

**THE EFFECTIVE USE OF GENRE-BASED
APPROACH ON THE NARRATIVE WRITING OF
ESL MALAYSIAN SECONDARY SCHOOL
STUDENTS**

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UNIVERSITI SAIN MALAYSIA

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ESL MALAYSIAN SECONDARY SCHOOL
STUDENTS**

by

CHONG VOON SING

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**PENDEKATAN BERKESAN “GENRE-BASED” TERHADAP PENULISAN
NARATIF DALAM KALANGAN MURID ESL SEKOLAH MENENGAH DI
MALAYSIA**

ABSTRAK

Kemahiran menulis adalah kemahiran yang mencerminkan tahap penguasaan bahasa seseorang dan sering diuji untuk mengukur tahap penguasaan bahasa seseorang. Akan tetapi, kebanyakan murid ESL terutamanya murid ESL sekolah menengah di Malaysia masih menghadapi pelbagai cabaran dan masalah dalam penulisan mereka walaupun mempelajari kemahiran tersebut di sekolah. Hal ini kerana, ia merupakan kemahiran yang paling mencabar dalam proses pembelajaran sesuatu bahasa. Bagi murid ESL, kemahiran menulis dalam Bahasa Inggeris adalah kemahiran yang paling mencabar sekali untuk dikuasai. Dalam karangan literatur, terdapat pelbagai penyelidikan yang memberi penekanan terhadap cabaran dan masalah yang dihadapi murid ESL ini. Dilema tersebut boleh menyekat perkembangan kemahiran menulis yang efektif dalam kalangan murid ESL. Keberkesanan pendekatan ‘genre-based’ dalam mempromosikan perkembangan kemahiran menulis dalam kalangan murid ESL tidak dapat dinafikan. Tesis ini bertujuan untuk mengenal pasti keberkesanan implementasi pendekatan “teaching-learning cycle” dalam kalangan murid ESL sekolah menengah untuk membantu murid mengintegrasikan struktur skematik dan sistem “transitivity” dalam penulisan naratif mereka. Tesis ini juga bertujuan untuk mengenal pasti pengalaman dan pendapat murid terhadap pendekatan tersebut. Seramai 12 orang murid tingkatan empat dari sebuah sekolah menengah di Johor Bahru telah dipilih untuk

penyelidikan ini. Intervensi ini terdiri daripada empat fasa “teaching-learning cycle” yang dijalankan selama 12 minggu. Murid tersebut diuji sebelum dan selepas intervensi dilaksanakan. Data pertama dikumpul daripada markah penulisan murid sebelum dan selepas intervensi. Data juga dikumpul daripada analisis “transitivity” terhadap “process types” dalam penulisan naratif mereka serta temubual berkaitan dengan pengalaman murid semasa intervensi. Keputusan analisis markah esei dan analisis “transitivity” menunjukkan peningkatan kebolehan murid dalam aspek struktur skematik dan system “transitivity” selepas menjalani pendekatan “genre-based”. Maklum balas yang diterima semasa temubual yang dilaksanakan selepas intervensi tersebut menunjukkan respon positif daripada kalangan murid. Responden menyatakan bahawa pendekatan ini mempunyai tujuan, jelas, sistematik dan menyokong kemahiran menulis. Ia boleh disimpulkan bahawa 4 tema ini mempengaruhi impak pendekatan ini terhadap perkembangan kemahiran penulisan naratif dalam kalangan murid. Berdasarkan dapatan tesis ini, ia tidak dapat dinafikan bahawa pengenalan pendekatan “genre-based” dalam silibus Bahasa Inggeris di semua sekolah menengah seluruh Malaysia mempunyai implikasi yang besar. Pendekatan ini akan memberi kesan positif kepada para pendidik dan murid terutamanya dalam mengatasi masalah berkaitan pembelajaran kemahiran menulis. Dapatan tesis ini juga menunjukkan peranan penting persekitaran pembelajaran yang positif untuk pembelajaran penulisan dalam kalangan murid sekolah menengah.

