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Note from Editors-In-Chief

NOTE FROM EDITORS-IN-CHIEF

It gives us great pleasure to present to you the proceedings of the 28th MELTA International Conference, **English Language Education and Society 5.0: Developing Sustainable Literacies**. The conference features ELT professionals sharing innovations in exploring and embracing education for the future. The conference brings together education policy makers, practitioners and scholars to engage and collaborate with colleagues from around the world to evolve solutions in English language education focused on developing sustainable literacies hat are future proof and relevant focusing on the following sub-themes:

- Peer and mentor lead education
- Flexibility in learning and teaching
- Personalised and meaningful learning
- Reality focused knowledge application
- Digital and online learning and teaching tools
- Learning based on themes, modules, and projects
- Orientations to multi-disciplinary and multi-literacies
- Education for humanity and the development of human values
- Assessment for learning of sustainable literacies and competencies

On behalf of the 28th MELTA International Conference, we would like to take this opportunity to thank all authors for your invaluable scholarly contributions. We would also like to invite you to submit revised versions of your full papers, after the conference, to MELTA's journals, The English Teacher (ISSN 0128-7729) and the Malaysian Journal of ELT Research (ISSN: 1511-8002).

Thank you and wishing everyone a fruitful session. Jane Chai En-Huey

Swi-Ee Cheah, Jane Chai En-Huey & Subarna Sivapalan
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Using Literature to Empower Children Against Domestic Violence: A Study of Self-Efficacy in Jacqueline Wilson's *Lola Rose* (2003)

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ABSTRACT

The statistics of domestic violence occurring within the country is growing at an alarming rate. Studies have shown that children who encounter and/or witness the tragedy suffer the consequences both emotionally and psychologically. However, efforts to help this marginalized group remain scarce. Responding to that, the paper looks at how literary works can be utilized as resources to empower children against domestic violence. Specifically, it examines the portrayal of domestic violence in Jacqueline Wilson's contemporary realistic children's novel, Lola Rose (2003). The discussion traces how Jayni/Lola Rose, the pre-adolescent girl protagonist, witnesses and experiences domestic violence from her father within the selected text. Through the concept of self-efficacy forwarded by Albert Bandura in his work, Self-efficacy: The exercise of control (1997), the study explores how Jayni/Lola Rose gains self-efficacy through four sources of efficacy which are enactive mastery experience, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, as well as improved physiological and affective states. Resulting from that, the pre-adolescent girl protagonist is able to overcome the threat of domestic violence encountered. It is hoped that the findings of this research contribute to the consideration of Wilson's contemporary realistic children's novels as useful materials to impart a sense of empowerment in children, particularly those victimized by domestic violence.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

According to Susan Bissell (as cited in Payton, 2014) who serves as the Child Protection Chief with the United Children's Fund (UNICEF), one of the most worrying global concerns involves the "tremendous violence […] committed against children" (par. 5). This phenomenon has shocked the global community and heightened efforts to address and tackle the issue. For UNICEF, violence against children is defined as

> physical […] and emotional abuse, and may involve neglect or deprivation. Violence occurs in many settings, including the home, school, community […] Similarly, a wide range of perpetrators commit violence against children, such as family members, intimate partners, teachers […] and other children ("Children from", 2016, par. 1).

While violence against children continue to gain attention and awareness worldwide, it remains "complex and difficult to study" ("Child maltreatment", 2016, par. 3). This is because "the phenomenon remains largely undocumented and underreported" ("Children from", 2016, par. 3). Throughout its effort to protect the rights of children, UNICEF admits

that "[o]ne of the limitations inherent in any attempt to document violence against children is what it leaves out: the presumably large numbers of children unable or unwilling to report their experiences [as many] victims are too young or too vulnerable to disclose their experience or to protect themselves" (ibid). Likewise in Malaysia, the "Welfare Department statistics show that the number of children in need of protection and care following abuse and neglect cases […] has increased from 3, 257 cases in 2010 to 4, 453 cases" (Lee, 2016, par. 9) in 2015. However, "only extreme child abuse and neglect cases are reported […] often involving tragic elements of disturbing injuries, sexual abuse or even death" ("Violence against", n.d., par. 3). According to city chief police officer Datuk Mohmad Salleh, "many cases were not brought to the attention of the authorities also because of the shame and embarrassment which the victims and their families were likely to endure" ("Many child", n.d, par. 2). This leads UNICEF to assume that "reported cases are likely to represent only 10 per cent of total cases perpetrated" ("Violence against", n.d., par. 4).

On the detrimental effects of violence against children, UNICEF cautions that

[c]hildren who have been severely abused or neglected are often hampered in their development, experience learning difficulties and perform poorly at school. They may have low self-esteem and suffer from depression, which can lead, at worst, to risk behaviour and self-harm. Witnessing violence can cause similar distress ("Children from", 2016, par. 2).

According to English, Thompson, Graham & Briggs (2005), negative emotional and behavioural implications have "long-lasting impact […] into adulthood" (p. 191). In view of that, WHO has called for a multisectoral approach" ("Child maltreatment", 2016, par. 15) in combating violence against children. For UNICEF, these efforts should focus not only on "documenting the prevalence of violence but also understanding the underlying factors that fuel it and evaluating interventions aimed at preventing and responding to it" ("Children from", 2016, par. 4). These include "educational measures to protect the children from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation" ("Children from" 2016, par. 5). On the local forefront, "[t]he Child Act (Amendment) 2015 was passed by Dewan Rakyat [recently which] protects children against abuse and neglect, and guarantees their welfare" (Lee, 2016, par. 1, parenthesis original).

In response to that, the paper proposes the use of literature to address the issue. Hooper (2005) observes that literary works highlighting contemporary realistic issues have begun to dominate the teenage book market. Wopperer (2011) notes that contemporary realistic novels are written to help readers "cope with problems they face. It can also be written to introduce […] situations to its readers or to portray characters with whom readers can relate to better understand themselves" (p. 26). For Waddilove (2012)

[i]n today's media dominated society, children are well aware of the plight of others when families fracture; issues such as domestic violence, neglectful or absent parents, bereavement and serious illness (all depicted in Wilson's works) are common currency (p. 76, parenthesis original).

As such, Joshua & DiMenna (as cited in Prater et al 2006) believe that fictional works can be used "to provide information or insight about problems, stimulate discussion about problems, create awareness that other people have similar problems, and in some cases provide solutions to problems" (p. 6). The reading of contemporary realistic literary works within the classroom therefore offers a non-threatening avenue to address these issues

(Stevens & Bean, 2007; Hitt, 2008; Prater et al, 2006; Wopperer, 2011; Guerra, 2012). As Hitt (2008) maintains, exposing the children to these contemporary realistic literary works prepares them "for the nasty adult world" (par. 19). The study thus extends the effort by introducing Jacqueline Wilson's contemporary realistic children's novel, *Lola Rose* (2003) as a viable material to bridge discussions pertaining to domestic violence within the safe confines of the classroom.

Jacqueline Wilson is the first children's author (Waddilove, 2012) to be conferred the title "Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire, the female equivalent of a knight" ("Dame Jacqueline", 2008, par. 1). She has authored more than 90 titles which are widely received by the pre-teen and teenage female children market (Britton, 2002; Dungworth, Grimshaw, Mcknight & Morris, 2004; Duncan, 2009). Some of these works have been adapted for television shows and won the International Emmys award for "best children and young people's programme" ("UK sweep" 2004, par. 1) and "two Bafta[1]s" (Pauli, 2005, par. 4). Resulting from that, the author is hailed as "one of the most influential writers of her generation" (Howarth, 2006, par. 5). According to the statistics released by the Public Lending Right office, Wilson is also "the most-borrowed author in United Kingdom libraries" (Sutton, 2008, par. 3). *The Telegraph* reports that "[i]n the 10 years to June 2009, Wilson's books were lent 16 million times by British public libraries" ("Jacqueline Wilson named", 2010, par. 2). The author's continuous effort has also earned her the position as the first Coram Fellow of the Foundling Museum in London (Crichton-Miller, 2007) for having "significantly enhanced children's lives" (Jardine, 2007, par. 4) and "a ChildLine award in recognition of the way her work gives 'unique insight into challenging subjects'" (Dakin, 2012, par. 8). According to Waddilove (2012), "[t]he accolade of a year-long exhibition at Seven Stories which explores in depth her work and life affirms her importance in 21st century British children's literature" (p. 77). Through her awards and titles, Wilson's contribution to the field of children's literature is widely recognized.

Despite Wilson's reputation, there remains a noticeable gap in the scholarship devoted to serious analyses of her novels (Armitstead, 2004; Corbett, 2007; Duncan, 2009). This is partly due to the contemporary realistic issues discussed within the novels which many adults feel are unsuitable for children. Moreover, the stories do not always portray happy endings. Tucker & Gamble (2001) summarize Wilson's contemporary realistic children's novels as

> [w]ritten from the point of view of a young narrator telling the story as if for themselves, the various parents described are often shown as failing to provide their children with a settled, secure and understanding background. The child characters concerned are then frequently unable to explore the world outside in any reasonably confident way, since they constantly feel they have to check that everything is still all right back at their domestic base (pp. 69-70).

Duncan (2009) thus acknowledges

> [t]he fact that [Wilson's] work has not yet been a subject for serious academic debate in the world of children's literature is a matter of regret. A writer who sells two million books a year is a phenomenon that needs to be understood with greater critical insight than she currently is (p. 172).

Drawing from that, the paper highlights the examples of domestic violence present within Wilson's *Lola Rose* (2003) which reflects one of the challenges and struggles that

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[1] BAFTA is the British Academy Film Awards hosted by the British Academy of Film and Television Arts.

modern children are increasingly threatened with. The novel charts the journey of 11-year-old Jayni/Lola Rose whose father, Jay, continuously abuses her mother, Nikki. This eventually escalates when the pre-adolescent girl protagonist is caught in the commotion and physically injured. Using the theory of self-efficacy forwarded by psychologist Albert Bandura, the study traces how Jayni/Lola Rose learns self-efficacy through four sources of efficacy information which are enactive mastery experience, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion and improved physiological and affective states to handle and ultimately overthrows the domestic violence experienced. It is thereby hoped that the discussion instigates more scholarship focusing on Wilson's contemporary realistic children's novels. It also advocates for the application of Bandura's theory of self-efficacy to study how children can be empowered to manage and overcome similar life challenges.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

Widely acknowledged as "the 'father' of cognitive movement" (Boeree, 2006, par. 6), Bandura introduced the theory of self-efficacy which gained attention in the 1980s and 1990s through his work, *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control* (1997). Briefly, he defines self-efficacy as the "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (Bandura, 1997, p. 3). Within this theory, Bandura observes four sources of information which enhance perceptions of self-efficacy. They are enactive mastery experience, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and improved physiological and affective states.

Enactive mastery experience is identified as "experience in overcoming obstacles through perseverant effort" (Bandura, 1997, p. 80). Compared to other sources, Bandura (1997) recognizes this as "the most influential source of efficacy information because they provide the most authentic evidence of whether one can muster whatever it takes to succeed" (ibid). The next source of efficacy information is vicarious experience which involves "[e]fficacy appraisals […] mediated through modeled attainments" (p. 86). Research has shown that "[w]hen adequacy must be gauged largely in relation to the performance of others, social comparison operates as a primary factor in the self-appraisal of capabilities" (Festinger, 1954; Goethals & Darley, 1977; Suls & Miller, 1977, as cited in Bandura, 1997, p. 87). Vicarious experience is thus able to "alter efficacy beliefs through transmission of competencies and comparison with the attainment of others" (Bandura, 1997, p. 79).

A person's self-efficacy is also enhanced when "significant others express faith in one's capabilities than if they convey doubts" (Bandura, 1997, p. 101) during difficult phases. This is termed as verbal persuasion. Bandura (1997) observes that "[p]eople who are persuaded verbally that they possess the capabilities to master given tasks are likely to mobilize greater effort and sustain it than if they harbour self-doubts and dwell on personal deficiencies when difficulties arrive" (ibid). Verbal persuasion therefore promotes self-affirming beliefs which lead to "development of skills" (ibid). Lastly, Bandura (1997) maintains that people determine their capabilities based on "somatic information conveyed by physiological and emotional states" (p. 106). He labels them the physiological and affective states. These bodily functions help people to "judge their capableness, strength, and vulnerability to dysfunction" (Bandura, 1997, p. 79). Physiological and affective states enhance efficacy beliefs when participants strive to improve their "physical status, reduce stress levels and negative emotional proclivities, and correct misinterpretations of bodily states" (Bandura, 1991a; Cioffi, 1991a, as cited in Bandura, 1997, p. 106).

Research over the decades has enabled scholars to "verify the predictive generality of efficacy beliefs as significant contributions to the quality of human functioning" (Benight & Bandura, 2004, p. 1131), thus "changing the lives of millions" (Foster, 2006, par. 3). According to Lehman (2007), reading and thinking about literary characters who exhibit self-efficacy allow children to model after their empowering behaviours. As Duncan (2009) observes, Wilson's child characters "think deeply and carefully about the possible solutions to their problems in ways that will not risk matters worse or place them in the hands of social workers and care institutions" (p. 165). Hence, relating these fictional events to personal experiences helps readers to imagine "solutions to problems and give them a sense of vicarious accomplishment through these resolutions. Children then can apply or adapt these models to their own lives" (Lehman, 2007, p. 111). It is with that purpose in mind that the following section discusses how Jayni/Lola Rose learns and enhances her sense of self-efficacy through the four sources of efficacy information as expounded by Bandura to manage and overthrow the threats of domestic violence experienced within Wilson's *Lola Rose* (2003).

3.0 DISCUSSION

Domestic violence within the novel causes physical harm to the family. Jay, the father character of the story, is portrayed as a violent person with a history of conviction for causing 'grievous bodily harm' (GBH)[2] (Wilson, 2003, p. 12). The family thus lives in constant fear of his unpredictable temper. Jayni confesses: "…I wished he could stay in prison for ever. He was safe behind bars and we were safe at home. But he got out eventually" (Wilson, 2003, p. 13). After Jay's release from the prison, the pre-adolescent girl protagonist and her younger brother witness repeated episodes of domestic abuse imposed upon their mother. Jayni narrates the trauma she endures from the ordeal: "I had to listen, even though I couldn't bear it" (Wilson, 2003, p. 18). According to Watkins (2000), "children are violated not only when they are the direct targets of patriarchal violence but as well when they are forced to witness violent acts" (p. 63). In order to help lessen the frequency and severity of her father's outbursts, Jayni develops an acute sensitivity to interpret his mood. She also adopts an amiable persona in her father's presence to preserve his temper (p. 23). This builds up her enactive mastery experience which enhances her self-efficacy to avoid the instances of physical harm resulting from the domestic violence within in the family.

When Jay's temper is provoked after a family dinner one evening, Jayni tries to speak up against her father in order to protect her mother from being physically harmed: "'I'm staying here,' I cried […] 'You spoil everything! It's all spoilt because of you and your moods and your shouting and your hitting […] Why can't you be like a real dad?' I yelled" (Wilson, 2003, p. 30). Despite her attempt, the pre-adolescent girl protagonist suffers physical abuse in the hands of her father. The escalation of domestic violence within the novel instigates the mother, Nikki, to run away from her husband. With the £10, 000 lottery money that she had recently won, Nikki and the children escape to London to start a new life (pp. 30-2). Throughout their escape, the pre-adolescent girl protagonist gains vicarious experience from her mother's modeling of resourcefulness by strategizing their escape plan in order to avoid Jay's pursuit. This boosts Jayni's sense of self-efficacy in challenging the domestic abuse encountered. In addition to that, Nikki changes their names to prevent Jay from locating them. She takes on the pseudonym Victoria (Vicky) Luck while Jayni adopts

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[2] Under the English law, GBH is categorized under the umbrella of 'common assault' and listed as a criminal offence (http://www.inbrief.co.uk/offences/assault-gbh-abh/)

the glamorous-sounding Lola Rose. Her younger brother Kenny renames himself as Kendall[3]. Trites (1997) maintains that the act of naming "implies ownership, also calls attention to subjectivity. Someone self-named […] displays more agency than whatever, whoever receives the name" (p. 31). Lola Rose's choosing of her new name thereby symbolizes her growing sense of self agency.

The shift to London and the adoption of their new identities raise Lola Rose's physiological and affective states as she becomes less fearful of the threat of her father's domestic violence: "Lola Rose wasn't scared of anyone. Not even her dad. I breathed out slowly, a little smile on my face" (Wilson, 2003, p. 46). Through her enhanced sense of self-efficacy, Lola Rose is able to extend comfort to her mother when she discovers that Vicky grew up in a violent home. She does this by assuring her mother that domestic violence is not her fault. Rather, it is the men who use violent ways to exert their power over others who should be held responsible (pp. 67-8; p. 73). In contrast to Vicky who seems powerless to resist the continuous cycle of domestic violence and remains trapped within a victim mindset, Lola Rose represents a figure of empowerment through the sense of self-efficacy developed. This is further reinforced when Vicky finds employment at a nearby pub (p. 90) while Lola Rose receives a warm welcome at her new school (p. 102). As their livelihood and condition improve, the pre-adolescent girl protagonist gains verbal persuasion from her mother: "'…there's no need to be scared about your dad, not anymore. We're never ever going to see him again'" (Wilson, 2003, p. 90). All these cumulate to empower Lola Rose against the threat of domestic violence as her self-efficacy is enhanced.

In the second half of the novel, Vicky discovers a lump on her breast. Due to her young age and lack of knowledge, Lola Rose assumes that her father's physical violence is the cause of her mother's illness. When Vicky is admitted to the hospital to surgically remove the lump, Lola Rose fears that they will be forced to return to Jay. She thus endeavours to locate and seek assistance from Auntie Barbara, her mother's elder sister with whom the family has lost touch. The arrival and presence of Auntie Barbara in the story provide the pre-adolescent girl protagonist with vicarious experience through her modeling of strength in challenging the threat of domestic violence. Pajares & Schunk (2002) are of the view that children's encounters with personal agency are

> mediated by adults who can empower them with self-assurance or diminish their fledgling self-beliefs. Because young children are not proficient at making accurate self-appraisals, they rely on the judgments of others to create their own judgments of confidence and of self-worth (p. 22).

Lola Rose thus learns of how her aunt overcomes the threat of physical violence exerted by both her father and her late grandfather:

> '[Jay] didn't hit *you*, did he?'
> 'I'd like to see him try,' said Auntie Barbara, flexing her big arms. 'I don't think any man would dare take me on. Even your granddad thought better of it once I'd got to a certain age. He had a really nasty temper too, just like your dad' (Wilson, 2003, p. 222, italics original)

When Jay appears in their new flat, the family's safety is compromised. Lola Rose becomes fearful of her father and interprets his presence as a form of captivity: "I didn't know what to say. I started shaking. […] 'My family, safely come back to me,' said Dad,

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[3] The characters will henceforth be referred to by their new names unless the in-text citations state otherwise

arms round us all. Imprisoning us" (Wilson, 2003, p. 242). In this instance, the pre-adolescent girl protagonist observes Auntie Barbara's calm and steady demeanour despite Jay's insults (p. 243). Auntie Barbara's assurance that she will not let Jay harm Lola Rose improves the pre-adolescent girl protagonist's physiological and affective states (p. 246). Through her enhanced sense of self-efficacy gained from Auntie Barbara's modeling of courage, Lola Rose is empowered to resist her father when Jay tries to hit Vicky again: "He raised his hand, his fist clenched. I ran towards Mum" (Wilson, 2003, p. 248). In this episode, however, Auntie Barbara's quick reaction precedes Lola Rose's attempt to stop her father. With her big size and knowledge of martial arts, Auntie Barbara successfully overpowers Jay and prevents him from hurting the family. She also demands that he leaves them permanently (pp. 248-9). These become examples of vicarious experience for the pre-adolescent girl protagonist in overthrowing the threat of domestic violence.

The novel closes with Auntie Barbara inviting the family to live with her, ensuring that their safety and well-being are protected. This continues to improve Lola Rose's physiological and affective states as she no longer has to live with the constant threat of physical harm resulting from her father's domestic violence. Through the four sources of efficacy information discussed which are enactive mastery experience, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, as well as improved physiological and affective states, the pre-adolescent girl protagonist's sense of self-efficacy is enhanced as she becomes empowered to challenge the threat of domestic violence. Although she is powerless to completely overthrow the consequences of physical harm resulting from her father's domestic violence, Lola Rose benefits from the assistance and protection offered by her Auntie Barbara. The pre-adolescent girl protagonist is therefore able to envision a better future for the family as they are finally liberated from the threat of domestic violence: "I don't really worry about Dad now. Auntie Barbara will protect us if he ever comes back […] We're going to live happily ever after, Mum and Auntie Barbara and Kendall and me. Fingers crossed" (Wilson, 2003, p. 288).

4.0 CONCLUSION

Although Lola Rose is subjected to the threat of domestic violence throughout the novel, the discussion shows how the pre-adolescent girl protagonist manages to overcome it by employing enactive mastery experience, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and improved physiological and affective states which enhances her sense of agency. According to Pajares & Schunk, (2002), "understanding critical issues related to our children's sense of self is crucial to understanding the manner in which they deal with all of life's tasks and challenges" (p. 4). For that reason, Bandura (1986) asserts that

> [e]ducational practices should be gauged not only by the skills and knowledge they impart for present use but also by what they do to children's beliefs about their capabilities, which affects how they approach the future. Students who develop a strong sense of self-efficacy are well equipped to educate themselves when they have to rely on their own initiative (p. 417).

Moreover, Wopperer (2011) stresses that "all characters in children's and young adults' books […] need to be portrayed independently solving their own problems" (p. 29). This is because "[b]ooks which empower girls to recognize and claim their subject positions empower the entire culture" (Trites, 1997, p. 137). Concluding, it is believed that the paper strengthens Guerra's (2012) claim that "[l]iterature is powerful in its capacity to introduce new ideas and contribute to belief formation" (p. 386). The reading of Wilson's contemporary realistic children's novels such as *Lola Rose* (2003) aims to equip young

readers to effectively manage and overcome life's many challenges, including the increasing threat of domestic violence.

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Providing Feedback On Students' Written Assignments At A Polytechnic in Malaysia

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KEYWORDS: Lecturer feedback, student preferences, English writing teaching

ABSTRACT

A lecturer's feedback on students' written assignment is crucial as it helps to improve the students' writing ability. This paper presents the results of a classroom research study that examines the types of feedback most preferred by the students in their written assignments, as well as analysing students' preferences for and responses to lecturer's feedback on their writing. A quantitative data analysis approach was incorporated using a questionnaire. The results showed that students preferred oral feedback the most, together with the lecturer highlighting all mistakes that they have made in their writing. Besides, the results also showed that the students mostly paid attention to the lecturer's feedback involving grammar, vocabulary, and content/ideas, and are not so concerned about the organisation. This study concluded that it is necessary for lecturers to take their students' diverse feedback preferences into consideration as well the range of feedback strategies, especially during the teaching of English writing.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Writing skills require a student to build sentences and generate ideas for different types of writing genres. The construction of sentences and generating of ideas often involve matters relating to the personal experience as well as the existing knowledge of a student. Good writing also needs to have creative writing skills by using the imagination they possess.

In the context of English language education at a Malaysian Polytechnic, students are assessed through writing assignments such as preparing reports, cover letters, resumes, and short essays. The importance of writing skills in a student's future career make the role of lecturers very important and critical. Today's composite profile of students also makes teaching and learning instruction in the classroom more challenging. As such, lecturers should be more diligent in designing a particular strategy or approach that is in line with the needs of students so that they can cultivate good writing skills.

Providing feedback to students is important in teaching and learning in the classroom. Feedback focused on learning can help students understand the level of their progress, identify

the challenges they are experiencing, while also suggesting what to do next. Effective feedback offers students an opportunity to obtain both oral and written feedback from their lecturers (Ali & Al-Adawi, 2013). In other words, providing feedback is the most effective activity a lecturer can do to improve student excellence.

Additionally, by using rubrics as one of the feedback tools, it can provide students with the criteria that can help to build success, making the desired learning outcomes clearer to them.

2.0 PERSPECTIVES ON TEACHER FEEDBACK

Teacher feedback refers to a means of providing information regarding students' errors, either in the form of correction, comment or pointing out the mere location of the error (Štajner, 2013). Teacher feedback is crucial in transforming a student's learning. When feedback is predominantly negative, it can dampen students' efforts and achievement. Hence, it is essential for any educator to find an appropriate feedback response that will not discourage a student's learning (Reynolds, 2017).

Effective feedback provided by the educators to their students is deemed as a key strategy in the learning and teaching process. However, what is effective feedback? Effective feedback refers to feedback that is timely, targeted, tangible, and tied to goals (Mindsteps, 2018). When educators provide feedback to their students, they should focus on the task and the associated learning outcomes, as well as inform the students whether they are on the right track (Ali & Al-Adawi, 2013). For example, language instructors could provide feedback in terms of grammar, sentence structure, lexical and syntactic complexity, or feedback in terms of ideas expressed, arguments, and writing style (Horbacauskiene & Kasperaviciene, 2015). It is essential for educators to provide quality feedback to their students as quality feedback is a key factor in improving achievement in language learning (Omar, Taib, & Basri, 2017).

A few studies have been conducted on the students' acceptance towards teacher feedback on their work. In Seker and Dincer's (2014) study, students felt that they were cared for, and thus improved and became satisfied when they received feedback from teachers. Retna and Cavana's (2009) study also demonstrated that high quality feedback is important to the students as it improved the quality of their work, and their results. This can eventually lead to greater student learning and satisfaction with the feedback they received for their work. Ferguson's (2011) study identified that students prefer feedback that is positive, clear, and constructive, which focuses on acknowledging their achievements and targets at the lecturers' ability to guide them towards future improvement. The students prefer feedback that contains a certain amount of positive comment, as this could increase their confidence level and motivate them. Besides that, Ratnasari's (2015) study indicated that the students believe that their teacher's written feedback is useful in helping them to improve their written work and they read the comments written by

their teachers carefully. In addition, the students believe that both positive and negative comments would encourage them to improve their written work.

In the present study, the researcher addressed the following research objectives:
a. To identify the types of feedback preferred most by the students in their written assignments.
b. To find out the students' experiences and preferences of feedback on their written assignments.
c. To examine what kinds of feedback the students paid more attention to.
d. To identify students' attitudes towards feedback on their written assignments.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This study is an exploratory descriptive study that aims to explore the types of feedback preferred by the students and their attitude towards feedback received on their writing assignments. A questionnaire was used to collect data from the students. It was designed with reference to the studies by Irwin (2017) and Chiang (2004). It is written in both English and Bahasa Malaysia. It contains five parts. Part One centres on the respondents' backgrounds. Part Two revolves around identifying the types of feedback that the students preferred most in their written assignment. Part Three seeks to explore the students' experiences and preferences of feedback on their written assignment. Part Four aims to identify the types of feedback that the students paid more attention to. Lastly, Part Five seeks to find out the students' attitudes towards feedback on their written assignment. Statistical data of the research study were processed with SPSS version 22.0 (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) programme using the descriptive statistical method.

The sample of students in this research was taken from the Commerce and Engineering Departments who took Communicative English 3 (DUE5012), which is offered in the fourth semester. A total of 163 students were enrolled in this course and taught by the researcher. The research sample was selected based upon convenience sampling. The reason for choosing this method in selecting the sample for this research was due to the respondents' proximity, availability, and accessibility (Abrams, 2010).

Table 1: Department

Department	No. of Students	Percentage
Department of Mechanical Engineering	31	26.3%
Department of Petrochemical Engineering	1	0.8%
Department of Commerce	86	72.9%

There were 118 students participating in this study. 31 (26.3%) students came from the Department of Mechanical Engineering, 1 (0.8) student from the Department of Petrochemical Engineering, and 86 (72.9%) students from the Department of Commerce.

3.1　Reliability of The Questionnaire

To ensure that the questionnaire was reliable, the researcher conducted a reliability test using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The alpha value is considered satisfactory if it is equal to or greater than 0.70 (Pawar & Thakurdesai, 2013). The questionnaire was tested in its wholeness for its reliability. As a result, the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients showed 0.85 for the questionnaire as in Table 2. The result indicated high levels of internal reliability.

Table 2: Cronbach's Alpha Test Result

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardised Items	N of Items
.854	.866	19

4.0　RESULTS

In the study, Questions B1 and B2 is aimed at the types of feedback that students preferred most in their written assignment, when asked whether they preferred oral or written feedback the most.

Table 3: Types of feedback that students preferred most in their written assignment

No.	Statement	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
1.	I prefer oral feedback the most as it gives me a chance to reflect on my lessons and give an explanation to my lecturer on why my essay is written in such a way or mistakes or errors are made.	4 (3.4%)	18 (15%)	98 (81.7%)
2.	I prefer written feedback the most as it enables me to remember what mistakes that I have made so this will help me to avoid them in the future.	6 (5%)	23 (19.2%)	91 (75.8%)

Table 3 shows that the majority of the students expressed that lecturer feedback was important to them. 98 (81.7%) students preferred oral feedback the most as oral feedback enables them to reflect on their lessons and provide an explanation to their lecturer on why their essays were written in such a way or why certain mistakes or errors were made. The study by Küçükali (2017) showed that oral feedback created the opportunity for purposeful interaction, clarification, and negotiation between the students and helped the students to receive additional elaborate and

constructive feedback, which considerably improved their writing skills. In addition, 91 (75.8%) students preferred written feedback as written feedback enables them to remember the mistakes that they have made so that they would not repeat the mistakes in the future.

Table 4: Students' experiences of feedback on their written assignment

No.	Question	Always	Sometimes	Never
1.	How often has your English lecturer provided feedback on your written assignments?	95 (79.2%)	25 (20.8%)	0
2.	To what degree do you want your English lecturer to provide written feedback on your assignments?	82 (68.3%)	37 (30.8%)	1 (0.8%)
3.	To what degree do you read the written feedback your English lecturer provides?	73 (60.8%)	46 (38.3%)	1 (0.8%)
4.	Is your English lecturer's feedback legible?	106 (88.3%)	14 (11.7%)	0
5.	When your English lecturer provides feedback in English, to what degree do you understand it?	92 (76.7%)	27 (22.5%)	1 (0.8%)
6.	To what degree do you prefer feedback in English?	86 (71.7%)	33 (27.5%)	1 (0.8%)
7.	To what degree do you want your English lecturer to correct every mistake you have made?	101 (84.2%)	19 (15.8%)	0
8.	How often do you think about your English lecturer's comments and corrections carefully?	89 (74.2%)	31 (25.8%)	0
9.	Does your English lecturer's feedback help to improve your writing?	106 (89.1%)	13 (10.9)	0

Questions C1 to C9 examined the students' experiences in receiving feedback on their written assignment. Questions One and Two dealt with the frequency of feedback provided by the lecturer and the frequency that the students wanted to receive feedback. Students reported that their English lecturer always (79.2%) provided feedback on their written assignments. In addition, 68.3% of the students answered that they always wanted feedback from their lecturer.

When asked about the frequency with which the students read their lecturer's feedback, 60.8% of the students responded that they always read the feedback provided. However, 38.3% of the students cannot seem to be taking full advantage of the lecturer's feedback.. There are researchers which remarked that some students might not even scan the recommendation and feedback provided by the teacher unless expressly told to do so (O'Flaherty, as cited in Irwin, 2017).

In terms of the legibility of their lecturer's feedback, the students reported that their lecturer's writing was always (88.3%) legible. It is essential for the lecturer's feedback to be legible as this points to the very fact that students take their lecturers' feedback and comments very seriously (Ferris, 1995).

An important question to think about was how well the students understood the written feedback once it was provided within the target language. 76.7% of the students answered that

they always understood the feedback, 22.5% answered that they sometimes understood the feedback, and 0.8% answered that they never understood the feedback.

On the other hand, 71.7% of students always wanted the feedback in English, 27.5% sometimes preferred English, and 0.8% never preferred English.

The majority of the students surveyed (84.2%) indicated that they wished their English lecturer would highlight all of the mistakes they created, whereas 15.8% felt their lecturer ought to sometimes point out all of their mistakes. This finding coincides with the finding by Irwin (2017) had stated that the students felt strongly that their lecturer should provide ample and robust feedback on all of the mistakes in their written compositions.

Finally, when asked if the students thought their lecturer's feedback helped them improve their writing, the majority (89.1%) answered that it helped. Only 10.9% of the students felt that the feedback they received sometimes helped them improve their writing. This means that each student (100%) found a positive association between the feedback their lecturer was providing and also the improvement of their writing skills.

Table 5: Types of feedback the students paid more attention to

No.	Question	Always	Sometimes	Never
1.	Do you pay attention to the feedback involving organisation?	83 (69.2%)	36 (30%)	1 (0.8%)
2.	Do you pay attention to the feedback involving content/ideas?	101 (84.2%)	19 (15.8%)	0
3.	Do you pay attention to the feedback involving grammar?	107 (89.2%)	12 (10%)	1 (0.8%)
4.	Do you pay attention to the feedback involving vocabulary?	103 (85.8%)	16 (13.3%)	1 (0.8%)

Questions D1 to D4 examined more closely what kinds of feedback the students paid more attention to. It can be seen that the students paid more attention to feedback involving grammar (89.2% Always), followed by vocabulary (85.8% Always) and content/ideas (84.2% Always) as compared to feedback related to organisation (69.2% Always).

Table 6: Students' attitudes towards feedback on their written assignment

No.	Question	Not Important	Somewhat Important	Quite Important	Very Important
1.	How important is it for your English lecturer to give you comments on grammar?	1 (0.8%)	2 (1.7%)	21 (17.6%)	95 (79.8%)
2.	How important is it for your English lecturer to give you comments on vocabulary?	0	3 (2.5%)	23 (19.3%)	93 (78.2%)
3.	How important is it for your English lecturer to give you comments on the organisation?	0	3 (2.5%)	36 (30.3%)	80 (67.2%)
4.	How important is it for your English lecturer to give you comments on content?	0	2 (1.7%)	20 (16.8%)	97 (81.5%)

In this study, Questions E1 to E4 aimed to look into students' preferences for lecturer feedback. When asked how important it was for their English lecturers to give them feedback, the majority of the students answered that it was either quite important or very important. In finding out how they perceived lecturer feedback in different aspects, 81.5% of the students thought that feedback on the content was very important, followed by 79.8% and 78.2% of the students thought that feedback on grammar and vocabulary was very important.   A   smaller percentage of the students expressed the same view on organisation (67.2%). The comments regarding the content is essential because it will promote students to make greater progress in the expression of ideas (Zhang, 2016). Kepner's study (as cited in Zhang, 2016) conjointly confirms that the comments associated with the contents acts as a positive role in improving the smooth flow of composition ideas. Hence, lecturers should focus more in providing feedback on the content during college English writing teaching (Zhang, 2016).

5.0   CONCLUSION

When the findings of this research were assessed, it can be concluded that the polytechnic students have positive attitudes towards lecturer's feedback on their written assignments. Moreover, the research findings revealed that students mostly prefer oral feedback as well as lecturers pointing out every mistake they make in their written assignments. The findings also revealed that the students mostly pay attention to lecturer feedback involving grammar, vocabulary, and content/ideas. Hence, the research findings can provide polytechnic English lecturers some suggestions on how to give feedback to their students.

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English Language Teachers' Continuing Professional Development: Teachers as Learners

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ABSTRACT

Teachers' professional development always has been one of the important issues that require serious consideration within teacher education. This presentation is going to introduce a national policy on English language teachers' development in Mongolia, rationale for the research study, current situation of the secondary English teachers' in-service training, a concept of continuing professional development as a lifelong learning experience, and a model for continuing professional development modified based on the research findings. Some results of comparative studies and examples of practice in continuing professional development will be described to the audience. As well as some current challenges faced by secondary school English teachers within the newly revised curriculum implementation process will be addressed. Quality of English education in many ways greatly depends on the quality of teaching. Therefore, it is crucial for teachers to develop themselves on their own and learn by doing and trying out different things in the classroom. There can be various ways for them to develop their teaching skills and competences at workplace. Teachers should be aware of CPD concepts, become able to explore new ways for their own professional development and gain lifelong learning experience. Especially when the government is undergoing a curriculum reform, teachers are required to develop their personal and professional competences, and turn challenges into real opportunities. On the other hand, with regards to the newly reformed curriculum, which is based on the learner-centered teaching teachers' learning experience, it plays an important role in motivating students' for active learning and becoming autonomous learners.

1.0   INTRODUCTION

This study has been done within the secondary school English language teacher development project which aimed at introducing CPD concepts and models. Recent reforms in the secondary education sector require transforming English language teaching and teachers to make transition to learner–centered teaching and learner development. In this regard, teachers are struggling in changing their ways of teaching. Therefore, continuing teacher development is crucial for incorporating innovative ideas set forth in the newly revised curriculum for teaching English in grades 5-12.

1.1. Education policy on teachers' development in Mongolia

Supporting the educational innovations, improving quality of educational services, complying with public and learners' needs, upgrading teacher training curriculum and

methodology, and setting up an effective in-service teacher training system in Mongolia are demands of the whole country's social development. In compliance with the Law on Education of Mongolia (2002) all educational institutions, including universities and secondary schools, have to employ teachers with professional background and pedagogical training. Primary teachers are required to have graduation certificates from a teacher training college, secondary school teachers must hold a bachelor's degree earned from the pedagogical university, and university teachers have to hold a master's degree or higher.

