



## RESEARCH PAPER

### Blended Learning for the Teaching of Story Writing: An Experimental Study

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#### ABSTRACT

The study investigates the effectiveness of blended learning and online collaborative learning tools for teaching story writing. Theoretical framework is based on Constructivism (Jonassen, 2000; Seimen, 2004), and Cognitivism (Mayer, 2002) for this experimental study. The experimental research has a quantitative paradigm and conducted on purposively selected 50 undergraduate learners distributed into control and experimental groups, with 25 participants in each group. The experimental group was taught through blended learning, and the control group was taught face-to-face. The treatment for the experimental group was given in the form of both face-to-face classroom sessions and online sessions including Wattpad, Wikispacesclassroom, Storybird, and Penzu. The study's findings revealed that interactivity, variety in the ways of teaching, collaboration among students for writing stories, exposure and interaction with the communities of practice, and feedback from instructors and peers were the factors responsible for the high scores and performance of learners in the experimental group. The study recommends using a blended learning approach to teach story-writing skills. Furthermore, modern trends in AI and innovations should be incorporated in blended learning, as technology has a major role in every field of life.

#### KEYWORDS

Blended Learning, Automated Writing Evaluation (AWE), Motivation in writing, Story Writing

#### Introduction

The field of information technology has tremendously grown in the last few decades, which has influenced every sphere of life. These advancements have brought changes not only in our lives, workplace, lifestyles, and media of communication, but have also influenced our approaches towards doing things. The traditional ways of doing work have been modified due to the facilitations provided by technology. The field of education has also been influenced by technology, and new trends in emerging technology have modified our traditional ways of teaching and learning, both in theory and practice, which in turn have influenced all aspects and fields of teaching and learning, including both teachers and learners.

The role of two learning environments, online and face-to-face classroom learning, has been modified as two separate, distinctive learning settings. Both physical and virtual classroom learning environments have been blended for providing quality education to learners, especially in higher education. Classroom teaching and virtual teaching environments have been criticised separately for their shortcomings. Face-to-face classroom settings have been criticised for their lack of innovative learning methods and

utilisation of online resources for learning purposes, and virtual learning has been criticised for excluding the physical interaction of teacher and learners and even learners with learners. Therefore, blended learning offers a flexible approach that blends all the components of online and traditional classroom learning settings.

Several disciplines have adopted blended learning to enhance the teaching learning process and achieve their learning goals. It has also been used for language teaching, including: vocabulary, speaking skills, writing skills, collaborative writing and interactive learning. In response to the current demands of society on the educational systems, it has become necessary to modify our curriculum and teaching practices. Therefore, it is very important to improve our andragogical practices and expose our learners to current teaching trends to fulfil the demands and requirements of today's world.

Blended learning approach to teaching advocates the use of technology in online learning environment along with the traditional learning setting (face-to-face classroom settings) and utilisation of online tools and resources to maximise learning, as it turns the setting from a teacher-centred class into a student-centred class. This helps improve the teaching-learning process quality by engaging both face-to-face and online learning settings.

The present study aims to conduct an experimental study on the use of blended learning to teach story writing skills to undergraduate EFL learners. Blended learning, online collaborative learning environment and face-to-face classroom sessions can help EFL learners improve and polish their story writing skills, as the collaborative online tools available to teachers and learners can facilitate the teaching learning process. The reading and writing practices made on story writing forums and sharing them with the same community of practice can motivate the learners to improve their skills. Also, the corrective feedback provided by peers on the style, diction, grammar, and language within the same community and by the teacher can improve their story-writing skills. Collaborative blended learning environments, including online and offline knowledge resources, provide opportunities for interactive learning, creativity and novelty during the construction of knowledge through interaction and sharing of experiences. Hence, utilising blended learning environments, including both face-to-face and online classroom settings, can enhance the story-writing abilities of learners.

