



**A CASE STUDY OF STUDENTS AND TEACHERS'
PERCEPTIONS OF THE USE OF A HIGHER
ORDER THINKING SKILLS MODULE
FOR TEACHING WRITING TO
WEAK ESL LEARNERS**

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to investigate the higher order thinking skills (HOTS) strategies used by the ESL teachers to teach writing using the module developed. Analysis of ESL students' performance was carried out after using the module. This study also analysed the teacher's and students' perception of using the HOTS module developed for teaching writing to weak learners in selected national schools in Malaysia. The HOTS module was developed based on Bloom's Taxonomy focusing on cognitive as the main domain of learning. The activities in the module were developed based on the themes stipulated in the English language curriculum. A qualitative approach with a case study design was used for this study. Two ESL teachers from Kedah and Johor were chosen using snowball sampling method as studied subjects. Classroom observations, semi-structured interviews for ESL teachers, focused group interview for ESL students and document analysis were used to collect data. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the classroom observations and interviews. Classrooms observations were made to investigate the teachers' strategies to incorporate higher order thinking skills using the module developed to teach writing. Teachers and students' interviews were carried out to ascertain their response towards the strategies and use of the higher order thinking skills module to teach writing. The findings revealed that the mean score for the students in Kedah increased from 3.63 to 6.94 and for students in Johor it increased from 10.0 to 16.9 after using the HOTS module developed. The analyses of the interviews showed that the teachers preferred using the module as they were able to integrate the higher order thinking skills strategies to teach writing. Students expressed that their writing improved after they were exposed to the higher order thinking skills strategies and module used by their teachers. The pedagogical implications for this study is adopting higher order thinking strategies in the form of writing module in the ESL classrooms for teaching and learning is practicable





KAJIAN KES PERSEPSI GURU DAN PELAJAR MENGGUNAKAN MODUL KEMAHIRAN BERFIKIR ARAS TINGGI UNTUK MENGAJAR PENULISAN

ABSTRAK

Tujuan penyelidikan ini adalah untuk mengkaji strategi kemahiran berfikir aras tinggi (KBAT) yang digunakan oleh guru-guru Bahasa Inggeris untuk mengajar penulisan menggunakan modul yang dibina. Analisis prestasi pelajar dijalankan selepas modul KBAT tersebut digunakan. Penyelidikan ini turut menganalisis persepsi guru dan pelajar terhadap penggunaan modul KBAT yang dibina untuk tujuan mengajar penulisan kepada pelajar yang lemah di beberapa sekolah kebangsaan yang terpilih di Malaysia. Modul KBAT ini dibina berasaskan Taksonomi Bloom yang memberi tumpuan kepada kognitif sebagai domain utama pembelajaran. Aktiviti-aktiviti dalam modul ini dibina berdasarkan tema-tema yang ditetapkan dalam kurikulum bahasa Inggeris. Pendekatan kualitatif dengan reka bentuk kajian kes telah digunakan untuk penyelidikan ini. Dua orang guru yang mengajar Bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa kedua dari Kedah dan Johor telah dipilih sebagai sampel berantai. Pemerhatian bilik darjah, temu bual separuh berstruktur untuk guru *English as a second language (ESL)*, temu bual kumpulan terfokus untuk pelajar *ESL* dan analisis dokumen digunakan untuk mengumpul data. Analisis tematik digunakan untuk menganalisis pemerhatian bilik darjah dan temu bual. Pemerhatian bilik darjah dibuat untuk menyiasat strategi guru untuk menggabungkan kemahiran berfikir aras tinggi dengan menggunakan modul yang dibina untuk mengajar penulisan. Temu bual guru dan pelajar dijalankan untuk memastikan respon mereka terhadap strategi dan penggunaan modul KBAT untuk mengajar penulisan. Dapatan menunjukkan prestasi pelajar Kedah meningkat daripada skor min 3.63 ke 6.94 dan prestasi pelajar dari Johor menunjukkan peningkatan skor min daripada 10.0 ke 16.9 selepas menggunakan modul KBAT yang dibina. Analisis temu bual menunjukkan bahawa para guru lebih suka menggunakan modul ini kerana mereka dapat mengintegrasikan strategi kemahiran berfikir aras tinggi untuk mengajar penulisan. Pelajar menyatakan bahawa penulisan mereka bertambah baik selepas mereka terdedah kepada strategi dan modul kemahiran berfikir aras tinggi yang digunakan oleh guru mereka. Implikasi kajian ini adalah strategi KBAT dalam bentuk modul penulisan di bilik darjah Bahasa Inggeris sebagai Bahasa kedua untuk pengajaran dan pembelajaran sesuai digunakan.



