

Does Blogging Facilitate the Development of Students' Writing Skills?

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Abstract

Blogging is viewed as a tool in facilitating the development of writing skills. To ascertain such contention, this study attempted to determine the effects of blogging (weblogs) on the forty-one freshman college students' writing performance based on the results obtained from pre-test (entry essays) and posttest (exit essays) mean scores, interviews and reflections. Three classes or a total of 66 freshman college students from a top university in the Philippines, majoring in Communication Arts and Accountancy participated in the study that ran for more than three months in the first trimester of AY 2012-2013. These classes were introduced to blogging as they wrote their three essays on a computer in English classrooms with free access to the Net via school Wi-Fi. Prior to and after the treatment period, they were made to write entry and exit essays based only on one topic of their choice for an hour. However, upon completion of the study, only 41 students were able to accomplish all the instruments needed. The findings reveal that students' writing skills improved based on the results of paired samples dependent *t*-test of their entry and exit essays' mean scores at $p < 0.05$ level of significance. Furthermore, three independent raters unanimously agreed that students improved on content and organization. These findings matched students' perception that blogging helped them improve their writing skills because of their peers' constructive feedback.

Keywords: blogging, weblogs, blogs, writing skills

Introduction

The influx of Information Communications Technology (ICT) has revolutionized the teaching of English, particularly writing, to ESL/EFL learners. If students before were used to in-class writing tasks using the traditional mode of writing, paper and pen, today, they can now enjoy laptop, net book, tablet, iPad, and other

electronic gadgets when writing their essays. Hence, with this technological advancement dominating globally, it is imperative that the teaching of English, specifically writing, must be interactive to make it more challenging and meaningful to the learners. The interactive nature of the Web makes it a good platform for the teaching of writing. Today, educators can utilize social networking sites as Blogger, Tumblr, Face book, and Multiply as platforms in honing students' writing skills. Among these sites, blogger is the most widely used domain in ESL writing classrooms.

Blogger is a website in which students can create their own weblogs (blogs) where they can post their essays, poems, and other creative works arranged chronologically in reverse order, where the recent post appears first. Campbell (2003) defines a weblog (or 'blog') "as an online journal that an individual can continuously update with his or her own words, ideas, and thoughts through software that enables one to easily do so" (para. 1).

Since the invention of blogger in 1999 (Weblog applications, 2005), blogging and its impact on students' writing performance has been the subject of several studies and most of them confirm that blogging improves students' writing skills (Anderson, 2010; Zhang, 2009; Kelley, 2008; Jones, 2006; and Simsek, 2003).

While studies on the effects of blogging on students' writing competences are mostly qualitative in nature, this study used mixed methods of quantitative and qualitative research to ascertain the impact of blogging on the writing performance of freshman college students.

Review of Related Literature

Blogs and Blogging

Blogging as defined by Jones (2003) "is short for web logging" (p.1). Blogging is the act of keeping a diary or journal online. This online journal or blog with dated entries are linked to other sites on the web, usually other blogs, thus creating a virtual community (Jones, 2003 cited in Cequena and Gustilo, *n.d*). Blood (2002) in Elison and Yu (2008) further defines blogs as, "online public writing environments in which postings (individual writing segments, often

containing hyperlinks to other online sources) are listed in reverse chronological order" (p. 105).

Campbell (2003) categorized blogs into three types which can be used for ESL classrooms: tutor blog, learner blog and class blog. The tutor blog is an online journal created by a teacher himself/herself whose objectives are to encourage students to read by providing texts written in casual and natural way native speakers write, to promote exploration of web resources related to lessons, to encourage verbal exchanges where students can provide feedback or comments on blog entries, to provide information about syllabus, and to encourage self-study by providing links like online quizzes, audio and video files for ESL listening exercises. The learner blog, on the other hand, is owned by individual learners. This can be an avenue where students can keep online journals for their writing practice by posting either their reactions to reading texts or their responses to writing assignments. Lastly, class blog, is a product of collaborative entries in which students can post messages, discussions, and images related to classroom lessons. In this way, students can better understand lessons in class since they are further discussed and elucidated through online forums in a class blog.

