

# **The Effectiveness of a Blended Program in Enhancing Creative Journal Writing among Palestinian Secondary School Students**

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## Abstract

This study aims at investigating the effectiveness of a blended program in enhancing journal writing among Palestinian secondary school students. The sample of the study consisted of 36 female students as an experimental group. A blended program was used for teaching the group. The researcher chose journal writing as one of the creative writing strategies to be treated in this study. A pre-posttest was used to measure the effectiveness of the program on students' achievement of the experimental group in journal writing. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as means and standard deviations, in addition to the analysis of covariance (ANCOVA). The main results of the study indicated that the mean scores of the experimental group were significantly high. This means that the use of the blended program had a significantly greater positive effect on the students' achievement in journal writing in favor of the posttest and showed also significant results in all journal writing sub-skills.

**Key Words:** Blended learning, creative writing and journal writing.

## 1. Introduction

Writing is one of the four language skills and arts that has a very important position, as it is one of the linguistic means of communication. Through writing the students can express their thoughts and feelings. In addition, it is a tool that connects the learners with others, enables them to interact, and helps them to achieve social demands in communicating with others through temporal or spatial distances. Creative writing has a special nature, it is an expression of emotional experiences suggestively and interestingly. It raises a cause or an invitation to clarify, but on the floor of the beauty of shape and emotional impact (Healey, 2019).

The development of creative writing skills for high school students is an urgent necessity, as it is no longer acceptable in the modern era in which we live from technological development to help students memorize written templates for use in written expression, but rather it has become necessary to help students to show their talents in writing by developing creative writing skills(Hanna, 2018). So creative journal writing, as it is considered one of the creative writing strategies, helps the students to express their feelings and thoughts in unique expressions that differ from what others write.

However, teaching creative writing is a complex process because thinking processes, experiences, knowledge, and creative cognition are needed for

creative writing. This means the role of the teacher will be very important to encourage students to write creatively. Unfortunately, teachers in creative writing activities only emphasize the English language and do not use the language creatively (Shoro, 2019). Teaching writing forms such as grammar, accuracy, and error correction become the primary focus, not creative writing processes. This means that teaching writing at schools does not provide students to practice creative writing if they have to face the real writing contexts.

Consequently, there should be other instructional resources that can be used alongside the school to help students read and write creatively. Today online technology can be an instructional choice in many classrooms. Several studies show that online technology-mediated instruction can assist students to understand writing processes and contents (Fri & Bi, 2013; Root, Steinberg, & Huber, 2011).

The expansion use of e-learning in educational institutions has increased. Its use as an educational approach supports the potentials provided by e-learning that meet the needs of learners and teachers. E-learning nowadays can remove the barriers caused by traditional education. So, E-learning could be considered as a very important instructional resource in the field of education. Many educational institutions have applied it and held lectures and webinars to introduce it.

Since the spread of COVID-19, the concept of "Blended Learning" appeared to be used to maintain learning and communication during school closure. This type of education combines e-learning with regular traditional education, it is an education process that combines e-learning and the regular way of teaching. Blended learning has the potential for stimulating learning on a social constructivist paradigm given the wide range of applications available on the Internet and face-to-face learning. Creative writing associated with creative thinking and problem solving through collaborative learning especially online creative writing (Mbatl, 2012). As creative writing needs a creative cognitive which emphasizes higher mental functions in the learning process. Furthermore, blended learning is a means of learning through which we can use both asynchronous and/or synchronous collaboration through platforms, chat rooms, blogs, discussion boards.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1 Creative Writing**

Creative writing is one of the most important linguistic activities that a person undertakes to express his feelings, thoughts, visions, and perceptions, and what experiences he is going through, whereby the students can express their emotions, thoughts, and special thoughts, and transfer them to others in a

literary linguistic container, characterized by the beauty of expression and style and also exciting presentation (Godley, & DeMartino, 2016).

