ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Exploring Young ESL Learners' Narrative Writing Performance: Implications for Teachers and Learners

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ABSTRACT – English writing is one of the most essential skills for global communication in the 21st century. It can help students express their personality, develop thinking skills, give and receive feedback, and argue on logical ideas. Taking this into account, the present study investigated the English writing performance of Malaysian ESL young learners. Specifically, the present study focused on the performance of the students in writing narrative essays. A total of sixty upper primary school students aged 11 years old were involved. A narrative writing task was developed for the purpose of the study. Sixty sample essays (4569 words) were collected and analyzed. The analysis conducted on their writings revealed that majority of the students (65%) are at a low level of narrative writing proficiency. Only 28% of them are at satisfactory level. The findings also indicate that the students committed the most errors in sentence structure (37.9%) when writing the essays. Meanwhile, grammatical error was observed to be the second highest to be committed by the students (33.4%), followed by spelling error (13.2%) and punctuation error (15.5%). This study brings an implication especially to the teaching of narrative writing to young ESL learners, in which the five aspects (sentence structure, grammar, spelling and punctuation) should be prioritized for proficient narrative writing skills to be nurtured among the students.

INTRODUCTION

English writing proficiency has become one of the most invaluable skills for many learners in many countries worldwide. In the Malaysian education system, the English Language Curriculum for Year Three (eleven-year-old pupils) to Year Six (twelve-year-old pupils) uses a modular design comprising five primary modules: listening and speaking, reading, writing, language art, and grammar modules. One of the modules is the writing module, which as stated in the *Dokumen Standard Kurikulum Pentaksiran Bahasa Inggeris Tahun 5* (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2020, p.34):

> The Writing Content Standards focus on pupils' ability to learn to write, to communicate meaning, and to use appropriate mechanical features of writing. Learning Standards for communicating meaning progress from pupils being able to communicate information, to describing people and things, to being able to organize what they write.

As stated in the Malaysia Education Blueprint, it is the national aspiration to prepare students with essential language skills to produce better human resources (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). In this regard, students need to have better English writing skills as it is one of the most critical communication skills in the workplace, especially in the business, entertainment, information technology, medical and science sectors (Sidhu et al., 2018). Yunus et al. (2019) added that to survive in the machine age and the fourth industrial revolution (IR 4.0), students need to be equipped with effective writing skills. In the workplace, a written document is used to store information or even communicate. According to Cellier, Terrier and Alamargot (2007), professional documents are the most important writing types in the workplace, covering everything from instructions and guidelines to usage directions. Professional documents are diverse in its types based on its content, format, and communication goals. Generally, the main purpose of professional document is to assist people to understand and perform a task in the workplace.

Preparing students with effective writing skills is important as it is perceived as a versatile skill that can be used to achieve many goals, such as telling stories, sharing information, and creating the imaginary world (Graham et al., 2013). Writing is an indispensable tool in learning too. Wingate and Harper (2021) claimed that writing is widely used for assessment or evaluation purposes, and Graham et al. (2013) stated that writing impacted other language learning skills such as reading because students with better writing skills would improve in their reading skills too. Additionally, Herman et al. (2020) asserted that language learners will have a better opportunity to understand, explore, and express themselves through writing. Writing also stimulates students' thinking skills as it compels students to concentrate, organize ideas, summarise, and criticize (Puteh et al., 2010).

However, as mentioned by Herman et al. (2020), writing is a complicated skill. This is true as many learners are found to face difficulties in planning their writing (Foung & Lughmani, 2021). Learners also have problems managing their writing process due to poor time management and failure to plan their writing effectively (Morrison, 2014). In a similar vein, Majid and Stapa (2017) reported that learners' writing difficulties result from their lack of skills in organizing and

applying correct writing steps. In other words, learners do not have sufficient knowledge of the writing process, which comes in handy when they are at the stage of writing a piece of text. In addition to the abovementioned challenges, some other common factors that have been identified to affect learners' writing quality include errors in organization, spelling, conventions, grammar, vocabulary, sentence fluency, handwriting and genre elements (Graham et al., 2017).

