

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter will further review more relevant literature based on the issues introduced in Chapter One. Hence, this chapter will first provide a general overview of the Internet, the Web 2.0, with particular emphasis on Web logs. The literature reviewed will then move on to the relations of Web logs in education, particularly in the ESL field. This will be followed by more relevant terminologies and principles on assessments as a lead-in to the discussion of the Humanistic approach to language learning, i.e. the theoretical framework of this study. Sub-topics of assessments such as language assessment, alternative assessments, and feedback will also be reviewed. This chapter will conclude with the discussion on the relevance of class blogs as an alternative assessment and feedback tool.

2.1 Information Technology: The Internet

Undoubtedly, the Internet is dramatically altering people's modes of interaction in this millennium. There is a long history of technological advances that have made it possible for us to connect with many individuals across the globe today. Briefly, the Internet is "a standardized, global system of interconnected computer networks that connects millions of people. It is a *network of networks* that consists of millions of private and public, academic, business, and government networks of local to global scope that are linked by copper wires, fiber-optic cables, wireless connections, and other technologies" (Wikipedia, 2009). Examples of new-age communication made possible through the Internet and computers

are instant messaging, electronic mails (e-mails), and social networking. McKenna and Bargh (2000) propose four domains in which social interaction via computer mediated communication (CMC) differs from other more conventional interaction mediums: relative anonymity, reduced importance of physical appearance, attenuation of physical distance and greater control over the time and pace of interactions (as cited in Guadagno et al., 2008, p. 1994). These four aspects are claimed to contribute to the vast development and popularity earned by the Internet today.

2.1.1 Web 2.0 and Types of Web 2.0 Sites

As explained in Chapter One, the sophistication of the Internet has lead to the development of Web 2.0, through which Internet users can interact with one another, without having to speak the HTML language. Web 2.0 is generically known as “social networking”. Examples of social networking sites which have earned popularity and major utilization vary from personal data (MySpace, Facebook, Twitter), photos (Flickr, Fotopages), music (podcasts), videos (YouTube), diaries or opinions (blogs), or encyclopedic definitions (Wikis like Wikipedia) (Caverly et al., 2008). Of all these sites, blogs have been claimed to be the greatest use of the participatory Web 2.0 phenomena (p. 34).

2.2 Web logs

A web log, or blog, in short, is one of the newest forms of online self-presentation, self-expression, and interaction that has been facilitated by the age of Internet (Guadagno et al., 2008, p. 1994). Millions of people around the world maintain Web logs, also known as Internet journals, covering a huge range of topics and interests. Blogs have emerged as an

effective way to publish and manage content on the Web. They have in fact reshaped the web, enabling millions of people to have a voice and connect with others (Blogger, 2009). Blogs are, therefore, collaborative, joining people from diverse geographic, political, and socioeconomic groups in one place (Richardson, 2003a, p. 39). This rise in popularity has in fact resulted in new words being added to the English language: blog (Embrey, 2002, p. 7). This is an indication that blogging will not be a fad.

As defined in Chapter One, blogs are periodically updated journals, providing online commentary, with minimal or no external editing, that is available to users on the Web. They are known to be easily created and updateable Web sites that allow people to publish to the Internet instantly even if they do not have any knowledge of HTML programming (De Almeida Soares, 2008, p. 518). According to the Blogger site, on “What’s a blog?”:

A blog is a personal diary. A daily pulpit. A collaborative space. A political soapbox. A breaking-news outlet. A collection of links. Your own private thoughts. Memos to the world. Your blog is whatever you want it to be. There are millions of them, in all shapes and sizes, and there are no real rules. In simple terms, a blog is a web site, where you write stuff on an ongoing basis. New stuff shows up at the top, so your visitors can read what's new. Then they comment on it or link to it or email you. Or not.

(Blogger, 2009)

They typically contain 3 items: a title, text, and links (Winer, 2003). The texts are usually presented as a set of “posts”, individual entries of news or commentary, in reverse chronological order (Drezner & Farrell, 2004, p. 32). New posts are placed at the top of the page instead of the bottom, making it easy to see what has changed. Blogs offer many links to related information, which are loosely joined to each other through hyperlinks. The

hyperlinks include links to new sites, other blogs, e-mail, online advertisements, video and audio files, or other online content (Nelson, 2006, p. 3; Richardson, 2003a, p. 39). This linking means that any blogger who has something to say is part of a global network called the blogosphere, the planetary community of bloggers (Scoble & Israel, 2006, p. 26). It is of no surprise, therefore, that blogs are said to be link-driven.

Blogs started out as personal communication tools that could provide Web commentary on social issues and other topics of interest to the blogging community (Embrey, 2002, p. 7). Thus, they are often rather personal and opinionated. Blogs function in two primary ways, serving either as personal diaries or as news journals. Either way, unlike websites, blogs are written in an informal style and reflect the interest, view, and personality of the blogger (Mercado-Kierkegaard, 2006, p. 128). Also, in most cases, blogs usually allow room for readers' comments and site visitors can read other comments and identify the author (Scoble & Israel, 2006, p. 26). Anybody with access to the Internet can read blog entries and leave comments on what they have read. This feature serves as a platform for interaction between the bloggers and their readers. Other contents shared by the bloggers can also be in the form of text, digits, symbols, graphics, or audio/video.

Web blogs did not even exist until about 10 years ago. Their number, however, has surprisingly grown at an astronomical rate over the last decade (Drezner & Farrell, 2004, p. 33). In fact, the overall growth of blogging is among the fastest of any technology in history (Scoble & Israel, 2006, p. 25). Also, more blogs are created everyday than there are books published in the United States each year (Nelson, 2006, p. 3). There is evidently a great shift in the reading habit among people worldwide. Blogs are fast becoming

ubiquitous and there are bloggers in every country where Information Technology (IT) is common.

Technorati (a blog search engine company) reports that in 2008, there were over 113 million blogs growing at the rate of 175,000 per day with 18 postings per second (Caverly et al, 2008, p. 34). Technorati claims that youths are the main Web logs users. Although bloggers come in every shape and size, this virtual explosion has increased significantly among younger generations. For many of these youngsters, the Internet is tightly integrated into their daily communicative practices. According to Nussbaum, 90% of today's bloggers are between 13 and 29 years of age, which coincides with the ages of a significant portion of the population of foreign language learners (Webb, p. 410). Such online technologies are quickly becoming incorporated into schoolwork as well (Ellison & Wu, 2008, p. 100).

