

# The Effect of Weblog on the Filipino Learners' Writing Performance

**ROTHELIA MARIA G. UGSAD**

<http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4774-2207>

[rotheliamariaugsad@gmail.com](mailto:rotheliamariaugsad@gmail.com)

Palompon Institute of Technology

Palompon, Leyte

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## ABSTRACT

Writing is a daunting task for Filipino college students. However, in the midst of cyberspace and social networks, this study sought to determine the effect of the weblog as a motivational tool on the writing performance of Bachelor of Arts in Communication 1<sup>st</sup> year college students of Palompon Institute of Technology, Philippines. Using the pretest-posttest control group design, the students enrolled in Communication Skills II were randomly assigned to either the weblog group or the paper-and-pen group. A writing test was used both as a pretest and posttest, which was scored using Jacobs (1981) ESL Composition Profile. The data were treated using the mean and t-tests for both dependent and independent samples. Results revealed that the students' initial writing performance was more or less on the same level while the post writing performance of the weblog group was better than the paper-and-pen group. Students in both groups benefited considerably from the use of their respective writing tools, but weblog is a more motivating tool than the paper and pen in the development of the students' writing ability. Students then need a writing tool in whatever form to improve their writing ability, but they perform better if they use a weblog instead of paper and pen.

**Keywords** — ICT in Education, academic writing, weblog, L2, pretest-posttest control group design, Philippines

## INTRODUCTION

Writing plays an important role in our personal and professional lives. It is a tool for the creation of ideas and the consolidation of the linguistic system by using it for communicative objectives in an interactive way. Thus, it has become one of the essential components in the curriculum (Massi, 2001).

According to Warschauer (2010), writing is especially important for the instruction of second language learners for three reasons. First, writing well is a vital skill for academic or occupational success, but one that is especially difficult for second language learners to master. Second, writing can be an effective tool for the development of academic language proficiency as learners more readily explore advanced lexical or syntactic expression in their written work. Third, writing across the curriculum can be invaluable for mastering diverse subject matter, as written expression allows learners to raise their awareness of knowledge gaps, abstract problem-specific knowledge into schemas that can be applied to other relevant cases, and elaborate mental representations of knowledge that can be more easily retrieved, while simultaneously allowing teachers to better understand the students' state of knowledge and thinking process and thus adjust instruction as necessary.

Many students find writing an unpleasant task and have a negative attitude towards it. According to Sayuti (2013), writing is a daunting task for English as a Second Language (ESL) learners. Most of the time learners would sigh at the thought of having to write a long essay even though this is what is expected of them in public examinations.

Similarly, Villas (2013) pointed out that writing poses greater problems than the other language skills—reading, listening and speaking. This demands that writing teachers acquire a deep understanding of its nature and intensively plan how to present it to the class in an effective way.

The above-mentioned difficulty in writing is evident in the Philippines, where English as a language is highly valued because it has prestige and offers social mobility. However, it is a fact that the school setting offers the learners very limited access and exposure to English.

In their effort to respond to 21st century literacy needs of learners, many educators now are using technology that combines computers and telecommunication (more popularly known as Computer-Mediated Communication or CMC) in the classroom (Cequeña & Gustilo, 2014).

From CMC, various Social Networking Sites (SNSs) with multiple applications have emerged. Among these features, blogging or weblogs have

become a very popular medium in teaching academic writing (Cequeña & Gustilo, 2014). According to Manzanilla (2013), the weblog is a new technology strategy in the teaching practice that sparks online conversations

Blogging might help language learners to obtain, process, and construct words in the English language. Students are motivated to use technology to write. Using this idea, teachers can assimilate what the students are already doing through personal websites/blogs and classroom content with a meaningful audience. Students, no matter what their gender or ability level is, need to see that writing is a vehicle to show individual thought on subjects, and that this is powerful. Technology, such as weblogs, can provide one part of the answer, but educators should recognize that the key to conscientious writing among students is that they need to be a more active part of the educational community (Manzanilla, 2013).

