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Saudi Students' Perspectives of Blogs in ESL Writing

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ABSTRACT

The researchers used an intact class of convenience at the English Language Institute (ELI) in Jubail, Saudi Arabia to conduct their study to find out about the students' perspectives about the use of blogs as an additional out-of-class ESL writing activity. These perspectives were important as mixed results about benefits and limitations of the use of blogs in ESL writing were reported in the literature. Twenty Saudi male students participated in the questionnaire and interview. The researchers aimed to gain in-depth information from the participants to try to answer the research question (i.e., what are the ELI Saudi students' perceptions of the use of blogs in ESL writing?). As such, these twenty students who agreed to participate in the study were enough since the aim was to gain rich information to answer the research question not to generalize the findings to any intended larger population. The study found advantages for using blogs in ESL writing. These were: (1) motivation, (2) collaboration among students, (3) helping students express their views freely and (4) being user-friendly. One drawback was reported by the participants, namely, the use of impolite language by some bloggers. These positive results of using blogs were in line with the results of other primary studies reported in the literature such as Kitchakarn (2012), Vurdien (2012) and Wang et al (2011). The one reported limitation was also reported in Nepomuceno (2011). One tip was presented by the researchers to overcome this limitation. Finally, they offered suggestions for further research.

Keywords: *Teaching Writing, ESL, EFL, Saudi Students' Perceptions, Self-Learning, Blog*

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1. Introduction

Blogs or weblogs are kinds of online journals that can be easily updated and instantly published on the World Wide Web allowing for comments and threaded discussions by all interested internet users (Wu, 2005). Blogs are part of what came to be known as web2.0 technology; such new technology gives its users the chance to *interact, collaborate and engage in constructive social dialogue* rather than being passive viewers of content as was the case with web 1.0. Early Internet websites were static. One needed the help of *web developers* to use HTML coding in order to write and publish on the Internet. Blogs opened opportunities for language learners to easily publish their opinions and share them with the Internet community (O'Reilly, 2004).

Fortune magazine ranked the blog as the number one technology trend in 2005

and reported that twenty-three thousand new blogs were being created every day; one every three seconds (Kirkpatrick, 2005). Twelve million Americans published their own blogs and fifty-seven million read blogs (Lenhart & Fox, 2006 as cited in Armstrong & Retterer, 2008). This massive use and production of blogs was due to the fact that plenty of free blog-creating software became available since 1999 (Blood, 2000). Examples of such free software are: Blogger, Weebly and Diaryland.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

This study aimed to find out about Saudi students' perspectives, views, ideas and what they think about the use of blogs as an additional out-of-class ESL writing activity. There has been a mixed pattern of results in the literature concerning the use of blogs in ESL writing. Some studies found advantages of using blogs in ESL writing and other studies found limitations of using



them in ESL writing. Consequently, delineating Saudi students' perspectives about the use of blogs in ESL writing was vital as their perspectives can either support the advantages of blogs in ESL writing or attest to their limitations in the particular context of this Saudi institution.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Writing as the Most Difficult Language Skill

Nepomuceno (2011) contended that writing is the most difficult skill of language; learners are not enthusiastic about it as it is basically a desk activity; they cannot stand up and move around as in speaking activities. He further added that the writing output is documented so writers think twice before they write. Soven (1999) subscribed to the view that most students hate writing by the time they join high school as it gets more demanding. By the time they join university, they will hate writing even more as academic writing at university is highly demanding and requires various skills: grammar accuracy, mechanics such as spelling, punctuation, and capitalization; unity; coherence and content. Finally, writing in academic settings tends to be a requirement not a means of expressing genuine ideas and feelings.

2.2 Blogs Balance off Academic Writing

The researchers contend that blogs can balance off academic writing by providing a less intimidating genre of writing that typically allows students to express their genuine ideas and emotions. The blog genre is characterized by free personal writing style, use of personal pronouns such as I and we, expressing the writer's *voice*; in other words, one's opinions, ideas, beliefs about the issue or topic at hand, use of abbreviations peculiar to the blog genre and other Social Networking Sites (SNSs) such as *brb* which means be right back, *asap* which means as soon as possible and *lol* which means laughing out loud.

Students have the freedom to choose whichever topics they want to write about as long as they do not disrespect any institution or libel any person. For example, students can write about their travels, neighborhoods, city, country, sports, hobbies, relationships, experiences, beliefs and opinions. They write in a non-academic, personal tone to express their *voice* clearly and openly.

They are encouraged to write *individually and collaboratively* in pairs or small groups so that the more proficient students can scaffold the less proficient ones. It is also highly recommended that

students comment on each other's posts and keep threaded discussions. It should be stressed that the blog writing is for *fluency* only and *accuracy* is not required nor graded even if the students' writing is full of errors. Accuracy is stressed in academic writing not in blog writing.

Blogs as additional out-of-class activities should be given 20% of the grade because blog writing is a genre in its own right and can balance the highly demanding often dreaded academic writing genre.

