

Effect of Using the Blog Educational Tool on Writing Achievement and Motivation for Legal Writing

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Abstract

This article reports the results of a study that examined the relative effectiveness of the blog educational tool in improving the writing proficiency of attorneys enrolled in English for Lawyers level I class in Lebanon and on increasing their levels of motivation for legal writing. In addition, the study documented the perceptions of the participants with regard to the relevance and efficacy of using blog in English for Specific purposes (ESP) context. The study is based on the assumptions that blogging provides an excellent opportunity for teachers to provide supplementary activities and materials that enrich the content and exercises of the ESP course. Descriptive statistics were calculated and a series of independent sample t-tests and a content analysis of the qualitative data regarding the participants' perceptions of their blogging experience were carried out. The results of the study indicated that the blog proved the credibility of the study assumptions.

Key words: ESP, ESL, blogs, writing achievement, technology, communication.

1. Introduction

Recent decades have witnessed a growing awareness of the role of using technology in teaching writing and a number of technology-based teaching applications have been developed (Tekinarlan, 2008 & Noytim, 2010). Likewise, previous research has documented the superior effects of technology-assisted instruction in comparison with regular teaching (Sullivan & Pratt, 1996, Kutlu, 2012). A basic assumption behind the efficacy of technology in teaching is that it creates a non-verbal communication opportunity for learners (Vinagre, 2005).

Previous research has shown that technology contributes to the development of writing skills (Cahill & Catanzaro, 1997) and is more useful when it is used in combination with the traditional classroom teaching (Liou, Wang, & Hung Yeh, 1992). Technology also contributes to the development of digital fluency, which refers to the way people become comfortable in using technology (Huffaker, 2004). Some scholars suggest that digital fluency will be another prerequisite for sociability, lifelong learning and employment opportunities (Resnick, 2002). As such, using educational technologies have a two-fold advantage: They can promote the types of literacy traditionally encouraged in learning, as well as the digital fluency needed to prosper in the digital age.

Blogs, wikis and forums are effective educational tools (Niles, 2013). Palloff and Pratt (2009) underscored the educational use of the wikis that can contribute to “portfolios for assessment” (p. 2). Similarly, Miyazoe and Anderson (2010, p. 1) reported “...a positive effect on students’ language learning progress” in their study with students employing all three writing tools simultaneously. In addition, students in the course made “progress in their ability to differentiate English writing styles” (Miyazoe & Anderson, 2010, p. 1). These forms of online writing led to the practice of different language skills and contribute to students learning. As such, the blog is a good tool to fuse technology and writing inside and outside the classroom. Because their format is similar to a personal diary, where recounting interesting experiences and events is prevalent, blogs provide an arena where self expression and creativity are boosted. Its connections to other bloggers establish the same peer-group relationships found in the real world. The set template and design of the blog make blogging an appealing, intuitive and effortless system for both teachers and students to learn (Cassell, 2002).

However, Matsumura & Hann(2004) warns the practitioners about the feedback issues. Though writing through educational tools contributes a lot, students may feel uncomfortable with the feedback published online.

2. The Present Study

The present study was conducted at a private university in Lebanon where English is used as the language of instruction as well is taught as an important ESP and EOP subject. The importance accorded to studying EFL in the context of this study is based on the perceived vitality of English as an important world language used extensively in the domains of international jurisprudence, contracts, precedents, agreements, and treaties. Presently, there are no previous studies which investigated the effect of the Blog educational tool in improving the writing proficiency of Lebanese attorneys receiving EFL and decreasing their levels of writing apprehension.

Consequently, the purpose of the study was to investigate the effectiveness of using blogging in English for Lawyers course designed for improving the writing skills of the experimental group

participants. The study is based on the rationale that there is a scarcity of research on the use of blogs in ESP legal English classes. Specifically, the study addressed the following questions:

What is the relative effect of using the ESP Blog in comparison with regular legal English writing instruction in improving the writing achievement of ESP learners of EFL in Lebanon?

What is the relative effect of using the ESP Blog in comparison with regular legal English writing instruction in increasing the writing motivation level of ESP learners of EFL in Lebanon?

What are the ESP learners' perceptions of the experience of using Blog in ESP writing instruction?

3. Literature Review

3.1. Blogs in writing

Needs analysis aiming at enhancing speaking and writing skills is significant because the future jobs would incorporate both oral and written tasks. However, speaking does not get enough attention during classes at universities since evaluation mainly takes place in writing (Adorjan, 2013). Many scholars expect that the blog sphere to grow and demonstrate the importance of studying blogs alongside other computer-mediated communication contexts (Henning, 2003; Herring, *et al.*, 2004; Kumar, *et al.*, 2003), especially with consideration of the ways in which school administrators, policy-makers and educators can use blogs and other computer-mediated communication contexts to promote learning (Henning, 2003). Many researchers have investigated the impact of the online educational tool on learning but there is a need for research investigating the impact of using Blog in universities, particularly in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classes (Zeqiri, 2013).