In recent years the government of Mongolia has been paying a special attention to raising the quality of teaching at all levels of education and developing teachers' professional qualifications. So reforms in teacher education and teacher development are focusing on significant changes within higher education and secondary school system, and as it was stated in the recent policy document "Providing an education sector with creative teachers and professionals capable to develop every single child"[1] became the main goal for developing the whole education system. The Law on Promotion of Teacher Development adopted in 2018 set up a current legal framework for teacher development at all levels of education. It declares that teacher development should be a lifelong process and that continuing professional development should be an integral part of any education policy and strategy[2].

In the field of English language education there have been two national programs: the 1st National program was for 2000-2008 and the 2nd National program for 2008-2020. The priority within these programs is given to improving quality of educational services, revising English language teaching curriculum and national textbooks, intensifying pre-service and in-service teacher training system, supplying rural and urban schools with well-qualified teachers, retaining them at their job places, supporting teachers' initiatives and meeting demands for continuous upgrading of teachers' qualifications. According to the last program, which is implemented in three stages, every year 150 teachers of English were expected to get involved with in-service training[3]. At present there are 803 secondary schools in Mongolia where 2498 teachers of English and 463 teachers teaching both English and Russian languages are employed. Teachers have to take a 5-year-cycle of formal in-service training and accumulate a certain number of credits to upgrade their qualifications. The statistics which can be seen from the table below, show that for the last 4 years the number of English language teachers taking part in in-service training had tripled.

Table 1: Number of English language teachers involved in in-service training for the last 4 years

No	Years	1-year teaching experience	5-year teaching experience	10-year teaching experience	Total
1	2016	117	142	177	436
2	2017	139	108	208	455
3	2018	167	110	199	476
4	2019	164	127	118	410

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[1] Teacher Education Reform, 2016

[2] Law on Promotion of Teacher Development, 2018

[3] Second National Program of Developing English Education, 2008

Teachers with one year of teaching experience are novice teachers, and they have to take the program in order to get a teaching license. According to legal regulations, a Teacher's License could be received by young teachers only after their graduation from the university and completion of one-year teaching practice.

1.2. Rationale for the research study

A recent reform on the revision of the national curriculum for English language teaching at the secondary school level which was completed in 2018 made significant changes in terms of the teaching content and methodology. First of all, emphasizing the learner-centered teaching and learner development revises the aims and objectives for learning English. In this regard principal changes made in the newly revised curriculum are as follows:

- learning objectives
- learning strategies
- teachers as facilitators of learning
- assessment of learning performance and learning outcomes

The previous curriculum has been more of the teacher-centered and language skills based, whereas the new one is putting more emphasis on the learning process and learning strategies. This means that teachers' role and duties in the classroom are changing. Now they have to think of not what to teach but how students should learn using various learning strategies. So, learner training for lifelong development is an important part of teaching. Observations of the current teaching practice show that teachers are not aware of learning strategies and ways of learner development. Thus, they need to be trained as learners themselves, and they "should not stop at the level of delivery, but go higher to the level of persuading and convincing students"[4]. Therefore, this project was focusing on making teachers aware of learning as a whole system. If this is done successfully the implementation of the newly reformed curriculum will be more effective, and teachers' personal learning experience will have a great impact on their students.

1.3. Overview of the research work

The scope of the research work includes the following:
- studying policy documents and reports
- CPD related literature review
- comparative study
- teachers' needs assessment survey
- developing a CPD model for secondary school English language teachers

Comparative Study

In different parts of the world, systemic CPD policies have been established to advance teachers' professionalism. For example,

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[4] Ora Kwo. Developing a Mongolian Model of Teacher Education: Insights from a Consultancy Visit. P.7.

- In England, the General Teaching Council has initiated the Teachers' Professional Learning Framework. It provides a map of professional development experiences for both teachers and those who support, advise and facilitate teachers' learning and development. The Framework acknowledges that learning runs through a teaching career. It takes place every day, formally and informally, through a wide range of learning experiences, deepening and revitalizing teachers' skills, abilities, values and knowledge.
- In Scotland, A Teaching Profession for the 21st Century introduces a contractual 35 hours per year of CPD for all teachers. The Scottish model of continuing education is an appropriate balance of professional development, attendance at nationally accredited courses and school-based learning activities. CPD is a condition of service including every teacher having a commitment to CPD. CPD is regarded as an essential opportunity for staff and should be accessible and applicable to every teacher.

The table below demonstrates some countries' CPD models which are in actual practice.

No	Countries	CPD models
1	England	Mentoring model
2	Finland	National in-service teacher training and mentoring program
3	Scotland	CPD Framework: Standards-based CPD
4	Italy	Action research-oriented reflective model
5	Australia	Standards-based CPD
6	Malaysia	Smart school teachers' CPD model through ICT
7	Indonesia	Action research-oriented model
8	Singapore	The teacher growth model
9	Japan	School-based action research model

CPD international models are examples of effective practices for teachers' professional development. Adapting them in local conditions allows learning more about CPD as a system. As well as the experiences of other countries demonstrate that school networking could be an effective mechanism to address various issues. In addition, studying international best practices can inspire and stimulate teachers for innovations and personal development and for teachers' networking and exchange of ideas as well.

Teachers' Needs Assessment Survey

400 secondary school English language teachers have been involved in the needs assessment survey in order to identify their priorities for professional development and awareness of CPD. From the table below it is possible to see what kind of professional development teachers need. Majority of them want to learn from others and participate in conferences. Besides that, teachers are aware of other types of professional development such as doing action research, following experienced teachers, doing peer observation and getting involved in various projects. Teachers consider that their personal professional development can be greatly enhanced by these types of activities.

Table 2: Needs assessment survey

Number of teachers	Expression of needs
311	Learn from others
280	Do action research
219	Follow experienced teachers
224	Do peer observation
333	Participate in conferences
273	Get involved in projects

In addition, 45% of surveyed teachers prefer face-to-face training, 34% online training and 21% distance training. The data shows that majority of teachers got used to the conventional face-to-face training. The online training is becoming more popular in recent years; therefore, it was the second preference. The distance training programs are not well set up in Mongolia although some institutions try to organize distance learning programs and activities such as video-conferencing.
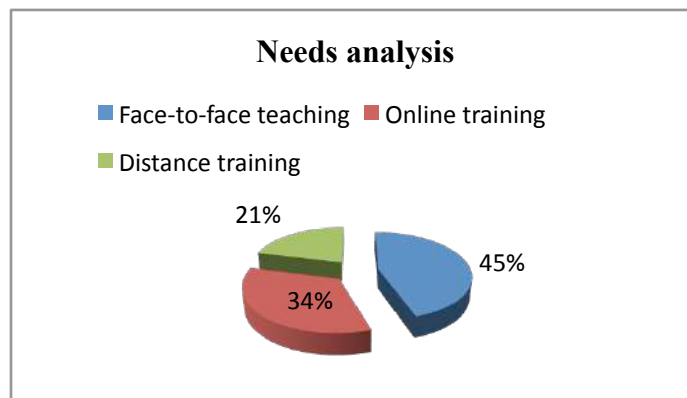
Starting from 2016, USA Embassy and Regional English Language Office have been implementing a mentorship program for secondary school English language teachers from all parts of Mongolia. At present there have been 119 mentors (4 mentors for each of 21 provinces and 35 mentors for the city of Ulaanbaatar) trained altogether. The program includes a blended approach as face-to-face and online training for mentors who are expected to develop professionally on their own and mentor other teachers in their local areas. This experience indicates that a mentorship program is effective, and a lot of teachers can benefit from it.

2.0   CPD CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

As a concept, continuing professional development continues to grow around the world emphasizing lifelong learning and teachers' effective performance and delivering quality services. Nowadays, the learning society is putting emphasis on teachers as human resource and challenges them to become lifelong learners because it is considered that "Teaching is reflection of life, related to the environment formed by people and the surrounding world"[5]. Lifelong

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[5] Magnus Persson. Continuing Professional Development and Networking in Europe. P. 9

learning is a holistic view of education and recognizes learning from a number of different environments.

CPD is based on the lifelong learning concept. It is not about only getting information, but it is more about problem solving, adapting, adjusting, transferring, transforming, reflecting and creating continuous learning.

2.1. Theoretical foundations

There are different views on CPD expressed by scholars and educators around the world. To summarize them we would say that CPD is an ongoing planned learning and development process that:
- enables teachers to maximize their potentials
- contributes to work based and personal development
- ensures continuing confidence and capability particularly in changing environments
- updates skills, knowledge and understanding
- prepares individuals for changes in existing roles or moves to other roles
- enhances individual and organizational performance.

CPD applies to every member of professional services staff throughout their career. The following definitions better describe the essence of CPD:

Continuing
A cyclical process that allows teachers to reflect on what they have learned and consider what skills or qualities they want or need to develop next. It's not ad-hoc, but planned from a career long perspective.

Professional
Focused on developing the qualities and capabilities that define what it is to be a teacher. As a professional it's also important that teachers maintain their knowledge of policy developments at local and national levels.

Development
Not a box ticking exercise that shows that a set of requirements have been met. To be effective it should be about refreshing and enhancing teachers' professional practice.

CPD is more than just going on a course. It can be
- innovative
- challenging
- progressive
- formal/informal
- expensive/low cost

CPD activities should be planned, purposeful, collaborative, and self-motivated at every stage of professional development:
1. Awareness of professional development and motivation
2. Understanding (knowing what professional practice means and why it's important)
3. Engagement (demonstrating competency in professional practice at work)
4. Integration (demonstrating high level of competency in the professional practice which informs what a teacher does at work)

In this regard some of the teachers' professional practices include:

- planning lessons
- understanding learners
- managing lessons
- knowing the subject
- managing resources
- assessing learning
- integrating ICT
- taking responsibility for professional development
- promoting 21st century skills
- using a variety of teaching approaches, methods and techniques
- understanding educational policies and international best practices

2.2. CPD model for English language teachers

The professional development needs of teachers vary from teacher to teacher and from school to school. A generic CPD model proposed within the project can enhance individual teachers to make meaningful self-evaluations of their learning needs over professional practice. It also should enable schools to address the professional development of their entire staff. Based on the research findings, the following generic CPD model is developed and proposed for schools and individual teachers.
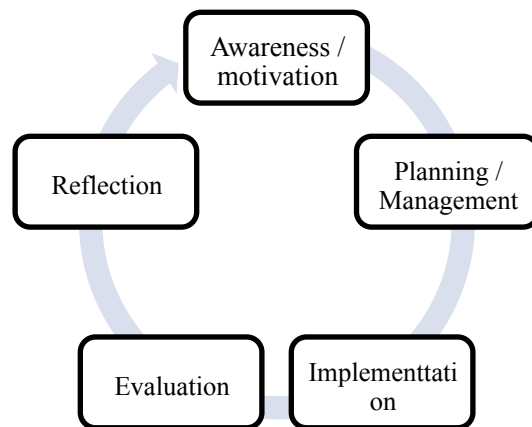
Figure 1: CPD Model for English Language Teachers

This CPD model is a cyclical process where a lot of reflections on personal development activities are involved, and it enables teachers to develop their professional qualifications on the systemic basis. First of all, teachers have to be aware of CPD concepts and motivated for developing their everyday teaching and self-learning as well. Next, teachers have to identify personal goals and strategies based on personal needs and plan what to do. At the implementation stage planned ideas should be put in practice and tried out as much as possible. After that, teachers have to evaluate what was done, what was achieved, and what went well or wrong. Reflection is obviously needed for identifying strengths and weaknesses looking at them

from multiple dimensions in order to improve CPD activities and decide on strategies for further personal growth.

3.0   CONCLUSION

Mongolia has a well-articulated national policy on teacher development and advocates for teachers' continuing professional development. It is trying to raise a social status and the value of teachers by supporting then in various ways. However, recent reforms within the education system challenge teachers who are facing several constrains as dealing with innovative ideas for implementing newly revised English teaching curriculum. At present teachers need much support on raising an English language proficiency level and developing professional practice skills.

So, following the CPD model teachers are expected to learn through a range of professional practices such as exploring new ideas and reflecting on them, studying best practices and trying them out, discussing and sharing personal ideas and thoughts with colleagues, researching own teaching and evaluating learning outcomes.

Teachers as learners have "to learn to know, learn to do, learn to be and learn to live together"[6]. It is worth to say that the quality of continuing education is more important than the quantity because it is not merely the frequency of attendance and participation in professional development activities. Thus, it should be a positive impact on teachers' perspectives and professional practice at different stages of development.

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My Success In Implementing Brain-Targeted Teaching In Class

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ABSTRACT

Cognitive learning is gaining momentum in the world of education. 'Brain-Targeted Teaching Model' (BTT) is an effective teaching technique that helps students improve their perceptive skills and become more creative. Hardiman, (2012) initiated this method at The Johns Hopkins University, USA. The BTT model is a pedagogical framework that seeks to connect research and practice by providing instructors with a cohesive model of effective instruction based on the neuro-cognitive sciences. This method helps educators to combine a number of elements related to research-based effective teaching and associates each component to what neuroscience reveals about how a human brain learns (Hardiman, 2003)

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Brain Teaching is gaining popularity in the world of education. Knowing how students' brains work can help a teacher to create an environment that gives the learners more chances of success in learning (Prince, 2005). According to The Room 41 Team, A Blog by Concordia University-Portland (2012), current research on brain-based learning is informing ideas for improved learning experiences and greater aptitude for success that teachers can incorporate into their teaching methods.

Teaching poses challenges like completing a syllabus, facilitating students in the learning process, monitoring their progress, and at the same time maintaining discipline in the classroom. My English Language curriculum comes from the curriculum department, which covers the selected units, skills, objectives and pacing. I teach academic English and incorporate technology and scientific methods to deliver my content. Apart from the school curriculum, we also train students for standardized tests like IELTS, EMSAT, TOEFL, etc. in the UAE government schools. My students, who are mostly 15+ years, use laptops and iPads to read books (e-books), complete research work and collaborate digitally. Some of my students' academic performances are inconsistent due to anxiety, insomnia, excessive worry due to family problems and a number of other issues. At times I feel there is a lack of positive learning atmosphere in my class despite some reasonable academic achievements. There are students who are often disengaged and restless. They are always in a hurry to complete their assignment just for the sake of submitting the assignments with no reflection, thoughts and application of knowledge. Their anxiety and disorder affects their ability to learn. After lots of thoughts and reflection, I discovered how to understand my students more deeply and find out what goes on in their minds to make a connection with them emotionally and increase their motivation.

With cognitive sciences at the back of my mind, I pursued the study of the 'Brain Targeted Teaching Model'(BTT) at the Johns Hopkins University, USA. BTT is an effective teaching technique that helps students improve their cognitive skills and become more creative. Hardiman (2012) initiated this method and introduced a pedagogical framework that seeks to connect research and practice by providing instructors with a cohesive model of effective instruction based on the neuro-cognitive sciences. It is one of the most popular ways of teaching that is gaining momentum in the world of education.

2.0   LITERATURE REVIEW

In my opinion, it is essential to understand how a student's brain learns. Once a teacher is able to comprehend how a child gathers information, it becomes easier for her to execute her teaching practices and help a child to learn better. However, finding literature on how a human brain functions and its connection to our teaching practice is a bit challenging as the concept originates from cognitive psychology and neurosciences (Darden, 2012).

Amodt and Wang's (2011) in their book, 'Welcome to your child's brain', clearly explained how the brain develops and how this development shapes personality. A child's brain copes with school, and children learn to react to environmental stress. Parents have an important role to play in molding their ward's brain and getting them ready for school. Meanwhile, Galinsky, (2010) states that the best gift that parents can give their children is to train them to develop 'self-control'. The ability to control their own behavior in order to reach one's goal proves that executive functions of the brain contribute to the development of children's basic brain functions.

If teachers try to understand how a child's brain learns, it helps them to comprehend them better. According to Souza, (2011) the different parts of the brain have different functions to perform. In his book 'How the Brain Learns' he explains that the brain has the power of transfer, it can process information, enhance thinking skills, memory, retention, and learning cited in Darden (2012). The author further states that the most important thing is our emotions which have effects on our learning memory and recall. As a teacher, I have also noticed that cognitive processes in students including attention, learning, reasoning, retrieving prior knowledge, etc., are often influenced by their emotions. If they are happy they cooperate with their teacher, if they are not then it's going to be a stalemate. All these prove that students' sentiments and feelings play a big role in learning and long term memory retention.

To understand more about brain and learning it is essential to understand multitasking and task switching while doing natural task and complicated tasks (Souza, 2011). According to him, students' brain cannot carry out two cognitive processes simultaneously. Although sometimes multitasking makes us feel good (Widrich, 2019) but many researchers counter this belief and consider this as a myth. There should not be any disturbance in a child's thinking process as single tasking helps one to maintain an interconnection in the sequence of ideas and retain more information in the working memory to understand any text. As an individual even I get confused between multitasking and task switching.

According to Hardiman (2012), educators should have more information about neuro-cognitive sciences and be strong enough to separate neuro-myth from neuroscience. Teachers should understand brain structure and function and establish an emotional climate for learning in the classroom.

3.0   METHODOLOGY

I chose to use the Brain-Targeted teaching model in my class because I wanted to increase my students' cognitive focus while they are learning. This model is a pedagogical framework, based on six components known as Brain Targets (BT), which is explored to provide the teacher with an organized framework of effective instruction based on the neuro-cognitive sciences. This approach focuses on how to apply educational and cognitive neuroscience principles into classroom settings through an academic framework.

The participants are the students (boys) of Grade 10, 15 years of age, intermediate level, in a technical school in the UAE. They follow the curriculum designed by the curriculum department of the school system and the medium of instruction is English. The model lesson is based on the six stages of the Brain-targeted teaching approach (model).

The topic of the Unit is 'City Traffic' which is a general topic and appropriate for the target students. The unit's lessons extend over a couple of weeks, with each week having eight periods. The primary language skills focused in this section are academic reading, writing and speaking, with special reference to language system, such as the 'use of linkers' in academic writing.

3.1   BT-1

Emotional connection is the first target, where the teacher establishes a personal connection with the students. In this class the teacher personalizes the lesson through enquiries about the means of transport students use to come to school every day. They discuss different modes and explain why they use it. Teacher also uses technology and artistic displays to help the students become more passionate about the topic. Teacher sends them a preliminary question through www.socrative.com and asks students to make a list of the different types of transport (air/water/sea) they are familiar with and which is the most popular one. Teacher analyzes students' responses electronically (displays the retrieved file on the OHP) and gives a general feedback. After that, the students discuss and share their knowledge about the city transport, how it was before and how it is now, and create an iMovie of 1 to 2 mins to share with their class.

Teacher plays a video and instructs them to compare and contrast Dubai transportation in order to encourage students to reflect, predict and appreciate the global transport systems. Each one of them share their ideas, opinion and comments. After school, they visit the school library to enhance their knowledge on the topic through reading books and magazines.

3.2   BT-2

The Physical Environment is the target to enhance the novelty in the classroom and expand their attention level. The teacher delegates students to organize the class environment in their own way. I am curious about how to get students to focus if they are always talking with friends. Students arrange the desks in clusters of 5s for group activities, so that it adds up to the newness of the classroom and also to view the OHP comfortably. Students suggest that basic stationeries for each group to be kept on the table. Each one of them prepare their name card and place it on the table, they further select a color for their group and shade their name cards for easy recognition. The teacher makes the class look visually appealing with displays of charts and art work related to public transport, traffic rules and traffic jam. Students use pictures as prompts to think of solution, preferably 3D printouts. Teacher sticks quotes related to safe driving in the classroom in a creative way. Students are encouraged to bring indoor plants to decorate their classroom which would also add up to the oxygen level of the room.

3.3 BT-3

Concept Map is the next target, when the teacher sends a pre-defined mind map to the students to use and record their facts and refer to it at every stage and update the content. The 'big picture' connects their prior knowledge and leads them to do research, enquiry and discussion on problems and solutions of UAE Traffic. Students are recommended to read the passage on their recommended book, 'Masdar: The future of Cities' to further reinstate content about advantages and disadvantages of traffic. Teacher checks their understanding of the main idea and supporting details through peer discussion and comprehension questions. At this stage students' knowledge in the language system and their writing skills is reinforced through numerous activities. They can use their artistic skills and use their creativity to generate their ideas.

3.4 BT-4

Mastery of knowledge is the stage where the teacher checks their knowledge in various ways. Teacher does it through academic activities like asking thought provoking questions, checking understanding of the content through comprehension and also through art work. Students practice role play, give presentations, debate and have group discussions on the given topic. All these help them to research on the topic and gain mastery over the matter.

3.5 BT-5

Extension and application of knowledge is under BT-5, where students enhance their cognition, divergent thinking, creativity, critical analysis and mastery of content through application in creative ways. In this unit 'City Traffic' students are encouraged to decide whether their suggested solutions on traffic problems would be feasible or not. They have to get involved in activities with problem and solutions and come out with exclusive ideas related to traffic problems in the city as that is the main idea of the unit. They are expected to understand the importance of their solutions and find out the disadvantages of executing them.

3.6 BT-6

Evaluating learning is done in BT-6. Students are given immediate feedback for better performance. Assessment is done through quiz, classwork, homework, etc. where they are constantly evaluated on their learning. In this unit students are evaluated on their acquisition of knowledge and their academic skills like reading, writing and speaking in relation to the unit. At the end, students do a project, present their art work, perform a role play and also take a quiz on the content of the topic, City Traffic. Teacher uses rubric to evaluate students' presentation skills and other activities.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

With lots of thought I executed Brain targeted teaching model in my class and the brain friendly approach worked well with my students of Grade 10. The physical environment made them happy and they enjoyed sitting with their peers and working together whole-heartedly. The sitting arrangement also helped the teacher to have a better control over the students. Teacher had the opportunity to refer to the key performance indicators that are usually used in the curriculum to assess students' progress. Overall students were able to predict content using visuals, expand ideas with justifications. They were able to read and understand topic related articles and discuss the problems and solutions in a much easier way.

The learning unit was meant to develop students' cognition and help them in knowledge acquisition. It also assisted the teacher to have a better control over students' emotions as they were all engaged with full enthusiasm. Students had the opportunity to discuss, read and understand the various means of transport in this country (UAE) and at the same time find out feasible solutions of

the traffic problems in the different Emirates of the UAE. They researched, examined and used their creativity and artistic skills to generate ideas on various modes of transport. These ideas would reduce traffic jams and help motorists experience smooth traffic flow. They also discussed the advantages and disadvantages of the possible solutions. While inspecting the concept map (in the form of mind map), the teacher had an opportunity to differentiate and find out the strengths, weaknesses, needs of every individual and their progress. Teacher had to give instant feedback from time to time on students' production.

Students learn to work in groups to complete their models. They had more opportunities to think critically and use their knowledge to justify their ideas. They practiced speaking about the advantages and disadvantages of the possible solutions and had a quick debate. Each group exhibited their artwork with a brief presentation to explain their ideas of possible solutions of the traffic in the cities of the UAE.

It was evident that this method helped the shy students to participate as individuals in art work, group discussions and role plays. Since artistic production helps a student express his identity, develop ideas, skills and explore culture (Freedman, 2003), it worked well with my boys in BT-3. The activities that were based on kinesthetic responses such as arranging the classroom, organizing debate and group discussions in BT-3 and BT-4 can nurtured creativity in the students.

5.0 CONCLUSION

Despite the challenges, I can finally say that the teaching model was a huge success. It really helped my students to think out of the box and improve cognitively. Apart from my students developing their reasoning skills, it also helped me change my attitude towards them and have a better understanding of their minds and emotions. It also helped me to establish a positive relationship with my students. It gave the students opportunities to develop their intrapersonal and interpersonal skills. They found the learning environment interesting and they were highly engaged in finding real world applications for what they were studying. It also helped them to develop self-control so that they remain focused on their studies, which eventually aided them to acquire more knowledge, and prosper academically. Since understanding the stages of Brain-Targeted Teaching model are not very difficult, it is hoped that the structure explained here will motivate teachers to change their attitude towards their students and create a successful harmonious learning environment for better learning.

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Integrating Authentic Learning Strategies In A Mobile Cloud Computing Environment: Writing Apprehension And Writing Attitude

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ABSTRACT

Students dread writing from the start of their school years. Writing apprehension is one of the most predominant problems English language teachers in Malaysian primary schools face in the teaching of writing. However, with the integration of Authentic Learning Strategies in a mobile cloud computing environment into writing instruction, a primary school teacher aided the young learners, lessen reluctance and resistance to writing. This preliminary qualitative case study explores the role of Authentic Learning Strategies in a mobile cloud computing environment as well as to get a better understanding on how young learners use Authentic Learning Strategies for writing in the cloud computing environment. It addresses the implementation of the most commonly used cloud applications, Google Drive, in a primary school classroom. The learning environment integrated Google Docs that students were using to write articles for an online magazine, Class eMags. A total of 20 Year Five students from a Chinese national-type primary school participated in this learning experience. They collaborated in groups of five to produce articles for the online magazine. Data was collected by means of observations on participants and from semi-structured interviews. Results show that there is a reduction in the level of writing apprehension of the young English language learners and their change of attitudes towards writing. Thus, it is recommended that the integration of Authentic Learning Strategies in a mobile cloud computing environment be carried out by primary school English language teachers.

1.0   INTRODUCTION

Writing apprehension is a phenomenon which has been affecting learners in Malaysia (Abd Rahim, Jaganathan & Tengku Mahadi, 2016; Badrasawi, Zubairi & Idrus, 2016; Kassim, Daud & Daud, 2013; Singh & Rajalingam, 2012). The fear of the composing process is said to affect individuals in different ways and to different degrees, and educators have long been aware of this anxiety, which Daly and Miller termed as 'writing apprehension' (Daly, 1978). "Students of all ages can be apprehensive of writing, and apparently, this reluctance and dislike for writing can start at the young age of six, when children are just beginning to learn to write" (Feil, 2016). It might sound shocking but there are in reality, convincing reasons as to why young learners dislike writing from the tender age of six. There is too much emphasis on grades and the mundane monotonous writing classes are among the causes of writing apprehension Feil (ibid), Brown, Morrell and Rowlands (2011), Tyler (1994) and Auten (1983). Tan (2006), believes that this reason is shared by learners in Malaysia as discourse of examination is one of the dominant discourses in Malaysian school context. In addition, the discourse of examinations narrows school writing to what is expected by examiners resulted in compliance and tactical or strategic responses from the students.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

This study is a part of a more comprehensive study which seeks to explore the role of Authentic Learning Strategies (ALS) in a mobile cloud computing environment (MCC). For this preliminary case study, only two of the six research questions will be discussed in order to explore the issues: The research questions are:

(1) How does the ALS assist in reducing young learners' writing apprehension? and
(2) To what extent does the ALS contribute in changing the young learners' attitude?

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

At the primary school level, Malaysian young learners have to sit for the Primary School Achievement Test, also known as *'Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah'* (UPSR) by the end of Year 6. In 2016, several changes were made to the format of the English language paper (KPM, 2015). According to Ien, Yunus and Embi (2017), writing has become a dread for the young learners including the English language teachers with the introduction of a new format for English paper. The English language papers have since been divided into two papers; English Language Paper 1 or Comprehension Paper and Writing Paper or English Language Paper 2 (KPM, 2015). Young learners are evaluated a whopping 60% on their writing skills for Paper 1 with 100% weighting on their writing skills for Paper 2.

In vernacular schools, pupils' writing skill at the UPSR level was reported as far from satisfactory by Sia and Chuah cited in Samuel and Bakar (2006). This phenomenon is still prevalent today. The 'Pelaporan Pentaksiran Sekolah Rendah' (PPSR) 2018 revealed that the performance of vernacular school candidates in English language is much lower than other language papers in this type of schools (KPM, 2018). Table 1 displays the comparison of 2018 UPSR candidates' performance for writing in every language in vernacular (Chinese national-type) schools.

Table 1: Vernacular Schools UPSR Candidates' Writing Performance in 2018

Subject	Grade				
	A	B	C	D	E
English	14.86%	16.45%	24.17%	24.08%	20.44%
Bahasa Melayu	23.36%	17.24%	28.41%	17.20%	13.78%
Tamil language	31.54%	34.73%	18.42%	7.70%	7.61%
Chinese language	25.93%	24.34%	28.17%	13.54%	8.02%

Source: KPM, 2018

English language is the weakest subject with 14.86% candidates scoring grade A and 20.44% scoring grade E compared with other subjects in term of writing. Due to the heavy emphasis on the writing component, the English language subject has become one of the most feared subjects among the UPSR candidates (Ien et al. 2017).

In the UPSR examination, the young candidates are assessed on their ability to construct different written text types with a range of rhetorical styles besides being assessed on their ability to use the language functions for different purposes and the ability to write on the given topic (KPM, 2015). Since writing in the English language demands young learners to apply many cognitive and

linguistic strategies, of which they are mostly uncertain, young learners tend to perceive composing in English language as tedious and challenging (Maghsoudi & Haririan, 2013). The young learners' anxiety and uncertainty caused the ideas in their writing to be disorganised. The young learners might have ideas to compose in English language but they find transforming the ideas into grammatically correct written form a big challenge. In addition, Firmansyah (2015) claims that young learners faced difficulties in forming paragraphs to fulfil the task requirement, due to the lack of vocabulary.

Teaching methods employed by Malaysian English language teachers is argued to be one of the reasons which contributes to the difficulties in writing faced by young learners besides the nature of the writing activities carried out in the classrooms and the scarcity of authentic writing practices (Yunus & Chien, 2016). Since the teaching and learning of writing occurs in the classrooms and the teachers are the prominent figures in the writing process, the teachers could create a non-threatening environment in order to help reverse the young learners' 'nightmare' into a tolerable and enjoyable experience. Tyler (1994) believes that teachers could create an environment which is conducive to learning by incorporating certain techniques, tools, and attitudes into teachers' writing instruction. Such a view is also supported by Tackvic (2012) and Feil (2016) who posit that technology can be an excellent source for getting the apprehensive young learners to write.

Studies have shown that by connecting technology to writing, it increases young learners' motivation and improves their literacy skills as it connects to their lives. The idea is jointly shared by Ghavifekr and Rosdy (2015), Harmston, Strong and Evans (2001), Haswani (2014), Witte (2007) and Zandi and Krish (2017) who believe that using technology in writing classrooms provides young learners with an authentic learning experience and at the same time it can help to enhance writing skills and increase their motivation towards writing which eventually change their attitudes.

In the studies on authentic learning, Herrington et al (2006) and Herrington and Oliver (2000) suggest that the learning environments should: (1) provide authentic context; (2) provide authentic activities; (3) provide expert performances; (4) provide multiple roles and perspectives; (5) support collaboration; (6) promote reflection; (7) promote articulation; (8) provide coaching; and (9) provide integrated assessment of learning.

By acknowledging authentic learning environment, teachers could integrate ALS in MCC into the teaching of writing. MCC is a potential technology for mobile services which comes alongside the mobile applications and the emerging of cloud computing concept. Dinh, Lee, Niyato and Wang (2011) assert that MCC integrates the cloud computing into the mobile environment and overcomes obstacles related to the performance, environment, and security discussed in mobile computing. By integrating authentic writing tasks in the teaching of writing, teachers would be able to show young learners the relevance of their learning to their own lives and helps to improve their motivation towards writing, as tasks with value beyond school usually possess personal value aside from obtaining a grade (Scheurman & Newmann, 1998).

Irrefutably, writing is of utmost importance in young learners' lives besides writing for audiences such as the teacher and writing for real reasons. When young learners write for real-world relevance matters, they write for authentic purposes (Oldfather, 2002). Hence, there is a need to examine studies on authentic tasks and young learners' preference towards writing, in order to understand how to support them to become engaged, competent and enthusiastic writers (Jones, 2015). Nonetheless, there is a little literature in this area, specifically in the Malaysian context. In response to the gaps in the literature, the researcher undertakes this study to explore the role of ALS

in a MCC environment, and to investigate its contribution towards young learners' writing apprehension and their attitudes towards writing.

3.0   METHODOLOGY

3.1   Research Design

The researcher used qualitative case study to explore the role of ALS in MCC environment, and to investigate its contribution towards young learners' writing apprehension and attitudes. The researcher chose case study design because more than one type of data was utilised. Thus, according to Roller and Lavrakas (2015), questions should be framed in a way that allows for gathering of more than one type of information from a variety of sources, such as; participant observations and interviews. Yin (2014) outlined other characteristics of a case study, which include: (1) a bounded sample; (2) the researcher has no control over behavioural events; (3) researching a situation where the sample is trapped in the context and cannot be separated, and (4) the focus of the study is on a contemporary phenomenon.

For this study, the 'phenomenon' under investigation was the young learners' writing apprehension and the integration of ALS in a MCC environment into writing instruction was the 'contemporary phenomenon'. The case or unit of analysis for this study was 20 Year Five young learners from a small national-type Chinese primary school or 'Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Cina' (SJKC) in Kedah, Malaysia. The case study design was chosen because the researcher wanted to cover contextual conditions which were believed to be relevant under study but the case could not be considered without the context, which was the vernacular primary school, and more specifically the young learners who learn English as an additional second language (L2). It particularly explored how the ALS was integrated into the MCC environment and how the young learners used ALS for writing. Hence, the qualitative case study design was appropriate for this study (Yin, 2009).

3.2   Research Participants

Twenty young learners from an intact Year Five class were selected upon receiving approvals from the school head and their parents as the participants for this study because Feil (2016) claimed that learners of all ages can be apprehensive of writing, and the hesitance towards writing could start at the tender age of six, when the young learners were just beginning to learn to write.   In addition, Gungle and Taylor (1989) asserted that writing apprehension was a real problem among L2 writers, and this problem is still prevalent until this moment (Genç, 2019). As this study intends to collect more in-depth and rich information on how young learners integrate ALS in writing activities in the MCC environment using a mobile cloudbook, these young learners were deemed suitable as participants for this study.

All the 20 participants were asked to complete a simple survey form in order to gather specific information regarding the language(s) spoken in their order of importance. The researcher used pseudonyms for participants to preserve the anonymity and confidentiality (Crow & Wiles, 2008).

The researcher selected five participants for the interview based on their ethnicity and linguistic diversity, which is displayed in Table 2. The participants of this study also meet the following criteria: (1) They are national type Chinese primary schoolchildren who do English writing at least 60 minutes per week; (2) They have experience in using the mobile cloudbook; (3) They are conversant with Google Drive platform; and, (4) Their first language (L1) is not English. For the five interviewees, the researcher refrained from using pseudonyms and created a smoke

screen by attributing codes to each of the interview extracts (Saunders, Kitzinger & Kitzinger, 2015). This measure is taken to avoid revealing too much about the participants' ethnic and cultural background because it might compromise anonymity (Kaiser, 2009 in Saunders et al. 2015).

Table 2: The Interviewees' Linguistic Diversity

Participant	Ethnicity	L1	L2	L3	L4
YL1	Chinese	BC	BM	E	
YL2	Malay	BM	BC	E	
YL3	Thai	T	BC	BM	E
YL4	Chinese	BC	BM	E	
YL5	Indian	Ta	BC	BM	E

Note: (n=5), YL; young learner, BC: Mandarin, BM: Malay language, E: English language, T: Thai language, Ta: Tamil language

3.3 Research Procedure

Collaborative writing activities were carried out in an ALS integrated mobile cloud computing environment. The Year Five young learners collaboratively wrote descriptive articles for a publication in their class online magazine, Class eMags, during their English lessons. They learn the English language for 180 minutes per week since they are in vernacular primary schools where Level 2 students (Year 4, 5 & 6) are allotted 180 minutes in Standard-based English Language Curriculum for primary schools (SBELC) or KSSR in the Malay language (KPM, 2013). The young learners used a mobile cloudbook to create articles on Google Docs, the Google version of MCC. In this study, MCC provided the young learners with the data processing and storage services in clouds. The mobile cloudbook used, does not require a powerful configuration as all the complicated computing modules can be processed in the clouds (Techopedia Inc. 2019). Thus, the young learners are provided with a MCC environment to write collaboratively in groups. The MCC environment eased the collaborative writing process by providing an online collaborative writing tool like Google Docs, which basically functions as a web-based processor. Hence, the writing collaboration could be made possible with the young learners and their teacher sharing the same document online (Lin & Yang, 2013).

3.4 Data Collection

By having multiple sources of evidence, a case study could be ensured of its robustness (Green, Camilli & Elmore, 2006; Yin, 2009). In this study, data was collected through observations on the participant and interviews carried out. When the researcher could not discover the phenomenon under study through observations, Bogdan and Biklen (2011) suggested the interviewing method to be used in order to develop insights into the participants' understanding of the phenomenon. The researcher interviewed five participants and recorded each conversation using a mobile phone. Patton (2002) asserted that the use of voice recording tool is vital in ensuring that the researcher does not change the participants' words due to misinterpretation, either intentionally or unintentionally.

Observations on the participant were conducted during the first stage of the study. The observations were carried out over a period of four weeks. For this study, the researcher employed unstructured observation owing to the fact that it is more distinctive in term of qualitative data collection. As posited by Leedy and Ormrod (2005), unstructured observation allows the researcher

to shift focus from one event to another as new events arise. The researcher took field notes and recorded the observation using a mobile phone. Each session lasted about 60 minutes.

During the second stage of the study, the researcher adopted one-to-one interviews to collect the relevant data. The questions were formulated after considering a number of issues when interviewing young schoolchildren, such as the age, gender and ethnicity (Gill, Treasure & Chadwick, 2008). The researcher used the semi-structured interview approach (Merriam, 2002) and a uniform set of open-ended questions to obtain: (a) participants' perceptions, and (b) experiences with ALS, mobile cloudbook and online collaborative writing in a MCC environment. They were asked about their feeling towards writing in English, writing in a MCC environment and the integration of ALS in the teaching of writing. For example, participants were asked: (1) Do you like writing in English? Why? (2) How do you find writing using a mobile cloudbook? Why? and (3) Do you like writing articles for your Class eMags with your friends? Why? Each session took about 10 to 15 minutes.

