

BLOG-BASED ONLINE JOURNALS FOR ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE
LEARNERS

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This thesis is submitted as a part of the requirement for

Masters in Educational Technology

Faculty of Education

Universiti Teknologi Malaysia

DISEMBER 2007

For my late father (Allahyarham Haji Ngah bin Yusoff), my loving mother, (Hajjah Esah binti Md Zin), my ever-supportive beloved husband (Norazrol bin Muhammad), the rest of my family and my closest friends who have always been there throughout my thick and thin.

Acknowledgement

My deepest gratification for having completed this dissertation as planned. My highest appreciation and thanks to my supportive supervisors : Associate Professor, Dr Bharuddin Aris and Dr Faizah Mohd Noor; whom without their consistent encouragement and assistance this dissertation would not have been possible to be completed.

My deepest pleasure to all the students who were involved in the studies and had given their full co-operation in helping me throughout the research.

Countless gratification too to all lecturers and non academic staff in Faculty of Education who have helped me a lot throughout my studies at the university. A special thanks to all my classmates, colleagues and friends for their advices and endless support for me to complete my studies.

Finally, to all who have involved whether directly or indirectly, thank you from me. All the kindness that you gave will be my greatest treasure for the whole of my life.

Abstrak

Kajian yang telah dijalankan adalah mengenai penggunaan *blogs* sebagai alat untuk meningkatkan penguasaan penulisan dalam pembelajaran Bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa kedua. Subjek adalah terdiri daripada dua puluh lima orang pelajar Tingkatan Empat di sebuah sekolah menengah di Kuantan, Pahang. Instrumen yang digunakan untuk tujuan pengumpulan data adalah soal selidik, temubual separuh-berstruktur dan juga analisa kandungan *blogs* subjek. Kajian merangkumi perspektif pelajar terhadap *blogs* sebagai medium jurnal, keberkesanan *blogs* sebagai alat membantu meningkatkan kemahiran menulis dalam Bahasa Inggeris dan juga bagaimanakah *blogs* membantu pelajar meningkatkan kemahiran menulis mereka. Daripada data yang diperolehi, adalah didapati para pelajar berpendapat bahawa *blogs* adalah medium yang menarik untuk penulisan jurnal mereka berbanding menggunakan buku dan pen; ia juga dapat membantu mereka memperkembangkan kemahiran menulis dalam Bahasa Inggeris; dan menerusi pelbagai ciri yang terdapat di *blogs*, ia dapat membantu mereka menulis dengan lebih baik dan berkesan.

Abstract

The research on the use of blogs as online journals was carried out with a group of twenty five Form Four students in a secondary school in Kuantan, Pahang. The aim of the research is to find out the effects of blogs as a tool in developing writing in English as A Second Language. The instruments include questionnaire, semi-structured interviews and analysis of the blogs content. The research covered students' perspectives of blogs as the medium for online journals, the effectiveness of blogs as a tool to assist students' writing skill and to what extent blogs could help students to enhance their writing skills. From the findings, it is discovered that there is a positive impact on the development of students' writing throughout the research as gained through the instruments. From the research, the students claimed that blogs is an interesting medium for them to write their journals as compared to writing in their log books. Blogs also could help them developed their writing skill in English Language; and through the various features in blogs, students were able to write more effectively. .

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ESL	-	English as a Second Language
CALL	-	Computer Assisted Language Learning
CMC	-	Computer Mediated Communication
L2	-	Second Language Learner
KBSM	-	Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah (Secondary School Integrated Curriculum)
SLA	-	Second Language Acquisition

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Education has evolved in line with the era of globalisation which has had a major impact on the whole wide world. The integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the education mainstream has also led to some radical changes in the styles of teaching and learning at schools. Teachers, inevitably have to incorporate ICT into their lessons and use it either as the main tool for teaching or just as a teaching aid in classrooms.

The main aim of Secondary School Integrated Curriculum or known as KBSM, is to promote learner-centred learning environment in classrooms where teachers act as facilitators. One of the ways which helps towards achieving this aim is by implementing ICT in schools. Most schools in Malaysia are now equipped with multimedia computers in order to enhance the learning process. The establishment of Smart Schools which use computers as the backbone in teaching and learning for

example, is a living proof which indicates the implementation of ICT has now become one of the main agenda in the Malaysian Education system.

