

DESIGNING INTERACTIVE WRITING TEACHING USING BLOGS

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Abstract: In recent years, the use of blogs has received a great deal of attention from English teachers around the world and is now establishing its place in writing classroom, as a means of assisting a more realistic setting for the joyful and interactive writing learning. However, blogging activity can be a complicated activity to implement in EFL writing class due to the focus on the writing activity in an internet application. This paper explores the design of using blogs for teaching writing so that blogging activities can be implemented in writing class to be interactive activities to improve the students' writing skill for particular context in university level. For so doing, it is conducted a research going to be integrated into the writing class. Therefore, classroom action research design is used. It is expected that the use of blogs in a writing class can enhance students' writing skill, and it is to be an alternative technique for English writing teachers to encounter their problems in writing classroom.

Keywords: *writing skill, interactive writing teaching, blogs, blogging activity.*

1. Introduction

Learning to write is considered the most difficult skill for students who lack motivation to write in English, and whose writing capacity is not good. In order to improve students' writing skill, English writing teachers have to find the suitable, effective, and innovative approaches or activities (Kitchakarn, 2013:1). Also, English teachers should try to use the teaching medium that contains aspects of pedagogy, social interaction, and technology use (Wang in As'ad, 2010:175). Thus, teaching media, here, relates to the use of technology and one which is the famous media is internet. One of the internet facilities is blogs. Therefore, blogging activity is one of the alternative ways to solve the problem.

Mynard (2007) stated that blog is an influential and effective way for language teachers to encourage student writers to communicate or reflect their ideas on their learning experience and add their response to their peers' blogs to encourage further expression. In addition, Williams & Jacobs in Blackstone, et al. (2007:1) assert that when a language teacher introduces blogging activity within the language classroom (writing classroom), the opportunity for student interaction in writing activities and the learning environment are really provided. Hence, blogging activity provides student writers with a far greater audience both within and outside the classroom.

Blogging activity is one of the effective ways to share ideas when writing. According to Aljamah in Kitchakarn (2013:3), students can be motivated to write more in both academic and non academic. They can write and give comment on their friends' writing through blogging activity. In this activity they can discuss and share their interests, their likes, and individual differences. Students can get feedback from other audiences through blogging; they also have an opportunity to get information in which they are interested and write things they really want to. Moreover, it can improve students' writing skills by integrating blogs in writing classes (Dawns, 2004).

In academic context, the personal experience of teaching writing at English Department of State Islamic Institute of Palangka Raya shows that in the writing class most of the students got difficult in writing. They could not communicate to each other and could not reflect their ideas when they are assigned to write. They lack motivation for the writing activities. It seems that the fore mentioned problems become the trend problems in the writing class. Therefore, in writing classroom there should be a way to let the students exchange their ideas and respond to each other. One of the alternative ways is through blogging activities.

The use of blogs with special features in EFL writing class gives benefits as shown by some studies. A research conducted by Fellner & Apple in 2006 (as cited by Kusumawardhani, 2014:485) believed that using weblog would promote writing fluency because students can consider their vocabulary more and recycle it as well as notice their language use. Blackstone, et al. (2007) researched on using blogs in English language teaching and learning. By blogging activity the student as peer review partners can help their peer edit the writings before being uploaded. It facilitated greater learner interaction and reflection on skill development. Next, a study by Fauzan in 2009 (as cited by Kusumawardhani, 2014:485) showed that blogging strategy in writing class could improve students' writing skill in developing descriptive essay. Blogs can be powerful and useful if the use is maximized to meet teachers' and students' needs. Then other studies investigated weblogs to teach students to write recount text (As'ad, 2010; Kusumawardhani, 2014). Results showed that the use of weblogs in the teaching and learning process can motivate the students to write better, express their ideas through their blogs, and improve their writing abilities. Lestari (2011) did a research on blogs for teaching writing. The findings indicated that by using class blog the students could be familiar with blogging and could make their writings which consist of their thoughts and feelings. Further studies on blogging combined

with peer feedback were done (Kitchakarn, 2013; Gomez & McDougald, 2013). The results said that online peer feedback through blogging can contribute to the improvement of the students' writing abilities (Kitchakarn, 2013) and act as boosting factors to enhance or maintain levels of coherence in text through the shaping of the students' cognition and affection (Gomez & McDougald, 2013).

In the current study, the researcher attempts to overcome his problem in the writing class. It focuses on how the students exchange their ideas and respond to each other interactively to writing better. Therefore, it is very much necessary to conduct a study to enhance the students' writing skill at English Department of the State Islamic Institute of Palangka Raya. The study explores the design of using blogs for teaching writing so that blogging activities can be implemented in writing class to be interactive activities. By using blogs it benefits the students greatly for their writing skill improvement, and teachers benefit from blogging activity as an alternative technique to teaching writing with the great challenges.