THE EFFECTIVE USE OF GENRE-BASED APPROACH ON THE NARRATIVE WRITING OF ESL MALAYSIAN SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

ABSTRACT

Writing is a skill which reflects one's language proficiency thus making it the most commonly tested skills to measure one's language abilities. However, many ESL Malaysian secondary school students still struggle in writing despite many years spent on learning the skill in school. This may be due to the fact that writing is deemed the most challenging task for language learning especially among ESL learners. There are many researches and a proliferation of literature that highlight the challenges faced by these students. It has been demonstrated that this dilemma intervenes with the development of effective writing skills among secondary school students. The effectiveness of the genre-based approach in promoting the development of writing skills among ESL learners has been reported in a number of studies. The current study examined the changes in Malaysian upper secondary school students' narrative writing through the implementation of genre-based approach to writing. Specifically, it aimed to assess the effectiveness of the teaching-learning cycle, in helping the students to develop schematic structure and transitivity system which are key features of narrative writing. The study also investigated the students' experiences and opinions regarding this approach. Twelve Form Four participants from a secondary school in Johor Bahru were selected via the purposive sampling technique. The subjects underwent an intervention for a duration of twelve weeks which consisted of the four phases of the teaching-learning cycle. The participants were tested before and after the intervention. The first data collected

were the participants' pre and post intervention essay scores. Data were also gathered through transitivity analysis on the process types found in their writing as well as semi-structured interviews regarding their experiences. Analyses revealed that the students were able to show development in schematic structure and transitivity system after the intervention. Moreover, analyses of the participants' interviews demonstrated positive responses regarding the approach in helping with their narrative writing. The respondents found the approach to be purposeful, explicit, systematic and supportive. It can then be concluded that these key themes influenced the impact of the approach on the participants' development in narrative writing. Based on these findings, it is suggested that there are major implications of integrating this approach into the Malaysian secondary school syllabus. Both educators and students would benefit from this approach in addressing the problems regarding writing. The findings also showed that positive learning environment plays an equal part in the development on writing skills among secondary school students.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1. 0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the increasing role of writing and the method of teaching writing in Malaysian English Second Language (hereafter referred to as ESL) classroom. Questions and objectives related to the current research are also highlighted and sequenced by explanations of the significance of the study. Similarly, the limitations of the study and the definitions of some important terms are also featured in this chapter to provide understanding of this research in different phases.

Writing is a process that involves complicated cognitive operations and employs a variety of strategies to form or produce a text. Hedge (2000) states that in order to write, writers use individual strategies and go through many throughout processes to gradually develop a text. Applebee (1984) also mentions that writing is the externalization and remaking of thoughts, thus allowing writing to be a reflective tool in making meaning. The modern notion sees writing as personal and interactive acts, expressing cultural and social purposes and reflecting a relationship and engagement in a given context or community (Hyland, 2013). Writing is also a skill that reflects one's language proficiency (Sabariah & Chan, 2008), making writing a skill that is often used to test and measure one's language ability. In Malaysia, ESL upper secondary school students (age 16 to 17 years old) often struggle and face many difficulties and challenges with writing. Nunan (1999) claims that the most difficult task in language learning is to create a coherent and fluent piece of

writing, a task even more challenging for ESL learners. As there are many studies conducted to support the positive effect of the genre-based approach to writing; mainly among ESL students (Ahn, 2012; Chow, 2007; Elashi, 2013), this research intends to investigate the changes in ESL upper secondary school students' narrative writing especially in the schematic structure and transitivity system through the implementation of the genre-based approach to writing.

1.1 Background of the study.

1.1.1 Writing in the English classroom.

Students are the future leaders and therefore need to improve their proficiency in English, alongside their leadership and decision-making skills (Malaysian Ministry of Education [MOE], 2016). Hence, there is a notable need to equip students with the abilities to have effective and efficient communication skills which can be employed in their social and professional use. Gan (2012) states that great importance is placed on the students' abilities to obtain good English grades in public examinations such as the Malaysian Certificate Examination (Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia) and the Malaysian University Entrance Test (MUET) because it is one of the requirements for entrances to institutions of higher learning as well as securing a job in the current globalized world. Likewise, one of the initiatives of the Malaysian Education Blueprint (PPPM) 2013 – 2025 aims to have 70% of the students pass the SPM English 1119 paper with a minimum credit (MOE, 2015). In order to achieve this goal, the Blueprint emphasizes on the significance of full mastery of basic literacy alongside other relevant skills like higher order thinking skills and problem-solving skills. In short, in order to produce future leaders who are able to meet

the challenges of the 21st century, students should acquire basic, competent English literacy skills especially the ability to write effectively.

