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Using Contrastive Analysis (CA) to Promote Conceptualisation of English Sentence Patterns in The Malaysian ESL Classroom

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ABSTRACT

Conventionally, the first language (L1) is regarded as a source of interference in the English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom. But the use of the L1 has been recorded in Malaysian ESL classroom, with many supporting the use of L1 to teach English. This paper examined the use of Contrastive Analysis (CA) of Mandarin Chinese and English as a pedagogic approach to promote conceptualisation of the English sentence patterns among Malaysian ESL learners, 7 respondents from a school in Sabah were recruited as participants of a study. An Error Analysis task, which served as a form of Need Analysis, was administered to identify a particular language learning need. In particular, the Need Analysis determined the participants' ability to: (i) identify grammatical errors, (ii) justify rectifications of said errors. Then, the intervention programme, based on the concepts of Structural/Taxonomic Model and also Shi's (2002) Contrastive Analysis of English and Mandarin Chinese, was administered to the participants. Sandwiching this intervention programme are the Pre-, Post- and a Delayed Posttest, intending to examine the use of CA of English and Mandarin Chinese. Qualitative data was also obtained from the participants in the form of Reflective Logs, in which they provided feedback regarding the use of the CA-oriented intervention programme while input from the teacher was recorded in the lesson plans. Statistically, the findings indicated that CA helped to improve participants' ability to detect grammatical errors, but less so when it comes to explaining or justifying them. The participants were receptive towards the idea of learning English sentence structures with the use of Mandarin Chinese, as the use of L1 helped them to conceptualise sentence patterns better. These findings highlighted some implications for future considerations. There is a need to reconsider how English is learnt, taught and assessed, as well as how teachers ought to be equipped to address an increasingly multilingual ESL classroom in Malaysia.

KEYWORDS: **contrastive analysis; structural/taxonomic model; sentence pattern**

Introduction

Despite its negative image as an outdated and a minimalist approach to language teaching, the use of the First Language (L1) in the English as a Second Language (L2) classroom has undergone some revival in recent decades. The use of translation, for example, is garnering more traction and popularity, especially in countries of the outer and expanding circle

(Carroll & Sambollin Morales, 2016; Debreli & Oyman, 2016; Hwang, 1994; Laufer & Girsai, 2008; Shabir, 2017; Torre, 2014).

Unsurprisingly, the use of L1 as a means to teach English as a L2 is not a new notion in Malaysia. Recent studies have explored the role of Malay (Abdul Aziz & Mohd Don, 2014; Benson et al., 2001; Bukhari & Abdul Aziz, 2020; Darmi et al., 2018; Hiew, 2012; Ong & Tajuddin, 2020) and Mandarin Chinese (Hwang, 1994; Philip et al., 2019; Tan, 2019; Wong, 2012) as L1 in the Malaysian ESL classroom. There are also suggestions for teachers to use their students' L1 to clarify unfamiliar vocabularies during lessons (Hiew, 2012).

Similarly, L1 in the ESL classroom is also best complemented with the use of bilingual dictionaries and thesauruses, as many agreed with the use of L1 to promote comprehension of a literary text (Hiew, 2012). Teachers are, therefore, encouraged to paraphrase English phrases in Malay or Mandarin to promote comprehension and understanding when it comes to difficult words and phrases (Bukhari & Abdul Aziz, 2020; Darmi et al., 2018; Hwang & Embi, 2007; Ong & Tajuddin, 2020; Sowell, 2016). Another study indicates that "Malaysian students tend to rely on their L1 when writing" to "formulate strategies at different stages" (Stapa, 2008, p.158) as learners find this helpful when they try to articulate their ideas. To some extent, the findings are congruent with previous literature where advance students tend to use the L1 to:

(i)   Generate ideas/content
(ii)   Monitor language use;
(iii)   Source lexical items

<div align="center">(Wang & Wen, 2002, as cited in Stapa, 2008, p.150)</div>

However, very few studies look into using L1 to teach sentence patterns in English, especially within the Malaysian ESL setting. Learners' inability to make sense of rules and structures easily demotivates them from learning English in a fully immersive L2 learning environment (Jumal et al., 2019; Li, 2011; Sowell, 2016; Yong, 2010). For these learners, L1 is useful in helping them to conceptualise L2 structures, especially when differences between these languages impede understanding of meaning and grammar. In essence, this study intends to demonstrate a practical application of Contrastive Analysis (CA) for pedagogical purposes in Malaysian English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom.

Contrastive Analysis (CA)

One language learning theory that involves the use of L1 is Contrastive Analysis (CA). By definition, CA compares, contrasts and studies the linguistic relationship between languages which could promote language acquisition and language learning methodologically and structurally (Gilquin, 2000; James, 1980; Willems et al., 2003). Because of its emphasis on comparing and contrasting language structures, CA is a prime candidate in a grammar or structure-focused language pedagogical approach. Theoretically, making distinctions and noticing similarities between languages could heighten language awareness among learners. They would have acquired the knowledge of what linguistic patterns that are transferable and non-transferable between languages (Gilquin, 2000; James, 1980; Willems et al., 2003). Drawing from the theoretical foundations of Structuralism, language is viewed as finite, usually minimalised and simplified in the process of acquisition (James, 1980). This is because, without pre-determined boundaries or parameters attached, the study of language could be immensely time-consuming and cost-inefficient.

Structural-Taxonomic Model (STM)

Among the many CA models that have been developed over the years, the Structural-Taxonomic Model (STM) is the most promising. The STM model enables the measurement of differences in grammatical structure and establishes the maximum difference or similarity between two language systems (James, 1980). It does not heavily involve complex transformations of syntax and morphological patterns, unlike the more contemporary Chomskyian models. Generally, there are two major procedures in STM.

Step 1: Describing the surface structure

The first step is to first parse the sentences in the L1 and L2 into parts of speech:

L1:   Mandarin Chinese – 我去学校补习(I-go-learn-school-[repair-practice])

L2:   English – I go to school for tuition

Figure 1

Sentence Parsing in Structural/Taxonomic Model (Mandarin Chinese & English)
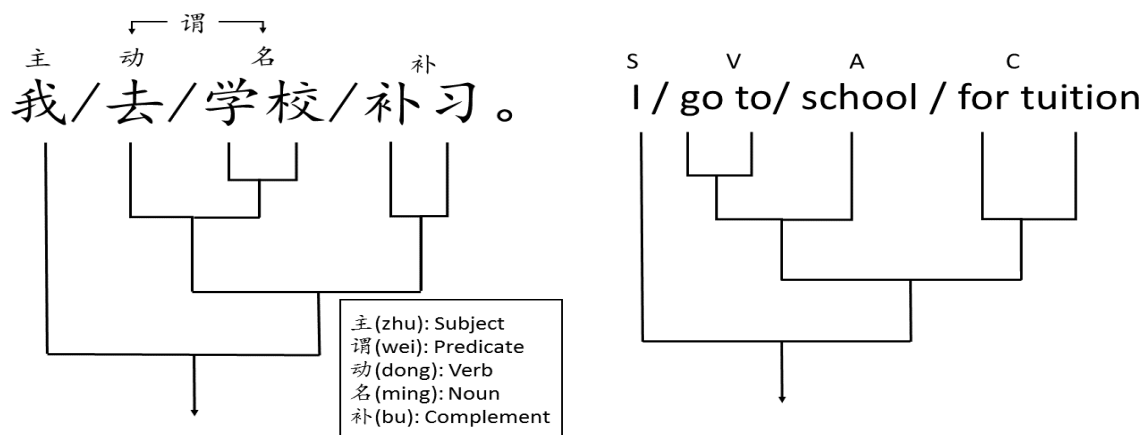
First is to manipulate the surface structure of the sentence. The example given above has 4 constituents, which correlate to the sentence pattern S-V-A-C (Figure 1). Based on the analysis, the Verb Phrase and the Adverbial constituents combine to form the primary branch of the Predicate. The "reason" that explains these two constituents is added into the sentence as the Complement being the third constituent. Lastly, the Verb Phrase, Adverbial and Complement Constituent combine to form the Predicate, co-existing with the Subject head of the sentence.

The parsing of this sentence is first conducted entirely in Mandarin Chinese before its key components are translated. This is to mitigate any bias when examining a language from a different point-of-view. Based on the analysis here, the sentence pattern given here is S-V-C (Figure 1). The 谓语 (wèi yǔ), which refers to the Predicate or the Proposition, is slightly different from the English Predicate, in the sense that the Intransitive Verb and the Adverbial of place/location are ingrained as a whole instead of being treated as distinct constituents. The primary constituent of the Predicate is the combination of the Verb and the Noun Constituent, which is then supplemented with the Complement Constituent. In turn, the compound constituents of the Predicate combine with the Subject to form the sentence. This sentence

also has 4 constituents. To summarise, the sentence has 4 constituents, thus yielding the formulaic expression:

Figure 2

Example of a STM Formulaic Expression

$$\text{Pronoun} + \text{Verb}_{\text{(Intransitive)}} + \text{Adverbial}_{\text{(Location)}} + \text{Noun Phrase}_{\text{(Complement)}}$$

Step 2: Analysing the deep structure

The next step is analysing the constituents of the sentences vertically. James (1980) stated that the STM requires a "common ground" (p.39) for comparison and contrast, which is achieved by identifying the devices for "form and arrangement" (Fries, 1952, as cited in James, 1980, p.39). In this example, English and Mandarin Chinese are seemingly similar in the use of:

‹ "function words" –
  a. signifiers of elements likely to precede or follow content words
‹ "arrangement" –
  a. the relative order of elements in constructions

(James, 1980, p.39)

Based on the formulaic expression (Figure 2), one can theoretically substitute words or phrases of similar category or class into the expression without jeopardising the overall syntactical structure of the sentence. Hence, the probability of making grammatically unsound sentences is reduced. However, this technique places little emphasis on the semantic value of constituents, hence the validity and reliability of the translated meaning fall upon the translator. In Figure 3, the products of the Vertical Axis of both sentences are compared and contrasted. In the example, the two sentences (in English and Mandarin Chinese) share almost identical deep structures, with most of their forms and elements having equivalents. Armed with this information, one can exploit these two sentence structures for pedagogical purposes. Using the obtained formulaic expression (Figure 2) and deep structure (Figure 3) as a blueprint, one can construct sentences of different meanings while adhering to the syntactical requirements of sound grammar.

Figure 3

STM Analysis of Mandarin Chinese and English Sentence Structure
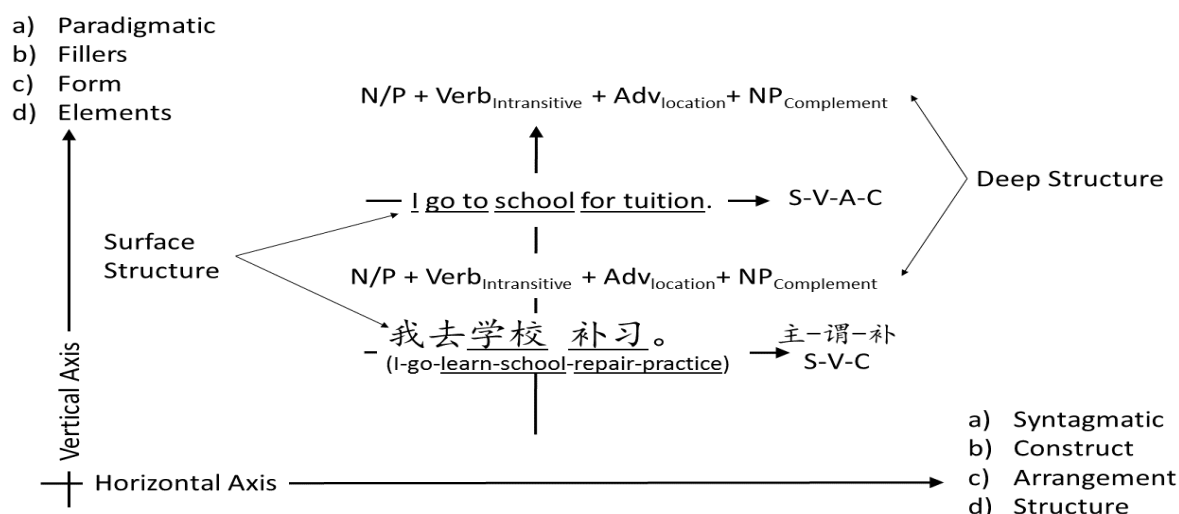
In summary, the STM model is used to design the intervention programme of this study. This allows the study to answer the following research questions:

I. Does CA of Mandarin Chinese (L1) and English (L2) promote the conceptualisation of English sentence patterns among Malaysian ESL learners?

II. What are the factors or elements:
    a. may make CA a useful approach to teaching English sentence patterns with the use of Mandarin Chinese?
    b. may not make CA a useful approach to teaching English sentence patterns with the use of Mandarin Chinese?

Methodology

This study primarily adopts a classroom-based action research framework (Ölmezer-Öztürk, 2019), where its primary focus is on understanding how the use of CA may impact on language learning, and what factors may make it useful in the Malaysian classroom setting. At the same time, this study identified a specific classroom issue through the use of needs analysis, which is a hallmark of classroom research with an action research orientation. This allows teachers to iteratively improve classroom practice (Korkmaz, 2017), which is crucial for one's professional development.

This is, therefore, a small scale study, where it only involves a total of 7 participants: 4 females and 3 males. These participants were recruited from the same school, living in a rural area of Sabah, Malaysia, aged between 14 and 15. They come from Chinese and mixed-Chinese descent, growing up in an environment that predominantly uses a localised variant of Malay, and surrounded by a large Hakka speaking community. In any case, English is not their first language, often their 3rd or 4th language. They are proficient in Hakka dialect, as this is their mother tongue and heritage language, while they have learnt Mandarin Chinese formally in schools and use them extensively when speaking to their peers. All 7 participants unanimously agree that their dominant and first language is Mandarin Chinese. For these reasons, there is no real purpose and need to use English in the community, other than to learn it in an academic setting. Hence, one key observation here is that the

participants displayed little to no progress in their English proficiency. This could be attributed to the environment that the participants were situated in. Subsequently, the objective of this study is to explore how the use of CA can be helpful in a learning environment that is deprived of exposure to the English language.

There are two stages in this study. The first stage involves adopting the precepts of CA and applying them in a series of research lessons (see *Appendix 3 & 4* for sample lessons) that comprises of two cycles. Sandwiching these two cycles, the pre-, post- and delayed posttest were also administered to the participants. The data obtained here is quantitative in nature. In the next stage, the participants provided feedback about what they think and feel about the research lessons, where their L1, Mandarin Chinese, was incorporated and used. Qualitative data is collected through reflective logs by a participating teacher and the student-participants (see *Appendix 1 & 2*).

Quantitative Data

To answer research question I, a working hypothesis was proposed to see how CA can be used as a L2 language learning approach:

> *H: CA of Mandarin Chinese (L1) and English (L2) does promote the conceptualisation of English sentence patterns among learners*

Error Analysis (EA), commonly associated with CA, was adopted as the central mechanism for the needs analysis, Pretest, Posttest and Delayed Posttest. EA allows the study to measure and evaluate the participants' prior and subsequent conceptualisation of English sentence patterns. Operationally, EA manifests as an Error Identification exercise with broad themes, where participants were expected to:

(i) *identify the distortions or deviations in a given text*
(ii) *rectify and provide viable justification for the correction for each distortion or deviation identified.*

The participants would find such exercises familiar as they are exposed to this in their *Pentaksiran Tingkatan Tiga* (PT3) English paper. The Pre-, Posttest and Delayed Posttest adopted the Error Identification test rubric from the English PT3 Section A assessment (see *Appendix 6*). A 200-word text is given to each respondent, where each line contains an error that is not pre-identified. There is a total of 10 errors in each text. Participants were not allowed to refer to peers nor any reference materials during the exercise. To ensure test reliability, the selected texts used for the Error Identification exercises have a Flesch Reading Ease ranging between 82.1% to 87.6% (Table 1).

Table 1

Flesch Reading Ease for Each Text

No.	Error Identification	Flesch Reading Ease (%)
1.	Needs analysis	82.7
2.	Pre-test	87.6
3.	Post-test	82.1
4.	Delayed Post-test	85.7

The answer scheme provided for all four exercises were rated and verified by another language teacher, attaining a preliminary agreement level of 100% for identifying errors and

92.5% for justifying rectifications. Upon discussion and review, the agreement levels for both sections are at 100% and 97.5% respectively (Table 2). The teachers were not able to fully agree on how certain items should be rectified, as they have different opinions about how the particular language pattern should be explained. The findings were then tallied.

Table 2

Level of Agreement between Raters

No.	Error Identification	Preliminary Agreement Level (%)		Final Agreement Level (%)	
		Identifying Errors	Justifying Rectification	Identifying Errors	Justifying Rectification
1.	Needs Analysis	100	100	100	100
2.	Pre-test	100	90	100	100
3.	Post-test	100	80	100	90
4.	Delayed Post-test	100	100	100	100
5.	Average	100	92.5	100	97.5

Operated as Pre-, Post- and Delayed Posttest, the participants' responses in the Error Analysis exercise yielded statistical data that helped to determine if the intervention had successfully promoted conceptualisation of English sentence patterns among the participants. After the participants had completed the Error Analysis exercises, their responses were collected and redistributed randomly to other participants for peer-marking. Collectively, under the teacher's guidance and supervision, they tallied the number of errors that they had managed to identify successfully. Then, participants were interviewed individually to determine the number of errors that they were able to explain successfully and accurately.

Intervention Design

It is worth noting that EA exercise was operationalised as a needs analysis, which aimed to identify the participants' specific language needs. The findings then informed the intervention programme. However, the subject content of the CA-oriented intervention programme was derived from Shi's (2002) synchronic study of Mandarin Chinese. His work described the grammatical structures of Modern Mandarin Chinese, and how it has evolved from Old and Middle Chinese. From this, it became possible to describe the similarities and differences between Modern Mandarin Chinese and Modern English, which in turns allow teachers to utilise this information to inform the CA-oriented intervention programme.

Figure 4

4 Steps & Procedures in Contrastive Analysis (Whitman, 1970)

1. Taking the two languages, L1 and L2, and writing formal descriptions of them
2. Pick forms from the description for contrast
3. Contrasting chosen form
4. Predicting difficulty through the contrast

How a CA-oriented intervention programme should be delivered was drawn from older literature. Whitman (1970) described the steps and procedures involved in CA, which

reflects how a CA approach would appear to be. This is later incorporated throughout the lessons, although it is significantly more prominent in Cycle 2. The programme consists of two cycles:

(i) *Cycle 1* – Introducing and reviewing Simple Sentence and Word Class in English
(ii) *Cycle 2* – Reviewing and cross-referencing Simple Sentence and Word Class in Mandarin Chinese and in English

The rationale for Cycle 1 is to activate the participants' prior knowledge about the Simple Sentence and Word Class that they should have acquired prior to their participation in this study. Cycle 2 aims to relate and provide linkage between the principles governing the Simple Sentence and Word Class in English with those in Mandarin Chinese.

Intervention Delivery

Figure 5

Intervention Programme Timeline
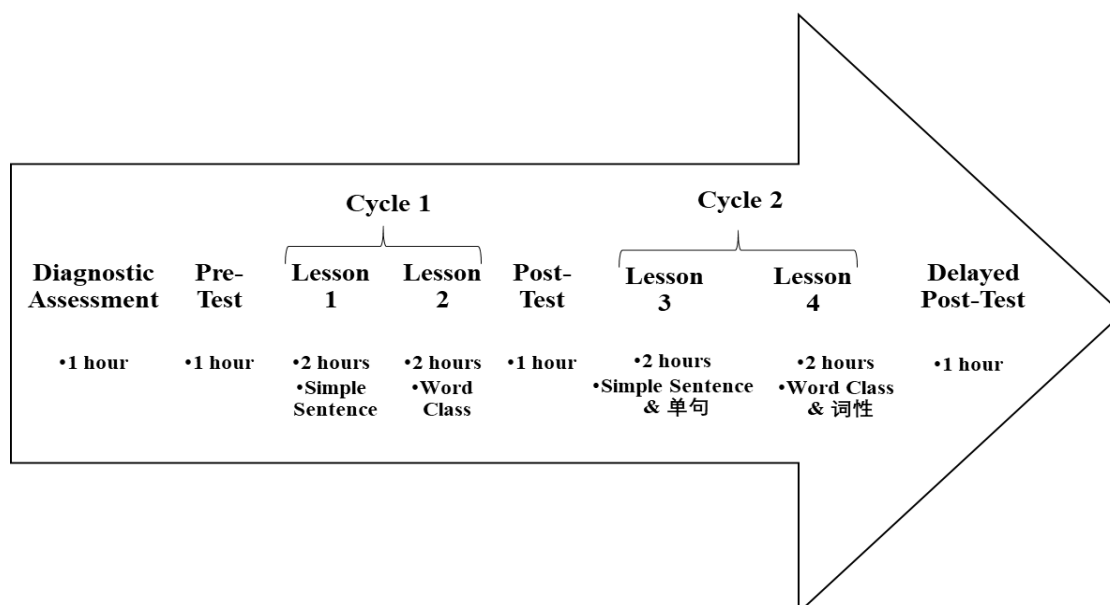
This study was conducted outside the normal school hours, so the intervention programme was only delivered on a 2-hour long session, occurring once per week. The participants attended a total of four sessions (Figure 5) which spanned across two cycles, sandwiching a posttest in between cycles. The Error Identification exercises required an hour each, so a total of 4 hours was spent on administering the tests and obtaining feedback from the participants. In total, the whole study lasted about 12 hours of face-to-face interaction between the teacher and participants (Figure 5).

Reflective Logs

To answer research question II, qualitative data was also gathered from the participants. These qualitative data were collected in the form of reflective logs (Table 3). Reflections were integral to this study, as they help triangulate quantitative data and raise the trustworthiness of the research findings. The participants were required to complete the reflective log, where they provided feedback about their experience throughout the study (Appendix 1), although their responses were given in English rather than in their L1. They had the opportunity to review their responses before their reflective logs were tabulated.

Table 3

Learners' Reflective Long Template

1. What do you think about learning English without using Mandarin Chinese?   a. To what extent is this helpful for you?
2. What do you think about learning English using Mandarin Chinese?   a. To what extent is this helpful for you?
3. How would you prefer to learn English?   a. Please explain why?
4. What do you like or dislike about the whole programme?

Table 4

Lesson Plan Template with Reflection

Date	:
Time	:
Class	:
Topic	:
Research Stage	:
Learning Outcomes (i) (ii)	:
Procedures 1. 2. 3. 4.	:
Reflection	:

In hindsight, however, insisting that the participants to respond in English may have discouraged them from providing a more in-depth reflection, as they resorted to stringing brief responses. This, in turn, curtailed the study's ability to present a clearer picture of how the participants feel about the CA approach. The teacher's reflections, which were intended as an avenue to observe how the participants respond to a CA-oriented programme, were recorded after each lesson. The reflections were captured using the Lesson Plan Template (Table 4) which were later reorganised into a collective (see *Appendix 2*).

Results

Quantitative Data

The responses that the participants provided during the lessons were tabulated, tallied and recorded. The participants were scored according to how many errors they successfully identified and justified, out of a total of 10 errors per exercise. An average for the cumulative scores for all participants was obtained and presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Needs Analysis Data

Identifier	Identifying Errors (IE) $(^{dia}\text{-}Z_{ie})$	Justifying Rectifications (JR) $(^{dia}\text{-}Z_{jr})$
F1	8	1
F2	8	1
F3	8	1
M1	9	1
M2	9	2
M3	7	0
M4	9	8
Mean, Z	8.29	2.00

$^{dia}\text{-}Z_{ie}$: *mean score for identifying errors in diagnostic needs analysis*
$^{dia}\text{-}Z_{jr}$: *mean score for justifying rectifications in diagnostic needs analysis*

Clearly, the participants scored relatively well in error identification ($^{dia}\text{-}\overline{X}_{ie}$ = 8.29), indicating that they were competent in identifying language errors. However, they struggled to explain what the errors were and how they should correct the said errors ($^{dia}\text{-}\overline{X}_{jr}$ = 2.00). Conversely, this implies that the participants' ability to identify errors did not stem from their understanding of the English sentence patterns; they instinctively sensed faulty structures in the sentences. This observation was also recorded in the teacher's reflection (see *Appendix 2*, *Lesson 2*), where participants were observed identifying errors based on what they memorised. This phenomenon is the result of an automated response, akin to that of classical conditioning governed by stimulus-response-reinforcement (SRS) mechanism (Kumaravadivelu, 2003).

In summary, the needs analysis (Table 5) and analysis of the teacher's reflection (see *Appendix 2*) indicated that the participants were struggling with: (i) Simple Sentence Structure, and (ii) Word Class, which the intervention programme emphasised on. A month after the needs analysis, the Pretest was administered to the participants.

