

## Exploring the use of WordPress in a literature lesson based on ASSURE Model

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**Abstract:** This study explored the effectiveness on using of blog specifically WordPress in a literature lesson based on ASSURE model. A qualitative study was employed by the researcher and interviews were conducted with five secondary students in a Malaysian secondary school. The literature module used in this study was developed using the ASSURE model which acts as a guide for lesson planning and instruction which involves instructional technology. In terms of findings, three key themes identified: (1) “I may not favor blogging, but it is beneficial for my learning”, (2) “I tend to self-reflect more than I constructively contribute”, and (3) “Blogging opens my eyes to learning literature”. With the rapid expansion of technology, the study provided wider implications and help institutions to understand which methods work best to develop course materials and techniques appropriately for students. Literature has always been regarded as an area too abstract and complex, resulting in its reputation of being a 'dry' subject for students. Nevertheless, given the proper guidance and conducive platform, students' literature response can be highly enhanced; the act of blogging can cater to such needs.

**Keywords:** Blog, WordPress, literature lesson, secondary students, ASSURE model

### INTRODUCTION

Ducate and Lomicka (2008) state that “in today’s information technology age, Internet tools are becoming increasingly popular in educational settings” (p. 9). A large number of students, with varying background in Internet tool application, usually go to class with certain degrees of understanding and expectations already ingrained in them (Churchill, 2011) and schools need to be cognizant in igniting and nurturing their technological literacies through integration of Internet tools as instructional technology into classrooms (Hutchison & Wei, 2012; Zawilinski, 2009). These literacies range from decoding upon interaction with the interface, meaning-making upon reading the content, to communicating the comprehension of “the interface, the affordances and the unique features” of the particular Internet tool within a digital environment (Hutchison & Wei, 2012).

The constant emergence of new Internet tools creates a generation of students who view learning and are capable of learning with technology in innovative ways. Instructional technology impacts teaching and learning; be it used for the sharing learning materials during out-of-class hours (Miceli, Murray & Kennedy, 2010), or for enhancing class meetings through providing pre-class online prompts or discussions (Higdon & Topaz, 2009). To serve such purposes, one of the most widely-used online applications which is easy to operate is blog (Churchill, 2011; Zawilinski, 2009).

Blogs are “online, Web-based journals in the form of frequent, chronological publications of thoughts and ideas, typically within a specific theme or area of interest” (Dunlap & Stevens, 2009, p. 35). It is a “publicly and freely available Web 2.0” technology (Higdon & Topaz, 2009, p. 105). ‘Blog’, the short for ‘weblog’ (Greer & Reed, 2008; Zawilinski, 2009) is at its core an online platform for self-expression and sharing. Blogging came about in the 1990s and John Barger was the earliest to coin the word ‘weblog’ for his website in 1997 (Blood, 2004; Kaye, 2005; McGrail, 2013). Since then, the growth of blogging has been rather impressive. Such activeness could be, though not completely, implied by the escalation in number of blogs created. Nielsen (2012) reports that “by the end of 2011, NM Incite, a Nielsen/McKinsey company, tracked over 181 million blogs around the world, up from 36 million only five years earlier in 2006”.

Blogs can be published either on conventional blogging websites or via social networks which integrate blog tools (Hourigan & Murray, 2010; McGrail, 2013; Nielsen, 2012). When it comes to its purpose, blogging can be very commercialized. It can be political in nature (Kaye, 2005) or highly business related. Blogging is now a major publishing business as well as a vital tool for improving brands and businesses online (McGrail, 2013). As

Rampton (2012) reports, 60% of the businesses in U.S. have a business or company blog; its impact is evident in the 61% of U.S. consumers who are found to have made purchases based on blog posts (McGrail, 2013).

Learning literature requires interaction between the reader and the text, beyond literal meanings and extends into figurative meanings (Hiew, 2010). In fact, “reading is a transactional process that goes on between a particular reader and a particular text at a particular time, and under particular circumstances” (Rosenblatt, 1986, p. 123). In reading a literary text, the students while reading, generate their own perception and interpretation after living through the text. More often than not, their meaning-making is innate and distinct from each other, and it needs being communicated among the students to magnify the aesthetic value of the text. The similarities and differences in understanding and appreciating literary texts calls for a convenient online forum like blog for sharing and discussing critical aspects. As Blackstone, Spiri, and Naganuma (2007) put it, blog posts provide that opportunity to express opinions, particularly on the controversial facets of the content being discussed.

