

# A Case Study of The Online Interactions Among ESL Students To Complete Their Narrative Writing Task

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## ABSTRACT

The study is a qualitative case study that investigated the patterns of interactions among ESL students during their online interactions to complete their narrative essays. The study found that students were engaged in interactions related to language related assistance, using partner as a resource and providing encouragement as suggested by Golonka et al. (2017). Nevertheless, these interactions were only focused on aspect related to sentence fluency and word choice. Interactions related to organizations and ideas were minimal. The findings implied that the presence of a teacher is pertinent for students to construct knowledge in a more meaningful way in the virtual classrooms. A number of pedagogical implications were suggested in this study.

**Keywords:** *online learning, interactions, language teaching methodology, writing skills*

## INTRODUCTION

The increasing prevalence of digital media has afforded educationalists and practitioners the opportunity to assimilate new technologies while designing diverse pedagogies in English language learning. Online interactions seem to be important feature in the use of technology as it complements teacher fronted interactions by providing a context of practice. According to Mark and Coniam (2008) meaningful online interactions will not only equip learners with language skills but also provide learners with authentic learning context that traditional classroom setting does not offer. In the framework of social-cultural tradition suggested by Vygotsky (1978), learning takes place when interactions take place more than in learners' minds and knowledge is co-constructed via the network of interaction. Swain (2010) termed interactions as 'languaging' that help learners make sense of their learning unambiguously. According to Hsieh (2017) language mediates learners' higher order thinking and help them generate ideas to reach new understanding in a problem-solving process (p.115).

Research have demonstrated the different methods of utilizing online interactions in various online environment. For example, Zou et al. (2016) conducted a study among 32 students in an online (Wiki) language exchange programs between China and the United Kingdom. The study found that the online interactions helped students to correct language errors and eventually students improved their writing skills. In Taiwan (2014) wikis was used to explore whether it can be used to encourage foreign language acquisition via peer interaction and collaboration. The study reported that students' interactions on wikis increase their motivation to learn English and students appeared more confident. Yen et al. (2015) studied the students' activities by integrating Facebook and Skye as online platforms found that students improved their speaking

and writing skills via peer-interactions. In a Cyber University in Korea, Kang and Im (2013) found that instructional interactions positively affected perceived learning achievement and satisfaction that interactions related to social interactions. In all these studies, there was positive relationship between interaction and learning outcomes. Infact, interaction is also viewed as an important strategy of self-regulated learning.

Despite the well-acknowledged role of interactions, some findings show that not all types of interactions are effective nor do they contribute to effective learning (Strijbos, Narciss & Dunnebie, 2010; Shute, 2008). More specifically, there are only a few studies on what type of interactions may best contribute to improving learners' writing and learners failed to use the strategy appropriately to their advantage. A number of studies have pointed out that that the virtual classrooms have not been accompanied by a necessary shift in interactions which is obviously a challenge for educators because they tend to carry on with traditional pedagogical practices that is not appropriate in online classrooms and learners. This implies that online interactions which is part of online learning needs to apply appropriate strategies in order to stimulate effective learning. It appears findings related to online interactions have not been perfected and requires further research. Positive findings on online interactions cannot be generalized to other educational settings or populations with different background. With the increase number of online learning courses more studies are needed to explore students' interactions and the ways in which we can improve the interactions in teaching and learning activities.

Given the relevance of interaction and its influential role in educational environment, the researcher's aim in the present study is twofold. First, to explore the online interactions of a group of ESL learners. And these interactions improve the interactants' writing quality. Informed by the Vygotsky's (1978) social cultural theory and the concept map suggested by Golonka et al. (2017) this study aims to provide valuable insights into the patterns of online interactions in a group of ESL learners and explore the pedagogical implications for writing skills. This study is intended to yield insides that provide greater insights online interactions of high school students in the Malaysian contexts. This study can form a basis for defining how feedback can be designed to improve virtual classrooms in the Malaysian context. It is also envisaged that the findings of this study will be able to provide suggestions on how learners and instructors need to be trained to maximize the benefits from online interaction. This will further able the researcher to suggest pedagogical suggestions and the required interactions for the instructors in future.

