



## The Electronic Library

Digital literacy and digital content supports learning: The impact of blogs on teaching English as a foreign language

Charlene L. Al-Qallaf Afaf S.R. Al-Mutairi

### Article information:

To cite this document:

Charlene L. Al-Qallaf Afaf S.R. Al-Mutairi , (2016), "Digital literacy and digital content supports learning", The Electronic Library, Vol. 34 Iss 3 pp. 522 - 547

Permanent link to this document:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/EL-05-2015-0076>

Downloaded on: 01 November 2016, At: 23:17 (PT)

References: this document contains references to 75 other documents.

To copy this document: [permissions@emeraldinsight.com](mailto:permissions@emeraldinsight.com)

The fulltext of this document has been downloaded 372 times since 2016\*

### Users who downloaded this article also downloaded:

(2016), "Use of smartphone apps among library and information science students at South Valley University, Egypt", The Electronic Library, Vol. 34 Iss 3 pp. 371-404 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/EL-03-2015-0044>

(2016), "Effects of gender in library and information science research: A case study of The Electronic Library", The Electronic Library, Vol. 34 Iss 3 pp. 488-503 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/EL-08-2014-0126>

Access to this document was granted through an Emerald subscription provided by emerald-srm:563821 []

### For Authors

If you would like to write for this, or any other Emerald publication, then please use our Emerald for Authors service information about how to choose which publication to write for and submission guidelines are available for all. Please visit [www.emeraldinsight.com/authors](http://www.emeraldinsight.com/authors) for more information.

### About Emerald [www.emeraldinsight.com](http://www.emeraldinsight.com)

Emerald is a global publisher linking research and practice to the benefit of society. The company manages a portfolio of more than 290 journals and over 2,350 books and book series volumes, as well as providing an extensive range of online products and additional customer resources and services.

Emerald is both COUNTER 4 and TRANSFER compliant. The organization is a partner of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) and also works with Portico and the LOCKSS initiative for digital archive preservation.

\*Related content and download information correct at time of download.

# Digital literacy and digital content supports learning

## The impact of blogs on teaching English as a foreign language

Charlene L. Al-Qallaf

*Department of Library and Information Science, Kuwait University, Shuwaikh, Kuwait, and*

Afaf S.R. Al-Mutairi

*Department of English Language, Ministry of Education, Farwaniya, Kuwait*

### Abstract

**Purpose** – This paper aims to investigate the impact of blogs on teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) to primary students. The study also explores educators' perceptions of social media tools and digital literacy in school environments.

**Design/methodology/approach** – A three-step approach was used to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. First, the blogs of 23 fifth-grade students in an EFL class in Kuwait was analysed for one semester along with student perceptions and teacher observations. Second, a survey was distributed to the students at the end of the semester, and finally, four focus groups were conducted regarding educators' perceptions on the use of social media, their skills and needs and problems encountered.

**Findings** – The findings showed that by the end of the semester, students were writing lengthy sentences, had fewer spelling and grammatical mistakes, were more motivated and independent and displayed a more positive attitude towards learning EFL. In addition, educators are enthusiastic about using Web technologies in their teaching practices but have several concerns such as digital literacy competencies, technology-use behaviour and lack of accessibility to digital content.

**Research limitations/implications** – The number of questions on the student survey could be reduced. Also, it would be preferable in future studies to require all students to blog at least twice a week which could provide a broader representation of their writing abilities.

**Originality/value** – Little research has been reported in the literature on the use of blogs in teaching EFL to primary school students. Most literature focuses on teaching EFL to university students. By using a mixed-methodology approach, this study also highlights the needs of educators and students in technology learning environments and makes a good contribution towards offering pragmatic solutions.

**Keywords** Blogs, Kuwait, Libraries, Teachers, Social media, Librarians, Digital literacy, EFL

**Paper type** Research paper

### Introduction

Technology has transformed the way individuals live, learn, conduct business and create and manage information. According to the American Library Association (ALA, 2013), there are two parts to the technology equation: having access to technology is the first part, while the second part includes increasing digital skills and competencies (ALA, 2013). The first part of the equation – having access to technology – is strongly



supported by proponents who visualize technology as being pivotal to educational success and key to sustaining democracies in the digital age (Aspen Institute, 2009; Lietzau and Helgren, 2011; USA Department of Education, 2010). The second part of the equation – digital literacy, iSkills, Information Literacy 2.0, media literacy or ICT literacy – has a common core of providing an environment where the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, understand, evaluate, create, manage and communicate information to meet the needs of a knowledge-based society (ALA, 2013; Bawden, 2008; Koltay, 2011). Both these parts make up the whole, and one cannot exist without the other, necessitating a skill set that “requires both cognitive and technical competencies” (ALA, 2013, p. 1). This digital environment challenges many assumptions on how education should be delivered, how students should learn, how information is disseminated and what digital competencies are necessary to function in a technology-driven society.

Within the educational context, information and communication technologies have inspired new pedagogical practices which redefine the conventional methods of teaching and learning. Social media tools are one format of these new technologies that are viewed as being an active force among information professionals, teachers, and learners. Social media networking sites (SNSs) support communication, collaboration and active engagement among participants, and provide significant sources of information for the educational community (Maron and Smith, 2008; Richardson, 2010). These tools transform learners from passive receivers of information into active content creators. Examples of SNSs are blogs, Facebook, wikis and podcasts.

One Web-based medium that is becoming popular among educators as a pedagogical tool is blogs. Blogs are described as “online diaries; logs of thoughts, reflections; a space for individuals to write whatever they choose with an option for readers to comment on what they have read” (Eastment, 2005). The growth in the popularity of blogs as educational tools can be attributed to the benefits they provide to educators. For example, blogs are one of the easiest applications of social media because they require minimum technical skills, and blogging software is readily available. Blogs provide meaningful opportunities for collaborative learning, easy content creation, facilitation of communication, and building online communities. Blogs can be used by teachers for a variety of activities, including providing sources of valuable information, following a student’s progress, explaining class materials and engaging students in a discussion as a means to measure their understanding of what has been taught in class. More specifically, students can use blogs to express themselves by sharing their ideas with their fellow students, working cooperatively in completing group assignments, asking questions about course content and developing their language abilities.

Developing language skills, especially writing skills, in learners of English as a foreign language (EFL), is a challenge for educators. One of the main problems with primary school students (Grades 1-5) studying EFL is that they view learning a foreign language as difficult, boring and, in many cases, as their least favourite subject. Research shows that EFL blogs can keep students interested and motivated by actively engaging them in the writing process, and these interactions and sharing of their experiences increases the valid use of the target language (Gedera, 2012; Taki and Fardafshari, 2012). The purpose of this study is to investigate the use of blogs in teaching and learning EFL in a primary school (Grades 1-5) in Kuwait. The study seeks to establish whether blogs can improve students’ writing skills, promote peer learning

and change students' attitudes towards learning EFL. The study also explores the perceptions of educators towards social media tools and digital literacy in school environments.

### **Background of public education in Kuwait**

The public education system in Kuwait follows a model similar to most industrialized nations: two years of kindergarten, five years in primary school, four years in intermediate school or preparatory education and three in secondary school (UNESCO, 2011). As a country, Kuwait is divided into six districts, and public schools follow this division as well. The language of instruction is Arabic. Beginning at the primary level, schools are segregated by gender. Each teacher has a subject specialization; thus, EFL is taught by an English teacher. Prior to 2000/2001, EFL was taught from Grade 5 onwards, but now EFL is being taught from Grade 1 through Grade 12. Depending on the grade level, students in primary school have anywhere from four to five EFL classes per week. The curriculum for students in a fifth grade class focuses on more advanced sentence structure, creating paragraphs based on storylines and increasing vocabulary. Pupils have three books consisting of a textbook with lessons, a workbook with exercises and a writing book which could be equated to a journal.

Since the 1995/1996 academic year, computer education has been compulsory for all students, and students are now taught two lessons per week from grades one through twelve. Students in year five understand and use software applications, such as MS Word, Movie Maker, Paint and .Net Framework.

### **Literature review**

This review of the literature covers the following areas of research: digital literacy and educational technologies, blogs in an educational context and the use of blogs in teaching EFL.

