Enhancing EFL Students' Writing Skills Through Blogging in Indonesian Vocational High School

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Abstract: This study examines the effectiveness of Web Blog (WB) practices in enhancing the foreign language (FL) writing skills of vocational high school students in Indonesia. Digital learning, especially web-learning based blog (WB) has been proven advantageous to enhance the second and foreign language skills of Senior High school and university students in Indonesia. However, little research to date has explored whether Web Blog practices are fruitful for vocational high school learners in foreign language (FL) contexts, a population characterized by low competence levels, naughty adolescents, and few opportunities to engage with the FL. This study involved a tenth-grade class (N=18) who participated in a pre-test, received WB-based instruction, and then completed a post-test. The findings revealed significant improvements in students' writing, as evidenced by higher post-test scores in unity, completeness, coherence, and spatial order. The implications of these results suggest that incorporating WB into FL instruction can effectively enhance the writing skills of vocational high school students, providing them with greater opportunity for peer collaboration and teacher-led conferences.

Abstrak: *Penelitian ini mengkaji efektivitas praktik Web Blog (WB) dalam meningkatkan keterampilan menulis bahasa asing (FL) siswa sekolah menengah kejuruan di Indonesia. Pembelajaran digital, khususnya pembelajaran web berbasis blog (WB) telah terbukti bermanfaat untuk meningkatkan keterampilan bahasa kedua dan bahasa asing siswa SMA dan mahasiswa di Indonesia. Namun, hingga saat ini masih sedikit penelitian yang menyelidiki apakah praktik Blog Web bermanfaat bagi pelajar sekolah menengah kejuruan dalam konteks bahasa asing (FL), sebuah populasi yang ditandai dengan tingkat kompetensi rendah, remaja nakal, dan sedikit peluang untuk terlibat dengan FL. Penelitian ini melibatkan kelas sepuluh (N=18) yang berpartisipasi dalam pre-test, menerima instruksi berbasis WB, dan kemudian menyelesaikan post-test. Temuan ini menunjukkan peningkatan yang signifikan dalam kemampuan menulis siswa, sebagaimana dibuktikan dengan nilai post-test yang lebih tinggi dalam bidang kesatuan, kelengkapan, koherensi, dan keteraturan spasial. Implikasi dari hasil ini menunjukkan bahwa memasukkan WB ke dalam pengajaran FL dapat secara efektif meningkatkan keterampilan menulis siswa*

sekolah menengah kejuruan, memberikan mereka peluang lebih besar untuk berkolaborasi dengan teman sejawat dan konferensi yang dipimpin oleh guru.

INTRODUCTION

Facilitating students to understand and be able to communicate in English both orally and in writing is considered the ultimate purpose of EFL teaching in Indonesian context. Negotiating for meaning as well as offering learners opportunities for real discussions seems paramount for effective language learning (Long, 1996). Foreign language (FL) settings have been characterized as basically different from L2 contexts in terms of quantity and quality in terms of input and opportunities for engagement both inside and outside the classroom (Munoz, 2006 and Lasagabaster, 2008). In Indonesia, teachers talk dominantly in the classroom, and merely reducing this talk or improving input quality and quantity does not guarantee students' good mastery or commands in English. The use of advanced technology, especially digital learning through websites or other flatforms has given a lot of advantages for teachers to run their interacting classes. For Indonesian students, the emergence of previous Covid-19 left something like 'blessing in disguise'. They are more capable and adaptable now in the use of modern applications than in the last decade. Studies by Sanjaya, Apriani, & Edy, (2020) and Juniari, Artini, & Dewi, (2022) reported positive responses to weblogs in writing classes, with students preferring them over traditional methods. Weblogs features, such as drafting and commenting enhance EFL instruction by enabling easy sharing of writing knowledge (Kavaliauskiene, 2014; Alsubaie & Madini, 2018).

The strong commitment and enjoyable activities of Indonesian teachers for the adaptation of school subjects into online learnings have been widely recognized either in the national or international level. Sanjaya et.al., (2020: 466) for example, reported that students gave positive response to the use of weblogs as a medium in writing class. He further asserts that students also preferred to do their assignment on blog rather than wrote conventionally on paper. In addition, Juniari, et. al (2022) found that web blog had a positive influence on EFL students learning to write.

