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Teaching Academic Writing under the Influence of Collaborative, Blended, and Process Approaches: Findings from a Systematic Literature Review

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"A good teacher teaches, a better teacher explains, and the best teacher inspires". (Adas & Bakir 2013).

Abstract

The current study is conducted with the ultimate aim of locating a university academic writing course in the fields of (I) Collaborative Language Learning , (II) Blended Learning, and (III) Process Writing. With a systematic literature review, the paper screened a number of English Language teaching journal articles in the area of teaching academic writing . Accordingly, a set of implications relevant to the practicality of the above- mentioned approaches in teaching academic writing to EFL university students was identified and discussed thematically . Based on the findings of the literature reviewed, the researcher was spurred to implement a synthesis of those approaches together in a practical method to deliver an academic writing course to EFL preparatory year students at Hail University in Saudi Arabia. It has been observed from the implementation that the students' writing skills underwent noticeable improvement. In other words, the students were found to improve their writing skills, both linguistically and psychologically. For the convenience of our colleagues who have been striving to make objectives of a writing lesson approachable, the method is structured in detail in this paper. Finally, some challenges that may impede the implementation of the method were provided to open the door for more research to conduct in future.

Keywords: academic writing, blended learning, cooperative learning, process writing, systematic literature review

1. Introduction

Different from other language skills, acquiring writing , as argued by Zheng(1999) in Ahmed(2011), is a burdensome task. To surmount it, Gibson(2008) sees teaching writing as "an intensive small instructional group of activities offered to students to help create interaction between teachers and students during writing a particular point". On this, she underscores on the importance of collaboration between teachers and students in the way that teachers essentially support and guide their students while the latter write. This apprenticeship of writing works effectively for primary levels as their students share the similar needs of instruction.

Zaki and Yunus(2015) noted that academic writing is seen in particular the most serious challenge for tertiary students. On this, Caldwell(2012) in the same study mentioned a few problematic issues facing EFL learners when writing academically, inter alia, lack of knowledge about academic writing conventions, and plagiarism. Additionally, lack of proper training in

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logical thinking for Lai(2010) is not only a difficulty for EFL learners , but also is a problem among English native speakers.

As to consider the challenges confronting academic writing teaching, there has been an increasing interest among educationalists on the approaches of teaching academic writing in higher education and their attempts led to real improvement in the field. Researchers like Zaki and Yunus(2015), Ganobscik – Williams(2006) in Zaki and Yunus (2015), Lea and Street (1998) in Street (2015), and Street(2015) concluded that academic writing can be taught by various approaches to deepen students' understanding. They claimed that the models : Skills approach, Socialization approach, and Literacies practice can only best touch this form of writing.

However, Caldwell(2012) , as cited in Zaki and Yunus (2015: 14) noted that "there is no one consistent teaching method that is best to academic writing." Hence , the current study is conducted to contribute to the huge literature made in the field of teaching academic writing but under the influence of three major language teaching approaches, namely cooperative learning, blended learning, and process writing. In relevance to the research questions, a number of studies in the areas of those aforementioned approaches were found indispensable to identify and discuss a set of pedagogical techniques that may scaffold the ways of teaching writing in various contexts . In light of the results' discussion of those studies reviewed, a generic lesson of a synthesis of the approaches under investigation has been attempted to improve the art of writing teaching in the context where the researcher is teaching English and conducting the current study.

1.1.Statement of the problem

The current study stems its need from two areas. Firstly, learning how to write for academic purposes in English is a must for students matriculated at the preparatory year college in Hail University where the current study happened . During the first three levels offered at the English Language Skills Department (ELSD henceforth) , students learn how to write a seven-line paragraph about very simple informative topics. However, a new context of writing practice emerges in level four in which they start challenging essay-based writing tasks for academic purposes. Technical reports, descriptive text type, argumentative, causal essays, and analytical and comparison writing are all problematic for teachers to handle and for students to master. That in turn prompted the current researcher to understand why such writing forms are seen as of a big issue for both teachers and students in the said context. Relevant to this, verbal interviews with three teachers working in the same context were performed to inform data for preliminary study. It showed that our colleagues have strived much in teaching writing for academic purposes. They did not seem to have systematically adopted any pragmatic teaching practices in which the teachers and students are engaged in more flexible and effective learning environments, hence high levels of anxiety reported in the classrooms. On this , challenges of developing specialized writing should be surmounted; not to become an obstacle. To do so, it was argued by Caldwell(2012) , in Zaki and Yunus (2015:14) that: " teachers and educators need to develop their own curriculum and instruction to meet the needs of their students that could lead them to teach with clear objectives". Accordingly , our colleagues are advised to vary teaching practices to first cope with the new challenge environment and then meet their students' needs for more complicated writing tasks in their academic life.

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The second relates to the current researcher's in-class observation. Through his experience in teaching writing courses to students enrolled at the preparatory year college in Hail University, it has been observed that the traditional mode of teaching writing in which the teacher plays the central role in delivering an academic writing lesson is less effective. It was clear from the observation that most of the students attending the class neither interacted with nor realized the subject matter per se , hence the weakness of students' overall writing performance. It has been also observed our students tended to learn form-based activities rather than those of the content-based. Thereupon, most of them face difficulties to develop a very well- coherent piece of writing. Such difficulties might be attributed to many reasons. Firstly, our students are mark- oriented ; knowledge is consequently less considered. Secondly, the students thought that they were not motivated enough to cope with the new writing genres challenges. Thirdly, less attention and guidance were given to weak students to spur their disposition of classroom participation . Fourthly, the writing classroom atmosphere used to be rigid. Teacher were most likely concerned to accommodate with the pacing schedule and the students were passive recipients. Lastly, students preferred to have ready-made writing models to imitate.

