

Improving Students' Classroom Participation through Creative Pedagogical Strategies (Meningkatkan Penyertaan Pelajar dalam Kelas Melalui Strategi Pedagogi Kreatif)

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ABSTRACT

Low-proficient students' low performance in English as a second language (ESL) descriptive writing was observed to be related to their lack of participation in the teaching and learning process. This presents a need to explore alternative pedagogical strategies that could boost their participation, and thus their performance. This action research explored the effect of using creative pedagogical strategies on the classroom participation of 38 students at one of the secondary schools in Petaling Perdana District, Selangor. Focus group interviews, observation, and researcher's reflective notes were utilised for data collection. Results show that students' participation levels systematically improved at every cycle. Findings also revealed that the creative teaching strategies utilised caused active involvement in lessons and fostered cooperation among students in completing tasks. The multifarious materials and interactive tasks used during the lessons inspired communication and discussions among students. Learning from multiple resources provides enthusiasm to learn among students. Lastly, teaching strategies that require active participation developed positive mindset that developed positive attitude towards learning among the students. In conclusion, creative pedagogical strategies that are based on the students' learning needs have a straightforward and positive effect on boosting the students' participation in learning.

Key Words: creative pedagogical strategies, classroom participation, ESL writing, action research, inovasi pendidikan

ABSTRAK

Prestasi rendah pelajar berkemahiran rendah dalam penulisan deskriptif Bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa kedua (ESL) dilihat berkaitan dengan kurangnya penyertaan mereka dalam proses pengajaran dan pembelajaran. Ini menunjukkan terdapatnya keperluan untuk meneroka strategi pedagogi alternatif yang dapat meningkatkan penyertaan mereka, seterusnya prestasi mereka. Kajian tindakan ini meneroka kesan penggunaan strategi pedagogi kreatif terhadap penyertaan 38 pelajar di salah sebuah sekolah menengah di Daerah Petaling Perdana, Selangor. Temu bual kumpulan berfokus, pemerhatian, dan catatan reflektif penyelidik digunakan untuk pengumpulan data. Hasil menunjukkan bahawa tahap penyertaan pelajar meningkat secara sistematik pada setiap kitaran. Dapatan juga menunjukkan bahawa strategi pengajaran kreatif yang digunakan menyebabkan penglibatan aktif dalam pelajaran dan memupuk kerjasama antara pelajar dalam menyelesaikan tugas. Bahan pelbagai dan tugas interaktif yang digunakan semasa pelajaran menginspirasi komunikasi dan perbincangan dalam kalangan pelajar. Pembelajaran dari pelbagai sumber memberikan semangat belajar dalam kalangan pelajar dan strategi pengajaran yang memerlukan penyertaan aktif mengembangkan minda positif yang mengembangkan sikap positif terhadap pembelajaran dalam kalangan pelajar. Kesimpulannya, strategi pedagogi kreatif yang berdasarkan keperluan pembelajaran pelajar mempunyai kesan langsung dan positif untuk meningkatkan penyertaan pelajar dalam pembelajaran.

Key Words: strategi pedagogi kreatif, penyertaan bilik darjah, penulisan ESL, kajian Tindakan, teaching innovation

INTRODUCTION

Writing is always a difficult activity in all languages, as it is a complex process of expression and discovery which requires writers to compose thoughts through effective word choice and sentence structuring and string ideas through brainstorming, multiple drafting, feedback practices, revision, and final editing (Mohamad et al. 2018). Therefore, the teaching and learning (T&L) of writing can be challenging, especially when the emphasis is on the outcome; for example, grammatical accuracy and appropriateness of the sentence structures (McNamara et al. 2010).

For all levels of schooling in Malaysia, where the status of English is as a second language, writing is made a compulsory skill to be learnt; it is also tested to measure students' mastery of the skill. The Malaysian Ministry of Education (MOE) reported that in national English examinations, writing is one of the most difficult components for students to perform satisfactorily, where vocabulary and grammatical accuracy is still an ongoing issue; this was also found by previous studies (Jalaluddin et al. 2015; Yunus & Chien 2016; Narinasamy et al. 2013; Fareed et al. 2016). According to Azman (2016), since the year 2000, only around 60% of students can pass English in the national examinations. An analysis of the latest 5-year performance of Malaysian students in the Malaysian Education Certificate (SPM) English 1119 exam results show no linear trend of increment, as shown by the subject average grade (GPMP) in Table 1.

In the SPM English 1119 exam, writing test (which is in the Paper 1 of the SPM) carries the biggest weightage among the other test components, with 115 marks out of 155 marks, or 76 percent of the overall marks. However, since the year 2018, there is a change in the policy of language assessment from using the general SPM descriptor to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) global scales; this has caused the teaching and learning (T&L) of ESL in secondary schools to focus on grammar, reading and speaking more than ever before. Meanwhile, the SPM is still used as the measure of students' performance in English in secondary school, and its format has been left unchanged. Therefore,

when students are not proficient in writing, it significantly affects their overall grade of the subject, even though they have higher proficiency in other types of language skills.

Among low-performing students, their low proficiency in writing, coupled with unsuitable teaching strategies, would further negatively affect their motivation and attitude towards learning English (Alaga 2016; Ni'mah et al. 2017; Souriyavongsa et al. 2013), which would increase anxiety and negatively affect their participation in the T&L process (Diaz 2018; Akib et al. 2018; Griskell et al. 2020), or worse, further lead to withdrawal from the T&L lessons altogether (Patrick et al. 2012; Skinner et al. 1990). This would then create a vicious cycle of underperformance.

