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STRENGTHENING TERTIARY STUDENTS' WRITING SKILLS THROUGH T.R.E.N.D. MODEL

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ABSTRACT

Writing has always been subjected as a difficult task for students taking English language subjects during their first two semesters studying in tertiary education. For these students, writing a composition has been a task they would prefer to avoid doing. One of many reasons is the inability to first generate and organize their ideas for writing tasks. Besides, they faced difficulty in expressing themselves fluently or being able to write sentences that are grammatically correct in the target language. Realizing the importance of writing skills among undergraduates in the tertiary education, a study was carried out on 200 undergraduates who attended a day Malaysian University English Test (MUET) workshop to examine students' writing ability through a proposed model of Transferring, Restructuring, Engaging, Negotiating and Documenting (T.R.E.N.D.). The findings had shown significant improvement in learners' writing in term of coherency and the development of ideas after the workshop. As a whole, the use of T.R.E.N.D. Model had helped to improve students' writing ability in terms of not only language proficiency, but also their level of confidence.

Contribution/ Originality: This study has conducted a model for writing in tertiary education. The introductory of T.R.E.N.D. model acts as an alternative to traditional Process approach to writing in where the involvement of peer-readers in the third stage of the model is highly anticipated to help writers to express ideas.

1. INTRODUCTION

Writing has never been easy for students studying in this institution of higher learning. A good piece of writing is a valuable tool for communicating one's thoughts to others. Most of these writers find it difficult to organize their thoughts, edit or remove information during writing. In addition, it is noticeable that students tend to repeat basic mistakes such as misspelling and lacking in the elaboration of points which disrupted the flow of writing and automatically make it bad writing as a whole. In contrary, the focus of most writing tasks assigned in English classroom had placed heavily on the final product rather than the process of writing the essays. In fact, most students are not able to write in English for many reasons. Hence, many English language lecturers have then

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placed heavy emphasis on writing drills in hoping to help student writers in mastering writing skills as it is one of the four basic language skills that is given unique importance (Salem, 2013).

One of the factors is the lack of knowledge in developing and arranging content and ideas. Students might not be exposed to the writing process correctly or at all in some cases. Therefore, the students do not know how to express their ideas in writing. The situation had dampened students' writing as they could come up with brilliant thoughts, but unfortunately, were unable to incorporate those thoughts into writing. Hence, most students will end up abandoning those ideas which made the writing dull and uninteresting for readers. In returns, due to poor writing skills, the students' motivation and confidence were then hampered. This has then caused many to struggle in putting ideas on paper every time they were told to write in the target language.

In writing, student writers must get used to drafting, revising, and redrafting for several time before producing a final piece (Gashout, 2014). Instead, it is like an evolution of students' first thought which will go through some process where they might imitate a model or a sample of writing, try to add or subtract more ideas into it, how the plan to incorporate those ideas in the draft, how to revise the content based on the feedback from learners peers, making suitable corrections before publishing, and lastly where learners will share the final product with the readers. By going through all these processes, the quality of the writing is hoped to be ensured, but most importantly, the standard of writing among ESL learners are at the level where it is supposed to be. Sahar and Alireza (2014) proposed that one of the teaching strategies in some classes is to assign the students to work in a writing task by using a model essay. In preparing the writing after analyzing the main components of the sample text then make use of the sample text's organizational characteristics.

However, the process approach focused highly on the writing process on how writers started writing as well as how they develop their ideas. Bae (2011) stated that students are given enough time to go through the writing process along with appropriate feedback from both their teachers and peers. Therefore, they can develop their first drafts which might be unorganized and full of grammatical errors to final drafts which are better organized with fewer grammatical errors. As Hyland (2009) pointed out, some students may not trust peers' feedback, and at the same time, they are reluctant to criticize others' writing making it difficult for students to explore further. Hyland (2009) went on to criticize on process writing for merely focusing on the process, and teaching good writers' strategies cannot fully equip students as good writers.

2. OBJECTIVES

Thus, this study examined the effectiveness of the proposed T.R.E.N.D. model in generating tertiary students' writing skills and if those processes applied affects their writing performance in term of the organization of content and language used. The study in this project involved the analysis of any significant difference in students' writing performance before and after the implementation of T.R.E.N.D. model in writing. It is also hoped that this project will enlighten English lecturers to opt for strategies in helping tertiary students in preparation to write a good piece of essay during examinations. During the development of a piece, the student writer always does a certain amount of transferring and trashing of ideas. And, further, writers often try to place themselves in the shoes of their audience, the readers, in order to check the comprehensibility of their presentation from the reader's perspective.

