

Ain Shams University
Faculty of Education
Curriculum and Instruction Department



The Effectiveness of a Blended Program on Enhancing Official Language Prep School Students' English Creative Writing Skills

**A Dissertation Submitted in Partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the
PhD. Degree in Education (Curriculum and EFL Instruction)**

BY

Khalid Sayed Shalaby Ali

Senior Teacher of English

Supervised by

Dr. Magdy Mahdy Aly

Prof. of Curriculum and
EFL Instruction
Faculty of Education
Shams University

Dr. Dalia Ibrahim Yahia

Lecturer of Curriculum and
EFL Instruction
Faculty of Education Ain
Ain Shams University

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Author: Khalid Sayed Shalaby Ali

Supervisors: Prof. Magdy Mahdy Aly, Prof. of Curriculum and EFL Instruction, Faculty of Education, Ain Shams University

Dr. Dalia Ibrahim Yahia, Lecturer of Curriculum and EFL Instruction, Faculty of Education, Ain Shams University

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of a blended learning program on enhancing Official Language Prep school students' English creative writing skills, definitely in memoir writing. The research instruments included a list of creative writing skills, a pre-post writing test, an analytical creative writing skills rubric, a satisfaction questionnaire and a reflection report. A whole class of twenty-four 3rd. prep graders from Nile official school for languages in Bani Suef was assigned to be one experimental group which received training through a blended learning program. Pre and post tests were statistically analyzed through using t-Test and the effect size was calculated. Both the quantitative and qualitative data about the program showed that there were statistically significant differences between the pre and post test results in favor of the post test. Study findings and analysis also illustrated that blended learning had a positive impact on students' creative writing, their social and cognitive skills as well as the atmosphere of learning and teaching.

Key Words: Blended Learning – Creative Writing - Memoir – Memoirists – Vivid description

Similes and metaphors - Anecdotes – Figures of speech – emotional appeal

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Chapter one

Background and Problem

1.1 Introduction

English Language is deemed as one of the most essential elements in education and literacy. Its efficiency and command depends entirely on the mastery in the language receptive and productive skills which include reading, listening, speaking and writing. Conventionally and even today, in the eastern world particularly, the English language writing skills are given a high priority and interest. This big standing and high status of writing is justified in the schools where students are required to master good writing compositions. Writing is very important as it is an essential language activity, a major classroom procedure and an effective technique for reinforcing the oral language. Writing has such functions as to send, store and retrieve messages. Writing also provides relatively permanent record of information, opinions, beliefs, feelings, explanations and theories. One of the most attractive types of writing is creative writing.

Creative writing definitely is a distinct type of writing which deserves to be focused on and cared for. Creative writing is a special kind of writing which is characterized as so involving that it requires more concentration. Creative writing is referred to as the writing which is done in a way that attracts the audience. It is also considered as a source of pleasure to its readers or any writing that is original and self-expressive. A news article for example cannot be considered creative writing, because its main goal is to present facts and not to express the feelings of the writer. Brookes and Marshall,(2004) cited in Nasir, Naqvi, & Bhamani.(2013:28) demonstrate that creative writing cares for imagination more than the standardization of thought and truthfulness. Creative writing has many different forms.

Mahmoud, (1997:19) points out that creative writing includes poetry, plays, movies, television scripts, fictions (novels, novellas, and short stories), songs, speeches, personal essays and memoirs. Despite being a non-fiction type of writing, memoirs (this study focus) can be considered creative writing. Memoir can be creative because it is written in the first person, and it informs the reader about the writer's life in an expressive way. The memoir is a longer piece of creative non-fiction that delves deep into any writer's personal experience.

Memoir writing was selected as this study focus because it is interesting and thoughtful for students. That was clear through a range of writing tasks students were given before. Memoir writing has nothing to do with how much to write; but what to write and how it affects the readers. When teaching memoirs, teachers ask students to construct narrative versions of their lives, to remember events and people from their past, and to invent additional details and dialogues. Teachers ask students also to consider the “So what?” of their remembered stories. The “So what” idea is a direct way of capturing student writers’ intentions and of asking them to consider how their life events and meanings will resonate with readers. Creative memoir writing includes such essential components as character, plot development, vivid setting, underlying theme, point of view, dialogue, anecdotes, metaphors and similes, figures of speech, imaginative language, emotional appeal and heavy description. Learning memoir writing online may be of a high value for the writer and the reader.

Online learning method appears as a replacement for the face to face synchronous traditional classroom setting, or at least a complementary to it. Online learning may offer such benefits for students and teachers as convenience, time and geographic flexibility (Bates, 2000). Online memoir learning overcomes the crowded classes, supplies ongoing feedback and resources, supports the language of debate and critical thinking as well as the sense of freedom and the desire for updating. However, e-learning should not be seen as an alternative for the traditional face to face classroom teaching and learning method because it may have some defects.

Delacey and Leonard, (2002), Rossett, Douglass, and Frazee, (2003) have proved that e-learning has such problems as the programs high cost, the lower efficiency of e-learning students conversation, and the less ability to express their ideas than in traditional learning. Online learning may cause boredom to its users in time. This led to the appearance of a new approach; an approach that combines the advantages of both e-learning and face-to-face methods. This is called the "blended learning approach" (Graham and Robinson, 2007: 34-54).

