



Perceptions of English foreign language university students towards the online freshman composition course

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to explore the perceptions of English Foreign Language University students towards online freshman composition courses at the university. The study aims to explore students' perspectives on the course and evaluate the reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity of the construct among Omani EFL university students. Data were collected from 276 Omani EFL university students who were enrolled in freshman composition courses using a quantitative survey methodology. Participants rated their experiences using a five-point scale. The study used both exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) conducted with Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) 26 to achieve its research objectives. The results of this research provide substantial support for the validity and reliability of the multidimensional construct representing students' perceptions. Additionally, the results of the study demonstrate that the measurement is consistent across various academic levels indicating programme invariance. A five-factor model that accurately represents students' opinions on online freshman composition courses has been developed in this study. The outcomes contribute to the theoretical understanding of evaluating students' perceptions of the course and hold practical implications for enhancing the teaching and design of similar courses.

Keywords: English as a foreign language, Factor analysis, Freshman composition, Online learning, Perceptions.

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Contribution of this paper to the literature

This study adds to the body of knowledge on online language teaching and gives teachers and curriculum developers' insightful information for enhancing the online learning environment for university students studying English as a foreign language. The study's findings have a number of practical consequences and provide helpful insights for teachers and curriculum designers. Students' assessments of the course's strengths and faults can be used to identify targeted interventions and instructional tactics that will improve the course's overall quality.

1. Introduction

English has emerged as a global language of communication widely used in various domains such as business, politics and academia (Salomone, 2015). Consequently, English as a foreign language (EFL) education has gained significant importance in many countries including Oman. English is mandated as a compulsory subject at Oman's schools and universities since it is an essential skill for students to succeed both academically and professionally (Ministry of Education, 2018).

Writing skills hold paramount importance in achieving academic success and pose challenges for EFL students (Singh, 2019). Writing in English requires not only linguistic proficiency but also an understanding of the cultural and academic expectations of the target audience (Mo, 2012). As a result, EFL students frequently struggle to achieve the requirements of academic writing especially in higher education where academic writing skills are highly regarded (Singh, 2019).

EFL students have typically received writing training in face-to-face classroom settings. However, the rise of online learning has created new opportunities for writing instruction in EFL settings. Online writing courses have a number of benefits such as instant feedback, the use of multimedia resources and chances for interaction among students from different cultural backgrounds (Kwak, 2017; Warschauer & Grimes, 2007).

There is not sufficient data on the effectiveness of online writing classes especially in EFL contexts despite their possible advantages. Some research (Khatter, 2019; Sulisty, Mukminatien, Cahyono, & Saukah, 2019) shows the efficiency of online courses in teaching writing skills to EFL students while other studies show inconsistent outcomes. As a result, examining the effectiveness of online writing courses for EFL students will require more research with a focus on the perspectives of the students.

Assessing the effectiveness of online education, particularly online writing courses for Omani EFL university students has gained increased attention recently due to the substantial recent investments made by Oman in e-learning infrastructure and technology (Ministry of Education, 2019). Therefore, this study aims to investigate the effectiveness of online freshman composition courses for Omani EFL university students particularly from the perspective of the students. This research aims to shed light on the factors influencing students' perceptions of online courses and contribute to the body of evidence already available on the effectiveness of online writing courses in EFL environments.

Online education has become a very popular teaching method in higher education because of the COVID-19 epidemic and other factors. Online courses have many advantages including flexibility and accessibility. There are questions about how well they serve the needs of EFL university students particularly in the area of writing.

Writing proficiency is essential for academic success especially for EFL students learning a second language. Writing in English requires not only linguistic proficiency but also knowledge of the intended audience's cultural and academic expectations. According to research, EFL students face a variety of obstacles while writing in English, including insufficient vocabulary and grammatical knowledge, problems structuring and articulating cogent arguments and issues adjusting to various genres and writing styles (Khatter, 2019).

Online introduction to composition courses have grown in popularity particularly in EFL settings (Borgman & Dockter, 2018). Research on these courses' efficacy, particularly in terms of how students perceive them is still lacking. Some online students report higher levels of enjoyment and engagement while others complain about feeling alone and receiving little support in contrast to traditional classroom settings (Laato, Lipponen, Salmento, Vilppu, & Murtonen, 2019; Owston, York, & Malhotra, 2019).

The study will evaluate a number of significant aspects of students' perceptions such as content and organisation, feedback and instruction, discussions and collaboration, online platforms and virtual environments and perceptions of virtual academic writing courses. These aspects are widely acknowledged as important determinants of online course participants' happiness, engagement and learning results. The study uses an analysis of these factors to pinpoint areas that need improvement and attention such as teaching methods, online collaboration, platform usability and students' attitudes and views about virtual learning. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to ascertain, specifically from the viewpoint of the students, the efficiency of teaching Omani EFL student freshmen writing courses online. The study's goal is to add to the expanding body of knowledge about online courses in EFL contexts and to shed light on the variables that affect students' perceptions of online courses by assessing the efficacy of online freshman composition courses in this setting.

