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EXPRESSING OPINIONS THROUGH BLOG: IDEAS OF THE ESL STUDENTS

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THIS DISSERTATION IS SUBMITTED AS PARTIAL REQUIREMENTS FOR
MASTER OF EDUCATION

FACULTY OF LANGUAGES
UNIVERSITI PENDIDIKAN SULTAN IDRIS

2010

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work in this dissertation is my own except for quotations and summaries which have been duly acknowledged.

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PENGAKUAN

Saya mengaku disertasi ini adalah hasil kerja saya sendiri kecuali nukilan dan ringkasan yang setiap satunya saya jelaskan sumbernya.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to dedicate a special thanks to my supervisor, Dr Abdul Ghani Bin Abu for his supportive advice and encouragement throughout the journey of completing this dissertation. His supervision has contributed to the completion of this dissertation within the planned time.

I would like to also express my greatest appreciation and gratification to Dr Raja Safinas Binti Raja Harun as my co-supervisor for the ideas contributed in clarifying many aspects in this study. I deeply appreciate the time, effort and energy spent in ensuring that this dissertation is ready for defense.

I would also like to thank all the participants for their co-operation in participating in the blogging project. Not just they provided me with the data, they had also taught me a lot in conducting a blog project with students.

My thank you is also dedicated to all the staff of the faculty and the Institute of Graduate Studies in fulfilling my needs throughout the study.

Finally, to all my friends and family members who shared their time and love with me in, I am very thankful to have you by my side.

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Abstract

This case study aimed at exploring the use of blog in helping ESL student to express ideas. The study investigated the participants' responses, perceptions and feelings while and after engaging in blogging, and providing and receiving comments. A class of 30 ESL students participated in this study. Topics were given every week for eight consecutive weeks. Participants were free to log on to the blogs. Data from the blog content and self assessment rubrics were collected concurrently with the study. At the end of the study, participants answered questionnaire. Semi-structure interviews were conducted. Data were coded with initial coding, followed by focused coding. Data from the four sources were triangulated. Three major themes emerged from the study. Firstly, based on the number of entries, it is found that blogging motivated the majority of the participants to voice out their opinions. Secondly, comments in blogging serve important roles to the participants. Thirdly, participants learned new knowledge and skills through blogging. The findings suggested that blogging could be an effective tool for student teachers to express, share and disseminate ideas on various current issues that could be incorporated in classroom teaching and learning.

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Abstrak

Kajian kes in bertujuan untuk memahami penggunaan blog sebagai alat untuk mengemukakan ide-ide di kalangan pelajar yang mempelajari Bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa kedua. Kajian berfokuskan respon, persepsi dan perasaan semasa menjalani dua aktiviti utama iaitu menulis blog, dan memberi dan menerima komen. Seramai 30 orang pelajar mengambil bahagian dalam kajian ini. Topik diberi setiap minggu untuk lapan minggu berturut-turut. Mereka bebas untuk melayari blog itu pada bila-bila masa sahaja. Data dari blog dan rubrik dikumpul sejajar dengan permulaan kajian ini. Di akhir kajian pula, mereka menjawab soal selidik dan ditemubual. Data dikodkan dengan pada peringkat awal dan dikodkan sekali lagi menggunakan kod-kod yang lebih fokus. Data dari empat sumber ditriangulasikan. Tiga tema utama muncul dari data-data tersebut. Dengan berpandukan jumlah blog yang telah ditulis, pelajar didapati memberi respon yang positif terhadap penggunaan blog untuk mengemukakan idea.Komen didapati memainkan dua peranan yang penting dalam menggunakan blog untuk mengemukakan idea. Mereka juga didapati teleh mempelajari kemahiran dan ilmu pengetahuan yang baru melalui penggunaan blog. Dapatan kajian ini menunjukkan blog berpotensi menjadi satu alat yang efektif untuk bakal guru mengemuka, berkongsi dan menyebarkan idea tentang pelbagai isu semasa dalam proses pengajaran dan pembelajaran.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CMC	-	Computer-mediated communication
ACMC	-	Asynchronous computer-mediated communication
SCMC	-	Synchronous computer-mediated communications

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This chapter introduces the concept of asynchronous computer mediated communication (ACMC), particularly weblog or blog. It provides general description of the benefits of incorporating ACMC into education. It also identifies the problem of articulating ideas faced by teachers in teaching and learning. The chapter further explains the purpose of the study, before posing the research questions. It also describes the rationale, significance and limitation of conducting this study. The chapter ends with defining the key words used in describing this study.

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1.1 Background of the study

In just seven years, Malaysia has witnessed the growth of 265.63% of Internet users from 3,7000,000 in 2000 to 13,528,200 in 2007 (Internet World Stats, 2008). Furthermore, the same statistics also shows that Malaysia is placed 36th of the 43 countries to have more than 50% of its population in Internet penetration, ahead of countries like Spain, Italy, France and Singapore. These statistics seem to correspond to the continuous growth of World Wide Web which contributes to the emphasis on e-learning.

The characteristics of e-learning are corresponding to the development of World Wide Web. Before the IT bubble which happened between 1998 till 2001, e-learning was a read-only medium (Thompson, 2007). The main objective that e-learning aimed to achieve was the distribution of knowledge to a wide range of audience. The characteristics of the tools as summarised by (Fish, 2007) are inactive, not interactive, expert-driven, naive design, text-heavy, slow and isolated. Although the tools involved are still widely used now, the needs of the students who are digital natives (Prensky, 2001, cited by Fish, 2007) could not be catered anymore.

These digital natives who are continuously engaged in knowledge creation (Fish, 2007) needs more than what e-learning 1.0 could offer. The IT bubble which saw the emergence of Web 2.0 and thus, e-learning 2.0 caters the need their needs. In order to prepare them to be knowledge creators instead of just knowledge workers

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(Pink, cited by Fish, 2007), e-learning 2.0 provides read and write medium (Thompson, 2007) for the students. This advancement is best described by Downes (2005) as a transition from merely utilising and spreading information to creating sharing, refining, redefining information before spreading it to other parts of the world. Some of the e-learning 2.0 tools are social networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook, wiki, blogs, video sharing website such as YouTube and others.

In Malaysia, e-learning is emerging as one of the most important learning aspects to emphasise on teachers, students and stake holders. From learning, teaching, professional development to educational management, e-learning is incorporated and utilised to effectively achieve the National Education Philosophy (http://www.moe.gov.my/?id=37&lang=en):

> Education in Malaysia is an on-going effort towards further developing the potential of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner, so as to produce individuals who are intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically balanced and harmonic, based on a firm belief in and devotion to God. Such an effort is designed to produce Malaysian citizens who are knowledgeable and competent, who possess high moral standards and who are responsible and capable of achieving high level of personal well-being as well as being able to contribute to the harmony and betterment of the family, the society and the nation at large

Specifically, multiple strategies and initiatives have been planned and implemented in schools by government and non-government agencies. These include The Malaysian Smart School, MySchoolNet, equip teachers with ICT knowledge and skills, computerising schools by building computer laboratories, providing ebook,

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Penang E-learning Community, Chinese Smart Schools and Private Smart Schools (Chan Foong-Mae, 2002).

In institutions of higher education, initiatives for e-learning are implemented in two phases (Raja Maznah Raja Hussain, 2008). It began by equipping institutions with proper ICT infrastructures. Next, emphasis is given in incorporating e-learning in the teaching and learning process. With Open University, Multimedia University and University of Tun Abdul Razak (UNITAR) as pioneers in e-learning, other higher institutions could adopt best practices and learn from the challenges faced by these universities.

The integration of computer-mediated communication (CMC) tools in education has enabled e-learning to be successfully being implemented. Despite the fact that computer literacy engages online communities in communication, it is important to acknowledge the fact that computer-mediated communication (CMC) differs from the conventional face-to-face communication. Apart from geographical location, the biggest difference is the time element. While face-to-face communication occurs simultaneously in real time, computer mediated communication can occur simultaneously in near real time or not simultaneous. In synchronous computer mediated communication (SCMC) such as instant messaging, videoconferencing and audioconferencing, all participants are online simultaneously. Asynchronous computer mediated communication (ACMC), on the other hand, such

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as email and blog, allows communication without having the participant to be online simultaneously.

The discussion above has surveyed and analysed the different tools available to support CMC in educational setting. The current study specifically focused on the use of blog since blogging has prevailed over other tools in many aspects. Unlike other tools, blog provides comment, access to wider audience and online publishing.

Blog is generally defined as an online individual entry of journals in reverse chronological order in which the blogger consistently includes or posts new journals or entries (Blood, 2000; Mason & Rennie, 2006; The Economist, 2006). Dave Winer, the pioneer to several blogging technologies told The Economist (2006) in an interview that the essence of blogginess lays within the raw, unpolished, authentic and individuality voice of the person who produces the journal.

Although in 1999, only 23 blogs existed (Blood, 2002; Riley, 2005), the growth of blog never stop since then. On the same year, Pitas.com and Blogger.com started to provide web publishing tool and blog hosting service that are user friendly to those with minimal knowledge about computing to create blog in a fast and convenient way (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006). Other free blog software available are LiveJournal, Wordpress, MSN Spaces, Tripod Blog Builder, and many more. Social networks such as Friendster and Ning.com also provide its user to create their own

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blog. Technorati, one of the first blog search engines, reported in its annual publication, State of Blogosphere (2008) that it has indexed 133 millions of blog since 2002.

Utusan Malaysia (2008, April 2) reported that there are more than 133 millions of blog created and maintained by bloggers worldwide. In Malaysia alone, there are approximately 500,000 blogs. The same report also claimed that this statistics positioned Malaysia as the third country with most bloggers, after European Union and Indonesia. Outlining from the features listed above, blogging is seen as a tool that could serve an important role in assisting the students to voice out their opinion.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Previous research has found that Malaysian students are not likely to voice out their opinions in classroom (Sarjit Kaur & Rosy Thiyagarajah, 2000; Noorizah Mohamad Noor, 2006; Zainal Abidin Bin Sayadi, 2007). From the pedagogical perspective, Malaysian students are used to spoon-feeding style of teaching and learning (Joseph Wong Kee-Kuok, 2004). This has caused students to be unsure of the proper ways to produce quality written work. They are not exposed to opportunities to organise and analyse information and acknowledge authors, thus resulting in plagiarism. Teachers found that students do not have skills needed to support their ideas (Hansford, 2003). Thus, students do not provide enough information to substantiate opinions.

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In addition, limited contact time between the teachers and the students does not sufficiently and effectively provide opportunities for students to express themselves. With only two hours per week and 30 students in the class, and four language skills to be taught, the amount of time available for practising target language is very minimal. Furthermore, it is difficult for teacher to pay individual attention to every student. Even in whole class discussion, only a few and normally, the same students would participate. These students dominate the discussion (Zainal Abidin Bin Sayadi, 2007) while others are just listeners.

The exam-oriented Malaysian students are not trained to be differ. They are very much "by the book" in order to score good grades for written and spoken formal and informal assessments (Noorizah Mohamad Noor, 2006). Students prefer to memorize, rather than analyse critically on the material that they read. They seldom question what is read and written in the textbooks or in other media such as journals and newspapers (Sarjit Kaur & Rosy Thiyagarajah, 2000).

From the student's perspective, they restrain themselves to express ideas in face to face interaction due to several factors. Firstly, students are shy to participate in classroom (Bahiyah Abdul Hamid, 1992). They believe that expressing opinion might cause embarrassment to themselves (Pilcher, 2003). This is especially true when students give incorrect or unacceptable answers. Students are afraid that it would bring unwanted attraction (Zainal Abidin Bin Sayadi, 2007). They are reluctant to

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differ and justify their opinions as they are afraid to be ridiculed by teacher and peers (Beaven, Calderisi & Tantral, 1998).

Secondly, students are influenced by the cultural background. Students have responsibility to sustain harmonious environment of a learning community (Pilcher, 2003), thus it is inappropriate to disagree or argue in public. Asking question or clarification is not possible as students are expected to be good at perceiving others' opinions. Therefore, students are worried of how others would perceive them if they express opinions (Hansford, 2003). They perceive interrupting others as rude (Zainal Abidin Bin Sayadi, 2007).

Thirdly, students do not have the language proficiency to articulate themselves. Students who are used to speak in English might need to think many times before they could construct a sentence that could express their ideas (Zainal Abidin Bin Sayadi, 2007). This is a tiring mental routine for almost every sentence that is constructed. It is also discouraging because by the time the sentence is finally constructed, the teacher might have turned to another student or question. The situation is worsened if they do not get any help from peers and the teacher to find the proper vocabulary, grammar or sentence structure.

Students also do not have broad knowledge to participate in discussion (Zainal Abidin Bin Sayadi, 2007). The lack of reading among the students halts them from

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examining issues from multiple angles. Given the fact that teachers have to finish the syllabus according to the time table, there is not much time to expose students to different reading materials. Although language is taught across the curriculum, little emphasis is put to introduce students to current issues. In addition, as future teachers, they need to be aware of the latest development not only in their area of expertise, but also in general knowledge.

Although blogging has been widely used in journalism, a review of literature found that not much empirical evidence could be found in supporting the use of blogging in ESL classrooms. The existing evidence is largely based on context outside Malaysia. Furthermore, to date no research has been done to investigate the possibility of using blog to increase students' opportunities to voice out opinions. Most of the research done focused on using blog to improve writing skills. Therefore, it is important for researcher to examine this line of inquiry in the Malaysian context.

1.3 Rationale of the study

Blogging in the existing literature (Armstrong, Berry & Lamshed, 2004; Flatley, 2005; Jafar Askari Arani, 2005; Ducate & Lomicka, 2008; Abdullah Kuzu, 2007; Glewa & Bogan, 2007) has shown that this tool is well-received among its users. Although previous research has investigated students' perception in using blog for instructional purposes, the current knowledge and understanding about instructional blogging is till inadequate. Blog, as a tool has not yet been examined thoroughly. Little is known,

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though widely used, about how the characteristics of blog contribute to the success of instructional blogging.

Previous research (Armstrong, Berry & Lamshed, 2004; Baggeton & Wasson, 2006; Kavaliauskienè, Anusienè & Mažeikiene, 2006; Murray, Hourigen & Jeanneau 2000; Pinkman, 2005) has limited explanation on how the students reacted and responded to the characteristics of the blog, specifically on publishing and comments, which directly influenced their involvement in blogging. Thus, is important to understand this area in instructional blogging as the new insights could fill the gap of how these characteristics contribute to the well reception of blog users in educational setting. Existing literature also advocate the notion of independent learning through blogging. However, little evidence could be found to affirm, support or negate this notion. This study, hence, aimed to provide more evidence through in-depth investigation on how students carry out learning activities independently through blogging.

1.4 Research questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How does blogging help students to voice out their opinion?
    a) How does blogging motivate students to voice out opinion through blogging?
    b) How do students perceive the role of comment in blogging?

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2. How do students learn independently through blogging?

1.5 Objectives of the study

This study was carried out to determine how the students utilise blog as part of their learning process. This is especially important because blogging is an out-of-the-classroom activity. Blogging also provides a space for the students to express themselves. Thus, this study was also conducted to establish understanding on how the students are motivated to articulate themselves through blogging. Apart from that, this study also aimed to investigate how the students perceive the role of comment in blogging. Finally, this study was also implemented to explore how the students learn independently through various activities conducted while blogging.

1.6 Significance of the study

Previous research (Armstrong, Berry & Lamshed, 2004; Baggeton & Wasson, 2006; Kavaliauskienè, Anusienè & Mažeikiene, 2006; Murray, Hourigen & Jeanneau 2000; Pinkman, 2005) mainly focused on the use of weblog from a general perspective. No research has yet been carried out to understand how characteristics of weblog contribute to the success of using blog in educational setting. Thus, this study carries significance as it will be the first to examine the two major characteristics in weblog, namely the online publishing and comment. The findings of this current study will

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enable academicians, teachers and students to exploit the elements in weblog further and deeper in using them for instructional purposes.

By understanding how blogging could motivate the students to express themselves, teachers and instructors could encourage students to explore and use blog as a useful tool in teaching and learning. Teachers and instructors will also be aware of the challenges and difficulties faced by the students. Thus, proper guidance and measures could be planned ahead of the blogging activities.

The study will also provide insights to teachers and instructors in preparing students to take part in blogging. Generally, students should be equipped with the basic IT skills to enable them to blog. Teachers and instructors might need to teach them the skills if they are not IT savvy. Furthermore, they should also be aware of the ethics of blogging and their responsibility as a blogger.

By understanding the role of comments, teachers and instructors could plan ahead strategies to encourage students to provide comments actively. Proper guidance could be given if needed. Students need to be taught on how to utilize comments beneficially. Strengths and weaknesses highlighted in this study will be able to provide some insights for teachers and instruct

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The current study, in its purpose to investigate how blogging can promote independent learning will generate concrete evidence and explanation that previous research were not been able to explain about this major benefit of using blog. In addition, this study will contribute to improve the current practice of integrating this new instructional technology. By gaining new insights and knowledge of instructional blogging, teachers and researchers will be able to understand further how students can learn beyond the classroom in a virtual world.

This study also carries significance to institutions in deciding how to incorporate blog into teaching and learning. The authority plays an important role in monitoring teachers and students who blog. Findings in the current study will be able to provide suggestions on the aspects that need to be taken into consideration in allowing teachers and students to blog in teaching and learning.

1.7 Limitations of the study

Two limitations have been identified in this study. Firstly, this researcher was also the students' instructor. Blog is not widely in Malaysia schools and higher learning institutions. Therefore, it was difficult to find teachers and students to be the participants of this study. As a result, the researcher initiated the blog project with her students. However, the researcher did not have the authority to change the structure of

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the existing course that she was teaching. Thus, the project could only be carried out as part of the extra work given to the participants.

Secondly, the convenience sampling procedure for the survey and the case study decreases the generalizability of the findings. The small number of participants in a class could only reflect the blogging behaviour of this particular class. Although this research could not be generalized to all aspects of blogging in educational setting, the findings that emerged from the study could help to enhance understanding when incorporating blog in teaching and learning.

1.8 Definition of terms

Blog

The writer who writes blog is a blogger (Blood, 2000). The activity of writing, decorating blogs or using theirs or others' blogs for any reason is called blogging (Blood, 2000). The current subculture of blogging is called blogosphere (Matisse, 2008). Blogosphere also refers to the online community who engages actively in blogging (Matisse, 2008). It also refers to the world of blogs in the Internet. Blogosphere is an interconnected community which comprised not only of bloggers but also the readers (Technorati, 2008). In this study, blog is perceived as a tool for

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students to express ideas. Blogging activities refer to posting blog entries, providing and receiving comments as well as decorating the blog. Finally, in this study, blogging also refers to blogging in educational setting.

Independent learning

Kesten (1987) defines independent learning as a learning process of which learners decide under certain conditions on how to fulfil their own learning goals. Although independent learning is synonymously used with autonomous learning, a distinction is made by Pinkman (2005). According to Pinkman (2005), independent learning involves all the characteristics portrayed in autonomous learning, and the most important characteristics that only appears in the concept of independent learning is learning how to learn. In this study, independent learning is defined as the ability to learn according to the student's needs and interests without receiving instructions from the instructor.

