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2

Effect of Blended Learning on EFL Eight Grade EFL Students' Writing Performance in Amman

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Abstract

This study examined the Effect of Blended Learning on EFL Eight Grade EFL Students' Grammar and Writing Performance in Amman. The participants in the present study consisted of male and female students in the eighth grade at AlResalah private school in. The number of the participants was 97 students who were allocated randomly into four groups: A, B, D and E. In the first and second group (i.e. A & B), students learned writing by the means of blended learning instructional program where the conventional method combined technology. In contrast, the other groups (D & E) were taught according to the guidelines suggested by the Teacher's Book. The findings showed that There are significant statistical differences in the writing performance of eight grade students at the level ($\alpha = 0.05$) in favor of blended learning groups. The key points of the findings confirmed the need of applying blended learning in Jordanian school and this requires conducting training programs for teachers in order to educate them about the relevant theories.

Keywords: Blended Learning; EFL students; Writing performance; Jordan.

أثر التعلم المتمازج في تحسين الأداء الكتابي في اللغة الإنجليزية لغة أجنبية لدى طلبة الصف الثامن في عمان

الملخص

تهدف الدراسة إلى تقصي أثر التعلم المتمازج في تحسين الأداء النحوي والكتابي في اللغة الإنجليزية لغة أجنبية لدى طلبة الصف الثامن في عمان. تكونت عينة الدراسة من طلاب الصف الثامن الذكور والإناث في مدرسة الرسالة الخاصة. وبلغ عدد أفراد الدراسة (97) طالباً وطالبة تم توزيعهم عشوائياً إلى أربعة مجموعات (أ، ب، ج، د)، في المجموعة الأولى والثانية (أ، ب) درس الطلاب القواعد والكتابة من خلال برنامج التعلم المتمازج حيث دمج الدمج بين استخدام التكنولوجيا والطريقة التقليدية في التدريس. وبالمقابل، درست المجموعات (ج، د) بحسب الخطوط العريضة الواردة في دليل المعلم لكتاب الصف الثامن. أظهرت النتائج وجود فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية في أداء طلاب الصف الثامن في الأداء الكتابي عند المستوى ($\alpha = 0.05$) لصالح مجموعات التعلم المتمازج. لقد أكدت النتائج الرئيسية في الدراسة الحاجة إلى تطبيق التعلم المتمازج في المدرسة الأردنية، وهذا يتطلب تنفيذ برامج تدريب للمعلمين من أجل تثقيفهم حول النظريات ذات الصلة.

كلمات مفتاحية: التعلم المتمازج. متعلمو اللغة الأجنبية. الأداء الكتابي. الأردن.

Introduction

As the world of today is witnessing a massive revolution in information and communication technology, using it becomes more and more possible in the learning/teaching process; namely to make the content as accessible as possible by integrating technology-enhanced activities and implementing them in teaching in general and in EFL classes in particular. Using technology to develop writing performance may be of great significance in EFL context where the need to communicate internationally becomes of great interest.

Writing in English requires a great deal of attention as it is related to the production of ideas and feelings then conveying those ideas in written forms to others. Of course, it is needed for academic study as well as for international communication needed by all people especially for students (Olango & Geta, 2016).

Writing is defined as the use of symbols containing letters related to sounds produced while speaking (Challob, Abu Baker & Latif, 2016). It is the process of recording ideas and feelings on an electronic means such as computers applications (Camahalan, 2014). Olango and Geta (2016) highlighted the importance of writing as related to its use in the daily life as well as the other sub-skills included such as spelling, acquiring vocabulary, punctuation, conveying ideas and the use of correct grammar. Clearly, writing plays an important role in enabling students to organize their ideas, expressing themselves and providing evidences for their opinions and attitudes. What is more, writing is considered as a mean for extending students' knowledge and it helps them to learn other language skills effectively (Liu, 2013).

However, writing skill development requires a systematical instructional approach. In this regard, writing skill involves many processes such as interactions between the student from one side and with the teacher from the other side. Further, developing writing skill entails addressing the content of the message, its organization, its structures along with its different writing mechanisms (Banados, 2006). Accordingly, teachers may need to use effective teaching methodology that improves their students' ability to communicate their ideas effectively through writing. Of course, combining traditional writing classes with new technology trends may have more potential success (Camahalan, 2014). Of particular interest, blended learning may stand as an example of such combination, namely; traditional and technological means simultaneously.

Blended learning is considered the final step in a long history of technology-based education. It is not a new concept, but the tools available to institutions today are new. Further, to Brown(2003) blended learning origins are simple but overwhelming need to extend classroom student-centered experience in space and time as in the 1960s and 1970s were the real beginnings of integrated technology in classroom though systems at those times have their own limitations.

In the early 1980s, the development and use of CD-ROM came to be. Thus, educational and training departments realized that using such technology will be very useful in finding new ways for teaching. The learning experience had great possibilities and perhaps could make the instructor led-model obsolete (Clarck, 1983). In this context, Berge (1999) assured that blended learning builds on many years of development and experiences, but it applies new technologies and delivery options that will continue to change rapidly and dramatically.

Blended learning helps to overcome a number of challenges facing teachers while teaching language, for example, it allows students to retain information and it motivates students to participate excellently which, in turn, trains them to shoulder the responsibility for their learning.

This enables them to access a huge amount of information through internet (Holmerg, 1998). Likewise, Bersin, (2003) added that combining online activities with conventional ones establishes a comprehensive and integrated activities that can be used by teachers inside and outside the classroom to ensure the complete productivity of students and enabling them to learn together within different kinds of interaction.

Blended learning is typically based on combining human mind and operation within diverse and rich learning activities that may result, in turn, with an improvement in achievement and satisfaction among students. In blended learning, different types of media are used in an integrated form leading to the increase of students' ability to apply the language communicatively (Means & Rochelle, 2010). Blended learning refers to teachers' use of more than one mode of their presentation relevant to applying technologies of personal learning. To this end, it has the potentiality of optimizing the achievements of learning purposes within the right personal teaching style (Singh & Reed, 2001). Similarly, blended learning is considered as a well-known educational tool for teaching EFL students that goes with their personal and educational preferences (Banados, 2006). Further, blended learning is defined as the combination of many traditional and technological learning styles, aiming to develop students' competencies and improving their achievement by using modern technology to learn anywhere and anytime by using the internet and other technological means (Al-Sawalmeh, 2008). Further, blended learning is the organic integration of thoughtfully selected and complementary face to face and online approaches and technologies (Larsen, 2012).