Blog in literature, which some may call literature response blog, in fact moves the idea of literature response journal to an online medium (Zawilinski, 2009). Hiew (2010) further explains that a “literature response journal required students to write on a given topic pertaining to the characters, settings, values, and their personal thoughts and feelings on certain matter at the end of the literature lesson” (p. 28). The idea of a literature response blog is similar to a literature response journal where teacher posts a prompt to invite student responses to a text. Although literature response journal has quite some history (see Hancock, 1992), the use of blog to elicit students’ personal response is just beginning to be examined by practitioners. In a recent study on blogging as a form of literature response, Hutchison and Wei (2012) propose that blogging can be a safe and structured space for literature dialogues in order to induce critical responses to literature.

Responding to literature through blogging and through journal-writing is by far different although the basic process is to write. Blogging happens within a virtual community and a social context, thus making it very different from the individual literature response journal which is more private. In blogging about literature, students get to stay connected in their literature circle and share their responses with teacher and classmates alike, and are able to be involved in discussions and collaborative tasks. The generation of literature dialogues to cater to the exchange of comments and critique among readers is one important way to enhance literary appreciation (Hutchison & Wei, 2012).

Blogs in the literature classroom have a huge impact especially in the Malaysian educational setting. In Malaysian classrooms, literature to students has often been labelled as arduous and difficult-to-understand, most probably due to the complexity in trying to tackle literal and figurative meanings (Hiew, 2010). Govindarajoo and Mukundan (2013) who have investigated young adult literature in the Malaysian secondary school point out that research in the Malaysian context to understand students’ experience in learning literature, one which involves depth and reflection, is inadequate. What has been a vicious cycle is the neglect of the students’ personal responses in learning literature. Rosenblatt’s (1986) view still holds true till today, that we should question if our students are nurtured “to savour and deepen the lived-through experience, to recapture and reflect on it, and to organize their sense of it” (p. 126). This module serves to look into how blogging could cater to these needs for students learning literature.

To further explore the prospective of blogs in educational settings, this study essentially investigates the introductory use of blogs among secondary students learning literature. The blogging platform used in this module is WordPress, an open-source software appropriate for building a full-blown website; users can “upload pictures, add text, install free plugins, create pages, change the look and feel of the website” with just a click (*How to use WordPress tutorial, 2012*). Although it is now a full-scale content management system (CMS) where websites could be built without much knowledge of HTML, CSS, Javascript and so forth, it humbly started in 2003 merely as a blogging system. In 2011 and 2012, WordPress was reported as one of the top two blogging sites in the U.S. – together with Blogger (Nielsen, 2012; Rampton, 2012). Impressively, over 60 million people have opted for WordPress (*WordPress.org, n.d.*). The literature module used in this study was developed using the ASSURE model which acts as a guide for lesson planning and instruction which involves instructional technology. Thus, the main objective is to understand how students react toward a literature module which introduces them to blogging activity and its use as a learning activity in a literature lesson.

## METHODOLOGY

In order to investigate the use of blogs, specifically WordPress, among secondary students learning literature, a qualitative study was employed by the researcher and interviews were conducted with five secondary students in a Malaysian national type secondary school. The literature module used in this study was developed using the

ASSURE model which acts as a guide for lesson planning and instruction which involves instructional technology. The ASSURE model developed by Heinich, Molenda, Russell and Smaldino in 1999, was used to design a complete literature module made up of one complete lesson which comprised three blogging tasks throughout a three-week period. In brief, the development of the module is summarized in Table 1:

Table 1  
The Development of Literature Module using the ASSURE Model

	Descriptions
<b>Step 1 - Analyze Learner</b>	All the five students who participate in this case study are 16-17 years old with intermediate language proficiency. They generally lack the ability to think from multiple perspectives when reading literary texts and their written work usually lacks depth as their understanding is only at the surface level and only from the author’s point of view. Students generally have little enthusiasm when spoken to about learning literature in school. All students are passive learners in class.
<b>Step 2 - State Objectives</b>	The objectives are to enable students to read and respond to literary texts and express themselves creatively and imaginatively, all through their writing. Since literature and blogging are built upon the foundations of ‘expressiveness’, ‘creativity’ and ‘reflection’, the idea of incorporating blogging in a literature lesson seems promising. Overall, students will get to enhance their literature response and experience a different form of self-expression.
<b>Step 3 - Select Methods, Media, Materials</b>	The instructional technology employed is "WordPress.com".
<b>Step 4 - Utilize Media and Materials</b>	The lesson consists of five stages: Induction, Pre-activity, While-activity, Post-activity, and Closure (refer to the complete Lesson Plan). Basically, the main activity is to have students complete three blogging tasks in three weeks.
<b>Step 5 - Require Learner Participation</b>	The students are required to participate through individual writing tasks, whole-class dialogue and reflective commenting.
<b>Step 6 - Evaluate and Revise</b>	Students’ feedback on their experience in blogging and the module is gauged using survey and interviews. From here, the module effectiveness in achieving its goal is determined. The module will then be revised for future use.