Online learning community

The online learning community created in this study is the blended learning community (Kaplan, 2002). This community combines face-to-face interaction and online interaction. He proposed that there are two assumptions in this community. Firstly, the learners share close relationship with each other. This relationship would bring useful contributions to collaborative learning. Secondly, apart from face-to-face

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learning, the students' relationship would be further strengthened through online interaction, in this study, blog. The students in the community built learn from each other through two means. The online learning community in this study refers to a group of students who contribute and gain new information and knowledge from each other while they are blogging.

Self editorship

Free Online Dictionary (http://www.thefreedictionary.com/editor) defines editor as a person who is fully in charge in producing a magazine, newspaper, or programmes. In this study, the student as editor means student as the individual is fully in charge of the blog. Self editorship is defined as the ability of the students to write, edit, publish and reach readers. Every individual student is the sole person in charge of their blog. They make every decision regarding the creation and maintenance of the blog.

1.9 Overview of the study

This study is presented in five chapters. Chapter 1 includes the background of the study, statement of problem, purpose of the study, research questions, rationale of the study, significance of the study, limitations of the study and operational definition.

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Chapter 2 presents a review of literature, which includes the social constructivism theory, the general overview of blog and blogging, scaffolding ideas through blogging, online publishing, the blogging readership, receiving feedbacks through comments, blogging and communication, continuous learning beyond classroom and learning independently through blogging.

Chapter 3 details the methodology employed in this study. It includes the selection of participants, modes of inquiry, data collection and data analysis procedures. Chapter 4 describes and discusses the findings for the three research questions. Chapter 5 provides a summary of the study, the implications of the study to the students, teachers and school authority, and the recommendations for future studies.

1.10 Conclusion

The chapter began with the brief discussion of the emergence of the Internet and ACMC, followed by the history and development of blogging and its need to be cooperated to education sector. Next, the problems that were intended to be addressed in the current study were discussed. The chapter continues with the research questions. Then, the chapter proceeds with the purpose and the rationale of conducting this study. The significance of the findings was detailed before the discussion of limitations of the current study.

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The next chapter will begin with the discussion on the theory underpinning this study. It also presents the literature on blog, generally and specifically in education. The history and development of blog will be described briefly to ensure the understanding of the features and nature of blogging. The chapter also illustrates the ethical considerations involved in blogging. It will then discuss thoroughly on how blog has been used in education. Its major contributions to education will also be explained.

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CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter begins with introduction to the theoretical framework that governed this study. Three theories, namely social constructivism, cognitive apprenticeship and transactional distance theory are discussed and the relevance to this study is explained. The chapter proceeds with the general overview of the creation and development of blog. A comparison is made between blog with other ACMC tools to examine why it prevails over other tools. The chapter tackles the ethical issues prior of blogging to highlight its importance. It is followed by the types of blog and the atmosphere of a blog that enables its incorporation in the educational setting. Understanding the atmosphere of blogging brings in the next section on the construction of ideas, on individual and collaboration levels. Online publishing and readership, and its significance to blogging is reviewed, followed by how readership brings in

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communication in blogging. Then, the review weighs the impact of comment as feedback to bloggers. Finally, the chapter rationalise independent learning, beyond the classroom walls as the positive impact of blogging.

2.1 Theoretical framework of the study

The social constructivism proposed by Vygotsky (1978) provides the foundation for the pedagogy of blog. Little was known about his banned work due to the political complication in Russia. It was not until 1960s and 1970s that his works were translated to English and made accessible to the other parts of the world.

Vygotsky argues that interaction with people is an important aspect towards cognitive development (Maddux, Johnson & Willis, 2001) in which culture acts as the cognitive tool. Furthermore, he argues that socially mediated activities facilitate learning. The activities in which the students engaged in differ with the cultural context brought in by individuals or naturally exist in the environment. As such, in this study, blog is seen as a 'contemporary cultural tool' (Salen, 2007) which creates different impacts culturally, within the educational setting. Students interact with peers asynchronously through the text, comments and other multimedia supports such as videos, songs and photos. It is culturally different because students choose their own photos, songs and other content which represent the context in which the students

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are from. Thus, in this study, it is evident that a variety of cultural elements would be brought in to diversify the learning context.

Vygotsky (1987) also suggests that students learn from other peers who are more capable. It allows scaffolding to happen, to maximise the learning that happen in the Zone of Proximal Development. Three areas are involved in learning. First is the area where activities that students can do independently exit. The third area is where activities that students cannot do exist. In between the two areas is the stage where the activities that students can do with the other's assistance. This notion somehow is practised in blogging, as students are involved in collaborative activities to build ideas. The ability to publish and comment enables students to ask questions, clarify and teach their peers. The information is not only available to the students who asked for assistance, but also accessible by other students. More than one student could respond to the questions. Therefore, they learn from each other. Collaboratively, they help each other to achieve higher educational objectives as being outlined in the Bloom's taxonomy.

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Table 2.1.Achieving learning objectives through blogging

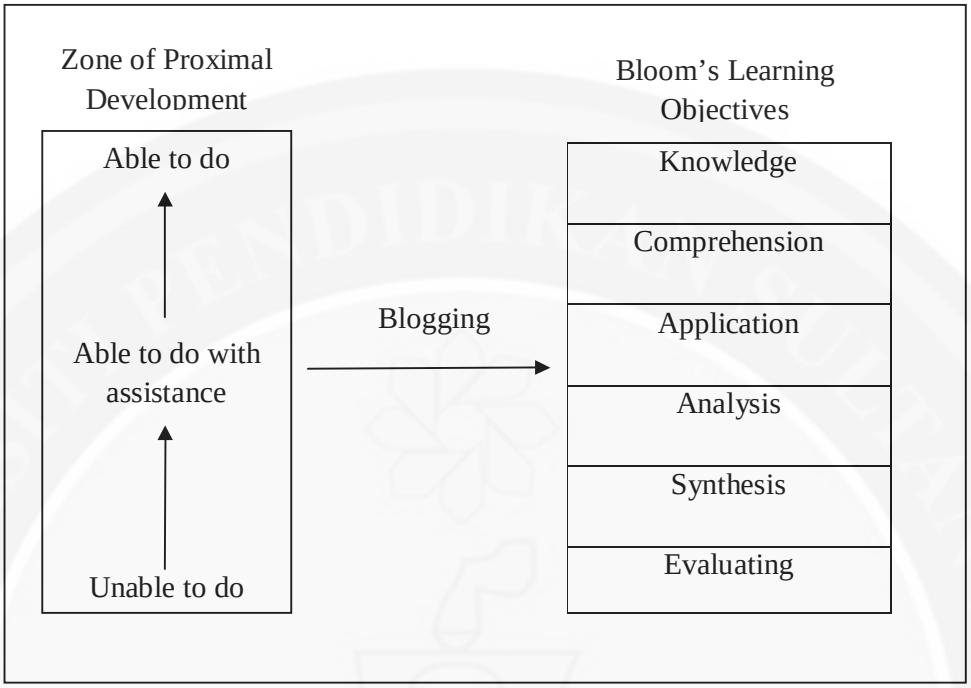
Categories	**Activities in blogging**
Knowledge	Students recall their prior knowledge and read materials from multiple sources.
Comprehension	Students understand the issue from the materials and explain it in own words.
Application	Students relate the information to own experiences to construct ideas
Analysis	Students examine each others' ideas through comments and try to find evidence to support claims.
Synthesis	Students reconstruct ideas based on the comments given
Evaluation	Students compare each others' ideas and justify the strengths and weakness of the ideas.

In this study, blogging as a socially mediated activity helps to push the students from doing with assistance towards doing independently. Ferdig and Trammell (2004) explain how publishable, archival, tag, hyperlink and comment abilities in blog support social constructivism in learning. In this study, the publishable ability allows students examine and reflect their development and competency level. The archival ability allows the examination over time on the growth of the competency level. The ability to comment helps in scaffolding ideas. The archival ability allows the examination over time on the growth of the competency level. The ability to comment helps in scaffolding ideas. The tag and hyperlink ability bring students into a larger space of knowledge construction, sharing and meaning making in the Internet (Ferdig & Trammell, 2004; Maddux, Johnson & Willis, 2001).

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Figure 2.1.Theoretical framework of the study



2.2 General overview of blogging

This section outlines a short history and development of blog. Then it explains the types of blog that are incorporated in the educational setting. The features of the blog are described to provide the understanding to start blogging. Ethical issues in blogging are discussed to present the possible ethical issues that could arise and thus, enable teachers to take pre-cautious measures. Finally this section illustrates the key elements in the blogging environment which contribute to learning.

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2.2.1 Defining blog

Numerous definitions on blog could be found in both printed and electronic media. The definitions generally describe blogs as an online website which the entries appear in reverse chronological order. This is a very important and distinctive characteristic of blog as it keeps the readers with the latest updates of the blog through feeds such as RSS. While the above definitions probably describing the blog in the context of journalism, personal blog is more likely as personal diaries or journal, posting entries related to personal interests. Winer (2002) defines blog as a regularly updated site which directs the readers to other commentary websites or other articles within the same website.

The creation of the weblog dated back in the early 1990s before even the existence of the term itself. When the idea was first disseminated to the public by G. Rakundalia and M. Reis (1995, cited by Riley, 2005) it was only known as a website which accumulates, organise and present a piece of related information from different sources. Although Riley (2005) believes that the idea was initiated originally to solve the problems of storing information on electronic meetings, the idea evolved. Eventually it created a huge impact to the journalism field corresponding to the dramatic American politics in 2002 onwards revolving around names such as Trent Lott, Howell Raines, John Kerry and Dan Rather (Hewitt, 2006).

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Several pioneer bloggers who first realised the blogging phenomenal have written about the history and development of blog. Winer (2002) and Riley (2005) conclude that Tim Berner-Lees created the first web page at http://info.cern.ch that employ the initial idea mentioned by G. Rakundalia and M. Reis (1995, cited by Riley, 2005). In 1993, The National Center for Supercomputing Applications (NCSA), and later Netscape compiled a list of new sites in What's New. David Winer who started his Scripting started his first blog when he was involved in the 24 House of Democracy Project (Festa, 2003). In 1997, he started the Scripting news.com blog which is now the longest running blog. Robot Wisdom, Tomalak's Realm and Camworld are some of the earliest blogs.

The term weblog really surfaced in the internet when John Barger joined the words 'web' and 'log' together in 1997 (Blood ,2002; Winer, 2003; Riley, 2005). Two years later, in 1999, Peter Merholz made a significant change to the word by announcing that he would pronounce 'weblog' as 'wee-blog', hence the birth of the shorten form of the original word, blog.

While blogging in journalism might have minimal impact in incorporating it as other web 2.0 tools, it is exactly the creation of personal blog that educators world wide need to explore on this latest ACMC tool. The advantages of blog over other ACMC tools are summarized in Table 2.2 Comparison of ACMC tools

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Table 2.2.Comparison of ACMC tools

Characteristics	Email	website	discussion board	blog
One to many interaction	X	√	√	√
Personalised layout	X	√	X	√
Minimal knowledge on programming	√	X	√	√
Provide and receive comments	X	X	√	√

2.2.2 Types of blog

Lamshed, Berry and Armstrong (2002) identifiy two types of blogs exist in blogosphere. The first type, the filter blog, as its literal meaning, filters all information available on the Internet, select articles, websites, links, pictures or any other form of information that the blogger thinks are the most useful for the readers. The filtered information is presented in a way that is convenient for the readers to get the gist of the relevant issue in just one blog. The other type is the journal blog, which narrates the blogger's thoughts, ideas, everyday's events and feelings in an unbound manner.

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Within the educational setting, the tutor blog, the class blog and the learner blog exist (Campbell 2003). The tutor blog contains information related to a course such as syllabus, assignments, reading materials and even the teacher's life. The class blog is where all the students of the class contribute information towards building a database of information that is relevant to the course. Finally the learner blog is the personal blog owned by individual students to blog according to the teacher's instruction. Teacher can use a combination of more than one type of blog for the purpose of the course (Campbell, 2003).

The discussion shows that within the educational setting, a combination of filter and journal blog can created for academic purposes. Although it is mentioned earlier that journal blog which is more personal is the type of blog that brings impact to education, teachers also incorporate the nature of filter blog in creating educational blog as can be seen in tutor blog.

2.2.3 Features of Blog

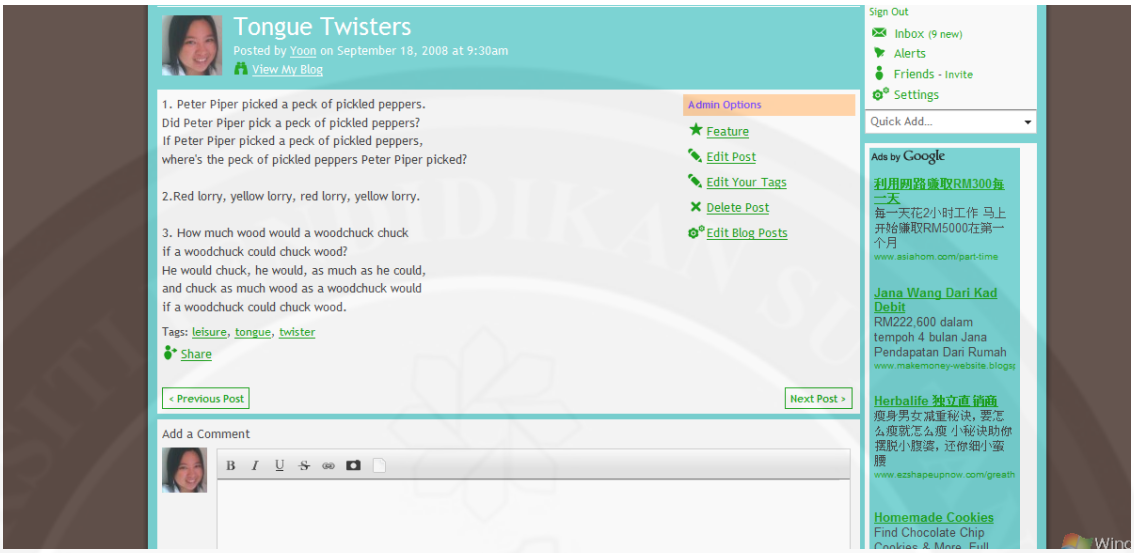
A blog is easy to recognise as it has features that distinguish it from other ACMC tools. Although features in blog differ depending on the hosts that provide the blog software, in ning.com, the host where the researcher conducted this study with the participants, the blog is being featured as in Figure 2.

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Figure 2.2.A blog entry



After exploring the blog at ning.com and blogs hosted by other host provider, researcher concluded that the use of the features is as below:

Title

The title of the blog. Each post also has its own title

Post

The main body of the blog. A post can be merely wordings or inserted with graphics and videos. The author of the blog can edit the post after it is published. Author can choose to preview the post to see how the post would look after it is published.

Permalink

Permanent link directs to a specific posting, which might not longer be found on the main page of the blog.

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Comment

The response given by the readers. Usually this section appears just after the post. Comments can either be chronological or reverse chronological. Readers are able to see other comments posted earlier. The author can choose to moderate comments, which means that author must approve each comment before it is visible to the readers. Author can delete the comments if needed.

Tag

Tagging a post with keywords that are related to the post, or tags to enable user to search the post through the tag

Hyperlink

Author insert hyperlink to words, text, graphic, web address or any content that appear in the post and blog to link, retrieve and show the web page that author intend to lead the readers to.

Archive

Older posts that cannot appear on the main page of the blog would be automatically archived. The archive systematically categorised the posts according to the year and month. Readers can retrieve the posts by searching at the archive.

TrackBack

A comment or post made, with reference to the original post is traced by TrackBack. Readers can see the influence and effect created by a particular post

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RSS feeds

Rich Site Summary, RDF Site Summary or Real Simple Syndication (Matisse, 2008). By subscribing RSS feeds, one can read the updates of all the subscribed blogs and other websites, without having to visit each individual blog or website.

About page

A click on this would direct the readers to a page with simple biography of the author.

Blog rolls

Blogger can include links to other blogs or information website that the blogger visits

2.2.4 Ethical Considerations of Blogging

There is a need to establish a code of ethics for bloggers as the public nature of blogging carries significant impact to its readers. In fact the impact could stretch beyond the virtual world to the affect those who are not within the online community as well. Cyberjournalist.net (2003) is aware of the seriousness of these issues and thus, establishes a model of ethical codes for bloggers. It highlights three main principles which are honesty and fair, minimal harm and accountability.

Teachers should educate students on these principles to ensure the genuine and originality of the work. Any post which violates the principles could pose a threat to

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the learning activities, not only to individual student but to the learning community at large.

Due to its public nature, it is evitable to take into consideration on various ethical issues, particularly of concern of the student, teacher and institution. Several considerations have to be taken into account in order to protect the safety and privacy of the three parties involved from the outsiders that could pose as threat to them. One security measure is teachers can restrict access to the blogs with passwords.

2.3 The environment of blog

Environment is one of the determining factors in encouraging students to comfortably voice out their ideas. Even if students generated ideas, without stimulating environment, chances are that students would keep their voice to themselves. Previous studies have shown that the environment of blog manage to overcome fear (Brescia & Miler, 2006) and increase their confidence (Jenny Wang & Yuehchiu Fang 2005; Murray, Hourigan & Jeanneau 2007; Armstrong & Retterer 2008) which keeps them motivated as the blogging process goes on.

Under a non threatening environment, blogging allows students to make errors (Kavaliauskienè, Anusienè & Mažeikiene, 2006) which is part of the trial and error experience (Campbell, 2003) or ask question (Zorko, 2007) without the fear of being

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labelled (MacBride & Luehmann, 2008). Students feel relax (Ducate & Lomicka, 2008) to express themselves in a personal space with only some restrictions and limitations (Olander 2007). They could think twice before they blog (MacBride & Luehman, 2008) even though Hulburt (2008) argues that this is an unnatural process

There is also less formality when it comes to blogging. This results in informal (Murray, Hourigen & Jeanneau 2007), casual (Betts & Glogoff, 2004) and conversational (Flatley, 2005) manner of writing. The informal manner is best described by Armstrong and Retterer (2008) that blogging allows ‘a valley of tenses, moods and vocabulary to express their ideas’. Hence, formality is accepted in blogging in which Richardson (2006) argues as a new form of genre.

2.3.1 Scaffolding Ideas

Existing literature shows that student bloggers construct ideas in two levels, individually and collectively. Individually, they locate, research, read, analyse, conclude and reflect on synthesized ideas (MacBride & Luehman, 2008). Collectively, they construct ideas through collaboration effort (Arena & Jefferson, 2008; Flatley, 2008; MacBride & Luehman, 2008).

Bloggers, researchers and educators who have used blog before agrees that blog is a knowledge management tool (Li Dan, 2005). Students construct new ideas and make an attempt to disseminate through online publishing, keep a record of their

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ideas construction through archive, and constant idea-provoking discussion through response received.

