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Emerging Technologies for Autonomous Language Learning: Using Pre-Writing Tool for ESL

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Abstract

The rapid development of the technology has shifted the way how the student learns and how teacher teaches. Social media such as Pinterest may not only provide opportunities to achieve social function, but also create positive learning environment for the students. It also has become an alternative tool to teach writing. This paper aims to investigate students' perceptions on using Pinterest as ESL pre-writing strategy. It also attempts to identify advantages and challenges that students faced when using Pinterest as pre-writing strategy to enhance ESL writing. The respondents of the study consisted of 50 Form Five secondary school students from Menara Gading Academy located at Kuantan, Pahang. The findings revealed that the respondents showed positive feedback to the integration of Pinterest as a pre-writing tool to learn ESL writing. Pinterest also help to expand and organise ideas for writing and inject the fun element in learning due to its easy, friendly and interesting features. However, the respondents in opinion that they can be easily carried away by Pinterest and lost focus in the learning process. Unable to secure internet connection would be biggest hurdle to implement Pinterest in a classroom setting.

Keywords: *Emerging technologies; Pre-writing; strategy; social media; ESL writing; Pinterest.*

1. Introduction

Over the recent years, social media have become a major part of our society with the help from the ever expanding reach of Internet to young people. The process of delivering messages and information has changed greatly since there are a variety of social platforms that enable the users to connect themselves globally. The discourse between people has been altered with the breakthrough of technology that broke down the sociocultural barrier across cultures, languages and political perimeters. Interestingly, social media have also brought changes to the way we perceive 21st century education. The definition of a 'classroom' is on a dynamic transition, from a traditional mode to a more independent, student-centred process that could help to further maximise the students' potentials. Current generation of students have greater access to education and limitless knowledge as they are currently exposed to the very best of technology advancement that could benefit them as proactive learners. The four major language skills; listening, reading, reading and writing, are constantly being taught through the usage of social media, directly or indirectly. Academicians saw this as an opportunity to further integrate the availability of social media into pedagogical strategies. Teaching of writing particularly in ESL (English as second language) context is daunting task for educators. Writing requires special skills in brainstorming, organising, concentrating, editing as stated by [1]. Writing is a process which requires creativity and imagination. One of the ways to spark the flow of writing is to go through pre-writing stage. According to [2], pre-writing stage improves students writing in terms of content, organisation, voice and motivation towards writing. It is essential to learn how to generate ideas and plan an outline before writing. However, most students are not aware of the prewriting stage and thus unable to write effectively [3].

Conservative methods of teaching writing in schools are obsolete and do not fit to cater 21st century audience as the students. For example, visual maps are overly used for everything but the students fail to see the connection from one visual to other as they do not have interest nor motivation in them. Pinterest can be a better alternative to the traditional mind-mapping as it is a platform where those of talents and great minds share their ideas. As mentioned by [4], social media will benefit the students greatly as they are able to 'bring along' the classroom out of the classroom itself. In addition, [5] claimed that social media are no longer options but rather compulsory that both teachers and students must be competent in. Pinterest, an online medium that collects visual prompts and images, could be the answer which can assists the process of pre-writing among the students. Pinterest is a social network that allows users to visually share, and discover new interests by posting (known as 'pinning' on Pinterest) images or videos to their own or others' boards (i.e. a collection of 'pins,' usually with a common theme) and browsing what other users have pinned. Using a visual orientation, the social network is very much focused on the concept of a person's lifestyle, allowing you to share your tastes and interests with others and discovering those of likeminded people. Users can either upload images from their computer or pin things they find on the web using the Pinterest bookmarklet. This paper aims to investigate the usage of social media in teaching ESL writing. Particularly, it holds to identify the students' perspectives on the implementation of Pinterst as pre-writing tool to improve their ESL writing skill.

