



Original Article

Exploring Teachers' and Students' Perceptions of and Attitudes Towards the use of Blogs for English Writing Skills at a Vietnamese University

Nguyen Thanh Mai^{1,*}, Dat Bao²

¹*School of Foreign Languages, Hanoi University of Science and Technology,
No.1 Dai Co Viet, Hai Ba Trung, Hanoi, Vietnam*

²*Faculty of Education, Monash University, Australia*

Received 04 April 2020

Revised 13 April 2020; Accepted 13 April 2020

Abstract: The study aimed at finding out: i) the attitudes of both teachers and students at a Vietnamese university as regards the integration of blogs into English writing classes; and ii) their perceived advantages and difficulties in adopting such a way of teaching and learning. Data was collected in two stages: a preliminary questionnaire survey with 110 students and 12 teachers of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) writing, and follow-up interviews with 07 participants, both teachers and students. Findings indicated participants generally held a positive attitude toward the integration of blogs into EFL writing curriculum. Significant benefits in adopting a blogging approach included teachers' and students' access to computer and the Internet, their ability to handle blog-related technical issues, and their awareness of the possible benefits of a blog-integrated curriculum. However, the current limited use of blogs for practicing English writing at the institution as well as students' willingness to post their writings and give feedback on a public page were among the major obstacles. The study was concluded by some important pedagogical implications for the realization of a blog integrated EFL writing curriculum in Vietnam.

Keywords: Blogs, blogging approach, blog-integrated curriculum, EFL writing, Vietnamese university.

1. Introduction

The innovation of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) over the past decades has brought about intensive

changes in roughly every aspect of our modern life and has prompted education to search for ways to successfully integrate technological advances into its curricula. Up to now, a multitude of studies worldwide have been conducted on the integration of blogs, an application of web 2.0, into language teaching and learning. Specifically, the positive outcomes of contemporary [1-4] have

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: mai.nguyenthanh@hust.edu.vn

<https://doi.org/10.25073/2588-1159/vnuer.4402>

strengthened educational practitioners' belief on the use of blogs as a high-yielding tool in foreign language teaching and learning.

The worldwide influence of ICT innovation, to some extent, has raised Vietnamese educational researchers' awareness of the necessity to speed up ICT integration in education and training, yet research into the employment of ICTs for academic purposes in general is still in its early stages, not to mention the specific area of English language teaching (ELT). The first and very few studies targeting ICT applications in ELT in Vietnam included those carried out by Nguyen [5, 6], which discussed technology-enhanced EFL (English as a Foreign Language) syllabus design and materials development, and Dang & Robertson [7-9] which studied EFL students' autonomy and e-behaviours through their participation in a web 2.0 Moodle site. However, available studies have not yet specifically addressed the use of blogs in the teaching and learning of EFL writing at tertiary level.

The study, therefore, aims to explore the attitudes and perceptions of teachers and students at one of the public universities in Vietnam regarding the integration of blogs into English writing curriculum. The two major research questions include:

- i) What are teachers' and students' general attitude towards the use of blogs in English writing classes at the university?
- ii) What are the possible advantages and difficulties in adopting this way of teaching and learning English writing skills?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Benefits of a blogging approach in the teaching and learning of writing skills

2.1.1. Blogging improves language writing performance

Studies on the influences of blogging on language writing have concluded that blogs can facilitate and enhance the instruction of academic writing [10], resulting in greater

improvement in students' writing performance compared to mere in-class writing instructions [11, 12]. From a quantitative point of view, Mompean [13] noted that "the number of contributions was quite satisfactory as the students posted more messages than the number originally required and this can be interpreted as a sign of involvement in the project" (p.389). Also through blogging, language learners further develop their intercultural competence [3], activeness in reading [14], vocabulary base and background information of the foreign language [15], and most importantly, writing fluency [2, 16].

Because of the asynchronous nature of blogs, students have more time to reflect on the content and write without any time pressure [17]. That explains why there tends to be more open and better expression of self among online learners than when they are on the more traditional pen-and-paper mode [18]. Another reason for students' personal development in writing has been attributed to the meaningful and diverse interactions that they are involved in while participating in blog activities [3].

2.1.2. Blogging fosters language learners' understanding and personal growth

The construction of weblog broadens the context of classroom interactions [19] by minimizing the limitations of time and space [20], therefore encouraging students' deeper understanding and individual, critical voices in their writings. When blogging, each student plays two roles of a speaker/writer and an audience and is actively involved in a social process with meaningful and reciprocal interactions. As writers, student bloggers have opportunities to interact and negotiate meaning in the target language with authentic audiences, ones that are closely connected to the meanings generated both in oral and written form [21]. As consumers of blog posts, many students appreciate anonymity, a feature of blogs, as a chance to critically review and challenge their peers' writings, something they may not find easy and comfortable to do in a face-to-face context [22].

On top of that is the instructor's vital role in providing linguistic feedback and promoting students' own views and capacity for self-critique and self-reflection [2, 17, 20]. Although blogs are not considered 'real-life,' the multidirectional interactions among student bloggers, teachers and anyone else happen to view the blog posts are meaningful, because "they make sense for learners who are fully engaged in the writing process and in the interactions" [13]. In their recent study, Jimoyiannis and Tsiotakis [4] concluded that the enhanced opportunities for managing individual work, peer feedback and interaction, supportive dialogue and reflection, sharing ideas, critical thinking and metacognition, all positively influence the students' writing quality.

