THE EFFECTIVENESS OF COLLABORATIVE WRITING OF NARRATIVE ESSAYS AMONG MALAYSIAN LOWER SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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by

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LIST OF SYMBOLS

p	p-value
F	F-statistic
d.f.	Degree of freedom
N	Number of students
A	Alpha
Z	z-score

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANCOVA	Analysis of Covariance
CV	Curriculum Vitae
CWES	Collaboratively-Written Essay Scripts
CWT	Collaborative Writing Technique
DSKP	Dokumen Standard Kurikulum Pentaksiran
DV	Dependent Variable
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
EPRD	Educational Planning and Research Division
ESL	English as a Second Language
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
HOT	Higher Order Thinking
ICC	Intra Class Correlation Coefficient
IQR	Interquartile Range
IV	Independent Variable
JEPeM	Human Research Ethics Committee of USM
KBSM	Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah
KSSM	Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah
KSSR	Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
M	Mean
max	Maximum
min	Minimum
NVivo	A qualitative data analysis computer software package produced by QSR International
Para	Paragraph
PMR	Penilaian Menengah Rendah
PT3	Pentaksiran Tingkatan 3
RQ	Research Question
S.D.	Standard Deviation
SAT	Scholastic Assessment Test (formerly Scholastic Aptitude Test)
SBELC	Standard-Based English Language Curriculum for Secondary Schools

SE	Standard Error
Sig.	Significant Level
SISC+	School Improvement Specialist Coach
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
SPM	Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
Std	Standard
TWI	Traditional Writing Instruction
UK	United Kingdom
UPSR	Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah
USA	United States of America
USM	Universiti Sains Malaysia
WP	Writing Practice

KEBERKESANAN PENULISAN KOLABORATIF DALAM ESEI NARATIF DALAM KALANGAN PELAJAR MENENGAH RENDAH DI MALAYSIA

ABSTRAK

Pengajaran penulisan tradisional (PPT) dan teknik penulisan kolaboratif (TPK) telah digunakan dalam kajian kuasi eksperimen, yang melibatkan sejumlah 125 pelajar sekolah menengah rendah dari dua buah sekolah di Malaysia. Sebuah sekolah menggunakan PPT manakala sebuah sekolah yang lain menggunakan TPK. Pengumpulan data adalah selama lima bulan. Fokus kajian adalah untuk meneroka keberkesanan TPK dalam meningkatkan prestasi esei naratif para pelajar. TPK ialah teknik pembelajaran berpusatkan pelajar yang merangkumi perkembangan pelbagai kemahiran apabila pelajar terlibat dalam tugasan menulis dari segi mental, fizikal, sosial dan emosi. Pelajar bekerja dalam kumpulan lima atau enam ahli untuk menulis esei naratif secara rangkaian. Mereka membaca, memikir, membincang, menganalisis dan mengarang perenggan untuk menyumbang kepada perkembangan satu esei naratif yang lengkap. Satu kitar lengkap struktur TPK 6-perenggan ialah hasil akhir penyertaan kolaboratif mereka. Kaedah gabungan rekabentuk penyelidikan membekalkan pengumpulan dan analisis data yang komprehensif. Secara kuantitatif, terdapat perbezaan signifikan skor esei pasca ujian antara kumpulan eksperimen dan kumpulan kawalan. Secara kualitatif, pengaruh TPK dalam kumpulan eksperimen dilihat dalam skrip esei yang ditulis secara kolaboratif dan pendapat pelajar terhadap TPK dalam temubual. Kesan TPK atas skrip esei kumpulan eksperimen mengemukakan tiga tema utama; (1) penggunaan bahasa dan idea yang berulangan, (2) peringkat pembinaan bahagian plot dalam cerita dan (3) kesinambungan antara perenggan yang berterusan atau terganggu. Sementara itu, pengalaman pelajar

terhadap TPK dikategorikan ke dalam dua tema utama; (1) pengalaman positif dan (2) pengalaman negatif. Secara keseluruhan, hasil kajian ini adalah positif terhadap penggunaan TPK. Hasil kajian dalam penggunaan TPK mempunyai implikasi pedagogi untuk kelas di Malaysia serta cadangan bagi penyelidikan masa hadapan.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF COLLABORATIVE WRITING OF NARRATIVE ESSAYS AMONG MALAYSIAN LOWER SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

