

Engaging ESL Students in the Writing Classroom Through the Multiliteracy Approach

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ABSTRACT

The consensus on ‘socially responsible’ practices in today’s literacy pedagogy indicates that the parameters of school literacies have been significantly extended with the rapid cultural and technological changes in literate forms of communication in recent years. Increasingly, educators around the globe experience dilemmas in engaging with the issue of what to do in literacy pedagogy due to varying cultural identities and the proliferation of multi-channelled communication technologies. Such concerns are also important in Malaysian ESL classrooms. This paper presents the findings of a case study of teaching writing by an ESL teacher using the multiliteracy approach. The respondents were 37 Form Four Science students in a Chinese school in Penang. The research instruments used included semi-structured interviews with the ESL teacher and Teacher Rating Sheets which were used to evaluate the students’ progress in continuous writing. The findings show that the students’ continuous writing performance improved as they experienced activities assisted by Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in various stages of writing. Findings also revealed that the students’ engagement in the process of writing was instrumental in developing their ideas for their essays and simultaneously promoted their motivation during the writing lessons. The implication of the results suggests that literacy educators must take into consideration various pedagogical practices which will serve effectively in the teaching and learning of writing through technology as a medium.

Keywords: English as a Second Language, Information and Communication Technology, learning element, literacy, multiliteracy approach, multimodal, writing

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INTRODUCTION

Today’s education is perceived as a gateway to avenues that enables each individual to participate in various global debates, to make

informed choices and creative contributions, that can empower not just individuals but whole classes and communities towards nation-building (Pullen & Cole, 2010). In coping with the challenges of globalisation, the realities of today's global economic changes impact on the dynamic evolution of information and communication technology (ICT hereafter) and literacy evolution in the workplace. In educational environments, literacy instruction is changing in profound ways as these new technologies provide opportunities to enhance meaningful literacy practices (Leu, 2002). Efforts towards this end are being seen in many western classrooms; however, there is a scarcity of research on innovative use of technology in ESL classrooms in Asia. This study aims to fill this gap in the literature as it examines the effects of the multiliteracy approach (MLitA hereafter) on the continuous writing performance of ESL learners in a Chinese school in Penang. It is imperative that these changes be addressed in educational settings to help improve students' ability to understand a range of social and scientific issues. In addition to more traditional literacies of paper, pencil and books, today's ESL learners who are exposed to and engaged in diverse forms of technology prefer to carry out reading, writing and communication online through Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Youtube, Instagram, Blogspot and others (Larson, 2008). In line with such global trends, teachers in Malaysia too need to effectively embed technology in their classroom teaching in order to meaningfully affect their students' learning experiences.

Kalantzis and Cope (2009) note that significant changes in today's globalised era demand that learning and education prepare students to equip themselves with soft skills that are relevant in future workplaces. Today's interconnected world of technology promotes a knowledge economy that focuses on the use of information and knowledge through innovation and creativity (Leu, 2002; Leino, 2006; Menkhoff & Bengtsson, 2011). Additionally, the English language currently plays a significant role as it is widely used in world economy and it is a medium through which the challenges of corporate sectors, governments and technological revolutions may be confronted. The Tenth Malaysia Plan (2011-2015) is the national agenda to prepare students to compete in the global community which focuses on the vision of the Government Transition Programme and the New Economic Model (Tenth Malaysia Plan, 2010). Human capital is perceived as holistic in nature where emphasis is placed on producing students who are well equipped with knowledge and skills that encompass science and technology, entrepreneurial capabilities, cultural values and other real-world skills.

Teaching English language literacy skills in contemporary ESL classrooms is evolving dynamically in cohesion with the multiplicity of communication channels, media, cultural and linguistic diversity (Kalantzis & Cope, 2005). Students engage with different texts according to their social and private contexts which include web-based stories, interactive stories, hyper-narratives in computer games, Internet, podcasting, online news, e-mail,

text messaging, MSN, Facebook, Twitter, Skype and weblogs. Hence, the MLitA takes into consideration these new practices which fundamentally change perspectives of students' learning processes in the classroom as they are being integrated as part of the global world through the mass media, Internet and the multiplicity of communication channels and social networking. Students expect teachers to weave technology into classroom activities as part of the learning process as they perceive this to be important.