Table 6 depicts the participants' ability to identify errors. Before the intervention programme began, the participants, on average, managed to identify 7 out of 10 errors accurately ($^{\text{pre-}}\overline{X}_{ie} = 7.43$). After completing the first cycle of the programme, the Posttest was administered and recorded a 50% drop in their proficiency in identifying errors ($^{\text{post-}}\overline{X}_{ie} = 3.71$). Likewise, their ability to justify the correct answers for the said errors also regressed by 51% ($^{\text{post-}}\overline{X}_{ie} = 3.71$; $^{\text{post-}}\overline{X}_{jr} = 2.43$). The participants then underwent a delayed posttest for the CA-oriented Programme after the second cycle was completed. In the delayed posttest (Table 7), they recorded a 2% improvement in identifying errors ($^{\text{del-}}\overline{X}_{ie} = 7.57$) and a 3% drop in justifying their corrections ($^{\text{del-}}\overline{X}_{jr} = 4.57$) of the said errors compared to the pretest data.

Table 6

CA-Oriented Programme Quantitative Data

Identifier	Pretest		Posttest	
	IE ($^{pre}\text{-}Z_{ie}$)	JR ($^{pre}\text{-}Z_{jr}$)	IE ($^{post}\text{-}Z_{ie}$)	JR ($^{post}\text{-}Z_{jr}$)
F1	7	7	3	3
F2	7	6	5	4
F3	7	2	4	1
M1	7	4	4	2
M2	7	7	4	4
M3	8	0	2	0
M4	9	7	4	3
Mean, Z	7.43	4.71	3.71	2.43

$^{pre}\text{-}Z_{ie}$: *mean score for identifying errors in pretest*
$^{pre}\text{-}Z_{jr}$: *mean score for justifying rectifications in pretest*
$^{post}\text{-}Z_{ie}$: *mean score for identifying errors in posttest*
$^{post}\text{-}Z_{jr}$: *mean score for justifying rectifications in posttest*

Table 7

CA-Oriented Programme with Delayed Posttest

Identifier	Pretest		Delayed Posttest	
	IE ($^{pre}\text{-}Z_{ie}$)	JR ($^{pre}\text{-}Z_{jr}$)	IE ($^{del}\text{-}Z_{ie}$)	JR ($^{del}\text{-}Z_{jr}$)
F1	7	7	8	7
F2	7	6	7	6
F3	7	2	7	3
M1	7	4	8	3
M2	7	7	8	5
M3	8	0	6	0
M4	9	7	9	8
Mean, Z	7.43	4.71	7.57	4.57

$^{del}\text{-}Z_{ie}$: *mean score for identifying errors in delayed posttest*
$^{del}\text{-}Z_{jr}$: *mean score for justifying rectifications in delayed posttest*

As the texts used in the Error Identification exercises have similar Flesch Reading Ease rating, so the pertaining issue is not inherent in the data collection process. The delayed posttest suggests the participants may have required more time to adapt to a CA approach, but this data alone cannot conclusively accept or reject the working hypothesis. As the sample size in this study is fairly small, the findings are not statistically significant, meaning that the interpretation of this quantitative data requires triangulation of other data.

Qualitative Data

There are two modes of qualitative data in this study; the first being learners' reflective log, and the second being the teacher's reflection after each lesson. Most participants agree with the use of Mandarin Chinese when learning English, believing that it helps them to understand the sentence patterns and the word class better. They indicated a strong preference for learning English with the use of Mandarin Chinese. It is also noteworthy that

an additional question was added into the reflective log (see *Appendix 1*), as opposed to the version proposed in Table 3. The objective of this additional question is to inquire what may have transpired during the posttest, especially when the outcome was in contrary to the Working Hypothesis.

The teacher's reflections were captured at the end of every lesson and thus were scattered across different lesson plans. He noted that the participants reacted positively to a CA approach to learning English, although they noticeably require more time to adapt to the new approach. These reflections were compiled into a single document (see *Appendix 2*) to ease cross-referencing.

Discussions

There is a dearth of research regarding the use of CA in the actual language classroom for pedagogical application, as recent CA studies in Malaysia focused on examining mother tongue interference in the L2 classroom (Abdul Manan et al., 2017), English and Malay speech acts in the community (Maros & Halim, 2018), and how learners respond to the use of CA in the classroom (Yaccob & Yunus, 2019). Two studies examined CA's pedagogical role in the classroom, but Hassan et al. (2019) mainly utilised CA to analyse learner errors, while Ting's (2016) research focused on the error analysis of undergraduates learning German as a second language. Despite the lack of similar studies in Malaysia, this paper will attempt to refer to and compare its finding to previous studies where possible, which makes the findings of this study all the more intriguing from many perspectives.

I.a   Does CA of Mandarin Chinese (L1) and English (L2) promote the conceptualization of English sentence patterns among Malaysian ESL learners?

Table 8

Comprehensive Data for Pre-, Post- and Delayed Posttest

Identifier	Pretest		Posttest		Delayed Posttest	
	IE ($^{\text{pre-}}Z_{ie}$)	JR ($^{\text{pre-}}Z_{jr}$)	IE ($^{\text{post-}}Z_{ie}$)	JR ($^{\text{post-}}Z_{jr}$)	IE ($^{\text{del-}}Z_{ie}$)	JR ($^{\text{del-}}Z_{jr}$)
F1	7	7	3	3	8	7
F2	7	6	5	4	7	6
F3	7	2	4	1	7	3
M1	7	4	4	2	8	3
M2	7	7	4	4	8	5
M3	8	0	2	0	6	0
M4	9	7	4	3	9	8
Mean, Z	7.43	4.71	3.71	2.43	7.57	4.57

Statistically, the participants performed worse in the posttest ($^{\text{post-}}\overline{X}_{ie} = 3.71$; $^{\text{post-}}\overline{X}_{jr} = 2.43$) compared to the pretest ($^{\text{pre-}}\overline{X}_{ie} = 7.43$; $^{\text{pre-}}\overline{X}_{jr} = 4.71$). Based on this information alone (Table 8) the CA-oriented Programme seemingly failed to promote conceptualisation of English sentence patterns among the participants. However, in the teacher's reflection (see *Appendix 2*), the teacher noted that the participants "performed much better in previous Error Identification tests" [Appendix 2, *Posttest*], while the participants also appeared to be "overconfident and were careless at answering the questions" [Appendix 2, *Posttest*]. This

brings to question whether the participants could have benefited from more time and exposure to the CA approach before taking the posttest.

Specific to the posttest EA exercise (see *Appendix 1*), 3 out of 6 participants explained that they were nervous, while another 3 indicated that they struggled because that specific task contained many words and phrases that they are not familiar with. The feedback from the participants is coherent with what the teacher observed and recorded in his reflection [Appendix 2, *Posttest*]. However, upon review, the Flesch Reading Ease of the said task is on par with the other EA exercises, although it is noted that its rating (82.1%) is the lowest (Table 1). Thus, a mismatched between the text chosen for the posttest and the participants' language proficiency was unlikely. An alternative explanation of why the participants struggled during the posttest is that they were expecting a few more CA sessions before they were to undergo the posttest. Thrusting the participants into the posttest after just two sessions may result in them being under-prepared, thus explaining why they were careless and nervous. This lack of preparation contributed to their struggle to understand the text that they were reading.

The second cycle of the CA Intervention Programme commenced a week after the posttest activity. It is worth noting that the participants revisited what they have learnt in the previous cycle, but with a stronger emphasis on contrasting the Word Class and Sentence Patterns with their counterparts in Mandarin Chinese. Perhaps due to having more time to internalise what they were exposed to over the few weeks, the participants recorded a slight improvement in identifying errors ($^{del\text{-}}\overline{X}_{ie} = 7.57$) and a slight regression in justifying rectifications ($^{del\text{-}}\overline{X}_{jr} = 4.57$) when compared to the pretest.

An overarching view of the quantitative data seems to suggest that the CA of English and Mandarin Chinese slightly improves the participants' ability to detect distortions and deviations in English sentence patterns. But, the data also confirms that CA can impede the participants' understanding of these patterns and their capability to explain them. As such, the findings of the experiment reject the Working Hypothesis, thus resulting in Revised Hypothesis where:

> *RH: CA of Mandarin Chinese (L1) and English (L2)* <u>*may*</u> *promote the conceptualisation of English sentence patterns among learners.*

>> *RH[1]: CA of Mandarin Chinese (L1) and English (L2) improves students' ability to identify errors.*

>> *RH[2]: CA of Mandarin Chinese (L1) and English (L2) does not improve students' ability to justify rectifications and corrections of errors.*

II.a   What are the factors or elements that may make CA an effective approach to teach English sentence patterns with the use of Mandarin Chinese?

Factor 1: CA of English and Mandarin Chinese emphasises understanding of sentence patterns over rote-learning and memorisation

Generally, the participants responded positively towards the idea of learning English with the use of Mandarin Chinese (Appendix 1). They agreed that learning English with the use of their L2, Mandarin Chinese, is extremely helpful because they were able to understand what they learnt during the CA-oriented Programme. This confirms previous studies that

highlighted how using the L1 can enhance learners' understanding when learning the L2 (Bartlett, 2017; Debreli & Oyman, 2016; Galali & Cinkara, 2017; Zulfikar, 2019).

> *F2 – [Learning English with the use of Mandarin Chinese] is*
> *good because it can help me understand better and learn*
> *more new words*

Being able to comprehend what they are learning is crucial to the participants. Contrary to conventional rote learning methods, they do not have to rely on memorisation to learn sentence patterns in English, as memorisation tends to make learning the L2 harder (Yaccob & Yunus, 2019). Also, when it becomes a habit for learners to memorise words without properly understanding them, they run into the risk of making grammatical errors (Bukhari & Abdul Aziz, 2020). Instead, the process of internalising the English sentence patterns can be based on their prior understanding in the Mandarin Chinese sentence patterns, as propagated by the principles of CA (Figure 1). The participants were positive about the CA-oriented programme because it structurally and linguistically re-packaged the relationship between the L1 and L2, as recorded in the participants' reflective log (see *Appendix 1*). This allows them to gain an understanding of the English sentence patterns that they were learning, consequently facilitating positive linguistic transfers at the same time mitigating the effects of negative/zero linguistic transfers (James, 1998). Notably, this echoes the recommendations to take advantage of instances of positive transfer between the L1 and L2 that occur in the language classroom (Almoayidi, 2018; Bukhari & Abdul Aziz, 2020; Darmi et al., 2018).

Factor 2: CA of English and Mandarin Chinese lowers learning anxiety and affective filter that are commonly experienced when learning a second or foreign language

5 out of 6 participants disliked the idea of learning English immersively, mainly because they struggle to make sense of or understand the language. Directly, one participant was noticeably frustrated by her inability to fully understand the task or activity.

> *F3 – I don't like [learning English without using Mandarin*
> *Chinese] because sometimes I can't really make sense of*
> *it*

These responses imply that the use of the L1 in the L2 classroom provides an avenue where L2 learners and teachers can talk and discuss about the L1 and the L2 (James, 1996). In turn, this significantly reduces learning anxiety and affective filter among the learners (Bartlett, 2017; Carroll & Sambollin Morales, 2016; Darmi et al., 2018; Debreli & Oyman, 2016; Sowell, 2016; Zulfikar, 2019). Learners feel more at ease or comfortable when learning in a language that they are familiar with. Discussing or contrasting two language systems in their L1 provide a safe platform for them to explore and experiment with these languages. Also, the learners are more likely to demonstrate L2 use naturally (Carroll & Sambollin Morales, 2016) as discussing the structure of a L2 would seem less intimidating and less stressful. Another participant responded positively when asked if she preferred to learn English with Mandarin Chinese.

> *F2 – I like it [learning English with Mandarin Chinese] because*
> *I think I have improved a little bit*

On the contrary, learners may end up glossing over opportunities to learn the L2, especially when the use of L1 is completely prohibited. This is evident from the response provided by participant M3. He reported that he would often resort to avoidance strategy, skipping words that he does not understand when learning the language.

> *M3 – I don't think [learning English without using Mandarin Chinese] is good because I often skip words that I don't understand*

Nevertheless, two participants stated that learning English without the use of their L1 is helpful because they perceive this as a challenge to improve themselves. Shabir (2017) believed in encouraging learners to think in English as they gradually attain higher degrees of English proficiency, as this could also become a powerful source of motivation to learn the L2. Echoing this, Galali & Cinkara, (2017), Sowell (2016) and Li et al. (2016) expressed support to tailor and differentiate the use of L1 in the L2 classroom according to the learning needs.

> *M4 – Yes [learning English without using Mandarin Chinese] helps because we can understand [or come across] more English words*

Factor 3: CA of English and Mandarin Chinese promotes "additive bi/multilingualism" among L2 learners

More interestingly, though, is the fact that several participants remarked how their L1 and L2 improved concurrently. This signifies the possible L1-L2 interaction that positively influences language learning and development.

> *M2 – Yes both languages [English and Mandarin Chinese] have improved*

This is a good example of "Additive Bi/Multilingualism", a notion strongly advocated by sociolinguists in recent years (Carroll & Sambollin Morales, 2016; May, 2014; Ortega, 2014; Thompson, 2016; Tyler et al., 2018). Conventional language learning theories contemplate languages as conflicting and competing language systems that interfere with language acquisition. Contrary to this perspective, additive bi/multilingualism views languages as mutually interacting systems that promote language acquisition, which is achieved by raising language awareness in the L1 and L2. Hwang (1994) reported that it is possible to raise learners' language awareness based on their prior knowledge in the L1 (p.157). In the context of this study, the participants were observed to formulate structures in the L2 with their existing L1 knowledge (see *Appendix 2*, *Lesson 3*):

> *T – They [Participants] were also able to use their L1 knowledge to construct structurally equivalent in the L2, albeit with a number of grammatical errors.*

Therefore, CA can help learners to conceptualise sentence patterns by making them more aware of and sensitive towards their similarities and differences. Yang (1992) observed that learners, when using the L1 to learn English, were able to communicate and discuss the structures of both languages. Using the L1 is not seen as a barrier to learning the L2 but as an effort and ongoing process to become bi/multilinguals. More importantly, this is in line with one of the aspirations of the *National Education Blueprint 2013 – 2025* to produce

bilingually proficient learners (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013) as well as the growing emphasis on pluralingualism in the *Common European Framework of Reference* (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2018).

II.b What are the factors or elements that may not make CA an effective approach to teach English sentence patterns with the use of Mandarin Chinese?

Table 9

Pre-, Post- and Delayed Posttest Data for Justifying Rectification

Identifier	Pretest	Posttest	Delayed Posttest
	JR (^{pre}-Z_{jr})	JR (^{post}-Z_{jr})	JR (^{del}-Z_{jr})
Mean, Z	4.71	2.43	4.57

Factor 1: Learners might overgeneralise certain grammar rules or sentence patterns

The participants under-performed in the posttest in terms of justifying changes or corrections to the errors that they have identified (^{post}-$\bar{X}_{jr}$ = 2.43). The teacher noted that the participants were "over-confident and were careless at answering the questions" (Appendix 2, *Posttest*), and this was later corroborated with the findings obtained from the qualitative data. 3 participants admitted that they were careless when completing the activity, and one underlying assumption made here is that the participants required more time to process and internalise the use of CA. They did perform better in the delayed posttest (^{del}-$\bar{X}_{jr}$ = 4.57), but this was still lower than the mean average they attained in the pretest, albeit slightly.

Based on this analysis, the use of CA could, hypothetically, result in a false sense of security or even confusion among L2 learners. When the use of Mandarin Chinese is allowed and encouraged, the participants could end up overgeneralising rules or sentence patterns in Mandarin Chinese and transferring them to English indiscriminately. This finding concurs with the conclusions presented by Abdul Manan et al. (2017), Abdul Aziz & Mohd Don (2014), Li et al. (2016) and Wong (2012), where overgeneralisation of grammar rules is cited as the main reason for language interference. Therefore, without proper mitigation and guidance from the teacher, learners might end up forming grammatically unacceptable phrases or sentences, especially when they are not afforded sufficient time to internalise the approach.

Factor 2: Learners might become over-reliant on their L1 as a word-for-word translation tool

Many studies also observed the tendency for learners to fall back to translation to complete tasks assigned to them in class (Abdul Aziz & Mohd Don, 2014; Bukhari & Abdul Aziz, 2020; Galali & Cinkara, 2017; Hassan et al., 2019; Li et al., 2016; Yaccob & Yunus, 2019). The quantitative data in Table 9 also suggests that the learners, using a CA approach, may end up relying on their L1 as a translation tool when learning the L2. Although CA stresses the importance of understanding and comprehension as starting points for L2 learning, in this study, a participant resorted to translation as her primary learning strategy.

F2 – I like the [CA]method but sometimes I still have trouble translating from Mandarin Chinese to English

The CA-oriented Programme does not embrace an operant view towards language learning, so both positive and negative reinforcements lack presence throughout the study. While the CA-oriented programme may mould them into more confident learners, they could also become over-reliant on their L1 for word-for-word translation. The main focus of the CA approach is raising learner's language awareness towards the different linguistic structures and patterns of the L2 (James, 1980, 1996, 1998; Ke, 2018; Lennon, 2008). But while CA creates a safety net for learners to explore the different forms of various languages, they may become complacent or even reckless in their use of the L2.

Implications

The findings of this study are generally supportive of a multilingual approach to the teaching of English in Malaysia. The quantitative data does not strongly suggest that the use of CA will help L2 learners to develop a better conceptualisation of English sentence patterns, but the participants have reacted positively to the approach, as indicated in the qualitative data. These highlight how the approach can help the participants to learn the L2 with higher degrees of understanding and motivation. This is consistent with the findings documented in present literature, reaffirming the fact that the L1 is far from irrelevant in the Malaysian ESL classroom (Abdul Aziz & Mohd Don, 2014; Bukhari & Abdul Aziz, 2020; Hiew, 2012; Jumal et al., 2019; Ong & Tajuddin, 2020; Philip et al., 2019; Sowell, 2016; Stapa, 2008; Tan, 2019; Wong, 2012).

There are, nevertheless, several implications from this study. The use of CA may help to promote better conceptualisation of English sentence patterns among learners, especially when raising their awareness towards ungrammatical language constructions. This can be particularly helpful for learners who are situated in areas with limited exposure to English. As indicated in the findings, presenting to learners the target language in a systematic and rule-governed manner can "reduce learning load" (Abbaspour & Zare, 2013, p.65). They feel more at ease learning the L2 as this gives precedence to understanding and comprehension as opposed to mere memorisation or regurgitation. The use of CA as a multilingual language learning system thus provides learners and teachers with a focal point where "meta-linguistic reflection and discourse" (p.65) can occur. By emphasising and encouraging discussion on the sentential level of the L1 and L2, learners are exposed to the language in context, rather than decontextualised use of language. This then mitigates the concerns about structural or formal syllabi not allocating sufficient emphasis on meaning or function of language use (Robinson, 1998).

CA, thus, can serve as an intermediary learning resource aiming at scaffolding learners to be proficient multilinguals in their own context, with their understanding of different language structures and patterns contributing to their multilingual repertoire. In addition, as the findings suggest, the interaction between the L1 and L2 can result in positive language transfer. This builds upon previous studies calling for a review on the treatment of L1 in the ESL classroom (Almoayidi, 2018; Debreli & Oyman, 2016; Galali & Cinkara, 2017; Li et al., 2016; Shabir, 2017; Zulfikar, 2019). Coincidingly, CA complements the recent incorporation of the CEFR into the Malaysian English Language syllabus, where plurilingual and multilingual competence are gaining traction (Council of Europe, 2018).

Also, a CA-oriented programme can function as a remedial language programme that complements the conventional mandatory language syllabus. This is particularly helpful for

low proficiency learners as using the L1 can considerably lower their affective filter when learning the L2. Following this line of thought, teachers can also stratify and prioritise certain language elements according to their students' immediate language learning needs. This is coherent with the notion of localising or personalising language learning (Tabari, 2013; Torre, 2014). Nevertheless, this study points to the need for teachers who are *proficient bilinguals* in both their L1 and the targeted L2 to fully apply CA in their teaching practice. While CA approach may not necessarily be relevant in every school, ensuring that teachers are familiar with the approach would certainly empower them to react and adapt their teaching approaches to suit their students' immediate language learning needs. This means they have to be more versatile and robust against future challenges in the ESL classroom, especially in suburban and rural areas where there is limited use of English in the community. Furthermore, as the study concluded, the use of CA is susceptible to the failings of traditional methods like the Grammar-Translation and Audiolingual Approach. Teachers would need to bear the responsibility of mitigating the learners' tendency to overgeneralise sentence patterns in the L2 by encouraging activities that raise their language awareness and promoting metalinguistic discussions. This can be far more effective if the teachers are bi/multilinguals.

Conclusion

This study does not confirm that CA helps learners learn English quicker and better than other approaches. But there are several positive observations and feedback in this study that support this approach. At the very least, this study has demonstrated that it is possible to utilise notions of CA and apply them for pedagogical purposes in an authentic Malaysian ESL classroom setting. Nonetheless, further in-depth studies are required to determine how and when such an approach would be helpful to assist learners to conceptualise, and preferably, internalise sentence patterns of both the L1 and L2 on a larger scale. Future studies could also undertake a longitudinal experimental paradigm that involves students living in urban or suburban settings so that they can provide more conclusive suggestions and applications in the Malaysian ESL classroom.

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APPENDIX 1 Learner's Reflective Log

1. What do you think about learning English without using Mandarin Chinese?
a. To what extent is this helpful for you?
F1 – No, because I cannot understand what the teacher is saying
F2 – Not really because my English is not very good.
F3 – I don't like it because sometimes I can't really make sense of it.
M1 – I don't like it because sometimes I don't know what it means in English
M2 – I don't think it's good because I often skip words that I don't understand
M3 – It is good because I can learn proper English.
M4 – Yes it helps because we can understand more English words.

2. What do you think about learning English using Mandarin Chinese?
a. To what extent is this helpful for you?
F1 – Yes, because I can understand much more.
F2 – It is good because it can help me understand better and learn more new words.
F3 – Yes I can understand more than the other method.
M1 – Yes because I can understand better
M2 – Yes, I can understand better
M3 – N.A.
M4 – Yes, this can help me understand grammar correctly.

3. How would you prefer to learn English?
a. Please explain why
F1 – I like it because I can learn more new words in both English and Mandarin Chinese
F2 – I like it because I think I have improved a little bit.
F3 – I like it a little bit
M1 – Yes, because both my English and Mandarin Chinese have improved a little bit.
M2 – Yes both languages have improved
M3 – I like it because I could learn a lot more English and Mandarin Chinese language.
M4 – I like it.

4. What do you like or dislike about the whole programme?
F1 – I like the way the teacher is teaching
F2 – I like the method but sometimes I still have trouble translating from Mandarin Chinese to English.
F3 – I like it only a little bit, because learning English is too hard.
M1 – I love knowing many new words.
M2 – I like it because I can gain more knowledge
M3 – I like it
M4 – I like it.

❖ How did you feel about the Posttest?
F1 – There are many words that I couldn't understand.
F2 – We couldn't understand their languages.
F3 – I was careless and nervous.
M1 – I was careless
M2 – I was being careless
M3 – N.A.
M4 – There are many words that I couldn't understand

APPENDIX 2 Compilation of Teacher's Reflection

	Reflection
Programme Needs Analysis	My first overall impression of the students is that they have a certain command of the language but severely lack reading. I will have to design a reading programme (Article + Mind Mapping) for students to consistently use English to analyse the things they read. It would seem that the most appropriate focus is to focus on the Simple Sentence patterns and their related parts of speech. Apart from M3, the others seem to fall between the Lower Intermediate – Intermediate English proficiency level. For M3, he has below-par reading and comprehension skills, often unable to verbalise simple words, especially when the words are longer than two

		syllables. Nonetheless, he does show some signs of learning difficulty, although more observation still has to be done.
Cycle	**Lesson**	**Reflection**
1	1	Introduced the notion of Sentence Types to the students today. Students seem to understand the concepts but have reservations about the practical uses. M2 was able to complete his task fairly quickly, followed by M4. The others took more time to complete the task. Response from students is lukewarm at best. Assigned them a 5 sentence writing task to help them practice. The next lesson will move into Word Classes. I will need to modify a PT3 English Error Identification task to test students' understanding/proficiency in this subject area.
1	2	The students have shown some improvements, but most of it could be attributed to the short term memory retention and behavioural response. When the lesson turned highly technical (especially when focusing on Word Classes), I could see that students were highly demotivated and extremely passive. This is probably due to the low subject knowledge in that subject matter. Students' response is monotonous and robotic, highlighting the fact that the students don't find the lesson very engaging. An impromptu interview with student F2 revealed that she had some problems with Verbs & Conjunctions, largely because she couldn't really understand the technicality behind the word class. She stated that she may have improved slightly on her grammatical knowledge, but remain pretty much confused and unclear about the English grammar.
Posttest		Surprisingly, students actually performed much better in previous Error Identification tests. This was something that I have not anticipated. Students actually made more errors in the Posttest. They seemed to be over-confident and were careless at answering the questions. It was also noted that the Error Identification Test is slightly more difficult than the previous ones, an issue that I have not foreseen before the test was administered. Students may have actually improved grammatically but students' over-confidence may have impeded that progress. A more in-depth mining of information is required to confirm this suspicion. I will approach some of the students individually and get feedback from the in order to find out a clearer picture regarding the use of this approach to teach English.
2	3	Students were asked to write sentences with more cohesion in forms of paragraphs instead of isolated and distinct units of sentences. As a result, the students were able to dive into context far more easily. They were also able to use their L1 knowledge to construct structurally equivalent in the L2, albeit with a number of grammatical error. This is seen as a major indication that the CA of English and Mandarin Chinese seemingly help improve students' grammatical proficiency in English. The next lesson will focus on the word classes, which would build upon today's progress. I would like to see how students respond and compare both types of approaches.
2	4	This session marks the end of the CA Intervention Programme. Students just barely got accustomed to the idea of writing Simple Sentences. The students struggled in the beginning, thinking about the different kinds of Word Classes in both Chinese and English. The association of Word Classes and sentence construction was rather strong, something that is apparent during the activity.

