

# Effects of Using a Blog as a Free Online Space for Practicing English Writing Skills by Thai Students Taking English as a Foreign Language

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## ABSTRACT

The study explored the effects of using a blog as a free online space for practicing English writing skills by Thai EFL students. The participants of the study were 83 Thai undergraduate sports science students in a university in Nakhon Pathom province, Thailand. The data were collected from 100-word written pieces and interview responses. During the experiment, each participant was assigned to write three 100-word written pieces on the blog in the computer lab. Every time, they were proctored by the teacher and had 20 minutes allocated. Based on the findings, the statistical evidence showed significant differences in the mean scores of the first, second, and third written pieces ( $F = 190.073, p < .001$  calculated from multivariate tests and  $F = 132.151, p < .001$  calculated from tests of within-subjects effects). The participants' average mean score was higher in their last written pieces ( $\bar{X} = 40.19, SD = 3.76$ ). From the first to the last written pieces, their writing errors decreased from 421 errors, to 228 errors, to 190 errors, respectively. However, even though there was a decrease in the number of writing errors as a whole, it cannot be concluded that using the blog for practicing writing was totally effective for students because there was an increase in some writing errors, such as incomplete sentences, relative pronouns, word meanings, auxiliary verbs, transitive and intransitive verbs, and past simple tense in their last written pieces. The interview results indicated that the participants had positive attitudes toward using the blog for practicing their English writing skills. They claimed that the blog offered convenience for practicing writing.

**Keywords:** blogs, writing skills, English as a foreign language (EFL) students

## บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้มีจุดประสงค์เพื่อสำรวจผลของการใช้บล็อกเป็นพื้นที่ฟรีออนไลน์สำหรับให้นักเรียนไทยที่เรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศได้ฝึกทักษะการเขียนภาษาอังกฤษ ผู้เข้าร่วมการวิจัยมีทั้งสิ้น 83 คน เป็นนักศึกษาวิทยาศาสตร์การกีฬา ณ มหาวิทยาลัยแห่งหนึ่งในจังหวัดนครปฐม ประเทศ

ไทย ทั้งนี้ได้ทำการเก็บข้อมูลงานวิจัยจากงานเขียนสามชิ้นในบล็อกและการสัมภาษณ์ ระหว่างการทดลองผู้เข้าร่วมการวิจัยแต่ละคนจะต้องเขียนงานเขียนสามชิ้นในบล็อกในห้องปฏิบัติการคอมพิวเตอร์ โดยแต่ละชิ้นงานจะต้องมีจำนวนคำประมาณ 100 คำ ทุกครั้งจะมีอาจารย์คอยควบคุมและให้เวลา 20 นาที ในการทำ จากผลการวิจัยพบว่าคะแนนเฉลี่ยที่ผู้เข้าร่วมการวิจัยได้ในงานชิ้นที่หนึ่ง สอง และสาม มีค่า

ความต่างทางสถิติที่นัยสำคัญ ( $F = 190.073, p < .001$  จำนวนจาก multivariate tests และ  $F = 132.151, p < .001$  จำนวนจาก tests of within-subjects effects) ทั้งนี้พบว่างานเขียนชิ้นสุดท้ายมีคะแนนเฉลี่ยสูงกว่างานเขียนสองชิ้นก่อนหน้าที่มีนัยสำคัญ  $\bar{X} = 40.19, SD = 3.76$ ) และจากงานชิ้นแรกถึงงานชิ้นสุดท้ายยังพบอีกด้วยว่า จำนวนคำผิดลดลงจาก 421 คำ เป็น 228 คำ และ 190 คำ อย่างไรก็ตาม แม้ว่าโดยภาพรวมแล้ว จำนวนคำผิดจะลดลง แต่ก็ไม่สามารถสรุปได้อย่างเป็นเอกฉันท์ว่าการใช้บล็อกเพื่อฝึกเขียนจะมีประสิทธิผลต่อผู้เรียน เนื่องจากพบว่าผู้เรียนบางคนมีเรื่อง เช่น ประโยคไม่สมบูรณ์ คำสรรพนามขยาย ความ ความหมายของคำ กิริยาช่วย สกรรมกิริยา อกรรมกิริยา และรูปกาลอดีต เพิ่มขึ้นในงานเขียนชิ้นสุดท้าย สำหรับผลการสัมภาษณ์ พบว่าผู้เข้าร่วมการวิจัยมีทัศนคติในเชิงบวกต่อการใช้บล็อกเพื่อฝึกทักษะการเขียนภาษาอังกฤษ พวกเขาถือว่าบล็อกให้ความสะดวกในการฝึกเขียนภาษาอังกฤษ

**คำสำคัญ:** บล็อก ทักษะการเขียน ผู้เรียนภาษาอังกฤษ เป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ

## INTRODUCTION

Blogs have been present in the cyberspace world since 1998, but they have become more well-known among Internet users after the release of the hosting website "Blogger.com" in August 1999 (Blood, 2000). The term "blog" can be defined as a free online writing space which is managed through a web browser (Godwin, 2003). In education, it is believed that blogs have many useful characteristics that contribute to language learning and teaching. Flatley (2005) points out that blogs can provide a free space for students to interact with one another. On blogs, students can write about their own experiences during school, travel, and social activities and share them with the teacher, classmates, or other visitors (Elliott, 2008).

