



Blogs For Strengthening Arabic Writing: A Study Of Students' Perception

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Abstract

Blogs are a digital platform for any form of sharing ideas, knowledge, and information through writing in cyberspace. In the world of education, blogs have the potential to polish writing talents and improve language skills as well as add vocabulary. Therefore, this study aims to identify the benefits of blogs for the consolidation of Arabic writing among students of higher learning institutions in Malaysia. A total of 52 respondents among first year students of the Bachelor of Arabic Language program, University of Sultan Zainal Abidin were involved in this study. This study is a qualitative study that uses open-ended questioning techniques adapted from semi-structured interview questions to collect data and information on the benefits of blogs on Arabic writing skills in Arabic Literacy classes. The findings of the study showed a positive response to the use of blogs for the consolidation of writing skills in Arabic. In conclusion, the use of digital applications such as blogs should be fully utilized at every level of educational institutions because they are easy to use, operate and able to support students' self-learning.

Keywords: Web 2.0; Blog; Arabic language; Writing skill; Perception.

1. Introduction

In 2004 the term Web 2.0 was introduced and defined by Dale Dougherty as a read-write web. Web 2.0 technology allows social interaction to take place through the gathering and management of a global community that shares common interests and tendencies. Web 2.0 is also referred to as the second generation of the World Wide Web which allows individuals online to collaborate and share information. Wilson et al (2011) stated Web 2.0 refers to the second generation of the web, wherein interoperable, user-centered web applications and services promote social connectedness, media and information sharing, user-created content, and collaboration among individuals and organizations

Web 2.0 is also known as web of wisdom, web of human-centered, web of participation and web of read-write. With read-write applications available in Web 2.0, the web can now be a two-way interaction where Web 2.0 users have more interaction without limited control. Web 2.0 is not only a new version of Web 1.0, but it also offers flexible web design, reusable creative applications, update systems, collaborative content creation and modification facilities. One of the remarkable features of

Web 2.0 is to support collaboration and help gather collective intelligence from Web 1.0 (Murugesan, 2007).

In general, web 2.0 is a change from a static website to a more dynamic website where users can provide input and upload material into the website. The use of Web 2.0 in teaching and learning is driven by the concept of 'open educational resources' where information and applications are free to use without restrictions unless there is a specific package that must be paid by users. The concept of 'open educational resources' is designed so that the interaction between individuals in the virtual world is more systematic and easier to use.

1.1. Literature review

1.1.1 Definition of blog

Blogging applications are one of the Web 2.0 technologies. A blog is defined as a website where an individual or representative of an organization will write periodically about an issue or topic of interest and is usually uploaded along with pictures and links to other websites related to the issue (Oxford, 2021). Blogs are easy to manage, and students can publish their writing in a more systematic and orderly chronological order than writing in a diary or notebook. They can refer to the writing and make edits regardless of time and place constraints.

1.1.2 The benefits of blog

There are several past studies that report the benefits and advantages of using blogs in the learning and teaching of various courses and subjects. The study of Zarei and Hussin (2014) showed that the use of blogs serves as a tool to facilitate English language learning and language acquisition process among students. They can use language learning materials on the blog as well as interact with each other in discussion forums. Students develop their self-learning, interest, and motivation to use English learning materials and participate in blog applications. Baharin's study (2011) also reported that the use of blogs can improve students' understanding of learning through collaborative learning, provide quick feedback, and teachers and students can connect with teachers who specialize in the subject of Basic Economics.

1.1.3 Learning and teaching foreign language

Learning and teaching a foreign language requires various and interesting strategies to attract students to practice a language. This is because, students are often not motivated enough to learn a language because they do not find the benefits of using the language learned outside the classroom soon. Most students also do not have the opportunity to go to the country of origin of the language which can motivate them in language learning. Therefore, the role of teachers is to encourage students to learn foreign languages more effectively using media. Nowadays, there are various gadgets and communication tools based on new technologies that have been developed among which are blogs and various social networks (Gorąca-Sawczyk, 2015). Technology like this helps the process of language learning and teaching more quickly and effectively.

