Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter discusses the participants of the study, the instruments and procedures that were used to collect data and how the data was analyzed. The research was qualitative to investigate the effects of collaborative blogging contributed to the communicative writing skills of the students and also their attitudes towards collaborative blogging in depth and detail.

3.1 Participants

The setting of the current study was a government university in the northeastern region of Thailand. The participants were fourth year English major students enrolled in the Argumentative and Expository Composition course, which was offered as an elective subject. The participants had already taken Basic Writing, Paragraph Writing and Narrative and Descriptive Composition courses as prerequisites for this course. At the beginning of the study there were 13 participants, three of them were male and the remaining ten participants were female. However, one participant dropped out of the course after two weeks and there were twelve participants who created their blogs on Blogger and did all the eight blog assignments collaborating with the researcher. The sampling method for this research was non-probability sampling and the type of sampling was convenient sampling. According to Saumure and Given (2008), non-probability sampling relies on the judgment of the researcher. In the present study, the 13 participants were chosen by the researcher, since they were already enrolled in a writing course and were conveniently available for carrying out research.

3.2 Research Instruments

The instruments that were used for collecting data were blogs, interviews and questionnaires. Multiple instruments were chosen to bring about a triangulation of data (Mills, 2003)

3.2.1 Blogs

Blogs were the instrument chosen for the study, in which the participants wrote their assignments. The participants were given explicit instructions on how to set up their blogs on Blogger and also how to add other blogs to their reading list.

Blogger was one of the standard software around, being used for blogging and hence it was chosen as the blogging software for this study. The following figures are snapshots that display the steps in creating a blog on Blogger.
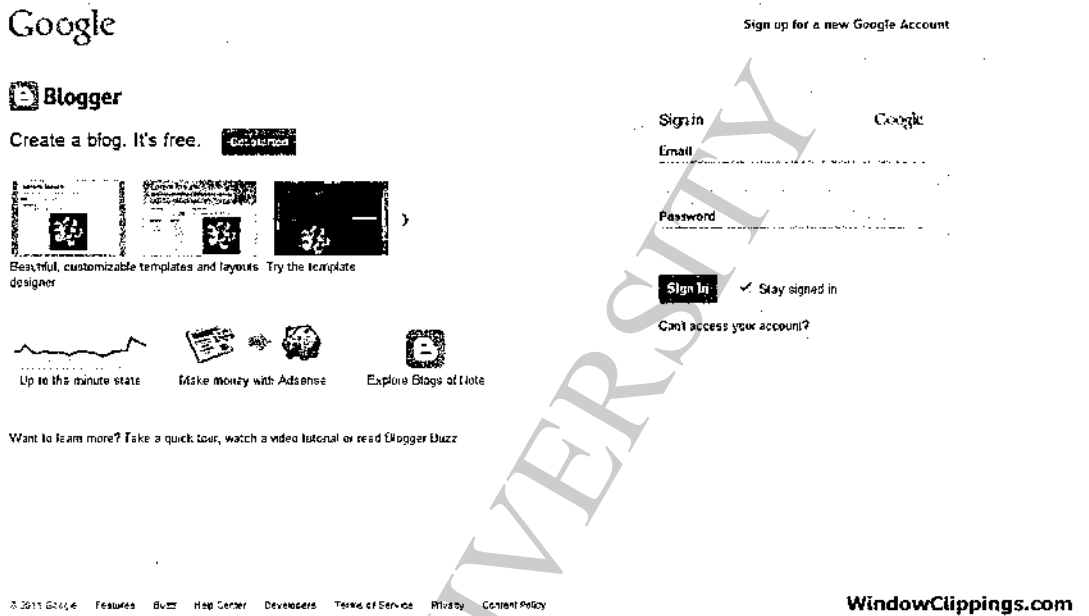

Figure 2. A Screenshot of Blogger

Figure 3. The main page of Blogger for a first time user

Figure 4. The Add button to add other blogs to the Reading List

Figure 5. The first step in adding a blog to a user's Reading List

3.2.1.1 Blog Assignments

The blog assignments were used to investigate the effects of collaborative blogging contributed on students' communicative skills in writing. As part of the blog assignments, the participants worked in groups of three and each participant in a group was required to read and comment on the other two classmates' blogs. This was done to ensure that each participant receives at least two comments from their peers each week. The researcher and the course teacher also posted comments on the participants' blogs. The participants wrote a total of eight blog assignments.

