USING BLOGS TO FACILITATE ESL WRITING AMONG STUDENTS IN A TERTIARY INSTITUTION

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1. INTRODUCTION

Second language/foreign language teachers are continuously searching for the best ways to help their students learn a new language. One area that introduces much engagement, collaboration, fun as well as excitement in recent years is the use of advanced technology that supports computer-mediated communication (CMC), both synchronous and asynchronous (Rashid & Rahman 2014). The spread of advanced technology in the teaching of writing has been a positive development in first language as well as second language teaching. Teaching and learning with new and advanced technology is no more the unfulfilled dream in many places and it is on the horizon for many other higher institutions. It is also a trend of the future and can change how students learn and absorb the knowledge as well as the way teachers teach. The Center for Digital Education also notes that "[t]wenty-first century learning facilitates learning comprehension through access to interactive resources and mirrors what skills students will be expected to have upon entering postsecondary education or the workforce" (2004, p. 1).

Within the past few decades, writing and technology have emphasized various computer applications as well as several tools such as word processors, web page projects, e-mail, listservs, online chat, bulletin board discussions, wikipedia, podcast, RSS, social web and blogs. Technology is now evolving very fast, accelerated by faster, smaller, more powerful, and less expensive components that are easier to be applied by people from all walks of life. It does not only support communication for second language (L2) learning, but it also expands theoretical concepts about the latest writing pedagogy in the academic field.

Through the years, theories of process approach which were introduced by Flower and Hayes (1981) and Elbow (1990) in teaching writing have been accepted and its pedagogical approach has been widely used for L1 writing. The process approach focuses on the processes involved in writing and it does not focus totally on the product of the writing. The process approach in writing involves a lot of collaborative and cooperative processes instead of individual and solitary acts. Writing could easily match with concepts of social interaction, cooperative/ collaborative, and constructivist activities. The process writing approach focuses

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on characteristics of recursive process such as brainstorming, ideas, drafting, organizing, editing, and rewriting (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Matsuda, 2001; Tuzi, 2004).

L2 writing research and pedagogy have followed the footsteps of L1 writing practices. In addition, English as second language or foreign language (ESL/EFL) teachers, just as enthusiastic as L1 teachers, are using more and more advanced technology in their classrooms. They do not depend solely on traditional approaches to teach the students. Nowadays, teachers are brave enough to try as well as to integrate technology in the teaching and learning process with the students. Mohamed and Bahari (2017) also stated that the use of technology may also increase the motivation of L1 learners because it helps the learners to get authentic and personalised writing materials for their writing assignments. Technology Enhanced Language Learning (TELL) is another term used to show that technology is not limited totally to the computer itself. The focus of TELL is on its purpose to serve communication assisted by the computer, and the technology does not overshadow the main purpose. Many organizations have realized the potentials of technology in facilitating education and some of them organized workshops for teaching and technology use such as the American Council for Teachers of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). Richardson (2009), an international well known "evangelist" for the use of weblogs, RSS, and related Internet technologies in classrooms and schools that assist learning, has written many articles regarding teaching and its positive connection with technology. All of these positive developments have inspired and triggered L2 teachers in using and incorporating technology in a new and fresh way to facilitate their instructional practices. It is a brave experiment rather than solely depending on the traditional approaches that have no more element of surprise to these millennial students who were described by Prensky (2001) as *digital natives*.

Educators in Malaysia are facing the challenge of adopting and developing a wide range of instructional approaches to accomplish effective teaching of English writing. This is not an easy task. An alarming large number of students in Malaysia fail to master the basics of the English language even after nine years of formal education from Standard One to Form Three (Suzana, 2009). At tertiary level, the ability to generate well-organized and coherent essays is expected of the students regardless their previous knowledge in English during their schooling years. Most of their course work assessments and examinations are in essay form, therefore effective writing skills are compulsory to the students. The ability to write effectively is also a necessity in working life. In fact, mastering the basic structure of the essay, with emphasis on a clear point and well-organized, logical support, will help with almost every kind of writing that a person does. Thus, learning to write effectively has major significance for both academic as well as work pursuits. Admittedly, writing is a complex process involving skills which cannot be learnt overnight. It requires practices and strategies, as students need to explore ideas

and thoughts as well as to experiment with the language. The common complaint among English language teachers in primary, secondary and tertiary level is that students are unable to produce a good piece of essay. In tertiary level, students are expected to write five types of essays: narrative, descriptive, compare and contrast, cause and effect, and argumentative essays.

