The Use of Scaffolding Technique via Facebook in Improving Descriptive Writing Among ESL Learners

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ABSTRACT

Learners today anticipate some form of blended instruction using technology. This study investigated the effectiveness of scaffolding writing using Facebook in a blended learning ESL class. A qualitative study was chosen to gather data from the subjects from a rural secondary school in Malaysia. The subjects were divided into experimental and control groups. The study then continued for 12 weeks beginning with a pre-test for both groups. The experimental group (blended learning class) went through traditional instruction in the classroom and scaffolding using Facebook after school hours. The control group went through only traditional classroom instruction. A post-test was administered at the end of 14 weeks to determine the effects of the treatment on the experimental group. All essays written by the participants in both groups in the pre-test and post-test were examined in order to see the difference in the ability to produce descriptive patterns. The findings revealed that the participants favoured the use of blended learning as a learning method compared to mere traditional strategy. They also opined that scaffolding-using Facebook enabled them to learn better and improve their writing process and writing performance. Content analysis on the essays written by participants revealed a marked improvement among the experimental group. The implications of this study suggest that Facebook or any online platform should be integrated in the teaching and learning of writing in the ESL classroom.

Keywords: Blended learning; descriptive writing; Facebook; ESL learners; scaffolding

INTRODUCTION

Scaffolding in learning is the gradual removal of a teacher's support which is given through modelling, instruction, feedback and questioning. These supports are given in view of getting the child to perform successfully by slowly transferring autonomy, little by little, to the child. Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) led to the birth of scaffolding instruction (Rachel 2002). In defining ZPD, Raymond (2000) states that the distance between what children can do by themselves and what they can achieve with the assistance of a more knowledgeable person is called the ZPD. By scaffolding teaching, a teacher provides individualized support based on the learner's ZPD (Chang, Chen & Sung 2002). Prior knowledge and internalization of new information is facilitated by the scaffolding provided by the more knowledgeable party. According to Olson and Pratt (2000), the activities provided in scaffolding instruction are just beyond the level of what learners can do on their own. Bransford, Brown and Cocking (2000) further elaborate by saying that the more knowledgeable party, usually a peer or teacher, provides the scaffolds so that learners are able to accomplish the tasks that they could otherwise not complete. This way, the learners are helped to move through their ZPD.

According to Holton and Clarke (2006) scaffolding can be divided into two aspects. The first one is *agency* and the next is *domain*. There are three *agency* scaffolds which are: *expert scaffolding*, *reciprocal scaffolding* and *self-scaffolding*. The scaffold provided by a teacher is *expert scaffolding*. On the other hand, a scaffold provided by a student working in a

group either face-to-face or online is *reciprocal scaffolding*. Finally, *self-scaffolding* is when a learner is in a situation where he or she is able to scaffold his/her own self. Under the *domain* aspect, there are two further categories which are *conceptual scaffolding* and *heuristic scaffolding*. *Conceptual scaffolding* is where the teacher provides conceptual understanding and development while *heuristic scaffolding* on the other hand is where the teacher provides the multiple ways to solve a problem in the learning process. In this study, the three types of *agency* scaffolds i.e. *expert scaffolding*, *reciprocal scaffolding* and *self-scaffolding* were utilised as scaffolding strategies to enhance the writing ability of students via the use of *Facebook* in a blended learning ESL class.

The use of blended learning (learning using both the traditional method and technology) promotes social interactions among learners and teachers and also facilitates the L2 writing process and could also improve writing. By using blended learning, learners are encouraged to argue, interact and debate with each other. These acts allow learners to mediate, reflect and pool resources in the process of knowledge building (Jill 2009). The problems faced by L2 learners in writing can be helped by collaboration activities in blended learning. Along with the development of information and communications technology, the use of computers and the Internet has started to play an increasingly important role in education. Computer supported collaborative learning has become an innovation to improve teaching and learning (Järvelä, Hakkarainen, Lipponen & Lehtinen 2000). Previous research results generally show that learners are more willing to collaborate and are more capable of helping one another to achieve better results if they are allowed to engage in an online collaborative learning environment (Abdul Hameed 2015).