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION



1.0 Introduction

As English serves the purpose of connecting people, learning to think especially in using higher order thinking skills is important because thinking is always the first step of learning. This is because, as students develop thinking skills, they will be able to solve problems and make critical decisions. A teacher can teach her students list of words and this knowledge is useful when the teacher tests the students, and students need that knowledge to do practical things like understand a news article the students have read, or describe a situation to someone. Students' understanding of how knowledge learnt in the classroom can be converted into useful action highlights the importance of higher order thinking skills.





This research aims at testing out a writing module developed by the researcher for the lower secondary schools learners in line with the English Language Curriculum. The module developed will aid ESL teachers in implementing HOTS in their lessons. According to Felder and Brent (2003), teachers face difficulty teaching a huge class with a variety of students. A huge variety of students includes students with limited English proficiency, diverse backgrounds, dissimilar interests and multiple emotions about the school experience. Having to teach a class of a variety of students, teachers need to cultivate critical and creative thinking in their students (Rajendran, 2009). Teachers are responsible for producing students who can take up world challenges (Carroll et al., 2010). To build their own knowledge, students need to use the awareness of what they know and what they do not know (Price-Mitchell, 2015). Price-Mitchell (2015) also stated that students need to learn the way to require information they encounter and remodel the information into their own information.

English is taught as a second language in all Malaysian schools. According to the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025, The Ministry of Education Malaysia governs all national education-related matters from preschool to higher-level education. The aims are to provide all Malaysian citizens with equal access to quality education that produces highly-skilled, knowledgeable, and united Malaysians. With a specific end goal to be a profoundly skilled and knowledgeable citizen, students will be expected to think critically and creatively.

The government has instituted reforms to make Malaysia a country of well-balanced citizens. This move is more evident when the National Education Philosophy





(NEP) which was documented in 1987 clearly draws attention on how the education system of Malaysia moulds students into those capable of achieving a high level of self well-being to contribute to the betterment of the nation, family as well as the society. Following is the extract of the NEP:

Education in Malaysia is an ongoing effort towards further developing the potential of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner, in order to produce individuals who are intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically, balanced and harmoniously, based on a firm belief in and devotion to God. Such an effort is designed to produce Malaysian citizens who are knowledgeable and competent, who possess high moral standards and who are responsible and capable of achieving a high level of personal well-being to contribute to the betterment of the nation, family and society.



Malaysia has the capacity to produce educated and competent Malaysians. The NEP emphasises people who are diligent to acquire and apply their knowledge to benefit not only themselves but also to benefit others. It also emphasises people who are competent not only in the sense of knowledge but having certain skills enables them to contribute to the nation's progress. One of the highlighted aspects of the NEP is intellectual capability. This capability covers cognitive knowledge. Cognitive here incorporates the ability to think logically as well as having the capacity to manipulate cognitive level to empower one to think critically and creatively which will help in problem solving.





Students in Malaysia are however experiencing difficulty utilising their reasoning aptitudes. The Malaysia Education Blueprint states that “Education plays a central role in any country’s pursuits of economic growth and national development. There is no better predictor of a nation’s future than what is currently happening in the classrooms” (Othman, 2014, p. 14). Othman (2014) also reviewed that teachers are clear about what to do in the classrooms but it is questionable if they are able to create students who can think critically and creatively in the classrooms and in real life situations.

One of the scenarios occurring in Malaysia is that in spite of the fact that educators are prepared to teach HOTS questions, most of them have very little pedagogical knowledge of HOTS (Rajendran, 1999). The most ideal approach to empower students to use HOTS in their everyday life is when teachers in schools have a decent pedagogical knowledge on HOTS, truly comprehend HOTS and then impart this knowledge in everyday lessons so that it will be easier to see the changes in the students’ thinking skills (Rajendran, 1999).

