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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CONTEXTUAL LEARNING IN WRITING AMONG YOUNG ESL STUDENTS.

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THIS ACADEMIC EXERCISE IS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT OF THE MASTER DEGREE IN EDUCATION (TESL)

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work in this project paper is my own except for quotation and summaries which have been duly acknowledged.

Date : 7th April 2005

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(SARASWATHY THEVARAYA PILLAI)
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SPECIALLY DEDICATED TO :

MY BELOVED LATE PARENTS MR. E. THEVARAYA PILLAI AND MRS. M. SELLAMMAL

MY DEAREST HUSBAND MR. SUKUMARAN KARUPPIAH PILLAI

AND TO MY LOVING CHILDREN S. THARMENDRAN, S. DHARSHINI PRIYA, S. SANTHIRA RUPINI AND S. SAKTIVARMAN PILLAY

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ABSTRACT

This study conducted explains the use and the effectiveness of contextual learning in the teaching of ESL writing skill. The research methodology applied was experimental using the pre-test and post-test. Additional data was also gathered from questionnaire which provided further insight on factors that would affect the successful implementation of contextual learning in schools. The results indicated that the average and low ability group students gained by the implementation of contextual learning. Contextual learning too promoted collaborative and learner-centered learning environment when students engaged in writing process. The significance and implication of the results as well as direction for future research are also discussed.

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ABSTRAK

Kajian ini mengkaji keberkesanan pembelajaran secara kontektual dalam sebuah kelas penulisan Bahasa Inggeris, Tingkatan Satu. Kajian ini berasakan kaedah eksperimen dengan mengunakan pra-ujian dan pos-ujian. Manakala maklumat tambahan diperolehi daripada soalan kaji selidik yang dijawab oleh kumpulan eksperimen. Ini mengemukakan dapatan yang lebih menyeluruh mengenai factor-faktor yang memberi kesan terhadap kejayaan penggunaan pembelajaran secara kontektual di sekolah. Hasil kajian ini menunjukkan pelajar-pelajar di dalam golongan sederhana dan lemah mendapat menfahat melalui pembelajaran secara kontektual. Pembelajaran secara kontektual didapati lebih merangsang corak pembelajaran koperatif dan pembelajaran berpusatkan kepada pelajar dalam proses penulisan. Implikasi dan siknifikasi hasil kajian, dan juga cadangan mengenai kajian yang boleh dilakukan seterusnya turut dibincangkan.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ESL	English as a second language
CL	Contextual Learning
C	Control Group
E	Experimental Group
PMR	Penilaian Menengah Rendah
UPSR	Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The new revised KBSM English Language Syllabus 2002 is based on three main areas of language outcomes. They are the interpersonal, the informational and the esthetic. According to the Curriculum Development Centre of the Malaysian Education Ministry firmly agrees that the mastery of appropriate listening, speaking, reading, and writing strategies can enable and develop the students to attain the interpersonal, the informational and the esthetic domains successfully.

Writing is considered as a problem-solving activity where the writer usually has to accomplish two main tasks : they are, generating ideas, and composing them into a structure adapted to the needs of the reader and the goals of the writer in accordance with the context of situation. Currently, there has been a gradual shift from the traditional language based writing to the study of composition techniques and

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strategies. Reid (1993) states that the dramatic change in the teaching of writing in recent times began with the recognition of the needs of ESL students in the academic environment. This change would help students who were found to be unprepared for the written work required in academic classes to do better.

Teaching composition at primary level required teachers to concentrate on mechanical practice of the language which involves spelling drills, vocabulary, copying, or completing skeleton texts. All these are actually the very distinct features of traditional approach to teaching writing. However, according to Cox (1996), the process of writing refers to what children do, and it involves five stages : prewriting, drafting, revising, editing and publishing. The skill of writing for different audiences is also emphasized.

One of the most effective strategies of teaching writing is by contextual learning. Contextual learning or experiential learning is a mode of learning that combines content with the daily experiences of an individual, the community and working environment. This mode of teaching enables concrete learning by involving the students to do ‘hands-on’ and ‘minds-on’ activities and occur in close relationship with students’ actual experience. Most people learn best through informal contextual experience (Caine and Caine 1991, Gardner 1982, Kolb 1984). Contextual learning can also be described as the REACT strategy which is an acronym for Relating, Experiencing, Cooperating and Transferring.

Having looked at the strengths of experiential or contextual learning, the researcher feels that it is worth looking at its impact on the teaching of writing among young ESL students and to ascertain that it will also be beneficial for their future

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needs. Thus, this research project will look at the effectiveness of contextual learning strategy in writing.

1.2 Need for the present study

Efforts made by the Curriculum Development Center to introduce Contextual learning especially in Science and Mathematics is a break-through in our newly revised syllabus. This new learning strategy is widely used in all subjects in accordance with the 'real-life' learning situation. Students from the primary, secondary or even at the university level are very weak in writing. This may be due to the students' low linguistic proficiency or poor teaching methodology in writing.

Writing is an individual activity; no two responses to any written assignment are the same and no two students have absolutely identical problems in learning to write. Thus, there is a need to carry out this study especially in providing a strong foundation among students to better their writing skills.

Poor expression of ideas in writing is another factor that can be attributed to this problem. Writing lessons are carried out typically based on traditional product-based approach where students cannot successfully generate their ideas effectively. Students are not given the opportunity to discover and generate ideas for themselves and their teachers are mainly concern of the grammatical and spelling errors found in their writing.

At present the new revised KBSM syllabus aims to produce students who can express and develop their ideas well in their writing. Through the use of contextual

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learning strategy, students are exposed to real–life situation whereby they use all their senses effectively to ponder their ideas. Teachers are merely the facilitator and the students can actively play their role to collect information needed. Having that in mind the researcher planned to use the students of Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Muhibbah who are generally weak in writing to use contextual learning methodology in writing classes which will provide a stimuli for them to generate and express ideas better.

1.3 Statement of Problem

There have been numerous complaints from various quarters that students from the secondary school to tertiary level lack the ability to read, speak, comprehend and write effectively in English. What normally happens in our Malaysian school nowadays is that writing lessons are conducted in such a manner where each student works through the lessons or task individually after some explanation given by the teacher. Student are not exposed to writing in context whereby a real situation is created for them to help in their writing tasks.

The phenomenon “writing has been neglected” in most schools especially in the weaker classes is also another problem in the deteriation of writing. Some English language teachers assume that weak students cannot write and they become the victim of such phenomenon. However, despite the fact that writing is the most difficult skill to master due to its rules and conventions, surprisingly 70% of the Lower Secondary Assessment or Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR) examination format is based on

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writing. So, students who are sitting for the exam should really equip well to master their writing skills in order to pass their examination. This is due to the fact that there is a close line between writing and success at school. If students are unable to write then learning across the curriculum and passing examinations will not be easy.

Some English teachers from various schools lamented that students are unhappy and reluctant to write composition. They cannot express and generate ideas well. Apart from that, there are many grammatical errors made through direct translation from their mother tongue to English. Students too repeat ideas due to loss of words, and lack of proper vocabulary. There are also weak sentence pattern, poor coherence and most of all they do not have the proper context to build a foundation in order to write better. On the other hand teachers spend more time trying to improve spelling, hand-writing and grammar, but very little time is allocated in teaching children how to write and compose successfully for different audiences and purposes.

One way to remedy this problem is by promoting contextual learning methodology especially among the average and weak students. This form of learning can help to enable them to get the experience and knowledge to be better ESL writers.

1.4 The Purpose of the present study

I had personally observed in science laboratory, home-science cookery and sewing classes and in Living Skill Education or Kemahiran Hidup workshops how students learn the skill in a lively manner. The students move around from one group to the other to exchange ideas and compare their task. This active manner of learning in the

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laboratory and workshops makes me think that I could try out that kind of learning in English writing classes.

Thus, the main aim of this study is to use contextual learning among the average and weak students to enhance their writing skills. Contextual learning is based on experience which can enable students to do “minds-on” and “hands-on” activities. It could be valuable in helping teachers to realize that contextual learning can help students in writing composition lessons. As for students, it helps to show them the alternative in learning language especially in writing composition. It will also provide insights to the language teaching and learning in writing.

1.5 Research Question

The research was designed to shed light on the following research question :

1. Can contextual learning improve Form One average and weak students’ writing performance ?

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CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In Latin the word “con” means “with” and the word “textum” means woven. Taken together therefore, contextual learning refers to “learning that is woven with reality”, reality meaning real life conditions, situations or happenings.

The term contextual learning has been used by contemporary scholars to define and describe a number of theories regarding teaching and learning that include the role of the teacher, the role of the student, and relevant learning practices which will help student make connections from the classroom activities to their own lives. This is very necessary for their future life.Many of the concepts of contextual learning were endorsed both by John Dewey (1933) and William James (1899).

This chapter discusses the contextual learning strategy in writing skills which has been lately introduced in the revised syllabus by the Curriculum Development

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Centre into Malaysian schools. It is believed that this will help students to develop the ability to explore, generate and express new ideas through writing.

Contemporary contextual scholar, Dale Parnell in 1995 called William James the Historical Father of Contextual Learning. In his series of essays and talks to teachers, James described the “older pedagogic method of learning as learning things by rote, and “reciting them parrot-like in the schoolroom” (1899 p 733). He suggested that “students must keep notebooks, make drawings, plans, and maps, take measurements, enter the laboratory and perform experiments, consult authorities, and write essays”. (p 734)

James also believed that teachers must vary their lessons in order to excite students, ask questions in different ways and change data used in numerical problems. He also admonished teachers not to preach to pupils but rather “ to get pupils both to think; to feel, and to do” (p 753). A good teacher, James believed, will help students make connections between the new lesson and children’s experience and that “ the shuttle of interest will shoot backward and forward, weaving the new and old together in a lively and entertaining way” (p 769) so that students connect learning with something already there. Connections to what one already knows is vital to the students.