Students in schools are taught the many aspects of English particularly the four main skills of English, which are reading, writing, speaking and listening, during the allocated periods of English lessons in their primary and secondary education. Among these set of skills, focus is placed on writing because in the English Language Curriculum, writing is considered a basic skill that must be mastered by all students (MOE, 2003). Koo (2008) also states that literacy is important in the 21st century as learners are co-authors and co-producers in knowledge acquisition. Thus, in addition to doing well in examination, having the ability to write well will also allow the students to be engaging partners in sharing and acquiring information and knowledge because the role of writing is increasing in the academic and professional setting (Chow, 2007). In order to aid with students' transition from school to university, Zuraidah and Melor (2004) claim that these students should be allowed and encouraged to improve on their writing skills to equip themselves without abandoning their passion and personal preference for certain writing modes and genres. Likewise, the Malaysian Ministry of Education stipulates that by the end of secondary education, students should be able to communicate intelligibly through print and digital media through the use of appropriate language, form and style in a variety of contexts, among others (Curriculum Development Unit, 2018). Writing is now viewed as a skill which requires students to be able to communicate meaning and to use appropriate language, form and style in order to produce coherent and cohesive writing. In line with the current demand for students to be exposed to 21st century learning

skills, there is a shift of focus on the objectives to the teaching of writing in secondary school in order to fulfill the aforementioned aspirations.

The newly introduced English Secondary School Curriculum Standard for Form 4 focuses on 2 main objectives regarding the area of writing. Abilities to communicate and organize information, feelings and opinions clearly as well as to plan, draft and edit work appropriately by using suitable registers are among some of the curriculum targets that should be achieved by Form 4 students by the end of the year (Curriculum Development Unit, 2018). Through the emphasis placed on the importance of comprehensible communication as well as effective use of language in terms of form, register and style, there needs to be a shift in the current methods regarding the teaching and learning of writing among secondary school students in order to accomplish the objectives stated in the curriculum standard.

Hence, based on the current curriculum standards, students in the upper secondary are required to accomplish more in their writing tasks as compared to when they were in the lower secondary. In the upper secondary, students are subjected to more demanding and challenging written tasks compared to the writing component in the lower secondary. In the lower form, students are only required to write essays of about 100 to 150 words in their Penilaian Tingkatan Tiga (PT3). The English 1119 writing task is an additional writing task of about 300 words that can prove to be rather challenging, especially for Form 4 students. Secondary school teachers and students should also realize that the English 1119 paper presents a platform for secondary school students to improve their writing skills so that they are able to prepare and equip

themselves for their future tertiary education and professional demands in the 21st century.

1. 2 Statement of Problem.

Based on the objectives and content standards listed in the syllabus as well as curriculum standards, emphasis on the importance of writing skills cannot be overlooked. In the Malaysian education system, ESL education especially writing is considered very important, yet language proficiency levels and achievements among the students are declining. The rather daunting demand with regards to writing placed on upper secondary school students does come with problems of its own. Many stakeholders raised their concerns regarding the predicament in attempts to figure out how to rectify the problem. It is evident that the most difficult task in any English classroom is the ability to produce fluent and coherent writing. The ability to write effectively can be even more challenging for ESL students, according to Nunan (1999). In general, Malaysian students are still not able to achieve a satisfactory level of writing proficiency (Saadiyah & Khor, 2009; Sharifah Nor et al., 2010). Maarof and Murat (2013) also state that many students are still weak in their English writing abilities, even after learning the language for so many years in school. Students' inability to perform writing tasks effectively can be reflected in the weak performance in the Malaysian Certificate of Education or *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM). According to Dr. Habibah Abdul Rahim, the executive director of the Education Performance and Delivery Unit (PADU), the SPM English 1119 paper for 2015 recorded a 76% in passes but only 44% obtained a minimum credit ("Students to Master Third Language", 2016). This can be attributed to

the weak performance in the writing task as it makes up a large percentage of the examination total scores.

Many studies in Malaysia have highlighted and identified the problems in writing among ESL students in different contexts. Ghabool et al. (2012) carried out a research among secondary school students to investigate the challenges in writing. Through the questionnaire administered to ten teachers and the analysis of the participants' writing samples, the research found that students faced challenges in three aspects especially in language use (Ghabool et al., 2012). A research by Saadiyah and Khor (2009) among Form 1 students in a Chinese vernacular school found most students committing errors in mechanics, tenses, prepositions and subject-verb agreement. Due to the differences between the verb system of Mandarin and English, the researchers found that the students tend to omit the inflection of the English verbs (Saadiyah & Khor, 2009). A study by Madahri and Malini (2017) also found five grammatical errors in the essay written by Form 1 students in a private Chinese school. Based on the interviews conducted, the researchers found that students tend to mix too many tenses in their writing because in their first language (L1) such as Mandarin and Malay, the verbs of these languages do not inflect with regards to time (Madahri & Malini, 2017). The similar result was found in a study conducted by Marlyna et al. (2007) among rural Malay secondary school students. This research discovered that the most problematic grammatical categories faced by these students were problems and issues regarding the omission and wrong use of determiners, subject-verb agreement and the copula "be", based on the free writing activity carried out among Form 1 students from 6 rural schools (Marlyna et al., 2007). The researchers concluded

