Exploring Solutions to Decrease Taiwanese University Lower Achievers' English Writing Difficulties via Blogging

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore solutions to decrease Taiwanese university lower achievers' English writing difficulties by using blogs. A group of non-English majors with a lower level of English proficiency at a national university in eastern Taiwan was divided into the low-rated (LG) and high-rated (HG) groups. They used blogs as the writing platform, and the writing scores collected in the pre-test and post-test, as well as the interview information, contributed to the data source. The participants' writing scores were analysed by applying Wilcoxon signed-rank test and Mann-Whitney *U*-test while the interview information was used to support the quantitative results. The research findings indicate the use of blogs significantly improved the students' writing performance in the LG due to their acceptability of their peers' writing samples, active participation in blogging, and gaining more skills from peers. In addition, how the affordance of blogs decreased their English writing difficulties is also discussed subsequently. The research concludes blogs could enhance Taiwanese university lower achievers' English writing competence and lessen their writing difficulties because the authentic communication in blogs fostered their positive writing attitudes which further facilitated their writing performance.

Keywords: EFL lower achievers, writing difficulties, blogging

Introduction

English writing is particularly difficult for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students, especially for lower achievers who usually have lower levels of learning motivation and interests (Yunus, Salehi, & Embi, 2012). In Taiwan, an EFL learning context, students have often thought writing the most difficult and the least important language skill (Chia, Johnson, Chia, & Olive, 1999; Chu, 2016) because writing seems to be impractical to many of them, which diminishes their learning interests (Wang, 2004). Chen (2002) therefore proposed six categories to explain Taiwanese university students' writing difficulties, including the problem in grammar, difficulty to use proper and precise words, an insufficient amount of vocabulary, different writing organisation in English, writing in Chinglish, and inadequate ideas.

To improve Taiwanese students' English writing competence, many researchers (Chang, 2016; Liaw & John, 2001; Lin, Li, Hung, & Huang 2014; Shang, 2017; Shih, 2011; Yang, 2018; Yeh, 2014) have adopted computer technology in their writing classrooms because digital literacy ability has caught many researchers' and practitioners' attention in recent decades (Zheng et al., 2017), and more and more students nowadays

rely on online spaces to share their writing both in and out of schools (Curwood et al., 2013). In this study, the researcher tried to investigate if the application of blogs revamped Taiwanese lower achievers' English writing performance and understand how its affordance decreased their writing difficulties. Blogs were applied because they provide pure learning environments for students to practise writing (Dizon & Thanyawatpokin, 2018) and offer authentic interactive opportunities for language learners (Zheng et al., 2017). Through blogging, students may find writing interactive, practical, and useful which may increase their sense of the practicality of writing and further decrease their writing difficulties. Consequently, this study aimed at investigating the effects of blogs on Taiwanese university lower achievers' English writing performance and exploring solutions to respond to Chen's arguments about Taiwanese university students' writing difficulties.

Literature Review

EFL Students' Writing Difficulties

Among the four language skills, improving EFL students' writing ability is particularly important due to its complexity and recursiveness which are vital for their future academic and career needs (Chen et al., 2017). However, students have often thought writing the most difficult and the least important language skill (Chia et al., 1999; Chu, 2016), so they are relatively passive to practise it.

To improve EFL learners' writing abilities, studies have been conducted to understand how it is difficult for EFL learners. Yoon (2008) interviewed six non-native English speakers and found that language issues and expressions, different organisations and cultures, content knowledge, and rhetorical concerns were the major difficulties while they were writing in English. Atay and Kurt (2006) investigated 85 in-service or prospective English teachers in Turkey to explore their writing anxiety, and the results indicated that writers' insufficient abilities to organise thoughts and to develop ideas were their primary English writing difficulties. Chen (2002) conducted a study to examine Taiwanese university students' English writing problems among 28 students. She finally proposed six categories in the study, including the problem in grammar, difficulty to use proper and precise words, an insufficient amount of vocabulary, different writing organisation in English, writing in Chinglish, and inadequate ideas.

Other studies have also explained why English writing is difficult for EFL learners. For students, EFL writing is never an easy task because students not only have to generate and organise writing ideas in English, but they need to deliver their thoughts in English effectively (Lee, 2017). As for instructors, it is difficult to understand every student's specific needs, and teaching may be based on personal experience which would possibly deteriorate students' learning due to too many grammatical corrections in students' writing samples (Yeh, 2014). Therefore, the incorporation of explicit teaching and collaborative learning may decrease learners' writing difficulties and to increase their critical thinking ability (Aunurrahman et al., 2017).