This study used learner blog wherein students were required to create their blogs from which they posted their entry essays and academic essays written on a computer in class.

Effects of Blogging in the Development of Writing Skills

Weblog or blogging has evolved from a simple online diary for self-expression to a complicated educational tool as academic writing. Weblog was viewed as a means of developing students' writing proficiency (Jones, 2006; Roth, 2007; Kelley, 2008; Zhang, 2009; Drexler, Dawson & Ferdig, n.d.; Fageeh, 2011), positive attitudes towards writing (Fageeh, 2011; Jones, 2006; Lee, 2010; Armstrong & Retterer, 2008; Kelley, 2008; Drexler, Dawson & Ferdig, n.d.), and ability to critique others' writing (Jones, 2006).

Several studies were conducted focusing on the effects of blogging in the development of writing skills. Fellner and Apple (2004) investigated the impact of blogging on the writing fluency of twenty-one low proficient and low motivated senior university Japanese students in a seven-day intensive English course for five and

a half hours a day. For each session following the listening and speaking activities conducted, each student is expected to write his/her reaction about the topic discussed previously for twenty-minutes and their outputs were sent via email to class blog account so that they can read and post their comments (feedback) on each others' works. Results of the study reveal that students' writing fluency improved from an average word count per student of 31.5 words to 121.9 words for 20 minutes. Their written outputs also improved in terms of lexical complexity. This implies that blogging or online journaling can hone writing skills for it provides the students an avenue not only for self-expression but also for writing practice where they get trained to write under time pressure and at the same time to comment on each others' written outputs which serve as a learning experience because they also get to learn from their peers' writing styles.

Similarly, in Lee's (2010) study of seventeen university students at advanced level who kept personal blogs over 14 weeks, the findings obtained from blog pages, post surveys and final interviews "showed that regularly creating blog entries had a positive impact on learners' writing fluency and increased their motivation to write for a broad audience" (para.1). Bernstein (2004) echoes similar findings, stating that weblogs improve writing given that frequent writing on a computer for an audience provides practice, thus improves writing.

Dujisik and Cai (n.d.) conducted a study among the 37 low-intermediate ESL learners enrolled in an English Language Institute (ELI) at a large southeastern public university. The class met 50 minutes each day for five times a week. They were given writing assignments on various topics which they accomplished in a networked computer laboratory once a week and posted in their individual blogs for peers' comments. At the end of the term, a survey questionnaire consisting of 11 Yes/No items to identify the respondents' profile or background knowledge about blogging and two open-ended questions to determine their attitudes towards blogging was administered. Students' responses to open-ended questions were manually coded by the researchers themselves. The findings show that ESL learners felt comfortable in using computers, felt it was easy to create blogs, knew how to upload images in blogs, and thought that blogs helped improve reading and writing skills

among others. Regarding students' attitudes towards their blogging experience, results reveal six emerging themes from their responses to open-ended questions which included development of the English language skills, network/communication, motivation / interest, use of technology, collaborative learning/audience, and ease of blog tasks. Furthermore, analysis of qualitative findings indicated that the primary reason for students' positive attitudes towards blogging is that it develops their writing skills.

The process done by Dujsik and Cai (n.d.) in manually coding students' responses to open-ended questions, identifying emerging themes from these corpora and counting their frequency, was followed by the researcher in the present study.