APPENDIX 3 Cycle 1 Lesson Plan Sample

Class: PT3 -Lower Form (Lower-Intermediate Proficiency)
Topic: Grammar – The Simple Sentence
Duration: 2 hours
Research Stage: CA Intervention Programme Lesson 1 (Cycle 1)

Learning Outcomes:

(i) Students activate prior knowledge and re-learn about the basic sentence structure
(ii) Students activate prior knowledge and re-learn to identify the Subject, Verb & Predicate
(iii) Students activate prior knowledge and re-learn to construct Simple Sentences

Procedures:

1. Conduct a short dictation on "Spiderman". Each student has to write as dictated:

   "Spiderman is one of the most famous heroes in comic books. He is also known as Peter Parker. He is a very smart high school student, although not very popular in school. One day, he was bitten by a spider in a lab. After that, he realised he can climb walls and sense danger. He then decides to used his new powers to help others."

2. Get students to switch their dictation with their peers. They are to peer mark their friends' dictation. Highlight and explain potential challenging vocabulary. Use a chain reading technique here to check students' dictation.
3. Distribute the handouts to students. Get them to do a final check before pasting them onto their books.
4. Inform students that the lesson will be focusing on the Simple Sentence. All Simple Sentence:
   a. Must have "Subject"
   b. Must have "Predicate"
   c. 1 Predicate = 1 Verb
5. Provide a few examples to demonstrate to students the different forms of the Simple Sentences.
6. Get students to analyse the sentences in the dictation text. Get them to determine if they are all Simple Sentences and justify why.
7. Distribute visual Stimulus to students. Students have to:
   a. Brainstorm key vocabulary related to stimulus
   b. Construct Simple Sentences (minimum 8 sentences)
8. Provide individual attention to whoever finishes their work first. Also get students to peer-mark using pencils to decide if their friends have constructed good Simple Sentences.
9. Go through the students' writing individually, rectifying language errors in detail.

Reflection:

Introduced the notion of Sentence Types to the students today. Students seem to understand the concepts but have reservations about the practical uses. M2 was able to complete his task fairly quickly, followed by M4. The others took more time to complete the task. Response from students is lukewarm at best. Assigned them a 5 sentence writing task to help them practice. The next lesson will move into Word Classes. I will need to modify a PT3 English Error Identification task to test students' understanding/proficiency in this subject area.

APPENDIX 4 Cycle 2 Lesson Plan Sample

Class: PT3 -Lower Form (Lower-Intermediate Proficiency)
Topic: Grammar – Word Classes
Duration: 2 hours
Research Stage: CA Intervention Programme Lesson 4 (Cycle 2)

Learning Outcomes:

(i) Students activate prior knowledge and re-learn about the different forms of Word Class in both English and Chinese.

(ii) Students use the different forms of Word Class to construct Simple Sentences.

Procedures:

1. Drawing from their prior experience learning Chinese, get them to list down the types of Word Classes they are familiar with:

Chinese	English	Chinese	English
名词	Nouns	介词	Determiner
代名词	Pronouns	副词	Adverb
动词	Verbs	形容词	Adjectives
方向词	Preposition	助词	Aspect Markers
连词	Conjunctions		

2. Make links between the different word class in Chinese with the ones in English. Highlight both the similarities and differences:

    a. Nouns, Pronouns, Verbs, Determiners, Adverbs, Adjectives, Conjunctions and Preposition share similar grammatical form and function in both English and Chinese.

    b. One notable difference is the Aspect Markers, which is usually omitted in the list of English word classes. Grammatically, Aspect Markers are forms of Prepositions in English. It is used to denote time in the absence of deictic tenses.

    *Note: Avoid becoming overly linguistic when explaining the differences as students may not be able to comprehend all the information given. They might end up being more confused.

3. Briefly explain the roles of different word classes to students. Compare and contrast similarities and differences between the word classes in both English and Mandarin:

i.e. The position of adverbs is usually after the verb (in English) The position of adverbs is usually before the verb (Mandarin)	i.e. The Perfect Aspect (助词)is used to linked adverbials and determiners to the verb or noun.
I go home happily. (Verb) (Adverb)	(i) My car – 我 的 车子 (Determiner) （助） （名）
我高兴地回家。 (状) （动）	(ii) Go home happily – 高兴 地 回家 (Verb) (Adverbial) （状） （动）
	(iii) Ate happily – 吃 得 开心 (Verb) (Adverbial) （动） （状）

4. Distribute Sentence Sequencer Worksheet to students. Inform students that this sequencer is meant to assist students construct simple, active voice sentences.

THEME:							
Determiner	Subject: Nouns/ Pronouns	Verb Clause/ Phrase	Determiner	Adjectives	Object: Nouns/ Pronouns	Adverbs	Prepositional Phrase

5. Demonstrate to students how to use the sequencer:

    a. Decide on a theme

    b. Brainstorm vocabulary related to the theme

    c. Using the generated vocabulary, construct simple sentences

6. Highlight the sentence structure involving the use of different Word Classes. Compare and contrast the structure with that of the Chinese Language:

      a.   Subject-Verb-Object: 主–谓–宾
      b.   Determiner-Subject-Verb-Determiner-Object-Adverb: 定–主–状–谓–补–定–宾

7.   Move around to monitor and supervise students' progress.

Reflection:

This session marks the end of the CA Intervention Programme. Students just barely got accustomed to the idea of writing Simple Sentences. The students struggled in the beginning, thinking about the different kinds of Word Classes in both Chinese and English. The association of Word Classes and sentence construction was rather strong, something that is apparent during the activity.

APPENDIX 5 – Sample Texts used in Error Identification Exercises

There was once a rich man who lived in a huge mansion in Northern India. One day, the man lost his bag of money and he asked for help from a wise judge. He told the judge that there are many servants in his house but he did not know who stole his money. The judge said to the man, "Call all your servants here and I shall find out who the thief is." Later, all of them appeared before the judge. The judge said, "I have some magic sticks but each stick has the same length. Bring your sticks back to me tomorrow morning because the thief's stick will grow longer by a finger's length." Frightened, the thief thought of a way to cover up his theft. Finally, he found an answer and he cut his stick shortest by exactly a finger's length. "When it grows in the night, it will be the same length as others," he thought. He was proud of his brilliant plan. The next morning, everyone gathered in front of the judge with their sticks having the same length, except the thief's. The judge pointed at the thief and said, "It's you who have stolen the money!"

Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level	:	5.2
Flesch Reading Ease	:	87.6

APPENDIX 6 – Sample Error Identification Exercises

During the last school holidays, my friends and I went on a trip to Ulu Yam Waterfall. We gathered at the bus station early in the morning. The journey there took a hour and a half. It was my first trip together with my friends. Everyone were so excited. We brought some snacks and drinks from home. Upon arrived, we were captivated by the beautiful views of the hills and forests. It was truly breath-taking. The chirping by birds and the sound of the waterfall made me feel so peaceful. Ulu Yam Waterfall is famous for it's beautiful recreation park among tourists. We can do many things there. We can hike up the hills, swim over the waterfalls, and fish at the rivers. We got to see and learned about the flora and fauna in the park. As we were swimming at the waterfall, it suddenly started to rain. We run to find a safe shelter. After a few minutes, the rain stopped pouring. We have a small barbecue near the waterfalls. We rested for a while after eating. Before we headed home, we clear up our things and left the area as we found it. Although it was quite tiring, it was a fun and educational trips.	*e.g.* ___*an*___ (a) _____ (b) _____ (c) _____ (d) _____ (e) _____ (f) _____ (g) _____ (h) _____ (i) _____ (j) _____

[10 Marks]

Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level	:	4.4
Flesch Reading Ease	:	82.1

The Effect of Formal Feedback on the Improvement of Writing Skills of O-Level Students in Selected Private Schools in Lahore

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the effect of teachers' feedback on O-Level students' English composition writing in private high schools in Lahore. A mixed-method approach was used to gather data through the use of survey questionnaires and essays. Research participants (n=75) were selected using the random sampling method. The ESL composition profile constructed by Jacobs et al (1981) was used to examine the quality of learners' first draft and second draft. The essays were rated before the feedback (first draft) and after the feedback (second draft). A paired sample T-test was run to understand whether there was a significant difference between the first draft and the second draft. Results of the paired sample T-Test showed that the scores increased significantly in the second draft as compared to the first draft. Teachers' comments had a constructive effect on the quality of writing. This study revealed that students get assistance even from marginal feedback.

KEYWORDS: teacher feedback, O-Level, multiple drafts, ESL composition writing, academic achievement

Introduction

Teaching the English language in Pakistan is very challenging for ESL instructors. Teachers are implementing various methods and teaching instruments in the best feasible manner to make learning English language stress-free for students. ESL learners' problem in studying the English language has remained a subject of debate for several years. In Pakistan, the environment does not offer native-like exposure to the students. Correspondingly ESL instructors and learners have to make effort to bridge this difference. Acquiring the English language is hardly an unconscious procedure for Pakistani ESL students. Pakistani students are unable to write in correct English language that is expected and required of them (Sultana & Zaki, 2015). Moreover, numerous studies have highlighted the writing problems faced by Pakistani students (Khan, Javaid & Farooq, 2015; Shahzadie, Mushtaq & Khan, 2014).

O-Level students need to employ different forms of writing to suit a range of purposes to show that they can understand the content and argument of given written texts. Learners need to be

familiar with exactly how good they are performing as they study. It is for this reason that the feedback which informs that they are performing well provides them a feeling of accomplishment that in turn encourages them to write better. Teachers' feedback on students' work is considered to have a bigger impact on their accomplishment than any other elements such as grading (Black & William, 1998). Many second language learners find it difficult to cope with the different forms of writing required for the Cambridge O Level. ESL learners find it difficult to progress their thoughts logically from the word level to the entire paragraph (Bilal et al., 2013; Khan, 2011; Haider, 2012).

Various ESL teachers believe that feedback with handwritten comments can assist students to enhance their second language composition writing (Brown, 2007; Hyland & Hyland, 2006). Furthermore, ESL students would like, look forward to, and value teachers' feedback on their writing and prefer to receive written feedback rather than verbal feedback (Ferris, 1995; Leki, 1991; Satio, 1994). If teachers do not provide handwritten comments then it might be problematic for learners to determine whether a written assignment is completed accurately and what are the areas in which they require enhancements (Chastain, 1988). Specific handwritten feedback is important in the Pakistani setting, where usually generalized feedback is provided on learners' writing (Haider, 2012).

Feedback which is constructive, useful, as well as improves students' learning is a fundamental skill for teachers (Harmer, 2004; Peterson, 2010). According to Bruning and Horn (2000), two decades of cognitive studies have revealed that it is an extremely multifaceted linguistic and cognitive chore to learn to write which requires careful consideration of the circumstances for increasing enthusiasm and skillfulness. It has been revealed in many research studies that teachers' feedback is an effective tool in enhancing accomplishment in several settings (Bruning & Horn, 2000; Carless, 2006; Duijnhouwer et al., 2010; Duijnhouwer et al., 2012; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Kellogg & Whiteford, 2009; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996; Shute, 2008). Students' learning has been widely researched from both the learner and teachers' perspective, however, there has been no in-depth study conducted for evaluating the impact of ESL teachers' handwritten comments in the high school setting in Pakistan. Hence, to fill this gap, there is a need to reveal the current implications of a teacher's written feedback. The paucity of research in this area calls for a study to address this gap. The current research used a mixed-method to examine instructors' views, procedures, and learner choices concerning the delivery of formal handwritten feedback comments and its impact on the enhancement of correctness and expression in ESL composition writing.

The current research has opened up several pedagogic avenues to the researcher concerning the ESL writing classroom. The researcher learned that providing written feedback to learners is helpful in the development of their L2 composition writing. It also became conspicuous in the research process that teachers' written feedback has to accompany verbal feedback so that the teacher could find the difficulties that learners confront when revising their essays. Regular feedback that involves verbal discussion ceases to be the most important strategy to inspire quality revision of composition texts.

The current study contributes to research in terms of offering valuable insights into the most difficult aspects of writing faced by Pakistani students studying at O-Level and how those feedback comments might impact their writing. Moreover, most of the research studies on

feedback have been conducted at college or university level. There is a lack of research that addresses the secondary school setting. A focus on secondary school students is essential as students are exposed to L2 writing at a very early stage. An awareness of the impact of feedback at the secondary level can help us better understand how secondary school teachers can modify their feedback practice. This research contributes to the present work on teachers' comments by relating actual teacher feedback comments to its impact on students' writing skills. Research outcomes have constantly indicated that teachers' comments on single draft compositions do not benefit students much in enhancing their compositions as they do not get the chance to revise, rewrite, and resubmit their writing. Thus, the present study used multiple drafting pedagogical settings so that the impact of teacher feedback can be investigated on students' compositions in terms of content and form.

The following research hypotheses were tested:

H_1: Teachers' handwritten feedback has a positive effect on ESL learners' second draft of composition writing.

H_O: Teachers' handwritten feedback has no effect on ESL learners' second draft of composition writing.

Literature Review

The preliminary research and philosophies regarding teachers' handwritten comments are nearly 100 years old based on the practices developed by the cognitive perspective named behaviorism (Thorndike, 1913). Numerous debates by researchers in the past 15 years are about whether learners get assistance through written comments on the assigned composition or not (Chandler, 2003; Ferris, 1999, 2004; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Truscott, 1996, 1999, 2004, 2007). Teachers' comments have shown to have enhanced motivation which results in high scores among high school learners (Stake, 1982).

Pakistani high school learners need writing skills for educational reasons comprising writing activities assigned by the instructors and taking quizzes and final term examinations (Khan, 2011). Furthermore, prompt as well as critical handwritten feedback should be provided on their essays, to enhance their confidence (Haider, 2012). Another research carried out in colleges in Pakistan have discovered that the learners find it challenging to identify parts of speech (Imran et al., 2016). Panhwar et al. (2017) deduced that the outdated ESL teaching methods applied in Pakistan as well as the lack of teacher training make learning writing skills difficult.

Kluger and DeNisi (1996) conducted a study and analyzed 131 research articles on teachers' comments; the majority of the studies were from the classroom context. It was discovered that teachers' comments enhanced the accomplishment of the majority of the students, however above 33% of studies showed that teachers' comments reduced the performance of the learners. It is stated that teachers' very complex comments could direct the student's concentration away from the assignment. Furthermore, current research studies correspondingly provide support, presenting proof in favor of feedback (Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener et al., 2005; Ellis et al., 2008). Based on the outcomes of their research studies, they uphold that teachers' feedback comments facilitate their students in developing grammatical accuracy in essay writing.

Feedback holds a psychological effect by improving students' self-confidence because feedback is a method to show that the tutor has read students' writing carefully (Glenn & Goldthwaite, 2014). Handwritten feedback on students' writing seems to be more serious as tutors assess students' essay writing, concentrating on ideas, composition, vocabulary as well as style. Many research studies have agreed that teachers' handwritten feedback on students' writing resulted in improvement in students' writing (Alvira, 2016; Baghzou, 2011).

Even though many research studies have been conducted to examine teachers' handwritten feedback (Farid & Adlina, 2012; Othman, 2009; Razali & Jupri, 2014), these research studies primarily were concentrated on college students. High school students, nonetheless, were hardly studied (Servilio, 2009). Referring to the significance of tutors' handwritten feedback, Peterson (2010) identified that feedback informs the students about the readers' response to their writing.

Feedback is a less investigated field, particularly about ESL learners' perceptions of teachers' comments (Ferguson, 2011; Pokorny & Pickford, 2010). Most ESL educators approve that teachers' written comments are very helpful if they are delivered at the starting stage of composition writing (Ferris, 2003). The current study contributes to the research in the field in terms of offering valuable insights into the most difficult aspects of writing faced by Pakistani students studying at O-Level and how those feedback comments might impact their writing tasks. There is a lack of research that addresses the secondary school setting. A focus on secondary school students is essential as students are exposed to ESL writing and they develop writing skills at this stage. An awareness of the impact of feedback at the secondary level can help us better understand how secondary school teachers can modify their feedback practice. This study contributes to the existing literature on feedback by relating actual teachers' feedback comments to its impact on students' writing skills. Research outcomes have constantly indicated the point that teachers' comments on single draft compositions do not benefit students much in enhancing their compositions as they do not get the chance to revise, rewrite, and resubmit their writing. Thus, the present study uses multiple draft pedagogical settings so that the impact of teachers' feedback can be investigated on students' compositions in terms of content and form. Thus, it is significant to find out how feedback impacts the students so that the teachers can further improve on their expertise in providing feedback comments and guide learners well in becoming better writers.

Research Methods

This research work employed a mixed-method approach to test the hypotheses. The mixed-method approach used here included collecting the views of the research participants through a questionnaire and analyzing multiple draft compositions. Essays were collected to show the effect of one variable on the other. In the present study, teachers' feedback is the independent variable whereas, the development of students' composition writing is the dependent variable.

The ESL composition profile constructed by Jacobs et al. (1981) was used to examine the quality of learners' first draft and second draft based on the scores on accuracy, content, expression, vocabulary, and mechanic features of essay writing. Students' essays were assessed earlier than the feedback (first draft) as well as later after receiving the feedback (second draft).

This rubric has been chosen for the current research because it has been used everywhere since 1981 (Al-Mudhi, 2019; Ghanbari, 2012; Klimova; 2011). Besides, this rubric is commonly employed by ELT teachers for marking learners' compositions (Meisuo, 2000). The mean scores of the first draft and second draft were compared to test the research hypotheses. The difference in marks was considered as an achievement or progress in composition essay value.

The target population of the current research was Pakistani students enrolled in the O-Level course. The random sampling technique was employed for collecting information from students enrolled in the O-Level course in three public high schools in Lahore. Out of the overall population of schools in Lahore, 75 students studying English and 3 experienced English language teachers were selected to participate in the study. The research sample comprised of 75 male participants. The age of research participants ranged from 14 to 17 years.

Data for the current research was gathered using a closed-ended questionnaire that explored the perceptions of the teachers and learners regarding the impact of teachers' comments on writing. The questionnaire was based on a five-point Likert scale. Closed-ended questionnaires were triangulated by analyzing real classroom documents. In the current research, documents had an essential role in analyzing handwritten feedback on multiple drafts. All three teachers were requested to provide a photocopy of their students' multiple draft essays with handwritten comments. The objective of collecting students' essays was to further examine the impact of tutors' feedback on writing skills.

Students' written essays with teacher's handwritten feedback comments were collected which indicated the teachers' inner thought processes and feedback. Furthermore, these multiple draft essays also indicated any improvement shown by the students after receiving the teachers' feedback. These documents provided evidence of the actual feedback practice. It is important to note that the feedback was provided initially on the collected essays. Figure 1 presents the writing stages followed in the public high schools which participated in the study.

Figure 1

Essay Writing and Feedback Stages
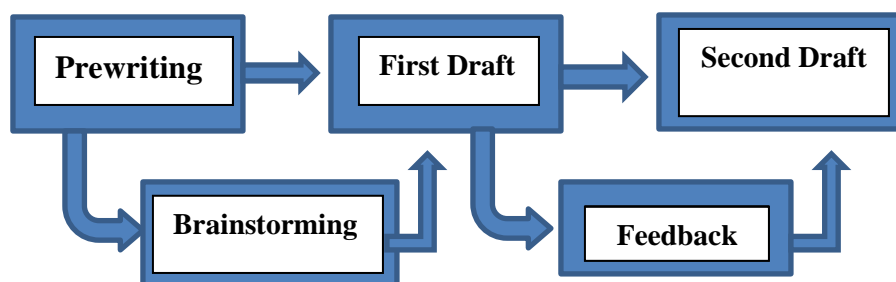
Data Analysis and Discussion

A paired sample T-test was run for understanding if there was a noteworthy variance among the first draft as well as the second draft. It was discovered that a noteworthy change was present among the initial draft in addition to the next draft (t= -2.32, p = <0.05). Outcomes regarding the paired sample T-Test showed that the marks awarded by the teachers increased significantly in the second draft as compared to the first draft.

Table 1
Paired Sample T-Test

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval				
				Lower	Upper			
Pre Marks – Post Marks	-1.24	4.04	.53	-2.31	-.17	-2.32	56	.02

The null hypothesis was rejected by these results (P ≤ sig level 0.05, reject Ho). Having rejected the null hypothesis, the alternative hypothesis was consequentially accepted. The results show that students made progress in the second draft and improved their written performance. It also indicates that the students were able to respond successfully to teachers' handwritten feedback on their first draft and as a result their essays improved in the second draft. Therefore, significant improvement was observed between the first draft and the second draft after receiving teachers' handwritten feedback comments.

Impact of Feedback on Writing Skills

Data collected through questionnaires were analyzed in terms of frequency and percentage of responses. The SPSS was used to analyze the data collected from the questionnaire which facilitated in getting the precise percentages of responses.

Table 2

Error Correction Frequency Table
Q: I do not make the same error once the teacher corrects it

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	8	10.7	10.7	10.7
	Agree	25	33.3	33.3	44.0
	Neutral	22	29.3	29.3	73.3
	Disagree	13	17.3	17.3	90.7
	Strongly Disagree	7	9.3	9.3	100.0
	Total	75	100.0	100.0	

Table 2 shows that 44% (n= 33) respondents agreed that they did not make the same error once their teacher corrected it. On the contrary, 27% (n= 20) of participants disagreed with the above

statement. Whereas, 29% (n= 22) students gave a neutral answer. This shows that majority of the students did not make the same mistake once their teacher corrected it. When the teachers were asked to respond to the above statement, 67% (n=2) respondents disagreed that their students made the same error once corrected. Whereas, 33% (n=1) respondent remained neutral.

Error Analysis

Primary data analysis included the classification of errors made by the research participants. Participants' essays were analyzed to see how many errors they had made based on the three selected aspects. The errors found in the data were classified into three major categories; namely, 'Errors in Grammar' which included errors in verb, tense, and prepositions, 'Errors in Mechanics' which comprised errors in punctuation, spelling, and capitalization, and 'Errors in Language Use' which contained wrong word choice and errors in word order/function. Figure 2 illustrates the frequency of errors made by the research participants in their essays.

Figure 2

Classification of Errors
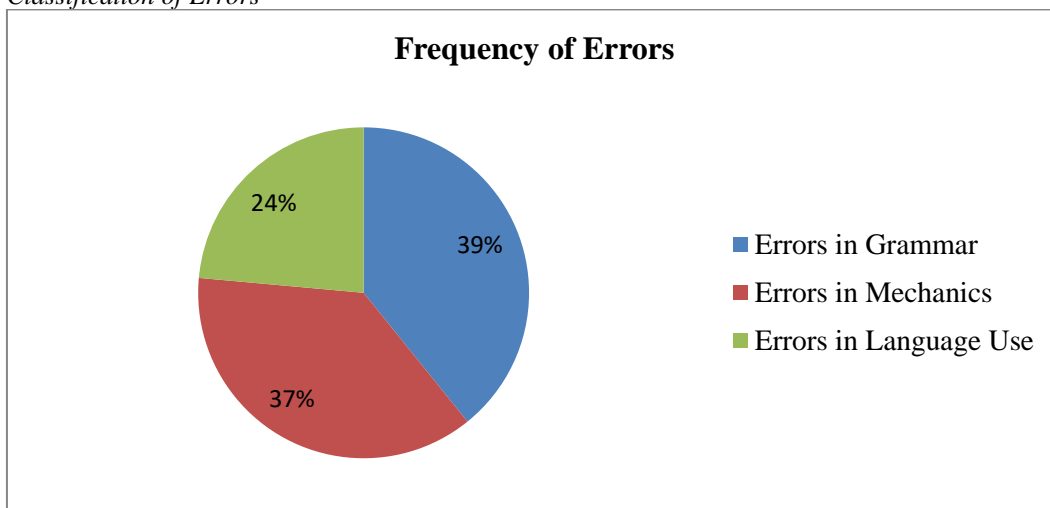
As shown in Figure 2, the students faced problems in language use, mechanics, and more specifically in grammar. It can be easily seen that ESL students mostly encounter problems in Grammar and Mechanics. It can be observed, with an approximate calculation, the highest number regarding mistakes made by learners within the essay is that of grammar, whereas the lowest is language use. Mechanics was in the second position in writing errors among the three categories. According to the errors found in data 39% errors were of 'Grammar', 37% of 'Mechanics' while only 24% of the total errors were that of 'Language use'.

