

## DEVELOPING WRITING ABILITIES OF EFL STUDENTS THROUGH BLOGGING

Orachorn KITCHAKARN  
Bangkok University  
Language Institute  
Bangkok, THAILAND

### ABSTRACT

Due to a rapid development and expansion of technology and, as a result, Web 2.0 technologies are providing both teachers and learners with new solutions to the limitations of traditional method in the field of language teaching and learning. The research compared students' writing ability before and after they were taught through blog, a new medium or tool for written communication and interaction in many different languages around the world.

The research design is a kind of one group pretest posttest. Participants were 35 first-year students. They were divided into eight groups. Four or five students in each group created a blog, [www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com), and they worked together for twelve weeks to produce six pieces of writing assignments.

Each member in the group worked through providing comments, editing and revising on the blog until the group got a final writing and submitted that to the teacher for grading. The instruments used in this study were:

- two writing tests
- a questionnaire surveying students' attitude toward learning through blogs, and
- postings on blogs to reflect their learning experiences.

The results revealed that after the students worked together on weblogs, their English writing mean score of the posttest was higher than that of the pretest, and they had positive attitudes towards using weblogs in learning. Regarding cooperative learning experiences through using weblogs, most students thought that it was interesting, a new experience to work with their friends on the weblogs.

**Keywords:** Writing abilities, blogging, EFL students

## **INTRODUCTION**

**In second language learning, writing is thought as the most difficult skill. It is a vital skill for students to gain their educational and occupational success; however, undergraduate students' writing skill still needs improvement. Most of them have to struggle with their insufficient language knowledge, so their sentences are not correctly grammatical. In addition, they are unable to transfer their ideas clearly and completely in writing (Silva, 1993). They do not know how to choose the right words and start their writing (Cimcoz (1999).**

**Therefore, writing can be a painful learning experience for some students who may have inadequate ideas, knowledge and skills to process (Warschauer, 2010). However, this problem may result from English teachers who still use the traditional teacher-centered method in classroom; they also fail to use appropriate materials and suitable teaching techniques in their writing classes, so it leads to boring and ineffective classes (Sritunyarat, 2003).**

**Since the importance of writing skill has been realized, many new techniques are implemented in class. In recent years there has been a rapid development and expansion of technology and, as a result, Web 2.0 technologies are providing both teachers and learners with new solutions to the limitations of traditional method in the field of language teaching and learning.**

**According to Ajjan & Hartshorne (2008), the great beneficial characteristics such as low cost, accessibility, interaction and ease of use of Web 2.0 technologies make teaching and learning more attractive than before. Among Web 2.0 tools, blogs are applied as a powerful tool for language learning and teaching (Campbell, 2003; Johnson, 2004).Weblog can help students develop their writing abilities, motivate them to write effectively and maintain environments for students to continue learning to write even when out of classroom walls. For language teachers, using blogs is a creative and innovative way to teach language skills (Hashemi & Najafi, 2011).**

## **WHY TEACH WITH BLOGS?**

**Weblogs, or blogs for short, are simply described as user-friendly webpage, in online journals, logs of thoughts, and reflections. It's a space for people to write whatever they want and publish. Readers can write comments on what they have read, displayed in reverse chronological order with most recent first (Eastment, 2005; Throne & Payne, 2005, Davis & McGrail, 2009).**

**In addition, blogs can include photos, audio, hyperlinks and video information. In language learning, the use of blogs is seen as journal writing. Although the purpose of using blogs has not been set for education from the start, blogs can be used as a learning tool to develop students' writing skills and provide an exciting environment where they can practice writing.**

**Blogs are slowly becoming well known as a useful tool in English language classroom. Dyrus & Worley (2005) stated that methods of information exchange in education can be done by blogging. Likewise, students can have a personal space where they read, write, share ideas, or ask questions, so social cohesion is developed (Huffaker, 2005).**

**It is not difficult for students to create, design and maintain their blogs themselves although they do not have technical background experience. When blogging, students need to be active learners, construct meaning, and organize their thoughts, both inside and outside the classroom (Du & Wagner, 2005). Blogging fosters interactive, critical thinking and collaborative skills. When posting their work on the weblog, the students' writing will be exposed to various ideas for their wider audience beyond classmates (Ward, 2004).**

**Using blog provides a real audience for students' writing; they have to carefully monitor their writing before posting. Integrating blogs for educational purposes can be used to improve L2 writing (Downes, 2004), to increase students' reflective learning process (Xie et al, 2008), and to develop L2 community of writers (Sollars, 2007).**