2. Discussion

'Blog' is a term which is shortened from 'weblog', and this term is introduced in 1999 by Merholz in As'ad (2010:175). 'Blogging' refers to the activities to write in a blog. Blogging activity means the writing activity in an internet application in which the drafts or the product of writings can be accessed by everyone whom has internet connection and blog of her/his own (As'ad, 2010:175).

A blog contents the activities of writing and posting short articles displayed in a reverse chronological order and the visitors can give comments on the author's entries. As stated by Richardson (2003), because a blog is essentially writing activities, this digital paper can support drafting, provision of feedback (can be from students or the teacher), revision, and online publication in ways the traditional paper simply cannot support. To do so, teacher can give a teaching instruction to the students to write a paragraph or an essay by a given a topic and explaining the paragraph or essay development.

There are three types of blog for the language classes (Kusumawardhani, 2014:486). The first type is 'tutor blog' which is run by the teacher of a class. The content of this type can be limited to syllabus, course information, homework or assignment. Students are normally restricted to being able to write comments to the teacher's posts. The second type is 'class

blog’–blogging groups/subgroups within the class or a group within the class–in which this blog is a shared space, with teacher and students being able to write the main area of class discussion. Students can be encouraged to reflect in more depth in writing on themes touched upon in class, and they are given a greater sense of freedom and involvement than with the tutor blog. The last one is ‘learner blog’, a student has individual blog, which requires more time and effort from the teacher to both set up and moderate, perhaps the most rewarding. It benefits students for their own personal online space. Students can be encouraged to write frequently about what interests them, and they can post comments on peers’ blogs.

This research more focuses on the working of blogging groups within the class. As suggested by Blackstone, et al. (2007:8), to have assigning certain students to respond to others’ posts, a teacher can use ‘blogging groups’ within the class. A blogging group might consist of any number of students, but since the purpose is to narrow the field of potential peer respondents/commentators to a specific manageable group, it is best limited to no more than six members.

Moreover, creating blogging groups is the equivalent of classroom management; only in this case, student interactions in cyberspace are manipulated for greater inclusivity (Blackstone, et al., 2007:9). When blogging groups are utilized in the writing class, the students are created in groups of five to six classmates—a high student, two average students and two low students—gotten from the recorded scores of writing test in preliminary study (Kitchakarn, 2013:5). Researcher teacher asks the groups to create a group blog, with password-protected and friendly environment for students to work together. Teacher suggests the students to use a popular, easy-to-use and free weblog provider: Blogger. Students are explained about how to exchange their ideas and respond to each other interactively when writing.

To engage students in experiencing blogging activities, the training session is conducted before the lesson starts. They are trained to be familiar with the blogging activities. Members of each group are required first respond to the posts of at least half of the members of the blogging group before responding to the posts of other classmates. This procedure creates a realistic chance for each blogging group member to receive multiple comments per post, while it also eliminates the common occurrence of student writers only reading and responding to posts by friends. That is why teacher trains students to get easily involved in

blogging activities so that they can produce more effective and specific response or comments.

As stated by (Blackstone, et al., 2007:9), in addition to working with the posts of their blogging group members, students are recommended to do other activities as a group, such as peer reviewing or giving feedback on various exercises, or carrying out content discussions such as ideas development etc. Thus, feedback activity is implemented in blogging activities. By so doing, students can further cultivate a sense of meaningful social interaction continuity with their group members for the posted revision to better writing versions.

Then the role of teacher in blogging activities is really important. Teachers with experience in this activity should guide students to successfully writing. If students are not provided enough guidance, they will gravitate to the posts made by their friends. To encounter this problem teacher is also suggested to make comments on students' writing. The comments might come after students give comments. Finally, they make changes of their writings based on the peer and teacher feedback as well.

This present research is going to be integrated into the writing class of English Department of the State Islamic Institute of Palangka Raya. It is because this research is conducted to find the appropriate procedures of the implementation of using blogs to enhance the students' writing skill. While carrying out the research, classroom action research design is used. It is a cyclical process covering four steps—planning, implementing, observing, and reflecting—adapted from the model proposed by Kemmis & McTaggart (1992:11-13). Data are mainly gathered from students' writings through blogging activities, observation, field notes, questionnaire and interview.

