

USING BLOG AS A MEDIUM TO HONE WRITING SKILLS IN ENGLISH

Dr.R.Latha,

M.A, M.Phil, Ph.D,

Professor, Department of English,

Madha Engineering College,

Affiliated to Anna University, Chennai, India

Abstract:

Technology exposes new horizons within the field of teaching and learning by presenting blog. A blog is a web journal which will be updated by its users as and when required. there's no necessity to possess computer knowledge or understanding of HTML to construct, and their lay out and content are often improvised through the utilization of images , audio and video files. thanks to their asynchronous nature, blogs allow people to write down and publish their thoughts and views at their own pace without space and time constraints. In learning , the utilization of blogs is taken into account to be almost like that of journal writing. Hence, students use the idea of their worldviews to shape and interpret their own meanings in writing. Using task-based activities to encourage students' interaction, this study explores how a blog as a computer-mediated tool engages a gaggle of engineering students to enhance their written English. Fifteen students who were preparing for the Certificate course through NPTEL were involved during a study that lasted for five months. All the participants created their personal blogs in order that they might read each other's views, share ideas and discuss their peers' postings. The activities focused on the precise writing tasks. The study is conducted to seek out out whether the scholars who use blog as a tool in sharing their views are improving their writing skills. This paper argues that private blogs can motivate students to create their writing skills through self-reflection and peer feedback. The blog creates a chance for the users to debate their idea, negotiate the meaning, clarify their understanding and provides their feedback for refining their views before submitting their work. additionally, regular interactions within the blogs build collaborative skills among the scholars.

Keywords: writing skills, blog, collaborative skills

Introduction:

Mastering any language across the planet begins with the understanding of significance of 4 basic skills namely Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. Writing skills are considered to be a crucial a part of communication within the business world. Good writing skills allow you

to speak your message with clarity and ease to a far larger audience than through face-to-face or telephone conversations. Effective writing may be a skill that's grounded within the cognitive domain. It involves learning, comprehension, application and synthesis of latest knowledge. From a school member's perspective, writing well entails quite adhering to writing conventions. Writing also encompasses creative inspiration, problem-solving, reflection and revision that leads to a completed manuscript. From a student's perspective, writing may instead be a laborious and even dreaded exercise of attempting to put thoughts on paper while developing mastery over the principles of writing, like spelling, citation format and grammar. Writing might be classified into 5 types namely; expository, persuasive, narrative, descriptive and artistic.

Expository Writing: the foremost common sorts of writing skills, expository writing firmly concentrates on advising or explaining things. it's more of facts and figure a few particular topic or a subject; it's likewise to be in logical order and sequence. Among all the examples, textbook writing may be a sort of expository writing, where the author intends to clarify the topic by giving a brief introduction at the start on the pertinent topic.

Persuasive Writing: Opposite to the expository writing, persuasive writing glares opinion, justification, explanation, some extent of view etc. the aim of this writing is to convince the reader or to furnish a number of the thoughts (author) to the readers. Example: Editorial page, Letter of complaint then on.

Narrative Writing: Narrative literary genre, simply narrates a story to the readers, (where the story might be fact or fiction). During this written work, writer or author will make a minimum of one distinct character. This literary genre likewise uses creative writing – use of imagination and creativity, instead of handling the facts and figures. Alongside the character, the author likewise frames dialogue, event, action, emotions etc. Example: Novels, Short stories, etc.

Descriptive Writing: This written work style generally describes tons quite the remaining styles. Thus, descriptive writing's main purpose is to explain and describe. Simply, it's a method of writing, which focuses on describing a personality, an event, or an area with details. during this form, a writer or an author envisions what he feels, what he notices, taste and far more and describes intelligibly. Example: Diary writing then on.

Creative writing: this type of writing is typically enjoyed by the writers. In creative writing, the author explains a poem, story or an occasion during a creative manner so on meet the aesthetic needs of readers. it's written to entertain people and to involve them in reading for a extended time. An informative yet imaginative sort of writing, creative writing is usually considered because the sort of art. it's far beyond the boundary of normal professional writing, academic writing, content and technical writing and other genres of writing. This inventive yet powerful sort of writing is by and enormous uses of figurative literary languages – word, phrase

etc. It's simply entertaining, original, self-expressive, and loved by the audience at an equivalent time.