ABSTRACT

The traditional writing instruction (TWI) and the collaborative writing technique (CWT) were employed in this quasi-experimental study, which involved a total of 125 lower secondary students from two schools in Malaysia. One school used the TWI while the other school used the CWT. Data collection was over a period of five months. The research focus was to explore the effectiveness of the CWT in enhancing students' writing performance in narrative essays. The CWT is a learner centred instruction that encompasses the development of multiple skills as students mentally, physically, socially and emotionally engage in the writing task. Students work in groups of five or six members to do chain writing of a narrative essay. They read, think, discuss, analyse and write their paragraph to contribute to the development of a full narrative essay by the group. The complete cycle of a 6-paragraph CWT structure is the end result of their collaborative participation. The mixed methods research design provided comprehensive data collection and data analysis. Quantitatively, there was a significant difference in the post-test essay scores of the experimental group as compared to the control group. Qualitatively, the influence of the CWT in the experimental group was seen in the collaboratively written essay scripts and students' interview responses on the CWT. The effects of the CWT on the experimental group essay scripts revealed three major themes; (1) repeated use of language and ideas, (2) plot development stages in the story and (3) maintained or disrupted continuity between paragraphs. Meanwhile, students' experiences of the CWT were categorised into two major themes; (1) positive experiences and (2)

negative experiences. Overall, the findings of the study were positive towards the use of the CWT. The findings on the use of the CWT have pedagogical implications for the Malaysian classroom as well as recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Introduction

Listening, speaking, reading and writing are the four skills emphasized in language teaching. To master a language, all four skills are equally important. In addition writing has been a focus in academic institutions especially for written examination purposes. Watanabe (2016) stated that "English language writing is important in university entrance examinations in Japan and influences what learners and teachers do in English classes. This is especially noticeable in secondary education in Japan" (p.1). Additionally, studies that focus on the writing skill and ways to enhance writing are significant since they are reflections of students' learning ability in the first and second language (Marzban & Jalali, 2016).

Similarly, the importance of the writing skill is evident in Malaysian public examinations at both primary and secondary school levels. To obtain a pass in the English language paper, students must perform well in the writing component that constitutes a high percentage of the overall paper. Hence, writing is emphasised in school to ensure that students secure a good grade in the summative national public examinations in Malaysia; i.e. *Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah (UPSR)* in Year 6, *Pentaksiran Tingkatan 3 (PT3)* which replaced *Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR)* in 2014 at Form 3 and *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM)* in Form 5.

Writing is undoubtedly an important skill to be acquired as noted in many studies. Writing sets the cognitive processes in motion that enable students to develop their knowledge, thus playing an essential role as a tool for further learning (Ortega & Fuentes, 2015). Harris, Graham, Friedlander, and Laud (2013) argued that writing is

crucial in demonstrating students' knowledge in the classroom, and if not acquired, may restrict opportunities for both postsecondary education and employment.

Writing is a complex skill and challenging task for students. Many students fare poorly in writing and experience difficulty with writing (Harris et al., 2013). Many studies on writing techniques have been carried out in trying to improve students' writing skills such as Self-Regulated Strategy Development (Harris et al., 2013), metacognitive strategy in English writing (Chen & Xiao, 2016), integrated writing strategy (Cho & Lee, 2016) and strategy-focused writing instruction (Torrance, Fidalgo, & Robledo, 2015). Yet, writing is still a struggle among a major segment of the student population. Research on strategies in developing students' writing ability is encouraged, to build a variety of writing programs that may suit students in varying circumstances (Troia et al., 2015). The use of different writing techniques is an attempt to provide different alternatives in improving students' writing performance. Reviews on past collaborative writing instruction have been found to be successful in developing students' writing effectiveness (Ali, 2017; Chen, 2015; Ibrahim et al., 2015; Khatib & Meihami, 2015; Mirazi & Mahmoudi, 2016; Rahmat, 2015; Shafie, Maesin, Osman, Nayan, & Mansor, 2010; Yang, 2014).

Against this background on the potentials of collaborative writing instruction the present study would like to propose the use of the Collaborative Writing Technique to address the lack of writing skills among the participants of the study. The Collaborative Writing Technique proposed is pupil-centred and has cooperative learning involving team work. The objective is to improve students' writing scores by engaging them collectively. The idea for this technique came from a "story-building" game used by the researcher with the students at her school. The game was not only

fun but also able to develop anticipation and get students to have a more analytical view of continuing the plot of a story to completion. Looking at the fun and benefits of the activity, the idea of the game was incorporated into the writing lessons in this study with suitable adaptations. Termed as the Collaborative Writing Technique or CWT thereafter, students expanded on storylines together in a sequential process in group work. Students' experiences on the CWT were also gathered to study its effectiveness.

1.2   Background of the Study

Beginning 2017, the Standard-Based Curriculum for Secondary Schools or popularly known as *Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah* (*KSSM*) came into enforcement with the first batch of Form One students in the Malaysian secondary schools. *KSSM* will gradually replace *Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah* (*KBSM*) as students progress at each level of their secondary education. These students have been following the *Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah (KSSR)* syllabus since they started their Primary One education in 2011. After six years of primary education and having sat for the new *UPSR* format in 2016, this batch of students continue their lower secondary education in Form One at Malaysian secondary schools under the new *KSSM* curriculum. The introduction of *KSSM* is in tandem with the National Education Blueprint 2013-2025.