2. Theoretical Framework

The research can be framed within the context of the community of inquiry framework by drawing on the dimensions of content and organization, feedback and instruction, discussion and collaboration, online platform and virtual environment and belief in a virtual academic writing course (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 1999). The community of inquiry concept is especially pertinent for this study as it focuses on the social, cognitive and teaching presence in online learning environment (Arbaugh, Bangert, & Cleveland-Innes, 2010). A knowledge of how EFL university students perceive and improve online freshman composition courses can be attained by integrating these characteristics with the community of inquiry framework (Choo, Bakir, Scagnoli, Ju, & Tong, 2020).

The community of inquiry framework's cognitive presence component has a counterpart in the content and organization dimensions. The present research is an assessment of the arrangement, classification and display of data in online courses intended for beginners commencing their first year of writing courses (Waters, Kovanović,

Kitto, & Gašević, 2015). The cognitive presence element of the online learning milieu accentuates the intellectual and educational facets particularly the enhancement of critical thinking acumen and the cultivation of knowledge (Waters et al., 2015).

The social presence component of the community of inquiry framework aligns itself with the discussion and collaboration dimension, encompassing an examination of the extent of student participation, interaction and engagement in online dialogues and collaborative endeavors relevant to first-year composition courses (Lin & Gao, 2020). The presence of a social component in the digital pedagogical environment underlines how crucial it is to develop a sense of academic community and deep connections among the learning cohort (Lin & Gao, 2020).

One essential aspect of the community of inquiry framework is the pedagogical presence component which shows a strong relationship to the instructional and feedback dimensions. We will examine the impact that web-based courses' pedagogical approaches and feedback mechanisms have on introducing new students to various areas of composition within the scope of this dimension (Turk, Muftuoglu, & Toraman, 2021). The focal point of the pedagogical presence component resides in the role of teachers in advancing and assisting student knowledge. This encompasses their aptitude for lucid communication, the provision of punctual feedback and the promotion of substantive interpersonal exchanges (Turk et al., 2021).

The community of inquiry framework's social presence component lines up with the discussion and collaboration dimensions. It includes an investigation of the degree of participation, interaction and engagement of students in online conversations and group projects in first-year composition classes. In the online learning environment, the social presence component highlights the value of fostering a sense of community and encouraging meaningful interactions among learners (Lin & Gao, 2020).

The cognitive presence and social presence elements of the community of inquiry paradigm can be combined to generate the online platform and virtual environment dimensions. It entails a review of the functionalities, usability and general learning experience offered by the online system and virtual setting used in introductory writing courses. The technological features and overall user experience of the online learning environment have an impact on both cognitive presence and social presence (Yang, 2016).

Students' impressions of and involvement in online freshman composition courses are influenced by their beliefs about the virtual academic writing course dimension. The individual attitudes, beliefs and expectations of EFL university students with relation to online academic writing courses are covered under this component. The community of inquiry framework does not specifically address individual beliefs. It can offer a context for comprehending how these beliefs interact with the social and cognitive facets of the learning environment (Jimoyiannis, Schiza, & Tsiotakis, 2018).

This study uses the community of inquiry framework to examine how these factors affect students' perceptions, engagement and learning outcomes in online courses for freshmen in composition. The paradigm offers a thorough perspective for comprehending how social, cognitive and teaching presences are interconnected and how they affect the online learning experience. It is possible to gain a better understanding of the dynamics of online learning as well as recommendations for enhancing the online first-year composition courses offered to EFL university students by using this framework.

3. Literature Review

Online learning has received a lot of attention in higher education because it provides students with flexible and accessible alternatives (Yusnilita, 2020). The development of students' writing and communication skills is a key objective of the many online courses available (Pilkington, 2018). It is crucial to comprehend the views of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students to ensure the efficacy and worthwhile learning experiences of these online courses (Mahyoob, 2020). This review of the literature attempts to examine the available research on EFL students' opinions of online freshman composition courses highlighting major themes and offering insights into the difficulties and advantages of these courses.

Students' opinions of online learning have been the subject of research which has revealed a number of variables that affect their experiences. Language difficulties, cultural differences and unfamiliarity with online learning environments may cause EFL students to have unusual impressions. Studies show that EFL students usually perceive online learning as flexible, convenient, and encouraging of independent study (Sakkir, Dollah, & Ahmad, 2021). However, concerns related to technology proficiency, lack of face-to-face interaction and limited opportunities for language practice have also been identified (Karkar-Esperat, 2018). These perceptions shape students' attitudes towards online freshman composition courses and affect their engagement and satisfaction levels.

The quality of instruction and feedback in online freshman composition courses significantly influences students' perceptions and learning outcomes. EFL students value clear instructions, prompt feedback and meaningful interaction with teachers (Litterio, 2018). An effective teaching presence is crucial for fostering a supportive learning environment. Research has highlighted that EFL students appreciate personalized feedback that addresses their language proficiency and writing skills (Gan, 2020). Furthermore, collaborative activities and discussions that provide opportunities for language practice and cultural exchange positively impact their perceptions of online composition courses (Zheng & Warschauer, 2015).