Table 1: Academic writing vs. blog writing

Academic writing	Blog writing
1 Objective (The writer of this paper contends, the researcher subscribes to, etc.)	Personal (use of personal pronouns: I believe, we think)
2 Required topics	Free topics (any topic of choice as long as it doesn't disrespect any institution or person)
3 Highly demanding (focus on cohesion, coherence, mechanics of writing, etc.)	Minimally demanding (be understood)
4 Accuracy (grammatical correctness emphasized)	Fluency (grammar errors tolerated)
5 Detached	Voice clearly expressed
6 Use of APA style	No specific style required
7 Specialized terminology (e.g., TESOL, SLA)	Abbreviations peculiar to blogs and SNSs (e.g., brb, asap)
8 Audience (professors, members of the discourse community, specialized journal referees, etc.)	Audience (family, friends and other cyber readers)
9 Feedback (meticulous, on both form and content, choice of words, relatedness of ideas, relevance to topic, etc.)	Feedback (friendly, use of the "like" button if ideas appeal to audience, no comment on grammar or form, etc.)
10 80% of the grade	20% of the grade

2.3 Advantages of Using Blogs in ESL Writing

Many primary research studies reported positive results for the use of blogs with ESL writing. Kitchakarn (2012) conducted a study on first-year, first-semester university students in Bangkok, Thailand. They were all enrolled in an English course. Her research questions were: To what extent do the students improve their summary writing abilities after learning through blogs in groups? And what are the students' attitudes towards learning through blogs? The researcher used two summary writing tests; one before and one after blogging and a questionnaire that contained 10 items with a five-point Likert scale to delineate the students' attitudes towards the use of blogs to improve their writing. A t-test was used to compare the pre-test and post-test scores. As for the questionnaire results, all students had a positive attitude toward learning via blogs.

This research finding showed that blogs can contribute to improving the students' summary writing abilities owing to the nature of blogs which offer authentic learning experience; where students can collaborate amongst themselves; comment on each other's work and get feedback from other audiences as well such as the general public who may be interested in language

learning. Moreover, students had a positive attitude toward using blogs as shown by the questionnaire perhaps because of the novelty of the medium and because creating blogs and keeping them give students a sense of motivation and made them involved in writing.

The researchers of this study value the "collaboration and interaction among students" that can be brought about by blog writing. They believe in the socio-cultural theory of learning based on Vygotsky's (1997) ideas of interaction as a means for learning. When students interact and collaborate with each other while blog writing, they scaffold each other in which the weaker students learn from the more proficient ones.

Vurdien (2012) reported on enhancing writing skills through blogs. She aimed to discover: (a) how learners can enhance their writing skills in specific tasks (b) how learners can provide each other with feedback (c) how learners can develop collaborative skills, of course using blogs. The participants were EFL learners in a language school in Spain preparing for the Cambridge Certificate in Advanced English. All participants created their own blogs and were given specific writing tasks such as letter, report, article and essay every two weeks and they were 11 participants. This project lasted for five months.

The overall attitude of the students towards the study was positive. Eight students reported they benefited from the project and stated that they became motivated. Seven students explained that exchanging viewpoints helped them and that posting on their blogs improved their writing. Moreover, students appreciated feedback from colleagues and found it helpful. In sum, Vurdien's (2012) study found that the use of blogs helped the participants improve their writing skills via peer feedback and motivation. Blogs also gave the participants a chance of interacting with each other and sharing information outside the classroom.

The researchers of the present study see a potential for blogs to "motivate" the students to write. They subscribe to Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis which posited that more motivation and less anxiety will help the language input to pass through the filter thus activating the Language Acquisition Device (LAD). In other words, if we offer our students a means to motivate them and make them less anxious such as the blog; they will

write, learn and improve their English eventually.

Wang, Wu, Chiu, and Wu (2011) performed a study on two classes of Taiwanese freshmen in a mid-southern Taiwanese university of science and technology. The study addressed the use of a university (e-campus) blog for paragraph writing in grammar courses. The research question was:

How did the university freshmen respond to the paragraph writing assignment on the university e-campus blog in English Grammar courses?

The participants in this study were 119 Taiwanese students; 19 males and 100 females in two freshman classes enrolled for two grammar courses I and II. They were all applied foreign language freshmen. They were asked to write paragraphs on the university e-campus blog. Data collection procedures included a six-point scale questionnaire and reflection papers. Results showed that the majority of students (98-100%) had positive views of using blogs in paragraph writing and stated this use enhanced their learning about the different sentence patterns they studied in the grammar I and II courses.

Nepomuceno (2011) reported on the use of blogs in the ESL tertiary classes. He carried out a blog project in an academic writing class. Participants were 36 students; 6 males, 30 females. They were sophomore students in different majors including English, Literature and General science in the Far Eastern University in the Philippines. Their mean age was 18. A blogger profile survey was implemented before the project. Participants were required to upload blogs once a week and comment on each other's blogs. The blogging project lasted for 12 weeks. The participants wrote about personal experiences, love, relationships, friendships, interests and hobbies such as dancing, acting and singing.

A post-project survey was carried out to delineate the participants' views on the blogging project. They had very positive perceptions of the blogging project. They reported the benefits of blogging as:

- Having more time to practice writing
- Spending time wisely on the Internet
- Writing under less pressure
- Making new friends via blogging

Finally, 83% of the participants responded positively to a proposition of substituting traditional writing classes with online writing classes. Their specific reasons



were that the online writing classes were more convenient as they had the ability to connect to a wider audience and their technological features such as hypermedia, links to other websites and blogs that were not present in traditional writing classes.