Gurak and Antonijevic (2008) describe three elements of blogging that satisfy human natural desire, namely expressing one's own identity, the creation of community and structuring past and present learning experience across any limitations. Student bloggers achieve this desire when they engage in the individual level of constructing ideas through voicing out their opinion. The desire is further achieved in the continuation of the first process in which student bloggers construct knowledge collectively through collaboration with peers.

2.3.2 Voicing Individual Ideas

The environment of blogging allows individual voices to be heard. As mentioned earlier that blogging in educational setting is more than just journaling feelings and everyday events, Armstrong, Berry and Lamshed (2004) discuss that blogging exhibits students' insight and perspectives. Existing literature shows that five characteristics that exist in the blog environment amplify and individualised these voices.

Firstly, the blog environment is created, owned, controlled, participated and dominated by students (Baggetun & Wasson, 2006; Godwin-Jones, 2006; MacBride &

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Luehman, 2008). The student centred environment creates a sense of ownership (MacBride & Luehman, 2008; Pimpare & Fast, 2008). Students' control of the learning activities motivates them because they are able to determine activities and actions that they want to engage with. Students see the content which represents their learning activities as meaningful and personalised (Ferdig & Trammell, 2004; Huffaker, 2004). Apart from that, Olander (2007) and Ducate and Lomicka (2008) also draw our attention that student bloggers utilised the blog features creatively such as videos and pictures, along with the text. It allows the self-documentation (Li Dan, 2005) as a sign of ownership. This environment allows the "I narratives" (Reed, 2005) to echo in the blog.

Secondly, the virtual blog environment provides freedom for student bloggers to voice out. Kuhns and Crew (2006) believe that the bloom of blog lies in its freedom. As mentioned earlier, many free blog software are available over the Internet, which means that bloggers create a blog at no cost if access to Internet is provided. Secondly, bloggers are also free to express themselves with almost no restrictions. If the student-centred environment provides students with control of learning experience, freedom acts as complimentary by further enhance the sense of control. O'Donnell (2006) argues that the freedom of blog is defined by its "immediacy and flexibility". These elements provide a sense of controlling the content and layout of the blog. Students are free to present ideas (Kuzu, 2007) which reflect their beliefs and views (Bloch, 2007; Jafar Askari Arani, 2005). By providing this sense of freedom, they get equal rights to voice out (Flatley, 2005)

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Third, students' voice is intensified with the assistance of hyperlinks. It bring readers to the original materials that the student blogger referred to (Oravec, 2002), thus act as supports in substantiating the voice. Hyperlinks also tell teachers and readers that they do additional research and reading to find related information outside the classroom to support their thoughts. It enables not only the student blogger to learn more, but also helps in convincing the readers. Inevitably, for readers, it serves as a source of reference.

Fourthly, student bloggers also tag their posts. They tag with keywords that appear in the post. Therefore, it accumulates posts with the same key words, which represent the student bloggers' thoughts. It strongly reflects the similarities and consistency across a wide range of topics. Readers can further read about the student bloggers' thoughts in different context by tracking the tag. Another function of tag is described by Arena and Jefferson (2008) as a mean to introduce a discussion with a group of people with the same interests. He further mentioned that the archival and storage ability enable them to get feedback and even introduce a new discussion again.

Finally, educators see the ability of blog allowing student bloggers to build their own archive to store their learning activities and experiences as an advantage in the learning process (Lamshed, Berry & Armstrong, 2002). It works as a learning log as students can observe how their ideas evolve over time, based on comments or their subsequent editing of the initial post. The archive keeps students' learning activities

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in a systematic manner which facilitates reflection and metacognitive analysis (Richardson, 2006) and which is accessible by students and teachers.

2.3.3 Collaborative ideas construction

Godwin-Jones (2006) labels the blog as a tool that "stimulates debates, further critical analysis and encourages articulation of ideas and opinion". Together with the help of social tagging and hyperlink, a community (Priya Sharma & Ying Xie, 2008) could be form to fully utilise the blog in collaborative idea construction, which is proven to happen during blogging by Flatley (2005), Mynard (2008) and Olander (2007). From the personal database of personal thoughts, they start to collectively generate ideas the moment the ideas are published. The nature of the blog, which invites feedback, keeps the readers to agree, disagree, challenge, or support the original idea. Community is built when interaction is not only prolonged beyond the classroom, but also needs blogger to actively engaged with each other to collaboratively build a huge virtual database for collective interest of the community.

In other words, the argumentation and debates do not act as personal competition. Rather it is a shared meaning making (Allert, 2004) which represents the collective interests. It places the student bloggers in equal position to contribute towards its construction as well as equal access to information in this database.

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Students reflect their ideas after getting feedback from the readers. From the comments and argumentation, student bloggers identify the core issue emerged, that could possibly be a different one from what is originally blog. Murray, Hourigan and Jeanneau (2007) highlight that student bloggers perceived differently the importance of each issue at different point of time, should the learning happens. This signifies personal growth (Murray, Hourigan and Jeanneau, 2007) and a widen and more diverse perspectives at exploring an issue.

The above activities during blogging also promote the development of thinking skills when constructing ideas collaboratively. Reading sources or even others' blogs facilitates students' thinking process in synthesizing new ideas (Olander, 2007). The thinking keeps refined (Li Dan, 2005) every time they blog.

2.4 Online Publishing

Literature written by scholars and educators who have tried blog have discussed extensively about online publishing. Student bloggers publish their ideas, thoughts, and understanding of a particular topic in a personal, self-controlled space. The space, the blog, belongs to them and only they have the ultimate power to control over the activities in their blog. Making their work to be public means that they are conscious and take extra efforts to ensure a more presentable and convincing work (Armstrong, Berry & Lamshed, 2004).

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Publishing knowledge through blogging is a great leap to information sharing. Paquet (2003) makes a comparison between publishing knowledge through blog and other methods. The scholarly papers share many similarities with online publishing through blog, which prompted Paquet (2003) to believe that "personal knowledge publishing appear as the direct descendent of the traditional scholarly prepublication".

2.5 Blogging and Readership

The presence of readers, either small or big community brings difference to student bloggers. Written assignments submitted to teachers probably would have only teacher alone as the reader. But when a larger group of readers present, they not only need to present their work to get good grades but also must be appealing to the other students, in order to get peer recognition. Student bloggers enjoy having others to read their work (Armstrong, Berry & Lamshed, 2004; Baggeton & Wasson, 2006; Pinkman, 2005). It acts as motivation to keep them blogging (Arena & Jefferson, 2008). Students feel proud to blog (Glewa & Bogdan, 2007) when they know that the content of their blog is useful for the readers.

By having readers, students are more conscious over the presentation and the content of the blog. They are aware that there are other students who would read their blog, which motivates them to make their as presentable (Kavaliauskienè, Anusienè & Mažeikiene, 2006) as possible.

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The existence of readership also means that student bloggers can penetrate into other students' blog as well. It gives a dual identity for them, as blogger and as reader. This is very important as it creates an equal access (Glogoff, 2005) to information.

Some readers also demonstrate the lurking behaviour. Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary defines lurk as "to read messages on Internet discussion forum (as a newsgroup or a chat room) without contributing". These readers or lurkers do not leave comments but their presence in reading should not be undermined. Nonneck and Preece (2001) explain that lurkers might lack of communicative skills, inconfidence, and passive. As Chen Weihao and Bonk (2008) argue, lurking behaviour does bring some positive impacts to student bloggers. In fact many blogs are equipped with feature to record the how many times the public has hit the blog and to identify most read post, and most emailed post.

Google Analytics presents another way to examine the importance of lurking. Gustas (2008) explains that it provides statistics on how many times readers have viewed the pages on the blog (Pageviews), how many pages readers view averagely on your blog (Page/Visit), how many readers left after reading only one page of the blog (BounceRate), how do they get to the blog; through email, link, typing URL at browser or through search engines (Traffic Sources Overview), and the number of visitors that have been to your blog (Visitors Overview) and many other types of information. These benefits do not motivate student bloggers directly through comments but its positive impact is traceable.

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2.6 Receiving feedbacks through comments

Blog appears to be both monologue and dialogue, but cannot be either one (Wrede, 2003). The nature of the blog is such that publishing work on blog itself necessarily means inviting readers of feedbacks (Godwin-Jones, 2006). This automated characteristic boosts its potential in educational setting as non reachable students in classroom can now respond to students, thus pave ways for expansion of ideas, interaction and criticism among themselves. Often, the source of feedback is unexpected (Wrede, 2003).

Existing literature on educational blogging has not studied in depth about the role of comments. Therefore the literature on the role of comments only appears as supplementary of the whole blogging process. However, these findings show positive outcomes in indicating the usefulness of comments in blogging.

Some comments are provided as content that is originally unaddressed or untouched in the past (Mishne & Glance, 2006). The original idea scaffolds (Ferdig & Trammell, 2004) as new ideas are added through comments. Thus it motivates both student bloggers and readers to check the blog regularly to see others' response towards their ideas. Both parties can interact closely.

Providing and receiving comment acts as a training ground for students to improve communicative skills (Pinkman, 2005). They ask questions (Nelson &

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Fahrenmeir, 2003), which allows the teacher to identify problems faced by them when they could not answer questions. Through comments, they also interact with their peers (Flatley, 2005). Comments, as peer review also help student bloggers to self-edit their posts (Jafar Askari Arani, 2005) and reflect their learning (Mynard, 2007).

2.7 Blogging and Communication

This non face-to-face interaction of blogging also encourages student bloggers the continuation to interact with each other in the virtual blog world (Pinkman, 2005; Abdullah Kuzu, 2007; MacBride and Luehman, 2008). Chances of students to mingle with everybody in the huge classroom are limited. Some are also too shy to socialise with others. Blogging triggers socialization by allowing the process of interaction to continue outside classroom. Priya Sharma and Ying Xie (2008) found that students prolonged the interaction from the blog by further conversing with other students to either clarify or to argue on their ideas posted on the blog. Apart from the content, the design of the blog could prompt interaction, as reported by Nelson and Fahrenmeir (2003). This experience concludes that interaction could happen in two ways, either from face-to-face to non face-to-face, or the opposite way. Nevertheless both ways enhance communication among students and between the students and the teacher, in both verbal and written forms.

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2.8 Continuous learning beyond the wall

One of the advantages of ACMC is the extension of learning beyond the classroom wall. Although other ACMC tools such as emails and discussion board allow this to happen too, Quible (2005) argues that blog is more efficient than other ACMC tools.

Existing literature (Flatley, 2005; Jenny Wang & Yuehchiu Fang, 2005; Quible, 2005; Abdullah Kuzu, 2007; Coutinho, 2007; Chen, Wu & Yang, 2008; Priya Sharma & YingXie 2008; Wasell & Crouch, 2008) on educational blogging discussed extensively on how blogging amplifies learning outside classroom. Firstly, students can respond to learning content without any temporal and spatial boundaries. Blogging makes learning almost possible anytime, anywhere. Thus, this enables students' time of exposure to learning content to increase. Students learn how to manage their learning more effectively outside classroom.

Secondly, students have more time to respond in their attempts to gather information, find resources, share information and constructed ideas outside the classroom time. Apart from sharing materials, blogging provides a dissimilar atmosphere to strengthen and reinforce knowledge learned in the classroom, together with their prior knowledge and the knowledge gained outside classroom time.

Thirdly, students who blog outside classroom place themselves as part of the virtual learning community. They contribute and also gain from it. They are ready to

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cooperate and collaborate with other members of the community, thus open up the chances for individuals, other than teacher alone, to respond to students' doubts abut the learning content. By placing them as active contributors, they are encouraged to ask questions that only arise after the classroom learning. It eradicates the feeling of shy and scared to ask questions, as discussed in the earlier sections. Consequently, it promotes student-initiated participation (MacBride and Luehman, 2008). It motivates them to be active contributors of ideas, information and questions.

2.9 Independent Learning and Blogging

The investigation on how blogging promotes independent learning has not been conducted before. The existing evidence of this aspect is very limited. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that this area is explored in this research.

Kesten (1987) defines independent learning as a learning process of which learners decide under certain conditions on how to fulfil their own learning goals. Although independent learning is synonymously used with autonomous learning, a distinction is made by Pinkman (2005). According to Pinkman (2005), independent learning involves all the characteristics portrayed in autonomous learning, and the most important characteristics that only appears in the concept of independent learning is learning how to learn.

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Students show considerable autonomous act of taking responsibility towards their own (Mynard, 2007) and others' learning (Ducate & Lomicka, 2008). Several researchers reveal that students take action such as referring dictionary (Wen-Shuenn Wen, 2005), self editing (Olander, 2007) and reading other materials (Murray, Hourigan & Jeanneau, 2007). Through blogging, learners are able to find and communicate with 'mutual friends' who share similar interests (Wu Wen-shuenn, 2005).

2.10 Conclusion

This chapter presents the theory underpinning the current study. A brief discussion of the history and development of blog is also presented. The discussion also shows the layout of the blog created in this study and some of its features. The chapter proceeds to examine the use of blog in the education setting as studied by other researchers. The next chapter illustrates the procedure involved in designing the methodology.

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CHAPTER 3

RESEACRH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the methodology used to investigate the research questions. It includes six sections: (a) research design (b) use of multiple methods (c) participants (d) research ethics (e) data analysis procedure, and (f) issue of credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability.

3.1 Research design methodology and procedure

The primary characteristic to be recognised as a case study method is the study of a bounded system, known as a case, that is bounded by the number of people involved, the time frame of the phenomenon studied by the researcher (Merriam, 1998). Thus,

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the case can be an individual, a group of individuals, a classroom, a school, or any entity that fulfil the mentioned characteristic. Creswell (2003) argues that case study emphasizes on individual behaviour portrayed by the participants in the case, rather than a shared pattern of behaviours. This research employed a case study design. The educational phenomenon explored in this research was instructional blogging. The case or bounded system was a classroom that was introduced and experienced instructional blogging.

This study was implemented in one Communicative English II class, at a university in Perak. This course is a 14-week program which involves the four language skills, namely, the listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, and soft skills. Prior to the commencement of the study, the researcher explained and asked for the students' consent to participant in the research (refer to Appendix E). The nature, objectives of the research and their responsibilities as participants were also informed. All participants signed the consent form.

Classes were conducted in the computer laboratory. One the first week, the researcher showed a sample of blog created by the researcher. Then, instructions on signing up the network and creating the blog were explained to the participants. Next, they submitted their email address to be invited to join the network. Upon receiving the invitation, they signed up and created their own blog. After this, the participants were told that this activity is an out-of-classroom activity for eight weeks. However, before the class started or after the class ended, they were allowed to stay and use the

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computer as long as the researcher was in the computer laboratory. Every week, a topic was given to them. The participants were required to write at least one entry of 100 words for each topic and comment at least two of their friends' blogs every week. They were also given a guideline to provide comment (Refer Appendix A). They were told not to be worried of their grammar and spelling problems. They were also told that their involvement in the research would not affect the coursework and examination marks. Table 3.1 shows the topics given for blogging.

Table 3.1 Topics for blogging

Week	Topic
1	Should international artists be allowed to perform in Malaysia?
2	Is it good to read comics?
3	Should students get married while still studying?
4	Is dependence on computers good or is it better if technology is simpler?
5	Trainee teachers should spend more time in school than in university
6	Women make better parents than men. Other claim men are as good as women. What say you?
7	Computers can translate languages. Do we still need to learn foreign languages
8	Should moral education be made compulsory in tertiary institutions?

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The participants were given the self assessment rubric every week. They filled in the rubric and submitted to the researcher after the end of the eighth week. At the end of the program, they answered the questionnaire. The content and comments posted on the blogs by the participants were saved. The text and comment were extracted to form text data. Six participants were identified for interview. The interviews were recorded.

3.2 The Use of multiple methods

In order to increase the validity of the study, four methods were utilized to obtain evidence from different sources. These methods were (a) administering a closed-ended questionnaire at the end of the study (b) conducting semi structure interviews with six participants (c) investigating blog entries and comments posted by the participants and (d) examining participants' self assessment rubric.

3.2.1 Survey

The survey was employed to assess the experience of the participants in blogging. The survey, which is defined by Babbie (2007) as the administration of a questionnaire to the participants served several advantages (Corbetta, 2003; Creswell, 2005; Babbie, 2007; Cohen, Manion & Morison, 2007) which prompted this study to utilise closed questions. Firstly, the use of closed questions ensured that the participants could

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interpret the item homogenously. Secondly, the scale included in the questionnaire provided a guideline to inform them about the anticipated response. This preset scale ensured convenience and flexibility in analysing numeric data. Thirdly, the participants were also led to think critically within the anticipated response and transferred their thoughts through the scale.

The questionnaire was modified from Jones (2006). The initial questionnaire was piloted. The validity of the modified questionnaire was checked by following the procedures suggested by Frankael and Wallen (2000) to obtain content-related evidence. Two experienced educational researcher were identified to be the judges. Definition and intended objectives of the questionnaire and explanation about students were described and submitted, along with a set of questionnaire to the judges. The judges read the description and the questionnaire. Check marks were placed on items that do not measure the objectives. Similarly, check marks were also placed on objectives that are of measure by any item. The questionnaire was then improved. The improved questionnaire was submitted again to the judges. The same procedures repeated until the judges determined that all the items measure the objectives and all the objectives were measured by the items. Then the questionnaire was piloted.

The pilot study was conducted with a group of 15 students who were also involved in the blogging project. The participants in the pilot study also blog on the same topics for five weeks. The questionnaire was administered at the end of the fifth week. The participants were also told to write their comments about the questionnaire

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at the end of the items. Based on the findings, it was found that some participants were unwilling to write their name on the questionnaire. It was also found that some items were ambiguous. Thus, some of the items were modified.

In order to establish reliability of the questionnaire, the questionnaire was piloted, prior to the study, following the Spearman-Brown formula, which tested the reliability of all items in the questionnaire (Cronbach, 1984 cited by Creswell, 2005). The correlation coefficient analysis (Cronbach's Alpha) measured the consistency of scores on the instrument. The correlation coefficient computed through SPSS was 0.978. This shows that the items are highly correlated.

The modified questionnaire was used to administer to the participants of this study (refer Appendix A). The questionnaire for the survey was separated into two parts. The first part aimed to obtain information about the participants' name (optional), course, semester, MUET result, education level and level of computer skill. The second part of the questionnaire consisted of 27 questions to derive information about the participants' feelings, thoughts, responses, problems and experiences to provide a holistic perspective from all the participants pertaining to blogging experience.

The items of the questionnaire used 4-point Likert Scale to rate the agreement to the items (1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=disagree, and 4=strongly disagree).

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Participants were compiled to choose either to incline to the agree or disagree end in this 4-point Likert Scale (Trochim 2004).