> The Malaysia Education Blueprint evaluates the performance of the existing Malaysian education system with considerations of historical starting points against international benchmarks. The Blueprint also offers a vision of the education system and student aspirations that Malaysia both needs and deserves, and suggests 11 strategic and

operational shifts that would be required to achieve that vision (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2013, p. E-1).

For English language at secondary level, the Standard-Based English Language Curriculum for Secondary Schools (SBELC) or *KSSM Bahasa Inggeris* is introduced. SBELC is a progression from the Standard-Based English Language Curriculum for Primary Schools and is developed on the basis of accessibility, quality, equity, flexibility and do-ability. The SBELC document encompasses the Content Standards, Learning Standards, assessment and pedagogical approach. Currently, the Form One English Language teachers use SBELC as a reference guide to design their lessons by planning appropriate Teaching Organisers for classroom instruction.

Among others, SBELC focuses on activities that involve pupil-centeredness and cooperative learning, which is outlined in *Dokumen Standard Kurikulum dan Pentaksiran* (*DSKP*) *KSSM* Form One English Language:

> In pupil-centred classrooms, the learning tasks or activities are geared towards discovery learning. Pupils involve in tasks that require inquiry learning and collaborating with one another…Group work is recommended for activities or tasks to familiarise pupils with the idea of working in teams. To ensure that every group member is productive and responsible, it is recommended that the size of groups is kept small. (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2016, p.13)

In Malaysia, English is taught as a second language. The ESL classroom which include the writing classroom in Malaysia commonly practices a teacher-centred approach and requires a paradigm shift (Ibrahim et al., 2015; Rahmat, 2015). Lately, this conventional method of teaching, especially in the writing classroom, is gradually

being replaced globally with many different learner-centred approaches such as blended scaffolding strategies using Facebook (Rosa & Vital, 2016), language games (Saha & Singh, 2016), and collaborative writing (Begum, 2016). The researcher hopes to introduce the CWT, a student-centred writing instruction in response to the SBELC and the Malaysia Education Blueprint (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2013).

Moreover, writing an essay is definitely not an easy task and is dreaded by students (Abbasian & Bahmani, 2014; Saddler, Moran, Graham, & Harris, 2004). Every time an essay writing task is given, students quietly write alone, having to submit the essay at the end of the lesson and they "see writing as a chore" (Rahmat, 2014, p.2), which is often a personal activity. The writing process becomes an unpleasant experience with students encountering difficulties in finishing an essay. "In Malaysia, the ESL writing classes are seen as students attempting to write about ideas and issues students neither are vaguely aware of nor interested in a language they are almost unfamiliar with" (Rahmat, 2015, p.124).

The following is a glimpse into the Malaysian ESL writing classroom. Students have been writing essays since primary school, particularly guided essays with picture(s), and words or phrases provided, based on the standard *UPSR* format essay question. From the researcher's experience as a secondary school teacher, Form One students who come into the first year of secondary school, are expected to be able to write an essay without the teacher's guidance, as it has been taught and learnt at the primary level. Ismail and Maasum (2008) acknowledged that "most teachers and educators are in dubiety of the students' ability to acquire knowledge on their own" (p.404). Besides, writing exercises provided by teachers also usually involve very little effort from the students which is evident as "secondary classroom teachers report

frequently giving writing assignments that require little analysis, interpretation, or actual composing (i.e., abbreviated responses, worksheets)" (Applebee & Langer, 2006, 2011; Kiuhara, Graham, & Hawken, 2009, as cited in Troia et al., 2015, p.293).

In accordance to *KSSM DSKP* for Form One English Language *(Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia*, 2016), narrative writing practices are part of the English language activities suggested in the new *KSSM* Form One English Language Textbook, published for *Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia* (Teo, Tan, Parasuraman, & Azman, 2016). Thus, the text type focused in this research is the narrative essay, which involves plot development and storyline. Narrative essays, which are also commonly known as story essays, are the first type of essays introduced to students. At Malaysian lower secondary level, guided narrative essay questions are usually provided in three different ways. Firstly, students are free to write a story based on the picture(s) provided in a question, which is known as pictorial composition. Secondly, instead of pictures, students are provided with short notes, in the form of words or phrases. This second type is also known as note expansion of guided narrative essays. Thirdly, guidance is given in a combination of picture(s) and notes.

At *UPSR*, students are tested only on narrative essays. When these students advance to secondary school at Form One, they are initially instructed to write narrative essays. The introduction of the other types of essays occurs gradually. At *PT3*, students are only required to write one essay. The essay can be a narrative essay, speech, article, argumentation, report, informal letter or formal letter. Students do not have a choice in selecting the type of essay they wish to write as only one essay question would be given in the exam.