2.1.3. Enhancement of motivation through various authentic language activities

Blogging helps learners become more involved in writing through a wide range of authentic activities, i.e. those having relatively equal cognitive challenge and complicatedness as real-life tasks [23-25]. Take Galien & Bowcher's [1] study as an example. The diverse cultural background of their students was well catered for in the blog activity, which, under the broad topic of "High schools around the world" students were asked to write descriptive paragraphs to exchange their high school experiences. Thanks to this, the writing task became directly relevant and motivating to students.

Other examples of authentic tasks can also be found in the blog-integrated curriculum designed by Lee [17]. In one task, students were encouraged to reflect on a topic of their own interests or concern. Another task asked students to choose certain podcasts in the language they were studying to listen to (e.g. Facebook or eating out and fast food) then write an entry to describe the content and explain some new words or phrases they found interesting. Involvement in authentic tasks like these helps build up learners' confidence and motivation in learning, for they have some control over their learning. The students in Lee's research were also allowed to use

multimedia (e.g. external links, photos, and YouTube videos) to support the text content. As a result, over 80% of participants preferred blogging to the traditional mode of writing. Similar findings were observed in the study by Huang [3] where students reported higher motivation as they could choose their own topics and were able to incorporate writing into real life.

All in all, the employment of authentic blog activities complies with adult learning principles put forward by Brundage & MacKeracher (cited in [24]): "adults learn best when the content is personally relevant to past experience or present concerns and the learning process is relevant to life experiences."

2.2. Challenges of a Blog-integrated Curriculum

Although much of the existing literature on blog-integrated curricula has been about the benefits, some studies did discuss the difficulties that teachers and students faced as they took up a blogging approach in their writing class. For example, Petersen et al [26] found certain students would refrain from posting their works on blogs due to shyness. Besides, publicly commenting on their peers' writing is another thing that students may not be willing to do, not only because it is a demanding task that requires skills and practice [27] but also because, for certain cultures (usually Asian), people are not encouraged to directly criticise their peers [22].

Apart from these, the use of blogs in writing classes may also come with typical challenges of any ICT-integrated curriculum. There have been concerns about teachers' confidence with as well as students' access to and affinity with computer and the Internet, especially the gap between those living in big cities and those in the rural area [28, 29]. On top of that is how to encourage teachers' consistent use of technology as a teaching and learning tool as technology-enhanced lessons would require extra planning time and greater workload [30, 31].

3. Methodology

Data was collected in two stages, using two different research techniques. Stage 1 (Questionnaire survey) involved 110 EFL students and all 12 teachers of writing skills at the Faculty of Foreign Languages of a public university in Hanoi (Vietnam). The students were selected from 6 out of the total 11 first- and second-year classes using *one-stage cluster random sampling* [32], in which each class was considered a cluster or a collective unit consisting of approximately 20 single units, i.e. students. The questionnaire survey aimed to find out: i) teachers' and students' experience with computer and Internet in general and blogs in particular; and ii) their attitude towards the integration of blogs into EFL writing. The questionnaire was of closed-ended type, but for each question there is one option called "Other" that allows for any answer other than those suggested or further clarification of a chosen answer.

Based on preliminary results in stage 1, three students and four teachers were purposefully selected for stage 2 (in-depth interview) using one of the following criteria:

- Having prior experience with blogs (preferably using blogs for practicing English) and willing to join the new approach of teaching and learning EFL writing; or
- Having prior experience with blogs but not willing to join the approach; or
- Having no prior experience with blogs but willing to join the approach.

The interviews were conducted to further explore participants' prior experience with blogs as well as highlight the possible advantages and difficulties in adopting a blog integrated writing curriculum.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Attitudes Toward a Blog-integrated Writing Curriculum

Statistical data highlight welcoming signals from both teachers and students (89%) regarding the use of blogs in English writing skill. None of the teachers refused to take part in the new approach, and only three out of 110 surveyed students showed negative opinion to blogging in writing.

Table 1. General attitudes toward the integration of blogs into EFL writing

	Options	Teachers		Students	
		No.	%	No.	%
<i>Opinion towards the integration of blogs</i>	I'm interested in and would love to try	11	91.7	97	88.2
	I don't want to try	0	0	03	2.7
	I can't decide	01	8.3	10	9.1
	Other: (02 comments)				

A very small number of participants, i.e. one teacher and 10 other students, were still considering the adoption of blogs. However, from the teacher's further comment in the questionnaire, she was more likely to hold a positive rather than negative attitude toward the proposed curriculum:

"It seems to be an interesting approach, especially in the context that students are very quick in updating new technologies and many of them are keen on free writing. However, I need to find out more about this approach

before deciding to give it a try. For example, whether it is feasible for the majority of students? Whether there are any difficulties for teachers? Whether teachers can control and assess students' learning? Whether any research has been conducted to verify the effectiveness of blogs in writing? Etc."

Her explanation demonstrated a cautious attitude toward making a choice in how to learn rather than following the trend. Indeed, her considerations of the feasibility and other aspects of the approach turned out to confirm

the significance of the research, as these were indeed what the study was set out to explore in the first place.