For the purpose of this module, a service called WordPress.com (see *wordpress.com*) was used. One major advantage of using WordPress blog is that we can actually “own” our blog by self-hosting it with our own domain name (though certain charges may apply but the blogging software of WordPress is generally free), in contrast to registering an account to other hosts and be bound to their terms and conditions. WordPress has enjoyed the rise to be “the largest self-hosted blogging tool in the world, used on millions of sites and seen by tens of millions of people every day” (*WordPress.org*, n.d.). WordPress is used by the students as it lets them create a new and totally free WordPress-based blog. Even though this service may not be as flexible or provide as many applications as the download-and-install version of WordPress-based blog, visiting WordPress.com and registering an account is much more accessible and convenient considering that all the students are first-time users. Any start-up procedure too complicated may hinder their budding interest and motivation for developing their blogs. Furthermore, WordPress.com is comfortably equipped with various basic and easy-to-use applications such as photo and video upload to scaffold first-timers’ blogging experience. Thus, WordPress.com with interesting interface and ease of user management is appropriate for the introductory and exploratory aims of blogging (in line with the goal of this literature module).

**Student Participants**

The participants were purposefully identified (passive students in class) and upon approach, five out of six students consented to participate in this case study. The participants were students from the fourth and fifth form in a Malaysian national type secondary school. They were named S1, S2, S3, S4 and S5. There were three female participants and two male participants. The participants’ details are summarized in Table 2. As Literature in English was incorporated as a component of the English language subject in Malaysian schools in 2000

(Govindarajoo & Mukundan, 2013), all participants learned literature in school. The short story selected was "QWERTYUIOP" which was prescribed in the text book for Literature Component for Secondary Schools - A Collection of Poems, Short Stories and Drama (Form 4 and Form 5).

Table 2  
Details of the Participants

Student	Gender	Grade Level
S1	Male	Form 5
S2	Male	Form 4
S3	Female	Form 5
S4	Female	Form 4
S5	Female	Form 4

### *Procedures*

The participants were briefed about the purpose of the study, what they could expect throughout the study as well as what would be expected of them. Basically, the students were told that they needed to complete three blogging tasks in total. The teacher-researcher explained that the module would be a literature lesson spanning across three weeks. The teacher-researcher assured the participants that this module aimed to introduce them to the use of blogging in learning literature; thus there would be writing prompts for every task (they would not be blogging without guidance). Students were introduced to and given guidance on how to navigate the blogging site (WordPress.com), the instructional technology used in the module. They were given one week to create an account and to explore WordPress.com on their own. The participants, considering their privacy rights, were given the freedom to use either their own names or pseudonyms. All the participants had easy access to each other's blogs (Blackstone, Spiri, & Naganuma, 2007) with the teacher's blog serving as the homepage.

Task 1, Task 2 and Task 3 were assigned to the participants in Week 1, Week 2 and Week 3 respectively. The participants were chiefly required to complete each blogging task based on their reading of the short story 'QWERTYUIOP'; it was fundamentally a story of determination and loyalty, a story of two main characters: Lucy and Miss Broome who haunted a typewriter. The synopsis of this short story as provided by the Ministry of Education Malaysia (2009) was as follows:

"QWERTYUIOP" by Vivien Alcock is about a young graduate named Lucy Beck who has just finished her "O" levels at Belmont Secretarial College. Being a slow learner herself, she has no confidence that she will find a job. Fortunately, she is offered a job by Mr. Ross, the Manager of Ross and Bannister's. During her first day, she encounters many peculiar incidents. Later, she finds out that there is a spirit lingering around the office who is adamant in holding on to her position as the company's secretary. Towards the end of the story, Lucy tries to get rid of the spirit that has been haunting that place for many years by putting the spirit at peace.

The participants' role was to complete all the three tasks online, either on the teacher's blog or on their own blogs (depending on the task requirements). The participants were encouraged to have discussion and to comment on their peers' blog posts but this requirement was not made compulsory, as the teacher-researcher would like to observe the students' natural actions without such imposition. Throughout the three weeks, the teacher-researcher observed students' online behaviors in completing all the three tasks. After the three weeks, each student blog was evaluated using the teacher-researcher-developed Rubric of Evaluation. Nevertheless, the participants were not informed beforehand that they would be evaluated as the teacher-researcher preferred that the students were indeed blogging willingly and freely without the concern of being judged by the teacher or other students. After the module completion, the participants were given feedback on their blogs. Their scores for the Rubric of Evaluation were used to gauge the students' overall behavior toward the module.