The introduction of the CWT in narrative writing among Form One students is to create an enriching and fun learning environment, with the aim of improving students' writing ability in a student-centred classroom. The CWT uses face-to-face interaction in a physical setting of a conventional classroom. The study does not involve the use of technology and online learning environment.

1.3   Statement of the Problem

Although Malaysian students have been taught the English Language for approximately 11 years at national type schools, yet they have been unable to achieve a reasonable level of competency in the language (Azman, 2016; Jalaludin, Awal, & Bakar, 2008; Pandian, 1996). Rashidah (2005) (as cited in Maarof and Murat, 2013) further supported that "Despite learning English for many years, many of these students remain weak in the English language, especially in their writing skills" (p.47). In her study, Azman (2016) concurred that learning English for a long duration, even since young does not justify the mastery of the language. She said that "even though it is established that a Malaysian child is taught the English language from the age of 6, early English language education does not guarantee competent acquisition of the language, as evident in the Malaysian scenario" (p.66).

The EPU's (2016) report (as cited in Azman, 2016) supported that less than 50% of the students who had completed six years of primary education in 2013 were literate in the English language. "This problem has increasingly become critical in the current years with regards to graduate unemployment, where low English proficiency is cited (56%) as one of the main reasons for not hiring (JobStreet.Com)" (Azman, 2016, p.66). Hence, English proficiency is still a major concern in Malaysia.

The low English proficiency was also evident when the government postponed plans of the compulsory pass in English for the *SPM* examination that was scheduled to be enforced in 2016. Education Minister Datuk Seri Mahdzhir Khalid said the conclusion was based on data and a special simulation study based on the *SPM* results from 2011 to 2014 and that the postponement was made to provide space for teachers, pupils and related parties to better prepare themselves ("Compulsory pass in English *SPM* postponed," 2016). In 2013, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, who was then Education Minister, announced that making English a must-pass subject in *SPM* was part of the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025's second implementation wave, which started in 2016 (Khor, 2015). The need to revert on the decision to make English a compulsory pass in *SPM* was very likely due to the poor English language proficiency among students in Malaysia.

As mentioned earlier essay writing skill is important and tested in major examinations. The essay score can affect the overall grade of the English paper since it carries a significant weightage. In Malaysia, the *UPSR* English essay is marked upon 25, *PT3* English essay marked upon 30, while *SPM* directed writing (35 marks) and continuous writing (50 marks) in English Paper 1, with a total of 85 marks. Maarof and Murat (2013) pointed out that since the writing performance remains weak among candidates, they are unable to accomplish their task effectively and contribute to a better overall English grade. This was seen in the analysis of the national examination performance by the Examination Division, Malaysian Ministry of Education (Malaysian Examinations Council, 2009 as cited in Maarof and Murat, 2013) that "less than twenty percent (20%) of the Malaysian Certificate of Education or *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (*SPM*) candidates had obtained distinctions (Grade A) for the standardized national *SPM* English 1119 paper" (p.47). "Since the writing section of the *SPM*

English 1119 makes up a larger percentage of the examination total score, the low scores obtained for the writing task had affected the overall performance of the students for the English paper" (Maarof & Murat, 2013, p.47).

Conversely a low English proficiency level contributes to poor writing performance among students. Chitravelu, Sithamparam, and Teh (1995) emphasized that most Malaysians are less proficient in writing and have problems in accomplishing their written tasks satisfactorily. The present study concerns the writing performance of students, which is a focus in assessment, both in the classroom as well as examination. ESL classrooms usually witness poor writing performance among students, which prompted many studies to be conducted. The fact that many researchers (Challob, Bakar, & Latif, 2016; Chow, 2007; Lee, Yunus, & Embi, 2016; Sultana, 2016; Tan, Emerson, & White, 2017) have been trying to find ways to help improve learners' writing ability in English language in various contexts like ESL, EFL and L1 indicates students' poor writing performance. Besides, Chow (2007) also lamented that scarcity in research in writing in our local context has led to the uncertainty of the effectiveness of writing instruction employed in schools. Hence, it is important to understand students' experiences and involvement in the writing approaches employed.

Writing is a complex cognitive activity comprising a number of processes and strategies (Maarof & Murat, 2013). The key to producing good writing relies on the type and amount of strategies used, the reason for the use and how the students regulated the strategies to solve the writing problems encountered, like generating ideas or for revising what has been written (Abdullah, 2009). Unfortunately, the lecture method is still being widely practised, which might account for students' poor

performance in writing (Tan et al., 2017). Ismail and Maasum (2008) concurred that due to the rigidity of the teacher-centred approach used widely in Malaysia, students are treated like empty vessels that need to be filled to trigger their cognitive ability. Shafie et al. (2010) also discussed the significance to shift away from the typical teacher-centred milieu in college classrooms specially in the current globalized era. Besides, the newly introduced *KSSM* in 2017 that encourages student-centred activities as stated in the Form One English Language *DSKP*, also indicates the lack of student-focused classrooms in the current education system. Moreover, in a survey conducted by Tan (2006) at Universiti Putra Malaysia it was discovered that both lecturers as well as students displayed the least preference for the lecture method instruction and the lecture method was the least effective (as cited in Tan et al., 2017). Thus, it is time to emphasize learner centred writing instruction.

