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## The Effect of Weblog (blog) students' writing performance

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### Abstract

With the recent advances in internet, the writing instruction that is proved to produce positive effect writing performance has taken a new trend. Due to such limitations of school setting as time restriction, lack of opportunity for students to reach a real audience or to satisfy their individual learning needs it has been understood that effective implementation of writing instruction is not so easy in practice. This understanding has led to the integration of weblogs in writing instruction. In this study; it has been investigated the effect of weblog integrated writing instruction on student writing performance. Total 70 Primary School students participated in the study. Data were collected through students' written products. Results indicated that weblog integrated writing instruction improved students.

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*Keyword:* Blog; weblog; educational technology; e-learning; writing.

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### 1. Introduction

The term weblog refers to a personalized web page, kept by the author in reverse chronological diary form. As a “log on the web” it is kept first and foremost on the web, either on a static web page, or via a database-backed website, enabled through “blogging” software. As a “log of the web”, it easily refers to other Internet locations via hyperlinks (Eastmen, 2005).

According to the Wikipedia, “*blog is a website where entries are made in journal style and displayed in a reverse chronological order. [...] typical blog combines text, images, and links to other blogs, web pages, and other media related to the entries.*”

Likewise, Campbell (2003) discusses the possibilities of integrating weblogs into educational context, especially in language teaching field and mentioned about three types of blogs that are likely to be beneficial for language learners. The first type is *tutor blog* through which the class teacher can produce special texts for reading and vocabulary activities by considering the students proficiency levels(Campbell,2003).

The second is learner blog run by individual learners. Campbell (2003) claims that this type of blog “may be best suited for reading and writing classes” and he explained the function of learner blogs in writing as follows: Individually, blogs can be used as journals for writing practice, or as free-form templates for personal expression.

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The idea here is that students can get writing practice, develop a sense of ownership, and get experience with the practical, legal, and ethical issues of creating a hypertext document. In addition, whatever they write can instantly be read by anyone else and, due to the comment features of the software, further exchange of ideas is promoted (Farmer, J. 2006).

The last type Campbell (2003) advises for use with language classes is class blogs a collaborative work through effort of an entire class. It can serve like a free form bulletin board for learners to share thoughts on a common topic assigned as homework. It can also prove to be useful for an international language exchange.

Possibilities of weblog use in language teaching are only limited to the ability of creativeness of the user and although it can be applied in all language skills; weblogs seem to be an extremely valuable tool for current writing instruction especially since it is directly related to writing something. Such developments as the emergence of the communicative approach, cognitive and socio-cognitive views of language teaching have affected writing instruction just as they have influenced computer applications and caused the advent of weblogs (Wright, A., Knight, P., & Pomerleau, N. 1999).

Ward (2004) expresses the place of weblog in writing instruction as: For the language teacher, the weblog is a timely arrival which can fulfill many of the needs identified for the effective teaching of writing. The weblog provides a genuine audience, is authentically communicative, process driven, peer reviewed, provides unusual context and offers a completely new form with un-chartered creative potential. By forming a learner blog, the writing teacher can make use of blogging in all the stages of writing process from drafting to publishing and assessment. In drafting stage, the students can share their writings through blog pages and this will ease the feedback process.

According to Ward (2004) when the students write only for their teachers “they may not only have difficulty adjusting their writing to fit the reader but may have trouble getting started because, aside from the final grade, what they write does not mean anything to them because it does not need to mean anything to anyone else”. Integrating weblog into the course has potential to change this situation since students will feel the possibility of being read by any internet user. When writing for a weblog, Kohnen (2003) observes that “the (online) audience is not anticipated but expected, and thus influences and structures in a very manner in which the writer articulates, composes and distributes the self document”

More important than all these are that the weblog supported with the writing course may contribute to the student awareness of the process-driven nature of writing. Continually, updating a weblog may be helpful for the writing student to appreciate that the writing is a ongoing process (Ward, 2004).

These are the benefits that are probable to be obtained from the learner blogs. In addition to the learner blogs, teachers can make use of blogs by setting a tutor blog through which they can provide their students with lots of materials internet includes, so they can create opportunities for extra studying for the students. The students can choose among the materials referenced by the teacher according to their own needs, and this will lead to the individualization of learning (Stepp-Great, J. 2002).