3.2.2 Interview

Six participants were selected to participate in the semi-structure interviews. Babbie (2007) defines qualitative interview as an interaction between the interviewer, who has the intention of inquiry, and a respondent. The voice of the respondents, which is uninfluenced by any precede perspectives, provides the insights into the respondents' perspective through comprehending of their mental categories, interpretation, opinion, emotions and motives which govern their actions (Corbetta, 2003; Creswell, 2005). In order to achieve this objective, semi-structured interviews were conducted. Several advantages have been identified to lead this study to employ semi-structured interview (Corbetta, 2003; and Creswell, 2005; Babbie, 2007; Cohen, Manion & Morison, 2007). Firstly, the interview probed in-depth responses from the participants. It provided opportunities for them to reflect on their blogging experience. Secondly, the semi structure interviews allowed researcher to promptly add any questions related to the answers given by the participants. This is important because different participants might relate different answers.

An outline is formed as a reference to ensure that all related topics were asked to respondents. The initial interview questions comprised of 12 major questions. Pilot test on the interview questions found that the questions were not focused and

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disorganized. Based on the findings of the pilot test, new questions were added. The questions were categorised into four major sections, according to the research questions (refer to Appendix B). The questions were also improvised in the choice of words and sentence structure. The questions were modified to be short, precise and concise.

The new set of questions consisted of four major sections, namely the prior knowledge on blogging, publishing ideas on the blog, role of comment in blogging and learning independently through blogging. The questions on the role of comment in blogging were further divided into two minor sections, namely providing comments and receiving comments. The change of the order, choice of words and addition of new questions was sometimes triggered by the initial question or participants' response. Thus, this flexibility of semi structured interview allowed clarification and meticulous information from the respondents.

The selected participants were given a choice to be interviewed in English or Bahasa Malaysia. The choices were given to ensure that they would not face any language barrier in illustrating their experiences. They were also informed that although they chose to be interviewed in English, they could use Bahasa Malaysia if they could not express in English at any point of the interview. The interviews with Participants 15, 20 and 21 were conducted in English. Participants 03, 05, 06, 12, and 14 chose to be interviewed in Bahasa Malaysia. The interviews were recorded with their consent. Some participants required to be given a copy of the recording.

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3.2.3 Blog content analysis

Blog content analysis as defined by Babbie (2007), is an in-depth study into recorded communications, which refers to the students' blog in this study. Data from the blog was examined to portray how they blog. Two types of blog content were collected in the present study. The first type was the blog entries posted by the participants. The blog entries were the entries that response to the topics given every week. The second type was the comments posted to all the blog entries. Participants were free to comment on any blog entries that they wanted to.

The blog content contributed to this study from three aspects. Firstly, the content of the blogs provided concrete information to derive the pattern of blogging from a general perspective. From the blogs, data on the frequency of posting entries by the participants could be determined by the dates the entries were published. Furthermore, the amount of words for each entry could also be determined. Data on the number of comments given by the readers and the blogger were also collected. The researcher also considered also the comments given by the blogger because the comments were somehow triggered by the comments given by the readers, and thus could be seen as a response reacted upon the comment received. In addition, data on the use of netspeak also provided information on the types of netspeak and its frequency in the blogs. Data from the blog content served as an additional evidence to check the affirmation or contradiction of the themes derived from survey and interviews data.

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3.2.4 Self assessment rubric

While survey and interviews collected data on feelings, responses, perceptions and thoughts of the participants after they had finished blogging, self assessment rubric was used to collect the data while they were blogging (Refer Appendix C). It allowed the participants to respond on individual topic after they had posted their entry and received comments from other participants. The issues asked in the rubric include understanding and feelings of blogging the topics, feelings and actions taken after receiving comment, reading materials, and problems faced during blogging. The rubrics were collected one week after the end of the study to provide enough time for them to blog and comment on the last topic.

3.3 Participants

3.3.1 Choosing site

This research was conducted at a university in Perak. The campus and the hostels are equipped with several facilities to facilitate this study. On the campus, twelve computer laboratories are situated at the Information Technology Centre, three computer laboratories at the Information Technology Laboratory and three computer laboratories at the Science and Technology Information Technology Laboratory. All the laboratories can be accessed by students.

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For students with laptops and handhelds, access to Internet is even easier and more convenient. The campus is also equipped with wireless network which is dated back in 2002. The network covers all buildings on campus as well as the ground floor of all the five hostels. The UPSI-Jaring WiFi wireless broadband Internet service is also provided on campus, in the hostels and surrounding area within 300 metres radius. Cyber cafes are also available around the campus and hostels. The cafes are within walking distance from the campus and hostels. The cafes charge from RM 1.50 to RM 2 per hour.

3.3.2 Choosing participants

This study involved a class of 30 participants who registered the Communicative English II. Communicative English II is a compulsory subject for all students, regardless of the level of proficiency in English. Another 15 participants were used for pilot test.

In this study, the researcher used a pre-existing class of Communicative English II. This sampling strategy, called convenience sampling which is defined by Cohen *et al.* (2007) and Creswell (2005) as obtaining participants based on availability, accessibility and willingness to participate in the study. The researcher had access to this class because the researcher was also the instructor for this class.

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Maximum variation was used to identify participants for interview. The advantage of involving participants with diverse variations is to confirm the main findings (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Confirming, disconfirming, extreme, deviant and typical participants were selected to fulfil the diversity. As Gay and Diehl (1992) argue that selecting 20% of the participants is sufficient if the given size of participants is small, which in this research there were 30 students, the researcher identified 10 participants which represented the diversity mentioned. Two participants were randomly selected for each category. Eight participants accepted the request to be interviewed. The profiles of the participants interviewed are described in Table 3.1.

Table 3.2 Demographic of the participants interviewed

Participant	Gender	Course	Number of blog entries	MUET result	Prior experience in blogging
03	Female	Visual Communication Arts	8	Band 3	Yes
05	Female	Visual Communication Arts	3	Band 2	No
06	Female	Visual Communication Arts	3	Band 3	No
12	Female	Visual Communication Arts	1	Band 3	No
14	Female	Visual Communication Arts	8	Band 3	No
15	Female	TESL	3	Band 3	No
20	Male	TESL	8	Band 5	No
21	Female	TESL	8	Band 6	No

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3.4 Research ethics

This section discusses the ethical issues involved in the study. As the researcher was also the instructor of the students, several issues had to be taken into consideration to ensure the rights of both the students as well as the researcher were protected. These issues were anonymity, confidentiality, non-traceability, informed consent, beneficence and power relations.

3.4.1 Anonymity, confidentiality and non traceability

Participants were given the option to reveal their names or to remain as anonymous in answering the questionnaire. All names of the participants were not revealed to anyone who was not involved in this study directly.

In order to keep the identity of the participants, all data collected from the questionnaire, the interviews, the blog content and the self assessment rubric were not shown to anyone. Codes were assigned to participants from 01 to 30. All data collected will only be kept for six months after the final report has been written. All data will be destroyed.

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3.4.2 Informed consent and beneficence

The researcher explained to the participants about the nature of the research, the purpose, procedures, risk and how their identity would be protected. It was also explained that the participation in this study would not affect their academic performance. No psychological harm would be created during the process of blogging. Nonetheless, participants had been reminded to be responsible and respect to other participants. Participants gave their consent by signing the consent form (refer to Appendix E).

The participants had been told that they would not benefit directly from participating in this study in the form of monetary or grade reward. However, the researcher convinced them that their participation would benefit them in their learning process.

3.4.3 Power relations

As the researcher was also the instructor for the course that the participants were studying, it was important to inform the participants that they were not coerced to participate and no actions would be taken if they refused to participate. Participants were also informed that they could at anytime quit from participating without the need to explain their reasons to the researcher.

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3.5 Data analysis procedures

Data collected from the quantitative and qualitative strategies was analysed in three ways. Firstly, the quantitative data was analysed by using descriptive statistics. Secondly, the qualitative data was analysed by coming up with themes or categories that would best explain the findings.

3.5.1 Analysing Survey

Quantitative data was analysed with SPSS version 15.0. Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to obtain the reliability analysis. Data collected from survey was analysed by descriptive statistics to find the frequency and percentage for each item (Frankael and Wallen, 2000).

3.5.2 Analysing Interviews

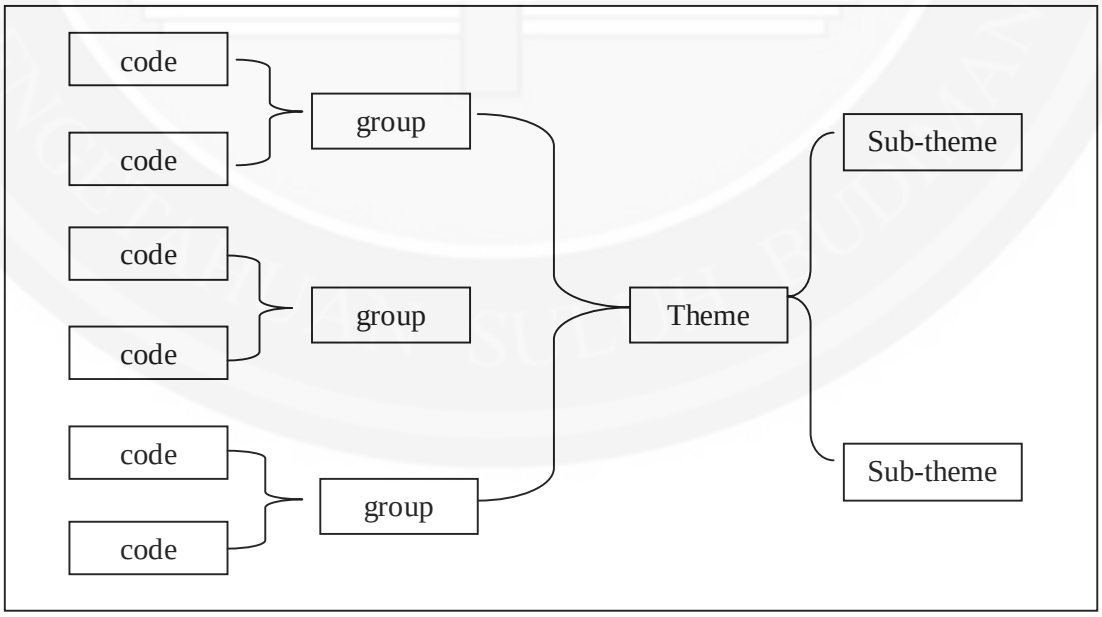
Concurrent analysis of data obtained from interviews and blogs were conducted. Although no particular procedures has been claimed to be the best practice of analysing qualitative data, this research followed the guidelines provided by Creswell (2005), Babbie (2007) and Cohen, Manion and Morison (2007).

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In order to convert the audiotaped data obtained through the semi-structured interview to text data, transcription was done. As some of the interviews were conducted in Bahasa Malaysia, the transcripts were translated and checked by two language expert. This ensured that the translation had the same meaning as said by the participants. The researcher comprehended the general sense of the data to form an open coding. Babbie (2007) defines open coding as the initial effort of labelling codes to the identified concepts. Codes were designated when reading the transcript. Similar and redundant codes were grouped. Concurrently, the organisation of the data were planned and represented in the concept mapping. The list of codes was categorized into themes. These themes formed the major ideas of the qualitative database. Saturation of the themes was ensured. The themes was separated and rearranged into major and minor themes. The themes were then arranged to form layers to represent the development of the issue from the most specific and broadest data into codes, themes and finally the general major themes.

Figure 3.1.Analysing qualitative data



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3.5.3 Analysing blog content

The blog entries and the comments were saved to be the textual data. In analysing the individual blog, one table was formed for each participant. The data derived from the blog was used to fill up the table. The data included for every week was:

- date of posting
- length
- number of comment received
- netspeak used in the entry

The comments were saved and open-coded to determine its role. The coded comments were checked by two experienced researchers.

3.5.4 Analysing self assessment rubric

Data collected from the rubrics were grouped according to the questions asked in the rubric. The data were used to support, confirm or negate the themes and sub-themes found in the interview. The groups included were:

- understanding of the topic
- preference of the topic
- feeling
- response to positive comments
- response to negative comments
- stress due to negative comments
- reading other materials

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- problems faced while blogging

3.6 Issue of credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability

Credibility in this case study involves creating and verifying the element of believable from the perspective of the participants of the study (Trochim, 2004). As such, member-checking (Creswell, 2003) had been conducted in order to make the data and findings credible. After the interview had been transcribed and interpreted, I sent the data to the respective participants. The participants verified the interpretation and made changes if the interpretation was inaccurate. The procedure took two weeks. The response from the participants was used to amend the original data before proceeding to data analysis.

Triangulation was used to confirm the findings of this study. Validating findings from qualitative data is very important in ensuring an accurate interpretation from the several perspectives, namely the researcher, the participants and the readers (Creswell, 2003). Therefore, in this study, two steps will be conducted to validate the findings. Firstly, triangulation of data will be done. Data from questionnaires, interviews and content analysis will be triangulated.

The analysis between the quantitative and qualitative data enabled data transformation. Babbie (2007) claims that data transformation is one of the strengths

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of collecting data from two traditions as it will create a detailed understanding of the use of blogging in this study. The qualitative data was quantified to form behavioural data that appeared in interview and blogs. The quantified data was triangulated with the qualitative data to form a detail understanding on the use of blogging.

Table 3.3.Triangulation of data

Research question	Sources of data
How does blogging help students to voice out their opinion?	Survey, interview, self assessment rubric
How does blogging motivate students to voice out opinion through blogging?	Survey, interview, self assessment rubric, blog content
How do students perceive the role of comment in blogging?	Survey, interview, self assessment rubric, blog content
How do students learn independently through blogging?	Survey, interview, self assessment rubric

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter described the case study design used in the current study. It also provided a detailed description of the four modes of enquiry, namely the survey, semi structure interview, self assessment rubric and blog content analysis. The selection of the

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participants and the site followed. Next, the chapter described the ethical issues involved in this study. The data procedures are explained following by the issues of credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability. The next chapter will report the findings pertaining to the research questions. Analysis and interpretation from the four sources will also be discussed. The chapter also presents the relevance of the findings with the body of the literature.

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CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from four instruments in answering the research questions. It begins with the overview on how students use blog to articulate their ideas. The following section details the findings on the students' perception on online publishing and the role of comments in blogging. The chapter also describes the implication of blogging in promoting independent learning among students.

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4.1 Research Question 1: How does blogging help students to voice out opinions?

Overall, there are 175 blog entries. Table 4.1 summarises the number of blog entries posted by the participants.

Table 4.1.Number of entries

Number of entry	Number of participant	Percentage (%)
1	3	10
3	4	13.3
4	3	10
5	1	3.3
7	3	10
8	15	50

Four themes emerged from the data indicating how blogging helps students to voice out opinions:

- blog lowers students' anxiety in voicing opinions
- using blog to ask and express themselves outside classroom
- blogging enhances students' motivation
- establishing an active online learning community.

4.1.1 Lowering Anxiety in Voicing Opinion

Three sub-themes emerged from this major theme. Firstly, it is found that blogging activities increased participants' confidence in articulating ideas in a non face-to-face environment. Secondly, participants in the present study were able to overcome their

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fear of voicing opinions through blogging. This finding is important especially to those who had no blogging experience prior to this study. The final sub-theme details how the non-threatening atmosphere contributed in lowering participants' anxiety while blogging.

Increasing confidence

From the data collected, 56.7% and 30% of the participants strongly agreed and agreed respectively that blogging improved confidence in expressing ideas. The confidence was built in Participants 05, 12 and 15 when they received comments from the readers. The comments which agreed or disagreed with their opinions gave them the spirit to blog and listen to others' comment regarding their opinions. The participants' attitudes of increasingly being confident through blogging seem to affirm other research (Deitering, 2004; Murray, Hourigan & Jeanneau, 2007; Helena Song, & Yuen May Chan 2008). The importance of this finding is that students regardless of their level of proficiency in English could secure themselves a space to articulate. In a mixed ability classroom, it is important to increase the confidence of the students of lower ability. This ensured them the ability to voice out their opinions like other students. Evidence from the interview showed that when they gained confidence, they dared to voice out their ideas, as illustrated by Participant 14:

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> We would write about things that we know. We try to find from many resources. I am confident of my points. Although sometimes, the points could be wrong, but I would still post it confidently. [*Kami akan utarakan apa-apa isi yang kami tahu, kami akan cari dari mana-mana sumber dan bagi saya, isi yang saya utarakan setiap kali tu saya yakin isi tu. Saya yakin isi tu walaupun pada masa yang sama, kadang-kadang saya rasa salah, tapi walaupun dalam keadaan macam tu saya yakin juga, saya post kan juga blog tu.*]

Apart from that, Participant 15 believed that the non face to face interaction in blogging provided her the confidence to comment on others. In non face to face interaction, students could response at their own convenience. They could think, write and rewrite before they are confident to post the entry or the comment. This attitude is congruent to Gumbrecht (2004) who argues that blog provides the students an infinite time frame to think and act, contrary to face-to-face interaction which demands immediate response. Evidence from the self assessment further supported this finding as participants wrote that they were excited and happy when they blog because they could take a longer time to blog or respond to the comments. Participant 05 described her experience that:

> ...if the language used by my friends are too difficult for me to understand, I would think twice to comment on their blog. After a few days, I realised that I would not learn anything if I refuse to comment. So I used simple words like yes and no. [*...bahasa inggeris terlalu tinggi kan, contohnya pelajar-pelajar TESL, kita pun ingat balas ke tak, nak ke tak nak, jadi macam nanti dulu, tinggal dulu. Esok pun fikir lagi eh takkan lah kita tak nak balas, bila lagi kita nak baiki? Tinggal dulu, nanti lama-lama tergerak hati, nak juga lah, walaupun sikit-sikit yes no yes no, tapi kita cuba baca faham kan apa yang dia tulis...*]

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Overcoming fear

From the data collected, 43.3% of the participants strongly agreed that blogging helped the participants to overcome fear in expressing ideas. Another 40% of them also agreed on this item. Through the interviews, the fact that the participants did not have to face others was mentioned repeatedly by Participants 05, 12, 15, 20 and 21. They felt that they were just facing the computer, thus reducing their fear and allowing them to be vocal and straightforward. Participants 05, 12 and 15 explained that in the classroom she would think twice whether to express her disagreement towards certain issues if she realised that the facial expression of some students changed and indicated that they were not happy with her disagreement. However, when Participant 05 blog:

> I admit that when I blog, the fear and shyness disappeared. When I receive positive and negative comment, it teaches me how to face certain situations [*Saya akui bila saya blog ni dibuka, saya rasa macam perasaan takut, segan tiba-tiba hilang. Macam saya rasa apabila saya menerima komen-komen positif dan negatif dia mengajar saya erti macam mana kita nak menghadapi sesuatu*.]

These findings are consistent with Ducate and Lomicka (2008) who suggest that students who are shy or fear to express themselves could find a space to voice out through blogging. Evidence from the self assessment rubric showed that they felt relax when they blog. For instance, Participant 20 explained that he felt no anxiety toppled over him during blogging. This was supported by Participant 12 who said that she could learn in a more relaxing manner and this aided in her learning process, as she described:

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> When we learn, we can not feel pressured. When we are pressured, we do not enjoy. Blog is relaxing and enjoying, so we can learn easily [*Bila kita belajar kita tak rasa tertekan kan. Bila tertekan rasa tak enjoy kan. Kat blog ni santai, enjoy lepas tu kita dapat belajar dengn senang la*.]

