8-10 September 2014- Istanbul, Turkey
Proceedings of SOCIOINT14- International Conference on Social Sciences and Humanities

358

THE EFFECT OF BLOGGING ON DESCRIPTIVE PARAGRAPH WRITING SKILL OF THE
INTERMEDIATE IRANIAN EFL LEARNERS

Masoomeh Beygom Hoseini

Science and Research Branch Damvand Islamic Azad University, THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN
Masoomehbeygom.hoseini@gmail.com

Abstract

This research was carried out to find out whether using weblog is effective on Iranian EFL learners' descriptive paragraph. To do so, two samples of students were selected as the control and the experimental group. To check their homogeneity, a PET test (writing section) was administered as pretest. Using paired Samples T- test, it was proven that students of both groups were at the same level of proficiency. After that, the traditional method of teaching writing was used for the control group and using weblog for the experimental group. The students of the experimental group used weblog for their writing homework assignments while students of the control group used papers. When 2 months of instruction ended, another test (writing section), as the posttest, was given to the students of both groups to assess their writing proficiency. Using paired Samples T-test, it was shown that using weblog was more effective than the traditional method of teaching writing on the descriptive paragraph of the Iranian EFL learners.

Keywords: weblog, descriptive paragraph, intermediate.

1. INTROUDCTION

As important components of the writing paragraph could be enhanced by the use of computer technology such as Weblogs (blogs). Specifically, this study described how participants use teacher electronic feedback and use it to produce revisions on their weblog posts. This study would discuss two main concepts paragraph writing, and weblogs.

The motivation for this study derive from observations make in various EFL teaching and learning situations in which new strategies for application of weblog in paragraph writing need to be developed.

In order to further investigate the opportunities that blogs can provide for literacy development, this study investigate one specific classroom blog and analyses syllabus strategies, using the online application of blogging. An analysis of the individual student and teacher contributions, that is, blog posts, make and the pedagogical purpose, grammatical features of each literary recount and social interactivity assessed.

1. Does blogging have any effect on descriptive paragraph writing of Iranian intermediate EFL learner? H1.
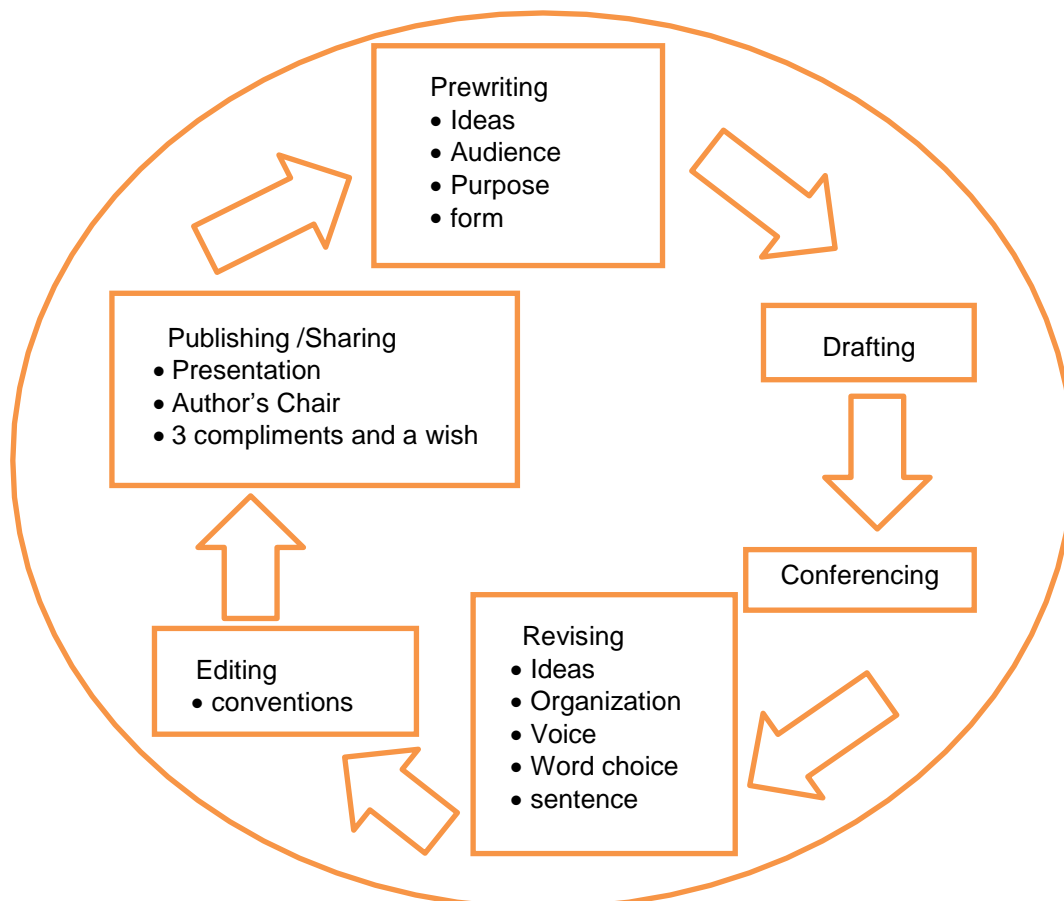There will be no significant effect on descriptive paragraph writing of Iranian intermediate learner.
The implications of this research are numerous. First, application of weblogs in English for writing classes proves useful for raising learner development. Second, learners enjoy being given choices of various learning activities. Third, due to the novelty and diversity of class activities, students' motivation enhance. Finally, online writing and publishing for the audience make students reflect on their performance.