### *Data Collection*

Before the module implementation, the teacher-researcher carried out a semi-structured pre-lesson interview with the students to gauge their understanding and background of blogging, and also their experience of learning literature in school. During the three-week module implementation, the teacher-researcher observed students' online behaviors and considered the challenges faced throughout the lesson and how the lesson could have been more effective as a whole.

### *Data Analysis*

The researcher interviewed the participants based on a list of questions expanded from the research questions. The questions were open-ended, which allowed the participants to freely express their experience with blog, blogging and literature lessons using WordPress. Follow-up questions were improvised during the interview. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes and was recorded. Finally, the interviews were used to develop three key themes for the comprehension of students' reaction and feedback towards the module.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### *Student Background Interview*

Using the Student Background Interview, the teacher-researcher basically investigated two aspects of students' previous experience: Blogging and learning of literature in school. To students, although they were not very clear about how blogs function (especially S3 and S5), their perception was that blog was a place to express themselves and share their thoughts easily and freely. From the students' responses, it could be deduced that students did have the basic understanding of blog function although, more sophisticatedly, blog was also a multi-dimensional interactional platform. Generally, blog to students was simply an online site on which they could write about anything interesting to them.

All of them except one student had never blogged before. Some had read blogs before, like S2 and S4 whereas S3 and S5 had no exposure to reading blogs although they had heard of them. S5 expressed little knowledge about blogging. For S1 who had created a blog before, regarded his blogging experience with *"didn't really like it though"* and he in the end gave up his first trial because he *"did not have interesting things to share with people and it was troublesome to think up of even one post"*. S3 who had never read a blog or blogged before, had a negative impression of blogging as she professed to dislike writing in general. It was inferred that a dislike for writing may very well lead to a dislike of writing-based activities, including blogging. Gauging her keenness to blog, she said she worried that she may not have anything to write about. On a different note, S2 was a regular reader of his siblings' blogs but this was his first time creating and managing a blog on his own. Meanwhile, S4 did check out blogs but only for irregular leisure reading. It was evident that the students were not highly optimistic about the idea of having to blog but it was also encouraging that they still showed enthusiasm to try and like blogging, provided they would be blogging with guidance and not from nothing.

With regard to students' experience of learning literature in school, it was actually quite interesting to know that none of the students had activity-based literature lessons in schools; most lessons revolved around reading the text, copying notes and completing exercises. S5 even had literature lessons where the teacher completed the reading of text with students in class and students were left with no follow-up tasks. Such a situation was in unison to the one described earlier by Govindarajoo and Mukundan (2013) and Rosenblatt (1986) where literature response was practically "dead". Literature, being one of the subjects which required the most in-depth interpretation and personal connectedness with the text, was stranded in a peculiar situation as it was taught rather didactically. Even more surprisingly, perhaps due to years of familiarity with such literature lessons, most students were fine with how they were learning literature. However, they were far from being excited or enthusiastic; perhaps they were unaware of how literature lessons could have been. Nevertheless, the desire for a change in learning literature was existent. When asked if they liked the literature lessons which they were having in school, S3 exclaimed *"Boring!!"*

Therefore, it was hoped that this module, though a brief one, would open students to a different experience in expanding their minds to reading and interpreting literature. Writing about literature, on blog especially, would benefit students in many ways. S1, S3 and S5 expressed that they would like writing about literature, mainly because they would pay closer attention to the text for better understanding. S2 was excited to write about literature as he had been copying notes from the Internet for his literature lessons and he looked forward to expressing what he thought about the text. Meanwhile, S4 saw that writing about literature would give her an opportunity to think deeper about the text, *"I think more when I write"*.

### *Student Feedback Interview*

Further discussion regarding student feedback toward this module was elaborated from the perspective of the three key themes:

#### **Theme One**

*"I may not favour blogging, but it is beneficial for my learning."*

The students in general acknowledged the good of blogging in learning although they hardly embraced the activity of blogging itself. All the students agreed that blogging motivated them to think and to express their ideas while learning. However, not all students were enthusiastic in basic blogging acts like adding a new post or checking other students' blog regularly (although most of them liked reading other student's blogs for homework-related purposes). The only thing that all the students liked was reading the teacher's blog, largely because the teacher's blog was informative and well-developed. Here, as discovered by Churchill (2011), the students seemed to pay more attention in checking the teacher's blog as well as their own, but seldom took the initiative to check the other students' blogs (unless for homework-related purposes).