Brescia and Miller (2005) in Cequena and Gustilo (n.d.) presented seven features of blogging that uniquely enhanced college level writing instruction:

- (1) provides greatest instructional potential for those who maintain weblog throughout their college careers both as a source of knowledge and as personal management content system; (2) provides opportunities to share in public (via virtual society) what is learned in the classroom; (3) leverages teaching to outside school hours; (4) allows students to express freely what they feel; (5) provides opportunity for free writing; (6) encourages students to do more formal writing; and (7) promotes interactivity in which the students can post comments and ask questions. (para.6)

Furthermore, Sun and Chang (2012) mentioned that weblog "not only encourages students to actively and reflectively engage in knowledge sharing, knowledge generation, and the development of numerous strategies to cope with difficulties encountered in the learning process," (p.43) but also provides them with a sense of authorship, that allows them to reflect on the requirements of academic writing, the purposes of writing, and their authority as writers. Liu (2007), on the other hand, reported that in order for students to benefit from blogging, they have to meet the requirements such as English proficiency and computer/Internet, writing, and communication efficacy.

The aforementioned studies have pointed out the facilitative effects of blogging on the development of students' writing skills. This study is an attempt to contribute to a dearth of existing knowledge in the field. However, different from the studies cited above that commonly used qualitative data, the current study used both quantitative and qualitative data obtained from students' essays, reflections and interviews to fill in the research gap in ascertaining the effects of blogging on students' writing performance. The study also described the students' perceived improvements on their writing skills based on their reflections and interview transcripts.

Peer Feedback on E-portfolio: Effects on Writing Performance

Blogging may not be sufficient to help students improve their writing skills. Peers' and mentor's feedbacks on essays are essential to help the learners realize their lapses in writing, and in the process, improve on their writing style, content, flow and organization. While Wu's (2006), Zhang's (1995), and Yang and Badger's (2006) studies reveal similar findings that teacher feedback was more preferred by students compared with peer feedback in making revisions, Bakar (1985) and Ware (2008) highlighted the significance of peer feedback in improving their writing skills.

Ware (2008) found out in his research that language learners are appreciative of their partner's individualized feedback in their blog posts, with some even correcting their grammar errors. However, transcripts show little percentage of corrections on form. This finding indicates that students only provide grammar corrections unless given explicit directions (Ware, 2008). Hence, feedback through asynchronous dialogues in blogs can help improve one's writing competence.

Likewise, Bakar (1985) investigated the effects of a blog collaborative project on students' writing competence. Students were divided into small groups according to their own preferred members usually their friends. Each group chose any topic on social sciences to write a paper on. They initiated discussion about the topic and posted their research in blogs. The final paper of each group was also posted online for peers' comments to help them revise their final group project. Next after having undergone collaborative blog

project, they were asked about their attitudes towards blogging. Results indicate “that the students perceived blogging as an interesting and motivating learning environment because interacting through blogs helped with the critical thinking and peer feedback facets of their writing projects” (p.45). It was also found out that social interaction online provided much help for students to improve their writing skills. Another interesting finding of Baker is that the students tended to write better online since they were aware that their papers could be read by many readers due to its accessibility via World Wide Web.

While peer feedback is indeed useful in developing students’ writing skills, Meier (n.d.) suggested that learners should be provided with opportunities for practice like workshops where they are guided on how to critique a piece of academic writing. A language teacher, for instance, may model first to the students on how critiquing of academic essay is done. Then, with small groups, they are provided an opportunity for practice through a critiquing workshop with the teacher as a guide on the side, scaffolding, until the students get used to the task. Then, later on when they are already trained, that is where the teacher may withdraw his/her instructional support where students can now critique and write essays independently.

This critiquing workshop advocated by Meier (n.d.) was adapted in this study where students were given a critiquing task by group after a critiquing workshop done in class with the researcher herself training the class in analyzing a sample essay. The critiquing workshop was done at home where students interact via email or Skype to critique an academic essay provided for them. Then, each group presented their outputs (critiques) in class where students interacted and provided feedback based on the reports presented.

Statement of the Problem

The main purpose of the study is to determine the effect of Weblogging or blogging on students’ writing performance. Specifically, the study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. What is the effect of blogging on freshman college students’ writing performance?

2. What are the improvements in students' writing skills after having been exposed to blogging as a platform for their academic essays?
3. What is the perception of students on the mediating effect of blogging in the development of their writing skills?

Methodology

Research Design

This descriptive qualitative study aims to ascertain the effects of blogging on freshman college students' writing skills through survey, focus group interview and students' essays.

