Creative Blog Writing in Spanish as a Cognitive Approach

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Abstract
The advent of the internet has increased opportunities for the creation and mutual sharing of language learning content. This paper discusses the use of blogs as an innovative method in the teaching and learning of Spanish as a foreign language. Jean Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development (1952) is applied to examine the learners' writing skills through blogs. In the study, learners are encouraged to apply the writing skills they have learnt within the classroom onto blogs based on their creativity. Five blogs are then selected to explore the learners' writing style and product in composing basic Spanish sentences. The findings from this research highlight the learners' creativity and thinking skills in writing the blogs which promote the improvement of their basic writing skills. The task of writing blog also monitors the cognitive development in practicing Spanish language. The paper argues that the approach contributes to a new dimension in diversifying the pedagogy of teaching Spanish as a foreign language at the global level.
Keywords: Blogs, Learning Spanish, Cognitive, Thinking Skills, Creativity

Introduction
    Social media platforms and applications play an important role in strengthening language teaching and learning (T&L) process of foreign language (Mondahl & Razmerita, 2014; Zheng et al., 2018; Reinhardt, 2019). The emergence of social media applications like

TikTok, Whatsapp, Twitter, Instagram, Telegram and blogs have become the choice of the current learners to obtain information because they are multimedia and interactive. In Malaysia, the development of technology and multimedia era nowadays plays a huge role in influencing every aspect of education (Zulkhairi, 2012). It is evident that language

learning does not only occur in the classroom but goes beyond the classroom. The use of technology in language immensely helps foreign language learners to learn and master the target language, and the internet has made it so convenient to access information and content. According to Munuyani et. al (2021), the integration of web-based games or mobile language learning has benefited lecturers and learners by making T&Lmore effective. As a result, learners now are more autonomous in their learning where they can be in control of the content they access. This in turn creates a more engaging environment among foreign language learners, enabling them to control the pace and amount of their learning.

Literature Review

In line with the multimedia technology development, lecturers must be able to apply the technology to their T&L (Bañados, 2002; Reinhardt, 2020). Numerous local studies have been carried out with using technology in T&L. Mohd & Mohd (2013) explore a web site known as EZ-Arabic in order to to assess the potential that exists in the virtual learning platform. In addition, Mohd (2012) found the need for suitable instructional design model selection based on particular multimedia elements after using Balaghah software design. According to Teoh (2012), the language aspect has become the main focus in his discussion in his research on the use of Chinese language in blogs developed by Malaysian youths. It is evident that the choice of language style is also the concern in creating a web site.

Ahluwalia et al (2011) studied 42 first year engineering college students in India who used blogs to learn English. The blogs are online journals and every post in the blog follows the chronology of activities carried out in class. Each student needs to record communication enhancement activities together with related pictures at the end of every learning session as evidence. The students were given the liberty to comment other students' postings as a way to practice their communication skill. 80.9% of the students chose 'Strongly agree' or 'Agree' were on the use of blog writing and agree that the activity was very useful in enhancing language learning. The study also found that most of the students agreed that the blogging, including writing and uploading their blog posts and responding to classmates' posts, to be positive and useful. 80.9% of the respondents (34/42) chose "Strongly agree" or "Agree" for the statement that they liked blogging. Similarly, 76% of the students (32/42) responded for the statement, "I like posting writing assignments on my blog,". 92.8% (39/42) of the students expressed agreement on statement, "I like reading my classmates' written posts,". 66.6% (28/42) students indicated agreement for the statement, "I like making comments on my classmates' posts". 97.3% students responded positively on the statement value of receiving comments on posts from classmates. 99% students liked their instructor to give written comments on the blog posts.

Lecturers who teach Spanish in Malaysia have put in a considerable amount of effort to ensure the students will improve in the learning of Spanish.the. Nevertheless, there are still issues that need to be addressed. One of them is there are not many Spanish speakers in Malaysia, thereby reducing the chances of exposure among learners. Furthermore, printed materials are scarce, and if there is any, they would be costly. Hence, the existence of freely available Spanish learning web sites serves as a rich resource for Spanish learners in Malaysia. The ubiquitous learning material can be employed as a tool to enhance learners' writing skill.

In this study, learners will be taught basic blogging as a method to both learn and practice their writing. It is therefore interesting to observe their cognitive level when writing in Spanish blogs. This study focuses on enhancing sentence writing skills using blogs as a novel approach to learning written Spanish. Blogging is used because it is multimedia, interactive and more engaging than conventional writing practice methods.