EFL Blog Writing Classrooms

The emergence of the blog has made it purposeful in education because of its features of being user-friendly (Fageeh, 2011; Noytim, 2010), there being ease of use, and providing a collaborative learning environment in which learners can share and exchange their ideas with their peers and readers to enchant their learning, create their sense of belonging, and further facilitate their performance (Habul-Šabanović, 2015). Also, it is communicative, constructive, and collaborative in EFL writing education because learners can communicate with their peers to construct their language knowledge in a collaborative manner (Aydin, 2014).

Because of being able to facilitate students' writing activities both in and out of classrooms, a blog is a potential tool in developing students' writing ability in a variety of ways (Kung, 2018; Warschauer & Liaw, 2011). For example, writing in an EFL blogging community improves students' participation and interaction (Alsamadani, 2018), so students would develop their readership and ownership (Fageeh, 2011) which might lower their levels of writing pressure and anxiety and strengthen their writing motivation and confidence (Noytim, 2010). Moreover, students who have better attitudes toward blogging might have better perceptions toward English writing in general, so they might have better writing performance (Asoodar et al., 2016). Blogging is not merely a product-oriented process, but it is a process for writers and readers to think, draft, and review that make them think carefully and consider their social contexts during their writing process (Özdemira and Aydin, 2015).

The effects of blogs in writing education have been widely proved. Lin et al. (2014) investigated 57 English majors who were grouped in the control (paper-pencil instruction) and experimental (blog instruction) groups at a Taiwanese university in central Taiwan. After experimenting for 16 weeks with two 50-minute classes every week, the results in their study indicated that the students in the experimental group outperformed those in the other group because blogging significantly lowered the learners' writing anxiety. Arslan and Şahin-Kızıl (2010) examined the effects of blogs on 50 Turkish university students who were divided into the control and experimental groups to understand how they benefited from the blogging process. Their results pointed out that the participants' writing content and organisation had significant improvement in the experimental group, and this might be because they were able to share their work and retrieve others' anytime and anywhere in the blogging community where provided ubiquitous learning opportunities to students.

Therefore, the affordance of blogs in EFL writing classrooms is possible to enhance students' writing competence in both direct and indirect ways. That is blogs directly strengthen EFL students' writing performance by providing more language input via reading peers' written products, sharing ideas with peers, retrieving online information, and giving comments to each other. They also indirectly develop students' attitudes and affection toward writing through the process of communicating, interacting, and collaborating (Chang & Szanajda, 2016). Consequently, students would possibly reinforce their social, cognitive, and affective abilities in this independent and collaborative learning environment (Lee, 2017).

Although the impact of blogs has been vastly researched, how its application decreases Taiwanese lower achievers' English writing difficulties remains unclearly. To fully understand if the application of blogs benefits lower achievers' English writing performance, and how its affordance decreases their writing difficulties, two research questions (RQ) are proposed:

RQ1: Are there any significant differences in terms of the Taiwanese lower achievers' English writing performance in a blog-based writing classroom?

RQ2: How does the use of blogs decrease Taiwanese lower achievers' English writing difficulties?

Method

The Research Context

This study was conducted in a General English class at a national university in eastern Taiwan. The instructor of the course (the researcher in tandem) met the students once a week for two 50-minute classes every week (except for the national holidays) in two consecutive semesters in the 2017/2018 academic year. However, this course was not specifically designed for writing, so only one hour was used for the research purposes in this study.

The Participants

A total of 25 non-English majors from two engineering departments participated in this study. All the participants were divided into three groups of the low-rated with 10 students (LG), medium-rated with 7 students (MG), and high-rated with 8 students (HG) according to their results in the pre-test which was graded based on the English as a Second Language Composition Profile (ESLCP) (Hughey et al., 1983). However, the data in the MG was excluded from the data analysis to eliminate the level of ambiguity, so the researcher could make a clear comparison between the LG and HG whose writing performance had significant differences in the pre-test (Total score: $p = .000 < .05$, Content: $p = .000 < .05$, Organisation: $p = .001 < .05$, Vocabulary: $p = .002 < .05$, Language use: $p = .000 < .05$, Mechanics: $p = .000 < .05$).

Research Instruments

In this mixed-method study, the research instruments included written essays, the ESLCP, a blog space, *Blogger,* and semi-structured interviews. First, two written essays with an identical writing question were distributed to the participants before and after the treatment phase in the first and second semesters respectively, which served as the pre-test and post-test and were evaluated based on the ESLCP developed by Hughey et al. (1983). There are five evaluation criteria in the ESLCP, namely content (30%), organisation (20%), vocabulary (20%), language use (25%), and mechanics (5%). The researcher implemented this study by applying Blogger, an open free blog platform. The participants used their blogs by simply logging in their Google accounts which all of them had one, and its application was also easy due to its simple interface and there being user-friendly. Finally, the researcher adopted the interview questions from Chang's study (2016) because the research contexts were akin to each other, which would be suitable to suffice the research purposes in this study.

