

## **Research Article**

# **The Effects of Blogs on EFL Learners' Writing Skill**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The present study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of using blog on improving the writing skill of Iranian EFL learners. In addition, the study compared the effects of teacher's error correction and peers' error correction on students' writing skill. The students who participated in this study were 74 intermediate female students who were Persian native speakers and they have never been in an English speaking society and their only exposure to English was through books, English songs, chatting and movies. Preparing for the survey, firstly the participants became homogenized by administering a placement test and they were randomly divided into three groups. The first group, the control group, was taught in a traditional way, and the other two groups were treated as experimental groups and they delivered their writing homework on blogs. The only difference between the two experimental groups was that one of them received error correction from the teacher, while the other one took advantage of peer correction. After 18 sessions of instruction, a descriptive writing post-test was administered to all the groups and two raters scored the tests. The results showed that the performance of the experimental groups were significantly different from the control group. Also, the group with teacher's error correction obtained higher mean scores on the post test. The findings suggest that blogging was effective on enhancing learners' writing skill and teacher's error correction was more effective than peer correction among Iranian EFL learners.

**Key words:** post; blog; writing skill; error correction

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

To be able to write properly has always been one of the most important and challenging factors in publishing information and expressing new thoughts and it is somehow representative of other skills of a learner in academic world. Nowadays there are many factors and situations in which may influence this important skill in a negative or positive way and one of them is the entrance high tech in our daily lives.

As a matter of fact no one can deny the importance of writing skill in academic communities such as discipline groups, school or university programs, or professions; however, a

vast number of foreign language students have problems with writing properly (Evans, Hartshorn, McCollum, & Wolfersberger, 2010). As most composition educators frequently declare and Leki (1992, as cited in Howrey & Tanner, 2008) expressed the major problem that writing instructors face is to see that students learn from their previous mistakes, and acquire both writing fluency and accuracy. Despite the given instructions, students often show slight or no development in their writing performance. As Howrey & Tanner (2008) argued, learners often do not learn that they have to take the

responsibility of their writing improvement and often neglect their teacher's feedback.

Additionally, the vast majority of them experience the apprehension of being humiliated by their instructor in the sights of the whole class when they make a mistake, so they try different avoidance strategies to run away from the problematic statements and to hide their flaws. To clear up the problem, peers' correction is proposed to be a good solution through which learners can learn from their mistakes and use each other's experiences.

Also, some teachers believe that digital technologies benefit student writing in several ways such as encouraging them for a great collaboration among students and encouraging the students' creativity and personal expression. Computer-mediated communication (CMC) provides multiple ways of communication to produce writing in real-life situated contexts. It also allows the users to be widely exposed to the target language in an authentic environment (Beauvois, 1992; González- Bueno, 1998). The development of the internet has been increased enormously in the past few years and with the advent of computer-based technology, and its applications to teaching and learning, many students apply a large number of ways to communicate with one another via the internet. They send texts, write on social media sites, update their blogs, and of course, write for school homework. This use of writing for both personal and school assignments is being energized by technology. For instance, many students practice their writing skills synchronously as in instant messaging, chatting, and live discussion boards (Smith, 2006) or asynchronously as in emailing and blogging either consciously or unconsciously.

Blogs function as online journals or personal diaries which everyone can create and they can be updated any time and allows users with little or no technical background to create, decorate, and maintain the blog. They also let the learners

publish their own written works and in this way bring them a sense of belonging (Betts & Glogoff, 2004). Besides, through the blogs the learners are able to share their information in a friendly environment far from the formal environment of the classroom. In addition, they are one of the most recent student-centered pedagogical practices that can raise autonomous learners (Dettori 2006).

On the other hand, Halliday and Hasan (1989) focused on learning as a social process and believed that there is a significant connection between language and its social context. They concluded that the effective language learning should be in relation to the social activity and the interpersonal relationships, and exploring situational settings not as simple material aspects of writings but as locations where social processes of production and interactions take place, and where interpersonal relationships are enacted. Thus, the subjects with more interactions with their peers appeared to be more efficient language learners. Though, both teacher and peers are not available all the time and their relationship is limited to the class hours.

One way to work out the problem is a blog in which everyone would be able to leave comments and help their peers to improve their writing. Furthermore, the teacher can leave comment when needed and lead them to the right direction. Besides, blogging makes student-teacher relationships more worry-free and let the students prepared for the final presentation in the classroom. Also, blogs allow students to easily link to resources that support their assertions, and thereby encourage critical thinking. The current study aims to investigate the effects of blog writing and blog-based correction on improving the students' descriptive writing.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Writing Skill**

For graduate students in EFL contexts, English writing seems to be the most critical and challenging skill they face and that is the only

way that let them to communicate with others as recognized members within the international academic world.