2.2.1 Why Blogs?

One does not have to be an Einstein to understand why blogs are so popular. The most important aspect of the blog is that it is conversational and community forming (Scoble & Israel, 2006, p. 267). It creates a new channel for Internet users to express views and interact with one another. Research indicates that most blogs have one author and the main reason cited for maintaining a blog is to express personal content (Guadagno et al., 2008, p. 1994). Blogs also allow for ease of idea sharing and construction. The connections they create, when readers and writers interact and explore common interests, are also said to be one of the major appeals of blogs (Richardson, 2003a, pp. 39-40). This is undeniable since readers can respond to writers' entries with comments and even conduct, intentionally or unintentionally, a threaded discussion in a particular blog (Campbell, 2003, as cited in Elola

& Oskoz, 2008, p. 460). This point is also advocated by Richardson (2006, as cited in McPherson et al., 2007, p. 25), who posits that an advantage of blog is the organisation of discussions as personal publications enabling communication. Mercado-Kierkegaard (2006) further postulates on the interactive nature of blogs, as follows:

It allows people to have conversation and give their rapid feedback, not only in the same blog, but also in other blogs. Newspapers and journals are not able to print comments from readers immediately and reply instantaneously.

(p. 128).

This shows how marked blogs are in terms of interactivity, in comparison to other forms of media. The uses of blogs are thus limitless. In fact, no other modes of communication “let one person converse with many people in multiple locations from any point where he or she has a computer and Internet access – not until blogging” (Scoble & Israel, 2006, p. 27). Hence, blogs have inexplicably become an empowering and a phenomenal media in today’s world.

Blogs are not simply empowering, but they are practically effortless. The ease with which Web logs facilitate that interaction is equally important. “The promise of the web was that everyone could publish, that a thousand voices could flourish, communicate, and connect” (Nelson, 2006, p. 4). Thanks to numerous Web log softwares, the whole process is as simple as connecting to the Internet, going to the Web site, logging in, composing a post, and pressing “Publish”. In seconds, the site is updated (Richardson, 2003a, p. 39).

Blogging software allows a blogger to create a blog without knowing a lot of Hyper Text Markup Language (HTML) or working with complicated Web templates (Embrey, 2002, p. 8). Blogs are easier to create than ordinary Web sites that some researchers even compare the ease of blogging to writing an e-mail. The ease of use provides a platform for quick online collaboration and is perfect for encouraging lively dialogues (Burke & Oomen-Early, 2008, p. 362; Margolis, 2005, p. 11). Also, the ‘easy-to-publish’ and ‘easy-to-access’ attributes are more likely to increase the likelihood of accommodating younger students’ needs in that today’s generation of students are easily dissatisfied with a system requesting too many steps to obtain online information (Maag, 2006, as cited in Kim, 2008, p. 1344).

“The big phenomenon, perhaps the “most democratized revolution in media ever” was made possible by software that is widely available and often accessed for free”

(Nelson, 2006, p. 4).

This is a pertinent feature of blogs, whose softwares are mostly free or can be purchased at a very reasonable price. Some may question, what are the differences between Web logs and Web sites? Burke & Oomen-Early (2008) provides an extensive explanation:

A Web log (i.e., blog) is very similar to a Web site in that both allow for self-expression, and they may contain narrative comments, video, audio, photographs, sketchblogs (images or drawings chronicling events), gaming, political editorials, and links to other blogs or sites. Unlike a Web site, though, a blog is more fluid and changing as the online community, individual posts new information to share.

(p. 362).

In other words, Web logs provide a more flexible and definitely dynamic mode of digital communication for Internet users. When compared to e-mails or forum discussions, blogs

are different as Internet users and readers can see all pertinent comments by simply scrolling down the screen (Elola & Oskoz, 2008, p. 460). Bloggers can also upload pictures and customize the layout of the blog to their liking, making it a much more personalized tool. Further, it is subject to self-correction. It is easy to retract a statement and/or to provide the parties with their right to reply. It facilitates ease of publication and correction of information which might be false (Mercado-Kierkegaard, 2006, p. 129). Web logs are also a safe form of online communication. As a safeguard, blogs can be moderated so that comments are reviewed before being made public to ensure that inappropriate remarks do not appear (Brooks-Young, 2005, p. 10).

As postulated earlier: Your blog is whatever you want it to be. This relates to Karrer's (2007) assertion, as evident in the following metaphor:

Likens a blog to a camera. It puts the world in a new perspective. Everything that the user encounters become the potential picture, or in the case of a blog, a potential post.

(p. 20).

2.2.2 Types of Web logs

In terms of authorship, Campbell (2003) presents three different types of blogs that fit pedagogical purposes: The tutor blog, run by the class; the learner blog, run by each student in the group individually; and the class blog, run by the teacher and students collaboratively (De Almeida Soares, 2008, p. 518). In the quest of addressing the research questions listed in Chapter One, only 'class blogs' will be the subject of discussion in this study.

2.3 Web 2.0 and Education

In today's high-technology and fast-paced environment, it seems critical to motivate and engage the "Web 2.0 generation" by integrating technology into the classroom (Burke & Oomen-Early, 2008, p. 362). Owing to the abundance digital learning materials available on the Internet, the Web-based learning environment has changed the traditional ways of teaching and learning. Web tools are capable of extending communication well beyond the classroom to allow continued learning and collaboration anywhere, at any time (Driscoll, 2007, p. 12). Research indicates that 73% of American college students surveyed reported using the Internet more than the library and 58% of college students had used the e-mail to discuss grades with a professor (Jones, 2002, as cited in Ellison & Wu, 2008, p. 100).

Evidently, based on the statistics above, students prefer to use resources on the Internet, rather than the typical traditional resources, and have used the Internet quite extensively in their learning experience. This shows that Ellison and Wu's (2008) assertion that most students are already intrinsically motivated to use new media is of great relevance (p. 100). Why do such digital and virtual media seem appealing to many students? Brown (1993, as cited in Chambers, 1999, p. 132) posits that information technology gives pupils the opportunity to work with a medium which many of them have at home and enjoy, to work independently and at their own pace and to create documents which can be corrected neatly without the need for the teacher's dreaded red pen. It is thus logical and motivating to use a medium that is familiar and comfortable to the millennial generation. There is, however, insufficient amount of research that has been done on the potential of Web logs, in particular, for motivating language learners.

A great number of researches have been conducted to determine the benefits of using Web 2.0 in education. In general, many of the technologies presented can be exploited by teachers to increase substantive conversation in the classroom (Gooding, 2008, p. 51). This is of particular relevance since teachers and individual students often have insufficient opportunities to communicate in the classroom due to the large classes and curricular activities. Likewise, students and teachers may not communicate outside class because of a lack of suitable office hours and busy schedules. Thus, Web 2.0 tools can be a useful alternative for both educators and learners to address these teacher-learner interaction issues. This technology provides incredible opportunities for collaboration that must be incorporated into all classrooms if they intend to become and remain progressive. In explicating the specific plus-points of using technology in education, Rockman (1998) postulates that:

...students who use computers in schools demonstrate improved motivation and enthusiasm for school; critical thinking, problem-solving, and independent learning; skills and content knowledge; and ability to compete in the workforce.