The findings range from qualitative and quantitative research regarding the use of technology in ESL writing. The research conducted showed that technology use could have a positive impact on students' performance and writing (Bloch, 2002; Hertel, 2003; Kramsch, A' Ness, & Lam, 2000) and on students' attitudes and motivation (Hertel, 2003; Warschauer, 2000). Some of the findings (Bloch and others) showed that students were highly motivated to write and they produced more text while writing by using advanced technology in completing tasks given. However, it was also reported in some of the studies that the results would be either no significant differences or presented negative findings when writing using advanced technology (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2000; Gonzales-Bueno & Perez, 2000; Gousseva-Goodwin, 2000; Perez, 2003; Schultz, 2000). These unfavorable and negative findings suggest that technology use did not make any difference nor improved ESL writing.

In response to the urgency of addressing ESL writing skills among students in tertiary institutions, this study hopes to investigate how blogging might work to facilitate ESL writing, consequently to be able to suggest possible solutions to the never-ending problems faced by ESL students in honing their English writing skills.

Many studies have confirmed the value of blogging in facilitating ESL/EFL writing. However, literature review reveals that not many studies have been conducted to affirm the positive potential of using blogs to facilitate ESL writing, particularly in the Malaysian education context. Thus, this study is interested in examining whether ESL writing can be facilitated by using computer-mediated communication (CMC) advanced technology tool-blogs. By observing and triangulating students' achievements on written tasks given, behaviors, as well as opinions about blogging, it is possible to conduct a study to explore the impacts of blogs on ESL writing. The context of study is a Malaysian higher institution of learning involving a population of ESL students.

This study will therefore investigate whether blogs can be used to facilitate ESL writing in tertiary institutions. The specific question addressed by this study focus on the main components, the use of blogs in facilitating ESL writing in tertiary institutions. The question that frames this study is: How do tertiary level students respond to blogging in the ESL writing classroom?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. The Process Approach to L2 Writing

In this era, attention is given on the process of writing that is viewed as a complex problem solving process. There are three major views that give impact to writing:

an expressive view (Elbow, 1998), cognitive view and social view (Faigley, 1986). In these views, writing is seen to have recursive, non linear mental strategies, cognitive and metacognitive concepts which will be experienced by students as they go through the process of writing. It also includes the elements of interactive, communicative and social activities as well as formulating and solidifying ideas in writing.

The term of process approach in L2 writing was first introduced by Zamel (1982, as cited in Jones, 2006). She believes that advanced L2 writers are similar to L1 writers and therefore would benefit from the process approach. As a result, many L2 researchers as well as practitioners began to implement the process approach to L2 writing. From there, writers are demonstrated as using the same processes for L1 as for L2. Therefore, the process approach is then adopted for L2 writing. Zamel believes that the teacher is involved with students during the process and intervenes at various stages for pedagogy of writing process. According to Kroll (1990), it has been proven that writing process is an effective approach when dealing with L2 learners. The characteristics of process approach pedagogy which have been used widely in ESL writing classes in the United States are prewriting exercises, opportunities to reflect on writing, teacher and peer feedback on content without immediate grading, multiple redrafting cycles, and substantive interactions via teacher conferencing and peer-response groups (Auerbach, 1999; Santos, 1992).

2.2. Collaborative Writing in ESL

Many studies have been done on collaborative writing in ESL. In 2006, Leong observed and examined the effects of collaboration versus non-collaboration on students' writing and reflective thinking skills in an online learning environment. To achieve the aim of the study, students were involved in online writing tasks and non-collaborative online writing tasks. Findings indicate that the implementation of telecollaboration and structured reflection during the teaching and learning of writing among ESL tertiary students can encourage students to share, discuss thoughts, build ideas as well as get into a relationship with the writing tasks and motivate them to negotiate meaning at a deeper level.