Non-threatening atmosphere

The questionnaire found that 40% strongly agreed that expressing ideas in blogging was better than in the classroom. Data also showed that 43.3% of them agreed with this item. This attitude corroborates with Betts and Glogoff (2004) who found that students who seldom talk during lesson could produce a lengthy blog entry. In the interview, Participant 05 explained that in a classroom, she could be scolded if she said anything incorrect. Participant 15 and 21 believed that blogging is suitable for students who are shy and timid as they have to see others' facial expressions and body language. On the other hand, in blog nobody could see them. They only faced the monitor but not anyone else. Participant 14 explained that by reducing the threat, she was able to express herself beyond everyone's expectation:

> **...**when I wrote something about myself, my friends would say that I am very funny. They did not expect that I could be like that. [**...***tulis apa-apa pasal kita, member-member akan cakap ya, kau ni lawak la. Mereka tak sangka kita boleh buat macam tu.*]

The less threatening environment was not only beneficial to those who voiced out opinion, but to those who are being commented as well. Participant 21 believed

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that voicing out opinions through blogging ensured that students would not hurt others' feeling:

> ..., maybe if we voice out our opinion openly, then maybe some of them wouldn't like it. They just, what we call, reply back in negative way, so that's the dangerous way of replying one's opinion right. That's why. I think blogging is safer. Like I just said, we have to sensitive to other people sensitivity.

When the participants did not need to follow the formal protocol, they felt comfortable. The environment had also allowed them to read, accept and reject ideas, and justified their actions. As a result, Participant 12 experienced changes in her perception towards certain issues.

Once the blog was perceived as non-threatening (Davidson, 2008), the participants felt relaxed and comfortable to express themselves because it compensated the time needed by them to consider the language that would be used. Furthermore, the style of writing in blogging was more conversational (Chuang Hsueh-Hua, 2008b) and informal (Ellison & Wu, 2008).

This non threatening atmosphere of blogging provided an avenue for participants who were enthusiastic to be active in voicing out their opinions, but were compelled to obey the teacher (Littlewood 2003). They felt obliged to sustain the harmonious classroom environment as mentioned by Redding (cited by Sally Chan,

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1999), especially in the Asian context. Some students also tried to protect the collective harmony (Tani, 2005) by agreeing with majority, instead of being different. Blogging provided a choice to differ without creating harm and damage to the harmony built in classroom.

4.1.2 Asking and Expressing Outside Classroom

Interaction in English was enhanced as the language was still being widely used outside classroom by participants who engaged in blogging. By providing opportunities to ask and express ideas outside classroom, participants were given equal rights to express themselves. This theme also describes how participants shared and exchanged ideas through blogging, followed by a discussion on how blogging enabled their opinions to be heard.

Enhancing interaction in English

The questionnaire found that 50% of the participants strongly agreed that blogging allowed interaction with other students. 33.3% of the participants also agreed with this item. In the interview, Participants 12 and 15 stated that blog enabled them to ask and express themselves to others outside classroom. Participants' interaction with others outside classroom was determined by two factors. Firstly, participants were able to seek for language assistance from others who also signed in at the same time. As they described:

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> I feel shy when I am interacting face to face with them. However, through blogging, I could spontaneously express myself and improve my English [*Kalau kita nak berdepan dengan dia, saya rasa macam malu sikit kan. Jadi melalui blog, kita spontan boleh luah dan kita boleh memperbaiki bahasa Inggeris kita*.]
>
> [Participant 05]

> Sometimes when I faced problem, I would ask the TESL students how to write the sentence in English. [*Sometimes macam saya tak tahu saya akan tanya budak-budak TESL macam mana nak tukar ayat ni dalam bentuk BI*]
>
> [Participant 14]

> ...if I do not try, I would not be able to know if my English writing is correct. However, when I blog, my friends can comment on my writing... [*...kalau kita tak cuba untuk tulis, kita pun tak tahu penggunaan Bahasa Inggeris kita tu betul atau tidak. Jadi macam dekat situ, bila tulis blog, kawan-kawan boleh komen...*]
>
> [Participant 06]

Secondly, blogging seemed to be the answer for spatial and temporal challenges as Participants 05, 12 and 14 described it as time saving, unlimited, and could be done anywhere. Students who did not have opportunity or time to voice out opinions in the classroom, they could still do it even after the lesson ended. Participant 21 further explained that students can be active in learning even whenever they want to. As Participant 14 described:

> Students in UPSI are from different courses, they do not have time to sit down and discuss. Through blog, even if we do not have time, we can access Internet and blog.... Through blogging, we can combine ideas even though we do not have time, we still can do it [*Macam setiap budak, pelajar di UPSI ni tak sama course, tak ada masa kalau nak duduk semeja nak berbincang. Mungkin melalui blog ni saya rasa walaupun tak ada masa, melalui Internet kami boleh macam bila-bila masa kami boleh buka blog....Dari situ mungkin boleh bergabung ideas, macam walaupun tak ada masa, kami boleh, masih boleh*]

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These findings are consistent with previous research (Deitering, 2004; Anastasi 2006; Abdullah Kuzu, 2007; Chen & Bonk, 2008; Ellison & Wu, 2008; Felix 2008) which indicate that students' interaction with teachers and amongst peers is expanded, hence enhanced learning beyond classroom. This finding is of great magnitude because expanded communication through blogging enhanced learning by providing opportunities to be proactive. Participants sought opportunities to improve and learn while blogging, thus stimulating learning. These behaviours corroborate Pinkman's study (2005) in which they are motivated to interact with each other in English. A possible explanation for this might be the status of participants as ESL and EFL students. It could be that they sought for more opportunities to interact in the target language outside classroom. The findings suggest that this behaviour might be facilitated by the creation of spatial and temporal barriers to students, which affirms previous research (Chen, Wu & Yang, 2008; Helena S.Y. Song, & Yuen May Chan, 2008). The importance here is that the convenience of blogging promotes equality in terms of opportunities, access, and contributions for every individual student.

Exercising right to express

Blogging also allowed them to experience freedom to express their thoughts without having to address the others' acceptance of their ideas. Since the blog belonged to them, they were free and had the right to express themselves. This finding mirrors other research (Lamshed, Berry & Armstrong, 2004; Flatley, 2008) which reported that blogging allows students to equally reveal their personal perceptivity and voice. Participant 12 described this freedom was the main reason which motivated her to

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update and follow progress of the blog frequently. With this freedom, they gained the confidence to express their opinions without having the fear of others not accepting their opinions. As Participant 15 described:

> If I do the blogging, I want to say like this and like that, I just write it down, I don't think others, they will like my comments or not, I just don't think that. [sic]

Blogging had taught them that all participants had equal rights to explore the ideas and that all ideas were valid. It enabled them to be honest, thus vitalizing them to blog. As Participant 12 described:

> ...writing and expressing myself in blog because everyone has the rights. Everyone has the right to have ideas and everyone has the right to explore the ideas [*...menulis dan meluahkan pendapat saya kat blog sebab semua orang berhak kan. Semua orang ada idea-idea yang berhak, semua orang berhak untuk explore idea-idea tu.*]

Sharing and exchanging ideas

Blogging acted as a complementary platform to cater students with different personalities and learning styles. It enabled students with different ways of learning, as described by Participant 21 to convey their ideas. Evidence from the self assessment rubric revealed that the participants had positive responses towards sharing and exchanging ideas with others through blogging, as summarised in Table 4.2.

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Table 4.2 Sharing and exchanging ideas

Participant	Thoughts on sharing and exchanging ideas
14	I can change idea with our friend
23	I want to know what's the opinion of the others
28	It's exciting because I can share my ideas with friends
20	it generates a lot of heaty arguments among boys and girls

Allowing opinions to be heard

The questionnaire showed that 16.7% of the participants strongly agreed while 63.3% agreed that their voice could be heard through blogging. This was supported by the self assessment rubric in which they wrote that they could point out their opinion and speak up. Participants 12 and 15 mentioned that their voice was heard when their opinions were read by partipants who accessed the blog. Participants 05 and 14 explained that she would not feel shy to let others to hear her voice. As Participant 14 detailed:

> The topics allowed us to express. We could write what was in our heart....in blogging, others would not expect that we could say something like that. But actually we were shy to say. We could do that in blogging. [*Macam yang, tajuk-tajuk yang kita buat tu, dari situ la kita boleh utarakan, kta boleh tulis apa yang dalam hati kita....dalam blog kita tulis-tulis orang akan baca, oh tak sangka dia boleh cakap macam ni. Padahal malu nak cakap tapi kita boleh tulis macam tu*.]

This finding further elaborates Nelson and Fahrenmeir (2003) who proved that the immediacy of blog for others to access, read and respond allows voice to be heard. The expansion of interaction also expanded the time and opportunities of thus

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lengthen the time of voices being heard. This finding is important for the participants because it helped them to create an arguably greater and longer impact of their voice to themselves and others through blogging. It was possible because students' voices would exist permanently as long as the blog is still maintained. It supports Lipton (2002) that blogging allows self discoveries with the public.

4.1.3 Enhancing Motivation

From the data, 43.3% of the participants strongly agreed while another 36.7% agreed that being able to express ideas motivated them to blog. The participants were motivated to express ideas through blogging due to several factors. Firstly, blogging indirectly assisted them in improving language skills. Participant 05 detailed that dictionary was used concurrently while blogging. She also tried to use new language structures and figurative language in her writing. When she could not understand the meaning of certain words or sentences, she would seek help from other participants who were also online.

> We had to learn English to blog. I had to refer to the bilingual dictionary when I wanted to give comment. For me, it is fun. If I didn't know, I would ask TESL students how to change a sentence into English [*Kami kena belajar bahasa Inggeris macam start dari blog tu. Dari blog tu bagi saya masa saya nak tulis blog tu, saya akui masa nak buat nak bagi komen tu saya selalu buka dictionary dari BM ke BI macam tu. Bagi saya memang seronok. Sometimes macam saya tak tahu saya akan tanya budak-budak TESL macam mana nak tukar ayat ni dalam bentuk BI*]
>
> [Participant 05]

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The present finding seems to be consistent with numerous research (Jafar Askari Arani, 2005; Jenny Wang, & Yuehchiu Fang 2005; Pinkman, 2005; Drexler, Dawson & Ferdig, 2007; Armstrong & Retterer, 2008; Ducate & Lomicka, 2008) who discover that students improve their language skills, notably vocabulary and writing skills. They became more confident to write and gain the benefit of learning from their peers. This finding has important implication for students and teachers because blog is proved to have the ability to mediate and facilitate learning process. As they blog and gradually improved both their language and blogging skills, they became more competent to explore and conduct more learning activities.

Secondly, the participants could experience a free flow of ideas among themselves. They were free to express ideas, free to provide and receive information which eventually helped them in improving their knowledge on certain issues. As Participant 12 stated:

> I am motivated when I get so much information through the blog. Honestly, my motivation to learn will increase" [*Melalui blog ni ia dapat mempengaruhi motivasi saya melalui kat blog tu kita akan mendapat banyak maklumat. Secara jujurnya motivasi saya untuk belajar akan naik, akan meningkat lah*]
>
> [Participant 12]

> I think it motivates me in the sense that I can improve my writing and the I can widen my knowledge when I share things with my friends and then besides that I can also improve my vocabulary, for example in English [sic]
>
> [Participant 21]

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This finding echoes Efimova (2004) that students engaged themselves in several activities such as organising, contributing and connecting ideas. It showed that the participants appreciated and utilized the notion of free flow ideas. This finding carries certain importance because the participants were free to access to others' work, as opposed to traditional written assignment which most of the time was addressed to the teacher only. Furthermore, in classroom discussion, the time and chances allocated for each participant to respond to others' ideas was limited whereas blogging allowed every individual student to respond to as many blogs as they could. Moreover, through blogging, the instructor and participants could examine their ideas from the individual perspectives as well as collective perspectives.

4.1.4 Establishing an active online community

30% of the participants strongly agreed while 50% agreed that blogging allowed them to participate actively in the course. This was especially when the topics given were interesting. The participation not only kept them updated with the ideas but also with their friends' recent activities. As a result, a learning community was formed. As Participant 05 illustrated:

> When we log in frequently, we learn about language, grammar and get more friends, not only Malay but also Chinese and Indians. [*Bagi saya macam tu sebab kita selalu buka, belajar ah belajar dari segi bahasa, bahasa grammar la kan, dapat lebih ramai rakan, bukan saja rakan orang Melayu tetapi Cina dan India juga.*]

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The attitudes expressed by participants are similar to those reported in previous research (Efimova, 2004; Anastasi, 2006; Arena and Jefferson, 2008; Priya Sharma & Ying Xie, 2008) which indicate that active participation leads to mutual learning experiences amongst the students with others of similar interests. They could find peers of the same beliefs which might be difficult to achieve through traditional written assignments. Furthermore, this finding is important because participants created a network for themselves in which they could learn not only certain issues given by teachers but also the cultural perspectives and differences. Interaction within his network created a sense of belonging (Arena and Jefferson, 2008) to those who contributed and benefited from it. Moreover, it allowed them to acknowledge diversity, thus preparing them for a much more diverse and wider community in blogosphere.

4.2 Research question 1a: How does blogging motivate students to blog?

Three major themes emerged from the data. First, blogging motivates students by fostering ownership practices. Second, online publishing motivates students by providing them freedom of expression. Third, blogging enables students to reach more readers.

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4.2.1 Fostering ownership practices

Participants, as authors of the blog, engaged in various activities in developing and practising self-authorship. This section explains participants' actions and thoughts in ensuring original writing. Discussion on participants taking control of blogging follows. Finally, this section examines how participants engage their ideas with real life experiences.

Ensuring originality

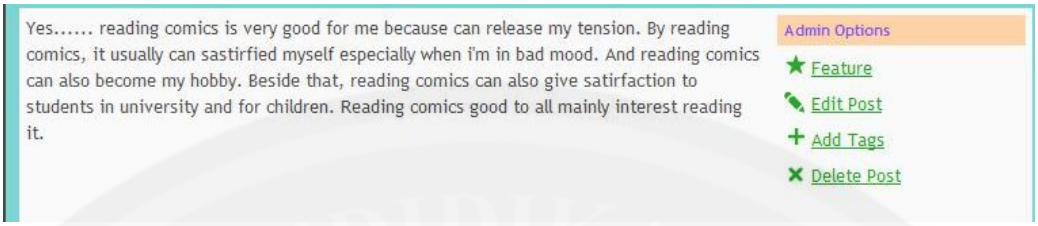
Participants were aware of the importance of originality in their writing. They understood that they had to express reasonable and logic ideas, but not plagiarised from any sources. They emphasized that originality was crucial for students to follow. Participant 14 demonstrated the seriousness of producing original work by explaining that "we produced our writing as an outcome from our own imagination" [*kita buat karya kita sendiri hasil dari imaginasi kita sendiri*].

Participants insisted originality in putting their thoughts, even if it would mean lots of language problem, such as Participant 10:

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Figure 4.1 Blog entry by Participant 10



In ensuring that the participants fostered editorship practices as a writer, originality had to be emphasized. The findings in the present study further support the notion argued by Namwar and Rastgoo (2008) that blog could be an effective tool to educate students to respect intellectual property and eradicate plagiarism. The determination shown by the participants indicates that they were conscious that blog is a public presentation of their work, hence willing to take risk to be wrong, rather than to plagiarise.

Despite the positive ways of used by the participants to voice out opinions through blogging, there were also participants who plagiarised articles from other website and blog in their first language, Bahasa Malaysia. Two blog posts were not original work from the participants. The posts were copied from articles in the Internet. These posts belonged to Participants 01 and 06. Four blog posts were found written in Bahasa Malaysia. Three blog posts belonged to Participant 08 and one belonged to Participant 13.

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The importance here is that students need to practise producing original work if blog is part of the learning process or assessments. Firstly, plagiarism defeats the purpose of learning. Secondly, it raises the question of the quality of the blog content. Thirdly, it is an academic crime that teachers and bloggers do not hope to proliferate through blogging. Therefore, the implication here is that teachers should take serious and strict emphasis on the blogging code of ethics as recoded in the earlier chapter.

Taking control of the blog

Participants were able to control the length, content, frequency of posting, and design of the blog. Although they were required to write about 100 words in each entry, the length varied. The shortest entry was 17 words, whereas the longest entry was of 387 words.

Apart from controlling ideas, they also controlled the choice of netspeak used in their blog. Some participants used emoticons such as '☺' and '@_@', onomatopoeic such as 'haha' and 'hehe' and initialism such as 'lol'. Netspeak is also known as internet slang, internet jargon or chatspeak. Apart from email, instant messaging and social networking sites in the Internet, this new form of language is also widely used in short text messaging. This new language shares similarity in both spoken and written discourse (Crystal, 2006). The netspeak used by the some of the participants is summarised in Table 4.3.

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Table 4.3 Netspeak used in blogging

Participant	Netspeak
11	yippi, wow
21	u, dat, wow, u'll, hmm, bcoz, haha, 4, da, juz
23	+, =, wow, ??, nite, wat, tat's, relationshipsss, ^^, vs. Thru, mah
28	wow, gatal, err, hellooo, dat, ur, dat, B%#LS*%T

This is an important finding gained from this study because it raises the issue of the extent of informal style allowed in the educational setting. Participants who belonged to generation web 2.0 are arguably competent in using and understanding netspeak used in synchronous computer-mediated communication tools such as instant messaging. This practice is also widely used in mobile text messaging. When the participants considered blogging as a space where informal and conversational styles were allowed and acceptable, the use of netspeak was inevitable, as shown by participants the present study. However, in the educational setting, netspeak is unacceptable. It puts the teachers and students in dilemma. Students might resort to netspeak as they regard blog as a personal space. Some students also regard netspeak to be part of their identity in articulating themselves. Therefore, students might not be as vocal and straighforward as when netspeak is allowed. It creates a barrier for students as not only in language but also in expression.

The influence and use of netspeak in formal written work is an ongoing debate. Students admitted that they use emoticons, shortcuts and informal writing in their homework (Lenhart et al, 2008; Eller, 2005). Teachers also reject the use of netspeak in written work (Saiqa Imtiaz Asif, 2007). Teachers believe that netspeak should be

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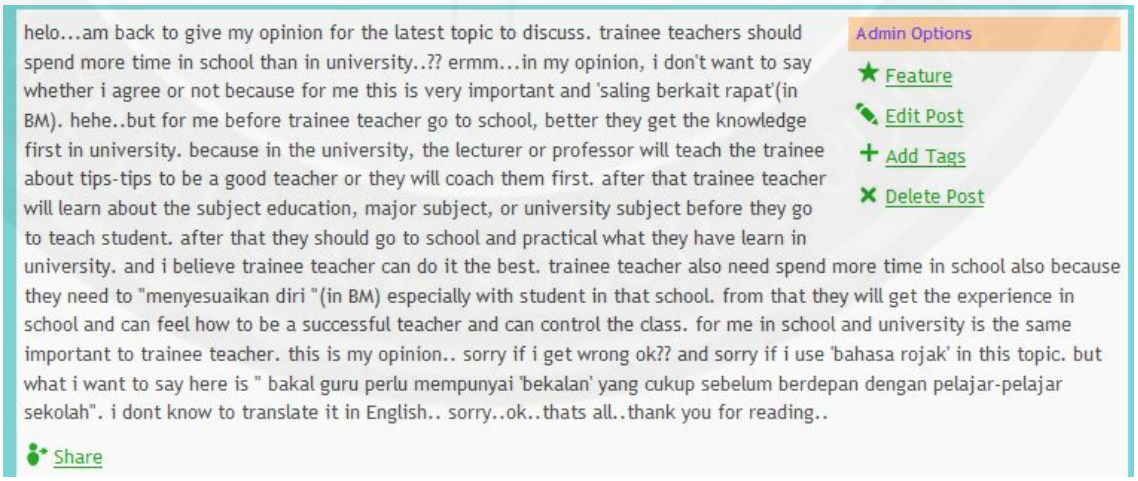
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confined in informal setting (An Maduekwe, 2008). The Chinese government has taken a stance to ban the use of netspeak in formal settings, including written documents, media and classroom (Hughes, 2005).