For Malaysian ESL learners, previous research has shown that they have difficulties in writing, especially in language use, punctuation and conventions (Ghabool et al., 2012). Malay learners, especially from rural areas, are found to make many grammar errors in their writing (Hong et al., 2011). Moreover, Puteh et al. (2010) claimed that many Malaysian learners lacked ideas to produce and elaborate on important events that are creative enough for their writing.

Nevertheless, over the years, most studies on writing performance of Malaysian learners focused on students from the secondary school to students at tertiary level (Cheung, Chu, & Jang, 2021). Studies which investigated writing performance, particularly narrative writing performance of younger learners at the primary school level can hardly be found. Teaching writing skills in English to primary school pupils is difficult as learners at the same time need to learn to write in their first language and do not have a strong foundation of their second language. This provides a more substantial reason for the need to conduct more research in this area (Patekar, 2021). Supporting this, Cheung et al. (2021) stated that it is crucial to explore primary school students' writing skill to broaden the knowledge of writing skill itself. Only by exploring learners' current abilities and weaknesses, the stakeholders such as teachers and learners themselves can take the necessary approach to further improve students' writing performance.

Considering this, the present study aims to investigate Malaysian ESL young learners' writing performance by exploring the patterns of errors committed by the learners. In other words, detailed analysis of the learners' writing was carried out to identify types of errors they commonly commit, which may impede writing performance. It is highly hoped that this study can serve as a guideline to language instructors at schools, especially in catering the requirements of teaching writing to young learners, and assisting them to achieve better writing proficiency, particularly in relation to narrative essay writing. The research questions addressed in the study are as follows: 1) To what extent are Malaysian primary school students able to write narrative essays? 2) What type of errors are commonly found in the narrative essays written by the students?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Writing

Writing for primary school students can be a very tough skill. Many students at the primary school level, age 7 – 12 years old in Malaysia face the same problem as they perceive writing is the most difficult skill to be mastered (Shah et al., 2011). Good writing skills may increase students' knowledge, creativity, and imagination. In a scientific study investigating the correlation between neural and creative writing, general writing and creative writing showed to promote active cerebral activity as it activates motor-associated areas, including the primary motor cortex (Shah et al., 2013). According to this study, creative writing triggered motor and visual brain areas for handwriting, cognitive and linguistic areas. For example, when performing brainstorming activity for writing preparation, the cognitive, linguistic, and creative brain function will actively engage in a parieto-frontal-temporal network that enables better comprehension.

There are four types of writing: descriptive, narrative, exposition, and argumentation. Narrative writing is a form of writing which tells a made-up story or events in sequences. Some examples of this type of writing are short stories and novels (Cahyani & Nurjanah, 2019). In the present study, narrative writing performance was chosen because firstly, it is one of the most critical writing types (Ministry of Education, 2020), and in fact, "World of Story" is one of the major themes in the syllabus for primary school or known as *Dokumen Standard Kurikulum dan Pentaksiran Tahun 5*. Besides, with the insertion of the Contemporary Children Literature component in the syllabus, students should be exposed to a few types of literary genres such as graphic novels and also short stories.

Secondly, narrative writing is able to instill students' moral values (Rahim & Rahiem, 2013). Narrative writing can be an idyllic medium to educate children with moral values from the events that occur in the narrative writing task. For instance, the teacher may provide picturized writing task with positive moral values such as assisting the elderly. The task and further elaboration from the teacher will educate students on the importance of the value. Besides, according to Mello et al. (2015), children learn much better from pictures than precepts and stories with the picture will transmit proper values to the children.

