-tests and post-tests, evaluating four writing criteria (content, communicative achievement, organization, & language), analyzed by using SPSS through descriptive statistics and T-tests. Questionnaire data were collected to respond to the effects and learners' attitudes towards OWMT. Ten experimental learners were invited for semi-structured interviews, analyzed by the thematic analysis approach. Findings indicated OWMT significantly improved learners' writing performance, particularly in language, organization, and communicative achievement. Participants specifically demonstrated positive attitudes as dynamic triangular relationship of cognitive, affective, and behavioral, assisted their learning. These findings indicate that OWMT can serve as an effective formative assessment tool to foster writing development and learning autonomy.



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1. Introduction

Writing skills are regarded as the most complicated because of the sequential logic in the use of linguistic features like graphic symbols, words, sentences, and coherent text, as well as the purposes of writing pieces or their functions in practical assistance to develop other skills (Duong et al, 2026; Little, 2006; Nunan, 2015). In terms of the significance and necessity of writing, English persists as a global medium of communication, and language learners are increasingly expected to reach specific benchmarks set by international language standards such as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) or other internationally recognized frameworks (Council of Europe, 2020). Therefore, to achieve these global writing standards at each certain level, not only non-native but also native learners encounter numerous significant challenges because of various factors, including inapplicable pre-existing knowledge, limited engagement with authentic writing approaches, and insufficient feedback (Alisha et al., 2019; Bui, 2022; Nguyen, 2021; Nguyen, 2024).

Since education continues to evolve in response to social and technological change, and the tendency looks more toward the future, modern students' motivation and information perception differ from the past (Dörnyei, 2001; Prensky, 2001), making changes in education essential for successful language skills development. Based on that, numerous scholars affirmed the integration of technological advancements like Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) and Computer-Assisted Language Testing (CALT) into education has transformed language education (Chapelle, 2019; Chapelle & Voss, 2016; Curry & Riordan, 2021; Selwyn, 2021; Tran & Ngo, 2024). By underscoring learners' awareness of language accuracy, facilitating self-regulated learning, and constructing validity and authenticity, as well as aligning with communicative language teaching, lead to low affective filters for language acquisition. CALL and CALT effectively integrate with communicative and constructivist teaching methods, promoting dynamic, autonomous, and student-centered educational environments beyond traditional ones.

In the EFL context like Vietnam, English is taught as a compulsory subject from primary school to university (Tran et al, 2025). English is considered a cornerstone of the education system and a gateway to global integration, which reflects a national priority for global integration and competitiveness (Hoang, 2019). Since the reform of the educational curriculum promulgated by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) of Vietnam, significant changes have been introduced in the Vietnam education system nationwide, which emphasized communicative competence in both spoken and written forms and established a specific learning outcome for each language learning level. The reform program specifically interpreted that enhancing the learners' ability to use linguistic knowledge and apply English in daily life through linguistic skills as well as students' academic achievement has to exceed a certain threshold established in the 6-Level Foreign Language Proficiency Framework of Vietnam (VNFLPF) compatible with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) (Hoang, 2022; MOET, 2018).

Even though the new program comes with ambitious goals, challenges remain within the system. Numerous researchers have shown that learners frequently make a significant number of mistakes in writing, including vocabulary, grammar, and spelling, and overarching writing problems related to content and organization (Nguyen, 2021; Nguyen, 2024; Tran & Nguyen, 2020). The performance of learners in this field is problematic due to struggling or being unable to apply their pre-existing learning of language to construct accurate phrases, cohesive sentences, or a whole text (Bui, 2022; Nguyen, 2021; Vu & Tran, 2025). To explain that underperformance of students, it was due to the complexities of writing text, which involved the conventions and sequential logic in the use of linguistic features as well as the varied purposes and functions in practical assistance to cross-develop other skills (Güvendir & Uzun, 2023; Little, 2006; Nunan, 2015; Taye & Mengesha, 2024). Besides that, the long-standing dominance of the teacher-centered paradigm has resulted in the over-reliance on teacher guidance and external correction of Vietnamese students. They were convinced that their teachers possess the essential knowledge and skills to identify and remediate errors; hence, students became accustomed to receiving constructive feedback from their teachers (Vo & Nguyen, 2022). This dependence has shaped learners' habits and mindsets as well as limited proactive-driven learning and autonomous learning. Furthermore, a shortage of authentic experience heightened feelings of anxiety have resulted in a negative effect on Vietnamese learners in language competency exams (Nguyen, 2024). Many students infrequently possess the opportunity to practice writing under real exam conditions like time constraints, unfamiliar topics, or specific task formats. Likewise, classrooms are often insufficiently supplied, lacking authentic materials that allow for immediate feedback and meaningful revision. Therefore, mastering writing skills is challenging for language learners, which requires additional time, effort, and guidance to write independently in their learning process. These challenges may be barriers for learners to achieve communicative purposes, lifelong learning purposes, or writing benchmarks not only of Vietnam but also of CEFR; consequently, they may contribute to the potential failure of the new reform education program of MOET. Additionally, the integration of CALL into English education in the past few decades has accelerated considerably; however, the actual implication in education in classrooms is limited and inconsistent (Rintaningrum, 2023; Selwyn, 2021). This indicates that the inadequate incorporation of technological potential and pedagogical application into educational settings in a way may diminish the quality of learning experiences, limit learner autonomy, and impede the development of essential skills in the current setting.

