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Abstract:

The COVID-19 pandemic has shifted the teaching and learning of the English language from face-to-face interactions to remote teaching. In my context, most of my students did not engage with remote teaching during school closures due to certain factors such as lack of internet connection and the readiness of their parents. When schools reopened during the post-pandemic, I used the WH-questions strategy and poetry to improve my students' writing skills. WH-questions are considered guiding questions that can direct students to get new ideas in writing a text. Poetry is a form of literature that can help young learners tap into creativity by using words in writing. By using an action research design lens, this study aims to describe the process of using WH-questions strategy and poetry to improve writing skills among Year 5 primary school learners. The process consisted of four steps: planning, acting, observing and reflecting. Data were collected using a multimodal approach, including students' daily journals and structured-interview and the data gained were analysed narratively. Based on the data obtained, it was found out that the intervention used had successfully improved my learners' writing skills, especially in constructing correct simple sentences. I learned how to plan, conduct and evaluate WH-questions strategy as well as how to modify poetry writing to teach writing skills in English language lessons in the post-pandemic times.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic had profound impacts on many industries and sectors, including human activities. This includes the education sector and has led to the provisional suspension of face-to-face to remote teaching. According to UNESCO (2020), over 200 countries shifted to online teaching and learning to minimise the spread of COVID-19. Tümen-Akyıldız et al. (2021) asserted that the emergence of remote teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic had caused many perceptions, advantages as well as long-term challenges. In Malaysia, many approaches and strategies were suggested by the Ministry of Education Malaysia to maintain the dissemination of knowledge to all learners without leaving any student behind. Some methods include undertaking projects, completing quizzes and modules, and teaching and learning using online platforms such as Google Meet and Zoom (MOE, 2020).

In teaching and learning of the English language, students must master the four language skills: speaking, listening, writing and reading. This is also highlighted in the English language Document Standard and Curriculum (DSKP) which indicates that the main aim of the teaching and learning of the English language at primary level is to equip students with basic language skills to enable effective communication in different contexts (MOE, 2021). However, COVID-19 has caused prominent disruption to English language learning because of many factors such as students not having internet access and lack of preparation among teachers, parents and learners. Based on Khatoony and Nezhadmehr (2020), COVID-19 pandemic has encouraged many educators and students to explore a myriad way of utilising technology to language teaching, however there are some prolonged challenges such as lack of attention and motivation and lack of financial support.

Based on my previous observations, my pupils' mastery of the English language ranged from low to an average level of proficiency. They tend to speak in the Malay language during English lessons and often struggle to find words in English to be used in their writing and speaking. Of all the five skills that were taught, my pupils had the biggest problem in their writing skills.

In my context as an English language teacher, some of the approaches and strategies to teach the English language during the COVID-19 pandemic were ineffective as my students were not engaged with the remote teaching activities, especially in writing and language arts lessons. Based on my investigations, this issue was caused by students' lack of grammar and vocabulary knowledge. Hence, I decided to use the WH-questions strategy and simple poetry to improve their writing skills.

Literature Review

This section will address two conceptual frameworks employed as an intervention throughout this action research study. The conceptual frameworks that guided my action research were the WH-questions strategy and poetry writing.

WH-Questions Strategy

WH-questions strategy is widely used in many disciplines, including the teaching and learning of the English language. According to Igbaria (2013), WH-questions are also constituent questions that often use Wh-words such as what, which, who, when, why and how. Using these questions in writing must be ended with a question mark. These types of questions are called WH-questions because they start with Wh.

Khaydarovna (2022) conducted a study to investigate the importance of using WH-questions in teaching English language to EFL learners in Uzbekistan. In this study, WH-questions were used as guiding questions to make EFL learners understood certain expressions in asking and giving responses and hence improved their speaking skills. Another study was conducted by Jebi and Ahmad (2019) which aimed at evaluating the effects of WH-questions to teach story prompt writing among Year 5 pupils at a local school located in a rural area of Sarawak, Malaysia. In this study, a product called WH-Foldable Cube was used to teach writing skills particularly on story prompt in ten consecutive sessions. The product contained a set of WH-questions such as What, When, Where and Why to help the pupils generate ideas to expand in the context of writing richness. Based on the data gained in this particular study, the incorporation of WH-Foldable Cube was an effective alternative to guide the pupils in writing story prompts. Besides, using WH-questions also enhanced their motivation and confidence as they could organise appropriate ideas. This study is supported by Suhendi and Puwarno (2018) who stated that the contribution of guiding questions leads to a real learning process that helps increase retention. However, this study did not narrate vividly the steps on how to produce the WH-Foldable Cube and what theory bases this product.