The technological aspects and course design play a pivotal role in shaping EFL students' perceptions of online freshman composition courses. User-friendly online platforms and well-structured courses enhance their learning experiences. Research has emphasized the importance of intuitive and accessible interfaces, multimedia materials, and interactive learning activities. Additionally, incorporating culturally relevant content and authentic writing tasks can enhance EFL students' motivation and engagement, positively influencing their perceptions of online composition courses (Dahmash, 2020).

Cultural and social factors significantly influence EFL students' perceptions of online learning and composition courses. Cultural values such as collectivism versus individualism, power distance and uncertainty avoidance can impact students' preferences for collaborative learning, interaction with teachers and the perceived effectiveness of online courses (Tarhini, 2016). According to research that has focused on how cultural elements affect EFL

students' views, their expectations for social presence and collaborative learning in online settings may be influenced by collectivistic cultural norms (Meihami & Salite, 2019).

Online freshman composition courses present a range of challenges as well as benefits for EFL students. Language obstacles, difficulty writing down ideas and a lack of real-world language practice are all issues. Although flexible, self-paced learning and access to a variety of learning resources are advantages of online courses (Zakaria, Ahmad, Bahari, Hasan, & Zolkafil, 2021). According to research, EFL students like the chance to independently analyse and edit their writing projects since it fosters their independence and self-directed learning abilities (Ghufron & Rosyida, 2018).

The literature study emphasises how critical it is to comprehend how EFL students approach online first-year composition courses. It shows that although EFL students view online learning as convenient and adaptable, they nevertheless face difficulties with their language skills and have few opportunities for social engagement and language practice. Positive opinions of online composition courses are influenced by their clear instructions, prompt feedback, user-friendly technology, culturally relevant content and collaborative activities. The effectiveness and quality of online freshman writing courses for EFL students can be improved by teachers and institutions by taking these criteria into consideration. The primary aim of this research is to add to the continuously growing pool of information related to internet-based education in the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Additionally, it aims to clarify the diverse factors that impact students' views on online courses while thoroughly evaluating the effectiveness of online introductory composition courses in this unique context. This study uses a multidimensional analysis technique to fill the knowledge gap by looking at the underlying structure of students' views using both exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) will be used after Principal Axis Factoring (PAF) to confirm the conceptual framework and identify pertinent dimensions. The robustness and dependability of the measurement model are ensured by this methodological approach's alignment with accepted psychometric practices (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2019; Kline, 2023).

4. Method

4.1. Instrument

The cross-sectional research design used in the current study was a quantitative research strategy. The research instrument was a questionnaire with 20 items that covered five scales or structures. The scales covered topics including content organization, discussion and collaboration, online platform and virtual environment and beliefs about online academic writing courses. A five-point Likert scale questionnaire was employed wherein respondents expressed their agreement levels, with options ranging from 1 denoting strong disagreement to 5 representing strong agreement.

A validation process involved nine experts from institutions in Oman and Jordan who assessed questionnaire items for alignment with the operational meanings of constructs and clarity. The experts used a validation template to rate the relevance of items, with Content Validity Ratio (CVR) values computed. All items met the acceptable CVR threshold of 49 percent. The overall CVR for the instrument was 95.8 percent affirming strong content validity and suitability for assessing the constructs.

Moreover, the study used Cronbach's alpha to assess the internal reliability of a research model comprising five sub-constructs. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated for each sub-construct: Construct A (discussions and collaboration) achieved an alpha of 0.757, construct B (content organization) had a coefficient of 0.811, construct C (feedback and instruction) yielded an alpha of 0.834, construct D (online platform and virtual environment) recorded an alpha of 0.812 and construct E (beliefs regarding the virtual academic writing course) exhibited an alpha of 0.782.

According to Nunnally and Bernstein (1994), alpha values between 0.6 and 0.7 are considered adequate while those between 0.8 and 0.95 are exceptionally good. In this context, the instrument demonstrated excellent reliability. Additionally, individual scale alpha coefficients ranged from 0.7 to 0.9 indicating good to very good internal consistency across all scales further validating the instrument's reliability and validity.

4.2. Participants

During the first semester of the academic year 2021–2022 at Al Buraimi University College, 267 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students enrolled in the course "Essay Writing and Freshman Composition" made up the population for the study. For second- and third-year students majoring in English and literature, this specific subject is a prerequisite within the program. Matriculation in the instructional module denoted as "Essay Writing and Freshman Composition" necessitated the successful attainment of proficiency in the foundational course designated as "Introduction to Essay Writing." It is imperative to underscore that the individuals comprising the study cohort lacked any antecedent exposure to online scholastic writing courses proffered by institutional e-learning platforms.

Table 1 is the repository of demographic attributes characterizing the participants enrolled in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) program within this research inquiry with a specific emphasis on their registration in the "Essay Writing and Freshman Composition" course. This tabular representation affords a comprehensive delineation of the participants' academic year of enrollment, their field of specialization within their academic programs and other salient particulars of relevance. The cumulative sample examined in this research encompassed a total of 267 students of which 74 were male and 193 were female. In terms of age distribution, the preponderant majority, precisely 250 students were situated within the age demographic spanning from 20 to 25 years while a relatively smaller subset composed of 27 students, surpassed the age of 26. In terms of their scholastic advancement, 134 students were positioned within their second academic year while 133 were in their third year of academic matriculation.