Blended learning mixes between traditional classroom's teaching with web based one. Therefore, blended learning is also presented as a flexible way to design and deliver courses that mixes times and places for learning, as well as providing students with some potentials provided by technology without neglecting face- to- face learning that happens in the classroom (Bonk & Graham, 2006). In blended learning instructional process, blended learning combines learning that is based on online techniques with regular types of classroom teaching where emails support such instruction (Mowat, 2002). Additionally, it uses mixed types of technology such as virtual classrooms, self-regulated instruction, and streaming along with audio texts to meet the desired educational goals (Gray 2007; Rondy 2002). Blended learning has other names, such as, half-and-half learning or blended learning (Graham, 2010). Intrinsically, the result of conjunction of the traditional face-to-face learning environment and the two typical learning environments is called blended learning. These

two learning environments that have been strengthened according to the communication and collaboration between students and teachers are synchronous and asynchronous learning.

Moreover, Garrison and Kanuka (2004) confirmed that blended learning is an effective learning environment that provides advantages over traditional and on-line learning. Blended Learning can achieve both face-to-face interaction requirements along with the need to use on line resources for more learning.

In blended learning environment, numerous reasons impact students' satisfaction. Three key factors have been identified by Bollinger and Martindale (2004) that affect students' acceptance, these factors are; technology, instructor, and interactivity. There are other factors such as course organization issues and teaching, which also contribute toward students' acceptance (Gray, 2007). They also stated that students' acceptance influences the student's level of motivation,

their feeling, and their attitude that result from combining all the benefits that a student expects to have from blended learning atmosphere system. They finally concluded that students' acceptance is very important to encourage them to communicate and learn effectively.

The forms that blended learning can take are not agreed upon. Actually, blended learning has numerous levels of integration with the traditional face-to-face learning experience, these levels may take a form of a four-dimension continuum which are; time (live/synchronous vs. asynchronous), space (physical/face-to-face vs. distributed), humanness (high human/no machine vs. no human/high machine) and fidelity (rich/all senses vs. text only). However, blended learning may take various forms, as these four dimensions change value (Graham, 2010).

Accordingly, to design a blended learning program, it must be known that blended learning materials are not traditional ones with added technology; they are built in a transforming redesigning process. In this perspective, Carroll (2003) believed that blended learning is a matter of how blending learning can use a large array of examples and activities with the incorporation of innovative technology in a form that meets the needs of students considering their individual differences.

According to Camahalan (2014), blended learning can meet the desired educational goals effectively because in blended learning, there are different types of web-based technology, collaborative learning, self-paced instruction and virtual classrooms. In the same vein, Kilickaya (2015) pinpointed the usefulness of combining aspects of traditional learning environment and other forms of e-learning environments. Of course in such integration, students can find the flexibility and enjoyment which may be absent in traditional classes.

In spite of the fact that studies highlighted the significance of blended learning in the field of teaching English, most of them focused on increasing students' motivation (e.g. El Omari, Ayasrah & Al-Jabali, 2016; Keshta & Harb, 2013) or even on enhancing instructors' lesson planning (e.g. Bataineh, 2015; Camahalan, 2014; Harb, 2013) but none of them focused on the processes of teaching grammatical structures or writing processes simultaneously at performance levels.

In Jordan, many studies concluded that student' achievement in writing skills is unsatisfactory (e.g. Al-Haq & Al-Sobh, 2010; Al-Sawalmeh, 2008; El Omari, Ayasrah & Al-Jabali, 2016). Now, Jordanian schools are supplied with computers that can deliver proper technological support in learning; but as a matter of fact, students do not benefit from the use of computers or of any technological applications in language classes (e.g. (Ababneh & Lababneh, 2013; Ibrahim, 2011; Keshta & Harb, 2013). Moreover, most of those studies were conducted in public schools, and there were no studies in private schools where the infrastructure is more suitable for the use of blended learning; and results will differ due to the existence of suitable infrastructure.

Therefore, it is worth attempting to develop students' writing performance by the means of blended learning instruction, which combines traditional teaching methods and the online instruction method at the same time. Of particular focus, the present study will explore the effect of blended learning in improving EFL students' writing performance at private school students in Amman.

Statement of the Problem

The researcher, being as a teacher herself, noticed that most EFL students have many problems writing performance. A number of researchers (e.g. Al-Haq & Al-Sobh, 2010; Bani Hani & Bataineh, 2010; Harb, 2013; Ibrahim, 2011), other studies attributed this defect to the absence of

innovative writing strategies (e.g. Al-Kataybeh & Al-Shourafa, 2011; Ibrahim, 2011; Tarawneh, 2011). It is true that blended learning instruction was researched in the Jordanian setting (e.g. Al-Sawalmeh, 2008; El Omari, Ayasrah & Al-Jabali, 2016); it has not been investigated in private schools setting to the researcher's best knowledge. In addition, the previous research conducted in Jordan did not consider the students' performance writing in blended learning context; for example; some studies were conducted in Iraq, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Palestine, therefore, there is a need to conduct a study in the local environment. In order to achieve the purposes of the present study, the following question will be answered:

1) Are there any statistically significant differences at $\alpha \leq 0.05$ between eighth grade students' writing test means scores that are attributed to the teaching method (namely, Blended learning versus Traditional)?

Significance of the Study

Practically speaking, the major impetus for carrying out this study can be presented through several aspects that are relevant to the improvement of writing performance among basic stage students in Jordanian private schools then deciding the effect of gender on such performance. Hence, the integration of technology in teaching the English language in general and teaching writing in particular is expected in the time of prompt improvements and changes in the educational system in Jordan. As such, students can advantages from these technological improvements to develop their writing performance. The findings of this study may also benefit educational planners to develop materials that are based on learner centred classes using blended learning.

However, from a theoretical perspective, the significance of this study emerged from the scarcity of addressing this issue, as to the best knowledge of the researcher; in the field of teaching writing by the means of blended learning. Further, the findings of the study may give an insight to the Jordanian teachers, as they will be informed on the importance of blended learning in teaching writing. Finally, this study may encourage other researchers to investigate the same field with different variables which are not included in this study.