The topic for the first blog assignment was the flooding situation in Bangkok since it was current national news and the participants could relate to it:
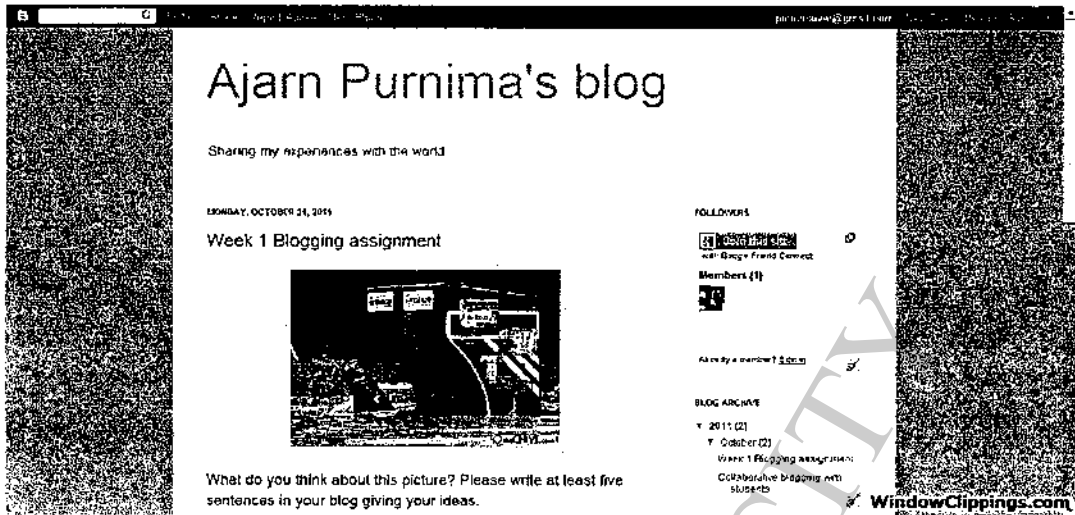
Figure 6. The blog post showing the blogging assignment for Week 1

Following this the topic for the second week was a travel video which the participants were required to watch on Blogger and then write about what they thought of the video. After the first two blog assignments, the selection of topics for the remaining six blog assignments was open to the students (see Appendix A). This was done in order to give them an opportunity to become autonomous in their learning and take control of decisions they needed to make while they communicated through their blogs. According to Vanett and Jurich (1990) giving students personal topic increases autonomy to a large extent. The blog assignments were part of the course requirements in order to ensure participation from the participants.

3.2.1.2 Scoring

The participants' blogs were scored based on the rubric (see Appendix B). The points for each type of communicative skill: creativity, critical thinking, voice and comments ranged from 0 to 3 where 0 = Unsatisfactory, 1 = Partially proficient, 2 = Proficient and 3 = Exemplary. Thus, for each criteria of creativity, critical thinking, voice and comments, each participant could get a minimum of 24 (3x8) for the eight blog assignments. Since there were four sets of criteria, the maximum possible score that could be obtained was 96 (24*4).

3.2.2 Questionnaires

There were two questionnaires given to the participants in the study. The first questionnaire was given before the beginning of the study to find out personal data about the participants such as their English learning experiences, experience in using the internet and blogging (see Appendix C). The second questionnaire was given to the participants after the blogging project was over to explore their attitudes towards using collaborative blogging (see Appendix D). The questions in

the first part of the second questionnaire were rated on a four point Likert scale and the scales of agreement were 1 for 'Strongly Disagree', 2 for 'Disagree', 3 for 'Agree' and 4 for 'Strongly Agree'. The questionnaire was adapted from a study by Shahsavar and Tan (2012). Out of 19 questions, seven questions were not chosen to be included in the questionnaire because they were not appropriate for the needs of the current study. The reliability and validity of the items in the questionnaire were ensured by the "Delphi Technique" in which a group of experts reviewed the items to make sure that they were clearly worded, and evaluated the clarity, readability and content validity of the items (Delamare, et. al., 2001; Mayfield & Crompton, 1995). The inter-item correlation coefficients of items fell between 0.30-0.60 and the internal consistency of the items was 0.88 (Shahsavar & Tan, 2012).

3.2.3 Interviews

The researcher also conducted semi-structured interviews with each participant to explore their attitudes towards using collaborative blogging and also to find out in what way collaborative blogging contributed to their writing skills. Each participant was asked about 10 structured questions and some other questions emerged based on the responses during the conversations. The interview questions had already been used in the interview questionnaire, which was part of a study by Pinkman (2005) (see Appendix E). The questions on journal blogs in the study by Pinkman (2005) were not included in the interview questions in the current study since the participants did not keep a journal blog. The interviews were video recorded and were transcribed for analysis at a later date.

3.3 Data Collection Procedure

The data collection procedure took place for a period of 17 weeks from November 2011 to February 2012. In week 1 the participants were introduced to the blogging project by the course teacher and Blogger was introduced to the participants in class. The email notification feature was also shown to the students and Questionnaire I was handed out in class. Participants were shown how to set up their blogs and how to add other blogs to their own blog.

In week two blog assignment 1 was posted on the researcher blog and participants started writing in their own blogs and posted two comments on two other participants' blogs. The students could write the blog assignments at their homes if they had internet or write them in the computer lab in the university or wherever they had convenient access to the internet.

In week three the participants as well as the researcher gave feedback on the participant blogs in the comments section on Blogger. The same process was repeated for blog assignments 2 to 8. Then the course instructor and researcher printed out and collected the blog assignments for analysis. In week 17 the second questionnaire was given out to the participants and the interviews were also carried out.