The advancement of information technology has also affected the education system in Malaysia. By the year 2010, all the 10 000 schools in Malaysia are to be Smart Schools, whereby the use of computers would be incorporated in the classroom process thus changing both the roles of 450 000 teachers and learners (The Malaysian Smart School Blueprint, 1997). The learning process will be student-centred and teachers will mainly be facilitators throughout the lesson.

Applying computers in education has been a widespread topic especially to those with a special interest in that area. The use of computers in schools and homes have expanded quite dramatically for the past number of years and inevitably, the trend has also affected those involved directly in the education system especially language teachers. Even though computers seem to be broadly used in language learning, educators have now begun to think the significant implications of computers in language learning in particular the impact of multimedia instruction in the teaching and learning environment.

The fast growing of computer technology has definitely influenced the intensification of interest of the educators in multimedia instructions. According to Mishra, (2004:12)

“the emerging Internet technology has made it possible for the increasing powerful computer-based authoring tools. The trend, has also influenced the online communication thus, created more readily available resources on the net. This is especially true for learners who require more assistance in learning outside their academic hours. The existence of the advance Internet

technology has allowed access to an online learning and references through various tools online.”

Therefore, the term “multimedia” is resolutely associated with computer-based delivery, usually over the Internet and accompanied and supported by interaction provided via some form of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC). Roblyer and Schwier (2002) (cited in Mishra, 2004:13) further offered this definition of multimedia:

“A computer system or computer system product that incorporates text, sound, graphics, and audio with the purpose of communicating information”

According to Tapscott (1988) (cited in Tse Kian and Neo, 2004) the revolution in the ICT has produced a techno-savvy and media-hungry generation which uses digital media as a way to learn and communicate with each other. For that reason, in this new age of digitalism, instructional strategies in classroom learning could also be modified to integrate the latest trend of information technology.

Language instructors too, in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) especially, could create innovative teaching techniques in the instruction-learning process to make learning more fun and interactive. As result, students would feel more motivated to learn the target language and eventually would acquire the target language. Gardner (1979, cited Norris-Holt, 2001) suggests that expectations regarding bilingualism, combined with attitudes towards the target language and its culture and environment, form the basis of an individual's attitude towards language

learning. Thus, it is clear that a conducive environment is essential in developing the motivation towards learning a second language.

1.2 Background of the Problem

English Language is a compulsory subject taught to all students both in primary and secondary levels in Malaysia. Therefore, Malaysian students are exposed to the language throughout their six years of studying in primary level and another five years in secondary level before continuing at tertiary education. Nevertheless, having been exposed to the language for a fair number of years students still face some problems in mastering this second language.

Among the main reasons faced by students in Malaysia in learning English as a Second Language (ESL) is that most learners lack opportunities to practice their English outside of the formal classroom. Once the lesson is over, English becomes a distant entity to the students as they are only given little space for to practise what they have learned in class. They are expected to fall back to their first language leaving them much less chance to use English with the surrounding community. This is because for some of the students, they neither use English at home nor with friends to communicate. Consequently, this affects their performance in school especially in writing.

To be able to be a fluent English language user, a learner is required to master four important skills which are reading, writing, speaking and listening. All the four skills are necessary for them to be actively involved in a global world which uses

English as the main means of communication. However, there are some who are left disadvantaged just because of difficulties in learning to control written English. According to Cummins (1996, in Gibbons, 2002), most second language learners (L2) suffer problems in writing because there is a high probability that the learners have not previously developed literacy in their own mother tongue. Therefore, it causes them to have difficulty in learning a second language too.

To overcome this problem of writing in second language learning, language educators have suggested various approaches. Among them is combining classroom teaching strategies with technology aids in delivering the lesson content or as the tools in learning the target language (Readence et al., 2001). Integrating technology into classroom learning and teaching could be rewarding as most present day students are computer literates and they might find linking language learning and technology as something which would motivate them more to learn the language.

As in recent years, the use of the World Wide Web as a resource for language learning materials has achieved increasing popularity among language teachers and learners. Language evolves through time and so does the Internet. As the Internet keeps expanding, there are many websites which have been developed devoted for language learning. It is believed that language learners especially, could maximise the learning process through online exploration of Internet based materials which include written, visual and verbal texts.