Hayes (1996) suggests that writing is a communicative act, which requires a social context and medium. A good writing environment, thus, has to have a social context, an audience, and other texts the writers may read while writing. In this study the social constructivist theory (Vygostsky 1978) is undoubtedly in line with the scaffolding strategies through *Facebook* where the online activities allow real world interaction and engagement between learners. Therefore, through engagement and collaboration, learners construct knowledge. The constructivist approach relies much on challenging projects involving both learners and teachers coupled with experts in the learning community. The goal of the constructivist is to foster learning communities that are closely woven into real world collaboration. This collaboration, when done authentically, allows for participants to see problems in different perspectives and they are able to solve problems through a shared understanding. In blended learning, the process of knowledge building is shared by members working collaboratively. Warshauer (1997), found that online learning enhances language input and output. The synchronous and asynchronous discussion in the online learning motivates the learning process reciprocally. Good descriptive writing uses precise language; It does not simply use general adjectives, nouns, and passive verbs. It uses specific adjectives and nouns and strong action verbs to give life to the picture one is trying to paint in the reader's mind (Schaeffer 2010). Good writers will always *show* and not only *tell*. An example is: *The girl is pretty*. Only telling *The girl is pretty*, would not be sufficient as readers will argue about the statement. A good writer will go a step further by showing how the girl is pretty by using specific nouns, verbs and strong action words. With nouns, readers will be able to see and with verbs, they will be able to feel. Thus the same description *The girl is pretty* could be described in this way: *The girl is very pretty. Her dark brown eyes gazed at me incessantly*. By having to work collaboratively and from getting the support from the learning community, the students would be able to improve the quality descriptive writings.

The poor writing skills among both first and second language learners are due to the complexities of the writing process (Siti Hamin Stapa & Abdul Hameed Abdul Majid 2012,

Deane et al. 2008, Celce- Murcia 2001). Writing is complex because of several reasons. One of the reasons is because learners have to conduct a non-reciprocal interaction with the text. They do not know the audience and have to anticipate the reactions of the readers. Another problem for them is mastering the knowledge of conventions of rhetorical patterns which differentiate various types of discourse and genre. Many studies (Supyan Hussin 2008, Nadzrah Abu Bakar et al. 2010, Wan Fatimah Wan Ahmad & Subarna Sivapalan 2010, Scher-Bruenner 2013) have been proposing a myriad of different ways to help L2 learners improve their learning and writing ability. However, there has not been any study carried out to investigate the effects of blended scaffolding strategies through *Facebook* on ESL learners' writing performance in a Malaysian rural secondary school. This study aims to explore and analyse the scaffolding techniques via *Facebook* for the purpose of teaching and learning descriptive writing.

METHODOLOGY

THE PRE-TESTING PHASE

Six students from two form four classes (16 years old) from a selected school that had similar academic achievements were selected for this study. The experimental group went through blended teaching where they learned face to face in the classroom and then later received scaffolding using Facebook after school hours. On the other hand, the participants of the control group only went through face to face learning. All the participants were briefed by the researcher on the purpose of the study, the procedure and the duration of the study. Three were chosen for the experimental group while another three participated in the control group. Their essays were analysed to investigate the effectiveness of the scaffolding techniques on descriptive writing.

The study continued with the pre-testing. The pre-testing was carried out to gauge if the participants were of similar ability. The researcher and another English language teacher conducted the pre-test for both the experimental and control groups. They were given sixty minutes to write a descriptive essay entitled ***The Person Whom I Admire Most***. Participants were not given any prior teaching or input about descriptive writing.

THE TREATMENT PHASE

The treatment phase lasted for twelve weeks. During this phase, participants of both groups were taught descriptive writing face to face in a classroom. Each class lasted for eighty minutes. Both the experimental and control groups were taught by the lead researcher himself. Both the experimental and control groups also used the same teaching support materials such as handouts and power-point presentations. The only difference between the two groups was that the experimental group received scaffolding through Facebook after school hours at a predetermined time while the control group did not.

Prior to the treatment, the researcher brought the participants of the experimental group to the school's computer laboratory. Although the researcher found out that most of the participants had registered for Facebook accounts, the researcher decided to formally introduce Facebook to all of them. All the participants were taught how to log on to Facebook and they were also given a step by step guide on how to become a member. They were also taught how to use Facebook to look for friends and how to use the chat function. The researcher then added the participants concerned into a closed group called the Scaffolding group.