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2. Literature Review

In order to be at par with current trends in education, the integration of technology in teaching process has become a must. Therefore, the implementation of technology in an ESL classroom is among the important issue that needs to be considered by ESL teachers. According to [6], the classroom experience should advance along with the world which is advancing and moving towards being strongly connected to the information and communication technologies. Though gadgets such as computers and smartphone will not be able to substitute the role of the teacher entirely, [7] believed that the growing significance of smartphones among ESL learners creates opportunities to provide extra English language practice; which is much needed by learners, anytime, anywhere. Several studies have been conducted to study the effect of implementing social media including Pinterest in an ESL classroom. The most important thing to be considered in implementing social media in an ESL classroom is the application itself; whether it is effective or not. [7] proposed that the best apps to be used in an ESL classroom should be an application that requires the user to complete something in a short time while teachers should be able to link that activity to a longer activity which encourages repeated use and progress.

The use of Pinterest in classroom activities is helpful to enhance the development of positive communities and provide fluid environment that incorporated latest trend in technology along with current information [8]. A study done by [9] agrees to this, stating that social networking is beneficial for the students as it provides stress free environment to interact with others in ESL context. The finding of the study also asserts that integrating of social networking tools in ESL writing classroom will allow the students to voice out their ideas freely, discuss and exchanging ideas with their peers and thus encourage the students to write more creatively. It also creates a student-centred environment for students to be active and collaborative [10]. Despite the advantages, some researches also revealed the weakness of implementing this particular tool in an ESL classroom. As stated by [8], as students are used to using social media for entertainment and leisure, they are quite held back when using social media as a learning tool. Other than that, the strength of the internet connection may also affect the flow of the lessons using social media [9]. They also believed that the habits of using short forms are among the challenge of using social media in an ESL classroom. This will contribute to deterioration of writing quality among students.

3. Methodology

This study employed a quantitative method to investigate students' perceptions on using Pinterest as ESL pre-writing strategy. The students were the respondents of this study consisted of 50 Form Five enrolled in special programme under Menara Gading Academy. The programme is an intervention programme funded by Yayasan Istana Abdulaziz. The programme aims and goals to help selected students of B40 households where their family incomes are below than RM3000 per month and orphans from multiple districts in Pahang state to enhance their academic mastery and quality of education, personality, soft skills and social skills development. It also provides the students with motivation, tuition classes which can help boost their academic achievement in Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) to further study in public or private higher education institution latter.

An ESL writing workshop was conducted at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. The one-day workshop was aimed to help secondary school students to enhance their ESL writing skills. The workshop was facilitated by Pre- Service TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language) teachers from Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. There were 4 teaching slots conducted by these pre-service TESL teachers using various techniques and methods to improve the students' writing skill. One on the slots integrated the use of Pinterest in the teaching of ESL writing. Each slot was 40 minutes long and handled by three to four pre-service teachers. Once the slots were over, the questionnaires were distributed to the respondents. The questionnaire consisted of 25 items on the students' perception on the usage of Pinterest, the advantages, as well as the challenges faced by the students in integrating Pinterest as a pre-writing strategy. These elements are measured in Likert scale measurement in which the students have to answer their degree of agreement or disagreement with the statements that are provided.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Students' Perception on Using Pinterest as a Pre-writing Strategy

Table. 1: Students' Perception on Using Pinterest as a Pre-writing Strategy

Items	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel comfortable while using Pinterest as a strategy to learn writing.	0	2(4%)	20(40%)	18 (36%)	10(20%)
I feel motivated to learn writing while using Pinterest.	0	0	20(40%)	23 (46%)	7(14%)
I prefer visual mapping as a method to spark ideas instead of writing them down in sentences	0	3(6%)	11(22%)	16 (32%)	20(40%)
I find Pinterest very easy to use.	0	3(6%)	9(18%)	20 (40%)	18(36%)
I will use Pinterest as visual map from now on	0	3(6%)	15(30%)	21 (42%)	11(22%)
I discover new forms of sentences as well as poetic expression that can be beneficial for my essay while browsing on Pinterest.	0	2(4 %)	10(20 %)	21 (42 %)	17(34 %)
I can expand my ideas for writing better while using Pinterest.	1(2 %)	1(2 %)	7(1 4%)	28 (56 %)	13(26 %)
I get better ideas for writing Ideas or Pins	0	1(2 %)	14(28	24 (48	4(8 %)