Also, in the questionnaire survey, another teacher expressed her willingness to adopt blog application in not only writing but also other subjects:

“I think it’s worth trying blogs in writing skills. Gradually we can expand this model to other subjects. Each week teachers post topics on a class blog for students to discuss and comment, and their interactions on blog can be counted as participation”.

This pattern of attitudes was consolidated by data from the in-depth interviews. Hoang, the youngest teacher and a former student of the Faculty, said enthusiastically: “*if there is such a writing curriculum, I will be the first to join*”. Similarly, Quoc, a first-year student, asserted his full support of bringing blogs into English writing:

“... I’m willing to participate once it [the curriculum] is implemented, since this helps promote students’ familiarization with Internet environment and the use of written language to express themselves.”

The fact that most teachers and students at the Faculty held positive attitudes toward the employment of blogs in EFL writing subtly implies that they perceive this type of instruction as worthwhile to be adopted. As the direct recipients of the proposed blog-integrated curriculum, a positive attitude among students is particularly important, since it determines their engagement to the online learning environment as well as their language outcomes [33, 34]. The more students believe in the benefits that the online environment could bring about, the greater sense of community they experience [35] and the more active learners they will become [36].

4.2. Possible Advantages in Adopting Blogs in EFL Writing

4.2.1. Easy access to computer and the Internet

Survey data indicated the number of students having access to computer and the

Internet accounted for very high percentages (99.1%). Among them, 31.8% had 6 to over 10-year experience with computer, 41.8% had been using computer from 3 to 5 years, and only 26.4% had less than 2-year experience. Moreover, learners could access the Internet from various locations: at home (85.2%), in the dormitory (16.75%), at public access points (13%), and at the Faculty (7.4%). These figures allow for greater confidence in the realization of the integrated approach to EFL writing in the future.

The statistics also proved that the EFL teachers at the Faculty had no problem accessing to the facilities needed for the blog approach to writing. Specifically, all 12 teachers had access to computer and Internet, 9 of whom had been using computers from 6 to 10 years and the other three had experienced computers for over 10 years. Teachers could also access the Internet from different locations, for example, at home (100%), at school via the Faculty’s wireless system (7 teachers), at public access points like Wi-Fi cafés (3), and in the dormitory (1). Internet access was even made easier and ubiquitous with the convenience of 3G/4G mobiles and D-Com 3G USBs. Overall, the availability of facilities among teachers of the Faculty was undoubtedly an advantage in implementing any ICT-integrated curriculum.

4.2.2. Ability to handle blog-related technical issues

In terms of technical issues, participants who had some prior experience with blogs reported that they did not encounter any remarkable difficulties in using this application. Hoang recalled his early experience as a student blogger:

“I found using blog rather simple. My friends introduced that blog page for me, then I learned to manage it myself.”

Bao (a freshman) and Thi (a sophomore) both considered blog as one kind of popular knowledge they could pick up easily:

“... blogs are designed in a way that many people can easily take up. That is universal knowledge, so I can teach myself how to use.

Anyway, if something comes up, I can always search for instructions from the Internet” (Bao).

The actual experience of these teacher and students underlines the user-friendly nature of blog, and therefore the feasibility of the blog-integrated curriculum. What teachers need to do to ensure a higher chance of success is to provide students with some brief pre-training on preferably blog’s technical features and *conceptual basis* [37] as well as its function in the writing course and in students’ own learning [38]. Hoai pointed out a simple solution:

“We’ll look for students who are competent in computer technology in each class and ask them to help with the training.”

Hoang asserted that such training did not need to be complicated but covered only the basics:

“The most important thing is to help students establish and manage their own blog page. I believe they can learn very quickly under the assistance of their friends and guidance from the teacher.”

Involvement of technology savvy students in technical training like this is very helpful, as they can act as “on-site technicians” to troubleshoot device problems, thus alleviating stress for both teachers and students and promoting the progress of classes [39].

4.2.3. Awareness of the benefits of a blogging approach in foreign language writing

Data from the interviews showed virtually all interviewees agreed that integrating blog activities into EFL writing would be a good way to improve writing. This is critical because autonomy and motivation will suffice as people do what they perceive as meaningful and are gaining new skills from that [40].

4.2.3.1. Promotion of students’ motivation through various blog activities

The participants in this study were quite aware of the potentials of blogs in providing more varied writing activities compared to the traditional offline approach. “*A variety of activities on blogs will diversify students’ writings and encourage them to share more often*”, said Thu, a senior lecturer with over 8

years’ experience in EFL writing. Hoai, a young aspiring teacher, elaborated:

“Writing needs diversity to inspire learners. Listen to a song today, read a story tomorrow, and watch a movie the day after then write a reflection; that’ll do them good, especially when students are truly interested in what they want to share.”

In her answer, Hoai touched on a typical advantage of blogs and other ICTs that is the ability to enhance learners’ accessibility to multiple input channels (e.g. texts, visuals and audio-visuals) [41, 42]. These diverse inputs are supposed to remove one of the biggest blocks in writing, i.e. lack of ideas [43], and result in higher students’ motivation to write and to share.

More importantly, a blog with its various possible activities when combined with in-class writing would better support students’ different needs and learning styles. As she discussed this, Phuong, a teacher with the most experience in teaching writing skills, shared one of her thought-provoking situations, which calls for enhanced pedagogy:

“There are students who like free writing very much, and they keep questioning me: ‘why do we always study in this boring way? Why do we need to write our essays with the introduction, body and conclusion following a fixed structure? I notice that those considered ‘great writers’ in the world always have their unique writing style. Why don’t you encourage us to develop our own style instead of casting us in a mould?’”