Because of all of the above , the study has come with a systematic review of a bulk of studies in the areas of the aforesaid language teaching approaches to suggest a number of pedagogical implications for the sake of teaching writing development . It basically included a range of research pertinent to being in one group, seating in U-shape, speaking and oral interaction, technology integration and conduct of feedback sessions. As a result, the study humbly ends up at providing other colleagues who strive to teach a lesson on academic writing to EFL students at Hail University and elsewhere with a practical method to make the ultimate goals of a writing lesson approachable and highly achievable. Using various research instruments, the method (sub-section 3.2) welcomes experimental research to further investigate its effectiveness, though.

Objectives of the study

To show that university students' writing skills can be ameliorated through adopting various teaching approaches , this study was guided by the following two research objectives:

- To review systematically a relevant amount of literature made in the field of teaching academic writing with specific reference to cooperative learning approach, blended learning approach, and process writing approach.
- To propose under the influence of the three approaches aforementioned a practical environment of teaching academic writing to EFL university students.

1.2.Questions of the study

The current study attempts to yield answers to the following research questions:

- Based on the literature made in the areas of those aforementioned writing teaching approaches , what are their pedagogical techniques that could enhance the overall performance writing skills of EFL learners ?
- How do the practicalities of those approaches intermingle to scaffold teaching a university academic writing course?

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1.3.Significance of the study

The study seems to be significant because it reproduces the impact of three teaching approaches in delivering an academic writing course. In terms of teaching academic writing to EFL students majoring at various university disciplines, the study's findings could contribute to overhaul the design of EFL program offered at the Preparatory Year College in Hail University in Saudi Arabia and other similar EFL contexts. It is also significant for teachers as it aims at proposing a practical method of three major writing teaching theories. For those researchers interested in examining various teaching writing practices, some pedagogical and didactic challenges have been provided in light of the study results.

2. Method

A research method of literature review was carried out in this paper to develop knowledge of the incorporation of the three teaching approaches aforementioned into delivering an academic writing lesson at tertiary level.

It is in particular a systematic literature review research method. According to Cohen, Manion, & Morrison(2007), Okoli and Schabram (2010), and Dhammi(2018), the method was employed in the current study with a four -stage process that consists of identification , assessment , selection , and interpretation of the findings of the journal articles upon their direct relevance to the research topic. By looking specifically at the research questions that have been introduced in section (1.3), the research method was therefore utilized to reproduce, describe, and analyze the contents of those relevant journal studies reviewed on understanding the impact of three language teaching theories on teaching an academic writing course to university EFL students. Primarily, publications covering team-work, U-shape seating, spoken interaction, technology integrating, and feedback sessions conduct were searched to meet our inclusion criteria throughout the study.

3. Results and discussion

In relevance to the research topic, the following discussion reviews a considerable amount of literature to have a clear image about three language teaching approaches that are kernel to the study in question**.** Under the subsection of each approach, articles pertinent to the approach per se are reviewed to identify their relevance to the research topic and give answers to the first research question . Accordingly , a number of pedagogical implications are thematically included to make relevant answers available for the second research question and hence to shape the proposed researcher's method of teaching an academic writing lesson in the context of the study.

3.1.Language Teaching Approaches

3.1.1. Collaborative Learning Approach

A review of the related literature shows that several studies have been conducted to examine the effectiveness of implementing the collaborative learning approach in teaching English academic writing over the last few years . For instance , Mahmoud(2014) used quantitative case study method with a pre -post test design and a questionnaire to investigate the effectiveness of the

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cooperative learning method in developing the writing skills of second-year university students enrolled in an English course at Al-Imam University . He argued that the cooperative learning approach is significant in any university writing courses in which teachers create a stimulating and enjoyable learning environment for students to attempt writing on a particular point. Thereof, he advocated that the approach can be used effectively to enhance students who act collectively as small groups comprising a team inside the classroom.

In another exploration, Challob, Abu Bakir, & Lati (2016) had qualitatively used semi-structured interviews, learning diaries and observation to examine the effects of collaborative blended learning writing environment on students' writing apprehension and writing performance as perceived by a group of EFL school students in Malaysia. They concluded that the students had positive attitudes towards the collaborative blended learning approach as it helped them reduce their writing apprehension and improved their writing performance concerning the micro and macro aspects of writing. According to the literature reviewed by the same study , the authors indicated that the majority of research examined the effectiveness of blended or collaborative as separate entities. Thus their study is different from those made separately as it fills the gap throughout investigating qualitatively the effectiveness of three approaches, namely collaborative learning, blended learning, and writing process combined together in reducing writing apprehension and improving writing performance among school students in Malaysia . However, the current research is slightly different from Challob's et al.,(2016) as it describes the effectiveness of integrating the three learning approaches into one method to a university academic writing course.

To be theoretically consistent with the standpoints of those studies reviewed above, it could be argued that the following two implications are found important to prove in practice the effectiveness of the collaborative approach in affecting students' writing quality.

- **One-group**

Under the influence of the collaborative approach , the results of Mahmoud's study(2014) showed that students were put in groups of 4 or 5 each with leaders. Based on the researcher's experience of using multi-member groups, groups of 4-5 students, it was discovered that selfishness and individualism among students loomed since the creation of each group. To implement group work concept but in a different manner , the current researcher observed that the students could better develop positive attitudes towards being all put in one group. That in practice enables everyone to act as an autonomous leader learner in the classroom. In addition, the students' bilateral talks that might cause disturbance and time waste disappear. As a result, real exposure to communicate in English avails itself for all students to be immersed in . Thus, the current study tends to be different from Mahmoud's in the method(see section 3.2) that it does not have students participate in several groups; students are encouraged to participate individually.