Thus, the present study is an attempt to add to the literature of online interactions in the social networking sites. The research site is in an urban high school knows as CLHS in Malaysia. In Malaysia, students have been traditionally faced with challenges in the effort to acquire writing skills in the ESL classrooms. These challenges range from mother tongue interferences to practical issues of time and space to communicate outside the classroom. The shortage of interactions indirectly affects the students writing in English. Online interactions can play a pertinent role to address the many challenges facing EFL learners. ICT tools have contributed to many advantages in EFL instructions. In fact, the Malaysian Blueprint (2015-2015) has stressed the importance of the use of ICT in teaching and learning activities.

Facebook is used as an interactional platform in this study due to its popularity in Malaysia. Social networking sites such as Facebook inherit some of the highly sought after qualities that are effective and long have been practiced in traditional classrooms and higher learning. In fact Staines and Lauchs (2013) pointed out that social networking sites such as Facebook should be leaners' normal extension and part of their daily life practice.

This study was designed to answer the following questions:

What are the types of student-student interactions that enhanced the quality of their narrative writing?

While the academic and research literature provides pertinent views to guide the current study, the researcher holds the perspective that practice should be considered by the emerging data from the context it is taking place.

## Literature Review

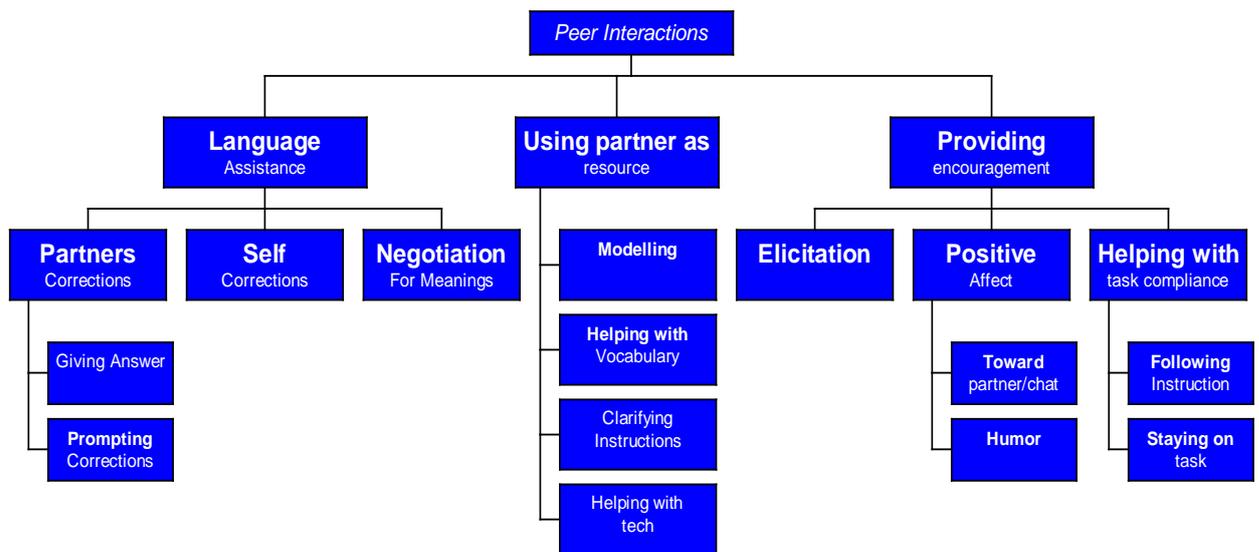
In this study the researcher focused on theoretical framework of social constructivism theory suggested by Vygotsky to explain the conceptualization of interactions in learning. According to social constructivism theory meaningful learning occurs when complex ideas and information are combined with students' experiences and prior knowledge to form personal and unique understandings (Keengwe et al., 2008, p. 86). Vygotsky (1986) found that all cognitive functions are based on social interactions and interaction in knowledge communities is a constructivist process. Social constructivism perceives learning not as knowledge transfer but knowledge constructed. Thus, exploring the interactions in the online discussion is pertinent, not to acknowledge the social and motivational factors but to realize the quality of the discussions and achievement (Andresenm 2009). In the current era, the introduction of ICT tools into the practice of online education has heightened the interest of practitioners to the notion of interactions. Interaction is considered important strategy in self-regulated learning.

