Beyond the Written Word: Emerging Innovative Writing Practices in a Malaysia University Classroom

Nur Huslinda Che Mat[1], Farina Tazijan[2], Nor Fazlin Mohd Ramli[3], Siti Fauziana Zakaria[4], Malissa Maria Mahmud[5], Mohammad Radzi Manap[6]

[1,2,3,4,6]Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia

[5]Centre for English Language Studies, Sunway University, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

According to recent studies, there is a widening gap between traditional writing pedagogies and the demands of the digital age. It is evident that both teachers and students have expressed challenges in negotiating the complex standards of meeting the requirements of academic writing conventions. In the Malaysian educational context, there is a noticeable struggle to balance traditional writing approaches with the demands of the digital era. Given the unique practices observed in the university setting, this study aims to provide an in-depth qualitative exploration of changes in academic writing practices and innovative solutions to the identified challenges. Drawing on the theoretical foundations of Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory and Brian Street's Academic Literacies, this study utilises semi-structured group interviews with four students and one teacher from a university writing classroom. Exploring the academic landscape in Malaysia, the findings shed lights on several key issues: the pressing need for adaptable teaching approaches, the importance of students acquiring and using digital skills, and the value of collaborative learning in achieving effective writing outcomes. This study highlights the need for a blended teaching approach to prepare the teachers, policymakers, and students for global writing standards. The findings are expected to have important implications for curriculum development, teaching approaches, and broader educational policies.

Keywords: academic writing, multimodal writing, innovative writing, university writing, writing approaches

INTRODUCTION

One such area in our current time is the rise of digital literacies that have changed how writing is currently conducted. Input and output models of language as well as writing process models may over time not be useful to handle the complexity of multimodal writing in the current new learning environments (Zhang et al., 2023). Consequently, teachers are in need to leverage some of the resources of the new digital literacies, including the open-source work accessible online and the user-generated content found on the internet. University students who operate for the present day have grown up within this new digital environment. The integration of digital writing practices in the classroom can provide numerous benefits for students, such as enhancing students' engagement, encouraging collaboration and peer learning, providing efficient feedback and developing students' multimodal literacy skills (Jong & Tan, 2021; Hafner & Ho, 2020). In addition, Monteiro and Leite (2021) consider that fostering digital literacies is a high institutional priority, with costs involved if these are not integrated into curricula. The challenges will lead to students' lack of preparedness for digital competencies and disengagement in digital communication. Thus, the initiatives to develop these digital writing spaces are instrumental in addressing the challenges of including all students in the various

digital writing channels available today. By recognising the diverse multimodal approaches used by students, these initiatives can bridge the gap between traditional and digital writing. Buragohain et al., (2023) asserts that the domain-specific variations in digital writing acknowledges the unique ways in which different students engage with and express themselves. Additionally, these initiatives empower students to critically analyze and meaningfully interact with digital texts. By advocating for the integration of these digital writing spaces into curricula, students will be digitally literate individuals who are able to navigate and contribute to today's increasingly digitalised society (Abiddin et al., 2022).

With a flexible mindset and approach toward pedagogy as well as a flexible set of digital technologies, the writing classroom can become a very versatile, inspirational, productive, and rewarding place for student learning. Due to the rapid changes in the educational landscape and advancement in digital tools, the conventional 'static text structures' pose a challenge to how students write to make meaning (Mills et. al., 2023). Burgess (2020) asserts that, it is imperative for all those involved in teaching and assessing writing, from schools to universities, have the confidence to accept, support, and assess the thoughtfully constructed multimodal texts-in-progress as well as the diverse writing products that students are naturally drawn to, sharing their ideas and experiences through a variety of digital platforms. Teachers using this approach must be adaptable and up-to-date on the most recent developments in innovative writing practices (Farooque, 2020). Teachers can increase students' enjoyment and engagement in the writing process, working towards becoming experts in multimodal practices and digital technologies themselves (Li, 2020; Dahlström, 2022; Kustini et al., 2020). Therefore, teachers ought to offer authentic writing opportunities to enable students to relate their work with real-world audiences and contexts. This approach can create a more dynamic and engaging learning environment that encourages creativity and critical thinking.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the past few years, there has been a notable surge in interest in exploring innovative writing practices in Malaysian university classrooms, particularly in the context of second language (L2) university writing. This section aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the various facets of L2 university writing, along with an analysis of the most recent trends and highly effective strategies used.

A. Conceptualising l2 University Writing

Writing in a second language, or L2 writing, calls for a deep understanding of lexical and syntactic concepts in order to effectively communicate ideas in the target language form (Ransdell & Barbier, 2002). For L2 writers to effectively convey their ideas and concepts, they need to have a thorough understanding of vocabulary and grammatical structures. With commitment, perseverance and an emphasis on gaining language proficiency, students can reach the proficiency levels required to succeed in L2 writing. Consequently, L2 student writers must continually expand their lexical and syntactic repertoire to achieve fluency and proficiency in writing in a second language. The acquisition and utilization of such knowledge are essential for accomplishing the ultimate goal of conveying ideas in a clear, coherent, and appropriate manner (Ransdell & Barbier, 2002).