In 2003, Hirose examined the use of peer feedback in English writing instruction in a university in Japan. The main aim of the study was to explore how Japanese university students with no prior peer feedback experience interacted with each other using peer feedback in a semester-long English writing course. The findings showed that there were dynamic and varied interactions between peers as well as promising activity for the students to involve themselves collaboratively, benefit from each other, improve their writing and communication skills in English.

Ferris and Robert (2001) who studied 200 ESL writing students found that students who received feedback outperformed students without feedback. Literature review shows many studies which determined that L2 students are concerned when

it comes to accuracy and they also expect feedback for errors in their writing pieces (Al-Jamhoor, 2005; Ferris, 2004; Zhu, 2001).

As for peer revision, most of the research empirically support the approach. It also receives positive feedback for bringing a sense of audience in the L2 writing classroom. Peer revision is also viewed as one part of feedback as well as revision process in ESL writing classes (DeGuerrero & Villamil, 2000; Ferris, 2003). The results from DeGuerrero and Villamil's study show that peer collaboration improves students' writing performance.

In order to benefit from the peer review process, students need to be given guided training in order to lead them to alternative points of view in their writing. This could further lead to development of their ideas. To prepare students for peer feedback, research suggests that the students should participate in feedback training. This could coach the students towards meaningful suggestions instead of empty comments and praises (DeGuirrero & Villamil, 2000; Ferris, 2003). Based on past research, it was confirmed that students who receive training develop better quality responses and specific suggestion for their writing improvements.

Teacher, group feedback, group response, editing as well as revising process are the elements of collaborative writing which is based on cooperative and collaborative learning theories. Knowledge is given and taken and it depends on interaction between them. From these processes, students will gain self-confidence and positive self-esteem. This will also lead them to become tolerant towards different opinions as well as appreciating the non-threatening environment of working in small groups (Romney, 2000).

2.3. Research on the Use of Blogs in ESL Writing

Blogs are an area of research interest that is growing because of their impact on writing. Many research approaches have been used from personal reflections and experience, community building, critical analysis of segments of blogs, discourse analysis, qualitative as well as quantitative studies of blogging activities. By offering in-depth descriptions, these articles provide a close look at the implications of blogging.

Kelley (2008) analyzed the impact of weblogs on the affective states and academic writing of L2 undergraduates for his dissertation. The quantitative data results of the study indicate that blogging does not inherently promote positive affective conditions to the extent that it improves academic writing performance. At the same time, the qualitative and emergent findings show that blogging is associated with behaviors and conditions that can lead to writing improvement, as well as a positive learning experience.

Roth (2007) conducted a comparative study in an effort to investigate whether the implementation of blogging as a journaling activity into the teaching and learning of writing in the high school classroom facilitated writing skills and increased

enjoyment throughout the process. Three types of journaling styles were compared: Group One consisted of participants who hand-wrote their journal entries each week for eleven-weeks, Group Two consisted of participants who word processed their journals entries each week, and Group Three consisted of participants who blogged their journal entries each week. The results clearly indicate that participants who blogged made the greatest gains in writing proficiency.

In a 2005 study, Thorne and Weber (reported in Harrison, 2006) examined ESL Spanish-speaking high school students in America who created weekly blog entries throughout an academic year. Results from survey data (N=18; interviews N = 12) included comments from students reflecting the four conditions set out by Warschauer above – 1) understanding purpose; 2) relevancy; 3) sense of personal fulfillment; and 4) ability to appropriately use the medium—including comments that they enjoyed the process, preferring the blogging process over traditional weekly essay or journal writing; frequently reviewed their own blogs entries and those of classmates; noted significant progress in writing skills; understood how their writing had improved, noting specific rhetorical and pragmatic changes; and understood the relevancy of the activity. Furthermore, findings indicate, "L2 blog use shows the potential to support the performance of multiple linguistically mediated social identities".

Herring, Scheidt, Bonus, and Wright (2004) analyzed 203 blogs and pointed out that blogs can serve as interactive knowledge-exchange tools. Herring et al. found that the greatest advantage of blogs is that the members of a community can exchange thoughts on a public channel without using HTML language, and it will allow students to concentrate on content of writing rather than editing complicated HTML language. It also provides the students with opportunity to archive articles and comments contributed by the community, and to share these valuable resources and findings with people outside the community interested in the given topic. These features give educators further opportunities to use blogs in the classroom.

