



Graduate School of Education

**A mixed-methods study of exploring and explaining the impact of
the use of educational blogging on Saudi EFL students' writing
development**

**Submitted by
Sami Mohammed Almalki**

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Abstract

The dominance of technology in many learners' lives is inescapable and is an opportunity upon which educators could capitalize. Using educational blogging in language teaching, this study aimed to explore and explain the nature impact of the use of educational blogs on EFL students' writing development. The study used a mixed-methods design to analyse the impact of the educational blogging.

The first phase was a quasi-experimental study with an intervention and comparison group, with 90 participants in total (45 in each group). Participants were undertaking an English Language writing course during the Preparatory Year Programme at a higher education institution in Saudi Arabia. The comparison group was taught using traditional teaching methods and the intervention group was taught by using educational blogs both individual and class blogs. Both groups had the same course materials and teaching hours. The sentence variety, syntactic complexity, vocabulary, paragraph organisation and the coherence and cohesion of student pre and post writing tests were measured in order to compare the groups. Mann-Whitney tests were used to investigate whether there was a significant difference.

In the second phase, a sequential mixed-methods case study focused on the intervention group was developed to explore and explain the participants' attitudes towards the use of educational blogs. Attitudes were measured using a closed questionnaire, and then this data was supplemented by open-ended questions, focus group discussion and semi-structured interviews designed to explain the nature of the impact of the intervention in more detail. This phase also investigated the first blog and last blog entries on the class blog using the same procedure used in investigating the pre and post tests.

Statistical findings reveal that the intervention group outperformed the students in the comparison group who were given similar lessons but using traditional methods (pen and

paper). Qualitative findings suggest that the use of educational blogging seems to have increased these students' motivation to practise writing, and that this resulted in more sophisticated and syntactically complex texts after the intervention. The study supports the theory of using educational technology as a pedagogical teaching method in English classes, based on the socio-cultural and cognitive theory of social interactional learning. In so doing, it extends the relation of educational blogging affordances and writing development context, particularly in the context of HE students taking a non-English major, who might be expected to be possibly less motivated or invested in developing their English writing skills than those students who have typically formed the sample for similar previous studies. This study is significant in investigating the pedagogical use of blogging a new context, revealing how educational blogs can be used in a context which traditionally hinders pedagogical approaches which are collaborative or student-centered: one with large class sizes, a tradition of transmission-style teaching and limited opportunities for peer interaction. The findings suggest how and why blogging can be an effective pedagogical approach for supporting writing development in similar context.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.....	2
Abstract.....	3
Abbreviations.....	11
1. CHAPTER ONE	12
Introduction to the Study	12
1.1 Introduction	12
1.2 Problem of the Study.....	12
1.3 Rationale for the Study and the Literature Gap	14
1.4 Significance of the Study.....	18
1.5 Objectives of the Study	18
1.6 The Study Design.....	19
1.7 Contribution to Knowledge	19
1.8 Structure of the Thesis	20
2. Chapter Two.....	23
Context Background.....	23
2.1 Introduction	23
2.2 The Saudi context: An overview	23
2.3 An overview of the Saudi education system.....	24
2.4 The Status of English Language Education in the Saudi Context	27
2.5 The Status of English Language Education in Saudi Government Schools.....	32
2.6 The status of English language education in Saudi Higher Education.....	35
2.7 Preparatory Year Programme (PYP).....	35
2.8 Challenges Facing EFL Learners in Saudi Arabia	37
2.8.1 Introduction.....	37
2.8.2 Socio-Cultural Challenges	37
2.8.3 Pedagogical Challenges	38
2.8.4 Governmental and Administrative Policy Challenges	39
2.9 Summary of the Chapter	39
3. CHAPTER THREE	41
Theoretical Framework and Literature Review	41
3.1 Introduction	41
3.2 Theoretical framework	42
3.2.1 Social Constructivism	42
3.2.2 Impact of Technology on Social Constructivism.....	43
3.2.3 Participation and Social Constructivism	47
3.2.4 Affordance Theory.....	50
3.2.5 Multimodality theory	54
3.3 Definition of Writing Skill	55
3.4 Students' Writing Difficulties.....	56
3.5 Pedagogical Approaches to Writing in A Foreign Language.....	57
3.5.1 Product Approach	57
3.5.2 Process Approach.....	60
3.5.3 Genre Approach	63
3.6 Technology and L2 Writing Practice.....	65
3.7 Systematic Literature Search.....	68
3.7.1 Review Questions	68
3.7.2 Review Methods	69

3.7.3	Selection Criteria.....	69
3.7.4	Study Identification.....	70
3.8	Introduction to Blogging in L2.....	73
3.9	Why Blogging?.....	74
3.10	Types of Blogs.....	76
3.10.1	The Learner Blog.....	76
3.10.2	The Tutor Blog.....	76
3.10.3	The Class Blog.....	77
3.11	Challenges When Using Blogs.....	77
3.11.1	Safety.....	77
3.11.2	Accessibility.....	78
3.12	Pedagogical Use of Blogs in Higher Education.....	78
3.13	Technology Use and Blogs in Higher Education in Saudi Arabia.....	80
3.14	EFL Writing Skills and Blogging.....	81
3.15	Does Blogging Enhance EFL Writing?.....	87
3.16	Attitudes towards Using Blogs When Learning A Foreign Language.....	91
3.17	Feedback.....	94
3.18	Teacher Feedback.....	96
3.19	Collaborative Learning and Writing.....	98
3.20	Summary of the Chapter.....	100
4.	CHAPTER FOUR.....	101
	Methodology.....	101
4.1	Introduction.....	101
4.2	The Philosophical Assumptions.....	101
4.2.1	Ontology, Epistemology and the Research Paradigm (Pragmatism).....	101
4.3	Socio-Political Considerations.....	104
4.4	Theoretical Background vs. Practical Implementation.....	105
4.5	Research Methodology.....	106
4.5.1	Case Study.....	106
4.5.2	Quasi-Experiment: Comparison and Intervention Groups.....	108
4.6	English language programme.....	109
4.6.1	Course Descriptions.....	109
4.6.2	Objectives.....	109
4.6.3	Outcomes.....	109
4.7	Mixed-methods approach.....	110
4.8	Research design in mixed-methods.....	112
4.8.1	Explanatory Design.....	113
4.9	The Study Design.....	114
4.9.1	Phase 1: Quasi experimental.....	116
4.9.2	Phase 2: Mixed-methods case study.....	116
4.9.3	Phase 2. A: Quantitative strand:.....	116
4.9.4	Phase 2. B: Qualitative strand:.....	116
4.9.5	Phase 3: Integration of quantitative and qualitative methods.....	117
4.10	The Sampling Strategy.....	117
4.11	Research Questions and methods of data collection.....	123
4.12	Background to the Participants.....	124
4.13	Ethical issues.....	125
4.14	Practical procedure of data collection.....	128
4.14.1	Permissions.....	128
4.14.2	Quantitative elements of the study.....	128
4.15	Qualitative Elements of the Study.....	137
4.15.1	Focus Group Discussion.....	137

4.15.2	Semi-structured interview.....	143
4.16	Pilot Study	146
4.16.1	Questionnaire pilot.....	147
4.16.2	Interview Pilot	148
4.17	Distribution of Questionnaires	149
4.18	Conducting Focus Group and Interview	149
4.19	Data Analysis	149
4.19.1	Quantitative Data.....	150
4.19.2	Qualitative data.....	150
4.20	Data Analysis Process	151
4.21	Quality of research	156
4.21.1	Measures of Quantitative Research Quality	156
4.21.2	Measures of Qualitative Research Quality	157
4.22	Summary of the chapter	161
5.	CHAPTER FIVE	162
Statistical Findings.....		162
5.1	Introduction	162
5.2	Data Analysis and Results	162
5.3	The Effect of the Intervention	163
5.4	Descriptive Analysis	167
5.5	Investigating the contents of the educational blogs	177
5.5.1	The influence of the educational blogging on the intervintion group.....	177
5.5.2	Descriptive Analysis.....	178
5.6	Participants' attitudes towards using the educational blog.....	187
5.7	Descriptive statistics for attitude toward blogs and sub-dimensions.....	189
5.8	Frequency tables.....	190
5.8.1	Dimension One	190
5.8.2	Dimension Two.....	191
5.8.3	Dimension Three.....	192
5.8.4	Dimension Four.....	193
5.8.5	Dimension Five	193
5.8.6	Dimension Six.....	194
5.8.7	Dimension Seven	195
5.9	Conclusion of the chapter	195
6.	CHAPTER SIX	198
Students' perceptions and experiences		198
6.1	Introduction	198
6.2	Findings from the open-ended questionnaire, focus group discussions and interviews	198
6.3	Themes, Codes and Sub-Codes	199
6.4	Contextual issues affecting EFL learners' writing development.....	202
6.4.1	Inadequate teaching methods.....	202
6.4.2	Teaching methods in English language classes	208
6.4.3	Teacher-centred learning.....	210
6.4.4	Large class size	211
6.4.5	Lack of writing practice	212
6.4.6	Insufficient feedback.....	214
6.5	Conclusion.....	217
6.6	Students' attitudes and perceptions of using educational blog in learning and	
teaching EFL writing		219
6.6.1	General perceptions of the use of the blog in English classes	220

6.6.2	Blogging as pedagogical method of teaching English	224
6.6.3	Benefits of blogging.....	230
6.6.4	Challenges facing students adopting the use of educational blog technology	235
6.7	Students' perceptions of affordances of using blogging as a tool of writing development	239
6.7.1	Relationship between affordances of blogging and writing.....	239
6.7.2	Collaborative writing	239
6.7.3	Free writing.....	241
6.7.4	Discussion board.....	242
6.7.5	Online feedback and comments	244
6.7.6	The effect of multimodality on student writing	245
6.8	Students' experience of using the educational blog.....	250
6.9	Conclusion to the chapter	266
7.	CHAPTER SEVEN.....	269
	Discussion.....	269
7.1	Introduction	269
7.2	Discussion of the main findings and their meaning.....	270
7.3	Use of educational blogs in teaching and learning English.....	274
7.4	Blogs as a pedagogical teaching method.....	280
7.5	Influence of using educational blogs on EFL students' writing development	284
7.6	Distinctive characteristics of using educational blogs	290
7.7	Pros and cons of the use of educational blogs in English writing classes	299
8.	CHAPTER EIGHT.....	306
	Conclusion	306
8.1	Introduction	306
8.2	Summary of the study and its findings	306
8.3	Contributions	308
8.3.1	Knowledge Contribution.....	308
8.3.2	Theoretical and practical contributions.....	309
8.3.3	Methodological contribution.....	311
8.4	Limitations of the study	311
8.5	Implication and further research recommendations	313
8.7	Reflections on my PhD journey.....	317
	References.....	319
	Appendices.....	342
	Appendix 1: Pre and Post Tests	342
	Appendix 2: Writing Rubric	344
	Appendix 3: Ethical Research Approval from the University of Exeter.....	346
	Appendix 4: Permission from the University in the KSA.....	347
	Appendix 5: Information Letter for Comparison Group.....	348
	Appendix 6: Information Letter for Intervention Group Students	351
	Appendix 7: Information Letter Arabic Version.....	353
	Appendix 8: Consent form for Comparison Group.....	355
	Appendix 9: Consent form for Intervention Group.....	357
	Appendix 10: Consent form Arabic Version	359
	Appendix 11: The questionnaire (English Version).....	361
	Appendix 12: The questionnaire (Arabic Version).....	365
	Appendix 13: The Focus Groups interview (English version).....	369
	Appendix 14: The Focus Groups interview (Arabic version).....	370
	Appendix 15: Semi- Structured interview (English version).....	371

Appendix 16: Semi- Structured interview (Arabic version)	373
Appendix 17: Initial cods	375
Appendix 18: Main themes, codes, sub-codes and quotes from the transcripts.....	379
Appendix 19: Test of Normality Pre and Post Test	385
Appendix 20: Test of Normality First and Last Posted Assignments on Class Blog.....	386
Appendix 21: Inter-rater reliability (pre and post-tests)	384
Appendix 22: Course Materials: English Book 3 & 4	388

Table of Figures

Figure 3.1: Framework for educational affordances of blogs (Deng &Yuen, 2011, p.450)	45
Figure 3.2: Stages in product approach to EFL learning (Source: Steele, 2004).....	59
Figure 3.3: Steps in process-oriented learning in EFL (Source: Steele, 2004).	62
Figure 3.4: Systematic Literature Review.....	72
Figure 4.1: Sequential Explanatory Mixed-methodsDesign.....	113
Figure 4.2: The Multiphasers study design.....	115
Figure 5.1: Pre-test writing sample by a student from the comparison group	170
Figure 5.2: Post-test writing sample by the same student from the comparison group	172
Figure 5.3: Pre-test writing sample by student from the intervention group	174
Figure 5.4: Post-test writing sample by the same student from the intervention group	176
Figure 5.5: Writing sample produced in the beginning of intervention by the same student from intervention group (First homework assignment).....	184
Figure 5.6: Writing sample produced in the end of the intervention by the same student from the intervention group (Last homework assignment).	186
Figure 6.1: General perceptions of the use of the blog in English classes	223
Figure 6.2: Blogging as a pedagogical method of teaching English	229
Figure 6.3: Participants’ perceptions of using educational blog	234
Figure 6.4: Challenges facing students adopting the use of educational blog technology	238
Figure 6.5: Relationship between affordances of blogging and writing.....	249
Figure 7.1: New Framework of the theory of the relationship between blogging affordances and writing development.....	268

Table of Tables

Table 2.1: A classification of KSA’s educational system	26
Table 2.2 : IELTS Test Performance 2014.....	37
Table 3.1: Relationship between blogging and Writing Development.....	55
Table 4.1: Non-equivalent quasi-experiment design.....	108
Table 4.2: Research questions and methods of data collection.....	123
Table 4.3: Elements of the Braun and Clark Data Analysis Method.....	151
Table 5.1: Shapiro-Wilk test (N=90)	146
Table 5.2: Inter- rater reliability of the pre and post tests (N=90).....	146
Table 5.3: pre-test data by group.....	156
Table 5.4: Post test data by group	166
Table 5.5:Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test for pre and post tests by group	167
Table 5.6: Comparison of mean, minimum and maximum scores on pre- and post-tests by group.....	168
Table 5.7: Comparison of mark distributions on pre- and post-tests by group.....	169
Table 5.8: First and last assignments data of the intervention group	178
Table 5.9: Comparison of mean, minimum and maximum scores of first and last posts on class blog by the intervention group.	178
Table 5.10: Comparison of distribution of scores on first and last posts of intervention group	179

Table 5.11: Total posts on class blogs and learners' blogs.....	181
Table 5.12: Example of one of the most improved participant's writing from the intervention group.....	182
Table 5.13: Frequencies and percentages for demographic variables (N = 45)	187
Table 5.14: Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficients for complete 'attitudes towards blogs' items.....	188
Table 5.15: Descriptive statistics on attitudes toward blogs and dimensions (N = 45)	189
Table 5.16: Distribution of sample on Attitude towards using blogs (N = 45).....	190
Table 5.17: Distribution of sample on Attitude towards using affordance of blogging to improve EFL writing (N = 45).....	191
Table 5. 18: Distribution of sample on Attitude towards using blogs in EFL writing class (N = 45).....	192
Table 5.19: Distribution of sample on Attitude towards writing anxiety and blogs (N = 45)	193
Table 5.20: Distribution of sample on Attitude towards online peer and teacher feedback and comments on blogs (N = 45).....	193
Table 5.21: Distribution of sample on Attitude towards grammar and blogs (N = 45).....	194
Table 5.22: Distribution of sample on Attitude towards vocabulary and blogs (N = 45).....	195
Table 6.1: Themes emerging from open-ended questionnaires, focus groups and interviews	201
Table 6.2: Contextual issues affecting EFL learners' writing development	202
Table 6.3: Students' attitudes and perceptions of using educational blog in learning and teaching EFL writing	219
Table 6.4: Students' perceptions of affordances of using blogging as a tool of writing development	239
Table 6.5: Students' experience of using the educational blog	250
Table 6.6: Cross-cases analysis.....	265
Table 8.1: Knowledge Contributions.....	306

Abbreviations

PYP:	Preparatory Year Programme
EFL:	English as a Foreign Language
SLA:	Second Language Acquisition
ELC:	English Language Centre
CALL:	Computer Assisted Language Learning
CMC:	Computer Mediated Communication
Qual:	Qualitative
Quan:	Quantitative
ING:	Intervention Group
COG:	Comparison Group
FG:	Focus Group
SPSS:	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
MAXQDA:	Qualitative Data Analysis Software Package
BERA:	British Education Research Association
SELEP:	Saudi English Language Education Policies
KSA:	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
HEIs:	Higher Education Institutions
MOHE:	Ministry of Higher Education

1. CHAPTER ONE

Introduction to the Study

1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the thesis and offers a brief description of what follows in the coming chapters. It presents a concise introduction to the research problem, the rationale and the gap in the literature addressed by the study. The study's significance, objectives, research questions, contribution to knowledge and design are also briefly discussed. Finally, the structure of the thesis is presented.

1.2 Problem of the Study

The inspiration for this study came from my own experience as an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) lecturer, through which I found that my native Arabic-speaking students struggled to learn English as their second language. Since I had found educational technology to be useful in this context in the past, I took steps to introduce my students to technological tools. Initially, I planned to investigate their impact and, more precisely, to explore the impact of educational blogs on EFL students' writing skills. However, I broadened my research scope to L2 learning more generally and educational blog use, since there appeared to be no clear way forward based on the existing literature. I found that various methods could be used to investigate the topic once I had obtained further information on the issue. Having discovered that many studies had adopted either quantitative or qualitative methods, with much focus on attitudes or on comparison of pre- and post-tests with no further exploration of impact, I wondered whether an alternative strategy would be appropriate. I found that several researchers had adopted a mixed-methods approach to this topic on EFL students but that no-one had used the mixed-methods approach to investigate the use of educational blogs in teaching and learning English writing skills in Saudi Arabia (SA). Furthermore, no single study has been

conducted in the Preparatory Year Programme (PYP) for non-English major students in the health stream at a university in the kingdom. Furthermore, it may be that there needs to be more studies investigating how/why blogs can be used and it seems that there are relatively few studies in SA, in particular. Moreover, no single study has investigated the use of educational blogs' as a pedagogical tool in teaching and learning EFL writing for Arabic students. There was thus a significant research gap in this area. Therefore, this study is intended to explore the impact of the use of educational blogging affordances in developing the writing skills of EFL students in the PYP at a University in Saudi Arabia. Many Middle Eastern studies have adopted quantitative or qualitative methods alone. Instead of contributing to the existing body of studies which take either a quasi-experimental or a qualitative approach, in isolation, I decided it would be better to take a different perspective which would enable me to better understand why and how an intervention may or may not have a positive impact. Another reason for this decision was that I wished to offer insights to help decision-makers when creating or modifying educational policy, with the greater depth of understanding provided by the layers of a mixed-methods investigation. Furthermore, I wished to contribute to the growing body of research which demonstrates the value of pursuing mixed-method approaches. However, I discovered that the issue at hand went far beyond the initial topic of educational blogging affordances as an EFL teaching method for students in the Middle East and Saudi Arabia. Specifically, according to a news report published by Al-Madinah Newspaper (Alabdulkarim and Aladwani, 2013), the policy that applied English as medium instruction in teaching in the PYP was criticised because the students experience difficulties in English which might affect their progress. As such, I determined that the Saudi education system was outdated and in need of pedagogical modernisation. It appeared that academic issues were overlooked in the kingdom. Instead, research and policy focused on financial and

administrative issues. As a result, the number of PYP students who quit before graduating had been increasing for quite some time Aal Abdulkareem & Aladwani (2013). Therefore, it was essential that PYP students were assisted in improving their ability to learn English as a second language. Whilst this could be, in part, addressed by policy, I believed that it was important for me to use the opportunity afforded by this PhD to contribute to Saudi's EFL learning situation by exploring possible teaching materials and strategies that could be effectively implemented within the Saudi higher education system.

1.3 Rationale for the Study and the Literature Gap

In recent years, there have been significant improvements in the implementation of varied learning strategies and resources. Previously, the teacher had dominated the learning process, whereas now the student was the prime focus (Huijie, 2012). Furthermore, the development of educational technologies and the internet provide new tools with which to accomplish learning goals. Social interactivity has taken on a new form with the introduction of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) and the internet-based social networking known as Web 2.0. This technology has enabled students to initiate interaction and collaboration with their peers as well as to accumulate knowledge and build networks through social media websites such as blogs, Wikis, YouTube, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram (Fong, 2012; Soviyah & Etikaningsih, 2018). One form of CMC internet-based social networking is the Weblog, more commonly known as the 'blog'. Due to the huge popularity that the blog has garnered, educational researchers have started to explore its potential for education and learning (William & Jacobs, 2004), while another Web 2.0 tool, the wiki, has attracted similar interest (Chen et al., 2005). Promoting student-based educational strategies is the main objective of such studies. Pedagogy, and, in particular, pedagogy in the context of foreign language teaching and learning, has also begun to make use of blogs. There is a wide range of formats that a blog can take, with the majority

consisting of dated entries ordered from the newest to oldest with integrated external links. There are some elements that are generally considered to be standard in a blog, namely, a series of posts with a date and permalink, the name of the author, and, sometimes, a section for comments (Holmes, 2005). From the early 2000s onwards, the blog has come to be perceived as a useful tool for foreign language teaching (Wu, 2006). The beneficial effect of blog use in learning has been reported by many quantitative and qualitative studies (Halic et al., 2010; Jones, 2006; Miceli et al., 2010; Sharma & Xie, 2008; Vurdien, 2013; William & Jacobs, 2004). Furthermore, the blog has been found to have a positive impact on the development of grammar and writing skills, student-centered learning, as well as on collaboration and social interaction (Jones, 2006; Vise, 2007). An additional benefit of blog use, as indicated by Amir, Ismail, and Hussin (2011) is that the teamwork promoted by blog-based learning increases learner productivity, work pace, and satisfaction, as no temporal or spatial restrictions are imposed on the learning process. Similarly, Supyan et al. (2010) argued that, through collaboration, bloggers can exchange ideas, language, grammar, structure, and essay organisation. What is more, learners can also develop new strategies and approaches to writing in English. It is clear from the above considerations that, within the context of foreign language learning, the blog constitutes a helpful tool of internet-based social networking.

The perceptions and attitudes of students regarding the use of the blogs to learn a foreign language have also been explored (Abouammoh, Smith & Duwais, 2014; Amir, Ismail & Hussin, 2011; Chiao, 2006; Hussin, Razak & Qasim, 2010; Istifci, Lomidazde & Demiray, 2011; Miceli et al., 2010; Noytim, 2012; Wu & Wu, 2011; Yang, 2009). Results reveal that students consider that blogs enhance their learning interest, motivation, productivity and enjoyment. Some studies have investigated how blogs can be used in the teaching of other European languages, not just English. One such study was conducted by Isenberg (2010)

over a period of fifteen weeks, in which she proposed a web-based programme for the teaching of the German language. According to the results obtained, learning was significantly improved by the web-based programme. In a different study, Murphy (2009) applied synchronous online communication for learning French as a Foreign Language (FSL), highlighting the advantages and difficulties of solutions to data categorisation. Data were derived from observation, blog use by teachers, and an online discussion forum. Independence, peer-learning, authenticity and motivation were the main benefits that were reported. Such studies show that blog use is relevant in the learning of European languages other than English.

In Saudi Arabia, most institutions of higher education use English as the medium of instruction. Over 80% of prospective students must take Preparatory Year Programme (PYP) courses before they can commence their higher education (Alhazmi, 2003). Lasting for one or two years, these courses are implemented by all public and private Saudi higher education institutions (HEIs) and consist of four key disciplines, namely, English language, physics, mathematics, IT skills, and general skills (Alhazmi, 2003). The purpose of the PYP is to make sure that the academic abilities of students meet the required standard before they begin their academic degrees. At the same time, the PYP is intended to help students to become accustomed to academic requirements and develop the necessary learning skills (Alhazmi, 2003). Therefore, in order to be able to study subjects in their desired major, it is imperative for students to pass their language test. This process is extremely arduous for PYP students. Prior to beginning their academic studies, students in the first year of the PYP take intensive English courses for a period of one year. The Saudi Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) oversees recommending and authorising the PYPs and, therefore, they all have very similar features (Alshumaimeri, 2013). However, according to the findings of Alshumaimeri (2013), the PYPs offered by public Saudi

universities of education do not make a notable contribution to the improvement of students' English proficiency, their IT knowledge or the basic mathematics that they require in their academic studies. Language teaching strategies continue to rely on the standard methods of lecturing, textbooks and hand-outs. These methods fail to meet the learning requirements of the students and, therefore, a large number of first-year PYP students, particularly male students, find it challenging to learn English and decide to withdraw from the course, as shown by the annual statistics of the Saudi MoHE (Alshumaimeri, 2013; MoHE, 2014). This is a clear indication of a significant problem in terms of maintaining student motivation and finding effective ways to develop the language skills of these students. Given these considerations, the aim of the present study is to explore the impact of how blog use can contribute to the writing abilities of PYP students at a public university and how relevant and helpful students perceive it to be for learning English as a foreign language. Students' attitudes towards blogging and providing feedback on other students' blog entries will also be examined.

Building on the significance of prior research into how blogs can support the development of academic writers, this study aims to investigate the impact of and identify how and why educational blogs can improve the writing skills of the PYP students at a public university. All over the world, teachers of Foreign or Second Language (FL or SL) are always on the lookout for new techniques and materials that will improve their L2 students' learning. One of the most vital objectives in implementing these techniques, as opposed to the conventional methods of language acquisition (Fong, 2012), is to improve or promote students' motivation in acquiring English as a foreign language. However, some institutions of higher education demand that their teaching context continue to be teacher-centric, where the instructor is the central focus (Ahazmi, 2003; Alshumaimeri, 2013). The time

has come for such institutions to concentrate on becoming student-centric, where the student is given the chance to demonstrate what he/she is capable of.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study of blogs will enhance our understanding of how technology can be integrated into the teaching of writing, especially for the Saudi higher education students who encounter problems with the traditional methods of teaching. The study will develop a teaching method that has been explored from an experimental perspective in a small number of studies in the Saudi context (Aljumah, 2012; Fageeh, 2011; Hashem, 2018). These studies have focused on measuring the participants' attitudes, entries in participants' own blogs and pre-post tests. This means that these studies have been more focused on quantitative results and have not looked in depth at exploring and explaining why and how the use of the blogs has an impact on the students' writing ability from the participants' perspectives. Technology enhanced teaching practices have focused on using websites in teaching and learning writing, but the interactive features of blogs and their capacity for developing independent writers and individualized learning is currently under-researched. It is hoped that blogging may assist in turning students into active writers, developing positive attitudes towards writing and the use of technology to support writing.

1.5 Objectives of the Study

The study has the following objectives:

- To identify the extent and nature of the impact of blogging on developing the writing skills of EFL students.
- To measure students' attitudes towards using blogs in teaching and learning English in general and writing in particular.
- To explore student's perceptions of the affordances of using blogging as tool of writing development.

- To consider the relationship between blogging and writing development.

1.6 The Study Design

The design of this study adopts multiple phases. Phase one is quasi-experimental in order to investigate the extent of the impact of the use of educational blogs. The second phase aims to explore and explain the nature of the impact of the use of educational blogs on EFL students' writing skills and explore the perceptions of the participants regarding how and why using educational blogs' affordances may have helped students to improve their writing skills. This second phase is a sequential explanatory mixed-methods case study. I have adopted a quasi-experimental methodology in the first phase to allow me to compare the development of writing in two groups, namely an intervention and a comparison group. I have subsequently adopted a sequential explanatory case study in order to engage more with the context and to employ multiple methods in order to explore the impact of the blogs in depth. This mixed-methodology approach revealed many important findings related to the students' perceptions of the use of educational blogs' affordances and their relationship with students' writing improvement and practices, as will be shown in the findings and discussion chapters later in this thesis. Detailed information about the research design is presented in the methodology chapter (Chapter Four).

1.7 Contribution to Knowledge

According to the present study's aims, and in light of the study's findings and the discussion of these findings (Chapters Five and Six), I argue that the study provides significant contributions to theory and practice. These contributions may develop the theory of the relationship between blogging affordances and EFL learners' writing development. These could be implemented by EFL English learners and researchers in order to improve teaching English skills (especially writing). The findings provide useful insights into students' writing development in a social and interactional environment and

they could lead to increased awareness of the use of educational technology as a pedagogical method in teaching and learning English, and the construction of beliefs in this regard. Moreover, the findings could contribute to encouraging English teachers to use educational technology in their classes and to allowing their students to use the internet. This could also encourage teachers to give their students the opportunity to be involved in more student-centred learning. These contributions are discussed in detail in the concluding chapter (Chapter Eight).

1.8 Structure of the Thesis

I have structured this thesis (eight chapters) as follows:

Chapter One: Introduction

The introduction chapter provides a summary of the study, its problem, rationale and structure. It also offers an overview of the theoretical framework of the study and its research design. It proposes the contributions to knowledge that the study is intended to fulfil. It concludes with an outline of the structure of the thesis and its chapters.

Chapter Two: Study context

This chapter presents background information about the study context and its characteristics to offer the reader the contextual dimensions that contribute to shaping the study. The purpose of the context chapter is to present general information about Saudi Arabia, its culture and educational system, the history of teaching English in Saudi Arabia and challenges facing EFL learners in Saudi Arabia.

Chapter Three: Literature review

This chapter systematically reviews the relevant literature and it consists of three main sections. In the first section, I present the theoretical framework of the study and discuss how it could contribute to understanding the issue under investigation. In the second section, I review the literature related to theories of writing. In the third section, I review

the literature related to the use of educational blog technology in education and explore the gap that this study attempts to bridge.

Chapter Four: Methodology

This chapter presents a detailed description of the philosophical assumptions, research paradigm, ontology and epistemology, followed by socio-political considerations. Next, the methodology of the study is presented, including descriptions of the English language programme, mixed-methods approach, research design, sampling strategy, research objectives and research instruments, and the background to the participants. Furthermore, ethical issues and the procedure of data collection are presented, followed by the data analysis process and theoretical considerations related to the analysis. The validity, reliability and trustworthiness of the research are discussed at the end of this chapter.

Chapter Five: Quantitative findings

This chapter presents the quantitative findings from the pre-test and post-test. It reports findings related to improvements in the students' writing ability which compare the intervention and comparison groups. In addition, the first and last blog post homework assignments are used to detect changes in the writing ability of the intervention group only, and to compare with their post-test results. Finally, the questionnaire reports findings related to the students' attitudes towards the use of educational blogs in seven dimensions, as follows: attitude towards using blogs, attitude towards using affordances of blogging to improve EFL writing, attitude towards using blogs in EFL writing class, attitude towards writing anxiety and blogs, attitude towards feedback, attitude towards grammar and blogs, and attitude towards vocabulary and blogs.

Chapter Six: Qualitative findings

This chapter presents the qualitative findings from the open-ended questionnaires, focus groups and interviews. In this chapter I present findings related to the participants'

perceptions and experiences regarding the use of educational blogs' affordances, how and why these affordances could help students improve their writing, and the writing elements in which they were helped to improve.

Chapter Seven: Discussion

The aim of this chapter is to examine the implications of the main findings which emerged from the quantitative and qualitative data analysis in relation to the extensive literature and in the light of sociocultural theory.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

This chapter concludes the thesis by presenting a summary of the study and its main findings. It discusses the study's contribution to knowledge, including theoretical and practical contributions. It also discusses the study's limitations and presents justifications for these limitations. The implications suggested by this study are also presented here, including its implications for the students, teacher educators and policy makers who are involved in the health stream Preparatory Year Programme. I conclude the chapter with recommendations for further research, concluding remarks, and a reflection on my doctoral journey.

2. Chapter Two

Context and Background

2.1 Introduction

The major focus of this chapter is on providing a better understanding of English education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), specifically in the Saudi era. Therefore, a brief background to Saudi Arabia is also presented alongside information on the Saudi context. Firstly, this chapter provides a background to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Secondly, it presents the Saudi education system, incorporating the different systems and policies adopted by the Ministry of Higher Education and the Ministry of Education. Thirdly, the status of the English language in the country is elucidated, specifically regarding aspects that have played either a positive or a detrimental role in its development. Fourthly, the development of English language education in Saudi schools is explored from various cultural and historical perspectives. Fifthly, the status of the English language regarding Saudi higher education is presented alongside the policies and systems found in Saudi universities. Finally, the challenges of teaching and learning English language in the KSA are addressed.

2.2 The Saudi context: An overview

Often referred to as “The Land of the Two Holy Mosques”, Saudi Arabia was established as a kingdom in 1932. For Muslims across the globe, the two mosques at Madinah and Makkah have significant value. In terms of geography, KSA covers an area of approximately 2 million square kilometres. While being one third the size of Europe, it is approximately twice as large as Egypt. It is the largest country in the Arabian Gulf and the Middle East as a whole, being located towards south-west Asia. However, a large amount of area in the country consists of desert. The land is bordered by sea on the south, east and west, and Saudi Arabia does not have any permanent rivers. Riyadh, the country’s capital,

is located in the centre (Smith, Abouammoh, and Duwais, 2014). Islamic law is predominant in Saudi Arabia, a law derived from the Holy Quran and from the practices and teachings of the Prophet, “Peace Be Upon Him” (PBUH) called the Sunnah. The latter provides regulations, rules, and principles that help to steer Muslim life in the right direction (Smith & Abouammoh, 2013). Approximately 20 million people in the country are Saudi themselves while another 10m are expatriates, amounting to a total population of 30 million (The Central Department of Statistics & Information, 2015). Arabic ethnicity is around 98% while the Islamic faith is followed by around 99% of the people, with Arabic being the national language of the country (Elyas, 2011). As an economy, Saudi Arabia is one of the biggest exporters and producers of petroleum and oil products across the globe. This is also the major source of income for the country. High levels of unemployment during the 1990s led to the establishment of a “Saudization” program, where expatriates were replaced by Saudi workers in order to accommodate the young Saudis who would be entering the job market (Smith & Abouammoh, 2013).

2.3 An overview of the Saudi education system

Certain areas in the KSA are underdeveloped in terms of transportation and, therefore, there is a lack of communication with the major cities, and this has affected educational opportunities. Partly as a result of the lack of educational institutions in rural areas, the literacy rate in the country was low in the 1950s. A centralized approach has been taken regarding the country’s educational system. While grades 7-9 fall under the domain of the government, Saudi Public-School grades 10-12 are vested under The Supreme Committee for Educational Policy, established in 1963. This performs the role of a superior authority that is responsible for working on aspects such as uniform, textbooks, curriculum, and syllabuses that would be used across the country. Four authorities regulate educational affairs in the KSA (Al-Shumaimeri, 2003):

- i) The Ministry of Higher Education
- ii) The Ministry of Education
- iii) The Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs
- iv) The General Organisation of Technical Education and Vocational Training.

A classification of KSA’s educational system is indicated below in Table 2.1:

NO	AGE GROUP (YEARS)	DESCRIPTION
1	3 – 6	Kindergarten
2	6 – 11	Elementary Level
3	12 – 14	Intermediate Level
4	15 – 18	Secondary Level
5	19 – 24	University Level (based on the courses taken and the education type)

Table 2- 1 A classification of KSA’s educational system

When the General Presidency of Female Education and the Ministry of Education were established in the 1950s, an enormous transformation was witnessed in the status of education. Eventually, both these entities started working as a single ministry, the Ministry of Education (Sayegh, 2009). Between 1953 and 1970, a large number of schools were established across the country. Statistics indicate that teachers’ preparation institutes and other schools increased from 511 and 290 to a mammoth 7000 and 2722. Moreover, the number of students enrolled also increased tremendously to 401,000 (*ibid.*). It was stated by Sayegh (2009) that government schools in the KSA can be classified according to three stages:

- 1. Primary School (Elementary Level):** This level involves 6 grades (1-6), and a child is given admission to Grade 1 usually around the age of 6.
- 2. Intermediate School (Intermediate Level):** This consists of 3 grades, Grade 7 to Grade 9.

3. Secondary School: This category includes grades 10-12 for eventual graduation from public schools.

In 1975, the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) was formed in the KSA. The major purpose of this entity was supervising and regulating different educational institutions and universities. The principles that guided this entity, as also highlighted by Smith and Abouammoh (2013), included the Islamic teachings to be followed and practised, establishing a centralized educational structure in terms of control and support, government financing at all educational levels, and a policy regarding gender discrimination. The King Saud University (KSU), the first university in Riyadh, was established in 1957. This is now the largest university in the KSA and has attained a ranking of 221st in the Times Higher Education - QS World University Rankings. This is the highest ranking ever attained by an Arab university and is thus a major accomplishment in terms of educational development in the country. Presently, there are around 25 public universities and nine private universities in the country, including the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST). Over the past 10 years, around 17 public universities have been established alongside the other private universities, which indicates that efforts are being undertaken by the government in order to promote this cause. Moreover, around 4.5% of higher education is represented by private universities. Various other strategies have also been implemented by the Ministry of Higher Education in order to ensure further development regarding education. As a result, student admission rates have increased tremendously (Alhaisoni & Ur Rahman, 2013). Educational institutions are on the increase as there are now 24 private universities, 21 government universities, 25000 schools, and many other institutions devoted to advancing education in the KSA (mohe.gov.sa). It was reported by the MoHE in 2013 that student admissions in the KSA rose to a level of 1.2 million during the period 2011-2012, mostly regarding attaining Associate and Bachelor

level degrees. After the death of King Abdullah in 2015, King Salman became the Kingdom's leader. The Ministries of Higher Education and Education were eventually merged with a similar focus on the regulations, rules, and principles established earlier for the development of education.

2.4 The Status of English Language Education in the Saudi Context

In the KSA, the official language is Arabic while English is taught as an additional language. Being introduced in 1928, English had a provisional status in the Saudi educational system. This was a major step in the development of English language education as it took place several years after the Directorate of Education was established in 1923 (Al-Seghayer, 2005). Since then, the education system has significantly developed and transformed. Furthermore, English is gaining increasing prominence across the country, as a result of the development of the country, including its various social establishments. The range of educational provision is also developing at different levels which have been further hastened as a result of the growth experienced in the industrial and commercial sectors (Al-Seghayer, 2014). In a similar manner, one barrier tends to be the fact that English is not normally used in conversation. Its principle use is in formal settings, for instance, in medical, educational and industrial sectors. Therefore, teaching and learning English in the KSA is rather challenging. Learners of the English language seldom get the opportunity to practise it outside the educational setup (Intakhab Alam Khan, 2011). English has been significantly influenced by numerous positive and negative events in the history of the KSA. These aspects were at times political, educational, religious, and even social. A number of anti-English Saudis were against the entire notion of teaching English in Saudi schools (Elyas, 2011). Still, it was stated by Faruk (2014) that the Saudi English Language Education Policies (SELEP) eventually succeeded in overcoming resistance to this program. Saudi society's attitude towards teaching English

negatively influenced the development of English language in the country, just as Saudi attitudes to learning foreign languages have usually been negative. Moreover, there has been a significant amount of pessimism and obstruction to teaching the English language or any other language. Earlier, the foreign language taught in Saudi Arabia was Turkish, as the country came under the domain of the Ottoman Empire. The Arabian Peninsula, which is now called the KSA, was administered by the Ottomans. This also included the manner in which school governance was carried out. However, such governance was not accepted by Saudi society as the Turkish language was considered to be the language of invaders and intimidators (Al-Saddat & Al-Ghamdi, 2002). After the demolition of the Ottoman Empire in 1914, Turkish was taken out of the curriculum. Thereafter, the Arabic language achieved prominence in the public schools, where education is free. Numerous policy makers and scholars wanted to ensure that the Arabic language retained its supremacy over the English language after the latter was introduced in government schools (Abuhamdia 1988). Thus, a number of authorities monitor the English language. Religious scholars have also criticized the impact the introduction of English is having on the KSA (Elyas, 2011). However, it has been claimed by Abuhamdia (1988) that, as Arabic possesses faith-based roots, the use of other languages such as French and English specifically for scientific development are unlikely to have any significant influence on Arabic. Moreover, many Arabs believed that introducing the English language in schools would negatively affect Muslim identity as students would be likely to start adopting western values and culture alongside modernizing themselves. These students might also begin to disregard their own religious and cultural values and principles. In consideration of such an approach, the major constituents of the English syllabus were strictly confined to the local culture, and references to western customs, cultures and habits (for instance the consumption of alcohol or dating) was restricted. (Elyas, 2008). A large number of scholars

believed that references to western culture might conflict with the basic principles established in Saudi society, and thus might eventually lead to weakening of Islamic values. This could also eventually lead to corrupting Islamic youth (Islamia, 2003). To overcome this problem, certain scholars believed that an Islamic approach should be adopted which would help students better comprehend and understand Islamic values rather than be negatively influenced by western culture. To this end, English syllabus designers were invited to craft a syllabus grounded in Islamic heritage and principles (Mahboob & Elyas, 2014). Another aspect that has adversely affected English education is the fact that students find very little motivation to learn the language. Motivation is a vital element when it comes to learning something new or acquiring additional knowledge, especially when it comes to new languages. Towards the end of the twentieth century, a large number of Saudi students developed a negative view of English. Zaid observed (1993) that students did not possess sufficient motivation and, as a result, the language failed in terms of teaching and learning. It was further added that the reason that not much attention was given by students to this new language was the various misapprehensions they had. The importance of English language in practical life was not fully comprehended, nor how important it would be for employment and communication purposes. Students were mostly concerned with passing examinations and memorizing certain rules, passages or words, rather than learning and exploring the language (Al-Seghayer, 2014). However, despite a more optimistic attitude being reported by Faruk (2014) in the early 21st century, he found, in his study, that the Saudi students continued to believe that they were incompatible with the language and the only purpose for studying the language was to pass the examination. Nevertheless, there were some positive aspects regarding English language and establishing its foundations in the KSA. As a result of its economic importance, English began to spread across the KSA. This was due to fact that the KSA is highly dependent on a number of

foreign organizations that contribute heavily towards its economic development. Statistics indicate that, in 1978, only 10% of the workers involved in building hotels, restaurants and shopping malls were Arab nationals, while 90% were foreigners (Al-Braik, 2007). Furthermore, a large number of companies, for instance Saudi Aramco Oil Company, Saudi Telecommunication Company and many others, used this medium for providing training sessions to its employees. The purpose of teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in the KSA was mostly to produce people with sufficient command of English to communicate with foreign workers. Indeed, once the Saudization program was launched in the 1990s, it became compulsory for Arabs to acquire English if they were to obtain positions in the core and service industries (Looney, 2004). As a result of this policy, English began to spread throughout the KSA. For example, the Arabian American Oil Company (Aramco), which was established in 1933 and played a significant role in developing the economy, places great importance upon the English language. Therefore, a large number of Saudis have become keener to learn the language in order to secure a desirable job. The terminology relating to petroleum products usually has an affiliation with the English language and thus it has become more important to master it. An oil dynamics study carried out by Karmani (2005) referred to English in the Arabian Gulf as “Petro-linguistics”. Moreover, the enhancement of KSA’s military force via input from American technicians and advisors has been greatly facilitated by the English language since 1948 (Cordesman, 2003). Many Saudis have become quite fluent in English as a result of the nature of their work.

As a result of the legislation, the efforts to promote English for its commercial and practical value have been increased significantly. For instance, English had been introduced in all Saudi public schools by 1959 (Al-Sadat & Al-Ghamdi, 2002). The major aim of teaching English is to ensure that Saudis do not have any difficulty in their everyday lives, as English

is required in many places such as hospitals, while trading, while travelling, or even in technology management (Elyas & Picard, 2010). After the discovery of oil, the educational sector developed rapidly, with many English language instructors being recruited from countries such as Lebanon, Egypt, and Jordan (Zaid 1994). Many scholarships were offered to Saudi students for learning English and improving their skills. Moreover, Saudi students were sent by the government to universities abroad, to the US, Canada, Britain and Australia, to study for postgraduate degrees in the English language. These developments are intended to secure the future of the Saudi population. These students are encouraged to do well abroad but eventually to return and contribute towards the development of Saudi society (Ministry of Higher Education, 2015). As stated by Ur Rahman and Alhaisoni (2013), the importance of English is increasing in all sectors across the KSA. English has spread significantly as a result of both electronic and print media, alongside the substantial circulation of English language newspapers. Many English programs are also broadcast regularly by TV and radio. Government websites use English irrespective of the fact that Arabic is the national language. But, despite these developments, the growth of English in the KSA seems to have come to a standstill. Various objectives and aims have been recently stated by the Ministry of Education regarding this issue, alongside various objectives established by SELEP (Saudi English Language Education Policies) for the teaching and studying of English (Faruk, 2014). The Ministry of Education provided these objectives in a document which stated that efforts should be increased to develop the language through enhancing it at all levels (intermediate, secondary and elementary) with six primary objectives (Alamri, 2008: pp. 1-14; Ministry of Education, 2004):

- i) Broadening Islamic horizons and faith
- ii) Improving global communication
- iii) Establishing a cultural and socio-economic environment across the country

- iv) Communicating fluently with English speakers rather than depending solely on Arabic
- v) Establishing a promising career and future
- vi) Possessing the ability to acquire as well as transmit knowledge.

English is considered by SELEP as the global language of technology, communication, science, commerce and arts, alongside essential religious, economic, social, political and cultural beliefs which together establish a capital asset for individuals to acquire advanced education and foster their career progression and development. On a similar note, English is a viable medium through which the message of Islam can be further spread, better traction across the globe can be developed, and educational and employment prospects can be increased.

2.5 The Status of English Language Education in Saudi Government Schools

In the KSA educational system, Saudis are required to study English from Grade 4 in primary level until the end of the secondary level (12). The English language syllabus in the country has been designed in accordance with various cultural and religious conditions. The teaching of English in the country is largely influenced by its status in the country. Initially, a significant amount of resistance was witnessed regarding teaching English and only a few schools adopted it, and that was for too few hours a week. English was only offered at the secondary school level at that time, (MOE). English has become a crucial aspect of the educational curriculum in primary schools (Elyas & Picard, 2010). In the early 20th century, once oil was discovered in the country and the government started collaborating economically with the USA, a realization grew regarding the importance of the English language in enabling Saudis to participate fully in the global economy. Thus, various Scholarship Preparation Schools (SPS) were developed by the KSA in the year 1936 in the city of Makkah for preparing and educating Saudis regarding travelling abroad and attaining western education. For many, this development is the very beginning of

English being actively taught in the KSA (Alamri, 2008). However, the domain of the SPS was confined to Saudis who were going abroad and no other citizens of the Kingdom (Al-Ghamdi & Al-Saddat, 2002). A number of courses were offered by SPS, whose syllabus was derived from the Egyptian educational system, which, in turn, was influenced by France's educational practices. However, Islamic education was regulated according to the KSA government when it comes to teaching. Various teachers were invited from the Middle East, specifically from Egypt to teach English in these schools (Al-Ghamdi & Al-Saddat, 2002). Initially, French and English were introduced in the KSA as foreign languages at the secondary level. Later, a decision was taken by the Ministry of Education to establish a new study system comprising Grade 7 to Grade 9, which was referred to as the intermediate level education system. In this system, a significant amount of importance was given to both English and French. However, the latter was removed by the Ministry of Education in 1969. This was because of political and economic reasons. As for the political aspect that links Saudi Arabia with America's and Britain's governments, these have directly impacted the curricula devoted to teaching English in the Saudi education system. As for the economic aspect, English is more widespread and has greater perceived economic value. For instance, unlike with French, learning English can easily lead to a job. (Al-Braik 2007). Therefore, French was now only present in the curriculum between Grade 10 and Grade 12 (Al-Abdulkader, 1978). Subsequently, the French language was also removed from the secondary school level by the Ministry of Education. Thus, across the KSA, English is now taught as a core subject irrespective of whether it is a private or a public school. As a result, Saudi students are usually exposed to the language for a period of six years until they reached Grade 12. The frequency of studying this language was four times a week, 45 minutes per session. Instructors teaching English were mostly non-native speakers who had graduated from local universities, as well as foreign instructors from

countries such as Sudan and Egypt. In the year 2003, the English language was further extended by the government into primary schools as a result of the numerous political and social pressures. This initiative was carried out by the Director of the Curriculum Department at the Central Office (CDCO) of the MoE (Elyas 2008). However, when the English language was introduced in primary schools by the Ministry of Education, various anti-English sentiments started to surface. Irrespective of these arguments, English was made compulsory for Grade 6. At present, the development of the English language in the KSA has been transformed significantly; English is a major component of the curriculum. Students now are exposed to the English language from Grade 4 up until university. Furthermore, efforts are being made by the Ministry of Education to introduce the language in primary schools from Class 1 in the KSA.

Nevertheless, recent developments indicate that the English language is likely to be introduced from Grade 1 in order to further ensure that all pupils become confident English users (Ur Rahman & Alhaisoni, 2013). Moreover, many students are now also aware of the importance of English as they understand that it is an integral component of international communication, trade, business, commerce and higher education. Additionally, proficiency in English is held in high esteem. As a result, an increased number of students are now enrolling in English language institutions. However, levels of English proficiency across the population are still far from satisfactory irrespective of the efforts that are being made in the KSA schools. Various secondary level students are still incapable of adequately communicating in the English language even after being exposed to it for seven years, as this time devoted to the study of English is still not considered sufficient (Al-Rasheed, 2008).

2.6 The status of English language education in Saudi Higher Education

The first college was established in the year 1949 in Makkah where English was taught for a minimum of two hours every week in a programme that lasted for four years. King Saud University was the first university to launch a specific English department, in 1957 (Al-Haq, 1996). A large number of Saudi universities were established during the seventies, including Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud University (1974), King Saud University (1957), King Faisal University (1976), King Abdul-Aziz University (1961), King Fahd University (1975) and Umm Al-Qura University (1980) (Al-Haq & Smadi 1996) . Most of these universities possessed English departments while others had specific English language centers aimed at providing English education courses alongside English-Arabic translation institutes (Al-Haq & Smadi 1996). Since then, teaching and learning of the English language has gained a significant amount of status. At present, based on information provided by Saudi universities and the Ministry of Higher Education, at least four years of study need to be undertaken in order to obtain a bachelor's degree (BD). English is taught as a compulsory subject for all students at university. As a result of its importance, English is taught as a core course more than once a week for students who are about to start their study at university.

2.7 Preparatory Year Programme (PYP)

The PYP was introduced by Saudi universities for enhancing student capability as the Ministry believes that students still require further development regarding their English proficiency (Alenazi, 2014). The PYP is the initial year at most Saudi universities. The purpose for developing this particular programme was to develop students' academic and language skills. During the year, English language courses are compulsory for two complete semesters at an average of approximately 20 hours every week. The major focus of this program was on enhancing English language proficiency, specifically in reading,

writing, speaking and listening; this includes vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar. All these efforts are made to ensure the precision and fluency of students' use of the English language (Alshumaimeri, 2013). The staff recruited for these programmes are required to be able to use English as their semi-native or native language. Such instructors are required to hold a PhD or master's degree alongside the Cambridge-based English Language Teaching (CELTA, TESOL and DELTA) qualification. Furthermore, many Saudi universities also established partnerships with other reputable universities and organizations that were running English language programs, for instance Bell International, Kaplan, Cambridge University Press and Pearson Longman, who already possessed fully structured and developed study contents and syllabuses for the PYP programme (Alenazi, 2014). A student is only eligible to start university once the PYP is passed. Students are allowed to select their own majors if they score a high enough grade, especially on the English language course. The reason behind this is that most faculties, such as science, medicine and engineering, use English as a medium of instruction. Majors cannot be selected by students who score a lower grade in the PYP and they are required instead to specialize in areas where English is not the major medium of instruction, for instance, humanities, religious studies or Arabic language studies (Alshumaimeri, 2013). The Preparation Year, therefore, has a tremendous impact in preparing students for university study and plays a gate-keeping role in allowing or preventing them access to certain majors. The curriculums of different universities in the KSA tend to be rather similar as a result of their regulation and modernization (Picard & Elyas 2010), Students who specialize in English tend to study skills such as listening, speaking, writing and reading, separately from literature, translation modules, and other linguistics modules. Moreover, syllabuses are generated by the government for different educational levels in collaboration with other educational bodies and institutions. Financial aid is also provided by the Saudi government

to educational institutions through recruiting qualified and professional English teachers, constructing language labs, developing the curriculum and, lastly, carrying out various training sessions for the teachers (Mahboob & Elyas, 2014).

2.8 Challenges Facing EFL Learners in Saudi Arabia

2.8.1 Introduction

According to Grami (2010), there are three major types of challenge that EFL learners in Saudi Arabia have to deal with, namely, socio-cultural challenges, linguistic and pedagogical challenges, and challenges related to legislation and administrative policy. It is important to note that it was difficult to acquire sufficient data in relation to the context of Saudi Arabia; unpublished theses obtained from two British institutions of higher education constitute the main sources of cited references. The severity of the issue is illustrated by table 2.2 in the following sub-section which includes data derived from IELTS test records 2014.

2.8.2 Socio-Cultural Challenges

Among the socio-cultural challenges, the most prominent ones are the emphasis on teacher-oriented approaches, the pervasive assumption that teachers are the overarching and even the only dependable source of knowledge, as well as learners' justification of poor performance based on personal contexts and mitigating circumstances (McKay 1992). An additional problem that is of great significance in the Saudi context is the fact that most Saudi learners do not have enough opportunities to use their English in real-life settings. This is compounded by the demoralised outlook of learners, who perceive that their English competency and their communicative requirements do not converge, and teachers, who are unconvinced that learners could use English in any meaningful way outside class (Syed, 2003). A further major issue arises from this lack of opportunities to apply English, namely, learner demotivation, which can lead to the loss or failed acquisition of even fundamental

competencies of communication (Al-Eid, 2000; Syed, 2003). In turn, this issue may compound the linguistic and pedagogical challenges addressed below. In terms of linguistic challenges, research has revealed that Saudi learners have significant deficiencies when it comes to ESL writing. For example, by comparison to listening (4.9), reading (4.8), and speaking (5.6) skills, the writing skill was associated with the lowest mark on average (4.6) among Saudi learners who took the IELTS test in 2014. As seen in table 2.2 below.

Place of origin	Listening	Reading	Writing	Speaking	OVERALL
Saudi Arabia	4.9	4.8	4.6	5.6	5.0
Spain	6.8	7.1	6.1	6.6	6.7
Sri Lanka	6.6	6.2	6.0	6.6	6.4
Taiwan	6.1	6.2	5.6	6.0	6.1
Thailand	6.1	5.9	5.4	5.9	5.9
Turkey	6.0	6.0	5.5	6.0	5.9
Ukraine	6.5	6.5	5.9	6.6	6.5
United Arab Emirates	4.8	4.6	4.6	5.3	4.9
United Kingdom	7.3	6.8	6.5	7.5	7.1

Table 2-2 IELTS test performance 2014

2.8.3 Pedagogical Challenges

According to Bersamina (2009), pedagogical challenges comprise issues such as students' poor classroom performance and reduced levels of English mastery, especially with respect to writing, rote learning, and lack of curriculum and methodology revision. These are closely linked to the other two categories of challenges. Research has shown that a top-down approach dominates the educational system and that the most widely applied classroom practices are audio-lingual and grammar translation methods. Several studies have focused particularly on the poor performance demonstrated by Saudi learners in EFL writing (Al-Eid, 2000; Syed, 2003).

2.8.4 Governmental and Administrative Policy Challenges

Among the issues included in this category of challenges are inadequate support systems, lack of English language teachers with suitable qualifications, and a lack of comprehensive training programmes for teachers (Al-Hazmi, 2003, Al-Eid, 2000). As previously mentioned, there is an emphasis on high-stakes assessment and conventional teaching methods in Saudi Arabia, which are the direct outcome of educational policies. The Saudi government has taken some measures to employ a greater number of expatriate English teachers, but this has not solved the shortage of qualified teachers. For instance, in 2001 alone, over 1,300 non-Saudi teachers were hired (Al-Hazmi, 2003), most of them being Sudanese, Jordanian or Egyptian (Bersamina, 2009). Nevertheless, despite the fact that expatriate teachers may apply a contextually situated pedagogy, their recruitment gives rise to a range of socio-cultural and pedagogical problems, because they may be unable to reach out to their students, linguistically and culturally speaking, as a result of their superficial understanding of Saudi socio-cultural communities and languages. Additionally, expatriate teachers may lack not only the motivation towards active involvement in the existing system, but also the drive to foster innovation and change. (Al-Hazmi, 2003).

2.9 Summary of the Chapter

The major focus of this chapter was on providing a brief summary of the status of English language education in the KSA from the Saudi era to the present day. The educational system was outlined in terms of the Ministry of Higher Education and the Ministry of Education as well as the interconnection that exists between these two entities. The various historical and socio-cultural features that have contributed towards English language education in the KSA were also highlighted, as well as the obstacles that have been encountered in the process. Various stages of the development of English language education were depicted in the Saudi higher education and public-school systems. This

overview will help the reader better understand the overall Saudi educational context. In the following chapter I discuss the theoretical background underpinning the study and present the literature review.

3. CHAPTER THREE

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to critically examine the theoretical concepts underpinning the use of educational blogs to improve EFL students' writing skills. A blog is a platform for writing practice in social space. In Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research, writing has always been considered challenging due to the cognitive demands of the writing process. This challenge is compounded by the linguistic differences between L1 and L2 as well as other factors such as teaching methods. While reviewing the existing literature on the topic, it became clear that a many issues and studies were relevant and, consequently, it was not an easy task to review the existing literature on this important area of language teaching and learning. Nevertheless, I began by conducting a combination of systematic and narrative review in order to explore the various aspects of the use of educational blogs to improve EFL students' writing. I used ENDNOTE software as a personal database in order to organise the articles I collected. Initial reading helped me to tease out key themes in the literature relating to the use of educational blogs to improve EFL students' writing. I then specifically reviewed information regarding the methods of teaching English in Saudi Arabia. After this stage of initial reading, I carried out an extensive review of literature by systematically organizing a search for research articles via electronic databases such as the Saudi Electronic Digital library (SEDL) and SAGE, ETHOSE, BERA, ERIC, and others. As my knowledge developed, I streamlined my search to specific topics that would form the main sections of the review presented below.

3.2 Theoretical framework

According to Zareekbatani (2015), writing can be seen as both a way of developing ideas *and* making selections from a range of resources, with a variety of inputs driving the writer's thought processes, including the topic under discussion, situation, purpose in writing, audience, lexical access and syntactic structure (Flower & Hayes 1981). Myhill and Watson (2011) indicate that “writing has been theorised from different perspectives, principally through cognitive psychology, socio-cultural theory and linguistics. An appropriate pedagogy for writing needs to draw on all three” (Myhill & Watson, 2011, p.69). The theoretical framework for research into writing has principally been shaped by the three theories mentioned in the preceding quote. In an attempt to create useful pedagogical approaches towards the teaching of writing, researchers have tended to lean towards the all-encompassing concept of "interdisciplinary methodologies". This creates a broader theoretical base, including all three elements, that is seen as being more useful for teaching writing (*ibid*). Socio-cultural theories are seen as useful because they acknowledge the thought process of the learner and their social context in terms of how they develop (Riley & Zare Ekbatani, 2014, p.108).

3.2.1 Social Constructivism

Vygotsky (1978) extended the constructivist epistemology by advocating for the key role played by social interaction in the development of cognitive functions, also contending that interaction between individuals can lead to higher-order thinking. Vygotsky (1978) differentiated social constructivism from constructivism by stating that, in social constructivism, learners become part of a knowledge community that is based on culture and language. Social constructivism identifies learning as a collaborative process which is segregated into two developmental levels. Vygotsky (1978) identified these levels as actual development and potential development, resulting in the recognition of the “zone of

proximal development”. The zone of proximal development refers to the latent level of cognitive development in a learner when appropriate support is provided.

Marsh and Ketterer (2005) contend that social constructivism, through such proximal development, aims to create a collaborative and co-constructed environment. In this environment, learning is achieved by promoting internal dialogue as an inter-psychological tool which leads to the construction of meaning. This requires the use of scaffolding. Brown and Green (2006) refer to scaffolding as the process of supporting individual efforts by organising interactions and breaking down instructions into manageable steps for the student, corresponding to their performance level. The lens of social constructivism, with reference to the use of the blogs as tools of education, invites us specifically to consider the collaborative nature of these digital tools. Blogs can act as tools which can create interaction between students and between the student and the teacher. This type of interaction can target instructions and thereby contribute to the scaffolding process (Halic et al., 2010).

3.2.2 The Impact of Technology on Social Constructivism

The pedagogies of social constructivism have been significantly affected by technology. Desai et al. (2008) identify instructional design as being crucial in the creation of effective online instruction. The authors (*ibid*) further contend that developing agile technology-based course content is a significant step in the creation of a successful e-learning environment. The instructor is required to invest significant time and effort so that a successful e-learning environment can be created. This investment cannot be unidirectional but requires the involvement of different stakeholders including the instructor, the learner, the learning platform and the institution (Beetham & Sharp, 2013). Therefore, in the context of technology as a tool for education, the inherent requirement is collaboration and social interaction. The core of knowledge generation, from this perspective, is the ability

to learn through interaction and dialogue with others. As Kundi and Nawaz (2010) conclude, social constructivism is a useful theory for explaining technology adoption and e-learning, where learning becomes more personalised, student-centric and learner directed, and where learner experience and learner interaction drive knowledge creation and development. According to Wenger et al. (2009), the use of social tools like blogs offers the advantage of connecting with students outside of the usual educational context, creating a virtual public sphere for discussion and virtual communities of practice.

According to Abdallah (2008), the impact of technology dramatically alters social interaction, which is crucial to pedagogies founded on social constructivism. The rise of Computer-Mediated Communication has led to the concept of 'new literacies', with most researchers today defining literacy as something which goes beyond the basic ability to read and write linguistic symbols. According to Warschauer (2002), and Lankshear and Knobel (2006), any definition of literacy varies according to different contexts, including socio-cultural, political and historical contexts. This contrasts with the traditional view of literacy. In previous centuries, literacy has been defined simply as the skills required to obtain knowledge by reading books or other printed material (Leu & Kinzer, 2003). This is the generally accepted view among many students who believe that they are literate because they can read and write. However, the traditional view of literacy changed with the advent of internet technologies, according to Leu et al. (2005, p. 2). Today, we need to look at literacy from a new angle. While the new perspective of technology is still in its infancy, according to Leu et al. (2007, p. 41), it is a powerful view that redefines literacy in the 21st century.

The modern view of literacy represents an extension of the existing skills that students need to master. With the rapid proliferation of electronic communication technologies, the importance of reading and writing will increase even more (Leu, 2000), but this will be

accompanied by the need to develop the skills to read multimodal texts, which involves interpretation of visual, spatial and audio elements, amongst others, and a non-linear, modular structure which often involves the use of hyperlinks and embedded content. Kellner (2002) suggests that the 21st century IT revolution thus demands a radical shift in educational curricula and pedagogy to bring them more in line with the modern view of literacy. Students today grow up surrounded by technologies. As such, there is a need to develop IT literacy skills, not only to read, but also to communicate by using graphics, hyperlinks, and other techniques that represent the new literacy skills (Karchmer, 2001: p. 442). By no means does this mean that English teachers and courses should not focus on the development of reading and writing skills. In fact, teachers need to make sure that an all-round development of students takes place. They need to focus on increasing the ability of students to comprehend information available both online and offline, and also communicate the information through both traditional and digital media. There is thus a need to develop a model of education for literacy development that takes into account the needs of students in the present context of information technology.

Clearly, educators need to be cognisant of new definitions of literacy/literacies. The traditional view of literacy has become outdated as it does not account for the digital modes of communication, and the multimodal nature of them. Becoming IT literate is crucial for students in the present era where the speed of information access and dissemination of information using technological tools is key to success. The ability to locate the required information to address issues, and to communicate the same through the use of technology, will determine students' success in the academic field and beyond.

Learning from a socio-constructivist perspective is demand-driven, wherein the learning context shapes the selection of content and development of cognitive processes. In such conditions, learning is considered a social act, where the learner and the trainer become

affiliated to a community of practice (Qureshi et al., 2009). These communities of practice can include either teaching communities or learning communities (Brown & Dugid, 2000). The evolution and use of e-learning through blogs has helped create such learning communities. For example, Kim (2008) argued that blogs can help create a student-centric environment which contextualises learning and helps students construct their own knowledge which is independent of teacher driven content. This is fostered through peer interaction: as Meinecke et al. (2013) argue, in such conditions, students have the ability to post questions for their peers and read different perspectives to their argument, thereby creating an independent learning community.

This also has consequences for how teachers and learners are positioned in relation to knowledge, authority and expertise. Desai et al. (1998) contend that every time communication media has transitioned from speech to print to video to electronic form, there has been a change in the means of creation, recording, storage, distribution, access and retrieval of information. Consequently, there has been a change in the social interactions of students with teachers and other students, and teachers are no longer the main source of information for students. Nevgi et al. (2006) identify the importance of web-based environments for idea sharing, knowledge building and collective problem solving, which is far removed from the traditional view of the teacher as expert guide, leading and controlling the learning journey of students. This change has been characterized by Nawaz and Zubair (2012) as a genuine shift in the paradigm of learning. This shift is observable from instructor-directed learning to construction and delivery. This has also resulted in a shift from a teacher-centric pedagogy to a learner-centric pedagogy. This shift has also come with new demands on teachers. According to Thormann and Zimmerman (2012), it is imperative for educators in an online environment to redefine their communication skills, as students now learn in a social setting where they

communicate with more knowledgeable people. The authors (*ibid*) further contend that the success of instruction is dependent on a high degree of interaction between the teacher and student. Technology has made it necessary for a teacher to remain active in communicating with students even outside of scheduled lesson time, so that motivation and attention can be maintained. The active involvement of the teacher in the learning environment in the context of a technology-based learning environment can be strongly linked to principles of socio-constructivism.

As Comas-Quinn et al. (2009) rightly argue, blogs can help individuals improve their knowledge by sharing their thoughts with others. In such conditions, where knowledge is co-created in the environment, learning occurs at an individual level and feedback provided by peers and the teacher can be internalised and acted upon by the individual. Halic et al. (2010) contend that, since the information gathered is electronic, students are not temporally limited in their access to it. This ease of access further enhances students' control of their own learning, further supporting the internalisation of the learning process. However, the development of the best pedagogical practices is still dependent on the relationship of the student with the technology. According to Gabriel (2011), the youngest generation currently comprehend the internet as a mobile phenomenon. In order to develop effective pedagogies to support language learning amongst these digital natives, it is therefore imperative that the possibilities of these technologies be carefully leveraged by the instructors, so that they can support students in building knowledge and understanding collaboratively, in parallel with making use of the advantages of traditional classroom instruction.