#### *Digital literacy and educational technologies*

Along with widespread support for the use of technologies and digital media in educational systems, there is equal support for individuals to be able to use these technologies and use the tools "to ensure digital inclusion and empowerment" in 21st century communities (ALA, 2013). Digital literacy, media literacy, Information Literacy 2.0, and ICT literacy have been "linked" to many community development and education reports (Aspen Institute, 2009; Davies *et al.*, 2011; Hobbs, 2010; IMLS, 2012; P21, 2011a,2011b). Other organizations, agencies and institutions have developed standards or adopted policies to assess digital literacies. For example, in higher education, the Educational Testing Service (2008) developed *The iSkills Assessment*, and the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL, 2014) extensively revised their *Information Literary Competency Standards for Higher Education*. The ACRL (2011) also developed specific standards for teacher education. Their purpose is twofold: to provide educators with the necessary knowledge and competencies for their own professional growth and to instruct future educators how to integrate information literacy into curricula and instruction. At the international level, UNESCO (2008) adopted the *ICT Competency Standards for Teachers*. They are designed for the professional development of educators who will use technologies and digital media in their educational practices. The American Association of School Librarians (2007), in their *Standards for the 21st Century Learner*, stated that children need equitable access

to technology in a safe and responsible environment. The purpose of standards is to provide guidelines on how to develop students' information and technology skills. Similarly, Eisenberg *et al.* (2010) outlined a curriculum that included technology literacy and information literacy based on the Big6 skills approach. They stated that such capabilities must not be a laundry list of isolated skills but taught across subject areas and grade levels. Examples of how social media, such as blogs and wikis, could be integrated within the curriculum also were described.

Part of a report by the CfCT Education Trust in the UK pointed out how digital literacies could be incorporated into educational blogging (Barrs and Horrocks, 2014). The authors stated that several elements of digital literacy, such as critical thinking skills, creativity, constructing and evaluating information and using digital media effectively, could be developed as a result of students' digital writings. In a more specific context, Hockly (2012) discussed digital literacies and implications for English language teachers. She argued that one cannot separate language from digital environments and, thus, by integrating technologies into the classroom, instructors were helping learners to become digitally literate. She also noted that this could be a disadvantage for teachers who might not feel confident with technologies; therefore, she recommended that educators should take part in professional development programs to become digitally literate themselves. Similarly, Dudeney *et al.* (2013) suggested that new literacies and new technologies needed to be incorporated into English language learning. The authors stated that all lessons in English language learning should be digital activities reflecting language, technology and digital literacy development.

The Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21) (2011a) also promotes the use of technologies within the learning process as well as the necessity for individuals to have life skills. This effort "has forged alliances with key national organizations" to develop a framework for core academic subjects, one of which is world languages. Part of their philosophy regarding the language classroom is that education should be learner-centred with the teacher as the facilitator, technologies should be integrated into instruction to provide diverse learning strategies and to use language beyond the classroom. Information, media and technology skills are also one of the four twenty-first-century student outcomes, and, within the context of teaching foreign languages, this report maps how these skills can be interwoven within a foreign language curriculum (P21, 2011b).

#### *Blogs in an educational context – sources of information*

Recent literature demonstrates that blogs are being recognized in a wide range of disciplines as resources for information sharing and use. Examples include the field of library and information science (LIS) (Bar-Ilan, 2005; Eades, 2011; Hernandez and Dominguez, 2010; Lietzau and Helgren, 2011), the business sector (Habermann, 2005; O'Connor, 2013), the healthcare industry (Reed *et al.*, 2013), politics (De Zuniga and Puig-I-Abril, 2009; Leccese, 2009) and legal systems (Maxwell, 2008). Several studies have also identified that information disseminated and circulated in online communities, particularly blogs, have a significant impact on educational and scholarly practices (Deitering and Gronemyer, 2011; Gruzd and Goertzen, 2013; Kjellberg, 2009; Maron and Smith, 2008; Martindale and Wiley, 2005). According to Kim *et al.* (2011), social media tools have become increasingly popular among college students as alternative sources for information. The authors surveyed 446 undergraduate students

to determine what types of social media were used and for what purpose. Wikipedia (98 per cent) and social networks (97 per cent) were the most widely used by the students, while 32 per cent of the students used blogs as an information source for finding or acquiring information for course-related activities.

### *Class blogs*

Blogs have emerged as a pedagogical approach to learning. The theoretical framework guiding their development is rooted in social constructionism which emphasizes the importance of the learner being actively involved in the learning process (Duffy and Orrill, 2004). The constructionist approach to blogging underscores student-centred instruction (Bobish, 2010), social interaction and shared responsibility (Ferdig, 2007) and the understanding that knowledge is constructed and used for developing ideas collaboratively with peers and teachers (Jones and Brader-Araje, 2002). Campbell (2003) proposed three types of blogs used in the teaching/learning process: tutor blog, class blog and learner blog. The *tutor blog* is written by the teacher and contains the syllabus, course information, homework and assignments. Students are not allowed to write comments to the teacher's posts in the tutor blog. The *class blog* is a discussion space between teacher and students where students can write about themes discussed in the class. The class blog gives students more freedom and involvement than the tutor blog. The *learner blog* is set up and monitored by the teacher. The teacher can assign each student to an individual blog and supervise all blogs, which gives students an open space to write and share thoughts with their peers, and comment on other students' blogs. Dowling (2013) demonstrated how blogs were used to allow students to share and publish learner-generated content (LGC). With the use of blogs, LGC focuses on a wider audience who can exchange ideas and assess and evaluate their peers' work. The underlying premise for LGC in blogging is to present, practice, produce and publish. Publishing is the key to the model which is to increase student motivation, help students acquire twenty-first century skills and create learning resources for fellow students. Glogowsky (2008) opined that blogging is about "meaningful, thoughtful engagement with ideas", not just writing and reading responses.

There are a number of applications in the K-12 learning environment where blogs have been used. Clyde (2005) pointed out that educational blogs have been used as sources of information for instructional activities, for curriculum development, for maintaining connections within the school community and for creating blogs as student-centred learning projects. Hauser (2009) added that blogs facilitate knowledge sharing between students, teachers and parents, as well as being used as a source of professional development for educators. These applications were endorsed by Richardson (2010) who further wrote that blogs in classrooms were being used as class portals, for knowledge management, as sources of information and as a new writing genre referred to as connective writing. *Connective writing* is a form of communication that forces bloggers to read carefully and critically, and demands clarity and cohesiveness in language construction because "we write not just for communication but to connect with others who can potentially teach us more" (Richardson, 2010, p. 28). Research by Barrs and Horrocks (2014) compared students' writing on blogs to regular school writing on paper. Twelve primary school students (Grades 3, 4 and 6) were selected from four classes in three London schools to participate in the study. Teachers in each class chose their own topics for discussion; therefore, topics could range from

comments on a book to providing information about a science assignment. The end results were different for each class; however, some common themes appeared: teacher support was imperative, students were enthusiastic about writing, improved student-teacher relationships, increased student engagement in writing and some of the best writing happened within a cross-disciplinary context.

A study conducted by [Morgan \(2012\)](#), focused on a Grade 6 (11-12 year olds) literature class in Australia. The purpose of the blogging project was to have students respond to the books they were reading. The authors found that 72 per cent of the blogs showed evidence that students were searching and using information from other Web sources, exhibited higher order thinking skills, became more independent as the project continued and increased their visual literacy and textual literacy.

### *Blogs in teaching English as a foreign language*

The majority of research appears to identify the pedagogical benefits of using blogs in teaching EFL to undergraduate students. In these studies, there was also a general consensus that, in addition to the positive affect that blogs had on students' academic achievement in developing language skills ([Fageeh, 2011](#); [Qi-Yuan, 2013](#)), blogs also improved students critical thinking abilities ([Grami, 2012](#); [Namvar et al., 2011](#)), increased their motivation ([Fageeh, 2011](#)) and provided encouragement to become more independent, confident and responsible learners of EFL ([Blackstone et al., 2007](#); [Pinkman, 2005](#)).

[Wu and Wu \(2011\)](#) investigated the efficacy of applying blogs in teaching reading and writing skills to EFL learners. Forty-nine first-year university students from Southern Taiwan were divided into ten groups and responded as a group to regular readings posted on the blog by their instructor. Students also commented on the reflections produced by other groups. Participants were also administered a pre-blogging and post-blogging survey regarding their knowledge and perceptions about blogs. The authors reported that most students (82 per cent) felt that reading blogs improved their reading skills, and 63 per cent believed that their writing skills were enhanced. Students thought that their grammar, sentence structure and vocabulary improved; their reading comprehension was enhanced, and they could write in English more fluently.

In another study, [Lin et al. \(2014\)](#) investigated the effects of blogging as an approach to journal writing in a university EFL class in Taiwan. Students were divided into two groups. The experimental group was required to blog daily, while the control group kept a more traditional journal using pen-and-paper. At the end of the 16-week period, both groups were tested through a writing test and a questionnaire. The authors found that there was a significant difference between the two groups in terms of their writing performance. The experimental group significantly outperformed the control group in writing quality. Although students in both groups exhibited positive attitudes about journal writing, there was a significant difference between the two groups on the subject of students' anxiety towards writing. The experimental group experienced significantly less anxiety than the control group. The research also indicated that the use of blogs had a positive effect on learner perceptions and attitudes towards learning a second language.