Brooks, Nichols, and Priebe (2004) conducted an empirical study of students' perception towards blogging. They examined three characteristics such as remediation, genre, and motivation as key concepts for teaching with weblogs. The study determined if motivated and engaged weblogging would lead to stronger writing. The results show that blogging is seen as a repurposing of familiar print genres or a remediation of already familiar forms. Upper level college students were interviewed to see the value of weblogging for their academic purposes and whether they preferred using weblogs. Students were surveyed based on their familiarity with weblogs, use of weblogs for journaling, note taking and how they felt about it. Through surveys and observations, it was concluded that weblogging is worth pursuing as a general writing activity in college courses.

Xie and Sharma (2004) conducted a phenomenological study on using weblogs in identifying and exploring students' experience and feelings for reflective journal

writing. The participants were graduate students from an instructional design program. The findings were categorized into positive and negative feelings about the use of weblogs. The data supported the suggestion that weblogs could be applied to support reflection. For positive findings, blogging helps thinking and learning, gives a sense of community, as well as allowing exploration of new technologies. The negative findings relate to the issue of correct usage of weblogs for it is a new tool, the role of prior experiences, and concerns of privacy.

Cole (2004) conducted a study on weblogs as a tool for response to literature in the middle school language arts classroom for her dissertation. Attitudes and perceptions of teachers and students regarding the implementation of blogs into the curriculum and of using technology into the classroom were also considered. Results of her qualitative study show that blogs offer a motivating environment, allowing students to have audience for their writing pieces as well as to read others' writing. It was also found that blogs foster quality responses to literature by applying higher level of discussions. Overall, Cole states that blogs have positive impact on teachers' and students' attitudes in terms of using technology in the language arts classroom as well as the perceptions of using blogs as a tool for giving responses to literature.

Campbell (2004) presented findings of a study on learner attitudes toward weblogs, which he developed for EFL college students. He analyzed the effectiveness of using class blogs in disseminating and discussing assignments, communicating ideas to prepare for conversational topics and posting reading explanations of assignments and materials. According to qualitative and quantitative data from surveys and interview of his combined face-to-face and online learning class with weblogs, students enjoy learning with weblogs, improve their attitudes towards English learning and develop significant interest in creating their own blogs to accompany writing classes in the future.

In their research, Lowe and Williams (2004) asked their students to use blogs for personal reflections, drafts, reading responses, and other writing assignments. Barrios (2003), Davis (2005), Kuropatwa (2005), and Richardson (2009) also use blog tools for writing assignments, such as group discussions, research, thematic writing, diaries, reflections, reading responses and many more. They strongly believe that blogging fully enhance their instructional goals of getting students to write as well as to join in blog projects, either individual or collaborative.

Ward (2004) encouraged his English writing class students to blog and post-course survey confirms that his students enjoy the experience though they have no prior web design experience. The students show improvements in the language and they are more careful in their writing as a larger audience (inclusive of peers) could view and read their work.

The origin of blogs (or weblogs) rest on personal online journals. There has been a growing interest in blogs use within the learning environment. K-12 teachers,

for example, can help students in creating personal blogs to record their reflections (Kadjer & Bull, 2004; Stiler & Philleo, 2003); establish blogs as a communication channel among themselves, students, and parents; or use blogs to demonstrate students' learning processes and finished products on a regular basis (Langhorst, 2006, cited in Wang & Hsua, 2008). Blogs can serve as resource centers (Oravec, 2002); faculty can use blogs as teaching and learning aids in a higher-education context (Martindale & Wiley, 2005; William & Jacobs, 2004; Quible, 2005) and students can display their projects on blogs (Richardson, 2009). Dickey (2004) studied the effect of blog use on learner perceptions of isolation as well as alienation and found that blogs support the formation of an online community.

Nelson and Fernheimer (2003) state that blogs are effective for collaborative writing projects especially for small groups. They point out that blogs can be useful in helping students work through the writing process because blogs consist of brief and frequent posts. They also indicate that it is useful to involve groups for blog writing, as they can share individual work because it facilitates revisions, which later can be negotiated between writers as well as readers. Through the approach, the writing project development could be observed as the writer modified and made changes according to collective feedback from readers. Blogs also promote self-reflection as students can post their comments as well as observations that provide evidence for their self-assessments. Finally, yet importantly, blogs also help students in developing and maintaining a sense of audience.