At the university level, the ability to skillfully express oneself in writing in an academic style is undeniably challenging and requires immense dedication and practice (Irvin, 2010; Friedrich, 2008). It demands the acquisition of a vast array of language and rhetorical tools, as well as a deep understanding of the subject matter at hand. Che Mat (2020) explores how student writers conceptualise two transitions: from writing at school to writing at university and from English as a Second Language (ESL) to English used as a medium of instruction (EMI) in terms of academic writing practice. She finds that not only do student writers face challenges in adapting to the new writing practices and language expectations, but they also need to navigate the cultural differences in academic writing styles and conventions. All student writers are expected to

navigate through complex ideas and concepts. This aligns with Brian Street's Academic Literacies (Lea & Street, 1998), which emphasizes the social and situated nature of writing. According to Brian Street, when students write, they negotiate meaning and develop their skills through interaction with other members of the academic community. Despite their proficiency level, all student writers are expected to navigate through complex ideas and concepts set by the university (Lillis & Tuck, 2016). This requires them to develop a strong foundation in academic writing skills and strategies to effectively convey their writing with precision, clarity and adhering to strict guidelines and conventions, such as proper citation formats and referencing techniques. These conventions ensure the validity and credibility of the student writer's work while also displaying their academic writing skill for acquisition in higher education. Thus, understanding the cultural context and audience expectations is essential in L2 university writing (Friedrich, 2008).

It is of utmost significance to duly acknowledge and comprehend that the act of L2 university writing is a complex and multifaceted process that requires a deep understanding of language and culture (Ivanic, 1998). This aligns with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory which emphasises the importance of social interaction and the guidance of more knowledgeable others in the learning process (Lantolf, 2000). University writing entails the creation of an incredibly meticulous, carefully structured, and impeccably organized piece of text that impeccably adheres to the long-standing conventions and established norms of the specific discourse community in which it is deeply embedded and firmly rooted (Canagarajah, 1999). In addition to this paramount aspect, academic writing itself assumes an undeniably profound and exceptionally personal nature as it becomes intricately interwoven and intertwined with an individual's profoundly inherent sense of self and deeply-rooted personal identity, playing an influential and transformative role in not only its initial formation but also its subsequent solidification and overall writing process (Ivanic, 1998). It is unequivocally crucial to underscore and emphasize that the intricate and multifaceted relationship that indisputably exists between language, writing, and culture further accentuates the complexity of L2 university writing. In this regard, understanding the nuances and intricacies of L2 writing is essential for effective teaching and learning.

B. Writing Practices in Malaysian University Classrooms

According to the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education Draft Malaysian Qualifications Agency Code 2013 (Sack, 2017), the to-be English language graduates need to be able to write and comprehend various types of writing in the formal, informal, academic, professional, print, and digital discourse. Based on the national economics' aspiration to establish Malaysia as an Education Hub, to expand the Education Market segment, and to attract inflows of Educational Services, six years ago, a Malaysian Education Blueprint 2015-2025 was constructed. In line with the aspiration, the 11th Malaysia Higher Education Plan 2015-2025 Tier 1 and Tier 2 should achieve 80% and 60% of the students scoring the CEFRL-B2 in public universities (Othm et al., 2020).

Writing practices in Malaysian university classrooms vary according to the context. This creates a significant challenge for the student writers when it comes to expressing themselves effectively and confidently in English. However, overcoming this obstacle is crucial for their academic success. In order to address this issue, teachers in the classrooms play a vital role in helping students to improve their writing abilities (Moses & Mohamad, 2019; Ganapathy et al., 2020). Teachers are seen to incorporate interactive writing activities, providing personalized feedback to students and encouraging students to express their thoughts and ideas in English can greatly contribute to their language development. Additionally, creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment is also essential for nurturing a positive writing culture among student writers and they have been exposed to write collaboratively with their peer group (Pham, 2021; Fan & Xu, 2020). Peer writing groups can be established, where students can collaboratively work on their writing assignments and provide feedback to one another. This fosters a sense of community and allows students to learn from each other's strengths and weaknesses. However, literature reports that

traditional writing practices in Malaysian university classrooms emphasise rote memorization and passive learning; limiting student's critical and analytical skills still in place (Sulaiman, 2022; Illahibaccus-Sona, 2023). In terms of writing approaches, teachers used to bring in a process approach to the classroom and it was seen as a solution to writing problems given the limitations of the product approach (Stapa & Majid, 2012). However, Che Mat (2020) asserts that though the process approach has its benefits, it also has its limitations in preparing students for real-world writing tasks and that genre-based approach has been an increasing interest over the last twenty years.

In order to address this issue, it is evident in the literature that higher educational institutions have considered providing comprehensive learning platforms focusing on enhancing students' writing skills (Mishra, 2020). These platforms include interactive writing workshops and language labs. However, in Malaysia university, these types of institutional support for their student writers are not as common as in Western universities. Therefore, when guidance is limited to feedback from the teachers in the classroom, student writers often struggle to develop their writing skills (Mishra, 2020). Not only that the teachers provide them with ample opportunities to practice and receive feedback on their writing, but varying the platforms using a comprehensive approach from online writing tools can gradually improve writing in the community of practice (Rahman et al., 2020). It is important to emphasize the relevance of good writing skills beyond the academic setting; providing students with real-world examples and scenarios where effective writing is required. By integrating these resources, the students are encouraged to actively participate and apply their theoretical knowledge in practical situations.

