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The Effect of Blog-integrated Writing Instruction on Writing Performance: Using Social Constructivism  
as a Theory

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Hongyan Xi<sup>1,2</sup> a, Siok Peh Seah<sup>3,\*</sup> b

<sup>a</sup>*Faculty of Education and Liberal Studies, City University Malaysia, Petaling Jaya, Selangor, 46100, Malaysia*

<sup>2</sup>*Faculty of Foreign Language, YiChun University, Yichun, 336000, China*

<sup>b</sup><sup>3</sup>*Faculty of Human Development, Sultan Idris University of Education (UPSI), Tanjung Malim, 35900, Malaysia*

*\*Corresponding author*

**Abstract:**

**Introduction:** *The primary objective of this study was to investigate the effect of incorporating blogs into writing instruction on the writing performance of Chinese English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students from the perspective of social constructivism.*

**Methodology:** *The study used a quasi-experimental design to compare the writing performance of the two groups of students for the pretest and the posttest. Purposive sampling was used to select sixty EFL freshmen from non-English majors at a China University. The participants were randomly assigned to an experiment group (n=30) and a control group (n=30). The experiment group utilized blogs for their writing class and posting assignments, whereas the control group received traditional instruction without using blogs or other technology devices. The IELTS writing test served as the pretest and the posttest for the data collection. The data were analyzed using a one-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) and a paired sample t-test.*

**Results and discussion:** *The results indicated that there were no significant differences in writing performance between the two groups. However, intra-group analyses revealed that both groups improved their writing performance. The findings revealed the importance of social interaction and collaboration in language learning which was highlighted in the socio-constructivist theory, and blogs provide a writing platform for collaborative learning, knowledge construction, and the development of higher-level thinking skills.*

**Conclusion and recommendations:** *Both groups have similar progress in writing performance in the present study, more psychological factors and measures of writing performance need to be considered in future research.*

**Keywords:** *Blog-integrated writing instruction; writing performance; social media; social constructivism*

## 1. Introduction

The integration of social media as a learning platform into language instruction has become a prevalent educational practice. Numerous studies have demonstrated a growing body of data that supports the efficacy of social media in facilitating language training and acquisition. The utilization of social media enabled the exchange of knowledge and encouraged active involvement from all users (Harrison, 2009; McLoughlin C. & Lee, M., 2007; O'Reilly, T., 2007), resulting in numerous advantages such as increased student motivation, access to authentic materials, and opportunities for meaningful engagement with genuine readers (Deng, L. & Yuen, A.H.K., 2012; De Almeida Soares, D., 2008). Writing is commonly perceived as the most challenging talent to acquire (Richards & Renandya, 2002). The writing instructors of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) are currently in the process of assessing their instructional approaches and endeavoring to integrate social media platforms, such as Blogs and Facebook, into their instructions (e.g., Pinkman, 2005; Chapelle, 2001; Sullivan & Pratt, 1996; Marcoul & Pennington, 1999).

Blogs have been gaining more popularity because of supporting language learning, especially in second language (L2) writing classes. In the context of L2 writing, Blogs can facilitate easy access to a variety of online resources, encourage better writing practices, give essays a real audience, improve collaborative learning, foster a sense of community, ownership, and autonomy among L2 learners, and improve interactions between instructors, students, and peers (Özdemir and Aydin, 2020; Armstrong and Retterer, 2008; Chen, 2016). The prominent characteristics of the blog are “reverse chronological order of posts, easy-to-use hyperlinked post structure” (Viegas, F. B., 2006), “open-to-anyone nature and comment option” that cultivates interaction and collaboration (Burgess, J., 2006). As a pedagogical tool, the blog platform possesses a notable feature in facilitating interactive communication among its users through the utilization of the comment function. The function of commenting enhances the development of learners' writing abilities through the provision of feedback from both teachers and peers, so fostering an increase in confidence and self-efficacy. As blog interest grows, students learn about their strengths and limitations through criticism, revisions, and eventual development as creative writers (Lee, 2010; Murray and Hourigan, 2008). The utilization of blogs in classroom instruction is proving advantageous for students as it fosters a social constructivist atmosphere that benefits all learners. (Cochrane et al., 2009).