Action research was conducted by Puspitasari (2017) to explore the use of the WH-questions method on narrative writing skills among students in Indonesia. Based on the data obtained, it was proven that the WH-questions method improved the students' narrative skills in which the average score increased significantly from 58.13 to 78.39. This study also motivated the students and they became more enthusiastic about improving their writing abilities without being monitored wholly by the teachers.

By looking at the success of the above studies, I felt that the WH-questions strategy has its benefits, especially in teaching the writing of simple sentences.

Poetry

Literature and language teaching have been used widely in teaching English language in the Malaysian Education System. Literature involves arts where learners explore their knowledge through songs, jazz chants, short stories and poems. Poem has been a popular medium for pupils to learn the English language. Poems are simple, engaging and can be exploited or modified to learn a language in many possible ways. Many studies have highlighted the advantages of using poetry in second language teaching. The teaching of writing is one example where poems are used to learn the language. A poem is very versatile as it consists of several variations of the type of words used. In other words, a poem can be used for many activities to learn English depending on the purpose such as to teach writing using authentic models or real language in context (Brumfit & Carter, 1987).

Kangasharju et al. (2022) conducted research in Finland to study the use of poetry in helping students to revise and improve their writing products. In this particular study, an artificial

intelligence-based tool was utilised to help Finnish students to write poetry easily and enjoyably. It was found out that poetry fragments and rhyme dictionaries in the tool generated draft poems and modelled poetry writing. In addition, according to research by Hismanoglu (2005), literature is a key component of many non-English-speaking nations' English-language curricula. In addition, Aladini et al. (2015) stated that poetry provides a variety of chances for language learning and practice. It offers several opportunities to acquire vocabulary and structure. There are fundamental applications for poetry in good English instruction. It infuses the classroom with feelings, poetry, and amicable expression.

Research Focus

In my own practice as an English teacher during the COVID-19 pandemic, I had to teach remotely and some of my teaching and learning activities were ineffective and this caused my learners to disengaged especially throughout my writing lessons. Hence, I decided to come up with an intervention to improve their writing skills when schools reopened during the post-pandemic period. My intervention was based on my learners' learning preferences as well as empirical evidences from previous studies.

I employed an action research design to narrate the process of implementing my intervention. Burns (2009) stated that "action research involves taking a self-reflective, critical and systematic approach to exploring your own teaching contexts" (p.2). This action research aimed to explore the use of WH-questions strategy and poetry as an intervention to teach writing skills among Year 5 ESL Malaysian primary school learners. The study was conducted in one of the primary schools in Semporna, Sabah. The time horizon of this study was eight weeks starting from the planning stage until the reflecting stage according to Burns (2009)'s action research model. This study is to answer one research question: *How to use WH-questions strategy and poetry in teaching writing skills during the post-pandemic?*

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed an action research design. Action research design is very common to teachers who act as practitioners in their own setting to improve their teaching and learning practices. According to Mcniff (2017), action research method involves the understanding of the self through a "reflective spiral of planning, acting, observing, reflecting and re-planning" (p.11). Burns (2009) stated that in action research study, a teacher plays an important role as a researcher to improve personal teaching practices. Thus, action research design is suitable to answer this particular study's research question. I adapted Burns (2009) model of action research, particularly on language teaching which has four steps; planning, action, observing and reflecting.
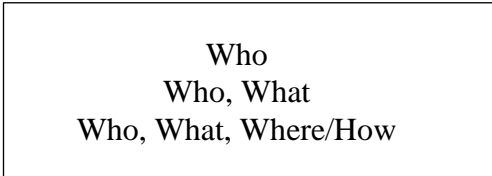
The Participants

The research participants of this study were the Year 5 learners, aged 11 years old from one of the primary schools located in a suburban area of Semporna, Sabah, Malaysia. The group of research participants consisted of twelve research participants where six of them were boys and another six of them were girls. The pupils' level of proficiency ranged from pre-intermediate to intermediate based on their previous Classroom-based Assessment (CBA) results. The research participants came from average socioeconomic families where their parents were self-

employed. They were not exposed to English as they did not belong to the English-speaking family.
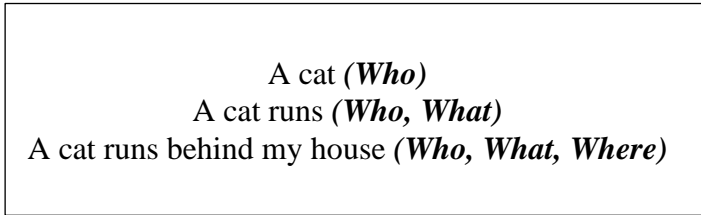
The Intervention

The intervention used in this study was the WH-questions strategy and poetry. Specifically, each line of the poem contained WH-questions in it. The first line had one WH-question, followed by two questions in the second line and three questions in the third line. During English lessons, the pupils were instructed to write a short poem using the WH-questions in each line. The WH-questions used in this poem were Who, What, Where or How questions and this was adapted from Azar and Betty (2006). The following (Figure 1 and Figure 2) are the body of poems using WH-questions.

