The Effects of Task-Based Process Writing Approach on the Academic Writing Skills among Second Language Tertiary Learners

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Academic writing occupies a very important place in the English language syllabus at tertiary level. Where higher institution writing is concerned, it is not enough that students have to write in traditional essay or report formats; their writing must be appropriate to the discipline – yet deal with the multitude of genres expected of them. Additionally, academic writing skill is considered an essential skill for academic success and a requirement for many occupations and professions. However, it is a skill that a number of second language tertiary students find most difficult to acquire and only a few of them fully master it. This study, therefore, embarks on the theory that task-based approach together with the exposure of process writing would have a significant influence on the development of students' academic writing skills. In this study students were made to work in groups on real-life tasks which relate to their field of study or future employment. In the midst of pursuing the group project, the students will have to write their group proposal and individual writing assignment. This will be the stage where the process writing techniques are put into practice. This paper will illustrate an eclectic pedagogic intervention in the teaching of academic writing skills to second language tertiary students.

Keywords: academic writing, task-based approach, process writing approach, tertiary learners

Menulis akademik menempati posisi penting pada silabus bahasa Inggris di perguruan tinggi. Mahasiswa tidak cukup hanya dengan menulis esai dan laporan; tulisan mereka harus sesuai disiplin ilmu. Selain itu, kemampuan menulis akademik penting demi keberhasilan akademik dan persyaratan profesi. Namun bagi mahasiswa keterampilan ini masih sulit. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini ingin melihat apakah kombinasi teori task-based dengan proses menulis akan berpengaruh terhadap kemampuan menulis akademik. Dalam penelitian ini, mahasiswa dibagi dalam kelompok dan diberi tugas yang langsung berhubungan dengan pekerjaan mereka di masa depan. Selain bekerja dalam kelompok untuk menyelesaikan proyek, mahasiswa juga mengerjakan tugas individu. Artikel ini memberikan gambaran intervensi pedagogi eklektik pada pembelajaran menulis akademik bagi mahasiswa dimana bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa kedua.

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INTRODUCTION

Writing is a complex process, often entailing a long and slow development. It requires some conscious mental effort where the writer needs from his/her linguistic storehouse those language patterns which are socially appropriate to convey the message clearly, fluently, and effectively. Likewise academic writing is often regarded as a highly problematic but always transformational activity (Murray & Moore, 2006). Learners' perception of academic writing is that it is a formal learning activity directed by the instructor which reflects the top-down approach in class and a challenging task for them to endeavor. Hence, an innovative instructor will create writing tasks that ensure the learners as the one responsible for their writing activities such as self-discovery activities, self-change topic, self-change project proposal and practicing of self-observation, and writing activities. In other words the top-down approach to the teaching and learning of academic writing skills can be transformed into the bottom-up approach where learners are given the opportunities to be the instructor of their own learning with the guidance from their instructor. Additionally, looking into academic writing as a transformational activity means emphasizing inquiry-based learning, critical thinking, and the development of higher-order thinking and communication skills. Learners must be made to recognize the limitations of their current knowledge and skills and have opportunities to test and apply new skills and perspectives in the process of developing their academic writing skills.

The ability to write effectively has become critical in today's globalized world; thus instruction in writing is considered as one of the crucial communication skills to be acquired, as stated by Weigle (2002) "writing has become more important as tenets of communication rather than as an objective of study – have taken hold in both second- and foreign-language settings" (p. 1) Ardington (2011) also emphasizes a similar point on the importance of writing where she emphasizes that writing is an essential and powerful communicative tool for all learners in all disciplines. Hyland's (2013) justification on the importance of writing has further enhanced Ardington's point in which Wright has declared that one needs to be proficient at writing because writing is evidential; that is, there is a record and evidence of what has been communicated.