However, when students are writing, they are unable to deliver a decent review particularly with great reasoning aptitudes. They are unable to think creatively and critically. As indicated by the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025, thinking skill is likewise one of the six aspirations that students of Malaysia should have besides knowledge, leadership skills, bilingual proficiency, ethics and spirituality and national identity. It additionally stresses that all children will learn how to continue acquiring knowledge throughout their lives and to create new knowledge. Every child will master a scope of important cognitive skills including critical thinking, reasoning, creative





thinking, and innovation. Subsequently, this is an issue in which the students are unable to apply critical thinking outside familiar academic contexts.

Teaching higher order thinking skills becomes effective when there is integration of critical and creative thinking in the activities prepared. The researcher believes that there are activities prepared to teach the learners how to be able to think critically and analytically. Serious endeavor ought to be taken to ensure HOTS usage in the classrooms with the goal that it would bring about students who can utilise higher order thinking skilfully to solve problems. Regardless of having various programs to help teachers to infuse HOTS into teaching, Rajendran (1999), in his research, discovered that teachers were unable to show HOTS through infusion in their own classrooms. He additionally expressed that most teachers lacked the skills to construct HOTS related content knowledge.



Although thinking is a discerning process and it is undeniably the core of learning, being able to use higher order thinking skills for instance analysing, applying, synthesising and evaluating needs to be emphasised in teaching and learning a second language because language learning is similar to skill learning. Only this will then be assessed as making sense of what they have learned. It is irrefutable that the ability to think effectively is vital in today's world especially when it becomes more complex and sophisticated. Clearly, having the ability to think using HOTS is one of the skills that students need to master. With modernisation and the socioeconomic changes that happen very swiftly day by day, students are required to solving various problems and having to take numerous decisions. Thus, students need to exercise their thinking skills in settling on the correct decisions.





Aside from that, in education it is similarly vital to have students who also act as the new generation of the country to be able to think and become more critical and analytical thinkers. In Malaysia, the notion of teaching higher-order thinking skills is not a new idea in its education system. It has been decades since the Ministry of Education attempted to acquaint changes with Malaysian classrooms through different projects. As a matter of fact, some of the elements of critical and creative thinking skills have been visible in most of the curriculum specification across all the subjects.

Hence, the incorporation of HOTS in teaching is far from satisfying in spite of the efforts taken by the Ministry. A research conducted by AKEPT in 2011 as cited in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (2012) discovered that only 50 per cent of 125 lessons observed in 41 schools across Malaysia infused HOTS during the teaching and learning process. Additionally, Malaysia's disheartening ranking of 56 out of 76 countries in the 2015 PISA exercise (Malay Mail Online, 2015), which evaluated students' thinking skills in mathematics, science and reading, was an indication of students' poor problem solving ability (The Star Online, 2015).

In general, the teaching and learning of HOTS, particularly at the school level are usually associated subjects like science and mathematics, rather than arts subjects like language. Hence causing the integration of HOTS in the language classroom to be marginal (Pica, 2000). This should be rectified, language classrooms should be a platform for students to process information critically and reflect on their thinking skills (Li, 2016), and the incorporation of HOTS in the language classrooms may facilitate





the production of more critical ideas at least in writing, which subsequently influences the students' use of language (Gibson, 2012).

1.1 Background of the Study

Fogarty (2009) suggested four roles of teachers in the development of students' HOTS. The first role is 'teaching for thinking' with teachers creating a classroom environment that challenges students to think. Another role is 'teaching of thinking' where teachers posing questions that require students to link their prior knowledge to novel situations. Yet another role is 'teaching with thinking', involving structuring activities that encourages students' thinking through discussions and dialogues. Finally, is 'teaching about thinking' with teachers guiding students to be more conscious of their own thinking processes.