Blended learning combines online delivery of educational content with the best features of classroom interaction and live instruction (Watson, 2008). Blended learning combines the advantages of face-to-face and e-learning to satisfy individual differences (Bersin and Associate, 2003). Francis, (2012) states that blended learning has the advantage of making large classes feel smaller through collaborative learning and the sustainable student participation via online and face to face instruction.

Blended learning can enhance the students' motivation to participate and interact actively in class, and also can create a positive experience for both instructors and students (Shih, 2010). Through blended learning, students can converse, question and comment on each other's work.

In spite of that, using technology should not be just because it is available, but for finding better ways to achieve the learning objectives. Blended learning is used to unite the best features of the in-class teaching and learning with the online ones. “Blended learning supports ‘top learning performance’ through advanced technologies and student collaboration that includes concrete experience, experimentation, practical application of theories, and self-reflection of acquired knowledge” (Vasileiou, 2009:82).

Face-to-face interaction in blended learning no longer needs to be primarily lecture-based; rather, the instructor may facilitate discussions and team projects online in preparation for face-to-face discussions. Several studies like Tsou, Wang and Li, (2002), Al-Jarf, (2004), Chuo, (2007), Tsou, (2008), and Sobh & Al-Haq (2010) have proved the effectiveness of web-based programs on developing the students' creative writing skills.

1.2 Context of the problem

The context of the problem is Nile Official School for Languages in Beni Suef Governorate, Egypt; where a Blended Learning program (BLP) has taken place. This program aimed at enhancing the 3rd prep graders' English creative writing skills, definitely in memoir writing.

This environment was selected due to such several reasons as the following:

- The long experience of the researcher in teaching English provides a good insight into this particular environment. The researcher noticed that writing encounters such obstacles which may hinder creativity as the overloading curriculum, the lack of language practice, the students' poor vocabulary stock, the rarity of real experiences, the fear of making mistakes, the non-motivation as well as adopting the traditional teaching approaches.
- Based on my observation to other colleagues' class periods, it was noticed that some of them are currently still directing students just to write what they memorize, ignoring the critical and creative thinking skills of students needed when writing. Teachers are no longer keen on

creating a motivating atmosphere for teaching writing. Some teachers may need to be well trained as creative writing demands a genuine awareness of its rules and procedures.

- Due to the pilot study conducted on (10) students not included in the study, findings showed that students' written texts are still restricted to the words only they know, the present tense that is commonly used as well as the ill-structured sentences in composition. Students cannot speak voice to their thoughts because they may lack the adequate stock of vocabulary and also the democratic atmosphere of writing. They are unwilling to share their work with other students and even if it happens, they do not get the suitable feedback.
- When talking to students about the nature of creative writing, they showed a big initiation and motivation to express and reflect their attitudes creatively.
- According to the literature review, there was a limited body of research on the application of blended learning for ESL and EFL instruction. This pushes the researcher to fill the gap in the literature review and the previous related studies.

1.3 Statement of the problem

1.3.1 The problem

The 3rd prep graders at Nile official school for languages in Beni Suef Governorate, Egypt, might be good at the spoken language; however they remain unaware of the conventions that operate in writing generally and lack the fundamental principles of creative writing particularly. This problem was documented through English exam-marking experiences, class observation to other teachers, consultation with English supervisors and teachers, and also via a pilot study conducted.

1.3.2 Research questions

This study attempted to answer the following first and main study question: **"To what extent can a blended program enhance the official language 3rd prep school graders' English creative writing skills?"**

The following **sub-questions** emanated from the above major one:

1. How can the factor of gender affect on the creative writing productivity?

2. How much are students satisfied with blended learning?
3. How does the observation report contribute to the study findings?

1.3.3 The study goal

The overall and overarching goal of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of a blended learning program on enhancing Nile Official Language Prep School 3rd graders' English creative writing skills, definitely in "memoir writing". Blended learning program appears as a proposed solution. The use of various multi-media may help students employ the creative writing skills into their daily writing tasks such as emails to a friend, and posting or sharing ideas through texts or short paragraphs.

1.4 Pilot Study

The pilot study involves a preliminary data collection with a very small sample. The study instruments included: a creative writing skills' list, pre/posttest, an analytical skills rubric, a satisfaction questionnaire, and a reflection observation report. This pilot study method is revised or checked by a number of language specialists for the following reasons:

- To try out the data instruments and identify any details that need to be addressed before the main data collection goes ahead.
- To check the suitability of instruments in terms of the difficulty level, time frame and the students' feedback.
- To ensure the study validity, reliability, quality and ensure the clarity of items after preliminary tryouts and revisions.

1.5 Hypotheses of the study

By the end of this study, the following eight hypotheses may take place:

1. "There is a statistically significant difference at 0.05 level between the students' pre and posttest mean scores regarding the clarity and interest of the main writing idea and supporting details, in favor of the posttest".
2. "There is a statistically significant difference at 0.05 level between the students' pre and posttest mean scores regarding the strong flow and excellent sequence of ideas, in favor of the posttest".