A Class Blog: Cultivating Students' Writing Accuracy within Collaborative and Competitive Atmospheres

by Teguh Sulistyo

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Teguh Sulistyo[1], Maria Cholifah[1] and Siane Herawati[1]

English Language Department, Universitas Kanjuruhan Malang

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Abstract: In reality, writing is considered very complex activities in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes but the smallest satisfying subject for teachers and the most discouraging lesson for students. The students often produce grammatical errors or unnatural expressions. One of the activities to solve the problems the students encounter in accomplishing a writing task is the implementation of a class blog. As a computer-mediated platform, the blog allows observable interactions both within and beyond the classroom between students and teachers and or among students. Thus, the present paper investigated the power of a class blog in cultivating the students' writing performance, especially the accuracy of the essays posted in the blog. A number of 30 students majoring in English Department participated in this study. They were treated using a class blog in one term. The findings suggest that the blog facilitated the students to revise and develop their accuracy in composing essays. Nevertheless, teachers are strongly suggested to take into account students' different levels of technology savvy.

1 INTRODUCTION

In reality, writing is considered very complex activities in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes but the smallest satisfying subject for teachers and the most discouraging lesson for students (Xiao, 2008). Dulger (2011) states that improving students' writing performance is important even though it is a complicated part of language learning. Commonly, EFL learners' writing performance is measured from three elements: complexity, accuracy, and fluency (CAF) in the target language (Pourdana and Behbahani, 2011; Tavakoli and M Rezazadeh, 2014). This study, however, focuses on the accuracy of EFL learners' writing performance since EFL studens often produce grammatical errors or unnatural expressions.

Writing encourages students not only to expand ideas into texts but also to creat readable and sufficient contents which meet readers' interest and needs. In EFL writing activities, students have to express their ideas in a sufficient content and organization, and they also pursue hard to produce precise grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics (Galbraith, 2009). Traditionally, the teaching-learning processes of writing in Indonesian contexts are applied in pen and paper-based activities. These activties seem to be necessarily minimized by maximizing the existence of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) along with the process witing approach. Process writing approach in integration with technology-supported learning writing classes seems to facilitate EFL learners to build their writing proficiency. Domalewska (2014) adds that technolog supports learners in the learning process modifying the way learning is delivered, so learning takes place in context and nowadays this means technology-rich context. One of the ICTs which is probably suitable to modify the way learning is delivered and to motivate students to work harder in writing classses is Blog-Assisted Language Learning (BALL).

Lin, Groom, and Lin (2013) explain that BALL covers any teaching-learning activities involving the use of blogs as a computer-mediated platform (1) where interactions both within and beyond the classroom take place between teachers and students and or among students, and (2) where language learning activities are observable. In relation with writing process approach, Zhang (2009) specifies BALL as a web-based medium for writing in which all activities covering the writing and editing of information is done through a web browser and is available on the Internet immediately and publically.

BALL, in relation to teaching-learning process of writing, is divided into three kinds: tutor blog, learner blog, and class blog (Zhang, 20[1]; Lin, Groom and Lin, 2013; Domalewska, 2014). First, the tutor blog is run by the teacher in order to give course information, to provide links for self-study online materials, to o[1]r extra reading practice. In contrast, learner blog is run by individual learners or groups of learners a[1] a form of writing and reading practice. Finally, class blog provides not only current information on the course and homework but also gives the opportunity to develop reading and writing activities allowing students to communicate and share ideas with their classmates and teacher. The last kind of blog is used in the present study in integration with process writing approach.

In relation to the advantages of BALL in L2 learning, there have been several studies conducted by different researchers. Anh and Ho (2009) found that blogging can be a useful constructivist learning tool to supplement classroom teaching practice. If well integrated with face-to-face teaching, blogs can give students a very useful platform to practice their target language skills and develop learner autonomy. Meanwhile, another study by Yunus et al. (2012) proved that ESL learners can be motivated to improve their writing skills by using blogs. However, Miyazoe and Anderson (2010) who investigated the effects of online writing through blogs on students' learning outcomes and perceptions found that they have positive perception of blogs, but there are no significant learning outcomes. In addition, Kashani et al. (2013) also conducted research by comparing the effect of blogging and pen-and-paper based modes on Iranian graduate students' writing performance. The findings of the research revealed that blog has no effect on students' writing quality, but it motivates the students to write more enthusiastically due to a new platform in learning in contrast with traditional activities in the classrooms.

