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Enhancing Paragraph Writing through Flipped Classroom Instruction: A Mixed-Methods Study among TESL Students in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Writing is widely acknowledged as one of the most demanding skills in second language learning because it requires accuracy, organization, and sustained cognitive control. For TESL students, strong writing ability is essential not only for academic success but also for their future roles as English teachers. In the Malaysian context, however, writing has remained a persistent area of weakness, with many graduates struggling to produce clear and well-structured texts. Traditional writing instruction, which often relies on lengthy teacher explanations, tends to limit student engagement and provides insufficient opportunities for active practice. This study was conducted to investigate whether the flipped classroom could offer a more effective approach to teaching paragraph writing, with a particular focus on the four essential elements of topic sentence, elaboration, examples, and closure. A mixed-methods design was employed, involving two intact classes of semester two TESL undergraduates. The experimental group received flipped instruction through pre-class videos and in-class collaborative activities, while the control group followed conventional lecture-based teaching. Quantitative data were collected through pre- and post-tests, and qualitative insights were obtained from reflective journals and semi-structured interviews. The findings revealed that students in the flipped classroom group showed significant improvement in their paragraph writing performance compared to those in the control group. The qualitative data further highlighted students' positive perceptions, with many reporting increased motivation, flexibility, and confidence in their writing. In conclusion, the study demonstrates that flipped classroom pedagogy can effectively enhance both writing outcomes and learner engagement, offering valuable implications for TESL writing instruction in higher education.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Writing has been widely regarded as one of the most demanding skills to master in second language learning. This is because it requires the students to not only be competent in grammar and vocabulary but also the ability to organize ideas coherently (Qi, 2024). Mastery in writing is even

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more crucial for TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language) students, as it demonstrates their readiness to teach English to their future students. In the Malaysian context, English writing has long become an area of concern, with graduates criticized for lacking the ability to produce clear, well-structured, and coherent texts as expected by the national English Education Roadmap (2015–2025) [7,11].

1.2 Problem Statement

In many higher education settings, writing instruction has relied heavily on teacher-centred approaches, where lecturers provide lengthy explanations of writing structures and students are expected to produce paragraphs or essays either during lessons or as homework. While this method ensures that theories and content are covered, it often results in limited student participation and passive learning [16]. Learners may memorize the structural components of writing but still struggle to apply them in authentic tasks [4]. Furthermore, classroom time is frequently dominated by the lecturer's explanations, reducing opportunities for interactive feedback, peer collaboration, and the development of higher-order thinking skills [13].

Recently, the flipped classroom approach has emerged as a promising alternative teaching strategy to address these challenges. Technically, the flipped classroom reverses the conventional lecture-based model by delivering instructional content online before the scheduled physical class, while reserving actual classroom time for active learning activities such as peer collaboration, problem-solving, and teacher scaffolding [5,10]. In writing instruction, this approach offers a dual advantage: it enables students to review the content at their own pace outside class, and it allows classroom sessions to be devoted to more intensive writing practice and immediate feedback [9].

Research worldwide has shown promising outcomes of flipped learning in language classrooms. Studies report improvements in learner motivation, autonomy, and performance in skills such as speaking, reading, and grammar [10,16]. Recent findings further confirm its positive impact on writing: Kawinkoonlasate [8] found that a digital-flipped classroom approach improved EFL learners' writing and motivation, while Qi (2024) reported through meta-analysis that flipped classrooms significantly outperformed traditional approaches in second language learning outcomes. However, research focusing specifically on writing skills in Malaysian higher education TESL programs remains limited [7]. Writing requires not only knowledge acquisition but also iterative practice with scaffolding and feedback, making it a particularly suitable skill for the flipped model.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

Against this background, the present study was conducted with the aim of investigating whether the flipped classroom can significantly improve the writing performance of semester two TESL students in Malaysia. Specifically, it examined the effectiveness of the flipped classroom in enhancing students' ability in Paragraph Writing, particularly in producing clear topic sentences that are coherently supported by well-developed details, including elaboration, examples, and closure. The study also sought to identify students' perceptions of learning through flipped instruction, hence providing both quantitative and qualitative insights. In doing so, the research contributes to the expanding body of literature on technology-enhanced language learning while offering practical implications for language teachers and curriculum designers in Malaysian higher education.

1.4 Research Objectives and Research Questions

There were two primary objectives in this study, designed to investigate the teaching and learning of Paragraph Writing among TESL students through the flipped classroom approach:

i. To measure the impact of the flipped classroom on students' writing performance.

