CHAPTER V
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This study on the application of information skills in practicum reports was carried out to provide answers to issues raised in the research questions. The creation of these research questions facilitated the research planning process. The researcher would review each research question, one at a time, in order to find relevant answers for the research problem.

5.2 Research Questions

The data collected from various instruments used in this research, has provided the answers to the research questions.

5.2.1 Does the background of the participants affect their performance in the practicum reports?

The answer to this question was viewed in terms of years of teaching experience as well as years of English language teaching (ELT) experience, subject specialisation, type of school, subjects taught in school, participants' writing experience, their language problems and finally their general attitude towards work. The conclusions drawn from these factors, are best explained from the perspective of TESL and Non-TESL course participants.
5.2.1.1 The TESL Course Participants

From the study, it is clear that the TESL participants on the whole performed better than the Non-TESL participants. There were nine TESL participants in the sample. The top three scorers were all TESL-trained. On the other hand, we cannot deny the fact that the worst participant (the lowest mark) was also a TESL participant.

Course participants who had many years of teaching experience and ELT experience, had greater exposure to the language and had greater opportunity to use the language. As they taught more hours of English in school, they were forced to read up more and prepare lessons ahead of time. This eventually improved their proficiency and made them more confident in facing any writing challenge. This was the main factor that spurred them to action where the writing of the practicum report was concerned.

A study of the course participants' area of specialisation in teacher training colleges has revealed that only forty-seven percent of the whole group had majored in English Studies (Refer to Table 1 b). On the whole, the findings show that TESL-trained teachers performed better than Non-TESL teachers. The top three scorers were all TESL-trained.

Although the best TESL course participant in this study, stemmed from an urban school, that is Convent School, the findings were not conclusive and there was no clear-cut difference between the performance of urban and rural school teachers in the practicum
reports. Thus, it could be said that the course participant's place of work did not have an important bearing on his/her performance in the practicum report.

The findings revealed that those TESL participants who taught more hours of English and fewer hours of other subjects were more confident in their use of English language and this was mirrored in their performance of the practicum report.

As regards the writing experience of the TESL course participants, the data collected showed that only three course participants in the group wrote frequently and were regarded as confident writers. All three course participants had obtained distinctions in the practicum reports. Another five TESL respondents wrote in English language occasionally and although they obtained distinctions, they were not the best participants in the group. Those who wrote frequently during their free time were able to tackle the intricacies of writing with relative ease. Writing in English was second nature to them.

TESL participants who were habitual writers of English did not encounter any problems in writing. Those TESL participants who were occasional writers voiced out that their main problems in writing were lack of ideas owing to inadequate time allocated for reading, grammatical errors sometimes, lack of the right vocabulary to express themselves and no stylists in writing. Where the writing of the practicum report was concerned, they were all perfect in terms of applying information skills and keeping to the general framework of a practicum report. Only one TESL participant was found to be not up to the mark owing to his nonchalant attitude towards the whole course.
This research had shown that the TESL participants’ attitudes towards work, their motivation and perseverance had a marked effect on their overall performance in the practicum reports. It was only the daring, hardworking and persevering ones who went against all odds to acquire information for their report. This helped to explain why eight out of nine TESL respondents obtained distinctions. They had positive attitudes towards work and never gave up easily inspite of difficulties. In conclusion, it could be said that TESL participants emerged as veterans in the arena of writing because of their keen interest in writing, their experience in writing and finally their high motivation to write in English.

5.2.1.2 The Non-TESL Course Participants

The Non-TESL course participants fared almost as well as the TESL participants. Only one Non-TESL participant managed to secure a score which exceeded ninety percent. About six participants had marks ranging from eighty to ninety percent, two participants obtained 'B' grades and one had a 'C' grade. There were no 'D' graders amongst the Non-TESL participants. There were seven Non-TESL course participants who had obtained grade 'A' for their practicum reports as compared to eight TESL participants who had obtained 'A's.

The Non-TESL course participants varied in their years of teaching experience and ELT experience, ranging from a minimum of three and a half years of teaching experience to a maximum of twenty years of teaching experience. The oldest member of the Non-
TESL group with twenty years of teaching experience was the fourth best participant for the practicum report with a score of ninety percent and the youngest member in the group obtained eighty percent.

The Non-TESL course participants majored in subjects such as Malay Studies, Chinese Studies, Tamil Studies and Pre-school Education. The fourth best course participant was a Chinese Studies major. She was the only Non-TESL optionist who majored in Chinese Studies and had been teaching Chinese language for quite a while until recently. Her feat in the practicum report was highly commendable.

The type of school the Non-TESL course participants came from, had no bearing on the practicum report result. In fact, practically all the Non-TESL course participants stemmed from semi-urban dan rural schools.

