The impact of peer feedback in an EFL writing class using blogs as a medium

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Keywords: *blogs, peer feedback*	*People nowadays are getting addicted to using the internet, especially blogs. Then, this phenomenon inspires the English lecturers to use blog as one of the media to teach writing in an EFL class. This research, therefore, discusses the students' experience of writing using blogs. Here, the blog is used by the students to post their writing assignments based on lessons and discussions in the classroom as well as provide and receive feedback. The qualitative research method is employed while carrying out the research. Data are mainly gathered through students' writings posted to their blogs, peer feedback questionnaires and interviews. The research reveals that 95% of students in the class agree that posting their writings on a blog is an interesting thing to do, and 93% argue that providing and receiving feedback helps them to revise their writing, mainly in the case of grammar and vocabulary. It shows that the experience in writing using blogs and interactions between students is able to enhance their writing abilities. Moreover, the chance to revise their writing is the developing process that can build their motivation and confidence. In the end, it is hoped that this research might inspire English teachers to implement a blog peer feedback process and design suitable activities in an EFL writing class.*

1. Introduction

When compared with other fundamental skills such as listening, speaking and reading, writing is the most difficult skill to acquire in academic contexts. Mardiana et al. (2022)) argues that it happens because writing requires students to have a great deal of lexical and syntactic knowledge as well as principles of organization in a foreign language to produce good writing. Hence, a language teaching method is needed here. As said by (Harianja et al., 2021), the use of language teaching media is likely to make teaching more successful and interesting. Media, here, relates to the use of technology, and one that is at the top of popularity is the Internet.

As we know, people nowadays always use the internet in their daily lives. They use many kinds of internet services, such as email, instant messaging, video calls, discussion forums, social networks, online shopping sites, and blogs. In view of this, new technologies like wikis, blogs, podcasts, Twitter and online forums are becoming popular in writing classes. Among these user-friendly technologies, blogs have suitable features and characteristics that

can fully support writing activity. Besides, blog is the one that can be used in all aspects of life. In line with that, Campbell (2003) suggests that a blog is an online journal that can be updated frequently by an individual and used for personal, educational, and commercial purposes.

Blog deals with writing entries or posts that are published online. Since then, it has been used as a media in teaching writing in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes. Teng et al. (2022) supports that teaching with blogs provides the opportunity to engage students in literacy activities, and the strategy has the additional benefit of enabling students to publish their writing easily and share their writing with an authentic audience. Moreover, a blog is considered as a channel of social communication and a great educational resource (Alsamadani, 2018).

In addition, Graus et al. (2022) declares five features of a blog: personal editorship, a hyperlinked posting structure, frequent updates, free public access to the content via the Internet, and archived postings. Besides, three types of educational blogs can be used in EFL classrooms: the lecturer blog, the student blog and the class blog (Campbell, ibid). Therefore, the blog is very useful to use in the writing class since each feature can help the students interpret their ideas into one of the types of blogs. The creation of features and the writing process of the blog is an ideal tool for students to construct and manage their own websites. A simple customization of templates can help students build a sense of ownership and unique online identity. Most students will write more carefully if they know they will publish their articles online for authentic readers.

As well as the students, lecturers may gain advantages by using blogs in the EFL writing class. They can create, edit, or delete their teaching handouts, such as notes, homework assignments, and review materials. All these lecturer's messages will be organized in a reversed chronological order with the latest postings on the top, and it is quite simple for lecturers to put the materials online with links to their source websites; students have more chances to read related articles. The most important part is that lecturers can easily use the blog to organize a collaborative learning environment in which students can peer edit others' postings. Students should be encouraged to comment on their partner's postings, which other classmates can also share.

When students write and comment on their peers' entries, blogs become an integral part of a lively literacy community. Once a student posts an entry, others in the class can respond, provide supportive feedback, and offer additional suggestions or perspectives. By writing and commenting on blogs, students write for real readers (not just for their lecturers). As a result, students focus on clear communication and get immediate feedbacks on their effective communication. This activity is called as peer feedback.