Researchers such as Casanave (2002) have reported that non-native English-speaking students not only need to know the rules and conventions of writing activities, but must also have a noticeable writer identity—which totally is related with their linguistic, cultural and rhetorical competence—to participate in various academic writing practices. Additionally, research has also shown that through language learners' participation in blog writing, they will be acquire a sense of voice in a community of writers in English (Bloch, 2007; Rezaee&Oladi, 2008; Sollars, 2007). In a language learning contexts, this knowledge-constructing collaborative dialogue “occurs when learners work together to solve linguistic problems and/or co-construct language or knowledge about language” (Swain, Brooks, & Tocalli-Beller, 2002, p. 172).

These partnerships scaffold learners so that they are able to perform at a higher level than their individual competence. Such collaborative interaction has been found to aid L2 learners in writing, especially when they were asked to read some text and reconstruct and paraphrase it and then edit it with the assistance of peers (Swain et al., 2002).

To sum up, Composing is vital in light of the fact that it's utilized extensively in higher education and in the workplace. If students don't know how to express themselves in writing, they won't be able to communicate well with professors, employers, peers and so forth. People use written communication more regularly now than ever before. Much of professional communication is done in writing: proposals, memos, reports, applications, e-mails, and more are part of the daily life of a college student or successful graduate and they are all modes of communication that typically rely entirely on written words.

## 2.2. Peer Error Correction

In the past 20 years, the use of peer feedback in EFL/ESL learning was strongly supported by four theories: Vygotsky's socio-cognitive theory of learning, collaborative learning theory, process-oriented writing approach and interactionist theory of L2 acquisition (Hyland & Hyland, 2006)

*Vygotsky's Socio-Cognitive Theory* of learning emphasizes on the social relationship and the interaction of the peers in learning process. He believed in the concept of ZPD (zone of proximal development) which refers to supporting a novice learner by an expert learner. In this procedure the reader scaffolds the writer to move from a potential developmental level toward an actual developmental level. To state the matter differently peer feedbacks provide both reader and writer a desirable environment to operate in their ZPD.

*Collaborative Learning Theory* argues that collaboration with informed peers in community is the reason that some kinds of knowledge can be acquired or learning constructed (Liu & Hansen, 2005). If a learner is not able to perform a task individually, one can use the great use of resources of the peers' knowledge and complete it successfully. In other words, peer feedback aids learners to facilitate doing the writing tasks via interaction with peers and receiving their feedback.

*Process-Oriented Writing Approach* consists of a multiple-draft process. In this procedure learners focus only on generating ideas and the meaning and write them in a draft in the pre writing phase. Then they receive some feedback from the reader prior to completing the eventual writing product. It is crystal clear that peer feedback is a fundamental key in using this approach (Hyland & Hyland, 2006).

According to *Interactionist Theory* of second language acquisition encouraging students to negotiate meaning via group working and collaboration enhances the effectiveness of

language learning. Also non proficient writers understand how readers discern their work and furthermore, these feedbacks can scaffold acquisition by making input available and comprehensible as long as they provide some opportunities for practice and using language in a semi-authentic atmosphere and revise their writing in response to peer feedback (Hyland & Hyland, 2006).

Although lots of the literatures and surveys suggest that peer tutoring can be very useful in helping students to learn more effectively and it can foster students motivation and encourages all students with all kinds of special learning and behavioral needs, a research by Cheng &Yuku (2005) found that there is no significant difference between the achievement of peer tutoring group and non peer tutoring group students.

Over the past two decades, technology has been continually explored "as a way to promote interaction about writing through peer response groups" (Ware &Warschauer, 2006, p. 109).

The main question that have always been is that whether applying the old traditional face to face peer response or the computer-mediated classes worked more properly in the EFL/ESL writing classes. Although surprisingly different scholars based on different situations such as culture, personal characteristics, age, purpose, etc. conclude different results and they did not come up with one unique satisfying answer to answer this question. Hence, the following review of literature is not going to be describing how technology has to be used in EFL writing classes and especially EFL peer-feedback activities and only reports a description of how technology is used during these decades and how different it failed and fit in diverse learning situations.

Peer feedback activities, "in which students work together to provide comments on one another's writing in both written and oral formats through active engagement with each other's progress over multiple drafts" (Liu & Hansen, 2005, p. 1)

have been presented from L1 into L2 (ESL/EFL) writing instruction many years ago.