Despite the popularity and high accessibility of the weblogs, yet the research on the use of such this digital learning at Senior High School levels have been mainly addressed to investigate both teachers' and students' perceptions on the use of this advanced online learning media. Most of these studies, however, lacked visions on the development of students' learning, especially dealing with process and products of EFL writing. Moreover, the previous studies have not specifically addressed the unique characteristics of students in Vocational Schools specializing in technical, engineering, fashion, economic and plantation, among other fields.

This current study exemplifies a strategic model using Web Blog for teaching writing in a Vocational School located in Riau Province. The findings highlight the benefits and challenges of this instructional approach, suggesting areas for future research and practical application in similar educational settings. Five parallel classes of Grade Ten, each consists of 36 students, were in pre-intermediate level who had a very limited number of vocabulary and therefore, most of them suffered from the inability to communicate either to speak or write in English. The teachers are well-informed of these students' characteristics such as high temper and gangster. However, they are easy

going and tolerant in many ways. Besides, the use of blogs is mainly addressed to provide students with the opportunity to think or draft, discuss it with the classmates, revise and edit it under the teacher's supervision (Alsubaie & Madini, 2018).

As the basic and real writing of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, describing thing such as in personal recounts represent a core narrative genre that Indonesian Junior and Senior High School students mostly encounter when learning about everyday experiences in English. This is so because a key feature of recounts comprises 'temporal-spatial circumstantial meanings, often realized lexico-grammatically through adverbial and prepositional phrases that guide movement through a sequence of habitual actions and reported happenings' (Crane and Maloy, 2021). Therefore, through a succession of well-defined events, none of the English teachers deny, that recounts are, in (Malek, 2019)'s term as 'ideal textual environments' for vocational high school students to practice verb forms and cohesive devices. A brief picture of Junior High School students' difficulties in writing recount text as identified in Husna (2019: 67) was to include mechanics, grammar, content, and organization. While in generic structure of the text, students still had difficulty in making reorientation, orientation and event.

Research on spontaneous writing has never been executed in Indonesian context, and therefore, the current study is expected to fill the gaps. Recent works on how vocational high school students develop their L2 in particular reference to producing or writing recount texts have had little contributions to this endeavor. Muhsin (2017), for example, found that through the use of Transition-Action-Details (TAD, students' skills in writing Recount Text dealing with the organization of writing got improved through Classroom Action Research. Framana (2017) found that the teacher did not have any particular strategy in teaching and students were lazy to write and they did not understand how to write recount text. Furthermore, the general assessment of students' writing has been mainly based on grammar as Setyowati and Sony (2020: 172) point out that 'EFL writing teachers are often caught in endless checks of students' errors in grammar, punctuation, spelling, diction, cohesive devices, transitions between paragraphs, main ideas, and sentence connectors.

Dealing with students' low ability in writing recount text, Framana (2018) further asserts that teachers were lack of facility to support the process of students' learning. In addition to the absence of teacher's methodology, Siswita and Hafizh (2014) postulate that teacher should help students to develop viable strategies for getting started, drafting, revising, and editing. The absence of language developmental researches as pointed above, have been the primary reason to conduct this study in the hope that it sheds light for clarifying the essential aspects in the teaching of writing, particularly dealing with recount text.

There have been various approaches of assessment for students' writing in the literatures. Jacob (1981) for example, focused on the five criteria including content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. These criteria, however, have been challenged by Byrne (1986) since the students were worried about expressing their ideas clearly within the boundaries of correct usage, grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Therefore, to better assess students' works in this study, simpler indicators were set to include unity, completeness, coherence, and spatial order (Muhsin, 2017; Derewianka, 2004).

