

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

Fatimah Puteh & Yeap Yong Lynn  
Fakulti Pendidikan,  
Universiti Teknologi Malaysia.

**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.

**ABSTRAK :** Penyelidikan ini mengkaji penggunaan peralatan Microsoft Word di kalangan guru pelatih TESL untuk mempercepatkan penulisan mereka. Fokus kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji penggunaan, kebergantungan dan masalah yang dihadapi oleh guru pelatih TESL semasa menggunakan peralatan Microsoft Word dalam penulisan mereka. Sampel kajian ini merangkumi 50 orang guru pelatih TESL Universiti Teknologi Malaysia yang berada di tahun tiga dan tahun empat. Soal selidik telah digunakan dalam pengumpulan data kajian untuk mengetahui penggunaan peralatan Microsoft Word di kalangan guru pelatih TESL. Di samping itu, data yang dikumpul dianalisis dengan bantuan Microsoft Excel. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa guru pelatih TESL menggunakan kebanyakan peralatan yang terdapat dalam perisian Microsoft Words. Selain itu, didapati juga guru pelatih TESL sangat bergantung kepada peralatan dalam Microsoft Word untuk mempercepatkan proses penulisan mereka dan hanya menghadapi masalah dalam penggunaan Synonym yang terdapat dalam Microsoft Word. Selepas kajian dijalankan, adalah dicadangkan bahawa kajian ini diperbaiki melalui perubahan skop kajian. Tumpuan kajian boleh difokuskan kepada satu versi Microsoft Word sahaja semasa pengumpulan data kajian.

Keywords : *Microsoft Word, TESL,*

## **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.

## **STATEMENT OF PROBLEMS**

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.

## **PURPOSE OF 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.

## **OBJECTIVES OF 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.

## **SCOPE OF STUDY**

The study was conducted to investigate the integration of Microsoft Word tools to facilitate writing among TESL teacher trainees. The respondents of this study consist of 50 UTM third year and fourth year students who are currently pursuing a TESL programme in UTM. The respondents of the study are students who are familiar with the use of computer system as they have taken information technology subjects as their minor. Thus, the respondents are exposed to the use of word processor such as Microsoft Word to prepare their reports, as well as teaching materials in English. In addition, the Microsoft Word tools referred to in the study is Microsoft Word 2003 and Microsoft Word 2007 since the respondents are more familiar with these versions of Microsoft Word. These two versions of Microsoft Word share similar tools and functions. Finally, the data of this study were collected via questionnaires which were distributed to the respondents from 2 February to 16 February 2009.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

This study was conducted to find out the use of Microsoft Word tools among TESL teacher trainees to facilitate their writing. It also aims to identify the respondents' dependency on Microsoft Word tools and the problems faced by them while using the word processing package.

In this study, quantitative research methodology has been adopted in the form of a questionnaire to obtain the required data. By using quantitative research methodology, the data in the form of numbers and statistic can be collected in order to show the respondents who are integrating Microsoft Word tools to facilitate their writing. Besides, the use of this research methodology also enables the study to be conducted in an unbiased manner as this study involved respondents who are selected randomly from a large group of study population. Quantitative research method can be used to generate a quantifiable and reliable data which is able to generalize the trend of Microsoft Word tools used by respondents which consist of a large population.

## **RESPONDENTS OF THE STUDY**

The respondents of the study consisted of 50 third and fourth year TESL teacher trainees from the Faculty of Education, UTM. They have been selected as the respondents in the study because the third and fourth year TESL teacher trainees have undergone their teaching practice and they had been exposed to the use of word processor to facilitate their writing, such as while preparing their lesson plans, reports and classroom learning materials. Thus, they are more familiar with the tools available in the word processor and this helps in identifying their dependency on the tools and problems faced while using word processor.

## **RESEARCH INSTRUMENT**

In this study, quantitative research methodology has been utilised. By using questionnaire as the research instrument, the privacy of the respondents can be protected as the researcher collected the

questionnaire after distributing them to the respondents on the spot. This encourages the respondents to provide honest response. Besides, this approach facilitates the study as the respondents know that only the researcher can gain access to the data provided by them. In addition, through the use of questionnaire, the respondents intended for the study can be reached easily because the researcher distributed the questionnaire to each respondent personally. Hence, time can be used efficiently because the researcher will distribute the questionnaires and collect them back instantly after the respondents are given 15 to 20 minutes to respond to them.

