

**Malaysian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (MJSSH)**

Volume 3, Issue 2, April 2018

e-ISSN : 2504-8562

Journal home page:
www.msocialsciences.com**Exploring the VAW Method of Writing: The Module Development****Dg Nursazwani Binti Daud¹, Wardatul Akmam Din¹, Asmaa AlSaqqaf¹**¹Faculty of Psychology and Education, Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS)Correspondence: Dg Nursazwani Binti Daud (dg.nursazwani@gmail.com)**Abstract**

This study intended to identify the best learning strategies of writing by focusing in vocabulary acquisition among the primary school pupils in Malaysia. Axiomatically, local education used the Process Writing Approach in producing writing composition. Unfortunately, the researchers thought that it is not sufficient to fulfill the component of good writing. By using the theory of scaffolding pioneered by Vygotsky, the researchers agreed to include vocabulary learning to scaffold the existing Process Writing Approach followed by application or practices. During application, the researcher as the teacher will provide a module where the experimental group will do writing exercises by using the new learned vocabularies. The researchers will use mixed method research where questionnaires of vocabulary and writing strategies are distributed where the results are the determinants of VAW module development.

Keywords: vocabulary learning strategies, writing skills, vocabulary acquisition, writing composition, primary school

Introduction

Writing is a multifaceted cognitive skill which involves suitable cognitive strategies, intellectual skills, verbal information and appropriate motivation (Tierney, et al, 1989). Meanwhile, White and Arndt (1991) indicate writing as a process of thinking in its own right. In writing composition, the pupils produce a text by referring to certain rules, conventions and applicable information (Byrne, 1993) or in other words, it contains the converting of thoughts into written language. In the Bloom Taxonomy (Bloom, 1956), writing composition referred to “synthesis”, being a “production of unique communication where the writer tries to express ideas, feelings as well as experience to others. Siti Kadijah Johari (2004) summarized all statements above as “Writing is multilevel, interactive and goal-directed process of constructing, encoding and communicating meaning by means of a conventional system of visible marks”.

In fact, two of the challenges encountered by the primary schools teachers in Malaysia are to improve the English proficiency level and to prepare pupils for the upcoming School Certificate Examination (UPSR). Instead, pupils have been taught certain methods or techniques to answer the questions but all struggles prove to no avail as the UPSR reports suggested that pupils’ compositions for Paper 2 are weak when they need to master the writing skills. Based on the researchers observations as teachers, pupils were unsuccessful to produce a short paragraph of comprehensible writing comes as they are habitually being spoon-fed with the information by the teachers. This study investigates the best

vocabulary and writing strategies among primary pupils ESL pupils, where the data collected serves as a guide for the development of an English learning module.

The Cognitive Process Theory of Writing

The theory of the cognitive processes produces preliminaries for more comprehensive study of thinking processes in writing. This theory is established on the Flower and Hayes's work with protocol analysis over the years and has a sufficient evidence to support it. This theory breaks into four key points; firstly, the process of writing is best understood as a set of exclusive thinking processes where writers consolidate during the act of composing, secondly, these processes have a hierarchical and highly embedded organization, thirdly, the act of composing is a goal-directed process of thinking concentrated by the writer's own mounting goals, and lastly, writers generate their own goals by producing high-level supporting sub-goals which direct the writer's developing sense of purpose, then by shifting major goals or even forming completely new ones based on what has been learned in writing.

A cognitive process theory of writing signifies a shift from the old-fashioned paradigm of stages where in a stage model, the main analysis units are considered as stages of completion that replicate the development of a written product and these stages are structured in a linear sequence. In a process model, the main analysis units are mental processes, for example the process of idea generation. These processes illustrated in a hierarchical structure, for instance, a hierarchy of sub-process of planning. Furthermore, each of these mental acts may take place at any time in the composing process. An advantage of knowing these basic cognitive processes or thinking skills used by the writers is that we can make comparison of the writing.

Writing in Malaysia

Writing is a part of the four modes in the language system. According to Kadajah Johari (2004), in enhancing the opportunities to improve the quality of primary school pupils' writing, Malaysian teachers have been exposed with various teaching methods and techniques to prepare themselves in handling such approach. However, a large number of these teachers could not manipulate sufficient repertoire of those techniques to confidently practice the student-centered teaching in schools.