The present study researchers believe that what the participants of Nepomuceno's (2011) study reported especially "writing under less pressure" attests to the fact that social media generally and blogs in particular are places where students normally feel at home and relaxed and so they can write more while being away from pressure such as timed writing in class or under standardized tests conditions.

2.4 Limitations of Using Blogs in ESL Writing

Lin, Groom and Lin (2013) reported in their primary study that some drawbacks occurred when blogs were introduced in the ESL writing class, namely "difficulty and time-consumption" and "anxiety about unsympathetic remarks on mistakes and errors". The participants were 25 first-year applied foreign language students in a university in central Taiwan. They agreed to do a Blog-assisted Language Learning (BALL) in their writing course to practice the narrative, compare-contrast and argumentative essays. The course lasted for a full academic year; almost 36 weeks in a computer lab on campus and the participants had to post at least 17 assignment entries in their blogs and comment on each other's blog entries too.

The data was collected via in-depth interviews with eight students. Interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese because of the low-proficiency level of the participants who were in elementary and intermediate levels. The research questions were:

What do the participants think about learning by using blogs?

And how do the participants describe their learning attitude and motivation when learning writing through using blogs?

How do the participants evaluate the effectiveness of the blogging activities used in these writing lessons?

And Are the participants willing to attend more lessons supported with BALL like this? Why? /Why not?

Results showed that students perceived blogging in English as difficult and time-consuming probably because of their low-proficiency level in English. They were also anxious and worried about unsympathetic

classmates' remarks about their mistakes and errors in writing.

Lin et al (2013) offered some suggestions to fix such negative results. First, blogs should be used with high-proficiency level students who can write more in English. Second, the teacher of the class should encourage students to focus on *fluency* first and *accuracy* will come eventually. Third, the teacher should strive to establish *rapport* with and among students so that all students should participate and write without fear of cynical comments on their mistakes or errors.

The present study researchers concur with Lin et al (2013) in that the class teacher should do all he/she can to establish and maintain rapport with and among students so that each student feels at home to express his/her ideas, participate and write without being worried about any negative comments from anyone. Moreover, if blogs are used outside class, they are expected to motivate shy students to express their views which they may not be comfortable expressing face-to-face.

Wu and Wu (2011) reported some negative views of some participants in their study about blogging and ESL writing. About 37% of participants didn't feel that their English writing was improved after 4 weeks of blogging. One of the students said:

"If I have already had difficulty in English writing, I would have the same difficulty even though I write through computers".

Furthermore, 10% of the participants, two students, believed that blogs were difficult to use because they were complicated and hard to explore one participant said: "It's difficult to read articles through the computer. It's tired [sic] for my eyes".

Nepomuceno (2011) reported on some problems with blogs in ESL writing. The participants in his blogging project stated that:

- Blogs didn't really help with writer's block or the lack of ideas to write.
- Some bloggers posted "derogatory" comments.
- Bloggers were distracted by online gaming and other applications online.
- Participants who didn't own personal computers or Internet access had to pay money to post their blog entries.

The present study researchers subscribe to the view that in some cases, social media such as blogs, Facebook and

twitter, because of their relaxed atmosphere and motivation may lead some to use impolite language or may discuss issues of sexual nature. In such case, the teacher can fix this situation by involving the students in deciding on a code of conduct that should be followed while blog writing for the sake of not offending anyone.

With this background, the study attempted to answer the following research question-

What are ELI Saudi students' perceptions of the use of blogs in ESL writing?

3. Methodology

3.1 Setting & Participants

The researchers used an intact class of convenience at the English Language Institute (ELI) in Jubail, Saudi Arabia. There were thirty students in that class, twenty of which agreed to participate in this study. They were enrolled in an integrated skills course called *English Unlimited Special Edition A2*, of which ESL writing is a major component. There were four levels in these General English integrated skills by Cambridge courses; *A1, A2, B1 and B1+*. These levels correspond to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) starter, elementary, lower-intermediate and intermediate. So, their level was elementary according to the CEFR. There was a Cambridge entrance test that placed them in these four different proficiency levels. All the participants were Saudi. Their ages ranged from 18-20. They were all in the preparatory year at the ELI where they get 25 hours of English instruction per week. Upon successful completion of the preparatory year, they continue their studies in different engineering majors such as mechanical, electrical and chemical for the associate and the bachelor's levels. This *Cambridge English Unlimited Special Edition A2* course started Sunday November 13, 2016 and ended Thursday January 12, 2017. It lasted for eight weeks. Class met every day from Sunday to Thursday from 12 pm to 3 pm. This made 15 hours of English weekly instruction; another 10 hours of English weekly instruction were offered in other courses such as vocabulary, grammar and reading. ELI adopted the *Quarter System* of instruction where students study one given level such as A1, A2, B1 and B1+ for eight weeks then they sit for the quarter final exams and get one week off before starting a new quarter. The academic year then has two semesters; each semester has two quarters. Over one academic year, students complete the four levels of English

assuming they started at level A1 which is for beginner.

