

ACHIEVEMENT OF MALE AND FEMALE STUDENTS USING E-DIALOGUE JOURNAL WRITING

SITI HAMIN STAPA¹ & INTAN SAFINAS MOHD ARIFF AL-BAKRI²

Abstract. Studies done in the area of composition support the notion that free writing activities help to develop confidence and efficiency among first language (L1) and second language (L2) students. Dialogue-journal writing is one of the activities in free writing that can provide students with the opportunity to explore and experiment with language. The emergence of microcomputer technology has given endless and remarkable enhancement in language teaching instruction. Studies done by Lee (1998) and Warshauer (1995) indicate the usefulness of e-mail in teaching English where teachers and students can communicate with each other through formal and informal consultation. Apart from that, e-mail can be used in exchanging dialogue journals and writing conference. The aim of this paper is to look at the effectiveness in terms of quantity and quality of e-mail as a tool in dialogue journal writing among male and female students from the Matriculation Centre in Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. The result of this study revealed that this technique is effective – all subjects showed improvement in their writing skills.

Keywords: e-mail, journal writing, computer-mediated communication, writing quality, writing quantity.

Abstrak. Kajian dalam bidang penulisan menyokong aktiviti penulisan berbentuk bebas untuk membina kemahiran penulisan kepada pelajar bahasa pertama dan kedua. Penggunaan jurnal berbentuk dialog adalah salah satu aktiviti di dalam penulisan bebas yang memberi peluang pelajar meneroka dan mencuba bahasa itu sendiri. Kemunculan teknologi komputer telah memberikan kesan yang tiada tandingnya di dalam pengajaran bahasa. Kajian yang dilakukan oleh Lee (1998) dan Warschauer (1995) menyatakan keberkesanan penggunaan mel elektronik dalam pengajaran bahasa Inggeris di mana pelajar dan pengajar boleh berkomunikasi secara formal dan tidak formal. Selain itu, mel elektronik juga boleh digunakan untuk bertukar jurnal dialog. Tujuan kertas kerja ini ialah untuk melihat keberkesanan dari segi kuantiti dan kualiti mel elektronik sebagai alat di dalam jurnal dialog kepada pelajar lelaki dan perempuan daripada Pusat Matrikulasi, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. Hasil kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa teknik pengajaran ini berkesan – kesemua subjek menunjukkan peningkatan di dalam kemahiran menulis.

Kata kunci: Mel-elektronik, penulisan jurnal, komunikasi melalui komputer, kualiti penulisan, kuantiti penulisan.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

EFL/ESL teachers are known for their innovations. When a new method or approach comes along, they explore and discuss it, and they sometimes adopt it,

¹ Fakulti Pengajian Bahasa, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, sitihami@pkrisc.cc.ukm.my

² Fakulti Pendidikan, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, intan@pkrisc.cc.ukm.my

partially or completely. For the past few years teachers have been talking about the use of computers in the language classroom. The discussion first centred on the use of computers as word processors, debating over the issue of whether students should use word processors in order to write their assignments. Studies have been conducted to answer the question and the result of the studies favour the use of the word processor, especially in the process approach. Many composition teachers believe that word processing, encourages new pedagogical relationships in the class, by facilitating student revision and collaborative writing (Susser, 1992). The debate on that matter is essentially over now with the teachers accepting the computer as a valuable tool for developing students writing skills.

Now the discussion has shifted to the use of the Internet and computer-mediated communication (CMC) in the language classroom. Most teachers who have ventured into cyberspace have reported about the wonderful learning opportunities offered to ESL/EFL students, as well as the valuable resources for teachers. Among the advantages of using the Internet are:

(i) Increased Student Motivation

People would usually enjoy new things, especially with the computer, where they can explore a lot of things with it. Students are very comfortable with computers and are very receptive to any learning activities that involve computers (Beauvois and Eledge, 1995; Warschauer, 1996, Siti Hamin and Intan Safinas, 2001). Increased motivation leads to increased language use which eventually leads to improved proficiency.

(ii) Authentic Language

Apart from increasing students' motivation, the Internet also provides exposure to authentic language. When a writing activity is truly communicative, as e-mail projects are, the language is authentic. In sending and receiving e-mail the students are not going through the motions of an artificial exercise. They are communicating because they need to and want to communicate.

