

TEACHING WRITING PARAGRAPHS USING E-PEER RESPONSE TECHNIQUE (THROUGH BLOG) AT UNIVERSITY

Gusti Ramadia¹, Yandri², Fatimah Tanjung²

¹The Student of English Department, the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Bung Hatta University

Email: gusti.ramadia@yahoo.co.id

²The Lecturers of English Department, The Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Bung Hatta University

Abstract

This article mainly presents the use of e-peer response through blog to improve students' English writing skill specially writing paragraphs at University. The first part of this paper discusses the students' difficulties in writing activity, limitation of the problem and the purposed of this paper. The second part focuses on what is the definition of peer response specially e peer response through blog and how it can be incorporated to process-based writing by using blogs, especially in the revising stage in which the writer will get a feedback from peers and have a chance to review and rewrite their composition, and how to using blog as a tool in do this technique. This writing process which is usually done through cooperative learning approach enhances learner centeredness and increases the potential of learner autonomy. Chosing the modes of e-peer response suitable for a particular learning situation, they are oral response, written response and the last online response, and then the advantages of doing e peer response technique through blog in teaching learning activity. The third part is focuses how to implement this technique in teaching learning activity, in pre teaching activity, whilst teaching activity, and post teaching activity. The final part raises an awareness of some benefits and drawbacks of peer response process, followed by some conclusion and suggestions of effective implementation of e-peer response.

Key words: E-Peer Response, Paragraphs, Blog, Writing

A. Introduction

English is an international language. It is used all over the world. For that reason, it is important for people to master English orally and in writing, in order to be able to community and socialize with the world community. To master English as a foreign

language, there are four skills that should be acquired by the students in; they are listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These skills are related each other and cannot be separated. It means that if someone is good in reading he /she also probably good in writing.

Writing is a process which the writer writes in organized steps, such as planning; includes setting goals and generating ideas, organizing; includes organizing information and selecting appropriate language, drafting, revising, and editing. Kri `szner and Mandel (2008:209) states that writing is a process including a series of steps such as planning, organizing, drafting, and editing.

Generally, students have difficulties in finding ideas. They are often thinking a perfect ideas more than making a simple idea and make it to be a perfect one. In addition, students find difficulties to arrange their paragraph. The idea is available but the students do not know how to arrange the idea to be a good paragraph. This problem can be because the students lack in grammar and vocabularies. To write a good paragraph, the students have to consider about grammar in order to make a good sentences. If the students do not have good understanding about grammar, they will have difficulties in writing paragraph. Lack of vocabularies also is a problem in writing paragraph. The students do not know the appropriate words in making sentences. So, the students' difficulties in arrange the idea are lack of understanding in grammar and vocabularies.

Beside the difficulties in student's side of writing a paragraph, teacher also finds difficulties in teaching writing. Windiyati (2010:1) said that English teacher's difficulties in teaching writing are difficult to determine an appropriate technique for the students who had low ability and interest in writing, choosing an activity that could encourage and attract students' attention to write better, and arranging activities which were going to be used in the class.

In order to overcome this problematic condition, English teachers have to find suitable, effective approaches or activities. Peer response is one of the effective ways to improve students' writing and effective technique to help English teacher in teaching writing. In general, peer response is used in the form of written commentary and verbal interaction between readers and writers in the preliminary and final stage of drafts. According to (Hyland: 2006), feedback is perceived as an important way to help writers be better in drafting.

At present, teaching and learning trend has shifted from the teacher centered approach to student centered approach. With the integration of educational technology into writing classroom, peer response has

shifted from traditional face to face environment to a networking computer mediated environment called electronic(computer mediated communication) peer response, or e-peer response, in which the students are able to exchange their own ideas and respond to each other through computers online.

As Warschauer and Ware (2006: p.105) stated, “The rapid pace at which educational technologies are growing creates a broad spectrum of ways in which technology can be integrated into classroom instruction”. The technological developments can motivate students in learning and make writing classroom more creative, autonomous and collaborative (Kern: 2000).

Wu (2006, p.125-139) said that in terms of online peer response, not too many studies specifically about asynchronous online peer response can be found. Compared to face-to-face oral or written comments, online peer response has the following advantages: (1) time independent; (2) place independent; (3) no pressure to quickly respond; (4) the ability to monitor conversations. Although email was long seen as a useful tool to facilitate authentic forms of communication via interaction of

relevant topic with real people, to enhance critical thinking and writing, and to improve communicative language skills, blog, with its introduction in 1998, has rapidly become a popular learning and teaching aid in a writing class (Wu, 2006). Because blog design and maintenance is so easy compared to using other traditional web creation software, like Frontpage, Dreamweaver, etc, it is an ideal tool for teacher to construct and manage their own websites.

