The Improvement In English Writing Skills Of Students Through Blogging At Higher Secondary School Level

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Abstract

The present study seeks to identify the effectiveness of blogging in developing writing skills of Higher Secondary School Students. The English writing of the students was measured in terms of the organization and content of text. A true experimental design was used to measure the effects of blogging and pen-and-paper tools at a public sector Higher Secondary School for Boys. After pretest sixty eight students of 2nd year were randomly divided into two mix-ability groups blogging (n=34) and pen-and-paper (n=34). The students of both groups wrote 24 texts (essays, summaries, and character-sketches) from their course according to the schedule of the experiment during eight weeks treatment. The pre and post-tests were validated by a committee which constituted six experienced English language experts. After eight weeks treatment a similar-structured posttest was conducted to find out the difference. Two raters evaluated the students in both the tests according to the developed rubric with combative weight age to each aspect. The median score given by two raters was assigned to each participant. The salient difference of blogging group was peer review and peer feedback. Findings of the research showed that the effects of blogging were significant in terms of organization and content of text. Technology, internet, peer review, and peer feedback motivated the students to write with eagerness. They also liked innovative learning style in contrast with traditional old method of practicing and learning of writing. They found blogging interesting and motivating platform and enhanced their English writing performance through blogging as compared to traditional writing tools.

Keywords: English Writing, Writing performance, Blogging, Pen-and-paper, Higher Secondary School Students.

Introduction

English as a language has been regarded as the most used and widely distributed language across the world for many decades. English language is also called as "Lingua Franca" in the global village (Crystal, 2009). The grandness of English language has already been recognized and established by UNESCO, declaring English as one of the official languages of august institutions along with Russia, French, Arabic, Chinese and Spanish (UNESCO, 2015). Although in Pakistan comparatively English is used by influential segments of the government departments working at administrative posts in commerce, higher education, mass media, and military etc., yet it is still considered as the official language in Pakistan (Haim, 2014). English language is a foreign language in Pakistan. English is still being taught as a mandatory subject in schools and colleges throughout the country. The

effective and efficient use of English as foreign language requires mastery in four basic skills namely writing, reading, speaking and listening. Among these four basic skills writing is considered to be the more challenging one, even the native speakers' encountered problems due to its intricacies (Johnstone, 2002). However, this inefficiency in English writing stays with learners throughout their lives (Babkhel, 2015). English writing performance of the Pakistan learners are extremely substandard and weak. Traditional teaching methods and writing tools motivate the learners to rewrite the memorized material word by word to go through the examinations. Critical thinking and creative ability are not focused. Sultana & Zaki, (2015) state that there is a dire need to introduce innovative tools of English writing performance of the school students. Students must adopt latest learning pedagogy and language learning tools according to contemporary world. English writing skill is a cognitive process rather than natural capability (Harris, 1993), and it has required continuous practice, training and schooling on part of learners.

The demand of writing proficiency has increased due to globalization and proliferation (Akram & Malik, 2010). There has been rapid expansion of technologies, in the last decade and consequently, technologies of web 2.0, especially blogging both for teacher and learner with new celestial horizons in the field of language study. In this age of technology, globalization, revolution of connectivity and information, English writing has become crucial demand for any learner who wants to follow up the vast changes in this world of vistas of knowledge. However, learning and teaching English writing is not as easy for the students at intermediate level, especially at public sector institutions due to limited, resources, facilities and low academic level of students. Students mostly memorize subjective texts like character sketches, stories, answers, summaries, essays and, passages for purpose of passing examinations. Furthermore,

the conventional tools of writing and teaching pedagogies have no greater improvements in the results of English at intermediate level in Pakistan.

In the current research study, the researcher has tried to suggest a solution that teachers at intermediate level in public sector institutions may implement as part of their teaching techniques to develop English writing performance of the students. Since blogging is a proposed technique, which may improve creative thinking in writing performance of the students, the researcher decided to inquire the effectiveness of adopting blogging on developing writing performance of the students. After previous literature review the researcher concluded that there are various research studies available to verify the potential use of blogging in improving second language learning and particularly writing skills of the learners. However, a tool of writing, blogging is unexplored in Pakistan to date, for learning English as second language context.

