| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Blogging About Current Global Events in the EFL Writing Classroom: Effects on Skill Improvement, Global Awareness and Attitudes

Reima Al-Jarf
Full Professor of ELT, ESP and Translation, King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia
Corresponding Author: Reima Al-Jarf, **E-mail**: reima.al.jarf@gmail.com

| ABSTRACT

A class blog was created and used as a supplement to in-class EFL writing instruction for freshman students. Topics that focused on current global events such as Ramadan in Islamic countries, the Tsunami in Japan, the Royal wedding, and refugees in Europe were posted by the instructor. The students were required to look for videos, photos or articles related to the assigned event and write a short paragraph (blog post) that describes the photo, summarizes the video and article content, or talk about the event in their own words. They also had to write their reaction to the event, and post comments and feedback on their classmates' blog posts. The students worked on their blog posts individually, in pairs or small group. Comparisons of the posttest scores of students who blogged about current global events and those who used paper-and-pencil assignments on the same topics showed significant differences in writing improvement in favor of the blog group. In addition, students in the blog group had positive attitudes towards the blogging activity. They enjoyed interacting and collaborating with their classmates and reflecting on their own writing in response to the feedback and comments they received from other blog members. Blogging about current global events proved to be effective in raising students' global awareness and enhancing their writing skills in EFL.

| KEYWORDS

Blogs, blogging, current global events, collaboration, interaction, writing instruction, EFL writing, global awareness.

1. Introduction

Writing constitutes a major problem for English-as-a-foreign (EFL) or second language (ESL) teachers and students at Saudi Language and Translation Departments. Many teachers do not know which writing topics to assign to students and do not know which instructional techniques are effective in developing EFL/ESL students' writing skills. In addition, many students have difficulties expressing, generating, and organizing ideas for their essays or paragraphs, in addition to spelling, grammatical and punctuation problems (Al-Jarf, 2005; Al-Jarf, 2004; Al-Jarf, 2002).

Moreover, due to latest developments in information and communication technologies, the world has become a small village. The social, economic, political, educational, health, ecological and cultural systems in various countries are interconnected. The students are no longer citizens of their country or local community, but they are also citizens of the world. Hence, it has become necessary to integrate a global dimension to the various courses particularly English language courses, being the global language, in order to develop a global awareness among the students and help them understand what is going on in the world.

Due to the importance of global competence and global awareness in education, a review of the literature has shown numerous studies that integrated global learning in different courses. For example, Omidvar and Sukumar (2013) indicated that global education is the backbone of balanced teaching even in second language courses. Integrating global issues into the syllabus in an EFL intermediate, multilingual, and multi-cultural conversation class at the Institute of Language Studies, India, produced competent students. The students showed a higher degree of awareness of global issues, enhanced linguistic competence, the

ability to analyze problems and apply critical thinking in their environment. They were also more active and motivated in their class participation than in other classes. In another study, integrating global issues in language learning revealed that Turkish students had positive opinions of the global issues used in class. Global issues expanded their perspectives and improved their learning gains. Their conceptions of global issues included examples such as poverty, environment, education, and oppression (Bayraktar Balkir, 2021). Similarly, EFL freshman students had positive attitudes toward multicultural differences, yet they did not deal with multicultural situations in real life confidently. In order for multicultural awareness to contribute to foreign language skill development it needs over one academic year. These results confirmed the indirect utilities of multicultural awareness in second/foreign language development (Zhang, Cui & Zhang, 2021).

In Ukraine, the integration of global issues into the teaching of English for Specific Purposes had a synergetic effect on combining professional skills, soft skills, and global competence. This combination improved future professionals' skills and improved the quality of higher education in general (Diachkova, Sazhko, Shevchenko & Syzenko, 2021).

A study by Meng, Zhu and Cao (2018) examined global competence of Chinese students living in Belgium, a non-Anglophone European country, as a mediator between foreign language proficiency in EFL, and local Belgian language, academic and social adaptation, and social connectedness in the international community. Both English and local language proficiency were found to be significant predictors of global competence. Global competence had a significant influence on students' social connectedness and social and academic adaptation. Together, English, and local language proficiency explained 32% of the variance in global competence. Global competence explained 55% of the variance in social adaptation and 38% of the variance in academic adaptation, respectively. In addition, English proficiency and global competence explained 33% of the variance in social connectedness in the international community. Global competence was a partial mediator in the relationship between social connectedness and proficiency in EFL. But it fully mediated the relationships between social and academic adaptation and proficiency in EFL and local Belgian language.

In Taiwan, multicultural/global learning helped university students construct knowledge, provided them with opportunities to learn more about themselves and encouraged them to take actions within and outside their communities. It also found that authentic materials helped motivate the students in learning English (Huang, 2008).

In Saudi Arabia, Alsamani (2014) found that many EFL students had positive attitudes toward the target culture and its people, yet they lacked awareness of the target culture and they needed to learn about different aspects of the foreign culture to develop their cultural awareness. The students mostly depended on audio-/visual media to learn about the target culture. The study recommended the integration of authentic materials such as DVDs, video tapes, and newspapers in foreign language instruction to enhance students' cultural awareness and improve their language proficiency. It also recommended that EFL instructional programs be modified to introduce the foreign language culture in the classroom.

