

Using Blogging in EFL Grade Twelve Student Teaching: Theoretical Foundations

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Abstract

Research on the challenges students face in argumentative essay writing in English as a Foreign Language classes has found that broader issues are related to language and mechanics and the organization of ideas and thinking skills. Web 2.0 instructional tools addressing these challenges have been proposed. This study aims to address the use of blogging in secondary EFL classes in Lebanon to improve the organization of ideas and develop the evaluative skills of Bloom's Taxonomy needed for argument formulation. The outcomes of the integration of blogging activities may show higher effectiveness in improving the organization of ideas in the students' argumentative essays and the development of the evaluating skills of Bloom's Digital Taxonomy. Based on this theoretical work, a second study will be proposed to assess and investigate the analytical side using the statistical significance of the outcomes. Implications and recommendations for future studies are made.

Keywords: Argumentative Essay, Blogging, Bloom's Digital Taxonomy, Evaluative Skills, Organization of Ideas, Web 2.0

المخلص

وجدت الأبحاث حول التحديات التي يواجهها الطلاب في كتابة المقالات الجدلية باللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية أن القضايا الأوسع لا تتعلق فقط باللغة وميكانيكات الكتابة ولكن أيضاً بتنظيم الأفكار ومهارات التفكير. وقد تم اقتراح أدوات تعليمية للويب 2.0 لمعالجة هذه التحديات. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى معالجة استخدام التدوين في صفوف اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في المرحلة الثانوية في لبنان لتحسين تنظيم الأفكار وتنمية المهارات التقييمية اللازمة لعملية صياغة الحجج وفق هرم بلوم. قد تظهر نتائج تكامل أنشطة التدوين فعالية أعلى في تحسين تنظيم الأفكار في المقالات الجدلية للطلاب وتطوير مهارات التقييم لتصنيف بلوم الرقمي. وبناء على هذا العمل النظري، سيتم اقتراح دراسة ثانية لتقييم ودراسة الجانب التحليلي باستخدام الدلالة الإحصائية للنتائج ويتم تقديم الآثار والتوصيات للدراسات المستقبلية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: مقالة جدلية، التدوين، تصنيف بلوم الرقمي، مهارات التقييم، تنظيم الأفكار، الويب 2.0

Introduction

An argumentative essay is a piece of academic writing that requires the writer to practice cognitive and linguistic skills, including evaluating and making judgments (Ward-Loneragan, 2010). This writing genre includes arguments and counterarguments. Teaching argumentative writing is an essential skill that emphasizes the potential of a particular issue, defends a position logically, and evaluates an idea. Thus, it grants the learners the ability to develop the reasoning, persuasive, and evaluative (checking and critiquing) thinking skills (Liu, 2018) that Benjamin Bloom included in his classification system of the levels of cognitive skills.

For decades, Web 2.0 technologies and the inflow of Information Communications Technology (ICT) have revolutionized the teaching of writing to EFL students to become more meaningful, interactive, and collaborative. Meeting this need requires a combination of technology and pedagogy. Hence, Churches (2008) extended the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy developed by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) and added new action verbs to highlight how technology use relates to relevant skills. Many instructors have started to utilize social networking sites and platforms as tools to foster the development of thinking skills and to facilitate the development of writing skills in EFL writing classrooms. Among these platforms and tools is the class blog, which allows students to post messages, discussions, and images related to classroom lessons (Cequena, 2013). This gives them the opportunity to employ Bloom's taxonomy as they need to comprehend, analyze, and synthesize their ideas to share their opinions, critique and evaluate.

In the Lebanese context, blogs were piloted into the Lebanese curriculum for two semesters as supplemental material, revealing that they nurtured students' critical thinking and enhanced their motivation to read and use the target language (Soufi et al., 2015). Further, Awada (2018) found that integrating blogs fostered a deeper understanding and appreciation of diverse cultures, enriching the language learning experience. However, Itani (2018) highlighted that while digital tools were available, their integration into teaching practices was limited due to insufficient training and resources. Such findings in the Lebanese context necessitate the importance of the study.

The Rationale of the Study

The current globalization era requires learners to pay attention to the development of argumentation activities to build knowledgeable critical thinkers and problem solvers. This is consistent with the United Nations (UN) consensus that education in the 21st century must build knowledgeable communities through ICT literacy skills, critical thinking skills, and collaborative skills (Kusnandar, 2008). Hence, high school EFL learners should have the time and space to engage in evaluative activities, share their arguments, write, and reflect on others' writings. However, because of the high thinking skills involved in these activities, EFL students may dislike or even fear such writing tasks in the classroom, leading to poor performance in writing. Such a context requires the teachers of English not only to be well-versed in second language acquisition but also to be aware of innovative pedagogical strategies meant to motivate students to use the target language and to increase its (Chehimi & Alameddine, 2022). Blogging is a blended learning choice that the teacher can exploit in the EFL classroom. It is an instructional writing tool that employs online learning activities anytime, anywhere, particularly when the task needs tolerance, focus, and time (Rashtici & Porkar, 2020). Through classroom blogging, learners could have the space to develop the skills related to critical thinking (Montaner-Villalba, 2019), i.e., interpret, appraise, support, defend, verify, justify, criticize, validate, and judge. The collaborative nature of blogging offers researchers the potential for collective learning and growth, fostering a sense of community and shared knowledge.