John Dewey’s philosophy of learning paralleled James’. He believed that students must connect what they learn in a classroom and their own preparation for community life. Students should not learn something for the remote future or because the teachers say that it is important. According to Dewey (1933), learning in this way

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"does not become a part of the life experiences of the child and so are not truly educative" (p 431).

Dewey also endorsed the teamwork component that contemporary scholars define as essential to contextual learning. In 1899, Dewey endorsed teamwork and cooperation as important to solving problems. Both Dewey and James emphasized the importance of the teacher serving as a facilitator to learning, with students' activity receiving the information and applying it to his life, making connections among disciplines, and the importance of teamwork.

2.2 The REACT Strategy

The concept of contextual learning as learning that occurs when knowledge is placed in a frame of reference, a point a person already knows or understands is further explained by Souders (1999). "Every person is different", said Souders. "Start with something a student understands and build on it". He cited two key statements that help define contextual learning :

- The mind seeks meaning in the environment in which a person is located.
- The mind seeks meaning through searching for relationships that make sense and appear useful.

The word REACT has often been used in the education circle as an attractive acronym by which teachers can promote contextual learning where R refers to "Relating", that is learning in the context of life experience. It is the kind of contextual learning that typically occurs with very young children. As children grow older,

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however, providing this meaningful context for learning becomes more difficult. The curriculum that attempts to place learning in the context of life experiences must, first of all, call the student's attention to "relate" everyday situations to new information to be absorbed or a problem to be solved.

E stands for "Experiencing" that is, learning in the context of exploration, discovery and invention and the chance to observe and it is the heart of contextual learning. The teacher should provide as many hands-on-experience as possible. No matter how well a teacher explains, the best way to reinforce learning is by getting students engaged first hand.

On the other hand A stands for "Applying". Applying concepts and information in a useful context often projects students into an imagined future or into an unfamiliar location. This happens most commonly through text, video, labs, and activities, although, in many schools, these contextual learning experiences will be followed up with firsthand experiences such as outings, and mentoring arrangements. Students should be led to understand that the knowledge or information they obtain in the classroom can be used in their daily lives, not merely to be regurgitated during examination. Learning is for life.

C stands for "Cooperating" that is learning through the context of interpersonal communication, sharing, and responding with other learners. It is a primary instructional strategy in contextual learning where students are encouraged to share, respond and communicate with other learners who may have different views, opinions or life experiences. This sharing is done through group work or team work which then

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provide students immeasurable opportunities to talk to one another, plan their work, pool their resources, and decide on their mode of presentation.

T stands for " Transferring" that is learning by using knowledge in a new context or situation. A teacher should always be aware of what the students already know and then motivate them to build new knowledge upon their existing "database". Knowledge can also be transferred from the classroom to daily life.

In summary REACT is a method of teaching which emphasizes the importance of teachers making connection between students' life experiences and what is being taught.

2.3 Experiential Learning

Stephen Brookfield (1983 : 16) has commented that writers in the field of experiential learning have tended to use experiential learning in two contrasting senses. The first type of experiential learning is the sort of learning undertaken by students who are given a chance to acquire and apply knowledge, skills and feelings in an immediate and relevant settings.

The second type of experiential learning is ' education that occurs as a direct participation in the events of life' (Houle 1980 :221). It is learning that is achieved through reflection upon everyday experience.

Much of the literature on experiential learning, " is actually about learning from primary experience, that is learning through sense experiences" (Jarvis, 1995 : 75) .

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2.4 Contextual Classrooms

Caine and Caine (1991) wrote new information must be significant to students and connected to their personal experiences. Referring to their connection as map learning, they stated it is vital to "help students relate the material they need to know to what they already know" (p. 51). They also advocated giving students real experiences, providing physical movement, social interactions, and practical projects to complete the connection.

Teaching in this way has many advantages. Caine ann Caine (1991) gave three reasons for this approach. First, the brain searches for common patterns and connections. Second, every experience contains within it the seeds of many, and possibly all disciplines. If students are studying about Malaya in a history class, literature, art, music, and geography can become a part of the historical study. Thirdly, the student has a much better chance of grasping what is learned since the same message is packaged in many different ways.

To bring the class to life in the mind of the students, Caine and Caine (1991) described a German class. English was a foreign language of the students. The classroom also reflected Germany through German artifacts and posters of Germany. Students in this class translated fairy tales and sang German songs. Caine and Caine (1991) asserted the effectiveness of this technique. They asserted that "students in these classes won first, second, fourth and sixth places in the state language contest " (p 116).

This total immersion in German culture is but one example given by Caine and Caine in order for students to make connections and become totally involved in

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learning. While Caine and Caine (1991) agreed that students must be exposed to subject matter in many different ways, they believed that a great number of the experiences “must be complex, real projects” (p 120). This project method has added advantage of connecting content to the students’ everyday learning. He believed the project method enables the teacher and students to “model or demonstrate the subject, bring in experts, engage in genuine problem solving, interview authorities, and create learning games “ (p 120).

A good example of authentic learning that motivated students is by placing them in cooperative groups whereby each group is assigned of different task. Firstly, the classroom became noisier as students exchanged ideas and learned to work with each other. Secondly, the role of teacher changed to that of a facilitator. No longer was the teacher at the front of the room dispensing information but rather moving from group to group serving as a listener, making recommendations and sitting among the students as a group member.

The traditional form of teaching, on the other hand, stresses more on rode learning and memorizing grammatical rule. The teachers were the main source of information provider and the students play a very passive role in just receiving the information. Teachers decide everything for the students. The content of their teaching is typically focused on language and logical-mathematical intelligences only. All the teachers practice on the same type of methodology, that is by giving lectures and their feedback is only by assessing question and answer only.

Thus the differences between contextual learning and traditional learning in classrooms can be summarized in the following table. (Table 2.1)

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Table 2.1

Differences between Contextual Learning and Traditional Learning in Classroom

Topic	Traditional Learning	Contextual Learning
Learning Outcomes	Transfer of information. Fills students with deposits of information until needed.	Find, build on and apply the information received to the real world. Relate information with prior knowledge.
Teacher's role	Information provider	Facilitator and mentor
Student's roles	Passive information receivers through lectures and reading	Active in finding and building on the information gained through real activities in everyday life.
Content	Caters for language and logical-mathematical intelligences only	Caters for multiple intelligences
Methodology	Lectures / question & answers	Inquiry, findings and application
Evaluation	Testing for facts	Based on achievement and problem-solving

Source : Contextual Teaching And Learning by Alan Blanchard, Ph.D.

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2.5 The role of the teacher

John Goodlad (1970) believed there should be a checklist of reasonable expectations for schools in the teaching methodology. One of those expectations is that classroom instruction would be guided by an emphasis on learning how to learn. Rather than the teacher telling students, they should be given the opportunity “to explore, to try, to inquire, and to discover for oneself “ (p 13).

Bruner also believed that the key to finding meaning for students lies with the role of the teacher. In 1986, he wrote about a favorite teacher who spoke to the class about a puzzling fact that water changed from liquid to solid. Immediately, Bruner felt the teacher’s sense of wonder and realized later that “she was an event not a transmission device” (p. 126). He believed that outmoded pedagogy viewed the process of education as a “transmission of knowledge and values by those who know more to those who knew less and knew it less expertly” (p 123) and that “the pedagogy that resulted was some view of teaching as surgery, suppression, replacement, deficit feeling, or some mix of them all” (p 124)

Caine and Caine (1991) in their brain-based research identified the importance of the role of the teacher in facilitating learning. They view educators “as generators of meaningful information, connecting, and linking knowledge who can not only use the appropriate software but far surpass its performance in interactive questioning and explanations of information” (p 23).

All these scholars view the teacher as a facilitator of learning, as one who is able to inspire students to become involved and who creates a classroom environment that includes much more than simply dispensing knowledge. As the role of the teacher

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changes, questions then arise : What is the role of the student in a contextual learning classroom? and what have researchers determined after observations in the classroom about the usual role of the student ?

A contextual learning classroom should be teeming with activity since the teacher has taken a secondary role. However, in far too many classrooms, the student is still only passively involved. Goodlad (1970) asked the following questions about school : How does the teacher brings pupils into the subject matter? Are students exchanging with each other? Is the teacher the source of knowledge, telling the children and then questioning them on what they have been told? Using these questions regarding effective school, Goodlad and his associates observed 158 classroom in 67 schools in 26 school districts around the major cities in the United States. Observers gathered data from three sources: interviews with teachers, interviews with principals, and observation of classroom activities .The observers visited three classrooms each day , preparing anecdotal records of visits, which were, with three exceptions more than forty-five minutes long.

After raw data had been obtained and written up by the observers, three members of the staff analyzed them. One area observed and analyzed was student involvement. Again, the issue of passive verses active learning comes into play. One observer noticed that in one classroom only three children participated in a total class discussion lesson during a period of thirty minutes.

In categorizing the instructional environment of the classes, Goodlad (1970) and his associates discovered that , “rather than probing, seeking, inquiring, children were predominately responding and covering” (p 79). Children seemed to be neutral

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toward learning and showed neither boredom nor enthusiasm. At the same time child-to-child interaction occurred occasionally and " these students were gaining only very limited experience with the techniques and self-discipline of group intercourse" (p 85). Bruner called this group intercourse culture making where the "pupil, in effect, becomes a party to the negotiators process by which facts are created and interpreted and becomes at once an agent of knowledge making as well as a recipient of knowledge transmission" (p 127). In other words, teachers and students are active partners in the culture making process.

