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Technological Support of Workplace Writing

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Abstract

Technology supported writing is crucial especially currently when digital transformation and innovation were rife. Previous studies in the field suggested that technology-enhanced learning became more widespread as writing tools that serve multiple purposes namely evaluation, scoring and instructional. In the present study, the needs for a certain components of writing instructions that are enabled by technological support were looked into. The study focuses on the perception of workers in different service sectors in Malaysia on technology-enhanced writing supports for their workplace writing in English needs. 46 operational level workers responded to the survey. Data were analysed quantitatively using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 26, descriptive statistics. The findings revealed that most workers believed in the importance of digital support not only struggling second language writers but also as tools to assist them with the text-level focus (language) and genre focus. In conclusion, technology support serves as tools to assist the users with the structure and mapping the direction of their text, as well as mechanics in writing, grammar and spelling.

Keywords: workplace writing, writing tools, technological writing support, ESL, EOP

Introduction

Functional written communication in the workplace is now more than ever characterized by the technology. The technology advances namely the Internet, e-mail, e-commerce and teleconferencing cannot be taken for granted when discussing what 21st century workplace tasks can offer. Latest devices and innovations have contracted the world into a global village (Kolin, 2015). Besides, the crowd inflowing the professional workforce today are from the Net Generation (Steinwart, 2009). Karoly and Panis (2004) estimated that the technological synergies which demand highly skillful workforce continue to give rise to the economic sectors including the services. Technology was traditionally defined as any piece of equipment and applications that are electronic based and not confined to the Internet and computers (Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005). Technology transforms to suit users' needs and demands users to adapt them into their lives. In the past, when we thought of writing classrooms, we often imagined a solitary author, head bent, scribbling on paper with pen. The communication has been transformed by the new channels called the media and technology (Gamble & Gamble, 2013).

The notion is outlandish in many workplaces today. Writing is no longer a lonely process but has become an extended routine communication. Though it is a myth that 21st century literacies is all about technology only (National Council of Teachers of English 2011), an ethnographic study which looked into digital media and youngsters has concluded that the young people are highly engaged and "always on" relationship with digital media (Ito et al., 2008). There are the good and bad sides of these new tools in writing. It can facilitate a writing process and improve vocabulary and grammar, provides supportive and encouraging environment and boosts the quality and quantity of writing (Lam & Penninton 1995; Fidaoui, Bahous & Bacha 2010; Melor et al. 2013). In second language writing (SLW) ability in general, grammatical ability is widely accepted as a key component (Neumann, 2014). Blogs and social media are very common among the current generation of workforce. It is a platform to express their worldview. There is abundant substantiation to support that those who have personal blogs tend to be prolific writers (Melor et al. 2013). In fact, the interactivity side of blogs increases the sentence grammar. On the other hand, the use of these new tools could cause laidback attitude when they do not take their work seriously, distract their attention and give rooms to informal abbreviations (Yusuf et al., 2018).

Employing technological tools in professional writing (such as internet applications and software) mediates writing activities (Yunus & Yusuf, 2019). The innumerable tools can both promote

Copyright © 2020 Virtual Symposium on Teaching and Learning (VSTL2020) e-proceeding. and restrain, shape and organize and design their writing activities (Swarts 2013). Workplace writing processes are now more than ever characterized by features of the digital workplace. Professional communication involves intense collaborations with others (both face-to-face and electronic). In the current workplace, writing for occupational purposes involves intense adoption of digital context which the workforce has a wide variety of sources, easily accessible, only a click away (Leijten, Shriver, et al., 2014). Despite technology is extensively considered a focal source of economic progress, it also has a historical record for being a source for cultural anxiety (Mokyr et al., 2015). Texts are built with the combination of language and ideas especially in a collaborative writing activities. The situation encompasses interconnecting webs, e-mails, Internet and etc. that help writers to communicate synchronously and asynchronously (Coffin et al., 2003; Hartley, 1997; Lewis & Ritchie, 2003; Poverjuc, 2010; Supyan et al., 2015).

The workplace communication, both 'internal' and 'external' to the organization relies on the intense collaborations of humans and electronic. The myriad of tools these workers rely on to help and restrain their perception is the mediator to their writing activity (Leijten, Van Waes, et al., 2014; Yang, 2014). Constructing documents for written communication every so often involves a plethora of digital sources (Leijten, Waes, Shriver, & Hayes 2014). The interaction is very dynamic that the multiple digital sources allow text and graphics evolution, refashioning and reprocessing of content from various sources. These actions frequently being alleviated by various software programs and information searching that is enabled by the internet. The workers shape, organize and design their functional written communications using these technology-enabled tools/ new media such as the internet applications, software, hardware, etc., (Swarts 2013). On the other hand, the new communication tools influence English as a second language (ESL) written composition on two different levels; content level and word, sentence and paragraph level (Supyan et al., 2015). It is a real huge relationship between the advancement of technology in both of the internet sources and software and the ESL field especially in written tasks. At workplace, companies have rapidly become fully aware as a fact that technologies or the new communication technologies are deserving of their capital invested. Countless establishments have begun to delight new tools as an essential investment aimed at generating a new standard for workplace communication (Lee, 2011). This is due to the proclaimed motivation booster that it can offer to the workforce and as a result, contributing to the companies' profit and the state development (Kruss et al., 2015; Lee, 2011).

Methodology and Results

A survey was carried out with a group of operational level workers at five different services sectors in Malaysia. The services sector was selected as it has the most working population in Malaysia. The operational level workers are those at the bottom level of management or the employees who directly produce services and do not involve in supervision of others' works. The samples selected are also graduate from institutions of higher learning (IHL). The instrument used was a set of 43 items questionnaire. It investigated primarily with the respondents' perspectives through their experiences of dealing with the completion of workplace writing. The questionnaire looked into the two levels of text production: the micro-level and macro level text quality.

A total of 46 respondents, both female and male operational level workers responded to the questionnaires.

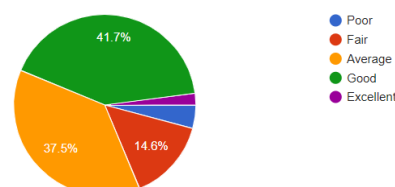


Fig. 1 Workers' English proficiency level

Based on Fig. 1, the data from the questionnaire have revealed that most of the respondents (42%) believed that they have good command in English proficiency and half of them (52%) thought that their English proficiency is either average or fair. Only 2% of the respondents assumed they have excellent command of English and 4% believed that their English proficiency is poor.

When asked about technological support in the execution of their workplace written tasks, 85% of the respondents believed that technology-enhanced writing supports have helped them in developing their self-monitoring and writing strategies. The tools have both assisted the workers with the factual knowledge or the language to deal with the tasks (micro-level) and maintaining the quality of text they

Copyright © 2020 Virtual Symposium on Teaching and Learning (VSTL2020) e-proceeding. produced (macro-level). At the macro-level, the tools assisted them to map and specify directions of their text that is abided by their workplace genres.

Conclusion

When considering the experience of the workers, changes are as important in writing classrooms as they have effects into their work experience. Writing support tools can assist through the interaction of both the macro and micro-level of text quality. Appropriate choices of writing support tools are considered as they affect students' experiences (DeVoss et al., 2010). The outcomes of the successful employment of the right tool can result in more efficient workers. ESL or English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) writing research needs to explore the effectiveness of available writing applications in both longitudinal studies and experimental studies or improvised the existing tools.

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