The Instructional Blog and Materials

The course instructor prepared all the teaching and learning materials and uploaded them to the instructional blog (Figure 1) which was used to deliver the teaching contents as well as manage the students' blogs. The teaching materials were mainly from two electronic books, *英語寫作滿分特訓*(Special training for a full score on English writing) and *英文寫作特訓班* (A guide to effective English writing) which were retrieved from the participants' university library. The books were chosen because of convenience and instructional purposes. First, the students did not have a book for English writing, so the use of an electronic version would be convenient for them if they needed more writing skills. Second, some writing samples suited the participants' writing ability in the selected books, so it would be easier to satisfy the instructional purposes in this study.

Figure 1
A sample of the instructional blog

A model article was provided.

Talent Shows: Inspiring Audiences And Helping Performers

The function and purpose of the paragraphs were explained after each paragraph.

I enjoy watching talent shows on television, and they have surged in popularity in recent years. Different nations throughout the world now have their own shows, and many of them are modeled after the U.S. television show *American Idol*.
(Introduction: to briefly describe what you are going to talk about in your writing)
The main purpose of the introductory paragraph is to interest your readers so that they will be more willing to read your writing sample.

The contents were analysed and highlighted in different colours.

(Body: based on performer's perspectives)
There are many reasons why I like talent shows. First, they give people a place to go to where they can show off the special things they do. Talent shows give people a reason to practice and perfect their act, and the professional panel of judges gives them advice and criticism about how to become better. Additionally, the shows can be vehicles that lead to a career in performance.

after the main idea, there come with supporting ideas....

(Body: based on audience's perspectives)
For audience members, talent shows can be quite inspiring, the shows feature people pursuing their dreams and trying to go from being unknown to famous. They let audience members see the fruits of the hard work that the performers have put into their art. The people also get to weigh their personal opinions with what they hear from the judges.

For these reasons, I think talent shows are a healthy form of entertainment, they provide benefits for both audiences and performers, leaving everyone satisfied in the end.
(Conclusion: to restate your opinions)

取自 *STEP BY STEP 英文寫作特訓班：誰說英文寫作很難！* (ISBN: 9789865776251)

Data Collection

The data was collected in two consecutive semesters in the 2017/2018 academic year at a national university in eastern Taiwan. Since all the participants were novice English writers, a descriptive essay that they also practised in class and on blogs was used

in the writing tests. Before distributing the writing test to the participants in the pre-test, the researcher explained the purposes of the study in detail. The students understood all the information they provided would be kept confidential and anonymous, and the data would be analysed and published. They also understood they could withdraw from the participation at any time without having any penalty, and their participation was voluntary.

Gao's (2012) instructional guideline of the process/genre approach (PGA) was applied in the class for two semesters. The instructor demonstrated and analysed a model paper on the instructional blog to the students who later discussed their ideas with their peers in class and imitated the writing structures in the model paper. However, all the participants were non-English majors and novice writers, so they formed a small group to write together to reduce their sense of anxiety and level of stress. They needed to post their group written work on their blogs (Figure 2) every week so that their peers from other groups and the instructor were able to review and comment. Reading the peers' posts and giving comments to each other were requested, and the researcher also tracked if they interacted on blogs and gave feedback to their peers. They then had to modify their essays based on the given comments and finalised their writing tasks by publishing their written work on their blogs. Finally, the researcher marked their finalised writing samples based on the ESLCP (Hughey et al., 1983). Owing to the time constraint, only one paragraph was conducted every week, so the participants spent five weeks completing a piece of the essay while following the teaching steps in the PGA mentioned above. In the end, the participants completed three pieces of writing samples in 15 weeks in two consecutive semesters. A timeline is provided in Table 1 to illustrate how the researcher conducted this study in two semesters.

Table 1
The timeline for data collection in two semesters

Semesters	Weeks	Tasks
I	1	Course Orientation
	2	Preparation
	3	Pre-test
	4	National Holiday
	5-9	1st Writing Task (5 classes: 1 class for 1 week)
	10-11	School Mid-term Exam
	12-16	2nd Writing Task (5 classes: 1 class for 1 week)
	17-18	School Final Exam
II	1	Course Orientation
	2-6	3rd Writing Task (5 classes: 1 class for 1 week)
	7	Post-test
	8-9	Interviews
	10-11	School Mid-term Exam
	12-	Data Analysis and Interpretation

The same writing test used in the pre-test was applied again in the post-test. To make sure the reliability, the participants did not receive any feedback after they completed their pre-test in the first semester. Finally, to understand how the students perceived blogging in their writing process, the researcher invited the students to take part in the interviews, and several students agreed to share their thoughts voluntarily. Two

volunteers who participated in the process actively from the two groups respectively were chosen for the semi-structured interviews in which their native language, Chinese, was used. Figure 3 demonstrates the whole instructional procedures, representing in solid-line boxes and the data collection procedures, representing in dotted-line boxes.