Regardless of having a systematic education framework in Malaysia, one of the major problems that teachers confront is like what Dewey has once said:

If he (student) cannot devise his own solution (not of course in isolation, but in correspondence with the teacher and other students) and find his own way out he will not learn, not even if he can recite some correct answer with one hundred per cent accuracy. We can and do supply readymade "ideas" by the thousands we do not usually take much pains to see that the one learning engages in significant situations where his own activities generate, support, and clinch ideas – that is, perceived meanings or connections.

(Dewey, 1916, p. 160)





This actually mirrors the ability to think. An educative experience, according to Dewey (1916), we make a connection between what we do to things and what happens to them or us in consequence. Dewey (1916) also stated that the value of an experience lies in the perception of relationships or continuities among events. Thus, if a child reaches for a candle flame and burns his hand, he experiences pain, but this is not an educative experience unless he realizes that touching the flame resulted in a burn and, moreover, formulates the general expectation that flames will produce burns if touched (Dewey, 1916, p. 172). Hence, reflective thinking and the awareness of relationships arise only in problematical situations. This concept relates to higher order thinking skills as higher order thinking skills shows the ability to devise a solution from various suggestion that comes to mind.



Higher-level thinking is a significant objective of our education system today.

Students should be challenged from rote memorisation to further comprehension of content. Brookhart (2010) identifies definitions of higher-order thinking as falling into three categories: (1) those that define higher-order thinking in terms of *transfer*, (2) those that define it in terms of *critical thinking*, and (3) those that define it in terms of *problem solving*.

This is similar to having the student acquire the knowledge and skill and then applying it. This is the kind of thinking that Brookhart (2010) explained that life outside of school is where thinking is characterised by ‘a series of transfer opportunities (rather) than as a series of recall assignments to be done’. The *critical thinking* category includes definitions that refer to ‘reasonable, reflective thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do’ (Norris & Ennis, 1989) and ‘artful thinking’, which





includes reasoning, questioning and investigating, observing and describing, comparing and connecting, finding complexity, and exploring viewpoints (Barahal, 2008).

The Ministry of Education has attempted to enhance HOT in Malaysia. One of the significant projects is i-THINK which is utilised to help create thinking skills in every single Malaysian schools (The Star Online, 2012). The Malaysian Government and Agent of Inovasion Malaysia (AIM) conjointly created the i-THINK project to prepare Malaysia's next generation of innovators to think critically and be versatile in anticipation without bounds in preparation for the future.

The Star Online (July 13th, 2012) reported that former Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Abdul Razak, at the launching of the Premier Rally Excellent Teachers 2012 in Putrajaya, focused on the significance of the development of higher-order thinking skills among Malaysian students. He said:

Rapid progress in technology has created jobs that did not even exist 20 years before. This trend will become more prevalent in years to come. The question is, how do we prepare them to take on jobs that don't exist yet? The answer is, we can't because we don't know what will come in the future. What we can do is prepare them with higher order skills, with the ability to not only think at a deeper level but also creatively (The Star Online, 2012).

A research conducted by AKEPT in 2011 as cited in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (2012) revealed that only 50 percent of 125 lessons observed in 41 schools across Malaysia engaged students in HOTS. Additionally, Malaysia's





dismal ranking of 56 out of 76 countries in the 2015 PISA exercise (Malay Mail Online, 2015), which evaluated students' thinking skills in mathematics, science and reading, was an indication of students' poor problem solving ability (The Star Online, 2015)

According to Hyland (2003), writing has been identified as one of the essential process skills because our world has been conquered by text and numerical data more than ever. At the same time, however, writing a good piece of product has been a hassle especially for students. Students perceive productive skills namely speaking and writing as more difficult skills than listening and reading (Berman & Cheng, 2010). In the context of Malaysia, writing is the skill that most students are lacking proficiency (Nesamalar, Saratha, & Teh, 2001).



Writing provides students with a chance to practice their thinking and organise information. Being able to write critically expands the use of higher level thinking skills through understanding of content knowledge and applying critical thinking. Knowledge of topic is essential before students can analyse, evaluate or synthesise. With these skills students are allowed to make connections to new knowledge. The 2005 School Certificate Examination Report on English Language 2 revealed that majority candidates were very weak and has yet to master writing skills in English (School Certificate Exam Report, 2005). Studies have examined the problems faced by teachers in teaching writing skills (Palpanadan, Abdul Rahim Salam & Fauziah Ismail, 2014). Many ESL teachers in Malaysian classroom faced challenges specifically when it comes to teaching writing effectively (Pour-Mohammadi, Zainal Abidin & Lai Fong, 2012).





