CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Introduction

Out of the four language skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing), writing is regarded as the most important skill as it could reflect the level of one's language proficiency (Sabariah Md. Rashid & Chan, 2008). Hence, writing test is often carried out to measure one's language ability. Nonetheless, Naginder Kaur, Nor Hayati Othman, et al. (2008) revealed that writing is also known the most difficult skill to acquire. Most Malaysian students, such as the upper secondary students (16 - 17 years old) with lower level of English proficiency face difficulties in terms of writing. One of the main factors is due to the change of assessment format in the writing component from the Lower Secondary Assessment (Penilaian Menengah Rendah) level to Malaysian Certificate of Examination (Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia) level. As there are studies which show that pre-writing helps to improve students' written work (Smalley, Ruetten, & Kozyrev, 2001; Witte, 1987; Worden, 2009), this study will look at the impact of pre-writing in timed-essays.

The upper secondary students need to sit for two English papers (1119/1 & 1119/2) in the Malaysian Certificate of Examination (Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia). Writing skill is tested in Paper 1 (1119/1) which only consists of two sections. Section A is 'Directed Writing' whereby the students are required to write according to the points and content given. In Section B, 'Continuous Writing' students have to write a free composition based on the topic they have chosen. There are a variety of topics for the

examinees to choose from, mainly the narrative, descriptive, factual, argumentative and reflective type essays. However, many students with low level of proficiency in English have difficulties attempting this writing task, hence most of them obtain poor results in the writing test. The 1119 paper will be explained in detail in the background of this study.

1.2   Background of the Study

Koo (2010) explained that the level of English proficiency among Malaysian students have deteriorated over the past 30 years since Bahasa Malaysia was implemented as the language of instruction in school. Nevertheless, the English grades obtained in the public examinations, such as the Malaysian Certificate of Examination (Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia) and the Malaysian University Entrance Test (MUET) are important as these grades are used as one of the basic requirements to gain acceptance into programmes of higher learning institution.   Therefore, teachers and parents exert a lot of emphasis on students to do well in the examination. The English paper in both public examinations places high emphasis on writing and reading skills. Reading skills are tested based on students' comprehension and to identify the answers based on the contextual clues given in the comprehension questions. However, when students with low English proficiency are expected to produce a piece of writing on their own, they are unable to perform well.

In Malaysia, Form Five students (17 - 18 years old) in secondary schools need to sit for a public examination known as the Malaysian Certificate of Education (Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia) and English (1119) is one of the compulsory subjects. The 1119

English Paper consists of two sub-papers, Paper 1 and Paper 2. The allocation of marks is shown in the table below:

Table 1.1: English 1119 Paper

1119	Sections	Marks
Paper 1 (85 marks)	A. Directed Writing	35
	B. Continuous Writing	50
Paper 2 (75 marks)	A. Multiple Choice Questions	15
	B. Information Transfer	10
	C. Reading Comprehension and Summary	25
	D. Literature	25

From Table 1.1 above, Paper 1 carries 85 marks and consists of two sections. Paper 2, on the other hand, which consists of four sections, carries a total of 75 marks. This research will focus on Continuous Writing in Paper 1, which carries the highest score (50 marks) compared to the other sections in the 1119 paper. For this section, examinees will be given a variety of topics to choose from, such as narrative, descriptive, factual, argumentative and reflective. They are required to choose one out of the five topics given and write a free essay in not less than 350 words. They are advised to spend about an hour to complete their work.

Nevertheless, this section is scored poorly by many of the students, specifically those from the rural areas due to their low level of English proficiency. Even though English is considered as a second language in Malaysia, Fauziah Hassan, and Nita Fauzee Selamat, (2002) cited from Norrizan (1992) who explained that due to multiracial background of this country, students come from various communities and those who live in rural or remote areas often converse in their mother tongue. As English is not used in these areas, the students are only exposed to English in the classroom. Hence, most of them do not see the importance of English and consider it as a foreign language (Fauziah Hassan, & Nita Fauzee Selamat, 2002). With the teacher's

guidance, a few students may participate in class discussion, however, they are unable to generate ideas on their own, especially during exams. Students' lack of ideas which causes poor writing performance in timed-writing (Kho, 2006) has led to problems which include students who produce essays with short length, excess repetition of ideas, poor arrangement of ideas and abrupt endings.

1.3   Statement of Problem

As students progress in learning, they tend to have to do more writing tasks. However, when the requirement of writing task becomes increasingly difficult, some students' are unable to cope due to their low level of English proficiency. The writing component for English paper in PMR requires the Form Three students (15 - 16 years old) to write a minimum of 120 words, with notes provided to guide them. When these students are in Form Four, the written task becomes more challenging. They are required to write an essay with a minimum of 350 words without any notes given. Thus, it is understandable that many upper secondary students are overwhelmed, especially those who are weak in the English subject. Sharifah Nor Puteh, Rashidah Rahamat, & Aidah Abdul Karim (2010) explained that it is common for these students to experience 'writers' block' or lack of ideas when they are expected to compose by themselves without any guidance from the teachers. While some students would attempt the task, others just give up completely. Du (2009) mentioned that the less proficient students' lack of confidence coupled with language anxiety, would lead to poor performance in writing examination.

According to Koo (2010), many students seem to lack confidence when they need to work individually during timed-writing. Without the teacher's guidance and

peer discussion, most students face problems in generating and expressing their own ideas within the limited time given. One of the problems that can be seen in the students' timed essays is their lack of ideas (Sharifah Nor Puteh, et al., 2010). For students with low level of English proficiency, their essay length tends to be problematic. When students are expected to write at least 350 words, some would submit blank paper or write less than 100 or 50 words, which would affect their writing scores. As for intermediate level of proficiency students who are supposed to be able to write longer essay length, yet they do so by repeating the same ideas. Hence, their essays are dull for the examiners.

When these students write longer essays, it might lead to other problems such as the lack of organisation, paragraph and cohesion in their essays. Some students do not arrange their ideas into separate paragraphs, therefore they would end up writing one whole page in one or two paragraphs. Another problem would be the lack of cohesion, this could be due to the reason that students write and often stop for planning in order to generate more ideas. The organisation of ideas is not cohesive and sometimes it could cause abrupt ending especially when they are not able to complete the task within the timeframe given.

In view of these problems, this study hopes to investigate a method to encourage students to produce their own ideas and organise those ideas appropriately during timed-writing. This study is significant as it looks at students' problems in narrative writing and attempts to look at how pre-write would impact their writing.

1.4   Significance

Sabariah Md. Rashid & Chan (2008) mentioned that out of the four language skills, writing is the most important yet the most difficult skill to learn; hence this skill is often used to test one's language ability. Students who have poor writing ability often could not perform well in the English paper as the writing component carries a significant amount of weight. Writing skill is tested in Paper 1 (Refer to Table 1.1, Pg 3) and the two sections in Paper 1 carry a total of 80 marks. Paper 2, on the other hand, mainly test on the students' reading skill, though there are a total of four sections, the total marks for Paper 2 is less than Paper 1, that is 75 marks. Hence, Paper 1 is a reliable indicator of whether one would obtain a higher or lower grade for the English paper.

In the attempt to aid lower proficiency students gain better scores in writing, this study will focus on narrative writing, as research has shown that this mode of discourse is easier (Sabariah Md. Rashid & Chan, 2008). Another reason is because students have more experience in narrative writing. By looking at the school syllabus, as stated in the Malaysian Secondary School English Curriculum (KBSM), it shows that the main paradigm for the teaching of writing for the first four years of secondary level focuses on narrative and descriptive mode of discourse. Hence, students would gain advantage if they choose a narrative writing topic as their prior writing experience would help them to perform better.

Besides selecting the suitable mode of discourse, writers with low level of English proficiency could benefit from pre-writing as well. Past studies have shown that there is a correlation between pre-writing and writing performance (Kellogg, 1990;

Plakans, 2008; Victori, 1999; Worden, 2009). A study conducted by Victori (1999) revealed that skilled writers plan more extensively before they compose, while less skilled writers would plan as they compose and often stop to plan during the writing stage. Worden (2009) explained that writers that practice pre-writing tend to compose more fluently during the writing stage which leads to better writing performance and higher writing scores. He also added that, teachers should coach the students towards pre-writing, in order for them to succeed in timed writing exams (Worden, 2009).

The findings of this study could aid educators plan their teaching of narrative essays in producing creative and independent students. The use of plot as a pre-writing strategy can be a useful approach in writing classes when exposing students to narrative writing for instance.

1.5   Pre-Writing Strategy for Narrative Essay

Pre-writing refers to the first stage of the writing processes while the following two stages involve drafting and revising. Pre-writing is also known as planning, as one will spend some time to plan before attempting to produce a piece of writing. According to Smalley et al. (2001) there are a few strategies to help writers generate ideas. For example, brainstorming helps students to associate ideas and stimulate thinking whereas freewriting allows writers to free the mind in making associations and connections, hence writing whatever comes to mind without thinking of the suitability of the ideas written. The Wh-Questions strategy is quite popular as well. It uses questions such as, 'who', 'what', 'when', 'where', 'why' and 'how', which enable one to see the topic from different perspectives. Clustering is another strategy which helps one to think creatively and make new associations by doing mind-map. After writers

generate ideas on the topic, they would need to organise and develop their ideas effectively in their written work. Previous studies have also shown that pre-writing does help students' to write better during the examination, which leads to more distinction and more passing essays (Witte, 1987; Worden, 2009).

In the English examination, students are given a variety of topics to choose from. As cited by Sabariah Md. Rashid & Chan (2008), the four major mode of written discourse classified by Bain (1867) are narration, description, argumentation/persuasion and expository and this study aims to examine the use of plot as pre-writing in students' narration. Narrative writing basically tells a story or experience that could be in both past narration or present narration.

One way to attempt to use pre-writing for narrative essays is by using plot. Plot refers to the structure of a five-act tragedy, shown in the form of triangle or pyramid. The plot diagram was postulated by the German critic and novelist Gustav Freytag (1816-1895) in his book *Die Technik des Dramas* (1863). He claimed that a play should have five components consisting of 1. exposition (introduction), 2. complication (rising action), 3. climax, 4. falling action and 5. catastrophe (resolution). The plot diagram is widely used to show the structure in dramas and also stories. It is also one of the main literature components used in schools to explain the main events that take place in a short stories or novels read. However, this study intends to examine the use of plot during pre-stage of narrative writing.

1.6   Objective of the Study

As narrative writing tells a story, students are expected incorporate the basic components of a story in their writing, such as characters, place, time, and events (Yap, 2008) and plot plays an important role in developing the story from beginning, rising action, climax, falling action and ending in an organised manner. This research intends to examine the use of plot in pre-writing strategy, and its effects in terms of generating and organising ideas.

For both groups of subjects comprising low and intermediate level of English proficiency, the study plans to answer the following research questions:

i.   In terms of scores obtained, how does plot as a pre-writing strategy improve their narrative writing?

ii.   In terms of essay length, how does plot as a pre-writing strategy improve their narrative writing?

iii.   In terms of writing dimensions, how does plot as a pre-writing strategy improve the content and organisation of their narrative writing?

iv.   How does the students' awareness of the use of plot as pre-writing strategy lead to the improvement in writing in terms of essay length, content and organisation?

As this is a small scale study which only looks into a few areas, there are bound to be some limitations to the findings of this research.

1.7   Scope and Limitation

This study may not be applicable to all secondary schools in Malaysia as this study only involves 40 students. Hence, this would pose a problem as the findings could not be used to generalise the student population in general. As there are only four female participants involved in this study, the findings could not be used to study issues concerned with gender. Moreover, the school selected is a rural school. Therefore, findings might vary if the study is conducted in an urban school.

In the SPM continuous writing section, students are given five modes of discourse to choose from which include descriptive, factual, argumentative, reflective and narrative. However, this study only focuses on the narrative mode.

Another limitation to this study is that the writing assessment for SPM level examines a few writing dimensions of the students' use of English which include grammar, vocabulary, spelling, content, organisation, punctuation, essay length and so on. Even though grammar is one of the important aspects in writing, however, for the purpose of this study, grammar is not part of the focus and the findings will only discuss the overall length, content and organisation of the essays written.

1.8   Conclusion

In general, this study aims to look at the impact of pre-writing in timed writing. It is hoped that by raising students' awareness towards the use of plot as pre-writing strategy in narrative essays, it would lead to better writing skills and writing scores among students. The following chapter will discuss the review of literature which will substantiate the theoretical foundation of this study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   Introduction

Writing is one of the major skills tested in language examinations because it is regarded as a very important skill in determining one's language ability (Sabariah Md. Rashid & Chan,2008). Leong (2000) stated that though English is widely used as a second language in Malaysia, many secondary school students face difficulties when it comes to writing. The Ministry of Education has identified writing as the main reason examinees failed to obtain a higher grade in the public examination (Ilyana Jalaluddin, Melor Md Yunus, & Hamidah Yamat, 2011).   Hence, this study attempts to investigate the use of a pre-writing strategy in facilitating students' timed-writing.

This chapter is divided into five main sections which cover a few issues related to writing. The first section highlights the issues of second language writing. The second section looks at the mode of discourse in essay writing and how different modes can impact learners' performance in assessment and the third section touches on the different stages and theories of writing processes. The fourth section focuses on the different types of pre-writing for various modes of discourse and its effects in writing. The final section looks at the use of plot as a pre-writing strategy for the narrative mode of discourse and the history of plot.

2.2 Second Language Writing

According to Fauziah Hassan and Nita Fauzee Selamat (2002), it is important for second language (L2) students to use the target language in the real world in order to enhance their interest and motivation to learn the language. Arshad Abd Samad, and Hawanum Hussein (2010) stated that even though English is widely used in Malaysia as a second language, many are not exposed this second language environment, specifically those who live in rural or remote areas, thus learning English is a difficult task for them as they have limited opportunity to use the language. Norrizan (1992) quoted by Fauziah Hassan and Nita Fauzee Selamat (2002) explained this problem from the sociolinguistics perspective since Malaysia setting consists of various races and social backgrounds. Besides the national language, Bahasa Melayu, each ethnic group has its own language which is mostly used in their daily lives. For students from the rural or remote areas, English is only used in the classroom and is often treated like a foreign language.

Fauziah Hassan and Nita Fauzee Selamat (2002) stated other reasons that could lead to poor English performance may be due to inexperience teachers, negative attitude towards the language and certain language skills that are not given equal emphasis. According to Sharifah Nor Puteh, Rashidah Rahamat and Aidah Abdul Karim. (2010), the natural order in second language learning begins with listening, followed by speaking, reading and lastly, writing skill. Several researches noted that writing is considered the most difficult skill to master as it is the advanced stage of language development that involves a complex process (Sabariah Md. Rashid & Chan, 2008; Sharifah Nor Puteh, Rashidah Rahamat, & Aidah Abdul Karim, 2010).

In terms of theories related to writing, Ilyana Jalaluddin, Melor Md Yunus, and Hamidah Yamat (2011) looked at the socio-cultural theory by Vygotsky, which focused on four principles of writing. Firstly, language learners need to be active participants who would seek help to improve themselves and become capable writers. Secondly, social context is important in one's learning experience and writing development. Thirdly, teachers play an important role as facilitators and provide proper guidance throughout the learner's writing process. Finally, writing helps to enhance mental development as the more they write, the more vocabularies they would learn. Besides that, Connor and Mbaye (2002) as cited in Haan and Esch (2005), adapted the communicative competence model for writing and managed to identify four types of writing competences. These competences are: 1) grammatical competence, whereby one needs to be aware of grammar, vocabulary, spelling and punctuation. 2) Discourse competence refers to the structure, cohesion and coherence of the text. 3) Sociolinguistic competence, on the other hand, stresses on the correct genre, register and style in writing. Lastly, 4) the strategic competence which addresses the readers in an appropriate manner. The complexities of writing goes to show that it is a difficult skill to acquire, hence learning writing is also the most dreaded among the other skills (listening, speaking and reading) in English (Halimatus Sa'diyah, 2011).

This situation worsens when it comes to L2 writing, as an emerging field there is still lack of research which addresses the L2 learners' need and problems (Chan & Ain Nadzimah Abdullah, 2004). The difficulties faced by these L2 writers may vary since the sentence structure, the way ideas are presented or how audience is addressed are deemed as different and relates to L1 linguistic features and cultural background (Committee, 2001). Silva (1993) made a comparison between L1 and L2 writers and it was found that L2 writers spend less time in planning, therefore they have problems

with generating ideas and this lack of ideas often interrupt their own writing process. The language used is also less fluent and less accurate as compared to L1 writers (Haan & Esch, 2005).

The Malaysian students face similar issues and this has raised the concern of the Ministry of Education as schools in the rural areas are performing poorly in English subject. The ministry had identified writing as the main problem which lead to the poor results in the public examination as most of them failed the writing task which is the task accorded with the highest marks (Ilyana Jalaluddin, Melor Md Yunus, & Hamidah Yamat, 2011). Fauziah Hassan and Nita Fauzee Selamat (2002) had identified the internal and external factors which cause the poor writing performance. The external factor refers to the lack of exposure to English outside the classroom, while the internal factors are the negative attitude and the lack of confidence in using the language. Hence, Victori (1999) explained that it is common that many low achievers dreaded when it comes to writing examination.

MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) explained that it is common for students to have language anxiety whenever they are put in a situation which requires them to use the second language that they are not very proficient in, due to their 'lack of confidence, fear of failure, and other negative thought processes'. When these learners experience high amount of stress during an examination, it could also lead to poor performance. They further added that learners' self-perception of themselves is important as it can have a direct impact on their behaviour. They also added that by providing learners with positive learning experience, it could boost their confidence in the use of second language, which will later be reflected in their performance in the examination (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). In order to help low achievers change their self-

perception and lessen their writing anxiety, the type of essays given in class or during the examination plays an important role. The following section will discuss about the different types of writing compositions, or better known as, modes of discourse and the effects it has on the learners' writing performance.

2.3   Mode of Discourse

Based on Bain's classification (1867), the four major modes are narration, description, argumentation/persuasion and exposition. Each mode has its different organisational pattern and sometimes requires the writer to employ different writing styles (Sabariah Md. Rashid & Chan, 2008). In the English paper of the Malaysia secondary school public examination, Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM), one of the tasks given is free-writing which is also known as continuous writing. Examinees are allowed to choose one out of five topics given ranging from descriptive, factual, argumentative, reflective and narrative compositions.

Past studies indicated that writers need to employ different schemas when composing different mode of discourse (Kegley, 1987; Koh, 2004; S. C. Leong, 2000; Sabariah Md. Rashid & Chan, 2008). According to Leong (2000) and Koh (2004), descriptive mode requires writer to have the ability to describe things in detail in order for the reader to see, smell, hear, taste, touch, or feel exactly what the writer has described. Koh (2004), Lee (1996) and Leong (2000) also added that learners need to have good lexical competence to write interesting detail, use effective expressions or figurative language such as similes and metaphors when they describe things like people, places, events, or experience. When it comes to factual mode, learners should make sure that they have ample knowledge regarding the topic as subordinate ideas

should be included together with sufficient examples when each point is elaborated (Helena, Pushpa Raghavan, & Siva Prasanna Krishnan, 2004). While attempting argumentative mode, writers need to interpret the topic properly and take a clear stand regarding the issue concerned. Writers have to employ different levels of cognitive thinking skill as they need to provide facts and classify those facts accordingly. A convincing argument requires writers to think carefully and deeply about the issues in order to persuade the reader to believe their argument. Hence, according to Koh (2004), students are advised to avoid argumentative mode topics which they have little knowledge about.

In contrast to factual and argumentative mode, Koh (2004) stated that the reflective mode does not need writers to have any specialised knowledge as this type of topic involves ordinary happenings in daily life, such as food, shopping, clothes and so on. Therefore, it gives the impression that reflective mode is the easiest, however, only a handful of students could write a good piece of reflective essay. Leong (2000) added that writers need to be creative as the writing ideas and approach should be fresh and witty. Hence, students who are not proficient in English, could not think well under pressure, or not very creative are advised not to attempt the reflective mode essay (S. C. Leong, 2000). For the narrative mode, writers need to tell a story based on the topic given. In order to compose a good narrative essay, one should be aware of the basic structure of a story which consist of beginning, middle and ending (S. C. Leong, 2000). Although students are given the freedom to select one from the five topics given when they sit for the English paper in Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM), several studies discovered that the level of difficulty in attempting these modes varies, and one tends of be more challenging than the other and this could affect the learners' performance (Kegley, 1987; Sabariah Md. Rashid & Chan, 2008).

