

**EXPLORING THE USE OF THE WRITING
PORTAL TO SUPPORT ESL STUDENTS'
WRITING PROCESS**

NORAINI BINTI SAID



UMS
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SABAH

**THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

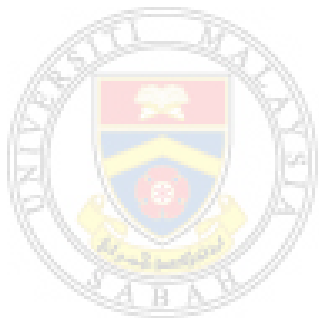
**FACULTY OF PSYCHOLOGY AND EDUCATION
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SABAH
2015**

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the material in this thesis is my own except for quotations, excerpts, equations, summaries and references, which have been duly acknowledged.

20th July 2015

Noraini Said
PT20109089



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SUPERVISORS' DECLARATION

NAME : NORAINI SAID

MATRIK NO. : PT20109089

TITLE : EXPLORING THE USE OF THE WRITING PORTAL (TWP) TO
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VIVA DATE : 12 MAY 2015

CERTIFIED BY

1. **MAIN SUPERVISOR**

Supervisor's Name



Signature

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2. **CO-SUPERVISOR**

Co-Supervisor's Name

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ABSTRACT

Studies have shown positive outcomes and benefits of collaboration in the stages of the writing process which contribute to students' writing development, particularly the use of technology such as open software and Web 2.0 tools which supports the Personal Learning Environment (PLE) and social constructivism. The purpose of this study is to explore the use of The Writing Portal (TWP) as a platform for online collaboration by pre-service English as second language (ESL) teachers when they embark on the five-stage writing process to accomplish their written coursework. TWP was introduced to serve as an online collaborative learning tool to support students' writing needs and improve their writing experience. Therefore, the study strives to achieve two purposes: to produce the prototype of a dynamic TWP by employing the systematic instructional model of ADDIE, and to test TWP usability by exploring its use in an actual written coursework in relation to all stages of the writing process. In the design and development stages, social constructivism-related concepts such as the PLE, collaborative learning, and web 2.0 were emphasized. The implementation stage took into account Rogers' Diffusion of Innovation theory to explain the process that explains the behaviors of TWP users. The evaluation stage comprised of formative evaluation, and summative evaluation to complement the data obtained throughout the reiterative stages of ADDIE. The participants in the study were 16 pre-service ESL teachers in a teacher education institute. The course lecturer also participated in the study in collaboration with the researcher to integrate TWP into the coursework. Other participants in the design process included instructional technology experts and subject matter experts since the study also captured the development of TWP. The pre-service teachers' writing experiences in the 12-week written coursework were studied through a qualitative case study design. Data was obtained from reflections, interviews, online discourses, feedback forms, content analysis of instructors' comments in writing drafts and log files from the portal. Data analysis mainly includes thematic analysis in most of the sources, and Soller's Collaborative Learning Conversation Skills Taxonomy (2001) was used to analyze users' interaction in TWP to find evidence of collaboration. Besides, students' writing drafts prior to the use of the portal, and after, were collected and analyzed to track any development which may be contributed by the portal. Their activities captured in TWP, and writing experiences were also compared. Positive results were seen in the evident use of TWP in all stages of the writing process, and students' improved writing experiences and perceptions after TWP use. TWP is therefore seen as a promising online writing support tool for future use. This study has the intention to highlight the significant roles and responsibilities of instructors as developers which are rarely captured in literature, and add to the body of knowledge on product development in ESL writing research.