Writing is one of the productive skills greatly emphasised in language learning. Error-free writing shows the learner's command of the language's structure and grammar. This is one of the aspects of becoming proficient in writing skills. Another aspect of becoming proficient in writing skills is jotting down one's ideas and knowledge in such an effective way that it impacts and affects the reader's mind. It is a mode of expressing one's ideas, knowledge and thoughts, making one's thinking visible to others. Creative writing is taught at all levels of education, but is mostly taught in traditional face-to-face teaching. Story writing is one of the genres of creative writing.

The present study is significant as it blends the face-to-face teaching of story writing with online teaching in a collaborative online learning environment utilising the digital resources available through online blogs, websites, software, writing journals and online story writing practice sessions. The present study is significant for English language teachers to organise an effective teaching and learning environment for teaching creative writing to learners. It contributes to the existing literature as it has identified how learners can be taught story writing skills, which can motivate and develop the learners' interest towards writing stories. In addition, it has provided ways of utilising online resources and

multimedia for developing collaborative learning environments, which could foster learners' writing skills.

## Literature Review

Theories of learning describe the principles and processes involved in the learning process. Driscoll (2000) defines learning as "a change in human performance or performance potential [which] must come about as a result of the learner's experience and interaction with the world" (p. 11); hence, learning is considered a phenomenon which governs human potential of performance, which is the result of the experiences which the learner passes through and the kind of interactions learners have lived in a world of complex entities and phenomena. Gredler (2001) expresses behaviourism in terms of its assumptions regarding learning. Behaviourism talks about observable behaviour, stimulus and response and learning is all about changes in behaviour. Anderson (2005) discusses the epistemology of connective knowledge by relating it to pedagogy and technology. Learning is based on networking, and networks are the connections between entities (nodes), which can be ideas, individuals, groups, systems, or communities; hence, learning occurs due to the connection between nodes and networks. Connectivism sees knowledge as residing in networks stored in the human mind or non-human appliances. It is always present in the form of interconnected networks. Networked theories of learning (Goodyear, 2001) explain the impact of ICT (information communication technology) on education and articulate integrating technology for learning purposes in formal and informal contexts.

Three epistemologies, Objectivism, Constructivism and Connectivism, play a vital role in applying Web 2.0 and Web 3.0 tools. Connectivism argues that internet technology transforms the nature of knowledge. Siemens (2008) argues about the role of collective intelligence; according to him, knowledge is advanced and transformed by the contribution of elements connected to a particular network, which are connected to further networks.

DeVoss et al., (2010) remarked the effectiveness of using digital technologies in improving students' writing and it revealed that teachers in high schools found digital technology very helpful in writing, sharing and writing in collaboration with other learners. Liu (2013) used a blended learning environment to teach the English writing course. He explained and evaluated the use of blended learning in the academic English writing course. Awada and Ghaith (2014) examined the role of educational blogs in improving learners' writing skills in an English for specific purposes course. Tananuraksakul (2014) uses qualitative research methods to explore the perceptions and experiences of learners on using Facebook in writing classes. The findings proved the effectiveness of using Facebook as an effective blended learning tool for learning writing skills. Majid et al. (2015) conducted an experimental study on blended scaffolding strategies through Facebook for learning and improving the process and performance of writing. Mabuan and Ebron (2017) explored using a blended learning approach for teaching writing in ESL classrooms using emails.

The researchers found from the review of existing literature that more work is needed on using a blended learning approach in different fields, including social sciences and natural sciences, in the Pakistani context. In social sciences, particularly in English language research, much work is done on vocabulary learning, language skills and academic writing, students' writing apprehension and performance of EFL learners, blended scaffolding strategies through social media, especially Facebook, for learning and improving the writing process and writing performance, the effectiveness of using digital

technologies in improving students writings, learning outcomes and perceptions of writing online through forums, blogs and wikis in blended learning settings. The present study fills a gap in the existing literature by using blended learning to teach story-writing skills to English language learners.

### Hypotheses

H0: There is no significant improvement in the story writing skills of learners who were taught in a collaborative blended learning environment compared to the learners taught through face-to-face classroom settings.

H1: There is a significant improvement in the story writing skills of learners taught in a collaborative blended learning environment compared to the learners taught through face-to-face classroom settings.