Campbell (2004) conducted another study, a case study regarding computer supported cooperative learning using weblogs in a university class. The participants were the American students at the Japanese university in a face-to-face class which was later enhanced with weblogs for online interaction. In the study, learners' experiences were examined in terms of cooperative learning, blended structure learning environment, weblogs use, as well as the public nature of writing. Campbell found that weblogs are beneficial for constructivist learning in a blended structure-learning environment and their public nature fosters students' interest in producing writing pieces.

According to Campbell (2003) and Johnson (2004), blogs have great potential for improving second language and literacy skills. Barrios (2003) says that blogs could also provide suitable space for students to post their thoughts on themes assigned for homework given. These can be followed up by blog postings on the thoughts of each learner or group of learners. Barrios states that blogs are capable of developing reading and writing skills, empowering students to be better researchers, writers, independent learners, as well as developing international web communities. Blogs also offer many alternatives for improving writing skills such as learning journals, thinking journals, learning logs, reader response journals, reflective journals and visual learning logs. If writing is to be collaborative, blogging is then effective for it. Practitioners also say that the assessment of writing is

facilitated by blog use because it combines the best elements of portfolio-driven courses, where student work is collected, edited, and assessed, with the immediacy of publishing for a virtual audience. The content management platforms on which blogs are built facilitate the assessment process.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

The study adopted a qualitative research design involving analysis of students' relevant documents; comments and writing in blog entries, interview, questionnaire, survey as well as student and researcher's reflective journals. This is due to its complexity in analyzing student's improvement and comments that is in line with Jones (2006) and Kelley (2008).

This study took place at one of the public universities in Kuala Terengganu. The university is provided with complete facilities of educational environment rich for the students. Thus, the campus has language laboratories, wireless Internet access; comfortable and spacious lecture rooms as well as halls fully equipped with computers. All of these facilities will facilitate interaction and the teaching learning process. The research was limited to 28 students from semester two who participated in normal class as well as class blog.

4. FINDINGS

In their first exposure towards class, all of the students wrote that they had a feeling of apprehension regarding the tool when they first heard about blogs. This is because they lacked knowledge and exposure to what blogs are and how to use them. As the semester went on, however, the students seemed to like blogging activities in the writing classroom. Two of the students mentioned in the journals that:

> "When I have been asked to create blog, I felt it so hard because I have no ideas how to create because this is first time. After that, I found that blog is quite interesting. I very thanks you to my English lecturer because she has introduced us to use the technology. With this blog, I can change idea with friends."

> *(January 17, 2013)*

> "I found that blogging is fun and it is also a fresh, not a lame way to learn the language. It is very easy to be used."

> *(January 19, 2013)*

Twenty-seven out of 28 students loved to use the tool in the classroom and they also had positive reactions towards learning how to write with the use of technology tool. The students described their attitudes and motivation as "*Excited to use the tool*", "*No problem in using blogs*", "*It is easy*", "*It is fun and new way of learning boring language*", "*Not a boring method*", "*More confident in giving ideas*", "*No more sleepy times*", "*Easier to translate the language using the tool from net while blogging*", and "*Boost their motivation in writing*".

Twenty-eight students felt that blogs helped them improve their writing skills as well as increasing motivation towards the English language. However, two students felt so devastated with blogs at first due to their mistakes in forgetting passwords and URLs of the blogs. Both of the students had to create new blogs many times before they could finally use blogs normally like their friends. I also helped the students to figure out the problems together with their more technology-savvy friends who had enrolled in the Multimedia and Information Technology courses in the university. In the classroom, I sat together with students to share information regarding the latest technology towards betterment in using blogs for language learning.