Students should not only become active participants in learning but, they should also be discovery learners. Bruner (1986) first defined discovery learning as learning on one's own to recognizing that "most learning in most settings in a communal activity, is a sharing of the culture. It is not just that the child must make his own knowledge , but that he must make it his even in a community of those who share his sense of belonging to a culture" (p 127). Through sharing and negotiating, pupils will have made an appropriate step to "becoming a member of the adult society in which one lives out one's life" (p 127). Bruner (1986) also believed the lesson itself should be presented as an exercise in "collectivity, one that depends upon the attunement of the teacher to the expressions and intents of members of a class" (p 133). There must be a good inter relationship between teachers and students to promote team work.

Other scholars have reached similar conclusions. In a paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Vocational Association Annual Conference on December 2, 1993, Walter Edling reported that learning is most effective when

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students are highly motivated, active participants rather than passive, and taught within a contextualized environment. He commented that most people learn best in an experiential manner involving personal participation, physical or hands-on activities and opportunities for personal discovery. He also believed that group learning, interpersonal communication sharing and positive reinforcement is essential in the learning process.

Parnell (1995) also advocated discovery learning and defined it as a situation whereby "students are guided toward discovering new knowledge rather than having the answer handed to them. Teachers help students explore, test, and seek their own answers, often with the help of learning partners" (p 9). Echoing Parnell's discovery principle, Adler (1982) stated :

> When instruction is not accompanied by discovery, when instruction makes impressions on the memory with no act of understanding by the mind, then it is not genuine teaching, but mere indoctrination. Genuine teaching, in sharp distinction from indoctrination, always consists in activities on the part of teachers that cooperate with activities performed by the mind of students engaged in discovery. (p 172)

In order for discovery learning to occur, the classroom must not depend on the textbook alone for instruction but rather present students with a wide variety of supplementary materials. Adler believed memories can "only be formed by coaching, never by lectures and the reading of textbooks" (1982, p 173) whereas Goodlad (1970) through classroom observations found that the prime medium of instruction was the

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textbook along with workbooks. Students completed these activities on their own with little interaction between the teacher and other students.

2.6 The Schema Theory

Schema theory is based on a framework for the mental representation of knowledge. Schema, also called the "building block of cognition" (Rumelhurt 1980), is a significant notion in understanding the knowledge structure of our brains.

According to Piaget, most schema theorists postulate that there is not just one body of knowledge available to learners at any given stage of development, but rather a network on context-specific bodies of knowledge that learners apply to specific situations.

Situation-specific schema help to explain the difference between expert and novice interpretation of knowledge; experts, with more complex developed schema in a particular subject can function better in any given domain than a novice with no schema or an inadequate schema to help them interpret and react to new information. Since these schemas are context specific, they are dependent on an individual's experience with exposure to a subject area rather than simply "raw intelligence" (Driscoll 1994 p. 155)

Schema are important not just in interpreting information, but also in decoding how that information is presented. Schema reflecting how information is presented can also be culturally determined. Robert Kaplan (1966) stated that the structure of formal argumentative essays is culturally determined and that therefore second language

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writers and readers must be aware of their insufficient command in their second language but also of the textual structures in their second language.

According to schema theory, ESL students from different countries have different schema and most of them have difficulties in processing knowledge like English native speakers. As this theory states, proficient readers are able to activate prior knowledge stored in memory to integrate new linguistic data in the comprehension process. Therefore under schema theory, ESL reading and writing classes should utilize pre-reading and pre-writing activities to activate prior knowledge and teachers should provide minimal background knowledge when students do not have sufficient prior knowledge, especially due to cultural differences.

In addition to schema, learners are also thought to have mental models, which are dynamic models for problem-solving based on a learner's existing schema and perceptions of task demand and task performance. According to Driscoll (1994) "what this means is that people bring to tasks in precise, partial, and idiosyncratic understandings that evolve with experience" (p. 152). In addition, instruction should be "realistic familiar scenarios in teaching problem-solving rather than more conventional abstract contexts" (Prince & Driscoll, 1997).

Another important implication of schema theory is the recognition of role that culture and experience play in creating individual's knowledge. Educators must pay attention to the cultural reference in the listening, speaking, reading or writing materials. We present to our schema theory and avoid potential cultural-biases. For example, if our students are assigned to write on 'snow', they would have no

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preexisting snow schema that can activate them to process the information effectively. Thus, they would find difficulty in expressing ideas about snow.

Patricia Carrell distinguishes three kinds of cultural schemata : linguistics (language knowledge), content (topic knowledge), and formal (rhetorical knowledge). Students' background knowledge will influence what and probably how they write. Students need pre-writing activities to stimulate and trigger their schema. When form and content are familiar, reading and writing are relatively easy. But when one or both are unfamiliar, efficiency, effectiveness, and success are problematic.

2.7 Vocabulary and Writing

In some ways, the ability to write effectively hinges upon having an adequate vocabulary. During the writing process, however, a student does not have the luxury of examining the context in which a word is used, he or she is creating the context. Therefore, the writer must be able to spontaneously recall words that are known not only by sight, but that are understood well to use correctly (Mayher and Brause, 1986). Apart from that "writing is dependent upon the ability to draw upon words to describe an event "(Corona, Spangenberger, and Venet, 1989 p. 18).

The breadth and depth of a student's vocabulary will have a direct influence upon the descriptiveness, accuracy and quality of his or her writing. As Ediger (1999) noted, "variety in selecting words to convey accurate meanings is necessary in speaking of word, the outgoes of the language arts" (p.l) Corona, Spangenberger and

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Venet (1998) concur. "At any level, written communication is more effective when a depth of vocabulary and command of language is evident" (p.26).

Because words are the writing's most important tools, vocabulary development must be an important and ongoing part of classroom learning. Laflamme (1997) offers several key principles that should guide the creation and implementation of a comprehensive vocabulary development program :

- Direct instruction of technique or procedures for developing a broad and varied vocabulary – formally or informally through various classroom interactions.
- New vocabulary terms must be connected to student's previous knowledge and experience. If students are unable to contextualize new words by attaching them to words and concepts they already understand, the words will likely have little meaning to them.
- Students should be able to contextualize the vocabulary terms they have learned and use them in society (Ediger 1999, p. 7).
- Practice and repetition are important methods by which students can become familiar with new words and understand how they may be used correctly students should be frequently exposed to the same words through practice exercise, classroom use and testing.

2.8 Writing

Before we can assess writing, we need to understand what is involved when an ESL learner is engaged in the process of writing. Writing is essentially a complex,

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individualistic and idiosyncratic process. When an ESL learner writes, he/she goes through “an active thinking process” (Lawrence, 1972 p. 3) as he/she comes to grip with the target language.

Rich (1992) defines “writing” as a meaning-making and meaning-seeking process for different purposes and readers, in certain context. Writing is a system for interpersonal communication using visible signs or graphic symbols on a flat surface such as paper, cloth or even stone slabs. In short, writing is thinking put on paper.

To Halliday and Hassan (1976), writing is the ability to compose a series of well-connected sentences that are grammatically and logically correct. The writing process involves selecting and organizing experiences according to a certain purpose which requires active thought. The student has to keep in mind his/her purpose, and select relevant facts for that purpose and then consider how to organize those facts into paragraphs.

According to Liao (1993), teaching writing is more difficult than teaching listening, speaking and reading skills. In fact, writing is a daunting experience to ESL students ad teachers alike. Therefore contextual learning is one of the pertinent factors that should be taken into consideration in the ESL writing class, in order to make writing a more lively, fun, enjoyable and meaningful experience.

Writing is a thinking and learning process. The exploration of ideas and the understanding of information are facilitated by the medium. Writing is also a process of discovery, where different types of connections between ideas and language can be made. One may gain unexpected and surprising insights into some of these connections. The permanent feature of writing makes it possible for others to read

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one's work and also for future reference. The reading that is created is vital as it "informs and shapes human thought" (Troyko, 1993 p, 2).

Ann Raimes (1983) says that, "Writing helps our pupils learn. First, writing reinforces the grammatical structures, idioms and vocabulary that we have been teaching our pupils. Second, when pupils write, they become very involved with the new language, the effort to express ideas and the constant use of the eye, hand and brain is a unique way to reinforce learning".

A consensus as to what makes for good writing "begins with this qualifier : writing is contextual". Writing depends on the disciplinary context and situation in which the writing is done. Elements common to all good writing are :

- Perspective - Competent writing must have a strongly stated purpose and perspective on what writing teachers call voice or point of view.
- Audience - To communicate effectively, writers must have a sense of audience and rhetorical situation.
- Evidence - If the intent is to persuade the reader, good writing must marshal evidence or support.
- Logic - Good writing must have internal logic and coherence from the paragraph to the entire work.
- Correctness - Good writing displays a control of language and tone : grammar, punctuation and spellings are generally correct.

(Tom Waldrep)

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2.9 The Writing Process

The impetus for research on the writing process per se is frequently traced to Emig's (1971) study of 12th grade writers. Emig focused his attention on the process rather than the product.

The word "process" as used to describe "process writing" which refers to the method of teaching and learning writing which places much more emphasis on the process the writer undergoes to produce writing than on the product that is produced as a result of the act of writing.

In the past, emphasis had been placed on the written product - on correcting and grading writing, rather than on the experiences the writer undergoes as he writes. Writing pedagogy had developed tremendously in the international academic arena in the last twenty years.