Indeed the students were found to have a great sense of responsibility to complete their homework (Ducate & Lomicka, 2008). In other words, they seemed to agree to only blogging-as-a-learning-activity, and to not anticipate themselves to proceed beyond the learning activity to stay an active blogger. None gave a definite "yes" when posed with the question "*Will you start a blog in the future?*" The students continued to keep blogging at arm's length and would leave it as an enjoyable, regular learning activity. Despite the fact that all had reservations about blogging, S2, S4 and S5 pronounced more interest and motivation towards blogging on their own, provided that they had the time.

During the Student Feedback Interview, S1 mentioned that blogging seemed dull and boring to him mainly because he was not keen on sharing information with others and he felt that maintaining a blog could be time-consuming (Dunlap & Stevens, 2009). Because blogging by nature required personal time and initiative, the students were sometimes unmotivated to give such long-term commitment. As S2 admitted, he felt "*lazy*" to manage his blog although he did find blogging enjoyable. In short, some students actually found blogging tedious.

Out of the five students, S3 may not like blogging but still performed well because she knew it would be good for their learning. It was then discovered that her rejection towards blogging stemmed from her distaste for writing. "*Writing is a pressure to me*", confessed S3. Therefore, in her case, blogging as an activity or the instructional technology was not the root issue, but writing was. She was fine with blogging as a learning activity if required by the teacher and/or being graded; however voluntary blogging should not be expected of her. Other students too committed to the notion that they would be willing to blog mainly as a subject requirement and/or as part of their subject assessment; this finding was similar to the results reported by Churchill (2011), and Hutchison and Wei (2013). Assessment seemed to drive the level of student motivation and participation. As S1 said, "*I may not be into it but if it's what the teacher requests for our subject, I will do it*".

Of all the students, in fact there was one who despite having a non-committal attitude toward blogging, claimed that she actually found blogging interesting: S5. She was quite thrilled when she added her first post as everything appeared new and fascinating to her. She realized soon that she could share her hobbies, photos and other interesting happenings in her life with others. She seemed to have explored WordPress.com more than the rest as she commented that WordPress.com was kind of limited in terms of choices of decoration and applications. This was true; for instance, bloggers could not upload mp3 files on WordPress.com without having upgraded their blog and paid the extra charges. Nonetheless, WordPress.com, being simple and easy to use was adequately effective in providing the first-timers with a "real" blogging experience.

In regard to sharing information on their blogs, the students had reservations about the virtual audience which they were cautious of. Ironically, such a facility should have been enjoyed by the students (Ducate & Lomicka, 2008; Zawilinski, 2009), instead, the issue of privacy popped up, an identical discovery to that by Dunlap and Stevens (2009). At large, the students blogged with the knowledge that their work would be viewed and shared with others; and at the same time they blogged guardedly, for the very same reason. In S1's opinion, "*I don't really like sharing things with people on the Internet whom I don't even know*". As for S4, she agreed that she would rather share on social networking sites like Facebook where only friends can view what she shared rather than on a blog site where the readers were unlimited and unknown.

Aside from intrinsic motivation towards blogging, the students' experience of blogging was also hindered by the lack of technical skills. Despite having discussed earlier that blog hardly required any sophisticated technical skills to operate (Blood, 2004; Churchill, 2011; Hutchison & Wei, 2012), some students still needed step-by-step guidance in order to be able to utilize the instructional technology efficiently. S4 lamented that to her blogging was "*kind of troublesome*" because of the blog interface. She thought that it would have been beneficial if they were provided training prior to the module implementation as it was their first time using a blogging site and all of them, except for S1, were first-time bloggers. Nonetheless, the students on the whole thought that WordPress.com was sufficiently user-friendly for them to benefit from the module.

It was realized that the students generally lacked the exposure that an online application like blog could be used for learning. The students were uncomfortable mostly because they had never displayed publicly something as significant as their homework. A situation as such added to the worry of students like S3 who lacked self-confidence; she reported that she feared embarrassment, that she was not as good as the other students (Greer & Reed, 2008). S4 too was overly self-conscious of having mistakes seen in her homework. She was most concerned about having the teacher evaluate publicly her homework on her blog. The teacher-researcher believed that this concern was in fact comprehensibly common as this was the first time most of them blogged. S1 and S2 eventually asserted that they were much more comfortable now after the module to let others view their homework on their blogs. S1 especially had a change of perception toward blogging after realizing that a blog could serve well for learning activities like group study. As a matter of fact, it was just a matter of understanding better and getting used to the facets of the instructional technology in use. For instance, S5 portrayed an optimistic attitude towards sharing her homework on her blog as she deemed this an opportunity to ask for advice for improvement which could then spark further discussion.