With the above-rationale, this study investigates the effects of online-based writing mock tests (OWMT) on Vietnamese EFL learners' writing skills and attitudes at a language center in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The two research questions were formulated to fulfill the purposes.

1. What are the effects of OWMT on EFL learners' writing skills?
2. What are the EFL learners' attitudes toward OWMT?

2. Literature Review

2.1. The CALL Systems for Developing Writing Skills

The theoretical foundation of CALL denotes the use of digital technology and computational tools to facilitate language acquisition and pedagogy (Chapelle, 2019). CALL has evolved significantly recently due to its effectiveness in language teaching and its high level of interaction with scaffolders (Bikowski & Vithanage, 2016; Curry & Riordan, 2021; Yeh, 2025). Furthermore, artificial intelligence has recently been integrated into CALL; therefore, the Intelligent CALL (iCALL) system could support various aspects of language learning by integrating language conventions into algorithms to deliver timely responses and criterion-based feedback on learners' performance. In the domain of writing skills, the iCALL named Write & Improve (CEWI), which was developed by Cambridge University Press & Assessment, exhibits a wide spectrum of contemporary technologies employed to facilitate and improve writing performance through four aligned CEFR writing criteria of content, communicative achievement, organization and language, as imitated tests (Curry & Riordan, 2021). To specify, the imitated tests, commonly known as mock tests, serve as practice assessments that simulate authentic examination conditions. The term "collaborative writing" (CW) describes the process of two or more individuals working together on revising or problem-solving (Jaszi, 1992). Online collaborative writing platforms have further expanded this process by facilitating the cooperation between learners and teachers with networked technologies. Besides that, the development of Computer-Assisted Language Testing (CALT) has transformed the way to evaluate learners' performance through the utilization of digital devices to administer, score, analyze, or deliver language assessment. Additionally, closely related to this advancement is the employment of the automated writing evaluation system, which provides learners with automated corrective feedback with sophisticated devices based on sets of writing criteria programmed by algorithms (Chapelle, 2019). Collectively, these technological innovations illustrate the growing integration and then function as assessment as learning by helping learners monitor and regulate their progress and assessment for learning by providing formative feedback to guide learners' improvement, thereby reinforcing assessment of learning, the final evaluation of achievement (Chapelle & Voss, 2016).

Within this study, CALL indicates the pedagogical approach in which digital technologies are deployed to support language teaching and learning, while CALT refers to the application of technology to language assessment and testing. Additionally, automated writing evaluation is understood as a particular technological system or mechanism providing automated scoring and/or feedback on learners' writing performance. Meanwhile, formative assessment is used to provide real-time-feedback to support and improve learners' learning. In much the same way, practices like mock exams and group writing are just classroom activities, not grand educational theories. A mock test like OWMT merely offers a safe environment to practice for exams, whereas group writing is about students teaming up to draft and polish their work.

2.2. Attitudes' Components and Triangular Relationship

The definition "attitude is a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor" (Haddock & Maio, 2004) is widely accepted by numerous scholars. In the context of language acquisition, the significance of attitudes is emphasized as its influence on learners' motivation, engagement and shaping individuals' perceptions in multilingual and multicultural context; thereby, attitude plays a crucial role in forming language learning (Li & Wei, 2025; McKenzie, 2010). The investigation of attitudes primarily concentrates on three fundamental components: cognitive, affective, and behavioral. These dimensions interact dynamically to shape how individuals perceive and respond to a particular object. In reference to cognitive, they pertain to an individual's beliefs and thoughts about an attitude object, in which cognition involves thought processes directed toward an object and refers to general knowledge or specific experiences without favor (Haddock & Maio, 2004), or encompass individual's beliefs, stereotypes and generalizations, which influence evaluative judgments (McKenzie, 2010). In the domain of language learning, cognitive might involve beliefs about the effectiveness, usefulness, or reliability of a learning tool, whether these tools improve writing accuracy or foster autonomy.

The affective component refers to emotional responses toward an attitudinal object. Since McKenzie (2010) notes that they can be verbal or physiological reactions with changes in bodily function indicating favorable or unfavorable attitudes. In the view of Haddock and Maio (2004), affective attitudes commonly described with two favors of positive or negative, with different intensities. This dimension is especially important in language learning, where emotional responses, such as enjoyment, anxiety, or satisfaction often influence performance. As emphasized in the Affective Filter Hypothesis (Krashen & Terrell, 1983), learners with positive affection, such as high motivation and low anxiety, allow language input to become intake. In contrast, negative affection, like fear or discomfort, can act as a barrier, reducing the effectiveness of language learning.

Regarding behavioral element consists of how an individual reacts to attitudinal objects which means a person's response or reaction to doing anything associated with an attitude object (Defleur & Westie, 1963). This component is critical of attitude due to reflecting the motivation and habit formation of individuals. Students with a favorable attitude may regularly practice writing, seek feedback, and apply them cross-contexts, whereas students with negative attitude might exhibit avoidance or disengagement.

These components of attitudes considered as cognitive-affective-behavioral (CAB) model are not independent but interrelated components with mutual reinforcement (Zhao & Liu, 2026). The belief in effectiveness, usefulness, and reliability can generate positive affection or enjoyment, anxiety, satisfaction, and confidence, which turns willingness to engage, persist, or apply strategies across contexts. On the opposite side, negative feelings could hinder perceptions and restrict engagement (Alzaanin, 2023; Zhao & Wang, 2025). The triangular relationships of cognition, emotion, and behavior enable an in-depth awareness of learners' attitudes towards language learning experiences, particularly in CALL environments.