In this scenario the researcher felt intense need to conduct this research study. English writing skills can be learnt in two ways, using updated technology tools and traditional writing tools. Blogging is one of the latest technology tools. The English writing skill is very important for students in Pakistan. In this study, the researcher proposed a solution for subject specialists in English and lecturers of English in Pakistan to implement blogging as part of their teaching techniques. The present research therefore was experimented to measure the effects of blogging on English writing skills of Higher Secondary School students in Pakistan by engaging them in blogging for the purpose of English writing performance.

Statement of the Problem

Higher secondary school students face various difficulties in English writing. It is believed that blogging offers writing incentives for English learning and writing on the grounds that it puts the

emphasis on content, quick multiple feedback, the choice of working with both words and pictures. Thus, with this study it was aimed to find out if blogging has a potential to enhance students' writing skills.

Objectives of the Study

The following objectives have been set to guide the present study:

1. To assess the content and organization in English writing of Higher Secondary School students.

2. To compare the content in text of pen-and-paper and blogging groups.

3. To compare the organization in text of pen-and-paper and blogging groups.

Hypotheses

Following hypotheses were made for achieving the objectives.

H_{01}: There is no significant difference between the content of the text in blogging and pen and paper groups.

H_{02}: There is no significant difference between the organization of text in blogging and pen-and paper groups.

Review of Literature

Writing is a tool of communication. Wu and Ru-Chu Shih (2010) stated that writing creative text is an exercise of life integration into language or words. The writer uses language, depth and originality to make text meaningful. This enriches his/her life and vitalizes the use of language. Writing a text or composition is combination of the four language skills i.e., speaking, listening, writing, and reading, along with proficiency and competence in language. Due to complexity of writing it is difficult skill

for learners. Creativity consists of various genres such as poems, fictions, essays, dramas and novels etc. Lin, (2015) stated that all individuals have creative capabilities with a range of different forms. In present study creativity means essay writing, summary writing, and character-sketches. Through these writings learners can express their ideas, feelings, opinions, reactions etc., in their own style, considering the organization and content of writing. Nepomuceno (2011) stated that out of four language learning skills, writing is the most difficult one. Especially school learners are not much enthusiastic about writing skill, because it is basically a desk activity, where learners cannot stand up and move around as they do in other three skills of language learning. Soven (1999) further explains the views that most of the learners hate writing by the time when they join high school, as it gets more demanding for them. Kiran, (2010); Ahmed, (2004); Abbas, (2016); and Haider, (2012c) condemns faulty teaching method of college teachers as the sole reason of weaknesses in writing of secondary school students at school and college level. Different studies have been carried out around the globe and in Pakistan to teach listening, speaking, and reading skills by using mobile phones and other social media like face book and blogs (Cavus & Ibrahim, 2009; Baleghi & Oladrostam, 2010; Cheng, 2010; Power & Shestha, 2010; Sife, 2010; Dansieh, 2011; Aziz, 2013; Hayati, 2013; Yousaf & Ahmed, 2013; Waqar, 2014). Warsi, (2004) finds a wide gap between the practices of instructors and modern teaching methods in Pakistan.

There are different teaching approaches used in writing skill across the globe. These approaches include the product approach, the genre approach, the process genre approach and the process approach. The Process approach helps learners in different stages of writing in elaborating. As Graves (1994, p.80) states, here writer follows a simple design: he/she selects,

composes, and reads; teachers organize writing not like product but a process that requires thinking and giving meanings. It considers learners as writers and value is given to their work". Blogs focus on and stress on activities relating to writing skills which transform learners to active, creative and learn new ideas from one another (Tribble, 1996). Learners work in collaboration. This sharing of ideas in writing process encourages learners to write eagerly (Graves, 1998). The teacher is facilitator and enhances the writing abilities of students by giving them feedback. Mostly, this approach has three writing stages like before writing, planning, and editing. The researcher used this approach in current study for enhancing English writing performance of students through blogging.