### Material and Methods

Theoretical triangulation is used in the present study to understand the learning theories involved in collaborative blended learning completely. Constructivism (Jonassen, 2000; Seimen, 2004) is a major theory of learning addressing the research question on the effectiveness of using a collaborative blended learning environment to teach learners' story-writing skills. Cognitivism (Mayer, 2002) and connectionism are supportive theories for addressing the role of online resources and multimedia in blended learning settings for learning story-writing skills.

The present experimental study has a quantitative research paradigm as it deals with quantitative and numerical data due to the nature of the current study. This investigation is made through an experimental research design using quantitative research methods to analyse learners' performance before and after the experimental study.

The study involves the randomised distribution of participants in two groups, the Experimental Group and the Control Group, and the treatment is provided to the Experimental Group only. The Experimental Group was taught story writing through blended learning, while the control group was taught via traditional methods. The experiment lasted for four weeks.

**Table 1**  
**Demographic Information**

Group	N	Female	Male	Semester	Total Participants
Experimental	25	09	16	7 <sup>th</sup>	-
Control	25	11	14	7 <sup>th</sup>	50

The research site of the present study was Karakoram International University, Gilgit Baltistan. The study population consists of undergraduate learners from the Department of Modern Languages, Karakoram International University, taking Creative Writing as a regular course offered in the 7th semester, comprising two sections, including 25 students in each section.

Two types of sampling strategies were used in the present study: First, Purposive sampling. Second, random sampling. Purposive sampling was used as the semester of the undergraduate program selected for the experimental study was the one in which creative writing was offered as a course. Therefore, the 7th semester of the undergraduate program was purposively selected for the study. The random sampling strategy was used to divide the sections into the control and experimental groups.

The online resources in the form of forums and websites used in the present study were as follows.

- Penzu (The personal online writing Journal)
- Wikispacesclassroom
- Story Bird
- Watt Pad

The experimental group participants were taught through a blended learning approach utilising online collaborative learning tools and face-to-face classroom sessions. It blended two-phase teaching, face-to-face and online sessions. The participants in the control group were taught through face-to-face classroom teaching methods of writing, and they received the materials, instructions, and feedback merely through traditional methods.

Quantitative data in the form of test scores (Pre-Test and Post-Test) for checking learners' performance before and after intervention is employed in the study. Statistical analysis of the scores: means and standard deviations of the test scores of both the experimental and control groups. The study intended to use Quantitative instruments (pre-test and post-test) to measure the relationship between the blended learning approach (Independent Variable) and the Dependent Variable (story writing skills). SPSS 20 Version was used for statistical analysis of the results.

The ethical considerations made in the present study are as follows:

- Participants of the experimental study signed an informed consent that included the experimental study's objectives and their role in the study.
- Privacy, anonymity and confidentiality were addressed by not revealing participants' names and work. Secondly, fake names were assigned while the statistical analysis of their data was being done.
- Approval was obtained from the university to conduct the research in their settings (Annexure B).