CALL and CALT in this study are used as affordances for technology-mediated learning and assessment, and the CAB model provides explanations for learners' perceptions and experiences. Regarding the deployment of OWMT, learners' cognitive responses (e.g., beliefs about the effectiveness, usefulness, or reliability of a learning tool) could be first affected by technological features (e.g., immediate automated feedback, reported online-writing practice, examination-like tasks). Subsequently, learners' affective responses (e.g., enjoyment, anxiety, or satisfaction often influence performance) could be shaped by their cognitive responses. Finally, learners' behavioral attitudes (e.g., participation, attention, revision) were positively affected by their positive cognitive and affective responses. Therefore, the relationship between CALL/CALT and learner attitudes is treated as an explanatory pathway in which learners' cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses are shaped by technology-mediated affordances.

2.3. Related Studies

Writing skills are a fundamental component of academic success, professional communication, and personal expression; however, they are highly complicated which are affected by various factors, including linguistic features, content, genre, and medium of writing (Nguyen, 2024; Nunan, 2015). Internationally, regardless rhetorical situations of ESL, EFL or Native Speakers, students encountered numerous challenges when producing well-structured texts in which the written errors extended from punctuation, spelling, grammatical errors, and language use to connective devices (Alisha et al., 2019; Latupeirissa & Sayd, 2019; Little, 2006; Sakmiankaew et al., 2024). Within the context of Vietnam, an EFL country, students consistently commit the same writing errors to attain writing purposes or language proficiency examinations. The difficulties concern linguistic aspects to writing strategies regardless of students' level or geographical location in Vietnam (Nguyen, 2021; Nguyen, 2024; Tran & Nguyen, 2021).

The effects of engaging with CALL systems have been documented to improve writing skills but also enhance attitudes toward language learning. Studies in improving writing skills have demonstrated the value of CALL or CALT integration highly affects learners' performance. Typically, students found CALL effective, helpful, engaging and motivating because they addressed students' writing aspects like spelling, grammatical, and lexical errors (Curry & Riordan, 2021; Bikowski & Vithanage, 2016). A study of Curry and Riordan (2021) conducted in two EFL universities in Turkey discovered that the CEFR level, engagement and motivation of students enhanced after using automated writing evaluation system of CALL on the online platform called CEWI. Studying on the same online platform, CEWI, Karpova (2020) found that the level of proficiency increased significantly and boosted learners' motivation in the language learning process. Tursina et al. (2021) stated that appropriate guidance and instructions from teachers and CEWI can make the students independent learners. In the same vein, Wali and Huijser

(2018) found that notable result stated that students showed their appreciation for the features of timely and nonjudgmental feedback and perceived the usefulness of the tool as well as emphasized the affective response to the tool and expressed preference for teacher feedback in a higher-education foundation program context in Bahrain. Similarly, Vietnamese students in the study of Nguyen and Tran (2023) shown the improvement in accuracy, enjoyment with the assist of CEWI, whereas the cautious in using because of impersonal feedback.

In brief, prior research highlights promising evidence for the utilisation of CALL-based automated writing evaluation and CEWI in improving ESL/EFL writing, but some significant gaps are noticed. First of all, research has indicated the improvement language proficiency, motivation, engagement (e.g., Curry & Riordan, 2021; Karpova, 2020), learner autonomy (Tursina et al., 2021), perceived usefulness, and writing accuracy (Nguyen & Tran, 2023), but limited evidence on the influence of technology-mediated writing interventions on all dimensions of writing performance was not found. Second, studies (e.g., Curry & Riordan, 2021; Karpova, 2020; Nguyen & Tran, 2023; Wali & Huijser, 2018) seemed to focus on learners' outcomes and perceptions of CEWI without sufficient explanations of improvement mechanisms. Third, prior studies (e.g., Nguyen & Tran, 2023; Wali & Huijser, 2018) showed that CEWI could improve learners' writing accuracy, and timelines and automated feedback were valued by learners; however, such studies did not sufficiently explore whether the same intervention could improve learners' higher-order dimensions of writing. Finally, previous research did not focus on the use of mock-test tools to support EFL learners in achieving learning outcomes. Therefore, this study attempts to investigate how online writing tools can enhance writing proficiency, test preparedness, and long-term academic development for EFL learners in a specific context of Vietnam.

3. Method

3.1. Research Methods and Participants

This quasi-experimental study aims to examine EFL learners' writing proficiency and their attitudes toward OWMT. The data were collected from tests, a questionnaire and interviews. A convenience sampling method was used to select 36 participants divided into an experimental group (EG) with 19 learners and a control group (CG) with 17 learners. This sampling approach was chosen in this research due to the accessibility of the participants as well as the practical constraints of the research that made random sampling not feasible. With this sampling method, it was appropriate in quasi-experimental designs when researchers aimed to study intact groups in real educational contexts (Creswell, 2014). Of 36 participants, 52.8% were male and 47.2% female.