Many of the more sophisticated models of the writing process are built on the work of Bereiter and Scardanalia (1987), who argued that there are essentially two models of the composing process that writers may follow ; one is referred to as knowledge – telling model, the other is the knowledge – transforming model. In the knowledge telling model, the writer is assumed to draw on both content knowledge and discourse knowledge to execute the written assignment. In the knowledge transferring model, however text processing and knowledge processing interact with each other. Even though the writer may still draw on the knowledge-telling strategy, the writer executes it within a reflective context, a context in which the writer formulates and solves problems.

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Murray (1980) proposes that we look at the stages of the writing process which includes rehearsing, drafting and revising. Within these stages of writing, the writer is driven on by the four forces of the writing process : collecting, connecting, writing, and reading. Murray discusses how these forces work in order to demonstrate how writing emerges as the writer undergoes the process of discovering what he has to say, and then making this meaning clear to the reader. Writing, according to Murray, involves the experience of discovery. According to Murray (1980 p. 7)

> Minute by minute, perhaps second by second ….. or less at certain stages of the process …. The writer may be rehearsing, drafting, and revising, looking back and looking forward, and acting upon what is seen and heard during the backward sensing and forward sensing.

Griffith (1974 p. 12) sees the writing experience as one of "wrestling with angel of language". He sees writing as involving a great struggle before meaning emerges. Griffith's view of writing would be a more appropriate description of a literary-type writing process. Whereas, Murray's description of writing is more appropriate, perhaps, to the general writing experience.

Lauer (1980), on the other hand, has a very systematic and practical approach to teaching the process of writing. Lauer allows for discovery writing, but also acknowledges that writing "involves maintaining a balance among the writer, the audience and the subject in each unique rhetorical situation" (p. 54). He sees teaching writing as equipping writers with skills that will enable them to be in better control of the writing process, so that they write better. Thus, as instructors respond to students'

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writing at each stage of the process, they are able to help the students negotiate the process of writing.

When writing, student work through the stages of writing process. The creation of writing occurs in basically five stages : prewriting, drafting, revising, editing and publishing. Prewriting is the planning and idea-gathering stage. Drafting refers to time spent composing a rough draft. Revising is the process of improving the draft. Students reread their work and share it with a partner or small group; they than make changes in the writing based on the feedback from their peers. Editing is the process of correcting mechanical errors. Publishing, or sharing is accomplished in a wide variety of ways. When the work is in final form, students of all ages move back and forth among these stages while writing, stages are not lockstep or sequential (Gardner & Johnson, 1997; Tompkins, 1990).

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CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the methods and procedures of the research, the research design, research questions and the subjects chosen for this study. Data are obtained through the implementation of pre and post tests and a set of questionnaire. It is hoped that the analysis from the data collected will further support that teaching writing using the contextual learning strategy helps second language learners perform better in their writing tasks.

3.2 Research Design

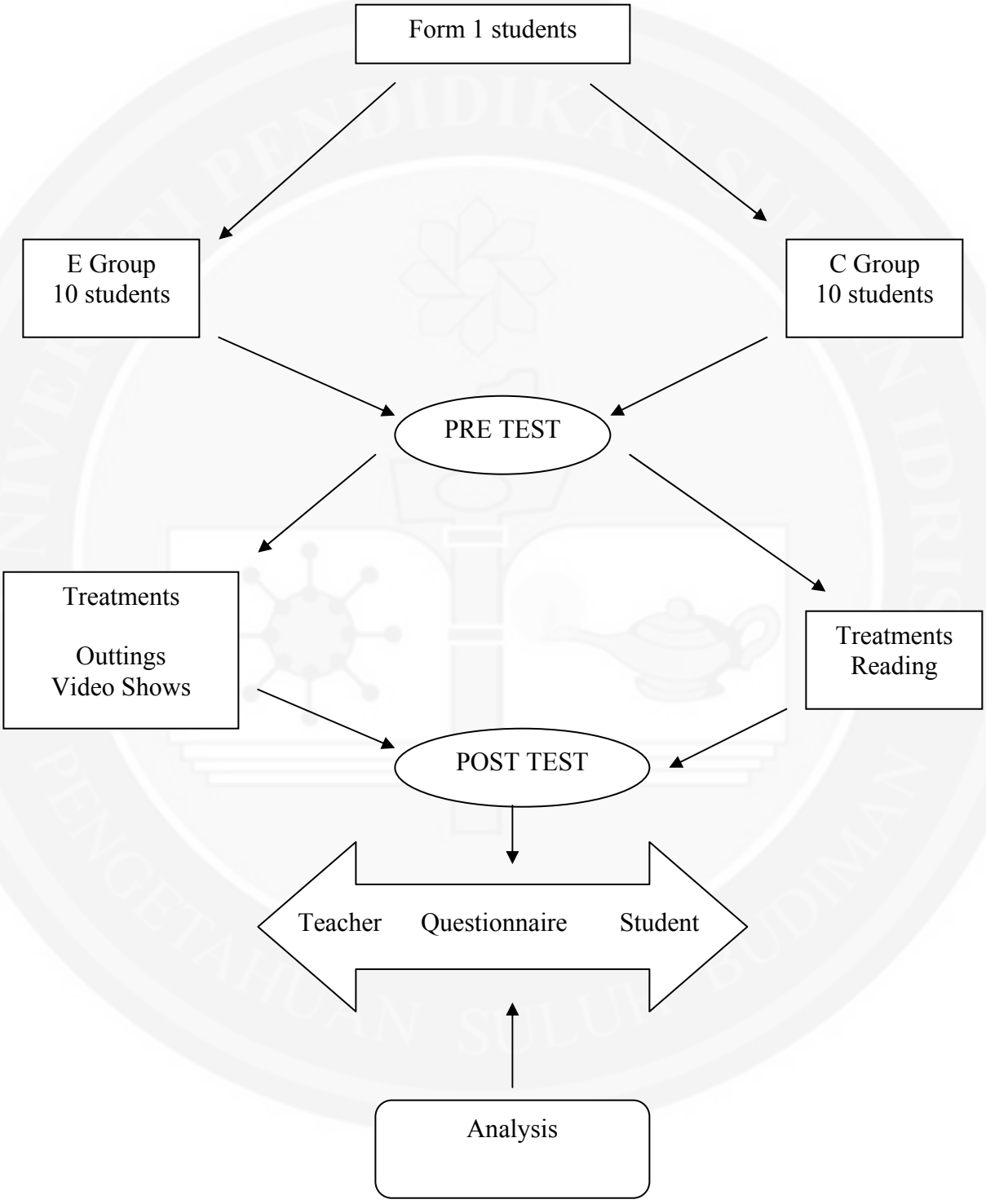
The researcher used the experimental design in measuring the effectiveness of contextual learning strategy in enhancing writing among the Form One students.

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The research design is shown in Figure 3.1 below.

Figure 3.1 The research design



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3.3 Sampling and Sampling Procedures

This study was conducted in Sekolah Menengah Kampung Muhibbah located in Sungai Siput (North), a small town not very far from Ipoh, the capital of Perak. Participants comprised of 20 Form One students (13 years old) from a sub-urban, co-ed school which had a student population of 450. The majority of them come from middle and lower- middle socio-economic background. The ethnic composition was as follows : 80 % Malays (16 students) and 20 % Indians (4 students).

These students were randomly selected and randomly assigned into two groups: the Control Group (C) which consist of 10 students from a good class and the Experimental Group (E) which consist of 10 students from an average class. The groups were divided according to their previous UPSR English Language results, heterogeneous academic levels, multicultural social economic backgrounds, language differences and male and female students.

Although the students in both groups come from average class family, they regard English as a primary need for both educational and occupational purposes. Thus they follow their English lessons with great interest and a majority of them have done fairly well in their UPSR English paper 2004. (Appendix A)

Table 3.1

UPSR English results of the Control and Experimental Group

Group	Male	Female	Total	UPSR English Results		
				A	B	C
Control (C)	5	5	10	2	8	-
Experimental (E)	5	5	10	-	2	8
Total	10	10	20	2	10	8

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The main criterion for choosing the Form One students of this school was because they are fresh new students who have completed their primary education and are about to experience secondary education. Secondly, these students are easier to control and take instructions from their teacher. The researcher hopes that these set of students have the potential to provide an indicator needed to ascertain the effectiveness of contextual learning.

3.4 Instrumentation

The instruments used in conducting this study were pre-test, post-test and a set of questionnaire.

3.4.1 Pre-test

The pre-test (Appendix B) was prepared similar to Lower Secondary Assessment or Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR) English Paper 2 in Section A, which is a national paper set by the Examination Syndicate, Ministry of Education. The pre-test was given in January before the treatment sessions to both the Control and Experimental group of students. All the students were requested to write individually a composition entitled "My Holidays", in about 100 words. The time allocated was thirty minutes. The aim was to measure the students' performance at the beginning stage of this study. The results were used as the students' background performance in the ESL writing before the contextual learning method was conducted.

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3.4.2 Post-test

The post-test (Appendix C) was conducted similarly as the pre-rest. It was carried out after the treatment session in March. Both the groups were requested to write a composition entitled "An outing during the holidays". This composition was given to test the students' experience after the outing and reading.

3.4.3 Questionnaire

The questionnaire (Appendix D) was designed to obtain information and feedback specially about the student's attitude towards the contextual learning in writing. This questionnaire was only given to the experimental group after the post-test was conducted to get relevant feedback from the students.