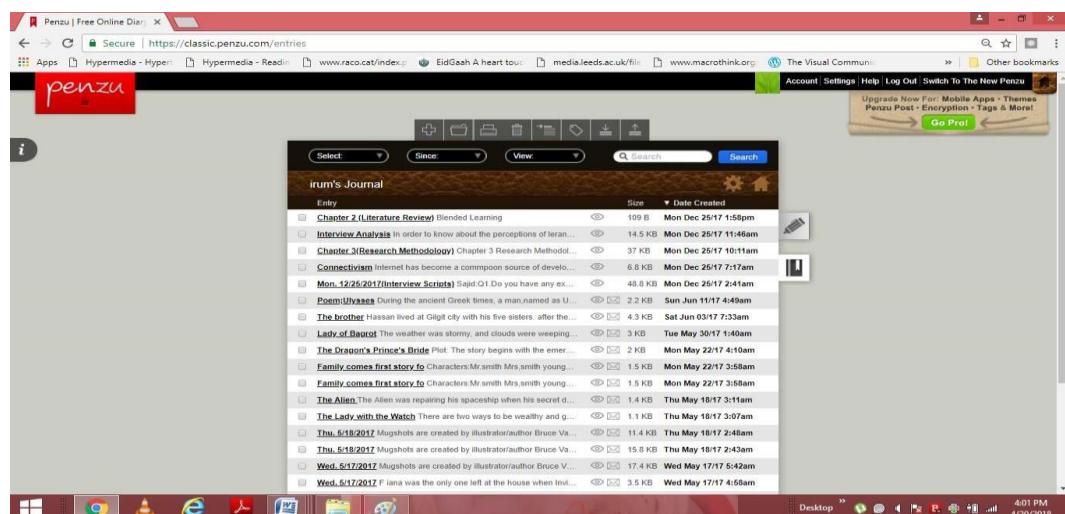


Figure 1: Penzu online Personal Writing Journal

Penzu was used to write stories, complete tasks and assignments that the learners could save for future use, and share their work with the instructor through Penzu. Personal feedback to the participants on the tasks and assignments related to stories was also given through Penzu.

Wikispacesclassroom was used as an online classroom and a discussion forum where all the students were registered and enrolled with their online IDs. This forum was used to share content related to story writing, deadlines, assignments, and tasks and to discuss queries related to tasks.

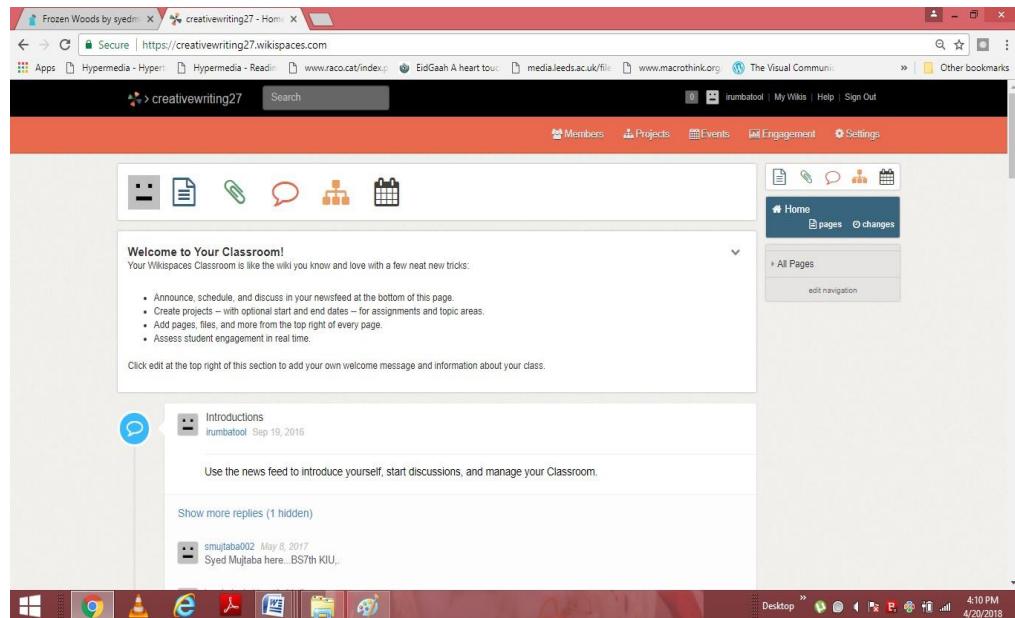


Figure 2: Wikispacesclassroom

Story Bird is an online story-writing website where learners register and complete stories based on images presented on the website. This provided learners with opportunities and ideas for writing stories based on different images provided to them online. This also ensured learners' spontaneous writing and brought creativity to their story-writing ideas.

