The Impact of Weblog on Omani Learners’ Writing Skills in the English Language

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to investigate the impact of utilizing weblog on facilitating teaching writing at Buraimi University College (BUC) and to explore the extent to which a blog as a computer-mediated tool enhances learners’ writing skills in English as a foreign language (EFL), English as a second language (ESL). Vygotsky’s model will be adopted in this study. Furthermore, a process approach is employed to involve students in writing. A mixed-method of qualitative and quantitative was embraced. Three instruments were used to answer the research questions of the study. The participants consisting of 60 students, were placed into two groups: 30 students for experimental group (Ex.G.) and 30 for the controlled group (Cont. G.). Also, 30 EFL teachers (15 males and 15 females) were selected randomly. Pre-and post-tests were assigned to both groups before and after incorporating weblog as a teaching tool. Questionnaires were distributed to (Ex. G) to check the effect of using a weblog on students’ writing quality. Interviews were also conducted with both teachers and students. The findings reveal that the students of weblog group significantly outperform their counterparts. This study concludes that integrating weblogs in teaching is of paramount importance to language learners and a promising tool in higher education.

KEYWORDS

Attitudes, Blogging, Motivation, Technology, Weblog

INTRODUCTION

Blogs are basically online journals where individuals can express their ideas and post entries. Proponents of educational blogging demonstrate computer-mediated tool as an effective instrument in education. Ferdig and Trammell (2004) assert that blogging increases learners’ interest and chances to participate in a rich learning community online. Since incorporating technology in education has been spreading out rapidly across the world, it can be a platform to enhance learner’s writing performance. Aydine (2014.b) sustains that online activities contribute as a pedagogical tool in learning writing. Face-to-face teaching creates boring lessons that affect learners’ writing quality. This study will check the feasibility of integrating weblog in BUC writing classrooms. Hashmi and Najafi (2011) ascertain that the majority of people have been using blogs in education since it paves the way to students to generate new ideas easily. Moreover, developing literature on blogging creates an effective teaching and long-life learning in education where blogging provides all learners with enough opportunities to practice writing independently (Godwin-Jones, 2008).

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Furthermore, previous studies state that “blogging has its potential to transform technology for learning and teaching” (Williams & Jacobs, 2004).

This paper examines the feasibility of integrating weblog in teaching writing skills. It also discusses challenges that bar technology integration into classrooms and examines the perspective of English teachers who sometimes fail to update their teaching techniques despite the availability of several technological devices in everyone’s hand such as Tablets, iPhones, and Smart-Phones, no matter where they are. To master writing, students have to achieve writing process through utilizing technology (Badger & White, 2000). Additionally, social media usage has effective influence on the different purposes it has been employed for. So, it can be integrated in education since devices are available in learners’ hands. Using diverse technologies affects people’s behaviour towards information system (Altyayr & Ibin Saud, 2015; Tarhini, Masa’deh & Abbasi, 2015).

Technological devices are adopted and sometimes rejected due to some influential factors related to culture and the nature of people’s daily life (Tarhini et al. 2015). Elsoudy Fouda (2016) indicates that e.portfolio promotes learners’ critical thinking, achievement and self-confidence as well. Previous studies demonstrate that integrating technology contribute to enhance students as they struggle in language skills due to the traditional-learning environment that includes teacher-centred instruction. AlKhoudary (2015.a) points out that the majority of Omani students still suffer from their poor writing. Interestingly, students can access to post assignments on weblog so as to get feedback and comments from both teachers and partners as well (Aydin, 2015.a; Warschauer & Liaw, 2011; Al-Fadda & AlYahya, 2010; Al-Fahad, 2009).

Weblog is considered a supporting tool that excites students to engage in writing to achieve satisfactory results since writing is hard to teach due to learners’ previous accumulated weakness. Hall and Davison (2007) maintain that peers’ comments create interactive and collaborative learning community online. This humble study attempts to unveil appropriate solutions to those who are interested in teaching. Furthermore, this study is expected to affect teachers’ and students’ attitude towards integrating technology in education to eliminate teacher-centeredness and shift to student-centeredness.

RATIONALE

Weblog is a controversial issue that can be utilized in the EFL/ESL classrooms. It also creates an interactive environment for students who are taking writing courses in BUC classrooms. A review of the related literature reveals that no study on blogs or podcasts using task-based writing activities has been conducted in Oman. Furthermore, although the pervasive of technological devices among people, traditional teachers are still available in BUC classrooms. Therefore, EFL teachers and curriculum designers in Oman work hard to find out solutions to reduce the authority of teachers as information providers. Besides, they try to incorporate technology in teaching to enhance the quality of education. Furthermore, using technology in the classroom constitutes a challenge for both teachers and learners (Ahluwalia, Gupta & Aggarwal., 2011; Gebhard, Shin & Seger., 2013; Leaning, 2010; Lee, 2009.a). Moreover, integrating such a platform stimulates learners’ creativity and critical thinking during writing process (Flower & Hayes, 1981).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study tries to explore the effect of employing weblog on writing quality, to find out the possibility of presenting the new system to EFL teachers and learners in Oman and to promote further research in the field of teaching writing via weblog. Thus, the objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To explore the relationship between theory and practice in teaching writing through using weblog;
2. To investigate the applicability of using weblog in writing classrooms;
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