Table 1. A Sample of Intervention

Session	Purpose	EG	CG
2	Writing and Replying to an Informal Email	- The warm-up activity involves a labelling game for identifying various text types, namely email, postcard, and story, to activate prior knowledge of informal writing. - Pre-writing stage: Common contractions and informal phrases in email writing are presented to help learners internalize the tone and language. - While-writing stage: learners log into the CEWI platform, working on session 2.1 taken from task 1, the B1 Preliminary 1 (Cambridge University Press, 2019, p. 18). Learners outlined, drafted, and revised their email using the online tool. - Within 20 minutes, a 100-word email was written and submitted. Real-time feedback was received from CEWI and corrective feedback from the teachers was on this platform. Students had opportunities for revision and could resubmit until they reached B1-level proficiency.	- While-writing stage: working on task 1, test 1 of the B1 Preliminary 1 (Cambridge University Press, 2019, p. 18). Learners outlined, drafted, and revised with the textbook. - Within 20 minutes, learners finished their task, self-checking or peer-reviewing, which would then be submitted for the teacher's checking and feedback.
		- Post-writing stage: get the learners review structure and criteria	

Most participants were 12–13 years old and had studied English for over six years (58.3%). Regarding level of confidence in writing, 52.8% reported it as moderate, whereas 30.6% were slightly confident. The majority (72.2%) sometimes used English outside the classroom, and 61.1% were at the pre-intermediate proficiency level. Most participants (94.4%) indicated that they had engaged in online-based English learning, while 55.6% reported experiencing online-based writing. Ten of the participants of the EG participated in interviews voluntarily. An intervention was conducted, and it included a total of ten sessions within ten weeks; each session lasted for 90 minutes. The interventions concentrated on the production of three text types: email, article, and story. The instructional method used for the treatment group was grounded in communication and task learning, with the goal of enhancing their writing skills. The Automated writing evaluation system on the online platform CEWI served as a tool to support and reinforce the learning process (Table 1).

3.2. Research Instruments

The pretest and posttest design was used to evaluate the impact of a new teaching intervention. The pretest and posttest used the same text type including an informal email and narrating a story based on prompts adopted the sample test of B1 Preliminary (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2024). The same settings were for both groups but different mediums of writing. The length of writing text accords with CEFR instruction for B1 from 100 to 120 words per task; the duration of the test lasts for 45 minutes for both tasks; the test takers did not receive any aids from reference materials, dictionaries, and others (Cambridge University Press, 2019). The scores of the test were assessed in terms of Content, Communicative Achievement, Organization and Language, detailly band descriptors provided by (Cambridge University Press and Assessment, 2024).

To examine EFL learners' attitudes toward OWMТ, a closed-ended questionnaire was adapted from previous studies (Curry & Riordan, 2021; Link et al., 2020; Wali & Huijser, 2018) and designed with two main parts, Part A seeks participants' demographic information; part B with 21 items to investigate learners' attitudes toward OWMТ in terms of affective (6 items), cognitive (7 items), and behavioral (8 items) attitudes. All items in the questionnaire were designed with a five-point Likert scale from Strongly disagree to Strongly agree. The questionnaire's internal consistency values were .88, which confirmed a high level of reliability.

Semi-structured interviews were used to gather in-depth qualitative data in this study which consists of nine main questions seeking participants' cognitive attitudes (3 questions), affective attitudes (3 questions), and cognitive attitudes (3 questions) toward OWMТ. The interview questions were designed based on the research focus and questionnaire. Interviews were conducted in participants' native language to avoid misunderstandings.

3.3. Methods for Data Collection and Analysis

Both groups completed a pretest in the first week to evaluate learners' foundational writing proficiency. Throughout the next 8 weeks of the intervention period, the EG and CG both worked on the same writing exercises and adopted B1 Preliminary 1 and B1 Preliminary 2 of Cambridge University Press, but on different bases. The post-test was in the 10th week of the course.

The questionnaire and semi-structured interview were piloted with ten learners who possessed similar background characteristics but were enrolled in different classes with the participants in the main study. After necessary modifications, the instruments were officially employed in the main phase of the research. Regarding the questionnaire, a physical version was directly given to 19 participants of the EG. Data collection spanned five days; each participant took approximately 20 minutes to complete the questionnaire. All responses were carefully reviewed, resulting in a total of 19 valid copies. A semi-structured focus-group interview was designed. Of the participants in the EG, ten interviewees were selected by convenience sampling to gain more insight into learners' perceptions toward the OWMТ based on their willingness. The group interviews took about 25 minutes and were recorded and transcribed for thematic analysis with the agreement of participants.

The quantitative data collected from the study with pretest and posttest was analyzed by statistical methods. Before conducting the analyses of t-test, the assumption of normality was critical for parametric statistical procedures, so it was necessary to assess whether the data were normally distributed to ensure accurate and valid conclusions (Razali & Wah, 2011). IBM SPSS Statistics version 26 for Windows was used to assess the appropriateness of parametric statistical tests by analyzing the p-values and Q–Q plots.

The interpretation of the mean scores for the learners' attitudes toward the OWMT used a five-point Likert scale and was classified as 1.00–1.80: Strongly Disagree; 1.81–2.60: Disagree; 2.61–3.40: Neutral; 3.41–4.20: Agree; 4.21–5.00: Strongly Agree. A rubric for writing assessment consists of four assessment criteria of content, communicative achievement, organization, and language use. These helped the tests remain consistent and objective and maintain writing quality in scoring. Besides that, the rubric scores offered by educators' details breaking down learners' strengths and weaknesses.