It attempts to address key aspects of the ever-growing literature on blogging, specifically on its impact on scaffolding students to argue for or against a claim to improve their writing and evaluative skills.

Significance of the Study

The Center for Educational Research and Development (CERD) has set a plan to develop the Lebanese curricula to consider the attributes of the 21st century learner as they involve all students, develop their critical thinking skills, improve their communicative skills, and encourage self-assessment and peer feedback. Since this study shares similar objectives, it can prepare students to get used to such teaching and learning platforms. This preparation is significant and beneficial as it shows how students' involvement in purposeful-oriented blogging develops evaluative skills and improves the writing of an organized argumentative essay. Another distinctive feature added to the current study, besides the experience of nurturing communicative social skills and developing writing, is the relaxing environment of the blogging activities that foster learners to express their thoughts without interruption, i.e., anytime and anywhere. It inspires students to participate and create online student-written work in any subject matter. As for teachers, the study serves as a guide for teachers to adopt

a virtual learning tool that can help them reinforce their classroom concepts, improve their instruction, and cultivate their teaching expertise. It is also substantial as it provides a variety of theoretical views and strategies relevant to developing writing skills and fostering evaluative skills using blogging as a tool in the EFL classroom. In this respect, teachers decide what to adapt, adopt, and avoid based on their learners' needs.

Statement of the Problem

In the learning process, learners generally listen to their teacher, rarely question what is presented, and copy material dictated by the instructors who rely on textbooks for instruction (Bashnack & Malaeb, 2022), and teachers in Lebanon are faced with limited time, and many curriculum contents (Human Rights Watch, 2021). Based on the researcher's experience in teaching English in high schools and universities in Lebanon, Lebanese students get confused when learning to write in EFL classes, even though they know that organizing and convincingly presenting ideas are indispensable. According to Hamoud and Shuayab (2021), poor education quality stems from decreased teaching days, teachers' and students' limited experience with ICT, and difficulty meeting teaching objectives. The employment of conventional teaching methods and the lack of opportunities to practice writing tasks using ICT instructional tools not only let students find the task of organizing their ideas in essay writing tedious or complex but also cause a decline in the development of the evaluative skills of Bloom's taxonomy needed for the process of writing an argumentative essay. Due to the unprecedented recent challenges and the decline in the results of EFL official exams (CERD, 2018), many experts expect the Lebanese educational system to slowly fall apart unless significant steps are taken to save it (Al-Hasan, 2022).

Purpose of the Study

Blogging and its impact on students' writing performance is a popular research area elsewhere; however, it is still underexplored in the Lebanese EFL context. This study aims to determine the effect of blogging on learning argumentative essays in EFL classes, examine its impact on developing Bloom's Digital Taxonomy's evaluating skills, and improve the organization of ideas of Third Secondary students at public schools in South Lebanon. The blogging tool provides opportunities for students to build organization skills and gain various evaluative skills, including commenting and critiquing while posting online. Thus, combined, the blogging writing activities in this study (supporting an idea, opposing an idea, refuting an idea) can enhance the organization and

evaluative skills, yielding a better product and consequently improving the writing skill required for argumentation.

Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

- (1) What are the perspectives of students and teachers towards the effects of using online classroom blogging on teaching and learning argumentative essays in an EFL Third Secondary writing environment in Lebanon?
- (2) How does using online classroom blogging in learning argumentative essay writing in an EFL Third Secondary class in Lebanon improve the organization of ideas in the students' argumentative essays?
- (3) How does the use of online classroom blogging in learning argumentative essay writing in an EFL Third Secondary class in Lebanon develop the evaluating skills of Bloom's Digital Taxonomy?

Literature Review

The Nature of Writing Skill in Language Teaching and Learning

As Kumar (2024) recommends, academic content writing demands the need to learn the formats and writing standards like the ability to manipulate sentences, use language effectively, write appropriately for a particular purpose with a particular audience, and select and organize relevant information. Thus, academic writing, according to Hedge (2005), demands a high degree of organization in the development of information, ideas, or arguments, high accuracy to avoid ambiguity of meaning, focus, and emphasis by using complex grammatical devices, and a careful choice of vocabulary, grammatical patterns, and sentence structure to create a style which is appropriate to the subject matter and potential reader. Teaching academic writing should focus on the linguistic accuracy of grammatical constituents of a sentence as proposed by the conventional product-oriented writing paradigm and also on the "macro strategies of planning, drafting, and revising" (Cheung, 2016, p. 12) and the micro strategies of content, words, and syntax (Cumming, 2001).

Theories of Teaching Academic Writing in the EFL Class

Cognitive Process Theory of Writing

Composing, structuring, and expressing thoughts through writing is a typical cognitive process that authors design. According to Flower and Hayes (1981), a writer must think through and create macro and micro-objectives before writing. They then use their mental faculties to brainstorm, plan,

investigate, make conclusions, organize, and complete the assignment by combining the ideas. According to their commonly accepted concept, writing is not a sequence of sequential steps or distinct phases but a set of hierarchically ordered thought processes.