In order to make an efficient learning ambience, language teachers got to specialize in the core principles of learning community which include integration of curriculum, active learning, student engagement, and student responsibility (Darabi, 2006). Other scholars (Seitzinger, 2006) have suggested that learning should be constructive as described by these features: 1) active and manipulative by engaging students in interactions and explorations with learning materials and providing opportunities for them to watch the results of their manipulations; 2) constructive and reflective by enabling students to integrate new ideas with prior knowledge to form meaning and enable learning through reflection; 3) intentional by providing opportunities for college kids to articulate their leaning goals and monitor their progress in achieving them; 4) authentic (or simulated) by facilitating better understanding and transfer of learning to new situations; and 5) cooperative, collaborative, and conversational by providing students with opportunities to interact with one another to clarify, share ideas, to hunt assistance, to barter problems and discuss solutions.

Rapid development in information and communication technology has precipitated various changes concerning the methods of teaching and learning. as an example , the utilization of computers within the classroom has increased tremendously and it's quickly becoming one among the training tools in language classes (Nadzrah, 2007). More recently, blog, which may be a sort of internet publishing, has become established communication tools and has been employed by many users for variety purposes. The existence of blog has opened an area for writers to share articles or materials within the weblog that are open for view to the audience with an online access. This has given language learners the chance to precise and shares their ideas to the unlimited internet community within the World Wide Web. Such features of blog make it very fashionable and customary during this era of technology advancement.

Literature Review

In learning, blogging has been experimentally used as a tool to develop writing skills (Pinkman, 2005). Experience of writing on blogs may provide opportunities to assist students to enhance their knowledge in writing. Nadzrah and Kemboja (2009) found that blogs let students compose writing with specific purposes which will encourage them to reinforce their writing in language. Most blog writers use their blog as a platform for self-expression and empowerment, and this helps them to become more thoughtful and important in their writing (Armstrong & Retterer, 2008). Blogging is additionally a sort of writing exercise. The cycle of blogging activities like making blog posts, viewing other bloggers' posts, commenting and reflecting on them are beneficial in polishing the writing skills. In situations where they can't relate to certain words, they need the selection to ask online dictionaries and using the web, they're ready to keep the grammar in their writing intact. This creates an environment for a lively learning

(Darabi, 2006) among students which will present positive impacts on the writing skills also as increase learner autonomy respectively.

The Pedagogy of Blogs

The pedagogy of blogs can be successfully linked to Lev Vygotsky and his Social Development Theory. Vygotsky, on challenging Piaget's theories of cognitive development believed "the life long process of development is dependent on social interaction and that social learning actually leads to cognitive development" (Vygotsky, 1978). This experience is called the Zone of Proximal Development. Vygotsky describes it as "the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978). In other words, with peer interaction and teacher facilitation, learning is heightened. It is this Zone of Proximal development that closes the chasm between what is familiar and what is unfamiliar. Vygotsky's theory can be dramatically illustrated through implementation of educational blogs in today's classrooms. According to Myers & Cereijo (2006), the theoretical framework that supports children from communication to learning must involve transformative communication. In typical classroom environments, there is staunch resistance to this notion. Communication in classrooms is generally viewed as transmission of information, usually from teacher to pupil. Vygotsky (1978) asserts that even the meager conversations that occur daily in a classroom become the cognitive roots and scaffold for learning. In fact, communication through assiduous interactions is the thread that supports learners toward more cognitive prowess; communication occurring naturally but harnessed through a process called blogging.

Collaborative Blogging

Blogs create readers and writers within a classroom. Drexler, Dawson, & Ferdig (2007) suggest that blogs provide a practice venue for literacy. Blogs also create an effective vehicle for reflective feedback. These tasks are indicative of the writing process being utilized, and thus, promote blogs as once again supporting literacy growth. In a study of a collaborative blogging Drexler et al (2007) had findings that create a research based scaffold in supporting blog implementation into an elementary school classroom. Of importance was the suggestion that collaborative blogging created improved attitudes toward writing in children. Furthermore, technology as a vehicle for writing became a motivator. Children were more appreciative of the reflective feedback process rather than the technology itself. In this manner, technology becomes transparent. The focus is on learning not merely technology usage. Drexler et al (2007) note that the asynchronous fashion in which blogs can be accessed create an immediate extension of classroom curriculum.

