



EFFECTS OF COLLABORATIVE BLOGGING  
ON COMMUNICATIVE SKILLS IN  
WRITING OF THAI EFL  
UNIVERSITY  
STUDENTS

PURNIMA IYER

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Purnima Iyer

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Researcher: Purnima Iyer

Degree: Master of Arts in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

Advisor: Jenjit Gasigijtamong, Ed.D.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study explored the effects of collaborative blogging on communicative skills in writing of Thai EFL students. It also investigated the student's attitudes as a result of collaborative blogging. The participants were 12 fourth-year university students from the northeastern part of Thailand, studying English as their major field of study. They had not written blogs before, and were relatively new to the concept of blogging. The participants wrote a total of eight blog assignments, completed two questionnaires, one before the study, and the other after writing all the blog assignments. An interview was also carried out at the end of the study. The results revealed that the students displayed a low degree of communicative skills in writing: (26%-32%) for creativity, critical thinking, voice and comments. They showed a positive attitude towards collaborative blogging and found the process of blogging and commenting helped in their writing skills and developing good relationships with each other. They, however, faced problems with the blogging interface and suggested that blogs could be merged with Facebook allowing for a more convenient way for the participants to write and communicate with one another.

ชื่อเรื่อง:	ผลของการเขียนบล็อกแบบร่วมมือต่อทักษะการสื่อสาร โดยการเขียนของนักศึกษาไทยในระดับอุดมศึกษาที่ใช้ ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ
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อาจารย์ที่ปรึกษาวิทยานิพนธ์หลัก:	ดร.เจนจิต กสิกิจำรง
วันที่อนุมัติผลงาน:	14 พฤษภาคม 2556
สถาบันการศึกษา:	มหาวิทยาลัยพายัพ จังหวัดเชียงใหม่ ประเทศไทย
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## บทคัดย่อ

วิทยานิพนธ์ฉบับนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาผลของการใช้บล็อกแบบร่วมมือต่อทักษะในการสื่อสารโดยการเขียน ของนักศึกษาไทยที่เรียนภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษาต่างประเทศ กลุ่มตัวอย่างเป็นนักศึกษาวิชาเอกภาษาอังกฤษชั้นปีที่ 4 ในมหาวิทยาลัยในภาคตะวันออกเฉียงเหนือของประเทศไทยจำนวน 12 คน ซึ่งไม่เคยมีประสบการณ์ในการเขียนบล็อกมาก่อน กลุ่มตัวอย่างเขียนบล็อกจำนวน 8 บล็อก ทำแบบสอบถาม 2 ชุด - ก่อนและหลังการเขียนโดยใช้บล็อก -- และผู้วิจัยได้สัมภาษณ์กลุ่มตัวอย่างด้วย ผลการศึกษาพบว่า กลุ่มตัวอย่างมีทักษะในการสื่อสารโดยการเขียนทั้งในด้านความคิดสร้างสรรค์ การวิจารณ์ นำเสียงและการแสดงความคิดเห็น ค่อนข้างต่ำ (26 %-32%) กลุ่มตัวอย่างมีเจตคติเชิงบวกต่อการเขียนบล็อกแบบร่วมมือ และพบว่ากระบวนการการเขียนบล็อกแบบร่วมมือช่วยพัฒนาทักษะการเขียนและก่อให้เกิดความสัมพันธ์ที่ดีกับผู้อื่น อย่างไรก็ตาม กลุ่มตัวอย่างมีความเห็นการใช้บล็อกค่อนข้างยุ่งยาก และแนะนำว่าน่าจะผสมผสานการใช้บล็อกกับเฟซบุ๊ค ซึ่งผู้มีส่วนมากมีความคุ้นเคยอยู่แล้ว

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS**

CALL	=	Computer – Assisted Language Learning
ESL	=	English as a Second Language
EFL	=	English as a Foreign Language
L1	=	First Language
L2	=	Second or Foreign Language

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Rationale and Statement of the Problem

Writing is one of the four skills that students use to communicate, whether it is on paper or on the computer. These days many students use social networking sites such as Facebook, Myspace and hi5. With English being used as a global language for communication in education, business and technology, it is essential that students need to be able to communicate in English. Good writing skills are, therefore, important in today's world of technology where people want to share ideas and communicate over the internet. According to Kroll (1990), writing is a task that is difficult for any person and ESL students, even in native English speaking countries, find academic writing challenging. If that is the case, then EFL students should find this to be quite a difficult feat (Thonus, 1993). This section, thus talks about the problems that EFL students face in writing.

According to Torwong (2003), the emphasis in teaching writing in the English classrooms in Thailand, is more on the accuracy of the grammar, punctuation and spelling than the communication of the ideas. The teachers only correct the grammatical errors of the students' writing and focus on the accuracy. Torwong (2003) states that grammar and spelling errors that are corrected by teachers are in the student's memories for only a short time. There is a need to focus on the fluency too and to give the students a chance to think about the errors and how to improve their writing ability. Creating student blogs and incorporating them in the coursework may then give students an opportunity to focus on fluency in writing and improve their general writing ability by reading other's posts and comments, as well as responding to those. According to Cohen and Cavalcanti (1990) ESL/EFL teachers may comment on organization and content while students perceive it as a focus on grammar and other details. This calls for the ESL and EFL teachers who teach writing to set a common ground, for instance giving explicit instructions to students before they start writing. They could also respond to the students' writing in such a way that it guides the students to improve their writing and makes them responsible for producing a well written product. This, however, is probably easier said than done and more often than not teachers are not able to come to this common understanding (Kroll, 1990).

This leads to another important problem in teaching writing in Thailand, that is, using a teacher-centered approach (Torwong, 2003). This approach may not help learners in becoming autonomous and taking control of their own learning. According to Holec (1981, p.3) learner autonomy is "the ability to take charge of one's own learning". The teacher – centered approach may then hinder the importance of learner autonomy which is highlighted in the 1999 National Education Act of Thailand by the

Bureau of National Education Committees. There needs to be a focus on the learner, allowing the learners to make mistakes and for the teacher not to be correcting every single mistake in their writing but acting more like a facilitator in helping the students rectify their mistakes. Blogs can be then seen as a tool to foster learner autonomy as students take charge of publishing their work and also make decisions about what to write and how much to write (Lee, 2011).

Another problem that Thais as well as other non-native learners of English encounter is the difficulty they have in expressing their thoughts while writing in English because of the interference of their first language. According to Bennui (2008) thinking in English when writing in English is a very difficult task for Thai students as their default cognitive process is still Thai. However empirical research shows that some amount of use of the first language in translation when planning and writing may actually improve the final product if the topic is related to the students' culture (Friedlander, 1990). For Thai students the translation would mean carrying over all the aspects of their language into English. This L1 interference may cause problems in the way they write in English.

Moreover, the interference from the first language into a foreign language can cause a lot of anxiety for Thai students and this may hinder them from becoming confident writers in English. A solution is found in the work of Boonkerd (2003) who states that one way to help students to improve writing skills and writing abilities is to develop activities that promote process writing skills. According to Sheets (1999), the learning activities could be done online which would help students to learn in a relaxed stress free environment. The Economist (2008), a weekly magazine, supported that people who were born between 1978 and 1994 are likely to have spent some part of the day online. It is important to not only motivate students to write, but also make them feel comfortable, and give them confidence to write in English. Taking this into regard, in this study the students were given topics that they could relate to, so that they felt comfortable and motivated in writing about those topics. According to Fernsten (2008), students should be able to express themselves and their identity in their writing.

Blogging is still a relatively new teaching concept in the classroom. However, there have been a few studies carried out on the benefits of using blogging in the classroom such as studies by Drexler et al.(2007) and Tse et al.(2010). The studies above have investigated motivation among students from the feedback received as a result of the blogging process and the impact of blogging on the reading skills of students. The results of these studies have been positive. The positive nature of the results influenced the researcher to use blogs in her study which aimed to focus in depth on the effects that the collaborative blogging can have on the students' communicative skills in writing.

As mentioned above, EFL students face problems, for instance, anxiety in writing in L2, lack of explicit instructions before beginning to write in L2, emphasis on accuracy in the correction of written output, teacher-centered approach in writing classes and assignment of uninteresting topics for writing. The current study attempted to find a solution to the above problems by incorporating blogging into the writing courses, helping students to improve their writing as well as their communication through writing. This was done by focusing more on what the participants wrote and replying to the ideas and thoughts that they displayed in their blog assignments, rather than looking for errors in grammar and syntax, and

commenting on those. This also helped lower the participants' anxiety and they felt free to express their ideas in their blogs.

## 1.2 Purposes of the Study

The purposes of this study were to investigate Thai EFL university students' communicative skills in writing as a result of using blogs and to explore the students' attitudes towards using collaborative blogging.

## 1.3 Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. In what way does using collaborative blogging contribute to the communicative skills in writing of Thai EFL university students?
2. What are the students' attitudes towards using collaborative blogging?

## 1.4 Significance of the Study

Although the integration of CALL and research in writing skills using blogging has increased in recent years, there is still not much research which focuses on investigating student's communicative skills through writing in blogs. In addition, with the number of blogs that are available on the internet these days for sharing information to the public, it seems appropriate to study the communicative skills in students' writing through their blogs. With so much information available just from blogs on the internet these days, the exploration of student variables regarding blogging can be reconsidered and stretched out to find out how the integration of collaborative blogging in and out of the classroom can be applied in Thailand.

Furthermore, there is research that has explored the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of both students and teachers toward collaborative blogging and benefits of blogging in the classroom, for instance studies by Drexler et al. (2007) and Tse et al. (2010). However, studies that investigated the communicative skills in students' writing and their becoming autonomous through the process of writing on blogs are still limited. The present research aims to bridge these gaps.

The results of the current study may also help solve the problem of teacher-centered approach in writing classes by focusing on a student-centered approach, allowing the participants to decide the topics for the blog assignments themselves by discussing with one another and then agreeing on a common topic for each assignment. Lastly, the current study could also act as an impetus to motivate educators and curriculum developers to include blogging as an integral part of the ESL/EFL curriculum.

## 1.5 Scopes of the Study

The participants of the study were fourth-year English major students enrolled in the Argumentative and Expository Composition course, which was offered as an elective subject at a university in the northeastern part of Thailand. This study focused on the students' communicative skills in writing using blogs, the skills being creativity, critical thinking, voice and comments. The time period for evaluating the benefits of using collaborative blogging was one semester which was a period of 17 weeks from November 2011 to February 2012.

The themes or topics for the blog assignments were the following: current events, travel, a topic of one's own interest, dating and relationships, New Year's resolutions, Children's Day, money and Valentine's Day. The first two themes were assigned by the researcher, with the remaining being chosen by the participants.

## 1.6 Definition of Terms

### Attitude

Attitude is a settled way of feeling or thinking with regards to a person or thing. In this study attitude represented the attitudes of the participants towards the use of collaborative blogging.

### Blog

A blog is a short term for web log. It is like an online journal, a blog space that anyone can set up for free, and post text, links, photos, and videos. Others can comment on the posts and paste links too.

### Collaborative Blog

The collaborative blog is a type of weblog in which posts can be contributed by more than one author and the authors work in a group. These posts are usually centered around a single theme.

### Comments

Comments are the sections in blog posts, right after the post entry, where readers can type out their reactions to what they read in the blog post (Junelius, 2013).

### Communicative Skills in Writing

Communicative skills in writing in this study is defined as skills that a writer possesses to be able to communicate their ideas and thoughts in a group in a form that is meaningful and readable and work as a group while writing. The writing skills that this study focused on were creativity, critical thinking, voice and comments.

## Creativity

Creativity in terms of blogging is defined as a perfect platform for bringing out one's ideas and discovering the potential to reach out to others (Makim, 2011).

## Critical thinking

In this study, critical thinking has been classified as creating, evaluating, analyzing, applying, understanding and remembering ideas when blogging, in which the higher order thinking skills are creating, evaluating, and analyzing.

## Voice

A writer's voice is a form of self-expression and in terms of blogging it is seen as a feel or style that is suggested in one's writing, which makes it personal to the lives of the reader (Goins, 2011).

## Writing

Writing is the act of representing and communicating of language in the form of signs and symbols that are readable and meaningful. In this study writing represented the content that the participants typed out in their blogs and the comments on others participants' blogs.

## 1.7 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter described the rationale and statement of the problem, which are the problems that EFL students face when it comes to writing in English. EFL students face problems such as anxiety in writing in L2, not receiving explicit instructions before beginning to write in L2, written output corrected more for accuracy than fluency, writing in teacher-centered classrooms and writing about topics that students cannot relate to. The current study attempted to find a solution to the above problem by incorporating blogging into the writing courses, helping students to improve their writing as well as their communication through writing. Since blogging is a relatively new concept, and empirical research investigating this topic in Thai classrooms is rare, the results from the current study would be beneficial to teachers. This study was carried out to find out: 1) the effects of collaborative blogging on the communicative skills in writing of Thai EFL university students and 2) the students' attitudes towards collaborative blogging. The scope of this study was a group of English major students studying a writing course in north eastern Thailand. In addition, the significance of the study and the definition of terms were also presented in this chapter.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

This chapter reviews the conceptual framework of this study and related studies that have been done on writing and blogs. Using blogs as a teaching tool to enhance language learning has been becoming popular in the last decade. Recently, teachers have started to see the usefulness of using blogs with their students. Blogging is no longer seen as just an internet tool but as a very useful medium of teaching and communicating with the students. According to Richardson (2005), teachers are beginning to see the educational benefits of blogging and use it as classroom portals, storing handouts and posting assignments.