[Aljumah \(2012\)](#) surveyed 35 students enrolled in an entry-level English writing course in a Saudi Arabian university. He reported that students found sharing their

work in an online collaborative environment made them more comfortable and increased their interest and motivation to write and share information within that community. *Bakar et al. (2010)* discovered that blogging helped EFL students become more self-confident, increased their feelings as independent learners and reduced their anxiety when learning and using English among their peers. Findings from other studies showed that blogs encouraged students to take responsibility for their work because they understood that their writing was a reflection of themselves, and that they were sharing information with their peers (*Daskalogiannaki, 2012; Tekinarlan, 2008*). Similarly, *Trajtemberg and Yiakoumetti (2011)* noted that when students interacted in a collaborative space, traits such as self-expression and self-evaluation were promoted. Students were found to be more aware and conscientious when expressing themselves which lead to a progressive change in the extent and purpose of their writing.

*Daskalogiannaki (2012)* assessed the blogging activities of 12 Greek junior high school students in an EFL course over a four-month period. It was found that the class blog improved students' writing, cognitive and communication skills. Also, the relaxing, interactive environment increased student motivation and created a venue for self-confidence and independent learning. The study concluded by stating that blogs could be highly effective if students received specific instructions and teacher feedback, schools had proper information technology support and teachers were provided appropriate training.

Few studies have explored the impact of blogs on EFL learners in Grades 1-5. *Swanson and Early (2009)* provided an overview of blog development for the foreign language classroom. In one section, the authors provided examples on how elementary foreign language teachers could establish and monitor blogs. Specifically, they identified what software to use, how to structure the blog for content such as class assignments and course information and what blog features as well as what type of information to use. Another study created "a blog-mediated writing curriculum" for second grade students who were second language (L2) learners of English (*Gebhard et al., 2011*). Their aim was to explore written literacy practices and abilities of L2 learners. During the course of 22 months, students were given various writing assignments. Several patterns emerged: the students' written work developed into more complex grammatical constructions, increased command of vocabulary and longer posts. Another pattern was how students responded to each other's posts. At the beginning of the study, students were posting very short generic responses, while further into the blogging project the posting feedback was more varied, substantive and subject specific.

This literature review has shown that, although there are a number of studies about the use of blogs as an educational tool for undergraduate students, very little research has been conducted regarding primary school students, and, most certainly, there is a paucity of literature on the impact of blogs on EFL learners. *Barrs and Horrocks (2014)* and *Richardson (2010)* concurred with this, and *Richardson (2010, p. 27)* wrote that "research on the effects of Weblogs on K-12 students is still in its infancy". This research aims to fill part of the gap by investigating whether primary students' participation in blogging in an EFL class encourages communication, interaction and collaboration among students, thus improving their writing skills and increasing their motivation to learn. It is hoped that the results of this study will inspire more blended-learning pedagogies in school communities, especially among Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)

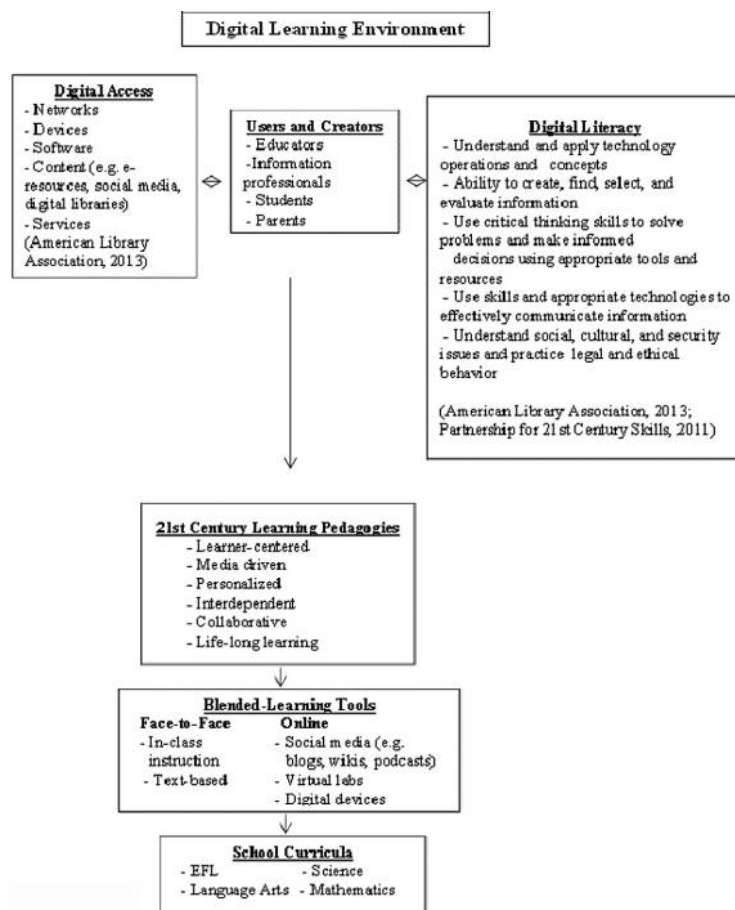


countries. Such studies are particularly important to GCC countries where English is taught as a foreign language. In addition, by bringing to light the issues and challenges educators face, the relevant local and regional organizations, governing bodies and educational institutions can address the concerns identified in the study. Finally, based on the review of the literature, a conceptual model evolved that guided this study. Figure 1 shows the different aspects of a digital learning environment along with examples of supporting characteristics.

### The purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of using blogs in teaching EFL to primary students in Kuwait. A second area of research explores educators' perceptions of social media tools and digital literacy in teaching and learning environments as well as challenges encountered. Specifically, this study addresses the following objectives:

- to investigate the impact of blogs on students writing skills, such as grammar, vocabulary and spelling;



**Figure 1.**  
Digital learning  
environment model

- to investigate whether blogs improve student motivation towards learning EFL;
- to determine student attitudes and perceptions concerning the use of blogs in learning EFL;
- to determine how educators' perceive the use of blogs and other types of social media tools in school environments;
- to explore the preparedness of educators and students in a digital environment; and
- to identify the challenges and needs of educators and students in using social media in an educational context.

### Definitions

For the purposes of this study, the following definitions are proposed.

#### *Digital content*

"Products available in digital form. It typically refers to music, information, and images that are available for download or distribution on electronic media" ([PC Magazine Encyclopedia, 2015](#)). Specific examples include social media, e-journals, e-books and websites.

#### *Digital literacy*

Digital literacy is the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, understand, evaluate, create, and communicate digital information, an ability that requires both cognitive and technical skills ([ALA, 2013](#)).

#### *Educators*

Any individual involved in the development and practice of education ([Wikipedia, 2013](#)). This includes, for example, teachers, head teachers, supervisors, school principals, vice-principals and academics.

#### *Information professionals*

A generic term for any individual who manages and disseminates information resources and services and applies information tools and technologies ([SLA, 2003](#)). This includes, for example, librarians, knowledge managers, information systems specialists, Web developers, record managers, digital archivists and teacher-librarians.

### Methodology

The researchers adopted a three-step approach to collect both qualitative and quantitative data for this study.

#### *Class blog*

First, students in a Grade 5 EFL class in an elementary girls' school in Kuwait were selected to participate on the class blog. This class was selected because one of the researchers is a teacher in the school; her proximity to the school made it easier to monitor and have access to the students on a regular basis. Participation was voluntary and out of an EFL class of 30 students, 23 students volunteered. One of the researchers became the blog moderator and instructed the students on how to create a blog and

publish posts. WordPress, a free publishing platform with user-friendly blogging functions, was chosen for the class project. The project was conducted as an in- and out-of-class exercise. The moderator met with students during one EFL class period a week for one semester, students were assigned a task, asked to post once on the blog during class and were encouraged to carry out their blogging activities at home. Examples of assigned tasks were:

- curriculum-related activities;
- writing letters to friends;
- describing travelling experiences; and
- watching a video and writing about it – videos included both educational and animated stories such as fairy tales.

Blog postings were followed for 12 weeks. One of the methods used to collect the data was the participant observation method. This method allows the researcher to learn about daily activities, interactions and events of the participants engaged in the study (Dewalt and Dewalt, 2010). These observations are normally divided into two major categories: inside class observation notes and casual conversations/informal interview notes (Bernard, 2011). The moderator observed the behaviour of the students while they were working on their blogs during the class session and recorded her observations. Notes were also recorded regarding conversations with students while they were involved in various blogging activities in the classroom. The post content was analysed each week based on the following criteria: number of participating students, grammar and spelling mistakes, number of posts and number of sentences. Finally, a comparative analysis of weeks three and twelve was conducted to show the writing progress of the students.