8-10 September 2014- Istanbul, Turkey
Proceedings of SOCIOINT14- International Conference on Social Sciences and Humanities

359

Table 1 *Scopes of blog*

Notes	Scoping
To develop and assess writing growth To create authentic and motivation learning opportunity To foster self- reflection, peer feedback and collaboration	Purpose of the blog
Reflection prompts (class posts) for Ss to brainstorm, and write their first drafts Blog entries to set the writing task Individual blogging folios set up by T where Ss archive and assess their work	Blog content
By the end of this project Ss should be able to Practice process and collaborative writing Use the blog as a means of expression and communication of opinions and ideas Write for different purposes and real audiences using blog functions Develop a critical eye to their work and that of others	Objectives
To develop competent and autonomies writers	Learning outcomes
By designing purposeful tasks and writing lesson plans based on the Ss' course books	Meeting curriculum
Via instruction for tasks and work routines, peer/ self- evaluation task-sheets, guidelines for good commenting, and model plans for each writing genre	Providing scaffold learning
By analyzing students' posts, comments and drafts By observing their participation and work Via a questionnaire	Evaluating the effectiveness of blog writing

Fig 1: Process of Writing

8-10 September 2014- Istanbul, Turkey
Proceedings of SOCIOINT14- International Conference on Social Sciences and Humanities

360

However, to the best of my knowledge, no single study tackled coherence and cohesion in students' English writing. Hence, the current study is exploring the coherence and cohesion problems that student teachers of English face in their English essay writing. This, in turn, inform my research whether these problems in the context are similar to or different from those of the previously reviewed studies. (Ahmed, december 2010)

2. Blogs

A weblog (or 'blog') can be thought of as an online journal that an individual can continuously update with his or her own words, ideas, and thoughts through software that enables one to easily do so. Unlike a standard website, weblog entries are made by typing directly into the browser and with the click of a button are instantly published on the internet. All basic document formatting, like spacing, bold, italics, underline, and creating links, requires no knowledge of HTML or FTP (File Transfer Protocol), so that anyone who can type, copy, and paste can create and maintain a weblog. However, with a very basic knowledge of HTML, users can extend their ability to customize the layout of their blog and even add pictures to enhance its attractiveness. Similar to an open journal, the accumulation of writings and other content creates both a record of learning and a resource for others. Furthermore, a weblog is interactive, in the sense that readers can respond to any given entry with a comment and even threaded discussions can take place depending on the software chosen.