Past studies were carried out to investigate the learners' scores when attempting different modes of discourse and the results concluded that narrative is found to be the least difficult task among the mode of discourse, hence those who attempted narratives tend to score better (Kegley, 1987; Koh, 2004; Manchón, Larios, & Murphy, 2000; Sabariah Md. Rashid & Chan, 2008). As cited by Kellogg (2001), Mancuso (1986) and Howard (1991) explained that most writers are familiar with the narrative schemas compared to the other modes (argumentative, exposition, descriptive) as they are exposed to it since childhood through storytelling. Therefore when the students attempt timed-writing, they could retrieve the narrative schemas from their long term memory easily as compared to the other modes of discourse.

A study was carried out by Kegley (1987) to evaluate the students writing competency across four modes of discourse in determining whether their writing performances vary when they attempted different modes of discourse. The sample involved 457 seventh-grade students that were selected from three middle schools. Each participant was randomly assigned a writing task in one out of four modes of discourse and they were evaluated based on a 0 - 4 score scale. Those who gained 0 - 2 were considered inadequate writers while 3 - 4 are categorised as adequate writers. The findings revealed that students' writing competency partly depends on the mode of discourse. As a whole, 56% of the students were considered as adequate writers in narration, 43% in description, 41% in exposition and 31% in persuasion (Kegley, 1987). This showed that most students were able to gain higher scores in narration as compared to the other three modes of discourse.

Another study was carried out in a Malaysian context by Sabariah Md. Rashid & Chan (2008), comparing the learner's writing performance between narrative and

argumentative compositions. The sample involved 384 Lower Six secondary students with intermediate to advanced proficiency levels from six secondary schools. The results concluded that participants of both proficiency levels tend to perform better in narrative composition than argumentative. It was found that they were able to write longer essays and gained better writing scores when they were given a narrative task. Narrative does not involve as complex discussion or ideas as compared to argumentative writing since it only requires the writer to describe a series of events (Koh, 2004; Sabariah Md. Rashid & Chan, 2008).

According to Koh (2004) in *Master Studi Sasbadi SPM English 1119*, among the problems that students commonly faced when writing argumentative, factual, or descriptive include lack of ideas, vocabulary, and knowledge on the subject matter. Moreover, some students sometimes misunderstood the question entirely and this often happens in examinations (S. C. Leong, 2000). Narrative, on the contrary, is more straightforward and does not involve complex discussion of factual ideas (Koh, 2004). Ishikawa (1995) who looked at the narrative writing of low proficiency EFL (English as a foreign language) students, explained that learners improved significantly when they focus on discourse level, such as narration, rather than word or sentence level. She also stated that when learners concentrate on producing their composition, the learning experience is more meaningful to the learners as compared to learning grammar, vocabulary or sentence structure individually. Besides identifying the modes of discourse that can help low achievers perform better, the next section will focus on an area that many less skilled writers pay little attention to; the writing processes.

2.4   Writing Processes

One of the major differences which separate skilled and less skilled writers is the ability to employ strategies and writing processes (Victori, 1999). Many studies have highlighted the importance of writing processes and the positive impact it has on one's written work (Ilyana Jalaluddin et al., 2011; Kellogg, 1990; Victori, 1999). The writing processes mainly consist of three stages: (1) pre-writing which involves brainstorming for ideas before the text is written, (2) writing, where the ideas are being transferred into the written form, and (3) post-writing whereby the writers read through their work for final editing (Ilyana Jalaluddin et al., 2011). Some writing processes involves writing drafts after drafts in order to produce the best piece of writing, however, for writing assessment, the students' performance is determined based on one written product.

Zhao (2008) explained that as writing is a recursive process, language teachers could guide their students on how to 'create ideas, compose them and then revise them in order to generate a text'. Smalley et. al. (2001) also stated that a writer would require some time to think about the topic, to come up with ideas, and also plan on the piece of writing before they compose. This is highlighted in the Cognitive Process Theory (Flower & Hayes, 1981) which will be discussed in the following section.

2.4.1   Cognitive Process Theory

The cognitive process theory postulated by Flower and Hayes (1980) is one of the theories investigated by various studies that involves writing processes. The theory highlights that the writing processes is recursive, and the process involves moving back and forth from one component to the other (Berninger, Whitaker, & Feng, 1996).

The cognitive process theory, as shown in Figure 2.1 below, explains that writing involves three main components: the task environment, the writer's long-term memory and the writing processes.
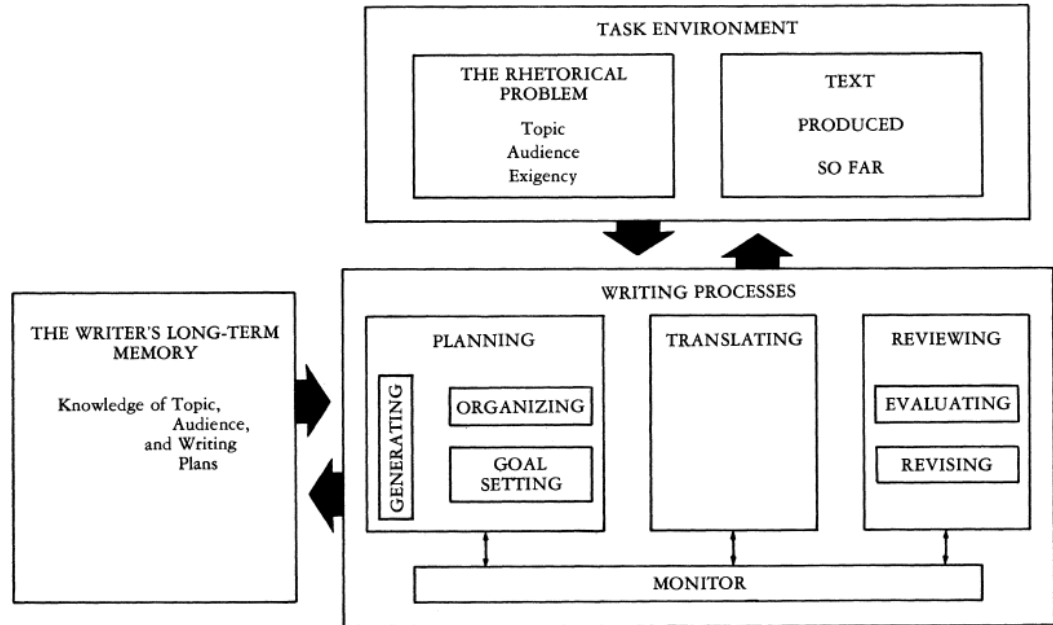
Figure 2.1: A Cognitive Process Model

(Source: Flower & Hayes, 1981)

The model first looks at task environment which involves the rhetorical problem, assignment or topic and later leads to the text produced. Writers need to solve the given problem, in this case, the assignment or topic, by responding or writing and writers may interpret the problem given in various ways. However, if the understanding of the rhetorical problem is inaccurate, they might fail to solve the problem given. As the written text becomes more extended during the composing stage, the writers face more restriction. For instance, each word produced in the text determines the word choices that come next. Hence this requires much of the writer's time and attention at the composing stage to think of the appropriate word choice or idea that follows. At the same time, the writer's long-term memory which stores knowledge about the subject

matter, the readers and the writing plans involved plays the role of assisting the writer to solve the rhetorical problem.

Flower & Hayes (1981) explained that during the composing process, writers will tap on the stored knowledge in their long-term memory to retrieve information regarding the topic given, the readers and a writing plan in order to produce a good piece of writing. They also stated that it is important for writers to identify a cue from the topic to aid them in retrieving the necessary knowledge and produce it in the written text. Once the knowledge is retrieved, writers face the next challenge in terms of organising the retrieved information. As Flower & Hayes (1981) further cited the ideas and organisation of a written text also reflect the internal structure of the writer's long-term memory.

After the knowledge is retrieved, the final component of the cognitive process model stresses on the writing processes, which include planning, translating and reviewing. These three processes are managed by the monitor.

a.   Planning

The first stage of the writing processes is planning. This writing stage consists of a few sub-processes: generating, organising and goal-setting. In the first stage, ideas are generated by retrieving relevant information from the long-term memory. The information may be well-developed or sometimes are in fragments and ideas are unconnected. It is the role of the second sub-process to organise and provide a meaningful structure to these information and ideas. Flower & Hayes (1981) claimed that 'organising' of ideas would enable writers to think creatively as it helps them to

group their ideas and form new concepts. These first two sub-processes are guided by the process of goal-setting. The goal is created by the writer based on the rhetoric problem and it becomes more complex as the ideas are being generated and organised (Flower & Hayes, 1981).

As cited by Kormos (2011), Scardamalia & Bereiter (1987) claimed that the skilled writers produce better written text as they employ a 'knowledge transforming' process. They use the goal they have set to help them direct the writing process. The goal helps writers to retrieve the relevant content and use only ideas that are pertinent to the topic. In the case of less skilled writers, they use a 'knowledge-telling' process. Though these writers seek out content from the long-term memory, they would write whatever that comes to mind instead of selecting only the relevant information. Kormos (2011) also cited from MacArthur, Harris & Graham (1994) who addressed this issue by explaining that the less skilled writers are not able to plan effectively as they have problems separating between the planning stage and the translating stage.

b.   Translating

Flower and Hayes (1981) defines this stage as 'the process of putting ideas into visible language' and it requires the writer to cope with all the demands of written English by taking into consideration the syntactic and lexical forms and to organise the sentence structure accordingly. Flower & Hayes (1981) cited from Ellen Nold who explained that less skilled writers face difficulties as they lack ability to juggle both planning and grammar simultaneously. Consequently, these writers tend to feel frustrated since they ended up producing poor planning when they focus on the language forms or producing multiple grammatical and language errors when the focus

is on planning. One way of assisting the writers to plan yet minimise the errors is through reviewing the written text when they have completed it.

c.   Reviewing

The reviewing stage in the cognitive process model involves two sub-processes: evaluating and revising. Beal (1993), quoted by Flower & Hayes (1981), defines reviewing as a highly complex process and requires writers to manage multilevel goals, which involves problem detection and repair. In his study, Beal (1993) discovered that skilled and developing writers have diffuculties in detecting the problems; in contrast to less skilled writers who lack the ability to fix the errors. These skilled writers were able to repair the errors with ease when the mistakes are pointed out to them. However, the type of repairs usually only involves the basic language or grammatical features instead of meaning (Flower & Hayes, 1981). Nonetheless, second language (L2) writers are found to be less efficient in the revising stage (Haan & Esch, 2005) due to lack of confidence. Hence, only the minor errors such as spelling were corrected. These writers feel that the problems only involve grammar and their lack of knowledge in this area causes them to overlook the reviewing stage (Uzawa, 1996). Each process in the writing stage plays a crucial role in producing a well-written text and these processes are guided by the monitor.

d.   Monitoring

Monitoring is utilised as the writers progress in their writing. Flower and Hayes (1981) describe this component as a 'writing strategist' as the duration a writer takes to develop from one process to the next varies depending on the writing approach and

habits. While some prefer to shift to the writing stage hastily, some prefer to complete the planning stage before they compose (Flower & Hayes, 1981). It was found that L2 writers are not flexible when it comes to planning and revising as compared to the L1 writers (Uzawa, 1996). As the complex writing processes could hamper and dampen the learners' motivation to learn writing, it is important for writing teachers to be aware of this issue. The next section looks at the past studies on the teaching of writing processes.

2.4.2   Past Studies: Writing Processes

Victori (1999) explained that some writing teachers and programmes have the impression that L2 writers have acquired the knowledge of writing when they learnt their writing in L1, hence the teaching of the writing skill is not emphasised in L2. As a result, less skilled L2 writers sometimes do not perform well in writing as they have limited knowledge and often employ inefficient writing strategies when they attempt a writing task (Victori, 1999). In order to overcome this problem, Zhao (2008) suggested that writing educators should plan activities to teach the writing process. He has identified two elements that could develop effective writing strategies through the process approach: 'students' awareness' of the nature of writing as a process, and 'teacher intervention' which involves the relationship between teacher-student and student-student in the process writing classroom (Zhao, 2008).

Many process-centreed studies were carried out and the approach had proven to be effective to aid L2 learners in producing a good piece of writing (Leki, 2003; Matsuda, 2003; Parks, Huot, Hamers, & H.-Lemonnier, 2005; Uzawa, 1996; Victori, 1999; Zhao, 2008). However, the students' awareness of the usefulness of writing

process is not easy to develop as it might take a considerable amount of time to help learners understand how the process approach can help them produce better written work. Parks et al. (2005) explained that at the beginning stage of the process approach, learners only obey the teachers' request; however, with more experience in using the process method, learners will eventually discover its effectiveness in producing a well-written work. When learners found the process method useful, it becomes self-regulated and they began to implement it in their writing activity and in other courses which involved writing (Parks et al., 2005).

Despite the various advantages learners can gain from process-centreed approach, some research found a mismatch between the need of implementing the process-centreed writing instruction and the use of product-centreed writing assessment (Y.-J. Lee, 2002; Matsuda, 2003; Uzawa, 1996; Zamel, 1983; Zhao, 2008). Even though the L2 writing instruction has slowly moved into the process-centred approach since the last two decades, Matsuda (2003) cited from Hinkel (2002) that the assessment of writing skill in major examinations still focuses on written product by giving impromptu timed-essay. He later explained that the process-centred approach in teaching writing is not widely accepted in the education field as many composition teachers and text book writers ignore the use of process writing as a pedagogical method. John (1995) explained that the process approach in writing may not be suited for academic writing as the approach focuses on content but tend to overlook the linguistic form in writing (Allison, 2004). The lack of acceptance could also be due to the high amount of time and energy required by the teachers to focus on the various stages of writing as compared to just focus on one written product (Zhao, 2008).

Research conducted by Raimes (1987) and Zhao (2008) found that when L2 composition teachers continue to exercise the linear approach in writing classroom, the L2 learners are not made aware of the process involved in writing. As a result, they face difficulties when it comes to the generation of ideas and text organisation due to the lack of independent thinking (Zhao, 2008). Another finding revealed that even though more efficient writers are capable of generating ideas before they compose, however, they fail to organise and develop those ideas before they start to write (Uzawa, 1996).

A local study done by Ilyana Jalaluddin et al (2011) highlighted the importance of teaching the writing process yet took into consideration the teachers' energy and time needed to focus on various processes involved in writing. Hence it was suggested that the best solution is to start off by focusing on the teaching of planning at the beginning stage and eventually learners will pick up the other processes independently. It is essential that teachers need to guide learners to have their own planning strategies to aid the self-efficacy and understand the importance of the writing processes (Ilyana Jalaluddin et al., 2011). The role of planning in the writing processes will be discussed in the following section.

2.5   Pre-Writing

Pre-writing is the stage where writers plan by generating and organising ideas based on the topic given before proceeding to the writing stage (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Kellogg, 1990; Plakans, 2008; Smalley et al., 2001) and it is regarded as a major writing process which contributes to the teaching of composition (Flower & Hayes, 1981).

Kellogg (1990) explained that a well-prepared pre-writing could assist the learner to produce the written text fluently and effectively. When the ideas are written out, writers could refer to the 'external plan' hence lessens the working memory from being overloaded with ideas. When all the ideas and information are written out externally, the working memory will have free space to focus on other aspects of writing, such as grammar, phrases, sentences and other related aspects (Kellogg, 2001). This is in line with past studies which reported that pre-writing is used among skilled writers as compared to less skilled writers who prefer to practise local planning, whereby they plan as they compose (Kellogg, 1990; Plakans, 2008; Victori, 1999; Worden, 2009).

Plakans (2008) cited that different strategies are used in composing, however, it is shown that both skilled L1 and L2 writers plan more before they begin to write, while less skilled writers plan less at the beginning stage and often stop for local planning. Cumming (1989), as quoted by Victori, described the strategy used by the less skilled writers as 'what next strategy' because there is no purpose or plan when attempting the written task. This strategy resulted in the over-dependence on the written text to generate more ideas as these less skilled writers need to re-read the paragraph or essay whenever new ideas are needed (Victori, 1999). Hence, this often leads to poor writing performance, such as short essay length (Victori, 1999; Worden, 2009). Moreover, Worden (2009) also found out that writers who did not prepare any pre-writing tend to write out of context from the topic or instructions.

On the contrary, skilled writers have fewer issues during the composing stage as they would plan and list out the ideas before they start to write (Plakans, 2008; Smalley et al., 2001; Victori, 1999). There are various planning strategies that one could employ.

Some of the ways used to generate ideas are brainstorming, freewriting, Wh-questions and clustering (Smalley et al., 2001). However, Kellogg (2001) stressed that the planning approach used varies according to the different mode of discourse.

Zhao (2008) has classified the three traditional mode of discourse as narrative, expository and argumentative. Out of these modes, Kellogg (2001) cited from Mancuso (1986) and Howard (1991) that writers have the most exposure when it comes to narrative mode. Besides story telling, learners acquired knowledge about narrative mode through formal education as most writing tasks given in composition classroom involve narration (Kellogg, 2001). The other mode of discourse are weakly developed because learners are taught to them much later when learners are expected to be more proficient in the language (Kellogg, 2001; Sabariah Md. Rashid & Chan, 2008). In the Malaysian context, Sabariah Md. Rashid & Chan (2008) revealed that learners are found to perform better in narrative writing task as compared to argumentative.

Based on the Malaysian Secondary School English Curriculum (KBSM, 1990), narrative and descriptive mode of discourse are emphasised on since Form One until Form Four. While argumentative mode is only included in the Form Five curriculum. Hence the lack of practice and writing experience in the argumentative mode lead to the lower performance as compared to narrative mode writing task (Sabariah Md. Rashid & Chan, 2008). Therefore, Kellogg (2001) concluded that with the amount of experience and well-developed knowledge learners have on narrative mode of discourse, they should face less difficulty in planning narrative writing task, which consists of a sequence of events, a plot (Tomaszewski, 2005).

2.6   Plot

Narrative can be described as a series of events, a plot (Tomaszewski, 2005). Plot originated from the field of drama and it was introduced by Aristotle into theatre during the 14th and 15th century. He defined plot as 'the arrangement of incidents', these incidents are arranged into three elements: beginning, middle and ending. Plot is used to describe the structure of a story that follows a chain of 'cause and effect' events or conflict, which ends with the solution of the conflict (Tomaszewski, 2005). The beginning introduces the situation, for instance, the characters, time and place of the story. The middle involves a sequence of events or conflict which leads to the turning point of a story, while the ending is when the writer would explain how the conflict was resolved (Koh, 2004; S. C. Leong, 2000).