(iii) Global Awareness

Apart from providing authentic language, information can also be exchanged easily between people in different corners of the world, connecting students around the globe. The students can have "key-pals" (electronic pen-pal) from all over the world and communication between students in Kuala Lumpur and Seoul can be effected swiftly and smoothly. With this type of communication, students can increase their understanding on global issues.

Dialogue-journal writing is a form of computer-mediated communication done through e-mail. Dialogue-journal is interactive, functional writing which occurs

between students and their teacher or their peers about self-generated topics of interest of each writer. Dialogue-journal writing is chosen for this study because it constitutes a purposeful use of writing in the school environment, one which has meaning and which benefits both student and teacher. It also serves as a bridge between spoken and written conversation.

1.1 Literature Review

Dialogue journal writing was used initially in L1 and ESL classes, and later in foreign language classes, as a successful writing technique. The benefits of using dialogue journals in the classroom have been reported by Barba (1993), Peyton and Reed (1990) and many others. Lee Geok Imm (1997) found that ESL Malaysian learners also benefit from this writing activity. The learners had improved their writing skills qualitatively and quantitatively (overall effectiveness, content, language, vocabulary and length). The improvement is a result of safe writing environment where the students communicate without having to worry about grammatical accuracy and where the instructor's responses act as models of accurate language.

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) has recently made its way in the teaching and learning of languages as an innovative way to increase language use in the classroom. Communicating through the Internet will not only have a great motivational effect on the students (Beauvois 1995, Warschauer 1996), but may also ultimately improve the students' writing and speaking skills as they send and receive e-mail messages. By providing additional possibilities to receive input and produce output in the foreign language, communicating through the electronic medium can establish a rich context for language development to occur. According to Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, language learners communicate by negotiating meaning, thereby creating an environment "o learn language, learn about language, and learn through language" (Warschauer 1997: 471).

Gonzalez-Bueno (1998) carried a research on the effects of electronic mail on Spanish students. She reported similar advantages of e-mail as discussed earlier. She added that dialogue journal activity gave some of the shy students, those who would never initiate open exchange, the opportunity to communicate without having to face embarrassment of making mistakes in front of the class. Apart from that students are also exposed to accurate input and corrective feedback from their teachers and peers, which are unavailable in group interaction. According to Gonzalez-Bueno these beneficial effects were enhanced, as witnessed by the quantity and quality of the target language produced by participants in contrast to that observed during previous experiences with paper-and-pencil versions of dialogue journals.

Wang (1994) observed that using the electronic medium to conduct dialogue journals in her intermediate English class had additional advantages over the traditional dialogue journals. She found out that a group of ESL students using e-mail for

their dialogue journals wrote more per writing session than did the traditional group, asked more questions, used more language functions, and adopted more conversational tone in their language. Some of these had already been observed in L1 CMC interactions (Ferrara, Bruner and Whittemore, 1991).

Siti Hamin and Intan Safinas (2001) found that by using e-dialogue journal writing, ESL students' motivation increases and communication between teachers and students was enhanced.

Rosetti (1998) did a study on gender differences in e-mail communication where he studied the different styles women and men adopt when contributing to e-mail discussion group. Rosetti reported that there is a clear difference in the language used by males and females online. For example "aggressive" expressions recorded in the messages written by men outnumbered those written by female.

1.2 Purpose of the study

This study attempts to find out:

- (i) The effect of e-mail on male and female students' writing quality of the dialogue journal.
- (ii) The effect of e-mail on the length of female and male students' dialogue journal entries.

1.3 Research Questions

In this study, the following research questions were posed:

- (i) How does e-mail dialogue journal writing affect the male and female students' writing skills in terms of the writing qualities?
The writing qualities examined were:
 - (a) overall effectiveness
 - (b) content
 - (c) language
 - (d) vocabulary
- (ii) Does e-mail dialogue journal writing affect the length of male and female students' dialogue journal entrien?

2.0 METHOD

2.1 Subjects

The subjects of this study were two male and two female students from the Matricu-

lation Centre, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. The main reason for choosing these matriculation students as the subjects of the study is because they were exposed to dialogue journal writing as they were asked to write journals to their English instructors the semester before as part of the English Language subject assessment. Thus the students possess the ability and skill to write the traditional dialogue journals. However, for the purpose of this study, the students were asked to write dialogue journals using the computer (via e-mail) to their peers.