As for the teaching strategies that EFL instructors utilize to develop intercultural competence, intercultural-awareness and intercultural communicative-competence, Omidvar and Sukumar (2013) highlighted the amalgamation of content-based and task-based, and communicative language teaching methods, focusing on content and task (Omidvar & Sukumar, 2013); incorporating intercultural competence in the EFL curricula, and utilizing collaborative projects between Omani and American students (Salih & Omar, 2021); using project-based inquiry (Spires, Himes, Paul & Kerkhoff, 2019); global-issues projects such as collecting used EFL textbooks for donation to refugee camps, participating in a Model United Nations conference, and voluntary letter-writing campaigns in English for Amnesty International (Yamashiro, 1996); writing workshops, multimodal literacies and teacher collaboration (Iyengar & Hood, 2016); connecting learners with different lingua-cultural backgrounds over extended periods of time via digital communication technologies and designing exchanges in which learners collaborate on shared tasks based on local and global real-world problems (Krengel, 2021; Al-Jarf, 2020a; Al-Jarf, 2020b; Al-Jarf, 2007b; Al-Jarf, 2006a; Al-Jarf, 2006b).

In addition, prior studies have integrated a variety of technologies in the EFL writing classroom such as the integrating a variety of online tasks and online courses in writing instruction (Al-Jarf, 2014b; Al-Jarf, 2007a); integrating online reading and writing activities using different Learning Management System (Al-Jarf, 2013; Al-Jarf, 2010); online collaboration and online dialogue with EFL students in other countries (Al-Jarf, 2006a; Al-Jarf, 2006b); integration of mind maps (Al-Jarf, 2009); the integration of mobile apps and social media such as Facebook in wiring (Al-Jarf, 2020c; Al-Jarf, 2018; Al-Jarf, 2015; Al-Jarf, 2014a); the integration of blogs in writing practice (Al-Jarf, 2022; Chen, 2014) and others.

Blogs, in particular, are widely used in educational settings. Prior studies showed that EFL students had positive attitudes towards using blogs in practicing writing because they engage in online exchanges and share their posts with their classmates. They get to know the foreign culture by capturing, sharing, and reflecting on their experiences with their peers. Blogs create a sense of community outside the classroom, encourage interaction, maximize students' collaborative writing, and promote autonomous and

reflective learning. They help the students express themselves. Interaction, self-reflection, peer comments and feedback motivate the students to build on their writing skills and encourage collaborative reflection and learning. The comments and feedback that students post on each other's blog posts play a crucial role in the language learning process as they support learner-centered learning (Kuo, Belland & Kuo, 2017; Huang, 2016; Gunduz, 2016; Aliakbari & Mohammadi, 2016; Wall & Anderson, 2015; Jackling, Natoli, Siddique, & Sciulli, 2015; Ballén, 2014; Ahluwalia, Gupta & Aggarwal, 2011; Zaini Amir & Supyan, 2010).

The above literature review shows lack of studies that investigate the utilization of blogs in writing about current global events in EFL writing instruction. Specifically, there is lack of studies in Saudi Arabia that focus on blogging activities about current global issues by EFL students at language and translation departments. Therefore, this study aims to find out the following: (i) the impact of using blogs to write about current global events on writing skill improvement in EFL freshman students in Saudi Arabia; (ii) whether there is a significant difference in writing skill improvement between EFL freshman students who utilized a blog and those who used paper-and-pencil assignments to write about current global events; (iii) the impact of blogging about current global events on students' attitudes towards the blogging activity and the integration of themes related to current global events in EFL writing instruction.

2. Definition of Terms
2.1 What is a blog
A blog (weblog or web log) is a website consisting of posts (entries) similar to those of an online discussion forum. They are created using specific publishing software. They typically include comments. Links, Pdf, doc, ppt, xls files, photos and video clips can be uploaded. In education, blogs (edublogs) can be used as an instructional tool. They can be written on the laptop or a mobile device like a smart phone, iPad, or tablet.

2.2 What are Current Global Events
Kniep (1986) identified 4 essential elements of global education: (1) the study of global systems such as economic, political, ecological, technological systems and so on; (2) the study of diverse human values; (3) the study of global problems and issues; and (4) the study of global history, contact and interdependence among cultures, peoples, and nations.

Moreover, Boocker and Others (1985) and Collins, Czarra and Smith (1996) identified 4 types of goals associated with the integration of global issues in education: (i) *Knowledge goals* pertaining to acquiring facts, concepts, or generalizations from history and the social sciences; (ii) *Skill goals* pertaining to the ability to collect, organize, interpret, and use information; (iii) *Value goals* pertaining to understanding the principles that underlie developing the ability to make judgments based; and (iv) *Participation goals* pertaining to life-long involvement by students in social issues and civic affairs.

The present study will specifically focus on current social, political, economic, health, educational, cultural, and environmental global issues that affect people all over the world such as climate change, pollution, malnourishment and hunger, security and wellbeing, violence, unemployment, lack of education, government corruption, substance abuse, terrorism, issues of peace, human rights, and the environment. It will also focus on participation goals that require the students to describe a current global event, problem, or issue, diagnose the problem, and propose solutions to it (Al-Jarf, 2020a; Al-Jarf, 2021b; Al-Jarf, 2003a; Al-Jarf, 2003b).