The plot structure was later adapted into a more detailed version by Freytag (1863). The main three elements remain, however he added another two elements into the structure (rising action and falling action), hence the five elements involve: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and denouement. The plot structure, as shown in Figure 2.2 below, is also known as Freytag's Triangle (Mohammad A. Quayam & Rosli Talif, 2000) where the exposition stage introduces the characters and setting of a story, rising action reveals the development of the crisis of one or more characters, which later leads to the turning point of the story in climax. The crisis gradually resolves in falling action and lastly, the plot ends at the final stage, denouement.
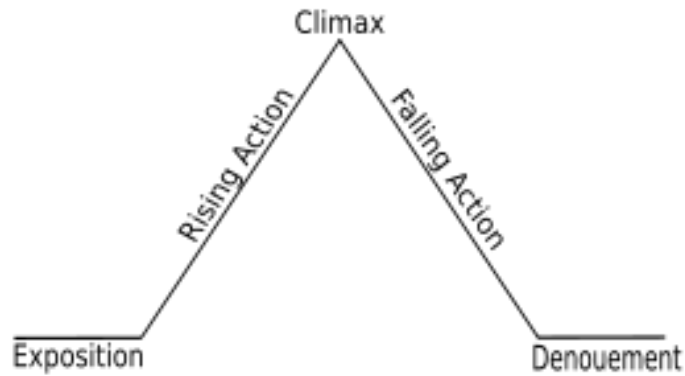
Figure 2.2: Freytag's Triangle (Plot)

(Source: http://www.scribendi.com/advice/theplotskeleton.en.html)

As plot is the basic structure of a story, it is now included in essay writing reference books as a guide to write narratives (Koh, 2004; A. Lee, 1996; W. C. Leong, 1994; Yap, 2008). Meadows pointed out that it is crucial to have a clear perspective when writing a narrative as one needs to consider issues concerning what and how to write yet organise it simultaneously (McKie, 2008). Johnstone stressed the one should bear in mind the structure of a narrative, in order to generate a workable storyline. When a writer is aware of the structure, the content would be created at ease (McKie, 2008). Nonetheless, plot was included in many essay guide books for the learners to be aware of the basic structure of a story, but not as a pre-writing strategy. In fact, the use of plot as a pre-writing method matches the planning stage of the writing processes in the Cognitive Process Theory (refer to Figure 2.1, pg.21). Plot not only tells the story (generating), but it also presents the story in a structured format (organising); based on the title given (goal-setting).

2.7   Conclusion

This chapter reviewed a number of discussions which serves as the guiding principles of this study. Less skilled writers could have an opportunity to gain better score in timed-writing if they choose the mode of discourse which would benefit them and employ the process strategy, in this case, planning. Though previous studies have shown that pre-write strategy contributes to good writing (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Stallard, 1976; Witte, 1987; Worden, 2009), writers need practices to express their ideas in order to have the ability to retrieve the structure of the remembered information from their memory into writing (Stallard, 1976). This is one of the issues considered in the treatment session of the study, which will be discussed in the following chapter along with the other aspects related to the in methodology of this study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Writing skill is often used to evaluate one's level of English proficiency. In attempt to explore teaching methodologies for writing, this study looks at the impact of using plot as a pre-writing strategy in the students' narrative timed-writing. This chapter aims to discuss the research design of the study, which includes the selection of participants, the instrument and procedure used during data collection and how the collected data was analysed.

3.2 Research Design

This study employed the explanatory mix method research design by first collecting and analysing the quantitative data followed by the qualitative data to help explain and obtain a better understanding of the quantitative results (Bamberger, Rugh, & Marby, 2006; Clark & Creswell, 2011; Creswell, 2008). The research involved 40 participants from Sekolah Menengah Teknik Kuala Klawang, Negeri Sembilan. 20 of the participants were of intermediate level of English proficiency, while the other 20 with low level of English proficiency. A pre-test was carried out before the treatment was administered.

The first stage of treatment consisted of two sessions where the participants were introduced to the use of the literary device, plot, as a pre-writing strategy for narrative

essays. This activity was carried out by using the fairytale 'Cinderella' as an example to demonstrate to the participants how plot was implemented. When the participants understood the use of plot, they were divided into groups during the second session. When the topic was given, they were then required to formulate a story based on the plot diagram. Stage 2 involved Session 3 and 4, whereby the participants practiced using plot to formulate their stories within 10 minutes. Besides planning, they also needed to compose a narrative essay with a word length of 350 words based on the plot prepared. Lastly, the participants were asked to plan and write their narrative essays individually during Stage 3 to familiarise themselves with the pre-writing technique.

After the three stages of treatment, a post-test was carried out. A total of eight participants with the highest and lowest improvements were interviewed to investigate how the participants found the technique had affected their writing performance. Lastly, the pre and post-tests scores were compared in order to investigate the impact of the pre-writing strategy used in the participants' narrative writing.

3.3   Description of Subjects

For the purpose of this study, participants were selected through convenience sampling. The study involved 40 Form Four students (16 years old), from two classes (4EE2 and 4EE4) of Sekolah Menengah Teknik Kuala Klawang, Negeri Sembilan. The participants had a minimum of 11 years of experience in learning English language. Nevertheless, they are weak in English and have poor writing skills.

These participants were required to sit for four examinations in one year, including two monthly tests and two major examinations. In Sekolah Menengah Teknik

Kuala Klawang, the examination format for Malaysian secondary school public examination, SPM, is used during the mid-year and final year English paper examination. During these two major exams, students have to sit for two separate English papers.

Paper 1 carries 85 marks and it comprises of two components; Section A is a Directed Writing (35 marks) and Section B is a Continuous Writing (50 marks). For Section A, the examinees are awarded marks for content if they use and elaborate every content given appropriately. Students need not provide their own ideas unless they are required to do so. Students are advised to complete this section in 45 minutes and there is no minimum number of words required. Section B, however, involves freewriting whereby students are required to choose one out of the five topics given and write a minimum of 350 words. Students are advised to complete the essay within one hour.

With reference to Table 3.1 below, Paper 2, on the other hand, carries 75 marks and it consists of four components. Examinees are given 15 multiple choice questions in Section A (15 marks); comprehension of short texts with information transfer-type questions in Section B (10 marks); comprehension of longer text with open-ended type questions and summary in Section C (25 marks); and lastly, Section D (25 marks) assesses on the selected texts listed in the literature component, with structured response questions on poem, short story and personal response questions on novel.

Both Paper 1 (85 marks) and Paper 2 (75 marks) make up a total of 160 marks. The total mark for both papers is later converted into percentage to obtain the overall score and grade to determine the students' level of English proficiency.

Table 3.1: English 1119 Paper

1119	Sections	Marks
Paper 1 (85 marks)	A. Directed Writing	35
	B. Continuous Writing	50
Paper 2 (75 marks)	A. Multiple Choice Questions	15
	B. Information Transfer	10
	C. Reading Comprehension and Summary	25
	D. Literature	25

For this research, the participants whose English language proficiency levels are deemed at the low and intermediate level of English proficiencies were chosen based on their mid-year examination grade for English paper. The demographic information of the participants is presented in Table 3.2 and 3.3 below.

Table 3.2: Demographic Information of Participants with Low Level of English Proficiency

Subject	Gender	Race	Class	Grade
L 01	Male	Malay	4EE2	G
L02	Male	Malay	4EE2	G
L 03	Male	Malay	4EE2	G
L 04	Male	Malay	4EE2	E
L 05	Male	Malay	4EE2	E
L 06	Male	Malay	4EE2	G
L 07	Male	Malay	4EE2	E
L 08	Male	Malay	4EE2	G
L 09	Male	Indian	4EE4	E
L 10	Male	Malay	4EE4	G
L 11	Male	Malay	4EE4	G
L 12	Male	Malay	4EE4	G
L 13	Female	Malay	4EE4	E
L 14	Male	Malay	4EE4	E
L 15	Male	Malay	4EE4	G
L 16	Male	Malay	4EE4	G
L 17	Male	Malay	4EE4	E
L 18	Male	Malay	4EE4	E
L 19	Female	Malay	4EE4	G
L 20	Male	Malay	4EE4	G

Table 3.3: Demographic Information of Participants with Intermediate Level of
English Proficiency

Subject	Gender	Race	Class	Grade
I 01	Male	Malay	4EE2	D
I 02	Male	Malay	4EE2	D
I 03	Male	Malay	4EE2	C
I 04	Male	Malay	4EE2	C
I 05	Male	Malay	4EE2	C
I 06	Male	Malay	4EE2	C
I 07	Male	Malay	4EE2	D
I 08	Male	Malay	4EE3	D
I 09	Male	Malay	4EE2	C
I 10	Male	Malay	4EE2	D
I 11	Male	Malay	4EE2	C
I 12	Male	Malay	4EE2	D
I 13	Male	Malay	4EE2	C
I 14	Male	Malay	4EE4	D
I 15	Female	Malay	4EE4	D
I 16	Male	Malay	4EE4	C
I 17	Male	Malay	4EE2	D
I 18	Male	Malay	4EE4	C
I 19	Male	Malay	4EE4	C
I 20	Female	Malay	4EE4	C

Those who scored A's (75% - 100%) and B's (65% - 74%) are categorised as advanced level students, hence, 20 of the students who scored C's (50% - 64%) and D's (40% - 49%) were deemed as the intermediate level and the other 20 who scored E's (30% 39%) and G's (01% - 29%) in the mid year examination were selected and identified as the low level of English proficiency group.

3.4 Data Collection

In order to measure the impact of the pre-writing strategy (plot) on the participants' timed-writing performance, a pre-test (Appendix B) and post-test (Appendix C) were administered before and after the treatment was carried out.

Both tests were assessed based on two rating scales adapted from the marking schemes of SPM trial examination for Negeri Sembilan in 2009 (Appendix D) and East (2009) (Appendix E). The former is used to evaluate the total score of both tests while the latter was used to evaluate the essay length, content, and organisation of both tests.

In order to increase the interrater reliability, another examiner who was also an experienced SPM examiner was asked to mark the pre and post-tests according to the rating scale provided. The results from both raters were later compared to determine the reliability of the scores awarded. After the results were considered reliable, eight students with the highest and lowest improvements were then interviewed to examine their views on how they find the use of plot as a pre-writing strategy affect their narrative writing of the Continuous Writing component.

3.4.1. Continuous Writing

This study focuses on Continuous Writing, the second component of Paper 1, which carries the highest mark compared to all the other components in both papers (Refer to Table 3.1, Pg.36). As mentioned earlier, examinees have to choose one out of the five topics given, which include descriptive, factual, argumentative, reflective and narrative compositions. Koh (2004) and Leong (2000) have given a description of each type of essay, which will be outlined below:

For descriptive type essay topic, one may be asked to describe a place, a person, or an event. It is important to describe things in detail so that the reader will be able to picture exactly what is being described. For example:

- Descriptions of places: *A Visit to the Zoo*

- Descriptions of people: *Meeting a Film Star*

- Descriptions of events: *Describe a school trip you went on*

For factual essays, writers may need to explain processes, analyse or even propose solutions to situations, trends, or problems. It is important for writers to make sure that they fully understand the question and have sufficient information to complete the essay. For example:

- *Keeping fit*

- *Discuss steps that should be taken to help the very poor people in your area*

- *The problem of deforestation*

For argumentative essays, writers need to take one position on the issue given. For example:

- *Should boys and girls be given the same education?*

- *Do you think school prefects should be chosen by their peers?*

- *Should people be allowed to ride motorcycles at the age of 15? Discuss.*

The reflective kind of essays require students to express their own thoughts, opinions and feelings on ordinary happenings in our everyday life. For example:

- *Food*

- *Clothes*

- *Water*

Finally, there is also the narrative essay, where one needs to tell a story that is logical and consistent. For example:

- *Write a story beginning with: 'I wish I could take those words back…"*

- *Write a story entitled: 'A Narrow Escape'*

- *A Day I Will Never Forget*

This study chose to focus on the narrative type essay for a few reasons. For descriptive essay, Koh (2004) explained that it is important for one to have the ability to describe and portray their ideas vividly. In order to do so, one needs to have a considerable level of lexical competence. She later also added that the weaker and intermediate level of English proficiency students might face more problems compared to those with advanced proficiency as they would have difficulties finding the exact words or expression when writing descriptive essays, hence they may not produce a well-written descriptive essay as compared to the advanced proficiency students (Koh, 2004). However, there are instances where the descriptive topic given could be used to write a narrative essay as well. For instance, a student who chooses the topic 'A Visit to the Zoo' can either describe the event, surroundings and animals vividly or they could write a story about the events that occurred during the visit to the zoo.

When it comes to argumentative essay, Koh (2004) stated that students especially those who are weak in English would often misunderstand the topic and end up writing out of context content which is irrelevant to the topic. Helena, Pushpa Raghavan and Siva Prasanna Krishnan (2004) explained that one needs to think deeply, carefully and highlight the issues being discussed. Hence, it is difficult for the students to write about topic that they have little knowledge of.

Reflective essay tends to give many students the impression that it is the easiest type of composition to write as it basically requires them to reflect on their personal experience and perception on the subject matter. However, in order to produce a good piece of writing, Koh (2004) and Leong (2000) stated that one needs to be creative and make their perception unique. Those who are not proficient in English, usually cannot think well under pressure, thus are advised not to attempt reflective essays. Nevertheless, reflective topic which usually consists of a single word or a brief phrase such as *Shopping* or *Homework* can sometimes be used to write a narrative essay which is related to the topic (Koh, 2004; Leong, 2000). The topic 'Shopping' can be used to narrate a story of a shopaholic and the ending is used to inculcate moral value to the story, for instance, one should learn to shop moderately.

In brief, there would usually be two or three topics given in the written examination that could be used write a narrative essay (descriptive, reflective and narrative topics). Besides that, the earlier discussion goes to show that students who are not so proficient in English would experience less problem or stress when attempting narrative essay as compared to other types of essays. This is consistent with the findings of past studies which revealed that students who attempted the narrative mode essay may have a higher chance to obtain a better score (Kegley, 1987; Manchón, Larios, & Murphy, 2000; Sabariah Md. Rashid & Chan, 2008).

With reference to page 18 − 19, in a study carried out by Kegley (1987), each participant was randomly assigned a writing task of either narrative, descriptive, expository or persuasive type essay. The result showed that most of the participants who were assigned to write narrative essays managed to gain higher scores as compared to the other three modes. According to another study discussed earlier in page 19,

Sabariah Md. Rashid and Chan (2008) compared the writing performance between narrative and argumentative mode of discourse among 384 students with intermediate to advanced proficiency levels. As the test reliability was taken into consideration, each participant was required to complete two writing tasks: narrative and argumentative essays. The findings revealed that both proficiency levels obtained better scores in their narrative writing tasks.

Based on the findings of past studies which showed that students with low and intermediate English proficiency fair better in narrative writing, thus the narrative mode was employed in this study. A narrative type topic was given in both pre and post-tests (Appendix B and C). For example, in the pre-test, the participants were instructed to write a story beginning with 'Kim was nervous when the door opened…', hence participants needed to write a minimum of 350 words essay to complete the narrative piece. They were given an hour to complete their work.

After the treatment sessions, participants sat for the post-test whereby they had to write an essay beginning with 'As I read the letter, I cried…'. Instead of writing the essay straight away, participants were given an empty plot diagram for them to plan their story for 10 minutes before they were given the test pads to write their essays. The participants had 50 minutes to complete their 350 words essay. Those who managed to complete their plot before the 10 minutes timeframe were allowed to begin their writing first.

3.4.2 Interview with the Participants

An interview was carried out with the participants after both the pre and post-tests were analysed. Four participants with the highest improvements and another four with the lowest improvements were identified and went through a one-to-one interview session. The interview consisted of 10 main questions, from general to specific questions (Appendix F). The interviewer began by asking about the participants' writing process in general. Next, they were interviewed on the types of pre-writing strategies they normally use before being introduced to the use of plot and their preference after comparing both types of pre-writing strategies.

The participants were later asked to compare and comment on the impact of plot as a pre-writing strategy on their performance in writing narrative essays, in terms of essay length, content and organisation. Lastly, participants gave their opinion on the relevance of the usage of plot as a pre-writing strategy during the examination.

3.5 Procedure

In order to investigate the impact on the use of plot on two groups of participants with different levels of English proficiency, a total of 40 participants were selected based on their mid-year English language examination scores, 20 who scored C's and D's were chosen as the intermediate group (refer to Table 3.3, pg.37) while another 20 students who scored E's and G's were chosen as the group with low level of English proficiency (refer to Table 3.2, pg. 36). The procedure of the research design is shown in Figure 3.1 below.

```
                    ┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
                    │        Selection of participants     │
                    │  (Based on mid-year English language exam)│
                    │        20 - Intermediate proficiency  │
                    │        20 - Low proficiency           │
                    └─────────────────────────────────────┘
                                      │
                                      ▼
                         ┌───────────────────────┐
                         │       Pre-test         │
                         └───────────────────────┘
                                      │
                                      ▼
                    ┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
                    │             Treatment                │
                    │       (Refer to 3.5.1 and            │
                    │           Appendix A)                │
                    │                                      │
                    │            Stage 1                   │
                    │         (Two sessions)               │
                    │              │                       │
                    │            Stage 2                   │
                    │         (Two sessions)               │
                    │              │                       │
                    │            Stage 3                   │
                    │         (Two sessions)               │
                    └─────────────────────────────────────┘
                                      │
                                      ▼
                         ┌───────────────────────┐
                         │       Post-test        │
                         └───────────────────────┘
                                      │
                                      ▼
                         ┌───────────────────────┐
                         │       Interview        │
                         │    (Refer to 3.4.2)    │
                         └───────────────────────┘
                                      │
                                      ▼
                         ┌───────────────────────┐
                         │        Results         │
                         └───────────────────────┘
                                      │
                                      ▼
                    ┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
                    │          Data Analysis               │
                    │         (Refer to 3.6)               │
                    │          -Essay length               │
                    │          -Content                    │
                    │          -Organisation               │
                    │          - Interview                 │
                    │           transcription              │
                    └─────────────────────────────────────┘
```
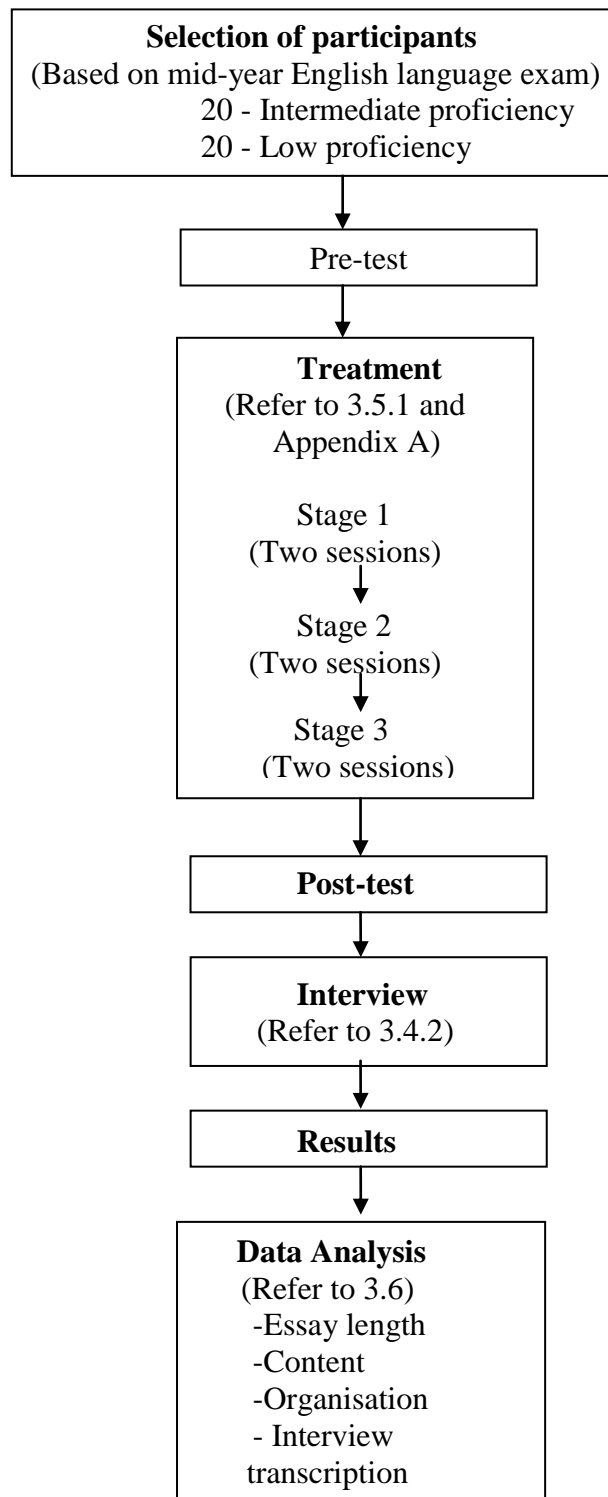
Figure 3.1: Research Design

Before the treatment was administered, all the participants sat for a pre-test to determine their writing ability in terms of essay length, content, and organisation. The treatment involved three stages, each stage comprised of two sessions (refer to 3.5.1, pg.45). Hence, the participants had a total of six sessions to familiarise themselves with

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the pre-writing strategy. After the treatment, the participants were required to sit for a post-test.