C. Innovative Writing Practices

With a flexible enough mindset and approach toward pedagogy as well as a flexible set of digital technologies, the writing classroom can become a very versatile, inspirational, productive, and rewarding place for student learning. It is vital for all those involved in teaching and assessing writing at all levels, from primary school to university and beyond, to feel confident enough not only to identify but also to embrace, promote, and assess the carefully crafted multimodal texts-in-the-making as well as the diverse writing products that student writers produce (Selfa-Sastre et al., 2022). The transformation with the emerging technologies dedicated to the multimodal writing and digital platforms can enhance student engagement and learning (Liang & Lim, 2021; Kearney & Maakrun, 2020; Fisher & Baird, 2020).

With the aim to focus on the shift to introducing and exploring the use and implications of the emerging writing applications in the academic writing classroom, a systematic review conducted by Ramamuthie and Aziz (2022) presents various digital tools that have been employed by researchers to enhance ESL students' writing skills. The review looked at 16 Malaysian articles, published within 2017 and 2021 from various databases. Among the frequently used tools reported were Padlet, social networks such as WhatsApp, Instagram and a mix of Facebook and Twitter. Digital storytelling and Kahoot were used alongside Edmodo, Google+, PenPal Schools, TikTok, and Wattpad. These digital tools and platforms were utilized to engage students in interactive and collaborative writing activities spanning from different education levels from primary to tertiary level. In this digital age, teachers are expected not only to be versatile but also continually evolving through an ever-increasing diversity of formats, media, and digital tools. Creative, innovative, and flexible in their pedagogical approaches, writing teachers will be able to adapt to the changing landscape of writing instruction. This can result in more engaging and effective writing instruction for students, ultimately preparing them for success in the digital age.

In today's academia, with the rapid spread of the English language and the unavoidable globalization implicated, researchers have to deal with innovations in teaching English in higher education. This premised call for investigations to widen the focus onto other non-traditional approaches which are also, perhaps unjustly, not receiving enough attention. Tarigan and Stevani (2022) suggest that while the traditional paradigm of English language teaching has been changing in the last few decades, a number of factors have

influenced these changes, including, but not limited to, the advent of new technologies. These nontraditional approaches often focus on a different kind of language practice, for example, emerging innovative writing practices or genre-based actions which are discipline-bound, especially in an academic context.

The opportunities offered by the emergence of various writing tools are undeniable for the classroom to tap into the connected 'writing-ecology'. In the pursuit to adopt innovative writing practices, there are several challenges and opportunities that educators need to consider. One of the main challenges is resistance from traditional teaching methods and curriculum requirements. This resistance often stems from the belief that traditional methods are more effective and reliable (Tarigan & Stevani, 2022). The main challenges herein may not only stem from the low English language proficiency level of the students or the crowded classroom size, but more fundamentally from an unfamiliar higher education instruction culture that for years has thrived on cultures of teacher-centrism, knowledge transmission, and exam-driven task completion inside classroom walls (Ling et al., 2022, Jeyaraj & Wald, 2020; Omar et al., 2020). Furthermore, the approach is highly demanding in terms of teacher resources and teaching and learning time. The opportunities need to be seen against these challenges and the current local university context. Also significant to the facilitation of innovative writing practices are the students themselves (Reed, 2020). This could not be more pertinent than in the area of writing; much has been written about the dearth of exposure to expert academic writing models for students outside their discipline fields.

Building on the theoretical foundations of Brian Street's Academic Literacy and Vygotsky's Cultural Theory, the study aims to respond to contextual changes within higher learning education There has also been a proliferation of new innovative writing practices and research that reflect the contemporary complex environment within the subject of writing. This is viewed as one particularity of the teaching and learning landscape that remains largely unexplored within the Malaysian university context. To achieve this aim, the study has two research objectives to explore:

1. To find out students' writing practices in the digital age.

2. To find out how student writers navigate the expectations of academic writing in the digital age.

METHOD

A. Research Design

The research design for this study is qualitative in nature. The qualitative research design is deemed to provide an in-depth understanding of the participants' lived experiences, which will be essential in exploring and understanding the challenges they face (Creswell, 2017; Denzin, 2017; Merriam, 2009; Paxton, 2012). This method enables the description and interpretation of the shared and learned patterns of values, behaviors, beliefs, and language within a culture-sharing group to be explored (Creswell, 2017). The aim of the study is to understand students' writing practices and emerging needs in the digital age. Therefore, a qualitative approach is beneficial for providing contextual insights from students' voices, allowing for an understanding of their personal experiences and perspectives on how traditional teaching approaches are perceived and how digital tools are utilised.

B. Participants

Using purposive sampling, an academic writing teacher and four third-year student writers from a Malaysian university classroom were selected based on their participation in the writing module, their experience with group and online writing, their average English proficiency sufficient to express opinions in English and their consent to be interviewed about their writing practices. The inclusion criteria for selection, as outlined by Whitehead and Whitehead (2020), ensured that participants with relevant experience writing in an L2

university classroom were chosen, aligning with the aim of this study.

C. Instruments

Data collection method used in the study is a semi-structured group interview to gather participants' insights and experiences. Patton (2002: 20) asserts that interviewing allows the researcher to capture "in depth, open-ended inquiry into people's perspectives and experiences". An open, less structured approach to interviewing students and the teacher was used to understand the depth and breadth of their teaching and learning experiences. While students worked in groups for their writing tasks, it appears to be important to conduct group interviews to gather insights on their experiences writing with others and the specific roles they engaged in. A group interview is a method that aims to elicit the perspectives of each individual who are being interviewed (Krueger & Casey, 2009).

