



Effects of Digital Writing Software as a Tool for Process Approach to Writing on Teacher Trainees' Academic Writing Performance

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Knowledge about academic writing is important to be promoted among the community in Institutes of Teacher Education Malaysia (ITEMs) as the teacher trainees will need to teach these academic writing skills to their students in the future. Additionally, the amalgamation of digital technologies and instructional practice is known to be able to ignite the change in the teacher trainees' learning of academic writing. As such, this study was conducted by adopting a single group quasi-experimental research design to investigate the effects of digital writing software as a tool for process approach to writing on teacher trainees' academic writing performance. The study was done on 10 teacher trainees at one ITEM using pre- and post-tests, observation, and reflective journal. Findings indicate that the use of digital writing software as a tool for process approach to writing does improve the teacher trainees' academic writing performance. The eclectic approach proposes an effective way of enhancing the writing process and increasing the teacher trainees' motivation to write digital conceptual papers. The use of digital writing software as a tool for process approach to writing can be carried out over an extended duration to develop better comprehension and practice of academic writing.

Keywords: academic writing, digital conceptual papers, digital writing software, process approach to writing, teacher trainees

Introduction

Possessing writing competence in English can possibly assist the students to advance in their future endeavors (Ali & Yunus, 2004; Annamalai, 2016; Chan et al., 2003; Darus & Ching, 2009). However, Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) Executive Director, Datuk Shamsuddin Bardan laments that low English language proficiency (e.g., unable to even construct proper sentences in written form) constitutes a major problem among Malaysian job seekers (Singh, 2018). Due to the status of English language as a second language in the country, each major Malaysian education reform emphasizes the importance of

English language repeatedly (Jayasingam et al., 2018; Palpanadan et al., 2014). Writing, particularly, as one of the four language skills, has received much attention in the Malaysian English education (English Language Standards and Quality Council [ELSQC], 2015). Nonetheless, writing skill is identified as the least comprehended English skills among Malaysian students (Chitravelu et al., 2005).

The Malaysian government has launched The Malaysian national English language education policy, the English Language Education Reform in Malaysia: The Roadmap 2015-2025 to upgrade the English language levels among Malaysian students to international standards (ELSQC, 2015). The roadmap serves as a guide for English language curriculum developers and educators to ascertain that students from primary and secondary schools and tertiary education, as well as in teacher training institutions achieve proficiency levels aligned to international standards, which are benchmarked against the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) (ELSQC, 2015).

In line with the roadmap, the entire process of English language education in all tertiary educational institutions that prepare future English language teachers for the teaching profession, especially at the Institutes of Teacher Education Malaysia (ITEMs), which award the degree of Bachelor of Teaching has to be aligned to international standards of English language proficiency and competencies (ELSQC, 2015). Upon graduation, the exit proficiency levels for all Teaching English as a second language (TESL) teacher trainees is set at a minimum C1 level. In accordance with the CEFR Global Scale for writing section, it is stated that students should be “able to produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organizational patterns, connectors, and cohesive devices” (ELSQC, 2015, p. 48). Along this vision, Ismail (2011) indicates that writing has always been regarded as playing a prominent role in learning a second language, which includes the ESL writing. This further informs the need to align the writing pedagogies in ITEMs to the standards set in accordance with the CEFR as to determine that the teacher trainees gain adequate English language proficiency in both their writing competence and writing pedagogies before they are placed in schools to teach ESL writing to their future students.

It is reported in the Results Report of Cambridge Baseline 2013 that Malaysian students perform the best for writing skill as opposed to the other language skills in national examinations for primary, secondary, and pre-university levels (ELSQC, 2015). Interestingly, this assertion does not seem to sustain when the students transit into tertiary education. In actuality, many undergraduates’ writing skills are found to have fallen far short of the writing demands in the tertiary education institutions (Mansor, 2007).

In a similar vein, all of the TESL teacher trainees at the ITEMs sat for the British Council Aptis test in 2014, the result reveals that less than 50 percent of the teacher trainees in the one-year TESL foundation program and four-year TESL bachelor’s degree program were positioned at C1 or C2 (ELSQC, 2015). No doubt, this statistic is worrying as the figure corresponds the lack of English language proficiency in many of the teacher trainees, which includes also their inadequate writing abilities when reference is made to the minimum proficiency standard required for CEFR Global Scale writing section.

It is an undeniable fact that Malaysian English language teachers with poor writing proficiency will possibly affect the provision of ESL writing instruction, which may result in their students performing unsatisfactorily in ESL writing (Malaysia Education Blueprint [MEB], 2013). In addition, the intricate revision process in writing, more often than not, discourages many students in the writing acts (Azis & Husnawadi, 2020). Kee and Razali (2019a) caution on the negative effect of the ESL writing problem in the country when it is left unattended, “... the future English teachers’ writing pedagogies are questionable, and the students’ writing proficiency, on the other hand, is also in doubt” (p. 323). As writing is one important subject that influences a learner’s ability to excel in other subjects (Calkins, 2014), due attention must be given to efforts in increasing the writing performance among the teacher trainees nationwide.