3.5 Data Gathering Procedure

3.5.1 Treatment for the Experimental Group

The experimental group were given three types of contextual learning treatments before they were tested. The treatments are as follows :-

Treatment 1

About 20 students in Form One (including 10 experimental students) were taken for an outing to Ulu Chepor which is about 10 km. from the school. Ulu Cepor is a popular

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place for picnics, jungle trekking, camping and discovering nature. This outing was part of our English Society program. Students were requested to bring their own food, drinks, clothing and note books. The researcher grouped the students in three and explained their tasks. They were to jot down whatever they saw, hear or feel throughout the outing.

The students went jungle trekking and had a picnic by the waterfalls. At the end of the outing, the teachers asked each group leaders to read out whatever their group members had jotted down. Then, the researcher called out a few students to share their experience with others. The outing lasted for about six hours.

Treatment 2

Two days later, the same students were taken to the English lab for a video show. They were allowed to see a documentary on famous holiday spots, islands, beaches and recreational places in Malaysia. After watching the video clips, they were asked questions to test their understandings. Students actively responded to the teacher. It was a 40 minute lesson.

Treatment 3

The following week, the teacher discusses an essay on "An outing during the holidays". The students were first briefed on the topic and were divided into groups of three. The students were given an opportunity to collaborate and exchange ideas on the

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topic. Their task was to draw a mind-map and organize their essay according to the process approach writing. After checking their mind-map, the researcher explains again the writing process and the students were given 30 minutes to write their essay which will be tested as their post test.

3.5.2 Treatment for the Control Group

On the other hand, the control group were taught by the traditional method. They were given the same topic for their essay writing . Before they start to write, the teacher ask them to read selected texts on outings to get some ideas before they write. Their reading texts consist of holiday brochures taken from the Tourist Development Centers, a reading passage from the text book and a newspaper cutting adapted from The Star (about 300 words in length). After the readings, the teacher explains the texts. Then, the students are given the title of the composition and the students write the essay which will be assessed as their post-test.

After the treatment, both the experimental group and the control group were given the same post-test and are requested to complete the given task in 30 minutes. Both the pre-test and post-test were marked by experience PMR markers using the official marking scheme. After the rating had been completed, the results of the two tests were compared to measure the effectiveness of contextual learning in writing tasks. At the end of the lesson with the experience group, the researcher distributed the questionnaire for them to answer. The students were given clear instructions in order to help them understand each item in the questionnaire well before answering. Then,

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all the data gained from all the instruments were recorded, analyzed, discussed and interpreted.

3.5 Marking Scheme

The scoring of the test was based on the specifications that was used by the Examination Syndicate 2005 whereby the students' writings would be graded through their accuracy and relevance of language use, task fulfillment and format (30marks). An inter-rater marking system was used to enhance reliability of the test in terms of marking. that is, the tests were evaluated by another independent marker who is well-versed with the marking specifications of the PMR examination. This was to ensure that evaluation would be more objective. This method of marking was employed to prevent scoring biasness on the part of the researcher.

The full mark allocated for the composition of each test (pre-test and post-test) was 30 marks which was divided into 5 bands. (Appendix E) ranging from band A to E as shown in Table 3.2.

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Table 3.2

Marking and grading scheme according to the

Perak State Education Department 2005

Band	Score	Grade
Band A	24 - 30	A
Band B	18 – 23	B
Band C	17 - 12	C
Band D	6 - 11	D
Band E	0 - 5	E

3.7 Data Analysis Procedure

The analysis of the different data collected were carried out in the follwing manner. Firstly, the results from the pre-test and post-test were recorded and analyzed by using the norm reference criterion.(Appendix I) The mean and the standard deviation were calculated based on the scores obtained in the pre and post tests. The data obtained were tabulated and highlighted to answer the research questions stated. To find out if there will be any significant difference between the pre-test and the post-test scores, the results of the two tests will be compared.

In this case, the first step was to convert the marks of each test (pre-test and post-test) into percentage score. For example : 15/30 x 100 = 50%. Then, the mean score of each test was calculated using the formula below :

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$$\sum X = \frac{fx}{N}$$

X - the mean score

x - the subject scores

F - the frequency with which a score occurs

N - the total number of subjects

$\sum$ - the sum of all

Consequently, the two pre-tests results were compared with the two post-tests results. The comparison was meant to measure whether the contextual learning method helped the experimental group of students to perform better in their writing. Hence, indirectly the findings also measured the effectiveness of contextual learning compared to traditional teaching technique.

The experimental group's pre and post test results were compared to measure the improvement made by the students in the frequency of performance by ability. Next, after the post-test the information from the questionnaire were gathered and analyzed accordingly to the responses given by the students of the experimental group.

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CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the analysis of the pre-test, post-test and the set of questionnaires given to the students. Thus, this chapter provides the results and the discussions on the following research question.

1. Can contextual learning improve Form One average and weak students' writing performance ?

Table 4.1

Demographic Distribution (Race and Gender)

Group	Malays		Indians		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Control Group	4	2	1	3	10
Experimental Group	5	5	-	-	10

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Table 4.1 above shows the demographic distribution of the Control and Experimental group in accordance with race and gender. From the table, we can see that the majority of the students in the control and experimental groups were Malays (16 Malays – 80%; 4 Indians - 20%). There is an equal distribution of male and female subjects in both the groups (5 male students and 5 female students in each group).

Meanwhile, Table 4.2 below shows the level of English proficiency of the students in the control and the experimental group. The level of proficiency was based on their previous Primary School Assessment Test or Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah (UPSR) examination grades. Students in the control group are proficient in English while the experimental group of students are less proficient in English.

Table 4.2

Profile of Subjects.

English Proficiency Level	Number of Subjects	Age	UPSR English Grade
Proficient (Control)	10	13	A - B
Less Proficient (Experimental)	10	13	C - D

4.2 The Findings

4.2.1 Findings of Pre-test

The pre-test was conducted in January for both the control and experimental groups of students. The results of the pre-test are as shown in Table 4.3 below:

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Table 4.3

Pre-test scores of the Control and Experimental Group.

Number of students	Control Group Pre-test scores	Experimental Group Pre-test scores
1	60	33
2	60	40
3	60	40
4	60	40
5	63	43
6	73	43
7	77	43
8	80	47
9	83	47
10	83	50

Based on the scores of the Pre-test of the control and experimental group in Table 4.3, the control group (consist of good students) scored higher than the experimental group (consist of average and weak students). The highest score of the control group was 83 and the lowest score was 60; wherelse the highest score of the experimental group was 50 and the lowest score was 33.

However, some samples (Appendix F) of their written composition show that the students still lack the ability to generate and organize ideas well. Their compositions were short with poor sentence structure and vocabulary.

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4.2.2 Findings of Post-test

During an interval of two months the implementation of contextual learning treatment sessions were carried out. Then, a similar post-test was conducted in March after the treatment sessions.

Table 4.4

Post-test scores of the control group and experimental group.

Number of students	Control Group Post-test scores	Experimental Group Post-test scores
1	67	40
2	67	50
3	73	50
4	73	53
5	73	53
6	83	53
7	83	60
8	87	60
9	87	63
10	90	67

Based on the scores in Table 4.4, the scores in the Post-test was significantly higher than the scores in the pre-test for both the control group and the experimental group. The highest score of the control group was 90 and the lowest score was 67. On the

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other hand the highest score of the experimental group was 67 and the lowest score was 40.

The sample composition (Appendix G) in the post-test were longer with better sentence structure, vocabulary and ideas. The experimental group students wrote better than their pre-test compositions. The average ability level students shifted to good ability level and the low ability level students moved to average ability level.

The researcher purposely grouped the good students under the control group to verify the effectiveness of contextual learning; and to compare the poorer writers to pitch with the good writers.

4.3 The Overall Findings of the Pre-test and Post-test.

The overall findings of the pre-test and the post-test has been tabulated and analyzed to show the difference in the students' achievement and performance in both the tests. In both pre-test and post-test, the students were tested on their ability to express their ideas on what they experienced.

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Table 4.5

Pre-test and post-test scores of the Control group and the Experimental group.

Number of students	Control Group		Experimental Group	
	Pre-test	Post-test	Pre-test	Post-test
1	60	67	33	40
2	60	67	40	50
3	60	73	40	50
4	60	73	40	53
5	63	73	43	53
6	73	83	43	53
7	77	83	43	60
8	80	87	47	60
9	83	87	47	63
10	83	90	50	67

Based on the scores in Table 4.5 the scores in the post-test is significantly higher than the scores in the pre-test for both the control and the experimental group. Even though the control group scored higher than the experimental group, we must bear in mind that the researcher's main aim of this study is to see the achievement of the low proficiency level group. Overall the experimental group's results were significantly higher than their pre-test scores.

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4.4 The Effectiveness of Contextual Learning in the teaching of writing .

Consequently, since the findings were based on the overall performance (average score), the researcher had analyzed the test results in a more detailed form. Analysis had been made on the subject's performance according to the ability and the rating score by the Examination Syndicate of the Perak State Education Department for Penilaian Menengah Rendah Smart Writing Project 2005 as shown in Table 4.6 below. The identification used to show the ability levels were as below.

Table 4.6

Ability Level and Scores.

