



## **Beyond Critical Thinking in Academic Writing: A Discourse Perspective**

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### **Abstract**

This study explores the use of blogs as a teaching tool in EFL writing classes, inspired by the increasing popularity of blogs among internet users. It focuses on students' experiences with blogging as part of their writing assignments, where they post their work, provide peer feedback, and receive comments. The research was conducted in English Department classes at a university in Semarang, Central Java. A qualitative approach was used, with data collected from blog posts, peer feedback questionnaires, and interviews. The findings indicate that 95% of students found blogging an engaging activity, and 93% believed that giving and receiving feedback helped them improve their writing, particularly in grammar and vocabulary. The study highlights that blogging and peer interaction can enhance students' writing skills, boost motivation, and build confidence through the revision process. The research aims to encourage English teachers to adopt blogging and peer feedback as effective strategies in EFL writing instruction and to design appropriate class activities for this purpose.

**Keywords:** Blog; Peer Feedback; Critical Thinking; Academic Writing; Discourse Perspective

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Compared to other core language skills such as listening, speaking, and reading, writing is often regarded as the most challenging to master in academic settings. According to Tangpermpoon (2008), this difficulty arises because effective writing requires extensive lexical and syntactic knowledge, as well as a solid understanding of organizational principles in the target language. Therefore, appropriate language teaching methods are essential. Cahyono and Cahyani (2012) emphasize that the use of media in language teaching can enhance both the effectiveness and the appeal of instruction, particularly through technological integration. One of the most prominent tools in this regard is the internet.

In modern life, the internet has become an integral part of daily activities, offering a range of services such as email, instant messaging, video calls, discussion forums, social networking, online shopping, and blogs. Consequently, digital tools like wikis, blogs, podcasts, Twitter, and online forums have gained popularity in writing instruction. Among these tools, blogs stand out for their user-friendly features, making them particularly suitable for supporting writing activities. As Campbell (2003) notes, a blog functions as an online journal that can be frequently updated for personal, educational, or commercial purposes.

Blogs involve writing entries or posts that are published online, which positions them as a valuable medium for teaching writing in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. Gardner (2013) highlights that incorporating blogs into teaching fosters student engagement in literacy activities and allows for easy publication and sharing of writing with authentic audiences. Additionally, Gedera (2012) underscores the role of blogs as both social communication platforms and valuable educational resources, further supporting their integration into language learning contexts.

Paquet (2003) identifies five key features of blogs: personal authorship, a hyperlinked structure for posts, frequent updates, public access via the internet, and archived content. In an educational context, Campbell (2004) categorizes blogs into



three types that can be utilized in EFL classrooms: lecturer blogs, student blogs, and class blogs. These features make blogs particularly effective for teaching writing, as they enable students to express their ideas through different blog types. Additionally, creating and managing a blog helps students develop essential skills in website management. Campbell further emphasizes that simple template customization fosters a sense of ownership and helps students build a unique online identity. Knowing their work will be published for an authentic audience often motivates students to write more carefully.

Blogging also offers significant advantages for lecturers in EFL writing classes. They can easily create, edit, and organize teaching materials, including notes, assignments, and review resources, which are displayed in reverse chronological order. This format allows lecturers to include links to external resources, providing students with broader access to related materials. More importantly, blogs facilitate a collaborative learning environment where students can engage in peer editing (Dieu, 2004). Students are encouraged to comment on their peers' posts, fostering a dynamic literacy community. This interaction allows students to receive supportive feedback and diverse perspectives, emphasizing real communication and improving writing clarity. The feedback they receive from peers—rather than solely from lecturers—helps them develop a greater sense of audience and purpose.

Peer feedback, as defined by Liu and Hansen (2002), involves students taking on roles typically held by teachers or tutors to provide critiques and suggestions on each other's drafts. This process, involving both written and oral feedback, encourages collaboration and enhances writing quality. In EFL classrooms, peer feedback is highly effective because it allows students to exchange ideas, corrections, and suggestions, thereby improving their writing through mutual support. This two-way interaction helps students refine their work and build cooperative relationships.

Liu and Hansen also highlight that peer feedback increases students' awareness of their audience and promotes a collaborative drafting process. It provides EFL students with meaningful opportunities to practice English. Yang et al. (2006) note that peer feedback can be effectively implemented in both EFL and ESL contexts, as it is not restricted by cultural factors. Although not all peer suggestions are incorporated into final drafts, the process enhances self-editing skills and fosters greater writing autonomy. Li (2009) adds that peer feedback boosts students' confidence and reduces anxiety by allowing them to observe the strengths and weaknesses of their peers, contributing to their overall development as independent writers.

Recent studies continue to highlight the benefits and challenges of using blogs in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms, particularly for developing writing skills. For example, a study in 2023 by Perumal emphasizes that blogs not only enhance writing skills but also foster creativity and allow students to express themselves freely, thus promoting engagement and ownership of their learning. This is particularly useful in contexts where students benefit from self-directed learning and peer interactions.