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) Theory of Writing

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) theory devised by Michael Halliday (1978) studies the language through meaning, i.e., its function, and analyzes the relationship between social contexts and linguistic aspects. It considers language as a social semiotic system that serves specific purposes or functions for them, such as what language is used for, i.e., the writer's purpose in writing the sentence. This theory does not tackle the manner of language representation or process in the human brain. However, it would instead focus on language as meaning-making as speakers and writers have a systematic choice in a particular context, which is related to the meaning-making choice in a particular situation. Halliday's SFL model proposes that human language has evolved to make experiential meanings (representation), interpersonal meanings (exchange), and textual meanings (message).

Sociocultural Theory of Writing

Hodges (2017) contends that human learning is a social process influenced by social influences, interaction, and motivation. This is based on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. It is believed that socialization is essential to developing higher-order cognitive functions. The zone of proximal development (ZPD) is a widely used Vygotskian concept. According to Vygotsky (1978, p. 78), the concept of ZPD is a student's performance under the supervision of an adult or their collaboration with peers. Beyond their competence, learners can advance and reach a greater potential development level through interaction. Vygotsky explained that since writing is a social act that needs a distributed process of invention and mediated knowledge, students need socializing and help. Given the focus on social interaction and communication as a prerequisite to cognitive development, more significant opportunities and social practices between teachers and students should be considered.

Social cognitive theory and self-efficacy in writing

Social cognitive theory (SCT) refers to how different factors determine motivation and behavior: cognitive, behavioral, personal, and environmental. This evolved as a social learning theory (SLT) and combined ideas behind behaviorist and cognitive learning approaches. Bandura (2001) theorized the SLT concept and explained how people can learn from each other through observation, imitation, and modeling. LT entails students developing their

perception by looking at past productions and “employing self-observation, self-evaluation, self-reaction, and self-efficacy, which refers to the writer’s confidence in accomplishing a writing task given and accepting challenges” (Bandura, 2001).

The Teaching of EFL Writing Approaches

Product-based Approach

This writing process targets the end product. It is a conventional approach to teaching writing based on reproduction and focuses on correctness and conformity to rules. Students are encouraged to read a model text, look at its features, analyze the form and the organization of ideas, do controlled activities, practice the highlighted features, and then mimic the model text. The students will be prepared to organize a pre-determined set of ideas to fit the model and then do the writing task by using the skills, structures, and vocabulary they have practiced to produce the expected written product. Students systematically learn to use particular pattern-product methods in writing composition, learn to correct vocabulary and various sentence patterns, and develop grammatical awareness (Tangpermpoon, 2008). Although it minimizes difficulties and errors and helps learners develop analytical skills, it devalues their linguistic and personal potential (Campos, 2022).

Process-based Approach

This approach fosters creativity as it needs the learners’ previous knowledge and starts thinking about a text based on the ideas that they come up with (Jee & Aziz, 2021). It is sequential, where the writer goes through planning, drafting, revising, and editing while writing. It values the actual process of getting the end product, as teaching writing occurs during the writing process. This approach fosters individual creativity and allows learners to get involved in the four processes of planning, drafting, revising, and editing. To improve their writing before they produce the final product, learners think about what to write, get ideas, plan, outline, make notes and drafts, revise, receive feedback from peers and/or from the teacher, and replan, redraft, and edit (Hedge, 2003).

A central feature of the process approach is the notion of students sharing their work while the teachers act as facilitators, providing constant support to students in developing their compositions (Din et al., 2021). In case students receive formative feedback or peer comments during the writing process, mainly in successive drafts, they will improve at critiquing their own and others’ writing, and then their final products will improve.

Genre-based Approach

Like the product approach, it regards writing as a linguistic activity that shows its distinctive features in terms of layout and organization. However, unlike the product approach, it refers to the writing process, showing its systematic orders to be followed by the teacher or the students. This approach to writing varies with the social context; it values the writer-audience relationship more and varies with the social context since social needs influence it.

This approach includes three stages. The first is modeling the target, where a specific genre's model is examined. In the second stage, the instructor and the students construct the text; learners develop relevant language forms through exercises and text manipulation. In the third stage, learners construct an independent text as a complete product (Badger & White, 2000). Reppen (2002) argued that with such an approach that focuses on the direct instruction of the features of the text, learners can better understand how to make their writing more appropriate and effective for communicative purposes.

The POWER-S Approach

This is a tailored approach to teaching writing. The POWER-S approach stands for “Plan, Organize, Write, Edit, and Revise-Share,” proposed by Englert et al. (1988). It is an elaborated practice combining the product, genre, and process approaches. POWER-S mnemonic describes the distinct phases of writing. Bidari (2021) claims the importance of the last phase, ‘share,’ to meet the needs of digital learners. He stated that combining the product approach with the genre and process approach offers specific procedures for students to improve academic writing.