Ability Level	Scores
Very low	39 and below
Low	40 - 49
Average	50 - 59
Good	60 - 79
High	80 - 100

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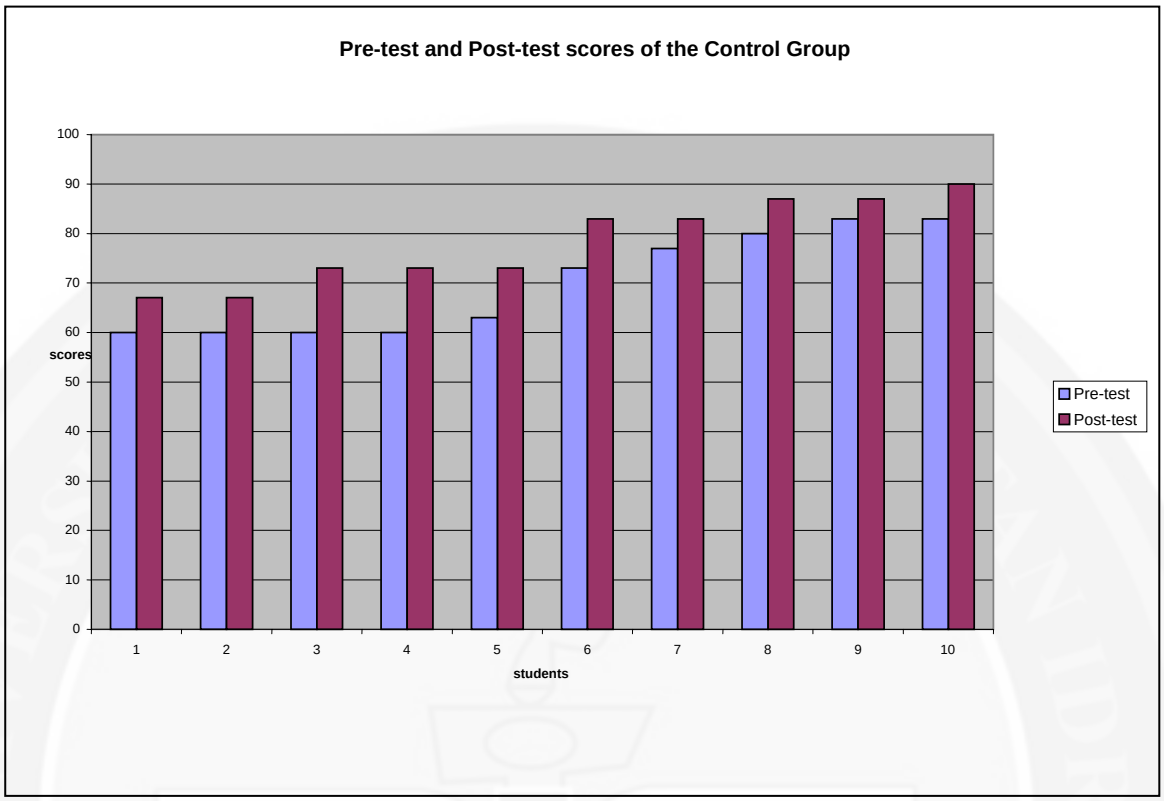


Figure 4.1

Pre-test and Post-test scores of the Control Group

Thus, the bar graph (Figure 4.1) above represents the Control Group's performance by ability in the pre-test and post-test. The bar graph shows that based on the pre-test results 30% (3 students) were of high ability and the rest 70% (7 students) are of good ability. On the other hand, the post-test scores shows 50% (5 students) were of high ability and the other 50% (5 students) were of good ability.

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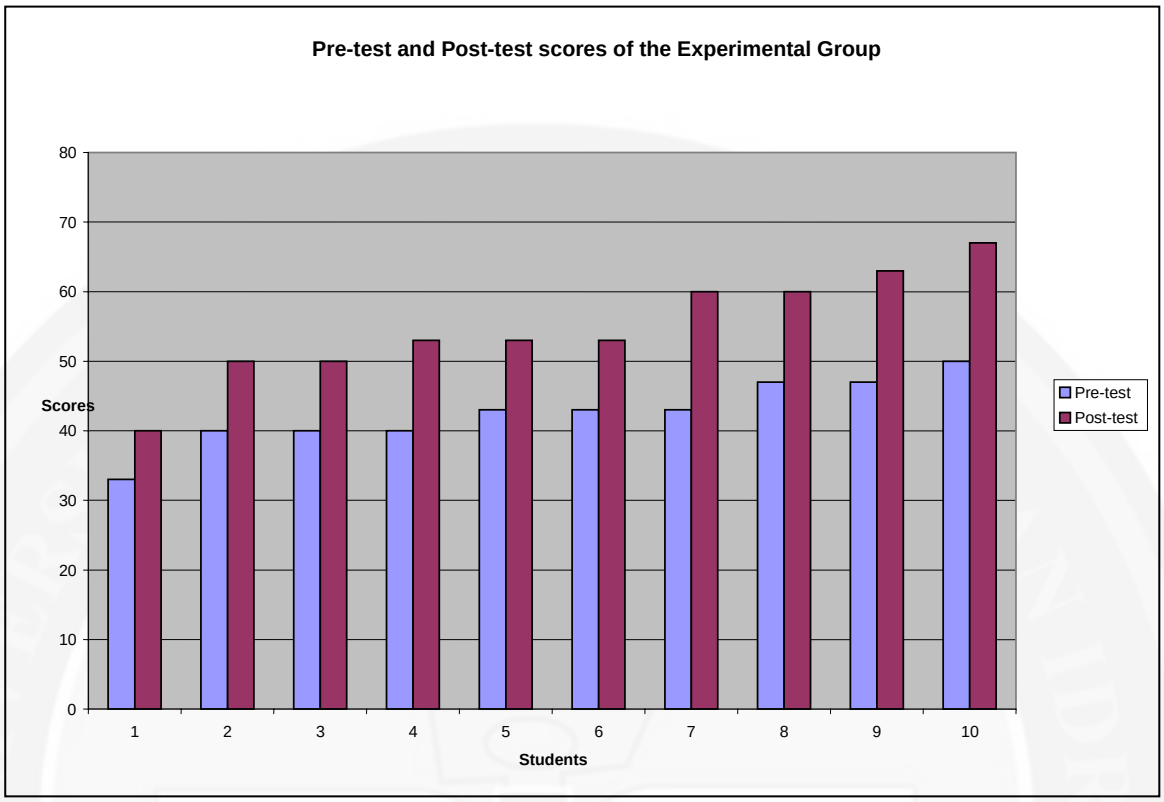


Figure 4.2

Pre-test and Post-test scores of the Experimental Group

The bar graph (Figure 4.2) shows that based on the pre-test results 10% (1 student) was of very low ability level, 80% (8 students) were of low ability and the remaining 10% (1 student) was of average level. On the other hand, the post-test results show some increase in the students performance that is, only 10% (1 student) was of low ability, 50% (5 students) rose to average ability and 40% (4 students) managed to touch the good level ability. This shows that there was a significant increase in the post-test scores and the student achieved better ability level compared to their pre-test scores.

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4.5 The Overall findings on the subject's performance by ability.

Table 4.7 below presents the number of percentage on the frequency of performance by grade and ability of control group and experimental group in the pre-test and post-test.

Table 4.7

The overall findings on the subjects' performance by ability

Group	Test	Percentage of Ability Level				
		High A	Good B	Average C	Low D	Very low E
Control Group	Pre-test	30%	70%	0%	0%	0%
	Post-test	50%	50%	0%	0%	0%
Experimental Group	Pre-test	0%	0%	10%	80%	10%
	Post-test	0%	40%	50%	10%	0%

The data in Table 4.7 indicates that based on the control group's pre-test and post-test there is a small increase in the ability / grade level that is 20% increase in the high level . Whereas, based on the subject's frequency of performance by ability in the pre-test and post-test, it was found that the experimental group had managed to improve significantly their performance by ability/ grade level. Their achievement rose to 40% in the good level and 50% in the average level. The very low achiever managed to move to the low level proficiency by showing a little improvement.

Hence, in comparison of the ability level of achievement we can conclude that the experimental group performed better than the control group. The better

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achievement indicated that Contextual learning strategy is an effective technique to be used for this particular Form One students. The findings also gave the implication that contextual learning was very effective among the average and low ability students. The technique was found to be most beneficial to the average and low ability level because these students made the greatest improvement compared to the other levels where the low achievers showed tremendous improvement whereby 40% of the students could produce good level writing.

4.6 The measure of Central tendency / Variability of Pre-test and Post-test of the Control and Experimental group.

The results of the pre-test and post-test were measured by using central tendency of variability. The figures are shown below in Table 4.8

Table. 4.8

Measure of central tendency of Pre-test and Post-test of the Experimental and Control Group.

Test	Group	Mean	Median	Mod (F)	Range	Variance	Standard Deviation
Pre-test	E group C group	42.6 69.9	40/43 68	43 60	17 27	20.64 94.49	4.54 9.72
Post-test	E group C group	54.9 78.3	53 78	53 73	27 23	54.48 67.21	7.38 8.19

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From the above Table 4.8 we can conclude that the experimental group comprising of the average and the low proficiency students performed better than the control group of students. It could be seen that the mean difference between the pre-test and the post-test of the experimental group (54.9 - 42.6 = 12.3) was significantly higher. The standard deviation of the post-test (7.38) was higher compared to the standard deviation of the pre-test (4.54). The level of language ability of the experimental group of students moved significantly from very low to low (10%); low to average (50%); and from average to good (40%). This shows that the contextual learning strategy was proven effective in improving the experimental group students' academic achievement.

4.7 Findings based on students' feedback from questionnaire

The questionnaire (Appendix D) was distributed to the subjects in the experimental group to look at the perceptions towards composition writing taught by their language teacher and the researcher at the end of the treatment. All the 10 subjects in the experimental group responded to the questionnaire. The response to each question is stated in the percentage and frequency form as can be seen in Table 4. 9.