Through this innovation of the Internet technology, second Language learners are definitely among those who could benefit the most. This is due to the fact that learning a second language is difficult and could be a daunting task for many people. Each language contains its own system of grammatical rules which explain how words may be combined into meaningful speech patterns by anybody who speaks or reads the language.

Computers have definitely transferred the way humans communicate with each other. They could get connected by just a click away. The social and cultural transformations brought about by computers or more accurately, the Internet, have also affected the way students learn in primary, secondary or tertiary education. It goes further than just communication whereby identities, relationships and communities are formed in this virtual world.

Cyber communities are formed where billions of people from across the globe communicate with each other, exchange information and to many, deal business online. Muhammad Betz (1998, quoted in Henrickson, 2000), recognises that we are all undergoing behavioural changes which are influenced by the tools that we use. The tools here include computers, and the Internet and other forms of communication which affect behavioural changes in psychology and also physical (Lengel, 2004).

In actual fact, there is more to technology than just technology. It is human communication and what we do with our technology that really counts. Furthermore, it is about the transformation of our patterns of social interaction – how we live and work through, with and around the technology. Therefore, it is certainly worth the while to allow students to experience technology in the classroom and obtain some benefits related to their educational purposes.

Therefore, by integrating the use of Internet technology in classroom, students are now open to a bigger audience and they could communicate in English freely and at the same time will be able to obtain information by just a click of a button. There are many available Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) tools on the Internet which include e-mail, discussion forums, and chat which are by now familiar to many language teachers. Recent innovations such as blogs, wikis and RSS feed may be less familiar but offer powerful opportunities for online collaboration for both language professionals and learners (Godwin-Jones, 2003). Shin (2006)

found that communication between learners which exists in CMC activities not only focus on social or cultural exchanges but could also be extended to linguistic features.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

The understanding of the key concepts in second language acquisition can definitely improve the ability of mainstream teachers to serve the linguistically diverse students in their classrooms. A thorough research is necessary to gain a full understanding and some insights of the crux of second language acquisition theory before the theory could be practised in the classroom learning process. Hence, understanding the problems faced by students of secondary school in developing their writing ability in learning English as their second language for example could help language instructors to develop better lessons in assisting the students to overcome the problems.

As in the case of Malaysian students, the main obstacle that they face in empowering writing in English Language is that they do not have the medium in which they could practice the skill outside the classroom at their own free will. As well as spoken ability, students too are encouraged to practise their writing skill as emphasised in the New Curriculum Specifications (2003:3) :

“The English language curriculum enables learners to listen to, view, read and respond to different texts, and express ideas, opinions, thoughts and feelings imaginatively and creatively in spoken and written form”

In order to assist students to produce a piece of writing and respond to different texts as aforementioned, students have to be well-informed of the availability of the right medium for them to do so. They have to acknowledge that there is a place where they could express their ideas outside of their classroom concrete walls. In accordance to several theories of second language acquisition which, apart from linguistic factors, psychological and sociological aspects (Freeman and Freeman, 2001) also play significant roles in developing students' language acquisition. Therefore, it could be said that the inner and outer factors of each individual student are also strong attributes which could enhance students' linguistic ability.

Researchers of early childhood language development discovered that children come to understand the concept of reading and writing as they see those around them engage in using written language for varied purposes and they themselves engage in writing and reading in the company of others (McGee and Purcell-Gates (1997), Teale and Sulzby (1986, 1989), in Gersten and Hudelson 2000). Thus, the same concept can be applied in learning a second language for young adults, as in this case, secondary school students. By preparing a conducive environment for them to study, it is hoped that it will assist the students in acquiring and applying the target language in the appropriate medium.

One activity which allows students to write freely is journal writing. Writing journals in learning English as a second language is a medium which allows learners to express themselves freely. Peyton (1987) suggests that in journal writing, there exists a two-way communication between teachers and learners as teachers give feedback on the content and not on the grammatical mistakes. She further asserts that this form of interactive writing holds the interest of most learners, promotes self-confidence in writing and contributes to the overall writing skill for academic and personal purposes. Nevertheless, in order for students to develop more of the writing skill, teachers should expose them to a wider world outside of their classroom.