Even though weblogs have been in existence since the very beginning of the world wide web itself (Winer, 2002), free, commercially available 'blogging software' of the type discussed in this article, seems to have made its first appearance in July of 1999 (Blood, 2000). Because of the relative quickness and ease of publishing this type of software affords, the number of users has grown tremendously since then, and we can now observe blogs being used for personal, educational, journalistic, and commercial purposes. In the following section, (Campbell, february 2003)

3. Why teach the descriptive paragraph?

The importance of teaching how to write descriptive paragraphs can be analyzed from to viewpoints: inside the c1assroom and outside the c1assroom. High school students are faced with the need of describing events, experiences, areas, and objects inside the language c1assroom. No matter what the level is, students always ask about what they did during vacation, last night, in the morning or about their plans. They are also requested to provide a physical description of themselves and others. Outside the c1assroom, most high school students are supposed to put into practice all the knowledge that they have acquired in the English lessons. Nowadays, knowing how to write in English has become a transcendental feature of a 21 - century citizen. Students have to express themselves in English in writing to establish relationships with foreigners and people outside the country. Most of the time, students write e-mails to describe events, experiences and so forth. For this reason, students need to use techniques , strategies , and the mechanics of writing (such as punctuation, spelling, and capitalization) , use vocabulary and familiar with the structure of descriptive paragraphs . If students apply for a job in a corporation in which English is a requirement, they are required not only to speak it but also to write it. Therefore, students must know, at least, the basics of writing that may enable them to compose a paragraph.(Eizondd & Garita, may 2010)

Procedure

The study follows a semi-experimental design and the two homogeneous groups of intermediate level students select by intact group design (convenient sampling). Thirty participants with the same characteristics of our participants select to standardize the homogenization test (PET) and malfunctioning items that are the most difficult and easiest items discard and the reliability of the test before and after discarding malfunctioning items calculate. Then the Preliminary English Test is employed to homogenize participants regarding their proficiency in English. The scores which are +1 and -1 standard deviation above and below the mean consider as intermediate.

Those who met the criteria divide into two equal groups: experimental and control. Before exposing the subjects to treatment, a list of those words they learn, is given to make sure they do not know the words in advance. During the term, the teacher teaches the paragraphs to both experimental and control groups. The experimental group receives the treatment, which is blog. Blog use to reinforce what have already been taught. After 16 educational sessions a writing test of five single paragraph essays according to the topics of five units of interchange 2 as posttest administers in each group. The purpose of the present study is to

8-10 September 2014- Istanbul, Turkey
Proceedings of SOCIOINT14- International Conference on Social Sciences and Humanities

361

investigate the impact of the application of weblog on writing one descriptive paragraph.

The PET test administers in order to homogenize the participants. The writings measure according to PET

rating scale from 0-5 that check paragraphs in content, grammar and vocabulary use. Then weblog offer as treatment to experimental group. Finally after 16 educational sessions a test of writing as posttest is administered in each group. Out of the test takers two homogeneous groups of intermediate level students are selected as control and experimental.

In this semi-experimental study, the implementation of the weblog (the independent variable) monitor and the students' writing performance measure. The main purpose of the writing activities adapting weblog is to offer intermediate students a cooperative learning environment in order to improve their quality of English writing by sharing their written products and learning from their peers, not only from the teacher.

During the 16-week semester, the experimental writing group equally instruct by the researcher. However, the main difference between the two conditions is that adopting the traditional approach applies in the control group whereas adapting the treatment implement in the experimental group. In both conditions, the other two writing teachers together with the researcher grade the students' written products.(Kenworthy, october 2004)

Thirty participants involve in the study, based upon a convenience sampling procedure due to availability and practicality reasons. They are be all sophomore BA students majoring at either English Translation or English Literature and English Teaching in the University of Rudehen. All the participants' first language is Persian. The students' age range is between 20 and 35. Among the participants, 10 were male and 20 are female. All of them are taking the course of essay writing when participating in the study.