The descriptive essays written by participants in this study were put through an inductive content analysis based on the Mayring (2000) Model of Inductive Category Development in order to come up with descriptive patterns that had vivid description using adjectives, nouns and verbs. The definitions of descriptive writing by Jolly (1984) and Dilberto (2004) together with Schaeffer's (2010) characteristics of good descriptive writing were used as the basis to do an inductive analysis on the essays looking for improvement in descriptive patterns. As mentioned earlier, good descriptive writing uses precise language. It does not simply use general adjectives, nouns, and passive verbs. It uses specific adjectives and nouns and strong action verbs to give life to the picture one is trying to paint in the reader's mind.

FINDINGS

Essays written by participants of both the experimental and control groups were analysed to see if there were any improvements in their descriptive writing abilities. The topic given for the participants during the pre-test was *The Person Whom I Admire Most*. For the post-test, the topic given was *An Unforgettable Experience*. To maintain anonymity, all participants in this analysis were given pseudonyms. The analysis began by highlighting the descriptive patterns found in the essays of the participants in the experimental group followed by descriptive patterns found in the essays of the participants in the control group during the pre and post-test.

DESCRIPTIVE PATTERNS IN THE PRE AND POST-TESTS ESSAYS OF THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE EXPERIMENTAL GROUP

PARTICIPANT 1

Amalia chose her father Ahmad Yunus as the person whom she admired most in her life. Her father works as a lecturer at a teacher training college in Bangi, a town in the Hulu Langat District. Amalia mentioned that her father is a loving person and that he sat beside her while she did her work. According to Amalia, her father is very supportive of her. He motivates her to be a good person and encourages her to work hard. Amalia also mentioned that her father is a responsible person. He likes to play games such as badminton, football and indoor games with his family. Her father also plays football at his work place with his friends. Amalia hopes that her father will always be a good and responsible person towards his family.

Amalia's essay written during the pre-test, did not show precise descriptive language using specific adjectives and nouns and strong action verbs. While describing her father, Amalia was very general in her writing. She wrote: *He is a responsible father*. She did not use any specific nouns or action words to describe her father's quality.

Amalia also wrote that her father is a loving person: *My father is a loving person*. Although she attempted to use adjectives to describe her father, her description of her loving father is short on details. Amalia did not explain how her father showed his love for her. Towards the end of her essay, once again Amalia mentioned about her father being a responsible person. In doing this, Amalia made an indication of how her father was responsible. She mentioned that her father sent her to school every morning before he went to work. *My father is also a responsible person. He will send me to school at the morning before he goes to his work place.* On the whole, the essay written by Amalia during the pre-test about the person she admired most was not very captivating. She did not manage to describe her father with vivid adjectives, nouns and verbs.

During the post-test, Amalia wrote about *An Unforgettable Experience*. Amalia started writing her essay by stating her full name and her age. Then, she went writing about the experience that she felt most exciting and could not forget. She began by saying *I think this is the sweetest experience. It is still fresh in my mind.* Amalia explained her experience as the *sweetest* and something that is *still fresh* in her mind.

Amalia went on relating her unforgettable experience. In the second paragraph she wrote *.......my dad brought my family to a wonderful shopping mall in Putra Jaya.* Then she continued writing *…….he took me to a very beautiful shop*. Here, it can be observed that Amalia has made attempts to describe her experience strongly through phrases such as *wonderful shopping mall'* and *very beautiful shop*. She went on describing her unforgettable experience at the mall by further *saying I was the happiest person in the world. I was singing in my heart.* Amalia has been able to use expressions metaphorically to show her feelings. This is something that was not found in her essay during the pre-test.

In the following paragraph, Amalia mentioned about her visit to a shop to buy a gift as a reward for her excellent performance in her exam. In describing the gifts her parents gave her, Amalia wrote *I selected a pair of pink dresses, they were exquisite, and very beautiful. I also chose a piece of coloured bracelet that had a silver lining. The bracelet looked like gemstones, beautiful and appropriate for teens.*

While scrutinising Amalia's essay, a glaring difference was noted compared to her pre-test essay. Amalia wrote *I also saw a gold necklace which was very fabulous*. Here, she did not just say that she saw a gold necklace but went further describing the necklace to be *fabulous*. Amalia's unforgettable experience essay also mentioned about her father taking her to a restaurant. In stating this, Amalia wrote*: The restaurant wasa very exotic, luxurious, had fragrant smells like heavens and neat.* These specific words used by Amalia to describe is very captivating and alluring to the senses of the reader. Amalia's post-test essay had truly improved in terms of her ability to describe precisely using specific adjectives and nouns and strong action verbs in accordance with Jolly (1984), Dilberto (2004) and Schaeffer's (2010) characteristics of good descriptive writing.