Blogs are communicative by nature which makes this study lean towards using them in the writing classrooms, where they can be used to supplement the teaching material. Moreover, students along with teachers can benefit from blogging, if the writing tasks are designed in such a way that they are of interest and meaningful to the students. Blogs, can thus, be a good medium to make students motivated to write and then share that writing with their teacher as well as peers.

#### **2.1 Conceptual Framework**

The idea of integrating technology for communication in education has been accepted by teachers and educators worldwide. The benefits have been recognized both inside and outside the classroom. This section describes the conceptual framework related to blogging (see Figure 1). The current study was conducted based on the concepts of writing in L2, blogs and communicative skills in writing through collaborative blogging.

##### **2.1.1 Writing in L2**

Writing is an important skill that is required for communicating with others. Becoming a good writer requires a lot of practice both by native speakers of English as well as non-native speakers. In order to become a proficient writers one needs to possess a number of skills, for instance, good spelling skills, the skill to be able to express complex ideas in a simple way, metacognitive skills, namely, being aware of the audience and understanding different writing genres (Diane & Shanahan, 2008). There are three fundamental dimensions of second language writing which include the text that needs to be produced, the composing process and the context in which the text is written (Cumming, 2001). The production of rich texts involves the second

language writer to possess metacognitive skills as mentioned previously. These are essentially skills that require the writer to think about how to use the knowledge that they already have to work on the writing task. Weigle (2005, p.131) claims that metacognition involves “compensatory strategies for overcoming perceived gaps in

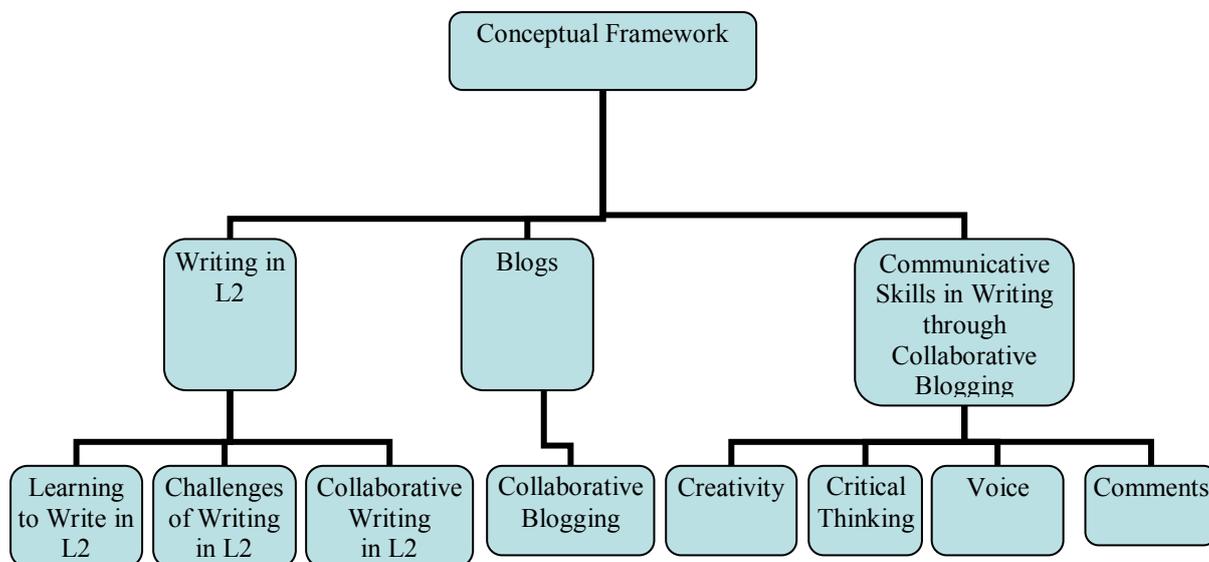


Figure 1. A conceptual framework of the study

one’s knowledge about the task”. An example of this could be students trying to relax and concentrate when they are trying to use a language pattern they have never studied before.

#### 2.1.1.1 Learning to Write in L2

The process of learning to write in L2 is not too different from learning to write in the first language. According to Fitzgerald (2006) L2 learners’ developmental process of writing skills in English does not differ much from native speakers of English. However, one special aspect that target language learners bring to their writing is their bicultural and bilingual experiences (Hyland, 2003). Second or foreign language learners tend to use their first language knowledge and different strategies when writing in the second language. This language transfer tends to occur due to the gap in the learners knowledge between L1 and L2. O’Malley and Chamot (1996) define this transfer as “the use of linguistic or prior skills to assist in comprehension or production” (p.120). The bicultural experiences are as a result of the learner studying two different languages, and hence their cultures. Culture is intertwined with language, and the identity of the bilingual learner gradually evolves through their experiences. Another aspect that they bring to their writing is the interference of the first language of the students while they write in the L2. The type of interference could be in terms of phonology, vocabulary or grammar. When writing in the target language the learner tends to lean heavily on the native language (L1) structures. The subject-verb

agreement, syntactical rules and tenses could be examples of the difference in the structures between the learner's first and second language. If there is a marked difference in the structures of the two languages then one can expect a relatively high error in L2 writing.

### 2.1.1.2 Challenges of Writing in L2

This section describes the challenges in writing in L2. For EFL learners, writing seems to be a difficult task. Firstly, EFL learners tend to rely on their L1 while writing in L2 with regards to vocabulary, generating ideas and planning their writing. For example, the dependence on translation in their writing in English may not prove to be useful because of the differences in syntax between Thai and English. Research conducted by Grabe and Kaplan (1996), Kaplan (1966, 1988) and Matsuda (1997) show that copying the L1 system of writing while writing in L2 may not always produce texts in English that meet readers' expectations. In addition, EFL learners may not have acquired enough English language knowledge to be proficient writers (Cumming, 1989; Pennington & So, 1993). L2 learners in general may have insufficient knowledge of the L2, or they may tend to overgeneralize the rules that they learn about using the language. According to Myles (2002), the learners may also lack familiarity with new linguistic structures and organization and presentation of their ideas. This may lead to expressing things in a wrong way in their writing, which might be perceived by native speakers of English as incomprehensible or not related to the topic.

Moreover, L2 learners' exposure to the second language maybe varied in their everyday lives, whereas their exposure to L1 is greater and fairly constant. Most L2 texts that the learners get access to are mostly in the classrooms and the school and university atmosphere. Thongrin (2000, 2001, 2002, 2006) found that Thai EFL students, who had limited exposure to L2 texts, had a problem in generating their thoughts in a sequence that could be understood by readers and expressing those thoughts while writing. Lastly, the students might not have received guided instructions before they start writing. A study carried out by Gebhard, Harman and Seger (2007) revealed that explicit instruction helped learners develop writing in the second language. In terms of blogging, it is necessary for the teacher to give the L2 learners relevant and supportive instructions about the software that they will be using. In a study by Armstrong and Retterer (2008), the learners were provided a training session in which each of them practiced how to make and start using their own blogs. This gave the learners an opportunity to get familiar with the software and also address any technical issues that they came across while blogging.

In summation, it can be seen that students face the following challenges while writing in the L2:- the tendency of EFL learners to rely on their L1 while writing in the L2, insufficient knowledge of the L2 in order to write proficiently, limited exposure to L2 texts before writing, and not having received guided instructions from teachers before starting to write in the L2.

### 2.1.1.3 Collaborative Writing in L2

Collaborative writing is defined as the combined production of a text by at least two writers (Storch, 2011). It includes one person working interactively with others and creating or revising a text based on others' ideas (Farkas, 1991). In the real world, learning is more often a social process where the learning takes place between peers, teachers, students, parents and children. This communication with peers and others improves learners' skills on managing clashes, helps acquire leadership roles, gives learners a chance to understand and clarify concepts and develops learning outcomes (Krashen & Terrell, 1983).

Regarding the nature of writing, Ong (1982) and Olson (1981) claim that writing is not a solitary act. In universities, assigning collaborative writing assignments is quite common as it simulates the real world team writing scenario (Strauss, 2001). The process of writing in a collaborative manner helps the writer by providing feedback. This further provides insight into improving the writing task. In addition, Bruffee (1993) states that the process of collaborative writing encourages reflective thinking and leads to a greater awareness of the audience. Likewise, collaborative writing provides learners with the opportunity to get feedback from various characters such as co-writers, teachers and critical readers. The provision and noticing of this feedback is said to be more feasible with writing as compared to speaking (Harklau, 2002). Spoken language is fleeting, temporary and in the moment, whereas written language can be reflected upon and altered if desired.

The other advantages that collaborative writing brings to learners are that it lets them express the meaning they want to put across, and gives a voice to their thoughts. These thoughts are then changed into writing that can be explored and languaged further (Swain, 2010). This work on collaborative dialogues by Swain (2010) is influenced by Vygotsky's theory that in the real world learning is a social process. This learning is where peers collaborate and provide scaffolding to each other by sharing their expertise, a process that is referred to as collaborative scaffolding (Storch, 2009). Collaborative writing, thus, gives learners opportunity to raise questions about their peers' as well as their own language use when they try and create a text. The great benefit is for all learners to be able to share various resources when they face problems (Kim, 2008).

### 2.1.2 Blogs

Rapid advancements in technology have influenced the way computers are being used for communicating in daily life. An example of advancement in Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) is blogs, which have gained momentum in the last decade. According to Rettberg (2008), the word blog is derived from weblog and was originally coined by Jorn Barger. These weblogs were like online diaries and were used to keep information about various things in one's life. Blogging has been catching on since then and more teachers are trying to integrate it into their classrooms (Beeson, 2005). The advantages that blogs provide are educational benefits such as allowing students to work at their own pace and providing a broad audience to increase students' participation and motivation. Fernet and Brock Eide (EideNeurolearning Blog, 2005) state that blogging can also be a powerful promoter of creative thinking, a powerful medium for increasing access

and exposure to quality information and combine the best of solitary reflection and social interaction.

The collaborative nature of blogging which leads to the development of language skills, learner motivation and learner identity has led to a lot of research interest by educators and teachers in the last few years. Several studies have reported that blogging brings about collaboration, develops a sense of community among students and helps develop students' writing skills (Bloch, 2007; Lee, 2010; Noytim, 2010; Sun, 2009). For English teachers, blogging collaboratively also brings about a range of literacy skills, that might not be developed in the traditional classroom. By receiving feedback from peers, students are exposed to new language that they can use to write in subsequent blog posts. This gives students exposure to new language patterns, thus helping them learn the language.

Through blogging collaboratively, students were motivated by a real audience, their peers and the "Internet" (Ackerman, 2006). The feedback that students receive from the audience also makes students cautious of what they write. The constructive feedback that students receive from peers as well as readers from different countries makes the learning process more diverse. There are new ideas and information that is shared on the blogs and students can notice and become aware of linguistic forms in the text. Nadzrah (2009) suggests that using blogs improves the student communication and interaction with peers and the wider community. In the process of working collaboratively, it is beneficial if there is gradual scaffolding by the teacher in the beginning. Eventually the students can be given opportunities to become autonomous and take control of their learning.

### 2.1.3 Communicative Skills in Writing through Collaborative Blogging

Communication skills are set of skills that enable a person to convey information so it is received and understood. Good communication skills in writing are reflected in the way a person is able to express his/her thoughts clearly. The present study focused on the following communicative skills in writing, namely, critical thinking, creativity, voice and comments. According to White et al. (2000), any kind of writing brings about communication, and writing on blogs is a powerful tool for communication in the modern, digital age. They have been looked upon as a platform for students to improve fluency by writing new posts and also commenting on their peers' work. The shift from the teacher as audience to other students and peers increases the motivation and interest of the students to write and keeps the students engaged (Thompson, 2000).

#### 2.1.3.1 Creativity

With regards to creativity, this form of online collaboration can be used to create powerful connections among students, collaborations and give students opportunities to display their creativity (Johnson, 2010). Creativity in writing is defined as the ability of the writer to express their thoughts, feelings and emotions rather than simply stating facts and information (Hale, 2008). According to White (1980), creative writing is communication through exposure; it is the freeing oneself into the open. Creativity in writing can be brought about by metaphors, poems and non-fictional writing. Using metaphors in creative writing is a necessary part of

communicating in a specific way with the audience, and can bring more substance to the writing, thus helping to make a powerful connection with the reader (Waldman, 2007). Secondly, poetic expression in writing can lead to a richness of thoughts in a way that is admired by the readers (Grover, 2012). And finally, expressing creativity through nonfiction writing has been looked upon as just another form of communicating to readers by telling stories and utilizing dialogues, but in a way that it keeps the reader entertained but informed (Gutkind, 2007). In relation to the above creativity in writing can also be brought about by having a title that attracts the attention of the reader, using pictures to support the content, and making the content unique and memorable, in such a way that it engages the audience (Lai, 2011). Thus, as a result of using blogs, creativity in writing can be stretched by stimulating conversations and connecting with other people, that leads to rethinking about old ideas, and working on new ones (McGuinness, 2013). As defined by a blogger on the internet, the more time students give to blogging and delivering to the community, the more opportunity they get to become creative writers (Goins, 2011). Students can get creative in their blogs by posting not only text, but also pictures, videos and other hyperlinks that are not possible with the traditional paper-pencil method.

