Virtual traveling strategies in teaching writing during COVID-19 pandemic

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Abstract
This study sought to examine the strategies adopted by teachers to improve students’ writing ability during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study was conducted at the Department of English Education, Faculty of Teachers Training and Education, Universitas Muhammadiyah Parepare, Indonesia. The research method involved questionnaire to see the students’ interest in learning English and pre-test/post-test to see the student’s ability to promote tourism objects through written texts. The data indicates significant contribution of Virtual Traveling Strategy in writing class. Moreover, the majority of students agree that Virtual Traveling Strategy is very useful and applicable in in-class writing. Furthermore, the dependency on internet connection becomes the weaknesses of this strategy. Despite its limitation, this method is highly recommended as one of the teaching strategies in addressing writing skills.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, teaching strategy, teaching writing, virtual traveling strategies

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Introduction

Education is characterized by continuous and future-oriented process aligned towards particular objectives which needs deep thinking and innovation appropriate to current situation and conditions (Hall et al., 2018; Hero & Lindfors, 2019; Leitch & Harrison, 1999; McGettrick et al., 1997). Through deep-thinking and innovation, innovative thinking and action, sustainability, goals achievement and objectives would be more practical and reachable. It is strongly believed that educational process will result to instant output. As a result, is the birth of a low competitive generation without a clear long-term orientation.

Some previously-conducted studies have revealed that educational process should be fun for the students (Mahirah, 2017; Setyaningsih, 2016; Taylor, 2008) to maintain continuity in the educational community. The process of teaching and learning are the steps to the door of community independence (Gómez-Zotano, José; Riesco-Chueca, 2010; Shacham & Od-Cohen, 2009). Independent society in this regard is global community-minded and has a high knowledge. In addition, the process of teaching and learning as well as the initial step of laying the foundation-minded younger generation fighter will become a shield for the independence of a nation. The process of teaching and learning cannot be separated by the presence of an educator, in this case, the educators in question is a lecturer.

Literature has clearly emphasized the fundamental characteristic of a good teacher, that is, a good teacher should be able to be the agent of change which positively affect students’ mindset (Harden & Crosby, 2000a, 2000b; Kurtz, 2001; Samian & Noor, 2012; Su & Wood, 2012). Therefore, teachers must be able to transfer their knowledge through appropriate and interesting learning strategy.

Teaching and learning process, more especially during the Covid 19 pandemic, remains challenging for a teacher (Favale et al., 2020; König et al., 2020; Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison, 2020; Vidal-Alaball et al., 2020). Therefore, a teacher must be observant to see and to choose an appropriate, efficient and effective learning strategy to create fun learning conditions running under virtual meeting. One of the learning strategies during the pandemic period was that the learning should be conducted virtually with no any face to face interaction between teachers and students. The drawback was that students often face various kinds of challenges that directly affected the students’ focus in online learning.

According to Psychology Today, some of the obstacles faced are not only not focused when doing remote learning, but also the internet connection which is not stable and smooth enough to handle online meeting. During teaching and learning through the internet, there are lot of distractions that interfere with the learning process. The temptation to watch videos, access social media, and read news content impulsively is often done without a prior plan. In addition, internet connection sometimes suddenly dropped. To minimize the obstacles, challenges, and distractions, one of the best strategies that can be implemented is known as Virtual Traveling Learning which has been recommended by previous researchers.

Pakaya, (2014:2) explains field trip study as a teaching method done outside the classroom with objectives to learn something where students can observe any object directly. Field trips allows students to see an event that occurs directly and discuss it. Discussion in groups consisting of 2-3 students, accompanied by top-level students who are considered capable by the college student to guide the
juniors in practicing writing in the wildlife. Also, students can gain experience that they would never get just by learning in classroom. Another definition is argued by (Subramaniam et al., 2018) who explains field trip pedagogy as pre-, during-, and post-field trip pedagogies and teachers’ decision-based actions central to making connections between in-school science and out-of-school science.

