

An Investigation into the Effect of Using Blogs as E-learning tool in EFL Writing Instruction in Saudi Context from the Perspective of sociocultural theory

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Abstract

Writing is a very important skill in language learning and communication with others. However, writing is considered a difficult skill because the way writing was taught in Saudi Arabia focused mostly on grammar and vocabulary and the classes were teacher-dominated; besides, lack of interaction, collaboration, and motivation between the students made the students' uppermost concern was only how to pass exams. This explains the reality of teaching EFL writing in Saudi Arabia that mainly depends only on transforming information to the students in a passive atmosphere and the traditional method lacks any form of interaction between the learners. Although effective learning should be carried out in a social process that depends on social interactions between students and their colleagues in addition to their teachers according to Vygotsky's Sociocultural theory. This theory argues that learning is a social process that occurs when people interact with each other. Additionally, social interaction institutes a state of interaction and collaboration between the learners enable them to obtain the required support that facilitates the learning process which is referred to as *scaffolding*. So, this theory can be underlined by the use of blogs in EFL writing classes, where it emphasises that learning occurs within social activities when a learner interacts with people, objects, and events. It is worth mentioning that the concepts of the Sociocultural theory can be activated by integrating online blogging technology in EFL writing classes that can help create an interactive/collaborative learning environment. Additionally, the blog allows the learners to discuss their ideas, negotiate, clarify their knowledge, and obtain feedback for refining their ideas online before posting their final work. Moreover, regular social interaction via the blog enhances collaborative learning skills among learners. This study seeks to know the value of using the blog as an innovative tool in EFL writing classrooms in the Saudi context from the perspective of sociocultural theory. It employed a mixed research methods design. The participants involved were a group of second-year majoring in the English language in one Saudi university. The study took three months of intervention in Saudi Arabia. The results indicated that the Saudi EFL learners showed positive attitudes towards their experience with blogging because of continuous social interaction and peer collaboration. Additionally, their linguistic and cognitive skills improved because of the *scaffolding* they receive from their teacher and proficient classmates that made them reach the *Zone of proximal development* of the perspective of sociocultural theory.

Keywords: EFL writing, Saudi learners, scaffolding, Zone of proximal development