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THE INTEGRATION OF MICROSOFT WORD TOOLS TO FACILITATE WRITING AMONG TESL TEACHER TRAINEES

YEAP YONG LYNN

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Bachelor of Science with Education (TESL)

Faculty of Education
University Teknologi Malaysia

APRIL 2009
DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis entitled “THE INTEGRATION OF MICROSOFT WORD TOOLS TO FACILITATE WRITING AMONG TESL TEACHER TRAINEES” is a result of my own research except as cited in the references. The thesis has not been accepted for any degree and is not concurrently submitted in candidature of any other degree.

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To mom, dad and my late nana,
whose love and care I shall cherish forever.
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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the integration of Microsoft Word tools among TESL teacher trainees to facilitate their writing. The focus of this study is on the use of Microsoft Word tools, the dependency on Microsoft Word tools and the problems faced while using Microsoft Word tools by the TESL teacher trainees. For this study, a total of 50 TESL teacher trainees who consist of third year and fourth year TESL students of Universiti Teknologi Malaysia were chosen as the sample. Questionnaire has been used as a means of data collection in order to identify the integration of Microsoft Word tools in the writing of TESL teacher trainees. The data collected have been analysed with the aid of Microsoft Excel. The findings of the study indicate that the TESL teacher trainees utilised most of the tools available in Microsoft Word. They are highly dependent on the tools as these tools facilitate their writing process and they only face problems while using the Synonym feature within Microsoft Word. Some suggestions have also been made in order to further improvise the study by altering the scope and by focusing on only a version of Microsoft Word when collecting data.
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TESL – Teaching of English as a Second Language

UTM – Universiti Teknologi Malaysia
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The creativity of human mind has enabled our ancestors to come up with ample innovative inventions such as wheels, compass and also umbrella. However, human beings are very motivated to keep their imagination wild. Ever since the invention of daily paraphernalia in order to lead an easier life, human race is eager to improve themselves by venturing further into the field of science and technology. Thus, centuries after the invention of the abacus by the Chinese, the development of data processing device did not come to an end. In fact, the technology continues to evolve until the invention of the first computer system in 1951, which is the UNIVAC I. However, the first generation of modern computer system were enormous and expensive. It was difficult to maintain the computer system and it broke down easily because of overheating.

During the early 1960s, the invention of integrated circuits had set as a stepping stone for the redesigning of the latest computer systems. The feature of integrated circuits which enables the combination of several single-function electronics component in order to work as one device leads to the development of smaller and more advanced computer systems. The achievement eventually
promoted the development of the latest computer technology such as the release of Pentium processors and the likes.

In this epoch, the role of computers has undergone other major changes and their functions are no longer restricted in the field of science and business. Besides using computers as gaming gadgets, they can be used as a tool for word processing which facilitates and improvise the traditional writing process. By using the word processor available in the computer system such as Microsoft Word, the writing process will be facilitated as there are useful tools within the word processor to assist the writers. Thus, writing will no longer be a tedious task for the writers as the dependency of the tools will help them improve the quality of their writing.

1.2 Background of the Study

Writing is an essential skill which is widely used in the academic field, as well as in a person’s daily life. In fact, writing is so important that students are exposed to this skill from as early as their primary education. Thus, students need to fully master the elements of effective writing, such as the writing mechanics, grammar, word choice and others in order to ensure that they are able to put their ideas clearly in the written form (Aziz et al, 2006). Writing can be a tedious task as students need to go through the chore of recopying the whole text while they are engaging in drafting or editing process before producing their written master piece. In spite of the invention of typewriter, the editing of a written work is still complicated as there is no easy way of correcting major writing errors such as misspelling of words or even errors in sentence organisation.
As the technology advanced, computers began to replace the role of typewriters in written text management. The prices of computers become more affordable and they are able to transform into a powerful writing tool which have the potential to promote writing among students. Besides, a range of word processing software has been developed simultaneously to cater to the needs of computer users. With the aid of word processing software, users are able to manipulate text on the computer screen based on their creativity, as well as preview their work before printing out their end product in the form of hard copy (Moore, 1986). Nowadays, the features found within a word processor have transformed into a fundamental programme which are able to perform multiple task besides the usual text handling function. In fact, the most common word possessing software is Microsoft Word and the programme is compatible to both Macintosh and Windows platform. Thus, Microsoft Word has given a new dimension to writing as the tools found within the software are able to facilitate the writing process (Michigan’s Assistive Technology Resource, 2004).

There are various formatting and writing tools available in Microsoft Word which are able to facilitate the students’ writing, such as the use of templates to facilitate letter writing, the use of spelling and grammar features for editing which will make the writing process a breeze. In short, Microsoft Word can enhance the writing process, as well as increase the quality of the end product of writing.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Writing is an essential skill to master. Even though a person might be a fluent speaker of a language, he or she might not be equipped with sufficient knowledge to master the written language (Chitravelu et al., 1995). In order to encourage the students to master the skills, a creative and innovative method such as the use of word processor in writing can be used (Godsey, 2000). The use of word processor
facilitates the writing as it has the ability to simplify the conventional writing tasks (Lichtenstein, 1996). However, while engaging in writing, some students are not aware of the functions of tools available in word processing software such as the Thesaurus, Grammar and Spelling Checker to help them improve their writing. Besides, some of them do not have the initiative to further explore the tools embedded within the software because they are unfamiliar of the availability of tools within the word processor. Their lack of knowledge on the tools found in a word processor will be a disadvantage for them as they are unaware to maximise the availability of word processing software to cater to their own language needs, as well as save time on the tedious editing process (Lockhard, Abrams and Many, 1997).

To date, no extensive studies have been conducted to study the effectiveness of the variety of tools available to assist writing except for the use of Grammar and Spell Checker only. It is hoped that by conducting this study, the students’ awareness of the tools found within word processing software, such as Microsoft Word will be increased, as well as their problems while writing using word processor will be identified.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

Microsoft Word is a well known word processor which has been used widely to facilitate the process of writing. However, not every feature of Microsoft Word tools has been mastered by students while engaging in writing activities. Thus, in order to encourage the students to make full use of Microsoft Word in their writing, a study was carried out to investigate the students’ usage and dependence on Microsoft Word while writing. This study also identified the obstacles faced by students while utilising the tools found in Microsoft Word to engage in written activity.
1.5 Objective of the Study

The objectives of this study are:

i. to investigate the use of Microsoft Word tools among the TESL teacher trainees while engaging in writing.

ii. to investigate the dependence on Microsoft Word tools among the TESL teacher trainees while writing.

iii. to identify the problems faced by the TESL teacher trainees while using Microsoft Word tools in writing.

1.6 Research Questions

The study is conducted to find the answers to the following research questions:

i. What are the Microsoft Word tools used by the TESL teacher trainees to facilitate their writing?

ii. How dependent are the TESL teacher trainees on Microsoft Word tools while engaging in writing?

iii. What are the problems faced by the TESL teacher trainees while using Microsoft Word tools to facilitate writing?