3.5   Data Analysis

The researcher transcribed the interview data fully and had the observations data coded. The researcher then identified the recurring patterns and themes through multiple readings, listening to and watching the recorded sessions. The researcher came up with the themes after categorizing the codes using single words and phrases as labels for codes. From the identification of similar themes from multiple participants, the researcher derived the final categories. In ensuring rigour and trustworthiness of this qualitative case study, the researcher adapted several techniques purported by Lincoln and Guba (1985) namely thick description and peer debriefing.

4.0   RESULTS

4.1   Observations on participants

From the observations, most of the young learners demonstrated active participation in carrying out the writing tasks. The young learners were observed to work collaboratively in groups of five during class period, each from their own mobile cloudbook in the computer room; seeking clarifications in real time through the comments and live chat functions from their English teacher who was monitoring the class; and made direct edits in their group document as they were writing. Nonetheless, at times, they were seen hesitating and restless, turning around to consult friends, and calling out to their teacher.

4.2   Interviews
When asked about their feelings towards writing in English, almost all participants reported a repugnance to writing, and the reasons given were uninteresting writing topics assigned, fear of making mistakes and lack of self confidence in their writing abilities due to the limited vocabulary that they possess on the given topics.

All participants admitted that they loved English and would like to write in English if they were allowed to write non-academic texts such as messages, stories and comics, which are often more emotional or opinionated, less formal and not necessarily intended for their teachers. Therefore, the choice of topics and the nature of tasks play a vital part in motivating young learners to pursue writing in the English language. The young learners reported that writing imaginative stories, for instance, writing about happy events and celebrations, are seen as one of the motivating factors for the learners to engage in writing, as two young learners explained, "I like to write stories …I like to write about my birthday party and…I also like to write about places that I go … went

with my family." (Young Learner 1), and "I don't like to write about… pollution, trees, animals … and tough topics." (Young Learner 5)

Fear of making mistakes due to constant negative feedbacks given by teachers make the young learners shun writing and do not enjoy their writing classes, and the fear of making mistakes was cited by three out of five young learners as the causes for the reluctance towards writing. This is clear in the following remarks which a young learner made, "I don't like writing…in English because…I always make…made lots of mistakes. My teacher said … I careless … and I am no good …" (Young Learner 2)

Limited vocabulary makes the young learners develop self-defeating beliefs and it eventually leads to difficulty in generating thoughts and ideas when they were asked to write. The young learners expressed their concern over the lack of vocabulary knowledge in the English language. One of them said, "I try to write when my teacher asked …but I cannot because many … words I don't know. Sometimes, I ask my friends…and sometimes I ask my teacher …or check dictionary… but it very difficult." (Young Learner 3)

In response to the integration of ALS in the teaching of writing, three out of five participants expressed their liking for sharing work online and writing for real audiences and purposes. They said, "I like to share writing with my friends… I'm not very good… many words I don't know …my friend, Jon always helped me." (Young Learner 4), "I like to write to real people … I like when teacher asked us to write stories … she said the stories …. are for our class magazine… she said other people can read our stories." (Young Learner 5) and "I like to write messages to my friends …and I like to write email to my teacher… why … it because… teacher don't mark my work… and my friends like to read my messages." (Young Learner 2)

Young learners cited three reasons why they like writing articles for the Class eMags with their friends: (1) it is fun, (2) more ideas could be generated, and (3) friends could help them with vocabulary and sentence structures. Three out of five participants regarded the writing task as a very good activity, while two of them wished that they would be allowed to do similar projects in every class. One of the participants explained, "I like writing for Class eMags … it's fun … I can write with friends … we write about ourselves … we put our photos too." (Young Learner 3)

Three out of five participants mentioned the generation of ideas as one of the reasons they enjoyed writing articles for the Class eMags. The idea-generating technique was executed in a MCC environment where the young learners brainstormed for ideas and all the collaborative activities were enabled on a Google Docs platform, which allowed for peer online communication and ideas brainstorming and sharing to be facilitated. The young learners elaborated, "When we work together … many ideas come … in my group… Yee is very good. She always gives good ideas … Wan is good too … but her English not very good." (Young Learner 4), "We can chat online… we don't have to talk loudly. Our class was quiet … when I type something wrong, my friend will delete the words." (Young Learner 1) and "Teacher can check our work … very fast … teacher can give comments too … I like teacher's comment …she help us write well." (Young Learner 3)

5.0 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The study discovered that ALS is well received by the young learners and they found the writing tasks enjoyable because it provides them a real reason to write. This finding confirms the results of studies done by Gambrell et.al (2011) and Jones (2015). Similarly, they also found that the young learners' attitude towards writing changed remarkably. One possible explanation for the

finding of this study is that the authentic nature of the writing tasks, which required the young learners to collaborate and produce articles of their interest for a publication, carried satisfactory values for them to be motivated to write and thus changed their attitudes towards writing.

Fear of making mistakes was found to deter the young learners' writing interest conspicuously. Excessive red pens and negative comments given by teachers were cited as the causes why the young learners were reluctant to write. As a result, the young learners were inclined to distance themselves from the act of writing itself. Studies carried out by Buley-Meissner (1989), McIntyre and Leroy (2003) and Tyler (1994) found similar problems, which eventually leads to a bigger setback that is writing apprehension.

While negative comments and red markings given by teachers discouraged the young learners from writing, positive comments and suggestions to the editing provided on a Google Docs platform in a MCC environment, motivated them to collaborate and produce descriptive articles for their class magazine. This finding supports the study done by Rish et.al (2015) and Slavkov (2015) who found that students' writing and teacher's feedback serve as additional tools for others to refer to when they collaborate online in a MCC environment.

In addition, young learners were observed to be more inclined to write when they were put in groups and assigned real-world relevant writing tasks. Writing articles for Class eMags supported the integration of ALS as it provided the young learners with real-world relevant writing tasks where they could complete the tasks collaboratively. The young learners developed pragmatic teamwork and problem-solving skills, in line with the requirement of SBELC (CDC, 2011) by working together as a group to accomplish the tasks. This finding is consistent with studies carried out by Kamarulzaman and Hashim (2018) and Rog (2007). When young learners were given an opportunity to discuss with others about their ideas, they developed more confidence and became more enthusiastic to write (Roser & Bomer, 2005). Indisputably, other learners in the same group could become great sources of information for the authentic writing activities.

The integration of ALS in the teaching of writing was reported to be encouraging and well-received by the young learners. They were able to write descriptive articles on Google Docs platform collaboratively and it was in line with Herrington and Kervin (2007)'s suggestions of using authentic learning supported by technology. In addition, critical thinking and authentic learning occurred during the writing process enabled young learners to generate thoughts and ideas for the content of their descriptive pieces. The young learners found the writing tasks exhilarating as they felt the tasks were authentic and their pieces of writing will be shared with real audiences.

The ALS in a MCC environment plays a pivotal role in motivating young learners to write in English. The result of this study showed that young learners prefer to write for real audiences and on topics that interest them, and write collaboratively in groups with friends as it helps them to see the real purposes of writing. Additionally, the young learners voiced their liking for real time comments and corrective feedback offered by their teacher during the class.

In conclusion, the integration of ALS in the teaching of writing carried out in a MCC environment played a fundamental role in minimising young learners' writing apprehension level. Although the findings are encouraging but this study mainly focused on exploring the role of ALS in a MCC environment while the learners' products were not analysed. Future research should focus on examining young learners' writing content, which may help the English language teachers to gauge the effectiveness of the ALS.

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ELF: An English Language Project to support the pupils' language learning in the ESL Classroom

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ABSTRACT

English language proficiency has been one of the main concerns among teachers and parents in my school. Based on the data collected, it showed that the low level of proficiency among the pupils was greatly affected by their family backgrounds and the school environment. The pupils lack interest and confidence in using the language. In addition, most of the academic programs focus on raising the bar for the English language paper. To minimize this problem, the ELF project was introduced and implemented in the school. The project started in 2015 and was carried out every year at the end of semester two specifically for the level two pupils. It is a continuous project to support the pupils' language learning in English by providing extra activities outside of the classroom. Other than providing the platforms for the pupils to communicate using the language through the various fun English language activities and competitions, this project also involved guest participants from the neighboring schools. Every year, different themes were emphasized in this project to highlight the positive messages and boost the pupils' motivation as well as to embrace their uniqueness and talents. The outcomes of this project suggest that ELF has brought significant impacts on pupils' language learning especially in their confidence and engagement in the English language activities or lessons. It also creates a highly immersive English Language environment which indirectly enhances the pupils learning in English.

1.0   INTRODUCTION

In Malaysia, the English language is taught as a second language. It is a compulsory subject in all the public schools since Primary one. The English Language Curriculum for Primary School aims 'to equip pupils with basic language skills to enable them to communicate effectively in a variety of contexts that are appropriate with the pupils' level of development' (KSSR, 2017). The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) aligned with the Standard-Based English Language Curriculum (SBELC) was publicly introduced in 2013 to provide more internationally oriented view of English Language Education in Malaysia. CEFR is built on the foundations of communicative competence which aims to gear the pupils in becoming independently proficient in the English Language. Various programs are introduced to address the numerous learning issues and initiatives are taken to constantly improve the English language learning in all levels of education.

Sadly, there is a large number of pupils who are unable to go beyond the most rudimentary command of the language despite six years of English education in primary level (Zuraida Mohd Don, 2015). Azian (2015) states that attaining a reasonable proficiency in English language is still one of the biggest challenges to students in Malaysia. This struggle is greater in rural schools, especially in low-performing school. The majority of the pupils who are in the rural schools still lag behind those in urban school (Zuraida Mohd Don, ibid). The pupils are deprived of the opportunity to learn English language effectively due to the inadequate facilities, materials and exposure to English language (Ansawi, 2017). Therefore, there is a need to employ different strategies in teaching English to bridge the achievement gap between the urban and rural schools.

The study was conducted in a rural primary school in Telupid district which is situated in the 'heart' of Sabah. It is a small school with around 150 pupils (pre-school to Year 6) and the majority of the pupils are from the Dusun ethnic background. This paper attempts to discuss the issues faced by the pupils in learning the English language and the intervention taken to support their language learning through the ELF project.

1.1 Statement of problem

The English language subject has been one of the main concerns among teachers and parents in the school over the years. This situation seems like a normal issue faced by all schools all over the country. With the little experience I had, I did not look into this issue seriously. I carried out my normal teaching routine; plan, conduct and reflect on my lesson without extra efforts for a long-term impact. In my mind I believe that I will very likely stay in this school for three years only and will definitely be transferred back to my hometown. Little that I know that those hopeful dreams and veiled potentials in the pupils ignite the 'fire' in my soul after a few months of my posting.

During the annual Parents-Teacher Associations (in 2015), some of the parents brought up the issues of English language subject. They were very worried with their children's performance in the English language especially when their children were to sit for the Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah (UPSR) in Primary six. Even though the majority of the parents come from the low income group and have very little exposure to English language, they still hope the best for their children's progress in the language. Seeing the parents' concerns and their awareness on the importance of the English language made me ponder on what to do next. However, I felt that I was still a novice to make the next move, so I did not progress a lot. I just did the best in my part at my own pace. I was unaware that those group of parents play important roles in supporting the ELF project.

When I first came to the school, there was only one English language option teacher and she was the DPM (*Diploma Perguruan Malaysia*) graduate and has been teaching English in the school for almost 15 years. Most of the teachers in the school refused to teach the English language subject even though there was a lack of English language teachers. Thus, it was difficult to deliver impactful lesson and engage in collaboration among the English language teachers. It was a huge relief to the school to have another English language teacher when I reported to the school.

A few months after reporting to the school, a Choral Speaking Competition was organized in the district for the very first time. I did not have any experience in training a Choral Speaking team but was very anxious to give it a try. We gathered a team and had a few practice sessions after school when the competition was just two weeks away. The pupils were extremely nervous but they still gave their best. On the day of the competition, our school were announced as the 1st runner up against nine other schools. It was the best achievement so far and absolutely a breakthrough moment for the pupils. I was overwhelmed by the positive comments from the other teachers and the joy manifested by the pupils. This experience impacted the pupils the most and they were more motivated to learn the English language in the class after the competition was over.

This experience triggered me to have a deeper look into the learning issues of the English language. I realized that I need to provide the support that the pupils need to at least make English less foreign to them.

1.2 Issue of concerns

There were several issues among the pupils that contribute to their low proficiency level in English.

Firstly, the pupils had low confidence in using the language because the majority of them come from a family with little or no exposure to English language. They only gained the exposure to English language in school through structured instructions in the classroom. With the limited exposures, they were unable to cope with the language as they were so used to communicating in the local language among themselves even in the English language class. Though some of them mentioned that they love the English language but they felt awkward and uncomfortable to communicate the language as they were scared that their friends would laugh or tease them. This kind of behavior not only lowers the pupils' confidence in using the English language but also contributes to negative attitudes in learning the English language. The pupils lost their interests to learn the language because of the negative 'pressure' from their friends.

Next, there were no specific English language-based activities because most of the academic programs only focused on raising the bars for English language achievements in UPSR/examination. Consequently, the desired result for the examination was difficult to achieve because there were no continuous English programs to support the pupils' language learning. There was also no direct involvement from the parents or community to support their children's learning academically. Lack of engagement in English language-based activities in this school had minimized the pupils' opportunity to develop familiarity and fluency in the language.

There was also unbalanced emphasis in the development of the pupils' basic language skills. Most of the time, the listening and speaking skills were neglected in the learning process because the pupils were expected to master the ability in answering the questions in the examination. The teacher-centered teaching and learning process also contributed to this problem. Teachers do the talking most of the time and the pupils are tasked to copy down things from the board. The real meaning and fun part of learning were overlooked in the process. This indirectly hindered the opportunities for communication among the pupils which made it more difficult for them to practice using the language with each other.

Based on the data collected, there were three main concerns in learning the English language in the school which are; the low confidence level, lack of English language-based activities and unbalanced development of language skills. By taking into consideration these learning issues, I decided to provide the language support that the pupils need and introduce the ELF project.

1.3 Research objectives and questions

This study aims to address some questions pertaining to the implementation of ELF Project in the school. The following research objectives were developed as a guide to the inquiry;
a) To support the pupils' language learning in English through ELF Project
b) To determine the impact of ELF Project to the whole school (pupils, teachers and parents)
    The corresponding research questions are:
a) How does ELF Project support the pupils' English language learning?
b) What was the impact of ELF Project to the whole school (pupils, teachers and parents)?

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

The process of implementing the ELF Project in the school was supported by several learning theories which will be further elaborated.

The implementation of ELF Project is based on the theory of constructivism. As stated by Sharma & Gupta (2016), interaction with each other on the basis of previous experiences enables the learners to construct their knowledge themselves. Ansawi (2017) also mentioned that by associating to their prior knowledge, the learners will be able to construct new information through a contextualized process. Constructivism suggests that to relate to the material and make it personally relevant, students should draw on their prior knowledge and background (Mvududu & Thiel-Burgess, 2012). When the students do this, they will have a deeper level of understanding of the subject. It is the teachers responsible to understand, refine and further develop the students' prior knowledge so that the students could understand it within their own context. Through this project, the pupils are exposed to various language activities and gained new meaningful experiences in the language which they could optimize in their English learning.

Sociocultural theory stresses the importance of the learner's role as an active meaning-maker and problem-solver in any learning situation (Turuk, 2008). According to Ellis (2000) as cited from Turuk (2008), socio-cultural theory suggests that 'learners first succeed in performing a new task with the help of another person and then internalise this task so that they can perform it on their own'. Thirusanku & Md Yunus (2014) stated that when there is social interaction between a student and more knowledgeable individual in a specific subject matter, the zone of proximal development will occur. Interactions in a diverse setting are greatly encouraged among the pupils in this project for learning to take place.

In 2015, the Highly Immersive Program (HIP) was introduced to address the poor performance in English. It aims to increase the students' English language proficiency through an immersive learning environment. Each stakeholder (school leaders, teachers, parents and community) plays important roles in creating the English rich environment in the school. Through this program, teachers are encouraged to carry out event or activities that help to enhance the pupils' language learning. With the right implementation, schools especially in the rural areas would benefit tremendously from this program (Ansawi, 2017).

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

ELF stands for 'English Language Fair', a project which aims to support the pupils' language learning through various English-related activities outside of the English lesson. Through ELF project, it is hope that the pupils in the school will not just score excellently in examination but also able to communicate the language confidently when they have finished their primary school.

The objectives of the ELF project are;
   a) To create fun and meaningful learning environment
   b) To enhance the pupils' confidence
   c) To provide platform for pupils to showcase their talents
   d) To appreciate pupils' efforts and progress in all English related activities

The project was started in 2015 and carried out every year at the end of semester two specifically for the level two pupils. It is a continuous project to support the pupils' language learning in English by providing extra miles and activities outside of the classroom. Every year, different themes were emphasized in this project to highlight the positive messages and boost up the pupils' motivation as well as to embrace their uniqueness and talents regardless which background they are from. There were also different theme songs (with actions) used every year to add the festive vibe in this project.

Table 1. Date, theme and message for each ELF

ELF	Date	Theme (Song)	Messages
ELF 1.0 2015	15th September 2015	'R.O.A.R. with English' **'Ready On-set And Run with English'** (ROAR, Katy Perry)	A starting point to give exposure to the pupils on the uses of English Language through the various language activities
ELF 2.0 2016	9th – 10th November 2016	'Fighting to get Heroic Triumph' (Fight Song, Rachel Platten)	The theme emphasizes the strengths and talents own by everyone. It is more on winning against themselves. With the message of, everyone has their own capabilities. If they can win against themselves, they are the heroic triumph!
ELF 3.0 2017	14th November 2017	'Get Together through Songs and Stories' (We're all in this Together, High School Musical)	The theme highlights the spirit of togetherness among the pupils through their union in the songs and stories. It is hope that the ELF this will be a joyful and memorable event while immersing oneself through the magic of Songs and Stories!
ELF 4.0 2018	12th – 13th November 2018	I am who I meant to be, This is me! (This is Me, Keala Settle)	'This is me' is a rousing song of self-acceptance. It brings an inspiring message for people who had lived in the shadows their whole lives and for the first time wanted to feel love and acceptance. In this learning context, this song reminds each pupil that they are unique in their own way and should feel proud of their own identity.

3.2 Data Collection Method

The data were collected through observation, informal interviews and document analysis. Observations were made on the pupils' behaviors in the English lesson to see their attitudes towards learning the English language. Informal interviews were conducted to the school admins, teachers, parents and the pupils to gather the data on the English learning issues and impacts of the ELF project. The results for English papers in the examinations were also analyzed to see the effectiveness of this project.

3.3 Implementation of Action

This project is adapted based on the previous English program organized in the school and from my teaching experience in Teacher Training Institute. In 2014, the English panel of the school had organized an English Day, which was a half day program. This program was successfully conducted and received numerous positive feedbacks from the pupils and teachers. During my teaching training, I had the opportunity to join few series of English Language Fair (ELF) organized by the English Language Department and the TESL teacher trainees in my Institute. In this program, teacher trainees had the opportunity to conduct English activities and games for the invited schools (Primary and Secondary) around the town. This experience gave me the insight to adapt the same program that suited my current school's needs.

The ELF was thoroughly planned to meet the current learning issues in English in the school. Through the English Panel meetings, a working paper consisted all the detailed actions that would be taken along the process was prepared. A meeting with the school admins was held to propose the project. As this project was very new to the school, there were lots of loopholes that were drawbacks in the process but improvements were made through the years. When the Headmistress agreed upon the project, briefing sessions were held with teachers and parents to collaborate with them on this project. Then, invitations were sent out to the neighborhood school and the Telupid District Education Office. Briefing and practice sessions with the pupils were conducted every day after school except on Friday. This whole process of preparation took around one month (it usually started after the UPSR examination in September). One week before the ELF, we would do final preparation and rehearsal as well stage set up. This was when the teachers and parents worked together to prepare on things before the day came; English Language Fair.
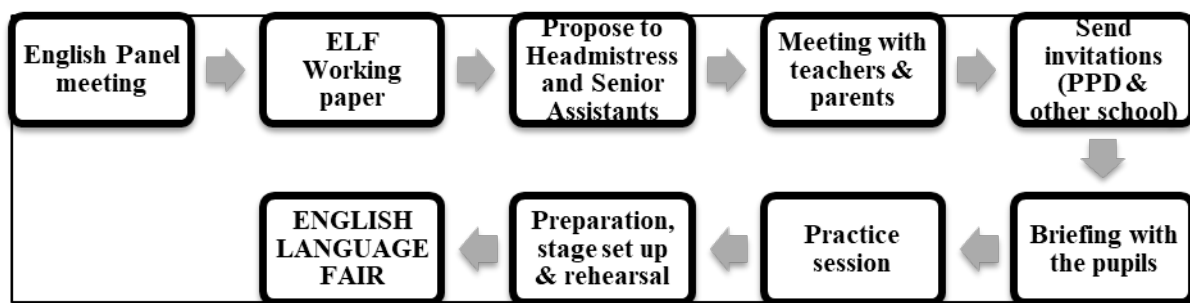
Figure 1. The implementation process of the ELF Project

On the day of ELF, various activities and competitions would be conducted to immerse the pupils in the language in an enjoyable setting. Other than providing platforms for the pupils to communicate the language through the various fun English activities and competitions, this project also involved guest participants from the neighborhood schools. We also collaborated Non-Government Organization (SAWO – Sabah Women Organization) for a talk and a local entertainer (Magician) in this project.

Table 2. The schools involved and activities conducted during the ELF

ELF	Schools Involved	Activities
ELF 1.0 **2015**	The school Other school 1 Other school 2	• Tongue Twister Competition • Language Quiz • Singing Competition • Creative Class Booth Competition • Educational Talk by SAWO
ELF 2.0 **2016**	The school Other school 1 Other school 2 Other school 3 Other school 4 Other school 5	• Tongue Twister Competition • Singing Competition • Creative Costume Competition • Outdoor Language Game • Drama Performance • Magic performance by Mr Jelly (Local Magician)
ELF 3.0 **2017**	The school Other school 1	• Action Song Competition • Drama Competition
ELF 4.0 **2018**	The school Other school 1	• Poster Making Competition • Scrabble Competition • Dictionary Race • Poetry Recitation • Musical Dance Competition • ELF Concert Night • Drama Performance

Starting in 2016, few pupils were appointed as the ELF crews. This aims to nurture the pupils' leadership skills as well as serve as role models (English Ambassador) to the other pupils. This group of pupils were actively involved in the whole process of implementation of this project. On the day of ELF, they would also take the role as the Master of Ceremony and had the opportunity to conduct the activities. In 2017, the English Wizard Award was introduced to acknowledge the pupils who have performed excellently in all the English activities and examination for the current year. These individuals demonstrate high level of enthusiasm in all English activities and recognize as the Role Model in learning English among the pupils.

4.0   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results will be discussed based on the corresponding research questions pertaining to the implementation of ELF Project in the school, Telupid.

a) How does ELF Project support the pupils' English language learning?

The ELF Project helps to enhance the pupils' confidence especially in communicating the language. During ELF, the pupils had the opportunity to perform and stand on stage which helps a lot in overcoming their stage fright. After ELF, the pupils are also more confident in becoming the Master of Ceremony during the school assembly and in any related English program. In the school, the morning assembly is conducted in English every day. So now, even some of the Level 1 pupils are capable to be the Master of Ceremony for the morning assembly. The pupils are also more confident in the speaking activities or any presentations during the English lesson.

On top of that, the pupils are engaged actively in the English class and activities because they already have the confident to communicate the language. In English class, they are more interested and eager to take part in the activities. For example, they will make their own props if they have presentation or role play. They also show interest to take part in other English activities such as Storytelling, Dictionary Race and Idiom Race. When the pupils have developed their confidence in the language, they are comfortable to use the language and more interested to learn the language. It is not an alien language for them anymore.

Finally, ELF makes the English learning fun and meaningful! This is the most important element in conducting the ELF. The pupils should not feel be pressured to learn English or stressed over their grades in examination especially for English papers. They should feel the fun in learning while picking up the positive values and appropriate skills along the way. There are variety of English activities conducted during ELF that the pupils could participate. When they find that English is fun, they will have that positive attitudes and motivation in learning English in the class.

ELF has indirectly supported the pupils' language learning in the classroom which is evident through the improvement of English Subject in the UPSR result in 2016 to 2018. Other than improvement in the passing grade for English subject, the quality (Grade A) of the result also increases through years.

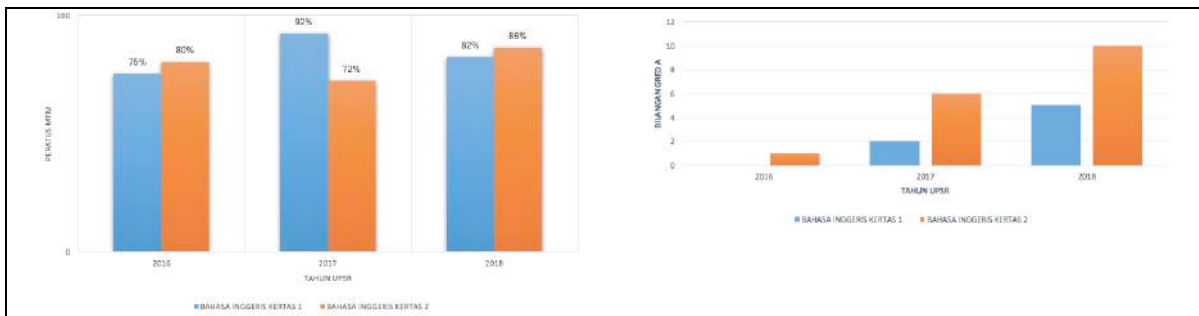| The percentage of passing in UPSR for English papers in 2016 to 2018	Number of pupils who scored A in UPSR for English papers in 2016 to 2018

Figure 2. The UPSR result for English papers in 2016 to 2018

b) What was the impact of ELF Project to the whole school (pupils, teachers and parents)

ELF provides platform for the school and Parents-Teacher Association (PTA) to work together. Before organising the ELF, we will have meeting between the school and parents. In the meeting, the parents would be briefed on the whole program and the things that they can do to make this event a success. Plus, it is also to make them understand why the school organised the ELF. Through the process, the parents were also actively involved in the preparation such as setting up the stage and canopy, painting the wall and training the pupils for the competition. They were also part of the committee in this project; food and drinks, PA system and taking photos. Most importantly, they come and support the ELF every year.

On top that, ELF also promotes leadership skill. We set up the ELF crew since 2016 and it continues up to 2018. They work together as a team and help the teachers in the preparation process. Before the ELF, the crew also conducted few projects which were the Ice cream fund raising project and house cleaning project. We also brought them together to send the letter of invitations to PPD and other school because it is part of the learning process. They get to interact and gain new experiences on how to invite others for an event. Indirectly, it gives them the sense of responsibility and ownership in making this event a success.

Finally, through this project, it created a highly immersive English-rich environment in the school. The main aim for this project is to support the pupils' language learning in English by providing extra miles and activities outside of the classroom. The English learning is not confined in the four walled room or through the formal structured instructions given in the class. It stretches beyond every platform that is available in the school. Since my first day of posting, there is very few activities organized in the district level for English and this school is located far away from the big city. Hence, it is a huge challenge to expose the language to the pupils other than what we have in the English class. Thus, we created everything from what we have around us in the school to immerse the pupils in the real situations to use the language in an informal setting.

5.0 CONCLUSION

The outcomes of this project suggest that ELF has brought significant impacts on pupils' language learning especially in their confidence and engagement in the English activities or lessons. It also creates a highly immersive English Language environment which indirectly enhances the pupils learning in English. Few limitations had surfaced along the process of implementing this project especially in term of financial, time and resources. However, through the ELF post-mortem, improvements were made especially for the critical areas. This project can be further explored in a different setting taking into consideration the limitations that may surface.

The experiences gained from this project do not only leave huge impacts on the pupils but also the whole school; teachers, parents and community. For the pupils; they know that they have

something to look forward at the end of the year other than facing the countless questions on paper and wondering what ranks they are in the class. Some children are not at school for the learning but they are to be loved and accepted in a welcoming environment. Once they get love and feel accepted, then teacher can work on their academic part. Rome was not built in a day, so does learning. After few years, the positive love towards English are now seen in every corner of the school, Telupid.

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Language Activities as a Platform to Incorporate Higher Order Thinking Skills Among Primary School Pupils

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KEYWORDS: Higher Order Thinking Skills, Group Activities, Individual Activities, Bloom's Taxonomy, Verbs

ABSTRACT

This study explored how teacher trainees used activities as a platform to incorporate higher order thinking skills (HOTS) among their pupils in the ESL classroom during their practicum. The trainees used both group activities and individual activities to encourage HOTS with varying results. The participants of this qualitative case study consisted of four teacher trainees who were in their final phase of their practicum. Data were collected through three main instruments; classroom observations, semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Results of this study revealed that (a) group activities made pupils to be active and responded at a higher thinking level, (b) well-planned individual activities encouraged pupils to think at a higher level, and, (c) thinking level was found to be closely related to lesson planning. HOTS in this study was identified based on verbs and the upper levels of Bloom's taxonomy.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Globalization and technology development have revolutionized education system worldwide. All over the world there are initiative to address the 21st century skills. In Finland, one of their focus on "citizen skills" is thinking skills, which includes problem solving and creative thinking meanwhile in United States, the Common Core Standards initiative includes the application of knowledge through higher-order skills. In Singapore, the education system is now trying to balance knowledge transmission with more explicit attention to 21st century competencies. Stewart (2016) stated that in Melbourne, Australia, educators are focusing on online assessment platform, which would include indices of creativity and critical thinking skills for self and peer assessment. One of the 21st century skills is critical thinking which is related to higher order thinking skills (HOTS). Over the decades, the aim of developing and enhancing students' HOTS has been a major educational goal (Fisher, 1999; Marzano, 1993; Supon, n.d; Zohar & Schwarter, 2005 as cited in Tan and Siti Hajar Halili, 2015). In recent years, education system worldwide has also developed framework on increasing emphasis on thinking skills as one of the 21st century skills.

In Malaysia, both the revised new primary school curriculum (KSSR) and the Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013-2025) have given great emphasis on fostering HOTS in the teaching and learning process. In the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (MEB), it is stated clearly "The emphasis is no longer just on the importance of knowledge, but also on developing higher order thinking skills" (p.E6). However, before the introduction of MEB, the Ministry of Education (MOE) had implemented a number of structural reforms; critical thinking through the Integrated Curriculum for Secondary Schools (KBSM) in 1988, Vision 2020 in 1991, which aspires to establish a scientific and progressive society, the Critical and Creative Thinking Skills (KBKK) in 1996, and Smart School Concept in 1997.

2.0   LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Thomas and Thorne (2009), HOTS take thinking to higher levels than restating the facts and requires students to do something with the facts — understand them, infer from them, connect them to other facts and concepts, categorize them, manipulate them, put them together in new or novel ways, and apply them to seek new solutions to new problems.

In this study, higher-order thinking is based on the concepts in the cognitive domain of Bloom's Taxonomy. This taxonomy suggests that skills involving analysis, evaluation and creating are of a higher order, requiring different instructional practices. Higher-order thinking is thought to be more useful because such skills are considered more likely to be useable in situations other than those in which the skill was initially learned. As such, Bloom's Taxonomy provides an important framework for teacher to use and to focus on higher order thinking. By providing a hierarchy of levels, this taxonomy can assist teachers in designing performance tasks / activities, crafting questions for conferring with students, and providing feedback on student work. It looks at the different cognitive levels of learning. This study is focused on HOTS which is the three upper cognitive levels; applying, analyzing, evaluating and creating. Incorporating these skills into the activities of the English language lesson would help pupils to think and perform tasks which requires higher order thinking.

Activities can be the platform to incorporate HOTS as stated by Pal (2015), classroom activities are proven to be very effective in terms of learning for both the adult and the children for better understanding. He further explained that through classroom activities, knowledge in terms of the information can be delivered interestingly among the students with that help of different classroom activities. Activities used during classes may contribute to making the learning permanent, creating positive attitudes towards the class, and attracting interest for the class (Camci, 2012 as cited in Celik, 2018). The incorporation of HOTS in the classroom activities would make the pupils think critically which is a very important 21st century skill.

The principles of constructivism are relevant in a classroom where HOTS is incorporated. In the constructivist classroom, the focus is on the students. The classroom is not a place where the teacher pours knowledge into passive students, who are waiting to be filled. In the constructivist model, the students are urged to be actively involved in their own process of learning. This student involvement is appropriate because the incorporation of HOTS through challenging activities would drive the students to act and think at a higher level. Teachers

provide students with opportunities to test the adequacy of their current understandings. Therefore, in the constructivist classroom, both teacher and students think of knowledge as a dynamic, ever-changing view of the world we live in and the ability to successfully stretch and explore that view not as inert factoids to be memorized.

3.0   METHODOLOGY

This study employed a case study approach. A case study approach was the most appropriate method of inquiry for this study because it provided a holistic view of the teacher trainees incorporation of HOTS. Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, (1990) defined case study as the detailed examination of a single individual or a single discrete social unit. Thus, this study is an examination of four participants' (teacher trainees) incorporation of HOTS in the activities that they carried out in their English language lessons in the ESL classroom.

Participants for this qualitative case study was purposefully selected from among the final year teacher trainees who are pursuing a degree in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) and who had completed their third phase of teaching practice. The sites chosen for the study were two rural primary schools in Sarawak, Malaysia. The three instruments used for this study were observation field notes, semi structured interviews and document analysis. The data collected from the semi-structured interviews were first transcribed and typed before they were analyzed. Meanwhile the data collected from the classroom observations were also typed to ease the process of analyzing them. Data collected from the three instruments were analyzed using Creswell's thematic analysis method to answer the research question.

4.0   FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Teaching and learning activities in the classroom is the core of any lesson carried out by teachers to get pupils engaged in the process of learning. The teacher's fundamental task is to get students to be engaged in learning activities that are likely to result in achieving the learning outcomes. It is helpful to remember that what the student does is more important than what the teacher does (Schuell, 1986). Activities are a significant part of any lesson in the classroom. In a typical classroom, a teacher usually carries out activities during the teaching and learning. However, whether the activities produce active or passive response from the pupils depend on the nature of the activities and what the teacher expects her/his pupils to do. If the teacher wants to incorporate HOTS in the lesson, he/she needs to plan activities that would challenge the pupils to think at a higher level.

In this study, the incorporation of HOTS was identified, first by studying these activities, then by looking at the verbs present in the activities. Finally, by linking these verbs to the four upper levels of Blooms' taxonomy; applying, analyzing, evaluating and creating. The linking process was important to establish the presents of HOTS in the activities carried out. Below are three examples how HOTS were incorporated in the ESL classroom' teaching and learning activities.

Table 1:   Incorporation of HOTS in Language Activities

Activity	Verb	Bloom's Taxonomy Level
The participant explains the next activity to them. He asks them to create a poster about "Steps to plant a flowering plant" using their own words.	create	Creating
Pupils are placed in groups of five. Each group is given 8 sentence strips. They are asked to read the sentences and classify according to their categories. These sentences are classified and categorized according to the different possessive pronouns	classify and categorize	Analyzing
Pupils were shown four pictures of occupations. Then teacher asked 4 questions: three LOTS questions and one HOTS question; *If you were an artist, what will you draw?*	opinion	Evaluating

The examples given in Table 1 display how the teacher trainees applied their knowledge of HOTS. In the first example, which was a group activity, the pupils discussed the task with their group members, wrote down the steps on "how to plant a tree?" This activity made the pupils to think and to organize the sentences in their posters. Similarly, in example 2, which was also a group activity, the pupils had to read, classify, and categorise the sentences which was also a HOTS activity. Finally, in example 3 was an individual activity where pupils were asked one HOTS question. They had to evaluate the question and give their opinions. Therefore, these activities were examples how the teacher trainees' knowledge of HOTS were demonstrated through the incorporation of these skills in the lessons.

The participants had introduced individual and group activities like bubble map, shape poem, mind map, question and answer, predicting, writing email, making a modal laptop, double bubble map, interview, writing postcards, compare and write, sequencing, rewriting, creating a scrapbook, and mentor-mentee in their lessons. These activities focused on verbs like construct, create, identify, give opinion, compare, contrast, organize, interview and construct and sequence. All these verbs are related to the four upper levels of Bloom's taxonomy. Teacher trainees' incorporation of HOTS through the various activities contributed to the lesson in more than one way. The contributions can be seen from the effectiveness of the lesson. Effective refers to how the activities had enhanced, encouraged and created opportunities for pupils to think at a higher level in the classroom. The elements of HOTS were integrated in the activities in this lesson and carrying out these activities made the pupils to be actively involved and think at a higher level.

Planning a lesson is a very important part of teaching. The teacher trainees used their pedagogical and declarative knowledge in planning especially when they want to incorporate HOTS in the activities that they carry out in the ESL classroom. The classroom observation in the two rural primary schools showed good lesson planning. Good planning was seen through the

implementation of the lesson. The difference between ordinary lesson and HOTS lesson is in the HOTS lesson as the participants incorporated elements of HOTS in the activities that they carried out in the ESL classroom. Good planning would lead to good activties that would eventually help students to acquire knowledge and skills. The construction of knowledge requires the input of knowledge and skills. Table 2 and Table 3 show the HOTS activities carried out by participants A, B, C & D in their lessons.