## **FINDINGS**

According to the data collected, 21 of them have been using computers for 6 to 11 years, while another 17 of the respondents have used the computer for more than 12 years. Besides, only 12 respondents reported having 1 to 5 years of experience in using computer. From the findings, it shows that the majority of TESL teacher trainees had been exposed to computers as early as their primary or secondary school. Based on the findings, it shows that computers have become a common tool for study and entertainment and the respondents have gained early exposure to computers at home or even in computer classes in schools.

The data collected shows that 31 of the respondents always make use of the Spelling and Grammar Checker while they are engaging in writing. This shows that Spelling and Grammar Checker is a tool which can be used throughout the writing process to ensure that the writing produced is free from errors as mentioned by Zimmerman et al. (2008). However, there is only one respondent who does not use the spelling and grammar checker as he or she relies on other tools to identify the mistakes within the writing.

In addition, 28 of the respondents use different Font or Style to improve the appearance of their writing. Sharp (2005) in his study mentioned that by using the tool, the respondents are able to manipulate the appearance of the text such tools include Bold, Italic and Word Underline that can easily be used to suit their needs. This tool is commonly used among the respondents as none of them responded as 'rarely' or 'never' in using this tool. Besides, 28 of the respondents use the numbering function to organise their ideas while writing, whereas only 26 of them use the bullet function. The numbering and bullet function are similar and they help the respondents to organise their ideas in point forms as mentioned by Iskandar and Zaitun (2001). This helps the respondents to see their ideas clearly as it is a useful tool in the pre-writing stage. So, none of the respondents are not utilising both tools in writing.

From the data collected, 22 of the respondents strongly agree that they are familiar with the functions of Microsoft Word tools, while 25 of them agree to that statement. The majority of the respondents are familiar with the function of Microsoft Word tools as most of them have been using computers for more than one year and the tools within Microsoft Words of other versions are similar (Seguin et al., 2002). Based on the demographic information, even though there are 30 respondents who use Microsoft Word 2007, they are not alien to the tools available in other versions of Microsoft Word as the tools share almost the same functions.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Based on the findings of the study, the TESL teacher trainees use the major tools available in Microsoft Word which is also used by the majority of other people while engaging in writing. From the research, the tools identified are Cut, Delete, Cut and Paste, Copy, Alignment, Font or Style,

Bullets, Numbering and Tables. According to Sharp (2005), these are the basic editing tools which are commonly used during the writing process as they are able to facilitate a person's writing.

In addition, from the questionnaire distributed, only a minority of TESL teacher trainees are not using some of the commonly used tools within Microsoft Word. The tools are Drawing Tools, Spelling and Grammar Checker, Synonyms, Thesaurus and AutoCorrect. According to Sharp (2005), these are the supporting tools available in Microsoft Word and not all the TESL teacher trainees have the exposure of utilising these tools to improvise and enhance the quality of their writing. The use of these tools is based on the TESL teacher trainees writing needs. However, based on the demographic data collected, the TESL teacher trainees have more than one year of experience in using computers. Thus, only a small number of respondents are unfamiliar and unable to use these tools while engaging in writing because of the availability of tools in different versions of Microsoft Word (Shelly, Cashman and Vermaat, 2006; Zimmerman et al., 2008).

The findings also show that the TESL teacher trainees utilise other tools apart from those stated in the questionnaire while engaging in writing. The additional tools are Chart, AutoShape, Hyperlink, Highlight, Word Count, Short cut, Insert picture, Borders and Shading, Clip Art, Page number, Word Art, Help, Comment and Paragraph. These additional tools are used to improve the layout and presentation of the writing based on the individual needs of the trainees. As mentioned by Sharp (2005), these are not the basic editing tools within a word processor and the teacher trainees are utilising them only when they need it.

From the findings, most of the TESL teacher trainees do not encounter much problems while using Microsoft Word tools except for a minority of them. The minority of the TESL teacher trainees are not exposed to the latest version of Microsoft Word and they are not familiar with the availability and location of the tools in Microsoft Word as mentioned by Zimmerman et al.(2008). This is because the layout of the Microsoft Word tool which is unfamiliar to some of the TESL teacher trainees who are used to the older version of Microsoft Word (Shelly, Cashman and Vermaat, 2006). Besides, the years of experience of using computers also contribute to this factor. A minority of TESL teacher trainees who have less than five years of experience in using computers might encounter problems while engaging in writing using Microsoft Word as they are unfamiliar with the uses and functions of the tools available.

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