(p.3, as cited in Gooding, 2008, p. 51).

Besides such benefits, with the help of information technology, a teacher can fully understand a student's learning status and intervene when or where necessary (Wang et al., 2008, p. 1119). These are not only useful, but also a very convenient means of checking students' progress in learning and providing corrective feedback. In terms of assessment, technology allows for different constructs to be measured particularly, for example, those assessed through time keeping (Chapelle & Douglas, 2007, p. 16). Nonetheless, research has shown that little technology is actually being used in classrooms in meaningful and

transformative ways (Boling, 2008, p. 74). Teachers, therefore, must be prepared to provide technology-supported learning opportunities for students. Hence, further research is needed to prove the efficacy of such Web tools and to verify the extent to which specific Web 2.0 sites, such as blogs, can assist both teachers and learners in particular aspects of teaching and learning, for instance in the ESL field.

2.3.1 Research on the Use of Class Blogs in Education

The myriads of technologies being adopted in education today aim to keep teachers and students connected in and out of class. This is also the case for Web logs. While blogs are common to the Internet, they are still unusual in the classrooms. Nonetheless, a small but growing number of educators are starting to buzz with the promise of Web logs in their teaching and incorporating them into courses (Richardson, 2003a, p. 40; Carlson, 2003, p. A.33). In fact, a number of educators have already embraced blogging and are active bloggers. Kim (2008) posits that teachers worldwide have been exploring the potential of Web logs as powerful teaching tools because of their interactive features. For example, most blog platforms offer the possibility of uploading PowerPoint presentations, photos, slide shows, audio and video resources, which makes blogs even more attractive (De Almeida Soares, 2008, p. 518). In addition, blogs can be viewed both as an extension of the learning setting and as a new phase of teaching and learning in cyberspace. Universities are also finding more ways to incorporate blogs in several courses (Jones, 2007, p. 17).

Millennial students now entering college are very comfortable blogging to keep in touch with their friends and write about their lives (Caverly et al., 2008, p. 34). The interactive nature of blogs is a major reason they are catching on in the classrooms. The public and

immediate nature of blogging also motivates the learners. In addition, the emergence of blogs lets everyone have an opportunity to become a journalist. The freedom to publish and share ideas is said to create a learning environment that empowers teachers and students to become more active educational settings (Driscoll, 2007, p. 12). This is one of the many reasons why blogging is gaining popularity, as it allows everyone in the class to share their opinions. Blogging obviously has opened up an extra channel to teacher-student communication. Borja (2005) further reiterates on the issue as follows:

What I am most attracted to in Web logs is the empowerment of the student voice. Most of our students...do not often feel like they are heard. And here they have a tool that gets them noticed.

(p. 12).

This is the reason why blogs are a great tool for class interaction. The collaborative nature of Web logs also makes them valuable instructional tools to connect students and teachers (Flannery, 2005, p. 32). Teachers can respond to students at a faster rate than through discussion boards or other asynchronous online methods. Consistent with online learning, blogs provide both students and instructors a high level of autonomy, while offering a new opportunity for peer dialogue and interaction (Burke & Oomen-Early, 2008, p. 362). As a successful social application, the blog network has shown the importance of communication and collaboration in today's technology-enhanced learning environments.

In addition, the interactive nature of blogs offers a number of possibilities for student-centred learning in higher education. Discussion can take place at times and places chosen by students. Interactivity also encourages self and peer assessments, which are critical

aspects in the learning process. Writing entries in Web logs and exchanging ideas with others refine students' thinking and writing skills (Theng & Wan, 2006, p. 559). They all allow for sharing or collaboration among a number of students. Further, they do this in a format that is much less restrictive than the traditional classroom insofar as time and place are concerned. The learning experience, also, becomes more fun and concrete as it involves an authentic use of the target language for real communication. All these definitely make Weblogs an excellent vehicle for student-centred learning.

Blogs' interactivity also encourages more in-depth discussions than those conducted in the classroom (Borja, 2005, p. 17). This is relevant as blogging requires students to analyse, apply, synthesize, and evaluate, thus reaching the highest levels of Blooms Taxonomy. This will be reflected in the increase in students' interactivity in terms of their intellectual exchange. In fact, even students who merely read blog postings are able to benefit from considering their peer students' entries and comments as important feedback (Lin et al., 2006, as cited in Kim, 2008, p. 1345). In other words, blogs provide opportunities for most of the students to be more critical and analytical in their learning. This is unsurprising as the blogspace is a versatile social environment in which different layers of learning are allowed (Lin & Yuan, 2006, p. 39). Its versatility means that it is possible for teachers to differentiate their instruction for students with diverse needs.

Creative classroom techniques incorporating technology foster a more vibrant learning environment where students can develop their interpersonal and communication skills (Burke & Oomen-Early, 2008, p. 362). This is definitely the case for web logs, and is made possible through the comments feature. Through this feature, the collaboration can be amongst the students in a particular classroom in a particular school, or even another class

somewhere else in the world. Support for this is also presented by Thornburg (2007) as follows:

Often students create documents that only a teacher will see. But when students create online reports of their work, they can hear from others who have an interest in their work. This give-and-take provides tremendous incentives for students to share their perspectives with clarity and vision.

(p.21, as cited in Gooding, 2008, p. 47).

Thornburg (2007) shows that receiving feedback not just from your teacher but from your peers or possibly from the outside world can be very empowering to students. Harris (2006) in fact claims that access to a wider audience than the traditional student-teacher relationship is more likely to reinforce collaboration and feedback (as cited in Kim, 2008, p. 1348). Class blogs are also claimed to promote a sense of belonging (Margolis, 2005, p. 11). This is another reason that makes blogs an excellent teaching tool.

Numerous softwares, such as Blogger (www.blogger.com) and Edublogs (www.edublogs.org), make it easy for teachers to establish class blogs (Driscoll, 2007, p. 10). Such tools provide instructors and learners with a convenient, easy-to-use application that will enrich their teaching and learning. They are also relatively inexpensive to create and can be updated quickly and easily. The flexibility and simplicity of Web logs, evidently, are creating a range of opportunities for teachers to deepen their discussions of curriculum, bringing new voices and experiences into their classroom (Richardson, 2003b, p. 61).

