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### **Formative Assessment: Master Trainers' Attitude and Practice**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

Formative Assessment (FA) as discussed by Black and Wiliam (1998) was introduced to English teachers in 2018 through English Language Education Reform which aligns the curriculum, teaching and learning, and assessment to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). A group of teachers were handpicked by the Ministry of Education (MOE) to undergo a centralized training regarding FA with Cambridge Assessment in English Language Training Centre (ELTC). These teachers were then appointed as Master Trainers (MT) and were tasked to train teachers all over the country. However, two years after the introduction, little application of the assessment can be seen in schools. Hence, the research focusses on the MTs to see whether they themselves possess good attitude towards the assessment and practise the principles of assessment. Data was collected from 40 MTs all over Malaysia through a questionnaire which was distributed online. Overall, data from the questionnaire have revealed that the participants have positive attitudes towards FA and the assessment is an establishing practice in their classroom. Even though there is a positive correlation between attitude and practice, attitude is found to play a small role. Therefore, more support should be provided by MOE to teachers as to ensure assessment for learning is practised widely by English teachers in the nation.

**KEYWORDS:** formative assessment, assessment for learning, teachers' attitude, teachers' practice, English teaching and learning

## Introduction

Reforms in the education mostly revolve around what should be taught, how should it be learned and how should learning be assessed (Popham, 2011). These questions are valid and important to be explored to ensure that we are providing the best teaching and learning experience to our learners. Of late, assessment, be it summative or formative have received more attention given their role in supporting learning (Black & Wiliam, 2006).

Unlike summative assessment (SA) which is usually done after a learning session to evaluate the overall progress and its effectiveness, formative assessment (FA) could be done throughout the learning with the purpose of collecting information regarding learning progress which will be used to decide the next step in learning (Cambridge Assessment, 2018). The use of assessment input for learning progress is what makes FA be seen as the bridge between teaching and learning. This bridge is proven as an important component in increasing learners' achievement and is able to inculcate interest in lifelong learning (Young & Jackman, 2014). Moreover, reviews by Crooks (1988), Black and Wiliam (1998), Nyquist (2003) and Bennett (2011) proved that FA could multiply learning momentum if it is done accurately.

The difference between SA and FA is not limited to when and why they are carried out. FA involves five important elements which requires teachers to possess specific skills such as questioning techniques and the ability to translate learning objectives into success criteria (Black & Wiliam, 2009). However, the most important skill that teachers need to acquire in order to implement FA effectively is the ability to plan assessments throughout each teaching and learning session. They also need to be able to interpret assessment input to identify learners' needs and progress. Ultimately, teachers need to be able to adapt their teaching according to the assessment input that are collected throughout each lesson (Cambridge Assessment, 2018)

FA as discussed by Black and Wiliam (1998a) was introduced to English teachers in Malaysia in 2018 through English Language Education Reform 2015-2025 which aligns the curriculum, teaching and learning, and assessment to Common European Framework Of Reference (CEFR) (ELSQ Council, 2015). More than 200 teachers were selected to undergo a training where they were exposed to formative assessment theories and principles. This group of teachers were appointed as Master Trainers (MT) and were responsible to disseminate the information to other teachers around the country through a series of cascade training (Aziz, Rashid, & Zainudin, 2018). FA is core to the CEFR-aligned curriculum and therefore, English teachers are encouraged to practise the assessment as it has been proven to increase learners' motivation and achievement (Cauley & McMillan, 2010)

Although every reform, policy and innovation seek to better the education world, negligence towards factors and conceptions that influence teachers' practice may affect the change intended making it less impactful and ineffective (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998; Robinson & Walker, 1999). This is especially true with top-down initiatives which are heavily influenced by teachers' level of co-operation, knowledge and belief (Brown, Hui, Yu, & Kennedy, 2011). The introduction of FA in English teaching and learning is one of top-down initiative. Hence, it is imperative to understand teachers' attitude towards the assessment given the fact that the assessment requires them to have

a set of specific skills. Moreover, it is also important to see how their attitude influence their FA practice.

Therefore, this study is seeking MTs' attitude towards FA, their level of practice and the relationship between the two variables. Following the above, the study looks into the following research questions:

- a) What is the attitude of MTs towards FA?
- b) What is the level of FA practice among MTs?
- c) How much influence does the MTs' attitude have over their practice?

## Literature Review

Black and Wiliam (1998b) defined FA as a set of activities carried out by teachers and/or learners to collect evidence of learning which will be used to modify teaching and learning activities based on learners' needs. It will also be used to guide teachers in giving feedback to learners to help move their learning forward (Wiliam, 2018). FA focusses heavily on the learning process and it is usually done throughout the lesson whether from minute to minute or day to day (Thompson & Goe, 2009).

Wiliam (2018) stressed that modification of learning based on assessment input is the core of FA. He also outlined five principles of FA that can help teachers collect their learners' evidence of learning which is crucial in guiding any modification of learning.

1. Sharing and understanding learning objectives and success criteria.
2. Helping learners to show what they learned (e.g. in classroom discussion).
3. Giving feedback that moves learning forward.
4. Helping learners to help and support each other with their learning.
5. Helping learners to be owners of their learning.

The principles above show that FA through its sociocultural background approach helps in identifying learning gaps, reinforcing new learning and anticipating the next step in learning (Bennett & Gitomer, 2009). FA also encourages learners to self-regulate their learning (Andrade, 2010; Andrade & Heritage, 2018).

Empirical studies regarding FA done in many countries (e.g. United Kingdom, Canada, Hong Kong, Singapore) across various level of education (from pre-school until tertiary level) and subjects (Mathematics, Language, Science) found positive impact of FA on learning especially in increasing academic achievement, motivation and learners' involvement in teaching and learning session (Bennett, 2011; Black & Wiliam, 2009; Dunn & Mulvenon, 2009; Filsecker & Kerres, 2012; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Kingston & Nash, 2011).

Kingston and Nash (2011) have found practising FA in an English class helped with learners' language skill. In addition, Volante and Beckett (2011) summarised that learning pace can be multiplied through the use of FA strategies such as effective questioning techniques, nongraded feedback, self-assessment, peer assessment and the use of SA formatively. FA was also found to

help low achievers tremendously which in the end reduced the learning gaps among learners in a class (Black & Wiliam, 1998b)

Despite all the benefits that FA could offer, it would not be successful if teachers have an unfavourable attitude towards assessment. Academicians have concluded that attitude, perception and belief are sub-groups to constructs which shaped, defined and explained mental conditions and they have an influence to individual's behaviour (Ahmedi, 2019). Attitudes, in particular, have been identified as important factor in determining teachers' behaviour in various aspect of curriculum or co-curricular. Oreck (2004) has found that teachers' attitude played a part in encouraging learners' participation in an art class while Maier, Greenfield, and Bulotsky-Shearer (2013) have found the same in a science class. Kale and Goh (2014) have also found that teachers' attitude was a vital factor for the success of technology adoption in a classroom.

In extension, Brown (2004) has insisted that studies on teachers' opinion, attitude and belief towards assessment is crucial as there are many research findings which stated that teachers' opinion, attitude and belief towards teaching, learning and curriculum have a strong influence over their practice and ultimately their learning output. The necessity of such study is more pivotal when it involves new policies to guarantee not only the success of those policies but to also gain insights which would then be used for the development of teachers' education (Brown et al., 2011).

An insight to teachers' attitude towards FA would be helpful as the assessment is challenging where teachers have to choose wisely on which assessment practice suits their teaching and integrate it in their pedagogy (Blatchford, Baines, Rubie-Davies, Bassett, & Chowne, 2006; Leahy, Lyon, Thompson, & Wiliam, 2005). Moreover, teaching is considered very personal where teachers develop their own philosophy while trying to make sense of the curriculum and assessment (Harrison, 2013). Therefore, it is clear that attitude and cognitive factors may have an effect on teachers' teaching and assessment practise.

Results from a study based on Theory Of Planned Behaviour by Yan and Cheng (2015) showed instrumental attitude was a significant predictor of teachers' intention to conduct FA. A positive attitude was also identified as a key factor to positive implementation of FA and vice versa (Hajah Norwati, Mohd Isa, Ab Halim, & Mohd Aliff (2016); Pastore, Manuti, & Scardigno (2019). These findings however are in disagreement with Black and Wiliam (2018) who think teachers' assessment practise may not always mirror their belief and attitude. This is the case found in Young and Jackman (2014) study. Johnson, Sondergeld, and Walton (2019) discovered the same especially when it comes to certain FA strategies. Alkharusi, Kazem, and Al-Musawai (2011) and Yamtim and Wongwanich (2014) explained that this is due to teachers' belief that they are incompetent. Hence, teachers chose to only apply strategies that they are comfortable with.

This variability of findings shows that teachers' attitude regarding FA is unique to a demography. Therefore, it is important to study Malaysia's teachers' attitude about the assessment, their practice and the relationship between the two so that suitable actions could be taken to ensure that the introduction of FA in English classroom in the country does not go to waste.

## Method

This research employs a quantitative approach to obtain data concerning MTs' attitude towards FA and their practise.

### *Participants*

The population of the study is a group of English teachers who were appointed as MTs for FA under the English Language Education Reform 2015-2025 initiative. Purposive sampling was employed by emailing 60 of these MTs to invite them to join the study where 40 of them agreed. Mohd Majid Konting (2009) mentioned that 40 samples is enough for any research to be carried out and to run inferential statistic if the data collected abide to normality assumptions (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). 12 of the respondents are male and 28 are female. 45% of them are secondary school teachers while the rest are from primary schools.

### *The Instrument*

The questionnaire used in this study is adapted from Neesom (2000), Yan and Cheng (2015), and Young and Jackman (2014) for the first construct which aimed to measure MTs' attitude towards FA. Meanwhile the second construct was adapted from O'Leary, Lysaght, dan Ludlow (2017). This construct is to measure MTs' FA level of practice. 9 new items were developed for the first construct and 13 for the second one based on Teacher Handbook of Formative Principles and Practices (Cambridge Assessment, 2018). This handbook was distributed to all schools in Malaysia for English teachers' perusal.

The first construct "Attitude Towards FA" consists of 17 items. 5 points Likert Scale was employed for this construct with labels: Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Somewhat Agree (3), Agree (4) and Strongly Agree (5). The second construct "FA Practice" consists of 21 items and uses 5 points scale with different labels which are Never (1), Sporadic (2), Emerging (3), Established (4) and Embedded (5).

All items in the questionnaire had undergone face validity and content validity process using Content Validity Ratio (Lawshe, 1975). This procedure involved ten panel of experts which included lecturers from public universities, lecturers from ELTC and SISC+. Items which did not achieved experts' agreement ratio were dropped and the remaining items were further rectified based on panel of experts' opinion.

