

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF USING LITERATURE RESPONSE JOURNAL TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' WRITING FLUENCY

WENDY HIEW



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**SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND SOCIAL
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**DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF
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2007**

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the material in this dissertation is my own except for quotations, excerpts, equations, summaries and references, which have been duly acknowledged.

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WENDY HIEW
PS05-006(K)-074



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CONFIRMATION

I confirmed having read this dissertation entitled

***THE EFFECTIVENESS OF USING LITERATURE RESPONSE JOURNAL
TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' WRITING FLUENCY***

By



WENDY HIEW
(PS05-006(K)-074)

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I confirmed that this dissertation is accepted as a requirement to obtain
Masters in Education (TESL)

MEJAR DR. HAMZAH MD. OMAR

Lecturer

School of Education and Social Development

Universiti Malaysia Sabah

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ABSTRAK

Penulisan merupakan satu kemahiran yang sukar dihadapi oleh pelajar yang mempunyai kemahiran bahasa yang rendah dan sederhana. Pelajar perlu menulis dengan lancar menggunakan idea dan pengetahuan yang sedia ada. Walaupun pelajar hanya perlu menulis dengan bebas tanpa bimbang tentang kesilapan ejaan dan tatabahasa, mereka tetap menghadapi masalah meluahkan perasaan dan pendapat mereka. Ini disebabkan pelajar kurang ilmu tatabahasa serta kurang latihan menulis dan membaca. Kajian ini menggunakan kaedah kuantitatif dan kajian kuasi-ekperimental reka bentuk ujian pra-pasca bagi kumpulan-kumpulan tidak seimbang. Jurnal respons sastera digunakan untuk menentukan sama ada ia membantu memperbaiki kemahiran menulis pelajar. Selain itu, empat faktor: latihan menulis, tabiat membaca, peranan ibu bapa dan persepsi pelajar terhadap Bahasa Inggeris dipilih untuk menentukan korelasi setiap faktor ini dengan kemahiran menulis pelajar. Dua kumpulan yang terdiri daripada 30 pelajar Tingkatan Empat dipilih secara rawak daripada enam buah kelas Tingkatan Empat. Satu kumpulan merupakan kumpulan kawalan manakala kumpulan kedua bertindak sebagai kumpulan rawatan. Kumpulan rawatan yang terdiri daripada 30 orang pelajar diperkenalkan dengan jurnal respons sastera. Pelajar diminta menulis tujuh karya jurnal, iaitu satu karya sehari, selama tujuh hari. Topik yang telah ditetapkan oleh penyelidik diberikan kepada pelajar sebelum kelas sastera berakhir. Pada akhir hari ketujuh, jumlah bilangan patah perkataan setiap karya jurnal pelajar dikira. Ujian-t untuk pengukuran berulangan (*paired samples t-test*) digunakan untuk menentukan sama ada terdapat perbezaan yang signifikan antara jumlah patah perkataan pada hari pertama dan hari ketujuh penulisan jurnal. Seterusnya, pelajar dalam kumpulan rawatan diberi kertas soal selidik yang menggunakan 4 skala Likert untuk menjawab soalan berkaitan latihan menulis, tabiat membaca, peranan ibu bapa pelajar dalam pembelajaran Bahasa Inggeris mereka, dan persepsi pelajar terhadap Bahasa Inggeris. Pekali *Pearson Product-Moment* digunakan untuk menentukan korelasi setiap faktor dengan kemahiran menulis pelajar. Berdasarkan analisis data, ujian-t untuk pengukuran berulangan menunjukkan perbezaan bermakna dan jurnal respons sastera boleh membantu memperbaiki kemahiran penulisan pelajar. Pekali *Pearson Product-Moment* menunjukkan kemahiran menulis pelajar mempunyai korelasi sederhana dengan latihan menulis dan tabiat membaca pelajar manakala kemahiran menulis pelajar mempunyai hubungan yang lemah dengan peranan ibu bapa dan persepsi pelajar terhadap Bahasa Inggeris.