The first objective was to investigate the extent to which flipped classroom instruction enhanced students' ability to compose paragraphs with four essential components: a clear topic sentence and its supporting details consisting of elaboration, relevant examples, and an appropriate closure.

ii. To explore students' perceptions and experiences of learning writing through the flipped classroom approach.

The second objective was to examine how students perceived the flipped classroom instruction compared to conventional methods. This objective aimed to capture whether students felt more engaged, motivated, autonomous, or confident when learning paragraph writing through pre-class digital input and in-class collaborative practice.

In line with the objectives, the study was guided by the following research questions:

i. To what extent does the flipped classroom approach improve the writing performance of semester two TESL students in Paragraph Writing?

ii. How do TESL students perceive their learning experiences in writing through the flipped classroom approach?

1.5 The Nature of Writing in Second Language Learning

Among the four language skills, writing is widely recognized as one of the most complex and demanding in second language acquisition. Unlike speaking, which relies heavily on spontaneity, writing requires cognitive control, careful planning, and a strong focus on accuracy and organization. For TESL students, mastering writing skills is not only crucial for academic success but also essential for their future careers as language teachers. Nevertheless, previous studies have shown that many students continue to struggle with coherence, grammatical accuracy, and paragraph development [6].

In the Malaysian context, writing has long been identified as an area requiring constant attention, especially at the tertiary level. Employers have repeatedly raised concerns that graduates often lack the ability to produce clear, well-structured written texts [11]. This places a significant responsibility on higher education institutions to ensure that their students meet the expectations outlined in the English Education Roadmap 2015–2025.

1.6 Paragraph Writing: Components and Pedagogical Importance

Within the broader field of writing, Paragraph Writing is consistently regarded as a crucial element, since a well-constructed paragraph forms the foundation for producing impressive and effective written discourse. A paragraph is not merely a collection of sentences but functions as a cohesive unit that develops a single idea. The fundamental components of paragraph writing include a main idea, commonly referred to as the topic sentence, which is supported by coherent details consisting elaboration, examples, and closure. The topic sentence introduces and controls the central idea, elaboration provides explanation and expansion, examples reinforce the point with concrete details, and the closure signals the end while emphasizing the main idea.

For TESL students, mastery of paragraph writing is particularly crucial, as it forms the foundation for more advanced genres such as essays, research papers, and lesson plans. Without the ability to structure a paragraph coherently, students may find it difficult to produce extended texts. Scholars such as Oshima and Hogue [12] have emphasized the pedagogical importance of explicit instruction in paragraph structure, arguing that it provides learners with a framework that supports clarity and logical flow.

1.7 The Flipped Classroom Approach

Over the past decade, the flipped classroom has emerged and gain recognition as a significant pedagogical innovation. Bishop and Verleger [5] define Flipped Classroom as a teaching model that reverses the conventional approach by shifting the instructional contents earlier than its actual class time often through pre-recorded lectures, while reserving the actual class time for interactive and student-centred physical activities. This strategy allows students to access materials at their own pace before attending the class, thus allowing classroom sessions for interactive activities, peer collaboration, and teacher feedback.

Literature has documented several advantages of the flipped classroom, among all, it promotes learner autonomy by encouraging pre-class independent learning, as students are responsible for learning the content by themselves before the actual class begins [1]. The in-class time, on the other hand, is maximally used for active engagement in collaborative problem-solving and critical discussion, as students have already understood the basic content. It also allows for more immediate feedback, since the in-class time is not spent on passive listening to lectures; instead, students work on tasks while the teacher is present to provide guidance. Nevertheless, researchers have also pointed out challenges, such as the increased workload for teachers in preparing digital content and the potential for unequal access to technology among students.

1.8 Flipped Classroom in Language Learning

The flipped classroom has been widely applied in language education, yielding promising results. Hung (2015), for instance, demonstrated that EFL learners who engaged in flipped learning developed higher levels of motivation and performance compared to those in traditional classrooms. Similarly, Webb and Doman [16] found that flipped instruction improved learners' attitudes toward grammar learning, making the process more interactive and less monotonous. In writing instruction, the flipped classroom provides opportunities for students to study models and writing strategies before class, and then use class time for actual writing, peer review, and teacher feedback.

Studies from various Asian countries such as China, Thailand, and Indonesia have demonstrated that flipped learning can lead to substantial gains in students' language performance [17. In Malaysia, however, research on the flipped classroom remains relatively scarce. Existing studies have mostly concentrated on oral and grammatical skills, with far less attention given to writing, particularly to the foundational skill of paragraph construction. This lack of focus signals the need for more in-depth exploration of how flipped classroom practices can be leveraged to strengthen TESL students' writing development.