Several researchers (Achterman, 2006, Brandt, 2008, Godwin-Jones, 2003, Ray, 2006, Tekinarslan, 2008, Yang, 2009) have investigated a variety of methods in using blogs in teaching, in order to examine the role of integrating Blogging into a classroom practice. Some studies underscored that the obligatory use of Blog in a course is beneficial (Lui, Choy, Cheung, & Li, 2006, p.248). However, these researchers assert that students stop using their blogs as soon as the course ends. This is despite the fact that blogs are easy to use since they do not require any knowledge of designing web pages (Abdullah & Kuzu, 2006) and they are an effective tool to help students communicate, reflect, and track their own progress (Baker & Ismail, 2009, Rezaee & Oladi, 2008, Pinkman, 2005, Zeqiri, 2013).

3.2. Students' perceptions of using blogs

Kavaliauskienė (2010) and Williams and Jacob (2004) indicate that students like blogging irrespective of the difficulty of the tasks. Cobanoglu (2006) suggests that teachers should motivate the students to do their blog assignments by evaluating them. They should be shown how to post on their own blogs, leave comments on their followers' blogs, upload videos and post pictures. In order to make the students post more frequently, the teacher should motivate students continuously by giving suggestions, commenting on their posts, giving feedback carefully and praising them.

Zeqiri (2013) asserts that the most reliable instrument for data collection of learners' perceptions of blogging was students' actual work with blogs. The teacher can keep an ongoing report of their progress (improved reflective posts and comments). This researcher adds that Blogs helped the majority of the students to express themselves, reflect on different topics and evaluate

each other's posts and ideas. The teacher, through blogs, kept the students up-to-date by informing them about their assignments, materials, events, etc. In addition, blogging was helpful for the students who missed ESP classes because they read their colleagues' posts, articles or hyperlinks related to the lesson (Zeqiri, 2013).

4. Methodology

The present study employed an experimental pretest-posttest control group design. Two intact classes were randomly assigned to control and experimental conditions and the treatment lasted for 12 weeks of instruction at the rate of 4 class periods of 55 minutes each per week to teach the legal English skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking along with language rules and mechanics and critical thinking in an integrated manner. The study was conducted in a major university in Lebanon.

4.1. Participants

A total of 30 ESP learners participated in the study and were assigned to two groups. The experimental group included a total of 10 males and 6 females ($n = 16$) and the control group consisted of a total of 6 males and 7 females ($n = 13$), as there was one ($n = 1$) participant with missing gender data. All the participants were native speakers of Arabic and came from similar socio-economic backgrounds. They were studying ESP in accordance with English for Lawyers program designed by the researcher. The participants received legal English instruction for twelve weeks at a rate of 4 hours per week, covering the listening, speaking, reading and writing skills along with critical thinking in an integrated manner.

4.2. Research Context

As indicated earlier, the research context of the present study is a private university in Lebanon. This context is characterized by enrolling Lebanese attorneys who feel the need to enhance their legal English skills so that they would become able to become proficient in drafting and interpreting the articles of international agreements and to negotiate in writing and in speaking using legal English. Normally, the participants feel apprehended to get enrolled in an ESP class, due to the age factor, especially that their ages ranged from 27 and 52. Yet, it should be noted that the majority of participants in this study context, as well as in other similar ESP or English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) university programs contexts, can be considered largely as limited English proficient (LEP) learners yet with access to computers and modern technology.

4.3. Instruments

Two instruments were used to collect data and measure the variables of ESP writing achievement and motivation for legal writing under investigation. Specifically, a teacher-made ESP writing test was used as a pre-test and post-test measure of ESP writing achievement. Participants were asked to perform an ESP pre and post writing task which required writing, using the proper terminology, the job description and the tasks of a successful attorney. These tests also included comprehension questions, terminology matching and cloze activities in addition to the writing task. The writings were scored holistically according to the quality of ideas, focus, organization, word choice, and language mechanics. The tests aimed at assessing the participants' written performance and the use of legal terms and structure in both the control and experimental groups before carrying

out any instruction and following study implementation, Three experienced teachers of ESP, each with more than 5 years of in-service teaching of EFL writing were selected to evaluate the written tasks of the participants and unanimously agreed on reporting a score for each writing on a scale of 1-20. Moreover, a questionnaire that investigated the subject's motivation was administered to the experimental group participants prior to and after the treatment to assess change in their motivation for legal writing.

