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Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia

Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

ICT and ELT : research and practices in South East Asia / editors  
Muhammad Kamarul Kabilan, Wei Keong Too, Handoyo Puji Widodo  
(MELTA-USM ELT in South East Asia Series)

ISBN 978-983-861-563-1

1. English language—Study and teaching—Computer-assisted instruction.
2. Information technology. I. Muhammad Kamarul Kabilan.  
II. Too, Wei Keong. III. Widodo, Handoyo Puji. IV. Series.  
428.00712 LB2372.E5

Typeset in Minion Pro

Copy Editor: Marina Azmi  
Cover Designer: Mohammad Ridhwan Jaapar  
Proofreader: Rosni Habib  
Typesetter: Noraini Md Isa

Published by Penerbit Universiti Sains Malaysia (Universiti Sains Malaysia Press),  
11800 USM Pulau Pinang, Malaysia.

A member of the Malaysia Scholarly Publishing Council (MAPIM).

Printed by Sinaran Bros. Sdn. Bhd., 389 Lebu Chulia, 10200 Pulau Pinang, Malaysia.

# Contents

Preface	vii
Abbreviations	ix
<b>ICT and ELT in South East Asia: Identifying the Research Agenda and Practices</b>	xi
<i>Muhammad Kamarul Kabilan, Wei Keong Too &amp; Handoyo Puji Widodo</i>	
<b>Implementing Wiki and Blog Mediated Writing Tasks in an EFL Context</b>	
<i>Handoyo Puji Widodo &amp; Adriadi Novawan</i>	1
<b>Using Blogs and Wikis to Foster Learner's Engagement in an Inclusive Process Writing Model</b>	17
<i>Fikri S. Ismail</i>	
<b>Development and Growth of Pre-Service English Language Teachers Using E-portfolios</b>	33
<i>Mahbub Ahsan Khan, Muhammad Kamarul Kabilan &amp; Norlida Ahmad</i>	
<b>Always On: Connecting Theory and Practice in New Media</b>	
<i>Malai Ayla Surya Malai Hj Abdullah &amp; Alistair Wood</i>	52
<b>Blended is Better? A New Approach to Communication Skills for Pre-Service Teachers</b>	72
<i>Mary Ellis, Linda Mary Hanington, Ong Cheng Teik &amp; Mark James Wilkinson</i>	
<b>Utilizing Web 2.0 Technologies in Teaching the KBSM English Literature Component via MY LIT PROJECT</b>	92
<i>Nor Fadzleen Sa'don</i>	
<b>Students' Preferences in Using Social Networking in Academic Writing in the Philippines</b>	111
<i>Paolo Nino Valdez</i>	
<b>The Application of WebQuests to Improve University Students' Reading and Writing Skills</b>	126
<i>Bambang Yudi Cahyono</i>	
<b>Improving Pre-Service Teachers' Writing Compositions through Weblogging</b>	141
<i>Anik Nunuk Wulyani</i>	

Contents

<b>Pre-Service English Language Teachers' Reflection and Concerns in Weblogs</b> <i>Wei Keong Too &amp; Malachi Edwin Vethamani</i>	159
<b>Pedagogical Blogging: Enhancing Motivation and Opportunities for Learning Within Two University-Level Communities of Practice</b> <i>Chris Harwood &amp; Brad Blackstone</i>	181
<b>An Examination of ICT Utilization by Academics in Vietnamese Universities</b> <i>Bui Nguyen Khanh, Dinh Ngoc Thuy &amp; Muhammad Kamarul Kabilan</i>	214
Contributors	229
Index	233

# Implementing Wiki and Blog Mediated Writing Tasks in an EFL Context

Handoyo Puji Widodo • Adriadi Novawan

## Introduction

Due to the explosion of digitally mediated learning resources or support like the internet or World Wide Web, language teachers utilize such resources not only as “learning tools”, but also as “authentic means of communication and relationship building” (Sykes, Oskoz & Thorne, 2008, p. 528). This internet mediation allows for interactional spaces between a teacher and students, and between students and their peers in and out of class. In this respect, language learners have to play a role as net generations who should be literate in technology rich learning resources. Along with this, language teachers are challenged to help learners acquire technology or information and communication technology (ICT) literacies. One of the most recent web technologies that language teachers can make use is second generation web or Web 2.0.