**Smith (2005) suggested that teachers integrate blogs into their teaching and learning. By so doing, students will no longer live in the age of the static web pages." Likewise, Ferdig & Trammell (2004) showed that blogs provide students with an easy and friendly environment to write their reflection and publish their work. It is effective to use blogs in teaching and learning.**

**As Noytim (2010) stated that there are many good reasons why teachers use blogs as a powerful means for developing English language teaching and learning. Blogging provides students an authentic learning environment; they know that the audiences for their writings are not only teachers but also their classmates and a global audience or people in cyber space.**

**Therefore, blogging motivates students to write more. Through blogging, students have chances to read or write things according to their interest and need, they also get feedback from other audiences (Aljamah, 2012).**

**Language instructors may use blogs as a teaching tool to encourage students to reflect their views on their learning experience; they also add comments or feedback to their friends' blogs to encourage further expression (Mynard, 2007). Blogs also integrate students into the world of interconnected media; they become familiar with using blog both as a writer and a reader. Students can develop critical thinking skills, writing skills and information literacy through using blogs (Richardson, 2006). Due to Bloch (2008), it is very powerful to integrate blogs in teaching writing skills because it is easy for both teacher and students to create and run the blogs; moreover, they support group work, feedback activity, and collaborative learning. Students will be encouraged to write more, they can share their writing easier.**

Besides, students have opportunities to write outside classroom practice, they are provided with sense of ownership; and teachers are encouraged to use blogs in different ways of teaching.

According to Campbell (2003), teachers can use blogs to post materials that recycle and review vocabulary and topics presented during lessons; blogs work as a bridge to link lessons. Also, teachers can provide students information about course materials, schedule changes, homework assignments etc. through blogs. Campbell (2003), remarked that there are three types of blogs that can be used in ESL classrooms, they are the tutor blog, the learner blog and the class blog.

Moreover, blogs provide increased communicating opportunity for shy, quieter students to have more time to consider what to express and to write their reflection or feedback (Galien & Bowcher, 2010).

### **PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON BLOGS IN EFL WRITING CLASSES**

Weblogs are a kind of powerful teaching tools which were employed in L2 instruction for different educational purposes. There are some studies that have shown the benefits of using blogs to help develop the students' language ability. It is important to know the results of the previous researches about the effect of using blogs on language teaching in order to understand whether blogs are truly useful for instruction.

McGrail & Davis (2011) explored how blogging influenced students writing development at the elementary level. Data was collected from students' pre- and post- blogging writing project, and students' postings. The finding showed that the students became conscious of and associated with the audiences, involved in a community of bloggers, they also learned to master the writing process. T

hey felt more concentrated on writing. Khampusaen (2012) examined the potential value of blogging collaboration on the students' essay writing skills, teachers and peers provided feedback through blogging. The results showed that students' attitudes towards writing through collaborative blogging were positive. Feedbacks from both teacher and peers helped students improve their writing skills.

Moreover, students became autonomous learners as a result of using blogs in writing class. Likewise, Downes (2004) found that students' writing skill can be improved through blogging in writing classes. In addition, Nadzrah & Kemboja (2009) pointed out that students write their compositions with specific purposes when using blogs.

Among the different aspects, affective factors such as attitude are considered important because many experts believe that the attitude of the learners plays a significant role in their success or failure in language learning, i.e., it can act as a facilitator or a barrier in language learning (Krashen, 2007). Exploring the learners' attitude can be helpful for teachers, textbook designers, curriculum planners, and program evaluators.

Many previous research studies showed that students had a positive attitude toward using blogs.

For instance, Aljumah, (2012) investigated students' perceptions and attitudes towards the use of blogs and stated the advantages and disadvantages of using blogs in teaching English writing course for EFL Majors at Qassim University in Saudi Arabia. Thirty-five Saudi students majoring in English participated in the study. Data were collected from the participants through questionnaires.

The finding indicated that students had a favorable perception and attitude towards the use of blogs in their writing class.

Findings also revealed that students perceived benefits of using blogs to increase motivation and interest to use English in interaction with classmates and teachers. Likewise, Jones, (2006) explored perceptions of ESL students and those of the teacher regarding the implementation of blogs in the ESL writing class. Data was collected from five students.

They were assigned to use blogs for peer responding, editing, revising and publishing in their writing assignments. The data collecting from interviews, open-ended questions, and students' reflective journals showed that the students liked using blogs for completing their writing tasks.