Incorporating ICT into the classroom learning could be the answer to language learners. The Ministry of Education (MOE) under the New Curriculum Specifications (2003:1) emphasises the use of ICT in language learning in order to :

“enable learners to access knowledge on the Internet and to network with people both locally and overseas”

In relation with the call from the MOE on integrating ICT, teachers in Malaysia should be aware that language practitioners from around the world have already implemented pedagogic strategies incorporating Internet-based communicative activities, such as the use of keypals, tandem language exchanges, chat, message boards, and discussion forums (Campbell, 2004). The most recent one is the use of blogs in the classroom where students publish their writing and receive comments from outsiders, potentially leading to discussion and further use of the target language. Godwin-Jones (2003) claims that blogs gives better opportunities for language educators and learners to apply the method of journal writing online. Blogs is the current technology which allows users to publish their writing online. Fiedler (2003, in Campbell, 2004) defines the weblog as a 'reflective conversational tool for self-organized learning', which best captures the constructivist theory with which the tool can be used for fostering autonomous, self-directed learning approaches.

As most schools in Malaysia now have computers for learning purposes, it is a wise idea that language teachers in Malaysia utilise the readily available materials to the full use. Since language and ICT evolve through time, the paradigm of language teaching and learning should also be shifted accordingly. Malaysian secondary school students should be exposed to the fact that the Internet could be used as the platform for them to learn and use English. Therefore, this research aims to implement the use of blogs as a tool in English Language classroom to develop students' writing ability.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

It is a fact that the Internet is persistently evolving. It offers a dynamic environment for the purpose of communication and obtaining information from all ranges of fields. Over the years, the Internet has introduced various terminologies which have been put to use by the community across the globe such as e-mail, chat rooms, forum, Wikipedia, and the most recent, blog (Godwin-Jones, 2003). The content provided on the Internet which is mostly in English ranges from various subjects and they cater to all age groups. Indeed, this is an exceptional platform for learners of English to assist themselves in learning the language.

Lowe (2004) asserts that blogs can easily replace traditional classroom uses of the private print journals. For instance, free tools such as Blogger can be used for private, expressive writing. Students are free to choose whether or not to make their personal site public or to be kept as a secret or just merely exchange the URL addresses with friends, families or teachers. Blogs then could be used as a platform for students to develop their writing ability at their own free will.

The Malaysian Ministry of Education encourages the use of ICT in the learning process (The New Curriculum Specifications, 2003). This includes integrating the use of the Internet to help learners learn better in acquiring a second language. In relation to that, this study aims to find out how students could develop their writing skill in the English Language by developing their own blogs as their online journals.

The results of the study could then be used as the basis for further research to be developed by the researcher herself or anybody who is interested in the subject. Apart from that, it is hoped too that the findings could be used as the guidelines for

teachers and students of English as a Second Language to consider the technique in their writing classes.

The Internet offers a wide range of reading materials. It acts as a resource which can enrich and expand language instruction. Chun and Plass (2000, in Brandl, 2002) claim that the Worldwide Web (WWW) portray general capabilities that have the potential to enhance language learning which include the universal availability of authentic materials, the communication capabilities through networking, the multimedia capabilities, and the nonlinear (hypermedia) structure of the information.

Recent research has consistently documented how a form of network-based language teaching which links students using Internet-mediated communication tools. This further can be used as a viable classroom alternative for promoting communicative competence, increase student motivation and promote greater target language output (Ware, 2005). Students have better opportunities to engage themselves in more online language learning activities in order to enhance their communication skills

The most convincing reason for the rise of Internet usage is definitely the convenience in accessing and obtaining an endless supply of authentic materials in target languages. The World Wide Web or WWW has brought the world to the fingertips of each learner. Applying the WWW to foreign language teaching also provides the opportunity to meet the standards in several ways. Walz (1998) and Brandl (2002) state that all students learn in a variety of authentic ways and settings; associated with language, culture, education and incorporated effective technologies.

The Internet too provides the opportunity for users to get connected with English speaking people who share similar interests with them. This could be done

via e-mail, blogs, podcasts or forums. Apart from social exchanges, communicating online too is one of the ways to learn English as it requires users to use the language during the exchanges. According to Kaufmann (2006), this method is proven to be appealing to all users especially adolescents as according to Kaiser Family Foundation, 70 per cent of Americans between the ages of 55 and 64 use the Internet while youngsters and students are found to be the most avid users among all. Similar trends are also seen in Europe and Asia. Thus, it could be said that using the Internet in learning English as a Second Language for teenage students is possible to be carried out and can be a useful source to both teachers and students in the long run.

