

FOSTERING STUDENTS' WRITING ACHIEVEMENT THROUGH WEBLOG

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Abstract

To support students' academic success, it is essential to equip them with good ability in writing. However, most of students encounter some problems in writing since writing involves essential, constructive, and complicated process. There are several ways to facilitate students to develop their writing. Due to many students inherent interest in technological things, thus implementing an online tool can be an alternative way to foster students' writing achievement. One of the choices is using weblog. As many studies revealed that weblog could enhance students' writing skills. Therefore, this study integrated weblog into students learning activities. Furthermore, it involved forty eleventh grade students that divided into two groups; experimental and control groups. At the end of the study, the students in experimental group gained better writing achievement than those who were in control group. It points out that learning through weblog could help students to enhance their writing achievement.

Keywords: *writing achievement, weblog, online tool*

1. Introduction

Writing is a necessary skill for students' success in learning. This skill has to be possessed by students because it is an academic success predictor and basic requirement for participation in social and global life (Graham & Perin, 2007). However, most of students encounter some problems in writing since writing involves essential, constructive, and complicated process. Moreover, writing is regarded as a difficult skill in learning English and students who lack writing skills are de-motivated to write in English. Furthermore, Tuan (2010) asserts that in the EFL classroom, numerous students occasionally cannot accomplish their tasks as they don't have any ideas to write but they tend to be forced to finish their writing tasks within a certain length of time.

Dealing with writing problems, Mettaningrum, Dantes, and Suarnajaya (2013) point out that ideas organization and language structure are the most

common problems that can be found in students' writing. Furthermore, students also have problems in developing their ideas, expressing their feeling, and stating their opinions. Additionally, insufficient exposure to English also contributes to students' poor performance in English writing skill. As the result, many non-standard sentences commonly appear in most of Indonesian students' scientific writing as they are affected by local languages and various forms of other nonstandard language usage (Kholiq & Ningsih, 2011). In addition, Chen (2002) mentions four major problems faced by EFL students in writing. First, lack of vocabulary contributes to difficulty in writing the ideas properly. Second, difficulty in generating ideas make students frustrated in developing ideas and providing supporting details in writing a paragraph. Third, grammatical errors include mistakes in tenses, parts of speech, and subject-verb agreement. Forth, problem with mechanics includes punctuation, capitalization and spelling.

Considering the problems above, teachers have to do some efforts to develop their students' writing skill. Computer-assisted instruction and interactive media technologies can be used in EFL classroom. As a large number of recent researches revealed that technology yield positive outcomes for educational purposes especially dealing with increasing motivation, facilitating active learning, providing efficient resources, and giving better access to information (Kizil, 2011). Moreover, implementing an online tool can be an alternative way to foster students' writing achievement due to many students inherent interest in technological things. One of the choices is by using weblog. Many studies (Murray & Hourigan, 2008; Klages & Clark, 2009; Palombo, 2011) found out that weblog could enhance students' writing skills.

Weblog is a medium of learning in which the students can post and comment their writing tasks on it. This medium is becoming increasingly popular to be used in process writing approach since it can optimize students' participation and maximize their level of motivation to write in English. In addition, teachers can systematically monitor students' writing skills (Sampath & Zalipour, 2009). For those reasons, this study used weblog to foster students' writing achievements.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Technology in EFL Learning

In recent years, the use of technology has become an essential element in foreign language learning. The integration of technology into teaching and learning process can increase student involvement into meaningful and deep understanding about language studied. Frank, Golonka, Bowles, Becker, Freynick and Richardson (2008, p.1) conclude that there are five primary functions of technology use in foreign language learning and teaching. They are: (1) Organization; Technology enables learners and teachers to organize learning and instruction outside of the classroom, and it enables learners to reflect on and take control of their own learning. (2) Input; Technology expands access to a broader range of rich target language input than is available in the classroom and/or provided by the curriculum, and it creates opportunities to individualize input. (3) Output and interaction; Technology expands opportunities for learners to create their own output and to interact synchronously or asynchronously with native speakers and more proficient peers outside of the classroom. (4) Feedback; Technology creates opportunities to give and receive individualized, maximally effective feedback. And (5) Collaboration; Technology enables collaborative, social learning synchronously or asynchronously outside of the classroom.