They also felt positively to blogging. From the finding, it is significant that the students had trust and confidence in peer editing and revising.

At Bangkok University, there are ten faculties comprising Accounting, Business Administration, Communication Arts, Laws, Humanities, Economics, Science and Technology, Fine and Applied Arts, Engineering, and Architecture, The students are required to take three fundamental English courses.

Four main skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking are integrated in each course. Students' writing ability is rather poor.

In most writing assignments, they wrote ungrammatical sentences and copied stories from different websites. Also, the results from the test revealed that most students got low scores in the writing part. Therefore, as an English teacher, it is necessary to find new techniques to encourage students to improve their writing skill.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Objectives**

Since today, educational technology, web 2.0 technologies, such as blogs are providing both teachers and students with an interesting, active, and friendly language teaching and learning environment.

It would be beneficial for students to use blogs to work in groups, to get feedback, and to promote collaboration among teams.

So, the researcher decided to adopt blogs as an innovative tool to develop students enrolled in EN 012 to make this class more interesting and challenging. In this study, three main research questions are addressed as follows:

- Will the use of blogs help students to improve their writing abilities?
- What are students' attitudes towards using blogs in writing English?
- What are students' perception on the advantages of using blogs in writing English?

### **Participants**

This study employed one group pretest posttest design. The population was 4,515 first-year students enrolled in a fundamental English course (EN012) in the second semester of 2012 academic year. There were 129 sections altogether.

Since students were already assigned to their sections, the cluster sampling was employed to get one section. As a result, 35 students from one section participated in this study. They ranged from 18-21 years of age. None of them had experience of using blogs prior to the study.

### **Instruments**

Three kinds of instruments were used to investigate the impact of using blogs on students' writing abilities and attitudes. There were two writing tests, a survey questionnaire, and postings of learning experience on blogs.

First, one writing test, functioning as the pre-test, was given to the students at the beginning of the semester.

Another writing test, as the post-test, was given at the end of the semester. Time allowed for writing was 70 minutes.

Students were given a topic, narrating an event, to write a paragraph, containing at least 150 words with the total score of 20 points.

Second, to study how students thought and perceived about using blogs in a writing class, a questionnaire containing two parts with a choice of five rating scale responses for each was distributed to the students after the posttest. The first part asked about students' attitudes toward using blogs in writing English, and the second part asked about advantages of using blogs.

This questionnaire was adapted from the concept proposed by Aljamah (2012), and it was pilot-tested with 32 students in the summer class after they had participated in pilot learning of seven weeks. The reliability value of the questionnaire used to explore students' attitude was .791.

Improvement on the piloted questionnaire items had been made based on the students' feedback, so any misinterpretation can be prevented.

The data obtained from the questionnaire was analyzed quantitatively for mean and standard deviation and presented in tables based on the following ranges: 1.00-1.50 = very negative/very low, 1.51-2.50 = negative/low, 2.51-3.50 = moderate, 3.51-4.50 = positive/high, 4.51-5.00 = very positive/very high.

Finally, the third instrument was students' reflection on blogs. To understand more information of students' using blogs in a writing class, at the end of the semester the researcher encouraged all students to post their working experience through blogs on their weblogs. Moreover, students could share their learning experience with the classmates. They also reflected their feedback on the problems and the benefits they obtained while using blogs in doing writing tasks.

### **Learning Procedure and Data Collection**

In the first week, the subjects were given a pretest. They were then placed in the high, average, and low groups according to their scores. Using mean, median, and mode to group the students, the researcher got 8 groups, each of which contained 4-5 members; a high student, two average students and one or two low students.

Next, the teacher asked them to create blogs with a safe password-protected environment for students to work together. Students were suggested to use a popular, free and easy-to-use weblog provider: Blogger.

The first three weeks of the semester is allocated for teaching of paragraph writing. Students were instructed how to write a main idea or a topic sentence, supporting details, and a concluding sentence. Then they were given a topic and practiced writing. During weeks 4-11, students worked together in their blogs; they worked in groups of four or five to complete their writing assignment. Every two week the teacher gave students in each group a topic to share ideas. During the working step, the teacher posted questions about the topic on the teacher blog to encourage the students to define ideas or information related to the topic. The students discussed with group members by posting their ideas about the topic on their blog. However, they could consult the teacher to get some more ideas for writing a draft. Later, on blogs they worked in groups to look over the draft and check the details of grammar as well as spelling and punctuation. During this step, they might adjust or add contents to create their final writing. In week 12, the students were given a topic to write a paragraph in class which also functioned as the posttest. After that, they had to do a questionnaire which was distributed to them after the posttest. During the completion of the questionnaire, the researcher clarified some questions.