Thus, the objectives of this research are to offer the possibility of using the Internet, specifically blogs, to motivate learners to learn English as a second language and extends the body of evidence that supports the use of online learning journals as part of the second language acquisition. Through the processes of free writing and reflective compositions throughout online exchanges, it is hoped that students could develop their skills of using the English language in a much better environment. Simultaneously, through online blogging too, students will be more motivated to learn the English language and eventually the level of their English standard will also be upgraded.

The term blog which was coined in 1999 (Catalano, 2005) defined in Webster's dictionary as a "diary; a personal chronological log of thoughts published on a Web page." More importantly, it says that blogs are "typically updated daily" and that "blogs often reflect the personality of the author." Blogs are chosen in this study as they allow non-technical audience to publish news, opinions, and information widely. Thus, any user could just log on to any blog provider and create their own blog.

For ESL learners, blogs could be seen as the medium to develop their writing skills as the concept applied in blogs are similar with journal writing. Nevertheless,

writing journals online would be more interesting for learners as the site could be managed by adding fascinating features. Hence, it is hoped that learners would be more motivated to use the language by creating their own blogs which will certainly assist their second language learning too.

Therefore, providing the right environment and ensuring learners' motivational level is always maintained at a high level will assist them acquiring a second language. In relation to the demand for e-learning which continues to grow, the need for tools and activities which promote collaboration and interactivity among participants will also increase. These should allow for sharing of information, information gathering, collaboration, and interactivity. Hence, the project aims to implement the technologies available on the Internet which is blog, to be used in the classroom learning to motivate students in learning a second language.

1.5 Objectives of the Study

- i. To find out students' views of blogs as online journals
- ii. To examine how blogs could help students to improve their writing skills..

1.6 Research Questions

1. What are the students' perceptions of blogs as online journals

2. How do blogs help the students to develop and improve their writing skills?
3. To what extent blogs help the students to develop and improve their writing skills?

1.7 Theoretical Framework

Over the years, there have been many approaches and theories to second language teaching and learning. Among them is Stephen Krashen's Monitor Theory. The foundation of the theory is that second language acquisition occurs when comprehension of real messages exists, and when the acquirer is not 'on the defensive' (Krashen, 1981). Language acquisition does not require extensive use of conscious grammatical rules, and does not require tedious drill. Real language acquisition develops slowly and the best methods are therefore those which supply comprehensible input in low anxiety situations, containing messages that students really want to hear. These methods do not force early production in the second language, but allow students to produce when they are ready, recognizing that improvement comes from supplying communicative and comprehensible input, and not from forcing and correcting production (Krashen, 1981)

Keeping learners at a low anxiety level and maintaining a high level of interest during a period of language learning is one of the paramount keys to make the whole process more successful. This statement is further supported by Gardner (1982) cited in Norris-Holt (2001) who formed a socio-educational model which identified a number of factors which are interrelated when learning a second language. Gardner's model of second language acquisition is influenced by four

interrelated motivational factors which are social and cultural milieu, individual learner differences, the setting or context in which learning takes place and linguistic outcomes.

The study proposed in this paper is put forward after considering a few related theories. The theoretical framework used in this research is designed based on the concept of Constructivism Theory and Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and how the theories could be integrated through the medium of technology in developing writing in learning English as a Second Language.

The study to be carried out uses Constructivism Theory as the foundation of the framework. The main idea of Constructivism Theory (Bruner, 1966 cited in Smith, 2002) is that learning involves an active process in which learners construct new ideas or concepts based on their present or prerequisite knowledge. Learners are selective in deciding the right information to be transferred, constructing hypothesis and making decisions in structuring their learning process. Bruner (1966) also indicates that cognitive structure (i.e. schema, mental models) provides meaning and organisation to experiences and allows the individual to "go beyond the information given". Thus, teachers could design lessons which allow learners to gain more knowledge in the right environment. This is further strengthened by Jamalludin Harun and Zaidatun Tasir (2003) who emphasise that constructivism could affect the instructional process and the learning environment.

The theory of computer use in classroom learning reflects constructivists' perspectives (Knight and Knight, 1995 in McLoughlin and Oliver, 1998) of learning. Children are found to learn by discovery and experiential learning through the use of computers. Apart from creating opportunities for students to use the language, it is also found that learning environment supported by computers allows access to higher order of thinking (Light, 1993 in McLoughlin and Oliver, 1998). Computers could

therefore be used as the medium where teachers and students can share thoughts and ideas which in turn could promote an active learning environment.