#### *Survey instrument*

A survey instrument was developed based on sample questionnaires found in the literature (Aljumah, 2012; Baker *et al.*, 2012; Blackstone *et al.*, 2007). The instrument seeks to identify student attitudes and perceptions regarding blogging. The instrument was pilot-tested on a sample of EFL 5th graders. At the end of the semester, the questionnaire was distributed in a structured environment to the 23 students who participated in the blogging exercise. There were 38 statements using a three-point Likert-type scale (1 = Yes, 2 = No and 3 = I don't know) to solicit student feedback in four areas: familiarity with technology (4 statements), attitudes and perceptions regarding the use of blogs (16 statements), effectiveness of blogging in developing their writing skills (12 statements) and the effect of blogs on student motivation (6 statements). SurveyMonkey.com was used to analyse the data.

#### *Focus groups*

Third, focus groups were conducted to provide more in-depth data about educators' perceptions and views regarding: the use of blogs and other social media in educational practices, digital literacy and obstacles and challenges encountered. The data collection consisted of four focus groups: two initial and two follow-up. There were 21 participants from the Kuwaiti public educational sector, with each group ranging from four to ten educators. Each session lasted for approximately 90 minutes and either one or both of

the researchers moderated each session. Sessions were recorded using a digital recording app on a mobile phone after which the recordings were transcribed and collated into themes.

Educators were given several minutes to review each question and then each participant would share her response with the group followed by a short discussion. The following is an example of the open-ended questions used to stimulate discussion:

- Q1. HOW would the use of blogs improve the English language skills of students?
- Q2. How do you perceive the use of social media tools for educational activities?
- Q3. Can you identify any student problems that could have an impact on student learning?
- Q4. What problems do you encounter when trying to implement technologies in educational activities?
- Q5. What types of resources, skills and knowledge do you need to teach in a digital environment?

## Results

### *Profile of participants*

*Student profile.* The students were from a fifth grade EFL class in a public elementary school for girls in Kuwait. Twenty-three students volunteered for the study from a class of 30 students. They ranged in age from 10 to 11 years.

*Educator profile.* All 21 participants were female having 4 to 17 years' experience in teaching EFL. Nineteen participants had a bachelor's degree in education with a major in English, and two had a bachelor's degree in English literature. Two participants had a master's degree. The current positions of the participants are 11 ESL teachers, seven head-teachers of EFL departments, two EFL supervisors and one primary school vice-principal.

### *Student background with technology*

All students had used the internet and 18 (78.3 per cent) used e-mail. Previous experience with social media included Instagram ( $n = 19$ , 82.6 per cent) and Twitter ( $n = 9$ ; 39.1 per cent), and four students (17.4 per cent) had already experienced blogs prior to the class project. When accessing the Web, the vast majority of students ( $n = 20$ , 87.0 per cent) had used both Arabic and English sites, two students (8.7 per cent) used only Arabic sites and one student (4.3 per cent) had used only English websites. Almost all students ( $n = 22$ , 95.0 per cent) had the use of iPads at home, followed by eight students (34.8 per cent) who had their own computer and four (18.2 per cent) who owned smartphones. These devices were used when students were engaged in the blogging project from home. Almost two-thirds of the students ( $n = 14$ , 60.9 per cent) blogged outside of class time 5-7 times a week, four students (17.4 per cent) blogged three times a week, three students (13 per cent) never blogged outside of class time and two students (8.7 per cent) did not respond.

### *Class blog*

Although 23 students volunteered to participate in the class blog, it was not expected from all students to post every week because it was found that there was regular student

absenteeism. At the beginning of the project, students were apprehensive as to the role and purpose of the class blog. Students believed that it would require extra work, which it did, but once they became more comfortable, their enthusiasm was quite obvious. Also, there was some confusion as some students who did not have e-mail accounts and students also had difficulty registering their user names, thus preventing them from posting or accessing the class blog. The first two weeks, therefore, were used to introduce the class blog, establish accounts and teach students how to post, insert photos and modify text. Once these issues were resolved, by Week 3, all students were able to blog. To get students interested and familiarized with blogs, the first blogging exercise instructed students to write about themselves as if they were writing in their diary. Responses and comments were limited, mostly two and three word phrases which was to be expected. In Week 4, the moderator announced the award of the “best writer online certificate” which was to be given at the end of each week to those who exhibited more than a basic interest in writing. It was observed that the online certificate motivated students to write more and actually started a sort of competition among students to see who could record the most posts. By Week 5, the weekly number of bloggers had almost doubled. During Weeks 5 through 12, the moderator uploaded a video each week, with some of the videos being animated stories for children and some being animated educational videos that developed vocabulary and taught English grammar. It was observed that there was more interaction among students when they were posting comments about the videos. Also, students showed more fluency in their writing and in their ability to formulate ideas. During this period, there was an increase in active participation and, by Week 8, students began suggesting which videos they would like uploaded to the blog.

The moderator observed that all students liked receiving feedback. Most of them preferred immediate feedback and sought the opinions, ideas and corrective measures from the moderator. For example, students wanted the moderator to comment on each of their posts even if they posted more than five comments per day and expressed disappointment if the moderator did not provide immediate feedback. It was observed that spelling and grammar mistakes when corrected had a positive influence on students’ future blogging. Students commented that moderator feedback showed that the teacher cared about their language development and was interested in their thoughts and ideas. Students also responded well when the moderator used emoji which injected a sense of fun and wit into the blogging activities. A final observation was that a few students were copying their classmates’ posts or getting help from home. After a careful conversation with them, this phenomenon stopped.

To further assess the development of the students’ writing skills, a quantitative analysis of the posts was conducted. There were ten main blogs opened as lessons for discussion for the students resulting in 732 blog entries with a total number of 739 sentences. Students went from writing two words to writing full sentences using proper grammar, increased vocabulary and fewer spelling mistakes. As shown in [Table I](#), a comparison between the first blogging session (Week 3) and the last blogging session (Week 12) showed that the number of bloggers grew dramatically, almost 500 per cent. Similarly, the average number of sentences per student was 4 in Week 3 and 7.6 by Week 12, an increase of almost 190 per cent. In conjunction with the increase in the number of sentences being constructed, students also showed an improvement in their sentence structure, such as grammar and their ability to spell words correctly.

EL  
34,3*Students' attitudes and perceptions about the blogging project*

This section of the study analyses the attitudes and perceptions of the 23 students who participated in the blogging project and is divided into three areas: general perceptions, writing skills and the degree of motivation.

534

*General blogging attitudes and perceptions*

Sixteen statements identified students' general attitudes and perceptions as a result of their blogging project. All participants responded positively to eight statements which are summarized below:

- blogging was not difficult, nor a waste of their time;
- excited when watching video segments and writing about them, but preferred segments non-course related;
- liked when the teachers made comments on their posts, and also classmates; and
- preferred writing on the blog rather than in class, and wished to use blogs for other classes.

Most students ( $n = 22$ , 95.7 per cent) found blogging fun and interesting, not boring, a positive learning experience, and would like to continue blogging. Students felt that blogging was a good way to learn English and were excited to write diaries and about issues outside of class. Even though all students liked their classmates' comments on their posts, when it came to reading their classmates' posts, only 65.2 per cent ( $n = 15$ ) liked reading the posts, while 26.1 per cent ( $n = 6$ ) did not like to read the posts of others and 8.7 per cent ( $n = 2$ ) responded "I don't know".

*Students' writing skills*

A series of 12 statements referred to the effectiveness of using blogs to enhance writing skills. As illustrated in Table II, the findings show that the overall attitude of the students towards developing their EFL writing skills was positive. All students felt that blogging gave them the opportunity to develop their vocabulary, they felt that their writing on a blog was better than writing in a journal during class time, and they learned from their teacher's comments regarding their spelling and grammar mistakes. Moreover, 22 students (95.7 per cent) added that their English grammar had improved, and that they were less inhibited when writing on a blog. As a result of blogging, 21 students (91.3 per cent) felt that their ability to write in the English language had improved. Even though almost half of the students ( $n = 10$ , 43.5 per cent) stated that they did not worry about their mistakes, almost all ( $n = 22$ , 95.7 per cent) checked their work before posting their writings. The opposite was true when it came to checking their

**Table I.**

Comparison of students' blogging

Week of project	No. of participating students	Total no. of posts	Total no. of sentences	No. of students with grammar mistakes $n$ (%)	No. of students with spelling mistakes $n$ (%)
3	4	13	16	2 (50.0)	3 (75.0)
12	19	76	145	7 (36.8)	9 (47.4)

Statement	Students' responses to statements (N = 23)		
	Yes <i>n</i> (%)	No <i>n</i> (%)	I don't know <i>n</i> (%)
I like writing in general	19 (82.6)	2 (8.7)	2 (8.7)
I like writing on the blog	21 (91.3)	2 (8.7)	
I have improved my writing skills since I began blogging	21 (91.3)	2 (8.7)	
In general, I feel that my English grammar has improved since I began blogging	22 (95.7)		1 (4.3)
I learned more new words since I began blogging	23 (100)		
I always check my sentences before I post my writings on the blogs	21 (91.3)	1 (4.3)	1 (4.3)*
I don't like to check my writing when I write on paper	22 (95.7)	1 (4.3)	
I don't worry about mistakes when I write on the blog	10 (43.5)	7 (30.4)	6 (26.1)
I feel that my writing is better when writing on the blog than writing on paper in class	23 (100)		
I feel freer to write on the blog than in class	22 (95.7)	1 (4.3)	
Teacher comments on my posts helped me find my mistakes and correct them	23 (100)		
Teacher's comments on my blog were useless. It didn't help me with my spelling/grammatical mistakes	23 (100)		

**Table II.**  
Students' responses  
to statements  
regarding their  
writing skills

writing in their journals, and an equal number of students did not like to check their journal writing which could result in more misspelled words and grammatical mistakes.