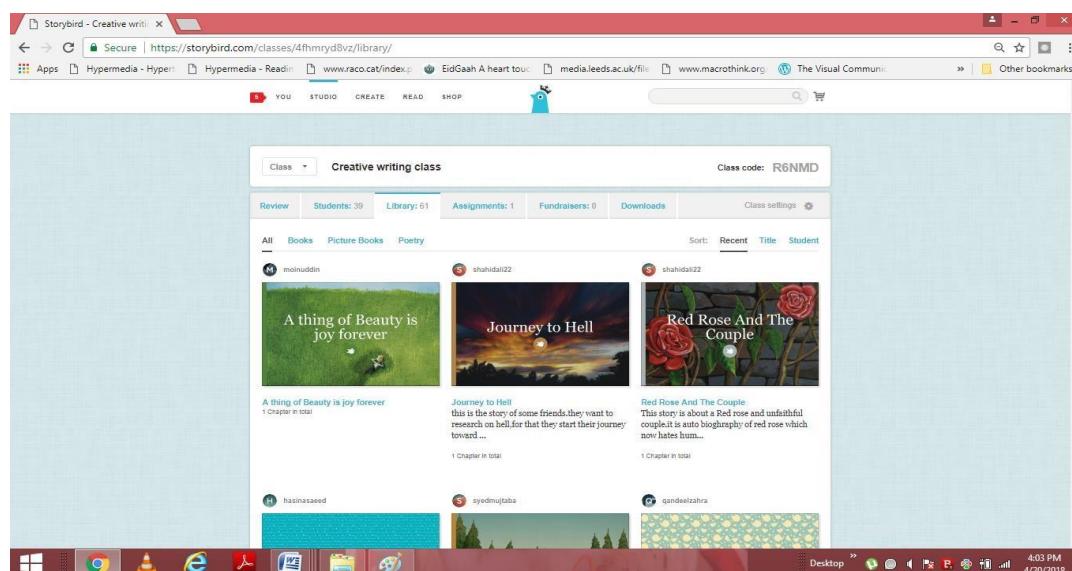


Figure 3: Story Bird

Wattpad was an online story writers' forum where learners could be a part of the online story writing community, read the published stories of different writers worldwide, and familiarise themselves with different genres of stories.

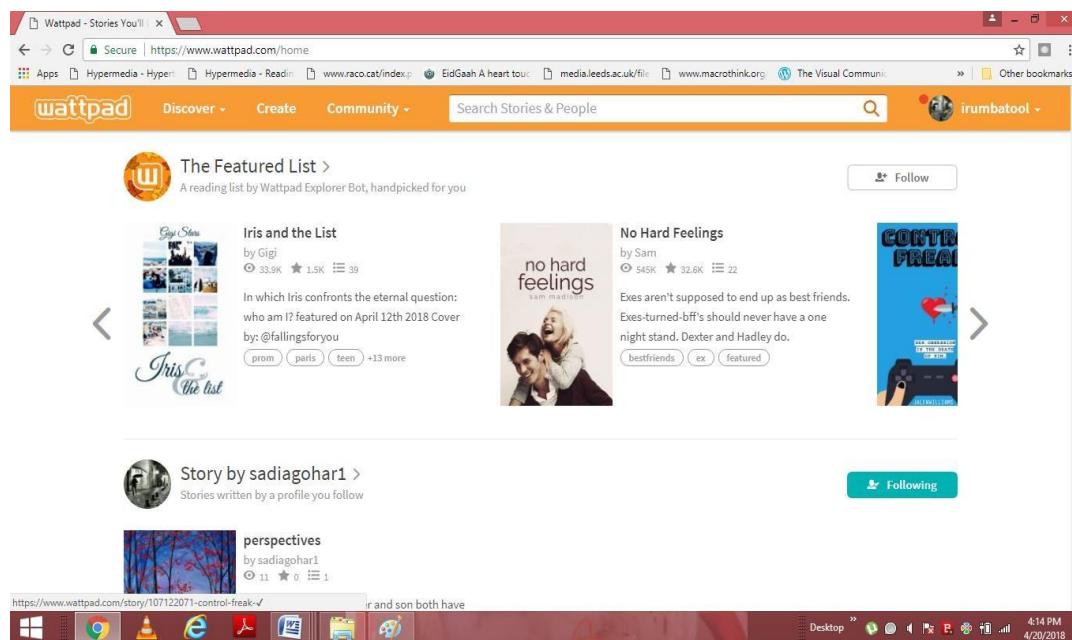


Figure 4: Wattpad

The experimental Group and the control group participants were given a Pre-Test to analyse the learners' story writing skills at the beginning of the study. For this purpose, the learners were asked to write a story on a given topic, which was analysed later through the Story Writing Rubric (Annexure A).