The pre and post-test were assessed based on the overall score, number of words, content and organisation of the essays by using two rating scales adapted from the Negeri Sembilan SPM trial examination marking scheme (2009) and East (2009). The eight participants with the highest and lowest improvement were later interviewed. The interview analysis will be discussed in 3.6.6. The interview aimed to gain insights from the participants' point of view towards the treatment used in this study and to what extent it affects their essay in terms of length, content, and organisation.

3.5.1. Treatment

Yap (2008) suggested the use of plot device in narrative essays as a tool for generating ideas, as well as organising them. The five-stage plot diagram was created by Gustav Freytag and was earlier known as Freytag's Triangle (1863), as shown in Figure 3.2 below.

Mohammad A. Quayam & Rosli Talif (2000) stated that Freytag's plot is accepted widely by many critics as a way to obtain a structure of drama and fiction. The five elements in a plot are beginning, rising action, climax, falling action and ending. They also explained that such structure is used as a way of knowing where we are in a story (Mohammad A. Quayam & Rosli Talif, 2000).

Climax

Conflict

Falling Action/
Denouement

Rising Action

Exposition/
Introduction

Resolution/
Conclusion

Figure 3.2: Freytag's Triangle (Plot)

(Source: http://waxebb.com/writings/plotting.html)

This study looked at the effectiveness of the treatment whereby plot was used as pre-writing activity in narrative essays. The treatment was carried out for six weeks in order for the participants to familiarise themselves with the use of the method. It was divided into three stages and each stage lasted for two weeks. It started with two sessions of group work in Stage 1, followed by two sessions of pair work in Stage 2 and the final two sessions of individual work in Stage 3. This study looked at the improvements in their narrative writing, in terms of the length, content and organisation.

3.5.2 Stage 1 (Session 1 and 2)

Before the participants were given their task, they were introduced to the use of plot as pre-writing during Session 1. The teacher used a fairytale, 'Cinderella' as an example to teach students the way to plot the story on the diagram. A fairytale was used as all the participants were familiar with the story. After they had an idea of how to plot the sequence of events on the diagram, they were divided into groups of four. In Session 2, students were given a title and they were asked to create and draw their plot on a piece of mahjong paper. Students were encouraged to draw out their characters as

well. After all the groups have completed their work, each group was to present their story in front of the class.

3.5.3 Stage 2 (Session 3 and 4)

During Stage 2, participants, in pairs, were given a topic and were required to develop a plot (Appendix A) within 10 minutes, as the time recommended by Kellogg (1990) for pre-writing during exams. Once they have planned their story, a few pairs were chosen in random to present their plot. After that, another topic was given and the participants then created a new plot in 10 minutes and another few pairs were chosen to present their plot. While the participants were planning their plot, the teacher walked around to facilitate and assist the participants if needed. This process went on for one session. For the next session, participants were instructed to write their essays using plot as pre-writing strategy. Each pair was given a new topic and a blank sheet of plot diagram for them to plan the story in 10 minutes. After that, the participants were informed that they needed to complete their essays individually in 50 minutes, based on the plot diagram prepared.

3.5.4 Stage 3 (Session 5 and 6)

For the fifth session, the process that was carried out during Stage 2 was repeated, but this time, participants were required to work individually. A topic was given and each participant needed to create a plot in 10 minutes. When the time was up, the teacher chose a few participants in random to narrate their plot. After that, a new topic and another 10 minutes were given to them to prepare their story. A few participants were selected to present their plot. The process went on for one session.

For the final session, each participant was given a topic and a blank plot diagram to plan their story within 10 minutes. The test pads would only be given after 10 minutes and participants wrote their essay based on the plot prepared within the remaining 50 minutes. After the third treatment sessions were carried out, a post-test was administered. Next, both tests were evaluated and analysed based on the adapted rating scales.

3.6   Data Analysis

Data was analysed according to each research questions (RQ), as shown in Table 3.4. The students' scores (RQ1) in both pre and post-tests were evaluated based on the adapted marking scheme from the Negeri Sembilan SPM trial examination (2009) for English Paper 1 (Appendix D), the scores for both tests were compared. For essay length (RQ2), the essay length in both tests were tabulated and scores of $1 - 6$ marks were given according to the number of words written (Appendix E).

Table 3.4: Data Analysis

Research Questions	Data Analysis
For both groups of subjects comprising low and intermediate level of English proficiency, the study plans to answer the following research questions:	
RQ1: In terms of scores obtained, how does plot as a pre-writing strategy improve their narrative writing?	Differences in writing scores from pre and post tests.
RQ2: In terms of essay length, how does plot as a pre-writing strategy improve their narrative writing?	Number of words written in pre and post tests.
RQ3: In terms of writing dimensions, how does plot as a pre-writing strategy improve the content and organisation of their narrative writing.	Differences in scores for content and organisation of students essay in pre and post tests.
RQ4: What are the factors that influenced the improvement in writing in terms of essay length, content and organisation?	- Transcription from semi-structured interview with students.

The writing dimensions (content and organisation) of the essay were assessed based on a rating scale adapted from East (2009) (Appendix E). The scores for the writing dimensions (RQ3) in pre and post-tests were compared.

Lastly, eight participants with the highest and lowest improvements were interviewed to determine the factors that influenced their improvements in terms of essay scores, length, content and organisation (RQ4).

3.6.1 Pre-Test/ Post-Test: Score

The writing score was evaluated based on an adapted version of Negeri Sembilan SPM trial examination English Paper 1's marking scheme (2009) in order to examine how far has plot affected the students' timed-writing. Since the marking scheme of the SPM examination is deemed confidential, hence, the marking scheme for SPM trial examination was employed instead. It would be fair to assume that the changes in scores observed for both pre and post-tests would portray students' performance in terms of content and organisation in accordance to the SPM standard. Therefore, the marking scheme was adapted whereby grammatical items and the other language mechanics, such as punctuation, and spelling were removed and only items related to content and organisation were considered. This adaptation was carried out to enable the writing scores to reflect students' performance in content, organisation and essay length.

The adapted rubric (Appendix D) which carried 50 marks were divided into six mark ranges. The content of the essays with the upper bands of A (44 - 50 marks), B (38 - 43 marks) and C (32 - 37 marks) bands were deemed as interesting, well-organised

(paragraphs) and relevant to the topic. The bands with average scores included, D (26 - 31 marks), and E band (20 - 25 marks). Essays which were rated in these bands tend to have weak organisation. The content showed some relevance to the topic but there will be substantial linguistic errors in the written work. The lower bands included, 'U(i)' (14 - 19 marks), 'U(ii)' (8 - 13 marks) and 'U(iii)' (0 - 7 marks). Essays which were rated as the lowest three bands were generally short in essay length, lack unity in terms of paragraph, and the ideas were blur or not comprehensible. The raters gave a holistic evaluation based on the description of criteria for each range and the scores for both scripts were later compared. Next, the number of words written in both tests were counted to determine the scores for essay length.

3.6.2 Pre-Test/ Post-Test: Essay Length

During both the pre and post-tests, the participants were instructed to write a minimum of 350 words. The essay length of the scripts for both tests were counted and were given scores from 0 - 6 marks according to the number of words given (Appendix E) After the scores for both tests were compared, the decrease or increase in number of words was used to determine the impact on the use of plot as a pre-writing strategy in influencing the students' ability to write more or less words during timed-writing.

Marks were awarded based on the number of words written, as shown in Table 3.5 below. Sabariah Md. Rashid & Chan (2008) explained that students are usually encouraged to produce longer responses in the writing examination, as it could lead to a better performance. Scripts which were too short (0 - 59 words) were not awarded any mark, 1 mark was awarded to scripts with 60 - 119 words; 2 marks for scripts ranging from 120 - 179 words; 3 marks for scripts with 180 - 239 words; 4 marks for scripts

with 240 - 299 words; 5 marks for scripts with 300 - 349 words, and the highest score of 6 marks was awarded for participants who wrote 350 words and above.

Table 3.5: Scoring Rubric for Essay Length

Marks	Number of Words
6	350 and above
5	300 – 349
4	240 – 299
3	180 – 239
2	120 – 179
1	60 – 119
0	0 – 59

Besides essay length, the study also looked at two writing dimensions of both pre and post-tests. The first dimension examined, content, looked at the participants' ability in generating ideas.

3.6.3   Pre-Test/ Post-Test: Content

The scores for content were given based on the adapted version of scoring rubric by East (2009) (Appendix E). The rationale for choosing the scoring rubric by East (2009) was the fact that the language items were divided into five sections (coherence and organisation, vocabulary, grammar, mechanics and register) and each language item can be assessed separately. Therefore, only the first section of the rubric (coherence and organisation) was employed to assess the content and organisation for the pre and post-tests, while the remaining four sections were removed from the rubric.

The mark ranges from 0 - 6 and the description of criteria given for each range is clearly specified. The rubric mainly looks at how well the participants understood the task given. The content was also evaluated based on their main ideas and the flow of

ideas in their writing. Those who scored between 5 - 6 marks for content were considered good as their written work showed that they understood the task and they were able to give a good flow of clear ideas with fluent expressions. The average participants would score between 3 - 4 marks for having a certain amount of understanding of the task. Their writing may be clear or quite disconnected at times and the flow of the essay may not be very fluent. Essays that were written poorly would fall between 2 - 0 marks as the written work reflected the writer's limited understanding of the task, as seen in the confused and disconnected ideas in the essays. The scores for the marks awarded in pre and post-tests were later compared. Besides content, this study also looked at another writing dimension, the organisation of ideas.

3.6.4 Pre-Test/ Post-Test: Organisation

The scoring rubric for organisation was also adapted from East (2009) (Appendix E) and the mark ranges from 0 - 6. The rater determined the mark range of the script based on the description given for each criterion which looks at the organisation, logical sequencing, development of ideas and cohesion of the scripts written. Essays which obtained the highest marks, that is between 5 - 6 marks were considered good because the ideas were organised in order and were mainly cohesive. As for the average essays which scored between 3 - 4 marks, the essays were loosely organised, lack sequencing and development. Those who scored between 0 - 2 marks were considered weak and were categorised as poor for having minimal or no sequencing, development of ideas and have weak cohesion in their written work. The marks awarded for both pre and post-tests were later compared.

In order to ensure the reliability of the scores given, an experienced English teacher was chosen as the interrater for this study. She started her teaching profession since 1988 and has taught in school for 24 years. She was also involved in SPM marking for 10 years (2000-2010). The rater was given the similar rating scales (Appendix D and E) and after explaining the specifications of the scales, she was asked to assess the participants' pre and post-tests. When the papers were marked, the scores given by both the researcher and the second rater were compared. The objective of this exercise is to determine the interrater reliability.

3.6.5 Interrater Reliability

Jackson (2010) explained that interrater reliability is used to measure the agreement in assessment between the raters involved. This is carried out to determine how far the raters are consistent in their evaluation. Hence, this process involves at least two or more raters and the percentage of agreement is calculated to demonstrate the consistency of ratings among the raters (Gatewood, Feild, & Barrick, 2011; Jackson, 2010).

In this study, the interrater was an experienced English teacher and the similar rating scales were used by two raters (researcher and interrater) to assess both pre and post-tests. When the results of both raters were obtained, the interrater reliability was calculated based on the formula below:

$$\text{Interrater reliability} = \frac{\text{Number of agreement}}{\text{Number of possible agreements}} \times 100$$

Both raters were required to assess the writing scores in general (Appendix D), and also the essay length (Appendix E), content (Appendix E) and organisation (Appendix E) of the essays. The interrater reliability for each area was calculated based on the number of times raters agreed upon the marks awarded for the 80 papers that were assessed. There were 40 papers for pre-test (20 for low proficiency and 20 for intermediate proficiency), and another 40 papers for post-test (20 for low proficiency and 20 for intermediate proficiency). The interrater reliability for each of the focused area will be discussed accordingly.

For writing scores, the raters assessed the scripts based on an adapted version of Negeri Sembilan SPM trial examination English Paper 1's marking scheme (2009) (Appendix D). The number of agreement was calculated according to the bands given, which include A, B, C, D, E, U(i), U(ii) and U(iii). Out of the 80 papers, the raters agreed 57 times upon the bands given. Hence the scores given were reliable at 71.25%.

For essay length, the raters were required to calculate the total number of words written and later gave a score, ranging from 0 - 6 marks (Appendix E). Since only counting of words was involved in essay length, the scores awarded were of full agreement with the reliability at 100%.

This study also looked at two writing dimensions, content and organisation (Appendix E). The raters awarded a score of 0 - 6 based on the rubric. For content, the raters agreed 72 times out of 80. Hence, the interrater reliability was considered reliable at 90%. The second writing dimension involved was organisation and the rater agreed with the marks awarded 69 out of 80 times, thus, the result was reliable at 86.25%.

Based on the interrater reliability result of the marks awarded for writing scores, essay length, content and organisation, it is evident that the rating of scores was not biased. After the results were analysed, eight participants were selected to go through an interview.

3.6.6 Data on Interview Transcripts

The improvement of each participant was counted according to their essay length, content and organisation. Four participants with the highest improvements and another four with the lowest improvements were selected to undergo a one-to-one semi-structured interview session (Appendix F). Creswell (2008) explained that it enables the researcher to obtain useful and detailed information regarded to the phenomenon, by asking specific questions to elicit necessary information. The semi-structured interview was carried out to investigate the types of pre-writing strategies used before plot was introduced, as well as, to what extent was the treatment sessions helpful during the planning stage, and the writing process, for instance, the use of plot had its impact on the participants' ability to plan, generate and organise ideas.

The interview was carried out at the school's Self Accessed Learning Centre during the school hours when the participants were free. The interview session was carried out for three days and the duration for each session on average took a minimum of 10 minutes to a maximum of 15 minutes. The main focus of the interview was to find out the participants' awareness towards the use of plot as a pre-writing strategy that leads to the improvement in terms of essay length, content and organisation. Hence, after the interview sessions, the data was transcribed, analysed and coded, according to the three main components: essay length, content and organisation.

3.5.7   Coding

Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) revealed that coding is divided into two types which are concept or data driven. They also elaborated that codes which are concept-driven are developed in advance before the coding process is carried out while data driven codes are derived as the researcher reads through the materials (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). For this study, the coding process is based on concept driven, in accordance to the three components (essay length, content and organisation). The first component (essay length) coded responses on the participants' ability to produce the number of words written in both tests. Some of the words used for coding essay length, were 'more', 'words', 'ideas', 'longer', 'elaborate', 'sentences' and so forth. Whenever the transcription showed any of these or other words related to essay length, it will be coded and later put into themes. For example, in the excerpts (Excerpt 1, 2) below, the words in bold signifies the words coded for essay length.

- Excerpt 1 :

I   : How did plot help you to write longer essay?
P1   : It (plot) gave me **ideas**. when I got the point, I just **elaborate** and make it **longer**.

- Excerpt 2:

I   : So what kind of difference do you notice?
P3   : **More words**.
I   : More words. What else?
P3   : **Ideas** are **longer**, ideas are **elaborated**.

The second component (content) focused on responses which referred to the generating of ideas during pre and while-writing stage in both tests. Among the words selected for coding were, 'content', idea, 'point', 'box', beginning', 'rising', 'climax',

'falling', 'ending', 'storyline', 'easier' and so on. An example of codes for this theme is shown below where the bold words signify the coding process for content.

- Excerpt 3

I   : So how did it (plot diagram) help you to get those ideas? When it's actually just a piece of paper with empty boxes.
P2   : It's like... it shows the **storyline**.

- Excerpt 4

I   : Just now you said it helps to elaborate the ideas. What else?
P2   : If I do it this way (plot), it's **easier** to understand.
I   : Easier to understand? What is easier to understand?
P2   : The **storyline**.

The third component (organisation) looked at responses regarding the participants' ways in organising their ideas during the pre and while-writing stage in both tests. The coding process was carried out based on instances of words related to organisation, such as 'arrange', 'organised', 'in order', 'box', 'paragraph', 'mess', disorganised', 'storyline' and so forth. This next dialogue is an example of coding for the organisation component.

- Excerpt 5

I   : So does this (plot) help to generate ideas or do you find that both (participants previous planning method and plot) are the same?
P6   : Maybe it's like this... Both (essays) are the same. It's just that we have the **box** (plot), so we can **arrange**. The other one (previous planning method) the **storyline** is a **mess**, I just write what I wanted to write. This one (plot) is more **organised**, so we don't have to rethink anymore. As for the earlier one (previous planning method), all the points are there, but still not **organised** yet.

Apart from the researcher, another coder was involved in the coding process. Researchers claimed that a minimum of two coders are required for any human-coding content analysis in order to obtain reliability (Cheng, 2008; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). After the coding was completed, an intercoder reliability check needs to be carried out to ensure both coders were consistent in coding. The result will be discussed in the following section.

3.6.8   Intercoder Reliability

Neuendorf (2002) defined intercoder reliability as the comparison in terms of the number of agreement and disagreements in the coding procedure between two or more coders. Evans (1996) claimed that it is crucial for the intercoder reliability to be of satisfactory level to confirm that the coding scheme could be used as a measurement tool by more than one coder, yet achieve the same result (Neuendorf, 2002). The intercoder reliability for this study was measured by using Holsti's formula (1969):

$$CR = 2M / (N1 + N2)$$

***   *CR= coefficient of reliability*
M= the number of coding decisions both coders agreed upon
N1 and N2 = the number of units coded by coder 1 and 2

The result ranges from .00 for no agreement to 1.00 for total agreement. For this study, the intercoder reliability coefficient for selected sample coding ranged from .70 to .71. When the interrater reliability and intercoder reliability were of acceptable level, the quantitative and qualitative data were compared and analysed and this process is known as triangulation.

3.6.9   Triangulation

The strength for mix method approach research is emphasised when the findings from both quantitative and qualitative data are collected and triangulated. This is where the role of triangulation comes in. Creswell (2008) explained that triangulation occurs when there is a comparison between the two types of data. The outcome of the comparison will be used to confirm or disconfirm the findings during the discussion stage (Creswell, 2008).

Triangulation enables the researcher to not only look at the results from two different perspectives but both types of data can be used to further confirm the result. It also serves to question the findings as well, if the results for both types of data are contradicting, thus requiring the researcher to find out the reasons to explain the contradiction. Therefore, triangulation is an important aspect of mix method approach as the use of both quantitative and qualitative data in this study made the findings of the study more reliable.

For this study, the quantitative data was collected based on the result of the pre and post-tests. The result was used to answer the first three research questions on writing scores, essay length, content and organisation. The final research question involves the qualitative data, whereby eight participants with the most and least improvement were selected to go through an interview. The interview mainly includes questions about their planning strategies and opinions on the awareness of using plot as pre-writing which eventually led to the improvement in essay length, content, and organisation of their essays.

For instance, when the comparison between pre and post-tests showed that the essay length was longer in post-test, the result can be further supported with the interview data. Respondents whose essays have improved in terms of length, which may be due to the increase of ideas, can then explain to the interviewer how they managed to do so.

Therefore, the qualitative data (interview transcription) not only further confirms the results obtained from quantitative data (pre and post-tests) but it is used to provide insights from the participants' point of view.

3.7   Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the use of plot as a pre-writing strategy in narrative timed-writing and its impact in terms of writing scores, essay length, content and organisation. This chapter discussed how the quantitative (pre and post-tests) and qualitative data (interview) were collected, analysed and compared. The findings for these data will be described and discussed in the next chapter, according to the participants' difference in scores for the four areas mentioned earlier, as well as their personal views on the pre-writing strategy they were exposed to in this study.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1   Introduction

Out of the four language skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening), writing is the most difficult skill to acquire (Naginder Kaur, Nor Hayati Othman, & Abdullah, 2008). There are many aspects in writing that can be explored but for the purpose of this study, only two stages of the writing processes will be examined, that is the use of plot as a pre-writing strategy in composing narrative essays. As all the research questions looked at (a) low and (b) intermediate group separately, the discussion for each question will first address the result for the low level of English proficiency group, followed by the intermediate level of English proficiency group.