In this kind of learning it is believed that the process of learning will be facilitate if students cooperate and work with each other when it is needed. It is really beneficial for the learners because it brings different students with diverse backgrounds and abilities together and teaches them pairing and grouping and how to share. Another one of the biggest merits and principles of cooperative learning and peer tutoring is that the responsibility of failure or the success of a task is not on the shoulder of an individual and it goes to all persons involved in a communicative act and this principle is the cornerstone of the process of peer tutoring (Richards and Rodgers, 2000). Additionally the students will be provided with such opportunities that more knowledgeable learners would help less knowledgeable ones (Richards& Rodgers, 2000). Moreover it can change the class' atmosphere from a teacher center instruction to a student center environment.

Most of the scholars who worked on utilizing technology-supported peer feedback have compared learners' feedback in traditional of CALL writing classes. For instance, Braine (2001) after a semester of treatment instruction concluded that students working in face-to-face traditional classes produce the essays with higher quality than students training in computer-mediated classes. Also, Warschauer (2002) discovered that learners with different level of proficiency, different cultures and totally different characteristics have almost equal participation in different tasks and activities due to the fact that less skilled students feel more secure and comfortable in participating in the networked communication. Although findings of technology-supported peer feedback were not favorable and practical. Thus it seems that personal characteristics and cultural differences are effective factors on the result of using peer correction technique in the process of teaching.

Since learner-centered method entered in language teaching, the practice of peer feedback has become considerably more frequent in language classrooms. Also, peer feedback does not focus on the teacher and thus it has a transfer of roles from the teacher to the learners. Thus, the teacher is not the main authority of the classroom and he/she share it with the learners. Finally, since peer correction offers chances to the students to take the responsibility of their own learning, it is also advocated by the practitioners who believe in learner autonomy. Some researchers have strongly suggested peer feedback to be applied for checking, especially, students' written work. They have made an outline of how it can be implemented in classroom; as students finish writing, the teacher gives a written work to each student and students are asked to evaluate each other's work. They correct the errors and send notes to the respective authors about what they have corrected.

In another research, Fitze (2006) supervised a comparative study of the mixture of two type of peer feedback for two advanced ESL classes to differentiate involvement and textual features. These two groups participated in EFL writing classes their first two weeks of attendance and the second two weeks they worked with traditional face to face peer feedback classes. To examine which writing class was more successful and to decide about the total number of words produced by each class, the numbers of the words used by each student were counted. The results proved that there is no significant distinction between in the sum of produced words in two conventions. Afterwards, to examine if the students of one group produced more advanced words, the type\_token ratio was employed to evaluate the discourse produced by the learners of two classes. The results revealed that there was a different significance and the subjects of the computer-mediated class produced more complex words and used more advanced discourse than the productions of the

face to face convention. Additionally it revealed that the discourse produced by the computer-mediated group presented a higher level of communicative competence than the other group. When a student gives a response peer correction happens in class and "we ask a class do you think that's right? or tell them to add a written comment to a piece of written work they have completed (Jeremy Harmer, 2007). Peer correction is performed to increase learner interaction, participation, autonomy, and involvement and lots of language teachers apply this technique in classrooms, aware or not aware of the theories of learning.

In conclusion, as mentioned most researchers observed that working in peers and groups makes the learners more interested in learning environment and accelerates their learning. Although, there were a few researchers who concluded the opposite results and believed that students gain better result individually. The mixed results of these studies raised my motivation to conduct the present study to investigate the effects of peer tutoring on improving the writing skill of the students through computer assistant language learning (blog writing) in the case of Iranian students in the intermediate level.

### **2.3. Blog Writing**

Technology provides an authentic and global environment in which learners can practice their language skills and it is perfectly suitable for those who do not have access to a native environment. In her discussion of strategy training in the CALL classroom, Ngeow (1999, p. 303) states that computers play several roles in helping language teachers address learning styles and strategy development. Ngeow argues that CALL applications can provide authentic language learning and expose learners in such activities and help students to present ideas in new ways. Also educators such as Cashion and Palmieri (2002) recognized that not also they

provide authentic and flexible learning environments, but also computer-based resources can be an ideal location for reflective and collaborative learning. A blog is one example of this type of resource which is a new form of blended learning. It combines face to face teaching and learning by teacher and an appropriate use of technology to aid teacher in the process of educating. Like other on-line environments that encourage reflective thinking, interactivity, and deep learning where students interpret information and apply their knowledge (Cashion and Palmieri, 2002, p.157), blogs are being used to enhance and supplement classroom environments and its popularity outside the foreign language classroom may be a motivating force for the learners. Teachers can scaffold students and provide opportunities for them to develop their digital fluency and accuracy while strengthening their traditional literacy skills at the same time by combining writing with online technology (Witte, 2007). Rebecca Blood(2002) defines blogs this way: 'Some provide concise descriptions of links carefully selected. Some contain extensive comments, dotted here and there, with links to news of the day. Others consist of infinity of statement on the day of the writer. The links, when there are, lead to other similar personal sites. Some are political. Some are intellectuals. Others are comical. Some are focused on a specific topic. Some are eccentric. Most are nonprofit, and all are passionately involved from the argument they talk about. They are blogs. What they have in common is the format: a Web page where new contributions are placed at the beginning, frequently updated, in some cases even several times a day' (Blood 2003, p. 3).

