

## **BLOGGING: AN ESL WRITING PRACTICE**

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Writing is a complicated process that allows the writer to express his or her ideas in a manner that he himself desires. However, the task can be difficult, confusing and tiring particularly for intermediate and low proficiency students (Sarojini Devi, 2005). This is because students do not know what to write, how to write and when to write. Teachers should therefore be able to make something intangible becomes tangible by helping students to gain confidence in writing by creating a conducive writing environment (Wolfersberger, 2003). Thus this study was carried out to find try out a writing method which should make students like writing, that is, by using blogs.

### **Objectives**

The three main aims of this study were to a) investigate the students' perceptions regarding blogging and whether blogging helps them in learning ESL writing, b) assess how blogging helps students in their writing activity and indirectly their proficiency and c) investigate how blogging helps to improve student's writing fluency and their thought process that makes them to want to keep on writing.

### **Research Questions**

Specifically, the study seeks to answer the following question:-

1. What are students' perceptions regarding blogging activity in helping students learn to write better in ESL?
2. How does blogging help promote positive attitudes towards writing in ESL?
3. How does blogging help improve students' writing fluency and thought processes that makes them want to keep on writing?

### **Methodology**

#### *Design of the study*

This study seeks to find out students' perceptions regarding the blogging activity. Students will be asked to answer a questionnaire administered periodically once in two weeks as the writing process progresses. Observations in the computer lab will be carried out to determine students' habits and likes or dislikes when they are writing. Interviews will also be scheduled on a monthly basis to find out students' problems and their interest in what they are doing. These are in addition to the student's writing product on the website.

#### *Sample of the study*

The sample of the study comprised 20 students of very low proficiency in English. They could either be from the Counseling course or the Early Childhood Education Program. The program will give the students choices of whether to join or drop out from the program once they decided not to continue doing it.

#### *Instrumentation*

Apart from the actual writing product, a questionnaire will be administered periodically once in two weeks as the writing process progresses. Observations in the computer lab will be carried out

to determine student's habits and likes or dislikes when they are writing. Interviews will also be scheduled on a monthly basis to find out students' problems and their interest in what they are doing.

### *Research Procedure*

Once the respondents have been identified, the students will be given a briefing on what they are going to be doing over a period of 6 months. Then they will be given training on how to use the program and to start writing.

The writing from students need to be something personal sometimes to answer a given question, to put their thoughts on paper about an issue, something that triggers their interest, current issues, etc. All thoughts must be personal and something that they are passionate about.

A questionnaire will be administered every two weeks to find out what their perceptions are regarding the activity. Observations will be carried out every session and interesting things, events and occurrences will be recorded. Interviews will be carried out once a month to identify the progress and problems faced by the respondents.

### **Findings**

When the students shared their experiences in writing Blogs, the following themes emerged during the analysis of the qualitative data:

1. Writing using blog is a novelty for the students and they like the idea of publishing what they write.
2. Guided writing as opposed to free writing is more preferable to the students after a time of writing as finding topics to write becomes a problem.
3. Access and exposure to technology and Internet needs to be expanded.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

A blog is a frequently updated, personal website featuring diary-type commentary and links to articles on other websites. Blogs range from the personal to the political, and can focus on one narrow subject or a whole range of subjects. Some 25 students were involved in the project. Data were collected from the blogs themselves, the questionnaire and the semi-structured interviews given at the end of the project. The number of students started to decrease slowly during the course of the project. The 8 students who completed the project stated that this activity is a very rewarding one as it gives them practice in writing in English. They found an increase in their vocabulary and said that simple sentences were now easier to write. They also showed a marked increase in their posttest scores.

However, most students find that writing should be guided and that contributing to blogs using the free-writing method is not very conducive to writing. This is because they could not identify what to write, how to write and also found uploading a problem as it could be done once in a week only. This is because that is the only time they could have easy access to the web provided by the researcher in the lab. Another problem is the lack of time as they were in the semester and had a lot of things to do.

While they were positive that blogging helps them to write especially in terms of the sentence structure and grammar, the respondents feel that they need to have more time and guidance in order to succeed in learning English especially for writing. This theme was repeatedly given by the respondents.

Thus, this project, even though is a great help for the students in learning English, needs a more guided method in order to make it a success and they need to have more time and practice in using the skill.

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