3.2.3 Participation and Social Constructivism

The participation of learners in group work is required as a part of social interaction in online learning. Ford and Lott (2009) propose that communication practices in virtual

group work provide a social dimension and support the establishment of networks which can support learning. Socio-constructivism explains blog adoption as a process of using technology to create social groups which foster learning directly related to learners' experiences, knowledge, habits and preferences. In contrast to traditional classrooms dominated by a linear model of knowledge transfer and one-way communication from teacher to student, contemporary views of learning recognize the value of it becoming more personalized, student-centric, nonlinear and learner-directed. According to Nevgi et al. (2006), before the advent of technology, social clues (e.g., inflection, non-verbal cues and facial expressions) and dialogues were used for communicating a social presence. The shift to the use of the blog shows how technology is providing new ways to communicate in which the traditional face-to-face cues have been replaced by other (multimodal) ways of communicating which can be used to increase the participation of learners in social and in learning activities.

As Xin and Feenberg (2007) argue, such socio-constructive principles of participation form a key element of learning through blogs. As the authors conclude, participation in a learning community, where different learners share information, views, opinions and feedback, helps create a reflective learning loop where students are able to understand different viewpoints and, more importantly, resolve conflicting ideas. This leads to a situation where students can progressively restructure and develop their understanding of blogs and ask questions, exchange ideas and provide necessary feedback (Robertson, 2011). Since every student enriches the classroom with a unique set of experiences, social media, with its participatory nature, allows them to take ownership of their scholarship by actively participating in the process of knowledge creation. This may be quite different for people used to a more traditional classroom.

Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that the instructor has a key role to play in such an online environment. Lazonder et al. (2003) contend that, similar to the role of a teacher in a classroom, a skilled moderator is required in social media spaces to facilitate the occurrence of effective learning in the course of the collaborative knowledge creation process. When a mediator keeps a discussion on track, a sense of ownership is felt by the community of knowledge over the practice, while simultaneously working under the structure of the course objectives of the instructor. While the end point would eventually be the same, the student learning community can benefit from different approaches to knowledge generation rather than simply fulfilling the course objectives. More detailed coverage of selected areas of coursework is possible with the response and interest of students in specific topics (Beetham & Sharp, 2013). Halic et al. (2010) conclude that the use of the blogs can help instructors direct mediated discussions and help in improving the overall knowledge of all students involved in the process. Students receive coaching and support from the instructors through the platform, and the feedback given by the instructor can be useful for a range of students who visit the blog page (Robertson, 2011).

On the other hand, as governed by the principles of social constructivism, online participation can help in moving learning beyond simple learning management systems to the creation and engagement of an active system. This approach can help students examine the course and the specific programme from a macro perspective with the aim of gaining life-long education, rather than concentrating on specific objectives which address independent needs and requirements. This is largely attributed to the emergence of student-centric learning environments like blogs which are inherently constructivist in their nature. These blogs provide a resource-based, student-centred setting through which they can connect and network with people (Cakir, 2013).

3.2.4 Affordance Theory

Affordance theory identifies how learning can be driven by environmental cues in relation to an animal (including a human) (Gibson, 2000). The theory of affordance can be traced to the work of the seminal author, Gibson (1979). The theory deviates from classical views on perception, which focused on physics and physical options, and aims at developing an appropriate ecological frame of reference. Gibson (1979, p.127) defines affordance as “what it offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill”. This conceptualisation of affordance identifies environmental resources as key elements which are meaningful to the animal and can provide opportunities for a specific behaviour. As Scarantino (2003) argues, such affordance is an environmental property which presents relevant meaning to the animal. Gibson (1979) introduced the need for ecological objects to be value-rich, contending that an affordance can capture notions of benefit or harm to an individual. Moreover, Gibson’s theory argues that the information that is constructed by animals is derived from what is present in the environment. The animal is attuned to specific variables or invariants of information in the environment. This leads to interaction with other animals as participants within the system. Gibson’s affordance theory thus views environmental stimuli as binary (present or absent) (Grenere & Ho, 2000). Norman (1988), on the other hand, introduced the concept of perceived affordances. In his book, *The Psychology of Everyday Things*, he posits that affordance as a term should also account for variations in human perception (Norman, 1988). He defines affordance as a term that refers to the perceived and actual properties of a thing. He argues that while affordance defines the actual property of a thing and its true benefit/harm to a human, perceived affordance identifies what the human thinks it can do (Mihnkern, 1997). Perceived affordance is therefore different to the actual property of the thing. Norman (1992) also argues that the same object could have different affordances in relation to different subjects. The lack of a

frame of reference with respect to this environmental stimulus resulted in the evolution of perceived affordance.

In his research on conventions and design in Human-Computer Interaction (HCI), Norman (1993; 2008) provides a range of examples of how perceived affordance can directly influence usability. He believes that designers need to take into account the action possibility and the way this action is conveyed to an actor (Norman, 1993). These differences in the concept of affordance have been discussed by many researchers. For example, Smets, Overeek and Gaver (1994) conclude, in their research on HCI, that perceived affordance and affordance need to be differentiated by designers. They argue that the design of forms can convey non-visual information, including sound, taste, smell and structure, driven by prior knowledge or experience of the actor. They conclude that such perceived affordance can be applied to the design of icons by a HCI researcher to represent this complexity of information.

Mihnkern (1997), on the other hand, contends that perceived affordance should be examined as a means of communicating a given design model to the user, and that the application of relevant knowledge to the design of the system can improve the overall utility as well as the usability of the system. According to Brown et al. (2004) educational researchers have started to study what the environment might offer the teaching and learning process when studying technological tools and their relationship with educational practice. Moreover, Tanner and Jones (2002, cited in Brown et al., 2004, p.122) defined the affordance as “a potential for action, the capacity of an environment or object to enable the intentions of the student within a particular problem situation”. These, therefore, according to Brown et al. (2004, p.122), “necessarily involve both the ability of the learner and the affordance of the technology. These combine to determine the potential of the

interaction in any given situation”. In this view, it is clear that affordance concentrates on the relationship between learner and technology.

In this study the focus is on the affordances of blogs and their relationship to the learning of writing. These affordances have been divided into three aspects. The first is social affordances, with the blog considered as an environment for people to practice writing and interact with others, for example, through online comments, discussion and collaboration. The second is cognitive affordances, such as the design features of blog which help the learners to know or learn something new, for example, "the dashboard" which is the place for making one's own profile on the blog. Finally, there are motivational affordances, in line with Venkatesh and Speier's (1999, p. 2) argument that blogs enhance the learner's motivation. This will be considered, in line with Jung, Schneider and Valacich (2010), in terms of intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation “refers to the pleasure and inherent satisfaction derived from a specific activity”, while extrinsic motivation “emphasises performing a behavior because it is perceived to be instrumental in achieving valued outcomes that are distinct from the activity” (*ibid*).

Bearing the aforementioned in mind, the current study has adopted the framework for the educational affordances of blogs from the study conducted by Deng and Yuen (2011) which examined to what extent blogs might support pre-service teachers during their fieldwork. This framework underpins the social and cognitive dimension focused on learning activities. For example, "the individual activity of blog-reading is contextualised in a social setting. Indeed, it is the contents created by community and shared easily online that provide rich food for inner reflection" (Deng & Yuen, 2011, p.450). This can be seen in the following figure 3.1. However, I aim to develop this framework with regard to the pedagogical affordances of blogging and its relationship with writing development in the light of sociocultural theory and cognitive theory.

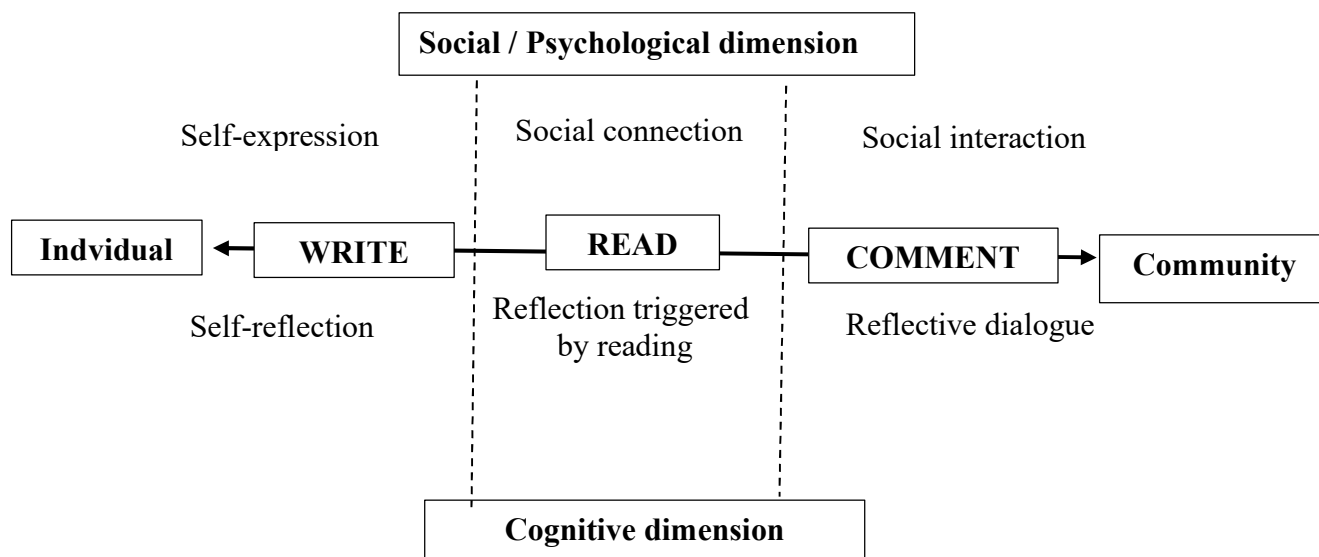


Figure 3.1: Framework for educational affordances of blogs (Deng & Yuen, 2011, p.450)

Finally, the anticipated causal relationship between blogging and writing development in the current study is explained in the following table (Table 3.1).

Affordance of blogging	References to research	Expected impact on writing
Interaction outside the classroom	(Sun & Chang, 2012)	Motivation to write more
interaction	(Goldman, Goben, & Sbeaban, 2008)	Increased awareness of audience
Student directed learning	(Alexander, 2008; Kaplan, 2008)	Increased awareness of writing for purpose
Writing in social space	(Downs, 2004)	Experience of writing in different registers
More feedback on their writing	(Downs, 2004)	General non-academic
Bloggers anticipate their readers' reactions to their blog entries	(Pinkman, 2005; Ward, 2004)	Encouragement of collaboration in writing
Free writing in blog	(Sun & Chang, 2012)	Increase in the number of ideas in students' writing due to its lack of constraint
Online feedback and comments	(Brescia & Miller, 2005, in Cequena & Gustilo, n.d.)	Peer feedback on the personal and class blog should increase awareness of audience, leading to increase in the

		accuracy of students' sentence structure. Also, students' writing ability may improve due to the opportunity to read other students' work and receive feedback on their own compositions
Collaborative writing	(Pinkman, 2005; Ward, 2004)	Generation of more thoughtful and critical writing
Using online dictionary	(Van Leeuwan (2005)	Easy checking for synonyms should avoid repetition and increase vocabulary.
Multimodality	(Jewitt, 2013), (O'Halloran, Tan, Smith, & Podlasov, 2011)	Easy uploading of pictures, videos etc. on to blogs, and then writing comments and reflections, should increase motivation to read and write

Table 3.1: Relationship between Blogging and Writing Development

3.2.5 Multimodality theory

Multimodality theory is a concept that was introduced to account for the rise in the number of semiotic resources that are used for the communication and expression of meaning (Kress, 2009). The term is used to describe the various approaches that signify human communication and has enabled the identification of different research streams where semiotic resources or modes, including text, still and moving image, speech, writing and gesture, often combine or interact to provide meaningful communication (Bezemer & Jewitt, 2011). Van Leeuwan (2005) concludes that multimodality involves the combination of different modes of semiotics (e.g. language and music). O'Hallaran et al. (2011), on the other hand, contend that multimodality can be better understood by the type of media used to integrate such access to information across modes. This supports the views of Bezemer and Kress (2008), who argue that a shift in the representation and evolution of multimodality can be related to two processes of change, including transformation and media. Transformation occurs due to the changes within a given mode; that is, there can be

changes within a given mode (e.g. within language) or between modes (e.g. from language to music). Secondly, media help in the distribution of messages, where the changes in media forms may have social and epistemological effects.

Ajayi (2009) argues that there can be a multiplicity of modes depending on the nature of communication. Every mode in itself can be a multifaceted ensemble where inherent differences are understood. The author concludes that multimodality assumes that all modes are shaped through culture, history and individual perceptions. Jewitt (2009), however, looks to define multimodality beyond the nature of media and the available modes of communication, arguing that as a field of research or theory, multimodality consists of representation and communication, which are dependent on different modes which are socially developed to make specific meanings. For example, Jewitt (2009) argues that modes including gestures, sounds, images and colours can be used as additional modes in combination with speech and writing. They each add a specific functional load to the meaning, and the holistic interaction between different modes can help create differences in meaning and perception (O'Halloran, Tan, Smith, & Podlasov, 2011).

Recent advances in multimodality have focused on the social impact of digital technologies. While communication has always been multimodal, the rise of digital technology has created alternative popular modes (i.e. other than predominantly linguistic text and speech). Online environments have provided relevant platforms for multimodal texts which make effective use of the multiplicity of modes to communicate to a diverse audience base (Jewitt, 2013). This has made the phenomenon of multimodality visible to a significant extent in the context of digital technologies.

3.3 Definition of Writing Skill

Writing is a crucial skill for life. Through writing we can communicate with others, conduct transactions, influence, irritate, and express our feelings. Yet, we know that writing,

particularly in a second language, is not only a case of “writing things down”. Writing is one of the four fundamental skills, but it is complicated and challenging to learn. MacArthur (2006) indicates that writing is one way to communicate ideas or messages by making marks on paper or other surfaces. In particular, writing is an expression of language created using a specific set of symbols and has conventional values to represent a language’s words which is visually created. Hyland (2003) states that writing is complicated and challenging to learn; it requires one to master grammatical patterns as well as the rules of writing, for instance a large amount of organisation in developing information and ideas, and selecting the correct sentence structure and vocabulary to create styles appropriate to the subject. Consequently, writers provide the form for what they are thinking or feeling. A writer must be competent in the use of written language to convey their messages or ideas.

Heaton (1975, p.138) states that there are four necessary skills for writing, which are:

- a) Grammatical skill: Being able to write sentences correctly;
- b) Stylistic skill: Being able to manipulate sentences and effectively use language;
- c) Mechanical skill: Being able to correctly use conventions specific to the written language, e.g. spelling and punctuation;
- d) Judgment skill: Being able to write appropriately for the purpose with the ability to choose and organise relevant information.

3.4 Students’ Writing Difficulties

Students do not find it easy to learn to write in a second language. Difficulties include: (1) how to begin writing, (2) how to come up with ideas, (3) how to create unified paragraphs, (4) the logical organisation of ideas, (5) creating grammatical sentences, and (6) maintaining motivation. According to Hyland (2003), the main issues which students face when learning to write are: (a) the organisation of ideas, (b) vocabulary, (c) grammar

accuracy. From the above issues, the writer concluded that students can more easily learn to write if they are able to organise their ideas and master the vocabulary and grammar.

Heaton (1979, p.138) states that writing in a foreign language is a difficult skill to learn in terms of the ability to use formal structures but also skills such as mechanical and stylistic skills. Stylistic skills are being able to effectively use language and manipulate sentences, whereas mechanical skill is correctly using those conventions specific to the written language, such as spelling and punctuation.

3.5 Pedagogical Approaches to Writing in A Foreign Language

The extant literature reports that, since the second half of the twentieth century, there have been three primary writing theories which have acted as the primary rationale for instructional approaches used in most L1 and L2 classrooms: structuralism, cognitivism and social constructivism (Ferris & Hedcock, 2014; Hyland, 2009). Different factors determine the best practice for a particular situation; these factors include the curriculum, the text under study and the competence level of the student. Along the same lines, Gardner and Johnson (1997) describe writing as a fluid process that writers create as they work. Rather than being a highly organised linear process, writing is a continual movement across the various steps of the writing model. According to Olson (2002), the writing process, regardless of its context, is considered from a “one-size-fits-all” perspective in the process strategy. Over the last decade, genre approaches have gained importance in EFL classrooms. The purpose of this section of the literature review is to revisit these approaches and critically evaluate their role in L2 learning (EFL).

3.5.1 Product Approach

The existing literature contends that the majority of recent studies associated with the capacity of strategy training for L2/EFL learners have been product-oriented in approach (Jurianto et al., 2015). Chen (2007) notes that, in these studies, improvement in the test

scores of learners have been measured quantitatively after a strategy training programme was completed. According to Lee and Coniam (2013), the EFL strategy training programme evaluation study is associated with the measurement of the results of learner training. The product-oriented approach is predominantly linked to the structuralist perspective of EFL learning and management. As Bressler (2003) reported, on a structuralist perspective, codes, signs and rules govern human social and cultural practices, including communication. This helps identify the underlying structure, which helps identify meaning. When such a perspective is applied to language studies, the aim is to identify similarities and differences which exist within existing language paradigms (Chow, 2006).

Gabrielatos (2002) defines a product approach in EFL as a traditional approach wherein mimicking a model text is encouraged. For instance, typically in a product approach-oriented classroom, a standard sample of text is provided to the students who are expected follow the same when a new piece of writing is to be constructed. This type of approach in structuralism can be linked to the study of mental models. For example, Glazer (1996) reported that structuralists examine mental frames which govern the manner in which texts are produced. The use of mental models in the EFL classroom, through provision of previous samples, can help students organise their approach to learning. As Oshima and Hogue (2006) rightly argue, this approach is adopted by teachers in the form of outline development or funnel introduction, which helps the student structure their work in line with previously available standards and helps refine the mental models. Steele (2004) identifies four stages in a product approach model where the clear presence of these models is evident. This view is highlighted in the following figure.

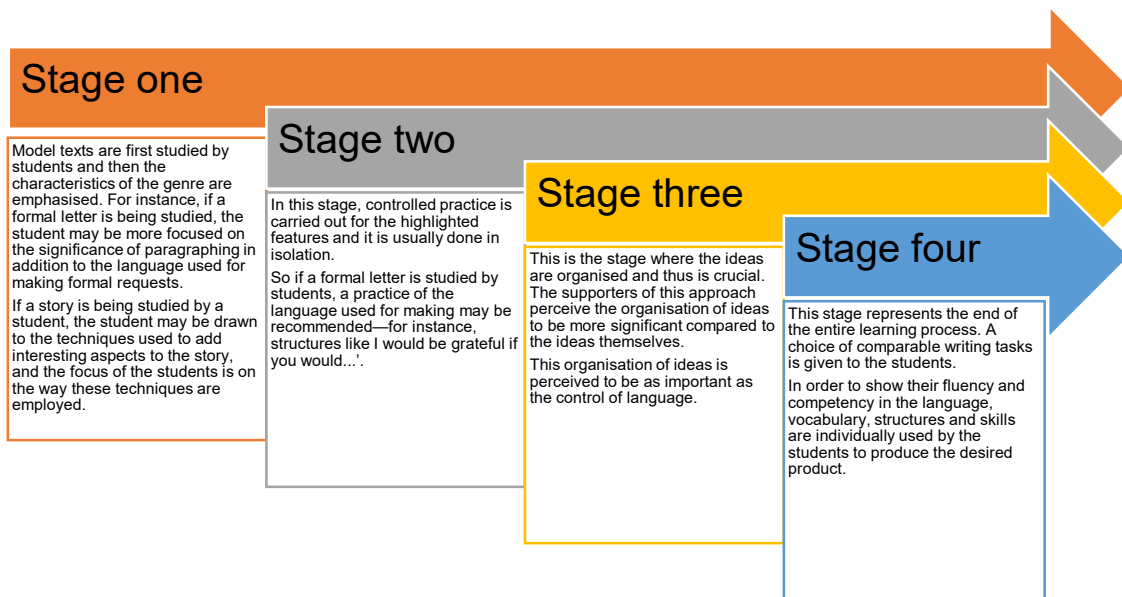


Figure 3.2: Stages in product approach to EFL learning (Source: Steele, 2004)

From the above model, it is increasingly clear that teaching within a structuralist framework is followed in most EFL classrooms. This is because structuralism can help in enhancing the underlying language patterns through the use of memory and a focus on grammatical accuracy (Khan & Bontha, 2014). The use of such an approach is considered ideal by many EFL teachers as it can emphasise correctness, arrangement and style (Kaewnuch, 2009). Therefore, most teachers prefer this approach as it promotes a traditional rubric which can help understand underlying elements. Shin (2013), in a study of EFL reading, contends that structuralism is preferred by EFL teachers as it can help improve reading competence by focusing on specific structures and vocabulary. The use of imitation, regular drills and dialogues help provide a foundation for the students from which they can improve their knowledge. The author (*ibid*) also reports that, in such an approach to language reading, the teacher is often concerned with comparing L2 and L1 languages and analysing the differences that exist between the two, which can help them understand underlying similarities and differences.

The use of a product-oriented approach to L2 learning has been reported in many countries, including Indonesia (Jurianto et al., 2015), Hong Kong (Lee & Coniam, 2013) and Iran (Panahandeh & Asl, 2014). As Raimes (1991) argues, this approach is often preferred by EFL teachers as it is found to revolve around well-established frameworks which can ultimately create an end-product. However, the author (*ibid*) also reports that such an approach can lead to short term growth and achievements, without long term benefits. Graham and Perin (2007) support this argument by indicating that, when the focus is on the end-product rather than the process of writing, it can lead to low motivation and difficulties in generating new ideas and can restrict the composition skills of the students. This view is shared by other authors, who believe that a cognitive approach to writing and reading EFL is needed, leading to the birth of the cognitive process approach.

3.5.2 Process Approach

Previous research has reported on cognitive theory in the composition process involved during reading or writing, including planning, drafting and reviewing (Flowers & Hayes, 1981; Grabe & Kaplan, 1996). Since then, the process-oriented theory has evolved. According to Kroll (1990), a process approach can be defined as an umbrella term for different types of writing course. The term encapsulates the fact that, instead of a single shot approach, a cyclical approach is used by students in their writing tasks. Polished and complete responses to their writing assignments are not expected until they go through back-and-forth stages of drafting and feedback, during which the evolving texts are revised. Therefore, as Tsui and Ng (2000) and Keh (1990) contend, the process-oriented theory enables writing scholars and researchers to arrive at a set of ‘prescribed’ principles which can be adopted in L2 classrooms. These principles are key to motivating the student through the management of personal views and interaction with others (i.e. peers or teachers) (Casanave, 2012).

Process driven approaches are quite similar to task-based learning as students are considerably autonomous in their tasks (O'Brien, 2004). Nevertheless, process approaches show some interest in the product, with the aim of achieving the best product. The fact that the product, the result of the writing, is not preconceived in a product-centred approach differentiates it from a process-focused approach. Thus, the focus of a process approach is more on using different classroom activities to motivate the development of language use, which includes brainstorming, group discussion and rewriting. The use of the process pedagogy has been highlighted as able to promote personal expression in writing through the development of cognitive skills and able systematically to document the learning evidence of the student (Hamp-Lyons & Condon, 2000). Therefore, constructivist learning theory involves the identification of writing as a process which can help equip students with essential composition strategies and provide them with the tools they need to become more self-reflective and develop self-regulatory capacities through the text construction process (Lam, 2014). Steele (2004) identifies eight stages in the process approach model which help describe the steps that EFL teachers adopt as seen in the following figure 3.3.

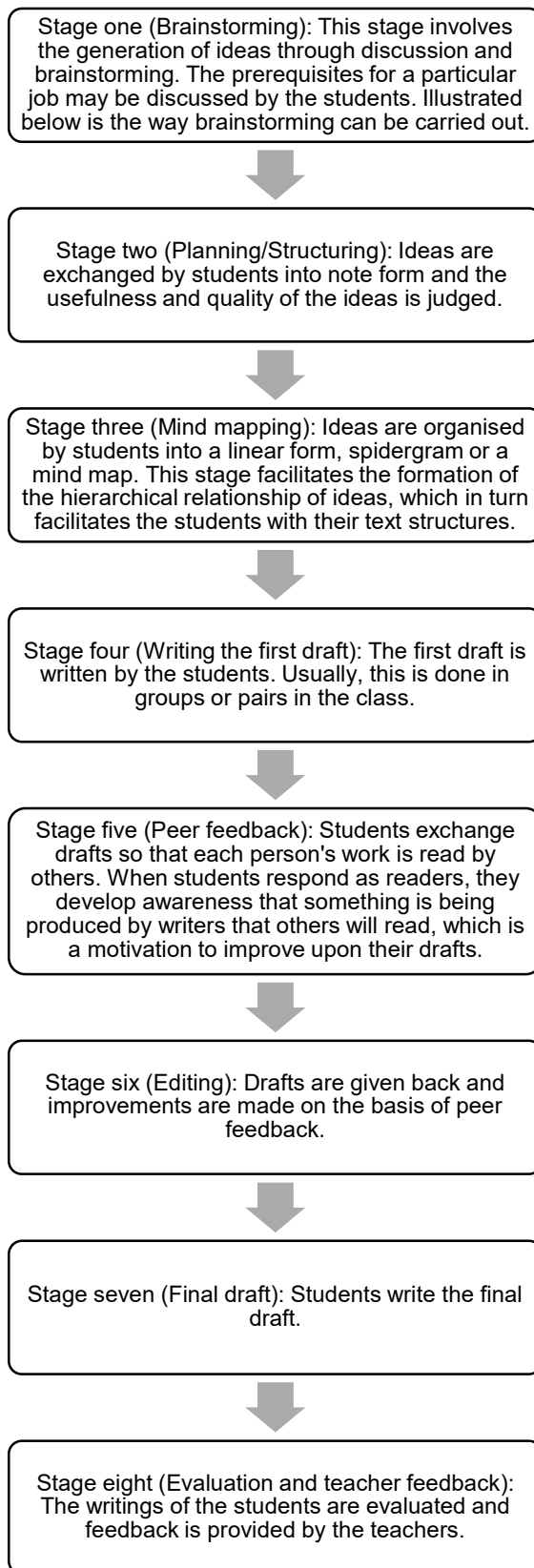


Figure 3.3: Steps in process-oriented learning in EFL (Source: Steele, 2004).

However, there have been challenges associated with the use of the process writing approach with respect to EFL. For example, Atkinson (2003) and Hyland (2009) contend that, though the focus is on the writer and their composition process, the implementation of such an approach in traditional settings is not easy. The authors contend that, in tertiary institutions, the focus on fluency over accuracy clearly indicates its failure in helping students participate in discourse communities. Additionally, Graham and Sandmell (2011) also contend that, while clearly this approach can be considered as a liberating instructional approach, there is limited conclusive evidence to corroborate the claim that its application to process pedagogy can bring about an improvement in student knowledge, especially when the students have been brought up within a product-based instruction environment.

3.5.3 Genre Approach

Writing is considered to be a cultural and social practice within the genre-based approach. This writing is aimed at the context where the writing takes place in concordance with the target discourse community. This implies the need for explicit teaching of relevant genre knowledge in the language classroom. According to Paltridge (2004), the genre approach to teaching writing emphasises the teaching of a particular genre that the students may require in their later socio-communicative success. The focus is on the discourse features and language of specific texts and the context of their use. Hyland (2003) defines the notion of genre as abstract, socially recognised ways in which a language is used, which Swales (1990) identifies to be purposeful communicative activities that the members of a certain discourse community employ. According to Munice (2002), the emphasis of the genre approach is more on the reader and on the conventions that are necessary for a piece of writing to follow so that the readers can successfully accept it. Therefore, as Johnstone (2008) argues, this approach is strongly based within the realm of understanding the practice of writing arguments by keeping in mind the idea that learning of a foreign

language should be a socially constructed activity. Johnstone (2008) further contends that genre analysis is important as it can provide learners with the tools they need to develop procedural ‘scaffolds’ as a launch pad for the production of text. This approach seeks to understand the similarities that exist between genres and attempts to explore alternative configurations which are prevalent within a given context (Hyland, 2003). This analysis is therefore useful to explore the relationships which can help facilitate and constrain the language learning process (Hyland, 2003).

However, as Johnstone (2008) argues, while the genre-based approach can provide learners with skills which can equip them to tackle authentic real-world activities, an approach which strongly overcomes the challenges of the process approach, there can be a potential side effect: a lack of standardised teaching, which is needed in a tertiary education setting. Furthermore, as Hyland (2007) stresses, the use of the genre approach requires L2 or EFL language learners to become very familiar with the written genres, as this knowledge can become potentially difficult and can restrict their ability to gain access to professional, academic and occupational communities. Furthermore, Freedman and Medway (1994) argue that a genre-based approach can theoretically have negative political and ethical implications, which can in turn marginalize certain groups.

Despite its advantage of providing a ‘facilitated’ and ‘scaffolded’ learning experience, this approach is found to have similar drawbacks to those identified in the structuralist approach, i.e., the possibility that it is passive and promotes learning through prescriptivism.

From the above discussion on the pedagogic approaches to learning in EFL, it is seen that there are some inherent differences with respect to the approach to learning. The structuralist approach remains the predominant way to teach EFL due to its prescriptive format and measurable degree of success. This pedagogic approach is found to emphasise

writing or reading as a product, which can help language learners develop their inherent knowledge of the language. This approach is found to have a positive impact on student language skills. However, as Lee et al. (2015) argue, the structuralist approach can be punitive and pervasive in nature and focusing on the process of learning and the growth of reflective assessment should be highlighted. The process approach, however, has been debated for its ability to function within the existing pedagogic approach of meritocracy (especially in MENA and Asian settings), where mastery of learning is found to be typically valued. The process approach does have versatile and context-specific applications, with inherent difficulties, requiring an overhaul within the system. The literature promotes the view that process and product pedagogies need not be mutually exclusive and that they need to be productively assimilated to provide formative and summative feedback to developing writers. Furthermore, through the integration of a genre approach in such a learning process, it is possible to develop cognitive and metacognitive dimensions of writing which can enhance the linguistic awareness of the L2 learners.

3.6 Technology and L2 Writing Practice

Reichert (2011) has recommended the use of journal entries by students on disparate topics that can be personal and non-personal in order to practise their writing skills. Writing journals helps in finding out shortcomings and, furthermore, ways to overcome them, according to Orem (2001). In applying this method, there is a need for data protection and teacher trust since it involves sharing of personal information (*ibid*). According to Orem (2001), making journal entries is an effective way to reflect and self-evaluate, not only for students but also teachers. In other words, the practice can help in student learning and teacher professional development. The advancement of internet technologies has made it easy to maintain electronic journals that can be accessed anywhere, anytime. The

technology has set the scene for collaborative journal writing, allowing students located geographically apart to write and share journal entries with teachers (Orem, 2011).

There are many advantages of journal writing in L2 learning. The practice can help students to learn about correct language structure and form based on the feedback of the teacher (Orem, 2001). Moreover, the practice contributes to a conversation between the reader and the writer (*ibid*). Another benefit of the dialogue journal is that it helps in exchange of concerns and problems relating to L2 learning (*ibid*). Writing a journal offers the opportunity for students to explore problems and obtain a suitable solution thereby resulting in personal empowerment as it promotes self-mastery (*ibid*). It provides students with a framework to understand the importance of context and audience in an exchange of ideas. Moreover, writing a journal can result in the prioritisation of content and meaning over form with an indirect correct forms model replacing the direct feedback model (Orem, 2001).

Students who used technology, such as a word processor for practising writing skills, were reported to gain increased fluency in L2 writing as compared to students who wrote texts on paper, based on the word count (Nirenberg, 1989). However, Reichelt (2001) remains critical about the success of technology in improved fluency, finding that success with the use of technology depends on a conducive environment that promotes developing fluency in writing. The quick exchange of ideas through the use of online technologies results in the use of incomplete sentences by students, thereby failing to achieve learning development (*ibid*).

To promote effective learning and improvement of L2 writing, Reichelt (2001) has recommended the use of interactive Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) tools such as word email and online conferencing. Moreover, Reichelt (2001) has recommended that directions and requirements, including specific guidelines for collaboration, should be

clearly communicated to students before letting them engage with technology. Moreover, Alsied and Pathan (2013) further add that there are many advantages in making use of technology to teach, learn, practise and assess a foreign language, especially when it comes to English as a Foreign Language, wherein there are limited opportunities for practising and assessing language skills. According to Günüş and Kuzu (2014), a significant role is played by technology in instructional activities to engage students in learning.

Zhu and Wang (2006) contend that, if technology improves along with its use in EFL classrooms, the roles of EFL teachers will also change. According to Barzaq (2007), this change warrants knowledge of technology use for foreign language teachers in several teacher training programmes. Moradkhani et al. (2013) further add the need for pedagogical knowledge for teacher educators, while Chiang (2003) identifies the same for in-service teachers. Lam (2000) identifies the reasons for integrating technology in foreign language classrooms as altering the manner of demonstration and provides enthusiasm to students. This is not due to any lack of knowledge pertaining to teaching with technology, but due to a lack of contact with technology.

Furthermore, Celli (2014) recommends that foreign language teacher education programmes should recommend use of the interactive whiteboard to facilitate student engagement. In fact, technology use is perceived to be very beneficial in many teaching and research contexts. For instance, Mollaei and Riasati (2013) observed positive attitudes in Iran towards the use of technology for augmenting language learning by means of computer-oriented instruction. Along the same lines, Alshumaimeri (2008) observed in Saudi classrooms a positive correlation between the presence of a teacher while the computer is being used and Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) training, in addition to a positive attitude towards using Information and Communication Technology (ICT) methodologies in learning.

A more detailed discussion about blogs is presented in the next sections, including why people blog, the introduction to blogging in L2, their definition, types and features, and other matters relating to the use of the blogs. Moreover, previous research on the use of the blogs to enhance EFL writing skills, the use of the blogs in higher education, the use of technology (the application of blogs) in higher education in Saudi Arabia, and attitudes towards the use of the blogs when learning a foreign language are also discussed.

3.7 Systematic Literature Search

For this element of the literature review, systematic literature search methods criteria were used in this study, in line with Almilaibary (2017). Reviewing all extant literature concerned with the use of educational blogs in teaching and learning English in general and in writing in particular over the last 22 years was necessary to reveal the influences of the use of educational blogs on EFL students' writing improvement. The systematic literature review has looked at all extant work regarding what impact the use of educational blogs has upon EFL learner's writing as pedagogical methods in/out of the classroom. Alongside this, it has considered the participants' attitudes to and perceptions of the affordances of blogs. The review was undertaken for the identification of any gaps in our present knowledge and to develop useful research questions for this present study.

3.7.1 Review Questions

To undertake a valid review employing systematic methodologies, we must create review questions. In the context of this review, I created the questions below to help guide me when making the systematic search of the literature:

"Does the use of educational blog affordances improve EFL learners' writing? How and why?"

3.7.2 Review Methods

Searches were run on the Saudi Electronic Digital library (SEDL), SAGE, ETHOSE, BERA, ERIC, WRITING journal, EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY journal, and other electronic databases for the years 1997 to 2018 (inclusive). A search of reference lists for eligible studies was then undertaken to check that no important work had been missed when searching the databases. Google Scholar, Since Direct, and WorldCat were also employed to search for relevant material. These were the search terms that were employed, used in combination: Educational blogs, educational technology, weblog and EFL writing, using blogs in English classroom, and affordances of blogging.

3.7.3 Selection Criteria

Research which has already been undertaken on the barriers/obstacles to the use of educational blogs in teaching and learning English writing has used a variety of designs. For this review, I included research that is both qualitative and quantitative in nature, which means the review includes every relevant article relevant to this thesis published in the last 21 years. In this regard, I used the systematic review criteria to discover all the relevant research studies on educational blogs in teaching and learning EFL writing skills to answer the synthesis question as set out on p.72. Furthermore, I used the narrative review criteria for specific topics such as the context, theoretical and writing approaches so that the review was informed by, but not restricted to, the list of the studies on p.72.

3.7.3.1 Inclusion Criteria

- 1- Research published in peer-reviewed journals between 1997 and 2018 inclusive, English-language publication.
- 2- Published on the use of educational blogs in teaching and learning, English writing being the main focus of research.

3- Research looking at the students' perceptions of and attitudes towards the affordances of blogs as pedagogical methods at school and university.

4- Every relevant study, whatever research method, was employed.

3.7.3.2 Exclusion Criteria

1- Any studies published before -1997

2- Any papers not in English or Arabic

3- Any articles regarding other technology use in teaching such as Facebook, Twitter and so on.

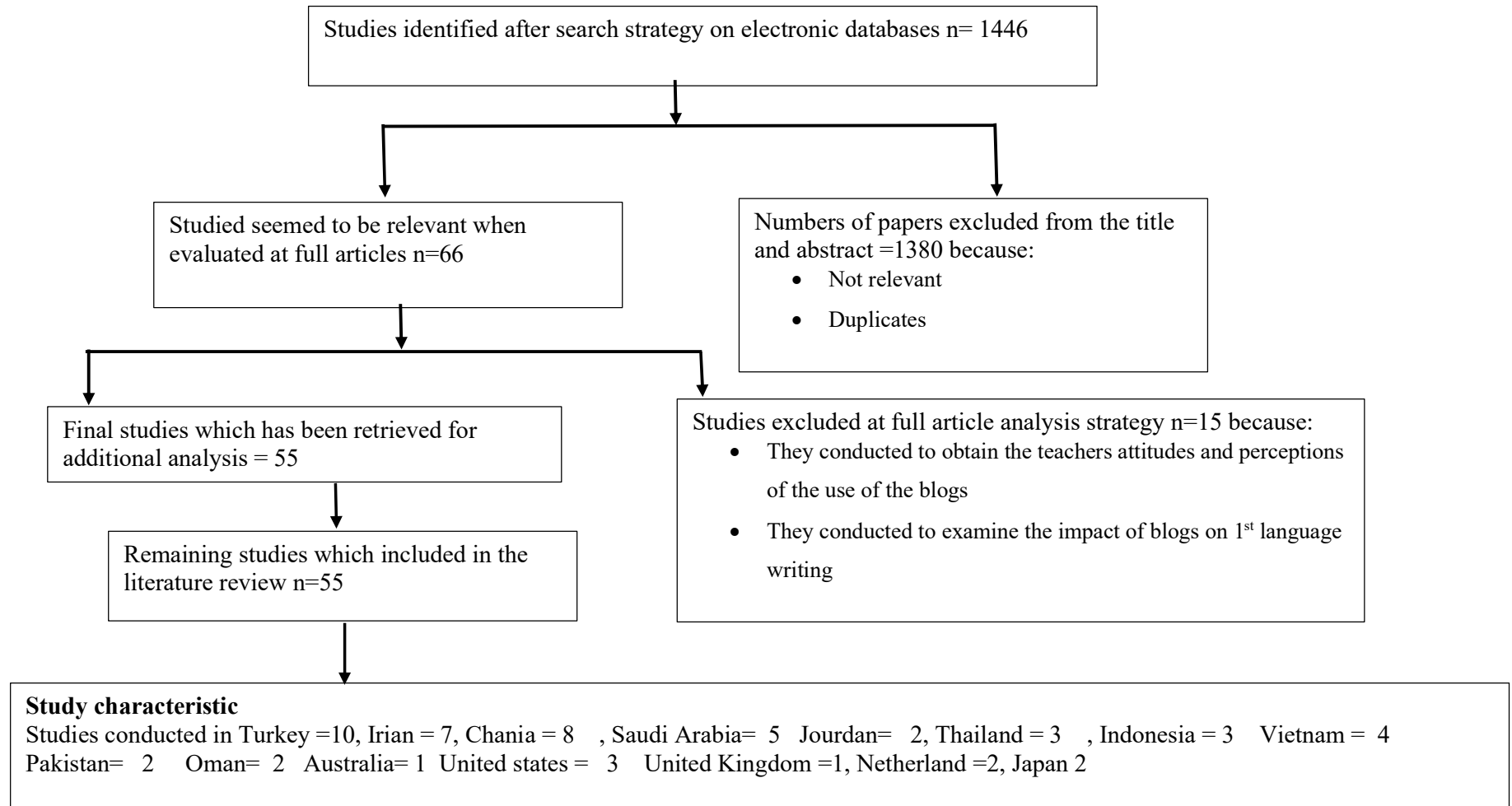
4- Lengthy abstracts, reports of conferences, editorial pieces, and unpublished work.

3.7.4 Study Identification

The systemic literature search found 1450 pieces of research that met my criteria. The results came from the following sources: Google Scholar, 745, WorldCat, 466, Science Direct, 189, the Exeter University electronic library, 38, and the International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education, 12. A number of checks were then made to test the research for eligibility. Thorough checks were made on the abstracts and study titles, which resulted in 1380 papers being rejected. A review was then undertaken using complete copies of the 70 studies remaining, checking suitability regarding the review question and consistencies with the strategy employed when searching. Assessing these full papers led to the exclusion of 15 papers, resulting in a cohort of 55 papers selected to be further examined and critiqued. Whether or not a paper was excluded was dependent on the point at which it was decided to exclude. When examining the titles and abstracts, exclusion could be applied if the paper duplicated existing papers, if barriers or facilitators to the use of educational blogs in teaching and learning EFL students' writing were not one of the primary outcomes of the study, or the paper was identified as not being a study, e.g., an editorial. Papers which were rejected after full paper analysis were excluded either

because the final outcome of the study was not related to blogs and writing, or because the paper addressed cohorts that did not fit my research criteria. The exclusions for each point are illustrated in the flowchart below (Figure 3.4)

Figure 3.4: Systematic Literature Review



3.8 Introduction to Blogging in L2

The rapid proliferation of Web 2.0 social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, wikis, Instagram, Snapchat and blogs, offers unprecedented connectivity and opportunities for new modes of acquiring information in an educational context. Modern post-secondary students, who have had access to digital media since childhood, spend a high proportion of their time engaging in digital activities, whether simply accessing the internet, consuming audio and/or visual media such as videos, or playing games online. The term ‘blog’, a contraction of ‘web log’, was first used in 1997 by John Barger (Fun & Wanger, 2005). Blogs have seen a continual rise in popularity since the late 1990s. At the inception of the blog medium, the format offered a new approach to digital communication (Mathenson, 2004; Papastergiou et al., 2011; Tan, 2009).

Blogging has been defined in several ways. The primary characteristic of a blog is the continual addition of new content. A blog may be described as an online journal with frequent new entries (Mathenson, 2004), or simply as a personal website displaying new content in reverse chronological format (Du & Wanger, 2005). Individuals who contribute to or maintain blogs can therefore be described as ‘blogging’ when they regularly post new entries (Mathenson, 2004).

Blogs may be broadly considered to have some points in common. Most generally, they are an exclusively web-based medium where new content is regularly posted. Blog posts tend to consist of descriptions or discussions of events, either events in the personal life of the blogger or events at the wider societal level. Social interaction takes place on blogs via comments from followers. Blogs abound on the internet and, according to Qian and Scott (2007), serve a variety of purposes. For instance, some have been effectively employed within the political arena (Lawson-Borders & Kirk, 2005; Trammell, Williams, Postelnicu & Landreville, 2006). Some have been adopted for different educational purposes (Deitering & Huston, 2004; Ellison & Wu, 2008; Trammell & Ferdig, 2004). Others have been used for promoting marketing and

developing business (Dearstyne, 2005). In recent years, however, there has been increasing interest in using blogs in educational settings (Godwin-Jones, 2003), including the area of L2 learning (Ducate & Lomicka, 2008).

3.9 Why Blogging?

Within CMC - Computer-Mediated Communication - numerous factors result in people choosing to utilise blogs as their preferred form of online social media. Firstly, blogs are a modern platform in which students can achieve self-learning via searching about a range of topics, listing, and reading in order to build up their knowledge. Also, learners can choose the topics they write about as free writing on their own blogs. Blogs are one of the most useful networking platforms as they facilitate more discussion, and collaboration-inspired and in-depth communication between peers and also with their teachers. Furthermore, blogs do not force people to respond to queries; they afford their users the liberty to choose whether to respond or not. In addition to this, blogs can be accessed whenever the users wish to and in any location. People choose to blog as it facilitates co-operation and communication and enables them to point out other users' errors, whilst the sharing of different viewpoints provides them with greater understanding of their common interests, for example, from receiving reactions from their peers to something they have posted. Additionally, participants enjoy using blogs as they are simple, practical, efficacious and fun. Finally, blog writing over a long period develops the users' writing skills, enhances self-learning and improves their self-esteem and drive (Goh et al., 2010; Hossain & Quinn, 2012; Instone, 2005; Kim, 2008; Sun, 2010).

Overall, there are many internal and external factors that have led to the wide popularity of blogging, although where there are issues, these are usually linked to the extrinsic factors. For example, for newcomers, learning how to blog can be problematic and confusing. Additionally, some people choose not to continue blogging as they are worried about issues surrounding privacy; a minority of users do

not feel happy about posting private or intimate details on an easily accessible platform. Furthermore, the lack of blogging tutorials has led some users to criticise the medium. Another major issue, outlined by Instone (2005), Kim (2008), Sharma and Xie (2008), Andergassen et al. (2009), and Hossain and Quinn (2012), is the substantial amount of time required to post, read, review and interact with blogs and their users. The research shows that concerns about privacy and the number of hours required to use the medium are the main issues that result in individuals choosing not to blog frequently.

No one completely understands the advantages and disadvantages of blogging; it is, as such, important to understand what motivates individuals to blog. Understood through detailed questioning of everyday blog users, five primary factors have been found to influence people in making and continuing with their blogs (Nardi et al., 2004). Chronicling their lives was the most frequent reason, but the findings also reveal individuals who like to express their views and observations, reveal personal feelings on certain issues, explain their thoughts through detailed posts, and to become part of a supportive online network. Expressing personal feelings in an epistolary format was the primary reason for MySpace users utilising the site (Fullwood et al., 2009). The research found a notable link between eighteen to twenty-nine-year-olds and their utilisation of blogging sites to gain understanding of other young people's lives.

3.10 Types of Blogs

According to Campbell (2003), there are three different blog types which can be used in language classes: (1) the tutor blog, (2) the learner blog, and (3) the class blog.

3.10.1 The Learner Blog

The learner blog is managed individually by learners. Each of the learners can continually update the learner blog with their own thoughts and words. It is therefore an online journal. Additionally, as the learner blog affords the opportunity to archive posts, it is also useful as an online electronic portfolio whereby learners can return to previous work, and progress assessments are made in language classes. The learner blog could be the most rewarding type of blog. However, it requires additional time and effort from the teachers to organise, moderate, and review. It might be difficult for teachers to deal with the additional workload. Thus, a class blog might be more ideal for teachers (de Alneida & Soares, 2008). For example, in the current study, every participant in the intervention group built their own blog as an interactive social space so that students can interact with others in real time in the United Kingdom, Australia, etc. By interacting in this manner, they were able to practise their language skills as well as share cultural knowledge, feelings, thoughts and ideas (de Alneida & Soares, 2008).

3.10.2 The Tutor Blog

The class teacher manages the tutor blog. It is a space where parents and students can find information about assessments, syllabuses, homework assignments, due dates, etc. (Stanley, 2005). It also acts as a portal to assist learners with exploring the available internet resources. Thus, the tutor blog resembles a personal library where one can find resources such as reference books and extra-curricular activities for the interests and needs of the group. Using the tutor blog might provide learner autonomy and encourage students to advance further in their studies (de Alneida & Soares, 2008). Nonetheless, the tutor blog limits learners to only writing comments on the

topic posted by the teacher. Therefore, if the reason to have a blog is to aid the creation of spaces where learners can self-manage, an improved option is the learner blog (*ibid*).

3.10.3 The Class Blog

The class blog is collaboratively managed by both students and teachers. It is a means to foster a sense of community between class members (Campbell, 2003; Stanley, 2005). One advantage of the class blog is that it can be used as an interactive class resource where instructional prompts and learning assignments are posted and where learners can write messages, post links, and upload files in relation to topics for discussion in the classroom (Campbell, 2003). One of the biggest advantages of using class blogs in language classes is that the internet enables groups of learners to interact across the globe. Therefore, the four classroom walls ‘fall down’, and the ‘classroom’ becomes a virtual environment where students, even when they are outside of the classroom, can interact with teachers and each other. For instance, in the current study, the class blog was a pedagogical teaching method to teach English writing and also to collaborate, discuss, share feedback, and practice writing. The three kinds of blog discussed here are used for different pedagogical purposes. Instructors must think about learners’ needs and teaching objectives to decide on which blogs to use for L2 teaching and learning.

3.11 Challenges When Using Blogs

Some issues exist which instructors need to consider when blogs are used for educational reasons.

3.11.1 Safety

When expanding the online classroom, it is vital to protect the identities and security of students (Trammell & Ferdig, 2004). Thus, personal information such as the names,

addresses and telephone numbers of students should not be posted online (Ray, 2006).

3.11.2 Accessibility

According to Ray (2006), the use of the blogs needs not only computer systems but also internet access. This may not be such an issue if students use blogs at schools or universities in computer labs. Yet, if teachers intend for students to use blogs after class meetings then it is crucial for teachers to determine if students have a computer and internet access before carrying out blogging tasks outside of schools.

3.12 Pedagogical Use of Blogs in Higher Education

More and more Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are making use of the blogging medium in order to take advantage of the capacity of blogs to contribute to the acquisition of knowledge at a profound level (Ducatee & Lumicka, 2008; Leslie & Murphy, 2008). Research has demonstrated that blogs can increase levels of collaboration in educational activities within HEIs (Du & Wanger, 2005) by acting as a mechanism for coordinating learning and conveying information. Learners may use blogs to present content in a logical and intuitive way, including direct links to external sources, and to present a timeline of their learning experience, commenting and sharing observations. Creating and maintaining a blog can also enhance engagement with the learning process, enabling learners to take a proprietary interest in developing and using a common tool. Blogs can act as a shared online classroom, offering powerful new methodologies to improve students' skills in communication and analysis (Du & Wanger, 2005).

One year-long study focused on the experiences of students using blogs in an educational context (Ducate & Lomicka, 2008). Study participants were L2 language students, studying either French or German. The students initially used blogs as a source of information, and subsequently contributed to the creation of blog posts. Data

was gathered through questionnaires and interviews, as well as through the blogs themselves. Study findings indicated that the students' experiences of using and creating blogs were generally positive, with most respondents indicating that they would be happy to participate in similar experiences in the future. Another study focused on 49 first-year students of English as a Foreign Language at a private college (Wu & Wu, 2011). Participants completed surveys at six-week intervals, both before and after the experience of using blogs as a learning tool. Again, feedback was generally positive.

Despite these findings, concerns have been raised about the efficacy of blogs as a learning tool in an EFL context (Arena & Jefferson, 2008). While researchers are broadly in favour of using blogs to enhance the learning of a second language, they believe that clarification of methodologies for the use of the blogs is required, and that it would be helpful to define specific procedures for incorporating blogs within existing language teaching processes. One study revealed that students in higher education did not derive significant benefit from receiving feedback via blog comments, while they did derive some advantage from reading comments intended for other students (Elion & Wu, 2008). A study by Xie and Sharma (2008) also revealed that blog comments were minimally useful as a mechanism for providing feedback. Another study focusing on students learning French reported numerous issues in the use of the blogs, including difficulties in organisation, timing, continuity and flow of information, as well as logistical and technical difficulties such as inferior sound quality. In summary, while some research seems to indicate that blogs may be powerful learning aids for EFL students, significant drawbacks have also been identified. Further research is needed in order to draw definitive conclusions about the helpfulness of blogs in this educational field.

3.13 Technology Use and Blogs in Higher Education in Saudi Arabia

In recent years, Saudi Arabia has seen a boom in the number of new universities. The interest in higher education has been coupled with a demand across the country to improve educational standards to ensure an empowered and competitive workforce (Al-Harbi, 2011). One of the main recognitions amongst educational strategists is the need to embrace the latest technologies in order to give students a competitive advantage on a global stage (*ibid*). This has been a challenge because, although the necessary finances are available, education has traditionally remained highly conservative and tightly controlled by the state (Elyas & Picard, 2013). Of all the countries in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia has been the most reluctant to embrace internet technologies, with only 29% of the population having internet access (Elyas & Picard, 2013). This means that two things are clear. Firstly, it is likely that Saudi Arabia will need to find its own creative solution to the issue of online learning in order to remain globally competitive. Secondly, larger volumes of research are needed in order to help to shape that development. This was confirmed in a study (Parvez, Akhter & Mohammad, 2013) on the usage of web 2.0 applications such as Facebook, Twitter, RSS, wikis and blogs by the Saudi government and private universities, which discovered that wikis and blogs were not popular in Saudi higher education. It found that King Saud University was the only institution using blogs among Saudi government universities, and these blogs took the form of news, starting in 2007. Additionally, Prince Mohammed bin Fahad is another Saudi private university which has blog service news on WordPress, but this has not been updated since 2010. In other words, the study indicated that the use of the blogs in the above-mentioned universities was for community service news only, not for educational purposes, which demonstrates the lack of blog use in teaching in Saudi Arabia.

3.14 EFL Writing Skills and Blogging

Broadly speaking, blogs enable a user to occupy an area within the online realm where they can express themselves and leave a personal imprint, generally in the form of a personal diary that describes the day-to-day life and experiences of the user. These diaries generally revolve around the user's specific interests or hobbies, for example, politics, fashion or architecture, or may even reflect a literal or spiritual journey undertaken by the user. For example, some users may accept a new challenge and may blog about it in order to discuss the challenge with others and perhaps get feedback on their progress (Tremayne, 2012). These blogs have also expanded into the field of education and a specific type of educational blog, referred to as an 'edublog', has emerged. While there is no definitive model on how such edublogs should be employed in an educational context, Angelaina and Jimoyiannis (2012) propose that they fall into one of the following categories:

- Blogs as a record of knowledge acquisition
- Blogs as a reflective journal that tracks an emotional learning journey
- Blogs as a collaborative tool for feedback and teacher feedback
- Blogs aimed specifically at giving students the experience of writing for an audience.

Crystal (2005), a linguist, believes that a new style of linguistics had emerged in blog content and argues that the onset of the digital age has had a significant effect on the development of language that must be acknowledged. In addition, due to the rapidity of these changes over the last 15 years, he argues that "it is already possible to see a diachronic as well as a synchronic dimension to this subject" (Crystal, 2005, p.2).

Crystal (2005) also found the type of language used in blogs to be quite creative and asserted that the content written in blogs contains written language in its most 'naked' form, free from the influence of copy editors, proofreaders or any other writing

professionals who “take our written expression and standardise it, often to the point of blandness”. In effect, the writing contained in blogs is the most perfect example of natural and organic language.

However, the notion of encouraging language learners to engage with a form of language that does not always comply with linguistic rules appears risky: arguably the whole purpose of EFL is to learn the rules and codes that govern a language with a view to acquiring a universal and standardised form that can be easily examined to generate comparable results that grade students according to their ‘ability’. Thus, since blogs have increased in popularity, they have generated considerable interest among EFL professionals and academics in light of the role they might play in the written language development of EFL learners (Angelaina & Jimoviannis, 2012).

As discussed throughout this study, some researchers and EFL academics have explored the role of blogs in the enhancement of EFL students’ writing abilities using limited approaches in recent years. For example, in Arab and Middle Eastern countries and specially in Saudi Arabia, there have been studies on the use of the blogs to develop EFL students’ writing skills such as (Al-Fada & Al-Yahya, 2010; Aljumah, 2012; Fageeh, 2011; Hashem, 2018). The findings of these studies are explored below. From the perspective of improving the linguistic proficiency of students using blogs, Hanson-Smith (2016) performed a study of five EFL students who were required to complete questionnaires and reflective logs and to participate in interviews. The findings indicated that students often used blogs to share their work in a public space and to seek feedback and comments from other users on the quality of their writing. It was also discovered that students frequently used blogs when working on written assignments. An EFL teacher performed a similar study and discovered that learners who frequently used blogs were better equipped to become accustomed to the requirements of university-level English (Muncy, 2014). In addition, blogs were

found to allow students to learn in a less structured, less censored and more equal environment (*ibid*). The researcher added that, through blogs, students have the opportunity to improve their abilities and self-confidence since they are able to write in an unrestricted way and share their thoughts with others. In light of these findings, it seems that the two primary motivations for using blogs are for confidence-building and the exchange of identities and ideas with others. That being said, more in-depth study into the motivations of EFL learners who use blogs is required.

More recently, Sun (2010) performed a study which analysed the impact of regular blogging on the writing abilities of 23 university students. The participants in this case were required to compose 20 blog posts and to offer 10 feedback comments and were then required to complete a questionnaire in order to elicit their opinions and attitudes toward blogging and the methods or cognitive processes experienced by the students when blogging. The outcome of this study suggested that the writing abilities of EFL learners increased in line with the frequency of their blogging activity. Sun (2010) also argued that students grew more confident in their writing abilities when they engaged regularly in blogging activities. A study by Vurdien (2013), in which EFL learners were asked to complete a survey in order to ascertain their attitude towards the use of the blogs, drew similar conclusions. This particular study found that the majority of students had a positive attitude toward blogs. A further two studies have also found that blogging activities had a positive impact on the EFL writing abilities of learners (Istifci, 2011; Wu & Wu, 2011).

Nonetheless, despite these findings, it must also be acknowledged that several researchers found no discernible link between blogging activity and writing ability. For example, Thitthongkam (2010), in a study of how internet-based communication tasks influenced the writing abilities of students, found that whilst learners became more motivated to write and their writing abilities increased, a number of issues with

the students' compositions were identified, specifically with the incorrect use of tense, sentence structure and wording. Further still, it was also discovered that students had issues with internet usage and computing skills.

Anderson (2010) performed a study from a constructivist perspective in order to determine whether or not different types of writing skills were positively or negatively influenced by private journaling versus public blogging. In addition, the researcher sought to determine the impact of special education, socioeconomic status, ethnicity and gender on the students' learning outcomes using each medium. A total of 70 students from an American secondary school took part in this quantitative, quasi-experimental study and the findings indicated that students using both private journals and public blogs had similar writing abilities, though there were some differences with regards to voice and content scores. A comparative longitudinal study was performed by Groom, & Lin (2013) in order to test the impact of Blog Assisted Language Learning (BALL) on the writing abilities of 50 Taiwanese EFL students. All 50 of Lin's students involved in the study were divided into two equal-sized groups both with low-intermediate English abilities and both undertaking the first year of an undergraduate degree. The study involved a thorough quantitative evaluation of BALL, which entailed an analysis of learners' enthusiasm to write in English, the quality of their compositions and their level of self-confidence with regards to English writing. The outcome of this study suggested that conventional classroom methods achieved similar or more superior learning outcomes than BALL with regard to English writing. As such, Groom & Lin (2013) concluded that the BALL method was not a more beneficial learning approach.

On a more detailed level, researchers associate blogging with the development of several core writing skills, which include structuring at all levels, from syntax through to paragraphs through to the text level (Kitchakarn, 2012). It has also been found that

blogging enhances learners' summary skills, as its primary aim is to summarise and reflect on a learning unit or experience (Kitchakarn, 2012). As such, blogging is useful for many types of writing, including academic and business writing, and is also useful in the development of a personal tone or in the development of linguistic agency and autonomy in a new language. That being said, most researchers are more interested in the process of improving writing abilities as opposed to the core writing skills cultivated, and, additionally, much of the research in this field has been conducted in China.

As is the case with any speaker of an Arabic language, a Chinese EFL learner must learn a completely foreign language system and often encounters difficulty when learning how to write in English. An empirical study performed by Zhou (2015) analysed the blog-assisted writing process where 81 students took part in an eighteen-week course that focused on blogs as the primary teaching vehicle inside and outside the classroom. Students were required to present and record their work in the form of a blog that teachers and other students could read and comment upon. According to Zhou (2015, p.189), the results were “resounding” in that the use of the blogs had “significantly improved the students’ writing ability”. A study by Chen (2012) also found that the peer-review element of blogs has a particularly positive impact on the writing acquisition process as students found blogs refreshing and were encouraged to “rethink and revise” their writing on account of on-going critical reflection. Broadly speaking, however, it is worth noting that Chinese students are known to have high levels of computer literacy and internet accessibility. However, students in Saudi Arabia are not blessed with the same skills, as Saudi Arabia has one of the lowest rates of internet usage across the Middle East. Nonetheless, Aljumah (2012) was permitted to perform a blogging study from an EFL writing perspective in Saudi Arabia and discovered that “learner-perceived benefits of using blogs included increased interest

and motivation to use English because of interaction with, and feedback from, classmates and teachers” (Aljumah, 2012, p.100). Similar conclusions were drawn by Ciftic and Kocoglu (2012) based on the analysis of blogging activity by Turkish students, as those who received feedback from peers had superior writing abilities and a more favourable overall writing performance. In addition, the students expressed their enjoyment of blog usage, which suggests, like many other studies, that the value of blogging in the context of EFL writing acquisition lies not in the language of blogs but in the overall blogging process.

More specifically, blogging enables students to share their work with others and to engage in a critical reflective process with their peers. According to Chen (2014, p. 1), this can “reduce the threatening atmosphere caused by face-to-face interaction”, though it cannot be determined whether this completely outweighs the fact that peer-generated comments are typically quite superficial. This issue is a persistent problem in relation to digital learning and features heavily in discourse regarding alternative student-to-student channels, such as the plagiarism checker Turnitin. Many teachers and students have highlighted the fact that the comments left by students can be inaccurate and the overall quality of peer-reviewed learning cannot be measured as it depends on the quality of the peers who are asked to review the work (Cilliers, 2012). Based on an extensive evaluation of 95 studies on blogging in an educational context over the last ten years, Chen (2014) argues that blogging must be strategically integrated into the existing pedagogic system as it is simply untenable to request that students ‘go home and blog’. Alternatively, he proposes that such a strategy be effectively managed by cultivating appropriate group dynamics and clearly delineating the function and role of blogging in an educational context along with the limitations of its use in enhancing the learning outcomes of students.

In addition, Chen (2014) argues that there is currently a lack of adequate teacher training resources to facilitate the effective deployment of blog-based learning strategies in a classroom setting. In light of these findings, while several studies failed to detect any correlation between blogging activity and the writing abilities of EFL learners, most studies have identified a positive relationship between blogging activity and the students' understanding of language, grammatical skills, vocabulary and writing performance. Further still, it is clear that blogging facilitates collaborative learning, peer interaction and confidence-building. As most of the studies discussed in this section have employed the questionnaire and interview as research instruments, these are the methods that will be employed in the present study, but some of the qualitative methods incorporated will examine the attitudes of teachers and students in more depth.

3.15 Does Blogging Enhance EFL Writing?

In the past, blogs were used primarily for personal reasons. However, these days, an increasing number of students are beginning to use blogs to enhance their writing skills. Various researchers, such as Fageeh (2011), Drexler, Dawson and Ferdig (2007), Kelley (2008), Roth (2007) and Jones (2006) have found that learners' writing skills can be improved through blogging, and Drexler, Dawson and Ferdig (n.d.), Fageeh (2011), Lee (2010), Kelley (2008), Armstrong and Retterer (2008) and Jones (2006) all found that blogging gave students a more favorable attitude towards writing in another language. Interestingly, Jones (2006) also found that blogging enhanced learners' critical-thinking skills; with students offering more meaningful feedback to peers after spending time blogging. In one Japanese study, 21 students were involved in a 38.5-hour English language programme over the course of one week. The students were in their last year at university and had little motivation and ability with regards to learning English. The participants were asked to spend 20 minutes writing down their thoughts after engaging in speaking and listening tasks. These writings were then

emailed and shared on the class blog. This allowed the participants to offer feedback to one another. It was discovered that, by the end of the 7-day course, learners' writing fluency increased from 31.5 words every 20 minutes to 121.9 words every 20 minutes, on average. The students also exhibited greater lexical sophistication by the end of the study period (Fellner & Apple, 2004). It is clear that the above study indicates a positive relationship between students' writing skills and blogging/journaling activity. There are a number of potential influencing factors on this result. Firstly, students' writing ability may have increased due to the learners being given the opportunity to read other students' work and receive feedback on their own compositions. Secondly, the 20-minute time window given to students offered the learners additional writing practice, which could have improved their writing ability. Finally, the class blog offered students a place to express their thoughts, identities and opinions. Lee (2010), found that students were more enthusiastic about sharing their writing on a public forum when they frequently engaged in blogging. Furthermore, the same researcher found that writing fluency increased in line with the amount of time spent posting on blogs. These results were based on a blog post analysis of 17 advanced university students over a 14-week period (Lee, 2010). Other studies have found that learners' writing skills can increase when using blogs since this allows students to gain writing practice time (Bernstein, 2004).

In another study by Dujsik & Cai (2010), 37 participants were chosen to engage in 50-minute English lessons over five days. The students attended an English Language Institute (ELI) at a leading public university in the South East and were at a low-intermediate level. The students were asked to use computers in an IT room once each week in order to complete different writing tasks and submit their work to their own blogs so that other students could offer feedback. Once the term was complete, students were asked to fill in a questionnaire. The purpose of the 11-item questionnaire

was to find out whether the students had any previous experience of blogging through the use of simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’ questions. In order to assess the students’ opinions of blogging, participants were also given two open-ended questions as part of the questionnaire. The researchers then coded the participants’ answers to these two questions so that they could be analysed. It was found that the students were highly computer literate and that they did not find blogging to be a challenge. Furthermore, the students were aware of how to add images to their blogs and they believed that various skills (including reading and writing) could be enhanced through blogging. The two open-ended questions helped the researchers to identify six key factors involved in students’ opinions of blogs. These factors were the difficulty of blogging, the presence of an audience and chance to learn with others, technology usage, enthusiasm, interaction and networking and ELF skill enhancement Dujcik & Cai (2010). Additionally, it was suggested that the enhancement of writing skills was the main factor involved in learners’ favorable opinions of blogging, based on the qualitative data analysis.

In another study, five advantages of blogging were outlined and associated with improved EFL writing in higher education (Brescia & Miller, 2005; Cequena & Gustilo, 2014). Firstly, blogging was said to serve as a knowledge database and individual content archive for bloggers who post regularly during their time in education. Secondly, blogs offer students the chance to take classroom-based lesson content to a wider audience or community via the internet. Thirdly, blogs allow EFL teaching to occur beyond the classroom environment and, therefore, without time restrictions. Fourthly, blogs provide a space for self-expression. Furthermore, blogs offer students the chance to write both flexibly and in a more structured manner. Finally, blogs facilitate communication and peer feedback.