ABSTRACT

Writing fluency has always been one of the difficult writing skills faced by low and average proficiency students. It requires students to be able to write smoothly as the ideas flow through their mind. Even though students are only required to write freely without worrying about their spelling and grammar, they still find it hard to pen their feelings and thoughts. This is due to the lack of vocabulary knowledge, writing practice and reading. This research utilizes the quantitative method using the quasi-experimental approach specifically the non-equivalent groups pre-post tests design. Literature response journal is used to determine whether it can help improve students' writing fluency. In addition, four factors: writing practice, reading habit, parental roles and students' perception towards the English language are chosen to determine their degree of correlation with students' writing fluency. Two groups of 30 Form Four students are systematically selected from six Form Four classes. One group acts as the control group while the second group acts as the treatment group. In the treatment group, the 30 students are introduced to literature response journal. They are asked to write seven journal entries, one journal each day, for seven days. Selected topics are given to the students before the end of every literature lesson. At the end of the seventh day, the total word count of each student's journal entry is counted. The paired samples t-test is used to determine whether there is any significant difference in the total word count between Day 1 and Day 7 of the journal entries. Next, students in the treatment group are given a four-point value Likert scale questionnaires related to their writing practice, reading habit, their parents' role in their English learning and their perception towards the English language. Each factor is correlated with their writing fluency using the Pearson Product-Moment to determine the degree of correlation. The data analysis shows a significant difference in the paired samples t-test and that literature response journal helps improve students' writing fluency. The Pearson Product-Moment shows that students' writing fluency had an average correlation with their writing practice and reading habits while students' writing fluency had a weak correlation with parental roles and students' perception towards the English language.

ABBREVIATION

B.Ed	Bachelor of Education
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ESL	English as a Second Language
KBSM	Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah
L2	Second Language
PKPG	Program Khas Pengsiswazahan Guru
PMR	Penilaian Menengah Rendah
SPM	Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia
SPSS	Statistical Package of the Social Science



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The English language was introduced in Malaysia through the colonial education system and today it is still entrenched in our educational system. The report of the Education Planning committee 1956 ensured the continued teaching of the English language in Malaysia (Asmah Haji Omar, 1992: 84), and the teaching of English is still seen as an integral part of the Malaysian education system. It is taught as a compulsory second language right up to the university level. Students have to enrol for the subject, though attaining a pass grade may not be mandatory at certain levels in some institutions.

In keeping with the national education policy, English is taught as a second language in all government assisted schools in Malaysia at both the primary and secondary levels of schooling. English is used not only as a means of communication in certain everyday activities and job situations but also in local and international trade and commerce. Furthermore, English provides an additional means of access to academic, professional and recreational materials. Thus, knowledge of English will help Malaysia participate meaningfully in the world community.

Zaidan (1993) points out the reasons that have helped to enhance the status of English in Malaysia:

"The government has set itself a target year 2020 by which it hopes to achieve fully developed status – this is known as Vision 2020. This involves strong competition with other nations commercially and economically, industrially and technologically, and educationally and scientifically. As this cannot be attained through any means other than English as an effective way of communication in this respect, today there is more emphasis on improving the Malaysian's command of the English language and this matter is taken up seriously by the whole political and educational structure of the country... The King, a constitutional head of the government, has urged Malaysian to improve their English language skills to realize and ensure the continued growth and advancement of their country" (p. 10-11).

In the implementation of the Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah (KBSM), the four language skills of Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing are emphasized. The KBSM English Language aims to extend learners' English language proficiency in order to meet their needs for English in everyday life, for knowledge acquisition and for future workplace needs (Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 2003). The KBSM English language syllabus programme emphasizes the acquisition of the four language skills and communicative ability through the three areas of language use namely interpersonal, informational and aesthetic.