The experimental group participants underwent the treatment (the teachings of both face-to-face and online blended sessions of story writing). The whole session comprised four weeks, including face-to-face teaching and online teaching. There were two weekly classes, comprising 30 30-minute face-to-face sessions and 1 hour for online collaborative writing.

In face-to-face sessions, the content related to story writing was shared and discussed, instructions were given, and for online sessions, forums like Wattpad, Wiki space classroom, Story Bird were used for discussions, assignments, sharing of their stories, peer reviews, comments and feedback. A t-test was used to compare the results of the experimental and control groups. An independent sample t-test was conducted to test the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the Pre-Test scores of the experimental group taught story writing through a collaborative blended learning environment and the control group taught through traditional classroom teaching methods.

A Paired-Sample T test was conducted to test the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the Pre-Test and post-test scores of experimental groups, which were taught story writing through a collaborative blended learning environment.

A one-sample T-test was conducted to test the two null hypotheses first, there is no significant difference in the post-test scores of the experimental group, which was taught story writing through a collaborative blended learning environment and the control group, which was taught through traditional classroom teaching methods. Second, the Null

hypothesis shows no significant improvement in the story writing skills of learners taught through collaborative blended learning environment and those taught through traditional methods in the classroom. In order to determine the effect of treatment given to the experimental group, the post-test results of both groups were compared.

## Results and Discussion

The Null hypothesis was tested through an independent sample t-test, and there was no significant difference in the pre-test scores of both experimental and control groups.

**Table 1**  
**Pre Test Statistics**

Group	N		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
	Valid	Missing			
Experimental	25	0	11.4000	2.04124	.40825
Control	25	0	11.7600	1.58850	.31770

**Table 2**  
**Paired Samples Test**

Pre-Test	t-test for Equality of Means								
			t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F.	Sig.						Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed									
1.385	.245	-.696	48	.490	.36000	.51730	-1.40010	.68010	
Equal variances not assumed			-.696	45.269	.490	.36000	.51730	-1.40173	.68173

Table 2 shows the results of the pre-test of both the Control and Experimental Groups. The test was significant, and the results of the test favour the hypothesis as the P value for the significance is 0.406, which is greater than the p value (0.05), hence the null hypothesis is accepted, which says there is no significant difference in the scores of the pre-tests of both control and experimental group. This shows that all the learners at the experiment's beginning had the same level of story writing skills. The hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the pre- and post-test scores of the Experimental groups was tested using the paired sample Test to determine the effectiveness of collaborative blended learning environment for teaching story writing skills.

**Table 3**  
**Paired Samples Correlations**

		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	Pre Test & Post Test of Experimental Group	25	.927	.000
Pair 1	Pre Test & Post Test of Control Group	25	.853	.000

**Table 4**  
**Paired Samples Test**

	Paired Differences						Sig. (2-tailed)		
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference					
				t	df	Lower			
Experimental	Pre Test - Post Test	-4.20000	.81650	.16330	-4.53703	-3.86297	-5.720	24	.000

A Paired sample T test was conducted to test the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the experimental groups' Pre-Test and Post-Test scores, which was taught story writing through a collaborative blended learning environment. In order to find out the effect of treatment, which was given to the experimental group in the form of a collaborative blended learning environment, on the learners' story writing skills, the Pre-Test and post-test scores were compared.

The results of the paired sample T test that the Mean score ( $M= 4.20$ ,  $SD=0.816$ ) and the ( $p = 0.000$ ) indicate that there was significant difference in the scores of the Pre- Test and Post-Test of the experimental group as the p value (0.000) was less than 0.05 which means the hypothesis that states that there is no significant difference in the pre. Post-test scores of the experimental group are rejected, as the results indicate a significant difference in the test results of the experimental group.