Blogs encourage students to reach their cognitive potential through social interaction via specific learning tools. Indeed, blogs create a sense of ownership in learning. Blogs create

acceptance among diverse viewpoints in which children are sharing opinions and reflecting on others thought processes. Blogging creates genuine opportunities for children to contribute. It improves their receptiveness to feedback. Other potential) include the promotion of higher level thinking skills, the promotion of more creative thinking, more access to better information, and a combination of independent and collaborative interaction.

Research Methodology

This study was conducted to investigate students' improvement in writing skill. A team of 15 students from an engineering college was selected for this study. There were 9 male and 6 female students. They had Communicative English in the semester and Technical English in their II semester. The respondents were instructed to create their own blog account as well as to write a reflection based on their experience. The participants, thus, were familiar with blogging activities.

The researcher administered basic task at the beginning to make them write comfortably. For example, the respondents were given a picture and were asked to comment on what they understand from it. Many came out with different interpretations and few sounded similar. Further the tasks from their prescribed syllabus under Technical English were assigned. The respondents were given a bar graph depicting different countries and their expenditure towards education and defense. The respondents were instructed to interpret the data they could comprehend from the visual representation. Each one was asked to read the blogs of others in their group and give their feedback. The respondents became curious to receive the feedback from others on their writing. This showed their receptiveness to feed back, a vital component in interpersonal skills. This gradually improved their perception towards learning English. The tasks administered included generic type also. For example, the respondents were asked to share about their weekend plan, the place they visited recently and the celebrity they wish to meet in person and the reason. The respondents were asked to frame a set of interview questions for the celebrity.

Brainstorming is a good way of creating ideas for writing. The goal is to pour their thoughts out without worrying about whether they make sense or how they fit together. Since students have different learning styles, some students will be uncomfortable with the disorganized frenzy of spilling thoughts out. Due to its nature of instant writing and correction, blog can help them leap out of the mire because they can change what has been written down immediately once mismatches occur.

Data Analysis

The study compared the results of blog-integrated writing with those of the traditional in-class writing. It lasted one semester. The pre-test and post-test results of the experimental group were analyzed. The analytical results were supposed to show the different effects of the two writing methods. The average score had risen from 5.86 to 7.28. The result shows that the respondents

have improved in their writing skill. The group's mean value is 0.01 which signifies that the means are different at the significance level. This shows that the blog writing proved to be more effective way in improving their writing skill.

Discussions and conclusions

The respondents found the feedback from their peers to be very useful and motivational. In addition to teacher, the peers also helped in correcting the errors they did in framing sentences. The students expressed positive views in using blogs. They added that the exchange of their opinion helped them to write thoughtfully, and they had improved their writing skills through regular posting on the blogs. The participants started experience improvement in their writing. They were able to learn from the feedback. The major advantages in blogging relates to technology literacy improvement, social engagement, and practical fostering of learning. Additionally, it gives them the feeling of working with authentic contexts and performing real life activities. The possible recommendations for blogging use include the adoption of creative tasks for bloggers and encouraging higher engagement of students with web blogs.

References:

- Alvi, M. (1994). Computer mediated collaborative learning: An empirical evaluation. *MIS Quaterly*, 18(2), 50-74.
- Armstrong, K., & Retterer, O. (2008). Blogging as L2 writing: A case study. *AACE Journal*, 16(3), 233-251. Bakar, N. A., & Ismail, K. (2009). Using Blogs to Encourage ESL Students to Write Constructively in English. *AJTHLHE*, 1(5), 45-57.
- Spiri, J., & Naganuma, N. (2007). Blogs in English language teaching and learning: Pedagogical uses and student responses. *Reflections on English Language Teaching*, 6(2), 1-20. Campbell, A. P. (2003). Weblogs for Use with ESL Classes. *The Internet TESL Journal*, 9(2), 33-35.
- Darabi, R. (2006). Basic writing and learning communities. *Journal of Basic Writing*, 25(1), 53-72.
- Drexler, W., Dawson, K., & Ferdig, R.(2007) Collaborative blogging as a means to develop elementary writing skills. *Electronic Journal for the Integration of Technology in Education*, 6 , 140-160.
- Huffaker, D. (2004). The educated blogger: Using Weblogs to promote literacy in the classroom. *AACE Journal*, 13(2), 91-98.