UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

EFFECT OF BLOGGING ON ESSAY WRITING PERFORMANCE OF IRANIAN GRADUATE STUDENTS

HAJAR KASHANI

FPP 2014 62

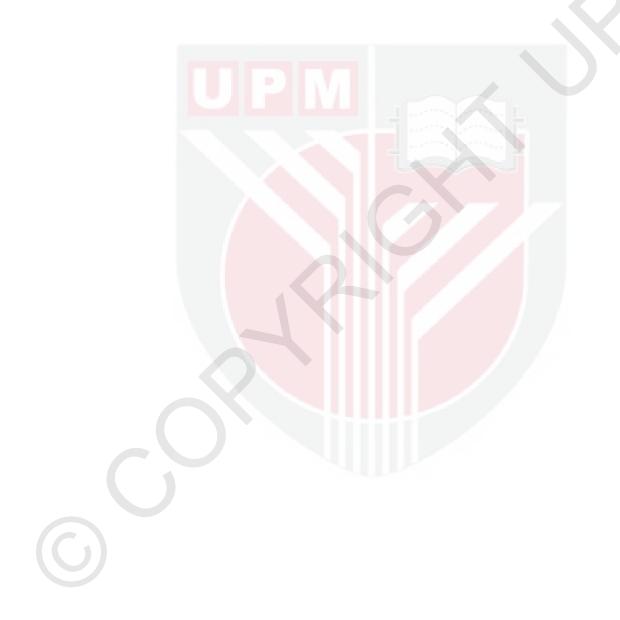**EFFECT OF BLOGGING ON ESSAY WRITING PERFORMANCE OF IRANIAN GRADUATE STUDENTS**

By

HAJAR KASHANI

Thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science

January 2014

DEDICATION

To my father
Source of knowledge, insight, intelligence, and love...

EFFECT OF BLOGGING ON ESSAY WRITING PERFORMANCE OF IRANIAN GRADUATE STUDENTS
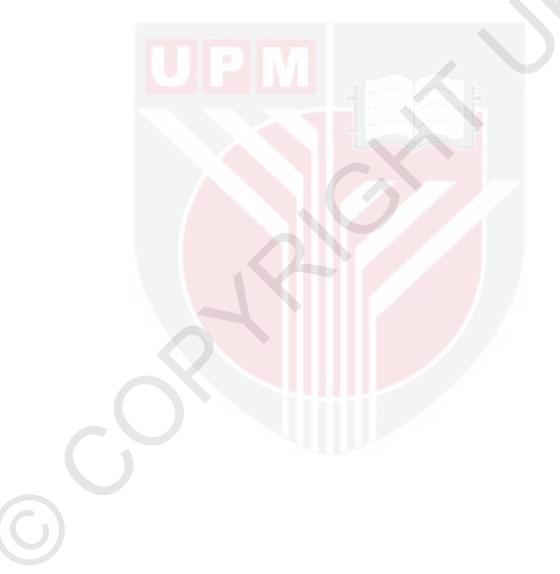
By

HAJAR KASHANI

January 2014

Chairperson: Rosnaini Bt. Mahmud, PhD

Faculty: Educational Studies

The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of blogging on the essay writing performance of Iranian graduate students. The writing performance was measured in terms of content, organization, language use, vocabulary, and mechanics. A quantitative experimental design was used to assess the effect of blogging on the Iranian graduate students' essay writing performance compared to the control group who did not receive the treatment (blogging) and used conventional pen-and-paper tool for essay writing. Sixty four participants were randomly assigned into two groups of pen-and-paper and blogging by using the table of random assignment. The instrument to assess the participants' writing performance in their pre and posttest was the TOEFL writing test. The instruments were validated by two experienced English language experts before using in this study. Data were analyzed descriptively and inferentially using paired-sample t-test and independent-sample t-test. Results of the pretest and posttest of each group showed that both groups improved in their overall writing performance from pretest to posttest. The pen-and-paper group pretest overall mean was 51.15 while in the posttest overall it increased to 63.11 ($p< 0.05$). Therefore, there was a significant difference between the pretest and posttest overall mean scores of the pen-and-paper group. The blogging group pretest overall mean score was 49.93 while it increased to 65.48 in their posttest overall mean score ($p< 0.05$). Thus, there was a significant difference between the pretest and posttest overall mean scores of the blogging group. Posttest results which compared both groups revealed that only in terms of content the blogging group outperformed the pen-and-paper group. It means that in other writing categories such as organization, vocabulary, language use, mechanics, and also in overall writing performance there was no significant difference between two groups after participating in the study. The posttest mean score of pen-and-paper group was 63.11 while for the blogging group 65.4 ($p> 0.05$) showed there was no significant difference in posttest scores of writing overall performance between pen-and-paper and blogging groups. The post content mean score of pen-and-paper group was 18.37 while the