1.9 Theoretical Framework

This study is informed by three main theoretical perspectives. The first is constructivism, particularly Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which emphasizes learning as a socially mediated

process. The flipped classroom aligns with this theory because it encourages active learning through collaboration, peer interaction, and scaffolding from the teacher.

The second is Bloom's Revised Taxonomy, which differentiates between lower-order and higher-order thinking skills. The flipped model is designed so that students engage with lower-order skills (remembering, understanding) before class, and then practice higher-order skills (applying, analyzing, creating) during class activities. In the context of writing, this means students learn basic structures through pre-class materials and then apply and refine their writing skills during classroom tasks.

Finally, the study is linked to principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which emphasize meaningful interaction and learner-centered practices. In a flipped classroom, students spend more time using English actively to construct meaning in writing, thus supporting communicative competence.

1.10 Research Gap and Rationale

Although the flipped classroom has been increasingly adopted in language education, there remains limited research on its application in paragraph writing among TESL students in Malaysia. Most existing studies have focused on general language performance or on other skills such as speaking and grammar. Moreover, few studies combine both quantitative and qualitative methods to examine not only performance outcomes but also student perceptions. This creates a gap in understanding the holistic impact of the flipped classroom on writing instruction.

By addressing this gap, the present study seeks to provide evidence on whether flipped learning can enhance paragraph writing performance while also giving voice to students' experiences. This dual focus offers practical insights for TESL educators and curriculum designers in Malaysia, and contributes to the broader literature on technology-enhanced learning in higher education.

2. Methodology

2.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the methodology employed in conducting the study. It outlines the research design, participants, instruments, procedures, and methods of data analysis. Since the purpose of this study was to measure the effectiveness of the flipped classroom in enhancing students' writing performance in paragraph writing, as well as to explore their perceptions of learning through this approach, a mixed-methods design was adopted. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of the intervention.

2.2 Research Design

The study adopted a quasi-experimental mixed-methods design. The quantitative component involved the administration of pre- and post-tests to compare the writing performance of two intact classes of TESL students: one experimental group taught using the flipped classroom model and one control group taught through conventional methods. The qualitative component was integrated to capture students' perceptions and experiences of learning through flipped instruction. This was done through reflective journals and semi-structured interviews with selected participants.

The rationale for choosing a mixed-methods design is that quantitative data alone would not provide sufficient insights into how students experienced the flipped classroom, while qualitative data without performance measures would not demonstrate measurable improvements. By

combining both strands, the study was able to address not only "whether" flipped learning improved writing but also "how" students perceived its effectiveness.

2.3 Participants

The participants of the study were 50 semester two TESL undergraduates enrolled in a writing course at a private higher learning institution in Malaysia. The participants were divided into two groups of 25 students each, forming the experimental and control groups. Both groups were comparable in terms of age, gender distribution, and prior English proficiency, as indicated by their entry-level placement scores. The experimental group received instruction through the flipped classroom model, while the control group continued with traditional lecture-based instruction.

2.4 Instruments

Several instruments were used to gather data:

Writing Tests (Pre- and Post-Tests):
Both groups were required to complete a writing test before and after the intervention. The test required students to produce a 200-word paragraph on an assigned topic, and was assessed using a rubric focusing on four components: topic sentence, elaboration, examples, and closure. Each component carried equal weight (25%).

Reflective Journals:
Students in the experimental group were asked to write short reflective journals each week. These journals captured their views on pre-class materials, in-class activities, and their progress in paragraph writing.

Semi-Structured Interviews:
Six students from the experimental group were selected for interviews at the end of the study. The interviews provided deeper insights into their learning experiences, including motivation, challenges, and perceived benefits of the flipped classroom.

2.5 Procedures

The study was conducted over eight weeks.

(i) Pre-Class Stage (Experimental Group): Students in the flipped classroom group were given access to video lectures and online tutorials before each lesson. The materials introduced the components of paragraph writing—topic sentence, elaboration, examples, and closure. Students were also assigned short pre-class quizzes and asked to prepare one topic sentence relevant to the week's theme.

(ii) In-Class Stage (Experimental Group): Classroom sessions were dedicated to active learning. Students worked in groups to complete paragraph writing tasks, peer-reviewed each other's drafts, and revised their work based on feedback from peers and the lecturer. For example, students were asked to reconstruct incomplete paragraphs, provide elaborations for given topic sentences, or add closure sentences. The lecturer facilitated by providing scaffolding and encouraging collaborative problem-solving.