Those who had several years of English language teaching experience manifested greater confidence in the use of the English language. The top scorer in the Non-TESL group was a Chinese Studies major and she had been teaching English for a year or so. She was also one of the supervisees of the researcher and her command of the English language was regarded as being reasonably good, with occasional grammatical errors. Her minor grammatical errors disappeared with time, till her work was almost perfect. Her determination and perseverance earned her a distinction in the end.

None of the Non-TESL course participants were frequent writers of English. Six out of the ten Non-TESL participants indulged in English language writing occasionally
and although most of them obtained distinctions, they were not the best writers in class. There were occasional errors in their practicum reports. There was one participant who had marked "never" for his writing frequency. This was because he did not teach English language at all. He taught physical education and local studies in school. His performance in the practicum report was satisfactory. He scored a 'C' grade and his grade was better than the TESL participant who obtained a 'D' grade. This was due to his determination to do well in English as he had very little experience in ELT and in English language writing. Besides that he sought the help of the best participant in the class and this had enabled him to secure a 'C' grade on the whole for the practicum report. Thus his grade, although the second lowest, was commendable as he was a Non-TESL teacher who did not teach English language in school.

The majority of the Non-TESL course participants who were not habitual writers of English, confessed that their main problems in writing were inadequate knowledge of grammar, poor vocabulary and lack of general writing skills. Although most of them were perfect in terms of applying information skills and keeping to the general framework of a practicum report, their writing performances were impeded by poor English and diction. If the supervisors had not corrected their grammatical errors, many of them would not have obtained distinctions. There would have been fewer distinctions for practicum reports on the whole.

The Non-TESL course participants were not as motivated as the TESL participants partly because of poor proficiency. Furthermore, during their free time, they
did not indulge in English language writing as frequently as the TESL participants. Coupled with poor motivational levels, negative attitude at times and lack of reading, the Non-TESL participants often faced diffidence and waning interest where writing in English was concerned.

In conclusion, it could be said that the various factors pertaining to the background of the respondents were important as they gave insights into the experience and attitudes of the respondents where academic writing was concerned. Furthermore, exposure to reading materials in English as well as the frequency in writing will determine the respondents' receptiveness to the new subject on information skills and its effective use in the practicum report.

5.2.2 What were the information sources used by the participants in their practicum reports? How were they used in academic writing?

The main sources of information used in the practicum reports were reference books, ELT journals and dictionaries from libraries, specific information accessed through the Internet, interviews conducted in schools, reflective journals, lectures and classroom observations. When and how was this information presented in their practicum reports?

5.2.2.1 Library Sources

A close study of Chapter I of the practicum report revealed that information pertaining to definitions of terms were acquired through linguistic dictionaries. The background to the project which entailed literature review on studies done by linguists
and experts plus their theories and approaches were mostly accessed through library reference books and journals. The top five participants however accessed specific information pertaining to their topic through the Internet.

5.2.2.2 Interviews

Chapter II of the practicum report required a detailed description of the project which encompassed the background of the school and pupils; the classroom activities planned by the participants and their relevance to the curriculum; the language problems of pupils or school authorities; current strategies adopted by the English language teachers, senior assistants and head teachers. Their main source of information for this description of project was interviews. The course participants obtained valuable information about their topics by interviewing people involved in English language teaching in their schools.

5.2.2.3 Lectures

In Chapter III of the practicum report, the course participants discussed the major findings based on the study, the ancillary findings based on teacher’s comments and from personal observations and recommendations to ameliorate the situation. Here their skill in discussing and displaying their findings in various forms stemmed from lecture comprehension and lecture notes.

The lectures on 'Recording Information' exposed the course participants to ways of evaluating the currency, accuracy and authority of source of information and in
distinguishing between fact and opinion, relevant and irrelevant information, essential and non-essential information. In addition, they were required to apply their knowledge of reading skills in particular note-taking skills and classifying information in linear and non-linear forms such as tables, charts and so forth.

They were able to organise their information for presentation in a systematic way bearing in mind the knowledge they had acquired from lectures on 'Organising information for presentation'. They knew how to cite, acknowledge sources of references and write out the bibliography.

5.2.2.4 Classroom Observations

Another source of information for their practicum reports was classroom observation. What was said in the classroom, by the teacher and pupils, was written down by the course participant who sat quietly at the back of the classroom, observing the English language teacher implementing the activities (planned by the course participant) in the class. The observations included the classroom pedagogic interaction and the teaching and learning that went on in the classroom. This involved focusing on various aspects of classroom methodology, the strategies, activities and techniques that the teacher employed to communicate his/her teaching point. In addition, other aspects of classroom methodology were observed such as the language skills used; the way the class was organised for the activity, in groups, pairs, on individual tasks, or as a whole; the sort of materials used; and the different roles adopted by the teacher and the learners in the particular activity in question.
As classroom observation was something new for course participants, no specific observation instrument was given to them. The researcher left it to the participant concerned to come out with his/her own observation schedule and instrument. At the end of the lesson, the course participant analysed his/her observations and included them in the practicum report. The participants wrote about their observations in their journals too.