Writing is a skill that is vital in today's globalised classrooms. Students need to develop good writing ability in order to effectively express their ideas in various academic fields. Furthermore, effective writing ability is related to a country's human capital as it is the amalgamation of education, personal experience and skills that contribute to the impact of the workforce. However, one of the most daunting and challenging skills for ESL students in Malaysia is the writing skill and in relation to this, Nor Shidrah *et al.* (2005) highlight that students' anxiety and boredom in the writing classroom is further aggravated when teachers pressure students to produce linguistically accurate essays without exposing them to current approaches to writing in a creative manner. Schools in Malaysia, as in many other countries in the Asian region, are characterised by conventional approaches to grammar drills, classroom confined settings, textbook-centred methods, the teacher as the primary source of information, the students

as passive learners, excessive pressure to pass exams and an emphasis on uniformity (Mukundan, 2011).

In addressing these new challenges, ESL students require effective instruction on writing skills in order to understand the range of literacies used in making meanings from multimodal communication elements. As a result of such concerns, many language teachers acknowledge the view that the concept of multiliteracies has become relevant and prominent in current literacy and learning environments. Accordingly, Tan and McWilliam (2009) assert that 21st century learning should involve elements of multiliteracies that relate to students' lifeworlds as such integrations would make learning more relevant and responsive to students' needs. The birth of new digital technologies is linked to current terms in the literature review, which Kalantzis and Cope (2009, p.8) conceptualise as "new worlds, new learning environments, new persons and new literacies." The learning that takes place in classrooms today has to be relevant to the reality of real-world developments in the face of globalisation of world economy and various information and communication technologies.

THE PEDAGOGY OF MULTILITERACIES

In terms of operationalising the multiliteracy theory into perspectives of pedagogy, teaching and learning is perceived as comprising four orientations which are currently practised and similar to the four factors in the multiliteracy pedagogy:

situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing and transformed practice. Responding to the changing dynamics of new times, the pedagogy of multiliteracies promotes students' higher order thinking skills through the various pedagogical choices in this framework which are termed as knowledge processes. The knowledge processes encompass the cognitive skills of experiencing, conceptualising, analysing and applying.

In the framework of the multiliteracy theory, literacy includes multimodal texts involving the elements of linguistic, visual, auditory, gestural and spatial designs (Kalantzis & Cope, 2009). In deconstructing the myth about the term 'literacy', scholars such as Kress (2003) and Gee (2004) suggest that educators consider literacy by taking a socio-cultural view that it is more than reading and writing of print-based texts to consider the multiple ways literacies are used all around us. In support of this view, Kalantzis and Cope (2004, p.39) also state that "pedagogy is the stuff of knowing and knowing is what connects the stuff of the mind with the stuff of the world. Knowing is a way of acting, a way of thinking and a way of meaning." These various channels of knowing are construed as different 'movements' or 'moments' in the learning process as reflected in Fig.1:

In the multiliteracy approach, when a sequence of knowledge movements or processes has achieved a certain level, even if only momentarily, it is termed as pedagogy as illustrated in Table 1.

TABLE 1
Mapping the multiliteracy pedagogy with knowledge processes
(Source:Kalantzis and Cope, 2005)

Knowledge Process	Multiliteracy Pedagogy
Experiencing	Situated Practice
Immersion in experience and the utilisation of available discourses, including those from the students' varied worlds	
Conceptualising	Overt Instruction
Systematic, analytic and conscious understanding: the introduction of an explicit language to describe the design of meaning	
Analysing	Critical Framing
Interpreting the social and cultural context of particular designs of meaning; standing back from meanings and viewing them critically in relation to their purposes and cultural context	
Applying	Transformed Practice
Transfer in meaning-making practice which puts the transformed meaning to work in other contexts or cultural sites	

The learning elements (LEs hereafter) which were designed for this study integrates all the four knowledge processes listed in the table above and the action research teacher conducted the lessons by adhering to the multiliteracy pedagogy. This study takes into account the objectives of the MLitA in