Concerns addressed in the interview protocol were: 1) participants' understanding of writing approaches, 2) digital literacy and technology use, 3) language proficiency, and 4) collaborative writing. The first step involved asking the participants some descriptive questions to gather their detailed experiences. Next, to delve deeper into participants' attitudes, exploratory What-questions where ask (what) and finally, reflective questions were employed to understand how participants' experiences have influenced their own writing practices. The interview sessions were less structured with minimal emphasis on students' linguistic abilities.

D. Data Collection Procedure

The primary data collection method for this study was semi-structured group interviews. The interview sessions with the student writers were conducted twice, via Google Meet each lasting between 15 to 30 minutes, with their teacher also in attendance. Semi structured, open-ended questions were used to explore for their views, experiences, and challenges related to writing with the emergence of online writing tools. The interviews were captured using an audio recorder. After the interview sessions, the responses were transcribed verbatim using audio-to-text feature in Microsoft Word for analysis. After becoming familiar with the data, critical incidents from the raw data were identified to form the basis for developing initial codes for thematic analysis. The data collected from the interviews provided valuable insights into their L2 writing practices of four student writers in a Malaysian university classroom. The responses from the teacher are used to understand the challenges and successes of implementing innovative writing techniques in an L2 classroom setting.

E. Data Analysis Procedure

Data analysis was carried out in order to obtain answers to the various research questions. The data analysis method for this study is thematic analysis. Thematic analysis involves identifying patterns in the data to develop themes that capture the essence of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The transcripts were reviewed again to identify recurring themes and sub-themes that captured the participants' experiences and challenges. The approach taken is focused more on 'what' was said than 'how' it was said (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The main aim of thematic analysis is to identify patterns or themes within qualitative data to address research questions and to provide insights into a particular issue. Given the small data set, complete coding was utilised for the analysis instead of selecting specific instances. The data set was manually coded using pencil and paper, post it notes and highlighters. According to Braun and Clarke (2013), it is common to perform manual coding or "coding on hard-copy data," where you write down the code name and mark the associated text in some way (p. 210). The analysis involved multiple stages of open coding and re-coding and organising data into core categories and sub categories focusing on what the participants feel about L2 writing and the emergence of online writing tools. The critical incidents that emerged from the research questions were coded relevant to the research inquiries. The emergence of themes was being validated against the chosen theoretical lenses; Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory and Brian Street's Academic

Literacies. Throughout the data analysis process, themes were continuously compared with the raw data to avoid bias. Adjustments were made as new insights emerged, ensuring that the themes remained grounded in the data. Once the data saturation was reached, the identified themes were comprehensive and adequately meet the research objectives.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Drawing on Brian Street's "Academic Literacies" and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory as a framework, the findings focus on students' and teacher's views and experiences of L2 writing in the university classroom in the digital age. The findings reveal that students embrace innovative digital tools and platforms to enhance their L2 writing skills but at the same time they face challenges. These findings are presented using thematic analysis. The thematic analysis of the data collected revealed three crucial aspects and are presented in Figure 1 and its interpretation of the findings come after.

Fig. 1 Visual representation of the findings
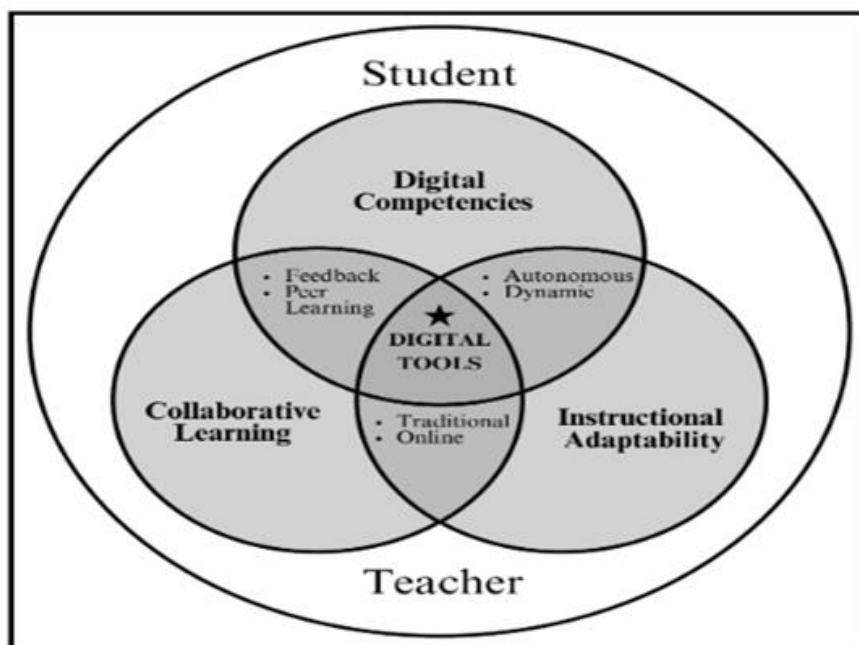
A. Theme 1: Instructional adaptability

The urgent need for adaptability in instructional methods is becoming increasingly evident due to the evolving and ever-changing student needs. The teacher appears to recognize and cater to the diverse learning styles and preferences of her students. Moreover, she seems to stay abreast of the rapid technological advancements and ensure that her teaching methods align with these changes. By embracing adaptability, the teacher hopes to provide an inclusive learning environment for all students.

