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EFL Students' Writing Interactions through Weblog and Self-Assessment

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Abstract

Weblog is powerful learning media that triggered interaction and self-assessment among students. This study indicates that weblog is very useful tool of learning to be used in developing the students' active writing interaction as well self-assessment. The students could continuously improve their writing skill through studying and sharing their knowledge through weblog and all comments posted by their friends are useful for the improvement of their writing skill. This study adds to the understanding of the use weblog in teaching English, especially in teaching writing. It is also intriguing to the students as they are well exposed to technology in their daily lives. The online environment of weblogs really offers a learning place that encourages collaboration and analytical thinking towards providing constructive comments on their writing assignments necessary for students to improve their writing skill.

Keywords: *weblog; EFL interaction; self-assessment;*

Introduction

Technology is being increasingly employed in instruction to enhance teaching and learning. A variety of e-learning technologies are available for use in educational programs. An Internet-based weblog is one of the existing e-learning technologies recently available. Weblog is also known as a blog, is essentially a homepage managed by a writer. McIntosh (2005) explains that weblog is written by one individual who gives his or her thoughts in a generally relaxed, 'spoken' style and highly interactive. According to Williams & Jacobs (2004), Blog has evolved along similar lines to other forms of human communication and it is a product of convenience rather than design. Lamshed *et al.*, (2002) state that weblog can be a continually updated resource that grows over time with the accumulation of writing and other content.

Several studies suggest that weblog allows educators motivate the students to creatively active in learning. Pinkman (2005) revealed that weblog makes the students interested and motivated to do online interaction and subconsciously practicing their English communication, this is due to comments from the teachers others can be obtained instantly. Other studies also strongly suggest that weblog should be more intensively used in teaching. Aljumah (2012) revealed that learner-perceived benefits of using weblog included increased interest and motivation to use English because of interaction with, and feedback from classmates and teachers. Hsu *et al.*, (2008) found that the use of weblog meets the instructor's instructional needs, providing an efficient and effective way to evaluate students' oral performance and permitting individualized feedback. In addition, students enjoy using weblog and believe that weblog assists their language-learning experience. Moreover, students have a favorable perception towards weblog use in their writing classroom.

Ahluwalia (2011) found that the blogging methods and activities provide a motivating curricular addition for those students with internet access to having meaningful target language interactions outside the classroom. Arani (2005) found that students prefer writing through weblog and most students believed that weblog can improve their English. Simsek (2009) revealed that students' perceptions toward weblog used in their writing class are really positive and the students believe that weblog could improve their writing interaction. The finding indicated that weblog integrated writing instruction improved the writing performance of students. Moreover students had a favorable perception towards weblog use. Ellison & Wu (2008) found that students who participated in the blog project were interested in continually writing on weblog even after the semester finished.

The previous studies mainly dealt with the students' perception on the use of weblog in instruction and how weblog may benefit the students' learning. There has been hardly any study conducted to investigate the students'

writing interaction and self-assessment. Therefore, based on the phenomenon of weblog significances in English language teaching as well as self-assessment practice made the researcher curious about investigating the students' writing interaction and self-assessment through weblogs. This study mainly investigated research questions related to the students' writing interaction when learning through weblogs and how the students do their self-assessment.

Research Methods

This study made use of a qualitative research design investigating the EFL writing interaction and self-assessment through weblogs. Descriptive analysis was utilized to analyze the data. The required data were collected through direct observation, interview and questionnaire to EFL students and a writing lecturer. This study was conducted to the fourth semester undergraduate students of English Education study program and the participants consisted of 22 EFL students who were currently taking English writing subject for their undergraduate degree in English education. Dealing with the characteristics of the students in this study were 10 male and 12 female. They all had passed the elementary and intermediate writing subjects. They had been taught various form of writing; therefore they have adequate knowledge to communicate through weblog in written forms.

A writing lecturer was also investigated to obtain more detail information on the use of weblog in English Language learning especially in the field of active writing activity and the use of weblog as a basis for students' self-assessment. The lecturer in this study was one male lecturer who had been teaching as a lecturer more than 5 years and had experiences in teaching writing subject. This was done to ensure that the data gathered were valid and reliable and obtained from reliable source of learning.