Some previously-published studies have shown that learning under natural setting provides students more hands-on experiences and makes learning more meaningful (Farmer et al., 2007). In addition, (Patrick et al., 2013) treat field trip as important since pre-service teachers benefit from the inclusion of field trip pedagogy in university teacher training programs. Furthermore, (Houser et al., 2011) reveal that their participants enrolled into field trip pedagogy score significantly higher as measured through test. Moreover, Pakaya, (2014:12) discovers that the field trip study method in learning writing poems improves the students’ writing ability.

---Rigid learning means how students deal with less motivation, fewer ideas, not concentrate during indoor writing class because every student has a different strategy in producing ideas for their writing. As a replacement, virtual tour learning will make them more flexible in choosing kinds of topics for their writing. Not only about the writing content, but the motivation may also be increased because students free to choose a strategy that fits them. Therefore, by engaging in virtual tours students can explore their thoughts for their writing during the pandemic.

Furthermore, the core of the strategy is the students reveal what they get on virtual traveling or visit attractions into writing. Foster (Leggette & Homeyer, 2015) claims that students use writing as a process to discover, develop and disseminate scientific information and ideas. In disseminating scientific information and ideas, it needs the good capability to enhance communication as part of public relations ensuring the satisfaction of the listener in speaking and reader in writing. In addition to communication through writing or speaking, Pangerty, 2014:12 citing communication the definition of Hovland, Janis, and Kelly as follow: “the process by which an individual (the communicator) transmits stimuli (usually verbal) to modify the behavior of other individuals (the audience)” . A process in which an individual (the communicator) sends stimuli (stimulus, which is usually in the form of verbal) to modify the behavior of other individuals (the audience). The lecture is very important as a barometer of the achievement of the course objectives. Methods “lecture center” can be a tedious thing for the active roles of a college student as consequently reduced the impact on the lack of ability of the students in writing activities. The objectives of this research are to know the benefits of virtual traveling strategy toward the students’ interest in learning writing and to know the worthwhile of virtual traveling strategy on the students’ writing skill.

**Literature Review**

Virtual traveling is an alternative picnic during the pandemic that is done online (Aschenbrenner et al., 2016; T. C. Chang et al., 2010; Chao et al., 2013; King et al., 2005; Peštek & Sarvan, 2020). Through virtual traveling, the potential to be infected with COVID-19 can be avoided and there is no need to prepare various kinds of travel administration needs like before the pandemic period. Through virtual traveling activities, a traveler can visit various places around the world just by surfing through the Virtual Tour application. The virtual tour is a simulation of an existing location, usually composed of a sequence of videos or still images. It may also use other multimedia elements such as sound effects, music, narration, and text (Chiao et al., 2018; Y. H. Cho et al., 2002; Matthews et al., 2002; Moturi, 2014; Rosenberg et al., 2013).

By utilizing various virtual tour websites, researchers invite students to explore the virtual world by doing virtual traveling as one of the learning strategies during the Covid 19 pandemic. The choice of this
strategy is believed to be able to foster students’ imagination in learning. The advantage of this strategy is that in addition to being inexpensive and time-saving, this strategy can also enrich students’ scientific knowledge and knowledge about various tourist spots in the world through live video broadcasts that are broadcast through the virtual tour website. Also, based on browsing on the internet, the use of virtual tour websites as a strategy to improve student’s English language skills is still under-developed.

Previously-published study has confirmed the superiority of virtual reality in addressing teaching and learning. A recently new study confirms that virtual reality enables students to travel before traveling (Peštek & Sarvan, 2020), meaning that students are enabled to experience traveling to particular environments and learn from their virtual experiences. In other words, virtual experience possibly maximizes the sense of reality (Y. Cho et al., 2021). In addition, it potentially enables students to execute experiential learning virtually (Alrehaili & Al Osman, 2022) which leads the students to have significant positive effects towards their learning (Y. S. Chang et al., 2020).

Runkle (Hawkins & Razali, 2012) defines writing as the process of selecting, developing, and arranging ideas effectively which requires students to write in a variety of forms, for a variety of purposes, and a variety of audiences. Writing also refers to reveals feelings through written text. In addition, through process of writing, one does be obtained to communicate indirectly. Therefore, through writing, idea may be produced by means of written as part of interaction which aimed to share all kinds of gained information as well as informed it to others.

