# المراثات المراجع

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# هيئة التحرير

رئيس هيئة التحرير د/ صالح حسين الأخضر

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#### الافتتاحية

مع إطلالة العدد الرابع من مجلتكم الناشئة "مجلة التربوي" نجدد العهد مع قراء المجلة الكرام بأن تكون دوما ملتزمة بنشر الجديد والمفيد والهادف من الأبحاث العلمية التربوية إيمانا منها بأن كلية التربية عبر منبرها المتمثل في مجلتها "التربوي" تعتبر قلعة ومنارة يشع نورها في ربوع بلادنا الحبيبة.

إن أعضاء هيئة التحرير بالمجلة ، وأسرة تدريس كلية التربية الخمس تتوجه بالشكر الجزيل لكل من أسهم ويسهم في مساعدة المجلة في تحقيق الهدف المنشود، وبخاصة الأساتذة الفضلاء الذين استقطعوا من وقتهم الثمين لقراءة البحوث فأفادوا الباحثين والمجلة بملحوظاتهم القيمة، التي تثري البحث، وترفع من قيمة المجلة في الأوساط العلمية .

ونحن إذ نسير في هذا الدرب يحدونا الأمل بأن نكون من الذين أسهموا في خلق الإنسان المؤمن والمربي الفاضل المتمسك بقيم الدين والأخلاق الكريمة .

#### هيئة التحرير





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#### **Abstract**

This paper explores the use of Blogs in ELT and English Language Teacher Education programs. It reviews the existing literature about using blogs in English language teaching and learning and how it can be implemented in the courses within the English language teacher education programs. The paper starts by defining blogs and discussing blogging as a new writing genre. It highlights and provides ways to deal with the problems that might threaten students' safety and privacy, and the possible ethical misconduct and plagiarism. The paper also shows how blogs can be used in the English language classroom and how blogs can be used in teacher preparation programs.

#### Introduction

The first time I heard about blogs have been used by the researcher during the doctoral course work. During the graduate courses, It was suggested to write and post blog entries and read and comment on my peers' blogs. In the first blog, I had to post reading reflections that showed my understanding of the readings and how I related them to my personal experiences. Those reflections "[gave] me the chance to reflect on an academic experience in a personal way" (Elsherif, 2012). In the following semester, I had to post

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autobiographies that helped me create an understanding of how literacy and technology are related and how my literacy is affected by those technological tools I used and am using.

Blogging in the two experiences was an exceptional experience in many ways. In the first blog, I had to use IUP's blogging site whereas in the second experience, I had to use Google's Blogger. Both of those blogging systems were easy to create and start posting. In addition, the act of writing and posting itself helped me to be more aware of my audience and how much information I did or did not want to reveal since my final product will be online. Another point that made me more enthusiastic about blogging was my peers' and professors' comments. I was so determined to know what comments I will be getting from my peers and professors. My professors' comments were specifically significant because they would show whether my understanding of the assigned readings or writings met their requirements. My peers' comments would show how they were engaged with my ideas and whether I was successful in expressing myself.

Searching the Internet to explore how varied blogs are resulted in my finding out about the popularity of blogs. The reasons behind that can be related to being easy to use (write & publish), can be used for different purposes that might be for pleasure, to provide information, to create personas, to provide marginalized people with power, and to provide people the chance to practice varied writing styles. It was also apparent that blogs gave many educators, especially language teachers, a space to widen their classrooms to involve the outside world into the students' classroom environment.

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Having explored various blogs, living this exciting experience of blogging myself, and seeing how motivating blogging can be to the L2 writer made me think of how to integrate blogs into my writing classroom.

The second researcher became interested in blogs after reading some of my entries. When we discussed them together, she became interested in investigating how to integrate blogs in ELT and English Teacher Education programs. For that reason, this paper is going to investigate the use of blogs in the EFL classroom and English Teacher Education programs. It will focus on blogs as a new writing genre and discuss some examples of teachers' blogs. It will also highlight the advantages and disadvantages of using blogs in the EFL classroom and ELT education.