Based on the complexity of the phenomenon in EFL learning to write in Indonesian context, the current study seeks to explore the effectiveness of Web Blogs as the main media in teaching recount text at Vocational High School students at Ujungbatu

Pekanbaru, Riau Province, Indonesia. Therefore, two main research questions are put forward to be answered throughout the study namely: (1) What was the current achievement of Grade Ten students before they were exposing to Web Blogs? and (2) What was the students' post achievement after being taught through Web Blogs?

METHOD

This study employed a case study design, focusing on comparing pre and the post-test results to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention. The novelty of this study lies in its unique participant group and the innovative instructional design used. The subjects of the study were Grade Ten students (N=18) from a Vocational High in Ujung Batu, Pekanbaru, Riau Province, Indonesia. Initially, students received five weeks of guided EFL instruction to cope with general competencies (such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing), then their writing competencies were assessed (as Pre-Test). The subsequent treatment was given in the form of new instructional design utilizing Web Blog media over several meetings as described below:

Table 1. Stages and Activities of the Experiment (Web Blog)

Meeting	Stage	Activity
1st	Socializing and building commitment	Students were introduced to the use and function of Web Blog
		Students were encouraged to discuss both advantages and disadvantages of Web Blogs
		Students were guided to make their own blogs
		Students were told what to do with their blogs
		Students were provided with a recount text material through link to be discussed in the following week
2nd	Teaching/ Training session	Learning the definition of recount text through web blog
		Learning the generic structure of recount text via Web Blog
		Learning the purpose and language structure of recount text by using Web Blog
3rd	Teaching/ Training session	Materials review
		Further learning of Grammatical aspects of the recount text
		Students were exposed to recount text
		Students observed the social function, structure and language feature of the text
		Students were guided to understand the new vocabulary, structure and language features contained in the example of recount text
		Students comment on the Web Blog that has been shared
		Students reviewed the previous materials under the teacher's guidance
		Students were provided another example of recount text to be discussed
		Students observed the social function, generic structure, and language feature of the given text
		Students asked, confirmed, and discussed the new vocabulary items, and language features.
4th	Evaluation	Students were asked to write their own text (as the Post-Test) on their own blogs: the topic was 'My Last Holiday'.

The treatments lasted for four weeks, encompassing the learning sessions namely: Accessing the Link, Presenting the materials through Web Blog, Peer Reviewing or Editing and Revising, and Redrafting/ Evaluation. Students were exposed to sample of recount

text prior to their full engagement with the tool. Activities included understanding the use and function of Web Blog, creating personal blogs, sharing the link to access the text materials.

Scaffolding the text via Web Blog allowed students to explore the materials through observing, asking questions, and hypothesizing, thereby encouraging interaction in the target language. The focus was on ingraining the content of the text into the students' mind or perception through understanding its purpose, generic structures, and language features. Students then created their own texts by jotting down what they have remembered in that particular time. At this stage, the teacher's role begins to reduce, providing assistance only when necessary to specify the place and sequence of activities. The teacher refreshed students' memories by sketching or drawing arrows, or reminding them of the correct verbs until the activity concluded.

A pre-test was administered to the students prior to the treatment. Both sets of data were analyzed quantitatively using statistical analysis to identify significant differences between the tests. A paired-sample T-test was conducted using SPSS 25.0 to determine the significant differences in students' writing skills before and after the treatment.

Further data on the effects of Web Blog to students' writing skill especially related to language development were taken from students' writing on the Web Blog. The analysis was focused on temporal-spatial adverbial and prepositional phrases meanings (Crane and Maloy, 2021). It is expected that through some hypothetical and inductive reasonings, we will be able to generate several tenets on what signifies qualified writing recount text for Vocational High School students. Finally, Students' real writing of the recount text were assessed by two raters, and they were directed to the use of scoring rubrics promoted by including unity, completeness, coherence, and spatial order.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Results

Students' current achievement in writing recount text was 74.5 as reflected in the pre-test which had been conducted prior to the treatment. Their average scores indicated that they had 75 in unity, 76 in completeness, 74 in coherence, and 73 in spatial order. Complete data is presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2 Students' Average Pre-test Score in Writing Recount Text

Test	Variables				Mean Score
	Content		Organization		
	Unity	Completeness	Coherence	Spatial Order	
Pre	75	76	74	73	74.5

After four meeting sessions, students' Post-test scores were 82, 81, 84, 85 in unity, completeness, coherence, and spatial order respectively. Meanwhile, the mean score was 83 as presented in Table 3 below. Samples of students' writing are attached in the appendix).