The tendency in learning writing towards English learning, likewise, other foreign languages especially listening and speaking. Communicative learning requires the lecturer to conceive the way of teaching fluency, not only accuracy, how to make a demand on using authentic text and classroom context, how to focus on the objective of linguistic communication, and how to endorse students’ motivation. In learning activities in the classroom, the lecturer is hoped to be a facilitator and wise responder toward the students’ writing. Lecturer as facilitator gives guidance to endorse students to involve in exploring thinking and ideas of the writing process, but not to force their idea to involve in students’ writing. Lecturer’s role is limited to give corrections and comments.

The term process of writing has been bandied about for quite a while in ESL. White and Arndt in Baroudi assert that writing serves as a cyclical process. While students are revising, they might have to return to the prewriting phase to develop and expand their ideas. The diagram below proposed by White and Arndt shows the nature of the writing stages (Baroudy, 2008).

![Figure 1. Writing stages by White and Arndt in (Baroudy, 2008)](image)

Virtual traveling is a learning strategy that invites the students to visit certain places that are considered attractive by the student and approved by a college student. This strategy is just similar to
field trips study in which students visited tourist attractions intending to study and search for information on these attractions. The difference is that virtual traveling is done virtually over the internet network.

Djamarah in (Fitriyani, 2013), “The method is a way of field trips to the procurement of teaching materials to the children by bringing them directly to the objects contained in the environment outside the classroom or in real life so that they can observe or experience directly. By modifying it into a virtual traveling strategy, it is expected to provide many opportunities for students to practice writing the utterances through in a natural situation. Students write independently and responsibly following the agreed lecture contract in a condition that is not limited by the boundaries of the room. Besides, students will be freer to experiment in an attempt to improve their ability to practice writing.

Method
The participants of this research were undergraduate students’ majoring English Education program at Faculty of Teachers Training and Education University in Muhammadiyah Parepare. Quantitative method was applied to gain the data which focused on students’ writing ability and students’ interests as well.

In this study, researchers invited students to do virtual traveling to improve students’ writing skills, especially in English. There was a strong tendency to boost students’ proficiency in writing as ruled in curriculum, syllabus, and lesson plan. Without having good proficiency in writing, the students must be experiencing difficulties in English class indeed fail to finish their study in the university since they will be required to do research and publish articles in English which are mainly academic-oriented.

The definition of writing accepted in this study came from Foster in Legette and Homeyer who described writing as a critical element in students’ self-discovery, self-development, and social maturation (Leggette & Homeyer, 2015). In this study, due to the pandemic which disallowed face to face meeting, the researchers modified the field trip learning method by encouraging students to do virtual tours on some tourism spots. It was considered as the best strategy to conduct learning enabling the students to learn without having any physical meeting which was considered as dangerous due to COVID-19 pandemic. By enrolling the students into the virtual tours, the students could flexibly learn without having any potential to be infected by coronavirus which was treated dangerous by World Health Organization.

The instruments of this study were writing tests and questionnaire. The writing tests were done in the first meeting and in the last meeting. In pre-test and post-test, the students were enrolled into writing around 150 words passage. The students’ writings were then assessed based on writing rubric adapted from (Mazloomi & Khabiri, 2018; Wolf et al., 2018) including (1) content; (2) organization; (3) grammar and mechanics; and (4) vocabulary and language use. In this study, the mean score of students’ writing score in pre-test and post-test were compared to see whether the treatment made changes in students’ writing score. Furthermore, the questionnaire was applied to find the desired data on students’ interest and experience in writing through virtual traveling.