Furthermore, the participants' program specialization exhibited diversity with 90 students enrolled in the Translation program and 177 students pursuing studies in English Language and Literature. The data presented highlights the study sample's academic diversity which includes EFL students enrolled in Al Buraimi University

College's "essay writing and freshman composition" course. It highlights the distribution of students across different academic years and program specializations which are vital for a comprehensive understanding of the study population.

Table 1. Sample breakdown (N=267).

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	74	27.7%
	Female	193	72.3%
Age	20 to 25 years	250	93.6%
	26 years and more	27	6.4%
Year of study	Second-year	134	50.2
	Third-year	133	49.8
Specialization	English language and literature	177	66.3
	Translation program	90	33.7
Total		267	100%

4.3. Data Analysis

SPSS version 26 was used to perform data cleaning, descriptive analysis and extract the underlying dimensions of perceptions among English as a foreign language university student regarding the teaching of an online Freshman Composition course. The data was subjected to Principal Axis Factoring (PAF) with promax rotation. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sample adequacy, Bartlett's test of sphericity and communalities tests of assumption were used to evaluate the applicability of PAF before interpreting the results. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was then used to confirm the measurement model of students' impressions of the course using the AMOS (version 26) model-fitting programme. In this study, the construct validity of the model's components: convergent and discriminant validity was assessed in order to analyse its psychometric features. Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability were used to evaluate each sub-construct's internal consistency. EFA is an initial data exploration technique that helps generate hypotheses about underlying factors while CFA is a subsequent confirmatory step that rigorously tests these hypotheses to ensure the validity and reliability of the measurement model.

5. Findings

5.1. Descriptive Statistics

This section provides a thorough examination of how university students who speak English as a second language view the delivery of an online course in freshman composition. The information was analyzed descriptively, giving mean and SD values for each survey item. The items were divided into five groups: Beliefs about virtual academic writing courses, online platforms and virtual environments, discussion and collaboration, feedback and instruction, content and organization. The two items with the highest mean ratings in the category of content and organization were item 1 (M = 3.93, SD = 0.850) and item 4 (M = 3.95, SD = 0.787) demonstrating students' satisfaction with the course's structure and content. Item 2 (M = 3.62, SD = 0.776) and item 3 (M = 3.73, SD = 0.863), on the other hand, obtained significantly lower scores. Conversely, item 2 (M = 3.62, SD = 0.776) and item 3 (M = 3.73, SD = 0.863) received comparatively lower scores suggesting potential areas for improvement.

The two items with the highest mean scores on the feedback and instruction section were item 5 (M = 4.26, SD = 0.686), and item 7 (M = 4.24, SD = 0.840) demonstrating that participants had favourable opinions of the feedback and instruction strategies used in the online course. However, the lower ratings for item 6 (M = 3.61, SD = 1.114) and item 3 (M = 3.81, SD = 0.952) indicate that these areas still require improvement. Item 9 (M = 2.76, SD = 0.707) and item 11 (M = 2.70, SD = 1.112) had the highest mean ratings for discussion and collaboration. These findings imply that students think there is a reasonable level of collaboration and participation in the online course. Lower scores were received on item 10 (M = 2.21, SD = 0.612) and 12 (M = 2.45, SD = 0.892) showing the need for fostering a more robust environment for discussions and collaboration.

Analysing the categories of online platform and virtual environment, item 15 (M = 3.64, SD = 1.350) and item 13 (M = 3.60, SD = 1.105) received the highest mean scores. These findings suggest that students generally perceive the online platform and virtual environment as satisfactory. However, item 14 (M = 2.18, SD = 0.716) and item 16 (M = 2.33, SD = 1.185) received lower scores indicating potential areas of improvement in terms of user experience and interface design. Finally, when considering belief in a virtual academic writing course, item 20 (M = 2.18, SD = 1.134) and item 17 (M = 2.09, SD = 0.874) received the highest mean scores. These results suggest that students may hold moderate beliefs regarding the effectiveness and value of the virtual academic writing course. Conversely, item 18 (M = 1.80, SD = 0.660) and item 19 (M = 1.96, SD = 0.999) received lower scores indicating potential challenges in students' beliefs and attitudes towards the online course (see Table 2).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the students' perception regarding teaching an online freshman composition course.