In a similar manner, the reader has also been considered a writer in that the reader's mind races ahead to anticipate not only the message but also the structure and presentational style of a piece; words are thought of as well as ideas, in ways in which they might appear (Flower and Hayes, 1980; Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1982; Roselmina and James, 2000). With the introduction of T.R.E.N.D. model, thus, a reader's text can be compared with an author's text and revised when needed. This sense of writing as reading provides a sense of personal engagement to the reading experience.

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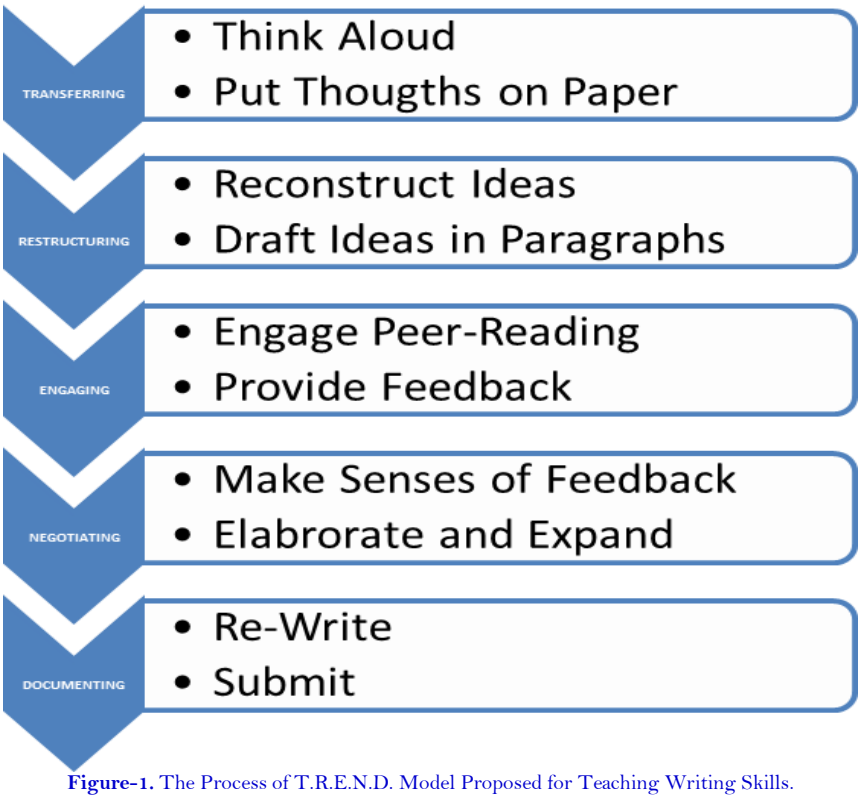

Figure-1. The Process of T.R.E.N.D. Model Proposed for Teaching Writing Skills.

For these students, writing a composition has been a task they would prefer not to do. As many of them are not sure how to first generate and organize their ideas, how to express themselves fluently or to be able to write grammatically correct sentences have become a problem to the English lecturers teaching the subjects. Students at different levels generally confine their revisions to local problems at the word and sentence level (Ferris, 1995; McCutchen *et al.*, 1997; Polio and Fleck, 1998; Mohd and Saifuddin, 2009). They added that one of the reasons why students go to edit their writing in terms of grammar and mechanics routs in the way teachers score the essays. Realizing the importance of writing skills among undergraduates in the tertiary education, this study is to carry out to improve students' writing ability through a proposed model Figure 1 of Transferring, Restructuring, Engaging, Negotiating and Documenting (T.R.E.N.D.).

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on second language writing has always been a controversial one. Many researchers had conducted studies on the effectiveness of process writing approach in the teaching of writing skills. Many, too, had agreed that the process writing approach has an upper hand in getting students to write better as to compare to the product approach. Beginning with According to Zamel (1982) writing process is made up of a few steps before the writers ends up with the finished product. Since writers do not seem to know beforehand what it is they will say writing is a process through which meaning is created. This suggests composition instruction that recognizes the importance of generating, formulating, and refining one's ideas. It implies that revision should become the main component of this instruction that writing teachers should intervene throughout the process and that students should learn to view their writing as someone else's reading.