### 2.1.3.2 Critical Thinking

Following creativity, critical thinking is another important communicative skill in writing. Critical thinking is a form of realistic and perceptive thinking that focuses on deciding what to do and how to do it. It has also been defined as thinking of a particular quality, namely good thinking that meets specified criteria or standards of competence and precision (Bailin, 2002). Bean (1996) says that in order to appreciate the connection between good thinking and good writing, one needs to see knowledge as something other than discrete bits of information to be studied and stored. It involves formulating ideas, reflecting on them, interpreting them and being able to communicate those thoughts effectively with others. Communication can be seen as the process of getting ideas across and receiving ideas and information and it is in this context that critical thinking can be perceived as an important communicative skill. According to Pohl (2000), critical thinking has been categorized into creating, evaluating, analyzing, applying, understanding and remembering, where creating, evaluating, and analyzing are the higher order thinking skills. Critical thinking, as such, has been defined as the process of analyzing and evaluating thinking with the goal of trying to improve on it (Paul & Elder, 2008). This would involve the critical thinker to raise and ask important questions when writing about a topic or commenting on others' work, identify and come to well-reasoned conclusions and solutions, communicate with others and be open to different viewpoints when finding solutions or coming to a conclusion, and also raise inquisitiveness and think open-mindedly within alternate systems of thought (Paul & Elder, 2008). Critical thinking also involves one to consider both sides of an issue when writing or commenting about a topic, and also display a sense of inquisitiveness to enhance one's personal wealth of information (Lai, 2011). According to Pohl (2000), internalizing one's thoughts and revising judgments based on new information through critical thinking is also seen as one of the affective domains that affects one's way of thinking. Thus, along with creativity, collaboration and communication, critical thinking seems to be one of the most important components of learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Blogs can be looked upon as a medium to promote critical thinking skills among students. According to McGuinness (2013), a lot of clarification in one's thinking happens as a result of writing blog posts and commenting on feedback received from others. It is important for students to also be able to think critically when they write, and it is the teacher's responsibility to introduce this process. By doing this, students will be able to write consistently and cohesively, and this leads to the development of their writing. When writing on blogs, students must carefully monitor what they write, as it will be available to the public. This process of writing carefully leads to the development of critical thinking skills.

### 2.1.3.3 Voice

As a result of writing on blogs, students can try and find their blogging voice by communicating with a wider audience. A good and consistent blogging voice leads to effective communication, more appeal and more fans, and also influences the readership on the blog. It is important to write consistently and comfortably, and also observe others' blogging voices. This process involves not only expressing one's own views but also observing feedback from others since blogs involve a two way communication and comments are exchanged back and forth. The different types of blogging voices usually found on the internet are informative, friendly, humorous, inspirational and dreamy (Cutmore, 2012).

To begin with, the informative blogging voice is seen as one of the most common writing styles in blogs, and bloggers of this kind like to give facts and information clearly to the audience. This type of blogger needs to write interesting points in such a way that it informs the audience about something. A very important rule for informative bloggers, as suggested by Chibuzor (2013), is to do detailed research on others' inspirational blogs, which in turn gives ideas to write one's blog. Secondly, a blogger with a friendly voice makes the audience feel comfortable when reading the blogs and adds a personal touch to the writing, which gives the audience an impression that they are having a real conversation when reading the blogs. According to Stewart (2012), when writing with a friendly blogging voice it is important to remain authentic and just be yourself, since blogging is an online extension of a personal conversation. Having humor in one's blog voice also is necessary when it is called, but depending on the topic that the blog post is about, it is understandable to have a serious tone to it sometimes. The blogger with a humorous voice likes to add humor to their writing and gives the audience a few laughs now and then when they read the blogs. According to an online blogger, Hess (2012), having a tone of humor in one's blog post will be naturally sensed by the reader, and the writer doesn't have to try too hard to bring in that humor. Next, the inspirational type of blogger has the ability to write in a style that encourages and inspires the reader and provides a positive spirit to their minds (Ridinger, 2012). Lastly, the blogger with a sentimental voice is seen as writing in an emotional way about the good and bad experiences in life and keeps the reader engaged (Cutmore, 2012). The writer tries to develop a connection with the reader, as the reader tries to dream about and imagine the situation that is given in the writing. According to Bloch (2007), blogging helps students acquire a sense of voice in a community of writers in English. If there is a

need to rightfully prepare students for communicating in the real world, teachers can no longer be the only source of information in the classroom (Johnson, 2010).

#### 2.1.3.4 Comments

The comments generated from readers are also valuable for blog writers as the number of comments generated might affect their motivation to write. According to Gunelius (2013), comments are the sections in blog posts, typically immediately following the post entry, where readers can provide their reactions to the content of the post. It is a two way communication between the reader and the writer, where both sides voice opinions, leading to further discussion. Blog commenting helps in promoting a healthy, active and interactive community with lots of reader input. Comments are what makes the blog social in nature and helps in developing the blogging community as well as the writer's online presence. The comments are generally of six different types, which are, disputative, non-disputative, critical, subjective, positive and negative.

Disputative comments are those which disagree with the blogger or other commenters, thereby giving scope for an online debate and non-disputative being ones that do not bring about any disagreement or debate (Mishne & Glance, 2006). Secondly, critical comments are usually those statements that make the writer's point clearer and more emphasizing, with the intention of possibly disagreeing without being disagreeable (Muse, 2000). Going on to the third type of blog comments, that is subjective comments, they are usually personal and contain some subjective information, to express feelings or concerns regarding any matter (Yang et al., 2009). Finally, positive comments seem to be important for a blogger and appreciating one's work can lead to the blogger feeling motivated and wanting to write (Grand, 2013). Negative comments are of course, inevitable, and a blogger might face them sometime. They are comments that may carry a tinge of non-constructive criticism and might be potentially rude or offensive (Gunelius, 2013). Also, on receiving very few or almost no comments, blog writers might question their ability to write well and communicate with their readers. Moreover, this might affect the popularity of blogs, when viewed by various readers on the internet. A well written blog that receives a lot of comments might be seen as one worth reading. According to Dmattricno (2011), leaving meaningful and consistently positive comments on others' blogs might also help in attracting readership to one's own site. The feedback through comments that are received on a blog, however, needs to be curbed sometimes, because of inappropriate content or lack of relevance. There are options on blog websites that allows writers to change the privacy settings to allow greater control of the blog comments. Regardless of these potential problems in receiving blog comments, they are defined as a simple and effective way to interact with their readership and one of the defining set of weblog characteristics (Michne & Glance, 2006).

According to Myles (2002) limited knowledge of the L2 such as vocabulary, content and language structure might inhibit students' writing performance. Online collaboration overcomes the above hurdles by making a large pool of resources available to the writer in order to get new ideas for writing and doing it in their own convenient time.

## 2.2 Review of Related Studies

Studies related to using computers and the internet in writing have been done for several years, such as online courses to improve the students proficiency and attitudes towards learning English (Al-Jarf, 2005) and using online video conferencing and chat sessions with a group of students living in different parts of the world, in which they were asked to write a research paper together (Noel, 2011). However, studies about the effects of blogging on communicative skills in writing of students are rare. The present study intended to discover the effects of collaborative blogging on the communicative skills in writing of university students and their attitudes towards collaborative blogging. The review of related studies can be categorized into the following three groups: blogs, collaborative blogs and communicative skills in writing through online collaboration.

The concept of blogs and their unique features attracted teachers as well as education researchers to use them in their own courses and classrooms. Many studies have been conducted to explore the effectiveness of using blogs in writing and classroom learning. Brooks et al (2004) carried out a study to investigate the relationship between weblog genres such as journal weblogs, notebook weblogs etc. and student motivation. The study was conducted with freshmen and well as senior students. The results revealed that students generally values personal reflection and showed a preference for journal weblogs regardless of the courses that they were taking. One of the participants said that writing on a blog journal made her feel motivated to write, because, although it was like writing in a journal, other people were going to read it too. The researchers concluded that irrespective of the genre of weblogs, technology has a great potential to increase students' self-expression and their motivation to learn.

Recent studies have also investigated how the application of blogging contributed to raising students' language awareness. Kavaliauskiene et al. (2006a, 2006b, 2007) conducted studies on students who were studying ESP (English for Specific Purposes) at a university in Lithuania. Blogs were used with the participants, which was a medium for them to do their assignments and submit their homework. The researchers pointed out that language awareness was brought about in the interaction between the lecturers and the students in the process of posting and receiving comments on blogs. The results from the questionnaires distributed among the participants showed that nearly 70% of the participants found reading blogs and writing comments to be useful. The study concluded that online activities such as using blogs motivated learners to enhance their language skill and awareness. Another significant strand of research related to using blogs is learner autonomy. A study was carried out by Pinkman (2005) in a foreign language class at a university in Japan to determine the effectiveness of using blogs in improving learner autonomy. The findings revealed that the interaction between students as well as between students and lecturers were perceived as beneficial by students, increasing their interest and motivation to use English. The results from the questionnaires and interviews showed that nearly 80% of students had developed learner autonomy.

Regarding blogs in general, Wang and Fang (2005) carried out an exploratory study on college students, the main idea being centered on the advantages brought about by weblog networks. The investigation showed that nearly 65% of the students approved that using weblog networks enhanced their academic development and

increased their opportunities to participate in writing classes. The participants still favored face-to-face interaction; however, they felt that using blogs helped in aiding the learning process. The other advantages of using blogs in teaching, addressed by the researchers, were learner autonomy, cooperative learning and time management.

The benefits of using collaborative blogging to increase students' motivation and interest to write was evident from a study conducted by Glogoff (2003). The researcher conducted an online course and used blogs with his class of 2003. A class blog was created and students were allowed to share their ideas in the blog space. They could discuss things related to one of the course's main themes which were real world use for new technologies. Students who were not that motivated to post comments on the blog did not do so and the other students complained about them. In order to make things more effective in the following year, the researcher added a blog for each student and gave assignments in class. The students were required to read others' blogs and comment on those at least three times a week. This increased students' motivation to work on their blogs and they started taking an interest. It provided a sense of community to them and participation increased. They said that being able to read and comment on what their peers wrote gave them an opportunity to understand the course content a lot better.

Drexler et al.(2007) carried out a study between pre-service teachers and third-grade students to help the students complete a five-paragraph essay as part of an assignment. The study used collaborative blogging in which each student posted their assignments on their respective blogs. The assignment involved each student to write a paragraph contributing towards an essay. The students were given instructions on how to use the blogs before starting the study. The pre-service teachers recommended websites they could visit that would help them with their assignment. As each paragraph of a student's assignment was posted on their own blogs, the teachers also made comments and encouraged them to do better. After the assignment was complete, all the paragraphs were combined and posted on the class website. This study was a success in that it not only improved the writing skills of the students but other skills they learned through the collaboration process were transferred to other subjects and other facets of their life. The students' visual literacy skills also improved since the assignment finally culminated into an online presentation, further improving the presentation skills of the third grade student

Another important area of research that the present study focused on is the communicative skills in writing through online collaboration. Saeed and Yang (2008) conducted an action research to find out how effective blogs were, when combined with a course. The study was carried out in an institution in Australia offering courses in technology. The results revealed that more than 80% of the participants who accessed the blogs posted at least one answer in reply to the queries posted by other classmates. The researchers found that the participants were ready to share their thoughts on the blogs and this improved online collaboration and communication not only among the students but also among the lecturers. Another interesting finding of the study was that nearly 40% of the participants preferred to stay anonymous on the blogs, in order to be able to voice their opinions frankly.

In another study by Sun and Chang (2012), seven graduate students studying for a Master's degree in TESOL and Linguistics created their own blogs and used them to share knowledge with one another. The interactive features of the blogs not only helped the students in generating and sharing knowledge but also gave them a space to seek their writer identity and their voice in writing.

From the studies reviewed above, it was found that most participants found blogs to be interactive and beneficial in the learning process. Some participants did raise issues about privacy, and the conditions of participation. Regardless of the feedback that was received, students still need proper guidance from teachers before starting to carry out blogging activities, in order to participate and contribute to the success of the blogging group as a whole.

The present study focused on the effect of incorporating blogs into the regular writing course. One of the emphases of blogging collaboratively was the noticing of language patterns by the participants through reading and commenting on others' blogs, and trying to incorporate those in their own blogs. Regarding learner autonomy, the present study on blogging also involved the participants to not only write on their own blogs, but also comment on at least two other participants' blogs. This was to investigate if this prerequisite along with her anonymous identity motivated the students to blog with each other. Above all, the effectiveness of collaborative blogging on the participants' communicative skills in writing was the main focus of the present study.

### 2.3 Summary of the Chapter

The review of the literature and related studies found that the use of collaborative blogging holds great promise as a medium to teach and learn a language. A review of writing in L2 found some essential factors that contribute to success in writing, that also relate to using technology in writing. It further reinforced the ideas of using collaborative blogging to bring about learner autonomy, learner motivation and improving of communicative skills in writing. There seems to be great prospective for integrating blogs into the school curriculum, as it promotes learning through communicating with one another.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

This chapter discusses the participants of the study, the instruments and procedures that were used to collect data and how the data was analyzed. The research was qualitative to investigate the effects of collaborative blogging contributed to the communicative writing skills of the students and also their attitudes towards collaborative blogging in depth and detail.