Therefore, in order to combine informational and aesthetic, the researcher decides to use literature response journal to help students improve their writing fluency and, simultaneously, assist them in their literature studies which students find it unfamiliar to them and difficult to comprehend. The literature response journal requires students to write on a given topic about the characters, settings, values and their personal thoughts and feelings on certain matters at the end of the literature lesson. Some students will find literature a 'dry' and difficult subject. Hence, the literature

response journal draws the students into the literature by being the characters, being in the settings and to ponder on the values incorporated in the short story and poem.

The main focus of the literature response journal is on students' writing fluency and not on their language accuracy focusing on students with average and low English proficiency. Using the literature response journal helps to motivate students to write freely and write more without worrying of being scrutinized for their grammar, spelling and sentence structures. Calkins (cited in Benishek, Vejr, and Wetzel, 2001) states that the most important thing teachers can do for students who struggle in writing is to provide them with opportunities to write 'freely and unselfconsciously' (p.290). When many changes, revisions, and corrections are made by the teacher, a learner's sense of ownership regarding his work may be weakened. Hence, literature response journal not only improves students' writing fluency but also increases their comprehension of the literature material and, thus, instill an interest in learning literature.

1.1 Background of Study

Journal writing has been experimented and used by teachers from various level of education to enhance learners' mental development and to improve their writing skill; writing fluency being one of the specific purposes. Positive results from previous studies on the use of journal writing support this study which utilizes literature response journal to improve students' writing fluency.

First of all, a study conducted by Saroya Binti Yahya (2006) among 96 matriculation students have shown significant improvement in their overall writing performance after the introduction of journal writing and it was able to lower students' language anxiety level.

Meanwhile, Lee (2000) has introduced journal writing in her *Program Khas Pengsiswazahan Guru* (PKPG) class, which is a twinning program to Universiti Malaysia Sabah to give a B.Ed. TESL degree to primary school teachers. She reported that her student's writing fluency has greatly improved, at the end of the program, leading to longer writing. The result was very encouraging especially students who were clearly very weak and had a lot of trouble writing. This outcome provides much encouragement and hope for the researcher that the same result can also be achieved in this study.

Similar positive results were reported in the *Jurnal Akademik Maktab Perguruan Ilmu Khas* (2000) where a group of in-service teachers participated in a fourteen-week Immersion course. They were asked to write unstructured journals where they recorded their own thoughts on a regular basis and reflected their own experience inside and as well as outside the classroom. The researchers concluded that the journal writing activity has helped the teachers to learn and develop critical thinking, see things from a different perspective and they could reflect on their practices. Like wise, the students in this study who utilize literature response journal are able to view the literature topics from their own perceptive by analyzing the characters, settings and values, and to relate them with their life.

Vygotsky (1978:117) considered that the child's 'budding personality will not grow' if children are asked to write only 'what the teacher thinks up'. However, for the purpose of this study, journal topics are determined by the researcher to ensure validity and uniformity among all the students' journal entries. Journal writing among primary school students have found that children wrote confidently and with enjoyment in their journals, exploring world of home and school, and making a bridge between the two

cultures. They love the idea of writing journals, and began to use them to explore their own world and their own imagined worlds (Graham, 2003).

Such example is Gaynor Talley and Annette Johnson, both teachers, who gave children freedom to choose what to write in their journals. They tried introducing journal writing to Year 1 and Year 6 students and discovered that children began to write with joy and enthusiasm, and to find their voices as writers. In addition, they made marked progress in writing (Graham, 2001).

Talley worked with a group of Year 1 children who were already experienced readers. She found that the freedom to 'write what you like' in journal writing enabled them to develop confidence and vigour in their writing (Graham, 2003). The journals developed as written dialogues between teachers and pupils (Hall, 1989).

Meanwhile, in a different model, Johnson had introduced writing journal to her Year 6 class, where children were free to choose what to write, to decide whether or not to share journal entries with the teacher, and read aloud their work to the class. The introduction of the journals had enabled children to write with newly found enthusiasm, and made it possible for them to find their voices as writers. They not only developed confidence and competence in their writing, but also began to see themselves as writers and as writers of particular genres.

