



USING Q2 WRITE STRATEGY TO IMPROVE PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS' ESSAY WRITING QUALITY



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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of using Q2Write strategy to improve the writing skills among English as second language learners. The aim was to determine if the students who used Q2Write strategy produced better written texts holistically. The subjects of the study were 23, 11-year-old students from Sekolah Kebangsaan Batu Kikir, Negeri Sembilan. Students were selected using purposive sampling method. The pre-test and post-test scores were used as the main findings and supplemented by the findings from semi structured interview. Participants were required to write essays and participate in a semi structured interview. Five students from the participants were selected based on their essay scores and band for the interview at the end of the study. The study results indicated that Q2Write strategy is effective in improving the quality of essay writing as the participants were able to create better quality essays after implementing Q2Write strategy. The results also indicate that participants were able to improvise their essay in terms of organization, vocabulary usage, sentence construction and relevance of idea.

Contribution/ Originality: This study contributes in the existing literature on ESL writing strategy. It examines the use of Q2Write strategy by the pupils in ESL classrooms, particularly at a primary school and the effectiveness of the strategy in improving pupils' essay quality.

1. INTRODUCTION

Al-Khasawneh and Maher (2010) stated that large scale of international links in terms of non-native communication and projects are usually done in English. It is important to enhance writing skills because gaining good knowledge and improving writing skills effectively can lead the students to get professional success in the future (Azam, Fadhil, & Yunus, 2019; Yunus, Salehi, & Nordin, 2012). It is carried out in large settings in areas such as trade market, tourism, journalism, politics and more. This statement reflects the importance of learning proper writing skill from the beginning in order to be a competent writer in today's situation. Thus, the requirement to master English for different purposes is deemed as a key skill. In ESL education field, the importance of writing skill is dominant due to the need of completing assignments, projects, examinations etc. According to Sadiq (2010) ESL classes should pay more attention to writing skill so that the students will be prepared to cope with real life situations. Kartawijaya (2018) also shared his view that writing is not a skill acquired naturally because one could not obtain this skill involuntarily and effortlessly. To acquire it, the students should be given adequate writing

practices. The aim of giving such practices is to encourage the students to improvise their skill in writing and expressing their thoughts in a well written passage. There are several literatures that discusses on importance of writing skill in English as Second Language (ESL) setting in Malaysia.

The mastery of English is basic for students to access data and information written in English. "Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025" (Ministry of Education (MOE), 2012) is an effort taken by the Malaysian government solely to improve Malaysian Education system. Even when the Malay language is being used as the National Language, with due respect the government never fails to endorse on policies to strengthen English Language Education in Malaysia. According to Darus and Subramaniam (2009) the New Standard Curriculum has been implemented in the primary and secondary school since 2011 and it has increased the time allocated for teaching and learning English in schools.

Malaysian Education system has always regarded ESL writing skill as an important part. In 2015, the number of subjects for the Primary School Evaluation Test (UPSR) was increased from 5 to 6 altogether. The additional paper focuses solely on students' English language writing skill. Malaysian students learn English for an average of 6 six years during their primary school and 5 years during the secondary level. Despite that, Malaysian students' English proficiency level is still not up to the mark. Speaking of English paper in general, a total of 25 % failed the year 6 UPSR exam and 22.5% and 23 % failed the PMR and SPM exams respectively. Ranjit (2013) said, the 1119 English examination which is an International English paper taken by form 5 students has recorded much higher failure rate where more than 50% has failed. Focusing on writing skill, the Ministry of Education quite recently has shown that a minimum of 23% of the Year 6 UPSR candidates failed the English language Writing paper (FMT, November 18, 2016). Writing has always been regarded as the killer subject among ESL learners.