The Form One Malaysian ESL students' writing performance is measured using the *PT3* Writing Marking Criteria, which involves descriptors that consist of task fulfilment, language accuracy, organisation and development of ideas, sentence structures, vocabulary and creativity. Scripts are awarded scores holistically by applying the "best fit" principle in the 5-band mark scheme *(Lembaga Peperiksaan Malaysia*, 2014). Hence, students' writing performance relates to these descriptors. The writing task is a challenge for ESL students as they will not only need to show a good command of the language but also develop an interesting and organised story.

According to Tan et al. (2017), writing remains difficult even among good students as it involves a culmination of multiple abilities that include linguistic, cognitive, rhetorical, social skills and knowledge, and most importantly, the right feeling plus attitude towards the act of writing. Indeed, all required skills and abilities

cannot be taught by one particular writing technique alone. More writing techniques are needed to further improve the situation as postulated by Maarof and Murat (2013) that students need to be encouraged to use various strategies in improving their writing. They also mentioned that writing strategy training for ESL students is important. Likewise, Torrance et al. (2015) in their study found that strategy-focused writing instruction is effective in developing students' writing performance. Therefore, this study attempts to provide an alternative writing instruction to solve the generally poor writing performance in school.

1.4   Research Objectives

A mixed methods research design was used to investigate if the employment of the CWT would enhance students' narrative writing scores. The students' collaboratively-written essay scripts were analysed to explain the influence of the CWT on the writing processes. Apart from that, students' experiences were also explored in regard to the CWT. The effectiveness of the writing technique and its acceptance by students were closely studied and examined for the benefit of future writing classrooms.

In short, the research objectives are as follows:

1. To investigate the effectiveness of the Collaborative Writing Technique on students' narrative writing scores.

2. To explore the features of narrative essays written using the Collaborative Writing Technique that influence students' writing scores.

3. To find out students' experiences using the Collaborative Writing Technique.

1.5   Research Questions (RQ)

Three research questions are formulated based on the research objectives of the study. These research questions function as the foundation of the study and are consistent with the methodology chosen. The research questions are as follows:

1. Is there a significant difference in the post-test writing scores between the experimental group which uses the Collaborative Writing Technique and the control group which uses the traditional writing instruction?

2. What are the features of the narrative essays written using the Collaborative Writing Technique?

3. What are students' experiences using the Collaborative Writing Technique?

The quantitative approach is applicable in answering RQ1 which requires inferential statistics. The null hypothesis formulated for RQ1 is as follows:

H_{01} There is no significant difference in the post-test writing scores of the narrative essays between the control and experimental groups.

1.6   Rationale of the Study

Writing is one of the four skills taught to students at school and is usually a part of language assessment. Although writing has been taught and practised throughout the students' schooling years since Primary One, students still encounter problems. Despite the many studies (e.g. R. Abdullah & Mohamed, 2015; Ali, 2017; Annamalai, Tan, & Abdullah, 2016; Challob, Bakar, & Latif, 2016; Chambers & Yunus, 2017; Kean et al., 2016) conducted to help students improve their writing skills, writing problems persist. The mastery of writing skill involves multiple

segments that require equal attention. Writing is complex and demands more than language ability. Writing includes content, creativity, logical reasoning and organisation. Hence, it is indeed necessary to design a variety of writing techniques in effective writing instruction and appeal to all types of students. Research is usually carried out only on one particular subject area or focus, thus solely referring to one writing segment of the writing mastery and this will not help in enhancing writing performance in a holistic manner (Abbasian & Bahmani, 2014; Challob et al., 2016; Hussin, Abdullah, Ismail, & Soo, 2015; Liu, 2013; Riddell, 2015). It is not easy to master all aspects in one writing technique, as the students will not only get confused but may also not be able to acquire anything at all due to its complexity.

This study is expected to provide an insight into a CWT that is aimed to improve students' writing scores. The CWT is incorporated with the intent to develop students' thinking to build a meaningful story in sequence, culminating in a 6-paragraph structure. The CWT is worthy of investigation because it gives the teacher a practical writing technique that can help students write within class time.

The findings of this study are expected to equip school teachers with an effective writing technique that can be carried out easily in Malaysian ESL classrooms, the majority of which have yet to be completely equipped with web-based technology. The use of innovative writing techniques is always anticipated by students as compared to the usual tedious and mundane individual writing exercise. It is hoped that the CWT will inspire them to write well. Furthermore, a study on writing is timely for Form One students who are at the beginning of secondary school education. A good writing technique lays the foundation for further learning in writing which is required all the way to tertiary education.