The researcher had briefed them on what to observe in one of her Information Skills' lectures. The supervisors of practicum reports were not required to observe the their supervisees' classroom observations. This was one of the rules and regulations of practicum in this Immersion Course. As practicum comes under the Department of Educational Studies in the college, prior approval from the Head of Department had to be obtained before a visit to a school could be made. In addition, the Head of School had to be informed earlier if any lecturer wanted to visit the school. Owing to these restrictions, the course co-ordinator disallowed any visits to schools. Thus, the researcher did not have the opportunity to observe any of the classroom observations made by the course participants during practicum.

5.2.2.5 Journals

A journal is a write-up of the course participant's involvement in his/her classroom-based activity and progress in his/her practicum report. Each course participant was required to submit four journals. In their journals, the course participants wrote about the topic, objectives and scope of their projects; the introductory chapter and materials for their
portfolios; activities carried out during their practicum and finally their reflections on the course component 'Information Skills'.

The journals were useful for the course participants as they were able to keep track of their daily development of their classroom-based activity, the writing of the practicum report and preparation of materials. They discussed their journals with their supervisors and obtained suggestions for improvement. Writing of journals was more affective than cognitive as it called forth participants' feelings and reflections on the whole course and their writing experience.

5.2.2.6 Information Sources used by TESL Course Participants

The most commonly used information source by TESL course participants was library sources. The TESL participants referred more to current ELT journals than library books. Out of the five top scorers, four of them were TESL participants and all four accessed information through Internet.

Practically all participants conducted interviews but some confessed they could not get much out of their interviewees regarding their research topic. In fact, they had various other information, which were too remote and alien for their research topic.

Those who did not read widely relied heavily on lecture notes. These were the people who lacked creativity and were satisfied with the notes provided by the lecturers. The high achievers amongst the TESL group were very imaginative and creative and put
forward new and more interesting activities after several classroom observations. The activities planned by the course participants were implemented by the regular teachers in the classroom. After observing their own activities being performed, the participants had better ideas and they further improved their original activities to suit the milieu.

Journal writing and frequent consultations with supervisors and the researcher helped the course participants to glean further information for their practicum reports. The best students were able to work on their own with minimum consultations with supervisors and the researcher. On the contrary, the weakest student in the TESL group however, did not bother to consult his supervisor regarding his topic. He had more faith in his fellow coursemates, who unfortunately, were not much of a help to him in the writing process.

5.2.2.7 Information sources used by Non-TESL Course Participants

Non-TESL course participants relied heavily on library sources and lecture notes. Only one course participant accessed information via Internet. The rest gave several reasons for not using the Internet, one of them was, not being computer literate and the other was that the college computer was not easily accessible. Owing to these constraints, they were forced to rely on library books and journals.

The Non-TESL participants were more positive than the TESL participants regarding information received from interviews. Being ignorant about many aspects of ELT, they were however able to glean information by merely interviewing experienced
TESL teachers and the senior assistants.

They also tended to rely heavily on lecture notes. In some of the practicum reports, there was a mere regurgitation of ideas given by lecturers. One of the supervisors detected her own notes used in a variety of ways in the practicum reports. Although lecture notes were meant to inform and clarify ideas, if used exhaustively, they stifle creativity and make the practicum report 'cut and dry'.

Besides lecture notes, they also favoured classroom observations. They were totally satisfied with all they had planned for their selected class. Unlike the TESL participants, the Non-TESL participants did not 'doctor' their activities after their observations and they adopted them fully without further improvement.

Furthermore, they were not as inquisitive as the TESL participants were when it came to journal writing and other ideas. Here they were handicapped by poor proficiency and lack of confidence. Owing to their shortcomings, they rarely asked probing questions regarding their topic and this resulted in many questions not asked during their encounter with their supervisors.

5.2.3 Does journal-keeping help course participants to seek, store and process information for their practicum reports? How?

The journals written by the course participants helped them to seek, store and process information for their practicum reports. Journal writing emphasised process approaches to writing where less attention was paid to the finished product and more
to the writing process itself.

The participants regarded journal writing as the discovery of the true self and it aimed at fluency. Through journal writing they gained personal power over the act of writing and allowed a personal voice to develop, which was often lost in traditional basic writing skills. The course participants regarded journal writing as being non-threatening as they were not coerced into writing. On the other hand, it encouraged development of ideas and fluency. There was personal involvement in what they were writing and it was very purposeful.