Definition of Terms

The following terms will have the associated potential meanings in this study as follows:

Blended learning: is an instructional approach of using modern online teaching techniques with the traditional techniques inside the classroom to meet the aims of the course (Kilickaya, 2015). Operationally, blended learning refers to the instruction of different traditional and electronic tools and to the combination of more than one method in teaching the content. These methods and tools were determined according to the needs of eight grade students specifically. Variety of activities from *English World 8* textbook writing were redesigned in order to achieve the outcomes of the program because in the blended learning program students could choose the correct answers that appeared on the screen, model answers were also prepared by the researcher at the end of each session so students can receive feedback and get their scores for their achievement immediately. A *Teacher's Book* rubric was used in order to find out the students' writing performance.

Writing: is a mental work that involves the organization of ideas within topic and structures, word choice, amount of produced writing, as well as lexical and messages to be conveyed (Keshta & Harb, 2013). Operationally, it is defined by the level of students' performance in the post-test as the writing skills test is corrected by a writing rubric that entails the criteria of writing; spelling and

punctuation, task achievement, vocabulary ,communication and fluency in the following subjects (opinions, magazine articles, letters and writing notes).

Traditional Method: is the method used by teachers as mentioned in Teachers' Book (Bonk & Graham, 2006). In this study, it refers to teaching of *English* writing activities and the strategies presented in *Teacher's Book*.

Limitations of the Study

The generalizability of the results is bound to the following limitations:

1. The instrument of the study are limited to the achievement test in writing performance. Therefore, generalizing the findings is related to the same instruments that have the same skills.
2. The blended learning instructional program is limited to videos, power points, internet links and electronic tests that are available on the internet and match the writing content of the *English World* textbook.
3. The context is limited to private school students only; as the content in public schools (namely; *Action Pack 8*) may end up differently.
4. The duration of the program is eight weeks within two months, started on 26/3/2017 till 24/5/2017.
5. Experimental groups were taught by the first researcher while; the control groups studied in their classes with their teachers.

Empirical Studies

This section presents a review of the studies on the effect of blended learning in students' writing performance.

An American Study of Cook, Goldeberg and Russell (2003) reviewed 99 studies published in 1992-2002 which were concerned with the effect of using technology in school students' performance in writing. the authors selected twenty six studies for the analysis while the rest (specifically, twenty five studies) did not meet the requirements of the analysis. the results showed that the use of a word processor as a technological means had a positive effect on the quantity of student writing. this effect was stronger for middle and high school students than for elementary stage students. that is, students who use word processors for writing, generally produce longer, higher-quality writing than other students.

In addition, Ibrahim (2011) explored the effect of computer – mediated instruction on developing language writing of university juniors in language classes in Iraq. He also surveyed data concerning students' perceptions about the technology – enhanced environment of learning. The study showed that computer – enhanced instruction and learning had a significant positive effect on improving students' writing and communication skills.

Abdelfatah (2011) investigated the effectiveness of a blended learning program on developing secondary school students writing skills in Egypt. The study sample included sixty students, thirty students in each group) at a public school for boys in Cairo district. The design of the study was the pre/post quasi experimental control design. The study administrated a pre- test in writing to measure students' actual level in writing skills before receiving any instruction, the program and the checklist to elicit the experimental group learners' post-experiment impressions, opinions and improvement suggestions about the program. The program was divided into two parts; the online part included the content of suggested program for developing writing skills and the face

to face instruction that included 16 sessions. The findings of the study showed that the program developed the performance of the experimental group and the results were in favor of the post-test.

In Taiwan, Shih (2011) studied the effect of integrating Facebook and peer assessment with college English writing class instruction through a blended teaching approach. The participants were 23 first-year students majoring in English at a technological university in Taiwan. Both quantitative and qualitative approaches were employed in the study. The researcher used pre-test and post-test of English writing skills, a self-developed survey questionnaire, and in-depth student interviews. The findings suggested that incorporating peer assessment using Facebook in learning English writing can be interesting and effective for college-level English writing classes. Students can improve their English writing skills and knowledge from cooperative learning. Facebook integrated instruction can enhance students' interest and motivation.

In another study, Sayed (2012) carried out the study on 60 students selected from Nader El-Riyadh Preparatory School. They were divided into two groups: control 30 students and experimental 30 students. The students of the experimental group practiced writing on a website under the teacher's guidance and feedback. A post-writing test was administered to collect data. The findings showed that there was difference between experimental group and control group and it revealed that electronic portfolio had a large effect on the writing skills.

Similarly, Harb (2013) examined the impact of blended learning on students' writing skills in Palestine. The study adopted an experimental approach through dividing forty tenth grade students randomly on two groups, one was taught through blended learning while the other was taught through traditional teaching methods. The findings of the study revealed that there were significant differences in the scores of the control and the experimental groups in favor of the experimental group and which is attributed to the blended learning. The findings also pointed out that there were statistically significant differences at the participants' achievement level before and after implementing the blended learning program in favor of the experimental group.

Moreover, Keshta and Harb (2013) investigated the effect of blended learning on Palestinian students' writing skills. The sample of the study consisted of forty males students from the tenth grade in a basic school in Gaza strip. Students were distributed into two groups; an experimental group contained twenty students studied through a blended learning program for eight weeks and a control group contained 20 male students studied through traditional methods. The authors applied a writing achievement test before and after the experiment on both groups. The study concluded that there is a significant statistical difference in achievement in favor of the experimental group against their counterparts in the control group.

Ababneh and Lababneh (2013) investigated the effect of using internet on EFL elementary school students' writing. The participants of the study were thirty females purposefully chosen from a private school in Irbid district in Jordan. In the first semester, students were taught randomly and then rated by a test while they were taught by the use of the internet in the second semester. The findings showed that students' overall performance on the post-test improved significantly, particularly on the use of vocabulary in writing and on the development of their paragraphs in general.

Bataineh (2015) examined the effect of text chat based on word processor on writing accuracy and productivity among a sample of Saudi students. A sample of forty Saudi students were distributed into an experimental group supported by Facebook and Skype programs and a control

group who used paper and pencil to write their essays. The study used pre and post tests to measure the effect text chat assisted with word processor on Saudi English major students' writing accuracy and productivity. The study concluded that there is a significant improvement in the performance of the experimental group especially in spelling, punctuation, grammar, phrasal verbs, idioms, idiomatic expressions, pragmatics and creativity when compared to the control group.