blogging group's post content mean score was 19.90 ($p< 0.05$). This showed that there was a significant difference in post content mean scores between pen-and-paper and blogging groups. Results of the study showed that essay writing can enhance the university students' writing performance by using both conventional and technology-based tools. The study also suggests using blogging as a communicative tool of writing to the ESL/EFL teachers in order to lower the students' anxiety level compared to the pen-and-paper tool and increase their motivation in writing.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Sarjana Sains

KESAN MENGGUNAKAN BLOG TERHADAP PENCAPAIAN PENULISAN ESEI PELAJAR SISWAZAH IRAN

Oleh

HAJAR KASHANI

Januari 2014

Pengerusi: Rosnaini Bt. Mahmud, PhD

Fakulti: Pengajian Pendidikan

Tujuan kajian ini ialah membandingkan kesan menggunakan blog terhadap pencapaian penulisan esei pelajar siswazah Iran. Pencapaian diukur daripada segi isi kandungan, organisasi, penggunaan bahasa, perbendaharaan kata dan mekanik. Satu reka bentuk eksperimen kuantitatif telah digunakan untuk menilai kesan penggunaan blog kepada pencapaian penulisan esei pelajar siswazah Iran berbanding dengan kumpulan kawalan yang tidak menerima bantuan (blog) dan menggunakan cara konvensional iaitu pen-dan-kertas untuk penulisan karangan. Enam puluh empat peserta dipilih secara rawak telah dibahagi kepada dua kumpulan pen dan kertas dan blog dengan menggunakan jadual tugasan rawak. Instrumen yang digunakan untuk mengukur pencapaian penulisan peserta di dalam ujian pra dan ujian pasca ialah ujian penulisan TOEFL. Instrumen disahkan oleh dua orang pakar Bahasa Inggeris yang berpengalaman sebelum digunakan dalam kajian ini. Data dianalisis secara descriptif dan inferensi menggunakan ujian-t bersandar dan ujian-t tidak bersandar. Hasil ujian pra dan ujian pasca setiap kumpulan menunjukkan kedua-dua kumpulan ada peningkatan dalam pencapaian keseluruhan penulisan. Min keseluruhan ujian pra bagi kumpulan pen-dan-kertas adalah 51.15 sementara min keseluruhan ujian pasca meningkat kepada 63.11 ($p < 0.05$). Oleh itu, terdapat perbezaan yang signifikan antara ujian pra dan ujian pasca skor min keseluruhan bagi kumpulan pen-dan-kertas. Skor min keseluruhan ujian pra untuk kumpulan blog adalah 49.93 sementara min keseluruhan untuk ujian pasca meningkat kepada 65.48 ($p < 0.05$). Oleh itu, terdapat perbezaan yang signifikan antara ujian pra dan ujian pos keseluruhan skor min kumpulan blog . Keputusan ujian pasca yang membandingkan pencapaian kedua-dua kumpulan menunjukkkan hanya daripada segi isi kandungan kumpulan blog yang mengatasi kumpulan pen-dan-kertas. Maksudnya, dalam kategori penulisan lain seperti organisasi, perbendaharaan kata, penggunaan bahasa, mekanik, dan juga dalam pencapaian penulisan keseluruhan tidak terdapat perbezaan yang signifikan antara kedua-dua kumpulan tersebut selepas menyertai kajian