The semi-structured interview response was thematically analyzed to identify cognitive, affective, and behavioral themes. The transcripts were subjected to analysis using descriptive labels, color-coding, and comparative methods to clarify themes. Ten interviewees were coded as S1 to S10. The results presented in a semi-structured interview, combining thematic analysis with the quantitative findings to enhance the understanding of the intervention's efficacy. To guarantee the credibility and consistency of the interview, the inter-raters were invited to double-check the interpretations for consistency of meanings.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. The Effects of OWMT on EFL Learners' Writing Skills

The results of the normality of the pre-test of both groups show a significant value (p) of .155, and significant value of post-test (p) of .206. These high ratings were above conventional threshold of .05; therefore, supporting that research did not significantly deviate from a normal distribution, and the assumption of normality was not violated. Consequently, they adhere to the key assumptions underlying parametric testing. As shown in Figure 1, the Normal Q-Q illustrated the data points closely to the 45-degree reference line, so it further supported the appropriateness of applying parametric statistical tests in this study.

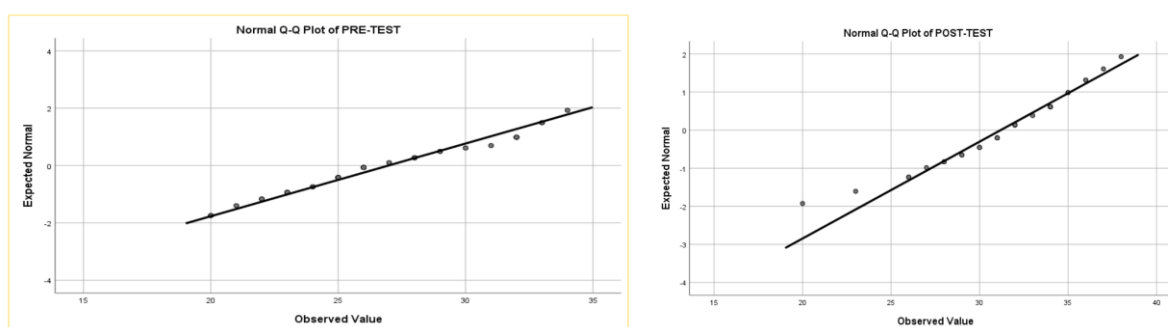


Fig 1. Normal Q-Q plot of pre-test and post-test

a) Pre-test and post-test scores between two groups

As seen in Table 2, in the pre-test stage, the CG ($M = 27.06$, $SD = 4.09$) and the EG ($M = 26.89$, $SD = 3.93$) showed identical results of two groups. Additionally, the data from the independent samples, $t(34) = .12$, $p = .903$, $d = .04$, indicated no statistically significant difference and negligible effect size between groups before intervention. After the 10-week intervention, in the post-test stage, the score of independent samples t-test showed the noticeable gap between the CG ($M = 29.76$, $SD = 4.41$) and the EG ($M = 32.47$, $SD = 3.03$). Furthermore, $t(34) = 2.17$, $p = .037$ and $d = .72$, negative signs indicated the direction of difference, so these numbers indicated that the treatment had a statistically significant and practically meaningful improvement in learners' performance compared to those in the CG.

Table 2. Pre-test and Post-test Scores between Two Groups

No.	Stage	Group	N	M	SD	p	t	d
1	Pre-test	Control	17	27.06	4.09	.903	.12	.04
		Experimental	19	26.89	3.93			
2	Post-test	Control	17	29.76	4.41	.037	2.17	.72
		Experimental	19	32.47	3.03			

As shown in Table 3, there were four writing components used to evaluate scores of the pre-tests between the control and experimental groups throughout the independent-samples t-tests. For Content,

there was no significant difference between groups $t(34) = .57$, $p = .570$, $d = .19$, CG ($M = 8.94$; $SD = 1.25$), and EG ($M = 8.74$, $SD = .87$). Similarly, results on Communicative Achievement, $t(34) = .44$, $p = .666$, $d = .15$, CG ($M = 7.12$, $SD = 1.11$), and EG ($M = 6.95$, $SD = 1.22$), shown that it was not significant between two groups. For Organizations, CG ($M = 6.06$, $SD = 1.14$) and EG ($M = 6.21$, $SD = 1.03$), $t(34) = .42$, $p = .678$, and $d = .14$ indicated no significant difference between groups. In the same vein, Language did not show a significant difference based on CG ($M = 4.94$, $SD = 1.03$), EG ($M = 5.00$, $SD = 1.25$), $t(34) = .15$, $p = .879$, $d = .05$. All p -values from this stage were greater than the conventional threshold of .05, and Cohen's d was less than .20; therefore, the difference between CG and EG was not statistically significant or practically meaningful. Consequently, the two groups had the same baseline performance before treatment.