4.2   Writing Scores

The data for writing scores was obtained by comparing the scores between pre and post-tests for both groups with low and intermediate level of English proficiency based on a rating scale (Appendix D) adapted from the Negeri Sembilan SPM trial examination English Paper 1's marking scheme (2009). The adapted version only looked at items concerning length, content and organisation of ideas in the participants' writing. There were a total of eight bands, with marks ranging from band 'A' to 'E' for those who scored from good to lower average, and the lowest three bands, from 'U(i)' to 'U(iii)' were those who produced from lower average to weak essays. The results collected were used to answer the following question:

Research question 1: In terms of scores obtained, how does plot as a pre-writing strategy improve their narrative writing?

The significant improvement between the two proficiency groups in terms of writing scores were measured through the use of an adapted SPM trial examination marking scheme (2009). Paired samples t-test was carried out to compare the means of the pre and post-tests for the low and intermediate level of English proficiency groups. The result showed that there was a significant improvement in both groups. Table 4.1 below presents the result of writing scores for both groups respectively.

Table 4.1: Results of Writing Scores

	N	Pre-test M(SD)	Post-test M(SD)	T	T-Test Df	p
Low	20	6.50(4.98)	14.50(4.19)	-11.89	19*	.000
Intermediate	20	12.50(6.68)	18.50(5.37)	- 9.89	19*	.000

*$p < .001$

The mean score for low proficiency group was 6.50 in pre-test and 14.50 in post-test. This showed a significant improvement from pre to post-tests (t=-11.89, df=19, p<.001). The same goes for the intermediate group with the mean score of 12.50 in pre-test which later increased to 18.50 in post-test. The result revealed that there was a significant improvement between the two tests (t=-9.89, df=19, p<.001). This shows that the low English proficiency participants benefited more from the treatment as compared to the intermediate group as they used to face more problems in composing, in this case, generating and organisation of ideas; while most participants in the intermediate group had issues with organisation of ideas.

Table 4.2 below presents the writing scores result of the low proficiency group based on the pre-test and post-test as well as the improvement between the two. Each discussion will begin with the lowest scores leading to the highest scores obtained in the group.

Table 4.2: Low Level of English Proficiency (Writing Scores)

Participants	Writing Scores		Improvement	
	Pre-Test	Post-Test	+/-	%
L-01	1	12	+11	+22%
L-02	2	12	+10	+20%
L-03	5	14	+9	+18%
L-04	4	12	+8	+16%
L-05	5	16	+11	+22%
L-06	4	13	+9	+18%
L-07	12	13	+1	+2%
L-08	12	25	+13	+26%
L-09	7	15	+8	+16%
L-10	6	18	+12	+24%
L-11	2	10	+8	+16%
L-12	3	12	+9	+18%
L-13	14	18	+4	+8%
L-14	19	22	+3	+6%
L-15	12	19	+7	+14%
L-16	2	8	+6	+12%
L-17	3	12	+9	+18%
L-18	5	14	+9	+18%
L-19	10	15	+5	+10%
L-20	2	10	+8	+16%
Total	130	290	+160	+16%

For pre-test, 14 participants (L-01-06, 09-12, 16–18 and 20) in the low level of proficiency group scored the lowest band 'U(iii)', with scores ranging from 0 – 7 marks. Four participants scored 'U(ii)' with scores from 8 – 13 marks (L-07, 08, 15 and 19); while two participants with the highest score of the low proficiency group scored a 'U(i)' (14-19 marks). The participants were L-13, with 14 marks and L-14, with 19 marks.

For post-test, none of the participants scored the lowest band, 'U(iii)' whereby half of the group (L-01, 02, 04, 06, 07, 11, 12, 16, 17 and 20) scored a 'U(ii)'. Another eight participants (L- 03, 05, 09, 10, 13, 15, 18, 19) scored a 'U(i)' with scores ranging from 14 – 19 marks while another two participants obtained an E (20 – 25 marks), with L-14 scoring 22 marks, and L-08 scoring 25 marks.

All the participants showed some improvement in the post-test with three participants improving less than 10%. L-13 improved by four marks (8%), while L-14 improved 3 marks (6%). The participant with the least improvement was L-07, who improved by only 1 mark (2%). Most participants improved by 10% - 20%, with three participants (L-15, 16 and 19) improved between 10% - 15%, while nine participants (L-03, 04, 06, 09, 11, 12, 17, 18 and 20) improved between 16% – 19%. On the other hand, a total of five participants improved at least 20%. L-02 improved by 10 marks (20%), L-01, 05 improved by 11 marks (22%), L-10 improved by 12 marks (24%), and L-08 improved the most by 13 marks (26%). The writing scores result for the intermediate group will be discussed based on the table below:

Table 4.3: Intermediate Level of English Proficiency (Writing Scores)

Participants	Writing Scores		Improvement	
	Pre-Test	Post-Test	+/-	%
I-01	4	14	+10	20%
I-02	3	14	+11	22%
I-03	20	25	+5	10%
I-04	20	21	+1	2%
I-05	20	25	+5	10%
I-06	20	25	+5	10%
I-07	13	19	+6	12%
I-08	5	12	+7	14%
I-09	8	16	+8	16%
I-10	2	9	+7	14%
I-11	18	20	+2	4%
I-12	7	10	+3	6%
I-13	10	14	+4	8%
I-14	10	20	+10	20%

I-15	22	25	+3	6%
I-16	13	18	+5	10%
I-17	16	24	+8	16%
I-18	6	14	+8	16%
I-19	13	20	+7	14%
I-20	20	25	+5	10%
Total	250	370	+120	12%

The intermediate group scored a total of 250 marks in pre-test, with scores ranging from band 'U(iii)' to 'E'. Six participants (I- 01, 02, 08, 10, 12 and 18) scored the lowest band of 'U(iii)', with scores ranging from 0 – 7 marks. The participant with the lowest score among the group was given only two marks (I-10). A total of six participants (I-07, 09, 13, 14, 16 and 19) scored a 'U(ii)', with scores ranging from 8 – 13 marks and the two participants who scored U(i) were I-11 with 18 marks, and I-17 with 16 marks. A total of six participants with the highest scores of the group managed to obtain an 'E' band with scores ranging between 20 – 25 marks. Five of these participants scored 20 marks (I-03, 04, 05, 06 and 20) with I-15 scoring the highest score of 22 marks.

In the post-test, none of the participants scored the lowest band, U(iii). Three participants (I-08, 10 and 12), who obtained 'U(ii)' scored between 8 – 13 marks. Another seven participants (I-01, 02, 07, 09, 13, 16 and 18) attained 'U(ii)' with scores between 14- 19 marks. On the other hand, 10 participants (I- 03 – 06, 11, 14, 15, 17, 19 and 20) managed to obtain an 'E' band (20 – 25 marks), a total of five participants managed to achieve 25 marks, which was the highest score for post-test (I-03, 05, 06, 15 and 20).

Similarly with the group with low level of English proficiency, all the participants in the intermediate group showed some improvement in the post-test.

There were five participants who improved less than 10% (I-04, 11, 12, 13 and 15), with I-04 scoring the least improvement of one mark (2%). 12 participants improved between 10% - 16% (5 marks – 8 marks). Whereas, three participants (I-01, 02 and 14) improved by at least 20%, with I-02 having the most improvement of 21% (11 marks).

All the participants from both groups showed some improvement in writing scores after the treatment was administered. This finding was consistent with the study carried out by Worden (2009), who explained that high levels of pre-writing correlated with more distinction, passing marks, and there were fewer essays rated as needing work. In her study, a total of 499 out of 890 sample's work were coded as 'more pre-writing', obtained the result of 70% of passes, 11% of distinction and 18% of needs work essay. On the other hand, essays coded as 'no pre-writing' correlated with lower scores; with lower distinction, pass level, and more needs work essays. There were 250 essays which were coded as 'no pre-writing', and the result showed 63% of distinction, 8% of passes and 29% that needs work. The findings seemed to suggest that pre-writing helps to improve writing performance, which leads to higher writing scores. This study also looked at the link between pre-writing, i.e., the use of plot, and essay length, which will be discussed in the next section.

4.3 Essay Length

Both narrative essays from the pre and post-tests were also compared in terms of essay length. In order to standardise the rating rubric for essay length and writing dimensions (content and organisation), the rating scale for the number of words written was also divided into a band of 0 – 6 marks (Appendix E). The discussion for pre-test,

post-test and improvement will begin from the lowest score up to the highest score. The results aimed to answer the following question:

Research question 2: In terms of essay length, how does plot as a pre-writing strategy improve their narrative writing?

The comparison of mean scores for the pre and post-tests for both low and intermediate level of English proficiency group was administered by carrying out a paired sample t-test. The results are presented in Table 4.4 below.

Table 4.4: Results of Essay Length

	N	Pre-Test M(SD)	Post-Test M(SD)	T	T-Test Df	p
Low	20	1.75(1.59)	4.10(1.29)	-6.58	19*	.000
Intermediate	20	2.75(1.86)	4.80(1.47)	-6.76	19*	.000

p < .001

The results showed that both groups have improved in terms of essay length. The low level of English proficiency group improved from pre-test (M=1.75, SD=1.59) to post-test (M=4.10, SD=1.29) and the improvement was statistically significant (t=-6.58, df=19, p<.001). As for the intermediate level of proficiency group, though they did not show as much improvement as the former group, the results did increase from pre-test (M=2.75, SD=1.86) to post-test (M=4.80, SD=1.47), and the improvement was significant as well (t=-6.76, df=19, p<.001).

The low proficiency group showed an enormous improvement as most participants wrote relatively short essay length for pre-test and a much longer essay for post-test. Whereas for the intermediate proficiency group, the number of words written in pre-test were mostly of medium or long essay length as they have less problems in

terms of generating ideas for their essay. Hence, after the treatment was administered, the result for post-test did not improve as much as the low proficiency group. The result of each participant for both proficiency groups will be discussed based on Table 4.5 and Table 4.6 below.

Table 4.5: Low Level of English Proficiency (Essay Length)

Participants	Essay Length		Improvement	
	Pre-Test	Post-Test	+/-	%
L-01	0	3	+3	50%
L-02	0	6	+6	100%
L-03	1	5	+4	66.67%
L-04	1	3	+2	33.33%
L-05	1	4	+3	50%
L-06	1	6	+5	83.33%
L-07	5	6	+1	16.67%
L-08	2	4	+2	33.33%
L-09	2	4	+2	33.33%
L-10	1	3	+2	33.33%
L-11	2	3	+1	16.67%
L-12	2	4	+2	33.33%
L-13	5	5	-	0%
L-14	4	5	+1	16.67%
L-15	4	4	-	0%
L-16	0	2	+2	33.33%
L-17	0	4	+4	66.67%
L-18	1	3	+2	33.33%
L-19	2	6	+4	66.67%
L-20	1	2	+1	16.67%
Total	35	82	+47	39.17%

The low level of English proficiency group scored a total of 35 marks in pre-test. Four participants (L-01, 02, 16 and 17) were given '0' mark as they wrote less than 59 words. Seven participants (L-03 - 06, 10, 18 and 20) who wrote between 60 - 119 words scored 1 mark, while five participants (L-08, 09, 11, 12 and 19) scored 2 marks for the essay length of 120 – 179 words. Another two participants (L-14 and 15) who produced 240 - 299 words essay obtained 4 marks, and lastly, two participants (L-07 and 13) achieved the highest score in pre-test, obtained 5 marks for writing 300 - 349 words in

their narrative essay. Thus, the scores added up to a total score of 35 marks for pre-test. After the treatment was given, a post-test was carried out.

For post-test, the scores were higher as compared to pre-test, with a total of 82 marks. None of the participants scored 0 and 1 mark. Two participants (L-16 and 20) were given the lowest score of 2 marks. Five participants (L-01, 04, 10, 11 and 18) scored 3 marks for producing 180 − 239 words; six participants (L-05, 08, 09, 12, 15 and 17) who wrote 240 − 299 words scored 4 marks; while another three participants (L-03, 13 and 14) scored 5 marks. There were four participants (L-02, 06, 07 and 19) who managed to score the highest band of 6 marks by writing 350 words and above in their essay. The total score for the post-test was 82 marks.

After comparing both tests, there were two participants who did not show any improvement. L-13 scored 5 marks, while L-15 scored 4 marks for both the pre and post-tests. Four participants (L-07, 11, 14 and 20) had a slight improvement by 1 mark, while seven participants improved by 2 marks. A number of them showed some improvement, for instance two participants (L-01 and 05) improved by 3 marks (50%), whereas three participants (L-03, 17 and 19) improved by 4 marks (66.67%). There were two participants who improved the most; L-05 improved by 5 marks (83.33%) while L-02 had the highest improvement of 6 marks (100%). However, the intermediate group improved slightly lesser as compared to the former group, with the results shown in Table 4.6 below.

Table 4.6: Intermediate Level of English Proficiency (Essay Length)

Participants	Essay Length		Improvement	
	Pre-Test	Post-Test	+/-	%
I-01	0	4	+4	66.67%
I-02	1	5	+4	66.67%
I-03	4	6	+2	33.33%
I-04	5	6	+1	16.67%
I-05	4	6	+2	33.33%
I-06	4	6	+2	33.33%
I-07	4	6	+2	33.33%
I-08	1	3	+2	33.33%
I-09	1	5	+4	66.67%
I-10	0	2	+2	33.33%
I-11	4	6	+2	33.33%
I-12	1	3	+2	33.33%
I-13	1	2	+1	0%
I-14	2	6	+4	66.67%
I-15	6	6	-	0%
I-16	3	3	-	0%
I-17	4	4	-	0%
I-18	1	5	+4	66.67%
I-19	4	6	+2	33.33%
I-20	5	6	-1	16.67%
Total	55	96	+41	34.17%

The intermediate group scored a total of 55 marks in pre-test. Nine participants scored the lower bands, between 0 − 3 marks. Two participants (I-01 and 10) were given '0' mark as they wrote less than 59 word, six participants (I- 02, 08, 09, 12, 13, 18) scored 1 mark, one participant (I- 14) scored 2 marks, and only one participant (I-16) scored 3 marks. The remaining 11 participants managed to score the higher bands of 4 − 6 marks, with seven participants (I-03, 05-07, 11,17 and 19) scoring 4 marks, whereas two participants (I- 04 and 20) scored 5 marks. There was one participant (I-15) who managed to write a minimum of 350 words, thus scoring the highest band of 6 marks. In general, the intermediate group scored a total of 55 marks. The result for post-test increased by 41 marks as most of the participants showed some improvement after the treatment was administered.

The post-test for the intermediate level of English proficiency group scored a total of 96 marks. Only two participants scored the lower band of 2 marks (I-10 and 13), and three participants (I-08, 12 and 16) scored 3 marks. The rest of the group scored 4 marks and above, with two participants scoring 4 marks (I-01 and 17), and three participants (I-02, 09 and 18) scoring 5 marks. Half of the group managed to achieve the highest score of 6 marks as they were able to write at least 350 words in their narrative essay (I-03, 04, 05, 06, 07, 11, 14, 15, 19 and 20).

Even though 50% of the participants obtained the maximum score of 6 marks in post-test, the improvement shown is slightly lower than the low proficiency group. There were three participants (I- 15, 16 and 17) who did not show any improvement as they gained similar results in both tests. On the other hand, three participants (I-04, 13 and 20) improved by 1 mark (16.67%), nine participants (I-03, 05 - 08, 10 - 12, 19) improved by 2 marks (33.33%) while five participants (I-01, 2, 9, 14, 18) had the highest improvement of 4 marks (66.67%). On the whole, the intermediate group improved a total of 41 marks (34.17%). While the improvement for essay length can be seen as high as 6 marks, the improvement for writing dimensions (content, organisation) did not yield the same pattern.

4.4   Writing Dimension (Content)

For the purpose of this study, only two writing dimensions were looked into by referring to an adapted rating scale (East, 2009) as shown in Appendix E. For content, the scores awarded ranged from 0 – 6 marks, it mainly looked at the participants' ability to generate main ideas and elaboration for their narrative essays. Hence answering the following question:

Research question 3: In terms of writing dimensions, how does plot as a pre-writing strategy improve the content and organisation of their narrative writing?

In order to answer the third question, a similar paired sample t-test was carried out. The results as shown in Table 4.7 below showed significant improvement for both low and intermediate level of English proficiency groups in terms of content.

Table 4.7: Results of Content

	N	Pre-Test M(SD)	Post-Test M(SD)	T	T-Test Df	p
Low	20	2.15(0.88)	3.25(0.79)	-6.85	19*	.000
Intermediate	20	3.00(1.03)	4.10(0.79)	- 8.90	19*	.000

*p < .001

The mean score for the low level of English proficiency group was 2.15 in the pre-test and 3.25 in the post-test. The result showed significant improvement (t=-6.85, df=19, p<.001). The intermediate proficiency group has showed improvement as well, from 3.00 in the pre-test to 4.10 in the post-test, again the result was significant (t=-8.90, df=19, p<.001). The result in Table 4.8 and Table 4.9 below showed that both proficiency groups showed equal improvement in terms of content, which will be discussed accordingly.

When the participants learned to generate ideas according to the plot structure, their ideas were clearer and more connected. This suggests that both proficiency groups were able to generate better ideas for their narrative essays as they were aware that a story should consist of a basic structure (plot). The improvement for content for both proficiency groups will be discussed based on Table 4.8 and Table 4.9 below.

Table 4.8: Low Level of English Proficiency (Content)

Participants	Writing Dimension (Content)		Improvement	
	Pre-Test	Post-Test	+/-	%
L-01	1	3	+2	33.33%
L-02	2	3	+1	16.67%
L-03	2	3	+1	16.67%
L-04	2	3	+1	16.67%
L-05	2	3	+1	16.67%
L-06	1	3	+2	33.33%
L-07	4	4	-	0%
L-08	2	5	+2	33.33%
L-09	3	4	+1	16.67%
L-10	2	3	+1	16.67%
L-11	1	2	+1	16.67%
L-12	2	2	-	0%
L-13	3	4	+1	16.67%
L-14	4	4	-	0%
L-15	3	4	+1	16.67%
L-16	1	2	+1	16.67%
L-17	2	3	+1	16.67%
L-18	2	3	+1	16.67%
L-19	2	4	+2	33.33%
L-20	2	3	+1	16.67%
Total	43	65	+22	18.33%

The discussion for pre-test, post-test and improvement will begin with the lowest score (0 mark) to the highest score (6 marks). For pre-test, 16 participants scored the lower band of 0 – 2 marks as their ideas seemed disconnected. However, none of the participants was given '0' mark. The lowest score was 1 mark, which was obtained by four participants (I-01, 06, 11 and 16). A total of 12 participants (I-02, 03, 04, 05, 08, 10, 12, 17, 18, 19 and 20) scored 2 marks, and another two participants (I-09 and 13) scored 3 marks. Only two participants (I-07 and 14) managed to score the upper band with the highest score of 4 marks. In general, the low level of English proficiency group scored a total of 43 marks. After the treatment, the result for post-test revealed that most participants showed improvement for content.

The post-test result for the low level of English proficiency group has improved due to the fact that none of them scored the lowest two bands of '0' and '1' mark. Only three participants scored 2 marks (L-11, 12 and 16). Half of the group (L-07, 09, 13, 14 and 19) scored 3 marks while another half attained the upper bands between 4 – 5 marks, with six participants (L-07, 09, 13 – 15 and 19) scoring 4 marks and one participant (L-08) achieved the highest score of the group of 5 marks. None of the participants managed to score 6 marks.

There was no major improvement for these participants as the scores improved by only 1 or 2 marks. Nonetheless, there were three participants (L-07, 12 and 14) who did not improve at all. A total of 13 participants' result (L-02, 03, 04, 05, 09 - 11, 13, 18 and 20) increased by 1 mark (16.67%), while four participants (L- 01, 06, 08 and 19) increased by 2 marks (33.33%), hence improved by 33.33%. The result for the next group, as shown in Table 4.9 below, showed a similar pattern as well.