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Who
Who, What
Who, What, Where/How
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Figure 1: Poem Format

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A cat (Who)
A cat runs (Who, What)
A cat runs behind my house (Who, What, Where)
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Figure 2: Example of a Poem

Steps to write a poem:
1) Pupils are asked to create a poem using their surroundings or based on their observation.
2) The first *who* refers to who the pupils see doing the action.
3) The second refers to the action done by the subject.
4) *Where or how* refers to the place or how the action is done.
5) They will write down the object, action and places of their surrounding into a poem.

Data Collection Method

Daily Journal

Daily journal was one of the data collection methods used to collect data in this action research. The daily journal was written based on the observation throughout the intervention, including the activities and research on the participants' behaviour. Everything would be considered and observed to make the data more reliable and avoid biases in collecting the data needed for the action research. According to Lischetzke (2013), daily journal is an effective data collection tool to gather necessary information regarding research participants experiences and behaviour in a particular natural setting. For the implementation of the intervention, one senior teacher was requested to observe the intervention and he wrote his observation reports in the students' daily journal.

Structured Interview

Another instrument to collect data for this action research was structured interviews. The research participants were interviewed after the intervention had been done. Structured interviews are conducted when there is a list of questions which is followed exactly with all research participants (Patton, 2002). Hence, in this this study, all the research participants were required to answer similar questions. Standardized questions made the process more efficient. The research participants answered the same question to ensure that the answers could be easily compared and observed. The research participants were also allowed to use their first language (Malay Language) to respond to the question. This was because the response from the research participants is more important than their ability to use the English language in answering the questions.

Data Analysis

The data were analysed narratively to describe the process of using the WH-questions strategy and poetry to teach the writing of simple sentences which involved the teacher-researcher and the learners. According to Rice and Ezzy (1999), the theoretical underpinning of using narrative analysis is more to tell a story, particularly about actions and choices. Hence, narrative analysis is effective in explaining changes in a particular study. In this study, after collecting data via daily journals and structured interviews, the data were presented narratively in a textual form. This study used first-person language to show the use of narrative inquiry in presenting the data.

Findings and Discussion

The findings and discussion will address the data from this study in the form of a narrative to answer the research question: *How to use the WH-questions strategy and poetry in teaching writing skills during the post-pandemic?*

Planning

When I taught writing skills to my pupils, I had to present the correct writing techniques. In my class, many pupils struggled to write even a sentence. I realised that I needed to teach the correct form of writing and the components of writing correct sentences. Several rules govern the writing of a sentence, but some pupils cannot recognize even the most straightforward rule. For example, when a learners want to write the most straightforward sentence, he/she need to have a subject (S) and a verb (V) hence the rule, SV or subject and verb to write a sentence. An example of a sentence written in SV is "Ali jumps" where Ali is the subject (S) and jumps is the verb (V). The next rule would be to add an object, preposition or adverb at the end of the sentence. These are among the basic rules that govern the correct way to teach writing to the pupils.

Based on my previous experience teaching my students, I found out they enjoyed the learning activities when I used poetry during the Language Arts lessons. Therefore, I came up with an idea of using something related to poetry to improve my pupils' writing skills. Generally, poetry is one of the techniques used to teach the English language to Malaysian primary schools. It is one of the elements presented in the learning standard of the Malaysian KSSR for the teaching and learning of English language. A poem used or produced does not have to be complicated when used in the teaching and learning lesson. What matters more is the outcome obtained by the pupils such as developing their writing within themselves as they are to use the language when producing or analysing one. Using poems is one exciting way for the pupils to learn the

English language. Poems can make the pupils creative and imaginative in their learning, making English learning more meaningful. As an English teacher I must identify my instructional methods, namely learners' lack of writing skills which was due to many factors and of them was remote teaching (Chai & Basri, 2020)

Acting and Observing

Firstly, based on the students' daily journal, there were three focused areas in the daily journal which were the teaching, intervention (activity) and the research participants' responses through the implementation of the intervention. In short, these three areas were focused on identifying the effect of WH-questions strategy and poetry in improving the pupils' writing skills. According to the students' daily journal, the intervention was deemed helpful in helping to improve the writing skills of the research participants.

Based on the students' daily journals, I had provided clear instructions to the research participants when implementing the intervention. I realised that explicit instruction helped the research participants understand the intervention's implementation. According to El Kemma (2019), instruction-giving has imperative effects on teaching and learning activities in which a lesson will become chaotic when learners do not understand what they should do.