Moreover, narrative writing gives students more opportunities to demonstrate their creativity and imagination, which is fundamental to ensure successful learning (Pishghadam & Mehr, 2011). According to Duffy (2006), imparting creativity and imagination in students will allow learning to happen in the cross-curriculum. For example, some of the cross-curricular elements in the current syllabus are language, environmental sustainability, values, patriotism, creativity, and innovation. Through narrative writing task, students will be able to integrate these cross-curricular elements. For instance, if the students are given narrative writing on recycling activity, the teacher may explain our environment's importance.

Narrative Writing Assessment

There are a few ways and steps to follow when assessing narrative writing. Generally, in evaluating writing abilities, learners were asked to produce writing samples in a given period (Taylor et al., 2020). Short story writing is frequently used to assess students' creativity (Kaufman et al., 2013). A short story writing task for evaluation is in the form of a

series of pictures with some captions (Kaufman et al., 2007). Later, the writing samples will be gathered and assessed by the rater with sufficient expertise (Taylor et al., 2020).

The most common writing assessment is still using human scores (Taylor et al., 2020). There are two common scoring writing methods: using the Consensual Assessment Technique and providing raters with specific criteria or rubric. Consensual Assessment Technique is a technique of assessment where the expert panels independently judge without any definite criteria. The validity of this technique relies on the judgement of the experts involved. On the other hand, providing rubrics for a writing assessment allows novices in an educational setting to evaluate writing samples using reliable ratings without any expertise (Taylor et al., 2020).

Error Analysis

According to Khansir (2012), error analysis is an inevitable topic in second language study as the error is an integral part of a language's learning process. Corder first established error Analysis in 1971 (Harun & Kabilan, 2020). One of the most significant relevance of error analysis is to enable learners to reconstruct their 'approximative system' in their learning process rather than just practising the information delivered by their teachers.

Errors made by learners are significant for the teachers as the errors will show the learners' progress and what is left for the learners to learn (Harun & Kabilan, 2020). Besides, error analysis will also benefit researchers to investigate how language is acquired and the strategies used in acquiring the language.

Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005) have proposed a few steps to be taken to analyze students' error, including collecting samples from language learners, identifying errors, describing errors, and explaining errors. The steps that should be followed in analyzing grammatical errors in students' writing may include gathering data from the language learners, usually in written form. After that, the process of identifying the errors needs to be done, including the type of errors – sequencing, wrong verb form, singular, and plural noun. Then, the researcher needs to classify the errors – agreement, preposition, articles, or conjunction errors. After that, the researcher will have to count or quantify the errors. Then, the process of analyzing the source of errors will follow before proceeding to plan and conduct the remedial intervention (Harun & Kabilan, 2020).

Writing Performance of Young Learners in Malaysia

The issue of English language proficiency of Malaysian ESL learners has been a concern to many parties over the years. When more than a decade is spent by most of Malaysian ESL learners to learn the language, they are still reported to not able to acquire satisfactory competence of the language, regardless of the skills involved. For many years, Malaysian primary school students had to sit for Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah, known as UPSR, by the end of Year 6 (12 years old). In this formal examination, English Writing was one of the subjects that needed to be taken by the students. However, the students' English writing performance in the exam has been reported as far from satisfactory (Chien et al., 2016; Suhaimi et al., 2019).

In view of the writing performance of young learners, a few studies have been conducted to investigate this. In this regard, studies which have focused on errors in learners' writing include Singh et al. (2017) and Harun and Kabilan (2020). Singh et al. (2017) reported that 34.7% of their 74 form four respondents made subject verb agreement errors in their writing and 30.4% committed errors on verb tense. On the other hand, Harun and Kabilan (2020) reported that 44 students in primary schools in the rural area of Perak made the most errors in tenses, which is 120 errors. Apart from grammatical errors, the previous study also has examined learners' ability to use correct tenses in their writing, as done by Harun and Kabilan (2020). From the findings of their study, Harun and Kabilan (2020) found that most students in primary schools have difficulties using correct tenses in their writing. In their study, 44 students from two different schools were selected, and overall, the students made 395 errors. The students made the most errors in tenses (120 errors) followed by punctuation (111 errors), vocabulary (83 errors) and spelling (81 errors).