Students of the three majors mention above usually share the same courses in the second year of BA program, which mostly has to do with developing academic English language skills. The participants generally belong to the same category of English language learners, university students of English. (Rahimi & Qannadzadeh, 2010)

The students who send emails to their instructors are not freshmen and are all familiar with sending and receiving e-mails. To observe the ethical issues, all participants are informed that their data use in the research and are guaranteed that their names, addresses, and any identifying features keep confidential and use only for the purposes of this research. (Rashtchi & Hajihassani, 2010)

To gather necessary data, writing performance task, questionnaires and interview use. In the following section, these instruments further describe. First instrument in this research is Writing Performance Task, which examines the existing ability of the participants in writing. The students both in experimental and control groups ask to perform a writing task as a pre-test. The tasks provide the students with choices on the topics and paragraph types that they are going to learn throughout the term. The participants require writing a paragraph on the topic they chose. After the treatment, the same tasks repeat as a post test. The evaluators train with the Reader Guide in the use of rubric.(SIMSEK, july 2009)

This is an essay writing test based on some of the topics deal with in blogging and discussion boards. The test require a paragraph writing of about six sentences long; as well, it require a paragraph of approximately 150 words in length. Inter-rater validity for the test assess by judging the writing items against the opinion of a jury of writing instructors; suggestions for modifying topics and wording forward and implement.(Fageeh, 2011)

The following instruments use in order to collect the required data for this research:

a. A writing pretest is in the form of describing a series of pictures.

b. A writing posttest be an educational online workspace enabling the users to perform collaborative editing, complete history, and audit trail and easily inviting students to participate in the activities.

c. The next material is the book which use both as the textbook and as a source for choosing the topics for students' writings in the course of the 12-session treatment period.(Arabsarhangi)

In order to guarantee the close homogeneity of the groups, the Oxford Placement Test administer to the participants. The test, which is a commercially developed package, is claimed to grade and place students reliably into appropriate levels. It divides into two sections, listening and grammar, which take about an hour to complete. The results interpret by referring to the test manual..(Shahrokni, december 2009)

8-10 September 2014- Istanbul, Turkey
Proceedings of SOCIOINT14- International Conference on Social Sciences and Humanities

362

A language proficiency test (PET) to homogenize the prospective students for the study. The PET employ in the study be a standard one released by Cambridge University Exam Center and account as a standard test.(Aghdam & Farahani, octobr 2012)

Each subject ask to write independently an descriptive paragraph (the requirement and prompt of the writing task) of no fewer than 150 words within a class period (20 min) while they attend the English writing class towards the end of the second semester (the total number of the compositions are 30, 15 written about descriptive). Neither dictionaries nor other reference books allow. All the compositions, then, grade holistically according to the independent writing rubrics by two teachers of applied linguistics independently. They have, on average, 10 years' experience teaching EFL and are quite familiar with the marking criteria of writing test. Each of the compositions only label with a code number without disclosing any information about the writers' names or grade levels. Therefore, the raters cannot be biased by the writers' grade levels or other personal information while assigning scores to the compositions. The inter-rater reliability examine among the scores given by the raters. The final score for each composition is the mean of the scores marked by two raters. The four marking benchmarks of independent writing section, standard scoring criteria for descriptive writing, are very appropriate and effective tools to assess the essays under present investigation. For one thing, the first two criteria which concern the writer's manifestation of his/her position on the issue to be addressed and his/her utilization of the supporting examples to justify the position specifically target at descriptive writing. For another, the last two criteria evaluate the writer's organization of the text and his/her mastery of idiomatic vocabulary, syntax, etc., which are the universal benchmarks for scoring writing. Therefore, the independent writing rubrics can not only validly assess descriptive compositions, but also accurately index EFL learners' writing proficiency. Furthermore, the scores yield from independent writing rubrics can effectively mirror learners' overall EFL proficiency as well, since one of the four scoring criteria concerns writer's idiomatic and various vocabulary choices, syntactic complexity and the number of lexical and grammatical errors in writing, which is, no doubt, directly associated with the writer's overall EFL proficiency. Hence, the writing scores, as demonstrate, may again justify that seniors, in comparison with the sophomores, are intermediate proficiency learners. (Yang & Sun, 2012)