A paired sample t-test was used to evaluate the contrast in participants' writing errors between the first and the second drafts. Data analysis was conducted for different types of errors in grammar, mechanics, and language use. The outcome of the paired sample t-test illustrated the followings:

Impact on Grammar

Table 3 represents the means, standard deviations and standard error means of total grammatical errors made by participants in the first draft and the second draft. As illustrated in the table, this could be clearly observed that the average concerning total grammatical mistakes dropped from 73 to 35. This shows that students corrected their grammatical errors in the second draft and made fewer grammatical mistakes as compared to the first draft. It also indicates that participants were able to respond successfully to teachers' feedback on their first draft which resulted in an enhanced second draft with fewer grammatical errors.

Table 3

Means of grammatical errors between the first and second drafts

		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	First draft	73.00	31.43	18.14
	Second draft	35.00	18.24	10.53

Furthermore, a paired sample T-Test was performed on the total grammatical errors concerning the sample to understand whether there was a significant difference in grammatical errors between the first draft and the second draft.

Table 4

Paired Sample T-Test on Grammatical Errors

Paired Sample T-Test									
		Paired Differences					T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	First draft – second draft	38.00	13.22	7.63	5.13	70.86	4.97	2	.03

As shown in Table 4, there was a noteworthy change concerning grammatical mistakes between the first draft as well as the second draft (t= 4.9, p= <0.05). The outcome showed that the students improved their second draft and the total number of grammatical errors dropped in the second draft.

To answer the research question, the researcher examined ESL learners' essays to observe the incorporation of teachers' feedback. It was observed that the learners corrected their grammatical mistakes after getting the teacher's handwritten feedback on their first draft.

Table 5

Samples of Grammatical Errors

Type of Error	Examples
Grammatical Errors	The whispers had now ***becoming*** screams of animosity.
	Then one day, the people who I ***said seen*** on the streets, not too many years ago looking upset and hopeless, were now full of anger and scorn.
	The days spent ***playing their arms*** can never be forgotten.
	Arthur and Lionel knew somehow Glove got the passcode and ***reseted*** it.
	The other pool that was made for swimming ***practicing***.
	That was the best moment ***I ever saw*** in my life.

Impact on Mechanics

Table 6 depicts the means, standard deviations and standard error means of total errors in mechanics made by participants in the first draft and the second draft. As illustrated in the table, it could be clearly perceived that the mean concerning total mistakes within mechanics dropped from 74 to 39. This showed that students corrected their errors in mechanics in the second draft and made fewer errors in mechanics as compared to the first draft. It also indicated that participants were able to respond successfully to teachers' feedback on their first draft which resulted in an enhanced second draft with fewer errors in mechanics.

Table 6

Means of Errors in Mechanics

		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	First draft	74.33	30.61	17.67
	Second draft	39.33	18.82	10.86

Furthermore, a paired sample T-Test had was carried out on the total errors within mechanics made by participants in the first draft and the second draft. This test was carried out to understand if there was any noteworthy variance of errors in the first draft and the second draft.

Table 7

Paired Sample T-Test on Errors in Mechanics

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	First draft – Second draft	35.00	12.12	7.00	4.88	65.11	5.00	2	.03

As shown in Table 7, the result of the paired sample T-test showed that errors in mechanics made by the research participants decreased significantly from the first draft to the second draft (t= 5, p= <0.05). The result demonstrated that students improved in the revised draft and made fewer errors in mechanics. It also showed that teachers' feedback had a positive impact on students which resulted in an improved revised draft with fewer errors in punctuation, spellings, and capitalization.

To answer the research question, the researcher examined ESL learners' essays to observe the incorporation of their teacher's feedback. It was observed that the learners corrected their errors in mechanics after getting the teachers' handwritten feedback on their first draft.

Table 8

Samples of Errors in Mechanics

Type of Error	Examples
Errors in Mechanics (Capitalization, punctuation and spelling)	*e*very time that I went outside the glorious gates of the palace*.* I could see that people were not happy.
	We use to work in Las Vegas in America ***togather***
	Glove also ***didnt*** know that by ***reseting*** the password would trigger the intruder alert.
	Lionel was ***continously*** asking the passcode.
	I will set up special glasses and ***brail*** cards for blind people
	I got bored then I got it that PI has been **compromised**.

Impact on Language Use

Table 9 represents the means, standard deviations and standard error means of total errors in language use made by participants in the first draft and the second draft. As illustrated in the table, it was clearly observed that the mean concerning total mistakes within language use dropped from 44 to 25. This showed that students corrected their errors in language use in the second draft and made fewer errors in mechanics as compared to the first draft.

Table 9

Means of Errors in Language Use

		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	First draft	43.67	21.73	12.54
	Second draft	24.67	14.29	8.25

It also indicated that participants were able to respond successfully to teachers' feedback on their first draft which resulted in an enhanced second draft with fewer errors in mechanics. To answer the research question, the researcher examined ESL learners' essays to observe the incorporation of their teachers' feedback. It was observed that the learners corrected their errors in language use after getting the teachers' handwritten feedback on their first draft.

Table 10

Samples of Errors in Language Use

Type of Error	Examples
Errors in Language use (wrong word choice, errors in sentence construction and agreement)	I had **a very** extraordinary childhood.
	Nothing can make me forget the ***hateful*** looks they all threw at me
	I knew something was going to happen but I had no idea that it would be so ***huge*** and so savage.
	My father and mother had sent me across the border into England ***to*** safety
	I imagine him to have died as noble as Sydney Carton, **and I hope he lived a life as noble.**

Based on illustrative examples from different essays it was evident that the teachers' handwritten feedback helped the learners to correct their errors in grammar, mechanics, and language use. Errors such as incorrect verbs, spellings, articles, capitalization, and punctuation were identified and corrected. Analyses of students' written compositions revealed that the majority of students did not make the same mistake once their teachers corrected it. It also indicated that the students were able to respond successfully to teachers' handwritten feedback on their first draft and as a result their essays improved in the second draft.

Comparison of total errors

The data on the total errors made by all the research participants in both the first draft and the second draft was obtained. The data on the total number of errors was entered into SPSS and a paired sample T-Test was conducted. The test had was conducted for matching the total figure concerning mistakes in the first draft and the second draft.

As presented in Table 11, the mean number concerning mistakes dropped considerably from 191 (First draft, pre-feedback stage) to 98 (Second draft, post-feedback stage). This could be clearly observed that the mean number concerning mistakes dropped significantly in the second draft.

Table 11

Mean of Errors in Both Drafts

		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	First draft	191.00	76.29	44.04
	Second draft	98.33	43.40	25.06

As shown in Table 12, the total number concerning mistakes significantly dropped within the second draft as compared to the first draft (t= 4.87, p= <0.05). It showed that the students made progress in the second draft and improved their writing performance.

Table 12

Paired Sample T-Test

Paired Samples Test

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
First draft – second draft	92.67	32.95	19.02	10.79	174.54	4.87	2	.04

Discussion

Learners between the age range of 14-16 were chosen because the researchers had easy access to students of this age group as an English language teacher. Besides, through personal experience, the researchers were aware of the fact that this range is possibly the perfect age for second language acquisition. In line with Yule (1985), kids between the ages of ten to sixteen are the most effective learners of a second language in school.

The primary aim of the current research was to discover whether teachers' written feedback helped students enhance their writing quality after reviewing and revising their first draft. With reference to some previous studies on the topic (e.g., Ashwell, 2000; Ferris, 1997; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Sachs & Polio, 2007), it was discovered that thorough feedback was directed to develop accuracy in grammar, mechanics, and language use in the revised draft. It was discovered that students made fewer errors in their revised draft after implementing their teachers' handwritten feedback on their essays. This result that teachers' written feedback resulted in better accuracy in the revised draft is also in agreement with the outcomes from two current research studies, i.e., Beuningen et al. (2008) and De Jong and Kuiken (2012). Beuningen et al. (2008) explored the revised composition drafts and conducted post-analysis research. In their research, it was discovered that written feedback on students' writing resulted in enhanced accuracy in the revised draft. This study explored the effect of teachers' feedback on a larger sample (N= 268) of Dutch learners. Furthermore, he discovered that teachers' feedback helped in treating written errors. The study concluded that only direct teachers' feedback has the ability to produce grammatical accuracy (De Jong & Kuikon, 2012). In both of these research studies, only the use of teachers' feedback and metalinguistic descriptions were apparent in the post-test. These research studies employed a quantitative research methodology whereas; the current research used a mixed methodology to explore the effectiveness of teachers' feedback. The research discovered that even teachers' marginal feedback provided to O-Level students was useful and delivered a platform and a successful life-time learning experience. As a result, this practice trained learners for further composition writing.

It is clear from the findings that teachers' written comments facilitated the learners in improving their composition skills. Teachers' comments had a constructive impact on the writing quality of the learners and a significant improvement was noticed in their piece of writing in their post-

test stage compared to their pre-test stage. Comparing the learners' essay scores in the 1st and 2nd draft also exhibited a general improvement in writing tasks in the Pakistani ESL context. This outcome has been examined by many scholars (Ferris, 1995; Leki, 1991; Radecki & Swales, 1988; Truscott, 1999). However, the results of the current research study contradicts the claim made by Truscott (2007) that teachers' feedback is ineffective and it discourages complex sentence structure which results in simplified writing. The current research discovered that the students were able to successfully implement teachers' feedback in their revised draft and wrote more accurate and complex sentences in their second draft as compared to the sentences they wrote in the first draft.

The null hypothesis H_0 was rejected at $P< 0.05$ which showed that educators were 95% assured that the relationship between the dependent variable (essay writing score) and the independent variable (teachers' feedback) did not occur by chance. It was due to the role of handwritten feedback which helped in improving students' essay writing skills.

Largely, the participants showed more improvement in their grammar skills than in content in their second drafts. It means the majority of the students dealt better in correcting their grammar errors than content. The result demonstrated that there was a noteworthy change concerning grammatical mistakes between the first draft as well as the second draft ($t= 4.9$, $p= <0.05$). The outcome showed that the students improved their second draft and the total number of grammatical errors dropped in the second draft. , it was observed that the average concerning total grammatical mistakes dropped from 73 to 35. The mean concerning total mistakes within language use dropped from 44 to 25. This showed that students corrected their errors in grammar in the second draft more as compared to the errors in content.

Moreover, they did better in organization and development in content. This outcome is in agreement with the research by Ravichandran (2003) that is based on feedback comments on essays that lead to the learners' writing extensive essays with substantial improvement in organization of content. The outcome of this research supports the earlier research outcomes in ESL composition writing settings (Ferris, 2002; Kepner, 1991). The results provide sufficient evidence that the majority of ESL composition writing students not only acknowledge the significance of feedback, they also trust that they get assistance from feedback comments.

Teachers in this study had to cope with students trying to compose a single whole sentence and producing coherent composition throughout the writing class. Subsequently, there were visible levels of learning among high and low achievers in one class. Overall, the results of this research offer strong evidence in favor of teachers' written comments as proposed by numerous former scholars in the area of ESL writing like Bitchener (2008), Chandler (2003), Ellis et al. (2008), Ferris (1999, 2004), Hyland and Hyland (2001). All learners in the research expressed their gratitude for their teachers' feedback, irrespective of what kind it was. This has been witnessed in many different contexts by many scholars (Chandler, 2003; Ferris, 1995; Leki, 1991; Radecki & Swales 1988; Truscott, 1999). It can be concluded that the outcome of this research is in line with earlier research studies with regard to the effectiveness of teachers' feedback irrespective of type.

Conclusion

Composition writing is a creative skill. It is the most challenging subject to teach in an ESL classroom. It is particularly hard for ESL learners because learners are supposed to produce written compositions that show their skills in the organization and exhibit their language ability. Teachers' feedback plays a significant role in teaching ESL writing. This research explored the impact of teachers' handwritten comments on O-Level students' English composition writing in private high schools in Lahore. The qualitative and quantitative data gathered through essays and survey questionnaires showed that the learners were keen to receive feedback on their first draft of their essay which facilitated them in revising and enhancing their writing.

In conclusion, teachers' feedback develops students' learning and improves teachers' teaching if the learners are responsive and the feedback is relevant, clear, focused, and objective. The results of the pre-test and post-test were compared. The comparison showed that the students' writing in the second draft highly improved and their mistakes decreased because of feedback. The null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis that the teachers' handwritten feedback has a positive effect on the ESL learners' second draft of writing was clearly proven.

The research discovered that even teachers' marginal feedback provided to O-Level students was useful and delivered a direction for revision and a successful life-time learning experience. As a result, this practice trained learners for further composition writing. The research revealed that teacher feedback is essential to aid ESL learners to write well in the second language. The majority of students are keen to have teachers' feedback on their essays to make their writing clear and interesting to the teachers who are the critical readers of their essays. It can be inferred that learners reacted positively to teachers' feedback for the reason that they were aware that the enhanced revised draft would get them better scores.

Limitations faced during the research

Even though the research achieved its aims, certain inescapable limitations were realized in the process. The researchers encountered numerous challenges throughout the research. The main challenge was gaining access to research participants. O-Level students were busy preparing for their Cambridge examination when data collection began. In the majority of schools, O-Level students were not free or were having mock examinations. Many high schools denied participating in the research study as the O-Level students were not available. It was challenging to meet most of the school heads, and in many cases even to make contact with them. The coordinators reported that they were very busy or not interested. Thus, one of the major limitations of this study was the reduced sample size than the initially intended sample size. The schools that agreed to participate in the research were unable to provide the required photocopies of students' essays because of their non-availability.

The major limitation of this research is that it was conducted in three private high schools in Lahore. The results cannot be generalized to other settings such as government high schools where O-Level is not offered and multiple draft strategy is not implemented. Moreover, another limitation of the research, which might have affected the result, is that the student participants were limited to male learners only hence; the results cannot be generalized to female students.

The reason for excluding female learners was their availability. The results from female students could have demonstrated different trends and behavior towards the reception of feedback. This could have led to a gender-based study on feedback and its impact. Considering the gender limitation, further research should investigate the impact of feedback on female students and the results can be compared and contrasted with the results of the present study. This future research will be able to fill these knowledge gaps.

The current study focused exclusively on teachers' handwritten feedback comments on students' essays. Therefore, other forms of feedback like peer feedback, oral feedback, group feedback were beyond the scope of the research. The current research analyzed handwritten feedback only. Furthermore, another limitation of this study is the selection of the genre of composition writing. The present research analyzed narrative and descriptive essays only. It will be fascinating to reproduce the current study using other types of writing tasks to test the generalizability of the current findings and assess their impact on different features involved in the writing process.

Recommendations for future research

There are many opportunities for future research that have emerged as a result of the present study. Taking into consideration the present situation of feedback in high schools in Pakistan, this section suggests several recommendations to improve students' writing skills. The current research investigated a small population in urban public schools. This research did not explore government high schools and rural locations with distinct learners with different levels of proficiency. Future research must be carried out in diverse settings to compare outcomes.

The present study used only a multiple-draft writing approach of teachers' written feedback. Future research should look at various other feedback strategies that can be used by teachers in enhancing ESL learners' writing quality such as post-it notes, traffic lights strategy, navigation notes, and voice notes. Further research should be carried out to decide the number of revisions or the total number of reviews that could best help ESL composition students.

Finally, the current research used feedback comments on the use of English articles, prepositions, past tense verbs, language use, and mechanics. Further research should be conducted in relation to the range of teachers' feedback on the modal auxiliary verbs, infinitives, and other syntactic rules or morphological structures of ESL learners' composition text.

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Blended Learning in a University Writing Course – A Test of Effectiveness

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ABSTRACT

The advancement in technology has offered both teachers and learners countless opportunities for exploring and pursuing higher standards in the field of education. Particularly in the era of industrial revolution 4.0, technology has become an indispensable tool for both teachers and learners in language learning. However, the appropriate integration of technology in teaching and learning still needs the thoughts and consideration of many educated minds. This case study aimed to explore the impact of combining traditional methodologies and various technological applications and modern classroom activities in a writing class at a national university in Southern Vietnam, hoping to figure out the effectiveness and drawbacks of this mode of learning. Participants were thirty-two intermediate level freshmen, divided into eight groups for various learning activities. Throughout the course of thirteen weeks, the students received formal classroom instructions, got involved in a variety of interactive and independent learning activities and channels (extensive online reading, discussion, analysis of essays, error recognition, mind map presentation, vocabulary collection, Kahoot, Facebook group postings and corrections, Google quizzes), did the pre-test and post-test and completed the questionnaire at the end of the course. Analysis of the questionnaire, and review of the procedures, activities and pre-test, post-test scores revealed that this blended learning model helped students improve writing competence, gain valuable skills needed for the twenty first century and more importantly, generated the motivation of lifelong learning. The study also reported a few issues that need careful thoughts when applying this mode.

KEYWORDS: **blended learning, higher education, teaching writing, teaching techniques, technological applications**

Introduction

It can be widely observed that blended learning has taken gigantic steps to become a common tool in language teaching in most developing and developed countries where technology plays an important role. In the era of emerging technologies, learners, especially the young ones even go beyond teachers and educators in aspects of practising and utilising new forms of technology.

Prensky (2001) claims that there exists a widening gap between teachers and learners as the former feel uncomfortable adapting their teaching styles to well fit the diverse and trendy demands of the latter. Ribble (2015) published a book titled *Digital Citizenship in Schools,* introducing the nine elements of a digital citizen which include digital access, digital commerce, digital communication, digital literacy, digital etiquette, digital law, digital rights and responsibilities, digital health and wellness, digital security. Isman and Gungoren (2013) conducted a survey in Sakarya University in Turkey on 4395 students participating on a voluntary basis and finalized with the result that students who had more exposure to the internet for reading books/newspaper, banking transactions, shopping, using Twitter and Google+ obtained more digital citizenship features. Technology truly helps develop personalities and abilities, therefore, the concept of using technology in language teaching has been widely adopted and adapted, which contributes to the popularity of blended learning in recent years.

Rationale and research gaps

This small scaled study was conducted at International University, a member of the Vietnam National University – Ho Chi Minh City. With a quite high tuition fee, the International University hosts a majority of students from wealthy families. Mostly self-equipped with modern technological devices like laptops, smartphones, tablets, these students have quite a full grasp of knowledge about technology. Surprisingly, results from a quick survey showed that they mainly used their devices for entertainment related purposes like surfing Facebook, watching movies or chatting with friends, but not for academic purposes. It would be beneficial if the use of the devices was devoted to activities for learning. At the same time, students requested for higher teaching and learning standards and especially, more interesting, motivating and effective learning environments for receptive skill classes such as writing. A review of ninety-seven articles seeking the benefits of blended learning (Smith & Hill, 2019) showed that the blending mode had positive impacts on performance outcomes, satisfaction, engagement and motivation. Therefore, applying blended learning could be a solution.

Despite the fact that blended learning has been existing in developed countries for years, there still remains a doubt about its effectiveness in the minds of many parents, students and even educators. In fact, very few studies investigating the effectiveness of the blended learning model in Vietnam have been reported (Thi, 2019; Tran, 2016). Publications testing the use of blended learning in teaching writing skills at University level in Vietnam are quite rare.

In addition, a review on past studies on classroom activities and online learning applications have indicated that none of these could perfectly act as a blended learning model for teaching writing at the International University. Therefore, a study on a mixed model between technological approaches and classroom face-to-face activities on teaching writing skills was well worth conducting. This was the urge to the conduct of this study.

Research questions
This research aimed to investigate (i) the relationship between the blended learning mode and students' improvement in writing and (ii) the attitudes of students towards this blended mode. There were three research questions as follows:

(i.)   Do students achieve higher scores in the post-test than in the pre-test?

(ii.)   What are the perceptions of students about the applied blended learning mode?

(iii.)   Is there a correlation between the students' post-test scores and their attitude on the applied blended learning mode?

Literature Review

Definition

There have been various dimensions and methods to describe the term 'blended learning'. Perhaps, the initial concept of blended learning was attributed to Colis and Moonen (2001), cited in Afip (2014), who defined blended learning as "a hybrid of traditional face-to-face and online learning so that instruction occurs both in the classroom and online, when the online component becomes a natural extension of traditional classroom learning" (p.38). Valiathan (2002) investigated the term blended learning in three dimensions including the skill-driven, attitude-driven and competency-driven learning, all of which received strong involvement from the instructor, facilitator and media support tools. Thorne (2003) regarded blended learning as a natural form of learning, specifically the integration of "innovative and technological advances offered by online learning with the interaction and participation offered in the best of traditional learning" (p.16). In a broader sense, Whitelock and Jelfs (2003), cited in van Moergestel et al. (2016) proposed the three aspects of blended learning as "the integrated combination of traditional learning with web-based online approaches, the combination of media and tools employed in an e-learning environment and the combination of a number of pedagogic approaches, irrespective of learning technology use" (p.274). To put if briefly, Garrison and Kanuka (2004) regarded blended learning as "the thoughtful integration of classroom face-to-face learning experiences with on-line experiences" (p.96). Blended learning was seen as the mix of traditional practices with online learning activities to produce effective, efficient, and flexible learning (Stein & Graham, 2014). The most widespread concept of blended learning, suggested by many researchers was introduced by Driscoll (2002). He helped identify the four features of blended learning as mixing modes of web-based technology, combining various pedagogical approaches, combining any form of instructional technology and combining instructional technology with actual job tasks. This form of learning appeared to open up a new horizon of knowledge and opportunities for all the teachers and learners involved. In the scope of this study, blended learning is based on the concept of the integration of technological tools and applications into traditional learning activities to give students effective learning experiences through a variety of activities, collaborative work, self-reflection and feedback.

Previous research studies

A variety of research studies have been carried out hoping to verify the effectiveness and possibilities of this learning mode. In 2012, Pop and Slev aimed to maximize the efficiency of EFL learning in a class-size project. They combined the asynchronous elements including self-paced asynchronous writing and speaking tasks and collaboration via writing blogs. The outcomes revealed that the opportunities to collaborate and work outside classroom boundaries helped students generate their satisfaction and enthusiasm in communicating in the target language. Adas and Bakir (2013) explored how blended learning worked for their university writing class. The experimental study involved sixty Palestinian students during a semester using the online tool- "Moodle". A few tasks required by students included posting their feedback to a given paragraph by teacher as error recognition; submitting a

paragraph written by themselves on a given topic; and giving opinions to a piece of posting. The t-test results showed that the experimental members enjoyed the online working experience, improved significantly their writings using topic sentences, spelling and grammar, punctuation and produced better coherent works. In the same year, Ferriman (2013), hoping that blended learning would be a compensation for the problem of class-size, conducted a quasi-experimental study to compare the writing performance of two groups, each with fifteen undergraduates. However, the outcomes of the experimental group, exclusively treated with the online discussion boards for document sharing, personal messaging and conferencing, were not statistically dominant.

As blended learning involves the use of technologies in various forms, researchers have also been trying to explore different possibilities of technological innovations, software and applications. Keles (2012) gave twenty-four elementary teachers instructions on mind mapping techniques, then interviewed them on a six open-ended questions for their viewpoints. Results indicated that mind mapping helped teachers perform better in planning and evaluating lessons, giving instructions and making the lessons interesting. For students, the usefulness of mind maps involved solving problems, generating ideas, enriching vocabulary, sharpening reading skills and preparing for presentations (Buran & Filyukov, 2015). As for the effectiveness of using Facebook as a component of blended learning, Tananuraksakul (2014) conducted a qualitative research study with fifty-three students in a university writing class in Thailand and found that Facebook could be used as a blended learning tool and platform to learn with, not to learn from. According to Majid, Stapa and Keong (2015), when used as a tool for blended scaffolding strategies and a platform for technological aid, Facebook was proven to help students improve the writing process and writing performance. Challob et al., (2016) explored the effects of a collaborative blended learning writing environment on students' writing apprehension and writing performance as perceived by a selected group of EFL students enrolled in one of the international schools in Malaysia. After thirteen weeks through the writing process in face-to-face and online learning modes via a class blog and online Viber online discussion and collaboration on writing in Viber groups, the participants improved greatly in their writing task. Another study on the application of reflective writing was carried out asynchronously using Edmodo as an effective pedagogy for learning English by Sasidharan (2018). Participants approached the materials posted on Edmodo and produced their reflective writings. Results showed that this learning style helped promote student autonomy and active participation in learning, and nurture essential skills such as critical thinking, creativity and problem solving.

These scientific works act as a firm ground to the belief that blended learning is an indispensable component to language learning in the time of technological revolution. However, what to blend and how to blend to fit the purpose of teaching and learning still remain a question for many educators.

Methodology

The sample

The population of the research study was freshmen of an intensive English 2 writing class, with an English proficiency at the intermediate level. All of these students progressed from intensive English 1. Upon completing intensive English 1, these students had acquired basic grammar and structures and learnt to write full paragraphs from about 100 to 150 words in

the genres of giving narration, description or opinion and even write full essays of up to 250 words. They had frequent exposure to traditional classroom practices, for instance, listening to explanations, looking at samples, practising writing from sentences to paragraphs and essays, receiving new words and phrases for writing from lecturers.

A brief survey on the first class meeting was carried out with the purpose to find out how much these students understood the concept of blended learning or how familiar they were with the teaching and learning practices manipulated by blended learning. The finding revealed that all of these students knew very little about blended learning. Some might have attempted to get online, searching for sample materials but they did not receive formal instructions on how to utilise the effects of this learning mode.