The questionnaire was then administered to 30 MTs as a pilot study to identify its internal consistency. These 30 MTs were not from the sample pool. Johnson and Christenen (2014) and Muijs (2012) stated a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.70 is accepted as an indicator of a good internal consistency. Analysis of pilot study showed the Cronbach's Alpha for construct one and two are 0.874 and 0.890. This proved that all items are fit to be used in the real study.



### *Collecting Responses*

The data was collected via an online questionnaire (Google Form), which was emailed to every MT who agreed to participate in the study. A brief introduction of the study was provided so the MTs were aware of its purpose and objectives. Administering the questionnaire online increased accessibility as these MTs are all over the country making logistics difficult.

All MTs were given two weeks to respond to the questionnaire and to return it to the researcher via email. Throughout that period, assistance and clarification were given if required. After two weeks, data obtained was statistically analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 23.

## **Results**

### *Master Trainers' Attitude Towards Formative Assessment*

To interpret the min score of the first construct, the study referred to Nunnally and Bernstein (1994) interpretation of min score as detailed in Table 1.

*Table 1. Min Score Interpretation*

Min Score	Interpretation
4.01 – 5.00	High
3.01 – 4.00	Medium High
2.01 – 3.00	Medium Low
1.00 – 2.00	Low

Overall, MTs' attitude towards FA is at a medium high level with construct min score 3.91 (SD = 0.50). MTs' individual score is then grouped into five categories according to their score range. It shows that more than half of the MTs have positive attitude towards the assessment. This grouping is showed in Table 2 below.

*Table 2. MTs Attitude towards Formative Assessment*

Construct	Completely Negative	Partially Negative	Somewhat Positive	Positive	Completely Positive
Attitude	0%	2.5%	25%	65%	7.5%

Analysis on agreement rate for every item showed that not all MTs possess good attitude towards several formative assessment strategies. Items related to feedback received discouraging rate which reflected MTs less favourable attitude towards the strategy. Table 3 details this finding.

Table 3. MTs Agreement Rate on Certain Items

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Summary (mean, sd)
I do not believe plenary activities could help my pupils consolidate their learning	47.5	22.5	17.5	12.5	0.0	4.05 1.085
I find the concept of deliberate practice is difficult to apply	25.0	35.0	22.5	15.0	2.5	3.65 1.099
Identifying ways to help my pupils move forward in their learning is tedious	22.5	17.5	42.5	15.0	2.5	3.43 1.083
Individualised non-graded feedback is impossible to do	10.0	40.0	35.0	10.0	5.0	3.40 0.982
I do not have enough time to check on my pupils' action towards feed forward	2.5	17.5	50.0	22.5	7.5	2.85 0.893

### *Master Trainers' Practice of Formative Assessment*

Lysaght, O'Leary and Ludlow (2017) have divided respondents to their questionnaire into four categories based on their score range which are detailed in Table 4. The analysis shows that 37 MTs fall under Established category while 3 of them are under Embedded.

Table 4. Interpretation for MTs Practice

Score Range	Interpretation
78 and above	Embedded
61 - 77	Established
44 - 60	Emerging
0 - 43	Sporadic

Teachers under Established are described as someone with high FA skills and is using practices which are relatively hard to embed. FA is a growing feature of pedagogy and as such it is an approach with which the teacher and pupils are beginning to engage more fully. They use a fuller range of techniques including all aspects related to sharing learning objectives and success criteria. Teachers in the category also practise aspects related to effective feedback, sharing questioning role with their pupils and starting to introduce one or two aspects of self- and peer-assessment.

Meanwhile, teachers under Embedded are described as someone with very high FA skills and is using practices which are very hard to embed. Formative assessment is likely to be a customary or

firmly established feature of pedagogy and occurs routinely in day-to-day teaching and learning. Teachers in this category employ the full range of practices and their practice is distinguished by their incorporation of four additional techniques associated with self- and peer-assessment.

Analysis on level of practise for every item showed that there are some FA strategies which are not widely practised by these MTs. These strategies are related to differentiated learning, effective feedback and peer- and self-assessment. Table 5 provides details of each strategy.

*Table 5. Relationship between Attitude and Practice of Formative Assessment*

Strategy	Never	Sporadic	Emerging	Established	Embedded	Summary (mean,sd)
Success criteria related to learning objectives are differentiated and shared with pupils	2.5	12.5	30.0	42.5	12.5	4.50 0.961
Feedback to pupils is focussed on the original learning objective and success criteria	2.5	7.5	37.5	40.0	12.5	4.53 0.905
Feedback is turned into targets for pupils to work on autonomously	2.5	12.5	30.0	45.0	10.0	4.48 0.933
Feedback is specially catered to individual	0	15.0	40.0	35.0	10.0	4.40 0.871
Pupils are encouraged to use a range of assessment techniques to review their friends' work	7.5	7.5	47.5	32.5	5.0	4.20 0.939
A visual record of pupils' progress is maintained to celebrate pupils' learning and show areas of/for development	10	22.5	35.0	30.0	2.5	3.93 1.023
Pupils are encouraged to review their own learning approach as one way to achieve their learning target	0	22.5	50.0	25.0	2.5	4.08 0.764
Pupils are welcomed to prepare their own short test to assess their friends' learning	22.5	30.0	30.0	12.5	5.0	3.48 1.132

Pearson Correlation analysis was carried out to determine the relationship between attitude towards FA and the practice of it in MTs daily teaching. Finding shows that there is a positive linear correlation with  $r$  value = 0.576,  $n = 40$  and  $p < 0.001$ . The  $r$  value is interpreted as strong by Field (2018) which means the more positive the attitude towards FA, the more likely these MTs will practise it. Nonetheless, analysis done on covariance shows only 33.2% of attitude score contributes directly to the practice of FA. This means there are other factors which were not measured in this study that contributes to the practice of FA in MTs' classroom.

## Discussion

The findings of this study are important to the build-up of FA literature in Malaysia taking into account that fact that these MTs were the first group of English teachers in the country exposed to the theories and principles of FA. Overall, MTs attitude towards FA is at medium towards high level based on the min score. 72.5% of them are in the positive categories. Nevertheless, there are MTs in the somewhat positive and partially negative categories which is a concern. This shows that even though they received a direct and in-depth exposure to FA, it did not totally guarantee a positive attitude. Given that this study did not explore factors behind MTs' attitude, no concrete explanation could be provided. In support of this finding, Volante and Beckett (2011) have suggested that teachers may develop negative attitude towards FA due to certain blocks related to strategies such as peer- and self-assessment. This is reflected in this study findings as items related to these two strategies were found to receive the lowest agreement rate from respondents. Apart from peer- and self-assessment, items reflecting effective feedback and deliberate practice also received low agreement rate.

Based on MTs' attitude score, it is expected that their practice to be at a high level and this is reflected through this study's findings. For the majority of these MTs, FA happens 75% of the time while some MTs practise it 90% of the time. However, there are strategies such as differentiated learning, addressing learning gap, effective feedback and peer- and self-assessment which were not practised enough by the respondents. These strategies have been identified as difficult and may be one of the reasons behind the lack of use of FA (Johnson et al., 2019; Lysaght & O'Leary, 2013; Pastore et al., 2019). This difficulty causes teachers to view FA as an added burden instead of seeing it as one of important elements in their teaching (Coffey, Hammer, Levin, & Grant, 2011). Young dan Jackman (2014) suggested that when teachers see that practising FA strategies requires extra effort in terms of time and resources, they will avoid those specific strategies even if they think it will be worthwhile.

This study also found a strong, positive correlation between attitude towards FA and its practice. However, as reported earlier, the influence is not huge. This indicate that there may be some factors that could affect FA practice. Parr and Timperley (2008) linked these factors to school organisational culture, teachers' readiness and limited sources. Volante, Beckett, Reid, and Drake (2010) on the other hand, listed lack of training, resistance from parents and pupils, and lack of instructional leadership as factors influencing FA practice. They concluded that these factors will definitely impact teachers' practise of FA despite their good level of knowledge, perception and attitude towards the assessment.

The findings of this study proved that professional training regarding FA yielded positive attitude. Positive attitude which then translated to its application in the classroom. However, the findings also showed that this attitude did not apply to all FA strategies. This shows that one-off training like the one provided by MOE is not adequate. It is clear that teachers need continuous in-service training and support in order for them to be adept in implementing FA effectively (Desimone, 2009; Furtak et al., 2016; C. C. Johnson et al., 2019; Yan & Cheng, 2015). Therefore, authorities need to take the appropriate initiative to ensure the newly introduced assessment will not get drowned by teachers' confusion. This is also to make sure the investment made by MOE will not go to waste as the training involved foreign consultants from Cambridge Assessment.

### **Limitation of The Study**

The findings of this study are limited to its respondents and they cannot be generalised to English teachers' population due to the difference in training received by the two. Other than that, there is the concern about the reliability of self-reported data as there are chances that respondents are not truthful especially when reporting their practice (Lysaght & O'Leary, 2013). This may due to concerns about people's perception towards them as an MT. Hence, triangulation via observation is recommended to support respondents' responses. Nonetheless, information gained through this study still provides a foundation to explore FA in Malaysia.

### **Conclusion**

FA is introduced to English teachers in Malaysia with the aim to enhance the quality of teaching and learning across all levels. To guarantee that this could be achieved, teachers must be given ample knowledge so that they have positive attitude towards the assessment. However, as discussed above, knowledge and attitude alone are not enough. Teachers are bound to meet hiccups along the way as they implement the assessment especially when it comes to certain specific strategies. Hence, support in terms of workshop, professional learning community or support group must be provided so teachers can direct their questions or problems related to the assessment. With enough support, it is without a doubt that teachers will continue to use FA in their teaching and ultimately move away from the traditional practice of teaching for examination.

For further study of FA in Malaysia, the scope of this study could be widened to include English teachers from both secondary and primary school to see the difference in attitude and practice between teachers and MTs. This is to see whether level of training has any effect on the two variables. Plus, there is also a need to better understand external factors affecting the implementation of FA in English classroom nationwide

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## Article

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### Using Character Maps to Learn English Literature

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#### ABSTRACT

Learning English literature has always been a challenge, as it demands advanced analytical skills, especially when learners are expected to critically analyse and discuss literary texts. Character mapping is proposed as a technique that develops analytical and critical thinking skills among learners. Drawing theoretical basis from cognitive science, constructivism, and cognitive stylistics, character mapping helps learners visualise connections between characters and events in a literary narrative, which then allows better comprehension of the literary text. 18 respondents from a Form 4 secondary school in Sabah, Malaysia, participated in a small-scale action research study. First, their previous experiences learning English literature was extrapolated via a need analysis, after which the respondents were then exposed to character mapping and its underlying principles. Then, they were asked to reflect and provide feedback on their experiences learning English literature using character maps. The feedback indicated positive support from the respondents, suggesting that character mapping can help learners learn English literature more effectively. Key observations include enhanced levels of comprehension, engagement, creativity, memory retention and organisation of thoughts. Two negative feedback were observed: (i) character mapping is time-consuming, and (ii) overusing character mapping might impede learning engagement. Future studies need to recruit larger sample population and potentially an experimental paradigm to investigate the impact of character mapping in greater detail.