Methodology

The research uses qualitative method in observing five blogs written by Spanish learners in Malaysia. Descriptive analysis is used to analyse the variety of writing skills applied by learners (schema). Learners attended formal classes and were exposed to blog writing. Then they were assigned to be write in their blogs (assimilation). The blogs are chosen through non-probability purposive sampling method based on participants' creativity in making blogs in Spanish (accommodation). Extra focus was given to constructsimple sentence in Spanish. The focus included grammar and vocabulary appropriacy (organization and equilibration). All the five blogs used in this study were written by learners in Basic Spanish class from Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM). Each identified writing skill will be matched to Jean Piaget's (1952) cognitive development theory which states that each learning process is constructive. Table 1 below shows Jean Piaget's (1952) five stages of cognitive development are schema, assimilation, accommodation, organization and equilibration.

Table 1
Stages in Jean Piaget Cognitive Development Theory

Schema	A framework to organize and interpret information
Assimilation	The ability to incorporate new knowledge into existing knowledge
Accommodation	The ability to adjust schemas to the environment
Organization	Grouping isolated behaviours into higher order
Equilibration	A shift, a resolution of conflict to reach a balance

Participants in this study begin from the schema stage as none of them has any basic knowledge and skill in Spanish. Some of them proceed to equilibration accordingly in basic Spanish. Nevertheless, only several stages are used to explain the contents of the blogs that the participants made. Observations on the production of Spanish sentences are carried out to match their writing skills at any given stage of the cognitive development. The observations are necessary to identify if there is any cognitive development in the process of making blogs among learners of Spanish as a foreign language. According to Nazmiye & Kenan (2022) creative cognition, a product of normative cognitive functioning with novelty in nature and appropriateness, can manifest that a bilingual with higher originality contribution can write in a more unanticipated way with useful ideas. Therefore, the cognitive development can be used to enhance the ability of student in writing skill. The objectives of this research are as to study the learners' writing skills in blogs and to explore the creativity of writing style used in blogs.

Results

Blogging is a recommended classroom activity for learners to make notes or to record daily activities to be shared to their audience. Speaking in foreign languages often creates apprehension for learners (Puteh-Behak et al., 2015); thus, journal writing online through blogging should be adopted. Speaking in foreign languages can be obstacles to many foreign

language learners; thus, writing in blog can be considered to motivate them to write in the target language. Blogs are used in education because it is online, a simple web publishing, interactive and support cooperative and autonomous learning. Blogging is interactive when blog audience are allowed to comment in the form of questions and discussions on posts, and their comments can be commented by other readers. This active learning is similar to online forums. Blog interactivity has the potential for learners to ask (Godwin-Jones, 2003; Warlick, 2005). Blogs also expose learners to a wider international audience from different backgrounds (Godwin-Jones, 2003; Warlick, 2005) depending on the extension of learners.

The purpose in getting learners to write in blogs is to give them space to practice their writing skill in Spanish within line with the recent technological advancement. Learners exhibit high levels of confidence although their writings are simple. Piaget (1952) explains that learning is a constructive process where learners need to build on what the learners already know. In this research, it is evident that learners are able to construct sentences from Spanish vocabulary that they have learnt in class. Given enough time and correct instructions, learners can advance from Piaget's (1952) schema to assimilation, accommodation, and perhaps equilibration.

In the selected blogs being studied, the learners have produced writings related to basic topics, such as about themselves, families and interests. The sentences they produced reflect their cognitive development in learning Spanish. Furthermore, blogging is easy to make and update the content. Therefore, blogging has become an effortless method to publish learners work on the internet as easy as sending an email (Stanley, 2005).

From the analysis of the selected blogs, participants one to four made minor mistakes in sentence construction. The fifth participant produced the most. compared to The sentences are written below:

a) "*Mi madre se llamo Yang Roziyah*" (My mother name is Yang Roziyah). '*Se llamo* should be changed to *se llama*'
b) "*El trabaja como es el hombre de negocios*" (She works as a businesswoman). Sentence should be *ella trabaja como es la mujer de negocios* because the referred subject is feminine.
c) "*Vivo* [en] Malasia" (I live in Malaysia)
d) "*Yo tener cinco hermanos*" should be written *as Yo tengo cinco hermanos*
   (I have 5 brothers).