The POWER-S approach, which this research refers to, is highly beneficial for teaching writing skills; it provides students with specific guidelines they need to follow in prewriting, organizing, writing/drafting, evaluating, revising, and sharing. They employ these phases in a dynamic scaffolded learning environment that ensures the benefit of the ZPD. Students develop writing skills progressively, moving from teacher-assisted learning to autonomous expression on blogs and directed through peer feedback and comments. STC is emphasized through collaborative peer review. Blogging in EFL integrates ZPD and SCT principles.

Argumentative Writing Components and Assessment

Essays meant to persuade readers of the veracity of a central claim are referred to as argumentative essays. They train students to question, reflect, analyze, synthesize, solve problems, and make decisions (Beniche, 2023). To

concisely establish a position on a topic, the writer has to investigate, collect, generate, and evaluate evidence. Jumariati et al. (2021) posit that an author must possess in-depth knowledge, weigh realistic evidence, and identify enough credible supporting ideas that can be drawn from the findings of other people's research or personal experiences to persuade the reader to adopt a particular point of view or take a particular action. According to Suhartoyo (2017), a good argumentative essay should include eight (8) components enlisted in the Scoring Rubric of an Argumentative Essay (SRAE), namely: The introduction and thesis statement, the development, the refutation, the conclusion, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics.

Argumentative Essay Writing and Evaluative Thinking

Evaluative thinking is a disciplined approach to inquiry and reflective practice that helps individuals make sound judgments using good evidence. Buckley et al. (2015) define evaluative thinking as “critical thinking applied in the context of evaluation, motivated by an attitude of inquisitiveness and a belief in the value of evidence, that involves identifying assumptions, posing thoughtful questions, pursuing deeper understanding through reflection and perspective taking, and informing decisions in preparation for action” (p. 379). Kelly (2017) asserts that according to Bloom, “it is essential to engage higher critical skills of analyzing and evaluating in education. The evaluation level is where students judge the value of ideas, items, materials, and more. At this level, students are expected to bring in all they have learned to make sound evaluations of material” (para 1). Sham (2016) also asserted Bloom’s definition of evaluation and stated that checking, critiquing, detecting, experimenting, hypothesizing, judging, monitoring, and testing may be involved; learners have to set up criteria for the defense of their different views in making judgments. They can make choices through evaluation based on reasoned argument in group discussion.

Bloom’s Taxonomy and Evaluative Thinking

Bloom's Taxonomy prompts learners to engage in critical thinking and information analysis. According to the updated taxonomy, evaluating entails making decisions and judgments based on inferring relationships between concepts and checking and critiquing. Because they involve conscious value judgments based on precisely specified criteria that include knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, and synthesis, the learning outcomes in this category are, therefore, the highest in the cognitive hierarchy (Bellis, 2020). Maghsoudi and Haririan (2013) contend that evaluative thinking necessitates

much work because it sharpens authors' analytical, organizing, and summarizing skills and forces them to focus and concentrate on their writing.

According to Bloom's definition of thinking skills, six categories of thinking skills - knowledge, understanding, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation - would be included in writing tasks. These types of thinking abilities are arranged in order of complexity. Heick (2018) reports Bloom's Taxonomy Digital Planning Verbs, which was updated by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001). He outlines the skills and shows what is involved in evaluative thinking.

Evaluative Thinking Skills in Argumentative Essay Writing

Many scholars and educators recognized the correlation between critical thinking and argumentative writing in an EFL context. Fahim and Mirzaai (2013) asserted that students typically employ their beliefs and ways of thinking when writing argumentative essays. They use more significant levels of linguistic proficiency and higher-order thinking abilities, such as evaluative reasoning. Stapleton (2001) and others assert that writers must arrange ideas, defend positions, interpret, analyze, draw conclusions, and make comparisons. However, their argument will likely be weak, and their ideas will be poorly argued if they do not possess critical thinking skills (Nattawut & Dumrong, 2019). Giving readers facts, logic, and reasoning might be a persuasive argument (Beniche, 2023).

Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) emphasized the value of skill evaluation and suggested that students practice decision-making based on standards and criteria by verifying and analyzing their work. Learners must conjecture, identify, test, debate, argue, evaluate, validate, post, and reflect.

Teaching Argumentative Essay and Instructing Evaluative Skills

Argumentation is a skill that must be cultivated with clear education and learning opportunities (Kuhn, 1991). Within the dynamic landscape of education, instructional techniques are pivotal in promoting efficacious teaching and learning methodologies. To meet the varied requirements of students, interactive instructional practices that encourage collaboration, critical thinking, active involvement, and problem-solving should be used, drawing on various educational theories. Lu and Swatevacharkul (2020) proposed a comprehensive pedagogical framework to teach interpretation, explanation, assessment, backing, and reflection to direct the infused practice of teaching the argumentative writing process. In addition, students must participate in such a framework to receive explicit training in thinking skills. Instructors must help students apply their critical thinking abilities to their writing, encourage them to debate the assigned material to use those skills, let students draft alone, and

assign them to rewrite independently. However, Moufarrij's (2015) study on writing instruction in Lebanese private schools reveals a drop in both the students' desire to write and produce original work at this point and the teachers' inventiveness in the classroom. The importance of argumentative writing in education is acknowledged.

