

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

**THE USE OF BLOGS TO IMPROVE FORMAL LETTER
WRITING SKILL AMONG IKM LUMUT STUDENTS**

NORLIZA BINTI ZAINAL

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ABSTRACT

Blogging is viewed as a tool in helping the students to improve their formal letter writing skill through a self-correction practice and autonomous learning behavior (Arana, 2013). To ascertain such contention, this study aims to investigate the use of blogs to improve students' formal letter writing skill. Two classes or a total of 30 students from Institut Kemahiran MARA Lumut participated in this study that ran for 6 weeks. A quasi-experimental research design was used to answer the research questions in this study. These two classes were introduced to blogging as they wrote job application letters in their blogs during the 6-week treatment. A pre-test and post-test were administered one week before and after the treatment was carried out. The results of the pre-test were compared with the result of the post-test to identify the improvement of their writing skills. After the experiment, the students were asked to express their attitude towards using blogs in learning through questionnaire and interview. The findings reveal that students' formal letter writing skill improved based on the results of independent sample t-test and paired samples t-test of their pre-test and post-test mean scores at $p < 0.05$ level of significance. Furthermore, two raters unanimously agree that students' job application letter writing improved on content, format and mechanics. The result from questionnaire also indicated that students had positive attitudes in the overall attitude ($M=4.53$) of learning writing through blog. The interview responses implied that blogging can be considered as an effective platform in facilitating the development of students' formal letter writing skill. Therefore, it can be concluded that blogging can help in improving students' formal letter writing skill in ESL classroom.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

The social networks of the Internet are bringing the world closer together and it has changed the students' conventional ways of learning especial in writing. Nowadays students are familiarly seen with their labtop, tablet, IPad, and other electronic gadgets as compared to those days where they used to in-class writing tasks using the traditional mode of writing like paper and pen. The online world encourages students to be more actively involved in the tasks given by teachers. As a result, students' learning is promoted through digital devices from consequential activities which engage real audiences. The novel wares of technology have evolved from desktops to laptops to wireless systems to handheld devices, in which online social networks and Web-based learning environments have been established (Ferdig & Trammel, 2004). Martindale and Wiley (2004) suggest the Web is one of the most accessible technology integration pieces available for classroom use. Today, educators can utilize social networking sites as Blogger, Tumblr, Face book, and Multiply as platforms in honing students' writing skills. Among these sites, blog is the most widely used domain in ESL writing classrooms (De Almeida Soares, 2008).

Blog is an example of social networking which allows people to connect, to communicate, and to collaborate online (Kitchakarn, 2012). According to Cequena

(2013), blogging may help to develop students' ability to organize their thoughts and support their topic with adequate details since they have been introduced to peer feedback online and their exposure to various written essay may have also provided them insights on effective strategies to use in text organization. Similarly, Richardson (2006) claimed that blogs integrate students into the world of interconnected media; they become familiar with using blog both as a writer and a reader. Blogs also provide a great value in developing critical thinking skills, writing skills and information literacy.

The use of blogs in writing class would encourage constructive learning and collaborative classroom discussion making education more meaningful. According to research done by Mynard (2007), it showed that students used their blogs as a medium to reflect on specific aspects of their learning where they can express or reflect their ideas on their learning experience and add their comments to their friends' blogs to encourage further reflection.

Blogging and its impact on students' writing performance has been the subject of several studies and most of them confirm that blogging improves students' writing skills. This has been found to be especially in higher education (Normand-Marconnet & Cordella, 2012; Abu Bakar, Latif & Ya'acob, 2010; Song & Chan, 2008; Williams & Jacobs, 2004). Blogs are one of the alternative technological tools that can help students develop their skills, especially writing (Normand-Marconnet & Cordella, 2012; Våljataga, 2010; Sollars, 2007). Thus, this study attempts to investigate the use of blogs to improve formal letter writing skills among IKM Lumut students.