Table 3. Pre-test Scores of Writing Components between Two Groups

No.	Stage	Group	M	SD	p	t	d
1	Content	Control	8.94	1.25	.570	.57	.19
		Experimental	8.74	.87			
2	Communicative Achievement	Control	7.12	1.11	.666	.44	.15
		Experimental	6.95	1.22			
3	Organizations	Control	6.06	1.14	.678	.42	.14
		Experimental	6.21	1.03			
4	Language	Control	4.94	1.03	.879	.15	.05
		Experimental	5.00	1.25			

After the 10-week intervention, the improvement in writing scores was demonstrated. However, learners' exhibition of enhancement in the four writing criteria components varied widely. As shown in Table 4, the highest gain after intervention was in the Language criterion. $t(34) = 2.97$, $p = .005$, and $d = .99$ implied the significant and large effect between the two groups. It suggested that OWMT particularly enhanced learners' grammatical and lexical accuracy. The difference approached significance, $t(34) = 1.90$, $p = .065$, $d = .64$, interpreted as there being a moderate effect size in favor of the experimental group. For Content components, although the scores of EG ($M = 9.42$, $SD = .69$) were higher than those of CG ($M = 8.88$, $SD = 1.41$), there was no significant difference between the two groups with $t(34) = 1.48$, $p = .148$, $d = .49$. Similarly for Communicative Achievement, no statistically significant difference was found with $t(34) = 1.31$, $p = .200$, $d = 0.44$, even though there was a gain in favor of CG.

Table 4. Post-test Scores of Writing Components between Two Groups

No.	Stage	Group	M	SD	p	t	d
1	Content	Control	8.88	1.41	.148	1.48	.49
		Experimental	9.42	.69			
2	Communicative Achievement	Control	7.88	1.22	.200	1.31	.44
		Experimental	8.37	1.01			
3	Organizations	Control	7.00	1.12	.065	1.90	.64
		Experimental	7.74	1.20			
4	Language	Control	6.00	1.17	.005	2.97	.99
		Experimental	6.95	.71			

b) Pre-test and Post-test score within control group

The results of the paired samples t -test for the pre-test and post-test of the CG showed there was no significant change with $t(16) = .22$, $p = .826$, $MD = .06$, as shown in Table 5. Among four components of writing, the result for communicative achievement showed a clear improvement from the pre-test to the post-test ($MD = .77$), and $t(16) = 4.19$, $p = .001$. The organization was $M = .94$, $t(16) = 5.19$, and $p < .001$, suggesting learners generated texts consistently with the minimum B1 Preliminary requirements for organization. In terms of language at the B1 level, the score was $M = 1.06$, $t(16) = 4.01$, and $p = .001$, indicating substantial progress after 10 weeks of training. Therefore, the results for the overall writing skills ($M = 2.71$, $SD = 2.20$, $t(16) = 5.07$) confirmed that teaching writing with the traditional teaching method had a positive effect on learners' writing skills.

Table 5. Pre-test and Post-test Scores of Writing skills within Control Group

No.	Stage	MD	SD	<i>p</i>	<i>t</i>
1	Content	.06	1.09	.826	.22
2	Communicative Achievement	.77	.75	.001	4.19
3	Organizations	.94	.75	.001	5.19
4	Language	1.06	1.09	.001	4.01
Overall writing skills		2.71	2.20	.001	5.07

c) *Pre-test and post-test score within experimental group*

Different from the CG, the score of EG revealed a statistically significant difference between sets of scores, $t(18) = 3.15$, $p = .006$; $MD = .68$ (Table 6). The p -value was smaller than the conventional threshold of .05, confirming that EFL learners adequately addressed the task and included relevant information on writing tasks. For the communicative achievement criteria, the EG was marked as a great improvement from the pre-test to the post-test due to the data collected from the paired samples t -test. Table 6 showed $MD = 1.42$, $t(18) = 6.44$, and $p < .001$, illustrating a significant difference in writing enhancement through two points of the experiment. After the 10-week-long treatment, 19 learners in the EG were better able to arrange ideas logically, separate content into clearer sections or paragraphs, and employ a wider range of cohesive devices beyond the most basic connectors, which was demonstrated by the mean difference gained by 1.53 points, $t(18) = 5.92$, $p < .001$. The notable progress in grammatical control with complex forms of structure use and broader vocabulary use at the post-test stage of the EG was evidenced by $MD = 1.95$, $t(18) = 6.94$, $p < .001$. The score indicated an apparent improvement after the 10-week preparation by the synchronous feedback on the mock-tests tool as well as the support of the teacher with the corrective feedback, which exerted a strong positive influence on learners' ability to use language. The writing tasks of 19 learners in this group aligned with the higher band of the B1 Preliminary descriptor, which meant the intervention helped effective control of grammar, and varied expressions enhanced both clarity and communicative effect. Accordingly, the overall writing skills scores ($M = 5.58$, $SD = 3.25$, $t(18) = 7.47$, $p < .001$) indicated that there was a noticeable improvement in the writing performance of learners after 10 weeks of learning collaboratively with the online-based mock tests and receiving corrective feedback from teachers.

Table 6. Pre-test and Post-test Scores of Writing skills within Experimental Group

No.	Stage	MD	SD	<i>p</i>	<i>t</i>
1	Content	.68	.95	.006	3.15
2	Communicative Achievement	1.42	.96	.001	6.44
3	Organizations	1.53	1.12	.001	5.92
4	Language	1.95	1.25	.001	6.94
Overall writing skills		5.58	3.25	.001	7.47

4.2. Learners' Attitudes toward OWMT

The results in Table 7 highlighted that learners had positive attitudes toward OWMT in all three components of attitudes. Learners' cognitive attitudes were the most positive with the score ($M = 4.06$, $SD = .77$), indicating a strong recognition of the effectiveness of the online tool in improving learners' writing knowledge and awareness of conventions. Behavioral attitudes ($M = 4.00$, $SD = .83$) indicated willingness to use OWMT in their writing practice. Compared to previous components of attitudes, affective attitude showed the lowest score with $M = 3.92$ and $SD = .81$, which is interpreted as less emotional engagement.