ABSTRAK

MENEROKA PENGGUNAAN PORTAL PENULISAN UNTUK MENYOKONG PELAJAR DALAM PROSES PENULISAN BAHASA INGGERIS

Kajian lepas menunjukkan hasil yang positif dan manfaat kerjasama dalam peringkat proses penulisan yang menyumbang kepada perkembangan penulisan pelajar. Secara khususnya, penggunaan teknologi seperti perisian terbuka dan alat Web 2.0 yang menyokong Persekitaran Pembelajaran Personal (PLE) dan sosio-konstruktivisme. Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk meneroka penggunaan Portal Penulisan (TWP) sebagai platform untuk kerjasama dalam talian oleh guru pra-perkhidmatan bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa kedua (ESL) apabila mereka memulakan proses penulisan lima peringkat untuk dalam menyelesaikan penulisan akademik dalam kerja kursus mereka. TWP diperkenalkan untuk sebagai alat pembelajaran kolaboratif dalam talian untuk menyokong keperluan penulisan pelajar dan meningkatkan pengalaman penulisan mereka. Oleh itu, kajian ini berusaha untuk mencapai dua tujuan: untuk menghasilkan prototaip yang TWP dinamik dengan menggunakan model pengajaran yang sistematik ADDIE, dan untuk meneroka penggunaan TWP dalam kerja kursus bertulis sebenar berhubung dengan semua peringkat proses penulisan. Fasa reka bentuk dan pembangunan memberikan penekanan kepada konsep-konsep yang berkaitan dengan konstruktivisme sosial seperti PLE, pembelajaran kolaboratif, dan web 2.0. Peringkat pelaksanaan mengambil kira teori Rogers' Diffusion of Innovation untuk menerangkan proses yang meramalkan dan menerangkan tingkah laku pengguna TWP. Peringkat penilaian terdiri daripada penilaian formatif dan penilaian sumatif. Para peserta dalam kajian ini ialah 16 orang guru pra-perkhidmatan Bahasa Inggeris di institut pendidikan guru. Pensyarah kursus juga telah mengambil bahagian dalam kajian itu dengan bekerjasama dengan penyelidik untuk mengintegrasikan TWP ke dalam kursus. Peserta lain dalam proses reka bentuk termasuk pakar-pakar teknologi pengajaran dan pakar bidang di dalam fasa pembangunan TWP. Pengalaman penulisan guru-guru pra-perkhidmatan 'dalam kerja kursus bertulis 12 minggu telah dikaji melalui lensa kualitatif dengan reka bentuk kajian kes. Data diperolehi daripada soal selidik, temu bual, pemerhatian, analisis kandungan draf penulisan dan fail log daripada portal ini. Analisis data termasuk menggunakan Perbualan Kerjasama Pembelajaran Kemahiran Taksonomi Soller ini (2001) untuk menganalisis interaksi pengguna dalam TWP untuk mencari bukti kerjasama. Selain itu, penulisan pelajar draf sebelum penggunaan portal ini, dan selepas, dikumpulkan dan dianalisis untuk mengesan apa-apa pembangunan yang boleh disumbangkan oleh portal. Aktiviti-aktiviti mereka yang direkodkan dalam TWP, dan menulis pengalaman juga dibandingkan. Hasil yang positif dilihat dalam penggunaan TWP dalam semua peringkat proses penulisan, dan pengalaman pelajar dalam penulisan bertambah baik selepas menggunakan TWP. TWP juga dilihat sebagai alat sokongan dalam talian bertulis menjanjikan untuk kegunaan masa depan. Kajian ini mempunyai hasrat untuk menyerlahkan peranan dan tanggungjawab penting tenaga pengajar sebagai pembina alat sokongan pembelajaran yang jarang dikemukakan dalam kajian lepas, dan menambah kepada pengetahuan kepada pembangunan produk Pembelajaran Kolaboratif yang disokong Komputer (CSCL).

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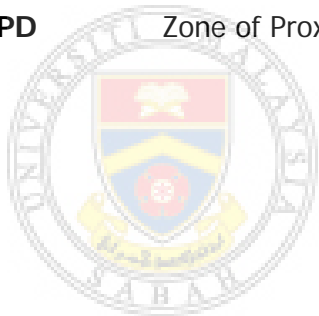
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LIST OF SYMBOLS / ABBREVIATIONS