### **Data Analysis**

The writing papers of the pretest and posttest were checked by two teachers using the same criteria. The writing scores were calculated for mean.

The inter-rater reliability coefficients of the two teacher raters in pretest and posttest using Pearson Correlation were 0.92 and 0.95 respectively. To find out the mean score of each participant, the researcher combined scores from both raters and divided by two. Data collected from the questionnaire surveying students' attitudes and perceptions were analyzed quantitatively through descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation. Mean scores of the writing tests of the two groups were compared using a paired sample t-test to reveal any changes in performance of writing. P values < 0.05 were considered statistically significant. The Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) program was used to record and analyze the received data. Regarding students' written reflection, the researcher grouped data by content analysis and described the result in one paragraph.

## RESEARCH RESULT

### Research Question 1:

#### To What Extent Do the Students Improve

#### Their Writing Abilities After Learning Through Blogs In Groups?

This research question explored the effects of using blogs by examining the students' writing scores. In order to find out whether the students improved significantly in their writing ability, the pretest and posttest mean scores were compared by using a paired samples t-test. Table: 1 shows that the mean score of the post-test was higher than that of the pre-test. As evidenced by the significant difference at the level of .05, it clearly showed that students improve their writing abilities after using blogs in learning.

Table: 1  
Means of the Pre-Test and Post-Test of the Students

	N	$\bar{X}$	S.D	t	Sig
Pretest	35	10.50	2.47	6.58	.000
Posttest	35	12.68	2.64		

### Research Question 2:

#### What Are Students' Attitudes

#### Towards Using Blogs In Writing English?

After the experiment, the students were asked to express their attitudes toward using blogs in learning. Table 2 indicated that students had positive attitude in the overall attitude ( $\bar{X}$  = 4.15) and in all items. When considering each items, it was found that the highest score was on no.5 (I am motivated to write comments on the blog,  $\bar{X}$  = 4.31), followed by no. 3 and 8 (I am more active in writing on the blog/I have more time to write on the blog, so I feel relaxed,  $\bar{X}$  = 4.26), and followed by no. 9 (Blog provides an exciting and motivating learning environment,  $\bar{X}$  = 4.20). However, the two items which had the least mean scores were no.1 and no. 4 (I feel comfortable using the blog to express my opinion/I am more active in writing on the blog,  $\bar{X}$  = 4.03).



**Table: 2**  
**Students' Attitudes towards Using Blogs in Writing English**

Statement	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	Meaning	Rank
1. I feel comfortable using the blog to express my opinion	4.03	.71	positive	6
2. Blog increases my interest, motivation and confidence in writing	4.09	.61	positive	5
3. I am more active in writing on the blog	4.26	.56	positive	2
4. I am more careful with my writing on the blog	4.03	.57	positive	6
5. I am motivated to write comments on the blog	4.31	.53	positive	1
6. I can be more creative when writing on my blog	4.14	.65	positive	4
7. I feel enjoyable in writing on the blog.	4.14	.65	positive	4
8. I have more time to write on the blog, so I feel relaxed	4.26	.66	positive	2
9. Blog provides an exciting and motivating learning environment	4.20	.47	positive	3
10. I can express my idea better on the blog	4.09	.45	positive	5
Total	4.15	.36	positive	

**Research Question 3:**  
**What Are Students' Perceptions On The Advantages Of Using Blogs In Writing English?**

As shown in table 3, the results indicated that the overall mean score of students' perception on advantages of using blog in writing was at a high level ( $\bar{X} = 4.15$ ). When consider each items, it was found that all five items of advantages of using blog in English writing were at a high level as well. Among the five items, the means scores could be listed in order of importance as follows: blog is helpful in learning new vocabulary ( $\bar{X} = 4.17$ ), blog is easy to use ( $\bar{X} = 4.17$ ), blog gives me opportunities to practice writing ( $\bar{X} = 4.11$ ), writing on the blog can increase my productivity ( $\bar{X} = 4.09$ ), and blog encourages me to write longer and more freely ( $\bar{X} = 3.94$ ).