Zhang (2009) claims that blogs can help

students develop their writing skills in various ways. He points out that on the blogs, students are involved in collaborative learning interactions, which allow them to get new ideas from other visitors easily. He cites that during this process, a community of practice, one of the Social Constructivism theories, can be developed after an adequate number of visitors give comments and suggestions on the blogs. He also states that blogs can increase students' interests by allowing them to explore other blogs which are written by people from other countries. With such an opportunity, they can develop a better understanding of other cultures, that is, they will have good comprehension of native English speaking cultures. As a result, students will be able to produce better pieces of work.

Not limited to just the usefulness as cited above, as a matter of fact, the results from previous research suggest that blogs can be used as a means to develop English writing skills. Fageeh (2011) conducted a study with 50 fourth-year college students in Abha, Saudi Arabia. Half of them were assigned to the experimental group and the other half were assigned to the control group. The students in the experimental group were allowed to practice writing on the blog while the control group received only traditional-lecture discussion instruction. It was found that the students in the experimental group produced a greater improvement in English writing skills than the students in the control group. The mean score of the experimental group was 40.84 while the mean score of the control group was only 28.88 ( $t = 13.222, p < .001$ ). Other than this piece of evidence, it was found that blogs could be used together with other computer assisted learning tools. Fellner and Apple (2006) conducted a study with 21 fourth-year private university students in western Japan. They examined the students' gains in writing fluency which were determined by the number of words and word frequency levels after they had been enrolled in a seven-day intensive computer assisted language learning program (CALL) for students who studied English as a foreign language. During the research process, the

students were given CALL tasks, such as web listening, reading, and vocabulary building. Based on a simple word count of the students' blog entries, there was an increase in the number of words produced. On the first day of the program, there was an average of 31.5 words, whilst on the last day, the number reached an average of 121.9 words. The researchers concluded that such an improvement represented an overall increase of nearly 350 percent in the word count.

When asked about the students' attitudes toward the use of blogs, it seems that EFL students enjoy writing practice on blogs. Pinkman (2005) carried out a project with 15 university students in a Pre-Advanced English class in Japan. The students were responsible for writing one entry of 150 words per week. They were also assigned to read and comment on two to three blogs of their classmates. The findings of the study showed that the students had positive attitudes, using the blogs as a means to develop writing skills. Eight students claimed that they enjoyed having interactions with other classmates on the blogs. Meanwhile, seven students claimed that after participating in the project, they had a substantial improvement in their writing skills. As cited in the study, they claimed that they learned new vocabulary that was necessary in writing. They enjoyed reading the comments given by other students and the teacher. In another supporting study, Hashemi and Najafi (2011) recently conducted a study with 60 college students who took an English Advanced Writing course in Iran. The students in this study were taught to create their own blogs using hosting websites, such as "Blogger", "blogfa", or "Mihanblog". During the course, they were assigned to write their self-introduction of 150 words per week. Then, they were assigned to comment on other classmates' writing work and at the same time they could receive comments from their classmates and the teacher. The data were only collected from the questionnaire and it was found that all of the students enjoyed having interactions with other classmates on the blogs. They claimed that they improved their English writing from the

comments given on the blogs. However, it seems that almost all of them were not likely to invite other students to read and comment on their written pieces posted on the blogs because they did not feel confident about the quality of their writing. Some of them claimed that they wanted to keep their postings private.

In Thailand, even though blogs have been available for people to post their writing for quite a while, studies about this issue are relatively rare and not a focus for study. Hubert (2009) conducted a study with 64 university students in Thailand and 53 university students in Japan. The participants in both countries were assigned to write articles about their own cultures on the blog. They were also required to read, exchange thoughts, and comment on the articles written by their international EFL peers. The findings of the study showed that Thai participants created a greater average article length being 16 percent greater than those of the Japanese students. However, this study does not mention the quality of the writing. Thus, it cannot be said that in this particular study that blogs helped Thai students to write better than Japanese students. In the most recent study, Chomchiawchan and Khampusean (2012) explored the effects of web-based lessons which included communication channels, such as e-mail, forum, and blog on the enhancement of the students' knowledge in using English conjunctions. The participants of the study were 19 university students who took an English writing course at Khon Kaen University, Thailand. It was found that there was a significant difference of the mean score between the pre-test and post-test ( $t = 15.74, p < .001$ ), that is, the students' knowledge of conjunctions improved after the treatment. The students also had moderately positive attitudes toward the web-based lessons. However, the blog involved in their study was just a minor tool used with other communication channels to enhance their knowledge of using English conjunctions.