Besides grammatical and tense errors, Malaysian young learners also have difficulties in writing their essays with correct sentence structures. This is reported by Nair and Hui (2018) as they found that the 102 Chinese students who participated in their study make most grammar and sentence structures errors. According to the study, female students make fewer errors than male students.

Despite what has been researched so far, it is deemed significant to further explore the writing performance of Malaysian young learners. Analysis on the weakness of the learners' writing especially should be carried out in a more comprehensive way where multiple aspects should be analyzed. Rather than focusing on just one aspect, such as grammar or tense, it is more insightful if the research study considers other important aspects that can impede or enhance their writing proficiency, such as sentence structure, spelling and punctuation.

Furthermore, as Cheung et al.(2021) recommended, further study on writing should focus on primary school setting and emphasizes on narrative writing as this type of writing is the most focused writing instruction in primary schools in Asia. It is also similar to what has been suggested by Harun and Kabilan (2020). They indicated that further studies on error analysis for primary school should be done in more different schools as students' error in writing may vary due to the differences in the learning process.

Therefore, the present study is significant as it intends to investigate errors made by primary school students in different areas. Not just that, this study also wishes to examine the current performance level of the primary students in narrative writing based on the rubric of holistic scoring.

EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS

This study is in the form of a quantitative study. 2 classes from 2 primary schools were selected. Two different English teachers taught both classes. The researcher did not involve in teaching both classes.

Instrument

The major instrument used in this study is a narrative writing task, which was developed for the purpose of the study. The task consists of two questions and an answer sheet. Each question contains a series of pictures and captions. The students were required to choose and answer only a question in the answer sheet provided. The researcher chose to have this format and types of questions as it is similar to the student's monthly writing task format.

The total mark allocated is 23 marks. The format of the narrative writing task was adopted from the English writing paper of *Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah* (UPSR), which was a national standard examination for primary school level in Malaysia. The format was adopted as it is a reliable and the students were familiar with the format. The writing task tested are according to the topic in Unit 1 Year 5 English textbook, which is "Free Time". The students need to write an essay between 80 to 100 words, and the time allocated is 45 minutes.

In evaluating the students' essays, the researcher used the scoring rubric, which was developed by Hughes (2002). The rubrics classify the students' writing into six performance levels (poor, satisfactory, fair, good, excellent, distinguish). Detailed description and range of mark of each performance level are described in the following Table 1.

Table 1. Writing Task Scoring Rubrics.

Performance Level	Descriptor	Marks
1 (Poor)	• Demonstrates incompetence in writing • Content is not coherent • The storyline is not relevant and undeveloped • Contain severe and persistent writing errors	0-3
2 (Satisfactory)	• Serious disorganization of ideas • Little or no detail of events • Severe and frequent writing errors. • Chunking of ideas	4-7
3 (Fair)	• Inadequate organization and development • Inappropriate and insufficient detail of events • Inappropriate choice of words • Frequent writing errors.	8-11
4 (Good)	• Relevant storyline • The adequate organization of ideas • Use some detail to support the events • Simple but correct vocabulary used • Contain writing errors that occasionally obscure meaning	12-15
5 (Excellent)	• Show a high understanding of the task • Ideas are well organized • Use some creative details to support the event • The variety used of sentences • Paragraphs are linked with cohesive devices • Use a wide range of vocabulary • Contain minimal writing errors	16-19
6 (Distinguished)	• Show a high understanding of the text • Ideas are organized well and clearly • Use creative details to make the writing more interesting • Paragraphs are linked with correct cohesive devices • Vocabulary used effectively • Contain high-frequency words in writing • Contain very minimal writing errors.	20-23

Participants

A total of sixty Year 5 students (11 years old) were involved as participants of the study. The students were selected based on the convenient and purposive sampling techniques. The sampling is convenient as the students were from two different primary schools located Kuala Krai, Kelantan, Malaysia; thirty students were from school A while another 30 were from school B. Two schools were involved to ensure sufficient number of Year 5 students for the study. The sampling is also purposive as the researcher selected the participants based on the suitability of the syllabus characteristics.