All the students were asked to do a thirty-minute pre-test *(See Appendix 1)* with one essay question taken from the TOEFL iBT exam, of which the writing section includes an integrated writing question and an independent essay question. The papers were graded by two examiners based on the grading rubrics *(See Appendix 2)* issued by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) to ensure objective and standard scoring. Based on the scores of the pre-test and the results from the brief survey, thirty-two out of forty students of the class were selected to be participants of the research.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of the Pre-Test

Variable	Total Count	Mean	Median	St Dev	Min.	Max.	Range	Q1	Q3	IQR
Pre-test	32	50.69	50.00	10.98	30.00	70.00	40.00	42.00	60.00	18.00

Theoretical framework

Depending on various factors like the purpose, the availability of facility, the knowledge and capability of both teachers and students, the time allowance, teachers can choose to blend the study mode in different ways. However, Bersin (2004), divides blended learning into two main approaches. The first approach is the Program Flow Model" (p.56). The online and offline components were selected based on the lesson objectives so as to best benefit the learners. In other words, this model "creates a step-by-step curriculum that integrates several media into a chronological program or syllabus" (p.56). The second approach is called the "core-and-spoke" model. "Core" refers to the essence of the course, which can be the basic face-to-face approach (offline mode) or a web-based software or platform (online mode). Then, other resources or supplementary materials (e.g. handouts, activity worksheets, assessment, exercises, online quizzes, software) are provided to complement the primary approach.

In this study, a combination of the two approaches described by Bersin (2004) was employed. With the long-lasting positive mindset towards the traditional approach in Vietnam and also, due to the present context of face-to-face learning at universities, the primary approach was the face-to-face class meetings, added by a variety of teaching and learning activities in both the online and offline mode to make blended learning an interesting and effective experience.

The steps and components

The first class meeting was reserved for informing students of the basic information of the course and for getting their approval to join the study. Their information and scores were promised to be used just for scientific purposes and for the improvement of future classes. Students also understood that they would have the opportunity to experience the combination of different methodologies and techniques for their benefit. Specifically, they would be exposed to and get involved in a variety of traditional classroom practices (e.g. getting explanations, brainstorming, discussion) and collaborative blended learning activities (e.g. mind map presentation, extensive reading, Facebook group) so as to improve their English essay writing competence (Challob et al., 2016). With detailed orientations and a clear recognition of expectations, the participants would be more motivated and make better plans to achieve the aim at the end of the course Ushioda (2013).

The students then proceeded with the pre-test and the brief survey, based on which thirty-two participants were selected. The names of the participants were recorded but no announcements on the list of selection were made since it was believed that failure to be a selected participant could hurt the student psychologically and this might affect the whole process and the effectiveness of the study. At the end of the first class meeting, the students formed eight study groups, each consisting of four members. A Facebook group in a secret mode was created and students were added to the group to get ready for the intensive sessions of the course. These groups were called fixed groups and would operate on the purpose of completing all the tasks needed to be done outside class time. In each class meeting, the lecturer would hold activities to form temporary groups depending on the purpose of the class.

In order to maintain flexibility and variety of each class meeting from weeks 2 to 13, different components were combined to fit the objectives of the lesson instead of applying a single component per class. The components of the course are presented in the visual below.

Figure 1

Course Components
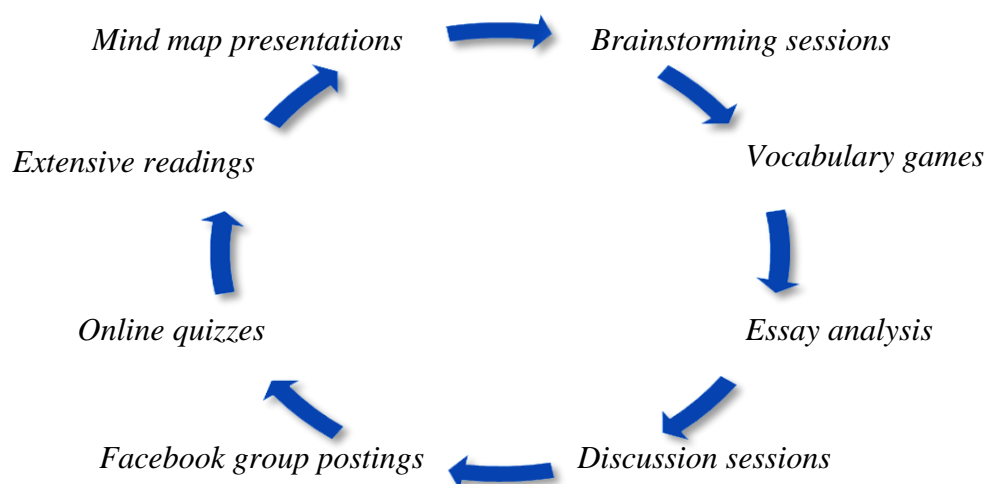
Brainstorming sessions

Brainstorming sessions occurred in almost every class meeting. Students worked together to discuss and gather ideas for some topics given by the lecturer. They then created a simple mind map summary of ideas before it was rotated to various groups for revision or adjustments. When the mind map summary completed a cycle and returned to the group, students reviewed and learned a great deal from the ideas their friends had added or even from the adjustments or corrections that other groups had made on the mistakes. Various techniques were used for generating groups as a means to get students work with different personalities.

Vocabulary games

To break the boring atmosphere seen in some traditional writing classes, students joined a variety of traditional pen and paper or technology assisted games such as hangman, hot seat, running dictation, Kahoot, puzzle. With a belief that games provided pleasant and motivating environments which helped foster vocabulary learning (Alavi & Gilakjani, 2019), the games were designed to involve all the students into the cycle of reviewing, learning, practising and testing on what they had learned. To reach a further aim, these games were expected to help students activate their schemata and unconsciously moved their vocabulary range from the short-term to the long-term memory (Thornbury, 2017). Therefore, this activity was used flexibly at the end of the class as a revision, wrap-up or at the first stage as a warm-up.

Essay analysis

In order to help students learn and improve on essay writing naturally, the Inductive Approach was employed. According to Brown (2014), learning a second language as well as the mother tongue involved a largely inductive process in which learners had to infer or form certain rules based on the observation or the facts around them. In this study, mostly in the presentation stage of the lesson, many opportunities were created so that students were requested to work in groups, pairs or individually to analyze a part of an essay (thesis statement, introduction, a body paragraph …) or a complete essay for error recognition or modification. Essay analysis could be in form of paper work or a blended Facebook posting. This activity helped students recognize the elements that should be included in each part of the essay, how various parts of an essay were connected, how to present the main ideas and supporting details in a logical way, how to express the ideas in English, how to improve the range of academic words.

Discussion sessions

Students had discussion sessions in most class meetings since group work or collaborative learning help boost the students' talking time and lead to more student ownership of responsibility for that learning (Lowman, 1987 cited in Laal et al., 2012). As for the grouping techniques for small activities in class, various techniques of group formation including traditional and technological applications were used (e.g. counting off, picking random partners from a hat, matching names alphabetically, matching favourites, random paper notes, https://flipquiz.me/grouper). These techniques just served the purpose of

providing students with opportunities to work with different partners, and at the same time, fostered appropriate exchanges and interactions (Dubé et al., 2013).

Facebook group posting

This activity served as the main channel for interaction between teacher and students throughout the course. In addition to seeing announcements and reminders, students posted their work, read others' work and gave comments or corrections and read teacher's corrections. Also, they could post the online reading passages, the collection of vocabulary they learned together with the definition and examples. This channel acted as a platform for students to conduct peer-assessment and self-assessment. The Facebook group was set in the secret mode, therefore, all the postings would not cause annoyance to the Facebook community and kept the participants away from the fear of being laughed at or criticized by outsiders.

Google quizzes

A few quizzes were given to test students' progress and vocabulary at various stages of the course. Quizzes, designed with Google forms, included vocabulary check, paraphrasing tasks, error recognition, paragraph reorder, essay analysis. With mutual agreement between the lecturer and the students, at certain time of the week, quizzes were posted on the Facebook group to fit students' interest in technology and to go green for the environment.

Extensive reading

This activity was regulated as an outside-class time task. With the topic taken from the theme of the lesson, students in groups searched for relevant reading passages online, then chose a passage of their interest for their group. After that, they were required to make a mind map summarising the key information and posted the passage onto the class Facebook group. On the next class meeting, groups took turns to give the mind map presentation to the whole class. The audience including the lecturer could ask further questions for clarification or elaboration for any confusion in the presentation. The class then voted on the best presentation of the day. Bonus points or rewards were used as an honor or recognition to the winning group.

Mind map presentations

With the information taken from the extensive reading or group discussions, students worked together in groups to make a mind map on A3 sheet with key notes, illustrations, colors and decorations depending on their creativity. Every member in the group had to take charge of one part of the presentation, got ready and together delivered the presentation to the whole class.

In week 13, students were required to do the post-test, which was in the same format with the pre-test *(See Appendix 3)* and the questionnaire *(See Appendix 4)*. Results of the pre-test, post-test and the questionnaire were then used for the analysis to answer the research questions.

Research instruments

The Pre-test and Post-test

The pre-test and post-test (See Appendixes 1, 3) were designed in the same format, which was a thirty-minute-essay writing task of the TOEFL iBT exam. The purpose of the two tests allowed for quantitative comparisons to answer the first research question.

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire (See Appendix 4) includes thirty-two questions in a five-point Likert scale (to get general attitude/ opinion), checkboxes (to get feedback on benefits/ drawbacks) and paragraphs or open questions (to get descriptive feedback/ comments). A Google form design was applied for the convenience of conducting and collecting results. Data collected from the questionnaire was used to answer the second research question. Answer to research question 3 came from the combination of post-test scores and the questionnaire findings.

Data collection and analysis

Data collection happened at two main phases of the study:
- Phase 1: the pre-test, taking place in the first class meeting
- Phase 2: the post-test and the questionnaire, taking place at the end of the course (week 13)

Two teachers were in charge of grading the pre-test and post-test papers, based on the detailed scoring rubrics issued by ETS. It was a requirement to record key notes of the grading, which would be the foundation for later analysis

To examine the scores of the pre-test and the post-test, the statistical tool Minitab19 was used to provide descriptive statistics for analysis. Descriptive statistics of the pre-test were used to select participants whereas those of the post-test were used to make a comparison. A paired sample T-test and Confidence Interval (CI) were analysed to examine the improvement of the participants.

To process data taken from the questionnaire, the excel spreadsheet was utilised due to its useful functions. When all the participants finished the questionnaire, the responses were recorded in a Google sheet, which then was saved as a spreadsheet file. Automatically, names of the respondents were presented in rows and their responses to each question were placed in corresponding columns/ cells. This allowed the production of graphs or calculation on percentages quickly and easily.

Via MiniTab19, the correlation between the post-test scores and the attitude of students towards the applied blended learning mode was calculated to answer research question 3.

Results

Descriptive statistics

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of the Post-Test

Variable	Total Count	Mean	Median	Std. Dev	Min.	Max.	Range	Q1	Q3	IQR
Post-test	32	71.53	72.50	6.77	60.00	85.00	25.00	65.25	78.00	12.75

Table 3

Estimation for Paired Difference

Mean	Std. Deviation	SE Mean	95% CI for μ_difference
-20.84	12.19	2.15	(-25.24, -16.45)

Statistics from Tables 2 and 3 showed that the participants improved significantly in the post-test (M= 71.53) compared to the pre-test (M = 50.69). The score range of the post-test also moved positively in comparison to that of the pre-test, with Min (60.00), Max (85.00) and Min (30.00), Max (70.00) respectively. With 95% confidence, the scores of the post-test were significantly different from those of the pre-test.

The Questionnaire

Quantitative data were analyzed with major findings displayed in the visuals below.

Table 4

The Ratings of Usefulness of Each Component

	Very useless	Useless	Not sure	Useful	Very useful
Brainstorming sessions	0.0%	3.1%	12.5%	59.4%	25.0%
Vocabulary games	0.0%	3.1%	12.5%	43.8%	40.6%
Essay analysis	0.0%	0.0%	9.4%	43.8%	46.8%
Discussion sessions	0.0%	3.1%	9.4%	43.8%	43.7%
Facebook group posting	0.0%	0.0%	21.9%	43.8%	34.3%
Google quizzes	3.1%	0.0%	18.8%	37.5%	40.6%
Extensive reading	0.0%	0.0%	18.8%	40.6%	40.6%
Mind map presentations	0.0%	3.1%	21.9%	46.9%	28.1%

The general ratings of the usefulness of each course components (Table 4) clustered mostly at 'useful' and 'very useful' with the percentage for Essay analysis topping at 90.06%, followed by Discussion sessions and Vocabulary games with 87.5% and 84.4% correspondingly. Still, 3.1% was witnessed at 'very useless' for the quizzes and another 3.1% was found at "useless" in four components: brainstorming sessions, discussion sessions, vocabulary games and mind map presentations.
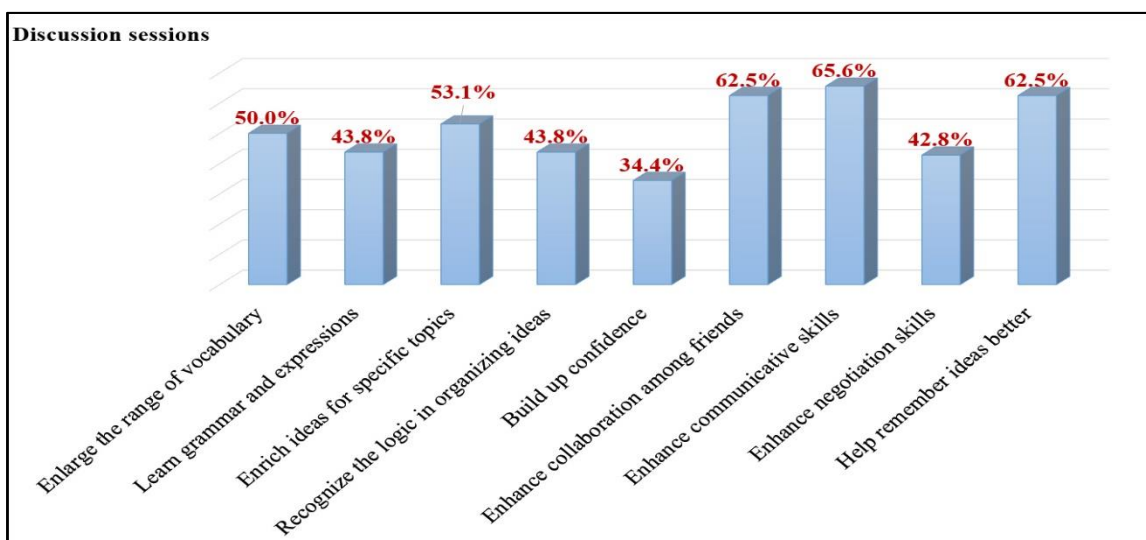
Figure 2

The Benefits of Brainstorming Sessions
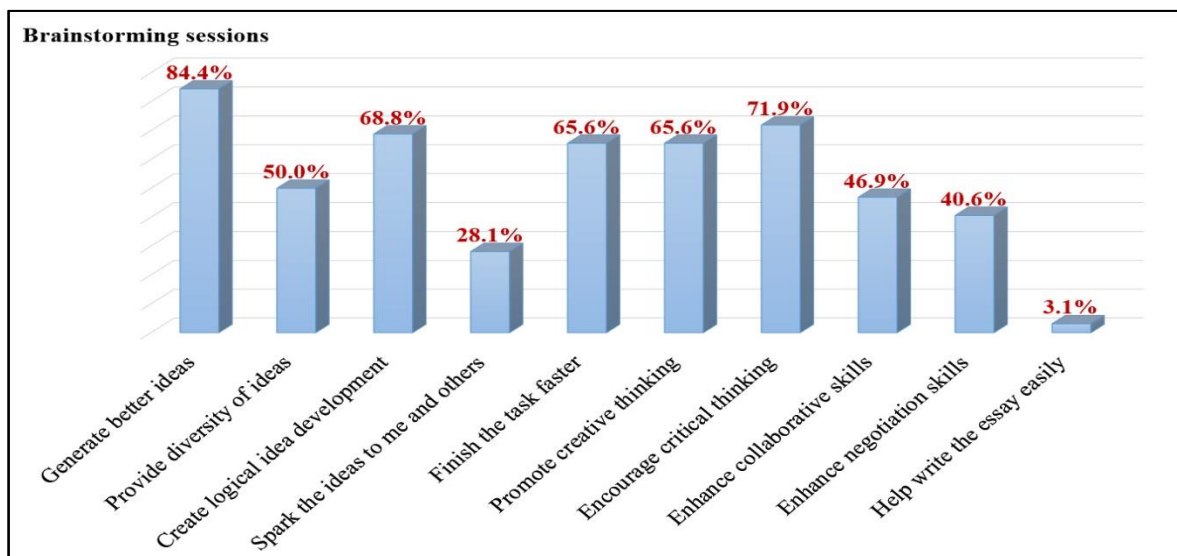
The illustrations in Figure 2 reported that the benefits of the brainstorming sessions possessed a wide coverage. This typical activity of Communicative Language Teaching resulted in 84.4% saying it helped generate ideas. More importantly, approximately two thirds or more out of the students reported that this activity promoted critical thinking, creative thinking, fast thinking and logical thinking, which are the 21st century skills required by any learners to meet the demands of the changing world (Ongardwanich et al., 2015).

Table 5

The Benefits of Vocabulary games and Google quizzes

Vocabulary games		Google quizzes	
Create interesting learning atmosphere	56.3%	Interesting	71.9%
Create a competitive learning environment	34.4%	Help build up vocabulary and collocation	65.6%
Build up and review useful language	34.4%	Time saving	56.3%
Enhance collaboration	18.8%	Encourage vocabulary check	56.3%
		Help review skills learnt in class	43.8%
		Encouraging due to the instant results	43.8%
		Competitive	40.6%

The percentage from Table 5 stressed on the belief that interesting environments fostered the process of learning and undoubtedly, most students would like to associate games with the learning process. More than half favored vocabulary games as they helped create an interesting classroom where students could learn, compete, enrich their vocabulary capacity and strengthen cooperation.

Blended Learning in a University Writing Course

Figure 3

The Benefits of Discussion Sessions

As shown Figure 3, joining class discussions helped students improve communicative skills, enhance collaboration and remember ideas better with more than 60% for each. Also, as a follow-up for the extensive reading activity, nearly half of the students voted that they could work, discuss and consequently figure out the logic in organization of ideas. This proved to be a useful activity with a variety of benefits gained by the students involved.

Table 6

The Benefits of Facebook Group Postings

Facebook Group Postings	Percentage
Enhance responsibility	65.6%
Make better word choice	56.3%
Improve technical skills	53.1%
Self-adjust	53.1%
Convenient	46.9%
Enrich ideas for specific topics	40.6%
Recognize the logic in organizing ideas	40.6%
Practise using grammar and structures	40.6%
Learn techniques in arranging ideas	37.5%
Relaxing	28.1%
Keep informed	28.1%
Promote participation and feedback	28.1%
Foster active learning	25.0%
Enhance communicative skills	21.9%
Enhance collaboration	18.8%
Build up confidence	12.5%
Enhance negotiation skills	12.5%

The activity of Facebook group postings also received encouraging feedback. Up to 65.6% of the participants reported that the act of posting reading passages, posting written paragraphs or whole essays, posting comments and receiving instant feedback via Facebook

gave them a sense of responsibility for their learning. At the same time, the majority of the population admitted that this activity provided them with a technical edge and helped them improve on the aspects of word choice (56.3%) and self-adjustment in language learning.
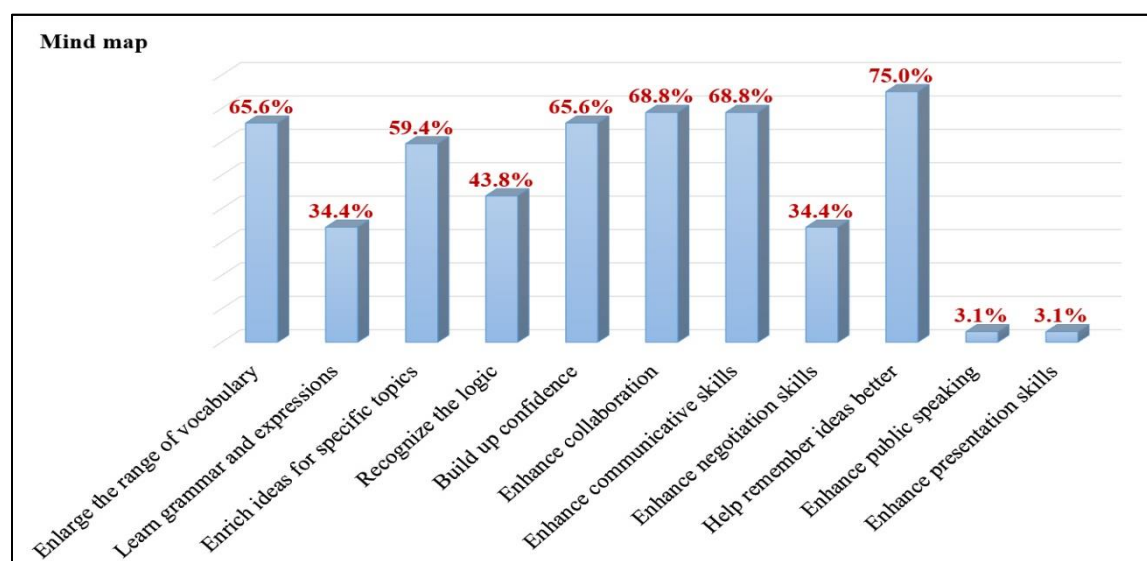
Figure 4

The Benefits of Extensive Reading
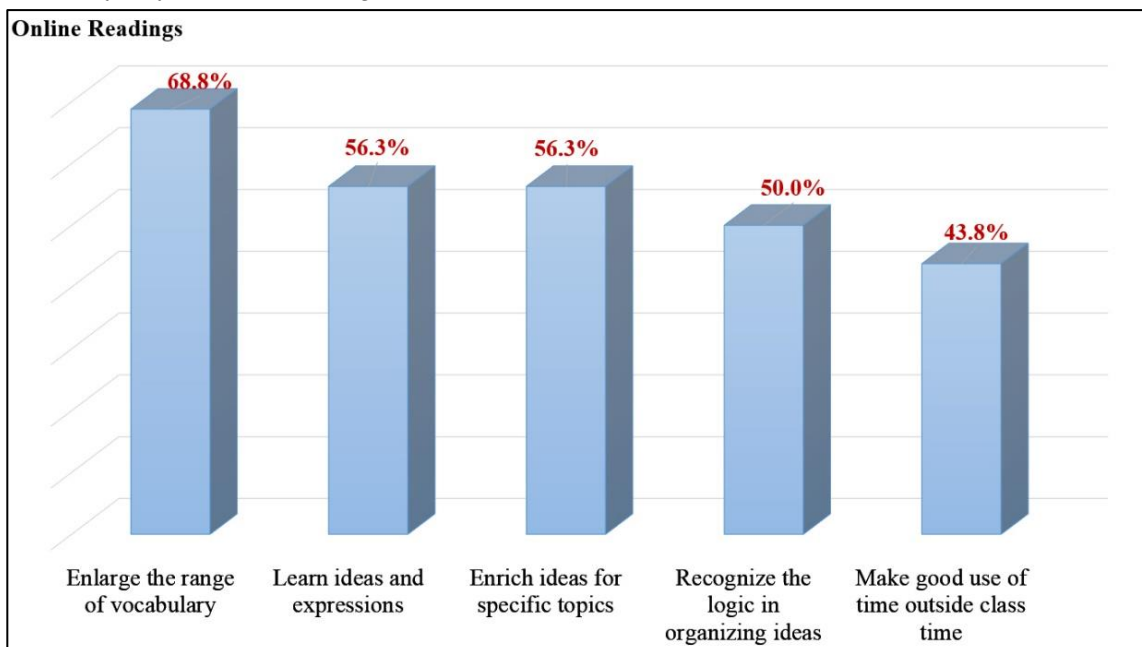
Specific ratings on the online reading activity showed that this activity brought about many advantages. The peak of this component lay in improving the vocabulary range (nearly 70%). In addition, students could equip themselves with more ideas for future use and above all, they could form a kind of logic in organization of ideas naturally. This self-recognition was very useful and worked as basic background when they started to learn about the structure of essays.

Figure 5

The Benefits of Mind Map Presentations

The mind map presentations witnessed quite a lot of positive feedback (Figure 5). In addition to helping to enlarge the range of vocabulary and remember ideas better, the majority of the students agreed that this component helped improve their communicative skills, collaboration and confidence.

In a sincere manner, responses to the open-ended questions revealed many interesting thoughts and sharing, with a few listed below.