According to the aforementioned information, it is possible to use blogs as a means for students to practice writing. Blogs can be

considered as a community of practice which offers students more choices to learn from their teachers, classmates, or even other visitors. Students can use suggestions given by these people to improve their writing skills. However, even though blogs seem to be effective, studies on the use of blogs for writing improvement are relatively rare. With respect to the benefits mentioned and the lack of sufficient studies done previously with Thai students, the present study explored the effects of using the blog as a free online space for Thai EFL students to practice their English writing skills. To further prove the effectiveness of the blog, the students' attitudes toward its use were investigated.

### Research questions

- 1) To what extent did writing practice on the blog improve English writing skills of Thai EFL students?
- 2) What were the students' attitudes toward using the blog as a free online space for practicing English writing skills?

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Participants

Data were collected from 83 undergraduate sports science students at a university in Nakhon Pathom

province, Thailand. All of them posted their written pieces on the blog. Sixty-one students in this group were male and twenty-two were female. Their ages were between 18 and 22 years. All of them studied English as a foreign language. They were chosen as the subjects of the study because most of the students in this group experienced writing difficulty to a greater extent than students from other faculties. As evidenced by the data of the 2010 academic year, it was found that from the total score of 50, the participants involved in this study had an average mean score of 24.37 in the English writing test, which was less than the average mean score of 28.39 for all students from other faculties.

### Course's goal

“By the end of the course, students will have developed abilities to write grammatically correct English sentences at the paragraph level from the assigned topics.”

### Blog

The blog was powered by Blogspot. It was used as a free online space for students to practice writing. It was open for students from June to September, 2011. The blog can be reached at <http://noidiary2010.blogspot.com> as shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1 Blog webpage

### Interview protocol

The interview was conducted to support the data collected from the written pieces on the blog. In this study, 13 volunteer participants were chosen for the interview. Each interview took 32 minutes. Most importantly, because most of the students had a fixed schedule for sports practices and had a short time to participate in the interview, we asked them only three important questions—1) “To what extent do you think practicing writing on the blog helps you improve your English writing skills?”, 2) “To what extent do you think the characteristics of the blog, like connection speed, typing codes before sending work, viewing your own written pieces, sizes and clearness of letters, colors, graphics, and web organization are effective and contribute to the enhancement of your English writing skills?”, and 3) “To what extent do you think the suggestions, correction, and the period of time you had to wait before receiving feedback on the blog are appropriate for you?”. These questions addressed the issues, such as the improvement in their writing after the treatment, the characteristics of the blog that aided their writing ability, and the appropriateness of time and feedback given by the teacher.

### Procedure

The data were collected during the first semester of the 2011 academic year. Each participant was assigned to write three 100-word written pieces, such as “Who am I?,” “My province,” and “My campus” on the blog. These topics were selected for treatment on the blog because from the previous semester, it was found that from the total score of 50, the students had received similar average mean scores in these topics ( $\bar{X} = 25.67$  for “Who am I?,”  $\bar{X} = 27.88$  for “My province,” and  $\bar{X} = 27.77$  for “My campus”). The students were allowed to go to a computer lab and write their pieces on the blog. They were proctored by the teacher and had 20 minutes allocated each time. After they wrote their first pieces, the researchers corrected their writing and gave them feedback on the blog. Two weeks later, they were assigned to write their second pieces and again the researchers

corrected their writing and gave them feedback. Then again, two weeks later, they were assigned to write their last pieces. After the data from these written pieces were analyzed, the interview was conducted with the volunteer participants.

### Data analysis

1) The written pieces were graded using the criteria adapted from the university requirements which comprised content (15 marks), punctuation (10 marks), paragraph organization (10 marks), and grammar rules and usage (15 marks) as shown in Table 1. The gain scores were analyzed by descriptive statistics.

2) To ascertain the reliability of the scoring process, the written pieces were graded by two raters and then the scoring results were analyzed (inter-rater reliability coefficient  $\alpha = 0.88$  in the first piece,  $\alpha = 0.93$  in the second piece, and  $\alpha = 0.92$  in the third piece).