ini. Min skor pasca kumpulan pen-dan-kertas ialah 63.11 manakala bagi kumpulan blog ialah 65.4 (p> 0.05) menunjukkan tidak ada perbezaan yang signifikan dalam skor ujian pos penulisan pencapaian keseluruhan antara pen-dan-kertas dan kumpulan blog. Skor min pasca isi kandungan bagi kumpulan pen-dan-kertas ialah18.37 manakala skor min bagi kumpulan blog ialah 19.90 (p<0.05). Ini menunjukkan terdapat perbezaan yang signifikan dalam skor min pasca isi kandungan antara kumpulan pen-dan-kertas dengan kumpulan blog. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa menulis esei boleh meningkatkan prestasi penulisan pelajar universiti dengan menggunakan alat konvensional dan berasaskan teknologi. Kajian ini juga mencadangkan menggunakan blog sebagai alat komunikatif bertulis kepada guru-guru ESL / EFL untuk mengurangkan tahap kerisauan pelajar berbanding dengan pen-dan-kertas dan meningkatkan motivasi untuk menulis.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I am thankful to the merciful and gracious Allah for blessing me during my life and helping me to complete this dissertation. I would like to thank my dear chairman of the supervisory committee, Dr. Rosnaini Mahmud who guided me patiently during the whole process of my data collection and thesis writing. She was really concerned and careful about my work since she respects good quality. I took all my courage and strength from her to continue the challenge of my research. Secondly, I would like to express my appreciation to my committee member, Dr. Nooreen Noordin, whose valuable insights and guidance toward my research were of great importance to me.

Thirdly, I would like to acknowledge all the Iranian postgraduate students who were the participants of this study. I confess that without them I would not have been able to carry out such research.

Finally, I would like also to thank my parents, Hossein Kashani and Sedigheh Kashani, for all their encouragement and support from my first day of school until now and their infinite love and patience towards me and my brothers. No words are really adequate to express what I owe them. To them I will always be grateful.

This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

Rosnaini Bt. Mahmud, PhD
Senior Lecturer
Faculty of Educational Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Chairperson)

Nooreen Noordin, PhD
Senior Lecturer
Faculty of Educational Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Member)

BUJANG BIN KIM HUAT, PhD
Professor and Dean
School of Graduate Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia

Date:

Declaration by graduate student

I hereby confirm that:
x   this thesis is my original work
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CALL	Computer-Assisted Language Learning
CMC	Computer-Mediated Communication
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ESL	English as a Second Language
ETS	English Testing System
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
MMU	Multimedia University
PHD	Doctor of Philosophy
SGS	School of Graduate
SPSS	Studies Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
TESL	Teaching English as a Second Language
TOEFL	Test Of English as a Foreign Language
TWE	Test of Writing English
UKM	Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
UM	University of Malaya
UPM	Universiti Putra Malaysia
UTM	Universiti Technologi Malaysia

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The English language is basically taught as a foreign language in Iran (Noora, 2008) which is most often being studied in formal educational settings such as schools, universities and language institutes and its role in Iran educational system is very important (Khajavi & Gordani, 2010). Iranians have different reasons to learn English such as travelling to foreign countries, becoming English teachers or tour guides, trading with other countries, or passing Test Of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or International English Language Testing System (IELTS) exams in order to enter overseas universities (Khajavi & Abbasian, 2011). However, the most significant role of English in Iran is in academic settings particularly in graduate program. Likewise, English is mostly used as a means of educational development in Iran (Farhady, Sajjadi Hazaveh, & Hedayati, 2010).

In accordance with Iran's Secretariat of the Higher Council of Education (2006), English is taught from the first year of secondary school (Year 6) until the last year of high school (Year 12) for seven years. However, it is being instructed at universities as general and specialized English courses. In Iranian universities, as Farhady *et al.* (2010) explained, a three-unit credit of general English is required for all fields of study. Besides, another four compulsory units of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) should be fulfilled by the students. At Iranian universities, English language instructors use grammar-translation method and give priority to reading skill among four other skills (Noora, 2008). Similarly, the university instructors are adhered to the traditional methods of grammar and translation (Boniadi, Ghojazadeh, & Rahmatvand, 2013). Reading comprehension and grammar are highlighted in English language teaching system of Iran compared to other language skills such as speaking, writing, and listening. This scenario demonstrates that the Iranian students are not well taught in writing, speaking and listening skills and they lack being proficient in these skills (Khajavi & Gordani, 2010).