Peer feedback has been defined as the use of students as sources of information and interactants for each other in such a way that students assume roles and responsibilities normally taken on by a formally trained lecturer, tutor or editor in commenting on and critiquing each other's drafts in both written and oral formats in the process of writing (Dan, 2017). This method is very effective to apply in the EFL writing class since after students finish a writing assignment, the lecturer has two or more two students work together to check each other's work and give comments to the peer partner. Peer feedback can be in the form of corrections, opinions, suggestions, and ideas to each other. Thus, peer feedback here refers to the two-way process in which one cooperates with the other by providing and receiving as well as sharing comments and suggestions for the improvement of their peers' work.

A more positive note also shown by Shen et al. (2020) that peer feedback not only increases the audience's awareness by creating a collaborative drafting process but also provides opportunities for ESL students to practice English in a meaningful context. Shen et al. (2020) adds the effects of peer response in an EFL environment. Peer response could also be successfully introduced into the ESL environments, as the dominant culture does not affect peer feedback. They also found that peer feedback, while not always integrated in later drafts, promotes better self-editing skills, displaying more autonomous writing skills. Moreover, (Jashari & Fojkar, 2019) states that peer feedback allows students to gain confidence and reduce apprehension by seeing peers' strengths and weaknesses in writing.

Another research carried out by Lundstrom and Baker (2009) concludes that both givers and receivers of feedback improve their writing ability and also enhance their critical thinking skills. Another positive issue proposed by Lin and Chien (2009) is that collaboration with comrade students increased their motivation and encouragement to write. The authors claim that even though the number of comments on a paper at the beginning of the writing process may not be quantifiable, it will greatly assist the students to develop and organize their work better before they start the actual writing.

On the other hand, some researches show contradictive results. One of them deals with the difficulties in carrying out peer feedback activities then some scholars provide several reasons, such as students' inability to provide helpful feedback, uneasiness to provide feedback to their friends, and the defensive nature of students (Khair et al., 2020). They point out that peer review is a difficult task. According to them, this is due to various reasons. First, students sometimes do not focus on in-depth matters. They ignore the revising issues and provide unclear and unhelpful comments. Second, students can be sarcastic and critical in their comments. Moreover, (Harlena, 2019) states that the students feel uneasy when they provide comments on their peers' drafts. Also, students can be defensive when they receive criticism from their peers. They might feel hesitant to accept the comments if they are unsure of the validity of these responses.

However, the new ways of providing and receiving feedback are beneficial and effective as well. With the shift of focus from traditional methods of giving feedback to computer-mediated feedback, the ways of giving and receiving feedback on writing have changed. This shift has brought about significant changes to the pedagogy of writing (Duin & Tham, 2020)

It has been described above that a number of researches have been done to prove the effectiveness of blogs in EFL writing classes. As such, the aim of this research is to discuss students' experience of receiving and providing peer feedback using blogs as integrated into the EFL writing class. In addition, the discussion of the research suggests different types of activities that can be carried out using blogs in the EFL writing class, indicating how they can be helpful in developing students' writing as well as editing skills. For this purpose, the research questions are put forward as follows:

• How are the students' interests in writing blog?
• How are the students' writing abilities in blog peer feedback?

2. Research Methodology
The participants of this research are the students of A Class consisting of 39 students enrolled in the English Literature Department of the University of the Visayas in Essay Writing Class in 2021. They are considered competent in writing skill since they have already passed the

previous two writing subjects: sentence writing and paragraph writing. They are chosen as the participants since this class has the highest score among the other classes in the previous two writing subjects. This research is carried out over a period of one semester. Moreover, this research employs the descriptive qualitative design, in which a key aspect of qualitative research is to capture the subjectivity of human experiences. The qualitative method leads to the making of detailed descriptions of what is happening in natural settings. When carrying out this study, the data are mainly gathered through semi-structured interviews, peer feedback questionnaires, and students' writings posted on their blogs. Students use their blogs as an online portfolio, where they share their experiences and post writing assignments based on lessons and discussions.

