

Blogging and EFL Writing: What Does the Research Tell Us?

THESIS

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Arts in the
Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

Hee Young Lim

Graduate Program in Education Teaching & Learning

The Ohio State University

2017

Thesis Committee:

Professor Youngjoo Yi, Advisor

Professor Alan Hirvela

Copyrighted by

Hee Young Lim

2017

Abstract

This thesis attempts to synthesize current empirical studies on using blogging writing in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing classes. Even though there has been an increasing amount of research on the use of blogging in writing instruction, little is known about how language learners use blogging for improving writing skills and how they experience the L2 writing process in blogs, especially inside and outside the EFL classroom. The purpose of this thesis is to investigate and analyze how blogging contributes to the learning of L2 writing. This study synthesizes twenty peer-reviewed empirical studies, published between 2005 and 2016.

This review begins with an analysis of different types of blogs used for EFL learners. This is followed by an investigation of purposes and topics that learners engage in while using blogging, and the relationship between the two. The article then turns to examining advantages and challenges of using blogging writing inside and outside EFL classrooms. The twenty empirical studies show that EFL learners use certain types of blogs for achieving their primary goal, improving writing in English. While blogging in diverse topics, such as current social issues and learners' daily lives, learners interact with others and this motivates them to write more meaningful and high-quality postings for audiences. Most research shows that the use of blogging writing improves EFL learners' writing ability. Learners can be motivated to write, manage the anxiety of writing in English, and interact with others in blogging writing. Finally, implications for

research and teaching will be provided for future researchers to consider for studying blogging writing for EFL learners.

Acknowledgments

The final version of this thesis presented here owes much of its existence to a variety of people who have helped and encouraged me throughout the whole academic career. First and foremost, I want to thank my advisor, Dr. Youngjoo Yi, who has suggested and criticized with her profound knowledge. Her patience and kindness are greatly appreciated. I would like to extend my appreciation to my committee member, Dr. Hirvela.

To all my friends who have listened to me alternately complain or prattle on excitedly about this project. I am thankful for your understanding.

Last may thank would go to very close people who have helped me immeasurably, both emotionally and practically, in the completion of this thesis. My parents, Hunwook Lim and Younghee Choi, have only grown more supportive as I progress through my education, encouraging me even when I did not have confidence in myself. Likewise, I am lucky to have brothers, Yonghyun and Donghyun, who have been tolerating late-night and early-morning eruptions of frustration and depression with listening to me and giving me confidence. You are my family and best-friends ever.

Vita

February 2007 Daegu Namsan High
2012 B.A. American Studies and English
Literature, Keimyung University
2014 to present M.A. Education of Teaching and Learning,
The Ohio State University

Fields of Study

Major Field: Education Teaching & Learning

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgments.....	iv
Vita.....	v
List of Tables	vii
List of Figure.....	viii
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: Thematic synthesis	8
Chapter 3: Method	11
Chapter 4: Findings.....	16
Chapter 5: Discussion & Conclusion.....	44
References.....	49

List of Tables

Table 1. Distribution of the Empirical studies in this Thesis.....	13
Table 2. Different Blog platforms in the Empirical studies.....	19
Table 3. Topics EFL Learners Blog about in the Empirical studies.....	24

List of Figure

Figure 1. Types of blogs in the empirical studies.....	18
--	----

Chapter 1: Introduction

The growing popularity of computers and the Internet contributes to the integrated teaching and learning environment of the Web 2.0 era. Through technology-mediated processes, students can now more easily engage in their learning, rather than being passive learners, just receiving from reading about target language and culture in textbooks or listening about them from teachers. Indeed, this issue is fundamentally important for foreign language learners in their countries. According to Wang & Vasquez (2012), this is because of the “paradigm shift: it is moving from a cognitive orientation to a social orientation, from classroom contexts to naturalistic setting, from an acquisition metaphor to a participation metaphor, and from L2 learning to L2 use” (p. 413). Second language learning research has been experiencing this movement in these areas since the end of the 20th century.

In addition, this shift in second language acquisition research seems in the same line with many of the fundamental features of Web 2.0 technology, for example, communication, collaboration, and information sharing. Even though there is diverse definition of Web 2.0 from different researchers and scholars, the most popular definition of Web 2.0 is offered by Wikipedia, a platform which itself is supported by Web 2.0 technology. Wikipedia represents “A Web 2.0 site may allow users to interact and collaborate with each other in a social media dialogue as creators or user-generated

content in a virtual community, in contrast to the first generation of Web 1.0-era websites where people were limited to the passive viewing of content. Examples of Web 2.0 include social networking sites and social media sites (e.g., Facebook), blogs, wikis, folksonomies (“tagging” of websites and links), video sharing sites (e.g., YouTube), hosted services, Web applications (“apps”), collaborative consumption platforms, and mashup applications, that allow users to blend the digital audio from multiple songs together to create new music,” (Wikipedia entry on September 3, 2016, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_2.0). Web 2.0 technologies provide language learners the potential for activating the attributes of current L2 learning.

Over the decades, research on writing for English Language Learners (ELLs) has flourished while it explores online writing in the Web 2.0 era. Internet applications offer diverse opportunities for people to interplay within target language exposure and production, improve learning attitudes (e.g., motivation enhancement and anxiety reduction), and encourage learners to communicate in multiple and mutual ways especially in written form (Sun, 2010). The text-based Computer-mediated communication (CMC), such as email, online discussion forums, online chat rooms, and other texts on the Internet, allows English language learners to engage in meaningful communication in the target language and eventually leads to effective language learning. It enhances a learner-centered approach, allowing learners to take control of their own learning process.

A whole new set of real-world target tasks has been created by technology itself. Technology can play its role for engaging in the learning process as a computer-mediated

platform where interaction both within and beyond the classroom takes place among teachers and students and where language learning activities are observable. These features are what distinguish blogs from other types of websites. More specifically, a blog is constructed by people in order to share a mutual interest with a view to setting objectives, regulations, and formats collaboratively. (Godwin-Jones, 2003; Richardson, 2010).

As Wang and Vásquez (2012) state, among diverse online writing tools, blogging (named also weblog and web logs) is one of the most widely investigated in the Web 2.0 era. Blogs have fundamentally changed the way people use and interact on the Internet, by changing users from consumers to contributors and creators of information (Du & Wagner, 2007). People can easily create and update blogs that enable authors with no technical knowledge of HTML to become instant publishers on the Internet. Blogs encourage people to develop collective intelligence by presenting readers with diverse ideas, questions, and links (Richardson, 2010; Warlick, 2005). Blogs are quite different from traditional Web sites that feature hyperlinks and reflect the Web sites developers' content-related priorities and usually contain a limited scope of content.

Blogs have different features as an educational tool from other online writing tools, including forums, wikis and discussion boards. In blogs, writers have authority to control and own their blogs. They show their identities as the author, standing in the center of the blog while organizing posts with specific topics or issues that they are interested in. Their strong personal editorship and public access to content encourage users to engage in meaningful negotiation and reflection while they share, create, and

interact in a virtual space to generate knowledge through writing and commenting on each other's posts (Richardson, 2010; Warlick, 2005). Moreover, the effective use of blogs helps learners to broaden their learning opportunities, bringing their learning process beyond the classroom, and develop individual and critical voices in learning.

Some researchers have investigated the advantages of using blogs in foreign language classroom to develop writing skills (e.g., Armstrong & Retterer, 2008; Campbell, 2003; Lee, 2010; Noytim, 2010; Sun, 2009), promote the development of a L2 writing community (Sollars, 2007), improve a sense of voice (Rezaee & Oladi, 2008), and encourage to build critical and synthesizing skills (Lee, 2010; Mynard, 2007; Noytim, 2010). Also, bloggers are able to collect their learning experiences (Noytim, 2010), and blogs serve as online portfolios to archive learning process and improvement.

It is worth noting the position of writing in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching. There are three features of writing in EFL settings in order to understand my thesis: form-focused instruction; examination culture; and an imbalance of the reality and the ideality in EFL language classes. According to Lee (2013), in EFL settings, writing instruction is designed to mainly reinforce language structures, grammar features, and vocabulary in order to focus on formal aspects of language. This has contributed to the preponderance of a form-focused and product approach to writing, where written accuracy is given greater emphasis than fluency. Based on the Grammar translation method, English language classes mainly focus on vocabulary and grammar to translate and interpret sentences rather than to understand the meaning of them. It seems students should be exposed to learning of

grammar and English language itself, with less attention paid to the discourse feature of writing (Lee, 1998). In where the examination culture prevails, “writing is tested rather than taught” (Lee, 2004, p. 288), even though educators in EFL contexts realize that learners can have ample opportunities to demonstrate their creativity, originality, and independent thinking through writing. In order to evaluate students’ English language learning, on a test paper, it is all about vocabulary and grammar.

Lastly, the current educational trend has changed the traditional focus on grammar and vocabulary to speaking and writing abilities based on the social constructivism approach. An increasing number of English language classes have been applied to the new trend, which is an approach that learners acquire language through interaction with others, and learners are aware of the meaning and the use of language features, and the form together. It means there is a balance of focusing on all three features, including the meaning, the use, and the form to use the target language in authentic communication with others. However, when it comes to evaluation, form-focused culture remains on test papers because it is hard to change the evaluation method. This leads to an imbalance between Focus on Form instruction and Focus on Forms examination, which is the reality in the EFL language classes.