- **U- Shape seating**

In the light of the implementation of the same approach, the researcher is convinced that to have his students seat in the shape of U might bolster the influence of cooperation among them. Psychologically , it could be said that this seems to be a new technique in classroom, which is

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unlike putting students in the class according to the traditional seating where the teacher stood in front of the class. This new classroom environment seems significant to the study in developing the following points:

- Easiness of communication. It could be said that the u-shape seating enable the students feel self-responsible on the comments they made . It also empowers them support , negotiate and defend their ideas loudly.
- Balance struck among students. It is clear that a balance is struck when introverted and extroverted students are engaged in participation and everyone is given the same opportunity to act in the classroom.

In a nutshell, the literature review has shown that the cooperative approach tends to have students divided into groups where three or four students comprise each. However, this research appears to include a practical method of teaching that is partially different in practice from those abovementioned studies as it tends to have students U- shape seated and place them in one group to ease participating individually with less guidance from the teacher.

3.1.2. Blended Learning Approach

Blended learning approach stems its definition from student- centered approach in creating more flexible learning situations whereby technology is integrated into face-to face classrooms to underpin students and teachers' interaction.

Many pieces of research have been made to examine the effectiveness of the blended learning approach. According to Lui(2013) blended learning approach is a new learning trend in teaching academic writing courses and had not received enough attention to be described or investigated at a key university in Beijing. It used mixed method approach to describe and evaluate a writing lesson integrating CALL to complement traditional writing classes. His study revealed that blending learning is of great importance in teaching English writing for academic purposes to Chinese EFL students. Among the many advantages of blended learning shown in the same study, student-student and student- teacher interactions were underpinned , communication anxiety levels dispelled , students were motivated to be more independent and autonomous, and hence their overall academic English writing skills underwent improvement. By designing a particular questionnaire and using pretests and posttest, Lui(2013) recommended that more studies are to conduct in China to assess and examine the impact of blended learning employed in teaching EFL\ESL writing .

In a more recent study , Rybushkina and Krasnova(2015) described the key factors of using blended learning in teaching foreign languages at various Russian Engineering universities. For them, developing students' meta-competences is one factor among others to emphasize on the positive influence of blended learning . They also highlighted the benefits of using blended learning in teaching foreign language skills to address the challenges the Russian Technical universities graduates meet in the context of labor market competitiveness in the global modern society. It therefore increases the students' personal skills in various aspects, such as the ability to effectively communicate with others , critical thinking, problem solving, teamwork , leadership…etc. They argued that it also becomes a flexible policy to engage weak students in collaborative works and highly motivates strong students.

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In the same vein , Hamdan(2014) used a survey to gather data to explore the reciprocal relationship between culture and online learning as perceived by sixty seven undergraduate Saudi female students. Findings of her study indicated that online education helped the students challenge some cultural norms, enhance their learning culture, and improve their communication and critical thinking skills. She concludes with the following script: " there remains little research into the factors that make online learning a significant part of undergraduate students' learning experience." Hamdan (2014:328) .

On the other hand, Alammary, Sheard, & Carbone (2014) understood from the widespread literature review related to the blended learning that the term is not new and it has been in use for the last two decades. With this claim in mind, they showed that the definition is loose and the debate about the most systematic definition of the term is still ongoing, though. On this , Alammary et al., (2014:443) argued that many researchers suggested it may be a feature "of the term's strength" though it lacks a universally accepted definition. According to Sharpe, Benfield, Roberts, and Francis(2006) as cited in the same study , " the lack of clarity around blended learning makes it possible for teachers and course designers to develop their own meaning of the term within the context of their courses or institutions". With this regard , it was mentioned in Alammary' et al.,(2014) that higher education teachers developed different notions of the term and different design approaches. Consequently, a selection of the best design approach for the implementation of blended learning is a major challenge for teachers who are new to the term". Therefore, their attempt emerged to guide teachers how they select the best design for effective blend . After they examined different processes of designing blended courses, they had identified three design approaches, namely low-impact blend in which extra activities added to an existing course, medium impact blend in which activities replaced an existing course, and high-impact blend in which blending course is built from scratch.

In relation to its nature, its quality and its degree , Al Fiky(2011), in Keshta and Harb(2013: 211), pointed out that blended learning can be carried out at four different levels :

- "Component level : several separated components comprise a whole in which the learning content is combined with the information transfer media . The components differ in terms of learner's nature, and the availability of traditional and electronic resources.
- Integrated level: the internet-based learning elements support each other. Practically, evaluation is integrated to other elements to measure the learners' ability to perform the assigned learning point.
- Collaborative level: it is a blend between the teacher and the cooperative learning groups in the traditional environment or on the internet.
- Expansive level: it is a blend between traditional classroom learning and offline electronic learning resources , inter alia, emails, e- books and documents, and programs".

With reference to the definition of blended learning, the synthesis Alammary's et al study(2014) made from the literature reviewed on their study allowed them propose that blended learning courses are defined as those combining a pedagogical integration of thoughtfully different instructional methods such lectures, discussion groups, self-paced activity and face-to face mode mixed to computer meditation mode. As far as the produce of that synthesis is to be driven for language teaching purposes , the role of blended learning approach

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will be pedagogically seen at certain stages in implementing our method(see section 4) through two practical teaching techniques:

- Speaking is integrated into a student-student- teacher verbal discussion on a particular writing learning point, and
- Blackboard based assignment at certain stages of the writing task is combined to face-to face mode.

❖ **Speaking and oral interactions**

Among the many benefits of implementing blended learning approach, Davoli, Monari, and Eklundh(2009), Richardson(2010), and Solomon &Schrum (2010) , as cited in Eydelman(2013), assured that blending is necessary for teachers to give their students the opportunity to provide each other with immediate feedback on a writing point. In addition, it encourages students and teachers to engage in informal communication. Therefore ,

- speaking barrier gradually demolishes as the students maintain oral communication practices on a writing learning point.
- stress reduces to the lowest levels in the classroom. Consistently , the results of Challob's et al study (2016) found that the implementation of blended learning activities seemed to have waned students' anxiety of learning writing.
- In addition to , student's language repertoire broadens regularly to include new vocabulary .