Manzanilla (2013) has observed that college students are “tech savvy” nowadays. They usually communicate in well-known social network sites such as Facebook, Twitter and blog spots to express their unrestricted thoughts through blogging. Since language learning is a communicative process, this emergent interest can be channeled to develop their writing abilities in English. The same is true in the Palompon Institute of Technology (PIT). Blogging can be used to motivate PIT students to write. Like most Filipino students, they find writing difficult. But like most young people, they are “tech savvy,” which can be harnessed toward getting them interested to write.

The researcher, as an English language instructor, has long been searching for an interactive writing tool that will motivate her students to write effectively. Blogging can possibly create a huge impact in the preparation of resources for language teaching. Through this tool, students will discover once again the need of writing effectively in English in their own turf, which is the Internet. It is in this light that this research study was conducted.

## FRAMEWORK

This study was founded on three theories that look at learning as a collaborative, social, dynamic process. These are the (1) Collaborative Learning Theory, (2) Socio-cultural Theory of Vygotsky, and (3) Constructivist Theory of Piaget.

According to Reimer (2013), the Collaborative Learning Theory (CLT) is a theory that can also be applied to incorporating weblog writing into the classroom. As Fageeh (2011) stated about CLT: “This theory regards sharing as a fundamental feature of successful collaboration. Blogging as a feature of CMC

provides a viable environment for collaboration in which EFL learners can share their emotions and ideas in cyberspace.”

Reimer (2013) pointed out further that the CLT theory is similar to Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which emphasizes learning through collaborative efforts with others. Weblogs that are available to a larger student body, or the general public, “have the potential of being a unique learning venue where collaboration can take place and interaction among L2 participants can be promoted”.

These three theoretical frameworks all incorporate a social aspect into learning, something that is very important when learning a second language. By using weblogs as a method of completing writing assignments, students are provided an opportunity to interact with the world and practice what they are learning in the classroom on a much larger scale. Weblogs can be used to connect the English language learners around the world to create meaningful interactions with students who are just like them (Reimer, 2013).

Barrios, as cited in Jones (2006), said that blogs can develop reading and writing skills, empower students to become better researchers, writers, independent learners, and develop international Web communities. Blogs for writing can be used in various ways; for example, learning journals, learning logs, thinking journals, reader response journals, reflective journals, and visual learning logs. If the journaling is to be collaborative, then blogging would be an effective use for it. Practitioners also assert that the assessment of writing is facilitated by the use of blogs because it combines the best elements of portfolio-driven courses, where student work is collected, edited, and assessed, with the immediacy of publishing for a virtual audience. The content management platforms on which blogs are built make the entire process of assessment efficient.

Meanwhile, Vygotsky (Fageeh, 2011) advanced the Socio-cultural Theory (SCT), “which emphasizes that learning is embedded within social events and occurs as a child interacts with people, objects, and events in the environment. Practically speaking, developmental processes take place through participation in cultural, linguistic, and historically formed settings such as family life and peer group interaction, and in institutional contexts like schooling, organized sports activities, and work places, to name only a few. SCT argues that while human neurobiology is a necessary condition for higher order thinking, the most important forms of human cognitive activity develop through interaction within these social and material environments.

This interaction with classmates and the outside world allow the student to have a real-world view when completing writing assignments and leads to an awareness of audience. Participants work in group settings and co-create social weblog posts. Co-creating weblog posts incorporates parts of the Collaborative Learning Theory (Reimer, 2013).

However, CMC may also be seen as an environment promoting the Constructivist approach. Social constructivism has been developed from the theories of Bakhtin (1981), Bruner (1966) and Vygotsky (1978). This theory stresses that knowledge is fluid, not fixed, and learners build their knowledge by engaging in collaborative activities with other students, instructors and learning environment. Its goal is to create learning communities that are akin to the collaborative practice of the real world.

According to constructivist approach and constructivist learning principles, online learning and teaching of languages could also be promising at promoting learners' language and communicative skills as well as at fostering their autonomy. Learners would have more opportunity for self-study as well as collaboration. In asynchronous learning environments, for instance, learners could contribute by having time for research and acquire the necessary skills for further knowledge construction. The acquisition of these social and interactive skills would contribute into their development into more confident, pro-active, responsible and social individuals (Tuncer, 2009).