3) The students’ scores gained from their written pieces were analyzed by repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA). This analysis included Mauchly’s test of sphericity, multivariate tests, tests of within-subjects effects, and pairwise comparisons. Mauchly’s test of sphericity was used to determine there was a violation of the assumption of sphericity. If the p-value of Mauchly’s test is less than .05, it violates the assumption and subsequently, the data can only be read with multivariate tests. If not, the data can be read with both multivariate tests and tests of within-subjects effects which were calculated to find out statistically significant differences of the gain scores in the first, second and third written pieces. Pairwise comparisons were calculated to find out statistically significant differences of the gain scores for one assigned piece of writing compared with the others.

4) The word errors found in the written pieces were analyzed using frequency and percentage. The aim was to identify the types of errors and to find out whether the number of errors reduced from the first written pieces to the last written pieces on the blog.

5) The interview data were transcribed and analyzed by content analysis. The data from the

**Table 1** Scoring rubric for writing tests (score out of 50)<sup>1</sup>

Criteria	Maximum score	Criteria	Maximum score
<i>Punctuation: 10 marks</i>		<i>Content: 15 marks</i>	
The spelling is correct.	3	The paragraph fits the assignment and is relevant to the topic.	6
Capital letters are used correctly.	3	The paragraph is interesting to read.	3
There is a period after every sentence.	2	The paragraph shows coherence (paragraph unity and sentence cohesion).	6
Commas or other punctuation marks are used correctly.	2		
<i>Paragraph organization: 10 marks</i>		<i>Grammar rules and usage: 15 marks</i>	
The paragraph begins with a topic sentence that has both a topic and a controlling idea.	3	Check for sentence fragments and run-on sentences.	5
The paragraph ends with an appropriate concluding sentence.	3	Check for various types of sentence (simple and compound sentences).	5
The paragraph contains several supporting sentences.	4	Check for overall grammar and sentence structure (subject-verb agreement, verb tenses, articles, and pronoun agreement).	5

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from the scoring rubric of the English Level 1 course, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Mahidol university

interview responses were used to support the data collected from the students' written pieces on the blog.

## FINDINGS

### Improvement in English writing skills of Thai EFL students

According to the scores gained from the students' written pieces calculated by repeated measures ANOVA, the value of Mauchly's W was .883 ( $p = .419$ ) which is more than .05. As shown in Table 2, this suggests that the assumption of sphericity has not been violated, that is, the scoring data can be read with both multivariate tests and tests of within-subjects effects.

As shown in Table 3, the p-values of Pillai's Trace, Wilks' Lambda, Hotelling's Trace, and Roy's Largest Root were less than .001 ( $F = 190.073$ ). Moreover, as shown in Table 4, it was found that the p-values of Sphericity Assumed, Greenhouse-Geisser, Huynh-Feldt, and Lower-bound were less than .001 ( $F = 132.151$ ). These statistical results indicate that there was at least one pair of the gain scores out of these written pieces which showed a statistically significant difference.

As evidenced by Table 5, the mean scores of the students' written pieces continuously increased ranging from the first pieces ( $\bar{X} = 31.06$ ,  $SD = 7.11$ ), to the second pieces ( $\bar{X} = 31.69$ ,  $SD = 7.46$ ), to the third pieces ( $\bar{X} = 40.19$ ,  $SD = 3.76$ ).

**Table 2** Mauchly's test of sphericity

(n = 83)

Within subject effect	Mauchly's W	Approx. chi-square	df	p	Epsilon
Writing treatment	.883	1.742	2	.419	Greenhouse-Geisser Huynh-Feldt Lower-bound
					.895 1.000 .500

In addition, when comparing the mean scores of the first, second, and third written pieces, there were statistically significant differences for the third written pieces compared with the first pieces

( $p < .001$ ) and the second pieces ( $p < .001$ ) as shown in Table 6. This suggests that the participants made significant improvements in their English writing skills.

**Table 3** Multivariate tests

(n = 83)

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	<i>p</i>
Writing treatment	Pillai's Trace	.824	190.073	2	81	.000
	Wilks' Lambda	.176	190.073	2	81	.000
	Hotelling's Trace	4.693	190.073	2	81	.000
	Roy's Largest Root	4.693	190.073	2	81	.000

**Table 4** Tests of within-subjects effects

(n = 83)

Source		Type III Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	<i>p</i>
Writing treatment	Sphericity Assumed	4448.008	2.000	2224.004	132.151	.000
	Greenhouse-Geisser	4448.008	1.820	2443.516	132.151	.000
	Huynh-Feldt	4448.008	1.859	2392.151	132.151	.000
	Lower-bound	4448.008	1.000	4448.008	132.151	.000
Error	Sphericity Assumed	2759.992	164.000	16.829		
	Greenhouse-Geisser	2759.992	149.267	18.490		
	Huynh-Feldt	2759.992	152.472	18.102		
	Lower-bound	2759.992	82.000	33.658		