Figure 2
A sample of the student's blog

Talent Show (modified para 1+2-2)

12月 01, 2017

Talent show is a popular program all over the world. Such as The Super Idol, America's Got Talent and The Voice of China. People who have humor skill, and want to fight for their own stage can dream to realize. It's exciting for everybody because you may become a super star at once overnight.

The students had to modify the paragraph based on the comments they received and posted it again.

It's no denying that talent shows change the world. For many people, studying is the most important in the past. They supposed that the only way to get a well job is studying hard. However, it's totally changes these days. People accept to find the jobs if they equipped with great skills. By watching talent shows, people know how hard work those performers are. It's also a key to change the value of society.

The students had to write the paragraph based on the ideas they got from the in-class discussion and post it on the blog.

· 2017年12月2日 上午5:27
I love watching The Voice of China.
回覆

· 2017年12月3日 上午2:40
Great idea of talent show can change the value of society. I think it also helps the next generation to push the boundary of personal preferences and consider about the life question in a labour of love.
回覆

The students had to give their comments to their peers every week.

· 2017年12月3日 上午5:31
I think that studying isn't the only way to succeed, too.
回覆

· 2017年12月3日 上午7:24
作者已經移除這則留言。
回覆

· 2017年12月3日 上午7:28
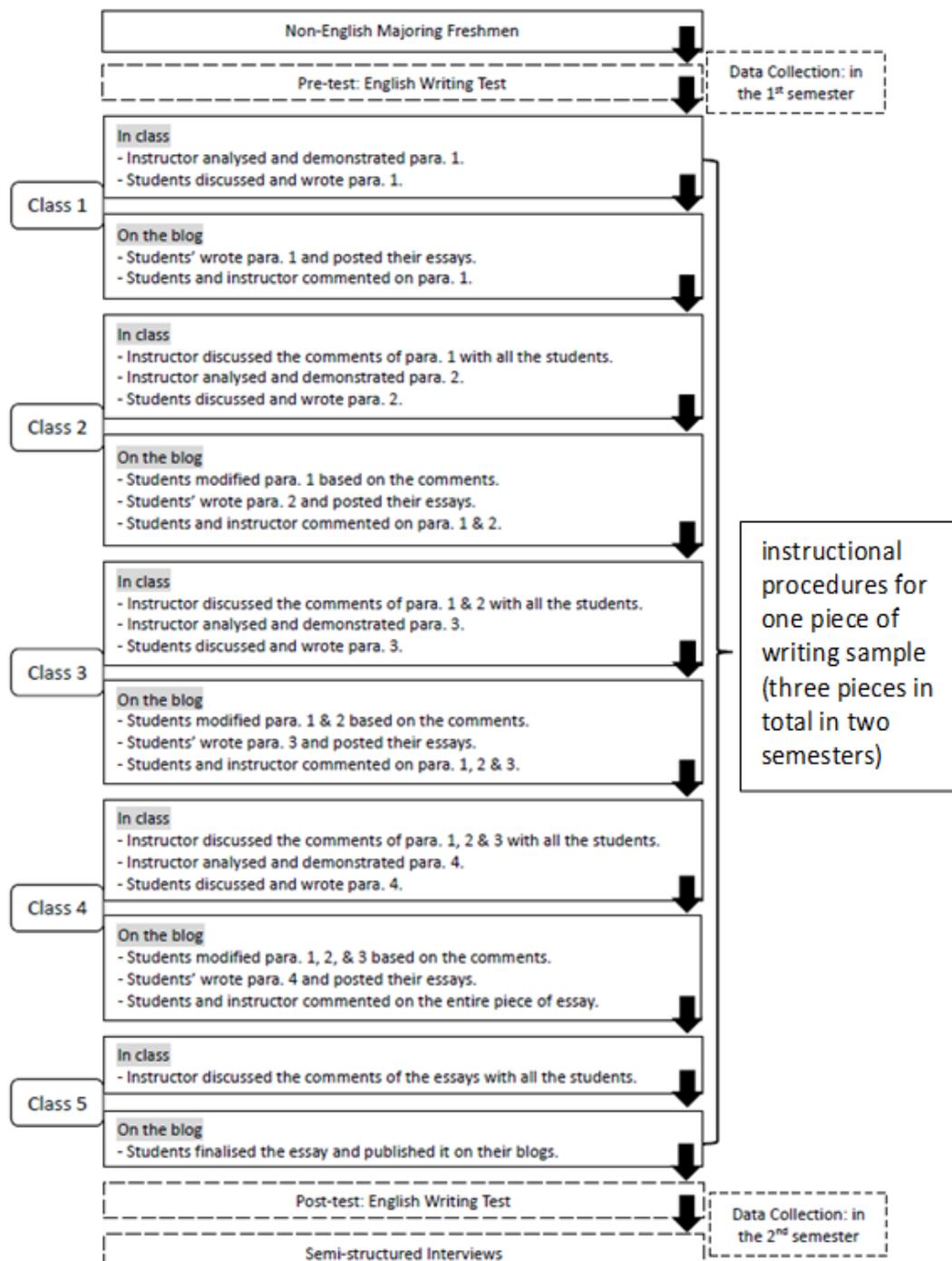I think skills and studying are important, studying can make skills better.
回覆

輸入您的留言...