The researchers aimed to gain in-depth information from the participants to attempt to answer the research question. They needed to explore what the participants' perspectives, ideas, views and what they think are concerning the use of blogs as an additional out-of-class ESL writing activity. As such, the twenty students who agreed to participate in this study in this class were enough since the aim was to gain rich information to answer the research question not to generalize the findings to any intended larger population (Glesne, 2016; Perry, 2011).

3.2 Instruments

3.2.1 Task

The researchers met with the participants on Sunday November 13, 2016. All twenty participants were familiar with blogs and have already used them for personal writing. Therefore, no training session was needed to familiarize them with how to post writings on blogs. The researchers explained the task to the participants. They were required to write a weekly paragraph via a blog individually and collaboratively for eight weeks until Thursday January 12, 2017. Each student wrote his own paragraph before they were encouraged to collaborative discuss ideas, exchange relevant expressions and structures before and while blog writing via smart phones or face-to-face outside class. The researchers created a class blog available at: <http://klayali.blogspot.com/> for the participants to use for this task. They also posted a sample paragraph for the students to know exactly what was expected of them to write. For the writing prompt, please refer to Appendix A.

The rationale for this task was to encourage the students to experience free personal ESL writing via blogs as an additional out-of-class weekly activity so they may establish a habit of writing and develop an awareness of using blogs for ESL writing over a period of two months. This was very important as they were later asked about their perspectives of using blogs as an additional out-of-class ESL writing activity. Furthermore, it was communicated to the participants not to worry about grammatical mistakes and errors as blog writing is a fluency rather than accuracy activity. Moreover, they were required to write both individually and collaboratively online in pairs or small groups, as explained above, so that the more proficient students



may scaffold the weaker ones. This collaboration would make writing via blogs even easier and more interesting.

3.3 Data Collection Procedures

3.3.1 Questionnaire

The researchers administered the questionnaire in class on Thursday January 5, 2017. The questionnaire included 20 statements and questions for the participants to comment on and answer. The statements and questions were written in English and in Arabic, the participants' native language. This practice is acceptable and has been employed in other studies especially when seeking the participants' perspectives and views because some of them may find it difficult to thoroughly express their views in English. As previously stated, this study was conducted in Saudi Arabia where English is a foreign not a second language. Finally, the participants of this study were at CEFR level A2 which is an elementary level of proficiency. Since this was the case, it was recommended to offer these participants the option of using their native language if they felt they could not express their ideas very well in English. For the questionnaire statements, please refer to Appendix B.

Since the study was a qualitative one, a questionnaire was used to obtain verbal data from the ELI students on their views of using blogs as out-of-class writing activities (Glesne, 2016). Furthermore, the researchers sought to get demographic data on the participants such as their age, nationality, prior use and familiarity with blogs, etc.

3.3.2 Semi-Structured Group Interview

The researchers met the participants in class on Thursday January 12, 2017 and administered a group semi-structured interview to gain insight into the participants' perspectives of using blogs as an additional out-of-class ESL writing activity.

The interview was audio-recorded for future reference and more accurate data analysis procedures (Glesne, 2016). For the semi-structure interview statements, please refer to Appendix C.

The semi-structured interview had the advantages of both the highly-structured and the open-structured interviews (Perry, 2011). Some statements of the questionnaire were used again with the participants to further explain perspectives in cases of contradictory or unclear answers. An open-ended prompt was also used so that participants can add anything they think is useful to add.

Furthermore, because of time constraints, the participants did not have much time for individual interviews near the end of the quarter and the final exams. The researchers and participants agreed to hold one group interview during the class time on Thursday January 12, 2017.

3.4 Data Analysis

Since the data from both the questionnaire and interview answers were verbal data, Maykut and Morehouse's (1994) constant comparative method for analyzing qualitative data was used. The students' questionnaire answers and the transcribed interview were read thoroughly many times and then coded into codes/themes according to their content and listed under two broad categories: (a) advantages of blogs in ESL writing and (b) disadvantages of blogs in ESL writing.

The researchers adopted a transcription method called "denaturalized transcription" (Oliver, Serovich & Mason, 2005). This method allowed for skipping parts of the students' answers that were irrelevant to the questions such off-topic answers or non-linguistic features such as coughs. Moreover, the transcription was done manually after carefully listening to the audio recording of the interview. Also, the parts provided in Arabic (i.e., the students' native language) were translated in English. The transcription was reviewed by experts in the field (i.e., professors of TESOL with the ELI).

The questionnaire had questions they were 20. The first 10 questions were seeking demographic data about the participants. For example, the first question sought for names which was optional to answer. The second question asked about age, the third one asked about gender and the fourth question asked about the city where you reside. Please refer to Appendix B for the whole questions of the questionnaire.

The twenty participants of this study were all Saudi males; aged 18-20 and they come from different cities in Saudi Arabia. If they are not from Jubail city where the ELI is located, they were offered residence at the campus dormitories. They were all familiar with blogs and some students had their own blogs. They used to write their blog entries in Arabic, their native language, and some students used both Arabic and English. They wrote via blogs at least once per week.