#### **3.1 Participants**

The setting of the current study was a government university in the northeastern region of Thailand. The participants were fourth year English major students enrolled in the Argumentative and Expository Composition course, which was offered as an elective subject. The participants had already taken Basic Writing, Paragraph Writing and Narrative and Descriptive Composition courses as pre-requisites for this course. At the beginning of the study there were 13 participants, three of them were male and the remaining ten participants were female. However, one participant dropped out of the course after two weeks and there were twelve participants who created their blogs on Blogger and did all the eight blog assignments collaborating with the researcher. The sampling method for this research was non-probability sampling and the type of sampling was convenient sampling. According to Saumure and Given (2008), non-probability sampling relies on the judgment of the researcher. In the present study, the 13 participants were chosen by the researcher, since they were already enrolled in a writing course and were conveniently available for carrying out research.

#### **3.2 Research Instruments**

The instruments that were used for collecting data were blogs, interviews and questionnaires. Multiple instruments were chosen to bring about a triangulation of data (Mills, 2003)

##### **3.2.1 Blogs**

Blogs were the instrument chosen for the study, in which the participants wrote their assignments. The participants were given explicit instructions on how to set up their blogs on Blogger and also how to add other blogs to their reading list.

Blogger was one of the standard software around, being used for blogging and hence it was chosen as the blogging software for this study. The following figures are snapshots that display the steps in creating a blog on Blogger.

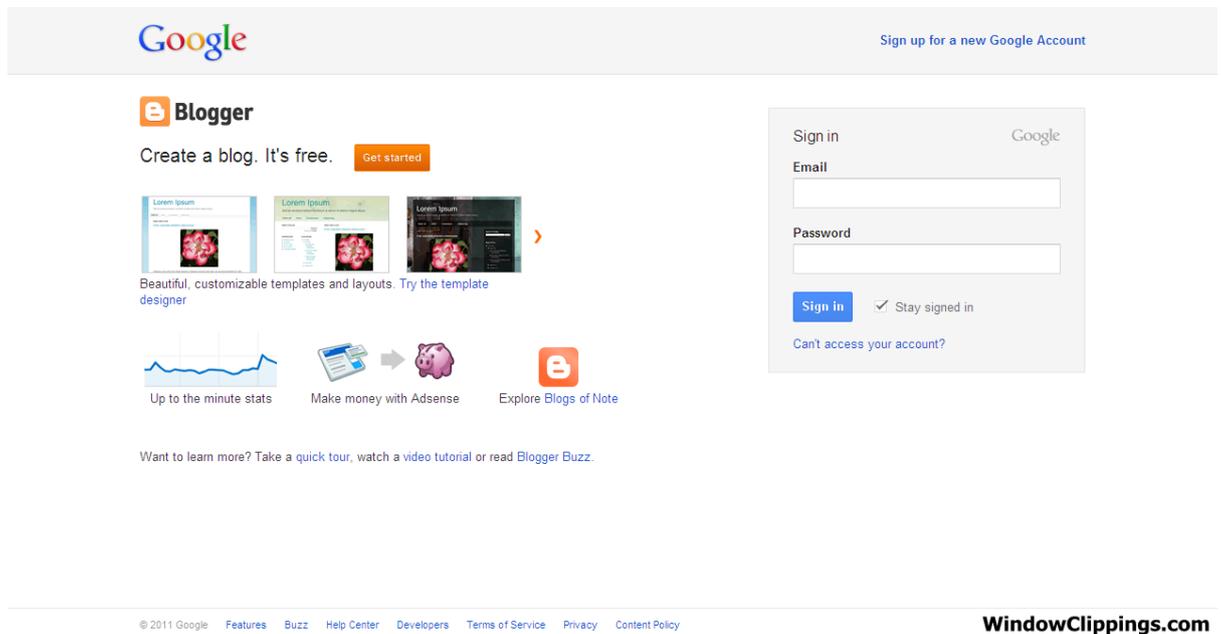


Figure 2. A Screenshot of Blogger



Figure 3. The main page of Blogger for a first time user

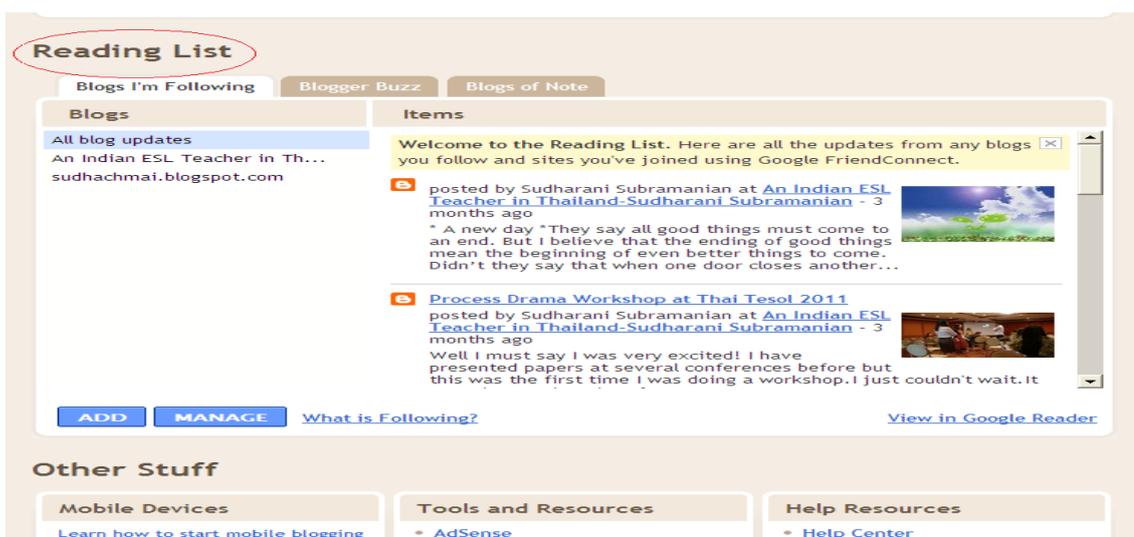


Figure 4. The Add button to add other blogs to the Reading List

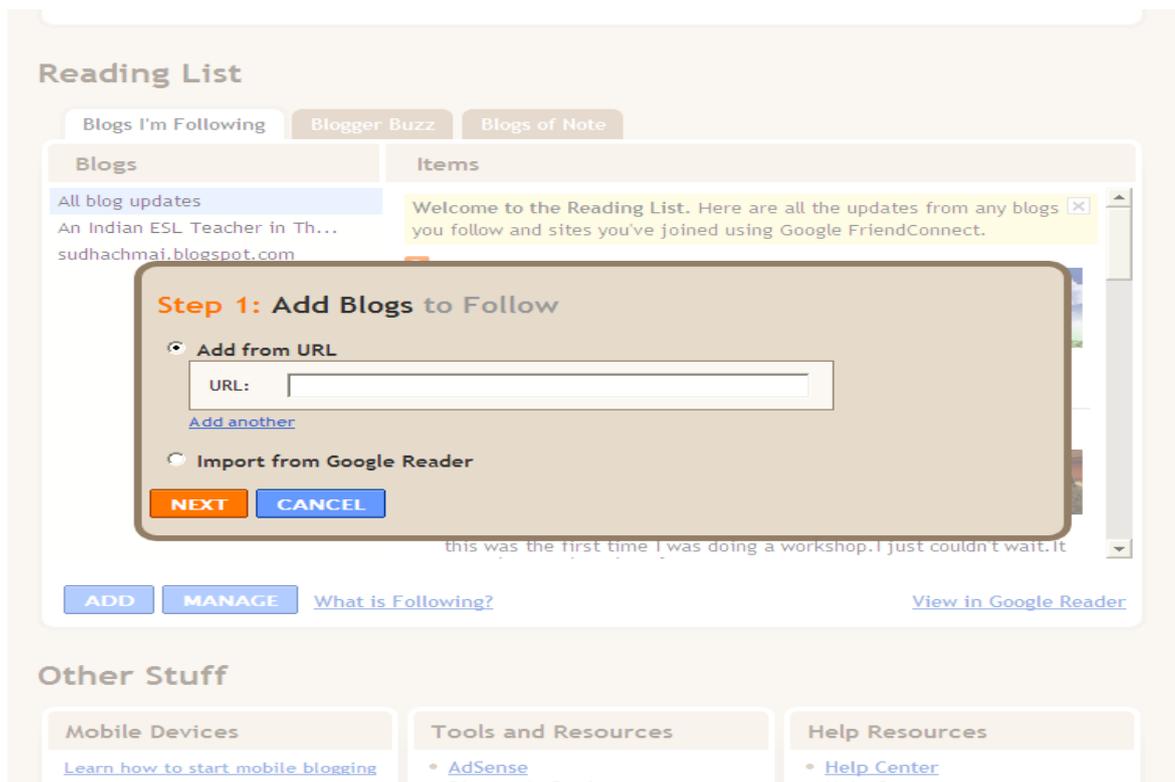


Figure 5. The first step in adding a blog to a user's Reading List

### 3.2.1.1 Blog Assignments

The blog assignments were used to investigate the effects of collaborative blogging contributed on students' communicative skills in writing. As part of the blog assignments, the participants worked in groups of three and each participant in a group was required to read and comment on the other two classmates' blogs. This was done to ensure that each participant receives at least two comments from their peers each week. The researcher and the course teacher also posted comments on the participants' blogs. The participants wrote a total of eight blog assignments.

The topic for the first blog assignment was the flooding situation in Bangkok since it was current national news and the participants could relate to it:



Figure 6. The blog post showing the blogging assignment for Week 1

Following this the topic for the second week was a travel video which the participants were required to watch on Blogger and then write about what they thought of the video. After the first two blog assignments, the selection of topics for the remaining six blog assignments was open to the students (see Appendix A). This was done in order to give them an opportunity to become autonomous in their learning and take control of decisions they needed to make while they communicated through their blogs. According to Vanett and Jurich (1990) giving students personal topic increases autonomy to a large extent. The blog assignments were part of the course requirements in order to ensure participation from the participants.

### 3.2.1.2 Scoring

The participants' blogs were scored based on the rubric (see Appendix B). The points for each type of communicative skill: creativity, critical thinking, voice and comments ranged from 0 to 3 where 0 = Unsatisfactory, 1 = Partially proficient, 2 = Proficient and 3 = Exemplary. Thus, for each criteria of creativity, critical thinking, voice and comments, each participant could get a minimum of 24 (3x8) for the eight blog assignments. Since there were four sets of criteria, the maximum possible score that could be obtained was 96 (24\*4).

### 3.2.2 Questionnaires

There were two questionnaires given to the participants in the study. The first questionnaire was given before the beginning of the study to find out personal data about the participants such as their English learning experiences, experience in using the internet and blogging (see Appendix C). The second questionnaire was given to the participants after the blogging project was over to explore their attitudes towards using collaborative blogging (see Appendix D). The questions in

the first part of the second questionnaire were rated on a four point Likert scale and the scales of agreement were 1 for 'Strongly Disagree', 2 for 'Disagree', 3 for 'Agree' and 4 for 'Strongly Agree'. The questionnaire was adapted from a study by Shahsavari and Tan (2012). Out of 19 questions, seven questions were not chosen to be included in the questionnaire because they were not appropriate for the needs of the current study. The reliability and validity of the items in the questionnaire were ensured by the "Delphi Technique" in which a group of experts reviewed the items to make sure that they were clearly worded, and evaluated the clarity, readability and content validity of the items (Delamare, et. al., 2001; Mayfield & Crompton, 1995). The inter-item correlation coefficients of items fell between 0.30-0.60 and the internal consistency of the items was 0.88 (Shahsavari & Tan, 2012).

### 3.2.3 Interviews

The researcher also conducted semi-structured interviews with each participant to explore their attitudes towards using collaborative blogging and also to find out in what way collaborative blogging contributed to their writing skills. Each participant was asked about 10 structured questions and some other questions emerged based on the responses during the conversations. The interview questions had already been used in the interview questionnaire, which was part of a study by Pinkman (2005) (see Appendix E). The questions on journal blogs in the study by Pinkman (2005) were not included in the interview questions in the current study since the participants did not keep a journal blog. The interviews were video recorded and were transcribed for analysis at a later date.

### 3.3 Data Collection Procedure

The data collection procedure took place for a period of 17 weeks from November 2011 to February 2012. In week 1 the participants were introduced to the blogging project by the course teacher and Blogger was introduced to the participants in class. The email notification feature was also shown to the students and Questionnaire I was handed out in class. Participants were shown how to set up their blogs and how to add other blogs to their own blog.

In week two blog assignment 1 was posted on the researcher blog and participants started writing in their own blogs and posted two comments on two other participants' blogs. The students could write the blog assignments at their homes if they had internet or write them in the computer lab in the university or wherever they had convenient access to the internet.

In week three the participants as well as the researcher gave feedback on the participant blogs in the comments section on Blogger. The same process was repeated for blog assignments 2 to 8. Then the course instructor and researcher printed out and collected the blog assignments for analysis. In week 17 the second questionnaire was given out to the participants and the interviews were also carried out.