There were free flow of ideas in the journals as the supervisor and the researcher were regarded as 'participants' in the on-going writing process rather than evaluators who correct or comment on their writing. The journals provided them the opportunity to use writing to communicate and to express concepts that were important to them, to accomplish real purposes, to be read by an interested audience and to receive a reply that was genuine and meaningful. The role of the supervisor and the researcher was to be responsive to participants' topics and concerns, to ask questions, to introduce topics and to encourage participants to write about themselves. Other skills that these journals seemed to help course participants develop were strategies for comprehension and communication as participants often had to negotiate meaning. Journals helped them to express their feelings regarding the activities planned for practicum as well as their classroom observations.

Journal writing provided a window to the hearts and minds of course participants involved in this research. It brought about greater understanding between the supervisor
and the supervisee and a free flow of ideas and feelings pertaining to the practicum report. All criticisms were received in good faith as they were for the betterment of the course participants. What emerged at the end of the line was a more enriched and an interesting practicum report.

5.2.4 Is the interview a valuable source of information for the practicum report?

The interviews conducted by the course participants in schools proved to be a valuable source of information for the practicum reports. Much of this information were processed for Chapters I and II which entailed the background to the study and the description of the project. They conducted their interviews in an orderly and a systematic fashion.

The course participants selected some people to interview, usually the Head of School, the Senior Assistant and the Head of the English Language Unit. The people selected for interviews had some direct experience related to their practicum report or some important information or knowledge related to the topic. In other words, the person was usually an expert in the area or an official who had access to such information.

As they interviewed, they made brief notes to help them remember important responses. They also jotted down enough information to help them reconstruct the essential information later, for example, 'What are some of the problems faced in school?' Notes: 'financial problems, few teaching aids.' After the interview, they tried to write up their interviews in some form as quickly as possible so that they would not forget essential
information.

In the final phase, they used the interview information to write their practicum reports. They explained who and why they selected the person to be interviewed. They used their knowledge of information skills pertaining to interviews and quoted sparingly and paraphrased extensively. Most of the interview was written in third-person in narrative form and was paraphrased. If the interviewee made a statement that was particularly important or well-expressed, the course participant quoted the statement directly.

From the interviews, the course participants faced a deluge of information pertinent for their practicum reports. Most of this information were in the nature of the school's background, the performance of pupils in English, facilities available and facilities required, teaching strategies for relevant English areas and the background of the pupils. Most of this information were used in Chapter I of the report. Interviews were definitely a valuable source of information for practicum reports of the nature they had to write.

5.2.5 What strategies of information use have the participants acquired, and how are these demonstrated?

The analysis of the practicum report results had shown that most of the course participants had acquired the necessary strategies for information use. The strategies were as follows:

(a) Choosing a topic
(b) Exploring the topic:
   - Brainstorming

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- Exploratory writing

(c) Narrowing the topic

(d) Developing the topic

(e) Doing library research

(f) Taking notes

(g) Quoting and paraphrasing

(h) Interviewing

(i) Making an outline

(j) Writing the first, second and final drafts

Of the ten strategies mentioned above for information use, strategies (a) to (d) are acquired from the first course content on Information Skills, that is, "Selecting the theme and defining the topic". Strategy (e) stems from the course content "Locating and retrieving information on a topic", whereas strategy (h) is acquired from input given in the course content on "Source outside the library". Strategies (f) and (g) are elements of "Recording Information" and strategies (i) and (j) are aspects of "Organising information for presentation". Hence all ten strategies are acquired from input given on lectures pertaining to the five course content stipulated in the Information Skills syllabus for the English Language Immersion Course.

(a) **Choosing a Topic**

This was the first strategy they mastered at the initial stages of the writing process.
This stage could be equated to "Getting Started" on writing. The topic selected was centred around a particular theme. In fact when the course participants met their supervisors for the first time, they were to have a topic ready for discussion.

(b) Exploring the Topic

After they had selected a topic of their choice, the course participants spent a few minutes writing down words and phrases that were connected to that topic. After they had thought about their topic, they started to write for fifteen or twenty minutes about their topic. They wrote anything that came into their mind. After they had finished, they read their exploratory writing over. They picked out the parts that interested them most so that they could think more about them. The highly motivated ones, read their exploratory writing to another person and asked that person for his or her opinion on the parts that were most interesting for further research and development. This strategy was employed at the initial stages of writing and involved elements of critical and creative thinking.

(c) Narrowing the Topic

After the exploratory writing, the participants thought of some specific questions that they wanted to ask about their topic. They thought of at least six or seven questions. These questions helped them focus their ideas and provided a sense of direction for their research. This strategy too enabled them to fine-tune their topic to a single focus.
(d) Developing the Topic

At this stage, the course participants studied their questions critically and changed some of them. They either added new ones, combined old ones or restated them in a different way. After they had fine-tuned their questions, they thought about where they could get information to answer each question. The possible sources of information needed to answer these questions were library sources such as books, journals and magazines, personal observation and experience as well as interviews.