The findings seem provide different perspectives about the effects of BALL on students' writing performance and motivation in writing. Another fact proves that students tend to avoid sharing their products with their classmates as a result of lack of confidence in their writing skills. To motivate the students to write more seriously and better, the students need to post and share their products not only with their lecturer but also the whole classmates. In addition, the use of appropriate and challenging activities should be applied in the writing class. Thus, it is still considered necessary to conduct further research on the implementation of BALL to improve EFL learners' writing accuracy which is still under researched.

The objectives of this study then were firstto find out how the students developed their attitudes during the class blogged-settings. Second, this study investigated the effects of class blog on the students' writing accuracy.

2 RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a Collaborative Classroom Action Research intended to improve practice on students' learning (Halim, Buang and Meerah, 2010). Also, action research has constructively assisted teachers to create in-depth perspectives about teaching-learning process (Lacorte and Ishihara, 2002). To investigate how the strategy could improve EFL learners' writing accuracy, a frame of three cycles of action research adapted from Lewin consisting of 16 meetings (2 SKS per meeting) was applied as the research procedures in the present study in which 30 students majoring in English Education Department participated as the respondents of the study.

In order to collect the qualitative and quantitative data, the present research employed three instruments: Field Notes, Open-ended questionnaire followed by in-depth interview, and writing test. The implementation of BALL in integration with process writing approach was applied consisting of pre-writing, drafting, revising and editing, and publishing. The recursive steps of writing were applied in the writing class where the students were treated using BALL. They wrote essays and got online feedback from the lecturer and their classmates, and they shared their final products in the class blog. Sixteen weeks were allotted for implementing the action in which each meeting consisted of two meeting hours (2X50 minutes), but the students were also obliged to do activities outside the classroom to accomplish their tasks.

The lecturer, with the help of an ICT person, provided a class blog at www.teguh-unikama.web.id. BALL in integration with the process writing approach was implemented in the writing class, and a Wordpress blog was chosen for the present study since Wordpress blogging provided two main advantages. First, it was not cluttered with advertisements which possibly distracted students' focuses in doing writing activities or reading the contents of the blog. Second, it was very easy for the students and the lecturer to set up an-email account and simple password as well as a user name

combination to log in. Thus, it was only the members of the blog who posted their products - in the forms of drafts and final products – and provided online feedback and comments.

3 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The qualitative and quantitative data collected from field notes, open-ended questionnaire followed by an in-depth interview, and writing test were presented in two sections: the students' attitudes towards the class blogged-setting and the effects of the class blog on students' writing accuracy.

3.1 Students' Attitudes towards the Class-blogged Setting

The data taken from a questionnaire which was followed by an in-depth interview revealed the attitudes of the students when joining the class blogged-setting. There were eight questions but only two main questions which showed the students' perceptions leading to the atmospheres of the class during the intervention of BALL.

The first main question says" *What do you feel if you get feedback from your classmates and lecturer in the class blog*?". The students in general did not mind getting feedback from their classmates and lecturer in the blog. There were 25 students stating that they were happy to get feedback from their classmates and the lecturer even though 4 of them felt nervous. In contrast, 5 students confessed that they disliked getting feedback via the blog. According to them, pen-and paper based feedback was easier to understand. Getting peer and teacher feedback generates collaboration in the classroom since the students gave and took the feedback. Boudjadar (2015) found BALL can stimulate discussion and provide feedback, so students are encouraged to make more effort to improve their writings. It seems that BALL also enables students to compete each other by trying hard to produce good texts in the blog. This is in line with Lin et al. (2013) and Zhang (2014) who found that blog increases students' motivation and self- efficacy.

The second main question "*What do you feel if your products are published in the class blog?*" In line with the question, 15 students were happy to share their products in the blog. Then 9 students felt motivated to have their products published in the blog, so they worked harder. In contrast, there were 5 students who were not confident enough to publish

their products in the class blog. Besides, 1 student had different feelings: happy and unhappy depending on the quality of his/her product. The students answer indicating their motivation to share their texts and work harder revealed the importance of motivation in L2 learning. The statement of the respondents is in line with the results of a study by Pinkman (2005) revealing that BALL stimulates them to use English due to the interaction with classmates and teacher. Motivation in L2 acquisition influences the outcomes of learning. Alizadeh (2016) states that there are three main keys of motivation: (1) positive attitudes towards L2 community, (2) the enjoyment of learning, and (3) external pressures. It stands to logic if it is predicted that motivation in L2 learning generates the students to do their best indicating competitive and collaborative atmospheres in the classrooms. Foroutan (2013) avows that students having positive perceptions in applying blog foster themselves to build self-regulation and autonomous learning in the target language. In addition, Boudjadar (2015) found that blog encourages students to work hard as indicated by their hard efforts to improve their writing quality. It can be concluded that collaborative and competitive atmospheres motivate the students to work harder to maximize their learning outcomes.