that most of the errors related to these three aspects reflected the interference of the Malay grammar, thus impacting the students writing in English. A study by Saadiyah and Kaladevi (2009) among Form 4 students in a secondary school, found six common errors in report writing whereas the research by Abdul Rashid et al. (2004) among Form 4 students in a Chinese vernacular school found the students' inability to handle the correct use of verbs in writing could be due to the overgeneralized use of tenses or hypercorrection. Similar to the previous studies mentioned, the researchers stated that the students did not inflect the verbs used in the writing which could be a result of the learners' method in storing English linguistics items. A study found that despite being positive about writing, the participants admitted that they face some difficulties in writing such as getting started with their writing, organizing ideas, using correct grammar and making sentence flow (Sharifah Nor et al., 2010). An error analysis on the types of errors committed by students in different types of writing found that in narrative writing, tense errors are most common but for descriptive writing, singular/plural errors ranked the highest (Azizi Yahya et al., 2012). This shows that students still face challenges and problems regardless of the types of writing they have to do.

This is not only evident among school students but also in tertiary education. A study by Isarji et al. (2009) among Engineering students investigated the English language problems faced especially in speaking and writing. A majority of the students stated that writing grammatically correct sentences is their main problem in writing. Using the similar survey, almost all the lecturers agreed with the students' perception. A research on the written errors committed by Education undergraduates by Anne Rowena et al. (2014)

found grammatical errors most common in diary writing where as Yau (2014) found six significant errors in university students' paragraph writing. A study by Charanjit Kaur et al. (2017) among ESL tertiary students echoed the results found in the previous researches as this study found nine types of grammatical errors in the essays for the entrance examination. The errors were committed because participants were inconsistent with tenses in writing (Charanjit Kaur et al., 2017). Similarly, a research by Sarimah and Nurul Ros (2010) among first year university students in a local university, found that tense errors are common. Based on the follow-up questionnaires, the students stated that they know the type of errors they usually make but do not know how to repair the errors, thus causing them to repeat the same errors in their writing (Sarimah & Nurul Ros, 2010). Language use in writing remains a problem area as Yah et al. (2010) found that the respondents scored the lowest in language use, which includes the mastery of several factors such as sentence construction, agreement, tenses and word order. The study by Zuraidah and Melor (2004) among third-year students from different disciplines in a local university showed that nearly half perceive writing to be more difficult than speaking. Half of the participants in the researcher also claimed that they faced many problems in their writing where most of their weaknesses are with regards to making meaning clear as well as using suitable connectives to link ideas and sentences (Zuraidah & Melor, 2004). The above studies showed that many Malaysian ESL students are still unable to achieve satisfactory levels of writing proficiency. The overemphasis on communicative competence may not necessarily ignite creativity as students sometimes not only still lag behind in developing effective communication skills but also grammatical competence (Abdul Rashid et al.,

2004). Teachers should be aware that by simply exposing the students to English learning environment is not enough to ensure the learning of writing, rather explicit instructions are needed especially for students who wants to write but does not know how (Yang & Sohn, 2009). Therefore, there should be a balance between the focus on fluency as well as accuracy in the teaching of writing to Malaysian students in order address such challenges and problems among students.

The current scenario reflecting the students' low proficiency in English language does not seem to justify the efforts and hopes pinned in upholding and improving the standard of English language in the country over the years. Although it is necessary for students to develop good writing skills, the question remains whether they receive sufficient exposure to good writing practices to train them to be effective writers. Hence, teachers must have sufficient writing knowledge and skills in teaching ESL writing along with the required knowledge to carry out writing instructions adequately. For this purpose, the approaches utilized by the teachers to teach writing particularly in ESL classroom, need to be further studied.