- *"Now I can organize a mind-map with suitable vocabulary, know the right structure for writing an essay."*
- *"I have improved my writing skill, enhanced my vocabulary and become more confident when speaking in front of a crowded."*
- *"I feel my self-study ability is better. I can work alone and listen to others, recognize my own shortcomings to fix it."*
- *"I can master the organization of an essay, be aware of writing a thesis statement, suitable topic sentences and paraphrase the thesis statement. My vocabulary range and ability of paraphrasing improve. My presentation skills and collaboration skills together with negotiation skills and logic skills develop."*
- *"I can be more logical in arranging ideas, more confident in communicating with friends and faster in collecting ideas for a topic."*
- *"I improve my people skill, creative and logical thinking, vocabulary, negotiation skills."*
- *"Beside the improvement in writing, the class gives me a habit of reading for ideas, I can do this for even other courses. I feel more confident because I can be faster in thinking, logical in talking or giving ideas."*
- *"It helps me to improve and develop my self-awareness. I have to arrange my schedule in order to work with my team and finish homework on time. However, by working in group, I can learn more about vocabulary, different ideas from different people."*
- *"This course uses many methods to help students improve skills. Personally, I think practising and posting homework on Facebook is a good idea because I not only learn from my mistakes but also learn from my friends in various ways of writing. Furthermore, I think it helps me to reduce time wasting on Facebook, and it is very convenient as well."*
- *"Blended learning helps our learning more interesting and effective. I can access any files on Facebook group to review the organization of the essay, useful language use or some other techniques that my teacher posted for us. I also enjoy the mind map presentation moment while classroom is like a discussion room. We can share the reading we read and collect the ideas actively. Besides, the mini quizzes that teacher post every two days encourage us to do quickly but precisely to compete with others. Day by day it creates a good habit of learning actively. After class, I also want to read more for academic words and ideas for different topics then organize them in mind map to remember the ideas easily".*
- *"I love the way we can work with friends and we can do much more outside the classroom."*

Figure 6

Ratings of the Applied Blended Learning Mode

OVERALL RATINGS

Neutral 6.25%

Very effective 31.25%
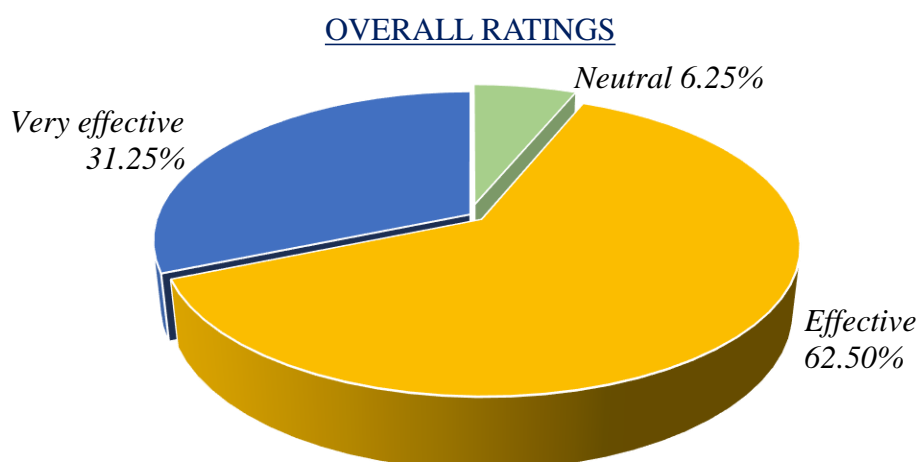
Effective 62.50%

The overall ratings of the applied blended learning model on a 5-point Likert scale showed very positive results. 62.5% of the participants rated the learning style of the course as "effective" and nearly one third (31.25%) ticked their choice as "very effective". Interestingly, no percentage was reported for negative attitudes.

Discussion

In response to the research question 1, descriptive statistics recorded the post-test mean scores at 71.53, much higher than that of the pre-test at 50.69. Specifically, comparison of the standard deviation and range of the post-test scores (SD = 6.77, Range = 25) and pre-test scores (SD = 10.98, Range = 40) proved that the wide difference in the abilities of students have been shortened. Maybe due to the training with the new skills learnt, students have performed better in their post-test with the minimum scores of 60.00 compared to 30.00 in the pre-test. The paired sample T-test also revealed that at the 95% confidence level, there was a significant difference between the post-test and pre-test scores. After the thirteen-week training, improvement in the participants' post-test scores was predictable. This could be a matter of maturity. However, when examining the descriptive statistics between pre-test and post-test in details, it is quite a surprise that there is strong improvement in the post-test scores compared to those of the pre-test. In other words, students achieved higher scores in the post-test than the pre-test. This indicates that students have benefited quite well from the course components. Hence, they fulfilled the requirements of the grading, and achieved certain standards of essay writing.

To answer the research question 2, findings on the attitudes of students towards the learning mode in general, the components in specific and the reasons behind their choices are elaborated. The general ratings (Table 4) positively indicated that all the components of both traditional and online learning activities were useful to the students throughout the writing course. With the positive attitudes of students towards the applied blended learning mode as a whole (more than 90% in Figure 6) and in components (at least 77% for each component in Table 4), there are grounds to belief that the mix of all the activities including brainstorming sessions, discussion sessions, essay analysis, Facebook group posting, online quizzes, vocabulary games, extensive reading and mind map presentations has been useful and beneficial to students in learning essay writing. However, as in Table 4 3.125% or one

student gave a negative attitude towards certain course components. It is understandable that styles of learning, perceptions of learning or attitudes towards a learning mode vary from people to people. There is no perfect methodology or learning style that can fit the demand of every learner. "What works with one learner may not work with another" (Manjula, 2017, p.298), therefore, 3.125% of negative response can be considered a norm. Furthermore, findings from the reasons for the attitudes towards each of the course component suggest that most students were pleased with the applied blended learning mode. With the sharing from the open-ended questions, there are grounds to claim that the combination of activities used in this blended learning mode has brought students many benefits and positively affected students' attitude in learning, especially the confidence and self-direct learning habit.

Table 7

The Drawbacks of the Components

Components	Major negative feedback
Brainstorming sessions	– Difficult to choose the suitable ideas – Some members don't give onions – Lose face sometimes – Noisy, difficult to concentrate
Discussion sessions	– Time consuming – Distracting due to too many different ideas/ opinions – Stressful and noisy
Facebook group posting	– Easy to cause arguments – Stressful – Time consuming – Easy to lose face
Extensive reading	– Confusing sometimes – Time consuming
Mind map presentations	– Time consuming – Stressful

On the other hand, feedback from the questionnaire leaves us with a few issues to consider. Most components were reported to be stressful and time-consuming as displayed in Table 7. This might be due to the intensity of many tasks given in class and outside class time, so they had to work under pressure and cope with deadlines all the time, as they had to fulfill other tasks and deadlines from other courses in the semester as well. Another concern was associated with the Facebook group activity (Table 5) in the sense that 11 out of 32 students claimed that participating in this learning component possibly resulted in having arguments with friends. This might be due to the frequent discussions and debates, from which students had to work together and reach agreement on specific ideas before sending a post onto the Facebook group. However, the real world is full of controversies and students need to learn to adapt themselves into the real world settings, and only being a part of this setting gives students a chance to obtain practical skills for life.

Figure 7

Correlation between Attitudes towards Blended learning and Post-test scores
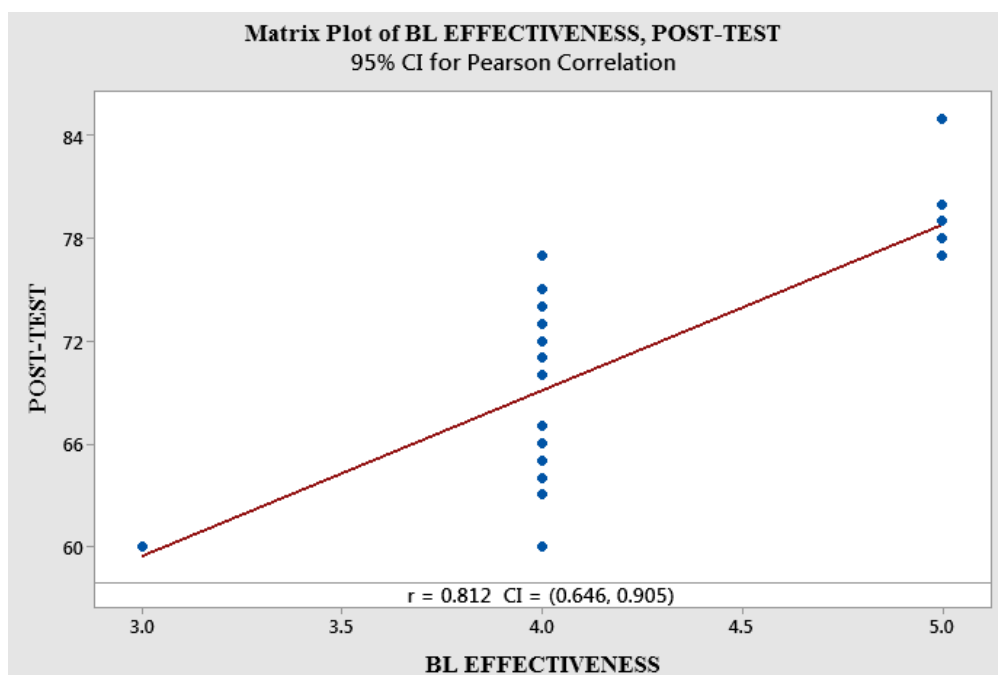
To find out the answer to the research question 3, correlation between the students' attitudes towards the applied blended learning and the post-test scores was calculated. The correlation test showed a positive correlation. Specifically, the Pearson Correlation (r) of 0.812 and the wide CI (95%, [0.464, 0.905]) proved that the relationship between the students' attitudes and the post-test scores were statistically significant. Additionally, the R-square (0.659) means that the effect size of correlation is quite large. 66% of the data has correlation. The statistical data allowed us to believe that there exists a correlation between the students' post-test scores and their attitude towards the applied blended learning mode.

Limitations

It is obvious that high frequency of tasks in various skills urging students to finish in a thirteen-week course was really a pressure, therefore negative feedback on some learning components was unavoidable. Giving students the opportunity to experience this learning mode from the first day students start to explore their college years should lessen the pressure and allow them the time to enjoy the benefits of blended learning at ease. Another limitation lies in the reliability of the results which were based only on the questionnaire and score records of one experimental group due to the involvement of only one group in the research. The correlation test proves that there exists a correlation between the attitude and the post-test score, but the effect size reached the highest of 60% of the samples. The same model applied in a larger scale with both control and experimental groups would give a more scientific result. Moreover, the combination of course components is quite complicated, which means the results could come from the mix of all the components as a whole, the combination of some single components together or even just some single component. Related studies should be carried out to test the effectiveness of each component.

Conclusion and Educational Implications

With the results found from the questionnaire and the statistical data, there are sound reasons to claim that the selection and arrangement of the course components were logical. Although which component brings students' improvement in the post-test is uncertain, the results fulfill the requirement of the study regarding the application of blended learning and which components to blend. Students benefitted from the course in a variety of aspects. Beside the improvement in writing competence, enhancement in typical skills for the 21st century, for instance, collaborative skills, fast thinking, logical thinking, critical thinking, and creative thinking have all been reported. The short answers would excite any educator with the fact that this blended learning mode helps build and cultivate in learners the confidence and self-directed learning attitude, which is logically the trigger to autonomy and motivation for life-long learning. If possible, this research should be carried out in a larger scale so that the effectiveness of this learning model could be clearly examined and clarified.

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APPENDIX 1. Pre-test

INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

ESSAY WRITING
(PRE-TEST)

TOPIC:

In around 300 words, write an essay on the following topic:

Some people like to live in the city. Others prefer to live their life in the countryside. Which is the better choice for you? Give reasons and details to explain your opinion.

WRITE YOUR ANSWER HERE.

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APPENDIX 2. Adapted ETS Scoring Rubrics

INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

IE2 TOEFL WRITING – TASK 2

Independent Writing Rubrics

* Please be noted that key comments of students' responses are compulsory.

<u>SCORE</u>	Task Description
81 – 100	An essay at this level largely accomplishes all of the following: ▪ effectively addresses the topic and task ▪ is well organized and well developed, using clearly appropriate explanations, exemplifications, and/or details ▪ displays unity, progression, and coherence ▪ displays consistent facility in the use of language, demonstrating syntactic variety, appropriate word choice, and idiomaticity, though it may have minor lexical or grammatical errors
61 – 80	An essay at this level largely accomplishes all of the following: ▪ addresses the topic and task well, though some points may not be fully elaborated ▪ is generally well organized and well developed, using appropriate and sufficient explanations, exemplifications, and/or details ▪ displays unity, progression, and coherence, though it may contain occasional redundancy, digression, or unclear connections ▪ displays facility in the use of language, demonstrating syntactic variety and range of vocabulary, though it will probably have occasional noticeable minor errors in structure, word form, or use of idiomatic language that do not interfere with meaning
41 – 60	An essay at this level is marked by one or more of the following: ▪ addresses the topic and task using somewhat developed explanations, exemplifications, and/or details ▪ displays unity, progression, and coherence, though connection of ideas may be occasionally obscured ▪ may demonstrate inconsistent facility in sentence formation and word choice that may result in lack of clarity and occasionally obscure meaning ▪ may display accurate but limited range of syntactic structures and vocabulary

21 – 40	An essay at this level may reveal one or more of the following weaknesses: ▪ limited development in response to the topic and task ▪ inadequate organization or connection of ideas ▪ inappropriate or insufficient exemplifications, explanations, or details to support or illustrate generalizations in response to the task ▪ a noticeably inappropriate choice of words or word forms ▪ an accumulation of errors in sentence structure and/or usage
1 – 20	An essay at this level is seriously flawed by one or more of the following weaknesses: ▪ serious disorganization or underdevelopment ▪ little or no detail, or irrelevant specifics, or questionable responsiveness to the task ▪ serious and frequent errors in sentence structure or usage
0	An essay at this level merely copies words from the topic, rejects the topic, or is otherwise not connected to the topic, is written in a foreign language, consists of keystroke characters, or is blank.

APPENDIX 3. Post-test

INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

ESSAY WRITING
(POST-TEST)

TOPIC:

In around 300 words, write an essay on the following topic:

Some people prefer to play team sports. Others prefer to play individual sports. Which do you prefer and why?

Give reasons and details to explain your opinion.

WRITE YOUR ANSWER HERE.

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APPENDIX 4. The Questionnaire

PART 1: THE BLENDED LEARNING COMPONENTS IN DETAILS

1. Which of the followings is/are your problems in writing an essay? You can tick more than one item.

   ☐ Lack ideas due to lack of general knowledge

   ☐ Have ideas but lack necessary vocabulary

   ☐ Not understand the essay structure

   ☐ Lack critical grammar for essay writing

   ☐ Unable to differentiate between main ideas and supporting

   ☐ Unable to arrange ideas in a logical order

   ☐ Others: _____

2. How do you rate the usefulness of having extensive online readings to writing an essay?

   ☐ Very useless   ☐ Useless   ☐ Not sure   ☐ Useful   Very useful

3. What are the benefits of the extensive online reading activity? You can tick more than one item.

   ☐ Enlarge the range of vocabulary

   ☐ Learn grammar and expressions

   ☐ Enrich ideas for specific topics

   ☐ Recognize the logic in organizing ideas

   ☐ Make good use of time beside class time

   ☐ Others: _____

4. What are the drawbacks of the extensive online reading activity? You can tick more than one item.

   ☐ Confusing sometimes. Don't know whether the information is reliable.

   ☐ Time consuming. Need to check vocabulary to understand.

   ☐ Boring. Reading is a passive activity itself.

   ☐ Others: _____

5. How do you rate the usefulness of the mind map presentation activity to writing an essay?

   ☐ Very useless   ☐ Useless   ☐ Not sure   ☐ Useful   very Useful

6.   What are the benefits of the mind map presentation activity? You can tick more than one item.

   ☐   Enlarge the range of vocabulary

   ☐   Learn grammar and expressions

   ☐   Enrich ideas for specific topics

   ☐   Recognize the logic in organizing ideas

   ☐   Build up confidence

   ☐   Enhance collaboration among friends

   ☐   Enhance communicative skills

   ☐   Enhance negotiation skills

   ☐   Help remember ideas better

   ☐   Others: _____

7.   What are the drawbacks of the mind map presentation activity? You can tick more than one item.

   ☐   Time consuming

   ☐   Stressful

   ☐   Irrelevant. This activity is not related to developing skills of writing an essay.

   ☐   Others: _____

8.   How do you rate the usefulness of the in-class discussion sections to writing an essay?

   ☐ Very useless   ☐ Useless   ☐ Not sure   ☐ Useful   Very useful

9.   What are the benefits of the in-class discussion sections? You can tick more than one item.

   ☐   Enlarge the range of vocabulary

   ☐   Learn grammar and expressions

   ☐   Enrich ideas for specific topics

   ☐   Recognize the logic in organizing ideas

   ☐   Build up confidence

   ☐   Enhance collaboration among friends

   ☐   Enhance communicative skills

   ☐   Enhance negotiation skills

   ☐   Help remember ideas better

   ☐   Others: _____

10.   What are the drawbacks of the in-class discussion sections? You can tick more than one item.

   ☐   Time consuming

   ☐   Stressful

   ☐   Noisy. It gives me a headache.

   ☐   Distracting. Different people have different ideas.

   ☐   Others: _____

11.   How do you rate the usefulness of the essay analysis activity to writing an essay?

   ☐ Very useless   ☐ Useless   ☐ Not sure   ☐ Useful   Very useful

12.   What are the benefits of the essay analysis activity? You can tick more than one item.

☐ Enrich ideas for specific topics

☐ Recognize the logic in organizing ideas

☐ Learn the techniques in arranging ideas in an essay

☐ Build up confidence

☐ Enhance collaboration among friends

☐ Enhance communicative skills

☐ Enhance negotiation skills

☐ Others: _____

13. What are the drawbacks of essay analysis activity? You can tick more than one item.

☐ Time consuming

☐ Stressful

☐ Noisy. It gives me a headache.

☐ Irrelevant. This activity is not related to developing skills of writing an essay.

☐ Others: _____

14. How do you rate the usefulness of the brainstorming stage in groups (discuss the main ideas, supporting details and draw a mind map)?

☐ Very useless ☐ Useless ☐ Not sure ☐ Useful Very useful

15. What are the benefits of the brainstorming stage in groups? You can tick more than one item.

☐ Generate better ideas

☐ Provide diversity of ideas

☐ Create more logical idea development

☐ Sometimes spark the ideas to me and other group members

☐ Finish the task faster

☐ Promote creative thinking

☐ Encourage critical thinking

☐ Enhance collaboration skills

☐ Enhance negotiation skills

☐ Others: _____

16. What are the drawbacks of brainstorming stage in groups? You can tick more than one item.

☐ Difficult to choose the most suitable ideas for the essay because different members have different point of view

☐ Time-consuming

☐ Boring

☐ Make me lose face because i can't think of the ideas

☐ Some members don't give opinions

☐ Stressful

☐ Noisy. I can't come up with my ideas

☐ Irrelevant. This activity is not related to developing skills of writing an essay.

☐ Others: _____

17.   How do you rate the usefulness of the Facebook postings and correction activity to writing an essay?

☐ Very useless   ☐ Useless   ☐ Not sure   ☐ Useful   Very

useful

18.   What are the benefits of the Facebook postings and correction activity? You can tick more than one

item.

☐   Relaxing

☐   Enrich ideas for specific topics

☐   Recognize the logic in organizing ideas in an essay

☐   Learn the techniques in arranging ideas in an essay

☐   Practise using grammar and structure in writing an essay

☐   Make better word choice in writing an essay

☐   Build up confidence

☐   Enhance collaboration among friends

☐   Enhance communicative skills

☐   Enhance negotiation skills

☐   Improve or sharpen the technical skills

☐   Keep informed

☐   Self-adjust from your own and your friend's errors

☐   Promote participation and feedback between students

☐   Make me feel more responsible for my writing and my group's work

☐   Foster me learn/ participate actively

☐   Convenient

☐   Others: _____

19.   What are the drawbacks of the Facebook postings and correction activity? You can tick more than one

item.

☐   Boring

☐   Time-consuming

☐   Stressful

☐   Easy to cause arguments with friends

☐   Easy to lose face

☐   Irrelevant. This activity is not related to developing skills of writing an essay.

☐   Others: _____

20.   How do you rate the usefulness of the Google quizzes (Google form) to writing an essay?

☐ Very useless   ☐ Useless   ☐ Not sure   ☐ Useful   Very

useful

21.   What are the benefits of the Google quizzes (Google form)? You can tick more than one item.

☐   Interesting

☐   Competitive

☐   Time saving

☐   Encouraging because of instant results and correct answers shown

☐ Help build up vocabulary and collocations

☐ Help review skills learnt in class

☐ Encourage me to check more vocabulary and learn more useful structures

☐ Others: _____

22. What are the drawbacks of the Google quizzes (Google form)? You can tick more than one item.

☐ Boring

☐ Time-consuming

☐ Stressful

☐ Irrelevant. This activity is not related to developing skills of writing an essay.

☐ Others: _____

23. How do you rate the usefulness of the vocabulary games in groups to writing an essay?

☐ Very useless   ☐ Useless   ☐ Not sure   ☐ Useful   Very

useful

24. What are the benefits of the vocabulary games in groups? You can tick more than one item.

☐ Create interesting learning atmosphere

☐ Create a competitive learning environment

☐ Build up or review useful language for writing

☐ Build up confidence

☐ Enhance collaboration among friends

☐ Enhance communicative skills

☐ Enhance negotiation skills

☐ Improve or sharpen the technical skills

☐ Others: _____

25. What are the drawbacks of the vocabulary games in groups? You can tick more than one item.

☐ Boring

☐ Time-consuming

☐ Stressful

☐ Noisy. It gives me a headache.

☐ Irrelevant. This activity is not related to developing skills of writing an essay.

☐ Others: _____

PART 2: THE BLENDED LEARNING IN GENERAL

1. What do you like best in this course? Why?

_____

2. What do you like least in this course? Why?

_____

3. What improvements have you made after this thirteen-week course? Why?

_____

4. What activities help you make those improvements?

_____

5.   What areas of your writing competence haven't seen any improvement?

_____

6.   How do you rate the effectiveness of this learning mode?

☐ Very ineffective   ☐ Ineffective   ☐ Neutral   ☐ Effective   ☐ Very effective

7.   What do you suggest to make the course more effective?

_____

This is the end of the questionnaire. Thank you.

Becoming a Reflective Pre-Service English Teacher:
Participatory Action Research

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on reflection conducted by four pre-service English teachers during their teaching practice for a month. In this study, Participatory Action Research (PAR) was used as a research method which emphasizes on the changes noticed in each pre-service English teacher while conducting reflective teaching. The photograph data was analyzed by using SHOWeD Analysis while thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to analyze the whole data. The results of the study showed four issues that emerged after doing reflection which are; (1) teacher agency, (2) teaching praxis, (3) reflective experiences dan (4) contribution of reflection in the teaching practice. From the issues that emerged, it can be concluded that the reflection process can improve the quality of teaching where pre-service English teachers can become a professional English teacher candidate.

KEYWORDS: reflective practice, pre-service English teacher, photovoice, participatory action research (PAR)

Introduction

Becoming a pre-service English teacher (PSETs) is challenging. As PSETs, we are trained to become professional teachers in the future. Thus, teaching practice exists as part of the teacher training program which is deemed as an important part to help pre-service teacher preparation. However, in relation to teaching practice in an EFL context, pre-service English teachers find difficulties and challenges during the training such as the use of the mother-tongue in English language lessons (Kabilan & Ida, 2008); lesson preparation and classroom management (Pasaka et al., 2014). Being just a pre-service English teacher is not enough to cope with the problems. It requires reflection on the teaching practice by the teachers.

Reflection or reflective practice plays a crucial role for PSETs in teaching practice. It helps PSETs to understand experience not only as a common-sense thinker, but to be a pedagogical thinker who is sensitively addresses the needs of learners (Kuswandono, 2012, p.159). The work on the reflective approach has been well-documented in the field of education. A variety of media is used as a means of reflection such as photovoice.

Photovoice is widely used in community development (Wang et al., 2000; Hergenrather et al., 2009) and in public health promotion and education (Baker & Wang, 2006; Kingery et al., 2016; Treadwell & Taylor, 2017). Although photovoice is used in educational areas, little has been done to conduct a study that embraces the use of photovoice on pre-service English teachers' reflection. To fill this gap, this paper reports a participatory action research

of reflective pre-service English teachers by using photovoice-mediated sessions during their teaching practice for a month in the Indonesian context.

The study addressed following questions:

1. What issues occured in Photovoice-mediated Pre-service English Teachers' reflection?
2. To what extent can reflection contribute to teaching practice?

Review of related literature

The term 'Teaching Practice' (TP) has a vital role in a teacher education as a central pivot of the professional training in teacher training programs (Gujjar et al., 2010). The literature has revealed the importance of teaching practice in the training program of student teachers. (Kiggundu & Nayimuli, 2009; Gujjar et al., 2010; Goh & Matthews, 2011). Teaching practice helps trainees to gain knowledge and interest in teaching as well as helps in a personal development such as decision making skills, critical thinking skills, and also increases confidence and self-esteem (Bukaliya, 2012).

