

THE USE OF CLASSROOM BLOG IN TEACHING WRITING TO JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Eugenia Ines Dwi Artvianti*
eugeniaines@rocketmail.com

*Graduated in 19 April 2013 from English Education Study Program of Indonesia University of Education

Abstract: This paper reports on the investigation of the implementation of classroom blog in teaching writing to the second graders in one of public schools in Bandung. The strengths and challenges faced by the students in using classroom blog as a learning tool to write are also described. A case-study design was used in the study and the data were collected through observation, interview and document analysis. Then, the data were analyzed qualitatively. The results were in line with the previous research (Song & Chan, 2008; Zhang, 2009; and Galien, 2010) which stated that classroom blog helps activate interaction with readers, and create an audience and feedback for their writing. The study also found that classroom blog had its strengths and challenges. Classroom blog enabled the students to: (1) have a fun learning environment; (2) write easily; (3) get feedbacks from teacher and peers; (4) discuss more with friends and teacher outside classroom easily; (5) access more reference for students' writing; (6) get more motivation to write; (7) have their personal space to read and write in a community; and (8) build their analytical and critical thinking skill. There were also some challenges faced by the students, as follows: (1) technical problems; (2) time management; (3) students' inability to point out mistakes done by their peers; and (4) plagiarism. Overall, the use of classroom blog created positive effects to the students' writing fluency. For that reason, classroom blog is recommended to be used as writing media for students.

Keywords: *Classroom Blog, Writing, Junior High School*

Introduction

The use of internet in this era for researching and gathering information is enriching in many language teaching and learning situations, and most of the sites in English are more accessible than ever before. These kinds of resources are intended to help

language teachers to be able to use them as various kinds of media in various language teaching contexts. Moreover, the Internet makes foreign language learners have access to virtual classrooms, depth and breadth of teaching and learning situations, and materials which previous online learning or even physical classroom-based learning could not give.

One of the features that the Internet provides is blog which can be used in EFL or ESL classroom. Blogs can be effectively integrated into the “broader professional context” which includes an understanding of learner needs, the educational setting, available resources, syllabus, and teaching learning goals (McDonough & Shaw, 1993, p.5). Thus, this study aims to explore the way teacher applied classroom blog to teach writing. The strengths and challenges in using classroom blog in teaching writing are also explored.

Research Methodology

The research method used in this study is qualitative. Additionally, multiple sources of evidences (Yin, 2003) such as data derived from observation, interview, and document text analysis were used to collect the data. The participants in this study were the students of 8th grade because students in that age are already familiar with the Internet. The participants consisted of three students who were voluntarily participated in this study.

Data Presentation and Discussion

- Teacher’s activities in teaching writing using classroom blog

The previous studies which had been done by Song & Chan (2008), Zhang (2009), and Galien (2010) investigated the utilization of blogs, including classroom blog. The results of this indicated that there are some similarities activities in using web blog with the ones in the previous research. First, the teacher gave the students a writing task to be done after she explained the nature of web blog and let the students

get familiar with the media. Then, the teacher let the students use the web blog freely to give comments on their peers' writing which led into self-directed learning, as they individually and socially constructed meanings to develop their intercultural knowledge and skills.

Moreover, based on the result of the observations, interview and document analysis, it can be seen that the teacher employed various kinds of ways in teaching writing using classroom blog. The activities are presented in the following table:

No	Types of Activities	Observations					
		1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th
1	Allowing students to post	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Allowing students to reflect on the blog entries sent by their peers.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	Reflecting on the comments received.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
4	Assigning prompts	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
5	Remind students to preview their text before posting their entries	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

The activities show indirectly the process of writing which stated by Harmer (2001) that piece of writing is created through the process of planning, drafting, revising, and editing. It can be seen that the teacher allowed the students to post their writing on the blog. It means that the students had gone through the process of planning and drafting before they posted their entries. The process of drafting based on prompts that the teacher gave is similar with the fourth activity which had been done by the teacher. Revising and editing process can be seen in the fifth strategy which was done by the teacher who reminded the students to preview their text before posting their entries.