Participants

The respondents of the study consisted of forty-one freshman college students enrolled in English Communication, Study and Thinking Skills, from two degree programs, Communication Arts and Accountancy, in a top university in the country. The course is divided into two components, the Writing Component (WC) and the Reading, Viewing and Language Component (RVLC). Two faculty members taught the course- the first handled the WC while the other taught the RVLC. The RVLC teacher is responsible for teaching grammar, reading different text types and critiquing various forms of media to supplement the WC's lectures on the basic principles of academic writing, stages of the writing process, logical fallacies, and APA documentation style so that the students can produce academic essays. This study was conducted during the first trimester of Academic Year 2011-2012 in WC classes. The classes were taught academic writing in English using weblogs (blogging) in which each student was required to write two major essays, extended definition and argumentative essays, along with other minor essays. Each session ran for one and a half hours with two sessions per week covering 13 weeks or more than three months.

Research Instruments

To gather pertinent data for this research, the following research instruments were utilized.

Weblogs and response logs

Weblogs are the respondents' essays posted in the Web. These include weblogs (blogs), their online electronic portfolio and response logs or online comments about their peers' blog posts. Students' weblogs and response logs were considered in describing qualitatively students' improvements in writing.

Reflections

Three reflections were written by the students based on the following prompts: effects of blogging in developing their writing skills; their reactions towards online peer editing and peer review in facilitating the development of their writing skills; and the challenges they encountered in using blogging as a platform in posting their portfolios. These reflections served as a basis in ascertaining students' perception on the impact of blogging in developing their writing skills.

Gustilo's (2011) Writing Rubric

Gustilo's (2011) writing rubric, having the highest score of 6 and lowest score as 1 with specific indicators/descriptions for each score, was used to measure the learners' writing skills. The criteria include content, organization, style (diction), grammar, mechanics, spelling and punctuations.

Interview Guide/Protocol

The interview protocol was designed to triangulate the quantitative and qualitative data obtained from students' essays and reflections. It is a set of open ended questions which aims to determine the respondents' perception on the impact and benefits of weblogs in developing their writing skills.

Procedure of the Study

Survey questionnaire and materials for instruction like web-based activities were designed and modified prior to the treatment period. These instructional materials were modified based on language experts' comments for implementation in Term 1 of AY 2012-2013.

Treatment period commenced in Term 1 of AY 2012-2013 after seeking approval and consent from the Deans of the colleges and parents or guardians for project implementation. The treatment period ran for more than 13 weeks with two sessions per week for one and one half hours per session. Prior to the treatment period, three English Communication classes were asked to write their entry essays on the topic of their choice.

During the treatment period, these classes were provided with web-based activities such as blogging, online forums, reflections and response logs where they could post their comments on each others' essays. To illustrate how the writing class was conducted using the Net. The session started with a mini-lecture about specific text type that students had to write, e.g. extended definition essay. Then, the class was made to critique by groups an exemplar for specific genre discussed in class. After which, the students were advised to do research at home about specific topic they were interested to write on for extended definition essay. In school, they were required to bring their laptops with the soft copies of their research on their chosen topic. For one and a half hour class, they were supposed to have done pre-writing strategies such as listing and clustering of ideas relevant to their topic based from their readings and prior knowledge. From the ideas generated, they had to write an outline with a thesis statement. The following meeting, their outlines were critiqued both by the teacher and students, and from these comments, they revised their outlines. Then, students wrote the first draft following their outline and posted it online in their individual blogs using a pseudonym. Each of them was instructed to post comments on at least two essays and the posting was done at home. The teacher also provided constructive feedback online. The final step was revising where students were made to write the final copy of the essay based on peer and teacher evaluation.