It can be observed that participant five has not reached high level of cognitive development in Spanish. The learner has not understood the concept of gender learnt in class. In Spanish, all nouns have gender. The learner's inability to use the correct gender in her nouns proves that the learner has not assimilated the schema of gender in Spanish nouns. Nevertheless, the learner shows motivation to write in her blog in Spanish. It resulted from the instruction which gave a general theme of introducing their family. Therefore, by giving autonomy to learners to choose their topic of interest, learners will be more motivated to learn a new language (Pink, 2009). The task to write blog is a platform for the learners to learn Spanish. Thus, blogging can be an activityfor learners to display their work and record their experiences, and opinions to represent their learning process (Ahluwalia *et al., 2*011). By giving them space to express their knowledge through writing blog in Spanish, the students can learn and explore the experience about Spanish in in their comfort zone as they can write anywhere anytime. Therefore, learning in this relaxed manner enables students to have fun and stimulates their motivation to remain focused and enthusiastic (Husain, 2021).

Discussion

a) First Participant

Referring to http://ummimusician93.blogspot.my/ blog in Figure 1, it is clear that the learner's work fulfils the aspects of schema and assimilation of the Piaget (1952) theory. This is because the learner is able to use her newly learnt basic Spanish vocabulary and applying it to her existing knowledge about blogs. Observing the blog, it can be seen that this learner is able to produce two simple writings regarding herself and her family. The use of simple sentences like "*mi padre es muy guapo y alto*" (my father is very handsome), "*tambien trabaja como maestro en una escuela*" (Also, he works as a teacher in a school), "*tiene quince años*" (he is 15 years old) and others serve as evidence that there is cognitive development.

Figure 1. Mi Familia (http://ummimusician93.blogspot.my/)

This learner is able to combine new knowledge with existing knowledge based on the creativity shown in the blog. The existing knowledge comes from Spanish class. In class, learners were taught basic vocabulary like "*Mi Padre*" (my father), "*mi madre*" (my mother), "*mi hermana*" (my sister), "*estudio*" (I study) and "*trabaja*" (he works). These vocabulary items were taught to the learners during lecture in the class. They also have a textbook as reference. In order to strengthen the learning of these vocabulary items, they were told to make blogs as a novel approach. Blogging has made the learners write in Spanish casually. Engaging learners is important because teachers are encouraged to use meaningful materials and activities to increase motivation (Spratt et al., 2002).

Aside from writing about family, the learner has also written about herself as shown in Figure 2. This is where the accommodation stage can be seen. Her ability to recognize simple phrases is now considered as old knowledge, and it is being used to construct a sentence about herself. The sentence "*estudio para ser profesora porque yo creo que es una profesión muy interesante*" means (I am learning to be a lecturer because I think because I think it is a very interesting job). It is a proof that the learner is able to use the old information to create a new one. The schema was gained during class when simple phrases were introduced, and by creating sentences, the learner is able to assimilate old information to create a new one. In the learner's assimilation, the learner is able to construct a compound sentence.

Figure 2. Hola Chicos (http://ummimusician93.blogspot.my/)

The blog above has shown that the respondent is able to practise her writing skill by writing about her family and herself. This is also proof that the learner's confidence in writing in Spanish has increased. It can be argued that the learner has achieved equilibration because of the evidence that the learner has written in order to improve her own writing skills. This serves as proof that this particular learner has achieved the highest stage of cognitive development, surpassing other learners. Simultaneously, this also demonstrates the learner's high confidence level. This occurrence proves that Piaget's (1952) constructivism theory with regard to the stages of cognitive development has been successfully applied in learning Spanish by constructing a blog.

b) Second Participant

Figure 3. Mi Idolo (http://spanisheddieupm.blogspot.my/)

In the blog http://spanisheddieupm.blogspot.my/ in Figure 3, the learner also demonstrates her ability to use old information and then add a new one, by writing about something different that is "*mi idolo*" (my idol). Although the sentence constructed is simple, it is proof enough that there is cognitive development. At this stage, the learner is able to match old information obtained during classroom with new information found in the internet.

The basic vocabulary taught in class was "*mi*" (my), "*una*" (a), "*es*" (is), "*ella*" (she), *"los"* (the) and, "*tiene*" (she has). The learner's creativity can also be seen in this blog when the learner made references from materials outside the classroom, not totally depending on notes provided by the lecturer. Kern (2006) concurs that the use of blogs in the learning of English as a foreign language is grounded in constructivist approach because it underlines learners' interaction. The practice of blogging can thus be considered as training learners to be creative and innovative.

Learners' creativity is further displayed through Spanish cultural elements seen in the images from the second participant's blog as shown in Figure 4. In one instance, the learner displays a cultural depiction of a cartoon character wearing a "*sombrero*", a broad-rimmed, high-crowned hat made of felt or straw worn especially in Spain and Mexico. The learner is able to expand the learning of Spanish vocabulary to learning the culture of the language. This is in line with Hauck's (2007) finding that suggested learners obtained cultural knowledge from the language learnt.