Besides, blogs are innovative and let the learners to interact with each other, not just with the computer and this feature makes it more interesting in the way that it feels like a classroom when someone interacts with the teacher and ones classmates. For blog users, the

computer is only the medium for communication and it is considered as a tool they use. By encouraging this extraordinary feature, blogging takes on a more communicative role than less interactive CALL applications and it seems that it totally fits the classroom situation.

The noun blog is also defined by The Oxford English Dictionary Online as, "2. A frequently updated web site consisting of personal observations, excerpts from other sources, etc., typically run by a single person, and usually with hyperlinks to other sites; an online journal or diary." On the Internet, a blog is a personal or professional journal that is frequently updated and intended for general public consumption. Journal form is one of the essential characteristics of the blog, typically a new entry every day, and of course the informal style. Blogs usually include audio, photo and video information.

Blogs also offer many reading and writing activities for English learners especially for improving writing skill because blogging emphasizes on content, working with words and images, speedy feedback, and the possibility of linking one post to another. Teachers who use blogs also say that because students know that a wide range of audience are going to have access to their notes by publishing their writing on the Web, they often present higher quality work than students who write only for the sake of teacher or for others in the class.

Moreover, blog writing presents outside school literacy practices into the classroom (Pahl&Rowse, 2005) and has the potential to become a literacy, not merely a technology issue in different educational systems (Leu, 2005). That is totally true because such technology "capitalizes on the strengths of authentic writing, the power of the writing process, and the engagement of collaborative writing" (Boling, Castek, Zawilinski, Barton, &Nierlich, 2008, p. 504).

In most of the view points, blogging is about communication and interaction. Because lots of the conversation in the school context is grounded in the educational curriculum and about critical thinking in student learning, it also needs to be seen as an academic exercise, which is different from blogging for merely personal intentions (Boling et al, 2008).

In addition, blogs display the activities of the author(s) in reverse chronological order (Hall & Davison, 2007). Of other characteristics of the blog are creating links to other web pages or resources on the Internet and receiving of comments from other readers (Hall & Davison, 2007; Ray & Hocutt, 2006). Likewise, blogs can be defined as personal journals that are similar to a paper diary that are made up of chronological entries and the writer does not have some problems like setting the time for his note (Huffaker, 2005). And the most recent entries and posts are supported by an archive of earlier posts recorded by the author or admin (Hall & Davison, 2007). Advocates of educational blogs suggest that blogging makes learners familiar with a less formal environment outside the classroom where they are free to exploit their daily achieved knowledge and record it for their learning journey.

The Blogs enrich the learning experience and provide proper opportunities for learners to improve their surface levels of learning to deeper levels. Surface learning is characterized by the approach of the learner to complete only the minimum content necessary to meet assessment requirements, whether that is learning only what may be presented in a test or simply attending and completing activities. Conversely, deep learning is how learners stand back from an experience, seek out connections between concepts, and contextualize meaning. In general, the blog as a learning journal is a way of documenting learning and collecting information for self-analysis and reflection, it helps students, nurturance a habit to study from surface to deep.

In another study, Campbell states that blogs have gained increasing notice since the late 1998, more and more foreign educators have applied this user-friendly technology to classroom instruction and language learning (Campbell, 2003; Johnson, 2004), but it seems that few English teachers have ever used blogs in an EFL writing class. Although blogs have not been originally created for use in language education, blogs have the potentials to be used for the teaching of EFL writing class. Especially in Iran which is considered as a developing country in the Middle East, it is not much time since students got familiar with this computer application and are using it in different areas of interest and lately for educational purposes.

In the case of collaboration, blogs may be considered as learning sites that scaffold learning process and increase the cooperative interactions among learners. On top of that blogs are not considered just as a one-way reflection but a two-way conversation to each of the users, which multiple users can collaborate in recording their acquired knowledge and co-construct each blog entry. Considering the fact of the collaborative nature of the blog and by analyzing the texts, conversations or comments presented on the learners' blog, the educator will be able to trace learners' path of knowledge and identity negotiation.