As a whole, blogging has intrigued instructors who are attracted to its social and technological affordances and its seemingly intrinsic appeal. Blogging is also of appeal amongst educational researchers, who struggle with appropriate methods to empirically assess its effects (Ellison & Wu, 2008, p. 105). Web log is also said to be a more ready record of learning, thinking, and working (Lin & Yuan, 2006, p. 39). All these show that it is feasible to use class blogs to revitalize the classroom (Fischman, 2007, p. A27). Nonetheless, there is not much research done to indicate the feasibility of using class blogs in the Malaysian education system, especially in higher learning institutions. This concern is addressed through this study.

2.4 Web 2.0 and ESL Education

In the 1990s with the popularization of the Internet, the use of computers in language teaching expanded by leaps and bounds. Much research has been done to highlight the importance and benefits of the implementation of the information technology (IT) in the second and foreign language classrooms (Chambers, 1999, p. 132). The Internet now provides another medium – often faster, easier, and less expensive than other ways – to draw on the many language learning and teaching resources. This paradigm shift and recent educational move are based on the belief that students should be given the opportunity to become more proficient in the language they are studying through a variety of new technological advances (Mathews & Hansen, 2004, p. 633).

Thanks to Web 2.0, for the first time, learners of the English language could practice the language 24 hours a day with native speaker or other learners around the world (Warschauer et al., 2001, p. 31). Access to the Internet increases the materials and

resources available to educators. Indeed, perhaps the most valuable contribution of the Internet to English language teaching (ELT) is its role in facilitating teachers' access to professional material, contacts, and resources (Warschauer et al., 2000, p. 11). In short, as postulated by Warschauer et al., there are five main reasons to use the Internet for English teaching: authenticity; literacy; interaction; vitality; and empowerment. Taken together, these reasons help bring English teaching ALIVE.

The Internet, however, is so vast and complex that learning how to incorporate it effectively into the language classroom can be quite challenging. The challenge seems even more daunting because of how quickly the Internet continues to change (Warschauer et al., 2001, p. 85) and how complex and mysterious the ESL field is (Brown, 1994). Section 2.4.2 will explicate in detail the plus and minus points of using a type of Internet tool, i.e. web logs, in classrooms, with particular reference to the ESL education world.

2.4.1 Research on the Use of Class Blogs in ESL Education

Blogs are increasingly used in the foreign language classroom for teacher development and for a number of other language learning objectives. For example, some are used to enhance student reading and writing skills and some are used to expose learners to cultural knowledge (Elola & Oskoz, 2008, pp. 457-460).

Written conversations, such as those mediated through class blogs, have many advantages, such as:

- (1) All students can “speak” at once, without being seen, thus giving shy students a greater chance to participate;

- (2) Students can notice, refer to, save and reuse input, which allows them to assimilate vocabulary, collocations, and grammar.
- (3) Students have greater control over the planning time for their output, which allows them to reach for more complex terms.

(Warschauer et al., 2000, p. 37).

When comparison is made between typical written conversations and those made through the digital media, a number of findings emerged. It was found that electronic dialogue journals achieve the same benefits as or greater benefits than paper journal do, with more convenience and spontaneity (Warschauer et al., 2000, p. 37). Students can easily send in their journals at any time of day or night and teachers can respond at their convenience as well. A good electronic management system at both ends will allow the teacher and the students to keep excellent, searchable records of the correspondence.

Wang (1993), in a study on the differences between the discourse in dialogue journals written on paper and those sent via e-mail found that students using e-mail wrote more text, asked more questions, and used more language functions more frequently than students writing on paper did (Warschauer et al., 2000, p. 34). Problems might arise, however, for institutions that do not have access to the Internet. Also, the easily-accessed feature of class blogs may be of no use if students do not have their own Internet access to be used at anytime and anywhere. In the Malaysian context, this concern can perhaps be clearly understood by investigating the students' and ESL educators' perceptions on the use of class blogs in ESL education.

Weblogs, in particular, can be powerful tools to use in the classroom. Reasons are: they engage students in the processes of critical reading and reflecting; they can improve writing; and they enable students to develop a unique writing voice and to become more analytical, reflective, and critical (Valencia, 2006, p. 4; Ellison & Wu, 2008, p. 106). Besides, blogs serve as a familiar writing platform for most learners. Hastings (2005, p. 45) likens blogs to learners' notebooks; and postulates that this is how they will communicate in the future. Flannery (2005) elucidates that "when you write on paper, your words are self-contained – It's on paper and it does not go anywhere. But when you ask students to blog, you're asking them to go somewhere" (p. 34). To utilize this advantage, an increasing number of educators are introducing online writing tools to their students. These tools can be used to publish work to share with an audience that extends far beyond the walls of the classroom.

Besides that, a recent study by the Pew Internet and American Life Project found that students make strong distinctions between the kinds of writing done in and out of school. Contrary to popular belief, the study found that students enjoy writing and many write quite often outside of school. Within school, students are most likely to engage in work that is merely assigned to them by teachers. With digital media, such as Web logs, teachers have new ways to create situations where writing is tied to students' interests (Regan, 2008, p. 12).

Blogs are also a perfect way to showcase students' work (Beeson, 2005, p. 27). In effect, the use of blogs in ESL classrooms is very empowering as blogs give learners a bigger stake in what they are writing (Hastings, 2005, p. 45). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, this is due to the public nature and comment feature of web logs. The public nature of blogs

is also a draw for many students, who would make an effort to be more careful with their grammar, logic, and writing style when potentially millions of people can read what they write (Borja, 2005, p. 17). Also, the huge peer pressure brought on by the blogs motivates many students to take extra care in editing their articles prior to posting. In the past, students simply turned in assignments to the instructor.

“The read or write functionality of blogging, wherein readers are encouraged to comment on blog posts and thus become part of an evolving, public discussion, is a primary reason behind blogging’s popularity” (Alexander, 2006). Blogs can be used as strategies for encouraging writing: when blogs are effective, students write for an audience, and receive authentic audience respond (as cited in Valenca, 2006, p. 4). Research by Regan (2008) indicates that posting student work online has improved the quality of professionalism of final projects: “It’s one thing to have a term paper read only by a teacher and quite another to have an interactive project with text and images posted on the Web for everyone to see” (Regan, 2008, p. 12). However, it must be noted that the above are only generalizations made on most learners. There are perhaps a minority of students who would feel too intimidated and pressured to have their work viewed by others, thus lowering their quality of work. This issue will be addressed through the analysis of this study, with particular focus on Malaysian tertiary level setting.