Blogging has been found to have many other benefits for EFL learners, including helping students to find ways to deal with the stresses of learning, helping them to acquire more knowledge and helping them to think more reflectively about sharing information with others (Sun & Chang, 2012). Additionally, blogging offers students the chance to think about their role as authors, their motivations for writing and the criteria for higher education writing (Sun & Chang, 2012). Nevertheless, some argue that students need to be able to use technology, understand English, have reasonably good writing skills and be able to communicate well before they can maximise the advantages that blogging could bring (Liu, 2007).

The research papers mentioned in this study have all highlighted various ways in which learners' writing abilities can be improved through blogging. However, students' writing skills may not be improved by blogging alone. Feedback from tutors and other students plays a critical role in guiding learners towards developing their voice, content, organisation and so on. Interestingly, some researchers have found that students are less comfortable with receiving feedback from other students than from teachers (Wu, 2006; Yang & Badger, 2006; Zhang, 1995). However, other researchers still maintain that students' writing skills can be significantly enhanced through the provision of feedback from peers (Bakar, 1985; Ware, 2008). Specifically, Ware (2008) discovered that EFL learners will not offer feedback about anything besides grammatical errors if they are not told to do so. Ware also found that students responded best to peer feedback that was meaningful and tailored to them and their writing. Therefore, it is suggested that students' writing skills can be enhanced through peers' blog comments. In the case of Bakar (1985) earlier study, participant students were assigned to groups they had chosen themselves and were asked to talk about any social science issue they wished to explore. The participants were then requested to share what they had found through blogs. The groups were also asked to

share their write-ups via the blog in order to receive feedback from the other students before submitting their group work to the researcher. Students were then questioned about their opinions of blogging. The researcher found that blogs were thought to be useful for obtaining feedback on writing tasks. Additionally, students felt that blogs were useful in developing their ability to think critically. Consequently, the students reported that they enjoyed learning through blogs and that they believed their writing competencies had improved due to having the opportunity to communicate with others online. Furthermore, Baker (1985) discovered that the audience-factor caused students to take greater care when writing their blog content.

Another study indicated that students would benefit from classes that teach them how to offer meaningful and accurate feedback to other researchers (Miceli, 2010; Vurdien, 2013). These classes could be facilitated by language tutors who could begin by showing learners how to evaluate other students' work. Students could then work together alongside the teacher until they are ready to construct their own papers and offer effective feedback to others. In the current study, the above idea was incorporated. The participants were involved in a virtual critiquing class orchestrated by the researcher via Skype and email. The participants were shown how to assess an academic paper and were then asked to try this for themselves. Participants then shared their evaluations with other students in the classroom.

3.16 Attitudes towards Using Blogs When Learning A Foreign Language

Sharma, Xie and Sharma (2008) and Halic et al. (2010) found that, as a web 2.0 technology, blogging assists students in improving their learning in general, and for second or foreign languages specifically (Miceli, 2010; Vurdien, 2013). Blogs offer an environment for genuine communication between learners and add an important layer of realism to learners' experiences of reading and writing (Miceli et al., 2010). Many studies have found that blogging has led to positive attitudes when it is included in foreign language acquisition. In their study, Chiao (2006) used military cadets at

the Air Force Academy in Taiwan as participants to request opinions regarding the use of the blogs in an English class. The majority of students were working at a basic level of English writing and studied English for three hours a week. Three classes were provided with guidelines on how to create a blog, with the use of the blogs comprising 20% of their overall grades. The aim of Chiao (2006) research was to discover the challenges and obstacles encountered by students when using a blog-based framework within their autonomous learning. Another aim was to discover the learning strategies and skills required by students when using a blog for their autonomous learning, in addition to discovering students' opinions and attitudes towards the use of the blogging. Overall, the findings demonstrated that, while they encountered certain degrees of difficulties in their learning processes initially, these students felt positively about the use of the blogging to assist autonomous learning of English.

In their 2009 study, Yang explored the implementation of blog use as a platform for reflection within the EFL training process. There were 43 teacher trainee participants, observed in two teacher-education programmes at two different institutions. Yang's (2009) findings demonstrated that the students regarded blogs as a valuable way of reflecting on and interacting with one other. Al-Fada and Al-Yahya (2010) carried out a similar study, with the aim of recording students' attempts at operating blogs as motivation for performing required reading projects and post-class reflections. Taking part in the study were five ESL students and ninety software engineering students. The findings demonstrated that the students presented positive opinions regarding the implementation of blogs for both pre-class research and post-class reflection.

Miceli et al. (2010) used an advanced Italian course for foreign undergraduates to discuss the success of assimilating a class blog. Using the qualitative data that the authors collected, it was discovered the blogs "appeared effective". Blogs could offer

an "environment" for students who found it hard to speak up in class dialogues Miceli et al. (2010, p.331). Wu and Wu (2011) and Istifci (2011) discovered positive results from blog use in learning English as a Foreign Language. They concluded that blog use could improve skills in writing. The students in these studies considered weblogs inspiring, entertaining and uplifting. To explore the possible effectiveness of weblogs on English language learning in Thai universities, Noytim (2010) studied students' opinions and feelings regarding the use of the blogs. He discovered affirmative responses from students on the use of the blogs, as they regarded weblogs as a chance to have freedom of self-expression in English.

Nevertheless, although earlier evidence demonstrates that blogging has positive effects on students, there are some obstacles preventing students from demonstrating an interest in blogging, or even preventing them from blogging altogether. Instone (2005) found that most PhD students were prevented from blogging due to time pressure, as they considered blogging as requiring high quality content and specialised writing. Consequently, PhD students did not utilise blogging to any great degree. In addition, some students did not feel "comfortable" with releasing their personal details in a public environment (Instone, 2005). Correspondingly, based on qualitative, open interviews with bloggers, Andergassen et al. (2009) discovered a key obstacle preventing students from blogging was their fear of losing privacy.

To summarise, blogging is an effective method of improving and advancing students' curiosity for acquiring a foreign language and learning English. Participants regarded the experience of blogging as pleasant, stimulating, inspiring and effective. However, blogging is regarded as time-consuming, which consequently prevents some students from taking part. An additional obstacle is privacy; some bloggers fear that they are being scrutinised when blogging inside their group. This leads them to feeling hesitant to blog regularly. The positive outcomes of using blogging with the EFL students of

the Preparatory Year Programme should be investigated to improve understanding of that issue. In addition, the blogging itself could be designed so as to minimize the risks outlined in the literature and to maximise the benefits.

The section below presents a more in-depth discussion of the pedagogical approaches to writing in a foreign language, as well as how these correlate with collaborative and feedback provision. It also discusses collaborative learning, peer feedback and teacher feedback.

3.17 Feedback

Narciss (2008) reported that feedback in the context of EFL involves understanding post-response information which is given to a learner in order to inform the learner about the current stage of learning or performance. This research will first reflect on the theoretical elements which underlie the provision of feedback. However, as Auld et al. (2010) contend, the use of feedback can be viewed as monitoring. Therefore, when such an approach is adopted, it can lead to a drop-in student engagement and motivation and, as Brandt (2008) reported, the student perception of the learning environment and associated feedback can have negative implications. In light of this view, other authors (e.g. Brandt, 2008; Segers et al., 2008) identified student perceptions of the learning environment and feedback from a social constructivist perspective. Ferriera et al. (2007) reflect on this approach in terms of peer feedback and conclude that, while provision of negative feedback from the instructor can have negative implications, provision of the same feedback from peers can provide more positive outcomes. As Segers et al. (2008) rightly argued when conducting an investigation into the learning environment, it is possible to use feedback to enhance student learning.

Weaver (2006) reflected on receiving feedback from a socio-constructivist approach and concluded that students are willing to receive feedback from their peers as they believe that peers understand the challenges they face. This is supported by the views

of Ware (2008), who discovered that EFL learners will not offer feedback about anything other than grammatical errors unless told to do so. This being said, Ware also found that students responded best to peer feedback that was meaningful and tailored to them and their writing. Therefore, it is suggested that students' writing skills can be enhanced through peers' blog comments. This supports the view that social constructivism can help both teachers and peers to become deeply involved in the learning process.

O'Brien (2004) contends that this approach to learning is strongly supported by the previously discussed pedagogic approach of process learning. The focus of peer mediated feedback is predominantly on learning as a social activity where learners can interact with each other and are able to enhance each other's strengths. This approach, as Schunk (2008) rightly argued, emphasises learning as a social activity and asserts that learner interaction among those of equal power can have better outcomes. This approach can also help learners collaboratively construct knowledge, which can contribute to the process-based writing or learning approach over something which is predominantly product based. In the case of Baker's (2010) earlier study, participant students were assigned to groups they had chosen themselves and were asked to talk about any social science issue they wished to explore. The participants were then asked to share what they had found through blogs. The groups were also asked to share their write-ups via the blog in order to receive feedback from the other students before submitting their group work to the researcher. Students were then questioned about their opinions of blogging. The researcher found that blogs were thought to be useful for obtaining feedback on writing tasks. Additionally, students felt that blogs were useful in developing their ability to think critically. Consequently, the students reported that they enjoyed learning through blogs and that they believed their writing competencies had improved due to having the opportunity

to communicate with others online. Furthermore, Baker (2010) discovered that the audience factor caused students to take greater care when writing their blog content. Another study indicated that students benefit from classes that teach them how to offer meaningful and accurate feedback to other researchers (Ashwell, 2000). These classes could be facilitated by language tutors, who could begin by showing learners how to evaluate other students' work. Students could then work together alongside the teacher until they are ready to construct their own papers and offer effective feedback to others. However, Baker and Bricker (2010) and Van Beuningen et al. (2012) report that direct and indirect corrective feedback via peers can be effective in the context of language learning only if efforts are made to structure this feedback correctly. Furthermore, Liu and Carless (2006), in their reflection on peer feedback in a language environment, conclude that while learners are often receptive to peer feedback, if they are not trained in providing good feedback, it can lead to challenges.

3.18 Teacher Feedback

According to Ferris et al. (2013), teacher written feedback is an approach which is commonly used in most EFL classes as a tool to improve the students' work. The authors reflect on this pedagogic approach and conclude that the teacher written feedback process can be linked to the product approach or the structuralist approach to feedback. The use of this tool has received some negative reviews. For example, Trucott (2007) reported that grammar correction through written feedback can be useless and unsystematic as it focuses on the product of feedback rather than the process. This can lead to a deterioration in students' subsequent writing and can compromise their overall achievement. Lee (2008) supports this argument by indicating that teacher written feedback does face the primary criticism of creating a 'gap' between the student expectation and teacher provision. The prevalence of this mismatch is found to lead to a loss of student motivation. Therefore, as Wen and Qinghua (2013) argue, looking into the structure of this type of feedback is important.

Ferris and Hedgcock (2005) contend that teacher written feedback needs to balance positive and negative comments by providing constructive criticism. This view is supported by Dowden et al. (2013), who report that student perception of written feedback is found to be better when it is in line with pedagogies which can specifically include the development of rich dialogue within the teaching and learning construct. According to Srichanyachon (2012), the student's own requirements from the class can further impact the type of feedback they expect from the learning environment. For example, Ferris (2003) and Diab (2006) argue that students prefer indirect to direct error feedback as they feel more motivated to take an active role in the classroom process. Secondly, Lee (2008) contends that highly proficient students are found to want written feedback which revolves around the content of writing rather than the language or its structure and organisation. On the other hand, written feedback amongst less proficient students is found to be geared towards organisation and language.

The use of such written feedback has, however, been questioned with respect to its relevance in an online mediated learning environment. Even though the integration of technology has been accepted positively by teachers, several challenges still occur. For instance, technology was mainly used by Saudi EFL teachers for teacher-centred drives like instructional supply instead of student-centred tasks. Therefore, they felt that providing written feedback in an online environment was often difficult. According to Li (2011), there are certain factors that limit the use of feedback-centred technology in early EFL instruction, including a lack of operational professional growth and teacher-centred experiences in education emphasising technology integration and instructional planning. Similarly, Emhamed and Krishnan (2011) contend that, in Libya, teachers faced challenges associated with lack of managerial support in integrating their capabilities of marking and highlighting submissions made

through online platforms. Therefore, if teacher-centred feedback is to be adopted in an online environment and e-learning-based platform, it is important to first adopt a standard approach to providing such feedback while considering the best way to provide constructive feedback.

3.19 Collaborative Learning and Writing

The collaborative learning via educational blogging and writing process can be examined from the theoretical perspective of sociocultural theory, which emphasises the role of interaction and peer collaboration in L2 development (Ellis, 2005). This approach to learning can be traced to the seminal research of Vygotsky (1978), who argued that learning should be examined through a sociocultural lens, where higher cognitive functions appear first on a social plane rather than a cognitive plane. Therefore, learners often construct knowledge in collaboration with other individuals. Collaborative learning often prevails in the context of peer feedback, where learners are found to have a positive impact on each other's development because they act as both novice and expert (Ohta, 2000). Since no two learners have the same strengths and weaknesses, when such collaborative learning is implemented in the context of the L2 learning environment, it can result in the development of a scaffold which can assist the students and can help pool their resources to achieve a higher level of performance (Swain & Lapkin, 2000).

The importance of educational technology such as blogs in enhancing student learning is very important in a social environment. According to Hedayati and Marandi (2014), complications in employing CALL in the language classroom were faced by Iranian EFL teachers due to the learners, the available facilities and the teachers themselves. Furthermore, Hedayati and Marandi (2014) concluded that the use of technology was found to enhance the overall learning process only when more collaborative tools were implemented and engaged in the process. Chiang (2003) identifies the advantage of using the internet in the EFL classroom as the provision of authentic materials to

learners through which students can meet native friends online and assist teacher-student communication where collaboration plays a key role in enhancing learning. Furthermore, Shin and Son (2007) contend that there are certain key factors that influence use of the internet in the foreign language classroom; these include computer amenities and technical support in schools, skills of teachers in incorporating internet resources in classroom tasks, and the interest of individual teachers in using the internet. As Swain and Watanabe (2012) contend, when collaborative learning and dialogue is adopted in such environments, there is a greater pool of learners who can collaborate to solve grammatical and lexical difficulties. This has helped learners arrive at the most relevant solutions to their language-related problems with a co-construction of new language knowledge (Leeser, 2004).

The use of collaborative writing has also been examined in research. A study by Storch and Wigglesworth (2007) examined the written texts that were produced as a result of collaborative content. The author concluded that performance in terms of writing was better when it was a result of a collaborative learning process. Furthermore, Storch (2005) reported that comparisons of dyadic and individual performance with respect to short composition tasks showed that paired respondents were found to provide shorter texts which were syntactically more complex and grammatically more accurate when compared to those written individually. Furthermore, Stock and Wigglesworth (2007) compared the performance of 24 pairs and 24 individual learners who worked on two writing tasks. The authors concluded that collaborative pairs were found to work better and showed better skills and accuracy (supporting the balance of strengths hypothesis, provided earlier in this research). Similarly, it was shown in a study by Wigglesworth and Storch (2009) that, while more time was taken to complete paired activities, accuracy was found to be greater.

3.20 Summary of the Chapter

Considering the literature examined previously, we can see that most studies have found affirmative attitudes regarding the use of the blogs in both learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and improving students' writing through blogging. The key objective of blogging appears to be social. It is interesting to note that most studies have been performed in North America, East Asia and Europe. There are not many studies that investigate blogs as a method of learning a foreign language performed in the Arab World (with the exception of Al-Fada and Al-Yahya (2010) and Leslie & Murphy (2008)) or in the Middle East. Furthermore, it appears that some studies found that blogging has little to no effect in advancing students' writing, or any constructive effect on students. Additionally, the aforementioned studies contain some gaps that need to be filled. The majority of studies were made using students who were studying in a language class or course, but who did not use blogs autonomously. As the English language has been the medium of education in many Middle Eastern countries, including Saudi Arabia, there are not many investigations into EFL students' attitudes and perceptions when acquiring a foreign language by using blogging. To date, there is no study that concentrates on the development of EFL students' writing by using blogging in a Saudi Arabian setting. Regrettably, in Saudi Arabia, foreign language learning is still grounded in a syllabus, and is teacher-centric. However, we must ask if there will be obstacles for EFL students implementing blogs in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in HEIs. It is hoped that the current research project will add value to this body of literature. The difference between the proposed thesis and existing research on EFL writing and blogging is that the current study adopts a mixed-methods approach rather than a single paradigm approach. This thesis now turns to the methodology chapter.

4. CHAPTER FOUR

Methodology

4.1 Introduction

In this section, methodological considerations are addressed. Firstly, this chapter covers the theories and philosophies behind the research, followed by socio-political considerations. Next, the chapter moves on to a discussion of methodological factors, followed by an outline of the methods adopted in this study and research questions. The chapter then describes the type of data and data analysis methods that are used in this study. Finally, it addresses the ethical considerations related to this study.

4.2 Philosophical Assumptions

Social scientists have a number of different ways of seeing social reality and explicate it in just as many ways. Cohen et al. (2007) state that these ideas about the social domain have to be viewed through the direct and indirect assumptions on which they are based. This means that, in any research, there are inevitably theories based on assumptions, which concern the nature of objective reality and conceptions of knowledge and truth, as well as observability. The assumptions that pertain to the current study are discussed below.

4.2.1 Ontology, Epistemology and the Research Paradigm (Pragmatism)

The concept of ontology concerns the nature of reality. Objectivism takes an ontological approach which treats social phenomena as being external to us, something we as humans cannot influence, as having an existence that is independent of social actors. Constructivism takes an ontological approach which treats social phenomena and their meanings as being continually accomplished by social actors (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009). Not only are social phenomena the result and consequence of the way people do things in societies, but they are being constantly altered (Bryman, 2008). Knowledge is seen as ambivalent. Positivists are said to believe that there is just one reality, beyond, as it were, our interference with it, while

interpretivists hold that we create realities around us, and these have many different forms. In other words, they believe that reality is multiple and constructed. The ontological perspective of this study comes from the belief that learning is contextually bound and that the learning environment (affordances and restraints, as well as its instructional design) will influence the learning process and strategic behaviour of the learner (Wiklund-Engblom, 2010).

Pragmatists hold that reality is external to the learning process, which means that reality is independent of our minds. In this they are in line with positivists and post-positivists, although they do not accept that truth regarding reality can actually be determined (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009). However, one truth as to the reality of the process of learning would be that social reality is based on socio-cultural factors. From a personal perspective, I believe that absolute reality exists, for example, I believe in the existence of language as a means of communication, though I also feel that how we learn a language is affected by the socio-cultural environment in which we learn it. Mixed-methods has been described as a third methodological paradigm that rejects forced choices between positivism/post-positivism and constructivism with regards to methods, logic and epistemology (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009). These researchers present two paradigms associated with mixed-methods, pragmatism and the transformative perspective, as including aspects of both positivist and constructivist positions Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009). Although associated with mixed-methods, the two paradigms are divergent. I follow Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009, p.86-87) in believing that pragmatism is a paradigm that represents my beliefs regarding 'truth' and 'reality'. For Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009, p.86-87), pragmatism is a "deconstructive paradigm that debunks concepts such as 'truth' and 'reality' and focuses instead on 'what works' as the truth regarding the research questions under investigation".

Regarding the second, transformative paradigm, Mertons (2003), quoted in Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009, p.87) suggested, is "characterised as placing central importance on the lives and experiences of marginalised groups and the researcher consciously analyses the asymmetric power relationships and seeks ways to link the results of the inquiry to wider questions of social inequity and social justice". Considering the two paradigms associated with mixed-methods, I believe that my study is associated with pragmatist beliefs, which give it the strength and benefits of the positivist and interpretivist paradigms. The central concept of pragmatism is that meaning is given to any idea by its likely empirical consequences and that truth is only arrived at through observable activity, whether in a scientific or non-scientific context. According to Hammersley (2004), pragmatists concentrate on what works in given situations and their search for answers always begins with a problem from previous experience and always involves taking much of that experience for granted. In the event, however, pragmatic enquiry results in discovery and the opportunity to amend what has gone before. To discover the impact of how blogging as a pedagogical method in teaching and learning English may improve EFL students' writing skills, I drew on my experience of a problem I faced when teaching EFL writing in Saudi Arabia. The research questions answered in this study required both quantitative and qualitative methods. From a pragmatist's standpoint, I decided a mixed-methods design would best enable me to answer my research questions.

Epistemologically, according to Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009, p. 87), "epistemological issues exist on a continuum, rather than on two opposing poles". This clarifies that the mixed-methods approach challenges the definitions that differentiate between positivism and interpretivism. I concur with this view and acknowledge that mixed-methods research can use a full cluster of quantitative and qualitative methods in different combinations depending on the research questions of

the particular study. I shall proceed to expand on the different combinations used in the mixed-methods approach and thereby clarify why I chose a particular combination of mixed-methods for this study.

4.3 Socio-Political Considerations

The socio-political environment in which a research study is set always has an effect on the study itself. It has been suggested that researchers seeking to understand social situations should follow one of two overall methods when conducting their research (Hammersley, 2003). On the one hand, researchers can adopt academic methods in order to share insights with other scholars and add to the body of literature available on a topic. Moreover, researchers can adopt a practical perspective, in which the researcher hopes to provide insights that can be implemented by key decision-makers and other actors within a certain field. Because policymakers in Saudi Arabia demand that research is of practical use, it is noted that the majority of Saudi-based studies adopt a quantitative approach to research. For this reason, the current study adopted both perspectives. Firstly, the intervention group of students who engaged with blogging over a substantial time period as part of the study were considered as case studies, and secondly, focus group discussions and interviews were held with participants in the intervention group in order to gain an understanding of their perspectives and thoughts on the affordances of blogging as a way of developing writing. On the practical side, it was hoped that the findings of this study would contribute to educational reform in Saudi Arabia, encouraging teachers to move away from traditional pedagogy and shift towards newer, more hands-on methods for teaching EFL. On the academic side, it was hoped that this study would generate new knowledge by developing the theory of the relationship between blogging and writing development. For example, the study may add to existing research which states that there is an impact of the use of the blogs on EFL students' writing skills and developing the English language teaching methods in EFL classroom. Accordingly,

the use of educational blogs should be to help students and educators if used as a pedagogical teaching and learning method to practice writing in more open social intractional ways which might open the door for students to work online collaboratively with peers and receiving comments and feedback from them and their teachers or even other audiences they might have on their own blogs. Furthermore, it might help in integration between the traditional teaching methods and using educational blogs in order to overcome and solve the writing problem with the EFL students. Furthermore, this study was intended to give voice to the learners who, I believe, are in a useful position to explain what materials should be used to teach EFL. This is particularly important since it appears that the Saudi university system is teacher-oriented rather than learner-oriented.

4.4 Theoretical Background vs. Practical Implementation

Researchers and practitioners have long been divided over the roles of theory and practice. Some suggest that the division between the two is compounded in studies which emphasise the generation of theoretical propositions (Kessels & Korthagen, 1996), whilst others add that theory and practice are two completely different spheres. Atkinson (2003) proposes that this segregation results from the polarised focuses of policymakers as opposed to scholars, who essentially seek different things. Some protest that the real world cannot be accurately explained or described through theory (Hargreaves, 1996), whilst others contend that, in the educational realm, theory provides a crucial framework for actual teaching (Atkinson, 2003). Arguments in support of education theory also suggest that theory has a positive impact on real-world policymaking, since those in power are able to make more informed choices. In this study, the adopted perspective is that the division between theory and practice can be minimised through appropriate research. In terms of the Saudi higher education sector in particular, it is believed that teachers have a need for pedagogical development if they are to effectively teach EFL to explain that theory allows us to

take understandings beyond an immediate context. It aids the transferability of findings. By building theory, we can develop principles that can inform the choices of teachers and practitioners not just within the institutions that we study at, but elsewhere too. Furthermore, it is important that policymakers are able to recognise what will be effective in practice. Most of all, if Saudi's HE system is to move with the rest of the world, it is important that teaching practice focuses more closely on the students than on the teachers.

4.5 Research Methodology

The current study is divided into two parts, namely a quasi-experimental study and an explanatory sequential mixed-methods study. This should enable it to gain the strengths of both the quantitative and the qualitative approaches. In this regard, case study and quasi-experimental methodologies were adopted in this study, about which further details and explanations are given in the following sections.

4.5.1 Case Study

Crotty (1998) defines the term 'methodology' as the structure that provides a rationale for a study's chosen methods. A research methodology also acts as a bridge between the research findings and the methods chosen. According to Wellington (2000), Miles and Huberman (1994), methodology refers to a researcher's strategy for data collection, along with the theoretical reasons for the selection of methods. Therefore, it is important that researchers are able to express the ways in which their chosen methods meet their research objectives.

In this study, it is believed that the case study method was the best way to explore and explain how and why the Preparatory Year Programme (PYP) health stream students improved in their writing, if they did, during the use of educational blogging to teach and learn English writing, and to explore the participants' perceptions of the affordances of blogging and of the relationship between blogging and writing

improvement. As Zainal (2007) explains, because case studies offer the opportunity to go into detail on an issue, they are useful when investigating phenomena or situations that are relatively complicated. Furthermore, quantitative methods such as tests and questionnaires are only able to offer surface insight when it comes to certain behavioral and social issues, while a mixed-methods case study approach allows for deeper, triangulated interpretations to be drawn. Zainal (2007) and Cohen et al. (2007) point out that, because case studies tend to focus on a small number of people or very specific locations or communities, case studies allow researchers to pinpoint and thoroughly delve into their issues of interest. Other researchers have explained case studies in terms of their investigative role in real-world issues: case studies allow researchers to explore pressing issues in their natural environment, especially in situations that are characterised by various data sources or where the lines between the setting and the issue are blurred (Yin, 1984; Zainal,2007;Stake,2007).

Despite the above benefits of case studies, Zainal (2007), Stake (2005) and Yin (1984) also point out that case studies can present a number of drawbacks. For instance, they can require a significant time investment from the researcher and can run the risk of producing biased results due to the difficulty involved in validating the data obtained from them. Furthermore, case study findings cannot be applied to broader populations, which makes the generalisability of case studies quite poor. However, the present study focuses specifically on EFL teaching in the Saudi higher education sector, and the intention is to provide insights that can be used by policymakers and educators to improve EFL learning in this particular context. According to Pring (2015, p. 57): "[a]ll situations are unique in some aspects, not in others. There is something distinctive about each individual, and yet something in common between this individual and that". Thus, readers may find some resonance with other contexts and

so, while the findings will not be generalisable, they may still be thought-provoking and useful beyond the particular context of the case.

4.5.2 Quasi-Experiment: Comparison and Intervention Groups

The studies of Cohen et al. (2000, 2007) outline some of the main challenges associated with incorporating a comparison group and a closely monitored experiment into a research study. The subjects are placed in a variety of experimental settings. Therefore, they cannot be handled in identical ways. Typically, special methods are used with the intervention group and the comparison group receives either no attention or it is subjected to the ‘expected’ treatment routine. For this phase of the study, a quasi-experiment research design was used, called the ‘non-equivalent control-group’ design. This design, introduced by Gravetter and Forzano (2011), uses two letters, O and X. The letter X represents the treatment while the O represents the observation or measurement. As explained in the following table.

O	X	O (treatment group)
O		O (non-equivalent group)

Table 4.1: Non-equivalent quasi-experimental design

The intervention group was taught in a technological environment in which they used blogging in their writing class to improve their writing skills. In contrast, the comparison group was taught in the traditional way. One potential concern was that the comparison group would miss out on any advantages provided by the special form of teaching. This issue was considered, however, and it was decided that it would be possible for the comparison group participants to take advantage of the special teaching techniques once they had completed their participation in the study. Importantly, as I worked within real world constraints, the groups were not homogeneous, but I tried to control important characteristics such as prior language level and confidence with ICT.

4.6 English Language Programme

This section presents the English language programme that both groups undertook in this study. The course was entitled ‘English for Academic Purposes’ and was designed by Monash University in Australia. ENG 2 books 3 and 4 is a 15-credit academic course comprising of three-hour classes, five days a week. It is mandatory for all non-English major students of the Preparatory Year Programme and the Health Stream at a public university. The course is designed to teach students academic English skills.

4.6.1 Course Descriptions

The four language skills - listening, speaking, reading and writing - are integrated. The course includes elements of contextual grammar, active vocabulary building, paragraph writing, face-to-face communication, group discussion, public speaking, word games, pronunciation and question-answer sessions.

4.6.2 Objectives

- to provide the pre-intermediate level English skills that are needed in an academic environment;
- to improve fluency in all four skills, i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing;
- to familiarise students with the use of vocabulary in different situations;
- to use simple, compound, and complex sentences in writing;
- to provide opportunities to learn about cultural norms through interaction with peers in pair and group work.

4.6.3 Outcomes

On successful completion of this course, students should be able to:

- Use reading strategies to understand and answer questions on passages including, but not limited to, identifying main ideas, and use context clues.
- Use listening skills that allow for the ability to interpret and answer questions after listening to unfamiliar recorded conversations.

- Write and speak on topics using transitions and descriptors based on research.
- Conduct oral presentations with visual aids and in group settings.
- Write a four to five paragraph essay including an introduction, body and conclusion.
- Use task related grammar accurately.

For more details about the course material see appendix 23.

4.7 Mixed-methods approach

A combination of qualitative and quantitative methods (mixed-methods) was adopted in this study because the combination would offer greater insight into the research problem than would any single method. ‘Mixed-methods research’ is a term used by Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989; Stake, 2005) to describe the multi-method collection of data for a research study. It generally involves the combination of a number of quantitative and qualitative methods for the gathering of data and its subsequent analysis (Creswell, 2003). A single quantitative or qualitative research method does not always fulfil the requirements of the researcher because each technique has its flaws; therefore, this study used both types of research to benefit from their advantages and mitigate their disadvantages. Five benefits of the mixed-methods research paradigm are outlined below as all will be exploited in this study. The argument for mixed-methods research is supported by the principle of triangulation; researchers should avoid being reliant on a single research method, using more than one way of measurement when looking for answers to a research question. The process of triangulation is used to check the validity of results by analyzing them from several perspectives and also encompasses complementarity, in that the weakness of one type of research for certain aspects of the study is compensated by the strength of another (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Moreover, Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) offer a theoretical basis for mixed-methods research

in the social science field, in that they emphasise the need to identify one particular research problem but then use diverse methodologies to investigate it. Their research adds further weight to the argument that both quantitative and qualitative methods can contribute to the production of valid and reliable research. In an NRCM discussion paper (n.d.), Brannen claims that mixed-methods research is a desirable opportunity to ‘think outside the box’ and turn attention away from the narrow theoretical work that is often specific to particular disciplines. Recognising the assets of the mixed-methods approach, this study used the qualitative data to provide triangulation, adding extra validation to the findings and also a more tangibly ‘complete’ answer to each research question. Mixed-methods research allows researchers to have confidence in their findings (Bryman, 2004). For example, the focus group discussion and interviews made it clearer why the use of the blogging had an effect on writing development, making up for what might not have been disclosed by the quantitative evidence. Only a mixed-methods approach could provide fuller answers to the research questions. The most frequently given reason for using a mixed-methods approach is the desire to add some breadth or intensity to the analysis (Mason, 2006).

Bryman (2004) explains that:

The rationale for mixed-method research is that most social research is based on findings deriving from a single research method and, as such, is vulnerable to the accusation that any findings deriving from such a study may lead to incorrect inferences and conclusions if measurement error is affecting those findings. It is rarely possible to estimate how much measurement error is having an impact on a set of findings, so that monomethod research is always suspect in this regard. (Bryman, 2004).

We ought, however, to be aware that mixed-methods research may have some pitfalls for researchers. According to Brannen (2005), first, researchers may escape exposure to the traditions of a particular discipline and may fail to acquire a secure identity within a discipline. The research questions to be answered by a project must be inspired by theory. Because a mixed-methods research strategy is determined by

practical rather than disciplinary influences, the approaches to theory can be selective. Second, getting mixed-methods research findings published may be problematic because the majority of eminent journals are discipline based and are partial to particular types of methodology Brannen (2005).

While I accept the potential problems that mixed-methods research may throw up, this study relied on the present trend in favour of a combination of methods, hoping the findings would be accepted as the output of a robust research design that employs the strengths of each of the two distinct methods. I as a researcher hoped that the evidence from quantitative data would yield additional explication from the qualitative data, giving a fuller and holistic picture of how the educational blog for student writing works or needs further improvement. It was expected that using mixed-methods in this way would make the findings more valid and lead to a more profound grasp of what can help shape the theoretical and practical teaching of writing. Furthermore, even at the most advanced level, the methods used within each framework are quite similar in nature. As Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005) and Sechrest and Sidani (1995) point out, the purpose of analytical methods in both quantitative and qualitative studies is to ensure that the collected data is evaluated in such a manner that the optimal volume of information is extracted.

4.8 Research design in mixed-methods

In the past, mixed-methods research has been conducted in line with several designs. Creswell and Plano-Clark (2007) offer four main designs: the triangulation design, where different but related data is obtained on the same topic; the embedded design, where one data set plays a supportive secondary role in a study based primarily on another type of data; the explanatory design, where the researcher uses qualitative data in a second stage to explain or build on initial quantitative results; and the exploratory design, in which quantitative research is held to be inappropriate until exploratory qualitative methods have been used to create a deeper understanding. In this study, I

did not integrate the quantitative and qualitative inputs to yield one set of findings but sought a more profound insight by using the qualitative data to get a deeper insight into the effects of what I did; in other words, an explanatory design. In his well-accepted typology of mixed-methods designs, Creswell (2007) defined an explanatory design as one in which the results of an initial quantitative phase are explained by a subsequent qualitative investigation. For example, I wanted to know whether there was a significant statistical difference in the quality of the written texts before and after the intervention. At the same time, it was valuable for me to have a deeper insight into the participants' response to the use of the blogging as an educational tool to improve EFL writing skills and the reasons why this pedagogy worked, or did not work, for them and, in either case, why. The statistical evidence, together with the data collected through a linguistic analysis of writing samples, blog posts, focus group discussion and in-depth interviews at the end of the intervention, provided a multifaceted insight into the results of the experiment.

4.8.1 Explanatory Design

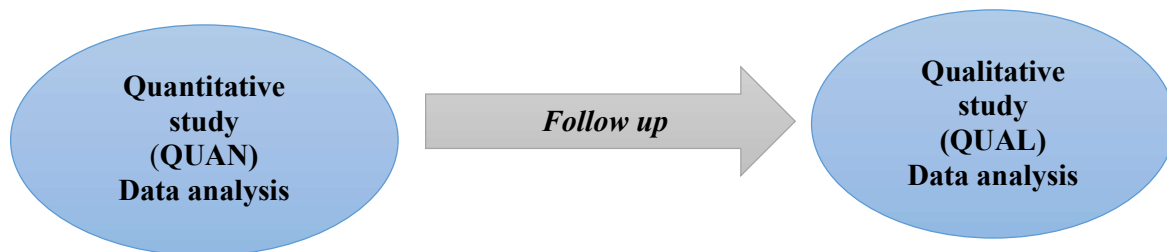


Figure 4.1: Sequential Explanatory Mixed-methods Design

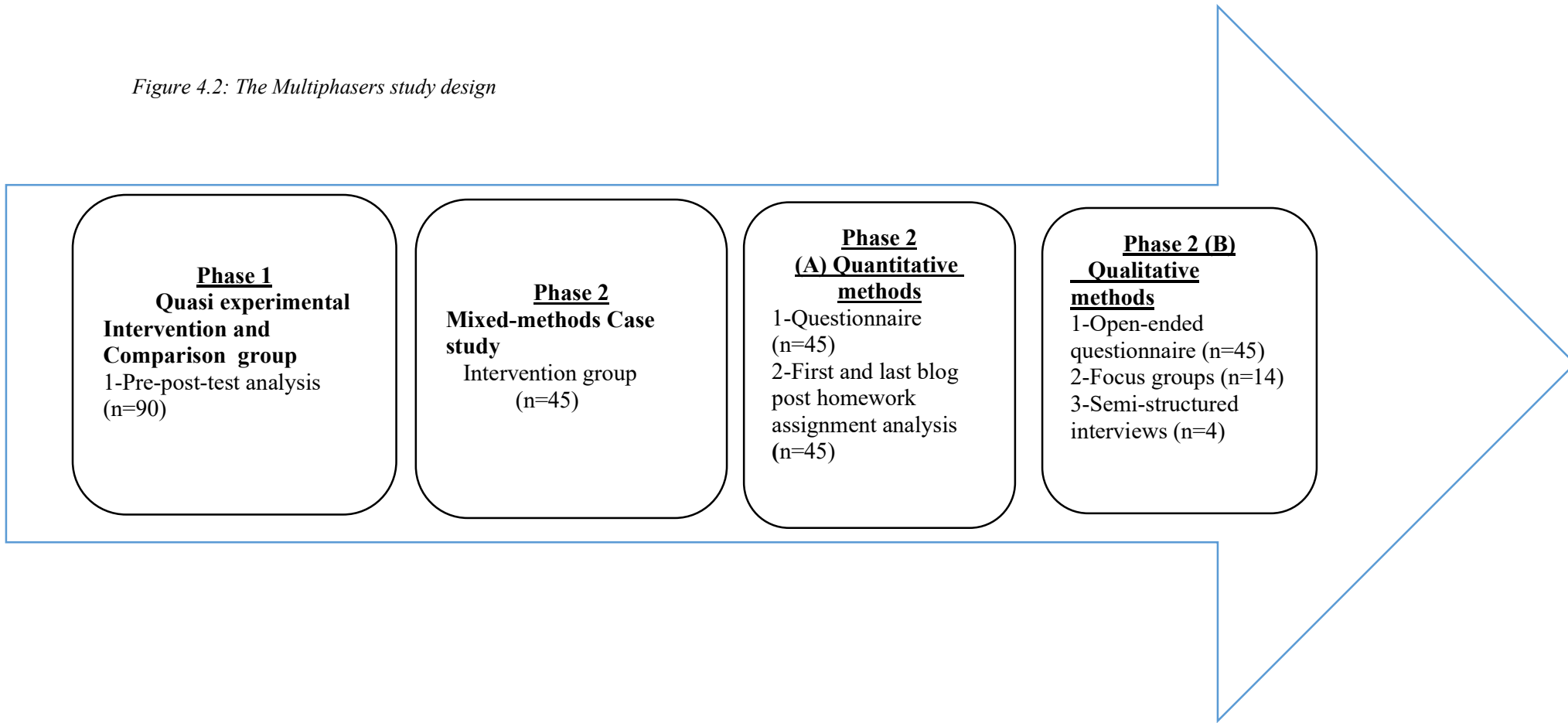
This study was set up to make use of the explanatory design, as presented by Creswell and Plano-Clark (2007). The lead approach will be a quantitative one, with qualitative findings being used to explicate the findings where necessary, and the approaches will be used relatively linearly, in line with a design proposed by Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009). The possible variations in the research designs, both of the sequencing and the respective dominance of qualitative and quantitative methods, are presented (Brannen,

2005; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Over time, a number of combinations have been recommended by scholars such as Bryman (2004), who offers a fourfold classification of mixed-method studies that depends on the particular kinds of main data used, followed by other kinds of data, and Creswell (1995), who distinguishes two further types of multi-method research in which both quantitative and qualitative research are administered roughly at the same time or are given equal importance in the overall research plan. In mixed-methods research, the types regularly co-occur as the different research methods are employed to examine different aspects of the phenomenon being investigated. I took account of the aggregation of different types and designs occurring in mixed-methods research and, considering my research questions, I found a design that would help me answer them in the best way possible. My objective in the present study used the qualitative results to enhance interpretation of the impact of blogging on student writing development and took the participants' personalised responses to explicate or add to the quantitative output.

4.9 The Study Design

The main purpose of this study was the exploration and explanation of the impact of the use of educational blogs on EFL students' writing development. According to Saunders et al. (2012), the mixed-methods approach in this current study is described as a multi-phase sequential explanatory research design. This study is divided into two main strands (i.e. quantitative and qualitative) of data gathering. Both methodologies were equal in priority to answer the research questions of this study. Finally, this research approach is illustrated as follows in figure 4. 2 below.

Figure 4.2: The Multiphasers study design



4.9.1 Phase 1: Quasi experimental

Quantitative strand: pre- and post-tests were utilised to see the impact of educational blogs on EFL students' writing ability by comparing two groups, namely the intervention and comparison groups. This quantitative approach was anticipated to be helpful in assessing the impact of the educational blog on the intervention participants' writing development but less helpful in answering how and why the intervention improved their writing.

4.9.2 Phase 2: Mixed-methods case study

This was adopted only with the intervention group in order to gain a deeper understanding of the use of the educational blog as a pedagogical method in teaching and learning EFL students' writing, with more emphasis on the qualitative strand. Qualitative approaches can equally be helpful in answering the how and why by providing in-depth data to understand a phenomenon and reveal issues behind the statistical results. This approach consisted of two phases:

4.9.3 Phase 2. A: Quantitative strand:

- 1- A closed-ended questionnaire was designed to measure the participants' attitudes to the use of educational blogs in the English language classroom and was divided into eight dimensions.
- 2- First and last posts of the students' homework assignment writing sample were analysed to determine how their writing had developed.

4.9.4 Phase 2. B: Qualitative strand:

This phase used a range of qualitative methods to explore the impact of the intervention.

- 1-An open-ended questionnaire was designed to discover the perceptions of all the participants in the intervention group about the use of educational blogs in teaching

and learning English to explain the result gathered from the five Likert-scaled items on the questionnaire (n=45).

2- Two focus group discussions with 14 participants, seven in each group, who were low achievers based on the pre-test of the intervention group. The purpose of the focus group was to explore the participants' perceptions of the affordances of the use of educational blogs.

3- Semi-structured interviews with four participants who were selected purposefully from the focus group as being those whose writing had improved the most during the intervention, based on the post-test and the last post homework assignment writing samples. The interviews focused on participants' experiences of the use of educational blogs and on the elements of writing in which they had improved.

4.9.5 Phase 3: Integration of quantitative and qualitative methods

According to Patton (2002), quantitative and qualitative approaches can be combined in one study if the research problem needs methodological triangulation to increase its reliability and validity. This phase integrates the findings from phases 1 and 2, as well as evaluating the extent to which phase 2 (B) of the study was able to explain the findings of phase 2 (A). Finally, the open-ended questionnaire, focus group and interview explained the results that the quantitative strands revealed. Their interpretation of the issues was important in understanding the study inquiry in greater depth, enabling me to look behind the statistical results from another angle.

4.10 The Sampling Strategy

Quantitative studies have proposed several different techniques and strategies for sampling where the type and size of the sample determine the reliability, validity and generalizability of the study in question. According to Sapsford (2007), one indication of an effective sampling strategy is that, even though there are margins for error, the sample should be representative of the population from which it is taken. Additionally,

it should be possible to readily compare groups within the sample, and it should be possible to assess differences between these groups of the sample in the larger population.

The three most popular sampling strategies available traditionally are probability sampling, purposive sampling and convenience sampling (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). The random sampling technique is defined as “one in which every member has an equal, non-zero chance of being selected” (Sapsford, 2007, p. 62). Using a random sample for this study was impossible owing to the nature of the environment in which the research was to be conducted. The Preparatory Year Programme consists of three streams, namely humanities, sciences, and health, so each stream has different textbooks and, moreover, their levels are not the same. The level was beginner for the humanities and sciences streams, whereas the level of students for the health stream was intermediate. The classes were assigned by the English Language Centre, and the teacher or the students had no choice but to be part of a particular assigned class. I chose my samples from the health stream because they had a good command of English as these students were at the intermediate level and had good technological skills also.

The sample comprised one intervention group and one comparison group. The phase one quasi-experimental study employed convenience sampling which involves easily accessible and deliberate sampling, according to Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009). While it is warned that the participants chosen by convenience sampling “may not be the most appropriate to answer the research questions” and may “often result in biased data”, since the sample chosen for this study came from that both the comparison and the intervention groups had similar backgrounds to each other, they were the most appropriate group that could be chosen based on the questions of the research. Additionally, in this case, I had to use convenience sampling because being one of the

tutors in the English Language Centre, I was assigned two classes composed of 45 students each. The students had similar abilities and level of grasp of the English language. Since both classes were included in the research, a total of 90 students formed the quasi-experiment study. The comparison group was also taught by me.

The sample size was, in essence, dictated by the nature of my work since it was not possible for me to enrol more students in my classes because the English lab classes could not accommodate more than 45 students. The second phase of this study revolved around a sequential mixed-methods case study comprised of quantitative and qualitative methods. This was primarily because the goals of a piece of research, particularly in qualitative studies, emphasise the level of understanding of specific phenomena and smaller sample sizes often prove more useful in such cases (Morgan, 2008). Moreover, Creswell (2009) recommends the purposive sampling technique, which was adopted in this study in phase two in order to gain greater insight into the issue at hand. Since generalizability is not the aim of this study, the case study method was appropriate in this particular scenario. Additionally, the qualitative sample was chosen based on the following criteria:

1. A total of 14 out of 45 participants from the intervention group were selected purposively based on the pre-test analysis and these students obtained low writing scores in the phase of the intervention group. They were divided into two focus groups of seven participants each.
2. After a semi-structured interview, the four participants who had improved the most in writing during the post-test and homework assessment phases were purposefully selected from the focus group participants.

Since I was to obtain a combination of qualitative and quantitative data, it was imperative for me to work with data that could easily be managed in order to obtain results that would provide value. While I understand that my sample size was too

small to generalize my findings and the results based on the study that I had conducted, I firmly believe that this research and its results can serve as an effective starting point for the investigation of improvement of English writing skills. Figure 4.3, below, explains how the intervention group worked.

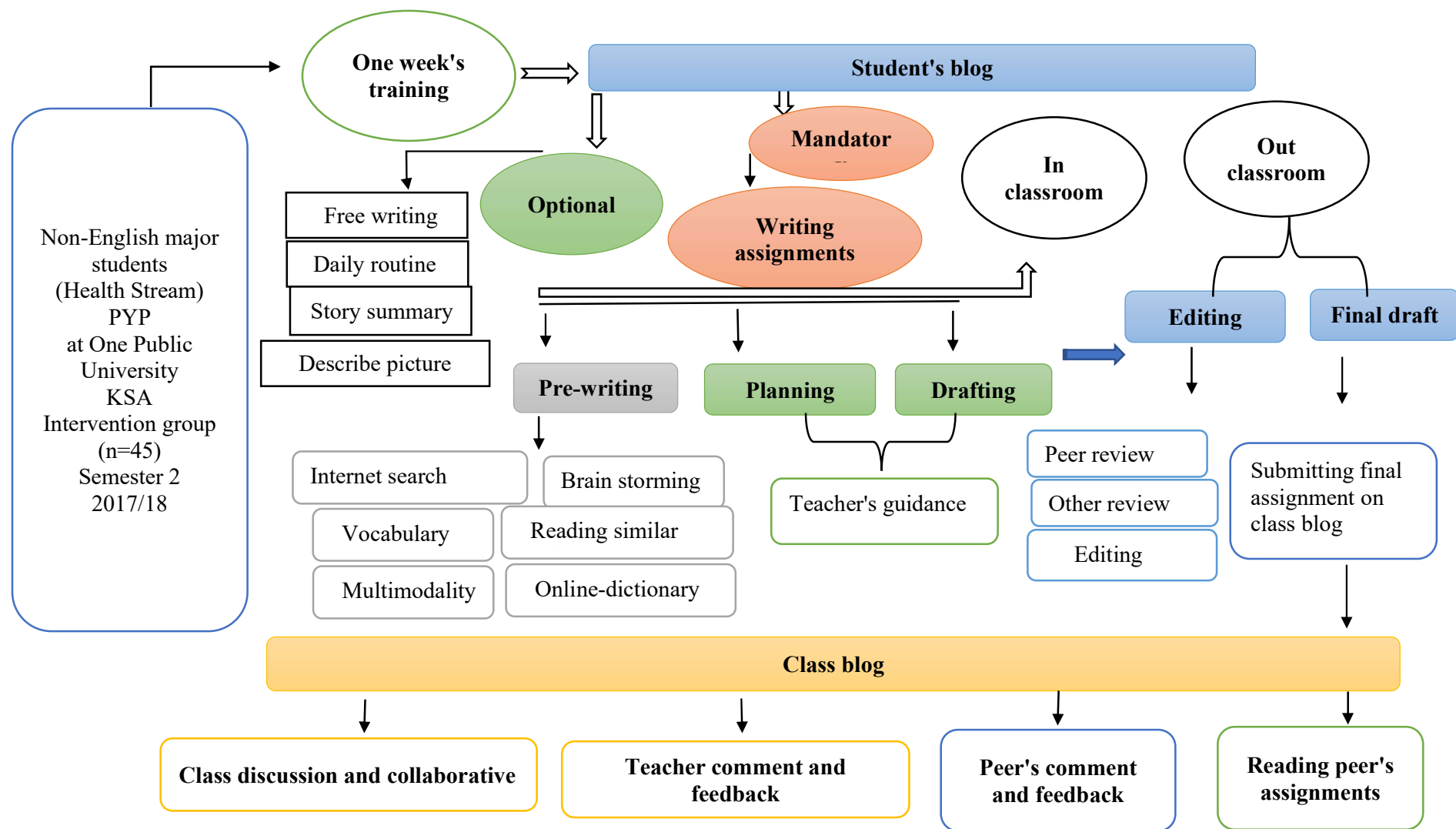


Figure 4.3: The Intervention group procedure

The above figure explains how the intervention group worked and the causal relationship between blogging and writing development.

Generally speaking, the procedure for the intervention group followed certain steps:

- 1- Before the start of the course, students had a week's training (three hours a day for five days) on the features of blogs and how to create them. This was in addition to their normal study.
 - a) I helped students to create their personal blogs by providing tutorials on how to use blogs, in general, and in education.
 - b) In a computer lab, students learned how to design their own blog from the website <http://edublogs.org/>, a popular and easy-to-use free blog provider.

Students learned to: 1) create an account, username and password; 2) name the blog; and 3) choose a template. Once the blog was created, the students could add as many postings as they liked.

- 2- During the course, students were responsible for writing their assignments on their personal blog and then posting a final draft on the class blog.
- 3- Students were also required to give feedback and comments on their peers' writing on both personal and class blogs.
- 4- I created a class blog on Edublogs.
- 5- The class blog posts included a general welcome message, instructions on how to write comments on the entries, and a slideshow about the content of the writing course by me as a researcher and tutor at the same time.
- 6- I identified frequently mentioned topics in the blog posts, read the posts, undertook the activities, and shared my experiences with the class.
- 7- I helped students with their problems and enquiries related to technology and the research during the course period.

4.11 Research Questions and methods of data collection

No.	RESEARCH QUESTION	DATA COLLECTION	INSTRUMENT	SAMPLE SIZE	SAMPLE TYPE
1	To what extent does an intervention using blogging improve students' writing?	Text analysis	Pre-post test	90 students, both comparison and intervention groups	Convenience
2	In what ways does an intervention using blogging students' writing?	Focus groups	Focus groups	14 students	Purposive
		Text analysis	Blog posts	45 students, intervention group	
		Semi-structured interview	Semi-structured interview	4 students	
3	What are the attitudes of students towards blogs as a writing development tool?	Questionnaires	Questionnaires	45 students, intervention group	Convenience
		Open-ended questionnaires	Open-ended questionnaires	45 students, intervention group	
4	What are students' perceptions of the affordances of blogging as a way of developing writing? a. Overall b. Students' blogs c. Class blogs	Focus group	Focus groups	14 students	Purposive
		Semi-structured interviews	Semi-structured interviews	4 students	

Table 4.2: Research questions and methods

It is clearly demonstrated in the table above that this research address four questions and various methods to support answering these questions quantitatively and qualitatively to generate a clear picture of the phenomena.

Question one was analysed at two levels, inferential and descriptive, using SPSS software. At the inferential level, these variables were analysed for significant differences between the intervention and the comparison groups, using Mann Whitney

non-parametric test techniques, as applicable. The test was done to see if there were any differences in pre- and post-test scores in paragraph origination, paragraph cohesion and coherence, variety of sentences, grammatical range and accuracy, and lexical range and accuracy. At the descriptive level, there were two parts. Firstly, minimum, maximum and mean scores of the pre- and post-test writing samples were reported. Secondly, for the intervention group only, their minimum, maximum and mean scores in paragraph origination, paragraph cohesion and coherence, variety of sentences, grammatical range and accuracy, and lexical range and accuracy were arrived at to investigate the differences between the first and last posts of the students' homework assignment writing samples. Additionally, the same procedure was used when the first and last homework assignments posted on the class blog were analysed. Question three was analysed statistically using SPSS software. Descriptive, demographic frequencies and mean scores of the participants' responses to each study variable were reported.

The qualitative questions, two and four, were analysed comprehensively using inductive and deductive thematic analysis, as discussed in Chapter Six. MAXQDA software was used to organise the themes and codes. Firstly, initial codes were identified from the open-ended questionnaire items, focus groups and semi-structured interviews. Later, these codes were clustered under categories according to their similarities. Secondly, these categories were classified under broader themes. Finally, four major themes emerged from the qualitative instruments.

4.12 Background to the Participants

The participants in this study were enrolled in a Preparatory Year Programme (PYP). They were Health Stream students in the second semester of the 2017/18 session at a public university in Saudi Arabia; they were not English majors. The total number of participants was 90, and they were all males because the education system in Saudi Arabia is gender segregated. Additionally, since this study used qualitative methods

such as focus groups and semi-structured interviews, it would have been problematic due to cultural issues to conduct interviews with female students. All participants in the study were aged between 18 and 20 years old. Based on the eligibility requirements of the university, all students that were part of the sample had similar linguistic ability and levels of maturity. Moreover, all of these students were Saudi nationals and had completed high school in Saudi Arabia. Since the students had recently been enrolled, none of them had been exposed to any advanced discipline-specific knowledge or information that would give them a competitive edge. All students had completed their first semester of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) with beginner level books 1 and 2 and were headed towards intermediate level English for Academic Purposes (EAP) books 3 and 4 in the second semester of the 2017/18 session. Once the PYP was complete, students were to begin in their desired disciplines at the end of the second semester.

4.13 Ethical Issues

When undertaking research projects, it is important to take account of ethical considerations. This is particularly true of academic research that involves people in the field of education. It has been said that the ‘search for rules’ is an essential ethical dimension to any research into human behaviour (Pring, 2000, p. 142). As Wellington (2000) points out, ethical considerations must be ascribed a high level of importance at the outset and this should be continued throughout any research project. In 2018, the British Education Research Association’s (BERA) ethical guidelines for educational research were published and these provide valuable and exhaustive guidance for practitioners. A considerable number of other similar guides have been produced in recent times. Clearly, a single source of guidance is unlikely to deal with every potential ethical issue affecting research programmes. “Moral judgements or decisions require a great deal of deliberation in the light of many factors which have to be taken into account” (Pring, 2000, p. 142).

At every point in this research programme, ethical considerations were meticulously taken into account. Fundamental concerns derived from the British Education Research Association's ethical guidelines (BERA, 2018) include the acquisition of informed consent from participants, advising them of their right to cease participation at any time if they so wish, and their right to anonymity and confidentiality. As set out in the Appendix, a Certificate of Ethical Approval was obtained from the University of Exeter's Ethics Committee following detailed review of the University's requirements. Again, as described in the Appendix, the University provided the approval to carry out the research and to make use of university resources. Focus groups were audio-recorded, and the interviews were audio-recorded, which naturally raises ethical issues. The Appendix shows the description of the programme that was issued by mail to participants, and the consent forms that were completed by participants confirming their understanding and acceptance of the process. Further details are provided in the account of the data collection process. Given that the research instruments (in this case a questionnaire, questions for a focus group and questions for interviews) required translation from English into Arabic, and that completed questionnaires had to be translated from Arabic into English, close consideration was given to potential ethical matters and the translations were subjected to expert review and validation to ensure that sense and meaning were maintained. Moreover, regarding the confidentiality and privacy of the participants' data, I followed this procedure:

- 1- I have sole access to all the participants' information, and the data is password protected and stored on my private laptop.
- 2- Answers and general information will be used only for the purpose of this study.

- 3- No names were recorded on the pre-post-tests, blog posts, questionnaires, focus groups or interviews: numerical signifiers were used instead.
- 4- Data from the pre-post-tests, blog posts, questionnaires, focus group discussions and interviews were anonymised at the point of transcription or analysis and will be destroyed once the study is completed.
- 5- The name of the university in which I conducted this study was anonymised.

In addition, another ethical concern is that the intervention would affect the scores of participants' formal course assessments. However, this was addressed by ensuring that the writing was not used for grading purposes for their formal academic course. All the written samples that were collected were outside of course requirements and therefore did not contribute to the assessment grades. The other key ethical concern was the teachers' impact on the outcome of the results as I had dual role as teacher and researcher. The intervention group was by the same person, and teacher performance may have influenced the outcome of the study. To address this concern, the comparison group was taught by me as well. This minimised the possibility of a tutor effect to a great extent; however, it cannot be denied that there may have been some influence from the teacher in terms of attitudes and beliefs. I attempted to mitigate this by closely scrutinizing my own beliefs and assumptions and attempting to set them aside and ensure that I gave the same amount of energy and attention to both intervention and comparison classes. I also attempted to ensure that there was no contamination between the intervention and comparison groups: the intervention groups did not know what the comparison group doing and vice versa.

4.14 Practical procedure of data collection

The data collection process involved seven consecutive elements:

4.14.1 Permissions

Prior to commencing the data collection process, a certificate of ethical approval was obtained from the Graduate School of Education at the University of Exeter. As set out in Appendix (4), the certificate contained a summary of the programme and descriptions of the topics and the ethical matters requiring attention. Also set out in Appendix (5), is the permission provided by the University, where the actual study was conducted, and which supported the programme. The Appendix further contains the forms in which the sample participants provided their consent (for the intervention group participants form, Appendix (6 and 9) for the comparison group participants) and the programme description which was mailed to them with the consent forms (for intervention group participants' letter, Appendix (7 and 11), for comparison group and intervention group participants in its Arabic version (see Appendix 8).

4.15 Data Collection Methods

In most educational research studies, the research questions direct what methods should be adopted. According to Crotty (2003, p. 3), methods are “the techniques or procedures used to gather and collect data related to some research questions or hypotheses”. To answer the four research questions of the current study, I designed five research instruments: a pre- and post-test, questionnaire, focus group, semi-structured interview and textual analysis (first and last assignments).

4.15.1 Quantitative elements of the study

Three quantitative methods are discussed below in detailed

4.15.1.1 Writing sample (pre-post-test)

Both the pre- and post-test were designed to shed light on the English writing ability of the participants, in both the comparison and intervention groups, at the beginning and end of the course. Moreover, they were designed to provide information to determine

whether the use of the blogging improved the learners' writing abilities. To test the current capacity of the participants in terms of their writing abilities, learners in both the intervention and comparison groups sat a writing pre-test at the start of the study, which provided a measure of their general linguistic capability, as well as detailed information about specific strengths and areas for development. The test was chosen from a bank of existing tests, in the English Language Centre at One Public University and the test was designed by an expert in the 'exam unit' following the commonly used format and assessment criteria (see writing tests in appendix (1)). Moreover, I used five writing criteria in order to assess the students' writing ability (grammatical accuracy, range of vocabulary, range of sentences, cohesion and coherence, and the structure of paragraphs). Scores out of six were given to each element so that the total score was 30/30. The test was corrected by me and another writing teacher from the ELC where I work. We corrected each student's test twice in order to assess the inter-rater test reliability. Only three texts were given different total scores: I gave one student 14/30 and the other teacher gave him 16/30, so in this case we gave the average score of 15/30 (see the test assessment criteria in appendix (3)).

The same test was repeated as a post-test for the two groups when the treatment was finished, to quantify the distinction, assuming there was any, in terms of the different writing abilities of both groups. To ensure validity, all the tests were evaluated by three experienced teachers: the researcher and another two writing teachers from within in the English Language Centre at the University.

4.15.1.2 Questionnaire

Wiersma (1986, p. 179) defines the questionnaire as a list of statements or questions to which the individual is asked to respond in writing. The response of a person can vary from a comprehensive written statement to a simple checkmark. According to Al Alassaf (1998), questionnaires can be of several different kinds: they can be open,

closed, or both. Each of the types can be used to achieve specific aims depending on the particular conditions in which they are used. Cohen et al. (2011, p. 256) reported that the questionnaire is the most commonly used method in educational research because of its descriptive quality. The present research used a closed and an open questionnaire. This questionnaire contained questions that the participants had to answer based on a five-point Likert scale. A Likert scale consists of five-point choices for each of the items in a list in order to reinforce the response obtained from participants. Typically, the answers range from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. The layout of a Likert scale makes completing a questionnaire easier than would be assumed, and it takes less time than other formats (Oppenheim, 2009; Gay & Airasian, 2000).

Bryman (2012) highlighted several positive aspects of the use of questionnaires. For instance, administering a questionnaire is a comparatively easy method. The responses are free from interviewer bias and the respondents find the questionnaire format more convenient than other methods of data gathering. Another advantage, according to Black (1999), is that questionnaires can be used to explore the beliefs, perceptions and attitudes of respondents. Wimmer and Dominick (2000) noted that an advantage of using questionnaires is that data can be obtained from respondents in a realistic setting. Questionnaires allow respondents enough time to give their responses; they have time to reflect on their opinions before expressing them in the questionnaire, so their answers are a truer reflection of their opinions and, therefore, more valid (Gay and Airasian, 2000; Oppenheim, 1992). The questionnaire method may therefore make for a data collection procedure that is effective, accurate and viable. It allows researchers to know exactly what they need to know and how they can measure the variables which are needed (Sekaran, 1992). The responses can be entered into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), which can be used to

analyse the raw data to obtain usable results (Khalil et al., 2011). This study's quantitative data were analysed at two levels, inferential and descriptive, using SPSS software.

However, every method presents a set of advantages and a set of disadvantages. Questionnaires offer plenty of advantages but there are also disadvantages which researchers need to be aware of. Wimmer and Dominick (2000) believe that not administering questionnaires personally carries a potentially high cost, especially if the sample is dispersed over a large geographical area. Also, Bryman (2012) believes there is the possibility of missing some data. The questionnaire is also liable to participants failing to provide genuine responses or misinterpreting questions so it is necessary to combat these problems by piloting the questionnaire and providing time to answer questions properly.

In this study, the questionnaire was administered and distributed personally by me as a researcher and two colleagues, made possible because of the small sample size. I made an effort to minimise the disadvantages posed by the questionnaire by the following means:

1. Conducting a follow-up focus group discussion and semi-structured interview in order to understand the problems with in-depth details.
2. Conducting the questionnaire on a small sample. This reduced the time needed to distribute the questionnaire and receive the responses so that the results could be collected in a timely manner.

The use of the questionnaire for this study has hence been justified by this section. The section which follows gives additional information about the design of the questionnaire used in this study.

Design of the questionnaire

Considering the discussion above, on the advantages and disadvantages of questionnaires, it is clear that a lot of thought needs to be given to constructing the questionnaire. This section will discuss the process of designing the questionnaire. First of all, most of the questionnaire items used in this study were adopted from several studies (e.g. Aljumah, 2012; Fageeh, 2011; Vurdien, 2013). However, Wimmick and Dominick (2000) stated that the researcher needs to be aware of the best qualities of questionnaire design, suggesting the following means of writing a high-quality questionnaire:

- (a) Add instructions wherever they are needed;
- (b) Do not include too many questions, to avoid it becoming overwhelming;
- (c) Give a clear and instructive introduction to increase the rate of response;
- (d) Give it an attractive layout;
- (e) Pilot the questionnaire.

It is clear from the discussion in the previous section that the researcher had to make sure the questionnaire fulfilled certain requirements of standard questionnaire design. This ensured that the respondents did not take too much time or effort to respond. It also made sure that the collection of data and its reliability were at an acceptable level (Oppenheim, 1992). It is also advised to avoid double-barrelled questions, negative questions, and anything vague or anything insensitive (Al Alassaf, 2010). Cohen et al. (2011, p. 403) say that researchers should make a point not to use leading or insensitive questions. They should also ask more closed than open questions to make data analysis easier. Wimmick and Dominick (2000) point out that it is necessary to make sure that every question has a relevant link to an aspect of the research being conducted and that every question works towards achieving some goal of the research.

Regarding the introduction to the questionnaire, Alassaf (2010) recommended that it contain some idea of the aims of the research. It should also include the following:

- (a) The importance of the role that participants play in achieving the results of the study;
- (b) The importance of the purpose of the study;
- (c) An assurance of confidentiality;
- (d) The date and method of returning the completed questionnaire to the researcher.

Some researchers consider that informing the respondents of these things is counterproductive for the research. An example would be the argument presented by Wimmer and Dominick (2000). Their belief is that the participants should not have any information about the aims of the research because knowing the aims might accidentally encourage them to give answers that they feel will be pleasing to the researchers, rather than expressing themselves in a completely honest manner. They will no longer be completely truthful in their responses. This bias could potentially corrupt the results of the study and invalidate the research. Nevertheless, I felt it necessary to give participants at least a general introduction to the study, which would be included with the paper copy of the questionnaire. This would include the nature of the study, its aims, and information validating the research, information pertaining to the researcher, a guarantee of confidentiality, and the means of returning the completed questionnaire. Doing this created a certain sense of trust so that the participants were more inclined to respond to the questionnaire. In fact, they were so eager to respond that some even provided the researcher with their email addresses in order to find out the final results of the study.

The appropriate length of a questionnaire has also been a subject of debate among researchers. Wimmer and Dominick (2000) presented their opinion that the questionnaire's length should be based on the percentage of completion and

participation. They said that some elements help researchers to control the length of their questionnaire: their research budget, the purpose of their study, the time available to carry out the research, and the attributes of the population being studied. According to Khalil et al. (2011), researchers need to avoid designing questionnaires that are too long. It takes a lot of time and effort on the participants' behalf to complete long questionnaires. There is also the fact to consider that if a questionnaire is too long, it can simply result in the respondent becoming bored and disinterested in the study altogether. This increases the risk of incorrect data input or misrepresentation of their actual views because of carelessness when entering data. A shorter questionnaire has a better chance of getting complete responses.