In regards with the data analysis, the researchers added up students score in both tests and then divided the score by the number of students participated in the research. The mean score in pre-test was then compared to mean score in post-test. In this study, the students’ cumulative mean score was interpreted based on the following criteria.
Data from questionnaire were processed in Microsoft Excel. The responses of each student participated in this study were classified based on the questionnaire item. The Likert scale score of each questionnaire item was then added up then divided by the total participants to generate the percentage which described students’ experience in learning through virtual traveling strategy. The following table describes the rubric of questionnaire items.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Range of Score</th>
<th>Descriptive Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>80 – 100</td>
<td>Very Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 – 79</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 – 59</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 – 39</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 – 19</td>
<td>Very Low</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Result
Based on the writing test, it is found that the mean score of the pre-test (54.89) is lower than the post-test score (73.33) with difference by 18.44. The enhancement of students’ writing ability from 54.89 to 73.33 descriptively means that the students enhance from average to good after learning through virtual traveling strategy. This suggests that learning writing II through Virtual learning strategy leads to improvement of students’ writing skills. However, in this study the researchers do not entail on the significance due to limitations the researchers experience during the research took place. Therefore, this point opens opportunity to other researchers to go deeper into the statistic calculation.

In regards with data generated from questionnaire distributed in the last meeting of the research, it is found that:
1. 70% opt high, 20% opt very high, and 10% students opt moderate on the ease of use of virtual traveling strategy.
2. 40% opt high, 30% opt high, and 30% opt moderate on interest in learning through virtual traveling strategy.
3. 10% opt very high, 60% opt high, and 30% opt moderate on learning flexibility in virtual traveling strategy.
4. 40% opt very high, 30% opt high, and 30% opt moderate on features of virtual traveling strategy.
5. 10% students opt very high, 60% students opt high, 20% students state moderate, and 10% students opt low on content clarity of virtual traveling strategy.
6. 30% students opt very high, 50% students opt high, and 20% students opt moderate on satisfaction in learning through virtual traveling strategy.
7. 40% students opt very high, 40% students opt high, and 20% students opt moderate on stability of internet connection in learning through virtual traveling strategy.
8. 50% opt very high, 20% students opt moderate, 30% opt low on the sufficiency of time allotment in learning through virtual traveling strategy.
9. 20% students opt very high, 30% students opt high, 20% opt moderate, and 30% students opt low on the clarity of visual of virtual traveling strategy.
10. 10% students opt very high, 60% students opt high, 30% students opt moderate on the clarity of audio of virtual learning strategy.

As explicitly mentioned under “Methodology” that the data on questionnaire are categorized into (1) technical system of the virtual traveling strategy – represented by ‘ease of use’, ‘feature’, and ‘internet connection stability’; (2) pedagogical feature – represented by ‘content clarity’, ‘sufficiency of time allotment’, ‘visual’ and ‘audio’; and (3) students’ psychological experience – represented by ‘interest’, ‘flexibility’, and ‘satisfaction’. Chart below illustrates the visual data drawn from the questionnaire.

Discussion
The findings of this study lead to discussion that the virtual traveling strategy potentially creates and leads to active, innovative, comprehensive and fun learning. The findings revealed in this study are around the students’ knowledge about virtual traveling strategies, benefits of learning through virtual traveling strategy and problems encountered during the implementation of virtual traveling strategies.

Results of the data analysis show that students’ knowledge on a variety of learning strategies in the COVID-19 pandemic is quite limited even most students stated that they did not have enough knowledge towards virtual traveling strategy or can be categorized that their knowledge is very low. This suggests that the variation of learning strategy is urgently needed in teaching writing.

The application of virtual traveling strategy applied in this study are explored through technical system of the virtual traveling strategy, pedagogical aspect, and students’ psychological experience. The data fall into conclusion that the virtual traveling strategy is technically perceived as positive, pedagogically perceived as positive, and psychologically perceived as positive. Previously-published study reveals virtual learning as relatively new concept which is popularly applied in tourism industry aimed at marketing purposes (Peštek & Sarvan, 2020). This study confirms that not only for tourism industry and for marketing purposes, this study emphasizes that virtual traveling is potentially be applied for educational purposes – more especially for writing class.

Recently-published literature treats virtual reality (VR) as a technology that potentially maximizes the sense of reality (Y. Cho et al., 2021). This study promotes claims that virtual traveling does the same. Furthermore, this study supports the claim that experiential learning is possible to be done virtually (Alrehaili & Al Osman, 2022). The virtual traveling strategy applied in this study potentially opens opportunity for the students to deep dive upon learning content from primary resources virtually. The fact that the virtual traveling strategy is contextually-oriented in which educators can flexibly create and adjust the learning strategy as attractive as possible based on situation and condition leads the students into more meaningful learning, enables the students to easily map out their ideas, and encourages the students to be more creative in learning.