This phenomenon was observed in one school in Petaling Perdana District, Selangor, Malaysia. The low-proficient students hardly participate and engage in the T&L process and have high anxiety characterized by being timid and passive in the T&L process. It is also disclosed that the T&L sessions of writing were mostly academically centred and routine-based, and that the teachers rarely carry out alternative teaching activities that could possibly encourage the low-proficient students' participation. Therefore, it is possible that the conventional academically centred teaching strategies are not suitable with the low-performing students due to the gap in their prior knowledge and the expectations of the lessons. There is a need to alleviate this problem, as the students' performance in writing was declining, and this affected their overall performance in the SPM. Table 2 depicts an analysis of the school's SPM English 1119 results from the year 2016 to 2018.

Prevailing over this matter of low students' participation during the T&L process of writing demands the use of alternate teaching strategies that could attract the interest of students towards the lesson, and thus towards learning. Therefore, an action research has been done to address the current research problem. The objective of this action research is to explore the effects of creative pedagogical strategies on students' classroom participation in the T&L of ESL descriptive writing.

TABLE 1. 5-Year Analysis of SPM 1119 English Exam Results in Malaysia

| Code/ Subject | Year | Candidate's Percentage of Pass | | | | | No of Candidates | GPMP |
|-----------------------------|------|--------------------------------|---------------------|---------------|------------|-------------|---------------------|------|
| | | Excellent (A+,A,A-) | Good (B+,B,C+,C) | Pass (D,E) | A+ to E | Fail (G) | | |
| 1119 English Language | 2014 | 13.6 | 28.7 | 35.0 | 77.3 | 22.7 | 392586 | 6.12 |
| | 2015 | 14.3 | 29.3 | 32.7 | 76.3 | 23.7 | 372573 | 6.08 |
| | 2016 | 14.5 | 29.8 | 35.1 | 79.4 | 20.6 | 368801 | 5.99 |
| | 2017 | 16.5 | 29.8 | 33.6 | 33.6 | 20.1 | 412308 | 5.84 |
| | 2018 | 14.4 | 30.6 | 34.4 | 79.4 | 20.6 | 388899 | 5.98 |

Source: Ministry of Education (2019)

TABLE 2. Analysis of SPM 1119 English exam 2016 – 2018

| Code/ Subject | Year | Candidate's Percentage of Pass | | | | | No of Candidates | GPMP |
|------------------|------|--------------------------------|---------------------|---------------|------------|-------------|---------------------|------|
| | | Excellent (A+,A,A-) | Good (B+,B,C+,C) | Pass (D,E) | A+ to E | Fail (G) | | |
| 1119 | 2016 | 24.4 | 29.2 | 31.4 | 85.6 | 14.4 | 192 | 5.31 |
| English | 2017 | 18 | 29.4 | 31.8 | 79.6 | 20.4 | 166 | 5.75 |
| Language | 2018 | 8.54 | 29.28 | 41.46 | 79.2 | 20.7 | 164 | 6.38 |

Source: Analysis Report from the School Panel

CLASSROOM PARTICIPATION IN THE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF WRITING

Participation in the T&L activity is frequently considered as the enthusiastic, attentive, and serious engagement and interaction among students, peers, and the teacher in a specific classroom setting with the aim to achieve the learning objective (Philp & Duchesne 2016). Classroom participation is normally linked to specific behaviours such as responding to the teacher during question and answer (Q&A) sessions and participating in group work during lessons (Siri, Nsuryani & Melor 2010). Boylan (2010) stated that participation involves progress in identity development and enhancement in students' liaison through moment-to-moment engagement in the community of practice and their correlation over time. Effective language learning requires full awareness during the T&L (Ellis 2015), which means classroom participation is crucial.

In the T&L of writing, when the T&L process of writing are deemed difficult by the students, their anxiety spikes, and they would be less participative in the process from frustration of not being able to cope. Their behaviour is usually characterized by disinterest in the tasks, unresponsiveness to interactions during the lesson, distracted, and tend to give up easily. This is vastly observed among students who are less proficient in writing (Alaga 2016; Ni'mah et al. 2017; Souriyavongsa et al. 2013). These students are more likely to attempt less effort in participating in a task or activity persistently, or be engaged cognitively nor creatively in the lesson (Philp & Duchesne 2016; Diaz 2018; Akib et al. 2018; Griskell et al. 2020). This problem may be caused by the teaching strategies used by the teacher that are unsuitable with the students' needs, interest, and proficiency levels. As argued by Sancho-Vinuesa et al. (2013), good teaching strategies could significantly improve students' engagement in learning.

Therefore, this is when creativity in teaching comes into play. Teachers should use their creativity to design pedagogical strategies that could cater to the specific students' needs, interest, and proficiency levels. When suitable instructional units are executed in the T&L sessions, students' self-efficacy would increase and their anxiety reduce, in the sense that they may be able to follow the lesson effectively and this would increase

their participation in the T&L activities (Patrick et al. 2012). Thornburry (2013) suggested that the acquisition of vocabulary, sentences construction and paragraph writing depend on how teachers' stir the spirit to learn.