Significantly, where higher institution writing is concerned, it is not enough that learners have to write in traditional essay or report formats; their writing must be appropriate to the discipline – yet deal with the multitude of genres expected of them. Irvine (2010) stresses that "writing in college is a fairly specialized writing situation, and it has developed its own codes and conventions that learners need to have taken a keen awareness of if they are going to write successfully in college" (p. 7). In actual fact a number of higher education researchers have also found that mastery of academic writing skills remains one of the greatest challenges for learners in higher institutions (Farrell & Tighe-Mooney, 2013; Horstmanshof & Brownie, 2013; Hyland, 2013; Klimova, 2012). Fung (2010) further states "academic writing is a manageable pursuit that has practical use for students' future academic and professional endeavors" (p. 472). Universities are about writing, and that the specialist forms of academic literacy are at the heart of everything learners do: central to constructing knowledge, educating learners, and negotiating a professional academic career (Hyland, 2013).

On these notes by Hyland (2013) and Fung (2010), effective, purposeful academic writing should be given more and more emphasis in the teaching at all levels especially the higher institution level, which is, to the undergraduate learners learning English as a second language. This is because these learners would be dealing with topics and themes from various different perspectives in their major programs, and these topics are dealt with in a greater depth, more sophisticated and broader context. As a result they need to develop and apply their writing skills during their academic years in universities to be able to produce good effective written assignments not only for their English courses but also for their major programs/courses as well as future employment world. As Ellis and Red (2003) point out, writing is not just a classroom exercise, but being able to write well has far reaching real-world as well as academic applications.

Academic writing occupies a very important place in the English language syllabus at tertiary level as stated by Osman (2004) that "learners pursuing a university degree require competency in both written and spoken language to handle academic discourse and to excel in the program" (p. 13). However, writing is a skill that learners find most difficult to acquire and only a number of them are able to fully master the skill (Byrne, 1993). Levine (as cited in Murray & Moore, 2006) asserts that "some researchers have claimed that writing can be experienced as one of the most difficult of all skills, requiring an intricate combination of neurological, physical, cognitive, and affective competencies" (p. 6). Murray and Moore (2006) further suggest that academic writing involves starting, progressing and finishing a complicated, challenging combination of tasks where it requires the writer to activate a number of different skills and orientations, sometimes at different stages and phases in the process, sometimes all at the same time. New literacy studies theorists such as Street and Gee (as cited in French, 2011) argue that "it is important that higher education learners engage in the writing development as part of wider discussions concerning the purpose of their writing in education, their audience, and how they use their writing to express ideas and understanding" (p. 228). From a study carried out by University Putra Malaysia, it is found that the feeling of incompetence in writing ability is extended to the tertiary level (Chan & Abdullah, 2004).

There is simply no single best way or method to understand and to teach so complex a skill as the academic writing skill and moreover teaching it within a constructive, motivating and authentic teaching and learning context. A variety of approaches and methods have been investigated and reported to succeed in encouraging learners' academic writing skills such as process approach, product approach, genre approach, and content-based approach (Akinwamide, 2012; Dooey, 2010; Pennington, 2013; Wardle and Downs, 2013). Where language teaching methods are concerned, a number of teaching methodologies and approaches have been recommended by theorists and researchers such as Communicative Language Teaching, Content-based Approach, Task-based Approach, Participatory Language Teaching, Cooperative Learning, and Multiple Intelligences (Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Brown, 2001; Richards & Renandya, 2002).

Hence, this study aims to determine and exemplify the most appropriate methodological approach for teaching academic writing skills at University Malaysia Sabah Labuan International Campus in order to create a motivating environment and stimulating

context for the learners to develop their academic writing skills. Among the teaching and learning approaches stated above, the researcher decides to merge two different approaches which have created various controversial issues (Bruton, 2006; Knight, 2012), namely, Task-based Approach and Process Writing Approach. Based on these readings, it could be summarized that these two approaches have their own sets of weaknesses and strengths. However, the researcher believes that merging them together will reduce their weaknesses, increase their strengths, and enrich the quality of the product or outcome. Hence the focus of this study is to explore whether the goal of merging these two eminent approaches will have an effect on the development of the undergraduate learners' academic writing skills. Chimbganda (2001) has, in fact, pointed out theoretically the significance of combining these two approaches in teaching academic writing, "...in order to deal with the different writing needs of ESL students, the teacher can use in some cases the process approach, while in other situations the task-based approach or a hybrid version of these approaches" (p. 176).