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Table 4.9

Students' feedback on the questionnaire

No.	Questionnaire	Yes Students %	No Students %
1.	Do you like writing before ?	2 20	8 80
2.	Does your teacher help you in your writing?	10 100	- -
3.	If you say yes to Q2, tell me how ? Your teacher gives all the words. Your teacher gives all the sentences. Your teacher gives a fill in the blanks kind of composition.	10 100 - 10 100	- - 10 100 - -
4.	Do you like the way your English teacher teaches composition writing ?	5 50	5 50
5.	Do you find any difficulties in understanding your teacher's explanation?	6 60	- -
6.	Did the outing help you to get better ideas for your writing ?	10 100	- -
7.	Do you find writing easier and more interesting after going for the outing ?	10 100	- -
8.	If you say yes to Q7, tell me why. Helps to give more ideas Gives me confidence to write Makes me to think	10 100 10	- - -

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	The experience helps me to understand better.	100 10 100 10 100	- - - - -
9.	Did group activities help you in your writing ?	10 100	- -
10.	Did you enjoy writing the essay after the outing ?	10 100	- -

The analysis of data based on the questionnaire is presented as follows :

Question : 1

Do you like writing before ?

Only 20% (2) of the subjects like writing while the remaining 80% (8) dislike writing. This shows that students generally dislike doing writing tasks.

Question : 2

Does your teacher help you in your writing ?

100% (all the 10) of the subjects were helped by their teacher in their writing task. This is what happens in most Malaysian classroom especially among average and low proficiency students whereby most of the task is done by their teacher. Due to the students low proficiency level, teachers at times under estimate them and do not provide room to exploit their mental ability.

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Question : 3

If you say yes to Question 2, tell me how ?

All the 10 students responded that their teacher help them by giving all the words in writing the composition and gives a fill in the blank kind of composition. None responded that their teacher help them by giving all the sentences. Most composition writings are guided writing whereby the some words are given. On the other hand the weak students are normally given the fill in the blank kind of composition.

Question : 4

Do you like the way your English teacher teaches composition writing ?

50% (5) of the students liked the way their teacher taught them composition writing, while the other 50 % of the students did not. Most of the ESL teachers find difficult to explain how to teach writing in class for there is no one methodology which is same used by any teacher. Each teacher has their own style of teaching.

Question : 5

Do you find any difficulties in understanding your teacher's explanation ?

60% of the students found difficulty in understanding their teacher's explanation while the remaining 40% of the students had no problem in understanding to their teacher's explanation in writing composition.

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Question : 6

Did the outing help you to get better ideas for your writing ?

100% of the students agreed that the outing helped them to get better ideas for their writing. This shows that the outing really created a positive role in helping all the ten students in their writing task.

Question : 7

Do you find writing easier and more interesting after going for the outing ?

100% of the students strongly agreed that they find writing easier and more interesting after going for the outing. The outing helped them to trigger their schemata thus helping the students to generate better ideas.

Question : 8

If you say yes to Question 7, tell me why ?

All the ten students responded positively that the outing helps to give ideas, give them confidence to write, make them think, and the experience helps them to understand better.

Question : 9

Did group activities help you in your writing skill ?

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100% of the students agreed whole heartedly that the group activities help them in their writing skill. This shows that collaborative learning too play an important part in contextual learning. Students collaborate each other in their group to exchange ideas to better their writing task

Question : 10

Did you enjoy writing the essay after the outing ?

100% of the students agreed that they now enjoy writing the essay after the outing. They responded that the outing helped them to carry out minds-on and hands-on activities successfully.

4.8 Summary

To sum up the main findings of the study are as follows :

a. Contextual learning was found to be more effective than the traditional teaching technique for writing class.
b. Contextual learning was effective to all ability levels especially the average and low ability group.
c. Majority of the students expressed positive remarks on contextual learning from the feedback of the questionnaire. They enjoyed the lessons.

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d. ESL teachers agreed that contextual learning is a good method in teaching writing but was also concerned about the time and money constraints involved in conducting contextual learning in outside classroom situation.

Thus, on the whole, the results of the pre-test, post-test and questionnaire were sufficient to show that contextual learning strategy can be a very useful and effective technique to be applied in the Form One ESL writing class. However, its success depends greatly on the positive attitude of the students and the credibility of the teacher in monitoring its use in and outside classroom and also designing the appropriate activities. In order to obtain the most positive result out of contextual learning, prior attention should be focused on implementing the contextual learning spirit in the students and most of all a mutual understanding and support from their parents and school administrators.

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CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION, INTERPRETATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The concluding chapter of this study gives a summary of the study and of the finding from the pre-test , post-test, and questionnaire in Chapter four. From these findings, implications are made to suggest the various recommendations for improvement in further research and teaching practices in the classroom. The results of this study provided strong evidence that average and weak students benefited academically from participating in contextual learning. These results indicated that students taught by using contextual learning gained significantly better language ability level and performed better. Thus the research question of the study was supported.

There are practical as well as theoretical implication of the results of this study. Malaysian classrooms are dominated by individualistic learning where students worked on their own to fulfill their writing tasks. There is minimum interaction with

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their classmates. In contextual learning students actively collaborate with each other to exchange ideas. This study shows that students working in small groups could perform better. Collaboration helps to fulfill the interpersonal domain of language use as set by the new KBSM English Language Syllabus.

The idea that students discovering for themselves to accomplish a certain task gives much more satisfaction than teacher aided task. Learning through contextualism facilitate the acquisition and storage of the material being learned effectively. Our personal experience is a rich storehouse of ideas which should never be ignored. It enables us to see ideas, thoughts, opinions and examples which we already have stored in our head. The contextual learning approach helps to trigger the stored knowledge (schemata) and helps the writer to generate more ideas. The contextual learning approach has been found to be more effective especially among the average and weak group of students.

5.2 Summary of findings

From the analysis of the pre-test and post test results, it was found that contextual learning was more effective in the teaching of composition writing skill among the average and weak students. The performance made by the experimental group in the post –test was enough to show the effectiveness or the positive quality of contextual learning. The mean score (Appendix I) of the post-test is 54.9 which is significantly higher than the mean score of the pre-test which is only 42.6. The increase in the mean score shows positive increase in the students performance level. The standard

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deviation of the post-test (7.38) is higher than the standard deviation of the pre-test (4.54). The shift from very weak level to low level (10%); low level to average level (50%); and from average level to good level (40%) in the experimental group students' achievement too, showed the effectiveness of contextual learning approach.

In addition, the feedback from the questionnaire showed that contextual learning has its own advantages. It has been proved by the experimental group of students that after the outing they tend to write better. The treatment helped them to generate better ideas, gave more confidence to write, made them think and most of all the experience made them to understand better. It also motivated the students by arousing their interest towards writing and makes writing an enjoyable task.

5.3 Limitations of the findings.

There are several limitations regarding the findings of the study.

The first limitation is that due to the time constraint, the researcher did not manage to take The second limitation is that this study has been undertaken for only a short period of treatment which was carried out only in three months. The amount of time was insufficient to fully implement contextual learning among the students which normally takes a longer time to make it work successfully.

The third limitation is that, there was insufficient financial support from the students' parents who were not able to pay for the outing. This made the researcher face difficulties to take the students for outings and to support their transport cost. Apart from this, there were a lot paper work to be done before and rules and

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regulations to be followed especially in terms of the students safety. Since it is a small school with limited number of teachers there is a difficulty faced to get support from other teachers while organizing outings.

Nevertheless, in spite of the listed limitations, the results gained from the pre-test, post-test and feedbacks from questionnaire still have their own significance in providing valuable insights and views on the use and the effectiveness of contextual learning in the teaching of writing skills in classrooms.

5.4 Implications of the findings.

From the findings of the study, it is possible to look at some implications on the use and effectiveness of contextual learning in the teaching of writing skill. Having proven that contextual learning was an effective technique and preferred by most of the experimental group's students, it was implied that the students should not be deprived of benefiting from contextual learning despite the many constrains it has. Even though ESL teachers have to double their efforts to make contextual learning a success, it is advocated that the contextual learning spirit should be implemented and practiced from the earliest stage.

Thus, when students have to deal with more complex writing lessons, the spirit of teamwork has to be strongly developed in them. Furthermore, it is easier to mould students with appropriate social skills at a younger age which is a needed value in contextual learning.

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In addition, it was implied that even though some of the weaker students were inferior towards the better once, it is still better to use contextual learning method than traditional method. It is because the weaker students have the advantage of having other people to assist them in the learning process besides their class teacher. Furthermore, it was found in the study that the average and low ability students were the ones who benefited the most from the contextual learning technique.

Another implication that was made regarding the findings of the study was that the success of contextual learning depends greatly on the credibility of the ESL teachers in organizing its use in and outside the classroom. The teachers need to emphasize and remodel the appropriate skills needed for successful contextual learning

Finally, it was also implied that contextual learning inspired the writing spirit among the average and weak students. Their essays were longer, with good vocabulary and adjectives in describing the outing after the treatment (Appendix G). The students enjoyed writing classes after the implementation of contextual learning.

5.5 Conclusion

In this study, the findings reported indicate that the students who were involved in contextual learning method of instruction scored statistically and significantly higher on the adjusted means of the post-test scores in the ESL writing class. It was observed that there was positive interpersonal relationship among the students especially when contributing ideas.

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The feedbacks from the questionnaire by the experimental group of students showed that contextual learning gave them more ideas to write, increase their confidence in their own writing and helped them to improve their communication skills. These responses support a few researchers opinion that interaction among students is important in a second language writing class (Hafernik and Chaudron, 1984).

However, contextual learning should not be implemented all the time in the ESL writing class because, students tend to be demotivated by a continuous application of one teaching method by their teacher. Teaching and learning activities should be carried out with various approaches to make it interesting to the students. ESL teachers should use their own discretion to know which approach to use at the particular time to ensure more effective learning. So, they should be eclectic in the selection of approaches.