Another advantage generated from the virtual traveling strategy, writing material can be made attractively by emphasizing relevant words and imagination. Although it is undeniable, that this method gives a little difficulty for students in its applications, more especially because the fat that the strategy mainly depends on internet connection which should be stable. Yet, it should be acknowledged that the virtual traveling strategy is beneficial for students more especially during COVID-19 outbreak. Yet, it is perceived positively as informed through questionnaire data. A recently-published study has warned that content quality, system quality, presence, enjoyment indirectly matters (Utami et al., 2022). Therefore, this strategy reaches its best if infrastructure is sufficient and internet connection is stable. In addition,
it is claimed that virtual traveling can be more beneficial for developing countries facing difficulties in economic aspects. Yet, (Schiopu, A. F., Hornoiu, R. I., Padurean, A. M., & Nica, 2022) treat it as a viable solution to deal with the situation which offers ease of use.

On the other hand, the results showed that the implementation of a Virtual learning strategy can improve the students’ writing ability. It can be seen from the average score of the pre-test which is 54.50 (average) while the post-test shows 73.43 (good). In the pre-test, the main reason why the students result on lower score is because the learning is treated as very monotonous. They are quite difficult to make variations or arrange their creative ideas because they feel bored with learning conditions that only show the picture and story of the places. Some students even look confused in making interesting writing. It is welcomed by researchers by introducing a new learning strategy they have never experience before. As a result, students are motivated to keep the learning fun and interesting during the treatment. They seem to be serious and tend to focus on arranging their writing.

This study also indicates that the learning in virtual traveling strategy potentially motivates students to be more active in learning process – as informed by questionnaire data where learning experiences in virtual traveling is perceived positively by the students. This finding supports the finding amplified by (Chen et al., 2020) the expository writing artifacts were collected through a multiple before- and-after non-experimental design and analyzed using ANOVA. A text-in-context coding approach was adopted to examine changes in students’ writing. The results showed a statistically significant increase in expository writing skills, particularly in description, cause/effect, compare/contrast, and enumeration. A descriptive survey assessing the acceptance of Google Earth VR was distributed as well. During the qualitative phase, a follow-up focus group for the ELs and teacher interviews were conducted. Field notes/memos were used to triangulate the data. The qualitative findings indicated that the ELs were engaged in the virtual-assisted writing environment and showed positive attitudes toward Google Earth VR. Concerns about using Google Earth VR in writing (i.e. time-consuming as well as distracting and posing integration difficulties claiming that students show positive attitudes in virtual-assisted writing environment. In addition, this study also supports the finding claiming that virtual learning leads the students to significant positive effects on learning (Y. S. Chang et al., 2020) particularly in the design and planning, testing and revision and thoughts and appreciation stages.

Conclusion

It is concluded that virtual learning strategy is very interesting to be applied in the learning of foreign language, especially in writing course because virtual learning strategy can help students to develop their writing abilities as proven by the enhancement of students cumulative mean score in test. In addition, the virtual traveling strategy can be effective to be applied to avoid burnout and boredom of students in participating in the learning process. As generated in the findings of this study, the virtual traveling strategy is superior in terms of technical system, pedagogical aspect, and psychological experience – proven by the data generated from the questionnaire. This study concludes that the virtual learning strategy is modifiable, meaning that it can be flexibly modified as needed. Therefore, further researchers and educational practitioners are encouraged to explore the virtual learning strategy deeper to generate data on its effectiveness in addressing students’ needs on learning. This study does no go deeper to the comparison which shows significance of difference between students’ score in pre-test and post-test due to unpredicted and uncontrollable situation experienced during the implementation of this study. Further researchers are expected to conduct further study addressing the significant difference in pre-test and post-test to see the actual quality of virtual traveling strategy in teaching writing.
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