Hence, as shared by Maghsoudi and Haririan pupils find writing in English as a complicated process because it requires them to apply uncertain cognitive and linguistic strategies. According to Jaclyn and Aziz (2019) various researchers have found that ESL learners in Malaysia have the least proficiency in writing skill. Most students write to fulfil the task requirement, but their ideas are often disorganized. This is supported by Firmansyah (2015) who believes that the main troubles faced by students in writing are their lack of capability to produce ideas, difficulty in forming the paragraphs with the subject matter and struggle in word choice caused by limited vocabulary. Notwithstanding when they compose, their thoughts are disarranged in view of their tension and vulnerability. Studies done by Yunus. and Mat (2014) and Yunus and Abdullah (2011) discovered that in general, students from schools in rural areas are interested to learn English but the problem arises when they put in least effort into improving their English proficiency.

Thus, this study sets to analyse the effectiveness of Q2Write strategy in students' quality of writing. The study sets to examine the use of Q2Write technique in the very first stage of the process approach (pre-writing stage) to improve students' writing quality. The objective of the current study is to find out the effectiveness of Q2Write strategy in improving the quality of essays written by the students.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Challenges in L2 Writing

According to Maznun, Monsefi, and Nimehchisalem (2017) second language writing is not an easy skill to be achieved. These challenges are continuously given importance and discussed by scholars. There are many researches that focused solely on finding out the challenges that students face when completing writing task in second language setting. Despite the importance often assigned to participation in classroom, it has been repeatedly reported that most students remain passive in class (Mustapha, Rahman, & Yunus, 2010). According to Haider (2012) and Hyland (2019) problems that students face can be classified into a few categories. The four major categories are linguistics, psychological, cognitive and pedagogical categories. This is also supported by a recent study by Sidman-Taveau and Karathanos-Aguilar (2015) and Dar and Khan (2015) they concluded that students

face difficulties in the psychological, cognitive, rhetorical and linguistics aspects of the English language while converting ideas into text. The common problems identified between these researches are the linguistic aspects of writing. This problem could exist due to the interference of the first language and the lack of proper strategy use in constructing sentences or planning the write up before presenting it in written form.

As stated in a study conducted by Rico (2014) lack of confidence in learners is usually caused by incoherence in the text which in return fails to communicate idea. This happens even if the students have mastered lexical, grammatical and syntax. When a learner is given a topic without any guidance or planning process, he might face difficulties in creating a good piece of write up. Learners are more likely to engage if they in turn are supported by teaching staff who engage with students, with the subject, and with the teaching process as stated by Bryson and Hand (2007). This is also supported by Al Murshidi (2014) who believes that generating ideas might also be a challenge that stops students from completing a writing task and it could be due to limited exposure to writing strategy (Mastan, Maarof, & Embi, 2017). In a study conducted by Mustafa, Kirana, and Bahri (2017) it is evident that students have problems in word choice. For example, the word order of the sentence might not be correct as they might misuse verb instead of noun. These show that some L2 learners are having problems with sentence pattern. Mustafa also stated that mixed tenses are major problem faced by students when writing essays. These are some reasons why students face difficulties in L2 writing task which turns out to create an incoherent writing. This is supported by a study which found that writing is probably a challenging task for ESL students who easily got bored with the conventional approach (Zakaria, Yunus, Nazri, & Shah, 2016).

2.2. Importance of Pre-Writing Strategy

To settle on how exactly prewriting strategies can profit learners, a variety of research articles about the subject matter were investigated. Most researches have concluded that pre-writing strategies have positive effect on students' writing skill (Lorenz, Green, & Brown, 2009; Nursazwani, Din, & AlSaqqaf, 2018). Referring to the previous session where the approaches were discussed, it clearly shows on how the pre-writing and organizing idea is given importance. Differentiated strategy is one of the major importance of pre-writing strategy. Malaysian education system focuses on the importance of differentiated strategy in classroom. Differentiated instruction is a teaching approach sparked from the pedagogical shift brought by scholars who placed learner differences as important (Mohd, Hazita, & Azizah, 2017). Pre-writing strategy serves as a mean of differentiated strategy. First phase of this writing process is very important as it helps the learners to get their ideas onto paper (Lorenz et al., 2009; O'Mealia, 2011). It helps students to organize their ideas before moving on to the other stages.