The subjects of this study volunteered to participate in the e-mail dialogue journal writing. They have had experience corresponding with their peers using e-mail thus they do not find using e-mail a problem. Their willingness to participate is important so as to ensure positive commitment on the experiment. Other than that, the students' level of English proficiency is also taken into consideration. Based on their English SPM results their proficiency is of high intermediate level. This is to ensure that the students will be able to comprehend the entries sent to them and that they themselves will be able to correspond well. All of the participants are of intermediate level of proficiency.

2.2 Procedure

The procedure of the study is divided into two parts. They are:

- an informal meeting
- the e-mail dialogue journal writing sessions

2.2.1 Informal Meeting

An informal meeting was held on 25th January 2000, before the dialogue journal writing session started. It was between the researcher and the subjects of the study. The students were briefed on the concept behind e-mail dialogue journal writing and what is expected of them throughout the experimental period. The students were also informed of the criteria for the e-mail dialogue journal. They were given the freedom to write on any topic of interest because in free-writing activities they are not limited to any topic. The important consideration in free-writing is fluency. Besides that, they were given the encouragement to express their feelings, thoughts and opinions in their journal writing. They were also informed that they should not worry about their grammar and spelling. They were also told that the experiment will go on for a period of 7 weeks and that they were supposed to write at least twice a week to their pals. They were also required to respond to the mail sent as soon as possible. Finally, they were told to enjoy the exercise as their writing will not be graded or marked. This provides a non-threatening writing environment for the students.

2.2.2 E-mail Dialogue Journal Writing Session

The male subjects were given the e-mail address of the female subjects and they were asked to mail a message to the female subjects as soon as possible. They were also told to mail the message to both their friends and to one of the researchers. This was to enable the researchers to keep track of the messages sent and also to collect the messages to be analyzed later. The turn – taking e-mail dialogue journal writing session between the subjects went on for seven weeks and a total of 56 entries were collected at the end of the session.

2.3 Data Analysis

The data from the dialogue journal entries were analyzed by two raters using an adapted qualitative writing scale by Wong (1989) (Appendix 3). The qualitative writing scale has a four – item scale which contains four important writing qualities of the writing skill: overall effectiveness, content, language and vocabulary. The four writing qualities were included to assess the subjects' writing proficiency. The overall effectiveness shows the quality of presenting ideas to the reader; the content reflects the development of the areas of interest; the language reflects the control of sentence structures and grammar and finally the vocabulary reflects the development of simple words to complex words.

3.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The discussion of the findings is divided into two:

- Writing Qualities
- Writing Quantity

3.1 Writing Qualities

The discussion for this section includes overall effectiveness, content, language and vocabulary.

3.1.1 Overall effectiveness

Based on the adapted qualitative writing scale by Wong (1989), the data on the overall effectiveness of the subjects' writing skills show that there was an all round improvement. The scores for the final dialogue journal entries on overall effectiveness had improved from the initial scores, thus indicating there was an improvement in this area for all four subjects (see Appendix 1).

Besides that, more ideas were presented by all four subjects over a period of time, for example in subject 1's first entry, eighteenth entry. In subject 1's first entry his idea was limited to his hostel activity. However, in his eighteenth entry, he presented three ideas, namely, his response to subject 2's English project, his reactions to subject 2's statement on religion and his opinion about love.

The data collected also show that female students presented more ideas in their journal entries compared to male students. For example, in subject 1's (male) first entry, he presented one idea about his hostel activity. In contrast, in subject 2's (female) first entry, she presented three ideas about a program she is participating in, her choice of faculty and her intention of being friends forever. Apart from that, in her second entry, subject 1 presented one idea about his choice of faculty whereas subject 2 presented two ideas about a poem she sent and the e - mail journal writing assignment.

When the mean of the entries were compared, it was found that Subject 3 (male) scored the highest (4.4), second highest was Subject 2 (female) who scored 4.2. This was followed by Subject 1 (male) and Subject 4 (female). Both of them scored 3.9.

3.1.2 Content

The data on content in all the subjects' writing show that there was an improvement in their content (see Appendix 2). Generally, the areas of interest between the male and female subjects varied. The female subjects tended to write about personal interest and feelings whereas the male subjects wrote more on general matters such as world issues and their background. For example in Subject 3's (male) first entry, his content was on war and ideologies. As for Subject 4 (female), her content in her first entry was more towards expressing her feelings about her grades.