In sum, the current researcher included blending learning in his study to underscore on the importance of integrating speaking skill as a means of face-to face mode of negotiations on a particular writing point. Thus, speaking activities were incorporated in the lesson(section 3.2) to underpin the writing material . Thereof, a new learning environment in the class was created for students to enhance their language skills, feel more responsible in debate, and reduce classroom anxiety.

❖ **Blackboard technology**

To highly benefit from the integration of blended learning approach , literacy of computer usage and computer accessibility are indispensible for both teachers and students to work out. Blackboard Software technology that is available at Hail University was employed at various feedback stages in implementing the method in question. In particular , students were individually and collectively given the opportunity to participate in evaluation sessions.

In reference to the literature reviewed in the area of blending learning approach, the researcher proposed his own practical method with the sense of integrating speaking skills and technology into delivering an academic writing lesson to EFL university students. Relevant to this, further research using various instruments might be called here to measure the effectiveness of blending speaking and technology into traditional mode of teaching.

3.1.3. Process Writing Approach

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The Primary National Strategy(2007) noticeably encourages students to participate actively in the writing process. It therefore enables them build confidence as they are grappling with the same issues. For teachers, process writing allows them decide whether the progress of achieving the goals is running successfully or not. As shown in Keshta and Harb(2013:209) process writing for Tang(2006) is" characterized by the awareness of the writer of the writing process and the intervention of a teacher or peers at any time during the process of writing to improve writing skills instead of fixing mistakes". Thereon, instead of getting the whole final writing -product done without zooming in the errors committed, students are guided to go through various forms of feedback at every stage of writing to assure they progress and avoid undesirable outcomes. In practice , Kamehameha Schools(2007), and Nordin and Mohammad(2006) show that the process can be carried out through six main stages: pre-writing, drafting, sharing, revising and editing, rewriting, and publishing. For other researchers like Lindsay and Knight(2006) as described in Keshta and Harb(2013: 210) the process is broken down into three stages. Preparation comes first to enable students think about the audience , consider the purpose of writing, and think of the components comprising the form of the task and its content. Secondly, drafting is whereby students put their ideas together in draft forms. For Gebhardt and Rodrigues(1989) as seen in Keshta and Harb(2013:2010), "drafting and redrafting can be done several times during writing process." The last stage of the process is editing and rewriting. To use Lindsay and Knight's words as appeared in Keshta and Harb(2013:210)," write several times so that the text is coherent and clear". As cited in Zaki and Yunus (2015:15) , Catramado(2004) however argued that this approach is a long process, so teachers should use it depending on the time they have in class and their students' proficiency . To that end ,it was proposed in Zaki and Yunus(2015) that students be allowed a large amount of time and enough opportunities to haul what they have already written. Teachers deal with the writing task as a multi- part work in which immediate and ongoing feedback is essential for students to improve their rough drafts step by step.

- **Feedback sessions**

To examine the effects of implementing writing feedback techniques and students' writing anxiety on students' writing ability, Astrid, Rukmini, Sofwan, &Fitriati(2017) used quantitatively the experimental method of 3 x 2 factorial design with a writing test and a questionnaire in a more recent study. From the results of the analysis used in their study, they explored that there was an interaction among writing feedback techniques, students' writing anxiety and students' writing ability. Therefore, they inferred that writing feedback techniques, namely teacher's written feedback, oral conferencing, and peer feedback affected students' writing ability and the effects depended on the degree of students' writing anxiety. It is unclear for them that how the feedback sessions contribute to students writing development, though. They claimed that many studies reported that students just performed feedback without realizing the reason behind performing it at some stages in writing. However, this is far away from the main pivot of our paper. Ours is not to testify how feedback works in improving students' writing, but to have students train on feedback sessions with reference to process writing approach. To what extent this technique is effective can be appraised in further studies with various experimental research tools.

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In accordance with the findings of those process writing studies pertinent to feedback sessions, the researcher was convinced that students ' writing should be fragmented into manageable pieces so that students could recognize the mistakes and to stave them off later. In other words, to correct students' mistakes from the beginning is better than to let them continue writing without recognizing the mistakes. Stanely (2003) in this regard argues that rather than being a marker, the teacher acts as a reader responding to his students' content over the many writing points. Therefore, the students should worry about what their audience reader is interested to know about what they have drafted before. Thus, feedback ensures that students realize that their ongoing attempts of writing a task on paper should undergo amelioration in terms of deletion, addition, rephrasing, organization, etc. Students are in classroom to learn and practice ; not to be tested.

With reference to the bulk of the studies related directly to the research topic under investigation, the article in hand seems to be benefitting from those studies in which it describes in the following section the researcher's own practical method to administer an academic writing lesson to elementary-level English learning university students. In relevance to this, the aforementioned five implications were found important to be mainly included to utilize a synthesis of collaborative learning approach, blended learning approach, and process writing approach in an academic university course to improve students' writing quality.

3.2.Generic lesson for academic writing

Based on what has just been discussed , this part of the current study emerges to yield answers to the second research question that was previously introduced in section (1.3). Practical in its nature, a generic lesson on writing for academic purposes as performed by the researcher, who has been teaching writing at the said context, is attempted in some detail. It is thus distinctive that it combines three language learning approaches in one method to deliver a lesson on academic writing over a span of 10 hours.

The discussion thereinafter is important as it sheds light into the following pivots: the importance of academic writing to students newly enrolled at Hail University , the status quo of writing courses offered at the said context where the study was carried out, the context of the lesson, the framework of the lesson, the mechanism of implementing the method, benefits of the method with reference to some literature , and finally the challenges facing the implementation of the method in hand.