According to students, providing responses through blogs also appeared to be less stressful, as they did not need to see the person face-to-face. Generally, if students have to provide feedback orally or in written forms, they do face some unavoidable issues. In some cases, students struggle with their peers’ accents if feedback is oral and they find it hard to read their unclear handwriting if it is written. Carrying out peer response process online allows the students to read all their peers’ essays at their own pace, place and time where as in a typical face-to-face classroom setting they may not get to read others’ essays due to time constraints. Thus, compared with face-to-face peer response, blogs provide more flexibility. (Dilani, 2012: 27)

In addition, blogs facilitate writing to a real audience, hence increasing students' self confidence and motivation to write more and share their experiences with their peers. Not only students but also teachers and parents are able to monitor and access their work at any time even after months or years, as blogs have a record of what is published in a blog archive. This also helps the students to monitor their own progress and become more reflective learners.

Blog also integrate students into the world of interconnected media; they become familiar with using blog both as a writer and reader. In addition, blogs provide a great usefulness in developing writing skills, critical thinking skills, and literacy skills (Richardson, 2006). With the potential for collaborative learning, more learning opportunities, and means for learners to interact with each other and learn effectively, peer response activity through blogging can possibly help students develop their writing. It is a worthy activity to increase students' motivation in writing and enhance the interaction among e-peers and teachers.

B. Review of Related Literature

Writing

Writing is one of the most important skills in learning language beside listening, speaking, and reading. Nunan (2003) states that writing is the mental work of inventing ideas, thinking about how to express them, and organizing them into statements and paragraphs that will be clear to a reader. Blair (2010) states that writing is an essential skill upon which all people rely. Having good writing skill is an important part of communication. Have writing skill allow you to communicate your message with clarity and ease to a far larger audience than through face to face or telephone conversation.

Writing skills are specific capabilities which help a writer put into words his thoughts, ideas, and knowledge in an effective, clear, comprehensible, and at times in a unique or artistic manner (Wikipedia, 2012).

Furthermore, according to Dietsch (2006), writing is a process of discovery. It means you will discover thoughts and ideas that lie beneath the surface of your mind. Writing is not easy skill because writer must be able to explore their own idea and their

thought. Most of people use writing to communicate each other. Writing can help us to express our idea in written form and writing is used for communication.

Writing is not easy. It takes practice, as well as revision and editing. In academic and business writing, it is important to be as clear as possible. Make sure that the words and phrases that we use clearly express our intended meaning. The wrong word, too many words, and vague generalities will undermine all the overall impact of our writing. We may have a great argument or theory, but if the reader cannot understand what we are trying to say, our grades will suffer (Wikipedia,2011).

According to Byrne in Roza (2011), there are five components that should be considered in writing:

1. Organizing Idea
2. Grammar
3. Vocabulary
4. Mechanic

Mechanic consist of three parts, they are:

- a. Punctuation
 - b. Capitalization
 - c. Spelling
5. Content

Thinkquest (2011) states writing has five steps: prewriting, writing, editing, proofreading and publishing.

Teaching Writing

According to Harmer (1998), the reason for teaching writing to students of English as a foreign language include some aspects, they are: the first is writing reinforce the grammatical structures, idioms and vocabulary that students have learned, the second is the relationship between writing and thinking makes a valuable part of any language. The third is learning style. The last and the most important in writing as a skill. It means that writing is language skill, just as important as listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Meanwhile, Caswell and Mahler (2004) said that teaching writing provides opportunities for the students to develop clear thinking skills. It means the students are granted time to write and process their thoughts, they can develop a way to analyze their thinking. The students should be ready to think clearly to get the chance to write. If they could not think clearly, they will not be able to develop their ideas to write and analyze their writing.

Based on the explanations above, we can conclude that teaching writing have some aspects like, grammatical structures, idioms and vocabulary, relationship between writing and thinking, learning style, writing as skill, and opportunities for the students to think, analyze and give a chance to write their ideas.

Paragraph

A paragraph is a basic unit of organization in writing in which a group of related sentences develops one main idea. A paragraph can be as short as one sentence or as long as ten sentences.