The activity of blogging to be in concert with the constructivist learning approach as research has revealed that learning is best achieved when students are actively engaged in the process of constructing new knowledge through acquiring, generating, analyzing, manipulating, and structuring novel information (Salen, 2007).

The foregoing constructs provided the theoretical underpinnings of this study, the rationale of which is to address the difficulty and poor motivation that the students have in writing, which is an integral part of their academic and future professional lives.

Research shows that with technology used as a motivating tool in the classroom, students produce better compositions. One way to incorporate technology into an ESL classroom is through the use of weblogs. Weblogs are "an online journal that an individual can continuously update with his or her own words, ideas, and thoughts through software that enables one to easily do so" (Reimer, 2013).

## OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of this study was to determine the effect of weblog and paper and pen on the writing performance of the students, specifically, the Bachelor of Arts in Communication (AB Com.) freshmen studying at Palompon Institute of Technology (PIT), Philippines.

## METHODOLOGY

The pretest-posttest control group design was used in this study to determine whether there was a significant difference in the writing performance of the students using weblog and those using paper and pen.

For the control group, the study was conducted at the AB Com. Classroom (Rm. 219) of the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) Building, while for the experimental group, it was conducted at the Cyber Library of Palompon Institute of Technology, Evangelista Street, Palompon, Leyte. The Cyber Library had enough computers for the use of all the concerned participants in the study.

As originally proposed, the subjects of the study were the thirty-seven (37) AB Com. freshmen of the Palompon Institute of Technology (PIT) who were enrolled in Communication Skills II in the second semester of SY 2015-2016. However, four (4) of them dropped out before the posttest due to financial and family challenges, thus the number of those who actually participated in the study was narrowed down to 33.

The students were assigned to either of two groups – the control group and experimental group. To ensure that each student would have an equal chance of being placed in either group, a random sampling technique was used. Firstly, they were ranked from top to bottom according to their final grades in English 1, to make certain that the participants in both groups had approximately the same writing ability level at the start of the study. They were then assigned corresponding numbers. Those whose numbers were even composed the control (paper and pen) group while those whose numbers were odd made up the experimental (weblog) group. There were 16 participants in the control group, and 17 in the experimental group. The names of the participants in each group, along with their corresponding numbers, were written in a master list prepared by the researcher for reference purposes.

A writing test was used both as a pretest and posttest. The test was based on an essay developed by process description entitled, “How to Study for Exams

and Get Straight 'As'" by Philip Z. A. Nazareno, which was lifted from the *Manila Daily Bulletin*, which the students were made to read and then rewrite or reconstruct in their own words.

The ESL (English as Second Language) Composition Profile developed by Jacobs (1981) was used to rate the students' written compositions. It is a set of criteria for rating content, organization, vocabulary, language use and mechanics on the students' compositions. It was utilized in this study because it encompasses all the aspects that need to be measured in a composition.

The Profile form contains five component scales, each focusing on an important aspect of composition and weighted according to its approximate importance for written communication: content (30 points), organization (20 points), vocabulary (20 points), language use (25 points), and mechanics (5 points). The total weight for each component is further broken down into numerical ranges that correspond to four mastery levels: excellent to very good, good to average, fair to poor, and very poor. These levels are characterized and differentiated by key words or "rubrics" representing specific criteria for excellence in composition. Unlike some holistic evaluations in which readers base their judgments on a single first impression of the quality of a composition, readers using the Profile in effect do five holistic evaluations of the same composition, each from a slightly different perspective on the whole. This is an important difference since readers sometimes tend to value only one aspect of a composition when using a purely impressionistic approach, yet it is only through a writer's successful production, integration, and synchronization of all these component parts of a composition that an effective whole is created.

The procedure was carried out in three (3) stages, namely: 1) conducting and scoring the pretest; 2) developing the writing ability and administering the treatment to the experimental group, and 3) conducting and scoring the posttest.