This study used four types of instruments; they are observation sheet, Interview guide, questionnaire and self-assessment sheet. The data collection of this study was in the form of direct observation, interview and questionnaire administration. Observation was conducted by means of intensively observing the students' activities in weblog. Observation is a "systematic and deliberate study through the eye of spontaneous occurrence as they occur". The observation in this study was conducted to collect data of the EFL writing interaction and self-assessment in EFL students' weblogs.

Semi-structured interview was conducted in relax and conducive atmosphere to ensure that the students and the lecturer being interviewed gave valid and reliable data needed for this study. Interview was a non-testing method of gathering information through direct communication with source of the data. The source of the data in this study referred to the students particularly conducted to find out the intense of the EFL writing interaction and self-assessment when they were learning writing through weblog.

Questionnaire was conducted to get more data concerning the EFL writing interaction, and self-assessment. Questionnaire was another way of gathering data which was administered to EFL students to collect data concerning the EFL writing interaction and self-assessment through weblogs. This was done to get more complete data by giving a serious of constructive questions to EFL teachers in regard to the EFL writing interaction and self-assessment through weblog.

Self-assessment data were obtained from the self-assessment sheet which was completed by the students after the interviews. The self-assessment sheet was administered in order to find out how the students can assess themselves more intensively and accurately by means of weblog. The self-assessment sheet was constructed in the form of statements of descriptors completed with comment space. The comment space was provided for the students to express their explanation and argumentation.

Results and Analysis

Based on the interviews conducted to the students and the lecture, it was found that weblog as the medium of writing promoted the students' writing interaction and also led to self-assessment to obtain reflection on their writing instantly and continually from their friends and the lectures. The extent of the writing interaction depended on how intense the students were engaged and involved in weblog writing activities.

The Students' Writing Interaction through Weblog

The lecturer' support is highly fundamental in making this online space a real environment for writing interaction and meaningful learning. In this study, the students were really motivated in writing through weblog; this is due to fact that being able to express opinions freely in the innovative venue of weblog is considered to be technology

minded students. Students interact easily in writing through weblog by utilizing the comment box. They post their assignments easily and they could also comment to their friends' writing, in addition, they could also interact to their lecturer wherever they are.

The study also revealed that the students' progressive change in the extent of willingness to interact in writing and their confidence to write has arisen which could be seen through the increased number of their postings. At the beginning, some students viewed the blog as a course requirement like any other courses, however, they then experienced its full facilitative potential of weblogs in developing their interaction ability in writing.

"I like writing on weblogs because I can get feedback straight away from my friends and sometimes from my lectures. I can assess myself by studying my friends' writing" (Student A)

"Weblogs motivate me to write because I want to show my friends my ability to write and want them to give feedback so I can assess my ability and improve my skill" (Student B).

"I like reading my friends' writing on weblogs and I can learn from them how to write in English. First, I felt shy to write my opinion and posted to weblogs created by my lecture, but after reading some of my friends' writing, finally, I love writing" (Student C)

Some of the selected statements above taken from the students during the interview indicated that the students are really intensively involved in writing interaction through weblog. It showed that weblog triggered them to interact in the form of writing and their eagerness to write has also developed significantly. The students also are willing to do their writing assignment and post them to the weblog to read by the others.

"I prefer to practice my writing in the blog rather than in the class and I don't feel worry of what my friends would think of language when I blog in English. I like to get my friends commented about my writing because those comments help me a lot"

The students' enjoyment in interacting in writing definitely needs to be maintained and developed in order their writing skill continuously improved. The use of weblogs was not only build up the students' willingness to interact in writing but also it helps the students to boost their self-confident in writing their opinions and ideas as well as their enthusiasm to know their friend comments.

"I feel uncomfortable to read my friends' comments. Weblog is a useful tool for me to share ideas with others. I find my writing is better when writing on my blogs than writing on paper in class. I don't know why. But I do enjoy reading my friends' posts and comments. They help me to be more confident"

The students' writing interaction progressively increased from day to day and more students post their comments and writing assignments. This indicated that weblogs have grabbed the students' attention and make them to compete among their friends to write. This is a positive impact of technology being utilized a medium of writing interaction.

