

Students' Awareness and Perceptions towards "Pre-Writing Stage" as a Strategy in Writing Directed Essay

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Abstract

Realizing the importance of writing strategies, there are numbers of researches conducted in figuring which of the proposed models is the most effective strategy in conducting writing tasks. In writing stages, one of the most basic and important stages is "pre-writing stage". Pre-writing stage is known for its efficiency in constructing a well-organized essay regardless of the types of essay questions. The purpose of this study is to explore students' perceptions towards pre-writing stage as a strategy in writing directed essay. Thirty students were selected from an academy known as Menara Gading which is located in Pahang, Malaysia. Based on the findings, it could be observed that students do use pre-writing stage but they are not aware that it is considered as a strategy in writing directed essay. This is because the students were not aware of the term used for the first few steps before writing was called "pre-writing stage". As far as the students' perception is concerned, it could be concluded that students have positive perception on the pre-writing strategy as the strategy helps them to be more confident in writing. In a nutshell, teachers should ensure that students are aware of the importance of "pre-writing stage" and conduct interesting pre-writing activities which are helpful, fun, time-saving and effective in order to enhance students' skills in writing.

Keywords

Pre-Writing Stage, Strategies, Awareness of Pre-Writing, Implication of Pre-Writing, Perception towards Pre-Writing

1. Introduction

English is known as the international and universal language where almost every

developed country has accepted it. While it is important to know how to speak the language, it is also vital to learn how to write since the language has its own structures and rules. Institutions of higher learning (IHLs) have a responsibility to prepare graduates to become a functional workforce (Yusuf, Yunus, & Embi, 2018). In the Malaysian Education Ministry's Education Transformation 2013-2025, there is an emphasis on English language proficiency, collaborative practices and ICT (Kwan & Yunus, 2014). Speaking is an everyday task human makes as communication is the key in almost everything. Though speaking comes naturally, it is hard for some to write especially in their second language. Writing is almost as important as speaking as it is used most of the time. In academic, students are required to write in tests and exams. According to (Lo & Hyland, 2007; Hyland, 2015) writing should be one of the primary curriculums in school and be taught at an early age. This is because as mentioned earlier, writing is one of the important keys in communication especially in this globalised world. Writing requires special skills in brainstorming, organizing, concentrating, editing and a lot more as stated by (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Grabe & Kaplan, 2014) and variety of approaches could be used in teaching writing for example; integration of technology (Yunus et al., 2018) and blogging (Said, Yunus, Doring, Asmi, Aqilah, & Li, 2013). One important stage before starting an essay is pre-writing. Pre-writing is when writers take their time generating their ideas before writing. Students are aware of the pre-writing strategy but they are unaware of how the strategy could change their experience in writing. Writing is an ongoing process which involves creativity and imagination throughout the writing process. Pre-writing gives students more time to generate and expand their ideas in their writing topic. There are a lot of pre-writing strategies including freewriting, brainstorming, questioning, listing, clustering and mapping. All of those strategies could be used to enhance writing as it helps them in getting the best outline for their ideas in writing.

The importance of prewriting is giving students materials to help them start their essays and also giving them time to explore their ideas, which is important for their ideas in writing flow smoothly as they write. It is important for students to find and lay out all of the materials they need in writing so that they would not leave any of the information behind. It is not foreign for students to entirely forget the specific aim of their writing project without an outline. Therefore, pre-writing helps students stay focus in the topic as well as keeping their writing materials ready before they start their essay. Students are also given more time to explore their ideas and put it all down on a piece of paper so that they would not lose their ideas. Arapoff (1975) cited in (Baba & Aziz, 2009) had stated that "writing is a thinking" process; thus, students are expected to think about their essays first before writing so that they could avoid errors. In this context, when students think and explore their ideas on the topic, they would avoid writing unimportant points and paragraphs that would waste their time. This is also to avoid their essays from being draggy and pointless.

Undeniably, pre-writing stage gives students more confidence in writing if they know what they ought to do for their essays. It is important to determine what kind of essay they would like to produce so that the essay would flow smoothly until the end. Furthermore, pre-writing could also avoid writer's block which is the most common problem students have during tests and exams. Another challenge is that students are unable to see the connection between the writing learned in the classroom and the meaningful communicative use outside of the classroom (Yunus et al., 2013). The objective of this research is firstly to identify the students' awareness of pre-writing stage as a strategy in writing directed essay. Secondly, this study was conducted to identify students' perceptions towards the implementation of pre-writing stage.