1.7   Scope of the Study

This is a quasi-experimental study which aims to investigate the effectiveness of the CWT in students' narrative writing scores in the Malaysian ESL classrooms. The findings of the study should therefore be interpreted in the experimental condition, where the CWT is explicitly carried out. The focus of analysis is on the essay scripts collected during the pre-test, post-test and CWT sessions, apart from the students' views on the CWT.

Narrative essays are the focused text type written by Form One students, whose ages range between thirteen to fourteen, in two national type co-ed schools. This study focuses only on a single genre, i.e. narrative essay, which is about writing a story by developing the sequence of the plot.

A total of 360-minute English lessons was covered in the study; comprising 6 double periods. Each double period lasted for one hour. In brief, the six double lesson sessions included a pre-test, a post-test, an input/practice session and three essay writing sessions. Data collection was completed successfully throughout the course of the study, which took about 4 months.

The schedule of the study was aligned to suit the fixed school time table to ensure a smooth process of the writing lessons apart from corresponding to the plans set by the school. Due to time and administrative constraints, an average of one narrative essay was planned monthly in the course of the study to suit the Teaching Organisers pre-planned by the teachers based on the *DSKP* for the first batch of 2017 Form One *KSSM* students. Usually writing instruction is conducted on a weekly basis in ESL classrooms. However, due to the variety of text type for essay writing and the wide range of writing activities in the new *KSSM* Form One English Language

textbook, the CWT and the traditional writing instruction (TWI) for narrative essays was employed once a month in this study.

1.8   Significance of the Study

The CWT highlights the need for a change in the writing classroom. Switching from individual to collaborative learning, it instils deeper responsibility in playing their role to complete the task of accomplishing an essay as a group. Peer pressure and peer response further strengthens the learners' capacity in trying to keep up with the group's expectation and objective.

This study attempts to guide students in their narrative writing by engaging their cognitive processes that would help them to sequentially continue a story and expanding ideas according to plot development. Appropriate paragraphing in accordance to the plot development would also be eventually acquired. The mandatory CWT structure integrated in the writing process encourages students to write in six paragraphs, building a foundation towards writing free compositions or continuous essays at upper secondary level.

Besides, this study is highly supportive of the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2013), incorporating the CWT into the writing classrooms of the experimental group, establishing learner-centred environment towards the 21st century learning besides recognising the Form One English Language *KSSM DSKP* (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2016).

The study could open avenues for future writing instruction that would meet the objectives of the Malaysia Education Blueprint. Innovative writing instruction can

be integrated into *DSKP* as a guide for educators, which is timely in shifting towards a student-focused writing classroom.

The English Language School Improvement Specialist Coach (SISC+) would also benefit from this study. The CWT can be a building block towards more writing techniques that would encompass all necessary writing aspects gradually. Developing a variety of writing techniques would also enhance students' engagement and interest with the hope of reaching out to individual learners of different preferences and need. The SISC+ could use this study as a framework in working on more writing instruction to be shared with teachers at schools and to attempt in developing techniques that would comprehensively cover all segments in mastering writing skills. Taking into account the complexity of teaching and learning writing, the SISC+ can derive their future writing designs and instruction to cover all areas in teaching writing skills to improve students' writing proficiency with regards to both fluency and accuracy. This is in tandem with the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2013) which focuses on "Intensifying teacher support to ensure the written curriculum is accurately translated into classroom teaching through better teaching resources and an expanded School Improvement Specialist Coach (SISC+) role" (p.4-4).

Functioning as an evidence or source to develop and design future writing instruction and techniques, this study would be resourceful to the Ministry of Education (MOE) and Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE). The CWT could contribute to the repository of developing an evidence-based programme for writing instruction. Subsequently, the textbook writers can include these writing techniques

for use in the classrooms. Thereafter, teachers can adapt the techniques to suit their unique classroom conditions.

The findings of this study would be significant to a number of stakeholders namely, the learners, teachers, the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE). It would also be useful for the body of knowledge and further research especially for those involved in the SISC+ Coaching Programme with the MOE.

1.9 Limitations of the Study

The topic and format of the writing tasks in the study must be compliant with the Teaching Organiser scheduled by the English Language teachers at the schools. The researcher was bound by the Teaching Organiser planned and must ensure that the writing tasks prepared did not disrupt this schedule. Thus the tasks could not be carried out immediately one after another but had to be planned as one task per month of the study. The lack of continuous flow might reduce the effect of the CWT treatment.