Table 2: Participant A & B's lessons and HOTS activities

LESSON	HOTS ACTIVITY	ELEMENT OF HOTS	TYPE OF ACTIVITY
1	Shape Poem	create/creating	Individual
2	Filling Bubble maps and constructing short sentences to form a paragraph & Email, organise and rearrange sentences to write a email	construct/applying organise/rearrange/applying	Individual
3	Predicting, based on a story, students predict what happen to the turtles & Modal laptop, creating a model laptop and construct sentences	predict/creating create/construct/creating	Individual Group
4	Question/Answer & filling Mind map	opinion/evaluating identify/applying	Individual Group
5	Double bubble map - students are asked to fill in the map to compare two different pets	create/compare/creating & analysing	Group
6	Mini interview -students interview classmates to gather information and construct four sentences	interview/construct/applying	Group
7	Creating postcards -students create their own postcards and write simple message on the postcards.	create/construct/creating	Individual
8	Compare and write -students and asked to compare two objects and construct sentences using demonstrative pronouns	compare and construct/analysis/applying	Individual

Table 3: Participant C & D's lessons and HOTS activities

LESSON	HOTS ACTIVITY	ELEMENT OF HOTS	TYPE OF ACTIVITY
1	Sequencing -students asked to sequence sentences strips correctly	sequencing /analysing	Group
	Comparing -students asked to compare two animals using a double bubble map	compare/analysing	Group
2	WH question -students answer 'Why' questions based on a story, answer not found in the story	opinion/evaluating	Individual
3	Rewrite a story -students rewrite a story using their own words	construct/applying	Individual
4	Sequencing -students asked to listen to a story and sequence the story correctly	sequence/analysis	Group
	WH questions -answer "why' questions based on a story and pictures	opinion/evaluating	Individual
5	Scrapbook -students create a scrape book about the characters based on a story. Then need to write about the character	create/creating	Group
6	Shape poem -students create a shape poem by transferring the correct information from a text	create/creating	Individual
7	WH questions -students answer 'why' questions by giving reasons	opinion/evaluating	Individual
8	'Mentor-mentee' -students talk about rules in playground and explain the rules to their friend	explain/evaluating	Group
	Sentence construction -students construct sentences using collective nouns	construct/applying	Individual

In this study, each participant wrote four lesson plans each. Participants planned activities which incorporated HOTS at applying, analysing, evaluating and creating levels. These HOTS activities were planned and carried out to encourage pupils to think at a higher level, to activate pupils' participation and involvement in the lesson. It is the teacher trainees' planning and their effort to incorporate HOTS in the lesson that brought forth lessons which enhanced pupils' thinking and participation. Teachers and teacher trainees must acquire knowledge of HOTS which is relevant and useful to them in teaching. Besides tacit knowledge, both their

pedagogical and declarative knowledge are vital in planning especially when they want to incorporate HOTS in the activities that they carry out in the ESL classroom. This is where Continuing Professional Development is relevant and can act as an important platform to upgrade teachers' knowledge. Leat (1999) stated that curriculum developers need to give close attention to teacher development.

The interview also revealed that the teacher trainees have the knowledge of HOTS and capable of incorporating it into their lessons through the activities that they carried out. The following excerpts justify the above statement:-

If I use lower order thinking skills (LOTS), like when I am teaching the topic 'animals', I can just ask the students to list out the animals from the text. But if I am using HOTS, I can ask them question like ,what type of animal you like to have as a pet? So, they would think and then I ask them why they want that particular animal to be their pet, they had to reason out the answer. So, it is not listing. If listing, it is LOTS, so when I am asking them to give reasons, that is HOTS.

(Interview 1/P1/ Lines 263-267/22.6.2016)

Because I want to produce a generation of pupils that can think critically and be at the same level as other pupils. I think HOTS is also important in solving daily life problem. Like they want to make decision in their life, real life situation, where they can think more critically.
(Interview 2/P2/ Lines 209-212 & Lines 321-23/22.6.2016)

Yes, because if there is HOTS, students are thinking at a higher level, they are doing much more elaborate kind of activities compare to they are just producing facts on just remembering facts. So again, the effectiveness of the lesson depends on what level they are thinking.
(Interview 3/P3/ Lines 188- 191/22.6.2016)

The activities that include higher order thinking skills, for example using grammar cards as an extention to a higher order thinking skill activity. I can use that cards as a media for them to express their opinion on why for wolves we used a pack of wolves, but not a school of wolves. Such questions would help them to think and respond at a higher level.

(Interview 4/P4/ Lines 265-270/22.6.2016)

The above excerpts were a clear indicator that the participants had knowledge of HOTS and can differentiate it from LOTS. They believe pupils should think critically and solve daily life situations and should be exposed to elaborate type of activities that require pupils to think at a higher level.

5.0   CONCLUSION

Another very important factor that encourages the incorporation of HOTS is group activities. Group and individual activities created more opportunities for pupils to be independent and creative. These activities encourage them to think, discuss, brainstorm and work out solutions as individuals and as a group. Group work opens more opportunities for usage of HOTS compared to individual activities. One of the steps recommended by Miri, David and Uri (2007) to improve HOTS among students is by creating opportunities for all students to think about their own thinking through group activities. Group activities are more student-centered than teacher-centered, which is a great platform for the incorporation of HOTS. However, all these are not possible without good lesson planning. The decision to conduct activities that would enhance pupils thinking and creativity are closely related to lesson planning. Teacher trainees must think and plan activities that would encourage pupils to think and respond at a higher level. Finally, in the word of Albert Einstein, "Education is not the learning of facts but the training of the mind to think"

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Understanding learner autonomy: An exploration of English language teachers' views and classroom practices

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ABSTRACT

The concept of learner autonomy has been extensively researched in education, including ESL. However, only few studies have been conducted to find out ESL teachers' views on their students' level of autonomy, their reasons for promoting autonomy, and how their classroom practices encourage it. This study looks into exploring English language teachers' views and classroom practices that shape their perceptions and understanding of learner autonomy as a concept. Fifteen secondary school English subject teachers in Sabah took part in this study. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. The data was coded, categorized and analysed based on emergent themes. The findings revealed that teachers' view their students' level of autonomy based on their ability to complete tasks, attitudes towards the lesson and proficiency levels. In terms of reasons teachers promote autonomy in their classroom, the themes related to teachers' personal understanding about learner autonomy and reducing students' dependency emerged. In classroom practices, teachers who encourage learner autonomy provide their learners with choices and freedom to dictate the lesson or classroom activities. The findings may contribute to a better understanding of how teachers' perceived and shape their understanding of learner autonomy. Training teachers on learner autonomy and developing interventions that could effectively reduce students' dependency on teachers are recommended.

1.0. INTRODUCTION

The concept of learner autonomy has been a buzzword in the education world. In the effort to produce lifelong learners, fostering learner autonomy should be one of education's ultimate goal. The concept of learner autonomy is originated from Europe and for a time, its relevance to educational cultures were questioned (Smith, Kuchah, & Lamb, 2018) and it gradually became a catchphrase in education as well as second language pedagogy and common goal of second language curricula (Ho & Crookallt, 1995; Little, 2010).

As our education system moves towards a more learner-oriented system and in developing 21st century skills for the learners, promoting learner autonomy to Malaysian ESL learners is necessary to ensure a sustainable, life-long learning experience or skill. Research in learner autonomy in general context indicates that teachers play vital role in encouraging or fostering learner autonomy to their learners or in the classroom (Compikgne, 1995; Little, 2007; Manzano Vázquez & Número, 2015). There are many roles and responsibilities to be

assumed by the teacher, ranging from being a facilitator to motivator for learners. Past studies and literatures on learner autonomy also highlights the importance of the teachers' role as the primary agent for fostering learner autonomy (Egel, 2009). Despite the breadth of researches and literatures on the concept of learner autonomy, studies that place emphasis on teachers' voices or perceptions and how their classroom practices affect or influence their students' level of autonomy are still lacking.

Studies on teachers' perceptions on learner autonomy has also been done in various contexts, mostly in tertiary education (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; Lengkanawati et al., 2017; Nakata, 2011). Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) found that teachers in a language centre at a university have positive perceptions on the concept of autonomy. Although most studies revealed that teachers have a fair understanding about the concept, little exploration has been done on the qualitative side of teachers' perceptions and practices on learner autonomy. Another gap that should be addressed on researches regarding teachers' perceptions and beliefs of learner autonomy, very few studies have been conducted to find out ESL teachers' views on their students' level of autonomy, their reasons for promoting autonomy, and how their classroom practices encourage it, especially in the context of secondary schools.

Hence, the main purpose of this paper is to explore several English language teachers' views and classroom practices that shape their perceptions and understanding of learner autonomy.

The research questions are as follows:
1. What are the teachers' perceptions about their students' level of learner autonomy?
2. What are their reasons for promoting autonomy?
3. What practices were used by the teachers to promote autonomy in their classroom?

2.0. LITERATURE REVIEW
2.1. Learner Autonomy

Learner autonomy is defined as learners being able to "take charge of their own learning" (Holec, 1981 as cited in Little, 2007). This ability, however, is not something that the learners were born with, rather it is an acquired skill (Holec, 1981). Holec implied that learners are responsible of their own learning by displaying a capacity to control important aspects of their language learning (Benson, 2013; Holec, 1981).

Since learning is a social process, Smith (2001) believes that an autonomous learner is able to work together or interdependently with his or her peers as well as assume responsibilities in his or her respective roles in the learning process. Learner autonomy, according to Benson (2013) is manifested in learning practices of the learner, which does not only stay in the classroom; it also takes place outside the context of formal instruction.

In order to fully understand the concept of autonomy, it is advisable to understand what learner autonomy is not. Little (1991) outlined five misconceptions about the concept of learner autonomy:
  i. Learner autonomy is not another word or term for learner's self-instruction. It is not limited to learning without a teacher.
  ii. In the context of a classroom, teachers do not abdicate his or her responsibility, it is a matter of letting the learners get on with things as best as they can.

iii. Learner autonomy is not imposed on the learners by the teachers; hence it is not a teaching method.
iv. Autonomy is not a single, easily described behaviour.
v. Autonomy is not a steady state achieved by learners.

Based on the misconceptions presented by Little, it could be summarised that learner autonomy is not an innate characteristic, rather it requires the teacher's guidance to a certain extent, where the teacher's role switches from an authoritative figure to a facilitative one and that it is not a teaching method that can be applied directly in the classroom.

2.2.   Learner autonomy in Malaysian context

In the Malaysian context, Yen Dwee and Anthony (2017) found that the concept learner autonomy is still at its early stages. In their qualitative study about language teachers' perceptions and practices, they found that the teachers have a fair understanding regarding the concept and there was a lack of focus in their efforts to promote autonomy to their learners. Yen Dwee and Anthony also found that the teachers faced some challenges that hinders them such as lack of readiness, passive students' attitudes and timing of English courses in the university. Januin (2007) in her study on distance learners in a university in Sabah found that new learners are not prepared fully to embrace learner autonomy and have a high degree of reliance on their tutors. Thang Siew Ming (2009) investigated autonomy in public and private universities in Malaysia and found that undergraduates in both public and private universities still preferred teacher-centred approach. Other studies on learner autonomy in the Malaysian education contexts conclude that most students in Malaysia still lack autonomy and are highly reliant on their teachers to spoon-feed them with information (Januin, 2007; Kaur, 2013; Siew Ming, 2009; Yunus & Arshad, 2015).

3.0.   METHODOLOGY

This study takes the form of a basic qualitative design. The rationale of employing the basic qualitative is to enable the researcher to explore how teachers would perceive or interpret the concept of learners' autonomy and how their perceptions shape their classroom practices in their attempt to promote autonomy to their learners. The overall purpose of this basic qualitative study is to understand how these teachers make sense of the concept of autonomy in their classrooms. Since a majority of the studies on teachers' perception utilises the quantitative approach, this study's qualitative approach is hoped to provide in-depth insight to teachers' perception and understanding on the learner autonomy concept.

3.1.   Background of Population & Participants

Fifteen English subject teachers in secondary schools in Sabah were selected using purposive and convenience samplings. The teachers came from four different secondary schools, located in urban, suburban and sub-rural area. All teachers from these four schools were invited by the researcher to join in the study and they accepted the researchers' invitation voluntarily. The background of the teachers can be referred to at the table below:

Table 1: Participants' demographics

Teacher's Pseudonym	Years of English teaching experience	Major	School
Shay	25 years	TESL	Urban area
Liew	20 years	TESL	Urban area
Mary	10 years	TESL	Urban area
Jude	11 years	TESL	Urban area
William	10 years	Science	Suburban
Wong	2 years	Mathematics	Suburban
Anis	2 years	Mathematics	Suburban
Wan	1 year	Science	Suburban
Ong	5 years	TESL	Sub-rural
Abby	8 years	TESL	Sub-rural
Constance	8 years	TESL	Suburban
Lara	2 years	Science	Suburban
Michael	12 years	TESL	Suburban
Joe	12 years	TESL	Suburban
Sham	11 years	TESL	Suburban

As presented in the table above, the participants' background includes their years of experience teaching English in their respective schools, their major and the location of their school. This study also includes teachers with non-TESL background to gauge additional information. The teachers' names used in this study are pseudonyms selected by the participants themselves.

3.2. Data Collection and Procedure

Data was collected using classroom observation, semi-structured interviews and document analysis. The semi-structured interviews were used as primary data collection method and it was conducted to gauge further understanding on the participants' perceptions of the learner autonomy concept. For classroom observation, the researcher assumed the role of non-participant observer to get a general observation of the teachers' classroom practices. The classroom observation was conducted on three teachers with their permission, to get the best understanding of the participants and site. Documents such as teachers' written feedback for students and other documents related to the study were also analysed.

The data collected was analysed using thematic coding. The interview data was transcribed ad verbatim, the researcher's observation notes was analysed based on emerging themes and a qualitative data analysis software helped in the coding and categorization of themes.

3.3. Data Analysis

Creswell's (2014) six steps of analysing and interpreting qualitative data was used when dealing with the data collected. The data was prepared and organized according to emergent themes. To obtain a general sense of the data, a preliminary analysis of the data was

done through reading. A thematic framework was then used to categorise the data. Prior to categorising, the data was reduced, indexed, coded and categorised according to themes (Ritchie, Spencer & O'Connor, 2003).

In this report, the data is presented verbatim in the following manner:

Participant's entry (Teacher A, Interview)

Teacher A represents the participant's pseudonym. "Interview" stands for data that was collected from an interview.

4.0.   FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The themes that emerged from the data were categorised according to the three research questions, namely teachers' perceptions of their students' level of autonomy, the reasons teachers promote autonomy in the classroom and teachers' perceived classroom practices that promote autonomy.

4.1.   Teachers' view on students' level of autonomy

The data suggests that the teachers perceived their students' level of autonomy based on their ability to complete tasks, their students' attitudes towards the lesson and their proficiency levels. The teachers found that autonomous learners are students who have the ability to work at a task independently or with minimal help from their teachers. These teachers also observed that students who are autonomous are able to complete the task as required.

> *Student had the ability to work tasks given on their own pace and style, I don't really have to guide them fully* (Mary, Interview).

> *Being able to do exercises given by referring notes given* (Shay, Classroom observation & written feedback)

> *Able to respond appropriately to task* (Wan, Classroom observation)

> *I noticed that they are able to complete tasks at their own pace.* (Zack, Interview)

Teachers whose students did not seem to have a level of autonomy that the teachers hoped were seen as "highly dependent" on the teachers. Most of the teachers claim that this happens in both rural and urban areas, more so in rural areas as they are highly reliant on teachers as their sole source of English:

> *Most students even in urban area, hardly can complete a task without assistant (assistance) from teacher. Teacher is consistently needed to tell them how to complete a task. This particularly applies to intermediate and low proficient students. (Constance, interview)*

> *Most of them are from rural areas and really dependent on the teachers as their sole source in learning English (Ong, Interview)*

In every task given, most of the students were unable to complete it without some guidance from the teacher. Students tend to wait for the teacher instructions/in-depth guide and most of them are unable to do the task/assignment on their own (Michael, Interview)

They depend on the teacher a lot to give them direct answers instead of them brainstorming ideas (Joe, Interview)

Most of the students need teacher to facilitate with their English language learning. (Shay, Interview)

They still need the teacher to explain things to them and still depends on teacher's cue or helps to solve problems (Wan, written feedback)

They depend on me too much on their learning and they seemed to have lack of initiatives to search on materials and information (William, Interview)

The teachers' responses above seemed to indicate a similar observation found in Yunus and Arshad (2014) where they observed that some students may not be ready to take responsibility to be independent learners and they could always be interpreted as lack of interest to the class as they might still be under the influence of their routine learning habits. Another similarity can be observed in a study by Pataraporn Tapinta (2016) in their study of Thai's teachers beliefs in learner autonomy. This study found that one common observation regarding students who lack autonomy is their students normally preferred to be spoon-fed in which they could mostly rely on their teachers and have the tendency to follow the teacher's explanations and instructions with little engagement in analytical thinking. The teachers responses in this study also further proves that most students are still highly reliant on their teachers as revealed by other studies on learner autonomy in Malaysian context (Kaur, 2013; Yunus & Arshad, 2015).

Students' attitudes and motivation are also important factors to consider according to the teachers. Some teachers observed that encouraging autonomy can help learners to be more motivated in their learning but an alternate view is also observed as even though teachers attempted to promote autonomy, their students are not motivated or interested enough to learn or cooperate. One teacher believes that in order for autonomy to be developed, the learners need to have personal effort in developing their learning skills.

It depends on the class environment. In some cases, the students are highly motivated to learn and in other cases, the students are not even interested in learning hence does not make any effort to learn or think by themselves. (Jude, Interview)

My students think that there is no importance in the learning of English outside of school" (Anis, Interview)

I notice that my students lack motivation and interests in the learning of English (Wong, Interview)

Students seemed to lack confidence in giving responses to the activities. (Anis, Classroom observation)

Students lack of interest in learning English becomes the major hindrance in promoting LA (Jude, written feedback)

These observations seemed paralleled with Yen Dwee and Anthony (2017) in their study of teachers' perception of autonomy in university English classrooms. The participants in their study believe that in order for learner autonomy to be successfully developed, students need to have eagerness and motivation to learn. Low levels of motivation and autonomy seemed to also relate with their learners' proficiency levels.

The findings also revealed that teachers also perceived learner autonomy as a concept that depend on the learners' level of proficiency. It was observed that the higher the proficiency level, the higher level of autonomy the learner has. Teachers who taught in mixed ability classes, which consist of intermediate to weak learners, seem to view their learners' lack of autonomy was due to their level of proficiency.

My students are generally weak in English and require much support from teachers (Ong, Interview)

They are quite weak in their basic (English), make them impossible to develop even in writing simple sentence (Abby, Interview)

Most of the students have low proficiency in English. They are afraid to use the language and only prefer to use the language during class and not outside of class (Constance, Interview)

I'm teaching low level proficiency students – and I find that weaker learners seemed to have poor motivation and lower autonomy than the excellent ones. (Wong, Interview)

The findings agree with previous studies on the relationship between proficiency and autonomy as proposed by Dafei (2007) in which there is a correlation between learner autonomy and English language proficiency. In terms of learner autonomy in English language learning, learners who possess good language skills also seemed to possess autonomy.

4.2. Teachers' reasons in promoting autonomy

As teachers are the main agent in promoting autonomy, it is important to explore the reasons why teachers promote autonomy in their classrooms. In terms of reasons teachers promote autonomy in their classroom, the themes related to teachers' personal understanding about learner autonomy and reducing students' dependency on them emerged.

I believe that when the lesson is learner-centred, they will learn more than having me to spoon feed them. (Lara, Interview)

I want them to be independent, not to depend on the teacher especially now that we are advocating PAK21 approach towards learning. (Michael, Interview)

I want my students to be able to learn by themselves without being too interdependent towards the teacher (Joe, Interview)

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They need to learn how to find answers on their own (Sham, Interview)

So that learners will be able to learn whenever they want to learn and they do not have to wait for the teacher to ask them. In this way, they'll be able to explore a bigger perspective (Constance, Interview)

I wanted to provide them the opportunity to explore and learn L2 according to their own pace (Shay, Interview)

Other themes that emerged in relation to the teachers' reasons to promote autonomy are students' improvement in which teachers believe that with learner autonomy, their students can improve their English language learning experience:

I believe that lesson can be sustainable if learners have autonomy (Ong, Interview)
So that learners will be able to learn whenever they want to learn and they do not have to wait for the teacher to ask them. In this way, they'll be able to explore a bigger perspective (Abby, Interview)

To ensure that learner understand their own learning process which will be useful to them and so our students will discover their own learning (Liew, Interview)

Promoting autonomy develops thinking skills and creativity. It reduces the follow-the-leader syndrome (Wong, Interview)

They remember things better and improve their language (Anis, Interview)

Other themes that emerged on the reasons why teachers promote learner autonomy to their learners is to prepare their learners for real life and to encourage their students to be self-sufficient:

It is pivotal for them to develop a sense of accomplishment in solving the problem that they are facing. (Jude, Interview)

To teach them to love the language when I give them free access to explore the wonder of the language. (Michael, Interview)

To prepare them with the real world task that they will venture in later on (Joe, Interview)

The teachers' responses above suggest that teachers in this study encouraged their learners to be autonomous as they believe that being autonomous or independent in their own learning is a vital skill for the students' English language learning experience. In addition to that, these teachers believed that if their students were fully aware of their potentials for learner autonomy, it would be a beneficial skill not just for English language learning, but also for the students' personal life.

4.3. Teachers' classroom practices that promotes autonomy

In classroom practices, teachers who encourage learner autonomy provide their learners with choices, flexibility and freedom to dictate the lesson or classroom activities.

Most of my classes consist of induction, content and practice in the lesson plan. I will let the students go wild with their imagination on the practice part to see how the content really absorb into their minds. (Ong, Interview)

I often times assign tasks that are not rigidly controlled in terms of process and results. Each student is given freedom to use their creativity. (Mary, Interview)

I ask them what activities they like and I incorporated their ideas in the lesson to make them learn English in a fun environment and not focus merely on exam (Abby, Interview)

These findings resonate with literatures regarding learner autonomy practices, in which teachers who encourage autonomy would provide choice to their learners. Asmari (2013) believes that learner autonomy can be encouraged by teachers through minimizing the evaluative pressure and by maximizing students' perceptions of having a voice and choice in the academic activities. The teachers' responses seemed to suggest their readiness to promote learner autonomy in their classrooms by minimizing their authoritative roles and playing a facilitative role in their classroom. This is further shown by the teachers' effort in their classroom practices and willingness to relinquish control in the classroom.

5.0. CONCLUSION

The teachers' views on their students' level of autonomy, their reasons to promote autonomy in their classroom and their classroom practices suggest that these teachers believe that learners' autonomy can be fostered and is beneficial for their students. Although the teachers involved in this study displayed a fair understanding of the learner autonomy concept, their attempts at promoting it in their classrooms would need additional exploration; perhaps it would require a framework or a model to guide them to encourage autonomy to their learners. Learner autonomy can be trained through strategy training and learner training (Dafei, 2007) and the findings in this study could be the basis of a framework for an instruction module for teachers or students. The findings contribute to a better understanding of how teachers perceived and shape their understanding of learner autonomy. Training teachers on learner autonomy and developing interventions that could effectively reduce students' dependency on teachers are recommended.

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Building Students' Critical Thinking with Questioning Exploration

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ABSTRACT

students to be a critical thinker in their process of writing is hardly a challenge. As an effective process of writing depend on how well they develop their critical thinking skills, helping them build the critical thinking in writing is considered as a way to make a correct judgment independently and create an environment that raises their best writing. The current study attempts to investigate whether the use of questions could generate students' critical thinking in their writing process. The participants were 38 English Department students who encountered argumentative writing class in University degree. The subjects were assigned into a mix method on a quasi- experimental study involving pretest - posttest with some features of semi structured interview to know their level of satisfaction from the gained score. The results of the study showed that the significance of exploring questions in helping students' critical thinking for meaningful learning, especially in the connectivity and cohessivenes of their writing product and also the flow of the sentences.

1.0   INTRODUCTION

Some studies have indicated on the importance of critical thinking students have for their learning process. The qualification on getting an effective learning and productive living needs creative thinking (Belghiti K et al 2017). Students will get benefits in many areas of their academic life such as in reading activity, writing activity and also when they are working with peers (open university, 2008) if they entail the critical thinking skills in the decision making. Based on Bloom's Taxonomy, students used critical thinking and is supported by data through argument and integrated reflection during scientific analysis.

In writing, developing ideas is one way for students to fight the problems with writers' block. Writing needs procedures of analysis and a great deal of organization, as well as creativity, eventhough the concept for writing are already in their head . Therefore, how well the developing of the critical thinking will affect on the process of effective writing. Thinking critically is a step to create strong arguments and to present and to justify based on the evidence evaluated (open university 2008). One way to achieve this is through questioning. The function of questions generate students to entail in a process which force them in thinking, constructive in learning, and keeping in content, if drained in such a way in order to beat the process of thinking and stir the idea (Smith, Rook, and Smith , 2008, p. 44). Tapper 2004 (in Vincke 2012) highlights the critical thinking as the name of the ability such as do the selection, make an evaluation, do an analysis, create a reflection, produce a questioning, do inference and judgment. Moreover, Santoso et al (2017) asserted that students' critical thinking skills has great connection with the ability on asking questions, where the levels of questions which play a significance function in critical thinking skills are on the levels of predictive, analysis, evaluation, and inference.

Previous study showed that the producing of critical thinking skills covers in some activities involving well- designed assignment (Cavdar, Doe 2012), problem- based learning (Chen & Li 2015), topic familiarity (Indah 2017) and the use of peer evaluation rubric in teaching (Daud 2012). In addition, a number of study has also expanded the use of teacher questions in the development of critical thinking skills. Posing teacher- led questions and answer approach that is considered as a good application on helping students in expressing the critical thinking skills (Lee, Da En 2015; Horowitz 2007; Etemadzadeh et al 2012) . However, there has been less research on applying students self questioning in developing the critical thinking skill. Therefore, this paper intends to investigate the development of students critical thinking from their self questioning in the writing performance which aims at the students' advance skills in questions formulation, actively in listening bustle to the others' point of view, identifying a good questions, constructing the difference various types of questions, expressing briefly their opinion, delivering argument, accepting others' ideas, constructing the emphaty.

2.0   LITERATURE REVIEW

The theories presented in this paper will identify the different concept on critical thinking in many studies and discuss its role in writing skill.Questioning as part of the modes of critical thinking skills will also be explored in assissting the development of writing skill.

2.1   The Description of Critical Thinking and Questioning

The views of critical thinking converge from some factors such as the individuals' capability to think and to decide independently, building the skills of argumentation, making correct judgment, border on problems from various points of view, has questioning path that construct the skills on higher order thinking and set in the middle point of an individual (Shirkhani & Fahim 2011, Cojocariu and Butnaru 2014, Islek & Hursen 2014). Therefore, the questioning approach can be undebatable as a powerful teaching method . Horowitz 2007 stated that the increasing of students'knowledge and their way of learning are influenced by the scope of the questions the teachers had on the improvement of the thinking critically and the ability of problem solving. When trying to support students' demonstration of their higher order thinking skill, questions section is considerably challenges to the learning environment. In order to improve thinking, reasoning, and critical thinking, Aflalo (2018) stated that it is important to develop questioning. The characteristics of questions make the individuals on having the cognitive demand to respon them (TEAL 2013). The best system for classifying the cognitive level of questions is known with Bloom's Taxonomy proposed in Aflalo (2018) which offers a hierarchy of questions ranging from knowledge questions, expressing the lowest order of thinking, to comprehension questions, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.This Bloom's hierarchical levels is also stated in TEAL (2013) that questions are classified into lower order questions that require students to remember the previous materials teachers gave to them and higher order questions that require students to impose the previous informations they have learned to create the answers in logically reasoned evidence. The use of that both lower and higher order thinking skills are crusially needed in the process of teaching and learning.

2.2   The Role of Critical Thinking in Writing

The attention of integrating writing and critical thinking in teaching have become the demand of many researchers as it is considered that this possible integrating plays an

important role in teaching and learning process . As Islek and Hursen (2014) indicated that the important of critical thinking in education is to teach the students to be productive, creative, and to have critical thinking ability. In order to get well- designed writing, students are encouraged to reconsider thoughts, critically evaluate assumptions, and perfom subtantive revisions of their writing (Cavdar & Doe 2012). Therefore, it is important for teachers to understand the interconnection of the research as a conceptual foundation for embedding critical thinking and writing (Murray 2016).

Over the past few years, the articulated importance of connecting critical thinking with writing became the intention of many researchers as many teachers have expressed their dissatisfaction with the students' competence in both skills (Dong 2015). Jacobson and Lapp 2010 (in Murray 2016) find that eventhough the students are able to make sentences and summarize basic information, they are still struggle with the ability to arrange and produce ideas in a logical manner, to produce a logical connection of informations within a paragraph, and to analyze the causes and purpose solutions of problems critically. The lack of logic and critical analysis in students' writing stimulate many reasearchers to concern about the writing proficiency as well as the critical thinking competence. Many college students complete their study in the higher educational institute without obtaining the obligatory competence in writing and critical thinking (Borglin 2012).

The skill of critical thinking entail with another skill of the language skill. Just like Indah (2017) indicated that the application of critical thinking skills can be used to measure other language skills such as speaking and writing. The critical thinking skills inspire the researchers as the major point for their investigation among students of numerous levels and disciplinary background (Dong 2015). Sharadgah (2014) also claimed that the students' critical thinking skill will considerably developed when they try hardly with writing task. This point offers the critical thinking and its skills may build up the students' process of writing as they can boost the individual language learning.

The literature about writing in relation to critical thinking is in line with the findings of some study. For example, Indah (2017)) stated, the better contemplation of students' critical thinking derive from the more advanced writing skills they acquire with. It is also revealed from Dong (2015), The improvement of students' critical thinking scores is effectively produced from the result of their critical thinking in writing ability. Moreover, Cavdar and Doe (2012) encourage other instructors to acknowledge the writing approach to promote the advancement of better critical thinker.

3.0   METHODOLOGY

The objective of this study was to assess the effects of questioning exploration to build students' critical thinking in their writing performance. In particular, the researcher examined whether the use of the questions exploration, in students' writing process, would impact on their written product.

The design of this study used the mix- method approach, both quantitative and qualittive, and the data from both forms of research were analyzed. The quantitative component in this study was in the form of rubric- based assessment from argumentative writing product. Therefore, first, a pre test was conducted for checking participants' competence to write using conventional method with outlining as the base of developing concept. Then, participants were treated using the strategy on questioning exploration . For

the experimental session, students were directed by using the questioning exploration through the guiding from Bloom's Taxonomy where the students were instructed to develop the questions from the lower order questions into the higher order one. Afterwards, the post test was administered in both groups to figure out the advancement of the students' learning.

The aim of the qualitative design was to see insight of the students' perception toward the use of questioning exploration. The data collected were from the classroom observation and the semi- structured interview to measure thestudents' perceptions, understanding, and other purposes like students'' inner world'' which cannot precisely recognized and evaluated.

3.1 Instruments
3.1.1 Pre-Test

The pre- test was adopted to determine students' proficiency to write an essay. In the pre- test, the students were provided a topic where they had to produce an essay based on the topic. In this session the students used traditional method such as outlining and mind mapping for developing ideas of their essay.

3.1.2 Treatment

The experiment of using questioning technique, in the first treatment, was introduced different types of questions from Bloom's taxonomy guide to write questions and was explained on how to use it in gaining information for their writing argumentative essay. It was greatly important to give the information and explaination in order that students could receive clear interpretation about how to work with questioning exploration. For the other treatment, a topic was delivered to participants along with the Bloom's taxonomi guide questions where they had to construct their own questions that associated with the topic given. After compiling the questions that covered from the lower order to higher order thinking skills questions, the students were given a chance to find the answer by various ways such as asking the questions to some different friends, lectures, and other sources. Through this way, the students were treated to be critic on investigating the evidance for and against different ideas, theories, and so on, consider alternative perspectives and explanations, come to an informed judgment from the proper evidence, and finally capable on giving logic arguments for the attained decision.

For the conventional method , a directed writing was given to students were they had to write an argumentative essay based on the developed outline. However, they had to write and develop everything from their own ideas.

3.1.3 Post-Test

After finishing the lesson, a post- test was administered to measure the students progress in writing process. In order to acknowledge the validity and the reliability of the pre-test and post- test as well as the treatment sessions, the materials such as selecting a topics and questions explorations were selected as the instruments for this research.

3.2 Participants

The second grade students of English Department from Nusantara PGRI Kediri University were the target population of the study who took argumentative writing class. By

choosing the upper grade achievement of writing class, this means that the students had already encountered the basic skills of writing on developing paragraph writing and essay writing as well. The total number of 38 students were participated in the experiment class consisted from28 female and 10 male.

4.0   DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The main question in this study was whether the use of questioning technique would generate students' critical thinking to improving students' writing skill. The result of the post-test suggested clearly that the respondent in the experimental session who were to bare to writing by using questioning technique demonstrated a remarkable improvement in post- test compared to those who were used the conventional method as the gaining ideas in writing. Therefore, the result investigation have also explainedthe research questions that questioning exploration technique can be used to help the students to promote their critical thinking skills in writing compared to conventional method. The difference of the pre- test and post- test were listed in the following table:

Table 1: Differences Pre-Test and Post-Test Achievement

No.	Group	Pre- test	Strategy	Action taken	Post- test	Differences
1	Control	65%	Guided writing Instruction	Topic with outlining	65%	-
2	Experimental	65%	Questioning technique Instruction	Topic With questioning and organizing ideas	90%	18%

In the application, the students were able to work with the technique tought in the process of experiment by developing the questions given from the prompt of Bloom's taxonomy as the guided questions that they could built from the lower order thinking skills through the highest order thinking one. They got the chance to choose and develop by their own as long as the questions developing would carry on the parts of the critical order thinking skills that shown in Bloom's taxonomy. After compiling the questions that they have considered about, they would get the answers by asking friends, reading from various sources, and might also posing to the rightfulperson. In this process, the students shared their knowledge and tried to identify and decide the proper answer to respon their questions from the level of knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. It was found that the students were actively engage in the process and they kept in being good participation in the writing process as well . In addition, they were actively involved in the meaningful communicative language and classroom activity.

Lastly, the result of the interviewed session revealed a positive responses from the students that they become more active in the writing class and more on getting the ease way on gaining information to developing and organizing the ideas on writing. Moreover, the students felt comfort in the process of writing as they could easily complete the details of the topics given.

5.0   CONCLUSION

The most common reason why writing regards as the most difficult skill in learning language is lacking of ideas. Based on the observation, the students become passive participants in the learning process and writing became the low skill students accomplished. Due to these reasons, questioning technique was utilized to boost the students to think critically and actively participate in writing activity administered in the classroom. Questioning plays a very essential role in teaching and learning which may build students' critical thinking skills.

By utilising questioning technique in teaching writing skill, students' critical thinking skills have been developed. It is proven by the significant development in post- test by the experimental , which illustrated a weighty increase from 65% to 90%. It showed that by questioning technique to the experimental group, the students were more confident and their critical thinking was stimulated by analysing and deciding the answers they got from the developed questions. The students were also engage with participating in the process poses and actively involved in a meaningful communicative language while the activity was administered in the classroom.

As a conclusion, the use of questioning technique in teaching writing had a good backwash on students' writing, as it could change the students' perception towards writing from passive participant to active participant during the learning process. Moreover, questioning technique assised them to raise their critical thinking through some phases as they learn how to organize and develop their existing ideas in writing through the surroundings supports. It was also proven that using questioning technique to teach writing is more productive compared to conventional method one.

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The Application of Blended Learning in a University Writing Course – Gains and Concerns

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ABSTRACT

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

1.   INTRODUCTION

Blended learning has found its way to become a common practice in most developing and developed countries where technology plays an important role in any areas of society. In the era of emerging technologies, learners, especially the young ones even go beyond teachers and educators in aspects of practising and utilising new forms of technology. Prensky (2001) claims that there exists a widening gap between teachers and learners as the formers feel uncomfortable adapting their teaching styles to well fit the diverse and trendy demands of the latter.

There have been various dimensions and methods to describe the term 'blended learning'. According to Stein and Graham (2014), blended learning is defined as "a combination of onsite (i.e. face-to-face) with online experiences to produce effective, efficient, and flexible learning". It is obviously seen that this form of learning appears to open up a new horizon of knowledge and opportunities for all the teachers and learners involved.

With a hope to verify the effectiveness and possibilities of this learning mode, a variety of research studies have been carried out. In 2012, Pop and Sley aimed to maximize the efficiency of EFL learning in a class-size project. They combined the asynchronous elements including self-paced asynchronous writing and speaking tasks and collaboration via writing blogs. The outcomes revealed that the opportunities to collaborate and work outside classroom boundaries help students generate their satisfaction and enthusiasm in communicating in the target language. Adas and Bakir (2013) explored how blended learning works for their university writing class. The experimental study involved sixty Palestinian students during a semester study using an online tool "Moodle". A few tasks required by students include posting their feedback to a given paragraph by teacher as error recognition; submitting a paragraph written by themselves on a given topic; and giving opinions to a piece of postings. The t-test results showed that the experimental members enjoyed the online working experience, improved significantly their writings using topic sentences, spelling and grammar, punctuation and produced better coherent works. In the same year, Ferriman (2013), hoping that blended learning would be a compensation for the problem of class-size, conducted a quasi-experimental study to compare the writing performance of two groups, each with fifteen undergraduates. However, the outcomes of the experimental group, exclusively treated with the online discussion boards for document sharing, personal messaging and conferencing, were not statistically dominant.