To improve student learning and maximize instructional methodology, Hall (2017) proposed co-teaching as a helpful exercise to exchange and contrast teaching methods. The fundamental idea behind this method is to give students more voice and responsibility; students must be accustomed to speaking up and participating in decisions that affect their education inside and outside the classroom.

Rubrics for Evaluating Skills in Writing

Evaluative thinking is frequently listed as a desired goal of EFL programs, but teachers frequently fail to evaluate these abilities directly in their classes. If the assignments, the instructor-designed assessment methods, and the desired learning outcomes are all constructively aligned, then students have a higher chance of developing this ability. The categories listed in Danczak et al.'s (2017) rubrics for assessing critical thinking (i.e., evaluating, analyzing, synthesizing, and forming arguments), for example, can be adapted and modified in light of Bloom's evaluative level, which requires students to "appraise, argue, assess, choose, collaborate, compare, contrast, conclude, critique, criticize, decide, defend, "friend/de-friend," evaluate, judge, justify, network, post, predict, prioritize, prove, rank, rate, review, select, and support" (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001).

Additionally, it is advisable to consider the categories for assessing the evaluative skills provided in the Lebanese National EFL Textbook titled "Themes" (Abou Hamad et al., 2000). For instance, the writers outline the factors students must consider when using evidence from sources in the Third Secondary "Themes" book assigned for the Literature and Humanities section. They demand that material be evaluated for correctness, interpretation, and applicability, as well as for citing the evidence's source in writing (Abou Hamad et al., 2000). The 4-point Argumentative Performance Task Writing Rubric for Grades 6–11 from the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (2022), which evaluates evidence and elaboration, considers these principles.

Lebanese Curriculum and its Principles in Developing Writing and Evaluative Skills

Lebanon's current English Language and Literature curriculum moves from a language education system based on rote learning, linguistic correctness, and

information cramming to a system that promotes autonomous learning, thinking skills, and communicative competence (CERD, 1998; CERD, 2012). It highlights the role of group work in developing communicative language skills and stresses the need for the cooperative learning model of classroom interaction.

According to CERD's principles (1998), language learning is most effective through meaningful, interactive, interdependent tasks in the classroom and social settings. Therefore, CERD (1998) suggested written communication objectives in the secondary classes, asserting that a Lebanese Third Secondary EFL student has to demonstrate advanced writing skills when responding to input and show advanced skills in writing well-researched papers on academic topics, utilizing a wide range of vocabulary and grammar. In the Humanities and Literature section, the emphasis lies more on reacting critically to what is read, demonstrating command of extended writing, and writing communicatively. It is worth mentioning that the same objectives remain valid and communicated for the academic year 2023-2024 curriculum (CERD, 2023, pp. 191-198).

However, Shaaban (2013) describes the disparity between the principles, guidelines, objectives, and classroom activities suggested by CERD's English language curriculum and the classroom realities. He explains how many factors, including language proficiency, the content and pedagogical knowledge from teachers, the availability of adequate resources, and the ongoing professional development programs, have loaded its proper implementation.

Secondary EFL Curriculum and Thinking Skills Objectives in Lebanon

In addition to the set of writing communication objectives, a Lebanese Third Secondary EFL student has to achieve thinking skills objectives. Among the New National Lebanese curriculum objectives is the ability to reinterpret written input, apply critical thinking skills in the reaction to the course material in context, evaluate information, and employ an integrated approach to language learning.

Learners of the Literature and Humanities section must practice argumentation, the cornerstone for developing evaluative skills. When working on issues that tackle 'Psychology' and 'Sociology,' the learners must apply inductive and deductive reasoning, respond critically to an argument, and demonstrate the ability to persuade. They must practice taking a stand or position on a topic or an author's argument and refuting counterarguments and counter-evidence using accurate, sufficient, relevant, logical, and interpreted information from various sources. To achieve these objectives, various activities have been incorporated. Moreover, specific guidelines are included in tables to

guide the students and ignite their thinking as they learn (Abou Hamad et al., 2000). The recurring economic, financial, and security events in Lebanon (Chehimi & Hejase, 2024, p. 10) affecting the education sector have led to the removal of many objectives from the curriculum content of English Language and Literature for the Third Secondary sections detailed in CERD's (2022). However, it is important to note that the fundamentals of evaluative skills remain as a cornerstone for teaching and learning; students must assess logical relationships, decide whether a theory is warranted, relate textual references to authentic experiences, apply experience to present situations, organize and analyze results, and compare findings to those reported in the literature. However, according to Bacha and Bahous (2013), schools in Lebanon do not emphasize critical thinking, classroom interaction, and student-centeredness. However, according to Yazigi's (2020) research, "university students show understanding of social and cultural issues, as they are trained in critical and analytical thinking, and acquire writing and communication skill." This allows graduates to secure jobs in the commercial and government sectors.

Teaching Writing in the Digital Age

How people write has been dramatically impacted by Web 2.0, i.e., blogs, wikis, email, instant messaging, text messaging, digital gaming, social networking, and software applications (Kilpatrick et al., 2014). Students might utilize tools like 'Essay Topic Generator,' Read Cube, and Zotero. The first to come up with topic ideas, refine the ideas into more well-thought-out sentences and craft an effective thesis statement. The second and third are helpful for quickly gathering, arranging, citing, and exchanging research. Furthermore, larger teams can easily access all of the curated and aggregated material with the aid of Pockt and Memonic. Additionally, 'Wordtune Read supports continuous reading and summaries of difficult essays, reports, and research papers (Pines, 2024).