Phuong’s story reflects to a large extent the current situation in most Vietnamese institutions, including hers, where the diversity in students’ learning styles, i.e. their preferred ways of learning [44, 45], has not been well catered for. Usually students are trained to write academic essays of limited genres and in a predetermined way. Consequently, it greatly inhibits their emotions and creation in writing. Phuong, therefore, believed blogging might offer a solution. Sharing similar idea, Quoc, one of the two freshmen, contended:

“... With the integration of blogs, writing will no longer be a mere academic subject but a more practical skill in our daily life”.

This belief complements Ferdig and Trammel’s [46] conclusion about educational blogs enhancing students’ interest and ownership in learning. More importantly, posting to a weblog can take many forms from personal reactions to topics covered in class, reflections to summary and annotations of readings as well as writings combined with a research activity [47, 48]. Hence, what students gain is not limited to the skills required to address regular writing tasks at school but is extended to higher order thinking skills and critical, creative problem-solving strategies, which is very much needed in any other areas.

To sum up, blogs, like other web 2.0 applications and ICTs, have given language instructors the opportunity to incorporate multiple learning experiences into their course and provided students with access to various information and formats, thus enhancing their motivation in learning.

4.2.3. Optimal benefits from regular and meaningful interactions

In addition to the potentials of offering a variety of activities, blogging in writing is appreciated for the meaningful and frequent interactions it is able to establish among teachers and learners. The ubiquitous and asynchronous nature of blogs makes it “*easy for teachers and students to approach at anytime, anywhere, and expands their working environment beyond classroom boundary*” (Quoc). Blogging in writing is also beneficial in the sense that:

“... Students’ writings are displayed in an open environment where not only the teacher, but also other peers can read, comment, and make references. Posting on blog facilitates knowledge sharing and language use, which will improve the general English level within and outside the class. At the same time, blog environment helps students become more flexible and self-confident” (Quoc, student).

Even though Quoc had never used blog as a learning tool before, his personal experience as

an active member of different language forums enabled him to make quite justifiable inferences about blogs: i) students are writing to and interacting with real and wider audiences compared to the traditional writing class [1, 20]; and ii) the genuine exchanges of ideas by means of commenting on blog posts can assist with developing students’ writing fluency and self-confidence [2, 16, 17]. Other participants discussed different advantageous aspects of blog interactions. For example, Thi, the second-year student, believed the frequent exchanges between teacher and students would result in “*better error corrections*” while Thu (teacher) stressed that students could learn from each other through reading their friends’ writings, especially those of higher writing quality. Above all, Hoang emphasized on a stronger sense of belonging to a shared interest community as the result of meaningful online interactions:

“What students benefit the most is that they know their blog belongs to some community and is regularly taken care of. Especially, if teacher frequently visits their blogs, gives feedback, and facilitates them to learn English seriously, students will have the feeling that their interactions with the teacher are not confined to the physical space of the classroom but open to virtual space. As the result, they will have more motivation to participate in the blog-integrated curriculum”.

In his study of Vietnamese students’ participation on a web 2.0 Moodle site (including the use of a class blog), Dang & Robertson [8] also concluded that students’ engagement in their online activities was directly proportional to the amount of communication and information generated in the online learning environment. As such, the more interactions are generated, the more engaged to blog activities EFL students will be. Moreover, the perception of blogs playing a strong community-building role echoed an important research finding by Miceli, Murray, and Kennedy [49], in which the blending of online component with face-to-face work in class provided “novel, additional opportunities

for nurturing a feeling of connectedness” among participants (p.338).

What the study has come up with once again highlights the importance of blogs as a learning tool that Ferdig and Trammell [46] put forth. Participants in the study acknowledged that blogging embraced considerable values in the development of second language writing, especially in providing students with diverse learning experiences and establishing meaningful interactive exchanges between teachers and learners both within and outside the classroom. However, since the approach is not yet familiar to both teachers and students, difficulties, especially at the early stages of implementation, seem inevitable. The next section discusses the possible obstacles that participants anticipated in adopting blogs in EFL writing.

4.3. Anticipated Difficulties

4.3.1. Potentially limited use of blogs in EFL writing

The current restricted use of blogs for academic purposes among teachers and students at the Faculty might become the most potential adversity to a blog-integrated curriculum. Statistics from the survey revealed teachers and

students had mainly employed blogs for recreational purposes such as sharing knowledge and personal experience (6 teachers & 31 students), relieving stress (6 & 45, respectively), and making friends, including foreigners (3 & 39, respectively). Only a modest number of 3 students said they used blogs to practice their English writing skills (Figure 2).

Regarding language used in blogs, hardly any participants posted their entries or comments solely in English. Nineteen students (28.8%) even reported that they used only Vietnamese in their writings. Six teachers and 41 students (62.1%) wrote in both their first and second language with posts in Vietnamese outnumbering those in English. These numbers reflect a fact that most teachers and students at the Faculty retain their blog to the preliminary usage of a normal personal diary written preferably in their mother tongue to entertain and to stay in touch with friends.