3.2 Students' Writing Accuracy

To determine whether BALL could improve EFL learners' writing performance in terms of accuracy the implementation of BALL was applied in a Collaborative Classroom Action Research in one semester consisting of 16 meetings. The first score (preentry behavior) taken in the second meeting was then compared with the final score (post-test) to investigate whether there was a significant progress of the students' writing accuracy after the students were treated using BALL in the Advanced Academic Writing Course.

Table 1 was the result of the statistical computation using Paired Sample t-Test based on the students' writing performance in terms of accuracy.

As Table 1 indicates, it seems that the students made a low improvement after they were treated using BALL. The Accuracy of the students' writing

Table 1: The Statistical Computation Using Paired Sample t-Test on Accuracy Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	preentry	13.5667	30	1.65432	.30204
	Post	14.5333	30	1.31263	.23965

Table 2. Paired Samples Test

	Paired Differences							Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	d. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower	Upper	t	f	
Pair 1 Preentry-post	96667	.23828	22608	1.42905	50429	4.276	29	.000

performance increased from 13.57 to 14.53 (the scores range 0 – 20) or 7.07%.

Somehow, the result of the statistical computation of Paired Sample t-Test Thus, it was concluded that the students' writing performance dealing with accuracy significantly improve before and after the implementation of BALL demonstrated that there was a statistically significant difference between the students' writing accuracy scores before and after the implementation of BALL since the level of significance obtained was 0.000 which was lower than 0.005.

Accuracy in L2 written production is commonly measured by evaluating the proportion of error free T – units to all T units. Housen, Kuiken, and Vedder (2012) define accuracy as the writer's ability to produce target-like and error-free language. In this study, accuracy is indicated by the mastery of EFL learners to use grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics appropriately in their essays.

The findings proved that BALL is able to increase students' writing accuracy from 13.57 to 14.53 (the scores range from 0 – 20). The findings are in line with those conducted by Aydin (2014) which revealed that blogs are effective for increasing rhetorical strategies and accuracy of the students' written products. It can be found, for instance, a student (IASD) reduced her grammatical errors in which in her essay before the implementation consisted of 19 errors, but after the implementation she just made 6 grammatical errors. Also, Ebrecht and Yuku (2015) investigating the roles of BALL on the students' writing quality also found that by using BALL, it is easier to edit the students' texts because it allows them to identify and correct grammar and spelling mistakes easily. Then Alsubaie and Madini (2018) proved that ICT integration in the teaching process support four main aspects in learning: group participation, regular interaction and feedback, connection to the real-world expertise, and active engagement. Accordingly, BALL plays a medium in improving students' writing ability, particularly accuracy and vocabulary.

In addition, Akda and Menemencio (2017) also conducted an exploratory case study by interviewing and observing the participants of the study. The results of their study explained that blog is an important tool for the students to increase their writing skills, especially vocabulary enhancement and syntactic accuracy. These findings are in accordance with the results of Arslan's study (2014) which proved that practice of blogging improve students' writing performance dealing with content, organization, and accuracy after implementing BALL in two academic years (28 weeks) for tertiary level.

The findings above seem inspire writers to have better performance in their written production since BALL promotes collaborative and competitive learning where the students share and give feedback in online settings. This implies that students are encouraged to collaborate more through sharing ideas in which the students become more active indicating obvious readiness, eagerness, and satisfaction (Abidin, Mohammadi and Hamid, 2011). Besides, students perceive advantages of using blogs included increase motivation to use better English because of interaction with their classmates and teacher as well feedback from both (Pinkman, 2005).

Rahmany (2013) investigating the roles of BALL on students' vocabulary enhancement and structural accuracy in an EFL setting with 40 students aged between 20 to 35 years old demonstrated that Blogs

help the students to minimize the amount of capitalization errors as well as grammar errors. In other words, the students improved their accuracy dealing with mechanics and grammar. When using ICT in writing, the students could make use of their computer in checking their grammatical errors and mechanics. Besides, the feedback given by the teacher and peers in the blog helped the students enhance their accuracy in writing.

4 CONCLUSION

Blog-Assisted Language Learning empowered students to write harder by implementing collaborative and competitive activities in the classroom. Collaboration and competition were reflected from the students' activities in posting and sharing their texts in the blog as well as giving and taking online feedback from their classmates and teacher. Thus, they finally could improve their writing accuracy. The improvement of their accuracy was the results of online feedback given in the blog and the use of ICT in writing itself since the students also maximized their computer to check the grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics of their texts.

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