When the choice of material of study is left to the students, they will take much more responsibility for their learning and develop a sense of autonomous learning, which is assumed to increase success in writing.

With all the potential benefits weblogs have been experienced by an increasing number of teachers and researchers who want to measure the effectiveness of weblogs in language teaching, in general, and in the writing instruction, in particular.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the “Is any difference between the writing performance of students who received in-class writing instruction and that of those who received the weblog integrated writing instruction?”

## 2.2. Research Model

This study is an attempt to disclose the potential effects of weblogs on the learners writing proficiency through writing course. Research designs were used in this study: a quasi experimental design. Firstly, it seeks mainly to find out the impact of weblog integrated writing process instruction on writing performance. Therefore by assigning the students randomly to experimental and control groups, a quasi experimental design was adopted.

## 2.3. Participants

Seventy primary school students participated in this study. Because of the curriculum and administrative limitations of the school where this study was conducted, it seemed difficult to have random sampling, therefore convenience sampling procedures which “involve choosing the nearest individuals to serve as respondents” (Cohen and Manion, 1994 p.88) were applied in drawing sample for the study. One of the two classes of students was assigned as experimental group according to their opportunity in accessing internet, and the other class served as control group. For each group, the number of participants are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Participants demographic variables

Groups	Gender	Number
Experimental Group	Male	17
	Female	15
Control Group	Male	15
	Female	20

## 2.4. Instruments

To gather necessary data, writing performance task, questionnaire. This instrument in this research is Writing Performance Task, which examines the existing ability of participants in writing. The students both in experimental and control groups were asked to perform a writing task as a pre-test. The task provided the students with choices on the topics and paragraph type that they were going to learn throughout the term. The participants were required to write a paragraph on the topic they chose. After the treatment, the same task was repeated as a post test. Two lecturer of writing were selected to evaluate the participants' written products by using a rubric which was constructed in accordance with Composition Profile. The evaluators were trained with the Reader Guide in the use of rubric.

## 3. Findings

The purposes of this study are to investigate the impact of the weblog integrated in writing instruction on the writing performance. With the aim in mind, for the research question that is “is there any difference between the writing performance of students who received in-class writing instruction and that of students who received the weblog integrated writing instruction?” were formulated. The hypotheses were there is a significant difference between the writing performance of students who received in class writing instruction and that of students who received the weblog integrated writing instruction. Integration of the weblog into the teaching of writing improves writing performance. The necessary data for the answer of the first question were collected through a Writing Performance Task which measures the students writing proficiency in the paragraph writing. Through Writing Performance Task, the students both in experimental and control groups were asked to write a paragraph on a chosen topic from the task at the beginning of the study and the same task was repeated as a post test at the end of the treatment.

The paragraphs produced by the participants were evaluated by two lecturers on the basis of a rubric called Composition Profile. The mean of the scores given by the raters to each student determined the level of the writing proficiency of each participant. The results obtained through pre and post tests were analyzed in SPSS computer program. Two different analysis techniques were used: Paired sample t test and analysis of covariance (ANCOVA). The analysis of paired sample t test was used to analyze the difference between the writing performance pre and post tests scores in the control and experimental group respectively. Table 2 presents the results as follows:

Table. 2 Paired Sample t-test Results for Writing Performance Scores in Each Group

Groups	n	Pre-test		Post test		t	p
		M	SD	M	SD		
Control	35	53,25	9,92	63,10	7,25	-4,323	,000
Experimental	35	54,28	13,02	69,09	12,29	-14,192	

Based on results a significant difference detected both in the control group;  $t = -4,323, p < .001$  and in the experimental group;  $t = -14,192, p < .001$  after the treatment. As seen in the table, the control group increased their test scores from a pre-test score mean 53,25 to a post-test score mean 63,10. In the experimental group an increase from a pre-test score mean 54,28 to a post-test score mean 69,09 was observed as well.

These findings indicated that both in-class process writing instruction and weblog integrated writing instruction had positively affected students writing performance as the subjects in both groups improved their writing performance. As shown in the results of the t-test analysis, there observed a difference in the post test scores of the attendant groups.

