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Using Social Media Activities to Enhance EFL Writing Skills of University Students

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to examine the impact of blogs and Facebook groups as effective technological tools for teaching EFL writing skills among university students. The research was conducted using a quasi-experimental design among Egyptian EFL college students at Higher Institute of Engineering & Technology Basic Science Department at AL Mahala in Gharbia Governorate to be the subjects of the research. In this design, subjects were randomly assigned to experimental and control groups. The experimental group was taught via social media activities, whereas the control group was taught in regular classroom settings. The research instruments were EFL writing tests (pre-post). The research findings were statistically examined. The results demonstrated that there were statistically significant differences between the pre-post instruments (EFL writing test) in favor of the post-test. According to the findings, the use of social media activities had a substantial impact on developing EFL students' writing skills. Finally, the research recommended incorporating social media activities to develop useful skills. It was also advised that further research should be performed about using social networking sites to teach EFL skills, listening and speaking.

Key words: EFL writing skills and social media activities

Introduction:

Today, knowing a language, especially English, is essential. Writing is crucial for language learners because it helps them to express themselves and think about their personal experiences. Students' ability to write well is essential to their academic performance. Language is essential for both personal and national communication. Technology facilitates learning English, including writing, and reinforces learners' confidence.

Theoretical background

Writing is described as "a reflective activity that requires sufficient time to consider the particular subject as well as to evaluate and arrange any prior knowledge." (Chakraverty, 2000). Then, in order to organize these concepts into a comprehensible discourse, writers need an appropriate language. Writing has been defined as "a social act that reflects the writer's

communicative skills, which are difficult to learn and develop, particularly in an EFL context" and is considered a complex activity (Shokrpour, 2007).

Writing is also the most challenging of the four language skills to acquire. Furthermore, effective writing does not come naturally; it requires special efforts on the part of the learner (Gangal, 2011). Writing is a difficult task for many students, and students of all ages struggle to become skilled writers.

The increased integration of technology has significantly contributed to the shift in teaching reading and writing in a second language. This type of integration in second language learning teaching shows a shift in educational models from a behavioral to a constructivist learning approach (Kasapouglu-Akyol, 2010).

With the rapid development of social websites, the Internet in the twenty-first century witnessed virtual changes. Researchers use a variety of terms to describe social website tools that support learning, including virtual learning environments (VLEs), blended learning classrooms, learning management systems (LMSs), web 2.0 technologies, or course management systems (CMS), and collaborative learning (Conradi, 2014, Ekmekcci, 2016). Social software is characterized by its ability to enhance information exchange, cooperation, and social interaction, as well as group or mass communication.

Based on the theoretical perspectives, the use of various types of social networking in language classes has a promising future. There are three types of social networks: those that encourage learners to engage in written or reading discourse (for example, Facebook, Blogs, LinkedIn, or Twitter); those that emphasize oral discourse (for example, PodOMatic, VoiceThread, or video messaging sites); and those that emphasize image sharing (e.g., Instagram, Pinterest, or SnapChat).

Online writing

Writing is thought to be a challenging skill to acquire for second language learners (L2), necessitating formal, and thorough writing instruction (Casanave, 2013).

The complexity of the writing process is well demonstrated by studies of skilled writers (McCutchen, 2011). To convey meaning through writing, Students need to properly address mechanics, organization, content, and structure (Lee & Lee, 2013). Numerous studies on online collaborative learning have been conducted as a result of the use of online learning tools. Online collaborative writing is expected to improve students' performance,

confidence, and problem-solving skills, according to several research (Jieun, 2021, Mahyoob, 2020, Farrah, 2020, Rezeki, 2017).

Meeting individuals from diverse backgrounds through critical thinking and problem-solving exercises allows students to actively engage in the learning process and enhance their problem-solving skills. Collaborative writing is heavily based on constructivist theory, which views students as knowledge providers (Farrah M., 2011).

Many researchers are interested in online collaborative writing because it includes both technology and collaboration into teaching and learning, thanks to recent technological advancements and the influence of sociocultural and interactionist theories. Researchers have lately investigated the benefits of online collaborative writing, including increased accuracy and fluency, social interaction, creativity, and confidence (Sarkhosh, 2020, Rezeki, 2017).

According to Butnaru (2021), when creating content for online courses, theoretical resources, a successful blend of pedagogy, and technology can assure effective and high-quality instruction. Furthermore, instructors must create assignments that demand collaboration and reflection using technology, as well as develop clear assessment and evaluation criteria.

It is claimed that offering writing-related tasks and activities online improves engagement, motivation, and language production. Then, to meet our students' needs in a way that best promotes the development of complex writing skills in the twenty-first century, the method writing is taught must be reconsidered and readdressed. Because of its potential collaborative nature, user-friendly interfaces, and popularity with students (visited outside the classroom), the two CMC environments chosen for this research are Group Facebook and blogs established on Blogger (www.blogger.com). As a result, teachers often use technology to overcome challenges.

