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**STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS
USING COOPERATIVE LEARNING IN ENGLISH ESSAY WRITING**

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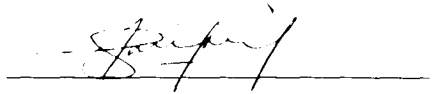
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Final Year Project Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the
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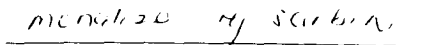
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A project entitled **Students Perceptions Towards Using Cooperative Learning In English Essay Writing**: was written by Gwendoline Raja and submitted to the Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Science with Honours (Teaching English as s Second Language)

It is hereby confirmed that the student had done all the necessary amendments of the project for acceptance.



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ABSTRACT

STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS USING COOPERATIVE LEARNING IN ENGLISH ESSAY WRITING

Gwendoline Raja

The study was conducted to find out students' perceptions towards using cooperative learning approach in English essay writing among form four students. The researcher also aimed to find out the usefulness of cooperative learning on the students' group work essay writing and the problems they faced in a group work writing task or essay using cooperative learning approach.

A three-sectioned questionnaire was administered to one hundred and fifty form four students in three secondary schools in Miri. Frequency counts, percentage and mean scores were the descriptive statistics used for the study. The mean scores of the advantages and the difficulties faced by the students were compared to determine students' responses towards using cooperative learning approach in carrying out their group work essay writings.

The findings indicated that the students responded positively towards the use of cooperative learning approach in carrying out their group work English essay writing. The results show that the students admitted that cooperative learning approach did help them in their English essay writing. This study shows that the use of cooperative learning approach in group work essay writing does benefit the students.

ABSTRAK

PERSEPSI PELAJAR TENTANG PENGGUNAAN PENDEKATAN BERKUMPULAN (COOPERATIVE LEARNING APPROACH) DALAM PENULISAN DALAM BAHASA ENGLISH

Gwendoline Raja

Kajian ini bertujuan mengetahui persepsi pelajar tentang penggunaan pendekatan berkumpulan (cooperative learning approach) dalam menyiapkan hasil kerja penulisan berkumpulan di kalangan pelajar dalam tingkatan empat. Selain daripada itu, kajian ini juga bertujuan untuk mengetahui keberkesanan pendekatan kerjasama dalam pembelajaran berkumpulan dan apakah masalah yang dihadapi oleh pelajar dalam kerja berkumpulan dalam penulisan dalam Bahasa Inggeris menggunakan pendekatan berkumpulan.

Soal-selidik yang mengandungi 3 bahagian telah diedarkan kepada seratus lima puluh orang pelajar tingkatan empat di tiga buah sekolah menengah dalam bahagian Miri. Penganalisan data kajian dijalankan dengan menggunakan pengiraan statistik diskritif yang melibatkan pengiraan kekerapan, peratus dan skor min. Perbandingan skor min di antara keberkesanan pendekatan kerjasama dalam pembelajaran berkumpulan dengan masalah-masalah yang dihadapi oleh pelajar dalam kerja berkumpulan digunakan untuk menentukan tindak balas pelajar terhadap pendekatan kerjasama berkumpulan dalam penulisan dalam Bahasa Inggeris.

Hasil kajian menunjukkan pelajar memberi tindak balas yang positif dan menggemari pendekatan kerjasama dalam pembelajaran berkumpulan. Justeru itu, kajian menunjukkan pendekatan kerjasama dalam pembelajaran berkumpulan dalam menyiapkan hasil kerja penulisan berkumpulan dalam Bahasa Inggeris adalah sesuai di kalangan pelajar-pelajar berkenaan.

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Last but not least, I would like to express my gratitude to the Principals, teachers, and students from the schools concerned who are involved in this study directly; thank you for their precious time and kind co-operation in giving me the information, opinions, without which my study would not be successful.

May God continue to pour His blessings unto those who have helped me made it through all the toils and snares of this programme.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background of the Study

English in both primary and secondary schools is taught as a second language. Under the National Educational Philosophy, the English Language Programme is incorporated with the aim to provide students with lifelong education. Listening, speaking, reading and writing are the four main skills that the students need to acquire under the English Language Programme from primary school to higher education.

Teachers have been interested to find out ways to improve the teaching-learning process especially the English Language. Barr and Tag (1995) claim that one positive change towards maximizing students' learning is to provide an environment like student-centred learning which can help students to master these four skills apart from building up their motivation and interest in the language. There were a few methods whereby the teaching-learning process are student-centred; cooperative learning, joint learning, peer teaching, peer learning, team learning and study groups. These methods of teaching and learning come under the communicative approach in the teaching and learning of the target language.

Hymes (1972) stated the term communicative is generally accepted to mean gearing to the competence and expectations of those participating in the learning process. In other words, a communicative approach is based on negotiation between the parties involved.