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┌─────────────────────────────────────────┐
│  Week 1:  Blogging project introduced    │
│           Questionnaire I distributed    │
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                    │
                    ▼
┌─────────────────────────────────────────┐
│  Week2: Blogging assignment 1            │
│         posted on researcher blog        │
│         Participants wrote in their      │
│         blogs.                           │
└─────────────────────────────────────────┘
                    │
                    ▼
┌─────────────────────────────────────────┐
│  Week 3: Participants and researcher     │
│          leave comments on assignment 1  │
│          Researcher and course teacher   │
│          analyzed blogs                  │
└─────────────────────────────────────────┘
                    │
                    ▼
┌─────────────────────────────────────────┐
│  Weeks 4 to 17: Process above repeated   │
│                 for blog assignments     │
│                 2 to 8                    │
└─────────────────────────────────────────┘
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                    ▼
┌─────────────────────────────────────────┐
│  Week 17: Questionnaire II distributed   │
│           and Interviews carried out     │
└─────────────────────────────────────────┘
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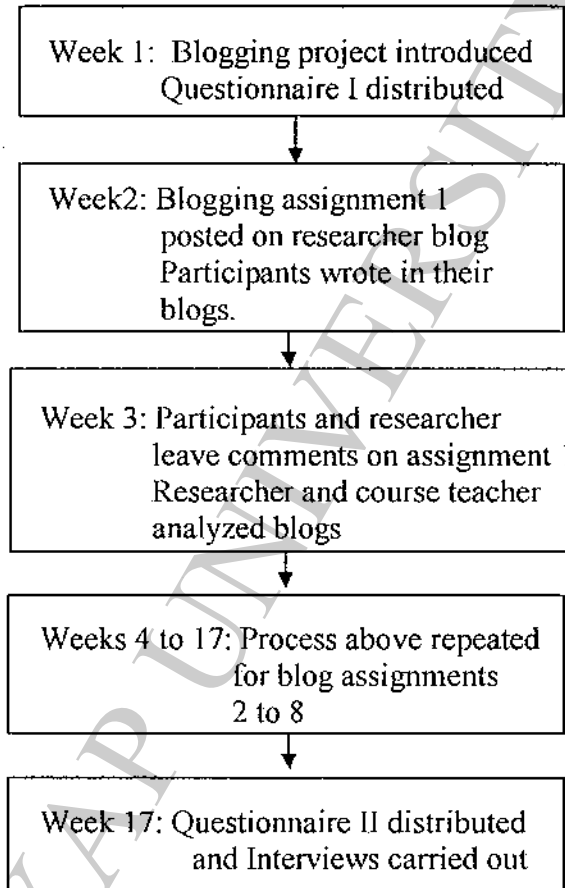
Figure 7. A flowchart of the data collection procedure

3.4 Data Analysis

The data from the blog assignments were analyzed by the researcher and course teacher based on the codes: creativity, critical thinking, voice and comments and contributions. A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a short word or phrase that characteristically assigns a collective, noticeable, essence-capturing, and/or suggestive attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data (Saldana, 2009). The above codes were taken directly from blog rubric-coding schemes online that were found suitable and appropriate for the current study. The rubric coding schemes were three blog rubrics (Franker, 2011; ELT Blog Evaluation, n.d.; Blogging Evaluation /26, n.d.) which were retrieved online by the researcher. The codes had been used for evaluating student blogs in other studies, in order to assess the effectiveness of the students' written work on the blogs.

Secondly, the data from the first questionnaire was analyzed to find out about the participants, for example, their experiences of learning English, the use of technology in their everyday lives, interest in writing, and favorite topics for writing. The first part of the second questionnaire which involved a Likert scale, was analyzed using frequency and the results were reported using descriptive statistics, that is, percentages. The results are reported in Table 2 in Chapter 4.

The data from the open-ended questions in the questionnaire and semi-structured interviews were also analyzed and the results were interpreted. This method involved the researcher to take one piece of data and compare it to other pieces of data to find the relationship between them. The researcher looked at the answers to each question and then looked for certain codes. The answers were then compared with other participants' answers to see if there were similar or different codes and in what way the similarities and differences arose. The categories and codes were adapted from a study by Pinkman (2005) (see Appendix F), which was similar to the current study in terms of using blogs with EFL students outside the classroom and studying their usefulness among students. The data from the interview transcriptions were used to support the results from the questionnaires. The results were reported under six different categories, namely, reflections from the collaborative blogging project, reading others' blog assignments, commenting on blog assignments, writing and speaking skills, communicative skills in writing and participants' opinions on the usability of Blogger.

3.5 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter presented the design and methodology of the current study. The participants were fourth year English major students enrolled in a Expository and Argumentative Composition course at a university in the northeast of Thailand. They wrote a total of eight blog assignments over a period of one semester. The blog assignments were analyzed using codes that were extracted from three blog rubric-coding schemes online, to find out the effects of collaborative blogging on the participants' communicative skills in writing. In addition, the questionnaires and interviews were also analyzed based on the categories and codes that had been used in a previous study.