4.4. Treatment

The treatment lasted for 12 weeks at the rate of 4 contact hours of integrated instruction per week. The ESP writing instructional component of the control group consisted of regular ESP writing practices that delivered instruction using legal texts, Word Banks and Role Play Presentations. The ESP control group writing instruction focused on enabling learners to explore their topics in order to generate ideas and conceptualize their written product, in addition to learning how to write up their ideas and revise their written products. Meanwhile, in addition to the ESP instruction given to the control group, the experimental group learners practiced ESP writing following instruction delivered using English for Lawyers blog which was created by the teacher. Both the control and experimental groups were given ESP writing assignments at the end of each session; however, the experimental group learners were asked to send their assignments via e-mail to the teacher who used to post their writings after editing them, and they were asked to track the changes in the word choice and structure to note the differences in their writings before and after posting them on the blog. The teacher also used the blog to post announcements, legal authentic materials required to enhance their writings. The teacher showed the participants how to access their blog and encouraged them to post their comments on each others' work and to share experiences through posting their comments asking the experimental group participants to send their work via e-mail and telling them that the teacher will publish their work only after editing it, which was very reassuring to them to write without feeling apprehended by the fear that they will go public with a weak work. On the contrary, they used to wait impatiently for the teacher to post their work so that they could share it with their friends, colleagues and families. The teacher herself used to post comments on the postings of all the experimental group learners.

The participants of the control and experimental groups, were always encouraged and given the opportunity to write anything other than the tailored assignment on condition that they would employ the legal Word Bank. However, only the experimental group participants had their writings published on the English for Lawyers Blog which had a total of 3371 page views by April 7, 2014. (See below). This motivated them to work in class and to write and type their work upon the completion of the session.



Figure 1

The blog archive for 2013-2014 was as shown below.



Figure 2

The experimental group postings appear in the archive as shown below.

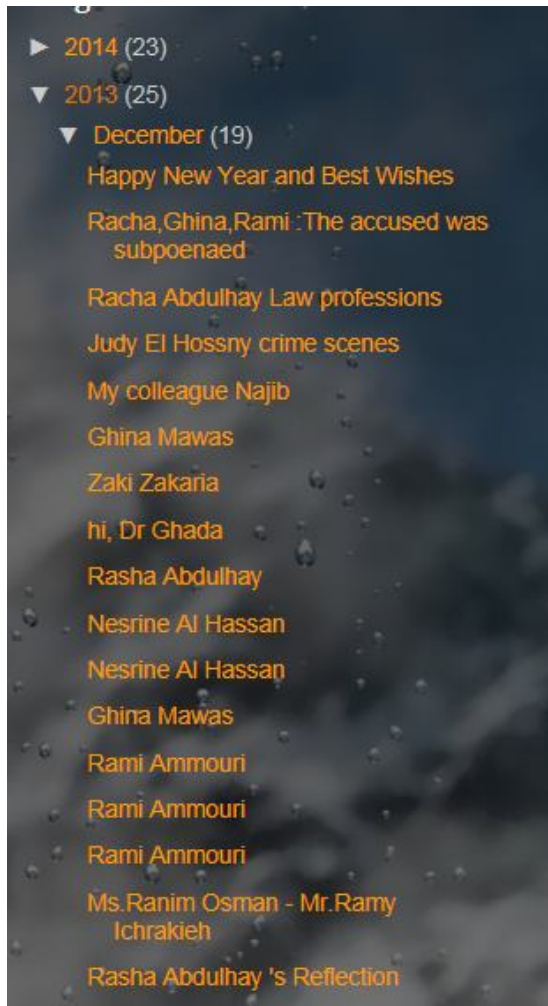


Figure 3

Participants were encouraged to write on different experiences using the terminology they learn as shown below.