Recently, the burgeoning development of Web 2.0 technologies has offered language learners a wide range of learning resources, which allow for “the availability of tools that can potentially be used in a variety of different ways to blend regular classroom practice” (Motteram & Sharma, 2009, p. 84). This shows that language teachers are able to optimize learning tasks that enable students not only to interact with a teacher but also to interact with their peers inside and outside the classroom. Unlike Web 1.0 technologies, the features of Web 2.0 technologies facilitate students in doing more interactive and versatile learning tasks with the teacher and peers. Thus, Web 2.0 technologies can be viewed as a mediating artifact or social software (Alexander, 2006) for language learning that language teachers can make use to maximize learning tasks and teacher-student and student-student interactions, thereby enhancing digitally mediated interactivity, engagement, and collaboration.

The applications of Web 2.0 technologies like wikis and weblogs or blogs have been well documented and researched, particularly in teaching writing both in English as a foreign language (EFL) and English as a second language (ESL)



contexts (e.g., Bradley, Lindström & Rystedt, 2010; Kuteeva, 2011; Lee, 2010; Sun, 2010). Wikis and blogs serve as mediating space that students can shift from the traditional niche of knowledge consumer to that of knowledge producer and move from only engagement in academic discourse communities to contributory and co-constructive roles in those communities, thereby allowing students, within the social web, to generate, edit, publish, and control information in an open and democratic manner (Kamel Boulos & Wheeler, 2007, as cited in Wheeler & Wheeler, 2009). Thus, Web 2.0 and social software, affords learners a wide spectrum of “unique and powerful information sharing and collaboration features”, serves as “cognitive reflection and amplification tools”, and facilitates “the construction of meaning through the act of self-design of knowledge databases” (Jonassen, Peck & Wilson, 1999, as cited in Parker & Chao, 2007, p. 57).

To take into account an emerging need for the use of Web 2.0 in the writing classroom, wikis and blogs can be pedagogically exploited particularly in implementing more interactive writing tasks that language teachers can assign to students. However, it is not sufficient to say that such Web 2.0 technologies have pedagogical benefits for students unless language teachers train them how to make use of such social software and exploit possible features of wikis and blogs. To fill this need, we would like to explore what writing tasks can be optimally implemented through blogs and wikis. Before highlighting this, we will discuss conceptual frameworks of blogs and wikis; technology or ICT literacies; and writing as socially scaffolded, participative, and collaborative practice.

## Wikis and Blogs

### Wikis

Ward Cunningham, the creator of the first wiki (wikiwikiweb), has defined wikis as “the simplest online database that could possibly work” (Leuf & Cunningham, 2001, p. 4). Kessler (2009) adds that wikis are extremely fast; therefore, Cunningham used the term wiki, pronounced *weekee*, originally from a Hawaiian word for *quick*. Wikis are “freely expandable collection of interlinked web pages, a hypertext system for storing and modifying information – a database, where each page is easily edited by any user with a forms-capable Web browser client” (Leuf & Cunningham, 2001, p. 14). Tardy (2011) also defines wikis as “a collaborative web-based space that can be modified by any user” (p. 13). Drawing on such definitions, wikis are a kind of server software, which enables users to freely and easily construct and edit web page content using any web browser in which hyperlinks are available.

The versatility and easy use of wikis can be facilitative to the implementation of collaborative and peer-to-peer learning in and out of class. Wikis are social software that enables students to work on particular writing tasks collaboratively. On wikis, a set of pages is loosely structured and “linked in multiple ways to each other and to Internet resources and an open-editing system in which anyone can edit any page (by clicking on the ‘edit this page’ button)” (Godwin-Jones, 2003, p. 15). Wiki users are able to freely create, modify, and delete the content of the wikis. This suggests that wikis serve as an authoring tool that language teachers and students can work collaboratively in such a way that engaging participation, intensive collaboration, and collective production are possible.