As blended learning involves the use of technologies in various forms, researchers have also been trying to explore different possibilities of technological innovations, software and applications. Keles (2012) gave twenty-four elementary teachers instructions on mind mapping techniques, then interviewed them on a six open-ended questions for their viewpoints. Results indicated that mind mapping helped teachers perform better in planning and evaluating lessons, giving instructions and making the lessons interesting. For students, the usefulness of mind maps involves solving problems, generating ideas, enriching vocabulary, sharpening reading skills and preparing for presentations (Buran and Filyukov, 2015). As for the effectiveness of using Facebook as a component of blended learning, Tananuraksakul (2014) conducted a qualitative research study with fifty-three students in a university writing class in Thailand and found that Facebook can be used as a blended learning tool and platform to learn with, not to learn from. According to Majid, Stapa and Keong (2015), when used as a tool for blended scaffolding strategies and a platform for technology aid, Facebook is proven to help students improve the writing process and writing performance. These scientific works act as firm grounds to the belief that blended learning is an indispensable component to language learning in the time of technology revolution. However, what to blend and how to blend to fit the purpose of teaching and learning still remain a question for any educators to answer.

This small-scaled study was conducted at International University – Vietnam National University, HCMC in an attempt to find out the effectiveness of blending the most common practices of communicative language teaching (traditional method) with the trendy online applications or software into a writing class of thirty-two intermediate students.

2.   METHODOLOGY
2.1   The samplings

Thirty-two freshmen of an intensive English 2 writing class, with the English proficiency at intermediate level were selected. Upon completing intensive English 1, these students acquired basic grammar and structures and were able to write full paragraphs of about 150 words in the genres of giving narration, description or opinion. Their mean score for intensive English 1 writing stayed at 59.63, with individual scores ranging from 35 to 71.

Findings from the initial paper survey on the first class meeting revealed that all of these students knew very little about blended learning. Some may have attempted to get online, searching for sample materials but they did not receive formal instructions on how to utilise the effects of this learning mode.

2.2 The procedure
2.2.1 The orientation

On the first class meeting, the students were informed of the course length (13 weeks) and the end-of-course target of TOEFL iBT of at least 61, which required much of their struggling to achieve. Therefore, students would be exposed to and get involved in a variety of traditional classroom practices (e.g. brainstorming, discussion) and collaborative blended learning activities (e.g. mind map presentation, online readings, Facebook group postings) so as to improve their English essay writing competence (Challob, Bakar and Latif, 2016).

Students were then divided into eight groups of study. A Facebook group in secret mode was created and students were added to the group to get ready for the intensive sessions of the course.

2.2.2 The course components

In order to maintain flexibility and variety of each class meeting, different components would be mixed to fit the objectives of the lesson. In general, the course components include the following:-

a.   Discussion sessions
Students had discussion sessions in most class meetings as group work or collaborative learning to help boost the students' talking time and lead to more student ownership of responsibility for that learning (Lowman cited in Laal, Laal and Kermanshahi, 2012). To offer students more exposure, various techniques of group formation including traditional and technological applications were used (e.g. random paper notes, https://flipquiz.me/grouper, https://www.randomlists.com/team-generator).

b.   Online readings
With the provided topic for the next class, students in groups searched for relevant reading passages online. They chose the passage that they favored, then made a mind map summarising the key information and posted the passage onto the class Facebook group. On the next class meet, groups took turns to give the mind map presentation to the whole class. The class then voted on the best presentation of the day.

c.   Brainstorming sessions
Brainstorming sessions occurred in almost every class meeting. Students worked together to discuss and gather ideas for some specific topic. They then made a mind map summary of ideas before it was rotated to various groups for revision or adjustments. Various techniques were used for generating groups.

d.   Mind map presentations
With the information taken from the online reading or group discussion, students in groups made a mind map with decorations depending on their creativity. Everyone in the groups took

charge of one part of the presentation, got ready and together delivered the presentation to the whole class.

e. *Essay analysis*

Students had frequent opportunities to work in groups, pairs or individually to analyze a part (thesis statement, introduction, body paragraph) or a complete essay for error recognition or modification. Essay analysis could be in forms of paper work or a blended Facebook posting.

f. *Facebook group*

This acted as the main channel for interaction between teacher and learners throughout the course. In addition to seeing announcements and reminders, students posted their works, read other works and gave comments or corrections and read teacher's corrections. Also, they could post the online reading passages, the collection of vocabulary they learn together with the definition and examples, and etc.

g. *Vocabulary games*

To break the boring atmosphere of many traditional writing classes, students joined a variety of traditional pen and paper or technology assisted games such as hangman, hot seat, running dictation, Kahoot, puzzle.

h. *Quizzes*

A few quizzes were given to test students' progress and vocabulary at various stages of the course. Quizzes (in Google forms) were posted onto the Facebook group to fit students' interest in technology and to go green for the environment.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

All the students did the questionnaire at the end of the course. Data was collected and analyzed with major findings displayed in the visuals below.

Table 1: The ratings of usefulness of each component

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

The general ratings of the usefulness of each course components (Table 1) gather mostly at 'useful' and 'very useful' with figures for Essay analysis topping 90%. Still, 3.1% is witnessed at 'very useless' for the online quizzes. This means that all the components of both traditional and online learning modes showed their usefulness in helping students perform well throughout the writing course. This lays grounds for the belief that cooperating these components in the course is a smart choice.

Table 2: The benefits of discussion sessions

Benefit	Value
Enlarge the range of vocabulary	16 (50%)
Learn grammar and expressions	14 (43.8%)
Enrich ideas for specific topics	17 (53.1%)
Recognize the logic in organizing ideas	14 (43.8%)
Build up confidence	11 (34.4%)
Enhance collaboration among friends	20 (62.5%)
Enhance communicative skills	21 (65.6%)
Enhance negotiation skills	14 (43.8%)
Help remember ideas better	20 (62.5%)
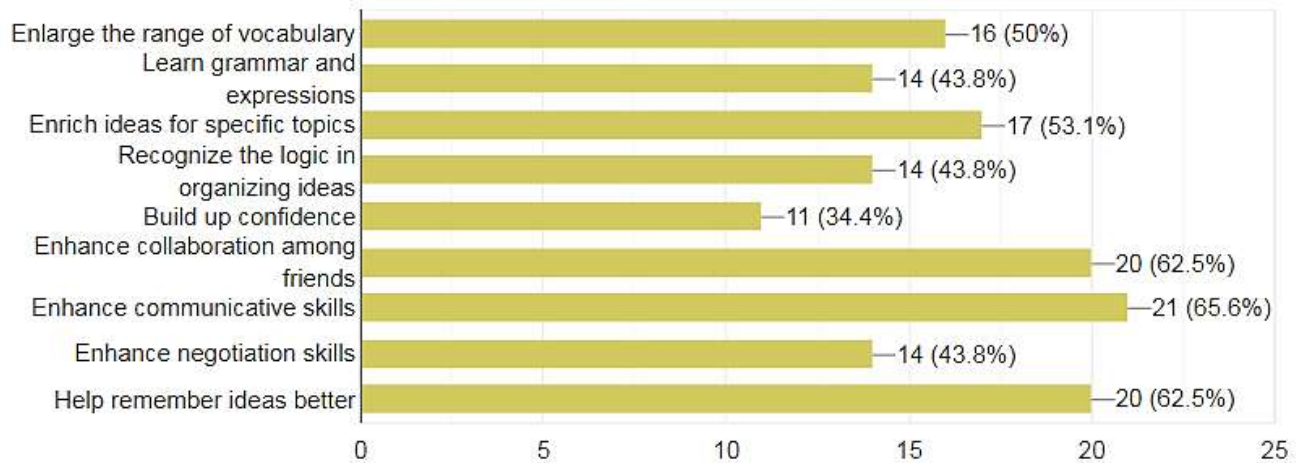
As shown in Table 2, joining in class discussion helped students improve communicative skills, enhance collaboration and remember ideas better with more than 60% for each.

Also, the benefits of the brainstorming sessions are illustrated in various aspects (Table 3). This typical activity of communicative language teaching resulted in 84.4% saying it helped generate ideas. More importantly, nearly 70% of the students reported that this activity promoted critical thinking, creative thinking, fast thinking and logical thinking as the 21st century skills (Ongardwanich, Kanjanawasee and Tuipae, 2015).

Table 3: The benefits of brainstorming sessions

Benefit	Value
generate better ideas	27 (84.4%)
provide diversity of ideas	16 (50%)
	22 (68.8%)
sometimes spark the ideas to me and oth…	9 (28.1%)
	21 (65.6%)
promote creative thinking	21 (65.6%)
encourage critical thinking	23 (71.9%)
enhance collaborative skills	15 (46.9%)
enhance negotiation skills	13 (40.6%)
	1 (3.1%)

86
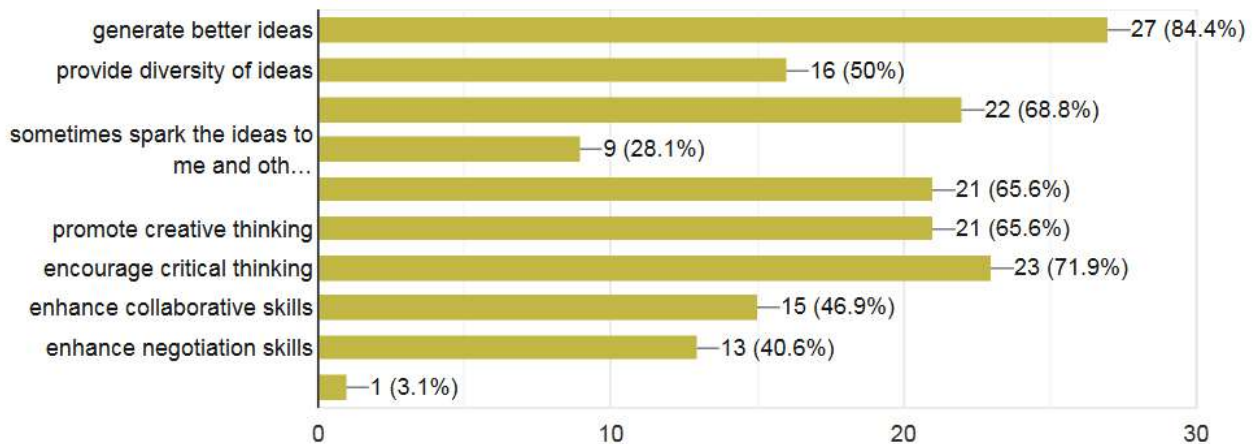
Table 4: The benefits of mind map presentations

Enlarge the range of vocabulary	21 (65.6%)
	11 (34.4%)
Enrich ideas for specific topics	19 (59.4%)
	14 (43.8%)
Build up confidence	21 (65.6%)
	22 (68.8%)
Enhance communicative skills	22 (68.8%)
Enhance negotiation skills	11 (34.4%)
Help remember ideas better	24 (75%)
	1 (3.1%)
enhance presentation skills	1 (3.1%)
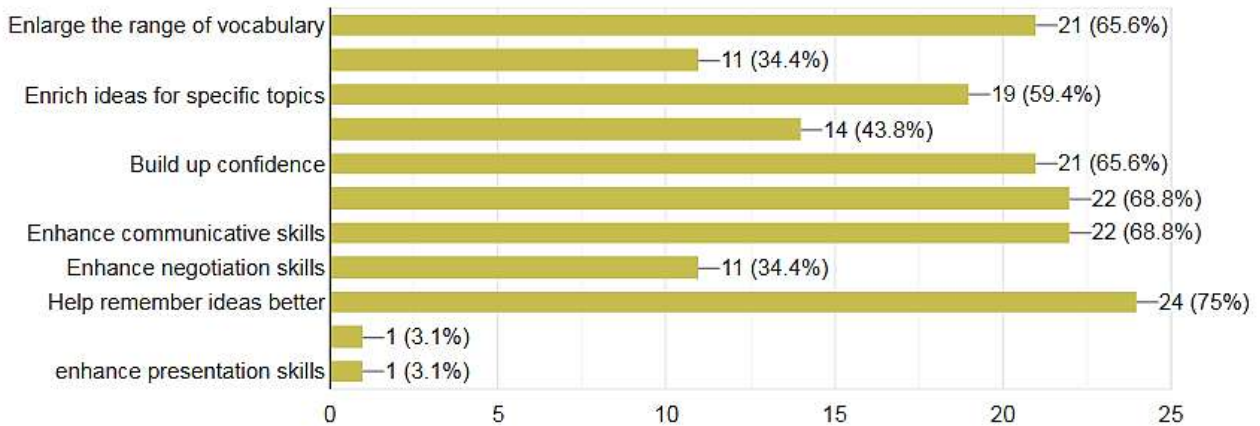
The activity of mind map presentations witnesses quite a lot of positive feedback (Table 4). In addition to helping remember ideas better and enlarging the range of vocabulary, the majority of students agree that this component helps improve their communicative skills, collaboration and confidence.

Table 5: The benefits of Facebook group postings

Relaxing	9 (28.1%)
	13 (40.6%)
Recognize the logic in organizing ideas...	13 (40.6%)
	12 (37.5%)
Practise using grammar and structure in...	13 (40.6%)
	18 (56.3%)
Build up confidence	4 (12.5%)
	6 (18.8%)
Enhance communicative skills	7 (21.9%)
	4 (12.5%)
Improve or sharpen the technical skills	17 (53.1%)
	9 (28.1%)
Self-adjust from your own and your frie...	17 (53.1%)
	9 (28.1%)
Make me feel more responsible for my wr...	21 (65.6%)
	8 (25%)
convenient	15 (46.9%)
	1 (3.1%)
exciting and encouraging; review lesson...	1 (3.1%)

Another component that received encouraging feedback is Facebook group activity (Table 5), which resulted in up to 65.6% of the students reporting that it gives them a sense of responsibility for their learning.

In a sincere manner, answers to the open-ended questions reveal many interesting thoughts and sharing, with a few listed below:-

- Now I can organize a mind-map with suitable vocabulary, know the right structure for writing an essay

- I have improved my writing skill, enhanced my vocabulary and become more confident when speaking in front of a crowded.
- I feel my self-study ability is better. I can work alone and listen to others, recognize my own shortcomings to fix it.
- I can master the organization of an essay, be aware of writing a thesis statement, suitable topic sentences and paraphrase the thesis statement. My vocabulary range and ability of paraphrasing improve. My presentation skills and collaboration skills together with negotiation skills and logic skills develop.
- I can be more logical in arranging ideas, more confident in communicating with friends and faster in collecting ideas for a topic.
- I improve my people skill, creative and logical thinking, vocabulary, negotiation skills.
- Beside the improvement in writing, the class gives me a habit of reading for ideas, I can do this for even other courses. I feel more confident because I can be faster in thinking, logical in talking or giving ideas.

With the sharing above, we can claim that beside the direct benefits, this blended learning mode positively affects students' attitude in learning, especially the confidence and self-direct learning habit.

On the other hand, feedback from the questionnaire leaves us quite a few issues to consider. Most components are reported to be stressful and time-consuming. This might be due to the intensity of many tasks, so they had to cope with deadlines all the time, needless to say they had to fulfill tasks and deadlines from other courses in the semester. Another concern is associated with Facebook group activity (Table 6) in the sense that 11 out of 32 students claim that participating in this learning component may possibly result in having arguments with friends. However, the real world is full of controversies and students need to learn to adapt themselves into the real world setting, and only being a part of this setting gives students a chance to obtain practical skills for life.

Table 6: The drawbacks of Facebook group postings
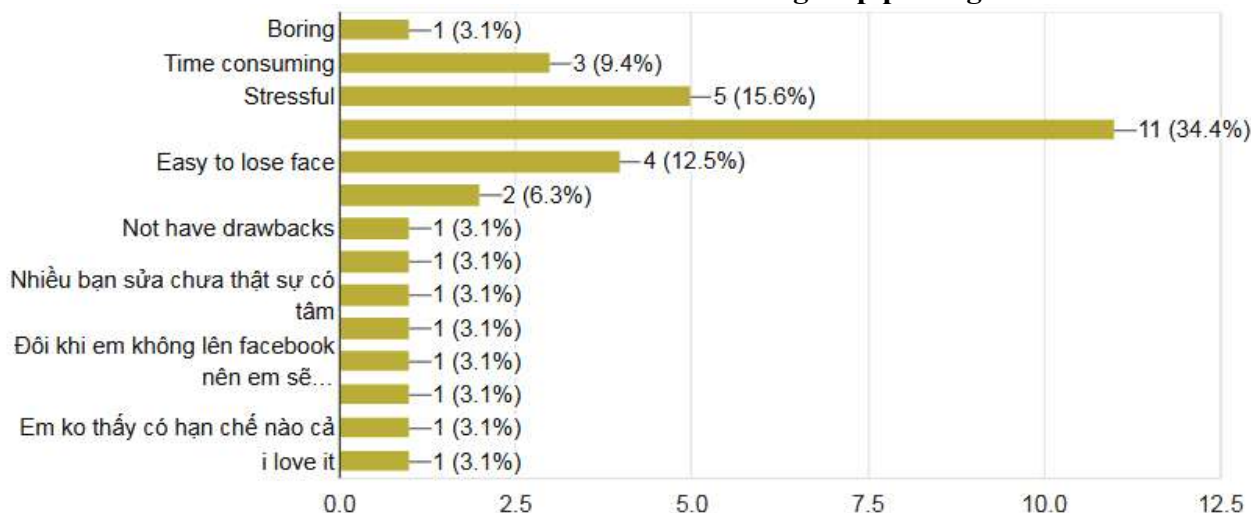
4.   LIMITATIONS

It is obvious that high frequency of tasks urging students to finish in a 13-week course was really a pressure to any learner; therefore, negative feedback on some learning components were unavoidable. Giving students the opportunity to experience this learning mode since the starting of the previous level should lessen the intensity of tasks and allow them the time to enjoy the benefits of blended learning at ease. Another restriction lies in the reliability of the results based only on the

questionnaire due to the involvement of only one group in the research study. The same model in combination with the pre-test post-test method would give a more scientific result.

5.   CONCLUSION AND EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

With the results found from the questionnaire, there are reasons to claim that the selection and arrangement of the course components originate from smart decision and firm logic. Students benefit from the course in a variety of aspects. Beside the improvement in writing competence, enhancement in typical skills for the 21st century, for instance, collaborative skills, fast thinking, logical thinking, critical thinking, and creative thinking have all been reported. The short answers would excite any educator with the fact that this blended learning mode helps build and cultivate in learners the confidence and self-directed learning attitude, which is logically the trigger to autonomy and motivation for life-long learning. If possible, this research should be carried out in a larger scale so that the effectiveness of this learning model would be clearly examined and clarified.

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APPENDIX 1
The Questionnaire
PART 1: THE BLENDED LEARNING COMPONENTS IN DETAILS
1. Which of the followings is/are your problems in writing an essay? You can tick more than one item.
    ☐ Lack ideas due to lack of general knowledge
    ☐ Have ideas but lack necessary vocabulary
    ☐ Not understand the essay structure
    ☐ Lack critical grammar for essay writing
    ☐ Unable to differentiate between main ideas and supporting
    ☐ Unable to arrange ideas in a logical order
    ☐ Others: _____
2. How do you rate the usefulness of having extensive online readings to writing an essay?
    ☐ very useless   ☐ useless   ☐ Not sure   ☐ useful   very useful
3. What are the benefits of the extensive online reading activity? You can tick more than one item.
    ☐ Enlarge the range of vocabulary
    ☐ Learn grammar and expressions
    ☐ Enrich ideas for specific topics
    ☐ Recognize the logic in organizing ideas
    ☐ Make good use of time beside class time
    ☐ Others: _____
4. What are the drawbacks of the extensive online reading activity? You can tick more than one item.
    ☐ Confusing sometimes. Don't know whether the information is reliable.
    ☐ Time consuming. Need to check vocabulary to understand.
    ☐ Boring. Reading is a passive activity itself.
    ☐ Others: _____
5. How do you rate the usefulness of the mind map presentation activity to writing an essay?
    ☐ very useless   ☐ useless   ☐ Not sure   ☐ useful   very useful
6. What are the benefits of the mind map presentation activity? You can tick more than one item.
    ☐ Enlarge the range of vocabulary
    ☐ Learn grammar and expressions
    ☐ Enrich ideas for specific topics
    ☐ Recognize the logic in organizing ideas
    ☐ Build up confidence
    ☐ Enhance collaboration among friends
    ☐ Enhance communicative skills
    ☐ Enhance negotiation skills
    ☐ Help remember ideas better
    ☐ Others: _____
7. What are the drawbacks of the mind map presentation activity? You can tick more than one item.
    ☐ Time consuming

    ☐ Stressful
    ☐ Irrelevant. This activity is not related to developing skills of writing an essay.
    ☐ Others: _____

8. How do you rate the usefulness of the in-class discussion sections to writing an essay?
    ☐ very useless   ☐ useless   ☐ Not sure   ☐ useful   very useful

9. What are the benefits of the in-class discussion sections? You can tick more than one item.
    ☐ Enlarge the range of vocabulary
    ☐ Learn grammar and expressions
    ☐ Enrich ideas for specific topics
    ☐ Recognize the logic in organizing ideas
    ☐ Build up confidence
    ☐ Enhance collaboration among friends
    ☐ Enhance communicative skills
    ☐ Enhance negotiation skills
    ☐ Help remember ideas better
    ☐ Others: _____

10. What are the drawbacks of the in-class discussion sections? You can tick more than one item.
    ☐ Time consuming
    ☐ Stressful
    ☐ Noisy. It gives me a headache.
    ☐ Distracting. Different people have different ideas.
    ☐ Others: _____

11. How do you rate the usefulness of the essay analysis activity to writing an essay?
    ☐ very useless   ☐ useless   ☐ Not sure   ☐ useful   very useful

12. What are the benefits of the essay analysis activity? You can tick more than one item.
    ☐ Enrich ideas for specific topics
    ☐ Recognize the logic in organizing ideas
    ☐ Learn the techniques in arranging ideas in an essay
    ☐ Build up confidence
    ☐ Enhance collaboration among friends
    ☐ Enhance communicative skills
    ☐ Enhance negotiation skills
    ☐ Others: _____

13. What are the drawbacks of essay analysis activity? You can tick more than one item.
    ☐ Time consuming
    ☐ Stressful
    ☐ Noisy. It gives me a headache.
    ☐ Irrelevant. This activity is not related to developing skills of writing an essay.
    ☐ Others: _____

14. How do you rate the usefulness of the brainstorming stage in groups (discuss the main ideas, supporting details and draw a mind map)?
    ☐ very useless   ☐ useless   ☐ Not sure   ☐ useful   very useful

15. What are the benefits of the brainstorming stage in groups? You can tick more than one item.
    ☐ Generate better ideas
    ☐ Provide diversity of ideas
    ☐ Create more logical idea development
    ☐ Sometimes spark the ideas to me and other group members
    ☐ Finish the task faster
    ☐ Promote creative thinking
    ☐ Encourage critical thinking
    ☐ Enhance collaboration skills

☐ Enhance negotiation skills
☐ Others: _____

16. What are the drawbacks of brainstorming stage in groups? You can tick more than one item.
    ☐ Difficult to choose the most suitable ideas for the essay because different members have different point of view
    ☐ Time-consuming
    ☐ Boring
    ☐ Make me lose face because i can't think of the ideas
    ☐ Some members don't give opinions
    ☐ Stressful
    ☐ Noisy. I can't come up with my ideas
    ☐ Irrelevant. This activity is not related to developing skills of writing an essay.
    ☐ Others: _____

17. How do you rate the usefulness of the Facebook postings and correction activity to writing an essay?
    ☐ very useless   ☐ useless   ☐ Not sure   ☐ useful   very useful

18. What are the benefits of the Facebook postings and correction activity? You can tick more than one item.
    ☐ Relaxing
    ☐ Enrich ideas for specific topics
    ☐ Recognize the logic in organizing ideas in an essay
    ☐ Learn the techniques in arranging ideas in an essay
    ☐ Practise using grammar and structure in writing an essay
    ☐ Make better word choice in writing an essay
    ☐ Build up confidence
    ☐ Enhance collaboration among friends
    ☐ Enhance communicative skills
    ☐ Enhance negotiation skills
    ☐ Improve or sharpen the technical skills
    ☐ Keep informed
    ☐ Self-adjust from your own and your friend's errors
    ☐ Promote participation and feedback between students
    ☐ Make me feel more responsible for my writing and my group's work
    ☐ Foster me learn/ participate actively
    ☐ Convenient
    ☐ Others: _____

19. What are the drawbacks of the Facebook postings and correction activity? You can tick more than one item.
    ☐ Boring
    ☐ Time-consuming
    ☐ Stressful
    ☐ Easy to cause arguments with friends
    ☐ Easy to lose face
    ☐ Irrelevant. This activity is not related to developing skills of writing an essay.
    ☐ Others: _____

20. How do you rate the usefulness of the Google quizzes (Google form) to writing an essay?
    ☐ very useless   ☐ useless   ☐ Not sure   ☐ useful   very useful

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

☐ Encouraging because of instant results and correct answers shown
☐ Help build up vocabulary and collocations
☐ Help review skills learnt in class
☐ Encourage me to check more vocabulary and learn more useful structures
☐ Others: _____

22. What are the drawbacks of the Google quizzes (Google form)? You can tick more than one item.
☐ Boring
☐ Time-consuming
☐ Stressful
☐ Irrelevant. This activity is not related to developing skills of writing an essay.
☐ Others: _____

23. How do you rate the usefulness of the vocabulary games in groups to writing an essay?
☐ very useless ☐ useless ☐ Not sure ☐ useful very useful

24. What are the benefits of the vocabulary games in groups? You can tick more than one item.
☐ Create interesting learning atmosphere
☐ Create a competitive learning environment
☐ Build up or review useful language for writing
☐ Build up confidence
☐ Enhance collaboration among friends
☐ Enhance communicative skills
☐ Enhance negotiation skills
☐ Improve or sharpen the technical skills
☐ Others: _____

25. What are the drawbacks of the vocabulary games in groups? You can tick more than one item.
☐ Boring
☐ Time-consuming
☐ Stressful
☐ Noisy. It gives me a headache.
☐ Irrelevant. This activity is not related to developing skills of writing an essay.
☐ Others: _____

PART 2: THE BLENDED LEARNING IN GENERAL
1. What do you like best in this course? Why?
   _____
2. What do you like least in this course? Why?
   _____
3. What improvements have you made after this thirteen-week course? Why?
   _____
4. What activities help you make those improvements?
   _____
5. What areas of your writing competence haven't seen any improvement?
   _____
6. How do you rate the effectiveness of this learning mode?
☐ very ineffective ☐ ineffective ☐ neutral ☐ effective ☐ very effective
7. What do you suggest to make the course more effective?
   _____

This is the end of the questionnaire. Thank you.

Assessing Secondary English Teachers' Competence in Oral Communication in Context and in Writing

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ABSTRACT

Teaching has always been the mother of all professions, making the teacher's responsibility tremendous, and pedestaling teaching as a profession and as a mission. In the Philippines, the introduction of K-12 curriculum has posed a number of challenges to teachers in the Senior High School. To address such challenges, training has become one of the solutions adopted by some institutions. The present study aims to assess the secondary school teachers' level of competence in oral communication in context and in writing. Data was gathered from a teacher-made test, speech tasks (impromptu and prepared speeches) and from a position paper. Rubrics for the tasks were used to determine their level of competence. Results in the written test for Oral Communication in context showed that most prospect senior high school teachers from junior level, only achieved the beginning level band in writing. However, they were at the advanced level in both impromptu and prepared speech tasks. Results in the writing task also showed that the teachers were at the beginning level. This imply that there is a need to reinforce the content of oral communication in context and the writing skills of the secondary school English teachers.

1.0   INTRODUCTION

Teaching has always been the mother of all professions. As such, the tremendous responsibility to form and produce quality professionals is left to the teachers, pedestaling teaching as a profession and as a mission. From this view, the competences of teachers that "represent a summary of key professional and personal skills/talents and behavioural patterns of an individual" (Blašková, Blaško and Kucharčíková, 2014, 457) are of exceptional importance. Hence, in the article, What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future (1996, cited in CPE, 2005), the influential report of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, made teaching the core of its "three simple premises" in its blueprint for reforming the nation's schools. They are:

i) what teachers know and can do is the most important influence on what students learn,
ii) recruiting, preparing, and retaining good teachers is the central strategy for improving our schools,
iii) school reform cannot succeed unless it focuses on creating the conditions under which teachers can teach and teach well (para. 3).

The aforementioned commission primarily recognizes the importance of the competence of teachers to empower the learners. Legankova and Nedvetskaya (2016) showed a similar concept in their study that dealt with solving challenges on the formation and improvement of their teachers' professional competence. Similarly, Ezquerra, De-Juanas, and San Martín Ulloa (2014) found that teaching competencies was most necessary to enable students to learn key skills. The reality is that good teaching requires hard work, the development of some very specific skills, and a thorough

grasp of the content being taught (Monk, 2012,). Teacher quality is one of the key factors that influence student achievement (Hattie, 2009 cited in CMEC, 2013). Furthermore, Goldhaber and Brewer (2000); Monk and King (1994 cited in CMEC, 2013) found several different teacher effects that contribute to quality teaching, such as subject-matter knowledge and knowledge about teaching.

In the Philippines, a similar concern to provide the necessary knowledge and skills to students is observed. While the Philippine government is currently implementing a great change in the educational setting with the implementation of K to 12, a great challenge to provide the expected knowledge and skills of the senior high school is posed on the institutions offering senior high school for the first time and most especially, to the teachers assigned to teach the new subjects. To address the pressing need, some institutions have adopted retooling or attempting to empower the teachers through seminar-workshops and trainings. As Meyers and Lester (2013) found in their study, "situated learning model of instruction better prepared the teachers in the acquisition and application of their teaching skills, and built their competence in developing educational programs for individuals …" (p.1). The need to conduct trainings, seminar-workshops for prospective senior high school teachers was therefore presupposed. Since assessment can foster or promote change (Englert, Fries, Martin-glenn, and Douglas, 2007), or can at least provide the baseline data to address a need, the present study adapts a similar position. It is with the foregoing premise that the teachers who participated in a training-workshop for a week in two specific subjects in the senior high school were assessed.

2.0   OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

The objective of this study is to assess the secondary English teachers' competence in oral communication in context and in writing. Specifically, it attempts to:
  (1) assess the level of competence of the secondary English teachers in oral communication in context and in writing as reflected in the following: (a) test in oral communication in context; (b) impromptu speech; (c) prepared speech; and in (d) the position paper,
  (2) identify the strengths and weaknesses of the secondary English teachers in oral communication in context and in writing.

3.0   REVIEW OF LITERATURE
3.1   Teacher competence

Kopelyan, Godonoga, Güney, and Yasmin (2016) presupposed the importance of knowing what the teachers know by assessing the teaching and learning of innovat)ion-related competences in an Erasmus Mundus Master program focusing on research and innovation in Higher Education (MaRIHE). It compared the results of two quantitative case studies on the teachers' and students' self-assessment of innovation-related competences. The study revealed that the teachers' perceptions of facilitating innovation-related competences and the learners' perceptions of acquiring them are generally favorable and they complement each other though the two stakeholder groups had also some specific differences in their perceptions on innovation-related competences.

Fungchomchoei & Kardkarnklai, (2016) conducted a study on integrated intercultural competence and identified learning activities that enhance the students' intercultural competence in their English classes. The study used questionnaire, structured interviews, and journal entries. The results of the study revealed the importance of developing students' intercultural competence aside from several implications for professional teacher training.

Blaskova, Blasko, Matuska , and Rosak-Szyrocka (2015) indicated that the knowledge and competence of teachers can be the basis of the knowledge and competence of the nation. A questionnaire was used to identify key competencies of teachers to address the teacher's professional and communication competence.

Indira and Cordón (2015) analyzed an oral interaction task recorded in the Spanish Foreign Language classroom, to explore the foreign language teacher's competence and eventually use it to facilitate his/her assessment.

Blašková, Blaško and Kucharčíková (2014) regarded teachers' competencies to be crucial factors to which lies the success of the performance of any professional. In their study, they analyzed the professional-personal profile of university teachers and the competences they should have. Through a survey questionnaire, they gathered data from 686 students who provided the data on the characteristics and competences of teachers.

Felipe and Barrios (2015) investigated 84 student teachers' reading competence through an objective test named Test de Competencia Lectora para Universitarios (Spanish for "Reading Competence Test for University Students") and through a self-report instrument that gathered information on respondents' perceptions of their own competence and difficulties encountered when reading different texts types. The descriptive statistics and the Pearson and Spearman correlation test results obtained showed that participants had an average reading competence which was opposed to the student teachers' high perception they had of their own competence. Vocabulary was the linguistic component that most often challenged participants and they also struggled with argumentative and expository texts.

Sezer (2015) investigated the teachers' levels of technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPCK) competencies, showing varied and scattered competencies, but with significant differences in some competencies.

3.2   Language training programs

Leyva and Diaz (2013) tried to generate empirical evidence for the efficiency of the secondary teacher language training programs. The study suggests that the students' low level of oral proficiency can be overcome through teacher trainings. Using a questionnaire, Mata, Cmeciu and Ghiaţău (2013) explored the pedagogical competences of language teachers in initial training programs. The respondents consisted of 210 2nd and 3rd-year students of the initial language teachers training program.

3.3   Teacher and learner competence

The study Fernandez (2013) looked into the teacher's competence and learner's performance using competency based examination and the descriptive survey method. The study found that teachers' years of teaching experience and performance rating are found to have significant relationship. There is no significant relationship between the teachers' competence and learners' performance. In regards to teachers' competence, the following weaknesses were identified: thorough knowledge of the subject matter; formulating questions to clarify a lesson; usage of various aids to make the subject matter in the module more interesting to learners; use of a variety of teaching strategies to make the lessons more interesting; and providing challenging task applicable to real life situations.

3.4   Teacher writing proficiency

The study of Denny (2011) investigated the level of writing proficiency of Caribbean teachers of English using two pieces of analytical/persuasive academic writing outputs that were evaluated in the categories of introduction, body, conclusion and stylistics. The majority of the teachers of English, and of writing, did not themselves, write well. Denny further stated that teachers need to assess themselves as teachers of writing to approximate the difficulty of tasks for the learners.

Huang (2011) examined the positive transfer of Chinese, the participants' first language, to English. The findings showed that the positive transfer of Chinese seemed to be more apparent in the content and organization of the English writing, followed by coherence and use of words. Huang concluded that "the positive transfer of mother tongue can facilitate English writing" (p.55).

The instructional performance of teacher education faculty members with the end view of formulating an action plan to enhance their teaching was conducted, utilizing the descriptive method of research (Punungbayan & Bauyan, 2015). The study found that the teachers' assessment of their performance yielded a slight difference with the students' assessment. The teachers considered their performance to be very good, but the students gave only a satisfactory rating.

A study that determined the competencies of instructors and its correlation to the factors affecting the academic performance of students using descriptive method was the study of Sali-ot (2011). A questionnaire checklist was the main instrument in collecting data from the respondents. The two groups of respondents have the same responses as to the teachers' competencies and the factors affecting the academic performance. The most prevailing competency was communication with the learners, and the least prevailing is learner reinforcement- involvement. The most prevailing factor was intellectual, and the least prevailing was physical. There was moderate correlation between the competencies of college instructors and the factors affecting the academic performance of students.

Sundayana (2015) asserted that the implementation of curriculum is greatly influenced by the teachers' readiness and competence. In this study, Sundayana investigated the Indonesia teachers' readiness and competence to implement the 2013 Curriculum using survey questionnaire and observation. The findings showed that the teachers were relatively well-prepared based on their claims and on the observations.

Frisch (2014) investigated the Swedish teachers' perceptions on oral proficiency through qualitative methods such as observation, interview and group discussion. Frisch found that the 12 teachers varied in their perceptions of oral proficiency due to their varying pedagogical philosophies. Such perceptions are permeated in their teaching and in their assessment practice.

Based on the foregoing review, there is no doubt that teacher's competence is indeed of primary concern and that teacher's competence can be assessed. In almost all of the studies mentioned, the teacher's competence was gauged through a survey questionnaire except for the student teachers' reading competence that was administered through a test which varied with the claims of the same participants who also assessed themselves in a questionnaire. Hence, the present study finds strength in the tools that it used because it used a test that parallels the knowledge competence or content of the subject Oral Communication in Context; performance tasks that are required in the subject such as the prepared speech, and impromptu speech; and a specific writing task, that is, writing a position paper, in the subject Reading and Writing (CG in

EN 11/12). This research was carried out for the purpose of investigating teachers' levels of technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPCK) competencies.

4.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The present study takes inspiration from two renowned theorists, Chomsky and his theory on competence and performance (Chomsky, 1965as cited in Newby, 2011) and Vygotsky (1978 cited in McLeod, 2012) with his theory on social interaction highlighting the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and the Knowledgeable Other (KO).

Chomsky's important theoretical standpoint, that it is the goal of linguistics to describe a speaker's "mental reality underlying actual behaviour" (1965, 4 as cited in Newby, 2011), is one that is shared by all the theories of competence. As is well documented, Chomsky's famous proposition, to distinguish between competence, being the speaker-hearer's knowledge of his language and performance, the actual use of language in concrete situations (Chomsky 1965 as cited in Newby, 2011). Though Chomsky's approach is cognitive in nature and questionnaires tend to appeal to the cognitive aspect of a person, a gap remains and doubt exists as a result of some empirical observations.