In general, most of the participants have minimum exposure to the English Language. The community they live in consists of farmers, rubber tappers, drivers, sawmills workers and grocery store owners. English exposure of the participants would only occur during the lesson at school, which is only thirty minutes to an hour a day. Moreover, most teachers and students used the direct translation method in teaching and learning the language. Therefore, their proficiency in the language is primarily limited. All of the participants are Malays and at the age of 11 years old. The participants have limited proficiency in the English language based on their previous examination result.

Data Collection and Processing

During the data collection procedure, the narrative writing task was administered to the students. The narrative writing task was in the "Free Time" topic, which is a topic that the students had covered during the previous teaching and learning process in the classroom. The students also needed to complete the task in 45 minutes which is the same time allocated for the test in the previous monthly test. This was aimed to gather the students' written compositions hence further analyze them to explore their narrative writing performance. The participants' answers were gathered and sent them to be marked by the appointed examiner, who has 15 years of teaching English experience and in marking English examination paper.

For analysis purpose, the scores of the essays were recorded and tabulated in the scoring sheet. Further, a detailed analysis on the individual essay was carried out by the researcher herself to identify common writing errors committed by the students. Overall, sixty essays were analyzed with a total of 4569 words written.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The objective of the study was twofold. First, the study intended to find out the narrative writing ability of Malaysian ESL young learners. Second, the study investigated writing errors that the students commonly committed when writing their essays. This was mainly done to identify difficulties experienced by the students in performing narrative writing; hence possible approach could be thought of to facilitate the students. Results obtained from the analysis are presented next.

To What Extent are Malaysian Primary School Students able to Write Narrative Essays?

The writing task score was first analyzed to find out the students' narrative writing performance. The result is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Narrative Writing Task Score.

Performance Level	1 (Poor)	2 (Satisfactory)	3 (Fair)	4 (Good)	5 (Excellent)	6 (Distinguish)
Percentage of student	39 65%	17 28.3%	4 6.7%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%

From the scores obtained, it can be seen that none of the students was able to achieve a 'good' score and above for the narrative essays they wrote. Surprisingly, majority of the students (39 students, 65 %) demonstrated poor performance, indicating their limited ability in writing the essays.17 of the students, 28.3%, were at a satisfactory level and only four students, 6.7%, were at a fair level.

From the analysis done, it was found that there are variations in terms of the word count of the essays. In other words, the students have written their essays with a range of word count, regardless of the word limit set in the task. Table 3 summarizes the word count analysis result.

Table 3. Word Count Analysis Results.

Word counts	0-25	26-50	51-75	76-100	101-125
Number of students	10 16.7%	5 8.3%	5 8.3%	26 43.3%	14 23.3%

As shown in Table 3, most of the students (26 students) wrote 76 to 100 words in their essays. Meanwhile, 23.3% (14 students) of the students wrote beyond the word limit as their essays contain 101-125 words. Surprisingly, there are 10 and 5 students who managed to only produce around 0 to 25 words and 26-50 words in writing their essays, respectively.

The results show that the students did not go beyond 125 words to write their essays. This may due to the 100 words limitation written in the instruction for the writing task. Although they managed to write few words in the essays, almost half of the students still did not meet the word requirement (100 words) set. A possible reason that can explain this is the limited vocabulary bank of the students, which impede them from expressing their ideas in the essays. In short, limited access to vocabulary might have prevented the students from expanding their essays longer.

Limitation in vocabulary knowledge has been found as one of the reasons why learners are unable to write satisfactorily. Wang and Yamat (2019) for instance found that 58% of primary school students who are involved in their study had low vocabulary level which resulted in minimum number of words written by the students in their essays. Ahmad Ghulamuddin et al. (2021) similarly reported that most students in the primary school setting were having difficulties in writing as they have low vocabulary level, inability to spell the correct words and L1 interference.