As Phillipson (2008) has pinpointed, pedagogical uses of wikis can be categorized into: (1) a resource wiki, knowledge or information constructed collectively; (2) a presentation wiki, the use of a wiki employed to voice one’s work to a group; (3) a gateway wiki, the use of a wiki to develop a discussion of data; (4) a simulation wiki, used to simulate an environment for exploration; and (5) an illuminated wiki, employed to jointly develop a group document like print, graphic, and audio and video hyperlinks. These wiki categories offer language teachers and students what kinds of wikis they would choose or emphasize. Indeed, they can implement those categories in an integrative way to create more dynamic learning tasks or activities inside and outside the classroom.

On a pedagogical level, wikis offer student writers some benefits. As Lamb (2004, as cited in Parker & Chao, 2007, p. 61) has listed, the benefits of wikis for teaching writing skills include:

1. Stimulate writing (‘fun’ and ‘wiki’ are often associated).
2. Provide a low-cost but effective communication and collaboration tool (with an emphasis on text rather than software).
3. Promote the close reading, revision, and tracking of preliminary work.
4. Discourage product oriented writing while facilitating writing as a process.
5. Ease students into writing for a wider audience.

In addition, Richardson (2009, as cited in Woo, Chu & Li, 2011) elaborates that wikis can help to scaffold students’ collaborative writing through a platform for sharing, peer-commenting, and co-constructing. This platform, indeed, helps students support one another, thereby building or even expanding peer scaffolding. Though wikis function as a digital platform for ideal engagement, collaboration, idea sharing, and publishing, they are not personally protected where individual voices should be kept originally like learning journals, reflective logs, and singly authored publishing. For this reason, language teachers need to blend the use of wikis with the application of blogs.



## Blogs

Weblogs or popularly known as 'blogs' has been the craze for an authentic and constructive learning tool, especially in the language classroom (Seitzinger, 2006). Davies and Merchant (2009, p. 23) also see weblogs or blogs as "one of the most well-established and well-known Web 2.0 applications." Weblogs or blogs are often referred to as social software, which involves participation and collaboration in nature. Blogs serves as a valuable tool for teaching foreign language writing. As Prinz (2010) argues, blogs make publishing content very easy and quick. Previously, one had to become apt at HTML editing or programming to create a website. The creation of content through a blog, thus, has technically become as easy as writing an e-mail, so the explosion of blogs in use has occurred. Through blogging, one can easily create and update content information, and she or he can instantly publish it on the World Wide Web from any internet connection (Richardson, 2009). However, it is important to keep in mind that blogs not only serve as a publishing tool, but also function as a valuable platform for interactive discussion, so threads of discussion can easily be kept track.

In other words, by nature, blogs are a public social space where every internet user can search informational texts uploaded onto the blogs, read them, and make comments on them. Compared to traditional websites where comments can only be attached to the website (e.g., an integrated guestbook or discussion board), in blogs, discussion threads can be attached to each piece of content separately. Alexander (2006) says that "the reverse chronological order of blogs constitutes a completely different rhetorical purpose than traditional web pages, which do not contain inherent timelines." Blogs tend to focus on "microcontent" and thus "break away from the page metaphor" and the "notion of the Web as a book" (p. 33).

Seitzinger (2006) argues that "blogs and networks of blogs can facilitate development of a community of learners and social presence. The comments on blog posts can be powerful feedback tools; they offer immediate and detailed responses to the learner's thoughts and ideas" (p. 7). This implies that from a social constructivist perspective, knowledge or idea is constructed in a social context through interactions with others. This reflects active, meaningful learning where students engage in social activities. Through a social digital space, blogs, students are able to express and explain their thoughts or ideas as well as negotiate and compromise such ideas or thoughts with their peers during the learning activities. Drawing on this notion, blogs can function as a mediating social tool for writing as socially participative and collaborative practice.