Another theory from which the present study was derived and which has been the foundation of much research is the theory of Social Interaction (Lev Vygotsky, 1934; 1978 as cited in McLeod, 2012). Vygotsky believed that community plays a central role in the process of "making meaning." For him, cognitive development stems from social interactions of guided learning within the zone of proximal development (ZPD), or the distance between the learner's initial knowledge and his potential or what he is capable of learning. The concept states that there is a potential knowledge that a child can reach if properly guided by the another or by the community he is with because to Vygotsky, partners co-construct knowledge. In this context, the role of the more Knowledgeable Other (KO) is therefore crucial to empower the learner. The KO, otherwise called as the tutor, may model behaviors and/or provide verbal instructions for the child. The instruction that transpires between the KO and the child is what Vygotsky refers to this as cooperative or collaborative dialogue. The child seeks to understand the actions or instructions provided by the tutor (often the parent or teacher) then internalizes the information, using it to guide or regulate their own performance (McLeod, 2012).

As implied in Chomsky's theory, there is a need to further prove the competence-performance discrepancy which the present study addresses. In this study then, competence encompasses the linguistic knowledge which may be gauged through a paper and pencil test on the specific topics in language, which are often times referred to as the 'what' in the English language, and performance or one's ability to apply his or her knowledge correctly in specific contexts or situations. Since the prospective teachers in the senior high school who specifically in this study, are the prospective teachers in Oral Communication and in Reading and Writing, then their competence in the two subjects need to be assessed to get assurance that the minimum competences and competencies are communicated. In the framework, the variables that are needed are the scores of the prospective teachers in the subjects mentioned earlier that were obtained through the teacher-made test, and the performance tasks: prepared speech, impromptu speech and writing a position paper. The results are deemed necessary in crafting possible trainings or seminar-workshops that would address the teacher's needs.

5.0   METHODOLOGY

The present study used a descriptive design in assessing the prospective senior high school teachers' competence in two subjects in the senior high school – Oral Communication in Context and Writing (in Reading and Writing). It used a teacher- made test validated in content by the three teacher trainers of the two subjects. With it were interview guides that were intended to capture the thoughts of the participants; manuscript of the speeches that the participants prepared; their impromptu speech productions and their position papers. The participants consisted of 14 prospective senior high school teachers in the two subjects who represented eight provincial private schools. In order not to preempt the tasks of the trainees, a pretest was not conducted with the assumption that after the one-week training, the participants would have exhibited a proficient level of competence in the test and tasks given them. The results were assumed to be the basis of further training or retooling.

To identify the competency levels of the teachers in the test and tasks, the DepEd proficiency level scale was used. The rubric of Scott (n.d.) in evaluating a position paper was used to score the teacher's outputs.

6.0   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
6.1   Test in Oral Communication in Context

Table 1 shows the level of competence of the secondary English Teachers in the written test on Oral communication in Context. As can be gleaned in the table, the respondents' level of competence was only beginning. This implies that the respondents' knowledge of the content of the course is rather limited based on their mean score. The results can be attributed to the short duration of the training given to them. The respondents were given the training for only a week and within the week, the content of the course was discussed with them. At the end of the week, the respondents took the written test to ascertain their knowledge of the topics in Oral Communication in Context.

The respondents' beginning level of competence is fairly alarming because they were expected to exhibit high level of competence in the written extract. Based on the culled written interview regarding the content of the course, only two of the respondents mentioned that the topics contained in the course were new. Most of them wrote that most of the topics if not all were only reiteration of the previous content of Speech and Oral Communication, the previous general education course in the curriculum. From their response, it can be deduced that there is no problem on content; however, the result proved otherwise.

**Table 1: Competence Level of the Secondary English Teachers in
Oral Communication in Context in the Written Test**

N = 14	Test in Oral Communication in Context	
Mean	54	beginning
Median	54	beginning
Mode	52	beginning
Std.	6.3	

The case of the participants who garnered lower scores in the test as compared to their self-assessment is similar to the findings of Felipe and Barrios (2015) in which the participants' test results obtained showed an average reading competence which was opposed to their high perception they had of their own competence. This could be a strength of the present study since the written test given to the participants was juxtaposed with the content of the subject they needed to have mastery with.

Frisch (2014) investigated the Swedish teachers' perceptions on oral proficiency and found varied results due to the teachers' varying pedagogical philosophies could enlighten the difference between the perceptions of the 14 teachers in the present study and their scores in the test on oral communication. Hence, there is a need for further investigation on the teachers' perceptions on oral communication. However, Sundayana (2013) varies with the present study because unlike the Indonesian teachers who were found to be relatively well-prepared, the Filipino teachers in the present study gained scores only at the beginning level. Hence, further retooling is forwarded.

Table 2: Secondary English Teachers' Competence in the Impromptu Speech

Criteria	Content	Organization	Language Use	Oral Delivery/ Vocal Appeal	Physical Appeal/ Non-verbal	Impromptu Speech Score
Mean (level of proficiency)	72 % (beginning)	74% (beginning)	83% (approaching proficiency)	91% (advanced)	90% (advanced)	**82% (approaching proficiency)**
Median (level of proficiency)	72 % (beginning)	78 % (developing)	87% (proficient)	93% (advanced)	90% (advanced)	**82% (approaching proficiency)**
Mode (level of proficiency)	70 % (beginning)	80 % (approaching proficiency)	87% (proficient)	100% (advanced)	90% (advanced)	**55% (beginning)**
Std. Deviation	12.283	15.87	12.41	11.81	6.38	9.85

Table 2 shows the level of competence of the secondary English Teachers in the in their impromptu speech which was a result of the trainers' evaluation. As shown in table 2, the content of the secondary teachers' speeches reached only the beginning level of competence (mean=72%; median=72%; mode=70%). This result is even more alarming because the majority of the teachers got 70% in content as shown by the mode. Compared to the other parameters, it is in content that the teachers got the lowest. This result supports their low scores in the written test which highlights the need to gain mastery of the specific content in the subject. Among the parameters, oral delivery or vocal appeal garnered the highest score which shows that the teachers have innate gifts of vocal apparatuses. Next to vocal appeal is physical delivery or non-verbal in which the teachers manifested an advanced competency. In general, the teachers garnered an approaching proficiency level (mean=82%, median=82%). However, what is alarming is the mode of 55% which is far from the DepEd passing rate of 75%. Furthermore, the mode shows that many of the participants garnered 55% and that the few who garnered a high score pulled the average to reach 82%. The findings further affirm Chomsky's theory on competence and performance. In the impromptu speech, the teachers' content, organization and language use which could be attributed to competence or knowledge yielded a lower proficiency level than their score in oral delivery or vocal appeal and physical appeal or non-verbal which could be attributed to performance. An ideal

speaker according to Chomsky is one who can manifest a balance between competence and performance. In this case, the teachers were lacking more of the content.

The present study varies with that of Shamsudin, Sadoughvanini, and Zaid (2013) who evaluated fifteen Iranian postgraduate students in an Intensive English Course in an impromptu (unprepared) speech test in which errors in language use were assumed and identified because the present study tried to evaluate a wider scope in which language use was just one component. In the present study, language use was a strength of the participants because they garnered approaching proficiency and proficient levels of competence. It is in content and partly in organization that they were found lacking. The difference could be attributed to the nature of the language being learned by the participants because the Iranian participants learned English as a foreign language while the Filipino participants in the present study learned English as a second language. As second language learners, the Filipino participants were expected to have a better grasp and command of the English language since their environment provides a vast encounter with the language. The Iranians on the other hand, may find it more meaningful to focus on the basics of language which explains the focus on the language errors of the participants.

Table 3: Secondary English Teachers' Competence in the Prepared Speech

N=14	Mastery	Level of Proficiency	Oral Delivery/ Vocal Appeal	Level of Proficiency	Physical Delivery/ Physical Appeal/ Non-verbal	Level of Proficiency	Prepared Speech Score	Level of Proficiency
Mean	94%	Advanced	89%	Proficient	83%	Approaching Proficiency	75%	Developing
Median	95%	Advanced	91%	Advanced	81%	Approaching Proficiency	73%	Beginning
Mode	100	Advanced	76%	Developing	80%	Approaching Proficiency	66%	Beginning
Std. Deviation	7.5		7.3		7.9		6.2	

Table 3 presents the results of the respondents' performance in the prepared speech. Based on the mode, many of the respondents were generally at the beginning level although it can be noted that their scores were rather spread as indicated by the SD (6.2). The result provides a general picture that the participants' oral performance in this task is low which is again beyond assumption. Considering the criteria used in gauging their performance, it is worthy to note that the respondents' mastery level is advance which means that they were able to deliver their speech spontaneously with limited hesitation. As regards oral delivery and vocal appeal, based on the mean score, the respondents were proficient; however, considering the mode, the respondents were generally at the developing level in this criterion. This implies that a majority of them were slightly good at delivering their speech in a modulated, animated, dynamic, pleasant and expressive voice; slightly good at making their speech audible; varying their rate or speed; pausing appropriately and pronouncing and enunciating words well. In terms of physical delivery, physical appeal, and use of non-verbal language, the respondents were approaching proficiency. This means that on the average, the respondents were able to establish and maintain eye contact during the delivery; there was evidence of confident posture, avoidance of movements or mannerisms; appropriate facial expressions were detected and gestures were considered expressive, dynamic, and natural. Comparing the teachers' proficiency in the prepared speech with that of the impromptu speech, the results seem to vary. This time, mastery which is attributed to competence or content had the highest results and oral delivery or vocal appeal and physical delivery or non-verbal which are attributed to performance in Chomsky's theory, garnered lower proficiency levels. The

discrepancy shows that competence and performance are affected by context and genre of speech. In impromptu speech, content including organization and language use, tends to suffer due to the speaker's lack of preparation while in the prepared speech, it is expected that the content is well-researched. In impromptu speech, topics are supposed to be easy and approximately known to the speakers, hence, the oral delivery and non-verbal may seem to have lower pressure while in a prepared speech, the pressure is laid on the performance because of the assumed expectations in a context in which preparation is provided. Hence, the participants gained lower scores in their performance in the prepared speech. The teachers who experience the nature of delivering a speech in the two genres can guide students who are to undergo the same situations. This idea is reflected in Vygotsky's concept of a more knowledgeable other (KO).

Table 4: Secondary English Teachers' Competence in their Position Paper

Criteria	Critical Analysis	Evidence & Support	Structure	Style	Mechanics & Evidence	Total Writing Proficiency
Mean Level of Proficiency	3 (60%)	2.8 (56%)	2.6 (52%)	2.6 (52%)	2.4 (48%)	**13.4(53.65)**
	Beginning	Beginning	Beginning	Beginning	Beginning	Beginning

Table 4 presents the competence level of the participants in their position paper. As can be seen, all the areas in the criteria in evaluating a position paper reached only the beginning proficiency level on the average. Mechanics and Evidence received the lowest mean score. This could be attributed to the limited time given to the teachers in writing their position paper. This also affirms the complexity of the skill and challenges every writer to monitor his or her writing and make one's writing more sensible by providing evidence. Though critical analysis received the highest score, it is not far from the rest of the criteria. What is noticeable is that all the score in all the criteria are far below the DepEd requirement of a passing score. Denny (2011) investigated the level of writing proficiency of Caribbean teachers of English using two pieces of analytical/persuasive academic writing outputs that were evaluated in the categories of introduction, body, conclusion and stylistics. The majority of the teachers of English, and of writing, did not themselves, write well. In the study of Denny (2014), the teachers writing proficiency was well in contrast to the result of the present study.

6.2   Strengths and Weaknesses of the Secondary English Teachers in Oral Communication in Context and in Writing

Table 5 presents the content areas and mean scores of the teachers in the written test in Oral Communication in Context. Based on the mean, the teachers got the lowest score in stages of intercultural sensitivity which is a new topic integrated in oral communication. Since cultural competence has become a new trend in communication, its newness could be one reason for the low score of the teachers. However, considering the SD (0.941), it could be inferred that there were some who could have garnered higher scores as well as low scores because of the wide spread of scores indicated by the SD. Another area in which the teachers got low is the communication process and type of speech. Conversation maxim, communicative strategy and speech act followed. These are also new topics in oral communication; however, speech act seemed to be the easiest among the three since speech acts that cater to the functions of language may be easier to connect to than the other two. Speech style followed by speech context seemed to be easiest for the teachers. The results however are not conclusive since the scores are varied and spread.

Table 5: Secondary English Teachers' Strengths and Weaknesses

Areas in the Test (Oral Communication in Context)	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation
Stages of intercultural sensitivity	1.5	1.5	0.941
Speech context	4.14	4	0.949
Speech style	4.43	5	0.852
Speech act	3.07	3	1.269
Conversation maxim	2.36	2.5	0.756
Communicative strategy	2.57	3	0.756
Communication process & Types of speech	2.3	2.6	0.77
Total Score	42.93	43	5.04
Percent Score	53.66	53.75	6.31

Table 6 shows the competence level of the teachers in the three sources of scores in Oral Communication in Context and in Writing. Based on the percent score, the teachers were better in the impromptu speech than in the other types of sources. They were low in the written test and in the writing task. They were a bit better in the prepared speech which was delivered orally. Based on the foregoing, it appears that the teachers were better in oral performance than they do in written task. Though the test was about the topics in oral communication, it was tested in written form. This needs further investigation to find other factors that could explain the low scores in the tasks related to writing.

Table 6. Secondary English Teachers' Strengths and Weaknesses Based on Sources

Sources	Test in Oral Communication in Context	Impromptu Speech	Prepared Speech	Position Paper Writing Proficiency
Mean	54%	82%	75%	54%
Competence Level	beginning	approaching proficiency	developing	beginning

Punungbayan and Bauyan (2015) who studies the instructional performance of teacher education faculty members with the end view of formulating an action plan to enhance their teaching found that the teachers' assessment of their performance yielded a slight difference with the students' assessment. If the teachers yielded competence levels at the beginning level, then this finding could be very bothering. The results therefore suggest an urgent action to attend to the needs of the teachers. As Sundayana (2015) asserted, after all, the implementation of curriculum is greatly influenced by the teachers' readiness and competence. Though Leyva and Diaz (2013) suggested that the students' low level of oral proficiency can be overcome through teacher trainings, the results in this study did not prove the same. Hence, other factors for teacher training should be considered such as the duration of the training and the teachers' attitude and motivation.

Table 7 shows that in all the components of the position paper, the teachers manifested only at the beginning level. Trainings and seminars have been key tools in equipping teachers with knowledge and skills that they lack but the training seems lacking. Hence, there is a need to address the needed competency in the two subjects especially in writing.

**Table 7. Competence Level of the Senior High School Teachers
in Writing a Position Paper**

Criteria	Critical Analysis	Evidence & Support	Structure	Style	Mechanics & Evidence	Total Writing Proficiency
Mean	3 (60%)	2.8 (56%)	2.6 (52%)	2.6 (52%)	2.4 (48%)	13.4(53.65)
Level of Competence	Beginning	Beginning	Beginning	Beginning	Beginning	Beginning

7.0   CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Secondary English Teachers' Competence in Oral Communication in Context and in Writing are below the expected level. Hence, further retooling is imperative. Among the sources, the written test reflects the lowest competence level of the participants. Thus, there is a need to review the test as the teachers need to review their content. The study confirms the complexity of writing. Therefore, there is a need to reinforce writing to the teachers to be able to empower their students. In the present Philippine educational context, the role of the teacher is critical in the success of the curriculum, pedagogy, and students. Capacity building or retooling of teachers can help address the present demands.

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THE USE OF PLOT TRIANGLE IN ENGLISH 1119 CONTINUOUS WRITING

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ABSTRACT

For Malaysian students with low proficiency in English language, writing narratives is perhaps their gateway of getting a pass in SPM English. However, the dilemma students faced in writing a narrative is that they need to generate ideas and simultaneously using devices to limit the number of possibilities within the storyline. In addition, students often found writing a story unmanageable. As a result, it will leave students feeling overwhelmed and perhaps giving it up altogether. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to investigate whether the use of 'Plot Triangle' can improve Form 5 students' English 1119 continuous writing. This method was once known for helping students to understand the development of a plot. However, in this study, we used it as a scaffold for writing narratives; whereby students will have to follow a clear story outline in order to help them write a coherent story. Students worked backwards using the 'Plot Triangle' method incorporating 21st century learning and higher-order thinking skills activities in the discussion. The sample population consists of 63 Form 5 students in Johor. Findings revealed that within 5 months, students showed significant progress in continuous writing, as in Paper 1 Section B of the examination paper.

1.0   INTRODUCTION

Writing is considered the toughest skill to be taught and learned. This can be seen from the previous practice in my school where even English option teachers shy away from teaching the skill. They would rather take the passive approach in letting the students copy sample essays from various resources. To make things worse, this approach is being used as a one-size-fits-all method; whereby even the advanced students are taught with this simplistic method. Consequently, this hinders opportunities for students to explore and challenge their writing skills further. Furthermore, the reluctance of teachers in teaching writing skill really contributed to the increasing affective filter towards the action of writing itself. Most of my students have their own pre-conceived ideas that writing is such a difficult skill to be mastered.

They still carried these pre-conceived ideas with them when I received them as Form 5 students. Most of my students chose not to answer the writing in Section B; Paper 1 in the assessment due to the ultimate common excuse that they do not know how to write. This is really not ideal for Form 5 students as writing section holds a significant weightage in deciding their English 1119 marks. Even for the better students, they chose to write the bare

minimum because they were never equipped with proper set of writing skills in answering the questions. As a teacher, it could be a both helpless and daunting experience as the students were already in Form 5. In addition, English language was only allocated 3 periods per week. Hence, the contact hours were insufficient.

In order to help them improve, I observed my Form 5 students' writing behaviours and patterns to have a better grasp and understanding of gaps in their knowledge and skill. I used their Form 4's final exam as my needs analysis material. After a significant amount of error-analysis, I found out that my Form 5 students respond well to formulaic, regimented instructions. Therefore, my SISC+ and I have devised a writing planner called 'Plot Triangle' to be used in my Form 5 classrooms in order to guide students in planning their narrative essays for Section B Paper 1. It was derived from a reading plan called 'Story Mountain' which was aimed to support comprehension.

2.0   LITERATURE REVIEW

Writing narratives should never be bounded by restrictive constraints of a story planner. Some advocates might argue that students must be given limitless opportunities to explore their creativity (Ellis, 2003). Whilst there might be some credibility in that statement, total freedom of creativity might not be ideal for ESL learners particularly. For ESL learners, there will always be an inevitable pressure when thinking out a plot (Petty, 1939). Therefore, although a plan might seem to be a drag to begin with, it might help a struggling student to have an abstract framework of thoughts in order to start their essays. This is supported by Ellis (2003) as she believes that the persistent dilemma when writing a narrative is that students have the needs to generate ideas whilst simultaneously using devices to limit the number of possibilities within the storyline. According to Cummins and Quinoa (2012), "if children do not understand the structural facets of the genre in which they are supposed to write about – their ability to communicate understanding may break down" (*p.23*). At this stage of writing a narrative, a teacher has the role of prompting for each of the story structure to help children develop expectations about its content (Gordon & Braun, 1983). This gives students a solid framework to work for as well as a good kick-start to write a narrative essay. Piccolo (1986) also argues that students need the assistance of a story organiser in the drafting stage.

Alternatively, there are more advocates in favour of planning a narrative essay. They recognised that despite the idiosyncratic nature of a narrative, nobody could argue that even the most creative story-teller needs some sort of structure in order for it to be able to reach the intended audience effectively and for their ideas to be communicated competently. As Nauman, Stirling and Borthwick (2011) argued that clarity and ease of understanding are classified as good writing and a predictable structure helps the writer achieves that clarity. This was also supported by Zipprich (1995) who suggested the use of structured instruction as a guided planning tool in order to provide students with a strategy for organisation and planning. With a little bit of planning and organisation, students' narrative essays are more cohesive

With regards to quality, a number of advocates believe that planning before writing could promote grammatical accuracy as well as precise choice of vocabulary (Meraji, 2011 and La Paz, 2001). This could be linked to the process of planning itself, which promotes mental planning and brainstorming as a strategy (Lam, 2015). This in turn will give students the chance to carefully plan their language prior writing their essays. In other words, planning for writing will help a great deal in terms of the technicality of language. Planning is also

viewed as a way to strengthen writing structure. La Paz (1997) explained that planning before writing elevates the quality of the content as well as the coherence of the essay.

It has been argued that planning for writing is viewed differently by learners of different proficiency levels. The more proficient the language user is, the longer time s/he needs to plan the composition. In other words, the more proficient the language user is, the more important the planning for writing is deemed of (Sasaki, 2004). Additonally, planning teaches students to regulate and manage the writing process independently (La Paz, 1997). It helps the students to organise their thoughts and consider their topic in advance and to use text structure knowledge to develop 5-paragraph essay (La Paz, 2001). Hence, the ability to organise their thoughts and structure their composition play an important role for beginner writers in order to jumpstart their writing process. To sum up, both low and high proficiency language learners benefit from planning for writing (Rahimpour & Nariman-Jahan, 2011).

2.1 The Concept of Plot Triangle in Writing

The plot chart is widely used and presented differently, but all of them have similar main ideas. One example is as below:
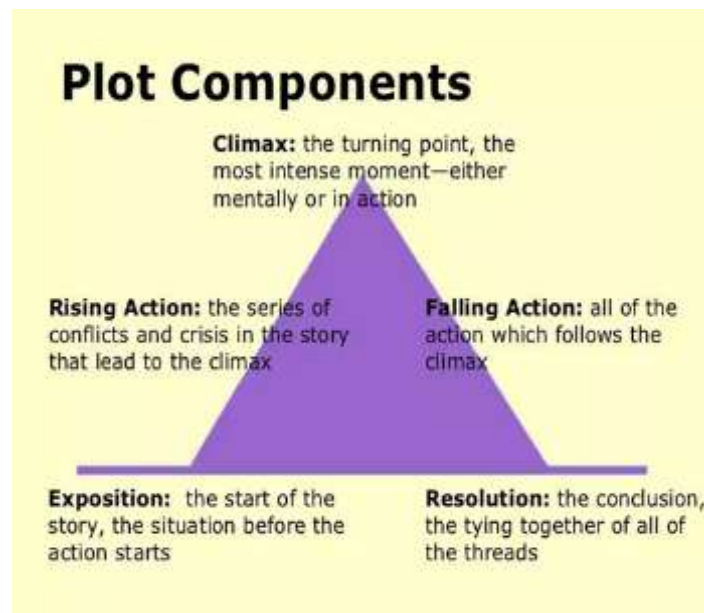

Figure 1: Plot components

For practical classroom purposes, the plot triangle can be simplified so that it is teacher and student-friendly. For this purpose, I have simplified the plot triangle as below:
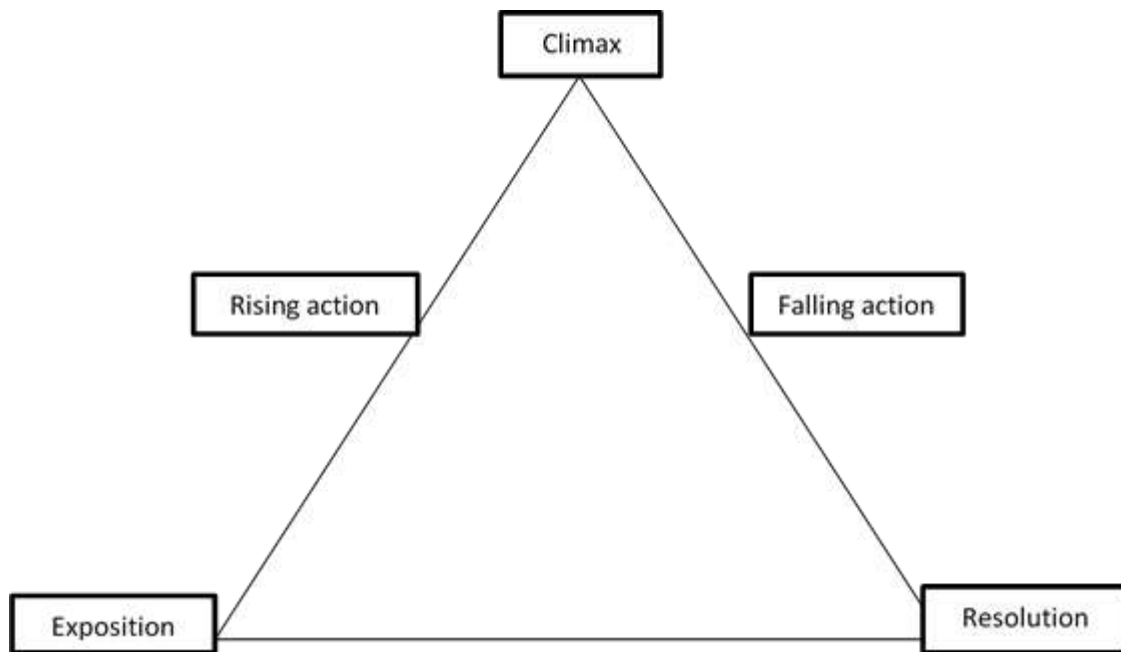
Figure 2: Simplified plot components

This is because Malaysian teachers do not realise that the plot triangle concept can be applied to teaching other subjects that are story-based and process-based such as history, literature, and other subjects teaching processes such as sciences, living skills and others.

2.1.1 Plot Triangle in Action

Teachers can train students to either trace storylines from a particular given story or build story boards for stories that will be created. An example of such process can be applied to this sample story line, "The Day I Lost My Temper".

Figure 3: Sample plot triangle

This style of draft has the tendency to limit students' view of the literature elements in a story. However, if teachers transfer the main ideas and information on the Plot Triangle, students can view the symmetry of the elements in a story such as below as practice. Teachers can also select and try doing it using other stories to teach students the elements of the stories.

Step 1: When students have fully understood the mechanics of how a story is written, teachers now can train their students to brainstorm for ideas in writing their own stories. It is highly recommended that teachers create groups for first-time tries to see the how students discuss and try to come up with the best storyboards. Teachers can even use exam questions with either similar beginnings or endings. Make students present both orally and in writing of their group work. An example is as below:
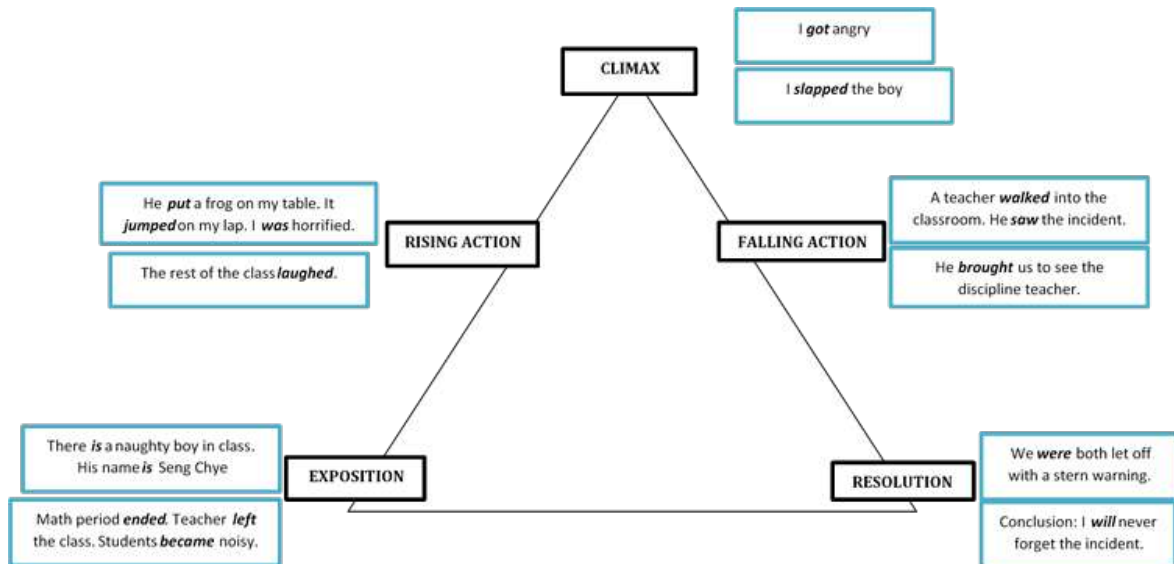
CLIMAX

I *got* angry

I *slapped* the boy

He *put* a frog on my table. It *jumped* on my lap. I *was* horrified.

The rest of the class *laughed.*

RISING ACTION

FALLING ACTION

A teacher *walked* into the classroom. He *saw* the incident.

He *brought* us to see the discipline teacher.

There *is* a naughty boy in class. His name *is* Seng Chye

EXPOSITION

RESOLUTION

We *were* both let off with a stern warning.

Math period *ended.* Teacher *left* the class. Students *became* noisy.

Conclusion: I *will* never forget the incident.

Figure 4: Plot triangle in use

Step 2: Teacher guides students to the correct use of verb tenses. It is easier to see this if it is written in simple sentence before venturing to compound and complex sentence structures. In other words, students are now also gradually exposed to the correct uses of grammar, one element at a time.

Step 3: A teacher can then guide their students to add details such as, adjectives and adverbs (from single word, to phrases and clauses) that enables them to get merits for better use of language. Train them also to add more descriptive details, such as descriptive through the use of the five senses and feelings, in order to make the story telling more vivid.

Step 4: In addition, utilise the five senses for descriptive effect that can add to the sympathetic and empathetic involvement of readers.

Step 5: Train students to add monologues, dialogues or conversation to make stories more natural, lively and adding to the variety of descriptions.

Step 6: Add varieties of sentence structures for example, sentences in passive forms, deserves higher merit than active forms. But as far as possible, avoid repetitiveness.

Step 7: The end product will be a combination of all the skills being unpacked from the syllabus. It is also commendable for teachers to make use of many samples of descriptive essays to make students learn, adopt and adapt high tariff vocabularies in order to help students score the highest of merits.

2.1.2 Elements in a Plot Triangle

Exposition

The most important element in story telling is the exposition which tells about characters and characterization. And the next is the setting which involves places and time. Actually, situation is another element of setting that determines and and provides the direction of the story.

Rising Action

Usually, in tragedies, the rising action involves small conflicts that drive to confrontations. In other words, these incidences will collectively propel to the suspense that boils down to the climax or the turn-around of the story.

Climax

The climax is actually the pinnacle of a story. Sometimes, it is also the turn-around point of the story. Because of the things that happen in this part, it can cause a change in the characterization of characters. It results in further actions that can propel to the next logical action in making things work, improve or get better.

Falling Action

This part ensues the climax. It is a part where unravelling of mysteries, investigations or solutions towards resolving conflicts which then lead to the revealing of truths or making things better.

Resolution

This is when all truths are revealed and conflicts are resolved. Usually, lessons will entail from the previous incidences and happenings in this part of a story.

3.0 METHODOLOGY
3.1 Needs analysis: Unpacking Form 4 Marked Final Exam Papers
- Analysing the number of scripts consists of attempts/non-attempts
- Analysing the number of certain bands achieved by students in Section B (Continuous Writing).
- Analysing the length/number of words of the answers for Continuous Writing.

3.2 Classroom Observation

Students' level of participation and engagement are observed when using the Plot Triangle as a method of instruction.

3.3 Mid-Term Examination

Students' marks for mid-term examination for English 1119 Section B becomes a tool to measure students' progress in using plot triangle as a planning instrument.

3.4 Interviews

Students are interviewed to gauge their views/opinions on the effectiveness of the Plot Triangle method. Below are the examples of interview questions:
- What do you think of Plot Triangle? Is it easy/difficult to use? Why?
- How do you think Plot Triangle has helped you in writing stories/teaching narrative?
- How do you think Plot Triangle limit you in writing stories/teaching narrative?

- List 3 adjectives that you can associate with Plot Triangle.
- If you could improve Plot Triangle better, what would you change/add?

3.5 Implementation and Procedures

Considering the fact that I only get 5 periods of English per week for each Form 5 class, I use Plot Triangle during the single period of English on Thursdays. The sequence of lessons is as follows:

- Week 1: Setting up task, setting up group members (5 in a group), filling in each stage of the plot triangle with brief points.
- Week 2: Collaboratively, students begin to write coherent paragraphs by using the discussed points from the previous section. Ideally, each student write one paragraph each.
- Week 3: Collaborative process of editing their group members' work.
- Week 4: Gallery walk of observing all of the groups' work and teacher gives feedback to students' work

4.0 RESULTS
4.1 Needs analysis: Unpacking Form 4 marked final exam papers

- The number of non-attempts for Continuous Writing (Section B) is quite high compared to Section A whereby there were no non-attempts at all.
- The distribution of the achieved bands are imbalanced. They are mostly saturated in the U(iii) band. This is worrying as a U(iii) band will increase the number of failures.
- Most scripts did not go beyond the required word count (350 words); which makes it harder for students to achieve higher band in their Continuous Writing. This issue might be rooted from the fact that they are lacking the technique to elaborate their ideas as well as to determine the directions of their written task.

From the needs analysis, we found out that the performance gap between the able and the less-able students in English was not too wide. The best script was in the highest C-band while the lowest script was in the U (ii)-band in their Section B (Continuous Writing). Below is the post-mortem of their performance in Form 4 English final exam.

Table 1: Students' Performance in UPK 1 for English 1119 (Paper 1, Section B)

	BAND							
	A (44-50)	B (36-43)	C (32-37)	D (26-31)	E (20-25)	U(i) (14-19)	U(ii) (8-13)	U(iii) (0-7)
No. of students achieved (Total no of students: 63)	-	-	2	15	12	2	5	27
Percentage	-	-	3	24	19	3	8	43

Looking at the data above, it is safe to conclude that almost half of the Form 5 students only managed to reach band U(iii) for their Continuous Writing. This is alarming because it shows that half of the Form 5 students did not attempt to answer the particular section at all. The withdrawal of the students from attempting to answer Continuous Writing shows how high their affective filter is when it comes to written task.

There could be a myriad of reasons why the students refused to answer – but it is quite apparent that the students are lacking the technique in writing long essays. This can be proven by looking at their Section A (Directed Writing); whereby 100% of students attempted to answer and only 13% of students reached U(iii) band for their language marks. Sadly, this is not the case for Section B (Continuous Writing). This clearly shows that these students have the potential to develop adequate writing skill and the willingness to try – it was just the matter of not being given the right exposure to do such writing task.

Also, there was no student who managed to achieve A or B-band based on the data above. Most of them answered factual essays. As much as we love to encourage freedom of creativity in my English classroom, it is quite impossible to ignore that it is harder to tackle fact-based questions. Students often run out of facts to be discussed in their answers; hence making their word count way less than A and B-band legible script – thus lowering the band.
Therefore, from this data, we can sum up 2 things – there is a need of an intervention plan that focuses on narrative writing that could be executed by a step-by-step, easy to follow instructions.

Table 2: Comparison of Students Achievement in UPK 1 and Mid-Term Exam for English 1119 (Paper 1, Section B)

	BAND							
	A (44-50)	B (36-43)	C (32-37)	D (26-31)	E (20-25)	U(i) (14-19)	U(ii) (8-13)	U(iii) (0-7)
No. of students achieved in UPK 1	-	-	2	15	12	2	5	27
Percentage (%)	-	-	3	24	19	3	8	43
No. of students achieved in Mid-Term Exam	-	4	8	20	8	8	8	7
Percentage (%)	-	6	13	32	13	13	13	11

From this data, it is obvious that we have exceeded our objective by reducing the number of students achieving U(iii) to 7; our initial projection was 10 students. Simultaneously, with the use of plot triangle 4 students managed to achieve B-band when we only targeted 2 students at the beginning of the research.

Consequently, the Plot Triangle was used for all students in a secondary school in Segamat as an instructional method in teaching how to write narratives in English. The predictability of nature of Plot Triangle was in sync with the students' thought processes –

they respond well to orthodox approach of inductive teaching; as they are accustomed to this method for their Islamic subjects.

4.2 Classroom Observation

We have observed the different instructional method when teaching narrative. We found out that students respond well to the Plot Triangle by becoming autonomous in every stage of writing; from planning, drafting, writing and editing compared to the conventional method of step-by-step guiding the students using prompts/stimulus (pictures). By using plot triangle, students will have the point of reference to self-check themselves if they are on the right track. This plot triangle can be used for each stage of writing. On the contrary, the method of guiding the students with prompts/visual stimuli will only increase the students' dependency on the teacher; leaving them rather powerless in the exam hall.

4.3 Mid-term examinations

Based on the Form 5 English 1119 result, there was a significant amount of progress in improving their Section B (Continuous Writing) band.

Table 3: Form 5 English 1119 results

	BAND							
	A (44-50)	B (36-43)	C (32-37)	D (26-31)	E (20-25)	U(i) (14-19)	U(ii) (8-13)	U(iii) (0-7)
No. of students achieved (Total no of students: 63)	-	4	8	20	8	8	8	7
Percentage	-	6	13	32	13	13	13	11

Based on the data above, it is clear to see that the saturation was moving to the D-band as opposed to the U(iii) band in their Form 4 Final Exam. There was a substantial improvement in terms of students' performance in their Section B (Continuous Writing). Therefore, it is safe to say that the Plot Triangle method has helped them a lot in effectively answering their Continuous Writing.

4.4 Interviews

All 63 samples as well as English teachers in a school in Segamat who were involved in this action research were interviewed by having them to answer a series of questions that directed them to the effectiveness of Plot Triangle. Below are comments and feedback from the students and teachers:

Organising Thoughts

"... the fact that I was able to arrange my thoughts in the form of storyline really motivates me to write" (Hannin, 5 B)

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"... helpful in organising thoughts" (Teacher B)

Sense of Direction

"... plot triangle is helpful when we are in control of the events of each of the stage(s) – exposition, rising action, climax, etc." (Teacher A)

"... helpful in giving me the sense of direction that any narratives need" (Nurin, 5 A)

Time Management

"... helpful in managing time to answer English Paper 1" (Sahirah, 5 A)

"... time-economical way of brainstorming" (Afiq W., 5 A)

5.0 CONCLUSION

From the experience of teaching and also observations, we found that teachers rarely give students the framework for thinking. Students need to be taught about concepts in whatever subjects and be given a guide or framework of what and how to think. Therefore, it is suggested that students who are in weaker bands or lower level of proficiency, should begin with pictures and picture series and help them with vocabularies before attempting to teach writing.