3. Conclusion

It is expected that the design of the use of blogs in a writing classroom can enhance students' writing skill since this blogging activity is an interesting one. Moreover, by implementing blogging activities it gives students chance to interactively exchange their ideas and respond on peers' writings to correctively revising into the better writings. Also, it gives them chance to develop writing process which can build their independency, confidence and motivation. At the end, hopefully this research might give insight to the English teachers and inspire them in using blogs and designing appropriate blogging activities for interactive teaching in EFL writing class.

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FOREWORD

The proceedings, *Applied Linguistics, General Linguistics and Literature*, are the selected papers that were presented in the 1st National Conference on ELT (NACELT) conducted at the State Islamic Institute of Palangka Raya, Central Kalimantan, on Sunday, 15 November 2015. The title of the proceedings was taken from the theme of the National Conference.

The conference was organized by English Education Study Program, Language Education Department, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, the State Islamic Institute of Palangka Raya. This annual conference is a discussion forum that researchers, practitioners (lecturers, teachers and instructors) and teachers can expose their ideas, researches and products on language teaching of applied linguistics, general linguistics and literature.

The activity of this national conference is aimed at testing out ideas and perspectives of all researchers, practitioners (lecturers, teachers, instructors) with intellectual bearings that can be different one another to share a similar frame of the references. Additionally, it is objected to bring together a broader spectrum of scholars to have an intellectual conversation.

With the compilation of the conference papers, it is expected that the proceedings will be beneficial for the practitioners (lecturers, teachers and instructors) participating in the conference. Also, it is hoped that this proceedings will be useful for those who are interested in the development of their knowledge in language teaching of applied linguistics, general linguistics and literature.

The appreciation is addressed to the organization of the conference and the publication of the proceedings. First, it is addressed to Rector of the State Islamic Institute of Palangka Raya (Dr. Ibnu Elmi A.S. Pelu, SH., MH) as well as Dean of Faculty of Teacher Training and Education of the State Islamic Institute of Palangka Raya (Drs. Fahmi, M.Pd). The gratitude is also addressed to the plenary speakers of the conference, Prof. Hj. Utami Widiati, M.A., Ph.D (State University of Malang), Prof. Wahjuningsih Usadiati, M.Pd (University of Palangka Raya), and Dr. Imam Qalyubi, M.Hum (State Islamic Institute of Palangka Raya). Finally, the deepest thanks go to the members of the organizing committee, and all lecturers and students of English Education Study Program of the State Islamic Institute of Palangka Raya who gave their attention and time for the success of the national conference.

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CONTENTS

Foreword	2
Table of Contents	3
1. ENHANCING STUDENT-TEACHER'S ABILITY IN WRITING LESSON PLANS FOR PRACTICE TEACHING <i>WAHJUNINGSIH USADIATI</i>	5
2. LINGUISTICS AND GENES: A CURRENT TRENDS AND THE FUTURE OF LINGUISTICS APPROACH <i>IMAM QALYUBI</i>	13
3. EDMODO: AN EFFECTIVE SOLUTION TO BLENDED LEARNING FOR EFL LEARNERS <i>ARIF RAHMAN HAKIM & LAILATUL KODRIYAH</i>	22
4. DESIGNING INTERACTIVE WRITING TEACHING USING BLOGS <i>M. ZAINI MIFTAH</i>	33
5. THE PERSPECTIVE OF LEARNING COMMUNITY TOWARDS LANGUAGE TEACHING <i>MAIDA NORAHMI</i>	39
6. THE ATTAINMENT OF THE HIGHER ORDER THINKING SKILLS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF BLOOM'S TAXONOMY IN TESTS USED BY THE ENGLISH TEACHERS AT MADRASAH TSANAWIYAH AND MADRASAH ALIYAH PALANGKA RAYA <i>RAHMADI NIRWANTO</i>	47
7. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF USING BRAINSTORMING TECHNIQUE IN WRITING PARAGRAPH ACROSS THE DIFFERENT LEVEL OF ACHIEVEMENT AT THE SECOND SEMESTER ENGLISH DEPARTMENT STUDENTS OF PALANGKA RAYA STATE ISLAMIC INSTITUTE <i>SABARUN</i>	65

8. THE IMPACTS OF PODCASTING ON SPEAKING FLUENCY OF L2 LEARNERS _____ 86
LUQMAN BAEHAQI
9. MEAN LENGTH UTTERANCE OF CHILDREN MORPHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT _____ 96
APNI RANTI
10. THE USE OF MORPHOLOGICAL AND SYNTACTIC SYSTEM IN SAMSUNG GALAXY ANDROID SMARTPHONE'S SETTING IN CYANMOBILE _____ 110
DELLIS PRATIKA