Integrating blogs into EFL writing class is started by asking the students to create their own blog provided by free-of-charge Blogger.com service. Students create their blogs in three simple steps - (1) create an account, (2) name the blog, and (3) choose a template. In the first step, the students only have to fill in all the basic information such as username, password, email, etc. Then, they have to give the blog a title and decide its URL address, for example, http://asuseno.blogspot.com. Finally, after the students pick up their favorite template, they can start writing down their thoughts and publish them in cyberspace, which then ends up with commenting on peers and editing the drafts of their writings. All students' blogs are linked to the class blog, which is created by the lecturer. Students use their blogs as an online journal, a place for publishing their assignments and writings, and most importantly as a space for providing and receiving peer feedback. On the other hand, the class blog is mainly used for sending guidelines, announcements, assessment criteria and resources such as readings, video clips and links to web pages. The students are asked to write 5 writing assignments in their personal blogs. The whole process of writing is conducted in the classroom since the environment provides the internet.

3. Findings

To start with, the nature of the blog peer feedback in this EFL writing class needs to be stressed. To enhance the students' understanding, they must follow the very comprehensive cycle of learning. During the whole semester, the students are always given the material and involved in discussing the type and topic of their essays. They are also provided with several resources from the class blog, such as links to websites and articles.

In the writing process, the students are involved in developmental writing. First, they are asked to finish the first draft of their essays and publish their work on their blogs. After the students finish publishing their essays in their personal blogs, they are asked to provide feedback on their peer's work in the comment feature of the blog. To ensure that all students give and receive feedback, each student is asked to choose two of their friends' essays freely, and in each assignment, they must be different peers. From this calculation, each student gets more than one comment. Giving them the freedom to choose their peers is believed to give them the convenience to provide and receive feedback from their peers. Before they start providing comments and suggestions to their peers' works, they are given a guideline that consists of some questions related to the writing assignment. It is done in order to help them to stay focused. The questions are about the organization, the content, and the grammatical mistakes. Moreover, they are also free to give comments if they find some mistakes or something that needs to be revised that are not mentioned in the guidelines. The next step is the revising and editing of the first draft based on the feedback that their peers

give. Then, the lecturer checks the second draft. As the last step, the students also need to revise their essays based on the lecture's feedback.

Another activity that can be found unpredictably is on the part of descriptive writing. In that activity, the lecturer plays a video clip of a song and asks the students to make a description of the clip. It is interesting to note that though the students are not required to include the clip or video captions, they still publish very attractive and interesting postings. It is also wonderful to see that the students are actively writing in their blogs, though it is not the writing assignments from the teacher. Moreover, the students are also very active in checking and giving some comments or questions in the class blogs related to any information about the blog posting activity.

4. Discussion

How are the students' interests in writing?

The blog feedback questionnaire is distributed to the students at the end of the semester. First of all, though blogs are already well-known all over the world, not all the students have heard about them. These 36 students (92%) have already heard about the blogs and know how it works, but just 7 students (18%) have already had them before. After all the students had blogs, the research revealed that 37 students (95%) agreed that posting their writing on a blog was an interesting thing to do. They become interested in writing since they are also free to design and decorate the fonts. They also argue that adding some pictures and other templates gives them so much fun.

The rest of the students who belong to passive response students do not totally dislike this activity. The student is a bit left out since he has some problems with attendance in class, and the other is because of a problem with the personal computer, which cannot connect to the internet. These problems make them unable to design blogs as interesting as the other friends and even cannot fulfill some editing processes after receiving feedback from their peers.

How are the students' writing abilities in peer feedback on blogs?

When answering how they feel when they receive feedback from their peers, no one claims that it is embarrassing, and they are not disappointed or angry; they are even receptive to constructive criticism. According to all 39 students (100%), providing feedback through blogs also appears to be less stressful, as they do not need to do face-to-face peer feedback. Compared to the situation in which students have to provide feedback orally or in written forms, they face some unavoidable issues. In some cases, students struggle with their peers' accents if feedback is oral and they find it hard to read their unclear handwriting if it is written. Doing peer feedback online allows them to read all their peers' essays at their own pace, place and time, whereas in a typical face-to-face classroom setting, they may not get to read others' essays due to time constraints and understanding. Thus, compared with face-to-face feedback, blogs provide more flexibility.