The mean for all the entries reveals that Subject 2 (female) had the highest score of 4.6, followed by Subject 4 (female) – 4.5, next Subject 3 (male) – 4.3 and finally Subject 1 (male) – 4.0.

3.1.3 Language

The data on the subjects' writing skills in English show that all subjects showed an improvement in their language ability (see Appendix 2).

Subject 3 (male) scored the highest mean (4.4), followed by Subject 2 (female) – 3.9, while both Subject 1 (male) and Subject 4 (female) obtained means of 3.7.

Both male and female subjects showed almost similar level of control of structure and grammar. Code-switching was practiced by both male and female subjects. Malay words used in the entries were “anak angkat”, “Selamat Tahun Baru Cina”, “main takraw” etc. The informality of e-mails is shown in words like Babai (Bye Bye), coz (because), U (you), etc.

3.1.4 Vocabulary

The range of vocabulary in the subjects' writing show that there was an improvement in the use of vocabulary. Both male and female students presented an adequate level of vocabulary development and showed variety in their word choice.

When the mean of the journal entries were compared, it revealed that male student (Subject 3) scored the highest mean of 4.5, followed by Subject 2 (female – 4.4), Subject 4 (female – 4.1) and finally Subject 1 (male – 3.9).

3.2 Writing Quantity

For writing quantity, the only aspect looked into is the length of the entries for the e-mail dialogue journal writing.

3.2.1 Length of the Dialogue Journal Entries

The data on the length of the subjects' dialogue journal entries through the hand count of words show that there was an improvement in the subjects' ability to write longer entries later. However, the data collected show that the female subjects wrote more than the male subjects. This is shown by the mean of the length of the journal entries. Subject 2's (female) mean score was 286, followed by another female student (Subject 4) who scored 267 while the two male students scored 236 (Subject 3) and 234 (Subject 1).

4.0 CONCLUSION

The overall result of this study revealed that all four subjects two males and two female had developed their writing skills qualitatively and quantitatively. The use of e-mail dialogue journal writing had helped the subjects to improve their writing skills in terms of the four salient writing qualities: overall effectiveness, content, language and vocabulary. Besides the writing qualities, the subjects had also shown an improvement in the length of their entries. However, when comparisons were made between the male and female subjects, the female subjects were found to write more content compared to the male subjects. The female subjects tend to write more about personal matters compared to the male subjects. And when comparisons were made in terms of the length of the entries (quantity), the result favours the female subjects. They were found to write longer entries compared to the male subjects.

The result of this study suggests the potential of e-mail dialogue journal writing in contributing to the development of ESL students' writing. Therefore, this activity should be considered by teachers and curriculum developers to be included in the syllabus at the school level up to the tertiary education. In order to integrate CMC and Internet in the ESL classroom, teachers should not worry that the computer will

replace them. Teachers still have a role to play as language learning is a very human experience and human teachers will always be needed in the classroom. The computer revolution, however, seems irreversible, and, as Ray Clifford of the Defense Language Institute, USA puts it, "Technology will not replace teachers ... teachers who use technology will probably replace teachers who do not".

REFERENCES

- Barba, C. 1993. The effect of dialogue writing on speaking ability of students of Spanish as a foreign language. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Penn State University.
- Beauvois, M.H., and J. Eledge. 1995. E-talk : Attitudes and motivation on computer-assisted classroom discussion. *Computers in the Humanities*. 28: 177-190.
- Ferrara, K., H. Bruner, and Whittemore, G. 1991. Interactive written discourse as an emergent register. *Written Communication*. 8: 8-34.
- Gonzalez-Bueno, M. 1998. The effects of electronic mail on Spanish L2 Discourse. *Language Learning and Technology*. 1(2): 55-70.
- Lee Eui-Kap. 1998. The effects of e-mail mode on Korean high school task-based writing in English. *The Internet TESL Journal*. IV (11), <http://www.aitech.ac.jp/~iteslj/>
- Lee Geok Imm, 1997. The effects of dialogue journal writing on the developments of students' writing skills. Unpublished MA Thesis, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
- Peyton, J. K. and L. Reed. 1990. *Dialogue Journal writing with nonnative English speakers : A handbook for teachers*. Alexandria, VA: TESOL Publications.
- Rosetti, P. 1998. Gender differences in e-mail communication. *The Internet TESL Journal*. IV (7), <http://www.aitech.ac.jp/~iteslj/>
- Siti Hamin Stapa and Intan Safinas Mohd Ariff Albakri, 2001. Enhancing communication through e-mail : Implications for the Teaching and Learning of ESL writing. Paper presented at the International English Language Teaching and Teacher Seminar, UPSI, 18th June. 2001.
- Susser, B. 1992. ESL/EFL process writing with computers. *CAELL*. 4(2): 16-22.
- Wang, Y.M. 1994 E-mail dialogue journaling in an ESL reading and writing classroom. Unpublished Ph.D Dissertation, University of Oregon at Eugene.
- Warschauer, M. 1996. Motivational aspects of using computers and communication . In M. Warschauer (Ed.), *Telecollaboration in foreign language learning: Proceedings of Hawaii Symposium*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii.
- Warschauer, M. 1997. Computer mediated collaborative learning: Theory and practice. *The Modern Language Journal*. 81: 470-481.
- Wong, H. 1989. *The development of a qualitative writing scale*. Monograph 2, Pusat Bahasa, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi: Penerbit UKM.