Each element was unpacked from the syllabus and taught in separate lessons in order to make students see the "scaffolding" effect of what they are learning. This made learning more meaningful, engaging and relevant towards reaching the cumulative objectives being put as the end product.

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EXPLORING MALAYSIAN INSTRUCTORS' PERSPECTIVES OF BLACKBOARD USE FOR TERTIARY EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Advanced web technology is a key driver of flexible learning environment growth. In dealing with increased demand, educational institutions are exploring the potential of E-learning technologies that can change the teaching and learning methodologies. Thus, this study aims to investigate the perception of instructors in using Blackboard as an online instructional platform. This study examined the perception of ten instructors towards Blackboard as a Learning Management System (LMS). To achieve this purpose, the researcher attempted to use ten semi-structured interview questions that included the instructors' perceptions of Blackboard usage and the features they would like to have in Blackboard Learning Management System. The interview data were analyzed and transcribed using the content analysis system involving the identification, coding and categorization of the data's main themes. The results showed that instructors need training in the use of Blackboard and they need more time to practice and plan their lesson with new technology. Based on the research results, the final chapter includes the important features that might be needed to implement Blackboard. Information from this study will provide the interested institutions the similar tracking paths in the future with some insights.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In social, financial, industrial businesses and education, Information Technology (IT) has become an important component of human activity. Information Technology affects learning among university learners considerably as they use it in their class programs. Teachers use Information Technology (IT) extensively and they use it in their professional exercise on a regular basis. As such, lecturers do not have technological barrier in order to deliver their lesson in the class.

Education today utilizes Learning Management System (LMS) intended specifically to promote distance-learning platforms (Wael & Morsi, 2005). Such platforms are also used to deliver and track mixed learning such as combination of traditional which is face-to-face and internet resources. However, E-learning is not a simple application of IT in education field, but a case of increasing learning opportunities and a fresh educational frontier. Creating procedures for both lecturers and learners needs enormous effort and dedication in order to foster value in E-learning lessons (Uzial & Oladiran, 2012). As a cognitive and knowledge-oriented process, the

complexity of learning makes it more hard to establish an efficient E-learning platform using IT. In fact, E-learning somehow influences the way teaching is accomplished. Compared to traditional teaching methods, E-learning involves much more effort to achieve equal or enhanced learning results, as it needs joint efforts from the lecturers and the learners.

Learning Management System (LMS) are a growing component of greater education academic systems. They are used in many types of E-learning from lessons that introduce minimal elements of web facilitation to complete online classes. To improve teaching and learning through face-to-face and also to maintain up with other institutions, "Blackboard (Bb) learn" has been adopted as a Learning Management System (LMS). This is a collection of software instruments intended in most Higher Education Institutions (HEI) to provide online teaching and learning (Hall, 2001). It is a web-based technology that provides an instructor with a better way to plan, design and perform, track and evaluate the performance of learners (Blackboard, 1997-2011). A teaching leadership scheme can also provide learners with the capacity to use interactive characteristic such as discussion forums, chat rooms for real-time debate, electronic mails, equipment for electronic submission of tasks and internet testing as well (Gronlund, 2002).

Yet, at the same time, lecturers' varying perceptions about the use of Blackboard (Bb) in teaching and learning process may play a vital role in developing the students' interest towards Bb. It could be said that, lecturers' perceptions utilize influence on their mode of adapting technology in classroom. Even after having a massive digital exposure in this era of technology, teachers' way of handling the E-learning tools has varying levels. It was found that there was a slow rate of changeover for instructional practices from traditional method to technological techniques. Considering the fact, it can be said that many lecturers still considering technology as a supplementary tool rather than viewing it as a main component in teaching and learning process.

According to Law-less & Pellegrino (2007), LMS is yet not fully equipped to facilitate student learning and make the lesson more student-centred teaching approach. These facts disclose that lecturers' perception on Bb integration have a significant impact on the constructive integration of technology to teaching and learning process. As per findings by Kagan (1992), teachers' belief provide a basis for the teaching methodology and it links to compatible teaching styles. Furthermore, according to Kane, Sandretto & Heath (2002) a shift to technology based teaching requires a major change to teachers' perception on the use of technology. Thus, the current research will present an analysis of lecturers' perceptions about the process of adoption of the Blackboard applications. In order to facilitate the investigation regarding the perception of the Blackboard use in teaching and learning process, the researchers form the following questions: a) What are the perceptions of the lecturers in incorporating Bb in their teaching and learning process? b) What are the challenges lecturers face in implementing Bb as a teaching tool? c) What are the features lecturers would like to have in Bb platform to improvise teaching and learning?

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Aljawarneh et al, (2012), Blackboard is a combination of E-learning application and conventional teaching. Blackboard is also a curriculum tool which is extensively used in tertiary institution. It serves as an online platform, where programmes and courses can be chosen and structured to assist class events. Online sessions, discussion boards and feedback session are those supplementary tool that are incorporated to improve further students' learning experience (Oye et al, 2012). Blackboard is one of the most known Learning Management System in Europe as it is able to be a good Teaching and Learning platform. Bb is also useful for lecturers as it can be used as a teaching aid to explain certain subjects for the students or to identify major points (Aljawarneh et al, 2012).

Even after Blackboard has been used widely, lecturers' acceptance and user-friendly handling for E-learning tool has varying levels. It can be said that, there is a slow rate of transition for instructional practices from traditional methods to technological techniques. Although many lecturers consider technology as a teaching tool instead of an essential component of successful teaching and learning process, yet there exist few lecturers who still have fear that online interaction between lecturers and students might replace the face-to-face interaction (Walker, 2004). Nevertheless, there is a group of lecturers who are still not well motivated and could not time frame their training to use this technology effectively. In addition to that they could not even become the expert users of Bb to improve the pedagogic mode as this the crucial element needed in teaching and learning process. At this point, it can be said that, lecturers need to be persuaded about the importance of Learning Management System in education and they should be induced with the frequent use of LMS. This is because when a lecturer uses technology effectively in order to teach then he or she considered as an effective lecturer (Kozma, 2003).

These facts reveal that lecturers' perception on the integration of Bb in teaching and learning process is fairly important. As for Kagan (1992), lecturers believe that LMS provide basis for the teaching methodology and it is directly linked to the teaching style used in the classroom. A shift to technology based teaching is considered as a kind of blended learning that require a strong change to the perceptions of lecturers towards the use of LMS. This is because lecturers' perception is important in order to implement a better teaching and learning process. As indicated by Kate, Sandretto and Heath (2002), such perceptions play major role in developing institutional practice and policy. Findings show that interrelationship between teachers' perception and actions provide a basis for the new practical to be implemented successfully.

In addition to that, Dockstader (1999) strengthened this fact by stating that the models of technology integration to the curriculum and student learning prove that the teacher is a vital part of the integration of technology. When one lecturer has a good perception towards the implementation of LMS in teaching and learning process, the whole process will be affected into a positive way. Thus will provide a better lesson and better students. This statement supported by Mohsin and Shafeeq (2014) where in their research study they pointed out that the situation

where teachers with positive perception on Blackboard applications helps to improve the teacher-student relationship in a course and make teaching to be more successful. Nevertheless, Kashghari & Aseel (2014) in their pilot study at King Abdul Aziz University claimed that it could not be determined whether Blackboard helped the students to improve their learning. Al-Maqtri (2014) revealed that, the student community, both male and female do not consider E-learning effective as learning platform as it is hard for the students to carry out the activities due to lack of internet access.

In contrast, Hubbard & Levy (2006) stated that there has been a steady increase of online learning over the last decade with the growth of the Internet and the proliferation of computers at home and in many educational institutions. Thus the problem on the internet access by right should have alternative to overcome. It is assumed that the continuous use of face-to-face teaching as a basic building block of the learning experience would be enriched and enhanced through the integration of the Blackboard both in and out of the classroom. As many are aware, LMS used in educational institution to offer the combination of conventional teaching and online teaching which is known as blended learning. Along with 21st century, integrative of LMS would open a wide range of resources for teaching and learning process. The integration would take place fully with the strong support of the lecturers, as they should have positive perception towards the implementation of Blackboard in teaching and learning process.

The current research will present a qualitative analysis of tertiary education lecturers' perception about the process of adoption of the Blackboard applications. The main purpose of this study is to explore the lecturers' perception towards the implementation of Blackboard in teaching learning and the features the lecturers would like to add on in Blackboard in order to make teaching and learning process easier and convenient.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

Ten lecturers from Segi University, Kota Damansara were selected as a sample of this study. They are lecturers from PACE department, School of IT, Faculty of Education and Faculty of Engineering. The participants' age varies between 27 to 45, with the average age being 36.65. All of them are Malaysian; 4 Malays, 3 Chinese, 2 Indian and 1 Bidayuh. Their teaching experience varies between 3 to 15 years. The participants have been using Blackboard for at least 2 years and some of them had been trained to use Blackboard by Blackboard trainers.

According to Yin (2008), semi-structured interviews are qualitative and flexible interviews, which allow new ideas or questions to be created during the process of an interview, based on what the interview participant says. In addition to that Saunders et al (2012) state that semi structured interviews are highly valid, as they allow participants to discuss a subject thoroughly, while providing in-depth information that is valuable in making valid conclusions. Thus the researcher chose purposive sampling method to select the 10 participants from the University and the researcher has used ten semi-structured interview questions in order to ensure complete and consistent information across different interviews. The interviews were then transcribed and segregate into coding as thematic analysis used by the researcher.

The researcher set an appointment with the lecturers to conduct the interviews. The purpose of the interview was to gain an insight about the perception of the lecturers towards the use of Blackboard system in the university. They were also asked why they chose Bb in teaching and learning, how it is carried out, their opinions about the usefulness of the training courses and materials, and if they encountered any challenges prior to, or after, the implementation of the Blackboard system.

The initial themes are shown in the table below, as well as the three major codes that emerged, which are examined in this section.

Table 1: Qualitative Data Coding Framework

Final Coding Framework	Initial Coding Framework
Functionality	Enough functionality of Blackboard system
	Effective features
Ease of Use	Issues with the Blackboard platform
	Ease of resolving these issues
	Ease of submitting/uploading assignment
	Manual to use Blackboard
Effectiveness	Communicating with the Blackboard platform
	Reliable learning environment
	Blackboard in the future
	Learning Management System

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
4.1 Findings

The three selected data codes were examined and similar responses have been grouped together for easier data analysis.

RESULTS		
THEME	**QUESTIONS**	**RESPONSE**
Functionality	What are the usage of Blackboard as a teaching tool?	*We are using Bb 100% for teaching and learning. we use announcement, workshop recording, upload content, web conferencing all in Bb. 100% our students access Bb.* *It has a good usage where we can upload the materials and the students can retrieve the materials anytime and* *Anywhere. In addition to that it is useful for blended learning as we are moving to 21st century and blended learning really need to be implemented.*
	Does Bb has enough functionality? Explain	*It has enough function but for conventional teaching process we really don't use the function. The functions are there and it's just the lecturers do not have enough time to explore the functions and see how it is beneficial.* *I think yes. Bb has enough functionality. All assignments, guidelines on the assignments, rubrics and everything is there and it is enough for students to retrieve anytime. Even the students can email the lecturer through Bb and ask if there is any issue*
	What are the benefits for students when Blackboard is used as a teaching tool?	*They can access it anywhere since students have app and they can simply access through their smartphone. Some university using Bb and some using advance features which is Blackboard Ultra. In Bb Ultra they can have beautiful content and integrated video content in it. In addition to that, in Bb Ultra will be beneficial compare to ours because we can simply email the authority person if we have any problem related to Bb.* *It ease students as they can access anywhere they go and it save lecturers' time.*
	How useful is the Blackboard for course delivery?	*I just use Bb to deliver lecturers and for me it's merely to upload materials and assignments. I use some other tool which is more convenient* *For course delivery I would say it depends on the lecturer how they utilize the Bb. Some very much into it where even tutorial they use Bb to upload. Some just use to upload and downloading materials.*

RESULTS		
THEME	QUESTIONS	RESPONSE
Ease of Use	Do you think the features on Blackboard are effective? Why?	*Some of the features in Bb are not user-friendly. When marking assignment, it will hang half way maybe need to increase the ram for the speed.* *It is effective as everywhere people talking about LMS. It is just that the facilities can be improved for an example for lecturers manual marking better and easier because the buffering taking longer period.*
	What do you think of the manual in using Blackboard?	*When I face problem then I refer. Because I don't really a reading person. If I need I will refer. But we need thorough manual or once in a while maybe this week you can send on how to send announcement next week you can send how to mark papers and so on. It will help* *Honestly I didn't go through any manual it is just that we go through the training and it somehow help us to use Bb*
	What are the features you would like to be added on in Blackboard?	*I would say it would be better if we have features where we can make video conferencing.* *I don't think so any additional features required. It's just that if controlling the stuff like adding the students in the course take charge by other person then we are having problem. It's better for the lecturers to have that priority.*

RESULTS		
THEME	**QUESTIONS**	**RESPONSE**
Effectiveness	Does Blackboard support pedagogical needs? How?	*Well it serve as a good tool like flipped classroom where students can read the notes in advance and we can give tutorial in extra and we can discuss in future at class but unfortunately the students don't really use Bb.* *I would say in terms of pedagogical need it is lacking because we are using only to upload material. Most of the students not participating much unless we make it compulsory.*
	Should the usage of Bb made optional? Why?	*Bb can be made as an optional method because some students prefer to see lecturers' hardcopy materials. Some students may have problem to get into the course. It is also related to registration issue.* *I would say Blackboard should be compulsory because it is a good LMS but of course we have challenges but we have to settle it off and come out with solution.*
	Further ideas on improvising Blackboard?	*Maybe we can have video live conferencing.* *We can improvise it means we can make it more user friendly. Set up good manual and better slides. And last time I had issue where students couldn't be registered so if we settle it off then would be better*

4.2 Discussion
Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of the lecturers in incorporating Bb in their teaching and learning process?

Most of the lecturers have a positive perception towards Blackboard where they do agree Bb is one the worldly known LMS. In addition to that, lecturers really want Bb to be sustained in the teaching process and they want some of the features to be added on so that the usage of Bb will be broad and good enough. For an example video conferencing, Live chat and so on.

Research Question 2: What are the challenges lecturers face in implementing Bb as a teaching tool?

From the interview session with the lecturers, the researcher found that there were few challenges and difficulties faced by lecturers in implementing Blackboard in their teaching and learning process. Some of the lecturers were having hard time to upload the materials online where the system started to buffer for quite some time it takes a lot of time. In addition to that, to convince the students to use Bb is one part of challenges which lecturer face. This is because the smart phone application was not widely used and students are not being exposed to the usage of Blackboard through application. Thus students face problems in order for them to use Blackboard to download materials and so on. Nevertheless, lecturers too face problem in the enrollment of the students. When the enrollment of the students done after few weeks, it makes the lecturers to have hard time to convey their lesson where they don't really have students in the online class to teach. Thus registration of the students earlier than now would be beneficial for the lecturers to conduct their teaching and learning process.

Research Question 3: What are the features lecturers would like to have in Blackboard platform to improvise teaching and learning?

When the researcher interviewed the lecturers almost half of them requested for video conferencing tool. As we all are aware, video conferencing really helps the teaching and learning process where lecturers can have the conference though they didn't attend the class. In addition to that, when the feature is boost up by adding another button of recorded video conference it would be much better and convincing for the lecturers. It helps the students to play and watch the conference on any particular topic or lesson the lecturers shoot the video on.

5.0 CONCLUSION

As mentioned recently, the effect of ICT on the instructive division has dynamically developed and "Blackboard" has gotten comfortable as major mechanical improvements in advanced education (Blackboard LearnTM, 2009). Bb is viewed as a rising advancement in different instructive foundations and it tends to be said that Bb is right now ruling the internet learning framework showcase (Coopman, 2009). In this way, it is significant for learning foundations to have the option to settle on educated choices and on the best way to use successfully Blackboard as instructing and learning platform. From the interview, the researcher found that Blackboard is widely accepted by the lecturers and it has positively influenced the lecturers to use in teaching and learning process. Moreover, the usage of the lecturers would be better if training and thorough evaluation of learning activities done time to time. In addition to that, it is undeniable that Blackboard platform is utilized in order to guarantee that the selected application accomplishes what it was designed and implemented for, which is to improve students' learning and teachers' tutoring activities.

The constant development of innovation has energized the advancement of separation learning, and permitted students who might not have gotten the opportunity of considering the chance to achieve this. In developing country like Saudi Arabia, distance learning opens up roads for achieving a more extensive scope of students who probably won't have had this opportunity previously. As referenced before, one of the significant methods for achieving this is by means of the utilization of Blackboard platform. This investigation has evaluated how instructors see the utility of Blackboard frameworks as a teaching and learning process. These outcomes support earlier studies in this field, which revealed that the expanded attainable quality and availability of online assets is a significant factor of online platform being esteemed by students (Heirdsfield et al, 2011; Mirjana, 2010). Along these lines, the general advantages of utilizing Blackboard for teaching and learning are extensive when factors, for example, straightforward entry to learning assets and simplicity of learning are considered. It can, along these lines, be presumed that Blackboard platform has a high prospect of replacing traditional teaching classroom soon.

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Building critical thinking in the language classroom: exploring critical thinking processes that enhance the virtues of society 5.0

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ABSTRACT

Critical thinking is an essential part of the learning process at any stage of learning, yet some students literally complete their entire schooling without totally grasping the concept. Rote learning and memorization are still part of the generic repertoire as the learning outcomes, based on assessments, are usually the target for achievement. Based on the current Malaysian education blueprint, steps are being taken at multiple levels to inculcate critical thinking skills which incorporate higher order thinking skills of analysis, application and synthesis. The purpose of this study is to identify student's perceptions about motivation for learning and consciousness of their ability, to apply the concept of critical thinking and problem solving through integrated practice in the language classroom at Pre-university level. The purpose of this paper is to present findings about student perception through a focus group interview, based on a critical thinking process conducted in class, where students use a series of group discussions to solve a problem then present their solution. Students then evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of the chosen solution to be implemented and present this to their class. The feedback and results from the activities indicate that the students not only grasp the skills required, but are able to integrate it into application in their daily life and interactions. Students clearly understand that practicing critical thinking skills is important and it is an evolving process for lifelong learning.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The world as we know it is rapidly adapting to a globalized environment where technology and communication are at the forefront of daily lives. Different countries are adopting and adapting various education policies which result in classroom strategies that may and may not work for those in real classroom situations, educators who have to not only teach different students with varying attitudes, aptitudes and backgrounds, but also integrate technology, gadgets and other "cool stuff" to try to keep learners engaged.

Rosefsky and Ofper (2012) stated the three major rationales why education systems need to develop and incorporate 21st century learning skills for students are economic reasons, civic reasons and globalisation. The economic perspective relies on the fact that computer and machines can effectively manage routine, mundane jobs that were once delegated to lower level workers, which means people will soon be employed for jobs that require higher-order thinking skills. The civic rationale relies on the idea that each individual needs to be an engaged citizen who thinks critically to

be able to "propose or review policies to address social challenges". This will require citizens who have problem solving skills, communication skills (oral and written) to be able to share their ideas, opinions, arguments etc. publicly. The Global perspective, involves the scale of economic supply and demand, which will eventually lead jobs that can only be obtained by workers who can deal with higher-competition, who can apply non-routine, complex thinking and communication skills to handle different problems and environments. This also includes the possibilities of global migration, interdependent international markets, climate instability, where citizens could be part of a globally interconnected economy and political network. Hence, it is imperative for students around the world to learn how to "communicate, collaborate, and problem-solve beyond national boundaries". These skills sets proposed are interdependent and overlapping. In essence, these skills need to be taught in tandem over a variety of spheres and at multiple levels.

2.0 BACKGROUND

Critical thinking is an essential part of the learning process at any stage of learning, yet some students literally complete their entire schooling years without totally grasping the concept. Rote learning and memorization are still part of the generic repertoire as the learning outcomes, based on assessments, are usually the target for achievement. Unfortunately, Malaysian statistics indicate that there are many graduates who are unemployed due to multiple factors, including the lack of crucial critical and creative thinking skills. According to Hossain et al. (2018), "Soft skills are titanic factors in acquisition of entry-level graduates, and students from Malaysian universities seem to lack in those areas". Based on the current Malaysian education blueprint, steps are being taken at multiple levels to inculcate critical thinking skills which incorporate higher order thinking skills of analysis, application and synthesis.

Most students currently intending to study at tertiary level should enter with a certain level of competency in these skills. However, this is not necessarily the case. Hence, students who enter into pre-university courses may have the necessary language competency grades to fulfill entry requirements for their respective courses, yet still lack the necessary reading, writing and critical analysis skills needed for tertiary level articulation and interpretation of ideas. Dovros and Makrakis (2012) believe that students need to be challenged to "questions their pre-assumptions rather than urge them to gather information without question". This means that they need to be given the opportunity to integrate their experiences and previous knowledge, while lecturers become non-authoritarian and encourage students to take on some of the responsibility for their own learning.

Taking this into account, the Pre-university Programme at Asia Pacific University includes a mandatory module called English for Academic Purposes (EAP). The aim of the course is to prepare students in their first semester in the Foundation and Diploma courses with academic skills they will need to cope with academic demands during their Foundation/Diploma and Degree studies. The knowledge and skills about the use of the English Language that students will need to master will include the ability to articulate an argument in oral or written form to support a claim or a thesis. Students are required to respond to what is heard and read, to 'challenge' assumptions, to make inferences, to analyze and or to participate in a discussion, while contributing to an adjustment in their own thinking or perception.

An effective technique to develop students' "critical thinking skills while teaching them language skills (Brinton et al, 1989; Liaw, 2007; Stoller, 1997) is the content-based approach. According to Brinton, Snow & Wesche (1989,p2), content based instruction involves the "concurrent study of language and subject matter, with the form and sequence of language presentation dictated by

content materials". Stoller (1997) also believes that higher-order thinking skills can be taught effectively through the content based language teaching approach as this incorporates language into the teaching of subject matter which collectively infuses speaking, listening and thinking skills.

In line with this, a number of lessons within the EAP course require students to participate in problem solving activities that integrate the use of critical thinking analytical skills, deduction, research skills as well as writing and presentation skills. It has been noted that there is a significant improvement in not only the language competency of students, but also the self-confidence levels of students. However, these levels cannot be measured by merely conducting assessments to determine the pre- and post-lesson competencies of individual students, as this is actually an ongoing process of learning and creating awareness.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to identify student's perceptions about motivation for learning and consciousness of their ability, to apply the concept of critical thinking and problem solving through integrated practice in the language classroom at Pre-university level.

The purpose of this paper is to present findings about student perception through a focus group interview, based on a critical thinking process conducted in class, where students use a series of group discussions to solve a problem then present their solution. This demonstrates their ability to analyse the problem and brainstorm for the solutions to the problem. Students then evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of the chosen solution to be implemented. Students present this finding to their class. The presentation will also demonstrate their ability to monitor the rate of their academic success of the change.

3.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Critical thinking

Although critical thinking has been a topic of discussion in Education and at the workplace, Ennis (1963) moans the absence of much research on critical thinking and its definition. However, Both Ennis (1963, 1991, 2011) and Murawsky (2014) note that '… there is a general agreement among higher education professionals that critical thinking skills are important and there is a lack of clarity about what exactly is critical thinking' (page 26). Critical thinking as defined by the National Council for Excellence in Critical Thinking, 1987, means the 'intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully examining data', generated by various means, then being able to pull out new thoughts and insights that guide us in forming beliefs and taking action.

According to Raikou and Karalis (2016), "enhancing critical thinking and reflective processes regarding established opinions must be one of the key benchmarks of student education. The preparation of new scientists with innovative methods and contemporary practices which will favor the development of thinking human beings, with broad horizons and the ability to adjust to constant changes." Thus, in order for students to be better prepared to adapt and adopt to new learning environments and experiences, these skills are essential.

3.2 Student motivation

This study will utilize J.M. Keller's (1983) ARCS model of motivation design to analyse different aspects of student perceptions, which can be used to further design future material and coursework or classroom activities. The ARCS analyses motivational categories, which can then be used for designing appropriate strategies based on this analysis. Therefore, ARCS model is both a

motivational and instructional model. As Keller (2000) says, the goal of this model is helping educators and learners to learn and have satisfying lives.

A few studies have encompassed the idea of student motivation based on a sense of responsibility. According to Fishman (2014), student have indicated that perception of control over learning and knowledge building is associated with the sense of responsibility. Higgins et. Al., (1994) concur by adding that this helps with students' inner motivation and self-regulation. Zimmerman and Kitsantas (2005) indicate that students who were actively involved in self-regulatory learning processes, delegated more responsibility to themselves as learner in comparison to the teacher. This is reiterated by Mameli et.al. (2019) who state that "the fulfilment of basic psychological needs plays a role in fostering a positive student attitude, that of being actors and protagonists of their own learning environment and processes. This result is particularly important as it offers hints about the means and the processes by which teachers can create the conditions for schools to face the challenge to form the citizens of tomorrow's societies".

3.3 Society 5.0

In the race to fulfill the needs and wants of all vested parties and sectors, some of these policies, plans and strategies are working, while others are not. Japan, a country with one of the most technological savvy societies, with a high context culture, should be one of those at the forefront of this education race. Hence, the Japanese government is taking crucial steps to try to integrate a disintegrated younger generation who are becoming more and more socially isolated. According to the Statistical handbook of Japan 2018, there is drastic drop in the population, especially in recent years. It is clearly stated in the 2017 census, "the declining marriage rate, rising marrying age and increased choice of unmarried life in recent years as described above is one explanation for the dropping birth rate". This census also confirms that there are more dependents (children and elderly) and less working population, which puts the burden of the majority onto the working minority. Subsequently, there is an increase in the number of burnout, depression and suicidal cases. Japan is taking serious steps to construct a better work life balance. The Japanese Diet enacted the "work style reform bill" in June 2018 to set a "Legal limit on overtime working hours". According to Professor Yasushi Sato (UNESCO News, 21st Feb 2019), Japan is advocating the next phase of global movement, their proposal for Society 5.0 involves transition and integration of complete digitalization of communications to establish a better balance of technology utilized within family, social and cultural values. All of which need to be reintegrated, and in some cases actively taught, through education of the current and future generations. According to Hiroaki Nakanishi (2019), Chairman of Keidanren, "emphasis will be placed on satisfying individual needs, solving problems and creating value". Yoshimasa Hayashi (2017), Japan's Education Minister, highlighted the following "emphasis must be on human skills such as communication, leadership and endurance, as well as curiosity, comprehension and reading skills". Some of the skills suggested include critical thinking, creativity and language competence.

4.0 METHOD

This study intends to demonstrate that components of critical thinking (as listed in Bloom's taxonomy of Educational Objectives for Knowledge-based goals) can be learned within a 12 weeks semester. Critical thinking behavior and mastery expected of students include asking questions to further understanding, considering all sides of an argument, recognizing other perspectives without jumping to hasty conclusions, identifying conclusions reached with inconclusive evidence and not accepting claims without conclusive evidence to support them (Murawski, 2014, Behar-Horenstein and Niu, 2011).

To facilitate the learning of critical thinking skills in the current semester, lecture sessions of two hours each were used to introduce students to practicing higher order thinking skills. These higher order thinking skills, based on Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives for Knowledge-based goals included all the six levels from recall, comprehension, application, analysis, to synthesis and evaluation. With videos and articles used as the stimulus, questions leading students to focused conversations were given to guide students in their listening and reading activities. Focused discussion questions served to set the stage for critical thinking necessary, to build on the lower levels of thinking and then gradually rising to the higher levels of thinking.

At the first level of questions, the focus was on what is observed i.e. what is seen and heard in exact terms (recall). Examples of these facts include who the people are, their roles in this issue, what happened who were directly affected, what was said. The second level of questions focused on the feelings evoked about the issue in question. Feelings allow individuals to be in touch with their values, their principles, and what they know is right or wrong. The third level of questions (analysis) focused on the interpretation of the facts, and the feelings. Students were given the opportunity to question the meaning of the situation; to list the causes and effects or differences and similarities; to discover key insights; answer 'what if' and 'then what' questions; to think about what others are probably unaware of such as assumptions being made. The fourth level of questions focused on assimilation and evaluation when students practiced identifying problems, brainstorming solutions, then presenting their best solution demonstrating how the problem will be solved, how easy it will be to implement it and how cost effective it is. Students were also encouraged to include other relevant criteria to convince the reader/listener of the effectiveness of their solution.

The students are also encouraged to study the author's position and the evidence used to support his/her position, what factors might have influenced the author to write about the issue and the perspective used to present the writer's position: i.e., political, social, religious or other perspectives.

Finally the students decide on their position – for example: Are they for or against decisions made about this issue of child marriage; what they think is the next step; and what solutions do they offer to solve problems as they emerge. To present their points of view, students were given the task of writing an argument to support their position on the issue. In class, one of the ways to share their point of view was to present the problem or the issue and to offer a solution that is considered most effective to solve the problem.

During the two-hour tutorial sessions that follow the lecture, students were divided into groups to discuss the issue based on their research. The purpose of the focused group discussion was to share information; to discuss the implications of the issue in their lives and in society; then to make a decision about actions to be taken to solve the problems. The tutorial homework task required students to write five-paragraph essays about their opinion on the issue.

Xhaferi & Xhaferi (2017) who indicate that students are very positive about self-assessment and reflections as they are able to find out their current state of knowledge and become more self-motivated as they realize that they are responsible for their own academic performance support the rationale for the final reflective essay in compounding the critical thinking process.

A month after the activities were conducted in class, a focus group interview, based on Keller's Arcs Model of Motivation (1983), was conducted with the students in the 10th week of classes, to determine students' perception of the motivation factors, which contribute to confidence levels. The independent researcher was introduced to the class for the session and 10 volunteers were requested to take seats at a discussion table. A brief explanation was given to reassure them that the questions posed

would be to elicit feedback for future development of the module and content and that they were encouraged to give any type of feedback without prejudice.

5.0 RESULTS

The results of the Focus group discussion conducted by the Independent researcher can be divided into the following segments based on Keller's Arcs Model of Motivation (1983): Attention, relevance, Confidence & satisfaction.

5.1 Attention

Students were asked two leading questions about Attention. The unanimous positive answer to the first question: "Do you think that the Problem Solving Questions were Interesting?" was explained further by two points. The first was that the problems posed were something that they did not really think about, therefore intriguing. The second was that they were able to share with other students in the group, who may not see the problem as clearly as they do. When asked what motivated them to do research for the preparation, five collective answers were given: the team, the task, the topics, the spirit of competition and the idea of learning something new.

5.2 Relevance

There were several questions posed about Relevance. When asked why they thought they were given the task, three options emerged, for future study or learning; for future work or jobs; and for use on their daily lives. When asked to explain how the task helped with understanding of future lessons or topics, the students responded that they gradually realized the benefits, especially to confidence and ability to see things from a different perspective. Students were asked to list the skills they learnt. These included: presentation skills, thinking skills, teamwork, leadership, observation, summarizing, research, listening, open-mindedness, time management and social skills. When asked if they felt empowered by this activity, they requested for the meaning of empowerment. The ensuing response was uncertainty.

5.3 Confidence

In the area of Confidence, students were asked how they felt about their own self-confidence on the topic researched. They responded by saying that after the research, they realized that they did not know much, but needed to learn more. They were excited to share what they learnt, but some of the topics were not relevant to the moment. Therefore, they felt a disconnection existed. When asked how it helped with their self-confidence about presenting, they mentioned that they felt more confident, but also felt that they could have done better if they have been given more time or compromised less for teammates.

5.4 Satisfaction

Several question were posed about Satisfaction. When asked about satisfaction levels on the outcomes achieved during the thinking process, collectively they voiced their dissatisfaction. This was also evident when asked about their satisfaction about presentations, which correlated to the answer to the earlier question posed about confidence. When asked about how it helped their understanding about various aspects of critical thinking, the unanimous response was that there is a lot more to learn. When asked if this process has motivated them to learn about the subject, the answer was "yes". They were then requested to talk about what they gained from the experience of sharing with their classmates. The response was that they learnt the numerous skills and that they realised there is a lot of room for

improvement in various aspects of their perspective, problem solving skills, presentation and interactions.

Students then voluntarily started a discussion on what they felt could be done to improve the activity. Their answers were that the sessions could be more interactive with the use of more technology and allowance of more time and they would like to see more diversification of topics that are more in trend or appealing to their age group.

6.0 CONCLUSION

Overall, the results of the focus group discussion indicate that the students were very positive about the motivation factors pertaining to attention, relevance and confidence. However, their levels of satisfaction were not fully met, as they truly felt that they could have achieved and learnt much more if they were given ample time, more use of technology to enhance the learning experience and different topics that appealed to their age group. However, it is very clear that students are aware that these skills are important in various aspects of their lives as students and working adults and through their daily interactions. Even though they could not communicate or relate to the idea of being "empowered learners", they do relate to the idea that it is a learning process. The lack of satisfaction also bodes well for their motivation for lifelong learning, as this means that these students will be able to not only take initiative to learn, but seek opportunities to practice the skills they have learnt.

Resfsky and Opher (2012) state that transfer of thinking skills need to be effective, the skills need to be applied to real 21st century situations as the work place demands. A recommendation then, is to continue with the 'teaching' of critical thinking skills in the EAP classroom by incorporating the factors highlighted into the classroom practice to ensure that satisfaction is further improved. The hope is that students will be able not only understand how and why they need these skills, but to also walk away with a sense of achievement and knowledge of a job well done. This will then ensure a complete motivation cycle that will essentially recur in many situations over a longer period, which will encourage students to practice what they have learnt in the classroom an incorporate it into their daily lives.

Ennis (1963) indicated in his paper 'Needed: Research in Critical Thinking' that there is still no clarity on what critical thinking is, but there still is the need to be a critical thinker since critical and creative thinking help us to contribute to the better development of society, to reduce suffering and to persuade others to work towards those goals. Thus, the goal is not for completion of the process, but to create a jumpstarting platform within the classroom, which enables students to inculcate critical thinking skills in all aspects of their lives.

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Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in Malaysian Schools: Sociocultural and Dialogic Perspectives for Practice and Research

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ABSTRACT

Professional learning communities (PLCs) have been enacted as a national strategy in Malaysian schools since around the launch of the Malaysian Education Blueprint in 2013, on the strength of its advocacy in the international education literature. Written in conjunction with the 28th MELTA International Conference, this paper reviews the theoretical and empirical literature and argues that, in theory as well as practice, PLCs can be a sustainable and viable approach for teacher professional learning; however, its effectiveness and success cannot be taken for granted. Adopting a sociocultural perspective on PLCs, this paper argues for attentiveness to dialogue as the mechanism of PLC learning, and on sociocultural context as the soil in which PLCs are to grow. In doing so, the author reviews some of the specifics of the Malaysian context, drawing possible connections to PLC practice and positioning them as 'foreshadowed problems' (Malinowski, 1922). The paper concludes by issuing a call to action for practitioners and researchers, inviting further work to clarify and better understand the PLC process in Malaysia.

1.0   INTRODUCTION

The 28th MELTA International Conference, in 2019, focusses on the notion of sustainability *in* and *through* education, drawing from frameworks such as the Society 5.0 Education for Sustainable Development, Education 4.0 and 21st century education. I believe that the focus on sustainability is highly appropriate, as it ties the practice of education (whether in English-language teaching or more generally) to a long-term vision for society's flourishing.

In this paper, I scrutinise the theory and practice of *professional learning communities* (PLCs). Though variously defined in the literature, I take the definition that PLCs are 'teams intentionally organised through formal structures to facilitate teacher inquiry into classroom practices' (Van Lare & Brazer, 2013: 375)[1].

Since its popularisation via Hord's (1997) seminal work, PLCs have become a feature of educational policy in many nations, states and school districts (Stoll & Louis, 2007; DuFour & Eaker, 1998), spreading beyond the Anglo-American heartlands of its birth and in some cases hybridizing with pre-existing collaborative practices in new contexts, such as Lesson Study in Japan (Yoshida, 1999), *jiayanzu* ('teach research groups') in China (Paine & Ma, 1993), or Singaporean Teacher Network's Learning Circles (LC) (Hairon & Dimmock, 2012) and even becoming part of

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[1] I do not use 'PLCs' in the sense of a network of schools working together, or even teachers sharing and collaborating informally, absent of school structures to facilitate joint inquiry. For discussions about the merits of defining PLCs in various ways, see Stoll and Louis (2007), for a sketch of the varying conceptualisations of PLCs, see Hairon *et al.* (2015) and Huffman *et al.* (2015). In my research, I most often encounter PLCs in the form of subject panels, which match Van Lare and Brazer's (2013) definition above.

educational discourse in contexts where formalised teacher collaboration is comparatively less well-established, like Malaysia (Abdullah & Ghani, 2014; Ling, 2017; Ismail et al., 2014).

2.0   LITERATURE REVIEW
2.1   PLCs as a model for sustainable professional learning – reviewing the evidence

The matter of sustainability, while not in the foreground of PLC literature, is inextricably built in PLC design and rationale. On the one hand, it is widely believed that the quality of an education system depends in large part to the quality of its teachers (Barber & Mourshed, 2007; Borko, 2004) and on the other, there is a growing awareness that traditional, workshop-based continuing professional development (CPD) has critical limitations, such as that they are [1] decontextualized and episodic, when it should be embedded in day-to-day teaching, close to practice (Cordingley & Bell, 2012); [2] not reflective of teachers' needs and learning preferences (Pang & Wray, 2017; Christ et al., 2017); [3] often implemented in a top-down fashion, thus eroding teacher agency (Hardy, 2012; Philpott et al., 2017; Watson, 2014). In other words, there is the view that sustainable, future-facing education requires teachers to engage in-service learning, and that workshops alone appear insufficient for the task. This in some sense motivates the 'turn' towards professional community.