### *Student motivation*

Six statements addressed students' motivation. When it came to blogging while learning EFL, all 23 students confirmed that the following statements motivated them to participate:

- Reading others' posts on the blog motivates me to write better posts;
- I feel excited that others read my posts; and
- Teacher comments on my posts motivate me to write more.

A similar statement referring to students' posting comments showed that almost all students ( $n = 21, 91.3$  per cent) were motivated by other students comments, one student (4.3 per cent) said "no", and one student (4.3 per cent) responded "I don't know". When asked if "the online certificate motivates me to write better", 21 students (91.3 per cent) said "yes", and the remaining two students said "no" (4.3 per cent) and "I don't know" (4.3 per cent), respectively. One final statement related to motivation asked the students whether they felt embarrassed when others read their posts. Approximately two-thirds ( $n = 15, 65.2$  per cent) did not feel embarrassed while eight students (34.8 per cent) were embarrassed.

*Educators focus groups*

The focus group data was analysed from a thematic perspective. Four themes emerged and are reported in the following sections. Comments from participants have been included to elaborate on the points being stated.

*Education and social media*

Although social media tools are not widely used by educators for educational activities, all participants agreed social media, such as blogs, podcasts, wikis, social networks, micro-blogging and Instagram, should be applied. The usage of such tools was found to be sporadic depending on the school environment; however, all educators further stated that “although the ministry encourages the use of social media, we are not given enough time to prepare lessons”, and normally “we have to supply our own equipment like iPads, laptops, and data shows”, and there are not “enough rewards” or incentives to use technology. Participants also stated that some educators are using Facebook, Twitter and Instagram but only to communicate with parents and students, to post assignments or to verify Ministry events.

When it came to educators’ perceptions of how the use of social media in educational practices would impact students, all participants voiced several positive points. For example, “having more interaction and communication with students”, “encourage creativity”, “raise self-esteem”, “improve all their skills”, “increase motivation” and “they will be interested to do something at home”. When it came to the ability of students to use social media, all participants confirmed that “most know more than the teachers” and students are “excited to use these tools”. One participant said “you have to use media that students and parents are interested in”.

*Blogs*

When discussing the use of blogs in educational practices, all participants agreed that the most challenging language skill that students have is writing, “they can read and comprehend but to produce a correct full sentence is a challenge to them”. Further discussion showed that the participants believed that the use of blogs for EFL learners is suitable for grades four and above and would “improve writing skills”, “motivate students to use the language”, “help them express themselves”, “improve critical thinking skills”, “increase vocabulary”, “improve reading skills”, “encourage independence” and “improve oral fluency”. Although in agreement about the benefits of blogs for EFL learners, one participant was in disagreement that blogs should be used in primary grades; she stated that “students are not responsible enough and too young to understand” the consequences of their actions.

*Information use and needs of educators*

The majority of the participants agreed that there is a genuine lack of access to information when it comes to teaching and the learning process. They want access to e-resources and services, they want to be part of “e-learning projects”, and they want to be able to have “access to online teaching materials”. As one participant elaborated, “we realize the value of libraries” and “we want digital libraries, e-libraries, online libraries, but unfortunately they are not available”. Interestingly, they primarily depended on “Google” and “Wikipedia” to gather information. This led to a discussion on how they search for and evaluate information. All of the participants acknowledged that they do not use search techniques or strategies but typically, “just type in the whole



sentence". Similarly, their proficiency in evaluating information is limited and unsystematic. They were surprised and pleased when it was pointed out to them how to perform Boolean searching, truncation, field searching and that by checking a site for authority, currency, or relevance can help in determining a better document.

When asked how they could use blogs as sources of information, one participant responded that "educational blogs are the best, because people write their own experiences". Such experiences help in "professional development" or learning about "current trends in education". Most participants believed that blogs provide "relevant information" for preparing reports, workshops and exams; for finding "opposing points of view" on various educational or curriculum-related topics, or for "creating and maintaining learning projects". It was noted in the discussion that some participants at times got confused between information found on a website or on social media sites, such as blogs.

### *Technology concerns*

When it came to implementing technology-related projects, participants seemed to be divided concerning such issues as training, hardware and connectivity. The outcome of the discussion indicated that perceptions varied depending on which school district and/or school administration determined the amount and type of hardware available, the speed and accessibility to the internet, and the level of technical support provided. It was also pointed out that students do not always have access to technology at home depending on their family background. Interestingly, this led to a discussion about security issues where the participants raised concerns regarding the security of the school portals and/or ministry websites. One participant stated that "the more technology you use increases the chance for hackers to access your information and could be used incorrectly or in an improper manner".

There was a general consensus, however, on the level of censorship that is enforced by the educational governing body. There are certain restrictions imposed on the usage of the internet by higher level administrators due to the sensitive nature of the amount of information available, but at the same time, "teachers are not made aware of the ministry's policies" in a timely manner which can present problems between educators, students and parents. A final comment made by the participants was that they want to use more technology and they gave as an example that they "need integration between using iPads and traditional methods of teaching for class activities", but would also like to see more concrete ideas on how to implement social media into the curricula.

### *Ethical concerns*

Educators stated that students lack digital literacy skills, such as having difficulty determining what information is needed, and how to locate and evaluate information. This leads students to "copy and paste everything". They see copyright issues as problematic for both students and teachers and are not sure how to control plagiarism or teach students the ramifications of plagiarism. Another concern is that information is easily accessible and "students believe everything they read on the Internet, whether real, true, or valid". Students do not think before they repeat information because they do not have the skills to think critically or make wise or responsible judgments about "information, pictures, [and] videos".

When using social media tools, especially blogs, educators are uneasy that students might “access inappropriate materials” or “post nasty comments”. There are privacy issues as well, one participant voicing her concern that there are social implications, for example, posting personal information or photographs “that could make their way to the Internet”. The subject was raised “how are you going to monitor it”, should there be “blog control techniques”, and some participants stated that “some parents won’t allow it [blogs] unless under supervision”.

### Discussion

Three major outcomes emerged as a result of the study. First, the research carried out shows that blogging encourages constructive and effective exchanges when teaching EFL. Student improvement in writing skills, spelling, vocabulary and their positive attitudes towards blogging can be attributed to several elements that became apparent throughout this study. These elements characterize blogging as being:

- *Personal*: Self-expressive, creative, feeling more free to write, become more independent and building self-confidence.
- *Participatory*: Interaction with peers and teachers, peer feedback and teacher feedback, communication and community learning.
- *Productive*: User-friendly, feel the need to write more, compete with other students, more motivated and used as a learning tool outside of class.

These findings are similar to several studies that emphasized the pedagogical effectiveness of blogs in teaching EFL at the college level (Bakar *et al.*, 2010; Blackstone *et al.*, 2007; Morgan, 2012; Wu and Wu, 2011) and at the primary school level (Gebhard *et al.*, 2011; Swanson and Early, 2009).

Blogging is also a non-traditional means of learning. Given that this generation of students is growing up in digital environments and most have access to smartphones, iPads, laptops and similar devices, this study found that the students thrived in their EFL blogging activities. In fact, students preferred writing online than in the typical writing journal. An added value was that students continued to blog throughout the day which emphasized that students were actively engaged after school hours.