For the calculation the average scores from the two raters use for the three domains of the writing scoring rubric. These three domains of form, content, and organization treat as items. Thus, one can argue that the three domains (form average, content average, and organization average) consistently measure the same construct of writing ability. Using a correlation procedure, inter-rater reliability calculates. Inter-rater reliability represents the degree of agreement in scoring between raters, and correlation refers to the degree to which one variable varies with another. First, the correlation between rater 1 and rater 2 calculate across the three domains of form, content, and organization. Since the scores be ordinal, a Spearman Rank-Order correlation procedure use. These findings also imply that the two raters interpret the scoring rubric in the same way and share an understanding of the elements that may be included for each domain.

Next, the correlation between the writing total score for rater 1 and the writing total score for rater 2 calculate. For the total score correlation, a Pearson product-moment correlation procedure use since the total scores are continuous in nature. It is evident that the total writing scores from rater 1 and 2 highly correlate. (Shin)

For the PET as the homogeneity test .To make sure that the participants of both groups are homogenous regarding their general English language proficiency, a PET test administer to the participants of both groups. (Rezapanah & Hamidi, janurary 2013)

The descriptive statistics include (mean, standard deviation) of the pre-service teachers' perceptions regarding learning, sense of community and collaborative learning.

The other variables (gender, previous experience with blogs) exclude from the equation of predicting perceived learning because they do not have a significant contribution to the variance in perceived learning.(Top, 2012)

In order to find out whether there is inter-rater reliability between the two raters' sets of scores, a correlation was run .(Behjat, Yamini, & Bagheri, 2011)

. Additionally, the entire five additional items base on the participants' weaker online performance is done significantly better in the delayed posttest. The answer to research question one, therefore, is that the online units do enhance students' learning of conjunction in a controlled context. Even when there is no practice give between the period of the posttest and the delayed posttest, students still make improvement, indicating that the online materials may have raised the participants' awareness and the effect is retained to push

8-10 September 2014- Istanbul, Turkey
Proceedings of SOCIOINT14- International Conference on Social Sciences and Humanities

363

learner performance as far as the five items were concerned.(Tseng & Liou, 2006)

Group statistics: Description of the scores of the two groups on writing

Std. Error Mean	Std. Deviation			group
.124	.681	18.87	30	1.00 i 2.00
.243	1.331	14.43	30	

As it is shown in table 2. , the average writing score of the experimental group is much higher than that of the control group.

Results of the paired *t*-test reported in Table 1 show that there is a significant difference between two main purposes behind using weblog, one for learning English at the .05 level of significance. According to the table, the mean difference is -2.533, which suggests that the students use the weblog more for fun than learning English.

Table 3 :Paired *t*- test results for EFL Students' Purposes behind Using the weblog

Sig. (2- tailed)	DF	t	Upper	Lower	Std. Error Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	
				95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	Paired Differences			
036	89	-2.124	-16347	-4.90319	1.19270	11.31490	-2.53333	Pair English – 1

According to Table 3, in the intermediate group there is a significant difference between using the weblog and learning English at the.001 level. According to the table, the mean difference is -
5.033, which shows that the intermediate group uses weblog.

Table 4
Chi-square Test

Observed value	Critical value	Sig.	d.f.
67.84	7.81	.05	3

As it is presented in Table 4, sequential progression with the percentage of 38 is the dominant type of progression used in paragraphs with listing organization.

To see if there is a real difference in the frequencies of types of topic progression used in paragraphs with time organization, the Chi-square test is used. As the result of the Chi-square test shows in Table 5, the null hypothesis is rejected. That is, there are differences between the frequencies of types of topic progression techniques used in paragraphs with time organization, and these differences are not due to chance.