ADDIE	Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, Evaluation
CALL	Computer-Assisted Language Learning
CSCL	Computer-Supported Collaborative Learning
CMS	Content Management System
LMS	Learning Management System
PLE	Personal Learning Environment
RSS	Rich Site Summary/ Really Simple Syndication
TEI	Teacher Education Institute
TWP	The Writing Portal
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Nowadays, many online ESL resources are available to cater to the different needs of students and teachers. A search using Google on 28^h August, 2014 alone yielded more than 11 million hits related to online ESL resources, and more than 45,000 hits on Google Scholar. This implies that there is a growing interest and demand in such resources as more and more online ESL resources are made available to interested users. Besides, such resources are also made as part of scholarly research and this proves how integral and essential these resources have become in education, especially ESL context. These online ESL resources range from educational portals, online writing labs, online dictionaries, discussion boards, online forums and many more. The popularity of these resources are further increased by the explosion and integration of web 2.0 technologies where online or internet resources are not just for display or just to be viewed only. Users can comment, interact, and sometimes edit the information on the web as well as sharing, discussing and inviting others to do the same.

As exciting as it may sound, as with other Internet resources, there is a great caution to using the Internet materials as references for educational or academic purpose. This is because, without having the skills and knowledge to filter unreliable information, the resources may not likely be helpful. Challenges and issues are often encountered in evaluating suitable resources such as the credibility and objectivity of the web authors, currency and accessibility of the web, and relevance and coverage of the content of the web. Nonetheless, there are undoubtedly credible and reliable ESL resources such as the Purdue Online Writing Lab (<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/>), Internet TESL journal (<http://iteslj.org>), and the Electronic Journal of TESL (<http://www.tesl-ej.org>) which benefit ESL students and practitioners. But sadly enough, there is no guarantee that ESL students do make use of these helpful ESL resources. Instead they may be using other

resources available in the Internet as often the case, students embarked on their own independent journey in seeking information especially those in higher education institutions.

Despite the caution, the use of internet has largely reformed the research field of computer-assisted language learning. In a presentation entitled "The History of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) Web Exhibition" at CALICO Conference in 2000 by Philippe, a detailed account of the birth of the Internet or World Wide Web (WWW) in late 80's and the boom in early 90's, and the history of CALL, was given. The presenters gave their credit by recognizing the integral role that Internet has played in the field of CALL. They claimed that to date, the web-based technology has contributed more advantages compared to how it was when CALL first emerged. Initially, the previous generation of CALL was often associated with costly technologies, difficult to develop and run, and inability to offer real-time or authentic interaction. Recent CALL identified internet technologies as being more economical to develop and run, providing more opportunities for real interaction, and offering flexibility and ease of use especially to users who lack technical expertise.

In Malaysian context, CALL in higher education institutions is promising due to the promising trend of Internet use and its infrastructure. In fact, the use of Internet in Malaysia is growing extensively across its population. An MStar article dated April 14, 2011, reported findings from the Nielsen Mobile Insight Malaysia 2010 that the internet use based on population size was 41% compared to only 25% for the year before (Bernama, 2011). The study conducted by the Nielsen Co (M) Sdn. Bhd. also found that users between 20-24 years old were the heaviest users of Internet with an average of 23 hours spent on Internet per week. The findings are further backed up by a report released by the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission for the first quarter of 2011, where 15-24 years old are the groups with the highest use of Internet, 28 hours spent per week (SKMM, 2012). Other findings include the purpose of using Internet which concluded that searching for information is the top priority. The data on the age

group of users implied that the heavy users are mainly students, be they in secondary schools or tertiary level education institutions.

Apart from that, serious attention and efforts have been given to-- the use of e-learning especially in higher education setting in Malaysia, where Internet is heavily integrated to enable access to various resources and tools and solve physical barriers to access such as geographical and time barriers. In early 2000s, e-learning was largely introduced to accommodate students' needs who enroll in open and distance learning programs (Anuwar Ali, 2003; Syed Othman Alhabshi, 2005). In a presentation entitled "Trends in Malaysia's e-learning policies and projects" at e-learning Asia Conference, Norrizan Idris stated that the penetration of e-learning is only at half of the total number of public universities (NorrizanRazali, 2009).

However, according to Muhammad Amin Embi in the 2011 International Lifelong Learning Conference, e-learning is already integrated in all public universities, not only to cater to open and distance programs, but also extended to other mode of programs as well (Mohamed Amin Embi, 2011). Evident in the use of e-learning is the use of Learning Management Systems (LMS) using various platforms, which consist these applications: communication, course delivery, productivity, administration, and content development. These trends imply the significant role that Internet plays in the academic setting, and the collective support that it has received, especially in Malaysia.