In Malaysia, Ismael, Nadrzrah And Hafiza, (2015) carried out a study to investigate the impact of blended learning on students' writing apprehension. the study used semi-structured interview on twelve male students from primary and high public schools. the findings of the study showed that the students had positive perceptions towards the collaborative blended learning writing environment they had experienced. they perceived that the collaborative blended learning activities had helped them reduced their writing apprehension and improve their writing performance.

In Malaysia, Challob, Abu Baker and Latif (2016) investigated the effects of collaborative blended learning writing environment on students' writing apprehension and writing performance as perceived by a 12 EFL students enrolled in one of the international schools in Malaysia. Qualitative case study method was employed using semi-structured interview, learning diaries and observation. Twelve male students enrolled in Class Ten were selected to participate in a 13-week study. To learn how to write collaboratively, the students followed the procedures of the blended learning writing process. Students were divided into three groups and were given the freedom to choose the members of the group they would like to work with. They went through the writing process in face-to-face and online learning modes via the class blog and online Viber discussion. Data collected were analyzed qualitatively using thematic analysis. The findings indicated that the students had positive perceptions towards the collaborative blended learning writing environment they had experienced. They perceived that the collaborative blended learning activities had helped them reduced their writing apprehension and improve their writing performance as they experienced and learnt much know ledge concerning the micro and macro aspects of writing. Students also viewed that their online discussion and collaboration on writing in Viber groups and the class blog had assisted them greatly in their writing task.

Concluding Remarks

As noted above, many studies (e.g. Abdelfatah, 2011; Challob, Abu Baker& Latif , 2016; Cook, Goldeberg & Russell, 2003; Ibrahim, 2011; Keshta & Harb, 2013; Sayed, 2012; Shih, 2011) examined the effects of blended learning on students' achievement in language classroom. Most of the studies (e.g. Bataineh, 2015; Cook, Goldeberg & Russell,2003; Ibrahim, 2011; Keshta & Harb, 2013) concluded that blended learning is a very effective instructional method in developing students' learning and achievement. Moreover, there was an agreement on the positive effects of blended learning where recommendations from many studies to conduct more studies with other variables especially in the basic stage.

Most of the reviewed studies helped the researcher to choose and design the instruments of the study, to review the suitable statistical methods for the study, to enrich the literature review, and to write the outlines of theoretical framework.

On the other hand, this study is characterized by its objective regarding the effect of blended learning in teaching writing for eighth grade students in private school students as no other studies

investigated this issue, particularly in Jordan. Accordingly, the effect of blended learning on students' writing achievement was examined.

Methods and Procedures

Design of the Study

The current study followed a quasi-experimental design in terms of using two experimental groups and two control groups. The independent variable is the blended learning instruction. The dependent variable is students' writing performance. The control groups consisted of 52 (34 male and 18 female) students. In contrast, the experimental groups consisted of 45 (26 male and 19 female) students.

Participants of the Study

The participants in the present study consisted of male and female students in the eighth grade at a private school in Amman in the second semester of the academic year 2016-2017. This school was deliberately chosen because the researcher has been working there for the past five years. The number of the participants was 97 students who were allocated randomly into four groups: A, B, D and E. In the first and second group (i.e. A & B), students learned by the means of blended learning instructional program where the conventional method combined technology. During the sessions of blended learning, the participants were given information about blended learning; followed by example practices as studied with the teacher. In contrast, the other groups (D & E) were taught according to the guidelines suggested by the *Teacher's Book*.

All members in the four groups under study were given a writing test the same test were used upon the completion of the training. To obtain valid scores that identify students' writing performance, clear criteria to assess their works were identified. To qualify this need, the pre-post writing test assessed student' writing in terms of: opinions, magazine articles, letters and writing notes.

The Instructional Program

To achieve the purpose of the study, the researcher designed a blended learning instructional program to writing skills as is the program is steered towards enhancing eighth grade students' writing performance. writing activities in English *World 8* textbook were considered in creating the blended learning instructional program .Certainly, the researcher considered the general guidelines of teaching English writing for eighth grade in Jordan . The pre-test helped in checking the equivalence among groups in terms of writing performance. Later upon the completion of the training, students' achievement was assessed by the post-test.

The Type of the Program

The blended instructional program started in 26/3/2017 and ended in 24/5/2017. It is eight weeks within two months. The researcher redesigned the writing material of units (8, 9, 10 & 11) of the students' *English world 8* in order to enhance teachers' use of blended learning effectively. Of course, the program was applied only to the assigned experimental groups. Here, the students were given three sessions for writing during every two weeks assigned for every unit; 45 minutes each.

Steps of the program

1. Topics, Activities and outcomes

Table 1: topics, activities and outcomes

Unit No	No. of less	Topic	Writing activities	Outcomes	Teaching Aids/ Time
Unit 8	3	Writing opinions	Writing students' opinions about football using a persuasive language.	1- To state the features of writing in expressing different opinions. 2- To work collaboratively on producing short pieces of text to express different opinions. 3- To write up students' opinions.	-CD/ videos Power Point/ electronic tests. -Direct Instruction 3 periods/ 45 minutes each
Unit 9	3	Magazine articles	Writing three sections of a magazine article about the seven wonders using the subheadings and the detailed information.		videos/ Power Point/ electronic tests. -Different questions and answers. 3 periods/ 45 minutes each
Unit 10	3	Writing letters	*Writing a formal letter to <i>The Bill Reid Foundation</i> asking for information. *Writing an informal letter to their friends talking about a trip.	1- To state the purpose, features and layout for formal letter writing. 2- To write a formal letter. 3- To write an informal letter.	CD/ Power Point/ electronic tests/ smart board. -Different questions and answers. 3 periods/ 45 minutes each
Unit 11	3	Taking notes	Reading a piece of information text and condense it into notes.	1-To take notes successfully. 2-To work collaboratively on condensing the given information into notes. 3-To show students' notes in front of the class.	CD/ Power Point/ electronic tests/ smart board. -Different questions and answers. 3 periods/ 45 minutes each

2. Components of the Program

a) The Textbook

English world 8 consists of twelve units. Every unit in the book needs 10 classes over a two-weeks period. The key skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening are consistently covered throughout the course and are underpinned by the firm foundation of the

syllabus. These elements are clearly presented in the textbook so that teachers have a clear objective for every lesson. There is a *Welcome Unit* to revise the basic language needed to begin the course. In addition, there are stories, dialogues, information texts, songs and poems to attract and motivate the learners.