## Differences between wikis and blogs

**Table 1** Differences between wikis and blogs

Wikis	Blogs
Designed for collaborative authoring by any users, but wikis may be singly authored.	More personal and generally written by a single author.
Information is typically organized into topics.	The information in blogs is chronologically presented in a reverse manner; therefore, information in blogs is historically recorded and rarely changes.
Allow users to show what information is related and make it easy to browse.	The reverse chronological order of blogs does not allow users to find all postings on a particular topic and browse through all postings on that topic.
Receive feedback by allowing users or visitors to edit topics directly.	Manage reader comments without being able to edit content information directly, so the contents in blogs belong fully to the owner or blogger.
Content information is editable.	Information is permanent, but comment space or button is provided.
Allow for knowledge sharing around topics.	Enable users to share ideas or thoughts spontaneously.

Although wikis and blogs are categorized as Web 2.0, their differences are shown in the design which dictates how users use them. As summarized from Duffy and Bruns (2006), we make a distinct list of wikis and blogs, as described in Table 1.

By knowing the characteristics and differences of/between wikis and blogs, language teachers and students can consider which suits particular writing tasks. Indeed, they are able to make an informed decision on what social software best facilitates writing learning tasks. Though wikis and blogs differ in some respect, they are seen as mediating software that allows for writing as socially scaffolded and collaborative practice. More importantly, wikis and blogs can create communities of student writers in a digitally situated participative and collaborative learning atmosphere. In doing so, student writers need to be literate in technology or ICT.



## Technology or ICT Literacies

The interplay between literacy and technology is transactional; both literacy and technology are mutually complimentary by nature. The internet or the World Wide Web has wrought a new challenge for language teachers pertaining to teaching students literacies foundation (Fahser-Herro & Steinkuehler, 2009). In today's technology rich learning spheres, students need to be fully literate and must "become proficient in the new literacies practices of information and communication technologies" (Sternberg, Kaplan & Borck, 2007, p. 418). As International ICT Literacy Panel (2002, p. 2) defines, technology or ICT literacy is the ability to use "digital technology, communications tools, and/or networks to access, manage, integrate, evaluate, and create information in order to function in a knowledge society." Further, the panel elaborates "access, manage, integrate, evaluate, and create" as listed below:

1. Access: knowing about and knowing how to collect and/or retrieve information.
2. Manage: applying an existing organizational or classification scheme.
3. Integrate: interpreting and representing information. It involves summarizing, comparing, and contrasting.
4. Evaluate: making judgments about the quality, relevance, usefulness, or efficiency of information.
5. Create: generating information by adapting, applying, designing, inventing, or authoring information. (p. 3)

Drawing on the above well-spelled definitions, ICT literacies involve multiple knowledge (cognitive literacy) and skills (technical literacy) to allow students to work with wikis and blogs. Such knowledge and skills can be taught to students. In addition, ICT literacies pervade ethical consideration since in most cases, information is copyrighted. This is called as information literacies. In implementing wikis and blogs in writing classes, language teachers need to train students the way to select types of wikis and blogs, identify and organize information, cite information properly, judge whether information is relevant and useful, and generate information. Therefore, the success of wiki and blog mediated writing learning tasks depend on whether learners receive coaching or training on ICT literacies cognitively and technically.

## Writing as Socially Scaffolded, Participative, and Collaborative Practice

Writing either in a foreign language (FL) or in a second language (L2) is viewed as a complicated task that most students or learners encounter. Since writing involves social interaction, the relationship between a writer and readers is socially situated. This means that the writer needs to make her or his ideas clear to the reader and posit herself or himself as a reader as well. For this reason, writing serves as a medium of articulating cogent ideas in a written manner, and indeed it involves particular purposes of writing and target audiences. In this sense, one should suit what they are writing to particular readers. So, the writer-reader relationship is built through a written communication. To create this relationship requires a set of conducive learning atmosphere where student writers can scaffold one another to promote participative writing learning.

Scaffolding is essential for a successful learning. It helps learners to move towards new skills, concepts, or levels of understanding (Gibbons, 2002). In short, scaffolding allows the teacher to help students to transit from assisted tasks to independent performances (Palincsar, 1998). It is a step-by-step process that provides students with sufficient guidance until the process is learned, and then gradually removes the support in order to transfer the responsibility for completing the task to the students. Thus, scaffolding is intended to bring students closer to a state of competence, which allows the students eventually to complete particular learning activities/tasks independently (Diaz-Rico & Weed, 2002; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Anchored in this notion, writing can be seen as a socially scaffolded activity in which students are not considered as passive recipients but viewed as potentially capable individuals (Saville-Troike, 2006). However, this process needs teacher assistance so that students succeed (Huong, 2003).