3.2.1. The importance of academic writing course to students enrolled at Hail University

That the English proficiency of the preparatory year college students at Hail University ranges from beginner to pre- intermediate , general writing learning gets the lion's share and hence lends itself as a core course but with serious challenge. In accordance with the EFL curriculum followed at the ELSD, students should be able to write mono-paragraph descriptive and narrative texts during the first three quarters. With much more attention to spelling, grammar, punctuation and capitalization, and other language mechanics, teachers typically spend 10 contact hours a week to accommodate with the material assigned. However, the specialized writing course i.e., academic one, aims mainly at enhancing students' skills in writing as they are requested later to write advanced papers in various disciplines taught at the university

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programs. Based on the curriculum implemented there , students should be able to develop critical and analytical essays by the end of the fourth quarter. Therein, they learn how to equally consider content development, argumentation, organization, and language mechanics over a span of 10 contact hours per week. To enhance students' competencies in advanced writing , the course hones them to be engaged in more complicated tasks to attain the ultimate goals of composing a multi-paragraph essay in various writing genres.

3.2.2. The status quo of writing courses for academic purposes offered at the ELSD

This section briefs the course offered there in terms of course objectives, course design, material, assignment and evaluation, students targeted , and teachers involved.

- **Course objectives**

It aims at teaching students to write cohesively and coherently about topics in the various academic subjects taught at Hail University. Particularly, students should be trained to make use of the expository writing patterns, namely reports, instructions, classification, description, causal analysis, and comparison.

- **Course design**

The course is designed to cover seven units over a span of seven weeks. Each unit addresses one writing text type. During 10 hour- full contact, students should be able to achieve the ultimate theme of writing in traditional mode of study.

- **Materials offered**

The textbooks/handouts used by the EFL program at the ELSD address academic writing along with its text types and its techniques.

- **Assignments and evaluation**

Over the span of seven weeks, students sit for two progress tests, a mid-term exam, and a final . Each test has a writing -paragraph question . To evaluate, a very general scheme of rubrics is provided for markers to abide by.

- **Students targeted**

English is a foreign language for those students enrolled at the prep year over three different tracks, namely science and engineering, medical, and humanities. Students are all high school graduates and their proficiency of English teeters from beginner to pre-intermediate. At school, English was taught as a means of communication. Yet, their ability to write for academic purposes has received a little concern.

- **Teachers involved**

The course teachers are native and non- native speakers of English. Most of them are M.A holders specialized in various disciplines of English , namely TESOL, Linguistics, Translation, and Literatures.

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3.2.3. Context of the lesson

This section is intended to familiarize the reader with the context where the lesson was carried out. In it, the following points are briefed to enable other colleagues adopt and adapt the method in hand effectively.

- **Course Description**

It is a partial fulfillment of an English course being offered to EFL students enrolled at prep year college in Hail University. The course branches into two separate sub-courses: Grammar, and Writing for Academic Purposes. The latter is our main concern for the sake of this article.

- **Text -type**

Generally, there are seven text types of academic writing for EFL students to get familiar with, namely Reports, Description of a Mechanism , Letters, Comparison , Giving Instructions, Classifying, and Causal Analysis.

- **Students' profiling**

All the students were high school graduates. They studied General English when they were school students with little concern to writing. However, a few of them have been abroad for General English Language courses. They study English as it is the language of instruction used in the various disciplines taught at the university .Their proficiency in English expands from beginner to elementary. The majority of students had previously experienced Blackboard technology as it is a mandatory use in computer science courses offered at the college.

- **Students involvement**

The sample of this study is a cohort of 20 students and enrolled to level –four preparatory English General English course at the Preparatory Year College at Hail University during the academic year 2015\2016 . The students were selected to act as an experimental group to serve the purpose of the study.

- **Classroom size**

Ideally, the number of students registered in the class should comprise 20 or less.

- **Speaking skills development**

Various speaking activities like debate and conversation , are examples of blending tools to be employed in the earliest stages of the lesson.

- **Technology employment**

That the method is carried out in the environment of blended learning approach, technology manifests itself as a kernel factor. In addition to the use of computer apparatus, smart phones, pencil and paper activities are incorporated to enable students take notes about the writing point.

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For finalizing, computers, projectors, and Blackboard Software are activated for presentation and evaluation.

- **Time allocation**

According to the pacing schedule, teachers should typically spend five two hour lectures per week instructing a unit that addresses a particular writing genre.

3.2.4. Theoretical framework for the lesson

Within the framework of Constructivism Theory , this study lends itself to describe a method of three language teaching approaches combined together to create a more flexible and feasible environment of a writing course for academic purposes. Constructivism for Brooks(2005) is the theory in which learners generate meaning through the active mental process of formulating and reformulating knowledge. Hamdan (2014) acknowledged that learning is a process of personal and social endeavors. She also pointed that adopting constructivism theory in learning requires a creation of a learning environment in which the student is being at the center of the process while the teacher facilitates it. Thereon, it could be inferred from Hamdan's argument and other constructivists' viewpoints like Brooks(2005), Fosnot (2005), and Kiraly (2000) in Rosas(2004), that the social aspect of a learning environment should transform students from being passive recipients of knowledge into collaborative participants working under the facilitator teacher guidance. Relevance to the theme being scrutinized in this paper, the research's participants were instructed to interact, collaborate, construct , and share their knowledge about a particular writing learning point through a scaffold of three practical approaches: Collaboration, Blending, and Process Writing.

3.2.5. How the researcher's teaching method works

Upon the findings of the study, the researcher was prompted to attempt the following discussion in which our method is explained in detail. What makes the method different from others is that it is a synthesis of three language teaching approaches, namely, cooperative learning, blended learning, and process writing. Below presents how the said approaches are engineered to underpin the researcher's method in administering a lesson on writing for academic purposes. To achieve the ultimate goals of the lesson, two action packs of procedures are implemented to strike balance between theory and practice in developing it.