### **Gathering Procedure**

The procedure was carried out in three (3) stages, namely: 1) conducting and scoring the pretest; 2) developing the writing ability and administering the treatment to the experimental group; and 3) conducting and scoring the posttest.

**Conducting and scoring the pretest.** The pretest was conducted to the students together as one group, although they had previously been equally divided into two. A coding system developed by the researcher was used to determine which group they belonged to. The students were given copies of the essay by Nazareno. They were instructed to 1) read the essay silently for ten (10) minutes and 2) reconstruct it in their own words for 30 minutes, without turning

back to the original text when they started writing. To ensure that the students followed the instructions, the copies of the text were retrieved 10 minutes after they had read it. Then, after the given time, the researcher collected the students' written outputs. She made sure that instead of their names, the students wrote only their assigned numbers on the upper left part of their paper in order to avoid subjectivity in the scoring of their answers.

To ensure the reliability of the test scores, three English instructors who are teaching writing in the PIT Language and Literature Department were asked to rate the students' outputs using Jacob's criteria. Then, the researcher got the average score of each student. The scores served as indicators of the students' initial writing performance.

**Developing the writing ability and administering the treatment.** After administering the pretest and while it was being scored, the researcher lectured to the students about how to write a process analysis essay a week before the two groups were separated in order to get reliable results. After the one-week lecture, the control group met at 9:30 to 10:30 in the morning during Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays at Rm. 219 of the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) building, while the experimental group met at 4:00 to 5:00 in the afternoon at the PIT Cyber Library. For six (6) meetings, she lectured to them about how to write a process analysis essay.

Based on the updated English 2 (Communication Skills 2) syllabus (Appendix C), one of the lessons that was taken up was writing the process analysis essay. The researcher taught the students how to write an essay that was developed by process analysis or the how-to essay or article.

After the lecture, the two groups were made to write six process analysis essays following the guidelines and standards set by the instructor. The essays were written one after the other.

After a lecture and a process analysis writing activity, the students in the control group wrote process analysis essays and submitted their papers personally inside the classroom. Outputs were returned for the students to rewrite based on the feedbacks given. Students were also able to interact with others through peer editing inside the classroom.

The experimental group underwent three (3) stages during the blog-integrated writing instruction: a) preparation; b) writing; and c) revision.

During the preparation stage, the students were provided a title or a video scene as a basis for them to organize their thoughts on their own. By logging on to the researcher's blog entitled "The Writer's Closet" using the weblog Internet

address <http://rotheliamariaugsad.wix.com/writing-blog>, they were able to study writing, do the online paragraph writing exercises and link with other learning resources, such as the online Merriam Webster Dictionary for the meanings of new or difficult words, and Our Daily Bread for sample paragraphs or essays. The students were exposed to the target language (English), which helped to broaden their horizon and enhance their language sense. Besides, the students were also made to collect as many writing materials as possible by logging onto linked websites. They also discussed the related issues by online interaction, which easily stimulated each other's imagination. Online evaluation among themselves also helped form their writing plots.

After having chosen the sufficient amount of accumulated materials, the students proceeded to the next stage, the writing stage. The researcher monitored the whole writing stage and helped to correct any error/s committed by the students. After receiving feedback, the students checked whether their writing made sense and whether structural and grammatical mistakes existed. Since the students' writings on blog were sequenced chronologically, the researcher did not encounter much difficulty in examining their writings and feedbacks, which facilitated the monitoring work.

In the last stage, the revision stage, the students' writings approached perfection gradually with the help of teacher-student interaction and student-student interaction.

**Conducting and scoring the posttest.** Lastly, the researcher gave the same reading text she gave the students in the pretest. Again, they were told to read the text silently for ten (10) minutes and to reconstruct the entire text in their own words for thirty (30) minutes, without turning back to the original text when they started writing. The three English instructors who rated the students' initial writing performance were the same ones who scored their post writing performance. The average scores served as measures of the post writing performance of the students.