Besides, the observations in schools which carried out by the Inspectorates in Kuala Lumpur Education Department in 1994 reveal that the teacher of writing does not give adequate attention to extended expression of ideas. Moreover, with the new curriculum of KSSR, the pupils would have necessary knowledge, skills and also the values to face and overcome the challenges of this fast paced advanced world because it is more focused on creating fun and meaningful learning to young learners. Apart from 3Ms (reading, writing and counting), the new curriculum has 4Ms, with 'Reasoning' added to the original 3Ms. The need for the pupils to think and reason, of making connections between their actions and consequences is concentrated there is a shift from rote learning where pupils simply followed instructions and are overly dependent on teachers. Pupils are now being taught to be active decision makers and be accountable for their actions.

Therefore, there was a review of the present syllabus made in 1994. The Ministry of Malaysian Education has implemented numerous changes to stimulate more effective English teaching and learning in schools basis. In the new syllabus, the focus of the writing component is on emerging pupils' writing ability from writing clearly and composing a whole text. The required skills to be acquired in the pre-writing stage are identified in this component. Benaissa (2010) states that in English writing examination, learners have to use their ability to understand and produce written texts.

English writing as a complex skill has become one of problems for the ESL young learners in Malaysia. Teachers allot writing tasks for diverse instructional purposes such as to have learners replicate some writing model so that they use and manipulate the linguistic and rhetorical forms, to

emphasize material that pupils have already learned in order to advance pupils' writing and etc. (Normah. O, 2007). However, ESL young learners are striving in writing especially when they have inadequate vocabulary choices.

An English teacher need to be aware of what is included in L2 writing when teaching English writing to ESL young learners consists of articulate perspectives, principles, models or thinking tool about L2 writing, ESL composition and for examining and contending views. Meaning, as a teacher, we must recognize the type of tool needed, what are not needed, and the uses of tool as well.

Writing is certainly a complicated skill to be mastered for L2 learners (Richard, 2002 as cited in Solati-Dehkordi & Saleh, 2015). They noted that the striving stems from the fact that produce and establish ideas and then translate them into legible text are time consuming and long-sought skills even for native speakers. The complex skills used in writing necessitate L2 learners to not only planning and organizing skills in a higher level but also on spelling, punctuation, word choice skills in a lower level. This struggle is mainly worse when language proficiency is frail.

The young learners need to learn writing strategies to make them able to write good sentences or composition. In this study, the researchers will adapt the questionnaire based from the previous studies to investigate the practical writing strategies most employed by the L2 primary school pupils in Malaysia. The results from the questionnaire will be utilized in developing the VAW Module.

Vocabulary Acquisition

According to Nation (2001), the different aspects of a word or vocabulary can be generally referred to as vocabulary knowledge, but the question is the range that can be considered to possess vocabulary knowledge. Vocabulary knowledge should be deliberated in terms of possessing the item and vocabulary system features. It means being able to identify word items (item knowledge) and being able to comprehend various features of word items (system knowledge) (Nation, 2001, p. 23).

Nation (2001) clarifies item knowledge as the single word or form of the word, for example, cat (the orthographic form), and system knowledge to mean the numerous features of the word (e.g. phonological, orthographic, semantic) containing the relationship of the word with other words in a person's mental lexicon. Then, mental lexicon used and annotated to mean what a person recognizes about words (Aitchison, 2003; McCarthy, 1990; Nation, 2001).

Of the several challenges confronted by learners at the numerous stages of ESL experience, the concern is deficiency of lexical competence. Apparently, learners themselves regard lexical incompetence as one of the major difficulties in L2 or foreign language learning (Nation, 2001). This is beyond doubt as lexical errors are the most basic type among second language learners (Segler, 2001). Low (2004, cited in Zulfa Zakaria, 2005, p. 2) similarly demonstrates that ESL learners in Malaysia face learning challenges mostly because they lack of vocabulary that cause them fail to obtain and understand lexical items.

Despite its important in developing language proficiency, unfortunately vocabulary instruction tends to left behind or sometimes ignored in ESL teaching main concern. In many teachers' instructional approaches, emphasis on the language structural signals and grammatical patterns seem to outweigh vocabulary yet learners are estimated to obtain vocabulary on their own with little or no supervision.