To be blamed for this situation was the lack of encouragement in blog use to promote writing fluency. None of the four teachers interviewed had ever encouraged their students to post their writings on public pages such as blogs:

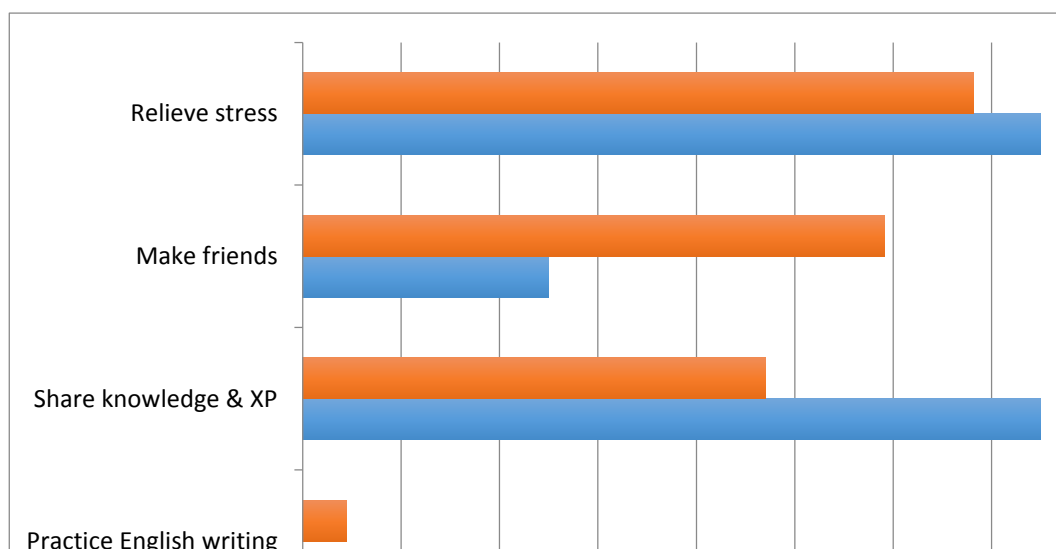


Figure 2. Main purposes of using blog.

“I’ve never told my students to do so, as I think it is part of students’ responsibility. Those who like writing will automatically do it, yet for those who don’t, they won’t write even if we tell them to do” (Phuong).

The teacher stayed outside students’ decision in writing beyond classroom border, assuming that their students would do the writings autonomously. However, what students had been doing with their blogs indicated the demand for more guidance and support from their teacher. Bao, the first-year student, blamed his low writing frequency for the absence of teacher’s supervision:

“When it comes to an English essay or some long writing in English, I don’t usually take up voluntarily but have to be told to do so by someone else. For example, if the teacher assigns a task then checks it, I’ll write. I virtually never write without anyone pushing me”.

Thi, the second-year female student, shared similar problem with writing frequency, yet for a slightly different reason. Apart from some personal diary entries in English, she never posted any of her written assignments on blog, because “*no one else was doing it or exchanging their ideas about writing*” with her. Hoang, the youngest teacher, named this situation “*the mossy blog*”, meaning a blog with so few interactions with audiences that it becomes a discouragement to its owner. Beyond simple attributions of laziness or passive learning, Wolff [50] provided a more justifiable explanation for the decline of blog use for English writing purpose: “our students are not working in isolation but with others, (...) and they need others to enhance their autonomy” (p.111). Wolff then led us to question whether the current teaching practice is truly student-centred and whether students have been given enough opportunities to communicate among themselves and to monitor each other’s learning. Up to this point, there emerges the need for guided blog writing that serves the current curriculum, perhaps in an enjoyable way. Putting it another way, it is high time that teachers treated blogging as an

organized activity to “build the writing habit” and to show students that promoting English writing skills with blog “is not only possible but can also be great fun” [51].

Apart from the above challenges, the use of blogs was also inhibited as the result of changes in ICT trend among young people at the Faculty, a deeper cause that did not come visible before the interviews. Hoang, the youngest teacher, talked about his real motivation of blogging as a student:

“Back then I didn’t have a clear writing purpose in mind. I took up blogging mainly because of peer pressure; my friends were writing blogs, and so was I. (...) Yahoo! Blog was so popular at that time that it became the daily topic of my classmates. Every day they talked about what they did on blog, who left such and such comments, etc. It was a trend, and I couldn’t help being a part of it”.

Not only Hoang but a part of participants also treated blogging as a trendy way to keep up with their peers, therefore would easily put it aside when blogging was no longer ‘fashionable.’ Bao and Thi (students) had also recently made a switch to Facebook, “a hip, hot and happening site” [52, p.158] where staying in touch with *online friends* has taken on a new dimension with up-to-the moment notifications of friends’ status or profile changes, wall posts, and new pictures, etc. [53]. Bao even made a generalization: “*We students like Facebook; we are addicted to Facebook*”. Regardless of how representative Bao’s statement was, such a change of trend already reduced students’ writing frequency with blog:

“I used to write regularly on blog. But ever since I took up Facebook, blogging seems to be less often”.