2. Literature Review

Realizing the importance of writing strategies, there are lots of research conducted in figuring which of the proposed models as the most effective strategies in conducting writing tasks. Among the famous and well-known module of writing is writing stages. In writing stages, one of the most basic and important stage is "prewriting stages". Prewriting stages is a component of pre-writing strategies conducted before a writer starts to write. Norries (1998) had conducted a research that is related to one of the prewriting stage, which is frequently used nowadays. The research aims to figure out the effectiveness of drawing as prewriting strategies, among children. The children from experimented group were expected to draw first, before they start writing, as the children from the controlled group are supposedly starts writing without conducting any prewriting strategies. The dependent variables in determining writing skills are the words, sentences, idea units and overall grade. The findings show a significant correlation of implementing drawing as prewriting strategies, towards the children's writing skills.

Another research emphasizing on prewriting stage as a strategy was conducted by (Mogahed, 2013). This research aims to propose a framework in implementing prewriting activities in teaching writing skills. (Mogahed, 2013) proposed a framework of prewriting stage which is divided into two sections, known as Invention and Arrangement. Invention refers to all of the activities that focuses on gaining more ideas and points. Among the examples stated in the research are brainstorming, freewriting and listing. As for arrangement, the activities focus on the way to identify and memorizing the structure of the essay. The activities suit this section are graphic organizer, fishbone map and series chains. The Effects of Different Prewriting Strategies in Learners' EFL Writing Achievement is another research which is related to this domain. (Mahnam & Nejadansari, 2012) conducted on an experimental research, identifying whether different prewriting stage applied by the students influences their composition in English Language. A number of 23 adults were chosen as samples of this research and divided into controlled and experimented groups. Samples from both

groups are from the same level of proficiency in English, yet the controlled samples are not expected to practice any prewriting strategies which implemented by the experimented group. The results show a significance of relationship between prewriting strategies and skills in composing English Language essays. Other findings figured out is the most favored prewriting strategies such as planning, translating and revising ideas.

Instead of identifying the effectiveness of any components of pre-writing stage, this research aims to identify students' awareness and perceptions on the pre-writing stage a a strategy in writing. According to Lily (2012), pre-writing stage improves student writing in terms of content, organization, and voice, and also improves student's motivation and creativity towards writing. It is essential for students to be taught how to brainstorm to generate ideas and plan by making a well-rounded outline before they actually start writing. However, most of the students are not aware of the pre-writing stage and thus unable to write effectively (Maarof & Murat, 2013). Therefore, the execution of this research clearly shows how important it is to find out whether or not these students are aware of pre-writing stages and how is their perception of the execution of pre-writing strategies being executed before writing.

3. Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore students' awareness and perceptions towards pre-writing stage as a strategy in writing directed essay. To achieve the purpose of this study, a total of 30 form four students from an academy which is located in Pahang, Malaysia were selected as respondents. All of the respondents were from Science and Arts stream. This study employed quantitative research design using survey. The questions of the survey were structured to find the answer for the following objectives:

- To identify students' awareness of prewriting stage as a strategy in writing directed essay.
- To identify students' perceptions on prewriting stage as a strategy in writing directed essay.

Data obtained from the survey were then analyzed and reported in the following section.

4. Results and Discussion

The findings are presented in three sections. Each section discusses the objectives of this research namely students' awareness of pre-writing stage and students' perception on pre-writing stage.

4.1. Students' Awareness of Pre-Writing Stage

This section describes the students' awareness of pre-writing stage. **Figure 1** and **Figure 2** present the data obtained from the students regarding their awareness.