As many modes of writing, blogging can be very significant in learning to writing in L2, because blogging tasks bring many benefits of teaching writing in blogs: namely, providing learning opportunities in interactive environments, fostering language learners’

written communication with authentic audiences (Chen & Brown, 2012), providing them with a number of authentic materials. Additionally, it encourages participants' autonomous monitoring of their own writing (Sun, 2010). It is not surprising that instructors are finding blogs as another means of engaging students in subject matter. Educators are using blogs in many different ways ranging from distributing syllabi, digital portfolios, group assignments, collaborative writing, and digital newspapers.

Problem Statement

However, although blogs may seem at this point to be a great asset to EFL writing education, some researchers point out that there are challenges of using blogs in the EFL class: low blogging frequency (Lin, 2014); maintaining the effectiveness of peer feedback matters (Zhang, Song, Shen, & Huang, 2014); teachers' workload (Lin, Lin, & Hsu, 2011; Zhang, Song, Shen, & Huang, 2014). Despite the increasing amount of research on online writing instruction, little is known about the implementation of writing in blogs, especially inside and outside the EFL classroom. Research has produced mixed results and understanding of using blogs in EFL class due to the fact that researchers have concentrated on a number of different components such as, participants, goals of the writing course, blog platform, statistical test methods and analyses of test results and whether a testing approach is product-oriented. This makes educators and other researchers confused to understand and implement using blogs in EFL class. Some studies have confirmed that blogs improve EFL learners' attitudes about writing and lead to increased revisions and improve products (Sun, 2010; Sun & Chang, 2012; Vurdein, 2013). Others have

discovered little differences between pen-paper writing and computer writing, or even blogging writing inhibited learners' perception of English writing (Lin, 2014). Blogging and its effects on EFL learners are still not completely understood. Thus, I decided to conduct a thematic synthesis on EFL students' writing learning process in blogs.

This thesis aims to explore and analyze how blogging contributes to the learning L2 writing in and out of EFL classrooms. Meanwhile, potential theoretical foundations of using blogs as a learning English platform can be uncovered to improve language education atmosphere in online writing. The following research questions have guided this thematic synthesis research paper:

1. What types of blogs are used inside and outside EFL classes?
2. What are the purposes for EFL learners to use blogs inside and outside school?
3. What kinds of topics do EFL learners blog about?
4. What are the benefits of blogging to EFL learners? What aspects of blogging seem to be the most influential on L2 writing development?
5. What challenges EFL learners face when they blog?

In the following sections, I will explain the introduction of a thematic synthesis, which is similar to, yet varies from a narrative literature review. In the next chapter, I will report findings that show how EFL learners use blogs to enhance their language writing in L2. In chapter 4, I will address the pedagogical implications in order to encourage EFL teachers to design and employ blogging writing practices in their own classroom. I conclude with a discussion of the results and ideas for further research.

Chapter 2: Thematic Synthesis

This chapter covers a brief summary of what a thematic synthesis is, including characteristics, and its potential benefits, referring to Duff, Norris and Ortega's paper. I will discuss why I chose the synthesis writing for my MA thesis paper and the necessity of synthesizing published research paper in computer-mediated EFL writing.

In order to help readers, I would like to introduce thematic synthesis through a comparison with a narrative literature review, which is a more format. A good review of the literature entails the creative effort from every researcher. Both graduate students and dissertators know that they learn a lot, looking through the history of their interest field. Unlike a traditional reviewing approach, syntheses provide a specific set of methods or strategies for reviewing. This makes systematic research syntheses higher quality comparing to traditional ones which have more mysterious art than most other research genres.

According to Duff, Norris and Ortega (2007), there are three defining characteristics of systematic research syntheses. For one, study selection is based on explainable and explicit purpose at the outset of the review process. Second, a synthesis focuses on the data reported which contains the evidence displayed in each study. Clearly, results, effect sizes, and confidence intervals are what he or she places emphasis

on as key analytical tools. Third, diverse types of coding book or protocol are frequently used in order to explain the main points thoroughly in each study and across all studies.

Main elements that cause a systematic review to have different products are the purposes of synthesizing and the features of the research domain. Study sampling is typically purposive and selective in synthesis of qualitative research. In contrast, in quantitative research syntheses, the selection of studies aims to be exhaustive or representative.

Investigating differentiations can be achieved only through syntheses not in any single study. These features allow research synthesis to have potential benefits to produce newly uncovered theoretical knowledge not found in any single primary study. Moreover, synthesis can generate foundations that stimulate future analysis of results by showing gaps, weaknesses, and needs in a given domain that narrative literature reviews cannot. Even though research synthesis has many potential benefits, it also involves certain limitations. Synthesists should be aware of pitfalls hidden in the approach. When doing meta-analysis and other types of quantitatively oriented synthesis, technicism might be the most serious pitfall, which is the overemphasis on manipulating data via new meta-analytic techniques to the detriment of theoretical and conceptual depth.

Research synthesis as a methodological approach provides exemplary approximations to knowledge about research questions given the relevant field. In some domains, synthesis has been covering a broadening of issues and philosophical perspectives to explore increasingly diverse types of primary research. Experts in applied linguistics, too, have experienced degrees that will soon generate novel and creative

interpretations of a systematic review. In this field, some researchers have investigated their valuable works through an increasing variety of quantitative and qualitative or mixed methodologies. Examples can be language learning, teaching language methods, language motivation and even interaction and language learning.

In the field of applied linguistics, researchers should be encouraged to “think and act synthesically”, and adopt “a commitment to intelligible and respectful communication: between the past and present studies, across theory and research and practice divides” (Norris & Ortega, 2006b, p. 36).

Chapter 3: Method

This thesis attempts to follow the procedures provided by Norris and Ortega (2006, 2007) called “the characteristics of systematic research synthesis.” I framed the following research questions in advance to examine articles: (1) What types of blogs are used inside and outside of EFL classes?; (2) For what purposes can EFL learners use blogs inside and outside of school?; (3) What kinds of topics do EFL learners blog about?; (4) What are the benefits of blogging to EFL learners? What aspects of blogging seem to be the most influential on L2 writing development?; and (5) What challenges EFL learners face when they blog?.

The methodology of this synthesis paper was informed by previous review studies by Wang and Vásquez (2012), who explored language learning and Web 2.0 and; Lin and Griffith (2014), who reviewed research on the effectiveness of online collaborative learning on ELL/EFL writing in 2014.

This paper synthesizes research on EFL learners’ L2 writing on blogs. The research investigated includes peer-reviewed journals published mainly between 2005 and 2015. Articles published in the first half of 2016 were also included, in order to keep the review as current as possible. The decision to limit the review to the decade was made because writing L2 in blogging follows the improving technological issues. The articles were selected via keyword searches in EBSCO, ERIC, Google Scholar and several

databases. I searched for all studies with the following descriptors: *blogging and EFL writing, blogging to learn, L2 writing on blogs, EFL learners, and Technology-mediated language learning*. Citations from other reviews and articles were also obtained.

From this set, I selected studies that met two criteria: (1) the studies were empirical studies, and the studies used quantitative, qualitative, or mixed method to analyze data; and (2) the studies were published in academic peer-reviewed journals. Doctoral dissertations, master's theses, books, unpublished reports, and non-referred articles were not included in the review. The keywords "Blog, EFL, and Writing" on EBSCO produced 130 publications which were all published in peer-reviewed scholarly or professional journals. More articles were found from Sun and Chang's article in *Language Learning & Technology* in 2012, "Blogging to Learn: Becoming EFL Academic Writers through Collaborative Dialogues". I identified publications that claimed to report (a) empirical research, (b) blogging, (c) writing, and (d) EFL learners and which addressed my research questions. In the process, I eliminated and added some articles to confirm my reliability at this stage by comparing notes. I initially found 27 articles; however, when I read those articles thoroughly some of them were not suitable for this synthesis paper for a number of reasons: using blogs for a purpose other than analyzing students' writing, not focusing mainly on a blog, not for EFL setting. In the end, I reviewed a total of 20 articles, focusing on the research questions listed earlier.

The following Table 1. shows the twenty empirical studies that will be reviewed in this thesis.