Table 4.9: Intermediate Level of English Proficiency (Content)

Participants	Writing Dimension (Content)		Improvement	
	Pre-Test	Post-Test	+/-	%
I-01	2	4	+2	33.33%
I-02	1	3	+1	16.67%
I-03	4	5	+1	16.67%
I-04	4	5	+1	16.67%
I-05	4	5	+1	16.67%
I-06	4	5	+1	16.67%
I-07	3	4	+1	16.67%
I-08	2	3	+1	16.67%
I-09	3	4	+1	16.67%
I-10	1	3	+2	33.33%
I-11	4	4	-	0%
I-12	2	3	+1	16.67%
I-13	3	4	+1	16.67%
I-14	3	5	+2	33.33%
I-15	4	5	+1	16.67%
I-16	3	4	+1	16.67%
I-17	4	4	-	0%
I-18	2	3	+1	16.67%

I-19	3	4	+1	16.67%
I-20	4	5	+1	16.67%
Total	60	82	+22	18.33%

For the pre-test, six participants scored the lower bands of 0 – 3 marks. The lowest score obtained was 1 mark (I-02 and 10), another four participants (I-02, 08, 12 and 18) scored 2 marks while six participants (I-07, 13, 14, 16 and 19) scored 3 marks. A total of eight participants (I-03, 04, 05, 06, 11, 15, 17 and 20) had the highest score of the group of 4 marks. As for the post-test, none of the participants scored the lower band of 0 –2 marks. Five participants (I-02, 08, 10, 12 and 18) scored 3 marks, the lowest score obtained in the group. Another eight participants (I-01, 07, 09, 11, 13, 16, 17 and 19) scored 4 marks, the remaining seven participants (I-03 - 06, 14, 15 and 20) scored 5 marks for content. Similarly to the previous group, there was only a slight improvement among the participants. While two participants (I-11 and 17) did not show sign of improvement, a majority of 15 participants (I-02 - 09, 12, 13, 15, 16, 18, 19, and 20) improved by 1 mark (16.67%), while three participants (I-01, 10 and 14) improved by 2 marks (33.33%). The result for organisation was somewhat similar with content.

4.5   Writing Dimension (Organisation)

The scores for organisation ranged from 0 – 6 depending on the cohesiveness, development and arrangement of ideas of the essay written. The result will be used to discuss the following question:

Research question 3: In terms of writing dimensions, how does plot as a pre-writing strategy improve the content and organisation of their narrative writing?

The results for the paired sample t-test for organisation showed significant improvement for both low and intermediate level of English proficiency, as shown in Table 4.10 below.

Table 4.10: Results of Organisation

	N	Pre-Test M(SD)	Post-Test M(SD)	T	T-Test Df	p
Low	20	2.00(0.73)	3.30(0.73)	-10.18	19*	.000
Intermediate	20	2.85(0.99)	3.80(0.77)	- 6.19	19*	.000

p < .001

The results revealed that both groups have improved in the post-test. The mean scores for low level of English proficiency improved from 2.00 in the pre-test to 3.30 in the post-test. Hence, the improvement was significant (t=-10.18, df=19, p<.001). The intermediate level of English proficiency has improved as well, from the 2.85 in pre-test to 3.80 in post-test. Similarly to the former group, the improvement was significant (t=-6.19, df=19, p<.001). In this study, the participants learned to organise their ideas based on the plot structure, from beginning, rising action, climax, falling action to ending. Thus, the development of their ideas or story in the post-test was more cohesive compared to pre-test. Next, the result for organisation of ideas for both low and intermediate proficiency groups will be discussed in detail based on Table 4.11 and Table 4.12 below.

Table 4.11: Low Level of English Proficiency (Organisation)

Participants	Writing Dimension (Organisation)		Improvement	
	Pre-Test	Post-Test	+/-	%
L-01	1	3	2	33.33%
L-02	2	3	1	16.67%
L-03	3	3	-	0%
L-04	2	3	1	16.67%
L-05	3	4	1	16.67%
L-06	2	4	2	33.33%
L-07	3	4	1	16.67%

L-08	2	4	2	33.33%
L-09	2	3	1	16.67%
L-10	2	4	2	33.33%
L-11	1	2	1	16.67%
L-12	1	2	1	16.67%
L-13	3	4	1	16.67%
L-14	3	4	1	16.67%
L-15	2	4	2	33.33%
L-16	1	2	1	16.67%
L-17	2	3	1	16.67%
L-18	2	3	1	16.67%
L-19	2	4	2	33.33%
L-20	1	3	2	16.67%
Total	40	66	+26	21.67%

Based on the pre-test result of the low level of English proficiency group, the participants scored marks in the lower bands ranging from 1 − 3 marks, whereby their organisation of ideas was of weak cohesion and lacked development. Five participants obtained the lowest score of the group was 1 mark (L-01, 11, 12, 16 and 20) while half of the group (L-02, 04, 06, 08 - 10, 15, 17, 18 and 19) scored 2 marks. The highest score of the low level of proficiency group was 3 marks, which was attained by five participants (L-03, 05, 0, 13 and 14). Therefore, the low level of proficiency group scored a total of 40 marks in the pre-test. Although none of the participants scored 4 marks and above for pre-test, most of them showed some improvement in terms of organisation in their post-test.

There were only three participants (L-11, 12 and 16) who scored 2 marks while the rest scored between 3 − 4 marks. Eight participants (L-01 - 04, 09, 17, 18 and 20) managed to score 3 marks, another nine participants (L-05, 06, 07, 08, 10, 13 − 15 and 19) scored 4 marks, which made up a total of 66 marks for the post-test.

Based on the result shown in Table 4.11, it shows that all the participants improved except for L-03. There were 12 participants (L-02, 04, 05, 07, 09, 11 - 14, 16,

17 and 18) who improved slightly by 1 mark (16.67%), while another seven participants (L- 01, 06, 08, 10, 15, 19, 20) improved by 2 marks (33.33%). Next, the result for the intermediate group will be discussed based on Table 4.12 below.

Table 4.12: Intermediate Level of English Proficiency (Organisation)

Participants	Writing Scores (Organisation)		Improvement	
	Pre-Test	Post-Test	+/-	%
I-01	2	3	+1	16.67%
I-02	1	3	+2	33.33%
I-03	4	4	-	0%
I-04	4	4	-	0%
I-05	4	4	-	0%
I-06	4	5	+1	16.67%
I-07	3	4	+1	16.67%
I-08	2	3	+1	16.67%
I-09	3	5	+2	33.33%
I-10	1	2	+1	16.67%
I-11	3	4	+1	16.67%
I-12	2	3	+1	16.67%
I-13	2	3	+1	16.67%
I-14	3	4	+1	16.67%
I-15	4	4	-	0%
I-16	3	4	+1	16.67%
I-17	3	4	+1	16.67%
I-18	2	4	+2	33.33%
I-19	3	5	+2	16.67%
I-20	4	4	-	0%
Total	57	76	+19	15.8%

The findings revealed that the intermediate level of English proficiency group did not improve as much as the previous group in terms of organisation. There were a few participants who did not show any improvement in their post-test. In the pre-test, only two participants (I-02 and 10) scored 1 mark for organisation, while five participants (I-01, 08, 12, 13 and 18) scored 2 marks and seven participants (I-07, 09, 11, 14, 16, 17 and 19) scored 3 marks. The six participants (I-03, 04, 05, 06, 15and 20) who scored 4 marks had satisfactory cohesion and there was some organisation as

compared to those who scored 2 and 3 marks. The total score for pre-test was 57 marks and most participants improved in their post-test.

In post-test, while none scored '0' and 1 mark, there was only one participant (I-10) who scored 2 marks while the rest scored between 3 − 5 marks. There were five participants (I-01, 02, 08, 11and 12) who scored 3 marks while 11 participants (I- 03, 04, 05, 7, 11, 14 − 18 and 20) scored 4 marks. Three participants obtained the highest score of 5 marks (I-06, 09 and 19). Even though the scores were higher, some of the participants' score did not improve in their post-test. Hence, the total score for post-test was 76 marks.

There were five participants who did not improve (I-03, 05, 15 and 20). Most of the participants (I-01, 06 - 08, 10 -14, 16 and 17) improved by 1 mark (16.67%) while four participants (I-02, 09, 18 and 19) improved by 2 marks (33.33%). Thus, the total improvement for the intermediate level of English proficiency group was 19 marks (15.80%). Based on the improvement of both groups for writing scores, essay length, content and organisation, it was shown that participants in the low level of English proficiency group improved more compared to the intermediate group in all four aspects. Therefore, an interview was carried out to find out how far did the use of plot as pre-writing helped both groups of participants in terms of length, content and organisation.

4.6   Interview

A total of eight participants were selected to go though the interview, four participants (I-04, 15, 17, 20) with the least improvement and another four participants

(L-01, 02, 06 and 19) with the most improvement. The interview findings aimed to answer the following question:

Research question 4: How does the students' awareness of the use of plot as pre-writing strategy lead to the improvement in writing in terms of essay length, content and organisation?

As the interview mainly focused on essay length, content and organisation, the total improvement only included the three aspects mentioned. The participants who improved by 7 - 8 marks were categorised as most improved while those who improved by only 1 mark were categorised as least improved. After the interview was transcribed, the themes were identified based on the coding of words related to the fields: essay length, content and organisation.

4.6.1 Essay length

From the interview data, words with instances related to essay length were coded. For example, 'more words', 'longer', 'more ideas', 'sentence' and so on. After coding, three themes were identified, as shown in Figure 4.1below.
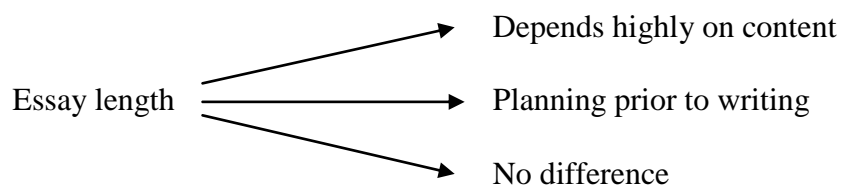
Figure 4.1: Themes for Essay Length

a. Depends Highly on Content

Most participants claimed that they were able to produce a longer essay in their post-test due to their ability to generate more ideas and elaboration. Before they were exposed to plot, they had problems in generating ideas. Consequently, they were not able to write a 350 words essay. After the treatment sessions, they claimed that plot has helped them to create more ideas compared to the past. When they had more ideas, they were able to write more words.   Participant 1 commented that he was able to generate ideas based on plot. After the main points were generated, he later elaborated on each point to make the sentences longer. On the other hand, Participant 3 stated that he was able to write more words as the ideas and elaborations were longer. The interview transcriptions are stated as below.

- Excerpt 1 :

I   : How did plot help you to write longer essay?
P1   : It (plot) gave me ideas. When I got the point, I just elaborate and make it
          longer.
I   : Before this?
P1   : I did not have ideas. No plot.

- Excerpt 2:

I   : So what kind of difference do you notice?
P3   : More words.
I   : More words. What else?
P3   : Ideas are longer, ideas are elaborated.

There were a few reasons which contributed to the participants' ability to write longer essays, and the use pre-writing is one of the reasons. The next theme discusses the participants' opinion on the use of plot as a pre-writing strategy.

b.   Planning Prior to Writing

Before the treatment was administered, most of the participants did not practise the use of pre-writing whereby they plan before they proceed to the writing stage. When they were asked about their previous writing strategy, they explained that they would plan as they write the essay. The participants later stated that when they prepared for pre-writing during the treatment sessions, they had to jot down the ideas and elaboration. By doing so, it helped them to produce longer essays as they planned out their story before they began to write. Participant 2 and 3 noticed that the essays were lengthy and there were more ideas and elaboration in their work. During the treatment sessions, participants were advised to write about 70 words for each paragraph. When they had completed their five paragraphs, they would have a minimum of 350 words. Their ability to produce longer essays had also improved their writing scores. The participants' responses are shown in the transcriptions below.

- Excerpt 3

I   : So do you notice any differences?
P3   : Yes
I   : What are the differences?
P3   : More words.
I   : More words. What else?
P3   : Longer ideas, ideas are elaborated

- Excerpt 4

I   : How do you find plot helpful in terms of essay writing?
P2   : To produce sentences, the points...
I   : Can generate points? What else?
P2   : After making the points, it helps in terms of elaboration too.

Most participants explained that plot was useful. Before the treatment was given, they did not have the habit of planning their story before they compose, which resulted

in their short essay length. The participants in a study carried out by Worden (2009) faced the similar issue as well. It was found that essays which did not go through pre-writing stage tend to have shorter essay length by 18%, as compared to essays with more pre-writing which only had 9% essays with short length. Less skilled writers have insufficient writing strategies and they are more dependent on the text produced to generate more ideas as they would plan as they write their essay, when they run out of ideas, they would re-read the entire essay hoping to generate more ideas. Victori (1999) explained that these strategies are rather time-consuming, less skilled writers would end up producing short essay length in timed-writing.

In this study plot was introduced as a pre-writing strategy as an attempt to aid low English proficiency participants in their writing performance. After the treatment sessions, they managed to generate more ideas and produced longer essays. As for the participants who have always practiced pre-writing, they also tend to produce longer essay in their pre-test. Therefore, they did not find plot useful in terms of helping them to write more words.

c.   No Difference

There were a few participants with the least improvement who did not find the use of plot useful in writing longer essays. These participants were able to produce long essays in their pre-test, and their essay length for post-test was equally lengthy. For instance, Participant 5 stated that plot did not help much in terms of writing more words (Excerpt 5), while Participant 6 did not notice any difference when he did his pre and post-tests (Excerpt 6). When they were asked about their planning strategy prior to the treatment sessions, the participants explained that they would usually spend some time

planning, and will only begin to write after they have completed the draft. This is consistent with Kellogg's (1990) findings whereby skilled writers understood the importance of planning, thus they were able to write fluently and effectively.

- Excerpt 5

I   : Ok, so did it (plot) help in terms of writing more words?
P6   : Not so much.

- Excerpt 6

I   : Do you think there's any difference after the session in terms of the number of words written?
P7   : I don't think there's any difference.

Nonetheless, for this context, the use of plot as pre-writing seemed helpful for those who had problems in writing lengthy essays in the past, such as the low level of English proficiency group. In order to write longer essay length, one should have the ability to generate more ideas for the content of the narrative essays.

4.6.2 Writing Dimension (Content)

Besides essay length, the interview also intended to relate the use of plot as a pre-writing strategy and the participants' ability to generate ideas. Words which had instances related to content were selected for coding, for example, 'content', idea, 'point', 'box', beginning', 'rising', 'climax', 'falling', 'ending', 'story' and so on. After coding, five themes as shown in Figure 4.2 below, were later identified and discussed accordingly.
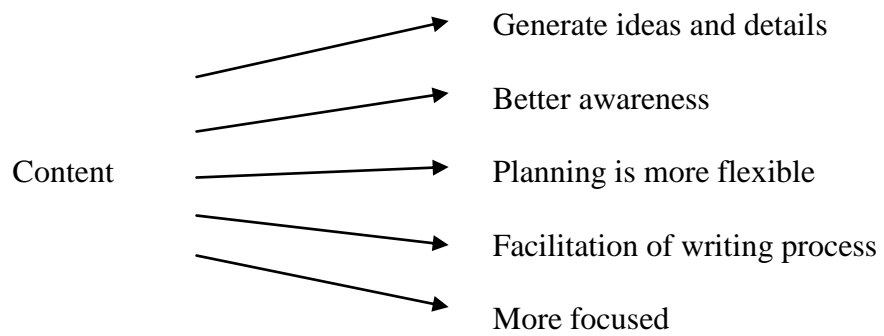
Figure 4.2: Themes for Content

a.   Generate Ideas and Details

Prior to the treatment sessions, participants faced problems in terms of generating ideas. Koo (2010) mentioned that the nature of the Malaysian school education system is intensely examination-orientated, and students are usually rewarded with good results when they memorise notes and formulaic responses. Nonetheless, she also added that this would constrain the students' critical literacy and ability to articulate their thoughts. Zhao (2008) added that coupled with the product approach in writing classroom which pays little attention the writing process, students are unaware of the importance of pre-writing. This causes them to struggle when it comes to generating ideas. After the participants were given six sessions to practice the use of plot as a pre-writing strategy for narrative essays, most participants found the use of plot to be useful since it showed them the structure of a storyline, whereby the 'beginning' would lead to the starting of conflict in 'rising action', followed by the 'climax' and slowly it progresses to 'falling action' where the conflict starts to resolve, and finally reaches the 'ending' of the story. Hence, the participants used these five elements in the plot diagram as a guide to generate ideas for their sequence of events more effectively. Participant 1 explained that he was able to plan easily according to the five elements, as shown in the interview transcriptions below.

- Excerpt 7

I   : So how was plot and the sessions helpful in terms of helping you to plan?

P1   : Because there is the beginning, then the points until the ending.

_____

I   : How did plot help you to get ideas?

P1   : Can get the points from there (plot), by following the box.

_____

I   : Do you think it'll be troublesome to use it (plot) during the exam?

P1   : No.

I   : Ok. Why not?

P1   : It's easy, because it's simple, just do the points (ideas) only, it's not difficult.

A few of the participants with the least improvement, such as Participant 7 also explained that by using plot as pre-writing, it was less time-consuming during the planning stage as stated in Excerpt 8 below. They were able to generate ideas quicker as compared to their previous planning strategy.

- Excerpt 8

I   : How is it (plot) helpful for your writing?

P7   : It's like, when we read it (title), we will have an idea of how to do it.

_____

I   : Do you think plot can be used during the exam?

P7   : I think so.

I   : If you think it can help, in what way does it help?

P7   : it helps us to think a bit faster.

I   : Why faster?

P7   : It's easy, when we read the topic given, we'll know the storyline.

When the participants were able to generate ideas more efficiently, it goes to show that they had a better understanding of how a story should be portrayed. In this study, these participants explained their new found awareness during the interview.

b.   Better Awareness

When the interviewees were asked whether they noticed any difference when they wrote their essays during the pre and post-tests, most of them stated that they were able to write more fluently during post-test due to a few reasons. One of the reasons was because they were aware that a story should consist of the five elements in plot, thus, this made it easier for them to plan their essay. When the participants were asked about their writing strategy in pre-test, Participant 8 explained that she did not give much thought about the storyline and just wrote whatever that came to mind as she composed the essay (Excerpt 9), whereas Participant 2 stated that the five elements enabled him to understand the storyline better (Excerpt 10). The interview transcription below highlights these issues.

- Excerpt 9

I   : So what are the differences you notice (between pre and post-tests)?
P8   : The one before (pre-test) is more like a mess. The later one (post-test) is better.
I   : Why did you say that the later one (post-test) is better?
P8   : Maybe it's because I have a better understanding of the storyline.
I   : What about the one before (pre-test)?
P8   : Don't know. I just simply wrote it.

- Excerpt 10

I   : So how did it (plot diagram) help you to get those ideas? When it's actually just a piece of paper with empty boxes.
P2   : It's like... it shows the storyline.

_____

I   : Just now you said it helps to elaborate the ideas. What else?
P2   : If I do it this way (plot), it's easier to understand.
I   : Easier to understand? What is easier to understand?
P2   : The storyline.

After the participants have familiarised themselves with the pre-writing method, they were able to generate ideas for their essay, plus they had more control over the planning process. Hence they could start their planning from any of the element that they chose.

c.   Planning is More Flexible

The participants found that plot enabled them to have a more flexible planning process. Unlike their previous way of planning which usually started off with the beginning of the story and slowly progressing to the end in an orderly manner; now they were able to start off planning their plot at any point of the story. For instance, Participant 2 would start with climax first (Excerpt 11) while Participant 8 would decide on the ending before planning the rest of the story (Excerpt 12). This theme is reflected in the two excerpts below.

- <u>Excerpt 11</u>

I   : Do you plan in order from the beginning of the box until the end?
P2   : Depends on the topic. Sometimes I'll jump here (climax) first.

- <u>Excerpt 12</u>

I   : So normally where do you start to plan?
P8   : Beginning.
I   : Plan in order or you'll skip to other boxes first?
P8   : I'll skip around.
I   : Normally which box you'll skip to first?
P8   : Usually the beginning is given, so I'll think of whether the ending is happy or sad, do the ending first. Then, decide how the middle of the story is like.