**KEYWORDS:** Character Maps, English Literature, Mind Maps, Cognitive Stylistics

#### Introduction

Recent curricular developments concerning the teaching and learning of English in Malaysia demand a review of the role of literature in our classrooms. The latest iteration of the English language syllabus (SBELC), which adopts the *Common European Framework of Reference*

(CEFR), challenged, and questioned the role and contribution of English literature to the overall English language proficiency among Malaysian learners. The outcome of this discourse resulted in a consensus; literature remains integral to the language classroom, as learners are expected to “develop Literature in Action skills simultaneously over the school year” (Curriculum Development Division [CDD], 2020, p.39). Despite listed as one of the “Subject Objectives” (Lembaga Peperiksaan Malaysia [LPM], 2020, p.9), English literature will no longer be tested in the now CEFR-aligned *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM) *English Language* (EL) paper. Nevertheless, a separate paper, *Literature in English* (LiE), remains an elective SPM paper that Malaysian learners can enrol and sit for.

Regardless of how its role has reduced, English literature remains crucial to the development of mature and critical Malaysian learners. The English literature curriculum (SBELitC) strives to produce “critical readers who make informed arguments and decisions with culturally sensitivity, empathy and awareness” (CDD, 2018, p.2), hoping that such developments will translate into the ability to produce “coherent and constructive personal responses and arguments supported by textual evidence” (p.10). In turn, our learners should attain enhanced maturity and cognition, which theoretically leads to better English proficiency. Unfortunately, no concrete attempts to date have investigated the correlation between learners’ achievements in SPM EL and LiE paper.

Globally, the teaching and learning of English literature have always been a subject of interest, where numerous opinions regarding how literature could and should be taught persist (Akyel & Yalcin, 1990; Lazar, 1990; Ross, 1991). In Malaysia, there is a sense of uncertainty and ambiguity on how English literature is best taught (Kaur and Mahmor, 2014), despite many teachers and learners reporting positive perception of English literature (Abdullah et al., 2007). In particular, learners struggle most with identifying literary elements and interpreting literary texts (Abdullah et al., 2007). While most can understand the more literal meaning of a text, learners struggle when producing in-depth analysis of figurative meanings or symbolisms. This is a challenging for teachers and students.

In present literature, one popular means of addressing the struggle in learning is through our understanding of schema theory. The incorporation of schema theory into pedagogy is well documented; we use it to facilitate receptive skills and promote better text comprehension (Al Asmari & Javid, 2018; Barrot, 2016; Kafipour & Jahansooz, 2017; Megat Abdul Rahim et al., 2017; Uba et al., 2017; Xi, 2018), or as a framing device to guide productive skills and expression of ideas (Abdul Aziz et al., 2018; Aprianto & Syarifaturrahman, 2020; Rahmat, 2018; Singh et al., 2018, 2020). However, studies using schema theory to produce interventions in teaching or learning of literary texts are extremely scarce.

Therefore, this paper utilised the principles of schema theory and graphic organisers (GOs) to devise a technique for learners to learn English literature. This paper intends to argue that English literature, despite its waning relevance, can still enrich learners’ learning experience when coupled with our understanding of schema theory. To do so, this paper introduces character maps, which is a form of GOs, as a pedagogical tool to learn English literature. Character mapping is derived from the principles of cognitive science, constructivism, and cognitive stylistics, which could

promote engagement between teachers and students, facilitate discussions among peers and develop critical thinking among individuals. As such, the research objective of this study is:

RO: To evaluate and determine if character mapping should be incorporated into future English literature lessons.

Correspondingly, the research questions are:

R<sup>1</sup>: How do respondents usually learn English literature and what are the common techniques used?

R<sup>2</sup>: How do respondents feel about character mapping? Do character maps motivate respondents to learn literary texts? What are the strengths and weaknesses of this technique?

## Literature Review

This section provides a brief review of recent literature on the use of GOs in classrooms by tracing its underlying principles and origin in schema theory, as well as how these feed into the conceptualisation of character mapping. Then, these will be synthesised with the discussions on literary theories of characterisation in literature.

### *Schema Theory*

Xi (2018) defined schema as the “prior knowledge in human’s mind when they perceive the world”, which become the basis on which “guidance for the understanding of the world” is based on (p.623). Therefore, schema theory posits that one’s knowledge and perception of the world manifest in the form of elaborated mental networks, which are constantly revised and added onto (Al Asmari & Javid, 2018; Barrot, 2016; Kafipour & Jahansooz, 2017; Xi, 2018). The notion of schema as a collection of mental inventories stemmed from the traditions of Constructivism and Cognitivism. A schema is, therefore, made up of small units of mental constructs that gradually expand and develop into a more complex web of inventories, as one gains knowledge and experience throughout a lifetime (Kafipour & Jahansooz, 2017). While schemata are often presented visually, they are initially generated as mental images because “the human mind actively constructs various types of cognitive representations” (Culpeper, 2002, p.258). In many ways, schemata are materialised neural/cognitive networks, which is why scholars have used schema theory to describe how the human mind operates (Barrot, 2016; Kafipour & Jahansooz, 2017; Xi, 2018). By understanding how the human mind perceive and construct information, we have learnt to leverage this to facilitate learning. One popular manner of operationalising schema theory in the classroom is in the form of graphic organisers (GOs).

### *Graphic Organisers*

GOs are relatively common constructs in educational settings (Abdul Aziz et al., 2018). They can come in various forms, and display visual information within flexible spatial constructs that illustrate the relationships between different elements that they contain (Abdul Aziz et al., 2018; Aprianto & Syarifaturrahman, 2020; Megat Abdul Rahim et al., 2017; Rahmat, 2018; Uba et al., 2017). GOs assist and promote comprehension by associating the learners' prior knowledge with the text that they are reading or listening to (Aprianto & Syarifaturrahman, 2020; Megat Abdul Rahim et al., 2017; Uba et al., 2017). Similarly, they utilise the learners' existing knowledge and prior experience to guide idea and content generation when planning written or verbal presentation (Abdul Aziz et al., 2018; Rahmat, 2018; Singh et al., 2018). This is more apparent when it comes to second language (L2) production (Abdul Aziz et al., 2018; Rahmat, 2018; Singh et al., 2020), where L2 learners may not have sufficient exposure to the target language culture and norms to use the language with a near native-like proficiency.

Despite their benefits, using GOs in the teaching and learning of English literature is regrettably scant at best. Akyel and Yalcin (1990) conducted a survey on how literature was taught in Turkish high schools, where they recommended teachers to bridge the gap between learners' content schemata and literary texts. Lazar (1990) highlighted the importance of carefully considering the cultural background of a literary text chosen for the learners. In Malaysia, teachers are encouraged to "acknowledge and promote our own local Malaysian literature" (Kaur & Mahmor, 2014) through their literary text selection, as appealing to their learners' cultural background is deemed quintessential to their engagement when learning literature. Abdullah et al. (2007) proposed Malaysian teachers to draw on learners' previous knowledge and understanding when designing lessons to teach English literature. Unfortunately, these papers failed to provide concrete methods or techniques that teachers can apply when teaching English literature. Uba et al. (2017) attempted an experimental approach using GOs to teach English literature in Nigerian schools, but the choice of literary texts, subjected to cultural, social, and linguistic norms, limited the implications and significance of its findings when discussed in the Malaysian context. So, this study was conceived to evaluate the adoption of schema theory in the teaching and learning of English literature, which is manifested in a form of GOs called character maps.

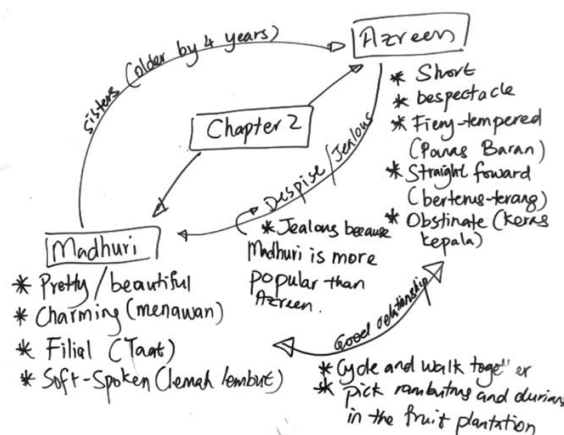
### *Character Maps*

In literary theories, schema is a well discussed and explored concept. Short (2018) described schemata as "connected bits of information" that are "stored as packages" (p.227). Schema theory is mainly used to explain how readers "interpret what is said and done" in ways that are similar (or dissimilar) to others (Short, 2018, p.228). The nature of character maps also reflects this perspective. As a derivation of GOs, character mapping is deeply rooted in the constructivist and cognitivist tradition, where one constantly constructs, modifies and de-construct information or subject knowledge (Derry, 1996). This is usually done by transferring information identified from lyrical or linear text into non-linear, graphical, spatial networks. However, character maps is slightly different in that they focus on the characterisation of the characters or personas with close attention paid to the events that embody them.

The core principle of character mapping is characterisation being “one of the most powerful of the literature elements” (Norton & McClure, 2003, p.82, as cited in Roser et al., 2007). Also, characters’ beliefs, desires, feelings and thoughts are actual elements that drive the plot, and bind characters to context (Roser et al., 2007). Consequently, Roser et al. (2007) strongly recommended guiding learners to follow characters when studying literary texts. As the primary driving force in narratives, individual character’s traits and behaviours, which are strongly associated with the events that occur throughout the story, are closely examined. According to Phelan (1989), plot is progressed by instabilities that occurred within prose. Similarly, characters are mental products of “complex interaction between the incoming textual information” and the readers or audiences’ prior knowledge (Culpeper, 2002, p.251). Culpeper and Fernandez-Quintanilla (2017) added that characterisations are results of readers’ deductions which are based on descriptions of a given character.

As such, our interpretations of the literary text, as readers and audience, result from our assumptions drawn from raw texts and schemata (Culpeper, 2002). Character mapping, therefore, translates characterisations of a literary narrative or prose into GOs. When this process is repeated throughout a literary text, patterns of character traits and choice emerge as plot progresses. Consider the following example of the character mapping of a short excerpt from the novel *The Curse* by Lee Su Ann:

Her mind wandered off to her sister. Madhuri was four years older than she. And oh, how Azreen had despised her! Madhuri was always the pretty one. The charming one. The filial one. Nobody would notice her or pay her much attention when Madhuri was around. Who would want anything to do with a short, bespectacled and fiery-tempered girl who always spoke her mind, no matter how improper the ideas were? Who would love an obstinate child who was such a contrast to her beautiful and soft-spoken sister?