1.3 Objectives of the Study.

In order to address the problems found in student's writing, the implementation of the genre-based approach to writing will allow students to be exposed to sample essays and explicit instructions from the teacher thus highlighting the complexities of writing. The introduction of the Teaching-Learning Cycle (TLC) by Hammond et al. (1992) enables the students to analyze models and gain better awareness of writing through explicit teaching

so that their writing performance would be improved. Likewise, the students will also be able to work with teachers and more capable peers in a collaborative manner through this approach to the teaching of writing. All these are in-line with the various initiatives in achieving the objective stated in The Malaysian Education Blueprint (PPPM) 2013-20125 as well as the Blueprint's second shift in ensuring every Malaysian child to be proficient in English. Thus, research objectives are as follows:

- 1) To investigate the change in students' schematic structure of narrative writing through the implementation of the genre-based approach.
- 2) To examine the change in students' transitivity system in narrative writing through the implementation of the genre-based approach.
- 3) To explore students' experience on the implementation of the genre-based approach to narrative writing.

1.4 Research Questions

The following research questions are based on the research objectives:

- 1) How does students' schematic structure of narrative writing change after the implementation of the genre-based approach?
- 2) How does students' use of transitivity in narrative writing change after the implementation of the genre-based approach?
- 3) How do the students feel about the implementation of the genre-based approach to narrative writing?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The fact that writing problems still exist among students even after learning to write in school for several years is indeed a cause for concern. This study could provide us with the knowledge and insights on the changes that occur in the students' narrative writing through the use of the genre-based approach in order to address the problems and issues of writing. The findings of this research will have significant pedagogical implications to many parties such as the ESL curriculum planners, textbook writers and teachers. It would also shed some light on the implementation or application of the genre-based approach to writing among upper secondary schools students specifically in their English 1119 paper.

The findings of the current study would encourage the genre-based approach to the learning of writing to be incorporated into the secondary school English syllabus. This is because this method as well as the genre-based activities can expose and support secondary school students in their acquisition of writing. The students should be made aware that writing takes place in a social situation and therefore, their knowledge of language is anchored on the social purposes that they intend to convey as writers as well as the readers' expectations of the text. Hyland (2003) stipulates that a successfully written text should demonstrate the awareness of the variables of the context.

Besides, the genre-based approach to the teaching and learning of writing can also be implemented among secondary school students as the provision of modeling of sample texts plays a vital role in the acquisition of such skill. Chittravelu et. al (1995) claims that through the models, the students could

benefit from them since they are able to get clear ideas with regards to what is expected in their writing. These models enable the students to gain access and be provided with opportunities to understand the ways of communication in a certain genre. The students will learn to reflect on the social contexts of writing and also to consider these features in their own production of texts.

If the genre-based approach to writing is introduced as an intervention for secondary school students, they should be able to increase their efforts in their acquisition of the writing skills. The joint negotiation sessions with peers and teacher would facilitate and enable the students to analyze and apply the knowledge regarding writing within a safe and less threatening environment. The support and scaffolding made available through the cooperative activities could help students to acquire and be skilled at writing.

Finally, it would be recommended that the genre-based approach to writing, specifically one designed based on the principles of the teaching-learning cycle, be utilized in secondary schools in Malaysia. Hence, it is significant that educators in Malaysia look into the application of this method as one of the many measures to strengthen secondary school students' abilities in writing in order for them to be prepared for their future tertiary education as well as for the working environment.

1. 6 Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations in order to investigate the change in students' narrative writing abilities through the implementation of the genre-based approach to writing.

The first limitation concerns the participants of the study. These 12 participants were selected using the purposive sampling technique for the researcher intended to intentionally select participants that best represent the population of the school. The participants who participated in the research were chosen based on the scores they obtained for their PT3 examinations. However, for the purposes of this research, it is important to note that participants who scored below 6 marks for their essay writing in the PT3 English paper were not considered as these candidates were considered very weak writers and faced many difficulties in writing. The consideration was only given to those candidates who were categorized as weak, satisfactory, good and excellent categories of writers as per the marking criteria set for PT3 writing. Therefore, due to the sampling method employed by the researcher, the conclusions drawn from the results and findings of this research could not be generalized to the population. Similarly, the generally small sample size also meant that the results of this study cannot be generalized.

The second limitation is with regards to the text features focused in this research. Based on the research objectives and research questions, the researcher of this study aimed to examine and investigate the schematic structure and transitivity of narrative writing. However, as discussed in the previous chapters, in addition to the structure and the incorporation of appropriate process types, the features and variables affecting narrative writing include the readers' expectations as well as the mode and tenor of the register of a narrative writing. With the focus placed only on the schematic structure and use of process types, the improvements displayed by the participants in the current study are only limited to the two aspects tested.