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, computers could promote higher order thinking skills as there exists communication which requires learners to try to use the language beyond their present knowledge. In support of this view, Krashen's Second Language Acquisition Monitor Theory (1985) also emphasises the significance of providing the right input in order for acquisition to take place. Krashen's Input Hypothesis indicates that only comprehensible input will result in acquisition of the target language. He further asserts that learners must be exposed to input that is just beyond their current level in order to make progress. This concept is called $i+1$. If the level of input is at $i+1$ the learner will make progress. If it is too high, for instance $i+7$, the learner will be unable to acquire it.

The study too is strongly supported by Krashen (1985) through Affective Filter's hypothesis which indicates that learner's emotions act as adjustable filters which freely permit or hinder input necessary to acquisition. The lower the Affective Filter is the easier learners will acquire the target language. In other words, learners are not forced to produce the language, instead they are using the language at their own pace.

Thus, it is fair to say that in order to assist learners in acquiring the target language, appropriate strategies should be implemented to make learning and the classroom especially, more inviting for students to learn. One of the ways suggested by many is through dialogue journals (Readence, et al, 2001). This method involves the teacher and students writing to each other before or after the class. Therefore, this means they could communicate with each other through free writing where grammar and spelling take a back seat to straightforward communication between two people. The journals are said to be one of the helpful tools in helping learners to develop

their writing skills in learning the English Language (Searfross et al, 1998 cited in Readence et al, 2001).

Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) which is based on ecological perspectives could assist teachers in creating an appropriate environment where communication between teachers and learners could exist. According to Shin (2006), social and educational ecology researchers (Bateson, 2000; Gibson, 1979) insist that human learning occurs in an integrated entity involving cognitive, social, and environmental elements. It is understood that only through an integrative perspective that the full picture of human activity can be captured.

In the field of second language acquisition, the integrative approach has also been discussed by Kramsch (2002), Leather & van Dam (2003) and Van Lier (2000, 2002) who explain the notion of unfixed context in language learning by focusing on the learner's active role in configuring a "semiotic budget" from the learning situation (cited in Shin, 2006). A medium which could allow the integration of learning as well as communication between teachers and students is blogs.

Thus, this reflects the underlying notion of the study which is to encourage students to learn a second language through language exploration by participating in blogs. By allowing learners to use blogs in classroom learning too, they will use the target language at ease and at their own pace. There will be no fear of being corrected by teachers because of grammatical mistakes as the initial focus at this stage will be more on the content and the flow of the whole process of blogging rather than on the mechanical aspect of language.

To conclude, KBSM, which focuses on learners rather than instructors, reflects constructivism theory of learning where learners become autonomous during

the learning process. Self-exploration, psychological, sociological, philosophical, and critical thinking are among the educational emphases in which constructivists are more concerned about. Among the first major contributors of constructivism are Jean Piaget, John Dewey and Jerome Bruner, to name but a few (Thanasoulas, 2000). In view of their theories, if put together, it can be outlined that learning as a social process (Bruner) which allows self-discovery (Piaget) on the part of the learners and at the same time offers learners to be engaged in meaningful activities (Dewey) in trying to apply their pre-requisite knowledge. Indeed, computers could assist the instruction-learning process as they feature constructivists' learning theory (Ibid.)

Mc Cracken (1990, in Bloch, 2004) suggested that there are some procedures to be followed when analysing data. The stages consist of reviewing the blogs, analysing the blog contents, observing, judging and connecting an idea with a wider concept.

1.8 Scope of the Study

Most of English as Second Language (ESL) learners lack opportunities to practice their English outside the classroom. The same situation happens in Malaysia whereby once the lesson is over, they were only given little space to practise what they have learned in class. They were expected to fall back to their first language leaving them a much less chances to use English with the surrounding community.

Therefore, by using blogs as their journal entries, students are now open to a bigger audience and they are free to communicate in English freely and will be able to obtain responses by their readers. Compared to writing journals the conventional way where the entries are strictly private and writers are only expected to produce and most of the time there is no allowance for reflection in the journals. Students not only have the chance to write and read but also to interact with each other on the blogs. Therefore, they are given the opportunity to engage themselves in a meaningful interaction with authentic audience.