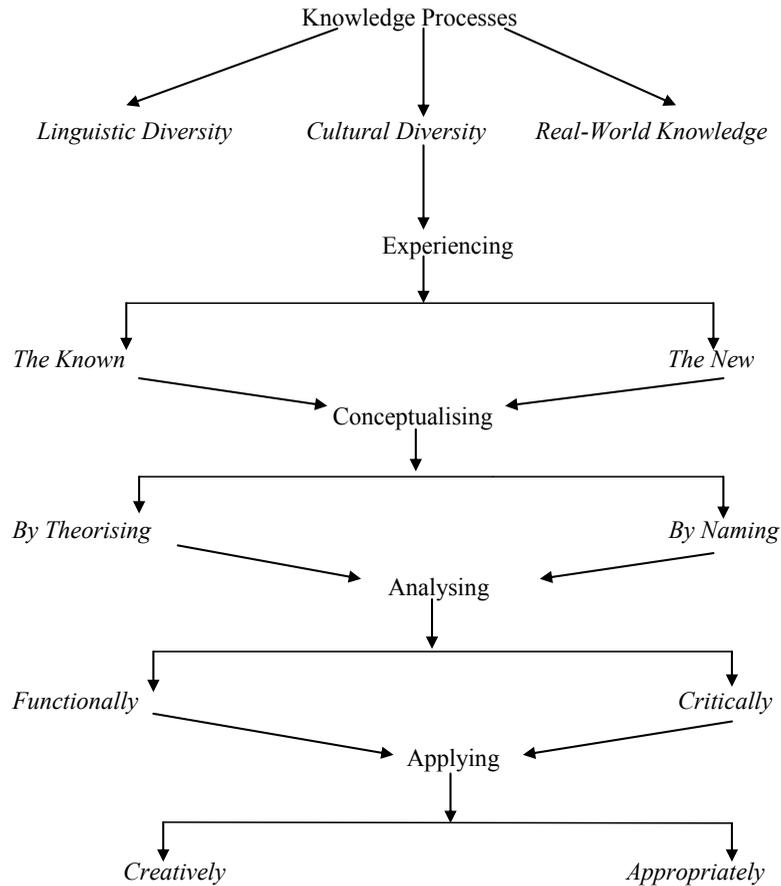


Fig.1: Knowledge Processes in the Multiliteracy Pedagogy (Source: Kalantzis & Cope, 2004, p.30)

the teaching and learning process during the implementation of the LEs which are used as lesson plans. The New London Group (1996) had coined the term multiliteracies as an initiative to bridge the issue of what to do in literacy pedagogy. This is also in relation to the different national and cultural experiences that are challenged by the changing nature of workplaces, citizens in changing public spaces and in changing dimensions of our community lives and our lifeworlds (Kalantzis and Cope, 2009).

In this study, the MLitA refers to the conceptual framework used in this study that takes into account the multiliteracy theory which forms the basis where the writing lessons incorporate the use of technological tools that supplement students' learning and teaching process.

METHODOLOGY

The study was guided by the following research questions:

RQ 1: To what extent does the multiliteracy approach affect ESL students' continuous writing performance?

RQ 2: What are the ESL teacher's perceptions of teaching continuous writing using the multi literacy approach?

Research Design

Traditionally, case studies facilitate an in-depth investigation which highlights a detailed insight of the particular nature of research studies and various characteristics of the concerned population (Kaufman & Kaufman, 2005). Following this, the study used a case study design as the researchers wanted to provide a detailed and accurate observation of how the MLitA can be used in a writing classroom. A case study research design enabled the in-depth analysis of the classroom context in which the intervention occurred and helped to sustain the description of the intervention itself. The action research carried out in operationalising this study's conceptual framework is contextualised in relation to similar situations in which the practices can be carried out. McDonough and McDonough (1997) perceive this as a naturalistic generalisation; as was the case with the present study in the context of a writing classroom. The findings of this case study promises to have wider implications for a range of stakeholders such as ESL teachers and students,

curriculum designers and officers in the Ministry of Education responsible for organising professional development courses for secondary school teachers in Malaysia.

This study adopted an action research approach (training the ESL teacher to teach writing skills by using the MLitA) where the information is highly detailed and comprehensive (Yin, 2009). It also allowed the researchers to analyse three ESL teachers' perceptions in evaluating the effects of the MLitA (using a Teacher Rating Sheet) as a teaching tool in the ESL writing classroom.

Research Sample

The research sample involved one ESL action research teacher, three classroom observers and 37 ESL students (a Form Four Science class). The Principal had sought the cooperation of the researchers not to name the school as a measure of safeguarding the privacy of the teachers and students involved in this study. Hence, the school where the study was conducted is referred to as 'School A'. The students from School A (a Chinese vernacular school) have to master three languages, which are Bahasa Melayu (the first official language), English (the second official language) and Mandarin, which is the medium of instruction in the school.

The students were chosen based on purposive sampling (Mc Niff & Whitehead, 2010). The class of Form Four Science students was selected by the Head of the English Panel in mutual agreement with the

School Principal as this study was perceived as an avenue for these students to improve their writing skills in order to perform well in their *SPM* (equivalent to the British 'O'levels) exam the following year. The selected class of students was identified by the Head of the English Panel. The streaming of classes is based on students' *PMR* (lower secondary school examination) results. The above average classes consist of students who scored straight As in all the content subjects and the average classes consist of students scoring grades B and C in the various subjects. The average class chosen for this study comprised a mixed-ability group of students in terms of their *PMR* results. The ESL teacher involved in the study classified the students' writing ability according to the school's existing grading system: good students (grade A), average students (grade B) and below average students (grades C and D).