"I feel autonomous learning will help. I expect my students to take charge of their learning. With the help of AI, I am sure they can learn something. I do encourage them to use ChatGPT and Perplexity to design their Term Paper. The writing part, or course is for the students to write, not AI" (Teacher)

The teacher believes that autonomous learning is beneficial and expects students to take responsibility for their own education. She is confident that with the assistance of AI, students can learn how to write effectively. The teacher encourages students to use AI tools like ChatGPT and Perplexity to help design their term papers. However, in today's rapidly changing educational landscape, the importance of

adaptability in instructional methods cannot be overstated. The dynamic nature of student needs requires the teacher to constantly reassess and adjust her approach to teaching.

"I observe that some of the students use some digital tools, but I never asked nor asking about their experience. The students prefer to write on their own. Accessibility could be one of the issues faced. In the classroom, I actually prefer students to co-write with their peers than AI. This allows them to collaborate and learn from each other's diverse perspectives. Peers are good motivators you know. But I do not know how the students write out of the classroom, maybe they use AI. " (Teacher)

The teacher notes that some students use digital tools, but they have never inquired about the students' experiences with these tools. She also observes that students prefer to write independently and recognizes that accessibility may be a challenge for some. In the classroom, she prefers students to co-write with their peers rather than using AI, believing that collaboration allows students to learn from each other's diverse perspectives. This teacher also views peers as effective motivators for learning. By recognizing the various learning styles and preferences of students, the teacher creates a more inclusive and engaging learning environment. Furthermore, staying up to date with the latest technological advancements is crucial in ensuring that the teaching methods remain relevant and effective. This means being open to incorporating digital tools and resources into their instruction, as well as encouraging students to develop their digital literacy skills. In the same veins, at some points students also feel that AI is useful;

"Sometimes I like to work independently, AI is useful in providing immediate feedback and suggestions for improving my writing skills." (Student 1)

"Paraphrase tools help me a lot. As well as free grammar checking tools. These tools help me a lot in writing my assignments." (Student 2)

"I use as a proofreading tool and make sure my writings are cohesive and relevant." (Student 3)

"In my opinion, the use of AI has boosted my writing progress. It also helps me to understand the subject in my writing and improve the way I articulate myself" (Student 4)

The students express a range of positive experiences with AI tools in their writing processes. It appears to them, there are various benefits. Student 1 appreciates the autonomy of working independently while using AI for immediate feedback, demonstrating a balance between self-reliance and technological assistance. Student 2 emphasizes the use of paraphrasing and free grammar-checking tools, facilitating their writing by ensuring clarity and correctness. Student 3 admits that AI provides a significant impact on his writing, particularly using it for proofreading to maintain cohesiveness and relevance in the texts. Finally, Student 4 claims that AI has substantially enhanced his writing progress, aiding in articulation. These reflections collectively emphasis the diverse ways in which AI tools support students' writing experience, from providing immediate feedback to ensuring the accuracy and coherence of their work, ultimately fostering a more effective writing process.

Embracing adaptability enables the teacher and her students to meet the changing demands of teaching and learning in the digital age, while also creating a more dynamic and responsive learning environment. This is in line with the framework of Academic, viewing writing as a social practice, it highlights the importance of adapting to the changing nature of academic discourse and the diverse needs of learners. By creating an adaptable learning environment, the teacher encourages students to participate actively in their learning. This helps the students to develop their multiliteracies needed to successfully negotiate the challenging and constantly changing field of academic writing. This, in turn, prepares students for the demands of the 21st-century workplace, where the ability to adapt and take the initiative is increasingly valued. Thus, the urgent need for adaptability in instructional methods is clear. As teachers, it is essential to prioritize recognizing

and catering to diverse learning styles, staying informed of technological advancements, and creating an inclusive and effective learning environment. (Ismailov & Chiu, 2022; Ceallaigh, 2022; Song et al., 2024) By doing so, students are equipped with the skills and knowledge they need to thrive in an ever-changing world.

B. Theme 2: The Importance of Digital Competencies

"The tools I use help to manage the writing process and track my progress." (Student 1)

"AI is helpful when you are out of idea and you want to start writing. I start with learning some tools. This is also important for future use, not just for writing assignments for this course." (Student 2)

"Personally, AI impacted my writing. I become more critical to find which sources suggested by AI are credible or not." (Student 3)

"Learning how to use AI can be challenging but beneficial. I found new ways to write, new words, different style of writing." (Student 4)

The responses from the students demonstrate the multifaceted benefits of acquiring digital skills in the context of academic writing. Student 1 made the observation that the digital tools he uses help to assist in tracking his progress and managing the writing process, highlighting the importance of utilising technology to enhance writing productivity and organization. This suggests that becoming familiar with a range of digital tools can enable the students to plan, structure and monitor his own writing more effectively, producing more effective writing outcomes. When Student 2 ran out of ideas, AI proved to be a helpful starting point. He used it as a launching pad to learn new tools and strategies that would come in handy for other writing assignments in addition to the one at hand. This highlights the value of having a broad skill set of digital technologies that will allow us to overcome a variety of challenges that might arise during the writing process. Furthermore, the student will be able to overcome mental blocks and stimulate his creativity, producing more creative and engaging written work. The response from Student 3 was rather insightful, as she pointed out that the use of AI has made her more critical of the reliability of sources that the technology has suggested. This highlights how crucial it is to develop critical thinking skills to navigate the wealth of information made possible by digital tools. The ability to distinguish trustworthy sources from untrustworthy ones and to exercise critical thought when evaluating information found online are extremely beneficial. Student 4 concluded that, even though learning AI was difficult, he discovered new vocabulary and new writing styles suggesting digital competencies exposed him to a wider range of stylistic and expressive possibilities.