Schools and teachers are racing to investigate new literacies and provide a distinguished vision of teaching writing using digital technologies (tools, practices, and technologies) because of these opportunities to provide new solutions to the limits of conventional approaches in the field of language teaching and learning (Dahlström, 2019). This makes the selection process more difficult. Therefore, technical and pedagogical knowledge is essential to evaluate tools' employability, viability, and interoperability (Graham, 2022). Carrington (2016) provides an insightful viewpoint by creating a pedagogical wheel with many applications that align with Bloom's Digital Taxonomy. Such a tool aligns Bloom's areas (remember/understand, apply, analyze, evaluate, and

create) with action verbs, activities, and iPad Apps, with many options chosen as needed.

Lebanon's Education Reform in the Digital Age

CERD and the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) created the foundation for Lebanon's Education Reform Strategy and Action Plan (LERSAP) in 2011. They positioned technology as the primary means of assisting with instruction and encouraged using ICT tools to fulfill the demands of a digital world. A roadmap towards ICT competencies and proficiency was given to the Lebanese general education system to guarantee this goal and aid in developing high-quality human capital marked by problem-solving, inquiry-based, creative, and cognitive skills (Diab, 2011). Lebanese researchers have demonstrated the benefits of using ICT and digital resources in EFL lessons. For instance, Awada and Abdallah (2014) ascertain the benefits of using Wiki and Google Drive to motivate and enhance Third Secondary students' research and communication skills, in addition to using WebQuest to improve sixth-grade pupils' writing skills and decreasing their writing anxiety. Also, MEHE (2012) declared that "technology needs to be matched with digital-age curriculum, instruction, and assessment for the promise of educational technology to be fulfilled," as noted in Lebanon's National Educational Technology Strategic Plan. The "Lebanon five-year General Education Plan 2021-2025," which strives to ensure excellent quality for everyone and equip youngsters with the skills they will need in the 21st century, strongly prioritizes improving the digital environment in schools. Additionally, MEHE promotes the use of ICT because it is thought to be a potent tool for enhancing and increasing education (MEHE, 2021).

Rationale for Integrating Digital Tools in the EFL Writing Class

Some students may find writing to be extremely tiresome and frustrating. To assist with writing and journaling, blogging tools are being made available to students so they can practice writing in less scary environments. Digital tools that promote teamwork and communication have a considerable potential to improve student learning and teacher effectiveness, according to Barnes et al. (2007). Less direct education occurs in the classroom when teachers are equipped with the digital skills and knowledge to use various computer technologies to gather, analyze, interpret, and communicate information to students (Habibu et al., 2012). The initial product is not the conclusion of the writing instruction process. Instead, students must improve and strengthen their writing via editing and rewriting in response to feedback (Woodard & Babcock, 2014). Using digital writing tools such as Google Docs and Woodard

allows students to keep track of all text modifications, making the writing process more visible (Yim et al., 2014). In addition, using colorful language and sentence construction was made easier by digital technologies, which enhanced students' spelling, organization, and clarity. Students can also see their changes in ways they have not before with tools like Google Docs' Revision History and Microsoft Word's Track Changes, which lets them see how their writing is altered (Hunt-Barron & Colwell, 2014). Furthermore, readers can use Google Docs' chat function to participate in real-time conversations or leave blog comments (Woodard & Babcock, 2014).

Blended Learning: Blogging as an Educational Tool

Gebauer (2022) posits that a “blog is short for web log or weblog. It is more of a content hub. A place where informational content is published” (para 2). Xu and Yu (2008) posit that “blogs are online public platforms where postings, or blog entries and individual writing segments, are listed in reverse chronological order.” Moreover, Gargano (2024) contends that “blogging is writing the content for a blog (‘blog posts’), and the individual who does so is a blogger” (para 8). By leaving comments and responding to feedback on other people's posts, bloggers provide themselves with platforms to express their voices and hone their communication skills.

Blogs devoted to education, such as e-learning blogs or edublogs, serve as a platform for students to respond to and discuss subjects that are not sufficiently covered in class. Students can use an edublog as a collaborative authoring tool to create and present group projects or assignments. It is an excellent way to encourage students to share their ideas, produce and publish pieces frequently, and offer comments on the posts.

Blogs in education support student and teacher learning by facilitating reflection, questioning by oneself and others, collaboration, and by providing contexts for engaging in higher-order thinking. Blogs such as Webley, WordPress, Canvas, Google Docs, Dropbox, Tumbler, and Blogger are for educational use (Bartlett-Bragg, 2003). They are all compatible with Bloom's Taxonomy. Class blogs help students post notes and participate in group conversations regarding what they have learned on the class blog (for example, Blogger, which will be used in this study). They will provide and receive feedback from one another on this platform and explain any postings they have made on the same subject (Cequena, 2013).