In short, the strategies of choosing, exploring, narrowing and developing a topic were essential steps in the preparatory stages of writing the practicum report before library research. Without this organised procedure, the writer would not be focussed in his research.

(e) Doing Library Research

Most of the information needed to expand their topic could be acquired from the college library. It was here that they employed their knowledge of library skills to find information on their topic. Some of the library sources that they used were the card catalogues, encyclopaedias, periodicals/journals, newspapers and the computer. Once they knew where the books were placed, they located them easily. Library research was a stage just before the writing of the first draft of the practicum report.
Taking Notes

While the course participants were doing their library research, they had to take notes. With reference to lecture notes on 'Note-taking', they adhered to the following:
- kept related information together. They developed a way to keep their notes for each chapter separate,
- organised and reorganised their information in different ways easily. Their notes, when they were all put together, functioned as a very rough draft of the practicum report.

Quoting Directly and Paraphrasing

Most of the information acquired from books were quoted directly and paraphrased. They quoted directly information which were important, ideas which were well expressed and statements by important linguists or experts in the field of their study. When restating an idea in their own words, the participants resorted to paraphrasing. Much of the direct quotations and paraphrasing were found in the first chapter of the practicum report.

Interviewing

In addition to doing library research on their topic, the course participants obtained information about their topic by interviewing people. Some of the strategies they employed in using information gathered through interviews were:
- deciding on interview information areas
- formulating interview questions
- selecting the right people to interview
- conducting the interview at a time that is convenient for the interviewee and finally,
- using interview information effectively in their practicum reports by quoting sparingly and paraphrasing extensively.

(i) Making an Outline

After they had gathered information from a variety of sources, they started to write their first draft. They found it useful to make a general outline before they began writing. They believed that making an outline helped them plan and organise their ideas. When they wrote their report, they referred to their outline to make sure that they had not forgotten any parts. In most cases, the outline was used as a guide and as a way of thinking about the organisation and content of the practicum report.

(j) Writing the First, Second and Final Drafts

The course participants started their first drafts with 'Chapter I: Introduction'. Some of them wrote in pencil and left space so that they had room to make changes as they went along. Then they showed their draft to their respective supervisors and asked what parts he or she liked best and what parts needed to be changed. All problem areas were discussed thoroughly with the supervisor to decide how to rewrite them. The participants concentrated primarily on ideas and made sure they were expressed clearly.
In their second drafts, they made the revisions suggested in the first drafts. Here too, they concentrated on stating their ideas clearly. Then they showed their second drafts to their supervisors. When the meaning was clear, they checked over grammar, punctuation and spelling with their supervisors who read their second drafts.

When everything was rewritten or revised, they started to type their final drafts in double space. They then submitted their final drafts to the course coordinator for ultimate evaluation.

(k) The Strategies used by TESL Course Participants for Information Use

Choosing and exploring a topic were not too difficult for TESL participants as they were exposed to a wide range of topics through their teacher training days as well as their experience as ELT teachers. The good participants were explanatory about their topic. Although some had teething problems in narrowing the topic at the initial stages, they were able to grapple with them by reading more into their topic and by listening to the advice of their supervisors and the researcher.

Once the topic had been narrowed down, it was relatively easy for the participants to develop the topic by formulating research questions and doing library research. The good participants were systematic in their note-taking skills, using index cards to record information from books. The proficient participants were able to paraphrase accurately and quote where necessary.
As regards interviewing, the weaker ones sought the help of their supervisors in devising relevant questions for interviewing. They also needed help in making an outline and writing their drafts. Their main problem in writing drafts were grammar and fluency. With constant consultations with supervisors, the researcher and course coordinator, the participants were able to allay their anxiety regarding writing drafts.

(1) The Strategies used by Non-TESL Course Participants for Information Use

Unlike the TESL course participants, the Non-TESL participants faced several problems in choosing a suitable topic. Some had long sessions with their supervisors regarding their topic. Even brainstorming at the initial stages were initiated by their supervisors. They also needed help in narrowing the topic to a particular theme.

Once they had fine-tuned their topic, they were able to cope with library research and develop their topic further. As in the case of the TESL participants, the Non-TESL participants were quite adept at taking down notes and quoting directly. Paraphrasing, however, was a chore for them, as they lacked fluency and proficiency in writing. Most of them sought the help of their supervisors, where grammatical accuracy was concerned. Only one participant was able to make an outline of her research. The rest needed help in not only outlining but also writing out the first, second and final drafts. Some had to restructure their whole research so as to follow a logical sequence.
5.2.6 Did the participants apply their knowledge of information sourcing and note-taking techniques such as direct quotation, paraphrase, summary and evaluation effectively in their practicum reports? To what extent?