Vocabulary is related with language teaching but left behind in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) research (Segler, 2001, p. 1). Obviously, there seems to be a deficiency of emphasis on vocabulary as teachers restrain its role in in-situ classroom instruction. This insight echoes in the Malaysian ELT context as Fauziah Hassan and Nita Fauzee Selamat (2002) found vocabulary exercises to rank fourth out of the nine language activities examined on the regularly use in ESL lessons.

The definition of vocabulary learning strategies is related to language learning strategies definition (Catalan, 2003). Many scholars provide different definitions of vocabulary learning strategies. Sokmen (1997, p. 237) defines vocabulary learning strategies as actions made by learners in order to help them to understand the meaning of a word, learn them, and to remember them later whereas Cameron (2001, p. 92) views vocabulary learning strategies as the actions that learners take to help themselves understand and remember vocabulary items". Such vocabulary learning strategies will be used to identify the most employed strategies most employed by the pupils in Malaysia. The results can provide information to be included in the development of the VAW Module along with the writing strategies as well as the most effective strategies suggested in the collection of literature review.

The Development of VAW Technique and Module

The VAW technique uses new words in sentence construction. The approach reinforces the new words to build sentences in writing. Beside of teaching letter sound recognition, the VAW technique is considered as a program that encompassed techniques of writing etc. The technique is a frisky and unique approach for writings with incorporated strategies to use new words to be memorized and used in related sentences or texts.

Meanwhile, the VAW Module refers to a module of writing which utilize vocabulary in the practice. This study presents an overview of the method which focusing on vocabulary in promoting writing skills among ESL primary school young learners. It also attempts to explore common assumptions underlying the method. Above and beyond, educational research frequently supports the emphasis of vocabulary enhancement in early writing programs, and aided with the pictorial mnemonics and also kinesthetic approaches to learning are called VAW technique.

Apparently, the objective is to determine if teaching by the VAW technique to primary school pupils could help to increase pupils' ability in sentence construction and enhance pupils' vocabulary. In this action research, the redemption activities will be established to scaffold the existing Process Writing Approach. However before the program implementation, the researchers will provide a questionnaire comprising of Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLSs) as well as writing strategies in order to investigate the strategies most employed by the Form 1 students who have undergone the UPSR.

Application of Vocabulary in Writing

A different classification of VLSs was suggested by Schmitt (1997) who allocated them into two groups: strategies for the discovery of a new word's meaning and strategies for consolidating a word once it has been discovered, which then, the items were organized into the four categories used in Oxford's (1990) system i.e. social, memory, cognitive and metacognitive strategies. Conversely in Oxford's classification, there was no category of strategies used when learners discovered a new word's meaning without other people's help, which he named as determination strategies. He mentioned that almost all of the discovery strategies could also be used as consolidation strategies, so the most obvious ones were listed in both sections of the taxonomy.

The Writing Strategies

Writing is one of the four modes of the system of language. According to Kadajah Johari (2004), in optimizing the opportunities for improving the quality and effectiveness of primary school pupils' writing, Malaysian teachers have been exposed to a variety of teaching methods and techniques to prepare themselves to handle such an approach. However, a large number of these teachers have not been able to manipulate a sufficient repertoire of those techniques to confidently practice the student-centered teaching in schools.

Besides, observations in schools which have been carried out by the Inspectorates in Kuala Lumpur Education Department in 1994 disclose that the teacher of writing does not give sufficient attention to extended expression of ideas. Moreover, with the new restructured and improved curriculum of KSSR, the pupils would have necessary knowledge, skills and also the values to face and overcome the challenges of this fast paced progressive world since it more focused on making learning fun and meaningful to the young learners. Apart from 3Ms (reading, writing and counting), the new curriculum has 4Ms, with 'Reasoning' added to the original 3Ms. The need for the pupils to think and reason, of making connections between their actions and consequences is concentrated there is a shift from rote learning where pupils simply followed instructions and are overly dependent on teachers. Pupils are now being taught to be active decision makers and be accountable for their actions.

Therefore, based on the observations, a review of the existing syllabus has been made in 1994. The Ministry of Malaysian Education has initiated various changes aimed at promoting more effective teaching and learning of English in schools. In the new English syllabus, the focus of the writing component is on developing pupils' writing ability in aspects ranging from the ability to write clearly and legibly to the ability to compose a whole text. Skills to be taught in the pre-writing stage and beginning stages of writing are thus identified in this component. Benaissa (2010) states that in English writing examination, students are required to use both their capacity to comprehend and more importantly produce written texts.