Figure 4. Español (http://spanisheddieupm.blogspot.my/)

The following blog has also shown that this particular learner is ready to adapt basic concepts through the translated sentences constructed. This demonstrates the existing schemata potential that include all basic concepts that has created a balance between knowledge, belief and experience. Additionally, blog writing gives learners the opportunity to communicate in Spanish. This is evident when learners briefly introduced themselves in Spanish. For example, a learner wrote: "*Me llamo Eddie, soy Malasio y tengo veinte años*. *Soy de Malasio*" (My name is Eddie, I am Malaysian and I am 20 years old). Although it is a simple introduction, it is authentic and can be used in a real conversation. As Armstrong & Retterer (2008) who studied the use of blogging in learning intermediate Spanish as a foreign language mentioned, blogging becomes a method for learners to communicate in a foreign language.

c) Third Participant

Figure 5. Mi Blog Español (http://adibahms.blogspot.my/)

Generally, the writings in the http://adibahms.blogspot.my/ blog in Figure 5 deal with the self and the family. This is because at the basic learning level the learner needs to have something that is already known or familiar to the learner's immediate surrounding to serve as a basis for the constructive process to take place. Sentences like "*tengo una familia*" (I have a family), "*soy estudiante*" (I am a student), "*estudio para ser profesora*" (I am learning to be a lecturer) and others show that the learner's proficiency is at the basic level. However, because there is accommodation, previous knowledge of sentence structure is used to create new sentences. This shows that a constructive learning process has occurred. The blog starts with a simple introduction to "*Mi familia*" (My family). Although there is some spelling mistake, the learner is able to write a sentence about family. However, in this learners' accuracy is not focused therefore mistakes are not discussed. Spellings are not ignored because the main focus are on learner's ability to use old information and create new ones.

The mistake can be seen when the learner wrote "*mi familia*" (My Family). The learner is able to write a sentence introducing her parents. The learner wrote "*Mi madre se llama Wardah y mi padre (es) Mohamad Sarbini*" (My mother's name is Wardah and my father's name is Mohamad Sarbini). Although the learner's mistake is not putting the word es (is), the whole meaning of the sentence is not affected. Additionally, the learner's creativity can be seen in the following sentence: "*Tengo una hermana se llama Afiqah. El marido de mi hermana se llama Irshad. Tengo dos hermanos se llama Fauzi y Faizal*" (I have a sister named Afiqah. My sister's husband's name is Irshad. I have two brothers named Fauzi and Faizal). The ability of this learner to produce this sentence shows that blogging can be used to develop learner's writing skill. Concurrently, it has been found that blogs can be easily integrated into a virtual writing environment (Murray & Hourigan, 2008).

Figure 6. Acerca De Mí (http://adibahms.blogspot.my/)

The learner's confidence can also be seen in the production of her writing when the learner is not afraid to make mistakes although producing basic sentences. Observing the sentences that the learner has constructed, it is clear that there are spelling mistakes and grammatical errors, but it has not stopped the learner from writing. Nevertheless, the basis of this study is not to look at mistakes committed but rather to evaluate the level of the learners' thinking in improving their Spanish writing skills. Based on the learner's writing about herself as shown in Figure 6, there are some minor mistakes. The learner's sentences include- "*Mis mejores amigos en la universidad son Darleen, Shahira, y Siti. Son hermosos y amables*" (My best friends at university are Darleen, Shahira and Siti. They are beautiful and kind). While the learner wrote amigos, the proper expression is amigas because her friends are female. Moreover, the word "*hermosos*" should be written as "*hermosas*" to mean 'beautiful'. Again, the mistakes are minor and did not interfere with the general meaning of the sentence. These mistakes are normal in the process of learning development.

d) Fourth and Fifth Participants
Referring to the two blogs in Figure 7 and Figure 8, it is clear that the learners' cognitive levels are at the same level when they write about their family. However, they have been written differently in accordance to the learners' creativity. The choice of the words like "*mi padre*" (my father), "*mi madre*" (my mother), "*tengo*" (I have), "*amo*" (I love) and others indicate that the learners are trying to create new sentences based on basic Spanish vocabulary taught in class.
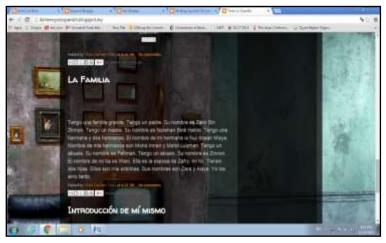