When students complain, as they often do, about the difficulty level in writing in a second language, they are not only referring to finding the right words or using the proper usage of grammar but students often find it hard to create and express their ideas.

Gough (1991) stated that:

Perhaps most importantly in today's information age, thinking skills are viewed as crucial for educated persons to cope with a rapidly changing world. Many educators believe that specific knowledge will not be as important to tomorrow's workers and citizens as the ability to learn and make sense of new information.

(Gough, 1991, p. 78)

Students are able to write effectively when utilizing thinking skills because they will be able to generate ideas critically and analytically. Yee et al., (2013) noted that students who are able to use higher order thinking skills are capable of finding new ways to solve their daily problems and make appropriate decisions. Piaget (1970) and Vygotsky (1978) stated that children are active agents of learning as they construct their own understanding of the world (cited in Jarvis, 2005). Ideas for writing are easily generated when students are able to construct their own thinking and understanding. This is additionally embraced by Jarvis (2005) in which he specified the role of the teacher is to encourage learning circumstances so the learners can discover things out for themselves. Through this active process, students can construct their understanding and consequently develop higher order thinking skills.



1.2 Problem Statement

Incorporating higher order thinking skills into teaching and learning is still an issue among Malaysian teachers (Siti, 2016). Teachers are confused over the definitions of thinking skills and it is difficult to differentiate levels in thinking; because they lack of knowledge of HOTS this will affect the teachers' ability to assess students and to teach HOTS (Tan and Halili, 2015).

According to Azlan A. Aziz, Fauziah Ismail, Noor Mala Ibrahim, and Norhanim A. Samat (2017), teachers in Malaysia find it difficult to infuse critical thinking. Chee and Pou (2012) stated that although teachers often perceive that critical thinking skills need to be taught, research has shown that they may not know how to do this effectively.

Teaching writing is an extremely difficult task for teachers especially in developing an understanding and improving second language writing because, for weak learners, learning to write in the second language is a complicated process (Nagin, 2006).

Teachers resorted to the process approach in the 1980s, product approach in the 1990s, copying sample essays and today they prefer to teach the traditional product oriented approach which focused on linguistic features (Palpanadan, Abdul, & Fauziah, 2015). By using this approach the students do not perform well and this hinders them from thinking critically and performing a good piece of work.



Rajendran (1999) in his study discovered that teachers were ill-equipped to teach higher order thinking skills through infusion in their own classrooms. He reported that the teachers lacked the attributes to construct the pedagogical content knowledge. Siti (2016) in her research found out that some of the teachers also feel unable to incorporate teaching of thinking because the course content is too loaded.

Based on the preliminary Report of the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025, most English lessons in schools do not highlight students into doing constructive thinking as most of the classrooms are teacher based and focused on lower order thinking skills such as recalling information or stating information. Teachers are unaware on how to teach thinking skills to a number of students at the same time. Based on the report by Tajularipin et al., (2017), it is difficult to teach HOTS to big class students compared to small classes. This phenomenon occurs when teachers are unaware of how to tap and tackle students' thinking skills. Results of research done by Tajularipin et al., (2017) show that teachers need to understand what HOTS are before they can apply this knowledge into teaching HOTS especially while focusing on the productive skills.

Recent study done by Siti (2016) also evaluated teachers' perspective and found that teachers believe that they did not undergo enough training on integrating HOTS in their lessons. Using HOTS in the classroom also requires more than giving students' higher order thinking questions; rather, students must be taught how to make thinking visible and this can be done with teacher guidance (Siti 2016). Thus, a study is needed





to increase focus on investigating the higher order thinking skills (HOTS) for ESL teachers specifically in writing.