In contrast to the popular belief that netspeak is widely used, Tagliamento and Denis (2008) reported that netspeak is in fact rarely used in students' instant messaging. They argued that the appearance netspeak is relatively low as compared to formal language used when the students chat. This finding is further supported by Baron (2005) that students' display proper use of grammar, spelling and vocabulary, and rarely use abbreviations, acronyms and emoticons.

Besides the use of netspeak, some participants also demonstrated code-switching in their blog post, such as Participant 14.

Figure 4.2 Blog entry by Participant 14



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In this blog post, Participant 14 explained that she code-switched English and Bahasa Malaysia because she did not know how to explain the words and sentence in English. This finding is important in indicating that students who have ideas to express but could face language problems. The participants expected language help from their peers or the language instructor. Some participants blog once they received new topics, whereas some participants only blog after they had accumulated a few topics. Participants who faced Internet problem wrote a few topics and blog all at one time when they managed to access the Internet.

Participants also controlled the design of the blog. The features available were important for them because personalised blog and the use of features such as photos and videos helped in presenting the personality of the participants, thus helping the readers to understand the ideas presented. The questionnaire showed that 26.7% and 53.3% of the participants strongly agreed and agreed respectively on the importance of the features in blogging. Participant 14 explained another that the features also functioned as background for their activities in the blog:

> ... photos and video are the background. We need background for decoration and to make it more interesting. [*...gambar, video tu semua dikira sebagai satu background untuk apa yang kita nak buat, macam sesuatu kerja kita perlukan satu background untuknya, sebagai menghiasi untuk lebih seronok lagi*.]

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These findings are consistent with Chuang Hsueh-Hua (2008a) that personal editorship allows students to be the sole player who writes, designs and publishes. As editors, the participants controlled the content and design of the blog. There are similarities shown by participants of the present study with those of Baggetun and Wasson (2006). Firstly, the participants emphasised on the importance of becoming the sole designer of their blog. Participants personalised the design (Farmer, Yue & Brook, 2007) of the blog by adding different background themes, changing layout, adding songs, video and other features available from the host provider, www.ning.com. Secondly, they determined the functions of their blog; as learning journal, reflection journal, online diary or others.

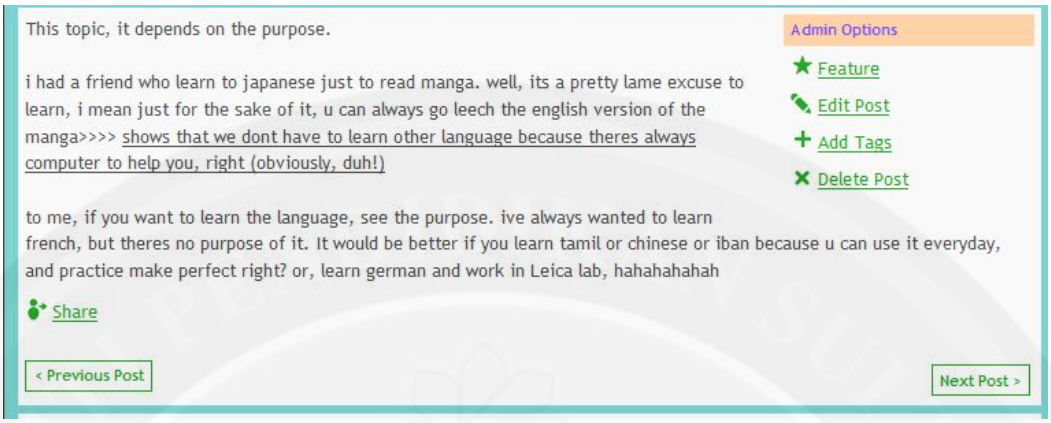
Making connection to own experience

Participants established connection between the topics discussed with real life experience. One participant wrote that ‘One of the situations faced by scholar in educational institutions including me and I will be teachers soon’. In his blog, Participant 30 wrote that:

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Figure 4.3 Blog entry by Participant 30



Data from the self assessment rubric further verified this finding. Table 4.4 summarises the participants' thoughts of associating blogging with real-life experiences.

Table 4.4 Associating blogging with real-life experience

Participant	Making connection between blogging and real-life experience
07	I will be teacher soon
23	It recalls back my memories in IPSAH [sic]
19	I have some experiences relating to the topic
24	It is related to feminism which I've learnt from my Modern Short Stories course
20	I can talk about this topic with anyone who has interests in this particular subject
03	it is a recent topic in newspaper and internet [sic]

Participants in this study adopted personal experience as a strategy to express themselves. Originality was ensured by participants by associating their personal

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experience with the issue that they were blogging about. It affirms Glewa and Bogdan (2007) who found that students establish association between the content of blog with real life experience in order to articulate the issue in depth from their perspectives. Similarly, participants in the present study hoped to use personal experience to convince readers to believe in their point of view. The possible explanation is that students used their prior knowledge in examining the topics given from their perspectives on how their lives were affected by these issues. An alternative explanation is suggested by Ducate and Lomicka (2008) that students used blog to compensate the limited opportunity and time for them to share their experience. This explanation is viable because participants in this study enrolled in different courses. Furthermore, the class was only a two-hour lesson. Therefore, blogging acted as a mean to share experiences after the lessons.

4.2.2 Providing freedom of expression

The percentage in the questionnaire marked 56.7% of strongly agree in indicating that they had freedom to write anything when blogging. Another 23.3% also agreed to the statement. Evidence from the self assessment rubric in Table 4.5 implies the importance of this freedom of expression to them.

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Table 4.5 Importance of freedom of expression

Participant	Thoughts on freedom of expression
20	It is very controversial and it is one of the situations that is faced by many scholars in educational institutions including me.
26	can tell the truth
23	free to express our subjective views'

The ability to provide the participants with freedom in expression gave them the confidence in exploring different angles when communicating their ideas. They were free to produce ideas and did not feel restricted, hence allowing them to be vocal. Participants were expressive when they blog. They did not have to consider others' acceptance of their ideas, thus allowing them to express their personal views. This was difficult to happen in the face-to-face classroom interaction. Participant 12 described:

> It is important because it can lessen the anxiety, of thinking about other's perception maybe some of them like to talk back right. Through blogging we can like, we are not forced to see them, how their expression, maybe that makes us feel free to express whatever we think without having to face them directly.

This finding is consistent with other research (Jafar Askari Arani 2005; Abdullah Kuzu 2007, Bloch 2007). The participants were given the authority to choose and initiate topics which were not included in the syllabus. Students could respond to current and emerging issues and keep themselves updated with the latest development. It prepared the students for their future professional development as teachers.

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However, an important implication here is the extent of freedom of expression that should be given to students. On the school level, insensitive issues and remarks could stir dissatisfaction to other students. On the blogosphere level, the issue of slanderous blogs and comments have always been debated among legal professionals and bloggers. Precedent cases of Jeff Ooi and Ahiruddin Attan, who are sued by a Malaysian English daily, New Straits Times in 2008 (Pauline Puah, 2008), showed that bloggers could not escape from facing defamation law. Students need to be aware of the possibilities of discipline and legal consequences if the blog content is deemed as inappropriate by the authorities.

4.2.3 Reaching more readers

Blogging transcended limits of accessibility, hence widen up the scope of readers. Initially, they were shy to let others to read their efforts. After a few sessions, they gradually felt comfortable to let others to access their writing. It encouraged them to keep blogging in their attempts to have more readers reading their blog. The claim was also supported by the questionnaire which indicated that 36.7% and 43.3% of the participants strongly agreed and agreed respectively that reaching more readers motivated them to blog. Transcripts of the interviews below revealed the feelings of the participants:

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> Feel excited, feel that I cannot wait any longer to see my blog. [*Rasa excited, rasa macam tak sabar la untuk membuka blog tu.*]
>
> [Participant 03]

> At the beginning I was scared, but after some time, I feel confident, feel like doing it again. It's fun. [*Masa mula-mula segan juga tapi dah lama-lama rasa yakin, rasa nak buat lagi. Seronok sangat.*]
>
> [Participant 12]

The above finding corresponds with Baggetun and Wasson (2006) who suggest that by enabling students to reach for more readers, the ideas presented will be widely read and acknowledged by others. They hoped that readers would read and acknowledge the ideas presented. Therefore, writing for readers motivated them because it enabled them to reach to more people without any boundaries. Not only their voices could be heard, but also they could hear the voices of their readers. The implication here is that students would be more conscious of their work (Chuang Hsueh-Hua, 2008a) because the presence of readers means public presentation of their work.

4.3 Research question 1b: How do students perceive the role of comments in blogging?

Although 36.7 % and 43.3% of the surveyed participants strongly agreed and agreed that they left comment when they blog, there are 40.6% blog posts which did not

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receive comment from their peers. The remaining 111 blog posts received at least 1 or more comment. The overview of the use of comments is summarised in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6 The amount of comment received by the blog entry

Amount of comment	Number of blog entry	Percentage (%)
0	76	40.4
1	47	25.1
2	25	13.4
3	16	8.6
4	9	4.8
5	4	2.1
6	5	2.7
7	2	1.1
8	3	1.6
10	1	0.5

This discouraging finding is consistent with Chuang Hsueh-Hua (2008b) that students seldom utilised comments. The possible explanation of this phenomenon could be that participants with lower proficiency in English were afraid to comment blog entries posted by participants with better proficiency. Nonetheless, participants in this study concurred that providing and receiving comments were beneficial for them. The data showed that 41.4% and 44.8% of them strongly agreed and agreed that it was useful to provide comments to others. Two major themes emerged from the data in investigating the role of comments in blogging. First, students perceive comment as peer review. Second, students perceive comments as motivator.

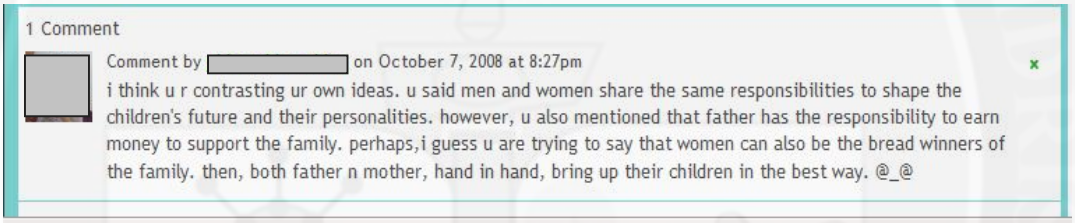
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4.3.1 Comment as peer review

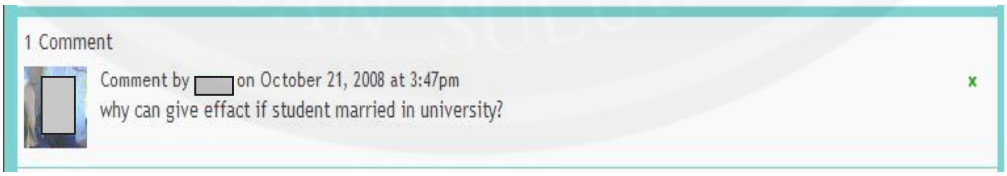
When participants, also as readers of the blog commented on others' blog, they reviewed the ideas by examining the consistency of ideas, clarifying ideas and expressed their agreement or disagreement of the ideas by adding information. Participant voiced out any contradiction of ideas found. This could be found in a comment by Participant 24

Figure 4.4 Comment by Participant 24



When they found vague ideas, they commented for clarification. Some participants even suggested possible meanings to assist them. The following comments are some of the examples:

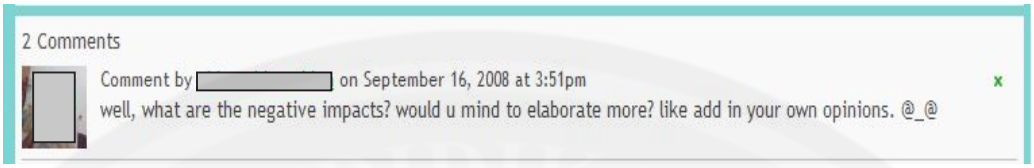
Figure 4.5 Comment by Participant 02



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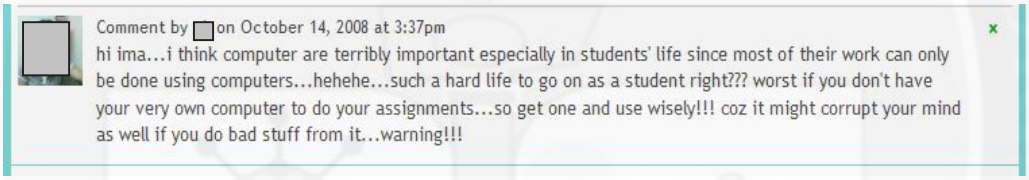
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Figure 4.6 Comment by Participant 24



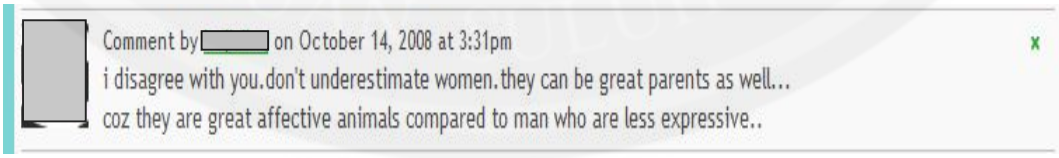
When readers accepted or rejected the ideas presented, they justified their stance. Figure 4.4 shows the an example of comment in expressing agreement

Figure 4.7 Comment by Participant 19



Similarly, in showing disagreement on whether men are as good as women as parents, Participant 23 provided her justification as shown is Figure 4.5 Comment by Participant 23.

Figure 4.8 Comment by Participant 23



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Participants responded positively towards negative comments given by their peers. Majority (70.0%) of the surveyed participants strongly agreed and agreed that receiving comments in blogging was better than in classroom. They either defended their ideas or accept others disagreement towards their ideas. In the interview, Participant 15 made a statement that she made comparison between her ideas and the challenge from others to get a better perspective of the topics. From there, she would decide if her thoughts would still be applicable. Table 4.6 summarises the evidence from the self assessment rubric on how the participants defended their ideas.

Table 4.7 Defending own ideas

Participant	Defending own ideas
07	support points
28	explain what the blog really meant
24	make the points clearer to firm opinion

Apart from defending their ideas, participants also showed that they could accept others' comment in a positive way. Some of the participants' responses are summarised in Table 4.7.

Table 4.8 Accepting others' comments

Participant	Accepting others' comments
14	it can improve my writing skill. Respect the comment
20	take into deep consideration
19	I don't see what they see and they don't see what I see

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These findings conjecture previous research (Arani, 2005; Pinkman, 2005; Brady, 2005; Flatley, 2005; Baggetun & Wasson, 2006; Chen & Bonk, 2008; Chuang Hsueh-Hua, 2008b) that students used blog to gather feedback, use comments as suggestions for self-editing and share ideas from their peers. The role of comment as peer review in agreeing, disagreeing, examining the consistency of ideas and asking for clarification further elaborates how that comment helps in scaffolding ideas as claimed by Ferdig and Trammell (2004).

The finding on examining the consistency of ideas has not been previously described. One possible explanation is that participants were provided a guideline on providing comment to be referred. The guideline which suggested the participants to comment on clarity, opinion, voice, organisation and mechanics provided them some insights on how they could provide critical comments to their peers.

However, these findings contradict with Ellison and Wu (2008) and Ducate and Lomicka (2008) which reported that students could not provide useful feedback. They also revealed that some students provided comments that could make others unhappy because proper guidance on providing comment was not taught to them. The current study did not demonstrate this phenomenon. One possible explanation is that it has already been addressed by providing participants a guideline to provide comments. Some participants also showed empathy when providing comments, as described by Participant 21 that, "...as long as they know the things that they have to

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be aware of, concern about something, just like I said, other people's sensitivity right".

4.3.2 Comments as motivator

Participants also motivated other participants who showed language problems. Evidence from the blog shows that they stated the problems and informed the remedy politely as commented by Participant 24 in Figure 4.6 and Participant 29 in Figure 4.7

Figure 4.9 Comment by Participant 24

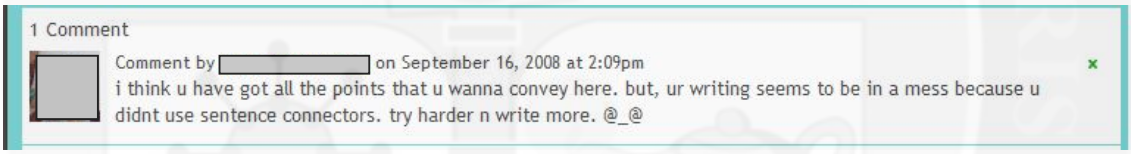
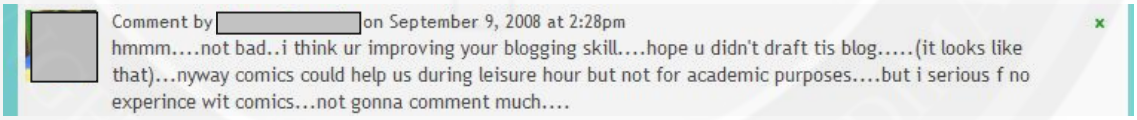


Figure 4.10 Comment by Participant 29



In the interview, Participant 05 described how she reacted to the comments received in her blog:

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> Initially, I had low self esteem, so I logged out from the blog.... I thought I should not act like that so I logged on the blog and see. I accepted it because I know my weakness. Usually I would thank them for their comments. [*Mula-mula baca alah macam rendah diri kan, ah tutup dulu....Kita akan fikir tak boleh lah, tak boleh la, buka tengok kan. Jadi saya pun terima je la sebab saya tahu lah kelemahan saya kan. Jadi saya, biasanya saya cakap thank you la sebab komen saya di sini kan, macam tu lah*.]

Evidence from the self assessment rubric also showed how the participants were motivated by the positive and negative comments that they received as summarised in Table 4.8.