A paragraph has three major structural parts: a topic sentence, supporting sentences, and a concluding sentence.

1. A Topic Sentence

The topic sentence states the main idea of paragraph.

Gold, a precious metal, is prized for two ***(Topic)*** important characteristics.

(Controlling Idea)

2. Supporting Sentences

Supporting sentences develop the topic sentence.

First of all, gold has a lustrous beauty that is resistant to corrosion. Therefore, it is suitable for jewelry, coins, and ornamental purposes. Gold never needs to be polished and

will remain beautiful forever. For example, a Macedonian coin remains as untarnished today as the day it was minted twenty three centuries ago. Another important characteristics of gold its usefulness to industry and science. For many years, it has been used in hundreds of industrial applications. The most recent use of gold is in astronauts' suits.

3. Concluding Sentences

The concluding sentence signals the end of the paragraph and leaves the reader with important point to remember:

Example.

In conclusion, gold is treasured not only for its beauty, but also for its utility.

In addition to the three structural parts of a paragraph, a good paragraph also has the elements of unity and coherence. They are:

1. Unity

Unity means that you discuss only one main idea in paragraph. The main idea is stated in the topic sentence, and then each and every supporting sentence develops that idea. For example, you announce in your topic sentence that you are going to discuss two important characteristics of gold, discuss only those points. Do not discuss anything else such as the price of gold, the history of gold or gold mining.

2. Coherence

Coherence means that your paragraph is easy to read and understand because (1) your supporting sentences are in some kind of logical order, and (2) your ideas are connected by the use of appropriate transition signals.

For example, in the paragraph about gold, there are two main supporting ideas: gold is beautiful, and gold is useful. Each of these supporting ideas is discussed, one after the other, and an example is given for each one. This is one kind of logical order.

Furthermore, the relationship between the ideas is clearly shown by using appropriate transition words and phrases such as “first of all,” “the second important characteristic,” “for example,” and “in conclusion.”

E-Peer Response

Peer response is a pedagogical cooperative learning technique, which commonly involves giving comments, on each other's written drafts, waiting for feedback to their own writing in return, and their written drafts can be improved according to these comments (Nelson and Murphy: 1993:135-141).

Peer response is also called peer review, or student feedback. It's a cooperative activity in which students exchange their writing drafts with other

students, their peers, give comments on their peers' writing draft so that their peers can improve their own written work (Nelson and Murphy: 1993). Students can do peer response activity with their friends, in pairs or small groups. Peer response has great potential benefits with regard to students' writing development. Students can do peer feedback activity either in a written, oral, or computer-mediated mode (Liu & Hansen: 2002:179).

In addition, peer response is a writing activity in which students work in groups collaboratively and provide feedback on their peers' writing; the peer feedback activity can be done in form of an oral, a written or CMC model.

According to Hansen and Liu (2005), peer response was defined an interaction between each other. Peer response is an integral part of most composition classes. Peer response comments can lead to meaningful revisions. Revisions based on peer comments can be better in vocabulary, organization and content.

Different modes of peer response are available for teachers to choose as follows:

1. Oral mode - the reviewer reads the writing draft paper and then orally gives comments.

2. Written mode - the reviewer reads the writing paper and writes comments to give back to the writer.
3. Written plus oral - the reviewer reads the paper and writes comments and then orally discusses the comments with the writer.
4. Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) is a method of using computers in human communication.

The reviewer reads the paper on-line and respond either asynchronously (delayed time frame) or synchronously (real time). Now, we have implemented technology in the writing classroom, and it can encourage the students to be more active and autonomous learners. Also, the atmosphere of writing classroom will be more creative and collaborative. (Liu & Hansen, 2005).

Adapted from Tuzi (2004), there are three modes of peer feedback, name;

- a. Written feedback,
- b. Oral feedback, and
- c. Online feedback.

Common features and differences of these three modes of giving feedback are presented in Table 1.