The following section is devoted to the ANCOVA results for five writing components and their interpretations. Table 4 presents the post test means, standard deviations, and ANCOVA results for scores of content as a significant component of successful writing.

Table 4. ANCOVA Results for Writing Performance Scores: Content

Source	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.	Descriptive Statistics	X	SD
CONTENT PRE-TEST	17,496	1	17,496	0,058	,158	Groups		
GROUP	180,672	1	180,672	21,118	,000	Experimental	32,42	3,28
Error	399,650	47	8,503			Control	28,34	2,48
Total	1552,000	50						

a: R Squared = ,312 (Adjusted R Squared = ,282)

As seen from the descriptive statistics, the experimental group differed from the control group in terms of content level post test mean scores. The post test mean score for experimental group is 32,42 and for the control group 28,34. To find the source of difference, the pre-test content scores were controlled through ANCOVA, and it was identified that the integration of weblogs into the course had a statistically significant impact on the content of the writings by experimental students ( $F(1,47) = 32,42, p < .05$ ). Such a difference in content scores can be interpreted in connection with awareness of audience in the students raised through weblog use.

The following table illustrates the post test means, standard deviations, and ANCOVA results for the scores of organization as one of the components of successful writing.

Table 5. ANCOVA Results for Writing Performance Scores: Organization

Source	SS	Df	MS	F	Sig.	Descriptive Statistics	X	SD
ORGANIZATION PRE-TEST	47,655	1	47,655	7,510	,009	Groups		
GROUPS	83,527	1	83,527	13,164	,001	Experimental	14,77	3,20
Error	298,229	47	6,345			Control	12,34	1,89
Total	9749,00	50						

As indicated in the table, a difference between the experimental and the control group in the organization scores was observed. The post test score mean for the experimental group was 14, 77, and for the control group 12, 34. Though the difference did not seem too important numerically, it was significant statistically ( $F(1, 47) = 13, 16, p < ,05$ ).

Therefore, after taking the pre-test scores under control through covariance analysis, it can be asserted that the weblog use improved the organization of the writing more than in-class- instruction. Referring to the rubric used in the scoring of the writings, writing performances of the experimental students in connection with the organization of their paragraphs could be characterized as *good to average* which means that students adequately used supporting

sentences and transitions; they used inviting beginning and effective sequencing; there was a satisfying sense of resolution.

### 3. Discussion and Conclusion

In an attempt to find answer to the question related to the impact of the weblog use on the students writing performance, two groups of students were compared with their writing performances. The writing instruction of the control group was limited to in the class activities; however, in the course design of the experimental group, the writing instruction was blended with the blogging activities (Smith, 2004).

The analysis of the data attained through writing performance pre-and post-test demonstrated that the students in both writing instruction methods groups improved their writing performances at a significant level. However, when the difference in the post-test results was taken into consideration, it was identified that the blogging integrated writing instruction proved to be more effective than in class writing instruction. Blogging affected students' writing performance of experimental students as a whole and it had a positive impact on the two components of their writings: *content* and *organization*. One possible explanation of weblogs being more effective on students' writing performance has to do with the language and writing input provided to the experimental students. Because of the limited course duration for the control group, the language input in the writing course was restricted in amount. In other words, they were given relatively less exercises on sentence structures used in the target paragraph types. Similarly, such materials used to teach the target types as sample paragraphs and relevant exercises were less than those used for the experimental students.

By means of blogging, the experimental students had the chance to be exposed to more language and writing input. The writing input in the weblog supported instruction was the web materials presented on one of the tutor blogs. Students received the writing input by surfing these web materials. They found the opportunity of examining many more model paragraphs than the control group did. For the language input, through blogging, students had the chance to access lots of interactive exercises and resources based on their own needs. Therefore, the experimental students having more chances to receive the necessary input may have caused the difference between experimental and control groups in the post-test results. The findings pertaining to effect of weblog use on specific components of writing revealed an interesting result. In the analysis, when the pre-test scores in five components of writing were controlled through covariance analysis, it was found out that the component on which blogging was more effective was *content*. It was followed by *organization*.

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