## **2.2 The Importance of Creative Writing**

Creative writing is a tool for self-expression, feelings, ideas, and imagination, and also could be a way to discover the talents that can be cultivated and developed. It satisfies students' tendencies and directions. Moreover, creative writing develops the linguistic wealth of the learners and provides students with what they lack from vocabulary, structures, and linguistics. Creative writing also gives learners enthusiasm and confidence; they can write about the things that matter to them or are eager to write about them. Because of this, they can control their language production. Furthermore, it extends the space for students to realize the mind and imagination, develops the literary taste of the learners, and overstates the sense of beauty in them. Moreover, it excites students' sensitivity to the different colors of literature and helps learners enjoy the high literary effects. Finally, it helps learners to invest free time to achieve psychological comfort for them (Suwantarathip & Wichadee, 2014).

### 2.3 Blended Learning

Blended learning is defined as an approach that integrated online learning into physical classroom learning. Blended learning can be viewed as the combination of an online teaching method with face-to-face instruction (Arellano et al., 2018).

The concept of blended learning is a scenario where education is combined with online opportunities, and the online materials are presented with the traditional classroom atmosphere (Thompson et al., 2019)

Blended learning is the use of technological innovations to integrate goals and content, sources and activities of learning, methods of communicating information through two methods; face-to-face learning, and E-learning teaching which creates interaction between the teacher and students through technological innovations (Staker, 2012, 5).

Bailey et al., (2013) define it as education through which it uses an effective set of multiple presentation methods, teaching methods, and learning styles that facilitate the learning process, and based on the integration of traditional methods in which students meet face to face with electronic learning methods. The technology attempts to improve learning effectiveness through the integration of active learning approaches and extensive use of working experiences.



This implied that blended learning allows different sections to different instructional methods which stimulate teachers to create courses with a variety of teaching and learning methods. This could be very challenging, as it requires teachers to step away from their usual and normal pedagogies coupled with creativity and innovation which is never easy to accomplish (Carbonell et al, 2013).

## **2.5 Journal Writing**

Many strategies can be used by teachers to teach creative writing. These strategies depend on the ability of the teacher to choose the appropriate one. One of the strategies which can be used to teach writing is writing creative journal.

Journaling is a kind of informal writing as a regular practice. Journals serve different purposes, some can be considered as creative and the other is personal. People write journals to record the day-to-day events in their own lives. It's a great way to force yourself to start writing and engage in a process of self-improvement.

There are many benefits of journal writing. For example; journaling encourages you to practice the art of writing. It helps you to explore new ideas and allows you to practice stream of consciousness writing. Journaling provides a space to write expressively without pressure. One of the biggest journaling

benefits is the ability to start writing free from the pressure of a formal written piece (Carol, J., 2021)

Moreover, using journals fosters students' learning in many ways such as being actively engaged in their learning and having the opportunity to clarify and reflect upon their thinking. Students can record ideas and feelings, special words and expressions they have heard, interesting things that have happened to them, or information about interesting people. Hogue (2003) stated that "journal writing gives the learner the ability to write fluently without pressure.

According to Langan(2001), journal writing might help students develop the way they think and will show students how ideas can be discovered and developed in the process of writing. In addition, students express their feelings and emotions freely (As cited in Wagiyo, 2018).

### **3. Related Studies**

A study by Keshta & Harb (2013) aimed to investigate the effectiveness of using a blended learning program on developing Palestinian tenth graders' English writing skills. Students were from Shohadaa' Rafah Basic School in Rafah Directorate of Education. The findings pointed out that there were statistically significant differences in the participants' achievement level after implementing the blended program in favor

of the post-application. This was attributed to the blended learning program in teaching writing.

A study by Liu (2013) aimed to describe and evaluate blended learning in academic English writing courses in terms of course design, material development and presentation, assignment submission and grading, students' involvement, teacher reflection, and student evaluation. Results showed that the students highly appreciated and benefited from the blended learning employed in the course. It helped increase student-student and student-teacher interactions, reduced or even eliminated communication anxiety, motivated them to become (more) independent and autonomous learners, and enhanced their academic English writing ability.