Despite this, disagreement still remains among researchers. Balnaves and Caputi (2001) are of the opinion that the length of a questionnaire should be, at most, 12 pages or 125 items. Bryman (2012) noted that clear presentation of the questionnaire with concise instructions facilitates participants' eagerness to respond. Alassaf (2010) also noted the importance of the layout of the questionnaire, saying that a good layout is vital to increase the response rate. The layout plays an important role in stimulating participants to complete the questionnaire. Bryman (2010) recommended that including statements like "you must choose only one answer" or "you can choose more than one response" can be vital when it comes to reducing the amount of missing data in a questionnaire. Bryman (2010) also said that the response format throughout the questionnaire should be vertical and advocated leaving an ample amount of space between the questions, especially when there are open-ended questions. Based on the discussion above, I made sure that the layout of the questionnaire was not only appropriate to stimulate a high response rate but also very clear. An example would be that the researcher provided guidelines pertaining to how participants should fill in their responses.

Purpose of the questionnaire

Summarising what has been discussed above, the researcher applied a questionnaire to measure the attitudes of the students in the intervention group. The final questionnaire, in particular, was designed to achieve the following goals:

- To determine the influence of the educational blog on students' writing development;
- To collect general demographic information about participants', use of technology, i.e. internet access in their homes;
- To obtain participants' perceptions of the use of educational blogs in learning English writing skills (on the open-ended questions).

I conducted an extensive review of the relevant literature before developing the initial questionnaire. The researcher also used his personal experience of having taught in the university, and of informal discussions that he has had with teachers and students, to develop the first questionnaire. This made sure that the resulting questionnaire was relevant, and that it fulfilled the necessary aims of the research. Once the first questionnaire was developed, a pilot study was conducted, designed with the goal of achieving the aims of this study.

The questionnaire was divided into three sections. These were not explicitly distinct sections defined in the questionnaire, but they were easy to identify. The first section within the questionnaire was based on obtaining demographic information about the experience of the participants in using technology and networks in general and using educational blogs in learning English language as mentioned above, i.e. network access and the kind of devices they had. The second section of the questionnaire asked questions about the participants' attitudes towards the use of the educational blog and its impact on the development of their writing skills. Finally, section three consisted of open-ended questions specifically included with the purpose of gaining subjective information through the reactions written in the learners' own terms (Jackson &

Trochim, 2002). Additionally, these open-ended sections would be able to offer realistic cases and illustrative sayings and prompt the raising of a few unforeseen questions (Dornyei, 2003). Accordingly, the purpose of the open-ended questions in this study was in order to obtain a holistic picture from all of the 45 participants in the intervention group regarding the use of the educational blog in teaching and learning English writing skills. (see appendix 12).

4.15.1.3 Blog assignment posts

The second research question involved in this study sought to investigate the content of students' blog posts, to determine whether and how their writing skills improved. The blog assignments are all available in appendix (2). The first and last blog posts were analysed to determine the extent to which students' writing had improved. In the first blog, students were asked to write about describing a photo. In the final blog, students were asked to write about shopping in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, the first task was arguably easier than the last - it had a visual prompt; students didn't have to generate ideas so independently, could use a simple tense and so on. The fact that the final blog task was arguably more challenging than the first blog means that the improvement in students' writing is even more remarkable. The collected data helped me to monitor any developments in the learners' writing skills during the study. This was achieved by conducting a comparative analysis of students' first and last blog posts so that I could ascertain whether or not blogging had helped to improve the students' EFL writing skills. Moreover, I intended to compare the participants' last blog posts with their post-test in order to detect any differences between them. The same writing ability was assessed, and the writing criteria used in the pre- and post-tests were used here too (see appendix (3)).

4.16 Qualitative Elements of the Study

The qualitative methods are discussed below in detailed

4.16.1 Focus Group Discussion

In this study there were two focus groups of seven students each. One meeting was held for each group during the course, in week six. I moderated all group discussions. All group participants were informed of the date, place and time of each meeting via email and WhatsApp prior to the meeting day. Moreover, a code number was designed to each group and each participant, e.g. FG1S1. To support the objectives and rationale for conducting the focus groups in this study, a brief discussion on focus group interviews is provided here.

According to Rabbie (2004), the focus group interview is a qualitative data collection method that involves the use of detailed group interviews wherein candidates are purposefully selected even if they are not a representative sample of the population. Therefore, as Gibbs (2012) argues, focus groups can be useful sources of qualitative data as they provide information about individuals' range of feelings and ideas regarding specific issues, in addition to illuminating variation across individuals and group perspectives. To conduct focus group discussions, the first step is to address the group composition and group size (Gill et al., 2008). To gain the best quality discussion, great care needs to be taken in the focus group composition. Thus, it is imperative that the impact of group mix (which affects the interaction in the group) be given due consideration by the researcher (Pontin, 2000). Following this, as Creswell (2012) argues, the next step should be preparing an interview schedule. Similar to research interviews, focus groups have a loosely structured schedule of the topics decided for discussion. Morgan (1998) described focus group interviews as interviews of several people being conducted simultaneously, noting the complexity of interaction. This creates focus group interviews which depend on the interaction between people in the group based on topics which are given to them by the

researcher. Morgan (1998) stated that the interaction between group members is necessary for the focus group to achieve their task. Cohen et al. (2011) also made note of this in defining the focus group interview as a kind of group interview but with a key difference: it does not necessarily rely on the to-and-fro between interviewees and interviewer; instead, it relies on the interaction that the interviewees have with each other, based on the nature of the topic given to them by the researcher. Since focus group interviews can be conducted at multiple levels of research, they can be used within the main data collection phase to boost a programme of activities (Barbour, (2007), or in the initial phases where the researchers are exploring the aims of the study they are conducting (Kitzinger, (1995), or to evaluate the impact of a programme once it nears completion (Stewart & Shamsdani, 1990). This indicates that one of the main goals of a focus group interview is to give an opportunity to the people who otherwise might not be able to articulate what they want to say, but who may have valuable views and opinions. Based on Liamputtong (2011), these excluded individuals are empowered by focus group interviews. Kitzinger (1995) pointed out that focus group interviews have been used by researchers to study the attitudes of subjects. The focus group method works particularly well when it comes to examining people's knowledge and experiences. It can be used not only to explore what people think about a topic but also how and why they think in a particular manner.

According to Stewart and Shamsdani (1990), focus group interviews can also be used for examining or developing hypotheses. Focus group interviews can be used as a method to test hypotheses, thereby having a place as a method of confirmation. Their application as a method to test hypotheses is viable when a researcher has good reason to believe that a particular hypothesis is correct, and the researcher wants to confirm it. Even a small group can be used to confirm a hypothesis. Kitzinger (1995) used focus groups with the expectation that they could give more validity to a questionnaire

by creating an understanding of the perception of participants about the use of the blogs for teaching and learning English language skills. He stated that “Focus Group discussion of a questionnaire is ideal for testing the phrasing of questions and is also useful in explaining or exploring survey results”. Bloor et al. (2002, p.11) said that a focus group can help researchers understand and explain their findings from quantitative surveys by saying: “[f]ocus groups may also be used to interpret survey results, to provide meaning to reports of attitudes or behaviour”. According to him, the use of focus group interviews also allows the researcher to obtain multiple perspectives on the same phenomenon. Liamputtong (2011) and Stewart and Shamsdani (1990) similarly said that the findings from this method can allow a better understanding of the response that has been obtained from participants in quantitative data collection.

There are several advantages of using the focus group method. According to Cohen et al. (2011), one of the first advantages is being able to study data from multiple groups of participants. Additionally, the researcher can obtain data in a smaller amount of time at a lower cost in comparison to other methods. Focus group interviews are also a flexible tool for researchers to assess a variety of problems with multiple individuals in the most diverse settings. However, while the focus group method has a significant number of advantages, it does not come without drawbacks. There is always the aspect of negative interaction among participants, which can influence the opinions that some of them might have. It can cause the coercion of some participants to change their point of view on certain matters, which can lead to the generation of data that might not necessarily be a true reflection of the entire group (Cohen et al., 2011). In addition, Breen (2007, p. 467) argued that “[d]ata obtained are very context-specific and, therefore, not generalizable to other institutions or contexts”. This was also noted by Stewart (2006). The focus group represents a

relatively small proportion of the population, so the responses from the focus group cannot be generalized to a larger population due to the small number of respondents.

Bryman (2012) stated a number of other disadvantages of focus group interviews:

- Obtaining a large amount of data is not a problem for a researcher; the problem is analysing the volume of data.
- A moderator has less control over the course of the discussion taking place in a focus group interview in comparison to a one-on-one interview.
- It takes a lot of time to transcribe the data obtained from a focus group interview because the researcher has to distinguish between the voices of the individual participants.

There are also situations where a focus group interview might not be an adequate measure since it can potentially cause discomfort within the group. In a group discussion on any matter, participants have the tendency to talk at the same time. This makes it difficult to comprehend what each of them is saying something that never happens in a one-on-one interview.

In the current study the focus group interview method saved a lot of time and cost since it allowed me to assess the impact of educational blogs on improving the writing of students. The disadvantages were there but the researcher managed to conduct a successful interview. The participants engaged fully in the focus group interview and they seemed to make an effort and put their perspectives forth in an articulate manner. Finally, once it was decided that the focus group interview method would be the most adequate way of moving forward, how it would be applied had to be considered when it came to the context of research. I used the focus group interview after the data from the questionnaire, the post-test and blog posts had been analysed. This allowed me to determine the areas which the focus group interview had to explore to obtain the participants' perceptions of the affordances of blogging and its impact on their writing

development and to discover other issues not covered or answered in the questionnaire. Another purpose of the focus group was that it would elicit information that would feed into the design of the interview. In another words, the focus group discussion was relied upon to fill in the gaps when alternative sources of information were not sufficiently effective.

In order to obtain a sample for the focus group, I asked participants who were interested in the results of the study to provide their contact information on the first page (their telephone numbers and email addresses). This way, I could inform them of the results and interview them in order to confirm certain aspects of the results from the pre-test and questionnaire. This resulted in a significant number of participants expressing their desire to be made aware of the results and they were more eager to participate in focus group interviews. Their willingness to participate in focus group interviews allowed the selection of 14 participants from the intervention group who were at a low level in writing based on the pre-test so that only those 14 students were selected purposively. They were divided into two groups of seven participants each. The selected participants were sent emails and WhatsApp messages to inform them about the questions, the suggested location, the date, time, aims and agenda of the focus groups. They were informed about all details a week in advance. This gave them more than enough time to prepare for the event. Follow-up emails and phone calls were also given in order to avoid any conflict with other appointments they might have had (Winlow et al., 2013). Separate sessions were organised for both groups. The chosen venue for the focus group interviews was a convenient one, based on the majority of the sample. This is an important consideration to make. Winlow et al. noted (2013) that the researcher should prepare a suitable setting for the focus group. There were refreshments served, the setting was comfortable, and the researcher used a U-shaped classroom table in order to keep participants close together. As I was the

moderator, I created a relaxed environment. Beyond that, I obtained explicit permission from the participants so that the information from both sessions could be accurately recorded. The moderator is “responsible for taking notes that inform potential emergent questions to ask” (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009, p. 4).

Craig and Cook (2007) insisted that the moderator of a focus group needs to establish a strong sense of trust by building a relationship with the participants. This would encourage participation from all members of the group. The researcher of this study explained to the participants that there was no such thing as a wrong answer for the ensuing discussion. Research would be better if there was diversity in perspectives. All of this contributed to making the whole environment better. The moderator, however, is not supposed to dominate the session. The purpose of the discussion was to encourage and stimulate participants to engage in open dialogue with each other, instead of addressing themselves to the moderator of the discussion (Kitzinger, 1995). This is why the participants were asked to introduce themselves to each other. It created a solid relationship that was mutually respectful for all of them. The instructions were all given to the participants before the discussion began so that they were clear on everything early on. The participants were told that the information that they discussed would be purely confidential and that only one person should speak at a time (Bryman, 2012). The moderator initially focused on talking about the nature of the topic and the aims of the study being conducted before moving forward to the more debatable aspects of the discussion (Longhurst, 2003). The researcher emphasised to the participants that they had to feel free to give their opinions. It did not matter if their opinions differed from those of other people in the discussion. The moderator’s role was only to facilitate and coordinate the session so that he could make sure that all the participants had the opportunity to give their responses to every question posed if they wanted to. The moderator of a discussion should take it upon

himself to make sure that active participation is encouraged. Even people who were shy should feel included in the conversation. If the moderator felt that a participant could contribute but had not yet been able to due to a lack of confidence, the moderator would invite the participant to express an opinion (Winlow et al., 2013). In order to fulfil this role, the moderator only intervened in the discussion if someone was taking a long time to express his or her perspective on the discussion so that others were also presented with the opportunity to speak.

The focus group discussion lasted for two hours. This is in line with the suggestion by Winlow et al. (2013) that focus group interviews should last one or two hours at most. These focus groups lasted two hours, with half an hour's break in between. Krueger and Case (2000) recommended that, once the focus group session concludes, the moderator should thank each of the participants for their contributions to the discussion (see appendix 14).

4.16.2 Semi-structured interview

The purpose of the semi-structured interview in this study was to explore the participants' experience of using their own blogs and the class blog to elicit how and why the educational blog's affordances helped in developing their writing, and to explain in what ways and in what elements of writing they believed that they had improved. Four participants were selected for one-to-one interview. One interview was held for each of these four participants at the end of the intervention, after the focus group discussion. It is worth mentioning that those participants were the most improved in their writing based on the post-test and the last blog post homework assignments. All participants were informed in advance of the date, place and time of their interview via email and WhatsApp, and the researcher conducted all the interviews. To preserve anonymity, pseudonyms were given to each interviewee, e.g. Muath.

To support the objectives and rationale for conducting interviews in this study, a brief discussion of semi-structured interviews will be provided here. I used the semi-structured interview alongside the focus groups because, in the latter, the participants may be less inclined to speak freely. Research has indicated that individuals are more likely to share their innermost thoughts and perspectives during interviews than through other methods.

Interviews aim to tap into participants' experiences in order to understand contexts and identify issues that are of value to the participant (Kvale, 2007). According to Brinkmann and Kvale (2009, p. 3), an interview can be described as a 'verbal exchange with a clear structure and a predefined set of goals. It is more formal than the impulsive exchanges that people share every day'. The main aim is to gather comprehensively tested information or knowledge. To be successful, the interview must involve an appropriate balance between listening and eliciting. Interviews are very helpful when it comes to gathering information, because they give subjects a chance to explore their personal understanding of the world around them. They also have the opportunity to discuss personal perspectives on a variety of valuable topics. There are three key forms of interview, as explained by Rowley, (2012). There is the (1) structured interview, the (2) semi-structured interview, and the (3) unstructured interview. Both the structured and semi-structured interview forms involve the use of predefined queries. Aside from this, they are distinct in a number of ways. For instance, semi-structured interviews are substantially more variable. The sequence of queries can be adjusted, if the researcher deems it necessary, or it is important for the questions to be arranged in order of significance. The phrasing of the queries may also be altered. Some may be excluded if they are thought to be unsuitable. This study used semi-structured interviews, because their degree of flexibility is better matched to the

objectives of the research. The method creates a slightly more informal and flexible study setting (Cohen et al., 2007), which allows researchers to take advantage of multi-sensory cues (verbal, non-verbal, heard and spoken). Ultimately, the semi-structured interview, as a research instrument, contains predefined queries, but it also offers room for alterations, adjustments, omissions and additional inclusions. In this way an interview generates much information that quantitative instruments are unable to provide. In this study, the semi-structured interview was held following the questionnaires, pre-post-tests, textual analysis of class blog posts, homework assignments and focus groups. This enabled the data gathered from the blog entry analysis and the questionnaire to be triangulated. The semi-structured interviews were also relied upon to fill in the gaps when alternative sources of information were not effective enough. For example, I conducted semi-structured interviews after the focus group discussion with 4 participants of the intervention group and these were used to gain insight into learners' opinions regarding blogging. Students in a face-to-face interview with the researcher give more information and speak more freely than when engaging in a group. Furthermore, the interviews assisted in highlighting areas for future development and for noting changes to the learners' ability to write in English. This being said, it is important that the right kind of rapport is built between the interviewer and interviewee in order for information exchange to occur. Specifically, interviewers must be able to help the participant feel that they are on the same level: a conversation should be had, not a unidirectional demand for information (Rowley, 2012). Interviewers must also be willing to give interviewees the time and opportunity to expand upon their thoughts and statements. According to Rabionet, (2011), the purpose of a semi-structured interview is not to serve as an information bank for researchers, but as an arena in which to construct social interactions. Overall, given the opinions outlined above on the strengths of the semi-structured interview method,

it was believed that this would be the most appropriate method for acquiring deep understanding of how and why EFL learners used the educational blogs to obtain information, enhance their abilities, build a concept of what is real to them, and to obtain their individual experiences of how the blogs' affordances helped them to improve their writing. It provided a private space in which the researcher and participants were able to explore. Moreover, in-depth interviews have other benefits too. For instance, they provide a lot of flexibility, because they can gather insightful, perceptive comments and observations very quickly. This allows researchers to explore a much broader, deeper range of issues and topics than by other methods. They are also positioned in a way which allows them to take advantage of the universal qualities of face-to-face interaction (Darlington & Scott, 2002). Interviews give researchers control and influence over the way in which the exchange proceeds as well (Nunan, 1992). They allow the researcher to deconstruct different beliefs, viewpoints, and attitudes, as they pertain to specific issues and topics. In an interview setting, it is acceptable to ask personal questions about background, principles, personality and experiences (Darlington & Scott, 2002). The rationale for adopting a mixed-methods design is that I wished to obtain all information possible from participants, and questionnaires are highly unlikely to be able to offer this level of information when used alone. Furthermore, as suggested by Rocco et al. (2003), it was believed that this study would benefit from the advantages of both methods, which would increase the value of its contribution to the existing literature. Since different methods have different restrictions and disadvantages, the triangulated mixed-methods approach would allow for greater meaning to be obtained (Sechrest & Sidani, 1995) (see appendix 16).

4.17 Pilot Study

A pilot study was employed to confirm and enhance the content of the questionnaire, estimate the timing of the process and to respond to focus group and interview

questions. Respondents were also able to provide input into the format and content of questions concerning the effect of using the educational blog as a tool in developing EFL students' writing.

4.17.1 Questionnaire pilot

Close consideration must be given to the issue of validity in the deployment of closed-ended questionnaires. The validity of a questionnaire can be characterised as “the degree to which it measures what it is supposed to measure” (Pallant, 2010, p.7). In order to examine participants' attitudes towards using educational blogs in teaching EFL students' writing, the attitude questionnaire was validated through a thorough development and improvement process during which a number of specialists were consulted. The main questionnaire which was ultimately utilised in the study received specialist review and approval from three experts in education at Taif and King Abdelaziz universities. The reliability of the questionnaire also needed to be confirmed. Reliability can be characterised as “the degree to which the items that make up the scale are all measuring the same underlying attribute” (Pallant, 2010, p. 6). The most commonly accepted method of confirming this is to apply Cronbach's alpha test, which is contained in the SPSS statistical package. The values generated by this test vary from zero to one, with the level of reliability increasing as the value approaches one. A value of alpha of greater than 0.7 is normally required. For example, Koh et al. (2013) and Schmidt et al. (2009), which were applied to comparable sample groups, exhibited satisfactory internal reliability and obtained high Cronbach alpha values. Due to the small sample size (45 intervention group students) and the smaller pilot study sample (ten PYP students), it was not possible to test internal reliability during the pilot survey, which would have been the preferable approach. As further explained in the quantitative analysis chapter, testing was therefore carried out on all data following the principal survey.

The questionnaire items were assessed and refined during a pilot held with ten PYP students (five Humanities Stream and five Science Stream). This was managed with the help of one of the researcher's colleagues in the English Language Centre (ELC), at the sample University. During this 50-minute meeting the research and the questionnaire were introduced. As described in Appendix (12), for the intervention group participants, particular attention was given to the amendments that were required following translation of the instrument into Arabic, overall appropriateness of content, and time taken in responding. The subjects spent around 30 minutes on average answering the questionnaire, noting as they did so any items that they felt required clarification. Once the completed instruments were gathered there was nothing that needed to be changed as everything was clear for all students.

4.17.2 Focus Group Question Pilot

The focus group interview questions ultimately deployed in the programme are set out in Appendix (14), and I generated the focus groups based on the questionnaire result. The suitability of the questions, particularly following translation, was established by running pilot interviews with two of the subjects (PYP students). The questions were found to be coherent and comprehensible and the interview process was found to take around 90 minutes.

4.17.3 Interview Pilot

The interview questions ultimately deployed in the programme are set out in Appendix (16), I came up with the semi-structured interview questions based on the data generated from the Focus Group and also on the questionnaires. The suitability of the questions, particularly following translation, was established by running pilot interviews with two of the Humanities Stream (PYP students). The questions were found to be coherent and comprehensible and the interview process was found to take around 60 minutes.

4.17.4 Distribution of Questionnaires

The sample of 45 intervention group students received the questionnaire from a pair of ELC tutors, which included me. An appropriate amount of time was allocated for the responses, following which the two tutors retrieved the completed questionnaires.

4.17.5 Conducting Focus Group and Interview

It was quickly established that, for data collection purposes, one focus group discussion with each group and interview with each participant would be sufficient, although it was originally envisaged that multiple interviews might be conducted if required. Elapsed time and changes in participants' views over an extended period were not among the research objectives, so this was not an issue. In arriving at this conclusion, the researcher conducted two focus groups and then picked out four student participants from the focus group sample of 14 upon the results of the post-test and last blog post and, thus, those participants were the most improved in their writing during the intervention period. Each focus group participant and each interviewee were given the opportunity to choose the time of their interview, which took place in private and secluded environment. Audio recordings are generally used in focus group discussions and interviews as they are the most accurate method of retaining interview data (cf. Yin, 2009, p. 109). It is essential in such cases that the participants are advised prior to the interview that it will be recorded and that they clearly confirm that they agree to this and give permission for use of the recording. This procedure was strictly adhered to in the interviews carried out.

4.18 Data Analysis

The data analysis for this study included both quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques. The sequential nature of this study required the quantitative data (the pre-test, post-test, blog post analysis and questionnaire) to be analysed prior to the collection of the qualitative data (the open-ended questionnaire, focus groups and

interviews). Thus, the description of the data analysis process is divided into two distinct parts.

4.18.1 Quantitative Data

The data from pre- and post-tests and first and last homework assignments posted on the class blog were analysed at two levels, inferential and descriptive, using SPSS software. The descriptive statistics offered a great deal of information that helped the researcher to familiarise himself with the data and the respondents' characteristics (Pallant, 2013). At the inferential level, these variables were analysed for significant differences between the intervention and comparison groups, using the Mann Whitney non-parametric test techniques, as applicable. The test was done to see if there were any differences in pre- and post-test scores in paragraph origination, paragraph cohesion and coherence, variety of sentences, grammatical range and accuracy, and lexical range and accuracy.

At the descriptive level, there were two parts. Firstly, minimum, maximum and mean scores of the pre- and post-test writing samples were reported. Secondly, for the intervention group only, their minimum, maximum and mean scores in paragraph origination, paragraph cohesion and coherence, variety of sentences, grammatical range and accuracy, and lexical range and accuracy were arrived at to investigate the differences between the first and last posts of the students' homework assignment writing samples. The questionnaires were analysed statistically using SPSS software. Descriptive, demographic frequencies and mean scores of the participants' responses to each study variable were reported.

4.18.2 Qualitative data

Open-ended questionnaires focus groups and semi-structured interviews were analysed comprehensively using inductive and deductive thematic analysis. MAXQDA software was used to organise the themes, codes, and further explanation

is to follow on the familiarisation with data section. Firstly, initial codes were identified from the open-ended questionnaire questions, focus groups and semi-structured interviews. Later, these codes were clustered under categories according to their similarities. Secondly, these categories were classified under broader themes. Finally, four major themes emerged from the qualitative instruments.

4.19 Data Analysis Process

A number of qualitative data analysis methods have been proposed by researchers such as Creswell (2012), which broadly coincide in their central concepts. The method set out by Braun and Clark (2006) proposes a particularly detailed analysis process centred around the generation of themes and codes. In this method there are six distinct elements, as set out in Table 4.3.

1. Familiarisation with data

2. Generation of initial codes

3. Exploring themes

4. Appraisal of themes

5. Definition and description of themes

6. Reporting

Table 4.3: Elements of the Braun and Clarke Model (2006)

4.19.1 Familiarisation with data

Open-ended questions from the questionnaire provided qualitative data in written form. Verbal data from focus groups and interviews required transcribing into written form before analysis could be carried out. This consisted of converting audio recordings or researchers' extempore notes into detailed written text (Creswell, 2012, p. 239). This process was meticulously carried out by the researcher by re-running the recordings multiple times to ensure all relevant data was transcribed. It has been argued that the transcription of spoken word recordings should in itself be regarded as a valuable part of the qualitative data analysis process, as the close listening and

rigorous transliteration required will give the researcher a deeper understanding of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Certainly, it was felt in this study that the analysis benefitted greatly from the detailed appraisal of the data carried out at this point in the process. As proposed by other authors (cf. Creswell, 2012), once the process of transcribing verbal data was complete, several preliminary readings were carried out to generate a broad impression of the content. Notes were recorded to capture overall impressions of the data content and thoughts on how it should be structured. An evaluation of software packages that could be applied in qualitative data analysis, for example MAXQDA and NVivo, was also carried out, with the result that MAXQDA was selected as the most appropriate package. The main consideration here was principally that it was distinguished from others, which also provide excellent analytical tools, by its support for the Arabic language. Many methodological and analytical benefits come from the ability to analyse data in the natural language of the subjects, particularly in instances such as this work, where sociocultural theory is applied in the analysis. In sociocultural theory, the study environment is regarded as important and the process of translating the data into another language, such as English, would be likely to render the definition and understanding of this broader context and its effects much more difficult. It is suggested that an important contribution to the understanding and analysis of text is made by retaining the original language so that the idiomatic and contextual content is preserved, as is the immediacy and vigour of the language (Vallance, Madang & Lee, 2005). The validity of data analysis is enhanced by processing the data in its original form. Then, only sections or passages that are particularly relevant to the analysis and results need be translated into the language of publication. Sociocultural integrity, cultural specificity and the original subject's sense and substance can be maintained by careful translation of the chosen text (Vallance et al., 2005). Computer software provides the ability to carry

out both qualitative and quantitative analyses of text that can be applied in grounded theory-oriented analysis using code and retrieve protocols or more complex text search methods (Creswell, 2012). MAXQDA provided these tools.

Once the database was set up in MAXQDA, it was sub-divided according to attributes (open-ended question, focus group, and interview). Within these sub-groups, codes were given to each file. For example, in the open-ended questions for the intervention group, students were given the code OQS1, in the focus groups the students were given a code and number, e.g. FG1S1, while, in the interviews, students were given pseudonyms.

4.19.2 Generation of initial codes

This work is theory-driven in that it is informed by sociocultural theory. As described in the theoretical considerations above, sociocultural theory provides guiding principles relating to data structure and analysis. However, it is believed that the codes combine elements of inductive and deductive analysis. Accordingly, after a thorough initial review, facilitated by the process of transcribing the data, coding was undertaken. This was described as segmentation and tagging of the data to identify general trends and facilitate descriptive analysis (Creswell, 2012). The starting point for the coding process, 'labelling', was the written text data derived from open-ended questions, which was subjected to repeated review, and the focus group interview, which was treated similarly. The participant responses were treated segmentally, extracting the intrinsic elements of information in each segment. In generating codes, the instrument items were kept in focus at all times and segments that appeared relevant and significant in terms of the overall study objectives were labelled accordingly. The process was then applied to other focus group interviews, and then to the final four individual interviews, generating codes inductively and coding segments with existing or with new codes as the process evolved.

4.19.3 Identification of Themes

Subsequent to the process of coding all the data, the process of grouping the codes into sub-themes and themes was begun by sorting the codes into themes, then collating all of the codes within the thematic structure (cf. Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process enabled a broad view of trends within the data to be obtained, as wider themes emerged from the relatively detailed and constrained code structure. The features of the MAXQDA software were of enormous assistance in this process, allowing codes, sub-themes and themes to be grouped and regrouped freely to assist in the identification of flows of thoughts and ideas. Notes could also be freely attached to all database items, whether codes or emerging themes, which could be displayed together on a single screen to allow the researcher to track and continually refine the evolving database structure. A screenshot illustrating the presentation of data, codes, themes and coded extracts on-screen is shown in appendix (24), which, in turn, shows the initial theme map comprised of initial themes, sub-themes and codes and all data tagged with individual codes. Eventually this resulted in a complete theme map of all coded data. Some data was not coded during this process but remained within the database and was reviewed again against the theme map to reaffirm that the coding process had been carried out comprehensively and effectively.

4.19.4 Review of Themes

A thorough review of the themes that emerged from the open-ended questions, focus groups and interviews was then undertaken in order to reaffirm the appropriateness and comprehensiveness of the structure set out in the initial theme map. It was evident that some 'themes' were, in fact, too amorphous and diverse in content. As an example, several sub-themes and codes within the theme 'Challenges facing students in teaching and learning English language' were identified as properly belonging to other themes, e.g. 'contextual issues affecting EFL students' writing'. Through this

process, consistency and congruity within and between themes was established, affirmed and reinforced. The review of themes embraced two broad objectives: firstly, internal consistency of each theme; and secondly, consistency across all themes within the whole theme map to confirm that the emerging thematic structure truly reflected the flow of thoughts and ideas emerging from the data. This process was undertaken against a background of continual re-review of coding to validate it and confirm that nothing of significance in the dataset remained un-coded. Finally, the completed thematic map was presented to my supervisors and another two PhD holders in education for peer review to check the relationship between themes and their components.

4.19.5 Defining and naming themes

Appendix (18) shows the final thematic map of the database structure. This is the result of repeated reconsideration and review of the themes and the codes within each theme, carried out in constant relation to the research questions. A nomenclature scheme for the themes was then developed by a comprehensive appraisal of each theme, particularly how and what the theme contributed to the overall picture emerging from the data. This was continually refined by reverting to individual data items to confirm the internal congruity of the themes and of the overall scheme. Nomenclature structure was carefully considered so that emerging themes and their overall implications could be understood from theme labels alone, so that a general understanding of data trends could clearly be assimilated from the thematic map.

4.19.6 Producing the report

Once the final version form of the thematic map had been established, final analysis of the data was undertaken. It was decided to record the research results in the form of prose, to reflect the fluid, evolving and intricate nature of the data as it emerged through the collection process. Data items were reproduced verbatim to support each result. These were presented in such a way as to extend and expand on the data itself

and throw light on its relationship to the research question. The qualitative findings are set out in Chapter Six. This presents the participants' views of the issues that influence their writing development, the importance of educational technology in general, and the use of the blogs in teaching EFL to improve their writing. It also presents the participants' perceptions and experience of using these types of blogs and the ways in which their writing had improved. It further presents the relationship between the affordances of blogging and their writing development, and the general advantages and disadvantages of blogging. Finally, it presents the affective benefits of using educational blogging as a tool of writing development, and the challenges faced by students in schools and universities in relation to using technology in EFL classes.

4.20 Quality of research

It is important to take quality control into account when considering the research findings of a study. Since this study involves both quantitative and qualitative research methods, two different quality control approaches were needed. However, validity and reliability are the two main quality control measures emphasised by quantitative research. The same approach cannot be taken with qualitative research. Flick (2007) and Seale (2002), for instance, argue that restrictive frameworks cannot apply to qualitative research, since it is characterised by an exploration of different realities as opposed to one scientific, evidence-based reality. Several researchers have suggested that the quality of qualitative studies can be assessed using the overall criteria to which I refer below (Klein and Myers, 1999; Lincoln, 1995).

4.20.1 Measures of Quantitative Research Quality

When adopting the questionnaire method as part of a study, the researcher must consider the reliability and validity of the method if the findings are to be valuable. Pallant (2007) explains that reliability reflects the notion that the outcome would be

the same if the study was repeated. Validity, according to Brown (1996), refers to how accurately the method can represent what it is designed to investigate. In this study, Cronbach's Alpha test was adopted to measure the reliability of the questionnaire in the form of an average correlation score. Brown (2000) and Pallant (2007) recommend that questionnaires are checked by other researchers and experts for validity. Therefore, the questionnaire used in this study was forwarded to a number of experts in the field in order to ensure the validity of the questionnaire as a research instrument, and the questionnaire was modified after seeking expert opinions. Three experts were elected from the education department and from the English department, One Public University in Saudi Arabia. Pre- and post- test designs are the preferred method to compare two groups and measure the degree of change occurring as a result of experimental treatments. Moreover, the writing test was reviewed by an expert in the field to assure its content validity, and the test was designed by a group in the exam unit at the English language centre at the university. Finally, a pilot study was undertaken in order to assess the validity of the test and questionnaire.

4.20.2 Measures of Qualitative Research Quality

4.20.2.1 *Trustworthiness*

In quantitative research, standard statistical tests with numerical results can be applied to determine the validity and reliability of results. In qualitative research, the process is a great deal less straightforward and there has been extensive academic discussion of this topic. Loh (2013), for example, is one of many authors who have attempted to lay down a set of standards to establish the required characteristics of good qualitative research. In quantitative research, the value of results is expressed in terms of their validity, reliability and generalisability. In qualitative research, it has been proposed that these terms be replaced by the concept of 'trustworthiness' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This concept has been defined as addressing the question "How can an inquirer

persuade his or her audience that the research findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to?” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.290). It has been further proposed that the trustworthiness of a piece of qualitative work can be measured by assessing its credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability against established standards. This model was followed here to evaluate the trustworthiness and therefore the overall quality of the study (*ibid*).

4.20.2.2 Credibility

Credibility in qualitative research is an essential criterion to be applied in establishing the trustworthiness of a research study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It can be broadly described as the counterpoint of internal validity in quantitative research. There are a number of established tools that can be used to establish credibility, including prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, referential adequacy and member checks. These were applied in this study. A key requirement in doing so effectively was for the researcher to be thoroughly cognisant of the environment in which the actual research and data collection took place, as this could have a significant impact on participants’ views and, therefore, on their responses. This requirement was fulfilled as the researcher was a lecturer at the university where the study was carried out and had previously worked as a tutor at the university with EFL learners during their periods of study. The researcher had ensured continuing familiarity with the Preparatory Year Programme in general and with teaching and learning English by keeping abreast of all changes in programme schedules and resources.

Triangulation was affected by applying five methods of data collection: pre-post-test, questionnaire, focus group interview, individual semi- interview and blog post analysis. A number of different theoretical frameworks were also applied to assimilate all perspectives on the study subject and facilitate thorough and complete theoretical

analysis. Written texts of open-ended questions focus group and interview transcripts were content-verified and checked by two colleagues to further enhance the credibility of this research. In accordance with the procedure recommended by Shenton (2004), study subjects were permitted to check and review transcripts of their conversations with the researcher to confirm that the transcripts truly reflected the information they wished to convey. The report and results were also submitted to, and scrutinised by, several experts in the field at seminars and conferences. Responses and suggestions from field specialists were, in many cases, incorporated to further enhance the credibility of the final report. It has been said that “the ability of the researcher to relate his or her findings to an existing body of knowledge is a key criterion for evaluating works of qualitative inquiry” (Shenton, 2004). A thorough review of the existing literature in this field was therefore conducted. This allowed incorporation of appropriate ideas and insights from comparable studies with similar results. It also allowed the researcher to identify the place this current work should take within and alongside the existing literature, and to refine the report accordingly.

4.20.2.3 *Transferability*

It has been pointed out that it is not possible to extrapolate the findings of a qualitative study to a wider group or to the general population as the findings are necessarily specific to a limited sample group and to the participants’ immediate environment (Shenton, 2004). This raises the issue of ‘transferability’ in confirming trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), which is regarded as equivalent to the criterion of external validity in quantitative research. Silverman (2010) has stated that results from individual qualitative case studies cannot be extrapolated to the general population. However, Cohen et al. (2010), argued that results from a case study approach can be extrapolated to a larger population, and described this property as ‘transferability’. The case study model employed in the current work can be described

as an instrumental case study as it reveals the PYP students' perceptions related to the use of affordances of the blogging as a tool of EFL students' writing development in the whole country of Saudi Arabia. Arguably this can be extrapolated to other nations in the Arab community given that characteristics such as culture, education systems and policies exhibit a high degree of consistency between Arab nations. There are two broad areas of comparability which bear this contention out. Firstly, the Ministry of Education of Saudi Arabia is responsible for all universities in the country and sets out all administrative requirements and educational policies at a national level to be followed by all institutions. Secondly, educational policies and curriculums for every school in Saudi Arabia are set by the Ministry of Education. This includes such matters as qualification and professional achievement requirements for teachers and the role and function of information technology in the national curriculum. A number of Saudi universities have Preparatory Year Programmes available that are similar to the programme taught at the sample university. It can therefore be contended that the results of this study could be, to some extent, extrapolated to those institutions. Although the issue of the use of the blogging in teaching and learning writing skills has been explored by research carried out in western nations, notably the United States and United Kingdom, few if any comparable studies (particularly studies focusing on sociocultural theory) have been carried out in Saudi Arabia. The results of this study could therefore have a general significance. Information gained in this study regarding the influence of the use of the blogging in teaching and learning writing development could be transferred to a wider or even a national context.

4.20.2.4 *Dependability*

The trustworthiness of a qualitative study can also be confirmed by its dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), which can be compared to the criterion of reliability in quantitative research. Dependability is the contention that if research work is carried

out repeatedly in similar environments, using similar sample groups and applying similar methods, then the outcome will be similar (Shenton, 2004). In the current study, the quality of dependability was established and enhanced by a forensic description of the process and techniques applied so the work can be replicated by others.

4.20.2.5 Confirmability

The criterion of ‘objectivity’ in scientific research can be compared to the concept of confirmability in qualitative research, as it contributes to trustworthiness. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that the process of triangulation, applied in studies in the field of humanities, could contribute effectively to confirmability. This was reflected in the current study where great pains were taken to ensure and confirm, in a process proposed by Shenton (2004), that the thoughts and opinions of the subjects were expressed with minimal input from the researcher. However, it should be noted in this context that the both first and second parts of this study were equally important.

4.21 Summary of the chapter

This chapter has provided a detailed description of the research methods and design that were used to conduct the study. The objectives of the research, questions and all philosophical assumptions were made at the start of the chapter. After that, I presented the methodology of the study itself, which included the description of the method of sampling, methods of research and instrument, the ethical problems and the process of data collection.

Finally, I presented the process of data analysis and all the theoretical considerations that were related to the analysis. I brought the chapter to a conclusion by talking about the validity and trustworthiness of the research. This includes the transferability, credibility, confirmability and the dependability. In the following chapter, I present the quantitative findings that emerged from the pre-post-tests, the first and the last blog assignments and questionnaire.

5 CHAPTER FIVE

Statistical Findings

5.1 Introduction

The findings of this study are divided into two chapters, namely, statistical results (quantitative findings) and open-ended questionnaire, focus groups and semi-structured interview (qualitative findings). This chapter presents the findings of the quantitative phase of the study, from the pre-test, post-test, blog posts and questionnaire. This chapter addresses research question 1.3 and the statistical part of research question 2 (see section 4.11, Chapter Four). The first part consists of a discussion of the test/re-test reliability and the content validity assessment; the second part presents the preliminary results including a general description of the study sample (demographic data, the means and standard deviations of the individually measured scale scores); in the third part, various statistical tests are used to address the research questions; and, finally, a further statistical analysis is performed to check interactions between variables that may reveal unanticipated results.

5.2 Data Analysis and Results

To answer the research questions and to investigate to the extent to which the intervention improved participants' writing when compared with the comparison group, a Shapiro-Wilk normality test for complete pre- and post-test data was carried out. As this test revealed that the data showed significant deviations from the normal distribution on all variables, the decision was made to use non-parametric tests. A t-test would not be appropriate and may have yielded biased results as it is only applicable to normally distributed data.

Mann-Whitney tests were used to investigate whether there was a significant difference in pre- and post-tests between groups. To investigate whether there was a significant difference within one group before and after the intervention, the non-parametric Wilcoxon Signed Ranks tests were used. Also, the inter-rater and intra-

rater reliability of the pre- and post-tests (N = 90) was calculated. To answer the quantitative part of the second research question, the non-parametric Wilcoxon Signed Ranks tests were used as well. To answer the third research question and investigate students' attitudes towards blogs as a writing development tool, descriptive statistics on complete attitude variables were calculated. Means and standard deviations, together with minimum and maximum values, were addressed. Prior to descriptive analysis, the questionnaire items were checked for reliability by using Cronbach's alpha on the complete questionnaire, as well as on the separate dimensions of the questionnaire.

5.3 The Effect of the Intervention

First, RQ1 was addressed: 'to what extent has the intervention group improved when compared with the comparison group?' The Shapiro-Wilk tests of normality gave statistically significant results, $p < .05$, as shown in Table 5.1. According to these results, the decision to use non-parametric tests was made. (see appendix 20).

	<i>Statistic</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Pre-Test	.97	90	.036
Post-Test	.96	90	.015

Table 5.1: Shapiro-Wilk test (N=90)

Upon investigation, the intraclass correlation coefficient results show that there is a high inter-rater reliability between the two instructors. In the pre-test, the ICC reached an excellent range of 0.99, which is greater than 0.7, Pallant, (2010). Further, the lower and upper bound are at an excellent level. Similarly, the post-test inter-rater reliability was 0.99, which is in the excellent range as well, as shown in Table 5.2. For more details, see appendix (20).

	Pre-test	Post-test
Average measures	.99.2	.99.3
Lower Bound	.98.8	.98.9
Upper Bound	.99.5	99.5

Table 5.2: Intrrater reliability

Next, the means and standard deviations regarding task fulfilment, organization and outline, coherence and cohesion, grammar range and accuracy, lexical range and accuracy and total scores for both pre- and post-tests were calculated, as shown in Table 5.3. Mann-Whitney tests were performed to ascertain whether any initial differences in means between the two groups were statistically significant.

Table 5.3: pre-test data by group

		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mann-Whitney U</i>	<i>p</i>
Overall	Intervention (N=45)	18.73	4.66	1004.50	.948
	Comparison (N=45)	18.60	4.11		
Task Fulfilment	intervention	4.16	.93	962.00	.666
	comparison	4.09	.87		
Organization and Outline	intervention	3.91	1.02	900.50	.345
	comparison	4.13	1.01		
Coherence and Cohesion	intervention	2.84	1.15	824.00	.104
	comparison	2.47	.84		
Grammar Range and Accuracy	intervention	3.80	1.16	924.00	.459
	comparison	3.98	1.10		
Lexical Range and Accuracy	intervention	3.96	.95	993.50	.873
	comparison	4.00	1.13		

No significant difference between intervention and comparison groups in overall pre-tests was found, *M* was 18.73 for the intervention group and 18.60 for the comparison group, *U* = 1004.50, *p* = .948. The intervention and comparison groups had similar levels on all subtests before the intervention, indicating that both groups had a similar ability in English writing.

The equivalent figures for the post-test scores were then computed, as shown in Table 5.4.

Table 5.4: Post test data by group

		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mann-Whitney U</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>ES(d)</i>
Overall	intervention	23.38	4.60	612.00	.001	0.76
	comparison	19.82	4.72			
Task Fulfilment	intervention	4.89	.78	723.00	.014	0.57
	comparison	4.40	.94			
Organization and Outline	intervention	4.71	.94	813.00	.094	0.37
	comparison	4.33	1.09			
Coherence and Cohesion	intervention	3.82	1.28	562.50	.000	0.88
	comparison	2.82	.98			
Grammar Range and Accuracy	intervention	4.96	1.07	655.00	.003	0.68
	comparison	4.18	1.23			
Lexical Range and Accuracy	intervention	5.02	.89	627.50	.001	0.69
	comparison	4.29	1.12			

The above table indicates that there are significant differences between the comparison and intervention groups in the results of the post-test.

It shows overall post-tests, $U = 612.00$, $p = .001$. The intervention group had significantly higher results on the overall test ($M = 23.38$, $SD = 4.60$), when compared to the comparison group ($M = 19.82$, $SD = 4.72$). A significant difference was also found for the Task Fulfillment variable, $U = 723.00$, $p = .014$, with the intervention group having a significantly higher task fulfillment score ($M = 4.89$, $SD = .78$), when compared to the comparison group ($M = 4.40$, $SD = .94$).

There was also a statistically significant difference between the groups in the Coherence & Cohesion score, $U = 562.50$, $p < .001$. The intervention group had better results in the Coherence and Cohesion subtest after the intervention ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 1.28$) than the comparison group ($M = 2.82$, $SD = .98$).

A significant difference between the groups was found also for the Grammar subtest, $U = 655.00$, $p = .003$. The intervention group had significantly higher results on the Grammar subtest after intervention ($M = 4.96$, $SD = 1.07$) than the comparison group ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 1.23$).

Finally, the Lexical Range and Accuracy score was also found to be different in the intervention and the comparison groups after the intervention, $U = 627.50$, $p = .001$, with the intervention group having a significantly higher score ($M = 5.02$, $SD = .89$), when compared to the comparison group ($M = 4.29$, $SD = 1.12$). Contrary to other subtests, there was no difference in Organization and outline scores between groups, $U = 813.00$, $p = .094$. Finally, as we know, that the P value indicates the statistical differences and the effect size indicates how much differences there is. Cohen (1988) suggested that an effect size of around 0.2 is small, around 0.5 is medium, and around 0.7 is large, so we can consider the effect size between the first and the last assignments in the intervention group to be large at 0.76.

The next set of tests were designed to demonstrate whether one group had improved more than the other group over the course of the intervention. For this, the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks test was performed, because this is the non-parametric test for repeated measures; that is, the same subjects take the same test on two different occasions. The results are shown in Table 5.5.

Table 5.5: Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test for both groups

	Intervention		Comparison	
	Z	p	Z	p
Overall	-5.21	.000	-2.95	.003
Task Fulfilment	-5.04	.000	-2.42	.016
Organization and Outline	-4.49	.000	-1.67	.095
Coherence and Cohesion	-4.78	.000	-2.98	.003
Grammar Range and Accuracy	-5.20	.000	-1.30	.195
Lexical Range and Accuracy	-5.29	.000	-2.12	.034

It is clearly demonstrated in the table above that there is a significant difference in pre- and post-tests in the comparison group, Wilcoxon Signed ranks tests were performed. Results showed a significant difference between pre- and post-intervention tests in the comparison group, $Z = -2.95$, $p = .003$. The comparison group had significantly higher results on the overall post-test by the end of the term ($M =$

19.82, $SD = 4.72$) when compared to results in the beginning of the term ($M = 18.60$, $SD = 4.11$).

A significant difference was also found for other subtests where the comparison group had higher results after the intervention: Task Fulfilment, $Z = -2.42$, $p = .016$; Coherence & Cohesion, $Z = -2.98$, $p = .003$; as well as Lexical Range and Accuracy, $Z = -2.12$, $p = .034$. On the contrary, no significant difference between pre- and post-intervention tests was found for Organization and Outline, $Z = -1.67$, $p = .095$ and Grammar scores, $Z = -1.30$, $p = .195$.

5.4 Descriptive Analysis

The details of the scores awarded to the sample writing pre- and post-tests are provided in Table 5. 6.

Scores indicating overall quality of writing	Intervention Group N = (45)		Comparison Group N = (45)	
	Pre-T	Post-T	Pre-T	Post-T
Mean	18.73	23.38	18.60	19.82
Minimum	11	14	11	11
Maximum	27	30	27	29

Table 5.6: Comparison of mean, minimum and maximum scores on pre- and post- tests by group

The results in Table 5.6 (as in Table 5.4) re-iterate that both groups had scores very like each other in the pre-test writing samples. The average pre-test results of the intervention and comparison groups did not differ significantly (as shown in Table 5.4). We can therefore assume that the initial quality of writing was comparable between the two groups of students. No one scored above 27 out of 30 in the pre-test writing sample. Similarly, no one scored below 10, although below 10 is a failing score. All groups improved their overall scores in the post-test writing (Table 5.4); however, the intervention group improved more than the comparison group (Table 5.5). Thus, the intervention group had higher overall scores than the comparison group in their post-test writing (Table 5.4).

The next table shows the distribution of marks across marking bands, in raw numbers and percentages.

Table 5.7: Comparison of mark distribution on pre- and post- tests by group

Score bands (Minimum pass=Band 2)	Intervention Group N = (45)				Comparison Group N = (45)			
	Pre-T Number of students	%	Post- T N. S	%	Pre- T N. S	%	Post- T N. S	%
Band 5 (26-30) Excellent	6	13.3	15	33.3	5	11.1	6	13.3
Band 4 (20-25) Above average	13	28.9	16	35.6	12	26.7	10	22.2
Band 3 (16-19) Average	12	26.7	14	31.1	14	31.1	13	28.9
Band 2 (10-15) Below average	14	31.1	0	0	14	31.1	16	35.6
Band 1(0-9) Poor	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	45	100.0	45	100.0	44	100.0	45	100.0

Based on Table 5.7, showing the number of students and percentages in each score band, in the post-test, 15 writing samples (33.3%) from the intervention group demonstrated excellent writing quality based on course descriptors, whereas only six writing samples (13.3%) reached that mark from the comparison group. No one in the intervention group scored in bands 1 or 2 in the post-test, which means they had improved in their writing and all achieved bands 3, 4 or 5. In contrast, in the comparison group, 16 students (35.6%) only achieved band 2, which indicates that most had made no improvement in their writing. Interestingly, no one in either group achieved score band 1 “poor” (i.e. less than 10) in the pre- or post-test.

To explain the marking bands, the writing samples were evaluated based on the writing rubric followed in the English Language Centre. A set of five categories or labels was ascribed to assist in marking the writing texts: lexical range and accuracy; grammatical range and accuracy; organisation outline; coherence and cohesion; and task fulfilment (see Appendix 3). Examples of two participants’ pre- and post-test

writing samples from the intervention and comparison groups are compared qualitatively as described below.

Below, in Figures 5.1 and 5. 2, the texts shown were written pre- and post-interventions by the same student from the comparison group, who achieved below average (band 2) in the pre-test and excellent (band 5) in the post-test. The writing samples were scored by two markers. The same topic was given in the pre- and post-tests. The pre-test writing scored a mark of 14 (Band Score 2) which was “below average”. The writing sample was rated as below average, not only because of its lack of grammatical structure but also because the participant gave no attention to paragraphing, outline and organization, lexical accuracy, or cohesion and coherence (See Figure 5. 1).

Writing

Write 10 sentences about your visit to another city. The following expressions/questions may help you.

2 months ago, by plane, go shopping, museum, beach, nice weather, delicious food, fantastic journey, etc.

Where did you go? How did you get there? What did you do? Did you have a good time?

1. Befor two monts I went to London
2. I ate good food in London
3. I visited alots mosumme in London
4. I have good time
5. The wather in London was not good
6. I did much thing in London
7. I went to harrodds mol

Marks Awarded: 14/30, Band Score: 2

Figure 5.1: Pre-test writing sample by a student from the comparison group

Figure 5.2, below, shows the writing sample by the same student after the intervention. This is a slightly better paragraph, but he composed his paragraph of individual sentences with no cohesion or coherence. He used a wider range of lexical and grammatical accuracy when compared with the pre-test writing. There was also a little improvement in his handwriting. The participant received a band score of 3 (marks 19/30 Average) in the post-test writing. The text was written in the same amount of time (i.e. 40 minutes), under similar conditions, and on the same topic. Many factors could account for this improved performance.

Writing

Write 10 sentences about your visit to another city. The following expressions/questions may help you.

2 months ago, by plane, go shopping, museum, beach, nice weather, delicious food, fantastic journey, etc.

Where did you go? How did you get there? What did you do? Did you have a good time?

Two months I went to Jeddah with my family. We visited many place there. we went to Albake restuorant. we did some shopp in Jeddah. we went by car. The wethar in Jeddah was ~~was~~ hot. we dont like it. we had good time.

Marks Awarded: 18/30, Band Score 3

Figure 5.2: Post-test writing sample by the same student from the comparison group

Below, Figures 5.3 and 5.4 give a comparison of texts written by one student from the intervention group who achieved below average band 2 in the pre-test and achieved an excellent band 5 score in the post- test. The writing samples were scored by two markers. The first sample was produced before the intervention while the second one was produced after the intervention. The same topic was given in pre- and post-tests. The pre-test writing scored a mark of 14/30 (Band Score 2) which was “below average” and below the required Pass (10/30 marks; Band Score 2). The writing sample was rated as below average, not only because of lack of grammatical accuracy and structure but also because the participant gave no attention to paragraphing, outline and organization, lexical accuracy or cohesion and coherence (See Figure 5.3).

Writing

Write 10 sentences about your visit to another city. The following expressions/questions may help you.

2 months ago, by plane, go shopping, museum, beach, nice weather, delicious food, fantastic journey, etc.

Where did you go? How did you get there? What did you do? Did you have a good time?

Before two months I went to India. I like Indian food. I like Bangali food. I visited many places in India. I went there by plane. Weather in India was good. I had good time. I visited museum. I arrived at 3:00 Saudi Arabia.

Marks Awarded: 14/30, Band Score: 2

Figure 5.3: Pre-test writing sample by student from the intervention group

Figure 5.4 shows the writing sample by the same student after the intervention, under the same conditions as before. Compared with the pre-intervention writing, this is a longer paragraph, a better organized piece of writing, a wider range of vocabulary is used, grammatical accuracy is greater, and there is better linkage between ideas. It also shows an improvement in linguistic maturity, perhaps because of the increased practice in writing on the educational blog as a tool to practise and learn writing during the intervention. The participant received a band score of 5 (marks = 28, an Excellent) in the post-test writing. Although many factors may account for this improved performance, the text was written in the same amount of time (i.e. 40 minutes), under similar conditions, and on the same topic. This improvement might be the result of the use of educational blogs in practising writing and learning through the internet; this could have helped the students to improve their writing skills (See Figure 5. 4).

Writing

Write 10 sentences about your visit to another city. The following expressions/questions may help you.

2 months ago, by plane, go shopping, museum, beach, nice weather, delicious food, fantastic journey, etc.

Where did you go? How did you get there? What did you do? Did you have a good time?

Two months ago... I decided to travel by plane to Dubai which is known as the largest and most famous tourist destinations in the world. In Dubai there is so much to do and see. For example, I visited Dubai Mall which is known as the largest mall in the world and the home of Dubai Shopping Festival. Visiting Burj Khalifa was at the top of my list. The transportation of Dubai is also far different than any thing that I had ever been exposed. There are many transportation options at your fingertips such as taxi, metro, tram and bus. The weather was very hot there. In this charming city you can enjoy a wide variety of restaurants sampling national cuisin from different parts of the world. I really enjoyed there and had a good time and fun in Dubai. I am looking forward to visiting it again.

Marks Awarded: 28/30, Band Score: 5

Figure 5.4: Post-test writing sample by the same student from the intervention group

5.5 Investigating the contents of the educational blogs

This section will show some samples of written texts of the first and last blog posts (homework assignments). These are for the intervention group students only. This also answered the quantitative part from the second research question.

5.5.1 The influence of the educational blogging on the intervention group

Table 5.8 indicates that there are significant differences between the first and the last assignments in the intervention group.

		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>ES(d)</i>
Overall	1 st assignments	18.87	3.94	.000	1.22
	Last assignments	24.00	4.44		
Task Fulfilment	1 st assignments	3.93	9.15	.002	0.09
	Last assignments	4.58	1.03		
Organization and Outline	1 st assignments	4.11	.88	.000	0.46
	Last assignments	4.56	1.01		
Coherence and Cohesion	1 st assignments	3.71	.89	.000	0.81
	Last assignments	4.53	1.10		
Grammar Range and Accuracy	1 st assignments	3.58	.91	.000	1.71
	Last assignments	5.18	.96		
Lexical Range and Accuracy	1 st assignments	3.58	.94	.000	1.61
	Last assignments	5.07	.91		

Table 5.8: First and last assignments data of the intervention group

The above table shows that there are significant differences between the first and the last assignment on the intervention group, overall $p = .000$. The intervention group in the last assignments had significantly higher results on the overall test ($M = 24.00$, $SD = 4.44$), when compared to the first assignment ($M = 18.87$, $SD = 3.94$). However, the

P value indicates the statistical differences and the effect size indicates how much difference there is. Cohen (1988) suggested the following for effect sizes: (0.2) small, (0.5) medium, (0.7) large, (1.0) very large so that the effect size of the statistical differences between the first and the last assignments in the intervention group were considered very large $d=1.22$. Significant differences were also found for Task Fulfillment, Coherence & Cohesion Grammar range and accuracy, Lexical Range and Accuracy. Complete descriptive statistics can be seen in Table 5.8.

5.5.2 Descriptive Analysis

Table 5.9 indicates the scores awarded to the writing samples which were posted first and last on the class blog.

Scores indicating overall quality of writing	Intervention Group Sample N = (45)	
	First homework assignment posted on class blog	Last homework assignment posted on class blog
Mean	18.87	24.00
Minimum	11	16
Maximum	26	30

Table 5.9: Comparison of mean, minimum and maximum scores of first and last posts on class blog by the intervention group.

Table 5.9 compares scores on the first and last posts of the homework assignments on the class blog. The average first and last posted results of the intervention group differed significantly. We can assume that there is a significant difference in first and last posts on the class blog by the intervention group participants. No one scored above 26 in the first posted writing sample. Similarly, no one scored below 10. All intervention participants improved their scores in the last posted blog writing. However, the information from above table shows that the last posted blog scored higher on the mean than the first posted blog writing. It seemed that the intervention group students had higher means in their last blog posts, which might be an indication that the use of educational blogs in teaching and learning writing helped students to

improve their writing. As it appears, they scored higher means in their post-tests as well. The distribution of marks across marking bands for the first and last blog posts (homework assignments) is shown in Table 5.10 below.

Scores band (Minimum pass = Band 2)	Number of Students (N, %)			
	First posts	%	Last posts	%
Band 5 (26-30) Excellent	4	8.9	18	40.0
Band 4 (20-25) Above average	8	17.8	16	35.6
Band 3 (16-19) Average	18	40.0	11	24.4
Band 2 (10-15) Below average	15	33.3	0	0
Band 1 (0-9) Poor	0	0	0	0
Total	45	100	45	100

Table 5.10: Comparison of distribution of scores on first and last posts for the intervention group

The table above shows the average score bands and percentages when comparing the first and last posts on the class blog. It is clear that 18 homework assignments (40%) in the last posts demonstrated excellent writing quality based on the writing criteria used to evaluate the writing assignments, whereas only 4 writing assignments (8.9%) reached that mark band in the first posts. Similarly, while no one in the last posts scored “below average” (i.e. less than 16), the number of students achieving only band 2 in first blog post decreased from 15 (33.3%) to zero in the last post, indicating that those students had improved in writing and achieved between band 3, 4 or 5. The descriptors helped evaluate the scripts on five major criteria: task fulfilment, organization outline, coherence and cohesion, grammatical range and accuracy, and lexical range and accuracy (see Appendix 3).

Table 5.11, below, presents the content of the learners' blogs and class blogs for the intervention group (N = 45). It shows that the participants posted 1250 homework assignments on the class blog and 464 free writings on their own blogs. Also, these participants received feedback from different audiences, including their classmates.

Furthermore, the participants wrote 187 paragraphs as informal writing on their own blogs, but nobody wrote informal writings on the class blog.

Content of class blogs (N= 45)	Number of posts	Content of learner's blogs (N = 45)	Number of posts
Total number of assignments	1250	Total number of paragraphs, thoughts, etc	464
Total number of peer feedbacks	579	Total number of peer feedbacks	982
Total number of teacher feedbacks	1432	Total number of follower feedbacks (other audience they have on their own blogs)	211
Total number of the use of multimodality	1013	Total number of the use of multimodality (pictures, videos, etc	1743
Total number of topics discussed on discussion board	85	Total number of formal writings	1321
Total number of collaborative writings	16	Total number of informal writings	187
Total number of formal writings	1250		
Total number of informal writings	0		

Table 5.11: Total posts on class blogs and learners' blogs

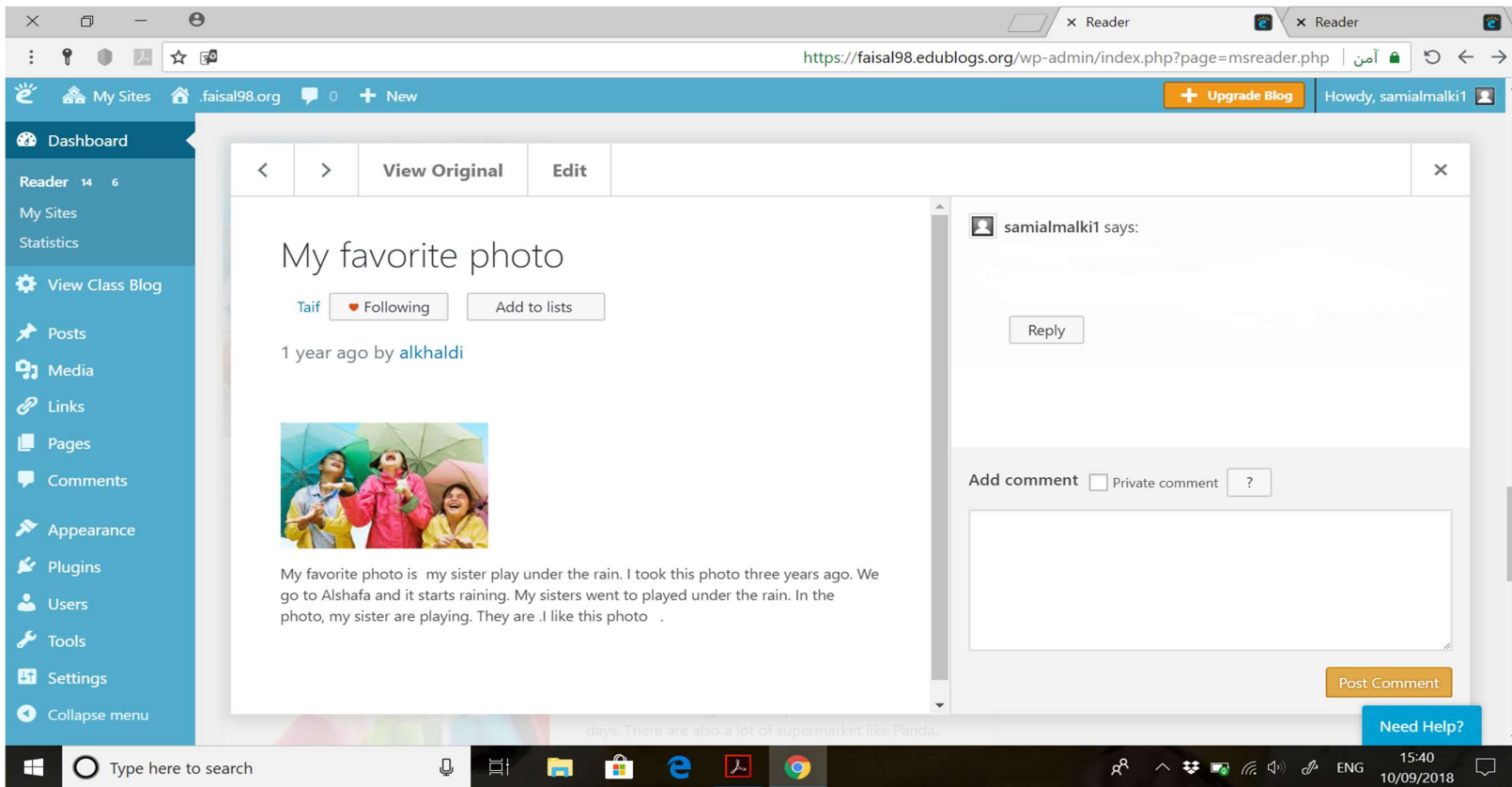
Table 5.12, below, evaluates the band scores for one of the most improved participants of the intervention group in the contents of his own blogs and his posts on the class blog.

Student number	First post score	Band score	Last post score	Band score		
1	14	2	29	5		
Total numbers of posts on learner's blog	Posts during intervention	Total numbers of posts on class blog	Posts during intervention	Content of paragraph scores	Class blog score	
					First post score (14/30)	Last post score (29/30)
Total number of paragraphs, thoughts, etc	18	Total number of paragraph's sentence	28	Task fulfilment	3	6
Total number of peer feedbacks	27	Total number of peer feedbacks	15	Organization and outline	2	6
Total number of follower feedbacks	10	Total number of teacher feedbacks	31	Coherence and cohesion	3	6
Total number of the use of multimodality (pictures, videos, etc.)	41	Total number of the use of multimodality (pictures, videos, etc)	25	Grammatical range and accuracy	3	5
Total number of formal writings	32	Total number of discussed topics on discussion board	7	Lexical range and accuracy	3	6
Total number of informal writings	6	Total number of collaborative writings	4			
		Total number of formal writings	28			
		Total number of informal writings	0			
				Total	14	29

Table 5.12: Example of writing from one of the most improved participants in the intervention group

Table 5.12 presents the contents of the learner's blog and class blog for one participant from the intervention group. It shows that the participant posted 28 homework assignments on the class blog and 16 free writings on his own blog. Also, this participant received feedback from different audiences, including his classmates. Moreover, he wrote 14 paragraphs as informal writing on his own blogs but did no informal writing on the class blog. Secondly, it presents the first and last blog scores; this participant scored 14/30 band score 2 (Below average) in the first post and 29/30 band score 5 (Excellent) in his last post. A set of five categories was ascribed to assist in the evaluation of writing texts: lexical range and accuracy; grammatical range and accuracy; organisation outline; coherence and cohesion; and task fulfilment (see Appendix 3).

Figures 5.5 and 5.6 below are examples of the first and last posted writing samples (homework assignments) for the same participant in table 5.12 from the intervention group who was one of the most improved students in their writing after the intervention.



Marks Awarded: 15/30, Band Score 2

Figure 5.5: Writing sample produced in the beginning of intervention by the same student from intervention group (First homework assignment)

The results in the figure above shows that this student achieved “below average” band 2 in the first homework assignment posted and achieved excellent band 5 in the last homework assignment posted. The writing samples were scored by two markers. The first writing sample was posted on the class blog in the first week of the intervention while the second one was posted in the last week of the intervention (week 14). Different topics were given in the first and last posts. The first posted homework assignment writing scored a mark of 15/30 (Band Score 2) which was “below average”. The writing sample was rated as below average, not only because of a lack of grammatical structure but also because the participant gave no attention to paragraphing, outline and organization, lexical accuracy, or cohesion and coherence (See Figure 5.5).