Lin et al. (2016) notes the heightened capacity of online interactions, when the content analysis found of the group page and Chi Square tests discovered significant relations among interactions types, initiation types and response type for the posts. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to investigate the positive and negative experiences of the participants. Against the background he asserts the strong presence of the instructors to foster the online learning environment. Also acknowledging the capabilities of online interactions are Gikandi and Morrow (2013) who draw attention to feedbacks the encourage active learners' participation and meaningful engagement. The qualitative study found that the interactions engaged the learners in dialogic peer feedback that eventually provide learning support and self- regulation. In the local scenario, Choo et al. (2014) reported that co-construction of knowledge when the interactions were categorized based on Gunawardena et al. (1997) Interaction Analysis Model.

As such, online interactions can be regarded as an important and constructive behavior to solve problem in learning activities. However, the usage of online interactions is not without the number of challenges. Students who have used interactions have reported their dissatisfaction on feedback, low quality of discussion higher order skills deficiency and inadequacy of involvement (Ishtaiwa et al., 2015; Arnold and Ducte, 2006; Ishtaiwa & Abdullah, 2012). Conceptualizing online interactions in the literature is still not clear and not enough is known. The lack of in-depth qualitative studies makes it hard to learn about the online interactions and learning outcome and indeed little is known about this relationship. One significant qualitative study that is relevant to the current research is by Golonka et al. (2017) who found various behaviors of students in online interactions.

The online interactions were related to language learning, such as providing language related assistance (self and peer correction, negotiation of meaning) using their partner as a resource (for clarifying information, modeling language use or helping with unknown vocabulary) and providing encouragement (responding positively to the task and to each other, eliciting information from a partner). Despite promising findings the study was not conducted with the ESL learners in the Malaysian setting. It is these perspectives on learning that informed the design of this study. The present study intends to use the Vygotsky social constructivism theory and the concept map suggested by Golonka et al (2017). to categorize the online interactions. investigate online interactions of a small group of Malaysian students. when they were engaged in the online writing environment to complete their narrative writing task. Thereupon it would be vital and informative to investigate the factors that help learners to add quality to the language leaning in a different setting. Figure 1 illustrates the concept map for types of peer interactions during chat sessions.

Figure 1 Concept map for types of interactions



Therefore the most pressing issue that need to be addressed is not how to promote online and beneficial learning attitudes to solve problem in online interactions, but to find out whether the online interactions are able to add quality of the students narrative writing. The online interactions in this study only involved student-student interactions.

## METHODOLOGY

The study was a qualitative research to examine the online interactions of a small group of ESL students from an urban school in Malaysia. A qualitative research will be able to detail human behavior and characters. Due to its in-depth nature, the current study only focused on a small sample. The researcher was not the instructor of the current course, thus there should not be any concern on issue of biasness and conflict of interest over the study. The writing task was part of their regular syllabus and there should not be any problem of biasness. Since the main aim of the current study is to examine the online interactions of the students instead of the products of the collaboration, the primary data is the categorization of the online archives based on Golonka et al. (2017). The researcher is concerned about the process as well as the product. Therefore students' scores of the writing task will also be discussed briefly. The researcher modelled ways of interactions with examples to the students. The interactions were related to explaining, confirming, referring to information from web-resources and resolving.

### Context of the study

The study was carried out in an urban Chinese school in the norther region of Malaysia. The school was interested in this study as it would be a worthwhile approach for students to integrate technology in language learning. Firstly, the Form Four students were selected by the Head of the English Panel after consulting with the Principal as this study was expected to be an avenue for the students to perform well in their SPM examination (Year 10) in the following year. Furthermore, the Form Four students were not sitting for any government examination in the year of the present study. Therefore, it is easier to get the administrative and parental support for a more effective and thorough study.

## Participants

The six participants were students of Year 10 have sufficient familiarity with the use of Facebook. The tasks given to them were based on their public examination in Year 11. Pseudonyms were used for all the participants. The students come from lower to the higher income group. The student population is Chinese. The Indian and Malay students are considered the minority in the school. However, there were no Malay and Indian students in the class where the research was conducted.