Scholars who use blogs also claim that because students know that by publishing their writing on the web they are going to have a group of readers other than their teacher and classmates, they often work harder and produce higher quality work than students who write only for the class. Several educators have reported on how they use blogs to support their classroom instruction and engage their students in the process of learning more efficiently and they have found that blogs offer many reading and writing stimulus (Di Zhang, 2009). Also some other researchers such as Warschauer (2002) found that the subjects produce more complex language when writing

on the blog rather than the traditional paper and pencil method.

In the end it is found that blog writing could promote participants' overall writing ability, enhance their autonomous monitoring of their own writing performance, and establish a positive viewpoint toward writing in a foreign language. He also concluded that blogs could establish an efficient task-based environment that induce authentic, purposeful language use, and enhances writing proficiency in foreign languages. From a psychological view, they also created an environment that enhanced the participations' motivation toward writing and promote their monitoring strategies and learner autonomy. Moreover it was revealed that the most common blogging behavior was revising and reviewing their blogs. As a whole he result supported the idea that open blogging environment inspire the learners to self monitor their work autonomously by revising their own work without the presence or grading of the teacher.

#### **2.4. The Research Questions**

1. Does the use of blogs in English classes have any effects on the writing skill of intermediate EFL students?
2. Is teachers' error correction more effective than to peers' error correction on students' blog writing?

#### **2.5. The Research Hypothesis**

- 1-The use of blogs in English classes does not have any effects on the writing skill of intermediate EFL learners.
- 2- There is not any difference between the effect of teachers' error correction and peers' error correction on students' blog writing.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1. The purpose of the study**

Reading and writing form the foundation of education, and are basically required for all academic disciplines, including mathematics and science (Cassell, 2004). Often referred to as verbal literacy, children begin developing

reading and writing skills even before they attend school (Huffaker, 2005). In Iran, the primary education system consists of a six-year program: a three-year foundation stage of primary education starting at the age of 13 and a complementary three-year stage starting at age of 16. One of the overall aims of the Iran's educational system is to enable students to take part in academic world, not merely joining them to society. Literacy development such as reading and writing are at the heart of the English Language instructional program in Iranian schools and less attention is given to speaking fluency and communication skills.

For another thing, today almost everyone has the experience of communicating with a peer via computer in one form of online communication or another, and in recent years, the use of such online communication has become very common in educational settings in general, and language learning in particular (Gorbanpoor, 2013). In the past few years the English teachers' attention is drawn to blogs and the application of them in the process of English learning. In addition, no one can ignore the entrance of technology to the classrooms and the effectiveness of such classes which the members are collaborating through the internet and specially blogs as in the current study

In order to help pupils improve their writing skills, some school English teachers have begun exploring the use of blogs and writing guides as a possible scaffold. In this study, the researcher aims to investigate the impact of using such an interactive learning environment on the pupils' writing abilities. Pupils' perceptions of using blogs as a tool for writing are also explored.

#### **3.2. Participants and Settings**

The participants of the current study were 74 high school learners of English in Shokouh Institute. All of the students were studying in various high schools in Dargaz; their major at high school were biology or mathematics. Their native language was Persian and they had not

been to any English speaking society. But their main exposure to English was through reading blogs and school books, listening to some English songs, and watching some movies. The participants' age ranged from 15 to 17 and all of them had a full access to the internet at home which made them totally appropriate to take part in the current research. The subjects were divided randomly into three groups of 25, 25 and 24. The decision based upon which the researchers divided the participants in 3 groups was only based on random sampling. Thus, the first group was treated as the control group and the second and third ones were considered as experimental. All of the participants were female and they had been exposed to a minimum of five years of EFL instruction. Before beginning of the sessions, the standardize placement test of Shokuh institute, was administered among the students and based on the test score the level of proficiency of the subjects were determined as intermediate.

### **3.3. Instrument**

Firstly, the subjects have taken a proficiency test by the institute. Before students devote to the classes, the standardize version of a placement test of Shokuh institute, was administered among the students which it included five sections of vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, reading comprehension, and writing. Then, they took an extensive writing test to be homogenized.

The material which were taught in the classes was the Top Notch Series by Joan Saslow and Allen Ascher(2013).The experimental groups were asked to do the tasks on their group blog and all students received a prompt to analyze their peers' writing at the first session. The prompt had four criterion areas to measure students' descriptive writing skills which were selected from the IELTS banding scores, and each area received one to five score. The criteria involved in that prompt included Task achievement and task response (5 points), Coherence and cohesion (5 points), Lexical

resource of the students and word choice which refers to usage of the lexicons in the right place (5points), Grammatical range and accuracy of their spelling (5points).