Although plenty of studies have examined the effect of blogs on the education field and L2 writing field (Yousefifard and Fathi, 2021; Lee, 2017; Pham and Usaha, 2016), different opinions and controversial research findings on whether using the blog in EFL writing can facilitate writing performance. Some researchers have reported that blogs promote writing performance (Alsamadani, 2018; Arslan & Şahin-Kızıl, 2010; Lin, 2015; Montaner-Villalba, 2021; Sutcu, 2020), whereas some studies have reported that blog has no statistically significant effect on learners' writing performance (Chen, 2020; Lin, 2014). Therefore, this research field requires further empirical studies from different perspectives. To bridge the gap, this research aims to identify the effect of blog-integrated writing instruction on improving writing performance using socio-constructivist theory.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 Socio-constructivist theory and blog

The socio-constructivist theory of learning developed by Vygotsky (1978) lay the theoretical foundation for the efficacy of Web 2.0 technologies in L2 learning. According to this theory, when learners generate knowledge jointly or collaboratively, they are better able to accomplish learning tasks (Pavlenko and Lantolf, 2000). According to Gredler (1997), social constructionists believe that signs and symbols promote higher mental functions. Social, cultural, and historical evolution have shaped the manner in which something is learned. Learners share knowledge by constructing and negotiating meaning. Then, with their newly acquired knowledge, they can add new information through social interaction. In short, "Knowledge is not simply constructed, it is co-constructed" (Jennings et al., 2013, p. 4).

Social context is the most crucial standard in Social Constructivism theory where the role of cognition and learning takes place (Vygotsky 1978). Barnard and Campbell (2005) asserted that language learning engagement occurs in a social context as opposed to a cognitive one. Having emphasized the interaction among learners in a particular setting through feedback and instructions from others offers additional learning opportunities. Barnard and Campbell (2005) also argued that the social and cultural cannot be separated in order to investigate human learning. Although a learner exhibits effort in the learning process, effort alone cannot be used to measure learning performance, as Turuk (2008), Glassman & Wong (2004) believe that interactions with others and collaboration within the learning context also contribute to the learning process. The focus of this theory, according to Jennings et al. (2013), is "on the collaborative nature of learning and the importance of cultural and social context" (p.1). This demonstrates the importance of Social Constructivism in the learning process (Kozulin, Gindis, Ageyev, and Miller, 2003; Wertsch,1991).

The importance of other individuals' role in influencing the learning process has been the main core of Social Constructivism theory. Using technology, specifically social networking sites, such behavior could be easily detected. Through the online community, users of Blogs are able to sustain meaningful educational experiences, dynamic interactions, and the development of higher levels of critical thinking skills and knowledge construction (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004), particularly in language classrooms. Social learning theory, which emphasizes active participation in social communities (Wenger, 1999), can be used to establish a connection between the interaction that takes place. The blog is viewed as the ideal platform for the online community of today because it can be used to foster and develop knowledge through collaboration and negotiation, active participation, and the construction of identity and community building.

Blog features such as comments and sharing enable the transfer of genuine dialogue across various contexts of conversation through the use of multiple languages (Allen, 2005). Blattner and Fiori (2009) elucidate the benefits of social media use in language learning by stating that the development of socio-pragmatic awareness and competence in EFL can be facilitated and enhanced through hands-on discussion of specific topics. In addition, through meaningful

intervention, learners can gain a deeper understanding of cross-cultural issues and have opportunities to interact with native speakers without encountering difficulties in person.

## **2.2 Blogs in second language learning**

In recent years, there has been a notable rise in the utilization of social media platforms for the purposes of L2 learning and instruction. Extensive literature research has been conducted to examine the efficacy of blogs in the context of L2 writing instruction (Yousefifard and Fathi, 2021; Zhang and Zou, 2021; Lee, 2020; Hansen, 2016). Based on the advantages of combining Blog and writing process, instructors and researchers conducted some empirical studies to investigate whether Blogs can improve students' writing performance.