In terms of affective factors, Web logs are useful as students could read their classmates’ work and overcome shyness about their opinion writing (Beeson, 2005, p. 27). Weblogs allow students the opportunity to view and learn from the work of students not just in their class. Blogging, therefore, can cultivate students’ 21st century skill of global awareness. “Posting work online enables students to share ideas and opens dialog between students

with different backgrounds and experiences” (Regan, 2008, p. 12). A sense of camaraderie is added to the class as students tend to support one another and this fosters group closeness and compassion (Beeson, 2005, p. 27). Active blogging interactivity can also be described by Lawler’s theory (Lawler, 1994) on motivation. Lawler stated that motivation is influenced by the expectancy outcomes. The expectancy among bloggers might be to receive comments from other bloggers (Kim, 2008, p. 1346; Valenca, 2006, p. 4). One has to keep in mind, nonetheless, that there might be students who do not find comments from other bloggers motivating and do not see the benefits of class blogging. It is the aim of this study to obtain students’ perception on using class blogs in ESL education.

2.5 Assessments

Assessments and tests confront teachers at every turn (Helman, 2005, p. 668). Teachers are always challenged by the claim that course content and teaching methods are insufficiently stimulating or relevant to pupils’ needs (Chambers, 1999, p. 7). In order to discuss assessments and other relevant aspects, we need to first understand three basic interrelated concepts: testing, assessment, and teaching. These concepts have distinctive meanings but their relevance are overlapping with one another in some aspects.

First, it must be noted that tests and assessments are not synonymous. By definition, tests are “prepared administrative procedures that occur at identifiable times in a curriculum when learners muster all their faculties to offer peak performance, knowing that their responses are being measured and evaluated” (Brown, 2004, p. 4).

In contrast, Brown posits that assessment is an ongoing process that encompasses a much wider domain. For instance, whenever a student responds to a question, offers a comment, or tries out a new word or structure, the teacher subconsciously makes an assessment of the student's performance. Any forms of written work, regardless of the levels of formality, are performances that the teacher implicitly judges, however peripheral the judgment may be. Assessments, incidental or intended, should always be done continuously by a good teacher in order to monitor students' progress and performance. Tests, are thus clearly a subset of assessment.

The interdependent relationships between testing, assessing, and teaching are as follows:

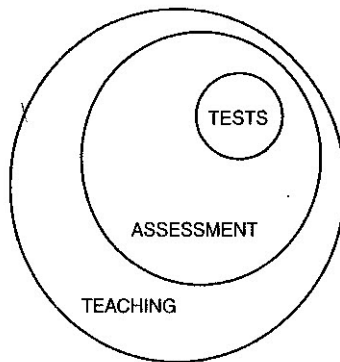


Figure 2.1: Tests, assessment, and teaching

The difference between these concepts lies in the formality of the testing. Informal testing involves unplanned assessments that are made as a course moves along toward its goals. Testing experts call most informal testing formative evaluation, i.e. assessing students in the process of “forming” their competencies and skills with the goal of helping them to continue that growth process (Brown, 1994, p. 375). Formal tests, on the other hand, are exercises or experiences specifically designed to tap into an extensive storehouse of skills

and knowledge, usually within a relatively short time limit. They are systematic, planned, sampling techniques constructed to give teachers and students an appraisal, as it were, of their achievement. Such tests are often summative, as they occur at the end of a unit, module, or course, and therefore attempt to measure, or summarise, what a student has grasped (Brown, 1994, pp. 375-6).

Testing, assessing, and teaching, however, are so interwoven and interdependent that it is difficult to tease them apart. Every instructional sequence has testing and assessing components to it, whether the tests themselves are formal or informal. That is, teachers measure or judge learners' competence all the time and, ideally, learners measure and judge themselves (Brown, 1994, p. 375). For optimal learning to take place, students must have the freedom in the classroom to experiment, to try things out, to "test" their own hypotheses about language without feeling that their overall competence is being "judged" in terms of these trials and errors (Brown, 1994, p. 376).

Teaching, then, sets up the practice games of language learning, the opportunities for learners to listen and think and take risks and set goals and process feedback and cycle and recycle through whatever it is that they are trying to achieve. While there is no escape from the informal testing that naturally ensues during teaching, formal testing places a different set of expectations of students. Formal tests are the tournament games, or the "recitals," that periodically occur in the learning process (Brown, 1994, p. 376).

2.5.1 Relations between Assessment, Learning, and Motivation

It must be pointed out that the role of assessment is to provide support for, rather than to become the driving force for teaching and learning (McKay, 1995, p. 35). Chambers (1999) postulates that in order to ensure assessment can provide support for successful learning, students' emotional hurdle has to be overcome first. This is where motivation comes in.

Researches have indicated that many non-native students struggle to see the point of learning second or foreign languages (Chambers, 1999, p. 3). The vast majority of teachers will readily concede that the major problem is not ability, but level of motivation. This is based on the idea that "no one can make you learn, you have to want to" (Brown, 1994, p. 34). This signifies the inextricable link between motivation and learning. It is in fact not an overstatement to say that motivation is the determining factor for success and failure in learning. Most language teachers will agree that the motivation of the students is one of the most important factors influencing their success or failure in learning the language (McDonough, 1981, p. 142). Spolsky (1989) regards motivation as one of the conditions for learners to be willing to invest the time necessary to learn a language (as cited in Spratt, Humphreys, & Chan, 2002, p. 260).

Children have talent in plenty but many lack the interest and willingness to work hard that are needed for high achievement. To make matters worse, the glorification of content, product, correctness, and competitiveness in language assessments has failed to motivate learners into a collaborative process of competence building (Brown, 1994, p. 40). It can be seen, therefore, that assessments, learning, and motivation all interact with one another in the form of a cycle, as follows:

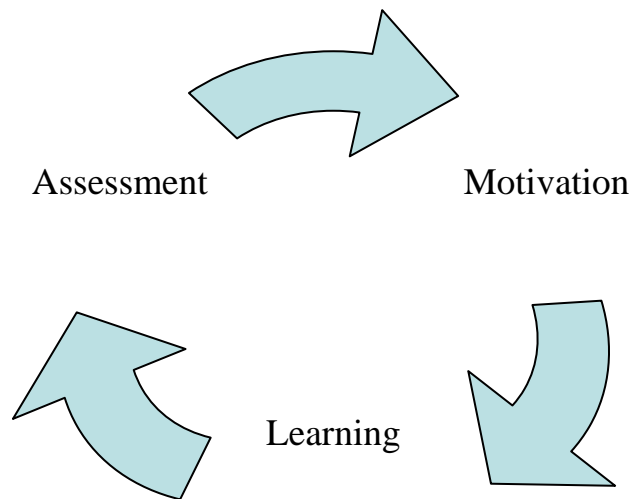


Figure 2.2: Relations between assessment, learning, and motivation

Motivation can be defined in many ways, based on the different theories of motivation which serve as two opposing “camps” in this field (Brown, 1994, p. 34). For example, the traditional view of motivation accounts for human behaviour through a behaviouristic paradigm that stresses the importance of rewards and reinforcement. Cognitive psychological viewpoints, on the other hand, explain motivation through deeper, more unobservable phenomena.