3. Methodology
3.1 Participants
Two sections (intact groups) of female EFL freshman students at the College of Languages and Translation (COLT), King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia participated in the study. One section (46 students) was assigned to the experimental group whereas the other (47 students) was assigned to the control group. Both groups were enrolled in a Writing I course (4 hours a week) that the author taught. Both were concurrently enrolled in Listening I, Speaking I, Reading I, Vocabulary I and Grammar I courses (16 hours a week). All the students were native speakers of Arabic, and they took the same EFL courses in school before they were admitted to COLT. The students' ages ranged between 17 and 19 years, with a median age of 18 years old.

The experimental group participated in blogging activities about current global events, whereas the control group participated in paper-and-pencil assignments. Students in the control group wrote about the same current global events as the experimental group. The blog and paper-and-pencil assignments were used as a supplement to in-class instruction that depended on the textbook assigned by the department.

Before writing instruction started, students in both groups were pretested. They were given the same writing pretest that required them to write a paragraph. Results of the independent T-test showed no significant differences between the experimental and control groups in their writing scores before writing instruction began (T = .43; Df = 91; P<.83), i.e., no significant differences were found in the students' writing skill level.

A qualitative analysis of the pretest paragraphs written by both groups revealed many weaknesses in English writing: The students had difficulty expressing, generating, and organizing ideas, made several spelling mistakes per line, did not insert punctuation marks, and did not capitalize words. They could not construct grammatically correct sentences. Their paragraphs were not cohesive and coherent.

3.2 In-class Instruction with the Textbook

The experimental and control groups were exposed to the same in-class writing instruction that depended on a textbook assigned by the department. Both groups were taught by the author. Students in both groups studied *Segal, Margaret and Pavl, Cheryl (2015-2016). Interactions 1: A Writing Process. Middle East Diamond Edition. McGraw-Hill.* This textbook targets high beginning and low intermediate students. The textbook follows a writing-process approach and aims to develop EFL freshman students' ability to write a well-connected paragraph that has a topic sentence and relevant supporting details with minimal grammatical, spelling, punctuation, and indentation errors. The book consists of 12 chapters, each of which has a theme and four parts consisting of sub-parts as follows: Exploring ideas, building vocabulary, organizing ideas, developing cohesion and style, some grammatical points, writing the first draft, editing practice, writing the second draft of the paragraph and journal writing. In each chapter, the writing skills are introduced and practiced one at a time, before the students put all the skills together in paragraph writing. Each chapter was taught in four hours (one week), and the book was covered over 12 weeks. Each week, the experimental and control groups completed all of the writing subskills and exercises in the chapter and wrote two long paragraphs. Both groups wrote at least part of the new paragraph in class. Sometimes they had to rewrite their paragraphs if they were unsatisfactory.

Students in both groups were encouraged to write and not to worry about grammatical, spelling, capitalization, or punctuation errors. While doing the exercises and writing the paragraphs, the author guided the students and provided individual help. The students were given communicative feedback that focused on communication and generating ideas. Focus was only errors related to rules or subskills under study in the chapter. The author highlighted the location of errors in the paragraph but did not provide nor show the correct forms. The author encouraged self-editing and peer-editing. She gave extra credit for good paragraphs (Al-Jarf, 2021a).

As for assessment, both experimental and control groups were tested once every 2 weeks. They took a total of seven quizzes during the semester. On quizzes 1, 3, 5, and 7, the students had to write a paragraph on a topic and on quizzes 2, 4, and 6, they worked on a variety of writing tasks similar to those covered in the textbook. The quizzes were always checked by the author and returned to the students with comments on their performance. Words of encouragement were always given. The slightest improvement in writing was noted and commended. Answers were always discussed in class.

3.3 Treatment

For the experimental group, a class blog was created on Blackboard LMS and used as a supplement to EFL in-class instruction. The blog was used for extensive writing activities. Then, a list of current global events was made which included general topics such as:

- *The Coronavirus Pandemic*
- *Ramadan in Islamic countries*
- *Royal weddings*
- *New Year celebrations around the world*
- *Revolutions in Arab countries (Arab spring)*
- *Draughts and famines in Africa*
- *Palestinian-Israeli conflict*
- *War on Gaza*
- *Issues of peace*
- *Human rights*
- *Gender equity*
- *Elections in the US*
- *Refugees in Europe*
- *Terrorism*
- *Drug trafficking and addiction*
- *The stranded ship in the Suez Canal*
- *Poverty, hunger, and malnourishment*
- *Political conflicts around the world*
- *Global warming (climate change)*
- *Environmental issues*
- *Pollution*
- *Water shortage*
- *Natural disasters such as tsunamis, hurricanes, volcanoes, earthquakes, floods.*
- *Poverty*
- *Child labor*
- *Street children*
- *Lack of education*
- *Violence*
- *Unemployment*
- *Racism*
- *Olympic Games*

Students in the experimental group worked on the tasks individually, in pairs or in small groups of 4 students. Members of each group were randomly assigned and were rotated and re-assigned for each new blog theme, so that each student has a chance to work, collaborate and interact with different members.