A study by Youssef (2016) attempted to mix both pedagogy and technology in a blended model reflecting two of the most influential theories of learning: social constructivism and connectivism. The study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of a program based on the scaffolding strategy using blogs in developing the first-year secondary school students' creative writing skills, reflective thinking, and their attitudes towards blogging. The results revealed that scaffolded blogging along with the genre-process approach was effective in developing students' creativity in writing. Students' ability to reflect significantly

improved, and students showed positive attitudes towards this new type of authoring.

A study by Perman & Gede (2017) aimed to investigate if there was a significant difference in writing competency between students who were taught by using blended learning and those who were taught by using conventional strategy. The experimental group was taught using "blended learning" while the control group was taught by using "conventional strategy". Results showed that there was a significant difference in writing competency between the students who were taught by using a blended learning strategy and those who were taught by using a conventional strategy.

A study by Wahyuni (2018) was conducted to know the effect of a blended learning model towards students' writing ability of the eleventh grade students at SMAN 6 Pekanbaru. The sample of the study was determined through random sampling method. The experimental group was taught by applying blended learning model through Telegram Messenger and the control group was instructed through the traditional method by lecturing method. To collect the data, writing test was administered. Findings of the study showed that there were statistically significant differences between the means of two groups in favor of the experimental

group which achieved better results in the post-test. This means that the blended learning model developed students' writing ability.

## **5. Statement of the Problem**

Through my experience, as a supervisor in the Ministry of Education in Palestine, results of English language in the government secondary schools are always unsatisfactory, and they are the lowest in results compared with other subjects. Through observing writing lessons, I always notice that most students are unable to write cohesive and coherent paragraphs and they are unable to write creatively. They have poor basic writing mechanics and lack clarity of ideas. Moreover, I found that secondary school students have an apparent difficulty in creative writing skills. Students haven't adequate experience with creative writing skills. We can say that creative writing might be completely or partially neglected. In light of what is mentioned and since English is regarded by Palestinians to be a crucial part of their education, the researcher found that a great emphasis must be placed on teaching English as a foreign language in Palestine especially creative writing skill. In this study the researcher chose creative journal writing as one of the creative writing strategies.

## 6. The main Questions of the Study

The researcher in this study has two questions:-

- 1- How can a blended program be designed to enhance students' creative journal writing?
- 2- What are the effects of implementing a blended program on secondary school students' creative journal writing?

## 7. Hypothesis of the Study

- There is no statistically significant difference at ( $\alpha \geq 0.05$ ) between the participants' main scores in the overall results of pre and post-test in creative journal writing performance due to the use of a blended program in favor of the post-test.

### **From the main question derived the following sub- hypothesis:-**

There is no statistically significant difference at ( $\alpha \geq 0.05$ ) between the mean scores in an overall pre and post-test in all creative journal writing sub-skills performance due to the use of a blended program in favor of the post-test.

## 8. Aims of the Study

- Designing a blended program to enhance creative journal writing.
- Investigating the effectiveness of a blended program to enhance creative journal writing among Palestinian Secondary Students.

## **9. Significance of the Study**

The results of the study can be used to improve the performance of students to be more independent learners and have self-efficacy in creative writing. The study may help students to be responsible in working collaboratively and cooperatively with others. It can be also beneficial for teachers to provide an effective teaching-learning environment by applying blended collaborative learning to enhance students' performance in creative writing. In addition, it could help familiarize the English language teachers with the effective ways of teaching creative writing through conducting workshops.

Furthermore, syllabus designers can use the results to modify, organize, and enrich English language curricula with activities based on blended collaborative learning in creative writing. Finally, researchers can use the results as the basics for conducting new research.

## **10. Delimitations of the Study**

The study has some potential delimitations:-

1. The study was limited to the Palestinian government schools of the Directorate of Education in South Hebron within the area of the researcher's work and for the ease of reaching them.