With internet, information searching is often named as the top purpose of using the it, and it is safe to assume that students use the Internet for their studies, especially in accomplishing written tasks. Johan @Eddy Luan, Fatin Sabrina Abdul, Kamarol Baharen Mohd Rom, & Fazyudi Ahmad Nazri, 2012) supported this notion as they found more than 90% of their undergraduate respondents use Internet, and searching information for academic purposes is chosen as the main purpose of using Internet (98%). Apart from that, with newer Internet technologies, more interesting and beneficial applications have continued to attract users such as collaboration and sharing.

Despite the positive perceptions towards the use of Internet, there are also concerns associated with the heavy reliance on Internet. Many studies voiced concern about quality of writing and plagiarism in academic writing among students in higher education which resulted from the use of Internet (Calkins and Kelley, 2005; Grimes and Boening, 2001; Syed Shahabuddin, 2009). Based on the studies, a lot of factors were speculated as to why plagiarism is rampant among students. One of them is students feeling overwhelmed with the vast volume of information when they search for information.

The lack of ability to filter the irrelevant information also causes the students to give up, and simply copy and paste from the Internet. Inability to paraphrase and cite sources properly is also another challenge related to plagiarism. Apart from that, students' use of unevaluated or inappropriate Web resources to support their writing assignments is another concern. Evidence that this concern is widespread is apparent in the development of hundreds of online guides evaluating Web resources. This shows how easily students are seduced by the convenience and speed with which they can locate what they consider to be good information on the Web.

In the academic context, especially in the higher education setting, good writing is often a result of stages that writers, or students have to undergo when writing such planning, drafting, revising, editing and publishing. This five-stage writing process involves stages that often occur recursively, which means that students can go back and forth in any stages of writing (Flower and Hayes, 1981). For instance, if the student is not satisfied with the ideas already written in the writing draft, he can go back to the planning stage and plan what he really wants to put in. This writing process also focuses on the process instead of the product, and enables students to be conscious or aware of their writing process. However, as found in literature, students tend to skip the revising and editing stages. Consequently, students' writing may contain easily avoidable errors in terms of spelling, syntax and vocabulary.

Solutions came with the introduction and use of web 2.0 technologies that enable collaboration and sharing of ideas. An annotated bibliography on research in teaching of English by Beach *et al.* (2010) detailed the following benefits of web 2.0 technologies in learning: students are given the opportunities to collaborate on their writing tasks by having their work reviewed by their peers and teachers; discussion boards and forums offer answers to students; students also get to apply their language skills by expressing ideas on social networking sites and having their writing published in blogs and wikis.

All of these technologies bring forward endless opportunities for students in language learning. However, in terms of writing, what has been done so far appears to be only addressing specific stages of writing. More needs to be done to address all the stages by giving rigorous attention on planning and drafting where bulk of the problem often lies. This is because the skill of evaluating the information from the Internet, which made up an integral part in students' attempt to generate ideas as mentioned earlier, is very taxing especially for students who are already pressured with their course load.

1.2 Background of the study

Tawau Teacher Education Institute is one of the 27 Teacher Education Institutes under the Ministry of Education which offers training to pre-service teachers as well as in-service teachers. It is located in Tawau, far away from the other sibling branch campuses in Sabah namely: Gaya branch, Kent branch and Keningau Branch. It is also the 'youngest' campus compared to the other campuses as it was officially opened in 2005, and has the least number of students, as well as lecturers. Despite that, Tawau campus has strived continuously and has pledged its commitment to offering and meeting the needs of various academic programs of different levels such as Diploma and Bachelor Degree.

A landmark change happened in June 2009, when all Teacher Education Institute (TEI) branch campuses were given the honour to run the Bachelor of Education in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) for the first time. Previously TEIs throughout the country play the feeder role in providing the

foundation stage of twinning programs with local public universities and universities overseas. The TESL program consists of 3 semesters of Foundation program and 8 semesters of Degree program. Tawau campus welcomed its first batch of 20 TESL students to its English Language Department. However, the language department faced several challenges in meeting the needs of the new program, particularly due to the limited number of lecturers and resources such as TESL-related reference books and reading materials. The lack of experience was also a big issue as Tawau campus had never offered such program before, and therefore had problems planning and preparing for the program and the students' needs.