## The Research Site: The Chinese Secondary School

The school is a co-educational school located in a middle-class residential area in an urban part of Penang. The total number of teachers in this school is 120 and it had an average enrolment of 2300 students. It is a premier school where students who obtained outstanding results were selected to this school. However, the Head of English Panel pointed out that students are generally weak in their writing particularly in continuous writing and it is reflected in their SPM results.

## Instructional design and procedure

To gather the online archives for this study the teacher set a closed group discussion in the Facebook environment. Students were invited to join the group. All the information was available to the teacher and the students.

The process involved three phases:

**Initial Task** (Week 1) Students were to write their essays traditionally without the help of the online environment. The title of the essay was: A Narrow Escape. Six essays will be collected for this task.

**Main Task** (Weeks 2-7) Teacher upload the title, examples, tips and suggestions for students to write their narrative writing. Students were instructed to interact with their peers to add quality to the essays. Students need to write their essays individually before interactions and another essays after the interactions. Students are given a duration of two weeks to submit the essay after the interactions. Interaction on the task is solely on the online environment and there was no discussion in the traditional classroom environment during the main task. The titles of the essays were ... For every task, each student need to write two essays before and after the interactions (2 essays). For three tasks, 36 essays were collected. The titles of essays were "Describe the most embarrassing experience you have had"(Task 1), Write a story beginning with "the students were excitedly unloading (Task 2) and "Write a story ending with "tears welled up in his eyes" (Task 3). **Final Task** (Week 8): After the online environment students were to write their final essays in the traditional classroom without the help of the online environment. The title of the essay was "Saved at the Eleventh Hour". The entire study lasted for 6 weeks. In total 12 essays were collected from initial and final task and 36 essays from the online environment will be collected.

## Coding of the online interactions

The online archives were analyzed and categorized based on Golonka et al.'s (2017) framework. The online interactions were identified based on Swain and Lapkin's (1998) definition that 'any part of a dialogue where language learners talk about the language they are producing, question their language use or correct themselves or others' (p.326). Two coders independently identified the online interactions. The inter-rater reliability was 80 %. Following the discussion, a third rater were considered for unresolved interactions. Therefore 100% agreement were achieved.

## Materials

The writing task was narrative writing which were part of the syllabus for public examination. Students were instructed to write one individual essay and another essay after the interactions. Each essays contains about 400 -500 words. The teacher provided the students with materials and relevant resources, tips and suggestions to complete the task. The expected structure of the narrative essays was based on Labov and

Waletzky's narrative structure (1988). There was:

Abstract: What is the story about?

Orientation: Who, when, where, what?

Complicating Action: Then what happened?

Evaluation: So what, how is this interesting?

Result of resolution: What finally happened?

Coda: That's it. I've finished and am "bridging" back to our present situation.

### Feedback guideline

Students were guided with examples on how to give feedback to their peers. The researcher offered examples and enriched the meetings with ideas and probes. linguistic aspects related to organization, content, vocabulary and mechanics. The instructor's interactions are not considered in this study intentionally to investigate on what aspects of writing are students able to handle independently in their virtual classroom and what are the aspects in writing that is lacking in their interactions.

### Data Collection

#### Scores for the narrative essays

The essays were rated by three independent raters. There were trained by the researcher by using the pilot study scripts. The raters were guided by the Model Assessment Scale by Spandel (2005).

Trait	Scores	Definition
Ideas(I)	20	Ideas create the writer's message .They form the thesis or argument of writing and are supported with details, examples and anecdotes that inform the reader's understanding.
Organization(O)	20	The internal structure that guides the reader smoothly from beginning to end. Here the writer provides transitions that guide the reader from one idea to another while paying attention to the overall logical order of the writing.
Voice	20	This is the persona or presence writes create through their engagement with their own writing. The writer's own interest, feelings and reactions to the topic shine through in the writing, creating a style and expressiveness that engages the
Sentence Fluency (SF)	20	Reader. This trait is concerned with the rhythm and cadence the writer produces in the text, a flow of word structures that engage the reader and make reading more pleasurable.
Word Choice(WC)	20	Choosing the right word at the right time can create just the mental image or impression the reader needs to understand the writer's intention. It brings to life the writer's thoughts.
Conventions (Con)	20	The mechanics of writing, this trait concerns punctuation, spelling, grammar and usage and proper paragraphing.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The participants were actively involved in the interactions with a minimum of 8 comments and a maximum of 45 comments per week. There was a total of 568 online archives collected from this study. All the students completed the 3 three tasks given to them.