Data Analysis

Because of having a small sample size, the application of non-parametric statistical methods is more appropriate than the use of parametric tests (Sasaki, 2000). Therefore, the researcher applied the Wilcoxon signed-rank test and Mann-Whitney U-test to

determine if there were any significant differences in terms of the participants' English writing performance in this study. The researcher utilised both the descriptive and inferential statistics to answer the RQs and used the interview information which was carefully transcribed, translated, and analysed by the researcher to support the quantitative results.

Figure 3
The process of data collection

In class	On the blog

Non-English Majoring Freshmen

Pre-test: English Writing Test — Data Collection: in the 1st semester

Class 1

In class
- Instructor analysed and demonstrated para. 1.
- Students discussed and wrote para. 1.

On the blog
- Students' wrote para. 1 and posted their essays.
- Students and instructor commented on para. 1.

Class 2

In class
- Instructor discussed the comments of para. 1 with all the students.
- Instructor analysed and demonstrated para. 2.
- Students discussed and wrote para. 2.

On the blog
- Students modified para. 1 based on the comments.
- Students' wrote para. 2 and posted their essays.
- Students and instructor commented on para. 1 & 2.

Class 3

In class
- Instructor discussed the comments of para. 1 & 2 with all the students.
- Instructor analysed and demonstrated para. 3.
- Students discussed and wrote para. 3.

On the blog
- Students modified para. 1 & 2 based on the comments.
- Students' wrote para. 3 and posted their essays.
- Students and instructor commented on para. 1, 2 & 3.

Class 4

In class
- Instructor discussed the comments of para. 1, 2 & 3 with all the students.
- Instructor analysed and demonstrated para. 4.
- Students discussed and wrote para. 4.

On the blog
- Students modified para. 1, 2, & 3 based on the comments.
- Students' wrote para. 4 and posted their essays.
- Students and instructor commented on the entire piece of essay.

Class 5

In class
- Instructor discussed the comments of the essays with all the students.

On the blog
- Students finalised the essay and published it on their blogs.

instructional procedures for one piece of writing sample (three pieces in total in two semesters)

Post-test: English Writing Test — Data Collection: in the 2nd semester

Semi-structured Interviews

Reliability and Validity

To fully understand the evaluation criteria in the ESLCP, the researcher firstly perused the descriptions in every category. He also did a pilot test on 10 students' writing samples collected from the other class before marking the participants' written essays. To make sure the reliability of his marking, the researcher conducted the test-retest reliability, and the results show significantly correlated between the two sets of scores presented in Table 2, so the researcher was able to give stable scores.

Table 2
The test-retest reliability on the students' writing samples in the pilot test

	Content	Organisation	Vocabulary	Language use	Mechanics	Total
Spearman's Correlation Coefficient	.878**	.833**	.859**	.966**	.773**	.948**
Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.003	.001	.000	.009	.000
N	10	10	10	10	10	10

Furthermore, the ESLCP has been widely used in the ESL/EFL field for nearly forty years, and it is one of the best-known evaluation criteria in English writing (Lin et al., 2014). Also, there are four levels with detailed descriptions to confirm the students' writing ability in all five categories (Arslan & Şahin-Kızıl, 2010), so it is an appropriate tool for the researcher to measure the participants' writing competence. As for the interview questions, the researcher borrowed those in Chang's study (2016) in which he confirmed the validity by consulting the experts as well as interviewing the students in his pilot study.

Results and Discussion

Together with both the quantitative and qualitative results, this section presents the research findings to answer the RQs in this study.

RQ1: Are there any significant differences in terms of the Taiwanese lower achievers' English writing performance in a blog-based writing classroom?

The first RQ was to investigate if the application of blogs developed the participants' writing performance between the LG and HG. The results indicate that all the mean scores increased in both two groups (see Tables 3 and 4), but there were significant differences in all items in the LG while there was only one in the HG (see Tables 5 and 6). Moreover, there were changes in terms of their writing ability between the two groups in the post-test (see Tables 7 and 8).