By design, the scope of the study is to investigate the effects of using blogs as online journals on the development of writing on a group of Form Four students in learning English as a Second Language. The subjects consist of twenty three Form Four students from a secondary school in Kuantan, Pahang. The topic is chosen as blogs have been found to be the most recent Internet based communication and students are well-exposed to the use of blogs outside of the classroom.

1.9 Significance of Study

This study is about an investigation about the use of blogs as a tool in learning ESL which focuses on the development of writing. Learners are encouraged to write and publish their own writing materials at their own blogs. The results of the study could be very useful to students, teachers, Malaysia Ministry of Education and the society as a whole.

Students are the ones who could benefit the most from the study as they are experiencing the learning process itself. Using blogs as online journals in developing writing encourage students to explore language use in a different medium other than pen and paper. They could write online and get connected to different people in just a matter of a click away. Apart from learning something new and more technology oriented, the interesting features available on the blog could help make learning more enjoyable, and fun.

Other than that, teachers too could gain some insight on diversifying their pedagogical strategies in teaching English. Using blogs in teaching is one of the ways to apply ICT in the instructional process as urged by the Ministry of Education. It is also one way of exposing the Malaysian present generation with the current development of the Internet technology whereby teachers diverge from the conventional teacher-centred-chalk-and-talk teaching to a more students-centred style of learning.

Besides that, the results of the study too could be the source of reference for Malaysia Curriculum Designers to incorporate the use of blogs in classroom learning. This too would then help to ensure that Malaysians Educational System will

be at par with other developed countries which had widely already integrated the use of technology in classroom learning since years ago.

1.10 Definition of Terms

The followings are the terms used in this study and will be frequently referred to in the next chapters.

Blogs

According to Kennedy (2003) blogs started out primarily as a self-publishing movement for both professional and armchair journalists making their voices heard in an open online press. Blogs now have now become the new genre for educators and students for them to form an interactive and immediate publishing tool. In many ways, blogs could be the medium in which student work is collected, edited, and assessed, with the immediacy of publishing for a virtual audience. Writing on blogs can make writing more real for students as they are writing for real audience online.

At its simplest, according to Armstrong and Berry (2003) blogs are one of the fastest growing features of the World Wide Web which features a personal web based space for writing managed by the author who compiles lists of links to personally interesting material interspersed with information and editorial. Blogs therefore, could be used as one of the tools in developing writing for English as a Second Language.

Second Language Acquisition

According to Krashen (1985), the study of how a second language is learned or acquired is referred to as Second Language Acquisition or SLA. It is the process by which people learn languages in addition to their native language(s). The term second language is used to describe any language whose acquisition starts after early childhood (including what may be the third or subsequent language learned).

Target Language

The language to be learned is often referred to as the "target language" or "L2", compared to the first language, "L1". Cook (2003) defines an L2 user as is any person who uses another language than their first language (L1), that is to say, the one they learnt first as a child. They could either learn the language when they were still a child or during adulthood. Learning another language take over a period of time in the learner's life,

Computer Mediated Communication

Payne and Ross (2005) define Computer Mediated Communication as the application of technology through computers which enable individuals to exchange text messages over a computer network. The communication via computers began to emerge in the second language research and teaching literature since the 1990s (Beauvois, 1992; Chun, 1994; Cononelos & Oliva, 1993; Kelm, 1992; Nicholas & Toporski, 1993)(cited in Payne and Ross, 2005).

Thus, Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) can be defined as any form of data exchange across two or more networked computers. More frequently, the term is narrowed to include only those communications that occur via computer-mediated formats between two or more individuals. Currently, the Internet innovation allows users to get connected from remote area through chat rooms, forums or blogs.

Computer Assisted Language Learning

Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) is an approach to language teaching and learning in which computer technology is used as an aid to presentation, reinforcement and assessment. CALL activities may be based in a network, such as the Internet, presenting several advantages: rapid global access at any time from any computer with Internet access; integration of graphics, audio, and text; and ease and low cost of publication (Kern & Warschauer, 2000) (in Gonzalez-Lloret, 2003). Network-based simulations offer access to an otherwise unattainable environment which translates into language input and tasks for second language (L2) students

1.11 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the background of the problem which is the foundation of the research. The details of the research objectives, its significance in educational environment, and the scope of studies have been described in depth in previous sections to provide a greater understanding of the whole study. It is hoped that the findings of the research later could be used as one of the resources for the development of Malaysian Educational System especially in the area where technology information is the prime concern. In the next chapter, discussion on previous research will be discussed and referred to further strengthen the research.