A blog primarily is text but can also be the format of images, films, photos, music, or sound (Zhang, 2009). Kupelian (2001) stated that blog as an open educational resource has not only shifted the writing process, but it also increased students' involvement in writing process. Sun (2010) argues that learners are encouraged to write more and more through blogging. Stapleton (2010) states that there are number of advantages of blogging like creation of knowledge, enhancement of writing skills, construction of learning files, reduction of misspelling, and exchange of ideas between teachers and learners, and between students and students.

Only blogging is not sufficient for students' improvement in writing performance. Students' and peers' feedback on written texts is also necessary to help the students, and find out their gaps in writing. They improve their content, style and organization in writing. Wu's (2006), Zhang (1995), and Yang & Badger (2006) reveal similar findings; participants of the research declare that teacher feedback is most essential as compared to learners' feedback. Ware (2008) concluded in his study that language students are comfortable of their peer's individualized feedback on blog posts, with some who are also correcting grammar mistakes. However, there was little percentage of correction on transcripts. Findings indicate that learners only provide grammar correction unless they are given explicit directions (Ware, 2008). Hence, it was proved that feedback through blogging can improve students' writing performance.

Teaching of writing skill through blogs is grounded from the learning theory of collaboration (CLT) Johnson, (2004) this theory focuses on group and peer learning by different activities. Theory considers sharing as a primary linement of collaboration in successful environment. Blogging as a lineament of computer-mediated communication gives us a proper environment for the purpose of collaborative learning in which targeted language learners could share their ideas and feelings in cyberspace (Antoinette, Colombo & Lozotsev, 2008). The second theory which forms the base of use of blogging for English language learning is the theory of Socio-culture. The third theory which is the base of learning through blogs is computer mediated communication theory (CMC). According to Keller (2006) instructional activities strengthen the students' extrinsic as well as intrinsic motivation. In the present research, following to Keller's ARCS model the first part is "Attention" here the social media "blog" is used to attract the intermediate students for learning writing skill in English language. Learning of writing skills through blogging is in accordance with the Vygotsky theory of collaborative learning where students could improve their knowledge by sharing with teacher and peers.

Multiple research studies have identified the potential use of blogs in ESL language skills especially from students' perspectives. Study by Cambell, (2003) "Blog as an innovative source of the analysis of data", explored students' attitudes to blog on language learning skills through a survey questionnaire. He took 57 students from different grades in four groups. It was concluded that

maximum number of students told blogs to be good. Most of the students did not read posts of others or read just occasionally. They preferred class tasks to be completed. The participants who offered comments on students' posts were less. Most of the students did not use the links to other resources posted by researcher through blog posts. Majority of the students, despite of recognizing the efficiency of blogging, reported that they were unable to manage the blog's benefits.

Simsek (2009) in his study discovered the effects of blogs integration in the writing skills pedagogy of second language learning. He collected data from 74 graduate students by distributing questionnaires about the benefits of blogs. Findings of the study showed that participants found blogs significant for instruction of second language learning.

A study was conducted by Akinwamide, (2018) titled as "Class Blogs and their Effects on language Learning of Students at junior Level", He has recommended the use of blogging is quite appropriate for language classroom and suggested that it might be incorporated in school curricula for the purpose of better results of the students.

Kelley (2008), Bayrak & Kocak Usluel (2011) measured the effects of blogs on students' writing achievements, neither the writing skill nor the attitudes of the students towards writing changed who used technology or who did not used. These researches have not found any significant difference in blogging and traditional tools of writing. On the contrary, O' Conner (2011), Quintero (2008), Nepomuceno (2011), Blackstone, Spiriand Neganuma (2007), Fageeh (2011), Wu (2005), Guttler (2011) studies diclared blogging has significant difference in writing achievements and attitudes of students towards writing in a collaborative learning environment.