CREATIVE PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES

The ability to effectively teach is to be able to design pedagogical strategies that would meet the needs of the specific students that are able to motivate and engage them in learning. Students' needs are always changing; therefore, teachers are required to step out of the typical, teacher-oriented and traditional language teaching methodologies towards creativity in teaching strategies and materials that appeal and attract students to be engaged and motivated in language classes, especially among the low proficiency students (Bailin Song 1995; Liu & Littlewood 1997; Littlewood 2001; Zhenhui 2001).

In Malaysia, since the education system forces teachers and students to be exam and result-oriented (Sulaiman et al. 2017; Azman 2016; Rahmat 2014), teachers adopt less effective teaching approaches such as product-oriented rather than process-oriented approach to teaching writing, and this hinders the ability to conduct a more meaningful T&L session. According to Lee (2018), the common strategy used by teachers, which is grammar drilling less helpful in essay writing because grammar items were taught separately and as sentences are generated, they stand alone. Hence, students suffer when they have to use what is learnt to be conceptualized in written discourse. This also affects the flow and coherence of the ideas pertaining to cultural knowledge and usage of vocabulary, thus unfulfilling the task achievement.

Creative or unconventional pedagogical strategies typically aim and require active participation of students, especially when various creative activities and materials are integrated during lessons (Harris & de Bruin 2018). Previous researchers found that these unconventional teaching strategies significantly improved students' classroom participation level as well as writing skills, as they allow students to participate more proactively as they would be more willing to self-explore and be committed to their tasks. For example, task-based learning (Johari 2017; Nisha

& Hamidah 2020), game-based learning (Yunus & Mutwarasibo 2013; Nachiappan et al. 2018; Nadia & Haque 2017; Nurshazwani et al. 2018; Ramanda Rizky 2020; Sahathevan et al. 2020), inquiry-based learning, and project-based learning (Jaelani 2017; Nim 2017; Soffianny 2017; Lidawan & Joaquin 2018).

In addition, creative learning activities using materials that are authentic through digital and technological means such as audio-visual presentation, communications through social media, augmented and virtual realities are suggested to positively affect learning engagement in some studies (Hui et al. 2018; Jesson et al. 2018; Ansari 2015; Abdelrahman et al. 2017; Ashmore & Moriarty 2016; Ayuni et al. 2017; Azman & Nur Ehsan 2019; Barnard 2017; Cahnmann-Taylor & Hwang 2015; Challob et al. 2016; Harwati et al. 2017; Harwati & Jess-Cooke 2015; Prakash 2016; Waite 2015; Melor & Mohamed Amin 2016, 2017; Weston-Sementelli, Allen & McNamara 2018; Liu & Tsai 2013; Mahadzir & Phung 2013; Tan & Nur Ehsan 2012).

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN AND PROCEDURE

This study is an action research carried out to address the problem of classroom participation among low-proficient students in the teaching and learning of ESL writing skills. Action research is a reflective practice undertaken by participants in social or educational context through a self-reflective, systematic, and critical approach to bring about changes or improvement in practice through a detailed intervention (Burns 2010).

The Kemmis and McTaggart's (1988) action research model was applied in this study. This study is in line with the four phases of the model, although due to time limitation, only two cycles can be implemented. Table 3 shows the intervention plan.

The methodology of this study has been approved by the educational Planning and Research Division, EPRD, Ministry of Education, and verified by content and field experts. Besides, the participants' identity was protected, and no name was provided in this research. The researcher used a consent letter for the teachers and the students asking for permission to implement and participate in the research. Nevertheless, students were informed that their participation in this research would leave an impact on their scores and learning process.

PARTICIPANTS

The participants of this research were 38 Form Four students from a secondary school in Petaling Perdana

District, Selangor, Malaysia. They comprised of 19 males and 20 females, of a mix of races and religions, and they are from moderate and low socioeconomic status. The students were sixteen years old and have low proficiency in English as a second language, as shown by their Form Three Assessment (PT3) English writing results in Table 4.

DATA COLLECTION METHOD

To collect data on student's classroom participation, observation checklist, reflective notes and focus group interviews were used as data collection methods.

During the lessons, the teacher's reflections as well as the teacher's observation on the students' actions during the lessons were recorded in reflective notes. The data collected using observation sessions were students' behaviour during the creative teaching practices, such as attentiveness, enthusiasm, conversations, application of knowledge, activities, groupwork outputs, writing skills, interest, feelings, actions, responses, initiative, effort and emotions.

Data were also collected through observation by two senior observers randomly during two of the lessons done in each cycle during this action research, accompanied by a set of pre-defined questions in the form of a checklist filled by the observers. The checklist was developed based on the Malaysian Education Quality Standard 4 (SKPM 4) rubric instrument version 11 from the Ministry of Education (2011). The checklist items were adopted and modified from the SKPM 4 because the SKPM 4 is the regular and current assessment checklist used during the teaching and learning sessions of English Language in national secondary schools by the superiors to observe the quality of education, which includes the component of students' participation. The components and its items were selected according to the need of the study and integrated to assess the learning behaviour of the students in the classroom especially during the intervention. This is also to examine the progress and learning behaviour so that the lessons can be amended accordingly in Cycle 2 to see improvement. This checklist was checked and verified by three senior ESL teachers and three ESL lecturers as experts' panel. The components and aspects in the checklist are listed in Table 5.

To supplement the observation data, focus group interviews were also done among six students in a group to collect data on the i) reflections on what had happened during their participation in the study, ii) their expectations of the result, iii) suggestions for improvement, and iv) how they felt and behaved overall for the next cycle. The interviews were done after the first observation, after the second cycle and observation, and after the third cycle and observation.