Blogging in English as a Foreign Language Classes: The Perceived Values

Farmer and Yu (2006) believe blogging fuels the learner with individual empowerment. Burgess (2006) argued that it leads to a “reconceptualization of students as critical, collaborative, and creative participants in the social construction of knowledge” (p.105). Engaging in participative and collaborative tools through scouring, posting, and engaging in discussions increases the students’ ownership and interest in constructing their knowledge; they will have increased responsibility for their learning (Apriani & Melati, 2018). Students exchange feedback with colleagues in a group environment where each person's reflection is acknowledged, valued, and welcomed. Moreover, researchers like Ducate and Lomicka (2005) stress that in a student-centered learning environment that fosters critical thinking and interpretive skills, blogs expose students to various perspectives and resources, allowing for self-reflection and critical evaluations of others' work. As for teachers, blogging assists them in asking the students questions and encouraging them to exchange views, express their concerns, and participate in discussions with their peers. The blog sites provide a record of learning for assessment purposes, which can be archived for use as work samples and as worked examples of scaffolding.

Blogging Assessment: The Adequate Rubrics

Teachers must create a blogging rubric if they want the educational blogging experience to be pedagogically sound. The abilities teachers want their students to acquire and the evaluation standards used for the students' blogging activities should be spelled out in the rubric. For instance, early in the semester, the University of New South Wales (UNSW) in Sydney advises creating a formative assessment tool for a blog. They contend that giving pupils marking criteria, or rubrics and standards, including word counts and the frequency of comments and posts, promotes self-control. They added a rubric scale that assesses the following five (5) factors in their "Assessing with Blogs" rubric: Format, subject understanding, mechanics, thought structure, and reference (UNSW.org, 2023). Important components teachers must consider while evaluating students' blog comments are absent from this form. Franker (2018) proposed a rubric comprising five elements for evaluating blog entries, including comments on peers' blogs. The elements include voice, text layout, multimedia and graphic use, timeliness and tags, citations, quality of writing, and proofreading. In this research, the latter will be used.

Reported Empirical Research Results

Blogging Effect on Writing

Yousefifard and Fathi's (2021) study, involving 47 Iranian EFL learners, concluded that "integrative and intrinsically instrumental motives for improving the participants' L2 writing were enhanced by blog-mediated instruction. Additionally, incorporating blogs into L2 pedagogy would be a workable blended learning strategy that produces superior linguistic and practical results" (p. 13). Also, Sütçü's (2020) findings confirm that students' performance scores significantly increased when using blogging for academic writing.

Vurdien (2013) concluded that Spanish students who used blogging improved their general writing abilities. Furthermore, Kitchakarn (2014) found that the students' mean English writing score on the posttest exceeded that of the pretest following their collaborative work on weblogs. Moreover, Amir et al. (2011) have verified that classroom blogging encourages students to write collaboratively and communicate with one another, thus fostering a feeling of community among them by exchanging knowledge in a genuine and quick social setting. Also, Abdin et al. (2011) indicated that even with students with ordinary competence levels, peer collaboration through blogging yielded positive benefits by sharing similar and different thoughts. Lee (2017) concluded that EFL writing students benefited from content creation, idea organization, and communication in English.

Furthermore, Fageeh (2011) confirmed that blogging was a form of practical and engaged audience interaction that allowed students to express themselves to a larger audience. Ketchikan (2014) reports that students' attitudes toward using weblogs for learning and cooperative learning were positive and described as an enjoyable experience. Mir and Ghoreishi (2020) concluded that writing proficiency affected by classroom blogging improved students' learning motivation and attitude toward writing. Moreover, Sun (2010) confirmed favorable sentiments regarding L2 writing. It boosted the students' ability to write independently and significantly raised their general writing proficiency.

Montero-Fleta and Pérez-Sabater (2010) additionally verified that all the postings and replies improved the students' language and informational proficiency when they were required to discuss their and their classmates' work critically. They asserted that the participants preferred blogging to prior forms of conventional writing and that writing for an authentic audience, knowing their voices were heard by people worldwide, greatly encouraged them to write.

Also, Khasmpusean (2012) showed how teamwork enhanced students' writing and aided in acquiring pertinent knowledge and abilities. Students considered blogging to be beneficial. Fathi and Nourzadeh (2019) also reported that their students felt optimistic about blog-supported L2 writing. The

students' motivation and writing skills have significantly improved, and their fear has decreased due to higher engagement, self-evaluation exercises, and prompt teacher and peer feedback.

Reviewing previous literature shows that plenty of research evidence is available to assert the potential of educational blogging in EFL writing classes. However, the tool is, to date, unexplored in Lebanese EFL.

Blogging Effect on Evaluation Abilities

Student collaboration on blogs develops higher-order thinking abilities and improves writing abilities and overall self-assurance in their work. Argumentation, according to Jonassen and Kim (2010), is mostly about two viewpoints: Learning to argue (i.e., providing evidence to back up beliefs) and arguing to learn (i.e., learning via debate or refuting the arguments of others). Furthermore, Daskalogiannaki (2012) examined the efficacy of a class blog in the context of Greek EFL instruction. Results demonstrated that blogging positively influenced students' writing habits, motivated them to write more and better, and developed their critical writing skills.