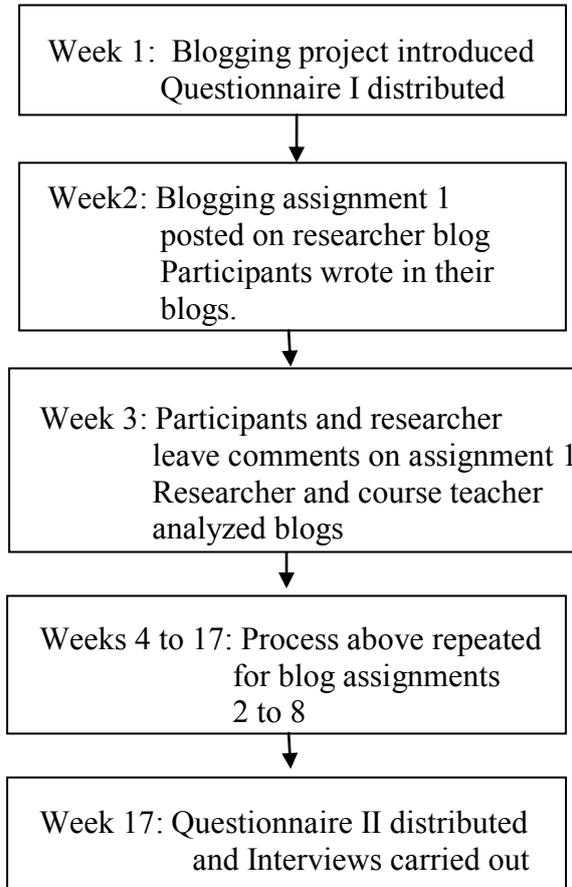


Figure 7. A flowchart of the data collection procedure

### 3.4 Data Analysis

The data from the blog assignments were analyzed by the researcher and course teacher based on the codes: creativity, critical thinking, voice and comments and contributions. A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a short word or phrase that characteristically assigns a collective, noticeable, essence-capturing, and/or suggestive attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data (Saldana, 2009). The above codes were taken directly from blog rubric-coding schemes online that were found suitable and appropriate for the current study. The rubric coding schemes were three blog rubrics (Franks, 2011; ELT Blog Evaluation, n.d.; Blogging Evaluation /26, n.d.) which were retrieved online by the researcher. The codes had been used for evaluating student blogs in other studies, in order to assess the effectiveness of the students' written work on the blogs.

Secondly, the data from the first questionnaire was analyzed to find out about the participants, for example, their experiences of learning English, the use of technology in their everyday lives, interest in writing, and favorite topics for writing. The first part of the second questionnaire which involved a Likert scale, was analyzed using frequency and the results were reported using descriptive statistics, that is, percentages. The results are reported in Table 2 in Chapter 4.

The data from the open-ended questions in the questionnaire and semi-structured interviews were also analyzed and the results were interpreted. This method involved the researcher to take one piece of data and compare it to other pieces of data to find the relationship between them. The researcher looked at the answers to each question and then looked for certain codes. The answers were then compared with other participants' answers to see if there were similar or different codes and in what way the similarities and differences arose. The categories and codes were adapted from a study by Pinkman (2005) (see Appendix F), which was similar to the current study in terms of using blogs with EFL students outside the classroom and studying their usefulness among students. The data from the interview transcriptions were used to support the results from the questionnaires. The results were reported under six different categories, namely, reflections from the collaborative blogging project, reading others' blog assignments, commenting on blog assignments, writing and speaking skills, communicative skills in writing and participants' opinions on the usability of Blogger.

### 3.5 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter presented the design and methodology of the current study. The participants were fourth year English major students enrolled in a Expository and Argumentative Composition course at a university in the northeast of Thailand. They wrote a total of eight blog assignments over a period of one semester. The blog assignments were analyzed using codes that were extracted from three blog rubric-coding schemes online, to find out the effects of collaborative blogging on the participants' communicative skills in writing. In addition, the questionnaires and interviews were also analyzed based on the categories and codes that had been used in a previous study.

## Chapter 4

### Results of the Study

This chapter reports the results of the data analysis that has been described in Chapter 3. The results are reported in two parts: the communicative skills in writing of the participants and their attitudes towards using collaborative blogging. In the first part, the results are classified and discussed under the writing codes, namely, creativity, critical thinking, voice and comments and contributions. The second part discusses the participants' attitudes and experiences before and after the collaborative blogging project.

#### 4.1 Communicative Skills in Writing

As described in the data collection procedure, the blog assignments of the participants were used to study in what way collaborative blogging contributes to the communicative skills in writing of Thai university EFL students. The findings from the blog assignments were classified into the following codes: creativity, critical thinking, voice, and comments and contributions. The scores allotted to the participants are show in Table 1 below.

Table 1  
Communicative Skills in Writing

Participant	Creativity	Critical thinking	Voice	Comments
1	12	13	10	10
2	11	14	10	11
3	9	12	8	5
4	6	5	6	5
5	8	5	6	7
6	7	6	7	8
7	10	11	10	6
8	12	10	11	12
9	6	5	5	5
10	10	11	10	5
11	7	6	5	5
12	6	5	5	5
Total	104	103	93	84
Mean	8.66	8.58	7.75	7
Percentage	36.08	35.75	32.29	29.16

The results presented in Table 1 show that creativity accounted for 36.08%, showing that the participants displayed a low degree of creativity. Critical thinking accounted for 35.75%, which was also a low score. The results of voice and comments were 32.29% and 29.16% respectively. Thus, the participants showed a low degree of communicative skills in writing, with a higher degree of creativity and critical thinking, compared to voice and comments.

#### 4.1.1 Creativity

This part of the study reports results of the participants' creativity in their blog assignments and how it contributed to their communicative skills in writing. The participants took the first few weeks to get into the mode of blogging and get familiar with it. Once they understood how it worked and grew more confident of posting and commenting on others' blogs, they started getting more comfortable to write creatively in their blog posts.

##### 4.1.1.1 Creativity Using Metaphors

One of the participants posted the title, "Water floods body, not floods heart" in his blog about the Bangkok floods. The title is an example of creativity that caught the attention of the reader. The participant used a metaphor to describe the feeling of a person who was caught in the floods. A metaphor is essentially a figure of speech where two things that are unlike are compared because they have a common connection. So here although water as an external thing can flood the body it is not capable of flooding the heart. This is because the writer feels that the heart is flooded with love and can overcome the superficial submersion in water. The two things that are compared here are body and heart. Though the heart belongs to the body as a physical entity the connection stops there. The heart is filled with love even though the body is submerged in water (see Figure 9).

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 14, 2011

Water floods body, not floods heart



Although water was flooding his body, he still called to his honey. Anyway, He just wanted to know that she was still great and happy. By the way, I could not imagine how sweet they were, but I had already known that he really loves her. Moreover, I thought his darling would be the most beautiful girl in the world for him forever. Finally, I wish they could meet each other again soon and live happily ever after.

Figure 8. A metaphor used in the title of a blog assignment

The following responses were generated bringing about communication between the writer and his classmates. This communication was fruitful since it gave the participants an opportunity to express their ideas and opinions on the writer's creative blog post.

R: Those are great thoughts. What do you think he said when he called his honey?

P: I think he would miss her when he was so sad while his house was flooded.

P2: Wow. The best lover of the flooding. ^^lol^^

P: 5555

R: Yes, I guess the most dedicated lover.

P: Yes, he is.

#### 4.1.1.2 Creativity through Poems

Another participant wrote a poem about money and this attracted readers as the poem contained many questions being put across to the reader, and made them think about various aspects of money. The writer put across his thoughts about money in such a way that stirred the emotions and imagination of the reader. It got the readers to think about the importance of money in their lives and what it actually brings to people. The writer understood that it is one of the most important things in life, but was not sure if it is the only most important thing. He made the readers ask themselves and answer this question. He seemed absolutely certain that money could buy various things in life, but not feelings such as love, sincerity and friendship. Life did not seem to be complete by having only money.

How is it important in our life?  
Some said...Money can buy everything.  
Some said... We cannot lack money.  
Some said...Money is the one of the most important thing of life.  
I think...  
Money is the thing that we assume  
It is need for human either much or less  
Does money buy everything?  
Can we lack money?  
The money is the one of the most important thing of life, isn't it?  
\* .....\*  
However  
...Money...  
Cannot buy Love  
Cannot buy Sincerity  
Cannot buy life  
\* .....\*  
How is the money important for you?

The following comments were generated from the readers, in response to the above question that the writer put across "How is money important for you?" The comments exchanged between the participants were beneficial in communicating their ideas about the value of money in their lives.

- R: I think money is very important in our lives and it can make or break relationships. How is money important to you?  
P: For me, money is the thing used to exchange what we want only!^\_^  
P2: For me, money is just a thing, but money can change many things.^  
P: 555^^I think so  
R: We need money to survive!  
It's all about the money, money, money!  
P3: because of money my parents and I don't live together!  
P : Oh! Let it be, your family and u finally love each other.^\_\_^  
P3: yeah I know :)

#### 4.1.1.3 Creativity through Non-fictional Writing

This type of creativity was expressed by a participant who wrote about her feeling on Valentine's Day and engaged the audience in the way that generated heartfelt comments. The participant also attached a picture of a black cat holding a rose in her blog page. This generated the feeling of sadness and despair on Valentine's Day to the readers.



clippings

I feel nothing on Valentine's Day. I have no boyfriend. I don't care. **NO!** I need someone to share every breath. When I see people fall in love, I'm so jealous. And deep inside,.... oh, my prince where are you now?

Figure 9. A blog assignment about Valentine's Day

The following responses were generated bringing about communication between the writer and other participants. The communication encouraged feedback from other participants and provided the learners an environment in which they could provide empathy to the writer, through their comments. According to Young (2011), empathy is vital in communication, and it also provides us with the ability to connect with readers.

R: Don't feel jealous, be happy that you have not experienced it and your heart is still fresh and waiting for love! If you wait, you will find the right person.

P2: Your prince is gonna be with you when the time is suitable.

P3: The right person will come in the right time Aele^^.

P4: Dont be sad my friend. Your love will come to you in the proper time. Then your love will be more jealous^^

P: Thanks everyone :)

P4: you're welcome^^

## 4.1.2 Critical Thinking

The four different types of critical thinking that were found based on the above criteria were analytical critical thinking, evaluative critical thinking, critical thinking through enumeration and critical thinking through internalization.

### 4.1.2.1 Analytical Critical Thinking

Analytical critical thinking is defined as thinking that involves one to sort, screen and select ideas, based on the information that is at hand. It is seen as being absolutely necessary for being creative as it requires one to decide which idea to take forward. With regards to writing, this could involve the writer to select and share the best idea on his or her blog, such that it displays creativity and generates communication with the readers. One of the participants wrote the following in her blog about Valentine's Day, "Anyways I should get used to with my loneliness on this day and be happy of seeing the other people's love (--- \_\_\_<)". This was an example of analytical critical thinking in which the participant was able to identify with her feelings on a day when love is celebrated and concluded that she should come to terms with her own situation on Valentine's Day. She was able to make inferences and embody her point of view.

Another example of critical thinking by one of the participants was shown in the following excerpt, where the participant analyzed her thoughts and wrote the following, "Certainly, money is important for live, but happiness is important too. I would like to have happy, and money in the same time". She was able to raise questions, make assumptions and generate implications. This third example of critical thinking by one of the participants is displayed in the following sentence, "I cannot buy everything although I am a rich woman. I think money cannot buy healthy and love". The participant analyzed the importance of money in our lives, and offered the other participants an opportunity to question their own insights.

### 4.1.2.2 Evaluative Critical Thinking

Evaluative critical thinking is considered to be a type of critical thinking that involves a writer to evaluate information that is at hand. This information could have been gathered from any source for example, experience, observation, reflection, reasoning or communication. It further involves evaluating thinking in order to find ways to improve it. One participant wrote the following excerpt about the color white,

“But many people think this color is kind of boring and empty. I don’t know why they think like that. Maybe because they like colorful, and they don’t want to look at one color and enjoy it”. This participant was evaluating and critiquing the color white. This was done by clarifying people’s opinions about the color white in the blog comments section, and by asking questions and thinking out loud. Here the participant was able to defend her position of her liking the color white by voicing plausible assumptions.

Another good example of evaluative critical thinking was shown by one of the participants, who wrote, “I have no boyfriend because I choose to leave him. If asking why I left him, by my reason is if it surely to know that we are not the couple, there is no reason to keep this love.” The participant evaluated her own situation and also identified reasons in order to justify why she left her boyfriend.

#### 4.1.2.3 Critical Thinking through Internalization

Internalizing one’s thoughts through critical thinking is seen as one of the affective domains that affects one’s way of thinking (Bloom, 1956). This type of thinking involves the writer to internalize and carefully reflect on different thoughts. The following two excerpts of internalization are found in the participants’ writing. In the following excerpt the participant was internalizing his own stand by questioning his choices for the future. He has to eventually make a decision about prospective career plans:

What way is my target of my life. I asked in that time that was the second choice. On the other, I asked myself again that is it too fast of my life. I really want to prove my beloved skill. It is English.

In the next example, the participant was internalizing her thoughts by showing and displaying a mature philosophical attitude:

Everyone wish born to be perfect in everything in life. But sometimes they disappointed with it. What do they do? Many things on earth are ready to serve you with happiness. Love is one of thing in this world that can string the heart of humankind together.