Second, the findings show that educators use information when they plan curricula, look for new pedagogical methods, build resource collections or for professional development. They appreciate the effectiveness and value of information in learning environments. These educators are enthusiastic, energetic and dedicated professionals who are trying to make a difference in improving the EFL skills of students, yet are hindered by several factors. These factors are prominent in the focus group discussions and indicative of the frustration and disillusionment educators sometimes encounter because there is either no access to digital content or they are not aware of the availability of such content. The teachers depend primarily on Wikipedia and Google searches to provide information for curriculum materials and instructional activities which limits their ability in acquiring the knowledge and skills they need to bring these practices to the classroom. This group of educators prefers a digital environment where digital scholarly resources, such as e-journals, blogs, discussion forums, professional and scholarly hubs, bibliographic databases, e-books and digital libraries, are readily available and easily accessible. This finding parallels a report by Maron and Smith (2008) who identified similar digital resources and found that they are gaining

widespread acceptance as relevant, scientific sources of information in the humanities, social sciences and science disciplines.

In tangent with the lack of availability and accessibility to digital content, educators do not know how to create appropriate search strategies that could help in making discerning choices about information. Most of the time, searches are done randomly, and there is no methodical structure to develop and clarify the information need. In addition, they do not know how to critically evaluate information, make relevant judgments or determine the efficiency of information. This result indicates that there is a lack of digital literacy competencies that can obstruct an educator's capacity to effectively engage with information leading to disinformation and misinformation.

Similarly, the findings led to several other concerns that educators have about students including that they use readily available e-resources, perform quick searches and cannot synthesize information. Furthermore, their ability to evaluate sources for relevance and reliability is deficient, resulting in students copying and pasting a lot. Similarly, Tekinarslan (2008) found that most blogging students needed help in searching, evaluating and using information. This implies that educators assume that students should either possess these competencies or will acquire them as needed. This suggests that educators require greater familiarity with the theory and practices of digital literacy skills, more clarity as to where the responsibility lies and how students can acquire these skills.

Finally, study findings indicate that more technology is not necessarily the answer. Overall, teachers, supervisors and school administrators are working independently, casually using different social media tools and digital devices. There is no doubt that the technology is there, that most educators understand technology operations and concepts and want to apply blended-learning practices. However, what seems to be happening is a mixed sense of direction, a communication problem, a gap in educators' information-seeking abilities and the expectation of more cooperation from educational governing bodies. These outcomes have implications for educators, students and information professionals in developing and implementing educational programs and curricula that are conducive for twenty-first century learners.

#### *Implications for educators and students*

There is a need for policymaking that encompasses several dimensions such as:

- implementing a unified technology plan;
- encouraging teacher creativity and motivation by providing incentives, recognizing achievements and soliciting teacher and student input;
- adopting blended learning methods; and
- applying awareness-raising activities (e.g. systematic notification of changes in educational policies and procedures).

Teacher feedback also is extremely important as students, especially primary students, are constantly looking for acknowledgement of accomplishments. This became particularly noticeable in this study. Teacher comments and peer interactions were highly motivational for students. This finding is consistent with several other studies reporting similar observations (Aljumah, 2012; Ozkan, 2011; Trajtemberg and Yiakoumetti, 2011). Consequently, it is important for teachers and administrators who

are going to implement blogging projects to be aware that such tasks are time-consuming and require sufficient support from educational governing bodies. It is also important for primary students to be offered rewards when writing and posting comments, as this has a motivational effect, especially if blogging activities are considered as extra-curricular. It is equally important that the type of content posted on blogs should relate to the school curriculum but should also be inviting to students, such as the use of multimedia content to engage students. Blogs or other types of social media tools should be implemented in planned stages. As it is shown to be successful in teaching EFL, blogging could be introduced in Arabic language courses, as Arabic is the language of instruction or in programs that teach the French language. This applies to other subjects as well.

More energy should be devoted to digital literacy initiatives. One immediate course of action to resolve the lack of digital literacy competencies among educators would be to create and implement professional learning opportunities in the form of pre-service and in-service courses, webinars or tutorials. A longer term goal would be to reform university curricula and include digital literacy courses in teacher education and LIS programs. This needs to take place on two levels: first, future teachers need to become proficient in digital literacies for their own success, and, second, they need to learn how to teach future students to become digitally literate. Latham *et al.* (2013) proposed several strategies for collaboration between education and LIS programs, such as fieldwork, specific courses targeting twenty-first century skills and continuing education. Hobbs (2010) recommended that teacher education programs need to build interdisciplinary bridges providing students with co-learning opportunities.

In an effort to develop K-12 students' digital literacy competencies, both traditional and non-conventional approaches are suggested:

- use posters, digital media, short lectures and activities to introduce digital literacy concepts;
- purchase digital toolkits that provide information, tools, ideas, models and lessons for teachers on how to teach individual competencies of digital literacy;
- use existing interactive programs such as *Globaloria* and *Kids Voting* where students are not just taught with digital tools but taught how to use media and technology (Hobbs, 2010); and
- more comprehensive efforts would be to follow examples such as the Common Core Initiative in American education (Bartow, 2012) and the Futurelab handbook in British education (Hague and Payton, 2010) by embedding digital literacy education across all curricula; or at least in English language programs (Dudney *et al.*, 2013).

Another consideration to be addressed is technology-use behaviours. Written ethical practices need to be adopted so educators and students can be taught through digital literacy programs, workshops or infused in school curricula. Summarized below are basic areas to be included:

- understands and employs respect for oneself, as well as others' backgrounds and ideas;
- understands and applies appropriate behaviour if a content-related problem occurs;

- understands and avoids violation of intellectual property and copyright laws, local internet use and institutional policies; and
- understands and demonstrates how to protect one's privacy and adopt security precautions to guarantee safety (ACRL, 2000; Richardson, 2010; Swanson and Early, 2009).

### *Implications for information professionals*

Information professionals recognize the need to reach out to educational practitioners and school leaders to forge partnerships in student learning through teacher and information professional collaboration. This can be accomplished in a number of ways:

- create a school environment that encourages teamwork;
- make the school media centre a focal point for instructional activities for the school community;
- design a workspace within the media centre for a computer lab;
- create an educational blog for information professionals and teachers that promotes open discussion and interaction of information and ideas for coordinating learning projects;
- create instructional units and lessons that can be taught by the information professional or by collaboration between teacher and information professional;
- engage students in active learning through technology by having students design and present their own ideas through videos, wikis and podcasts, or create their own digital products, such as building a classroom search engine, creating a collaborative notes page or creating a classroom Pinterest page; and
- design student learning centres with curriculum-related activities.

Information professionals must take responsibility to make online digital literacy instruction available. Tuition sources can be basic tutorials, such as how to access and critically evaluate information, through to more complicated instruction on how to incorporate Web technologies into teaching and learning. In addition, information professionals must create school library media centres that provide a hub for the school community to have equitable access to information, educational resources in digital formats, digital libraries and technology. This premise is endorsed by the [USA Department of Education \(2010, p. xviii\)](#) which states that stakeholders in educational systems must:

[...] expand opportunities for educators to have access to technology-based content, resources, and tools where and when they need them [...] that inspire them to provide more engaging and effective learning opportunities for each and every student.

Furthermore, information professionals need to use social media tools for public relations purposes, to keep classroom teachers and administrators informed about library events and to facilitate collective teaching tasks. Also, they can benefit from the numerous readily available apps that can increase organization and productivity, such as the LanSchool Teacher's Assistant for iOS or Keynote, or make use of the multitude of available apps, such as MeeGenius and International Children's Digital Library, that provide access to hundreds of books. Finally, create easily accessible and downloadable

library apps for educators, students and parents that allow for the use of books, games and activities in the classroom, on the playground, and at home.

### Conclusion and recommendations

The mixed-methodology of gathering data from students' blogs, as well as the responses given by students in a questionnaire and focus groups conducted with educators, provides a multi-dimensional view of using blogs for teaching and learning EFL, as well as highlights the technology and information needs of educators and students. In particular, this research makes a positive contribution to the small body of literature that shows non-traditional pedagogical approaches, such as using social media, does impact positively on the learning potential of primary school students.

This study also draws attention to the growing conviction that digital literacy skills are imperative for educators and students to be productive in democratic digital societies. This concurs with the many reports and studies which state that digital literacy is a basic requirement for creating a "digitally inclusive community" (ALA, 2013; Aspen Institute, 2009; IMLS, 2012; P21, 2011a). It should be noted, however, that the language of instruction in Kuwaiti public schools is Arabic. As such, digital literacy programmes require accessibility to digital content in Arabic. Subsequently, it is recommended that academic and school information professionals take the lead to work with governing bodies, such as government ministries, academic institutions, the publishing industry and the private sector, to develop and implement policies for:

- intensifying the translation of information/knowledge content into Arabic;
- strengthening the collection of e-resources, such as e-books and e-journals, in Arabic; and
- expanding access to Arabic digital content on the Web.

Furthermore, digital media and digital devices are not the catalyst that will solve educational problems but rather powerful tools that together with other types of pedagogical practices can have a positive impact on teaching and learning EFL. Unless educators and information professionals organize, plan, implement and follow through on their policies and strategies, access to the latest technology alone will not create a digital learning environment nor will it produce effective long-term learning outcomes.