Two traditions in motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation theories, represent yet another dichotomy in theories of language learning and teaching. Deci (1975, p. 23, as cited in Brown, 1994, p. 382) defined intrinsic motivated activities as the ones for which there is no apparent reward except the activity itself. In the old, traditional view of testing there was surely no such thing as an “enjoyable test”, and that still may be a lofty ideal. Intrinsically motivating test, however, is not at all unrealistic, especially within classrooms. Intrinsically motivated behaviours are aimed at bringing about certain internally rewarding

consequences, namely, feelings of competence, satisfaction, and self-determination (Brown, 1994, p. 38; Chambers, 1999, pp. 51-2). In other words, an intrinsically motivated learner finds the motivation in the task itself. Extrinsically motivated behaviours, on the other hand, are carried out in anticipation of a reward from outside and beyond the self (Brown, 1994, p. 38). Typical extrinsic rewards are money, prizes, grades, and even certain types of positive feedback.

The huge stockpile of research on motivation strongly favors intrinsic orientations, especially for long-term retention. It is suggested that intrinsically motivated learning leads to higher quality and more sustained performance than extrinsically motivated (Chambers, 1999, pp. 51-2). This is because, in general, classroom techniques have a much greater chance of success if they are self-rewarding in the perception of the learner: The learners perform the task because it is fun, interesting, useful, or challenging, and not because they anticipate some cognitive or affective rewards from the teacher (Brown, 1994, p. 20).

Also, the students' long term goals are much better served by promoting intrinsic motives (Brown, 1994, pp. 44-5). Maslow (1970) also highlights the superiority of intrinsic motivation over extrinsic motivation. According to his hierarchy of needs, we are ultimately motivated to achieve "self-actualisation" once the basic physical, safety, and community needs are met. No matter what extrinsic rewards are present or absent, we will strive for self-esteem and fulfillment (Brown, 1994, p. 38). Jerome Bruner (1962) also holds the same view, suggesting his preference on intrinsic motivation, as evident in the following statement:

Jerome Bruner (1962), praising the “autonomy of self-reward”, claimed that one of the most effective ways to help both children and adults to think and learn is to free them from the control of rewards and punishments. One of the principal weaknesses of extrinsically driven behaviour is its additive nature. Once captivated, as it were, by the lure of an immediate prize or praise, our dependency on those tangible rewards increases, even to the point that their withdrawal can then extinguish the desire to learn.

(Brown, 1994, pp. 38-9).

Interestingly enough, Brown found one type of extrinsic reward that can indeed have an effect on intrinsic motivation: positive feedback that learners perceive as a boost to their feelings of competence and self-determination. No other externally administered set of rewards has a lasting effect. So, sincerely delivered positive feedback in a classroom, for example, are seen by students as a validation of their own personal autonomy, critical thinking ability, and self-fulfillment. This can increase or maintain their intrinsic motivation (Brown, 1994, p. 39). Interaction is also one ideal to strive for in classroom tests, an ideal that will take time, but the results of which will be rewarding.

“Having something to say, writing to be read, to be discussed, to be responded to critically, this is the grand motivation (for literacy) we should be seeking and which is realized through classroom printing” (Freinet, 1969, as cited in Warschauer et al., 2000, p. 65) Freinet’s goals and methods are even more relevant today, given the prominent role of information and communication technology. The Internet, and classroom printing tool such as blogs, in particular, is said to foster students’ motivation to learn second or foreign languages. This is based on the idea that it is imperative that time is devoted more to engaging in activities and working with materials and syllabuses which learners wish to engage in for their own sake (Spratt et al., 2002, p. 263).

In this case, technology is a motivating factor by itself, and many learners are more enthusiastic about learning languages through this channel. This way, the teacher could focus on developing intrinsic motivation and on helping students to believe in the effectiveness of their own efforts. Class blogs, for example, make use of authentic language and tasks. It provides optimal feedback to the students and it may involve students in some phase of evaluation (Brown, 1994, p. 382). Even with the use of technology, assessments need not violate any of the principles of cooperation and student-centredness. They in fact become indispensable components of a curriculum.

It is thus apparent that there are indispensable connections between assessment and learning and that motivation is a construct that is inevitably relevant in every twist and turn of language assessment and learning. Whether this is the case amongst Malaysian university ESL learners and students in the use of class blogs as a form of assessment in ESL courses will be tapped in the analysis of this study.

2.6 Research on the Humanistic Approach to Language Learning and Assessment

In many second and foreign language instruction contexts, assessment practices have increasingly moved away from objective mastery testing of instructional syllabus content to on-going assessment of the effort and contribution learners make to the process of learning. This trend may be seen as part of a wider zeitgeist in educational practice, which increasingly values the contribution of the learner to the process of learning (Boston, 2002, as cited in Ross, 2005, p. 318). This signifies the aim of education as a whole, that is, to produce wholesome learners who are not mere passive recipients in the classroom. This objective is in line with the Humanistic approach to language learning, which will

inevitably affect language assessment as well. This tradition relates teaching, learning, and assessment to the work of Carl Rogers (1951) and to a movement in self-education which developed, encouraging students to have a momentum of their own, independent of and to some extent in opposition to, the conventional education system (Stevick, 1982, p. 12).

In relating this approach and language learning, Stevick (1982) reiterates that humanistic teachers see language as something which must engage the whole person, not as something purely intellectual. They recognise that their students are people like themselves, with emotional, spiritual, and intellectual needs. Humanistic teachers encourage students who can contribute to their own learning. Humanistic teachers also believe in a world of autonomous, creative, and emotionally secure people, and they believe that education can assist the process of creating such a world.

The implications of such a role reversal for education are huge. Teachers have been devising ways to treat learners as producers rather than products for a long while. The difference is that, today, many of these teachers are getting assistance from blogs (Oatman, 2005, p. 37). Web logs are believed to enable such a paradigm shift in education as learners, essentially, are looking for opportunities for self-expression and to find their own identities. Blogging is simply a part of a broader trend in which learners are taking control of the media they use. More and more learners, therefore, are becoming producers of information rather than passive consumers of it.

The Humanistic approach to language learning and assessment represents an affective-based methodology. Such a methodology needs to be based in part on a classroom organisation, which is sufficiently free, to enable students to make their own initiatives on

their own terms in any matter which relates to their deeper feelings (Stevick, 1982, pp. 15-6). In other words, affective education should be built on a methodology for freedom. Also, in humanistic education, the teacher has to be able to create a purposeful and calm atmosphere in which the 'momentum' for learning can be built (Blum, 1998, p. 11, as cited in Chambers, 1999, p. 36). In relation to assessment, Humanistic approach holds true to the belief that non-threatening methods of assessment is the best. A number of studies have shown that non-threatening assessments which involve praises and the use of humours relate positively to student learning (Christophel, 1990, as cited in Whipp & Lorentz, 2009, p. A1). Teachers must always be aware that individual characteristics of learners may be directly or indirectly related to achievement in foreign language learning. Nonetheless, such a humanistic approach is not easy to be materialized. Human beings are so infinitely complex that teachers must be infinitely sensitive to their students' variabilities (Stevick, 1982, p. 12).