- ❖ **Theoretical Procedure**
- **Writing genres**

Typically, the aforementioned text types of writing for academic purposes should be considered at any EFL program offered to students learning English for specific purposes. In this regard, a clear explanation of the only writing text type the students should learn over a span of 10 full contact hours is a must. Therein, the researcher teacher outlines the text based task objectives effectively . Having the text type and its objectives explained, students should be able to realize that the text type they are worrying about has certain particularities that are different from those of another text types. For instance , the particularities of writing reports are unlike of those of causal analysis, and the purpose of writing a description essay of a mechanism is not as similar as that of writing a comparison text . It is feasible to guide your students at this stage to stave off

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any potential confusion resulting from immediate start of writing later. They need to stay in the right path with a clear picture of what they write about.

- **Form -content distinction**

Having the text type of writing task along with its objectives clearly introduced, teachers should adequately provide their students with the items comprising the form-content distinction. Enough time should be allowed to this distinction. Students at this stage should be able to distinguish the items of form from those of content. For instance, students should recognize that spelling and punctuation are form items while the organization of ideas is content-related. At the macro level, students should realize that each text type has a set of form-content specs and different from those related to another text type. In other words, what specifies the form-content items of writing a report does not necessarily specify those of a comparison essay. However, the researcher teacher introduced only the items for form-content related to the genre being taught. This is again to avoid any unexpected confusion students might have later. Thereof, students at this stage could have notes about those items as they would refer to them when they are asked to start writing up.

❖ **Practical procedures**

- **Ideas collection**

The topic of writing task should be introduced to students clearly. Students should have already u-shaped seated and all engaged in oral discussion for productive brainstorming to collect the ideas related to the topic itself.

It is the teacher's own philosophy how to make the phase of collecting ideas comprehensible. In other words, various techniques like tree diagrams, Venn diagrams, spider grams, pictures, tables, charts, cues, or else can be offered for students to collect main and supporting ideas of the topic. Allow them enough time so that they could have a clear image about what they are going to write.

- **Drafting**

Having a particular genre introduced , the form and content items distinguished , and the main and supporting ideas collected , students should start worrying only about the starting point, namely the topic sentence . Bearing in mind that what topic sentence is has been already explained and the students took notes about it at the part of form- content distinction, less guidance at this stage could be driven. During this, keep them sitting in U-shape to activate face-to-face contact and make the classroom environment much friendlier. By this , students and teachers are given the opportunity to explain and debate over the writing point. Be somewhere in front of your students and act as a session facilitator. Here your role is to open the session for discussion.

Back to the topic sentence anew; each student individually reads his loudly in queue. His colleagues listen to him carefully. As the discussion is open for everyone , students are encouraged to actively participate commenting on their colleague's contribution on that particular point. Based on what they have already learned about the topic sentence characteristics , the

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students could constructively criticize their colleague's topic sentence and evaluate it accordingly. The students should be urged to behave gently using some polite expressions like : why don't you use this…, it would be better to say that…, that is a good idea, I agree or disagree and etc.

This practice serves three goals. The first concerns that the student who has just presented his topic sentence would benefit from his colleagues' comments as the fact that sharing information on meeting times helps the student draft ,and then edit it perfect. Ultimately, the student ends up with a very good topic sentence. The second relates to the communicative approach in which all students are engaged in oral discussion. The U-shape allows students realize that fears of interaction dispels gradually and the sense of audience makes them pay attention to fluency and accuracy in parallel. Not only does it improve their language skills in speaking and conversation, but also it psychologically encourages the introverted students, who may have not done that topic sentence or have had doubts on the appropriateness of it, to participate, share information and develop that particular point. According to Mahmoud(2014:616) the cooperative learning approach serves the very good students feel satisfied and proud that they are interacting and helping their colleagues positively. On a regular basis, the same procedure should be followed until the whole parts of the task get covered. In other words, once they finish drafting and revising the topic sentence, assign them another in-class task to worry about , for example, introduction. The same mechanism would be typically followed until the task components got drafted. However, it is not necessary for every student to comment every day. Implementing this , a new learning environment is created for teachers to cover the material thoroughly, check students' understanding on every single point, and benefit from the ongoing feedback. (Aborisade,2013).

After that, they have to submit the draft in full text to the teacher for sharing via smart board or projectors. The sharing of information is highly beneficial. It engages students in a real analysis of what they have learned over time. Once again, oral discussion resumes for commenting over the whole task. At this stage, comments on spelling, grammar, formatting, punctuation and other technical issues would worth much to be presented. A little attention would be given to content items as they would have been already measured while students discussed the task's parts orally. By the way, such comments resulting from the sharing should be highly considered by the students as their new written text will emerge and be prone to evaluation. I am impressed that my students got excited of sharing their work. Simply, the classroom turns to a vital workshop and fears of interaction among the students were gradually dispelled.

- **Evaluation and feedback session**

Each text type of writing has its own peculiarities that are different from the other's. In other words, evaluation criteria for reports are to some extent different from those evaluating a comparison essay. Students should have got familiar with this fact from the beginning of the lesson. However, I myself used a very holistic scheme of rubrics comprising all the form-content items of the text type. With Blackboard Service in mind as a tool to blend technology into face-to face mode of teaching, the student's work will be sent to the teacher and later presented on the board .Then the students are urged to participate in evaluating their colleagues' works according to the scheme in public. While evaluation session is running, other students are

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not allowed to work on theirs as they have submitted the draft already. They just participate in appraising their colleagues' works. It is feasible for teachers to keep a student's record of scores for the ongoing assessment and following up the student's progress for development. When this is done, students should be able to develop their task according to the evaluation results that show spots of strengths and weaknesses. Using Blackboard software, students will submit their final assignment to the teacher. Individual discussion between the teacher and students will be open for clarification and more comments. As for shy students, they can benefit from the non-face session of feedback. They can ask the teacher questions that enable them recognize their mistakes flexibly. With this aim in mind, online tutoring session works instead of office hour contact for time - effort saving. Online discussion board was used but not regularly. To track their achievement over the semester, e- portfolio is indispensable for students to review key issues they have learned to archive . The e-portfolio is useful for teachers as well. They archive students' works to share for other teachers if they would like to sit for future training development. The material sources can be shared and then updated for other writing courses delivered.