These findings propose a number of possible areas for further investigation. It is suggested that more research needs to be conducted on the efficacy of using social media to teach EFL within the K-12 context as well as across other subject areas. It is recommended, however, that when replicating the blogging project several suggestions be considered: to provide another avenue of assessing writing skills, samples of students' writing could be required at the beginning of a blogging project and used for comparison; have students commit for the entire semester as this will give a better representation of writing abilities; class(es) participating should be monitored by their teacher, making it easier to supervise students and oversee activities; and, given that these are primary school students, any survey should be limited to 20 to 25 questions. With regards to social media and digital content, more qualitative data are needed to determine specific needs of educators and students to create new learning models, to determine alternative sources of information and to build and develop educational collections and services. Additional empirical research is needed to study the interrelationships between undergraduate and graduate teacher and LIS education

programs on how to develop digitally literate teachers. Similarly, further exploration of teacher and LIS curricula will generate processes and practices for future teachers to teach their students digital literacy skills as well. Finally, more collaborative inquiry with educators and information professionals need to be explored to identify and develop best practices for teacher and information professional alliances in a twenty-first century learning environment.

## References

- Aljumah, F.H. (2012), "Saudi learner perceptions and attitudes towards the use of blogs in teaching English writing course for EFL majors at Qassim University", *English Language Teaching*, Vol. 5 No. 1, pp. 100-116.
- American Association of School Librarians (AASL) (2007), "Standards for the 21st century learner", available at: [www.ala.org/aasl/sites/ala.org.aasl/files/content/guideline\\_sandstandards/learningstandards/AASL\\_LearningStandards.pdf](http://www.ala.org/aasl/sites/ala.org.aasl/files/content/guideline_sandstandards/learningstandards/AASL_LearningStandards.pdf) (accessed 14 October 2014).
- American Library Association (ALA) (2013), *Digital Literacy, Libraries, and Public Policy*, Report of the Office for Information Technology Policy's Digital Literacy Task Force, available at: [www.districtdispatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/2012\\_OITP\\_digitalreport\\_1\\_22\\_13.pdf](http://www.districtdispatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/2012_OITP_digitalreport_1_22_13.pdf) (accessed 10 November 2014).
- Aspen Institute (2009), *Informing Communities: Sustaining Democracy in the Digital Age*, Report of the Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy, available at: [www.knightcomm.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/Informing\\_Communities\\_Sustaining\\_Democracy\\_in\\_the\\_Digital\\_Age.pdf](http://www.knightcomm.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/Informing_Communities_Sustaining_Democracy_in_the_Digital_Age.pdf) (accessed 28 September 2014).
- Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) (2000), "Information literacy competency standards for higher education", available at: [www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/standards/standards/pdf](http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/standards/standards/pdf) (accessed 12 October 2014).
- Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) (2011), "Information literacy standards for teacher education", *C&RL News*, Vol. 72 No. 7, pp. 420-426, p. 436.
- Bakar, N.A., Latif, H. and Ya'acob, A. (2010), "ESL students feedback on the use of blogs for language learning", *3L The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, Vol. 16 No. 1, pp. 120-141.
- Baker, W.M., Lusk, E.J. and Neuhauser, K.L. (2012), "On the use of cell phones and other electronic devices in the classroom: evidence from a survey of faculty and students", *Journal of Education for Business*, Vol. 87 No. 5, pp. 275-289.
- Bar-Ilan, J. (2005), "Information hub blogs", *Journal of Information Science*, Vol. 31 No. 4, pp. 297-307.
- Barrs, M. and Horrocks, S. (2014), "Educational blogs and their effects on pupils' writing", available at: <http://cdn.cfbt.com/~media/cfbtcorporate/files/research/2014/r-blogging-2014.pdf> (accessed 14 November 2014).
- Bartow, C. (2012), "The journey begins here: aligning information literacy with common core state standards and assessments", *Library Media Connection*, Vol. 31 No. 2, pp. 10-13.
- Bawden, D. (2008), "Origins and concepts of digital literacy", in Lankshear, C. and Knobel, M. (Eds), *Digital Literacies: Concepts, Policies, and Practices*, Peter Lang, New York, NY.
- Bernard, H.R. (2011), *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, 5th ed., AltaMira Press, Blue Ridge Summit, PA.

- Blackstone, B., Spiri, J. and Naganuma, N. (2007), "Blogs in English language teaching and learning: pedagogical uses and student responses", *Reflections on English Language Teaching*, Vol. 6 No. 2, pp. 1-20.
- Bobish, G. (2010), "Participation and pedagogy: connecting the social web to ACRL learning outcomes", *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, Vol. 37 No. 1, pp. 54-63.
- Campbell, A.P. (2003), "Weblogs for use with ESL classes", *The Internet TESL Journal*, Vol. 10 No. 8, available at: <http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Campbell-Weblogs.html> (accessed 30 December 2015).
- Clyde, L.A. (2005), "Educational blogging", *Teacher Librarian*, Vol. 32 No. 3, pp. 43-47.
- Daskalogiannaki, E. (2012), "Developing and assessing EFL students' writing skills via a class blog", *Research Papers in Language Teaching and Learning*, Vol. 3 No. 1, pp. 269-292.
- Davies, A., Fidler, D. and Gorbis, M. (2011), *Future Work Skills 2020*, University of Phoenix Research Institute, Palo Alto, CA, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/3m6cpc9> (accessed 23 November 2014).
- De Zuniga, H.G. and Puig-I-Abril, E. (2009), "Weblogs, traditional sources online and political participation: an assessment of how the Internet is changing the political environment", *New Media & Society*, Vol. 11 No. 1, pp. 553-574.
- Deitering, A.M. and Gronemyer, K. (2011), "Beyond peer-reviewed articles: using blogs to enrich students' understanding of scholarly work", *Portal: Libraries and the Academy*, Vol. 11 No. 1, pp. 489-503.
- DeWalt, K. and Dewalt, B. (2010), *Participant Observation: A Guide for Field Workers*, 2nd ed., AltaMira Press, Blue Ridge Summit, PA.
- Dowling, S. (2013), "Using blogs to share learner-generated content", *The Electronic Journal for English as a Second Language*, Vol. 17 No. 2, pp. 1-21.
- Dudenev, G., Hockly, N. and Pegrum, M. (2013), *Digital Literacies: Research and Resources in Language Teaching*, Routledge, London.
- Duffy, T. and Orrill, C. (2004), "Constructivism", in Kovalchick, A. and Dawson, K. (Eds), *Education and Technology: An Encyclopedia*, ABC-CLIO, Santa Barbara, CA, pp. 165-173.
- Eades, V. (2011), "Fashion blogs: too trendy for libraries or useful resources?", *Art Libraries Journal*, Vol. 36 No. 2, pp. 12-16.
- Eastment, D. (2005), "Blogging", *ELT Journal*, Vol. 59 No. 4, pp. 358-361.
- Educational Testing Service (ETS) (2008), *The iSkills Assessment*, Educational Testing Service.
- Eisenberg, M., Johnson, D. and Berkowitz, B. (2010), "Information, communications, and technology (ICT) skills curriculum based on the Big6 skills approach to information problem-solving", *Library Media Connection*, Vol. 28 No. 6, pp. 24-27.
- Fageeh, A. (2011), "EFL learners' use of blogging for developing writing skills and enhancing attitudes towards English learning: an exploratory study", *Journal of Language and Literature*, Vol. 2 No. 1, pp. 31-48.
- Ferdig, R.E. (2007), "Editorial: examining social software in teacher education", *Journal of Technology and Teacher Education*, Vol. 15 No. 1, pp. 5-10.
- Gebhard, M., Shin, D.S. and Seger, W. (2011), "Blogging and emergent L2 literacy development in an urban elementary school: a functional perspective", *CALICO Journal*, Vol. 28 No. 2, pp. 1-29.
- Gedera, D.S. (2012), "The dynamics of blog peer feedback in ESL classroom", *Teaching English with Technology*, Vol. 12 No. 4, pp. 16-30.