One of the means to encourage students to learn English language is to modify the teaching pedagogies and one way is by infusing digital technologies in the writing classrooms (Bakar & Ismail, 2009; Bakar et al., 2010; Murugaiah et al., 2010). Scott (2015) further emphasizes that such technologies and platforms must be integrated with comprehensive pedagogical strategies. In this context, new approaches that

amalgamate the process approach to writing with digital technologies (e.g., digital writing software) can possibly function as one viable means for the teacher trainees to learn and practice academic writing. They will then use these approaches in their future ESL writing instruction. In upholding the standards of ESL writing instruction in Malaysian classrooms, teachers have to be ready to implement the necessary changes to the teaching of ESL writing and students, on the other hand, have to gain the impetus to advance in the learning of ESL writing (Kee & Razali, 2019b).

As such, the digital writing software (i.e., iSpring software) as a tool for process approach to writing, aided by a process writing module written by the researchers is hoped to alleviate the aforementioned issue, and promote the use of both process approach to writing and digital technologies among the teacher trainees. Kee et al. (2018) note that digital technologies seem to provide a helping hand in the execution of the process approach to writing in ESL writing instruction. Hence, how to maximally use the digital writing software in externalizing the ideas behind process approach to writing and which will be reflected in the teacher trainees' academic writing performance is therefore, the focus of the researchers' study. In essence, the study attempts to answer the following research questions:

- i. How effective is the use of digital writing software as a tool for process approach to writing on the teacher trainees' academic writing performance?
- ii. In what ways (if at all) does the use of digital writing software as a tool for process approach to writing affect the teacher trainees' academic writing?

Literature Review and Underpinning Concepts

The literature review for this study consists of three relevant parts: (1) process approach to writing, (2) digital literacies in the 21st century education, and (3) infusion of digital technologies in ESL Writing.

Process Approach to Writing

The process approach to writing proposes a conducive, encouraging, and collaborative environment within which students, with ample time and minimal interference, can work through their composing process (Silva, 1990). Silva (1990) notes that the teacher's role in the process approach to writing is to facilitate the students in developing viable strategies for getting started (i.e., finding topics, generating ideas and information, focusing, and planning structure and procedure), for drafting (i.e., encouraging multiple drafts), for revising (i.e., adding, deleting, modifying, and rearranging ideas) and for editing (i.e., attending to vocabulary, sentence structure, grammar, and mechanics). Hence, the authorship in writing is established and the writing process stages are emphasized when the students write using process approach to writing to reach their final products as opposed to the usual traditional way most students write their academic writing.

In addition, the writing and thinking acts function in tandem and corresponding ways when the students write using process approach to writing (Murray, 1983). Similarly, Johns (1990) professes that thinking and the natural process of writing are emphasized in process approach to writing, in which higher order thinking skills are used with problem-solving when students plan extensively in writing (i.e., defining the rhetorical problem, placing it in a larger context, making it operational, exploring its parts, generating alternative solutions, and arriving at a well-supported conclusion). Once the problem has been identified and the writing has been planned, the students continue the writing process stages by translating their plans and thoughts into words, and by reviewing their work through revising and editing (Johns, 1990). In essence, process approach to writing is found to promote autonomy among the students who write using this approach in that they take charge of the writing to result in the final work, which includes more of their own voice.

On top of that, the essence of process approach to writing is that the writing process stages are not rigid

and formulaic but exclusive and recursive (Hayes & Flower, 1983). The process approach to writing entails a complex, recursive, and creative process; it involves developing an efficient and effective composing process in which the writer is the center of attention – someone who is engaged in the discovery and expression of meaning (Silva, 1990). Process approach to writing as defined by White and Arndt (1991) consists of the writing process stages of planning/generating ideas, focusing, structuring, drafting, evaluating and reviewing/revising, which are executed in a recursive manner. Therefore, in this study, the teacher trainees wrote the academic papers (i.e., digital conceptual papers) and published the final drafts as an e-book using the digital writing software as a tool for process approach to writing. They participated in the aforementioned writing process stages generally executed in a sequence and done in a recursive manner in that the teacher trainees visited or revisited any of the writing process stages whenever necessary.