No	Author	Journal	Keywords
1	Pham & Usaha (2016)	Blog-based peer response for L2 writing revision.	Blog, peer response, qualified comments, and writing quality
2	Lin (2015)	Learner-Centered Blogging: A preliminary investigation of EFL Student writers' Experience.	Blog-assisted language learning, Classroom blogging, EFL writing, and Phenomenological analysis
3	Chen (2014)	Actual and preferred teacher feedback on student blog.	Blog, teacher feedback, students' receptivity, self- regulation, interaction
4	Lin, Li, Hung & Huang (2014)	Blogging a journal: Changing students' writing skills and perceptions.	EFL writing, blogs, online journal, and students' attitudes
5	Lin (2014)	Effects of classroom blogging on ESL student writers: an empirical assessment.	Classroom blogging, learning motivation toward writing, self-efficacy beliefs in writing, and ESL writing
6	Zhang, Song, Shen & Huang (2014)	The effects of blog-mediated peer feedback on learners' motivation, collaboration, and course satisfaction in a second language writing course.	Peer feedback, self-reflection, self-confidence, L2 writing, feedback guidelines, and students' perceptions
7	Foroutan, Noordin & Hamazah (2013)	Weblog promotes ESL learners' writing autonomy.	ESL, computer-mediated communication, weblog, writing skills, autonomy, and social interaction
8	Lin, Groom & Lin (2013)	Blog-Assisted learning in the ESL writing classroom: A phenomenological analysis.	Classroom blogging, Blog-assisted language learning, EFL writing, Phenomenological analysis
9	Shen (2013)	Use of blog to improve English writing in the tertiary EFL classrooms.	Blog, English writing, and the Chinese EFL tertiary classrooms
10	Vurdien (2013)	Enhancing writing skills through blogging in an advanced English as a foreign language class in Spain.	Blogs, writing skills, and peer feedback
11	Sun & Chang (2012)	Blogging to Learn: Becoming EFL academic writers through collaborative dialogues.	Academic writing, blogs, dialogic interaction, identity, reflective learning, and writing strategies

Table 1. Distribution of the Empirical studies in this Thesis

Continued

Table 1. Continued

12	Lin, Lin & Hsu (2011)	The unrealistic claims for the effects of classroom blogging on English as a second language, students' written performance.	Classroom blogging, foreign language writing, and writing skill
13	Trajtemberg & Yiakoumetti (2011)	Weblogs: a tool for EFL interaction, expression, and self-evaluation.	Blogs, EFL interaction, interaction strategies, teacher-initiated interaction, student-initiated interaction, self-expression, posts and comments,
14	Arslan & Şahin-Kızıl (2010)	How can the use of blog software facilitate the writing process of English language learners?	Blogs, process-oriented writing instruction, and blogging
15	Mompean (2010)	The development of meaningful interaction on a blog used for the learning of English as a Foreign Language.	Blogs, online interaction, task-based learning, authentic production, and written expression
16	Noytim (2010)	Weblogs enhancing EFL students' English language learning.	Weblog, EFL, writing skill, reading skill, critical thinking, and social interaction
17	Sun (2010)	Extensive writing in foreign-language classrooms: a blogging approach	Blogs, extensive writing, foreign-language writing, foreign language learning
18	Yang (2009)	Using blogs to enhance critical reflection and community of practice.	Blog, hypermedia instructional programs, virtual community, reflective journal for language learning, technology for language learning, and computer-mediated communication
19	Soares (2008)	Understanding class blogs as a tool for language development.	Blogs, exploratory practice, learning English as a foreign language, social interaction, and Web 2.0
20	Pinkman (2005)	Using Blogs in the Foreign language classrooms: encouraging learner independence.	Integrated-skills foreign language class, blogs, motivation, learner independence, interaction, and feedback

In order to determine the implications for future research on Web 2.0 and language teaching and learning, the present analysis focuses on the findings of the empirical studies.

I followed the keywords in five research questions, such as types of blogs, the purpose, topics, benefits, and challenges. Some researchers referred three types of blogs by Compbell (2003), so I addressed the definition of the tutor blog, the learner blog, and the class blog. I also found which blog type was frequently used in the English language classes in twenty empirical studies. Meanwhile, some researchers applied specific blog platforms to meet the purpose of using blogs, and I identified the number of different blog platforms used. The main purpose of using blogs in the foreign language class, in many studies, was to improve EFL learners' writing ability. Furthermore, researchers pursued several other purposes, such as to encourage learners' self-reflection on learning or to facilitate learners' interaction and motivation. There are many topics about which EFL learners tend to blog. The frequently used topics were social issues and students' daily lives and interests. Most of the twenty empirical studies described both benefits and challenges, attaching some participants' comments from personal communicational interviews. At first, I had a research question about EFL learners' blogging experience but, learners' comments overlapped with the benefits and the challenges, so I eliminated EFL learners' blogging experience. Finally, with five research questions, I examined twenty empirical studies on EFL learners' blogging writing.

Chapter 4: Findings

In this synthesis paper, twenty empirical studies are investigated. My goal in this chapter is to provide an understanding of the dynamic of the field of English as a Foreign Language writing by considering its features and the implementation of blogging writing. The following section begins with findings of the types of blogs and how EFL learners used blogging inside and outside of class that has been researched. Next, I will discuss the purposes for EFL learners to use blogs inside and outside of school as well as topics they blogging about, followed by sections analyzing the benefits and challenges of EFL learners using blogging writing. The final section will present aspects of blogging that seem to be the most influential on L2 writing development.

Types of Blogs Used Inside and Outside of EFL Class

It is worthwhile to learn about the types of blogs used for EFL learners. Different types of blogs have their unique features that further facilitate EFL writers to implicate them. In this part, I will introduce three types of blogs and several numbers of blog platforms. Compbell (2003) presents that there are three types of blogs that fit pedagogical purposes: the tutor blog, the learner blog, and the class blog. Each type of blog is described below:

1. The tutor blog

The tutor blog is a space 1) for learners and parents to find class information such as course syllabus, homework assignments, assessment, due dates and so on (Soares, 2008), and 2) for learners to use as a personal library to explore the resources available from the Web in a guided manner. However, the tutor blog limits students only to writing comments on the teacher's posts.

2. The learner blog

Compbell (2003) describes the learner blog as an online journal on which a learner can upload his or her thoughts, with their own words, whenever they want. With this feature, this type of blog may be best used for reading and writing classes. By building their own blog, learners can have more freedom to write more. Making their work public gives them a real audience and a strong purpose to write.

3. The class blog

This type of blog is created from a joint effort between students and teacher.

According to Stanley (2005), the class blog is best used as a collaborative discussion space, encouraging learners to reflect more in depth in writing about themes discussed in class. Learners can continue their discussion after class in the class blog. Also, while they are working together, the class blog easily can be a space for peer feedback to develop critical reading and writing skills.

The most commonly employed blog in EFL writing classes is individual learners' blog (Figure 1). There are ten studies on individual learners' blogging writing, covering 50% of the total empirical studies. In three of them, students engaged in writing in learner blogs with 3-4 peers. Four studies (20%) used two types of blogs simultaneously, two of

those studies included tutor blog and learner blog, and two of them applied learner blog and class blog. A quarter of the total studies (five studies) examined the outcomes of EFL students using class blogs in writing classroom. One study (Shen, 2013) did not mention which blog type was applied in their research. Based on Compbell's (2003) analysis of blog types, half of the researchers in this synthesis paper investigated EFL students' writing learning process in learner blogs where individuals can feel free to write in the target language for their real audience.

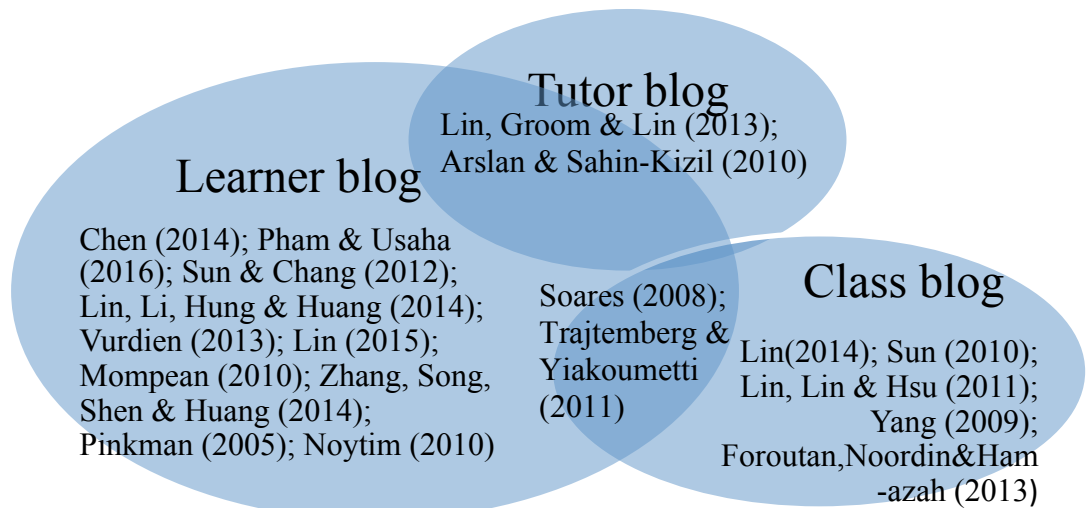


Figure 1. Types of blogs in the empirical studies

Besides, there are a number of blog platforms used in and out of class in order to facilitate EFL learners' learning process in blogs. Among the twenty empirical research papers (Table 2), some papers mentioned particular blog systems they used in their articles, such as Blogger (5), Lang-8 (2), Yahoo (1), Motime (1), Blogspot (1), and Sina (1); or others noticed that they used the blog system from the university (2).