Furthermore, although the interrater reliability of this study showed that the scores assigned to the participants' pre and post intervention narrative essays were reliable, the assessors could be influenced by other features of the narrative writing when assessing the narrative essays. As this research only assessed the schematic structure and transitivity of the participants' narrative writing, the assessors were probably influenced by other aspects of narrative writing such as the cohesion and coherent markers found in narrative writing, which are not assessed in this study. This could influence the scores awarded by the assessors thus proving to be a limitation.

1. 7 Operational definitions.

These are the definitions and explanations of some of the terms used in this research to avoid any confusion.

1.7.1 Genre-based approach

Hyland (2007, 2013) defines genre as a group of texts which share similar discoursal features and language that are easily identifiable by the members of the community. Each genre has distinctive features such as purpose, overall structure, linguistic features and are shared by members of certain cultures, which separate it from other genres (Hyland, 2013). Hence, genre is a communicative process that negotiates meanings for achieving purposes in social context and the genre-based approach places greater emphasis on the social context in which writing is produced. It is important that writing be done to meet the expectations of a genre as it increases the chances of the reader interpreting the writer's purposes for Hyland (2013) stresses that a text becomes coherent through the reader's background knowledge and

interpretative skills. This is because linguistic knowledge through the genre-based approach, is used as a means to achieve certain social purposes in a given context or situation (Badger & White, 2000). I will draw on Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (hereafter known as SFL) theory which emphasizes on the relationship between language and its function in a social setting (Cheng, 2008). Hyland (2004) also claims that by describing the typical features of a genre, students were provided with clear options for writing which will help them to create texts that are well-formed and appropriate to the readers. Language should be seen as a resource for making meaning in a certain context rather than as a set of fixed rules and structures (Hyland, 2004). Therefore, this study will particularly focus on the conventions of texts and help students to understand why they are writing a text (purpose), who are they writing for (audience), and how to write a text (organization). The purposes of genres and the schematic structures of the genres will be explicitly taught and stressed upon (Hyland, 2004). In short, for the purposes of this research, genre-based approach is defined as the explicit teaching of a genre to enable students to understand the purposes, audience and organization of a text in order to write narrative essays.

1.7.2 Narrative writing.

Narrative writing is chosen for this study because it is a fundamental genre for several advanced academic genres. Macken-Horarik (2002) states the social purpose of a narrative is to entertain, amuse or to reflect an experience which can be achieved by introducing the readers to individual characters who have experienced problems and how they overcome it. Therefore, a narrative writing instruction based on the SFL theory should

consist of rhetorical purposes, textual structures and language. In order to realize the social purposes of a narrative, the schematic structures consist of abstract, orientation, complication, evaluation, resolution and coda (Cheng, 2008). Similarly, according to Labov and Waletzky's Narrative Structure (1967), narrative essays consist of six parts which are abstract, orientation, complication action, result of resolution, evaluation and coda. These parts or structures enable the writers to write narrative essays in order to achieve the goal of communicating the ideas to their audiences. Cheng (2008) also specifies the language features for narrative writing include specific, individualized characters, inclusion of physical circumstances to create the reality of the world of the characters, as well as distinguishing word choices for thinking and doing processes. Halliday (1994) claims that experiences in the world can be represented by a set of process types with the relevant grammatical system called transitivity. By understanding such system, choices are made by the writers to help the readers to reconstruct the content for the events in the narrative. The writers would also be able to use explicit conjunctions and various cohesive devices in narrative writing. For the purpose of this study, the research will focus on the schematic structure of a narrative writing and also highlight how students develop their use of transitivity. Thus, narrative writing is defined as writers distinguishing suitable use of transitivity in order to write a text on characters experiencing problems and solving them through a structure from the setting, initiating event, complication or conflict, resolution and coda.

1.7.3 Schematic structure

According to the Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL) theory, the production of a text is influenced by variables such as the context of situation and the context of culture. Schematic structure of a genre is one of the important aspects in the context of culture. Schematic structure refers to the series of steps or stages established by social conventions in order to accomplish a transaction or an interaction. Eggins (1994) defines schematic structure as the staged, step-by-step organisation of a genre. Martin (1984) stipulates that these organised stages are a way of getting from point A to point B in the way that a given culture carries out the function of particular genre in question, thus representing the positive contribution genres makes to a text. As explained further in Chapter 2, the register of a text can be mediated through the realization of genre. This is because relevant details regarding the register or the context of situation can be filled through common or typical staging organizations, which is also known as schematic structure. For register and genre are realized through language, the patterns of meanings, words and structures allow for the identification of the register and genre of a particular text. This is because different genre has its own accompanying schematic structure, all of which are made up of different functionally-related elements and stages. As the main purpose of a text is to convey messages, a staged organization or schematic structure plays a significant role in ensuring that meaning is conveyed. Martin (1984) points out that we are not able to make meaning all at once, therefore requiring multiple stages which contribute a part to the overall meaning of a genre. Thus, the knowledge of the constituent structure of a genre enables the writer to identify the goal and purpose of a text

within a community. For the purpose of this study, schematic structure is defined as a staged, goal-oriented, purposeful organization within a genre of writing in order to convey meaning.