### **Statistical Treatment of Data**

In scoring the written outputs of the students, the scoring from the ESL Composition Profile of Jacobs (1981) was used, where the highest possible score was 100 and the lowest possible score was 34. The total scores were interpreted as follows:

Total Score on Students' Performance		Qualitative/ Descriptive
100 – 83.26		Excellent to Very Good
83.25 -- 66.51		Good to Average
66.50 – 49.76		Fair to Poor
49.75 – 33.01		Very Poor

The **mean** was used to determine the students' initial and post writing performance.

To test if there was a significant difference between the pretest and the posttest scores of each group, the **t-test** for dependent correlated samples was used.

To determine if there was a significant difference in the writing performance of the two groups, the **t-test** for independent samples was used.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### The Students' Initial Writing Performance

The first problem asks about the initial writing performance of the students assigned to the weblog and paper-and-pen groups. Table 1 presents the pretest or the mean scores of the students. The students exposed to the weblog got a mean of 66.18 which is interpreted as "Fair to Poor," while the paper-and-pen group got a mean score of 67.31, interpreted as "Good to Average."

Table 1. Initial Writing Performance of the Students

Group of Students	Pretest Mean	Interpretation	Critical t-value	Computed t-value
Weblog	66.18	Fair to Poor	2.120	Significant
Paper-and-Pen	67.31	Good to Average		

### Difference in Initial Writing Performance

The second research question investigates whether there is a significant difference in the initial writing performance of both groups.

Table 1 further shows that the difference between the means of the weblog and paper-and-pen groups got a computed t-value of 0.69, which is lesser than the critical value of 2.120. The result indicates that the slight discrepancy in their mean scores was not significant and their initial level of performance was the same. The final results of the study would not be affected by the insignificant difference in the pretest writing competence of all the students. Therefore, the null hypothesis that there is no difference in the preliminary writing performance of the students in both groups is accepted.

### Post Writing Performance of the Students

The third problem inquires about the post writing performance of the students using the weblog on the one hand, and those using paper and pen on the other.

Table 2 shows that in the weblog group, the highest score was 99 and the lowest score was 61. In the paper-and-pen group, the highest score was 95 and the lowest score was 52. Furthermore, Table 2 depicts that the weblog group got a posttest mean score of 83.61 which is “Excellent to Very Good.” On the other hand, the paper-and-pen group got a mean of 78.54 which means “Good to Average.”

Table 2. Post Writing Performance of the Students

Group of Students	Posttest Mean	Interpretation
Weblog	83.61	Excellent to Very Good
Paper-and-Pen	78.54	Good to Average

The result shows a difference of 5.07, but this time it was the weblog group of students which earned a higher mean. After using the weblog, the students enhanced their performance in writing compared to those using only the paper and pen in writing because the students were able to study writing through process analysis, do the online paragraph writing exercises and link with other learning resources and websites. Moreover, they were able to interact with the instructor and classmates from time to time.

### Difference between the Initial and Post Writing Performance of the Students Using Weblog

The fourth question seeks to determine whether there is a significant difference between the initial writing performance and the post writing performance of the students using the weblog.

Table 3 shows, at 0.05 level of significance, the computed t-value of the group using the weblog is 5.10, which is greater than the critical value of 2.120. The difference between the initial and post writing performance of the weblog group was significant, thus, the second hypothesis is accepted. The result implies that using the weblog as a writing tool contributed significantly to the improvement of the students' writing performance.

Table 3. T-test of the initial and post writing performance of both groups

Group of Students	Pretest Mean	Posttest Mean	Computed t-value	Critical t-value	Interpretation
Weblog	66.18	83.61	5.10	2.120	Significant
Paper-and-Pen	67.31	78.54	6.08	2.120	

### **Difference between the Initial and Post Writing Performance of the Students Using Paper and Pen**

The fifth question asks if there is a significant difference between the initial and post writing performance of the students using paper and pen.