Pre-writing also proves to be one effective technique in overcoming language problems such as lack of vocabulary. In a study conducted by Nursazwani et al. (2018) entitled Exploring the Vaw Method Of Writing Among ESL Primary Pup ils: Conceptual Paper, it is stated that rural learners face problems due to lack of vocabulary acquisition. They have limited choice of word thus making it difficult for them to express their ideas. The researcher came up with an idea to help L2 learners in rural area to write as they develop their vocabulary. The result of this research has shown that it helps in improving their vocabulary enhancement. Vocabulary is considered as important aspects of writing skill. According to them, the using a dictionary is not the only way to expand one's vocabulary but understanding the usage of words in sentences is the actual way. This shows that pre-writing strategy has the tendency to improve student's vocabulary skill.

Prewriting strategy also helps in organizing ideas. In a study conducted by Kartawijaya (2018) outline technique used as prewriting strategy improved students' writing skill. The students find it easier to design their writing, organized idea and construct their sentence into a good paragraph. This is also agreed by Mehr, Malayeri, and Bayat (2016) who stated in their study that it could be concluded that brain storming could be implemented to enhance students' performance in writing procedure text and solve the problem to generate and organize their ideas before writing.

2.3. *The Use of Wh-Questions in Improving Quantity and Quality of Writing*

Wh-questions are words used to ask questions. Lee (2012) states that Wh-questions begin with wh-words such as what, when, where, whose and why and it is usually used to request certain information regarding actions and events. There are two types of question words that can be used during writing namely the higher order question word and lower order question words. Lower order questions are created in order to get information that can be directly lifted from paragraphs or recall an exact fact discussed previously. This is in line with Bloom’s Taxonomy knowledge and comprehension levels. Winne (as cited by Sahin (2015)) regards higher order questions as items that expects students to analyze and manipulate previously learnt information in order to create an answer or to support statement with logical evidence. This also matches the definition stated in Bloom’s Taxonomy which involves application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation levels. These question words can be used to improve students’ writing quality and quantity.

Lower-order questions are equally important in classrooms too (Harrop & Swinson, 2003). Premmilah, Charanjit, Nor, Lajiman, and Maria (2017) also supports the statement by saying lower order questions helps students to recall and relate what is being learnt currently to their experience and knowledge. These question words are the key in this study as it will be converted into a technique to stimulate students’ thinking skill in order to help them generate ideas before writing. The word lower order does not mean it is only used for students with low level language acquisition, but it can also be used by students of every level to test understanding about something and to evaluate one’s learning process. Sahin (2015) also believes questioning can help students in improving their achievement intrinsically and extrinsically. The use of higher order questions during lesson also has shown a great impact on the students. It assisted the students in providing answers which are longer and along with logical reasoning to support it. This shows that the quantity aspect of writing can be improved with the help of WH-questions. This is also supported by Beena (2014) stating that critical thinking and intelligence can be further developed when students use higher order questions and leading to literacy success of students.

2.4. *The Use of Q2Write Strategy to Improve the Quality of Essay*

Q2Write strategy is a strategy used in pre-writing stage. It consists of a table which includes WH- Questions to help pupils expand their idea in a proper structure.

WHO?	DID	WHAT?	WHERE?	WHEN?	HOW?	WHY?
SUBJECT	VERB	OBJECT	EXPLANATION			
I	was eating	rice	at home	-	-	because I was hungry.

Figure-1. Q2Write strategy.

Figure 1 shows the example on how to utilize Q2Write strategy to improve word count and quality of write up. It serves as a guide to form proper sentence structure too. An intermediate student might be able to write the basic sentence such as “ I was eating.” but they tend to struggle to expand the idea which causes them to end up writing essays which are short and not up to the minimum word limit. With the help of WH questions in Q2Write strategy, it is possible for them to expand the idea by creating more complex sentence structure whilst increasing the word count.