Of the five topics stipulated in the syllabus for the component on information skills, namely "Selecting the theme and defining the topic; Locating and retrieving information on the topic; Sources outside the library; Recording information and Organising information for the report", practically all the areas of information skills were well applied in the practicum reports.

Most of the course participants (TESL and Non-TESL) did not face any difficulty in selecting the theme and defining the topic for developing information skills. They also located and retrieved information on a topic easily through library research. This was revealed in their use of relevant direct quotations in their practicum reports. Besides sources in the library, they hardly used sources of information outside the library purely because of time and financial constraints. The only other source of information they resorted to outside the library was interviews, which they conducted effectively in the schools they were emplaced.

On the whole, all the course participants had selected the theme and defined the practicum topic accurately. They were able to locate and retrieve information on the practicum topic and had organised the information gathered for their report efficiently.

However, the C and D graders were not very good in gleaning information from outside the library and their recording of information needed improvement. They were still
not very confident in evaluating the currency, accuracy and authority of source. They had difficulty in distinguishing between fact and opinion, relevant and irrelevant information, essential and non-essential information. They were also not very adept at note-taking skills. They could not identify main points and supporting details, cause and effect relationships, make comparisons and sequence. They also faced difficulty in classifying information under relevant headings and recording relevant information in linear and non-linear forms. There were also teething problems in their citation skills.

The difficulties faced by C and D graders in applying their knowledge of information skills effectively were however, non-existent amongst the A and B graders. The A and B graders had manifested their skills in note-taking effectively. They were able to express the main points of their topic easily. They were able to relate the main points to one another. Some creative participants were able to display their points in the form of a flow-chart or a mind map. The more systematic participants described their observations of teaching procedures in an organised manner. Their description of all chapters were orderly, clear, accurate and complete. All references and notes from books, lectures, observations and interviews were paraphrased or quoted directly. Some of the information had been summarised.

When the participants were writing their drafts, their main concern was to get all their ideas down on paper. They were advised not to be too meticulous about spelling, grammar or style of writing at first, but to allow their ideas to flow freely. When their drafts were ready, they were encouraged to leave plenty of space between the lines for
correction and comments. Once their first and second drafts had been corrected, the participants checked that the meaning of the reports was clear. Here too there was an interest in details - grammatical mistakes, spelling and punctuation errors.

Besides their concern for language errors, there was also a concern for accurate portrayal of main ideas and subsidiary ideas in the practicum reports. A random survey of any of the practicum reports of A and B graders revealed that the course participants had organised their main ideas about the topic in a systematic order. They had shown how their main ideas were related or reflected the organisation of the practicum report. They had used words and short phrases to summarise ideas. They wrote in their own words and were highly selective about information which were relevant and essential. They made outlines to separate main ideas and details. If they had portrayed their main ideas and details in the form of a mind map, they indented the lesser important ideas in such a way that they appeared closer to the centre of the passage.

On the whole, the A and B graders had revealed their dexterity at note-taking and had portrayed the facts and figures of the practicum report in an effective manner in accordance with the general framework given.

5.2.6.1 Application of Information Skills by TESL Course Participants

The TESL course participants had no problems in selecting the theme of their practicum topic. Owing to their experience in teaching English, they were able to focus on a particular topic to work on.
However, there was one D grader amongst the TESL participants. He chose a topic initially which was too broad-based encompassing a whole gamut of skills and concepts. With advice from his supervisor, he was able to work on a single theme. The participants admitted that selecting a theme was not a chore but to sit down and define their chosen theme proved to be an onerous task for most of them. Most of them were vague and ambiguous in their definition of their theme at first. Their first encounter with their supervisor brought tremendous changes to their views regarding their topic. They brainstormed and produced a well-defined topic which was more focused and lucid.

The third information skill, that is, "Locating and Retrieving Information on a Topic" was handled with relative ease. This was not surprising as they had adequate practice in class. As regards organising information for their report, the good participants were able to handle the situation but the weaker ones sought the help of their supervisors especially in outlining and writing of drafts.

5.2.6.2 Application of Information Skills by Non-TESL Course Participants

The Non-TESL participants too, did not face any problems in selecting a theme. As in the case of TESL participants, the Non-TESL participants too encountered teething problems in defining their topic. At the initial stages their topics were not focused, too broad-based and ill-defined. Their first encounter with their supervisor changed all that and they were able to focus their discussion on a particular theme.
They also did not encounter any problems in locating and retrieving information on a topic as they had sufficient exposure during lecture hours and practice sessions. They however had some problems initially in retrieving information outside the library, purely due to financial constraints. They mentioned about these constraints in their journals. Only one participant availed herself to sources outside the college library such as the Internet.

The Non-TESL participants were quite good at note-taking but were not too careful about the organisation of their notes. With help from supervisors, they were able to reorder their notes to form a coherent whole. Their first drafts were splattered with myriad grammatical errors and erroneous sentence patterns. This was especially so amongst the 'B', 'C' and 'D' graders. Their supervisors had the laborious task of correcting them and in some cases, the participants had to rewrite the whole thing to make the meaning clearer.