Instruction with bogs went through 3 stages. In the *pre-blogging phase*, the students were required to look for videos, photos or articles related to the assigned global event and were supposed to write a short paragraph that describes the photo or summarizes the video and article content and post it in the blog. They also had to write their reaction to the event. Participation goals were integrated in each blog topic. The students had to describe the current global issue or event, diagnose the problem, and propose solutions (Al-Jarf, 2021b). Classmates had to post questions, feedback, or comments on each other's blog posts. Several posts to the same themes/topic or global event were posted in the blog by a deadline. No assignments were accepted after the deadline. Marks were given for each post. Study skills, self-improvement tips, websites and links to reading material about the assigned themes were posted. Examples and instructions for a blog post are as examples:

Example (1):
Post a paragraph about Ramadan in a Muslim country of your choice such as Ramadan in Egypt, Pakistan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Morocco, Lebanon and so on. Your post should cover the following information: How Ramadan is celebrated in that country, what people eat, what they do in Ramadan, and how people can help the poor in Ramadan.

Example (2):
Post a paragraph (not more than one page) about a natural disaster such as a tsunami, a hurricane, a volcano, earthquake, floods, draughts, and famine. Your paragraph should include a definition, what happened, when, where, and results of the disaster and what can be done to help people affected by the disaster.

For both examples, the instructor asked the students to search the internet to find information about Ramadan in a particular country, or a particular natural disaster they have chosen. The information should not be more than one page long. Students should give the source of information. To help students find information, the author instructed them to search online by going to Google and entering "Ramadan & Islamic countries" in the search box. They will then get numerous websites. The students had to give their post a title and post it in the blog under the theme. For each country, they had to start a new topic, post a picture, a video, post the information to support their post.

As for the control group, the students wrote about the same current global events as the experimental group but using paper and pencil and in a different order. Students in the control group worked individually, in pairs or small groups of four students as well. They searched for information about the assigned topic in references of their choice. Discussions about the assignments were held face to face in class and discussed with the students as a group. It was not mandatory for the students to read each other's assignments.

Throughout the treatment, the instructor served as a facilitator for both groups. She trained students to use the blog and moderate their posts, discussion, comments, and responses. She provided help and answered questions about the themes, tasks or writing problems. She encouraged the students to collaborate, interact and write comments and feedback.

3.4 Procedures
Before instruction, EFL freshman students in the experimental and control groups were given a writing pretest. At the end of the semester, both groups took a writing posttest (the final exam for the Writing I course) that consisted of questions that covered all of the writing subskills covered in the textbook. The posttest was part of a three-hour final exam and contained the following tasks: (1) a posttest paragraph that the students had never seen nor practiced in class or blog; (ii) a letter-writing task; and (iii) four texts with objective questions covering all the writing and grammar subskills practiced in the textbook. Most of the questions on the writing test required production. The paragraph topic was concrete and within the students' background knowledge. The test instructions specified the paragraph length and components that were taught and practiced in the writing course such as writing a topic sentence, types, and number of supporting details, inserting conjunctions and cohesive ties, capitalizing word, and using punctuation marks where necessary, spelling words correctly and so on. The posttest instructions were as follows:

In your opinion, what are the causes of unemployment among college graduates in the 21st century. What kind of jobs can be created for them? Write a paragraph between 10-15 lines in which you give 3-5 cause and 3-5 examples of jobs suitable for the 21st century job market to support your answer. Give your paragraph a title. Your paragraph should have an introductory topic sentence and a conclusion. Use simple, compound, and complex sentences. Pay attention to verb tenses. Add transitional words and conjunctions where necessary. Indent, capitalize words and insert punctuation mark where necessary. When you finish, reread your paragraph, and double-check your spelling, use of punctuation marks, indentation, capitalization, conjunctions, tenses...etc.

The writing pre and posttests were blindly scored by the author using an answer key. The students wrote their ID numbers instead of their real names. The questions were scored one at a time for all the students in both groups. Marks were deducted for spelling

errors.

At the end of the course, students in the experimental group answered a questionnaire-survey with open-ended questions: (1) Did you like blogging about current global events or not? Why? (2) What did you like about the blogging activities? (3) Did your writing skills improve as a result of using the blogging activities? In what ways? (5) What problems or difficulties did you face in blogging about the current global events or in using the Blackboard blog? (5) Would you join a similar blogging activity or any other activity about current global events? Why?

3.5 Data Analysis
The writing pre and posttest raw scores for the experimental and control groups were converted into percentages. The mean median, range, standard deviation, and standard error were calculated for the writing test scores of both groups. To find out whether students in both groups have made improvement in EFL writing as a result of the extensive writing activities that each group received (blogs vs use of paper-and-pencil activities), a within group paired T-test was calculated using the writing pre and posttest scores for each group, i.e., the pre and posttest scored were compared for each group separately. To find out which group made more improvement in the writing skill as a result of writing about the current global events using a blog vs paper-and-pencil assignments, an independent T-test was calculated using the writing posttest scores for the experimental and control groups, i.e., the writing posttest scores for both groups were compared.

3.6 The Writing Test Validity and Reliability
The writing posttest is believed to have content validity as it aimed at assessing EFL freshman students' writing skill in English. The writing tasks performed in the writing posttest were comparable to those covered in the textbook and practiced in class and in the extensive writing activities using the blog and the paper-and-pencil assignments. In addition, the writing test instructions were formulated clearly, and the students' task was defined. Concurrent validity of the writing posttest was calculated by correlating the students' scores on the writing posttest and the students' overall writing course mark. The validity coefficient was .59. Concurrent validity was also calculated by correlating the students' writing posttest scores and their scores on the last paragraph writing quiz. The validity coefficient for the writing test was .74.