Table 2: Random sample of 10 students' answers to 10 questionnaire questions

Questionnaire question	Student no.	Actual quote	Translation in English (if quote was provided in Arabic)
11- Do blogs motivate you to write? Why/ why not?	Student 1	نعم لأنها تساعدني على حفظ الكلمات اللغة الإنجليزية	Yes they motivate me as they help me memorize English words
12-Do blogs make you collaborate and interact with your colleagues? How?	Student 2	نعم عندما أقرأ مدونات زملائي أخذ أفكار من مدوناتهم	Yes when I read my colleagues' blog entries I learn from their opinions
13-Do blogs help you express your views and ideas freely? How?	Student 3		Yes because I can use bictinary [sic] and more time for thinking.
14-Are blogs user-friendly for you to write (i.e. easy to use)? How?	Student 4	نعم اذا تجيد استعمال الحاسب سوف تجد المدونات سهلة	Yes if you know how to use the computer, you'll find using blogs easy.
15-Are blogs effective for writing (i.e. makes writing easier)? How?	Student 5	نعم لأنه لا يوجد وقت معين لتسليم ويوجد انترنت	Yes because there is no time restriction and you are online (He means you can avail yourself of the resources online)
16- Do you like using blogs outside the classroom? Why/ Why not?	Student 6	نعم لأنها أسهل ويساعدك لتكوين أفكارك والبحث عن معلومات أكثر ولا يوجد وقت محدد	Yes because blogs are easier to use outside for searching for more info and forming your ideas and there is no time limit
17-Do you think blog writing is difficult and consumes time? Why/ why not?	Student 7	لا لأنها سهلة جدا ولا تستغرق من الوقت	No blogs are very easy and don't take time.
18-Do bloggers (i.e., blog writers) sometimes use derogative and impolite language? How?	Student 8	نعم أحيانا عندما يفقدون تركيزهم...وإذا كان متنرفز أو غاضب سيستخدم لغة غير مهذبه	Yes sometimes if they lose concentration, and if they are nervous or angry, they will use impolite language
19-Do you sometimes feel afraid of mean comments by colleagues and other readers of blogs? Explain.	Student 9	لا لدى ثقة بالنفس	No I have self confidence
20-Do you prefer traditional ESL writing classes without an online blog component? Why/ why not?	Student 10		No I think if you have to write in class is uncomfortable because you don't have time. I prefer writing in blog as I said that's make (sic) you feel very comfortable.

These participants' quotations say the whole story. Student 1 spoke of *motivation*, he felt motivated when he used blogs as they helped him memorize more English words. This was corroborated by other studies' findings. For example, Vurdien (2012) found that the use of blogs motivated her participants to write and eventually they improved their writing skills. The participants were EFL adult learners in a language center in Spain.

Moreover, student 2 liked blogs as he interacted with his colleagues and learned from the opinions they wrote. Such *collaboration* was also found in other primary studies. For instance, Kitchakarn (2012) reported that blogs created an authentic learning experience for students and fostered their collaboration in ESL writing. She conducted her study on university students in Bangkok, Thailand.

Student 6 liked blogs because he found writing outside class was easier and he could search for more information online and form his ideas while not being under the pressure of time restriction. This is one of the advantages of blog writing; it does not require you to write in a certain place such as the classroom. With a tablet or smart phone and Internet connection, one can virtually write anywhere; on the beach, at home or in one's preferred café. Wang et al (2011) reported that blogs give students a chance to communicate beyond the classroom.

Moreover, student 8 liked blog writing but he reported one disadvantage of using blogs for ESL writing which is the use of derogatory and impolite language

sometimes by some blog writers, bloggers, when they are nervous or angry.

This last disadvantage, use of derogatory language, was reported by Nepomuceno (2011) in his primary study. His participants were university students in the Philippines. The results showed that some students posted "derogatory" comments in the blogs.

Netiquette, which means Internet Etiquette while being online, should be shared between ESL teachers and students where students agree to keep their language clean and not to use any derogatory language. Whenever someone flames you, ignore him/her or reply saying you do not use that kind of language.

In the group semi-structured interview: they reiterated their positive views of using blogs as additional out-of-class ESL writing activities. In the open-ended prompt, which is Frankly state your perspective of the use of blogs as online out-of-class writing activities, they replied that blogs motivated them to write and made them collaborate with their peers and that blog writing outside class was easier than writing in class as they weren't pressured by time restrictions and they could use online resources such as Google Translate, writing websites, sample written essays and paragraphs and spell check. They further added that in their future writing classes, they would prefer to have an outside class blog writing component rather than having a traditional writing class without a blog component.