2. Limited to the students of the 11th Grade scientific stream in South Hebron district.
3. The blended program implemented in the second semester of the scholastic year 2020/2021 for four months (15th of February to the 15th of June).
4. Creative writing was limited to creative journals writing .
5. Data collection was limited to tools that were used in the study; pre and post.

## 11. Definitions of the Terms

**Blended learning:** a teaching-learning process that incorporates both face-to-face teaching and teaching supported by ICT. It includes face-to-face teaching, students' interaction with the course content, peer and group interaction, discussion, and exchange of ideas (Lalimal & Dangwal, 2017).

The researcher defines blended learning as an approach to learning that combines face-to-face and online learning experiences. Ideally, each (both online and off) will complement each other by using its particular strength (44 hours; 50% for each type of learning).

**Creative Writing:** Harmer (2004) affirmed creative writing "as a term which implies "imaginative tasks, such as writing journals, poetry, stories, and plays." Creative writing normally refers to the production of texts which have an



aesthetic rather than a purely informative, instrumental purpose( As Cited in Din & Ghani, 2017).

For this study, creative writing is defined as writing that expresses ideas, feelings, and thoughts imaginatively through writing journals.

**Journal Writing:** Rebecca (2013) defines journal writing as a process of writing that allows learners to record their thoughts, feelings, opinions and description of their daily life. It helps writers develop their creativity in writing (As cited Wagiyo, 2018).

The researcher defines a journal writing as a way of expressing someone's feelings, thoughts and ideas, and putting them in an artistic writing style.

## 12. Design of the study

To achieve the aims of the study, an experimental design was used. Participants were chosen from Al-Samou' Girls' Secondary School-South Hebron. The experimental group was used to establish a cause-and-effect relationship between the independent and dependent variables. Students of this experimental group were taught using the blended program.

### **13. The Participants**

The participants of the study consisted of (36) 11th Grade female students, scientific stream, from Al-Samou' Secondary School for Girls in a town called Al-Samou', South Hebron Governorate in the academic year 2020 / 2021. The school was chosen because the teacher can use the internet and its applications.

### **14. Variables of the Study**

#### **1- Dependent Variables**

The dependent variable in this study is creative Journal writing).

#### **2- The Independent Variable**

The independent variable is the blended program.

### **15. Instruments**

#### **1. The Pre-post Creative Journal Writing Test**

After reviewing the related studies about creative writing, the pre-posttest was constructed. The aim of the pre-posttest is to measure students' performance in creative journal writing. To determine the validity of the test, it was submitted to a jury of professionals specialized in the field of TEFL. In light of their comments and suggestions, some items were modified or substituted and others

were deleted concerning the test content, questions, instructions, suitability, clarity, and level of difficulty to approve and apply it.

To check the test reliability, the researcher applied the test on a sample of twenty (20) students from the study population, the out sample was from a different group of the scientific stream students at the same school. The test was applied on the out sample, then after two weeks, the test was conducted again for the same students. The researcher calculated the Person correlation between the total scores of the two tests. The results indicated that the test produced stable and consistent results(see Table 1).

**Table (1)**

*The correlation coefficient of pre-test with post-test of the creative journal writing*

NO.	Test parts	Correlation coefficient	Sig.
	<b>Journal writing</b>	0.763**	0.000
1	Purpose	0.627**	0.000
2	Organization	0.546**	0.013
3	Voice	0.612**	0.004
4	Sensory Details	0.504**	0.023
5	Convention	0.491**	0.028
	<b>Whole Test</b>	0.591**	0.011

## **2. The Blended Program**

The blended program was designed for enhancing the creative writing skills of 11th grade scientific secondary school students. Thus, the objectives, content, teaching methods, activities, materials, and assessment were selected carefully to suit 11th grade school students scientific stream level and textbook themes. The program was validated by specialist jurors in the field of (TEFL); English supervisors and English teachers to verify the feasibility and validity. Some activities were modified, more cooperative activities were added, some strategies were changed or improved to suit the aims of the study.