After 13 weeks of treatment period, the students wrote their exit essay based on the topic similar to what they had written in their entry essay. The following meeting, focus group interview was

conducted with fifteen students to determine their perception on the impact and benefits of blogging. Open-ended questions like, "How would you describe the effects of blogging and online commenting on each others' essays on your writing skills?" "Do you think blogging and online commenting on each others' essays helped you improve your writing skills? If yes, what improvements in your writing skills could you cite?," and "What are the challenges that you encountered in the following: writing essays via blogging and online peer editing?"

To determine whether blogging has facilitative effects on students' writing skills, the entry and exit essays on a similar or related topic were rated by three language experts using Gustilo's (2011) rubric.

Data Analysis Procedure

To find out the effects of blogging on students' writing skills, three independent raters rated students' entry and exit essays. Their ratings were averaged for both sets of essays. To measure whether students' gains in post (exit) writing scores were significant, paired samples t-test was used. In addition, improvements in their writing skills were quantitatively and qualitatively described considering their entry and final essays posted in their blogs. The raters indicated specific improvements they observed in students' final essays compared with their entry essays aside from assigning points for each essay. These writing improvements were clustered into six such as content, organization, structure, style, language (word choice) and flow. Finally, excerpts from students' essays were taken as samples to illustrate specific improvements on their writing skills.

Results and Discussion

Effects of blogging on students' writing skills

Table 1

T-test of Students' Entry and Exit essays

Mean of Students' Entry Essays (Pre-test)	Standard Deviation	Mean of Exit Essays (Posttest)	Standard Deviation	n	T-test Sig =p<-05

mean score)		mean score)			
3.89	0.55	4.39	0.67	41	*0.02

As can be seen in Table 1, the students' mean score for their exit essays (posttest mean score) significantly improved as shown by the result of paired samples t-test of 0.02 at $p < 0.5$ level of significance. This implies that weblog or blogging may have positive effect on the development of students' writing skills. This study corroborates the findings of Jones's (2006), Roth (2007), Kelley (2008), Anderson (2010) and Simsek (2009) that blogging is an effective tool in developing students' writing proficiency. However, other factors such as instruction and peer feedback also contribute to the students' writing improvements, which the study did not quantitatively measure since its focus is on students' perception on the impact of blogging on their writing skills.

Improvements in students' writing as evidenced by their exit essays

Table 2

Raters' Evaluation of Students' Improvements in Writing

	Content	Organi- zation	Structure	Flow	Language	Style
Frequency	22	21	3	3	5	4
Percentage	38	36	5	5	9	7
Frequency =58		Percentage = 100				

To ascertain the improvements of students' writing, three independent raters (professors of English from a top university) were asked to identify specific improvements on students' writing based on their entry and exit essays. As gleaned in Table 2, the three independent raters unanimously agreed that students' exit essays were more organized, clearer and more developed in content compared with their entry essays. Table 2 shows that among the six categories of writing skills, the freshman college students improved on content (38%) (Anderson, 2010) and organization (36%). This result is similar with Simsek's (2009) finding in his experimental

study that web-integrated writing (blogging) improves students' content and organization compared with an in class writing.

To further support the above findings on students' writing improvements, below are sample entry and exit essays which are analyzed in terms of content, language and organization.