Since the author was the instructor and scorer of the writing pre and posttests, estimates of inter-rater reliability were necessary. A 30% random sample of the pre and posttest answer sheets of both groups were selected and double scored. A colleague with a Ph.D. degree and experience teaching writing at COLT scored the samples. The scoring procedures were explained to her. She also used the same answer key that the author used. The scores given by the rater and author were compared. There was a 96% agreement between both raters. Moreover, examinee reliability was computed using the Kuder-Richardson 21' formula. The examinee reliability coefficient for the writing posttest was .69.

Finally, experimental students' responses to the questionnaire-survey were sorted out and categorized according to the questions and are reported qualitatively.

4. Results
4.1 Effects of the Blogging and Paper-and-Pencil Activities on Writing Skill Improvement
Table (1) shows that the typical EFL female freshman student in the experimental and control groups in the current study scored higher on the writing posttest than the pretest (medians = 80% and 68% respectively) with lower variations among students' scores on the pretest than posttest (SD =10.63 and 09.17 respectively). This means that EFL freshman students in the experimental and control groups made more improvements as a result of writing about current global events using a blog and paper-and-pencil assignments respectively. However, the median and mean scores do not show whether improvement in the writing scores was significant or not. Therefore, the pre and posttest writing scores for each group were compared using a paired T-test. Results of the paired T-test showed a significant difference between the pre and posttest mean scores of the experimental group at the .01 level, suggesting that experimental students' writing skills significantly improved as a result of blogging about current global events (T =15.34, Df = 46). Similarly, a significant difference between the writing pretest and posttest mean scores of the control group was found at the .01 level, suggesting that the writing skill in control students significantly improved as a result of using paper-and-pencil assignments (T = 14.29, Df = 45).

Comparisons of the posttest writing posttest for the experimental and control groups using the independent T-test showed significant difference between the two groups in writing skill improvement (T = 25.76; df = 91). This means that students in the experimental group made more improvement in writing skills than students in the control group as a result of blogging about current global events. Experimental students' greater improvement in their writing skills is attributed to the student-centered activities, active collaboration, participation, intensive practice, and interaction among the students; a secure environment for making mistakes; and instructor and peer feedback and support, as revealed by students' responses to the questionnaire-survey.

Table (1): Distribution of Pre and Posttest Writing Scores in Percentages

Groups	Tests	N	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation	Standard Error	Range
Experimental Group	Pretest	47	27.14%	26%	05.37	0.67	09-43%
	Posttest	46	90.44 %	80 %	10.63	1.38	38-93%
Control Group	Pretest	47	10.76%	19%	04.29	0 .76	05-55%
	Posttest	46	68.62%	68%	09.17	1.41	21-84%

4.2 Students' Views

Comments and responses to the post-treatment questionnaire-surveys showed that EFL freshman students in the experimental groups had positive attitudes towards using blogs and the integration of current global events in extensive writing activities. All the students found the blogging activity useful and fun and considered it a new way of practicing writing and improving their writing skills in English. The blogging activity encouraged them to write more without feeling that writing is a chore as it is the case in conventional paper-and-pencil writing assignments. Blogging about current global events motivated them to write about interesting topics. The blogs created a warm learning climate among the students and between the students and their instructor. They learnt to write faster. They could blog anytime and anywhere, from a laptop, mobile, iPad or tablet. They acquired new vocabulary items related to the current global event they were writing about. They found the blogs useful, as they had a chance to read each other's posts, responses and comments, and work on their weaknesses and improve their posts accordingly. The blog environment was secure for making mistakes and editing their posts several times. The received instructor and peer support and encouragement. All the students mentioned that they would join a similar blogging activity in the future. The students added that writing about current events raised their awareness of what is going on around the world and made them feel that the world is a small village. Some students wrote:

Fatima: *Blogging about current global events broadened my horizon and made me keen on following what is going on in the world by watching the news on T.V. and feeling that I am part of the event.*

Sara: *Blogging about current global events that I am familiar with helped me generate ideas for my posts.*

Noura: *I did not only read my blog post only, but I also read my classmates' blog posts about the same topic, in what way ideas are similar and in what way they are different.*

Hanoof: *I had a chance to compare my own blog posts on the same topic with my classmates' and learn from those who write better than me. Thus my style, vocabulary, and sentence structure improved.*

Maha: *The collaborative activities helped my brainstorm with students in my group and elaborate ideas and answers with them.*

Samia: *Joining different students in a new group, when a new blog topic is assigned, helped me interact with many classmates. I learnt from and exchanged ideas with many rather than working on my own or with the same group members.*

Noha: *I learnt many things about foreign countries and foreign cultures from T.V., YouTube, pictures, and websites.*

The post-treatment questionnaire showed several factors that led to improvement in writing: student-centered activities, real-life concrete topics, topics of interest for the students, encouraging students to express themselves, practice and active participation in the blog, clear instructions, a secure environment for making mistakes, and instructor, and peer support. Students with lower writing skills had a change to view posts of students who have excellent writing skills. But soon they were encouraged to post because their classmates and instructor were supportive and did not pick on their mistakes.