Table 5
Chi-square Test

Observed value	Critical value	Sig.	d.f.
38.16	*7.81*	*.05*	*3*

8-10 September 2014- Istanbul, Turkey
Proceedings of SOCIOINT14- International Conference on Social Sciences and Humanities

364

As it is presented in Table, extended parallel progression with the percentage of 35 is the dominant type of progression used in paragraphs with time organization.

In order to find out whether there was inter-rater reliability between the two raters' sets of scores, a correlation was run. The results were as follows:

Table 6- Correlation between two raters' scores in writing pre-test

		Rater 2
First Rater	Pearson	.831
Correlation		.000
Sig. N		110

As Table 6 suggests, the correlation between the two raters' writing scores was .831, which represents a high inter-reliability of scores (r = .90) using Spearman's prophecy formula (Henning, 1987, p. 85). In order to see if the participants in both control and experimental groups were homogeneous, and they were at the same level of writing ability, a *t*-test was run. Table 2 summarizes the related descriptive statistics for the average of raters' scores in the pre-test in both control and experimental groups.

4. CONCLUSION

The main objective of the present study was to find out if there is any significant difference in the paragraph writing of learners who are in a weblog learning environment and those who take face2face instruction. The results of the study showed that those who are taught in a weblog environment, i.e., using online instruction and practice, outperform in their essay writing ability compared to those who attend a traditional face2face environment. The results of this study follow what El-Gayar and Dennis (2005) and Frydrychová Klímová a n d Semrádová (2008) claimed on the effectiveness of e-learning in the improvement of language skills in general and writing ability in particular. Language teachers can benefit from the results of the present study and plan to expose their students with some online out-of-class activities to help them enhance their writing skill.

As it was mentioned earlier, the motivation for this study derived from observations made in various EFL teaching and learning situations in which new strategies for application paragraph writing need to be developed. One useful strategy for the application of paragraph in writing is using weblog. There are different methods used for teaching a language as well as its paragraph to EFL learners; one such way is using weblog which may have deficiencies in teaching grammar or communicative skills but can be really helpful in teaching writing of other subject matters to students

The research results rejected the stated hypothesis meaning that there actually is a significant difference between those students who work with weblog and those who do not and unprecedentedly exceeded the researcher' expectations. But surprisingly the author found that not all the participants were in fact in favor of the weblog. The reason might be the students were not used to being taught under this situation. This study investigated one of the most important issues in EFL instruction, i.e., paragraph development and use in writing one paragraph essay. One of the most difficult aspects of learning a foreign language, particularly in an EFL context, is the retention and use of cohesion and coherence in writing. To prevail this problem teacher can teach paragraph through activities like weblog, reinforcing the teaching points without boring the students. Traditional techniques for teaching paragraph to intermediate learners might not be so effective.

In Iran, learning writing has been considered a boring subject for a long time and the traditional way of learning writing by mere copying and remembering has shown to be less than effective. Meanwhile, weblog are also seen as a time-filling activity in most English classrooms. It is believed that weblogs are just for fun and they have very little effect in teaching and learning. However, this research revealed that weblog contribute to descriptive paragraph learning if they give students a chance to learn, practice and to review

8-10 September 2014- Istanbul, Turkey
Proceedings of SOCIOINT14- International Conference on Social Sciences and Humanities

365

the English language in a pleasant atmosphere. From the research, it was found that students were demanding new ways of learning paragraph, and they themselves are in search of new ways of learning this subject as well.

Interpretations of the findings of this research also led to several suggestions for further research.

1. It is recommended that this study be replicated with a larger sample or number of participants from the same background. This study considered around sixty people which is not a large sample.

2. The present study may be replicated having native speakers as the participants, so that the efficacy of using weblog would be explored on the native speakers as well.

3. It is recommended that a concept mapping or a visual map study be conducted on the effect of paragraph learning of Iranian EFL learners.