**Table 5**  
**One-Sample Statistics**

Group		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Experimental	Experimental Post Test	25	15.6000	1.60728	.32146
	Content Post Test	25	3.9200	.49329	.09866
	Organization Post Test	25	3.8000	.40825	.08165
	Language and Style Post Test	25	3.6400	.75719	.15144
Control	Conventions Post Test	25	4.0000	.81650	.16330
	Control Group Post Test	25	13.7600	1.56205	.31241
	Content Post Test	25	3.9167	.50361	.10280
	Organization Post Test	25	3.5600	.50662	.10132
	Language and Style Post Test	25	3.0000	.40825	.08165
	Conventions Post Test	25	3.9200	.70238	.14048

**Table 6**  
**One-Sample Test**

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Paired Differences		
				Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	Lower
Experimental Post Test	48.529	24	.000	15.60000	14.9365	16.2635
Content Post Test	39.733	24	.000	3.92000	3.7164	4.1236
Organization Post Test	46.540	24	.000	3.80000	3.6315	3.9685
Language and Style Post Test	24.036	24	.000	3.64000	3.3274	3.9526
Conventions Post Test	24.495	24	.000	4.00000	3.6630	4.3370
Control Group Post Test	44.045	24	.000	13.76000	13.1152	14.4048
Content Post Test	38.100	23	.000	3.91667	3.7040	4.1293
Organization Post Test	35.135	24	.000	3.56000	3.3509	3.7691
Language and Style Post Test	36.742	24	.000	3.00000	2.8315	3.1685
Conventions Post Test	27.905	24	.000	3.92000	3.6301	4.2099

A one-sample T test was conducted to test the two null hypotheses. First, there is no significant difference in the post-test scores of the experimental group taught story writing through a collaborative blended learning environment and the control group taught through traditional classroom teaching methods. Second, the Null hypothesis shows no significant improvement in the story writing skills of learners taught through collaborative blended learning environment and those taught through traditional methods in the classroom. In order to determine the effect of treatment given to the experimental group, the post-test results of both groups were compared.

The results of the one-sample test show that the mean of the experimental group,  $M (15.6)$ ,  $SD (1.607)$ ,  $t (48.529)$ , was significantly different from the sample mean of the control group,  $M (13.76)$ ,  $SD (1.562)$ ,  $t (44.045)$ . Hence, the results reveal that there is a

significant difference in the post scores of the experimental group and the control group, as the P value (0.000) is less than  $P=$  0.05, thus rejecting the null hypothesis that states that there is no significant difference in the post-test scores of the experimental and control groups.

The same test results reveal that the learners who participated in the collaborative blended learning environment showed improvements in their story writing skills. The results of the categories of story writing reveal improvements in all the categories, like improvements in content, organisation, language and style, and conventions. When the  $t$  (48.529) of the experimental group was compared with the  $t$  (44.045) of the control group, it was indicated that learners in the experimental group had improved their story writing skills in all categories compared to the control group. Therefore, the hypothesis that there is no significant improvement in the story writing skills of learners who were taught in a collaborative blended learning environment as compared to the learners who were taught through traditional teaching methods is rejected.

Similar results have been found in other researches which investigated the role of blended learning in improving writing skills like (Adas & Bakir, 2013; Keshta & Harb, 2013). The effectiveness of using collaborative blended learning for improving the writing performance of the learners has also been investigated by (Taki & Fardafshari, 2012; Jafari & Ansari, 2012; Grami, 2012; Shukor & Noordin, 2014) and the results of the studies have supported the effectiveness of collaborative blended learning environment and strategies for the teaching of writing skills.

## Conclusion

The research questions of the present study dealt with two types of investigations; the first dealt with the extent to which a Collaborative blended learning environment can be useful, and the second dealt with the effective ways to teach story writing skills. The answer to this question was determined by pre- and Post-tests, which were conducted before and after the experiment.