Besides, the daily journal also reflected that I had provided and used suitable materials to implement the intervention when carrying out the lesson. Just like in a standard teaching and learning activity, suitable materials benefit both parties. Effective learning materials help teachers to carry out the intervention better and. Hence, the materials used in the intervention helped the research participants to improve their writing skills. The data from the daily journals also mentioned that the objective of the lesson was clear, which was to improve the pupils' writing.

Moving on, the observer had also included the activity or the intervention as one of the focused areas of the observation. The observer had mentioned that the activity or intervention by the teacher was planned and executed well to improve the writing skills of the research participants. Next, he had also mentioned that the activity done was appropriate to improve the pupils' writing skills. It was a good activity that will surely improve the writing skills of the pupils, especially the low-proficiency pupils. The WH-questions strategy helped the pupils to think of the component of the sentence to be written such as the subject, verb and object or preposition of the sentence. This is supported by Jebi and Ahmad (2019) who found that WH-questions were beneficial in teaching writing skills, especially to young learners who just start to construct grammatically current sentences. Therefore, the subject teacher and the peer had observed and commented on how the intervention had helped the research participants or the pupils whose English proficiency was mostly low to improve their writing skills and enabled them to write and form correct sentences.

In addition, another focused area of the observation was the research participants' responses throughout the process of implementing the intervention for the action research. According to the students' daily journals, the research participants participated actively throughout the activities in the intervention. This was because the teacher had prepared an activity that required constant participation by the research participants to improve their writing skills. This is in accordance with Suhendi and Puwarno (2018) who stated that the guiding WH-questions

gave students to answer real-life questions and hence the teaching and learning became more effective.

Next, based on the structured interview, the research participants had shown positive reaction toward the intervention. They liked the intervention as it helped them to write better as they loved to use their imagination and creativity in writing simple sentences. They also mentioned that the intervention helped them to construct correct sentences better thus improving their writing skills. Aladini et al. (2015) mentioned that language arts such as poetry encourages learners to write creatively. According to my students, the intervention provided them with clear guidance on how to write simple sentences, such as telling them what should be in a correct sentence and which one comes first in a correct sentence. My students also mentioned that the intervention was suitable and practical to be used to improve the pupils' writing skills, especially those with lower proficiency in English. It provided them with precise technique and guidance to write correctly. The WH-questions strategy enabled them to think easier and identified what should be written when writing down a correct sentence.

Reflecting

Based on my teaching experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, I had identified one of the major problems my pupils faced: writing correct sentences, even a simple sentence. Thus, I had devised an intervention to improve my pupils' writing skills using a technique involving the WH-questions and poetry. Based on the data obtained after the completion of the action research, I can reflect that my pupils had expressed their positive reaction toward the intervention in helping them to write better as well as engaged with the teaching and learning activities. Learning will happen when there is active engagement on the part of the learners (Mercer, 2019).

Based on the student's daily journals and the semi-structured interview, the research participants were able to improve their writing skills by writing correct Subject-Verb (SV) sentences, Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) sentences and also Subject-Verb-Adverb (SVA) sentences. The research participants had demonstrated their ability to write grammatically correct sentences through their involvement in the intervention phase. In writing activities, grammatical accuracy is essential to ensure the pupils intended meaning and to avoid communicative misunderstanding in learning English as a second language (Larsen-Freeman 2003).

Throughout the process of implementing the action research, there were few limitations. The intervention is lacking in the area of complex sentence creation. Generally, the use of WH-questions and poetry enabled the pupils to write simple sentences correctly. This is because the teacher intended to develop the pupils basic writing skills by helping them to write simple sentences correctly. It is only when the pupils can write simple sentences correctly, that they can proceed into writing complex sentences. Given that, this technique is lacking when the teacher wants the pupils to write more complicated sentences such as complex sentences. However, this technique can be modified to enable the pupils to form complex sentences at a certain level.

Conclusion

After completing the action research, it can be concluded that the use of WH-questions and poetry is an effective intervention to teach writing skills among the selected research participants based on the data gained via students' daily journals and structured-interview during the post-pandemic. This result is in accordance to previous research which studied the effects use of WH-questions strategy and poetry specially to teach writing skills (Khaydarovna, 2022; Jebi & Ahmad, 2019; Puspitasari, 2017; Kangasharju et al., 2022; Hismanoglu, 2005; Aladini et al., 2015). Remote teaching during the pandemic has indeed impacted the student's learning, and some could not join online learning due to various factors. Hence, the intervention of incorporating WH-questions and poetry has motivated students to learn English in a fun and meaningful environment especially in the context of rural schools. However, there are a few limitations of this study. Firstly, this study only focused on the students' writing skills instead of other language skills. Future studies should be conducted to explore the use of this intervention to improve other language skills such as reading and speaking. Next, this research can also be replicated by other English language educators who want to improve language skills as well as engage learners with teaching and learning.

Acknowledgements

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