Scaffolding can be much related to participative and collaborative learning (Jonassen, 1994). In a participative learning sense, students engage in productive writing tasks in which they play different roles. For instance, one student can play a role as a feedback provider, and another plays a role as a scaffoldee, the one who is being helped by another student. In this instance, a weaker or less proficient student can receive feedback from a more capable peer. In this peer interaction, both students are involved in peer scaffolding practice. One challenge that we should raise up here is that what more capable students get from this peer interaction. They can share their expertise with their less capable peers. In doing so, a teacher should reward more capable students by providing more credit points and more advanced ways of commenting on their pieces of writing. In this way, more capable students can be well-rewarded, and of course a teacher should balance the way to approach less capable students and more capable students to ensure that there is no big gap in treating such two groups of students.



In the collaborative learning sense, students are encouraged to collaborate throughout the process of writing. Such collaboration means that students are jointly responsible for composing a text and working on peer feedback. In integrating collaboration into writing tasks, writing teachers need to consider two main issues. The first issue is forming groups. This is the first step that teachers need to negotiate with students. Ideally, small groups of two members are preferred in order to allow for greater participation (Jacobs, 2006). Two options are possible to form groups: teacher chosen or student chosen (Widodo, 2006). The former rests on the teacher's decision. First, groups can contain mixed ability levels (e.g., a low achiever and high achiever work together). It is crucial to keep in mind that the group members should assume equal participation during the writing process if the mixed ability group is chosen. The second option is that students can choose their group mates. In this regard, teachers afford the opportunity for the students to choose their own group mates so that they feel comfortable to work with their own choices.

The second issue is when collaboration is implemented in writing tasks. Students work collaboratively throughout the entire process of writing (from pre-writing to post-writing stages). The same groups with the same members are assigned to produce a particular piece of writing and give feedback on each other's work until a writing process cycle is done. In another writing process cycle, teachers may assign students to write with other peers so that they gain different experiences when working with different students. Thus, as Nelson and Murphy (1992) point out, shifting or rotating group membership periodically allows students the opportunity to work with different peers in different writing cycles, thereby interacting with a wider audience of readers. The group membership rotation can be decided based on (1) the initial preferences of students, (2) a mixture of genders (males and females), (3) a mixture of student proficiency level in language and writing, and (4) a shared or similar writing topic.

To optimize socially scaffolded, participative, and collaborative writing learning, it is important that a writer has a medium of communicating his or her work. One of the ways is to exploit technological tools like Web 2.0 technologies (e.g., wikis and blogs). Wikis and blogs can optimize writing as socially scaffolded, participative, and collaborative practice because learners can communicate, exchange opinions, and share ideas. In short, such practice can be optimally implemented through wikis and blogs because both allow for interactive collaboration, active engagement, learner-centred and collaborative learning, social presence, enhanced interactivity, creativity, mutual support, and social mediation. This conclusion does not mean that other Web 2.0 technologies are impossible to deliver successful L2 writing instruction. Wikis and blogs are mentioned because they are frequently used by language teachers and learners when they explore FL and L2 writing learning. Although wikis and blogs can pedagogically be exploited in and out of class, it is not

simply sufficient to say that; on the other hand, language teachers are challenged to train language students how to use such social software to optimize FL writing learning, for example.