Digital Literacies in the 21st Century Education

According to Kochhar-Bryant and Heishman (2010), literacy has traditionally been defined as “the ability to read and write” (p. 188), however, there is a new form of literacy known as digital literacy, which requires the knowledge on how to use technologies for research, reading, and writing. The shift from traditional to digital literacies is taking place and in meeting the challenge of 21st century writing, which differs significantly from the traditional way of writing, both the teachers and their students need to equip themselves for this change (Elola & Oskoz, 2017). As noted by Razali (2018), many students are already embracing these literacies and technologies, which have become part and parcel of their lives, hence it is pivotal for teachers to implement them in education based on how they are seen as viable and advantageous for language instruction (including writing instruction). In this study, the researcher/lecturer and teacher trainees took on new roles when attending to the writing task. The researcher/lecturer facilitated the writing process and the teacher trainees used their digital literacies competency to conduct research, read, and write the digital conceptual papers as an e-book using the digital writing software as a tool for process approach to writing.

On the whole, the way people read, write, interact, find, and make use of information, and participate in public has transformed significantly due to the arrival of digital technologies (Coiro et al., 2008). Indeed, contemporary technologies, such as the Internet, computer games, digital video, mobile phones, and even digital writing software provide new ways of mediating and representing the world, and of communicating. These digital tools enable the students to conceptualize the activity of production in much more powerful ways than was possible with analogue media (Buckingham, 2015). In this study, the teacher trainees used the knowledge on how to use technologies for doing research, reading, and writing. In other words, they produced the alternative genre of digital conceptual papers by applying the selected modality (i.e., publication of digital conceptual papers as an e-book), modes (i.e., textual and visual representations), and media (i.e., digital writing software as a tool for process approach to writing).

Infusion of Digital Technologies in ESL Writing

Digital writing is becoming increasingly popular and well accepted in the educational setting (Embong et al., 2012; Fojtika, 2015; Huang et al., 2012; Lebert, 2009; Marshall, 2010; Mulholland & Bates, 2014). A piece of digital writing resembles a print book, only with pixels instead of toner (Marshall, 2010). Numerous digital writings are published as some authors enjoy creating websites, posting their works, and communicating with readers online (Lebert, 2009). In addition to the multimedia-enriched visual appeal, digital writings are known to be more flexible and accessible than paper-based texts (Huang et al., 2012). Cassidy et al. (2012) state that when displaying e-book on a digital screen, user will find value in the numerous displaying tools (e.g., ability to zoom in closer, adjust font face, and adjust color, size, brightness, and contrast). Mulholland and Bates (2014) claim that when teachers realize the usefulness of e-books in the teaching and learning process, e-books will be used more to improve their students’

performance.

Numerous research studies were conducted to investigate the infusion of digital technologies in ESL writing (Dahlström & Boström, 2017; Kee et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2016; Mohamad et al., 2018; Noordin et al., 2008; Razali, 2013; Samani et al., 2014; Yee & Kee, 2017; Zakaria et al., 2016). For one, Dahlström and Boström (2017) conducted a mixed-methods study on 16 fourth Swedish graders comparing three writing groups (i.e., tablet with access to speech synthesis group, tablet group, and pen and paper group) using students' texts and observations. The findings reveal the students' improvement in terms of content, structure, text length, and spelling of their essays when they write using digital resources as opposed to pen and paper. For another, a qualitative study conducted by Zakaria et al. (2016) on 15 diploma students at a Malaysian private university investigates the students' perceptions of using Storybird (i.e., digital storytelling tool) to write narratives. The findings induce that the participants become active writers and improve their writing skills when writing narratives using Storybird. In addition, a case study conducted by Yee and Kee (2017) on eight teacher trainees in one ITEM using students' work written in Storyjumper (i.e., a free online website to publish digital writing) reveals the participants' improvement in terms of content, organization, and language. The follow-up interviews indicate the participants' increased interest and motivation when they write and publish essays as an e-book using a combination of texts and images in Storyjumper. On top of that, Kee et al.'s (2019) analyses on six pieces of digital writings reveal that the digital writing software (i.e., iSpring) enhances the teacher trainees' narratives in terms of originality, task fulfillment, accuracy of message and genre, cohesion and coherence, multimedia illustration, and spelling, punctuation, and grammar. Overall, the infusion of digital technologies seems to aid the ESL writing among students and teacher trainees.

Despite the identified advantages, it is found that the abovementioned studies implement the process approach to writing in a rigid linear sequence rather than in a recursive manner, hence, the recursiveness of the writing process is somewhat missing in the past studies. Additionally, few studies focus on the use of digital writing software to produce e-books as products of writing skills in Malaysian classrooms thus far. In fact, research on the use of digital writing software in Malaysian classrooms is still in its infancy (Embong et al., 2012), thus more research has to be done to close the identified gaps. In this study, the teacher trainees used the digital writing software as a tool for process approach to writing to write the digital conceptual papers as an e-book in their academic writing lessons. With its salient features (e.g., e-mind map templates, editing features, and preview function), the writing process will possibly turn out to be more recursive than before.