In the Humanistic approach to language learning and assessment, it is believed that learning will benefit from students having wholesome relationships with classmates (Stevick, 1982, pp. 13-15). The first principle of any genuine relationship between human beings should be that of mutual respect. This can be made possible through the use of class blogs which are interactive in nature and requires collaborative effort among all members of the classroom. Also, this is in line with Krashen's (2002) assertion that it is important to successfully prepare students to deal with natural and communicative situations (as cited in Hsiao-fang, 2004, p. 545).

Numerous effects of employing a Humanistic approach to language learning have been reported. One example would be teachers who have been using humanistic exercises were

surprised to discover that their students have become more motivated to participate in the classroom (Stevick, 1982, p. 31). This clearly would address non-native language learners' typical motivational issues when it comes to learning second languages. An approach, nonetheless, cannot be generalized to all educational settings. In certain settings, the humanistic theory to language learning may not apply well, and other approaches are needed to conceptualise the learning experience. This concern will be addressed through this study which is based on the Humanistic theory of language learning and assessment.

2.6.1 The Goal of 'Assessment for Learning'

The humanistic approach to language assessment aims to develop learners who are intrinsically motivated to continuously transform the assessment as a learning opportunity, thus fostering life-long learning. This is obviously related to the goal of 'assessment for learning', in which the assessment's objective is not just to measure students' performance, but to encourage more learning to take place. The assessment-for-learning approach shifts the focus from summative to formative assessment, from making judgments to prove that students have learned to providing feedback to help them learn (Yuh-Mei, 2008, p. 238). This can be made possible through a number of Internet tools, such as Web logs. Students must not only learn but also 'learn to learn', that is, develop the autonomous learning strategies needed to adapt to new technologies and new situations. This ability will aid students in achieving the types of benefits that will long outlast one particular course (Warschauer et al., 2000, p. 86). How relevant this is will be discussed in Chapter Four.

2.7 Language Assessments

Language teachers need a solid understanding of assessment because they help learners to develop self-assessment strategies, test learners in the classroom, select or develop tests for language programs, and prepare learners to take tests beyond the classroom and language program (Chapelle & Douglas, 2007, p. 3). For that reason, a number of aspects relating to language assessments will be discussed in the following sections.

2.7.1 Principles of Language Assessments

It is imperative that principles of language assessment be applied to all forms of language assessments if they are to be effective. The principles that need to be taken into account when devising a good assessment are: validity; reliability, practicality; authenticity; and washback.

It is claimed that validity is the most important principle in an effective language test. Validity refers to “the extent to which inferences made from assessment results are appropriate, meaningful, and useful in terms of the purpose of the assessment” (Brown, 2004, p. 22). In other words, a valid test is a test that measures what it is supposed to measure. A language test is said to be reliable when it is consistent and dependable. That means if the same test is given to the same student on two different occasions, the test should yield similar results (Brown, 2004, pp. 20-1). Practicality is another salient principle. As the name suggests, a practical test is not excessively expensive, stays within appropriate time constraints, is relatively easy to administer, and has a scoring or evaluation procedure that is specific and time-efficient (Brown, 2004, p. 19).

An effective language test also needs to be authentic. Authenticity is another language assessment principle that is concerned with “the degree of correspondence of the characteristics of a given language test task to the features of a target language task” (Brown, 2004, p. 28). When a test is said to be authentic, it should likely be enacted in the “real world”. It also has to contain language items that are as natural as possible; contextualized items; meaningful and relevant topics; and some thematic organisation.

Washback is another principle of language assessment that refers to the effects testing has on teaching and learning. When students take a test, they should be able, within a reasonably short period of time, to utilize the information about their competence that test feedback offers. This can be done through the teacher’s useful diagnoses of strengths and weaknesses. Informal performance assessment is by nature more likely to have built-in washback effects because the teacher is usually providing interactive feedback. Formal tests can also have positive washback, only if they are getting more than just a simple letter grade or a single overall numerical score. Creating classroom tests that can serve as learning devices through which washback is achieved has been a great challenge to most language educators. Some of the ways of creating and enhancing washback effects are:

- To use students’ incorrect responses as windows of insight into further work;
- To praise students’ correct responses;
- To comment generously and specifically on test performance.

(Brown, 2004, p. 29),

The washback principle is not isolated; it enhances a number of basic principles of language acquisition such as: intrinsic motivation; autonomy; self-confidence; and language ego. For example, if a test performance is made to be an intrinsically motivating experience, from which a student will gain a sense of accomplishment and challenge, the test is said to have produce positive washback effects. The teacher's prompt return of written tests with feedback is therefore very important to students' intrinsic motivation (Brown, 1994, p. 385). In this principle, it is also emphasized that for learning to continue, students need to have a chance to feed back on teachers' feedback. This means that students should be able to seek clarification of any fuzzy issues and to set new and appropriate goals for themselves for the days and weeks ahead (Brown, 2004, pp. 29-30; Brown, 1994, p. 386).

All the five principles discussed above serve as a guideline of what a good language test entails. The process of designing effective assessment instruments is, however, far from simple. For the purpose of this study, however, these five principles will be suffice to exemplify the basic considerations of designing and evaluating language assessments.

2.7.2 Issues in Language Assessments

Our understanding of what makes an effective assessment changes over time. This is reflected in the improvisations that are continuously made to assessment procedures. One of the recent issues in language assessments is that many language teachers believe that old assessment procedures do not assess the full range of essential student outcomes. Also, teachers have difficulty using the information gained for instructional planning. The typical

assessment methods are also said not to be adequate enough to assess the full range of higher-order thinking skills considered important in ESL curriculum.

Such concerns gave birth to the growing interest in the use of alternative assessments and Internet-based assessment tool in the foreign and second language learning (Saito & Fujita, 2004, p. 31). These two issues are very much relevant in today's language assessment arena and they aim to improve various facets of classroom testing. For that reason, this study chooses to merge these two equally powerful notions, i.e. alternative assessment and Web-based tool (e.g. blogs), and see how this is relevant in Malaysian educational setting.

2.8 Alternative Language Assessments

Alternative assessment procedures have made consistent inroads into second and foreign language assessment practices over the last decade, just about the same time Web logs have (Ross, 2005, p. 317). It began as the answer to the need for more valid assessment methods and that assessment procedures must be capable of serving a range of purposes at all levels. Through alternative assessment, tests will be based on language use in the contexts and for the purposes relevant to the learners.