(iii) Control Group: Students in the control group received conventional lectures in which the lecturer explained paragraph writing structures in detail during class. Students completed exercises either in class or as homework, with feedback given after submission.
Assessment: At the end of the intervention, both groups completed the post-test. Students' reflective journals were collected weekly, and interviews were conducted with selected students from the experimental group.

2.6 Data Analysis

For the quantitative component, students' pre- and post-test scores were analysed using descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) and inferential statistics (paired-sample t-tests) to determine whether there was a significant improvement in the experimental group compared to the control group.

For the qualitative component, data from reflective journals and interview transcripts were subjected to thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step procedure: familiarization, coding, theme generation, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and reporting. This process allowed the identification of recurring patterns in students' perceptions of the flipped classroom, including themes such as engagement, collaboration, motivation, and flexibility.2.1 Figure Style and Format

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the study, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data in line with the mixed-methods design. The analysis is structured into two major sections: (i) the impact of the flipped classroom on students' writing performance, and (ii) students' perceptions and experiences of learning writing through the flipped classroom. The quantitative data are drawn from pre- and post-tests administered to both experimental and control groups, while the qualitative data are derived from reflective journals and semi-structured interviews conducted with students in the experimental group. The findings are discussed with reference to the research objectives and questions, and are related to previous literature.

3.2 Quantitative Findings on Writing Performance

Before the intervention, both the experimental group, which was taught through the flipped classroom approach, and the control group, which received conventional instruction, were given a pre-test to establish their baseline writing ability. The results revealed that there was no significant difference between the two groups at the outset, as the experimental group obtained a mean score of 56.2 while the control group recorded a mean of 55.8. This indicates that both groups began with comparable proficiency in paragraph writing.

After six weeks of instruction, both groups sat for the post-test. The results showed a notable difference in achievement. The experimental group recorded a mean score of 74.5, representing an improvement of 18.3 points from the pre-test, while the control group obtained a mean of 63.0, an increase of 7.2 points. The improvement in the experimental group amounted to a percentage gain of 32.6 per cent, whereas the control group improved by 12.9 per cent. A paired-sample t-test confirmed that the increase in the experimental group was statistically significant ($p < .01$), while the gains in the control group, though present, were less substantial ($p < .05$).

Table 1
Comparison of pre- and post-test mean scores

Group	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	Improvement	% Improvement
Experimental	56.2	74.5	+18.3	32.6%
Control	55.8	63.0	+7.2	12.9%

The data presented in Table 1 demonstrate that students in the flipped classroom improved more substantially in their ability to produce paragraphs that adhered to the four essential components of topic sentence, elaboration, examples, and closure. The overall difference between the two groups highlights the effectiveness of the flipped classroom in enhancing writing performance. These results resonate with previous findings which have shown that flipped instruction significantly improves language learning outcomes, particularly in writing contexts [8-10].

3.3 Qualitative Findings on Student Perceptions

The qualitative strand of the study provided a deeper understanding of how students perceived their experiences in the flipped classroom. Thematic analysis of reflective journals and interviews revealed that students valued the approach for several reasons. They described themselves as more engaged and motivated because they entered the classroom already prepared through pre-class videos and materials. Many reported that this preparation reduced the anxiety often associated with writing, as they could revisit the online resources at their own pace until they felt confident.

Collaboration also emerged as a strong theme. Students consistently highlighted the usefulness of peer review activities, explaining that exchanging drafts with classmates helped them to identify mistakes they had overlooked and to learn alternative ways of structuring their paragraphs. This peer interaction was often described as encouraging and supportive, contributing to a positive learning environment.

Another important aspect was the sense of autonomy fostered by the flipped model. Students emphasized that being responsible for studying content before class gave them greater control over their learning. They appreciated the flexibility of replaying lectures and revisiting examples whenever necessary. This independence translated into stronger confidence when they were asked to write during class, since they felt better prepared to engage with the tasks.

Finally, students noted that the flipped classroom contributed to increased confidence and reduced stress. Knowing that classroom time would be devoted to practice and feedback rather than lengthy lectures gave them reassurance that they could apply what they had learned immediately and correct their mistakes in real time. The combination of preparation, collaboration, and immediate support from both peers and the lecturer appeared to play a crucial role in shaping their positive perceptions.