## **3. The Assessment Rubrics**

After reviewing the related literature on assessing creative journal writing, An assessment rubric was adopted and adapted to assess students' performance in creative journal writing. The rubric was submitted to a jury of professionals specialized in the field of TEFL to emphasize its appropriateness for assessing creative journals. The jury's suggestions were taken into consideration, and some modifications were done in content, indicators, and criterion.

To test the rubric reliability, the researcher and another experienced rater used the writing achievement rubrics to evaluate students' performance in

creative journal writings. First, ten samples of students' papers were chosen randomly and were corrected by each of the two raters independently. Each rater read each piece of writing and suggested a grade. Reliability was estimated by comparing the scores given to each student on her written piece by each of the two raters (the researcher herself and another teacher). The percentage of raters' agreement on each paper was more than 90% which was considered appropriate to correct the papers of the sample of the study later on.

## 16. Results of the Study

### The Result of the First Hypothesis

**"There is no statistically significant difference at ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ) between the participants mean scores of the experimental group in pre-test and post-test in creative journal writing skills in favor of the post-test"**

To test this hypothesis, the mean and standard deviation scores of the experimental group of the pre-post creative journal writing skills test were calculated, and Paired Sample T-Test was used to test the hypothesis ( see Table 2).

Table (2)

*Differences between the Pre-test and Post-test in the journal writing of experimental group*

Creative journal writing skill	Application	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t. value	Sig. Value
1- Journal writing	Pre-test	36	11.78	2.00	-7.295	0.00
	Post- test	36	16.06	3.04		

According to the result in Table (2), the p-value (0.000) for the differences between the mean creative journal writing skills of students' scores in pre-test and post-test of the experimental group is less than the significant level ( $\alpha=0.05$ ). There is a significant difference between students' scores in the pre-test (Mean=11.78) and post-test of the experimental group (Mean=16.06). This indicates that applying the blended program in enhancing creative journal writing for the experimental group is in favor of the post-test.

**Table (3)**

*Differences between the Pre-test and Post-test in the journal writing skills of experimental group*

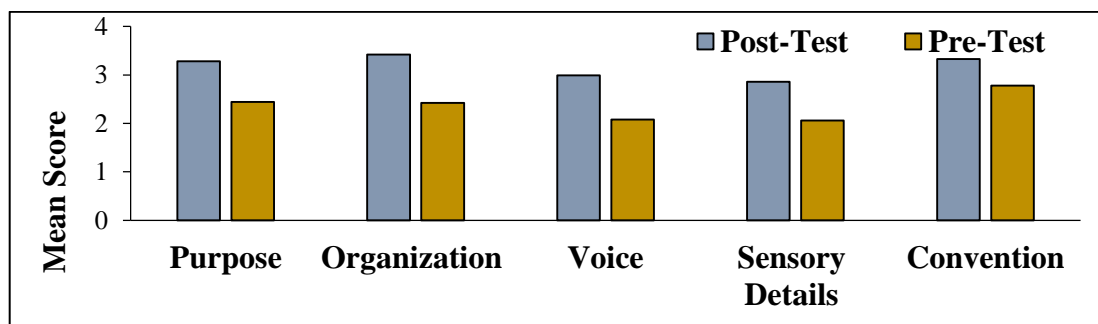
Journal writing skills	Application	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t. value	Sig. Value
1- Purpose	Pre-test	36	2.44	0.69	-5.000	0.00
	Post- test	36	3.28	0.74		
2. Organization	Pre-test	36	2.42	0.69	-6.708	0.00
	Post- test	36	3.42	0.73		
3. Voice	Pre-test	36	2.08	0.28	-8.442	0.00

	Post- test	36	3.17	0.74		
4. Sensory details	Pre-test	36	2.06	0.23		
	Post- test	36	2.86	0.68	-6.808	0.00
5. Convention	Pre-test	36	2.78	0.59		
	Post- test	36	3.33	0.68	-3.953	0.00
Total scores of journal writing skills	Pre-test	36	11.78	2.00		
	Post- test	36	16.06	3.04	-7.295	0.00