In spite of the fact that teaching practice is very essential in teacher education programs, it is deemed as a complex process. Widodo and Ferdiansyah (2018) contend that "Teaching practice is a complex educational issue that goes beyond learning to teach; it challenges student teachers to (re)construct knowledge, beliefs, and experiences in educational issues (p. 2)." With the existence of teaching practice' complexity, a number of challenges emerge and should be faced by pre-service teachers such as students' mixed-ability and the use of the mother-tongue in English language lessons (Kabilan & Ida, 2008); challenges related to lesson preparation, classroom management, and communication breakdown in their field practice (Pasaka et al., 2014). In relation to the issues above, the role of pre-service teachers should be strengthened through reflection which has strong relation with a development.

Teacher Professional Development (TPD) has been investigated by researchers especially in educational issues (Girvan et al., 2016; Núñez & Téllez, 2015; Tan et al., 2014). TPD is always associated with a teacher's capacity to improve teachers' skill and competencies and deemed as long-term process of professional growth. Richards and Farrell (2005) conceptualized teacher professional development as a long-term personal growth process that supports teachers' understanding of their teaching practice and of themselves as individuals.

Reflection or reflective activity has a strong connection with TPD because it leads the teachers to self-development and self-evaluation of their performances which allows them to make changes and implement innovations (Núñez et al., 2006, as cited in Núñez & Téllez 2015). Through reflective activities, teachers are capable to create better condition and improve their professionalism.

The work of 'Reflection' or 'Reflective Practice' have been conceptualized by Dewey (1933) as an activity based on "active, persistent and careful consideration and the further consequences to which it leads" (cited in Farrell, 2008, p.1). Reflection can be described in three phases, or modes: reflection –in, -on and –for action. Framed by Widodo and Ferdiansyah (in press) in their study, types of reflection can be grouped into reflection-on-action, reflection-in-action, and reflection-for-action (Burhan-Horasanlı & Ortaçtepe, 2016).

Table 1

Types of Reflection (Burhan-Horasanli & Ortaçtepe, 2016; Farrell, 2006); Adopted from Widodo and Ferdiansyah (2018)

Types of Reflection		
Reflection-on-Action	Reflection-in-Action	Reflection-for-Action
• This reflection occurs after an action (metacognitive action)	• Reflection takes place during an action itself (spontaneous reflection)	• This reflection occurs before an action and includes planning (proactive reflection)
• Teachers rely on memoir	• Teachers see what is happening and interrogate why this incident is occurring	• Teachers use reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action data
• Teachers take a retrospective look or look back on their past experiences	• Teachers reflect on the present practices, situations, and conditions	• Teachers identify weaknesses and strengths to make an informed decision on future actions.
• Teachers position themselves as learners (learner identity) and as professionals (teacher identity)	• Teachers examine or reconstruct their beliefs and practices	• Teachers adopt the role of an agent of change

Through reflective practice, pre-service English teachers can easily take action on what works and what does not in TP, and it can be mediated by Photovoice, video or a teacher's journal. In this study, Photovoice was be integrated as reflection tool in the teaching practice.

Photovoice has been brought into educational research in the last ten years (Rubrico & Hashim, 2014; Mulder & Dull, 2014; Hayik, 2016; Treadwell & Taylor, 2017). It helps pre-service English teachers (PSETs) to recall their teaching experiences through photographs. In turn, those photographs then serve as a discussion point to critical dialogue, empowerment and action to take place (Hernandez et al., 2014). Reflection which is photovoice-mediated is a creative way to explore the reflection of pre-service teachers' experiences through the lenses of people who are involved directly rather than through a researcher's interpretation.

Research methods

Participatory Action Research (PAR) was used as the research method because it is deemed as an ideal one as it deals with action and the reflection process. Participants are charged to reflect on what they believe, how they view themselves, how they view others, and how they understand the chosen problem – not just at the microscopic level, but in the larger discussion about education as well (Farrell, 2016). In this study, both researchers and participants were involved in the discussion process related to their reflections.

Four pre-service English teachers were recruited as participants of the study. They are Amal, Maspu, Wulandari and Lestari (female pre-service English teachers, pseudonym). They have experienced teaching at different levels particularly in a course before they got the school based internship program and they used to share their strengths and weaknesses

based on their reflection. Before they were recruited, the researcher convened a meeting with four pre-service English teachers and did a negotiation process. During the negotiation process, the researcher explained the purpose of the research to avoid misunderstanding and to ensure that all of the personal data will be kept confidential. Moreover, considering the data collection would be in the form of photographs, all participants agreed to publish them for the research purposes in reporting the findings.

The participants came from the same university located in West Java, Indonesia and they conducted their teaching practice at their final year in a primary and secondary school in Tasikmalaya. During a month, the participants did self-reflection in the form of Photovoice of their TP.

The data was collected by using Photovoice as part of the pre-service English teacher's reflection and semi structured interviews. Next, thematic analysis and the SHOWeD analysis were chosen for data analysis. There are 6 phases in thematic analysis as by Braun and Clarke (2006) as follows; (a) familiarization with data, (b) generating initial codes, (c) searching for themes among codes, (d) reviewing themes, (e) defining and naming themes, and (f) producing the final report. SHOWeD analysis appears as data analysis in relation with the photographs. SHOWeD is an acronym for a series of questions that students answer as they analyze their photos (see in Treadwell & Taylor, 2017):

S = What do you see here?
H = What is really happening here?
O = How does this relate to our lives (or your life personally)?
W = Why does this situation, concern or strength exist?
e = How could this image educate the community (class)?
D = What can we do about it?

Results

Drawing from the thematic analysis, we identified four emerging themes: (1) Teacher Agency, (2) Teaching Praxis, (3) Reflective Experiences and (4) Contribution of Reflection. These themes indicated that photovoice-mediated reflection in teaching practice can be a catalyst for pre-service teachers' personal growth and professional development. The findings of the present study showed that the teaching practice program has helped pre-service teachers in shaping the importance of professional development and awareness of their role as a teacher. Each of themes is presented with data, together with the analysis and discussion.

Teacher agency

Teacher agency has an important role for a teacher especially pre-service teacher in performing activities in schools. It is deemed as a crucial dimension of teacher professionalism (Biesta et al., 2015). Teacher agency can be conceptualized as Calvert (2016) says "the capacity of teachers to act purposefully and constructively to direct their professional growth and contribute to the growth of their colleagues" (p. 4). In this context, Pre-service English Teachers (PSETs) participated and engaged in numerous educational social practices, such as designing (lesson plan, materials), implementing it in the classroom and reflecting their teaching practice (Ferdiansyah & Widodo, 2018). More than that, the PSETs takes responsibility for their learning. The representation of teacher agency can be

seen in the following data. To begin with, Maspu (1st participant) declared her agency as a pre-service English teacher as follows:

> *As an English student teacher that is following school based internship program, I believe that I should give a good performance for starting my career.* (18 September 2017)

Maspu's identity as a pre-service English teacher encouraged her to give her best in the teaching learning process. The identity as "pre-service English teacher" gave her the strength to give students' satisfaction in their learning and improve her performance regularly.

Another pre-service English teacher (PSET), Amal (2nd participant), showed her agency as a creative English teacher.

> *As teacher, especially English teacher, we have to be creative, so that students could engage and receive the materials in interesting ways, particularly motor activities. It will stimulate their memory and knowledge....... I will always try to be creative in creating activities, so that students can easily learn the materials.* (21 September 2017)

Amal's identity as an English teacher convinced her to be a creative teacher so that in the future, she can make creative activities in the teaching learning process. Richards (2013) contended that creativity offers a powerful way of engaging learners with their learning and a creative teacher should have rich of knowledge as a base in making creative lessons because without knowledge, imagination cannot be productive. Thus, teachers' pedagogic interest is considered important in teachers' creativity.

Also, teacher agency is very closely related to a teacher's belief. It is supported by Danielewicz (2001) that pre-service teachers' agency solely depended on their belief in specific decisions or actions. To begin with, Amal, on her reflection showed her belief when she was teaching vocabulary in the classroom. She reported that "*teaching vocabulary to students start with things around them so that they could easily engage in teaching learning process.... I believe that teaching English has to be related on the context where the students are in*" (SHOWeD Analysis, 21 September 2017).

Figure 1
Students listing down things in the classroom

In the same vein, Wulandari (3rd participant) showed her belief when teaching speaking as presented below:

> *I try to build habitual of speaking English by memorizing their routines. If we teach English as a foreign language, the first thing that we have to build is building their habit, habit of communicating using English. So when they speak English, they will feel that it is not new, it's easier to speak using English because it has became their habit.* (20 September 2017)

It is obvious that Amal and Wulandari put theirs into their teaching and relate it to students' real life language use to make the students get used to the English language. Connecting the teaching learning process with real life language use is strongly connected with "authentic learning".

As proposed by Herrington and Oliver (2000) cited in Al Azri and Al-Rashdi (2014), "authentic learning is directly related to the students' real life and prepares them to face and deal with real world situations" (p. 250). To create authentic learning, other supporting authentic tools should be prepared and cosidered such authentic material in order to enhance learners' learning processes (Kilickaya, 2004). Associated with aunthentic material, Wulandari represented her belief when using signs as her authentic material in the learning process as shown in the excerpt below (SHOWeD Analysis – 28 September 2017):

> *In this activities, I want to make the students more considerable about all signs existed in the school... Illustrating real sign to students works much more than demonstrating signs which are uncommon. Exploring signs in the school environment is much more meaningful than learning from worksheet. The students grasp the materials quickly.* (28 September 2017)

Another example comes from Wulandari who used a greeting card as her authentic material in teaching English. She argued that "*Greeting card is one of the many authentic teaching materials and have many benefits in teaching English.. Greeting card teaches the students to respect or care toward somebody's precious moment and how to value something as special as they can because something made wholeheartedly is much more meaningful.*" (SHOWeD Analysis-2 October 2017)

Figure 2
Students making greeting cards

Other reflection data showed the PSETs' agency as an instructor, facilitator and motivator. The agency as an instructor relates to the guiding process. Alutu (2006) defined the teacher/instructor as "a person employed in an official capacity for the purpose of guiding and directing learning experiences of students in an educational institution" (p. 44). Amal and Lestari articulated their agency as an instructor in the classroom.

> *I ask students to write down what they can see in the classroom.* (Amal - 20 September 2017)

> *I ask them (students) to conclude what has been studied before and they should answer it voluntarily.* (Lestari – 2 October 2017)

Amal and Lestari guided students by giving such kinds of instruction in order to get the same perception about what will be done during the learning process. Thus, missconception can be decreased.

Related to the facilitator, Maspu showed her agency as a facilitator on her SHOWeD analysis in the following data:

> *As a teacher, I explain them how to make suggestion and obligation...... I encourage them to the game activity as catalyst for making them enjoy in English class.*" (SHOWeD Analysis-22 September 2017)

Maspu convinced herself as a facilitator in the learning process. She facilitated the students in each lesson she taught. She did the "scaffolding" to help students understand the meaning clearly. Another "scaffolding" was showed by Lestari's reflection during her teaching practicum. She reported that "*As an English teacher, I assess their speaking and help them if there is wrong pronunciation.*" (28 September 2017).

Figure 3
Students performing a speaking test in front of the class

Motivator comes up as teacher agency. It is essential to keep students' motivation in English learning and it has to be teacher's main responsibility. Terpollari (2014) argued that motivation is one of the teacher's goal which is the teacher tries to reach during the class to create a positive learning environment. Lestari appeared as motivator when teaching speaking, as follow:

> *The teacher should give the comprehension to the students that speak English is easy, so they won't be afraid to speak up.* (25 September 2017)

Lestari tried to motivate students and convinced them that speaking was not difficult as they imagined. Giving students positive comprehension about something to be learnt will give an impact to students' thought.

Teaching praxis

Bringing theory into practice is such an on going and long understood existing especially in the educational context. Praxis can be conceptualized by Sirotová (2016) as a "form of experience-based and professional learning" which enables future educators to develop their "professional as well as personal competencies" (p.530). A teacher involved in praxis would bring their theoretical thoughts to every decision they make.

In this study, pre-service English teachers tried to understand how theory informs practice during their teaching practice and how they shape their pedagogic knowledge and transform it into actions. As seen in the following excerpt, searching of teaching praxis, Wulandari adapted her teaching activity from the previous literature.

> *The students played game called "Dear friends, what's the next sign?" I initiate to make this game because it'll really fit the students characteristics who are all mostly hyperactive. I immitate Kevin McCaughey ways of teaching in which tool used to play the game is greatly low cost. McCaughey used dice while I'm using pen/anything existed in the classroom.*(10 October 2017)

Figure 4
Students playing "Dear friends, What's the next sign?

In this photo-enhanced reflection, Wulandari initiated to make the game *notice and caution/warning signs* and immitated the ways of teaching from the previous literature. She implemented the teaching ways with a low cost. In this activity, she just used pen/anything that existed in the classroom. The low cost tool can be maximized in game activities without decreasing students' motivation to learn English.

Regarding teaching praxis, Amal focused on how motor activity builds students' memory and knowledge of the materials. She implemented a motor activity called as total physical

response to stimulate students' memory through an interesting way as it fits with students' characteristic i.e hyperactive.

> *I will associate the appropriate materials with motor activities which could stimulate students' memory and knowledge.* (5 October 2017)

Reflective experience

Reflection in teaching has been widely discussed by teachers all over the world as it trains teachers to become aware of what they have been done during the teaching learning process. As proposed by Dewey (1933) "reflection enables us to direct our activities with foresight and to plan according to ends-in-view or purposes of which we are aware, to act in deliberate and intentional fashion, to know what we are about when we act" (p. 17). Based on the types of reflections conceptualized by Schon (1983); reflection-in, -on and Killion and Todmen (1991); reflection-for-action, most of the data showed their reflection–on action because the pre-service English teachers reflected on their teaching after the events occured, and reflection-for action was also identified in their reflection.

Reflection-on action proposed by Schon (1983) as "thinking back on what we have done in order to discover how our knowing-in-action may have contributed to an unexpected outcome" (p. 26) while reflection-for action as "anticipatory reflection" (Van Manen, 1991) where we "thinking about future actions with the intention of improving or changing a practice" (Olteanu, 2017, p. 2). Thus, reflection-for action is not only considered a future action, but also the strengths and weaknesses (Van Manen, 1991).

In the present study, Maspu showed her missconception in her teaching activity related to the game that she gave to the students after she reported it to her teacher mentor and how she reflected from the situation.

> *The game activity makes the students happy and enjoy to follow my English class, but my teacher mentor said to me I should assess my students during the teaching learning process, and the game doesn't indicate that I assess my students. I should follow 5 approaches in Indonesia education; mengamati, menanya, mengumpulkan informasi, mengasosiasi, and mengkomunikasi. After my teacher mentor suggests me to replace my teaching rule, I just follow her and do my teaching based on her suggestion. For the next week I'll follow the 5 approaches and prepare my teaching well than before.* (2 October 2017)

The data showed that she has just done the activity based on her desire without being concerned with students' assessment. She thought that the activity was great because it created a positive feeling for students, but it was wrong. Her lack of understanding in relation to the approaches of the teaching learning process led her to reflect on what she has done, and tried to fix it based on her mentor's suggestion.

Maspu also presented another data in which she reflected how her praxis helped her in assessing the writing skill.

> *The writing assessment I made is envelope challenge. In the envelope challenge, I assess students' writing through verb appropriation. I checked the students writing assignment without consider the mechanics of writing. I didn't care about the capitalization of the word, but after I read the book developing writing – writing skill practice book for beginner EFL by Patricia Wilcox Peterson emphasized that mechanics, grammar, controlled composition and sentence construction are important in writing skill. For the next teaching, I'll implement those elements to assess writing.* (27 October 2017)

At first, she just assessed verb appropriation in the writing skill, but something went wrong after she read the book related to writing. She found that several writing skills should be considered as assessment criteria. Through this knowledge, she learnt those criteria and tried to implement in the next writing assessment.

Contribution of Reflection in Teaching Practice

Reflective teaching has widely contributed in educational issues especially for teachers. Maksimovic (2018) proposed the advantages of reflection or the reflective process as the ability to prepare and plan teaching performance, handle the classroom climate, as well as the evaluation of students' progress and self-evaluation. Núñez and Téllez (2015) in their study argued for reflection as a "guidance" for teachers to self-dialogue that leads to the decision-making process within teaching-learning contexts. All of those theories link reflection to professional development. As Núñez and Téllez (2015) contended:

> Reflecting is a vital activity for professional and personal development since it leads the teacher to a process of self-recognition of his performance and to a self-evaluation that simultaneously allows him to make changes and implement innovations. (p. 56)

The excerpt below comes from Amal. She reported that reflection contributed greatly and helped her a lot in her teaching practice.

> *....whenever I write the reflection I could see the positive and negative thing happening in my classroom. So that, I could make such kind of plan to future meeting in order to make better teaching learning process.* (Semi-structured interview – 3rd April 2018)

Amal recounted on how reflection acted as a "strategy" to see the negative and positive things happening in the classroom. This role made it easier for her to determine if events happened effectively and appropriately. She could decide from those events which have been identified and make the decision for a better teaching learning process.

In the same vein, Wulandari expressed her improvement and satisfaction in her teaching after she reflected on it.

> *I feel confident with the concept of my teaching. the goal is clear in which it is improve the students' language focus comprehension, speaking and writing skills. Even though the materials mostly dominated by grammar in this grade, I feel like this is the teaching supposed to be, not oly testing, as I saw the students' excitement during my class. By the time I do reflection, I can engage the students in my teaching effectively.* (Semi-structured interview – 3rd April 2018)

Based on the data above, Wulandari saw reflection as "confident-making" for her both as an individual and as an English teacher. As an individual, she could understand herself and look back on her experiences and be more confident to give her "voice" for any problem that happened in her life. As an English teacher, she could be confident enough and be ready within her teaching process because she thought that teachers' confidence would spread a positive feeling to students and determine what the classroom will be like.

Conclusion and recommendations

Reflective practice has been put forward as reasonable experiences so that they can be seen and interpreted in a more purposeful way. Associated with pre-service English teachers, reflective practice hugely contributes as the catalyst which leads them to grow personally and professionally. Further, the PSETs become more aware of their role as a teacher and create a positive and strong agency which leads to shape qualified English teacher candidates. In addition, Photovoice can be a potential tool for pre-service English teachers (PSETs) to help them theorize what has been practiced.

The current research highlights about the PSETs' reflection during their teaching practice for a month which focussed on the issues that emerged from their reflection by using Photovoice. For the next study, it is recommended that a study on how reflective practice can be sharpened with other reflection tools within the context of PSETs be conducted. Also, the exploration of Photovoice as a tool for students' learning activity is recommended to be researched.

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The Use of Automated Writing Evaluation (AWE) in Developing Language Proficiency: A Study from the Learners' Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this research is on the perceptions of English as a second language (ESL) learners on the use of Automated Writing Evaluation (AWE) in improving their written English. By employing quasi-experimental research design, the effectiveness of the computer-generated feedback, which is known as *WriteLab* in improving ESL learners' writing is investigated. It is an online writing tool which brings in the latest developments of natural language processing and machine learning. The present preliminary study which is part of a bigger research indicated that there is a positive perception as viewed by the students. The statistical analysis also demonstrated that there is a positive correlation between the students' perception and the quality of the essays that they produced. Recommendations for further research and implications for instructors are also discussed.

KEYWORDS: computer-generated feedback, second language learning, perception, learners' perspective

Introduction

Learning English as a second language is admittedly important to fulfill the communicative demands of real life situations. The demands are to be both proficient and competent in the language as it is perceived as a platform for an individual to be successful in any field of work at local or international levels. Due to this justification, Malaysia, therefore, has acknowledged the importance of English among its graduates especially at the tertiary level. The Ministry of Education (MOE) for example, has taken several actions such as providing teacher training facilities, designing new syllabi and placing native English teachers at schools (Singh & Choo, 2012). Moreover, in 2012, the Malaysian Education Blueprint was presented by the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) to empower the educational policy (Abdul Kadir & Wan Mohd Noor, 2015). The blueprint is an effort to strengthen values of education in Malaysia. The transformation of classroom to keep up with technological trends, for instance, has been recognized to be implemented.

There is a need of deliberate policies and actions to be instigated by the government to improve graduates' competency in English because there are studies which have shown that there is still an increasing gap between the level of competency of the graduates and the level required by employers (Sarudin et al., 2013). A study on graduate employability in 2012 by the Malaysian government and survey findings from Malaysian employers, for

example, stated that the most common problems among graduates seeking jobs were poor command of the English language (55.8%) followed by poor character/attitude or personality (37.4%) and unrealistic expected salary/benefits (33%) (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2012). In addition, Ismail, Yussof and Lai (2011) in their study on employers' perception on Malaysian graduates found that graduates need to improve soft skills, including communication skills as well as Malay and English language proficiency.

Thus, it is imperative for the graduates to possess good communication skills that comprise both oral and written competencies in English. Excellence in written and spoken English skills are ever more crucial requirements because both are internal and also external needs of communication around the world. In fact, writing skills in the language are equally important to speaking proficiency (Omar, 2005). Writing skill is part of language proficiency that potential employers are always looking for among graduates seeking a career (Abdul Hamid et al., 2014). It has been pointed out that effective writing skills may increase students' chances for success (Alexander, 2008). Unfortunately, not all students have awareness of the importance of writing proficiently. Therefore, it is indeed important to create awareness among the students on the importance of Second Language Writing (SLW) for their future. This action should be started at a young age and as early as possible to attain the worldwide needs.

Due to its global dominance, writing in English is increasingly important. It has always been perceived as playing a big role in learning English as a Second Language context particularly. Surprisingly, Othman (2005) found that, English for Foreign Language (EFL) students ranked writing as their least competent skill even though they regarded speaking and writing as the most important skills to master the language. For this reason, developing student writing proficiency should be a core business for the English instructors in teaching writing. It could be of significant finding to know to what extent students are proficient writers by looking at their writing development.

However, to produce quality and proficient writers is one of the most challenging tasks for teachers. Teaching and giving instructions are not the only tasks they have to perform as they must also develop strategies to bring instructional activities in line with both assessment and instructional purposes. Both teachers and students might face lack of motivation when they fail to achieve their desired outcomes in the classrooms. Thus, the use of computers and technologies as proposed in Malaysian Education Blueprint has become integral in educational settings as both teachers and students prefer to make use of these facilities to facilitate them in teaching and learning process (Hyland, 2010). The development of technology in the field of teaching and learning has opened the door for teachers to experiment the effectiveness of technology in their teaching and learning activities. As digital natives, students are much more attracted to use technology in the classroom. The internet, for instance, provides numerous resources for teaching and learning a second language. This technology offers students opportunities to utilize a variety of learning techniques and strategies. The language learning and instruction nowadays consequently have become more fun with the existence of software and applications such as YouTube videos, wiki creation and also machine tools (Wenz, 2014).

Hence, teachers can use this technology to assist them in their teaching process. In teaching writing particularly, there are software and tools which can be utilized to provide feedback for improvement. As a matter of fact, a good feedback leads to effective writing. Feedback is very important in the teaching and learning process as it facilitates improvement of the learners as writers. Mohd Asraf and Md Zamin (2017) concluded that the developmental

rubric has an enormous potential to be used as a tool for the teaching of academic writing, but efforts should be made to ensure that the items in the rubric correspond with the content to be graded. At the same time, the teachers can easily monitor the students' writing development by comparing the series of essays written by the students. Hyland (2003) proposes that feedback in writing could be given by providing extensive comments on students' texts to give readers responses and at the same time help them to improve and learn as writers. Feedback is a mechanism to encourage students to revise their texts and make improvement. It is also an opportunity for both students and teachers to have interaction.

In practice, most ESL writing instructors recognize the difficulty to produce proficient writers especially when the main barrier comes from poor English background of the learners. Hiew (2012) claimed that, majority of Malaysian students are not proficient in English even upon completing the eleven years of education. When it comes to a practical part, they fail to perform greatly. This is due to the reason that they just learn without having an awareness of how important it is to master in all language skills including grammar. The worst scenario is when they just learn English for the sake of passing an examination. In other words, they possibly lack the motivation to learn the language as they are exposed to the same methods or ways of instruction. Similarly, the instructors will also feel less motivated when the learners do not show their interests in learning the language. With the development of technological devices, both parties can certainly manipulate the situation to make teaching and learning English particularly writing, incredibly interesting.

There are indeed numerous studies which emphasize on the impact of corrective feedback in ESL writing. Vaezi, Zand-Vakili, and Kashani (2011) for example, conducted a study on observational classroom research on corrective feedback. Meanwhile, some other researchers have proposed the effects of implicit corrective feedback (Ellis et al., 2006; Li, 2010; Mackey & Goo, 2007). The major concern of these studies was on the written feedback provided by teachers to improve students' essays. Since grammatical inaccuracy in students' written work has been a major problem that needs to be addressed, Muhammad Lotfie and Abd Samad (2007) conducted an exploratory study on the role of noticing in improving written accuracy. The researchers applied Enhancement technique, a feedback technique that promotes noticing. The finding showed that, this feedback type is very helpful to facilitate students' writing development.

Interestingly, with the development of technologies, modern automated system has been introduced to assist teachers to provide feedback. The system, which is known as Automated Writing Evaluation (AWE), helps learners to achieve accuracy in writing. This would help the teachers to frequently give feedback to students since the system at least will help to determine the types of errors produced by the learners in their writing, and with the teachers' help and guidance, they would improve themselves gradually.