The process writing approach is concerned with the use of process-oriented approach to facilitate the planning and production stages of writing. Even with other well-known approaches to the teaching of writing such as the product-approach, the genre-based approach, or the content-based approach, learners will still have to go through the writing processes and procedures to produce a written product. Process approaches to writing tend to focus more on the varied classroom activities which promote the development of language use: brainstorming, group discussion, rewriting. The main advantages are that they understand the importance of the skills involved in writing, and recognize that what learners bring to the writing classroom contributes to the development of writing ability (Akinwamide, 2012; Badger & White, 2000).

Henceforward, the researcher feels that the process writing is an approach not only designed to support the other approaches to the teaching of writing but also intended to support reading, writing, and language development simultaneously. The idea behind it is not really to dissociate writing entirely from the written product and to merely lead students through the various stages of writing processes but to construct process-oriented writing instruction that will affect performance (Maarof & Murat, 2013; Mourssi, 2013; Por-Mohammadi & Abidin, 2012; Seow, 2002; White & Arndt, 1991). Fung (2010) further emphasized that process writing offers learners an enriched learning experience, increasing their interest in subject matter, critical thinking, and appreciation of collected written works. Ultimately, and in an important sense, we are what we write, and we need to understand the distinctive ways our disciplines have in addressing our ideas and presenting our arguments academically (Hyland, 2013).

As for the task-based language teaching and learning approach, it is considered as the most appropriate or most relevant by the researcher for the reason that it not only increases learner activity but also drives the instructor to create, produce, and supply different tasks which will give the learners the opportunity to experiment spontaneously and originally with English language. Most importantly, what attracted the researcher to employ a task-based approach is that the approach can help the learners by placing them in the real world. Task-based learning and teaching is an overall approach, as it advocates that all the language skills should be integrated in the process of learning and teaching (Miao Hai-yan, 2014). According to the proponents of task-based approach (Beglar and Hunt, 2002; Ellis, 2003; Hosseini,

2012; Nunan, 2006; Stroud, 2013; Tamponi, 2012; Wang, 2004; Willis and Willis, 2007), task-based approach should put the emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language. Authentic texts should be introduced into the learning, and focus on form should be advocated, not putting aside learners' own personal experiences. The main rationale for employing task-based approach was for the awareness given by the advocates that task-based approach should link classroom language learning with language activation outside the classroom.

Process-driven approaches show some similarities with task-based learning, in that learners are given considerable freedom within the task. They are not curbed by pre-emptive teaching of lexical or grammatical items and the outcome of the writing, the product, is not preconceived. Pedagogically, task-based approach helps strengthened the principles and procedures of process writing approach. To date empirical studies on improving learners writing skills have proven that task-based approach has the most positive effect on their writing performance (Hai-yan, 2014; Li, 2013; Tabar & Alavi).

For these justifications stated above, it is hoped that this new pedagogic intervention will be a kind of resource for instructors to conceptualize the learning process in acquiring good effective writing skills and in a way that may assist them in identifying meaningful and intellectual forms of active learning (Nor & Samad, 2006) specifically where academic writing skills are concerned, as reported by Wardle and Downs (2013) that "a fact that we have accounted was we often find our students to have significantly greater enthusiasm, excitement, engagement, and investment with this focus on developing their writing skills once they understand what it means: that they are going to be engaged on issues with which they have experience and some degree of expertise, and that they will be challenged in meaningful ways" (p. 6). Ur (2013) further emphasizes that instructors are encouraged to develop theory and practice in situated methodologies that are likely, in their particular teaching context, to bring about good learning.