## Implementing Wiki and Blog Mediated Writing Tasks

### Wiki and blog posting and software

Before a teacher assigns students to work on writing tasks, she or he tells them to think of kinds of wiki and blog hosting and software they wish to use. To get started with wikis, the teacher needs to explain wiki hosting and software options to the students. Despite numerous wiki hosting services, there are three wiki hosting services that the students can use after they create an account, including:

1. Wikihost (<http://wikihost.org/>)
2. JotSpot (<http://www.jot.com/>)
3. Wikia (<http://www.wikia.com/wiki/Wikia>)

Alternatively, the students can install wiki software on their own site or server, some of which include:

1. Mediawiki (of Wikipedia fame) (<http://www.mediawiki.org/wiki/MediaWiki>)
2. Tikiwiki (<http://tikiwiki.org/>)
3. Dokuwiki (<http://wiki.splitbrain.org/wiki:dokuwiki>)

To start blogging, students have two hosting options: freely ready blog hosting and blog hosting installing. The former does not require them to install anything on their computer or laptop. They just create an account by filling out a sign-up form and this takes a few minutes to activate the account. The freely ready blog hosting also provides students with some ready-made templates that they can personalize. These hosting services include:

1. Blogger (<http://www.blogger.com/start>)
2. LiveJournal (<http://www.livejournal.com/>)
3. Edublogs (<http://www.edublogs.org/>) – free blogs for education professionals

The latter requires the students to install blogging software on their own site or server. Some of these are open source, so these hosting services would not charge the students. The following are some of the most popular blogging software tools:



1. Wordpress (<http://wordpress.org/>)
2. Greymatter (<http://noahgrey.com/greysoft/>)
3. Movable Type (<http://www.sixapart.com/movabletype/>)
4. Typepad (<http://www.sixapart.com/typepad/>)

Thus, the choices of wiki and blog hosting and software to name a few, depend on costs, ease of use, versatility, technical complexity, available features, and long- and short-term information storage. Through wikis and blogs, students can work on writing tasks like outlining, drafting, feedback, and reflection or e-portfolio. These task outcomes are certainly subject to live discussions and become historical and personal artifacts for both a teacher and students, as further discussed below.

### *Outlining tasks*

The main goals of draft outlining are to help students organize their ideas, assist them to write easily and quickly, and scaffold the students in improving their grammar at the beginning of the writing stage (Widodo, 2006). In this task, the students can use either a wiki or blog that they have. Students may use a certain graphic organizer (e.g., clustering, charting, semantic mapping) to elicit and communicate information. They may utilize Drawing/Draw tools like Group/Ungroup, Order, AutoShapes/Change AutoShapes, and so forth for idea outlining on MS Word. Then, the outline can be uploaded onto a wiki or blog.

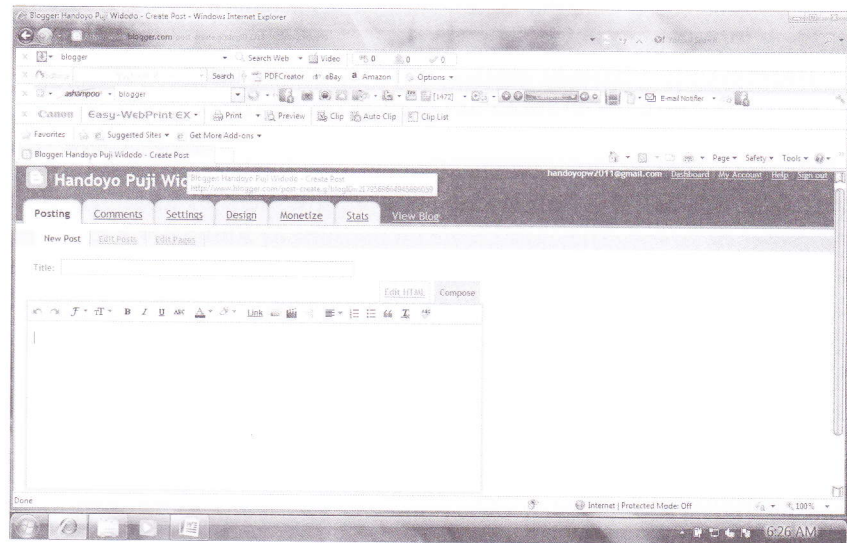
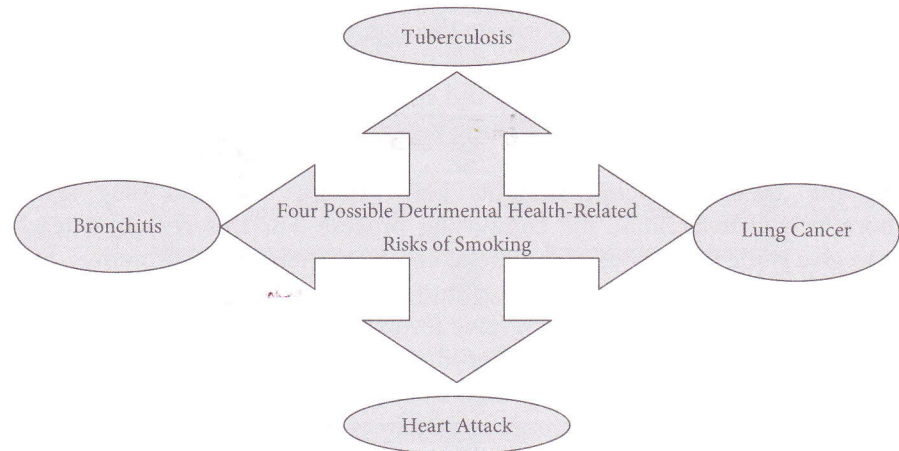