TABLE 3. The Intervention Plan

| Lesson | Writing Stages | CEFR Descriptors | Topic | Strategies and Materials employed | Time Frame |
|---|------------------------|---|---|--|--|
| CYCLE 1 | | | | | |
| Lesson 1 & 2 | Pre-Writing | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction, • Consent, • Ice-breaking (Snowball War and Guessing Game), • Creating WhatsApp Group & Written Test 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Game & content- based • Visual Thinking & Content based | First 2 weeks of Jan * <i>Observation 1 & 2</i> * <i>Semi-structured Interview</i> |
| Lesson 3 & 4 | Pre-Writing/ Drafting | Students will be able to write simple sentences and notes to describe | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 Squared Grammar • Show don't Tell! | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content & activity based • Character & mobile based | 3 rd & 4 th week of Jan |
| Lesson 5 & 6 | Drafting /Editing | Students will be able to write one simple paragraph to describe | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mystery Skype Edited • Connect Creatively | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technology and visual thinking based • Technology and visual thinking | 1 st & 2 nd week of Feb |
| Lesson 7 & 8 | Editing/Final Version | Students will be able to write simple paragraphs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build your support | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Game and visual thinking | 3 rd week of Mar |
| Week 9 Written Test 2 (4 th week of Feb) * <i>Observation 3 (random)</i> * <i>Focus Group Interview 1</i> Amend Intervention | | | | | |
| CYCLE 2 | | | | | |
| Lesson 1 & 2 | Pre-Writing/ Drafting | Students will be able to write simple sentences and notes to describe | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shake it Off! • Behave | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Task and project-based • ICT, mobile and Project-based | 2 nd & 3 rd week of Mar |
| Lesson 3 & 4 | Drafting/ Editing | Students will be able to write one simple paragraph to describe | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dot the points • Talk by Police | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visual thinking and task-based • Task and character-based | 2 nd & 3 rd week of March |
| Lesson 5 & 6 | Editing/ Final Version | Students will be able to write simple paragraphs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bully Fact Sheet • PowToon Video | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Task & project-based • ICT & project-based | 4 th week of March |
| 16 TH week Written Test 3 (1 st week of April) * <i>Observation 4 (random)</i> * <i>Focus Group Interview 2</i> | | | | | |

TABLE 4. PT3 English written results of the participants in this study

| Exam | Total Candidates | 80-100 (A) | 60-79 (B) | 50-59 (C) | 40- 49 (D) | 39< (F) |
|----------|------------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|---------|
| PT3 2018 | 39 | - | 5 | 11 | 11 | 12 |

TABLE 5. Student's Learning Behaviour observation components/items modified from SKPM 4 (2011)

| No | Components/Items | SKMP 4 |
|---|--|-------------------|
| The participation of the students during teaching and learning process of writing | | |
| Almost half a class: | | |
| 1 | participates in asking questions | 4.9 |
| 2 | participates in group work and group discussion | 4.1 |
| 3 | puts in initiative to do the task collaboratively | 4.1 |
| a | helps each other to understand the instruction or explanation | 4.1 |
| b | helps each other in using the teaching and learning materials | 4.1 |
| c | helps each other to produce ideas and organise the ideas into paragraphs to complete the task | 4.7 |
| d | helps each other to find vocabularies needed and construct sentences to complete the task | 4.10 |
| e | motivates each other to accomplish a given task through praises and encouragement | 4.10 |
| f | communicates with teacher and each other to complete the teaching and learning activities | 4.6 |
| The attentiveness of the students during the teaching and learning process of writing | | |
| Almost half a class: | | |
| 1 | focuses by giving response or asking question about the explanation and instruction to their teacher or classmates | 4.1/4.2 |
| 2 | focuses by providing remarks or queries about the teaching and learning materials to their teachers or classmates | 4.1/4.2 |
| 3 | answers questions related to the teaching and learning content | 4.9 |
| 4 | understands the instruction using a combination teaching and learning materials (gadgets, worksheets, etc.), or asking their teacher or classmates whenever they do not understand | 4.1/4.7 |
| 5 | links the teaching and learning content with daily life/local context/global issues through decision making or problem solving | 4.10 |
| 6 | behaves well without disrupting the class (shows positive attitude, does not waste time, polite and respectful) | 4.11 |
| 7 | shows nonverbal attentiveness (eye contact, head nods, gesture, facial expression, etc) | 4.6 |
| 8 | gives more than one idea/point related to content | CEFR (writing) |
| 9 | organize the ideas using more than one linking devices | CEFR (writing) |
| 10 | uses minimum 3 good vocabulary/word choice in sentences | CEFR (writing) |
| 11 | constructs more than one simple sentence with minimum error | CEFR (writing) |
| 12 | completes the given tasks on time during the lesson | 4.3 |
| 13 | does correction for the given tasks consistently | 4.3 |
| The enthusiasm of the students to do the tasks | | |
| Almost half a class: | | |
| 1 | moves to form small groups willingly (without being forced by the teacher when instructed) | 4.1 |
| 2 | takes notes during teaching and learning sessions | 4.1 |
| 3 | takes initiative by using supplementary teaching and learning materials to complete their tasks (gadgets, worksheets, etc) with minimum supervision from their teacher or classmates | 4.3/4.7 |
| 4 | actively uses teaching and learning materials to prompt ideas | 4.7 |
| 5 | actively discusses with classmates about the teaching and learning activities and materials | 4.7 |
| 6 | makes decisions and solves problems related to teaching and learning activities | 4.10 |