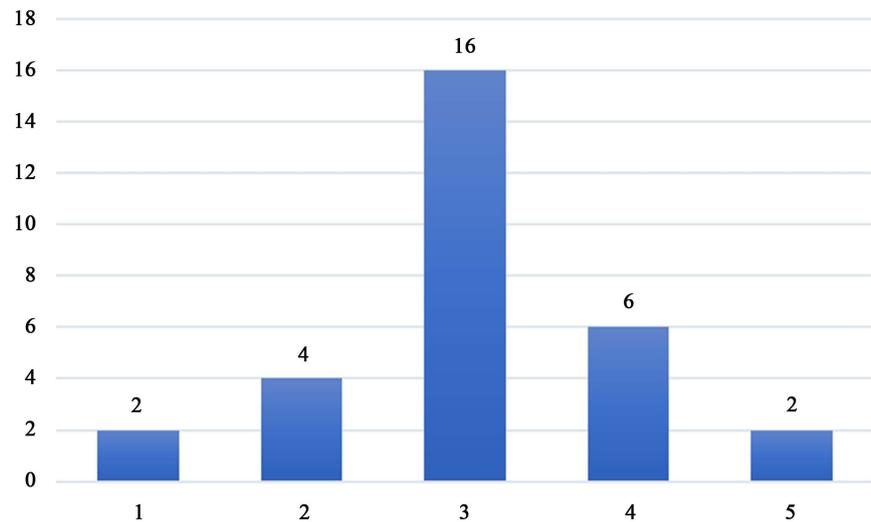


Figure 1. Students' awareness of pre-writing stage.

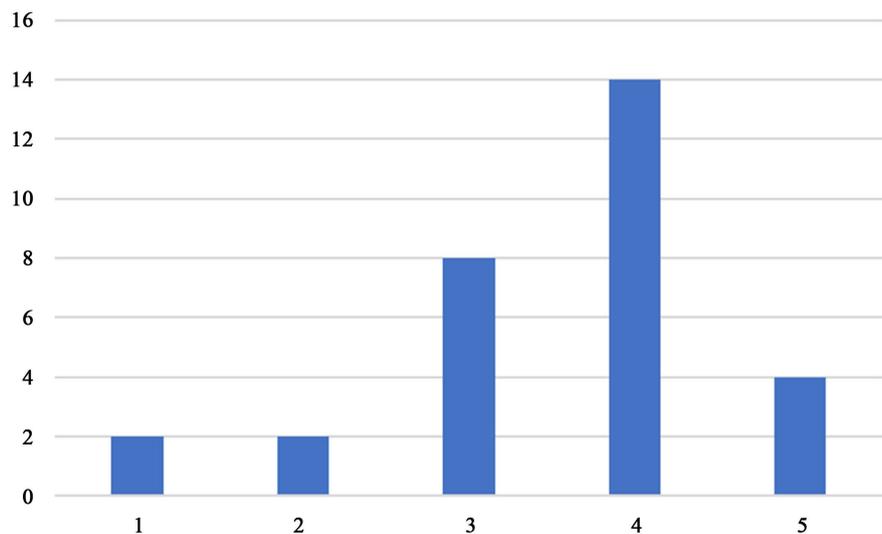


Figure 2. Students' awareness of different stages in pre-writing.

Based on **Figure 1** and **Figure 2**, it could be seen that majority of the students were not aware of the pre-writing stage. 16 (53.3%) students answered that they were uncertain with the idea of pre-writing. Moving on to graph one for example, only two out of thirty students; strongly agreed that they were aware of pre-writing stage and majority answered; Neutral with 16 students out of 30; 16 (53.3%) students answered that there was an uncertainty regarding pre-writing. Even with that being said, a few of the students had an idea that pre-writing has stages to follow. They have the knowledge where they knew that this pre-writing stage should be applied for essay writing purposes. Looking at **Figure 2**, a total of 14 students (46.7%) agreed that pre-writing actually had a few stages to follow yet only one out of fifteen students; 2 (6.7%) students strongly disagreed with this statement. From this observation itself, it showed that these students were not aware of the pre-writing stage that they used in writing daily.

Figure 3 shows some of the pre-writing stages applied by the students in their writing tasks. Referring to the figure, majority of the students answered; “Strongly Agree” and “Agree” for these statements to which explains that they do used pre-writing strategies such as; brainstorming ideas, writing out ideas first hand, think before ink, planning before writing and even choosing a right strategy before starting to write out the essay.

Based on Figure 3, it is clearly shown that majority of the students agreed that they did use brainstorming before writing out their essays. 16 students out of thirty (53.3%) agreed with this statement. Another evident that these students were actually using pre-writing state before executing their essay could be seen from the following figure (Figure 4) where majority of the students had chosen strongly agree with 18 out of thirty students (60%) that they did plan before writing.

