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Virtual Writing Tutor (VWT) on Students' Writing Skill Improvement at Writing Class

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Abstract. The study aimed to investigate Virtual Writing Tutor (VWT) on students' writing skill at writing class. The study involved 30 participants taking writing subject at English and Literature Department, Language and Art Faculty, Universitas Negeri Medan. The qualitative method was conducted in this study. An observation sheet, questionnaire, and interview guidance were the instruments of study. The findings of the study showed that 100% of students are interested in using the media in practicing their writing skills. However, 45% of students stated that the choice of essay types was limited. Furthermore, 15% of students stated that there are features that cannot be accessed for free because they must have a premium (paid) account. Thus, , it is still necessary to be highlighted that using VWT is not the only way to get better at writing. It ought to be utilized in conjunction with classroom instruction and lecturer directions.

Keywords: Virtual Writing Tutor, Writing, Essay

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1. Introduction

An important aspect of a student's academic journey is writing proficiency. Effective written communication of thoughts, ideas, and arguments is essential for academic success as well as future professional endeavors. Students can share their knowledge and understanding of numerous disciplines by using their writing skills. Writing gives students a platform to show their understanding and analytical skills, whether it be in an essay, research paper, or lab report. Students who write well-organized essays can provide examples and evidence to back up their claims. This technique not only deepens their comprehension of the material, but also enables lecturers to evaluate their students' grasp and offer insightful criticism. Writing abilities also promote critical thinking and problem-solving capabilities (Quitadamo, 2007). According to Crimmon (1984), writing requires a lot of labour, but it also gives us the chance to learn more about ourselves, share our views with those around us, and correct any knowledge gaps. Writing is a written work that requires effort to reveal everything about ourselves, to express thoughts to those around us, and to learn something we don't know through writing.

The use of technology in educational settings has drawn a lot of attention recently. However, it had not been maximized in writing class of English and Literature Department, Faculty of Language and Arts, Universitas Negeri Medan. It also affected the students' writing skills. It is known that students' writing skills were still regarded as low based on observations made in the writing class. This is a result of the lack of writing confidence and enthusiasm among students. One of the factors affecting students' writing abilities was that they didn't fully utilize the feedback that professors provide. Therefore, a media that can give students the most feedback while also boosting their drive and self-assurance in their writing abilities is required.

In response to the growing demand for linguistic assistance in the digital age, the idea of a Virtual Writing Tutor (VWT) evolved. VWT is a free online essay editor and grammar checker to improve writing skills (Walker, 2023). There was a need for resources that may aid students in improving their writing skill as more people from various linguistic origins started talking and studying in English. The utilization of VWT to help students independently improve their writing skills is one such technological innovation. Most people envision learning alone when they think of independent learning, according to Khamdan (2020). The way some people define autonomous learning is that they believe it to be learning done alone, without support from others like teachers or friends. In this situation, it is important to reiterate the importance of independent learning, which emphasizes lifelong learning with or without other people's assistance. Artificial intelligence and techniques for natural language processing are used by VWT to evaluate and analyze written writings. It highlights a number of writing elements, such as syntax, punctuation, vocabulary, coherence, and general organization. These programs seek to assist users in locating and correcting errors, enhancing language usage, and improving the general caliber of their work by giving automatic feedback. Additionally, VWT encourages self-reflection and thinking critically. These tools enable students to evaluate their work and make necessary adjustments by pointing out problems and recommending fixes. Students gain critical thinking abilities through this process as they learn to assess their writing. Thus, to encourage individual learning and advance students' writing abilities, VWT can be a useful tool in a writing class. It gives students rapid feedback, targeted practice, and customized coaching, enabling them to take charge of their learning and efficiently monitor their progress (Aamir, 2020)

Based on the explanation above, the study aimed to investigate the use of VWT in improving students' writing skill at English and Literature Department, Universitas Negeri Medan, independently.