However, students in the experimental group pointed out some challenging aspects of the blogging activity. Some students declared that at first, they were not familiar with the Blackboard Blog tool and how to post a topic, edit it, but with practice things got easier. Others felt inadequate and were shy to post their paragraph where all their classmates could read it.

Another challenge for the instructor was that at first some students did not post any responses to or comments on the blog posts if not prompted by the instructor and if the instructor did not post instructions or a sample post. Some wrote compliments rather than real posts. Others just browsed and read rather than posting paragraphs, comments, questions, or feedback. Some started a

new entry instead of adding their paragraph to the entry with the same theme. At first, some students did not take the blogging activity seriously as it was not used by other students and instructors at COLT. Many Saudi EFL college students do extra work only when extensive activities or assignments are part of the course mark. But if they are not part of tests and course marks, they will not participate and will not take the activities seriously. So, the instructor encouraged the students to participate in blogging activity by giving extra credit depending on how many blog posts each student has shared.

5. Discussion

Significant differences were found between EFL freshman students in the experimental and control groups in their writing skills as measured by the posttest at the end of the semester (after 14 weeks of the blogging activity) suggesting that writing skills in the experimental group have improved as a result of blogging about the current blogging events. The blogging activity enhanced the good and average student's writing performance and the performance of below-average students as well. Moreover, the current study revealed positive effects of the blogging activity on EFL freshman students' attitudes towards writing in general, and the integration of current global events with which they are familiar and which they found interesting. The students enjoyed blogging and felt it helped them to write more blog posts. At the end of the semester, EFL freshman students' ability to generate ideas, write topic sentences, relevant details and pay attention to the form and content of the blog post improved significantly. They could reflect on their classmates' blog posts. Unlike paper writing assignments, online/mobile blogging was more fun as they could blog anywhere and anytime, and the blog posts were focused, short and manageable.

Results of this study are consistent with results of prior studies in the literature which found that EFL students had a positive attitude towards using blogs in practicing writing because the students engaged in online exchanges and shared their posts with their classmates. They learnt about the foreign culture. Blogs created a sense of community, encouraged interaction, maximized students' collaborative writing, and autonomous and reflective learning. The students could express themselves freely. The comments and feedback played a crucial role in improving the students' blog posts. Blogs support learner-centered learning (Kuo, Belland & Kuo, 2017; Huang, 2016; Gunduz, 2016; Aliakbari & Mohammadi, 2016; Wall & Anderson, 2015; Jackling, Natoli, Siddique, & Sciulli, 2015; Ballén, 2014; Ahluwalia, Gupta & Aggarwal, 2011; Zaini Amir & Supyan, 2010).

In addition, the integration of current global events in EFL writing instruction helped raise students' awareness of global issues (Omidvar & Sukumar, 2013). Like Turkish students in Bayraktar Balkir's (2021) study, EFL Saudi students had positive opinions of the global issues integrated in the writing course.

When the blogging activity started at the beginning of the semester, students in the current were not adequately responsive and some did not participate in the activity, but at the end of the semester (4 months) they got better and almost each student tried to contribute something. In this respect, Zhang, Cui and Zhang (2021) asserted that the contribution of multicultural awareness to foreign language skills needs over one academic year,

Furthermore, integrating current global themes in the current study helped EFL Saudi students construct knowledge, develop intercultural competence and intercultural awareness because the blogging activity depended on combining real-world issues, content-based, task-based, project-based inquiry, the communicative approach, shared tasks and blogging skills as in studies by Huang (2008); Omidvar and Sukumar (2013); Yamashiro (1996); Iyengar and Hood (2016); Salih and Omar (2021); Spires, Himes, Paul and Kerkhoff (2019); Krengel (2021); and Diachkova, Sazhko, Shevchenko and Syzenko (2021).

6. Recommendations

In the present study, blogging about current global events in EFL writing instruction was found to be a powerful tool for unskilled, low ability EFL female freshman student writers. The benefits of introducing blogs in EFL writing instruction proved to be effective in enhancing students' writing skills. Improvement was noted in the blog posts. Differences in the post length, neatness, and mechanical correctness were observed. Therefore, use of blogs and the integration of current global events in writing instruction to improve EFL students' writing skills is strongly recommended. EFL writing instructors can be trained to integrate blogs and current global events in the teaching of writing to EFL freshman students anywhere and anytime. For blogging about current global events to be more effective in developing EFL students' writing skills, the present study recommends the following:

1) specifying the minimum requirements of students' contributions in the blogging activities and assigning marks to blog posts in order to encourage the students to take the blog activities more seriously. By responding to and commenting on students' blog posts, the instructor will prompt the students to post in the class blog more frequently.
2) topics should be familiar, tangible, specific. So, break broad global topics into smaller, more specific ones (examples/cases). The students can suggest global events to write about.
3) matching the current global event topic difficulty level, complexity, and relevance with the EFL student's proficiency level in EFL.