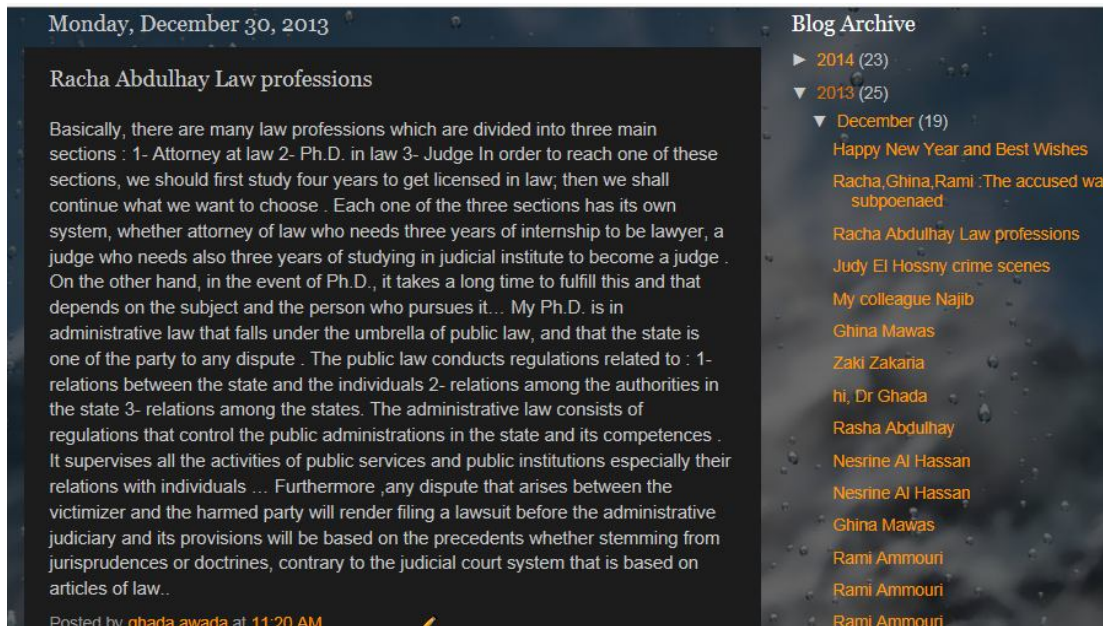


Figure 4

The participants were encouraged to post group work as shown below.

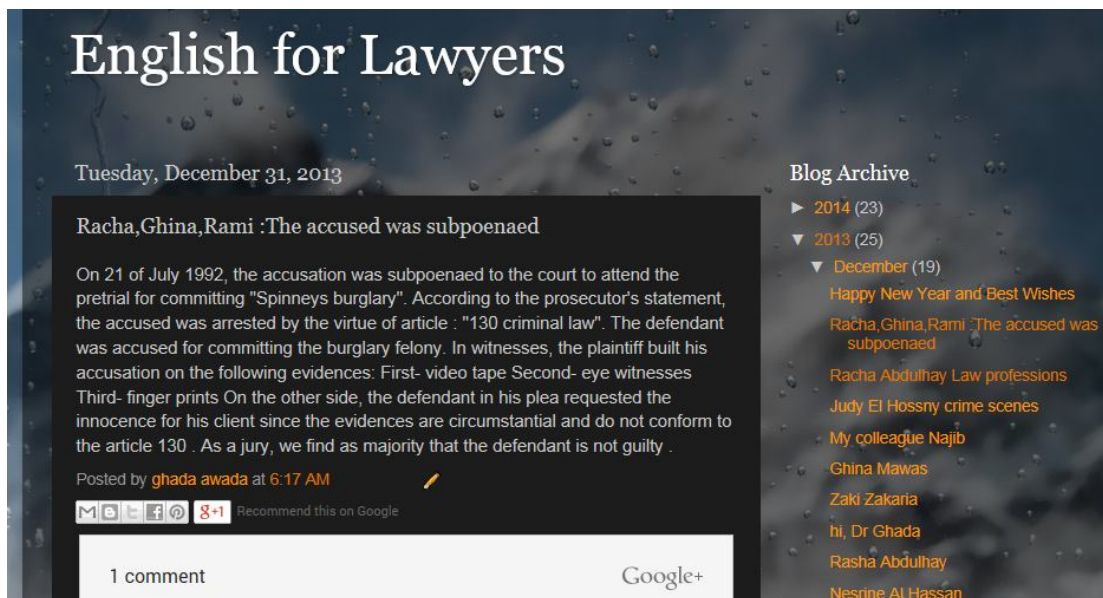


Figure 5

The participants enjoyed posting their individual work as shown below.