Mabuan (2018) implemented a study to ascertain the perceptions of students regarding the utilization of blogs as a means to enhance their English writing abilities, as well as to identify the perceived advantages associated with employing blogs as a virtual platform for writing. The data was obtained from a sample of 58 freshmen through their journals and questionnaires. In spite of technological limitations, the research findings indicated that students perceive blogging as a viable approach to enhancing their English writing proficiency. The ability to freely express oneself through writing fosters the enhancement and cultivation of writing abilities, while also facilitating online interaction and communication with peers.

Chen et al. (2020) conducted an empirical comparison study in Taiwan to compare blog-integrated writing instruction to traditional writing instruction in terms of learners' linguistic performance in order to investigate the impact of a blog-integrated English writing course. In a series of ANCOVA analyses, no significant differences were found in fluency, grammatical complexity, lexical complexity, or accuracy. However, intra-group comparisons revealed that both groups had substantially enhanced their fluency and accuracy.

Lee (2020) explored the effect of blog use on the improvement of L2 writing skills in online language courses. 48 freshmen were required to use blogs for writing courses; the experiment lasted for two years. The data included both qualitative and quantitative information collected from blog posts, remarks, and most recent interviews. The findings of this study indicated that students viewed blogging as an effective way to improve their writing skills. In addition, the results revealed that feedback scaffolding affected students' efforts to improve both form and content.

Perumal & Ajit (2022) carried out a descriptive study to examine the influence of blogs on the development of writing skills employing social constructivism as the underlying theoretical framework. A questionnaire was used to collect data from 54 students in Tamil Nadu. The study explored the use of digital tools in the classroom to enhance language learning and increase student motivation and conducted an investigation into the influence of blogs on individuals' English writing proficiency. The results of the study showed that incorporating blogs into ESL instruction has a positive effect on student motivation and engagement. The study suggests that the intersection of social media and academia has given rise to a diverse

array of online platforms that prove highly beneficial for the acquisition of English language skills, particularly in the realm of enhancing writing proficiency.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Participants**

This study was carried out in an English writing course at a China university. The approach of purposive sampling was used to select 60 EFL undergraduates whose age range is between 19 and 21 and who volunteered to participate in the study. Moreover, they had similar English learning experiences, and their English scores on the national examination for university entrance were above 110. The participants were randomly divided into the control group (n=30) and the experiment group (n=30) based on pre-test scores.

#### **3.2 Procedure**

The researcher herself instructed both groups, the writing instruction session was scheduled for ten consecutive weeks. Writing instruction for both groups followed the procedure of the process writing approach, which consists of the following steps: brainstorming, planning, mind mapping, writing the first draft, peer feedback, editing, final draft, instructor's evaluation and feedback (Steele, 2004). The experiment group received blog-integrated writing instruction where collaboration and communication in the form of group activities were the highlights during the writing process. At the beginning of the integration of blogs into the process writing approach, the students were introduced to <https://edublog.org> and following training on using blogs, they were required to register their own blogs linked with the tutor blog for posting their writings and follow-up assignments and making comments among peers. Instructor blogs were employed for sharing instructional writing strategies and authentic text materials and learning tools supplied by hyperlinks, and opinion communication.

On the other hand, the control group was provided with a conventional writing course within a classroom setting, excluding the utilization of a blog. The same instructor addressed the same subjects and curriculum. Actually, the resources employed for both groups of students were identical, except for the fact that the control group did not employ blogs as the experiment group did. The identical stages of the process writing approach were implemented with these participants. In contrast to the experiment group, which was afforded the chance to obtain feedback beyond the confines of the classroom through the utilization of blogs, the students in the control group only got conventional, in-person feedback within the classroom setting, without the ability to access the Internet or employ technological devices during instructional sessions. Peer feedback was not provided for their texts, and the evaluation they received followed a typical paper-and-pencil format.