It is necessary to conduct research to develop an instrument that can be used to measure the students' HOTS (Tanujaya 2016). Therefore, to assist the teachers in teaching HOTS, the teachers can make use of the HOTS writing module. To bridge the gap in finding good materials to teach HOTS, the researcher developed a 20-question writing module that is complete with lesson plans and answer schemes. This module was prepared by the researcher using the curriculum standard specification as a guideline. The module followed all the chapters in the Form Two syllabus. The questions in the module are prepared to trigger students to use Higher Order Thinking Skills when writing. The questions will either allow teachers to do HOTS questioning or higher order thinking skills activities suited for Form Two students. The module will also assist the teachers to teach writing as it provides guidelines for the teachers to implement HOTS in a lesson. Therefore there is a need for research on how a developed module that incorporates HOTS for teaching writing can assist teachers to better understand HOTS implementation.

For the purposes of this study, only the writing skill was investigated. This skill was focused on because writing is an integrative skills. Other skills such as reading, listening and speaking are integrated within the writing skill. Students would be required to write sentences and compositions. In the course of writing they would need to read what they wrote. Furthermore, texts which provided information for students to





use for writing required them to read. They would also need to listen to the teacher's explanations and to ask for information where required.

1.3 Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to find out to what the HOTS strategies used by teachers to teach higher order thinking skills using one of the productive skills in English Language Learning classroom, which is writing, to examine the students' performance using of the higher order thinking skills module developed. With that in place teachers' and students' perception of using Higher Order Thinking Skills in the ESL classroom using the module developed will also be taken into account.

1.4 Research Objectives

The objectives of the study are summarised as follows:

- a) To investigate the higher order thinking skills strategies used by ESL teachers to teach writing using the module developed
- b) To examine students' performance using the module developed
- c) To analyse teachers' and students' perception of using higher order thinking skills module developed in ESL classroom





1.5 Research Questions

Based on the research objectives, the research questions are:

- a) What are the higher order thinking skills strategies used by the ESL teachers to teach writing using the module developed?
- b) How have the ESL learners' performed using the HOTS module developed?
- c) What are the teachers' and students' perceptions regarding the higher order thinking skills module developed?

1.6 Significance of Study



This study contributes to the existing knowledge in educational research by drawing on teachers' personal experiences in using the HOTS module since Cohen and Macaro (2007) said teachers' personal experiences are rich sources of research problems. Students, teachers and also teacher researchers may benefit from this research. The significance of this research is to find out the effectiveness of developed HOTS module in improving learners' thinking skills in the English classroom.

This study is conducted to understand as well as to investigate the performance ESL learners using the module developed. The interpretive paradigm of this study ensures that the teachers' perception towards HOTS is heard through their practices that they employ in implementing the module to trigger the HOTS to develop analytical and





critical thinking in the classroom. By understanding the efficacy of the HOTS module implementation as an aid to help students to think critically and be able to analyse a situation accordingly, this study hopes to see how this area can contribute to the thinking process particularly in the Malaysian ESL classroom.

Thus, this study can illuminate certain issues pertaining to assist teachers in understanding the implementation of higher order thinking skills as an important thinking skill to be taught to the students to mould their thinking and how this can help them make crucial instructional decisions inside the classroom. This study will also hear voices of teachers in terms of the benefits and obstacles they encounter as they experiment with implementation of the HOTS module and help find ways of better understanding those issues as well as reach teachers who are not well-versed in implementing HOTS to rectify the problem. Knowledge and the rationale for using higher order thinking as an assessment tool has to be imparted in the teacher training.

This study hopes to give insights to teachers in managing the complexity of higher order thinking skill in second language learning. The outcome of this study will help to inform induction programs or in-service courses to better suit the needs of the second language teachers and learners. This study also hopes to provide teacher training colleges or higher learning institutions with realistic views of using HOTS in the classroom.





Subsequently, it will help policy makers and curriculum developers to better understand the teachers' and learners' challenges where higher order thinking skill is concerned. This study will shed some light on stakeholders including students, teachers, administrators, and parents as HOTS will be the yardstick for providing accurate information about student achievement in learning. In addition to the arguments in connection to teacher training programs, this study will make a significant contribution to educational research in Malaysia in terms of the use of case study approach in classroom research.