Worthington et al. (2018) concluded that students used their blogs to compile their views on numerous resources and add their analyses and observations on the subject matter. This might encourage them to think critically. Furthermore, in Ibrahim and Sithamparam's (2016) study, Third Secondary students developed their argumentative essays by drawing on their blog discussions with their peers. Faize and Rahman (2018) also investigated if publishing argumentation reports in their physics blogs would help high school students develop their argumentation skills through interactive online interaction. Results from the first and second bi-weekly reports were compared, showing that reasoning abilities had improved. After examining their colleagues' counterarguments, students strengthened their arguments and applied those newly acquired skills to other areas.

Closure

The literature study emphasized the value of using blogging's function for writing instruction and learning. It illustrated the findings of numerous research works on how well blogging helps with writing and assessment skills development. The aforementioned studies benefited this research in expanding theoretical understanding and learning about the advantages of incorporating educational blogging into EFL classrooms.

The current study shall employ distinct materials and interact with a different sample of students, even if it shares certain similarities with the previously described studies. This is particularly true when teaching argumentative essay writing through blogging. The future goal of this study is to assist an intended

experimental group of students in developing their organizational abilities and a range of evaluative skills, such as the ability to critique and remark on internet posts. Moreover, the present study emphasizes the use of blogging to guide the teaching-learning process to improve organizing and evaluative abilities, both of which may contribute to the development of argumentative writing skills.

In general, this extensive review shows a gamut of researchers' works to investigate the effectiveness of blogging on students' learning and critical thinking. However, no study was done on Lebanese school students with particular blogging activities to experiment with this study. Thus, students should be allowed to practice blogging while supporting, opposing, and refuting an idea. Consequently, English language instructors must be well-trained in implementing blogging in their classes. Based on the literature reviewed in this section, the following section discusses briefly the intended methodology of the current study.

Methodology

This paper is directed solely towards the theoretical foundations necessary to carry out quasi-quantitative research in a second stage to assess the statistical significance of the intended outcomes statistically. Stage two of this study (a follow-up paper) uses the quasi-experimental design in which a group of 97 Third Secondary Lebanese students from six Literature and Humanities classes at six different public schools in South Lebanon is selected. The researcher utilizes a mixed approach (qualitative and quantitative techniques) and looks for causal relationships among the variables. The materials to be employed to collect data include the Third Secondary National Textbook (Themes), Google Classroom Platform (Grade 12 Online EFL Learning Environment: Improve Your Argument), Google documents, and Google forms; moreover, the Padlet Application will be used for posting the participants' reflections after accomplishing six intervention activities on the writing tasks which shall be posted on the Blogging Platform (Grade 12 EFL: Improve Your Argument) at blogspot.com.

The instruments include a pretest and a posttest, with two adapted rubric scales of four elements each. The first scale focuses on the organization of the argumentative body paragraphs. In contrast, the other focuses on the evaluative skills of checking and critiquing in elaboration and evidence from the source material rather than mechanics and grammar. In addition, the study includes two student questionnaires of a 5-point Likert scale, a teacher questionnaire, four reflection logs, an observation sheet, and teacher and student focus group interviews. The Statistical Product and Service Solutions, IBM SPSS version 27.0 software (an IBM product since 2009) (Hejase & Hejase, 2013) will be used to process and analyze the data. This statistical computation will help

achieve the purpose of the study, answer the research questions, and offer valuable implications and recommendations.

To conclude, the effect of using the independent variable, blogging, on the two dependent variables which are the organization of ideas and the development of the evaluating skills in 'Third Secondary students' argumentative essays, responses are analyzed by comparing means, using descriptive analysis through cross-tabulations, and resorting to content analysis.

Conclusions

This paper's objective was to prepare the appropriate theoretical and empirical background for a second paper where full experimental and analytical results are presented. The theoretical foundations helped review and assess reported results of the effect of blogging on learning argumentative essays in EFL classes and to address and examine the necessary impact on developing the evaluating skills of Bloom's Digital Taxonomy and on improving the organization of ideas. Three research questions were proposed and will be later tested using descriptive statistical analysis of the tests' scores, as well as inferential statistics using multiple regression modeling and independent samples t-tests.

The notion of blended learning supporting medium in EFL classes has attracted attention from many researchers over the past decades and will surely continue to do so. The usage of blogging in EFL classes has tremendous theoretical importance because of its relevance to learning and writing in addition to its powerful practical consequences on thinking. This study attempted to address key aspects of the ever-growing literature on blogging, specifically on its impact on improving writing and evaluative skills.

The literature provides evidence that blogging is a multidimensional construct. It has many different benefits for learning in general as well as for writing and evaluative thinking specifically. Consequently, the theoretical perspectives on employing blogging in EFL classes have been mainly concerned with their influence on improving students' writing and evaluative skills. The study has endeavored to review several similar case studies that advocate the use of blogging to improve students' learning, writing skills, and evaluative thinking. Moreover, it is intended to have them as reference works that support this study and to build on their findings while running the experiment. Although there is a shortage of similar research in Lebanon, these studies have successfully given this work more impetus and insight into the implementation of the blogging activities, which were designed to scaffold students to argue for or against a claim.

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