1.1.4 Arabic language

Arabic is a language revealed through Islam through the main sources of divine revelation, namely al-Quran and al-Hadith. This language unites the hearts of Muslims and is considered one of the largest languages in terms of the number of speakers estimated at around 422 million people (Summer Institute of Linguistics, 2008). Arabic is also one of the most widespread languages in the world. Its spread all over the world helps the community understand the reality of the Islamic world and understand the message of the Islamic state through these language lovers comprised of Arabic language students from various countries and educational backgrounds (Siti Salwa et al, 2021)

1.1.5 Writing skill

Writing skills are a form of intellectual skills that express feelings and ideas on a matter or issue through writing that is prosperous and free from language errors. Writing skills also contain some aspects that need to be emphasized before starting to write; i.e. having feelings towards an issue and an interest in writing about it, forming ideas through reading, listening and so on, as well as constructing sentences using appropriate and correct terms in terms of grammar and meaning (Madkour, 2010).

Learning a foreign language such as Arabic should not be an exception to the mastery of writing skills. Writing skills are one of the language skills that function to produce an output or product that can be read and understood. It is a toss of ideas and thoughts created in the form of writing in contrast to audible speaking skills. Writing in Arabic in Malaysia is something foreign and more focused on matters of worship. Yet for students majoring in religion and Arabic language in institutions of higher learning, writing skills are very key as it is one of the most widely used skills for final assessment and examination.

Previous studies have also reported that the level of Arabic writing skills among students in institutions of higher learning is still at a weak and moderate level. Students felt a significant weakness in the aspect of writing skills after speaking skills (Kamarul et al, 2009). This situation needs to be addressed immediately by introducing to students a learning environment that is meaningful and close to the realities of student life. Learning skills such as writing requires activities that are like students' daily activities such as writing on social media such as blogs, facebook, instagram, whatsapp, telegram, email and so on.

1.1.6 Perception

Perception is whatever people perceive or gain a knowledge of. It is an idea of something presented to the senses (Graham, 1869). The effectiveness of a program is also identified through a survey questionnaire aimed at surveying participants' perceptions. In general, the study of human perceptions or attitudes is a part of the science of psychology. But now, the study of perception has become common in the world of education to identify student's satisfaction in learning and to study the effectiveness of teaching methods used by educators (Khoirun Nisak et al, 2015).

1.2. Research questions

This study will answer the following questions:

1. How much do students like the blog writing activity in Arabic?
2. What are the elements on the blog that help students to consolidate their Arabic writing skills?

2. Method

This study is designed based on a qualitative research method through a survey of students' perceptions in institutions of higher learning after using blogs as a training medium to strengthen writing skills in Arabic.

2.1. Sample / Participants

The study population consisted of 110 first year students of the Bachelor of Arabic who took an Arabic literacy course at the Faculty of Language and Communication, Sultan Zainal Abidin University, Terengganu. While the sample of respondents involved in this interview is a total of 52 students who have followed 14 weeks of study in semester two of 2021. Respondents have followed online learning completely throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.

2.2. Instrument(s)

This study uses a semi-structured interview method that has two open-ended questions adapted from the semi-structured interview questions from the study of Zarei & Hussin (2014). The purpose of this question was to identify the impact of the use of blogs on the learning of Arabic writing skills of students in institutions of higher learning. These interviews represented students' attitudes towards the use of blogs for Arabic writing skills and elements that were felt to be useful were found on blogs to help improve Arabic writing skills. Data obtained from the interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed concepts, themes, and meanings according to content analysis methods. Before this study was implemented on the study respondents, interview questions were used in a pilot study to see the students' understanding of the questions used and their applicability in the actual study. Expert validity was also considered to reinforce the use of these interview questions.

2.3. Data collection procedures and analysis

This study adapts the findings analysis method based on the content analysis approach as proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994). This method was used to analyze the interviews aimed at identifying themes, concepts and meanings obtained from the interview data conducted with the respondents. The findings of the study will also be analyzed using descriptive statistics such as mean and percentage to answer the research questions. The findings are presented in the form of appropriate charts and tables.

3. Results

The findings of this study will answer two questions namely the extent to which students like the activity of writing blogs in Arabic and the elements on the blog that help students to strengthen their writing skills in Arabic.