Table 7. Learners' Attitudes towards OWMT

No.	Attitudes	N=19	
		M	SD
1	Cognitive	4.06	.77
2	Affective	3.92	.81
3	Behavioral	4.00	.83

The qualitative data from the interview was taken account to obtain comprehensive insights regarding the three components of attitudes concerning the online writing mock test platform. Many participants

thought the tool was beneficial and helpful for academic use. The responses from the participants through the semi-structured interview provided explanations for the function of OWMT in strengthening their writing skills and contributing to academic growth.

The participants experienced a diverse range of emotions while working on the writing assignments assigned in the OWMT. By completing their writing tasks, most participants shared a sense of excitement and affirmed their fondness for the process of writing. Learners experienced excitement and motivation, and enjoyment.

I am happy with the tool because I know what level I am currently at, this obvious confirmation that I am getting gains keeps me inspired to keep practicing because I can see the positive implications of my work. (S5)

It feels like I have just completed a mission. This sense of achievement inspires me to keep trying, it feels like unlocking the next stage in a game. No one judges me, judges my work and I can redo as many times as I want until I get a better score. (S6)

I feel happy because I make fewer mistakes overtime. As the first time I did with PET, I got A2, it bellowed the requirement of B1, now I get higher scores, so it feels like seeing that my hard work has been rewarded (S7)

Moreover, learners experienced confidence growth as they gained successful writing experience. Feedback helped them recognize their strengths and improve, increasing their willingness to try more. Additionally, external factors or external expectations were considered as parental recognition or teacher's praise reinforced learners' identity.

I felt very confident because at first my writing was very poor, but after using this tool I felt more confident, my score increased from A2 to B1, and even my teacher praised me. Over time, I can correct mistakes myself because the tool shows them. I know why I was wrong, and I don't need the teacher to explain all the errors to me (S3).

I feel more confident because now I clearly understand what level I am at, and the tool provides me with an overview of where I'm going, whether correct or not, and then I can adjust myself and set goals for myself to achieve (S5)

However, interview data indicated that the learners' emotions were not uniformly positive. Most learners felt satisfied with the synchronous feedback, prompts, and mock-test scores as well as learning progress provided by the tool.

I feel satisfied when I look at my writing because it has improved a little compared to before. Also, when I review my work, I can see the mistakes I made and I have been guided on some structures I used incorrectly, so I can correct them more accurately next time. My highest level is B2. (S1)

Further, numerous learners expressed mixed feeling. Some examples are:

"Even though I have revised several times, my level hasn't improved. I don't know how to correct it to get a higher score, so I also feel discouraged." (S2)

"I feel neutral. Sometimes happy, sometimes sad. It depends on what score I get that day." (S4)

4.3. Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate the effects of OWMT on the writing skills of EFL learners. The findings unraveled that learners gained greater improvement throughout a 10-week training course with the OWMT tool compared to traditional learning particularly shown in the four criteria of content, communicative achievement, organization, and language. Concerning the criteria of content, there was a slight improvement as learners possessed previous experience of effectively addressing the task and fulfilled the main requirements of past language proficiency.

With respect to communicative achievement criteria, learners showed that they adopted a style and register that was appropriate for the communicative context and target reader, so the remarkable improvement in writing text was indicated. To explain this improvement, it could be attributed to frequent participation in authentic writing genres. Additionally, the feedback instantly provided for learners allowed them to keep revising over sessions; it led to their evolving awareness of audience and register

as well as knowing target readers. Besides that, the familiarity gained through sustained practice and constructive feedback from the teacher likely reinforced their ability to adopt an appropriate style for specific communicative contexts. The results were in alignment with a prior study, which highlighted the significance of automated feedback in improving communicative clarity and overall writing efficacy (Karpova, 2020). In terms of organization, learners showed a noticeable improvement, which meant they had control over paragraphing, logical sequencing, and use of linking devices. These improvements also aligned with the findings of Manipatruni et al. (2024) and Wali and Huijser (2018). Learners initially neglected to organize ideas in the writing text; nevertheless, the 10-week training with the integration of the OWMT and instruction of educators allowed learners to draft, revise, and edit iteratively, with discourse-level feedback addressing cohesion, sequencing, and paragraph development provided by the online tool, as well as other constructive feedback by educators. This led learners to exhibit clearer structures with more logical sequencing, paragraph use, and improved linking devices after the intervention. Language subscales were considered as the most noticeable improvement in terms of effect of OWMT toward EFL learners. In consequence, learners displayed their mastery control of sentence structure and grammar, eliminated spelling, and broadened their lexical range in composing texts. These findings in language criteria in current study were confirmed by the previous studies of Curry and Riordan (2021) and Link et al. (2020).