Figure 7. La Familia (http://darleengoesspanish.blogspot.my/)

Figure 8. Mi Familia (http://nadiafarlina3006.blogspot.my/)

Learner four's writing exhibits early writing skill development where there are minor mistakes that do not interfere with the intended meaning of the Spanish sentence. The learner is able to create sentences based on "*La Familia*" (family) and "*Introducción de mi mismo*" (self-introduction) as shown in Figure 9.
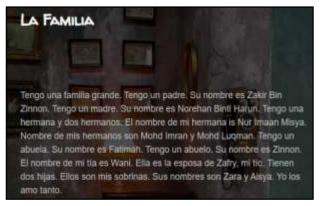

Figure 9. La Familia y Introducción De Mi Mismo (http://darleengoesspanish.blogspot.my/)
The sentences in Figure 9 are:
a) "*Tengo un padre. Su nombre es Zakir Bin Zinnon*" (I have a father. His name is Zakir bin Zinnon)
b) "*El nombre de mi tía es Wani*" (My aunty name is Wani)
c) "*Ellos son mis sobrinas. Sus nombres son Zara y Aisya*" (There are my nieces. Their names are Zara and Aisya). *Ellos* should be *ellas* because feminine
d) "*Los amo tanto*" (I love them so much)
e) "*Soy una persona feliz*" (I am a happy person)
f) "*Me gusta el color morado. Me encantan los gatos*" (I like purple colour. I love cats)

Based on the sentences above, there are evidences that the learner has developed assimilation and progressed to accommodation. This is because from the basic vocabularies about family and pronouns exposed in class, the learner is able to produce sentences based on a theme. The learner's ability to string words together to become comprehensible sentences is impressive, considering she was exposed to basic vocabularies. The learner has managed new information from the ones exposed during class.

The same situation can be observed in the fifth participant who writes about family and myself in the blog http://nadiafarlina3006.blogspot.com/ Figure 10 and 11.

> Esta es mi familia. Tengo cinco hermanos y dos hermanos tres hermanas. Este imagen se toma el año pasado en Perak. Mi madre se llamo Yang Roziyah. Mi madre tiene cincuenta y uno. El trabaja como es el hombre de negocios. Mi padre se llamo Ahmad Fuad. Mi padre tiene cincuenta y dos. El trabaja como es el professor. Yo amo a mi familia. Tengo los gemelos hermanos.

Figure 10. My life (http://nadiafarlina3006.blogspot.com/)

> Mi nombre es Nur Nadia Farlina bt Ahmad Fuad.
> Tengo veintidos años.
> Mi cumpleaños es treinta de junio 1992.
> Vivo Malasia.
> Soy de Ipoh, Perak
> Yo tener cinco hermanos
> Estudio en Universidad Putra Malasia en el curso ciencias agricolas.
> Me gustan los colores púrpura y gris y blanco
>
> Yo amor deportes tales como bádminton y tenis.

Figure 11. My biodata ((http://nadiafarlina3006.blogspot.com/)

Conclusion

Based on the discussion about blogging to learn Spanish, the research has concluded that knowledge obtained from the classroom has been developed. There are evidence that support learners' ability to assimilate and accommodate. Teaching Spanish through blogging is a novel approach in Malaysia. This approach can enhance learners to be more creative and confident in writing. Through technological affordances of the internet, language teaching and learning process has gone through revolution in its approach to learning Spanish in a more effective and fun way.

Furthermore, the researchers conclude that Schema, a general potential within the learners can be increased through learners' confidence in writing. This has been proven through the observation of several blogs discussed earlier that have demonstrated learners' potential to expand their basic Spanish writing skill. Choosing blogs as a platform to produce writing has in a way demonstrated how the learners' cognitive level has influenced their writing skill. Generally, topics regarding self and family have been chosen by learners because of their lack in proficiency in Spanish. Nevertheless,the learners were able to construct simple sentences on topics close to them and in this case, themselves and their families. Nonetheless, the variety of ideas generated indicates the different cognitive levels of the learners. It is interesting to note that the second participant wrote about my idol (mi idolo) instead of herself. This is evidence that some learners are able to establish a good schema, assimilate old with new information and accommodate her writing to suit different environments. The use of blogs can be a new approach to teaching and learning Spanish and

should be explored further. Learners will gain the satisfaction of creating their own web blog although their proficiency level is basic.

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