The descriptive and inferential statistics revealed the significance of using a collaborative blended learning environment to teach story writing skills. The hypotheses were tested using a T-Test. The pre- and post-test results supported the use of the collaborative blended learning environment compared to traditional teaching methods. The significant difference in test scores in the pre-test and post-test of the experimental group and the difference in test scores in the post-test of the experimental and control group revealed an improvement in the story writing skills of the experimental group compared to the control group. The two-dimensional analysis of the test scores within subject analysis and between subject analysis supported the improvement in the story writing skills of the experimental group.

The overall findings of the present study revealed the usefulness of using a collaborative blended learning environment for the teaching of story writing skills in terms of improvement in the performance of the learners, an increase in student-student and teacher-student interaction, an increase in learners' interest, and motivation through collaborative learning. A collaborative blended learning environment supported and encouraged the learners to be more independent and autonomous. Similar results are also revealed in different studies on using blended learning settings (Kupetz & Ziegenmeyer, 2005; Roed, 2003; Wiebe & Kabata, 2010).

The improved performance of the learners and positive perceptions of learners in support of using a collaborative blended learning environment for teaching story writing skills was based on several factors responsible for its effectiveness. The reasons for the effectiveness can be summed up as follows;

Several other studies, like (Bahrani, 2011; Beaty, 2003; Roed, 2003; Wiebe & Kabata, 2010), also support using computer-assisted language learning environments compared to traditional classroom teaching and learning environments. Computer-assisted and web-based learning environments provide flexibility in learning, increasing learners' motivation and involvement, and immediate feedback helps bring improvements. Hypermedia and multimedia make teaching and learning more innovative, inspiring and interesting.

## Recommendations

The study recommends pedagogical implications of using a blended learning approach for teaching story writing skills to learners are as follows.

- Teachers should do adequate planning for the implementation, execution and evaluation of the blended learning program. It should be designed according to the learners' needs, wants, lacks, necessities and learning needs.
- Teachers should move from teacher-centred classroom teaching to learner-centred teaching and learning, giving learners confidence and motivation towards self-paced autonomous learning.
- Interactive learning is very important as it promotes creativity and novelty during the construction of knowledge through interaction and sharing of experiences, which leads to the effective development of higher-order cognitive abilities of learners. Therefore, teachers should promote interactive and collaborative learning environments with online and offline knowledge resources.
- Creative writing and its genre should be taught through a blended learning approach, as face-to-face classroom teaching is not sufficient to teach creative writing. Teachers should use and promote innovations and current online and multimedia learning trends to teach story writing skills.
- Blended learning modules can be planned, designed, implemented and evaluated with adequate planning and consideration, including synchronous and asynchronous materials and resources.
- Blended learning approach broadens the horizons of teaching through space and time, as this teaching and learning can be extended beyond the classroom walls and
  - The teaching time can be extended even after classes, making learning more effective and dynamic.
- Learners should be encouraged to share and publish their stories on different forums. This will motivate them and give them a sense of achievement through the appreciation they receive from others.
- Teachers should familiarise learners with online personal journals like Pence, which learners can use for creative writings, both formal and informal writings, and for keeping records of their work for future use.
- Teachers should use online classroom dashboards like wikispacesclassroom and Edmodo for classroom discussions, assignments, tasks, projects, assessments and evaluations and for sharing reading materials. This will keep the learners and teachers connected even after class timings.

- Learners should be exposed to online writers' communities, making them part of the writer's community worldwide, which could flourish their writings when they read the works of other story writers.
- Teachers must incorporate variety in their teaching, as classroom writing activities are done for grades and students show no interest in creative writing. Therefore, story writing should be taught in different ways, like using images through Storybird, themes, collaboration and sharing, motivating and developing learners' interest in learning.
- The blended learning approach should not only be used for story writing but also for teaching other language skills, as it provides an effective learning environment for every kind of learning.
- Modern trends and innovations should be incorporated in teaching, as technology has a major role in every field of life, so its use has become a necessity of the time. Therefore, the use of innovations is irresistible in today's modern world.

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