The following table contains some of their actual quotes during the interview and their translations were they originally delivered in Arabic:

Table 3: Random sample of 10 ELI students' quotes during the interview and their translations



Student no.	Quote in Arabic	Translation in English
Student 11	أفضل محاضرات الكتابة التي تحتوي على مدونات لأن استخدام التكنولوجيا أفضل من الطرق التقليدية	I prefer writing classes that include blogs because using technology (in education) is better than traditional methods
Student 12		In English classes, you can use projector and online this is perfect but I feel in Calculus or Algebra or Maths, you can use (that is it is better to use) the old methods.
Student 13		I prefer writing on the blogs but I want to write by my hand for improving my handwriting shape.
Student 14	أفضل كتابة المدونات بسبب تزايد التفاعل لكن الكتابة التقليدية تكون أفضل لبعض الطلاب	I prefer writing on blogs because it creates more interaction but the traditional writing (without blogs) may be better for some other students
Student 15	كتابة المدونات طبعاً تحفزني أكثر للكتابة ويكون عندي وقت مفرح	Blog writing, of course, motivates me more to write and I have no time restrictions.
Student 16	الكتابة عن طريق التقنية أسهل بكثير من الكتابة التقليدية	Writing via technology (such as blogs) is way easier than traditional writing (with paper and pencil).
Student 17	الكتابة عن طريق المدونات أسهل لكن أول مرة تكون معقدة شوية حشان عمل إيميل بس بديك تستعين بصديق يساعذك أول مرة	Writing on blogs is easier but it is only a bit complicated the first time as you need to set up your own email (to log into the blog). However, you can seek help from a friend only in the first time.
Student 18	بديك تقرأ كتابات زملائك على المدونات وهذا يساعذك على إيجاد الأفكار للكتابة	You can read your colleagues' writings on the blogs and this helps you finding ideas for writing.
Student 19	الكتابة على المدونات أفضل من الكتابة باليد وبديك تكتب في أي مكان وفي أي وقت مثلاً ممكن تكتب بجوالك قبلما تنام بخمس دقائق	Writing on blogs is better than handwriting and you can write anywhere and anytime; for example, you can use your cell phone to write five minutes before you sleep.
Student 20	الكتابة على صفحة المدونة تمكنك من استخدام أشياء مثل مسح وإضافة وتعديل ونص ولصق وإطارات وغيرها مما يجعل الكتابة أسهل	Writing on a blog page enables you to use features such as delete, add, modify, copy, paste and frames etc. that make writing easier.

The previous 10 interview quotes of the ELI students further supported the use of blogs as additional online out-of-class writing activities. For example, student 11 explained he preferred the blogs as he thought using technology was better than traditional methods of writing. Student 12 believed using the projector and blogs suited English writing whereas it did not suit Calculus, Algebra and Maths (in his view). He meant to say that in English writing one can use the Internet resources such as Google translate, writing websites and online labs to help with writing but he thought the scientific concepts in Calculus, Algebra and Maths are better explained using the white board.

Moreover, student 13 preferred writing via blogs but he sometimes liked to write by hand to improve the shape of his handwriting. Student 14 liked the blog writing as it enabled interaction with his colleagues but he also said that for some other students, they preferred traditional writing (such as with paper and pencil). Student 15 stated blog writing motivated him and did not impose time restrictions on him; in other words, he could take his time without pressure to finish his blog writing.

Furthermore, student 16 said that writing using technology was way easier for him than traditional writing. He meant writing online via blogs made writing easier for him probably for its convenience. Student 17 had the same view but added that blog writing was complicated only the first time as he had to set up an email account (to

be able to log into the blog and post his entry) but he said one can ask for a friend's help the first time only.

Student 18 added one can read his colleagues' entries on the blogs first to help him find ideas for writing. Student 19 expressed his view that blog writing is better than handwriting and that one can write anytime anywhere such as writing using his cell phone a short time before sleeping. He meant it is a very convenient pressure-free option for writing compared to timed writing in class for instance. Finally, student 20 expressed his idea that writing on a blog page made writing easy as he could use the available features such as add, delete, copy, paste and so on.

The Coding Process:

The data collected was verbal data. Thus, the researchers had to peruse all the students' answers to the questionnaire questions and the interview transcripts. Then, the researchers had to specify certain wordings that could readily be interpreted in certain ways according to their meaning (Perry, 2011).

For example, since the researchers were examining the students' perceptions of the use of blogs in ESL writing, they specified certain words such as *collaboration, interaction, help, excellent, effective, and motivating* that reflect advantages of blogs in ESL writing and certain words such as *impolite language* that reflect disadvantages of blogs in ESL writing.

Two broad categories were emerged: (a) advantages of blogs in ESL writing and (b) disadvantages of blogs in ESL writing. Upon sharing the questionnaire answers and individual interviews' transcripts with professors of TESOL at the ELI and reviewing them several times, certain codes emerged. They were found in the students' answers of the questionnaire and the interview transcript (Table 4).

Table 4: Categories and Codes of ELI Saudi Students' Perspectives of Blogs in ESL Writing

ELI Saudi Students' Perspectives of Blogs in ESL Writing outside Classroom	
Advantages of blogs in ESL writing category	Disadvantages of blogs in ESL writing category
1. Motivation	1. Use of impolite language by some blog writers
2. Collaboration among students	
3. Helping students express their ideas freely	
4. Being user-friendly	

3.5 Findings

The participants of this study had positive views of using blogs as additional out-of-class ESL writing activities. They all answered "Yes" to question #11 of the questionnaire, which was: Do blogs motivate you to write? Why/why not? They also answered "Yes" to question #12 which was: Do blogs make you collaborate and interact with your colleagues? How? Moreover, they answered "Yes" to question #13 which was: Do blogs help you express your views and ideas freely? How? They further answered "Yes" to question #14 which was: Are blogs user-friendly for you to write (i.e. easy to use)? How? They also answered "Yes" to question #15 which was: Are blogs effective for writing (i.e. makes writing easier)? How? They answered "Yes" to question #16 which was: Do you like using blogs outside the classroom? Why/Why not?