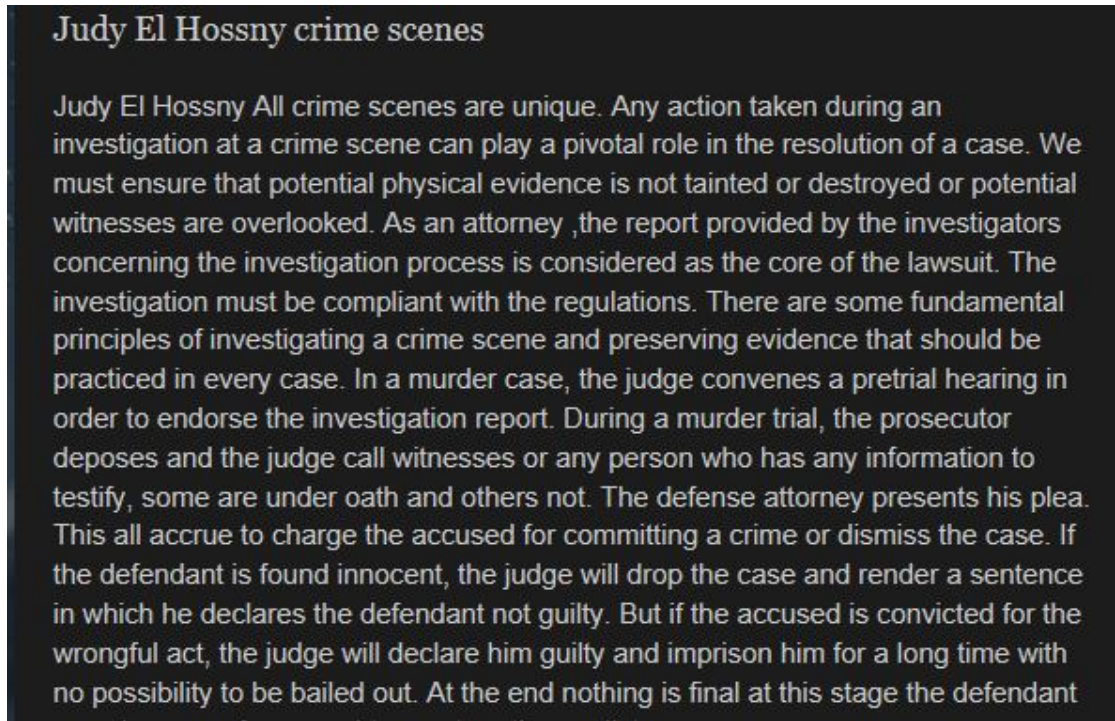


Figure 6

The teacher used the Blog to announce certain tutorial outline or events as shown below.