2.5. Framework

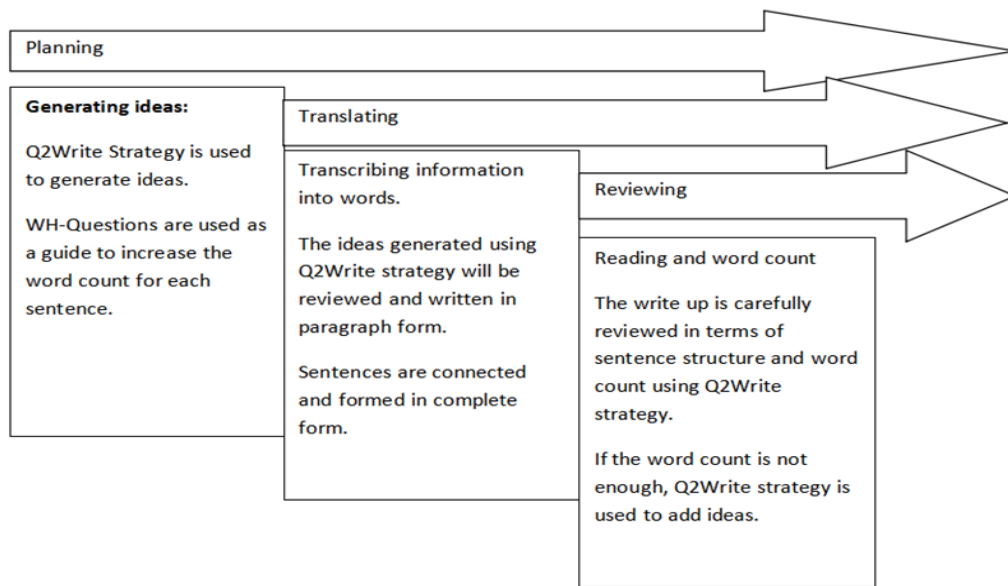


Figure-2. Framework designed based on flower and Hayes cognitive writing process.

This study is guided by Hayes and Flowers’ cognitive writing process model as shown in Figure 2. Hayes and Flower (1980) proposed that proficient writers use three cognitive processes during the acts of writing: planning, translating and reviewing. This study investigated the relationship between the Q2Write prewriting strategy proposed and ESL learners writing skill. The researchers discovered that ESL learners tend to have problems in expanding their idea and presenting a quality piece of write up.

Figure 2 shows that, Hayes and Flower considered the first step for acts of writing as the planning stage. Planning here causes the writer to be engaged and generate ideas using their long-term memory and the surrounding of the writing task. Planning stage in this study involves the Q2Write pre-writing strategy. This strategy is used to assist writers to establish goals and organize a plan that will guide them to improve the quality of the work that learners must produce. From the framework, we can see that the use of Q2Write strategy is in every stage of writing process. The strategy is believed to compel students to do their best throughout every step of the writing process for them to create a well written piece that adheres to the recommendation in terms of quality.

2.6. Research Design

In order to complete this study, mixed method had been chosen. They type of approach chosen is the explanatory sequential mixed methods approach. According to Creswell (2014) there are two phases in this study. The first one involves quantitative data collection which is analysed, and the result obtained is used to create the second phase. The second phase involves qualitative data collection. In this design, the quantitative results are used to select participants and prepare the items for qualitative phase. The reason two phases are carried out was to ensure the quantitative data collected was being supported by the qualitative data.

2.7. Profile of Participant

Table-1. Demographic profile of respondents.

Demographic profile	Male	Female
Gender	10	13
Race: Malay	10	13

There were 23 participants in this study. The number of male and female was almost equal whereby there were 10 of male participants and 13 female participants. Since this study is not based on gender, thus the difference in number is said not to affect the results of this study. Since the sample size is small and involves only one race due to the demographic factor of the school itself which consists all Malay students, it is clearly not a representation of Malaysian Primary ESL learner's population.

3. FINDINGS

3.1. Inter-rater Reliability

The essays written by the participants during the pre-test and post-test was evaluated and graded by two expert teachers who have experience in marking UPSR examination scripts for the past 8 years. The expert teachers were explained about the holistic marking scheme that will be used to mark the essays written. It is the same technique used in UPSR examination. The rating is based on 5 bands, whereby it begins with band 1 to band 5. The essay was marked out of 25 which follows the mark given to a perfect essay for section c. Once the marks were obtained, both the marks were compared, and the mean mark was derived if there was any difference in terms of marks between the 2 raters. As mentioned by Larson-Hall and Herrington (2010) any variation between the judges might cause the findings to be less reliable. Thus, Cronbach's Alpha was used to find out the inter-rater reliability. It is also considered to be an indicator to internal consistency (Larson-Hall & Herrington, 2010). Table 1 shows the data obtained when Cronbach's Alpha test was run using the pre-test and post-test marks respectively.

