

THE USE OF BLOGS IN IMPROVING NARRATIVE WRITING AMONG PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research was to investigate the effectiveness of using blogs in improving ESL narrative writing among primary school students in a school in Perak, Malaysia. The participants were 30 Year Six students. There were four main objectives in this study. Firstly, the study was to investigate how the use of blogs helps in improving students' narrative writing performance. Secondly, it was to find out the students' perceptions towards the use of a teacher's blog in writing their narrative essays. Thirdly, the study was also to discover the roles of teachers, peers and parents that help students in the blogging process. Lastly, it was to identify the positive or negative outcomes that students have when they use blog that support narrative writing. The study employed a quantitative and qualitative research design. The instruments of the study included a pre-test and a post-test, questionnaires, and interview. The data obtained from the pre-test and post-test showed that there was a significant difference on students' performance in their narrative essays. The students have improved their writing quantity and writing quality especially in language use, content and vocabulary. The findings revealed the perception of students towards blogs. They showed high interest in blogging (88.3%) and felt more positive about writing narrative essays (80.8%). The students also felt that they gained more ideas (76.8%), improved their grammar (78.3%), vocabulary (76.8%), punctuation (76.8%) and benefited a lot from the blogs. Apart from that, the study also found that roles of peers were more influential than the roles of teachers and parents in using blogs as medium of teaching and learning (83%). The findings from the interview analysis with the teachers' also revealed that there are great positive outcomes when the students used blog in their narrative writing. These results suggest that the use of blogs has a potential for improving students' performance in their narrative writing. As a conclusion, the study has shown positive evidence towards the use of blogs in improving students' narrative writing performance. Among the implications of the study are that the use of blogs require better ICT facilities and changes in teaching and learning pedagogy in a technology-based teaching and learning approach.





PENGUNAAN BLOG DALAM MENINGKATKAN PENULISAN NARATIF DI KALANGAN PELAJAR SEKOLAH RENDAH

ABSTRAK

Matlamat penyelidikan ini ialah untuk menyiasat keberkesanan penggunaan blog dalam meningkatkan penulisan naratif di kalangan pelajar-pelajar sekolah rendah di salah sebuah sekolah di Perak, Malaysia. Sampel kajian ini mengandungi 30 orang pelajar tahun 6. Terdapat empat objektif utama kajian ini. Pertama, kajian ini menyiasat bagaimana penggunaan blog boleh meningkatkan prestasi esei naratif pelajar. Kedua, ianya untuk mencari persepsi pelajar terhadap penggunaan blog dalam penulisan naratif mereka. Ketiga, kajian ini juga bertujuan untuk mengetahui peranan guru, rakan sebaya dan ibu bapa dalam proses blog. Akhir sekali, kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengenalpasti hasil positif dan negatif daripada penggunaan blog di kalangan pelajar. Rekabentuk penyelidikan ini ialah berdasarkan kuantitatif dan kualitatif. Instrumen penyelidikan termasuklah pra-ujian dan post-ujian penulisan naratif, soal selidik, dan sesi temuduga bersama responden yang dipilih oleh penyelidik. Data yang diperolehi daripada pra-ujian dan post-ujian menunjukkan terdapat perubahan yang signifikan terhadap prestasi pelajar dalam penulisan naratif. Pelajar-pelajar telah menunjukkan peningkatan dalam kuantiti penulisan dan kualiti penulisan termasuklah dari aspek penggunaan bahasa, kandungan dan perbendaharaan kata. Soal selidik juga telah mendedahkan persepsi pelajar terhadap blog. Mereka menunjukkan minat yang besar (88.3%) dan berasa lebih positif terhadap penulisan mereka (80.8%). Pelajar-pelajar juga berasa mereka telah memperolehi idea yang lebih (76.8%), meningkatkan tatabahasa (78.3%), perbendaharaan kata (76.8%), tanda baca (76.8%) dan mendapat faedah yang banyak daripada blog. Selain itu, peranan rakan sebaya mempengaruhi lebih daripada guru dan ibu bapa dalam penggunaan blog sebagai medium pengajaran dan pembelajaran (83%). Akhir sekali, analisis daripada temuduga antara guru-guru juga mendedahkan terdapat hasil yang positif apabila pelajar-pelajar menggunakan blog dalam esei naratif mereka. Hasil dapatan ini mencadangkan penggunaan blog mempunyai sebuah potensi untuk meningkatkan prestasi dalam penulisan naratif. Secara kesimpulannya, kajian ini telah menunjukkan bukti yang positif terhadap penggunaan blog dalam meningkatkan prestasi penulisan naratif pelajar. Antara implikasi kajian ini adalah kemudahan ICT yang lebih baik bagi kegunaan serta perubahan pedagogi dalam pendekatan pengajaran dan pembelajaran berasaskan teknologi.