In the present study, the students' lack of vocabulary knowledge is clearly seen in the wrong use of word collocations, which affected sentence's meaning and quality. On some occasions, the students know the meaning of the words but wrongly associated them with the correct object and verbs. For instance, students often wrote "playing seashells", "playing sandcastle" and "playing kite".

The findings so far suggested that the student's performance in English narrative writing is far from satisfactory level as most of the students score 1 to 3 marks out of 23 marks. It is similar to what had been reported by Ahmad Ghulamuddin et al. (2021), which claimed that Malaysian primary students' are still not competent enough to use English despite many years of schooling. The majority of the students scored between 1 to 3 marks for their narrative writing task from this current study. Comparing to the words written by the students in their essay, the majority of them wrote around 76 to 100 words. It showed that, although students wrote adequately, they are still unable to get good marks for the writing. Even though they wrote adequately, their sentences were irrelevant and meaningless and did not contribute well to develop the storyline in their narrative writing. Some examples of students' sentences are as follows:

Ali and sister sandcastles and father read book and mother laid delicius food.
Alisya go pantai cahaya bulan with happy.
Encik Jaafar go river walking to fishing fish.
Puan Umi cleaned the fish big and fried the fish big to eat dinner.
She have good time and fun together with her family.
And then, he playing seashells with brather.
Encik Jaafar patiently fishing fish Sungai Rek.

According to Berninger and Winn (2006), writing involves at least three processes: planning, translating and revising. In the planning process, a writer will generate ideas and transform them into language form, including the written form in translating process. Revising, on the other hand, involves correction and modification of the text produced. However, based on the observation of the study, most of the students did not perform these three processes accordingly. It may due to the approach used by the teacher, which preferred drilling and modelling essay. Therefore, most of the students did not plan their writing and even reread what they wrote before submitting their writing to their teacher. As a result, their writing contains many major and minor errors.

Therefore, it is suggested that primary school students should be exposed to the process involved in writing. Torkildsen et al. (2016) claimed that students' narrative macrostructural quality, including organization of ideas, cohesiveness and language precision, was positively associated with the writing process. By exposing students to the process involved in writing, students will have guidance towards accomplishing their writing task. Nevertheless, exposing the primary school students to process writing may be challenging as the process involved might be too complicated for them (Simmerman et al., 2012). Some teachers also believe that the process writing for primary school students is too time-consuming (Sukanaya, 2020). Thus, it is important to study on an effective technique in exposing primary school students to the process of writing.

What Type of Errors are Commonly Found in the Narrative Essays?

To answer to the second research question, the participants' essays were analysed based on the mistakes found in sentence structure, spelling, punctuation, and grammar. Results of the analysis is summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Writing Errors Committed by the Students.

Writing Errors	Sentence Structure	Grammar	Spelling	Punctuation
No. of Errors	517	456	180	211
Percentage	37.9%	33.4%	13.2%	15.5%

As shown in Table 4, most of the students (37.9%) made sentence structure errors in their writing. Sentence structure errors refer to three types of errors: i) fragment – incomplete sentences, ii) runs-on – wrong word order or improper or no use of conjunctions and punctuation, and iii) comma splice – incomplete sentences separated by commas. Some examples of sentence structure errors and its types taken from the participants' written transcript are as shown in Table 5:

Table 5. Type of Sentence Structure Error and Example.

Type of Errors	Example
Fragment	I *suggest for doing picnic something* was fun.
Fragment	Encik Abu *fish and sat.*
Comma Splice	By seaside, *we playing seashells, swim and then* we make sandcastles together.
Comma Splice	The fish *big, he* happy.
Runs-on	After finished our shower *was relaxing on the picnic site, I and my sister* made a sandcastles.
Runs-on	Encik Abu and family ate *curry tasty big fish.*

Errors in the sentence structure also involved multiple errors in a phrase or sentences as shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Sentence Structure Errors in Phrases or Sentences.