Table: 1

Common features and differences In oral, written, and online feedback

Criteria	Oral feedback	Written feedback	Online feedback
Mode of communication	Oral / two way communication	Written / mostly one way communication	Written / Two way communication
Pressure to respond	Pessure	Pressure	No pressure
Place and time	Dependent	Dependent	Independent
Components an communication	Nonverbal	No nonverbal	No nonverbal
Personal distance	Less	More or less	More
Level of cultural hurries	Greater	Greater	Fewer
Involvement	Greater	Greater	Greater
Frequency of meaning negotiation	More	Less	More
Delivery effort	Less	Greater	Less
Other facilitates	Not available	No cut & paste	Cut & paste
Message performance	Not available	Fewer	Greater

They are able to acces quickly the writing environment without time or place dependence. The use of network computers offers students free communication, autonomous interaction and collaborative

ideas shared in group discussion. Moreover, new ways of giving and receiving feedback seems beneficial and effective activity in writing instruction (Morra & Romano: 2009). New technologies like wikis, podcasts, blogs, twitter, facebook and online forums are increasingly used in writing class. Among these popular technologies, blogs seem to provide suitable features and characteristics that can support peer feedback activity in writing classroom.

Using Blogs in English Language

Learning Context

Students can be motivated to write more in both academic and non academic. They can write and give comment on their friends' writing through blogging (Aljamah: 2012). Moreover, they can share and discuss their interests, their likes, and individual differences. Students can get feedback from other audience through blogging, they also have an opportunity to get information in which their interested and write things they really want to. In a similar way, Dawns (2004) claims that integrating blogs to writing classes improved students' writing skills.

Gallen & Bowcher (2010) state that students have an additional motivating opportunity through blogging since they are

able to publish their works in a nonjudgement fun enviroment. Blogs provide increased and more balanced students' communication, students have more time to consider what to write and to formulate their responses. In addition, teachers can use blogs as a bridge between lessons; there are three kinds of blogs used in classroom; the tutor blog, the learner blog, and the class blog. Teacher are able to post teaching materials that recycle and review vocabulary and topics presented during lessons. Also, teachers can save the classroom time as information about schedule changes, homework assignment. (Campbell, 2003). Here is a screenshot of a *class blog* from WRITING 200 – winter 2013.

There are many advantages of Using Peer Response through blog in teaching writing, they are:

1. Blogging can improve students' writing skills and build their confidence as writers. By blogging, students can take ownership of their writing, become better observers of others' writing, and develop a more immediate and powerful understanding of audience. (Gayle Morris, p. 734).

2. Students had the “opportunity to develop their basic skills” and their ability to draft, proofread and edit texts. (Jones, 2004, p. 55).
3. Blogging to be extremely beneficial in assisting students to “articulate their ideas in a range of complicated linguistic modes, thus developing students’ ability to construct complex sentences.(Kelly and Safford, 2009, p.121).
4. Blogs provide students with the opportunity to apply and extend their writing skills and publish their work. (Block, 2007).
5. By being aware of their audience, students become encouraged to focus on their language choices, editing their work with the possibility of advancing their “story telling and creative writing” abilities, whilst also responding to and making comments on blog posts. (McNamarra, 2008).
6. Teachers can easily use the blog to organize a collaborative learning environment in which students can peer edit others’ postings (Dieu, 2004; Mitchell, 2003). Students should be encouraged to comment their partner’s postings, which can also be shared by other classmates.

The Procedure of Teaching Writing Using e – Peer Response Technique (Through Blog)

Pre – teaching activity

a. Pre writing activity

The writer gives two model in pre writing activity

By doing brainstorming

- a. Teacher gives the topic to the student
For example: *Animal*
- b. The teacher do brainstorming by asking the students some questions related to the topic.
For example:
 1. How many category of animal do you know in the world?
 2. What are the examples for each category?
 3. What we call for the animals that liveat home?
 4. Do you know how to take care the animal?
- c. Let the students open their handbook and read about the essay of tourisms by themselves.
- d. Point out the difficult words and ask the student to check it in their dictionaries.

- e. Explain generally about the topic
After the student give the answers for brainstorming, questions, and read the essay, teacher concludes their answer by producing one idea in oral or written.

For example:

Pet animals are the animals which are kept by the people. These animals can be cats, bird, dog, whatever your pet animals are, so that you have to treat your pet carefully and give them good treatment, protection and care. For example, when they are sick, take them to a venetarinarian. One point to remember is that you should place them in a warm and clean place to sleep in, and if you keep fish as your pet, you have to clean the aquarium at least once a week. Daily care is calso important because it will show them your love and affection. Pet animal cannot be in dangerous and harmful if you treat them nicely and love them as your friends. They will also love you and be loyal to you as their master

- f. The students think more over about animals. Then they choose the title related to the animals based on their need and interest. For instance how to keep pet animals, wild animals, how to keep snake the wild animal, etc.