The students' interest and motivation, opinion on visual mapping and the accessibility were identified in order to investigate their perception on the use of Pinterest as a pre-writing strategy. From the findings, it was evident that the respondents positively responded to the use of Pinterest as 23 of them or 46% of the student agreed that they feel motivated to write when using Pinterest and other 14% or 7 respondents strongly agreed on this statement. As seen through the feedbacks from the respondents, it can be postulated that the use of social media, particularly Pinterest in this

posted by my peers on Pinterest.			%)	%)	
I find it easier to complete my essays after participating in Pinterest activities.	0	0	17(34 %)	23 (46 %)	10(20 %)
I remember the points to include in my essay better after using Pinterest	0	2(4 %)	15(30 %)	17 (34 %)	15(30 %)
I can obtain a lot useful information while browsing through Pins on Pinterest.	0	0	13(26 %)	20 (40 %)	17(34 %)
I can stay focused longer while using Pinterest as compared to normal lessons on writing.	0	1(2 %)	23(46 %)	12 (24 %)	14(28 %)
I know how to improve on my writing skills with help from Pinterest	0	1(2 %)	13(26 %)	25 (50 %)	11(22 %)

case has motivated and elevated their interest in learning writing. [11] believed that one advantage of integrating social media in teaching and learning process is motivation and student enjoyment. Gadgets and mobile phones are the lives of today's youth; they can never live without it. Hence, teachers should take value of this matter. [12] suggested that constant usage of technology and social media could be a motivating factor for language teaching and learning process. Technology has offered a lot of benefit to all including the education field. Everyone wants things to be fast and easy in today's world. Thus, as the use of mobile technology is increasing, respondents should be offered the opportunity to learn at their own convenience of time and place through their own gadgets and mobile phones [13]. Based on this finding, it can conclude that Pinterest should strongly be considered by teachers in teaching writing as it sparks students' interest in learning.

Data also showed that the more than half of the respondents agreed that the use of Pinterest as a teaching tool in learning writing is very suitable for them. They also stated that they prefer using visual or mind mapping than listing down or writing down their ideas. Mind mapping is a diagram that has functions as a way to organize ideas and represent words, tasks, or another links that arranged a central keyword by branches and typically it contains words, colors, short phrase and picture. [14] believed visual mapping is an essential tool used for stimulating thought that shows ideas which are generated around one main idea and how they are interlinked. Visual mapping technique are able to help students' writing ability in terms of enriching vocabularies, improving creativity, arranging sentences and organizing ideas [15]. Visual mapping gives the option for students to do their prewriting in a simpler way. "Prewriting helps us to get our ideas on paper, though not usually in an organized form, and brainstorm thoughts that might eventually make their way into our writing" [16].

In addition, based on the results of the findings, majority of the respondents found Pinterest easy to use. The user-friendly features of any application or web is a strong key to attract students' and teachers' reactions and hence enhances their usability of that application [11]. Pinterest is such an easy application to be used; all you have to do is choose pictures related to the topic and pin them on the board. Other than that, [8] stated that Pinterest provide various resources from how to design own bedroom, to charts, writing prompts, or steps to writing essay. Pinterest favours not only visual learners, but also creative and inquisitive ones who will be tempted to search further.

4.2 Advantages of Using Pinterest as a Pre-Writing Strategy

Table 2: Advantages of Using Pinterest as a Pre-Writing Strategy

Items	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I can organize my thoughts better by pinning visuals and related images on Pinterest before the actual writing.	0	2(4%)	14(28%)	21 (42%)	13(26%)
I learn new vocabulary from browsing other Pins on Pinterest.	0	1(2%)	7(14%)	23 (46%)	19(38%)

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4.3 Advantages of Using Pinterest as a Pre-Writing Strategy

The questionnaire also inquired the respondents on the benefits they gained from utilizing Pinterest as a tool in writing. Based on the results, it was demonstrated that most of our respondents showed positive feedback towards the usage of Pinterest as a pre-writing strategy. Based on the table, 21 out of 50 respondents (42%) agreed that they could use Pinterest to organize thoughts and ideas before the actual writing started. Another 13 respondents (26%) showed strong agreement to the prior statement, which contributed to the total of 68% of positive feedback altogether. This result has proven that Pinterest is beneficial enough, that it serves its own purpose; to organize thoughts and ideas. Stunning visuals and simple 'pin it onto the board' routine are the reasons why students showed positive