Hence, journal writing benefits learners from all ages and should be adopted by English teachers to enhance learners' writing skill. Students in this study will also benefit through the use of literature response journal to improve their writing fluency and to assist them in their critical thinking through literature comprehension.

1.2 Statement of Problem

Students with average and low English proficiency experience writing difficulty because they lack vocabulary knowledge, ideas and writing practice which hinder their writing fluency. This problem is obvious when students attempt to produce a piece of writing during essay writing sessions and examinations. Their written products are usually short and not interesting. In the Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR) examination, students are required to write a 150-word guided essay while the Form Five students have to write a continuous writing essay of at least 350 words in the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysian (SPM) examination. The above mentioned students usually are unable to fulfill these criteria.

Besides that, some students do not look forward to literature lessons because they view it as a difficult subject to comprehend especially the literal and figurative meanings of a poem. In addition, the setting and culture of certain short stories are alien to students when it is set in a foreign background other than Malaysia. As a result, they are unable to relate and comprehend the literature materials.

So, this is where literature response journal can help both with students' writing fluency and literature comprehension. The purposes of the literature response journal are for students dwell into the characters, settings, plots and meanings of the poem and short story. Students can assume they are living in the poem and short story to help them fully comprehend the literature materials. At the same time, it helps improve students' writing fluency as they write their thoughts and feelings freely in their journals everyday. This is supported by Fulwiler (1980) who said that to be able to write with ease would be of great help to students as difficulty in writing is often associated with mental blocks that slows writing pace.

1.3 Significance of the Study

The study is significant because it gives the researcher an insight on how effective literature response journal is in improving students' writing fluency. The use of literature response journal allows students to write freely on a given topic related to the literature materials that are being taught in the classroom. Without focusing on students' language accuracy, students are more motivated and confident in their writing skill as they gain ownership of their written work. This is useful for students with average and low English proficiency to be prepared, most of all, for the PMR and SPM examination which require them to write guided and continuous essays respectively.

The researcher chooses literature response journal because it is one way to encourage students to practice writing daily and to help capture students' reaction and understanding of the short stories and poems that they learn during literature lessons. In addition, students can express their thoughts and feelings through literature and write freely without being constantly corrected on their grammar and written products. The sense of freedom and security are thought to be necessary in helping students to acquire language subconsciously (Krashen, 1987).

Hence, the school SMK Taman Tun Fuad, in the city of Kota Kinabalu, is one good example where the English proficiency is still of average level. Through the literature response journal, students will practice writing constantly in order to improve their writing fluency and, at the same time, increase their comprehension and interest in literature.

1.4 Objectives of Study

Literature response journal can be used as an additional writing activity in the teaching and learning of literature. Thus, for the objectives of this study, the researcher would like to look at:

- a) the effect of literature response journal in improving students' writing fluency.
- b) the correlation between students' writing fluency with their writing practice, reading habit, parental roles and students' perception towards English.

1.5 Research Questions

This study seeks answers to the following questions:

1. Can literature response journal improve students' writing fluency?
2. What is the correlation between students' writing fluency with their writing practice?
3. What is the correlation between students' writing fluency with their reading habit?
4. What is the correlation between students' writing fluency with their parents' roles?
5. What is the correlation between students' writing fluency with their perception towards the English language?

1.6 Research Hypotheses

Based on the research objectives mentioned, the research hypotheses are:

- H_{a1} : There is a significant improvement in the total word count between Day 1 and Day 7 of using the literature response journal.
- H_{01} : There is no significant correlation between students' writing fluency with their writing practice.
- H_{02} : There is no significant correlation between students' writing fluency with their reading habit.
- H_{03} : There is no significant correlation between students' writing fluency with their parents' roles.
- H_{04} : There is no significant correlation between students' writing fluency with their perception towards English language.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

- i) The study can only be conducted within a limited time which is less than a year.
- ii) The study only covers 60 Form Four students of Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Taman Tun Fuad which are divided into two groups of 30 students namely the control and treatment groups.
- iii) The research finding does not generalize the overall students of the mentioned school. A finding to generalize the overall students would require larger samples and longer study period.