### Language Assistance

Language related assistance that were evident in this findings were partner corrections, self-corrections and negotiation for meaning. The peers have indicated the error by highlighting the sentence with error as well as writing out the appropriate sentence (Example 1).

#### Example 1



Also evident was language assistance related to spelling errors.

#### Example 2



There was also participant who began to comment on a series of language errors.

#### Example 3





Grammatical errors were also evident in their essays and were highlighted in their interactions (Example 4). Such interactions allow students to reflect on grammar and language use to produce accurate sentence structures.

#### Example 4



The interactions also emphasized the appropriate use of vocabulary.

#### Example 5



#### Prompting corrections

Example 5 illustrates the interactions that made some noteworthy contributions by encouraging participants by giving clues on how to correct their errors.

#### Example 5



#### Negotiation meaning

Negotiation of meaning in this study is based on one participant seeking assistance in understanding the other speaker's message (Pica, 1987). The interactions were coded by identifying the following three steps suggested by Golonka et al. (2017).

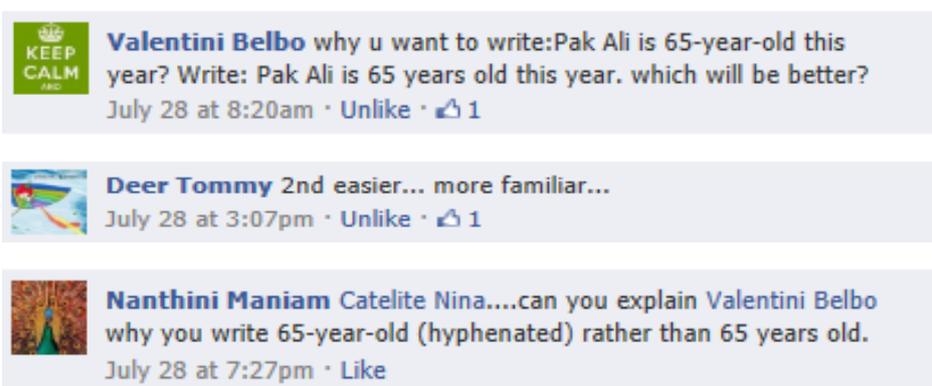
1. Look for a signal that communication has broken down
2. Trace back to identify the trigger
3. Look ahead to find the resolution

Example 6 indicates on how the participants were interacting on various types of sounds to make meaning. Example 7 illustrates negotiation of meaning related to appropriate sentence structures.

#### Example 6



#### Example 7



In summation, the interactions related to language assistance seems to engage students with active learning and reduces their reliance of teachers' response and facilitate interactions that permit students for effective learning.

#### Using partners as a resource

Using partners as a resource includes modelling, helping with vocabulary, clarifying instructions and helping with technology problems. Partners were used as a resource in the meaning making process. Such interactions represent language learning process, making online interactions a potential aspect in writing in collaboration. Modelling in this study is referred to examples given to enhance the quality of the essays. Example 8 illustrate on how certain ideas were illustrated with examples to gain better understanding and to be transferred to sentence structures in the essays.

## Modelling

A number of various linguistic aspects were discussed and models were made to make the ideas to be considered in their writing. Examples of such interactions were illustrated in the next section.

## Example 8

 **Valentini Belbo** hyphenated word is like a noun is it? such as: He is a 12-year-old boy  
July 29 at 8:51am · Unlike ·  1

 **Deer Tommy** Cuneorally Belbo has a good command of English... She can describe the actions very well... Well... Her essay really makes me "shiver"... and I feel ashamed because I can't use some BOOMBASTIC words like her... By the way, I like her essays "STYLE"... It was truly a SPM standard essay...  
June 27 at 5:40pm · Like ·  1

 **Catelite Nina** last time i checked for the word silenced. the dictionary said it was grammatical error  
July 30 at 7:07pm · Unlike ·  1

 **Deer Tommy** Silence is a noun. Silenced is a verb?  
July 30 at 6:47pm · Unlike ·  1

One of the participant reported on technical problem and one of the peers suggested solution to overcome the problem.