### *The Curse, Chapter 2*

Figure 1 Literary Text Excerpt and Corresponding Character Map

Generally, the underlying principles of character mapping resonate with what Uba et al. (2017) observed. Learners’ short-term memory and long-term achievement are notably enhanced through the recurring acts of summarising and manipulating concepts using GOs. Similarly, character mapping is a good technique for learners to organise their understanding, which corresponds with using GOs to “represent their [learners’] own understanding from a multimodal reading of texts” (Aprianto & Syarifaturrahman, 2020, p.143). With character mapping as a learning technique,

learners can make connections between complicated notions and concepts, as it enhances their ability to stimulate and collect information from a literary text (Singh et al., 2020).

Therefore, character mapping can highlight crucial information in a literary text effectively. It allows readers to scrutinise texts for details that help them link characterisation and plot development. Mind mapping makes it easier and quicker to recall information (Buzan, 2006), so character mapping can similarly demonstrate connections between different characters in a literary text. Relationships between characters are often the most intriguing parts of a story, and as such could be multi-layered, confusing, and difficult to keep track. In this study, character maps can demonstrate the relationships of different characters, and how these contribute to plot progression of a narrative. This allows learners to examine the characters and their characterisation, before repackaging them in the form of schemata, which are far more manageable than the original text. When learners have a clear framework to approach the text, their “comprehension level could increase” (Thompson & Thompson, 2004), and thus learning literature could become more effective.

## Method

### The Action Research Framework

It is paramount for learners to be aware of various literary elements in a literary text (Kaur & Mahmor, 2014) and able to discuss them critically (Abdullah et al., 2007). Character mapping is proposed as a viable technique that can achieve these two objectives. An action research, with an emphasis on problem-solving (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1982), was commissioned to evaluate the use of character maps to address the challenges of learning English literature among Malaysian learners.

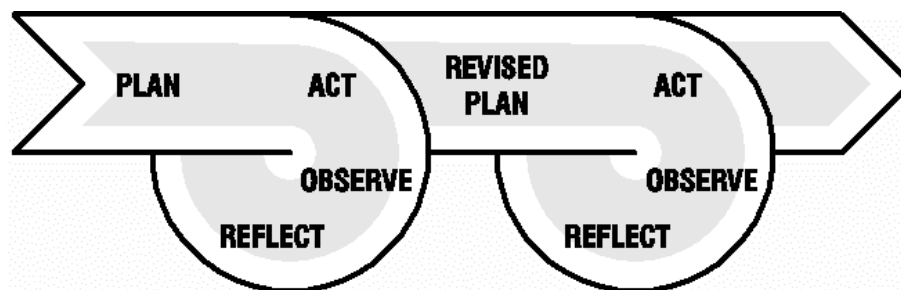


Figure 2 Action Research Framework (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1982)

### Planning: Identifying Learning Needs

A needs analysis was conducted to determine learners’ needs in SPM *LiE* to refine the parameters of the study. A group of students from a school in Sabah was selected as respondents of this study.

Although it is an elective subject, many respondents were encouraged to take SPM *LiE* by their teachers or parents, rather than by choice. They are profiled as such:

*Table 1 Respondents Sampling Profile*

Profiling:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Form 4 Science Stream (1<sup>st</sup> Set)</li> <li>• 18 respondents</li> <li>• Good English proficiency</li> <li>• Low motivation to learn English literature</li> </ul>

A major challenge with these respondents is that they are not always motivated to learn English literature. Despite having good English proficiency, they struggled to sustain their concentration and interest during lessons. They were posed two questions regarding their experience learning literature. The questions are:

1. *How did you learn literature in in the past?*
2. *In your opinion, how effective were those learning methods/techniques?*

The need analysis indicated that the respondents mainly learnt literature through typical and conventional methods, which are also examination-oriented. The most popular technique is “reading the literature text” (72%).

*Table 2 Common Techniques used when learning English Literature*

Techniques	Tally	Percentage
Reading text	13	72%
Note-taking	5	28%
Imaginative Reading	4	22%
Doing exercises	3	17%
Summarising texts	2	11%
Note: Total responses, $n = 27$		

Unsurprisingly, the techniques listed in Table 2 are incongruent with the SBELitC curriculum objectives. The curriculum intends to develop an interest and love for literature among learners, which would catalyse their aesthetic, imaginative and intellectual growth (CDD, 2018). In the process, they are also expected to “explore, reflect and adopt values in literature on universal concerns and issues from various periods and cultures” (p.2), an objective that works towards developing skills to “read, analyse, reflect, discuss and respond to text critically and with maturity of thoughts” (p.10). Arguably, teachers could have incorporated Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) through these techniques (Table 2). However, there was little indication from the respondents that these technique successfully developed their critical thinking and reasoning skills, which are key objectives of the SBELitC (CDD, 2018).

*Table 3 General Opinion towards Common Learning Techniques in English Literature*

<b>General Opinion</b>	<b>Tally</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Effective	11	61%
Unsure	2	11%
Not Effective	5	28%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>100%</b>

Ironically, most respondents find these techniques effective, possibly due to the highly examination-oriented nature of our education system as described by the need analysis (Table 2). Only 5 respondents believed that those techniques were not effective learning techniques (Table 3), whereas the remaining two were unsure. Clearly, the respondents were exposed to techniques that prioritise memorisation and regurgitation of facts (Table 2). Hence, this study utilised character maps to complement these highly examination-oriented techniques to explore “relationships, ideas, places, time and events” (CDD, 2018, p.1) and cultivate HOTS (CDD, 2018, p.12), while adhering to the SBELitC.

### **Acting: Addressing Learning Needs**

Next, the respondents were introduced to character mapping over several lessons. The chosen text was a short story entitled “Leaving” by M.G. Vassanji. This was included in the English literature component of the previous English language curriculum (CDD, 2000). It was chosen considering the respondents’ English language proficiency and their exposure to similar literary texts in previous years. This parallels with an objective in SBELitC, where “selected literary texts...should be accessible to a good percentage of pupils in terms of language, concepts, ideas, cultural references and in line with the values and aspirations of the Malaysian culture and norms” (CDD, 2018, p.5). The following is a brief demonstration how character mapping can be operated. While a short story was used here, character mapping can apply to other literary genres like poems or plays:

*Table 4 Excerpt from the short story "Leaving" by M. G. Vassanji*


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Kichwele Street was now Uhuru Street. My two sisters got married, and Mother was sad to see them leave home. Mehroon and her husband lived in town, but Razia was a rich housewife in Tanga, a town on the coast north of Dar es Salaam. Firoz, my older brother, did not finish his last year at school, and no one was surprised at that he was working in the office of a big shop.

Mother’s hopes were now on the youngest two of us, Aloo and me. She wanted us to study hard and not spend time working in our store. So one evening she locked up the big doors for the last time, and sold the store. That was just one week after Razia got married.

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Firstly, an expository reading of the literature text (Table 4) was conducted, with special attention paid to the minute details provided by the narrator. As the reading progressed, a character map was constructed on the board, firstly, by identifying the key characters in the passage (*i.e.* “Aloo”, “Mother”, “Me”). Then, information about the characters, for example, keywords from the narrator’s description of the said characters and actions were recorded and added onto the map in the form of little nodules. Figure 3 presents a complete character map. New information that could be important was added onto the character map (Figure 3) as the reading progressed, gradually making the character map more intricate and complex.

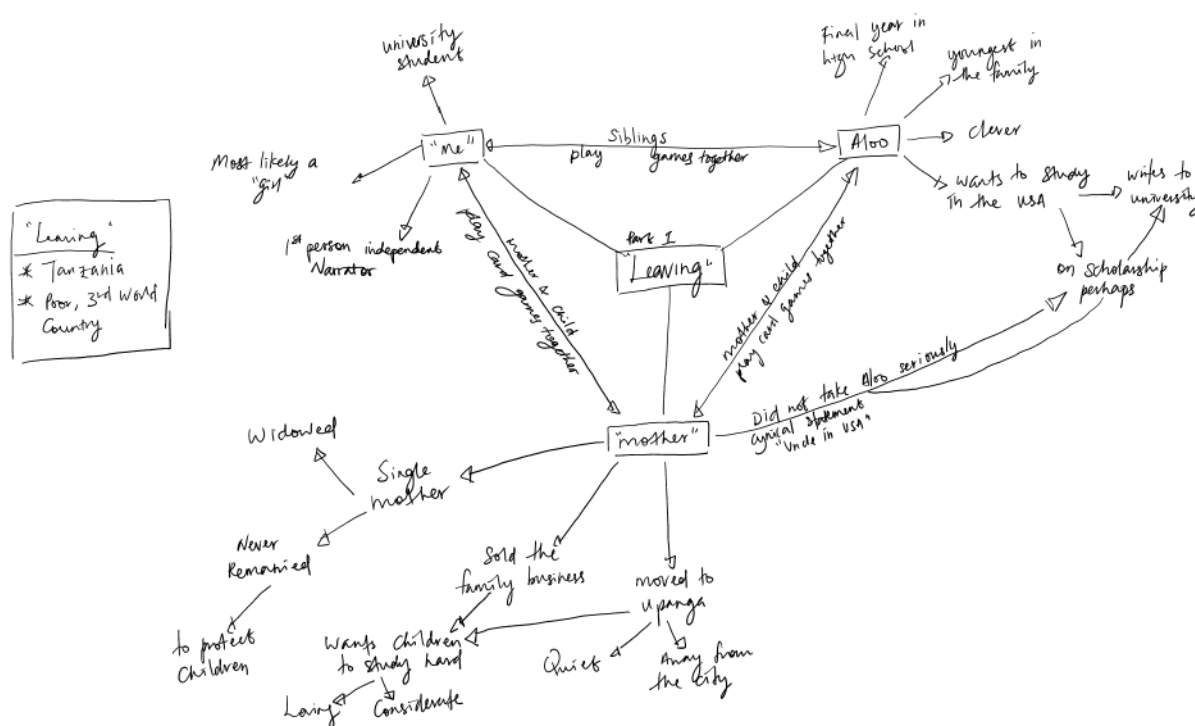


Figure 3 Character map corresponding to the excerpt

By the end of the expository reading, a comprehensive summary of the excerpt was produced. This is achieved by highlighting keywords that were interconnected and linked to each other based on the characterisation of its characters. The teacher then demonstrated how the respondents can use the character map (Figure 3) to guide the arguments and link them to the textual evidence in the short story. In the subsequent lesson, the respondents were given an essay question to respond to in writing, where they had to describe the main character, Aloo, and his relationship with his family based on the whole short story. They were encouraged to use the character map as their main reference to plan their written response. Their written work was not assessed for its accuracy but served as a platform to generate discussions and feedback about the advantages or disadvantages of character mapping when learning English literature.

### Observing: Gathering Feedback

After completing their written response, the respondents were asked to reflect on their experience using character maps to learn the short story. Several questions were provided to guide this reflective process:

1. *What is your general impression towards using character maps to learn the short story?*
2. *In your opinion, what are the strengths or weaknesses of this technique?*
3. *Do you agree that character maps help you to learn the short story better? Why? How?*
4. *Do you agree if character maps are used extensively when learning short stories? Why?*

Recurring or repetitive responses were expected as these overlapping questions were intended to elicit more responses.