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CDC	Curriculum Development Centre
CMC	Computer Mediated Communication
CMS	Content Management System
CSCL	Computer Supported Collaborative Learning (CSCL)
CSCW	Computer-Supported Cooperative Work
ESL	English as a Second Language
GPL	General Public License
HOT	Higher Order Thinking
HOTS	Higher Order Thinking Skills
IBM	International Business Machine
ICT	Information Communication Technology
IM	Instant Messaging
IPSC	Integrated Primary School Curriculum
LCD	Liquid-Crystal Display
MOE	Ministry of Education
MySQL	Structured Query Language
PBS	School Based Assessment
PDA	Personal Digital Assistant
PHP	Personal Home Page

SCPS	Standard Curriculum for Primary School
SMS	Short Message Service
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
SSQS	Smart School Qualification Standard
UPSR	Primary School Assessment Test
VLE	Virtual Learning Environment

APPENDIX LIST

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Overview

This chapter focuses on several sections that related to the study. It elaborates on the background of the study and highlights the problem intended to be explored. It also presents the focus of the study and provides a brief rationale for why this particular study is worth pursuing. The research questions for this study are also presented in this chapter. All the limitations during the study and the terms that related to this study will also be explained in this chapter.

1.1 Background to the study

Writing is the most difficult language skill for both native and non-native learners to master (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996). As many teachers of English have noted, acquiring the writing skills is to be more laborious and demanding than acquiring the other language skills (Zhang, 2010). The students also often face some problems even in constructing simple sentences (Nadzrah & Kemboja, 2012). As a teacher who has been teaching for more than ten years, I observed that, students tend to make mistakes in their writing and it has a potential to eventually demotivate some of them to continue learning English.

Writing is defined as a reflective activity that requires enough time to think about the specific topic and to analyse and classify any background knowledge (Murray, 2004). ESL students who have problems with their writing can still suffer from weaknesses of content and lack of logical organisation of their ideas (William & Jacobs, 2004). Process writing combines content, organization, grammar and revision, with an eye toward a final product (Syrus, 2005). It is important the students are able to put conscious effort in constructing sentences that are grammatically and structurally correct.

Since 2013, as part of the initiative of the Malaysian education system to further improve its international competitiveness, Higher Order Thinking Skill (HOTS) has been introduced as part of syllabuses, education content standard and examination. In term of writing skills, improvements to questions in narrative essays that have been designed by the Examination Syndicate is more challenging compared to previous years, whereby students have to come up with their own prediction of the story and write creatively with confident use of language (Nawal, 2015). To this end, all text books and workbooks published by highly reputable publishers are already focussing on how to tackle these kinds of questions.

Taking into account recent developments in the curriculum specification for the writing subject at the primary school level, I intend to explore the potential of incorporating a Teacher's Blog in writing classes as an approach to promote the writing performance of primary school students. Introducing blogging may allow young language learners to gain new method of learning writing instead writing on paper and to benefit greater understanding in writing skill and increase motivation among them to learn the language (Noel, 2015). By responding on the blog that the teacher has created, they indirectly could get feedback from other audiences throughout cyberspaces.