**Table 5** Descriptive statistics of the students' gain scores of the first, second, and third written pieces

(n=83)

Piece of writing	Range	Minimum	Maximum	$\bar{X}$	SD
1. Who am I?	25	20	45	31.06	7.11
2. My province	27	20	47	31.69	7.46
3. My campus	16	31	47	40.19	3.76

**Table 6** Pairwise comparisons calculated from the gain scores of the first, second, and third written pieces

(n = 83)

Writing treatment	Writing treatment	Mean difference	SE	<i>p</i>	95% Confidence interval for difference	
					Lower bound	Upper bound
1	2	-.625	1.725	1.000	-5.270	4.020
	3	-9.125	1.313	.000	-12.662	-5.588
2	1	.625	1.725	1.000	-4.020	5.270
	3	-8.500	1.408	.000	-12.294	-4.706
3	1	9.125	1.313	.000	5.588	12.662
	2	8.500	1.408	.000	4.706	12.294

Moreover, it was found that the participants created more meaningful content within a well-organized paragraph in their third written pieces; they used accurate English grammatical features and punctuation marks. As shown in Table 7, the average mean scores in content, punctuation, paragraph organization, and grammar rules and usage increased from 9.13, 6.94, 6.56, and 8.44 in the first written pieces, to 8.56, 7.19, 7.06, and 8.88 in the second written pieces, and to 13.13, 7.94, 8.75, and 10.38 respectively in the third written pieces.

Given the above results, it is clear that the participants improved their English writing skills. They gained significantly higher scores and created more meaningful content within well-organized paragraphs in their last pieces. Besides, it was found that the students' writing errors continuously decreased after participating in the use of the blog. To shed light on how the participants made improvements to their English writing skills, the following extracts of writing show how the same participant made fewer errors in his last written piece.

Topic 1: Who am I?

*“My first name is Pramote. I am at Bangkok [preposition] in [unnecessary preposition] Thailand. I am single. I believe in Islamic teaching. I have been studying English for 10 years and I like it. I am a freshman. I practice meditation everyday. The future [missing a preposition and a comma] I would like to be a government official.”*

Topic 2: My province

*“There are many interesting [incomplete sentence: missing an object] in my hometown. It is the capital city of Thailand. It's [form of possessive*

*determiner] name is Bangkok. Major attractions of interest is [subject-verb agreement] the Suan Lum Night Bazaar. There is also [missing an article] important tourist attraction is Temple of the Emerald Buddha (Wat Phra Kaew) [run-on sentence] which is on the terrace of the temple has beautiful mural paintings on the Ramayana and the longest in the world [run-on sentence]. To sum up [missing a comma] Bangkok is a good place to visit.”*

Topic 3: My campus

*“There are many new thing [plural noun] that I can learn and join in [incorrect preposition and missing a definite article] Salaya campus. I can make new friends here. They are very friendly and they are good friends. Every morning, I need to get up at 06.30 am to take a shower. Then I have my breakfast at 08.00 am. I studies [subject-verb agreement] 13 classes. I and my friends have lunch at the cafeteria. I like to eat rice and curry for my lunch. I like social [missing a definite article] class. After class, I need to practice football with my friends. To sum up, even though my life in Salaya is not easy, I love my friends, I love football, I love to stay and study here.”*

From the above extracts of writing, it was found that this participant had made errors with prepositions, verb tenses, punctuation, incomplete sentences, possessive determiners, subject and verb agreements, articles, and run-on sentences in his first and second written pieces. However, in his third written piece, he made only a few errors in using plural nouns, prepositions, articles, and subject and verb agreement. This suggests that this participant made a substantial improvement in his writing skills.

**Table 7** Gain scores of the first, second and third written pieces

(n = 83)

Writing criteria	First written piece				Second written piece				Third written piece			
	Min	Max	$\bar{X}$	SD	Min	Max	$\bar{X}$	SD	Min	Max	$\bar{X}$	SD
Content	5	15	9.13	3.07	5	15	8.56	2.97	11	15	13.13	1.15
Punctuation	4	10	6.94	1.65	5	10	7.19	1.38	6	10	7.94	1.00
Paragraph organization	4	10	6.56	1.82	5	10	7.06	1.73	7	10	8.75	0.86
Grammar rules and usage	5	14	8.44	2.53	5	13	8.88	2.55	6	14	10.38	2.78

### Decrease in number of writing errors

From the first to the last written pieces, it was found that the students' writing errors decreased from 421 errors, to 228 errors, to 190 errors, respectively, as shown in Table 8. Errors in using auxiliary verbs, pronouns, infinitives, and the past simple tense were not found in the second written pieces. Also, the errors in using possessive determiners, pronouns, 'any' and 'some', and word order were not found in the last written pieces. However, even though their writing errors decreased in their last pieces as a whole, it cannot be said unequivocally that the students made consistently great improvement after practicing writing on the blog because there was an increase in some errors, such as word meanings, incomplete sentences, auxiliary verbs, transitive and intransitive verbs,

relative pronouns, and past simple tense in their last written pieces.