4) keeping the blog posts short, encourage the students to write as often as possible and making the content easy and simple.
5) teaching the students about copyright issues.
6) selecting a good blog design is a must.
7) EFL college students should never use a blog or any other instructional technology passively. They should always have a topic to write a bout and some tasks to perform. The instructor's guidance should be provided at every stage.
8) EFL instructors may combine reading and writing, speaking and writing, or listening and writing activities using blogs and current global events (Al-Jarf, 2021c; Al-Jarf, 2013; Al-Jarf, 2010; Chou, 2016; Chou, 2015).

Finally, collaborative blogging activities can be extended to the Writing II, Writing III, and Writing IV at COLT. Students enrolled in the Writing I, II, III and IV courses can share a class blog and share the global topics together with their instructors. To encourage the students to participate, instructors can prompt and motivate the students. Rules for using collaborative blogs for writing practice should be made clear. The minimum number of blogs written may be specified. These blog strategies are believed to be very helpful in enhancing EFL students' writing skills in English and would help students engage in and benefit from class blogs.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

ORCID ID: Reima Al-Jarf, Ph.D**;** https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6255-1305

References
[1]   Al-Jarf, R. (2022). Blogging about the Covid-19 pandemic in EFL writing practice. *Journal of Learning and Development Studies (JLDS), 2*(1), 1-8. Doi: 10.32996/jlds.2022.2.1.1
[2]   Al-Jarf, R. (2021a). A model for communicative error correction in Saudi EFL freshman students' writing. *i-manager's Journal on English Language Teaching, 11*(2), 32-41.   Doi: 10.26634/jelt.11.2.17719
[3]   Al-Jarf, R. (2021b). Integrating participation goals in writing activities for EFL college students. *Journal for Research Scholars and Professionals of English Language Teaching (JRSP-ELT), 23*(5), January. ERIC ED613141. https://www.jrspelt.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/R._-Writing-Activities.pdf
[4]   Al-Jarf, R. (2021c). Mobile audiobooks, listening comprehension and EFL college students. *International Journal of Research – GRANTHAALAYAH, 9*(4), 410-423. https://doi.org/10.29121/granthaalayah.v9.i4.2021.3868
       http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3841694
[5]   Al-Jarf, R. (2020a). A model for a global education course for Saudi junior and senior high schools. *Eurasian Arabic Studies, 11, 76-97.* Doi: 10.26907/2619-1261
[6]   Al-Jarf, R. (2020b). Building cultural bridges through social media networks: a case study. *Global Trends and Values in Education, 1*(1), 81-106. ERIC ED613111. https://journals.sdu.edu.kz/index.php/gtve/issue/current.
[7]   Al-Jarf, R. (2020c). Mobile apps in the EFL college classroom. *Journal for Research Scholars and Professionals of English Language Teaching (JRSP-ELT), 4*(22), 1-5. (ISSN: 2456-8104). ERIC ED613138.
[8]   Al-Jarf, R. (2018). Exploring discourse and creativity in Facebook creative writing by non-native speakers. In Marcel Danesi's Empirical Studies in Visual Rhetoric, 1-31. IGI Global. Doi: 10.4018/IJSSS.2015010103
[9]   Al-Jarf, R. (2015). Discourse and creativity issues in EFL creative writing on Facebook. *International Journal of Sign and Semiotic Systems (IJSSS), 4*(1), 56-83. Doi: 10.4018/IJSSS.2015010103. https://www.igi-global.com/gateway/article/full-text-html/141521
[10] Al-Jarf, R. (2014a). *Social networks and creative writing in EFL*. In Hwee Ling Lim & Fay Sudweeks's (Eds) Innovative Methods for Electronic Discourse Analysis. IGI Global. 144-158. Chapter 7. Doi: 10.4018/978-1-4666-4426-7.ch007
[11] Al-Jarf, R. (2014b). What ESL teachers should know about online writing tasks. *ELTAM Journal, 1,* 47-54.   ERIC ED613065.
[12] Al-Jarf, R. (2013). *Enhancing freshman students' performance with online reading and writing activities*. 9th eLearning and Software for Education Conference (eLSE). Bucharest, Romania. 2, 524-530. Doi: 10.12753/2066-026X-13-193
[13] Al-Jarf, R. (2010). *Integrating RCampus in college reading and writing for translation students*. Touchpoint International Conference on Technology in Education. Manila, Philippines, March 5-6. ERIC ED609048.
[14] Al-Jarf, R. (2009). *Enhancing freshman students' writing skills with mind-mapping software*. Proceedings of the 5th International Scientific Conference eLearning and Software for Education (eLSE), 01, 375-382. Bucharest, Romania. https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=38737
[15] A-Jarf, R. (2007a). Online instruction and creative writing by Saudi freshman students. *The Asian EFL Journal, 22,* 1-14.
[16] A-Jarf, R. (2007b). *Integrating global culture in EFL college materials*. 7th Annual English Language Teaching Conference. Sultan Qaboos University, Muscat, Oman. April 18-19.
[17] Al-Jarf, R. (2006a). Cross-cultural communication: Saudi, Ukrainian, and Russian students online. *Asian EFL Journal, 8*(2), June. ERIC ED489964.
[18] Al-Jarf, R. (2006b). Using online dialogue to develop cross-cultural understanding. *Iranian Journal of Linguistic Studies (IJLS), 1,*13-25. ERIC ED494790.
[19] Al-Jarf, R. (2005). *Task-based instruction for EFL struggling college writers*. International. Conference on Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT 2005). Centre for Language and Migration, University of Leuven, Belgium.