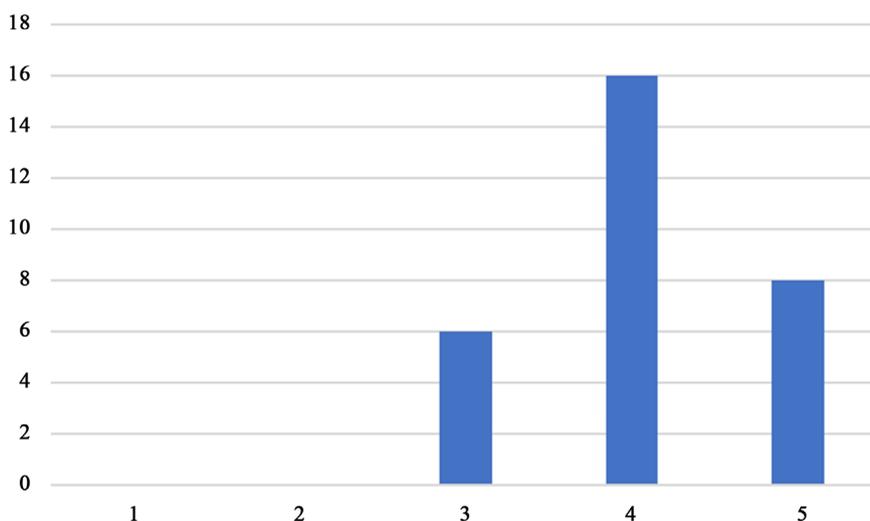


Figure 3. Students’ responses for using brainstorming for ideas before writing.

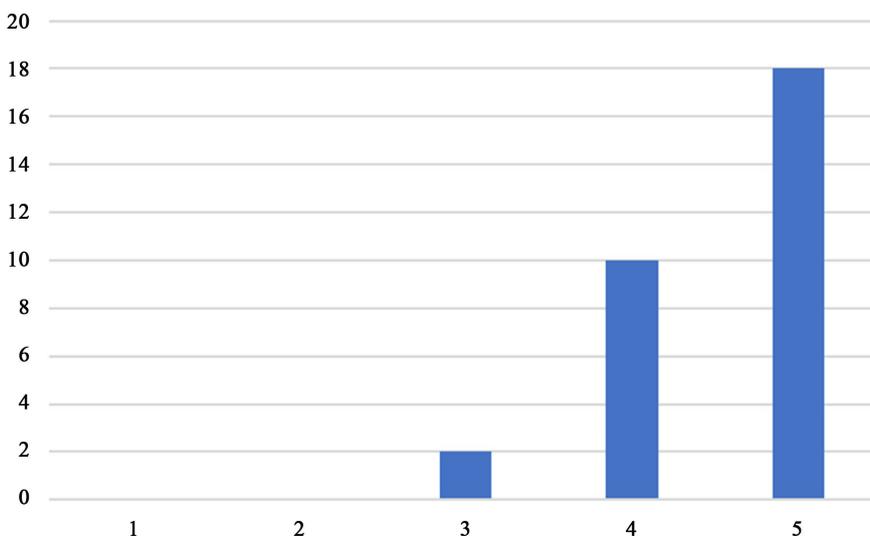


Figure 4. Students’ responses for planning before writing.

Overall, the data shows that students actually applied pre-writing stage in their writing task, however, they were not aware that it is called pre-writing strategies. This has proven that students were not given sufficient awareness of the pre-writing strategies. The finding of this study is in line with Nooreiny & Mazlin (2017) that most of the students are not aware of the pre-writing stage and thus unable to write effectively.

4.2. Students' Perceptions on Pre-Writing Stage

In terms of students' perceptions, the data obtained in this study showed that the students' perceptions towards the implementation of pre-writing stage were positive as they agreed that pre-writing actually help them in their writing assignments. From the data collected, the students gave feedback which indicates that with the help of pre-writing strategies, they feel that their essays are more organized. With pre-writing stage, they believed that they were capable in planning out their essay well beforehand. The most positive feedback received from the students was that the idea of planning beforehand actually helped them in writing out their essay faster and concise without missing any main points or elaboration needed.

Based on **Figure 5**, this could be seen that with the implication of pre-writing stage, students believed that their essay writing process is more organized. A total of 16 (53.3%) out of thirty had agreed and 12 (40%) students strongly agreed, it is obvious how positive their perceptions is towards pre-writing. Another example can be seen from graph where a total of 18 (60%) students agreed that the execution of writing is easier and faster with the implementation of pre-writing stage (**Figure 6**).