PARTICIPANT 2

During the pre-test, Ravi's essay on the person whom he admired most was about Muhammad Ali, the boxing legend. Ravi started by mentioning that Muhammad Ali was regarded as the greatest boxer in the world and that Muhammad Ali became famous by the age of twenty. No strong and captivating words were used by Ravi in the first paragraph to describe Muhammad Ali except for *'the greatest boxer'* and that *Muhammad Ali was born in Louisville, in the United States of America.*

Ravi continued his essay by writing about Muhammad Ali's visit to a fair where his bicycle was stolen there. He first reported the incident to a policeman asking for help. The policeman happened to be Martin Lister who taught boxing during his spare time. He felt pity for Muhammad Ali and offered to teach Ali boxing. Ravi wrote that Muhammad Ali *rose at five o'clock for jogging in the park*. Ravi too wrote *He will go jogging around fifteen kilometres to build up his stamina.* Although Ravi had made attempts to be descriptive by explaining that Muhammad Ali woke up early and went jogging for fifteen kilometres to build up his stamina, he was simply telling it without really showing much clarity in his description.

Analysis of Ravi's post-test essay entitled An Unforgettable Experience, revealed an opposite situation. In his post-test essay, Ravi was able to describe using strong adjectives, nouns and verbs. Ravi began by narrating his childhood experience growing up in a coconut plantation. He wrote: *My family lived in an old house bordering a coconut plantation near a*

beach. The coconut trees loomed tall and straight. Many animals and insects could be found scurrying up and down the trunks. Occasionally we could see flying lizards gliding from tree to tree.

From the descriptions made by Ravi as depicted in the paragraph above, it is obvious that Ravi has successfully used words which are very captivating. Words such as *old house bordering a coconut plantation near a beach*, *the coconut trees loomed straight. Many animals and insects could be found scurrying up and down the trunk'* and *occasionally we could see flying lizards gliding from tree to tree* do not merely tell something. The words appeal to the reader and creates imagination far beyond in the mind of the reader.

When examining Ravi's essay further, several other examples of vivid description were found. In mentioning how confident and brave he was when he climbed up the tree, he mentioned *By then I was sure of my ability that I started to shake the trunk. That was my extremely foolish doing. The next moment down I came with a thud on the ground.* Ravi's words in describing his braveness, foolishness and the consequences of his actions have been lucidly crafted. He could have only said *I was stupid* and *I fell on the ground*. However, Ravi chose to go beyond ordinary description. In describing his pain after falling from the coconut tree, Ravi wrote: *All the time I was in a sort of a daze as the pain was really terrible even after the doctor gave me a jab to lessen it.* He described in a way that his readers could understand more on how stupid he was, how the situation was when he fell on the ground and the pain of it. From this, it may be understood that Ravi's post-test essay has undoubtedly showed improvements in terms of his ability to describe in a captivating way. Ravi's post-test essay has shown improvements in terms of his ability to describe precisely using specific adjectives and nouns and strong action verbs in tandem with Jolly (1984), Dilberto (2004) and Schaeffer's (2010) characteristics of good descriptive writing.

PARTICIPANT 3

Shalini's essay was the third essay examined for improvements in descriptive patterns after 12 weeks of scaffolding writing using *Facebook* in the blended learning ESL class. In her pre-test essay, Shalini wrote about her cousin brother whom she admired. Shalini said that her cousin brother is the person she admired most because he is handsome. Shalini did not provide any detailed descriptions about her cousin brother except briefly saying: *He is handsome. His name is Previn'* and *He is good in his study.* Shalini failed to offer more detailed description about her cousin. She was just simply telling without showing how handsome her cousin was and how good he was in his studies.

In the second paragraph of her essay, Shalini wrote that she admired her cousin brother because he trained her to study. *I admire him because he trained me to study.* Here, Shalini did not give any explanation or description on how her cousin helped her. Elaborating further, Shalini mentioned in her essay that her cousin talked about her future and advised her on choosing her career. No mention was made in relation to the advices given thus making the description vague. Throughout the rest of the essay, Shalini was not able to write captivatingly. Adjectives, nouns and verbs that describe richly were not present.