5.2.7 Did the participants use their knowledge of information skills to write their reports cohesively and coherently?

The majority of the course participants were familiar with the norms of paragraph writing and sequencing. They were able to combine structures to form an acceptable sequence in writing by using appropriate cohesive devices. This skill in writing cohesively was acquired through lectures and practice exercises on writing done by the writing lecturer and this was manifested in their practicum reports. They had further exposure and practice through their information skills lectures.

In the practicum reports, the course participants had organised the information regarding their selected topic into paragraphs and this helped to develop the whole text.
Paragraph writing consciously developed participants' understanding of how ideas could be developed to create a coherent piece of writing.

The good writers showed a clear paragraph plan, each paragraph with a topic sentence leading to support sentences which developed the topic. Paragraphing for some writers is an uncertain activity, especially where complex information is carefully developed throughout a longer text. Trimble (1985) made the distinction between the conceptual paragraph and the physical paragraph. By conceptual paragraph, he meant all the information presented by the writer to develop a particular point, idea, or generalisation. However, the conceptual paragraph may be realised in several physical paragraphs.

Cohesive devices linked parts of a text as logically related sequences. They signalled the relationship between ideas in such a way that the writer's intentions were made clear. In the practicum reports, cohesive devices portrayed the meaning which the writer was trying to communicate and it helped the reader to anticipate what was coming next. Some examples of cohesive devices are pronouns, articles, conjunctions, demonstratives, prepositional phrases, synonyms and repetition of key words. Given below is a paragraph taken from the practicum report of a TESL 'A' grader.

It is important for a child to master the basic foundation of the four major language skills. In order to do so however, a teacher must cater to the varying levels of proficiency among the pupils. She should control the level of difficulty of materials and activities in the classroom. Materials and exercises used in the classroom must be suitable for pupils. They must not be too wordy and the ideas dealt with should not be beyond the level of comprehension of pupils.
Besides, the materials should be interesting and motivating.

In the paragraph above, there is a logical link of ideas and this is made possible through the effective use of cohesive devices such as pronouns 'It', 'She' and 'They' and adverbs of contrast like 'Besides'.

It was clear that successful writing required the skills of organising sentences into paragraphs, using linguistic cohesive devices, punctuating meaningfully, selecting appropriate vocabulary and organising ideas into a coherent piece of discourse. Course participants who were not confident in writing, had problems in many of these areas. Some of the problems were clearly to do with unfamiliarity of the language itself, in particular the uncertainty with grammatical structures. Other problems were related to unclear cohesive ties.

Other problems in writing proved less severe to the researcher but equally confusing. Some participants used appropriate cohesive devices in terms of meaning but they did not realise their syntactic constraints and placed them wrongly, used incorrect punctuation or over-used them.

Paraphrasing was another potential problem area. Sometimes a participant's work consisted of long strings of sentences with no 'natural breaks', so that it was difficult to see the relationship between main and supporting details or to anticipate changes in topic.
Another hazard of writing amongst Non-TESL course participants, was the transfer from the first language, that is, Bahasa Melayu or Chinese language or Tamil language. There was a tendency to produce long rambling and poorly structured sentences. This problem occurred when the ideas they were trying to express were complex. What they should have done was to break down a complex idea into a series of simple affirmative statements in English which represented the facets of its meaning and then to rebuild these into complex or compound sentences which responded to the rules of combination and modification in English as they knew them.

There was also the problem of words. Some participants needed a good deal of help in developing a range of vocabulary and the ability to use it effectively. Once ideas had been generated for writing, the selection of appropriate words to communicate precise meanings to create an effect and to develop a theme was very important.

5.2.7.1 The Study of Cohesion and Coherence in the Practicum Reports of TESL Participants

Paragraph writing was not a problem amongst TESL participants. They were able to combine sentences with appropriate cohesive devices.

There was only one 'D' grader amongst the TESL course participants. He manifested several problems in his paraphrasing skills. He made an attempt to find the appropriate words to express his meaning. This resulted in him copying bits and pieces from the original text and thus producing a beautiful quilt of plagiarised ideas.
5.2.7.2 The Study of Cohesion and Coherence in the Practicum Reports of Non-TESL Participants

Non-TESL course participants were able to cope with paragraph writing reasonably well. Some of them were able to select the correct cohesive devices but were not able to place them correctly in sentences. In addition, their punctuation marks were used wrongly in some cases.

Paraphrasing was their biggest problem. Some of them selected wrong words and phrases to express the original text thus leading to erroneous meaning. As it was mentioned earlier, there were evidence of interlanguage problems in their reports. Some of them literally translated the original text into their mother tongue before writing it out in English. This led to long and poorly structured sentences.