In the literature, PLCs are a multi-dimensional construct of a theoretical ideal for professional community in schools, based on the five dimensions of shared and supportive leadership, shared values and vision, collective learning, shared teaching practice, and supportive structural and relational conditions (Hord, 1997). Sigurðardóttir (2010)'s review produced a similar list of PLC characteristics:

- Shared values and vision that focus on students' learning.
- High expectation of pupils' academic achievement.
- Shared leadership that values teachers' participation in making decisions.
- A perception of mutual support among staff.
- Collaborative learning among professional staff that addresses pupils' needs.
- Organizational arrangement that supports teachers' collaboration.
- Habits of work that encourage collaborative learning.
- Job satisfaction and commitment.

According to the literature, these elements and characteristics of PLCs provide a foundation for effective PD – one that incorporates interdependent and shared job-embedded collaborative practices (Hirsh, 2013). Attributed to Senge's (1990) theories of organisational learning and Wenger's (1998) theory of learning, or 'communities of practice', PLCs entail teachers acting in an ongoing, reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning-focused, growth-promoting way for their students' benefit (Toole & Louis, 2002; Bolam et al., 2005). The learning activities in PLCs are usually 'embedded into the daily work; teachers gain knowledge, try it out in practice, and, from the experience, gain yet more knowledge. They do this in interaction with each other, by working collaboratively' (Sigurðardóttir, 2010:397).

Based on the above, PLCs appear to be a framework for professional learning that is in keeping with the times. Perhaps more importantly, there appears to be a consensus that PLCs are linked to desirable outcomes. Vescio *et al.*'s (2008) review concluded that '[The] unequivocal answer to the question about whether the literature supports the assumptions that student learning increases when teachers participate in PLCs… is a resounding and encouraging yes' (p. 87), a finding which has since found further support (Richmond & Manokore, 2011; Roth et al., 2011; Christ et al., 2017). The optimism about the positive effect of PLCs on student outcomes is indeed widespread, although there exist studies on PLCs that show more indifferent effects (Burde, 2016; Aylsworth, 2012), suggesting that the relationship may not be as straightforward as presumed.

Beyond student outcomes, PLCs are associated with other desirable school-based outcomes. Higher functioning PLCs are shown to predict higher levels of teacher collective efficacy (Voelkel

& Chrispeels, 2017), which in turn predict increased teacher job satisfaction (Caprara et al., 2003), helping behaviours (Somech & Drach-Zahavy, 2000) and team performance (Katz-Navon & Erez, 2005). Moreover, collaborative experiences fostered by PLCs are theorised to furnish more mastery experiences (Bandura, 1997) which in turn lead to increased self-efficacy among teachers (Weißenrieder et al., 2015, Mintzes et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2011). High teacher self-efficacy is in turn correlated with more teacher curriculum responsibility leading to instructional innovation (Guskey, 1988) and better motivated students (Midgley, Feldlarfer, & Eccles, 1989). Self-efficacy proved to be a consistent predictor of varying human behaviour such as creativity (Tella & Ayeni, 2006) and job involvement (Yang, Kao & Huang, 2006).

At this stage it is clear that there is strong evidence in support of PLCs; however, the discussion has so far only described the *what* and *why* of PLCs without explaining *how* PLCs bring about learning and change. In other words, the model of PLCs presented here and frequently found in the literature is a 'black box' model where we identify what PLCs are like and which of its features are related to positive outcomes, but not *how* those changes happen. That will be the focus of the next section.

2.2   Dialogue: Conceptualising The 'Black Box' of PLCs

The often-overlooked clue to how PLCs support teacher learning is its association with Vygotskian sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978). In sociocultural terms, *dialogue*, or the practice of using language as a tool for people to think together ('interthinking', according to Mercer, 2000), is the mechanism for learning, the vehicle for joint reasoning and framework for productive collaboration (Vrikki et al., 2017). Elaborating on this relationship, Littleton and Mercer (2013) describe dialogue as an 'intermental activity' where thinking is weaved together between multiple participants, which in turn has a complementary relationship with the more conventional 'intramental' concept of cognition as illustrated in Figure 1.
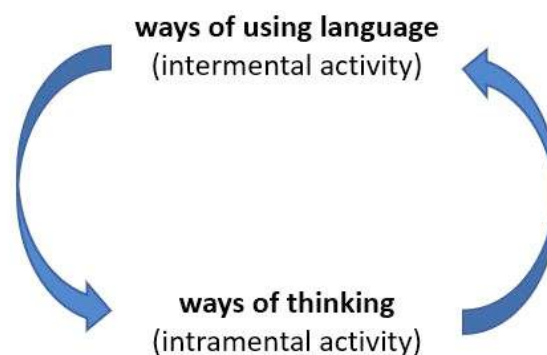

ways of using language
(intermental activity)

ways of thinking
(intramental activity)

Figure 1 The relationship between intermental and intramental activities

The view that dialogue is central to teacher professional learning is shared by experts in the field (Borko, 2004; Wells, 2014). Likewise, researchers have some progress on illuminating the 'black box' of teacher learning by studying how teachers engage in dialogue, whether it is in tracing how teachers frame problems of practice over time (Bannister, 2015), build knowledge in PLCs (Popp & Goldman, 2016) or categorising opportunities to learn that emerge in their professional meetings (Horn & Kane, 2015).

Dialogue is a variegated and complex phenomenon, with deep philosophical roots which cannot be lengthily explored in this paper[2], however we may consider it sufficient to argue that [1]

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[2] For a philosophical review of dialogue in relation to education, see Wegerif and Major (2019), who, among others, draw from the seminal works of Mikhail Bakthin and Martin Buber.

dialogue is a central mechanism for learning in PLCs and [2] not all dialogue is equal, but the forms of talk that we consider to be 'educationally productive' possess certain features.

Drawing from Mercer's (2000) concept of 'exploratory talk' and the wider theoretical and empirical research done by colleagues based in Cambridge and elsewhere, I propose that talk is considered educationally productive when participants are mutually participative (as opposed to being dominated by one or two speakers), seek to build on, elaborate or explain their and others' contributions (forming links between ideas) and are willing to offer contrasting ideas and even disagreement (Mercer et al., 2017). Moreover, Howe (2010) argues that it is desirable when speakers engage in the *process* of seeking consensus, stimulating participants to reflect further on their discussion and consider the evidence and contributions offered by others.

2.3   Problematising PLCs in The Malaysian Context

Notwithstanding the support for PLCs in the literature, there are also studies which warn of potential, often interrelated pitfalls for those who seek to establish PLCs. Despite limitations of space, a fair and critical reading of the literature requires some consideration of these. Here I offer two pitfalls that figure prominently in the literature.

The first pitfall has to do with the burden of work that falls on educators, who are at the centre of PLCs. To busy teachers carrying heavy workloads, it is unsurprising that some perceive PLCs as yet another unsustainable addition to duties (Lee & Kim, 2016). In the case of Singapore, Hairon *et al.* (2014) and Hairon and Tan (2017) demonstrate that the introduction of PLC activities requires teachers to master a new nomenclature and set of practices (e.g. collaborative work, peer classroom observation, other administrative tasks) which can be arduous and time-consuming. This issue is likely to apply in Malaysia as well, where the latest available TALIS survey suggests that teachers spend a disproportionate amount of time working on administrative tasks and tasks unrelated to teaching and learning more than double the OECD average (OECD, 2014)[3]. Besides teachers, workload issues affect school leaders as well. Hallinger's (2010) survey of scholars and educational leaders in Malaysia suggests a 'reform overload' experienced by educators, at the expense of their energy and motivation (p. 409).

The second pitfall is that PLCs risk being implemented through surface-level compliance, without reflecting a deeper understanding of its underlying theories and processes, as in the case of other education reforms (Hallinger, 2010). In the Malaysian context, this risk is acknowledged by Zuraidah Abdullah (2017), who goes to lengths in her work to improve practitioners' understanding of the PLC concept.

To illustrate the importance of theory, consider that PLCs are often attributed to Senge's (1990) organisational learning theories. Integral to organisational learning is 'double-loop learning' (Argyris & Schon, 1978) a rich concept that entails the capacity to question the value and philosophical assumptions behind one's goals, strategies and actions. For PLCs to have fidelity to these theoretical roots, teachers should have the space to engage in collective double-loop learning by being open to challenge and questioning assumptions behind their practice; however, some research has found teacher communities which, rather than allowing for these practices, are better characterised as 'performance training sects' (Hargreaves, 2003:186) whereby community becomes a tool to foster conformity and standardisation, thus diminishing the individual teachers' professional judgement and creativity. An example of this emerged in the ethnographic study by Grossman *et al.* (2001), where group norms of politeness made it hard for them to acknowledge and

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[3] It is acknowledged that at the time of writing, the Ministry of Education has taken significant measures to reduce teachers' clerical work; however, the data on this is still unavailable.

interrogate differences, giving an illusion of sameness and sealing off potential areas of productive discussion (pp. 982-3).

We may conclude, therefore, that it is not enough to know that PLCs work 'in principle' but consider how the idealised features of PLCs align with the norms in the contexts in which they are embedded. Understanding this congruence between PLCs and their sociocultural contexts is especially pertinent when PLCs are adopted in new contexts, given that there is a gap in our understanding of how PLCs are differently enacted from one culture to another (Hairon et al. 2017).

Currently, whether and how these and other pitfalls operate in the Malaysian context are empirical questions which require empiricial answers that we do not have at hand. The extant PLC literature in Malaysia mainly comprises small-to-medium scale descriptive and correlation-based statistical studies (Abdullah, 2009; 2016; Abdullah & Ghani, 2014; Ling, 2017; Ismail et al., 2014; Yaakob & Yunus, 2016), in some cases adding in semi-structured interviews to illustrate findings (Khairul et al., 2017; Tiong, 2016). These studies contribute by breaking the ground for future research and illustrating the role of variables like school culture (Yaakob & Yunus, 2016), school leadership (Abdullah, 2017) and administrative workload (Khairul et al., 2017) in relation to PLCs, but, for methodological and theoretical reasons, do not answer the substantive, often socio-culturally (or socio-historically) situated questions raised in this paper.

Even so, it is possible to arrive at some 'foreshadowed problems' (Malinowski, 1922) by first reviewing some of the general social research done in the Malaysian context and drawing links to the wider PLC literature. I proceed to present these in the next section.

3.0   DISCUSSION
3.1   Towards Sociocultural Theorisation of PLCs in Malaysia
Hofstede (2001) argues that culture is a property that permeates all social interactions. While we seek to avoid the fallacy of essentialist characterisations or generalisations, there is some usefulness in looking at what social research says about the patterns that characterise the Malaysian context, as I demonstrate here.

The literature frequently describes Malaysians, broadly speaking, as an indirect people with an aversion to conflict in their speech (Kuang, Wong & David, 2015). Within the Malay community, being non-confrontational (Asrul, 2003) and courteous, or *berbudi bahasa* (Kamisah & Norazlan, 2003) appears to be synonymous with politeness and propriety, or *adab*. This claim is supported by Lim's (2003) paremiological work on Malay proverbs and the 'Malay Mind', where he argues that *budi,* in contrast to dialectical rationality, 'is non-confrontational, non-competitive, gentle, friendly, and succumbing (in the sense of giving in or giving way), because its final goal is consensus and compromise' (p. 31).

A preference for indirectness and an aversion to conflict is said to also manifest among Malaysian Chinese, especially in a multiracial setting, which Ling (1995) argues is a legacy of the migrant attitude of wanting to prevent inviting trouble upon themselves. As for the Malaysian Indians, some studies suggest that young Malaysian Indians in universities are generally indirect (Jamaliah, 2000; Suraiya, 2002) although this observation was refined by other research which found that Indian professionals were very direct in their communication, suggesting variance according to social status and professional backgrounds (David & Kuang, 1999; 2005). Whether this observed variance also applies to Chinese and Malays is uncertain and requires further empirical work; however, we can see how sociolinguistic/communicative language research suggests that indirectness is relatively pervasive among the major ethnic groups in Malaysia.

Additionally, there is a rich vein of research in value orientations that we can draw from. Malaysia is said to be a hierarchical (high power distance) and collectivist (group oriented) society (Asma, 1992; Hofstede, 2001). These traits are shown to have a demonstrable impact on PLC practice, specifically the deprivatization of teacher practice, and collective learning and application (Ning et al. 2015). Specifically, it was found that (1) team collectivism positively predicts collegiality and collaboration and that (2) power distance moderates the relationship between collegiality and collaboration (the positive effects of team collegiality on team collaboration were stronger for teams with lower levels of power distance). In simple terms, Ning *et al's* (2015) study would imply that the Malaysian collectivist orientation would support PLCs; however, teachers' collegiality would be less likely to translate to collaborative acts in teams with high levels of power distance.

This argument might be taken further to suggest that high power distance may restrict some of the elements of productive dialogue which we take as theoretically necessary for PLCs to be a site for teacher learning. As it stands, the empirical research already shows that deep collaborative inquiry is difficult and challenging to foster (Le Fevre et al., 2015; Grossman et al., 2001).

Consider Watson's (2014) warning of how PLC rhetoric can mask deeper problems. The appeal to shared vision and values, for example, risks creating social exclusion of those who do not conform to status quo, discouraging diversity among the teacher teams. Ironically, the strong sense of identity and desire to maintain group harmony can be harmful in that they inhibit change, foster groupthink i.e. lead to participation norms that stifle dissent and result in groups working rapidly towards an unchallenged consensus, rather than seeking the best possible approach through a process of explorative challenge (Esser, 1998). When dominated by such social norms, group discussions constrict the conceptual space around the topic to arrive at a seemingly more 'efficient' outcome (Middup et al., 2010).

Put together, it is clear to see how the communicative and value orientations among Malaysians are potentially important considerations for the practice of PLCs. It is possible that Malaysian PLCs benefit from our collective value orientation; however, if, as argued earlier, the mechanism of learning is dialogue, and productive dialogue is characterised by the readiness to challenge each other respectfully, one has to account for the confounding effect of high power distance and communicative indirectness. If, as researchers, we accept Lim's (2003) argument that the spirit of *budi* sometimes necessitates a 'lie' in order to preserve harmony in the heat of the moment of conflict – a lie that is then untangled 'when the heat is over' (p. 31) – then we may find that it is not *during* the PLC meetings when opposing views are debated and resolved, but *after*, perhaps in private after the meeting had long been dispersed. This has important methodological implications for those who seek to study teacher talk.

In this section, I have made evident how even a cursory exploration of socio-cultural context opens new problem spaces for considering the ways in which PLC practice may manifest in the Malaysian context. This new problem space allows researchers, teachers and school leaders to ask more clearly defined questions about their work. In the next section, I explore these implications further.

4.0 CONCLUSION

In this paper I have attempted to engage in a critical review of PLC research, with the aim of being useful stimulus for practice and further research, especially (though not exclusively) in the Malaysian context. This critical discussion is deemed necessary for PLCs to be sustainably and judiciously enacted.

I began by examining the PLC concept and reviewing the evidence for its implementation, exploring also the warnings and caveats found in what is a growing international debate. Moreover, I have put forward an argument for viewing dialogue as a primary mechanism of learning in PLCs, based on Vygotskian sociocultural theory. Very briefly, I reviewed some of the educational dialogue literature to put forward some features of educationally 'productive' dialogue found in the literature. This was followed by discussion of some foreshadowed problems that are likely to be connected to PLC practice in Malaysia, based on the specifics of our socio-cultural contexts. In closing, I briefly issue a call to action to practitioners and educational researchers.

4.1   A Word For Practitioner – A Call For Reflection

Teachers and subject panel heads, or *ketua panitia* who convene and participate in PLC meetings might gain more from their activities if they attend to the features of productive dialogue and reflect on the professional culture of their teacher teams (see Mercer et al., 2017; for 'ground rules for talk'). As for school leaders, Zuraidah Abdullah's (2017) work describes school leaders as 'architects' (p. 87) of PLCs, with the key role of influencing school culture and establishing shared vision and mission that are so crucial for PLCs. Her assertion is supported by empirical evidence demonstrating that principals influence both *what* teachers choose to undertake in PLCs and *how well* they execute those activities (Buttram & Farley-Ripple, 2016). Therefore, school leaders have a vital role for the success of the PLC initiative in Malaysia.

4.2   A Word For Rsearchers – Moving Beyond 'Foreshadowed Problems'

Moving forward for the advancement of educational practice in Malaysia, it is not sufficient for researchers to only have foreshadowed problems – we must work with practitioners to interrogate these problems and develop stronger, evidence-based claims. As such I propose a research agenda that combines complementary methodological approaches to ascertain the realities of PLCs in Malaysia. I argue that the state of the field is very much at a 'question-finding' stage and as such, requires context-sensitive, exploratory work in naturalistic school settings. These perhaps should draw from ethnographic and anthropological methods and be rich in theory, including dialogic theory. Researchers' efforts should be supported through partnership with schools and education districts, governed by a culture of collegiality. Moreover, accompanying this research should be more extensive theoretical work than what I have attempted in this paper. On the long term, design-based studies or randomised control trials can play an important role in improving our knowledge of how to implement PLCs as a form of intervention and extending the evidence-base of PLC efficacy.

Few would question that meaningful collaboration and constructive dialogue are important – they are integral not only to learning but to a functioning civil society. The popularity of PLCs as supposed 'international best practice' bears testament to that. If, however, the concept is to truly take root and live up to its promise in Malaysia, practitioners and researchers must work hand-in-hand to lead and guide its progress, through seemingly uncharted territory, towards our educational goals.

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LEARNING CONTRACT: ITS EFFECTS ON LEARNERS' AUTONOMY AMONG STRUGGLING EFL LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted in form of an action research project. It investigated the use of learning contract on learners' autonomy among struggling EFL learners. The objectives were to explore the feasibility of learning contracts in promoting learner's autonomy and to find out the learners' experiences as they participate in the learning contract programme. The participants consisted of four primary EFL learners in a rural school in Sarawak. The learning contract programme was administered for seven weeks after a week of learners' training. Data were collected through reflective journals and semi-structured interview before being analysed using content analysis and thematic coding. The study demonstrates a positive effect of the learning contract on the learners' autonomy. The use of the learning contract in language learning is found to have fostered learner autonomy among the participants by developing their self-awareness as well as decision-making and problem-solving skills. The learning contract has also helped to improve the participants' language skills and increase their level of learning motivation. Hence, the use of learning contract can be considered as one of the valuable practice to develop the fundamental competencies of language skills especially among the struggling English learners from rural school to sustain the positive individual learning culture and support lifelong learning.

1.0   INTRODUCTION

The introduction of Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) into the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 breathes a new setting in the Malaysian English as Second Language (ESL) education system changing it from an exam-oriented to a more action-oriented approach (Aziz, Ab Rashid & Zainudin, 2018). It calls for a fundamental shift from the traditional stance of assessment of learning to assessment for learning with an emphasis on both peer assessment and self-assessment for the development of autonomous language learners (Sidhu, Kaur & Chi, 2018). Consequently, the notion of learner autonomy that is promoted in the new syllabus has diverted the roles of learners and teachers inside the classroom where learners are required to be more accountable towards their own learning with the role of teachers being kept up (Yunus & Suliman, 2014). Little (2013) emphasized that the CEFR-aligned primary school ESL curriculum is one that promotes learner autonomy through a ―democratization‖ of second language (L2). Using this approach, English learners are guided by teachers to self-assess themselves so that they are capable of taking more responsibility for their own language learning (Sidhu, Kaur & Chi, 2018). With this concern, there is a need to ensure that all English learners especially the struggling English learners are able develop autonomy in their learning process in order to develop their skills and literacy in the landscape of 21st century education for a sustainable future.

Lesaux and Kelley (2014) identify struggling English learners as ones who struggle in mastering the English language due to limited language competence or due to a complete lack of effective language learning strategies. It has been a major concern by teachers of the 21st century to help the struggling English learners to be autonomous in their learning to be creative, critical thinker and problem solver, thus avoiding them from getting left behind or to minimise delayed progress in mastering the language. Fostering learner autonomy is also the ultimate goal in education to produce independent lifelong learners (Chan, 2015; Kaur, 2013). However, the process of teaching this group of learners becomes even more challenging if they lack effective learning skills. Juin (2016) claims that most Malaysian English learners from the rural areas are struggling in learning language, especially when they are learning independently and not monitored by the teacher. To some of these learners, English is a third language and particularly as contact with the language is limited, the opportunity for them to use the language beyond English lessons is inadequate. This condition is what makes it appropriate for the learners to be categorised as English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners.

Despite problems related to their language learning styles, most struggling learners are found to have the desire to improve their proficiency in order to compete with the good language learners, yet are hindered by underdeveloped aptitudes and beliefs (Hsu & Sheu, 2008), a lack of knowledge of good language learning strategies (Ho, 1999; Hsu & Sheu, 2008), limited language repertoires, and by being overly engaged in passive learning strategies such as memorization (Ho, 1999). To address the issue, a practical approach is needed so that the struggling learners can identify and exercise their creativity by applying specific strategies that suit them best to improve their English learning and skills (Yunus & Suliman, 2014) as well as to improve their learning experience by helping them to learn effective skills, to embrace learning culture beyond formal classroom, and eventually to motivate them to enjoy learning (Guo, 2017).

In this view, learning contract, which is an evidence-based practice that has yielded positive results in learning (e.g.; Aidora & Tan, 2014; Frank & Scharff, 2013; Guo, 2017; Ismail & Alauyah, 2012; Jumali et al., 2013; O'Halloran & Delaney, 2011; Balcikanli, 2010), is seen as a potential solution to these problems. The term "learning contract" refers to a written agreement that is designed collaboratively between a learner and the instructor and the document describes what needs to be learnt, by the learner, how it will be learnt, what strategies and materials are needed, and how that learning will be assessed (Aidora & Tan, 2014). Using learning contract not only encourages the learners to acquire good strategies in learning, but they can also utilise the newly found skills to help them learn language beyond the classroom by conditioning their behaviours to follow the agreed learning contract (Juin, 2016). A vast study on learning contract has been carried out which covers a wide range of fields such as education, religion, and nursing. Nonetheless, there are a few gaps that could be explored in this study. Most studies involved only university students (Ya'acob et al., 2012; Ismail & Alauyah, 2012) and secondary school learners (Sidhu et. al., 2011; Juin, 2016). To date, no study involving primary school learners particularly struggling learners has been found. In addition, the locality of the research site which is in a rural area adds to the existing research gap as previous studies have mainly covered secondary schools and tertiary institutions in major cities or urban areas.

Motivated by these gaps, this study aimed to explore the effects of learning contract on learners' autonomy among the struggling EFL learners. The specific objectives of this study were to a) explore the feasibility of learning contracts in promoting learner's autonomy among struggling learners from a rural primary school in Sarawak, Malaysia and b) find out the learners' experiences after being exposed to the intervention.

The study sought to answer the questions as follow:

a) In what way does a learning contract help the struggling EFL learners to become autonomous learner?
b) What are the learners' experiences as they use the learning contract?

Details of the research methodology are discussed below and in the following sections, discussions of implications and recommendations are provided to facilitate future research.

2.0 METHODOLOGY
2.1 Research Design
This study employed an action research approach. This approach is seen as the most suitable method in the context of study to gather information about and to subsequently improve teachers' practice and their students' learning (Mills, 2011) by reflecting identified learning problems in the classroom, collecting and analysing data, and implementing changes based on the findings (Creswell, 2014). An action plan framework from Kemmis and McTaggart's action research model (1988) was followed as reference. The model comprises four steps, namely plan, act, observe and reflect. As the main researcher is an English teacher in Sarawak, the research methodology and findings are able to enlighten his teaching practice and to expand his teaching repertoire as driven by evidence-based best practices.

2.2 Background of Population and Participants
Four pupils from a national primary school in Sarawak were selected as the participants, comprising three males and one female using a purposive sampling based on their willingness to participate in the study and their similar level of proficiency. The participants were identified as struggling learners based on the observation and interview carried out in a preliminary study. Their English proficiency ranged between pre-A1 to weak A1 in the proficiency continuum in line with the CEFR Guidelines (Council of Europe, 2018). The participants' actual names are replaced with pseudonyms, namely Sylvester, Alex, Liston, and Sher to preserve their anonymity.

2.3 Research Instruments
The instruments used for this study were reflective journals and a semi-structured interview carried out in a focus group. The reflective journals were used to find out the feasibility of learning contracts as well as to explore the way that the learning contract helped the participants become autonomous learners. Considering their limited English proficiency, they were allowed to use their native language (*bahasa Iban* or *bahasa Malaysia*) when writing their journal entries at the early stages of the intervention and were encouraged to use English as the study progressed. A series of topic was given to the participants every two weeks throughout the intervention period to serve as a guide in writing their journals.

Next, the semi-structured interview was carried out using the interview protocol adapted from Juin's (2016) to elicit feedback on their experience of using the learning contract.

2.4 Learning Contract Procedure
The learning contract was administered for seven weeks. It was referred to as the "learning contract programme". The phases of the study are explained as follows:

(a) Phase 1

Prior to entering the intervention phase, the participants attended a one-week training session and they were briefed on the concept of learning contract, how to set their learning goals, choose of the learning activities and how to carry them out. Learner training is one of the important aspects toward the successful practice of learner autonomy in which in this phase learners should be able to identify and employ the suitable strategies with their learning styles and preferences since learner training has the capability in fostering and developing learner autonomy (Yunus & Suliman, 2014). The participants were also given time to do trial of their learning contract to help them organising the learning activities into learning schedules and guidance is given to the participants if needed based on their respective learning struggles. At the end of this phase, the learners were asked to provide feedback which was used to refine the existing contract.

(b) Phase 2

Using the information gathered in Phase 1, another brief meeting with the participants were carried out in the beginning of the second phase. The researcher guided the participants in setting their learning goals and selection of learning activities. The learners were asked to select activities that they thought would help them achieve their goals as well as the activities that were of interest to them based on their experience during the first phase. Finally, after the learning contract was revised and signed by the participants, the intervention commenced.

In this phase, the participants were also encouraged to share their opinions as to how learning contract encourages their learning autonomy, especially in the English language learning. They were also given the autonomy to propose suitable strategies in their learning contract to improve their learning after consulting the researcher. In the meantime, the participants completed their learning journal every two weeks. The learning contract implementation procedure in this phase is explained in the chart below:
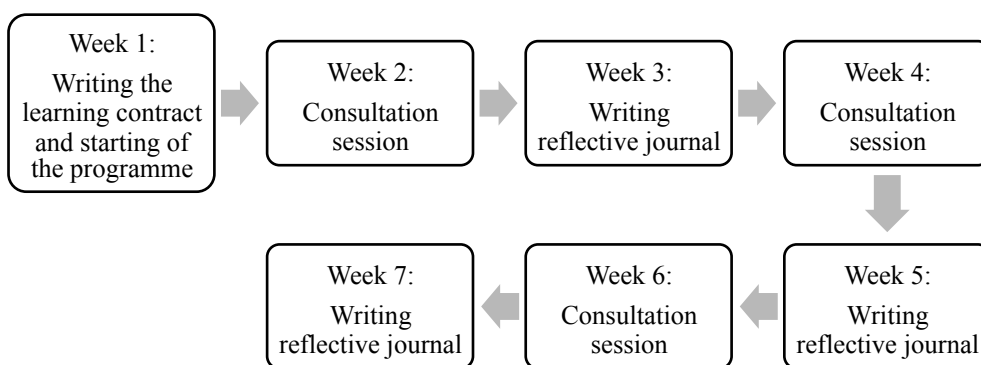

Figure 1: Learning contract implementation procedure, adapted from Juin (2016)

(c) Phase 3

In the final stage of the intervention, the participants were invited for a focus group interview which was conducted at the school library to elicit information about their experiences when using the learning contract. The interview lasted approximately 30 minutes and was audio-recorded with the participants' consent.

2.5   Data Analysis

The data obtained from the reflective journal and focus group interview were analysed based on Creswell's (2014) six steps in analysing and interpreting qualitative data. Firstly, the data were prepared and organised according to emergent themes. A preliminary analysis of the data was done by reading through the data in order to obtain a broad picture. The data were then reduced, indexed,

coded, and categorised according to themes using a thematic framework (Ritchie, Spencer & O'Connor, 2003).

3.0   FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Several themes emerged from the findings which describe how the learning contract helped the participants to foster learning autonomy by developing their self-awareness as well as their decision-making and problem-solving skills. The learning contract also resulted in the learners' language skills improvement and increased in level of learning motivation.

3.1   Learning Contract and Learner Awareness
Self-awareness is one of the primary traits of an autonomous learner. In the context of this study, *awareness* refers to the learners' personal knowledge and understanding of their strengths and weaknesses in the learning process. Before being engaged in the learning contract programme, a particular learner needs to demonstrate willingness and he/she has to be prepared of what may come. The participants' awareness of their struggles in learning English was perhaps one of the main factors that drove them to be part of the study.

From the journal entries, Liston confessed that English is indeed a difficult subject and he realised his own struggle when learning English, yet he pointed out that despite the ordeal of the struggles, he still attempted to use the language. He believed that English is an interesting subject and it was presumably his positive attitude that helped him to be ready in learning the language and was consistently willing to continue learning English.

Sher, on the other hand, admitted that she was very shy to use the language although her father sometimes tried to communicate with her in English. She admitted to having limited proficiency particularly in her speech and felt unmotivated to practise using the language because people around her mostly spoke in *Iban* language. Nonetheless, throughout the intervention, Sher demonstrated improvements that seemed to have been driven by her awareness of her previous struggles in learning English.

In Sylvester's case, he was found by the teacher to be a learner with huge potential to succeed, but he was often hindered by his own attitude. This was mentioned by him as he admitted that he was quite hesitant when it came to learning on his own. He stated that he needed something to motivate him to study independently. In his reflective journal, he wrote that he had been struggling to learn English because of his low commitment to the subject. He further explained that he would not do any revision if the teacher did not provide him with any task to be completed at home. From his reflective journal, Sylvester seemed to indicate that he knew the root of his learning struggles. By realising his weaknesses and his struggle especially in writing, he voluntarily participated in the programme with the hope that it would change his attitude and overcome his struggles.

In comparison to the typical struggling learners, the trait that separates Sylvester from the rest of them is the sense of self-awareness. Based on the researcher's experience and observation as an English teacher who taught struggling learners for nearly four years, struggling learners would repeatedly fail due to a lack of self-awareness. Only when a learner began to realise his or her own strengths and weaknesses in language learning would it create an opportunity to develop learning autonomy. Thus, the use of learning contract has a positive effect on learners' awareness.

The importance of being aware of language learning struggles in autonomy development is that it forces the learners to actively seek ways to improve themselves in a voluntary and

independent manner. These findings concur with Sidhu et al.'s (2012) study in which the participants admitted that they found the learning contract useful and advantageous to the extent that they felt compelled to carry out the activities planned in their learning contract.

3.2   Decision Making and Problem Solving Skills

Apart from having self-awareness, the participants seemed to also show that they were capable of making decisions and solving problems throughout the duration of the contract. The data revealed that each participant had to face their own learning difficulties. Sher for example identified that grammar was her main weakness as evidenced by the numerous grammatical mistakes that she committed and proven by her low scores in the grammar section of English Paper 1. She also stated that her vocabulary was limited which resulted in her constant reliance on the dictionary and had misused a lot of English words.

In her journal entry, she also wrote that she admitted some exercises that could help her to overcome her problem with grammar which was by using drilling on cloze exercises. She believed that the exercise helped her to expand her vocabulary. Meanwhile, Sylvester claimed that he enjoyed listening to the music to overcome his problems of laziness. Listening to the music helped him to complete his homework and to do the revision at the same time. The activity made him feel motivated to learn.

Alex, on the other hand, took the initiative to adjust his time to complete the activities that he decided to do. Since he was also preparing for the UPSR examination, he felt compelled to prioritise his homework. Therefore, when he was pressed for time, he tried to adjust his schedule. Since his participation in the learning contract programme, Alex seemed to be able to solve his problems independently and that forced him to overcome his weakness.

Based on the responses given by the participants, the participants displayed a change of perspective and they eventually believed that they were in charge in making their own decisions and in solving their own learning problem. In retrospect of ordinary struggling language learners, decision making and problem solving were often left in the hands of their teachers. A typical struggling learner also often lacks the confidence and frequently requires some reassurance from the teacher. Nevertheless, this study has proven that using the learning contract, learners are exposed to a more learner-centred approach, in which the KSSR Standards-Based English Language Curriculum (SBELC) also emphasized the —4Cs (communication, critical thinking, creativity and collaboration) of 21st century learning (Sidhu, Kaur, & Chi, 2018). This finding is in line with Balcikanli's (2010) study which implied that in order for the learning contract to be successful, a certain level of decision-making skills is required.

3.3   Learning Contract and Language Skills Improvement

The findings demonstrated that the learners in this study believed that they went through some improvements in terms of their language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading and writing. In terms of the listening skills, most of the participants conducted activities such as listen and sing along to English songs. They believed that such activities contributed to their improvement in listening skills either directly or indirectly. Sylvester acknowledged that listening to and singing along to English songs helped him to expand his vocabulary and helped him to have better understanding when listening to others in English.

A typical struggling EFL learner tends to avoid using the English language especially in speech. However, the data of the findings suggest that some of the learners found that they were confident to use the language when speaking to their peers and teacher. After the learning contract programme, Alex admitted that he improved his speaking skills as he found himself to be more

interested to involve in English conversation. He explained further that his command in the language developed positively because his friends had also helped and corrected one another in their spoken discourse to the extent that they tried to "imitate native speakers' intonation and speaking style."

Reading was also another language skill that the learners believed had improved. Liston agreed that by the end of the intervention period his reading fluency had increased and that he was also able to understand text better than before. He associated the improvement to some of the activities in the learning contract. In terms of writing skills, Sher, for example, observed that her essay quality had improved as compared to the past years. In explaining further, she recalled that prior to the learning contract she often struggled to look for ideas when writing an essay. In addition, she also mentioned that her essays were comprised of mostly simple sentences that were full with wrong grammar usage and vocabulary. During the intervention programme, one of Sher's selected activities from the learning activities was writing an essay once a week.

Based on the discussion of the findings, the learning contract helped the learners to improve and overcome their struggles in mastering the four language skills. Although their improvement was not uniform as evidenced by the different pace and level of achievement across participants, they were slowly progressing in overcoming their learning struggles and being more literate in the language. The findings of this section seemed to be in line with Ya'acob et al.'s (2012) and Juin's (2016) where the participants of the study reported to have observed improvements in all four language skills. Although the findings in Ya'acob *et al.*'s were not explained in detail, this finding could be an indicator that more exploration could be held.

3.4   Increased in Level of Learning Motivation
An increased level of intrinsic motivation was also identified in the participants' behaviour when carrying out the activities in the contract besides a noticeable improvement in their studying pattern. Alex for example reported that he became more confident in his writing and speaking due to the practises and consultations with his teacher. He also mentioned that learning activities in the learning contract boosted his motivation in using the language. Meanwhile, Sylvester disclosed himself to be more consistent in carrying out the activities and improving himself by the end of the intervention period. He was inspired by the ability to choose his own preferred activities in learning.

As evidenced from the findings, the involvement of the learner in the learning contract programme improved their behaviour and this concur with studies by Sidhu et al. (2012), Ismail and Alauyah (2012), and Ya'acob et al. (2012) in which their participants demonstrated an increase in motivation after utilising the learning contract as a tool in learning the English language. In reality, learners who possess personal motivation would be able to engage confidently in the learning process, thus sustain the positive individual learning culture.

4.0   CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion, it is suggested that learning contract has provided the participants with a structured way to study independently. The findings revealed that learning contract has managed to encourage the participants to develop autonomy through an increase in the learners' self-awareness as well as in decision-making and problem-solving skills. In addition, the intervention has the effects on the learners' language skills improvement and indirectly increased their confidence and learning motivation.

Despite the positive findings obtained from this study, the number of learners involved was small, thus the results are not representative of a broader community of primary English learners in Malaysia. Besides, the implementation of this particular type of learning contract is seen as

traditional as it was a paper-based method. To fulfil the demand of the Ministry of Education in support with Industrial Revolution (IR 4.0), e-learning platforms may be used to create a virtual classroom as supported by the VLE Frog application for instance. With the existence of ICT, learners can surprisingly be creative if they are given a certain amount of time and the freedom of how they want to learn and when they want to learn as the learning become more flexible (Yunus, Salehi, & Chenzi, 2012; Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012). The proposition has made it a possible area for further research to investigate the effects of learning contract in a virtual learning environment. By incorporating technology, it will render a study with a large class size possible and increase the study's external reliability. However, the locality and facilities available at the research site need to also be taken into concern.

Considering learners are also struggling, teachers or instructor should know how to train their learners toward becoming autonomous language learner and in times, autonomy should be given gradually so learners will have the time to absorb and manage the burden and can learn to not only to take responsibility but to sustain the role of autonomous language learners (Yunus & Suliman, 2014). In sum, learning contract has been demonstrated to be an interesting differentiated way for teaching and learning English in context of the new CEFR-aligned curriculum and it is capable of aiding struggling learners to consolidate their formal learning. Besides, it also can be one of many alternatives that teachers have in assessing learners' proficiency in the language in and out of classroom (Azli & Akmar, 2019).

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