[20] Al-Jarf, R. (2004). The effect of web-based learning on struggling ESL college writers. *Foreign Language Annals, 37*(1), 46-56. Doi: 10.1111/j.1944-9720.2004.tb02172.x

[21] Al-Jarf, R. (2003a). *Global themes in Singaporean secondary social studies textbooks*. Curriculum Development Conference Titled: Principles and Starting Points. May 13-14. 2, 921-950. College of Education, King Saud University.

[22] Al-Jarf, R. (2003b). *The global dimension in Saudi history textbooks for grades 4-12.* Curriculum Development: Principles and Starting Points Conference. Vol I, 101-132. College of Education, King Saud University. Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

[23] Al-Jarf, R. (2002). *Effect of online learning on struggling ESL college writers*. ERIC ED475920.

[24] Ahluwalia, G., Gupta, D. & Aggarwal, D. (2011). The use of blogs in English language learning: A study of student perceptions. *PROFILE: Issues in Teachers' Professional Development, 13*(2), 29-41.

[25] Aliakbari, M. & Mohammadi, S. (2016). EFL learners' perceptions of blog assignments and instructors' e-feedbacks. *International Journal of Web-Based Learning and Teaching Technologies, 11*(3), 1-16.

[26] Alsamani, Abdul-Aziz Saleh (2014). Foreign culture awareness needs of Saudi English language majors at Buraydah community college. *English Language Teaching, 7*(6), 143-153.

[27] Ballén, D. (2014). The role of blogs and web resources in students' autonomous learning awareness. *HOW, 21*(2), 10-30.

[28] Bayraktar B, N (2021). Uncovering EFL learners' perspectives on a course integrating global issues and language learning. *Novitas-ROYAL (Research on Youth and Language)*, 15(1), 118-133.

[29] Boocker, S. & Others (1985). *Social studies curriculum, K-8.* ERIC ED285817.

[30] Chen, W. (2014). Actual and preferred teacher feedback on student blog writing. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology, 30*(4), 402-414.

[31] Collins, H., Czarra, F., Smith, A. (1996). Guidelines for global and international studies education: challenges, culture, connections. *Issues in Global Education; June- July,* 135,136.

[32] Diachkova, Y., Sazhko, L., Shevchenko, L. & Syzenko, A. (2021). Global Issues in ESP Classroom: Challenges and Opportunities in Higher Education. *Arab World English Journal, 12*(1), 388-400.

[33] Gunduz, M. (2016). Promoting interaction through blogging in language classrooms. *International Journal of Research in Education and Science, 2*(2), 438-443.

[34] Huang, H. (2016). Students and the teacher's perceptions on incorporating the blog task and peer feedback into EFL writing classes through blogs. *English Language Teaching, 9*(11), 38-47.

[35] Huang, W. J. (2008). The learning of multicultural/global themes through authentic materials in EFL classrooms. *Taiwan Journal of TESOL, 5*(1), 9–118.

[36] Iyengar, K. & Hood, C. (2016). National writing project's multimodal literacies and teacher collaboration: enhanced student learning on global social issues. *Texas Journal of Literacy Education, 4*(2), 98-110.

[37] Jackling, B., Natoli, R., Siddique, S. & Sciulli, N. (2015). Student attitudes to blogs: a case study of reflective and collaborative learning. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 40*(4), 542-556.

[38] Kniep, W. (1986). Defining a global education by its content. *Social Education; 50(6),* 437-46.

[39] Krengel, F. (2021). Glocal education" through virtual exchange? training pre-service EFL teachers to connect their local classrooms to the world and back. *Global Education Review, 8*(2-3), 138-153.

[40] Kuo, Y., Belland, B. & Kuo, Y. (2017). Learning through blogging: Students' perspectives in collaborative blog-enhanced learning communities. *Educational Technology & Society, 20*(2), 37-50.

[41] Meng, Q., Zhu, C. & Cao, C. (2018). Chinese international students' social connectedness, social and academic adaptation: the mediating role of global competence. *Higher Education: The International Journal of Higher Education Research, 75*(1), 131-147.

[42] Omidvar, R. & Sukumar, B. (2013). The effects of global education in the English language conversation classroom. *English Language Teaching, 6*(7), 151-157.

[43] Salih, A. A. & Omar, L. I. (2021). Globalized English and users' intercultural awareness: implications for internationalization of higher education. *Citizenship, Social and Economics Education*, 20(3), 181-196.

[44] Spires, H., Himes, M., Paul, C. & Kerkhoff, S. (2019). Going global with project-based inquiry: cosmopolitan literacies in practice. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 63*(1), 51-64.

[45] Wall, S. & Anderson, J. (2015). Peer communication through blogging. *Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education (CITE Journal), 15*(4), 514-540.

[46] Zaini A, Z., Ismail, K. & Hussin, S. (2010). Blogs in language learning: maximizing students' collaborative writing. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences 18*(2011) 537–543. Doi: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2011.05.079.

[47] Zhang, H., Cui, L. & Zhang, X. (2021). Multicultural awareness and foreign language learning among Chinese college students: A one-year longitudinal investigation. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, *18*(3), 370-383.