On account of the scoring data and number of writing errors mentioned earlier, it can be said that using the blog for writing practice could somewhat enhance the students' writing skills, but it is not decisively the best choice for them because the students still made a greater number of writing errors in using some linguistic elements as shown in the above table.

### Attitudes of students toward using the blog as a free online space for practicing English writing skills

Thirteen volunteer participants were interviewed in this study. All of them claimed that they preferred to practice writing on the blog. More than half of them (eight interviewees) claimed that

**Table 8** Types of writing errors found in the students' written pieces on the blog (n = 83)

Types of writing error	First written piece		Second written piece		Third written piece	
	Frequency (Number of word errors)	Percentage (%) compared to other writing errors	Frequency (Number of word errors)	Percentage (%) compared to other writing errors	Frequency (Number of word errors)	Percentage (%) compared to other writing errors
Nouns	23	5.46	13	5.70	12	6.32
Transitive and intransitive verbs	5	1.19	1	0.44	2	1.05
Auxiliary verbs	4	0.95	0	0	3	1.58
Modal verbs	0	0	2	0.88	1	0.53
Adverbs of frequency	0	0	1	0.44	0	0
Possessive determiners	2	0.48	13	5.70	0	0
Prepositions	28	6.65	13	5.70	13	6.84
Articles	23	5.46	18	7.89	14	7.37
Pronouns	1	0.24	0	0	0	0
Relative pronouns	0	0	0	0	1	0.53
Infinitives	1	0.24	0	0	3	1.58
Gerunds	10	2.38	2	0.88	1	0.53
Conjunctions	1	0.24	7	3.07	2	1.05
Any/some	1	0.24	1	0.44	0	0
Word order	8	1.90	2	0.88	0	0
Word meanings	12	2.85	11	4.82	16	8.42
Subject-verb agreement	7	1.66	12	5.26	7	3.68
Incomplete sentences	29	6.89	23	10.01	29	15.30
Run-on sentences	7	1.66	10	4.39	4	2.11
Present simple	0	0	1	0.44	0	0
Past simple	3	0.71	0	0	2	1.05
Past continuous	0	0	0	0	2	1.05
Future simple	0	0	1	0.44	0	0
Unparalleled verb tenses	0	0	0	0	2	1.05
Spelling	66	15.68	33	14.47	34	17.89
Capitalization	136	32.30	44	19.30	34	17.89
Punctuation	54	12.83	20	8.77	8	4.21
Total	421	100	228	100	190	100

the blog developed their writing skills a lot. They knew their weaknesses in writing on the blog.

*“After I receive feedback on the blog, I know my weaknesses in writing. I think nobody on earth can write without any errors at the first time he starts writing. We need to learn from mistakes first and use them to solve our weaknesses. Because the mistakes come from us, we can remember them easily. We will be more careful in writing.”*

The other interviewees claimed that they learned English grammatical rules better from the teacher’s suggestions given on the blog. They could read written pieces of their friends and use them as examples to develop their own work. The blog offered a good choice for writing practice. It saved on travel expenses. They did not have to go to the university to hand in their writing assignments, but they could post them on the blog when they stayed at home. It was as if they had their personal tutors at home. They stated that before being given a chance to practice writing on the blog, they had been afraid that they would make some errors when they were assigned to write anything in English, but with the blog, they felt free to write more than before.

*“Practicing writing on the blog helps me improve my writing skills. In the past, when I knew that I had to begin a sentence in English, I always worried that I would make some errors. I did not know what to write. However, when I wrote on the blog, there was a teacher who could correct the errors. This can enhance my willpower in English writing.”*

With respect to the characteristics of the blog, connection speed, typing codes before sending work, viewing their own written pieces, sizes and clearness of letters, colors, graphics, and web organization, all of them claimed that they were satisfied with these blog applications. The blog applications were standard and appropriate for them and the letter sizes were suitable.