Collaborative Online Learning Using Web 2.0 Technologies

Web 2.0 Tools are all web platforms that allow individuals to communicate and collaborate online (Kosalge, 2017). Google Docs, Zoho, Facebook, wikis, Edmodo, and blogs are some of the most commonly referenced Web 2.0 applications described as social collaborative learning platforms. (Klobas, 2006); (Teehan, 2010); (Woods, 2011).

The Internet in the twenty-first century witnessed virtual changes due to the rapid development of social websites. Researchers use a variety of terms to describe social website tools that support learning, including learning management systems (LMS), blended learning classrooms, virtual

learning environments (VLEs), course management systems (CMS), web 2.0 technologies, and collaborative learning (Conradi, 2014, Ekmekcci, 2016). Social software is distinguished by its ability to encourage social engagement, cooperation, and group communication.

Background of the problem

The problem with this research is that students from AL Mahala Higher Institute of Engineering and Technology's Basic Science Department have poor writing skills. This research aims to investigate the impact of Facebook groups and blogs as effective technological tools for teaching EFL writing skills among university students.

To determine the current level of EFL college students at AL Mahala higher Institute of Engineering and Technology in writing skills, pilot research was conducted. A writing skills test was developed by the researcher to assess students' writing skills. Table 1 shows the mean score of the writing skills.

Table 1 Students' Results in the EFL Writing Skills Test

Sub-Skills	Mean	Std	Percentage
Language Use	5.30	5.75	21.2
Vocabulary	3.95	3.60	19.75
Organization	3.85	3.92	19.25
Content	5.15	5.22	17.16
Mechanics	1.05	0.99	21
Total	19.03	19.48	19.3

Table1 reports that the students' overall mean score in the writing test was 19.3, with the lowest skill mean score being content (5.15) and the highest mean score being language use (5.30). These findings indicate that the students need help in improving their writing skills.

The problem statement

Based on the related studies and literature review, the researcher's experience as a teacher, and pilot study, the problem can be articulated in the fact that university students have difficulties in writing skills, including vocabulary, language use, organization, content, and mechanics. This study suggests using social media activities assisted language learning to enhance university students' writing skills.

The research questions

The researcher attempted to answer these questions as follows:

1. What writing skills are essential for university students?
2. How can social media activities-based language learning be used to enhance university students' writing?

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3. What is the effectiveness of using social media activities in enhancing university students' writing skills?

The research purposes

This research aims to

1. Identify essential writing skills for university students.
2. Determine how social media activities are used to enhance university students' writing skills.
3. Determine the influence of social media activities in enhancing university students' EFL writing skills.

The research Significance

This study is significant for the following reasons:

1. Fill the gap between social media activities and writing skills for EFL university students.
2. Explain the effectiveness of using social media activities on writing skills.
3. Using social media activities (Facebook groups and blogs) in the EFL teaching process may be a feasible strategy to improve EFL students' writing skills.
4. Providing a guidance for university lecturers on how to use social media activities assisted language learning to teach writing to university students.

Delimitations

The following is the scope of the current study:

1. A class of first-year college students.
2. Some EFL writing skills (vocabulary, language use, organization, content, and mechanics) are needed.
3. Some social media activities (Facebook group and weblogs) that will be implemented in this research.

Hypotheses

To answer the research questions, the researcher made the following hypotheses:

Using social media activities would enhance EFL university students' writing skills. This research poses the following hypotheses.

- **Ho1:** At the 0.05 level, there is a statistically significant difference between the mean score of the EFL writing skills post-test of the experimental group students and those of the control group, favoring the experimental group.

- **Ho2:** At the 0.05 level, there is a statistically significant difference between the experimental group's mean score before and after administering the EFL writing skills test.

Methodology

Participants

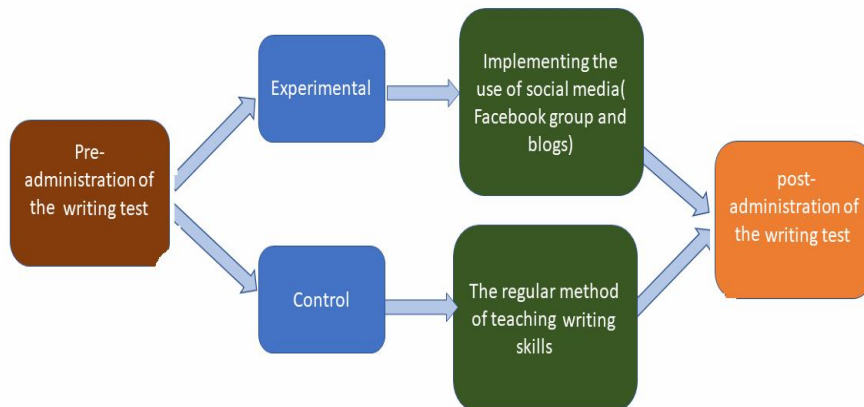
The study included 60 students divided into two groups: the control group (30 students) and the experimental group (30 students). The sample of the research was chosen randomly from AL Mahala higher Institute of Engineering and Technology Basic Science Department in Gharbia Governorate in the academic year 2023/2024.