The examination continued on Shalini's post-test essay. In her post-test, Shalini was able to write a longer piece. She wrote about a trip to Fraser's Hill with her family as her unforgettable experience. In her essay, Shalini mentioned that she went to Fraser's Hill with her family to celebrate her success in her PMR exams. In the first paragraph, she wrote about her preparations prior to going to Fraser's Hill. She also mentioned the height of Fraser's Hill and wrote briefly about its location.

The use of strong descriptive patterns emerged in Shalini's second paragraph. While describing the road up Fraser's Hill, Shalini wrote: *The way to Fraser's Hill was crooked like*

a snake and my mum felt like nauseous. In describing the road and the effect the road had on her mother, Shalini was able to use juxtaposition. She juxtaposed the windy road leading up to Fraser's Hill to that of a snake. And she was able to relate the windy road up the hill to her mother's nauseating feeling. Shalini went on writing about the birds she saw in Fraser's Hill. She mentioned seeing numerous types of birds there and named them. Very interestingly, she described the situation in which she saw some of the birds. Shalini said: *.....we saw only five variety of birds and three of them we saw at our resort in the glowing sunny morning*. Shalini's expression of *in the glowing sunny morning* is a successful use of colourful description by her.

Shalini also described her experience going boating in a man-made lake at Fraser's Hill. The name of the lake is Allan Waters. According to Shalini they went paddling at the lake and enjoyed looking at the fish in the lake. While describing the beautiful lake, Shalini wrote: *There was a man-made recreational lake which was jade green and surrounded with crystal clear water and huge stones*. This description of the lake is one that is filled with words that evokes in the readers mind about the beauty of the lake. Lastly, in concluding her essay, Shalini mentioned about the trip as a great gift for her success. In describing this, Shalini said: *This was a gorgeous gift which was a gift to me by my sweet family members for my success*. Here, once again, Shalini has used captivating describing words which have shown the readers her feelings. Similar to the essays written by Amalia and Ravi, Shalini's post-test essay too has proven Shalini's ability to describe precisely using specific adjectives and nouns and strong action verbs in accordance with Jolly (1984), Dilberto (2004) and Schaeffer's (2010) characteristics of good descriptive writing.

DESCRIPTIVE PATTERNS IN THE PRE AND POST-TESTS ESSAYS OF THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE CONTROL GROUP

In this section, several essays written by participants from the control group pre and post-test were examined for descriptive patterns. Unlike the experimental group participants who went through 12 weeks of scaffolding writing using *Facebook* in the blended learning ESL class, the control group participants only went through traditional classroom learning. No other forms of assistance was given to them either in or out of class.

PARTICIPANT 4

In Fitri's essay about the person whom he admires most, he talked about his father. He mentioned that he has admired his father since he was a little boy. He admired his father because his father is a good person and always took care of him. Another reason he admired his father was because his father worked hard to provide for his family. Fitri also wrote that his father is a strong man. His father takes him out sometimes and buys toys for him. Another reason why Fitri admired his father is because his father was a gangster before marrying his mother. According to Fitri, he admired his father not really because his father was a gangster but because he was not afraid of anything or anyone in life.

While inspecting Fitri's pre-test essay, the content analysis did not find precise descriptive language that used specific adjectives and nouns and strong action verbs. Fitri was very general when he described his father. For example, Fitri wrote: *I admire him because he is a very good father*. No further elaboration on description was made. At many other instances where his description could have been stronger, Fitri only made general statement such as *He has six children*, *He is a kind father* and *He is a strong man*.

The post-test essay written by Fitri was much better compared to his pre-test essay. Although he did not go through blended scaffolding through *Facebook* like his counterparts in the experimental group, the input about writing a good descriptive essay in the traditional

classroom to a certain extent has enabled him to perform better than what he did during the pre-test. Although his performance was not as remarkable as those who had gone through blended scaffolding through *Facebook*, patterns of good descriptive writing have been observed.

In the post-test, Fitri described his trip with his family to Pulau Langkawi as his unforgettable experience. He mentioned that his family woke up early in the morning and packed their things for the trip. He also mentioned about the journey taking seven hours by car from Kuala Lumpur. Upon arriving at the jetty, they parked their car and boarded a ferry to Pulau Langkawi. Fitri went on explaining what he did upon checking in at the hotel his father booked at Pulau Langkawi. The way he mentioned the first thing he did was very descriptive in nature. Fitri wrote: *The first thing I did was swimming on the beach under a blue sky. The sand was like crystal. The water was so cold and refreshing*. This description made by Fitri about the sea is one that is full of vividness. However, throughout the rest of the essay no further vivid structures or words were found.