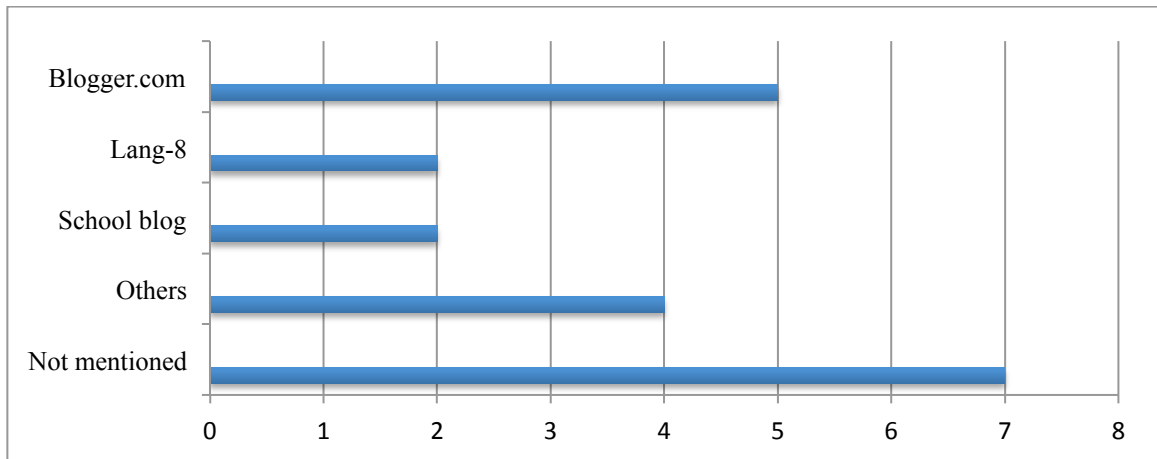


Table 2. Difference Blog platforms in the Empirical studies

A few studies described the reason they chose the specific blog system, such as error annotation (Lin, 2015; Sun, 2010), free and easy to use (Arslan & Şahin-Kızıllı, 2010; Noytim, 2010; Pinkman, 2005), and its popularity (Zhang, Song, Shen, & Huang, 2014). For example, Sun (2010) stated that the feature of the university blogging system is “available for the public to view the content of students’ posts, but only those who were approved by the administrator could register, login, and write on the blog” (p. 329), and provides data-management for tracking students’ blog writing and error-annotation feature. A majority of researchers did not articulate the reasons they chose the specific blog platforms in empirical studies. However, some researchers did not identify blog system they used in their papers (Chen, 2014; Lin, Groon & Lin, 2013; Lin, Lin & Hsu, 2011; Mompean, 2010; Shen, 2013; Sun & Chang, 2012; Yang, 2009).

Some empirical studies stated the reason for choosing a particular blog platform (as you can see above) to be that it helps readers to understand and implement those ideas and apply the results in their class. The findings summarized in Figure 1 and Tables 2

suggest that analyses of blog platforms in research on using blogs in EFL settings are still quite limited.

The Purposes of EFL Learners to Use Blogs Inside and Outside of School

Numerous purposes have existed to apply blogging writing inside and outside school in EFL settings. Among these, developing academic writing skills (14 studies) represents the most popular, followed by encouraging interaction between students (2 studies), reflecting students' learning in blogs (2 studies), and encouraging learner independence, including writing autonomy (2 studies). In addition to improving learners' writing ability, which is the primary goal of the researchers in my thesis, I analyzed additional purposes of dividing into groups as well. I will specify purposes from the twenty empirical studies in several sections; to improve English writing ability, to reflect and self-regulate learning process, and to promote learners' interaction.

To improve English writing ability. The primary purpose of using blogging writing in EFL classes is to improve EFL learners' writing ability. I found that the researchers applied blogging writing to EFL writing classes in two different ways: as a main performance during the class time, and as an integrated activity to practice and apply what they learned in class in and out of class.

First, in nine empirical studies, EFL learners mainly performed blogging writing in the classroom to improve their writing ability. All students had a personal desktop or laptop to write in blogs with or without peers, and their writing activity and interaction were performed through the blog. These nine studies (Chen, 2014; Lin, 2015; Lin, Groom and Lin, 2013; Lin, Li and Hsu, 2011; Lin, Li, Hung and Huang, 2014; Pham & Usaha,

2016; Sun, 2010; Shen, 2013) explored blogging writing research in order to improve learners' academic writing skills. In detail, some studies explored how students used blogging for developing well- organized paragraphs and essays (Lin, 2014; Lin, 2015; Lin, Groom & Lin, 2013) while other papers stated specific essay styles, such as narrative and argumentative essays, cause and effect, and chronological order, process essay styles (Lin, Li & Hsu, 2011; Lin, Li, Hung & Huang, 2014; Pham & Usaha, 2016), and thesis and journal publication (Sun, 2010), and only one study(Chen, 2014) investigated how students developed both learners' conversational skills and academic English in classroom blogging.

Moreover, another group of researchers incorporated blogging writing with the class. Four (Arslan & Şahin-Kızıl, 2010; Noytim, 2010; Pinkman, 2005; Zhang, Song, Shen & Huang, 2014) integrated blogging writing with the class content in order to encourage students to blog about what they learned in class and to extend their learning. For example, in Zhang, Song, Shen, & Huang (2014), students learned “about the fundamentals of essay writing in a traditional classroom environment once a week. Beyond the class sessions, they performed blog-mediated collaborative writing tasks in small groups.” (p. 673). In Arslan & Şahin-Kızıl (2010), the instructor taught the different types of writing and learners practiced the writing type that they learned as homework. These studies incorporated the class content and blogging writing for learners' writing improvement.

Vurdien (2013) mixed class and blogging writing in a slightly different way. The researcher incorporated a discussion class and blogging writing to support both activities.

EFL learners actually met in the classroom (once every two weeks) to ensure they worked in the blogs with peers and the tutor. Vurdien (2013) stated, “The tutor monitored the students’ blog postings and highlighted certain errors, whilst facilitating linguistic feedback in the discussion classes,” (p. 130). This direct discussion meeting in the classroom helped EFL learners concentrate on both form and meaning of English language in L2 writing learning process.

To reflect writing learning process. As a second primary goal, blogging writing promotes EFL learners’ reflection on their own writing learning process and develops independent learning skills. While students reflect on their writing learning process in English, they improve not only the language ability, but also their independence and responsibility of their own learning. They think deeply when looking back and forth at their learning and reviewing shared ideas and thoughts with others.

There are three research papers (Mompean, 2010; Sun & Chang, 2012; Yang, 2009) that found interesting results with Master’s students in language education (English and French) and EFL student teachers on how they used blogs for different reasons. In these three papers, the common purpose of using blogs is to reflect on their learning process by sharing what they learned and their opinions on the content. While using blogs as a tool for their learning process, they also improved their English language ability because they wrote in the target language for a meaning-making process in individual learner blogs. To be specific, Sun & Chang (2012) state that seven graduate students undertaking Master’s level study in TESOL and Linguistics were encouraged to “reflect upon their process of developing academic writing skills” (p. 46), using personal blogs;

(researchers did not mention about the specific blog platform) and Yang (2009) investigates the use of writing blogging for reflection on learning. In addition, in Mompearn (2010), the FFL (French as Foreign Language) Master's students showed interesting purposes to improve their future profession as academic writers or language teachers by identifying “the favorable elements that need to be reinforced for the success of the project and understanding why some elements did not work as expected” (p. 377). These students used blogs as a platform to refine their professional skills as researchers and student teachers (Mompearn, 2010; Sun & Chang, 2012; Yang, 2009).

In addition, learners’ independent learning was examined in three studies (Foroutan, Noordin & Hamazah, 2013; Pinkman, 2005; Sun, 2010). The researchers identified that blog environment contributes to learners self-regulated learning by providing a learning platform to consider their own world of learning. Blogs promoted EFL learners’ autonomous monitoring of their own writing. Learners can broaden their perspectives through others’ feedback and learning resources and develop metacognitive knowledge on the Internet. Blogging writing in the target language led them into improving their language ability as well.

To promote learners’ interaction in blogs. In some other research papers, learners’ interaction in blogs was not the priority, but to Vurdien (2010) and Soares (2008) learners’ interaction in blogs was one of the primary goals of the study or the project. In order to encourage students’ interaction in blogs, the researchers in both studies integrated a traditional classroom environment and the blogging activity. They did not separate blogging and classroom teaching, but instead made each section support the

other. For example, Vurdien (2013) assigned the blogging writing followed by an in-class discussion to support students' blogging writing, revising their work in class discussions before submitting their final version of writing. Soares (2008) invited students to create their own class blog, which contributed to learners' motivation for blogging. Moreover, requiring students to comment on peers' postings encourages their interaction in blogs. Responses to others' blog postings facilitate their conversation in blogs as well as wider usage of the English language beyond the classroom. Focusing on content in blogs, rather than linguistic errors, and sharing their own experiences and thoughts made students wait for others' comments and keep blogging writing in the target language.

Topics of EFL Learners Blog About

Diverse topics in twenty empirical research papers in this thesis were reviewed (Table 3). Students' daily lives and social issues were most frequently examined topics, followed by free to choose, issues about academic writing, and classroom contents.