As a result, although the Iranian students studying abroad -including Iranian graduate students at Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) study English from their 6th year at school until the end of university period, they suffer from lack of proficiency in English language especially writing skill.

1.1.1 Iranian Students at Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM)

There are approximately 50,000 Iranian students currently studying abroad. They are widespread in the American, Canadian, European, Australian and

Asian universities (Iran Ministry of Science, Research and Technology, 2012).

Following this, in the last few years, there has been a rapid growth of the Iranian students in Malaysian universities (Pourshahian, Gholami, Vaseghi & Rezvani Kalajahi, 2012). According to the Iran embassy website (2012), there are currently around 15,000 Iranian students studying at different Malaysian public and private universities such as Universiti Malaya (UM), Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM), Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Multimedia University (MMU) and Limkokwing University.

According to Bernama News Agency (2011), Malaysia has become a major choice for students from Iran to further their studies at the Master degree and doctorate levels due to various favorable conditions in this country such as the affordable cost of higher education in Malaysia, moderate cost of living, political stability, and its warm and friendly people. Furthermore, the Malaysian universities are well-known worldwide and the degrees are internationally recognized. Besides, there is no entrance exam for entering the Malaysian universities in contrast to Iranian universities (Bernama News Agency, 2011).

As stated in the UPM School of Graduate Studies' (SGS) records (2009), there were 1,411 Iranian students studying in UPM who enrolled in different majors and fields of study for Master and PhD programs in 2009. In the context of UPM, for direct admission, an international applicant including Iranians must obtain a minimum score of 550 for the TOEFL Paper Based Test (Academic Version) or Band 6.0 for IELTS (Academic Training), or 79-80 for TOEFL Internet-based Test or 213 for TOEFL Computer-based Test or their equivalents. The validity period should not be more than two years (SGS, 2011). An international applicant gaining a TOEFL Paper-based Test, or equivalent, score of 500 to 549, or an IELTS band of 5.5 (from its Academic Version) might be accepted on a provisional basis for admission to any degree program except those in the field of Teaching English as a Second Language, English Literature, and English Language. These applicants have to take part in the English courses offered by the university before they can begin their academic module (SGS, 2011).

1.1.2 The Iranian students' need for the English language

English is a second language in Malaysia and the university courses are being taught in both the Malay and English language. Hence, according to Pourshahian *et al.* (2012), the international students, including Iranian students, who are pursuing their graduate studies in Malaysian universities are required to know how to use English in various areas such as communicating with the lecturers, supervisors, and other students, doing their assignments and research as well as writing their theses and journal articles. Due to their English language background, when Iranian students plan to carry out their research in a university abroad in English, they suffer

from their weaknesses in writing, speaking and other language skills. However, the most problematic scopes are writing skill and grammar respectively (Pourshahian *et al.*, 2012). As a result, it is crucial for all international students including Iranian students of UPM to be proficient not only in reading and understanding the academic texts, but also in academic writing skills in order to fulfill their study requirements based on the university standards (Mousavi & Kashefian-Naeeini, 2011).

Accordingly, essay writing is one of the compulsory tasks for the university students although it is rather demanding for the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students (Lee, Wong, Cheung & Lee, 2009). Essay writing can be accomplished in different ways, using conventional and technology based tools. The conventional tool is mainly comprised writing with pen and paper. The technology-based tool consists of writing via computer and the Internet which has recently become more widespread. One of the technology-based writing tools which have been used for more than a decade is blogging. Blogs can be defined as web applications enabling the users to enter, edit, and display posts whenever they wish (Crystal, 2001). Moreover, blogs have different applications ranging from informative tools used by university departments to a personal diary (Hashemi, 2010).

1.1.3 Weblogs as a Tool for Teaching Writing

According to Arslan and Şahin-Kızıl (2010), Blog can serve as an applicable means of teaching writing in a Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) context. Moreover, Williams and Jacobs (2004) pointed out that "Blogs can facilitate knowledge sharing, reflection, and debate". They add that blogs transform learning and teaching by their potential as learning spaces for the students. Likewise, Godwin-Jones indicate that a blog can be a tool for writing and reading exercise and feedback is encouraged by the design of its page.