Given the demands of learning in the digital age, it would seem necessary for students to acquire and apply digital competencies. This includes the capacity to write, collaborate, and communicate using a variety of digital tools and platforms. Through the integration of digital tools, real-time feedback and student collaboration seem to improve students' writing process promoting creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. Furthermore, digital tools promote the exploration of new forms of expression and the development of unique writing styles. With the increasing use of technology in the classroom, students can also benefit from learning how to conduct effective online research. Collaborative writing tools and digital platforms foster an interactive and engaging learning environment.

"I like the fact when we write using digital tool, for example Google Doc, it allows for real-time collaboration and feedback, both with my peers and my lecturer. It enhances the learning experience and improves the overall quality of the work." (Student 3)

Student 3 seems aware that a digital tool such as Google Doc allows her to work together in real time,

receive and provide immediate feedback, and share resources easily. Agreed by her other friends (Student 1, Student 2 and Student 4), collaborative online platforms encourage them to exercise peer review and provide constructive criticism, leading to a more interactive and engaging learning experience for them. Their teacher appears to agree that incorporating digital tools into the writing curriculum can enhance her students' technological literacy. Encouraging collaborative writing and peer feedback fosters a supportive and dynamic writing community within the classroom. These practices are essential for preparing them for the demands of learning in the digital age as they encourage creativity, critical thinking, and communication skills.

The student's responses illustrate the application of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory in the context of collaborative writing. One of the students acknowledges the challenges of writing, particularly when reading before writing, but finds that working with team members has been beneficial, suggesting that the collaborative process allows students to draw upon the knowledge and perspectives of their peers, facilitating learning and growth. This aligns with the Academic Literacies framework, which emphasizes the social and situated nature of writing, where students negotiate meaning and develop their skills through interaction with more experienced members of the academic community.

In addition to the digital competencies discussed, writing and editing tools, such as paraphrasing tools, grammar checkers, and proofreading software, appear to be useful in this L2 writing classroom. These tools seem to be particularly helpful in improving students' writing skills. Due to students' empowerment to explore the use of digital tools, this approach offers significant opportunities. A dynamic and stimulating learning environment is created through the integration of these writing and editing tools with the more general digital competencies. This again aligns with the Academic Literacies framework, which highlights the significance of navigating the social and cultural aspects of academic discourse. By leveraging digital tools and collaborative learning, students can cultivate the multiliteracies required to succeed in the complex and ever-evolving landscape of higher education and beyond.

C. Theme 3: The Role of Collaborative Learning

The use of digital technologies and online platforms has also been shown to enhance collaboration and peer feedback in writing tasks. These practices have shown a positive impact on student engagement and motivation. Some of the emerging innovative writing practices in this Malaysian university classroom include collaborative writing exercises and using digital tools to enhance student engagement. There is evidence from the group discussion that all students value collaborative learning environments as it encourages effective writing outcomes;

"Writing is an overwhelming task, especially when we have to read before writing, but with my team members it has been good. We always learn something new from each other, and that includes learning how we can write using AI". (Student 1)

"Writing with other people for a group work can be challenging but I enjoy the learning process, the fact that we are supposed to discuss it puts me into perspectives." (Student 2)

"I can see myself progress very well with my friends and especially when working with Google Doc." (Student 3)

"Some of my friends are more mature and have deeper understanding on various subjects, I learn from them a lot" (Student 4)

The students' responses illustrate the application of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory in the context of collaborative writing. Students acknowledge the challenges of writing, particularly when reading before

writing, but find that working with team members has been beneficial. They highlight the value of learning from each other, suggesting that the collaborative process allows students to draw upon the knowledge and perspectives of their peers, facilitating learning and growth. Student 2 expresses the challenges of writing in a group, but also the enjoyment of the learning process, noting that discussing the work "puts me into perspectives." This aligns with Vygotsky's concept of the "zone of proximal development," where learners can achieve more with the guidance and support of more capable peers or instructors. Student 3 demonstrates the sociocultural aspects of writing by stating that "progress very well with friends" and when working with Google Docs. Student 4 emphasises how important more experienced peers in the learning process. This highlights the importance of having the 'others' as noted by Vygotsky to develop skills and understanding.

As per Vygotsky's perspective of learning as essentially a social and cultural endeavor, the student's answers show how collaborative writing, supported by both digital and face-to-face interactions, can nurture the development of writing and critical thinking skills. Although to these students writing can be intimidating, group work helps to overcome these difficulties. Peer interactions, particularly with more knowledgeable others are a major factor in their learning. Overall, the collaborative approach and use of digital tools enhance students' writing experience.