Crucially, it is hoped that this eclectic intervention will also enhance learners' motivation towards their self-improvement in acquiring the skills. Based on this purpose and the related preceding discussions, the study attempts to answer the following research questions.

1. What are the effects of task-based process writing approach on undergraduate second language learners' academic writing skills as shown through all the components within the grading criteria on learners' drafts and final writing assignments?

2. What are the effects of task-based process writing approach on the second language undergraduate learners' academic writing as shown through the academic writing assignments and the pre- and post-tests?

METHODS
Research design
In order to investigate and respond to the research questions, a hybrid method was employed and a number of sources of data were collected during the evolving of the Task-based Process Writing Approach. The research methods consisted of both quantitative and qualitative methods. This study designated significant characteristics of the participants, operational

tasks, data collection procedures, and objective measurement procedures of learners' performance in their academic writing skills. In addition, it also summarized the data analyses performed to investigate the research questions listed.

Settings and Participants

The study took place in a public university, a branch of University Malaysia Sabah located near a beach about 20 kilometers from the town center of Labuan Federal Territory. It is known as University Malaysia Sabah Labuan International Campus. The Labuan International Campus consisted of two schools: Faculty of Computing and Informatics and Labuan Faculty of International Finance.

The 138 participants in the study, 69 learners in the experimental groups and 69 learners in the control group, were full-time second year undergraduate learners in the Faculty of Computing and Informatics and the Labuan Faculty of International Finance of the university. The learners' age ranged between 20-25 years old consisting of 39 male and 99 female learners. The groups had a combination of race and ethnicity which is Malay, Chinese, Indian, Kadazandusun, Murut, Bajau, and others.

Where English proficiency is concerned the participants in the experimental and control groups were learners who had acquired a Band One, Band Two or Band Three in the Malaysian University English Test (MUET) which classified them as extremely limited user, limited user and modest user respectively (See Table 1). Both the experimental group and control group learners had completed the three levels of English courses before pursuing the English for Academic Reading and Writing course.

Table 1: Descriptions of MUET band 1 – 3

A	B	C	D	E	F
Below 100	1	Very limited user	Hardly able to use the language	Very limited understanding of language and context	Very limited ability to function in the language
100 – 139	2	Limited user	Not fluent: inappropriate use of language; very frequent grammatical errors	Limited understanding of language and context	Limited ability to function in the language
140 – 179	3	Modest user	Fairly fluent; fairly appropriate use of language; many grammatical errors	Fair understanding of language and context	Fair ability to function in the language

Note:
A: Aggregated Score
B: Band
C: User
D: Communicative Ability
E: Comprehension
F: Task Performance

Research Procedures

The participants for this study were divided into experimental and control group. Each group consisted of 69 students, respectively. During the first week the researcher briefed and explained to learners in the experimental group on the course syllabus and the written task to be completed. The participants were given the guidelines and procedures for completing the task, and the requirements of turning in a finished product. The learners in the control group were also briefed by their instructors on the course syllabus and the written task.

A pre-test was administered on the second week to the control and experimental groups. The test consisted of essay writing. The pre-test was performed to determine the participants' writing ability prior to the study. It was also a toll to identify their strengths and weaknesses in writing and their personal attempt towards academic writing. Immediately afterwards the participants responded the entry or pre-experiment questionnaire.

In the case of the control group, the participants were taught through the in situ approach moving along the scheme of work prepared for the course. They were to write the paragraphs in class and submit these paragraphs immediately after the class. These paragraphs were marked and graded with no opening for a rewriting. Later, these paragraphs were combined only to comply with the format of an academic essay consisting of the appropriate and necessary conventions. However, before the subjects started to write, they were given the language input on essay writing skills. An outline, sample paragraphs taken from their course books, ideas and suggestions were offered to them as well.