The research also shows that there are 36 students (93%) who argue that providing and receiving feedback helps them to revise their writing, mainly in the case of grammar and vocabulary. It shows that the experience in writing using blogs and interactions in peer feedback between students is able to enhance their writing abilities. Those students say that the peer feedback in the blog shows them the real comparison of their earlier drafts and their writings towards the end of the course, which portrays notable improvements in their

vocabulary and grammar. Most of them make some grammatical mistakes in the first draft, and they revise it in the second draft, as well as revise the dictions as checked by the lecturer. What is surprising is that the students are willing to provide second feedback on their peers' revisions, although the teacher does not ask them to do that. Otherwise, the students who feel that they have not made some improvements in their writing skills are just 3 students (7%). They think that their writing skills are just the same as before.

Another finding is in the students' way of thinking. The questionnaire shows that there are 37 students (92%) who have become more analytical and critical. It is believed that students who are aware that their postings and comments will be read by their peers should be more careful before they post them. Moreover, the process of giving feedback makes them more critical because they have to be able to provide some comments and suggestions. This process is as well as the editing process, leads them to be more analytic since they have to understand the feedback they receive and make the revision.

When stating their opinions about using blogs in the EFL writing class, students point out that it is an effective way to receive and provide feedback that assists them in increasing their confidence. 35 students (90%) became more confident with their published writing assignments. They consider that the feedbacks from their peers inspire them to produce better writing. Not only that, their confidence in providing feedback also increases since the lecturer's guidelines help them. The 36 students (92%) of them agreed that peer feedback guidelines are helpful in providing feedback to their peers. All the students follow the feedback guidelines when providing comments and suggestions to their peers. This results in fulfilling linguistics as well as pragmatic functions.

Other skills that can be given to the students are summarizing and paraphrasing. The students say that they feel better in doing these skills at the time they get to the descriptive writing topic. This assignment is based on the activity of the video clip played in the class by the lecturer. It clearly shows the autonomous and independent nature that the students developed through the experience of learning with blogs and carrying out peer feedback.

However, some concerns need to be addressed. First, some of the students (4 students - 10%) are not so sure in giving the feedback. The uncertainty is about their peers' mistakes and whether the mistake is really a mistake. The next concern is given to some students (3 students - 8%) who feel guilty because they feel that they cannot give some suggestions for the comments given. Generally, a positive thing is noted; when the lecturer provides feedback in the next draft, students learn the parts they missed out on or were unsure of. Thus, they are able to learn from their own as well as their peers' mistakes.

6. Conclusion

The interactions and sharing of the student's experiences using blogs improve their ability in writing. The most important thing is that they can express their ideas not only in writing their assignments but also reflect, change or edit what they write as learning is a developmental process and, thus, improve their self-editing skills and become more independent students. Besides they also learn how to give feedback constructively. In addition, blogs facilitate the students to be the real audience, hence increasing students' self-confidence and motivation to write more and share their experiences with their peers at unlimited times, as blogs can record the entries or posts that are published as long as the owner does not make some deletions. Reading peers' writings also gives them some motivation and knowledge.

Some limitations of this research need to be anticipated for further research. The period is the first limitation. Since this research is carried out in one semester, further researches need to take a longer period of time with classes of different proficiency levels. It will be necessary to find out the probable effects of peer feedback on the development of their writing using English and to compare their abilities among the classes. It is also suggested that the lecturer should join online discussions with students about their problems and difficulties during the blog peer feedback.

It will be far better for the lecturer to ask the students to join the online communities for writing articles and news so that they can lead them in the right direction as well as probe them to view things from different angles. Despite the limitations, this research concludes that blog peer feedback facilitates student-centered learning and allows students to explore and share their learning experiences outside the classroom.

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