An initial interview with the Head of the English Panel at the school revealed that students in School A showed low motivation in their writing activities and were passive during their ESL lessons. The Head of the English Panel and teachers who were interviewed expressed their enthusiasm to participate in this study. The teachers in the English panel consisted of experienced teachers who had a minimum of five years' work experience in teaching ESL. The Head of the English Panel selected the action research teacher to conduct the study based on her years of teaching ESL. An additional factor for choosing the action research teacher was on the basis that her class was

selected as the sample for this study. The selection of the three ESL teachers for the classroom observations was based on the criteria shown in Table 2 below:

TABLE 2
Selection Criteria of Classroom Observers

No.	Criteria for selection	No. of subjects
1.	ESL teachers with < 30 years of experience:	
	Teacher A	1
	Teacher B	1
2.	ESL teachers with >10 years of experience:	
	Teacher C	1

The rationale for using the number of years of work experience of the teachers in teaching ESL as a basis for selection was that the Head of the English Panel was of the view that the teachers with more than 30 years of teaching experience do not use technology or other multimedia tools as a pedagogical supplement in their teaching. The Head of the English Panel expressed the hope that the participating ESL teachers would benefit from the exposure to teaching continuous writing using the MLitA. As a facilitative effort, the participating teachers' teaching schedules (time tables) were revised to accommodate this study in order to allow them to conduct the classroom observations.

Research Instruments

The first method used in this study was a semi-structured interview. An interview schedule was constructed in order to enable the formulation of appropriate questions that facilitate the collection of the required

data to answer the research questions. The construction of interview questions for the ESL teacher was given due consideration in regards to the research questions, objectives and conceptual framework of this study. This procedure involved segregating themes and issues in relation to the area of study which is closely aligned to the teaching and learning of writing using the MLitA. The responses provided by the action research teacher were analysed deductively. The analysis looked into various aspects that encompassed the manner in which the action research teacher perceived the effectiveness of the MLitA to teach writing and if there were challenges, similarities or differences to the routine lessons.

The second research method used was a teacher rating sheet (TRS hereafter) which was adapted from The Designs Guide (Kalantzis & Cope, 2004) and used by the observers to gauge the effectiveness of the MLitA in the writing lessons. The classroom observations focused on the evaluation of

knowledge processes in the LE which is the main focus of the TRS. The assessment schema of the TRS is significant in this study as the categories in the scale (using the MLitA) constitute an integral component of the conceptual framework of this study. The elements of the TRS are shown in Table 3.

The assessment criteria were divided into five sections:

1. Demonstrations of experiential knowledge (students' ability to use their previous and new knowledge to interpret the essay topic)
2. Demonstrations of conceptual knowledge (students' ability to understand the requirements of the topic after researching)
3. Demonstrations of analytical knowledge (students' ability to select appropriate ideas in relation to the topic after researching)
4. Demonstrations of applied knowledge (students' ability to construct thesis

TABLE 3
Assessment criteria in the teacher rating sheet (TRS)

ASSESSMENT CRITERION	EVIDENCE
The student demonstrates that she can:	
Demonstrate Experiential Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiencing: The Known • Experiencing: The New
Demonstrate Conceptual Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conceptualising: By Naming • Conceptualising: By Theorising
Demonstrate Analytical Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysing: Functionally • Analysing: Critically
Demonstrate Applied Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applying: Appropriately • Applying: Creatively
Multimodal representations Multiliteracies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linguistic • Visual • Audio • Gestural and Spatial

- statements, topic sentences and supporting details and fulfil the requirements of the writing genre) and
5. Multiliteracies (students' ability to integrate multimodal meanings in their various presentations; graphics, gestures, spatial, linguistic, visual and audio)

Hence, the evidence that the teacher observers looked for was based on the various knowledge processes advocated in the multiliteracy theory (knowledge processes of experiencing, conceptualising, analysing and applying). The rating for each assessment criterion and evidence ranged from 1-20 marks and the total amounted to 100 marks (Appendix 1).

Procedure

This action research study advocated the implementation of the multiliteracy theory where learning elements (LEs) were used as lesson plans in the writing classroom. The first step in implementing the multiliteracy approach required the attendance of the action research teacher and the three classroom observers at five intensive workshops on using the MLitA (each workshop lasted for two hours). These workshops were conducted by the researchers and the aim was to explicate the multiliteracy framework underlying the study's conceptual framework. During the workshop sessions, the action research teacher was guided on using the MLitA in the writing classroom and she was assisted in categorising the activities in relation to

the knowledge processes in the LEs. The LEs prepared by the action research teacher had significantly shown an overview of some of the major learning experiences that encompassed the use of various ICT skills which Kalantzis and Cope (2005, p.242) term as "Multiliteracies for Learning and Productive Pedagogies".