Furthermore, Moqbel and Rao (2013) state that the use of technology along with its various tools (like computer with the help of multimedia and internet) engages EFL learners in motivating and enjoyable learning environment as they have more opportunities and exposure to practice and to learn English and its culture. In addition, technology helps EFL learners to get realistic and authentic resources (Al-Maini, 2011). Therefore, they can be exposed to learning materials and activities that are relevant to the real situation of target language. Within such an approach, this condition is potential to experience them to have comprehensible input from those resources.

However, lack of skill and competence to use technology in the classroom becomes the main reason for not integrating this learning tool in EFL teaching and

learning process (Abrami, 2001). Besides, Dashtestani (2012, p.62) finds some barriers to the implementation of technology (CALL) in EFL courses: (1) lack of technology-based facilities, (2) low availability of computers in EFL courses, (3) lack of educational authorities' support to include CALL, (4) low levels of teachers' and students' computer literacy, (5) lack of EFL teachers' CALL methodological knowledge, and (6) teachers' lack of knowledge and intervention in producing CALL materials. Therefore, those technical and practical problems must be taken into consideration before technology is implemented in EFL learning process.

2.2 Overview of Weblog

A weblog comes from two-word phrase *Web log*. This two-word phrase was compressed into a single word, *Weblog*, and subsequently shortened to *blog*. Weblog is an effective communication medium that is more structured than an e-mail list and more focused than a discussion board (Bull, Bull, & Kajder, 2003). It refers to an online journal posted on the web that consists of a series of entries (text, audio, video, images, and files) arranged in chronological order, often updated frequently with new information about particular topics. The information can be written by the site owner, gleaned from other websites or other sources, or contributed by other blog users. It can be used to share information with the public or with only a selected group of individuals. Moreover, weblog also has interactive features which allow readers to directly publish comments about the posts on the blog.

In addition, the writers of weblog (called bloggers) can embed some links of references that have been used in completing their posts. Those embedded links serve as online resources that are useful not only for bloggers themselves but also for readers. Bloggers can save the used references on each post while readers can directly go to the source just by clicking the links given. Furthermore, based on the purpose of this study, this feature is also useful for teacher to monitor students' writings.

2.3 The Effects of Weblog on Students' Writing

A survey conducted by Blackstone, Spiri, and Naganuma (2007) indicate that students perceived various blogging activities positively. They were motivated to improve their blog posts in content and organization and correct their careless mistakes as their writings were posted online and could be accessed and read by the classmates, the teacher, and anyone around the world with an internet connection. In addition, Zhang (2009) states that blog can be considered as an effective medium to improve students' writing for some reasons; 1. It facilitates students to foster their critical thinking by encouraging them to evaluate their writing. 2. It provides students more examples, thus they can learn better. 3. It affects the quality of students' writing as students can learn from the feedbacks received. 4. It creates meaningful learning for students since they can explore other blogs and links to learn about many things. 5. It gives students purpose for writing by increasing students' interest and ownership in learning. 6. It motivates students to write especially for those who want to give impact and gain responses from audience. In spite of the various benefits promoted by weblog, it is necessary to note that the integration of web based tool doesn't automatically make the students learn and improve their language skills. Therefore, the involvement of teacher is very essential to control students' interaction and provide effective intervention (Sun & Chang, 2012)

3. Method

In conducting the study, the writers used quasi-experimental design in terms of pretest-posttest non equivalent group design. The population of this study was the eleventh grade students of a state senior high school in Palembang with the total number of the population was 344 students. Forty students were selected as the sample of this study by using purposive sampling technique. They were divided into two groups; experimental and control group. Each group consisted of twenty students.