- Glogowsky, K. (2008), "Towards reflective blogtalk", available at: [www.teachandlearn.ca/blog/2008/02/04/towards-reflective-blogtalk/](http://www.teachandlearn.ca/blog/2008/02/04/towards-reflective-blogtalk/) (accessed 10 November 2014).
- Grami, G.M. (2012), "Online collaborative writing for ESL learners using blogs and feedback checklists", *English Language Teaching*, Vol. 5 No. 10, pp. 43-48.
- Gruzd, A. and Goertzen, M. (2013), "Wired academia: why social science scholars are using social media", *Proceedings of the Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences (HICSS 2013), Maui, HI*, pp. 3332-3341.
- Habermann, J. (2005), "Weblogs as a source of business news and information", *Online*, Vol. 29 No. 5, pp. 35-37.
- Hague, C. and Payton, S. (2010), "Digital literacy across the curriculum", available at: [www.futurelab.org.uk/projects/digital-participation](http://www.futurelab.org.uk/projects/digital-participation) (accessed 15 January 2015).
- Hauser, J. (2009), "Be the web 'go to' person for parents!", *School Library Media Activities Monthly*, Vol. 27 No. 6, pp. 24-26.
- Hernandez, Y. and Dominguez, N. (2010), "Blogs as content management system for an information literacy program: experience at the University of Puerto Rico at Carolina", *Current Studies in Librarianship*, Vol. 30 Nos 1/2, pp. 69-77.
- Hobbs, R. (2010), "Digital and media literacy: a plan of action", available at: [www.knightcomm.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/Digital\\_and\\_Media\\_Literacy\\_A\\_Plan\\_of\\_Action.pdf](http://www.knightcomm.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/Digital_and_Media_Literacy_A_Plan_of_Action.pdf) (accessed 12 January 2015).
- Hockly, N. (2012), "Technology for the language teachers: digital literacies", *ELT Journal*, Vol. 66 No. 1, pp. 108-111.
- Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) (2012), *Building Digital Communities: A Framework for Action*, University of Washington, International City/County Management Association, Institute of Museum and Library Services, Washington, DC, available at: [www.imls.gov/assets/1/workflow\\_staging\\_AssetManager/2140.pdf](http://www.imls.gov/assets/1/workflow_staging_AssetManager/2140.pdf) (accessed 20 November 2014).
- Jones, M.G. and Brader-Araje, L. (2002), "The impact of constructivism on education; language, discourse, and meaning", *American Communication Studies*, Vol. 5 No. 1, pp. 1-10.
- Kim, K.S., Yoo-Lee, E.Y. and Sin, S.C.J. (2011), "Social media as information source: undergraduates' use and evaluation behavior", *Proceedings of American Society for Information Science & Technology (ASIS&T 2011), New Orleans, LA*, pp. 1-3.
- Kjellberg, S. (2009), "Scholarly blogging practice as situated genre: an analytical framework based on genre theory", *Information Research*, Vol. 14 No. 3, p. 410, available at: <http://InformationR.net/ir/14-3/paper410.html> (accessed 12 November 2014).
- Koltay, T. (2011), "The media and the literacies; media literacy, information literacy, digital literacy", *Media, Culture, & Society*, Vol. 33 No. 2, pp. 211-221.
- Latham, D., Gross, M. and Witte, S. (2013), "Preparing teachers and librarians to collaborate to teach 21st century skills: views of LIS and education faculty", *School Library Research*, Vol. 16, pp. 1-22.
- Leccese, M. (2009), "Online information sources of political blogs", *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 86 No. 3, pp. 578-593.
- Lietzau, Z. and Helgren, J. (2011), *US Public Libraries and the Use of Web Technologies, 2010*, (Closer Look Report), CO State Library, Library Research Service, Denver, CO.
- Lin, M.H., Li, J.J., Hung, P.Y. and Huang, H.W. (2014), "Blogging a journal: changing students' writing skills and perceptions", *ELT Journal*, Vol. 69 No. 4, pp. 422-431.

- Maron, N.L. and Smith, K.K. (2008), *Current Models of Digital Scholarly Communication*, Association of College & Research Libraries, Washington, DC, available at: <http://dhcommons.tamu.edu/sites/default/files/current-models-report.pdf> (accessed 18 November 2014).
- Martindale, T. and Wiley, D.A. (2005), "Using blogs in teaching and scholarship", *TechTrends*, Vol. 49 No. 2, pp. 55-61.
- Maxwell, R. (2008), "Flash and substance; blogs as alternative sources of legal information", *AALL Spectrum*, Vol. 12 No. 4, pp. 9-10.
- Morgan, L. (2012), "Blogs and the development of independent learning skills: a case study of a primary school literature class blogging project", *Proceedings of the International Conference on Information Communication Technologies in Education (ICICTE 2012)*, Rhodes, pp. 70-83.
- Namvar, Y., Rastgoo, A., Sattary, S. and Payam, T. (2011), "The effect of learning with weblogs on university students' creative thinking development", *Australian Journal of Basic and Applied Sciences*, Vol. 5 No. 7, pp. 529-532.
- O'Connor, L.G. (2013), "Investors information sharing and use in virtual communities", *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, Vol. 64 No. 1, pp. 36-47.
- Ozkan, Y. (2011), "Blogging in a teaching skills course for pre-service teachers of English as a second language", *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, Vol. 27 No. 4, pp. 655-670.
- Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21) (2011a), *Framework for 21st Century Learning, Partnership for 21st Century Skills*, available at: [www.p21.org/about-us/p21-framework](http://www.p21.org/about-us/p21-framework) (accessed 17 October 2014).
- Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21) (2011b), *21st Century Skills Map: World Languages, Partnership for 21st Century Skills*, available at: [www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/21stCenturySkillsMap/p21\\_worldlanguagesmap.pdf](http://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/21stCenturySkillsMap/p21_worldlanguagesmap.pdf) (accessed 14 October 2014).
- PC Magazine Encyclopedia (2015), "Digital content", available at: [www.pcmag.com/encyclopedia/term/41313/digital-content](http://www.pcmag.com/encyclopedia/term/41313/digital-content) (accessed 27 May 2015).
- Pinkman, K. (2005), "Using blogs in the foreign language classroom: encouraging learner independence", *The JALT CALL Journal*, Vol. 1 No. 1, pp. 12-24.
- Qi-Yuan, S. (2013), "Use of blog to improve writing in the Chinese tertiary EFL classrooms", *English Language Teaching*, Vol. 6 No. 10, pp. 51-56.
- Reed, R.B., Chattopadhyay, A. and Iwema, C.L. (2013), "Using Google blogs and discussions to recommend biomedical resources: a case study", *Medical Reference Services Quarterly*, Vol. 32 No. 4, pp. 396-411.
- Richardson, W. (2010), *Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts, and Other Powerful Web Tools for Classrooms*, 3rd ed., Corwin, Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Special Libraries Association (SLA) (2003), "Competencies for information professionals for the 21st century", available at: [http://sla.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/0\\_LRN\\_Compencies2003\\_revised.pdf](http://sla.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/0_LRN_Compencies2003_revised.pdf) (accessed 17 May 2015).
- Swanson, P. and Early, P. (2009), "Establish your presence in the blogosphere: a guide to blog development for the foreign language classroom", *Proceedings of the Southern Conference on Language Teaching (SCOLT 2009)*, Atlanta, GA, pp. 1-28.
- Taki, S. and Fardafshari, E. (2012), "Weblog-based collaborative learning: Iranian EFL learners' writing skill and motivation", *International Journal of Linguistics*, Vol. 4 No. 2, pp. 412-429.

- 
- Tekinarslan, E. (2008), "Blogs: a qualitative investigation into an instructor and undergraduate students' experiences", *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, Vol. 24 No. 4, pp. 402-412.
- Trajtemberg, C. and Yiakoumetti, A. (2011), "Weblogs: a tool for EFL interaction, expression, and self-evaluation", *ETL Journal*, Vol. 65 No. 4, pp. 437-445.
- UNESCO (2008), *ICT Competency Standards for Teachers*, UNESCO.
- UNESCO (2011), *World Data on Education 2010/11*, 7th ed., available at: [www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Publications/WDE/2010/pdf-versions/Kuwait.pdf](http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Publications/WDE/2010/pdf-versions/Kuwait.pdf) (accessed 10 October 2014).
- US Department of Education (2010), *Transforming American Education: Learning Powered by Technology*, Office of Educational Technology, Washington, DC.
- Wikipedia (2013), *Educators*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Educators> (accessed 24 May 2015).
- Wu, H.J. and Wu, P.L. (2011), "Learners' perceptions on the use of blogs for EFL learning", *US-China Education Review A*, Vol. 1 No. 3, pp. 323-330.

#### About the authors

Charlene L. Al-Qallaf is an Associate Professor in the Department of Library and Information Science, Kuwait University, Kuwait. Her current work and research involves database development and management; application of communications and information technologies in information environments; and education, services and resources for multicultural communities. Charlene L. Al-Qallaf is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: [c.alqallaf@ku.edu.kw](mailto:c.alqallaf@ku.edu.kw)

Afaf S.R. Al-Mutairi is a primary English Language Teacher in the public school system in Kuwait. She has taught for eight years and recently received her masters' degree in library and information science, Kuwait University, Kuwait.

---

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website:

[www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm](http://www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm)

Or contact us for further details: [permissions@emeraldinsight.com](mailto:permissions@emeraldinsight.com)