Assigned Topics	Studies	Number of studies
Social issues (e.g., "Is copycat economy a good thing for China?" (Zhang et al., 2014), "Benefits of living in a big city" (Pham & Usaha, 2016))	Chen (2014); Pham & Usaha (2016); Lin, Li, Hung and Huang (2014); Lin (2014); Zhang, Song, Shen, and Huang (2014); Lin, Lin and Hsu (2011); Noytim (2010)	7
Students' daily lives and interests	Lin, Li, Hung and Huang (2014); Lin (2014); Lin (2015); Lin, Lin and Hsu (2011); Soares (2008); Trajtemberg & Yiakoumetti (2011)	6
About class contents (reflection)	Pinkman (2005); Yang (2009)	2

Table 3. Topics EFL Learners Blog About in the Empirical studies

Continued

Table 3. Continued

About academic writing	Sun and Chang (2012)	1
Tasks for exam	Vurdien (2013)	1
Not mentioned	Lin, Groom & Lin (2013)	1
Free to write	Sun (2010); Arslan & Şahin-Kızıl (2010); Foroutan, Noordin and Hamazah (2013); Mompean (2010)	4

Note. Some studies have more than one main research focus. Consequently, a single study may appear more than once in this table.

Social issues and students' lives were the most common topics students blogged about. To be specific, the range of social issues was very wide: from personal thoughts on certain issues, such as ideal girl/boyfriend, favorite books, Camera (Lin, 2014), and how to maintain good relationship with friends (Pham & Usaha, 2016), to similar issues from the exam. These issues relevant to the exam are of great interest since students used this as a form of preparation for the exam.

In one study, students used the prompts from certain English language tests, because the prompts shared on the Internet by other test takers have a high reliability. Instructors in Chen (2014) required students to complete writing tasks in blogs. In the first week, students started to post writing on a blog about, "Introducing your city" and in the fifth week, they concentrated on "The upcoming political election" to produce their postings.

Some students in Lin (2014) expressed their thoughts on the topic, "The camera never lies".

This is one of the examples of a student blogger's entry. The student in this example stated that the inconsistency between people in the picture and the real world,

and emphasized the necessity of considering the details and backgrounds. It shows how the student fully thought about the required topic related to the social issue. The assigned topic encouraged learners to express their opinions in the target language. They searched the language expressions, necessary vocabulary, and example sentences on the Internet, and by doing so, they practiced how to describe the personal thoughts in writing in English.

Camera is an useful tool for our daily life. It helps us to memory the happy or unhappy things. Camera can also take a picture to help us to understand what the things happened in our daily life. However, are these pictures slender, is she really having a slender figure in real condition? The person looks happy in the pictures may be not happy in the real life. We look many pictures on TV or Internet every day, and the pictures also look nice. We still need to think these pictures again or read more information about them. We couldn't make a decision from the pictures only. The details or background happened behind the picture is necessarily for us to realize the picture. "The camera never lies" let us feel that we seem to know everything on the picture, but we don't really know the "truth" behind it. (p. 580)

On the other hand, in Sun (2010), Arslan & Şahin-Kızıll (2010), Foroutan, Noordin and Hamazah (2013) and Trajtemberg & Yiakoumetti (2011), learners had the freedom to choose topics that they would like to write in blogs. Students, who wrote blog posts about what they chose, produced writing about diverse topics. I could not find exact topics from the researches and only Arslan & Şahin-Kızıll (2010) attached an example of a learner's writing work. All I could do is conjecture from some of examples. In

Foroutan, Noordin and Hamazah (2013) examples of comments in blogs were shown, so that I could assume the learners' topic. The teacher and learners extended their stories through comments. The teacher usually asked more questions about the learners' topic and the learner replied, "to her teacher's question and then adds more information to further clarify her own opinion on the programme" (p. 441). This example shows the learner's topic was about picture and digital camera.

Teacher: Did you used to take many photos before you had a digital camera?

Xaviera: hello Simon, I ask your question... I use to take a lot of pictures every time, before and after I had my digital camera, Because I think pictures can captures moments in time. It is almost magic! jaja ok I'll see you soon! (p. 440)

Arslan & Şahin-Kızıl (2010) showed one example of students' blog entries who chose the topic him/herself. This is a part of a learner's writing. This shows the learner, who chose the topic themselves, can write about diverse issues, including social issues.

Living in big cities is very difficult for people and there are several reasons for this situation. The first reason that makes living in a big city difficult is air pollution. This reason is the most Important problem in big cities because they have factories, cars and houses. Factories, cars and houses use chemical substances. And then, these substances go to sky and they react with other chemical substances on the sky, so this situation affect health of people. For example, they don't breathe easily or they make acid rain... (p. 189)

However, there is no additional information about how this student approached this writing process, such as why he/she chose this topic, what caused the learner to write

about this issue, how the learner learned the vocabulary necessary to write, and what the learner did for writing this topic. Especially, Arslan & Şahin-Kızıl (2010) applied the tutor blog to support intermediate level EFL learners' writing but due to a lack of background about learners' writing samples, it was hard to identify whether the learner was influenced by the tutor blog or other resources or did not grasp the tutor blog's influence at all. Compared to the learners in Arslan & Şahin-Kızıl (2010), in Lin, Li, Hung & Huang (2014) a few learners in a low intermediate level of language proficiency reported that it was "really difficult to think up new ideas every day" (p. 428). They had freedom to choose a topic and used only personal blogs without being required to share peer feedback. This illustrates that learners in the same level can have different writing experiences in blogging writing under the tutor's directions: having freedom to choose topics or not; applying a tutor blog or not.

A lot of studies reviewed in this thesis did not provide sufficient background on the content of learners' writings. It is important not only to emphasize the result but also to investigate substantial issues to support the result of the study. It seems difficult to examine the result without considering the circumstances under which the current papers were conducted. The questions I mentioned above are relevant to learners' motivation, and it is necessary to analyze the background of a learning process. Moreover, the identified information would be important issues to apply to future research papers, and educators in practical environments can employ the findings in future classroom. Incorporating diverse research methods, such as interviewing, observation or case study,

should be applied for further research on EFL learners' writing areas. Details of benefits and challenges will be addressed in next chapter.

While some researchers merely mentioned the content of students' blog writing, including Arslan & Şahin-Kızıl (2010), Lin (2014), Mompean (2010), Pinkman (2005), Soares (2008), Sun & Chang (2012) and Trajtemberg & Yiakoumetti (2011), Sun & Chang (2012) described details of what learners actually wrote in blogs when students made reflections in blogs. Self-judgment (negative), self-blaming, and echoing concerns and problems were the most frequent topics in the writing by seven students (38.2%). Sharing learning experiences (what I did, how/what I have learned) and offering help/sharing writing resources were second topics they usually wrote about in blogs (30%). Their purpose of using the blog was to reflect on their learning process as emerging researchers and they were under the big theme of blogging about academic writing. Thus, 45.2% of a topic was about learning related topics, such as sharing learning experiences (18.3%), offering help and sharing writing resources (12.7%), asking for help (9.6%), and class/course content reflection (4.6%).

As discussed above, a range of papers showed how the topics EFL students' blogged about is diverse.

The relationship between topic and purpose. After reviewing topics EFL learners blogged about and purposes of using blogging in twenty empirical researches, I determined the relationship between these two. It is important to review the relationship between topic and purpose of blogging writing because the matching of these factors will lead students to continue their writing development. While most studies fulfilled the

purposes they identified in their papers, I found the discrepancy between the purposes and the topic in a few studies. As an example of the former, in Pham & Usaha (2016) to develop cause and effect essay skill, the topic learners wrote was “the causes of traffic accidents in Vietnam”. To prepare the exam in Vurdien (2013), the topic was similar with the exam for practicing certain type of writing. The following example was the essay prompt from Vurdien (2013).

The organizer of a sports camp for children has asked you to provide a reference for a friend of your who has applied for a summer job as an activities supervisor at the camp. The reference should include relevant information about your friend’s skills and interest and suitability for the job. Write your reference in 220-160 words. (p. 132)

However, as noted above, a few studies had the disproportion between purposes and the topic. If the purpose for using blogging writing in EFL writing class was to improve academic English writing ability, the researcher should have assigned the topics for improving academic writing not letting the learners have a thesis statement and support sentences. On the other hand, in order to improve conversational English skills, it would be better for the learners to interact with people in diverse countries to use the target language rather than revising and reviewing APA styles in the reference list. In Sun (2010), the topics did not match the purpose, even no appropriate guidelines to how students should write a blog posting were provided. Also, in Lin, Groom & Lin (2013), researchers did not identify the topics that students blogged about. In particular, even though the purpose of the blogging writing was to learn how to write academic papers,

especially for thesis and journal publication, students were allowed to determine what they would write about in order to “make the blog experience informal, personal and exploratory” and “Neither formal instruction about how to prepare a blog post nor a list of expectations regarding form correctness was offered” (Sun, 2010, p. 330). At the end of the semester, students actually tended to show simple sentences over complex ones. The result of the research was different with the purpose of using blogging which was to improve learners’ writing ability. This unexpected result does not contribute the empirical study to be profound. This unbalance of topic and purpose show that an appropriate topic is needed to improve learners writing development.

Benefits of Blogging Writing

Blogging writing provides many advantages for EFL learners. Learners can be motivated when they are writing in blogs, where they can create the interactive nature between peers, tutors, and potential audiences of their blogs. Those several aspects in blogs, such as providing technological convenience and sufficient time to write help learners to manage their anxiety of writing in English. Some suggestions to apply blogging writing in EFL writing class will be addressed either.