Secondly, the action research teacher was required to implement the MLitA when teaching writing to her students. In this regard, the teacher used the multiliteracy approach to teach various essay skills to the Form Four students which were vital in terms of fulfilling the writing requirements in the SPM writing component. These pedagogical aspects encompass the basic structure of writing an essay which includes the following activities: planning pre-writing activities, preparing the essay framework, writing thesis statements, writing topic sentences and maintaining unity and coherence in essay writing. Students were later guided through the paragraph writing processes of planning, writing thesis statements, generating ideas, writing topic sentences, maintaining unity and coherence within a paragraph, using discourse markers and revising essay drafts.

The next stage involved the use of the multiliteracy approach in the writing classroom by using the prepared LEs which were planned in accordance to the conceptual framework of the MLitA. The duration of the study was seven months. Each LE took approximately one month to complete. Appendix 3 shows the topics of the LEs, which include Science and

Technology (LE 1), People (LE 2 and 3), Values (LE 4), Social Issues (LE 5) and Environment (LE6). The activities carried out in the writing classroom were planned in accordance with each multi literacy knowledge process and were collaboratively carried out by the students in groups. Students presented their essay frameworks by using a variety of channels such as PowerPoint presentations, graphics, role plays, mind maps, video clips and debates. Students wrote their essays at the end of each LE – each genre and title was based on the topic related to the specific LE.

Next, at the pre-writing stage for each LE, after students were exposed to the features of each essay genre, a continuous writing essay question was given to the students on an individual basis during a double-period ESL writing lesson (duration of one hour). The objective of this method was to gauge individual students' writing performance in terms of their composite scores after the implementation of the six LEs at the end of the research.

Then at the final stage of the implementation of each LE, classroom observations were carried out in order to gain in-depth information on the use of the multiliteracy approach. The three classroom observers used Teacher Rating Sheets (TRS) to investigate the effects of the MLitA on students' continuous writing. The rating sheets were used as the observation schema to evaluate students' use of the multiliteracy knowledge processes. The observers used the TRS to observe students' participation in the writing classroom and to

evaluate the range of multiliteracy activities that were carried out in the six LEs. An observation for each LE was carried out and the total number of classroom observations generated 162 sets of TRS (3 teachers x 9 groups=27 x 6 activities=162). Finally, after the implementation of the six LEs, an interview session was conducted by the researchers with the ESL action research teacher in order to glean insights into the extent to which the MLitA affected students' continuous writing performance.

RESULTS

Results from classroom observations

Table 4 shows the students' assessment scores for the domain on 'Conceptual Knowledge'. The observers rated 58.0% of the group activities as 'excellent' (collaborative competence) as they felt that the groups were able to use their previous knowledge to engage with the essay topics and simultaneously engage with the main ideas interactively based on what was researched. Students in the groups also showcased their ability to use previous and new knowledge to discuss thesis statements, topic sentences and supporting details in relation to the various essay topics. Another 29.6% of activities assessed demonstrated autonomous competence in students' ability to figure out for themselves the relevance between their personal experiences and using those experiences to relate to the essay topic while simultaneously connecting new ideas relevantly to the thesis statements, topic sentences and supporting details.

TABLE 4
Conceptual Knowledge

Assessment scale	Frequency	Percentage
Excellent (16-20)	92	56.8
Good (12-15)	51	31.5
Average (6-11)	19	11.7
Total	162	100.0

Almost half (48.8%) of the activities (see Table 5) were assessed as level 3 where students were able to work with their group members to demonstrate collaborative competence. Students were able to effectively select appropriate ideas and make causal connections, corroborate ideas from multiple sources and analyse ideas. A percentage of 41.4% of the groups were able to analyse causal connections (level 2; autonomous competence) to construct plausible interpretations of various ideas related to the essay topics. Around 16 groups needed scaffolding (level 1; assisted competence) in understanding the causal connections pertaining to the essay topic, and their understanding was checked through the relevance of ideas selected and presented during the various activities.