CONCLUSION

In Malaysian university classrooms, emerging innovative writing practices are receiving more attention as teachers are seeking fresh and effective approaches to improve students' writing skills. In this present study, both the teacher and students explore some of the prominent innovative writing approaches being used in Malaysian university settings. The objective of these practices is to enhance students' compositional creativity and writing abilities. Writing collaboration using Google Docs is the only example of AI being used as evidence of students' innovative writing techniques. Another emerging innovative writing approach is using online discussion for peer review and revision. This allows students to participate in collaborative learning and get prompt feedback from their teacher and peers, improving their analytical and critical thinking skills. Students are encouraged to collaborate on group writing assignments and give their peers constructive feedback. This collaborative approach builds a sense of community of writing in the classroom as well as improving the quality of work produced. The teacher appears to encourage the students to share their varied viewpoints and participate in insightful conversations.

Despite the small sample size, the exploration of emerging innovative writing approaches in this specific Malaysian university classroom has revealed a dynamic and transformative platform that necessitates a flexible and adaptive approach from both students and teachers. The integration of digital tools and multimodal communication strategies appears to suggest potentials of enhancing creativity, critical thinking, and collaborative learning. As demonstrated by the student responses, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory emphasizes the importance of embracing peer guidance and digital competencies in enabling students to take ownership of their writing process and reach their full potential. Moreover, the framework of Academic Literacies emphasizes how important it is to adjust and adapt to the changing nature of academic discourse. By creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment promoting new writing experience, teachers can develop a generation of digitally literate students who will then be prepared to contribute to an increasingly digitalised society. This, in turn, equips students to meet the challenges of the 21st-century workplace, where flexibility, inventiveness, and teamwork are highly valued. Those who are prepared to welcome the digital revolution and capitalize on its transformative potential will be the one shaping the future of writing education.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION

MRM and MMM carried out the introduction and literature review sections. SFZ collected and refined the data and performed data analysis. FT and NHCM wrote the methodology, discussion and conclusion sections. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

REFERENCES

1. Abiddin, N. Z., Ibrahim, I., & Aziz, S. A. (2022). Advocating digital literacy: Community-based strategies and approaches. *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 11(1), 198-198.
2. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3(2), 77-101.
3. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2013). Successful qualitative research: A practical guide for beginners. London: Sage.
4. Buragohain, D., Punpeng, G., Jaratjarungkiat, S., & Chaudhary, S. (2023, March). Impact of e-learning activities on English as a second language proficiency among engineering cohorts of Malaysian higher education: A 7-month longitudinal study. *In Informatics MDPI.* 10(1), 31.
5. Burgess, J. (2020). Through a lens of affect: multiliteracies, English learners, and resistance. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 41(5), 799-811.
6. Canagarajah, S. (1999). Interrogating the "native speaker fallacy": Non-linguistic roots, non-pedagogical results. In G. Braine (Ed.), Non-native educators in English language teaching (pp. 145–158). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
7. Che Mat, N. (2020). *Understanding academic writing practices in Malaysian university classrooms* (Doctoral dissertation, University of East Anglia).
8. Creswell, J. W. (2017). Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches. USA: SAGE Publications.
9. Dahlström, H. (2022). Students as digital multimodal text designers: A study of resources, affordances, and experiences. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 53(2), 391-407.
10. Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2000). Qualitative research (3rd ed.). Sage: London.
11. Fan, Y. & Xu, J. (2020). Exploring student engagement with peer feedback on L2 writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 50.
12. Farooque, M. S. M. (2020). New trends in teaching and learning. OrangeBooks Publication.
13. Fisher, M. M., & Baird, D. E. (2020). Humanizing user experience design strategies with NEW technologies: AR, VR, MR, ZOOM, ALLY and AI to support student engagement and retention in higher education. In *International perspectives on the role of technology in humanizing higher education*, 105-129. Emerald Publishing Limited.
14. Friedrich, P. (Ed.). (2008). Teaching academic writing. London: Continuum.
15. Ganapathy, M., Lah, S. C., & Phan, J. (2022). Creativity via a Genre Pedagogy to Promote EFL Indigenous Students' Writing. *3L: Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, *28*(1).
16. Hafner, C. A. & Ho, W. Y. J. (2020). Assessing digital multimodal composing in second language writing: Towards a process-based model. *Journal of Second Language Writing,* 47.
17. Illahibaccus-Sona, S. B. (2023). A Qualitative Phenomenological Investigation of Pre-university English as a Second Language Learners' Experiences in Malaysia. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*, 5(2), 197-212.
18. Irvin, L. L. (2010). What is "academic" writing? Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing, 1, 3-17.
19. Ivanič, R. (1998). Writing and identity. Amsterdam: Benjamins.
20. Jong, B. & Tan, K. H. (2021). Using Padlet as a Technological Tool for Assessment of Students' Writing Skills in Online Classroom Settings. *International Journal of Education and Practice*, 9(2),

411-423.

21. Joseph Jeyaraj, J. (2020). Possibilities for critical pedagogy engagement in higher education: exploring students' openness and acceptance. *Asia Pacific Education Review,* 21(1), 27-38.

22. Joseph Jeyaraj, J. & Wald, N. (2020). Students' reflections on barriers to promoting higher education's social purposes in the classroom. Teaching in Higher Education. otago.ac.nz

23. Kearney, S. & Maakrun, J. (2020). Let's get engaged: The nexus between digital technologies, engagement and learning. *Education Sciences,* 10(12), 357.