Since the participants involved in the study were Form One students in the Malaysian school system, the *PT3* marking criteria were used to assess their narrative essays. The *PT3* marking criteria uses a holistic marking guideline that applies the "best fit" principle, which is conveyed in a 5-band marking system. The markers used the criteria as a guideline in awarding marks after first identifying the band. Although the marking criteria cover task fulfilment, development of ideas, organisation, grammar, sentence structures, vocabulary and storyline, its holistic guideline did not allow the scoring of each of these components separately. Hence, this study explored students' overall writing quality.

The study only focused on the narrative text type. Hence, the effectiveness of the CWT on other text-types cannot be determined in this study. Likewise, the study only involved Form One students and the effectiveness of the CWT is not applicable for the other levels of education.

1.10   Operational Definitions

The operational definitions of the key terms that are used in this research are as follows.

"Collaborative Writing Technique" or *"CWT"* is the type of group writing instruction employed in this study, involving five or six members. The CWT, the treatment in the experimental group, is carried out as scheduled once a month throughout the study. Similar to chain writing, students practise a clockwise rotation pattern when writing the essay in a sequential format. All members' contribution is equal and important to determine the success of the writing task. Students write their paragraphs accordingly on multiple scripts in their respective groups, consequently producing completed essay scripts, which are the end products of the CWT. Students read, comprehend and then write to continue the plot of the story in their respective groups besides participating in group discussion when necessary.

"Traditional writing instruction" is a teacher centred approach in teaching writing, employing teacher focused activities. A typical lesson tends to be teacher-centred, as the teacher leads the activity and provides necessary information, usually in an open-class arrangement. Traditional writing instruction may involve a teacher-focused brainstorming session as teacher explains to students on the topic, before instructing the students to start on their writing task individually. The students would usually follow the teacher's instruction and complete their writing task. Chow (2007)

explained that the traditional product writing approach emphasized "good" English for successful writing, which refers mainly to linguistic features particularly on grammar and correctness. It is a form-focused approach.

In the present study, writing refers to essay writing, while scores refers to students' ability or how well they can write an essay. Hence, "*writing scores*" refers to students' writing ability and performance. Holistic judgment is used before an appropriate writing score is awarded for each essay. The marking criteria encompass task fulfilment, development of ideas, organisation, grammar, sentence structures, vocabulary and storyline. In short, the marking scheme covers both fluency and accuracy, employing the *PT3* essay marking criteria.

1.11   Summary of the Chapter

The chapter begins by describing the importance of writing skill in the Malaysian ESL classroom. Then, the background of the study and the statement of the problem indicate the need for change in the Malaysian ESL writing classrooms to address the unsatisfactory writing performance. Recent research findings on students' essay writing scores in English further stress the need.

The chapter proposes the use of the CWT to improve Form One students' narrative writing scores. Its effectiveness is studied with a quasi-experimental design. Three research questions and a hypothesis are derived from the research objectives. Subsequently, the rationale, scope, significance and limitations of the study are discussed. The operational definitions of common terms used in this study are stated to give a consistent understanding of the study undertaken. The next chapter provides the literature review of research and practices of collaborative writing besides explaining the theories relevant to the present research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   Introduction

This chapter aims to place the study within a theoretical framework by reviewing theories underpinning collaborative writing that involve cognitive, social and affective perspectives. This chapter begins by defining writing and discussing writing in the ESL/EFL context, the text types of writing, writing approaches and plot development stages in narrative essays. The traditional writing classroom is explained as compared to the proposed CWT. A background on writing and relevant studies are also discussed. The chapter ends with the theoretical framework and conceptual framework.

2.2   Defining Writing in Education

According to the Merriam-Webster's online dictionary (2011b), "writing" is defined as "a style or form of written composition". This definition is closely linked to writing in a school context, specifically in a high school or secondary school. Chitravelu, Sithamparam and Teh (1995) specified that written English is conveyed using 26 letters as a means of personal communication. Scardamalia and Bereiter (1991) viewed writing "as a process of discovery, of creating order out of chaos, or of coming to understand what one means" (p.179).

Emig (1977) has argued that writing is valuable to learning in various approaches and blends into powerful learning strategies. She also finds that some of the most distinguished contemporary psychologists have at least implied such a role for writing as heuristic, pointing out higher cognitive functions, such as analysis and synthesis, supported by the verbal language. Therefore, writing socially connects and

influences one another integrating information, sharing ideas and opinions (Marzban & Jalali, 2016).

Writing is one of the four language skills that is learnt and acquired for multiple functions. This is clearly evident in Hyland (2013) where the importance of writing is highlighted in various fields of the day-to-day activities. For example, writing functions as a formal report in the corporate world, making it a key feature of every student's experience and learning process.

In this study, the writing focus is in the field of education specifically in the ESL/EFL Malaysian secondary school classroom context, where students learn to write basically to fulfil examination requirements. Writing is a fundamental skill in education. It is an important skill that requires students' mastery at all levels and the main activity in most academic institutions. In education, writing is gradually taught from the basic alphabet to writing long compositions and essays, as the learner advances according to his ability and level. Ortega and Fuentes (2015) showed that the difficulty of a writing exercise is usually in accordance to their education level; the higher the education, the higher the management of cognitive activity in general planning processes (mental draft of a composition), transcription (writing a text), textual review (formal and functional analysis of what has been written) and self-regulation (control over the writing process).