In addition, Wu's study highlights the role of feedback in blog-based writing tasks, noting that teacher feedback tends to be more constructive than peer feedback. However, blogs still foster meaningful exchanges and help students develop audience awareness and collaboration skills. This is crucial for improving writing performance and fostering an appreciation for writing beyond classroom settings.

These studies suggest that integrating blogs into writing instruction can lead to significant improvements if accompanied by proper scaffolding and training for both students and teachers. Moreover, blogs allow learners to engage with a broader audience, enhancing their motivation and sense of community.

Research by Lundstrom and Baker (2009) highlights that both the providers and recipients of peer feedback improve their writing skills and develop critical thinking abilities. Lin and Chien (2009) further emphasize the motivational benefits of peer collaboration, noting that while early-stage feedback may not always be extensive, it significantly aids students in structuring and refining their ideas before formal writing begins.



However, challenges in implementing peer feedback have been noted. Amores (1997) identifies several issues, such as students' limited ability to give constructive feedback, discomfort in critiquing peers, and a tendency to become defensive when receiving criticism. Students may focus on surface-level aspects rather than offering deeper, more meaningful suggestions. Leki (1990) adds that students often hesitate to accept peer feedback, particularly if they doubt its accuracy or validity. Despite these challenges, technological advancements have transformed the feedback process. Morra and Romano (2009) argue that computer-mediated feedback, including blogs, enhances the writing pedagogy by fostering more interactive and collaborative feedback practices. This shift not only improves the quality of feedback but also encourages students to engage more actively in revising their work. Given these findings, this study explores students' experiences with blog-based peer feedback in EFL writing classes. It aims to assess how blogging impacts their interest in writing and their ability to provide and receive constructive feedback. The following research questions guide this investigation: (1) how do students perceive blogging as a writing activity? and (2) how does blog-based peer feedback influence students' writing skills?

## **METHODS**

This study employs a descriptive qualitative design, chosen for its ability to explore and capture the subjective experiences of students in a natural classroom setting (Cohen, 2011). The focus is on understanding the use of blogs as a tool for improving writing skills in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. The participants in this study were 39 students from Class A in the English Department at Sunan Gunung Djati Islamic State University. These students, enrolled in the Essay Writing course during the 2011/2012 academic year, were selected based on their strong performance in previous writing courses, specifically sentence writing and paragraph writing. The class was identified as having the highest scores among all sections, indicating their readiness to engage in more advanced writing tasks.

The research was conducted over one semester, integrating blogs as a central component of the writing curriculum. Students were required to create their own blogs using the free platform Blogger.com. The process involved creating an account, naming their blog, setting a unique URL, and selecting a template. These blogs served as online portfolios where students posted their writing assignments and reflected on lessons and discussions. Each student's blog was linked to a central class blog managed by the lecturer. The class blog functioned as a hub for sharing guidelines, announcements, assessment criteria, and additional resources, such as readings, video clips, and relevant web links.

A key element of the blogging activity was peer feedback. Students were encouraged to comment on their peers' posts, offering constructive feedback based on structured criteria provided by the lecturer. This process not only facilitated collaborative learning but also allowed students to engage in meaningful revision of their work. By revising their drafts based on peer feedback, students developed both their writing and editing skills, fostering a sense of community and collaboration within the classroom.

Data for this study were collected from three primary sources: students' blog posts, semi-structured interviews, and peer feedback questionnaires. The blog posts served as a rich source of data, providing insights into students' writing progress and engagement with the blogging activity. The interviews explored students' experiences and perceptions of using blogs, while the questionnaires captured the nature and impact of the peer feedback process. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns and themes in the data, focusing on how blog integration influenced students' writing skills, motivation, and collaborative learning.

Ethical considerations were carefully addressed. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and their consent was obtained for the use of their blog content and feedback. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained to ensure that



students felt comfortable sharing their work and experiences. Overall, this study highlights the potential of blogs as a tool for enhancing writing skills and fostering a collaborative learning environment in EFL classrooms.

The students are asked to write 5 writing assignments in their personal blogs. The whole process of the writing is conducted in the classroom since the environment provides the internet.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **Findings**

The findings reveal that the integration of blogs for peer feedback in the EFL writing class fosters a structured and comprehensive learning cycle. Students engage in a progressive approach to writing, beginning with the creation of their first drafts, which are then published on their personal blogs. Throughout the semester, the students consistently receive instructional materials and participate in discussions focused on essay types and topics. These resources, provided via the class blog, include curated links to relevant websites and articles, enriching their research and content development processes.

The peer feedback process is designed to encourage meaningful interaction and constructive critique. Each student selects two peers' essays to review, ensuring that every essay receives multiple comments from different classmates. This freedom of choice fosters a sense of comfort and autonomy, enabling students to provide feedback more thoughtfully. To maintain focus and structure, students are given detailed guidelines with questions targeting key aspects of writing, such as organization, content, and grammar. However, they are also encouraged to address additional issues they identify, promoting deeper engagement and critical analysis.