Traditionally, teachers are seen as the 'experts' who would impart their knowledge or 'expertises' to their unknowing students. But nowadays, students play a much more active role in the learning process. No longer passive recipients, they contribute to the planning and implementation of what become obvious in the classrooms.

Cooperative learning as one of the approaches introduced to enhance student-centred learning environment has been widely discussed and researched since. Teachers continually adopt and adapt strategies to accomplish immediate as well as long term goals which include and developing critical thinking and cooperative learning skills.

Cooperative learning is a teaching strategy in which, teachers divide their students into group of three to five members where each group comprises students of different ethnicity, levels of proficiency and uses a variety of activities to improve their understanding of the subjects (Johnson & Johnson, 1989).

According to David et al (1993) cooperative learning means students at various levels work together in activities such as discussion, brainstorming, problem-solving, debate, and other activities which are carried out in small groups or pairs to

accomplish shared goals. In cooperative learning students are responsible for each other's learning as well as their own (Gokhale, 1995). Therefore each member in the group, has the responsibility of ensuring the success of the other members, as a consequence students would feel that they are fully responsible and committed to the tasks given in order to achieve their learning objectives.

Panitz (1996) further states that when students are given the responsibility of ensuring the success of their group, they would be more willing to participate in the learning process and would end up taking up more active roles. This will not only cultivate a more positive attitude towards learning but also will promote positive interaction between members of the same group especially groups which consist of members differing in terms of cultural and socio-economic background. This will suit especially multiracial students in the Malaysian classroom.

According to Cohen (1990), cooperative learning has five characteristics:

- i) students work together on common tasks or activities that are best carried out through group work,
- ii) students are divided into small groups of two or five during the activities,
- iii) students make use of cooperative pro-social behaviour to achieve their goals,
- iv) students develop interdependence whereby they would collaborate and help each other during the activities, and
- v) students are given the responsibility to handle their own learning.

Teaching English to second language or foreign language students requires a variety of approaches. English teachers need to be more creative and may need to opt for different teaching approaches suitable to their students especially in teaching the four main skills; listening, speaking, reading and writing. Apart from that, language teachers especially need to make decisions at all time regarding the pedagogical matters too. The most crucial matter is that the teachers have to decide on the goal of the language instruction, the most effective teaching method and the best way to equip the students.

1.1 Statement of Problem

Teaching a second language to students remains a great challenge, because students' performance is measured not only based on their performance in examinations but also in their ability to listen, talk, read, and write in the target language in their daily lives. Among these four main skills, the ability to write well in the target language is considered the most challenging task of all for students in the primary and secondary schools. Wall, Nickson, Jordan, Allwright and Houghton (1980) state that the most difficult academic skill to acquire is in essay writing. Students need to have the ability not only in understanding the subject matter concerned, but also crucial is the skill to convey and arrange ideas coherently. Small group or pair work as well as individual essay writing are common to the students. Evaluation in writing is based on content, organization of ideas, analytical thinking, and also grammar of students' final product. These are the major challenges students face in writing even though they have been exposed to the English language since

they were in primary schools and have been writing in the target language for many years.

Even though most of the students are fluent and at the advanced level of proficiency in the target language but when it comes to writing most of them say that they do not feel confident to write well in the target language especially when it comes to the essay writing task. Studies have been done on the usage of cooperative learning approach in other fields such as in mathematics other countries.

Therefore, many teachers are interested in using cooperative learning method as it is able to promote positive outcomes on students (Balkom, 1992). It is claimed that cooperative learning is able to promote communication and increase the participant of students, improve academic achievement, improve behaviour, attitude and motivation and increase liking of school and classmates. (Johnson, Johnson & Holubec, 1993; Slavin, 1991; Stahl & Vansicle, 1992). These benefits have attracted many teachers to advocate this method but it is not clear whether this method do benefit the students in actual ESL classrooms in Malaysia.

Therefore, this study is to find out students' perceptions on the usage of cooperative learning approach in group work essay writing.

1.2 Research Objectives

The aims of this study are:

- 1) To investigate the usefulness of cooperative learning on form four students' group work essay writing
- 2) To find out the problems the students face in group work essay writing task using cooperative learning approach.
- 3) To find out the form four students' perceptions on the use of cooperative learning in their group work essay writing.

1.3 Research Questions

I would like to conduct this study based on the following enquiries:

- a) How useful is cooperative learning in carrying out English essay writing tasks for the form four students?
- b) What are the problems faced by the students in group work essay writing tasks using cooperative learning approach?
- c) What are the students' perceptions towards the use of cooperative learning approach in carrying out their group work essay writing tasks?

1.4 Limitations of the Study

The findings of the study is restricted and confined to a total of 150 form four students in three secondary schools in Miri. Therefore, the number of the chosen subjects involved will not be the representative of the whole population of form four students and the results may not be very significant to be generalized.