The process involves much more than studying a particular grammar, analyzing and imitating rhetorical models, or outlining what it is one plan to say. The process involves not only the act of writing itself but prewriting and rewriting, all of which are interdependent. Caudery (1995) supported the views stating that the process approach has always been controversial in the term for practical reasons. It was added that the process of teaching often requires more in the way of input from teachers and students as well as the degree of organizational

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problems. Horowitz (1986); Caudery (1995) on the other hand, stated that there has been debate over whether the focus of the teaching is always appropriate for the students concerned by preparing them for language examinations. He added that there is an obvious conflict between the extended composing processes encouraged by the process approach and the single-draft writing usually necessary in an examination.

Another problem identified in the texts written by the students is a lack of appropriate logical linking of ideas. A study conducted by Khuwaileh and Shoumali (2000) showed that the lack of cohesion and coherence in students' written texts is caused by the lack of logical connectors of sequence, consequence, contrast, addition and illustration. This showed that the students had problems in organizing ideas in their writing. The organization of ideas into paragraphs was not clear in their writing. Several main ideas were found in one paragraph written by some of the students. Moreover, this has further supported (Gambell, 1991) study on university education students' self-perceptions of writing at the University of Saskatchewan. The sample consisted of forty-eight elementary education pre-service teachers in their second (mostly) or third year who were writing in English as their first language. The results of the study provide information on common problems encountered by students, such as the inability to narrow down the topic, inability to organize the structure of their writing and difficulty in deciding relevant information to be used in their writing.

In contrary, Lima (2015) contrasted the effectiveness of using process writing approach in teaching writing skills. Lima (2015) added that the process writing approach focused mainly on the process which does not give students the sense of an audience. The reader in this approach was said of not having access to the process through which the final product was created. Therefore, dismissing the product was not in accordance with a teacher's objective which was to equip students with the tools to help them achieve and succeed in contexts other than the classroom. This emphasis implies the need to provide feedback and constructively respond to the feedback in ESL writing classes adopting the approach. Feedback is seen as essential to the multiple-draft process and is then becoming the main importance of this study.

Hence, the introduction of T.R.E.N.D. model to writing at the level of the tertiary institution acts as an intervention in helping student writers during the process of writing. As Bae (2011) presented on how process writing has become an essential way to improve students' writing abilities, he stressed on how to provide feedback on students' writing and how to use portfolios in the process writing classrooms. According to Bae (2011) giving feedback is not a simple issue, but requires teachers to decide many things such as when and how to respond to students' writing in advance. The ability to generate well organizes and coherent essays are expected if feedback is emphasized. Most of the course work assessments and examinations are in the form of essay writing. Therefore, effective writing skills are essential to students studying in tertiary education in which peers play an important role in providing effective feedback.

4. RESEARCH PROCEDURES

The research was conducted at one of the local private university in Malaysia. This research site was chosen with an intention to examine the effectiveness of using T.R.E.N.D. model to strengthen students' writing skills in term of organization, length, and language used. In this study, a total number of 200 respondents from various programs who had registered for Malaysian University English Test (MUET) had been selected and participated in a day MUET workshop. At the beginning of the study, all the respondents were given a topic to write in within a time provided. The respondents were not allowed to discuss and were told to write in the way of which they had been taught in the past. The sample essays were then collected.

The respondents were then been explained and guided on how the process of T.R.E.N.D. model could be applied. During this process, the respondents were first told to transfer all ideas into a mind-map as in the transferring stage. Through this stage, respondents were guided on how to build the introduction and thesis statement for their respective essay. In the restructuring stage, the respondents were to build elaboration and to

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provide examples to the points transferred earlier. From this, the respondents were able to see the required structures for a complete piece of writing. Once completed, the respondents exchanged their essay to be read by their peer. Lima (2015) stressed the importance of having peers to engage in the process as immediate readers. This was supported by Lee *et al.* (2007) stating that the peer response stage can stimulate students to work in groups which help to provide students with a mental model of readers in order to clarify any incongruity between their ideas and the audience perception of their thoughts. In the negotiating stage, the respondents responded to the readers' views by adding and trashing information from the first draft. Finally, during documenting stage, the respondents rewrote the essay in a presentable way before submission.