In the case of the experimental group, the lessons were carried out using the task-based process writing approach as projected. The task was based on the characteristics of task in a task-based language teaching approach. The framework and cycle of the lessons were also based and adapted from task-based language teaching approach. The focus was exploiting the participants' real world experience, be it the present situation as well as their future employment situation. The participants were encouraged to propose a project that relates to their field of study or future employment. In other words it was a project of their common interest. They were able to make all decisions themselves in selecting the group proposal topics, individual topics and about how to create and communicate their own meanings. This technique was further coordinated, supported and most importantly enhanced by the process writing approach. Since the participants were required to submit a group portfolio and most importantly an individual written assignment, the process writing approach seemed to be one of the effective techniques to help the participants produce an effective academic essay. The process writing technique consisted of five distinct steps subjects undertook in completing the assignment: prewriting, drafting, revising, editing and

publishing. The participants were able to edit and revise their paragraphs before giving them to their instructor. Without affecting the contents of the paragraphs or making major changes, the instructor would do further editing on the writing samples, and returned the drafts to the participants with suggestions for improvement. Participants would also be given the opportunity to review their peers' drafts and would also be able to make suggestions for improvement. At the end of the final week, the participants would have to produce a written assignment: a term paper. This was used as a documented product for the study that would serve as a significant discovery of their writing skills and as a verification tool to observe the effects of task-based approach on their writing performance.

At the end of the study, the participants from the control and experimental groups had to sit for a post-test which was similar in content with the pre-test. It was to verify whether a difference of effective written product existed between the control and experimental groups. It was also to observe whether there were any clear and significant differences between these two tests where the development of the academic writing skills of the experimental group was concerned. A post-task questionnaire was also conducted with the participants. The questions were similar as in the pre-task questionnaire with some additional questions related to the tasks and writing process. These additional questions were looking into the process of writing. Additionally the participants were asked to give comments about their task experience in this study through student reflection form. It was also designed to get additional information from the participants about their confidence and perceptions of the academic writing performance. The questionnaire also explored if they felt that this approach was more helpful, and if they felt that their writing was better than before.

Methods and Analysis

In this study, both quantitative and supplement qualitative data were gathered. The quantitative data came from comparisons of the ratings or scores of the final writing assignment, pre-test and post-test, the pre-task and post-task questionnaires, and essay draft from both the experimental and control groups. The scores were acquired through marking the scripts with a standardized marking scheme or rubrics which was more geared towards analytic marking scheme. The standardized rubric or marking scheme was adapted and modified from various experts (Graves, 2000; Tunceren & Cavusgil, 2006; Weigle, 2002) in academic essay evaluation. The quantitative data also came from the responses given by both, the control and experimental groups, in the Likert-scale questionnaire. In addition to those quantitative data, the qualitative data for this study were primarily assembled from participants' reflection from the experimental group only as the open-ended questions were focused on the process writing approach.

Hence the following kinds of data were collected: (i) the final grades on the finished written product marked through a standardized marking scheme. These were collected from written products by the participants of the control and experimental groups; (ii) the experimental and control groups' scores from their pre-test and post-test results; (iii) both the experimental and control participants' responses to the pre-task and post-task questionnaires, (iv) the scores based on a standardized scoring of experimental groups' writing draft and their final written product, (v) the experimental group's reflection. For part (iv) and (v), the results were only gathered from the experimental group as this group pursued the writing

component of the English for Academic Reading and Writing Course through the task-based process writing approach.