To some extent, Facebook appears to take over blogs as a more popular trend. However, when viewing from a different angle, participants’ adoption of Facebook is not necessarily a denial to the blog-integrated approach. Instead, it shows participants’ awareness of the value of web 2.0 applications other than blogs in sharing ideas and staying

connected. In fact, educational researchers have quickly sensed this change and brought into play the advantages of more recent ICTs in second language teaching such as Facebook [54], wikis [55, 56], and podcasts [57, 58]. Efforts have also been made to harness greater potentials from a combination of blog and other web 2.0 applications in language teaching, for example, blog combined with forum and wiki [59], blog and podcast [60], or blog and wiki [61]. Thus, regarding one blog-integrated approach, there are several options to choose from, and the most appropriate should be decided based on the specific academic context and to what extent students would like to involve blogs in their writing in a foreign language.

4.3.2. Reluctance to post writings and give feedback on a public page

Since blogging is not yet a familiar learning space, it seems that some students feel its effect is unknown and thus reluctant to publicize their writings as well as giving comments on blogs. Arguably, “when communicating online, people show fewer inhibitions, display less social anxiety, and reduce their public self-awareness” [62, p.155], there have been cases in which students shied away from publishing their works on blogs [26]. Phuong shared her observation of how differently students valued sharing their writings with audiences:

“A number of students really like to share and publicize their thoughts and feelings through writing while others simply don’t”.

Hoai pointed out lack of confidence as the main attribute for this difference:

“Like many Asian students, our learners are often shy to show themselves, especially when their writings, which they self-assess as “not good”, will be read by many people”.

Such a remark is relatively reasonable, because a student also confided in the questionnaire about her perceived limited ability in English writing:

“My writing skill is poor, so I don’t want to show it on public pages”.

If this particular group of students was to participate in blogging activities, Hoai anticipated two ways of reaction:

“As the less confident students join the blog and read better writings than theirs, they may either make an effort to improve their skills or feel discouraged from showing their entries on blogs”.

Ideally, it is expected that students react positively to the blogging approach in learning EFL writing. However, there is always a chance that a part of them feel withdrawn from this kind of activities, which demands teachers to create a secure learning environment and provide students with positive blogging experiences to foster their engagement to the blog-integrated curriculum.

On the other hand, whether students are willing to comment on their friends’ blog posts should also be taken into consideration. In this study, students’ sociocultural values and their second language capacity were regarded as decisive factors in students’ choice to give or refrain from giving peer feedback. Thi, a second-year student, only found it comfortable to give comments to those she felt secure being with:

“I only comment for those I know well, for example close friends and family members. For those I’m not familiar to, I need to read their posts and comments from other bloggers to define their characteristics first, because they and the topics they are interested in may not suit me”.

This pattern of engagement in blog activities is referred to as *community-oriented* [9], for which a student’s online participation is significantly mediated by her relationship with the online peers. Unlike Thi, Bao only commented on writings that stimulated him intellectually and emotionally:

“Depending on the content of the entry and whether it has any influence or impression on me, I’ll decide to give my feedback. I don’t arbitrarily leave a comment on others’ blog posts, as they may think that I’m showing off”.

Bao’s somehow picky attitudes toward peer feedback resulted from the precaution that the writers might perceive him differently once he gave them the comments. His way of thinking and reacting reflects the intimidation commonly

seen in students from a culture (usually Asian) that discourages critiquing one's peer [22].

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the present study has shed some light into the possibility of employing blogs in the teaching and learning of EFL writing at tertiary level in Vietnam. Basically, EFL teachers and students at the researched institution expressed a welcoming attitude towards the employment of blogs in the teaching and learning of writing skills. Participants were also able to point out important benefits of the blog-integrated approach over the traditional offline way of teaching. A variety of possible blog activities enable access to multiple input channels [41]. At the same time, the frequent and meaningful interactions on blogs offer a wider range of audience for students to write to [20], foster a stronger sense of community among participants [49], and result in better error correction and mutual learning. Furthermore, the number of teachers and students having access to the necessary facilities for blogging accounts for a large proportion of participants, meaning a greater chance for a blog-integrated curriculum to be realized.

However, the study did come up with some important pedagogical implications for any blog integrated foreign language writing curriculum at tertiary institutions in Vietnam. First, the general decline in blog use due to different challenges and changes in the trend of using ICTs at the institution is happening and inevitably influencing the choice of which blog-integrated models to adopt. Rather than rigidly holding on to a design that features only blog, teachers may consider a combination of blog and other web 2.0 applications including Facebook, wikis, and podcast [54, 59, 61] so as to achieve the desired effectiveness in teaching and learning EFL writing.

Second, the specific limitation in employing blogs for English writing purpose, in which participants mainly generated blog entries in

their mother tongue for recreational purposes, supposedly originates from mismatching teachers' and students' expectations of writing activities outside the language classroom. While teachers assume that writing on blogs should be done autonomously, most students insist on being provided with more guidance, support and even supervision from their teachers. This fact highlights a need to treat blog as an organized activity that serves the curriculum.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express sincere thanks to the leaderships and colleagues at the two institutions, especially Dr. Raqib Chowdhury (Faculty of Education, Monash University), for the valuable support and helpful comments throughout the study.