Figure 7

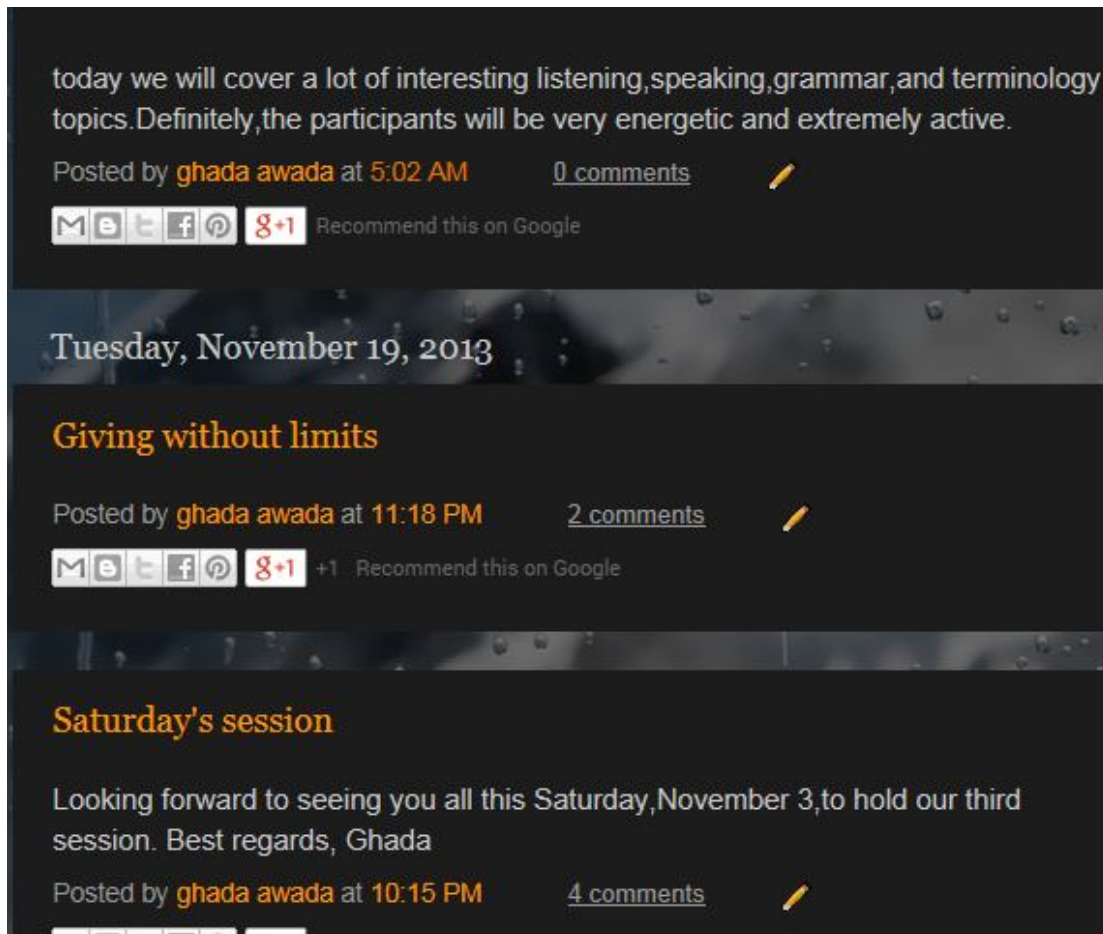


Figure 8

The participants also used the Blog for exchanging greetings .

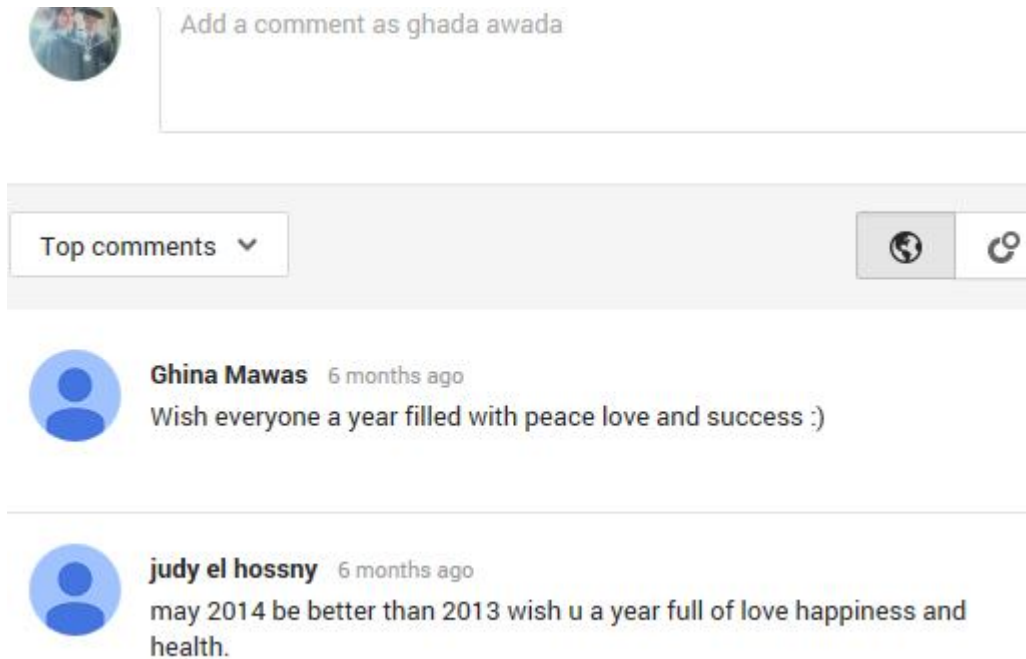


Figure 9

The participants used the Blog to interact with the teacher and to convey to her their satisfaction with the Blog model employed as shown below.

hi, Dr Ghada

hi, Dr Ghada whereas the teaching is your passion , whereas you are an energetic woman , so , please do read the topic as follows ; thank you finest regards

ARBITRATION CENTER When you get into my firm , you will find a real center arbitration there; three arbitrators , three paralegals and two secretaries , and three huge halls . In fact , we regulate the work ,and one of us studies the lawsuits , the petitions , and the issues ; the second supervises the work in the firm and fulfills all the legal procedures to start the arbitration act , and the third serves all the deeds and makes all the contracts with the clients to bill them the due fees.