4. It would be interesting to compare the results across levels of proficiency.

5. It is recommended that the chat teaching study be conducted in order to investigate the possible effect of chat on the retention of paragraph as well.

REFERENCE LIST

Aghdam, Zahra Shirinzadeh, & Farahani, and Ali Akbar. (octobr 2012). Speaking as an indicator of general proficiency in placement test *journal of english literature, 3*(6), 136-149. doi: 10.5897/IJEL12.095

Ahmed, Abdel Hamid. (december 2010). Students' Problems with Cohesion and Coherence in EFL Essay

Writing in Egypt: Different Perspectives *literacy information and computer education journal 1*(4),

211-221.

Arabsarhangi, Roya Khoii and Zahra. *The Effect of Wikis' Collaborative Environment on the Improvement of Iranian EFL Learners' Writing Skill* Paper presented at the international conference "ict for language learning" 4th edition.

Behjat, Fatemeh, Yamini, Mortaza, & Bagheri, Mohammad Sadegh. (2011). Adjunct Learning: Mixing the Cyber World with Face-to-Face Writing Instruction *international reviwe of social sciences and humanities, 2*(1), 230-239.

Campbell, Aaron Patric. (february 2003). Weblogs for Use in ESL Classrooms *The Internet TESL Journal ix*(2).

Eizondd, Lenna Barrantes, & Garita, Cnthya Olivares. (may 2010). USE WRITE: Useful Writing Techniques to Improve High-School Students' Descriptive Writing. *latras 47*, 59-82.

Fageeh, Abdulaziz Ibrahim. (2011). EFL Learners' Use of Blogging for Developing Writing Skills and Enhancing Attitudes Towards English Learning: An Exploratory Study *journal of language and literature, 2*(1), 31-48.

Kenworthy, Roger C. (october 2004). Developing Writing Skills in a Foreign Language via the Internet

(TESL-TEFL). *The Internet TESL Journal x*(10).

Rahimi, Ali, & Qannadzadeh, Jamal-addin. (2010). Quantitative usage of logical connectors in Iranians' EFL

Essay writing and logical and linguistic intelligences. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, 5*,

2012-2019. doi: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2010.07.406

Rashtchi, Mojgan, & Hajihassani, and Hassan. (2010). Blog-assisted Language Learning: A Possibility in

Teaching Reading to Iranian EFL Learners *international journal of language studies (ijls), 4*(4), 1-18.

Rezapanah, Fatemeh, & Hamidi, Hadi. (janurary 2013). Investigating the Effects of Word Games on Iranian EFL Learners' Application of the Words in Writing Paragraph Essays *international journal of applied linguistic and english literature, 2*(1), 35-43. doi: 10.7575/ijalel.v.2n.1p.35

Shahrokni, Seyyed Abdollah. (december 2009). Second Language Incidental Vocabulary Learning: The Effect of Online Textual, Pictorial, and Textual Pictorial Glosses. *the electronic journal for english as a second language, 13*(3), 1-17.

Shin, Hyun Jung Kim and Hye Won. A Reading and Writing Placement Test: Design, Evaluation, and Analysis *working papers in TESOL and applied lingusistics, 6*(2), 1-36.

SIMSEK, Ozgur. (july 2009). The Effect of Weblog Integrated Writing Instruction on Primary School Students Writing Performance *international journal of instruction 2*(2), 31-47.

Top, Ercan. (2012). Blogging as a social medium in undergraduate courses: Sense of community best predictor of perceived learning. *The Internet and Higher Education, 15* (1), 24-28. doi: 10.1016/j.iheduc.2011.02.001

Tseng, Yen-Chu, & Liou, Hsien-Chin. (2006). The effects of online conjunction materials on college EFL students' writing. *System, 34*(2), 270-283. doi: 10.1016/j.system.2006.01.006

Yang, Wenxing, & Sun, Ying. (2012). The use of cohesive devices in argumentative writing by Chinese EFL Learners at different proficiency levels. *Linguistics and Education, 23*(1), 31-48. doi: 10.1016/j.linged.2011.09.004