Following the peer review, students revise their drafts based on the feedback received before submitting their second drafts for lecturer evaluation. The lecturer's feedback serves as the final layer of input, after which students undertake a final round of revisions. This iterative process not only enhances their writing skills but also develops their ability to evaluate and edit their own and others' work critically.

An unexpected but valuable outcome emerged from a descriptive writing activity. Students watched a video clip of a song and were tasked with crafting descriptive essays. Despite not being required to include multimedia elements in their posts, many students produced visually engaging and creative entries, reflecting their enthusiasm and initiative. Beyond assignments, students demonstrated ongoing engagement by independently writing blog entries and actively interacting on the class blog. Their consistent participation in discussions and comments suggests that blogging cultivated a collaborative and motivated learning environment, fostering a sense of ownership over their learning journey.

Overall, these findings suggest that blogs not only facilitate peer feedback but also nurture creativity, autonomy, and active participation, making them a powerful tool in developing students' writing and critical thinking skills.

### **Discussion**

#### *What are the students' interests in writing blog?*

At the end of the semester, a blog feedback questionnaire was distributed to gather insights from the students. While blogs are widely recognized worldwide, not all students were familiar with them prior to the course. Among the 39 participants, 36 students (92%) were aware of blogs and understood their functionality. However, only seven students (18%) had prior experience with maintaining a personal blog. This indicates a general familiarity with the concept but limited hands-on experience, highlighting the importance of introducing blog-based activities in educational settings to bridge this gap.

Once all students created their blogs, the study found that 37 participants (95%) found posting their writings on a blog to be engaging and enjoyable. Many students expressed increased interest in writing, attributing it to the creative freedom they had





in designing their blogs. They enjoyed customizing fonts, adding images, and selecting templates, which made the process more fun and interactive.

The remaining students, though less enthusiastic, did not completely dislike the activity. One student faced challenges due to irregular attendance, while another struggled with technical issues related to their personal computer's inability to connect to the internet. These difficulties limited their ability to design their blogs and complete editing tasks after receiving peer feedback. Consequently, their overall experience was less fulfilling compared to their peers.

#### *How are the students' writing abilities in blog peer feedback?*

When answering how they feel when they receive feedback from their peers, no one claim that it is such embarrassing thing and they are not disappointed or angry, even they are receptive to those constructive criticisms. According to all 39 students (100%), providing feedback through blogs also appear to be less stressful, as they do not need to do face-to-face peer feedback. Compare the situation if students have to provide feedback orally or in written forms, they do 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 help them to revise their writings mainly in case of grammar and vocabulary. It shows that the experience in writing using blog and interactions in peer feedback between students are able to enhance their writing abilities. Those students say that the peer feedbacks in the blog show them the real comparison of their earlier drafts and their writings towards the end of the course which portray notable improvement 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 the revision of the dictions as checked by the lecturer. What is surprising is that the students are willing to provide the second feedback of their peers' revisions though the teacher does not ask them to do that. Otherwise, the students who feel that they do not make 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%) become more analytical and critical. It is believed that students who are aware that their postings and comments will be read by their peers to be more careful before they post them. Moreover, the process of giving feedback makes them to be more critical because they have to be able to provide some comments and suggestions. This process is as well as the editing process which 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 to increase their confidence. 35 students (90%) become more confidence with their published writing assignment. 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 they are helped by the lecturer's guideline. 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 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 the peer feedbacks. It can be seen in the following table.

However, there are some concerns that need to pay attention. First, some of the students (4 students - 10%) are not so sure in giving the feedback. The uncertainty is about their peers' mistakes, 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 of the given comments. Generally, a positive thing is noted; when the lecturer provides feedback in the next draft, students learn the parts they missed out or they were unsure of. Thus, they are able to learn from their own as well as their peers' mistakes.

## CONCLUSION

The interactions and sharing of experiences through blogs significantly enhance students' writing abilities. Not only do students have the opportunity to express their ideas through writing assignments, but they also engage in a reflective process that encourages them to revise, edit, and improve their work over time. This developmental learning approach strengthens their self-editing skills and promotes greater independence. Additionally, students learn to provide constructive feedback, which further develops their critical thinking and communication skills. The blog platform also serves as a real audience, which boosts students' confidence and motivation to write and share their experiences. The ability to revisit and edit past posts fosters continuous improvement, and reading peers' writings offers additional motivation and knowledge.

However, this study has some limitations that future research could address. The research was conducted over a single semester, so future studies could benefit from a longer duration to examine the sustained effects of blog-based peer feedback. Additionally, expanding the research to include classes of varying proficiency levels could provide valuable insights into the impact of peer feedback on writing development across different groups. It would also be beneficial for instructors to actively participate in online discussions to address students' challenges and provide timely support during the peer feedback process. Furthermore, encouraging students to engage with online writing communities could guide them toward more diverse perspectives and enhance their writing skills.

Despite these limitations, the findings suggest that blog-based peer feedback promotes student-centered learning, allowing students to explore and share their learning experiences beyond the classroom. This approach not only fosters a collaborative learning environment but also empowers students to take ownership of their educational journey.

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