4.1. Peer Responding

As for activities of peer responding, I could see the improvements of the respondents from passive to active learners. Previously, they only had to submit essays individually to the teacher. Then, the teacher would check it one by one and perhaps give short comments in their papers on how to improve the essays. However, now the students have to collaborate with three of their friends to read as well as to critically analyze the essays. Then, they had to give comments and later come out with the corrections before posting it to the blogs and submitting it to teacher. It was a very good activity as students were taught how to use their minds to maximum levels compared to the traditional method where they only had to prepare the essays once and the teacher was the one and only person who had to do lots of thinking to correct mistakes in the essays. Sometimes, there were some students who did not even care about their mistakes in the essays and kept repeating the same mistakes. The most important issue for some of the students was that they wanted to submit the essays as soon as possible to their teacher without giving proper attention to quality. However, with peer responding, the experience of working together in a group of three to four students and the active use of minds would leave positive effects on themselves especially in learning experience and the quality of the essays. Two of the students noted in their journals:

> "In group, we sit three of us and look at each other essays to look for mistake. When I don't know what to do, there are always help given by my friends from group. I never feel left out and alone. We not know whether we right or wrong, but at least we try do our best and learn through times."
>
> *(January 25th, 2013)*

> "The whole day is exciting. It is quit interesting having a class at the language lab with our own group. I enjoy work in-group. My group is the best of the best."
>
> *(January 28th, 2013)*

For commenting and editing activities, the students did face problems in giving comments on their friends' essays. During the first stage, the majority of students

did not have enough confidence in giving comments. They doubted their own ability, were afraid and felt that they were not good enough and not capable of providing critical comments on their friends' essays. One of the students in her journal noted that:

> "I felt that this activities is so hard. Because I don't know to comment my friends essay. But with commenting we can do correction to our friends essay."

(January 28th, 2013)

However, through the semester, the students were slowly exposed with characteristics of critical comments as well as on what they should look for in the essays. This was done by analyzing and giving comments towards my ex-students' essays from another university in Gombak. Through the exposure given, the students improved their ability in providing comments to their friends' essays. With this activity, the students at the same time were taught how to apply critical thinking skills in the classroom, as they had to carefully read, re-read, and analyze the essays first before giving comments. However, the activities were not considered as easy for some of the students who were used to the traditional approach of depending solely on the teacher in evaluating their essays. Through peer collaboration in giving comments, the old method could be changed and the new one could be adapted. Students should not depend solely on the teacher for everything; in fact, they are the one who should give the best in improving essays before submitting the end product to the teacher. As for editing activity, most of the students did not accept solely the comments given by their peers in the class. Twenty-six students re-read the comments in blogs and tried to figure out and analyze whether what their friends had said about the essays were right. Ten students came to see me and asked if what their friends commented in blogs was correct and whether they should correct the mistakes based on comments given. Here, I could sense that some of the students did not trust their friends' comments, as they were not the expert users of English language. There was also one student thought that it was a waste of time as it did not help her in improving her essays. In her journal, she noted that:

> "My friends comment do not help me at all, they not good in English, Madam is good in English."

(2nd February, 2013)

In fact, she also had problems in asking help from her group members regarding improving the essays. However, a number of good students recognized the benefits and value of doing peer review and commenting on each other's work. Four out of 28 students thought that they were good writers and assumed that they wrote without any mistake in essays. Yet, by applying peer response together with group members, they knew that they were not always correct. One of the students wrote in his journal:

> "I felt strange in class today, because I see everybody was busy with their work. I also worried about my essay because, I do not check yet my essay before publish into the blog. After my group members checking my essay she have found many mistake and suddenly I laughing why I can make this silly mistake. I need to do correction then."

(4th February, 2013)

The students were asked how they felt when they gave and received any negative and/critical or non-critical comments from their peers. The following is a compiled list:

(a) I received a negative comment from my friends. They said I must improve my essay writing because there still have mistake. So, I take it as a positive comment for my writing. Thank you my friends.

(b) Before I post, I feel so excited to share my essay with others and after I post I'm feel nervous to receive negative comment from my friends. This made me work more harder to improve my writing before posting to blogs.

(c) I feel shy with my mistakes, everybody in the class know my weakness.

(d) I don't like negative comments and I will try best to avoid getting negative comments.

(e) I can accept negative comments, no problem at all.

(f) I love non-critical comments as it boost my motivation in learning the language.

(g) With non-critical comment, I get nothing, but at least, I felt so close to my friends in the classroom. I not left alone in the classroom.