"When I saw one of my friends posted his writing assignment, I felt I have to post my assignment too. Then finally, we commented to each other. At first, I don't like to read my friend comments, but after a while I like it because I can learn from his comments. Then, I revised my writing assignment and my friends put his comments again, plus a few more friends' commented too. I like them all" (Students C)

Interacting through the medium of writing may also lead to more improvement of writing ability on the part of students who have both their own work and their friends' work. In addition, the writing lecturer was also positively belief that weblogs can develop the students' writing interaction. He has learnt that the students were actively engaged in writing interaction once a writing assignment was posted to weblog to be done by the students. The students found that interacting through weblog indeed interesting and bring a high degree of enjoyment.

"I can re-revise my writing directly only in few minutes after posting it because I get instant comments from all my friends and sometime from my lecturer. I really enjoy writing on weblogs"

The lecturer found that the students started commenting to each other and the students did corrective changes on their writing. This showed that the students have revised their writing based on their friends' comments and they could produce better writing assignments. The students found their friends' comments were very interesting to read which encourage them to reply the comments. This makes them really creative in developing their ideas to make a good piece of writing and makes the interaction more meaningful and useful for the students.

"My students really enjoyed writing on weblogs I created. They are very active in commenting their friends' writing. If I compared to writing activity in the classroom, weblogs have given a better potential facultative medium of learning. In fact I was surprised how active they interacted to their friends and commenting to each other. Weblogs helped me a lot to encourage my students to write" (Lecturer)

This statement clearly indicates that the students are really enjoyed and active in writing interaction though weblog. This creative activity makes the students willing to practice their writing skill more frequently. On the other hand, the lecturer also found weblog is very useful and helpful to be used in teaching writing skill. The teacher found that weblog is surprisingly an essential tool of learning for the students, especially in making the students worked collaboratively.

"I find weblogs really made my students active in writing. My students like to read comments from their friends. At first, I thought they don't like getting comments or commenting their friends' writing, but I was wrong. They really like giving comments and reading their friends' comments. They all could use those comments to measure their ability and revise their writing assignments. In fact weblogs made me easier to teach writing now. Before it was hard for me to me the students to write" (lecturer)

Based on the interview conducted to the writing lecture, weblog has been very useful in developing the students' writing interaction and make the students motivated to write as well as their willingness to share knowledge to their friends improved dramatically. The lecturer also found that the students could learn from their friends' writing and made use of their comments as fundamental basis of improvement of their writing ability. The students are also getting more confidence after posting several assignments and getting several comments for revising their writing.

"My students feel more confident with writing on weblog than on paper. They express their ideas, opinion and thought better and they prefer the blogging way of submitting their assignments. I found it is much easier for me because I can read and corrective comments as soon as possible. It seems my students like it better"

The data from the observation to the students' interaction on the weblogs indicates that the number of the students' weblog posts significantly improve from time to time. In addition, the increased number of the students' comments of their friends' writing also indicated that the students are really interested in studying their friends' writing through weblog as well as their willingness to write a better form of writing have developed positively. The students could constantly develop their ability in writing by using comments given by their friend and the lecturer.

The result of the questionnaire also indicated that the students really enjoyed interacting through weblogs because they could get direct feedback from their friends and the lecturer to be use to measure their existing ability in writing. Therefore, they directly could use those comments and feedback to revise their writing to have more unified and coherent and meaningful form of writing. The questionnaire result also indicated that the students have a positive belief on weblogs to be more intensively used in teaching writing in order the teaching of writing more interactive and interesting for the students. In addition, they could also do their writing activities on their leisure time without the formal pressure of classroom setting.

The Students Self-assessment

The main data related the students' self-assessment was collected from the Self-assessment sheet which was administered to the students after they posted their comment or their assignment on weblogs. The self-assessment sheet provides students with a structured way of reflecting on, and critically evaluating, their own written work posted on the weblogs. Besides giving the opportunities for them to assess them self in general based on the comments given by their friends and lecturer, they can also access themselves on their writing ability using self-assessment sheet specially designs for its proposes. The excerpt from the self-assessment sheet indicates that the students can assess themselves in various aspects of writing.

"I can create some clear images for the reader. I write well focused topic and I write detail sentences to support my ideas. I generally write a well-focused the topic. I write the text in good organization. I use some transitions. In general my writing usually is easy to follow for the readers"

The data above showed that the students can assess their ability in formulating writing ideas and formulating better organization for their writing. Ideas are always prime concern in writing good text since everything is started from the ideas. A good idea could certainly make their writing interesting to read. On the other hand, ideas should be described in good well constructed sentences in the form of a good organization by using appropriate transition signals. This is important for the students to do in order that the students' writing is easy to follow.