The researcher also wants to find out whether higher order thinking skill could improve students' thinking in class. Being able to think critically via the higher order thinking skills activities entails a more challenging and fun activity that leads to self-improvement. Apart from that, using HOTS in the language learning classroom breaks the norm by adding a new learning technique to divert students' attention from the traditional way of learning.

Therefore this research should be carried out so that teachers could use an aid to teach writing to weak learners. The results from this research will also provide practical implication for teachers and also for the students via the module created. The teachers could analyse the result of this finding to reinforce the module to the standard of their students and at the same time allow students to employ multiple intelligences. The findings from this study will give broad implication for teaching of higher order thinking skills thorough teaching of writing to weak learners to promote better learning.





1.7 Operational Definitions

a. Higher order thinking skills

Higher order thinking skills include critical, logical, reflective, metacognitive, and creative thinking (King, 1997). Higher order thinking skills give a certain level of clarity in communication to lessen the ambiguity and confusion as well as improve student attitudes about thinking tasks. Bloom's Taxonomy is often associated with higher order thinking skills as it refers to more than just the ability to read, write and count, but also to think and analyse a situation critically. In Bloom's taxonomy, for example, skills involving analysis, evaluation and synthesis are classified as higher order thinking skills. Based on the context of the study, higher order thinking skills are deployed in the module. Lesson plans in the module consist of activities and these activities have the essence of higher order thinking. Teaching students to use HOTS is similar to guiding them to strive for analytical thinking in writing.

b. Writing

Writing is delivering information or expression of original ideas in a consecutive way in the new language (Rivers, 1981). Writing is similar to a form of communication in which one is able to express feelings or thoughts in words. ESL teachers in Malaysia confirmed the problems in writing development, especially in conventions, punctuation, spelling, proper use of grammar and some of the basic and initiating





aspects of writing (Ghabool, Edwina & Kashef, 2012). Writing in this context refers to the activities and questions developed in the module to assist teachers to teach writing to Form two ESL learners.

c. ESL Learners

ESL learners are learners whose primary language, or language of the home, is other than English and would require additional English language support to develop reading, writing, listening and speaking skills. The participants in this study are Form Two ESL students who are taking English as a compulsory subject at schools.



d. ESL Teachers

English as a second language (ESL) teachers are those who guide and teach students whose first language is not English to use English in reading, writing and conversing effectively. In the context of this study, the teachers are from different backgrounds and are teaching English as their main subject.

e. Writing Module

The writing module in this research refers to twenty different types of activities and questions developed using higher order thinking skills. This module has activities and questions that will provide room for students to be able to think critically and creatively.





This module was prepared by the researcher using the curriculum standard specification as a guideline. The module followed all the themes such as People, Environment, Social Issues and Health as found in the Form Two Syllabus. All the questions in the module are prepared such that they instill higher order thinking skills. The questions will either allow teachers to do higher order thinking skills questioning or higher order thinking skills activities on Form Two students. The module will also assist the teachers such that it opens the way for them to implement HOTS in a lesson.

1.8 Limitations of Study

A few aspects have not been covered in this study which results in the limitation of the findings of the study. Firstly, the subjects of the study are limited to two schools only in Johor and Kedah. This is because only two teachers were found using the snowball sampling method. These two teachers are of two different background and both of them have general knowledge of teaching using HOTS. The findings of this study will be founded on the responses and performances of the teachers and students during the selected learning units only, without considering those in other lessons. Thus, it does not reflect the outcomes of the whole learning unit. The focus of the study is to look at the process of teaching writing through the HOTS module developed in a Form two classroom context. Thus, it does not look at any specific aspects of English language nor can any correlations or link be made to particular language schools.





1.9 Summary

Being able to generate ideas to write is not easy especially among weak learners. It is high time for teachers and educators to implement a new technique in writing which is by using higher order thinking skills in their lesson. This study clearly shows that it is therefore necessary to conduct a more extensive research on the use of HOTS and document the findings to help future teachers and students. If more research is done on using HOTS, its effects will be evident, resulting in a more appropriate teaching strategy which can be employed to enhance the competency and proficiency of the English language among Malaysian students which is waning at an alarming pace