Source: SKPM Standard 4, KPM (2011)

TABLE 6. Participation Level Classification Interpretation

| Percentage Score | Level Classification |
|------------------|----------------------|
| 0% - 49% | Low |
| 50% - 69% | Moderate |
| 70% - 100% | High |

TABLE 7. Themes emerged on Students' Participation for 3 cycles

| Cycle 1 | Cycle 2 | Cycle 3 |
|--|---|--|
| Collaboration fosters good participation level | Interaction encourages better participation level | Positivity facilitates greater participation level |

DATA ANALYSIS METHOD

During the course of the action research, the actual teaching and learning sessions were observed twice randomly. During each cycle, the components in the checklist were ticked "Yes" if the component existed during observation, and "No" if the component was absent. The students' participation level was classified based on the percentage score of low (less than 49% components present), moderate (50% to 69% components present) and high participation (70% and more components present), as shown in Table 6. The participation level classification interpretation was adopted from SKPM Standard 4, KPM (2011) because it is the regular and current assessment checklist used during the teaching and learning sessions of English Language in national secondary schools by the superiors to observe (i) teachers' pedagogical skills, (ii) students' participation and (iii) the impact of teaching and learning sessions.

In addition, the interview data and the reflective notes were analysed using thematic analysis. The reflective notes were analysed by referring to Miles et al. (2014) structural analysis and interpretation, and the interview data were analysed using Creswell's (2012) dialogue thematic analysis, which is systematic, organised and in order.

These three types of data were triangulated in answering the research questions in order to ensure consistency of the findings.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

From the findings, it was found that students' classroom participation level differs based on the teaching strategies employed and materials used, where creativity in teaching strategies and utilising multifarious materials supported the students' language ability and participation level. The students were noticed to have undergone a transformative change throughout their involvement in the action research process. It was apparent that their participation develops significantly throughout the three cycles. The discussion between observers and critical friends along the way helped and guided the researcher to make significance change in every cycle to suit the students' demand, meet the teaching and learning objectives, and improve students' participation level. Table 7 shows the three themes that emerged from the data.

CYCLE 1: COLLABORATION FOSTERS GOOD PARTICIPATION LEVEL

Based on the observation checklist, only sixty-one percent (61%) level of participation among students was achieved, which shows medium level of

participation. A few elements in the checklist required some attention. The elements are the ability to link the learning content with daily life or local context or global issues through decision making or problems solving and regularly grouping themselves with same friends. Besides, they were lacking in getting corrections done, still sought full guidance to make decisions and solve problems related to teaching and learning activities. Amendments to the elements mentioned were drafted accordingly for the next cycle.

In Cycle 1, it was noticed that the creative pedagogical strategies applied in the lessons evoked active involvement among students in the lessons, as well as high cooperation between the students to complete the tasks in the lesson, which are described as below.

Active Involvement in Lessons

From the observation data, students' participation level shows some improvement through a number of behavioural indicators. For example, passive students started getting engaged slowly in the lessons, the attention span of the class increased as well as the attendance, the students raised hands to answer questions, the students looked cheerful, excited, and motivated, the students collaborated among themselves in putting in the initiative to do a given task, they take notes during teaching and learning sessions, they actively used the teaching and learning materials to prompt ideas, they actively discussing among themselves, the more proficient student guided the less proficient ones, they motivated and encouraged each other to complete tasks, and they eagerly looked forward for what is next in the lesson. They also showed non-verbal attentiveness (eye contact, head nods, gesture, and facial expression). In addition, the students also looked interested to learn to write and to maximise opportunity to practice learning by providing remarks or queries about the teaching and learning materials to the teachers or classmate, answered questions related to the teaching and learning content, understood the instruction using a combination of teaching and learning materials (gadgets, worksheets, etc.) and asked the teacher or classmates whenever they do not understand. These behaviours observed indicate active involvement in the learning activities.

This higher level of participation during the lessons compared to the usual normal level of classroom participation was also noted by the students. The observation data triangulated with the interview data. In the interviews, they commented that they were active throughout the lesson. Some phrases uttered by the students from the first focus group interview showed how collaboration slowly blossomed among the group members. They said that "*all*

cooperated.....like give idea to write and expand”, “..help to read the materials or sources...then tell what to write first...second and all”, “at least they try to write.....happy lar they work together”, “help continue sentences too in my group”, and “bring resources to look for meaning or idea...like a list of words...dictionary.... Google earlier at home” (FGI_1). This shows that the students agreed that they were excited in the lessons and full-heartedly participated in all the activities when the teacher uses many types of teachings. The students also claimed that they were constantly anticipating new and exciting content from the lesson. For example, in the Mystery Skype activity, participant 2 claimed that new experiences kept the students excited when activities are interactive, “when they tell us about their country and all that....explain to us...what’s special about them and their country and the clues they gave us to find out their answers....it was interesting so keep awake...never had this talk to overseas students before this” (FGI_1_P2). In addition, Participant 3 also added that, “Skype teacher...never have this kind of experience in my life... now I know a little bit about them, flag and all.....connection was slow and I was like so scared to talk when teacher passed the mike to me.... but I talked teacher... tell them about our country...we write down with friends... good that they helped teacher” (FGI_1_P3).