Table-2. Cronbach's Alpha for pre-test for the two raters.

Test	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items
Pre-test	.98	.98
Post-test	.99	.99

The value of Cronbach's Alpha for pre-test and post test scores by both raters as shown in Table 2 was 0.98 and 0.99 respectively. It shows high reliability between raters. According to Larson-Hall and Herrington (2010) Cronbach's Alpha value above 0.8 is considered highly reliable. This proves the reliability of scores obtained on the pre-test and post-test.

3.2. Pre-Test and Post Test Data Analysis

Table-3. Descriptive statistics of pre-test and post test essay scores.

Test	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
pre-test	14.0	23	3.5	.73
post-test	17.2	23	3.3	.70

To further prove the improvement in terms of quality, a paired sample t-test was run using the pre-test and post test scores. Table 3 shows the results obtained from paired sample t-test that was run based on the quality of essay based on score obtained by participants before and after Q2write strategy was applied. The result shows a positive gain in mean score when post-test mean ($M=17.2$) is compared to the pre-test score mean ($M=14.0$) overall. This shows that Q2Write strategy is effective in increasing quality of essay among the participants.

Table-4. Paired samples correlations.

Test type	N	Correlation	Sig.
Pretest & posttest	23	.867	.000

Table-5. Paired samples test.

		Paired Differences				t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower				Upper
	Pretest - posttest	-3.1957	1.7629	.3676	-3.9580	-2.4333	-8.694	22	.000

To further clarify the dependent sample t-test was performed. Prior to conducting the analysis, the normally distributed difference scores were examined.

The assumption was considered satisfied, as the Shapiro-Wilk test for pre-test has shown significance of 0.35 and the post test has shown a significance of 0.67 which is >0.05 . This proves the data to be normally distributed. It is also to be noted that the correlation between both pre-test and post-test are estimated at $r = 0.87$, $p=0.00$ suggesting that dependent sample t-test appropriate in this case.

Thus, Table 4 and Table 5 shows the dependent sample t-test results that shows there is a significant difference in terms of essay scores of participants before Q2Write strategy was implied which is during the pre-test ($M=14$, $SD=3.5$) and the essay score after Q2Write strategy is implied which is the post test ($M=17.2$, $SD=3.5$); condition $t(22) = -8.7$, $p= 0.00$.

These results suggest that Q2Write strategy has helped the participants to increase the score of their essay overall and proved the effectiveness of Q2Write strategy in improving the essay quality.

Since holistic marking relies on band descriptions when marking, the scores of pre-test and post-test was grouped according to band to see if there is any increase in band.

Table-6. Mean band score of pre-test and post test score analysis.

Band score	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pretest band	2	4	3	.65
Posttest band	3	5	4	.64

Table 6 shows the descriptive statistic that was run to compare the minimum and maximum band for pre-test and post-test essay quality. The minimum and maximum band for pre-test is 2 and 3 respectively whereas the minimum and maximum value of post-test band is 3 and 4 respectively. The mean of the band for pre-test is 3 and post-test is 4. this also shows a significant increase in quality when the band descriptors are compared.

4. DISCUSSION

To find out the results of this research question, data obtained from pre-test and post test scores were analysed and supplemented with findings from the semi structured interview. The main findings from analysing the pre-test and post test scores have showed that Q2Write strategy has made positive difference in terms of quality of write up. The participants' scores were highly significant. To further prove these findings, the bands of the pre-test and post test scores were compared.

This too has shown a significant difference as most participants were able to improve not only in terms of score but also in terms of their band level too. When band levels increase, it proves that the participants' language use, organization, vocabulary and ideas written in the essay has also improved. This is in reference to the band descriptors of holistic marking technique. These findings were supported by semi structured interview that was carried out. The next part of the discussion will focus on the four main criteria in determining the quality of essay written when holistic scoring technique is used. The four main criteria are organization, language use, ideas and vocabulary use.