1.2 Whilst teaching activity

In whilst teaching activity the students should follow these procedures:

- a. Divide the students into a group, each group consist of four to six members and help each other in various ways. For example, the students who have higher ability in transferring idea and opinion should help the students who have low ability. By having a collaboration group, the students can learn to listen to the thoughts of others. They also learn more about the issues that will be criticized. They learn to see their own believe in the context of different life experiences. Thus,

- they become aware that their own ideas might need to be modified.
- b. Ask the students to write new paragraph about animals by conveying their new ideas, opinion based on the fact, real conditions or their experience in their own blog. In this section, students' collaboration group work are very needed. After they made the paragraph on their blog, ask the students to publish their draft on their personal blog and provide response or feedback on their peers' work using the comment feature of the blog.
 - c. Each of them in group should give any comments and suggestion in producing a good writing. And then the students make decision which revision to make based upon the group comments and suggestions.
 - d. Teacher's intervention for additional training after seeing how peers provide comments.
 - e. Then come to editing section where the students work together to correct all spelling, punctuation, capitalization, grammar, and others mechanical errors based on dictionaries or English grammar text book. and finally they can ask teacher as a final editor.
 - f. Ask the students to discuss their story and write into the new one, after correcting and improving their paragraph.
 - g. At last, check it again by the teacher to make sure whether the students make any mistakes or not in their rewrite. Then the teacher make decision whether students' writing can published in class blog.

1.3 Post teaching activity

Post teaching activity is an activity that is done after pre-teaching activity and whilst teaching activity. At this stage teacher do some activities, they are:

1. Collect students' work from their blogs and put it in class blog. To get them more motivated put the name of students and their group. And if it is needed include their photos in page of their writing.
2. Ask them to read their work one by one in front of the class.
3. Asking the students to retell what are the information they had heard.
4. Conclude the lesson and give some information to the students.

5. Follow up. Ask the students to write new draft using new topic in their personal blog.

Conclusion

Although developing students' writing skills is one of the most complicated tasks, English teachers try to find effective ways to develop the students' writing proficiency specially writing paragraph. Among them, peer response is the one mostly employed because it allows the students to construct knowledge through social sharing and interaction. Giving response to peers is a crucial part in process-oriented writing instruction, and it is always incorporated in the revision stage.

Peer response holds through blog both positive and negative views for students' writing development. At first, the students might not be accustomed to commenting on their peer's work, but they can learn and adjust themselves to the new learning environment. However, teacher's comments are still needed and useful. It will be more effective and beneficial for the students if the teacher's comments are given on the right time of the writing process. Effective peer response activities are not just a stage in the writing process; they are an

integral technique of promoting language development in the students' writing ability.

Aljamah, H. F. (2012). *Saudi Learner Perceptions and Attitudes toward the Use of Blogs in Teaching English Writing Course for EFL majors at Qassim University*. English Language Teaching. Classified from <http://www.ccsenet.org/journal/index.php/elt/article/view/13881/9527>.

Blair, G.M. (2010). *Writing Skill*. retrieved from. <http://www.ee.ed.ac.uk/~gerard/Management/art4.html>.

Campbell, P. (2003). *Weblogs for Use with ESL Classes*. retrieved from. <http://iteslj.org/Techniques/CampbellWeblogs.html>

Dawns, S. (2004). *Educational blogging*. *Educase review*, 39(5), 14-26. retrieved from. <http://www.educause.edu/ero/article/educational-blogging>

Dietsch, B.M.(2006). *Reasoning and Writing Well. Fourth Edition*. New York: Mc Graw Hill.

Donovan, Melissa.(2007). *Writing Habits*. retrieved from. <http://www.writingforward.com/better-writing/writing-habits>.

Galien, P. & Bowcher, W. L. (2010). *Using blogs in ESL/EFL Teaching and teacher training*. *Asian EFL Journal*. Professional teaching Articles. Vol. 4 February.

Hansen, J. & Lui, J. (2005). "Guiding Principles for Effective peer Response." *ELT Journal*. 59/1:p. 31

Hyland, K. (2003). *Second Language Writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hyland, K. & Hyland, F. (2006). *Feedback in second language writing: Contexts and Issues*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Johnson, A.(2004). *Creating a writing course utilizing class and student blogs*. Classified from. <http://iteslj.org/Technique/JohnsonBlogs>.

Kelly, A. & Kimberly, S.(2009). *Does teaching complex sentences have to be complicated? Lesson from children's online writing*. *Literacy UKLA*. Classified from. <http://online.library.wiley.com/doi/2009/full>.