Spencer (1983) explained that usually a teacher who is not an English teacher perceives his responsibility as pertaining only to certain aspects of writing, as required in his subject, which usually include clarity and accuracy of expression, organisation of material, and summarising and taking notes on information. He further reiterated that it is however different where writing for the English language subject is

concerned. The focus is also on grammar, spelling and punctuation that relate to language, apart from being concerned that pupils are highly inspired in expressing themselves in writing and thinking. Spencer showed that students usually perceive that writing is communicating something personal and they have difficulty expressing their thoughts and feelings.

As a productive skill, every writing task will generate a written end-product based on the requirement of the task and usually sent for assessment. As a graded piece of work, writing is a multidimensional skill requiring knowledge and proficiency in a number of areas (Archibald, 2001). Archibald and Gaynor (2000) acknowledged that writing is a complex activity that involves many levels and aspects, requiring proficiency in several skills. Hence, effective writing encompasses the combination of multiple skills that are usually graded under two broad areas of content and language. Generally, the grading of essays involves the following summarised aspects as given in Spencer (1983, p.18):

1. Ideas: quality and quantity of ideas and observations: relevance

2. Self-expression: confidence apparent in the writer in the value of what he/she has to say

3. Logic: logical organisation, relating of ideas and observations to each other; clarity of structure; cohesion, linkage of parts one to another (paragraphing and syntax and, to some extent, punctuation form part of the concern here)

4. Appropriate language: accurate vocabulary, varied vocabulary, sentence structures, use of rhetorical devices, etc, as appropriate for the purpose and likely readership of the piece

5. Conventions: conformity to expected standards of spelling, punctuation and grammar

Three important interconnected variables that lead to an effective composition are organization, amount of information and the linguistic considerations (Morgan, 1990). She added that one additional variable required by non-native speakers is second or foreign language ability. The degree of proficiency in the second or foreign language most certainly affects the way the student expresses his or her thoughts in writing. The problems and needs of an ESL/EFL learner of writing will be discussed in the following section.

2.3   Writing for ESL/EFL Learners

ESL, L2 and ESOL are abbreviations used interchangeably in a second language context while EFL is an abbreviation for the foreign language context for English. Writing is a language learning skill and required for ESL or EFL (Hussin et al., 2015). Learning a second language is definitely not an easy process as the learner struggles to embrace a new language, a new culture, a new way of thinking, feeling, and acting. "Sending and receiving messages effectively in a second language requires full commitment intellectually, physically and emotionally" (Brown, 2006, p.12). Brown (2006) also added that language learning is not easy as it involves many variables in the acquisition process and only a few people achieve fluency in a foreign language solely within their classrooms. Klein (1986) perceived second language

acquisition as conforming to some regularities, being restricted to certain limits in terms of progress, final outcome and instruction methods.

Lin (2016) asserted that writing in ESL or EFL context is a cognitive, social and intercultural activity. Many second language writers are highly literate in their first language, while others have never learned to write in their mother tongue, besides some are even native speakers of languages without a written form (Matsuda, Cox, Jordan, & Ortmeier-Hooper, 2006). Hence, even the acquisition of the first language varies widely depending on the learner's background and exposure to the language, which contributes to the diverse range of problems encountered in the learning of a second language.

Studies have indicated problems and difficulties in ESL/EFL essay writing (Challob et al., 2016; Derakhshan & Karimi, 2015; He, 2016; Itmeizeh, 2016; Lai, Lei, & Liu, 2016; Lin, 2016; Liu, 2013; Watanabe, 2016). The writing problems include grammar (Chambers & Yunus, 2017), corrective feedback (Abbasian & Bahmani, 2014), motivation (Baştuğ, 2015; Bulushi, 2015; Ni, 2012; Zainol & Morat, 2010), first language interference (Derakhshan & Karimi, 2015; Marzban & Jalali, 2016), writing apprehension (Challob et al., 2016), writing strategies (He, 2016; Lin, 2016; Maarof & Murat, 2013; Palpanadan, Ismail, & Salam, 2015; So & Lee, 2013; Tan et al., 2017), writing anxiety (Cheng, 2002; Daud, Daud, & Kassim, 2005; Hussin et al., 2015) and learner autonomy (Abdullah & Mohamed, 2015).

Matsuda et al. (2006) highlighted that second language writers from various linguistic, cultural and educational backgrounds, may face different difficulties depending on their backgrounds. Students and their educational backgrounds in ESL writing classrooms can be especially diverse (Byrd & Reid, 2006). Hence, the ability