According to Warschauer (2010), blogs "created more authors than probably any other medium in human history". He adds that although some technological tools such as blogs can facilitate teaching writing, but there should be meaningful use of these tools in order to augment the students' language proficiency especially writing. Likewise, Pinkman (2005) declares in this regard that "In language learning, blogs can be used as tools to develop writing skills and although   they should not replace face-to-face interaction, they may provide a practice environment where students can think, reflect, and create language slowly for a real-life audience."

According to Rezaee and oladi (2008), when the students write on the weblog, their writing style may change from conversational to academic one. Moreover, they feel that they have their own voice in a writing group and participate in creating an online content, not just consuming it (Rezaee & Oladi, 2008). By using weblog, learners can have discourse among themselves as well as learners and instructors (Brandon, 2003; O'Donnell,

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2006). Rebecca Blood (2002) who is the blogging first book writer, assumed that the blogger would be encouraged by his/her community to develop writing.

1.2 Statement Of The Problem

Iranian students studying overseas particularly in the English language contexts have to be able to utilize English well in terms of communication, writing of theses and assignments. However, they face problems due to some reasons, one of which is the fact that the medium of instruction in Iranian schools and universities is Persian (Boniadi *et al.*, 2013). Another reason according to Vaezi (2008) is the shortage of native teachers in Iran due to the political causes. Hence, Iranian students in general have few opportunities to learn from such native speakers of English (Vaezi, 2008).

However, the most important reason is the teaching methods of English in Iran, which is outdated and concentrates mostly on reading skill and grammar. Thus, it does not strengthen the writing, speaking, and listening skills of the students (Boniadi *et al.*, 2013; Khajavi & Gordani, 2010; Noora, 2008). Although the Iranian students are taught English language skills namely, writing, listening, reading and speaking for seven years at school, they are still unable to achieve complete proficiency after all these years (Piri, Barati, & Ketabi, 2012). In a study, it was found that the major problems in academic writing among Iranian postgraduate students in Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) are in content and form which consist of difficulties in punctuation, grammar and spelling (form) and organizing information, expressing ideas critically and coherence (content) (Mousavi & Kashefian-Naeeini, 2011). The root of these difficulties is basically not having sufficient practice in English writing while they were studying in Iran, lack of teaching experience of their English teachers, inadequate group activities inside their classes, and discouraging environment for learning English in Iran as the principal causes of not being competent in academic writing. Moreover, since English is a foreign language in Iran, the main education is in Persian and only few hours at schools and universities are allocated for teaching it (Mousavi & Kashefian-Naeeini, 2011). Likewise, it was revealed that the UPM postgraduate students had mostly difficulty in writing skills and grammar respectively (Pourshahian *et al.*, 2012). As a result, writing skill is one of the most important needs of Iranian graduate students which can be accomplished by using technology tools such as weblog.

Above all, prior to this study (around one month before the pretest), a needs analysis was conducted by the researcher regarding English problems among randomly selected UPM Iranian graduate students. The researcher sent an email to all the volunteers requesting them to write about their problems in writing in one paragraph. Around 70% of them replied about their writing difficulties. Based on this analysis, it was found that the majority of them faced problems in sentence construction and connecting

sentences together (organization), subject-verb agreement (language use), spelling, capitalization (mechanics), letter writing, and paraphrasing (Appendix A).

Some studies have been done regarding essay writing by pen and paper (Connor & Lauer, 1985; Norton, 1990; Intaraprawat & Steffensen, 1995; Hounsel, 1997; Krause, 2001; Rollinson, 2005; Uysal, 2008; Hinkel, 2009) but a few studies such as Dalir, Jafarigohar and Soleimani (2013) were conducted regarding the use of blogging in essay writing particularly for the Iranian students. However, to date, there is no study comparing pen-and-paper and blogging as conventional and technology-based tools in writing essays for Iranian postgraduate students. All in all, it can be concluded that writing on a blog is a new tool of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or English as a Second Language (ESL) writing ability in the developed and developing countries such as Iran. However, pen and paper remains as the main mode of writing at schools and universities around the globe.