According to the results in Table (3), the p-value (0.000) for the differences between the mean creative journal writing skills scores of students in the pre-test and post-test of the experimental group is less than the significant level ( $\alpha=0.05$ ), so there is a significant difference between students' scores in pre-test and post-test of the experimental group, which consequently indicates that applying the blended program in enhancing the creative journal writing skills for the experimental group is in favor of the post-test. Also, there are significant differences between the mean creative journal writing skills scores of students' in pre-test and post-test of the experimental group in all journal writing parts in favor of the post-test. "Voice" and "Organization" have the highest mean scores ( between pre-test and post-test (1.09) &(1.00), while "Convention" and "Sensory details" have the lowest mean scores (0.55) (0.80).

**Figure(1)**

*The mean scores of the pre-test and post-test in the creative journal writing skills of the experimental group.*



## 17. Discussion and recommendations

The study showed that the blended program was effective in developing EFL creative journal writing among first-year secondary school students (scientific stream) and results revealed significant differences in favor of the posttest.

Results in creative journal writing were significant. The difference in means between the pre and post-test was (4.25). This may be attributed to the constant writing of journals during the implementation of the program. Students were motivated to write journals as a tool for expressing their feelings, especially during the pandemic of COVID 19. They found a way to get rid of depression and stress by expressing their emotions and feelings through writing



journals. They were free to write whatever they want in their journals. For example, students were encouraged to write about happy moments such as wedding parties, birthdays, having new babies in the family, meeting friends, journeys, trips, and other ceremonies. Regarding the sub-skills of the creative journal writing, "Voice"(1.09) and "Organization"(1.00) had the highest mean differences in scores. This is attributed to the idea that students paid big attention to writing coherent journals and they were interested in writing them. They were given the chance to write their journals whenever they wanted, because of that, they were more confident and less anxious. On the other hand, and despite the significant differences in scores, using "Sensory details"(0.80) and "Convention "(0.55) had the lowest development (using figurative language like sensory detail, imagery metaphor, sophisticated precise vocabulary, and well-varied sentence structure throughout). As Carter (2015) said employing sensory details in writing is a useful technique for all learners of English as a foreign language, so they should be used from pre-school to tertiary education, and this should be used with a vast scope of texts that are certainly clear and that arouse the five senses. This could be explained that using "Sensory details" in writing was the most sophisticated writing sub-skill because students' knowledge about using them before the implementation of the study was very limited. Therefore, using sensory details, figurative language and vivid words in

writing needs a big concern from earlier stages. "Convention" in writing journals had low development. This result was expected in writing creating journals in particular because students concentrated on expressing their feelings. They were writing freely without limits and the attention was given to using ideas, improving voice, and using vocabulary rather than convention.

## **18 .Conclusion**

Based on the findings of this study, we can conclude that blended learning provided students with a better learning environment through a variety of multi-media resources which based on cooperative and collaborative strategies that enhance students' abilities in creative writing. Blended learning stimulated students towards an independent practice of the English language instead of direct instruction. It was very effective in motivating students towards participation and interaction both in synchronous and asynchronous activities because they were not criticized. Moreover, blended provided students with enjoyment, pleasure, enthusiasm, and variation which were significant enough to affect the students' achievement in creative writing positively. Furthermore, the program expanded students' imagination, this appeared when they were writing and using imagery, sensory details, metaphor, and figurative ideas.

## 19. Recommendations

In light of the results, teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) should encourage their students to practice writing journals weekly at least because learners express their feelings and ideas freely out of stress and fear. Moreover, suggesting a training program to familiarize EFL teachers with the pedagogical implication of how to design activities based on creative writing skills.

Curriculum developers are invited to enrich textbooks with activities which enhance students' creative writing and how to implement them.

In light of the results of the study, conclusions, and recommendations, further research should be considered to conduct blended learning on other skills of EFL such as reading, speaking and listening.

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