Figure 6. 6 below presents the writing sample by the same participant in the last week of the intervention and can be compared with the first post for the same student. This is a longer paragraph, a well-organized piece of writing, a wider range of vocabulary is used with greater grammatical accuracy and there is better linking between ideas when compared with the first homework assignment in the first week of the intervention. Furthermore, it shows an improvement in linguistic maturity, perhaps because of increased of practice in writing on the educational blog as a tool for practising and learning writing during the intervention. The participant received a band score of 5 (marks = 29, an Excellent) in the last writing homework assignment. Although many factors may account for this improved performance, the homework assignments were written in two stages: in the first one all participants were required to do the first draft in class, while the second stage was carried out at home to edit and revise. They were required to publish the final draft on the class blog by 12:00 am (see Figure 6.6).

The screenshot shows a WordPress blog post in a reader view. The browser address bar displays the URL: <https://sultan34.edublogs.org/wp-admin/index.php?page=msreader.php>. The page header includes the user name 'Howdy, samialmalki1' and an 'Upgrade Blog' button. The post is by 'alkhaldi' and was posted 11 months ago in Taif. The post title is 'Shopping in Saudi Arabia'. The main content features an image of a hand holding several colorful shopping bags (pink, green, blue, red) and a text block. The text describes shopping in Saudi Arabia as interesting, mentioning malls, supermarkets like Panda, Carrefour, and Ben-Dawood, and a specific mall in Taif. A 'Read More' button is located below the text. The WordPress dashboard sidebar is visible on the left, and the Windows taskbar is at the bottom.

alkhaldi posted 11 months ago in Taif

Shopping in Saudi Arabia

Shopping in Saudi Arabia is very interesting. There are a lot of big malls in Saudi Arabia. People usually go shopping on weekends. They always shop after 7:00pm. Most people like shopping in the days of discount. The things are cheaper than normal days. There are also a lot of supermarket like Panda, Carrefour and Ben-Dawood. I like panda as it is cheap and big. It sells everything I need. when I want to buy clothes, shoes and accessories I go to Jory mall in Taif. It has big and amazing shops. I can also buy from it mobile phones and tablet but you should choose a good shop that can trust. You shouldn't go to expensive shops. Really shopping in Saudi Arabia is very amazing....

Read More

alkhaldi posted 11 months ago in Taif

Marks Awarded 29/30, Band Score 5

Figure 5.6: Writing sample produced in the end of the intervention by the same student from the intervention group (Last homework assignment).

5.6 Participants' attitudes towards using the educational blog

This section addresses research question 3: 'what are the attitudes of students towards blogs as a writing development tool?' Table 5.13 below presents demographic data regarding the participants' possession of a computer, internet and smart phone at home. It also shows participants' awareness of blogs before taking the course, and whether they had their own blog. Finally, it shows what kind of blogs they used and in what language they wrote on it.

	Number	Percent %
Computer at home:		
Yes	42	93.30
No	3	6.70
Smartphone:		
Yes	45	100.00
No	0	0
Internet at home:		
Yes	44	97.80
No	1	2.20
Blog awareness:		
Yes	5	11.10
No	40	88.90
Type of blog:		
General blog	5	11.10
Not applicable	40	88.90
Blog language:		
Arabic	3	6.70
English	2	4.40
Not applicable	40	88.90

Table 5.13: Frequencies and percentages for demographic variables ($N = 45$)

According to Table 5.13, above, almost all participants had a computer at home ($N = 42$, 93.30%), with only three participants without one. All participants possessed a mobile Smartphone ($N = 45$, 100%), and almost every participant had the internet at home ($N = 44$, 97.80%). Before taking this course, most participants were not aware of the existence of blogs ($N = 40$, 88.90%). Only five (11.10%) participants had a

blog, and this was a general blog. Three of these five bloggers wrote only in Arabic, while the other two wrote in both Arabic and English.

Reliability

Prior to SPSS statistical analysis of the data and as the first step in running descriptive statistics, a reliability analysis to compute Cronbach’s alpha was conducted to verify the reliability measures of the ‘attitudes toward blogs’ scale and its subscales in the present study. Prior to the reliability analysis, seven items were recoded, as they were given in reverse order. Cronbach’s alpha indicated a high level of internal consistency for the complete ‘attitudes toward blogs’ scale, $\alpha = .93$ (Cronbach's Alpha). As shown in table 5.14.

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	Number of Items
.926	.930	33

Table 5.14: Cronbach’s Alpha Reliability Coefficients for complete ‘attitudes towards blogs’ items

5.7 Descriptive statistics for attitude toward blogs and sub-dimensions

The ‘attitude toward blogs’ questionnaire consists of a 33-item questionnaire using a 5-point Likert-type scale to compute mean scores for the total scale and seven sub-scales ranging from 1.0 to 5.0. Table 5.15, below, shows the attitude toward blogs survey instrument which quantifies the overall attitudes toward writing blogs and the seven sub-dimensions.

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>min</i>	<i>max</i>
OVERALL	45	4.26	.39	2.73	4.73
Attitude towards using blogs	45	4.18	.52	2.29	5.00
Attitude towards using affordance of blogging to improve EFL writing	45	4.22	.54	2.25	5.00
-Attitude towards using blogs in EFL writing class	45	4.16	.44	2.71	4.71
Attitude towards writing anxiety and blogs	45	4.27	.51	2.67	5.00
Attitude towards feedback	45	4.35	.38	3.14	4.86
Attitude towards grammar and blogs	45	4.33	.55	2.67	5.00
Attitude towards vocabulary and blogs	45	4.37	.61	3.00	5.00

Table 5.15: Descriptive statistics on attitudes toward blogs and dimensions ($N = 45$)

The results in Table 5.15 show that students had highly positive overall attitudes toward blogs ($M = 4.26$, $SD = .39$), with a minimum score of 2.73 and maximum 4.73 (on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 represents a negative attitude and 5 a positive attitude). All other dimensions also had highly positive average levels of reported attitudes: Attitude towards using blogs ($M = 4.18$, $SD = .52$), Attitude towards using affordance of blogging to improve EFL writing ($M = 4.22$, $SD = .54$), Attitude towards writing anxiety and blogs ($M = 4.27$, $SD = .51$), Attitude towards online peer and teacher feedback and comments on blogs ($M = 4.35$, $SD = .38$), Attitude towards vocabulary and blogs ($M = 4.37$, $SD = .61$), Attitude towards grammar and blogs ($M = 4.33$, $SD = .55$), and Attitude towards using blogs in EFL writing class ($M = 4.16$, $SD = .44$). It seems that most of the participants in the intervention group had a positive attitude

towards the use of educational blogs. Also, the results indicate that the attitudes towards each dimension above are positive.

5.8 Frequency tables

5.8.1 Dimension One

Table 5.16 below presents the frequencies of the participants' responses to the Likert items indicating their attitude towards using blogs.

<i>Item</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>		<i>Disagree</i>		<i>Neutral</i>		<i>Strongly agree</i>		<i>Agree</i>		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>		
I am glad that I have my own English blog.	0	.00	0	.00	2	4.4	24	53.3	19	42.2	4.38	0.58
I feel it is easy to create and publish my own blog.	2	4.4	1	2.2	8	17.8	21	46.7	13	28.9	3.93	0.99
I think the use of the blog is a waste of time. (Reversed)	0	.00	2	4.4	3	6.7	26	57.8	14	31.1	4.16	0.74
I like posting my daily routine on my blog.	1	2.2	1	2.2	8	17.8	24	53.3	11	24.4	3.96	0.85
I like to invite my classmates to read my blogs.	0	.00	0	.00	2	4.4	28	62.2	15	33.3	4.29	0.55
I do not enjoy the blog project. (Reversed)	1	2.2	0	.00	1	2.2	30	66.7	13	28.9	4.20	0.69
I will still use my blog in the future.	0	.00	1	2.2	2	4.4	22	48.9	20	44.4	4.36	0.68

Table 5.16: Distribution of sample on Attitude towards using blogs ($N = 45$).

It is clearly demonstrated in Table 5.16 that almost none of the participants strongly disagreed with items, but it is interesting that two participants still did not find it easy to create and publish their blog ($N = 2$, $\% = 4.4$). The largest frequency of participants was found for the Agree category in all items, with between half and two-thirds of participants giving point 4 on the 5-point Likert scale.

5.8.2 Dimension Two

Table 5.17, below, shows the frequency for the learners' attitudes towards using the affordances of blogging to improve their EFL writing.

<i>Item</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>		<i>Disagree</i>		<i>Neutral</i>		<i>Strongly Agree</i>		<i>Agree</i>		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>		
I think it is a good idea to use the discussion board on class blogs to improve writing skills related to planning, drafting, revising, etc.	0	.00	1	2.2	5	11.1	17	37.8	22	48.9	4.33	0.77
Working together on the class blog helped me to improve my academic writing skills.	0	.00	0	.00	1	2.2	18	40.0	26	57.8	4.56	0.55
I like uploading pictures, videos, links, etc on my blog.	0	.00	2	4.4	7	15.6	23	51.1	13	28.9	4.04	0.80
I like having my own portfolio on my blog to read anytime anywhere.	0	.00	2	4.4	7	15.6	27	60.0	9	20.0	3.96	0.74

Table 5.17: Distribution of sample on Attitude towards using affordance of blogging to improve EFL writing ($N = 45$).

Based on the table above, none of the participants disagreed with the given items. It is interesting that, for the first two items in the theme, participants mostly strongly agreed with items: *I think it is good idea to use the discussion board on class blogs to improve writing skills related to planning, drafting, revising, etc.* ($N = 22$, $\% = 48.90$) and *Working together on the class blog helped me to improve my academic writing skills* ($N = 26$, $\% = 57.80$). For the second two items, participants mostly just agreed with statements: *I like uploading pictures, videos, links, etc. on my blog* ($N = 23$, $\% = 51.10$) and *I like having my own portfolio on my blog to read anytime anywhere* ($N = 27$, $\% = 60.00$).

5.8.3 Dimension Three

Table 5.18, below, shows the frequencies for the learners' attitude towards using blogs in EFL writing

<i>Item</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>		<i>Disagree</i>		<i>Neutral</i>		<i>Strongly agree</i>		<i>Agree</i>		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>		
Writing on weblog was enjoyable and interesting.	0	.00	0	.00	3	6.7	22	48.9	20	44.4	4.38	0.61
I like to write a draft of what I want to say before publishing it on my blog.	1	2.2	3	6.7	9	20.0	20	44.4	12	26.7	3.87	0.97
I like reading my classmates' written posts.	0	.00	0	.00	3	6.7	22	48.9	20	44.4	4.38	0.61
I feel that my writing is better when writing on my blogs than on paper in class.	0	.00	0	.00	3	6.7	27	60.0	15	33.3	4.27	0.58
I prefer to write on paper rather than on blogs. (Reversed)	0	.00	0	.00	4	8.9	26	57.8	15	33.3	4.24	0.61
I have learned how to plan different writing tasks.	1	2.2	1	2.2	6	13.3	27	60.0	10	22.2	3.98	0.81
I prefer the blogging way of submitting my assignments to the traditional way of submitting assignments.	4	8.9	1	2.2	2	4.4	21	46.7	17	37.8	4.02	1.16

Table 5.18: Distribution of sample on Attitude towards using blogs in EFL writing class ($N = 45$)

According to Table 5.18, one item had four participants strongly disagreeing. They did not prefer the blogging way of submitting assignments to the traditional way of submitting assignments ($N = 4$, $\% = 8.90$). Other participants mostly had positive answers to items, as half of them agreed and one-third strongly agreed with Attitude towards using blogs in EFL writing class. Complete data can be seen in Table 5.18.

5.8.4 Dimension Four

Table 5.19, below, indicates the frequencies for students' attitude towards writing anxiety.

<i>Item</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>		<i>Disagree</i>		<i>Neutral</i>		<i>Strongly agree</i>		<i>Agree</i>		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>		
I feel pressure when writing on my blog or class blog because my friend will read my writing. (Reversed)	0	.00	1	2.2	3	6.7	26	57.8	15	33.3	4.22	0.67
I feel more confident with writing on my blog than on paper.	0	.00	0	.00	3	6.7	24	53.3	18	40.0	4.33	0.60
I feel freer to write on the blog than in the class.	0	.00	0	.00	4	8.9	25	55.6	16	35.6	4.27	0.62

Table 5.19: Distribution of sample on Attitude towards writing anxiety and blogs ($N = 45$).

It is clearly demonstrated in the table above that over 90% of participants agreed or strongly agreed with these items. None of the participants strongly disagreed with the statements. Thus, it seems that participants had positive opinion and did not feel writing anxiety when writing their blogs. Complete data can be seen in Table 5.19.

5.8.5 Dimension Five

Table 5.20, below, presents frequencies for the students' attitudes towards online peer and teacher feedback and comments on blogs.

<i>Item</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>		<i>Disagree</i>		<i>Neutral</i>		<i>Strongly agree</i>		<i>Agree</i>		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>		
Reading the comments and entries of my peers on the blog helped me to learn and improve my own writing.	0	.00	0	.00	2	4.4	28	62.2	15	33.3	4.29	0.55
I like making comments on my classmates' posts.	0	.00	0	.00	3	6.7	25	55.6	17	37.8	4.31	0.60
Responding to the feedback received on my blog improves my writing.	0	.00	1	2.2	2	4.4	26	57.8	16	35.6	4.27	0.65

I found it difficult to comment on the blogs of my peers and class blog. (Reversed)	0	.00	3	6.7	1	2.2	25	55.6	16	35.6	4.20	0.79
I like having classmates make comments on my posts.	0	.00	1	2.2	0	.00	24	53.3	20	44.4	4.40	0.62
I feel uncomfortable about my peers' comments. (Reversed)	0	.00	1	2.2	1	2.2	29	64.4	14	31.1	4.24	0.61
I like having my instructor make written comments on my posts.	0	.00	0	.00	0	.00	11	24.4	34	75.6	4.76	0.43

Table 5.20 Distribution of sample on Attitude towards online peer and teacher feedback and comments on blogs ($N = 45$).

The results in the table above show the mostly positive answers of participants, as none of them strongly disagreed with the items. On most items, participants agreed with the statement, and the only difference was for ‘I like having my instructor make written comments on my posts’, where three-quarters of participants reported that they strongly agreed with the statement ($N = 34$, $\% = 75.60$). Complete frequency data can be seen in Table 5.20.

5.8.6 Dimension Six

Table 5.21, below, gives the frequencies for the participants’ attitudes towards grammar and blogs.

<i>Item</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>		<i>Disagree</i>		<i>Neutral</i>		<i>Strongly agree</i>		<i>Agree</i>		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>		
Writing on the blog made checking word choice and word spelling easier.	1	2.2	1	2.2	2	4.4	18	40.0	23	51.1	4.36	0.86
Writing on the blog made checking my grammar easier.	0	.00	1	2.2	1	2.2	18	40.0	25	55.6	4.49	0.66
In general, I feel that my English grammar has not improved since I began blogging. (Reversed)	0	.00	2	4.4	2	4.4	28	62.2	13	28.9	4.16	0.71

Table 5.21: Distribution of sample on Attitude towards grammar and blogs ($N = 45$)

The results in the table above show that participants overall had positive attitudes, with participants agreeing or strongly agreeing with nearly all the given statements. For first two statements, they mostly strongly agreed with statement ($N = 23$, $\% = 51.10$ and $N = 25$, $\% = 55.60$), while for statement three there was agreement ($N = 28$, $\% = 62.20$), but less strong agreement ($N = 13$, $\% = 28.90$). Complete frequency data can be seen in Table 5.21.

5.8.7 Dimension Seven

Table 5.22: gives frequencies for the participants' attitudes towards vocabulary and blogs.

<i>Item</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>		<i>Disagree</i>		<i>Neutral</i>		<i>Strongly agree</i>		<i>Agree</i>		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>		
I learn new words when reading my friends' postings.	0	.00	0	.00	4	8.9	21	46.7	20	44.4	4.36	0.65
I prefer checking up meanings of difficult words in the online dictionary when blogging.	0	.00	0	.00	6	13.3	16	35.6	23	51.1	4.38	0.72

Table 5. 22: Distribution of sample on Attitude towards vocabulary and blogs ($N = 45$).

According to the data shown in the table above, participants generally agreed that they learned new words when reading their friends' posts ($N = 21$, $\% = 46.70$) and they mostly strongly agreed that they preferred checking meanings of difficult words in the online dictionary when blogging ($N = 23$, $\% = 51.10$). Complete frequency data can be seen in Table 5.22.

5.9 Conclusion to the chapter

The above chapter has presented summaries from the outputs of the SPSS software on which the normality tests for complete pre- and post-test data were carried out. As the data showed significant deviation from normal distributions on all variables, the decision to use non-parametric tests was made.

Mann-Whitney tests, as the non-parametric alternative to the t-test, were conducted in order to investigate the differences between pre- and post-intervention writing samples of the intervention and comparison groups. The comparison was made to address the first research question that called for statistical analysis of writing samples from both groups. The test was done to see if there were any differences in pre- and post-test scores in paragraph organisation, paragraph cohesion and coherence, variety of sentences, grammatical range and accuracy, and lexical range and accuracy (RQ1). This was done to investigate the extent to which the intervention group had improved when compared with the comparison group.

Differences between the groups on the pre-test showed that there were no significant differences. To investigate whether there was any significant difference on the post-tests between groups, Mann-Whitney tests were performed. The results showed that there was a significant difference between the intervention and the comparison groups in the overall post-test results. The overall scores awarded by the independent markers indicated the quality of the writing samples. Moreover, in order to investigate the differences between the first and last posts of the students' homework assignment writing samples of the intervention group only, Mann-Whitney tests, as the non-parametric was performed to address the quantitative part from the second research question. The test was done to compare the quality of writing in paragraph organisation, paragraph cohesion and coherence, variety of sentences, grammatical range and accuracy, and lexical range and accuracy. RQ3 was also investigated by seeing whether there were any differences in writing quality of the intervention group between the first and last posts of the writing homework assignments posted on the class blog.

The results of the first and second research questions were that the use of the blog as a pedagogical method in teaching and learning writing skills had a positive impact on the development of writing skills of the intervention group students. Students in the intervention group wrote a longer paragraph with grammatical range and accuracy, and well organised paragraphs with cohesion and coherence. The results also indicate that students in the intervention group used a variety of sentence structures and increased their use of compound sentences rather than simple sentences. Compared with the comparison group, the intervention group showed an improvement in their writing quality and their scores show that the overall quality of their writing in the post-test and the last post on the class blog had improved. Furthermore, to investigate the second research question (RQ2, what are the attitudes of students towards blogs as a writing development tool?) a questionnaire consisting of a 33-item Likert-type scale was used. Mean scores were computed for the total scale and its seven sub-scales ranging from 1.0 to 5.0. The “attitude toward blogs” survey instrument quantified the overall attitude towards writing blogs and students’ experience of writing blogs. It had seven sub-dimensions: Attitude towards using blogs, Attitude towards using affordances of blogging to improve EFL writing, Attitude towards writing anxiety and blogs, Attitude towards online peer and teacher feedback and comments on blogs, Attitude towards vocabulary and blogs, Attitude towards grammar and blogs, and Attitude towards using blogs in EFL writing class. The results show that students in the intervention group had highly positive attitudes towards using blogging and its affordances as a tool for teaching and learning English skills in general, and particularly in writing, in relation to grammar, vocabulary, feedback, discussion group and writing anxiety. The next chapter presents the qualitative findings.

6. CHAPTER SIX

Students' perceptions and experiences

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I present qualitative findings related to the perceptions, attitudes and experiences of participant students studying in the health stream of the PYP in One University in the KSA, regarding the impact of using educational blogs as a tool of writing development (intervention group). This includes their views on the issues influencing their writing development, the importance of educational technology in general and specifically the use of the blogs in teaching EFL to improve their writing proficiency. I then present the affective benefits of using educational blogging as a tool of writing development, along with some of the challenges faced by the students in the school and university in using technology in EFL classes. This is followed by the perceptions of participants of the relationship between the affordances of blogging and writing development. Finally, the experiences of the four most improved participants are presented regarding what they did on their own blogs and class blog and in what ways this may have improved their writing.

6.2 Findings from the open-ended questionnaire, focus group discussions and interviews

This study used mixed-methods. The quantitative findings were presented in the previous chapter, but these showed that several questions remained to be answered, such as how and why the written standard achieved was affected by the intervention. The previous chapter contained statistical analyses which demonstrated the impact of using educational blogging on EFL students' writing performance. Nevertheless, it was essential to expand on these findings by pinpointing and evaluating precisely how the intervention influenced writing abilities in order to provide a greater insight into the results. For example, it was vital to get the participants' perceptions of, and attitude toward, the use of the educational blog and its affordances, and whether they thought

the use of the blogs affected their writing development, in order to identify which aspects of blogging were most beneficial, and to identify any problems or drawbacks. In order to address these issues, an open-ended questionnaire was given to all 45 participants in the intervention group to get the whole picture of their perceptions with regard to using educational blogs in teaching and learning English language skills in general and writing in particular. This was followed by focus group discussions with 14 participants from the intervention group whose writing achievement was in band 2 (10-15; 'below average') in the pre-test, divided into two groups of seven. These focus group discussions were conducted twice, in week six and week eleven, during the intervention period in order to elicit perceptions and opinions of the relationship between using the educational blog and its affordances, and their writing development. Next, five days after the end of the intervention, four focus group participants were interviewed whose writing had improved the most according to their results on the post-test and the last homework assignment posted on the class blog. They were asked to describe their experiences of what they did on their own blogs and class blog and explain how and why they had improved and in which elements of writing.

6.3 Themes, Codes and Sub-Codes

The qualitative analysis of the data from the open-ended questionnaires, focus groups and interviews generated four major themes, which were linked to the methods by which students had used educational blogs in the past, as well as their attitudes, perceptions and experiences of the use of educational blogs inside and outside the EFL classroom. The open-ended questionnaire was given to establish the perceptions of all participants in the intervention group with regards to using blogs in teaching and improving EFL writing skills. Importantly, the broad themes were determined by the research questions, which fed into the questionnaire/focus group/interview design,

while the more specific comments arising from the data collection were categorised inductively. The thematic map table which displays all four themes and the codes of the participants, along with quotations, is provided in the appendix (19). Table 6.1, below, shows themes which emerged from the open-ended questionnaires, focus groups and interviews.

	Main themes	Codes	Sub-codes
1	Contextual issues affecting EFL learners' English writing	Inadequacy of teaching methods	Lack of use of technology
			Adopting traditional methods in teaching English
		Large class size	Teacher-centred teaching
			Lack of practice
2	Students' attitudes and perceptions of using educational blog in teaching and learning EFL writing	The importance of the use of educational blogs in English classes	Insufficient teacher feedback
			Blogging as pedagogical method of teaching English
			Affective benefits of blogging
		Challenges facing students adopting the use of educational blog technology	
3	Students' perceptions of the affordances of blogging as a tool of writing development	Relationship between affordances of blogging and writing improvement	Lack of peer feedback
			Collaborative writing
			Free writing
			Discussion board
			Online feedback and comments

		The effect of multimodality on student writing
		Self-directed learning
4	Students' experience of using the types of blogs	What learners did on their own blogs What learners did on the class blog
	The influence of the use of educational blogs on EFL students' writing development	Improved paragraph organization Increased vocabulary Improved grammatical range and accuracy Use of different tenses Paragraph cohesion and coherence

Table 6.1: Themes emerging from open-ended questionnaires, focus groups and interviews

6.4 Contextual issues affecting EFL learners' writing development

Theme1: Students' beliefs of contextual issues affecting EFL learners' writing development			
Code and sub-codes	Definitions	Sources	References
Inadequacy of teaching methods	Comments which refer to the teaching methods used in teaching English	Focus groups 1,2	14 participants
Lack of use of technology	Comments which refer to the lack of use of appropriate technology to enable the learners to improve their language skills	Focus groups 1,2	14 participants
Adopting traditional methods in teaching English	Comments which refer to traditional methods in teaching English	Focus groups 1,2	13 participants
Teacher-centred teaching	Comments which refer to teacher-centred teaching	Focus groups 1,2	14 participants
Lack of practice	Comments which refer to lack of writing practice in classroom	Focus Groups 1,2	14 participants
Large class size	Comments which refer to the large number in the English classroom	Focus groups 1,2	12 participants
Lack of teacher and peer feedback	Comments which refer to insufficient teacher feedback and the lack of peer feedback	Focus groups 1,2	14 participants

Table 6.2: Contextual issues affecting EFL learners' writing development

This section presents findings related to the contextual issues affecting learners' writing during their study of the English language. The participants mentioned factors that negatively affected their writing development during their study at school and university and proposed several solutions that might help them to overcome their problems. The issues fell into seven sub-sections: 1) Inadequate teaching methods, 2) lack of use of technology, 3) adopting traditional methods, 4) teacher-centred teaching, 5) large class size, 6) lack of practice, 7) lack of teacher and peer feedback.

6.4.1 Inadequate teaching methods

Analysis of the data obtained from the discussions with the focus groups suggests that all participants believed that one of the matters that influenced their writing

improvement was *"the lack of appropriate teaching methods in school and university"* (FG1S2). They emphasised that they *"faced this matter, especially in English classes"* (FG1S6). However, they explained what they meant about the teaching methods. For example, the grammar translation method was *"the main teaching style in school and university, and this hampered their capacity to comprehend the language or to understand the structure, meaning and function of the language"* (FG1S3). According to the above quote, I argue that the students criticised the style of teaching used in school and university which made the students passive recipients of knowledge, making it hard to achieve the target of communication.

Furthermore, the traditional teaching methods in English classes needed to be integrated with educational technology to make the classes more interactive. Accordingly, all participants in the focus groups believed that the use of technology was *"very important in teaching and learning English because they live in the technological age"* (FG2S5). Also, they stated that technology was *"not only for social or entertainment purposes, but it had become an essential tool in education, particularly in teaching and learning English"* (FG1S7). It seems that technologies such as the computer, internet and social networks, could be used for communication and practising the language. For example, most of the focus group participants felt that the use of educational technology as a teaching method *"has much benefit for students and it makes the class an attractive environment for the learners."* (FG2S7). From the quotes above, it seems that the use of traditional methods in teaching make learning passive for the students, unlike the use of technology which makes it more interactive. Ten participants in the focus groups indicated that *"classes in schools lacked technological equipment"*. They emphasised that it was *"only found in the Learning Resources Centre (LRC), which is not sufficient"* (FG1S1). In addition to the lack of use of technology in English classes in schools, focus group participants

suggested reasons for the limited the use of technology in schools. For example, most of the participants indicated that technology equipment in public schools *"was very limited, especially the internet"* (FG1S3), and, therefore, students were not able to use the internet in classes for educational purposes. Moreover, participant FG1S2 claimed that his previous high school consisted of 16 classrooms, *"not one of which had any technological equipment, and there was only one learning resources centre in the school"* (FG1S2). He mentioned, further, that the LRC *"had projector, an electronic whiteboard, computer lab and internet access, but that only the biology teacher took the students to the LRC"*. Another participant in the same group (FG1S5) emphasised that, in his previous school, they *"had an LRC but that teachers rarely used it; however, it was used in teaching English, where the teacher used projector, electronic whiteboard and PowerPoint"* (FG1S5).

In this regard, according to F1GS5's perception of where teachers did use technology, they seemed to use it to help them deliver lessons rather than having the students themselves use technology interactively. This might be because some teachers did not believe in technology in teaching, or due to their lack of training or experience in dealing with technology. Similarly, five participants in focus group two indicated that their previous schools lacked any technological equipment. In contrast, two participants, FG2S1 and FG2S6, reported that they had studied at private schools which *"possessed technological equipment such as projector, electronic whiteboard and the internet but that the internet was protected by a passcode which was only for the teachers"*. According to the above views, it seems that even the private schools did not allow students use the internet personally, and neither did the public school or university. This might be because the schools' policy forbade students' use of the internet due to cultural issues or to avoid criticism from wider society.

In this vein, all participants in focus groups confirmed that "*English teachers who used technology in the classroom did not allow students to use the internet*" (FG2S6). For example, students recognised that "*most English teachers just used PowerPoint, which was useless in teaching and learning English writing*" (FG1S5). I argue that these students did not prefer to use certain sorts of technology in English classes, i.e. PowerPoint, as they felt "*these technologies do not help or support students' writing skills*" (FG2S2). It might only be a help to the teachers, who used it themselves to deliver lessons rather than having the students use technology interactively themselves. It could also be that teachers did not want to alter their teaching methods but preferred to adhere to one method only. Nevertheless, teachers might use them when they had the head teacher or supervisor in the class and, after that, they returned to the traditional method. It seems that English teachers in schools are not interested in using technology in their classes for educational purposes, just to satisfy their supervisors and head teachers.

Interestingly, in focus group two, three participants put forward the view that the lack of use of technology in school might be because "*teachers had insufficient training in the use of the educational technologies which are needed for teaching English*" (FG2S3). For instance, this could refer to the internet, blogs, wikis and other educational technology, which all focus group participants felt were "*useful tools, might improve students' English, rather than just using PowerPoint or the electronic whiteboard*" (FG1S6). I argue that this would be especially applicable in the private school because it had technology already fitted in the classrooms, whereas many public schools were in rented buildings with small classrooms which could not accommodate technology.

According to above data from focus groups, the lack of use of technology in school and even in university was *"one of the factors affecting their learning of English, particularly in their writing development"* (FG1S4). Additionally, they emphasised that the university possessed technological equipment but that most of the computers in the lab were *"broken"*, and that there was no *"internet access in the university"* (FG2S2). For example, all participants in the focus groups claimed that the *"teachers in the university did not use the educational technologies, even PowerPoint or other elements of technology, to facilitate their lessons"* (FG2S7).

In the same vein, participant FG1S1 realised that *"some university English teachers in the first semester had used Blackboard just for two weeks then stopped"*. Therefore, participant (FG1S4) asked, what had the teachers used Blackboard for, was it *"for teaching English or just for the curriculum assessments"*? This was answered by participant FG1S6, who said that the teacher had used Blackboard for uploading material online and that he had written announcements on it. However, this participant emphasised that the teacher had *"no idea how to use Blackboard as he had not had any training in its use"*. Similarly, another participant, FG2S1, felt that the use of Blackboard in the university was *"very limited"* and he emphasised that the majority of teachers did not *"use their Blackboard regularly and just uploaded the subject material on it and they did not activate the useful function like discussion board"*. It seems that students wanted their English teacher to activate the collaboration or discussion board on the Blackboard to learn from their teacher and peers. This might also be an indication of the importance of the use of educational technology and its ease in supporting collaboration and self-learning.

In the same vein, all participants in the focus groups thought that the university environment and university teachers *"would be different"* (FG1S2), (FG2S7) from school regarding using educational technology in English classes, but they realised

that they were *"the same"* (FG1S4). It seemed that teachers in both school and university were unaware of the uses of educational technology, such as blogs, wikis and so on. This could also be because the English teachers did not get enough training in using educational technologies and that, while the university may have had several training sessions in using technology, these were probably technically focused rather than pedagogically focused. In other words, teachers get training from companies who sell software, but they might need to receive training from pedagogical experts in order to understand how they can use the technology to promote learning and how to integrate it effectively into their lessons.

Furthermore, another point reported by participants in focus group one is that *"some teachers used basic technology in their classes - they always had to ask for assistance from the students (FG1S6)"*. From this view, it seems that technology is difficult for some English teachers to use, especially the newest sorts of educational technologies, which suggests that teachers should have regular training sessions at the university.

Additionally, participants in focus group two raised the point that the *"age of teachers might affect their learning of the use of technology in English classes"* (FG2S1). They believed that *"older teachers would be less inclined to adapt to new pedagogical tools"* (FG2S5). Thus, all participants in both groups discussed the above issues related to the lack of use of technology in school and university, and of educational technology in particular. According to participants' beliefs, it seems that English teachers do not get the appropriate training in using technology; this could be for the reasons indicated by the participants in the focus groups. There was also an absence of the network infrastructure needed to support the use of educational technology in schools and university because internet access is limited by the policy of the Ministry of Education. All focus group participants argued that the points they had discussed previously led teachers to stick with traditional teaching methods in English classes,

or to use only essential technological tools which were insufficient, rather than using educational technology such as blogs, wikis and so on. The following quote is an example that shows this view:

Lack of technology equipment in schools and the university and also most English teachers don't deal with technology...lack of training or not interested in using technology in their classes. All these reasons are likely to keep teachers adopting the traditional methods in teaching English.
(FG2S6)

6.4.2 Teaching methods in English language classes

All the participants in the focus groups argued that the factors mentioned above led teachers to persist with traditional teaching methods and avoid using technology in teaching English. Participating students, on the other hand, believed that *"technology should be integrated into interactive teaching"* (FG1S1), and argued against traditional teaching methods. Traditional teaching methods in EFL in Saudi Arabia are *"not sufficient, particularly in learning and teaching English academic writing"* (FG2S4). Because *"learning and teaching EFL has become vital in Saudi Arabia"* (FG2S1), So that all participants emphasised that most of the teachers were still using *"traditional methods in teaching English (Audio Lingual Method followed by Grammar Translation Method) with no integration with educational technology"* (FG1S5).

From the above perceptions, I argue that the main concern of the participants in focus groups was that the use of the traditional methods in teaching and learning English writing was not adequate. This might be because the students live in a technological generation and they use different sources to learn English via technology, while teachers who use the traditional methods focus too much on teaching grammar and listening, and avoid spending more time on the other skills, such as speaking, reading and writing.

Making a further point, all focus group participants claimed that policy makers in the Ministry of Education should *"involve students in meetings"* (FG1S3), listen to them and learn what they need. They claimed that school and university should also *"provide more attractive environments for students"* (FG2S4). Moreover, if educational institutions provided different technological tools in classes and the English teachers taught writing in effective ways through technology, thereby enhancing student motivation, the obstacles faced in learning English, particularly in writing skills, could be overcome. However, all participants in focus groups raised the issue of the *"lack of active participation in English class"* (FG2S2) with the teacher dominating classroom talk and operating in a didactic style and some of them showed naïve views (as clarified in the next paragraph) about the use of teaching methods in teaching EFL writing. For instance, some participants felt that they were not *"interested in attending English classes"* and emphasised that they were *"bored and feel sleepy in the classroom"*. Three participants in each group indicated this view, as shown in the following examples:

Traditional teaching methods consider teachers as being the source of information, which is very boring, and I sometimes try to use my mobile and make chit-chat with my friends instead of concentrating on the main subject. (FG2S5).

These opinions could be seen as naïve as they focused on issues such as sleeping in class and using mobile phones during the lesson. The participants who held these opinions might have less awareness of the instructions of teaching and learning or it might be that there is not enough that engages them actively in lessons. In contrast, two participants in focus group two indicated that the traditional transmission strategy of teaching was *"fine for giving instructions or in teaching other subjects, but English teachers should integrate technology with the traditional style in teaching to make their classes more interactive"* (FG2S6). For example, having discussion groups for

brainstorming and exchanging ideas before starting to search the internet regarding the main topic of writing. These views can be seen in the following quotes:

I believe that using traditional methods in teaching English is a part of teaching, but I think teachers should use alternative methods as well in teaching English, especially in teaching academic writing. (FG2S3)
Teachers should make their classes attractive environments for students by using different methods in teaching and learning English. (FG2S5).

6.4.3 Teacher-centred learning

The analysis of the focus group data revealed that all participants believed that the main problem with traditional methods in teaching and learning EFL in school and university was that it is "*predominately teacher-centred*" (FG2S1). They emphasised that student-centred learning would lead to an increase in students' "*self-confidence, help to learn cognitive skills and share their views with other classmates*" (FG1S17). All participants in focus groups believed that teachers thought that if they give a chance to student-centred learning "*they could lose the class control, and they would like to keep students silent all the time*" (FG2S5).

From the quotes above, it seems that some teachers shift from their goal in teaching to other, less important aims, such as class control, wanting to keep students silent all the time. I argue that this is a teacher belief which is related to a cultural issue which might affect the process of teaching and learning. For example, one of teachers' concerns in Saudi Arabia is to control their classes, so they always tend towards teacher-centred learning. As a result of this, students lose the opportunity for student-centred learning, working in groups, and so on. This might have the effect of limiting students' learning of cognitive skills because of the lack of communication with peers in the classroom.

6.4.4 Large class size

According to the focus group data, all participants indicated that the number of students in their English classes was *"very large"* (FG2S3), ranging from 35 to 45 in school and 45 to 90 at university. Most felt that *"large class size could affect students' learning, especially in English writing because students need to practise it as much as they can"* (FG1S2). Emphasising that large class size is an issue facing students in school and university, they thought that *"large classes might affect the process of teaching and learning English language"* (SFG1S3). For instance, participants who had faced this issue in their previous school considered it to be a *"serious problem facing all learners in all subjects, but particularly in English writing classes"* (FG2S5). Because it is a foreign language and has a lot of exercises that teachers should practise with learners, but due to the class having 42 students and lasting only 45 minutes, this did not give *"much time for individual practice of language skills and students"*. This view was supported by another participant, FG2S6, who added that the large number of learners in the classroom not only affected practising of English skills but also had a *"deleterious effect on students' attention"*. For instance, this hearing-impaired student had been in a high school class of 44 and, sitting at the back of the class, could barely hear his teacher. This had a negative impact on English learners: *"I think that the large number of students in English classroom, and lack of motivation from teachers are clear reasons that might be affecting my writing"* (FG1S3).

All participants, when discussing the effect of large class size, focused on writing skills. Participants always revealed that they had a *"problem with their English writing proficiency"* (FG1S2). According to the data from the quotes above, it seems that all students in focus groups faced a problem in practising their writing in class because the large numbers of learners in English classes affected their learning process. Thus,

the number of students in English classes needs to be minimised to allow students more time to practise their language skills and writing in particular. It could also be a solution to integrate educational technology into English classes in order to give students more time to practise their writing in a social environment in/out of the classroom.

6.4.5 Lack of writing practice

All participants in the focus groups felt that the *"lack of writing practice affects writing development"* (FG2S2), due to some of the factors mentioned earlier. For instance, large class size might impact on practising writing as the teacher cannot give feedback to all the students in the class. As a result of this, all participants emphasised that their writing was *"poor"*, but they believed that *"practice makes better"* (FG1S1). It seems that these participants admitted they had a problem with their writing ability and they needed time to practise writing in/out of the classroom in order to improve it. This might be an indication to English teachers to give writing skills more attention and to integrate educational technology in their classes to give students greater opportunity to practise and improve their writing.

In the same vein, four participants in focus groups emphasised that they had *"problems with their writing, lack of vocabulary, layout of paragraphs"* (FG1S7). This could be because of the *"large number of students in his English class and a lack of motivation from teachers"* (FG2S3). Moreover, some participants felt that teachers just gave students *"specific writing topics for their mid-term and final exams, not during regular classes"* (FG2S5), emphasising that teachers were *"not interested in teaching writing"* (FG1S1).

From the above views, it seems that teachers have insufficient time to practise writing with their students and that, perhaps, they are not interested in writing skills. There could be a negative consequence to this in that students may not pay attention to

writing because they are given one topic in advance for the final examination. This might affect their learning process in writing because students want to obtain good marks in the examination rather than learning or developing their writing skills. Students might also not get motivation or encouragement from their teachers to practise their writing.

In addition to these factors, interestingly, five participants indicated that they had had a private teacher to give them English lessons, as they *"thought this might help to improve their writing, but they did not improve"* (FG2S6). It is clear that some private teachers are not qualified, and English may not be their major, although they may charge high rates. This takes us to the point that, according to the focus group data, some English teachers do not give writing skills enough attention. This led students to seek private teachers, but this could make the problem more complicated because the majority of the private English teachers were not qualified; this also cost students a lot of money.

Another point raised was that the large number of students in the English class could result in a lack of collaboration in writing because most English teachers talked all the time and students were not given the time to do so.

I think that one of the disadvantages of a large number of learners in the English classroom is the lack collaborative writing... One of my friends who studied in a private school in another city told me that they did collaborative writing in their English class because they were twenty-five students and their teacher gave them time in groups for collaborative writing. (FG2S2).

This participant also emphasized that this factor might affect students' writing development and other learning skills that could be *"learned from peers"*. For example, in his first semester at university, his English teacher had taught them to do collaborative writing in groups. This student thought that collaborative writing might *"improve their writing because they generated more ideas through brainstorming, heard new vocabulary and learned how to make an argument, among other benefits"*.

This could encourage low achieving students to improve themselves in order to participate effectively with their peers.

In contrast, another participant (FG2S6) indicated that he had twice participated in group *"collaborative writing"* last semester at university, but that their teacher had stopped it because the students had *"not focused on the topic but shifted to Arabic and discussed other issues, like what was new on social media"*. It seemed that some students failed to pay attention to collaboration because they had not practised it in school or simply through lack of awareness of this activity. All focus group participants claimed that teachers *"should give students time for practising writing, both individually and collaboratively"* to help them in developing their language and writing skills.

6.4.6 Insufficient feedback

Analysis of the focus group data revealed that insufficient teacher feedback was the main issue facing learners, as well as a lack of peer feedback. This section presents this issue in more detail.

6.4.6.1 Lack of teacher feedback

All participants in the focus groups felt that a lack of teacher feedback was *"one of the major issues affecting writing improvement"* (FG2S7) and, therefore, due to this and some other issues previously mentioned, this affected students' writing improvement. However, most of the participants explained what sort of feedback they got on their writing. For example, teachers only put *"some symbols to indicate the grammatical errors"* (FG1S5) with no explanation of their meaning, so that participants felt *"frustrated"* (FG1S6). All participants emphasised that, unfortunately, most English teachers were *"poor at giving feedback"* (FG2S2). Also, they were *"late in returning pieces of writing, with unclear feedback, and they sometimes did not give writing back at all"* (FG2S7). Moreover, one participant in focus group two indicated that they did

not get *"regular feedback from their teachers"* (FG2S3). Another participant in the same group supported this point, indicating that his teachers were *"not interested in giving feedback on extra work, even on core assignments"* (FG21S4). For example, they sometimes got their paragraph writing assignments back with unclear feedback and with symbols they did not know the meaning of. Furthermore, he said some teachers never gave feedback on assignments, just collected their papers and never returned them. It seems that providing feedback on students' writing is a tedious process for EFL teachers, as in the following quote:

I studied English for seven years in school and I remember that no single teacher gave me sufficient written feedback on my assignments or any encouraging phrases...I think that some teachers just write some words such as good and not too bad with no explanation or corrections on my mistakes. (FG2S3).

Similarly, all participants in focus group one had the same discussion on the lack of teacher feedback on their writing. They indicated that, when they were in school, their teachers only *"underlined their mistakes with no indication of the type of errors"* (FG1S5), or else they wrote *'long comments at the end of the paper or in the margin'* (FG1S3), which confused them. It seemed that teachers did not have enough time to correct their students' writing in order to give them useful feedback and comments. The following quote is an example of this view: *"I think that my teachers did not have time to correct all student assignments with feedback because we were forty-three students in the class and all my teachers had more than four classes per day"* (FG1S4).

Moreover, another participant in focus group one had a positive attitude towards an English teacher who had taught him in the last year of high school. He emphasised that his *"teacher always gave feedback and comments on writing, but he only focused on grammar and spelling mistakes rather than on the paragraph outline and cohesion and coherence"* (FG1S5). Nevertheless, this helped him to improve when compared with his friends in other classes who did not *"get regular feedback"*. It seems that this

teacher focused on grammar and spelling mistakes because the way of teaching in Saudi Arabia is more focused on grammar and the teacher may have thought that the other elements in the paragraph were not necessary. Although it was incomplete feedback, it improved some aspects of this student's writing.

On the other hand, all focus group participants claimed that English teachers *"should make sure that their feedback is effective and that students understand the feedback given in order to help students writing ability"* (FG1S7). This would help them know how to correct their mistakes and eventually turn them into good writers. However, such efforts should be undertaken by all English writing teachers to ensure that all students can become lifelong learners who seek to improve the quality of their writing in order to become truly competent writers.

6.4.6.2 Lack of peer feedback

The analysis of the focus group discussion data indicated that most participants talked about the *"lack of peer feedback"* (FG1S2) on their writing. Furthermore, they felt that peer feedback on their writing was *"something unusual to ask peers to get their feedback"* (FG1S6). Because they were at same level of English they had *"doubt in their peer feedback"* (FG2S1) and they emphasised that they *"never get their peer feedback in school"* (FG1S5) even though some colleagues were good at English.

In the same vein, four participants (FG2S4, FG2S3, FG1S7, and FG1S2) felt that peer feedback was *"very important to learn and communicate with other students"* (FG2S3). They emphasised that it was good to share their writing homework with other students to get their feedback due to the lack of teacher feedback. For example, some students had a good level of English and they could help others by giving feedback. They also indicated that they could *"learn from their peers to generate more ideas and could correct grammatical errors"* (FG1S2). From the quotes above, students thought it a good idea to share their writing with classmates to get their

feedback. They thought this could help in communication, generating ideas and correcting grammatical mistakes. They rejected the idea that peer feedback was inaccurate, off the point or untrustworthy.

In contrast, four participants felt that *"peers' feedback is useless because all students have problems in their writing and never ask for help or feedback on writing from classmates"* (FG1S5), emphasising that they believed in *"teachers' feedback"* (FG1S1) and bemoaning that they had not received *"enough feedback from their teachers"* (FG2S7).

From the quotes above, these participants preferred to get their teachers' feedback because they trusted it more than their peers' feedback, due to its greater accuracy and trustworthiness. Also, it seemed that these participants did not trust peer feedback because it might be not reliable when it comes to correcting errors rather than just giving encouraging phrases or giving ideas.

6.5 Conclusion

Finally, to sum up the contextual issues affecting EFL learners' English writing, all participants in focus groups suggested that schools and universities should try to minimize the number of learners per class, employ qualified English teachers, install technological facilities in classrooms, and give training in the use of technology to teachers and students. They also came up with some expectations of their English teachers:

- 1- Teachers should use technology in English classes such as the internet, computers, iPads, laptops or smartphones, rather than using PowerPoint and traditional lecture-style teaching methods.
- 2- Teachers should give priority to writing practice and collaborative writing in the class because students believe that practice that will help them improve their writing.
- 3- Teachers should give their students opportunities to learn from their peers to build their cognitive skills.

- 4- Teachers should give their students clear and accurate feedback on their written assignments.
- 5- Teachers should return written assignments to students because they will need to review them.

6.6 Students' attitudes and perceptions of using educational blogs in teaching and learning EFL writing

Theme 2: Students' attitudes and perceptions of using educational blogs in teaching and learning EFL writing			
Code and sub-codes	Definitions	Sources	References
General perceptions of the use of the blog in English classes	Comments which refer to the importance of the use of educational blog English classroom	1-Focus group	14
		2-Open-ended questionnaire	37
Blogging as pedagogical method of teaching English	Comments which refer to using educational blog in teaching English skills	1-Focus group	14
		2-Open-ended questionnaire	35
Affective benefits of blogging	Comments which refer to the benefits of blog such as enhancing motivation, self-directed learning, saving documents, virtual environment and helping students to practise process writing style.	1-Focus group	14
		2-Open-ended questionnaire	39
Challenges facing students adopting the use of educational technology	Comments which refer to challenges of using blog, such as technical issues, lack of privacy and lack of handwriting	1-Focus group	14
		2-Open-ended questionnaire	35

Table 6.3: Students' attitudes and perceptions of using educational blog in learning and teaching EFL writing

This section presents findings related to the participants' opinions of the use of the blogs in teaching and learning English writing skills. The analysis of data from open-ended questionnaire and focus groups shows that participants discussed the importance of educational blogs in teaching and learning English writing development, the role of blogs in improving linguistic skills, affective benefits of using educational blogs in EFL classroom, and the challenges facing students adapting the use of educational blogs, such as the lack of privacy and technical issues.

6.6.1 General perceptions of the use of the blog in English classes

According to data from the open-ended questionnaire and focus groups, all participants in the focus groups and 37 participants from the open-ended questionnaire felt that the use of the blog was *"very important in teaching and learning English skills in general and in writing particular"* (OQS29, FG2S13) recognising that they were *"happy to have their own blogs"* (FG1S8). Also, two-thirds of the participants in the open-ended questionnaire and all participants in the focus groups were glad to *"invite their classmates and other people to read their posts in English"* (FG2S11). Also, those participants felt that the use of the blog would *"save time and easy to create and publish on their own blogs and class blog as well"* (FG2S11) and they felt that they would *"keep going to use their own blog to improve their English writing and other skills"* (FG1S11) because they *"enjoyed their English blogs"* (OQS6). Thus, they considered their blogs as *"a part of their learning process"* (OQS23). From all the above participants' views, they had positive opinions with regard to using the educational blog in teaching and learning English.

In contrast, five participants in the open-ended questionnaire indicated that the use of the blog was *"difficult and it is not important in teaching English writing"* (OQS19). They also felt that the use of the blog was *"a waste of time"*, emphasising that they did not *"enjoy the blogging project"* (OQS45).

Nevertheless, ten focus group participants reported that they were really surprised that their English teacher did not routinely use educational technologies like blogs to teach students or even make them aware of the possibility of using digital platforms to develop their English skills. This can be seen in this response:

I like to post my daily routine on my own blog ...I can say that blog is a new tool for me in teaching and learning English writing...I think the use of educational blog is a revolution in teaching and learning English in Saudi Arabia ...I would ask why teachers in schools and university do not use such technology in their classes? I think it does not cost them providing internet access. (FG2S7).

The participant was excited to know about blogging as a tool for teaching and learning English writing and he wondered why this technology was not widely used in schools or university. Three participants from the open-ended questionnaire also emphasised the above perception. They *"wondered why their teacher was not interested to give their students information about the use of educational blogs in teaching and learning English skills"* (OQS32). Moreover, all focus group participants talked about the affordances of blogging, such as discussion boards, multimodality, collaboration, online-feedback and so on. All participants showed that they had a positive perception with regards to using the affordances of blogging. The following quotes are examples of this perception:

"Discussion board is really good feature in blog ...I really like to discuss any topic with my classmates...Also my argument skills were improved, for example I learned how to ask and respond to others in a respectful manner." (FG1S11)

"I like to participate in collaborative writing ...It makes me generate more ideas while writing." (FG1S9)

"In my opinion the use multimodality such as pictures, video, and so on is very important. It could help in developing students' writing." (FG1S5)

In the same vein, all participants in focus group two had the same discussion regarding the use of the affordances of blogging. Participant FG2S3 emphasized that the use of multimodality is *"very important"* and he gave an example, saying that *"I like to post a related picture to the topic that I want to write about because it allows me to generate more ideas"* (FG2S3). This view was also supported by another participant in the same group who said that he *"posted some pictures on his own blog and he wrote a few sentences to describe that picture and he also used to upload some pictures matching his homework assignment"* and he felt that it *"helped him to improve his writing and he thought that describing pictures or writing a summary about an interesting short video will help to improve creative writing"* (FG2S7). These

participants uploaded pictures related to their homework topics and they found it a useful way to practise writing, and also to keep them doing more exercises on their blogs, which might further help them improve their writing and their creativity in writing.

The following diagram sums up the use of educational blogs in teaching and learning English from the focus groups and open-ended questionnaire participants' views.

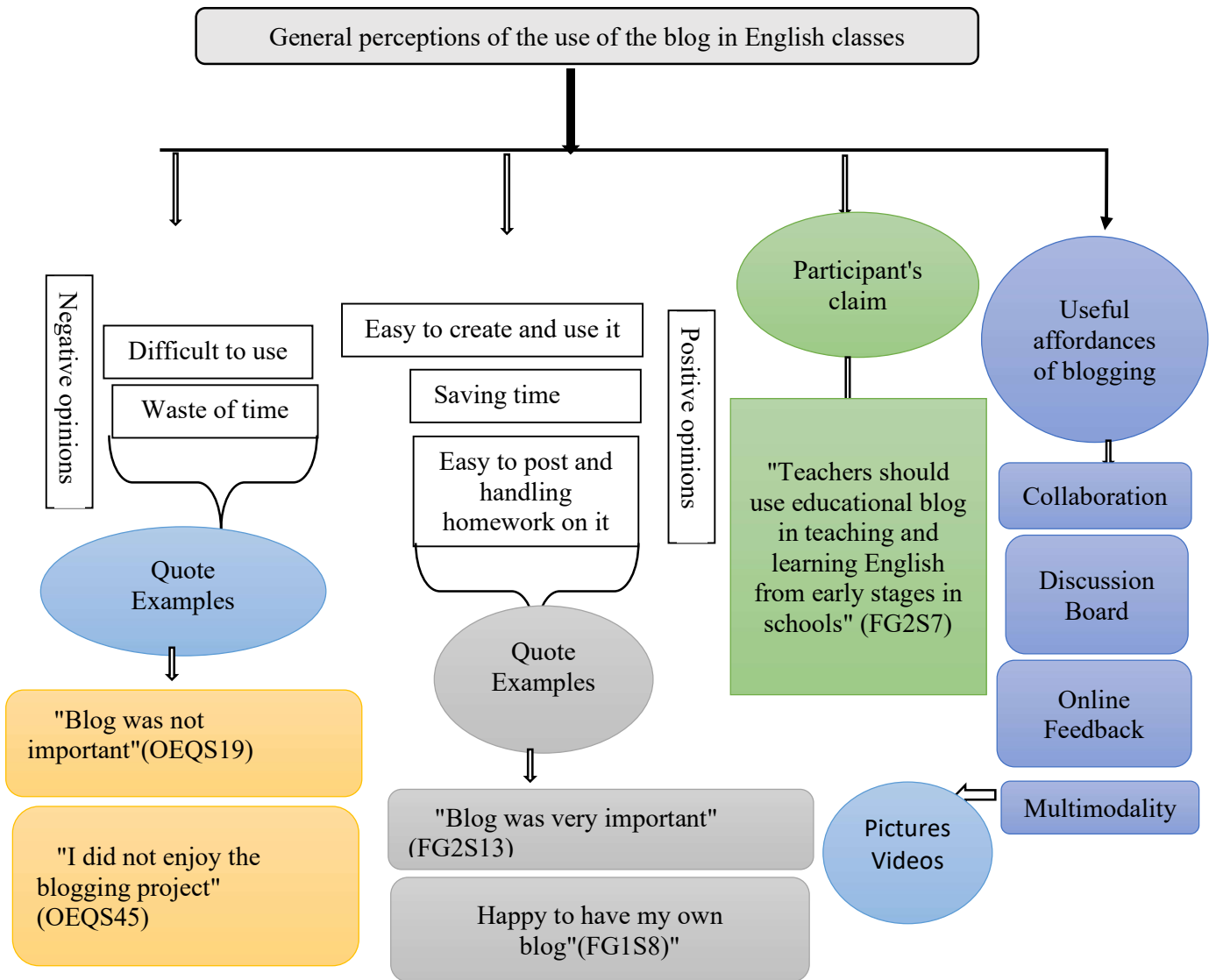


Figure 6.1: General perceptions of the use of the blog in English classes

6.6.2 Blogging as a pedagogical method of teaching English

According to participants from the open-ended questionnaire and focus groups, all participants in the focus groups and two-thirds in the open-ended questionnaire indicated the importance and the impact of using blogs as a writing platform to improve their writing skills. For example, all participants in the intervention group had the opportunity to write a first draft of their homework in the class and carried out other stages of the writing process at home. All focus group participants felt that they *"learned how to write a first draft of their homework before publishing it on their own blog and class blog"* (OQS15).

In the same regard, eleven focus group participants discussed this way of teaching writing and stated that they *"preferred to write on the blog rather than using pen and paper to write"* (FG1S2). However, they thought that they *"improved their writing when they started blogging"* (FG2S9), emphasising the weakness of traditional methods in teaching English writing. For example, this perception:

"My writing is really improved, and I think that is because I write on my blog and class blog every day ...I had evidence for this improvement which is my grade in midterm exam was very good ...I think using blog in learning and teaching English writing is better than using pen and paper." (FG2S8).

Another participant from focus group two gave an example which supported the above view. He said that he came to the university with difficulties in his writing and he never knew how to improve his writing, but he said:

When I started blogging, I was amazed how blogging could help me to improve my writing because of the combination between affordances of using educational blog to practice writing in different ways. For example, I can write in a collaboration environment; also, I search in the internet about to find out more about my writing topic and get different feedback from my teacher, classmates and other audience. I have them on my own blog...I think that now my writing is better than before (FG1S13).

From the above perceptions it seems that participants preferred writing on an educational blog than with the traditional medium of teaching writing (pen and paper).

This might be because they found that writing on an educational blog helped them to practise writing every day in a social environment. Therefore, as they had their own blogs, they could write whatever they wanted, receiving regular feedback from readers and the teacher. This increased their audience awareness and they tried to learn new vocabulary, avoiding grammatical errors and structure, which encouraged them to use the blog to practise their writing regularly and try to improve their writing skills. Thus, traditional writing might be an insufficient way of practising writing in the classroom, according to the participants, as they did not receive regular feedback from their teacher and never received any feedback from classmates. As a result of this, they lacked practice in writing in class, so they preferred writing on the educational blog over the traditional method. In the same vein, 35 participants in the open-ended questionnaire claimed that the educational blog should be more widely and regularly used, with one again noting the particular benefit of daily blogging: *"It should be used from an early stage in schools in English classes to teach and learn English writing ...because it is a very important tool for practising writing every day, which might help students to overcome their writing difficulties"* (OQS21).

In contrast, three participants in the focus groups argued that it was better to make *"a companion between using blog and pen and paper in writing"* (FG1S4). This means that these participants wanted to use them interchangeably to get the benefits of each strategy to improve their writing. Not all participants felt that blogging had helped their writing, however. In the open-ended questionnaire, five participants felt that they *"preferred pen and paper writing than writing on blog"*. For example, these participants indicated that *"writing on paper helps to improve my handwriting and also writing using pen and paper is easier because it does not need a computer or other devices to write on, only find blank paper and pen to write - that's all we need"* (OQS23).

In terms of how blogging supported writing development, in the focus group discussions, 12 participants spoke particularly about the benefits of practising writing in both formal and informal contexts through blogging. They revealed that they improved in their writing and they learned how to write formal and informal paragraphs because they had used their personal blogs to do both, but they had used the class blog only for formal writing such as homework and collaborative writing on the discussion board. The following quotes are examples of this view:

"I think that writing on blog is a good opportunity to practise formal and informal writing." (FG2S9)

"I used to write on my own blog as free writing space ... I like that way which helped me to improve my writing... I usually use the informal writing when I write my daily routine to share it with my friends but in class blog, I always use formal writing." (FG2S11)

"I learned how to structure formal and informal writing ...I think the use of educational blog is very important in learning and teaching writing." (FG1S7)

Moreover, all participants in the focus groups discussed an interesting point concerning their improvement in grammar and vocabulary; they said that their writing on their own and class blogs helped them to increase their vocabulary and to use a variety of sentences. The following quotes are examples of this view:

"I can see that there is improvement in grammar, sentence structure and vocabulary ...I think that the use of educational blog helped me to improve my vocabulary and grammar, which made me write a good paragraph." (FG1S4)

"I think blog is a good tool for writing, especially class blog...I improved in writing because my vocabulary and grammar improved." (FG1S14)

In this regard, participant FG1S9 agreed with his colleagues that his vocabulary and grammar improved during the intervention and he gave an example; he noticed an improvement in his writing after just three weeks of blogging, and he thought that the different posts from his classmates on the class blog improved his vocabulary and his grammar, as can be seen in the following quote:

Using educational blog is an important tool in teaching English writing so my writing improved during the intervention period; also, my vocabulary improved and grammar ...I think that my colleagues' post on class blog was really helpful to learn new vocabulary from their posts and also my grammar was improved as well. (FG1S9).

In this example, the collaborative affordance of blogging was identified as the key driver of improvement; by reading his colleagues' posts, the participant is able to learn from their use of grammar and vocabulary. In another words, blogs allowing students to learn from each other. The general view that blogging supports the development of vocabulary and grammar was confirmed by 35 participants in the open-ended questionnaire, where they "*improved in their grammar and vocabulary*" (OQS21).

One contentious point, however, concerned the extent to which the digital tools interfered with spelling development. Eleven participants in the focus groups argued that they had a problem in spelling when writing in English using pen and paper, but they felt that the use of the blog had "*helped them to improve their spelling and reduce mistakes in spelling*" (FG1S7). For example, participant (FG1S6) said that when he "*wrote on his blog any spelling mistakes automatically corrected, which is good, but he always tried to copy those difficult words on a word file and practise them*" (FG1S6).

From the above participants' perceptions, it seems that writing on blog helped improve their spelling through spell-checker to improve the final accuracy of the text. In contrast, two participants in the focus groups argued that the use of the blog had "*not helped them to overcome their problem with spelling mistakes; nevertheless, it could make it complicated because words corrected automatically*" (FG2S2). It seems that these participants thought that correcting their mistakes automatically on their blogs was not helpful and they might prefer to write with no automatic correction in order to know their spelling mistakes, which they could have set up as a function of their blog.

On the other hand, all focus group participants indicated that the use of the blog *"improved other linguistic skills"* (FG1S5), recognising that they had *"improved in reading, listening and speaking"*. For instance, participant FG2S3 said: *"I realised that my reading improved during the intervention because I read my peers' writing on class blog every day and I think that helped me to speed up my reading"* (FG2S3). This view was supported by participant FG1S6, who confirmed that the blog had improved his reading due to reading his colleagues' posts and other reading sources. This view can be seen in the following quote: *"I think that my reading improved...I read all my colleagues' posts on class blog and their own blogs. Also, I read more via blog when I prepare for my homework writing topic"* (FG1S6). Moreover, another participant in focus group two felt that the blog had helped him to improve his listening; for example, he said: *"I used to listen to some useful links while I wrote on my blog or class blog ...I think that using blog has many benefits to learn English skills at the same time"* (FG2S4). Also, another three participants in the same group felt that they had *"improved in listening"* (FG2S7), emphasising that the blog helped them to improve their listening skills. Participant FG2S5 explained how he improved in listening skills, as shown in the following quote: *"I downloaded the six minutes English BBC app on my iPad, and I was always listening for one topic every day while I wrote on blog ...I think that blog might help to improve students' listening skills"* (FG2S5).

Moreover, all participants in focus groups argued that they had difficulties in practising speaking skills because they lived in an Arabic speaking country (Saudi Arabia) but they felt that the use of the blog was *"a very good an environment for practising speaking"*. They recognised that they had *"improved in speaking English"*; for example, they thought their improvement in speaking was because of the

combination of other skills such as reading, writing and listening on the blog. The following quotes are examples of this perception:

"I think that the use of the blog helped me to improve all my speaking skills because I write on blog, listen while using my blog and reading my peers' blogs... combination between these skills helped me to improve my speaking skills." (FG1S2).

The following diagram sums up the use of educational blogs in teaching and learning English from the focus groups' and open-ended participants' views.

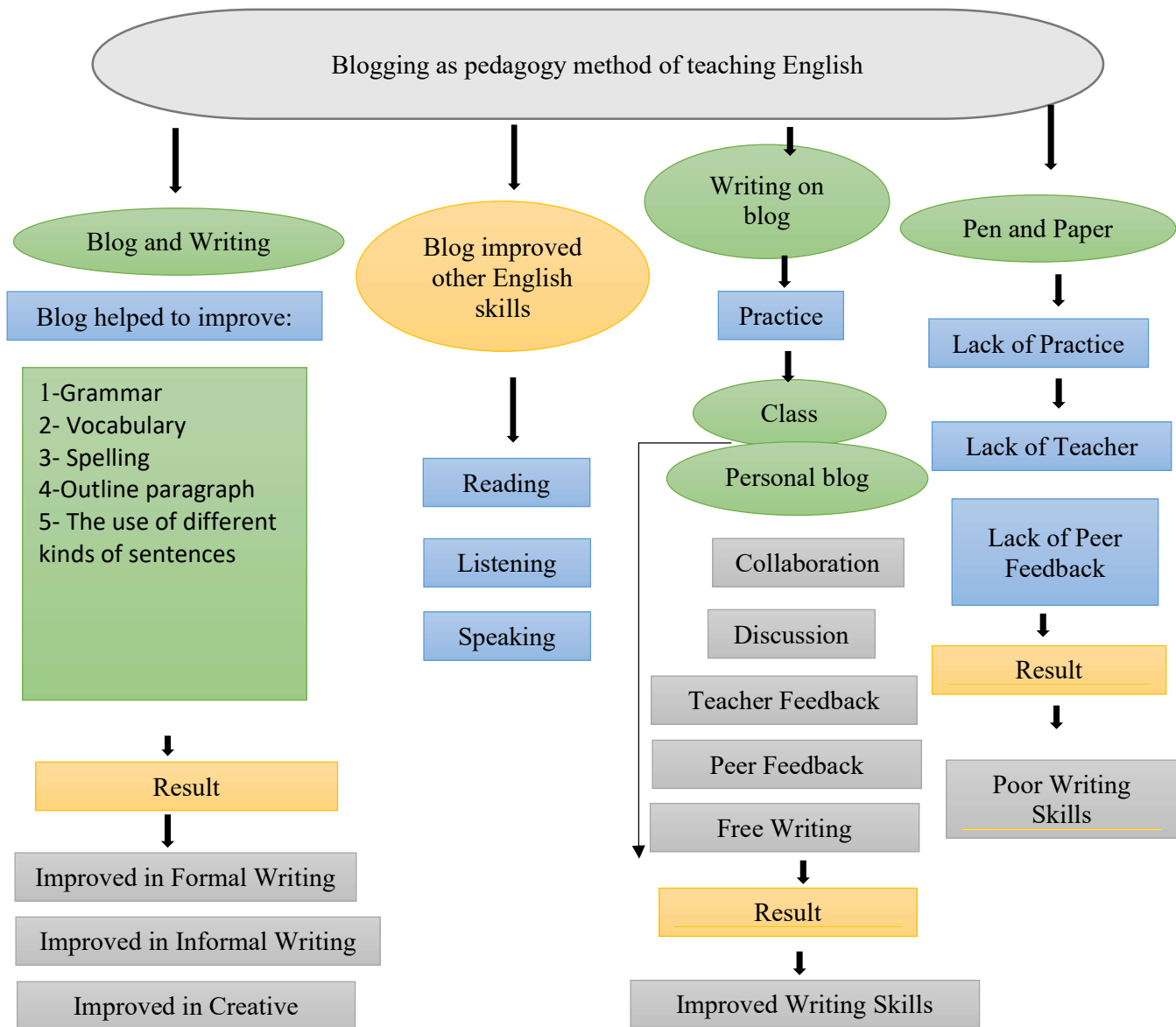


Figure 6.2: Blogging as a pedagogical method of teaching English

6.6.3 Benefits of blogging

The analysis of data obtained from the discussion with the focus groups showed that all participants indicated some benefits of using blogging in teaching and learning English, such as enhancing their ability to use process writing effectively, and enhancing motivation, self-directed learning, and embracing e-portfolios and virtual environments. This section presents these benefits in more detail.