Research Methods

This section discusses the research design used, research sample involved, and research procedures carried out. The researcher employed three data collection methods in this study. The pre- and post-tests were administered to the teacher trainees in which they wrote a conceptual paper in approximately 750 words within 24 hours using the writing prompt given. They selected one of the major issues in the English language teaching and learning in Malaysian primary and secondary school classrooms for the pre- and post-tests respectively. The observation checklist adapted from the concerted information of Writing Instruction Observation Protocol developed by Kotula et al. (2014) and The Writing Observation Framework developed by Henk et al. (2003) was used to gain insights into the teacher trainees' engagement with the writing process. Lastly, the reflective journal adapted from The Gibbs' Reflective Cycle (University of Birmingham, 2015) was used to gauge the teacher trainees' experiences of using the digital writing software as a tool for process approach to writing.

Design of the Study

This single group quasi-experimental design study aimed to investigate the effects of using digital

writing software as a tool for process approach to writing on the teacher trainees' academic writing performance. Creswell (2014) states that in experimental research, when only a convenience sample is possible, the researcher must use naturally formed groups. Therefore, the single group quasi-experiment was identified as one fitted design in this study due to the aforementioned condition, which applied to the setting at the ITEMs (i.e., teacher trainees were placed in their intact classes).

Research Participants

The purposively selected sample for the study consisted of 10 teacher trainees aged 19 years old. The teacher trainees entered the ITEM after they completed the Malaysian Certificate of Education or *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM). All of them obtained distinctions in any of the five subjects in SPM including English Language and obtained at least credit in Malay Language and History. The teacher trainees consisted of two males and eight females. The 10 teacher trainees were placed in their second semester of the one-year foundation program for Bachelor of Teaching (TESL) in one ITEM. Hair et al. (2014) regard five participants per variable to be analyzed as the lower limit, but the most acceptable way of determination is 10:1 ratio (i.e., 10 participants for one variable). Similarly, Schreiber et al. (2006) suggest that each parameter should have at least 10 participants for one sample analysis. Hence, the sample size of $N = 10$ was suitable and had met the requirement of the design for this study. However, the small sample size was still a limitation to be noted as it was somewhat unrepresentative of the teacher trainees' population.

Research Procedures

In the pre-treatment phase, the teacher trainees were first pre-tested at the beginning of Week 1 on their academic writing before engaging with the treatment of the study. This was where the pre-test administered to the teacher trainees checked on their baseline knowledge of academic writing. Input on how to use the digital writing software (i.e., iSpring) was given to the teacher trainees right after they completed the pre-test in Week 1. On top of that, the teacher trainees were introduced to the Process Approach to Writing (PAW) module prepared by the researchers. Both the input on digital writing software and the introduction to the PAW module were done via a workshop conducted in the Language Laboratory at the ITEM, at the beginning of Week 1.

Then, the treatment phase was implemented from Week 1 to Week 3. It lasted for six hours (i.e., three weeks), consisted of face-to-face interaction for the language proficiency course that the teacher trainees undertook as part of their undergraduate program support requirements (i.e., Language Support (LS1022) – a pseudonym). In parts of these writing lessons, the researcher/lecturer provided input on how to write digital conceptual papers using several salient features available in the digital writing software. The teacher trainees were then required to determine one relevant topic pertaining to the teaching and learning of English language that they needed to write on for their digital conceptual papers individually. They were allocated three weeks to complete their digital conceptual papers.

The-mind map templates for planning/generating ideas, focusing, and evaluating and 3000-word digital conceptual paper template for structuring in the PAW module, together with the readily available drafting features (e.g., typing, inserting, deleting, and adding) and preview function provided by the digital writing software functioned in tandem to ease the teacher trainees into writing the digital conceptual papers using process approach to writing. In planning/generating ideas, focusing, and structuring stages, the teacher trainees generated ideas, focused on the thesis statements, and combined the ideas into categories. They proceeded to produce the drafts of their digital conceptual papers in the drafting stage. The teacher trainees shared the digital conceptual papers to obtain feedback from the researcher/lecturer and their peers. They evaluated the digital conceptual papers upon obtaining the researcher/lecturer and peers' feedback in the evaluating stage. They also viewed the digital conceptual papers with a new perspective and rewrote any necessary parts in the reviewing/revising stage. They visited or revisited any of the writing process stages whenever necessary. The teacher trainees published the final drafts of digital

conceptual papers as an e-book.

In addition, the observation was carried out to check on the teacher trainees' engagement with the writing process during the treatment phase. The teacher trainees were also asked to write reflective journals pertaining to the treatment that they received and their overall experience with the study. Then, after the treatment was over and at the end of Week 3, the teacher trainees were post-tested on their academic writing performance to determine the effects of the treatment. By comparing the changes in the pre- and post-tests results, the researchers were able to infer the causal effect of using digital writing software as a tool for process approach to writing on the teacher trainees' academic writing performance.