"When I am writing a text, I always make sure my words are fairly precise, interesting and varied my word choices. My wording could be more specific to describe my ideas clearly. I use various figurative languages in my writing that adds depth to my writing and they make my writing more interesting to read"

The data above indicates that the students can assess their ability in choosing the appropriate words to describe their ideas and their ability to use more specific words so their writings become more meaningful and expressive. In addition, the students also could assess their ability in using figurative language. The ability of choosing and using of appropriate words is very necessary to developed by the students to develop their skill in writing. Moreover, the use of figurative meaning would add the value to depth of the students' writing.

"I use more complete sentences in my text. I generally write clear simple sentence structures. I do make few errors of grammar and usage, but I could fix them instantly based on the comments from my friends. I mostly use correct spelling, punctuation and capitalization. My text is very easy to read, spacing, color). My format is visually appealing to the readers. My presentation is creative and original in design so I think my writing is very interesting to read".

The data above indicates that the students have the capability to assess their ability in the use of language convention such as correct grammar, correct spelling, and correct capitalization and correct punctuation. They also could assess themselves on how their writing should be presented. The correct use of language convention and the right presentation of the text certainly made the text easy to read and interesting to follow as well easy to understand.

The data above showed that the students could easily do their self-assessment by using self-assessment sheet after they were interacting through weblog in written forms. They found that learning writing through weblog could develop various aspects of writing ability. Their improvements in writing aspects were mainly in formulating ideas, organization, word choice, figurative language, sentence fluency, convention and presentation. Those aspects of writing ability certainly should be continuously improved and this can be done by using weblog. Intensively use of weblog may maintain the students' learning motivation because their need to communicate directly and getting instant feedback become more essential for the students.

The interviews conducted to the students and the lecturer of writing subject indicated that weblog could be used to improve and intensify the students' writing interaction. The students could also assess their writing ability by using comments posted by their friends as feedback to their writing assignment. The writing assignments posted by all members of the weblog also could learn from their writing assignments as well as the comments given to their friends. This way of learning could be considered as multiple ways of communication which really led to students' independent of learning. Being independent learner would make the students more confidence in learning. [Pinkman \(2005\)](#) supports that blogging is a communicative and interactive online writing activity. Students can be very creative when learning writing through weblog. [Humphrey \(1999\)](#) confirms that online writing in general makes students work harder because their work can be constantly being shared with and receiving responses from their peers as well as their teacher.

The encouraging result of the observation on the students' active participation on writing interaction through weblog is certainly important to be considered for the development of language teaching, especially in teaching writing. This is due the fact that the students are highly active in interacting with their friends by posting their better writing assignment as well as posting their comments. The students posted their comments in suggestive manner or constructive criticisms, consequently most of the students found them interesting to read and made them willing to make their writing assignment better and easy to understand. [Williams & Jacobs \(2004\)](#) affirms that weblog expand the opportunities for students' interaction and the horizons of learning space, and provide student writers with a far greater audience both within and outside the classroom

The result of the questionnaire also supported the findings of the interviews and the observation which clearly indicated that the students are really interested in developing their writing skill through interacting on their weblog. They are motivated to write a better writing assignment to be posted to their weblog. The result of questionnaire also showed that the students made use their friend comments on their weblogs as the basis to improve their writing skill. This clearly can be seen that all students are positively accepted their friends' comments and use them to improve their writing ability. [Campbell \(2003\)](#) confirms that weblog can be used by teachers and students as media of communication in the EFL learning environment. He suggests that weblog can be used as a meeting place to express thoughts, thoughts, and interesting information.

In addition, the increased number of the posts sent by the students indicated that the students are really active in writing interaction. This phenomenon indicates that students also like writing through weblog. The reason might be because of the positive benefit of weblog in developing the students' writing ability. This finding is line with [Baker](#)

(2005), weblogs can improve writing of the students in English class. Weblogs are more potential to use in content sharing, creating and remixing activities.