Student	Entry Essay	Final Essay
A	<p>Many people are wondering, why it's getting hotter in the country, not only here but all over the world. Maybe it's because we are experiencing global warming. What is global warming? What causes it? What are its effects on the environment? How can we prevent global warming?</p>	<p>The whole world is now experiencing much heat which causes many problems. People are having different kinds of illnesses that may lead to death, like skin cancer and asthma. Glaciers are melting and breaking which causes sea levels to rise. If this cannot be solved, what world would the next generation have? These are the effects of global warming to us and to the environment.</p>
B	<p>It is quite common among the cities, that particular state that brings every person to their demise when they finally sink down to it. Centuries ago, the Filipinos fought against the oppression, abuse, and racial discrimination of Spain for their freedom from it – poverty. Every citizen of a country has his or her right to utilize its resources. But with the fast-paced economic growth of other countries, the Philippines strives hard to catch up; and thus, leaving many of its children behind in poverty.</p>	<p>Some students find the dress code unfair in various ways. For most girls, problems regarding the length from hemline of their short, skirt or dress to the tip of their middle finger plus one inch continues to spur among the university. Most females state that some girls just have much longer arms than other girls. On the other hand, the confusion whether boys are allowed to wear shorts is not mentioned, as to the fact that the hemline protocol is most applicable to female students.</p>
C	<p>Since Barack Obama approved of same sex marriage, much people are somehow legally allowed to sin. Divorce, premarital sex and corruption, these are the things that defile the word of God and it is being indulged in by America. These very things affect their government. Less values, more of the world. If they continue to do these, their country would flunk. If families get broken because of divorces, the mom and dad would fight in front of the kid.</p>	<p>It is often argued that a person has the will to avoid a smoky environment. It is one's choice if he or she will opt to enter a smoke-zone. For these very reasons why then are smoking rooms created in the office or in mall? There are also restaurants or bars that choose to be non-smoking environments, to give the people the choice to select their own environment. Admittedly, a sentient person can opt to dodge a smoking area. Although, not all people can avoid it; what about those children who are nonchalantly within the reachable distance of their father's cigar smoke?</p>
D	<p>Most of the OFW did not finish their studies. That is why, it is hard for them to have an easy job that has a high salary. They have to work for like two times a day to have a bigger salary. Most of their jobs are being a nanny, janitor, domestic helper and other difficult jobs. When they catch a cold, there is no one to care for them. Some of them, when they catch a cold, they will just drink a medicine.</p>	<p>In conclusion, overseas Filipino workers should really be viewed as one of the modern heroes in our country. They do not only help sustain their families but help our country in many ways. I believe that someday other children who do not share a healthy relationship with their parents, who are working across the world, would understand them why they are seeking employment abroad.</p>

Figure 2. Excerpts from Students' Entry and Final Essays

It is evident in the above sample students' writings the marked improvements on students' writing skills particularly on organization, content and voice in their final essays. Notice in the above entry essay that student A's introductory paragraph in his essay is not attention grabbing because the second sentence announces the cause so abruptly that the writer did not provide additional details to create an element of suspense. He introduced the topic 'global warming' that fast in his second sentence. Another flaw is the use of unnecessary commas. The succeeding statements are a series of questions that are not thought provoking. However, looking at his exit essay, his introductory paragraph is catchier and more logically organized compared to his entry essay, considering the topic sentence, "The whole world is now experiencing much heat which causes many problems." This topic sentence is supported by the succeeding statements that present the problems that are associated with a very hot weather like various illnesses and melting of glaciers.

Another major flaw in the above paragraphs both for students A and B is that general statements are used without supporting details. For instance, Student A could have explained the reasons for having hot weather. Student B, on the other hand, speaks about fragmented or isolated ideas in one paragraph that are not linked to one another. Entry essays of students A and B do not have topic sentences to develop into paragraphs compared with their final essays where topic sentence is stated in the first sentence of the paragraph and was fully developed by supporting details that follow. While student C's entry paragraph may have unity of ideas, it lacks coherence due to inability to sequence his ideas well. Lastly, student D's paragraph is not coherent and repetitive. On coherence, the last two sentences are inappropriate since the idea is entirely different from the previous sentence that speaks about jobs. On redundancy, the clause 'when they catch a cold,' is repeated twice, and this makes the last two sentences ineffective. Another grammatical lapse is the wrong choice of words as shown in this phrase taken from the last sentence '*drink a medicine,*' which should be '*take medicine.*' However, considering his exit essay, it can be seen that his paragraph is more organized compared to that of his entry essay because of his ability to write a good topic sentence with appropriate supporting details.

Looking at their final essays, there have been remarkable changes on text organization. Their writing improved; if before their

ideas were disorganized, without supporting details, after their blogging experience, their ideas were more organized with a topic sentence at the start of each paragraph and supporting details. In addition, their essays are characterized by their use of cohesive devices and consistent point of view, tone, and voice. This shows that blogging may help develop students' ability to organize their thoughts and to support their topic with adequate details since they had been introduced to peer feedback online and their exposure to various written essays may have also provided them insights on effective strategies to use in text organization.