Constructs	Items	SD	D	N	A	SA	MEAN	STDV	Construct Mean
Content and organization	1. I found the course content clear and organized.	0.0	6.7	19.1	48.3	25.8	3.93	0.850	3.81
	2. The course objectives were clearly stated and easily accessible.	0.0	16.9	5.6	76.4	1.1	3.62	0.776	
	3. The course materials were relevant and useful.	0.0	13.5	13.5	59.6	13.5	3.73	0.863	
	4. The course schedule was manageable and allowed for adequate time for writing assignments.	0.0	6.8	12.5	59.1	21.6	3.95	0.787	
Feedback and instruction	5. The teacher provided helpful and timely feedback on writing assignments.	0.0	0.0	13.6	46.6	39.8	4.26	0.686	3.98
	6. I felt that my writing improved as a result of the feedback received.	4.5	16.9	11.2	48.3	19.1	3.61	1.114	

Constructs	Items	SD	D	N	A	SA	MEAN	STDV	Construct Mean
	7. The teacher was available and responsive to my concerns.	0.0	6.7	5.6	44.9	42.7	4.24	0.840	
	8. Online discussions were an effective way of receiving feedback on my writing.	1.1	12.4	12.4	52.8	21.3	3.81	0.952	
Discussions and collaboration	9. I felt comfortable participating in online discussions.	2.2	32.6	51.7	13.5	0.0	2.76	0.707	2.53
	10. The online platform allowed effective communication with the teacher and classmates.	10.1	58.4	31.5	0.0	0.0	2.21	0.612	
	11. The virtual classroom environment fosters open and productive communication among students and teachers.	12.4	36.0	30.3	12.4	9.0	2.70	1.122	
	12. The online platform allowed effective communication with the teacher and classmates.	15.7	34.8	38.2	11.2	0.0	2.45	0.892	
Online platform and virtual environment	13. The online platform was easy to navigate and use.	5.6	12.4	18.0	44.9	19.1	3.60	1.105	2.94
	14. I believe that online writing courses offer a convenient way to study academic writing.	12.4	62.9	19.1	5.6	0.0	2.18	0.716	
	15. I believe that online academic writing courses are a convenient option for busy students.	16.9	0.0	13.5	41.6	28.1	3.64	1.350	
	16. The online platform was conducive to improve academic writing.	31.5	31.5	10.1	27.0	0.0	2.33	1.185	
Beliefs based on a virtual academic writing course	17. I believe that online writing courses offer a more flexible and convenient way to learn than in-person courses.	21.3	60.7	5.6	12.4	0.0	2.09	0.874	2.01
	18. I believe that online writing courses provide ample opportunities for interaction and collaboration among students and teachers.	33.7	52.8	13.5	0.0	0.0	1.80	0.660	
	19. I believe that online academic writing courses are just as rigorous as traditional in-person courses.	41.6	31.5	16.9	10.1	0.0	1.96	0.999	
	20. The online writing course provides an effective mode of instruction for academic writing.	27.0	50.6	6.7	9.0	6.7	2.18	1.134	

5.2. Underlying Structure of the Perceptions of English Foreign Language University Students Regarding Teaching an Online Freshman Composition Course

The perceptions of English as a foreign language university students regarding teaching an online freshman composition course were investigated using an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) procedure specifically Principal Axis Factoring (PAF) with Promax rotation. PAF was chosen over Principal Component Analysis (PCA) because it is a more suitable method for extracting the underlying dimensions of the students' perceptions (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2013; Yong & Pearce, 2013). The data consisting of 20 perception items was subjected to PAF analysis using SPSS version 26. Promax rotation was used instead of Varimax because it was expected that the perceptions of the students would be theoretically correlated and Promax is considered a robust technique in social science research (Matsunaga, 2010).

Two basic assumptions of PAF were examined to ensure the factorability of the data on the perceptions of English foreign language university students regarding teaching an online freshman composition course. The first presumption included performing Bartlett's Test of Sphericity and evaluating the sampling adequacy metrics. The second premise involved looking at the matrix of inter-item correlations. The early PAF study revealed that these assumptions were only partially correct. The findings of Bartlett's test of sphericity which establishes whether the correlation matrix is an identity matrix show that there were enough correlations inside the matrix. Additionally, a high level of inter-correlation was found between the 20 variables according to the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sample adequacy. The anti-image test demonstrated that several of the matrices were larger than the advised cut-off value of 0.5 demonstrating that the assumption regarding the factorability of individual variables was also satisfactorily met. Every item in communality met the necessary threshold of 0.3 demonstrating data factorability.

The 20 perception items were loaded onto five components based on the pattern matrix. Two items exhibited cross-loading onto multiple components while five failed to load indicating loading values below 0.4 and failure to meet the set criterion. Therefore, these problematic items were reassessed and subsequently deleted from the instrument following two revisions of the PAF. Ultimately, only 18 items were used for the final analysis of the perceptions of English foreign language university students regarding teaching an online freshman composition course. The results for the 20 items demonstrated that the basic assumptions of PAF were adequately met. The results of Bartlett's test of sphericity were significant ($X^2 = 2986.960$, $df = 190$, $p = .000$) suggesting that there were sufficient correlations within the correlation matrix. The KMO measure was found to be .911 surpassing the recommended value of 0.7. The assumption checks are presented in Table 3. Furthermore, the communalities of the 20 items met the acceptable values surpassing the minimum requirement of 0.30 (Basu & Jha, 2016).