Table 4.9 Comment as motivator

Participant	Comments as motivator
27	I know that others agree with what I have voiced
14	open-minded
20	take it as a part of learning experience
26	improve on writing
23	I smile to myself and pat my own shoulder as I do a good job in producing an comprehensible blog
07	happy because there are people who think the same like me outside there
24	they motivate me to write better

There are similarities between attitudes expressed by participants in the present study with those of Pinkman's study (2005). Firstly, comments motivated the participants to post and check their blog regularly. Secondly, they were motivated to learn from the comments. Finding from the survey showed that 40.0% and 43.3% of the participants strongly agreed and agreed that receiving comments helped them to think in-depth about their ideas.

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Despite the positive roles of comment indicated by the data, blog content data analysis found some negative findings. Firstly, participants showed code-switching in providing comments. Similar finding was also found in some blog entries. Table 4.9 shows some of these comments.

Table 4.10 Code-switching in comments

Participant	Comment Received
29	where got such thing, married woman can hang out la. its not the orthodox punya zaman la [sic]
27	bombastic betui [sic]
15	ehhh? you think so? how about if you read mine? tapi super negative la!! if you dare to read go ahead la k? [sic]

Secondly, not all comments were critical. Some of the comments were not responding to the blog entries posted. Table 4.10 shows some of these comments.

Table 4.11 Comments that were not critical

Participant	Comment Received
27	ecececeeh cik puteh ni
27	eh, gambar baru
29	hehehe... I was the first to comment
24	waiting 4 my comments aite? Hahaha..here I m...attention: everybody plz give more comment 2 tis little girl or else she will be demotivated o 2 giv any comments in the future!![sic]

Participant 20 expressed his disappointment in receiving comments that were not critical:

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> Sometimes I saw the comment, but I think that kind of comment is very very would say useless, in the sense that the person who commented just provided expressions such as utterances lalala, yayaya. I mean is that even a word? Is that just expressional utterances? Or what is that about?... I mean are you trying to support? Support me with your cheers or are you trying to boo me with your huhu and all sorts of stuff like that. I don't know...That's a waste of time to put, not even a word to be in the category of a comment. [sic]

This contradicts with Olander (2007) who found that students perceive even uncritical comments are very meaningful to them. One explanation could be that the students are happy because these comments serve as evidence that there someone has visited or read their blogs. The students could still feel the presence of readers, thus feel satisfied. However, some students feel disappointed when they received uncritical comments that do not carry any feedback.

This finding is important in proving that students have different expectations from their readers. If students who have high expectation in receiving critical comment receive only comments that do not review or motivate them, they could be discouraged from blogging. These students might think that the comments received do not play its role in helping them to improve and voice out ideas. However, it is not mutually exclusive for these types of comment to appear in blog, given the fact that uncritical comments are inevitable and they still have a magnitude of significance towards blogging. More importantly in addressing this issue is that teachers should affirm the importance of providing critical comments to their peers. This ensures that the critical and uncritical comments could be provided freely by the students.

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4.4 Research question 2: How do students learn independently through blogging?

Three major themes emerged from the data in exploring how students learn independently through blogging. First, blogging enables students to learn new knowledge. Second, blogging allows students to develop their own opinions. Third, blogging enhance responsibility towards own learning.

4.4.1 Learning new knowledge

Participants have learned three skills through blogging. Firstly, they learned computer literacy skills. Participants who had no experience in blogging explored the blog for the first time, not only as reader, but also as a blogger. They learned how to authorise the blog. They were able to present themselves through the personalised features. They learned how to utilise technology to disseminate their ideas to more people. As time goes by, Participant 20 claimed that a habit was formed to channel their thoughts in written words. They also learned to overcome the shortcoming of technology when they faced technical problems such as no access to Internet or timed-out if the page was left unattended for some time. As Participant 15 explained:

> So if I have some idea in my head and I want to and I don't get the access, I can't do the blogging... I just write down my ideas. I will just write down then when I have the access I will do the blogging... Not frequently I don't get the access. But I think, for me, blogging don't give any problem to me. [sic]

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Although the participants of the present study were adults, this finding still echoes Glewa and Bogan (2007) who reveal that children demonstrate improvement of computer literacy skills as they tried to personalise their blog. This is an unintended but important outcome. One possible explanation is that participants in this study were generation web 2.0 who were acquainted with web 2.0 tools such as instant messaging, wikis, emails, and others.

Secondly, they learned information management skills. As soon as they received the topics, they started to search for information from many electronic and printed sources. Upon understanding the topics, they had to choose and decide which information such as quote or statistics to substantiate their ideas. As described by Participant 05:

> Actually we found lots of information when we blog. We found and produced information.I had to decide what information to include in my blog... I was independent in searching information for my blog. [*Melalui blog ni, kita banyak mencari maklumat sebenarnya. Mencari dan menghasilkan maklumat. Sebelum saya nak ah hantar apa-apa kat blog tu kan, saya banyak decide dekat mana-mana ah maklumat yang ada....saya dah berdikari untuk cari maklumat saya sendiri untuk saya letakkan kat blog saya.*]

This finding corroborates other research (Ferdig and Trammell 2004; Williams & Jacobs 2004; Priya Sharma & YingXie, 2008;) that blog could be a knowledge management tool. Participants in the present study experienced similar process

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reported in Drexler, Dawson and Ferdig (2007) in researching and managing a vast pool of information.

Participants repeatedly described how blogging assisted them to improve their language skills, particularly grammar and vocabulary. Apart from seeking assistance from friends, they looked up the dictionary for new and appropriate words to illustrate their ideas. Participant 21 said that "it's very useful when you want to write essay" specifically when she had to stress her voice in the essay. Language skills were also improved through self discovery method, when they read again the blog that they had published. Sometimes, they could detect grammatical mistakes that were not detected when they wrote it. Consequently, Participant 20 explained that he improved through self editing carried out on his published blogs. This finding further supports Ducate and Lomicka (2008) and Huffaker (2005) who advocates the use of blog to promote literacy including reading and writing skills.

Participants also explained how they improved their communication skills. Since there were participants with different levels of proficiency, they learned to overcome the language barrier to establish communication via blog amongst themselves. Participants 05 and 14 admitted that their relationship with participants who had higher level of proficiency improved after understanding each other through the blog activities.

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Participants in the present study showed attitudes that affirmed Arena and Jefferson (2008) who argue that blogging assisted students to learn the proper ways to ascertain their tone to communicate effectively through blogging. As seen in this study, participants attuned their tone to communicate with participants of varied level of English proficiency. Participants showed appreciation to students who taught and used simpler English to interact with them.

Participants also enriched their general knowledge because blogging raised their awareness and understanding on current issues. In order to assert their ideas and convince the readers, they had to know in-depth about the topics. Participant 20 claimed that the self initiated actions of finding out more about the issues provided him the desire to learn and know more in order to please his curiosity. Questionnaire indicated that 53% and 30% of the participants strongly agreed and agreed respectively that blogging improved their general knowledge. This finding seems to agree with Ducate and Lomicka (2008) who report about improvement of knowledge in target culture through blogging.

The above skills and knowledge were useful for the participants as shown in the questionnaire. 40% of the participants strongly agreed that information gained through blogging was useful for them. Another 36.7% of the participants also agreed on this item. Participant 14 also described that the skills of creating, maintaining and personalising the blog serve as an exposure in creating her personal blog in future. The findings do not affirm Chen and Bonk (2008) who conclude that superficial

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entries do not provide much input to other students to learn. Participants in the current study engaged themselves in several activities to ensure their blog entries were informative. Furthermore, these findings further elaborate the notion of distributed apprenticeship advocated by Efimova (2004) that students learn different skills and knowledge from different skilled students.

4.4.2 Developing Opinions

60% of the participants strongly agreed that blogging allowed them to develop opinions. They developed ideas in two ways as presented in Figure 4.1. The first way is a gradual process of developing ideas. Participants started with posting a short entry of a topic, mainly due to the low proficiency English and lack of ideas. When they received comments asking them questions or clarification, they answered the questions by providing more supporting details. These details further substantiated their initial ideas. They provided more explanation and example to support the ideas. As Participant 20 explains:

> When you inhabit that then you actually rehearse on your writing, rehearse on how to form words and sentences. When you accumulate all of these practices, it becomes a habit that goes on par with developing more complex and more grammatically correct sentences in blogging. So it helps you to develop sentences in that way.

The second process involved discovering new information through reading others' blog. It only gave them a general idea but also new insights and perspective on

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how a topic can be approached. Thus, they synthesized their own perspective, associating with their own belief, as discussed earlier. As indicated by the data from the questionnaire, 30% of the participants strongly agreed whereas 50% agreed that reading others' blog prompted them to find more information about the topics.

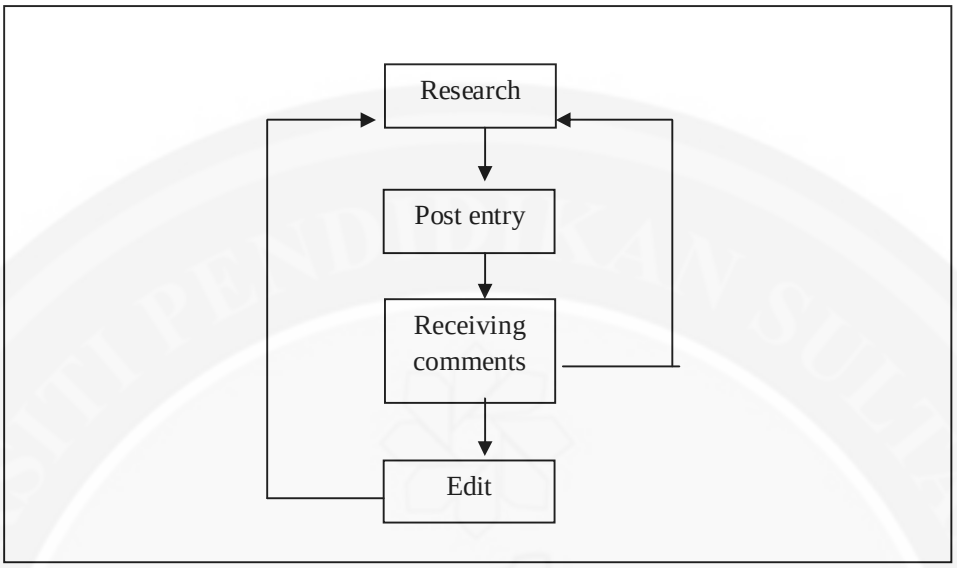
These findings verify Davidson (2008) who advocates that blog is a brainstorming tool. As shown by the participants of the current study, they were able to brainstorm new ideas when they read blog. The new ideas were then posted as comments. These attitudes also revealed that participants learned new knowledge when they read and provided comment, as proven by previous research (Bartlett-bragg, 2003; Ducate & Lomicka, 2008; Ellison & Wu, 2008).

The finding also generates a more extensive explanation as to the notion of collaborative ideas development advocated by Flatley (2005). By further elaborating the activities used in developing ideas observed by Efimova (2004), the findings of the current study suggest a cyclical process of developing ideas.

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Figure 4.11 Developing ideas through blogging



4.4.3 Responsible towards own learning

The participants felt that they were part of the learning community, thus must contribute to the learning activities via blogging. Even if they were afraid to receive negative comments, they thought that it was not appropriate to just leave the topics and comments unattended. Moreover, the sense of responsibility made them realised that they could not just do for the sake of doing it, by writing untruthful facts. They were aware that they had to be responsible in providing information for others' learning too. They felt obligated to share their knowledge with others. Thus, they were constantly self-correcting, self editing and self-initiating in finding and presenting information. As indicated by the data from the questionnaire, 50% strongly agreed that blogging helped in creating the sense of responsibility towards their own learning. 36.7% of them also agreed on this item.

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These findings further postulate Ducate and Lomicka (2008) that students are conscious of their role and contributions towards others' learning through the blog. The attitudes shown by the participants also further elaborate the notion of meta-learning skills advocated by Efimova (2004). In this study, participants demonstrated meta-learning skills by practising self-correcting, self-discovery and self-editing skills.

Reading Multiple Sources

Data from the interviews and self assessment rubrics shows that apart from reading others' blog, they also read journals, newspaper, magazines, and article in websites. Participant 05 explained that reading different sources for information helped in "making the story interesting" [*suka cerita tu menarik*] for the readers. Participant 21 said that she had to "master the topic first" in order to "write a good blog". Participant 20 also claims that reading information from multiple sources assisted him in making justification on their stance. Data from the questionnaire shows that 20% and 56.7% of the participants strongly agreed and agreed respectively that they read materials from other sources before they blog. This finding surmises other research (Murray, Hourigan & Jeanneau 2007) that students cited quotation from different reading sources.

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Learning within own pace

Apart from attending lectures and doing assignments, participants allocated time for blogging. Unlike other learning activities like discussion and lectures, blogging could be done at odd hours. Participants were not bound to accomplish any specific learning outcome, thus enabling them to learn according to their level. They might just want to write an entry of 100 words, construct sentences with new words, or reply a few comments. It was entirely their decision on what activity and how they want to accomplish it. They could spend a very long time checking for information, or just a very short time replying comments. As Participant 21 explained, "I can do what I'm good at, and what I'm quite not good at". Therefore, the data from the questionnaire also shows that 36.7% of the participants strongly agreed that they could learn at their own pace when they blog, where another 50% of them also agreed on this item. This finding further depicts Wen-Shuenn Wen (2005) who found that students acted upon their needs in learning by taking actions such as referring to dictionary. As Participant 20 explains:

> ...blogging is a very user-friendly, user friendly activity. Why don't I do it myself, I don't have to depend on others. I can be autonomous learner. I can g and find out myself, don't have to depend on others for the materials, for the information.

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4.5 Conclusion

The chapter has described the findings of the first research question which is on how the students utilised blog to voice out their ideas. It proceeds with the first sub-question which is how online publishing through blogging motivates students to blog. The findings for the second sub question which is the role of the comments in blogging are also discussed. Finally the chapters detailed the findings of the second research question which focuses on how blogging motivates students to learn independently. The following chapter concludes the study by providing a summary of the findings. It also discusses the implications and the recommendations for future research.

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CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

Previous research has revealed that Asian students are reluctant to express themselves due to socio-cultural background. Students refrained themselves to be active in voicing opinions because they have to practise obedience to teacher (Littlewood, 2003) and protect harmonious learning environment (Redding, 1990, cited by Chan, 1999). Hence, students keep their voice to themselves. These problems initiated this study which aimed to explore the use of blog as an educational tool for students to express themselves through publishing ideas and receiving comments.

Furthermore, this study also examined how students learned new knowledge and skills independently outside classroom. Blog is not just yet another ACMC tool. It has several characteristics that prevail over other ACC tools. Firstly, setting up a blog

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and publishing entries require minimal knowledge on computer programming. Secondly, the entries are placed in reverse-chronological order, which always update the readers with the latest entry. Thirdly, authors or bloggers receive comments from the public regarding their entries. Blog also allows multimedia supports such as video, song and photos. Blogger tag entries to form folksonomy which help readers to identify all blog entries with the same tag.

This final chapter begins with the summary the findings in answering the research question:

1. How does blogging help students to voice out their opinion?
    a) How does blogging motivate students to voice out opinion through blogging?
    b) How do students perceive the role of comment in blogging?
2. How do students learn independently through blogging?

Some practical implications for the students, teachers and school authority will be discussed. The chapter closes with some recommendations for future research related to blogging in educational setting.

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5.1 Summary of findings

This section summarizes the findings for each research question raised in the present study. Firstly, it describes the findings in relation to how students use blog to voice out opinions. Secondly, it elaborates how online publishing motivates students to articulate themselves. Thirdly, the role of comment in blogging is detailed. Finally, it also illustrates how blogging promotes independent learning amongst the students.

5.1.1 Using blog as a tool to voice out opinions

This investigation revealed that blog is a highly accepted by students as a tool to be used outside classroom. One of the more significant findings that emerged from the study is that blog allows students with mixed ability to articulate themselves without any fear. The analysis suggests that students' differences in personalities, language proficiency, access and opportunities are addressed through blogging. The encouraging response of the students in blogging proves that students regardless of their language proficiency could use blog to voice out their opinions. The use of blog has contributed to students' ability to voice out opinions in several ways. Firstly, it lowers the anxiety faced by students in articulating themselves. Students manage to increase their confidence through receiving comments from their peers. The non face to face environment increases their confidence in providing comments to others' ideas. They perceive blog as an informal, comfortable, relaxed tool. These characteristics help to overcome the fear and shyness to express in front of people, but

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could still reach the public. This non threatening atmosphere enables them to produce more ideas and differ from the majority.

Secondly, blogging enables students to ask and express themselves beyond the classroom. Blog is seen as a cheap yet flexible tool which could extend the learning process for an unlimited time. Students feel that they have equal opportunities to access, contribute and explore the content and the blog itself. This advantage allows them to equally share and exchange ideas with each other. It enables every student's idea to be heard once it is posted in the blog. It thus encourages interaction in the blog and also in the classroom. The conversations are initiated to discuss the ideas, the language or the design of their blogs.

Thirdly, blog is also used to enhance students' motivation. Blogging improves students' language skills and increase their knowledge. They practice language skills such as writing and vocabulary when they blog and when reading others' blog. Their peers provide language assistance if they face any language problem while articulating their ideas. The free flow of information without any boundaries or limit also allows the students to gain or learn as much as possible information and knowledge from the peers.

Finally, students also use blog to establish an active learning community. This community provides them a sense of belonging which causes them to keep updating

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the content of the blog and other features such as pictures and songs. They feel that they are part of the community, thus being passive would eventually lead this community to collapse. Therefore, they frequently visit the blog to update it. These findings strongly affirm blog as a "contemporary cultural tool" (Salen, 2007) in which students had non face to face interaction virtually. It enables students to learn when they engaged in meaningful social activities through blogging. Findings from the present study thus support the social constructivism theory.

The present study also confirms previous research (Flatley, 2005; Kavaliauskienè, Anusienè & Mažeikiene, 2006; Murray, Hourigen & Jeanneau 2007; Ducate & Lomicka, 2008) which has proven that the environment of the blog is advantageous towards ideas expression as it is informal, comfortable and non threatening. The atmosphere contributes to idea development on the individual and collective level. On the individual level, students are the sole authority to determine what and how ideas are presented and published in their blog (MacBride & Luehman, 2008). On the collective level, however, they are forced to accept comments as part of the process of idea development (Arena & Jefferson, 2008; MacBride & Luehman, 2008).

5.1.2 Motivating students to voice out opinions through blogging

Online publishing motivates students to blog in three ways. Firstly, blogging fosters self editorship amongst the students. This is another major finding in this study.

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Students experience the whole process of publishing, from drafting, reviewing, editing to publishing. Students produce only original work to post on the blog. Ideas derived from students' past experience as they associate the blog topic with their real life experience. Thus, it creates a variety of ideas as students come from diverse background. In fostering self authorship, students also assume control of the blog. They control the length, the content, language and design of the blog. The flexibility of the blog also allows them to control when to blog their topics.