Table 3 reflects the computed t-value of the paper-and-pen group which is greater than the critical value of 2.120. Thus, there was a significant difference between the initial and post writing performance of the students in the said group. Thus, the third research hypothesis is accepted. In other words, the performance of the students using the conventional paper and pen in writing also improved significantly. Like their peers in the weblog group, the students in the paper-and-pen group greatly benefited from the instructors' inputs and the learning experience to which they were exposed in class in the development of their writing ability.

### **Difference between the Writing Performance of the Students Using Weblog and those Using Paper and Pen**

The final research question investigates if there is a significant difference between the writing performance of the students in both the weblog and paper and pen groups.

To determine if there was a significant difference between the writing performances of the students in the two groups, the t-test for independent samples was used. Table 4 presents the results.

Table 4. T-test of the mean gain scores of both groups

Group of Students	Mean Gain	Computed t-value	Critical t-value	Interpretation
Weblog	17.43	2.40	2.120	Significant
Paper-and-Pen	11.23			

Table 4 presents that the weblog group obtained a higher mean gain score of 17.43 than the paper-and-pen group, whose mean gain score was only 11.23. The computed t-value is 2.40, which is greater than the critical value of 2.120. Thus, the difference is significant, based on the t-test for independent samples, at 0.05 level of significance. These figures reveal that the students using the weblog performed better in writing than those using the paper and pen. Thus, the fifth research hypothesis is accepted, i.e. there is a significant difference between the writing performance of the students using weblog and those using paper and pen. The significant edge that the weblog group had over the paper-and-pen group could be due to certain reasons. According to Maciuba-Koppel (2002), the internet is a global library of niches. Online writers enjoy freedom, challenges, and growth opportunities, and the ride of their writing life.

From the preceding discussion, the results mean that both the weblog and paper and pen are productive tools in teaching writing. However, the weblog is more potential in helping students not just to improve their writing skills but also to make them enjoy writing as an essential activity in learning how to write.

The result of the study is similar to that of Lin (2014), Asatryan (2014), Manzanilla (2013), Ellison-Wu (2008), Kashani, Mahmud and Kalajahi (2013) since they also used quantitative comparative data exploring the expressiveness in two types of writing: paper and pen and weblog. The results revealed that the use of weblogs improved the students' writing performance than did paper and pen.

## CONCLUSIONS

On the basis of the data gathered, the following findings were drawn:

1. The initial writing performance of those who belonged to the weblog group was "fair to poor" while that of the paper-and-pen group was "good to average."
2. The difference between the initial writing performance of both groups was not significant. Hence, with the students' initial writing performance being more or less on the same level, it can be said that the final results of the study were not in any way affected by the advantage of one group over the other.
3. The mean score of the weblog group was higher than that of the paper-and-pen group. This means that students using the weblog performed better than those using the paper and pen.
4. A significant difference was found between the initial and post writing performance of the students exposed to the weblog which means that the

- students in this group benefited considerably from the use of the weblog in writing. Thus, the second research hypothesis is accepted.
5. Similarly, there was a significant difference between the initial and post writing performance of the students in the paper-and-pen group. It means that, like their counterparts in the weblog group, the students in the paper-and-pen group also improved their writing performance considerably. Therefore, the third research hypothesis is accepted.
  6. There was a significant difference between the writing performance of the students using weblogs and those using paper and pen, hence, the fifth research hypothesis is accepted. This means that the weblog is a more effective tool than the paper and pen in the development of the students' writing ability.

Students need a writing tool in whatever form to improve their writing ability. The kind of tool given, whether in paper and pen or weblog, will guide them as they enhance their writing performance.

Furthermore, students perform better if they use the weblog as a writing tool instead of paper and pen because the former necessitates and encourages interaction between the writer and the instructor as well as his/her peers, and interaction, being a social activity, facilitates learning. In using the weblog, the students do their online paragraph writing exercises and link with other resources on the internet.

## **TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH**

The findings of this study may be best translated to the instructors' use of weblog as a tool for teaching writing in their classes and view the motivation and eagerness of the students in writing. The English 2 syllabus developers and curriculum makers can use this study in order to design practical writing courses using weblog in which the students receive interactive feedback through social media.

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