Another factor contributory for their writing improvements can be instruction. With direct instruction done in the classroom on the basic concepts, principles, stages, and tips in academic writing, it is assumed that students also learned from classroom discussions. Hence, this study does not solely attribute students' writing improvements on blogging since some other factors may come into play, which this research did not delve into.

Perceived Effect of Blogging in Developing Students' Writing Skills

Table 3

Benefits of Blogging in English Writing Classroom

Benefits of blogging	Frequency	Percentage
improves writing skills	20	27
helps improve essays because of constructive criticism	18	24
promotes ease and convenience in typing and editing essays	9	12
boosts confidence/self-esteem to write due to anonymity	7	9
serves as a good platform for writing/self-expression	5	7
is fun	5	7
develops positive attitude towards writing	3	4
develops critical thinking	3	4
motivates to write better because of wide readership	3	4
provides a chance for peer review that help others revise their works	2	2
Total	75	100

Table 3 summarizes the benefits of blogging as perceived by the students based on their reflections and interview transcripts which were manually coded. As gleaned in the table, most students perceived that blogging improved their writing skills (27%) and helped them improve their essays through constructive criticism (24%). It is also noteworthy to mention that some students perceived blogging as a good platform for writing or self-expression (12%), fun (7%) and a way of boosting their self-esteem (5%).

Results of interviews and reflections reveal that students perceived that blogging helped them improve their writing skills mainly because they were able to critique and learn vocabulary, writing styles, content, and organization of ideas from reading their peers' essays. Likewise, they also indicated that in the same way that they learned from peers' constructive comments, they too were able to help their peers improve their works as well through posting their reviews and recommendations. They also stated that since their essays would be published online, they were compelled to write well and be careful with their grammar (Baker, 1985). As what Zhang (2009) found out in his study, blogging "affects the quality of writing," (p. 67) since students have their audience in mind while writing. Therefore, blogging may be considered as an effective platform in facilitating the development of students' writing skills.

These findings are further supported by the following avowals in Figure 2.

Reasons for/ and Writing Improvements	Interview Transcripts and Reflections Reflecting Students' Perception on Their Writing Improvements
Awareness that their essays are published online	<i>Blogging is a nice way to spread what your insights are about a certain topic. You would be motivated to work better, knowing that you might get a lot of readers. This unconventional way of learning has taught me to be more careful in writing my essays. Posting my essays in blogs makes me write the best way I can because I know that my works can be read by many people online. I think blogging helped me most in my writing. Since, it would be practically seen by anyone I became conscious and it always reminded me to write better.</i>
Training in Honing Writing Skills	<i>Moreover, my blogging experience was a bit like a training ground for me; I got to hone my skills and learn from the works, mistakes, and views of others as well.</i>
Learning from peers' comments	<i>Editing became even more interesting especially when I read comments from my classmates about what they think of my essays. I had the chance to know the impact of my writing to various readers and to know my points of weakness. The idea of posting essays online was really interesting for me. I learned a</i>

