

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

5.0 Introduction

The phenomenal development of Web logs on the Internet has sparked the idea of integrating class blogs in the ESL settings, not only as a learning tool, but as an alternative form of assessment. Such an interactive Web platform can be potentially used as a channel through which the aim of ‘assessment for learning’ can be materialized. This study, thus, aims to provide evidence for the feasibility of using class blogs as an alternative form of assessment and giving feedback in ESL courses in Malaysian universities. It is also the objective of this study to encourage Malaysian ESL practitioners to consider incorporating class blogs as a tool to assess and provide feedback to students’ English language performance in future ESL courses. These objectives were set based on Carl Rogers’ Humanistic approach to language learning. To guide this investigation, the following two research questions were formulated:

1. How do Malaysian university students perceive the use of class blogs as assessment tools in ESL courses?
2. How do Malaysian university educators perceive the use of class blogs as assessment tools in ESL courses and its potential of use in giving feedbacks to students?

The sample of this study consisted of Malaysian university ESL educators and students. The tools used comprised two parts: (i) questionnaires and (ii) semi-structured interviews.

The participants for questionnaires were: (i) 20 Malaysian university ESL students (undergraduates) who have used class blogs in English courses; (ii) 20 Malaysian university ESL students (undergraduates) who have not used class blogs in English courses; (iii) 10 Malaysian university ESL educators who have used class blogs in English courses; and (iv) 10 Malaysian university ESL educators who have not used class blogs in English courses. Four sets of questionnaires were distributed to the four different groups of participants.

The participants for the semi-structured interviews were 10 Malaysian ESL university educators; 5 of whom were those who have used the class blogs in their ESL classes and the other 5 were the ones who have never tried integrating class blogs in their ESL classes. The interviews were conducted through instant-messenger and e-mails. The data obtained were analysed according to relevant themes of the Humanistic approach to language learning. The findings have been discussed in Chapter Four. Based on the findings, the following section will sum up the major conclusions of this study.

5.1 Major Conclusions

The foundation of this study was built on the assertion that students' needs, interests, and affective factors need to be taken into account to ensure meaningful language learning and assessment. The positive perceptions of the majority of the participants towards the idea of incorporating class blogs as a form of assessment in ESL courses in Malaysian universities suggest that this relatively new Web tool is worth a try. The findings have provided evidence that there is a parallel relationship between the findings of similar studies reviewed in Chapter Two and the perceptions of the participants in this study. For example,

it was found that feedback is a powerful element in assessment and contributes to the ongoing improvement of language skills on the part of the learners (Brown, 1994, p. 34). Similarly, the responses of the participants validate this finding as most of the students expressed their need to get feedback and educators expressed their acknowledgement of the power of feedback in ESL settings.

The same goes for the majority of other aspects discussed in this study such as motivation, active and collaborative learning, and assessment for learning. For example, as reviewed earlier, Stevick's studies showed that teachers who used Humanistic approach in teaching and assessing students' language performance found that their students have become more motivated in ESL classrooms. Similar findings were found in this study, as the majority of student and teacher participants indicated that students would be more motivated if class blogs are used as class blogs are a fun, interactive, familiar and less-threatening learning and assessment tool.

The only aspect in which there were some discrepancies was 'self-assessment'. This study showed contradictory findings compared to some literature reviewed earlier. Yuh-Mei (2008) postulated that through self-assessments, students can develop more understanding of their language skills and use the target language in an authentic context. In this study, however, there were a significant number of students, who have never used class blogs before, who indicated no confidence in self-assessing their own work. Amongst teacher respondents, however, teachers who have incorporated class blogs themselves were the ones who mostly expressed negative perceptions towards self-assessments. In this case, it was the teachers' negative experiences using self-assessments through class blogs that resulted in their negative perceptions. Although it was reviewed earlier that self-assessment

is “the sharing of responsibility for assessment decisions between the teacher and the learner” (Cram, 1995, p. 271), it is evident in this study that this is not necessarily the case. This validates this study’s presumption earlier that the Humanistic theory of language learning is not conclusive, i.e. it cannot be used to explain all ESL education settings. This insight on the practicality of self-assessments in ESL courses should thus be a factor that is taken into account if class blogs are to be integrated as a form of assessment in universities.

5.2 Implications of the Findings

The findings of this study have implications in many aspects:

1. The findings, i.e. the perceptions of this study’s participants, would allow other Malaysian ESL educators, curriculum developers, and those who are involved in determining the assessment components of ESL courses to decide whether or not class blogs are worth to be integrated as an assessment form in ESL courses.
2. The findings are insightful enough to be added on to existing ESL research discoveries. This is especially relevant as there are very few research studies done on the use of class blogs as a form of assessment in the ESL field.
3. The findings would allow ESL educators who are currently using class blogs as a form of assessment to view the perceptions of others on the issue. They, hence, can find ways to improvise and/or improve their current ways of integrating class blogs as a form of assessment in the ESL course/s they are

teaching so that learners will benefit more, in terms of the development and enhancement of learners' English language skills.

4. ESL educators who have not integrated class blogs as a form of assessment in their ESL course/s before would be able to learn the feasibility of using this Web tool in English language learning, teaching, and assessment, especially from the perceptions of those who have tried using class blog assessment before. The insights gained could be formed as a basis for a proposal to be made to the people in charge of the assessment decisions, so that class blogs could be seriously considered to be incorporated as an alternative and/or one of the continuous assessment forms in future ESL courses.

5. Many people are unaware of the advantages and limitations of using this assessment tool in ESL courses. The perceptions of both the student and teacher participants in this study could be used to justify the need of utilizing Web tools to enhance Malaysian students' English language learning experience and performance. The perceptions of the participants also might be enlightening to those in the ESL field who have been searching for fresher ways to revive the current ESL learning experience.

In sum, with regard to the research questions, both Malaysian university students and educators showed positive perceptions towards the idea of using class blogs as assessment tools in ESL courses. As explicated in the literature review, however, there is no single ideal assessment procedure in ESL education. Although in theory, using class blogs would bring about positive changes in ESL learning and assessment, this

relatively new-age assessment tool means that many other practical factors need to be taken into consideration. For example, in terms of time constraints, there is the need for both students and teachers to be given ample preparation time before integrating class blogs in ESL classrooms. It is also vital that teachers undergo training in ICT, particularly in the development of blogs. In addition, both ESL teachers and students need to be equipped with the required skills in self- and peer-assessments. Other aspects that must also be considered are financial issues and ease of administration.

It is hoped that this study's findings will trigger the development of more research on the use of class blogs in ESL courses, particularly in Malaysian settings. It is believed that such research areas are of pertinent relevance in this millennium and can assist our on-going efforts towards the pinnacle of ESL research discoveries.