### 3.3 Instrument

To measure the students' writing performance towards the effect of blogs as an instructional aid tool, students were given a writing pretest and posttest. Actually, the two writing topics are of different yet similar themes, but participants are not aware of this fact until the post-test. Wen Qiufang (2005) states that while comparing the influence of two writing instructive ways on students' writing abilities, one could prevent variance in difficulty if we utilize the same writing topic in the pre-test and post-test. The writing assessment rubric employed in this study was derived from the ESL/EFL composition profile devised by Jacobs et al. (1981). It has been consistently acknowledged as one of the prominent analytical scales within the EFL/ESL field. There are five main grading criteria that are frequently taught to ESL/EFL student writers, with a score assigned to each: the content's appropriateness and relevance (30%), organization (20%), language use (25%), vocabulary (20%), and mechanics (5%). The total scores of these five items were used for data analysis in order to evaluate students' complete writing performance holistically.

### 3.4 Data analysis

A writing test from the IELTS writing task was administered as a pre-test and post-test to gather data on writing scores. The ANCOVA was utilized to determine whether there are significant differences between traditional writing classes and blog-integrated writing classes by comparing the participants' writing scores. One-way ANCOVA analysis was used to assess any differences in writing performance between the two groups by comparing writing scores because ANCOVA can balance out any differences between the groups that might influence the dependent variables (known as covariates). Moreover, a paired-sample t-test was carried out to make an intra-group comparison between the pre-test and post-test for EG and CG.

## 4. Results and discussion

### 4.1 Results

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the pre-test and post-test results of students' writing scores, that is, a rough comparison of the pre-test and post-test for CG and EG. The pretest mean of the CG writing score is  $73.17 \pm 5.17$ , and the posttest mean is  $79.87 \pm 4.77$ ; while EG increased from  $71.90 \pm 4.81$  in the pretest to  $80.20 \pm 6.75$  in the post. That is to say, the EG's mean measure of writing scores increased most significantly from the pretest to the posttest, but CG showed a slight improvement.

**Table 1 Descriptive Statistics on the pre-test and post-test of writing scores**

Group	Variable	Test	N	Mean	SD
CG	Writing scores	Pre-test	30	73.17	5.17
		Post-test	30	79.87	4.77
EG	Writing scores	Pre-test	30	71.90	4.81

Post-test	30	80.20	6.75
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Source: Developed for this research.

Table 2 shows there are no significant differences in writing performance by comparing writing scores between the blog-integrated writing course and the traditional writing course ( $F [1,57] = 2.363, p = .130, \eta^2 = .40$ ) after controlling the covariate--pre-test writing score. Besides, there is a close relationship between pre-test and post-test writing scores ( $\eta^2 = .604$ ), that is, the pre-test writing scores can explain the post-test 60.4% variance. The results indicated that there is no significant difference in the students' development of writing performance using blogs from that of those taught in a traditional writing course.

**Table 2 ANCOVA results for the writing post-test scores**

Source	SS	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Between-subjects	32.53	1	32.59	2.36	.130	.040
Covariate (pretest)	1195.64	1	1195.64	86.86	.000	.604
Within-subjects	784.63	57	13.77			

a. R Squared = .604 (Adjusted R Squared = .590)

Source: Developed for this research.

Table 3 displays the comparative analysis of the pre-test and post-test results for both the EG and the CG. The results suggested a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores for the CG ( $t [29] = -11.40, p = .000, CI = [-7.90, -5.50]$ ); the EG also showed a significant difference ( $t [29] = -10.99, p = .000, CI = [-9.84, -6.76]$ ). That is to say, the writing performance of students can be enhanced through the implementation of two different writing instructions.

**Table 3 Paired sample t-test results of the writing test for EG and CG**

Variables	Paired Differences					t	df	p
	Mean	SD	Std error mean	95% CI of the difference				
				Lower	Upper			
CG	-6.70	3.22	.59	-7.90	-5.50	-11.40	29	.000
EG	-8.30	4.14	.76	-9.84	-6.76	-10.99	29	.000

Source: Developed for this research.