#### 1. The Definition of Blogs

Blogs were first known as weblogs which was "coined by" Jorn Barger. Now, the shortened term blog, which was "coined by" Peter Merholz, is more popular (Doctorow et al 2002, p.1). Blogs are one of the technological tools that are considered as user-friendly tools that encompass "brief, discrete hunks of information called posts. These posts are arranged in reverse-chronological order (the most recent posts come first). Each post is uniquely identified by an anchor tag, and it is marked with a permanent link that can be referred to by others who wish to link to it" (Doctorow et al 2002, p.1).

Blogs are one of the communication sources that present various topics and interests of bloggers. The content of these blogs varies from a page that provides different links about a specific topic, to private personal diaries, political remarks

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and debates, journalists' spaces, or personal interests such as compiling tips about travelling or cooking recipes. Now, they are becoming more popular in education where teachers use them as spaces for posting classroom reflections, written assignments, and/or literature discussion forums (Penrod, 2007; Richardson, 2010; Wilber, 2010).

Blogs can be private, so the author can restrict access to his/her blog, or they can be public where anyone can read the entries and comment which creates some kind of collaborative interaction that motivates the blogger to write and post more (Wilber, 2010). Blogs can be used by anyone in any age ranging from children to adults or elderly people. In brief, they are considered as "democratic writing resource[s]" that are "available to the world" to be used any time anywhere for any purpose (Wilber, 2010, p. 46).

### 2. Blogging as a new writing genre

Blogs are considered as powerful tools in enhancing learners' writing competence because they involve the learners in new type of literacy. So what makes blogs new captivating writing genre? According to Penrod (2007), blogs are "fascinating genre" because they are "a composite of several genres, a blend of forms familiar to most of us" (p. 44). The text involves many parts that might constitute parts that could be a conversation, a narrative, a letter, or a newspaper article. Blogs perform "diligently and reliably in whatever type of writing the blogger undertakes" (p. 44).

In addition, blogs are considered as new writing genres because they are changing literacy. They not only contain the written text, but also include images, sounds, graphics, videos,

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podcasts, and links to other websites (Penrod, 2007; Richardson, 2010; Wilber, 2010). By integrating these multimedia resources into their texts, learners change their texts to become multimodal (Wilber, 2010).

As a result, learners, as bloggers, will be considering the design of their blog as a multimodal text. They need to think about their audience and how to present their thoughts as a meaningful communication. They also need to think about their language and make significant linguistic choices. As they become more aware of the visual parts of their blogs, they make choices regarding their blogs' color, the type of images they will include, the type of sound effects they need, the position of each item they decide to include, the layout of the whole multimodal text and blog, and the organization of the blog. This process of thinking of how to present ideas, considering audience carefully, and decision making will improve learners' critical thinking, writing fluency, and social skills (Penrod, 2007; Richardson, 2010; Wilber, 2010).

Blogging also provides marginalized learners a platform to come out of their isolation and express themselves. Through blogging they can have their own voices and writing styles to express themselves and become part of their learning communities. This multimodal genre will give them the opportunity to find themselves within their community and among their peers.

#### 3. Blogs in the classroom

The overarching advantages of blogging are learners' motivation and engagement. Allison (2009) states that a school-based blogging "creates meaningful, dialogic,

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motivating environment where students get inspired to measure their own reading, writing, research, and response skills alongside their peers" (p. 75).

By practicing blogging regularly, learners also develop their own voices as writers and thinkers and become more confident in their critical thinking and reading (Wilber, 2010). Their sense of audience develops as well, since they are not writing only for the teacher and some of their peers. Their readers may include the other teachers, learners in their institute/school, and anyone was able to read and comment to their blogs. Besides, learners develop an understanding of the ethics and process of responding to and interacting with others and create a community of leaners. Finally, blogs give marginalized learners a space where they can raise their confidence and learn how to express themselves without any kind of fear. However, the widespread use of Internet and blogs might result in learners facing several problems that threaten their safety and privacy and might lead them to ethical misconduct or plagiarism.