In terms of organization, the participants too have agreed that Q2Write strategy has helped the in organizing their ideas. During semi structured interview, participants have given positive feedback by stating the they are able to plan their writing wen using this strategy. This proves that Q2Write strategy helps participants improve their writing quality in terms of organization.

These findings are also supported by [Kartawijaya \(2018\)](#) who believes that outline technique used as prewriting strategy improved students' writing skill. The students find it easier to design their writing, organized idea and construct their sentence into a good paragraph. This is also agreed by [Mehr et al. \(2016\)](#) who stated in their study that it could be concluded that pre-writing strategy could be implemented to enhance students' performance in writing procedure text and solve the problem to generate and organize their ideas before writing. Finally, the study found that the pre-writing techniques improved students study skills of free writing in terms of organization ([Geyimci, 2014](#)).

The language use aspect is yet another major aspect since we are dealing with the use of language itself. The findings from pre-test and post-test were supported with the response during the semi structured interview session, a few participants stated that when using Q2Write strategy helps them detect their mistakes and write proper sentences.

This shows that, using proper strategy can help participants not only to write better sentences but also to correct their mistakes in order to ensure proper language use. Since Q2Write strategy is made up of a series of questions, they can write complex sentences by answering questions such as 'why?'. These findings add up to the previous research by [Beena \(2014\)](#) who stated that critical thinking and intelligence can be further developed when students use higher order questions and leading to literacy success of students. On the other hand, [Mas et al. \(2017\)](#) in their study related to pre writing strategy also found out that the Wh-question served as a guide for students to guide them so that they will be able to generate a complete idea. Complete idea here stands for a complete sentence which works as a single unit.

Next up will the relevance of idea. This could be closely related to organization of essay and it shows the perfect example to use process approach in writing. Relevance of idea can be related to the editing stage of the process.

Q2Write strategy has helped the participant write essays using idea units that are relevant. To further clarify, participants of semi structured interview stated that they were able to add proverbs and idioms. Proverbs and idioms are idea units that are considered as major contributors to increase in quality when used correctly. This part of the finding has shed some light to the effectiveness of Q2Write strategy in terms of relevance of idea units. [Premmilah et al. \(2017\)](#) has stated in their study that pre-writing strategy used was able to also help the participants generate ideas and organize their write up.

Finally, in terms of vocabulary use. The findings have proven that, Q2Write strategy has helped participants to use the vocabulary correctly. Furthermore, the participants also clarified that, they were able to use the correct verb form of the words provided when using this strategy. This proves that Q2Write strategy has helped the participants to use the words provided during guided writing correctly. This will help in reducing grammar and syntax error. The result of this research has shown that it helps in improving their vocabulary enhancement with is the same result obtained by [Nursazwani et al. \(2018\)](#) in their research on the use of prewriting strategy in improving students' vocabulary level.

5. CONCLUSION

The interesting findings from the study have leads to propose a sum of limitations and recommendations to improve the study. The implementation of Q2Write strategy has given some insights for the teachers in using a different pedagogy in writing lessons. This treatment does not only help to improve pupils' writing skill but also it

motivates them towards learning by putting the learning responsibility on the shoulder of the pupils. In this case, they must be an active participant in their learning process to improve their writing skill.

In conclusion, the analysis of the results shows that the pupils can perform better in their writing activities with the use of Q2Write strategy. The quality of the final product has improved. Even though, the use of Q2Write strategy has positive impact on pupils' essay writing skill, it also has some limitations as mentioned earlier in terms of time, facilities in schools and generalisability.

This method cannot be affirmed to improve writing skill because the task involved in this study is just in the format of essay writing. Thus, it cannot be said to help in improving writing skill in general of pupils for all types of texts. Any firm conclusion pertaining to the pupils' achievement has to remain tentative until further research is done. The outcome from this study contributes to the field of researches for the second and third language learners of English language.

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