Q1: The first question of the study was answered through the findings that were analyzed using descriptive statistics, namely a total of 36 respondents expressed a strong liking for the blog writing activities introduced in the Arabic literacy class. Meanwhile, a total of 16 respondents expressed moderate feelings of liking the use of blogs for Arabic writing skills. The following chart shows the descriptive statistics of students' responses to the interview for the first question:

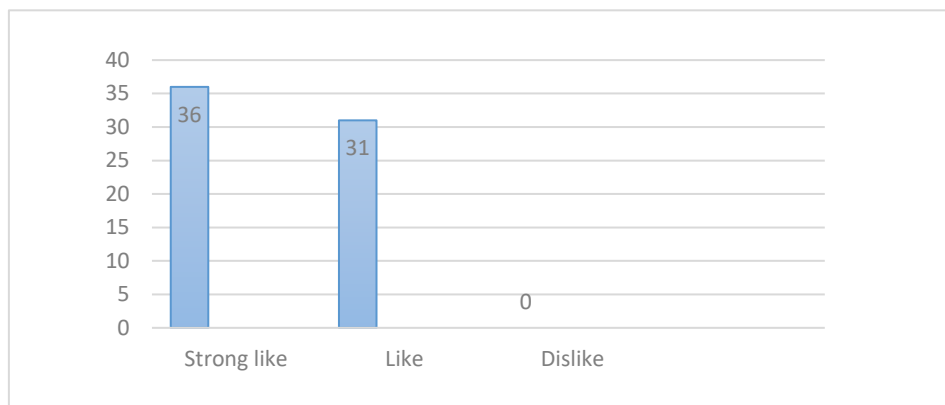


Chart 1. Descriptive statistics of students' perceptions of blog writing activities

The chart above shows that more than half of the respondents expressed a strong liking for the use of blogs for Arabic writing. The analysis of the interview content was done by the researcher and two concepts were obtained from the results of the interview with the respondents, namely the respondents' feelings after using the blog and the perceived benefits of using the blog to strengthen Arabic writing skills:

i. Feelings towards blog writing

Human feelings towards a thing are usually translated as initial perceptions and attitudes towards it. Positive perception is important because it will lead people to act wisely and sanely. Among the emotional statements expressed by students when asked about how much they liked Arabic writing activities using blogs were like I felt fun, excited, very pleasant, very happy, very enjoy, felt proud, very liked, challenged, unusual and confident to write. Some of these statements were recorded in several samples as follows:

"I was a bit excited and a little scared at first because it was my first experience to write in Arabic through a blog. Alhamdulillah, I learned various new skills after using this medium." (R 1)

"I am very excited because this is the first time, I have used the blogger application and it is written in Arabic. I got a new experience using it." (R 5)

"I really enjoy blogging and love it; I can feel the changes that are happening in my writing from day to day." (R 6)

"I am very happy because my writing and proficiency in Arabic is getting better." (R 7)

"I am very happy because I can practice and make it a place for me to review and practice. However, I hope that the training and writing that was done is marked and checked so that I know and can correct the mistakes I made." (R 8)

"I feel very excited because I can explore new knowledge and the world of IT." (R 10)

"I feel proud to be able to practice using new words in writing. Words related to current issues such as the covid19 situation." (R 14)

"Honestly, I like it! because it can improve writing skills, improve vocabulary, new words that are rarely found." (R 16)

"I am very happy with this assignment because it can sharpen my interest in writing." (R 18)

"Thank God, I am very excited because this is the first time I write about my daily life in Arabic and what I learned in class or something I want to share in the blog, this is my online diary." (R 19)

"It's a pleasure to use a blog in learning because it's amazing for me." (R 21)

"I feel very happy to know another new platform to train writing skills in Arabic." (R 22)

"I feel happy because this is the first time, I wrote it in Arabic and this blog is also a place for me to tell all the experiences I have gone through in my life." (R 25)

"I feel happy because I can share my stories through the blog. Although it is not very important but which one is good can help the reader and at least I can write in Arabic." (R 27)

"I feel very excited because before this I have never had my own Arabic language blog and I am happy to be able to add new knowledge every day." (R 28)

"I feel more confident to write in Arabic." (R 29)

"Vocabulary section and apply discourse markers correctly. Through this blog, I have gained a lot of new vocabulary and write correctly based on blog writing techniques." (R 30)

ii. The benefits of using a blog to writing

Positive perceptions are born from the point of view of the benefits that man feels for himself. These benefits are sometimes subjective and cannot be seen with the naked eye or directly. In this study, the findings also found the benefits and benefits obtained by respondents after using blogs for writing Arabic such as the addition of vocabulary, language style, the use of various sentence structures, and one way to express themselves and add and share knowledge. This statement is recorded as follows:

"Honestly, all aspects and elements in the blog help me in my Arabic language skills. Because as I said before, I want to express all the stories I have but only in Malay. So, this blog is very helpful in adding new sentences and singularities in Arabic. As with the corona virus." (R 2)

"I feel very happy to be able to improve my writing skills and also add Arabic pronouns." (R 3)

"I'm happy to be able to use the blog and convey what I want to convey in Arabic, this is my first experience in writing a blog." (R 4)

"The sense of fun has been challenged, in being able to train writing skills and add vocabulary, also able to improve the use of Arabic words while talking about everyday things." (R 6)

"This is my first time using a blog. It's fun because I consider my blog like a diary or social media where I share pictures, stories, daily activities & some information in Arabic." (R 8)

"I really like and have fun because with the blog we can improve in terms of writing and add new vocabulary." (R 15)

"My feeling after using the blog for Arabic writing skills is very pleasant and makes it easier for me to understand Arabic words in more depth." (R 21)

"I feel happy because I can write in Arabic even though there are a lot of mistakes in terms of grammar but at least I can add knowledge of a few syllables when I write." (R 26)

"I have fun and it makes it easier for me to better remember words and add vocabulary." (R 29)

"I feel very excited and happy because by writing this blog, I can improve my writing skills in Arabic."

"I am very happy when I was asked to write a blog because in adding mufradat, honing blog writing in Arabic and more." (R 30)

"Based on the answer above as well, I like to make this blog because I get a lot of new words in Arabic and some forms of writing that are satisfactory although not comprehensive." (R 34)

"In terms of vocabulary. I found a variety of interesting vocabularies and terms to use in writing Arabic." (R 36)

Q2: The second question of the study answered the question about the elements and features on the blog that help students for consolidation of Arabic writing skills. Content analysis of the findings from the respondents' interviews were categorized into two parts, namely the beneficial elements present in the blog or the advantages of the blog to Arabic writing skills and the types of assignments that are useful for blog writing to improve students' Arabic writing skills.

i. Useful elements of a blog (Advantages of a blog)

Among the elements that respondents felt helped them in writing Arabic were the interesting audio and graphic elements offered by the blog, the existence of a comment space for feedback from friends and lecturers, ease of entry and labels, there is no limit to the number of broken words in writing,

blog links are simple and can be shared with outside readers and the freedom to write and more relaxed as well as bole written consistently and easily referenced. Here are some statements that were recorded during the interview:

"The element that helped me was that I was able to see an increase in interest and enthusiasm for writing skills in a more creative way through the attractive graphics on the blog itself." (R 4)

"The listening part, in my blog, I put some Arabic videos and I summarized the videos and from this activity I was able to collect a lot of new mufradat and interesting verses used in the writing." (R 5)

"I've noticed that those who visit the blog can comment, so I think the comments section is important so that I can know the weaknesses and flaws in my blog." (R 7)

"Interesting blog entry, the use of new words that can add singularity." (R 10)

"The entry writing part because it can tell the story independently according to the current situation makes it more enthusiastic to write." (R 11)

"Blogs do not limit words. Therefore, it helps in constructing long sentences." (R 25)

"I feel that the part that helps me improve my writing skills in Arabic, there is a comment section where anyone can write or give opinions and correct my mistakes in the written entry, so it can help me write well in the future." (R 26)

"The element that helps me improve my Arabic language skills is to tell about the days that happen in daily life because the writing does not have to be long but just enough with the content of the presentation and what you want to convey is clear in a blog." (R 29)

"I can spread the link to friends, lecturers and teachers to check the writing either in terms of grammar, writing methods." (R 30)

"For me, blogging more and more requires consistency every day, will also force myself to continue to learn and write. It is undeniable that writing every day sharpens writing skills and adds a lot to the existing mufradat. Sometimes I don't even have the idea to write a diary every day, thank God, blogging can sharpen students' skills." (R 31)

"One of the sections on the blog that helped me improve my Arabic writing skills was the comments section. This comment section can help me to improve the weaknesses of Arabic writing." (R 30)

"Unlimited posting for a piece of writing makes me more reflex to throw my ideas in the form of writing which in turn improves my Arabic writing skills." (R 32)

ii. The type of assignment useful for blog writing

Through the findings of the study, it was found that among the types of tasks that respondents felt helped them in writing Arabic were writing daily activities or diaries, sharing experiences and knowledge, writing articles or news, summarizing videos watched and heard and writing tasks given by instructors in class. in the form of creative and academic work. The following are some of the pliers' statements recorded in the interview:

"There are various entries in my blog post, among them is the training provided by Ustazah which helped me a lot to further strengthen the skills not only learn in terms of theory while in class but I am able to practice it in my blog writing. Among others, it is also related to posts related to knowledge sharing, learning from lecture classes and so on that can also enable me to review lessons by making a summary in my blog writing." (R 3)

"Blogging on a daily basis, because I think blogs are a place to express feelings that are safe from the knowledge of others. Thus, it helps us to improve our writing skills because we are talking about what we are facing now and our story will be long and that is where we can see what improvements happen after telling the feelings in the blog." (R 4)

"The part of the blog that helps me in improving my Arabic writing skills is the sharing about myself, the exercises given. the blog written must be understood so that the unknown words can be learned through the writing of the blog." (R 6)

“The division does daily activities. It helps me remember what I did and what I got back then. As an example of class time, I got what had been taught at that time. Therefore, this blog can be my reference source later.” (R 11)

“For my part, I divide it into three parts, namely the tasks given to the ustazah. Secondly, I write my daily activities and the third part is about my thoughts on something” (R 12)

“Among the sections and elements on the blog that help me improve my Arabic writing are the training (tadribat) given by the ustazah and entries on my daily routine, where I can use Arabic terms about time, food names, and current terms such as lockdown, PKP, vaccine.” (R 13)

"The part about yourself because it's closer and easier to describe and explain." (R 18)

"Writing news -related blogs because news writing uses a lot of words." (R 19)

"The story of personal experience, so far I have rarely told the story through writing even in bm. But with blog writing, I can learn to share what we get. And the muhimmat assignment requested by the ustazah also helped my Arabic writing skills.” (R 20)

“Telling about experience and knowledge. I was able to further master my Arabic writing in a relaxed manner as it didn’t require too much formatting. I am free to write anything on the blog.” (R 21)

"The inside tells about daily life and about assignments, especially in making form letters." (R 26)

"When composing a story that is based on facts requires the use of correct language and verbs."

"The part or element on the blog that helps me improve my Arabic writing skills is the part of daily activities." (R 29)

“Part of the task given. From there, I learned and discovered new vocabulary.” (R 31)

“The element that helps me a lot is in terms of understanding the meaning of the words and how to produce writing either in the form of sharing or assignments given through classes. Overall, the potential to understand the meaning and skills of writing is very effective.” (R 32)

“Daily writing. Because I get new words every time I write.” (R 34)

“Words of wisdom and daily life. if we are close to the blog, we can express what we want to convey, we can strengthen the quality of writing.” (R 38)

"The essay writing section or the form of training provided has exposed us to the writing of an essay form with the correct writing format." (R 47)

4. Discussion

This study seeks to identify and survey students’ perceptions of the use of blogs in Arabic literacy classes. The use of blogs has been made as a platform for teaching foreign language writing skills such as Arabic. The findings of the study were obtained from brief interviews with students who had registered for an Arabic literacy course and studied for 14 weeks. 72 students expressed a strong liking for the use of blogs for Arabic writing skills, while 31 students expressed a moderate liking. Four concepts were identified from the findings of the study that shaped students’ positive perceptions of the use of blogs for Arabic writing classes. This concept can be summarized in four points, namely:

- i. Students' feelings towards blogging in Arabic.
- ii. The benefits of using a blog to Arabic writing.
- iii. Useful features on blogs (Advantages of blogs).
- iv. The type of assignment useful for blog writing.