First of all, blogging writing enhances students’ motivation. Interactive nature of blogging facilitates learners to write in the target language (Vurdien, 2013). Thanks to the technology, blogs record the number of readers and an increasing number of readers show that real audiences are waiting for learners’ new postings. Student writers were willing to display their work (Arslan & Şahin-Kızıl, 2010; Foroutan, Noordin & Hamazah, 2013; Shen, 2010;). The sense of audience can be increased by not only

potential audiences but also people around learners, such as their families or friends.

Arslan & Şahin-Kızıl (2010) specified that sometimes learners' family members and friends in different university actually visited the learners' blogs and left comments on their writings. This benefit regarding motivation includes other related benefits, such as interaction with audiences, qualitative writing, responsibility and independence, time issues and reading ability.

Publishing in blogs motivates learners to write more qualitative writing (Lin, Li, Hung & Huang, 2014). Qualitative writing refers to providing information, showing their interests or opinions in a well-written article, having a statement and supporting sentences. In order to provide a qualitative posting, learners were trying to improve their interactive manner by being more thoughtful writers for their audiences (Vurdien, 2013; Zhang, Song, Shen & Huang, 2014). EFL learners noticed that the meaningful interaction could bond from their effort on the blog postings both linguistic and content aspects. Carefully choosing vocabulary, and checking grammar and spelling errors before uploading their posts are examples of the effort given for audiences (Vurdien, 2013). In Sun (2010), revising and reviewing were the most frequent behaviors when learners blogged. Open access blog environment encourages learners to monitor their postings autonomously.

In a personal space, when learners had freedom to choose what they want to talk about, this also improved students' motivation to write (Noytim, 2010; Trajtemberg & Yiakoumetti, 2011). In Noytim (2010), a lot of learners enjoyed their free choice of topics in writing blogs. They replied they could write more freely, "without pressures and

anxieties in the comparison with their classmates” (p. 1130). They continued to say that under the topics assigned by the teacher “might be uninteresting, less motivated and difficult” (p. 1130). Though, a few researchers noted blogging writing demotivate learners because it caused students felt anxiety. This will be discussed in next chapter.

Another key benefit of blogging writing is that learners have different ways of dealing with anxiety they feel while writing (Lin, Li, Hung & Huang, 2014; Mompean, 2010; Noytim, 2010). Some papers showed that the learners felt less anxiety when writing in blogs. Blogging provides more convenient writing conditions (when revising and restructuring text); abundant resources as references to write; and update the number of visitors (Lin, Li, Hung & Huang, 2014). Unlike the paperwork, technology helps them to revise their work easily. In Lin, Li, Hung & Huang (2014), learners claimed they had experienced “free expression (or even emotional release) when keeping their online journal” (p. 428).

Some other studies showed that the learners in Zhang, Song, Shen & Huang (2014) addressed a little anxiety helped them to work hard to write better. In order to protect their face, they were eager to review and revise to produce their work more qualitative postings. As shown below, in Zhang, Song, Shen & Huang (2014), the learners stated that they were motivated by the anxiety.

If I have received feedback from my peers, I'll think that they have really read my essays. Knowing that, I'll have the motivation to write more and more, and I don't want to let me down. (p. 677)

In order to convey a better impression of me among my peers and avoid losing face, I wanted to try my best to write in order to get positive feedback. (p. 678)

The learners worked harder under the pressure that motivated them and enjoyed the interaction between peers. Still, there are some EFL learners who feel the anxiety of losing their face because of their grammatical errors in their blog postings. Mompean (2010) showed learners' positive feeling about the anxiety and blogging writing.

It's a pretty good training to regularly write down in the blog. I noticed it was quite challenging to write proper English (sic) when you tell about past experiences. I have to admit that I finally liked it, because even if I am sometimes (often?) wrong, I am aware that I did improve my English. I feel much more comfortable with the writing...(p.390)

Especially for learners in Confucian society, anxiety about peer criticism is a much more tractable problem pedagogically (Lin, Groom & Lin, 2013; Yang, 2009). For them, Lin, Groom & Lin (2013) suggests that considering learners' language proficiency level and their preference of creating a blog as a public accessed or as a private blog only for classmates and a tutor. Feedback from peers and tutors stimulate learners who had no ideas what to write about in blogs (Lin, Li, Hung & Huang, 2014). There are diverse blog platforms these days and tutors and learners can choose a better blog service based on their purpose and students' learning style and needs; (Lin, 2015; Soares, 2008; Zhang, Song, Shen & Huang, 2014). Explicit learner training about the importance of receiving and responding to their works and explicit instruction in how to write constructive critical feedback on other students' work can release learners' anxiety of making mistakes. For

low language proficiency level students, tutors' well-explained comments lead learners to correct their errors after understanding the reason they received that kind of comments on their postings.

Moreover, "it might be advisable for teacher responses to journal entries and other kinds of informal blog posting activities to focus on substantive content rather than lexicogrammatical form" (p. 136) and to inform students about the general policy and the rationale for it at the very beginning of a class (Lin, Groom & Lin, 2013).

EFL learners can also feel less anxiety when they write in blogs with time management environment. Blogging writing allows learners to take their time to focus on writing because they are not restricted by time and they can continue to write beyond the classroom time. Students can work whenever and wherever they want (Arslan & Şahin-Kızıllı, 2010; Foroutan, Noordin & Hamazah, 2013; Vurdien, 2013; Yang, 2009). In Vurdien (2013), students with strong writing skill "remarked that the asynchronous nature of blogs allowed them the freedom to reread their own and their peers' postings without any space and time constraints, which provided them with the opportunity to acquire new grammatical structures and vocabulary and, as a result, build on their writing skills" (p. 134). In an interview with students, all agreed that the asynchronous nature of the blogs allowed them to "take longer to ponder the different issues before expressing their views" (p. 134). Learners enjoyed their freedom to revisit to blog postings and acquire language issues. One negative side from some other learners was that they were busy with other tasks, and so did not have enough time for blogging writing after school.

It is important that we, educators, convince students to try out and experience blogging writing themselves. Further discussion will be addressed in next question: Challenges.

At last, through blogging writing, EFL student writers build meaningful interaction with their audiences, including peers, tutors, and people all around the world. Learners' efforts on linguistic issues, well-organized postings, and working on postings contribute to the strong bond with others. They deeply consider how to organize their viewpoints in order to deliver it more intentionally and how to create reliable content in blogs with their own opinions. Some research papers found that focusing on content increased higher chances to interact because EFL learners improved in content and organization components (Arslan & Şahin-Kızıl, 2010; Lin, 2015; Pham & Usaha, 2016). As I noted earlier, due to the lack of further explanation, I could not find the resources to add to this finding in those research papers.

While working for audiences, learners can improve learning responsibility and independence to update their blogging writing (Foroutan, Noordin & Hamazah, 2013; Pinkman, 2005). Learners search and study for better content to help audiences better understand their writing more easily. Student writers visit their blogs more often to review and revise their outputs. Visiting others' blogs is another way to improve their posting quality. While they were audiences for other writers, they could pay attention to others' writing styles (Yang, 2009). Being exposed to diverse writing styles and samples were good writing and reading input resources for students' learning process. They had chances to apply what they learned from others' writing to their own writings. Improving

independence and writing autonomy were followed during this effort (Foroutan, Noordin & Hamazah, 2013; Pinkman, 2005).

After posting their qualitative blog entries, learners were waiting for others' feedback on their posts. As I noted above, EFL learners really received comments from real audiences, not only from peers in the same class, but also people out of class (Foroutan, Noordin & Hamazah, 2013; Pinkman, 2005; Shen, 2010; Trajtemberg & Yiakoumetti, 2011). Through feedback, learners interacted with others and improve communication skills in the target language (Pinkman, 2005; Soares, 2008; Trajtemberg & Yiakoumetti, 2011). This increased learners' motivation because they were excited to communicate with other in foreign language. Interaction and motivation are interconnected to each other in blogging writing.

It is true that students preferred to see more in-depth guidance, such as higher order thinking comments (Chen, 2014). In EFL writing class, college learners desired to improve their writing skill with comments that made learners think deeper and higher (Chen, 2014). Learners can think critically from feedback from others. In Yang (2009), the instructors pushed a student to think further, as well as encouraged him or her to express more. They fostered student learners to think by asking "what do you think....?" and "What would you do if...?" questions. In order to facilitate learners' deep thinking on their writing and viewpoints, instructors can improve peers ability to give constructive comments.

Tutor's specific guideline for providing feedback would help learners to provide feedback that facilitates them to think deeper and more critically (Pham & Usaha, 2016;

Yang, 2009; Zhang, Song, Shen & Huang, 2014). In Pham & Usaha (2016), the peer response training is a great tip to adapt in future writing class so I will explain how learners were trained to improve their quality of comments.

The peer response training, which was adapted from Min (2005), consisted of two phases: in-class training and one-on-one student-teacher conferences. Pham & Usaha (2016) stated that for three hours, students learned 11 guidelines of Berg (1999) that followed “six-step procedure of evaluation, including clarification, alteration, suggestion/advice, explanation, and confirmation, as well as to use the peer-edit sheet provision as guidelines to help them provide and read comments” (p. 731). After training this step, they worked in their groups of four in order to provide peer feedback. A one-on-one student-teacher conference, it lasted 15 to 20 minutes beyond a normal class meeting in order to “help students learn from their own commenting experience to improve their quality of their comments” (p. 731). During the conference, learners could get answers of their curiosity on comments they received from peers.