Design

The research was conducted using a quasi-experimental design among Egyptian EFL college students at Higher Institute of Engineering & Technology Basic Science Department at AL Mahala in Gharbia Governorate. In this design, groups for experimental and control were distributed at random to participants. Social media activities were used to teach the experimental group, whereas traditional classroom instruction was used for the control group.

To evaluate their writing skills, a pre-post writing test was administered. Both groups took the two pre-post EFL writing assessments both before and after the intervention. Using the t-test for independent samples, the outcomes of the two pre-post EFL writing assessments were examined. The purpose of this was to see whether the mean score of the two groups differed significantly following the intervention. Figure (1) illustrates a quasi-experimental design of the research.

Figure 1 The Quasi-Experimental Design of Research



Instrument

The research instruments were designed as follows:

- Pre-post EFL writing tests to evaluate students' writing levels before and after intervention.

Definition of terms

Writing is described as "a reflective activity that necessitates enough time to consider the particular subject matter in addition to evaluating and classifying any prior knowledge." (Chakraverty, 2000).

This study's operational definition of "writing skill" is the learners' ability to use written words to express their own thoughts or opinions using writing skills, i.e., language use, vocabulary, organization, content, and mechanics.

Statistical analysis and results

Testing the research's first hypothesis

"The mean score of the EFL writing skills post-test of the experimental group students and those of the control group is statistically significant at the 0.05 level in favor of the experimental group," according to the first hypothesis.

To verify this hypothesis, a t-test was used to examine the relative extent of change caused by the intervention in the experimental group. The results of t-test were statistically compatible with the hypothesis given above, as in Table 2

Table 2. Comparing the writing performance of the experimental group on the writing pre- and post-test

Sub-Skills	The group	No. of cases	Mean	SD	Df	t.Value	Sig.
Language Use	Control	30	6.50	1.35	58	5.05	0.05
	Experimental	30	8.20	1.24			
Vocabulary	Control	30	6.40	1.42		5.68	
	Experimental	30	8.36	1.24			
Organization	Control	30	6.80	1.32		6.39	
	Experimental	30	8.76	1.04			
Content	Control	30	6.76	0.93		6.70	
	Experimental	30	8.56	1.13			
Mechanics	Control	30	6.40	1.16		6.72	
	Experimental	30	8.26	0.98			
Total	Control	30	32.73	5.09		7.71	
	Experimental	30	42.16	4.20			

Table 2 shows that there is a significant difference at 0.05 levels in the mean score of the experimental group students on the pre- and post-administration of the EFL writing skills test, in favor of the post-administration. Comparing the experimental group's EFL writing

performance in the pre- and post- test administration revealed that their writing performance was much better after the exam. Organization, content, and vocabulary improved ($m = 8.76$; $t = 6.39$ & $m = 8.56$; $t = 6.70$ & $m = 8.36$; $t = 5.68$, respectively). The experimental group's writing skills in "Mechanics" and "Language use" were less impressive with ($m = 8.26$ & $t = 6.72$; $m = 8.20$ & $t = 5.05$). Nonetheless, all values were statistically significant at the 0.05 level. These findings support those given for the first hypothesis.

Again, the findings of this research added up to the previous studies of (Bakeer, 2018), (Shahzadi, (2020), and (Purnama, 2024), whose studies indicated that the intervention significantly increased the students' writing skills.

Testing the research's second hypothesis

The experimental group's mean score before and after the EFL writing skills test was administered differed statistically significantly at the 0.05 level, supporting the post-test findings, according to the second hypothesis.

Table 3 Comparing the EFL writing performance of the experimental group on the writing pre- and post-test.

Sub-Skills	Practice	N. of cases	Means	SD	Df	t.Value	Sig.
Language Use	pre – test	30	6.86	1.43	29	-10.26	0.05
	post – test		8.20	1.24			
Vocabulary	pre – test		6.83	1.39		-10.82	
	post – test		8.36	1.24			
Organization	pre – test		7.20	1.54		-8.25	
	post – test		8.86	1.04			
Content	pre – test		7.10	1.47		-9.80	
	post – test		8.56	1.13			
Mechanics	pre – test		6.63	1.06		-7.92	
	post – test		8.26	0.98			
Total Score	Pre-test		34.63	6.22		-15.06	
	post – test		42.16	4.20			

Table 3 demonstrates that the experimental group's mean score on the writing skills test before and after administration differs significantly, favoring the post-administration at the 0.05 level.