Figure 1 The 'posting' function in blog



**Figure 2** Example of a semantic map

When outlining possible keywords or ideas, students can make use of a semantic map to envision such words or ideas. For instance, suppose a student would like to write “four possible detrimental health-related risks of smoking”, their outline looks like as follows (Figure 2). To allow for creativity, a teacher may allow students to jot down different semantic maps or other visual organizers, so the teacher can leave the choice of semantic map design up to the students.

Working on idea outlining smoothly, at this stage, the students should choose their own topic, problem, purpose, and target audience. When collaborative writing is implemented, the students need to brainstorm ideas with their own group mates. During this process, the teacher monitors the students’ interaction. If the students have difficulty generating ideas, the teacher can guide them in developing an outline.

After the students have outlined their ideas, they post outlines through their wiki or blog so that the students have a chance to comment on each others’ outlines. Once this peer feedback on outlines has been completed, the teacher can see threads of comments and see whether the students have commented on outlines properly.

### *Drafting tasks*

Before students develop their outline into a complete draft (e.g., a paragraph or essay), they have to discuss and negotiate what sort of wiki and blog hosting or software they are going to use. After that, they can proceed to drafting activity. It is important to keep in mind that writing through a wiki and blog challenges students to write for a wider audience. In collaborative drafting, students are suggested to



firstly focus on developing ideas into rough drafts without considering language accuracy. In other words, students can go through multiple drafting activities, and the first and second drafts are not supposed to be perfect in the composing process since this activity is meaning discovery and emphasizes the fluency of ideas so that students are able to finish a certain writing task gradually.

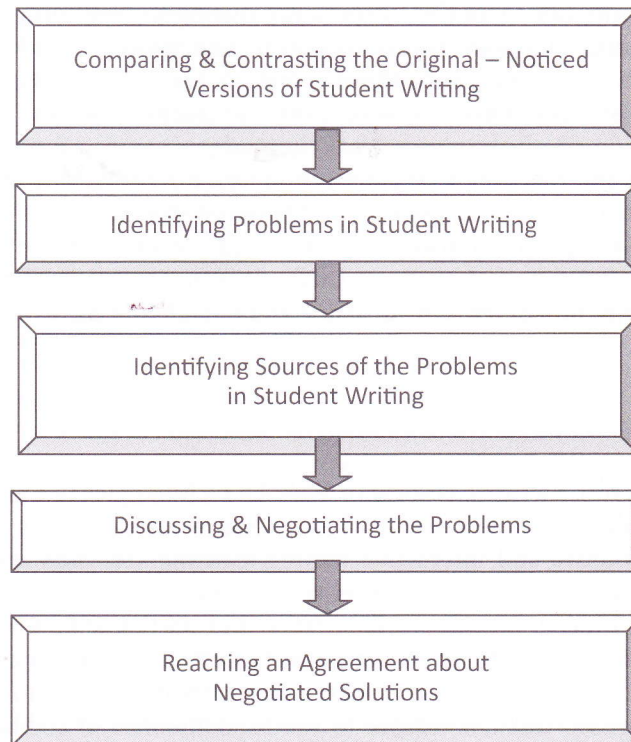
During the drafting process, students may explore wiki and blog features collaboratively that facilitate the composing process. For this reason, a teacher needs to give students considerable time to complete their drafts. Moreover, in the drafting process, the teacher has to allow students to write multiple drafts (second, third, or fourth drafts) before they receive feedback from their peers and teacher. The number of drafts that students can produce depends on the number of groups, time allotment, and students' ability levels in language and writing. Thus, through collaboration, students can share unique resources (i.e., language and content) as well as technical expertise (e.g., the use of a wiki and blog) when developing ideas into completed drafts. Also, a teacher can keep track of and assess what the students have done during the composing process.