6.6.3.1 Encouraging students to adopt process writing

All participants discussed an interesting point, which was the effect of using the blog to practise process writing stages such as planning, drafting, revising, editing, proofreading and presenting. All focus group participants indicated that the use of the blog *"enhanced their ability to use process writing effectively"* (FG2S1), and they argued that they *"did not learn enough about the process writing stages in school and university; however, they only used product writing"* (FG2S5). Furthermore, one participant in focus group one reported that his *"teachers in school and even in the university rely on product writing style although the assessment of writing in the textbook is process writing"* (FG1S6). For example, he said that *"when we have a writing topic in class, we start writing about it immediately with no plan or drafting"* and he thought that was *"due to the time we were given and also our English teachers did not pay attention to process writing style"* (FG1S6).

From the above views, it seems that participants benefited from practising process writing on their blogs and they became familiar with the stages of the writing process.

6.6.3.2 Enhancing student motivation

The analysis of focus group data showed that all participants recognised that the use of an educational blog *"encouraged them"*. For example, one participant said that the *"educational blog helped me to boost my motivation in learning English and practising writing effectively"* (FG2S6), and they felt that they were *"very excited"*; another participant said *"when I get my peer feedback of their own blog or on the class*

blog which encouraged me to replay to my peers" (FG1S3). For instance, one of the participants in focus group one thought that the use of educational blog was "*a motivational tool*". He stated:

When I get my colleagues' and my teacher's motivational words such as 'well done, good work, excellent, keep going' and so on and I considered that these kind words might be nothing but I thought that these words are like a trigger for me to develop my writing skills (FG1S1).

Moreover, this thought was supported by another participant from focus group two, who said that: "*I used to write some encouraging words to my peers, and I liked to receive words like these on my work as well ... I think that it is very important in order to boost students' motivation to write on their blogs*" (FG2S7). From these views, it is clear that all participants in the focus groups were motivated to write on blogs; the use of the blogs enhanced their motivation to write.

6.6.3.3 Self-directed learning

The analysis of data from the discussions with the focus groups indicated that all participants in focus groups thought that the blog was "*an important tool to support students' self-directed learning*" (FG2S2), recognising that they "*worked individually to discover and to know about the distinctive features of blogging*". In this vein, two participants in focus group one indicated that, after the introductory week of blogging, they had still some difficulties dealing with blogs but they started to learn how to use most of the affordances of blogging individually, such as how to write peer comments and share useful links on the class blog or on the learners' blogs with no help from others. The following quote is an example of this perception: "*In my point of view, I think that blog helped me to work individually. Sometimes, in order to learn something, I did not know about, by searching on the internet or asking my colleagues on class blog*" (FG1S3).

Similarly, in focus group two, all participants had the same discussion. Participant FG2S4 said that:

I learned how to design my own blog profile with no help; I just watched a tutorial twice and then I was able to create mine...I think that self-learning could help students to learn to build their knowledge individually with a little support from our teacher. (FG2S4).

In this regard, 39 participants from the open-ended questionnaire and all participants in the focus groups revealed that the use of the blog "*increased self-confidence*" (FG2S7), recognising that they felt "*freer to write on blog than using pen and paper*" (OQS26). For example, one participant in focus group one said:

I love to write on blog any time with no pressure ...I spent more time to write on my blog and class blog ...I think that the use of the blog reduces writing anxiety because it has no restricted time to finish my homework when compared with the traditional method in writing by using pen and paper. (FG1S5).

From the above views, all participants agreed that the blog was a useful tool to support their individual learning which increased their ability for independent learning, their language skills, and self-confidence.

6.6.3.4 E-portfolio

Interestingly, the data obtained from the focus group discussions revealed that all participants felt that the blog could be used as an "*e-portfolio to save an important document*" (FGF1S1). Moreover, participant (FG2S7) explained why he used his own blog as a portfolio, which was to "*save my important documents on my own blog in order to keep them safe and use them anytime anywhere*" and "*to avoid losing printed paper documents*".

Another participant FG2S5 emphasised this view and said he had activated his own portfolio on his blog, feeling that it was "*a good idea to have all documents in one place in order to facilitate the process of revising them for exams ...I think this experience gave me also a chance to read my peers' writing to compare with mine in order to prepare myself for exams*" (FG2S5).

Six out of fourteen focus group participants raised the interesting point of the use of the blog as an eco-friendly method; they felt that the use of the blog could help to "save and protect the environment from air pollution" (FG1S1). For instance, if they had a portfolio in which to save all documents, they could stop printing out papers which might be thrown away or burnt. In respect of using educational blogs as a repository, three participants in focus groups indicated the issue of data protection that was likely to be a problem when they used the internet. For example, participant FG2S4 said that:

Saving personal information on blog, computer and other devices it could be a problem because the internet is a spy network. Thus, personal information is likely to be stolen so that the students must learn how to protect their information that they stored on blog and computer.

6.6.3.5 Virtual environment

Based on data extracted from the focus groups, all participants considered that the use of the blog was like "a virtual environment in teaching and learning English" so they felt the blog was "a useful tool - we can use it as a virtual classroom" (FG1S3).

Moreover, participant FG1S8 indicated that he was "interested in using blog as a virtual classroom as social interaction". This participant was hospitalised for a week and was unable to attend his university English classes, but he was able to view the class blog as the 'virtual classroom' which allowed him to interact with his teacher and peers. This view can be seen in the following quote:

I think that the use of the blog is a social interaction platform which could be a virtual classroom because we can follow up the class blog from anywhere ...I could say that blog helped me when I was in the hospital, because I was not able to go to the university. I submitted my homework on time. I read my colleagues' homework and I participated in classroom discussion...I did not miss any English classes during my stay in the hospital. (FG1S8).

From the above quote, it is clear that this participant was interested in using the blog outside the classroom as a virtual environment and he was connected with his

classmates and teacher during his stay in hospital. As this indicates, the blog helped this student who was unable to attend classes for medical reasons.

The following diagram sums up the benefits of blogging from the focus groups' and open-ended participants' views.

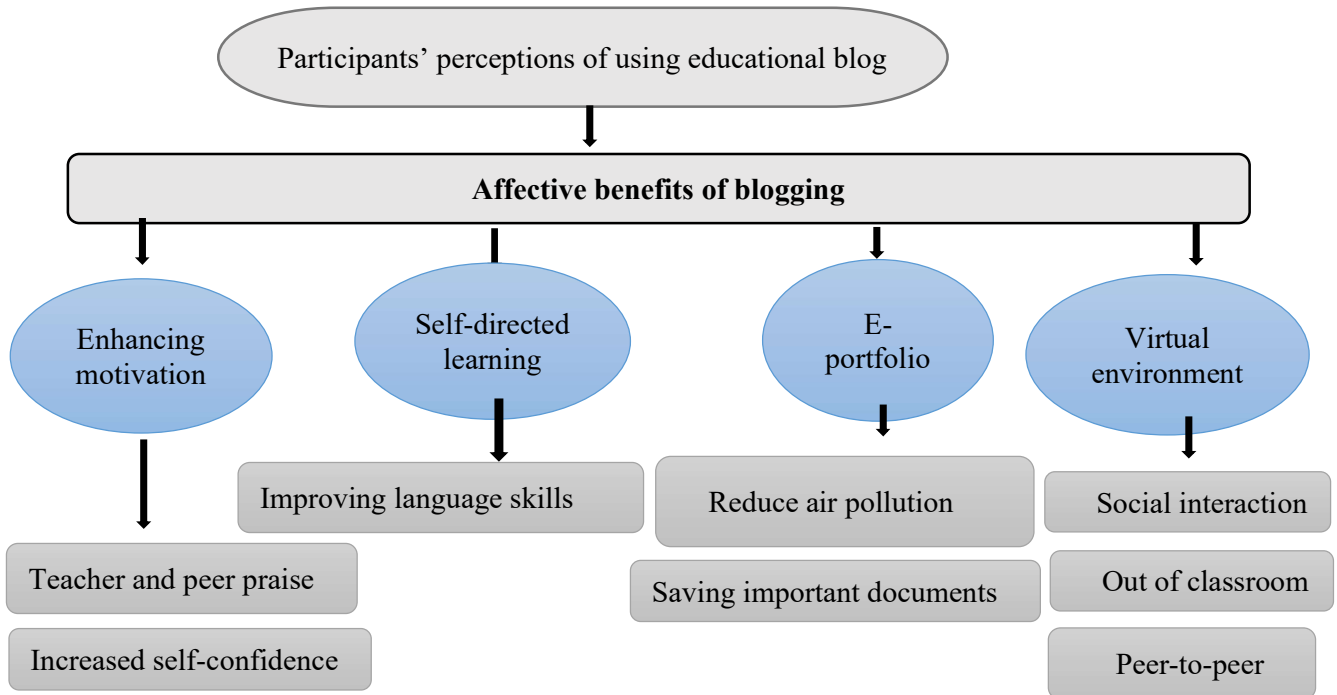


Figure 6.3: Participants' perceptions of using educational blog

6.6.4 Challenges facing students adopting the use of educational blog technology

Analysis of the open-ended questionnaire and focus group data revealed that there were challenges facing the participants while using the educational blog, such as technical issues, a lack of privacy and the lack of opportunity to write by hand. This section presents these issues in more detail.

6.6.4.1 Technical challenges

According to data from the focus groups and open-ended questionnaire, two-thirds of participants from the open-ended questionnaire and ten participants from the focus groups indicated that they had:

Difficulties in connecting with the internet in the beginning of the semester because there was no internet access available in the university for students, so we were using our own devices and later the researcher brought two routers into the classroom. Also, the internet was very slow because of the shortage in coverage and we thought that it was the major problem that we faced during the semester. (FG2S2).

They recognised that one of the disadvantages of blogging is the need for an internet network. A participant (OQS37) added that another problem he faced was "*most of the computers in the English lab were broken. However, I brought my laptop with me, which was very difficult to carry three days a week*". He also claimed that "*I thought the university should have computer labs available and they should have regular maintenance to fix all the broken computers*" (OQS37). This opinion was emphasised by another participant who lived in a remote area without internet access who had to go his friend's house or the internet cafe to do his homework assignments and other activities such as free writing on his own blog. This participant wondered why the university did not give students access to use the internet at university. This view can be seen in the following quote:

I think that it would be reasonable for the university to provide computer lab and internet access for students because it is becoming important in students' university life. We can do research using educational technology and so on by using internet. (FG2S6).

Thus, more than one participant found that lack of access to relevant technology hindered their use of blogging. Blogging requires internet access, and this is one of the disadvantages of blogs, according to the participants.

6.6.4.2 Lack of privacy

Analysis of the focus group discussions revealed that eight out fourteen participants in both focus groups noticed that one of the disadvantages of using blogs was *"the lack of privacy"* (FG2S3) and they felt that they were *"afraid to put their personal information, such as name, date of birth, address and picture, saving important documents on their blog because this information might be stolen by hackers"* (FG1S7). In contrast, the rest of the participants in the focus groups thought that it was *"safe to put our personal information on it because we generated a username and password"* (FG1S1), emphasising that they *"already have installed security software on our computers in order to prevent hackers getting into our personal account"* (FG2S5). From these quotes, it seems that participants had different views and different levels of understanding about the e-security of sharing their personal information on their blogs. Some considered that the use of the blogs might impact them negatively due to the lack of privacy while others did not mind sharing their personal information on their blog because they believed that the security software on their devices made it safe from hackers.

6.6.4.3 Lack of opportunities for handwriting

Interestingly, according to the data from the focus group discussions, three out of seven participants in focus group two argued that the use of the blogs might affect their handwriting because of its daily use. The following quote is an example of that perception:

I could say that the use of the blog is very important and is very useful in teaching and learning English skills and writing in particular ...but I think that writing on blogs every day using computer or iPad or other smart device could affect a student's handwriting. (FG2S2).

On the other hand, the other four participants in focus group two indicated that they were "very slow in typing or writing in English" although they used social media, but they only wrote in Arabic on Twitter, Facebook and so on. But while using blogs, they "got an advantage from frequently writing on blog", recognising that they thought their typing skills had "improved". For example, participant FG2S4 said that:

My handwriting was not good, and I was losing many marks because of the lack of my handwriting ...I think that writing my homework on class blog helped me to overcome and avoid my teacher's criticism of my handwriting. (FG2S4).

From above quote, it seems that this participant was embarrassed about his handwriting when he used pen and paper to write English homework. However, writing on blogs seemed to be a good way for him to avoid his teacher's criticism as well as improving his typing skills in English.

The following diagram sums up the challenging of blogging from the focus groups' and open-ended participants' views.

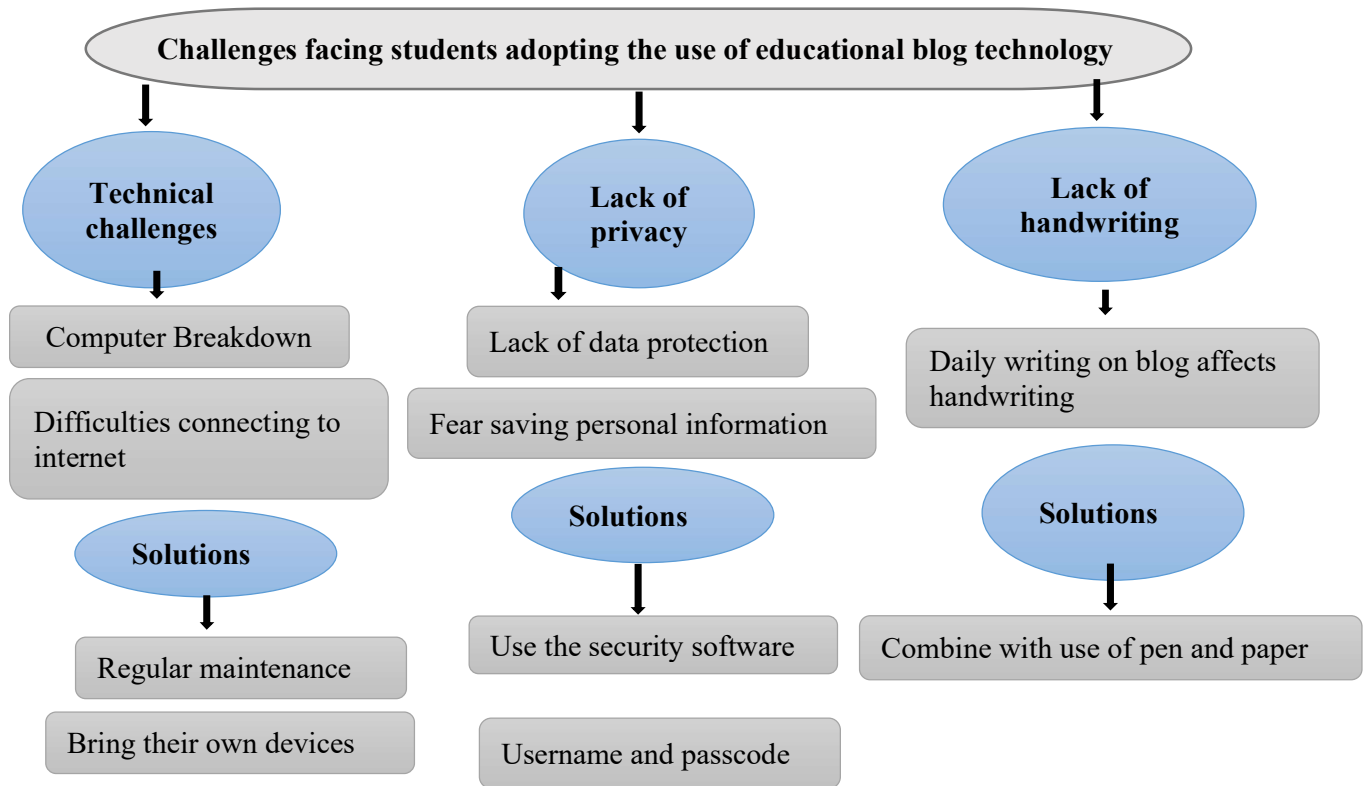


Figure 6.4: Challenges facing students adopting the use of educational blog technology

6.7 Students' perceptions of affordances of using blogging as a tool of writing development

Theme 3: Students' perceptions of affordances of using blogging as a tool of writing development

Code and Sub-codes	Definitions	Sources	References
Relationship between affordances of blogging and writing development	Comments on the relationship between blogging and writing	Focus groups	13
Collaborative writing	Comments on collaborative writing on blogs and how it benefits writing	Focus groups	14
Free writing	Comments on free writing on blogs and how it benefits writing	Focus groups	11
Discussion board	Comments on discussion board on blog and how it benefits writing	Focus groups	13
Online feedback and comments	Comments on online feedback on blogs and how it benefits writing	Focus groups	12
The effect of multimodality on writing	Comments on the use of multimodality on blogs and how it benefits writing	Focus groups	10

Table 6.4: Students' perceptions of affordances of using blogging as a tool for writing development

This section presents findings related to the participants' opinions of the affordances of using blogging as a tool for writing development.

6.7.1 Relationship between affordances of blogging and writing

Analysis of the focus group data revealed that the participants discussed the relationship between blogging and writing through some of the affordances of blogging, such as collaborative writing, free writing, discussion board, online feedback and comments, and multimodality and how these affordances could influence students' writing development.

6.7.2 Collaborative writing

All participants in the focus groups discussed the relationship between blogging and writing improvement and all felt that *"writing collaboratively on the blog helped them to improve their writing"* (FG2S3) emphasising that *"collaborative writing motivates*

students to do their best, especially with low level students to keep up with the rest" (FG1S5). For instance, two participants in focus group one said that *"we think that collaborative writing on the blog helped us to improve our writing skills because we were encouraged by each other to write"* (FG1S1). In relation to this, one participant in focus group two said that:

I committed to write with my group on the class blog and I learned some new vocabulary, how to plan my writing, using different tenses and so on ...I think that collaboration on the blog platform is useful for developing students' writing. (FG2S5).

In the same vein, participants (FG2S7, FG2S2) indicated that *"online collaborative writing on the blog is more helpful than actual collaborative writing in the classroom because shy students do not participate effectively in their groups, vice versa in online collaborative writing"*. It seems that participants thought that collaborating online rather than face-to-face was preferred by some students. This point of view was supported by another participant from focus group one. He indicated that online writing on his blog allowed him enough time to think and carry out brainstorming; he said that:

I do not like to work face-to-face in groups because I just listen to my colleagues' thoughts; but I prefer online writing rather than writing face-to-face in groups in the classroom because I can share my voice online and get have time to compose my writing so the result was my writing improves as well (FG2S7).

In this regard, it seems that this participant preferred online writing to pen and paper writing in face-to-face groups. This might be because such students appreciated the extra time that they could have to compose their writing while still collaborating; that is, the nature of collaboration online was different to face-to-face collaboration, and they felt that was helpful. Moreover, another participant in focus group one added an interesting point to his colleague's perception in relation to the comparison between online collaborative writing and face-to-face writing in groups, he said that:

I agree with you that online writing is more serious than writing face-to-face in a group because students do not focus on the writing topic and also students are pressed to speak English in the classroom so that they shift to their mother tongue language (Arabic) to discuss other issues. (FG2S6).

From the above participants' perceptions, they agreed that there is a relationship between blogging and writing development. It seems that collaboration on the blog might help them encourage each other to write and the matter may be taken more seriously than face-to-face writing. So that online collaboration focused learners on the work and less on the social interaction (i.e. having fun); this might help them to improve their writing, as they stated. In other words, this is less about socialising and more about the cognitive/time pressure of face-to-face situations which move so quickly that less competent speakers cannot respond or access and employ metalinguistic knowledge quickly enough.

6.7.3 Free writing

According to the data from the focus groups, all participants felt that "*free writing on the blog helped to improve students' writing*" (FG2S2). They also felt that free writing on their blogs was "*helpful in different ways, such as generating more ideas, self-confidence, reducing writing anxiety*" (FG1S5). For example, one participant in focus group one said that "*I wrote some free writing on my own blog, like my daily routine and some topics I was interested to write about. I think this way of free writing has helped me to improve my writing because I used to write on my blog everyday*" (FG1S3). From this point of view, writing on his own blog helped him improve his writing during the intervention. This might be because writing frequently on a blog made the participant feel the importance of writing. Similarly, all participants in focus group two indicated that the use of free writing on their blogs helped them to practise different tenses, types of sentences, and informal writing in social spaces with different people which increased their writing awareness. The following quotes are examples of this perception:

"I think that free writing on my blog helped me to improve my writing because I used it to practise tenses, simple and compound sentences...writing on the blog helped me to increase my ability to generate more ideas...Also, I would say that free writing allowed me enough time to read about what I want to write about." (FG2S6).

"Free writing on my blog made me break the barriers to discover the worlds of writers ...I tried to imitate some good writers and I found that my writing became more interesting to people who followed me on my own blog." (FG2S1).

Moreover, three participants in focus group one felt that *"free writing on a blog is just like a remote control in your hand and you can choose your favourite channel as you like, any time, without restrictions"* (FG1S7). The above quotes show that these participants emphasised that there is a relationship between writing on a blog and writing improvement, as they felt the blogging was helpful and that it supported them to improve their writing. For example, this may be attributed to the regular, informal nature of the blog as a writing platform and the fact that it stimulates and captures writing on a regular, even daily basis, and that it is designed to be a personal record rather than a formal academic piece seems to have motivated students to engage in more writing, thus giving them more writing practice. Being able to write about topics of choice may have increased learners' intrinsic motivation, which translated into increased writing engagement.

6.7.4 Discussion board

Analysis of the focus group data revealed that the participants spoke about writing on the class blog as a discussion board for issues related to how to improve their writing, use different tenses and plan their writing. The data showed that all participants in the focus groups felt that discussion on the class blog *"broke the fear of writing in front of others"* (FG2S1), emphasising that the discussions on the class blog *"helped to improve writing skills"* (FG1S3). For instance, all focus group participants discussed the relationship between writing on the discussion board on the class blog and the improvement in their writing. They felt that:

Discussion on the class blog encouraged us to participate in exchanging ideas, giving new information and, as a result of this, we learned new vocabulary, structures and expressions...We think that writing on the discussion space on the class blog encouraged us to improve our writing. (FG1S5).

Similarly, in focus group two all participants talked about the relationship between writing on the discussion space on the class blog and their writing improvement. They felt that using the class blog as a discussion space for certain topics, or issues related to writing in particular or language skills in general "*helped them to improve their writing for reasons such as practising their writing, sharing knowledge, and it allowed them to participate in the discussion as much as they could*". For example, participant FG2S4 regularly participated in any discussion on the class blog and he found his writing getting better day by day, as he explained: "*I like to participate in the class blog because it helps me to check what I want to write about before posting it, such as vocabulary, grammar and sentence structure*" (FG2S4).

On the other hand, one participant from focus group one explained the relationship between blogging and writing development from a different angle. He said:

I think there is a relationship between blogging and writing improvement - for reasons explained earlier. But, in my opinion, I can say that the discussion space on the blog helps in interaction between peers and teacher outside the classroom and helps to develop argument skills. (FG1S2).

It seems that this participant saw the blog as an interaction tool between the students themselves and their teacher outside of the classroom, and that it could also help students learn how to develop their argument skills. In relation to this, another participant in focus group one added another point to his colleague's comment in the previous quote, as he felt that the relationship between blogging and writing development was "*a combination between several factors*" and he emphasised that:

The discussion on the blog stimulated me to think, read and remember many vocabulary words I have but I hadn't used before... I practised using my vocabulary in different contexts while blogging, so I think this helped me to improve my writing. (FG1S6).

From the above quote, it seems that there is link between writing on the blog and writing development. For example, a blog can be a tool for practising writing, thinking, reading, brainstorming and sharing knowledge; so, according to the participants' views above, students valued the class blog as a platform for sharing their writing with others, both for how it enabled interaction, and for how having a real audience for their writing prompted them to pay more attention to technical accuracy, and for allowing them to try out writing in different contexts.

6.7.5 Online feedback and comments

Analysis of the data obtained from the discussion with the focus groups suggests that all participants felt that online feedback and comments on their writing on the class blog were *"very important and helpful"* (FG2S5), emphasising that online feedback on the class blog was *"a good opportunity to give and receive feedback from peer-to-peer and the teacher as well"* (FG1S3). For example, all except one participant in the focus groups felt that online peer and teacher feedback was *"beneficial to improve their writing"* (FG1S7). In other words, online peer feedback and teacher feedback had some advantages which helped them to improve their writing. An explanation for this can be seen in these points of view:

I like to receive feedback and comments on my homework assignments from other students ...I also like to give feedback on other students' writing ... I think this way helps us to read each other's work, learn how to correct grammar, spelling and structural mistakes. (FG2S7).

I think that online feedback from peers and teacher ...was a trigger to improve my writing because I increased my vocabulary and I learned different usages of grammar, structures, sentences and how to organise my writing in paragraphs. (FG1S6).

Furthermore, four participants in focus group one indicated that, in their schools and at university, their teachers, who used traditional methods of teaching English writing, did not use any activities to make students engage such as role play, drawing or discussion groups; they did not even give regular feedback on writing. Furthermore,

all participants emphasised the absence of peer feedback in traditional methods. For instance, they felt that blogging was *"a good tool for giving and receiving feedback and comments from peer-to-peer and from teacher to students very quickly"* (FG1S3), and they argued that the lack of peer feedback in traditional teaching methods could affect their writing improvement. Therefore, they preferred writing on the blog because they got their teacher's feedback and comments within a couple of hours, as well as peer feedback.

From the above views, these participants indicated that there was a relationship between giving and receiving online feedback and their peers' posted assignments on the class blog and their writing improvement, as blogging helped to facilitate speedy feedback from peers and teachers. I argue that giving and receiving online feedback peer-to-peer encourages them to write, increases students' awareness and builds their vocabulary. This could be because they practise various kinds of sentences and a range of grammatical usages which could help improve their writing.

6.7.6 The effect of multimodality on student writing

Ten of the fourteen participants in the focus groups talked about the effect of multimodality on their writing when using educational blogs as a platform for writing, for example, posting pictures related to their writing homework assignments on the class blog, or even on their own blogs, and posting short videos on their own blogs and writing short summaries of the videos to share with friends. In this regard, ten participants in the focus groups felt that the use of multimodality while writing on the blog was *"very useful"* (FG1S1), emphasising posting pictures related to writing topics, or writing a reflection about an interesting picture or a summary of a short audio or video and using an online dictionary to check the vocabulary. All these multimodalities *"helped them to improve their writing skills"* (FG2S3). For example, four participants in focus group one felt that posting a picture with their writing

motivated them to describe the picture and this made them more active in writing paragraphs. The following two quotes are examples of this perception:

I think the use of pictures in writing is very important ...I used to post a picture with each homework assignment, and I found that using a picture motivated me to imagine and concentrate on the topic itself (FG1S4).

From my point of view, I can say that choosing attractive pictures related to my homework assignment or for free writing on my own blog helped me to write my paragraph in a logical order. For example, it was easy to write the topic sentence, the introduction, the body and the conclusion with maintaining the cohesion and coherence in writing (FG1S7).

These views were expressed by six participants in focus group two, who felt that choosing a picture related to their homework topic or writing about an interesting picture on their own blog "*increased vocabulary, the language use, more ideas, and it also shaped up the writing paragraph organisation*" (FG2S5). According to the above views, it seems that those participants improved in their writing while using pictures in the text on their own blogs or class blog. It helped them to increase their vocabulary, practise different tenses, and produce more ideas. I argue that all these aspects improve their writing skills and indicate the relationship between writing on blogs and writing improvement. Interestingly, participant (FG2S3) raised this point while discussing using pictures in a text; he talked about the benefits he obtained from using pictures in text:

I think using pictures with text when writing on blog has many benefits, as we already discussed, such as increasing vocabulary and so on. BUT I would add one benefit, which is attracting the audience to read. For me, I prefer to read any text posted with pictures because it supports the point and indicates to know what the topic is about (FG2S3).

It seems that the participants in focus groups talked about the use of multimodality in terms of pictures more than using videos, online dictionary, etc. These participants chiefly used pictures rather than other modes, and they felt that the pictures had the benefit of prompting them when generating ideas and vocabulary, helping them to structure their writing and helping them to appeal to a reader.

On the other hand, while discussing the use of multimodality on blogs, the data from the focus groups revealed that only three out of fourteen participants spoke about writing their reflections or summarising videos in which they were interested. For instance, participant FG2S7 indicated that he wrote a summary of some YouTube videos and he felt that writing reflections on interesting videos was "very helpful". He realised that this process was more effective because he was sharing his reflections on his own blog to be seen by the followers in order to get feedback on them, as explained in the following quote:

I think that my writing was getting better day by day because the use of the blog and its affordances helped me to improve my writing skills ... In terms of video reflection, I always share my reflection or summary with others to get their feedback and that helped me to know my weakness in writing and I worked on these to improve myself (FG2S7).

The last point discussed by participants in the focus groups related to the use of multimodality while writing on blogs. One participant in focus group one indicated the importance of the use of an online dictionary on his own blog: "I had a link to a Longman dictionary on my own blog and it helped me write conveniently, easy to use to check spelling and to find synonyms in order to avoid word repetition" (FG1S5).

This was endorsed by another participant, in focus group two, who used the online dictionary on his own blog and who felt that the use of the online dictionary was: "more helpful to check spelling and finding synonyms or even to hear the new word's pronunciation. Also, it saves time because using a paper dictionary takes more time to find what we want". From the above views about the online dictionary, it seems that these two participants preferred an online dictionary to a paper one because of ease-of-use, which saved time and allowed for frequent searches to check meaning, pronunciation and spelling. I argue that the use of the online dictionary on students' blogs is one of the affordances of blogging, which helps students increase their vocabulary and this helps them improve their writing. The following diagram sums

up the participants' perceptions of the affordances of blogging and the relationship between blogging and writing improvement.

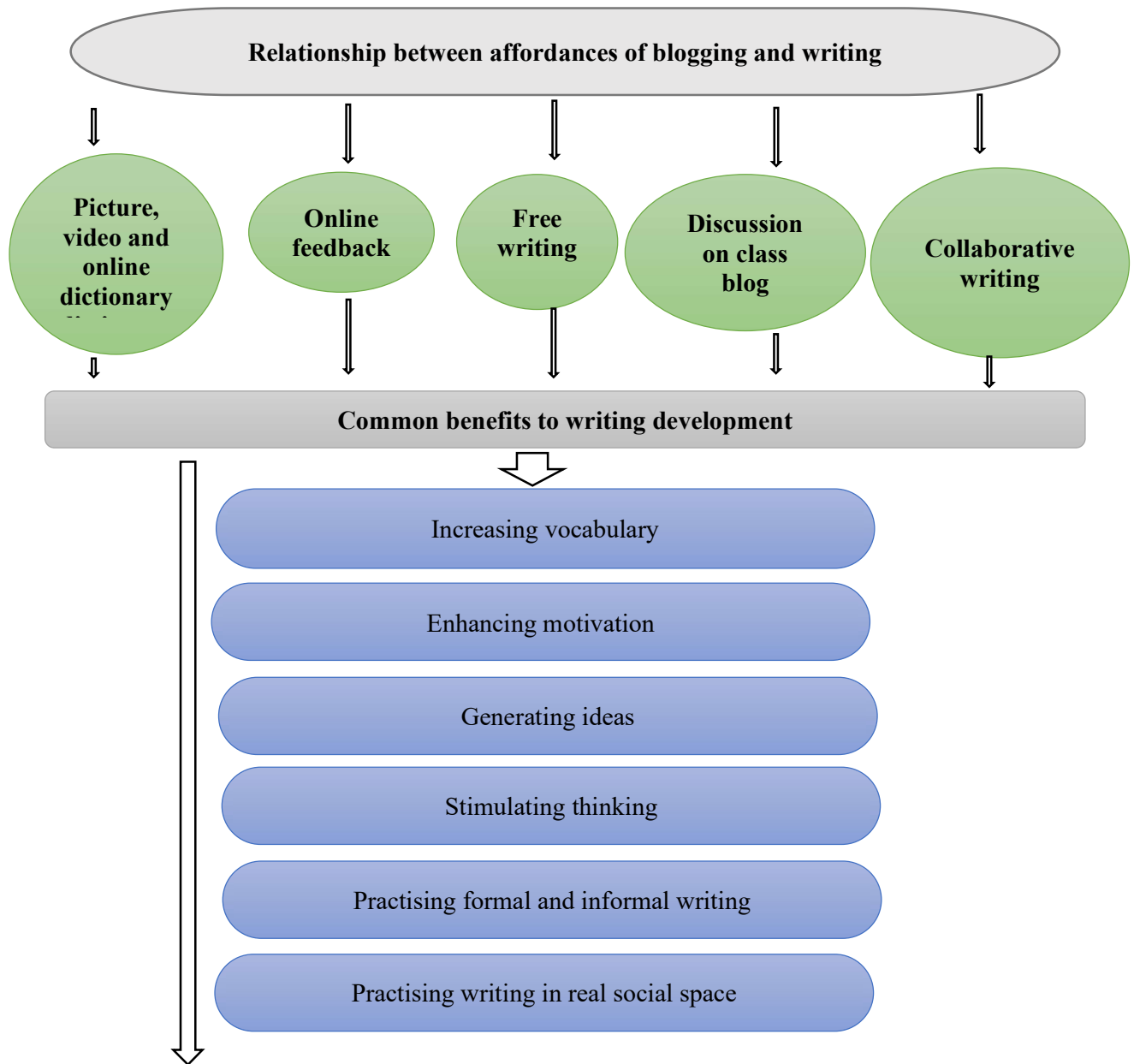


Figure 6.5: Relationship between affordances of blogging and writing

6.8 Students' experience of using the educational blog

Theme 4: Students' experience of using the educational blog			
Code and Sub-codes	Definitions	Sources	References
What learners did on their own blogs	Comments on interviewees' experience of how to use their own blog	Interviewees Ahmmed, Fahad, Hakim Muath	4
What learners did on the class blog	Comments on interviewees' experience of how to use the class blog	Interviewees Ahmmed, Fahad, Hakim Muath	4
The influence of the use of educational blog on EFL students' writing development	Comments on the influence of blogging on participants' writing and the elements of writing which improved	Interviewees Ahmmed, Fahad, Hakim, Muath	4

Table 6.5: Students' experience of using the educational blog

This section presents findings related to the interviewees' experiences of using the educational blog. This analysis is of data from four interviewee participants in the intervention group who were selected purposefully from the fourteen participants in the focus groups. They were selected after the focus group discussions as being the most improved over the intervention period based on their post-test results and last homework assignment posted on class blog. I dealt with them as four individual cases to obtain a more in-depth explanation of their improvement. Semi-structured interviews were designed for the purpose of understanding their experience of how they used their own blogs and the class blog and how this influenced their writing development.

6.8.1.1 Case one: AHMMED

Ahmmed had good skills in using technology; he had a smartphone and iPad. He talked about his experience of using his own blog and the class blog, the most distinct affordances of blogging, and how these affordances helped him to improve his

writing. In relation to what he did on his own blog, he explained how he approached the blog firstly by familiarising himself with the format and features, e.g. "*how to make my own profile and how to make comments*" and then he talked about the purpose of his own blog as explained in the following quotation:

The procedure of my own blog was to write the first draft of the homework assignment in the classroom and when I got back home edit my homework and publish it on the class blog. I also used my own blog to write about some interesting topics as free writing to share with my classmates or other people.

Moreover, this interviewee had added his classmate and others as an audience on his own blog and he was "*excited*" when he received their feedback and comments on his free writing on his own blog. He also used multimodality while he composed his writing. For example, he used relevant pictures with the topics on his own blog and he tried to write a few sentences about the amazing pictures he had on his blog. Another point he added was "*how he utilised his own blog as a portfolio to save his writing homework*" (Ahmmed). Furthermore, Ahmmed spoke about his experience of what he did on the class blog. He mentioned that the main purpose of the class blog was "*to post the final draft of the homework assignments on it*". He also explained that the reason he liked posting his assignments on the class blog was because it was "*a great opportunity*" for all students to see each other's homework assignments in one platform under the teacher's supervision. This procedure helped him to read his peers' work and give his feedback and comments to some of them. In the same vein, he felt that reading his colleagues' homework assignments on the class blog was "*very helpful*" and he said that:

I used to compare my homework assignment with others' work in order to improve my writing skills and I think this procedure is very important - when I read the homework topic from different students because each student has different skills in writing.

From this view, this interviewee indicated that reading his classmates' homework on the class blog helped him to improve his writing, and it also helped him refine his formal writing style by imitating other writers.

Another point he raised was about his way of dealing with his teacher's and peers' feedback, as he explained in following quote: *"When I received feedback and comments from my teacher, I used to correct my mistakes and edit my assignment carefully and repost it on the class blog"*. Ahmmed felt that the class blog was *"a very important platform for communication out of the classroom"*. For example, "students can be involved in discussion and write collaboratively with each other and also the teacher can be involved and lead the discussion as well". He emphasized that this process:

Helped him to write better and he realised that over the time his performance and his ability of writing was improved because the discussion and collaborative writing on blog increased his vocabulary, grammar, and so on and the result of that he was highly motivated to practise his writing.

This interviewee closed his talk about his role on the class blog at this point:

"I shared with my classmates some useful links in learning English language on class blog in order to save them on their own blogs and take the advantage of them". For instance, *"I used to listen to BBC 6 minutes English while I write on my own blog and class blog"*. From this example it seems that this student used his blog as an e-learning source to improve his English language skills, so I argue that the use of the educational blog in English language class increases opportunities to learn and to find different resources to support students in developing their writing. Moreover, after Ahmmed talked about what he did on his own and the class blog, he mentioned the influence of the use of the educational blog on his writing and also talked about the elements of writing in which he had improved. He started his response by talking about the organization of his writing. Ahmmed felt that the use of the educational blog was:

A useful platform for teaching and practising writing skills. For example, I learned how to plan my writing before starting to write about it. I think the use of the internet and reading about any writing topic before starting to write on my own blog was a great idea because it facilitated my writing and I learned how to write the paragraph introduction, statement, body and conclusion keeping cohesion and coherence.

Finally, Ahmmed spoke about how he increased his vocabulary, the length of his writing, and his language use such as grammar, structure and a range of sentences, over his three month use of the educational blog. This can be seen in the following quote:

Due to the use of my own blog and class blog as a tool for learning English skills and practising writing in particular... with time I realised that my writing had improved ... I think that was because of the process of using the educational blog and the characteristics of its use such as posts, feedback, discussion, and collaboration helped me to improve my writing (Ahmmed).

In this regard, this interviewee gave an example of how the combination of all the characteristics of the educational blog supported him to improve his writing skills.

This can be seen in the quote:

Reading my peers' homework, making comments and giving feedback in collaboration and discussion on the class blog increased my vocabulary ... Also, I tried to use different tenses, such as past and present continuous, because I was only using the present and past simple in my writing ... Another important point I learned was I improved in using some compound and complex sentences to make my writing better ... I think all the educational blog affordances share the same goal in improving writing skills which made me practise writing regularly until I got confidence in myself to write (Ahmmed).

From above interviewee's experience, it seems that he was keen to write on his own blog and class blog regularly and that he liked to participate in collaborative writing, joint discussions on the class blog, and in giving and receiving comments on his homework, both with peers and with his teacher. As he mentioned, the combination of these affordances of the educational blog motivated him to practise writing every day and this might have helped him to improve his writing skills.

6.8.1.2 Case two: FAHAD

Fahad was good at using technology; he had a smartphone, laptop and iPad. He had a little experience in using a general blog, namely Tumblr in the Arabic language. He talked about his experience of using his own blog and the class blog, the most distinct affordances of blogging, and how the affordances helped him to improve his writing. However, at the beginning of the conversation he talked about how he used his own blog, he explained how he dealt with the blog in the beginning, e.g. *"how to create my blog, make my profile and understand the blog function"*. In this vein, he felt that Edublogs was *"easy to use"* because it had some useful features such as supporting the Arabic language which helped him to understand how the features worked. He did not spend much time creating his own blog, however, as he just needed a username and password; moreover, he enjoyed using it. Furthermore, Fahad spoke about the aim of using his blog, explaining that he used it for several purposes. For example:

The main purpose was writing my homework assignments on it, in two stages: stage one to write the first draft of it in the classroom under our teacher's supervision; stage two was at home I should edit my work, for example checking the spelling and structural errors; also I tried to forward my homework to one of my classmates to check and give feedback and then submit the final draft on the class blog.

Fahad also explained the second purpose of using his own blog: *"I used my blog for free writing topics, for example to write my daily routine on my own blog"*.

Accordingly, he described his way of writing assignments and other free work on his blog:

I used to describe some pictures in a few sentences. In general, I found this experience more useful to share formal and informal writing with my followers to get feedback and comments. Fortunately, I had two friends from the USA and UK who were the most interactive and I learned so much from them.

Moreover, Fahad used his own blog as a self-learning platform: *"I uploaded some useful links which helped in learning language skills such as the online-Longman dictionary and six minutes English programme from the BBC"*. This interviewee went

on to explain his experience of using the class blog as he felt that his experience of using the educational blog was *"amazing and worthy in learning English skills especially in writing"*, emphasising that writing on the blog influenced the development of performance of his writing skills. Moreover, Fahad talked about this experience of the class blog, explaining what he used it for and the benefits for improving his writing skills. First of all, Fahad said: *"The main purpose of the class blog was to post the final draft of the formal homework assignments which can be seen by everyone in the class, including our teacher"*. In this regard, students on the class blog can read their peers' homework and the teacher can read all the homework assignments. Secondly, Fahad indicated some benefits of posting the homework assignments on the class blog, as shown in the following quote:

To get direct and indirect feedback and comments from our teacher. Also, I had the opportunity to give comments and feedback to my classmates. For example, I wrote some feedback to some classmates, such as 'go ahead' and 'good piece of writing' to encourage them because I liked to receive it on my writing, but I did not try to correct my classmates' homework in the first two weeks.

Accordingly, after two weeks Fahad felt that he had *"self-confidence"*, emphasising that he was able to *"give comment on some basic errors"*. For example, *"one of my colleagues had a grammatical mistake on his assignments paragraph where he wrote 'It were amazing holiday' so I just changed 'were' to 'was'. My teacher gave his comments and feedback regularly which was great"*. Moreover, Fahad discussed his role after reading everyone's writing on the class blog: *"I had a Word file in order to write any new vocabulary found in my classmates' work... Also, I responded very quickly to my teacher's feedback and got back to my homework to edit it again"*. Accordingly, this interviewee confidently said that: *"I think the procedure of the class blog helped me to improve my writing because of the focus on learning and practising writing in different ways as stated above and including the discussion and collaborative writing on class blog"*. Finally, after the above experience on his own

and class blogs, Fahad spoke about the influence of the educational blog on his writing improvement and the ways in which he found his writing had improved. First, he discussed his improvement in formal and informal writing. Fahad stated that "*the use of the educational blog improved my formal writing, such as writing homework on class blog and informal writing on my own blog like free writing ... I think this because of having more writing practice on the blog*". Another thing he felt that helped him to improve his writing was "*increased vocabulary*". For example, Fahad said that "*reading every day for preparing writing and reading my colleagues' assignments, comments, feedback and discussion on blog all raised my stock of vocabulary, which made my writing performance better*". Thirdly, he also explained how his grammar, spelling, punctuation and writing of different sentences had improved, as can be seen in the following quote:

I think writing on the educational blog was a good chance to practise my writing. For example, more writing with feedback and discussion on the class blog supported me to search for how I can use different tenses and different kinds of sentences in order to use them in my homework assignments and I realised that practising grammar is better than memorising it (Fahad).

Finally, in terms of paragraph outline, cohesion and coherence, Fahad said that:

I suppose that writing the first draft of a homework assignment on my own blog in the classroom supported me to know how to make a good plan and control ideas. This helped me to write the first and revised drafts ... Generally speaking, I knew all the paragraph elements so less practice made it more complicated but while practising writing on the educational blog facilitated how to write the paragraph statement, topic sentence, introduction, writing body and conclusion ... A useful idea I could say is comparing my writing with my friends' work and other bloggers made a big difference in improving my writing skills (Fahad).

According to Fahad's experience of using the educational blog as a platform for writing, he seemed happy to have that experience and he was excited about his achievement in developing his writing skills in a short time. He indicated that his improvement in writing was because of the combination of the different activities he

had on his own and class blogs. I argue that the use of the educational blog as a writing tool supported the improvement in this participant's writing skills.

6.8.1.3 Case three: HAKIM

Hakim had good information technology skills and had a smartphone and Notebook. This interviewee started to talk about his experience of using the educational blog in learning English writing and what he did on his own blog. Hakim had never blogged before and, while he had heard about general blogs, he had not heard of educational ones. In this regard, Hakim told his story about the educational blog and he felt that the use of the blog was *"a new and challenging experience"* and he was so *"excited to use it"* in order to find a way to help him to improve his writing. For example, *"I have difficulties in English writing because it is a foreign language but using educational technology helped me to practise my writing a lot "* and he felt that the use of new technology in teaching and learning English writing like blogs was *"a good idea and it helped me to improve my writing"*. Hakim went on to explain what he did and how he used his own blog, e.g. *"how to create and make my own profile"* as shown in the following quote:

First, I created my own blog under my teacher's supervision until I got my username and password, then I made my profile and I designed my own blog as I wanted and found the Edublogs application was easy to use (Hakim).

From the quotation above, it seems that the use of the educational blog helped this student to improve his writing as well as building his cognitive skills because he created his username and password and made his own profile the way he liked.

Furthermore, Hakim indicated that he *"uploaded the Edublogs app on his iPhone"* because he found that this enabled him to check and write on the blog at any time. Furthermore, he explained how he added his classmate on his blog: *"I sent my username link via email to my classmate who had already created his own blog"*. Then

Hakim moved on to talk about the main reason for creating his own blog in two parts, one obligatory and the other optional:

I used my own blog for the main reason which was to write the first draft of the homework assignment in class after discussing it with our teacher and then complete the task at home. For example, doing proofreading, editing in order to publish it on class blog. Fourth, I used to attach pictures with my assignments as an indication of what the topic was about (Hakim).

Then he talked about the optional reason for using his own blog:

I did informal writing on my blog. For example, writing informal letters and invitations to some followers I had on my own blog, and I created an online portfolio on my blog to return to previous homework assignments easily, anytime, anywhere (Hakim).

This interviewee raised another point, which was his strategy for what he did on the class blog. He indicated the aim of using the class blog was "*posting the final draft of the homework assignments, feedback, comments, discuss and negotiate a variety of issues related to academic writing, and to provide a space outside the classroom for students to collaborate and debate*". Hakim explained what he did on the class blog: he starting by polishing the final draft of his homework; for instance, he checked for spelling mistakes, structure and any repetitive vocabulary, sometimes asking for assistance from his father who is an English teacher to check the whole paragraph. After this process, he posted the final draft on the class blog to be visible to his classmates and teacher. He explained the process he went through on the class blog, for instance: "*to respond to my teacher's feedback, reading my classmate's assignments, checking the pronunciation of any new difficult words found from my classmates' works by using an online Longman dictionary, after that listing them in my portfolio on my own blog*". Moreover, this interviewee spoke about adding comments on his peers' homework assignments and receiving comments on his own work from them. He had found it difficult to give feedback to all his classmates, but it was "*worthwhile to learn from them and I did write a few comments randomly*".

As his last point in this regard, Hakim explained his final step on the class blog: *"Participating in the discussion on the class blog about some issues related to writing, for example discussion about how to use the past perfect and present perfect and so on"*.

According to Hakim, he felt that the usefulness came from the combination of his own blog and class blog. The process of using the educational blog in learning English had helped him to develop his writing and other skills. He learned, for example, search skills on the internet and practiced obtaining greater knowledge about what to write about, as explained in the following views:

I think that all these steps or actions on my own blog and class blog helped me to practise my writing regularly and also the response with feedback and comments from my teacher and classmates and other audience on my own blog encouraged and led me to keep going and also the use of the educational blog as a tool for practising writing was a good technology for this purpose (Hakim).

Finally, Hakim spoke in detail about what he did on his own blog and class blog. He felt that the use of the educational blog was *"the trigger to do hard work and remain constant in practising writing"* and he emphasised that his writing skills improved because of the benefits of the integration between all the affordances of the educational blog in practising writing. Furthermore, he explained the elements of writing in which he had improved and how he improved, so he felt that the *"interaction and enthusiasm in working on my own blog and class blog was really helpful to made me practise formal and informal writing regularly"*. Accordingly, Hakim focused on developing his writing and utilised the opportunity for the use of the educational blog in English writing class. For example, *this made me write, read a lot, compare my writing with others in order to copy a good writing style, getting effective feedback and responding to it so quickly, searching for new vocabulary, practising grammar and a variety of sentences to use in my writing, including the*

organization of paragraphs". According to above view, Hakim emphasised that all these steps above:

helped me to improve my writing skills, so this is how the educational blog works ... Eventually I realised my vocabulary had increased; I can use a different range of grammar, structure; I can use a range of sentences in my writing and I can use linking words correctly ... This improvement in my writing was because of the practice of writing on the educational blog.
(Hakim)

From Hakim's experience, it seems that he was a hard worker and he was enthusiastic to undertake a new experience in practising his writing. Therefore, Hakim wrote on his own and the class blog regularly and he enjoyed participating in collaborative writing and joint discussions on the class blog. Additionally, Hakim believed in practising writing every day, with the aim of focusing on writing, and he attributed his improvement to the practice of writing on the educational blog, the useful affordances of which supported him to improve his writing in an interesting environment.

6.8.1.4 Case four: MUATH

Muath had good competence in using technology and owned a smartphone and laptop. Muath started to talk about his experience of using the educational blog as a tool to develop his writing skills and his role in using his own blog. He felt that the use of the educational blog in teaching English writing was "*helpful*". He spoke about his experience of using his own blog, for example, "*how to make my own profile and how to write the first draft of homework assignments on my own blog, then at home check all the process writing stages and post the final draft on class blog*". Muath felt that the use of educational blogs facilitates students to practise the process of writing. Then he spoke about the other things he did on his blog as extra optional work. For instance, "*I used to write free writing on my own blog*". Muath found it "*very helpful*" because he worked under no pressure and had time to write. Furthermore, he talked about the use of the pictures he included with pieces of writing on his blog, as he explained in

the following point of view: *"I used to write about an interesting picture and post it to my friends. I followed them to get their feedback. I think this helps students to focus on reading and linking the paragraph idea with picture and also it helps to grab the student's attention"*.

Furthermore, Muath went on to speak about his experience of what he did on the class blog. He felt that the class blog was *"a real environment for practising writing due to the collaboration, socially interaction, discussion and feedback from teacher and peers"*. Muath emphasised that his own and class blogs were *"complementary to each other because the aim of both was to learn and practise writing"*. Accordingly, he explained his role in using the class blog. For example, how to publish final draft of homework assignment, to read and reread his classmates' works, responding to his peers' and teacher feedback and giving his own comments on his colleagues' assignments. In this regard, it seems that the class blog process helps students to become involved in writing in different ways as the students read their peers' work and re-read it many times, read their teacher's and peers' comments and give constructive comments. This may help students in vocabulary development, learning different styles of writing and organisation, and developing sentences and grammar structure. This, in turn, may enhance students' ability to improve their writing skills. Muath also added another point about sharing useful information and resources on the class blog, for example, *"I shared six minutes English application to practise English language skills"* and then he felt that learning English from different resources *"helped me to improve my English skills especially in writing because writing skills depend on the other three skills"*.

Before the end, Muath spoke about the class blog discussion outside the classroom: *"students are involved in discussion regarding some issues in writing, such as how to distinguish between past present and present perfect and so on"* and he felt that was

"a great idea because it was the first time for me to discuss any topic with my classmates and my teacher out of the classroom". He emphasised that it was a bit *"difficult"* at the beginning of the semester but that the number of students increased after a month of discussion, as he mentioned. Muath found that the use of the class blog *"serves as a wonderful educational environment in learning English writing skills"* emphasising that the educational blog supported him to improve his writing skills due to the blogs process. Finally, Muath explained the elements of writing in which he had improved: he said *"as I mentioned before, the common factor between participant's own blog and class blog was the practice of writing and I benefited from using both in developing and improving my writing"*. Muath emphasised that he learned how to practise his writing regularly through using the educational blog; for example, he said that *"I became able to shift from part to part easily without getting lost or stressed because of the practice of writing on the blog and reading a lot and trying to copy good writers"*. Moreover, Muath also indicated what he thought helped him, as can be seen in the following quote:

I think the increased account of my vocabulary was due to reading my classmates' writing, comments, feedback, collaborative work and discussion on the class blog. All these actions helped me to learn new vocabulary ... I can see improvement in the use of grammar because of the practice of new rules and discussing them on the class blog and my own blog ... I also improved in using different types of sentences and learned to use the transition words in my writing in a correct way... I learned how to write a good plan for my paragraph; also, I became able to connect my ideas more effectively in writing ... I think this improvement in my writing was because of the process of using the educational blog in the classroom and out of the classroom (Muath).

From above interviewee's experience, it seems that he wrote on his blog and class blog regularly and he undertook different tasks on his own and class blogs in order to improve his writing. As mentioned earlier, Muath's writing improved because of the process of using the educational blog as a tool for teaching and learning English writing skills and concentrating on practice, which was the common factor between

all the affordances of blogging. The reason I chose these four students was because the data showed an improvement that was likely to be due to the intervention.

6.8.1.5 Cross-case analysis

Table 6.6 below sums up the key findings, the similarities and differences in what the four participants said about the way blogging supported their writing development, and also relevant findings from the focus group discussion.

Key findings	Definitions	Similarities & Differences				Relevant findings from the focus groups	Source
		Case 1: AHMMED	Case 2: FAHAD	Case 3: HAKIM	Case 4: MUATH		
Extra reading	Comments on extra reading on blogging supporting student's writing development	√	√	√	√	√	14
Vocabulary development	Comments on how blogs helped to increased participant's vocabulary	√	√	√	√	√	14
Developing formal and informal writing	Comments on practising formal and informal writing on blogging supporting student's writing development	√	√	√	√	√	13
Online discussion	Comments on online discussion on blogging supporting student's writing development	√	√	√	√	√	13
Making comments	Comments on making comments on blogging supporting student's writing development	√	√	√	√	√	14
Receiving peer feedback	Comments on feedback on blogging supporting student's writing development	√	√	√	√	√	14
Collaborative writing	Comments on collaborative on blogging supporting student's writing development	√	√	√	×	√	14
Posting picture with text	Comments on including picture with text on blogging supporting student's writing development	√	√	√	√	√	10
Writing videos summary	Comments on writing video summary on blogging supporting student's writing development	√	√	×	×	√	8

Organising ideas	Comments on organising ideas on blogging supporting student's writing development	√	√	√	√	√	14
Spotting writing mistakes	Comments on spotting writing mistakes on blogging supporting student's writing development	√	√	×	√	√	9
Developing the use of sentences	Comments on developing the use of sentences on blogging supporting student's writing development	√	√	√	√	√	14
Developing grammar accuracy	Comments on developing grammar and structure on blogging supporting student's writing development	√	√	√	√	√	14
Online dictionary	Comments on using the online dictionary picture with text on blogging supporting student's writing development	×	×	√	×	√	6

Table 6.6: Cross-case analysis

The above table presents the cross-case analysis of the participants in order to draw out similarities and differences across the interviewees. According to the findings above, all four interviewees talked about their experience of using their own blog and class blog in detail, and how they used them. Additionally, participants explained in what ways they had improved and why. According to their experiences, they had the same goals and processes of using their own and class blogs. They did the first draft of their homework assignment on their own blog, starting by pre-writing, revising, editing and finally publishing it on the class blog. They used their own blog for practising free writing or uploading an interesting picture to write a summary or reflection about. Moreover, they had an audience on their own blog - from different countries. Regarding what they did on their class blog, they did almost the same things, such as reading their classmates' work, giving feedback, participating in discussions and collaborative writing, and responding to their teacher's feedback. Finally, according to the four interviewees' experience, they improved in their vocabulary, grammar, structure, spelling, connection of ideas, and use of a variety of sentences. This was because of the combined processes of using their own and class blogs in practising writing regularly.

6.9 Conclusion to the chapter

This qualitative findings chapter has presented the data from the open-ended questionnaires conducted with all students in the intervention group (45), focus groups conducted with 14 students (two groups of seven each) and interviews conducted with four students from the intervention group. None of the comparison group students were involved in the methods above. This was because it was not necessary to consider the differences in the views of the two groups because this was not required by the second or fourth research questions. These questions

concerned the perceptions, ways of improvement in writing, experiences of students regarding the affordances of blogging, how the students used these affordances and why these affordances helped them in writing improvement.

The students confirmed that using educational technology in teaching English writing was indeed necessary because they were struggling to find a way to help them improve their writing skills. However, in their view, their previous experience of studying writing in high school and university did not help them develop their writing skills. To address this problem, the students revealed that, nowadays, technology had become a part of teaching and learning English skills for EFL learners and they were not happy with the traditional methods used in teaching English. They considered those methods inadequate and that using educational technology like blogs to integrate with the traditional methods would make more sense to them. This was because the intervention was conducted in the context of educational technology (blogs) as a pedagogical teaching method to practice English writing regularly in a social environment in/out of the classroom. This gave students more free writing, exposure to different writing styles, more discussion, collaboration and different feedback from peers and teacher. The open-ended questionnaires confirmed that most of the students benefitted from and emphasised the importance of the use of educational blogs in teaching and learning English writing.

The focus group data confirmed that the students felt that they had benefitted from the affordances of blogging in relation to their writing development and said that, if given a choice, they would prefer to use educational blogs as a learning tool in their English classes in order to improve their writing skills. Moreover, the interview data confirmed that the students experienced the blogs' affordances and felt that their

writing had become much better. In particular, the students emphasised that they had improved in different elements of writing, such as organising paragraphs, linking ideas together, sentence structure, increased vocabulary and use of a wider range of sentences. What follows next is Chapter Seven, the discussion of the main findings of the study.

7. CHAPTER SEVEN

Discussion

7.1 Introduction

This research explored the impact of the use of educational blogs on EFL students' writing development in the Preparatory Year Programme (PYP), (health stream) at One University in Saudi Arabia. The aim of the study was to investigate the impact of the use of educational blogs on EFL students' writing skills as a pedagogical method for developing English writing skills.

To fulfill its objectives, the study adopted a quasi-experimental and sequential exploratory mixed-methods design with an equal emphasis on quantitative and qualitative methods. This approach was helpful in explaining why and how the use of educational blogs helped the students in their writing improvement. Moreover, this approach made it possible to assess the impact of the use of educational blogs on EFL students' writing development when comparison was made between intervention and non-intervention groups. It also explored the intervention group participants' perceptions of the use of educational blogs and their affordances, and the relationship between blogging and writing development. Furthermore, it enabled the exploration of the intervention group's experiences of using their personal blogs and the class blog, and the elements of writing in which they improved. This study was governed by quantitative questions, hypotheses and assumptions, and also by qualitative questions.

Although these questions were investigated and addressed earlier, in Chapter Four, their findings are summarized, merged and discussed in this section. Furthermore, in this section, these findings are compared with the findings of previous research studies and linked theoretically with sociocultural theory in the use of educational blogging and its impact on EFL students' writing development. In the qualitative

phase of the study, the analysis was based on the quantitative results and issues were explored from participants' perceptions and beliefs. The next section discusses the main findings and their significance.

7.2 Discussion of the main findings and their significance

This study used educational blogs in teaching English writing skills as the intervention method with the hope that the educational blog and its affordances would benefit writing development. As explained in the previous chapters, the theory of the relationship between blogs and writing development, the affordances of blogging, and sociocultural theory formed the theoretical framework for this research. The important issues that emerge from the study include the effect of using educational blogs in teaching English writing in second language learning, the affordances of blogging, and the benefits of the use of educational blogs. Accordingly, the discussion of findings will be based on the theoretical framework that was extracted from the findings of both the quantitative and qualitative approaches, which explains the theory of the connection between blogging affordances and writing development, as seen below, in Figure 1. 7.

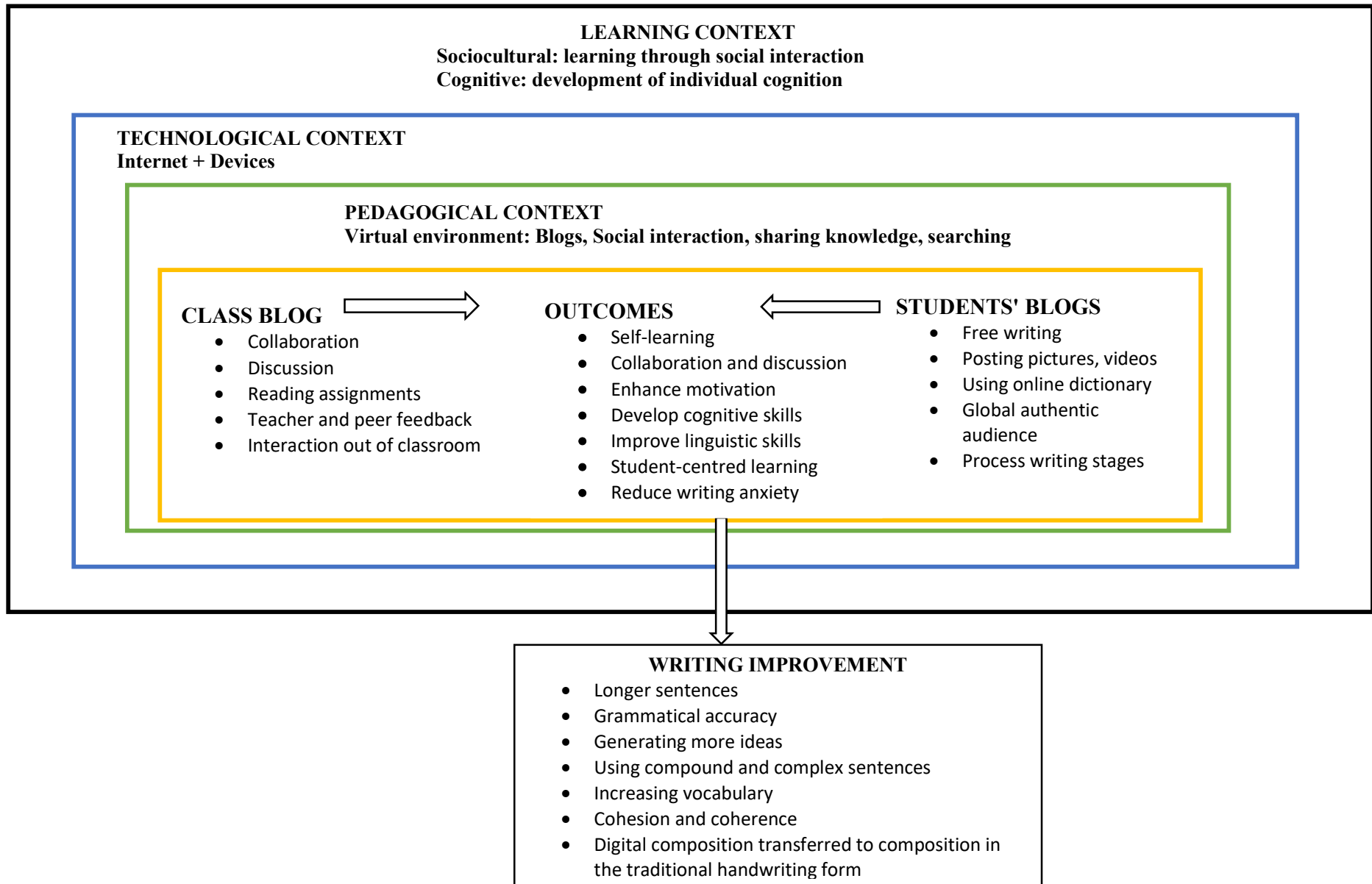


Figure 7.1 New Framework of the theory of the relationship between blogging affordances and writing development

Based on Figure 7.1 above, this new framework incorporates the development of the theory of the connection between blogging affordances and writing development. In light of the emergent themes, the new framework focuses on educational blogs. It is structured around three major types of contexts: firstly, the learning context, which is viewed through the lens of sociocultural theory; secondly, the technological context such as the internet and devices to facilitate the use of educational blogs in and out of the classroom; thirdly, the pedagogical context, in the light of the use of educational blogs as a virtual environment which allows learners to engage in more social interaction, sharing knowledge, commenting, discussion and collaboration. These are altogether associated with the two types of blogs, namely, the class blog and the learners' blogs.

This new framework shows how the affordances are 'situated' within these contexts and theories that extend the writing practice in different ways which could help students to develop their writing skills. The framework signposts for teachers the factors that they need to consider when integrating this technology into their teaching to extend students' opportunities to practice writing virtually, making use of the connectivity of the blog format to facilitate, for example, free writing, collaboration, discussion and feedback. In more concrete terms, writing blogs allows for collaboration and individually-centred expression of thoughts, ideas and information, and fosters self-reflection. From the combination of the use of learners' and class blogs several outcomes emerged, such as enhanced motivation, reduced writing anxiety, the development of cognitive skills, and improvement of other linguistic skills. The students' writing improved in several measurable ways, including writing longer sentences, creating more ideas, securing greater grammatical accuracy, and employing a wider range of vocabulary.

In the social dimension, the peer interaction that was afforded by the comment function provided an alternative place for conversational exchange. That said, as witnessed in the study, the interaction, through discussion, collaboration and teacher and peer feedback, mostly centred around practising writing and social interaction, with only limited instances of critical dialogue. Educational blogging as social interaction was revealed in four ways. Firstly, the blogs themselves were socially-oriented, so that blogging was not just about relating experiences or releasing emotions; in fact, it was about reaching out to get in touch and participate in communication with their peers as an audience. Secondly, the educational blogs fostered a sense of connection between peers when they read each other's blogs and homework assignments. Thirdly, constructive feedback online from teacher and peers provided more interaction and the exchange of information and knowledge. Fourthly, the use of educational blogs enhanced students' general motivation to practise their writing and also to reduce writing anxiety when they were allowed enough time to do their homework assignments. As a result, writing on the educational blogs enabled the students to capture and review the feelings and thoughts they had posted on their own blogs, and the class blog could trigger reflections on the part of classmates and increase their practice of writing.