The *English world 8 Workbook* offers extended practice to accompany the *Student's Book* and contains the *Workbook CD-ROM*. Each unit has many pages of tasks and exercises for independent work to extend and consolidate the learning in the *Student's Book*. Two pages of revision exercises appear after every other unit, giving practice of work covered in the two preceding units. A wordlist contains key words from the reading texts, vocabulary pages and spelling for each unit.

b) Blended Learning Model (Al-Jazar's Model , 2002)

The researcher adopted this model which designed by Abed Elatif Al- Jazar. Al- Jazar designed this model in 1992 after reviewing the related literature of the systematic approach and conducting many empirical studies on Egyptian and Arab students.

The model consists of five phases; study and analysis, design, production, evaluation and usage .It was followed to design the proposed educational program which aimed to improve eighth grade students' grammar and writing performance.

In addition, the researcher followed this model because it had a lot of educational applications in the Arab world which were proved as reliable. For example, Harb (2013) reported the effective of blended learning instruction using Al-Jazar model in improving school students' writing. Also, Abu Shabaan (2003) asserted that this model is systematic and sequenced as the sub-stages of the five phases are organized logically. These phases were adopted by the researcher as shown in Table2.

Table 2: Phases and steps of blended learning

Phase	Steps
Study & Analysis Phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -determining learners' characteristics. -determining educational needs. - analyzing educational resources *The researcher has taught 8th grade students for more than 5 years ,she ascertained these carefully.
Design Phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -writing behavioral objectives -determining educational content. -designing the pre-post tests. -selecting learning experiences and teaching techniques and students' organization. -selecting media, educational tools and facilities. -designing the educational mission on the median required. -designing teaching process elements. -setting the educational strategy to be followed. * These are stated earlier and elaborated in the previous pages.

Phase	Steps
Production Phase	-accessing the media and required facilities. -having what is available. -modifying what is available. *The school has smart boards connected with the internet to make the material more accessible.
Evaluation Phase	ongoing follow up and observation.- -micro experimenting of formative evaluation by monitoring and evaluating them during the grammar and writing activities inside the classroom. - -macro experimenting of summative evaluation by giving students assignments to know their progress in writing and grammar skills.
Use Phase	-analyzing learners' characteristics, the educational needs and resources, the program design and producing the required media and facilities.(as shown in the instructional program). -evaluating the program and implementing it with on-going assessment and evaluation.(The program was validated by educational technology specialists to achieve its objectives as shown in appendix,...)

More specifically, the program consisted of the followings:

1. **Live Events (Video and Audio):** This means using synchronous events, which all learners learn in the same time. Here, learners can experience the merits of dealing with a live online environment.
2. **Online Content:** Learning experiences that the learners complete individually, at their own speed and on their own time. Self-paced, asynchronous learning events add significant value to the blended learning equation. In order to get the maximum value and the self-paced learning, it must be based on the effective implementation of instructional design principles.
3. **Collaboration:** Learners can communicate with each other efficiently.
4. **Assessment:** To measure the learners' knowledge, pre-assessments can come before live or self-paced events to determine prior knowledge, and post-assessments can occur following scheduled or online learning events to measure learning transfer.
5. **Support Materials:** These include reference materials both physical and virtual that enhance learning retention and transfer. They include videos.

Content Validity of the Instructional Program

To ensure the content validity of the instructional program, it was handed to a jury of 10 experts in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at Yarmouk University . Additionally, two experienced EFL teachers and three colleagues who hold a PhD from the same department and work as supervisors at the Ministry of Education participated in the validation process. The jury was kindly asked to examine the program and provide their suggestions, recommendations and comments on it. The jury's comments and recommendations were taken into consideration,

as the researcher made the modifications suggested by the jury. Some modifications were taken into consideration according to the difficulty or easiness of questions, as well as the time of some parts was modified to suit the nature of the activity. Based on suggestions of the faculty members, the researcher retained some paragraphs without modification, rewording and simplifying some paragraphs, and replacing words that are not clear in terms of meaning with more explicit words.

Instrument

A writing pre and post test that was designed and administered by the researcher to find out if there are any significant differences among the participants of the experimental and control groups that can be due to their previous knowledge. The post-test was conducted immediately at the end of the study to find out the students' achievement in writing after the study was over. The participants were asked to write magazine articles, opinions, letters and making notes. The writing test was developed by identifying the most frequently skills of writing from student's book in order to find out students' writing performance. It was designed by the researcher to evaluate student' prior knowledge in their writing skills. It was used to establish the equivalence of the experimental and control groups. The researcher explained writing skills used in this study as: writing opinions, magazine articles, letters and writing notes

The writing test contained six questions within writing tasks requiring them to produce paragraph writing, the tasks focus on spelling and punctuation, task achievement, vocabulary, communication and fluency. The total score is 40 and the time set for the test is 1:30 minutes

Rubric

In the present study, a Teacher's Book rubric was used in order to find out the students' writing performance and their progress in the assignments. It allowed the teacher to see how students applied their knowledge using their own writing successfully and to assess their progress. This rubric consists of four categories: spelling and punctuation, task achievement, vocabulary, communication and fluency.(Appendix, p.....). A specialist in measurement and evaluation was consulted about the rubric that was used with the writing test for this level of students. This rubric for writing test was chosen from the teacher's book. It was adapted by the researcher in order to find out student' writing performance.

Validity and Reliability of the Test

To ensure the content validity of the tests, they were handed to the same jury of the instructional program. That is, a jury of 10 experts in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at Yarmouk University. Additionally, two experienced EFL teachers and three colleagues who hold a PhD from the same department and work as supervisors at the Ministry of Education participated in the validation process. The jury was kindly asked to examine the program and provide their suggestions, recommendations and comments on it. The jury's comments and recommendations were taken into consideration, as the researcher made the modifications suggested by the jury. Some modifications were taken into consideration according to the difficulty or easiness of questions, as well as the time of some parts was modified to suit the nature of the activity.