feedbacks to this item. As mentioned by [17], one of the characteristics that constitute a good piece of writing is organization and coherence. He emphasized that the pattern of organization should be self-administered, that the student could decide whether the information gathered must be gathered in a general-to-specific manner or vice versa. Pinterest allows its users to manipulate its flexibility in terms gathering information by selecting only related visuals that ring significance to the topic. It was assumed that the ease of mapping ideas of visual cues is particularly beneficial for descriptive essays contributed to the students' optimistic response of Pinterest. [18] stated that writing gives the author the liberty to explore thoughts and ideas and to make them visible and concrete. Prior to this, [19] claimed that descriptive writing is to paint a picture with words, which links back to the core concept of Pinterest. This modern visual mapping strategy could be an ultimate pedagogical alternative in imposing the need to be better at writing.

In addition, it was revealed that that more than half of the respondents, 28 of them (56%) agreed that they could expand their ideas better when using Pinterest. Besides, another 13 respondents agreed on this statement and they contributed another 26% to the positive feedback to Pinterest. Such results could be related to the sense of self –discovery and student-centered learning as pillared by many 21st century social media out there. According to [20], Pinterest was developed on the same notion as such the respondents have complete control over their 'Boards'. She further added that the information was designed to arrange themselves in a non-directive way that the respondents have to do thinking on which information could be included as a way to expand their topic. If this level of feedback could be drawn from the respondents, it is no longer debatable why Pinterest should be taken in as a new alternative to teach writing.

In contrary, up to 30% of the respondents claimed that they could not remember the points to include in their writing after they have pinned related visuals onto their Pinterest "Boards". Plus, 2 respondents (4.1%) claimed that they could not remember anything at all. It was assumed that this is linked directly to time constraints during the introductory session to Pinterest itself. Each teaching slot is given 40minutes. In the limited time frame, the pre-service teacher had to alert the respondents on the application of Pinterest as a tool in writing apart from conducting a mini writing activity. Due to this, the respondents rushed through the session without having ample time to reflect on whatever they have just done. [21] constructed the concept of "think-time," which defined as a period of uninterrupted silence by the teacher and all students so that they both can complete appropriate information processing tasks or responses. He further deduced that the students need at least two minutes or more 'thinking time' in order to let the new information sink it. Due to the lack of 'thinking time', Pinterest might just be a foreign idea to these students, far from using it as pedagogical tool to teach writing.

The respondents were asked whether they could maintain their focus throughout the session while the access to Internet and Pinterest was made available to everybody. Surprisingly, 46% (23 respondents) of our respondents claimed that they were unsure of this statement. Moreover, only 14 of them (28%) could totally agree that they maintained their focus till the end. In utilizing social media in classrooms, there are several factors that should be considered by teachers as to what might hinder the process of learning itself. It is a well-known fact that social media now have become major parts in the lives of these youngsters. They literally use social media for everything, even for simple tasks such as searching for the meaning of the words or connecting themselves to the bigger world out there. According to [22], the internet users spend most of their time to chat on social media sites than other types of webs. This might explain why most of the respondents were 'distracted' during the session. They might have wandered off from the original intent of learning about Pinterest to updating their current status at Facebook. In addition, internet connection problems might as well cause our respondents to detach themselves from the learning experience. Slow internet connection will affect the mood of the respondents in learning which will cause their anxiety while waiting for access to the page and bored in browsing [23].

4.4 Challenges in Using Pinterest as a Pre-Writing Strategy

Table. 3: The prevalence percentage of mental illness among adult for different location in Malaysia

Items	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I find it difficult to find a secure Internet connection.	5(10%)	4(8%)	17(34%)	12 (24%)	12(24%)
I tend to be distracted by other features of Pinterest	0	6(12%)	20(40%)	15 (30%)	9(18%)
I am a tech-savvy person	0	4(8%)	18(36%)	19 (38%)	9(18%)
I have smartphones that can support Pinterest	1(2%)	0	10(20%)	23 (46%)	16(32%)
I can learn writing better through visual mapping	1(2%)	0	8(16%)	17 (34%)	24(48%)