One crucial finding to be taken notice of was the improvement of teacher-student relationship through the use of blog in a lesson (Ducate & Lomicka, 2008; Greer & Reed, 2008). Statement 12 – “*I like reading my teacher’s blog*”, Statement 13 – “*By blogging with my teacher, I feel that my teacher is more involved in my learning*”, and Statement 14 – “*By blogging with my teacher, I feel more connected to my teacher*” demonstrated how a teacher could impact student learning. Teaching and learning were now extended beyond the four walls of a classroom and this module has shown that blogging in learning did enhance teacher-student rapport which would then facilitate effective teaching and learning in or out of the classroom. The teacher-researcher felt that the students were able to open up more when the teacher was involved with them in completing the module. The teacher-researcher also had the opportunity to communicate with students who had usually been passive in the class; this finding confirmed the testimony contributed by Greer and Reed (2008). It was indeed mesmerizing for the teacher-researcher to realize that such quiet listeners in class did have their own ideas and thoughts to be shared. A platform for expression and sharing was what these students needed to begin with.

Another important observation of the teacher-researcher was that most of the students did not actively maintain or take the initiative to add value to their blogs. The fact that they did diligently complete each assigned task came to prove that the students essentially viewed their blogs as a learning space to complete homework. This finding was similar to what was suggested by Hutchison and Wei (2012) where students responsibly completed and posted their homework on their blogs, and logged off. From the students’ work, the teacher-researcher could see the students fulfilling the requirements of each task well. The only thing was that they had neither taken full ownership of their blogs as a platform of personal expression nor as a site for social discussion. Future lessons to further explore the use of blog in educational settings would definitely enhance the students’ introductory experience gained from the current module.

### **Theme Two**

*“I tend to self-reflect more than I constructively contribute.”*

To begin with, out of all the components examined, “*Blogging as a Process of Reflection*” was the only one with inconsistent results. Throughout the module, the students in discussion rarely initiated or participated in responding to comments (even to comments from the teacher). It could be that the students actually knew that the exchange of comments among the teacher and the students would be beneficial for their learning as a whole; however, for certain reasons, the level of reflection by giving and responding to comments was minimal. Among all, time factor was cited as one of the reasons.

In blogging as a process of reflection, the students had to first ‘read’. For the record, they generally enjoyed reading blogs and comments. Research has suggested that students like reading blogs due to their “excellent writing” (Kaye, 2004). After that, the students basically need to ‘think’ and ‘respond’. Reading made them think. In terms of ‘thinking’, the students seemed to think when they blogged, when they read other students’ blogs and comments, when they received comments for their blog posts, and when they read the comments which other students received. In short, the students read and think; they were reflective in nature (learning style). Thus, it was discovered that with such cognitive processes, the students did practise quite a lot of self-reflection when learning.

In terms of “responding”, as much as the students enjoyed reading blog posts and comments, all of them clearly had little interest in giving comments to what they read and in responding to the comments received. Such a possibility has been reported by Kaye (2005) whereby while some students may be active participants, some may

prefer being passive and aloof, to merely read through the blog posts and/or comments. This behavior was similar to what S2 described of himself, "*I'm more fascinated with blog posts which are like stories ... it's just like reading a storybook ... I just read and absorb everything*". Often, he felt that he had nothing to comment on although he always read with effort.

For students like S1 and S4, they had worries about offending and hurting other students' feelings should their comments be taken too personally, or about displaying to others their own weaknesses, a finding in coherence with the one by Greer and Reed (2008); hence the intention to avoid conflicts by keeping mum (Hutchison & Wei, 2012). Other than that, time was another factor as keeping up with all blog posts and responding to all comments may prove too taxing for students who had other homework commitments.

When asked if making commenting and responding to comments compulsory would have resulted in a difference, S5 answered with a resounding 'yes'. In this module, almost no requirements were made compulsory as the teacher-researcher did not want to burden the students who were just exposed to blogging in order to elicit from them genuine feedback regarding the use of blog in learning literature. This study has shown that without compulsory requirements from the teacher, the students would most likely continue learning passively; hence the significance of teacher facilitation in guiding student learning when using an instructional technology (Miceli, Murray, & Kennedy, 2010).

Although it was tempting to deduce that assessment needs could have actually ensured a more robust commenting activity among the students, research has also found that students under forced condition would produce inauthentic responses to meet the teacher's minimum requirements (Hutchison & Wei, 2012). Throughout the lesson, the students even when they did respond to comments, have done so only for the comments from the teacher. Somehow, this implied that the students may have done so out of the feeling of obligation toward the teacher. Hence, appropriate motivation and reasonable assessment requirements (Ducate & Lomicka, 2008) deserve careful consideration to encourage students to productively, and not just reactively participate in giving and responding to comments.