5.6 Recommendation for further research.

This study was carried out by using a descriptive research design which is qualitative. It could be further strengthened by using an experimental design which is quantitative where data could be processed by using the SPSS (Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences) to compare and contrast both the results to test its significance of hypotheses .

The population of subjects used could be further diversified and equated through similarities of race, gender and language proficiency. This would give a better

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assumption on the use of contextual learning among students. In terms of experience, the study could also be improved by investigating the effects of contextual learning on the ESL academic achievement of high achievers and low achievers. This would help in identifying the significant influence of contextual learning on the different abilities of students.

This study was only carried out in only one school which was located in the suburban area. It is suggested that further study encompassing a wider range of schools from different demographic locations. A more in-depth and detailed study could be made to investigate to which extent the effects of contextual learning on the subject from different demographic locations. Comparisons could be made between the academic achievements of subjects from urban and rural schools.

The length of training used in this study was relevant to the specific composition writing test that was to be tested in the pre and post test evaluation. It is strongly recommended that if the duration of treatment is lengthened to encompass a more detailed and complex writing task, the students could perform even better. Apart from writing, we can also test other language skills such as listening , speaking or reading.

Further studies could be made to investigate to which extent the effects of contextual learning on the attitudes of students towards learning English as a second language. Another educational phenomenon that could be studied would be the effects of contextual learning on the attendance of students in ESL classrooms. The different learning style of students could also be examined in terms of the effects of such differences in the implementation of contextual learning in realistic classroom settings.

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In conclusion, there are still rooms for improvement for further research in investigating the effects of contextual learning on Malaysian students. This study does not hope to produce conclusive evidence pertaining to the effectiveness of contextual learning in Malaysian schools but, to add varieties to the teaching repertoire in teaching English as a second language in Malaysian classrooms.

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APPENDIX A

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENT BEFORE PRE-TEST

STUDENTS IN THE CONTROL GROUP
UPSR ACHIEVEMENT IN ENGLISH

NO	NAME	GRADE
1.	FASYANURAIN BT THAZALI	B
2.	GANTHA PRAGASH A/L GUNASEKARAN	B
3.	KHOGETA NAIR A/P JANATHARAN	A
4.	MALARVILI A/P KANASIN	A
5.	MOHD SYIMIR B MOHD YUNUS	B
6.	MUHD. MUIZZUDDIN B MEOR AMIRRUDDIN	B
7.	NOOR AZLIN BT HASPAWI	B
8.	SYED MOHD HANAFI B SYED SHAROM	B
9.	TURGADEVY A/P SUBRAMANIAM	B
10.	ZULHAMIZAN B MAT SUKRI	B

STUDENTS IN THE EXPERIMENTAL GROUP
UPSR ACHIEVEMENT IN ENGLISH

NO	NAME	GRADE
1.	DIANA ROS BT ZAMRI	C
2.	MOHD FAIZ B JANA	C
3.	MOHD KHAIRUL ASRAF B HAMADON	D
4.	MOHD NABAWI B MAT SABERI	C
5.	MOHD RABBANI B ABD MAJID	C
6.	MOHD SYAZWAN B KHALID	D
7.	NOR IZZATI BT MOHD PABLI	C
8.	NOR SYUHAIDAH BT AHMAD AFANDI	C
9.	NUR HIDAYAH BT MD FUZI	C
10.	NUR SAZILA BT MOHD NAWAWI	C

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APPENDIX B

Composition Writing - Pre-test

Question

Write a composition in not more than 120 words on **your holidays**. You may use all the given words to help you. Include other relevant information to make your composition more interesting.

place - how long was your holidays - with whom you spend your holidays

- what you saw - how was your feelings

(30 marks)

During the last holidays …….

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APPENDIX C

Composition Writing - Post-test

Question

During the Chinese New Year break your family and you went for go for **an outing**. Based on your experience, describe your outing. Your composition should be about 120 words.

(30 marks)

During the last Chinese New Year break, my family and I went for an outing to ……

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APPENDIX F

Sample compositions on Pre-test of the Control Group and the Experimental Group

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APPENDIX G

Sample compositions on Post-test of the Control Group and the Experimental Group

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APPENDIX H

The results of Pre-test and Post-test of the Control Group (C)

Pre-test scores Post-test scores

Subject	Xc	(Xc –Xc)	$(Xc-Xc)^2$	Xc	(Xc-Xc)	$(Xc-Xc)^2$
1	60	9.9	98.01	67	11.3	127.69
2	60	9.9	98.01	67	11.3	127.69
3	60	9.9	98.01	73	5.3	28.09
4	60	9.9	98.01	73	5.3	28.09
5	63	6.9	47.61	73	5.3	28.09
6	73	3.1	9.61	83	4.7	22.09
7	77	7.1	50.41	83	4.7	22.09
8	80	10.1	102.01	87	8.7	75.69
9	83	13.1	171.61	87	8.7	75.69
10	83	13.1	171.61	90	11.7	136.89
Total	699		944.90	783		672.10

Measure of central tendency for the Pre-test and Post-test scores of the Control group

Test	Group	Mean	Mod	Median	Range	Variance	Standard Deviation
Pre-test	Control Group	69.9	60	68	27	94.49	9.72
Post-test		78.3	73	78	23	67.21	8.19

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The results of Pre- test and Post- test of Experimental Group (E)

	Pre-test scores			Post-test scores		
Subject	X_E	$(X_E - X_E)$	$(X_E - X_E)^2$	X_E	$(X_E - X_E)$	$(X_E - X_E)^2$
1	33	9.6	92.16	40	14.9	222.01
2	40	2.6	6.76	50	4.9	24.01
3	40	2.6	6.76	50	4.9	24.01
4	40	2.6	6.76	53	1.9	3.61
5	43	0.4	0.16	53	1.9	3.61
6	43	0.4	0.16	53	1.9	3.61
7	43	0.4	0.16	60	5.1	26.01
8	47	4.4	19.36	60	5.1	26.01
9	47	4.4	19.36	63	8.1	65.61
10	50	7.4	54.76	67	12.1	146.41
Total	426		206.40	549		544.89

Measure of central tendency for the Pre-test and Post-test scores of the Experimental Group

Test	Group	Mean	Mod	Median	Range	Variance	Standard Deviation
Pre-test	Experimental Group	42.6	43	40/43	17	20.64	4.54
Post-test		54.9	53	53	27	54.48	7.38

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APPENDIX D

Student's Feedback Questionnaire

Please answer this questionnaire by marking (/) to the choice you have chosen. You may mark (/) more than once for Question Number 3 and 8. Thank you for your help in answering this questionnaire. Your answers will be kept secret.

1. Do you like writing before ?
A. Yes ( ) B. No ( )

2. Does your teacher help you in your writing ?
A. Yes ( ) B. No ( )

3. If you say yes to Question 2, tell me how ?
Your teacher gives all the words. ( )
Your teacher gives all the sentences. ( )
Your teacher gives a fill in the blank kind of composition. ( )

4. Do you like the way your English teacher teaches composition writing ?
A. Yes ( ) B. No ( )

5. Do you find any difficulties in understanding your teacher's explanation ?
A. Yes ( ) B. No ( )

6. Did the outing help you to get better ideas for your writing ?
A. Yes ( ) B. No ( )

7. Do you find writing easier and more interesting after going for the outing ?
A. Yes ( ) B. No ( )

8. If you say yes to Question 7, tell me why.
Helps to give more ideas ( )
Gives me confidence to write ( )
Makes me to think ( )
The experience helps me to understand better ( )

9. Did group activities help you in your writing skill ?
A. Yes ( ) B. No ( )

10. Did you now enjoy writing the essay after the outing ?
A. Yes ( ) B. No ( )

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APPENDIX I

Questionnaire on student's background

Name : ……Form 1 ……

Instructions : Put a tick (/) in the appropriate brackets provided and fill in the blanks where necessary.

1. Sex : ( ) Male ( ) Female

2. Race : ( ) Malay ( ) Indian ( ) Others

3. Father's / Guardian's Occupation :……

4. Address : ……...
……

5. Family Income : RM ……..

6. Language spoken in home : ……..

7. Do you like to learn English ? ( ) Yes ( ) No

8. Do you go for English tuition ? : ( ) Yes ( ) No

9. Do you like to write composition in English ? : ( ) Yes ( ) No

10. Do you read English story books or other reading materials?
( ) Yes ( ) No

11. Do you watch English programs in television ? ( ) Yes ( ) No

12. Do you communicate with your friends in English ? ( ) Yes ( ) No

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APPENDIX J

Self-test for teachers

Are you teaching contextually ?

Instruction : Read the questionnaire and put a (/) in the appropriate box.

No.	Statements	Yes	No
1.	Are new ideas presented using real-life (outside the classroom) situations and experiences that are familiar to the students ?		
2.	Are ideas in examples and student exercises presented in the context of their use ?		
3.	Are new ideas presented in the context of what the student already knows ?		
4.	Do examples and exercises include many real, believable problem-solving situations which are important to their current or possible future lives ?		
5.	Do examples and exercises cultivate an attitude that says, “I need to learn this” ?		
6.	Are students encourage to gather and analyze their own data as they are guided in understanding the new topic being taught ?		
7.	Are opportunities presented for students to gather and analyze their own data for enrichment and extension ?		
8.	Do lessons and activities encourage the student to apply concepts and information in useful contexts ?		
9.	Are students given the opportunity to participate regularly in groups where sharing, communicating, and responding to the important concepts and decision ?		
10.	Do you find the lessons and exercises given in your class improve your student’s reading, writing and speaking skills ?		

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