In Zhang, Song, Shen & Huang (2014), the researchers notified the guidelines for giving feedback as follows:

Read your peers’ essays carefully and give feedback on them from the following perspectives based on what you learned in class:

1. Topic sentence
2. Support details
3. Reworded sentences
4. Unity
5. Coherence
6. Organization
7. Mechanics (Grammar, spelling, word use, punctuation, capitalization, formatting, etc.)

Then, learners were required to make a correction based on their peer feedback as well as tutor's feedback. They were satisfied with the blogging writing and feedback from peers and the tutor. Interviewees showed their positive perceptions on blogging writing that peer feedback facilitated to work hard on blog as follows:

Blogs are on open-ended platform, where people can read and comment on what I've written anytime and anywhere. I have to work hard on the writing task seriously and to produce better essays just because my peers in the same group and beyond may read my essays. Also, I have to complete my writing tasks as soon as I can so that I won't hinder the progress of collaborative writing as a group (p. 676)

Through feedback from others, cognitive gaps can be noticeable and learners can broaden their multidimensional perspective of essay writing.

Even though some researcher pointed out there is a remaining concern whether the teacher should focus explicitly on linguistic form in blogs (Trajtemberg & Yiakoumetti, 2011), tutors' comments lead students' learning opportunities to improve linguistic issues and extend interaction between peers. In Pham & Usaha (2016), the result indicates that the students were able to provide more comments on content and organization areas rather than linguistic areas. The relation of this finding with blogging can be explained by referring to the fact that learners have a lack of language proficiency. Foroutan, Noordin & Hamazah (2014) described learners' negative perception on peer feedback because peers' feedback was not reliable.

Furthermore, in order to maintain peer feedback, it is important to training students to provide qualitative comments. Tutors' feedback on learners' blog posting help stimulate them to continue the interaction among peers. In Chen (2014), fewer prompts were posted toward the end of semester, so tutors pushed students to participate in dialogues by providing mediative feedback, which stimulates more interaction among students when less replies occurred. Almost all studies that integrated blogging writing with a classroom discussion had no concerns about encouraging students to respond to others' blog posting (Noytim, 2010; Pinkman, 2005; Vurdien, 2013; Yang, 2009; Zhang, Song, Shen & Huang, 2014). From their blogging experience, they highly suggest incorporation of blogging writing and a class discussion, including class contents or physical meetings to ensure the effective use of blogs.

Challenges of Blogging Writing

There are numerous advantages of using blogs to improve EFL learners' writing ability; however, some researchers point out it has several challenges to be resolved in EFL settings. The most frequently examined challenge was that blogging writing is time-consuming for EFL learners (Lin, Groom & Lin, 2013; Lin, Lin & Hsu, 2011; Noytim, 2010; Pinkman, 2005; Soares, 2008; Vurdien, 2013). Learners who had low English proficiency described they had not enough time to complete the blogging writing (Vurdien, 2013; Lin, Groom & Lin, 2013). In Vurdien (2013), learners who had low English language proficiency complained "due to other commitments and lack of time, they completed their tasks hastily without giving consideration to editing their postings for grammatical accuracy" (p. 135).

A few research papers addressed a concern about the effectiveness of blogging, given the significant effort and amount of time spent on the design and maintenance of the blogs for EFL students (Lin, Lin & Hsu, 2011). In Noytim (2009), some students listed negative perceptions on blogs, such as “time investment, plagiarism, neglect of teacher feedback and correction and Bloggers’ privacy with their personal information” (p. 1130). Regarding time investment, however, the research papers did not examine the exact reason for it.

A lot of EFL learners had the anxiety surrounding making mistakes on grammar issues (Foroutan, Noordin & Hamazah, 2013; Lin, 2015; Lin, Groom & Lin, 2013). In Lin, Groom & Lin (2013), EFL learners had concerned about losing their face because of mistakes on blog postings. Most of them had many worries about it, but they rarely made effort to protect their face, such as paying attention to improving their grammar knowledge, revising their works and searching different expression in the target language. The anxiety of losing face could explain the reason that some learners in Lin (2015) did not complete the required number of blog postings. Even some of students who satisfied the requirement did not like peer comments. They described, “too many corrections from others make me look stupid” (p. 453). There are others who stopped reading peer postings when they found themselves picking up peers’ mistakes on blog postings. They continued to say that the comments they received were all about grammar usage and word choice. Peers just commented the revised mistakes of the original version without sufficient explanation.

The anxiety can explain why some learners complained about issues with time. Since they had worries about their linguistic mistakes on postings and did not know how to express their ideas and opinions in the target language, they hesitated to complete the blogging writing. In Lin, Groom & Lin (2013), students were often trapped in struggles over deciding whether to post or not because of their limited language ability. This made them spent too much time on worrying about their mistakes and the amount time needed to correct mistakes based on peer feedback. One student even complained that he was “too busy” to post journal entries in English.

The anxiety of making mistakes arose from their attitude toward others’ mistakes on blog postings. Concerns about revising mistakes were because of lack of understanding of the learning process of language development. Some learners in Lin, Groom & Lin (2013) admitted that she “would mock others’ mistakes, thinking how silly that writer is, and felt that in turn, her peers would be equally critical of her if they observed any mistakes in her blog entries” (p.134). This comment showed learners’ attitude on mistakes when they were learning the foreign language. This attitude can be changed if they learn how blogging writing can help them improve their language ability and what they should perform in blogs. There were some learners, who did not revise and read others’ blog postings, and therefore did not improve language proficiency in Vurdien (2013). They also complained they had not enough time to upload blog postings.

This shows that a lot of learners concentrated on language accuracy rather than content or language fluency. This led some learners to choose easy topics to employ vocabulary and grammar structures that they knew and not to make mistakes. It is worth

to note that learners should be exposed to their zone of proximal development. Due to the learners' anxiety of receiving comments and losing their face from the mistakes, maintaining peer feedback matters is the growing challenge in EFL settings (Zhang, Song, Shen & Huang, 2013).

Interestingly, classroom setting also has negative impact on learners' blogging writing. Learners in Lin, Groom & Lin (2013) stated that classroom setting disturbed them to concentrate on class. They took the blogging writing class in a computer lab and they watched the monitor in front of them. The classroom setting did not allow the instructor to monitor the learners and many learners would spend class time doing online-shopping and checking email, instead of performing the in-class task with peers. These challenges address the needs of further research on an effective way to apply blogging writing for EFL learners. In next chapter, Discussion and Conclusion, I will discuss future directions for research and pedagogy.

Chapter 5: Discussion & Conclusion

In this synthesis review study, I have aimed to include the recent relevant empirical studies on EFL writing using blogging writing. Just as is evidenced by the finding of this paper, language learners can use diverse types of blogs, such as the tutor blog, the learner blog, and the class blog to improve L2 writing ability. In many EFL classes, the instructor integrated one or two blog types into his or her class. Among these types of blogs, the learner blog is the most frequently used blog in EFL settings in order to develop EFL learners' academic writing skills, encourage interaction between students and thus, facilitate learner independence while they reflect their learning process.

Blogging writing used inside and outside class can provide abundant opportunities to make a writing learning atmosphere. In some classes, blogging writing was the entire performance in the classroom. In other classrooms, blogs were used as additional activities, incorporated into the traditional class in order to extend their performing writing about diverse topics. Regarding the topics EFL learners blogged about, social issues and students' lives were the most frequent topics learners dealing with in blogs. There are other groups of EFL learners who used blogs as a reflection platform for their learning. They shared opinions, knowledge, and comments to better prepare them for their future as professionals, as academic writers, or as language teachers.

In this thesis, findings of the empirical studies show the importance of the tutor's role to provide diverse topics and contents that learners can think about, to ask questions for critical thinking and to help them express their opinions in the target language.

When EFL learners use blogging writing for improving writing ability, they can meet many advantages. Learners can be motivated because of the potential readers of their postings. Their feedback facilitates learners to write more qualitative postings both regarding content and linguistic aspects. Teachers' comments for in-depth guidance lead critical viewpoints of feedback from others. Unrestricted time makes learners extend opportunities of visiting blogs, and they are more likely to revise their products and improve reading ability. Managing anxiety is followed during learners' interaction with their audiences. Feedback from others encourages learners to enjoy blogging writing, but when comments only reflect grammatical issues, those comments tend to demotivate learners. Instead, sharing opinions on contents facilitates the readers and the writers' communication, leading to meaningful use of the target language.

Implications for Research

Most studies in this thesis provide a lot of suggestions for future research, including learners' differences (Lin, Groom & Lin, 2013; Soares, 2008), learning atmosphere (Zhang, Song, Shen & Huang, 2014), feedback (Lin, 2015; Lin, Li, Hung & Huang, 2014; Vurdien, 2013), teachers' role (Lin, 2015; Pinkman, 2005; Shen, 2013), the pressure of audiences and anxiety, linguistic analysis of writing production.

Numerous studies suggest that taking into consideration, such learner differences as age, gender, language proficiency level, major, learning styles, learners' perception

access to computers at school and home when blogging writing is applied to English language classes (Arslan & Şahin-Kızı1, 2010; Foroutan, Noordin & Hamazah, 2013; Lin, Groom & Lin, 2013; Sun, 2010; Sun & Chang, 2012) in further studies in order to better examine the effect of blogging writing on learners' language abilities. In addition to an investigation of learners' features, the corpus analysis of linguistic features in learners writings (Mompean, 2010). There are not many studies which investigate the content of learners' writings.