(h) Not all the comments good, my friends not expert in the language themselves. We are still learning.

One of the students explained in detail about what was going on in the writing classroom in his journal. The student was a technology savvy person, had high writing skills, and was very enthusiastic and appreciated collaborative work and peer response with his group members. He enjoyed sharing information, reading the essays and giving comments to improve the quality of the essays. He wrote this about his experience:

> "Writing alone doesn't help me, because I think I did not do any mistake when actually I did mistake ...but, with my friends, we seriously discuss about our essay one by one… I always ask my group members about, grammar, spelling and other things that I don't know. All my group members are the best compares to other groups in the class. As a team, we must work together. Help out our teammates and loves them."

(4th January, 2013)

The students also wrote about the stages he went through in writing and posting his essay through his blogs. He also detailed the strategies he used with his group

members in improving their writing skills. In order for him to write an essay, he and the rest of his group members would first navigate the Internet to find the suitable points for the essays. Then, they would discuss the points after the classroom hour. When satisfied with the discussion, they would get back to their hostel and start to write an essay on their own before publishing it to their blogs. There was no discussion involved during this stage among group members. Later, once they had published the essays in their blogs, they started to read, re-read and analyze the essays for any mistakes. There would be no problem in terms of the points used in the essays; still, they would search the mistake in terms of grammar, sentence structures and spelling in the essays. Even though the group members were from mixed ability, from these activities, they developed the confidence in giving comments on others' essays as well as editing their own essays from comments given. One student explained that the activity had boosted his motivation in learning English language once it was done sincerely.

4.2. Interacting with Classmates and Instructor

All the students did not have problems with their group members, as they were not the one who chose to be in the groups. I divided the students into mixed ability groups, from the best achievers to the average ones, according to their ability and grade during their Semester 1 English examination. This was done so that they would not be in the same group with their clique or social group from the same course. It was also with the good intention so that they could communicate and help each other in the activities assigned. As one student mentioned:

> "It is easier to do essay with friends around me to gave opinions and improve mistakes. I always blur because no idea. But now, I am getting better with the help from my friends."

> *(February 17th, 2013)*

Twenty-five out of 28 students loved to be in groups as they could communicate and share ideas among group members. One of the students noted the issue in her journal:

> "In the class, I feel very comfortable with the facilities in the lab. I also feel easy with my group to make a discussion. I like this situation."

> *(March 2nd, 2013)*

Nonetheless, there were three students who did not like working in a group for they had a lazy group member. One of the group members wrote in her journal about the problem:

> "I have problem with my group because he do not discuss with Anisa and me what should we do to write that essay. But, he can discuss with another group. He always came late to the class and this give problems to our group for having a lazy guy in the group."

> *(February 25th, 2013)*

There were also students who felt shy to communicate and discuss with their group members in the classroom. One of the students wrote in her journal:

> "For this time, I don't have problem interacting with classmates and teacher. All my classmates are very kind to me. I'm grateful to have friends like them. They always help me when I have problem in this subject. But, I have to improve my communication with my group members. We all shy with each other...he...he...he..".

(March 6th, 2013)

However, even though they were shy towards each other especially in the groups where we had male and female students, they could overcome the problem as time went by through the semester. At the end, they collaborated with each other very well as to achieve the objectives of learning the language facilitated by blogging tool.

5. CONCLUSION

The students' reactions towards blogging in the ESL writing classroom were revealed through their experience during the semester. Even though each of the student's experience was different, they shared some similarities. The data collected proved that the students liked the application of blogging tool for the ESL writing classroom. Being students as well as respondents for the study, they managed to do what they should do which were to write, post, revise, comment, edit, publish and submit the essays to me. They also succeeded in improving their tasks, ability in writing, confidence as well as motivation as the semester progressed. The data also pointed out three major drawbacks, which the students faced, namely: issues of confidence, lack of trust for peer reviewing, and group work. However, the students finally succeeded in overcoming the latest challenges with technology, blogging, and writing as evidenced by what they wrote in their reflective journals, as well as from the questionnaire given and interview sessions. Additionally, peer-responding skills (collaborative learning) improved with practice and instruction in my writing classroom. Overall, it appeared blogging was a constructive learning experience for the ESL writing students.

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