As shown in Tables 3 and 4, the descriptive statistics demonstrate the participants' writing scores on every item were higher in the post-test in both two groups. However, the results extracted from the Wilcoxon signed-rank test presented in Tables 5 and 6 show that there were significant differences in all items in the LG, but there was only a

significant difference (language use) in the HG. The possible reason for the difference between the two groups in the inferential statistics could be the students' acceptability of their peers' writing samples. Andy (a pseudonym, in the LG) stated, "*I thought we could get more writing ideas by reading others' writing samples.*" Contrarily, Lisa (a pseudonym, in the HG) mentioned, "*I did not understand what they* (their peers) *wrote about and thought if they were correct or not. ...What I got the most was from the instructor's comments. I might not adopt my peers' comments, but I completely trusted the instructor's feedback.*" The researcher argued being skeptical would possibly form an invisible gate to keep learners from gaining more ideas or skills from their peers, and they might choose certain peers' entries to read intentionally. On the other hand, if the students had higher acceptability to others' entries, they would obtain more writing knowledge and skills regardless of the quality of the writing samples. Through the reading process, students will be able to learn something they may not know from more competent peers and guide less competent peers when they find some mistakes in their posts, which strengthens their communicative, constructive, and collaborative writing abilities (Aydin, 2014). Because of being interactive with peers, blogs might indirectly increase students' writing competence by developing their attitudes and affection (Chang & Szanajda, 2016). Consequently, the results of the Mann-Whitney U-test presented in Tables 7 reveal that there were significant differences between the HG and LG before having the treatment. Nevertheless, there was no significant difference between the two groups after having the treatment presented in Table 8.

After having blogged for 15 weeks in two semesters, the participants in the LG seemed to benefit from it more than the students in the HG did according to the results shown in Tables 7 and 8. The differences between the pre-test and post-test explain that the students' English writing competence in LG had significant improvement. The possible reasons would be the participants' active participation and interaction in the LG. Blogging improves students' participation and interaction (Alsamadani, 2018) which might lower their levels of writing pressure and anxiety and enrich their writing motivation, confidence as well as autonomy (Noytim, 2010; Sun, 2010). Andy mentioned, "*In order to complete the assignment, we wrote our story unrestrainedly and imaginatively .... Therefore, I thought we could get more writing ideas by reading others' writing samples.*" The results in this study also confirmed Arslan and Şahin-Kızıl's (2010) results that sharing in a blogging community improved students' writing content and organization. Andy further explained, "*The use of blogs was interesting* (affective)*, and we could discuss together* (social)*. Also, we could learn more grammar and vocabulary from others* (cognitive)." This echoes Lee's (2017) arguments that blogging provided an independent and collaborative learning process in which students would corroborate their social, cognitive, and affective abilities. Also, they had more interaction with their instructor while reading others' entries. For example, "*.... I would read the teacher's comments and feedback. Then, I realise and remember those mistakes that I did not know.*" Consequently, the process of reading and giving comments improves students' participation and interaction while blogging (Alsamadani, 2018), and they are learning by reflecting what they have already known and learning by exploring what they can learn thereafter. In other words, they not only explore writing knowledge while reading others' entries and giving comments to others, but they also reflect their writing abilities during the blogging process.

In addition, the researcher further argued that the peer effect might be another factor

that brought the differences between the two groups. Although all the students formed a small group to discuss and complete the writing tasks with their group members, the students who were labelled in the LG may have better models to follow and have more competent peers to consult. However, for the participants in the HG, the instructor might be the only person they trusted as mentioned by Lisa (the interview subject in the HG), so they might have fewer models to follow and fewer peers to consult which might confine their improvement. In other words, the exploring and reflecting processes had limited effects in the HG.

Table 3

The descriptive statistics of writing performance in the LG

	Pre-test		Post-test	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Total Score	45.13	4.79	58.13	9.61
Content	15.75	1.39	19.38	1.77
Organisation	9.00	1.20	11.75	1.49
Vocabulary	9.63	1.19	12.00	1.85
Language Use	8.88	1.96	13.25	2.49
Mechanics	1.88	.35	3.00	.93

Table 4

The descriptive statistics of writing performance in the HG

	Pre-test		Post-test	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Total Score	58.80	3.55	63.80	9.74
Content	19.40	1.35	20.10	2.64
Organisation	12.70	1.42	12.80	2.53
Vocabulary	11.60	1.17	12.60	1.71
Language Use	12.00	.94	14.90	2.85
Mechanics	3.10	.32	3.40	.70

Table 5

The Wilcoxon signed-rank test for the writing performance in the LG

	Total Score	Content	Organisation	Vocabulary	Language Use	Mechanics
Z	-2.380	-2.371	-2.388	-2.214	-2.524	-2.124
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.017	.018	.017	.027	.012	.034

Significance level at .05

Table 6

The Wilcoxon signed-rank test for the writing performance in the HG

	Total Score	Content	Organisation	Vocabulary	Language Use	Mechanics
Z	-1.683	-.953	-.537	-1.556	-2.419	-1.342
Asymp. Sig.	.092	.341	.591	.120	.016	.180