#### 4.1.2.4 Critical Thinking through Enumeration

The skill of enumerating thoughts in critical thinking is also seen as one of the affective domains in thinking skills as mentioned by Bloom (1956). The following excerpt is an example of a participant displaying critical thinking by enumerating the value of money against that of time. The participant was thinking about the importance of money against time, and reflecting on his thoughts one by one, about money and time:

Money is an important thing but it is not the most. There are a lot of people said if I could change all my money to time, I would change all of my money to time. I really think like this because ten month ago I really wanted to work for getting money. But now I will finish my bachelor degree in a month. I do not want to finish at all.

### 4.1.3 Voice

This section reports results of the participants' voices found in their blog assignments and how it contributed to their communicative skills in writing.

#### 4.1.3.1 Informative Blogging Voice

Informative blogging voice is seen as one of the most common writing styles in blogs, and bloggers of this kind like to give facts and information clearly to the audience. This type of blogger needs to write interesting points in such a way that it informs the audience about something. A very important rule for informative bloggers, as suggested by Chibuzor (2013), is to do detailed research on others' inspirational blogs, which in turn gives ideas to write one's blog. Another important thing for this type of blogger is the use of contractions in the blog posts for effective flow of words and sentence, and trying to use the personal pronoun "you" when addressing a particular blog reader, to make it more informative, personal and interactive (Chibuzor, 2013). One participant wrote, "I love listening songs. I began to listen English songs when I was 11 years old. Nowadays I have many favorite songs and artists such as such as Savage Garden, Westlife...I also like Russian, Arabic, Hindi songs. I can sing many songs but my voice is bad". The participant was conveying facts and information honestly to the audience about her personal taste in songs and music.

#### 4.1.3.2 Friendly Blogging Voice

This type of blogger makes the audience feel comfortable when reading the blogs and adds a personal touch to the writing, which gives the audience an impression that they are having a real conversation when reading the blogs. According to Stewart (2013), when writing with a friendly blogging voice it is important to remain authentic and just be yourself, since blogging is an online extension of a personal conversation. The following is an example of a friendly blogging voice displayed by one of the participants when describing his experience of student life at the university:

This studying journey made my best friends and me feel very happy, fun, tired and love each other much more.....now we are thinking about traveling a new special place and we have wonderful memories of our journey.....we are not good students, but we are good people because we never do the bad things.

#### 4.1.3.3 Humorous Blogging Voice

This type of blogger likes to add humor to their writing and gives the audience a few laughs now and then when they read the blogs. According to an online blogger, Hess (2012), having a tone of humor in one's blog post will be naturally sensed by the reader, and the writer doesn't have to try too hard to bring in that humor. Having humor in one's blog voice is necessary when it is called, but depending on the topic

that the blog post is about, it is understandable to have a serious tone to it sometimes. One participant wrote the following about what he gauged from a photo of a man standing in the floods and using a public telephone booth which was also under water:

He was calling for help, but the person who was talking asked him a question What shirt were you wearing? He answered honestly that he was wearing a white shirt. The person said that he was sorry because he would help red or yellow shirt only.

The participant brought about wit and humor by bringing politics into this blog assignment and gave the readers a good laugh. The political situation that he referred to was the massive protests and fighting that took place between the red shirt and the yellow shirt groups in Thailand.

#### 4.1.3.4 Inspirational Blogging Voice

The inspirational type of blogger has the ability to write in a style that inspires and uplifts the mood of the readers. One of the participants wrote the following about friendship in her blog:

Because the word ‘friend’ teaches me many things. It is one part of my life. Did you remember when you and I be friend?...Likewise when I laugh I see you always join me. I would like to thank all of you that make me happy and understand the word ‘friend’ clearly.

The participant wrote a moving story about the value of friendship and inspired the audience to develop strong bonds of friendship in life.

#### 4.1.3.5 Sentimental Blogging Voice

This kind of blogger is seen as writing in an emotional way about the good and bad experiences in life and keeps the reader engaged. The writer tries to develop a connection with the reader, as he tries to dream about and imagine the situation that is given in the writing. The following example displayed a sentimental and dreamy voice when the participant wrote about their experiences in love. It made the reader imagine and try and visualize the situation that the participant wrote about, with a probability of reflecting on one’s own experiences:

He is a pretty boy and one year younger than me. Even though we had a short time with each other, he gave me good memories and I can say that is the time falling in love. However, my love is ended and now he is gone from me. I can’t go back to change everything but I won’t forget. I hope one day is these words remind him about us. I will miss you.

#### 4.1.4 Comments and Contributions

The examples of different types of comments displayed by the participants' in their blog assignments and their description are given below.

##### 4.1.4.1 Disputative Comments

Disputative comments are those which disagree with the blogger or other commenters, thereby giving scope for an online debate. A participant is seen as making the following disputative comment:

P1: That's all right! You can explain this picture clearly. I totally agreed every words that you wrote. You can be journalist surely! cheer up ^^

P2: Atipong we shoul'n't belive every words that someone writes criticize and think twice before it should be great for every reader. ;-)

The first participant complimented the writing of a blogger on her post about the description of a man standing in flooded waters. The second participant, in turn, disagreed with the idea of journalists necessarily giving accurate information, even though they wrote in a clever and convincing way. She disputed that one should not necessarily believe every word that journalists wrote.

##### 4.1.4.2 Non-disputative Comments

Comments that are in agreement with the blogger or other commenters are called non-disputative comments. These comments are generally seen as going hand in hand with what the blogger writes, thereby giving no chance for any dispute online. One participant wrote the following positive comments in reponse to her friend bloggers giving her advice on how to tell someone that she liked him:

P1: Atipong, I'm too shy to say that. Next time I'll try. ;-)

P1: Shiiakesaki, thank you very much. now I know what I should do.

The participant took the suggestions from other participants and agreed with what they said. She did not add to any debates or further conversation.

##### 4.1.4.3 Critical Comments

Critical comments are usually those statements that make the writer's point clearer and more emphasizing. They are usually analytical statements and make any matter move forward. An example of a critical comment given by one of the participants is, "Yes, but first of all we need money, haha^^". The participant responded to the researcher's comment about making a trip to Italy. She analyzed the comment and responded by saying that that the idea of going to Italy maybe good, but money was essential. The participant made the point clear to the researcher, that dreaming was good, but it was also important to be practical.

#### 4.1.4.4 Subjective Comments

Subjective comments are those that are usually personal and consist of such phrases as “I don’t think so”, “In my opinion”, “I think so”. They are usually biased in nature. A participant commented, on being told by the researcher that crocodiles might be floating in the water, in the picture that was shown for the first blogging assignment, “I think no have crocodiles behind the booth. I think it’s water or other things under the water”. Here the participant made a personal comment and was quite convinced that there were no crocodiles in the flood waters.

#### 4.1.4.5 Postive Comments

Positive comments are comments that are usually not productive and do not add much to the debates and conversation threads. The following was an example of a positive comment made by one of the participants and did not add to any further debate, “You’re not alone. I’ll stand by your side because I have no boyfriend too. T\_T”. Here the participant empathized with the feelings of another fellow participant and showed support to her, since the participant was in the same situation as her.

#### 4.1.4.6 Negative Comments

Negative comments are those that have a tinge of non-constructive criticism and generally do not add positive feedback to the conversation. One of the participants made the following negative comment.

P1: Yuck! Do you really like them?”.

P2: Yes, I like them of course. Because books are open my eyes to see the world.

P1: U’r NERD! 0\_0

The participant responded negatively to another participant’s blog post regarding her fondness of reading books. She wrote in her post that she used money to buy books. She was a little disturbed by the negativity of the statement, as she did not continue communicating directly with the participant on the blog.

### 4.2 The Results from the First Questionnaire

The first questionnaire aimed to find out personal data about the participants, for instance, their English learning experiences, and their experience in using the Internet and blogging. The results showed that the participants started studying English since they were in primary school and three out of 12 participants had also learnt English at home. The participants responded that they wrote generally about themselves, their feelings, everyday experiences, travel experiences, their friends and insights on love. They also communicated with foreign teachers on Facebook, by sending short notes to their teachers. The results showed that eight out of 12 participants had never kept a journal. The five participants who stated that they had kept a journal wrote in their journals once or three times in a week. The participants

wrote in their journals about activities with which they were impressed, stories in which they had overcome a problem, traveling, and anything new that they learnt.

With regard to using the internet, all 12 participants used the internet to find information in English and also for logging onto social networking websites like Facebook. All participants, except for one, had been using Facebook for at least four years. Eighty-three percent of the participants said that they used Facebook essentially for communicating with their friends. In addition to Facebook the participants also visited other websites such as YouTube, hi5, Google, Puntip and Hotmail.

Lastly, the results of the first questionnaire also showed that only two out of 12 participants had used blogs before the current study took place. One of those two participants wrote in the blog once a week and shared interesting information. The other participant wrote in the blog twice a week about their favorite songs and hobbies among other things.

### 4.3 Participants' Attitudes

The second questionnaire was distributed to the participants after the blogging project was over and was used to find out the students' attitudes toward collaborative blogging. The questionnaire comprised of Likert scale questions as well as open ended questions. The following results were deduced after analyzing the responses from the Likert questions and reported in Table 2 below. The Likert scale was accounted for frequency, and the results expressed as percentages.

The results from the second questionnaire revealed that 84% of the participants found the collaborative blogging project to be enjoyable. Regarding the usability of Blogger, half of the participants found the software difficult to use. The reasons for the difficulty were mentioned in the open-ended questions as well as the interviews and are reported below.

The process of reading and commenting on blogs was found to be interesting by 75% of the participants and 84% of the participants felt that reading others' blog assignments helped in writing their own. All the participants agreed that reading others' comments on their blog assignments helped them in writing their own assignments. In relation to this, commenting on others' blog assignments, helped 84% of the participants in writing their blog assignments and also improved their general writing skills. Having others comment on their blog assignments motivated 92% of the participants to write better.

Moreover, the process of writing the blog assignments helped 86% of the participants in improving their writing skills. Seventy-seven percent of the participants felt there was enough time to finish writing all the blog assignments. Finally, 84% of the participants said that they would like to continue blogging collaboratively. The results from the open-ended questions and interviews were reported under the following categories discussed below.

Table 2

Results from the Likert scale questions in the second questionnaire

Questions	Frequency (Percentage)			
	1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly agree
1) The collaborative blogging experience was enjoyable	1 (8%)	1 (8%)	5 (42%)	5 (42%)
2) The blogging software (Blogger) was easy to use	1 (8%)	5 (42%)	4 (33%)	2 (17%)
3) Reading and commenting on others' blog assignments was interesting	1 (8%)	2 (17%)	7 (58%)	2 (17%)
4) Reading other's blog assignments helped in writing my blog assignments	1 (8%)	1 (8%)	3 (26%)	7 (58%)
5) Commenting on others' blog assignments helped in writing my own assignments	1 (8%)	1 (8%)	7 (58%)	3 (26%)
6) Reading other students' comments on my blog helped in writing my blog assignments	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	9 (74%)	3 (26%)
7) Writing the blog assignments helped improve my writing skills	1 (8%)	1 (8%)	5 (43%)	5 (43%)
8) Reading others' blog assignments helped improve my writing skills	1 (8%)	1 (8%)	6 (51%)	4 (33%)
9) Commenting on others' blog assignments helped improve my writing skills	1 (8%)	1 (8%)	3 (26%)	7 (58%)
10) Having others comment on my blog motivated me to write better	0 (0%)	1 (8%)	8 (66%)	3 (26%)
11) There was enough time to finish writing all the blog assignments	0 (0%)	3 (26%)	6 (51%)	3 (26%)
12) I would like to continue blogging collaboratively	1 (8%)	1 (8%)	8 (66%)	2 (18%)

### 4.3.1 Reflections from the Collaborative Blogging Project

The collaborative blogging project was found to be enjoyable by 84% of the participants. The following excerpts from the participants' interviews were found to support the results revealed in the questionnaire. One of the participants expressed how blogging helped her to think about her friends and teacher, while connecting with them, and thus enjoy the experience of sharing ideas, "Yes I enjoy the blogging project because I think I know about....thinking of friends...for me, for blogging....thinking of teacher for blogging".

The comments from another two participants revealed that the participants found the process of commenting on blogs enjoyable, and also looking at others following up on their comments, "I will read another story that my friend wrote, then I will read the comment in the second and then I will comment and I will give a joke to friends. I think it's funny, it's funny, funny for me", " It's very funny to comment, comment, comment, comment....yes".

Following this, another participant stated that he found it enjoyable to read all the comments on his blog. In addition, he pointed out during the interview, that the comments by the researcher had been more serious than those made by his friends. The participants felt comfortable in connecting with their friends through blogs, and found the process of commenting to be fun, "Sometime it's funny, sometime it's serious...from you it's quite serious but from friends it's quite funny".

### 4.3.2 Reading Others' Blog Assignments

The questionnaire revealed that 84% of the participants felt that reading others' blog assignments helped to improve their writing skills. The participants stated the following in their interviews, regarding their attitudes towards reading other participant's blog assignments. One participant expressed that reading others' blog assignments helped improve reading skills, since he had to analyze and understand the text fully, before commenting on the blog. Commenting also helped him to improve his writing skills, because he had to be careful about what he commented on his friend's blog:

I think in the blog help me about the writing and reading, and analyzing because sometime I think...my friend, when he write the blog, they will use expression in the Thai style. But sometimes when I read, I don't understand what he want to tell in the blog. So I must sit a long time and analyze it and then I will comment them.