When these participants learnt to plan their pre-writing stage properly, with the ideas and brief elaboration written down on a paper, the writing process became less problematic for them as they can focus more on writing. If one skips the planning stage, the writing stage will inevitably be affected, as there is the need to pause for planning along the writing process.

d.   Facilitation of Writing Stage

After all the ideas were jotted down in the plot diagram, participants found that planning was helpful during the writing stage. They were able to construct sentences easily according to the ideas generated. This issue was highlighted in Plakans' (2008) study which examined the difference between L2 writers. His findings revealed that skilled L2 writers planned more before they began to write as compared to less skilled writers. These skilled writers who were interested and had more experience in writing would spend more time in planning. Hence they were able to write continuously and stop less for planning during the writing process as compared to the less skilled L2 writers who used less writing strategy and less time in planning. Consequently, these writers had to stop occasional to plan their work. This is consistent to the finding of this study as most participants felt that they were able to write continuously if they have completed their draft. For instance, Participant 4 and Participant 5 explained that when they planned their essay, it was easier for them to write and construct sentences for their composition, as explained in Excerpt 13 and 14 below.

- Excerpt 13

I   : If you compare that method (participants' own method) and this method (plot), which would you prefer?

P4   : This one (plot).

I   : Ok. So why do you prefer this one (plot)?

P4   : Because this one is easier. It's like we plan first right? So when we write, it's easy.

- Excerpt 14

I   : More content? Besides content?

P5   : It's easier to construct sentence.

_____

I   : You used to make points too. But why did you say it helped you to write easily, when it (plot) is merely points as well?

P5   : Because it can straight away fit into the essay.

_____

I   : Do you think plot can be helpful during the exam?

P5   : Helpful

I   : In what way?

P5   : Easier to make longer sentences and so on.

Besides having a smoother writing process in general, the use of plot as a pre-writing strategy also helped participants to be more focused when they wrote their essay because it was important for them to elaborate on one element at a time.

e.   **More Focused**

During the interview, a few participants explained that they were able to focus and wrote each paragraph in more detail because they would not carry on to the next idea until they have completed and felt satisfied with the elaboration on the current point written, while Participant 4 (Excerpt 15) explained that he would think of his story

one element at a time, Participant 1 (Excerpt 16) chose to follow the steps of using one element and elaborated it into one paragraph.

- Excerpt 15

I : So you can imagine the story? (Participant nodded) From beginning until the end with this thing (plot)?
P4 : Yes. Without it, maybe it'll (essay) be messy, all over the place, like…
I : Write, change, write, then change again?
P4 : Yes. When we are doing 'beginning', we just imagine for 'beginning' only. So when we are writing for 'rising action', we then imagine how's the 'rising action' like.

- Excerpt 16

P1 : Can get the points from that (plot), by following the box.
I : How?
P1 : One point, one paragraph, and then we elaborate that whole paragraph.

The majority of participants with the most improvement found that the use of plot as a pre-writing strategy helped in generating ideas for content. Worden (2009) revealed in his study that essays with high instances of pre-writing responded to the task more, compared to the ones with low instances of pre-writing. In her study, the essays which responded according to the topic were coded as 'responsive', those which did not were coded as 'unresponsive', while those that resisted to comply with the topic were coded as 'resistant'. For essays with high pre-writing, 93% of the essay were identified as responsive, 3% were unresponsive, while 3.5% were of resistant. As for the essays with low instances of pre-writing, 84% were responsive, 3% were unresponsive, and 18% were coded as resistant. She went on to explain that learners who practised pre-writing responded the task given accordingly as they pay more attention to the topic, hence they were able to plan accordingly because they have a better understanding of the given topic (Worden, 2009). The next section will look at the participants' ability to organise the ideas generated during both the planning and writing stages.

4.6.3   Writing Dimension (Organisation)

The purpose of this study was not only to examine the participants' preparation for content but it also looked at how far these participants were able to organise the content of their narrative essay. The coding process was done based on words that were related to organisation, such as 'arrange', 'organised', 'in order', 'box', 'paragraph', 'mess', disorganised', 'storyline' and so on. After coding, five themes were identified as shown in Figure 4.3 below. Each theme will be discussed and supported with transcription from the interview.
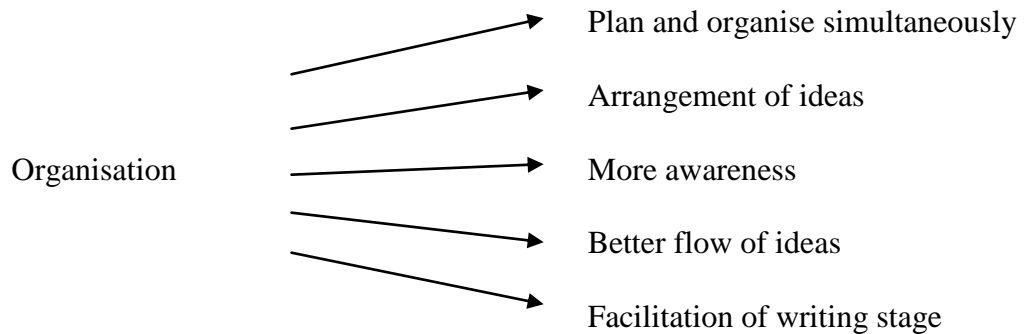
Figure 4.3: Themes for Organisation

a.   Plan and Organise Simultaneously

The plot diagram is divided into five elements, beginning, rising action, climax, falling action and ending. As the participants planned their ideas according to the elements, they could organise those ideas concurrently. Hence, most of the interviewees found the use of plot as pre-writing strategy to be convenient. Participant 6 stated that after she has generated the ideas, it was not necessary for her to think about how she wanted to organise her ideas as the use of plot during the planning stage enabled her to plan and organise simultaneously (Excerpt 17). Due to this reason,

Participant 4 explained that planning was less time-consuming (Excerpt 18), as seen in the responses given below.

- Excerpt 17

I   : So does this (plot) help to generate ideas or do you find that both (participants' previous planning method and plot) are the same?

P6 : Maybe it's like this... Both (essays) are the same. It's just that we have the box (plot), so we can arrange. The other one (previous planning method) the storyline is a mess, I just write what I wanted to write. This one (plot) is more organised, so we don't have to rethink anymore. As for the earlier one (previous planning method), all the points are there, but still not organised yet.

- Excerpt 18

I   : Ok, so if it's helpful, how would it help during the examination, and not just serve merely as exercises only?

P4 : It's like this (plot) saves time. The essay is not messy, so we do it one by one.

Prior to the treatment sessions, both groups of participants with low and intermediate level of English proficiency faced problems in organising their ideas. The similar pattern was found in a study conducted by Uzawa (1996) who made a comparison between L1 and L2 writing. Even though the participants were able to generate ideas for both L1 and L2 writing tasks, they did not further develop and organise those ideas into a unified text before they write. The mean scores for content in L1 and L2 were similar at 5.4 while the organisation in L1 writing was 4.9 and L2 writing was 5.3. The rationale for the participants' lack of organisation in writing was that these writers lack writing practice in both L1 and L2 (Uzawa, 1996).

In the context of this study, after the participants were given six sessions to learn how to use plot as a pre-writing strategy, they found it convenient and helpful in terms of organisation due to a few reasons, one of the reasons was because of they were able

to arrange the ideas generated more effectively as a result of the five elements highlighted in the plot diagram.

b.   Arrangement of Ideas

The five elements are shown through the five empty boxes along the plot diagram. When they have mastered the use of plot as a planning strategy, they had more control over the arrangement of ideas while they composed their narrative essay. These participants were able to decide when they wanted to combine any two ideas (elements) into one paragraph or just followed the usual strategy of one element for one paragraph. For instance, while Participant 4 would sometimes combined two elements into one paragraph, Participant 5 preferred to use each element as one paragraph, as explained in Excerpt 19 and 20.

- Excerpt 19

I   : How did you do (arrangement of ideas) it for the final test (posttest)?
P4   : Sometimes I don't (combine the ideas). Sometimes I combined them,
          like 'falling action' combined with 'ending', 'rising action' with
          'beginning'.

- Excerpt 20

I   : Did you use this (plot)?
P5   : Yes.
I   : So when do you split (arrange the ideas) yourself and when do you refer
          to this (plot)?
P5   : I follow one by one. When I have finished one, I'll start a new
          paragraph with the second point.

_____

I   : So sometimes you follow (the boxes in plot), sometimes you'll change? (Participant nodded). So if I give you this (plot), without the boxes. Will you have problems to arrange your ideas? Or it doesn't affect much as well?

P5   : Will have problem. It'll take a longer time to do elaboration, to think, and lengthen the story.

The important factor which led to the participants' ability to arrange the ideas in order could be due to the fact that, these participants had developed a better understanding about the plot structure and its elements.

c.   More Awareness of the Plot Structure

Before the treatment was administered, many participants especially those of low level of English proficiency only had a vague idea of how the structure of a whole story is like, and this was reflected in their poor performance for narrative writing. After the sessions, a few participants such as Participant 2 and 8 explained that they became more aware on the basic elements of a storyline. This awareness is explained in Excerpt 21 and 22 below.

- Excerpt 21

I   : So how did this (plot) help to get ideas when it's actually just a paper with empty boxes?

P2   : It's like… it shows the storyline.

- Excerpt 22

I   : Why did you say that one (post-test) is better?

P8   : Maybe because I have a better understanding of the whole story.

I   : Before this?

P8   : Don't know, I just simply write.

_____

I : How does it help to arrange the ideas?
P8 : Because of the storyline, follow the box, then create the story, then follow the box and whatever there is to get the ideas.

Once the participants had understood the plot structure better, they would understand that the flow of ideas from one element to the next was crucial in order to create a good story. This will be discussed on the next theme below.

d.   Better Flow of Ideas

When the participants planned their plot, they had to generate ideas for all the five elements given. If they did not complete any of the elements, it implied that the story was incomplete, which also indicated the lack of flow in their ideas. However, if the participants completed all the five elements, generally there will be a better flow of ideas as the ideas were more organised. Participant 3 stated that the previous essay was disorganised because the ideas were not arrange in order and yet he continued to write the essay based on whatever came to mind (Excerpt 23). During the interview, participants with the most and least improvement explained that when plot was used as a pre-writing strategy, they noticed the flow of ideas written in the essay was much improved. For instance, Participant 2 felt that he was able to write smoothly from one element to the next (Excerpt 24). Examples of the interview responses regarding the flow of ideas are shown below.

- Excerpt 23

I : So you plan based on the box?
P3 : Yes, after that I add more points.
I : Before this?
P3 : Before this it was not organised. 'Ending' here, 'falling' there.
_____

I	: Why is this (plot) more helpful?
P3	: We can know how's the beginning, the climax…
I	: So you are aware about the beginning and all, but when you write?
P3	: I know. But last time without the plot, the planning was disorganised. I just write whatever I know.

- Excerpt 24

I	: What do you mean by you can do it straight?
P2	: For example, from here (beginning) to here (rising action). When it's here (pointed to beginning), then when I wanted to go here (rising action), it's like…. (struggling for words).
I	: You were able to continue straight?
P2	: Yes… Can continue straight.
I	: So you meant that it was easier when you need to continue with the next idea?
P2	: Yes.

The use of plot as a pre-writing strategy was able to assist the participants to produce a well-organised draft. The flow of ideas arranged during the planning stage was crucial for the writing stage as well. Most participants realised that they were able to write their essay smoothly after they have drafted the plot.

e. Facilitation of Writing Stage

If a writer does not make proper planning before proceeding, it could pose a problem during the writing process as he or she would need to stop often to plan the next idea during the writing stage. Those who wrote as they plan might face similar problem as Participant 3, whereby he was unable to add in his new ideas as the essay was half written or almost completed (Excerpt 25). This goes to show that planning is important as a well-prepared draft would result in a smooth writing process and this was reflected in their written work as well. When the participants were asked to reflect on the past writing experience, they explained that there were times they were unable to

continue or complete their essay as there was a discontinuity from one idea to the other. When the plot was prepared before hand, the participants noticed that they had fewer problems composing the essay. For example, Participant 2 noticed that he was able to write smoothly from one sentence to another (Excerpt 26). Below are some of the responses given by the participants:

- Excerpt 25

I   : Last time was it easy for you? Were there any problems for you to get
         ideas?
P3   : Last time, it was the same. But last time if I remembered any other
         ideas while I wrote, I was unable to fit it in anymore. But this allows me
         to add in all the points. After I've added in everything, then only I'll
         write.

- Excerpt 26

P2   : The writing… it's a bit different, because when I use plot, it somehow
         feels easier.
I   : Easier to write in what way?
P2   : It's like.. when I have written a sentence, then when I wanted to move
         on the next sentence, I was able write it directly.
I   : So it was easier for you to continue?
P2   : Yes.

Pre-writing not only leads to a smooth writing process, the effort put into the planning stage was also reflected in their written work. A well-planned essay enabled the reader to read through the essay smoothly without pausing from time to time to figure out what the writer intended to tell or explain in the essay.

4.7   Conclusion

This chapter discussed the findings of the study in a few areas. These areas were writing scores, essay length, content and organisation. The discussion of the findings

with regards to the literature review were also discussed. In general, all the participants showed significant improvement. While some discovered the advantages of pre-writing, a few participants who practiced pre-writing prior to this study, found out that plot is a useful and practical planning strategy which generates and organises ideas concurrently. The next chapter will summarise and conclude on the findings of this study.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

5.1   Introduction

This study was set out to examine how pre-writing can facilitate the writing performance of low and intermediate level of English proficiency students. In this case, plot was used as a pre-write strategy for narrative writing. This chapter will begin with a summary of the findings based on Figure 5.1 below and what it implies theoretically and pedagogically. Based on the limitations of this study, a few recommendations are suggested for future research.

5.2   Summary of Findings

The findings discussed in the previous chapter are presented in Figure 5.1 below. This study looked at the use of plot and its impact on four areas, writing scores, essay length, and two writing dimensions, in this case, content and organisation. The findings are based on the results from the pre and post-tests and interview sessions.

After the pre and post-tests were compared, the findings revealed that there were significant improvement for all the four focused areas for both groups of low and intermediate level of English proficiency. When the scores of both groups were compared, the results showed that the low level of English proficiency group improved more than the intermediate group in all the focused areas, except for content, where both

groups improved at equal level. The can be explained as both groups of participants benefited from the strategy by learning to generate better ideas as compared to the past.
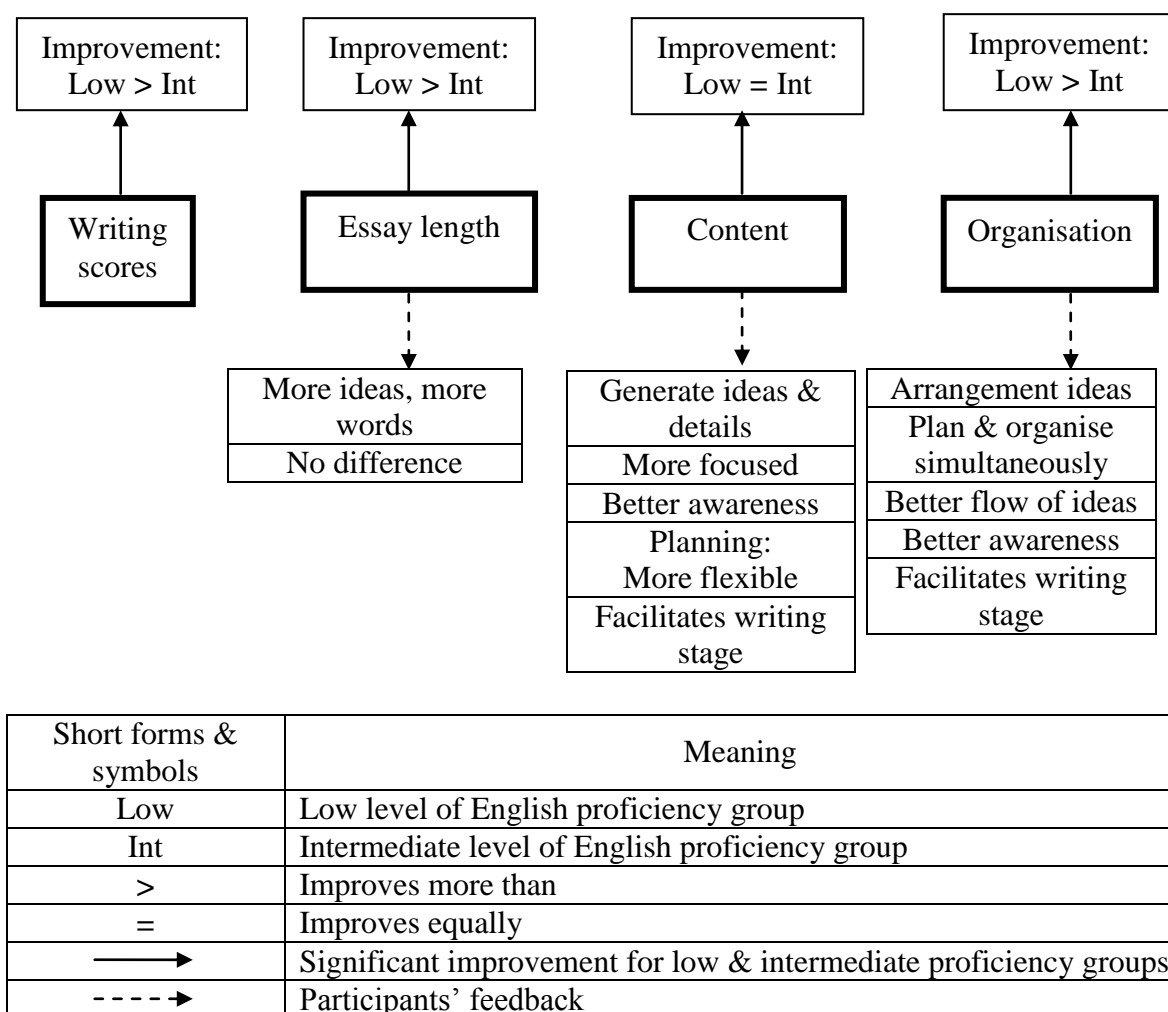
Improvement: Low > Int	Improvement: Low > Int	Improvement: Low = Int	Improvement: Low > Int
Writing scores	Essay length	Content	Organisation

Essay length:
More ideas, more words
No difference

Content:
Generate ideas & details
More focused
Better awareness
Planning: More flexible
Facilitates writing stage

Organisation:
Arrangement ideas
Plan & organise simultaneously
Better flow of ideas
Better awareness
Facilitates writing stage

Short forms & symbols	Meaning
Low	Low level of English proficiency group
Int	Intermediate level of English proficiency group
>	Improves more than
=	Improves equally
⟶	Significant improvement for low & intermediate proficiency groups
- - - →	Participants' feedback

Figure 5.1: Summary of Findings

Next, eight participants with the most and least improvement were interviewed. The interview sessions were designed to find out how their awareness of the use of plot as a pre-writing strategy had an impact on their essay length, content, and organisation of their essays. Majority of the students who produced short length essays responded that plot helped them to generate more ideas and elaborations; hence they were able to produce more words. A few participants who were capable of composing lengthy

essays in pre-test felt that there was no difference in terms of essay length after they were exposed to the use of plot.

However, all the participants stated that plot was helpful in terms of content. They explained that it was easy to generate ideas and elaborations based on the plot structure. The five elements (beginning, rising action, climax, falling action, ending) guided them as it taught them that each element represents one main idea or event. This enabled them to have better focus and a clear idea of how to go about planning a narrative piece of writing. Most of them also explained that previously, they either planned as they write, or began to compose once they jotted down a few brief ideas. Now that they are aware of the basic structure of a story, they could plan according to the structure of five elements. Furthermore, unlike their previous strategy, where they usually planned from beginning and slowly progressing to the end, the participants explained that plot was more flexible. They could choose to begin their planning at any part of the story, such as climax or ending.

As the participants were encouraged to complete the five elements before they began to compose, they also noticed that it facilitated their writing process. In their past writing experience, they tend to stop frequently to plan for more ideas. However, after the treatment sessions, they could write smoothly because all the ideas were generated before they proceed to the composing stage.