Significance level at .05

Table 7
The Mann-Whitney U-test for the pre-test in the two groups

	Total Score	Content	Organisation	Vocabulary	Language Use	Mechanics
Mann-Whitney U	.000	.000	2.00	6.00	1.50	.000
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.001	.002	.000	.000

Significance level at .05

Table 8
The Mann-Whitney U-test for the post-test in the two groups

	Total Score	Content	Organisation	Vocabulary	Language Use	Mechanics
Mann-Whitney U	25.0	27.5	24.5	34.5	28.5	30.0
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.181	.261	.162	.613	.298	.326

Significance level at .05

RQ2: How does the use of blogs decrease Taiwanese lower achievers' English writing difficulties?

The second RQ was to respond to Chen's (2002) argument about Taiwanese university students' writing difficulties. Although Chen explained the results in her study could not be representative due to the small sample size, the researcher argues that those problems generally exist in EFL writing classrooms. For example, Adas & Bakir (2013) pointed out that run-on sentences, Arabish, punctuation, and writing organisation are difficult for Arabic speakers. Chou (2011) found out that insufficient writing content, interference of the native language, and deficient knowledge in grammar and sentence structures are the problems for Taiwanese students.

To understand how to decrease Taiwanese students' writing difficulties proposed by Chen (2002), the results of this study suggest that the application of blogs might be effective because it enriched the participants' writing contents through reading peers' entries which also explains how the problems of inadequate ideas could be solved. Arslan and Şahin-Kızıl (2010) proved that EFL learners' writing content would become better if they have more audiences in a blogging community. Owing to being public to everyone, students may understand their instructor is no longer the only reader (Vurdien, 2013), and their sense of readership and ownership may be developed while blogging (Fageeh, 2011; Noytim, 2010) which is confirmed by the interview subject, Andy (a student in the LG), who mentioned, *"Blog is an open platform for everybody ...."*

Because of the features of being public in blogs and creating students' sense of readership and ownership, the students would treat their writing more seriously before posting on their blogs and took care of their writing quality more than before. This finding was also akin to Fageeh's (2011) and Vurdien's (2013) results. Due to considering their readers (peers), the students would be more proactive and interactive in the blogging community, and they might pay more attention to their writing assignments by retrieving online information, referring to the writing samples, and following the instructor's online guidance, so they would understand more about the writing organisation consciously and subconsciously.

The blogging process also possibly solve the participants' problem of insufficient amount of vocabulary and difficulty to use proper and precise words. Andy explained, "*If I had time, I would try my best to read every blog entry. .... I would read the teacher's comments and feedback .... realise and remember those mistakes that I did not know .... we could learn more grammar and vocabulary from others.*" This study argues that although the students were writing on the same topic, there remained different points of view among different writers who would use different vocabulary to construct their essays or use different vocabulary to describe similar ideas. Through reading their peers' writing samples and the instructor's comments, the students had more opportunities to learn more vocabulary while having the instructors' appropriate and accurate guidance on blogs. The result in this study, therefore, suggests that blogs help students learn more vocabulary and writing skills from their instructor and peers, which is also confirmed by Ducate and Lomicka (2008).

As mentioned earlier, instructors are no longer the only source of knowledge in a blogging community, but students have more opportunities to learn from their peers, online information, and even self-reflection which may increase their grammatical ability simultaneously. Blogging would be more interesting to learners because they are learning via genuine interaction and communication that develop their learning engagement, autonomy, and motivation (Lee, 2016; Sun, 2010; Vurdien, 2013). They would spend more time reading others' writing samples, providing ideas and feedback to each other, reflecting instructor's comments, and looking for online information in this collaborative learning community (Chang & Szanajda, 2016) in which they would possibly improve their grammatical ability consciously and subconsciously in this scaffolding learning process.

In addition, this research found the problem of writing in Chinglish is related to the students' performance of their writing content, organisation, vocabulary, and language use. The causes of Chinglish include the influence of Chinese thinking patterns, insufficient English input, and inadequate English writing practice (Wang & Wang, 2012). To solve this problem, using specific and practical instruction is possible to develop students' writing potential and creativity and lead to more native-like writing products (Li & Zhang, 2015). As mentioned earlier, the application of blogs would increase EFL university lower achievers' writing performance on the content, organisation, vocabulary, and language use which is a more practical way to stimulate their writing potential and creativity and ultimately improve their problem of writing in Chinglish.

Finally, Table 9 below presents how the use of blogs could decrease Taiwanese university lower achievers' English writing difficulties by integrating Hughey's et al. (1983) ESLCP and blog writing to respond to Chen's (2002) argument about Taiwanese university students' writing problems.