When the pre- and post-test results for the experimental group's EFL writing skills were compared, it was found that their writing performance improved significantly after the test was implemented. Their organization, content, and vocabulary improved ($m = 8.86$; $t = 8.25$; $m = 8.56$; $t = 9.80$ and $m = 8.36$; $t = 10.82$, respectively).

The experimental group's writing performance in "mechanics" and "language use" was less spectacular ($m = 8.26$; $t = 7.92$; $m = 8.20$; $t = 10.26$).

All values were significant at the 0.05 level. These findings support those previously reported for the second hypothesis.

The effect size

The researcher used the "Effect Size" equation in order to determine the extent of which the intervention is beneficial in improving writing skills. The researcher computed the value of η^2 .

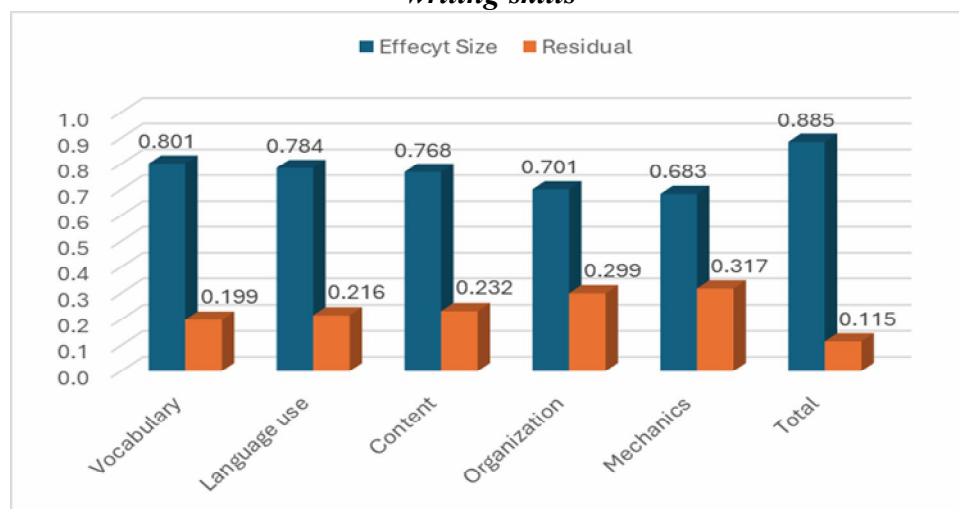
Table 4. The effect size of the intervention on the experimental group EFL writing skills.

Sub-skills	η^2	Effect size
Vocabulary	80%	High
Language use	78%	High
Content	76%	High
Organization	70%	High
Mechanics	68%	High
Total	88%	High

Table 4 demonstrates the effect size of implementing the intervention in developing the university students' writing skills test, with values of η^2 for each skill of the EFL writing skills ranging from 0.683 to 0.801.

Thus, the proposed intervention had a significant impact on the five targeted writing skills, with η^2 values of 0.801, 0.784, 0.768, 0.701, and 0.683. This suggests that the recommended intervention's contribution to improving EFL writing skills was between 80.1% and 68.3% of their performance.

Figure 2 The intervention's effect size on the experimental group's writing skills



Discussion and results

The statistical analysis of this research yielded the following results:

- Among the experimental group, the mean score on the pre- and post-EFL writing test differs statistically significantly ($p < 0.05$), favoring the post-test results.
- Results of this research added up to the previous studies of Bakeer, (2018), Shahzadi, (2020), and (Purnama, 2024), whose studies indicated that the proposed intervention significantly increased the students' writing skills.
- This research shows that using technology and web-based learning can effectively improve EFL university students' writing skills.

Research recommendations

1. Using the blended learning to teach EFL skills.
2. EFL teachers should encourage learners to use social networking sites for learning useful skills.
3. Encourage cooperative learning, including group work, both within and outside the classroom.
4. EFL teachers should prioritize student motivation, as it impacts learning outcomes.
5. Curriculum designers should include various activities at all levels of education to help students enhance their EFL skills.
6. Course designers should supply teachers with software packages that use social networking sites to assess reading comprehension and writing skills in a fun way.

Suggestions for further research

- Enhancing English language learning through social media activities.
- Using social networking sites at various school levels and with larger samples.
- Using social networking sites to teach EFL skills, listening and speaking.
- Investigating how students' motivation affects their achievement in learning English.

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