References

- [1] P. Galien, W.L. Bowcher, Using Blogs in ESL/EFL Teaching and Teacher-Training, *The Asian EFL Journal*, 42(1) (2010) 4-23.
- [2] F.W. Kung, Assessing an innovative advanced academic writing course through blog-assisted language learning: issues and resolutions, *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 2015, pp. 1-9.
- [3] H.Y.C. Huang, Students and the teacher's perceptions on incorporating the blog task and peer feedback into EFL writing classes through blogs, *English Language Teaching* 9(11) (2016) 38-47. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v9n11p38>.
- [4] A. Jimoyiannis, P. Tsiotakis, Students' engagement and peer interaction in online academic writing through a course blog, In M. Tsitouridou, J.A. Diniz, T.A. Mikropoulos (Eds.), *Technology and innovation in learning, teaching and education*, Springer, 2018, pp. 103-119.
- [5] L.V. Nguyen, Technology-enhanced EFL syllabus design and materials development, *English Language Teaching* 1(2) (2008a) 135-142.
- [6] L.V. Nguyen, The triangular issues in multimedia language courseware design in the Vietnamese

- EFL environment, *Asian Social Science* 4(6) (2008b) 65-67.
- [7] T.T. Dang, M. Robertson, E-behaviors and E-community Formation: An Investigation on Vietnamese EFL Students *The Asian EFL Journal*. 46(1) (2010a) 4-27.
- [8] T.T. Dang, M. Robertson, Impacts of Learning Management System on learner autonomy in EFL learning, *International Education Studies* 3(3) (2010b) 3-11.
- [9] T.T. Dang, M. Robertson, Pedagogical lessons from students' participation in Web 2.0. *TESOL in Context* 20(2) (2010c) 5-26.
- [10] M.J. Kelley, The impact of weblogs on the affective states and academic writing of L2 undergraduates, (Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation), University of Virginia (UMI Number: 3312190), 2008.
- [11] R.S. Arslan, A. Sahin-Kızıl, How can the use of blog software facilitate the writing process of English language learners? *Computer Assisted Language Learning* 23(3) (2010) 183-197.
- [12] Y.C. Sun, Extensive writing in foreign-language classrooms: a blogging approach, *Innovations in Education and Teaching International* 47(3) (2010) 327-339.
- [13] A.R. Mompean, The development of meaningful interactions on a blog used for the learning of English as a Foreign Language, *European Association for Computer Assisted Language Learning* 22(3) (2010) 376-395.
- [14] L. Ducate, L. Locmika, Exploring the blogosphere: From blog readers to blog writers, *Foreign Language Annals* 38(3) (2005) 410-422.
- [15] H.G.A. Le, Blogging and Vietnamese language teaching and learning, *Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching* 6(1) (2009) 268-277.
- [16] B. Farmer, A. Yue, C. Brooks, Using blogging for higher order learning in large-cohort university teaching: A case study, *Australian Journal of Educational Technology* 24(2) (2008) 123-136.
- [17] L. Lee, Fostering reflective writing and interactive exchange through blogging in an advanced language course, *European Association for Computer Assisted Language Learning* 22(2) (2010) 212-227.
- [18] M.H. Beauvois, Computer-Mediated Communication: Technology for Improving Speaking and Writing, In *Technology-Enhanced Language Learning*, Lincolnwood, Illinois: National Textbook Company, 1997, pp. 357- 365.
- [19] J.A. Oravec, Blending by Blogging: weblogs in blended learning initiatives, *Journal of Educational Media* 28(2) (2003) 225-233.
- [20] S.H. Yang, Using blogs to enhance critical reflection and community of practice, *Educational technology & society* 12(2) (2009) 11-21.
- [21] L. Opp-Beckman, Classroom Practice: Authentic Audience on the Internet, In *CALL Environments: Research, Practice, and Critical Issues*, Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc, 1999, pp. 79-95.
- [22] M. Guardado, L. Shi, ESL students' experiences of online peer feedback, *Computer & Composition* 24 (2007) 443-461.
- [23] J. Egbert, C. Chao, E. Hanson-Smith, Computer-Enhanced Language Learning Environments: An Overview, In *CALL Environments: Research, Practice, and Critical Issues*, Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc, 1999, pp. 1-16.
- [24] D. Nunan, *The Learner-Centred Curriculum*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- [25] J.C. Richard, *Curriculum Development in Language Teaching*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- [26] S.A. Petersen, M. Divitini, G. Chabert, Sense of community among mobile language learners, can blogs support this? *International Journal of Web Based Communities* 5(3) (2009) 428-445.
- [27] P. Rollinson, Using peer feedback in the ESL writing class, *ELT Journal*. 59(1) (2005) 23-30.
- [28] C.B. Scanlon, *The natives aren't quite so restless*, Sydney: The Australian, 2009.
- [29] S. Bennett, K. Maton, K. Kervin, The "digital natives" debate: A critical review of the evidence, *British Journal of Educational Technology* 39(5) (2008) 775-786.
- [30] J. Bauer, J. Kenton, Toward technology integration in the schools: Why it isn't happening, *Journal of Technology and Teacher Education*, 13(4) (2005) 519-546.
- [31] G. Azzaro, J.D.D.M. Agudo, The emotions involved in the integration of ICT into L2 teaching: Emotional challenges faced by L2 teachers and implications for teacher education, In Agudo, J.D.M (Ed.), *Emotions in Second Language Teaching*, Springer International Publishing AG, 2018, pp. 183-203.
- [32] B. Johnson, L. Christensen, *Educational research: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed approaches* (3rd ed.), Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc, 2018.