Moreover, they didn't see that blog ESL writing was difficult or consumed time; all answered "No" to question #17 which asked: Do you think blog writing is difficult and consumes time? Why/ why not?

However, they were also aware of one minor limitation of blog ESL writing that is "derogatory language sometimes used". Six students answered "Yes" to question #18 which asked: Do bloggers, blog writers, sometimes use derogative and impolite language? How?

Thus, the participants shared their perceptions of blogs as (1) "motivating", (2) "enhancing collaboration and interaction among students," (3) "helping students express their views and ideas freely" and (4) "user-friendly and easy to use." On the other hand, they perceived of one disadvantage of using blogs in ESL writing which was "impolite language sometimes used by some blog writers". This implies that Netiquette (i.e., Internet Etiquette) should be shared and established to overcome the problem of sometimes using "derogatory and inappropriate language" (Nepomuceno, 2011).

4. Discussion

4.1 Blogs and Richards' (2006) communicative theory of learning

The use of blogs in ESL writing outside class was in line with the communicative theory of learning and teaching. Richards (2006) contended that the overall goal of learning a second language (L2) was to communicate in the target language in authentic situations outside the classroom.

As per the present study, blogs could offer the ELI Saudi students the opportunity to write and communicate in English outside the classroom; which rarely happens in Saudi Arabia where English is a foreign language. Introducing blog writing as an additional activity, gave the ELI students this unique chance of using the target language out of class which eventually contributed to the betterment of their English.

Moreover, Kitchakarn (2012) reported in her study that blogs provided the ESL writing students with authentic learning experiences. Wang, et al. (2011) stated that blogs gave students a chance to communicate beyond the classroom.

Furthermore, the somewhat informal nature of blogs provided students with opportunities to write and communicate under less pressure (Nepomuceno, 2011). Again, blogs encouraged fluency and as such students were less worried about making errors and mistakes. Eventually, as students write more and read their peers' posts in different blogs, their accuracy improved.

4.2 Blogs and Vygotsky's (1997) Socio-cultural Theory

The present study researchers found that the use of blogs in ESL writing also worked with the socio-cultural theory. Socio-culturalists based their theory on Vygotsky's (1997) ideas that *interaction* and *collaboration* are the key factors to learning. In the context of interaction and collaboration, the skilled-person will scaffold (i.e., guide and help) the novice who will eventually learn.

The results of this study showed that the ELI Saudi students interacted and collaborated with each other while they were blog writing outside class using their smart phones or face-to-face to discuss ideas and exchange relevant expressions to the topics of writing. Such interaction and collaboration allowed the more proficient students to help the weaker ones.

Furthermore, Kitchakarn (2011) posited that most students who have been in an ESL writing course using blogs experienced improvement in their ESL writing ability by the end of the course as an outcome of interaction and collaboration among students.

4.3 Blogs and Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis

The present study researchers subscribe to the view that using blogs in ESL writing was congruent with Krashen's



Affective Filter Hypothesis. Krashen (1982) posited that if the learners were motivated and less anxious, the language input would pass through their affective filter and reach their Language Acquisition Device (LAD), thus allowing for language acquisition to take place. In other words, if the students are more motivated and less worried, they will grasp the language input and learn something about the target language at hand.

This study found that the ELI Saudi students were motivated by using blogs to write outside class. This motivation maybe because they were not asked to use blogs before to write their assignments outside class or maybe because of the nature of blogs in particular as part of social media where they normally feel comfortable using. This motivation made the ELI students write outside class via the blog and eventually learned something about the target language and about writing.

Moreover, Vurdien (2012) found that the use of blogs in ESL writing promoted students' motivation which in turn promoted the mutual feelings of the students in the same group (Wu & Wu, 2011). Most student participants had very positive attitudes towards using blogs in their ESL writing class (Kichakarn, 2012; Nepomuceno, 2011; Vurdien, 2012; Wang et al., 2011; Wu & Wu, 2011). Thus, using blogs lowered the students' affective filters and helped them learn about and improve their ESL writing.

5. Conclusion

This qualitative research study found that this particular class of Saudi students at the ELI was supportive of using blogs as additional out-of-class ESL writing activities. The study particularly found four benefits for using blogs in ESL writing: (1) motivation, (2) collaboration among students, (3) helping students express their views freely and (4) being user-friendly. These were in line with the results of many primary studies reported in the literature such as Vurdien (2012), Kichakarn (2012), Wu and Wu (2011) and Wang et al (2011). Furthermore, they were aware of the issue of "impolite language" that can sometimes happen in online writing environments such as blogs. This minor disadvantage was reported by Nepomuceno (2011). Establishing Netiquette (i.e., Internet etiquette) with students and sharing with them the tip of "behave/write respectfully online" you can help control this minor problem. Furthermore, the results of this study encourage the use of blogs as additional ESL out-of-class activities.