Besides, Henry (2006) claims that, the use of the blogs would encourage the students to think critically and apply HOTS due to the representing of personal narrative writing on the teacher's blog. Castek (2007) further states that on how blogs can integrate HOTS when students read online and off, Higher Order Thinking (HOT) blogging allow them to share diverse perspectives and exchange information with one another on the internet. This advantage would help the students indirectly to be well prepared in the new examination format which most of the elements of HOTS would be tested on. Abu Bakar, Latif and Yaccob (2010) claim that, blogging empowers students to develop critical thinking which make the more analytical and responsive to every issue they are confronted with. Additionally, Eman and Hasna (2014) indicate that, blogging is possibly an effective method for teaching narrative writing as it can create social interactions between students and the teachers, students and their peers and students with their global audiences.

This is because, the teacher gives them a task on the blog, then the students would ask several questions pertaining to the blogs and their friends will also be interested in coming up with their own questions about the task given. At the same time they could ask their friends to help with difficulties in handling technical matters that takes place during their blogging

sessions. On top of that, the teacher's blog would be available for public access allowing the blog to be read up by many readers throughout the world. This may encourage students to interact with other English language speakers outside the classroom and in cyberspace.

Blogs have the potential to be a transformational technology in that they provide learning opportunities for learners (Ahmad & Abdel Hamed, 2010). It can be a useful pedagogical tool that appears to be in its authentic, interesting and communicative nature (Abdel Hack and Helwa, 2014). I believe the blog is one of the approaches for teaching narrative writing and I think it can help students to improve their writing the narrative essays.

1.2 Problem Statement

According to Nor Hashimah (2008), teaching English language is a big challenge in Malaysia. English language has been taught throughout all levels of education. In primary and secondary schooling, English has been taught for almost 11 years and when the students enter the tertiary level, they still learn English as a subject requirement before graduation. However, despite all of the exposure, the proficiency level of students is subpar (Hamidah, 2017). Cohesion and coherence are considered as two important components of writing skills which are crucial part and virtual guarantee of writing quality (Renkema, 1993). However, students often come up with writing that is considered as incoherent. The incoherence of writing is not only caused by the lack of students ability to develop topic or themes, but also by other elements of writing such as inappropriate use of the kinds of genre, the generic structures, vocabulary, tenses, word choice and spelling (Wang & Sui, 2006). Wee (2009) states that, the majority of Malaysian L2 students

have still not mastered the grammatical rules and mechanical aspects of the English Language writing. In order to produce good and quality narrative essays, the students need to be free from all the mistakes and errors so that they would score better in their English paper. The situation will be worse if they have very limited ideas in expanding their writing.

The primary school students need something different in teaching approach which could motivate them to learn English and to improve their writing skill (Ruth & Khee, 2010). Based on my observation, the teaching and learning must not be serious and solemn in nature, especially when we are handling students who are age at 9 to 12 years old to learn writing. They need their friends, peers and teachers to study and learn together where possibly the learning environment becomes meaningful (Ruth & Khee, 2010). One suggestion would be for teachers to put the integration of technologies into learning process. The technological revolution research has become essential in the development of pedagogies and methodologies to introduce technology in a meaningful way, especially, in the Early Years education (Nathaly, 2016). The new generation of tech-savvy students demand greater control over their own learning and the inclusion of technologies in ways that meet their needs and preferences (Prensky, 2001).

A way to integrate technology in the classroom that can potentially enhance students writing skills is the use of blog. Their interaction with teachers and peers in writing process through blogging are hoped to reduce errors in writing, empower them to develop and gain more ideas as well as to increase their motivation towards learning English.



1.3 Research Aims

The general aim of this study is to find out whether the use of blogs helps to improve narrative essays by Year Six students of a primary school in Kuala Kangsar district, Perak.