#### *Feedback tasks*

Wiki and blog mediated feedback provides a digital platform for sharing ideas, celebrating creativity, and receiving immediate feedback from peers. While working through a wiki and blog, students are trained to give peer feedback. A teacher may make use of this feedback framework "critical contrastive framing" (Widodo, in press).

In this chapter, we define critical contrastive framing as a feedback task, which encourages students to critically compare and contrast the original and noticed versions of their drafts. This task needs to be done jointly to allow for lively discussion and negotiation between two students or more. This task can be implemented either through a blog or wiki. If the content remains original, students can use a blog, but they can utilize a wiki for a feedback platform since they can keep track of all comments.

What follows, in critical contrastive framing, a teacher asks groups or pairs of students to collaboratively respond to each others' drafts. In this task, students work on gap or problem identification (e.g., form-linguistic issues, content-ideas, and organization) in their drafts. After that, groups of students are asked to identify sources of the problems. Then, the students are told to identify the problems between the original versions of the drafts and the noticed versions of the drafts by critically comparing and contrasting those problems. This enables students to negotiate the problems, encourages them to do critical discussions, and in turn find solutions to the gaps noticed or identified. In short, in collaborative negotiation,



**Figure 3** A framework of critical contrastive framing for a collaborative feedback task

Source: Widodo (in press)

students articulate their thoughts through explaining, questioning, and defending their arguments. The entire framework of critical contrastive framing task for negotiated feedback is shown in Figure 3.

In summary, through a wiki or blog, students can receive immediate feedback from their peers without any time and space constraints. In other words, this task can be done in and out of class. A teacher can monitor and assess the way the students are commenting on each others' drafts. A wiki and blog function as a digital platform that can promote intensive feedback, thereby building negotiated and process oriented dialogs.

#### *Reflection or e-portfolio tasks*

Reflection can take form of online diaries through a blog. Individual reflection works through a blog since this reflection is personal and does not require any feedback from others, but, this personal reflection can allow for experience sharing.



On blogs, students can share their experience during the outlining, drafting, and feedback sessions. They may add reflection to one another. Students can make multiple reflection entries. From these entries, a teacher can see, monitor, and assess how the students have benefited from the learning process through wikis and blogs. In addition, the teacher can ask the students to create e-portfolio to show students' works and reflections. This reflection task through a blog aims to expand dialogs between a teacher and students and between students and their peers. This reflection log or e-portfolio also shows historical events that the students have experienced in and out of class. From this e-document, a teacher can assess and evaluate the entire process of writing inside and outside the classroom.

## Conclusion

Working on FL or L2 writing tasks with Web 2.0 technologies like wikis and blogs poses new challenges to language students while wikis and blogs are affordable tools for constructive and interactive writing learning. The new challenges here deal with ICT literacies and technical expertise. The applications of those tools in writing classes, indeed, promote collaborative and participative learning, learner centeredness, digitally mediated community of practice, cognitively and technically driven engagement, social presence, interactivity, creativity, and mutual support. As long as language teachers adhere to the fundamentals of socioconstructivist theory and provide the constructivist tools, the choices of using such tools are left to language students who play roles as online learning designers, developers, users, and controllers. Indeed, to achieve this goal, language students need to be well-trained. Most importantly, although Web 2.0 technologies like wikis and blogs are ubiquitously available, language teachers should not simply assume that students are familiar with the use of such technologies. In other words, training on the applications of such tools and ICT literacies remains an issue that language teachers should take into consideration.

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