The advancement of computer technology has made Automated Writing Evaluation (AWE) a great potential to be deployed in research. AWE which is also known as automated essay scoring, computerized essay grading, computer-generated scoring, or machine scoring of essays has been defined as "the ability of computer technology to evaluate and score written prose" (Shermis & Burstein, 2003, p. xiii). Page (2003) states that the investigations of AWE was initiated in the mid-1960s. There is also an opportunity to revise the draft for multiple times when utilizing AWE. The system reasonably supports the value of multiple drafting (Burstein, 2012). Multiple drafting means that writers have to go through a series of revisions to achieve a better grade. Revisions are essential in the writing process to give

learners the chance to improve their writing. However, it seems that teachers may refrain from providing the feedback to these multiple drafts especially when dealing with a big class. To be noted, the AWE can operate in the sense of bringing changes to instructional dynamics (Cotos, 2014). The vendors of AWE regard this program as effective supplements to assist teachers to achieve consistent writing performance among the learners. The realization of such tools to provide wider scope and advance applications has offered both teachers and students more options to have a far greater insight to seek for the best way to develop writing skills and performance. However, more research needs to be conducted to provide evidence that AWE can be an effective tool for corrective feedback in ESL writing classrooms.

Methodology

This study attempts to find out what the learners' perceptions are towards AWE as a tool to improve their writing. AWE was implemented as a part of classroom instruction during August 2017- January 2018 semester. Permission to conduct this research was sought from the Program Coordinator of Academy Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA Dungun, Malaysia. After getting the approval, the researcher identified 80 Diploma students (semester 3 students, taking Integrated Language Skills: Writing) to be selected as respondents for this study.

There were two phases involved. First phase involved a series of pre-experimental stages. Firstly, all 80 students, both control and experimental groups were given a grammatical sensitivity test using Oxford Practice Grammar-Intermediate Diagnostic Test to identify their level of grammatical sensitivity and the focus was on the types of grammatical items (Eastwood, 2019). The test was given to test their grammar sensitivity, whether they have performed Language Analytical Ability (LAA). LAA refers to individual factors known as aptitude and motivation that influence language learning (Kormos, 2012). In relation to that, Carroll's (1981) model of language aptitude comprises grammatical sensitivity and inductive learning ability. These two models have been combined into a single component which is known as Language Analytical Ability (Skehan, 1998). The test covers the revision of words and sentences, parts of speech, passive voice, the infinitive and the –ing form, reported speech, relative clauses, conditionals and also linking words, which are among important items found and used in a writing text. The internal consistency of the instrument was tested using Kuder Richardson Formula 20 (KR-20). The reliability coefficient index of the test (.81) indicates that it is highly reliable.

The next stage also involved all students when they were given exercises in the form of short reading texts and they were assigned to identify each grammatical item found in the text. At the same time, within three weeks, the participants were exposed to language analysis and mechanics of writing according to course syllabus by listening to a lecture and visiting websites. The researcher also started to introduce AWE systems to the experimental group and guided them on how to use those systems. The table 1 below provides selected grammatical items from a wide range of them that *WriteLab*, an AWE system, could detect in student essays and their corresponding feedback.

Automated Writing Evaluation in Developing Language Proficiency

Table 1
A Summary of the Important Grammatical Areas Detected by WriteLab

No.	Grammar areas		Detected samples and feedback
1.	**Sentences**		In the morning, after breakfast but before lunch. *Revised:* *In the morning, after breakfast but before lunch, I had a snack.*
2.	**Subject and Predicate**		Johan wash dishes every day. *Revised:* *Johan washes dishes every day.*
3.	**Clauses**		Who was wearing the red hat. *Revised:* *The thief, **who was wearing the red hat**, was optimistic.*
4.	**Phrases**		**Washing the dishes quickly**, a glass broke. *Revised:* ***Washing the dishes quickly**, I broke a glass.*
5.	**Parts of Speech**	*Nouns*	Coffee helps Kathy stay awake. *Explanation:* *There are two nouns in this sentence: "Coffee" and "Kathy." "Coffee" is a common noun, while "Kathy" is a proper noun because it refers to a particular person.*
		Pronouns	Nathan was tired, so Nathan took a nap. *Revised:* *Nathan was tired, so he took a nap.*
		Adjectives and Adverbs	The bird flew **swift**. *Revised:* *The bird flew **swiftly**.*
		Verbs	The windows **have not open** for years. *Revised:* *The windows **have not opened** for years.*
		Prepositions	I replaced my old coat with a new coat **with** a similar design. *Revised:* *I replaced my old coat with a new coat that looks similar.*
		Conjunctions	An open window is an excellent source of fresh air, **however**, many people prefer closed windows when it's raining. *Revised:* *An open window is an excellent source of fresh air. **However**, many people prefer closed windows when it's raining.*
		Interjections	**Yes**, I would love to skip class. *Explanation:* *We use the interjection "Yes" to express agreement. "Yes" is attached to the beginning of a sentence rather than left to stand alone.*
		Articles	He is good friend. *Revised:* *He is **a** good friend.*
6.	**Mixed Constructions**		By the time I finished the book was dawn. *Revised:* *It was dawn by the time I finished the book.*

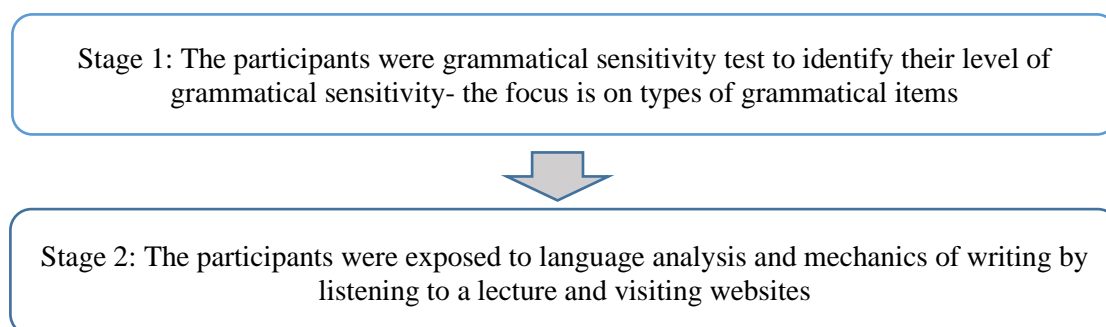| 7.	**Parallel Structure**	Most successful basketball players should be excellent at **running and jumping**, **able to dribble**, and **good at shooting**. *Revised:* *Most successful basketball players should be excellent at **running, jumping, dribbling, and shooting**.*
8.	**Negatives**	They hardly never eat healthy food. *Revision:* *They hardly ever eat healthy food.*
9.	**Numbers and Numerals**	The recipe calls for two dozens eggs. *Revised:* *The recipe calls for two dozen eggs.*
10.	**Typos, Misspelled Words, and Misused Words**	It's obvious for me. *Revised:* *It's obvious to me.*
11.	**Punctuation**	They ate apples, pears,, and oranges. *Revised:* *They ate apples, pears, and oranges.*
12.	**Formatting**	they went for a walk. *Revised:* *They went for a walk.*

In the second phase of the experiment, both groups were assigned to write an essay of 180-200 word length for the preparation of the first course assessment. The experimental group was assigned to use AWE to revise their essays and at the same time received teacher feedback while the control group only received conventional teacher feedback. After completing the task, all essays were collected, graded, analyzed and sorted into categories based on the scoring guide provided by the faculty. Categorising was performed to identify the types of writers the respondents belonged to. Those categories were excellent user, good user, satisfactory user, modest user and limited user. There is a need for placing them into categories to identify the strengths and weaknesses of each student. This can help the researchers to easily compare the consistency of the students' result before and after using AWE. The stages were repeated until they completed writing four different essays. The topics of each essay were obtained from past year question papers of the course and also course materials. The topics were "How to tackle financial crisis", "How one can gain benefits through participating in voluntary work", "The benefits of health education program", and "How youths can contribute to society". Both hardcopies and softcopies were collected for the analyses.

To assess the participants' perception of using AWE in assisting their learning process, the treatment group answered a questionnaire. The 15-item questionnaire was designed to identify how the participants perceive the effectiveness of the AWE system (5 items), writing motivation (5 items) and writing quality (5 items) and it was adapted from the study conducted by Liao (2016). 5-point Likert Scale ranging from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree) was used to measure the constructs. The items of the questionnaire attained Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from .81 to .89, indicating high reliability. This perception study added evidence of improvement in the aspects of grammatical sensitivity, lexical, syntactical as well as rhetorical developments of students' written work. Pearson's correlation coefficient was run to find out the relationship between AWE effectiveness and learners' motivation and also between learners' motivation and writing quality. The summary of the research design is illustrated in the following Figure 1.

Pre-experimental stage (WEEK 1-3)

Figure 1: Summary of research design

Pre-experimental Stage

> Stage 1: The participants were grammatical sensitivity test to identify their level of grammatical sensitivity- the focus is on types of grammatical items

> Stage 2: The participants were exposed to language analysis and mechanics of writing by listening to a lecture and visiting websites

These two stages were completed to identify the level of language analytical ability among the participants before utilizing AWE. The stages involved both groups; experimental and control groups.

Experimental tasks (WEEK 4-14)

Task 1: Both control and experimental groups were assigned to write an essay with the length of 180-200 words (this was a preparation for the first course assessment)

Task 2: The experimental group was assigned to use *WriteLab*, the tool to revise their essays

Task 3: Both groups submitted their essays to the teacher for scoring and grading.

Task 4: Teacher returned the essays and discussed the errors

Task 5: Another topic was given for writing a new essay

Task 6: Task 2, 3, 4 and 5 were conducted consecutively (first essay to fourth essay).

Task 7: Analysis was conducted by comparing the performance of both groups.

All scores obtained from both pre and experimental stages were recorded and compared to find out whether there was an improvement or otherwise.

Based on the questionnaire distributed to the participants, a statistical correlation was observed between AWE effectiveness and learners' motivation. There are five items for each category of questions. The questionnaire also highlighted writing quality, therefore, the correlation between learners' motivation and writing quality was observed. The items also consisted of 5 questions.

Results and discussion

Learners' perceptions of AWE effectiveness

Table 2 below shows the result of the learners' perceptions towards AWE effectiveness. There were five items or statements constructed for the effectiveness:

-       *AWE (WriteLab) feedback is effective to understand my weaknesses in writing.*

-       *AWE provides constructive errors and feedback.*

-       *AWE clearly clarifies each type of errors in my writing.*

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- *I can easily improve my essays based on the feedback.*

- *WriteLab improves my analytical ability.*

Table 2

Learners' Perceptions of AWE Effectiveness

Item	Statement	Strongly agree 5	Agree 4	Uncertain 3	Disagree 2	Strongly disagree 1
1	AWE *(WriteLab)* feedback is effective to understand my weaknesses in writing.	16 40%	24 60%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%
2	AWE provides constructive errors and feedback.	12 30%	27 67.5%	1 2.5%	0 0%	0 0%
3	AWE clearly clarifies each type of errors in my writing.	15 37.5%	23 57.5%	2 5%	0 0%	0 0%
4	I can easily improve my essays based on the feedback.	11 27.5%	23 57.5%	6 15%	0 0%	0 0%
5	*WriteLab* improves my analytical ability.	10 25%	27 67.5%	3 7.5%	0 0%	0 0%

From the table above, it can be drawn that item 1 for AWE effectiveness, with the total of 40 subjects involved, there were 16 participants (40%) who strongly agreed that "*WriteLab feedback is effective to understand my weaknesses in writing*". The rest 24 (60%) chose 'agree' for the item 1. No participant was found stating 'uncertain' (0%), 'disagree' (0%) and 'strongly disagree' (0%). This shows that all participants perceived that the tool has effectively aided them in tackling with their weaknesses in writing. This shows that all participants perceived that the tool has effectively aided them in tackling with their weaknesses in writing. The percentage indicates that 100% of the respondents were positive that AWE can understand their weaknesses.

For item 2, "*AWE provides constructive errors and feedback*", there were 12 participants who (30%) answered 'strongly agree', while 27 of them (67.5%) chose 'agree'. There were only one participant (2.5%) who answered 'uncertain' whether AWE provided them constructive errors and feedback or not. There was no response recorded (0%) for 'disagree' and 'strongly disagree' scales for item 2. Therefore, it can be concluded that majority of the participants regarded AWE as a constructive tool to deal with the errors and feedback. This result demonstrates that the students were satisfied that AWE could provide the necessary feedback that can help them improve their essay writing.

Item 3, "*AWE clearly clarifies each type of errors in my writing*" recorded 15 participants (37.5%) who responded 'strongly agree'. Majority of participants, with 23 of them (57.5%) stated that they "agree' with the statement. Even though most of the participants positively accepted that AWE can clarify their types of errors, there were 2 of them (5%) who chose 'uncertain'. Similar to the previous two items, there was no one responded to 'disagree' and 'strongly disagree' (0%). Although a small percentage of the students were not certain, a majority of the students reported that AWE can detect each type of error that they committed. This is imperative if the students would like to further enhance their skills through learning from their mistakes.

The fourth statement (item 4) which is *"I can easily improve my essays based on the feedback"* revealed that there were 11 participants (27.5%) stated that they 'strongly agree'. For the scale 'agree', there were 23 (57.5%) participants in which the result represented the majority of them. Meanwhile, there were 6 participants (15%) who responded 'uncertain' whether the AWE can easily improve their essays based on the feedback provided. The result also indicated that there were no one chose 'disagree' and 'strongly disagree' (0%) for the statement. For this item 4, although a small sum of percentage indicated unsure students. More than half positively agreed that AWE can improve their essays based on feedback.

The last item (item 5), "*WriteLab improves my analytical ability*" reported 10 participants (25%) who chose 'strongly agree' and 27 participants (67.5%) answered 'agree'. There were 3 (7.5) of them who were 'uncertain' with the improvement which the *WriteLab* can offer for them. No participant (0%) was found responded to 'disagree' and 'strongly disagree'. The results from the last item for this set of questions suggests that the software AWE can help to improve the writer's analytical ability.

Overall, the findings here reveal that the use of WriteLab has great potential in opening the door for teachers to experiment with the effectiveness of technology in their teaching and learning activities. This concurs the claim by Hyland (2010) that the development of technology in the field of teaching and learning has given new ideas to improve writing.

Participants' evaluative views of motivation towards the use of AWE system

The following Table 3 illustrates the result of the learners' perception towards motivation. There were five items or statements constructed for the motivation:

- *I enjoy using WriteLab every time I write an essay.*

- *When I write an essay, I have no fear to see my teacher anymore as I can always use WriteLab.*

- *I feel motivated when I received positive feedback from WriteLab.*

- *I feel confident to write more essays.*

- *The features of WriteLab stimulate my learning interest.*

Table 3

Learners' Perceptions of Motivation

Item	Statement	Strongly agree 5	Agree 4	Uncertain 3	Disagree 2	Strongly disagree 1
1	I enjoy using *WriteLab* every time I write an essay.	16 40%	21 52.5%	3 7.5%	0 0%	0 0%
2	When I write an essay, I have no fear to see my teacher anymore as I can always use *WriteLab*.	10 25%	24 60%	6 15%	0 0%	0 0%
3	I feel motivated when I received positive feedback from *WriteLab*.	15 37.5%	19 47.5%	6 15%	0 0%	0 0%
4	I feel confident to write more essays.	11 27.5%	26 65%	3 7.5%	0 0%	0 0%

| 5 | The features of *WriteLab* stimulate my learning interest. | 8 | 30 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| | | 20% | 75% | 5% | 0% | 0% |

The result indicated that for the first item which is "*I enjoy using WriteLab every time I write an essay*" recorded 16 participants (40%) who chose 'strongly agree' and 21 participants (52.5%) chose 'agree'. There were 3 participants who claimed that they were 'uncertain', while no one (0%) responded to 'disagree' and strongly 'disagree'. Although a majority of the students expressed their enjoyment in using *WriteLab*, what was more important is that the percentages indicated that none showed any dislike to the software.

For the second statement (*When I write an essay, I have no fear to see my teacher anymore as I can always use WriteLab)*, there were 10 students (25%) answered 'strongly agree' and 24 more (60%) responded 'agree'. Meanwhile, the other 6 participants claimed that there were 'uncertain' with the statement. No participant was found responding to 'disagree' and strongly 'disagree' (0%). This second statement is imperative to indicate the students' perception of their teachers in class while completing their writing task. This data suggest that teachers can be a stumbling block for students to improve their writing skill and that with *WriteLab*, they can cast away that fear.

The next statement, "*I feel motivated when I received positive feedback from WriteLab*" showed that there were 15 students (37.5%) answered 'strongly agree' and 19 students (47.5%) chose 'agree'. The other 6 students were found choosing uncertain for the answer. For both 'disagree' and 'strongly disagree', there was no student found responding to the scales. The data from this statement appears to confirm that motivation is an important aspect of writing. Without motivation, students will lose their drive to write and thus a software like *WriteLab* can help rectify this problem.

The fourth item (*I feel confident to write more essays*) recorded 11 (27.5%) participants who stated 'strongly agree' and 26 participants (65%) responded that they 'agree'. The rest 3 (7.5%) participants were somehow, "uncertain" with the statement. There was no participant (0) chose 'disagree' and 'strongly disagree'. Confidence in writing is certainly important and these percentages are a clear statement of how WriteLab can do the trick in helping these students to boost their level of confidence in writing.

Meanwhile, there were 8 participants (20%) regarded AWE as interesting when they chose 'strongly agree' for the fifth statement (*The features of WriteLab stimulate my learning interest*). Majority of them, 30 participants (75%) stated that they 'agree' with the statement, while the other 2 participants (5%) were 'uncertain'. The scales 'disagree' and 'strongly disagree' recorded no participant for the statement.

Maintaining a learning interest can be challenging for many students. Therefore, *WriteLab* has the potential to stimulate learning and maintain the students' interest. The overall percentage here indicated that students can find positive results when using *WriteLab*. One can easily gather that in general, students enjoy a great sense of motivation when they use *WriteLab* to provide feedback for them. Except for item number 3, the rest of the respondents have shown that they were in favor of using the software as something meaningful in helping them improve as writers. These findings confirm Wenz's (2014) research on how technology can stimulate students' interest in learning.

Participants' evaluative views towards quality of writing

Table 4 below indicates the learners' perception toward writing quality after using AWE. There were five items constructed in evaluating writing quality:

- *My progress report provided by WriteLab shows improvement.*
- *I start to know and be aware of each grammatical item and their functions in writing.*
- *My teacher gives a positive feedback to my writing performance.*
- *There is an achievement of my final score compared to my first essay score.*
- *WriteLab really helps me to become a quality writer.*

Table 4

Learners' Perceptions of Writing Quality

Item	Statement	Strongly agree 5	Agree 4	Uncertain 3	Disagree 2	Strongly disagree 1
1	My progress report provided by *WriteLab* shows improvement.	11 27.5%	23 57.5%	6 15%	0 0%	0 0%
2	I start to know and be aware of each grammatical item and their functions in writing.	13 32.5%	23 57.5%	4 10%	0 0%	0 0%
3	My teacher gives a positive feedback to my writing performance.	15 37.5%	22 55%	3 7.5%	0 0%	0 0%
4	There is an achievement of my final score compared to my first essay score.	14 35%	22 55%	4 10%	0 0%	0 0%
5	*WriteLab* really helps me to become a quality writer.	16 40%	22 55	2 5%	0 0%	0 0%

The result presented that for item 1 (*My progress report provided by WriteLab shows improvement*), there were 11 participants (27.5 %) chose 'strongly agree' and 23 of them (57.5%) indicated that they 'agree'. The other 6 participants (15%) were found to choose 'uncertain' with the statement. There was no participant found to answer 'disagree' and 'strongly disagree'.

The second item (*I start to know and be aware of each grammatical item and their functions*

in writing) was found to record 13 participants (32.5%) who chose 'strongly agree'. The other 23 participants (57.5%) were recorded to respond to 'agree'. For 'uncertain' scale, there was only 4 participants (10%), while there was no participant recorded for the scales 'disagree' and 'strongly disagree'.

Meanwhile, the third statement *"My teacher gives a positive feedback to my writing performance"* received 15 participants (37.5%) who 'strongly agree' and 22 participants (55%) who 'agree'. The other 3 participants (7.5) thought that they were 'uncertain'. They were also no responses (0%) obtained for 'disagree' and 'strongly disagree'.

The next statement (*There is an achievement of my final score compared to my first essay score)* had 14 participants (35%) who chose 'strongly agree'. The other 22 participants (55%) claimed that they 'agree' with the statement. The rest 4 participants (10%) however stated that they were 'uncertain' whether there was an achievement after using AWE. No responses for the scales 'disagree' and 'strongly disagree' was recorded.

The fifth statement for writing quality which is *"WriteLab really helps me to become a quality writer"* indicated that there were 16 participants (40%) who chose 'strongly agree'. The other 22 participants (55%) were recorded to answer 'agree' for the statement. Meanwhile, the rest 2 participants (5%) felt that they were 'uncertain' with the statement. The scales 'disagree' and 'strongly disagree' recorded no participant for the response.

What can be inferred from this set of questions is first, more than half of them responded positively to all the statements. Secondly, a majority of the students believed that quality writing can only be achieved from teachers' feedback, progress report as well as an indication of their grammatical problem along with the scores they obtained. These results lend strong support to Muhammad Lotfie and Abdul Samad's (2007) exploratory study on the role of noticing in improving written accuracy.

Correlations between AWE effectiveness and learners' motivation

This study was also interested in finding out the relationship between the effectiveness of the AWE and learners' motivation. Table 5 below illustrates the correlation between both variables. The result showed that AWE effectiveness and learners' motivation were positively correlated with Pearson's r (40) = .58, p< .001.

Table 5

Correlations between AWE Effectiveness and Learners' Motivation

Pearson Correlation between effectiveness and learners' motivation			
		effectiveness	motivation
effectiveness	Pearson Correlation	1	.583**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	40	40
motivation	Pearson Correlation	.583**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	40	40

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The results above highlight that there is a direct correlation between the use of *WriteLab* and learners' motivation to write in English. The use of *WriteLab* can potentially motivate students to improve their writing. This reiterates Hiew's (2012) suggestion that Malaysian students need to be exposed to new ways of instruction in order to motivate them to write and perform better.

Correlation between learners' motivation and writing quality

Another important aspect to the study was also to analyze if there was any relationship between motivation and writing quality among the students. Table 6 highlights the result for correlation between learners' motivation and writing quality. It is indicated that learners' motivation and writing quality were positively correlated with Pearson's r (40) = .62, p< .001.

Table 6

Correlations between Learners' Motivation and Writing Quality

Pearson Correlation between learners' motivation and writing quality			
		motivation	quality
motivation	Pearson Correlation	1	.619**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	40	40
quality	Pearson Correlation	.619**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	40	40

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The analysis using Pearson Correlation yielded data on the learner's motivation and *WriteLab*'s effectiveness as well as learner's motivation and writing quality. Results indicated that there is a positive correlation between the variables and this is important for educators and teachers alike to decide in the usage of *WriteLab* for corrective feedback for their writing. This confirms the study by Vaezi et al. (2011) that corrective feedback is vital to ensure the improvement of the students' writing skills.

Conclusion

The major purpose of the study was to implement Automated Writing Evaluation (AWE) as a complementary tool for teaching and learning writing in developing proficiency among ESL learners and to find out how the students feel about using the instructional tool. Responses to the questionnaire revealed the learners' perception of using AWE. The overall findings warrant the conclusive claim that *WriteLab* as an automated writing evaluation tool holds a potential to complement teacher feedback in ESL writing. The results obtained from the questionnaire may be summarized and interpreted as follows:

● There was a positive evidence for the learners' perceptions towards the *WriteLab* effectiveness. Therefore, the result suggested that the AWE feedback was appropriate for writing learners which contributed to learning improvement.

● The learners perceived the *WriteLab* as motivating and beneficial. The result therefore

confirmed that the learners experienced positive affective effect and felt excitement about their accomplishment when using AWE.

● The strength of the *WriteLab* to improve writing quality was approved by the learners. This indicated that the use of AWE influenced learners' writing quality.

With the introduction of automated writing evaluation, students began to have an initiative to develop their writing skills independently. The students can spend their own learning time without relying much on the teachers as they can do their own revisions. For many students, composing one draft is troublesome due to a number of reasons. Instead of lacking English proficiency, getting the feedback also may cause them a problem. The fact that they have to timely consult the teacher for the feedback might make them feel reluctant. Therefore, using a technology like AWE allows them to make their own choices in generating, obtaining, manipulating or even displaying information that they need in more ample time. The most worrisome situation for a teacher is when the students are lacking interest when they are given conventional academic tasks. The technology such as AWE, therefore, could be a contributing factor to increase interest, motivation and self-esteem. Students obviously take pride when they are able to successfully improve their performance on their own. Students who engage with AWE will possess an attitude of focusing on their weaknesses and improving them gradually. Technology provides a playful environment where the students might feel that they are in their own space, not in an institutional one. The technological advances and the students' ways to grasp technology make an academic world more fun and stimulating. Since academic writing is not an easy process, the use of AWE therefore, will spark the students' interest to get engaged with the writing matters.

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