It was also found that although the students were not into giving or responding to comments, they liked receiving comments, as an acknowledgement of their performance. The students were eager to know if they performed well or otherwise, and they were aware of this as a way for the exchange of ideas. To them, comments from others could be used to point out mistakes and to enable improvements. Therefore, in a way, the students did not mind receiving comments because they were useful for their self-reflection and self-learning, but they had a lot of room for improvement if they were to reflect and contribute constructively to facilitate other students' learning as well.

### Theme Three

#### *"Blogging opens my eyes to learning literature."*

In the past, learning literature for the students investigated in this case study had revolved around only reading the text, copying notes or doing exercises. Seldom had they an activity or seldom had they any writing task. Therefore, this module was significant in the sense that the students were exposed to the fact that literature was not supposed to be as boring or as meaningless as implied through their mundane school lessons. One very regretful finding was that the aestheticism of literary appreciation was largely lacking in the students' experience of learning literature. Missing were the "*inner tensions, sensations, feelings, and associations accompanying images*", described by Rosenblatt (1986, p. 124) as "evocation" when the reader corresponded to a text, and the platform for dialogues about readers' "evocation". The students almost never had to voice out their "evocation" when learning literature.

Therefore, the teacher-researcher anticipated that blogging would kick-start the students' experience of making visible their "evocation" by writing about literature. This was true simply because blogging about literature provided students with two critical things: (1) a reason to blog, and (2) an audience to blog for. Blogging facilitated the expression of the students' views and interpretation about the text read. As reading is a transactional process between the reader and the text in a personalized setting (Rosenblatt, 1986), the students were afforded the opportunity to generate in-depth interaction and engagement with the text in order to be able to blog freely and frankly about the meaning created. Through this module, the students learned literature by thinking from the characters' point-of-view and they managed to understand the context of the text from a whole different perspective. They could all basically interact and respond to the text using their creativity and personal feelings.

One interesting finding when examining the way the students interacted and engaged with the text (see the Component Blogging as a Literary Response) was that all the students either agreed or strongly agreed to all the related statements but there were three statements which some students were unsure about: Statement 29 - "*I relate the characters' experience to my personal experience*", Statement 30 - "*I put myself in the characters' shoes*", and

"I develop a more personal feeling about the story". The teacher-researcher discovered that the students basically saw little relation between themselves and the text they read, a condition far-fetched from Hiew's (2010) suggestion that students could imagine themselves living in the story. The students mainly thought of the text as a story for leisure reading. They expressed having little similar experience with the characters and/or the story they read, hence the inability to draw personal connectedness with the text. Even when they do, the students only related more personally to the characters they liked.

In a way, this scenario fell short of the aesthetic reading proposed by Rosenblatt in 1986. The students seemed to need more guidance and practice in learning how to read a text with not only an efferent stance (recall of details, paraphrase, summary, categorization of genres, formalistic analysis of verbal techniques, background knowledge, and literary history) but also with an aesthetic stance (the lived-through experience) (Rosenblatt, 1986). The students ought to be exposed further to learning literature with more self-immersion. Nevertheless, this module was a good start as it had brought about improvements in terms of "opening" the students' minds that to understand a text with depth, they have to think from more than one perspective, not only from the author's, in order to really delve into the reading of a literary text.

In addition, the students found that through blogging, they were encouraged to learn independently. They began to take more initiative in order to complete the tasks assigned and they acknowledged that this worked to their advantage. For instance, S2 elaborated,

*"I needed to read up the short story on my own. I also viewed the stuff posted by the teacher and the other students. I needed to think how I should write for all the given tasks. Now, I can also manage my own blog."*

Having to learn independently and to perform individual blogging tasks was very much welcomed by S3 and S4 who revelled in the freedom to decide the ways to complete the tasks to their liking and where they could work better in solitude. The rest of the students (S1, S2 and S5) thought otherwise. They showed that passive students did not necessarily dislike group work although they may not be as participative as other more active students in the class. Therefore, it was learned that passive students too may prefer occasional discussions and group work mostly because they could learn from a variety of viewpoints in understanding the text.

As literature response journal has been a regular in literature lessons, blogging was in fact an extension of literature response journal where the core activity was none other than writing about literature. The students realized that they could actually write about literature in a journal or on a blog. S2 and S4 preferred to blog about literature while S1 and S5 desired a mix of both ways. It was interesting to find out that the students brought up "handwriting" when they justified the advantages of journal writing. S5 explained:

*"When I write in journal, I think more carefully because if I write wrongly, I cannot simply delete and retype, so I tend to write more carefully and pay more attention to my language. Indirectly, I get to practise good handwriting too. For blogging, I can improve my spelling through the auto-correct function."*

Most of the students claimed that blogging was much easier than writing in a journal as they were very accustomed to a keyboard, allowing them to type much faster than they write with less fatigue. S3 who disliked writing in general preferred to write in journal presumably because she was still more comfortable writing in a more familiar setting since she did not find WordPress.com to her liking. To her, a different setting to write in (such as a blog site) did not manage to change her existing perception of writing.