The qualitative data in this study was to triangulate and corroborate the quantitative data of this study. The qualitative data consisted primarily in an analysis of specific channel of participants' reflections or responses in the Student Reflection form given after the completion of the Academic Reading and Writing Course that is in the final week of the semester. The learners' reflection was only given to the experimental group since this group was the only group that underwent the Academic Reading and Writing course through the task-based process writing approach. The control group would not be able to answer questions related to process writing approach as the learners in this group went through a linear process of writing.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The final essays for both groups were marked using the standardized scoring rubric used for the English for Academic Reading and Writing Course. Nevertheless, in order to further investigate and observe whether task-based process writing approach had produced comprehensible or clear improvements in the learners' academic writing, the written drafts and the final written essays of the participants in the experimental group were used. As how the final scores were marked, the comparison between the learners' essay draft and their final product scores were corroborated based on the five items of the grading criteria. The five items included: (1) content/organization, (2) language use, (3) vocabulary, (4) mechanics, and (5) sources. The paired-samples t-test was exploited to process the raw data, and thus the means and standard deviations of each item were obtained. On the basis of the processed data, the t-test would help to decide whether the difference demonstrated between the scores from the essay drafts and final essays arose from the task-based process writing approach to the teaching of the English for Academic Writing component. The results of each of the five items were presented in different tables respectively.

Table 2: Content/organization

Measure	Essay	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Content/ Org.	Final	69	11.20	6.37	14.60	68	.000
	Draft	69					

The results presented in Table 2 reveal that the participants in the experimental group scored better grades for the content/organization in their final written assignment as opposed to their scores in their written assignment draft. There was a significant increase of mean where the mean was 11.20. Such a mean difference was statistically significant as p value is p=.000 where p<.005. Thus, from the descriptive evidence displayed in Table 3, it is strongly assured of the fact that the undergraduate learners in the experimental group had shown improvements in their overall content and organization in producing the written assignment.

Table 3: Language use

Measure	Essay	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Language	Final	69	.83	.73	9.54	68	.000
	Draft	69					

Table 3 reveals that learners in the experimental group also scored better grades in language use in their final written assignment. Even though the mean was .83, it was statistically significant as the p value was p=.000 which is lower than p<005. This proved that the techniques of task-based process writing approach managed to help the learners improved their language use when it came to writing an academic writing essay.

Table 4: Vocabulary

Measure	Essay	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Vocab	Final	69	.72	.74	8.19	68	.000
	Draft	69					

The participants in the experimental group scored better grades for the vocabulary in their final written assignment where there was an increment of mean by .72 points. It was statistically significant because the p-value was as low as p=.000 where p<.005. Evidently, task-based process writing approach had a strong positive effect on the improvement of the learners' vocabulary skills.

Table 5: Mechanics

Measure	Essay	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Mechanics	Final	69	.49	.62	6.59	68	.000
	Draft	69					

Table 5 projects that learners in the experimental group scored a minor increase in their grades for the mechanics in their final written assignment with the mean score of .49. There was an increase of mean, even though it was slim, it was still statistically significant because the p-value was as low as p=.000 where p<.005. Consequently, these effect values revealed an improvement in mechanics in the learners' written essay. Hence, the researcher was reassured that task-based played a noteworthy role in helping the undergraduate learners to improve in their academic writing skills.

Table 6: Sources/References

Measure	Essay	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Sources	Final	69	3.45	1.16	24.76	68	.000
	Draft	69					

The knowledge and ability to cite sources, support statements with ideas from experts, write in-text citations and reference page were additional skills imparted through the English for Academic Reading and Writing Course. The first draft was written in a traditional way of writing essay, that is, without any citations or experts' ideas used. However, through the task-based process writing approach, feedback received by learners regarding these significant points in an academic essay had provided an improvement in the learners' written assignment. Table 6 projects participants in the experimental group scored highly better grades for the criteria of writing the sources in their final written assignment with an increment of the mean that is 3.45 points. Such a mean difference was highly statistically significant when the p-value was as low as p=.000 where p<.005.

As indicated in the descriptive evidences in the tables above, the participants in the experimental group made significant improvement in all five items of the grading criteria. In other words, the second language undergraduate learners in the experimental group provided a clear progress in all of the five areas which include the content and organization, vocabulary, language use, mechanics and sources as well as references of writing competence measured through the two written products, their draft and their final essay. Simultaneously, data from the questionnaire and student reflection supported the above interpretation of the above scores.