3.4 Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

Taken together, the quantitative and qualitative findings provide a holistic picture of the impact of the flipped classroom on TESL students' paragraph writing. The significant improvement in test scores demonstrates the tangible gains in performance, while the qualitative evidence explains why these gains occurred. Students improved not only because they had more time to practise writing but also because the flipped model encouraged active engagement, peer collaboration, and independent learning. These factors combined to create an environment that was more conducive to skill development than the conventional lecture-based classroom.

The results of this study are consistent with the broader literature on flipped learning, which highlights its capacity to enhance both academic outcomes and learner attitudes [14,15]. In the Malaysian TESL context, where writing proficiency continues to be a challenge, these findings offer valuable evidence that flipped classroom practices can effectively address long-standing weaknesses in writing instruction.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the concluding remarks of the study by revisiting its central objectives and synthesizing the key findings. It then discusses the pedagogical implications of the results within the Malaysian TESL context, acknowledges the limitations of the research, and offers recommendations for future investigations.

4.2 Summary of Findings

The study was designed to examine whether the flipped classroom approach could significantly enhance the writing performance of semester two TESL students and to explore their perceptions of learning through this model. The findings clearly indicate that students in the experimental group who were taught through the flipped classroom approach outperformed their counterparts in the control group who received conventional instruction. The experimental group demonstrated greater improvement in constructing well-structured paragraphs, particularly in producing topic sentences, providing elaborations, offering relevant examples, and concluding with appropriate closure.

In addition to the quantitative gains, the qualitative findings revealed that students in the flipped classroom expressed positive perceptions of the model. They described themselves as more motivated and engaged, noted that the flexibility of pre-class materials supported their autonomy, and highlighted the value of peer collaboration and immediate feedback during classroom sessions. The results of this study, therefore, confirm the effectiveness of the flipped classroom not only in improving measurable writing outcomes but also in fostering positive learner attitudes and confidence in writing.

4.3 Pedagogical Implications

The findings carry important implications for the teaching of writing in TESL programs. The evidence suggests that the flipped classroom can address persistent issues in writing instruction by reallocating classroom time from teacher-dominated explanations to student-centred practice. In this way, learners are able to engage more actively with paragraph construction and receive timely scaffolding and feedback from both peers and instructors. The use of digital pre-class resources also nurtures learner autonomy and supports the development of digital literacy skills, which are increasingly necessary in contemporary educational contexts.

For Malaysian higher education, the adoption of flipped classroom practices aligns with the aspirations of the English Education Roadmap 2015–2025, which emphasizes learner-centred approaches and outcome-based practices. By embedding flipped classroom strategies into writing courses, TESL programs can prepare future teachers who are not only competent in writing but also familiar with innovative pedagogical methods that they can apply in their own professional practice.

4.4 Limitations of the Study

Although the findings of the study are encouraging, certain limitations must be acknowledged. The study involved only 50 participants from a single institution, which restricts the generalizability of the results. Furthermore, the intervention was implemented over a relatively short period of six weeks, which may not have been sufficient to capture long-term changes in writing ability. The focus of the study was also limited to paragraph writing, leaving out more complex forms of writing such as essays, reports, and academic research papers. Finally, some students reported technical difficulties in accessing pre-class materials due to internet limitations, which may have affected their learning experience.

4.5 Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should seek to overcome these limitations by including larger and more diverse samples from multiple institutions, which would allow for broader generalisation of the findings. Longitudinal studies extending over a semester or an entire academic year would provide insights into the sustained effects of the flipped classroom on writing development. It would also be valuable to expand the scope beyond paragraph writing to include higher-order writing tasks such as argumentative essays or academic reports, which would test the robustness of the flipped model in more demanding contexts. Comparative studies that explore the flipped classroom alongside other innovative pedagogies, such as blended learning or gamification, could offer further understanding of its relative effectiveness. Moreover, research into teacher readiness and professional development in adopting flipped instruction would shed light on the practical considerations necessary for wider implementation.

4.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that the flipped classroom significantly improves paragraph writing performance among TESL students while also generating positive perceptions of the learning process. The model has proven to be an effective way of transforming classroom practice by shifting the emphasis from passive listening to active participation and collaboration. Beyond the immediate benefits for students' writing skills, the flipped classroom also aligns with broader educational priorities by fostering autonomy, digital literacy, and learner engagement.

The results of this study contribute to the growing body of literature on technology-enhanced learning and provide practical insights for TESL educators and curriculum developers in Malaysia. By adopting the flipped classroom, institutions can better prepare future teachers who are not only proficient writers but also confident practitioners of innovative pedagogy, thereby supporting the long-term goals of national educational reform.

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