### Results and Discussions

#### Reflecting: Analysing Feedback

The respondents' reflections were collected and summarised, which revealed some interesting findings. Note that responses that are covered in earlier sections will not be discussed again, even when similar responses reoccur.

#### *General Impression towards Character Mapping*

Generally, the respondents welcomed the use of character maps in English literature classes. Roser et al. (2007) noted that investigating a character's motives is an effective way of understanding a complex narrative. This is possibly why the respondents found the text simpler and easier to understand with character mapping (Table 5), which allowed them to analyse the characterisations with greater scrutiny. This is congruent with recent findings (Abdul Aziz et al., 2018; Aprianto & Syarifaturrahman, 2020), and Megat Abdul Rahim et al. (2017) attributed enhanced comprehension of literary text to the effects of "spatial graphic displays" in GOs (p.33). Character maps, as a form of schemata, can facilitate the process of understanding of the written text (Al Asmari & Javid, 2018).

*Table 5 General Impression/Opinion towards the use of Character Maps*

Feedback	Responses (Summarised)	Tally
Positive	• Simpler and easier to understand the text	14
	• Allows a holistic view/understanding of the story	
	• Fun and engaging	
	• Creative way of learning	
Negative	• Time-consuming during examinations	3
	• Time-consuming when learning literature	
	• Potentially source of confusion	

In addition, character mapping incorporates elements of creative learning which were absent in the respondents' experience learning literature. To them, learning literature using character mapping was fun (Table 5). Again, Roser et al. (2007) speculated that latching on to the major characters of a story helps readers to untangle plot lines. Breaking down complex plots alongside the characterisation of the literary text is akin to a detective gathering evidence at a crime scene to deduce the identity of the criminal. In other words, character mapping can promote a form of deductive reading, which engages learners to "interact" with the literary text at levels that were previously unimaginable (Barrot, 2016; Megat Abdul Rahim et al., 2017). This is also reflected in the literary theory of narrative co-creation, where readers/audiences "co-create the narrative through their engagement with the story world and its characters" (Culpeper & Fernandez-Quintanilla, 2017, p.115).

Also, the respondents indicated that character mapping is a creative way for them to study the literary text (Table 5). This parallels with studies that justified the use of GOs in the language classroom, where it encourages creativity and inspire innovation among learners (Abdul Aziz et al., 2018; Singh et al., 2020; Uba et al., 2017). Specifically, Uba et al. (2017) noted that using GOs addresses the learners desire for aesthetics, as they can be an avenue for self-expression. When learning English literature, this could result in heightened levels of engagement and interest among learners (Aprianto & Syarifaturrahman, 2020; Megat Abdul Rahim et al., 2017; Singh et al., 2020; Uba et al., 2017) which conventional learning methods are not capable of inducing (*see* Table 2).

Nevertheless, there were concerns regarding character mapping. For learners, whose main objective is passing the paper, time is seen as a valuable resource, as they have limited time to demonstrate their understanding of the literary texts. Therefore, character mapping is presumably a time-consuming technique, as devising character maps for a literary text is an additional workload. A respondent expressed doubt about its practicality during examinations (Table 5); how realistically can one generate a character map that is effective in helping to guide and plan a good written response under pressure? For teachers, Uba et al. (2017) reported that using GOs is indeed more time-consuming because they will require more time devising GOs that are suitable for their learners. Al Asmari & Javid (2018) strongly recommended teachers to incorporate the use of content schema when teaching reading, although they recognise that this inevitably amounts to extra time and effort.

In addition, the respondents also mentioned that their unfamiliarity with character mapping was a source of confusion, especially in the first few sessions (Table 5). This correlates with what Barrot (2016) observed, where using GOs was the least applied reading strategy, despite their proven benefits. She suggested that the "heavy extraneous cognitive load that visualising had on students" (p.889) can discourage learners from adopting GOs as a learning strategy. Therefore, the heavier mental and cognitive workload that come with character mapping may dissuade learners from truly embracing this technique.

### *Strengths and Weaknesses of the Character Maps*

When probed further, the respondents reacted positively to character mapping. First, character mapping seemingly strengthened memory retention (Table 6). Using character maps helped the respondents retain information about the literary text longer, which allowed them to access key evidence quicker, and thus able to formulate arguments more efficiently, especially when planning their written response. This is consistent with findings theorising that the use of GOs, as a form of schemata, can enhance short- and long-term memory (Barrot, 2016; Singh et al., 2018; Uba et al., 2017). From a cognitive stylistics' perspective, information stored in a schema represents the nodules of information pertaining to a literary text, which is crucial to one's abstraction of experiences and prior knowledge (Culpeper, 2002; Culpeper & Fernandez-Quintanilla, 2017).

*Table 6 Strengths and Advantages of using Character Maps*

Strength/Advantage	Responses (Summarised)		Tally
Strengthen Memory Retention	•	Easier to remember	9
		Not hard to remember	
Promote Better Organisation	•	Better time management when writing	8
		Useful	
		Simple notetaking	
Total			17
Total number of responses provided, <i>n</i>			28
Note: Previously discussed responses were ellipted			

Secondly, the respondents noted that character mapping improved their organisational skills (*see* Table 6). Character mapping, as an organisational tool, helps put mental representations and inventories into structures that they can easily comprehend (Uba et al., 2017). More importantly, it can be manipulated to produce language output that fulfils specific function or purpose (Al Asmari & Javid, 2018; Aprianto & Syarifaturrahman, 2020; Kafipour & Jahansooz, 2017). As the “organisation of the text must play a part in our impression of a character” (Culpeper, 2002, p.255), the respondents' interpretation of characters and plots of a literary text becomes structured and methodological, thus improving their reading skills. Concurrently, enhanced organisational skills resulting from character mapping translates into better time management when the writing process was guided by character maps. So, learners can elicit more ideas from spatial illustrations (Singh et al., 2018), maintain a form of “information checklist” (Singh et al., 2020), and model paragraph construction (Rahmat, 2018) using character maps. Regarding Malaysian learners' well-documented struggles in writing, Singh et al. (2018) concluded that schema theory can help to organise ideas and content, which is crucial to developing HOTS. Character maps seemingly facilitate similar benefits.

*Table 7 Disadvantages/Weaknesses of using Character Maps*

Disadvantage/Weakness	Responses	Tally
Repetitive – Boring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boring if done often</li> <li>• Cannot be used often</li> </ul>	3
Requires high English Proficiency Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not easy for those with weak English to use</li> </ul>	1
Total		4
Total number of responses provided, <i>n</i>		9
Note: Previously discussed responses were ellipsed		

Conversely, character mapping can alienate learners because it could get monotonous when overused (Table 7). Recent studies did not consider how learners may end feel indifferent towards GOs due to overuse. Conversely, they overwhelmingly believed that GOs can break the monotony of the language classroom in Malaysia (Abdul Aziz et al., 2018; Megat Abdul Rahim et al., 2017). Therefore, this contradiction reminds teachers the need to manage character mapping to minimise the effects of overuse. Ideally, they must interject character mapping with other learning strategies such as roleplaying and group work.

The second concern with character mapping is that a certain English language proficiency is required to use this technique. Some respondents feel that they lack the required proficiency in English (Table 7) to produce simple yet effective character maps. While some scholars agree that schema theory and GOs do enhance learners' English language proficiency (Abdul Aziz et al., 2018; Al Asmari & Javid, 2018; Rahmat, 2018; Uba et al., 2017), others cautioned that their usage need to be tailored to the learners' needs, especially with low proficiency learners. Notably, learners with higher English proficiency benefit more from using GOs compared to weaker learners, especially in their verbal presentation skills (Aprianto & Syarifaturrahman, 2020). Weaker learners would need more support and scaffolding from teachers, even if they are adept at using GOs to frame their ideas and plan their presentation. Despite its reported ability in enhancing learner autonomy, teachers are instrumental in facilitating learners' reading tasks, as "poor English language proficiency can seemingly impede activation of content schemata" (Al Asmari & Javid p.103).

#### *Effectiveness of using Character Maps to learn literary texts*

Most learners, "despite their proficiency in English, agree that the use of GOs is an effective language learning strategy" (Aprianto & Syarifaturrahman, 2020, p.149). Unsurprisingly, the respondents unanimously supported using character maps when learning literature (Table 8). They provided two interesting comments that warrant further discussions.

Firstly, some respondents believed that character mapping strengthened their ability to identify key ideas in the literary text (Table 8). As they constructed the character map, they gradually identified key events and characters by scrutinising the linguistic patterns in the text. This finding agrees with current literature; GOs are reportedly useful for identifying topic sentences and

supporting details (Barrot, 2016). Abdul Aziz et al. (2018) advocated for GOs to help learners “focus on what is really important” by diverting “their attention to the keyword, key concepts and relationships of the information” (p.30). Learners were observed delineating the structures of a text with the use of GOs through its “visual and spatial symbols”(Aprianto & Syarifaturrahman, 2020, p.143). These findings are congruent with the assumption that people tend to pay more attention to “information that is consistent with expectations derived from their schemata” (Culpeper & Fernandez-Quintanilla, 2017, p.99).

*Table 8 Effectiveness of Character Maps in learning English Literature*

<b>Do Character Maps help in learning literature?</b>	<b>Tally</b>
Agree	16
Disagree	0
Unsure	2
Total number of respondents, <i>n</i>	16
<b>Why? How?</b>	<b>Tally</b>
Identify key ideas easily	
• Help to search for key points and ideas	3
• Easier to find evidences when writing literature essay	
Promote social interaction	
• Discussing and sharing ideas with friends	2
• Discussing with teachers and friends.	
Total	5
Total number of responses provided, <i>n</i>	25
Note: Previously discussed responses were elllipted	

Secondly, character mapping also provided opportunities for the respondents to discuss learning English literature (Table 8). It became easier to share ideas with their teachers and peers, as the character maps served as a metalanguage and common starting point for discussion. This is consistent with previous studies observing better interaction among learners, when using GOs (Abdul Aziz et al., 2018; Aprianto & Syarifaturrahman, 2020; Uba et al., 2017) or incorporating schema theory into lessons (Singh et al., 2018). From the perspective of literary theory, character- and characterisation-driven analysis of literary texts can trigger discourse which help to construct and elaborate meanings (Roser et al., 2007). Hence, character mapping creates a platform on which learners can discuss literary texts.

Unexpectedly, the respondents were also observed comparing their personal character maps with their peers without being instructed, which was then followed with impromptu discussions about the literary text, suggesting that they may have developed greater extent of learner autonomy through character mapping. This agrees with what Singh et al., (2020) reported, where GOs may help to develop higher degrees of “autonomy as learners towards personal discovery and self-expression” (p.218). Likewise, Megat Abdul Rahim et al. (2017) also lobbied for the use of GOs to move learners towards a learner-centred paradigm by encouraging active learner participation.