The next step in the analysis involved determining the number of underlying factors represented in the data on the perceptions of English foreign language university students regarding teaching an online freshman composition course. Kaiser's rule guided the decision to retain dimensions with eigenvalues greater than 1.0. Five factors were therefore kept and they together accounted for 57.2% of the variation in the students' perceptions. The first factor accounted for 39.073% of the total variance with an eigenvalue of 8.235. The second factor accounted for 9.839% of the overall variance with an eigenvalue of 1.968. The third factor accounted for 6.524% of the overall variance with an eigenvalue of 1.305. Finally, the fifth component had an Eigen value of 1.043 explaining 2.415% of the overall variance. The fourth factor's eigenvalue was 1.164 explaining 3.447% of the variation.

Subsequently, the five factors were labelled and associated with the 20 items. The first factor, labelled "content and organization" comprised four items with loadings of 0.604 and above. The second factor, "feedback and instruction," consisted of four items with loadings of 0.577 and above. The third factor "discussions and collaboration," encompassed four items with loadings of 0.447 and above. The fourth factor, "online platform and virtual environment" consisted of four items with loadings of 0.441 and above. Finally, the fifth factor, "beliefs on a virtual academic writing course," included four items with loadings of 0.419 and above. Table 3 summarizes the five factors, their respective items, factor loadings, eigenvalues, variance explained and communalities.

Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to assess the reliability of the extracted dimensions related to students' perceptions of the course. Table 3 provides the estimates for each factor. The results indicate that all six measures examined in this study demonstrated acceptable internal consistency, with estimates exceeding 0.70 (see Table 3).

Table 3. Results of the principal axis factoring (PAF) and Cronbach alpha.

Factors and items	Items	FL	COMM	EGV	VE (%)	Alpha
Factor 1: Content and organization	CO1	0.844	0.672	8.235	39.073 %	0.834
	CO2	0.733	0.521			
	CO3	0.622	0.465			
	CO4	0.604	0.556			
Factor 2: Feedback and instruction	FI5	0.577	0.497			0.854
	FI6	0.920	0.737	1.968	7.634 %	
	FI7	0.727	0.518			
	FI8	0.682	0.577			
Factor 3: Discussions and collaboration	DC9	0.579	0.536			0.812
	DC10	0.447	0.474			
	DC11	0.775	0.639	1.305	4.635 %	
	DC12	0.704	0.534			
Factor 4: Online platform and virtual environment	OPVE13	0.537	0.573			0.815
	OPVE14	0.441	0.577			
	OPVE15	0.872	0.692	1.164	3.447 %	
	OPVE16	0.870	0.747			
Factor 5: Beliefs based in a virtual academic writing course	BVAWC17	0.419	0.486			0.773
	BVAWC18	0.839	0.684	1.043	2.415 %	
	BVAWC19	0.635	0.594			
	BVAWC20	0.517	0.407			

5.2.1. Measurement Validity of Perceptions of English Foreign Language University Students Regarding Teaching an Online Freshman Composition Course

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was used to assess the construct validity and reliability of the model constructs (Kline, 2023). This two-step approach is a common practice in factor analysis research. Figure 1 illustrates the utilization of CFA to evaluate the validity of each dimension, namely content and organization, feedback and instruction, discussion and collaboration and the online platform and virtual environment within the current population. The measurement model yielded satisfactory outcomes indicating a robust fit (Hu & Bentler, 2019). The normed chi-square value was 2.215, the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) was 0.068 which falls below the threshold value of .08 (Kline, 1998) while the comparative fit index (CFI) was 0.934 and the Tucker Lewis Index (TLI) was 0.919, respectively both surpassing the recommended values of .90 (Schreiber, Nora, Stage, Barlow, & King, 2015). Collectively, these goodness of fit indices indicate that the measurement model is well-suited to the data (Hair et al., 2019) (see Figure 1).