Phrases / Sentences Written	Type of Errors
He the back a big fish on the basket.	Unclear meaning
Encik Abu give the fish.	The use of tenses is not correct, the sentence is hanging and no full stop.
At beach, we playing sandcastle and ball and later we eat.	Wrong word choice, tenses and conjunction.
Mother set food in mat	Missing pronoun, wrong preposition, tenses and word choice,

The second biggest mistake, which is 33.4% done by the participants in their writing, is grammar. The grammar errors in the narrative writing task refer to every single misused of grammar items such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, preposition, conjunction and articles. Some examples of the errors in the participants' writing are shown in Table 7.

Table 7. Grammar Errors in the Essays.

Phrases / Sentences Written	Type of Errors
One day, Encik Abu *go* to fishing at the river.	Wrong tenses
After 20 *minute*, he caught big fish.	Wrong plural noun, and omission of article
My father *reading* a book.	Omission of 'is'
My mother put basket *in mat.*	Omission of article and wrong used of preposition
Encik *Jaafar* wife, Puan Umi *clean* the fish.	Omission Apostrophe for possessive and wrong tenses
They *are* very happy because they *can ate* a tasty fish.	Wrong tenses and verb

In addition to the above, the students also committed mistakes in writing punctuation. Mistakes in punctuation occur at 15.5% of the total mistakes in the writing task. The students often write a small letter after the full stop in their writing. Moreover, they did not put full stop and comma at the right place in their writing. Some examples of the errors are:

. *many* people at the beach
.*by* seaside we make sandcastle
We picnic at *pantai cahaya bulan*
One day Encik *abu* fishing at river He walk to river.

The students committed the least mistakes in spelling with only 13.2% spelling errors are written in the essays. The students had shown accomplishment in the spelling of common sight words. Students who score five marks and above mostly do not have any spelling errors in their writing. Some of the spelling errors made by the students in the essays are:

> We all excited to picnic and *dhen* we swam.
> He *waitting* for the fish eat the pait.
> Mother put *delicios* food on mat.
> One day, I go *piknik.*
> Puan Umi *friend* the fish for diner.

Generally, it is observed that more than 85% of errors found in the study derived from the interference of the students' first language. This is because the students direct translated the spelling and words from their first language into their writing. The same finding was found reported in Dipolog-Ubanan (2016), which found out that the interference of L1 resulted in word choice and form, spelling, tenses, articles, determiners and subject, verb and agreement errors in students; writing.

According to Ridha (2012), most English learners as the second language think in their first language to express ideas before writing the ideas into written form in the target language. When writing, they will try as much as they could to translate or transfer their syntactic knowledge and ideas into the use of the target language (Watcharapunyawong & Usaha, 2013). In this process of transferring and translating, the interference of the second language occurs.

In this study, some students clearly showed the interference of their first language in their writing. For example, they directly translated words into English, leading to multiple grammatical and structural errors in the sentences. Besides, some words are found to be spelt according to their first language. Some of the examples taken from the participants' writing are as in Table 8.

Table 8. Example of Errors from First Language Interference.

Sentence in First Language	Participants' Written Transcript
Encik Jaafar mendapat ikan yang besar.	Encik Jaafar get *fish big.*
Encik Jaafar pergi memancing ikan di sungai.	Encik Jaafar *went fishing fish* at river.
Saya dan keluarga pergi berkelah di tepi pantai.	I and family go *piknik beside* the sea.
Dia membawa pulang ikan itu.	He brought *home the fish*
Kemudian, ayah membuka tikar	Then, father *open* the mat
Saya dan adik lelaki saya membuat istana pasir.	*I and my brother* make sandcastle

Implication for Teachers

The findings obtained in this study generally indicate poor narrative writing performance of Malaysian ESL young learners. Without a proper pedagogical strategy, the students' performances in narrative writing can impossibly improve.