- Strength and challenges in using classroom blog in teaching writing

Below are the strengths of using classroom blog in teaching writing based on the students' point of view:

No	Strength in using classroom in learning writing form students point of view	Participants		
		1	2	3
1.	Classroom blog is fun.	✓	✓	✓
2	Classroom blog is simple and easy to use.	✓	✓	✓
3	I can get feedback from teacher and peers.	✓	✓	✓
4	Classroom blog makes me easier to discuss with friends and teacher outside classroom.	✓	✓	✓
5	Classroom blog facilitate me to get more reference for my writing.	✓	✓	✓
6	Classroom blog give me more motivation to write.	✓	✓	✓

The teacher found some other advantages based on the observations. The use of classroom blog in teaching writing enabled the students to have their personal space to read and write in a community, they also had a room to share their ideas so that they could activate interaction with readers and create audiences and feedback for their writing.

It is also discovered that when the students were blogging, they indirectly created a sense of ownership in the blogging process which fostered the students to write more freely and interactively. It can be seen from the way they treated their own blog, some of the students used interesting themes and avatars for their blog profile.

The classroom blog used in the writing session can be said a good source to increase the students' confidence in writing more than just paper based writing as they usually did. The confidence came from the students' awareness of the existence of the real audience to read their posting.

Moreover, classroom blog was a motivating tool of learning where it could enhance the students' analytical and critical thinking skills. Their analytical and critical thinking skills were built from the teacher's instructions where they were assigned to give comment to each other, to at least five writings after they finished with their writing.

Thus, based on the data gained from the observations, interview, and document analysis, there were some difficulties found by the teacher. Since laptop and modem became important tools to support the activity, the students who didn't bring the tools could not participate in the activity. Also, when the students shared their laptop to do the writing task, it ruined their time management to finish the task given by the teacher.

- Discussion

Overall the findings met some pedagogical theories of the usefulness of this technology tool in teaching writing. The data from observations, interviews and document analysis showed that classroom blog used by the teacher in teaching writing was responded positively by the students. Basically, the students enjoyed the way the teacher used classroom blog in the writing activities.

The reason for this is that with classroom blog students "can have personal space to read and write" in the community, in this case is classroom where they shared their ideas in a social network. These findings strongly abstracted from the interview, which indicated that classroom blog helped activate interaction with readers and create an audience and feedback for their writing. These findings are compatible with prior research findings from Song & Chan (2008), Zhang (2009),

and Galien (2010). From the interview, it was found that some of the students were not comfortable to give feedback directly to their peers because of the fear of being rejected and not to be encouraged enough to give feedback to peers' work. Using classroom blog as media to give feedback to the peers provided the students with pleasure feeling to give feedback as comments on peers' works.

These benefits of blogging counted up to a sense of ownership in the blogging process which really fostered the students to write more freely and interactively. This is similar to the observation which had been taken by previous researchers (Zhang, 2009) that engagement in blogging induces a subsequent engagement in developing one's literacy skills as fluency rather than accuracy, which is later build up by the time. This finding is in line with what Nunan (2004) states that pedagogical tasks involve communicative language use in which the user's attention is focused on meaning rather than grammatical form. Moreover, it was found that blogging could also induce learning new vocabularies and syntax as well as gaining writing style.

This was also proven in prior research which indicated that the quality of writing was improved by blogging and that blogging could lead to linguistic accuracy and students' creative expressions (Campbell, 2003). It can be summarized that the students who blogged focused on meaning rather than forms and meaningful writing in an authentic environment to the real audiences.

As such, blogging can be a source for increasing students' interest, motivation and confidence in writing as proven in prior research (Pinkman, 2005; Zhang, 2009). Relevantly, students' awareness of a real audience to read their posting which is publicity accessible for their classmates can covertly further them to monitor their writing (Pelletieri, 2000).

Conclusion

The research comes up with the conclusion that the use of classroom blog is an effective medium for writing. The argument is supported by the data gathered from the observation and interview. Clearly it can be seen regarding the students' choice of more various languages in writing, the addition of new perspectives to their thoughts, and the motivational aspects in writing more and more.

Based on the research findings, discussions, and conclusions of research results, it is suggested that classroom blog is highly recommended to be used in helping students with their writing skills. It is an effective medium to provide the students with real audience since it creates a good learning atmosphere among students, and between students and teacher. In addition, teacher should make the students get used to the media first by introducing classroom blog clearly before beginning the lesson. The last thing is for future researchers who are interested in classroom blog as media in teaching writing, training for the teachers in line with the usage of the media are needed.

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