Secondly, blogging motivates the students by providing them the freedom of expression. They feel free to articulate their ideas because they own a personal space to publish it. Therefore, they are not restricted to only blog about certain aspect of the topics. They could explore the issues from different perspectives without any constraint imposed upon them.

Thirdly, online publishing motivates students to blog because it enables them to reach for more readers. It creates a sense of satisfaction when others are willing to read their blog. This motivates them greatly as written assignments submitted to teachers do not provide the opportunities for the students to share their work with their peers.

These findings extended the findings of Chuang Hsueh-Hua (2008a) who found that students write, design and publish individually in blogging. The student's

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control over blogging found in the present study seems to mirror several studies (Ferdig & Trammell, 2004; Huffaker, 2004; Ducate and Lomicka, 2008). Similarly, students' eagerness in reaching for more readers through blogging also echoes previous studies (Armstrong, Berry & Lamshed, 2004; Pinkman, 2005; Baggeton & Wasson, 2006).

5.1.3 The roles of comment in blogging

The feedback, posted as comments in the blog is significant during and after the process of publishing. The finding is significant because students are empowered to have a say regarding their peers' work, which directly contribute to the learning community. Comments in blog serve two roles. Firstly comments assume the role of peer review. Comments provided by peers examine, confirm, negate and support ideas posted on the blogs. Students post comment if find any problem with the ideas such as contradiction or vague ideas. Students post their stance and thoughts if showing the confirmation and support of the ideas. Comments posted also act as argument for students who negate the ideas. In these processes, students add in new content or ideas that are not present originally in the blog entry. Students read these comments to review and edit their blog entries.

Secondly, comments also serve the role of a motivator. Students who get language assistance through comments are motivated to edit and learn the language. It encourages them to keep blogging because they are aware that their peers support

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their efforts. Students who receive positive comments are motivated to blog more in their subsequent entries. Students who receive negative comment do not feel unhappy, but treat those comments positively in enriching their learning experience.

These findings seem to substantiate numerous studies (Arani, 2005; Baggetun & Wasson, 2006; Brady, 2005; Flatley, 2005; Chen & Bonk, 2008; Chuang Hsueh-Hua, 2008a) that peer review through comments assists in self-editing of the blog entry. Comments as motivator also validates Pinkman (2005) that students comments motivate the students to check their blog regularly.

5.1.4 Promoting independent learning through blogging

Blogging promotes independent learning amongst the students in three ways. Firstly, students learn new knowledge and skills through blogging. These skills are literacy, information management, language and communication skills. Students also improve their general knowledge through blogging. These knowledge and skills are seen as beneficial for the students.

Secondly, blogging allows students to develop opinions independently. Students post an entry and expand the ideas based on the comments received. Students also read others' blogs to gain new insights on the topics before exploring their own perspective.

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Finally, blogging promotes independent learning because students who blog are responsible towards their own learning. Students read multiple resources to obtain background information and to find evidence to support their ideas. This evidence helps in convincing the readers. Students also are able to learn at their own pace through blogging as they could blog and comment according to their ability.

Similar to previous studies (Ferdig and Trammell 2004; Williams & Jacobs 2004; Priya Sharma & YingXie, 2008) blog is the present study is also found to be useful in learning certain skills. The findings also authenticate (Bartlett-bragg, 2003; Ducate & Lomicka, 2008; Ellison & Wu, 2008) that the students learn skills of developing ideas through reading, commenting and posting blog entries. The finding in this study also verifies Ducate & Lomicka (2008) that students take responsibility in contributing to their own as well as others' learning.

5.2 Implications of the study

The findings of this study have far-reaching implications to mainly three parties, namely the students, the teachers and the school authority. The public nature of blogging puts several implications and considerations for these parties to take into considerations before they embark on the use of blog in educational setting.

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5.3.1 Implications for students

The evidence of the present study suggests that student might need to spend extra time in blogging. Considering blogging is done outside classroom, students need to allocate time consistently from time to time to check and update the blog. A considerable amount of time is needed to search and read the information before they could blog the ideas derived from the reading. Time is also needed for students to read and comment others' blog. This could be burdening as student need to cope with homework, assignments and extra curricular activities. The implication here is that students need to learn and practise effective time management skills.

The findings also suggest that students depend on their peers as one of the sources; the other being they themselves; to develop ideas and improve language. This finding has important implication in developing sense of responsibility in providing other students with constructive comments. Students need to be aware of the importance of them leaving critical comments for their peers.

The present study also shows that students depend on their peers and teacher to correct their language. In order to articulate their ideas, students who do not have the knowledge on certain vocabulary and sentence structure code-switch their post with Bahasa Malaysia, a language they are more familiar with. It is important for other students and teachers to provide them the necessary language assistance so that they could learn the language to articulate ideas. However, it is impossible to have every

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student to read all the blogs. It is also uncontrollable to have students to read only certain blogs. Thus, it is difficult to make sure that all students would get the language assistance that they hope for. This issue must be taken into consideration because it might discourage students gradually to blog as they do not receive proper assistance. An implication for this is creating students' awareness and responsibility to provide language assistance through comments.

One issue that arises from this study is the readiness and ability of the students to provide language assistance to their peers. The mixed ability of a class raises the question of students' ability to provide proper language correction to their peers. Students who might have good command of the language but they could be reluctant to help. Conversely, students who are willing to help might not have the proficiency to do so. It will not bring any benefit to the peers if the language assistance is also incorrect. However, students who receive the assistance might not know. It creates a dilemma for these two groups of student; those who are receiving assistance and those who are providing assistance.

5.3.2 Implications for course instructors

The positive response shown in this study, teachers need to consider if the blog should be built within the institutional network or by using free blog software provider. Teachers have to consider two issues. Firstly, teachers need to determine how to integrate the blog into existing curriculum. The purpose of the blog must be clear,

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regardless of its use as portfolio, reflective journals or discussion. Teachers must decide if the blog would be use throughout the semester or just for a few topics. Secondly, teachers need to determine how the blogs should be maintained after the end of the subject. Students might keep blogging or might just stop blogging after the end of the subject. Teachers should encourage students to keep blogging for their own benefits. Blogs created within institutional network might be deleted after the end of the course. Therefore teachers should consider creating blogs by using the free software providers.

However, creating blog by using these providers means that public would be able to access students' blog. It would be difficult for teachers to monitor and moderate the blogs because the public might simply leave negative and uncritical comments with inappropriate words. It could discourage students to continue blogging if this happens.

Considering the importance of comments, teachers might need to students to compulsorily read and leave comments. One way to implement that is to assign a few students to form peer group. Students in the group would be responsible to read and comment on each others' blog. Students could still read and comment blogs which belong to students of different group.

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Teachers might also consider the needs to educate students the way of providing comment and correcting language errors. However, if blog is not used in language subjects, teachers need to decide if comment on language is necessary. The guideline to provide comments used in the current study could be a reference for teachers.

Another implication arise from this study is the acceptance of netspeak. In language classroom, netspeak is not appropriate considering the purpose of the blog as a tool to practice language. In other subjects, teachers should decide if netspeak is allowed.

5.3.3 Implications for educational institutions

The result of the study supports the idea of freedom of expression in blogging. However, an important implication here is the extent of freedom of expression that should be given to students. On the school level, insensitive issues and remarks could stir dissatisfaction to other students. The question of if school should be responsible to monitor blog created within the institutional network or created by teachers to use for instructional purposes involving students of the school.

School authority might consider establishing codes of ethics for blogging. This code could serve as the guideline for teachers and students in determining the extent

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of freedom that should be given to them. It is the responsibility of the school authority to ensure that teachers who incorporate blog in teaching and learning should uphold and follow strictly these codes. Furthermore, the school authority has to ensure that teachers teach their students about these codes of ethic.

The study also raises another issue about the knowledge on blog of these teachers who are eager to incorporate blog in teaching and learning process. These teachers should be given training on creating and maintaining blogs. Training should emphasize on the pedagogical and technological knowledge on incorporating blog in teaching and learning. Supplementary to training, school authority must provide technical support to help teachers in moderating the blogs even though it is relatively easy to maintain a blog, compared to other ACMC tools.

5.3 Recommendations for future studies

Considering that the use of blog in educational setting and this study was an exploratory study, several avenues could be institute in future research. It is suggested that future research could embark on the transfer of learning from blogging to class work or assignment. The present study has substantial evidence to claim that students learn new knowledge and skills through blogging. However, it was not within the scope of this study to examine the extent of these newly learned knowledge and skills could be used to fulfil the work and assignment required by the syllabus. Qualitative research which analyse students' work could provide evidence to elaborate the

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findings in this study. Quantitative research to examine the relationship of blog content and assignment content could also provide statistical evidence to support this claim.

Further research might also investigate cross-national blogging involving students from different countries. As recorded earlier that blog is a "contemporary cultural tool", blogging research involving students from different cultural background might yield more findings in determining how students voice out their ideas to other students' of different background. This are is worth studying as students from different cultural background would bring in different knowledge that is unique in their country. It is beneficial for language subjects if the students could interact with the native speakers of the target language via blogging. It allows students to experience the sociolinguistics difference among two communities.

Considerably more research should also be done to investigate blogging in educational setting from the teacher's perspective. Teacher as the moderator of all the students' blogs involves a lot of effort and hardship. Area of research could be the teacher's position in educational blogging, problems encountered and how teacher determines the blogging participation from the aspects of students' frequency of blogging, frequency of providing comment and the length of the blogs

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Finally it is suggested that future researchers should investigate the quality of comments provided to their peers and the extent these comments are accepted and applied in editing blog posts. Although the current study found that comments work significantly well as peer review and motivator, evidence on the changes done according to the comments are not within the scope of the study.

5.4 Concluding remarks

This study has given me insights in several aspects as the researcher and the instructor of a language course. As a researcher, one aspect that I learned while conducting this project was the importance of having a good rapport with the participants of the study. The researcher may have the flawless research design and excellent instruments to study an issue, but all these could not be utilized fully if the participants are not willing to co-operate with the researcher. This is especially true when the researcher is trying to explore a new area of study which is not being practiced in the site of the study. This project was implemented based on voluntarily participation. It was not part of their course structure. Furthermore, no incentive was provided to the participants. In order to sustain the participants' interest and willingness to continue participating in the project, having a good rapport with them is vital.

Secondly, it is important to explore and master the tool before trying it with the participants. One way to achieve this is getting involved with the tool in any possible way. Prior to this project, the researcher join other Ning networks and read others'

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blog to see how other learning communities are using the tool for educational or even other purposes.

As the language instructor, it is important to demonstrate the activities before the students embark on it. The instructor should guide them step by step. Although many students are comfortable with using other tools such as e-mails, social networking sites and instant messenger, it is best not to assume that the students are able to do all the activities without demonstrating to them. Every activity should be demonstrated to ensure that the students do not face technical problem in completing the task.

The instructor needs to spend more time monitoring and planning the learning through blogs. Due to the nature of online learning that is done outside the classroom, the instructor is not able to observe the students' learning directly. Rather, their learning is reflected in the activities done using the blog. Thus, the instructor needs to plan properly in order to ensure that quality learning is happening in the blog.

This is a meaningful experience to me both as a researcher and a language instructor. These insights would be able to help me to research and teach better in future.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Guidelines to Provide Comment on Blog Entry

1. Do you understand the ideas?
2. Are the ideas clear?
3. Are the ideas relevant to the topic?
4. Are the ideas significant to the topic?
5. Are the ideas consistent?
6. Which idea(s) do you agree with? Why?
7. Which idea(s) do you disagree with? Why?
8. Are the ideas supported by evidence?
9. Is the article hyperlinked? If yes, do the hyperlinks work?
10. Is the article bias or neutral?
11. Is the focus maintained throughout the article?
12. Is the writing fluent and cohesive?
13. Does the writer engage the reader in a conversational tone?
14. Does the article provide an insightful and original explanation about the topic?

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Appendix B: Questionnaire

Expressing Opinions through Blog: Ideas of the ESL Students

Instruction: This questionnaire consists of Part A and Part B. Please fill in your personal information in Part A. For Part B, please circle the number that reflects your answer to the item according to the scale.

Part A

Name (optional) :.....

Course: .....

Faculty: .....

Semester: .....

Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female

MUET result: ☐ Band 1 ☐ Band 2 ☐ Band 3
☐ Band 4 ☐ Band 5 ☐ Band 6 ☐ Not taken

Education: ☐ STPM ☐ Matriculation ☐ SPM
☐ Diploma ☐ Certificate

Computer skills: ☐ Beginner ☐ Intermediate ☐ Advanced

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Part B

Circle your answer according to the Likert scale.

(1= Strongly agree, 2= Agree, 3= Disagree, 4=Strongly disagree)

Number	Item	Scale			
1	Publishing my ideas motivates me to blog.	4	3	2	1
2	Reaching more readers motivates me to blog.	4	3	2	1
3	Being able to express my ideas motivates me to blog.	4	3	2	1
4	Blogging helps me to overcome the fear to express my ideas.	4	3	2	1
5	Expressing ideas through blogging is better than in classroom.	4	3	2	1
6	I learn when I read others' blog.	4	3	2	1
7	It is useful to provide comment to others	4	3	2	1
8	Receiving comments helps me to think in-depth about my ideas.	4	3	2	1
9	I read other materials from other sources before I blog.	4	3	2	1
10	Reading others' blog prompt me to find for more information regarding the issues.	4	3	2	1
11	Information gained through blogging is useful for me.	4	3	2	1
12	I can learn at my own pace when I blog.	4	3	2	1
13	Blogging allows me to participate actively in the course	4	3	2	1
14	My voice is heard through blogging.	4	3	2	1
15	Blogging allows interaction with other students.	4	3	2	1
16	Blogging is comfortable because it is less formal.	4	3	2	1
17	I feel the sense of authenticity when I blog.	4	3	2	1
18	Blogging is a non-threatening environment to express ideas.	4	3	2	1
19	Blogging allows me to develop opinions.	4	3	2	1

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20	I have freedom to write anything when I blog.	4	3	2	1
21	Blog is easy to use	4	3	2	1
22	Blogging improves my confidence in expressing my ideas.	4	3	2	1
23	The features are important to me in blogging.	4	3	2	1
24	I leave comment when I read others' blog.	4	3	2	1
25	Receiving comment in blog is better than in classroom.	4	3	2	1
26	Blogging improves my general knowledge	4	3	2	1
27	Blogging helps me to be responsible towards my own learning.	4	3	2	1

Thank you for your participation.

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Appendix C: Interview Questions

1. General ideas on blogging

-Have you heard of blogging before?

-Do you have any experience in blogging?

- How do you feel when you were asked to blog?

-How do you feel after trying several sessions?

2. What do you think about publishing your ideas on the blog?

-Does expressing your ideas through blogging motivate you to blog?

-What do you think about having more readers to read your writing?

-How does blogging affect your motivation to write?

- How expressing ideas on blog is different from other channel or method?

- Is expressing ideas through blogging better than in classroom?

- If yes, why expressing ideas through blogging is better than in classroom?

-If no, why expressing ideas in classroom is better than through blogging?

-Does blogging help in overcoming the fear to express ideas?

-If yes, how does blogging help in overcoming the fear to express ideas?

-If no, why blogging does not help in overcoming the fear to express ideas?

- Does blogging provide more freedom to express ideas?

-How does that freedom motivate you to blog?

-Does blogging allow your voice to be heard?

-If yes, how does blogging allow your voice to be heard?

- How does blogging allow you to participate actively in the course?

-How does the less formal environment of blogging help you to express ideas?

-How does the non-threatening environment of blogging help you to express ideas?

-How does the sense of authenticity in blogging affect you to express your ideas?

-How does blogging help you in developing opinions?

- How does the ease of use motivate you to blog?

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-How does blogging improve your confidence in expressing ideas?

-Why are the features important to you?

3. How do you feel about the role of comment in expressing ideas through blog?

a) Providing comment

-How frequent do you provide comment on others' blog?

-Why are the benefits of providing comment?

-How useful is providing comment on others' blog?

- What are the reasons that affect you to not provide any comment to certain blog?

-Why are the comments in one or two sentences only?

-Do you follow the guidelines provided in providing comment?

-If yes, do you think the guidelines are helpful?

-If no, why do you refuse to use the guidelines?

b) Receiving comments

- Are you satisfied with the number of comments that you have received?

-What are your suggestions to improve the number of comments?

-What kind of comments do you receive?

-Are the comments useful to you?

-How do you respond to negative comments?

-How do you respond to positive comments?

-Is receiving comment through blogging better than in classroom?

-If yes, why is receiving comment through blogging better than in classroom?

-If no, why isn't receiving comment through blogging better than in classroom?

4. How does expressing ideas through blogging help in learning independently?

-How does blogging help to learn?

-What do you learn when you blog?

-How does blogging improve your general knowledge?

-How useful is the knowledge that you gained through blogging?

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-How does blogging motivate you to read materials from other sources?

-How does blogging help you to learn at your own pace?

-How does blogging help you to be responsible towards your own learning?

-How does blogging provide opportunities and/or for learning independently?

-How does blogging encourage students to initiate and participate actively in learning?

-How does blogging empower students?

-How does blogging provide the desire to learn?

-How does blogging provide a supportive environment for learning?

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Appendix D: Self Assessment Rubric

Expressing Opinions through Blog: Ideas of the ESL Students

Name:

Topic:

Date:

Items	Note
Do you understand the topic?	
Do you like this topic? Why?	
How do you feel when you blog about this topic?	
How many comments do you receive for this article?	
Are you satisfied with the number of comments given to you?	
Do you understand the comments posted to you?	

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How do you response to the positive comments?	
How do you response to the negative comments?	
Do you feel stressful when you read the negative comments? Why?	
Do you feel happy when you read the positive comments? Why?	
Do you read other materials about this topic before you blog? If yes, what are the materials?	
Do you face any problem in posting the entry?	

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Appendix E: Participant Consent Form

I hereby consent to be the participant in the research entitled 'Expressing Opinions through Blog: Ideas of the ESL Students'. I understand that this research will explore the potential use of blog to express ideas by university students.

I understand that this research will be conducted by Yoon Sook Jhee, with the supervision of Dr Abdul Ghani Bin Abu and Dr Raja Nor Safinas Binti Raja Harun.

The nature and general purpose of the research procedure and the known risks involved have been explained to me by Yoon Sook Jhee. I have been informed that this study will take eight (8) weeks. This study will include the participation in a blog project. At the end of the research, I will answer a questionnaire. The content my blog will be analysed. Interviews will also be conducted at the end of the research.

The investigator is authorized to proceed on the understanding that I may terminate my service as a subject at any time I so desire.

I understand the known risks are emotional and psychological distress. I understand also that it is not possible to identify all potential risks in a research procedure, and I believe that reasonable safeguards have been taken to minimize both the known and unknown risks.

I understand that participation in research may involve a loss of privacy; however, the records will be handled as confidentially as possible. Only the researcher and the supervisors will have the access to the records. I understand that my identity will not be used in any reports or publications that may result from this study.

I understand that I will not benefit directly from my participation in this study. There will be no cost to me as a result of taking part in this study. I understand that there will be no payment to me as a result of taking part in this study.

Witness:..... Signed:.....

(Participant)

Date: .....

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