In Malaysia, the writing component is taught using memorization of vocabulary and repetition of key strategies (Lim, 2014). Besides, the teaching of writing in the Malaysian classroom is at surface level and limited to copy down the sentences written on the board (ibid). Writing component also is taught using the module approach, as seen in Ien et al. (2017). On this account, Li and Razali (2019) assert that many Malaysian classroom teachings approaches have not successfully helped students in their writing. The traditional method in teaching writing, such as direct translation and memorization, may not be effective enough to instill creativity and autonomy in students' writing.

Many researchers suggested that the process writing approach has positively impacted students' writing at different levels (see Faraj, 2015; Bayat, 2014; Pour-Mohammadi et al., 2012). Process writing involves an instructional program in the classroom, which provides a series of planned actions in learning and teaching writing. This process writing approach concerns four primary writing stages: planning, drafting, pre-writing, and editing.

In a recent study, Qarabesh (2020) reported that the process writing approach effectively enhanced Saudi EFL undergraduate students' writing ability. Hassan et al. (2020) also reported a similar finding as in their research, the process writing approach had some significant impacts on the students' writing performance and anxiety in a college in Pakistan. However, the above study primarily focuses on the secondary and tertiary educational settings. In other words, study on the impact of process writing on primary or elementary school students are still scarce.

As an English teacher, the researcher sees that students will have massive potential in improving their English narrative writing using the process writing approach. This process writing approach will assist them from the start to the very end of their writing. However, further study on applying the process writing approach to suit primary school students is needed as the process writing approach's stages may be too complex for the primary level students.

Implication for Students

The findings revealed in the present study also bring implications to the learners. Analyzing errors in learners' work are described as tedious (Harun & Kabilan, 2020). However, it is essential to identify which area to focus on to make progress and measure the learners' progress. Therefore, self and peer assessment need to be highlighted as a part of classroom activities in writing. In doing this, learners should be trained to identify errors by themselves and try to figure out how to correct them. However, teacher assistance needs to be in presence so that learners would have enough guidance.

Learners also need to be trained in writing using the correct English structure, for instance, using Subject, Verb, Object gridlines or table. It will assist them in familiarising themselves with the correct structure of the language. It will need a lot of practices. Nevertheless, it will help them later, especially in their school assessment.

Overall, in this study, most of the students are able to answer the narrative task, but none of them shows enough creativity and good control of language proficiency. There are a few factors that lead them to poor writing performance in the task. Their writing clearly demonstrated that most of the students are having first language interference as many signs of direct translation of their first language (Malay language) could be traced in the essays. Besides, the students failed to plan their writing. From the observation, the researcher found out that most of the students started to write their answer in the space provided on the very first minute the task began. They did not plan for their writing and did not have any draft. Some of the students did not reread and check for errors in their writing. This can be identified as some of the words that the students wrote in their essay were wrong in spelling although the words were given in the text. In some occasion, the students spelled the repeated word wrongly although in the earlier paragraph they had spelled it correctly. As a result, the students made some errors in spelling easy words and some basic punctuations resulting in their poor overall performance.

CONCLUSION

Although teaching and learning writing is not an easy task, English teachers and learners need to actively find solutions to cater to the weaknesses in the area reported in this study which is in sentence structure. Pedagogical aspects in the teaching of English writing in the classroom need to be revised so that they would be able to give students more positive impacts, especially in all of their language components such as sentence structures, grammar, vocabulary, mechanics, punctuation and organizations of ideas.

Other than that, the Ministry of Education needs to develop more enrichment programs and supports to bridge the gap between rural and urban area students' achievement. Hopefully, with enough supports and programs, the rural students' proficiency and literacy in the English language will increase and make the national aspiration in the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 a reality.

Despite the results obtained, the present study is a small-scale study, and the findings are not generalizable to all ESL young learners in Malaysia. Thus, future studies should employ larger samples so that the finding will be more solid and concrete.

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