#### **3.1. Safety**

One of the biggest issues that concerns parents and educators is learners' internet safety, what is known as cybersafety. How to keep learners safe while using internet, and more specifically when using blogs? Keeping learners safe, especially young learners, from scams, cyber-bullying, and other issues is of significance since surfing the internet is one of this centuries educational requirements. Cyber-bullying is one of the most feared acts by parents and educators. This is because of the long-term effects that might hurt learners and

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cause dangerous reactions. Penrod (2007) discussed three stories of teenagers that were victims of cyber-bullying, two of them died as a result of this and the third is still living the consequences of posting a private video online. So, how to protect these learners from scams, bullying and other dangers?

Raising learners' awareness towards these issues is the suggested remedy by many educators who use technology in their classes. For instance, Wilber (2010) and Penrod (2007) suggested educating learners and showing them consequences of cyber-bullying. Teachers should start every course that would include integrating blogs or technological tools into any classroom with teaching students how to be safe on the internet and speak up when there is any act of bullying or any kind of scam. Penrod (2007) suggested four guidelines to help teachers integrate blogging into their classrooms and provide a safer environment for their learners. She indicates that teachers should: "1) Offer workshops to students on proper blogging practices; 2) Set up regular workshops with medical and behavioral professionals as well as a cohesive peer mediation; 3) Consider using only classroom-friendly blog hosting sites and letting parents know that these sites have been "school approved"; and 4) Create common experience in schools connected to Internet use" (p. 101). These tips were specifically aimed at helping adolescent learners who face many problems because of their critical age period.

Moreover, teachers could use the varied websites that show learners, especially young learners, how to keep themselves

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safe. For example, Keeping Safe Online is a website that shows learners how to surf the internet and be safe. Teachers can use such website to provide instructions about their safety before and during the use of the internet. Another website, Common Sense Media, provided links to toolkits for teaching internet safety that teachers can use to raise their learners' awareness towards their internet safety.

#### 3.2. Privacy

Another significant point in regard to learners' use of blogs is their privacy. Since what learners write is going to be online, public, learners' privacy might be jeopardized. In some cultures, there are some topics that are regarded as taboos and cannot be discussed publicly. So, learners might not be willing to share their ideas in public. In addition, learners with low writing proficiency will fear posting their work and think that they will be subject to readers' criticism because of their mistakes. This will result in demotivating those learners from the actual regular practice of writing and blogging.

Richardson (2010) and Wilber (2010) provided suggestions that would help ensuring learners' privacy, and therefore safety. Teachers might set up private blogs where only trusted readers will be allowed to comment and gradually help learners develop confidence in having their work public. Moreover, teachers might divide the assignments into two types. The assignments that might endanger learners' privacy will be in-class assignments that will be submitted as paper-assignments, whereas the assignments that will not affect learners' privacy will be posted on their blogs. Furthermore,

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pseudonyms can be used to eliminate the correctness anxiety and create a fearless environment where students read each other's work and comment without knowing the real names of the learners they are commenting to (Wilber, 2010). The only one who would know the real names is the teacher.

Richardson (2010) and Wilber (2010) also provided suggestions that are related to peers' comments. Since learners are required to read each other's blog entries and provide comments, low proficiency learners' may get comments that might be regarded as mean or harmful. Providing instruction on how to give suitable constructive feedback to others will help ensure fairness and getting appropriate comments to all learners. Another strategy that might be helpful is dividing students into peers that read each other's blog entries before posting them which will eliminate the learners' fear from mistakes (Blackstone, Spiri, & Naganuma, 2007). Finally, teachers can set up the blog entries to not to be published until they are approved by the teacher. By this, teachers get the chance to read and provide learners with feedback that would give them the chance to post their final product.

#### 3.3. Integrity & Ethical Conduct

For 21<sup>st</sup>-century learners, information is readily available online. So, how can learners learn to choose the most significant information from this huge database and to appropriately use such information through blogging? It is the teachers' responsibility to teach those learners integrity and ethical use.

Penrod (2007) suggests creating classroom ethics by writing a code of ethics that "can provide a system for

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handling concerns as they arise" (p. 140). This code of ethics can be planned to be written by a group of people that involve parents, teachers, students, administrators, key community leaders, and the school board. Penrod listed three important points that are necessary to be encompassed in this code that include: "1) Increasing bloggers' ethical sensitivity and judgment in posting comments; 2) Developing bloggers' moral courage and agency to act in socially responsible ways or to handle conflicting or compromising online situations; and 3) Defining morally permissible boundaries for expressing ideas in language"(p. 141).