TABLE 5
Analytical Knowledge

Assessment scale	Frequency	Percentage
Excellent (16-20)	79	48.8
Good (12-15)	67	41.4
Average (6-11)	16	9.9
Total	162	100.0

Table 6 shows that 54.3% of group work reflects students' ability in mastering the requirements of each essay genre and

their creativity in outlining the framework of their essays through the construction of thesis statements, topic sentences and supporting details. However, 37.7% of the students were able to independently present their work without explicit scaffolding, and they managed to display their ability in demonstrating their understanding of fulfilling the requirements of the various genres through the construction of thesis statements, topic sentences and supporting details satisfactorily. Another 8.0% of observed group work needed scaffolding in enhancing their understanding of particular writing genres and construction of thesis statements, topic sentences and supporting details.

TABLE 6
Analytical Knowledge

Assessment scale	Frequency	Percentage
Excellent (16-20)	88	54.3
Good (12-15)	61	37.7
Average (6-11)	13	8.0
Total	162	100

Table 7 shows the multiliteracy scores obtained by students on the six activities presented in the LEs. It is interesting to note that 62.4% of activities were given an 'excellent' rating by the observers in communicating meaning using multiple modes of meaning which encompass the linguistic, visual, audio, spatial and gestural aspects during the various presentation sessions. The observers rated 26.1% of the students' work as good in this aspect and another 11.5% of group work was deemed as being average.

TABLE 7
Multiliteracies Knowledge

Assessment scale	Frequency	Percentage
Excellent (16-20)	101	62.4
Good (12-15)	42	26.1
Average (6-11)	19	11.5
Total	162	100.0

Results from the interview

Results from the semi-structured interview revealed that the action research teacher found various skills were acquired by the students during the writing lessons using the MLitA. According to her:

Students' creativity in their writing was evident through their thesis statement, topic sentences and supporting details. Their coherence and unity in each paragraph was achieved. I saw this in their drafting stage when I checked their essays. There were no major problems except for the prioritizing of topic sentences in paragraphs according to their significance of sequence.

Creativity of students was gained through the various collaborative activities at the pre-writing, while-writing and post-writing stages. Results revealed that the average and weaker students gained confidence and improved their style of writing. The writing lessons using the MLitA integrated the process-based approach while simultaneously incorporating activities that were mapped against the knowledge processes. According to the teacher:

My writing lessons were different as the knowledge processes in the Learning Element made a great difference in helping me plan the relevant activities systematically in the pre-writing stage, while writing and post writing. Learning outcomes were well achieved.

The teacher also emphasised that her students' mastery of each writing genre was clearly explicated at the pre-writing stage of the LE, and this enabled her students to understand the features of it as it was necessary for their writing skills. The normal lessons neglect this aspect to a certain extent as more emphasis is given to the copying of sample essays or producing essays according to the product approach.

It was also reported that the normal writing lessons facilitated students' existing knowledge but the MLitA lessons encouraged students to research ideas that were relevant to the essay topics. According to the teacher:

Students were able to be responsible in choosing points for their essays creatively and this I feel helps students to be autonomous learners. In the sense that they are able to research and decide for themselves the relevant topic that suited their thesis statements. Normally, students are just asked to think of points and straight away start writing their essays but the MLitA lessons have made a huge difference

in this way.

The teacher further elaborated that:

Students gained confidence in their writing when they mastered the art of constructing thesis statements, topic sentences and supporting details. The organisation aspect was more concrete in this way. There was more coherence and unity in the students' writing.

When the teacher was probed on whether the use of technology and multimedia advocated in the MLitA had made a difference in the teaching of writing, she said:

as I had never believed in using ICT in my teaching, the MLitA has changed my belief overnight, I would say. ICT had made an impact in many ways, especially in students' motivation of learning writing. Also, students improved their writing performance through ICT.

According to the teacher, the activities at the pre-writing, while-writing and postwriting stages also showed positive learning outcomes:

The various presentations at the pre-writing stage had created lots of enthusiasm and motivation among students as they favoured working with ICT. Students' work had made

me very impressed at their creativity of researching ideas which enabled me to achieve my writing outcomes.

Students who did not look forward to writing classes appeared to be generally motivated during the writing activities advocated in the MLitA as pointed out by the teacher in particular reference to the peer-writing conferences that were carried out through email, Skype, MSN, facebook, blogs and school websites. According to a student:

When I enter my class for writing lessons, I get demotivated myself when I notice that students are inattentive and hardly respond to the writing lessons. When I introduced the idea of peer conferencing to give feedback on each other's group work, I was expecting a negative response but to my delight students were excited at the thought of using ICT for this process of peer conferencing. Their interest and motivation enabled them to do a good job.

The teacher pointed out that students' engagement level was very high during the writing activities using the MLitA and that this was reflected by students' motivation when participating in numerous group activities. The students' responses to the writing lessons using the MLitA were positive and the teacher highlighted that these students were motivated to be

confronted with diverse activities and that this was reflected by the positive outcomes of their writing skills. These results concur with the scores given by the classroom observers using the TRS which showcases students' ability to build a concrete writing framework which was established and which served as a guideline when they started writing their drafts at the while-writing stage.