In the case of blog, a popular and easy-to-use free blog, Blogfa, were used in which students could post their texts and comments to all class members.

Undoubtedly a post test was required to check the result of the treatment. After about 40 days of the treatment the subjects took a writing post test.

### **3.4. Design and Procedures**

The present study is experimental in nature. At the beginning of the study students were to take a proficiency test to ensure the homogeneity of the participants. As a result of the test, students were randomly divided in three groups, A, B and C which can be defined as control group (A) and experimental groups (B) and (C). Then each group took a specialized writing test as a pretest. All groups were required to do descriptive writing tasks which were assigned in the course book or by the teacher in each session. The only difference between these groups was that all the students in group A, were writing their descriptive essay in a paper. The final score of the essay group A's subjects were given either by the instructor or the vote of the peers.

On the other hand, students in groups B and C were doing all of the writing practices on the blog and they were getting the feedbacks from them in cyber space. They also could use some pictures or videos attached to their essay to clarify their ideas and make it more interesting to read. The difference between the two experimental groups was that the subjects of the group C received the comments on the blog by their instructor and only were communicating with her, while the instructor were not leaving any comments in group B's blog and only the peers could make a remark on the blog for their classmates and evaluate their work. More over they had to leave them a number based on their administered banding scores.

The same teacher taught all three classes and the sessions were held twice a week each session lasting approximately for 90 minutes. In each session 30 minutes were devoted to writing activities. At the very beginning of the session the instructor distributed the papers related to banding scores through the subjects and explained that how they should use it to score their classmates and what points they need to obey in writing an essay.

Furthermore a brief introduction to the blog, concept of blog, how to send comments, share pictures and information and how to make a new account in *Blogfa* explained by the instructor (i.e. researcher) to minimize the technical errors. Eventually, in the last session a post test was administered for all three groups. In order to minimize the stress of the students for the test they were asked to write one composition but they did not have any idea that it was their posttest and it would be regarded as the post test of the study.

### **3.5. Data Analysis**

The present study included the three groups, one control group and two experimental groups who received the treatment. In this case researcher needed to compare three groups of students' performance on a task. And, because the survey had three different sets of results to be compared, administering one way ANOVA was appropriate. Thus the researcher conducted an ANOVA to analyze the results of the study for all three groups.

## **4. Results**

In the current study, to investigate the effectiveness of blogging on the EFL learners' performance, the final scores of the three groups of randomly chosen participants (two experimental and one control group) were compared. First of all the researcher examined the inter-rater reliability of the raters' scores to verify that the test scores were reliable and then One-way ANOVA was put to practical use as the

statistical method of comparison of the three groups by means of SPSS software.

Since the pretests and posttests were subjective writing tests, students' performances were rated by two different raters to make sure of the consistency of scores. Therefore, an inter-rater reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha statistic was performed to determine consistency between different raters. Inter-rater reliability is utilized to obtain the degree to which different raters make consistent judgments of the same tests.

Cronbach's alpha provides a useful lower bound on reliability. Generally, it increases when the correlations between the items increase. For this reason the coefficient measures the internal consistency of the test. A commonly-accepted rule of thumb is that an alpha of 0.7 (some say 0.6) indicates acceptable reliability and 0.8 or higher indicates good reliability.

Normally, a value of reliability is considered between 0-1, which the value of 1 is the maximum value and in fact implies perfect agreement and usually its minimum value is 0 and goes to no agreement, although its score can be negative too.

In statistics, one-way ANOVA is a technique used to compare means of three or more samples, and this technique can be used only for numerical data. The one-way ANOVA is used to determine whether there are any significant differences between the means of some independent groups which are not related to each other at all. In the current study, the researcher used a one-way ANOVA to understand whether the students' performance on the writing exams differed based on blog writing usage among students.

### **4.1. Reliability**

In order to determine the reliability of the scores, a second rater was asked to score the results. Then, inter-rater reliability was calculated, using Cronbach alpha's reliability formula. As Table 1 reflects the reliability index exceeded 0.83,

indicating that the scores were highly reliable and the first rater's scores were completely trusted.