Additionally, teachers concerns about the readily available sources might lead learners to plagiarism can be eliminated by the use of blogs. Wilber (2010) specifies that the availability of these sources itself helps learners to learn that by linking these sources directly to their blogs they "cut down on plagiarism, since the original source can be easily reached" (p. 46). Knowing that it is easy for the teacher to deter plagiarized texts will help them avoid plagiarism.

#### 4. Using blogs in English language classes

Not being sure about the EFL learners' ability to use blogs because of their limited language proficiency, EFL teachers might seem skeptical and raise the following questions: Can we use blogs to teach English to EFL learners? Is it effective in improving learners' writing competence?

Research in the effectiveness of integrating blogs into the EFL classroom is still new (Wilber, 2010). Although many research results are not confirmed, the existing studies encourage the use of blogs in the English classroom and in

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teaching writing. For instance, Blackstone, Spiri, Naganuma (2007) found that their Japanese students' were "highly motivated by the blogging activities" even with the fact that their writing was published online (p. 15). Arslan & Sahin-Kizil (2010) investigated how Turkish students' writing proficiency might be affected by using blog-centered writing instruction. Although their study has some variables that might have affected their results and therefore further research is needed, their results showed that integrating blogs in the EFL writing classrooms might enhance students' writing compared to writing instruction that is completely in-class. Another study that was conducted by Ming-Huei et al (2011) looked at the performance of two groups, one used blogs while the other only used the regular in-class writing instruction. Their findings revealed no difference in the two groups' performances in the post-test whereas there was improvement for both of the groups compared to the pretest results.

Another question that can be raised is related to how to use blogs into the EFL classroom. According to Richardson (2010), blogs can be used in schools in many ways such as class portals, online filing cabinets for students work, e-portfolios, collaborative space, knowledge management, and as schools' web sites. In his article titled "Weblogs for Use with ESL classes", Campbell (2003) discussed how to introduce ESL students to blogs through tutor weblogs, learner weblogs, and class weblogs.

#### 4.1. Tutor Blog

In the tutor blog, the teacher is the one who runs the blog.

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In this blog, teachers give learners the chance to practice reading on a daily basis by posting short blog entries that suite their learners interests and linked to sources that would provide more information. In addition, teachers can include links for new vocabulary definitions and uses such as online dictionaries definitions. This blog also can be used to provide learners with a variety of writing samples of varied genres to help students understand and become familiar to the varied writing genres and styles. The links that are embedded into the teachers' blog will provide the learners with great chances to become confident and motivated to check

websites in English rather than those that are in their own language. They will grow the habit of searching the internet for information that is relevant to their topics in English. In addition, this blog gives the learners the chance for "verbal exchange" (Campbell, 2003). The result of engaging learners in the acts of exchanging opinions, learners become familiar with the comment buttons, the procedure of commenting and exchanging thoughts, and how to question and challenge these views. Furthermore, teachers can provide learners with the course's syllabus, classroom rules, and a list of classroom assignments and homework that will enable the learners to visit and check whenever they needed. This will help them eliminate the learners' excuse of forgetting the assignment or not knowing about it. It will also give their parents the opportunity to understand the course. Finally, the compiled links for sources will provide learners with a great chance of self-study list where they can enhance their learning on their own and at their own pace.

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#### 4.2. Learner Blog

In this blog, teachers either divide the class into small groups where each group runs a blog or ask each learner to run a blog individually. According to Campbell (2003), this type of blogs can be suitable for reading and writing. Learners can be asked to post their thoughts about the assigned readings or write journals that provide details about their writing experience or about their writing process. This will empower learners' "sense of ownership" and understanding of "ethical issues of creating a hypertext document" (Campbell, 2003).

#### 4.3. Class Blog

Class blogs involve learners in collaborative work because they are run by the whole class. This type of blogs can be used in conversation-based classes, project-based language learning, international classroom language exchange, and as knowledge management software. This blog can be considered as a space for the learners where they cooperate together in compiling information or expressing their thoughts. Since this blog is run by the whole class, it not only enhances learners' language skills but also provides them with a great opportunity to learn working together collaboratively.