1.4 Research Objectives

Specifically, the study is conducted to fulfill the following objectives:

1. To investigate on how the use of blogs helps in improving students' narrative writing performance.
2. To find out the students perceptions towards the use of a teacher blog in writing their narrative essays.
3. To discover the roles of teachers, peers and parents that help students in the blogging process.
4. To identify the positive or negative outcomes that students have when they use blog that support narrative writing.



1.5 Research Questions

This study intends to answer the following research questions:

1. Does the use of a teacher's blog improve students' performance in writing narrative essays?
2. How do students perceive using blogs to write narrative essays?
3. What are the students' respond to the roles of teachers, peers and parents in the blogging process?
4. What are the outcomes to the students when they use blogs to support their narrative essays?

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study will make a useful contribution to the teaching and learning process by promoting a blog in the classroom as it is a tool to improve narrative writing performance among primary school students. Besides that, the used of blogs is parallel to the characteristics of 21st century learners whereby the students need to use Information Computer Technology (ICT) in their learning pace and benefit the teachers as well to integrate the current technology in their teaching. Nafiseh and Supyan (2014) further state that, currently, attention in the English Second Language (ESL) classroom has shifted from teacher-centred to student-centred

learning. Along with this shift, the current advancements in the ICT are needed to provide the learners with various tools in the form of computer-based or Internet-based resources.

The teacher's blog is implemented because it is one of the interactive medium for the learners to write, comment and use all the related and useful widgets rather than traditional ways of teaching and learning in the classroom. Nadzrah and Kemboja (2012) state that blogging was better because they could express themselves better and more freely compared to writing on paper in the classroom. And importantly, this research will be helpful to our education system and will encourage the teachers to use blogs as an approach to improve students' narrative essays performance. As for students, it will give advantage and opportunity to them to use other different learning style compared to the traditional method that they always use while they are in the classroom.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

There are a number of limitations associated to this study. Firstly, there are issues related to the participant's confidence in dealing with technology in the classroom among the learners who may not have had the experience of using the technology and also the learners who are not familiar with the technology that is introduced during the research. Students who participate in this study have to learn and familiarise themselves with the use of a teacher's blog. It is expected that only students with prior experience in using blogs would help them in easing the process and the technical aspect while conducting the blogs.

Secondly, insufficient time for English lesson becomes one of limitation in this study. English for primary school is only allotted for 10 periods (300 minutes) per week. The integration of this blog could only be done at the School Computer Laboratory as the laptops, computers and internet connection are available there. Activities involving the use of blogs are carried out at the school's computer lab as it is well-equipped with laptops, desktops and internet connectivity instead of the conventional classroom. As a result, time needs to be allocated for preparation time before the lesson starts and making the researcher to find double periods or more to conduct this research instead of one period lesson.

Thirdly, in order to carry out this study, the participants need to familiarise themselves with blogs. Thus, the training of using the blog needs to be done before conducting the research. The participants will be exposed first to use the Microsoft Word, how to type and then teaching them the icons on the blog. The other parts and component in the computer or laptop have been taught earlier by their Science teacher under the Teknologi Maklumat Komunikasi class during school hour. It will take one month of training as the researcher has to hold extra class after school hours just for this purpose.

1.8 Definition of Terms

The following are the terms used in this study and they are frequently referred to in the following chapters.

1.8.1 Weblog or Blog

Blog is a type of web application that displays serial entries with date and time stamps. Blogs has features that might help facilitate learning and also known as online journal or web diary. According to Blood (2000), weblogs commonly referred to as blogs, are asynchronous communication-mediated-communication tools that were introduced in the form they are known today. Williams and Jacobs (2004) stated that, blogs provide students with high level of autonomy and provides greater opportunity for interaction among the students. Using blog as a tool of teaching and learning would increase interactivity and reflective activities.