### *Opinion towards extensive use of Character Maps*

Surprisingly, when asked if character maps should be used extensively when learning and teaching English Literature, most respondents disagreed (Table 9). The key reason is because the respondents find the technique boring if used too frequently. Therefore, character mapping should be alternated with other techniques such as role-playing, miming and animation. Nevertheless, teachers need to consider whether these techniques are compatible with the literary genres that the learners are learning. For instance, role playing is mainly restricted to narrative-driven prose such as short stories, novels and plays, so learners would struggle to role play poems or limericks (unless they inhibit a clear narrative structure). Hence, further studies into how readers approach characterisation in various genres, as advocated by Culpeper (2002), might help us derive better ways of studying and teaching English literature that complements the character mapping technique. In short, overusing new approaches can demotivate or discourage learners, which may happen with character mapping. Teachers need to manage character mapping and mitigate its possible drawbacks. For one, scholars believe in investing time and effort to train learners to use GOs or schemata independently (Al Asmari & Javid, 2018; Megat Abdul Rahim et al., 2017). Once learners are adept at using character maps, they can decide where and when to use this technique, with or without specific instructions from their teachers.

*Table 9 Opinion towards extensive use of Character Maps*

<b>Do you agree with using Character Maps extensively in class?</b>	<b>Tally</b>
Agree	6
Disagree	10
Unsure	2
Total number of respondents, <i>n</i>	18
<b>Why?</b>	<b>Tally</b>
Disagree      Prefers alternative approaches: • Role-playing	1
Total number of agreements, <i>n</i>	9
Total number of disagreements, <i>n</i>	8
Note: Previously discussed responses were ellipted	

### **Conclusion**

The key to using any technique or method is to use it wisely and in accordance with learners' needs. The need analysis of this study indicated that the respondents were only familiar with typical and conventional examination-oriented techniques to learn English literature. By extension, this study, with due discretion, assumed that many learners suffered from a lack of alternative techniques when studying literary texts. This could be an interesting phenomenon that warrants further investigations. Having said so, learners who are mature in thoughts or have advanced English proficiency would probably benefit less from using character maps, as they may have other

learning strategies that suit them better. Nonetheless, character mapping could still be an alternative to enhance learning as part of enrichment or remedial programmes.

Overall, the respondents received character maps positively. The findings of this study are relatively congruent with studies investigating the use of GOs or schema theory to enhance learning and teaching experience in the classroom (Abdul Aziz et al., 2018; Al Asmari & Javid, 2018; Aprianto & Syarifaturrahman, 2020; Barrot, 2016; Kafipour & Jahansooz, 2017; Megat Abdul Rahim et al., 2017; Rahmat, 2018; Singh et al., 2018, 2020; Uba et al., 2017). Beyond the context of English literature, enhanced proficiency to read for specific key content, and the reinforced ability to organise writing with the use of GOs are exceptionally useful repertoires – the art of summarising ideas and extrapolating them are crucial academic skills that learners need, especially in tertiary education.

However, there are several adverse reactions to character mapping, such as it being time-consuming (Al Asmari & Javid, 2018; Uba et al., 2017), linguistically demanding (Al Asmari & Javid, 2018; Aprianto & Syarifaturrahman, 2020) and potentially demotivating due to overuse (*see discussions around* Table 7). But investing time and effort training learners to use character maps when learning literature can be richly rewarding, as with adopting schema theory or GOs (Abdul Aziz et al., 2018; Barrot, 2016). Therefore, teachers must pre-empt the learners' lack of confidence in their English proficiency and minimise possible overuse of character mapping. This can be achieved by providing more scaffolding when using character mapping (*see discussions around* Table 7) or alternating this technique with other methods (*see discussions around* Table 9). However, more research is required to investigate the full extent of these negative outcomes, as no other studies to date reported similar observations.

There are several limitations to this study. With a single group sampling, it was not possible to compare the impact of character mapping on respondents with a control group. Thus, this prevented a more empirical dissection of its impact on the respondents, meaning that character mapping, though promising, may not absolutely be a more effective learning strategy. Also, the small sample size of this study limits the generalisability of its findings. Any replication of this study should endeavour to recruit a larger sample population, perhaps utilising an experimental paradigm, to produce more comprehensive and conclusive findings.

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## Article

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### Using Frangenheim's Thinking Skills Framework to Improve Academic Writing Skills in Tertiary ESL Classrooms

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#### ABSTRACT

Malaysian undergraduates have been facing writing difficulties as a result of lacking effective guidance tools in upskilling English writing and activating thinking skills. Failing to achieve writing competency, the problems extend to the high unemployment rate among fresh graduates. This paper proposes using Frangenheim's Thinking Skills Framework (TSF) to improve university students' academic writing proficiency. 60 students were selected to undergo a 6-week quasi-experiment to investigate the effectiveness of the TSF on academic writing and focus group discussions were held to explore students' perceptions on utilizing the TSF in writing processes. The results of the study confirmed the positive effect of using the TSF in improving students' academic writing and promoting the use of Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) throughout the writing process. Findings revealed students' perceptions on the TSF: an effective guidance tool with various writing strategies, comprises clues to activate suitable thinking skills, and assists writers' idea generation and decision-making. The implications are important to tertiary stakeholders as a practical TSF is recommended as a supplementary tool to be infused in English writing syllabus to facilitate students in fulfilling the essential thinking skills and writing needs in higher education.

**KEYWORDS:** Thinking Skills Framework, Higher-Order Thinking Skills, higher education, English academic writing

#### Introduction

In the Malaysian context, English language is taught as the second language (ESL) whereby English language is as equally emphasized as the students' mother tongue (Peng, 2019). At the tertiary level, writing skills are claimed to have an important role in determining students'

academic achievement as most assessment and examinations are conducted in the form of written assignments (Abdulkareem, 2013). Students' academic writing competence is influenced by their cognitive development as the students' mastery of critical thinking skills is one of the crucial factors which determine whether the students can produce an effective writing (Putri, 2018).

However, tertiary students are facing writing difficulties as a result of insufficient writing strategies and poor critical thinking skills (Ismail, 2011; Wang & Zou, 2018). According to the Fresh Graduate Report 2018, the lack of linguistic skills and thinking skills has also led to the problem of low employability rate among Malaysian Fresh Graduates (JobStreet, 2018).

To ensure the students fulfil the 21<sup>st</sup> century needs of being linguistically and innovatively proficient, Ministry of Education Malaysia (2015) has stated two important aspirations in Executive Summary of Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025 (Higher Education): (1) students are equally proficient in *Bahasa Melayu* and English language at the operational level, and (2) students are inquisitive and innovative in applying knowledge and higher order thinking skills (HOTS) with problem-solving initiatives. Many undergraduates struggle to perform writing tasks assigned by the lecturers as these written assignments involve not only the students' comprehension of the language contexts, but also their ability to perform critical writing skills which require them to propose their own claims, analyze the content validity, justify their viewpoints and lastly, compose an effective writing with cohesive organisations and coherent language (Yasin et al., 2010). This concern requires immediate attention as it comes to a realization that the acquired English writing skills are totally insufficient for students to deal with the academic writing tasks, let alone the various writing tasks involved in their career aspects.

To date, despite the fact that researches have been conducted to explore the pedagogical strategies in teaching ESL writing, most of the studies direct the focus on primary and secondary education. There is only minimal emphasis given to overcoming students' writing difficulties at the tertiary level. Therefore, there is a need to explore a simple and practicable thinking skills framework (TSF) to provide students with adequate assistance for them to effectively and creatively utilize the language input learnt in the ESL classrooms to fulfil the writing needs (Foster & Russell, 2002).

Taking these into consideration, the purpose of the study was to determine the effectiveness of using the Frangenheim's TSF to upskill tertiary students' academic writing. Meanwhile, the study also aimed to explore students' perceptions on using TSF in their academic writing process.

This study addresses the following research questions:

- a) How did the use of TSF affect tertiary ESL students' academic writing?
- b) What were the tertiary ESL students' perceptions of using TSF in learning academic writing skills?

## Literature review

In the Malaysian context, tertiary students have been facing writing difficulties and it is reported that ESL students require a lot of writing practices to master the writing skills (Ismail et al., 2012). Due to the fact that writing skills are generally perceived as a complicated language skill, it has resulted in the problem of writing anxiety among undergraduates in Malaysia (Lau & Rahmat, 2014; Rahim et al., 2016). Writing anxiety refers to the psychological effects triggered by students'

negative feelings, such as tension, nervousness and stress, when they are assigned with a writing task (Al\_Sawalha & Chow, 2012). The writing anxiety among tertiary students was caused by many reasons, including the lack of creativity, insufficient vocabulary knowledge and low motivation in writing (Kirmizi & Kirmizi, 2015). This situation is worsened when English language has become the mandatory pass subject at different educational levels, as emphasized in the Malaysian educational blueprints.

### *Theoretical Framework of the study*

This study was grounded on the conceptual framework which integrated the theories of the revised Bloom's Taxonomy (2001) and the Cognitive Process Theory of Writing (1981).

The original Bloom's Taxonomy was developed by Benjamin Bloom in year 1956, along with a team of educational psychologists. It is a classification system of six levels for the cognitive skills and educational objectives at all levels (Bloom et al., 1956). Measurable task verbs are used to help educators define nebulous terms related to measuring students' learning outcomes in cognitive domain such as "internalize" and "comprehend". In the later year, Bloom's Taxonomy was revised by Anderson et al. (2001) to incorporate new insights about pedagogies on children cognitive development.

The revised Bloom's Taxonomy retained six levels of thinking skills which include three lower order thinking skills (LOTS) and three higher order thinking skills (HOTS). The LOTS comprise *remembering*, *understanding*, and *applying* whereas the HOTS include *analysing*, *evaluating* and *creating* (Anderson et al., 2001). To simplify the use of Bloom's Taxonomy, Frangenheim (2006) proposed a thinking skills framework (Figure 1) which integrates the measurable task verbs, relevant icons and thinking tools to serve as a guideline for teachers and students to master thinking skills and language skills simultaneously.

Other than that, the Cognitive Process Theory of Writing developed by Flower and Hayes (1981) is a model used to monitor the writers' cognitive processes during a composition, particularly a written work. While using this model, the students are allowed to take control over their own writing and given opportunities to think like writers and make the "writers' decisions and choices" (Flower & Hayes, 1981, p. 377). Therefore, linguistic accuracy is no longer prioritized and exclusive attention is given to the mental processes instead (Selvaraj & Aziz, 2019).

Four main points are highlighted by Flower and Hayes (1981) in this model:

- The writers are involved in making decisions and choices throughout the writing processes of planning the writing, converting thoughts to verbal and reviewing the writing.
- The stages of writing have no clear cut whereby the processes, namely *pre-writing*, *drafting*, *giving feedback*, *revising*, *editing* and *publishing*, are embedded into one another when necessary.
- Writing is a goal-oriented process which requires the writers to have clear set of goals when they write.
- Writing goals are not permanent and they change as more input is gained.