The writers administered writing test in form of composing a paragraph of report text before and after giving treatment to assess students' writing achievement. The test was valid and reliable since it was adjusted to the school curriculum and checked by two raters. The results of the test were analyzed by using paired and independent sample t-tests. In addition, observation was conducted to obtain clear information about the students' writing progress. The objects of the observation were students' posts on their blogs. The writers observed three blog posts of the students (in the beginning, middle, and final meetings).

During the treatment, teaching learning activities in experiment group were conducted through following certain steps namely; (1) Teacher introduced the topic of the meeting, (2) Teacher and students visited class blog, (3) Teacher and students browsed and read selected materials (report text) from the links embedded on class blog, (4) Teacher read one post from class blog about certain topic in each meeting while explaining about aspects of writing, (5) Teacher asked students to brainstorm or get the ideas about the same topic (students may browse other sources related to the topic), (6) Students wrote a paragraph of report text related to the topic with group/peer/individually (drafting process), (7) Students posted their first writing draft on their blog, (8) Students gave comments on each others works (responding process), (9) Students did self-editing on their works (revising and editing process), (10) Students published their revision or final draft in the comment column of class bog (post-writing), and (11) Teacher and students had small discussion about their works.

4. Results and Discussion

There was a significant improvement in writing achieved by experiment group students. In detail, for seven aspects of writing, experiment group also showed significant improvement in all aspects with the order from the highest to lowest results as follows: 1) closing sentence (23%), 2) tone (16%), 3) opening sentence (14%), 4) supporting sentences (14%), 5) organization idea (13%), 6) vocabulary or word usage (11%), and 7) spelling, capitalization and punctuation

(9%). But control group did not make any significant improvement in their writing. Moreover, only closing sentence improved while 6 aspects did not. Furthermore, there was significant difference of posttest and gain score between experiment and control group. The results of experiment and control groups' scores were presented in Table 1.

Table 1

VARIABLES	PRETEST		POSTTEST		Mean diff pre and post exp within	Mean diff pre and post cont within	T-value and sig. between pre and post exp within	T-value and sig. between pre and post cont within	T-value and sig. posttest between exp and control	T-value and sig. of gain between exp and control
	Mean Exp	Mean Cont	Mean Exp	Mean Cont						
Writing (total)	49.97	49.12	79.20	53.35	29.22	4.22	14.838	1.627	11.739	7.671
							0.000	0.120	0.000	0.000
a. Tone	51.88	51.88	84.38	53.13	32.50	1.25	13.175	0.490	11.650	8.810
							0.000	0.629	0.000	0.000
b. Opening Sent	48.13	50.00	77.50	51.88	29.38	1.88	7.194	0.348	6.042	4.069
							0.000	0.732	0.000	0.000
c. Supporting Sent	50.00	49.38	78.75	54.38	28.75	5.00	9.976	1.035	6.106	4.221
							0.000	0.314	0.000	0.000
d. Concluding Sent	31.25	27.50	77.50	40.00	46.25	12.50	12.333	5.210	9.693	7.581
							0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
e. Organization Idea	55.00	51.88	81.88	54.38	26.88	2.50	8.459	0.777	10.252	5.389
							0.000	0.447	0.000	0.000
f. Vocab/Word Use	53.75	52.50	75.63	57.50	21.88	5.00	7.315	1.405	7.623	3.630
							0.000	0.176	0.000	0.001
g. Spell, capital, punct	59.38	60.63	78.75	62.50	19.38	1.88	6.049	0.471	5.151	3.425
							0.000	0.643	0.000	0.001

In line with it, the results of observation revealed that there was progress in writing made by experiment group students. From the final observation, it could be identified that experiment group students made improvement in most of observation aspects. Over 50 % of the students were in excellent category especially in accession, organization, statement, and evaluation. Meanwhile, dealing with synthesis and creation, less than 50% of the students were in excellent category. The results of observation were showed in Table 2.