In addition, during the lesson, the usage of smart phones captured the students’ attention, when they were presented the opportunity to record a video and present their work digitally using their phones. A note from the researcher’s reflection indicates that, “*phone was used in a disciplined manner. Everyone was excited, engaged and having fun. Many were touched. They had an experience of explaining expressions of the receiver and the experiences of participating* (Ref_note C1).

High Cooperation in Completion of Tasks

From the observation data, it can be seen that the collaboration requirement during the learning activities encouraged every student to help each other, either forcefully or voluntarily not only at writing, but also at speaking that contributes to writing during the exchange of ideas and discussion. It was observed that this further helped the group members to identify and correct themselves when cooperation is involved. Some students shared their experiences below:

S1: my group no probs...we helped each other... like give everyone to do something... like teacher said...we feel secured when friends are around and willing to teach...

S2: idea teacher...now I know what more ideas I can add...I begin to speak more English with friends...in

the beginning and for group work wise times... everyone will be talking in English but some will be

talking in Malay.... but after you have started teaching us all....and all... I think everything started to talk in english which is much better... their English sounded better than last time....it is very very effective.... hehehehehehe.... (FGI_1)

Besides, the students agreed that the activities involving stacking up blocks to receive clues was very exciting and kept them in control. The activity required them to delegate tasks to each group member; for example, one will find, another will collect, and the rest will construct sentences and the more proficient one will check the end result. They also mentioned that they were hyperactive and wanted more time to play as the activities were exciting. They were also observed to feel disappointed when their blocks collapsed, as they do not get to receive clues and had to write on their own. Participant 3 noted that, “*I feel difficult....the clues also I find it difficult....the language teacher*” (FGI_1_P3).

The students also stated that the corrections or feedback that they received on their work through the WhatsApp group created for this study purpose continuously during class and outside or class hours were efficient for them to learn as much as possible within a short period. Participant 3 said, “*like doing work with fun...new tasks...new homework types*” (FGI_1_P3). Students 3 and 6 further iterated that, “*ya teacher...because sometimes we write a sentence right.....so sometimes we are not sure whether a sentence is correct or not....so if teacher marked and teacher says it’s wrong.....so on the spot we will and can learnt....oh so this is wrong...we can is place...in doing mistakes...so i think teacher*” (FGI_1_P3) and “*yes...hmmm...ya...true....u always make sure correction we do.....the energy is strong teacher....we feel like we can do*” (FGI_1_P6).

From the findings of Cycle 1, it can be seen that collaborative activities are more effective when the class is introduced to creative or new strategies and materials, especially for a large classroom capacity. Learning collaboratively is one of the 21st century skills that is required to be embedded in the National Curriculum. The outcome of being collaborative in a group discussion or teamwork can produce insightful ideas and strong connections among students, which foster a high level of enthusiasm and energy in learning. This finding is supported by the findings of previous studies, which suggested that creative pedagogical strategy allow students to participate more proactively as they would be more willing to self-explore and be committed to their tasks (Johari 2017; Nisha & Hamidah 2020; Yunus & Mutwarasibo 2013;

Nachiappan et al. 2018; Nadia & Haque 2017; Nurshazwani et al. 2018; Ramanda Rizky 2020; Sahathevan et al. 2020; Jaelani 2017; Nim 2017; Soffianny 2017; Lidawan & Joaquin 2018).

CYCLE 2: INTERACTION ENCOURAGES BETTER PARTICIPATION LEVEL

Based on the observation checklist, the level of participation among students achieved was improved to eighty-six percent (86%), which shows high level of participation. During this cycle, lesser elements required attention compared to the previous cycle, which were only three. The three elements were behaving well without disrupting the class (shows a positive attitude, does not waste time, polite and respectful), making decisions and solving problems related to teaching and learning activities and helping each other to produce ideas and organise the ideas into paragraphs to complete the task. Amendments were drafted accordingly for the next cycle after getting some insights from discussions with other teachers and exchange of opinions.

In Cycle 2, the strategies and materials involved were ICT based, mobile-based, music-based, task-based, used visual thinking, character, and project-based. Meanwhile, the materials also involved current issues that went viral on media, real scenes of meeting police officers, and bully cases among students. Findings show that the creative pedagogical strategies applied in the lessons used multifarious materials that inspired communication during lessons. The interactive tasks given during the lesson also initiated discussions among students. These findings are presented and discussed below.

Multifarious Materials inspired Communication during Lessons

From the observation data, the multifarious materials used caused students to access information required and respond well in the learning process, showed togetherness and belongingness with each other and dwelled in the entertainment while learning. Besides, they were also observed to be motivated when the learning resources were not limited within the school compound. Some students also brought materials and information beforehand and expressed themselves and relate to their prior knowledge. This showed that they tend to be more confident and prepared. Moreover, throughout the lesson, the students also became more friendly and outspoken, although they used inaccurate English language in communication. Many students were seen to be comfortable and motivated in learning using physical materials such as mah-jong paper, worksheets and any written form used as a learning medium. In addition, once again, students' attendance

was improved. Below is a small extract of reflective notes.