Findings and Discussion

The pre- and post-tests were scored using the assessment rubrics (see Appendix) developed with explicit reference to the CEFR, which highlight the domains of content, communicative achievement, organization, and language (Cambridge English, 2016; Council of Europe, 2001). Both tests were identical. The researcher/lecturer and an English language lecturer from one ITEM who hold master's degree in TESL with a minimum teaching experience of 20 years assessed the pre-and post-test scripts. The Pearson's correlation results indicated a strong positive correlation between pre-test scores, $r = .97$ and a strong positive correlation between post-test scores, $r = .97$. Due to the practice at the ITEMs, the data sets of the researcher/lecturer were retained and used for data analysis in this study, as there were no extreme differences between the two examiners' scores.

Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) Version 23 was used to analyze the quantitative data of pre- and post-tests and observation checklist. On top of that, the observational data shed light on the degree of the teacher trainees' engagement with the writing process. The researchers conducted member checking to review the accuracy of the observational items checked in the observation checklists by having the teacher trainees completed the "Checklist for the Writing Stages" (i.e., developed with the same items in the observation checklist) in the PAW module to indicate their writing progress. This ascertained the trustworthiness of the observational data. The researchers employed qualitative content analysis and applied deductive approach on the reflective journal entries, which were further recorded as one supplementary qualitative data to enhance the main quantitative data. The results were discussed with close reference to the research questions framed for the study.

Results of Pre- and Post-Tests

The scores of the pre- and post-tests (see Table 1) show that there are differences in the means. The mean value for the post-test (i.e., $M = 66.20$) is higher as compared to the pre-test (i.e., $M = 56.50$).

TABLE 1
Descriptive Statistics

		<i>Mean</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>
Pair 1	Post-test	66.20	10	4.85
	Pre-test	56.50	10	5.20

The higher mean value from the post-test illustrates that the participants performed better in the post-test. The finding indicates that the participants improved their academic writing performance after they were exposed to the use of digital writing software as a tool for process approach to writing. On the other hand, the standard deviation value for the post-test (i.e., $SD = 4.85$) is lower as compared to the standard deviation value for the pre-test (i.e., $SD = 5.20$). The lower standard deviation value shows that the participants' scores in the post-test were of narrower spread of measurements around the mean as compared to the pre-test. Therefore, the post-test consisted of more high values as compared to the pre-test. The finding indicates that more participants improved in their academic writing performance after

they were exposed to the use of digital writing software as a tool for process approach to writing as more participants are of higher scores when compared to the pre-test. Upon obtaining an overall impression of the data from the descriptive statistics, the researchers used the paired-samples t-test to determine the magnitude (i.e., size) of the mean difference between the scores obtained in each test and if this mean difference was statistically significant. The significance level used was set at .05 for the test.

The assumptions of paired-samples t-test were met in this study. One dependent variable namely the academic writing performance was measured at a continuous level. One independent variable consisted of two categorical, related groups (i.e., pre- and post-tests). There were no significant outliers in the differences between the two related groups. The distribution of the differences in the dependent variable between the two related groups was approximately normally distributed. The paired-samples t-test was used to determine whether there was a statistically significant mean difference between the academic writing performance scores after participants underwent the treatment (i.e., use of digital writing software as a tool for process approach to writing) as opposed to before the treatment.

An effect size is an attempt to provide a measure of the practical significance of the result. To calculate an effect size (i.e., Cohen's *d*) for a paired-samples t-test, the researchers need to divide the mean difference by the standard deviation of the difference (Cohen, 1988). Plonsky and Oswald (2014) suggest the use of new field-specific benchmarks of small ($d = .60$), medium ($d = 1.00$) and large ($d = 1.40$) for interpretation of within-group contrasts. From this division, the effect size, $d = 1.92$ (mean difference around 1.92 standard deviation) was of large effect (see Table 2).

TABLE 2
Paired-samples Test

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Paired Differences		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)	
			Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower				Upper
Pair 1 Post- and Pre-tests	9.70	5.06	1.60	6.08	13.32	6.07	9	.0005

The paired-samples t-test (see Table 2) used to determine whether there was a statistically significant mean difference between the academic writing scores after participants underwent the treatment as opposed to before the treatment yielded a number of conclusions. Data were mean \pm standard deviation. There were no outliers in the data, as assessed by inspection of the boxplot. The assumption of normality was not violated, as assessed by Shapiro-Wilk's test ($p = .73$). The participants scored higher when they underwent the treatment (66.20 ± 4.85) as opposed to before the treatment (56.50 ± 5.20), and there was a statistically significant increase of 9.70 (95% CI, 6.08 to 13.32), $t(9) = 6.07$, $p < .0005$, $d = 1.92$. Therefore, the mean difference was statistically significantly different from zero. There was a statistically significant difference in the academic writing mean scores amongst the participants after the use of digital writing software as a tool for process approach to writing.