Consideration of learning atmosphere, such as different forms of classroom organization as well as different types of blogging on students' overall writing performance and their perceptions on the use of blogging writing, is needed to determine which type is appropriate for which learning styles of learners (Lin, 2014; Lin, Groom & Lin, 2013; Lin, Lin, Hung & Huang, 2014). Also, a lot of studies highlight that a large sample from different contexts and longer duration would foster learners to further elaborate their opinions and discuss more complex issues on their learning (Arslan & Şahin-Kızı1, 2010; Chen, 2014; Pham & Usaha, 2016; Zhang, Song, Shen & Huang, 2014).

Regarding peer and tutor feedbacks, their interaction between tutor and peers, and students' ways of coping with or using comments for their L2 writing should be discussed in future research papers (Lin, 2015; Noytim, 2010; Vurdien, 2013). Concerns of teachers' role in blogging projects and teachers' experiences or self-efficacy in teaching in blog-mediated language classes (Lin, 2014; Mompean, 2010; Sun, 2010), the pressure of the audience and the student writers' consciousness of the audience (Sun,

2010) will also need to be investigated in order to better understand the pedagogical impact of blogs on L2 writing.

Implications for Teaching

There are some suggestions to handle challenges with blogging. It is important to choose a suitable blog platform to use blogging writing effectively (Lin, Groom & Lin, 2013; Soares, 2008; Zhang, Song, Shen & Huang, 2014) and consider learners' learning style into applying blogging writing at first (Lin, 2015). Creating rules for using blogs with learners can facilitate them to participate in the activity more actively. Some suggestions for learners who complained that blogging writing was a time-consuming activity include generating rules about the length of each blog posting, applying several revision steps, providing diverse topics, sharing peer feedback in groups of 3-4, deciding to whether open access for public or not, or deciding rules of feedback, such as friendly attitude and further explanation of comments. Guidelines and feedback training lead learners to provide quality comments to each other, and it encourages their interaction between readers and writers. Most anxiety comes from their lack of language proficiency. However, if they understand that making mistakes is one of the steps to improve L2 learning, learners who are willing to improve academic writing ability can support each other's mistakes and encourage their learning process rather than picking on others' grammar weaknesses.

In the EFL setting, there is the imbalance between instruction and examination as I addressed in Chapter 1. This imbalance refers to how EFL language classes need more suggestions for a better application of the new trends in SLA to EFL students. The new

trends, which is a collaboration of the social constructivism approach and Focus on Form to concentrate on the meaning, the use, and the form for authentic language leaning, can be realized with using blogging writing.

It is worth noting that providing a solid background on the research will help future researchers and educators to apply blogging writing in L2 writing class more effectively. Moreover, this review found that there are not sufficient thematic synthesis papers to compare and contrast with my paper. As points out by Wang & Vásquez (2012), future empirical research focusing on EFL writing learning and acquisition should be theoretically driven and well-designed, in order to achieve external validity and transferability.

References¹

- *Pham, V. P. H., & Usaha, S. (2016). Blog-based peer response for L2 writing revision. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 29, 4.)
- *Ming, H. L. (2015). Learner-Centered Blogging: A Preliminary Investigation of EFL Student Writers' Experience. *Journal of Educational Technology & Society*, 18,4.)
- *Chen, W.-C. (2014). Actual and preferred teacher feedback on student blog writing. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, 30, 4.)
- *Lin, M. H. (2014). Effects of Classroom Blogging on ESL Student Writers: An Empirical Reassessment. *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*, 23, 3, 577-590.
- *Lin, M. H., Li, J.-J., Hung, P. Y., & Huang, H.-W. (2014). Blogging a journal: changing students' writing skills and perceptions. *ELT Journal*, 68, 4, 422-431.
- Lin, S., & Griffith, P. (2014). Impacts of online technology use in second language writing: A review of the literature. *Reading Improvement*, 51(3), 303-312.
- *Zhang, H., Song, W., Shen, S., & Huang, R. (2014). The effects of blog-mediated peer feedback on learners' motivation, collaboration, and course satisfaction in a second language writing course. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, 30,6.)
- *Foroutan, M., Noordin, N., & Hamzah, M. S. G. (2013). Weblog Promotes ESL Learners' Writing Autonomy. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 4, 5, 994.
- *Lin, M. H., Groom, N., & Lin, C.-Y. (2013). Blog-assisted learning in the ESL writing classroom: A phenomenological analysis. *Educational Technology and Society*, 16, 3, 130-139.

¹ References marked with an asterisk indicate studies included in the research synthesis.

- *Shen, Q. Y. (2013). Use of Blog to Improve English Writing in the Chinese Tertiary EFL Classrooms. *English Language Teaching*, 6(10), 51.
- *Vurdien, R. (2013). Enhancing writing skills through blogging in an advanced English as a Foreign Language class in Spain. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 26(2), 126-143.
- Chen, J. C., & Brown, K. L. (2012). The effects of authentic audience on English as a second language (ESL) writers: A task-based, computer-mediated approach. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 25(5), 435-454.
- *Sun, Y. C., & Chang, Y. J. (2012). Blogging to learn: Becoming EFL academic writers through collaborative dialogues. *Language Learning & Technology*, 16(1), 43-61.
- Wang, S., & Vásquez, C. (2012). Web 2.0 and second language learning: What does the research tell us. *Calico Journal*, 29(3), 412-430.
- *Lin, M. H., Lin, C. Y., & Hsu, P. Y. (2011). The unrealistic claims for the effects of classroom blogging on English as a second language, students' writing performance_1225 148..151. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 42(6), E148-E151.
- *Trajtemberg, C., & Yiakoumetti, A. (2011). Weblogs: a tool for EFL interaction, expression, and self-evaluation. *ELT journal*, ccr015.
- *Arslan, R. Ş., & Şahin-Kızıl, A. (2010). How can the use of blog software facilitate the writing process of English language learners?. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 23(3), 183-197.
- Lee, L. (2010). Fostering reflective writing and interactive exchange through blogging in an advanced language course. *ReCALL*, 22(2), 212-227.
- *Mompean, A. R. (2010). The development of meaningful interactions on a blog used for the learning of English as a Foreign Language. *ReCALL*, 22(3), 376-395.
- *Noytim, U. (2010). Weblogs enhancing EFL students' English language learning. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 2(2), 1127-1132.
- Richardson, W. (2010). *Blogs, wikis, podcasts, and other powerful web tools for classrooms*. Corwin Press.
- *Sun, Y. C. (2010). Extensive writing in foreign-language classrooms: A blogging approach. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 47(3), 327-339.

- Sun, Y. C. (2009). Voice blog: An exploratory study of language learning. *Language Learning & Technology*, 13(2), 88–103.
- *Yang, S. H. (2009). Using blogs to enhance critical reflection and community of practice. *Educational Technology & Society*, 12(2), 11-21.
- Armstrong, K. & Retterer, O. (2008) Blogging as L2 writing: A case study. *AACE Journal*, 16(3): 233–251
- *de Almeida Soares, D. (2008). Understanding class blogs as a tool for language development. *Language Teaching Research*, 12(4), 517-533.
- Rezaee, A. A., & Oladi, S. (2008). The effect of blogging on language learners' improvement in social interactions and writing proficiency. *Iranian Journal of Language Studies*, 2(1), 73–88.
- Du, H. & Wagner, C. (2007). Learning with Weblogs: Enhancing Cognitive and Social Knowledge Construction. *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*, 50(1), 1-16.
- Duff, P. A., Norris, J. M., & Ortega, L. (2007). The Future of Research Synthesis in Applied Linguistics: Beyond Art or Science. *TESOL Quarterly*, 805-815.
- Mynard, J. (2007). A blog as a tool for reflection for English language learners. *The Philippine ESL Journal*, 1(1), 77–90.
- Sollars, V. (2007). Writing experiences in a second/foreign language classroom: From theory to practice. In M. Camilleri, P. Ford, H. Leja & V. Sollars (Eds.), *Blogs: Web journal in language education* (pp. 15– 24). Council of Europe, Strasbourg.
- Norris, J. M., & Ortega, L. (2006). *Synthesizing research on language learning and teaching* (Vol. 13). John Benjamins Publishing.
- *Pinkman, K. (2005). Using blogs in the foreign language classroom: Encouraging learner independence. *The Jalt CALL Journal*, 1(1), 12-24
- Warlick, D. (2005). Classroom blogging: A teacher's guide to the blogosphere. Raleigh, NC: Lulu.com.
- Lee, I. (2004). Error correction in L2 secondary writing classrooms: The case of Hong Kong. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 13(4), 285-312.

- Campbell, A. P. (2003) Weblogs for use with ESL classes. *TESL Journal*, IX(2).
<http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Campbell-Weblogs.html>.
- Godwin-Jones, B. (2003). Blogs and wikis: Environments for online collaboration.
Language Learning Technology, 7(2), 12–16.
- Lee, I. (1998). Writing in the Hong Kong secondary classroom: Teachers' beliefs and practice. *Hong Kong Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 3, 61–76.