## 4.2 Discussions

The one-way ANCOVA results shows that the two groups have no significant difference in the writing posttest score, that is, both writing instructions have the similar effect in improving writing performance. Besides, the result of intra-group comparisons found that both groups had gains in their writing scores after blog-integrated writing instruction and traditional writing instruction. It demonstrates that both writing instructions helped EFL learners to improve their writing skills at a significant level. Although there seems to be no obvious difference in writing scores, blogs as a learning-aided platform are popular among instructors and learners. The achievement of blog-integrated writing instruction in this study is consistent with numerous studies claimed that blog as a teaching tool can improve students' writing performance (Gao et al., 2022; Lee, 2020; Yousefifard and Fathi, 2021; Zhang and Zou, 2021).

In blog-integrated writing instruction, the importance of interaction is always emphasized during the whole writing process. Blog as a social media platform can provide much opportunity for interaction and collaboration and has had an impact on language acquisition. Social constructivism posits that learning is exclusively facilitated by social engagement, wherein meaning is collectively constructed through verbal communication and interaction with individuals (Vygotsky, 1986), and the process of learning occurs predominantly within social and cultural environments, rather than being confined solely to the individual (Schreiber & Valle, 2013). From the viewpoint of social constructivism, it can be assumed that interaction and collaboration in the blog context make a contribution to improving students' writing performance through feedback or comments on blog posts (Bener & Yildiz, 2019; Giannikas, 2019; Yeh et al., 2019).

In accordance with the sociocultural view of L2 acquisition, social constructivist theory promotes the utilization of language in diverse contexts, like the voicing of thoughts, the provision of explanations, negotiation, and reaching compromises with peers. The writing instruction in a blog context is in line with the opinion claimed by social constructivism that effective teaching and learning depend primarily on interpersonal contacts and interactions, with a specific focus on the perceptions of students regarding the issue (Prawat, 1992), increasing learning opportunities by emphasizing the interaction between learners in a given setting through feedback and direction from others. In the process of writing, the learners were instructed to search for new words and determine their meanings when scanning model passages. They were also required to comprehend a few passages on related themes provided by blog hyperlinks. Thus, they may acquire new vocabulary and grammatical structures. After completing this activity, participants were instructed to engage in group brainstorming and create new summaries for the topics provided by the instructor. Students started publishing their writings on websites. They participated with great enthusiasm and gave feedback to each other actively. When they posted grammatically incorrect comments on blogs, other students were quick to point out and correct the errors, and they were able to construct novel sentence structures and use appropriate words. In the context of blog writing, the different stages of the writing process offered many opportunities for interactive and collaborative writing with peers, improving students' writing performance. The instructor used some instructional strategies to



stimulate student engagement, such as discussion, brainstorming, mind mapping, and feedback. The learners were granted the opportunity to actively engage in their own writing process, thereby facilitating both social and individual interaction and collaboration within the group.

## **5. Conclusion and recommendations**

In general, this study adds to the expanding corpus of research that supports the utilization of technology in the realm of language acquisition. The prevalence of L2 learning occurring beyond the confines of traditional classroom settings has increased due to the integration of technology (Lee, 2010). The findings of this empirical study also provided evidence in favor of the positive effect of blogs in improving the writing performance of EFL learners. From the perspective of the socio-constructivist view of language acquisition, blogs have proven to be a highly valuable tool to supply the opportunity for interaction and collaboration activities, and the interactional and collaborative learning style can motivate the students' creative thinking and develop writing skills. They could write more with their own original opinions, and improve their lexical level and grammatical accuracy.

However, it is worth noting that there is no obvious difference in writing scores by comparing blog-integrated writing instruction with traditional writing instruction. That is to say, blog-integrated writing instruction is insufficient to ensure the achievement of learning outcomes. Tasks that are linguistically and cognitively appropriate for L2 learners have a substantial impact on the quality of student writing and the level of student interaction. (Lee, 2010; Lee, 2008; Murray and Hourigan, 2008). Furthermore, psychological or affective factors like motivation and perception, and self-efficacy need to be considered in this research to measure writing performance. Besides, the measure of the writing quality should also be evaluated using the different assessing rubrics to better achieve scoring objectivity.

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