One of the biggest hurdles in the path to writing excellence amongst Non-TESL participants was the lack of adequate and appropriate vocabulary. They were hampered by limited vocabulary. When they paraphrased, they often selected words and phrases which were not appropriate in meaning, thus affecting the meaning of what they were trying to say. In conclusion, the selection of relevant words was necessary to communicate precise meanings and to develop the theme of the practicum report.

5.2.8 Did the participants find the information skills component useful?

All the course participants were of the consensus that information skills was a useful course and they suggested that the number of contact hours be increased in future.
The five topics of information skills were used at different stages of the writing process of the practicum reports. For example, the first and second topics, that is, 'Selecting the theme and defining the topic for practicum report' and 'Locating and retrieving information on the topic' were pertinent areas for Chapter I which was the introductory chapter. The third topic 'Sources outside the library/resource centre' was pertinent for conducting interviews in schools as well as classroom observations. The fourth topic 'Recording information' was salient for all chapters. Finally, the last topic 'Organising information for report' was crucial especially for Chapter III where the course participants had to display major and ancillary findings in graphic form.

5.3 Recommendations

5.3.1 Recommendations to the Teacher Training Division, Ministry of Education, Malaysia

As the overall findings of this research were encouraging, information skills should be incorporated in all in-service training programmes. The Teacher Training Division of the Malaysian Education Ministry, should make a concerted effort to revive this 14-week English Language Immersion Course in Teacher Training Colleges. With the revival of this programme, more teachers from rural schools could have access to information skills. This would only serve to make them better writers.

In addition, there has been constant requests from participants for extended hours for information skills as the present four hours per week were not sufficient to meet the
demands of the whole course. Some wanted more hours for information skills simply because the course was interesting and useful. Besides that, information skills also taught them how to write a research paper. For the first time in their lives, primary school teachers were writing an academic paper. This was a great achievement for them.

5.3.2 Recommendations to Lecturers of the 14-Week English Language Immersion Course in Teacher Training Colleges in Malaysia

One of the common language problems faced by most course participants was the lack of adequate vocabulary to express themselves. In order to help course participants develop a range of vocabulary, lecturers must pre-teach a good deal of vocabulary during the pre-writing stage. As participants try to express their ideas in English, the lecturer can provide the necessary language. There was also room for including vocabulary building activities in the stages of planning, writing and rewriting, such as working with collocations or denoting attitude by using positive and negative adjectives.

Another area that needed attention was reading. As reading was a pre-requisite for good writing, all course participants should be encouraged to read extensively in English to develop a good writing style. To inculcate this habit of reading, reading syndicates should be organised by lecturers for the benefit of course participants.

Where writing in the classroom was concerned, controlled writing tasks which focus on one or more aspects of written discourse should be balanced by freer writing activities, even from the early stages. Writing in different cultures may differ in important
ways, not least in the logical development of ideas. The implication of this was that course participants had to acquire an awareness of patterns of discourse in English. Furthermore to develop coherent and cohesive writing amongst course participants, lecturers must offer them practice at the text level, that is, to encourage the writing of whole texts.

5.3.3 Recommendations to Course Participants of the 14-Week English Language Immersion Course

Besides improving the writing proficiency of course participants, they should also be encouraged to teach information skills in primary schools. With the advent of information technology, there is an increasing pressure on primary school teachers to facilitate pupils in their learning process. A knowledge of information skills would be most useful for primary school children as it would help them to access and process information through multimedia easily. In fact this mirror effect was an important element of the information skills course. The course ended with group discussion of the KBSR syllabus (Primary School Syllabus). They identified areas which can be exploited for developing information skills. They were advised to select information strategies appropriate for the task in the primary classroom.

5.3.4 Recommendations to Heads of Primary Schools

If this course filtered into the KBSR classroom, then the heads of schools should be supportive and order new books for the library. More activities and workcards should be designed around information skills in order to make it a success in primary schools.
5.3.5 Recommendations to Librarians of Teacher Training Colleges in Malaysia

As the library was the main source of information for academic writing, it is essential that it was managed well. One of the complaints regarding the location of materials in the library was the poor management of the college library. Efforts should be made by the Chief Library Officer to employ enough personnel to clean the library and rearrange books according to their call numbers. There should be more staff manning the place.

With the infiltration of information technology in the academic lives of students, computers will definitely play an important role in academic writing. Hence it is essential that colleges install computers in all college libraries so that facilities such as Internet and information search is easily accessible and within the reach of all course participants.

5.4 Implications for Further Research

What was attempted in this research was a study of information skills in academic writing in a small sample. A more indepth study on information skills could be done. Perhaps, this research could be taken a step further and a more detailed study of the text structure could be attempted. This research should lead to text analysis or genre analysis of academic reports.