"All groups did their part at home to at least browse through songs related to bully and collecting structures and phrases to be included in their song as well as some even google translated to be shown to their teacher the next day. This clearly shows that having them in the music helps a lot especially when the reward is to be seen people out of school or even within, simply among classmates." (Ref_notes_C2)

Interactive Tasks initiated Discussion

All of the activities in Cycle 2 involved frequent communication because it either requires them to present verbally along with other modes of presentation or discussion in groups to complete a task. From the interview data, the students concluded that the topic and nature of activity mattered the most in initiating discussions among them and increase their participation. For example, Participant 4 claimed that, *"like me uhmmmm...I see topic and activity teacher...if nice...i join also...difficult also I try to do...try to learn"* (FGI_2_P4) when asked about factors that impressed them. She even claimed that many of her friends preferred worksheets and physical materials both for writing production as well as presentation. She further added that she liked the police talk activity, *"teacher...I like the police talk...I listen to the police talk...the talk was on bullying...when I was listening...listened it...i was like should I change myself or not"*. Moreover, Participant 2 also stated that the topics of writing in the lessons are always hot and sensitive current issues, but the way the topics were integrated into learning was interesting and increased her curiosity to be engaged in the writing lessons more. This was supported by Students 6 and 4 when they could not agree more that the style of teaching was new. In addition, Participant 2 shared that some uncooperative students when scolded and firmly advised started to cooperate forcefully at first but later, when they find that the activities were creative and new, they enjoyed the task voluntarily despite their low proficiency in English. This shows how the interactive tasks excite the students and encouraged discussions among them.

The data from the interviews triangulated with the data from the reflective notes, as shown below:

"Having students to participate is the utmost important goal in this study. Thus, frequent discussion and small-group work were required. In short, a class became an opportunity to assess and promote learning when students participate willingly or indirectly answering, asking questions, or contributing to the discussion. Question and answer sessions were

integrated during the supervision of their group task. They referred to their notes and information as well as other groups' notes and information like the flash to answer me. Overall, the class tried to talk in English, but the dominant language here was still Malay where I had to do more translation from BM to English especially to Salman's Aim's and Naz's group." (Ref_notes_C2)

From the findings of Cycle 2, it can be seen that the use of multifarious teaching and learning materials throughout the lessons were successful in increasing student's participation in the T&L process. During the lessons, students used various ways to present their writing. They used single, paired and group presentation, gallery walk, video presentation, music app, PowToon, PowerPoint, visuals and infographic on mah-jong and manila papers, and factsheets. In addition, the multifarious teaching materials used were done to cater to various students' needs. Every student is different in the way that they learn. For example, asking questions or testing through quizzes, like what was done during this action research was known as an effective way of learning for auditory learners, where information was recited repeatedly. This is supported by the findings of (Jesson et al. 2018; Azman & Nur Ehsan 2019; Weston-Sementelli et al. 2018). Meanwhile, visual learners learn better when pictures, diagrams, or representations were displayed in a non-linear form; for example, through the use of video presentation and visuals and infographic presentation on mah-jong and manila papers, like what was done in this study. This is supported by the findings of (Abdelrahman et al. 2017; Barnard 2017; Cahnmann-Taylor & Hwang 2015; Melor & Mohamed Amin 2016). Therefore, the multifarious forms of teaching materials used could cater to various students' way of learning, this increased the likelihood of these various types of learners to be able to cope and follow the learning process.

Moreover, the lessons were designed to include interactive tasks that required the students to work as a team and discuss frequently. The requirement then fosters collaboration and teamwork among the students, which forced the students to participate. This was achieved through the question and answer sessions, through reflections and opinions, through feedbacks and evaluation of group work by other peers, and through feedback by the teacher through WhatsApp.

CYCLE 3: POSITIVITY FACILITATES GREATER PARTICIPATION LEVEL

Based on the observation checklist, the level of participation among students achieved was improved to hundred percent (100%), which shows high level of participation. During this cycle, the observers had only two comments for future improvement, which were the

noise level generated from the activities and the students' nature of being carried away with the activities. Noise reduction was always observed and given concern during this study; therefore, activities were mostly done in the Language room far away from the other classrooms. Students being carried away in the activities shows that they were participative indeed; hence, any incomplete lesson were communicated by the teacher through the WhatsApp group, email, and requesting extra relief lesson. These justifications were accepted by the observers. In the future, these two areas can be addressed through modifying the nature of the lesson, teaching strategies and materials.

In Cycle 3, findings show that the creative pedagogical strategies applied in the lessons led to positive mindset that led to positive attitude towards the lessons among the students. The usage of multiple resources in the T&L sessions also provide enthusiasm to learn. These findings are presented and discussed below.

Positive mindset leads to positive attitude

From the interviews, the students approved that the creative and interesting activities boost not only their positive mindset, also their attitude towards learning. They expressed their feelings of joy and contentment during group work although the language task was tough for them. A certain number of them stated that they like the lessons and had fun during the teaching and learning sessions. Participant 3 mentioned that, *"like all had something to do...the paragraph that teacher asked to write...we work together...happily"* (FGI_3_P3) when asked generally about the overall lessons.