DISCUSSION

The TRS was integrated as a research instrument in this study to gauge the learning outcomes of the LEs used (from LE 1 to LE 6). Based on the TRS, students' excellent presentations of thesis statements, topic sentences and supporting details highlight that effective pedagogy takes into account the students' background knowledge, which is pertinent in planning and advocating efficient pedagogical practices (Kalantzis & Cope, 2005).

The use of the TRS highlights the positive effect of the MLitA on students' presentations of thesis statements, topic sentences and supporting details during the various activities at the pre-writing stage in the ESL classroom. The TRS scores shown in Table 3 (Experiential knowledge), Table 4 (Conceptual knowledge), Table 5 (Analytical knowledge), Table 6 (Applied knowledge) and Table 7 (multiliteracy knowledge) show students' ability to build a concrete writing framework which was established and which served as a guideline when they started writing their drafts at the while-writing stage. This concurs

with the Vygotskian (1978) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) that emphasises on learning that takes place within a learner's comfort zone, the conceptual region just beyond the individual's capability to perform (or think) without external support of some kind.

The perceptions of the teacher and classroom observers revealed some pertinent pointers based on the conceptual framework of this study which highlights Vygotsky's theory underlying the MLitA. The collaborative activities carried out during the writing lessons using the MLitA achieved the impact of promoting a positive learning environment where the average and weak students benefited in terms of cultivating positive self-esteem which simultaneously enhanced their writing performance. The various activities paved the way for students to research ideas using ICT as a medium and to later present their work.

Kellough and Kellough (2006) make the point that teachers should use effective teaching approaches that can help establish a positive classroom environment, facilitate a classroom environment that encourages students to learn actively by taking into consideration students' learning preferences and administer techniques that are grounded on cooperative and social interactive learning.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study highlight the positive effects of the MLitA in relation to the collaborative activities which integrated

ICT. This study revealed that when the teacher's pedagogical approach is appealing and addresses students' interests, then students are motivated to learn, and their engagement with the lessons can give rise to positive learning outcomes. The collaborative activities carried out in the writing classroom (using the integration of ICT as a pedagogical supplement) can serve as a basis for teachers in terms of incorporating it in the current exam-orientated writing system in order to promote students' engagement and creativity and help positively impact their learning outcomes. The findings of this study confirm that when students are motivated and interested in their lessons, the learning outcomes are productive. The significance of the MLitA can be regarded in relation to implementing this framework as an approach to teaching writing among secondary ESL students in a Chinese school. However, further research is needed to establish if this approach is viable in the teaching of writing among other ethnic student populations in secondary schools in terms of overcoming other challenges encountered in the teaching and learning of writing in ESL classrooms.

However, there are several limitations that curtail the extent to which the findings of this study can be generalised. This study is based on only one Form Four ESL class in a Chinese school and limited to one action research teacher who conducted the writing lessons using the MLitA and three ESL teachers who observed the writing lessons. Therefore, the relatively small sample size employed by this case study

may not reflect the statistical support for any conclusive findings. This is especially in terms of directly generalising to the entire ESL student population of schools in the country. Although further research may reveal additional implications for teaching and learning writing in ESL classrooms, the ESL teacher and observers in this study reported many positive learning outcomes for ESL learners which they feel can help the learners prepare for other writing tasks. Indeed, the findings indicate that the weaving of technology into the activities of a writing classroom can help effectively integrate new literacies into the current educational system in Malaysia towards preparing the learners for the literacy futures they deserve.

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APPENDIX 1

TEACHER RATING SHEET (TRS)

DATE:

NAME OF GROUP:

TITLE OF ACVITY:

Activity being reviewed:

PowerPoint Presentation	<input type="checkbox"/>	Graphics Presentation	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mind Map Presentation	<input type="checkbox"/>	Role Play Presentation	<input type="checkbox"/>
Video Clip Presentation	<input type="checkbox"/>	Debates Presentation	<input type="checkbox"/>

ASSESSMENT CRITERION The student demonstrates that she can:	EVIDENCE	RATING
Demonstrate Experiential Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Experiencing: The Known Experiencing: The New 	0-20
Demonstrate Conceptual Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conceptualising: By Naming Conceptualising: By Theorising 	0-20
Demonstrate Analytical Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analysing: Functionally Analysing: Critically 	0-20
Demonstrate Applied Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applying: Appropriately Applying: Creatively 	0-20
Multimodal representations Multiliteracies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Linguistic Visual Audio Gestural and Spatial 	0-20
TOTAL		