1. Thinking Skills Et Task Verbs The Task 'WHY'		2. Bloom's Six Thinking Levels The Broad 'WHY'		3. Sentence Starters The 'WHAT'	4. Thinking Tools The 'HOW'
HIGHER ORDER SKILLS	Create Elaborate Extrapolate Invent Forecast Formulate	Generate Hypothesise Modify Organise Plan Propose	 <b>DESIGN</b> <i>Acting like an inventor, experiencing 'WOW light bulb' moments for new products, ideas or processes</i>	Formulate a set of criteria to judge... Compose a song, jingle or rap to... Plan an argument to persuade people to... Generate key questions for... Create a role play/experiment to... Modify an existing project studied so that... Organise a personal action plan to...	1:4:Publish:Circle:Refine FRESH Pros:Cons:Improve Real Problem-Solution 1 & 2 Word/Image Association Y Chart, Split Y Chart
	Argue (for/against) Assess Conclude Decide Determine Judge	Justify Prioritise Rate Recommend Select Verify	 <b>EVALUATE</b> <i>Acting like the Scales of Justice to 'weigh up' the evidence to make and justify a decision based on the Analysis data</i>	Determine to what extent... Decide which of the two...would be better for... Justify the decision of... Judge which is more effective, A or B. Evaluate the effectiveness of... Select which is the best option...or... Rank the following from...to most...	Court Case Decision-Making Matrix Extended PCQ Extent Barometer Extent Barometer with Perspectives Tournament Prioritising Y Chart
	Argue (about) Compare Complex Summary Contrast Differentiate	Discuss (in depth) Distinguish Explore Investigate Separate	 <b>ANALYSE</b> <i>Acting like a Microscope to identify the component parts of an issue, situation or object</i>	Examine...from at least 4 perspectives... Discuss the similarities and differences of... Investigate all factors that could influence...in... Explain how parts interact in... Explore research on the issue of...in order to gain a deeper understanding of... Compare the pros and cons of...	Double Bubble Map Icon Prompt KWL, KWHL PCQ, Extended PCQ S.W.O.T. Analysis T Chart Y Chart
FOUNDATION SKILLS	Arrange Calculate Compile Complete Construct Demonstrate	Extrapolate Illustrate Practise Show Solve Use	 <b>APPLY</b> <i>Acting like a Formula, to apply new skills, rules and concepts to related and new situations</i>	Apply previously learnt knowledge to construct... Interview a group of people to identify... Compile 4 questions based on your knowledge of... Write a letter to the editor pointing out... Construct a flow chart for... Manipulate a spreadsheet to answer 'what if'... Show/demonstrate how to...	Predict:Observe:Explain (POE) Silent Card Shuffle
	Comprehend Describe Explain Interpret Outline	Paraphrase Recognise Summary (basic) Translate Understand	 <b>UNDERSTAND</b> <i>Acting like an AHA! Bubble, showing understanding of words, concepts, cause and effect and 'reasons for'</i>	Explain how...has impacted on... Describe in clear logical steps... Use a...metaphor to help others understand... Paraphrase in your own words... Using words, pictures and icons, explain what you know about... Give reasons for...	Cause-Effect Concept Maps Metaphor Multiple Intelligence Model Silent Card Shuffle Six Icon Summary
	Define Find Label List Locate Memorise	Name Quote Remember Retell State	 <b>REMEMBER</b> <i>Acting like an Information Desk to recall information, facts and data</i>	Make an A-Z list of... Name all the... Describe what happened at... Repeat what...said about... What is...(facts/definition etc.)? Quote 10 facts about... List the ways that you are like...	Alpha Ladder KWL Silent Card Shuffle
5. Co-operative and Collaborative Strategies The Group 'HOW'			6. Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligence Model The 'WHO'		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1:4:P:C:R</li> <li>Court Case</li> <li>Doughnut</li> <li>Hot Potato</li> <li>Human Continuum</li> <li>Jigsaw</li> <li>Pairs and Stimulus RAS Alert</li> <li>Round Robin (Silent and Noisy)</li> <li>Silent Card Shuffle</li> <li>Think, Pair, Share</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Verbal Linguistic (Word Smart)</li> <li>Logical Mathematical (Number Smart)</li> <li>Visual/Spatial (Picture Smart)</li> <li>Body/Kinesthetic (Body Smart)</li> <li>Musical/Rhythmic (Music Smart)</li> <li>Interpersonal (People Smart)</li> <li>Intrapersonal (Self Smart)</li> <li>Naturalistic (Seeing Connections to the Natural World)</li> </ul>		

Figure 1. Frangenheim's Thinking Skills Framework (Frangenheim, 2006)

As the Frangenheim's TSF is a revised and extended version of the Bloom's Taxonomy, relevant past studies on Bloom's Taxonomy are reviewed to gather insights on how it is integrated in the ESL classrooms. First of all, it is evident in the study of Ganapathy and Kaur (2014) that using Frangenheim's TSF in the secondary ESL writing contexts is helpful to students in terms of idea generation and problem solving. It is also reported that the students are motivated to learn and employ this tool when it comes to evaluating ideas and constructing ideas based on the topic given by the teacher. The findings of the study reflect an existing research gap in introducing this TSF to the tertiary ESL writing contexts.

In another study, Moseley et al. (2005) reviewed and evaluated a total of 35 thinking frameworks and taxonomies with the aim to determine the effective framework for lifelong learning. From the findings, it is concluded that Bloom's Taxonomy is a constructive and practicable thinking framework to be used in classifying learning objectives for students at any age and with any level of ability. Regarding the effectiveness of Bloom's Taxonomy in academic writing, Korzh (2017) stated that Bloom's Taxonomy is useful in expanding students' English academic writing and reading skills and clearly presenting the expectations of the thinking skills and written tasks to the students.

Not only that, Sham (2016) has proven that students can perform better in writing tasks after they were taught with the critical thinking skills. Bloom's Taxonomy is also recommended to be included in the ESL writing courses due to its effectiveness in expanding students' ability to produce creative writing (Sham, 2016). This finding also concurs with Nevid et al. (2017) findings whereby the researchers concluded that writing tasks should be designed and assigned with the use of Bloom Taxonomy as it helps the students foster writing skills and cognitive skills simultaneously.

## Method

Mixed-method research design was used to conduct the study under two phases. This research design enables the researchers to explain the quantitative data collected first by using the qualitative data collected afterwards (Creswell, 2014). The first phase was conducted with the quasi-experimental pre-test and post-test design participated by a total of 60 students to collect the quantitative data. The purpose of the first-phase collection was to determine the effectiveness of the Frangenheim's TSF in improving students' writing performance. After the participants took the pre-test, the experimental group underwent an intervention program (Figure 2) for six weeks in which they were taught to write an academic writing with the use of TSF, followed by the post-test taken by all participants. Then, the second phase of data collection took place in which it involved four focus group discussions, with each consisted of 6 experimental participants. The purpose of the discussions was to gather the experimental participants' perceptions in using the TSF to learn how to write academic writing.

### *Participants*

The participants were 60 Malaysian undergraduate students from a private university in Ipoh who were taking the course named Academic Writing. They participated in the quasi-experiment and

they were divided into experimental and control group with 30 of them in each group. After that, 24 experimental participants took part in the focus group discussions.

This study used a multistage sampling method. First, purposive sampling method was used to decide the sample size for the whole study with the inclusion criteria of: (1) the student is a Malaysian; (2) he/she had completed his or her registration under the course of Academic Writing. Next, random sampling method was used whereby the sample size of 60 students were equally and randomly divided into two groups, namely experimental group and control group. Lastly, purposive sampling method was once again used to decide the participants for the focus group discussions with the following inclusion criteria: (1) the student was the experimental participant; (2) he/she had participated in all sessions of the intervention.

### *The Instrument*

There were two research instruments used in this study which were the pre-test and post-test question, as well as the question guide used in the focus group discussions. To increase the content validity of the test, the researcher adapted the writing topic from the past study conducted by Özdemir (2018). Content validity assesses whether the item in a test measures what it intends to measure (Creswell, 2014). To produce valid results on students' argumentative writing performance, this writing topic, entitled "Whether social media socializes or isolates people?" (Özdemir, 2018, p. 115) was adapted as the test questions in the quasi-experiment. Besides, the question guide was adapted from the past studies (Al Badi, 2015; Ganapathy & Kaur, 2014) as these past studies are relevant to writing difficulties and using the Frangenheim's TSF to teach ESL writing.

### *Interventions*

As mentioned, the experimental group took part in an intervention program which consisted of six sessions of teaching in which the participants were taught with academic writing skills by integrating the use of Frangenheim's TSF (Figure 1) throughout the whole intervention. In each intervention, they were given relevant writing tasks to practice their thinking skills at the expected levels. They had to complete the assigned writing tasks every week before the next intervention. The lesson plans were adapted from Ganapathy and Kaur (2014). The Frangenheim's TSF poster (Figure 1) was used as a guideline to design the HOTS lessons to teach academic writing by considering all six levels of Bloom's Taxonomy which covers both LOTS (i.e. *remember*, *understand*, *apply*) and HOTS (i.e. *analyse*, *evaluate* and *design*).



Task Sequence	Learning Outcomes in Bloom's Taxonomy
Students are given a copy of the TSF poster for their reference. Students are given facts and knowledge regarding the elements of an argumentative essay. Students are told to act like an Information Desk. Students were then required to answer 'WHAT' questions on the elements of an argumentative essay by recalling the knowledge and matching the elements to the correct definitions.	<b>Remember:</b> Acting like an Information Desk to recall the relevant facts and knowledge taught by the teacher and existing knowledge based on past experience if applicable.  Students are expected to list the components of an effective essay and match the elements of an argumentative essay to the correct definitions.
Students are involved in a discussion on the topic regarding whether the social media, such as Facebook, encourages or discourages human interactions. Students were then required to answer "WHY" and "HOW" questions to describe the reasons of using social media and explain how it may affect human interactions.	<b>Understand:</b> Acting like the 'AHA' bubble to show the understanding of the topic and the expectations of the writing tasks.  Students are expected to describe the reasons why people use social media and explain how the effects of social media on human interactions.
Students are instructed to construct a mind-map and use it to illustrate the functions of social media based on what they understand about this topic. Students are allowed to apply any relevant knowledge as per discussed in the previous lessons.	<b>Apply:</b> Acting like a formula to apply new or relevant knowledge, skills, and concepts to complete the writing task.  Students are expected to construct and use a mind map to compile and illustrate their ideas regarding the functions of social media.
Students investigate the effects of social media on human interactions from two points of view – whether social media socializes people or isolates people. Students discuss this topic in depth and explore the different points of view by using a T-chart.	<b>Analyse:</b> Acting like a microscope to analyse an issue or situation by identifying the component parts.  Students are expected to <del>analyze</del> the topic, discuss in depth the effects of social media in terms of human interactions and explore both agreeable and disagreeable views with a T-chart.
Students evaluate the points stated in the T-chart created in the previous lesson. Based on the T-chart, students argue on the topic by stating their claim, counterclaim and counterarguments. Students select the effective arguments (points) supported with valid evidence to justify their claim.	<b>Evaluate:</b> Acting like the scales of justice to evaluate the arguments and evidence based on the data collected at the Analysis stage to justify the claim or stand.  Students are expected to evaluate and judge the arguments, argue about a topic, and justify the claim.
Students plan their essays by generating more ideas or elaborations based on the topic on social media. Students organize the structure of the essay by using an outline before composing the entire essay. Students create an essay of 500 to 600 words.	<b>Design:</b> Acting like an inventor by designing an output based on the information gathered.  Students are expected to generate ideas or elaborations, plan the entire essay, organize the essay structure and create an argumentative writing.