Appendix 1

Raw Scores

Journal entries	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
S1 (M)	3	3.5	3.5	3.4	3.5	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4.5	4.5	4.5	5
S2 (F)	3	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.5	4	4	4	4.5	4	4	4.5	4.5	4.5	5	4.5	5	5
S3 (M)	3.5	4	4	4	4	3.5	4	4.5	4.5	4.5	4.5	4.5	5	5	5	5	5	5
S4 (F)	3	3	3	3.5	3.5	3.5	4	4	3.5	4	4	4	4.5	4.5	4.5	4.5	5	5

Appendix 2

Mean for the journal entries

Subjects	Mean (O.E)	Mean (C)	Mean (L)	Mean (V)	Mean (W)
Subject 1 (M)	3.9	4.0	3.7	3.9	234
Subject 2 (F)	4.2	4.6	3.9	4.4	286
Subject 3 (M)	4.4	4.3	4.4	4.5	236
Subject 4 (F)	3.9	4.5	3.7	4.1	267

**APPENDIX 3
QUALITATIVE WRITING SCALE**

CRITERIA	GOOD			FAIR		WEAK	
	6	5	4	3	2	1	
OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS Quality of communication With the reader CONTENT Quality treatment of Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a competent writer - generally communicates effectively with the reader, presents ideas effectively 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - still close to competent writer (6) but less impressive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a most writer - has reasonable ability to present 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a weaker version of the fair paper (4) in the choice of areas of interest but still relevant - little evidence of maturity of thought - reader has some difficulty in making out of the areas of interest to the writer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - attempts to choose relevant areas of interest but reveals serious weaknesses in the content - no maturity of thought - reader can hardly make out why the areas of interest are significant to the writer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a very limited writer - has virtually no ability to present ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - fails to choose relevant areas of interest - reader cannot make out why the areas of interest are relevant to the writer - reader has problem following the writing
LANGUAGE Control of sentence Structure and the grammar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - has confident control of sentence structure and grammar - correct and appropriate use of language except for very occasional slips 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - still close to the good paper (6) in the control of language - most sentences are grammatically correct except for occasional weaknesses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - has some control of structure and grammar - about half the sentence grammatically correct 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - has less control of structure and grammar than the fair paper (4) - less than half of the sentences grammatically correct 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - has little control of language - frequent weaknesses in structure and grammar - making comprehension difficult 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - has virtually no control of language - not more than 2 sentences correct - frequently strong words together, taking comprehension very difficult 	
VOCABULARY General level of vocabulary Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - an impressive level of vocabulary development - generally varied and accurate word choice - uses some interesting turn of phrases - uses synonyms to avoid repetition - correct use of word forms - very occasional inappropriate word choice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a less impressive level of vocabulary development than the good paper (6) but still commendable - occasional inappropriate word choice - occasional use of wrong word forms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - an adequate level of vocabulary development but uses common, ordinary word choice - some variety in word choice - an attempt at avoiding repetition - some use of wrong word forms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - less adequate level of vocabulary development than the fair paper (4) - less varied word choice - more repetitions - more use of wrong word forms than in (4) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a limited level of vocabulary development - limited word choice, confined to simple words - frequent repetitions - frequent use of wrong word forms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a very limited level of vocabulary development - great difficulty in choosing the correct words - very frequent use of wrong word forms 	