

Mr Ahmad Syafi'I – Indonesia – 9th September 2021

Optimizing artificial intelligence powered applications to enhance students engagement in EFL writing classroom

Purpose and context of the presentation

The context for the presentation is English writing skills in preservice teachers. Students and lecturers have found this to be the most difficult language skill, especially difficulties such as inappropriate word choice, inability to compose a good thesis statement, correct sentences, paraphrasing, summarizing, spelling, punctuation and citing references.

Prior to the pandemic, Mr Syafi'I delivered traditional, face-to-face teaching of English writing without the use of online resources, apps or technology. During the pandemic, he began to use a variety of resources, and this presentation overviews these, and provides a review of their effectiveness in the eyes of students and lecturer.

Online resources for writing

- Google Translate is popular among Indonesian English language students for translating their Indonesian sentences into English.
- Grammarly is used to help students check their grammar.
- Padlet is used for brainstorming prior to writing. The lecturer tends to invite students to brainstorm their ideas in Padlet.
- Thesis Generator is used to help students to craft good thesis statements.
- CoolBot assists with summarising and paraphrasing, along with Grammarly.
- Mendeley Reference Manager is used to help students keep their references in order and to cite them correctly.
- EssayBot, QuillBot and Ref-N-Write are also used.

Review of effectiveness

- Students were surveyed to ascertain their satisfaction and perception of effectiveness of the use of these online resources.
- Nearly 82% of students found these resources to be useful to their writing process and in dealing with errors.
- An identified weakness of the use of online resources is that the role of the lecturer is minimized because the corrections and suggestions are done by robot.
- Over 72% of students felt that choosing appropriate words was their biggest challenge, and Mr Syafi'I believes Google Translate and Grammarly are the best resources to support this skill.

- Students believed that some important components of learning to write were the provision of understandable feedback, including grammatical structural feedback, numerous alternatives for choices, and the facilitation of proofreading. In order to ensure this, Mr Syafi'I offered a 'deliberating room' in which he went through the feedback provided by the resources' artificial intelligence, explaining reasons for the suggestions and ensuring the feedback is clearly understood.
- Two drawbacks of using online resources that students identified were the fact that use of these tools consumes a lot of internet data, and the fact that the free versions of these programs limited the number of words students could input, and if they wished to go further, they had to purchase premium subscriptions.
- An additional drawback identified by the lecturer was the fact that, once the students began to use these applications, they began to rely on them and the creative process became somewhat lost, with students lacking accountability for the quality of their work, preferring to rely on the information provided by the programs. This required constant facilitation by the lecturer.