Table 2

OBSERVATION ASPECTS	OBSERVATION 1				OBSERVATION 2				OBSERVATION 3			
	Excellent	Good	Poor	Failed	Excellent	Good	Poor	Failed	Excellent	Good	Poor	Failed
Statement	15%	55%	25%	5%	15%	80%	5%	-	55%	45%	-	-
Accession	25%	35%	40%	-	25%	65%	10%	-	70%	30%	-	-
Evaluation	5%	50%	45%	-	10%	80%	10%	-	50%	50%	-	-
Organization	15%	35%	50%	-	10%	75%	15%	-	60%	40%	-	-
Synthesis	5%	45%	45%	5%	5%	75%	20%	-	30%	65%	5%	-
Creation	5%	40%	55%	-	5%	85%	5%	5%	40%	55%	5%	-

Based on the results above, it can be concluded that blogging is very effective to improve students' writing skill. The result of this study is in agreement with many other studies which have similar results. Study conducted by Murray and Hourigan (2008) show that blogs could be easily integrated into a virtual EFL writing environment to improve students' writing skills. Furthermore, Palombo (2011) explains that experiencing students by the use of blog in writing process improved students written products. In addition, a research conducted by Klages and Clark (2009) point out that integrating blogs into learning contributed to more effective writing.

The improvements in all aspects of writing indicate that writing performance of the students in this study was getting better. In each meeting, students uploaded better posts on their blogs based on corrections from others in the previous posts. As the result, the quality of the content also improved. Vurdien (2011) states that writing through blog in EFL class can make the students become more careful in planning their tasks and error corrections before submitting their work. Besides, there were participation and interaction among students during commenting and revising phase. It makes learning atmosphere become interactive and collaborative.

In detail, the order from the highest to the lowest improvement is as follows: 1) closing sentence, 2) tone, 3) opening sentence, 4) supporting sentences, 5) organization idea, 6) vocabulary or word usage, and 7) spelling, capitalization and punctuation. The results reveal that during writing process, students tended to be more focus on the content of their writing than mechanics like spelling, capitalization and punctuation. Furthermore, closing sentence was highly significant improved because most of the students did not include closing sentence in their writing pretest. They did not conclude their writing at all. It means that at the beginning of the study, students' knowledge about writing aspects was still very poor. Having been taught about parts of a paragraph, they already knew about those aspects then applied them on their writing product. Thus, not only closing sentence but also opening sentence and supporting sentences gained high improvement. Besides, reading before writing really helped students in getting the ideas. Input from reading helped them to elaborate the ideas that would be expressed into written words. Moreover, they were able to produce the ideas in correct tone and good organization. Furthermore, low improvement in vocabulary aspect might be caused by online activities during teaching and learning process. As the students preferred to open online dictionary they easily found the meaning but quickly to forget it. At last, due to unawareness of good spelling, capitalization, and punctuation, therefore students gained lowest progress in this aspect.

In conjunction with it, the data from observation also strengthen the results of students' writing improvement. In terms of accession, online activities enabled students to obtain more appropriate information that support their writing process so that they were able to organize their writing using good statement. Furthermore, their friends' feedbacks on their writing helped them to evaluate their compositions. Meanwhile, students' lack of language proficiency caused them difficult to synthesize the ideas from online resources. Finally, students did not really concern with creation on their posts since their main focus was on their writing.

5. Conclusion and Remark

Based on the results and interpretations, there was significantly different results in writing achievement between experiment and control group in which experiment gained significant improvement in all variables as well as their aspects. It is concluded that weblog was effective to improve writing achievement of EFL learners. However, it raises some important points that need to be suggested for further research. First, blogging for learning purpose in classroom is good especially in English language teaching as long as the facility and teacher's guidance support learning process. Second, web based resources in EFL learning should be taken into account in this digitized learning era. At last, some obstacles still could not be avoided but it still could be anticipated. Therefore, teacher should be well prepared before integrating ICT into EFL learning.

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