Table 9

Solutions to decrease Taiwanese university lower achievers' English writing difficulties

ESLCP components	Solutions found in this study	Chen's argument
Content	The use of blogs provides more sources for students collecting writing ideas from teachers, peers, and online information. This creates their sense of readership and ownership, so they will take more care of their writing quality.	- Inadequate ideas - Writing in Chinglish
Organisation	Retrieving online information, referring to the writing samples, and following instructor's online guidance are likely to enhance students' understanding on English writing organisation because they may be more proactive and interactive in a blogging community.	- Different writing organisation in English - Writing in Chinglish
Vocabulary	Students will learn different vocabulary from their peers and understand its usage from their instructor while blogging, so they are not only able to acquire more vocabulary, but they learn how to use it appropriately and accurately.	- Difficulty to use proper & precise words - Insufficient amount of vocabulary - Writing in Chinglish
Language use	Owing to being exposed to English more, students can learn a variety of grammatical knowledge from different sources. Although their peers may make mistakes, they could explore knowledge and reflect their understanding through the blogging process.	- The problem of grammatical ability - Writing in Chinglish

Pedagogical Implication

Pedagogically, the researcher suggests EFL writing instructors adopt blogs in their writing classrooms to improve their students' writing ability directly and indirectly as suggested by Chang and Szanajda (2016). To directly develop lower achievers' English writing ability, instructors should encourage students' constructive online communication and interaction. It is found that the students sometimes left complimentary words like "Your writing is good." on their peers' blogs, which did not improve their writing ability. Therefore, asking students to give "real comments" is necessary. To do this, creating an evaluation form based on the marking criteria and guiding the students using the form may help students understand what kind of comments may be useful to their peers. Moreover, instructors should actively monitor students' online communication and give feedback on students' blogs as frequently as possible. Students will be more participatory if there is a 'monitor mechanism' and they usually look forward to seeing their

instructor's comments after posting their entries on blogs. Also, to enhance students' writing competence indirectly, encouraging students to write collaboratively is likely to effectively facilitate their social, cognitive, and affective abilities (Lee, 2017) which may further increase their learning engagement, autonomy, and motivation (Lee, 2016; Sun, 2010; Vurdien, 2013). Blogging may lower students' levels of writing pressure and anxiety (Noytim, 2010; Sun, 2010) because it is a more interesting and relaxing way to practise English writing than paper-pencil writing.

Limitation of the Study and Suggestions for Future Research

Notwithstanding the encouraging results, there remain some constraints in this study. First, only one class of students was recruited, so the number of the participants was small and there was no control group. To generalise the research findings, having more participants and having a control group are suggested. Second, only the instructor marked the participants' written tests, so inviting another experienced writing instructor to avoid bias is recommended. Third, recruiting more interview subjects to get a wider range of opinions in further research is suggested. Finally, the researcher did not discuss the item of "mechanics" in the ESLCP. To understand its influence on EFL students' writing performance, looking into its effect in future studies is suggested.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore solutions to decrease Taiwanese university lower achievers' English writing difficulties by using blogs. The research findings in this study indicate that the affordance of blogs significantly improved the participants' English writing performance in the LG due to their acceptability of their peers' writing samples, active participation, and interaction in blogging, and gaining more skills from their peers. It is found that reading the peers' writing samples would develop their writing ability regardless of the writing quality because the students could explore new writing skills and reflect their writing problems during the process. Their active participation and interaction also facilitated their performance which reinforced their social, cognitive, and affective abilities in this independent and collaborative learning environment (Lee, 2017). Asoodar et al. (2016) suggested students who have better attitudes toward blogging would have better perceptions toward English writing in general, and they may have better writing performance accordingly. In addition, the role of peers was an important factor in their blogging process in which the students in the LG had more models and resources than the students in the HG, so their significant improvement might be due to having more competent peers to work together in their blogging community.

After understanding how blogs improved the participants' writing performance, this research, therefore, proposed possible solutions to decrease EFL lower achievers' writing difficulties. Because of the feature of being public in blogs, students have more models to follow and learn. They can not only learn from their instructors and online information, but their peers also support their learning a lot in a blogging process because students gain more writing ideas from peers to enrich their contents, understand writing organisation through online communication, expand their vocabulary from reading their

peers' entries, and explore grammatical knowledge and reflect their ability via online interaction.

This research concludes that blogging provides flexibility and mobility to Taiwanese university lower achievers, so they can benefit from this independent and collaborative learning process. The affordance of blogs is likely to diminish students' negative perceptions toward writing, such as, being as the most difficult and the least important language skill (Chia et al., 1999; Chu, 2016) or impractical language skill (Wang, 2004), and finally stimulate their learning engagement, autonomy, and motivation. Above all, the incorporation of explicit teaching and collaborative learning may decrease learners' writing difficulties and to increase their critical thinking ability (Aunurrahman et al., 2017).

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