Test	Variables		Mean Score
	Content	Organization	

	Unity	Completeness	Coherence	Spatial Order	
Pre	75	76	74	73	74.5
Post	82	81	84	85	83

Table 3. Students' Average Post-test Score in Writing Recount Text

The significant level in Shapiro Wilk method of pre-test and post-test was found to be 0.200>0.05, meaning that the data were normally distributed. Further analysis of data showed that the mean Sd was different as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. The Description of Students' Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores

	N	Min	Max	Sum	Mean		Std. Deviation
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic
Pre	18	66	88	1338	74.33	1.446	6.136
Post	18	67	90	1488	82.67	1.281	5.434
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	Paired Differences							
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower	Upper	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1 pre - post	-8.333	7.219	1.702	-11.923	-4.743	-4.897	17	.000

From the output above, it was seen that the sig (2-tailed) value was 0.000. So, it can be stated that 0.000<0.05, meaning that the alternative hypothesis (Ha) was accepted. Therefore, it can be concluded that students' writing skill was better after the implementation of Web Blog treatment in writing.

Examining into more details of their writing which is based on six aspects (e.g., the use of Predicates (Verb 2), Temporal, Spatial, Preposition, number of Words, and Mechanics), it was found out that exactly 50% of the students' average score was in the Low category, 33.33 % in the Average, and 16.66 was in the category of High (Table 5).

Table 5. Quality and Percentage of Students' Writing in Reference to Ideal Vocational High School Competence in Writing Recount Text

Aspects	Quality and Percentage of Students' Writing		
	Low	Average	High
Predicate (V2)	70	20	10

	50	40	10
Temporal	50	40	10
Spatial	20	60	20
Preposition	70	20	10
Word count	40	30	30
Mechanics	50	30	20
Total	300	200	100
Average	50	33.33	16.66

The above data indicated that the use of spatial helped students improve their writing gradually which were distributed in the average level (60%) and in 20% in the high level. Also, the number of words distributed equally(30%) in the average and high level. Almost similar distribution of mechanics were seen in the average level (30%) and in high level (20%). While there was no significant aspect found the high level, it suggests then that writing through web blog was not promising viewed from language learning and development.

Discussion

The improved quality of students' recount text writing, as evidenced in the statistical difference analysis, can be understood as impacts of using blogs. Apart from its influence to students' knowledge, the frequent use of this media also positively affected their skills and affective values. These findings corroborate the previous studies by Amal and Mandini (2018), Fahreza, et al, (2017), Artvianti & Dwi (2013), and Sanjaya et al, (2020). Recent phenomena related to 'technology literacy improvement, social engagement, and practical fostering of learning' as depicted in Amal and Madani (2018), were further developed and accessed through smartphones. The current study observed that students' involvement in daily activities manifested in multicultural settings have increased their love and care to the environment, especially regarding specific places. The use of Web blog also encouraged students to actively participate in social and cultural activities, fostering and sustaining social relationships. Consequently, web blogs promoted students' critical thinking skills.

Analysis of the relationships among Vocational High School students' writing products on the first hand, and activities plus words used in the text, and spatial-temporal prepositional phrases, on the other hand, does not give clear evidence to say that Web Blog really give significant effects to the students' writing. Instead, the following four tennets deserve to be further explored dealing with Vocational High School students' qualified writing. *First of all*, they have nothing to do with spatial knowledge. They should have reported many different places around Riau province since they have been residents of the place for a long time. The choices of flattering to outside Riau such as Java and other provinces for some students may indicate their strong family relationships. However, the limited places revealed in the texts might be due to geographical area of Riau province landscape which is mostly muddy area and large numbers of palm trees plantation.