Another limitation of this study is time constraint. This study was conducted towards the end of the second semester which as incidentally happened to be the final semester examinations for form four students. Due to this, the researcher had to schedule meetings with the respondents to distribute the questionnaire and get their feedback before they are busy preparing and set for their examination.

1.5 Significance of the Study

It is hoped that the findings of this study can be of considerable use to the educational field, and the language teachers of primary and secondary schools as well as the lecturers at the tertiary levels. The study will provide some new insights in the teaching and learning of the English language especially in essay writing and at the same time provide grounds for further research on the same subject in the future. In addition the teachers can use this study to come up with new ideas or concepts and look for more alternatives in their approach to teach writing.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

For the purpose of this study, the given key terms are defined as follows:

1.6.1 Perception

Perception is 'recognition and interpretation of sensory stimuli based chiefly on memory'. (The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition 2000)

Perception is stated as 'the complex method of obtaining information about our surrounding world, specifically through our senses, and apprehending this information as beliefs'. (Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy)

1.6.2 Cooperative Learning Approach

Cooperative learning approach is 'the instructional use of small groups so that student's work together to achieve shared goals'. (Roger and Johnson, 2001)

According to Brown (1994) cooperative learning approach is a diversity of techniques used in which two or more students are assigned a task that involves collaboration and self-initiated language.

1.6.3 Writing

Writing a process of choosing of selecting and rejecting, expanding and compressing, adding, deleting and rearranging at every stage of the writing process ... The writing process is not direct or linear, but it can be divided for convenience into three stages : planning, drafting and revising'. (Kirsznner and Mandell 1988)

Words that are written down as a mean of communication for the intention of this research, it applies to any writing genre. (MSN Encarta, 2002)

According to Chitrvelu, Sithamparan & Teh (1995, p.136), "writing is a system for interpersonal communication using visible signs or graphic symbols on a flat surface such as paper, cloth, or even stone slabs".

1.7 Summary

This chapter consists of the background to the study, statement of problem, objectives of the study, research questions, significance of the study, limitations of the study, research methodology, research instrument, and definition of terms. This chapter highlights and provides the background to the study and also some important information on what the researcher plans to do in the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter will attempt to provide a theoretical framework for the study. In providing a theoretical framework, the review will touch on areas significant to the study. These areas will include discussions on the following topics:

2.1 Writing as A Language Skill

Many scholars and teachers agree that writing is one of the four main skills which is the most difficult skill or task. As stated by Nunan (1991) writing is crucial in communications following the flow of development in our modern societies. Writing is perhaps, the principal means by which you are judged. To be able to express yourself clearly requires the skills to write well. For the non-native speakers of the English language the ability to write well in the language is not easy to accomplish, even the native speakers of the language face difficulties and often stumble in their writing.

According to Chitavelu N. et. al. (1995), writing is the skill most students are least proficient in compared to other skills. She says that this may be the result of the students having little use for it in the immediate present. She also says that there are very few social needs for writing in English in the school period of a Malaysian citizen's life. Furthermore, we may pick-up the ability to speak at home without any systematic instruction; we do need, however, to be taught the rhetoric of writing for the reason that writing is not a skill as easily acquired as speaking. She further states that since writing is usually taught and learned in a formal setting and it is not produced as natural as speaking, therefore writing in the target language is far more difficult to acquire.

In addition Long and Richard (1987) stated that writing is not a natural activity. All physically and mentally normal people learn to speak a language. Yet all people have to be taught how to write. Writing requires thought, discipline, and concentration. Writing involves committing something to a relatively permanent form.

Throughout the years, the writing courses bare a striking resemblance to one another. Nothing much has changed since the nineteenth century. Teachers only assigned topics and themes for writing and students handed in completed papers, get a grade, perhaps a feedback from the teacher and get another writing task. Students are almost on their own when the writing processes take place. Students hardly receive any feedback on how to go about filling a blank page with thoughts and ideas and sometimes require them to be critical as well. According to Bishop (1988), the responsibility of the teachers is to guide the students throughout the writing process.

In fact, Chitravelu N. et. Al. (1995) states that students are to be stimulated and encourage to think critically, effectively and also creatively in their writings with the guidance from the teacher. In addition, Tichy (1990) claims that students can learn to write better under the guidance of good, responsible teachers. Larsen-Freeman (1986) says that teachers need to experiment and investigate each potential approach or method of teaching that they know. It is the teacher who knows her or his students best by applying the best approach or method to suit his or her students' varying needs.

2.2 Difficulties In Performing A Writing Task

Bereiter and Scardamalia (1983) state that one of the problems faced by writers concerns the capacity limitation the brain of each individual to construct and build ideas from the information stored in the brain. This information is stored in the brain from everyday life and these researchers claim that even though our brain can store a vast amount of information and data, there is a limit to the amount of data and information which our brain can deal with at a time.

According to another researcher, Byrne (1991), since writing is a solitary activity, the writer may face psychological, linguistic, and cognitive problems which would hinder the act of writing an essay.