1.7.4 Transitivity system

Likewise, transitivity system is also equally essential in a particular genre. As one of the key variables in the context of situation or register, transitivity has significant impacts and influences on the production of a text. Eggins (1994) states that each register variable affects language use, thus enabling the identification of parts of the language system that are concerned with realizing each type of contextual information in a written text. According to the SFL theory, transitivity falls under the Field category which details the experiential meaning of a text, as explained in Chapter 2 of this study. According to Halliday (1976), our experiences in the world can be represented and encoded through processes, which reflect the ideational component of writing. This notion derives from the social function that language serves in expressing our experience of processes and the participants in them (Halliday, 1976). In order for a topic to be conveyed in a written text, some parts of the grammatical system are used such as patterns of processes or verbs, participants or nouns as well as circumstances, which are reflected through the use of prepositional phrases. These features of a clause contribute to the linguistic representation of the writer's experience. Transitivity is then described as the grammatical patterns employed to express "who is doing what to whom when where why and how" (Eggins, 1994). Halliday (1976) defined transitivity as the grammar of processes, the participants and the attendant circumstances or circumstantial features associated with them. This means writers make

choices with regards to process types and participants to encode their experiential reality in their written text. Transitivity patterns also support the schematic structure of a genre. Eggins (1994) explains that boundaries between each element of the schematic structure relate closely to the changes in the writer's transitivity choices. Hence, in accordance to the aim of this research, transitivity system is defined as the writer's patterns of processes in encoding experiential reality and creating boundaries between each stage in the schematic structure of a written text.

1.8 Summary

In short, this research intends to study the effects of the implementation of the genre-based approach on students' narrative writing, especially in the schematic structure and use of transitivity. The findings of this study are hoped to raise awareness among all shareholders, specifically ESL teachers in Malaysia on the need to revolutionize writing instructions in the classroom in order to help with students' writing skills and performance.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

Writing is a reflective tool which allows the writer to make meaning through externalization and remaking of meaning (Applebee, 1984). Chitravelu et al. (1995) state that writing is a very complex skill which requires the writer to consider many aspects such as the subject matter, purpose, sense of audience, thinking skills, organizational skills, writing process, mechanics and language. Writing is also personal and interactive, embedded in the cultural and social settings which create a relationship between the writers and readers to achieve its purpose (Hyland, 2013). As writing is a skill that involves the consideration of many aspects and can be a reflection of one's language abilities and proficiency, writing is often tested in language examinations (Sabariah & Chan, 2008). The complexities of writing could lead to students' poor performance in writing. Writing is a skill that has been proven to develop later in the arc of language learning and takes a longer time to fully develop in a learner (Vygotsky, 1987). According to Sharifah Nor et al. (2010), the natural order in language learning begins with listening, followed by speaking and reading and writing is the last skill to develop. This shows that writing is not an easy skill to master because it develops further along a more advanced stage of language development. As writing is a highly complex process, it proves to be difficult for many students to acquire this skill (Hinkel, 2006) and it may take years before the students master the complexity of writing. These complexities have contributed to the students' inabilities and difficulties in mastering writing.

Hence, the complexities of writing should be addressed through the teaching of writing in order to enable students to learn the various aspects to write well. However, despite the focus given to ESL writing in Malaysia, the writing abilities of many secondary school students are not satisfactory. Writing has been identified by the Ministry of Education as one of the main reasons that contribute to the fact that students fail to obtain high grades in examinations as writing is a task accorded with the highest mark (Jalaluddin et al., 2011).

This chapter discusses the importance of writing in the Malaysian context as well as the three approaches to writing which are product, process and genre-based approaches. The theoretical and conceptual frameworks of the genre-based approach are also discussed in relation to the objectives of the current study.