Due to the Iranian postgraduate students' need to improve in writing skills, the present study was conducted in order to compare two groups of the students namely pen-and-paper and blogging in their writing performance before and after the study.

1.3   Research Objectives

In general, the main aim of this study is to compare the effectiveness of blogging and traditional pen-and-paper methods on Iranian graduate students' writing performance.

Specifically, this study aims:
1. to determine if there is a significant difference between pretest and posttest mean scores of overall writing performance for the pen-and-paper and the blogging groups.
2. to determine if there is a significant difference between pretest and posttest mean scores of overall writing performance for the blogging group.
3. to determine if there is a significant difference in the posttest content, organization, language use, vocabulary, and mechanics mean scores between pen-and-paper and blogging groups.
4. to determine how the blogging improves the writing performance.

1.4   Research Question And Hypotheses

This study was carried out in order to answer to the following question:
How does blogging improve the students' writing performance?
Likewise, this study investigates eight null hypotheses as follows:

Null Hypotheses:

H_0 **1:** There is no significant difference between the pretest and posttest mean scores of overall writing performance for the pen-and-paper group.
H_0 **2:** There is no significant difference between the pretest and posttest mean scores of overall writing performance for the blogging group.
H_0 **3:** There is no significant difference in the posttest mean scores of overall writing performance between pen-and-paper and blogging groups.
H_0 **4:** There is no significant difference in the posttest content mean scores between pen-and-paper and blogging groups.
H_0 **5:** There is no significant difference in the posttest organization mean scores between pen-and-paper and blogging groups.
H_0 **6:** There is no significant difference in the posttest language use mean scores between pen-and-paper and blogging groups.
H_0 **7:** There is no significant difference in the posttest vocabulary mean scores between pen-and-paper and blogging groups.
H_0 **8:** There is no significant difference in the posttest mechanics mean scores between pen-and-paper and blogging groups.

1.5   Significance Of Study

This study was done in order to compare the effectiveness of two methods of writing namely, pen-and-paper and blogging on Iranian graduate students' writing performance.

The findings of this study can benefit various relevant parties such as the Iranian Ministry of Education, university lecturers, curriculum planners, language schools, and university students. This study can help the Ministry of Education of Iran to plan new and more effective methods of teaching writing at schools and universities such as using blogs in essay writing. They can use technology in their syllabi and compare the function with the conventional methods of teaching writing.

The findings of this study will provide the lecturers with better knowledge and understanding of the graduate students' needs for writing in the English language. They can use blogs as a tool for teaching writing in their classes and view the students' motivation and eagerness in writing. Since this study has scheduled topics based on five categories of writing namely, content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics, the lecturers can focus on each category in each session of their lectures and ask the students to write on essay topics based on these categories. If the lecturers provide feedback to the students, it will be more beneficial for the latter and help them to improve their essay writing.

The syllabus and curriculum planners can use the findings from this study to help them design practical writing courses in which the students receive feedback. They can include in the books writing topics which are more interesting for the students to write about.
In addition, the English language institutes of Iran can apply the two methods of teaching essay writing namely, blogging and pen-and-paper in their writing courses. By using blogs as a modern tool of teaching writing they can make their students' progress in using technology in essay writing.

The findings of this research are also helpful for postgraduate students who have experienced the tedious and non-creative English courses and need to learn English language in a modern and fresh atmosphere. It encourages them to learn how to communicate in English by writing essays either by blogging or with pen-and-paper. Writing essays without being graded helps them to reduce their anxiety and feel comfortable in writing.

1.6   Limitations Of Study

The present study investigates the effect of essay writing by blogging in contrast to pen-and-paper essay writing on writing performance in terms of content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. The

researcher is aware of the limitations in this study which are described in this section.

The study was carried out solely in UPM; therefore, it may be inappropriate to generalize the results to all Iranian graduate students in Malaysia. The writing tools in this study were confined only to two writing tools namely, pen-and-paper and blogging. Besides, the research was done only among the graduate students, so the undergraduate students did not have the chance to participate in this research. Moreover, the participants of this study were only Iranian graduate students and there was no participant from other nationalities.