Adapted from Kalantzis and Cope (2004, p.54)

Assessment Criterion Scale for each Knowledge Dimension	Rating	Assessment Criterion for Overall Scale	Rating
Excellent	(16-20)	Excellent	(80-100)
Good	(12-15)	Good	(60-79)
Average	(6 -11)	Average	(40-59)
Poor	(>5)	Poor	(>39)

APPENDIX 2

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (ESL TEACHER)

1. What do you think is the most important aspect of writing?
2. What are your students' strengths and weaknesses in writing?
3. What approach have you been using to teach writing? Has it been effective and interesting?
4. What aspects of the Learning Element was an advantage or disadvantage to your students?
5. What are the differences and similarities between the Learning Element and the Lesson Plan?
6. Does the Learning Element make a difference in your teaching of writing?
7. Do you find the knowledge processes as helpful in planning the lessons in the LE?
8. How do the knowledge processes facilitate the planning of writing activities?
9. Do you consider the Learning Element an important pedagogical tool in the teaching of writing?
10. Does the Learning Element enable you to achieve your learning objectives?
11. What are the factors that need to be taken into consideration when using the MLitA in the writing classroom?
12. Do you think the Multiliteracy Approach can be an effective measure in overcoming students' weaknesses in writing? Please elaborate.
13. Which aspect of the Multiliteracy Approach to teaching writing was the most beneficial?
14. Did the integration of technology make a difference in the teaching of writing?
15. Were there any differences in your students' responses in using the MLitA?
16. Did you find any improvement in your students' writing abilities? Please elaborate.
17. Were the collaborative group activities beneficial to students? Please elaborate.
18. Were the pre-writing activities helpful as an initial preparation method before students start writing their essays?
19. In what way did the writing of drafts help your students?
20. What specific improvements (if any) did you see in your students' development of the various knowledge processes (experiential, conceptual, analysing, applying)?
21. How did the Learning Element help you in the teaching of writing? Please elaborate.

22. Do you think the Multiliteracy Approach is practical in the teaching of writing?
23. Do you find the Multiliteracy Approach relevant and practical for present times?
24. Do you have suggestions that could serve as guidelines for teachers wanting to adopt the MLitAas a form of literacy practice in the ESL writing classroom?

APPENDIX 3

A SUMMARY OF THE LEs USED IN THE MLitA TO WRITING LESSONS

Learning Element	Topic	Writing Genre	Learning Objectives	MLiTA activities
1	Science and Technology	Reflective Essay (Title: Modern inventions and their Impact on Human Beings)	Write a reflective essay cohesively and coherently on modern inventions and their impact on human beings based on relevant thesis statements, topic sentences and supporting details.	a) PowerPoint presentation of essay framework on thesis statement, topic sentences and supporting details. b) Peer conferencing: feedback through email. c) Essays published on class websites.
2	People	Free Style Essay (Title: Teenage Fashions)	Write a free style essay cohesively and coherently on teenage fashions based on relevant thesis statements, topic sentences and supporting details.	a) Mind Map presentation of essay framework on thesis statement, topic sentences and supporting details. b) Peer conferencing: Feedback through Skype and MSN. c) Essays are published on individual students' Facebook.
3	People	Descriptive Essay (Title: Describe a person who has made a deep impression on you)	Write a descriptive essay cohesively and coherently on a person who has made a deep impression based on relevant thesis statements, topic sentences and supporting details.	a) Graphic presentation of essay framework on thesis statement, topic sentences and supporting details. b) Peer conferencing: Feedback through Facebook. c) Essays published in school magazine.

4	Values	Narrative Essay (Title: Write a story ending with: ... honesty pays)	Write a narrative essay creatively, cohesively and coherently on a story ending with: ... honesty pays	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Role play on the plot of the narrative. b) Peer conferencing through Skype or MSN. c) Essays are published in the school bulletin board.
5	Social Issues	Argumentative Essay (Title: Teenagers today are only interested in entertainment. Do you agree? Support your opinion)	Write an argumentative essay cohesively and coherently on your opinion if teenagers today are only interested in entertainment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Debates b) Peer conferencing: Feedback through e-mail c) Essays are published on personal blogs.
6	Environment	Factual Essay (Title: Global warming is becoming an issue in today's era. Discuss)	Write cohesively and coherently on global warming based on relevant thesis statements, topic sentences and supporting details.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Video clips on global warming. b) Peer conferencing using Skype or MSN. c) Peer conferencing using Skype or MSN.