## Example 9

## Helping with technology problems

 **Deer Tommy** My laptop Kapersky can't go into this website~ SAD~  
July 22 at 8:24am · Like

 **Nanthini Maniam** Dont worry Deer Tommy...you try to surf through any online dictionary which can suit your computer security setting  
July 22 at 10:28pm · Like ·  2

## Helping with vocabulary

The help of vocabulary was evident with a brief clarification for a better understanding. Quick solution was given for errors. Code switching (Example 10) was found in the interactions offering a translation from English to Chinese and also Example 10 illustrates interactions related to vocabularies.

## Example 10

 **Monster KBlue** oh i see... heart cannot 'popping out'...it wil be 'jump out' frm our body ... ahhs  
July 17 at 9:54pm · Unlike ·  1

 **Monster KBlue** hw can handling obedient students a challenging job for u?  
June 29 at 10:28pm · Unlike ·  2



**Monster KBlue** try to describe his 不安的心情.. it will be better i think



**Joyce Chee** stayed at school = stayed back school, stayed at school means tinggal di sekolah, stayed back school means 留校  
June 29 at 10:39pm · Unlike · ↩ 2



**Joyce Chee** declare is 澄清, can replace with announce the result  
July 21 at 7:03pm · Unlike · ↩ 1

### Providing encouragement

Providing encouragement will be the interactions related to giving support, confident and hope to continue writing. Participants interactions were found to be encouraging feedback. It is hoped that such interactions will provide opportunity to construct and refine their knowledge and language learning.

#### Elicitation

Elicitation refers to gathering information and ideas to improve the essays. The peers have given constructive comments for the particular participant to continue writing. Such positive comments in a way have encouraged the participants to complete their task.

#### Example 11



**Catelite Nina** I think this essay is interesting and more appealing to compare with other two essays....  
July 26 at 5:15pm · Unlike · 👍 1



**Valentini Belbo** ya.. Peony Moon That's a wonderful real story!!!  
ahaha :)  
June 29 at 4:16pm · Like

#### Helping with task completion

Participants helped their peers to clear their doubts and provided web-based materials to provide language accuracy for the participants to complete their tasks. The following section illustrates the example.

#### Example 12



**Joyce Chee** until now, that the rule was that when there is a full quote, the stop goes before the inverted commas, but when only parts of a sentence or odd words are in quotes it is okay to place the full stop after the inverted comma.  
June 25 at 11:11am · Like · 👍 1



**Joyce Chee** it's a bit confusing Deer Tommy I think you can refer to this website.. [http://www.proz.com/kudoz/English/Linguistics/831387-punctuation\\_quotations\\_full\\_stops\\_before\\_and\\_after\\_inverted\\_commas.html](http://www.proz.com/kudoz/English/Linguistics/831387-punctuation_quotations_full_stops_before_and_after_inverted_commas.html)



**Punctuation, quotations, full stops before and after inverted commas**  
[www.proz.com](http://www.proz.com)

(KudoZ) English translation of Punctuation, quotations, full stops before and after inverted commas [grammar Br Eng - Linguistics].

June 25 at 11:12am · Unlike · ↩ 2 · Remove Preview

#### Humor

Christophel and Gorham (1990) humor reduces social distance and encourage concerns and willingness and reveal their personal information for other individuals to know more about each other and provide a better environment to establish trust, support and a sense of belonging. Such interactions were

evident in this study as illustrated in Example 13.

Example 13



There were certain types of interactions not found in the study. For example, self –correction. Self-corrections refer to interactions of repairing owns errors right after they happened without being prompted by peers. In other words, self- corrections were self-initiated. Such corrections were not found in the interactions. There researcher found that the interactions related to positive affect, toward partner/ chat, following instruction and staying on task are overlapping with other types of interactions. There is no clear cut definition on how to differentiate these interactions and interactions related to language assistance and using partner as resource. Therefore, the researcher found that such types of interactions were redundant and not considered in this study.