Construct Validity of the Writing Test

To ensure the construct validity of the writing test, the test was piloted on a sample of 30 students who were chosen from outside the participants of the study. Difficulty index and discrimination index of the test items, major skills and questions that follow them were calculated as shown in Table 1.

Table 3: Difficulty and discrimination index

Over all Test	Writing notes	letters	Magazine articles	opinions	Item
51%	46%	61%	56%	41%	P-value difficulty
65%	72%	68%	62%	57%	P-value discrimination

Table 3 shows that the the proportion of students answering items correctly indicates the difficulty level of the items are propor as regard between 41% and 61%. The difference between the correct responses as a percentage of the upper 27% and lower 27% of the total group can tell us whether an item has discriminated the high scorers and low scorers on the test. Optimally, items have a positive discrimination index that are above 30%.

Reliability of the Writing Test

To obtain the reliability of the internal consistency of the test, Kuder-Richardson 20 was used. To make sure of the reliability of the test, it was given to the same pilot study two weeks after the pretest application according to the test and retest procedures, Pearson correlation coefficiency between the first and the second application was calculated. The reliability coefficient was found to be 0.91, which is appropriate for the purposes of this research.

Reliability of Scoring

The participants' writing performance was marked by an experienced EFL teacher who was the researcher herself because she was worked at the same school. The pre- and post- test was adopted to measure the skills in writing opinions, magazine articles, letters and writing notes.

To establsih the reliability of the test, Alpha Cronbach was calculated, it was estimated as 0.625 ; this was appropriate for this study.

Results of the Study

To review, the first question was: *Are there any statistically significant differences at $\alpha \leq 0.05$ between eighth grade students' writing test means scores that are attributed to the teaching method (namely, Blended learning versus Traditional)?*

To answer this question, a timed pre-test and post-test of writing was administrated. The mean scores and standard deviations of the students' scores on the writing pre-test and post-test were calculated, along with estimates mean scores and standard deviations of the post-test scores based on the differences between the levels of instructional delivery; blended learning, and conventional method as shown in Table 4

Table 4: Means and standard deviation of students' writing performance on the pre-test and the post-test per blended learning instruction

Group	Sample	N	Pre test		Post test	
			Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation
A	Blended learning (male)	26	15.1538	8.78950	32.9615	3.49263
B	Blended learning (female)	19	15.9474	8.43586	29.0526	7.78513
D	Control (male)	34	14.8529	8.04959	23.9412	7.68289
E	Control (female)	18	15.3889	8.83269	24.1667	8.17636
	Total	97	15.2474	8.34919	27.4021	7.86032

The test was out of 40 marks

Table 4 shows a difference between the mean scores and standard deviation of the writing performance of blended learning groups and the control groups on the pre-test and the post-test in favor of the blended learning groups. Clearly, group A & B outperformed their peers in groups D & E as their mean score was (32.96, 29.05) in contrast with (23.94, 24.17) respectively. Moreover, Table 2 shows the difference in the estimate mean scores of blended learning groups and control groups. To ascertain this result further, an ANCOVA test was used to analyze the students' scores, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5: ANCOVA of the students' writing performance on the post-test per blended learning instruction

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Eta Squared
Post test	3592.686	1	3592.686	372.381	0.000	0.802
Group	1390.640	3	463.547	48.046	0.000	0.610
Error	887.605	92	9.648			
Corrected Total	5931.320	96				

n=97

*Significant ($\alpha \leq 0.05$)

Table 5 shows a statistically significant difference in students' writing performance on the post-test ($F=48.046, df=96, P= 0.000$). Provided by these scores, this study reports that blended learning instruction has a significant difference on Jordanian eighth grade students' writing performance (at $\alpha \leq 0.05$). In order to find out which groups outperformed other groups, it is necessary to make the comparison among groups. Therefore, a Scheffe Test is used and the results are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6: Scheffe of the students' writing performance on the post-test per blended learning instruction

Group	Sample	Mean	Blended learning (male)	Blended learning (female)	Control (male)	Control (female)
			32.9615	29.0526	23.9412	24.1667
A	Blended learning (male)	32.9615	-	3.9089	9.0204*	8.7949*
B	Blended learning (female)	29.0526		-	5.1115*	4.8860*
D	Control (male)	23.9412			-	.2255
E	Control (female)	24.1667				-

* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

The results of the Scheffe Test in Table 6 displayed that there was a significant difference between blended learning (A), ccontrol (D), and control (E) writing performance on the post test because of the blended learning instruction. The students in blended learning group outperformed their peers on other groups.

The results of the Scheffe Test also displayed that there was a significant difference between blended learning (B), control (D), and control (E) writing performance on the post test because of the blended learning instruction. The students in blended learning group outperformed their peers on other groups.

To determine the differences in writing tasks (opinions, magazine articles, letters, and writing notes) means and standard deviation of the students' scores for blended learning groups and control groups with reference to writing tasks were calculated, along with estimates mean scores of the post-test. However, the investigation of writing tasks development was measured as shown in Table 7

Table 7 : Means and standard deviation of students' performance in the writing tasks on the pre-test and post-test per blended learning instruction

Tasks	Group	No.	Pre test		Post test	
			Mean	Std.	Mean	Std.
Writing opinions	Blended learning A (male)	26	5.0385	2.28877	8.7692	1.42289
	Blended learning B (female)	19	5.2632	2.10402	7.8421	2.14121
	Control D (male)	34	4.9412	2.13117	6.8824	2.01155
	Control E (female)	18	5.1667	2.20294	6.7222	2.19104
	Total	97	5.0722	2.15178	7.5464	2.08177
Magazine articles	Blended learning A (male)	26	2.5000	2.42074	6.8077	1.81150
	Blended learning B (female)	19	2.5789	2.47915	6.6316	2.60791
	Control D (male)	34	2.3235	2.19808	4.8824	2.31941
	Control E (female)	18	2.2778	2.49247	4.7222	2.65254
	Total	97	2.4124	2.33520	5.7113	2.47891
letters	Blended learning A (male)	26	2.7308	2.73580	8.4615	1.02882
	Blended learning B (female)	19	3.0526	2.61351	7.2632	2.02326
	Control D (male)	34	2.6471	2.50916	5.1176	2.53179