In conclusion, results of the quantitative data (i.e., pre- and post-tests) indicate that the teacher trainees' academic writing performance improved after they were introduced to the use of digital writing software as a tool for process approach to writing. The present findings are in line with several studies incorporating digital technologies in Malaysian writing classrooms among the teacher trainees, which indicate that they improve on writing practices with the inclusion of digital technologies (Lee et al., 2016; Noordin et al., 2008; Samani et al., 2014; Yee & Kee, 2017; Yunus et al., 2012). With the use of digital writing software as a tool for process approach to writing in the current study, the teacher trainees partake in the enhanced writing process, which is more recursive than before. The teacher trainees comprehend better and practice more on their academic writing. This resonates what Murray (1983) professes, as when writers write, they do many things simultaneously (i.e., the writing process stages are done in a recursive manner). The teacher trainees benefit from the treatment phase in that when they engage more in the writing process, they also improve on their academic writing performance.

Results of Observation

The researchers conducted the observations for the treatment phase. They analyzed the observational data quantitatively to further investigate on the ways the use of digital writing software as a tool for process approach to writing affects the teacher trainees' academic writing. The participants commenced the different writing process stages (i.e., planning/generating ideas and focusing stages (Week 1), structuring and drafting stages (Week 2), and evaluating and reviewing/revising stages (Week 3), generally implemented in a sequence, and the participants visited or revisited any writing process stages whenever necessary as they advanced in the writing process. The means and standard deviations computed (see Table 3) are as follows:

TABLE 3
Means and Standard Deviations of the Writing Process Stages

Writing Process Stages	<i>N</i> *	Mean	Standard Deviation
Planning/Generating ideas	10	3.20	.92
Focusing	10	3.50	.53
Structuring	10	3.60	.52
Drafting	10	2.00	.00
Evaluating	10	2.00	.00
Reviewing/Revising	10	2.00	.00
Publishing	2	4.00	.00
Conferencing	8	3.00	1.07

Note. **N* = Items in each section of the observation checklist

The participants engaged themselves in the stages of planning/generating ideas ($3.20 \pm .92$), focusing ($3.50 \pm .53$), structuring ($3.60 \pm .52$), drafting ($2.00 \pm .00$), evaluating ($2.00 \pm .00$), and reviewing/revising ($2.00 \pm .00$). On top of that, the participants also engaged themselves in publishing ($4.00 \pm .00$) and conferencing (3.00 ± 1.07) with their peers and researcher/lecturer. The descriptive statistics revealed higher means and standard deviations for the first three writing process stages consisted of planning/generating ideas, focusing, and structuring but lower means and standard deviations for the latter three writing process stages of drafting, evaluating, and reviewing/revising. The writing process stages (i.e., planning/generating ideas, focusing, structuring, drafting, evaluating, and reviewing/revising) were enhanced and made recursive for the teacher trainees with the use of digital writing software as a tool for process approach to writing. However, due to time constraints, the earlier writing process stages were completed more than the latter ones in the study. In light of this result, the researchers argue in such a way that the writing of digital conceptual papers goes through the six writing process stages, which is also enhanced by the conferencing with the researcher/lecturer and peers (i.e., giving and receiving feedback). These contribute to the better implementation of the writing process (i.e., the writing process stages are done more recursively), which is fundamental in giving a positive impact on the teacher trainees' practice of process approach to writing when they write the digital conceptual papers as an e-book using the digital writing software as a tool for process approach to writing.

Results of Reflective Journal

The reflective journal entries were analyzed qualitatively to further investigate on the ways the use of digital writing software as a tool for process approach to writing affects the teacher trainees' academic writing. The results of the reflective journal were discussed based on the following developed themes: (1) effectiveness of digital writing software as a tool for process approach to writing, (2) fun learning among teacher trainees, and (3) teacher trainees' increased motivation to write alternative genre.

Effectiveness of digital writing software as a tool for process approach to writing

The use of digital writing software as a tool for process approach to writing entails numerous benefits for the teacher trainees in learning and practicing academic writing. The participants improve in their academic writing performance when they display better quality and organization in their digital conceptual papers. As an example, RP3 wrote, "It is more convenient and easy to use [the software] because you can just easily [*sic*] edit and write any kind of writing easily." With the availability of digital writing software as a tool for process approach to writing, the participants are able to implement and practice the writing process in a better way as they write and edit the digital conceptual papers. In addition, RP2 stated this: "I do not have any problem to decide which sub-topic should I [*sic*] brainstorm first as everything is already been [*sic*] organized in the mind map and in the best way." As such, with the use of digital writing software as a tool for process approach to writing, the participants practice one of the writing process stages (i.e., planning/generating ideas) easily as it is enhanced by the use of digital writing software as a tool for process approach to writing. This finding echoes what Hawkins and Razali's (2012) belief to which process approach to writing redefines writing when more emphasis is given to the writing process than the final written product. In other words, when the writing process is taken care of, the academic writing will possibly arrive at the best product on its own.