**Quality of the Narrative Essays**

All students performed better on the essays after the interactions rather than the essays before interactions. There were basically significant differences in aspect related to sentence fluency (SF) and word choice (WC) aspects. However, there were not much changes in scores related to organization (O) and ideas(I). Table I illustrates the scores.

The score before the interaction and after the interactions were illustrated in Tables 1. It is found that there was difference of 2-3 marks in their scores for aspect related to sentence fluency and word choice and there were no significant changes is aspects related to organization and voice aspects. There were significant changes in the total scores of initial and final tasks.

**Table 1 Students’ Average Scores for Task 1**

STUDENT	AVERAGE SCORES											
	BEFORE INTERACTION						AFTER INTERACTION					
	O	I	SF	V	Con	T	O	I	SF	V	Con	T
S1	15	16	18	11	6	66	15	16	19	12	6	68
S2	14	15	17	13	6	65	14	15	18	15	6	68
S3	15	15	22	15	6	74	15	16	23	16	6	76
S4	14	14	18	13	6	65	14	14	20	15	6	69
S5	14	14	16	14	6	64	14	13	17	16	6	65
S6	17	18	23	16	6	80	17	18	24	17	6	82

**Students' Average Scores for Task 2**

STUDENT	AVERAGE SCORES											
	BEFORE INTERACTION						AFTER INTERACTION					
	O	I	SF	V	Con	T	O	I	SF	V	Con	T
S1	15	16	15	15	6	67	15	16	17	16	6	70
S2	14	15	15	14	6	64	14	15	16	14	6	65
S3	15	15	17	14	6	67	15	15	18	15	6	69
S4	15	16	18	14	6	69	15	16	19	15	6	71
S5	15	16	19	15	6	71	15	15	20	16	7	73
S6	17	18	24	18	6	83	17	18	25	18	6	84

**Students' Average Scores for Task 3**

STUDENT	AVERAGE SCORES											
	BEFORE INTERACTION						AFTER INTERACTION					
	O	I	SF	V	Con	T	O	I	SF	V	Con	T
S1	15	15	20	16	7	73	15	15	20	16	7	73
S2	15	15	17	15	7	69	15	15	18	16	7	71
S3	15	14	17	15	7	68	15	15	18	16	7	71
S4	15	15	16	16	7	69	15	15	16	16	7	69
S5	14	15	15	14	7	65	14	15	15	14	7	65
S6	16	18	21	19	7	81	16	18	21	19	7	81

**Students' Average Scores for Initial and Final Tasks**

STUDENT	AVERAGE SCORES FOR INITIAL AND FINAL TASKS											
	INITIAL TASK						FINAL TASK					
	O	I	SF	V	Con	T	O	I	SF	V	Con	T
S1	12	12	18	12	6	60	17	17	23	18	7	82
S2	17	17	20	16	6	76	18	17	26	16	7	84
S3	14	14	19	12	6	65	18	19	24	18	7	86
S4	12	13	17	12	6	60	18	16	25	16	7	82
S5	13	12	18	12	6	61	17	16	18	15	7	73
S6	15	16	23	17	6	77	18	18	23	18	7	84

## DISCUSSION

The qualitative coding of the online interactions highlighted three main types of characteristics: language related assistance, using partners as resources and providing encouragement. The interactions related to language is related to linguistic gains. This aspect is related to spelling errors, appropriate use of grammars and sentence structures. Such interactions are often considered to be meaningful in language acquisition as it encourages the noticing of language features that is pertinent to produce a good essay. The interactions also empowered the participants to look at the peers' writing and broaden their knowledge with ideas from their peers. However, most of the interactions related to language assistance are considered 'shallow interactions' as students were not proved to further construct knowledge. There were interactions related to using partner as a resource, learners interacted and collaborated with their peers with vocabulary, modelling and technical problems. Pooling of ideas and web resources were evident for students to complete their tasks. This echoes Zou et al. 2016; Storch, 2013; Mark and Coniam, 2008 studies that interactions involve highlighting peers' errors, arguing on language choices and requesting and receiving help. Such interactions highlight the transition of learners from traditional classroom learning to be more committed, purposeful and relevant. Such attitudes are in line with the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning skills that focuses on self-directed and peer support learning. It is evident that students are slowly moving towards autonomous learning.