Downes (2004) states that weblog exchanges are remarkable vehicles that create population of learners whereby participants learn more about each other through the give and take communication highway a blog provokes. Downes further states all participants have the same room to voice their opinion and weblog creates fair circumstances for all students to share their thinking and learning. The researcher believes that blogging gives children purpose to write and at the same time the audience shares their writing. For the purpose of this study *edublogs* were chosen as a blog development platform. *Edublogs* is chosen by the researcher in this research. The *edublogs* is a free and open source blogging tool and the Content Management System (CMS) based on Personal Home Page (PHP) and Structured Query Language (MySQL). Richardson (2006) states that, *edublogs* is a personal publishing platform with a focus on aesthetics, Web standards, and usability. *Edublogs* was born out of a desire for an elegant, well-structured personal publishing system built on PHP and MySQL and licensed under the General Public License (GPL). There are many reasons why *edublogs* is chosen in this study. Firstly, it is really easy to use and quick to set up. The versatilities of the blog increase students' interest to learn English. *Edublogs* is also user friendly that teachers could upload and update the blog anytime and anywhere. Secondly, *edublogs* allows teachers to

monitor students easily by giving time limitation when they do their task on the blog and ensuring the content is appropriate as well as to be a great tool for both teachers and students.

1.8.2 Blogging

Creating blogs and updating them regularly. The blogging activities that related in this research including commenting, revising, drafting and publishing the narrative essays on the blog.

1.8.3 Narrative

Spoken or written account of events; in the form of storytelling. Narrative in this study related to three or four pictures in a story line with few guided words.

1.8.4 Essay

A piece of writing, usually short and in prose, on any one subject. Essay in this study is related to the sequences of writing of the story based on the three or four pictures in the question. The essay is evaluated based on language, content, mechanics and grammar.

1.8.5 Narrative Essay

Narrative essay refers to a clear sequence of events that occurs over time. Both what happens and the order in which the events occur are communicated to the reader. Effective narration requires a writer to give a clear sequence of events (fictional or non-fictional) and to provide elaboration. Someone who wants to write the essay or story must know the steps of writing process and their aspects. Organizing the ideas in constructing the sentences, spelling well and using correct punctuation are must for all writers. One of the kind of text types in writing is narrative text. Narrative is a kind of writing that tells reader a story or relates an event whether in personal experience or in a personal way.

Zulfida and Sumarsih (2013) state the generic structure of narrative texts is having orientation, complication and resolution. The problem is the students' ability in narrative writing is not same for all students. Therefore, it is necessary to find a suitable technique in teaching writing in order to improve students' ability in narrative writing. Furthermore, a teacher also has to find a way to enhance their thinking skill and at the same time to spark their interest in writing. Students really need good vocabularies for precise word choices which are critical to make writing explicit.

The generic structure of narrative texts is having orientation, complication and resolution. According to Langan (2005), narration is commonly called as story telling whether we are relating a single story or several stories related to ones. The writers make a clear statement by relating something that they have experienced to happen in their lives. Narrative writing also has series of events that happened to a character. It could be human, animal, plant or thing. There are many types of narrative such as fairy stories, mysteries, science fiction, romances, horror stories, slice of life, and personal experience.

Anderson (1997) states that a narrative text is signed by the chorological use of time. The note expansion is used in this research as it has sequences and the students need to write their own prediction at the end of the story. The type of narrative text for this research is three or four stimulus pictures and each picture are given four or five guided words. The length for this narrative text would be more than 80 words. The topic or theme for the narrative text is chosen from any of Malaysian primary school of level two text books such as World of Stories, World of Families and World of Knowledge.

1.9 Summary

The basic concept of writing in English among primary school students in Malaysia and the use of blog towards the achievement in students' narrative writing have been discussed in the background to the study section followed by the problem statement and the objectives of the study. The research questions and hypotheses, the significance and limitations of the study as well as the operational definitions of terms are also presented. In the following chapter, the researcher will discuss the literature review concerning the study.