The interview data triangulated with the observation data. From observation, the students were seen to be motivated to put effort in the learning session and built a positive mindset in learning in the way that they felt that they too can talk, can write, can contribute like the rest of the members. This caused them to instil a positive attitude towards learning. During this cycle, the students were observed to have autonomy and require less spoon-feeding from the teacher. For example, lesson 1 in this cycle was planned in such a way that the students try to answer 9 different questions according to their own prior knowledge about recycling instead of spoon-feeding them with information, and only then they watch the documentary, news report, cartoon and explanations about recycling based on the questions given to the groups. This is supported by the data from the reflective note:

"Students found 2 words related to recycling/3 R difficult which were 'landfill' and 'biodegradable'. Yet

they did not give up when more clues of the letter were given. Although slow in guessing the word, they eventually completed happily. They seemed engaged and stayed focus especially when they could guess the words such as earth, pollution, and plastic. It was also evident when they were given a task in a puzzle form to be rearranged. Since the lesson was made slow and steady upon request, all the groups managed to complete the task appropriately." (Ref_noted_C3)

Besides, another positive attitude was seen among the students when they never seem to lose hope in completing their tasks. Possessing the right mindset to improve and never view any workload as a burden was noticed among the students. Participant 3 added that, "how to use in sentence...we practice right... you don't let us go until we get it right... you repeat a few lessons and then we write complete essay...so like that we learn properly and collect all knowledge...then we write...discuss and write" (FGI_3_P3). Participant 6 in astonishment stated that, "i improved my learning interest...my knowledge...my attention in class...now I think I like English...for the first time...oh my God." (FGI_3_P6).

In addition, they followed instructions especially when smartphones were involved. They have not experienced using smartphones during any lessons before; therefore, having experienced using it during this study, they claimed that it was attractive, fast and effective. Participant 1 stated, "all of us mostly keep on paying attention....then we try to type and post.....scan and then find the answer and take information to display.....interesting teacher....even the boring recycling topic was made fun and exciting" (FGI_3_P1). This further supported a reflection note during one of the lessons, QR Treasure Hunt, where live question and answer session was conducted through Mentimeter application as stated below:

"Meanwhile, students in groups were exposed to mentimeter.com and required to log in using their email add in their phones. The process was smooth, and they could view the question both in their phone and I projected on the screen. They were able to discuss and send answers numerous times if necessary, based on the question that they have received. The image attached is a form of help for their vocabulary and peer interaction was their support to initiate own opinions based on previous lessons and prior understandings." (Ref_notes_C3)

Multiple Resources provides Enthusiasm to Learn

The data revealed that having multiple resources such as the smartphone provides enthusiasm to learn. The students have not experienced using smartphones during any lessons before; therefore, having

experienced using it during this study, they claimed in the interview that it was attractive, fast and effective in facilitating the T&L process. Participant 1 stated, "all of us mostly keep on paying attention....then we try to type and post.....scan and then find the answer and take information to display.....interesting teacher....even the boring recycling topic was made fun and exciting" (FGI_3_P1). This further supported a reflection note during one of the lessons, QR Treasure Hunt, where live question and answer session was conducted through Mentimeter application as stated below:

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In another learning sessions, the students were required to use whatever resources available to come up with a recycled product, a brochure, and market it among their friends at a reasonable price through role play. Using a variety of materials and resources are vital in any pedagogical strategy, whether in classroom or real setting. This activity does not only create awareness among the students, also self-confidence and unleashed their creativity.

In addition, engaging the students in the T&L session using worksheets through the combination of kinaesthetic movement and HOTS questions caused them to be excited and enthusiastic in learning. An extracted reflection notes indicate that the worksheets were successful providing excitements among the students:

"During the worksheets' activities, all showed the same pattern. They were excited, rushing, and competing to be the fastest to complete and ensured that they correct it after showing me. Jealousy and screams were heard from many especially Aim, Sea, Hak, and Akm. Only Naq and his friends were a little talkative and noisy, influenced by one sleepyhead, Far. Students seemed to be in control, focused, and attentive. Hmmm... this is rather rare, but it could be due to the requirement of the task to read. The students were calm and happy. They attempted all sections of the questions although heavy reading and discussions were involved. They also managed to give answers for opinions during set inductions." (Ref_notes_C3)

From the findings of Cycle 3, having a positive mindset and a positive attitude towards learning is vital to ensure that the learning is completed successfully. Collectively, a classroom with positive vibration or emotional reaction is essential for all students to be engaged in the T&L lessons harmonically in a conducive manner. Hence, being participative is an important factor that yields positive learning among the students, thus further develop their learning skills, knowledge, boost confidence, and create a conducive space that enables the students to practise language well. Inversely, language skills can be polished further through continuous and constant usage that needs a conducive atmosphere that accommodates the usage, as supported by Siri et al. (2010).

In addition, the findings also show that by using multiple resources in learning, the students develop more enthusiasm in learning. This is because a variety of activities that use a variety of resources caused them to be involved in more interaction, discussion, and sharing session. The finding of this study shares the view of Sancho-Vinuesa et al. (2013) who suggested that it is evident when strategies and materials are beyond the tradition, out of the box, relevance to local context, and life-experiences, students develop a more positive learning behaviour during lessons (Sancho-Vinuesa et al. (2013).

CONCLUSION

This action research explored the effect of using creative pedagogical strategies on students' participation in the teaching and learning of ESL descriptive writing. Results show that students' participation levels systematically improved at every cycle. Findings also revealed that the creative teaching strategies utilised caused active involvement in lessons and fostered cooperation among students in completing tasks, multifarious materials and interactive tasks used during the lessons inspired communication and discussions among students, learning from multiple resources provides enthusiasm to learn among students, and teaching strategies that require active participation developed positive mindset that developed positive attitude towards learning among the students. In conclusion, creative pedagogical strategies that are based on the students' learning needs have a straightforward and positive effect on boosting the students' participation in learning. The findings implicate those creative pedagogical strategies can help in providing a meaningful teaching and learning in the 21st century learning environment. More advanced group work approaches, ICT involvement, digital application, real life, and multifarious materials should be explored in future studies among primary school students. In

addition, other components of language should also be explored alongside a longer duration of study to dwell in depth learning.

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