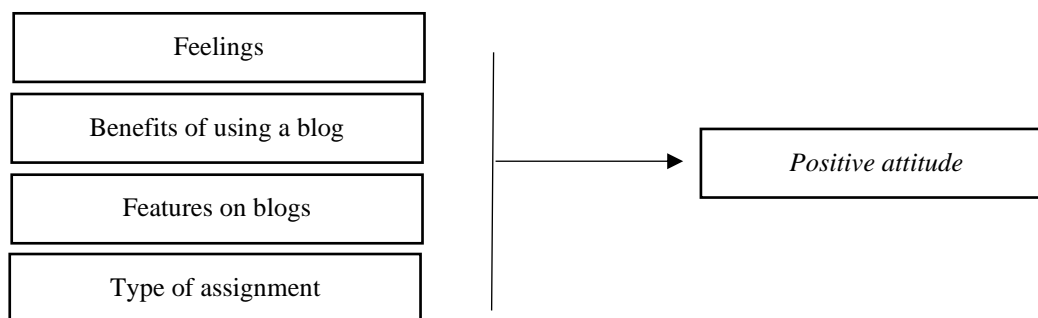


Figure 1. Concepts that shape positive perceptions of blog writing

i. Feelings towards blog writing

Human feelings are usually translated as perceptions and attitudes towards a matter or issue. Perception studies are often the focus of many researchers to look at perceptions before and after a program is implemented. This is because, positive perception is important as it will drive human beings to act wisely and give the desired response. The feelings expressed by the students when asked about how much they liked the Arabic writing activity using blogs were very encouraging. Students expressed a sense of fun, excitement, fun, joy, enjoyment, pride, love, challenge, extraordinary and confidence to write when given the opportunity to use the blog platform in Arabic writing classes. A survey of student perceptions such as this study is important to understand student satisfaction and usability of e-learning so that its use is effective and can be widely implemented in the future (Liaw, 2008).

ii. The benefits of using a blog to write

Positive perceptions arise from the benefits that man derives for himself. These benefits are sometimes subjective and cannot be seen with the naked eye or directly. In this study, the findings also found the benefits obtained by the respondents after using the blog for Arabic writing. Among the benefits expressed by students after using blogs as a medium of Arabic writing is that it helps increase vocabulary, the ability to diversify language styles in writing, practice discourse markers and sentence structure construction according to grammar, and blog writing is one-way students express themselves, feelings and experience as well as adding and sharing knowledge. This is in line with the benefits of blogs mentioned by Gorąca-Sawczyk (2013) that Edu-blogs are teaching and learning platforms where teachers (as language advisors) and students can exchange their ideas and experiences referring to different aspects of language learning.

iii. Useful elements of a blog (Advantages of a blog)

Elements or features found on the blog also form a positive perception of students towards learning Arabic writing skills using the blog. Audio, multimedia, and graphic elements that can be used in the blog attract students to be more creative and freer to express their opinions through writing. The comment section available on the blog for feedback from friends and lecturers also gives a twist on the learning of writing skills. In addition, other features such as systematic division such as the existence of entries and labels, no limit on the number of broken words in writing, blog links that are easy to share with outside readers and the freedom to write more casually and can be written consistently and easily also referred to as a factor of students' excitement using blogs in Arabic writing classes. This coincides with the recommendations of previous studies that state that blogs offer many opportunities for learning foreign languages in an integrated way, by listening, writing, and reading and in blogs, no time and place limits exist. The blog also opens a space of interaction for writers and readers to respond in the comment space provided by Gorąca-Sawczyk (2013).

v. **The type of assignment useful for blog writing**

The type of assignment also contributes to a positive perception of the use of blogs in writing foreign language skills such as Arabic. Among the types and forms of writing that instructors can use to stimulate students' writing activities in the blog are writing daily activities or diaries consistently, sharing experiences and knowledge, and creative or academic writing assignments given by instructors in class such as summaries, official letters, dialogues, resume and so on. This study found that students benefited greatly from instructor-planned assignments. They are given the opportunity to apply knowledge in the real world and not simply engage in pen and paper-based learning activities purely like traditional learning methods. Research also suggests that educators help motivate students by using materials and implementing activities that students consider meaningful (Spratt, Humphreys, & Chan 2002)

5. Conclusions

The teaching and learning of foreign languages can take place regardless of time and place with the existence of good internet access facilities. The learning of language skills is also not limited to face-to-face classes and can even be done with the presence of increasingly sophisticated and advanced technology. The use of blogs as an example is a medium of teaching and learning that can be utilized in learning foreign languages such as Arabic. The teaching of writing skills is very suitable using blogs as a medium to stimulate students' talents in writing and at the same time give students the opportunity to express themselves in the language learned. The use of blogs allows for formal and more relaxed offline learning. It is also not bound by time and place constraints and is even easy to use at any time. The features available on the blog such as an effective medium of interaction, freedom to express ideas creatively and innovatively and one form of e-portfolio and e-diary, make learning language skills more interesting especially when it involves learning a foreign language that is more difficult than the mother tongue. In the end, the development of students' autonomy can be strengthened, and they are more responsible for the learning process that takes place and involved in organizing learning and planning the process. This is something that should happen in any successful learning process.

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