In sum, while I recognise that collaboration, peer and teacher feedback, social interaction, and so on, can happen without a digital platform in a paper-based interactive classroom, this study indicates that blogs are an effective way to facilitate these processes in a way which can occur within or outside the classroom. Today's generation of learners generally prefer using digital technology in a social interactional learning environment (Pinkman, 2005). In this respect, this study suggests that educational blogging might facilitate the learning process and boost a learner's motivation to learn based on the questionnaire, focus group and interview

data. Moreover, blogs might play a role in reducing writing anxiety and it might help students to express their feelings, voice in discussion in more free way.

7.3 Use of educational blogs in teaching and learning English

Educational blogs were used in this study as a pedagogical method to teach and learn EFL writing skills in a social environment. This was based on my observation that the new generation of students understand and use social media, such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter (Akhiar, Mydin, & Kasuma, 2017; Listiani, 2016). So, I believed that they could use educational blogs in the educational context, with only some help and advice, to start practising writing in the interactive space. For example, they could be given training in how to create their own blogs and how to use the important features of educational blogs, as on Edublogs software. They would need internet access and devices such as iPads, laptops or even smartphones on which Edublogs' easy to use apps could be installed.

The use of the educational blogs is of special significance in the study of English as a foreign language. Past research in this area has been limited in the Arab world and in Saudi Arabia particularly. Also, researchers have focused on the general impact of the use of the blogs on teaching and learning English skills, and specifically on writing and attitudes towards writing. Moreover, most previous researchers have conducted studies with English major undergraduates but only a few on non-English majors (Aljumah, 2012; Fageeh, 2011).

This past research had confirmed that educational blogs had an impact on learning English skills, but no further explanation had been offered as to how and why they had an impact on teaching and learning English writing in and out of the classroom (Vurdien, 2013; Zhang, 2009). Accordingly, further studies still needed to be done, especially with respect to the use of educational blogs in the second language classroom. This is because the use of educational blogs as a means of teaching and

learning in a social environment is a relatively new area which has been growing over the past ten/fifteen years (Pinkman, 2005). However, the spread of weblogs in EFL classes in many parts of the world was one of the reasons that encouraged the researcher to adopt the blog as an innovative tool in teaching EFL writing skills to Saudi students at this university in Saudi Arabia.

Theoretically, it has been suggested by several researchers that the use of educational blogs has a positive effect on learning English and enhances EFL students' writing skills. Researchers (such as Aljumah, 2012; Drexler, Dawson, & Ferdig (n.d.); Fageeh, 2011; Jones, 2006; Kelley, 2008; Roth, 2007; Vurdien, 2013; Zhang, 2009; and several others) have all acknowledged that the use of the blogs has a positive effect on learners' writing skills. In their research, Armstrong and Retterer (2008), Drexler, Dawson and Ferdig (n.d.), Fageeh (2011), Jones (2006), Kelley (2008) and Lee (2010) all found that students had a positive attitude towards using blogging in English classes to improve English skills and, particularly, their writing. There is a consistency between these findings reported in the literature and the responses in the questionnaires and focus groups in the present study, which show that the intervention group had a positive attitude towards the use of educational blogs in the English classroom in general. They had a positive view of blogs and writing improvement, particularly improvement in vocabulary, grammatical accuracy and spelling accuracy. They were positive in their views of the affordances of blogging regarding its influence on their writing development.

Furthermore, the use of blogging will be an ever-increasing need in teaching and learning English skills because our students were born in a digital generation. The "technology revolution" demands a media-rich environment for learning and urgent changes in the methods of teaching and learning. This technology is especially rich in possibilities for opening the door for student-centred learning where they can learn

from each other via technology. This point will be discussed in more detail in section 7.7.

Moreover, for people eager to express their ideas in writing by means of virtual communication on social media, the visibility of blogs is becoming more important in Saudi Arabia. A large number of language learners could be presented with an important new opportunity to engage in developing their writing skills while working in groups or individually because of the availability of blogs. However, according to Parvez, Akhter and Mohammad (2013), in their study on the usage of Web 2.0 applications such as Facebook, Twitter, RSS, wiki and blogs by the Saudi government and private universities, blogs were only being used in the universities for community service news, not for educational purposes, which demonstrates the lack of blog use in teaching in Saudi Arabia. This is consistent with the findings of the present study, presented in Chapter Five, that 89% of the participants were not aware of blogs' existence and did not have their own blog, while 11% had their own general blogs but did not use them. Only three of them used blogs to practise writing in their native language and only two wrote in both Arabic and English on their general blogs. In other words, 11% actively contributed to blogs while 89% displayed a passive use of blogs. By passive use, it means that they used to read blogs, but they did not participate in activities such as writing, interacting, discussing or creating new ideas.

This result is also supported by a recent study conducted by Alsamadani (2017) as well as other studies (e.g. Aljumah, 2012; Fageeh, 2011; Vurdien, 2013). These provide robust evidence for the visibility of the use of the blogs in Saudi Arabia. I argue that the use of the blogs in Saudi Arabia for general purposes is growing, for example as personal journals, or in public use like publishing university news, but that there is obvious limitation on the use of the blogs in teaching and learning.

Based on the focus group findings in Chapter Six, all participants reported some factors that might limit the use of the internet and educational technology in schools and universities. Firstly, the role of the internet in schools is restricted, which would be the main resource for gaining access to educational technology like blogs as a teaching and learning platform in the classroom in order to practise writing or engage in the social environment. Secondly, there is the poor infrastructure, lack of software and support in schools, and the lack of access to information technology at the school level. This finding is consistent with the findings of research studies like that of Alwani and Soomro (2010), who found that teachers in a private elementary school in Yanbu, Saudi Arabia, reported barriers preventing them from using IT in the classroom, such as shortage of funding and software. Even though this finding is consistent with the current study, some factors are slightly different between the two studies. For example, the participants in each study, the year of conducting each study, and Alwani and Soomro's study being in a private school, which could be better financed than the university where the present study was conducted. Nevertheless, it is clear that finance could be an obstacle to buying expensive software and other investments needed.

Additionally, the findings were confirmed by a Jordanian study conducted by Ihmeideh (2009), who found that the same factors limited the use of the internet in schools in Jordan. It is worth mentioning that Jordan is an Arab country, so the cultural context is similar to the present study's, but Jordan's overall economic status is lower than Saudi Arabia's (Dandan, 2011) so their lack of financial support for education is not comparable to Saudi Arabia's high expenditure.

According to Al-Mengash (2006), the lack of awareness of educational policies was one of several reasons for not applying policies correctly and therefore not achieving their aims. This, together with the lack of infrastructure, is relevant to the focus group

findings of the current study where all participants thought that the policy and environment when they came to university would be different from that at school. But, unfortunately, the availability of the internet and the use of educational technology in English classes at university were as poor as at school. Also, students assumed that they would find open internet access at the university because, as undergraduate students, they believed in the importance of the internet in their academic life and to help them open the door to the world in order to obtain resources, information and knowledge from different perspectives. In this vein, based on my personal experience when I conducted this study at the university, the internet and technological equipment were not available in classrooms, so I had to supply three internet routers myself; we also faced a lack of network coverage and barely overcame it. It seems that there is still a lack of infrastructure at One University regarding the unavailability of the internet and other technological equipment on the campus, and this might be the result of this university being a newly developing one which needs time to come up to the standards of the best universities around the world in order to provide a good quality education.

To conclude the discussion above, there are obstacles facing students in school and university regarding the use of educational technology which depends on the availability of the internet. I argue that students could use the internet under the institution's control and policy for educational purposes in a way which would not conflict with the Islamic and moral values of society. Thus, Saudi Arabia, when launching dramatic changes to its education system, should consider addressing the finance, lack of infrastructure, lack of software and the incorrect application of policy as ways to improve the education system. Education is considered the fundamental resource for the development of the nation's renaissance in the light of the

government's aim to achieve the objectives of Vision 2030 in the Kingdom (Saudi vision, 2018).

Of particular note is the fact that the findings emerging from the focus group discussions in this study indicate that participants had many ideas about what was stopping their teachers from engaging with technology. For example, based on Focus Group data, students consider that teachers did not want to use educational technology in their classes: a few university teachers used essential technology such as a projector and PowerPoint, which are not considered by students to be useful technological tools in teaching English, but no one used educational technology that allows learners to use the internet in their classes, especially English teachers. Based on the focus group findings, most of the participants had ideas about why their teachers did not use educational technology in English classes at the tertiary level. For instance, it might be because of their lack of training in the new technology, or their lack of access to internet network. Finally, English teachers might be reluctant to use technology, such as using the internet in teaching writing through blogs or any other educational technology such as wikis and forums, because they do not know how to use them in the classroom or because these technologies need internet access which is not available in school or university.

This finding concurs with many previous studies, like those of Ageel (2011), Al-Mengash (2006) and Alwani and Soomro (2010). These studies investigated elementary and secondary school teachers' attitudes to, and perceptions of, the barriers to the use of information technology in schools. However, in terms of the university level, a qualitative study conducted by Saqlain and Mahmood (2013) had similar findings to those of the present study. From this discussion, I suggest that the participants' ideas about what might prevent teachers from coping with technology

would need more research. It would require talking to teachers to determine the extent to which the students' ideas are true.

7.4 Blogs as a pedagogical teaching method

As apparent from the literature reviewed, teaching and learning writing in L2 is often viewed as inadequate because of the use of traditional methods, teacher-centred teaching and the resulting difficulties in Saudi students' writing (McKay, 1992).

The findings of the present study suggest that the traditional pen-and-paper method that is prevalent in most writing classes is not enough (Barone & Wright, 2008): teachers need to encourage students to engage with social writing spaces, such as maintaining blog sites. When I analysed the open-ended questionnaires and focus group discussions I came to realise another important issue that was reported by the intervention group participants about the traditional teaching methods used by their teachers in teaching English writing in school and university. The questionnaire findings in the current study revealed that a high percentage of participants (93.3%) indicated a preference for practising writing on blogs rather than using traditional pen and paper in writing. This was also supported by the focus group findings as most participants agreed that they preferred using educational blogs as a tool for writing rather than traditional methods because it allowed them to practise their writing freely and constantly.

In brief, the findings of this research indicate the need for a shift to integrate the use of educational technology (blogs) in teaching and learning English as a foreign language and, more broadly, in the methods of teaching and learning English EFL writing. Of course, teachers might create a social writing spaces that are not digital, for example, doing face-to-face collaborative writing. However, blogs might allow for more writing practice in social interaction outside the classroom, and this could be especially useful for teachers with large classes. The use of blogs can also allow

opportunities for students to read their peers' work and give comments and feedback regularly. This procedure might motivate students to imitate their peers' writing and style in order to improve their writing skills. This concurs with the results of Arani (2005), who maintained that approximately three quarters of the class of students in their study preferred blog writing to the more traditional pen and paper. Moreover, this finding is similar to that reached by Song and Chan (2008), who found a difference between blog writing assignments and traditional classroom writing activities. Furthermore, these findings are supported by two studies conducted in the Saudi context (Aljumah, 2012; Fageeh, 2011) which indicated that their participants preferred writing on blogs instead of pen and paper. It seems that the findings of these studies revealed that students preferred writing on educational blogs because using blogs helped them improve their typing skills; they learned how to speed type and use the functions of the keypad. Furthermore, the ease and flexibility of writing on the educational blog might help students to express their feeling, emotions and ideas through their free writing on their own blogs.

However, the findings of the present study are inconsistent with what Brescia (2014) found in his study, that blogging was not supplanting traditional teaching since there was no indication that it was more effective in the learning process. I argue that this inconsistency could be due to the context of the study, and the age and gender of the participants. On the other hand, it is worth mentioning that findings from the focus groups revealed that some students suggested it would be better to integrate traditional methods with educational blog technology because students would get clear instructions from the teacher before starting to write their own blogs. This finding is consistent with that of Simsek (2009), who found that the writing performance of Turkish university students improved when weblog was integrated into the traditional teaching method.

From the above discussion, I could argue that, even though these studies support the current study's findings, there is a slight inconsistency between them because all previous research investigated the differences between traditional methods and the use of the blogs through questionnaires and pre- and post-tests, which are insufficient to present a holistic picture. For example, conducting interviews or focus groups in order to ask the students why they preferred writing on blogs rather than using pen and paper, as I did in this study, was useful to explore in more depth potential reasons for the quantitative study findings. However, any pedagogical changes need to be based on evidence of learning and thinking, not simply on the ubiquity of the use of educational blogs. Ramadas (2009) has urged educators of this technological generation to draw on the science of cognition for making informed and intelligent decisions, as there is plenty of technological choice available to the modern teacher. It must also be noted that, although emphasis has been placed on using blog technology in teaching and learning English writing in and out of the classroom, it is not the use of technology itself that matters. In fact, merely using advanced technology like blogs in teaching and learning English writing may not have any positive impact on the development of writing. From the study findings presented in the open-ended questionnaires and focus group discussions, participants raised the important issue that teaching and learning English writing skills needs specific technological tools with internet access, and that these enable them to practise their writing regularly. This led us to the point of how the technological tools are used and integrated into an effective pedagogy for L2 writing. That is, the blogs cannot supplant traditional teaching methods, but can complement them effectively by extending the opportunities for collaborative writing beyond the classroom. For example, the use of educational blogs required an internet network. However, using other technologies in the English classroom, such as Whiteboard, Projector and PowerPoint, were

considered useless because they had not benefitted students' writing practice, but only helped the teachers to deliver the lessons.

In fact, teachers do not have to use blogs, but they can offer a different approach that might be beneficial in specific ways but, in Saudi Arabia, there are issues such as large class sizes and poor levels of students' English that undermine the effectiveness of these other approaches. As such, therefore, it might be useful to use the educational technology in English classes to engage students in attractive and more interactional ways. According to Williams & Jacobs (2004, p. .3) the blog technology is defined as a tool that "has the capacity to engage people in collaborative activity, knowledge sharing, reflection, and debate, where complex and expensive technology has failed". According to the focus groups findings, the benefits of the blogs may have been more about compensating for the lack of interactive teaching methods typically used in EFL classes rather than about the affordances of the technology itself. In other words, teachers should focus on using technology as a pedagogical tool in order to make their classes interactive to support the teaching and learning process. This was suggested by studies conducted by Albaaly and Higgins (2012) and Higgins (2016) on the impact of interactive whiteboard technology, which is considered to be very effective, on Egyptian medical students' EFL writing development (Gaikwad, 2013). Their results showed that, although the students' essay writing skills improved in both groups (comparison and intervention), the use of the interactive whiteboard had no additional beneficial impact on the intervention group's writing achievement. Based on the conclusions drawn in their study, it appears that the pedagogical approaches to support learning are more significant than the technology itself (Albaaly & Higgins, 2012; Higgins, 2016). The point to be noted here with regards to the current study is that it is not just the use of the educational blog as a modern technological tool that could help in improving students' writing skills but the use of the educational blog as an

alternative pedagogical method, which could be integrated with other teaching methods to enable students to practise their writing constantly, and to write in a relatively informal, low-stakes format and to receive feedback.

To conclude the discussion on the distinction between the use of educational blogs as a pedagogical method in teaching and learning English writing and the use of traditional methods which make use of other technological tools, it might be said that the findings of this study indicate that teachers, especially in Saudi Arabia, need to be prepared for the use of educational technology in the light of its pedagogical affordances. This technology enables an interactive way of teaching and learning because it opens the door for students to use the internet in class in order to practise their writing, which has an impact on EFL students' writing development. Further discussion will shed light on the influence of blogs on writing improvement in the following section.

7.5 The influence of using educational blogs on EFL students' writing development

The findings from the quasi-intervention study and the descriptive data from the writing sample texts gathered from the pre-test indicated that, in both the intervention and comparison groups, the pre-test showed weaknesses in students' writing skills, including inaccurate structure, lack of vocabulary, the illogical starting of paragraphs and construction, and problems in grammar and sequencing ideas. However, the present study shows the positive impact of the intervention on students' writing development. The effective use of educational blogs improved students' writing skills, as shown in the mean scores (17.73 and 23.38) in the results of the intervention group's pre- and post-tests. Moreover, the results of the first and last assignments of the intervention group show that there was a significance differences in the mean scores (18.87 and 24.00). It is noteworthy that the intervention group improved both

when composing in a traditional, handwritten form, and when composing digitally (i.e. the online blogs). The positive results presented in Tables 5.4. and 5.8 in Chapter Five, seem to suggest that there was a transferred effect from the digital compositions to the handwriting form. However, the intervention findings indicated that student writing benefitted in many ways from the use of the educational blogs and, in relation to the student perspectives discussed in the qualitative findings in Chapter Six, it appears that it is the social affordances of blogging, particularly the relative informality, opportunities for collaboration and feedback and linking of in and out of classroom writing, that particularly benefitted students, linking to the idea that writing is a social practice (Myhill, 2005). Therefore, I believe that this improvement in the writing of the intervention group, and their response to the use of the educational blog as a platform for teaching and learning writing was, on the whole, positive. This was apparent in the data gathered statistically from the questionnaire and the pre- and post-tests, and qualitatively from the open-ended questionnaire and focus groups. Next, an overview of the relationship between blogging and writing development is presented. This study is in line with the findings of other researchers (Arslan & Şahin-KızıL, 2010; Fageeh, 2011; Farooq, Fatima, & Javid, 2015; Kitchakarn, 2012) that students improve in their writing after being taught by using educational blogs. In the same vein, the findings of this current study are consistent with two recent studies (Alsamadani, 2017; Rahmanita & Cahyono, 2018) which found that the use of the blogs had an impact on students' writing skills based on pre- and post-test scores. From the above discussion, it is clear that the use of educational blogs as a pedagogical method in teaching and learning English writing helped students in the intervention group to improve their writing skills, based on the quasi-experimental findings. However, as discussed earlier when mentioning the differences between adopting blogs as a teaching method and the traditional method, the findings from open -

questionnaires , focus groups and interviews in this study indicate that the general view was that the students thought the way of teaching English writing in schools did not benefit them. However, they felt that the use of educational technology such as blogs was extremely beneficial in learning English language skills and writing in particular.

I argue that the use of educational blogs helped students to improve their writing because of its distinctive affordances and its impact on writing improvement, so I will discuss these affordances and their benefits in more detail in the next section. Students from the focus groups and interviews emphasised that their writing improved in different ways, such as the organisation of paragraphs, coherence and cohesion, generating more ideas, grammatical accuracy and the increase of their vocabulary. In other words, students in the intervention group showed that they could write longer paragraphs, using a greater variety of academic vocabulary, and were able to use a mixture of simple, compound and a few complex sentences.

In brief, the qualitative findings of this study suggest that the writing skills of students had improved for the reason that they articulated their ideas better, so that writing in a social environment might help students to be more aware of their audience and they could benefit from drafting, revising and editing their writing content before sharing it on their own and class blogs. This was evident in a number of comments that suggested that the students were better able to practise their writing through the space provided on their own blogs and the class blog. In addition, they felt that they familiarised themselves with the concept they called "writing practice" on the educational blog in their social environment, which made a difference to their writing development (such as the use of a variety of vocabulary and different kinds of sentences in order to increase structural complexity), and, therefore, they were better

able to translate their daily practice into their writing, as evidenced by the quantitative findings.

The findings of the current study are supported by several other studies (Akçay, 2012; Amir et al., 2010; Istifici, 2011; Nam, 2010; Noytim, 2010; Sun & Chang, 2012; Wong & Sornsen, 2012) which confirmed that blogs had a beneficial influence on the writing ability of English learners and, furthermore, that learners could develop new strategies and approaches to writing in English. For example, these strategies could include imitating good writers, practising formal and informal writing, and participating in discussions about their writing topics. It is clear from the above discussion that, within the context of foreign language learning, the educational blog constitutes a helpful tool of internet-based social networking because it allows learners to read more, to search for topics related to their writing homework in order to compare and learn new ideas, and to improve their vocabulary, structure and style. On the other hand, some studies (İnceçay & Genç, 2014; Kashani, Mahmud, & Kalajahi, 2013; Zhou, 2015) found no significant differences between comparison and intervention groups after a blog-based intervention. They found that the blogs had no impact on the students' writing improvement. In this regard, I argue that the inconsistency between the findings of the present study and what is reported in the literature might be due to the difference in the context and the method of implementing the blogs in teaching and learning English writing. Finally, it is worth mentioning what the four case interviewees in this present study said about how they used their own blogs and class blogs and in which elements of writing they improved. Generally speaking, it has been explained that there are three different types of blogs that can be used in the English language class: the tutor blog, the learner blog, and the class blog (Campbell, 2003). However, the present study used the strategy of integration between the learner blog and class blog, with more emphasis on the class blog. The

reason for combining the student blog and the class blog was in order to give learners the opportunity to be more familiar with the context of blogs and to feel free to use their own blogs on which they could write whatever they wanted, while using the class blog more seriously to share their writing assignments, comments, reading and so on. It seems that this procedure benefitted students in that they used their own and class blogs constantly during the semester. This allowed them to do extra reading, free writing and discussion, which contributed to the improvement in their writing.

It is clear that, as Campbell (2004) mentioned in his study, one of the major difficulties that EFL teachers using blogs in a class could face is “lack of participation from readers outside the classroom”. In fact, this could happen; but in this study the use of the blog in class did not affect the interaction between participants and the teacher outside the classroom because the class time was divided into two phases: to discuss the topic together, and then to give students the opportunity to do the first draft of their homework assignment under the researcher’s observation, as his role was to guide them and offer help when they faced difficulties. However, according to the findings from the interviews in the current study, the students used their own blogs and class blog in similar ways due to the essential instructions they had been given in this study. In addition, students used their own blogs for two purposes. It is worth mentioning that they used their own blogs in class to write the first draft of their homework assignments; this helped them to search in relation to and focus on their work. Also, they used their blogs as online journals because the learners’ blog provided the opportunity to archive the posts; it could also be used as an online electronic portfolio through which learners were able to return to previous work. In addition, findings from the interviews indicated that students used the class blogs to post the final draft of their homework assignments in order to get their teacher’s and peers’ feedback. Furthermore, they used it to read their peers’ work, comments,

discussions, collaboration and for sharing useful knowledge and links that helped them improve their writing.

It is clear that, from the combined findings of the focus groups and interviews, the combination of the use of students' own blogs and the class blog helped them to improve their writing practice. For example, the blog affordances motivated them to write every day until they familiarised themselves with this habit. As a result of this process, the findings generated from the questionnaire, focus group and interview show that students found they had improved in grammar, structure, vocabulary, and formal and informal writing styles, which was confirmed by the findings of the text analysis in Chapter Five. Furthermore, the findings of the present study are consistent with a study conducted in Japan by Johnson (2004). He used learners' blogs and a class blog and indicated that the integration of the blogs was useful to help students improve their writing. This finding is in line with several studies (Vurdine, 2013; Wu, 2006; Zhou, 2015) which found that the use of educational blogs helped learners to improve their writing. However, these studies only used the learners' blogs as a technique to develop their students' writing, i.e. they used it for free writing, homework and other activities, unlike in the present study which used learners' blogs and class blogs for different purposes. To conclude the discussion above, I argue that the combination of learners' blogs and class blog encourages students to practise their writing in social space in a more interactional way and that this improves their writing. In this study, I believe that both class blog and learners' blogs might be considered useful interactional tools to help students increase their reading; this may also have had a beneficial impact on their writing. In contrast, the findings of a study by de Alneida Soares (2008) was that the learners' blog was the type of blog that encouraged learners to read more and more. This inconsistency might be due to the researcher's different purpose in the use of each blog type. Additionally, teachers may find it

difficult to deal with the extra workload the learners' blog created for them. Accordingly, a class blog may be a better decision for teachers (de Alneida Soares, 2008). I agree with this view but feel it might work best with a large group of students for which the teacher cannot observe all individual students' blogs. This is because, on the class blog, all posts can be monitored so that only the teacher can approve the posts to be published. Also, the class blog is more likely to encourage students to read and comment on their peers' work than the individual blogs (Beach, Anson, Breuch, & Swiss, 2008, p.129). On the other hand, teachers could easily look through all learners' blogs if they only had a small group of learners. The next section will discuss the distinctive affordances of blogging and their relationship with writing improvement.

7.6 The distinctive characteristics of using educational blogs

Educational blogs, like any technology, have many features which might help learners in different ways to develop their writing. Therefore, I will discuss these affordances and their relationship with the students' writing development based on the findings from the questionnaires, focus groups and interviews in the light of sociocultural theory. The findings reveal the importance of some blogging affordances that helped students in their writing development, such as collaboration and discussion, free writing, online teacher and peer feedback and the use of multimodality within a text. Statistically, the questionnaire findings revealed that the intervention group had a highly positive attitude towards the use of the blog affordances, such as the online discussion board, online feedback, and collaborative writing on the blog. Most participants strongly agreed with these affordances. Qualitatively, as the focus groups and the interviews revealed, the participants felt that the affordances of blogging helped them to improve their writing. They emphasised that their writing improved because of the combination of the distinct blog affordances in facilitating writing

practice. For example, the social affordances of blogging increased participants' awareness and understanding of their peers and the other readers of their own blogs and class blog (Alexandar, 2008; Kablan, 2008). This made their writing-based discussion collaborative, exchanging information and engaging in online peer feedback, allowing students to freely express their ideas in various forms. Moreover, this process enabled students to read their peers' work, learn from each other, and compare their writing with their peers'. The result of this, according to the participants, was that their vocabulary increased. They used a wider range of vocabulary in their writing instead of repeating the same words, and they used a variety of sentences rather than just simple sentences.

Regarding the motivational affordances of blogging, the use of pictures, videos and links helped to motivate students. The findings gathered from the questionnaire showed that only two out of 45 respondents had negative attitudes and half of them had a positive attitude towards the use of pictures, videos etc. on their blogs. This was qualitatively supported by students' perceptions from the focus groups and interviews, as the participants felt that the motivational affordances helped them to improve their writing. For example, the use of pictures with written texts, describing pictures, and summarising useful videos and then posting them on their blogs increased their motivation to learn and write regularly (Jewitt, 2013). Furthermore, participants enjoyed reading their peers' writing with related pictures because it made them link the paragraph ideas with the pictures, thereby encouraging them to read the whole paragraph. Thus, the multimodal affordance of the blogs increased reader motivation which then meant that the writer received better feedback. I believe that the students' writing improved while they used the educational blog affordances because they clearly perceived these affordances and could see the relationship between the different kinds of blog affordances.

According to Chemero (2003), it is clear that ‘affordances’ focus on the relationship between technology and the learner. Thus, affordances can be seen as relationships between students and technological functions, and definitely not just about the functions themselves. For instance, based on the current study findings in Chapters Five and Six, students utilised blogging affordances to practise their writing in a social environment which supported and motivated them to learn how to improve their writing. This was done by sharing their writing with their peers and other audiences they had on their own blogs in order to give advice, thoughts, corrections and even undertake writing style development. In other words, I argue that the relationship between blogging affordances and the improvement in students’ writing was due to the participants’ need for these affordances, as the students recognised the obvious improvement in their writing during the intervention.

According to Satish and Kaila (2005), blogs have been used in universities such as Harvard and MIT as a “vibrant link between the students, teachers and the university”. One of blogging’s affordances that is essential to language learning is that it can be used to maximize students’ collaborative writing. This was confirmed in the present study findings from the focus groups and interviews in which all participants indicated that the social affordances of blogging were seen as the key driver of improvement. By reading their peers’ posts, the participants were able to learn from each other as a group in terms of improving their use of grammar and vocabulary and so on, which led to an improvement in their writing. The reason for this is that, through the use of the educational blog, students had a personal space to read and write in the community, collaborate, discuss and share ideas through the social network. This was also supported from findings abstracted from the questionnaire, which indicated that blogs helped students to engage in social interaction with peers and other audiences that benefitted them through practising their writing with others and receiving

comments, feedback and ideas. Similarly, a study conducted by Supyan et al. (2010, cited in Amir et al., 2011) argued that, through collaboration, bloggers can exchange ideas, language, grammar, structure, and essay organization, consistent with the findings of the present study. Furthermore, the use of educational blogs in writing classes is recommended since it introduces literacy skills practised outside of school (Pahl & Rowsell, 2005). However, the current study's findings indicated that the learners had positive attitudes towards using educational blogs in writing classes and, also, it has been confirmed by all data. The focus groups and interviews revealed that those participants were excited to use educational blogs for writing out of the classroom as they discovered that their writing improved with time due to blogging every day and practicing writing in different ways. Sociocultural theory defines literacy as a social practice mediated by a person's culture (Larson & Marsh, 2005). Telling stories, having dialogue and entering into debates help enhance literacy and create a platform for self-expression. They help students explain their own ideas through writing, either in groups or individually. In this context, blogging is not merely a technology, but also a literacy that strengthens original writing. It helps build writing skills by including personal interaction, conversation and debates.

It is clear that the present study findings are consistent with those reported by many quantitative and qualitative studies (Halic et al., 2010; Jones, 2006; Miceli et al., 2010; Sharma & Xie, 2008; Vurdien, 2013; William & Jacobs, 2004). They found a beneficial effect of blog use on learning. Furthermore, the blog has been found to have a positive impact on the development of grammar and writing skills, student-based learning, as well as collaboration and social interaction (Jones, 2006; Vise, 2007). In the same vein, introducing blogging in writing classes can help in the development of various literacy skills including reflection, thinking, questioning, social practices, modeling, discussion and development (McGrail & Davis, 2011; Merchant, 2005).

The activity can help generate original ideas that can be refined later (Davies & Merchant, 2007).

One of the key tasks that students should engage in is collaborative writing and discussion on the class blog (Boling et al., 2008). Through academic blogging, students can collaborate and contribute to the improvement of the community (Miller & Shepherd, 2004). In this respect, blogging is a social practice which can help improve communication skills in a social setting (Lamonica, 2010). Blogging can help students to become actively contributing members of society by sharing their knowledge within a sociocultural system (Larson & Marsh, 2005). These findings are supported by the qualitative results of the current study that indicate that blogging is helpful in providing space for collaboration and discussion, and with participants believing that these might improve their ability in critical thinking, producing a good argument and communication skills - which might all feed into improvements in their writing.

In brief, blogging represents a radical change in writing classes from traditional student- or teacher-centred classrooms to a learning-centred approach. The learning takes place in a sociocultural context through active participation and collaboration. It is a key learning platform for undergraduate students allowing them to socialise, debate, communicate and express ideas to others. For this reason, interesting findings generated from the focus groups in the present study indicate that students appreciated the extra time to compose their writing, and they liked collaborating online, which was different from face-to-face. In this vein, I argue that, based on the findings, the participants preferred to work collaboratively on the online educational blog rather than face-to-face in the classroom. This helped them focus on the work and make the social interaction easier, thereby increasing their productivity in learning and practising English formal and informal writing styles.

Secondly, according to the questionnaire findings, participants all had a positive attitude towards teacher and peer comments and feedback on the online educational blogs. This was also confirmed by the qualitative findings from the focus group and interviews, indicating that the use of the educational blog facilitates the process of teacher and peer feedback. For example, learners can obtain an immediate response to their writing from their teacher and peers, both direct and indirect feedback, as they trusted the feedback they got from peers and teacher. This was in line with the findings of Kitchakarn (2012) who found that, in his study, the students believed in the online feedback received from their teacher and peers.

Of particular note is the fact that the participants in this study pointed out that one of the main issues that affected their writing development in school and university was the large class size which led to their writing skills receiving inadequate attention from their teachers. Therefore, in a situation where students receive insufficient feedback from their teachers and peers, the use of educational blogs might overcome this obstacle, especially in teaching and learning English writing. However, participants in the current study emphasised the importance of the online teacher and peer feedback given on their writing assignments and other informal writing. This finding is consistent with what other researchers (e.g. Aljumah, 2012; Alsamadani, 2017; Arslan, 2013; Fageeh, 2011; Vurdien, 2013) found in their studies concerning the effective role of online teacher and peer feedback on developing learners' writing. These results are of a similar nature to the present study as most students were sceptical about the effect of peer feedback when their qualitative views were taken. Teacher feedback emerged as the most preferred source of comments in both qualitative and quantitative analyses. It seems that, when class sizes are necessarily large and providing feedback via blogs might be impossible for a teacher, peers can give the same amount of individualized feedback.

Moreover, blogging can provide opportunities for additional teacher feedback, but this means more work for teachers and they could theoretically provide this level of feedback by marking handwritten assignments. In this regard, I argue that, even though teachers could provide informative handwritten feedback on their students' assignments, this was not preferred by most students, who had difficulty reading their teacher's handwriting. This means learners could not understand the feedback correctly. But online feedback on the educational blog might solve the problem and this option was preferred by many students because of the quick response from their teacher, the ease of understanding the comments and feedback, and the ease of saving their assignments on their own devices and of reviewing them at any time.

In contrast, other researchers have found that students are less comfortable with receiving feedback from other students than from their teachers (Wu, 2006; Yang & Badger, 2006; Zhang, 1995). In this regard, it is worth mentioning that the present study supports these findings in relation to traditional written feedback on their work by their teachers, unlike the online feedback from their peers. Although a few participants in this study indicated that, in their opinion, they liked their peers' feedback in giving praising words to encourage them to keep going, on the correction side of their homework assignments, they did not trust their peers' comments because their lack of accuracy might lead them to give wrong corrections. However, I argue that feedback from tutors and other students on the educational blog plays a critical role in guiding learners towards developing their writing by encouraging their motivation and praising their work (Vurdine, 2013; Arslan, 2013; Fageeh, 2011). As a result, this will help students practise their writing in different ways to become good writers due to the use of the interactive educational blog. Furthermore, it is clear that, in the effect of feedback and comments on students' writing, teacher feedback is

considered more accurate and more trustworthy for learners of English (Connor & Asenavage, 1994) while studies on the effect of peer feedback on learners' writing has been controversial.

Finally, Guichon and Cohen (2016, p. 1) argued that "any learning activity is multimodal by nature". It seems that language teachers use different techniques in their classes, such as speech, writing sentences on the board and role-play, in order to encourage learners to learn and facilitate the second language (L2) learning process. But now, with the advent of the internet and other multimedia technologies, more opportunities are offered to crucially "integrate imagery, voice, sound, written text, and other approaches" (Nelson, 2006, p. 57). The subsequent changes in communication and interaction approaches generate new learning opportunities and have provoked Computer-Assisted Language Learning researchers to suppose multimodality is a new lens to enable the learner to learn the language in interactive ways (Royce, 2006). This is in line with findings from the questionnaire in the present study, which show that most of the participants had a positive attitude towards the use of multimodality while writing on the educational blogs, for instance uploading pictures, videos and links. Moreover, when the participants shared their views qualitatively in the focus groups, interviews and open-ended questionnaires, they indicated that the use of multimodality on their own blogs and class blog had benefitted their writing development, with more emphasis on the use of multimodality in terms of pictures rather than any other mode.

It seemed that learners used pictures to a greater extent than other modes, and they felt that the pictures had benefits for prompting them when generating ideas and vocabulary, helping them to structure their writing and helping them to appeal to a reader. This was in line with what was found in study conducted by Grosseck (2009), who confirmed the benefits of using blogs in education because of the way they could

help in sharing and posting videos, microblogs, images and other resources. The present research supports some previous studies, such as the research conducted by Lara in 2004. She found that using an outline as a source of material or ideas for writing could improve the learner's writing ability. Also, Liku (2004), discovered that using a digital journal as a source of material could increase students' writing skills. In addition, the current study findings are consistent with Asrifan (2015), who found that the picture story contributed to developing students' writing ability. Similarly, a recent study conducted by Ekarista (2018) found that the students' writing ability improved by using a series of text pictures.

The above discussion suggests that writing with pictures leads students to improve their writing, whether blogging or not, as some studies show. But I argue that digital writing facilitates the multimodality process due to the use of the internet with its ease of access to pictures and a wide range of choices available, making it easy to choose appropriate high quality coloured pictures which help to attract the reader's attention. In addition, including images with text on the educational blogs platform helps to break up the text in the same way that people use paragraphs to separate ideas and make it easier for the reader to understand. People use pictures to separate ideas and make the text easier to read and understand. Also, the learners must think about choosing a clear image to post with their text. Here it is worth mentioning an important point: when students choose the related picture to go with their writing topic, they should only utilise legal pictures; they should not pick up any image from the internet and post it on their blog. In fact, some pictures are owned by companies and they might charge when people use their pictures. Thus, to avoid this, a free image should be used in the text with its reference.

To conclude the discussion on the affordances of blogging, I take a closer look at what is at stake with the benefits of these affordances and how these may contribute to foreign language learning writing development according to the current study's findings. These affordances helped the learners to improve their writing in different ways, such as increasing vocabulary, enhancing motivation, generating ideas, stimulating students to think, practising formal and informal writing, and practising writing in a real social space. The next section will discuss some useful benefits of the affordances of blogging in relation to the learners' writing improvement and some of the challenges facing learners when using the educational blog in English classes.

7.7 The pros and cons of the use of educational blogs in English writing classes

Blogging provides various advantages, as validated by different studies (Brescia & Miller, 2005, in Cequena & Gustilo, n.d.). One of the advantages of using educational blogs in teaching and learning English writing concerns motivation. According to several studies (e.g. Aljumah, 2012; Alsamadani, 2017; Arslan, 2013; Campbell, 2003; Fageeh, 2011; Vurdien, 2013; Wu, 2006; Yang & Badger, 2006), the use of educational blogs enhances the learner's motivation to write in social interactional space outside the classroom. It is clear that these findings support the findings of the current study, from the open-ended questionnaire and focus groups, which indicate that the students emphasised that the use of educational blogs motivated them to utilise the benefits of blogs to practise their writing regularly and, as a result, their writing had improved. Moreover, blogging allows students to consider their role as author and their motivation for the activity (Sun & Chang, 2015). However, students first need to learn how to use the technology before they can maximize the benefits of blogging. In this vein, the educational blog might help students to write freely, with no pressure, and it could reduce the learner's writing anxiety due to its flexibility and accessibility

in time to post their work. Therefore, writing on educational blogs might enhance the learners' motivation to improve by practising their writing frequently, sharing information, and enhancing their self-learning, communication and collaboration. This argument is based on the findings generated quantitatively and qualitatively in the present study and is similar to the results of others (Aljumah, 2012; Campbell, 2003; Fageeh, 2011; Wu, 2006; Yang & Badger, 2006) who indicated in their studies that one of the main advantages of the use of the blogs was the student's motivation. In this regard, it seems that the use of educational blog technology might enhance the learner's general motivation. For instance, the use of technology motivates the learners "to act and interact with each other more than motivating them to learn more or harder, which leads us to distinguish between general and learning motivation" (Higgins, 2016).

It is clear that this argument could support the idea that using blogging's affordances boosts intrinsic motivation due to the pleasure and inherent satisfaction derived from the activity. Nevertheless, regarding the use of the blogs as a pedagogical method to enhance teaching and learning interactively, this could also enhance the extrinsic motivation that emphasises performing a behaviour because it is perceived to be instrumental in achieving valued outcomes that are distinct from the activity. For example, adding pictures, videos and links on learners' blogs and class blog, and practising writing, are 'motivational affordances' which might motivate learners to learn.

Another advantage of the use of the educational blog in English classes based on the qualitative findings in this study was that it permitted student-centred learning. Theoretically, sociocultural theory assumes that teaching and learning are both social activities. Learning begins at a social level before the learners internalize it (Vygotsky, 1978). According to the sociocultural line of thinking, teachers of English and their

students share the process of teaching and learning interactively through educational technology like blogs which can be used as a virtual classroom. This means that the technological tools now available might benefit learner-centred teaching strategies. That being said, all participants in the focus group indicated that their teachers, who had not used technology due to the lack of availability of said technological tools to support learner-centred strategies, seemed to require technologies that support individual learning as well - for instance, technology like blogs which are considered a platform for a social interaction but also might give the learners a space for self-learning. This is quite obvious according to the results of the present study, in which a teacher who did not use the educational blog technology in teaching English might be led to use a teacher-centred learning strategy. This view about the nature of teaching and learning needed to change in order to adopt the constructivist theory more so than the sociocultural line of thinking. Unlike the sociocultural theory, the constructivist theory says that teaching is a social activity while learning is private (Hall, 2007). The open-ended questionnaire and the focus group findings indicate that those English teachers who did not use educational technology in their class, because they adopted the traditional teaching methods that might involve the students in less interaction, missed the opportunity for student-centred learning.

In this regard, I argue that this is the reason why English teachers who did not intend to use educational technology apparently adopted this approach and this might be due to a cultural belief which affects the processes of teaching and learning. For example, in Saudi Arabia, teachers are keen to keep their classes very quiet during lectures as a kind of class management. Accordingly, when English language teachers see this as their role in the university or school, they do not look further at students' 'Zone of Proximal Development' within the practice context but limit their learning activities to the classroom level. Teachers should guide their students in English language

classes to learn within their Zone of Proximal Development and guide them to improve their individual learning, allowing them to make the most of their ZPD in order to gain a new psychological learning tool.

The learners were then expected to use these opportunities to learn on an individual level and thus become more active and useful for them. The focus group findings confirm this argument, where the teachers who did not use educational technology in teaching English but simply adopted a 'teacher-centred learning approach' were found to provide students with activities and give them the opportunity to learn individually rather than focusing on interaction during these activities.

The third advantage is that blogging serves as a database of knowledge and information. The blog posts can be retrieved at any time, thereby serving as an online information repository. From the questionnaire findings, two-thirds of the participants had a positive attitude towards educational blogs as a portfolio. This was supported by the findings from the focus groups, which indicated that participants liked to make online portfolios from the class blogs to save their homework assignments, including their teacher's and peers' feedback, discussions, links, information and pictures, in order to have access to it anytime anywhere, unlike writing on paper which they might lose. This finding is similar to that reached by Aljumah (2012) and others, as they found in their studies that the learners were happy to have their online portfolio to save their documents which would enable them to read and review their work at any time. Interestingly, from the qualitative findings in this study, the majority of the participants indicated that saving their documents on their online portfolio might help to reduce the use of paper, which would help the environment. It seems that the beneficial use of the educational blog could help to protect the environment and therefore it was considered 'eco-friendly'.

In this vein, it is worth mentioning the potential issue of data protection while using blogs as with any other digital technologies which become a repository of documents. This issue was raised by participants, who noted it as a potential problem. It seems that the participants had a lack of awareness about data protection so that they thought their own blogs were protected by username and password, or that their devices were protected by using an anti-virus programme. I suggest that it is important that they learn more about data protection, especially concerning their personal information, because they might use unprotected devices and the hackers could steal or damage the personal information stored on their blogs.

The fourth benefit of blogging is that it helps improve classroom-based learning by expanding the learning environment to the 'virtual classroom'. Blogs allow students to expand their learning and share information with the outside world through the internet. According to Harris (2009):

All of the Web 2.0 technologies are Internet based. This means they are available to students 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. A student simply needs an Internet connection and he/she can be in the classroom. As a result, students can interact in a classroom environment when they are best prepared. (p.137).

In this study I have explored how the use of educational blog applications could be useful in the long run for virtual collaborative classroom practice and learning as it allows EFL teaching and learning to happen beyond the boundaries of the classroom, based on the focus group findings. For instance, the use of the blog as a virtual or online classroom for EFL learning allows students to deal with difficult learning situations allowing them to gain new information and think reflectively (Sun & Chang, 2012). This is in line with Campbell (2003) and Kim (2008), who report that one of the benefits of the use of the blogging in education is that it is a virtual classroom that allows students to follow up each lesson online at any time.

Lastly, one of the advantages of using the educational blog is to facilitate the process of EFL writing. The questionnaire and focus group findings show that the blog-assessed process writing teaching strategy was able improve the students' writing. This finding is consistent with Arslan and Şahin-Kızıll (2010) and Zhou (2015), who found in their studies conducted in Turkey and China that the use of the educational blog as a platform to practise the process writing model was helpful to provide effective guidance for students in terms of encouragement, resources and planning. Moreover, there was evidence from the focus groups and interview findings which revealed that blogs helped learners to practise the process writing approach due to allowing them to take more time to think, brainstorm, draft, revise, edit and submit the final version of an assignment on the class blog. In this vein, I argue that the present study used a process writing approach only with writing homework assignments but for free writing on the learner's blogs, they might use the process or either product approach. The data from questionnaire, focus group and interview revealed that the blog encourages students to use a process writing approach.

In brief, I suggest that the use of the educational blog facilitates practising the process writing model, which could improve the writing ability of non-English major Saudi students; the curriculum objectives are designed to use the process writing approach, but, unfortunately, the majority of teachers use pedagogical approaches more focused on product-orientated writing. The following four aspects explain how blogs can facilitate process writing. Firstly, the blog is a useful platform to practise writing in general and it might be assist learners to follow the writing process model because it has proved helpful to the dynamic assessment of learners' writing. For example, this might offer an effective opportunity for learners in terms of writing strategies, such as planning and brainstorming, pre-discussion and searching; this might increase students' ability to think carefully, develop their writing contents and strengthen their

writing strategies. Secondly, it also might increase the interaction between the students themselves and their teacher; therefore, it could help to improve students' ability in writing. Thirdly, the process writing model has helped reflective teaching; i.e., where students are required to write the first draft of their homework assignments on their own blog and then post the final draft on the class blog. Accordingly, this might affect the entire process of writing from beginning to end, which might encourage the students themselves and their teacher in having more interaction, discussion and collaboration, and in terms of giving more feedback and correction to grammatical errors and so on. This process might improve the EFL students' writing skills. Fourthly, all the above aspects might solve the major issue of Saudi students having problems in their writing, especially for those who do not use the process writing model in their actual classes due to the use of the product writing mode in school and university, although the curriculum assessment encourages teachers to teach by the process model.

Finally, just as digital technology has its advantages, as discussed above, it also has its disadvantages, as indicated in the current study's findings. The questionnaire results show that a few participants had a negative attitude towards the use of the blogs in English classes as a waste of time, that it affected their hand writing, and that there were some technical issues with the application in terms of managing their profile and posting their work on the class blog. This concurs with several studies (e.g. Aljumah, 2012; Alsamadani, 2017; Campbell , 2003; Fageeh, 2011; Wu, 2006) which found that the use of the blogging had some disadvantages, such as wasting time, poor internet connection and other technological challenges.

8. CHAPTER EIGHT

Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the whole thesis, with the conclusions and limitations of this study. Also, it sets out some of the implications of the study's findings in terms of practice, policy and future research. The chapter also provides concluding thoughts and remarks. Finally, there are reflections on my PhD journey at the end of the thesis.

8.2 Summary of the study and its findings

Several issues have emerged in light of the findings reported in this study. Firstly, the use of educational blogs had a positive impact on the learning of EFL writing skills among the Saudi students who were involved in this study. Secondly, the differences between educational blogs as a pedagogical method and the traditional methods of teaching English writing using pen and paper were found to be of crucial importance. This is because the blogs' affordances appeared to have most benefit in relation to facilitating writing outside the classroom, particularly in creating a social writing space in which students are able to discuss topics related to writing. For example, in generating more ideas, engaging students to discuss topics related to writing, reading their peers' work, and motivating students to practise writing in the social environment. The consequence of this social writing environment was improvement to elements of writing such as syntactic complexity, paragraph organisation, cohesion and coherence, breadth of vocabulary, structure, grammatical accuracy and text length. This improvement was also evident in both the pre- and post-test and in the content of the text writing for the first and last blog posts of the homework assignments, showing a clear impact on the intervention group students' writing skills. Thirdly, with reference to the previous point, while the blogs' affordances had pedagogical uses in terms of supporting free writing, discussion and collaboration,

they also had an affective consequence: they helped to decrease writing anxiety, and this also seemed to be more beneficial to writing development in terms of making students more willing to write, to share their writing and to be ambitious.

The educational blogs were seen to have a deep impact on students' learning, particularly in helping to redress many of the constraints under which teachers and students were working. The blogs helped to fill the gap created by the traditional methods of teaching which were limited by the large class sizes and limited time for discussion and collaboration. Integrating traditional teaching methods with blogging encouraged and motivated students to improve their writing by allowing them to write in ways not otherwise possible within the traditional classroom: practising writing in a social space, exploring different ways of representing ideas, thoughts and information, holding discussions about their writing, and so on.

Fourthly, the students' experience of the dual use of their own blogs and class blog encouraged them to link writing in and out of the classroom, practising writing in a classroom environment and then continuing this out of the classroom.

Fifthly, the use of educational blogs' affordances had further beneficial effects, such as facilitating the use of a process writing approach, being used as a virtual classroom and enabling students to develop a portfolio of writing. Blog technology may also be seen as providing an eco-friendly environment.

In summary, the use of educational blogs within this particular context of writing instruction appears to have numerous benefits for teachers and students which may lead to measurable improvements in writing outcomes. The pedagogical benefits centre on the opportunity afforded by blogs to shift pedagogy from a traditional transmission approach to a learner-centred approach, allowing teachers of large class sizes to create opportunities for peer collaboration, individual exploration and individualised feedback from teacher to student.

8.3 Contributions

In sum, the findings of this study contribute to the existing knowledge in the area of educational blogs' affordances in the area of writing development. The findings lead to theoretical, practical and methodological contributions, in the following ways:

8.3.1 Knowledge Contribution

The purpose of the study was to investigate the nature and extent of the impact of educational blogs' affordances as a pedagogical tool in teaching and learning English writing skills for EFL learners, as well as the attitudes and perceptions of the PYP health stream intervention group students who used educational blogs' affordances within their learning practices. In accordance with the established objectives and the subsequent research outcomes and analytical critique, it can be concluded that this study has successfully fulfilled the specified aim: it has provided relevant contributions to knowledge and theory and has practical applications. With a view to developing EFL students' writing skills and English teaching overall, the findings can be used to guide the implementation of blogging in the EFL classroom by educators in higher education. Comprehensive experience and perceptions of use of educational blogs' affordances were established in line with the expansion of pedagogical knowledge and the establishment of new beliefs. The study extends the use of educational blogging in second language writing development. As outlined earlier, several studies have been conducted in the past with English major students, though few have focused on students taking a non-English major, who might be expected to be potentially less motivated or invested in developing their English writing skills. Table 8.1 below indicates how the findings of this study contribute to and build on past research.

Dimension of Prior research	New theoretical knowledge on how blogging supports writing development
Blogging affordances and their relation to writing development	The findings here suggest that attempts to integrate educational blogs into writing courses should focus on pedagogical affordances rather than the use of technology itself.
Increasing motivation to write	The findings indicate that, for students at this level importantly non-English-major students - educational blogging can boost intrinsic motivation due to the pleasure and inherent satisfaction derived from the activity.
Writing in social context	Findings suggest that blogging may be particularly useful in contexts which otherwise inhibit or restrict the possibility of collaborative writing or peer interaction around writing. In this study, blogs allowed teachers to draw on the benefits of social interaction, peer dialogue and detailed and developed independent writing, as well as multimodal writing, while still managing large class sizes and small classrooms which make face-to-face discussion and collaboration difficult to manage.
Educational blogging and digital composition transferred to composition in the traditional, handwriting form	Findings suggest that writing skills harnessed through educational blogging and digital composition could be transferred to composition in the traditional handwriting form. There is very little evidence to date of such transfer, so this is a particularly significant finding.

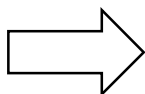


Table 8.1: Knowledge Contributions

8.3.2 Theoretical and practical contributions

These findings have both practical and theoretical contributions. The study supports the theory of the relationship between blogs' affordances and writing development in that the traditional teaching of writing has limited beneficial effects on students' writing development. This became apparent from the information from the open-ended questionnaire, focus group and interview data regarding the methods of teaching and learning writing that these students were exposed to in their high school and at university, and the inadequacy they felt in meeting the writing requirements at university. In this way, the study holds the view that the traditional method of teaching English writing that entails transmission teaching and rote learning has very limited benefits to the learner. Taking account of the constraints faced by teachers in similar

circumstances, such as large class sizes, the study proposes the use of educational blogs as a way to address the limitations of traditional methods. The blogs allow the students to learn through social interaction and through individual practise and feedback. I do recognise that blogs require internet access and devices such as computers, iPads and smart phones, which may not always be available. Nevertheless, the pedagogical affordances of the educational blogs, such as the opportunities for social interaction which allow students to share knowledge, alongside the opportunities for daily practice of writing which the blogs encourage, help students to improve their writing ability much more readily than traditional approaches.

The study suggests various dimensions of blogging which help the learner to become a good writer. These include free writing, posting pictures with text, having an audience, using an online dictionary, discussion, reading assignments and additional reading resources and receiving teacher and peer feedback. The study suggests that these activities are related to independent learning, enhanced motivation, development of cognitive skills, the improvement of linguistic skills, and reduced writing anxiety. The intervention group wrote longer sentences, generated more ideas, had greater grammatical accuracy, used more compound and complex sentences in their writing, and increased their vocabulary.

This study makes practical contributions in addition to the theoretical ones. The practical contributions lie in the suggestions for how blogging might be effectively implemented in the writing classroom. It may be of value to consider introducing educational blogs to students earlier in their education, for example in Saudi schools, as well as for higher education institutions to develop a curriculum for Preparatory Year Programmes (PYP) at English-medium universities that would integrate it into their writing curriculum.

8.3.3 Methodological contribution

This study contributes on the methodological level as well. This study adopted a mixed-methods approach in which two methodologies were used to explore the research problem and arrive at a clear holistic picture of the topic. The combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches (mixed-methods) in one study enabled the strengths of each approach to be utilised and indicated how a quasi-intervention approach can be used alongside qualitative methods to explore *whether, to what extent, why and how* a particular intervention might impact learning.

8.4 Limitations of the study

Some limitations are present in this study. They relate to the study sample and to the challenges of using technology. These limitations are presented and explained in the following.

1) The small sample size was one of the limitations of the research. In the academic year 2016/2017, One University had 4,600 students on tge PYP in total. However, only 90 consented to involvement in this study. The remaining PYP students did not consent to participate due to the differences between the three stream disciplines in the textbook and it was difficult to choose from these streams. Consequently, the study sample consisted of only 90 participants, who were divided into two groups of 45 each, namely, the intervention and comparison groups. A larger sample would increase the potential to generate a wider range of opinions and perspectives about the topic of research and a broader range of outcomes. It should be restated that, due to the small sample size, these results may only be used as the starting point for further investigations and may provide a window to see the research possibilities arising from these findings. Moreover, because the texts analysed in the study were fairly short, the sentence as a unit of analysis made up quite a large proportion of the text, and it

may be that more differences or similarities between the intervention and comparison groups would be evident with a larger sample, ideally producing longer texts.

2) Segregation of the education system in Saudi Arabia begins during early school years and continues through the university level. The gender divide has, therefore, been a significant limitation. With the gender of students being a major factor, this study was unable to include females from the health stream. This was particularly impacted by the data collection method of the open-ended questionnaire, focus group and the interview. If the opportunity had arisen to include female students in the study, the data obtained would have been more detailed. Gender-related sociocultural factors would also have been illustrated.

3) Preparatory Year Programme (PYP) students constituted the research focus; this was a limitation in its own right. The inclusion of other levels of education, such as undergraduate students, would have offered a broader analytical spectrum. The findings would have been richer, including additional sociocultural factors, such as student age and curriculum content. Whilst expanding the education spectrum would have been beneficial, this would have been challenging to implement. The reason for the increased complexity would include the wider range of subjects taught at all educational and curriculum levels managed by English language teachers; these would need to have been included if focusing on the broader schooling system.

4) The lack of technological infrastructure at the university was one of the limitations I faced while conducting this study. It was difficult to find a single computer lab in which all the computers were in working order; in each lab we could barely find five to ten usable computers while the rest were broken. That was why it was decided that all 45 students in the intervention group should bring their own devices. Another important issue we faced was the lack of internet access in some classrooms and the

slow network in others, so that I had to bring in four network routers to the classroom every day.

5) As one other (practical) limitation, this approach requires more time from teachers. e.g. They have to spend more time monitoring and responding to students' writing.

8.5 Implications and further research recommendations

Regarding the practical aspects of teaching and learning English as a foreign language, particularly in Saudi Arabia, there is a problem with the students' English skills, particularly their writing. This problem has arisen due to several issues, such as sociocultural, linguistic, pedagogical, legislative and administrative policy challenges (Grami, 2010). First of all, in terms of the sociocultural and pedagogical challenges, the curriculum in the education system is based on teacher-oriented approaches. For example, these approaches consider the teacher as the main source of knowledge and information, and, therefore, the most widely applied classroom practices are audio-lingual and grammar translation methods (Bersamina, 2009). These challenges may affect the process of students' learning in different ways. For instance, teacher-centred learning and the use of traditional methods in teaching and learning English writing might limited learners' opportunities for student-centred learning and result in lack of interaction in the classroom. Moreover, the teachers who use teacher-oriented approaches are unconvinced that learners could use English in any meaningful way outside class and dismiss learners' justifications for poor performance based on personal contexts and mitigating circumstances (Syed, 2003). Accordingly, these issues have revealed that Saudi learners have significant deficiencies when it comes to EFL writing, as evidenced by the IELTS test in 2014.

However, the second issue is that the educational policies and support systems are inadequate, there is a lack of English language teachers with suitable qualifications, and a lack of comprehensive training programmes for teachers (Al-Eid, 2000). Even

though the Saudi government has taken some measures to employ a greater number of native English teachers, this has not solved the problem of learners' English writing (Al-Hazmi, 2003). Another important issue is the lack of use of educational technologies in school and university, accompanied by the lack of regular training for teachers and students in use of educational technologies (Bingimlas, 2009).

Finally, large class size is a problem for efficient English teaching and learning. "With more students enrolling in schools, large classes in a country like Saudi Arabia and other developing countries like Egypt, India and Pakistan tend to be obligatory rather than exceptional" (Bahanshal, 2013, p.49). In consequence, large classes may affect the teaching and learning process. For example, students may not be given sufficient time for practising writing, and may only have access to limited teacher feedback, discussion and collaboration. Furthermore, the findings point to the fact that well-established uses of technology may be inadequate: for example, using technology such as projectors or PowerPoints slides was not considered useful because it helps teachers to facilitate their lesson rather than helping students to learn.

Generally speaking, if the HE institutions would like to improve the teaching and learning process, especially in teaching English as a foreign language, they should integrate educational blogs with traditional methods. They should incorporate blogging into the preparatory year curriculum. They should also give English teachers plenty of opportunity to expand their pedagogical knowledge. They should invest in technology which can be accessed by students as well as teachers, which will allow students to access the benefits of using educational technology and the internet. Furthermore, HE should invest in appropriate training to give teachers confidence in using technology.

As a result of my research, I think that educational blogs would be more useful than other educational technologies, such as wikis and online discussion forums, or than

incorporating more dialogue within lessons themselves. I argue that blogs allow teachers to draw on the benefits of social interaction, peer dialogue and detailed and developed independent writing, and multimodal texts, while still managing large class sizes and small classrooms which make face-to-face discussion and collaboration difficult to manage.

Taking into consideration the outcomes and challenges, this study can direct researchers towards additional investigative opportunities within this discipline. In the first instance, this study is based on a mixed-methods approach. To further the investigation, an ethnographic study could be introduced which focuses on educational blogs technology used amongst Preparatory Year Programme students. Their progression could be monitored by reviewing and following up their writing and growing practical experience, in observing their shift from university learning to practical application. An ongoing review, from the beginning of university education and ending with school placements, could provide an overall insight into experiences and progress throughout the course of the research. A study of this nature would enable researchers to participate in ongoing assessments. This would identify hidden elements which would not be evident through this form of study which is perspective-based.

PYP students and their different academic disciplines could form an area for further research. With the focus on PYP students in the health stream, Chapter Seven noted that subject area is a variable factor. Subject area could mould the attitudes and perceptions of PYP students in relation to their use of educational blog technology in the teaching and learning of writing. Widening the subject area context of the research could lead to collecting a much broader range of opinions and experiences from the three streams in the PYP, namely the health, humanities and sciences streams.

Teachers' perspectives should also be taken into consideration in further research.

This further research could reveal a larger number of sociocultural factors.

The issue of gender is another area of exploration to extend the depth of the study. As the sample only used male PYP health stream students, inclusion of the female PYP health stream community would give this research another level of complexity. A range of key sociocultural factors aligned to gender could also be revealed.

Whilst this study focused on the PYP at university level, expanding the range of educational levels could extend the study further. The study conclusions reveal that student age and educational level are highly influential factors which guide teacher educators to develop specific viewpoints and practices related to the use of educational technology in pedagogical ways. In addition, more sociocultural variables, such as student age or curriculum content, could be included to offer another layer of depth to the discussion. Thus, for example, introducing the higher levels of education into the study could deepen insights and increase the depth of findings.

Another area of potential study expansion is geographical. Whilst this study is based at One University, in Saudi Arabia, the study format and its framework played an important role in developing the beliefs of PYP students with regard to educational blog technology usage. Thus, expanding the geographical reach to incorporate other Saudi Arabian universities or international universities could deepen the context of this study whilst also revealing additional contextual factors. It would be recommended to embark upon comparative research to compare influential sociocultural elements which impact the PYP students' perspectives and attitudes.

Furthermore, the investigation could be extended into the use of educational blogs to improve other English language skills, such as reading, listening and speaking. Moreover, a further study could investigate the teaching of contextual grammar through using educational blogs while reading peers' work in the class blog.

Furthermore, a further study could be conducted on the perceptions of teachers of English who use blogs in their classes regarding the effect of blogs on EFL students' writing. Finally, further research could be conducted into the effect of transfer of the digital composition to the handwriting form.

8.7 Reflections on my PhD journey

When I first began my PhD journey by doing an MSc programme, I was introduced to different research philosophies such as ontology, epistemology and paradigms related to scientific research. Actually, it was something difficult to understand from the first glance because of its complicated nature and my lack of familiarity with it. However, during the MSc programme, in the first year, I studied a wide range of courses such as interpretive research and scientific research which helped me expand my research skills and knowledge. Moreover, being at Exeter University gave me access to a wide range of research journals and books which have significantly stretched my capability to read and widen my linguistics and academic knowledge as a researcher and as an EFL researcher. This initial year of the MSc programme significantly improved my research understanding and knowledge. I learned how to evaluate and critique the literature in a more professional way, taking into consideration the strengths, limitations and ethics of the academic works. In addition, I learned to include my own voice and arguments and justify what I am doing in my research appropriately. I also published two articles, namely, one on the challenges and benefits of integrating quantitative and qualitative data in mixed-methods research, and the other on knowledge and attitudes towards learning English among Saudi students at an institute in Exeter (UK). Therefore, I learned how to search and find a suitable journal for each topic and how to identify the most important knowledge and information the article should contain in order to meet the criteria for acceptance. By the end of my PhD journey, I believe that, by conducting this piece of

research, it has not just provided me with a great opportunity to discover key issues related to teaching and learning language and achievement in a particular learning context but has also developed my own research skills. It has equipped me with an expanded breadth of knowledge in relation to PYP health stream students and the potential afforded by blogging to support writing development. In addition, it likewise greatly developed my theoretical and practical knowledge in the field of TESOL. Finally, this doctoral journey was really a challenge, which, thus far, has been a worthwhile and informative experience.

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Appendix 2: First and Last assignments

First assignment:

Write 10 sentences about your favorite photo?

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Last assignment:

Write 10 sentences about shopping in Saudi Arabia?

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Appendix 3: Writing Rubric

	<p>1. Task Fulfillment and paragraph organization and outline <i>Task Requirements</i></p> <p><i>1.1 The text is approximately 10 sentences.</i> <i>1.2 The information is presented in the student's own words.</i></p> <p><i>Linguistic Features</i></p> <p>1.3 Writes a variety of simple and compound sentences</p>	<p>2. Coherence & Cohesion</p>	<p>3. Grammatical Range and Accuracy</p>	<p>4. Lexical Range and Accuracy</p>
<p>Band 5 (26-30) <i>Excellent</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Task Requirements are mostly fulfilled. - Appropriate linguistic features are mostly used. 	<p>Sentences usually convey meaning.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Ideas on selected topics are mostly expressed logically at a text level.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Grammatical control of level-appropriate structures is mostly maintained. - Simple and compound sentence structures are used accurately most of the time. - <i>Punctuation is used but occasional errors occur.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - An adequate variety of level-appropriate vocabulary is used but some errors occur. - <i>Spelling errors may occur which occasionally interfere with comprehension.</i>
<p>Band 4 (20-25) <i>Above average</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - An adequate variety of level-appropriate vocabulary is used but some errors occur. - <i>Spelling errors may occur which occasionally interfere with comprehension.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A very good range of cohesive devices is used mainly appropriately - <i>Cohesion is mostly natural and only minor errors are noticeable</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Very good range of appropriate structures produce a clear sense of academic style - Range of sentence types with rare mistakes, usually only at long, complex level, & do not affect meaning - Mistakes in grammatical structures do not affect meaning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Very good range of appropriate lexical items (both general academic and task specific) - Mistakes in word form and usage are occasional and do not affect meaning - Most vocabulary items are transformed from the source text (s) where possible
<p>Band 3 (16-19) <i>Average</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Task addressed well - Good understanding and application of ideas from texts using appropriate referencing conventions - Good paragraph organisation/text structure* to support stance*/ text purpose 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Good range of cohesive devices is used mainly appropriately. - Some errors are noticeable but do not overtly distract the reader 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Good range of appropriate structures produce an overall sense of academic style. - Generally accurate sentence structure but with limited range. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Good range of appropriate lexical items (both general academic and task specific). - Mistakes in word form and usage do not affect meaning.

			- Mistakes in grammatical structures are occasional and do not seriously affect meaning.	- Some vocabulary items are transformed from the source text (s)
Band 2 (10-15) Below average	-Task attempted but is either only partially addressed, misinterpreted, or lacking enough examples/ supporting information. -Main points are missing, and more examples and explanation needed	Limited range of cohesive devices is used appropriately. - Repetition or misuse of cohesive devices causes reader distraction and affects coherence.	Limited range of appropriate structures produces only occasional sense of academic style. -Errors noticeable in simple and compound sentences.	— Limited range of appropriate lexical items (both general academic and task specific). - Mistakes in word form and usage may impede meaning.
Band 1 (0-9) Poor	- Task Requirements are not fulfilled. - Appropriate linguistic features are rarely used.	- Sentences rarely convey meaning. - Ideas on selected topics are not expressed logically at a text level.	- Grammatical control of level-appropriate structures is not consistently maintained. - Simple and compound sentence structures are often inaccurate which causes significant strain on the reader. - Punctuation errors occur frequently.	- A limited range of level-appropriate vocabulary is used, and many errors occur. - Spelling errors occur consistently and significantly interfere with comprehension.



GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

St Luke's Campus
Heavitree Road
Exeter UK EX1 2LU

<http://socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/education/>

CERTIFICATE OF ETHICAL APPROVAL

Title of Project: Using blogs to improve EFL college students' writing skills: A study of the Preparatory Year Programme (PYP) at University in Saudi Arabia

Researcher(s) name: Sami Mohammed Almalki

Supervisor(s): Annabel Watson
Debra Myhill

This project has been approved for the period

From: 05/02/2017
To: 04/07/2017

Ethics Committee approval reference:

D/16/17/16

Signature: (Dr Philip Durrant, Chair, Graduate School of Education Ethics Committee) **Date:** 15/12/2016

Appendix 5: Permission from the University in the KSA



To Whom It May Concern

(٤٤٤)

Upon his request, this is to certify Mr. Sami Almalki, an English Language Instructor, has been granted a permission to conduct his study University English Language Centre (TUELC). With the participants' consent, this permission allows him to do the following:

- 1- Conducting a study on using educational blogs to improve EFL students' writing skills on the preparatory year programme (PYP), health stream students.

Should you have any further quires on this matter, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

مركز اللغة الانجليزية
English Language Centre
(ELC)

Dr Mansoor S. Almalki
Assist. Prof. of Applied Linguistics,
Dean, Supportive Studies (ELC - GRC)
Director, English Language Centre (ELC)
Supervisor, MA TESOL Program
PhD (Melb), MA TESOL, CELTA (Cambridge ESOL Examinations)
msamalki@tu.edu.sa

المملكة العربية السعودية - وزارة التعليم
ص ب ٨٨٨ الرمز البريدي ٢١٩٧٤
هاتف: ٠٢٧٣٧٧٠٠٠ فاكس: ٠٢٧٣٧٤٣٩٩

الرقم / /

الرقم:
التاريخ:
المرشحات:
الموضوع:

Appendix 6: Information Letter for Comparison Group



GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

the Project information sheet

PROJECT TITLE

A mixed-methods study of exploring and explaining the impact of the use of educational blogging on Saudi EFL students' writing development

INVITATION

You are being invited to take part in this research study, which is designed to investigate the contents of Preparatory Year Programme (PYP) students' blog entries, and to assess any improvement in their writing after Twelve weeks blogging in English. There will be two groups in this study: 1-Intervention group, which will be taught writing using weblogs technology to the end of the semester. 2- Comparison group which will be taught wiring using traditional methods to the end of the semester. Before you decide to participate, it is important for you to understand the purpose and details of the research. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Mr. Sami Almalki, the researcher, is available to answer your questions and provide more information related to the study. The researcher is a doctoral student from the Graduate School of Education in University of Exeter, United Kingdom (UK), and is supervised by Dr. Annabel Watson and Professor Debra Myhill.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

The purpose of this research study is to investigate the content of Preparatory Year Programme (PYP) students' blog entries, and to measure the improvement of their writing once they have spent over sixteen weeks blogging in English.

If you are placed in the comparison group

- You will be taught by traditional methods in your EFL writing class;
- You will sit a pre-test at the beginning of the study and a post-test at the end of the study.
- You will be invited to attend an optional session looking at blogging at the end of the study, designed to allow you to benefit more directly from the research study.

TIME COMMITMENT

This study will take place over a period of four months. The researcher will aim to complete the whole project before June 2017 so you can focus on your final examination.

RESEARCHER'S ROLE/RESPONSIBILITIES

Comparison group

- Give clear instructions to each student on how to participate in the study.
- Help students with any problem or enquiry related to the research.

STUDENTS' RIGHTS & ROLES/RESPONSIBILITIES

- You may decide to withdraw from the research study at any time without explanation.
- You have the right to refuse to participate in any phase of the research project.
- You have the right to ask that any data you have supplied be withdrawn/destroyed.
- You have the right to leave the class blogs group without explanation.
- You are asked to participate and collaborate with each member of the group to ensure the success of the activities.
- If you have any questions as a result of reading this information sheet, please ask the researcher before the study begins.

CONFIDENTIALITY / ANONYMITY

Your names will be replaced by identifying number to maintain anonymity. In addition to that, all the collected data will be kept securely private and used only for the research purposes. The research data will not be revealed to anyone but the researcher, and only for the research purposes. The consent forms will be kept separate from other information or data you provided.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

The researcher will be glad to answer your questions about this study at any time.

Name: Sami Almalki

Telephone: 00 44 (0)7413553888 or 00966568389691.

Email: smaa204@exeter.ac.uk

Yours sincerely,

Researcher: Sami Almalki

Supervisors:

Dr. Annabel Watson (A.M.Watson@exeter.ac.uk)

Professor. Debra Myhill (D.A.Myhill@exeter.ac.uk)

Data Protection Act: The University of Exeter is a data collector and is registered with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner as required to do under the Data Protection Act 1998. The information you provide will be used for research purposes and will be processed in accordance with the University's registration and current data protection legislation. Data will be confidential to the researcher(s) and will not be

disclosed to any unauthorised third parties without further agreement by the participant.
Reports based on the data will be in anonymised.

Appendix 7: Information Letter for Intervention Group Students



GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

the Project information sheet

PROJECT TITLE

A mixed-methods study of exploring and explaining the impact of the use of educational blogging on Saudi EFL students' writing development

You are being invited to take part in this research study, which is designed to investigate the contents of Preparatory Year Programme (PYP) students' blog entries, and to assess any improvement in their writing after Twelve weeks blogging in English. There will be two groups in this study: 1-Intervention group, which will be taught writing using weblogs technology to the end of the semester. 2- Comparison group which will be taught writing using traditional methods to the end of the semester. Before you decide to participate, it is important for you to understand the purpose and details of the research. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Mr. Sami Almalki, the researcher, is available to answer your questions and provide more information related to the study. The researcher is a doctoral student from the Graduate School of Education in University of Exeter, United Kingdom (UK), and is supervised by Dr. Annabel Watson and Professor Debra Myhill.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

The purpose of this research study is to investigate the content of Preparatory Year Programme (PYP) students' blog entries, and to measure the improvement of their writing once they have spent over sixteen weeks blogging in English.

If you are placed in the Intervention Group

- You will be taught by using weblogs technology methods in your EFL writing class;
- You will sit a pre-test at the beginning of the study and a post-test at the end of the study;
- You will have a week's training (3 hours a day) on the features of blogs and how to create them.
- During and between lessons, as part of the course:
- You will write in your personal blog;
- You will participate in class blogs as an exercise in collaborative writing;
- You will complete a questionnaire at the end of the study;
- You may be invited to participate in a focus group during of the study.
- You may be invited to participate in a semi-structured interview at the end of the study.

TIME COMMITMENT

This study will take place over a period of four months. The researcher will aim to complete the whole project before June 2017 so you can focus on your final examination.

RESEARCHER'S ROLE/RESPONSIBILITIES

Intervention Group

- Give clear instructions to each student on how to participate in the study.
- Monitor each group to ensure they collaborate in the research project.
- Encourage students to collaborate with their group members.
- Help students with any problem or enquiry related to technology and the research.
- **STUDENTS' RIGHTS & ROLES/RESPONSIBILITIES**
- You may decide to withdraw from the research study at any time without explanation.
- You have the right to refuse to participate in any phase of the research project.
- You have the right to ask that any data you have supplied be withdrawn/destroyed.
- You have the right to leave the class blogs group without explanation.
- You are asked to participate and collaborate with each member of the group to ensure the success of the activities.

If you have any questions as a result of reading this information sheet, please ask the researcher before the study begins.

CONFIDENTIALITY / ANONYMITY

Your names will be replaced by identifying number to maintain anonymity. In addition to that, all the collected data will be kept securely private and used only for the research purposes. The research data will not be revealed to anyone but the researcher, and only for the research purposes. The consent forms will be kept separate from other information or data you provided.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

The researcher will be glad to answer your questions about this study at any time.

Name: Sami Almalki

Email: smaa204@exeter.ac.uk

Yours sincerely,

Researcher: Sami Almalki

Supervisors:

Dr. Annabel Watson (A.M.Watson@exeter.ac.uk)

Professor. Debra Myhill (D.A.Myhill@exeter.ac.uk)

Data Protection Act: The University of Exeter is a data collector and is registered with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner as required to do under the Data Protection Act 1998. The information you provide will be used for research purposes and will be processed in accordance with the University's registration and current data protection legislation. Data will be confidential to the researcher(s) and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties without further agreement by the participant. Reports based on the data will be in anonymised

Appendix 8: Information Letter Arabic Version



GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

إقرار موافقة بالمشاركة في الدراسة

عنوان مشروع البحث

استخدام المدونات التعليمية لتطوير مهارة الكتابة الأكاديمية في اللغة الانجليزية للطلاب الغير ناطقين بها في برنامج السنة التحضيرية بجامعة [REDACTED] , بالمملكة العربية السعودية

معلومات مشروع الدراسة

يعمل الباحث مدرس لغة انجليزية بمركز اللغة الانجليزية في جامعة [REDACTED] , حيث إن الباحث طالب دكتوراه بكلية التربية والعلوم الاجتماعية بجامعة اكستر , بريطانيا . ومن اهتمامات الباحث , استخدام التكنولوجيا في تعليم وتدريب اللغة الانجليزية , وتركز رسالة الدكتوراه للباحث على استخدام المدونات التعليمية لتطوير مهارة الكتابة الأكاديمية في اللغة الانجليزية لغير الناطقين بها , دارسه استكشافية لفهم طبيعة استخدام المدونات التعليمية في دعم وتطوير مهارة الكتابة الأكاديمية في اللغة الانجليزية للطلاب الغير ناطقين بها .

معلومات التواصل

للمزيد من المعلومات بكل ما يخص البحث وكل يتعلق بمشروع الدراسة من اختبار قبلي واختبار بعدي , استبيانات , مجموعات النقاش والمقابلات , يرجى التواصل مع الباحث

الاسم : سامي بن محمد المالكي

الإيميل : ibnamri@hotmail.com

وللمزيد من المعلومات بخصوص ما سبق ذكره , التواصل مع المشرفين على الرسالة العلمية
(D.A.Myhill@exeter.ac.uk) أ.د. / دبرا مايهل

(A.M.Watson@exeter.ac.uk) .د. أنابيل واتسون

إقرار

لقد اطلعت على كامل المعلومات التفصيلية عن مشروع البحث والدراسة وأيضاً فهمت تماماً ما هو الهدف والغرض من الدراسة

• إذا تم اختياري في المجموعة الضابطة

- 1- سندرس بالطريقة التقليدية في تدريس مهارة الكتابة في اللغة الانجليزية , وهي استخدام القلم والورقة في الكتابة
 - 2- سوف يطلب منك بالمشاركة في اختبار قبلي في بداية الدراسة واختبار بعدي في نهاية مشروع الدراسة
 - 3- سيكون في نهاية المشروع البحثي دوره قصيرة عن استخدام المدونات الالكترونية في تعليم مهارة الكتابة الأكاديمية في اللغة الانجليزية
- إذا تم اختيارك في المجموعة التجريبية

- 1- سندرس نفس المنهج الدراسي المستخدم مع طلاب المجموعة الضابط
 - 2- مدة المحاضرة 3 ساعات دراية باليوم لكلا المجموعتين الضابطة والتجريبية
 - 3- عدد ساعات المنهج 15 ساعة أسبوعياً لكلا المجموعتين
- مهام إضافية للطلاب المشاركين في المجموعة التجريبية

- 1- ستدرس باستخدام التكنولوجيا (المدونات الالكترونية التعليمية) في تدريس مهارة الكتابة الأكاديمية في اللغة الانجليزية
 - 2- سيطلب من المشاركة في اختبار قبلي بداية مشروع الدراسة واختبار بعدي في نهاية مشروع الدراسة
 - 3- سيطلب منك إنشاء مدونة الكترونية خاصة بك , وكذلك المشاركة في مدونة الفصل بوضع الواجب بعد المراجعة على مدونة الفصل
 - 4- يجب على كل طالب كتابة تعليق وتغذية راجعة على الواجبات المرفوعة على مدونة الفصل بمعدل لا يقل عن خمسة تعليقات لخمسة طلاب
 - 5- يتطلب المشاركة في قسم النقاش بالمدونة بخصوص تطوير مهارة الكتابة الأكاديمية
 - 6- على جميع الطلاب المشاركة في تعبئة الاستبيانات في نهاية المشروع
 - 7- ربما يطلب منك المشاركة في حلقات نقاش حول استخدام المدونات الالكترونية التعليمية في تطوير وتنمية مهارة الكتابة الأكاديمية في اللغة الانجليزية
 - 8- ربما يطلب منك المشاركة في مقابلات فردية حول استخدام المدونات الالكترونية التعليمية في تطوير وتنمية مهارة الكتابة الأكاديمية في اللغة الانجليزية
- معلومات هامة

- 1- ليس هناك إجبار على الطالب بالمشاركة في الدراسة , وعلى الطالب أن يقرر بنفسه في حق المشاركة من عدمه
- 2- من حقوق الطالب أن لا يسمح في إفشاء أي معلومات شخصية أو أي نتائج اختبارات , استبيانات , مجموعات نقاش أو مقابلات شخصية لأي طرف آخر سوى الباحث نفسه
- 3- جميع المعلومات والبيانات ستعامل بسرية تامة وستستخدم من قبل الباحث للغرض البحثي فقط

اسم الطالب :

رقم الطالب الجامعي :

توقيعه :

Appendix 9: Consent form for Comparison Group



THE CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project

A mixed-methods study of exploring and explaining the impact of the use of educational blogging on Saudi EFL students' writing development

Details of Project

I am an English Language lecturer at █████ University in Saudi Arabia. Currently, I am pursuing my doctorate degree in Education (Four-year PhD in Education) at the University of Exeter, UK. This doctoral research project concerns the use of the blogs to improve college students' writing skills, seeking to understand how blogging may support the development of writing proficiency.

Contact Details

For further information about the research/pre- and post-tests/questionnaires/interview data, please contact:

Name: Sami Mohammed Almalki

Email: smaa204@exeter.ac.uk

If you have concerns/questions about the research which you would like to discuss with my supervisors at the University, please contact:

Dr. Annabel Watson (A.M.Watson@exeter.ac.uk)

Professor Debra Myhill (D.A.Myhill@exeter.ac.uk)

Consent

I have read the project information sheet and have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project.

I understand that, in consenting to participate, I will be asked to do the following:

If you are placed in the Comparison group

- You will be taught by traditional methods in your EFL writing class;
- You will sit a pre-test at the beginning of the study and a post-test at the end of the study
- You will be invited to attend a session looking at blogging at the end of the research period to get the benefits from the study.

I also understand that:

- There is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may withdraw at any stage;
- I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about me;

- any information which I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications or academic conference or seminar presentations;
- if applicable, the information which I give may be shared between any of the other researcher(s) participating in this project in an anonymized form;
- all information I give will be treated as confidential;
- the researcher will make every effort to preserve my anonymity.

.....

(Signature of participant)

(Date)

.....

(Printed name of participant)

One copy of this form will be kept by the participant; a second copy will be kept by the researcher(s).

Your contact details are kept separately from your interview data.

Data Protection Notice - The information you provide will be used for research purposes and your personal data will be processed in accordance with current data protection legislation and the University's notification lodged at the Information Commissioner's Office. Your personal data will be treated in the strictest confidence and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties. The results of the research will be published in anonymised form.

Appendix 10: Consent form for Intervention Group



GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Title of Research Project

Using blogs to improve EFL college students' writing skills: A study in the Preparatory Year Programme (PYP), [REDACTED] University, Saudi Arabia

Details of Project

I am an English Language lecturer at [REDACTED] University in Saudi Arabia. Currently, I am pursuing my doctorate degree in Education (Four year PhD in Education) at the University of Exeter, UK. This doctoral research project concerns the use of the blogs to improve college students' writing skills, seeking to understand how blogging may support the development of writing proficiency.

Contact Details

For further information about the research/pre- and post-tests/questionnaires/interview data, please contact:

Name: Sami Mohammed Almalki

Email: smaa204@exeter.ac.uk

If you have concerns/questions about the research which you would like to discuss with my supervisors at the University, please contact:

Dr. Annabel Watson (A.M.Watson@exeter.ac.uk)

Professor Debra Myhill (D.A.Myhill@exeter.ac.uk)

Consent

I have read the project information sheet and have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project.

I understand that, in consenting to participate, I will be asked to do the following:

You will firstly participate in the placement test and, according to your mark, you may be invited to participate in the rest of the study. Those invited will be randomly divided between two groups: the comparison group and intervention group.

If you are placed in the Intervention Group

Shared commitments:

- You will study the same curriculum which the comparison group study.
- The class duration for both groups will be the same.
- The number of teaching sessions are the same in all groups.

Additional commitments:

1. You will be taught by weblogs technology methods in your EFL writing class;

2. You will sit a pre-test at the beginning of the study and a post-test at the end of the study;
3. You will write in your personal blog and in the class blogs;
4. You will participate in class blogs as an exercise in collaborative writing;
5. You will participate by writing comments and feedback to your peers' writing in the class blog;
6. You will complete a questionnaire at the end of the study;
7. You may be invited to participate in a focus group during of the study.
8. You may be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview at the end of the study.

I also understand that:

- There is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may withdraw at any stage;
- I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about me;
- any information which I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications or academic conference or seminar presentations;
- if applicable, the information which I give may be shared between any of the other researcher(s) participating in this project in an anonymized form;
- all information I give will be treated as confidential;
- the researcher will make every effort to preserve my anonymity.

(Signature of participant)

(Date)

.....

(Printed name of participant)

.....

One copy of this form will be kept by the participant; a second copy will be kept by the researcher(s).

Your contact details are kept separately from your interview data.

Data Protection Notice - The information you provide will be used for research purposes and your personal data will be processed in accordance with current data protection legislation and the University's notification lodged at the Information Commissioner's Office. Your personal data will be treated in the strictest confidence and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties. The results of the research will be published in anonymised form.

Appendix 11: Consent form Arabic Version



GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

إقرار موافقة بالمشاركة في الدراسة

عنوان مشروع البحث

استخدام المدونات التعليمية لتطوير مهارة الكتابة الأكاديمية في اللغة الانجليزية للطلاب الغير ناطقين بها في برنامج السنة التحضيرية بجامعة [REDACTED] , بالمملكة العربية السعودية

معلومات مشروع الدراسة

يعمل الباحث مدرس لغة انجليزية بمركز اللغة الانجليزية في جامعة [REDACTED] , حيث إن الباحث طالب دكتوراه بكلية التربية والعلوم الاجتماعية بجامعة اكستر , بريطانيا . ومن اهتمامات الباحث , استخدام التكنولوجيا في تعليم وتدريب اللغة الانجليزية , وتركز رسالة الدكتوراه للباحث على استخدام المدونات التعليمية لتطوير مهارة الكتابة الأكاديمية في اللغة الانجليزية لغير الناطقين بها , دارسه استكشافية لفهم طبيعة استخدام المدونات التعليمية في دعم وتطوير مهارة الكتابة الأكاديمية في اللغة الانجليزية للطلاب الغير ناطقين بها .

معلومات التواصل

للمزيد من المعلومات بكل ما يخص البحث وكل يتعلق بمشروع الدراسة من اختبار قبلي واختبار بعدي , استبيانات , مجموعات النقاش والمقابلات , يرجى التواصل مع الباحث

الاسم : سامي بن محمد المالكي

الاسم : سامي بن محمد المالكي
البريد الإلكتروني : ibnamri@hotmail.com

وللمزيد من المعلومات بخصوص ما سبق ذكره , التواصل مع المشرفين على الرسالة العلمية

أ.د / دبرا مايهيل

D.A.Myhill@exeter.ac.uk

د. أنابيل واتسون

A.M.Watson@exeter.ac.uk

إقرار

لقد اطلعت على كامل المعلومات التفصيلية عن مشروع البحث والدراسة وأيضا فهمت تماما ما هو الهدف والغرض من الدراسة

• إذا تم اختياري في المجموعة الضابطة

- 1- ستدرس بالطريقة التقليدية في تدريس مهارة الكتابة في اللغة الانجليزية , وهي استخدام القلم والورقة في الكتابة
- 2- سوف يطلب منك بالمشاركة في اختبار قبلي في بداية الدراسة واختبار بعدي في نهاية مشروع الدراسة
- 3- سيكون في نهاية المشروع البحثي دوره قصيرة عن استخدام المدونات الالكترونية في تعليم مهارة الكتابة الأكاديمية في اللغة الانجليزية

• إذا تم اختيارك في المجموعة التجريبية

- 1- ستدرس نفس المنهج الدراسي المستخدم مع طلاب المجموعة الضابط
 - 2- مدة المحاضرة 3 ساعات دراية باليوم لكلا المجموعتين الضابطة والتجريبية
 - 3- عدد ساعات المنهج 15 ساعة أسبوعيا لكلا المجموعتين
- مهام إضافية للطلاب المشاركين في المجموعة التجريبية

- 1- ستدرس باستخدام التكنولوجيا (المدونات الالكترونية التعليمية) في تدريس مهارة الكتابة الأكاديمية في اللغة الانجليزية
 - 2- سيطلب من المشاركة في اختبار قبلي بداية مشروع الدراسة واختبار بعدي في نهاية مشروع الدراسة
 - 3- سيطلب منك إنشاء مدونة الكترونية خاصة بك , وكذلك المشاركة في مدونة الفصل بوضع الواجب بعد المراجعة على مدونة الفصل
 - 4- يجب على كل طالب كتابة تعليق وتغذية راجعة على الواجبات المرفوعة على مدونة الفصل بمعدل لا يقل عن خمسة تعليقات لخمس طلاب
 - 5- يتطلب المشاركة في قسم النقاش بالمدونة بخصوص تطوير مهارة الكتابة الأكاديمية
 - 6- على جميع الطلاب المشاركة في تعبئة الاستبيانات في نهاية المشروع
 - 7- ربما يطلب منك المشاركة في حلقات نقاش حول استخدام المدونات الالكترونية التعليمية في تطوير وتنمية مهارة الكتابة الأكاديمية في اللغة الانجليزية
 - 8- ربما يطلب منك المشاركة في مقابلات فردية حول استخدام المدونات الالكترونية التعليمية في تطوير وتنمية مهارة الكتابة الأكاديمية في اللغة الانجليزية
- **معلومات هامة**

- 1- ليس هناك إجبار على الطالب بالمشاركة في الدراسة , وعلى الطالب أن يقرر بنفسه في حق المشاركة من عدمه
- 2- من حقوق الطالب أن لا يسمح في إفشاء أي معلومات شخصية أو أي نتائج اختبارات , استبيانات , مجموعات نقاش أو مقابلات شخصية لأي طرف آخر سوى الباحث نفسه
- 3- جميع المعلومات والبيانات ستعامل بسرية تامة وستستخدم من قبل الباحث للغرض البحثي فقط

اسم الطالب :

رقم الطالب الجامعي :

توقيعه :

Appendix 12: The questionnaire (English Version)

Questionnaires

Dear participant,

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this study. The study is about the impact of the use of educational blogs on EFL students' writing development. This questionnaire will endeavour to measure the attitudes and perceptions of the participants towards the use of the blogs in learning and teaching English skills and writing in particular, and it is not going to take more than 40 minutes. Be assured that all the given answers will be kept in strictest confidentiality, and they will not be used for any evaluation purpose in any of your courses. Again, thanks for your time and efforts.

Student's card number

Instructions

This questionnaire consists of three parts as follow:

- 1- Questions from 1-35 are about student's attitude towards the use of educational blogs in learning English skills and writing in particular. A 5-point Likert scale ranging is used for this purpose. For each of the following statements please tick the box which best describes your view. There are no correct answers. The best answers are those that honestly reflect your feelings.
- 2- Questions from 36-39 are demographics data regarding the participants' possession of computer and internet at home, as well as smart phone. Just choose "yes" or "No"
- 3- Question number 40 is an open-ended

Part One: Participant's attitude towards the use of educational blogs in learning English skills and writing in particular. For each of the following statements please tick the box which best describes your view.

ITEMS	<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>
.1 I am glad that I have my own English blog.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
.2 I feel it is easy to create and publish my own blog.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
.3 Writing on weblog was enjoyable and interesting.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
.4 I think the learner blog is a waste of time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
.5 I like posting my daily routine on my blog.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
.6 I like to invite my classmates to read my blogs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
.7 I like to write a draft of what I want to say before publishing it on my blog and class blog.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

8	I think it is good idea to use the discussion board on class blogs to improve writing skills related to planning, drafting, revising, etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9	Working together on the class blog helped me to improve my academic writing skills.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10	I like uploading pictures, videos, links, etc on my blog.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11	Reading the comments and entries of my peers on the blog helped me to learn and improve my own writing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12	I like making comments on my classmates' posts.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13	Responding to the feedback received on my blog improves my writing.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14	I found it difficult to comment on the blogs of my peers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15	I like having classmates make comments on my posts.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16	I like reading my classmates' written posts.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17	I feel uncomfortable about my peers' comments.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18	I like having my instructor make written comments on my posts.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19	I like having my own portfolio on my blog to read anytime anywhere.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20	I feel that my writing is better when writing on my blogs than writing on paper in class.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21	I prefer to write on paper rather than on blogs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
22	I feel pressure when writing on my blog or class blog because my friend will read my writing.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
23	I feel more confident with writing on my blog than on paper.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
24	I feel freer to write on the blog than in the class.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
25	I have learned how to plan different writing tasks.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
26	I prefer the blogging way of submitting my assignments to the traditional way of submitting assignments.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

27	Writing on the blog made checking word choice and word spelling more easier.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
28	Writing on the blog made checking my grammar more easier.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
29	In general, I feel that my English grammar has not improved since I began blogging.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
30	I learn new words when reading my friends' postings.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
31	I prefer checking up meanings of difficult words in the online dictionary when blogging.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
32	I don't enjoy the blog project.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
33	I will still use my blog in the future.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Part two: (yes, no) questions

34- Do you have a computer at home?

- A. yes
- B. no

35- Do you have a smart phone?

- A. yes
- B. no

36- Do you have internet access at home?

- A. yes
- B. no

37- Had you heard about blogs or had your own blog before this course?

- A. yes
- B. no

If yes:

38- What type of blog had you used?

- A. general blog
- B. educational blog
- C. both
- A. not applicable

39- What language did you use to write on the blog?

- A. Arabic
- B. English
- C. Both
- D. not applicable

Part three: open -ended question

40- what is opinions in regards of using educational blogs in teaching and learning English in general and writing development in particular?

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Appendix 13: The questionnaire (Arabic Version)

استبانة

عزيزي الطالب

شكراً لاشتراكك في تعبئة هذه الاستبانة التي تهدف إلى جمع بيانات عن مفهومك عن استخدام المدونات التعليمية في تعلم وتدرّيس مهارات اللغة الإنجليزية ومهارة الكتابة بشكل خاص . اشتراكك في تعبئة الاستبانة محل الشكر والتقدير . جميع معلوماتك الشخصية (الاسم والرقم الجامعي) سوف تبقى سرية بشكل كامل حيث سوف تستخدم لغرض البحث فقط ولن يطلع عليها أحد سوى الباحث . أرجو التكرم بتعبئة الاستبانة بشكل دقيق بحيث انها لن تستغرق منك أكثر من 40 دقيقة لتعبئتها .

الرقم الجامعي :

الباحث : سامي محمد المالكي
طالب دكتوراه بجامعة إكستر , بريطانيا
رقم الجوال :

القسم الأول : توجهات الطلبة حول استخدام المدونات التعليمية الالكترونية في تعلم مهارات اللغة الإنجليزية ومهارة تطور الكتابة بشكل خاص , ضع علامة صح (✓) داخل مربع الإجابة للأسئلة من 1- 33

الرقم	الأسئلة	لا أوافق بشدة	لا أوافق	محايد	أوافق	أوافق بشدة
1	أنا سعيد لإنشائي مدونة خاصة بي	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	اشعر انه من السهل انشاء مدونة واكتب عليها	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	الكتابة على المدونة ممتعة	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	أعتقد ان الكتابة على مدونتي الخاصة مضيعة للوقت	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	أحب ان أنشر يومياتي على مدونتي الخاصة	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	أحب أن دعوة زملائي لقراءة مدونتي	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	أحب ان اكتب مسودة لما اردت كتابته قبل نشره على مدونتي ومدونة الفصل	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8	أعتقد انه من الجيد استخدام لوحة النقاشات على مدونة الفصل لتطوير مهارة الكتابة من ناحية كتابة التخطيط والمسودة والمراجعة	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9	العمل الجماعي على مدونة الفصل يساعد على تطوير مهارة الكتابة الاكاديمية	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10	أحب تحميل الصور والفيديو والروابط على مدونتي	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11	قراءة تعليقات زملائي على المدونة ساعدني لكي اتعلم وأطور كتابتي	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12	أنا احب كتابة تعليقات على مشاركات زملائي	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13	الرد على التعليقات الواردة على المدونة حسن من كتابتي الاكاديمية	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14	لقد وجدت صعوبة في التعليق على مدونات زملائي	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15	أنا احب تعليقات زملائي على مشاركاتي	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16	أنا احب قراءة تعليقات زملائي على مشاركاتي	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17	أشعر بعدم الارتياح لتعليقات زملائي على كتابتي	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18	أحب تعليقات مدرسي على مشاركاتي	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19	أنا احب ان يكون لدي ملف انجاز على مدونتي الخاصة في أي زمان ومكان	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20	أشعر بتطور في كتابتي على المدونة أفضل من الكتابة على الورق في الفصل	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21	أفضل الكتابة باستخدام الورق والقلم على استخدام المدونات الالكترونية	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
22	اشعر بالضغط عندما اكتب على مدونتي ومدونة الفصل لان زملائي سيفرغون ما كتبت	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
23	أشعر بثقة كبيرة عندما اكتب على المدونة أكثر من الكتابة على الورق	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	24 أشعر بالراحة عندما اكتب على المدونة أفضل من الكتابة على الورق
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	25 تعلمت كيف اخطط مهام مختلفة في الكتابة
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	26 أفضل المدونات لتدوين واجباتي عن الطريقة التقليدية لكتابة الواجبات
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	27 الكتابة على المدونة تجعلني اختار الكلمات المناسبة والتدقيق الاملائي بعناية كبيره
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	28 الكتابة على المدونة تساعد في كتابة قواعد اللغة الانجليزية بعناية كبيره
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	29 بشكل عام أشعر بان قواعد اللغة الانجليزية لم تتحسن منذ بدأت الكتابة على المدونة
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	30 أتعلمت الكثير من الكلمات عندما اقرأ واجبات زملائي وتدويناتهم
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	31 أفضل التأكد والتحقق من معنى الكلمات الصعبة على القاموس الالكتروني عند الكتابة على المدونة
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	32 لم استمتع بمشروع استخدام المدونات لتطوير مهارة الكتابة الاكاديمية
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	33 سوف استمر في استخدام مدوني في المستقبل

القسم الثاني : أختار الإجابة بنعم أو لا للأسئلة من 34-39

34 - هل لديك جهاز كمبيوتر بالمنزل ؟

(أ) نعم

(ب) لا

35- هل لديك جهاز اتصال حديث , أيفون على سبيل المثال ؟

(أ) نعم

(ب) لا

36- هل لديك شبكة اتصال بالانترنت بالمنزل ؟

(أ) نعم

(ب) لا

37- هل سبق أن سمعت بالمدونات الالكترونية من قبل واستخدمتها بشكل شخصي ؟

(أ) نعم

(ب) لا

إذا إجابتك بنعم

38- أي أنواع المدونات استخدمت ؟

(أ) مدونات عامة

(ب) مدونات تعليمية

ت) كلاهما

ث) لم أسأخدم أي منهما

39 – ماهي اللغة المستخدمة للكتابة على المدونة؟

أ) عربي

ب) إنجليزي

ت) كلاهما

ث) لم أسأخدم أي لغة

القسم الثالث : أرى الطلبة حول استخدام المدونات التعليمية

40- ما هو رأيك في استخدام المدونات التعليمية في تطوير مهارة الكتابة الأكاديمية في اللغة الإنجليزية؟

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Appendix 14: The Focus Groups interview (English version)

Focus Groups Interview Questions

Q1) – Could you please talk about the importance of blogging affordances in detail? And how these affordances help you to improve your writing?

Collaboration

Discussion

Interaction

Online feedback

Multimodality

Q2)- What have you learned from this project of using educational blogging in learning EFL writing skills?

Q3)- What is the impact on your writing development? How did you discover the difference in your writing?

Q4)- To what extent do you think feedback from peers and teacher helped to improve your writing? Give examples?

Q5)- Did using the blog increase your vocabulary use? If yes, describe how and why?

Q6)- Describe the procedure of writing on your own blog and class blog?

Q7 - What do you feel when you participate in discussion outside the classroom on the class blog?

Q8) – Tell me about the advantages and disadvantages of the use of educational blogs in English classes.

Q9) – Compare writing on the educational blog and the use of pen and paper. Which one do you prefer and why?

Appendix 15: The Focus Groups interview (Arabic version)

أسئلة المقابلة البورية (مجموعات التركيز)

- س 1) - تحدث عن خصائص المدونات الالكترونية التالية بالتفصيل؟ وماهي أهمية كل خاصة من وجهة نظرك في تطوير الكتابة الاكاديمية؟
- حلقات النقاش على المدونة
 - تعليقات المدرس على الواجبات في المدونة؟ هل كانت فعالة وسريعة مع المقارنة بتعليقات المدرس على الواجبات على الورقة.
 - تعليقات الطلاب على في المدونة
 - تعليقاتي على كتابة زملائي على المدونة
 - ملف الانجاز الخاص بك على المدونة
 - مدونة الفصل؟ أهميتها ومدى تأثيرها على كتابتك
 - مدونتك الخاصة؟ أهميتها ومدى تأثيرها على كتابتك
 - ربط بعض مواقع تعلم اللغة بالمدونة الخاصة,, تحميل الصور , الفيديو وغيرها ؟ أهميتها من ناحية تطوير مهارة الكتابة ؟ وهل هناك مهارات اخرى تم تطويرها لديك من خلال استخدام المدونات مثل القراءة والاستماع ؟ وكيف ؟
- س 2) ماذا تعلمت من هذا المشروع ؟ بالتفصيل ؟ وكيف تشعر ان هناك تطور فعلي في كتابتك باللغة الانجليزية ؟
- س 3) ماهو تأثير البلوق على كتابتك الاكاديمية ؟
- س 4) - مامدى تأثير التغذية الراجعة من مدرسك في تطوير الكتابة لديك؟
- س 5) - مامدى تأثير التغذية الراجعة من زميلائك في تطوير الكتابة لديك؟ أذكر بعض الامثلة من تعليقات زملائك على كتابتك وتعليقاتك على زملائك ؟
- س 6) - ما مدى تأثير استخدام المدونة على رفع معدل الكلمات الجديدة وكذلك التحسن في قواعد اللغة الانجليزية بالنسبة لديك ؟ وهل شعرت بفرق بين اول كتابة لك على المدونة و اخر كتابة ؟ ماهي الازمنة التي اصبحت تستخدمها على المدونة ولم يسبق لك استخدامها ؟
- س 7) - ماهي ارنك بالنسبة لحلقة القاش على المدونة؟
- س 8) - اذكر مزاياء وعيوب المدونات وخصوصا في تطوير مهارة الكتابة الاكاديمية ؟
- س 9) - بعد تجربتك للمدونات التعليمية في الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية هل هناك فرق من وجهة نظرك بينها وبين الكتابة على الورق بشكل عام في عمل الواجبات ؟ أيهما تفضل ؟ ولماذا

Appendix 16: Semi- Structured interview (English version)

Semi- Structured Interview Schedule

Project title

A mixed-methods study of exploring and explaining the impact of the use of educational blogging on Saudi EFL student's writing development

Background Information:

Interviewee's code	
Date	
Time	
Place	

Introduction:

Hello, I'm Sami Almalki, a PhD student at Exeter University, UK. This semi-structured interview is being conducted to explore experience using blogging and what the impact of using educational blogs on your writing skills. Your help in this regard will definitely be appreciated.

Notice:

- This interview is divided into three sections:
- Section 1: Background questions.
- Section 2: The main interview questions.
- Section 3: Conclusion.
- This interview will take at least 30 minutes.
- This interview will be recorded if you don't mind.
- You can quit any time during the interview.
- If you have any questions please don't hesitate to ask and if you don't want to answer any question, just let me know.
- I assure you that all the data will be kept confidential and will be used in the research work only.

Do you have any question before we start?

Section 1:

Background questions:

- 1- Have you ever blogged before this project? if yes
- 2- What kind of blog did you use? general blog or educational blog
- 3- What language did you use?

Section 2:**Interview questions:**

- 1- What did you actually do when composing your personal blog and class blog?
- 2- What have you learnt from this blog project?
- 3- What has been the impact of the blogs on your writing?
- 4- -What was the impact of the feedback from your teacher?
- 5- What was the impact of the feedback from your partner?
- 6- What has been the impact of the blogging on your grammar and vocabulary?
- 7- What is your opinion of the discussion classes?
- 8- What is your opinion of the collaborative writing on class blog?
- 9- What has been the impact of the blogging on your writing style?

Section 3:**Conclusion:**

- 1- Is there anything you would like to mention or discuss regarding this topic?
- 2- How did you feel about this interview?

Finally, thank you so much for your participating, if you have any further questions, please feel free to ask.

Appendix 17: Semi- Structured interview (Arabic version)

المقابلة

معلومات عامة

	رقم الطالب
	التاريخ
	الوقت
	المكان

مقدمة

عزيزي الطالب، شكراً لاشتراكك في هذه المقابلة التي تهدف إلى جمع بيانات عن مفهومك عن استخدام المدونات التعليمية وتأثيرها على تطور الكتابة كجزء من بيانات بحث الدكتوراه الذي يستكشف ويفسر مدى تأثير استخدام المدونات التعليمية في تعليم وتعلم مهارات اللغة الإنجليزية ومهارة الكتابة بشكل خاص من قبل طلاب المسار الطبي بالسنة التحضيرية. اشتراكك في المقابلة محل الشكر والتقدير. جميع معلوماتك الشخصية (مثل رقم الطالب واجاباتك المسجلة) سوف تبقى سرية بشكل كامل ولن تؤثر استجاباتك على تقييم ادائك خلال الفصل حيث أنها ستستخدم لغرض البحث فقط ولن يطلع عليها أحد سوى الباحث.

تنبيه

- تتكون المقابلة من ثلاثة أقسام
- القسم الأول : أسئلة عام
- القسم الثاني : أسئلة المقابلة الرئيسية
- القسم الثالث : الخاتمة
- المقابلة ستسغرق من الوقت مالا يقل عن نصف ساعة
- سيتم تسجيل هذه المقابلة إذا لم يكن لديك مانع
- يحق لك الانسحاب من المقابلة بأي وقت
- إذا لديك أي استفسار , يمكنك أن تسأل بكل أريحية
- علماً بأن جميع البيانات من رقم الطالب والتسجيل وغيرها ستحفظ بسرية تامة لأغراض البحث ولن يطلع عليها أحد سوى الباحث

هل لديك أي سؤال أو استفسار قبل البدء في المقابلة ؟

الجزء الأول: أسئلة عامة :

- 1- هل سبق لك وأن استخدمت المدونات قبل هذا المشروع ؟ إذا نعم
- 2- مانوع المدونات التي استخدمتها ؟ هل هي مدونات تعليمية أو مدونات عامة ؟
- 3- ماهي اللغة المستخدمة في الكتابة على المدونة؟

الجزء الثاني : أسئلة المقابلة الأساسية

- 1- ماذا فعلت عند الكتابة على مدونتك الخاصة ومدونة الفصل ؟
- 2- ماذا تعلمت من هذا المشروع ؟ بالتفصيل
- 3- ماذا تعلمت من استخدام المدونات التعليمية خلال هذا الفصل؟
- 4- مامدى تأثير التغذية الراجعة من مدرسك في تطوير الكتابة لديك؟
- 5- مامدى تأثير التغذية الراجعة من زميلائك في تطوير الكتابة لديك؟
- 6- ما مدى تأثير استخدام المدونة على رفع معدل الكلمات الجديدة وكذلك التحسن في قواعد اللغة الانجليزية بالنسبة لديك ؟
- 7- ماهو رائك بالنسبة لحلقة القاش على المدونة؟
- 8- ماهو رائك حول الكتابة الجماعية على مدونة الفصل ؟
- 9- ماهو تأثير المدونة التعليمية على أسلوب الكتابة لديك؟

الجزء الثالث : الخاتمة

- 1- هل لديك إضافة أو أي استفسار بخصوص مشروع الدراسة؟
- 2- ماهو إنطباعك عن هذخ المقابلة ؟

أشكرك على الحضور والتجاوب معي في هذه المقابلة

أسم الباحث : سامي محمد المالكي
طالب دكتوراه بجامعة إكستر , بريطانيا

Appendix 18: Initial cods

- 1- Contextual issues affecting EFL English writing
- 2- Challenges
- 3- Lack of teaching methods
- 4- Teacher -centered teaching
- 5- lack of technology in classes
- 6- unfit curriculum
- 7- The number of students in a class
- 8- Teachers don't give feedback on our writing
- 9- Teachers give a particular topic of writing for the final exam
- 10- Classroom is not prepared to use technology in school
- 11- Network is not available in the university
- 12- No lab to teach English
- 13- Lack of practice
- 14- Why students don't use educational technology?
- 15- Teachers are not interested in educational technology
- 16- Students experience of using the types of blogs
- 17- Learner's blog
- 18- Class blog
- 19- In what ways students improved in their writing
- 20- Paragraph organization
- 21- Increased their vocabulary
- 22- Improved grammatical range and accuracy
- 23- Used a different type of tenses
- 24- Paragraph cohesion and coherence
- 25- Practice the stages of process writing
- 26- Effect of using educational blogs in teaching EFL writing
- 27- Improving Linguistic learning
- 28- Improving writing
- 29- Formal and unformal writing
- 30- creative writing

- 31- Process writing
- 32- Improving reading
- 33- Learning new words (vocabulary)
- 34- Improving listening
- 35- Improving speaking
- 36- Affective benefits of Affordances of using blogging in teaching EFL writing
- 37- Relationship between Affordances of blogging and writing improvement
- 38- Social Interaction
- 39- combination of solitary and interaction
- 40- communication outside the classroom
- 41- writing in social space
- 42- Increase a wariness of students
- 43- peer-to-peer interaction
- 44- Collaborative writing
- 45- Free writing
- 46- Discussion board
- 47-RSS
- 48- Students directed learning
- 49- Online feedback and comments
- 50- Students' feedback
- 51- Teacher feedback
- 52- Multimodality
- 53- Pictures
- 54- Linking
- 55- webpage
- 56- Videos
- 57- audios
- 58-general blogs advantages
- 59- Virtual environment
- 60- Self-learning
- 61- Exchanging resources and information

- 62- E- Portfolio
- 63- Awareness of plagiarism
- 64- Improving typing skills
- 65- Eco-friendly
- 66- General disadvantages of blogging
- 67- Technical issues
- 68- Lack of privacy
- 69- Lack of handwriting
- 70- Health problems
- 71- Affective benefits of blogging
- 72- Enhancing motivation
- 73- Self- confident
- 74- Writing anxiety
- 75- Student's attitudes towards using blogs in teaching EFL writing
- 76- Students prefer writing on the blog rather than using pen and paper
- 78- Students prefer Submitting an online assignment than traditional way
- 79- Students like utilizing blog on their learning
- 80- Saving time
- 81- Negative attitude towards using educational blogs
- 82- Waste of time
- 83- Needs more practice
- 84- Difficulty of use
- 85- Students views of using general and educational blogs
- 86- Student's perceptions of using general blogs or educational blogs before the intervention
- 87- General blogs
- 89- Use in Arabic language
- 90- I don't belief it
- 91- Student's perceptions of using educational blogs after the intervention
- 92- It is important in teaching EFL writing
- 93- The importance of using educational blogs as a tool of teaching EFL writing
- 94- Educational blog improves English skills

- 95- Educational blog improves EFL writing
- 96- Practice inside the classroom and out classroom
- 97- Students perceptions towards using traditional methods and technology in teaching EFL writing
- 98- Traditional methods in teaching writing
- 99- Boring
- 100- Interactions between teacher and students
- 101- Not good for teaching writing
- 102- Educational blog in teaching EFL writing
- 103- Improving learning skills
- 104- Students -centered
- 105- Teacher as a guide in the class
- 106-Other linguistics skills
- 107-Student's experiences

Appendix 19: Main themes, codes, sub-codes and quotes from the transcripts

	Main themes	Codes	Sub-codes	Quotes from the transcripts
1	Contextual issues affecting EFL learners' English writing	Insufficient of teaching methods	Lack of using technology	<i>'I think that there are some reasons could be limiting teachers in using educational technology in English classes, because schools don't have technology facilities or might be because of the strict rules in schools.'</i> (FG1S3).
			Adopting traditional methods in teaching English	<i>'Learning and teaching EFL is became vital in Saudi Arabia ...so I believe that the teaching methods in schools and university are not good..., because teachers always tend to teach or follow the traditional styles in teaching English which is not appropriate for students.'</i> (FG2S4).
			Teacher-centred teaching	<i>'Teacher-centred teaching... I believe that they play the role in teaching as they think that if they give a chance to student-centred learning they could lose the class control, and they would like to keep students silent all the time.'</i> (FG2S1).

		The number of students in a class	Lack of practice	<p><i>1- 'Large classes is an issue facing students in school and university. I think that large classes might affect the process of teaching and learning English language.'</i> (SFG1S3).</p> <p><i>2- 'I still have a problem in my English writing, and I don't know how to write a good paragraph with no mistakes ...I think there was a lack of writing practice in the class under my teacher's supervision and I am sure that made my writing worse.'</i> (FG2S4)</p>
			Insufficient teacher feedback	<p><i>'I studied English for seven years in school and I remember that no single teacher gave me sufficient written feedback on my assignments or any encouraging phrases...I think that some teachers just write some words such as good and not too bad with no explanation or corrections on my mistakes.'</i> (FG2S3).</p>
			Lack of peer feedback	<p><i>'Peers' feedback is very important to learn and communicate with other students ... but there is a lack of peer feedback due to the weakness in our writing and the lack of practice.'</i> (FG2S3).</p>

2	Students' attitudes and perceptions of using educational blog in teaching and learning EFL writing	The importance of the use of educational blogs in English classes	"The use of educational blog technology is <i>very important in teaching and learning English skills in general and in writing particular</i> " (OEQS29, FG2S13).
		Blogging as pedagogy method of teaching English	<i>"My writing is really improved, and I think that is because I write on my blog and class blog every day ...I had an evidence for this improvement which is my grade in midterm exam was very good ...I think using blog in learning and teaching English writing is better than using pen and paper."</i> (FG2S8)
		Affective benefits of blogging	<i>"I think that the use of the blog is a social interaction platform which could be a virtual classroom because we can follow up the class blog from anywhere ...I could say that blog helped me when I was in the hospital, because I was not able to go to the university. I submitted my homework on time. I read my colleagues' homework and I participated in classroom discussion...I did not miss any English classes during my stay in the hospital."</i> (FG1S8).

		<p>Challenges face students adapting the use of educational blog technology</p>	<p><i>"Difficulties in connecting with the internet in the beginning of the semester because there was no internet access available in the university for students, so we were using our own devices and later the researcher brought two routers into the classroom. Also, the internet was very slow because of the shortage in coverage and we thought that it was the major problem that we faced during the semester."</i> (FG2S2).</p>	

	Main themes	codes	Sub-codes	Quotes from the transcripts
3	Students' perceptions of affordances of using blogging as a tool of writing development	Relationship between affordances of blogging and writing improvement	Collaborative writing	1- " <i>writing collaboratively on the blog helped them to improve their writing</i> " (FG2S3). 2- <i>we think that collaborative writing on the blog helped us to improve our writing skills because we were encouraged by each other to write</i> " (FG1S1).
Free writing			" <i>I wrote some free writing on my own blog, like my daily routine and some topics was I interested to write about, I think this way of free writing has helped me to improve my writing because I used to write on my blog everyday</i> " (FG1S3).	
Discussion board			" <i>the discussion on the blog stimulated me to think, read and remember many vocabulary words I have but I hadn't used before... I practised using my vocabulary in different contexts while blogging, so I think this helped me to improve my writing</i> " (FG1S6).	
Online feedback and comments			" <i>I think that online feedback from peers and teacher ... was a trigger to improve my writing because I increased my vocabulary and I learned different usages of grammar, structures, sentences and how to organise my writing in paragraphs</i> " (FG1S6).	
The effect of multimodality on student writing			" <i>I think the use of pictures in writing is very important ...I used to post a picture with each homework assignment, and I found that using a picture motivated me to imagine and concentrate on the topic itself</i> " (FG1S4).	

4	Students' experience of using the types of blogs	What learners did on their own blogs	<i>"The procedure of my own blog was to write the first draft of the homework assignment in the classroom and when I got back home edit my homework and publish it on the class blog. I also used my own blog to write about some interesting topics as free writing to share with my classmates or other people" (AHMEED).</i>
		What learners did on the class blog	<i>"I used the class blog to publish final draft of homework assignment, to read and reread his classmates works, responding to my peers and teacher feedback and giving my own comments on my colleague assignments.... I think the class blog is a real environment for practising writing due to the collaboration, socially interaction, discussion and feedback from teacher and peers". (MUATH).</i>
	The influence of the use of educational blog on EFL students' writing development	Paragraph organization	<i>"The use of educational blog made me to write ,read a lot, compared my writing with others in order to copy a good writing style, getting effective feedback and responding to it so quickly, searching for new vocabulary, practising grammar and a variety of sentences to use in my writing, including the organization of paragraphs.... I realised my vocabulary had increased; I can use a different range of grammar, structure; I can use a range of sentences in my writing and I can use linking words correctly ... This improvement in my writing was because of the practice of writing on the educational blog" (HAKIM).</i>
		Increased vocabulary	
		Improved grammatical range and accuracy	
		Used different tenses	
		Paragraph cohesion and coherence	

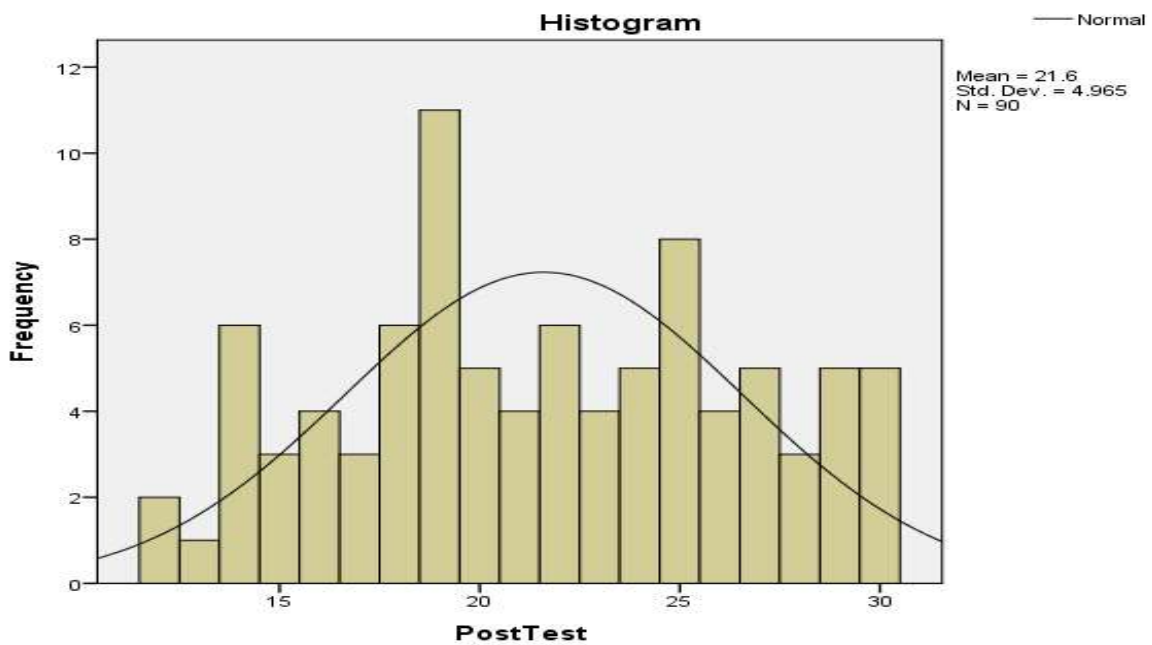
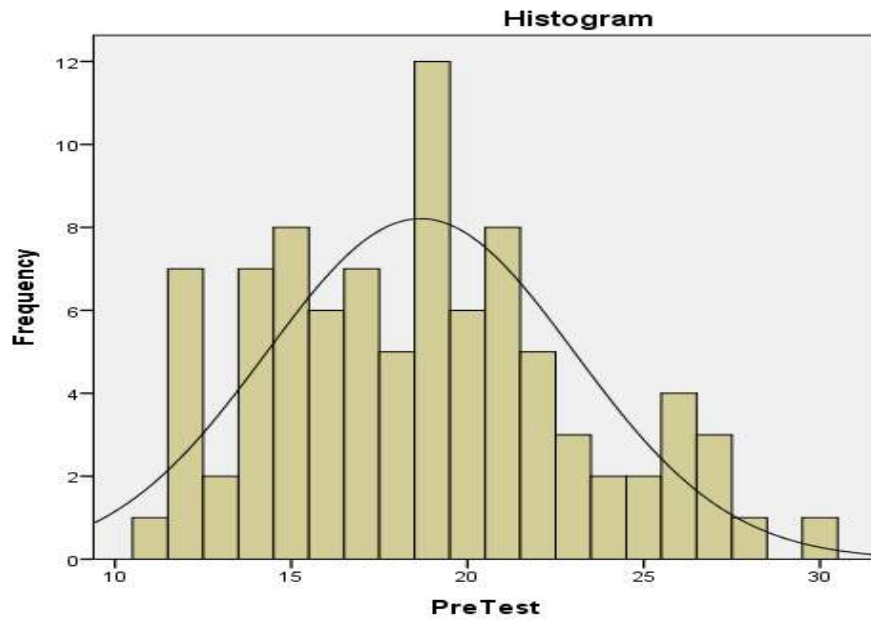
Appendix 20: Test of Normality Pre and Post Test

Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
PreTest	.081	90	.200*	.970	90	.036
PostTest	.100	90	.027	.964	90	.015

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

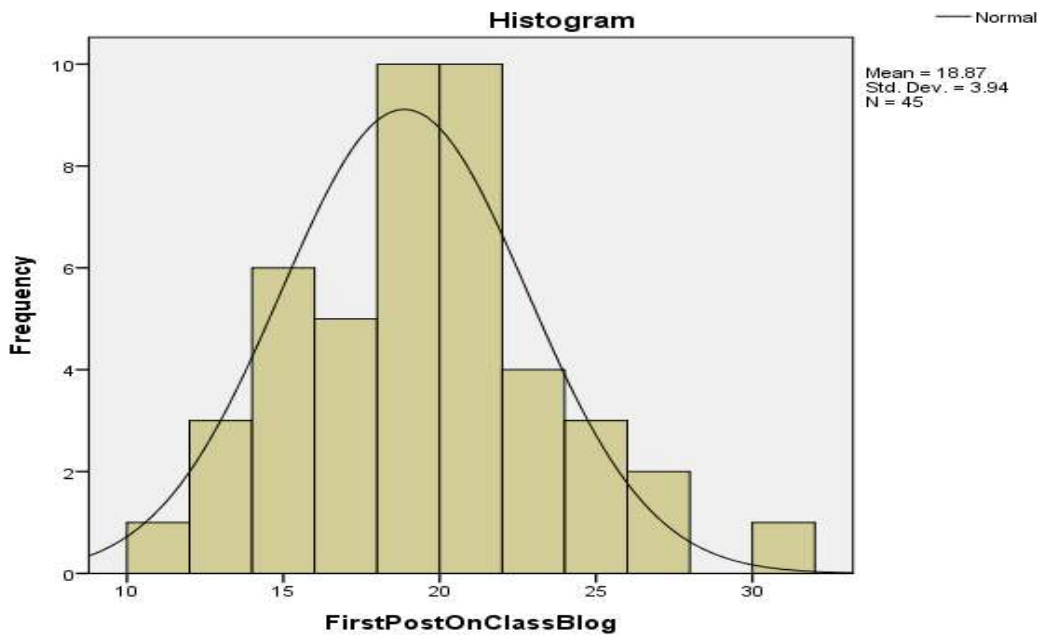
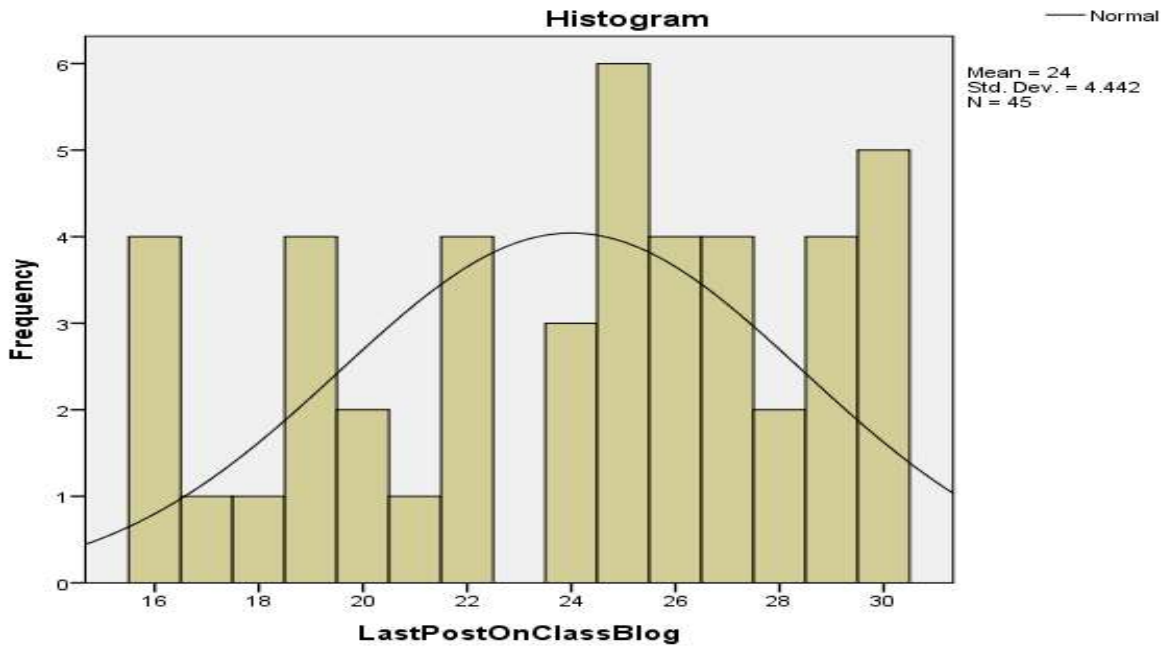


Appendix 21: Test of Normality First and Last Posted Assignments on Class Blog

Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	Df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
FirstPostOnClassBlog	.142	45	.023	.972	45	.345
LastPostOnClassBlog	.145	45	.019	.928	45	.008

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction



Appendix 22: Inter-rater reliability (pre and post-tests)

Pre-test

Intraclass Correlation Coefficient

	Intraclass Correlation ^b	95% Confidence Interval		F Test with True Value 0			Sig
		Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Value	df1	df2	
Single Measures	.984 ^a	.976	.990	125.429	89	89	.000
Average Measures	.992 ^c	.988	.995	125.429	89	89	.000

Two-way mixed effects model where people effects are random and measures effects are fixed.

- The estimator is the same, whether the interaction effect is present or not.
- Type A intraclass correlation coefficients using an absolute agreement definition.
- This estimate is computed assuming the interaction effect is absent, because it is not estimable otherwise.

Post-test

Intraclass Correlation Coefficient

	Intraclass Correlation ^b	95% Confidence Interval		F Test with True Value 0			Sig
		Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Value	df1	df2	
Single Measures	.986 ^a	.979	.991	149.527	89	89	.000
Average Measures	.993 ^c	.989	.995	149.527	89	89	.000

Two-way mixed effects model where people effects are random and measures effects are fixed.

- The estimator is the same, whether the interaction effect is present or not.
- Type A intraclass correlation coefficients using an absolute agreement definition.
- This estimate is computed assuming the interaction effect is absent, because it is not estimable otherwise.

Appendix 23: Course Materials: English Book 3 & 4

W E E K	Unit topic	Contents				Home Assignments
		Session	Classroom Study	Time allowance	Outco mes	
1	<i>Tales from the street</i>	1	What are you doing?	15 hours	Reading: understand a sequence of events in a text	The teacher Should always remind the students to self- study by assigning them homework.
		2	What are you wearing?	15 hours	Writing: use appropriate tenses to describe a photograph/picture	

2	<i>Tales the street</i>	1	Where are you going?	15 hours	Listening: understand and follow a set of directions on a map distinguish between routine and temporary activities		
		2	Let's party!	15 hours	Speaking: explain a set of directions, describe what is happening in a picture/photograph, talk about invitations and party plans		
3	<i>Pack your bags</i>	1	My Holiday	15 hours	Reading: understand the main ideas in a letter, identify the topic sentences and main ideas of a letter		
		2	Where should I go?	15 hours	Writing: organise details into basic paragraph structure		

4	<i>Pack your bags</i>	1	I'm not happy	15 hours	Listening: listen for information about travel experiences, understand advice about travel to make decisions		
		2	Explain it to me more	15 hours	Speaking: make requests and complaints about travel related experiences, give someone advice about their travel preparations and plans in a presentation		
5	<i>It's a bargain</i>	1	Let's go shopping	15 hours	Reading: read for specific detail in texts about shopping habits and in advertising texts, synthesize information from two texts		
		2	At the supermarket	15 hours	Writing: write a report about shopping customs in your country		
6	<i>It's a bargain</i>	1	Going gone!	15 hours	Listening: take guided notes from an interview, listen for specific information in a shopping exchange		
		2	Report time	15 hours	Speaking: participate in an exchange of information in a shopping context		

7	<i>Health matters</i>	1	Body Mechanics	15 hours	Reading: read for specific information, find details to support the main idea		
		2	Good Night, Sleep tight	15 hours	Writing: create an information poster, write an email describing your/another's health problems		
8	<i>Health matters</i>	1	Get well	15 hours	Listening: recognise the context of a spoken exchange, listen for specific information in administrative contexts, listen		
		2	Home remedies	15 hours	Speaking: participate in a discussion about possible treatment for medical conditions, role play a doctor's appointment		
9	<i>Who is to blame?</i>	1	When did it happen?	15 hours	Reading: understand the events in a news report/story, find details to support the main idea in a text		
		2	The perfect crime	15 hours	Writing: write detailed descriptions of people and situations, write a short narrative		
10	<i>Who is to blame?</i>	1	A police report	15 hours	Listening: identify information about particular people, take simple notes from a listening		
		2	Getting the important details	15 hours	Speaking: enquire about past events and arrange them in a time sequence, recount a dramatic narrative and participate in a role-play		

11	<i>When we were young</i>	1	Everything old is new again	15 hours	Reading: read about ways of life in the past and how they have changed and use contextual clues to determine meaning		
		2	Children of Invention	15 hours	Writing: write about the differences between your lifestyle or beliefs now and those of your childhood		
12	<i>When we were young</i>	1	The World of Tomorrow	15 hours	Listening: listen to a description of the past and identify a range of ideas and information related to a main idea and make predictions, listen and take notes related to past and present events		
		2	My Place	15 hours	Speaking: compare information on a variety of lifestyle subjects between two different time periods		

13	<i>End of Semester Review</i>	1	Review		Review		
		2	Review		Review		
14	<i>End of Semester Review</i>	1	Review		Review		
		2	Review		Review		

W E E K	Unit topic	Contents				Home Assignments
		Session	Classroom Study	Time allowance	Outcomes	
1	<i>What have you done and where have you been?</i>	1	I have done many things	15 hours	Reading: use context clues to comprehend and demonstrate understanding of a challenging text	The teacher Should always remind the students to self- study by assigning them homework.
		2	How long for... since when	15 hours	Writing: prepare a survey to collect information about people's experiences write about a definitive experience	
2	<i>What have you done and where have you been?</i>	1	How long for... since when	15 hours	Listening: organise notes from a listening text including information about past and current events recognise the function of signposting language in short talks	
		2	Listening for important details	15 hours	Speaking: talk about significant experiences in your life conduct a survey about people's experiences	

3	<i>Read all about it</i>	1	Good news, bad news		Reading: comprehend information about past news events with present relevance		
		2	It's an emergency		Writing: write a report		
4	<i>Read all about it</i>	1	It's a disaster		Listening: differentiate between the opinions of speakers		
		2	Cause and effect		Speaking: participate in a role-play present a reasoned opinion		
5	<i>Different cultures</i>	1	The Sensitive Tourist		Reading: compare information about customs in different countries and demonstrate understanding of similarities and differences		
		2	Mind Your Manners		Writing: write about the advantages and disadvantages of mobile phones express your opinion on a particular custom		
6	<i>Different cultures</i>	1	Social Progress		Listening: listen and make notes about travel advice listen and make notes about travel possibilities		
		2	Resistance to Change?		Speaking: discuss opinions and the advantages and disadvantages of various rules and customs in different cultures		

7	<i>Icons of the World</i>	1	Iconic people		Reading: read for specific information interpret graphical information		
		2	Iconic places		Writing: write a description of an international icon with a variety of informative, descriptive and factual information		
8	<i>Icons of the World</i>	1	An iconic event		Listening: make notes about an important citizen and an important monument		
		2	Iconic Things		Speaking: give a group presentation present information on an important place		
9	<i>The Great Debate</i>	1	Going green		Reading: identify main ideas and specific details including the order of events identify phrasal verbs in context		
		2	Forecasting the future		Writing: write sentences using zero and first conditional structures write an email expressing advice		
10	<i>The Great Debate</i>	1	Fair food		Listening: identify the arguments, opinions and reasoning of several speakers listen and make notes and answer comprehension questions listen and identify specific information in different contexts		
		2	It is my conviction		Speaking: discuss an issue giving clear reasons for an opinion participate in a debate giving reasons for an opinion and		
11	<i>Space</i>	1	Making Space history		Reading: identify main ideas recognise spelling patterns within a text summarise key points of a text		
		2	Who wants to be an astronaut?		Writing: write about shopping in Saudi Arabia?		

12	Space	1	Space tourism		<i>Listening:</i> identify key dates and events on a timeline take notes from a job interview identify speakers' opinions		
		2	Space Junk		<i>Speaking:</i> conduct a survey on personal opinion discuss advantages and disadvantages of a given topic		
13	End of Semester Review	1	Review		Review		
		2	Review		Review		
14	End of Semester Review	1	Review		Review		
		2	Review		Review		