Writing is a complex cognitive skill which requires appropriate cognitive strategies, intellectual skills, verbal information as well as appropriate motivation (Tierney, et al, 1989). Meanwhile, White and Arndt (1991) point out writing as a thinking process in its own right. In writing composition, the pupils generate a text by applying certain rules and conventions and by drawing on applicable information (Byrne, 1993) or in other words, it involves the encoding of thoughts into written language. In the Bloom Taxonomy (Bloom, 1956), composition writing would fall into the category of "synthesis", being a "production of unique communication" in which the writer attempts to convey ideas, feelings and experience to others. Siti Kadiah Johari (2004) summarized all statements above as "Writing is multilevel, interactive and goal-directed process of constructing, encoding and communicating meaning by means of a conventional system of visible marks".

English writing is a multifaceted skill that has become one of problems for the ESL young learners in Malaysia. Teachers assign writing tasks for different instructional purposes such as to have learners imitate some writing model in order to train learners in the use and manipulation of linguistic and rhetorical forms, to reinforce material that pupils have already learned to improve pupils' writing fluency and so on (Normah. O, 2007). However, when it comes to the ESL young learners, the pupils have difficulty in writing especially when they have lack range of vocabulary.

In teaching English writing to ESL young learners, an English teacher need an understanding of what is involved in L2 writing includes coherent perspectives, principles, models – tools for thinking about second language writing in general and ESL composition in particular, and for analyzing and competing views. Meaning, as a teacher, we need to identify what type of tool they are, what they are not, and what they might be.

Writing is undoubtedly a complicated skill to master for L2 learners (Richard, 2002 as cited in Solati-Dehkordi & Saleh, 2015). They noted that the difficulty stems from the fact that generating and organizing ideas and then translating them into readable text are time-consuming and long-sought skills even for native speakers. The complex skills which are used in writing require L2 learners are not only focus on planning and organizing skills in a higher level but also on spelling, punctuation, word choice skills in a lower level. This difficulty is especially worse when language proficiency is weak.

According to Cohen (1996), second language learner strategies encompass both second language learning and second language use strategies. When both integrated, they constitute the steps selected by learners either to improve the learning of a second language, the use of it, or both. Language use strategies comprises of retrieval, rehearsal, cover and communication strategies.

Generally, there are five stages of writing process, any stage can be skipped and returned to later. These stages include prewriting, drafting, revising, editing and publishing. Learning the process of writing is significant for the pupils in letting them to express their thoughts, knowledge and feelings competently. The range of what the pupils learn about the writing process will enable them to express themselves competently (Casewell, 2008; Ozbell, 2006 & Smith, 2005). This study is more on what we call the post-process since it will be conducted in 6 cycles.

The most influential cognitive model of the skilled writing process was proposed by Hayes and Flower (1980), based on protocol analysis of adult writers 'thinking aloud' as they composed, identified three processes includes planning, translating, and reviewing that function in the context of writer's long term memory and the task environment during written composition.

The Module of VAW Method of Writing for Primary Students

The researchers want to create the module since they are educators and researchers at the same time. As educators, they are facing the challenge of teaching young learners to learn foreign language i.e. the second language which is not their mother tongue and it was found that difficulties they have been encountering in the classroom proven by their assessment results especially in writing production.

In order to shed further light on overcoming this problem, the researchers would like to introduce a three steps approach called VAW methods (Vocabulary Acquisition, Application, Writing). This method will be utilized in the set induction step in every English lesson. The idea focuses more on vocabulary enhancement where the pupils will undergo the new action verbs drilling in improving their writing skills such as constructing sentences, e-mail or essay writings.

Captivatingly, the VAW technique uses new action verbs in sentence construction. The approach reinforces the new action verbs to build sentences in writing. Beside of teaching new vocabularies, the VAW technique is considered as an inclusive program that encompassed techniques of writing etc. The VAW technique is a frisky and unique approach for writings with incorporated strategies to use new verbs and sounds into memory through instructions. The characteristics of input in a classroom setting for this program depend on the type of instruction. Instruction intended to provide learners with opportunities to communicate written ideas naturally e.g. information gap, fill in the blanks, typically makes no attempt to manipulate the input or output in order to focus on specific items.