**Table: 3**  
**Students' Perceived Advantages of Using Blogs in Writing English**

Statement	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	Level of Advantage	Rank
1. Blog gives me opportunities to practice writing	4.11	.53	High	2
2. Blog is helpful in learning new vocabulary	4.17	.57	High	1
3. Blog is easy to use	4.17	.62	High	1
4. Blog encourages me to write longer and more freely	3.94	.73	High	4
5. Writing on the blog can increase my productivity	4.09	.70	High	3
Total	4.15	.36	High	

As for qualitative data, from students' posts, they were asked to express their learning experience and post it on their blogs. It revealed that 19 out of 35 participants specified that learning writing through blogging was a new exciting experience. Most of them also stated that operating and running their own blogs was not complicated since [www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com) is a friendly website for their usages. Meanwhile, 17 out of 35 participants revealed that feedback and comments from a teacher and peers were very valuable to develop their writing task. 14 Out of 35 participants stated that blogging made them become more careful in writing. 12 students stated that they had the great time to share learning experience and work cooperatively with their team members. Nine students stated that that they were more responsible since they had to plan the time for posting their own writing tasks as well as made themselves available for giving feedback to other members. If they posted late, it could affect others. However, three students complained that it was not convenient for them to work through blogging because of the technical problems of their computers.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The research finding revealed that blogging in the writing class can contribute to the improvement of students' writing abilities. When comparing the result of the pretest and posttest, it showed that the students' writing abilities significantly improved. The positive effect of using blogs in writing development was possibly due to the features of blogs that students can communicate with other audiences in authentic learning environment (Noytim, 2010, Juida & Bee, 2011). Blogs have potential to support L2 teachers' teaching and students' learning in classroom and make students increase their engagement (Churchill, 2009).

On blogs, students can post their messages both academic and non-academic, then they reflect their views or comments on their friends' writing freely. Teacher-student relationship seems to improve through blogging (Song & Chan, 2008). When using blogs, students can get feedback from other audiences; they have an opportunity to read things in which they are interested and write things they really want to (Aljumah, 2012). By so doing, writing assignment becomes an easy task while it used to be considered as a boring and difficult task before. Once a student was assigned a topic to write, they had to brainstorm and organize an outline of their writing with their team. While planning their writing, every member in the team will help together. They share ideas, comment and give feedback until they got their final writing. Students learn and share with their peers and teacher during the working process. Surprisingly, students who are low proficient learners or shy and quiet ones have more participation in doing tasks by using blogs.

This is probably because they have more time to think carefully before writing and giving their responses (Galien & Bowcher, 2010). The significant improvement on the participants' score was partly due to the fact that students realized that their peers in the group and their teacher read, reviewed, and corrected their written work. The results are consistent with previous research studies (Jones, 2006; Soares, 2008; Noytim, 2010; Aljamah, 2012) in which using blogs could enhance students' writing skills.

When considering students' attitudes towards using blogs in English writing, the responses in the questionnaire pointed out that after using blogs collaboratively for 11 weeks, the overall attitude of the students was positive.

The response suggested that they like the idea of using blogs to practice writing because they felt motivated to write comments on the blog. This might be because students had more time to organize their writing on the blog, so they felt relaxed to share or comment on the blog because the focus of writing was on the fluency, not on the accuracy of writing. Moreover, they agreed that blogs increased their motivation to write more freely. Because of this, students' writing ability increased. The finding goes along with many previous studies (Ferdig & Trammell (2004), Soares (2008), and Galien & Bowcher (2010). The process of creating and publishing information on blogs also promoted students' creative thinking. They had the choice to organize their ideas and content in their own ways, leading to divergent and creative thinking.

The blog also provided students to view their progress and monitor their improvement (Istifci, 2011). In conclusion, using blogs in a writing class is a new motivating and exciting learning experience which enhances students' creative and critical thinking skills.

Blogging provides opportunities for students to expose to various social interactions; between teachers and students, students and their peers, and students and global audiences. Students are active learners through blogging system, so using blogs in language classroom is beneficial and suitable for undergraduate students to enhance their writing performances.

#### **BIODATA and CONTACT ADDRESSES of AUTHOR**



**Orachorn KITCHAKARN** is currently teaching at Language Institute, Bangkok University, Thailand as an English language instructor.

Her research interests include teaching language skills, teacher self-development, and teaching methodology.

**Orachorn KITCHAKARN**  
Language Institute,  
Bangkok University, THAILAND  
Tel: 662-9020299 ext 2680  
Email: [orachorn.k@bu.ac.th](mailto:orachorn.k@bu.ac.th)

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