All in all, be it in a journal or on a blog, it was important to discover that the students were aware that writing about literature could enhance greatly their learning of literature. The main objective to enhance students' literature response by encouraging a multi-perspective (point-of-view) reading was achieved. By the end of the module, all the students came to the realization that literature is learned in various ways; one of them being blogging. As S4 exclaimed, "I can learn literature in a new way". S5 too concluded positively her experience with this module by saying: "I realized there are plenty of ways to learn literature".

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In integrating an instructional technology such as blog into teaching and learning, support is crucial before such a decision is taken (Hourigan & Murray, 2010), and the teacher's role is vital (Miceli et al., 2010). Students ought to be scaffolded with continuous support before, during and even after the module. It was found that students would have had a smoother blogging and learning experience should training sessions have been provided before the module. This ensures that students rather than being bogged down by technological and technical issues, could

embrace the benefits of blogging with minimal restrictions. Also, students should have been briefed about the choice to customize their blog for viewing only by the teacher and other students to overcome privacy concerns.

This study had the aim of exploring student feedback towards an introduction to using blog in their literature lesson and students in general recorded positive feedback toward the module as a whole. Put it simply, the students liked this module (lesson). In summary, this module has come to highlight three important themes:

- 1) Students acknowledge how blogging can actually enrich their learning. In fact, they enjoy blogging as a learning activity although they may not envision themselves indulging in blogging at least for the time being. This finding proves that a blog as an instructional technology can definitely work well with students (Churchill, 2011), and with proper and careful planning, teachers can help any student to benefit from the use of a blog in learning even under the circumstance that certain students may not fully embrace blogging as an activity; with continuous exposure and support, it is possible for teachers to improve if not alter students' perception towards the incorporation of a new instructional technology in their lessons.
- 2) The learning culture of our students is still embedded within the listen-and-follow behavior where students dedicatedly complete all assigned tasks but do not actively inquire or constructively contribute to the teaching and learning process. Similar to the findings of Churchill's (2011) study, it was suggested that perhaps it was our culture that our students were "less likely to be open to sharing and criticism than in the West" (p. 154). Blog is a platform for sharing and to display cognitive activity like reflection to encourage constructive criticism; nevertheless students are still wary about such a practice, hence the under-utilization of blog as students unknowingly treat it as only a space for homework-posting. This finding points again towards the passiveness in learning which is in fact a trademark among Malaysian students. Teachers ought to strive to engineer a more conducive and constructive learning environment to cultivate students who excel not only in self-reflecting for their own learning but also in collaborative learning.
- 3) Students find activity-based lessons interesting and enjoyable in learning literature. Through this module, it was encouraging to witness the realization which the students achieved, that learning literature is so much more than what they have been experiencing in class. In short, blogging can facilitate the teaching and learning of literature besides enhancing students' literature response. This finding is significant in improving teachers' pedagogical and technological knowledge as blog adds to the teaching and learning repertoire for the literature subject. From here, teachers should realize the value of freedom of expression in invoking students' literature response. Furthermore, teachers should react to the urge to proactively incorporate instructional technology into literature lessons simply because literature, if appreciated appropriately, is not at all a "dry", overly-abstract or difficult-to-understand subject.

For teachers, the current module could be used as a template to design complete modules to introduce blogging to students as an alternative to learning literature. Teachers could expand from this introductory module for the purpose of teaching other elements of a literary text, or even for developing a complete module made up of a series of lessons to teach a whole literary text. For researchers, the duration of this module could have been lengthened for future studies. A buffering period would have been necessary for the students to adapt to a different learning condition (blogosphere -- online learning) instead of the traditional face-to-face classroom. Understandably, this would prevent the effects of adapting to new instructional technology from overshadowing the real impact of the innovation.

Before implementing a new module or instructional technology with students, a teacher has to understand their learning difficulties and motivation. In this module, for example, one student disliked writing in general and this indirectly influenced her eventual perception of blogging. In future, the teacher-researcher should introduce appropriate learning activities for students with learning difficulty, and at the same time guide them to overcome the difficulty. This will ensure continual motivation to embrace an innovation and that the student could experience and react genuinely to the innovation without interference. Problems related to student mind set and culture should also be addressed appropriately to realize the full potential of the instructional technology. From this study, it could be observed that our students practise a non-inquiry learning habit. Throughout the module, they were responsible and diligent in completing all the assigned tasks; however rarely had they contributed or reacted to feedback to display reflection in their learning.

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