Notwithstanding the arbitration work , the paralegals do what the supervisor wants before , during , and after the deliberations, whether the arbitration begins or not . Beside , one of the hall is for the disputants and litigants and their lawyers , and the second one used for the panel arbitration , and the taste for deliberation before issue any verdict or gag order or renders any arbitration award. **ARBITRATION IN NORTH LEBANON** However, we are three colleagues and we have been practicing arbitration for 10 years . Since 2003 , every one of us has a practicing license in national and international arbitration . In fact , after 10 years , we have the experience and the expertise to solve any differences or any settlement ; I think that we are now overqualified. Usually, we render at least one arbitration award each three months . Although , the arbitration is not acceptable in our society, specially in north Lebanon , but we have a lot of arbitrations disputes in our firm , and all the settlements are from outside north Lebanon . Some people prefer the traditional trial , but the other say that we must not sue anyone in this court , they prefer to

Figure 10

English for Lawyers

Tuesday, December 31, 2013

Happy New Year and Best Wishes

Posted by **ghada awada** at 10:41 AM

Recommend this on Google

2 comments Google+

Figure 11

4.5. Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics (Means and Standard Deviations) were calculated on the pre-test and post-test performance scores of learners in the control and experimental groups, following which two independent sample t-tests were conducted to investigate the differences in writing achievement and motivation prior to and subsequent to the intervention between the groups of learners in the control and experimental groups. The treatment conditions (control vs experimental) were used as an independent variable given that these conditions represent the regular ESP writing teaching and the procedures of the Blog model under investigation. Likewise, the scores of the participants on writing achievement motivation were used as dependent variables in order to address the questions raised in the study. Furthermore, a paired sample test was used to compare the pretest and posttest writing motivation of the participants in the experimental group. Finally, a content analysis of the blog postings and comments were used as the method of data analysis of the qualitative data gathered and analyzed according to the inductive category development method proposed by Mayring (2000) to analyze learners perceptions. Data were unitized and categorized into idea units as given by data without any predetermined categories, following which data were organized into related clusters and themes to write up and report results as suggested by Patton (2002).

5. Results

5.1. Findings on writing achievement

We found that prior to intervention, as shown in Table 1 below, there was no statistically significant difference in the writing achievement of the participants in the control group ($M = 8.23$, $SD = 1.30$) and the experimental group ($M = 7.37$, $SD = 1.20$), $t(27) = -1.83$, $P = .07$ (see Table 1).

Insert Table 1 about here

Conversely, after the intervention, the experimental group ($M = 11.62$, $SD = 2.27$) outperformed the control group in writing achievement ($M = 9.61$, $SD = 1.75$), $t(27) = 2.61$, $P = 0.01$. The effect size of improvement $d = 1.14$, which suggests a highly significant gain in achievement from an educational point of view (see Table 2).

Insert Table 2 about here

5.2. Findings on Writing Motivation

The results of the paired sample t test conducted to measure difference in the writing apprehension level of the participants revealed no statistically significant difference at $P \leq 0.05$. As shown in Table 3 below: The pretest and posttest mean scores and standard deviations of the

participants in the experimental group were 7.42 (SD = 1.22) and 6.50 (SD = 1.22), respectively, $t(13) = 1.91$, $P = .07$ (see Table 3).

Insert Table 3 about here

5.3. Findings on Perceptions of Blog Experience

The researcher noticed a remarkable writing apprehension decrease in the experimental group's discussions that were carried out in class while listening to the participants' inquiries about the terminology and the structures that were inserted by the teachers in the participants' writings before posting them on the English for Lawyers blog. The teacher also observed change in fluency in the participants' role play activities they conducted in the class and in the blog postings and comments. Such fluency and improvement in the writing skills were not detected in the control group that employed similar role play and speaking activities.

The results of the content analysis of qualitative data from reflective logs about learners' experience with the blog suggest four aspects of interest: 1) the importance of the blog in increasing the confidence in one's abilities and accordingly increasing motivation, 2) the importance of the blog as a marketing tool 3) the importance of using blog in teaching EFL writing skills, in general, and Legal English in particular. 4) The importance of the blog as a medium of communication. Specifically, the theme of the importance of the blog emerged from the data as many learners in the experimental group expressed mainly their positive perception of this experience.

First, learners asserted the importance of the blog in increasing the confidence in one's abilities and accordingly increasing motivation. For instance, one learner reported that "...the blog makes me gain reputation/ gain influence... Emerge as an author... Attracting opportunities." Another said, "...Attracting colleagues/ More clients.. Learn from reviews." A third learner added, "Many people can read postings and get inspired....People can know about your work." Another learner reported that "...the blog makes my creativity increase...another learner added that "...blogging helps me express myself as an expert in the writing field. "The blog encourages us to work harder since our writings will be published....the blog gives us more confidence in our work and ourselves...."

Second, some learners underscored the importance of the blog as a marketing tool. A learner reported that "...Many people can read my blog postings and get inspired." Another learner noted that "...People can know about my work." Another learner highlighted that "...through blogging, people would get to know me and like my work and wait to read what I write always which would make any written work I do succeed." A third learner added that "... it is free space where my work would be published if I can't publish in a magazine or newspaper." A learner added that "The blog makes me create a profile about myself and shows my background and other information."