24. Krueger, R. A., & Casey, M. A. (2009). Planning the focus group study. Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research, 24(5), 17-33.

25. Kustini, S., Suherdi, D., & Musthafa, B. (2020). Beyond traditional literacies: A multimodal-based instruction to fostering student digital literacy learning. *Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra*, 20(1), 37-47.

26. Lantolf, J. P. (Ed.). (2000). Sociocultural theory and second language learning. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

27. Lea, M. R., & Street, B. V. (1998). Student writing in higher education: An academic literacies approach. Studies in Higher Education, 23(2), 157-172.

28. Li, M. (2020). Multimodal pedagogy in TESOL teacher education: Students' perspectives. *System*. 94.

29. Liang, W. J. & Lim, F. V. (2021). A pedagogical framework for digital multimodal composing in the English Language classroom. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching,* 15(4), 306-320.

30. Lillis, T., & Tuck, J. (2016). Academic literacies: A critical lens on writing and reading in the academy. The Routledge handbook of English for academic purposes. London: Routledge.

31. Ling, L. Y., Kaur, N., & Cheong, W. H. (2022). Task-Based Language Teaching Involving Authentic Situations at A Malaysian Institution of Higher Learning. *Journal of Institutional Research South East Asia,* 20(1), 53-75.

32. Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

33. Mills, K. A., Unsworth, L., & Scholes, L. (2023). *Literacy for digital futures: Mind, body, text* (p. 274). Taylor & Francis.

34. Mishra, S. (2020). Social networks, social capital, social support and academic success in higher education: A systematic review with a special focus on 'under represented' students. *Educational Research Review*, *29*, 100307.

35. Monteiro, A. & Leite, C. (2021). Digital literacies in higher education: Skills, uses, opportunities and obstacles to digital transformation. *Revista de Educación a Distancia (RED),* 21(65).

36. Moses, R. N., and Mohamad, M. (2019) Challenges Faced by Students and Teachers on Writing Skills in ESL Contexts: A Literature Review. Creative Education, Vol 10(13), Retrieved from http://doi.org/ https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2019.1013260

37. Omar, N. A. M., Jusoh, Z., & Kasuma, S. A. A. (2020). Malaysian university undergraduates' perceptions towards comprehensive online instructions amidst COVID-19. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 8(12), 7131-7140.

38. Othm, I. W., Yusoff, M. S., Ationg, R., Esa, M. S., & Shah, M. K. M. (2020). The influence of culture and family towards the decision to pursue study abroad: A case study of Malaysian public universities. *PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/Egyptology*, 17(6), 10688-10714.

39. Patton, M. Q. (2002). Qualitative research and evaluation methods (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

40. Paxton, M. (2012) Student voice as a methodological issue in academic literacies research. Higher Education Research & Development, 31(3), 381-391. doi: 10.1080/07294360.2011.634382.

41. Pham, V. P. H. (2021). The effects of collaborative writing on students' writing fluency: An efficient framework for collaborative writing. *Sage Open*, 11(1).

42. Rahman, A. M. A., Azmi, M. N. L., & Hassan, I. (2020). Improvement of English writing skills through blended learning among university students in Malaysia. *Universal Journal of Educational Research,* 8(12A), 7694-7701.

43. Ramamuthie, V., & Aziz, A. A. (2022). Systematic review: The effectiveness of digital tools to improve writing skill of ESL students. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, *12*(3), 408-427.

44. Ransdell, S., & Barbier, M. L. (2002). An introduction to new directions for research in L2 writing. In G. Rijlaarsdam, S. Ransdell, & M. L. Barbier (Eds.), Studies in writing: New directions for research in L2 writing (pp. 1-10). Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

45. Reed, M. (2020). Importing and exporting across boundaries of expertise: Writing pedagogy education and graduate student instructors' disciplinary enculturation. Composition Forum, (45). Association of Teachers of Advanced Composition.

46. Sack, R. (2017). Malaysia: Merging and demerging education ministries.

47. Selfa-Sastre, M., Pifarré, M., Cujba, A., Cutillas, L., & Falguera, E. (2022). The role of digital technologies to promote collaborative creativity in language education. *Frontiers in Psychology,* 13, 828981.

48. Stapa, S. H., & Majid, A. H. A. (2012). The use of first language in developing ideas in second language writing. American Journal of Social Issues & Humanities, 2(3), 148- 151.

49. Sulaiman, N. (2022). Exploring English-language teacher emotions, teaching instructions and professional identity in the context of ELT curriculum reform in Malaysia. *(Doctoral dissertation, Macquarie University).*

50. Tarigan, K. E., & Stevani, M. (2022). English Teachers' Beliefs in Teaching English Grammar to Improve Students' Speaking Skill. *Journal of English Language and Education*, *7*(1), 130-139.

51. Whitehead, D., & Whitehead, L. (2020). Data collection and sampling in qualitative research. *Nursing and Midwifery Research Methods and Appraisal for Evidence-Based Practice. 6th Edition. Sydney: Elsevier*, 118-135.

52. Zhang, M., Akoto, M., & Li, M. (2023). Digital multimodal composing in post-secondary L2 settings: A review of the empirical landscape. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 36(4), 694-721.