As for attitudes toward using OWMT, the findings revealed that learners had a positive attitude and showed their agreement on the importance of the online platform. Regarding cognitive attitudes, learners perceived it as beneficial for improving their writing competence, developing digital writing exam-taking skills, and receiving synchronous feedback. The feature of timely error-focused shading reinforced EFL learners' writing accuracy, which aligned with findings of Link et al. (2020) and Wali and Huijser (2018). The positive cognitive responses of learners could be explained by the transparent results. In terms of affective attitudes, learners reported that the tool's semi-suggestion brought them dual effects. Some expressed their enjoyment and satisfaction with the immediacy of results because of reaching personal goals and even meeting and satisfying stakeholders' expectations, and it fostered them to learn autonomously. Another benefit of the OWMT was reported that simulated authentic exam conditions, so it may reduce learners' anxiety during authentic exams. On the contrary, negative emotions like frustration, discouragement, or tiredness were also reported. They were explained by the contributions from varied factors, including physical strain such as eye fatigue and psychological dispositions such as cautious confidence. Most findings in this study matched with previous research (Curry & Riordan, 2021; Karpova, 2020; Wali & Huijser, 2018). In terms of behavioral attitudes, learners demonstrated their persistence by engaging frequently and proactively with the platform by completing all assigned tasks and practicing beyond with auto-generated tasks by CEWI with the purpose of reaching personal or external contextual factors' goals. They were considered intrinsic or extrinsic motivations that led learners to persistent practice. The sense of accomplishment or progress visualization and goal direction persisted in learners' continual engagement with writing tasks. Furthermore, thanks to feedback, learners expressed that they could apply what they had learned in a cross-context and practical use. Moreover, learners showed positive behavioral attitudes to the affordances of OWMT as OWMT could support learner independence. OWMT could provide more space for learners to self-practice and self-regulate their writing skills.

With particular attention to cognition, preference, and persistence in writing skills, this study highlighted the triangulated relationship of learners' attitudes to writing goals. The triangular relationship among these demonstrated how learners' attitudes were shaped. The beliefs about the OWMT tool influenced emotional responses, as well as drove observable practices. These engagements and practices strengthened or shaped beliefs, then creating a dynamic cycle of attitude formation, which aligned with the ABC model (Haddock & Maio, 2004). Based on the Tripartite model (Jain, 2014), learning attitudes of learners could be explained: learners believed in the usefulness of timely feedback for their academic improvement (cognitive attitudes); then it influenced their emotional responses of enjoyment, satisfaction, or cautious confidence (affective attitudes); and finally it turned to their frequent revision and task persistence (behavioral attitudes). These components interacted dynamically, reinforcing and reshaping one another, thereby shaping overall learner attitudes toward OWMT. This study contributes to research by featuring actual evidence of how Vietnamese EFL learners perceive and engage with online writing mock tests. The results suggest that while learners generally welcome the efficiency and motivational aspects of automated platforms, teacher scaffolding remains essential for interpreting feedback and sustaining positive affective engagement. The study tried to advocate a blended education of digital integration into traditional teaching methods in a reform educational program in an EFL country

like Vietnam. Because digital tools focused on accuracy improvement in learner writing, while the role of teachers supported clarifying and addressing complex aspects. This integration could maximize the benefits of online-based writing assessment while minimizing its drawbacks.

5. Conclusion

The results of this investigation provide clarity regarding the effects of OWMT on EFL learners' writing skills and their attitudes towards the platform. EFL learners significantly improve in writing performance, observed in the areas of language standards, organization criteria, and communicative achievement, and content, respectively. The findings confirmed consistent engagement with the blended learning method, alongside automated feedback and corrective feedback from instructors. Furthermore, the positive attitudes of learners toward OWMT were affirmed. The cognitive, affective, and behavioral attitudes formed a dynamically triangular and mutually interactive relationship. EFL learners perceived the OWMT as useful and reliable and then expressed satisfaction, motivation, and reflected more engagement in learning; nevertheless, negative emotions such as cautious confidence and physical strain were also noted.

Based on the highlighted results of this study, there is a necessity for school administrators to consider the multiple advantages of integrating online-based writing mock tests into language learning and assessment programs. The inclusion of OWMT in the syllabus should be advocated to equip both educators and learners with adequate resources and dependable tools to facilitate the writing process and promote learners' motivation and self-regulation. Learners, the centered factors in the student-centered paradigm, are encouraged to regard these tools not just as examination exercises in short-term personal accomplishment but also for lifelong learning purposes. Teachers, the second important factor, empower and play a role as a consistent scaffolder for learners by supporting, clarifying, and delivering constructive feedback in this learning paradigm.

When interpreting and generalizing, it is crucial to carefully consider several constraints. The study's small sample size and homogeneity in the learning environment may limit the generalizability of the findings to learners from larger groups. Secondly, this study was in summertime, so it may capture immediate growth in writing performance, but not adequately demonstrate steady progress, or skills transfer to other academic contexts. Third, this research utilized informal email, articles, and stories as writing genres, indicating learners' potential for developing in various tasks like formal emails, essays, and reports. Four, the study primarily focused on writing skills, neglecting cross-skill benefits and language improvements due to its limited scope. Additionally, the study focuses on the CEWI platform, so it neglects other technological tools that potentially influence participants' perceptions. Therefore, future studies could build on the current findings, like larger-scale research across multiple language institutions and proficiency levels to provide more comprehensive understanding; longitudinal studies to capture the sustained impact of online platforms on learners' writing development and autonomy during an academic year; and comparisons of multiple digital writing tools to provide a more comprehensive understanding of technology's role in writing education.

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Declarations

- | | | |
|-----------------------------|---|---|
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| Ethical declaration | : | All procedures performed within this study were out in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee, |

and the informed consent was obtained from all individual participants involved in this study.

We support ELTEJ in maintaining high standards of personal conduct, practicing honesty in all our professional practices and endeavors.

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