Second, the Vocational students do not reflect to have rich in temporal aspect as seen the products of Verb 2 (Past Form of Verbs). They do not have high mobility or movement (as reflected in their limited action) when recounting their past experiences. They even repeated the same prepositions of time although they performed the activity in different moments or occasions. *Third,* Vocational High School students are not identical with naughty children or disturbants who often supposed to destroy or disturb

people or other facilities. This is reflected in their limited activities which leads to the conclusion that they are good citizens.

One of the most important findings of this study, however, is that Vocational High School students were not aware of correct spellings. The fact is that the majority of this qualified writers misspelled the words. It is probably true to think of their hyper-psychomotor skills, but the case might be caused by the absence of revision in which teacher's role were supposed to be enacted as Philips (1983:1) once suggest the importance of 'the great value in writing instruction of using very frequent short writings, emphasizing validation through the writer's experiential knowledge, and staying aware of the close relationships between writing and speaking and between writing and learning'.

A similar case also happened in Azizi, et. al. (2022: 6) who investigated if podcasting and blogging led to improving Iranian advanced EFL learners' gains of Reading Comprehension. The findings evidenced that the two experimental groups significantly outperformed the control group on the post-test. Additionally, the results noted that there was no statistically significant difference between the podcasting group and the blogging group concerning the gains of RC at the end of the treatments. Based on the findings, Azizi and friends argued that the significant gains of the experimental groups may be ascribed to the effects of the given instructions. In other words, they argued that the participants within the experimental groups could benefit from the podcasts and blogs to achieve a comprehensive literal, interpretive, and critical comprehension of the passages.

Whatever the reasons of why and how vocational students made the utterances as they did in the recount text were mainly because of less frequent and valid tasks that were assigned to them. The minimum connection between writing and speaking, as well as the relationship between writing and learning are justifiable in this case since students are not appropriately adapted to these different cultures and languages. Last but not least, all variables that have been discussed above including place, activity, time, and prepositional phrases are the main inputs for good and standard recount text as Kecskes (2017: 28) claimed that 'the meaning depends the context in which individuals are located has a major effect on what they notice and interpret as well as the actions they take'.

CONCLUSION

The current study has explored Grade Ten Vocational school students' writing recount text in the pre and post treatment by using Web Blogs. It is evidenced in the research findings that students' writing competencies were better achieved after the implementation of Web Blogs. Positive impacts of Web Blogs are salient in the design of the process of learning in which students' visual and psych motoric skills were activated, model text presented prior to independent construction of text was connected to students' real imagination, and students' communications were established via links both to the teacher and their classmates. More intensive use of genre based- learning may have also contributed to the students' better product of writing since they were fully exposed to social function, generic structure, and language feature of the given text. In addition, students were facilitated to ask, confirm, and discuss the new vocabulary items.

However, analysis of students' language development provides insufficient judgment to support the use of web blogs media and as to such the limitation of this current study, future research should be addressed to investigate the levels of students' language development either in phonology, morphology, or syntax, etc. Although web blogs have brought new dimension to our current instructional program, both in their strengths and

weaknesses, the existence of Web Blogs present several implications for EFL learning to write. First, the Ministry of Education and Culture should equip their educational organizations with modern technologies such that EFL teachers and learners can use them to enrich their teaching and learning process. For example, they can equip their classes with enough computers and technology devices to allow EFL teachers and students to utilize blogs and podcasts.

Second, materials developers should adopt learning materials with multimedia-based instruments such as podcasts and blogs. For this purpose, they need to design the materials to facilitate interactions among peers, design a system to monitor the EFL learners' development regularly, and establish new assessment practices to measure EFL learners' learning accurately. Third, EFL teachers should adopt new strategies like blogging and podcasting. To this end, not only should they learn about technology adaptable skills and present the intended materials through technology to their students, but they also need to make students aware of the benefits of blogging and podcasting in L2 learning. Finally, the EFL learners should improve their digital literacy to know how to use new technologies such as blogs and podcasts in L2 learning.

With respect to the limitations imposed on the study, a range of suggestions for further research is suggested. For example, as the present study was cross-sectional, a longitudinal study can be conducted to disclose the effects of web blogs on EFL learners' writing skills over a period of time.

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