The first step in VAW is 'Vocabulary Acquisition'. In this step, the pupils will be introduced with 10 new vocabularies. Teacher will show the flashcards or picture cards of each verb whereas the pupils will listen, dictates and read the words. The second step is 'application'. In this step, pupils will apply and practice the new found words in language activities such as labelling, listing etc. These activities will take place in 6 cycles. Next, the final step is 'writing' that will be examined before and after the six cycles in order to evaluate the progress of writing production. In this step, pupils will now apply the verbs in descriptive writing situation. In sum, the VAW method program will be reinforced in six cycles within six weeks.

The sample of the study is the year 5 remedial and weak pupils. The expected outcome of the treatments is the improvement of pupils' performances in constructing sentences. This action research emphasizes on the usage of VAW (Vocabulary Acquisition, Application, Writing) method during set inductions to improve weak and remedial pupils' ability in sentence constructions. The respondents consist of 30 pupils from high level of Year 5 in SK Pekan Putatan. Although they are categorized as higher level in school, they are still lack in writing skills. The method is going to be exposed in six cycles and they will be tested at the end of the study to see the comparison before and after the intervention program. Data will be collected and then compared through two separated tests (pre- and post-test) in determining the pupils' strategies and initial abilities whereas the post-test is identifying and analyzing the result of the program intervention.

The current study set out to investigate the attitudes of students towards the VAW method in a Malaysian primary school. This stage will be assessed in the interview sessions with selected samples after the completion of the program. It also assists as an empirical investigation of the VAW method implementation in the case study school. In particular, it aims to explore the favourable factors and perceive difficulties of VAW method implementation so as to provide implications for the development of English language curriculum and teachers' professional development in Malaysia.

Application of VLSs and Writing Strategies

Teachers might help children to retain newly taught information in long term memory. Firstly, they have to understand what memory is, where memory is housed, and how it moves from short term or working memory into long term memory (Sprenger, 2008). Surprisingly, children's brain can only accept and memorize information that attracts his or her attention (Willis, 2010). Instead of giving the information of how this process are, the researchers thought that it is better to make the pupils familiar and practice the input and the said process will come to reality unconsciously or absentmindedly.

In fact, when the pupils use his or her eyes, ears, mouth, and body, as well as practice the smell and taste sensory to play with the new action vocabulary, they will master the skills of sentence construction which lead to writing fluency. For instance, when they see new action vocabulary in the shapes of objects, then they can move or gesture like the verb, and also say aloud the sounds of verbs while having fun with some actions like scratching the verbs on sandpaper with cinnamon sticks and tossing beanbags on verbs as they call out the action verbs loudly. Such types of activities will arouse their interest and keep their attention as well.

In addition, pupils' participations in peer or group in performing the playful vocabulary activities could encourage socialization, laughter, and a feeling of safety, which will stimulate the amygdala to open up the doors for memory (Sprenger, 2009; Willis, 2009; Wolf, 2000). They are required to do more practices for them to remember the newly taught material. These materials and have to be prepared and the activities have to be carefully planned since what is rehearsed is remembered (Sousa, 2005).

During the process, the pupils have to master one skill or concept before going on to the next skill. Therefore, repetition and feedback must continuously occur. Meanwhile, the pupils' brain is persistently looking for meaning. According to Wolfe in 2001, teachers have to give the children time to rehearse the information so that their brain can take time to understand and remember. Indeed, curriculum must be designed to meet the physical, social, emotional and biological needs of all children (Gurian & Stevens, 2005; Medina, 2009; Sprenger, 2008).

Conclusion

The VAW method is anticipated to provide sufficient information that could progress the language teaching and learning process and suggest on the greatest teaching method or approach especially in term of vocabulary acquisition and writing for the preliminary stage of young ESL learners. The outcomes of the study can contribute in the study too. If the vocabulary acquisition among pupils can improve the skills of writing, then the program can be assumed as successful to improve the ESL teaching and learning. Rationally, this study may suggest the effective information and useful to be a reference for educational growth in writing skills. Essentially, it can benefit the policy makers to determine the strategy and evaluation for further planning.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank her supervisors at the Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Prof. Madya Wardatul and Dr. Asmaa who have made major contributions as well as guidance described in this paper.

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