**Table 1:** Reliability of the scores

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Standardized Items	Alpha Based on N of Items
.837	.834	2

**Table2:** Raters' scores

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Rater 1	18.12	1.64575	74
Rater 2	18.55	1.64051	74

**Table 3:** Means and standard deviations comparing students' scores

Group	Students' scores		
	N	M	SD
A (traditionalpaper)	25	17.18	1.80
B (Peer Tutoring)	25	18.10	1.40
C (Teacher Correction)	24	19.23	0.93
Total	74	18.15	1.64

Table 3 provides descriptive statistics for the students' performance on the post test. As the mean scores show, group A (traditional paper and pencil) received the lowest scores,  $M = 17.18$ , followed by group B (Peer Tutoring Group),  $M = 18.10$ . The highest scores were obtained by group C (Teacher Correction),  $M = 19.23$  which showed the best performance after the post test. The observable information elicited from mean scores showed that providing teacher correction was the most effective method to increase the overall performance of the participants.

At this stage of work, it was possible to see whether different instructional methods had significant effects on students' performance or not. Thus, it was needed to calculate an ANOVA analysis to find a proper response for the research questions.

#### 4.2. ANOVA Analysis

The researcher initially conducted Levene's test of homogeneity of variances to check the

assumption of the equality of variances. As Table 4 shows the assumption is not violated ( $p = 0.122$ ). Thus, it was safe to rely on the ANOVA output.

**Table 4:** Test of Homogeneity of Variances

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
4.064	2	71	.021

The results of the analysis revealed statistically significant differences among students of different groups on post test scores,  $F(2, 71) = 12.65, p = 0.00$

A follow-up step was also taken to determine the differences across the groups of students. As is shown in table 5, Post hoc Tukey Tests indicated that based on their mean scores, group A (Traditional Paper and Pencil) differed significantly in their scores from pupils of other experimental groups. Likewise, there were also significant differences on scores between group B (Peer Correction), and C (Teacher Correction). In addition it is found that group C's subjects were more successful than group B's subjects and thus, teacher correction was a more successful method.

**Table 5:** Tukey Homogeneous Test for test scores

Group	N	homogeneous groups		
		1	2	3
A (traditionalpaper and pencil)	25	17.1		
B (Peer Tutoring)	25		18.1	
C (Teacher Correction)	24			19.2
Sig		1.00	0.55	0.68

#### 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The current research aimed to investigate the effects of blog writing on improving the writing skill of EFL learners and also, it tried to examine if teachers' error correction is more effective than to peers' error correction on students' blog writing.

Throughout the course of a semester that is 18 sessions during nine weeks, the 49 participants of both experimental groups uploaded more than

150 blog entries and around 100 comments from the subjects of group B on classmates' blog entries.

In the case of the first research question, the results of the study have revealed that blog writing effected significantly on performance of intermediate EFL subjects. Both experimental groups were more successful in the posttest than the subjects in control group, although the degree of prosperity of two experimental groups was different and, the participants of the experimental group who took advantage of teacher correction achieved higher scores in the post test and the results of the post tests were significantly different from the learners of the other groups. The results of the present study were in line with some previous research studies such as Cashion and Palmieri (2002) and Wong and Hew (2010) who concluded that blog was effective on improving the learners' writing skills. They also pointed out that the combination of class sessions and face to face interaction of the learners and teacher and an appropriate use of blogging and technology can help teachers in education. It was also a way to keep the learners involved and connected to language learning even at home other than class hours.

The researcher believes that various factors were effective on students' performance on tests. The first one is the publicity of the blog. This might be important for teenagers to not to be embarrassed by their classmates or even a stranger, so they probably did their best for writing correctly and they double checked all of it by receiving help such as using of a dictionary or the web pages.

The other reason might be the maintenance of their work even if the class sessions came to an end. Due to the fact that all the data on the blog were classified and saved in chronological order and the trace of their work always will be available to everyone, while the essays written by the subjects of the control group were not so.

Additionally, as Witte(2007) concluded, it was a very helpful method to develop their digital fluency while empowering their traditional literacy and enjoy the combination of technology and writing skills at the same time. Due to the fact that, as they were writing on the blog, they were asked to surf the internet and share the interesting materials they found with the whole group by posting it on the blog. This method proved to be very useful and motivating, since the participants in experimental groups were engaged in other techno-based activities, like emailing, commenting, chatting and so forth. Thus, the motivation of learners in this group seemed so much higher and they were extremely excited and interested to post and they were completely active writers. Another reason for the effectiveness of the blogs was the fact that the participants in the present research were teenagers.

Fortunately, both learners and the instructor were fully literate and interested in entering technology in English class. Also, all of them had a background in using different synchronous and asynchronous computer-based applications.

As the second research question, the results of the posttests were significantly different. The subjects attending in peer correction group achieved less success than the group with the teacher's error correction and online guidance.