Originally blogs are not created for writing purpose but they have potential for the class of 2nd language learners in writing (Kavaliauskiene, Anusiene and Mazeikiene, 2006). Majority of studies in this area found that complete potentials of class blog is yet to be explored; a lot of research yet to be needed about how effectively class blog can be used in a witting class. Review of the related literature indicates that there are sufficient researches available to use the potential of blogging in improving second language writing performance. However, as described earlier, to date blogging is underexplored in context of 2nd language learning in Pakistan. The current research has therefore been experimented to estimate the feasibility of blogging in teaching English writing performance of Pakistani students by engaging them in blogging in their class.

Method and Procedure

Population and Sample

The population in this study was all the students enrolled in 2nd year at higher secondary school level in district Abbottabad. At the time of conduct of study there are total 1751 students studying in 22 higher secondary schools in the academic session 2021-22 (Source: BISE, District Education Officer Male Abbottabad). The researcher draw a sample of 68 students from 2nd year class at GHSS Bandi Dhundan, Abbottabad by simple random sampling technique, using fishbowl sampling method. After taking pretest, the researcher formed two mixed-ability equivalent groups experimental (Blogging n= 34) and control (Pen-and-paper n=34) on the basis of marks obtained in the pretest. Every care was taken to make sure that the students selected in groups are equal by checking their relevant record from the school office.

The Design of Study

Pre-test and Post-test Equivalent Control Group Design was used in this study adopted by Farooq and Tabassam (2017). The symbolic representation of the research design is given as under:

	Pre-test	Treatment	post-test
R	o_1	x	o_2
R	o_3		o_4

Validity and Reliability of the Tests

The instruments of present research namely pretest and posttests were validated by a committee of six experts from Senior SS in English and faculty professors in English from postgraduate colleges. The tests were piloted in the month of March, 2022 at thirty students of 2nd year who were not part of the study. Tests consist of essay, summary, and character-sketch writing from English part-II course. On the basis of two writing aspects, participants who were included in the pilot testing were evaluated according to the given scoring rubric. "Reliability Analysis" was done. The value of Cronbach's Alpha remained 0.868. There were only small changes which were rectified in the tests. After rectifying the suggested changes, the pre-test was administered.

Research Instrumentation

1. Researcher-made pretest was administered in order to equate the control and experimental groups and to assess the level of English writing skills of the students.
2. Immediately after the treatment a similar-structured posttest was administered for re-assessment of English writing performance.

Data Analysis

Table: 1   Pretest frequency of the control group in content and organization

Writing Tasks	Score	Content (f)	%	Organization (f)	%
Essay (2)	0	5	13.9	5	13.9
	1	26	72.2	26	72.2
	2	3	8.3	3	8.3
Summary (2)	0	3	8.3	5	13.9
	1	29	80.6	27	75.0
	2	2	5.6	2	5.6
Character (2)	0	8	22.2	10	27.8
	1	25	69.4	20	56.6
	2	1	2.8	4	11.1

Table 1 depicts the level of English writing performance of Higher Secondary School students with frequency and percent of the control group on pretest. The frequency and percentage show that

students of control group (n=34) were weak in essay, summary, and character-sketch writing skills in terms content and organization.

Table: 2 Pretest frequency of blogging group in content and organization

Writing Task	Score	Content (f)	%	Organization (f)	%
Essay (2)	0	8	22.2	5	13.9
	1	23	63.9	25	69.4
	2	3	8.3	4	11.1
Summary (2)	0	8	22.2	10	27.1
	1	24	67.7	19	52.2
	2	2	5.6	5	13.9
Character (2)	0	6	16.2	6	16.7
	1	26	72.2	28	77.8
	2	2	5.6	0	0

Table 2 shows the level of English writing performance of Higher Secondary School students with frequency and percent of blogging group on pretest. The frequency and percentage show that students of blogging group (n=34) were weak in essay, summary, and character-sketch writing skills in terms content and organization.