The types of blog assignments range from just a blog that compiles students written reflections to other varied types of blogs such as research blog, technology autobiography blog, word-of- the- day blog, reading journal blog, grammar blog, and literature reflections blog (Penrad, 2007). The choice and range of blogs depend on the students' level and the

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objectives of integrating blogs into the classroom. For a writing teacher, blogs can be used as prewriting tools (Luongo, 2010). In this blog, Luondo (2010) suggests that learners can list all the ideas they have about the topic they are going to write about in one blog entry, free-write about the topic in another blog entry, and they might draw in one more blog entry as a different strategy to focus their ideas before they write. Another strategy that can be used as one of the prewriting process steps is posting videos or podcasts that help the learner become more focused about the topic and help provide a variety of sources. This prewriting blog provides the learners to learn the process of writing by practicing and in the same time learners compile this process in their blog where they can visit whenever they needed. This way of prewriting is better than using papers where many students lose them.

#### **5. Blogs in Teacher Education Programs**

A number of empirical studies show the significance of helping pre-service teachers connect between theory and practice in teacher education. Integrating theory and practice in teacher education can be achieved through pre-service teachers' reflections on practice (Laursen, 2007). Bangou and Fleming's study (2010) showed the significance of providing pre-service teachers with guidance throughout the reflective process. In these reflections, the pre-service teachers critically reflect on their beliefs about teaching and what they experienced during their teaching practices. One way of integrating reflections on practice is through blogs. Bangou (2011) indicates that "blogs can potentially enhance pre-

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service teachers' reflective practices and help them make a better connection between theory and practice." This is by taking into consideration "both instructor's and pre-service teachers' prior experiences with blogs, their practices, and their representations and convictions."

#### 6. Conclusion

Many educators confirm that blogs can be motivating and engaging to learners which will enhance their literacy learning. Research showed that blogs might develop learners' writing and commenting performances;

however these research results need to be explored and confirmed by conducting further research. From a personal experience, blogs can be motivating for advanced learners who have the ability to express themselves and are willing to present their thoughts and have their own voice. A question is always going to be raised, however, would blogs be beneficial for EFL learners? Another question will follow: would blogs help EFL learners develop their language proficiency as well as their communication and interaction proficiency? If the EFL teacher prepared a well-organized curriculum that integrates blogs taking into account the learners' safety and privacy issues and providing students with appropriate instruction regarding integrity and ethical conduct, learners will find the appropriate environment to share their thinking through regular blogging and improve their critical reading and writing proficiency.

The pitfalls of using blogs should not discourage teachers from integrating them into the English classroom and Teacher

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Education programs. With some focused instruction, learners will be motivated to blogging and this will enhance their language proficiency, especially reading and writing. Teachers and researchers are encouraged to study the effectiveness of using blogs and how blogging enhances learners' language competence and interaction and communication competencies.

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يشترط في البحوث العلمية المقدمة للنشر أن يراعى فيها ما يأتي:

- أصول البحث العلمي وقواعده .
- ألا تكون المادة العلمية قد سبق نشرها أو كانت جزءا من رسالة علمية .
- يرفق بالبحث المكتوب باللغة العربية بملخص باللغة الإنجليزية ، والبحث المكتوب بلغة أجنبية مرخصا باللغة العربية .
  - يرفق بالبحث تزكية لغوية وفق أنموذج معد .
  - تعدل البحوث المقبولة وتصحح وفق ما يراه المحكمون.
- التزام الباحث بالضوابط التي وضعتها المجلة من عدد الصفحات ، ونوع الخط ورقمه ، والفترات الزمنية الممنوحة للعديل ، وما يستجد من ضوابط تضعها المحلة مستقبلا .

#### تنبيهات:

- للمجلة الحق في تعديل البحث أو طلب تعديله أو رفضه .
  - يخضع البحث في النشر لأوليات المجلة وسياستها .
- البحوث المنشورة تعبر عن وجهة نظر أصحابها ، ولا تعبر عن وجهة نظر المجلة .

ضوابط النشر العدد 4

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