- [33] R. Ayres, Learner attitudes towards the use of CALL, *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 15(3) (2002) 241-249.
- [34] J. Stepp-Greany, Student perceptions on language learning in a technological environment: Implications for the new millennium, *Language Learning & Technology* 6(1) (2002) 165-180.
- [35] G. Kessler, D. Bikowski, Developing collaborative autonomous learning abilities in computer mediated language learning: Attention to meaning among students in wiki space, *Computer Assisted Language Learning* 23(1) (2010) 41-58.
- [36] J.A. Belz, Linguistic perspectives on the development of intercultural competence in telecollaboration, *Language Learning & Technology*, 7 (2003) 68-99.
- [37] R.E. West, G. Wright, B. Gabbitas, C.R. Graham, Reflections from the introduction of blogs and RSS feeds into a preservice instructional technology course, *TechTrends* 50(4) (2006) 54-60.
- [38] F. Vieira, L. Barbosa, Investigating contexts for autonomy - a study of learner readiness and beyond. In F. Vieira (Ed.), *Struggling for autonomy in language education*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2009, pp. 145-165.
- [39] S.L. Hsueh, Challenges of adopting Web 2.0 and Mobile 2.0 for language learning. In B. Facer & M. Abdous (Eds.), *Academic Podcasting and Mobile Assisted Language Learning*, IGI Global, 2011, pp. 70-91). Retrieved from <http://www.igi-global.com.ezproxy.lib.monash.edu.au/gateway/chapter/full-text-pdf/50671/>, 2011.
- [40] T.S.C. Farrell, G.M. Jacobs, *Essentials for successful English language teaching*, London: Continuum, 2010.
- [41] K. Graves, The language curriculum: A social contextual perspective, *Language Teaching* 41(2) (2008) 147-181.
- [42] R.C. Li, R.S. Hart, What can the World Wide Web offer ESL teachers? In J. C. Richards & W. A. Renandya (Eds.), *Methodology in language teaching: an anthology of current practice*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- [43] I.S.P. Nation, *Teaching ESL/EFL reading and writing*, New York: Routledge, 2009.
- [44] P. Cranton, *Fostering authentic relationships in the transformative classroom, New directions for adult and continuing education*, 2006, pp. 5-13.
- [45] A. Grasha, *Teaching with style: A practical guide to enhancing learning by understanding teaching and learning styles*, Pittsburg, PA: International alliance of teaching scholars, 1996.
- [46] R.E. Ferdig, K.D. Trammell, Content delivery in the "blogosphere", *T.H.E Journal* 31(7) (2004) 12-20.
- [47] R.A. Collins, The role of learning styles and technology, *International Journal of Web-based learning and teaching technologies* 4(4) (2009) 50-65.
- [48] W. Richardson, *Blogs, wikis, podcasts, and other powerful web tools for classrooms*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2009.
- [49] T. Miceli, S.V. Murray, C. Kennedy, Using an L2 blog to enhance learners' participation and sense of community, *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 23(4) (2010) 321-341.
- [50] L.B. Wolff, The "good language learner", learner autonomy and the teacher, In F. Vieira (Ed.), *Struggling for autonomy in language education*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2009, pp. 103-118.
- [51] J. Harmer, *The practice of English language teaching* (4th ed.): Pearson Longman, 2007.
- [52] E.A.V. Veer, *Facebook: the missing manual*, Canada: Pogue Press O'Reilly, 2008.
- [53] G. Blattner, M. Fiori, Facebook in the language classroom: Promises and possibilities, *Instructional Technology and Distance Learning*, 6(1) (2009) 17-28.
- [54] L.P. Hayashi, A learning success story using Facebook, *Studies in Self-Access Learning Journal* 2(4) (2011) 309-315.
- [55] M. Barton, Is there a wiki in this class? Wikibooks and the future of higher education, In R.E. Cummings, M. Barton (Eds.), *Wiki writing: Collaborative learning in the college classroom*, University of Michigan Press, 2008, pp. 198-214.
- [56] T.J. Nelson, Writing in the wikishop: Constructing knowledge in the electronic classroom, In R.E. Cummings, M. Barton (Eds.), *Wiki writing: Collaborative learning in the college classroom*, University of Michigan Press, 2008, pp. 215-224.
- [57] C. Fernandez, Four L2 learning objectives to guide podcast design, In B. Facer, M.H. Abdous (Eds.), *Academic podcasting and mobile assisted language learning*, IGI Global, 2011, pp. 21-36.
- [58] L. Lomicka, G. Lord, Podcasting - Past, present and future: Applications of academic podcasting in and out of the language classroom, In B. Facer, M. Abdous (Eds.), *Academic podcasting and mobile assisted language learning*, IGI Global, 2011, pp. 1-20.

- [59] T. Miyazoe, T. Anderson, Learning outcomes and students' perceptions of online writing: Simultaneous implementation of a forum, blog, and wiki in an EFL blended learning setting, *System* 38(2) (2010) 185-199.
- [60] D.S. Kim, Incorporating podcasting and blogging into a core task for ESOL teacher candidates, *Computers & Education*. 56(3) (2011) 632-641.
- [61] D.A. Castaneda, The effects of instruction enhanced by video/photo blogs and wikis on learning the distinctions of the Spanish preterite and imperfect. *Foreign Language Annals* 44(4) (2001) 692-711.
- [62] J. Roed, Language learner behaviour in a virtual environment, *Computer Assisted Language Learning* 16(2) (2003) 155-172.