Some learners respectively asserted the importance of using blog in the writing process, especially they highlighted the impact of the weblog postings as a source of feedback. For example, a learner reported that "...through blog postings, you get feedback, which allows you to know what you've done wrong and correct it... You can improve your writing." A learner added that "... Blog (blogging) improved my writing... blog gives me feedback, which allows me to know what I've done wrong and correct it." Another learner added that "...the blog makes you find the best ways to

obtain information."A learner wrote that "through blogging , I see what people say about me to rate my work." another added".. The blog gives me potential to become a better writing."

Finally, other learners reported the importance of the blog as a medium of communication. A learner reported that "through blog, you can share your ideas with people and be inspired by them....You can express your thoughts and give your own opinion."A learner noted that " It's a way of expressing my thoughts to whoever is concerned with a big amount of audience."

The majority of the learners asserted the relevance of blog when three learners respectively wrote, "the blog improves our work...the blog gives us ideas and different point of views from other writings."

".....the blog makes us more comfortable around each other....","...the blog teaches us from the mistakes we and our colleagues do....the blog supports our works from comments."

However, few learners expressed some disadvantages of blogging .Yet, their positive comments and perceptions outweigh the negative ones they noted . For instance, a learner reported that "some blog postings are negative comments....blogging might encourage people to commit Plagiarism.."Another learner noted that ". Some readers may copy my work as if it was for them."A third learner noted that "...through blogging, unexperienced(inexperienced) people would leave bad comments on the blog."Another learner added that "Blogs can be time consuming and may consume my time instead of doing something more productive..."

These remarks also show that the learners in the study have perceived the blogging experience as very useful in employing language to freely and interestingly express their thoughts on their own.

5. Discussion

The results of the present study corroborate the findings of Abdullah & Kuzu, 2006; Lui, , Choy, Cheung , & Li ,2006 who Underscored that the obligatory use of Blog in a course is beneficial.

Also the findings of the study are in agreement with those of Bakar & Ismail,2009, Rezaee & Oladi ,2008, Pinkman,2005, Zeqiri,2013 who assert that Blogs are an effective tool to help students communicate, reflect and track their own progress.

Conversely, the findings of the present study are not in agreement with those of (Matsumura & Hann, 2004) that warn the practitioners about the feedback issues. Though writing through technological tools contributes a lot, students may feel unpleasant with the feedback published online

As such, the education ESP blog can be a powerful and effective technology tool for students and teachers alike. Fortunately for teachers, blogs are easy to use. They require minimum technical knowledge and are quickly and easily created and maintained. In addition to providing teachers with an excellent tool for communicating with students, there are numerous educational benefits of blogs. Blogs are tools to enable scaffold learning to occur.

6. Limitations

One of the major limitations of the present study is that the researcher has been the teacher of both the experimental and control groups; as such, the attitude of the students might have varied in case the researcher weren't the teacher. Another limitation is that the present study employed a relatively small and convenient sample size, which has negative implications for the generalization of the findings into other contexts. Further research with a larger and more representative sample size should be conducted in order to test the generalization of the findings as well as examine the

interaction of the treatment effects of with other contextual variables such as students, level of language proficiency, gender, technology apprehension.

7. Conclusion

The present study proved that the Blog offers an environment where learning is not limited to the legal English classroom. The ESP Blog provides a space where teachers and students can work to further improve writing or other skills with the benefit of an instant audience. A legal English class blog paves the way for students to discuss topics outside of the classroom. It opens the opportunity to the participants to share experiences pertaining to the legal profession. With the legal English blog, participants including the instructor have an equal opportunity to express their thoughts and share postings. The ESP Blog provides students with the time to be responsive and reflective. Teachers can also raise debatable issues for the group of knowledgeable participants to discuss on a blog.

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Table 1. *t-test* Results of Control and Experimental Group Participants on Writing Achievement Prior to Intervention.

Treatment	n	Mean	SD	t	df	p	d
Control	13	8.23	1.30	-1.83	27.	.07	
Experimental	16	7.37	1.20				

Table 2. *t-test* Results of Control and Experimental Group Participants on Writing Achievement After Intervention.

Treatment	n	Mean	SD	t	df	p	d
Control	13	9.61	1.75	2.61	27	.07	1.14
Experimental	16	11.62	2.27				

Table 3. Paired Samples *t-test* Results of Writing Apprehension prior to and After Intervention

Treatment	n	Mean	SD	t	df	p	d
Pretest	14	7.42	1.22	1.91	13	.07	
Posttest	14	6.50					