Tasks	Group	No.	Pre test		Post test	
			Mean	Std.	Mean	Std.
	Control E (female)	18	2.7222	2.63027	5.0556	2.36325
	Total	97	2.7629	2.57703	6.4227	2.54065
Writing notes	Blended learning A (male)	26	4.8846	2.04601	8.9231	1.38342
	Blended learning B (female)	19	5.0526	1.98533	7.3158	1.70139
	Control D (male)	34	4.9412	1.80808	7.0588	1.99911
	Control E (female)	18	5.2222	2.18432	7.6667	2.02920
	Total	97	5.0000	1.95256	7.7216	1.92971

Table 7 shows differences in the means scores and standard deviation on the writing tasks (opinions, magazine articles, letters and writing notes) between blended learning groups and control groups. Obviously, it shows that students at the blended learning groups outperformed their peers at the control groups on the writing tasks. For example, mean scores of writing opinions (M= 8.77; 7.84; 6.88;6.72 respectively) Moreover, it shows the differences in students' performance in the writing tasks in the estimate mean scores on the post-test and blended learning groups and control groups in favor of blended learning groups. For clearer interpretations, MANCOVA was used to analyze the students' scores based on the variable of the blended learning instruction on the writing tasks, as shown in Table 8.

Table 8: MANCOVA of the students' performance in blended learning groups and control groups on the post-test per writing tasks

Source	Dependent Variable	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Eta Squared
Post-test	Opinions	234.062	1	234.062	188.528	.000	.672
	Magazine articles	351.863	1	351.863	216.188	.000	.701
	letters	240.659	1	240.659	133.409	.000	.592
	Writing notes	107.511	1	107.511	50.900	.000	.356
Group	Opinions	65.380	3	21.793	17.554	.000	.364
	Magazine articles	80.743	3	26.914	16.536	.000	.350
	letters	205.868	3	68.623	38.041	.000	.554
	Writing notes	55.786	3	18.595	8.804	.000	.223
Error	Opinions	114.220	92	1.242			
	Magazine articles	149.737	92	1.628			
	letters	165.960	92	1.804			
	Writing notes	194.323	92	2.112			
Corrected Total	Opinions	416.041	96				
	Magazine articles	589.918	96				
	letters	619.670	96				
	Writing notes	357.485	96				

n=97

*Significant ($\alpha \leq 0.05$)

Table 8 shows statistically significant differences in students performance on the writing tasks (opinions, magazine articles, letters, writing notes), in favor of blended learning groups.

Discussion and Recommendations

The question of the study seeks statistically significant differences among eighth grade students' writing performance that are attributed to the teaching method (i.e. blended learning). The statistical analysis of the data revealed that there was a significant difference on Jordanian eighth grade students' writing performance at the level of ($\alpha = 0.05$) in favor of blended learning groups. Obviously, the study shows that students at the blended learning groups outperformed their peers at the control groups on the writing tasks (namely; opinions, magazine articles, letters and writing notes). Specifically, the mean scores of writing opinions were as high as 8.77; 7.84; 6.88; 6.72; respectively. Moreover, the study demonstrates the differences in students' performance in the writing tasks which is reflected by the mean scores of the post-test scores for blended learning groups and control groups in favor of blended learning groups.

The observed improvement in students' writing performance could be ascribed to several factors. Initially, blended learning stimulated students to move towards independent practice of English writing instead of depending on direct instruction. This enabled students in the blended learning groups to move from the mere organizing of a writing text to the ability to practice writing different tasks. During the training, students interacted effectively with technical aspects; especially the interactive smart discussion board. Throughout the training, students enjoyed discussion forums that enabled them to take part in the learning asynchronously. So, they learned to write best, this effective interaction enabled them to benefit from each others' ideas. This result has been shared by Wang and Gearhart (2006) who stated that blended learning is the only way to resolve these difficulties through providing adequate writing chances and situations for communication and interacting with students and their teacher nevertheless of time or place.

Moreover, during the online writing lessons, the students were given an opportunity to identify their strengths and weaknesses in their essays. Throughout the training, students enjoyed discussion forums that enabled them to take part in the learning asynchronously. For example, they were allowed to reflect upon their work, write comments to their peers in the group, or to receive instant feedback from the teacher that made them eager to proceed to the next step. Specifically, they browsed information through multiple media tools. Their background information, certainly, took part in when it came to the construction of new pieces of knowledge or even evaluating the merits of such knowledge. Concerning the teacher, on the other hand, blended learning enabled her to work as managers rather than as a traditional teacher. Here, the participating students were able to compose the required writing tasks comfortably with ease. As a result, students did not only follow the teacher's instructions, but also they enjoyed everything that is displayed on the screen. Similarly to Huynh's (2005) results, Huynh confirmed that blended learning is an integration of both classroom instructions along with the potentials provided by different computer applications. Clearly, blending learning used in this study achieved the learning outcomes in an enjoyable way of presentation.

Another probable reason can be related to blended learning groups' out performance; the participating students were able to be more flexible as they proceeded in their writing step by step following the instructions of the teacher. It was noted that, after each blended classroom, the teacher acknowledged the potential for improving the students' writing; as consistent and timely feedback were offered. One and foremost, they were interested in displaying their essays by using different formats given on their screens. In this regard, Graham (2010) highlighted the role of technology in

language teaching. To Graham, technology should be the teacher's assistant as it renders itself to large numbers of opportunities.

Moreover, blended learning used in the present study afforded the students with a variety of activities, techniques and multimedia. Such activities included videos, images and sounds. That is, the students took advantage of both e- learning along with face to face instruction. To this end, having two modes of lesson presentation, actually, improved students' motivation which was reflected in their writing performance on the post test scores. This result was shared by Carter and Miller (2003) who demonstrated that blended learning instruction enriches students' experiences while writing through direct and indirect interaction and gives teachers the ability to adapt and edit activities by using pictures, motion and audio to meet students' needs and their performance level.

Further, throughout training, the students were intended to share their writing experiences with their peers. In the current study, eighth grade students received the blended instruction while the other groups received a more conventional classroom experience. Such adjustment provides a unique and unexpected insight into the different ways in which students responds to the opportunity to revise their written work. Likewise, the teacher enjoyed her cooperating in reviewing out their writing errors. As such, students submitted their tasks confidently and without any hesitation. Similarly, this was long-established by Bonk and Graham (2006) who issued how blended learning, as it mixes the conventional with web- based learning, helps teachers in designing and delivering flexible instruction that mixes times and places of learning. Obviously blended learning provided students with the potentials of technology without neglecting face to face learning.