According to the results of different studies on peer feedback such as Richard & Rodgers (2000), Liu & Hansen (2005), and Fitze (2006), the communication between teacher and student was more successful than receiving peer feedback and some piece of advice from their own friends and partners. Thus the teacher still seems to be the main authority and most accepted person for the learners. The mentioned results could also be interpreted in light of Vygotsky's Socio-Cognitive Theory in which a novice learner was supported by a knower to reach to the next zone. Actually, in the current research the teacher did the same for the learners,

but this theory were not consistent for the peers' correction. The first reason might be in the fact that the subjects were homogeneous and the level of proficiency of learners was almost the same. Therefore they did not accept any of their classmates as a knower. Also, according to the observations of the researcher and the evidences of the comments of the blog it seems that they did not trust their peers to know better than them and they did not take their peers for granted. So, as seen in the comments of the group B's blog, when they were corrected by their peers, it was not a reliable answer for them and they tried to justify themselves instead of welcoming criticizes from the peers. However, it was observed that the learners in group C were totally interested in the instructor's comments and error correction and they easily admitted to their errors, and even some of them thanked the teacher for her error corrections.

The second reason could be found in cultural differences. Iranian students are more interested in competition in the classroom rather than cooperation, so they were trying to prove that they know better than other peers all the time and they could not accept any error correction from the side of peers and it was considered as a weakness. Therefore, it seemed that peer correction was not a successful method in the research setting and the results of the current study were in contrast with some previous studies (Choudhury, 2002; Sanders, 2007).

In addition, it was observed that blog writers produce more complex sentences and the amount of their errors (especially grammatical errors) was remarkably different. Since the blog had an open domain, they knew that they might be read by audiences other than their classmates and the teacher such as their parents or their friends; so did their best to deliver the best quality of their manuscript and became more conscious about their work.(McGrail& Davis, 2011). In addition, the writing and editing box of the blog and the comment section included a spell-checker

feature, which prevented the participants from doing spelling errors by underlining and color changing of the misspelled words, so both experimental groups received another error correction treatment by the blog and their notes passed two filters of error correction (Ghorbanpour, 2013). The current finding is in line with the survey conducted by Richardson (2006).In his research he indicated that blog writing promotes metacognitive strategies and encourages students to take authorship of their own entries. Online publishing can guide learners to make more strategic attempt to improve the quality of their learning results.This finding indirectly suggested that "the lack of oral fluency and discomfort in speaking are important factors in determining students' relative participation in face to- face and electronic mode" Warschauer (1996, p. 21)

On the contrary to the previous problems discussed in the case of low participations of the subjects (Nair, Tay&Koh, 2013), the current research was completely successful and the results indicated the full participations of all of the subjects. This could be explained by the fact that all of the subjects had an access to the internet at home, the teacher constantly emphasized on everybody's participation and even she devoted some bonus marks for doing the assignments at the right time. Also, the blog's informal and casual environment represented a friendlier and interesting environment and it altered a highly structured, teacher-fronted, formal environment (Salaberry, 1996).

Additionally, blogging helped them to write purposefully and more cautiously and let them to join in a community of writers who had the same goal. Also, it was shown that in Iranian culture students tend to receive the feedback and correction from an authority which is the teacher and they preferred the supervision of the teacher for organizing the works and situation. Actually, in Iranian context they would rather to compete with peers rather than cooperate. Thus teacher

still had an important role in managing the classroom and Iranian classes were not accepted to be only student-centered and at least the cooperation of both teacher and the learners was needed.

### 6. Suggestions for Further Studies

Since blogging have recently become widespread among Iranian learners, the current research is one of the first which attempted to experimentally investigate a blogging approach, although, a vast number of learners in Iran still do not have access to internet and they have no idea about blogs. Therefore, there are a vast number of suggestions for further researches which some of them included here.

Firstly, the audiences of the current blogs were insiders (i.e. the teacher and the classmates). Although some random unfamiliar audiences which were not experts gave some comments on the posts, their comments were not professional and did not include any corrections in writings. The researcher proposed that the further study needs to focus on some ways to empower blogging audience and expose the blog to more professional audience; for example by joining the blog to educational websites and linking its address to online communities.

Secondly, further researches might be more effective on some computer applications which include some multimedia other than merely texts and images; such as video conferencing which it allows not only for audio and video interactions, but also for the use of different applied models in the current study.

Thirdly, based on the observations of the researcher (instructor), it is suggested to work on the special language register of net speak or shortened "text speak" of some of learners who learn a language through high tech. For instance, in some compositions of subjects they used the abbreviation forms of words in a formal situation such as *B4* instead of *before*, which is very

common in chatting or mobile phone communication.

Last but not least, in the present research, only 74 female EFL learners were investigated and further researches on male participants might end in different result. In addition, the duplication of the study on more participants could confirm the generalizability of the results.

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