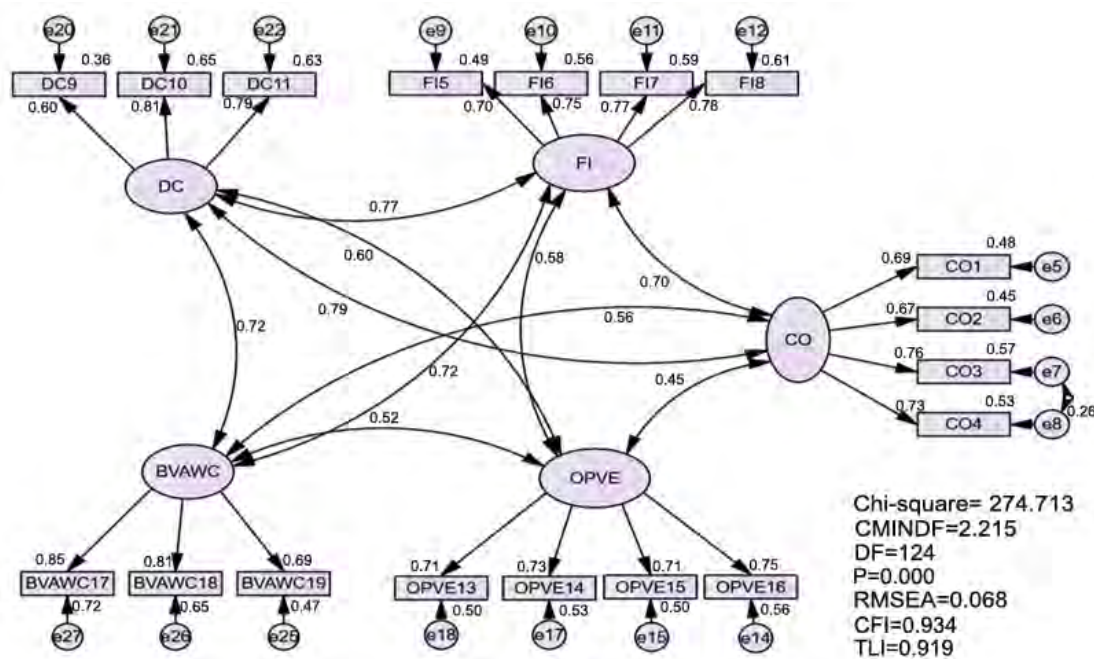


Figure 1. Results of the five-factor confirmatory factor analysis.

Through their convergent validity, discriminant validity and composite reliability, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to assess the psychometric features of the measuring model for the online Freshman composition course. The values range from 0.605 to 0.842 which are higher than the advised threshold of 0.50 as seen in Figure 1 and Table 4. It is assumed that the item loadings are acceptable. The items loaded over 0.50 and the

average variance extracted was above 0.50, this suggests a reasonable convergent validity (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2017). Finally, the model's reliability is well demonstrated by the composite reliability (CR) values which are over 0.70 (Hair et al., 2017) (see Table 4).

Table 4. Results of the confirmatory factor analysis.

Constructs	Items	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	CR	AVE
Content and organization	CO1	0.701	N/A	N/A	N/A	0.790	0.560
	CO2	0.678	0.094	9.946	0.000		
	CO3	0.751	0.082	10.441	0.000		
	CO4	0.719	0.089	10.043	0.000		
Feedback and instruction	FI6	0.741	0.105	11.445	0.000	0.805	0.508
	FI7	0.762	0.095	11.734	0.000		
	FI8	0.778	0.095	11.943	0.000		
	FI5	0.703	N/A	N/A	N/A		
Online platform and virtual Environment	OPVE15	0.702	0.085	10.499	0.000	0.810	0.516
	OPVE14	0.747	0.071	11.041	0.000		
	OPVE13	0.707	0.075	10.564	0.000		
	OPVE16	0.716	N/A	N/A	N/A		
Discussion and collaboration	DC9	0.605	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.790	0.560
	DC10	0.814	0.110	10.341	0.000		
	DC11	0.807	0.115	10.290	0.000		
Beliefs on virtual academic writing course	BVAWC19	0.686	N/A	N/A	N/A	0.823	0.610
	BVAWC18	0.807	0.112	11.791	0.000		
	BVAWC17	0.842	0.119	12.080	N/A		

Note: CO= Content and organization, FI= Feedback and instruction, OPVE=Online platform and virtual environment, DC= Discussion and collaboration, BVAW=Beliefs in a virtual academic writing course.
 NA=Not applicable, P=P-values, S. E=Standard error, CR=Composite reliability, AV=Average variance extracted, C. R=Critical ratio.

The inter-factor correlations are positioned below the table's diagonal in Table 5 whereas the values of the squared inter-factor correlations also known as shared variance are positioned above the diagonal. Each AVE factor is found to be greater than its squared inter-correlations with the other factors suggesting good discriminant validity even when the aggregate inter-factor correlation values are below 0.8 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 5. Discriminant validity of the measurement model.

Constructs	DC	CO	FI	OPVE	BVAWC	CR	AVE
DC	0.788					0.790	0.560
CO	0.743	0.763				0.805	0.508
FI	0.776	0.678	0.787			0.834	0.557
OPVE	0.626	0.430	0.602	0.718		0.810	0.516
BVAWC	0.710	0.543	0.725	0.539	0.781	0.823	0.610

6. Discussion

The descriptive analysis of students' perceptions offers valuable insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the online freshman composition course. While certain areas, such as feedback and instruction received positive perceptions, there are specific aspects that require attention and improvement, namely discussion and collaboration and beliefs in the virtual academic writing course. These findings suggest the need for targeted interventions and instructional strategies to enhance the overall quality of the online course.

The high mean scores for content and organisation suggest that students have a favourable overall impression of the course content and organisation. The areas where content and organisation can be improved are highlighted by lower scores for individual items within this category. To better meet the needs of the students, this may entail clarifying the instructions, offering more resources or altering the order in which the course material is presented.

Positive attitudes towards feedback and instruction mean that students value the criticism they get and think the teaching strategies work. Lower scores for some categories point to the need for development in some areas such as the range of teaching styles used or the clarity and promptness of feedback as indicated in the findings by Litterio (2018) and Gan (2020). Teachers can improve students' academic growth and learning experiences by addressing these issues.