Ideas from three other participants confirmed that by reading others' blogs, they had an opportunity to learn new ideas and tried to use them in their daily lives, "I want to read others' story and exchange experience to learn something new and apply to use my daily life like so they may think like this", "I honestly, I hope the reader really like it and I want to share my experience through some ideas that same or different from others. I want to read others' story and exchange experience to learn something new", "I feel good because it's teacher idea or friend idea....make me know more". Thus, they could also share their own experience, and exchange ideas with each other.

Another participant revealed that reading other's blogs helped her learn new vocabulary, which she could try and use in her own writing, "When I read others friends' blogs I can know about word choice and vocabulary sometimes".

### 4.3.3 Commenting on Blog Assignments

Regarding the process of commenting on others' blog assignments, 84% of the participants stated the activity helped them in writing their own blog assignments. Another 84% of the participants felt that commenting on others' blog assignments helped to improve their general writing skills. In addition, having others comment on their own blog assignments motivated them to write better. This participant stated that commenting on others' blogs helped share her own feelings with others, "I share my experience, my feeling to other, yeah. And they comment and sometime they teach me something that...oh, beneficial for me". Another participant revealed that the process of commenting on blogs helped him communicate with others. This communication helped improve his own thinking and find new ideas for what to write in the next blog post, "Yes I think it help in communicate with other people because when friends comment is help improve skill thinking, skill writing on the next blog".

Two other participants revealed that the continuing process of commenting on their friends' blogs was enjoyable, with some humor displayed by the participants from time to time, "I will read another story that my friend wrote, then I will read the comment in the second and then I will comment and I will give a joke to friends. I think it's funny, it's funny, funny for me", "It's very funny to comment, comment, comment, comment...yes". There was one participant, however, who did not seem to enjoy the comments that she received from another participant, which she considered slightly offensive and not positive in any way. The participant stated the following in her interview:

I think some, some parts of my writing and some friends comment is not bad comment...but is not good comment...is...but some parts of comment is a argue comments...thas mean is...I think when I read and I feel bad and uh I think in the parts of the topic and I...the money..teacher ask me in the comment...you use money..more money..for what, what for and I answer her, answer...I use, use a lot of money for the book because I like the book and some of friends, some of friends answer...really?...is that real?...and but I'm not, I'm not uh I don't like, I don't like the book because I'm lazy but yes, I like to read the book because it open my eye all of the world and she..he uh answer me...answer is a not good...he answer me...Oh you are a nerd....why why why.

In response to what the participant said above, the researcher tried to reassure her that the comment given by her friend, that she considered potentially offensive, might be a form of humor displayed by her friend and might not have been an intentional act.

### 4.3.4 Writing and Speaking Skills

The collaborative blogging project was found to help the writing skills of the

participants. Eighty-four percent of the participants stated that reading others' blog assignments helped improve their writing skills, since they had to check their grammar before they posted on the blogs. If they were unsure of the grammar, they asked their friends or English teachers to correct it. Regarding speaking skills, only one participant found that it helped in improving their skills. The excerpts from the participant's interviews are given below which support the above:

I think in the blog help me about the writing and reading, and analyzing because sometime I think...my friend, when he write the blog, they will use expression in the Thai style. But sometimes when I read, I don't understand what he want to tell in the blog. So I must sit a long time and analyze it and then I will comment them.

Yes, sure because is when a..like I tell you before, when I write, I must to check and when I type (haha)...I think..this is correct or not.....if I think that's wrong I will check and some of the subject, some of the parts..I will ask...ask English teacher some parts...if I don't understand...I cannot change, I will ask...friends or English teacher.

Umm...is make me to good writing skills because umm...before..I post I would check another...check with all of my grammar...

The following quotes from the interviews showed that writing on the blogs helped participants to have a simulation of real life conversation with each other, "Mmmm...yes. It improve skill..writing, skill speaking if uh...when when when we meet other friends, other people....we talk to, like blogging....I think it improve my speaker skills, yeah", "...if we learn and change it everyday..spoken English like written English..it help, it help us to prove our skill in reading skill and writing skill and so I'm...I can learn a lot from this". This led to the improvement of their speaking skills, as participants could use the language from the blogs in their everyday lives.

#### 4.3.5 Communicative Skills in Writing

The results from the open ended questions in the questionnaire revealed that 25% of the participants felt that the blogging project helped to improve their communicative skills in writing. Thirty-three percent of the participants stated that the process of blogging and commenting helped them in interacting with other learners and to improve their relationship with other participants. The following interview excerpts support the above. The participants stated that the blogging project improved their communicative skills in writing through exchanging ideas with others. It exposed the participants to a wider language than what was used in the classroom, and improved their writing:

I think the blogging is a good for to learn the writing process and communication language....when you write in the blog you must to exchange writing with other friends and teacher and you...I think in my opinion if you want it much better..you must to share with other foreigners people and others to

share opinion in topic and...I think is more wide and the people is more, language is to wide, more than study in the class and talk in the class..more than in the past.

Yes it makes a good relationship because I can communicate with friends' comments and share ideas.

Another participant revealed that because he had to use English in the blogging project, it improved the participants' communicative skills when writing. They were required to post only in English, in a way that was understood by the researcher and others in the group, as compared to Facebook and hi5 where the participants could communicate in Thai:

Yes..is a help in communication with my friends because when my friends comment that teacher comments...I think I will try to make understand because when you use Facebook, you use hi5, you use in Thai language....but in this course you must to use English language and you...I will try to write like English and who are teacher and friends, understand me...yes.

There was however, one participant who stated that she was not really interested in communicating through the process of blogging, but just wanted to share her own ideas with others. She frankly expressed her views in the interview, "In, for Blogger, I just did not want much to communicate. I just want to share some experience".

#### 4.3.6 Participants' Opinions on the Usability of Blogger

Regarding the usability of Blogger half the participants found Blogger to be difficult to use. Most participants stated in their interviews that they encountered difficulties when leaving comments. This was a problem faced by the researcher too, and it seemed to be a bug on the Blogger website. One participant also suggested that Facebook should be integrated with Blogger to allow for more effective communication among the participants. In relation to this, another participant suggested that Blogger should have a chatbox like Facebook to allow for participants to communicate with each other when they log onto Blogger. The following excerpts are given from the participants' interviews regarding the problems faced with using Blogger.

Yes...sometime...it difficult to comment, yes and difficult to sign in from my blog..yes...just a little problem. Sometimes it cannot comment...yes.  
When I first started blogging, it's ok if it's Thai language...I open 2 window, in Thai and English..(chuckling)..and compare it, what does it mean..and first it's for me...it's difficult and after that it's ok..and when comment...and for comment you found that it's difficult, we try 4 times, but no..it can't, can't comment.  
I think sometimes we have a problem to comment other people or every topic and yeah.

Uh as I wrote the comments sometimes it doesn't show, show....on the page.

Moreover, five participants confirmed that Blogger was difficult to use in terms of the interface, and it proved to be a tough task to manually add other friends' blog addresses and follow their blogs. One participant also found it difficult to login, since she had never used Gmail, but Blogger required all users to use a Gmail username and password to log in to their accounts. Facebook seemed to have an easier interface to use, and easier to communicate, as confirmed by another participant:

I don't find the blogging..it's difficult for me to find it and enter the system...hmm...when I sent the blog assignments to Aj. Sudha, I will send my page to my friend on chat in Facebook, give my friend to send it again in blog.

I ummm don't know because I know about blog a little. I don't know how can make, how much, don't know how to do, something like this. If I know about that, I can ask some questions.

I think the first is a difficult (haha) and I cannot do...I ask friends a lot...yes, but some part I cannot, I cannot do and is so less..because when I want to do, but I cannot do (haha) and I ask my friend, Aj. Sudha.....I never use Gmail and I don't know about blog, blogging and I don't know how to write it in blog but when my friends told me I'm more understand and I think is good.

I set up my blog in the Thai version and so it is difficult to change my name and how to improve my talent..I am the low technology. So it is difficult for me to put my image, improve my profile and how to comment on my blog. It's difficult, I don't know, I never used this.

I like blogging but sometime have problem about follow friend, I follow friends in this class but sometimes never see friends...too hard to find friend blog to comment..umm..and I think I like to chat Facebook, teacher and friends, easy more Blogger.

#### 4.4 Summary of the Chapter

The chapter described the results of participants' attitudes before and after the collaborative blogging project, from the analysis of the questionnaires and interviews. The participants generally showed a positive attitude to blogging. The process of reading and commenting on other's blogs helped the participants to improve their speaking and writing skills. It also gave them new ideas for what to write on their blogs, and helped in communicating with each other freely outside the classroom. However they did express difficulties in using Blogger for blogging and as a tool for communication, and gave suggestions on how to make collaborative blogging a better experience. The results from the second questionnaire as well as the interviews revealed that the participants experienced problems in using Blogger such as finding it difficult to log in sometimes, finding their friends on Blogger and commenting on the blogs. Blogger seemed to have occasional bugs regarding the above. Some participants were comfortable in using Facebook or other social networking sites for

written communication with others. They had already been using Facebook for a while and had got accustomed to the interface and way of communication.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusion**

This chapter reports and summarizes the main findings about how collaborative blogging contributed to the communicative skills in writing of Thai university EFL students and their attitudes towards using collaborative blogging. In addition to this, the pedagogical implications and limitations of the study are also discussed and finally suggestions are given for future research and improvement.

#### **5.1 Summary of the Results**

The summary of the results of the study, in response to the research questions addressed in this study, are presented below.

##### **Research Question I**

The first research question was, “In what way does using collaborative blogging contribute to the communicative skills in writing of Thai EFL university students?”

The results showed the participants overall displayed low degrees of communicative skills in writing: creativity, critical thinking, voice, and comments (26%-32%). Even though, the participants displayed low scores, the process of commenting on the blogs made the participants get to know each other and their blog writing styles outside of the classroom. These writing styles gave the participants ideas on what to write and how to write in their own blogs. Using creativity and humor, some participants managed to keep a conversation going on the blogs. The response to this creativity and humor motivated them to continue writing on the blog. The participants did not seem to be shy about voicing their opinion on the blogs. They communicated with others, by putting questions across to them in the form of a blog post or comments. The participants were seen as communicating on Blogger from time to time during the course of the study.

## Research Question II

The second research question was, “What are the student’s attitudes towards collaborative blogging?”

Most of the participants had a positive attitude towards blogging and found the collaborative blogging project to be enjoyable. They reported that reading others’ blogs and also the feedback from others on their own blogs helped in writing the blog assignments better and improved their writing skills. It also improved their relationship with other participants and motivated them to write more. One-fourth of the participants felt that the collaborative blogging project helped improve their communicative skills in writing. With regards to the usability of Blogger, half of the participants felt that Blogger was a difficult software to use. In spite of this, overall, the process of blogging and commenting was perceived as a fun experience by the participants.

## 5.2 Discussion

The results of the current study are discussed in this section and reported in two parts. The first part addressed EFL students’ communicative skills in writing and the second part reported EFL students’ attitudes toward collaborative blogging.

Based on the results in the area of critical thinking, the participants displayed a certain degree of critical thinking, depending upon their topics of their interest and possibly their background knowledge and experiences on that topic. The topics such as money and Valentine’s Day seemed to bring about more interest and more discussion was generated from these blog assignments. This showed that if the participants were given topics that related their own lives, they felt motivated to carry on communicating through blogs.

Regarding the display of participants’ voice in their blog assignments, there was a varying degree in the participants’ contribution, and a reason for this might have been anxiety while writing on the blogs. According to Fernsten (2008) students should not be anxious while writing and should feel comfortable and motivated to write. Some students might have a natural flair for reading and writing well, which might have led to some participants having the confidence to bring about their inner voice in the blogs.

The comments that were generated from the participants in the blog assignments were varied depending upon the topic, and also upon how much attention was brought to the blogs posts. There were occasional instances when one of the participants did not think of the comments given by another participant as positive, and was a little offended. However, the comments itself were not offensive, and the participant had the nature of adding a lot of humor and satire to their comments. Generally, comments that had humor in them generated more discussion. A possible reason for the participants’ general positive contribution might have been because the participants were not being checked for accuracy in their writing, and the focus was fluency. According to Torwong (2003), there is a need for teachers in Thailand to focus on fluency, to allow the students to write freely and feeling less anxious.

Overall, it was found that writing the blog assignments in their own time encouraged the participants to feel less anxious and contribute to the study. According

to Brooks and colleagues (2004), it is the nature and convenience of blogs might that encourages participants to write more with ease.

### 5.2.2 EFL Students' Attitudes towards Collaborative Blogging

The result of the participants' attitudes towards collaborative blogging, as analyzed from the questionnaires and interviews, is discussed below. With regards to the usefulness of writing the blog assignments and commenting on other's blogs, most participants felt that it helped them to communicate with other participants more than before and improved their relationship outside of class. The study also showed that the participants showed a positive attitude to reading others' blogs. It helped them to get ideas for writing their own blogs and also to learn the style of commenting on other's blogs. According to the studies done by Kavaliauskiene et.al. (2006, 2006b, 2007) and Wu (2005), students improve their language skills and become more aware of using the language after reading and commenting on others' blogs. The results revealed that the participants were open to receiving comments from others. Most of the participants found it enjoyable with the exception of one participant who was a little offended by the satirical comments that one other participant made on their blog.