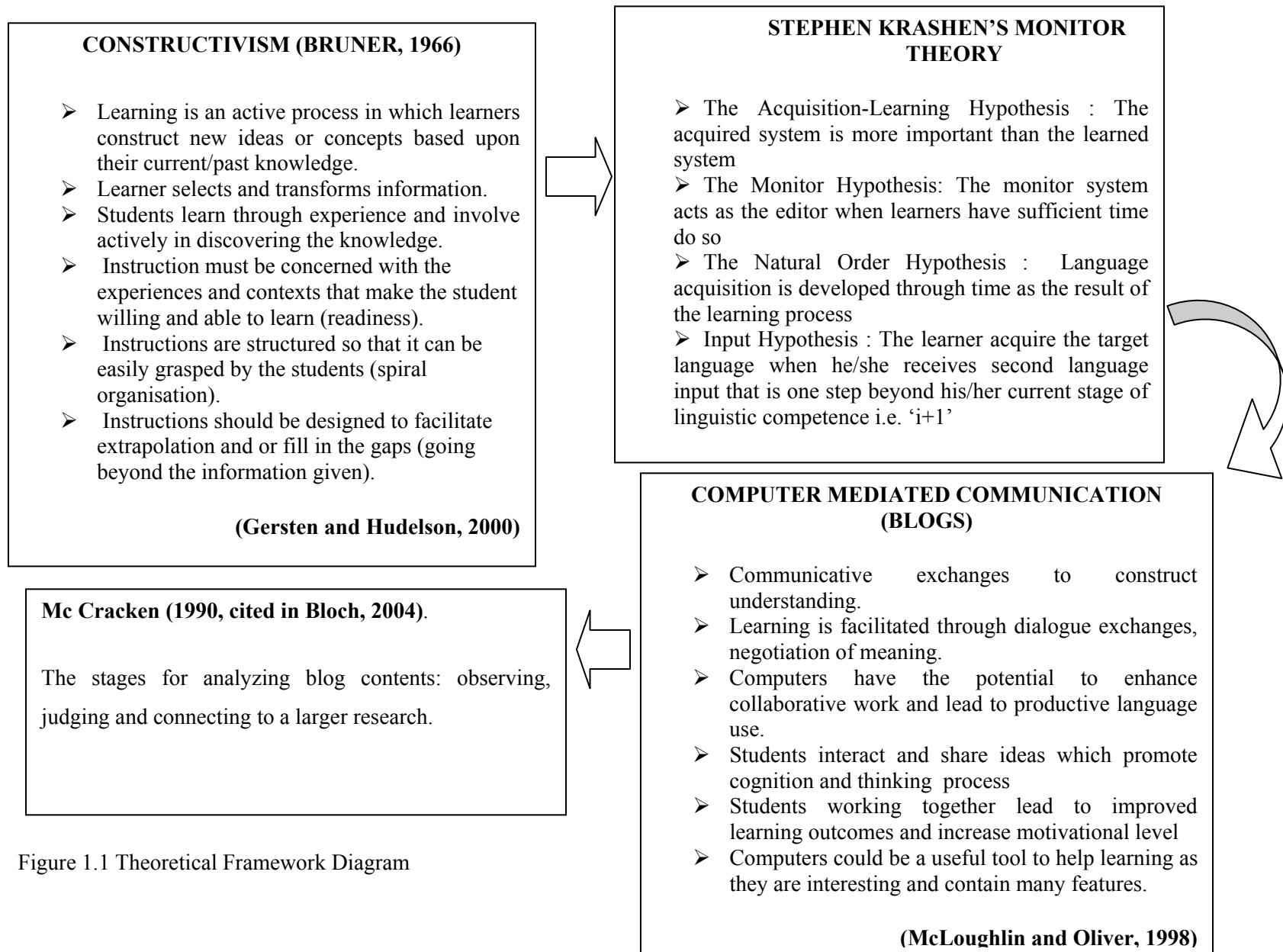


Figure 1.1 Theoretical Framework Diagram