Besides, Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL), English language and English Literature Iranian students were excluded from the study since their level of English language proficiency was assumed to be higher than that of the other students of different programs of study. The scope of this study focused only on the writing proficiency of the participants and other language skills such as reading, speaking and listening were not investigated. Moreover, the period of the study was limited to eight weeks only and the students needed to write at least six topics. Each topic was given feedback based on one of the five writing categories only (content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics) and did not include other writing categories.

Additionally, the methodology applied for the sake of this research was experimental since the participants were randomly assigned into two groups of pen-and-paper and blogging. Furthermore, the instruments used in this study were confined to TOEFL writing test topics and did not include other internationally accepted test topics such as IELTS.

1.7   Operational Definitions

In the following section, the operational definitions of all the variables of the study and specialized terms are defined and the meaning of each is explained.

1.7.1   Essay Writing

Donald, Morrow, Wargetz and Werner (1992) define essay writing as the act of writing an interpretation of experience. They assert that what an essay communicates is not facts or information, but an interpretation of such facts or information (p.6). In this study, essay refers to a piece of assigned writing topic which was written by the students and submitted to the researcher. The six essay topics were selected from the TOEFL writing topics. The blogging group wrote their essays on the blog and the pen-and-paper group wrote them on paper. The length of the essays was 150-250 words each.

1.7.2 Writing performance

In the context of this study, writing performance is the obtained scores of students in their pre and posttest writing tests rated by two raters. The students' tests were rated based on ESL Composition profile developed by Jacobs, Zingraf, Wormuth, Harfiel, and Hughey (1981) in terms of content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. The writing test was based on the TOEFL writing test.

1.7.3 TOEFL writing topics

TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) writing topics are the topics given to the TOEFL test takers in their Test of Writing English (TWE). The 30-minute writing test TWE is a part of the TOEFL Paper-Based test. Participants in the test are required to write a brief essay about a given topic to demonstrate their ability to organize and create ideas, and supporting those ideas in writing with evidence and examples, employing the written English format (ETS, 2010). In the context of this study, TOEFL writing topics are the six essay topics the participants of both groups wrote about during the eight weeks of treatment.

1.7.4 Pen-and paper

Pen-and-paper can be defined as a conventional tool for writing. In this study, pen-and-paper refers to the tool the control group used in order to write their essays.

1.7.5 Pen-and-paper group

In this study, pen-and-paper group is the control group, which did not receive the actual treatment of blogging for writing essays and used pen and paper for writing the six assigned essays. It included 31 Iranian graduate students of UPM.

1.7.6 Blog

Eastment (2005) has defined blog as online diaries. It is a log where the owner can write anything such as reflections, things that happen in his or her daily life, or even opinions or views. Campbell (2003) defines blog as an online journal that an individual continuously update with his or her own words, ideas, and thoughts through software that enables one to easily do soll (p. 54). In this study, blog refers to a created website

(www.afternoonwriting.blogspot.com) in which the blogging group participants wrote their essays.

1.7.7 Blogging

Weil (2006) defines blogging as a tool for immediate publishing and updating the content. It can be applied as a tool for teaching writing to the students, as well. Blogging in this study refers to the act of writing six essays on the blog during eight weeks of treatment by the blogging group participants.

1.7.8 Blogging group

Blogging group in this study refers to the experimental group who wrote six assigned essay topics via a blog. The blogging group included 33 Iranian graduate students of UPM.

1.8 Summary

Blog is a new phenomenon as an educational tool which has been used for teaching and practicing writing in recent years while pen-and-paper is a conventional tool of writing. Iranian graduate students in Malaysia are in need of practicing their writing since English is a foreign language for them and their theses should be written in English. This study was done in order to compare and contrast two tools of essay writing namely, pen-and-paper and blogging for Iranian graduate students of UPM. It is evident that the study was constrained by some limitations such as the number of participants which was only 64 and the duration of study which was eight weeks. The important variables of the study were operationally defined at the end of this chapter.

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