<div align="center">PARTICIPANT 5</div>

The next essay examined was the one written by Aishah. In the pre-test essay, Aishah wrote about her mother Fathima Beevi. She admired her mother because her mother cares for her family and spends time with her. Aishah also wrote about another person whom she admired. It was her friend Bavani. She admired Bavani because Bavani advises her. She is able to confide personal matters with her friend Bavani. In her pre-test essay, Aishah too did not use precise descriptive language to describe the person whom she admired most. She made general statements such as *My mother is a house wife. Another person I admire is Bavani. She is my best friend*. Aishah's description of her mother and friend was not done in detail enough to convince the readers why the two are the persons that she admired.

Aishah's post-test essay was better. Although her performance was not as remarkable as those who had gone through blended scaffolding through *Facebook*, patterns of good descriptive writing, although few, were nonetheless seen. The input about writing a good descriptive essay in the traditional classroom has enabled her to perform better than what she did during the pre-test.

In the post-test, Aishah wrote about her trip to Alamanda; a shopping mall in Putra Jaya. She had gone there with her friends. They went for a movie and also did some window shopping. Aishah also mentioned that they had lunch at Kenny Rogers Roasters. While explaining how delicious the chicken was, Aishah wrote: *The chicken was so juicy and mouth-watering. I licked my finger*. Aishah's description about the delicious roasted chicken used strong and vivid adjectives and nouns. No other such vivid expressions were observed throughout the rest of the essay.

<div align="center">PARTICIPANT 6</div>

Finally, Navin's essay was examined. Navin too wrote about his father as the person he admired most. Navin admired his father for his politeness. He mentioned that his father always advised him and told him to take care of himself. Navin also admires his father because his father never gives up in caring for his family. Apart from that, Navin mentioned that his father is responsible towards his staff. For this reason, his staffs like him. Navin cited other reasons too for admiring his father. He said that his father always advised him and supported him in his studies.

The inspection of Navin's pre-test essay, did not find precise descriptive language that used specific adjectives and nouns and strong action verbs. Navin was very general when he described his father. For example, Navin wrote: *He is polite*. No further elaboration on the

description was made. At many other instances where his description could have been stronger, Navin only made a general statement such as *He is patient'* and *He is a brave man*.

The post-test essay written by Navin was much better compared to his pre-test essay. Although he did not go through blended scaffolding through *Facebook* like his counterparts in the experimental group, the input about writing a good descriptive essay in the traditional classroom to a certain extent has enabled him to perform better than how he did during the pre-test. Although his performance was not as remarkable as those who had gone through blended scaffolding through *Facebook* patterns of good descriptive writing were observed.

In the post-test, Navin described his trip with his family to Melaka. Navin had gone to Melaka during Christmas last year. Navin stayed in Melaka for two days and two nights. He saw many interesting things while in Melaka. Navin reached Melaka at 10 am that day and checked in at a hotel called Kota AFamosa. He went to his room which was facing a lake. At noon they went for lunch and then started their Melaka tour. They went to the safari park and saw different types of animals such as tigers, dolphins and ostriches. Navin mentioned that he saw many types of parrots. While describing the parrots, Navin was able to use colourful descriptions that were jubilant. Navin wrote*: I also saw so many types of breathtakingly beautiful parrots. Their fur was so beautiful with bright colours*. This description made by Navin about the parrots undoubtedly is brilliant. The rest of the essay however, did not have further vivid structures or words.

DISCUSSION

The content analyses performed on the pre and post-test essays of participants in the experimental group have proven a marked improvement in the use of descriptive writing patterns compared to those from the control group. This can be seen from the descriptive patterns they produced. This improvement is due to the scaffoldings using Facebook. The experimental group outperformed the control group significantly and the reason could be due to nothing but the treatment. In relation to this, the researcher concurs with Stone and Chaney (2011), saying that using online tools for learning (ICT, Internet, Social Networking Sites) have practical and pedagogical benefits. The scaffoldings using Facebook by participants of the experimental study enabled them to use vivid descriptions. The analyses too have revealed participants' ability to use precise language to describe. They were able to use specific adjectives and nouns and strong action verbs. These made their descriptive writing livelier and they were able to paint a better picture in the reader's mind.