The students in this study enjoyed having comments from their classmates, it was unexpected by the lecturer because students are usually ignorant to direct comments in the classroom activity and they are usually reluctant to do revision based on the comments given by the teacher. However, weblog solved this problems in the students are getting more opened to comments and treated these comments positively towards the improvement process of better writing skill. Weblog is proven to be an effective way to make the students able to express themselves freely. Bloch (2004) found that weblog enables students to express their thoughts at their own pace and in their own space.

Weblogs accommodate the students to have the opportunity to share their works to others and make the students proud of themselves being able to write something online. This feeling would certainly make the students go further to be creative and confident writer. It is important to make the students to be happy and proud of their achievement to make them more creative and achieve more skill for their life. Richardson (2003) affirms that blogging stimulates discussion and motivates students to do close reading of the text and then encourages them to respond in writing.

The students in this study found weblog is an interesting way of learning and they now prefer to practice their writing through online system because they like to get responses from their friends so they can assess their ability in writing. For the teacher of course this way makes it easier to teach writing and easier to motivate the students to keep up with their writing assignment. Bruffee (1984) confirms that weblog develops the students' interaction in the form of writing and makes them interacting actively because this way of learning more challenging and leads to more public interaction and social talk.

Students' comment on the self-assessment sheet showed that the students could easily asses themselves on their writing ability after they made several posting on weblogs. Self-assessment sheet breaks the text down into its constituent parts and invites students to assess their performance in each constituent part, such as ideas formulation, organization, words choice, the use of figurative language, convention and presentation. This helps students to look analytically and critically at their own performance. The comment space of self-assessment sheet also provides opportunities for the students to write their comment honestly and genuinely on their work, and then the comments could be used as main feedback for further improvement of their writing assignments. Dieu (2004) reaffirms this by stating that blogging gives students the chance to maximize focused exposure to language in new situations, peer collaboration, and contact with experts.

The data from the self-assessment sheet indicated that the students' writing performance and writing interaction have improved significantly since they have been learning through weblogs. The data showed the students have developed their performance in formulating ideas, writing more well-organized text, using a better word choice, using more figurative language, using correct convention and having a better presentation. This ability would give a high contribution to the students writing skill to build up their language skill. Nadzrah (2007) reaffirms that weblog enables students compose writing and post their writing to get feedback from other audiences. Weblog really creates interactive systems of learning writing and encourage the students to enhance their writing in the language constructively.

Based on the explanation above, it was clear that weblogs made the students actively interacting in writing and they made use of the weblogs improve their writing interaction and self-assessment. The students' self-confidence also improved positively. Therefore they are willing to share their writing assignment on the weblog. Downess (2004) claims that students' writing skills improve when they are interacting through weblog. Moreover, Bruffee (1984) argues weblog provides opportunities for students improve their knowledge in writing because it enables them to get feedback from other students and the teacher instantly.

This study revealed that the students' writing interaction and their ability to do self-assessment can be activated through weblog. Weblog encourages students to experience learning English in a new light of learning and a meaningful process. Weblog makes the students feel sufficiently comfortable to express themselves in written English. Students are free to decide whether or what to publish on their weblog without being forced to actively publish anything beyond the prescribed writing activities. In addition, weblog allows students have multiple roles in the writing process, as writers who write and post, as readers/reviewers who respond to other writers' posts, and as writer-readers who, returning to their own posts, react to criticism of their own posts. Therefore, it can be considered that weblog is a social place for creative learning.

Conclusion

Weblog is powerful learning media that triggered interaction and self-assessment among students. This study indicates that weblog is very useful tool of learning to be used in developing the students' active writing interaction as well self-assessment. The students could continuously improve their writing skill through studying and sharing

their knowledge through weblog and all comments posted by their friends are useful for the improvement of their writing skill. This study adds to the understanding of the use weblog in teaching English, especially in teaching writing. It is also intriguing to the students as they are well exposed to technology in their daily lives. The online environment of weblogs really offers a learning place that encourages collaboration and analytical thinking towards providing constructive comments on their writing assignments necessary for students to improve their writing skill. Therefore, using weblogs in language learning could contribute to a more meaningful learning experience where students benefit from their friends' experience and language competence. Weblogs indeed make the students become confident and better writer and their learning process goes continuously even after classroom activity ended. Through the use of weblog, the students could actively interact outside the classroom to develop their writing skill and carry out more meaningful self-assessment.

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