It is a universal belief that challenges are constant and inevitable when it comes to dealing with technologies. Based on the research, three prominent difficulties faced by the students were identified, concerning on i) finding a secure internet connection, ii) the distraction of using other features other than Pinterest and iii) having smartphones, tablets or other mobile platforms that support Pinterest in learning writing. In an attempt to find a secure internet connection, it is indicated that 48%, that is nearly half of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed upon the difficulty in finding a secure internet connection as one of the challenges in using Pinterest. Nowadays, it is ostensible that our lives very much revolve around technologies such as laptops, tablets and smartphones that can be linked directly to the internet. Throughout the years the internet has developed rapidly and so does the ability to interact with each other particularly by the usage of multitude online applications. [24]. Nevertheless, the greatest challenge faced by these respondents is apparent in searching for a secure internet connection. Based on data gathered from the [25][26][27], the report provides insight into key global statistics such as connection speeds, broadband adoption metrics, notable Internet disruptions, IPv4 exhaustion and IPv6 implementation. Malaysia Average Internet Connection Speed was 6.4Mbps in Q1 2016, ranking dropped to 74 globally which devastatingly reflects a poor performance. Out of 15 countries across Asia, Malaysia, in this case holds the ninth spot. In this context, a slow internet connection definitely places a direct effect on the respondents' engagement on using online application namely Pinterest. 34% of the respondents are neutral about it as they may not or seldom encounter problems in connecting to a secured connection, which is manageable.

Throughout this research, it was discovered that 40% of the respondents are neutral on the issue of being distracted by other features offered by Pinterest. It also has proven to be the suitable application in channelling students' interest to as the distraction level is within one's control. In an attempt to find information, it can be seen these students have a strong sense of control and resistance in engaging with distractions. In this sense, despite technologies without doubt can be distracting, these students' intrinsic motivation has helped them to shift and maintain their focus throughout using Pinterest. Alternatively, it can turn

classroom distraction into learning interaction that can further draw their discovery, discussion, and learning.

Other than that, almost 80% of the respondents have come to a consensus that owning smartphones or tablets that can support Pinterest and other mobile platforms allow them to learn writing. Based on the statistic from statista.com, it shows the number of smartphones and tablets users in Malaysia from 2015 to 2021 is increasing rapidly. For 2017, the number of smartphone users in Malaysia is estimated to reach 17.8 million. With an increasing number of users each year, it appears that owning a smartphone is no longer foreign to the citizens of Malaysia. Smartphones has become a necessity and serve as a basic need to each and every one of us, particularly in creating a meaningful learning writing experience.

5. Implication and Conclusion

The intent of this paper was to investigate effectiveness of Pinterest integration in improving students' pre-writing strategies. It has been assumed that technologies should be used as a beneficial tool in promoting students' creativity. Overall, the students' intrinsic motivation is proven to be high as they do feel comfortable and encouraged in engaging with Pinterest. Multitude of advantages too can be gained by the students. From thought organization to enhancing one's vocabulary, students definitely can benefit a lot by using it. Nevertheless, challenges encounter in its usage are inevitable, rather manageable. Pinterest in this era of technology has proven to serve its purpose, providing worthwhile opportunities for students to practice their pre-writing strategy in a single grace of one's finger.

In conclusion, the integration of social media application such as Pinterest could definitely elevate student's interest and motivation in ESL writing. If teachers manage to apply the right application in teaching, it might not just ease the student's learning experience but also shows them how fun language learning could be. However, it is a crucial responsibility for teachers to ensure that the integration of social media in ESL writing is not only fun and games, teachers should guide and supervise the usage so that students still get the input of the lesson. It is also very important for teachers to be prepared of the challenges of handling technology. Teachers should always have a backup plan when using technology as a teaching tool. Problem such as poor internet connection is among the limitation that is beyond control. Social media is definitely an opportunity that teachers should not ignore however teachers should be creative in overcoming the problems that may come along with this technological advantage. The use of visual mapping as a pre-writing strategy helps stimulate students thought and expand their ideas on a certain topic. Students find visual mapping interesting as it makes pre-writing simple and quick. The use of Pinterest as a visual mapping tool definitely interests them more as it is much more simple and easier to search and pin their ideas on a Pinterest board. Teachers should really consider in integrating Pinterest as a pre-writing strategy as it will benefits both teacher and students in the teaching and learning process.

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