Challenges of Teaching Writing Skills Via Online Platform among Kolej Universiti Islam Perlis Lecturers

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Abstract
This paper discusses the challenges of teaching writing skills via online platforms among Kolej Universiti Islam Perlis (KUIPs) lecturers. Kolej Universiti Islam Perlis, or KUIPs, has made it compulsory for all programme students to participate in the English and Arabic language enhancement classes. However, due to the spread of COVID-19, most courses are conducted online instead of face-to-face, and not all skills can be taught via online classes. One of these skills is writing, which can be challenging for students who need to be proficient in English and Arabic. Consequently, this study identifies the challenges of teaching writing skills via online learning while also analysing the improvements in teaching writing skills effectively when using online platforms. This writing method is a qualitative approach where the data is collected through interview sessions. Two interview sessions were conducted with the respondents from Kolej Universiti Islam Perlis to answer the research questions. Thus, this study focuses on the challenges and ways to improve teaching writing skills via online platforms. This paper highlights a literature review on teaching writing skills using online platforms. Therefore, the expected result from this study will be valuable for lecturers specialising in language teaching to improve students' writing skills using online platforms.
Keywords: Second Language Acquisition, Writing Skills, Online Learning.

Introduction
Research Background and Significance of Study
This paper analyses the relationship between online classes and language teaching, especially regarding teaching writing skills for Arabic and English languages among the Kolej Universiti Islam Perlis (KUIPs) lecturers.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many things have changed. This pandemic has had a detrimental impact on global economic development and social events, particularly in education (Ismail et al., 2021; Ming et al., 2021). Most of the classes, if not all, are being conducted online due to the standard operative procedures that the Malaysian Government has set. When the pandemic first hit, online learning gradually overtook regular classroom

lessons as the primary medium of instruction. While online teaching allows for the continuation of teaching and learning while minimising the impact on students' academic progress, there are several challenges to overcome when implementing online learning (Raju et al., 2021).

During the unplanned and ad hoc transition from face-to-face learning to online learning, lecturers and students might feel detached and unsure about their expectations for the future of online education (Krishnapatria, 2020). On the student side, many from various communities, particularly in rural Malaysia, have been found to need access to the internet, have sluggish internet connectivity at home, or need compatible learning devices (Nassr et al., 2020). All of these problems lead to slow language acquisition, particularly among Kolej Universiti Islam Perlis students when it comes to English and Arabic languages.

In addition, learning new languages will be harder for the students since they have to attend the learning sessions online instead of in a traditional classroom where the lecturer is ready to assist without any limitation regarding reaction time. Today, even with the loosening of the government's standard operating procedures, higher education institutions adopt hybrid learning sessions; some classes are conducted face-to-face and others online. This compels educators to adapt to the online learning method, which can be challenging for the student's language acquisition process and the lecturers.

Thus, it is vital to know students' perceptions of online learning and the traditional face-to-face classroom, especially in terms of readiness and experiences of language acquisition, so that educators can design the ideal curriculum and instruction depending on the medium that they are using to teach language skills, mainly writing.

Therefore, this study focuses on the challenges of teaching writing skills for English and Arabic languages via an online platform among Kolej Universiti Islam Perlis students.

Research Questions
The research questions are as follows:
a) What are the challenges of teaching writing skills using online platforms among KUIPs lecturers?
b) What improvements are needed to be made in teaching writing skills to the students?

Research Objective
The research objectives of this study are as follows:
a) To identify the challenges of teaching writing skills online among KUIPs lecturers.
b) To analyse the improvement needed in teaching writing skills to the students.

Literature Review
Online Learning
Online learning, sometimes called e-learning, virtual learning, or remote learning, is a type of teaching offered via a digital device to support the teaching and learning process. This concept is made up of three parts: (a) the platform is a computer-based device like a laptop, desktop, tablet, or smartphone; (b) the teaching and learning materials presented are sentences in verbal or printed form and graphics like graphics, images, images, motion graphics, or video; and (c) the instructional goal is to cause specific changes in the student's behaviour and attitude. (Mayer, 2019). Since the mid-1990s, online learning has been widely employed in academia. Even though online teaching and learning have been around for a long time, the effectiveness of online learning towards students' performance is still lacking, and many

lecturers hesitated to use online teaching and learning due to a lack of exposure and training on online learning teaching methodology (Sia & Abbas Adamu, 2021). Although it makes life easier, designing e-learning takes 5.5 times as long as classroom courses (Prabawangi et al., 2021).

Technology is increasingly used in language learning since it can improve information retention and engagement (Duong et al., 2021). However, according to Chung et al. (2020), online learning cannot substitute direct human contact or the level of social interaction available in a classroom. These concerns significantly impact students, who think something needs to be added during online learning sessions compared to traditional face-to-face teaching and learning, resulting in reduced student engagement and involvement and a poor learning experience. According to the researchers, students may benefit from online learning, but there are downsides. (Hue Dung,2020) listed tiredness, boredom, loss of concentration and IT literacy as additional disadvantages in his study.