With regards to problems in blogging, some participants mentioned that they did not have access to computers and a good internet connection outside the university campus and were not able to complete the blog assignments on time. In addition they encountered difficulties in using Blogger as it was not as user friendly and familiar to them, compared to social networking sites like Facebook which was used for frequent communication. Regarding the problems of user interface and comments disappearing from time to time, a similar problem was found in a study by Lee (1998) in which the participants wrote that they needed more time to learn and get accustomed to new software. In the present study the participants were given explanation on how to use Blogger by the course teacher demonstrating it in class, in the first week, after which the participants were told to start writing the blog assignments from the second week. A solution to this problem could be by giving more time to the participants in the training session, and giving them sufficient time to encounter bugs and other problems which could be addressed in class.

Another issue that this study wished to address was Thai students not being able to take charge of their own learning. A way to foster learner autonomy in this study was by giving a chance to the participants to choose their own topics for the blog assignments after the initial blog assignment which was decided by the researcher. Only one participant took the lead in suggesting topics to the others. Some participants agreed to the topics and there was one participant who had some disagreement regarding the suggestions, which was communicated through messages. between the course teacher and the participants on Facebook. Eventually the participants found the process to be challenging and let the one participant suggest all the topics. In the interviews many participants mentioned that the teacher should suggest the topics and it was not possible for all the participants to agree with and come to a decision about one topic for each blog assignment. The participants when asked, if they had suggested any topic that they would like to write about, said that they just agreed with any topic and this way it would be easier. A possible reason for this might be the participants not getting enough opportunities to be able to think for themselves and be given the chance to take charge of their learning.

### 5.3 Pedagogical Implications

Blogs have become quite popular among university students and adults alike in the past few years. Recently many blogging websites have come up such as Tumblr, Xanga and Twitter. Websites such as Twitter can be linked to other websites and social networking sites such as Facebook. The blogging websites allow users to communicate with another in a collaborative manner and sites like Tumblr have also added features similar to Facebook such as ‘Liking’ posts on blogs and allowing these posts to be reposted on one’s own blog site. Posts from other websites such as Twitter and RSS feeds can also be imported into Tumblr. All these features provide a platform for collaboration, and educators could take advantage of this communicative nature of blogs and incorporate them into their own classrooms. Learners can share their experiences on their blogs with teachers as well as other students, providing opportunities for teachers to keep communicating with their students outside the classroom. With the blogging websites adding new features with time, and providing option for posting photos and videos, this could be used to give a more personal touch to the communication.

The results provided by the current study give a further insight into providing some pedagogical implications for the future. The participants generally welcomed the collaborative nature of blogging and stated that it helped them to get to know more about their friends and learn from others’ experiences. This could then be used as an initiative for the teachers to incorporate blogs in their classrooms as well as outside of class, and allow themselves to also communicate with their students. Secondly, the results of the written products showed that the participants provided more output when writing about topics that were interesting to them and ones they could relate to their own lives. These assignments generated more discussion and comments from their friends. Taking this into regards, teachers can carefully assign topics that the students might be familiar with, for writing assignments. According to Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) and Graves (2000), learners should be given activities that are more personalized and ones that they can relate to. This is also a step in helping learners become autonomous. Once the students start taking interest in the students when necessary.

### 5.4 Limitations of the Study

The limitations posed in the present study are presented as follows. Firstly, the study was carried out with fourth-year English major students who were all Thai. The results might have been different if the study was carried out in a different environment, which included non-Thai participants as well. Secondly, the course in which the study was carried out was already a writing course, where the emphasis was essay writing. There could have been different results if the study was carried out in other courses such as speaking, reading or other general English courses.

Thirdly, the students were English major university students and their level of English might be higher than the non-English major students studying English. In addition, the students were graded for their blog assignments. This was possibly the biggest limitation because the grade was an incentive for the students to write the assignments. The results could have been different if the students had not been scored blogging project.

The results of the study might vary if random sampling of participants had been done instead. The time frame for this study was one semester and it was not possible to conduct a longitudinal study to assess the students' progress on the blogs.

## 5.5 Recommendations for Future Research

This section reports the recommendations for future studies, based on the findings of the current study. Firstly, the results of the current study were obtained on carrying it out only with Thai students. The findings thus cannot be generalized for EFL students, who might consist of non- Thais too. The study could be replicated with other EFL students, both Thai and non-Thai. Secondly, it was seen that the scores given to the participants for the blog assignments motivated them to write in their blogs. The current study could be replicated in the future without assigning any scores for the blog assignments and the written output of the participants could then be observed.

Lastly, this study was carried out to observe how collaborative blogging contributed to the communicative writing skills of the students taking a writing course. With blogging sites being updated all the time and with all the new features being added to the sites, it would be interesting to see the results when the blogs are extended to other course and other classrooms, such as in conversation classes, reading classes as well as in other subjects such as Business English, History, Psychology to name a few.

## 5.6 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter discussed the major findings of the present study which were the ways in which collaborative blogging contributed to the communicative skills in writing of Thai EFL students and also their attitude towards collaborative blogging. The participants generally communicated well through blogs, outside classroom hours, and found the process of commenting on each other's blogs to be enjoyable. The display of creativity, critical thinking and inner voice in the blog posts and comments, enhance the communication among the participants. The participants' attitude toward the blogging experience was generally positive, and the results from the questionnaires and interviews provided further insight into how the study could be improved in the future. The pedagogical implications, limitations of the study and recommendations for future research were also discussed. The pedagogical implications were to provide in depth training and orientation before starting to blog with EFL students, in order to address any technical issued that came up. Another implication was to let learners decide topics for themselves for blogging, and in the process of negotiation with each other, to try and make them autonomous learners. By addressing the biggest limitation in this study, which was giving scores for the blog assignment, an interesting observation in the future could be if the participants are still motivated to write, without scores. The study could also be incorporated into other EFL classrooms such as Conversation, Reading and Business English courses and could possibly be conducted with other EFL students who would comprise of both Thai and non-Thai students.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **Topics for Blog Assignments:**

1. Current events
2. Travel
3. A topic of your own choice
4. Relationships
5. New Year
6. Children's Day
7. Money
8. Valentine's Day

## **APPENDIX B**

### Blog Rubric

Element	Exemplary (3)	Proficient(2)	Partially Proficient (1)	Unsatisfactory(0)
Creativity	Postings are creatively and fluently written to stimulate dialogue and commentary.	Postings are generally well written with some attempts made to stimulate dialogue and commentary.	Postings are brief and unimaginative, and reflect minimal effort to connect with the audience.	Postings are written in a half-hearted, disjointed manner that reflects no awareness of effective communication.
Critical thinking	Postings frequently demonstrate use of upper level thinking (analysis, synthesis, evaluation) and illustrate a thoughtful approach to the content.	Postings sometime demonstrate use of upper level thinking and illustrate a thoughtful approach to the content.	Postings rarely demonstrate use of upper level thinking and illustrate a thoughtful approach to the content.	Postings almost never demonstrate use of upper level thinking and illustrate a thoughtful approach to the content.
Voice	Postings are written in a style that is appealing and appropriate for the intended audience and a consistent voice is evident throughout.	Postings are written in a style that is generally appropriate for the intended audience and an attempt is made to use a consistent voice.	Postings are written in a style that does not consider the audience, and the author's voice is difficult to identify.	Postings are carelessly written with no attempt to consider the audience and no awareness of author voice.
Comments	Writes comments on other students' blog postings that are consistently positive, respectful, and succinct while providing a meaningful addition to the discussion.	Writes comments on other students' blog postings that are generally positive, respectful and add value to the discussion.	Writes comments on other students' blog postings which often fail to show respect for other opinions.	

***Franker, K. (2011).A Rubric for Evaluating Student Blogs & ELT Blog evaluation (n.d).***

## **APPENDIX C**

## Questionnaire I

Please take some time to fill out this questionnaire. It will be highly appreciated.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

1) When did you start studying English?

\_\_\_\_\_

2) Where did you first learn English in Thailand?

\_\_\_\_\_

3) Which of the following skills in English do you find the most difficult?

a) Listening            b) Speaking            c) Reading            d) Writing

4) What do you usually write about in Thai?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5) Have you ever kept your own journal?

a) Yes            b) No

If the answer to question 5 is Yes, please answer questions 6 and 7:

6) How often do you write in your journal?

\_\_\_\_\_

7) What do you write about in your journal?

\_\_\_\_\_

8) Do you use the Internet for finding information in English?

- a) Yes                      b) No

9) Have you ever created your own blog?

- a) Yes                      b) No

If the answer to question 9 is Yes, please answer questions 10 and 11:

10) How often do you write in your blog?

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11) What do you write about in your blog?

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12) Do you use social networking websites such as Facebook, hi5, myspace?

- a) Yes                      b) No

If the answer to question 12 is Yes, please answer the following questions:

13) Please give the names of the websites that you use.

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14) How long have you been using social networking sites?

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15) What do you use the social networking sites for?

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## **APPENDIX D**

## Questionnaire II

Please take some time to fill out this questionnaire. Your feedback will be highly appreciated and it will help in improving the collaborative blogging experience. Thank you.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_ years

Please rate the following questions according to the rating scale below

**Circle the best choice '1', '2' '3' or '4'.**

1 – Strongly disagree

2 – Disagree

3 – Agree

4 – Strongly agree

- |  |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|
| 1) The collaborative blogging experience was enjoyable.                                | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2) The blogging software was easy to use.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3) Reading and commenting on others' blogs assignments was interesting.                | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3) Reading others' blog assignments helped in writing my blog assignments.             | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 4) Commenting on others' blog assignments helped in writing my blog assignments.       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 6) Reading others students' comments on my blog helped in writing my blog assignments. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

- 7) Writing the blog assignments helped improve my writing skills. 1 2 3 4
- 8) Reading others' blog assignments helped improve my writing skills. 1 2 3 4
- 9) Commenting others' blog assignments helped improve my writing skills. 1 2 3 4
- 10) Having others comment on my blog motivated me to write better. 1 2 3 4
- 11) There was enough time to finish writing all the blog assignments. 1 2 3 4
- 12) I would like to continue blogging collaboratively. 1 2 3 4

**Answer the questions (Questions 13– 18).**

- 1) What are your ideas about the collaborative blogging software that was used?

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- 2) How did you find the activity of commenting on your friends' blogs?

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3) What do you think of the comments that other students' made on your blog?

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4) How did collaborative blogging contribute to your writing skills?

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5) How did collaborative blogging contribute to any other skills of yours?

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6) What is the most memorable thing you read on other students' blogs?

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7) If you could recommend three things about using blogs, what would they be?

- a) \_\_\_\_\_
- b) \_\_\_\_\_
- c) \_\_\_\_\_

8) What are your ideas about having another collaborative blogging project?

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*Shahsavari, Z. (2012). Developing a questionnaire to measure students' attitudes toward the course blog?*

## **APPENDIX E**

## Interview Questions

1. What are your goals in taking this class?
2. On a scale of 1-5, 5 being difficult and 1 being easy, how difficult did you find doing the blogging project?
3. Did you enjoy the project? Why/why not?
4. What aspects did you like and what aspects did you dislike about the project?
5. What did you feel about your blogging friend's comments on your blog?
6. What did you feel about the students' comments on your blog?
7. How much time/effort did you put into the project?
8. Did you meet the requirements of the project?
9. Did you feel that you were communicating through your blog (why/how/with who?)
10. Have you kept a blog before?
11. What do you think are the advantages of doing a blog?
12. Did you use pictures/ visuals to express yourself in your blog?
13. Do you think that the blogging project helped in improving your writing skills (how?)
14. Do you think that the blogging project helped in improving any other skills (how?)
15. What did you learn from the project?
16. How can the project be better?
17. Do you think that blogs can be used in other courses? Which courses and how?
18. Will you continue writing on your blog in the future?

***Pinkman, K. (2005). Using Blogs in the Foreign Language Classroom: Encouraging Learner Independence.***

## **APPENDIX F**

## **Categories and Codes for Analyzing Data from interviews**

### Category 1

Learner-perceived advantages of the blogging project

Codes:

Interacting with other learners

Improved communicative skills in writing

Learning and using new vocabulary

Practice in technology

Thinking in English

### Category 2

Learner – perceived disadvantages of the blogging project

Codes:

Blogging software was difficult to understand/use

Instructions not clear for blog assignments

Not enough time to complete the blog assignments

Teacher should have given fewer topics

Teacher should assign more blog assignments

### Category 3

Learner reactions to teacher's comments on their blogs

Codes:

Teacher's comments helped in improving writing

Teacher's comments were difficult to understand

Teacher's comments motivated me to write more

#### Category 4

Learner reactions to students' comments on their blogs

Codes:

Students' comments helped in improving writing

Students' comments were difficult to understand

Students' comments motivated me to write more

#### Category 5

Usefulness of reading other students' blogs

Codes:

Reading others' blogs helped in thinking about ideas for my own writing

Reading others' blogs helped in correcting my own writing errors

Reading others' blogs helped in learning how to comment responsibly

***Pinkman, K. (2005). Using Blogs in the Foreign Language Classroom: Encouraging Learner Independence***

## **RESUME**

Name: Purnima Iyer  
Date of Birth: 6 June 1982  
Place of Birth: Kolkata, India  
Education: M.A. TESOL  
Institutions Attended: M.V. J College of Engineering, Bangalore, India  
Payap University, Chiang Mai, Thailand  
Contact: purnimaiyer@gmail.com