It also need to be pointed out that the interactions did not engage in organization aspects of the essays. They were merely editing the essays and were not keen in revamping the essay for organization and content aspects. This is likely due to the fact that students are not aware of the advantages that is available in the online learning environment where they can be engaged in critical and higher order thinking. As evident most of the interactions were related to editing of the essays for grammatical and sentence structures and to enhance their vocabulary use in the essays.

When students are put in the online environment, higher order thinking can be achieved with the availability of materials, resources, time and space. Brief interactions as evident in this study will not result in deep learning. This is probably the deficiency of expertise in guiding the interactions. The online interaction environment is new for the students to work collaboratively. Thus, they might be going through the transition from traditional classroom environment to online environment. This in turn suggest the necessity of the proper guidance from the teacher before students' engaging in the online interactions.

There are a number of pedagogical implications offered by this study to increase the effectiveness use of online interactions in the virtual classroom. There is a need for interactions that encourage to revamp the whole essay. Online interactions should not only be confined to editing the essay for grammar and sentence structures. At this point the research would like to suggest a check list for a more positive and effective attitude towards interactions. A detailed specific and restricted criteria need to be outlined for students to increase the quality of interactions. According to Slavin, (1991) online interactions should plan their activities at the initial stage for member to negotiate meaning, set goals, build trust and sentence structure is only one part of essay writing. With the growing interest in online interactions and collaboration work one more solid guidance for essay writing should be implemented for online virtual classrooms. It is also important to note that without the instructors or teachers' supervision online interactions will not lead to significant interactions that allows higher order thinking to take place.

Overall, students were able to improve the quality of narrative writing tasks. However, in this exploratory study the researcher found that more effort is needed for students to be self-directed and self-regulated learners. Writing in English language involves the need to acquire grammatical aspects and students should be instructed to discuss aspects related to grammar such as different parts of speech. Discussion should be created for these aspects for life-long learning with minimal support from the teachers. Students should also be warned not to only give solutions to language problems. What is needed is how to solve the language problems. All these aspects have to be discussed by the group before the assignments are completed. Nevertheless, the teacher with effective and minimal guidance will be able to channel the discussion to construct knowledge.

Although the students have the flexibility to carry out the discussion, teachers need to set guidelines on what need to be included in the interactions. Number of posts by the students is not important. The quality of interactions related to higher order thinking should be emphasized. Thus, learning objectives suggested by Blooms Taxonomy (2001) such as apply, analyze, evaluate and create elements should be involved in their discussions. Xia et al. (2013) suggested that when their interactions are considered as part of their assessment, students will be able to interact effectively. Providing timely responses is also deemed pertinent for students to retain motivation and constructive interactions. Students need to be guided to find their own directions in learning, formulating their own learning problems, deciding their own action and reflecting on the outcome of that process. Therefore in virtual classroom the presence of teacher or instructor is vital. There must be a necessary shift in teacher's pedagogical practices. According to Gikandi et al. (2011) effective learning in the virtual environment involves active, collaborative and reflective discourse to foster self-regulation. Designing online interactions to achieve positive learning outcomes is a critical task for ESL teachers in future.

The following are possible limitations of this study with further opportunities for future directions. A large scale study would be able to confirm and expand the findings of this study. The researcher used Facebook as an interactional platform, further studies should consider other platforms such as Edmodo, Bebo, Whats App to verify if the results hold valid in other social networking sites. Therefore, the findings of the study are useful for teachers who are keen to use the online interactions, in teaching of writing for ESL learners. This finding provides basis for development of effective online student-teacher and student-student strategies in the online learning environment. Teachers may need to think and try to figure out a way to help students on writing instruction that will help students to move to higher order thinking skills.

## CONCLUSION

Although this finding have significant contribution in the field of online interactions an obvious drawback would be generalizability. As the use of online environment is new in the Malaysian context in high school. In summation, the current study provides valuable information for application for future research. The findings are culture specific since the study is situated in the Malaysian context. Future research could investigate the instructors' perception on the efficacy of the online environment for online learning. Ethnographic study should also be considered to investigate the factors the influence students' acceptance and participation in the online learning environment in longitudinal studies.

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