2.1 Writing in Malaysia

In Malaysia, English is widely used and taught as a second language. The underlying agenda of the 10th Malaysian Blueprint aims to improve the teaching of English with a new curriculum which focuses on five skills namely reading, speaking, listening, writing and grammar. The plan of the Malaysian Education Blueprint (PPPM) 2013 – 2025 intends to achieve a 70% pass rate in the SPM English 1119 paper with a minimum credit (MOE, 2015). It is evident that writing remains an important skill in language learning and the ability to write well would prove to be an added advantage for the students. The current English Secondary School Curriculum Standard focuses on 2 main objectives regarding the area of writing. Abilities to communicate and organise information, feelings and opinions clearly as well as to plan, draft and edit work

appropriately by using suitable registers are among some of the curriculum targets that should be achieved by students by the end of the year (Curriculum Development Unit, 2018). The Malaysian Ministry of Education also stated that by the end of secondary education, students should be able to communicate intelligibly through print and digital media (Curriculum Development Unit, 2018). As emphasis is placed on the importance of comprehensible communication and effective use of language forms, register as well as style, there is a need for teaching and learning methods that are dynamic and focus on these key aspects in the efforts of realizing the objectives of the curriculum standard and syllabus. Therefore, there needs to be a shift in the approaches regarding the teaching and learning of writing among secondary school students. Writing is and will be a basic skill that must be mastered by all students in the Malaysian English Language Curriculum (MOE, 2003) as good writing skills are important for students to excel academically and for future career opportunities (Chow, 2007).

2.2 Introduction to Teaching and Learning of Writing.

2.2.1 Product Approach to Writing.

The first approach to writing which is the product approach mainly places emphasis on the structure and form of the language in writing. This approach sees writing as a coherent arrangement of structure based on a set of rules (Hyland, 2013). The role of the teacher is to teach and provide specific linguistic forms and grammar structure to the students so that they are able to be competent and use these forms correctly in their writing. Drilling and grammar exercises are major parts of the lessons as students are able to

practise the forms taught by the teacher correctly. Elashi (2013) states that the traditional approach to writing places emphasis on the final product, the students' written work and writing instruction is primarily focused on producing accurate sentence structures and grammar. Through the product approach, the writing tasks involve little composition skills and every student would produce the similar written work (Chitravelu et al., 1995). An example of the product approach to writing is when the teacher provides a model of the written product and students are encouraged to mimic the model so that they are able to produce the similar written product. The teacher draws the students' attention to the structure such as the need for an introduction, three paragraphs of body and a conclusion found in the model and encourages the students to write using the similar structure in their written work. The teacher also focuses on the need of the thesis statement and supporting statements which makes up a paragraph. In this teacher-centered approach, the students imitate the model and attempt to create a written work similar to the model provided. The main role of the teacher is to focus on error correction and identify students' control of language (Hyland, 2013). Hence, the emphasis of this approach is on the final product, the written work by the students based on their imitation of the model provided by the teacher with as little errors as possible.

Hyland (2013) claims that though many students can construct accurate sentences, they may not necessarily have the ability to produce appropriate written text through this approach. In the context of the product approach to writing where error identification and accuracy are placed with the highest importance, students become focused on producing written work which is error-free and 'good' when compared to surface-level set of criteria. Students

become merely copiers through this approach. Thulasi et al., (2015) asserts that this method resulted in the failure to assimilate critical thinking as students replicate the model, thus making them more inclined to become dependent writers. This could also lead to plagiarism tendencies among the students for they do not feel guilty about taking others' work without acknowledgement. However, ESL teachers in Malaysia rely heavily on this method due to the stress places on examinations to measure academic achievements of students (Koo, 2008). This scenario motivates the teachers to instruct and model writing which focused on accurate language and structure. Students are provided with writing instructions that places emphasis on the expectation of accurate language from students. Luchini (2003) exclaimed that through the product approach to writing, students learn that they are only operators of the learnt language structure and the teachers are merely editors or proofreaders whose only interest is in the linguistic language accuracy. This would suppress the students' creativity from growing. Then, Chow (2007) claims that Malaysian ESL teachers' experience of learning writing similarly influence the use of the product approach in their teaching. He stated that most ESL teachers in Malaysia learnt to write in the traditional product approach (Chow, 2007). Hence, it is no surprise that focus is placed on linguistic features in these writing classrooms, causing students' tendencies to write what they think their teachers would approve (Tan & Miller, 2007).

The argument against the product approach to writing is the fact that students do not get the opportunity to learn how successful writers employ various processes in order to write. This is because, through this approach, writing is seen as a context where students practice the accurate use of