Apart from that, the students also found that the pre-writing stage as a strategy is useful especially during examination as they were able to structure out their essay first before writing out their ideas on paper. The students believed that it is time consuming if they would have to write out their essay first before planning. Hence, by applying these strategies, the students agreed that they were able to write a better and structured essay than before. Additionally, the students also found that these strategies were effective and should be implemented in the class and elsewhere. Pre-writing stage helped these students to brainstorm their ideas before writing out the essay in full form for submission. This study supported (Grabe & Kaplan, 2014) that writing requires special skills in brainstorming, organizing, concentrating, editing and a lot more. From brainstorming the ideas for the essay, to structuring the essay from paragraph to paragraph, hence it enables the students to improve their writing skills. This is in line with (Mahnam & Nejadansari, 2012) that pre-writing stage influences their composition in English Language.

5. Conclusion

From the denouement of this research, it could be proven that pre-writing stage is really efficient in helping students to improve their writing skills. By applying

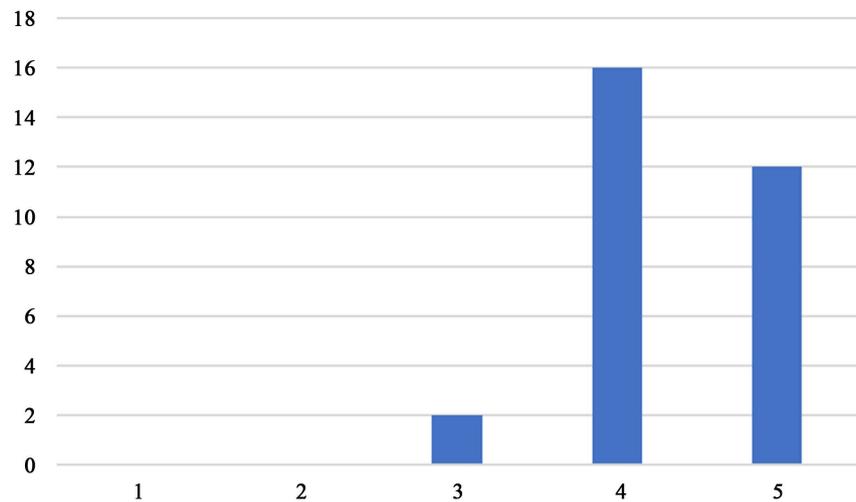


Figure 5. Students' responses for organization of essay writing with pre-writing strategies.

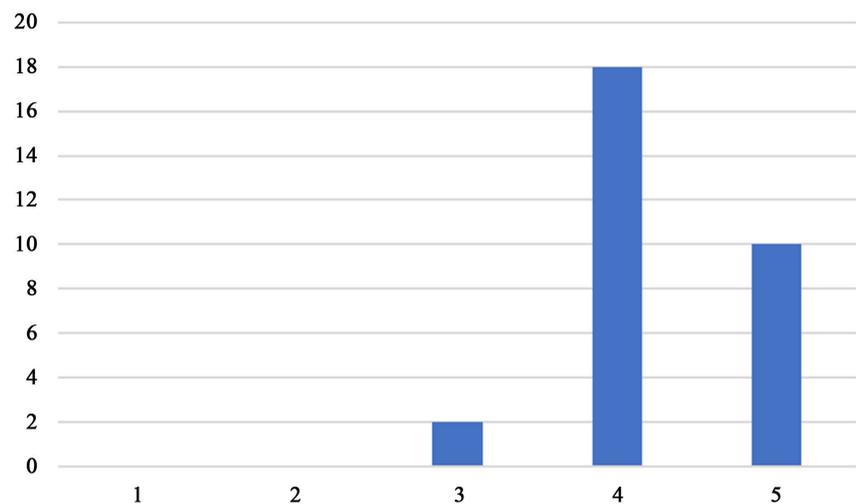


Figure 6. Students' responses on the ease of use of pre-writing strategies.

pre-writing stage as a strategy, the students feel more confident in writing as their thoughts and words are organized neatly together; complementing each other for the purpose of answering questions given to them. Apart from that, this strategy is helpful especially during examination as students waste a lot of their time trying to figure out ideas while writing. Little did they know that by doing so, they were just wasting more time and some might not even have enough time to complete their essays. Students could organize their words and thoughts better, which lead to a better and structured essay. However, with every strategy there is a catch, as these strategies have to be practiced constantly in the classroom and elsewhere. Without constant practice, the students would not be able to execute the strategies and improve themselves.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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