3.2.6. The lesson in brief

In accordance with the curriculum schedule followed at the context of the current study, writing component is dealt as partial fulfillment to the entire General English course. Thereon, a rate of 10 contact hours a week is given to the writing course and the entire course lasts for 7 weeks only. The material consists of seven units and each unit is about a genre different from others. Teachers and students strive to accommodate with the entire contents . In fact, this is considered an intensive course and consequently would appear as a limitation and challenge for conducting the current study. However, the study sample was taken from the section assigned to the researcher teacher. As a result, it was selected to act as experimental group for the sake of research. The group consisted of 15 students and were requested to be in one group seating in U-shape in the classroom. Seated in that shape was new experience for students and it enabled them engage in more relaxing environment to speak , exchange, negotiate , and share their productive outcomes. The teacher's role was as a session manager. The lesson started with a quick introduction to the components of Cause and Effect genre . The essay of such genre should have three paragraphs namely, introduction, body, and conclusion. The three paragraphs were done gradually over a span of ten hours; each paragraph took two hours of instructing on average. The first three hours were allocated for the introduction along with its associated issues like the topic sentences and other supporting sentences. There the concepts that should be embedded in writing the introduction of a Cause and Effect essay were theoretically taught . By that, the teacher's role suspended and students had to start their job. Each student had to write his own introduction as it was instructed by the teacher. Right after they finished writing down their introductions (topic and supporting sentences included), everyone had to read his loudly while others just listened to and took notes. One-by one, students commented on their colleague's outcome in detail. The student himself listened carefully to his colleagues to get the benefit of their contributions to strengthen his introduction product. Other students listened to and benefitted from such contributions as well. The same opportunity was available for everyone until the session concluded with the first draft of their introduction. On that day, no homework was assigned. As for body paragraph and the conclusion, the same mechanism adopted to deal with the introduction was applied. By this ,the three paragraphs were drafted

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and drafting took the first 6 hours of the week. Four hours remained. Two of them were available for presentation . Using the projector technology in the classroom, every student was able to present his essay for discussion. His colleagues' contributions and oral feedbacks were taken into high consideration. He had to do changes in a way that improved his second draft. Changes had to be done at home. In light of the changes made, the third draft was submitted via Blackboard technology which is available for every student at the university. The students and I were engaged in one-to one discussion to comment on the final version.

3.3.Pedagogical benefits of implementing the method under study

In light of the literature reviewed on the cooperative learning approach, the study briefs the following benefits of the implementation of the researcher's method as found consistently in numerous studies. (Mahmoud,2014), (Swanson , Davis, Parks, Atkinson, Forde,& Choi,2015), (Challob et al., 2016).

- Students interpersonal skills like respect others, debate, problem- solving , and collaboration were highly maintained in an interesting student- centered learning environment.
- Stages of writing were easily scrutinized . Students learned when and how to brainstorm, share ideas, give feedback , and revise and edit accordingly.
- Trust bonds were built in classroom to help students be more autonomous and collaborative.
- As cited in Challob et al.,(2016:232), Mulligan and Garofalo (2011) concluded that "through the collaborative learning, students can learn various language and writing skills more effectively than by working individually."

Among the many benefits cited by researchers with regard to incorporating blended learning approach into teaching academic writing to university students, this study is generally consistent with what Alammary et al., (2014) , Liu (2013), Challob et al., (2016) , Rybushkina and Krasnova(2015),Ertmer & Ottenbreit –Leftwich(2010) in Alammary et al.,(2014) had proposed as follows:

- The lesson objectives were highly maintained to cope with the students' pedagogical needs for academic writing.
- Speaking skills were highly enhanced that the students had open oral discussions over particular writing points.
- The availability of technology at the university was a boon for me and my students as we were all engaged at various stages in online discussion over many writing points.
- Forethought moving from a mode of instruction to another made the class environment less anxious.
- Flexibility of delivering technology -based feedback activities ensured the ideal students' final writing product.
- Archiving students' works to be used as models in in-class discussion enabled me improve the way of instructing the material. Areas of students' writing skills weakness were spotted for development though.

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- As cited in Alammary et al.,(2014:445) , Ertmer and Ottenbreit –Leftwich(2010) argued that "the experience gained from the approach can help teachers to be more confident in using blends", so it is unquestionable to say that novice teachers are inevitably honed to experience more advanced blended learning courses to tailor with their students' needs.

Consistently with the contribution made in process writing approach, the method benefits are:

- Stages of writing were easily scrutinized . Students learned when and how to brainstorm, share ideas, give feedback , and revise and edit accordingly.
- The students writing knowledge enabled them recognize how the task components are engineered. On this, Challob et al.,(2016) argued that students knew how to arrange the paragraphs of the essay and connecting them logically to be easily followed by the reader.
- A gradual improvement in various writing aspects like grammar, mechanics of writing, vocabulary, organization of ideas, and content of the essay took place as a result of the adequate knowledge the students gained when writing their essays. (Challob et al., 2016)
- Instead of turning in the final writing product, a recursive procedure of pre-writing, drafting, evaluating , feedback, and revising was facilitated to enable students learn where to approach any failure spots adequately. (Nordin & Mohamamd, 2006).
- As it has a pivotal role in the process writing, the implementation of any of feedback practices , namely teacher's feedback, verbal or written conferencing , and peer's feedback, affects students' writing performance, psychologically and linguistically . As a result, the students' ability to write underwent real improvement. (Astrid et al.,2017).