In January 2010, a project for the Language Development course was initiated to support students' academic needs and to make up for the limited number of face-to-face interaction with the students through the use of collaborative strategies via online tool, Wiki. It was specifically aimed to provide a platform for the students to work on their writing skills by giving them opportunities to draft, revise and edit their writing via the set up wiki. The project was a success in encouraging collaboration, and increasing number of revisions made in writing. The students were also satisfied that an effort was solely done and dedicated for them. The project also won a bronze medal in the National Innovation Contest organized by the Teacher Education Division of Ministry of Education (Noraini Said, Caroline, and Zillasafarina Jaafar, 2010).

However, the project ended when the wiki site was discontinued by the sponsor in January 2011, causing data loss as documents created and uploaded to the site could not be retrieved. Students were left to fend on their own and they resorted to different strategies to survive in the challenging academic environment as they were already in a Degree level by then. Coping with content-based courses in the Degree program, as opposed to skill-based courses in the Foundation program require different strategies, and greater support is needed to ensure students' engagement in the program.

Additionally, the department also could not offer much help due to the critical problems with human resources and fulfilling various responsibilities like

teaching proficiency courses for all non-TESL programs, training in-service teachers, making visits to schools for observation, and many more. Nevertheless, effort was done by the administration to buy compulsory references in all related course pro-forma. In June 2011, two more groups of TESL students enrolled in Tawau campus in spite of the already existing challenge.

In an effort to ameliorate some of the problems, an action plan, was drawn up in August 2011 (Noraini Said, Lee, and Tan, 2011) to address the following pressing concerns:

- i. Lack of support in terms of face-to-face consultation between lecturers and students,
- ii. Lack of resources in terms of compulsory references and reading materials,
- iii. Lack of opportunities for students to collaborate with each other, and mutually supporting each other's needs,
- iv. Lack of effort to make use of existing technology to assist students' learning,
- v. Concern about students' heavy reliance on internet materials as reference materials,
- vi. Concern about students' mastery of writing skills such as paraphrasing, citing sources correctly, and using reliable sources of information in writing.

The action plan outlines a number of initiatives and strategies to meet with the challenges identified. The initiatives in

clude:

- i. Supporting students' academic needs through online consultation and collaboration,
- ii. Leveraging on existing resources such as ICT facilities in the campus, lecturers' skills and expertise,
- iii. Providing a portal with reliable online ESL references to support students' writing,

- iv. Providing a platform that can encourage knowledge sharing and discussion,
- v. Offering writing support by giving links to materials related to writing such as evaluating Internet resources, citation styles, exercises and quizzes to improve writing.

The plan allowed experimentation with the use of open-source software to develop a Web-based tool (web portal) as an integral supplement for writing, and an alternative to much needed face-to-face consultation between students and lecturers, and students and students, especially when there are no more writing-skill-based courses offered in the degree program. In addition to providing a database of useful related external links and writing records, the planned online writing support should enable students to interact with others via a built-in discussion board and chat, where individuals can send text messages.

Based on the plan, students can also create individual pages to store, retrieve, create, edit, share, and discuss about their writing. This means that they can store their writing electronically and access it anytime they want. The tool should also offer security as only students who are registered in the portal can have access to this filtered information and communicate with other classmates. As for the research context, the tool should be equipped with log files to track user activities, and developed using the appropriate instructional design model of ADDIE. Further discussion on the selection of ADDIE as the instructional design principles is presented in the literature review and the portal development in Appendix E.

A number of potential benefits of having the online writing support are identified. Firstly, the project is considered as a cheap investment since TWP is developed by the researcher. Therefore the cost is much cheaper than outsourcing the project to private agencies or IT consultant, or procuring commercial software. Students also benefit from it in terms of convenience, flexibility, and accessibility of the portal. With the support available online, students are able to choose when