Fun learning among teacher trainees

As indicated by Hussin et al. (2001), teachers have to get their students motivated and interested in learning English language, and especially of writing. In this study, it is found that the participants express positive perceptions on the use of digital writing software as a tool for process approach to writing. They admit to having fun, satisfaction, and excitement throughout the three weeks of treatment phase. RP6 related her feelings: "I had lots of fun learning about it, and felt that it was a very user-friendly tool, in the sense that it was simple enough for even first-timers like me to use." On top of that, RP2 said this: "I feel so satisfied when everything is settled down easily without any problems." Additionally, RP3 stated this: "I feel so excited when I first use this kind of software because you no longer have to do your writing by using an old kind of writing." To conclude, most of today's learners desire for active learning that yields experiences which are fun, supported by rich media, and are within their control. This is made possible with the use of digital writing software as a tool for process approach to writing in the current study.

Teachers trainees' increased motivation to write alternative genre

In the study, it is also found that the participants have positive perceptions on the use of digital writing software as a tool for process approach to writing and believe that the tool will help to improve their academic writing. All participants express their interest to further explore the use of digital writing software as a tool for process approach to writing in enabling them to write better academic writing digitally. RP6 related her experience of using the tool: "... it is efficient and simple to use, thus I could get my work done very quickly and stress-free." In addition, RP3 stated this: "This software can be highly recommended to the others to make them enjoy writing more and can experience new way of writing." On top of that, RP1 said this: "I think this software can give a [*sic*] really huge benefits for those who really know how to use it wisely." RP1 also stated, "It is because an early exposure for [*sic*] this kind of conceptual and research paper is actually good for a student so that we will prepare ourselves to be more matured and to see [the] world in such a different way." RP6 concluded her learning experience: "Overall, I had a very pleasant experience indeed and cannot wait to learn more about it and how to use it again." This finding is in line with Razali (2013) who posits that digital technology enhances writing instruction with its affordances (i.e., interactivity and multimodality). The use of digital writing software as a tool for process approach to writing enhances the writing process and enables writing alternative genre (i.e., digital conceptual papers); hence, the teacher trainees start to gain increased motivation in learning and practicing academic writing.

Suggestions for Future Research

In answering the call to infuse digital technologies in the teaching of academic writing, the researchers prove that through the use of digital writing software as a tool for process approach to writing in producing digital conceptual papers, the teacher trainees experience increased awareness of the writing process and motivation to write on thus improve on their academic writing performance. Hence, the present finding, to some extent, points to the positive effects of using digital writing software as a tool for process approach to writing. However, the current study employs a small sample size and the design is lack of a control or comparison group, therefore, the generalization of the findings is regarded impractical. Future research can include the use of control group to improve the validity of the design, and with at least 15 participants in each group (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). This can be done to further investigate the effects of the professed approach as opposed to the usual way the teacher trainees write the conceptual paper in the regular academic paper writing lessons using word processing software (i.e., Microsoft Word), and the ways it affects the teacher trainees' ESL academic writing. Additionally, with the absence of random sampling, this study may be considered as a mere case study in one particular program. Despite the statistically significant difference, the findings at this stage could not be generalized to the other teacher trainees. Hence, future research can apply random sampling of participants to increase the generalizability of the findings.

Conclusion

Findings show that the digital writing software as a tool for process approach to writing functions as an effective approach in enhancing the teacher trainees' academic writing performance by enabling writing alternative genre (i.e., digital conceptual papers) with increased motivation throughout the writing process, which is enhanced with the use of this approach. Enhanced performance on academic writing is observed among the teacher trainees. All the teacher trainees also state that they have fun and benefit from the use of digital writing software as a tool for process approach to writing throughout the writing process. Additionally, the teacher trainees are motivated, more than before in learning and practicing the academic writing. The researchers believe that the use of digital writing software as a tool for process approach to writing can be carried out over an extended duration to develop deeper comprehension and practice of academic writing and implement better the writing process stages in a recursive manner. This study can further provide the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE) with some insights into the alignment of the writing curricula and approaches, which are currently used at the ITEMS. It sheds light on the possibility of using a realistic way (i.e., digital writing software as a tool for process approach to writing) to carry out a teacher-training program that may benefit the teacher educators and their teacher trainees. To conclude, the feasibility of digital writing software as a tool for process approach to writing in enhancing the writing process of the teacher trainees' learning and practicing of academic writing in the study brings out the potentials of using this approach as to be included in the academic writing courses in educational institutions in general and at the ITEMS in particular.