Finally, constructivism theory manifested itself in the implementation of the method in light of the following benefits:

- That students were immersed in using Blackboard technology available at the university and cooperatively engaged in verbal discussions , they could have constructed their new knowledge and experience throughout sharing the information on various writing points.
- In constructivist classrooms, my students and I were able to build new content on the bases of what we already knew about the necessary writing points to embark the writing task. For instance, the students were guided to use various thinking maps like bubble map, tree diagrams, flow maps, and among others to collaboratively probe data , generate main ideas , organize these ideas, and prepare them for the next stage of the writing process.
- Students were able to think of various solutions for one problem. This in turn empowered them to acquire creative thinking for more complicated tasks in their future academic writing .

3.4. Challenges and Limitations facing the implementation of the method :

On the other hand, below some challenges that may affect the quality of teaching an English academic writing in case of using the researcher's method are outlined . So, limitations and recommendations for teachers on how and when it can be adapted to and adopted are provided.

- **System support and faculty training**

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Having said that the method partially relied on blended learning in which face-to- face contact is activated in par with technology to create a new learning environment for teachers and students , technology manifests itself as a challenge. In other words, poor technology infrastructure services like lack of classroom projectors or inaccessibility of Blackboard System affect the process of implementing the method. That in turn impedes teachers integrate technology into the lesson.

It is considerable here to point out that Alammary et al.,(2014) showed that teachers engaged in teaching English writing for academic purposes may have not received IT training or might have no experience in teaching at all. On this, he said : " selecting the most appropriate design approach for a blended learning course is a major challenge for teachers in higher education institutions who are new to the idea of blended learning". Consequently, blended learning is doomed to failure . However, assuming that well-trained teachers are there ; students should also savvy the necessary technology applications to integrate into the method. More challenging, students might have troubles accessing the Blackboard Service that they do not have technology conduits like computers and smart mobiles.

- **Number of students enrolled in class**

I strongly agree with Aborisade(2013) as he underscores that the class size is a serious challenge confronting writing teaching process. His study emphasized that the huge number of students enrolled in the class makes any language teaching course a Herculean task. Lo Castro(2005) as quoted in Aborisade (2013:36) suggests that " when a language class exceeds 15 in number problems arise, such as of those pedagogy, management, and of the effective type, especially in a low resourced environment". Thereof, the method in question limits itself in that it does not guarantee success if the writing classroom has a number of students more than 20. Thus it is an insurmountable challenge for teachers to implement it in lecturing classes that have a huge number of students. Hence more research should be conducted to find more feasible and doable solutions to meet such a challenge.

- **Time management**

Integrating technology activities into classroom materials is time sensitive. Hence, teachers should worry much about how long the lesson takes if it employs blended learning activities to underpin the other two approaches. Bear in mind that teaching a lesson in accordance with a pacing schedule is not a trial study nor a lab experiment in which scholars spend hours to reach goals. In a nutshell, it is advisable that teachers use time wisely to accomplish all the tasks and the stages of the lesson. Otherwise the lesson objectives will scatter.

4. Conclusion

This piece of research was much interested in describing a new teaching environment in which a mixture of three language teaching approaches, none of them traditional, intermingle to instruct an academic writing course at Hail University. On this twofold study, the first of it was dedicated to extensive data collected from a systematic literature review to fathom the employment of three language teaching approaches in teaching an academic writing lesson to EFL students majoring in three tracks, namely sciences and engineering, medical, and humanities at the preparatory year college in the said context. Based on the findings of the

systematic literature reviewed in the areas of those aforementioned approaches, five pedagogical techniques namely, one-group , u-shape seating, speaking and oral interaction, technology and feedback sessions were identified and found essential to shape the second pivot of the article. The second pivot here manifests itself in describing a generic lesson on academic writing course the researcher delivered to a group of 20 students selected to act as an experimental sample of the study. The lesson was carried out in light of a combination of three teaching approaches, namely cooperative learning, blended learning , and process writing. Such a combination makes this study distinguished as it implements the three approaches of teaching writing to EFL learners in one method to achieve the ultimate goals of a writing lesson for academic purposes at tertiary level. To put it in practice, the method is ramified into two procedures. One is theoretical in which students get familiar with what the unit is going to be about. The other is practical; it is how the students and the teachers collaborate together to produce the ultimate writing task. The U-shape seating underpins the ease of communication flow . Therefore, students' skills in speaking undergo a drastic development. To achieve the feedback stages, Blackboard software lends itself as a kernel tool to blend tandem for the face-to face contact and technology.

As all the student have actively participated in the lesson's stages, I was pleased with the results of the lesson as the goals of it have been effectively achieved. The overall advantages of implementing the mixture of the three aforementioned approaches the method has adopted and adapted with in teaching an English writing course for academic purposes are many. Linguistically, it for Mahmoud(2014) enables students write coherently and cohesively. Furthermore, it psychologically dispels the anxiety of interaction , motivated the introverted, and enhanced students' autonomy. (Challob., et al 2016)

However, it would be neutral to say that this method is not fully ideal for all lessons. On this, some challenges and limitations that would impede the implementation of the method in question have been presented in the paper. The most striking challenges were class size inflation, technology readiness and literacy, and time mismanagement. Although cautions were made from laying more workloads to the teachers and students , blended learning in general should be officially adopted at the ELSD to train teachers and students on new learning environments. A separate level of weekly 20 hours dedicated fully to writing would in turn allow teachers and students more opportunities to engage in new creative methods to maximize the effectiveness of the courses.

It is hoped this study meet our colleagues' needs for teaching writing in more relaxing and communicative classrooms. It also included useful information and implications to improve their writing teaching classroom practicum. For researchers interested in teaching English writing , creative and innovative studies are to conduct on how-to ameliorate the pedagogy and didactics of teaching English academic writing in tertiary second language classrooms. With a variety of research designs utilizing various research instruments , further studies are called to appraise the method proposed.

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