Besides content, the use of plot as a pre-writing strategy also aided the participants in terms of organisation of ideas. As plot consists of five elements, the ideas are arranged in order as they are being generated, thus, the participants were able to plan and organise ideas simultaneously. This plot diagram also enables the

participants to be aware of the basic structure of a narration, which guided them to produce better flow of ideas. Each element represents one paragraph and they would progress from one element to the next when they write; for instance, how the conflict of the story begins in 'rising action', progresses to the most exciting part in 'climax' and how the conflict is resolved in 'falling action' and 'ending'.

As the participants were required to prepare their draft (plot) before they composed, this helped the participants to have a smoother writing stage by overcoming problems, such as, stopping frequently for local planning which was time-consuming and often resulted poor performance in timed-writing due to the lack of cohesiveness and poor planning strategy.

The results obtained from the quantitative and qualitative data not only provided useful insights but also important implications in terms of aspect related to the teaching and learning of pre-writing.

5.3   Implications of this Study

The findings of this study showed most participants improved significantly in post-test and this seem to indicate that the pre-writing strategy used (plot) could facilitate students' in their narrative writing, specifically in the essay length, content and organisation.   The interview sessions had provided insights on the participants' perceptions towards the use of pre-writing and the impact it had on their narrative writing.   The findings obtained from the quantitative and qualitative data had brought about implications which will be discussed from the pedagogical perspective.

5.3.1   Pedagogical Implications

The findings support the cognitive process theory (Flower & Hayes, 1981) as planning seems to assist the participants in generating and organising ideas. It was also found that planning helped them to overcome writing problems such as anxiety or writer's block, which led to poor writing performance, for instance, short essay length, lack of ideas and poor organisation of ideas. The findings also revealed that the type of pre-writing strategy employed played a crucial role as one strategy may be more effective than the other, especially when it comes to timed-writing, whereby one needs to be concerned with time constraints.

a.   Improved Performance in Timed-writing

The effectiveness of the use of plot as a planning strategy was displayed on the participants' narrative timed-writing performance. The findings of this study illustrated that plot is a simple yet helpful way to improve the participants' writing as they were capable of producing more ideas, able to arrange ideas properly and consequently produce lengthy essays. They employed the five elements (beginning, rising action, climax, falling action, ending) as a guide to produce cohesive ideas. In addition, each element represents one paragraph; hence, participants did not have to spend time arranging their ideas into paragraphs.

The simple plot diagram allows the participants, especially those with low level of English proficiency to gain more confidence in timed-writing. The participants could refer to the plot outline as they write, hence they stopped less frequently for planning

when they composed. This enabled them to have a fluent writing process, better writing performance, and ultimately better writing scores.

The findings revealed that plot as a pre-writing activity plays a vital role in assisting the students to achieve a better performance in timed-writing. Therefore, language practitioners should consider including planning in their writing pedagogy especially for students with low and intermediate level of English proficiency.

b.   Aids the Teaching of Writing to Weaker Students

The findings for this study have revealed that the use of plot as a pre-writing strategy has improved the writing performance of low level of English proficiency students, in terms of essay length, content and organisation. Most of the participants were able to produce more words, based on the ideas generated and organised in the plot diagram. This goes to show that plot could help improve the narrative writing performance of the weaker students.

As most teachers tend to face problems when it comes to teaching low level of proficiency students; perhaps, teachers could conduct the writing classes by introducing these students to narrative writing, as Kegley (1987), Koh (2004), Sabariah Md. Rashid & Chan (2008) revealed that it seems to be the least difficult as compared to the other modes of discourse, such as descriptive, argumentative and reflective writing. Teachers can also guide these students by starting off with simple pre-writing activities, such as plot to help them become accustomed to planning and hopefully improve their writing performance. When students are able to generate and organise ideas independently, it

would boost their confidence, thus overcome their writing anxiety and be capable of composing lengthy essays.

In addition, the test and curriculum designers who determine the test format and school syllabus play a significant role as well in encouraging the teachers and students to practice the use of pre-writing activities in their instruction.

c.   Planning Improves Timed-Writing Performance

The findings have proven plot as a useful pre-writing strategy in view of the fact that it helped the participants to produce better narrative writing as compared to their previous planning strategy. The main stakeholders should be made aware that findings from past studies have also indicated that planning correlates with better performance in timed-writing; therefore, planning should be included as a major part in the writing classroom. Nevertheless, majority of the Malaysia's public examinations are heavily exam-oriented and focus on final products; coupled with the number of syllabus that needs to be completed before the examination, it is inevitable that both teachers and students tend to ignore the writing processes, such as planning and focus mainly on what would be tested in the assessment.

The test designers could encourage the use of planning among teachers and students by including pre-writing as part of the writing assessment, in attempt to have a positive backwash on the teaching and learning of writing. Test designers may consider awarding marks for those who prepare pre-writing for their essays. By doing so, it is hoped that teachers will begin to include pre-writing in their writing lessons and guide students to plan their essays and which eventually will increase the students'

performance in timed-writing. Kho (2006) cited from Heaton (1990) who explained that such positive backwash effects could increase students' motivation to learn the language. Based on the findings and limitations of this study, a few recommendations are suggested in order to improve future research and the teaching and learning of writing.

5.4 Recommendations for Future Research

In lieu of the findings of this study, several recommendations will be outlined as a reference for future research. The recommendations involve sample, planning strategies for various modes of discourse, as well as, other writing process and dimensions.

5.4.1 Sample

In this study, the participants were only limited to two groups, which comprised of 40 Form Four students from one school in Negeri Sembilan. Future researchers should consider involving more participants from different states or comparing participants from different age groups and backgrounds which could provide useful insights on the sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic aspects of language teaching and learning. Ellis (1994) explained that learner's preference may differ according to social context and learning attitude of students with various background and proficiency groups.

Furthermore, this study was carried out in a rural area where most of the students have limited exposure to the use of English (Arshad Abd Samad, & Hawanum

Hussein, 2010). Though English is widely used in Malaysia and it is considered as a second language, it remains a foreign language to a majority of these students as English is only used in school through formal instruction in the classroom (Fauziah Hassan, & Nita Fauzee Selamat, 2002). Hence, most of them have low level of English proficiency. There is still lack of studies on these EFL students in the Malaysia context, therefore future research could fill the gap.

The findings revealed that both groups of students (low and intermediate level of English proficiency) have slight difference in perception towards pre-writing, future researcher could examine how pre-writing affects the writing of advance level of English proficiency students and also their perception towards pre-writing. Besides interviewing the participants to obtain qualitative data, actual classroom observation during the intervention sessions can be included in future studies. It will provide more useful insights regarding students' pre-writing strategies and its relevance to writing instruction.

As the main focus of this study is on narrative writing, future studies could also incorporate pre-writing strategies for other modes of discourse as well, such as descriptive, argumentative and expository writing.

5.4.2   Planning Strategies for Various Modes of Discourse

Prior to the study, future researchers should identify the various types of pre-writing and which strategy could be used to outline and aid the performance of certain modes of discourse effectively during timed-writing. It is also crucial that the planning

strategy selected should be less time-consuming yet is capable of executing the ideas fluently and effectively during the writing stage.

Nevertheless, this study only focuses on pre-writing; hence, it is recommended that future research can also examine other writing process as well, such as, revision and its impact on timed-writing. This could fill the research gap as Hinkel (2011) cited from Leki, Cumming and Silva (2008) that there is little research which relates the L2 writing models or instructions with the students' writing achievements.

5.4.3   Other Writing Process and Dimensions

In this respect, the strategies of revision and which aspect of writing to be focused on should be taken into consideration. Other dimensions, such as grammar, vocabulary or spelling could be included when carrying out future research. Hinkel (2011) revealed that past studies have reported that grammar and vocabulary often resulted in poor performance in writing. Therefore, future studies can look at the use of revision and its impact on grammar, vocabulary, spelling, punctuation or any other writing dimensions. Finally, it is hoped that revision coupled with a good pre-writing strategy would further assist the low level of English proficiency students in achieving a better scores in timed-writing.

5.5   Closure

This study has revealed that pre-writing strategy plays an important role in timed-writing, especially in helping the low level of English proficiency students to improve their writing performance by generating more ideas, organising ideas

effectively and producing lengthy essays. It is found that when students are aware of the plot structure, they have a better idea of how to go about planning their narrative piece of writing based on the five elements (beginning, rising action, climax, falling action and ending).

The backwash effect in school has lead to the dominance of product approach in teaching and learning. Though teachers are aware that the writing process includes planning, composing and revision, yet the product approach causes many teachers to emphasis on the composing stage. This study has revealed that the other processes, in this case, pre-writing is equally important as it serves as a platform to aid the students with low level of English proficiency overcome writer's block, and develop their confidence in writing by having the ability to generate ideas.

Teachers should consider the process approach in the teaching of writing as it will benefit the learners more than they expected. When students gain more confidence in writing, it will motivate the students to write. In the long run, the process approach would guide them to better written product, and ultimately better writing scores.

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Lost: chpt1:pg5(lee,1987,krashen,1985)

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APPENDIX A

PLOT

TITLE: ………………………………………………………………………………….

3. CLIMAX:
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2. RISING ACTION(S):

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4. FALLING ACTION:
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5. ENDING:
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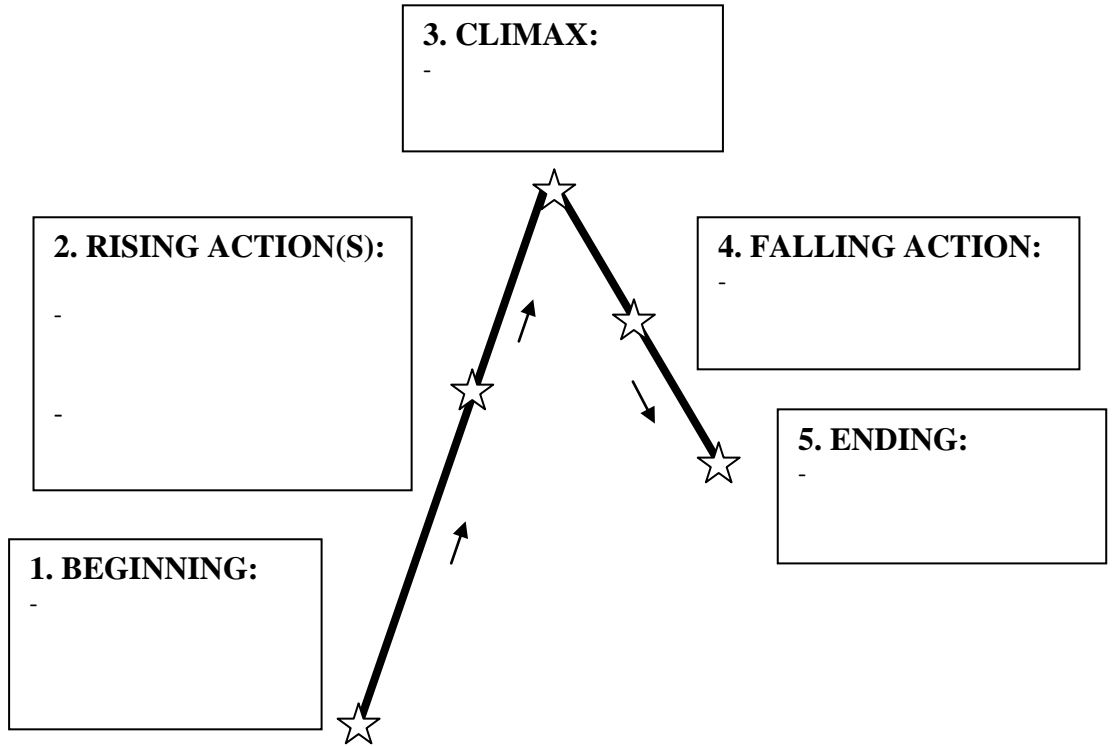
1. BEGINNING:
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APPENDIX B

PRE-TEST

Name: _____ Class : _____

TOPIC:
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Write a story beginning with:
'Kim was nervous when the door opened…'
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APPENDIX C

<div align="center">

POST-TEST

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Name: _____ Class : _____

TOPIC:
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:   Write a story beginning with: :
:   'Aminah reached out her hand…'   :
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APPENDIX D

HOLISTIC SCORING SCALE

CONTINUOUS WRITING (50 MARKS)

Mark Range	Description of Criteria
A 44 - 50	• Paragraphs are well-planned, have unity and are linked. • The topic is addressed with consistent relevance. • The interest of the reader is aroused and sustained throughout.
B 38-43	• Paragraphs show some evidence of planning, have unity and usually appropriately linked. • The piece of writing is relevant to the topic and the interest of the reader is aroused and sustained through most of the composition.
C 32-37	• The composition is written in paragraphs which may show some unity, although links may be absent or inappropriate. • The writing is relevant but may lack originality and planning. • Some interest is aroused but not sustained.
D 26-31	• Paragraphs are used but lack planning and unity. • The topic addressed with some relevance but composition lacks liveliness and interest value.
E 20 - 25	• Paragraphs lack unity or organisation. • The subject matter will show some relevance to the topic. • The high incidence of linguistic errors distracts the reader from any merit of content in the composition.
U (i) 14 -19	• Paragraphs lack unity or there may not be any paragraphs at all.
U (ii) 8 -13	• The content maybe comprehensible, but the high incidence of linguistic errors makes meaning blur. • The script may also be far short of the required number of words.
U (iii) **0-7**	• Whole section may make little or no sense at all. • The mark '0' should be given if the script makes no sense at all from the beginning to the end or the candidate copies the question only.

(Adapted from Negeri Sembilan SPM Trial Examination 1119/1 Marking Scheme,2009)

APPENDIX F

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1.   Can you tell me the process you would go through when you sit for a writing examination? After you have chosen the essay topic. What do you do next?

2.   Based on what you have said, what are some of the problems you face when writing essays in the examination?

3.   (i)   Do you normally make a draft before writing your essay?
            (If no, proceed to Question 5)

      (ii)   (If yes) what kind of draft do you normally use?

4.   (i)   Do you think 'plot' is different from your way of drafting?

      (ii)   (If yes) which way do you prefer?

After you have gone through the 6 sessions (2 Group Work, 2 Pair Work, 2 Individual Work) :

5.   (i)   If you compare before and after the sessions, is there any difference in your essay writing when you use plot as your draft?

      (ii)   (If yes) What are some of the differences?

6.   (i)   Do you think the sessions help you to plan your essay?

      (ii)   (If yes) How does the sessions help you plan your essay better?

      (iii) (If not) Why do you think the sessions do not help you to plan your essay?

7.   (i)   Do you think the sessions help you to write more?

      (ii)   (If yes) How do the sessions help you to write more?

      (iii) (If not) Why do you think the sessions do not help you to write more?

8.   (i)   Do you think the sessions help you to get ideas for your essay?

      (ii)   (If yes) How do the sessions help you to get ideas for your essay?
      (iii) (If no) Why do think the sessions do not help you to find ideas for your
                  essay?

9.   (i)   Do you think the sessions help you to arrange the ideas in your essay?

         (ii)   (If yes) How do the sessions help you to arrange the ideas in your essay?

         (iii)   (If no) Why do you think the sessions do not help you to arrange the ideas in your essay?

10.   (i)   Do you think the sessions will help you in the writing examination?

         (ii)   (If yes) How do you think the sessions will help you in the writing examination?

         (iii)   (If no) Why do you think the sessions will not help you in the writing examination?

SAMPLE 1

PRE-TEST (LOW LEVEL OF ENGLISH PROFICIENCY)

TOPIC:

Write a story beginning with:
'Kim was nervous when the door opened...'

'Kim was nervous when the door opened because his stepmother cruel to he, kim hide something from the stepmother suddenly step mother calling the kim, kim go with out his rooms, his step mother want the will from his mother.

Kim said, not, to me, he step mothe so angry to kim, he stepmother throw things to kim, war min he not to was step mother more.

Kim run from haise to save him self and go the police station police to bring report about step mother. the night step mother catch the police and kim life was to,

(93 words)

93 words.

Score. If
Cont . 3
Org . 2

123

SAMPLE 2

POST-TEST (LOW LEVEL OF ENGLISH PROFICIENCY)

POST TEST

Name: Shahrul ARIF B ROSLAN   Class: A E E 2

TOPIC:

> Write a story beginning with:
> 'As I read the letter, I cried…'

As I read the letter, I cried because I got money. I win the contets on Ice-cream Walls. I and my brothers shock beauve we win the Grand Prize to Holiday in Langkawi. my parents not believe. When I got prize to Holiday in Lang-kawi. after my parents read the letter my father call agent in contest Ice-cream Walls.   58

After Morning, My parents get ready to tick money in I won and ticket Langkawi. when my father tick money and ticket. We go to Langkawi with My car. When I Arived My father show the ticket on agent Ice-cream Walls. When my father shows the ticket, a agent give a key hotel to stay in holiday   115

After next Morning, My family go to a shopping to new dress and shoes. I and my brother buy a play station 3 and x-box 360. My Mother buy a new handbag and gown. my father buy a new TV plasma LCD on Electric chop. After we shopping, We go to find the food in dinner and back the hotels.   170

On tomorrow, We come back in home after holiday in Langkawi. but money one hundred thousand is not done. my father buy a new car and new house for my mother. My mother so excited a new home. I and my brother get a new watch Original.   217

the next tomorrow, My father bought we on restaurant five star. I and my brother shocked because we not come Restaurant in five star. Restaurant five star in ready to buffet on food so delicious and good. On one buffet in RM100 in person. After we eating we come back home.   aoy

On next tomorrow, My family go to movies and shopping for my new house. my father and my mom buy a new kitchen and chair. My brother get buy a new shoes and I buy a new T-shirt Paul Smith in kuala Lumpur. I and my Member family so fun and exicited got a Money so much.   525

finally money on the contets is done because we buy so much a new thing. and my family very thank on Ice-cream Contets win a money or Grand prizes

C 3   (355 words)
O 4

B

C 3
O 4

(15)

124

SAMPLE 3

PRE-TEST (INTERMEDIATE LEVEL OF ENGLISH PROFICIENCY)

TOPIC:

> Write a story beginning with:
> 'Kim was nervous when the door opened…'

Kim was nervous when the door opened and suddenly Kim breath suddenly stop when the things she doesn't like to see coming in front of her the things was result for poor studening Kim about so loud because her get 8a in this year. After two weeks Kim have apply KMIT Kuala klumpur and her got that school in february her expered that school Kim choose course electrical. Kim must live to hostel in that school. After a month Kim had many friends and Kim was close to teacher. Kim got the school award for the best student in the year. She take part in the school contest. The boy always watch Kim when her

116 w

C 2
O 2

(7)

APPENDIX G

SAMPLE 4

POST-TEST (INTERMEDIATE LEVEL OF ENGLISH PROFICIENCY)

POST TEST

Name: muhammad Izzuddin bin Ruslan   Class: 4 EE4

TOPIC:

> Write a story beginning with:
> 'As I read the letter, I cried…'

As I read the letter, I cried because my best friend was remember at me. ~~The~~ she and I was nice to me at my last school before I exchange to SMT Kuala Klawang. She was always make me happy because she can make a joke about someone that doesn't not like. She always support me from behind and always helping me in everything. 62

The special name for her was Yana and she live at Seremban Jaya. Yana house was not to far away from my house. The letter was to special for me and the content was about she got a new friend. The was that girl is Wani. As I was remember with some how I close to me in standard school. 122

But in the middle of the letter she always saying about she remember at me. But there was a surprise for me because there was a picture about she won a beautiful medal. She write at the back of the picture about she won a race in sport day. She get in to many event in that school but she want in netball. 185

After I read the back of that picture I start to continue the half of the letter that I haven't read. She try to flashback about everything that we done together, such as I always bought her some food and she always help me with my homework. An she always try to stop me for doing something bad for me such as stop me from stealing something, stop from bully someone and many more. She always make me to be ready for anything happen to me. In the last paragraph of the letter it about she want to see me at Seremban. 288

After I read the letter I cried because she was really remember at me. I wanted to sent a new letter and new photo for her.

314
~~320~~ words

14

C-3
0-4

C 4

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14