The participants in the control group however, were not able to come up with as many vivid descriptions compared to those in the experimental group who used blended scaffolding through Facebook. Although some were able to come up with one or two vivid descriptions throughout their essay, most of them were not able to do more than that. Perhaps this was due to the limited learning resources they received through the traditional face-to-face classroom instruction.

The findings undoubtedly shed some light on pedagogical improvements for the L2 classroom. It showed the success of scaffolding using *Facebook* to improve ESL writing performance. It therefore would not be wrong to conclude that inclusion of instruction through social networking sites would be a definite benefit in enhancing writing ability among Malaysian ESL learners. The inclusion of instruction through social networking sites along-side face-to-face classroom instruction will be able to solve many writing difficulties faced by learners. It therefore would be beneficial to put this strategy in place for the benefit of other ESL learners in Malaysian schools to support the government's decision to enhance

the English language proficiency among Malaysian students (Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia 2010)

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) has brought about changes in the roles of teachers and learners. This change has made way for the emergence of new teaching methods and new environments such as e-learning, web-based learning, open and distance learning and blended learning (Zeynep Kocoglu 2011). Although research in the past has shown students are successful in learning either through the traditional face-to-face classrooms or online mode (Donnely 2010), more recent research revealed that online learning by itself cannot provide maximum conditions for a successful learning (ibid). Thus, a combination of both online and face-to-face learning is more beneficial. This is because blended learning could bring out the best of in-class teaching and later scaffold learning through the self-directed and flexible pace of online learning.

Blended scaffolding strategies should be seriously considered for implementation in the Malaysian classroom because it is a teaching strategy that positively improves learners' achievement, develops conceptual understanding and also improves writing ability (Zydney 2008, Englert, Wu & Zhao 2005). It also helps learners solve problems, complete tasks or achieve learning objectives which are beyond the learner's unassisted ability (Bransford, Brown & Cocking 2000).

Another reason why gatekeepers should implement blended scaffolding to support writing and learning in general is because scaffolding assists the achievement of a successful level of social interaction within an online learning community (Oliver & Herrington 2003). This successful interaction has been observed by the researcher to be salient among participants of the experimental group. They have been noted to take advantage of the blended scaffolding across other subjects.

Nevertheless, in doing the above, teachers must at all times monitor their learners' learning needs. Students' learning goals must always be scrutinised so that the class does not deviate from their learning goals. The danger of not attaining learning goals must be avoided at all times because teaching without taking into account learning goals will only be detrimental to pedagogy.

Technological advancements bring about state of the art technologies almost every day. Teachers must always be aware of these developments and make informed decisions on whether to adopt them or ignore them. Keeping up with technological advancements is always a challenge. The nature of technology has to be understood so that it could be well utilized in education. Technology will always remain a tool and the more important issue is technology may not and should not replace education. It is just a tool to assist, enhance and improve the process of teaching and learning. Social media tools such as *Facebook* should be capitalized to make learning fun and accessible. Scaffolding writing through *Facebook* would be rewarding because *Facebook* is a phenomenon among learners across all ages. Therefore, learners would feel more comfortable using it.

Finally, as ESL teachers, the challenge of lifelong learning must be undertaken in order to ensure up to date knowledge about technological advances. A teacher has to be competent with the development in technology and other aspects of teaching methodology so that they can effectively and efficiently put it into practice. Nothing would be more rewarding for ESL teachers other than to see the fruits of success among their learners in terms of improvement in their language skills.

CONCLUSION

Vygotsky's (1978) proposition about ZPD which says that a learner has an actual development level determined by independent problem solving and a potential development level determined by problem solving with the help of an adult or a more able peer is depicted in this study. The help from the adult or more able peer to expand the ZPD was given through scaffolding strategies i.e. expert scaffolding; reciprocal scaffolding and self-scaffolding proposed by Holton and Clarke (2006) using Facebook in the blended learning ESL class. The findings of the study has shown an expansion of ZPD in the form of better achievement among the learners in the experimental group in their essay scores and their ability to come up with better descriptions in their essays compared to the learners in the control group.

Taking into account the above, the researchers reiterate that this research has undoubtedly proven the success of scaffolding using Facebook in a blended ESL class to improve descriptive writing performance. It therefore would not be wrong to conclude that inclusion of instruction through social networking sites would be a definite benefit in enhancing descriptive writing ability among ESL learners. The inclusion of instruction through social networking sites along-side face-to-face classroom instruction will be able to solve many writing difficulties faced by learners and be a boon for writing.

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