Meanwhile, according to Prihastiwi et al. (2021), online learning has transformed teacher-centred learning into learner-centred learning. Active learners can use this learning method to improve their knowledge through synchronous or asynchronous lessons. As a result, learners must be psychologically and physically prepared to adopt online learning to participate actively in their language learning process.

While online learning is a great way to communicate language knowledge by providing a variety of related videos and tutorials, Shahzad et al (2020) contend that it needs to develop and impart all language talents to learners fully. This argument is supported by Karuppannan & Mohammed (2020), who discovered that various factors influence online language acquisition among language learners, including teaching technique, psychosocial characteristics, language abilities, and language proficiency. They argue that learning a language is only sufficient with mastering its four skills: writing, reading, speaking, and listening, all of which may be learned efficiently through face-to-face contact in the classroom. When the lectures were delivered online during the pandemic, Lau et al (2020) discovered that students had great difficulty learning to spell the word and had many challenges improving their spelling.

Writing Skills

Each student may face different challenges in learning writing. All students are special and unique in their ways. These challenges will pull the students back from progressing to produce a good piece of writing. Lack of vocabulary has caused the students to face challenges in acquiring writing skills, claimed (Misbah et al., 2017). Vocabulary is the fundamental element in constructing sentences, which is the core of practical writing skills (Asep, 2014).

Writing is not just an academic requirement but also an essential skill for success beyond tertiary. It is one of the most critical skills that students need to acquire. Learners encounter great difficulties while writing. A learner can express his thoughts better through writing. In addition, academic writing skills are an essential requirement that university students fulfil because this ability is necessary for scholarly communication, academic performance, and future professional careers. Hence, many universities offer academic writing courses as a part of the curriculum for every major, and the students are expected to meet the writing skills requirements to graduate successfully.

Writing skills are crucial in mastering English and Arabic, especially for higher education students. It involves a complex cognitive process and indicates competence in English and

Arabic. These two languages play essential roles in Malaysia because English is the second language, and Arabic is closely linked with Islam, the country's official religion.

KUIPs offers Arabic and English language courses for all bachelor's degree students as part of their curriculum based on a standard programme set by the Malaysian Qualification Agency. Before the pandemic, all classes were conducted face-to-face, where lecturers were ready to guide the students in the classroom. Although the popularity of online courses is growing daily, the number of available tools for language instruction and academic teaching skills needs to be more balanced.

Strobl et al (2019) reviewed the technologies designed to support writing instruction in secondary and higher education. The authors claimed that technology-enhanced learning is becoming increasingly widespread, and new technologies and tools actively develop a range of genres, pedagogical settings, and approaches in online teaching. Strobl et al. added that the tools that support the development of writing strategies and encourage self-monitoring to improve the quality of academic writing (e.g., argumentative structure and rhetorical moves) are infrequent. Therefore, while the industry has developed numerous high-tech tools for language instruction, including teaching grammar, spelling, and word frequencies, only a few tools cover academic writing skills. Thus, this factor contributes to the slowing down the language acquisition process, mainly for writing skills, which hinders KUIPs students who need to be proficient in Arabic and English.

Therefore, this study focuses on the challenges of teaching writing skills among Kolej Universiti Islam Perlis lecturers via online learning.

Research Methodology

This research paper uses a qualitative approach to examine learning writing skills among KUIPs students via online platforms. The questions are adapted from (Pressley et al., 2018). Ten questions are given to two instructors from KUIPs who teach English and Arabic languages. The data are collected and analysed using thematic analysis.

According to Braun et al (2022), thematic analysis is a method for analysing qualitative data that involves reading through a set of data and looking for patterns in the meaning of the data to find themes. It is an active process of reflexivity in which the researcher's subjective experience is at the centre of making sense of the data.

Interview Results

From the answers given by the two respondents, one core theme is found throughout the interview sessions. The theme was the various strategies employed by the lecturers to teach writing skills to the students via online platforms.

The respondent uses multiple aspects of strategy, especially grammar, vocabulary, coherence and critical thinking, to differentiate between levels of writing proficiency for students. They usually employ a combination of grammar quizzes and vocabulary tests before the first session of the class starts by having the students write a common topic. This not only estimates the grammar proficiency among the students, especially in applying the correct grammatical rules, avoiding common errors, and using complex sentence structures, but it also gauges the student's vocabulary level, which helps the lecturers to understand which students have the enhanced richness and variety of vocabulary to make their writing more engaging and expressive. The writing exercise using a common topic has been proven suitable for detecting differences between lower-proficiency and higher-proficiency students.

From here, the lecturers were able to start the fundamentals of writing skills for lower-proficiency students by giving them a set of specific challenges for them to upgrade their writing skills. Usually, the lecturers will start using straightforward language so the weaker students can follow what needs to be written. The interviews show similarities between shaping and enhancing students' writing skills. The lecturers provide extra practice exercises and offer supplementary materials to the students that they create to cater to the student's needs to achieve proficiency. In addition, the lecturers conduct personalised writing workshops using multiple online platforms for teaching and learning, such as Zoom and Google Meet, especially for weaker students, by assigning straightforward writing prompts. This helps the students to understand simple instructions. Hence, as the lesson goes on, the level of instruction is increased based on their level of proficiency.