2. Methodology

The study was conducted through qualitative research method. Observation, distributing questionnaires, and conducting interview were the techniques of collecting data. The observation was conducted to observe students' activities and interest during writing class. It was guided based on the observation sheet. The questionnaire provided to the students consisted of some questions about students' writing skill, interest in learning writing skill, perception on using VWT at writing

class, and the improvement of writing skill through VWT. There were 30 participants taking writing class at English and Literature Department, Universitas Negeri Medan.

3. Results and Discussion

The study aims to evaluate the use of virtual writing tutor in writing courses to improve students' independent writing skills using qualitative descriptive method. Based on the results of questionnaires given to students after using VWT in writing particularly essays, it is known that 100% of students are interested in using the media in practicing their writing skills. This is because students obtained several benefits such as (1) easy access, (2) feedback obtained, and (3) the opportunity to carry out independent learning. 70% of the students stated that they obtained the three benefits simultaneously, while 30% stated that they did not obtain easy access because at the time of using the media they experienced problems such as slow internet connections. However, figure 3.1 below shows the difficulties experienced by students when using the VWT.

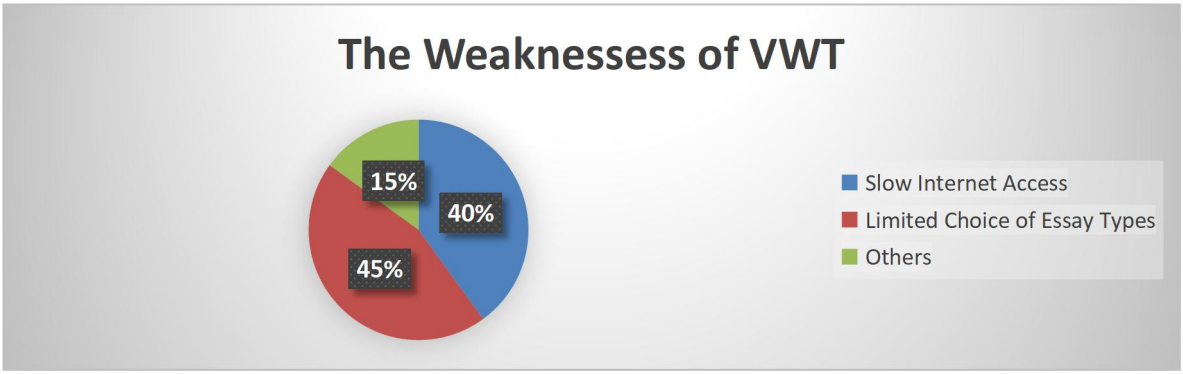


Figure 3.1 The Weaknesses of VWT

Based on Figure 3.1 above, it is known that 45% of students stated that the choice of essay types was limited. This is because Virtual Writing Tutor is only able to evaluate 4 types of essays, namely (1) Opinion Essay, (2) Argument Essay, (3) Film Analysis Essay, and (4) Literary Critique Essay. Furthermore, 15% of students stated that there are features that cannot be accessed for free because they must have a premium (paid) account.

Thus, it is vital to remember that using VWT is not the only way to get better at writing. It ought to be utilised in conjunction with classroom instruction and lecturer directions. Lecturers have a critical role in helping students develop their writing skills fully by providing context, clarifying concepts, and providing supplementary feedback.

However, it is referred that 100% of students claimed that the media had an influence on boosting their essay writing skills after using Virtual Writing Tutor to improve students' essay writing, especially opinion essays.

4. Conclusion

Virtual Writing Tutor is a strong and efficient instrument for improving writing abilities. For those looking to improve as writers, its immediate comments, thorough evaluations, and instructional tools are a priceless resource. By using this application, users can enhance their writing style, strengthen their command of grammar, and eventually generate more polished and successful written work. Thus, the utilization of VWT on writing class at English and Literature Department, Universitas Negeri Medan showed that 100% of students claimed that the media had an influence on boosting their essay writing skills after using Virtual Writing Tutor to improve students' essay writing, especially opinion essays. However, it is still necessary to be highlighted that using VWT is not the only way to get better at writing. It ought to be utilized in conjunction with classroom instruction and lecturer directions.

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