Figure 2. Simplified lesson plan based on the writing topic "Social Media"

## Results

### *The Effectiveness of TSF in Improving Academic Writing Performance*

Both control and experimental groups took the pre-test and post-test and the scores obtained by the groups were compared and analysed to determine the effectiveness of the intervention program. The control group received the standard treatment whereas the experimental group received the experimental treatment in which the Frangenheim's TSF was used to teach academic writing in consecutive 6 lessons on a weekly basis. Table 1 displayed the mean scores obtained by the control and experimental groups in the pre-test and post-test.

Table 1. Average Scores Obtained by Students in the Pre-test and Post-test

	Number of Participants	Average Score of Pre-Test	Average Score of Post-Test	Average Score Difference
Control Group	30	53.37	62.87	9.50
Experimental Group	30	49.64	70.17	20.54

As shown in Table 1, the students in the control and experimental groups showed improvement in their post-test writing. Specifically, the average score obtained by the control group increased by 9.5 marks, from getting the average scores of 53.37 marks in the pre-test to 62.87 marks in the post-test. On the other hand, the average score obtained by the students in the experimental group increased by 20.54 marks, as the students obtained the average scores of 49.64 marks in the pre-test and 70.17 marks in the post-test. The test results indicate that the experimental group, which participated in the interventions, achieved greater improvement in academic writing, as compared to the control group.

### *Tertiary Students' Perceptions on TSF*

As from the qualitative data collected through four focus group discussions with 24 experimental participants, the perceptions of students towards the use of Frangenheim's TSF in learning academic writing were explored.

Table 2. Students' perceptions towards the effectiveness of the TSF (N = 24)

Effectiveness of TSF	Example quote	Frequency, <i>n</i> (%)
Delivery of task instructions	<p>"I can clearly understand the task verbs. They made the instructions clear...I was able to have clear direction to think about the topic." [S4]</p> <p>"The task verbs help me think better as they provide some 'clues' for me to understand the topic and complete the task." [S6]</p> <p>"They are very specific words to help me think better. For example, when I see <i>list</i>, I know that I need to list the answers in the bullet points instead of writing in paragraphs. Then, when I see <i>explain</i>, I know I have to elaborate my answers and perhaps with some examples." [S14]</p>	24 (100%)
Exploration of topic	<p>"I can use the tools to explore the topics deeper and form a good outline for my essay." [S3]</p> <p>"The TSF tools help me explore the topic better because they show the clear picture and the overall concept to me." [S5]</p> <p>"I can use them to expand my ideas, especially when I use the mind map, because I can see how the ideas are connected together." [S10]</p>	24 (100%)

Text organisation	<p>"It's very good in organizing the essay because it makes my essay look more standardized." [S4]</p> <p>"In my opinion, they are very useful in organizing my points and essay, like how to write and elaborate." [S18]</p> <p>"Sometimes, I have too many ideas, so I think I can use the tools to help me organize the ideas." [S20]</p>	14 (58.3%)
Construction of counterclaim and counterargument	<p>"I think the T-chart helps me to see the points from both views clearly." [S3]</p> <p>"Since I already listed the points from two different views, surely I can construct the counterclaim, I would just need more counterarguments to support it." [S10]</p>	22 (91.7%)
Improvement in academic writing	<p>"Definitely, it helps. It helps me think better and make better decisions to choose the strong arguments in my essay." [S1]</p> <p>"It is helpful in comparing two stands and evaluation the points to select the strong points." [S11]</p> <p>"Personally, I think the words (task verbs) and tools help me come up with more ideas and meet the expectations." [S19]</p>	23 (95.6%)
Application of thinking skills	<p>"When I can understand the task verbs, then I can brainstorm and understand the topic better. So, they help me think better." [S12]</p> <p>"When I use the tools, I'm able to see clearly and know what information I'm lacking. So, I should think more and I can add in information. In this way, it also helps us explore the topic." [S21]</p>	24 (100%)

Table 2 indicates the themes detected from the responses collected through the focus group discussions. These themes are in relevant with the students' perceptions on the effectiveness of the thinking skills framework in terms of academic writing aspects. All 24 participants (100%) gave positive feedback in terms of the effectiveness of the TSF in the delivery of task instructions, topic exploration and the application of thinking skills throughout the writing process. First of all, the aim of using the TSF is to create clear educational outcomes for students to understand the task expectations and assist them in completing the tasks with specific instructions (Frangenheim, 2018).

From the responses, the clarity of the task verbs was highlighted by the participants that the task verbs are helpful because they are clear and specific. Meanwhile, they also provide "*clear directions*" and "*clues*" to help students understand the task nature. Besides, the participants also stated that the TSF tools such as mind maps, outlines and T-chart were useful in assisting them to explore the topics because they enabled them to see the connections between the points and further expand their ideas based on the connected points. Moreover, all participants agreed that using the TSF helped them apply the thinking skills, as in to help them "*think better*" when exploring the topic. One participant mentioned that he knew he should "*think more*" when he realized he was lacking some information in the writing draft created using the TSF tools.

One of the themes identified from the participants' responses was the effectiveness of the TSF tools in the construction of counterclaim and counterarguments. Most of them (91.7%) stated that when they used the TSF tools, particularly the T-chart, it was very helpful in clarifying the opposite points of view, as quoted "*see the points from both views clearly*". Another participant explained that the T-chart helped to list down the points, including the opposing points, so she had no problem in constructing the counterclaim.

Another notable finding is that many participants (58.3%) asserted that the tools were very good and useful in organizing the text. Some situational examples were given to explain their opinions on using the tools. The participants agreed that the tools were useful in: (1) standardizing the text, (2) organizing the ideas such as selecting the stronger points when they had too many points, and (3) elaborating the points.

The experimental participants gave their opinion on the effectiveness of the TSF intervention in improving their overall academic writing skills. Almost all of them (95.6%) agreed that the intervention was effective in upskilling their academic writing as it was claimed to be "*helpful*" in many writing aspects, such as making better writer decisions, idea evaluation skills and most importantly, meeting the writing expectations. Only one of them (8.4%) denied the effectiveness of the TSF as the participant explained that the TSF was very new to her, thus it did not seem to be a good tool for the time being.

## Discussion

The findings from the quasi-experiment indicate that the inclusion of the Frangenheim TSF in tertiary ESL classrooms has a great potential to upskill the students' academic writing competence. Besides, the findings from the focus group discussions indicate that students perceived the use of the Frangenheim TSF in upskilling academic writing as follow: TSF was able to improve their academic writing skills in terms of writing conventions and their ability to apply HOTS while completing the writing tasks. When it came to writing conventions, many students gave positive comments on the effectiveness of the TSF that the TSF assisted them mainly in several writing aspects, as shown in Table 2: (1) exploring the topic, (2) organizing the text and (3) constructing counterclaim and counterarguments. All these writing skills cannot be completed without the application of HOTS as all students (100%) agreed that they were able to think better and deeper when they were using the TSF to help complete the writing task. This finding is in line with Ganapathy and Kaur's (2014) findings that using the TSF in writing is able to challenge the students to think critically and assist them in producing creative written text by motivating them to generate more ideas related to the topic.

The students claimed that the TSF was helpful especially when they needed to make decisions such as selecting the strong arguments to be included in the essay after evaluating the weightage of the points. According to Selvaraj and Aziz (2019), writer's mental processes are prioritized as these processes involve making the right decisions throughout the writing process in which it involves analyzing the topic-related claims, evaluating the arguments, synthesizing the gathered information and creating an organized text. Many students mentioned that they used T-chart to help compare and evaluate points before they made decisions. This finding indicate that students engaged themselves throughout the writing process, from generating ideas to selecting the strong

ideas based on the information they have. This concurs with the claim made by Flower and Hayes's (1981) that learners take control over the writing process when they are given opportunities to make their writers' decisions and this is a set of mental processes that should be emphasized by the language teachers, rather than over focusing on the linguistic accuracy.

Another finding indicates that the TSF is an effective tool in setting educational outcomes as all participants (100%) agreed that the task verbs were able to deliver the task instructions in a clear and specific way. Moreover, the task verbs allow the students to think better and understand the writing task expectations. This finding concurs with some of the findings presented in Korzh (2017) study in which the functions of the task verbs in the Bloom's Taxonomy were stated as follow: develop students' writing skills, set clear and realistic learning outcomes and presenting the tasks clearly based on different thinking skills.

In short, the findings of this study suggest that Frangenheim TSF facilitate tertiary students' development of writing skills and critical thinking skills which are deemed necessary to master the English language as the second language. Due to the recent shift of the educational aspirations set by the Ministry of Education, tertiary ESL teachers and students are recommended to place emphasis on not only the linguistic competency, but also HOTS in language teaching and learning.

Based on the positive findings, it is a viable option to use the TSF in the teaching of writing among other tertiary students. It is also suggested to examine the potential of TSF in other ESL writing contexts, especially in the teaching of writing at the primary level, provided that the materials and lesson plans are modified to the suitable level for the primary students.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the Frangenheim TSF bring positive effects on improving tertiary students' academic writing skills. A strategic framework is required to help tertiary students overcome the writing difficulties caused by the lack of writing strategies and insufficient thinking tools. In regards to the students' perceptions, students view Frangenheim TSF as a useful and effective tool to upskill their academic writing as the framework is able to specify the task requirements, assist the students' thinking processes. It also functions as a writing tool to facilitate students' topic exploration, argument formation, idea evaluation and text organization. The students also stressed that the task verbs are able to specify the task nature and provide clear direction for them to meet the writing expectations.

The findings posit several implications which include developing independent tertiary learner by providing a potential writing and thinking tool, assisting tertiary teachers in setting educational outcomes for the teaching of ESL writing and giving insights to other tertiary educational stakeholders in developing ESL individuals who are both linguistically and intellectually competent. Since this TSF has been explored superficially, further studies are recommended to investigate the effectiveness of this TSF with a larger scale of sample and in other ESL contexts.

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