Furthermore, aside from assigning regular writing exercises, the lecturers set a schedule for submission. It helps the students to get regular feedback on their writing progress. The regular feedback process is from the lecturers and the automated grammar checkers that provide immediate feedback on common errors. Students are also encouraged to do peer review assignments, which foster collaborative learning. In addition, lecturers also offer students a repository of resources such as grammar guides and vocabulary enhancement tools by designing engaging and interactive content using Padlet or Mentimeter. These applications can help students when the lecturers provide clear instructions and offer responsive support for each assignment. Using online teaching sites like Padlet and Mentimeter helps to integrate 21st-century technological ways of teaching by using visual aids like graphics, diagrams, charts, and online stimuli to improve students' writing skills.

Additionally, the lecturers incorporate students' feedback to tailor the online learning environment to their preferences. They always communicate openly with them for questions and support outside of formal online classes using WhatsApp or Telegram, which helps to create a stronger bond between lecturers and students.

Even though lecturers try their best to ensure students get the best experience in learning writing skills using online platforms, there are some challenges that lecturers have to face. One of the biggest challenges shared by the respondents is having a large number of students in a classroom. In KUIPs, having more than 30 students in one classroom for a language subject is a norm. The large number of students limits the teacher's ability to assess each student's proficiency level, especially in writing skills. Even in face-to-face classes, lecturers cannot give equal attention to every student, so it becomes difficult for lecturers to provide the same treatment to the students via online classes. Thus, more proficient students are usually free to learn independently after the lecturers have given them clear instructions. This allows the lecturers to focus on weaker students because less proficient students might struggle to write lengthy passages. Furthermore, lower-proficiency students struggle with comprehension and critical analysis when understanding the instructions. Thus, it results in less effective responses to what must be written.

Despite the challenges, the lecturers in KUIPs always think about ways to improve their students' proficiency and make the learning process fun. The respondents suggested that to enhance the student's writing skills, they must constantly ensure that students achieve grammar accuracy and have a rich vocabulary and logical flow of ideas by staying updated with the latest online teaching tools and techniques. Artificial intelligence is one of the ways to improve students' skills and give them the ability to support arguments and use evidence in their writing. Some might argue that artificial intelligence will be the reason plagiarism goes rampant. However, using artificial intelligence helps lecturers give structured writing for the

students to follow. These tools are not only helpful, but they also improve the quality of academic writing. Moreover, the respondents participated in professional development workshops related to online education to enhance their teaching skills and provide the most effective and engaging learning experiences.

Literalearn, a Writing Skills Enhancement Module
Based on the data analysis, there are several strategies that the lecturers employed to enhance the student's writing skills. One of the strategies is to use Literalearn, a writing skills enhancement module. By using interactive websites such as Mentimeter or padlet, students can enhance their vocabulary and use it correctly in sentences with the guidance of the lecturers and peer review.

For example, the lecturer uploads a picture with clear instructions: Describe the picture using ten words. Students must submit ten vocabulary words to describe the image in one minute. Then, for the next exercise, the teacher asks the students to write ten sentences based on the previous ten vocabulary words. By using the Literalearn module, the lecturer can see the live responses, monitoring the students' response time. Another good thing about this activity is that the students can participate in the exercises and choose the correct written sentences on the screen by voting the sentences, further cementing the peer review method. In addition, the students can spot and amend incorrect sentences in the live comment section. This activity encourages students to broaden their vocabulary and helps with sentence structuring and creating interactive learning experiences even though they are not in the same space.

Conclusion
Based on the above analysis, the researchers can conclude that there are several challenges to teaching writing skills via online platforms. The respondents agreed that the classroom size should be less than 25 students. This gives the students a fair amount of attention regardless of their proficiency level, whether face-to-face or online. Furthermore, fewer students in a classroom will give the lecturers ample time to provide appropriate feedback on the student's work, and this will improve the student's writing skills. In addition, lecturers need to be up-to-date with the latest online applications to be integrated with teaching the skills the students need. They cannot solely rely on books. Hence, the use of applications such as Padlet and Mentimeter is good not only for the students but also for the lecturers.

The findings highlight that it is essential to have an online writing skill enhancement module that lecturers and students can use, especially for those learning English or Arabic as a second language. Thus, Literalearn could help lecturers enhance students' writing skills and make the lesson interactive and entertaining. Thus, this study demonstrates that Literalearn module, when effectively designed and implemented, can significantly improve students' command of the English and Arabic language, especially in grammar, vocabulary, and overall writing competence. Moreover, the key findings from the research highlight that structured writing exercises, combined with targeted feedback, help students internalise linguistic rules and apply them accurately in their written work.

To conclude, knowing the challenges of teaching writing skills via an online platform helped the researchers develop a module instrumental in helping students achieve greater proficiency in English and Arabic. For lecturers, this underscores the importance of innovative and inclusive strategies that cater to the diverse needs of language learners. Future research

should continue to explore the long-term impacts of the module and the potential for integrating emerging technologies to further enhance language learning outcomes.

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