	<i>lot especially after receiving comments that are relevant to my work. Those comments helped me in improving my essays. Receiving the feedbacks from my block mates through blogging helped me with my personal essays. They taught me ways in which I can improve my essay.</i>
Development of self-esteem	<i>Not only does posting my work on a blog enable me to receive constructive criticism and comments that can help me improve, it also boosts my self-esteem.</i>
Being able to help peers improve their essays	<i>The best part of blogging for me was actually commenting on others' works. I had the opportunity to help others improve their work and to do a self-check if I did my essay properly as well. It was also fun to read others' work and comment on them to help them in improving their works too.</i>
Ease in drafting, editing and revising essays	<i>First of all, blogging made us all anonymous which made it easier for all of us to express our thoughts through our words. Using a blog made it easier for me to edit and revise any written output. I did not need an eraser to delete an error I did while writing. Editing your work online is a lot easier than writing it on a sheet of paper because you can write your paper again and again and it wouldn't ruin your paper.</i>
Categories/Areas that Improved on Students' Writing	
Vocabulary development	<i>Reading the blogs of my block mates also helped me improve my vocabularies.</i>
Development of Writing Style	<i>Using blog and other online activities was really fun. I have learned how to be a creative writer and a wide reader as well. The activity also gives me the opportunity to view and critique other people's work. This allows me to see other people's writing style and gain inspiration from it.</i>
Organization of ideas	<i>I've learned to better organize my thoughts that others who read my blog can follow my train of thoughts. By commenting on other's works, I've developed a more critical outlook not only on their works but also on my own.</i>
Spotting Writing Mistakes	<i>I learned how to correct my own mistakes and I also saw possible errors that I have made based from the works of others.</i>

Figure 2. *Perceived Improvements on Writing Skills and Reasons for these Writing Improvements*

Conclusion

The current study corroborates the findings of other studies (Jones, 2006; Roth, 2007; Kelley, 2008; Zhang, 2009; Drexler, Dawson & Ferdig, n.d; Simsek, 2009; Fageeh, 2011) that blogging helps facilitate the development of students' writing skills. With more than three months of training students to write academic essays through blogging, the students' writing improved particularly on content and organization. Although there are other factors that may come into play that could have orchestrated their writing improvements like instruction, motivation, and self-efficacy which were not covered by the study, we cannot also deny the fact that blogging has contributed to the development of students' writing skills. Results of interview and students' reflections proved that the students themselves perceived that blogging honed their writing skills through reading and commenting on their peers' essays (Baker, 1985; Ware, 2008; Zhang, 2009). Since students had access on peers' essays, they could readily read, critique and post constructive comments on their essays. Likewise, they also enjoyed reading peers' constructive feedback that helped them improve their essays' content, style, structure, flow and organization.

However, as what Meier (n.d.) suggested, language teachers particularly writing teachers should train first the students in critiquing academic essays through workshops prior to peer editing so that they can readily spot flaws in a piece of academic writing during the actual peer review. Consequently, with their exposure to reviewing/critiquing academic essays, they will be in the best position to help their peers improve their essays. Furthermore, with intensive training on critiquing essays, they will not only be able to understand what to avoid in academic writing but also what basic tips to apply in writing academic papers effectively. With the facilitative effects of blogging on students' writing competence, language teachers, therefore, may introduce blogging as a platform for students' writing of essays online. In that way, students may find writing enjoyable and fun because aside from the satisfaction they may feel for having a wide readership, it will also boost their confidence on their writing abilities. Studies (Bernstein, 2004; Fellner & Apple, 2006 Roth, 2007; Anderson, 2010; Kelley, 2008;) show that frequent blogging on random topics will hone writing skills, which in

effect, will enable the learners to take pride in their writing achievements, thus, developing their self-esteem.

However, we cannot also discount the importance of direct instruction in developing students' writing skills. Since the findings of the study show that students find text organization as their topmost difficulty, language teachers, therefore, should intensify the use of cohesive devices in their instruction so that students can readily use appropriate transition markers in their academic essays.

As proven by research, the Internet plays a vital role in introducing new platforms like blogging for students' academic writing. While it is true that blogging has positive effects on developing students' writing skills based on several qualitative studies (Kelley, 2008; Jones, 2006; Liu, 2007; Ware, 2008; Lee, 2010; Simsek, 2009), limited research have been done to ascertain the effects of blogging on writing proficiency compared with the traditional tool, paper and pen, in writing essays. Thus, this study recommends that experimental research be conducted using two modes of writing academic essays, the traditional paper and pen and the innovative writing on a computer via blogging to ascertain which mode is more effective in honing students' writing competence.

Finally, a follow up study can also be conducted to delineate the effects of blogging, instruction, and peer feedback on the development of students' writing skills using multiple regression analysis.

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