Statement 1: The course has improved my skills in written communication

Table 7: Improvement in written communication skills

Scale	Experimental	Control
5	29.2%	15.4%
4	55.4%	52.3%
3	13.8%	24.6%
2	1.5%	3.1%
1	0.0%	4.6%

With reference to Table 7, it was evidently proven that the experimental group of learners' opinions' on their writing skills' improvement was encouraging whereby 29.2% strongly agreed and 55.4% agreed (in sum, 84.6%) that the course had improved their skills in written communication. As for the control group of learners' opinions, as reported in Table 7, 15.4% strongly agreed and 52.3% agreed, (in sum 67.7%) of the students agreed that the course had improved their skills in written communication.

Question 2: How would you rate your writing ability in English after completing the English for Academic Reading and Writing Course?

Table 8: Writing ability

Scale	Experimental		Control	
	Pre-Experiment	Post-Experiment	Pre-Experiment	Post-Experiment

5	1.4%	4.6%	1.4%	0.0%
4	34.8%	61.5%	23.2%	38.5%
3	56.5%	33.8%	66.7%	58.5%
2	7.2%	0.0%	7.2%	3.1%
1	0.0%	0.0%	1.4%	0.0%

In terms of writing ability, 61.5% of the learners acknowledged their writing ability as good and 4.6% of the learners confidently admitted their level of writing ability as excellent. The 33.8% of the learners who claimed their writing ability level was at the average level was also considered as having the improvement in their writing with the knowledge of their standard of MUET's result as indicated in Table 8. Judging from the pre-experiment scores, there was an increase of being able to write in English. Only 33.8% and 38.5% of the learners had rated their confidence and ability as good to write their assignments in English or their major courses' assignments in English respectively. The 58.5% of the learners rated their confidence level and writing ability as average level even after 14 weeks of attending and performing the tasks given in the course. For the control group of learners, there were 4.6% of them felt that their confidence to write assignments in English was poor, and 3.1% of the learners rated their writing ability in English after completing the writing course as being poor as well. The results are presented in Table 8.

Additional data elicited from the student reflection form on ways the course had helped the participants to improve their writing skills helped corroborated the results above. The descriptions below are the supporting evidence contracted from the question: *What did you acquire from the English for Academic Reading and Writing Course?*

A majority of the participants stated that the activities in the writing component had further enhanced their knowledge and skills in writing good essay specifically in coming up with effective thesis statements, constructing strong supporting and specific supporting details, organizing the content in every paragraphs especially the background paragraph which is considered new to them and writing good body paragraphs. Learners also reported that they were exposed to the importance of having connection between the introductory paragraph and the concluding paragraph to give a good flow to the essay. Many of the learners had stated that they have learnt how to generate proper sentences from the important key points. Most importantly, most of the learners had emphasized that they learnt how to use academic words and expressions in their written assignment. The following comments provided by the participants demonstrate their beliefs and convictions regarding the English for Academic Reading and Writing Course. Most importantly, this reflected the positive effects of task-based process writing approach that was employed to teach the course.

The question, *'Have the activities in the English for Academic Reading and Writing course helped you to improve your academic writing skills? In what ways have the activities helped you?'* showed that all the participants (69 out of 69 participants) agreed that the course had helped them to improve their academic writing skills in one way or the other. Even though there were a number (8 out of 69 respondents) who disliked the tasks, activities and the processes that they had gone through in producing the written assignment task but 100% (69 out of 69 respondents) agreed that they had improved their writing skills. Some learners commented that writing the drafts helped them to see the errors and provided them

opportunity to improve their essay. Others commented that the course helped them to generate ideas in order to produce good content, and they were able to organize their essay to suit the requirements of the assessment. Some participants even commented that the activities from the writing component helped them read meaningfully as they were able to apply the skills learnt when they read other reading materials.