*I am satisfied with them. I think the blog’s applications are appropriate for learning. The letters are not too big and not too small. They do not*

*disturb eyesight.”*

In terms of the suggestions, correction, and the period of time they had to wait before receiving feedback on the blog, 12 interviewees claimed that the suggestions they received were understandable. They pointed out that the teacher said directly what was right or wrong. This was easy for them to apply for use in their writing. Besides, they did not have to wait for a long time before they received feedback.

*“It is good for me. I do not have to wait for a long time. I can receive feedback about my piece of writing in a short time within one week. I think I learn a lot from the blog. I know what is right or wrong. The teacher always comes and corrects our mistakes on the blog. The teacher tells us directly about our mistakes. The suggestions are clear to understand. We can apply what we learn from the blog to use in our pieces of writing.”*

Moreover, one interviewee claimed that receiving the suggestions in English helped her to improve her English writing skills. She claimed that she could easily see the feedback given by the teacher by simply making the Internet connection.

*“The suggestions are in the satisfying level. We can get suggestions in English. I think this is good for me to improve my English writing skills. Also, it is easy for me to get feedback just only making an Internet connection.”*

According to the interview results, it can be said that the students were satisfied with and had positive attitudes toward using the blog as a free online space for practicing English writing skills. The blog offered a choice in practicing English writing. They could read written pieces of other people and use them as examples to develop their own written pieces. Learning from the blog saved on travel expenses. They did not have to see and discuss with the teacher face to face, but they could easily receive feedback from the teacher on the blog. The suggestions and comments given let them know the weaknesses in their writing as well as how to correct them. The blog also played the role of a personal tutor that increased their confidence to

write more without worries about their writing mistakes. Moreover, the characteristics of the blog, connection speed, typing codes before sending work, viewing their own written pieces, sizes and clearness of letters, colors, graphics, and web organization were suitable for their learning.

## DISCUSSION

The first research question addresses the writing improvement of students after practicing writing on the blog. The findings suggest that the students made significant improvements in their English writing skills. They created meaningful content within well-organized paragraphs and used correct punctuation and grammatical features in their last written pieces that were better than their previous pieces. In addition, from the first to the last written pieces, their writing errors were reduced from 421 errors, to 228 errors, and to 190 errors, respectively. Some grammatical errors, such as possessive determiners, pronouns, use of 'any' and 'some', and word order were not found in their last written pieces. Similar to the present study, Fageeh (2011) carried out a study with 50 fourth-year students of the English Department, College of Languages and Translation, King Khalid University in Abha, Saudi Arabia. Based on the post-test results, it was found that the mean score of the experimental group ( $\bar{X} = 40.84$ ) who practiced writing on the blog was significantly higher than the control group ( $\bar{X} = 28.88$ ) who received lecture discussions in the classroom. This suggests that the students who practiced writing on the blog showed a greater improvement in their English writing skills than the control group who received lecture discussions in the classroom ( $t = 13.222, p < .001$ ).

Thus, it can be said that blogs can be used as a free online space for students to practice their English writing skills. However, blogs are not always the best choice, since the students in this study still made a greater number of errors, such as incomplete sentences, word meanings, auxiliary

verbs, transitive and intransitive verbs, relative pronouns, and past simple tenses in their last written pieces. Among the errors found, one half (auxiliary verbs, transitive and intransitive verbs, and relative pronouns) are local errors while the other half (incomplete sentences, word meanings, and past simple tense) are global errors.

According to Ferris (2002), local errors are minor errors that do not violate the meaning of communication whereas global errors are types of errors that cause misinterpretations of the contents, ideas, or whatever the writer wants to communicate with the reader. As found in this study, incomplete sentences resulted from the omission of verbs and subjects, such as "*After that, have breakfast at 7.30 am.*" and "*They taekwondo.*" as well as incorrect uses of word meanings, such as "*After class graduation, I will practice sports.*" prevent the reader from comprehending the text. Meanwhile, incorrect uses of the past simple tense can bring about time confusion, such as "*I usually played basketball everyday.*" As a matter of fact, when we consider this matter, we can see that there are some possible reasons that affect a number of errors. One of the factors is writing mistakes. About half of the errors found in the last written pieces on the blog resulted from mistakes. For example, "*There are many new things that I can learn and join on campus. There are many challenging things. I can make many new friends here. They are very friendly. Sometimes I do homework with them. However, I feel so tired. This is because I have to study 13 classes this semcster [spelling]. I need to get up at 7.15 am every morning. After that, have breakfast at 7.30 am [incomplete sentence: no subject]. I like to eat fried rice. After class, I need to practice sports. I go to sleep 02.30 pm [no preposition]. To sum up, even though my life on campus is not easy, I love to stay and study here.*" From this example, the student wrote meaningful sentences in the paragraph, but it seems that he made a spelling error and forgot to insert a verb and a preposition, all of which may have originated from mistakes and not from errors.