Alternative assessment is gaining popularity today because generally, it addresses the five principles of language assessment as discussed in the previous section, i.e. it is a more valid, reliable, and practical way of assessing language skills, in relatively authentic contexts. It is also believed to bring about positive washback. The utilization of alternative assessments in the ESL world would also indicate that there is a progressing shift towards formative forms of assessments, rather than summative.

A key appeal formative assessment provides for language educators is the autonomy given to learners. A benefit assumed to accrue from shifting the locus of control to learners more directly is in the potential for the enhancement of achievement motivation. Formative assessment is also thought to influence learner development through a widened sphere of feedback during engagement with learning tasks (Ross, 2005, p. 319). Ross also posits that the trend towards formative assessment methods has by now taken hold at all levels of second language education (Ross, 2005, p. 320).

Considering their more flexible nature, alternative assessments are also believed to be able to promote autonomous learning. Flexible approaches to learning were born of an effort to meet the diverse needs of the range of learners within a class. They give pupils the opportunity to set short-term, achievable goals, to work at the pace which best suits them (Chambers, 1999, p. 133). The autonomous approach, however, is comparatively untried and teachers may feel uncomfortable with a concept which gives pupils responsibility for their own learning. Whether this is the case amongst Malaysian university students and ESL educators on the use of class blogs as a form of assessment will be discussed later.

Alternative language assessments can exist in many forms. Ross (2005) reiterates that formative methods increasingly feature on-going self-assessment, peer-assessment, projects, and portfolios (Ross, 2005, p. 320). These examples of alternative language assessments are a reflection of the student-centred learning approach; an approach that is encouraged to be used in ESL classrooms. Student-centred learning implies that the course curriculum will be shaped according to students' own needs and interests.

In today's technological age, language educators are challenged to create alternative forms of assessment that incorporate Information technology. For example, it could be in the form of electronic forum that is conducted through Web 2.0 sites such as the Web logs. The electronic forum gives students opportunities for language practice and communication that extend beyond the limited class time (Warschauer et al., 2000, p. 37). Several research studies have indicated that when teachers are able to make such a shift, learning has more positive results. There is, however, insufficient research to confirm the relevance of this statement in the Malaysian ESL setting, with specific focus on class blogs. This claim will be verified through this study.

Teacher-assessment is, inarguably, the most common form of teacher feedback in language assessments. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, teachers inevitably assess students, formally or informally, on a daily basis on almost all aspects of learning. There are, however, the emergence of two other ways of assessing that do not directly involve the teachers, namely peer-assessment and self-assessment. These new forms of assessment are relevant in this study considering that class blogs are highly interactive and allow feedback from not just the teacher but also from fellow classmates and even oneself.

2.8.1 Peer-assessment

Peer-assessment is not a foreign form of feedback in language assessments anymore. It is gaining a more prominent place in the ESL assessment procedure, that acknowledges the importance of collaborative assessment and learning. According to Saito and Fujita, (2004, p. 32), a large body of research suggests that peer assessment has in general shown consistent but moderate evidence of concurrent as well as predictive validity and is reliable enough to be used for assessing individual performance. Lack of research on the

characteristics of peer-assessment in EFL writing, however, may inhibit teachers from appreciating the utility of this innovative assessment (Saito & Fujita, 2004, p. 31).

2.8.2 Self-assessment

In line with theories of constructivism and learner autonomy, self-assessment is currently assuming a larger role in language teaching. By definition, self-assessment is that part of assessment carried out by learners which involves learners in discovering what they know and what they feel, as well as what they can do (Cram, 1995, p. 271). This assessment approach believes that test-takers should be ‘genuinely involved in the process’ of assessment (Fulcher, 2000, p. 485). It aims to provide opportunity for learners to develop an understanding of their own level of skills and knowledge (Cram, 1995, p. 282). The practice of self-assessment reflects new thinking about classroom assessment and ‘assessment for learning’. In fact, Hunt et al. (1989) claim that without learner self-assessment, ‘there can be no real autonomy’ (p. 207, as cited in Yuh-Mei, 2008, p. 236).

One of the most important characteristics of self-assessment is “the sharing of responsibility for assessment decisions between the teacher and the learner” (Cram, 1995, p. 271). Oskarsson (1989) mentions six advantages of using self-assessment in the learner classroom:

- promotion of learning;
- raised level of awareness and improved goal-orientation,
- expansion of range of assessment,
- shared assessment burden; and
- beneficial post-course effects

(as cited in Yuh-Mei, 2008, p. 236)

All of the above advantages signify that self-assessment is advantageous to both language learners and teachers. Many practitioners, especially in higher education, have delved into the use of periodic self-assessment to prepare students for improvement in their lives. Self-assessment is thus linked with the goal of lifelong learning. Through self-assessments, students can learn to discern patterns of strength and weakness that can help them become better learners (Yuh-Mei, 2008, p. 237). When conducting self-assessment, students would also use the target language in an authentic context (Yuh-Mei, 2008, pp. 254-5). Thus, as expected, the principle of authenticity is also taken into account in this new assessment approach.

2.9 Summary

This chapter has explicated all the relevant concepts that are needed as a foundation to address the study's research questions. Since this study aims to investigate the feasibility of using class blogs as a form of alternative assessment, this chapter begins by reviewing some literature on the phenomenon of information technology. The discussion moves on to the relevance of Web 2.0 in today's world, with particular emphasis on Web logs. To address the study's aims, previous research on the use of class blogs in education, particularly ESL education is also reviewed. This is followed by the discussion of the theoretical framework of the study, i.e. the Humanistic theory of language learning and other relevant concepts deemed relevant to the theory and Web logs, such as motivation, 'assessment for learning', peer-assessment, and self-assessment.

Previous research reviewed clearly indicates that there is a positive relationship between using class blogs as learning and assessment tool and students' language learning

performance. The lack of research in the use of class blogs in the ESL courses in Malaysian tertiary institutions, however, does not make this observation truly conclusive to all educational settings. This entails further investigation, as aimed by this study.

The Humanistic approach to language learning is chosen as the theoretical framework of this study because it emphasizes the importance of affective factors, such as motivation, which are pertinent in explaining student's language performance. The approach's emphasis on active learning that caters to students' needs and interests is in line with the interactive and collaborative features of blogs that are widely used by many youngsters in Malaysia today. As such, this theory is deemed relevant to be used in analyzing Malaysian ESL students' and educators' perceptions of the value of Web log-based assessment for learning purposes and the factors that influence those perceptions. The following chapter will present the methodology used to gather and analyse the information needed in order to answer the research questions set.