H_{01}: There is no significant difference between the content of the text in blogging and pen-and- paper groups.

Table: 3 Difference between the content of blogging and pen-and-paper groups on posttest

Task	Group	N	Mean	SD	t	Df	p.
	Pen-and-paper	34	3.793	0.845			
Essay	Blogging	34	4.680	0.806	-4.404	66	0.000
	Pen-and-paper	34	3.783	0.835			
Summary	Blogging	34	4.670	0.794	-4.396	66	0.000
	Pen-and-paper	34	3.773	0.825			
Character	Blogging	34	4.660	0.784	-4.386	66	0.000

Un-paired sample t-test in table 3 showed that the posttest content in essay, summary, and character writing of blogging group was statistically significant at 0.05 level. There was an improvement in the content of essay, summary, and character writings in the blogging group after undergoing the treatment. So, the 1st null hypothesis was rejected, because the treatment given to the blogging group in terms of content was effective.

$H_{02:}$ There is no significant difference between the organization of text in blogging and pen-and- paper groups.

Table: 4   Difference between the organization of blogging and pen-and-paper groups on posttest

Task	Group	N	Mean	SD	t	Df	p.
	Pen-and-paper	34	3.560	0.739			
Essay	Blogging	34	4.470	0.928	-4.050	66	0.000
	Pen-and-paper	34	3.540	0.712			
Summary	Blogging	34	4.672	0.911	-4.031	66	0.000
	Pen-and-paper	34	3.523	0.825			
Character	Blogging	34	4.602	0.784	-4.021	66	0.000

Table 4 showed that the posttest organization in essay, summary, and character writing of blogging group was statistically significant at 0.05 level. There was an improvement in the organization of essay, summary, and character writings in the blogging group after undergoing the treatment. So, the 2st null hypothesis was rejected, because the treatment given to the blogging group in terms of organization was effective.

Discussion

The aim of current research was to ascertain the effect of blogging on English writing content and organization of Higher Secondary School students. The affectivity of blogging and pen-and-paper was assessed by distributing pre and post-test prior to and after the treatment. The pretest of both groups (Table 1-2) concluded that both groups control and experimental were equally weak in content and organization in English writing performance on pretest.

$H_{01:}$ Statistical analysis of the result (Table.3) reflected that the blogging group performed better than pen-and-paper group in terms of content in essay, summary, and character writing after undergoing the treatment but as, p. value is less than alpha (p<0.05) therefore the 1st null hypothesis, "There is no significant difference between the content of the text in blogging and pen-and-paper groups" was rejected because the treatment given to the blogging group in terms of content was effective. This finding is in accordance with Kern and Warshaver (2000), Kitzmann(2003), Simsek (2009), Sun's (2010), and Hajar (2013) studies.

$H_{02:}$ Statistical analysis of the result (Table.3) reflected that the blogging group performed better than pen-and-paper group in terms of organization in essay, summary, and character writing after undergoing the treatment but as, p. value is less than alpha (p<0.05) therefore the 2nd null hypothesis, "There is no significant difference between the organization of text in blogging and pen-and-paper groups" was rejected because the treatment given to the blogging group in terms of organization was effective. This finding is in accordance with Kern and Warshaver (2000), Kitzmann(2003), Simsek (2009), Sun's (2010), and Hajar (2013) studies.

Conclusion

The results of current research showed that the effect of blogging was significant. Technology,

internet, peer review, and peer feedback motivated the students as compare to traditional old method of learning writing and practicing. They found blogging interesting and motivating platform and enhanced their English writing performance through blogging as compare to pen-and-paper.

Recommendations

1. English teachers should be given training about teaching of writing skills through blogging. Training may be provided about the potential use of blogs through refresher courses to the in-service teachers.

2. It is recommended that teachers need to conduct more than one training sessions with students so that they clearly understand the process of writing through blogging.

3. Teachers are recommended to monitor the process of writing through blogging and observe students' activities and behaviors. By doing so, teachers may understand their difficulties and can control negative influence of internet as well.

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