Furthermore, this study found that the use of blogs in ESL writing outside class created an authentic atmosphere for students to communicate, collaborate in English while being motivated and less worried which was recommended by well-respected theories such as Richards' (2006) Communicative theory for learning and teaching, Vygotsky's (1997) Socio-cultural theory and Krashen's (1982) Affective filter hypothesis respectively.

After implementing this qualitative study, it's highly recommended to conduct a quantitative study to be able to generalize the results to a larger population of Saudi university students (Glesne, 2016).

Furthermore, a replication of the present study should be carried out in the female section of universities in Saudi Arabia. Owing to the nature of tertiary education in Saudi Arabia, no co-education is allowed in public universities. Thus, further studies need to address the Saudi university female students to find out if they hold similar views to their male counterparts in relation to the use of blogs in ESL writing outside class. If the majority of the Saudi ESL learners approve of using blogs, then, these blogs should be incorporated as additional out-of-class activities in the ESL curriculum at Saudi universities and colleges.

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Appendix A: Blog free personal writing prompt

Write an entry of at least 200 words individually and/or collaboratively on one of the following topics (write on Only one topic per week):

Your plans for the next weekend.
Your dream job after graduation.
Your travels to another country that you liked.
What you would do if you became a millionaire.
What you would do if you became the owner of a big successful engineering company.
Your favorite hobby.
Your favorite meal.
Your favorite TV series.
Your favorite website or blog.
Your favorite car.
Your favorite city in your country.
Your favorite football (i.e., soccer) team.
Your neighbors.
The person you consider your higher example in life.
Your best friend from high school.
Your best teacher in high school.
Your family.
Take care of:
Voice: clearly express your ideas, opinions, feelings, views, etc about the topic.
Do not worry about grammatical errors; this is a fluency rather than an accuracy activity.

Appendix B: Post-blogging questionnaire/survey

بيانات ديموغرافية:

1-Name (optional): 1-الاسم (اختياري):

2-Age: 2-العمر:

3-Gender: 3-الجنس:

4-City where you reside: 4-المدينة التي تسكنها:

5-Nationality: 5-الجنسية:

6-Are you familiar with blogs? 6-هل المدونات مألوقة بالنسبة لك؟

7-Have you ever written a blog post or comment? 7-هل كتبت موضوعاً أو تعليقا في مدونه من قبل؟

8-Which language do you usually use when you write a blog post or comment? 8-أي لغة عادة ما تستخدم حين تكتب موضوعاً أو تعليقا في مدونه؟

9-Do you have your own blog? 9-هل لديك مدونه خاصه بك؟

10-How many times do you use a blog per week? 10-كم مره تستخدم المدونات كل اسبوع؟

اجب وعلق على الأسئلة التاليه:

11-Do blogs motivate you to write? Why/ why not? 11-هل تحفزك المدونات لان تكتب؟ لماذا/لماذا لا؟

12-Do blogs make you collaborate and interact with your colleagues? How? 12-هل تجعلك المدونات تتعاون وتفاعل أكثر مع زملائك؟ كيف؟

13-Do blogs help you express your views and ideas freely? How? 13-هل تساعدك المدونات في التعبير عن آرائك وأفكارك بحريه؟ كيف؟

14-Are blogs user-friendly for you to write (i.e. easy to use)? How? 14-هل المدونات سهله الإستعمال بالنسبة لك للكتابة؟ كيف؟

15-Are blogs effective for writing (i.e. makes writing easier)? How? 15-هل المدونات وسيله فعاله للكتابة (تجعل الكتابة اسهل)؟ كيف؟

16-Do you like using blogs outside the classroom? Why/ Why not? 16-هل تود استخدام المدونات للكتابة خارج الفصل الدراسي؟ لماذا/ لماذا لا؟

17-Do you think blog writing is difficult and consumes time? Why/ why not? 17-هل تعتقد ان الكتابة عن طريق المدونات صعبه وتستهلك الوقت؟ لماذا/ لماذا لا؟

18-Do bloggers (i.e., blog writers) sometimes use derogative and impolite language? How? 18-هل المدونون (كاتبوا المدونات) احيانا يستخدمون لغة اذرياليه وغير مهذبه؟ كيف؟

19-Do you sometimes feel a afraid of mean comments by colleagues and other readers of blogs? Explain. 19-هل تحذف احيانا من التعليقات السخيه (على كتبتك) من زملائك ومن قارئى المدونات؟ قدر أكثر.

20-Do you prefer traditional ESL writing classes without an online blog component? Why/ why not? 20-هل تفضل محاضرات الكتابة التقليديه التي لا تشمل مدونات على الانترنت؟ لماذا/ لماذا لا؟

Appendix C: Semi-structured interview مقابله

علق على الأسئلة الآتية:
Some items, taken from the post-blogging survey, that need further clarification, will be used again for students to comment on. سيتم استخدام بعض الأسئلة من الاستبانة التي تحتاج لتوضيح آراء الطلاب أكثر.

سؤال مفتوح:
Frankly state your perspective of the use of blogs as online out-of-class writing activities عبر بصفتك عن رأيك في استخدام المدونات كأداة للكتابة على الانترنت خارج الفصل الدراسي