The final essays were collected and both essays were rated by a rater to determine the effect of T.R.E.N.D. model in generating tertiary students' writing skills and if those processes applied to affect their writing performance in term of the organization of content and language used. The findings of this study were presented as follow. This study is hoped to provide a significant pedagogical implications for lecturers lecturing English language to plan and guide students to write effectively. Furthermore, it is expected that this study will shed light on the feasibility of incorporating T.R.E.N.D model in teaching writing activities during Proficiency English lessons. This will then help to improve students' writing ability before signing up for Malaysian University English Test (MUET).

5. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

All the 200 papers from the respondents were scored independently by a rater to show the effects of T.R.E.N.D. model (treatment) in strengthening students' writing skills. In this section, the data were analyzed based on overall, content and language scores. A set of hypotheses was set to show changes to the study in term of content (ideas and length) and language.

Alternative Hypothesis (Ha)

There is a significant difference between the development of content and language in students' writing performance.

Null Hypothesis (H0)

There is no significant difference between the development of content and language in students' writing performance.

6. ANALYSIS OF CONTENT SCORES

An analysis on Content Scores of all 200 writing scripts from the respondents is presented in the form of the table.

Table-1. Descriptive Statistics on Content Scores.

Paired Samples Statistics					
Content Scores		**Mean**	**N**	**Std. Deviation**	**Std. Error Mean**
Pair 1	Pre-Content	8.33	200	2.692	.190
	Post-Content	14.12	200	2.868	.203

Table-2. Paired Sample Test for Content Scores.

Paired Samples Test									
Content Scores		**Paired Differences**					**t**	**df**	**Sig. (2-tailed)**
		Mean	**Std. Deviation**	**Std. Error Mean**	**95% Confidence Interval of the Difference**				
					Lower	**Upper**			
Pair 1	Pre-Content-Post-Content	-5.795	3.826	.271	-6.328	-5.262	-21.422	199	.000

p value= .05

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In Table 2, the Paired Sample Test for Content Scores shows that there was a significant difference between the mean scores of -5.795. The Pre-Content mean score in Table 1 was 8.33 with a standard deviation of 2.692 and the Post-Content mean score recorded 14.12 with a standard deviation of 2.868. From Table 2, the t-value had shown a significant difference of -21.422 when p-value was set at the level of .05. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected and an alternative hypothesis was accepted where there was a significant difference in students' writing performance in term of content.

7. ANALYSIS OF LANGUAGE SCORES

An analysis on Language Scores of all 200 writing scripts from the respondents is presented in the form of table below:

Table-3. Descriptive Statistics on Language Scores.

Paired Samples Statistics					
Language Scores		**Mean**	**N**	**Std. Deviation**	**Std. Error Mean**
Pair 1	Pre-Language	18.30	200	3.781	.267
	Post-Language	22.71	200	2.922	.207

Table-4. Paired Sample Test for Language Scores.

Paired Samples Test									
Language Scores		**Paired Differences**					**t**	**df**	**Sig. (2-tailed)**
		Mean	**Std. Deviation**	**Std. Error Mean**	**95% Confidence Interval of the Difference**				
					Lower	**Upper**			
Pair 1	Pre-Language-Post-Language	-4.415	4.145	.293	-4.993	-3.837	-15.064	199	.000

p value= .05

In Table 4, the Paired Sample Test for Language Scores shows that there was a significant difference between the mean scores -4.415. As stated in Table 3, the Pre-Language mean score was 18.30 as compared to Post-Language mean score of 22.71. The standard deviation for Pre-Language was 3.781 while Post-Language with only 2.922. From Table 4, the t-value had shown a significant difference of -15.064 when p-value was set at the level of .05. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected and an alternative hypothesis was accepted where there was a significant difference in students' writing performance in term of language use.

8. CONCLUSION

The fact that writing problems exist even after the students have received several years of essay writing instruction in secondary school is definitely cause for concern. The current emphasis on structure, mechanics and linguistic knowledge in the teaching of writing sidelines the importance of teaching writing as a process and ignores the social nature of writing. This study is expected to provide insight into whether T.R.E.N.D. model could strengthen students' writing ability in the level of tertiary education. Based on the data tabulated above, it was found that there was a significant difference between the treatment and respondents' writing performance. The used of T.R.E.N.D. model had proven to be an effective strategy in helping tertiary students in developing ideas for writing in the English language classroom. With this study, lecturers lecturing English proficiency courses in a tertiary institution could apply T.R.E.N.D. model to the teaching of writing in strengthening the students' writing ability. This provides lecturers an alternative to the process approach as it was noted that not all the stages in the approach acted to be suitable for developing students' writing skills.

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