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Appendix

Assessment Rubrics for Pre- and Post-Tests

PROGRAM: FOUNDATION	YEAR/SEMESTER: 1/2				
MAJOR: TESL	COURSE/CODE: LANGUAGE SUPPORT II (LS1022)				
Aspect Criteria	HIGH DISTINCTION MARKS (23.0-25.0)	DISTINCTION MARKS (19.5-22.9)	CREDIT MARKS (16.5-19.4)	PASS MARKS (12.5-16.4)	FAIL MARKS (<12.5)
1.0 CONTENT (25 MARKS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All content is highly relevant to the task • Content that is very suitable • Intended audience is fully informed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All content is relevant to the task • Content that is suitable • Intended audience is informed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All content is quite relevant to the task • Content that is somehow suitable • Intended audience is somehow informed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All content is less relevant to the task • Content that is less suitable • Intended audience is less informed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Irrelevances and misinterpretation of task may be present. • Content that is hardly suitable • Intended audience is minimally informed
Aspect Criteria	HIGH DISTINCTION MARKS (23.0-25.0)	DISTINCTION MARKS (19.5-22.9)	CREDIT MARKS (16.5-19.4)	PASS MARKS (12.5-16.4)	FAIL MARKS (<12.5)
2.0 COMMUNICATIVE ACHIEVEMENT (25 MARKS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Register of the communicative task is used with sufficient flexibility • Complex ideas are communicated in an effective way • All communicative purposes are fulfilled 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Register of the communicative task is used with flexibility • Complex ideas are communicated in an appropriate way • Almost all communicative purposes are fulfilled 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Register of the communicative task is used with some flexibility • Straightforward and complex ideas are communicated in an appropriate way • Some communicative purposes are fulfilled 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Register of the communicative task is used but with little flexibility • Straightforward ideas are communicated in an appropriate way • Limited communicative purposes are fulfilled 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Register of the communicative task is hardly used • Straightforward ideas are communicated • Communicative purposes are hardly fulfilled

Aspect Criteria	HIGH DISTINCTION MARKS (23.0-25.0)	DISTINCTION MARKS (19.5-22.9)	CREDIT MARKS (16.5-19.4)	PASS MARKS (12.5-16.4)	FAIL MARKS (<12.5)
3.0 ORGANIZATION (25 MARKS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Text is a very well-organized, coherent whole, using a wide range of cohesive devices and organizational patterns with high flexibility • Excellent presentation style that fully engages the audience • Demonstrate skills to critically review the work with reference to the literature review that is very relevant, accurate, and good 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Text is a well-organized, coherent, using a range of cohesive devices and organizational patterns with flexibility • Very good presentation style that engages the audience most of the time • Demonstrate skills to critically review the work with reference to the literature review that is relevant, accurate, and good 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Text is adequately organized, coherent, using an adequate range of cohesive devices and organizational patterns with adequate flexibility • Good presentation style that always engages the audience • Demonstrate skills to rather critically review the work with reference to the literature review that is rather relevant, accurate, and good 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Text is fairly organized, fairly coherent, using a fair range of cohesive devices and organizational patterns but with little flexibility • Average presentation style that sometimes engages the audience • Demonstrate skills to less critically review the work with reference to the literature review that is less relevant, accurate, and good 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Text is disorganized, incoherent, cohesive devices and organizational patterns are hardly used • Poor presentation style that hardly engages the audience • Does not demonstrate skills to critically review the work
Aspect Criteria	HIGH DISTINCTION MARKS (23.0-25.0)	DISTINCTION MARKS (19.5-22.9)	CREDIT MARKS (16.5-19.4)	PASS MARKS (12.5-16.4)	FAIL MARKS (<12.5)
4.0 LANGUAGE (25 MARKS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of language is very suitable and appropriate for academic writing • Use of vocabulary is very suitable and appropriate for academic writing • Any inaccuracies occur only as slips 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of language is suitable and appropriate for academic writing • Use of vocabulary is suitable and appropriate for academic writing • Occasional errors, which do not impede communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of language is fairly suitable and appropriate for academic writing • Use of vocabulary is fairly suitable and appropriate for academic writing • Some errors, which occasionally impede communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of language is less suitable and appropriate for academic writing • Use of vocabulary is less suitable and appropriate for academic writing • Significant errors, which somehow impede communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of language is not suitable and inappropriate for academic writing • Use of vocabulary is not suitable and appropriate for academic writing • Gross errors which impede communication