Another possible interpretation of students' improved writing performance can be attributed to the art of mixing two learning strategies at the same time. For example, towards the completion of the training, the writing performance of the experimental groups was promoted because of the combination of human mind and technology. That is, such diverse and rich learning setting made students not only able to write, but also it helped them to be happier.

In the present study, students enjoyed blended learning as it combined multiple delivery media that is designed to complement each other and promote learning and application-learned behaviour through the writing tasks. For example, students were shown a video about the features of writing letters, and then they were asked to write sentences for each feature. After that, the teacher corrected their sentences by writing the best sentences on the white board. Having a written sample on the board gave them an opportunity to build their new sentences without hesitation. Interestingly, the teacher noticed how comfortable they were during their discussions with their peers or with their teacher. This result has been shared by Lo, Johnson, and Tenorio (2011) who demonstrated that when students use blended learning, their perception level of deep thinking and problem solving are higher and their interaction with peers is higher, too. Moreover, Ozek, Kesli and Kocoglu (2009) stated that blended learning helps teachers to engage students in live instruction in class, using communicative activities which encourage language production and peers discussions.

In fact, using blended learning enabled students during the training to develop their performance in writing with their teacher's guidance with minimal time and effort; if compared to the conventional method. For example, in one lesson, the teacher introduced the topic of *expressing opinions* by explaining the features and instructions that should be followed on the white board. Then the teacher gave more than one example on each specific feature. Of course, students were invited to ask, discuss and share their views with peers and with the teacher. After that, students

were asked to write their opinions. Only the best sentences were written on the board. At that point, the teacher read the whole composition. Upon demonstrating a model composition, the students were asked to perform an assignment on their opinions while considering the features of writing opinions demonstrated in class. To This end, Wang and Gearhart (2006) concluded that blended learning instruction is the only way to resolve these difficulties through providing adequate writing chances and situations for communication and interacting with students and their teacher nevertheless of time or place.

One probable explanation of the improved writing performance among experimental group's students is that blended learning supplied them with teaching materials that included downloaded pictures from the Internet, songs, videos downloaded from YouTube, URLs to certain websites, handouts, and screenshots of assignments to be commented on. Of course in this case, the teacher acts as an instructional designer who is responsible of providing the students with well-designed activities and materials suitable for integration into the writing course, allowed students to learn effectively by providing them with modern ways and strategies that helped them to get rid of feeling cloudy while writing. Here, not only blended learning influenced the students' writing quality, but also it gave teachers varied opportunities to help weak students and solve their problems in writing. In this concern, Chan (2010) reported that throughout blended learning, teachers are able to help students in overcoming number of linguistic problems such as, reporting verbs while writing and using the suitable cohesive devices correctly. In addition, Keshta and Harb (2013) stated that blended learning combines the advantages of face-to-face and e-learning to satisfy individual differences. Using blended learning does not mean the use of technology only, but also finding better ways of supporting students in achieving the learning objectives and providing them with the best possible learning experiences.

Another contribution of the blended learning instructional program was observed, in the experimental groups as they outperformed their counterparts in control groups in all writing tasks, namely; opinions, magazine articles, letters and writing notes. This result demonstrates the effective role of the blended learning instructional program in enabling students to retain the target information of the text, taking notes then organizing their writing in different forms. Excitingly, blended learning raises students' concentration and activates their memory more. To this end, students were felt as sustaining greater retention while carrying out all writing tasks. Earlier, Bello (1997) assured that teachers in different stages believe that different types of instructions based on technology; namely, blended learning instruction can shape students writing in many ways, it also can provide teachers with helpful tools to train students to enhance their students' learning as well as working in a collaborative manner with other students.

Instant peer and teacher feedback may be one key reason that justifies students' improved writing performance. Here, flexible and comfortable environment is ensured. For example, in writing notes, the teacher showed their students the different features of taking notes in details by using the smart board, giving them more than one example. Then the students were asked to brainstorm, draft and take notes for different examples. After that, the teacher could share students' notes between each other, adding and editing. To this end, students gain knowledge on this topic by the explanation of their teacher as well as by the use of blended learning program. This result is supported by Carter and Miller (2003) who claimed that students are encouraged to use immediate messaging to debate and discuss their favourite subjects inside and outside the classroom. They also

claimed that the word processing software is used to enhance their self-assessment, peer assessment, and collaborative writing.

Moreover, during the training, students were able to plan their writing tasks, revise and edit effectively. Of course, having writing as a process may eliminate a large number of students' mistakes and errors. For example, Abdelfatah (2011) and Larsen (2012) considered blended learning as a creative teaching instruction that provides students with an environment which encourages flexibility as well as varied arrays of activities while writing along with the ability to use feedback from teachers and peers to correct mistakes.

Overall, blended learning used in this study fulfilled many objectives, namely; increasing students' motivation along with an improved writing performance. Here, authentic materials were used to enable students to interact more in a way that develop the correct writing habits. Accordingly, this interactive relationship enabled students to be self-guided learners during their writing process which helps them to be more independent and more creative in producing their writing tasks. In this regard, Adas and Bakir (2013) noted that 80% of the skills learnt in conventional classroom are lost in 24 hours; however, providing students with blended activities reinforces the learnt material and enables students to interact with other students inside and outside the classroom as well as increases their motivation to learn through a flexible rich learning environment. This can be accompanied by the ability to review other students' writing as well as receive immediate feedback, then make suitable corrections and rewrite their writing once again for more feedback.

Nevertheless, the results of the current study are inconsistent with the results of

Harb (2013); Ibrahim (2011); Kazu and Demirkol (2014); Means and Rochelle (2010); Tabatabaei and Tehrani (2012); who argued that blended learning has rather an adverse impact on the students' learning performance.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study the researcher presented the following recommendations

- Use extra time to prepare multimedia and interactive lessons that include videos, images, electronic tests, YouTube and Power Point as well as having different activities to enhance students' learning.
- Enrich English language curriculum in Jordan with different activities that enhance the use of blended instruction inside and outside the classroom.
- Studying the effect of blended learning in improving EFL students' speaking and reading in private and public schools as well as in universities, with taking into consideration variables such as gender and the study level .

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