As for the other students who actually made errors, the researchers believed that the increased number of errors possibly came from their limited knowledge of the English language because all of the participants involved in this study came from the lowest English language proficiency group. All of them had recorded an O-NET (Ordinary National Education Testing) score in English of less than 45 points. Consequently, it is not easy for them to improve their writing skills in only a short time. Discussing the same problem, Loewen and Erlam (2008) found that 31 elementary level students at a language school in Auckland, New Zealand did not make a greater improvement in using English regular past tenses after receiving corrective feedback through online meaning-focused tasks. They concluded that such a failure resulted from the fact that the students involved in the study were only beginners. Moreover, they also had very low scores (less than 43 percent) in the pre-test.

The second research question addresses the students' attitudes toward using the blog as a free online space for practicing English writing skills. The interview results show that the students had positive attitudes toward the blog. They claimed that they could use the blog as their personal tutor. The feedback given from the teacher was clear and easy to understand. In addition, they could use many written pieces on the blog as the examples to develop their own work. They were satisfied with the web quality factors—connection speed, typing codes before sending work, viewing their own written pieces, sizes and clearness of letters, colors, graphics, and web organization—all of which contributed to English writing practice. All in all, it can be said that the students were satisfied with practicing English writing on the blog. As a matter of fact, blogs are online tools and in regard to previous studies, many scholars have stated that giving online feedback has more advantages than face-to-face feedback. McGovern (2004) claims that online feedback offers flexible hours, motivates student to be more responsible, saves on travel

expenses, and encourages students to stay connected with the teacher more than in face-to-face classroom discussions; students can discuss and receive feedback online, anytime, and anywhere. They are stimulated to control their own learning. They are given more opportunities to contact the teacher. Moreover, as evidenced by prior research, Wang and Woo (2007) conducted a study with 24 students enrolled in a Postgraduate Diploma in Education program at the National Institute of Education of Singapore, where based on the students' reflective essays, they claimed that it was more convenient to have discussions and receive feedback online. It encouraged them to express their opinions more than in face-to-face classroom discussions. However, in respect to authenticity, face-to-face classroom discussions seemed to be more real than online discussions because they could see the facial expressions of the other interlocutors.

As presented in this study and previous research results, it can be said that blogs can be used as a free online space for EFL students to practice writing skills. The blog used in the present study somewhat helped students make improvements in their writing skills and build positive attitudes in language learning. However, the blog is not always the best choice, since the students still made a greater number of some writing errors in their last written pieces.

## CONCLUSION

This study explored the effects of using the blog as a free online space for practicing English writing skills of Thai EFL students. To gain in-depth information about how the blog could help students improve their English writing skills, the students' attitudes toward the blog were also investigated. The results can be summarized as follows:

- 1) It was found that the mean scores of the students' 100-word written pieces on the blog were different at a significant level ( $F = 190.073, p < .001$  calculated from multivariate tests and  $F = 132.151,$

$p < .001$  calculated from tests of within-subjects effects). The participants' average mean score was higher in their last written pieces ( $\bar{X} = 40.19$ ,  $SD = 3.76$ ).

2) On the whole, the students' writing errors found in the blog were reduced in their last written pieces. However, there was still an increase in some writing errors, such as incomplete sentences, relative pronouns, word meanings, auxiliary verbs, transitive and intransitive verbs, and past simple tense.

3) The average mean scores in content, punctuation, paragraph organization, and grammar rules and usage increased from 9.13, 6.94, 6.56, and 8.44 in the first written pieces, to 8.56, 7.19, 7.06, and 8.88 in the second written pieces, and to 13.13, 7.94, 8.75, and 10.38, respectively, in the third written pieces.

4) The students had positive attitudes toward the use of the blog for practicing English writing. They could easily receive feedback from the teacher on the blog which aided them in correcting their writing. The blog itself also had useful characteristics which contributed to writing practice.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1) To encourage the students' interest in writing, instead of assigning topics concerned with their lives as was done in this study, future researchers can post some controversial issues on the blog on which students can express their written opinions. However, the students in the study should have good language abilities so that they will be able to critically discuss the issues.

2) Future researchers can use a random sampling method. With this method, all members of the population will have an equal chance to be involved in the study. Such a sample would be representative of the population, so it is reasonable to generalize the results obtained from the sample. Initially, the researchers can make a numbered list of the population in the table. Then, they can

randomly select from the table until they obtain the desired sample size of the population. The researchers also need to consider budget, complexity of the research design, minimum acceptable size, and variability of the population.

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