Discussions and collaboration received moderate scores indicating that while there is some engagement and collaboration, there is still potential for development. This finding goes in line with the findings by Karkar-Esperat (2018) and Zheng and Warschauer (2015). Students' involvement and collaborative abilities can be improved by providing venues for insightful debate, encouraging active participation and cultivating a welcoming online learning community. A more engaged and interesting learning environment can be created by incorporating planned exercises, promoting peer engagement, and setting clear rules for online discussions.

Satisfactory scores for the online platform and virtual environment indicate that students generally find the online platform usable and the virtual environment conducive to learning. This matches the findings of Sakkir et al. (2021). However, lower scores for specific items point to areas where enhancements can be made such as improving the user interface, ensuring seamless navigation and addressing technical issues to create a more user-friendly and efficient online learning environment.

Findings related to beliefs in the virtual academic writing course indicate a more mixed perception. Some students hold positive beliefs regarding the course, others exhibit lower levels of confidence as indicated in the findings of Owston et al. (2019) and Laato et al. (2019). It is possible to reduce concerns and encourage a favourable

opinion of the course by addressing students' beliefs and attitudes through focused interventions, creating a welcoming learning environment and presenting data about the advantages of online academic writing courses.

This descriptive analysis provides valuable insights into the perceptions of English as a foreign language university student regarding the online freshman composition course. The findings highlight both strengths and areas for improvement in various categories. By addressing the identified areas of improvement, educators can enhance the overall quality of the course and provide a more engaging and effective online learning experience for students. Furthermore, this study used both exploratory factor analysis specifically Principal Axis Factoring (PAF) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to investigate the underlying structure of perceptions of English among foreign language university students regarding teaching an online freshman composition course. The original 20-item questionnaire was allowed to have two questions removed by PAF and the remaining 18 items were mapped to five domains. The underlying conceptual structure was then confirmed using CFA in keeping with the methodological advantages of CFA as outlined by Kline (1998) and Byrne (2013).

The outcomes of both PAF and CFA have broadened our current understanding of how university students who are learning English as a second language view teaching an online course in freshman composition. The first finding of this study was that perceptions of English as a Foreign Language university students regarding teaching an online freshman composition course are a multidimensional construct showing that the measurement model of these perceptions generates a covariance matrix that is consistent with the data. In a nutshell, the PAF and CFA results justify the use of a five-dimension questionnaire to assess the perceptions of university students who speak English as a second language about the delivery of an online freshman composition course.

This study also sought to evaluate the validity and reliability of the five aspects of the views of university students who were learning English as a second language regarding the delivery of an online course in freshman composition. The findings show that there is enough internal consistency in the scores for each dimension with reliability indices ranging from .773 for the belief in a virtual academic writing course to .834 for feedback and instruction. With the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of each dimension exceeding the threshold of importance and moderate inter-correlations observed among the sub-constructs of perceptions of English as a Foreign Language university students regarding teaching an online freshman composition course, the data also supported the convergent validity and discriminant validity of the questionnaire. Consequently, the utilitarian value of the 18-item questionnaire becomes manifest in its aptitude for assessing the pedagogical apprehensions of university students studying English as a Foreign Language specifically within the context of delivering an online course in the domain of freshman composition. Furthermore, it offers a cogent elucidation pertaining to the import and diversification inherent within the five delineated dimensions within this particular cohort of students.

7. Conclusion

The meticulous scrutiny of student sentiments has yielded valuable insights into the merits and demerits of the online freshman composition course. The findings illuminate specific domains warranting enhancement and scrutiny, notably the facets of "discussion and collaboration" and "beliefs in a virtual academic writing course."

Teachers can improve the course's overall quality and give students access to a more effective and interesting online learning environment by resolving these issues. Additionally, the employment of PAF and CFA has advanced knowledge of the fundamental principles underpinning university students' perspectives on teaching an online course on freshman composition in English as a Foreign Language. The questionnaire can be used as an effective tool for measuring these perceptions because the measurement model has shown excellent validity and reliability.

8. Implications

This study adds to the body of knowledge on online language teaching and gives teachers and curriculum developers' insightful information for enhancing the online learning environment for university students studying English as a foreign language. In the context of teaching an online freshman composition course to university students who speak English as a foreign language, the study's findings have a number of practical consequences and provide helpful insights for teachers and curriculum designers. Students' assessments of the course's strengths and faults can be used to identify targeted interventions and instructional tactics that will improve the course's overall quality. The fact that the students' perceptions are multidimensional is one significant implication. According to the study, perceptions of instructing a freshman composition course online cover a wide range of topics including content and organisation, feedback and guidance, discussions and collaboration, online platforms and virtual environments and perceptions of virtual academic writing courses. Interventions that demonstrate the advantages of online academic writing courses can help allay worries and improve students' perceptions of the programme by addressing students' attitudes and beliefs. Furthermore, using both exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) helps to determine the validity of the questionnaire used to measure the respondents' perceptions and its underlying structure. This shows the questionnaire's validity and reliability and supports its usage as a useful tool for gauging how university students who speak English as a foreign language view the experience of taking an online course in freshman composition.

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