There were participants (67 out of 69 participants) who commented that the activities in the writing component from the course helped them to further enhance their written assignment in their other courses. Where writing sources and references were concerned, many (66 out of 69 participants) stated that they were able to cite and use these sources to justify their main points. Others (54 out of 69 participants) wrote in the student reflection form that the activities on writing references had improved their knowledge and skill in using the format of reference writing. There are a number of participants commented that with the improvement they made in the writing component had given them the confidence to write well.

Where academic writing skills are concerned, the progress aimed would be observing the characteristics and needs of academic essay such as the conventions of academic writing, academic organization in writing assignment, appropriate use of use of research-based writing materials, vocabulary development, grammar and sentence structure, and application of critical thinking skills through writing. Majority of the learners indicated that they had achieved a well satisfactory level of progress in producing good written academic essay. The following comments provided by the participants demonstrated their stand on their improvements. Some learners commented on their progress in their grammar, sentence structures and vocabulary skills. A number of the participants recognized their progress in being able to constructively criticize their friends' writing and able to present their ideas assertively. As a matter of fact, interestingly it was reported that the activities in the writing component not only enhanced the participants writing skills but also encouraged them to read academic materials and research articles which further increased their reading skills.

Convergence of the results analyzed through the data as in the student reflection and questionnaire responses confirms the validity of the quantitative results interpreted on clear improvements made through task-based process writing approach. Hence, these findings proved that the first objective of the study is achieved. In other words, task-based process writing approach had provided a significant opportunity for learners to develop and improve their academic writing skills.

For the measurement of the learners' writing performance, two writing tasks were performed by the learners in the experimental group and the control group, one as the pre-test and the other as the post-test. The tests were scored using the standardized scoring guide.

Table 9: Independent-samples t-test to compare the pre-test scores

Measure	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pre-Test	Experimental	69	45.60	14.29	.24	136	.81
	Control	69	45.00	15.26			

An independent-samples t-test on the pre-test in the course was used to compare the experimental group and control group's scores. This was to determine if the writing skills of the two groups were equal or similar in the level of performance before the experiment was applied. The independent-samples t-tests results revealed that there was no significant difference between the scores acquired by the experimental group with the scores acquired by the control group prior to the experimentation of the task-based process writing approach, indicating that the level of performance in the academic writing skills for the experimental and control groups were basically at the same English level. The mean score of the experimental group was 45.60 and 45.00 in the control group as shown in Table 9. There was no statistical significance as p>.005 where p=.81 as indicated in Table 10. This showed that the effects of the teaching techniques used in the participants' previous course, that is, the Reading and Writing in English were very small. Hence, there was no significant difference in the writing skills between the experimental group and control group.

Table 10: Independent-samples t-test to compare the post-test scores

Measure	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Post-Test	Experimental	69	69.17	17.27	6.89	136	.000
	Control	69	53.83	6.71			

After running the independent-samples t-test through SPSS, the results in the post-test of the writing task indicated that the experimental group scored significantly higher than the control group, with the mean score of 69.17 against 53.83 of the control group as shown in Table 10. The experimental group gained 15.35 more than the control group on the post-test of writing performance. Such a mean difference was statistically significant because the p-value was as low as .000 (p=.000) whereby p<.005. It can be said that the task-based process approach was able to aid the participants in the experimental group in developing their academic writing skills. Intrinsically, in view of the fact that learners' writing test results generally directly reflect their overall writing competence, it can be projected that such a significant increase in mean scores of writing tests can be considered as the most convincing evidence of a significant improvement of the participants' writing competence.

Table 11: Paired-samples t-test of the experimental group

Measure	Test	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Experimental	Post-Test	69	24.30	19.82	10.19	68	.000
	Pre-Test						

In addition to the inter-group analysis presented previously, the results of the intra-group comparison were also presented as follows. The first intra-group analysis was made on the experimental group. The analysis was performed through the paired-samples t-test. As shown in Table 11, the experimental group gained 24.30 more in the post-test, comparing with the scores they acquired from the pre-test. Such gain was statistically significant since the p-value was as low as .000 (p=.000) whereby p<.005. Thus, it is evidently strong to state

that task-based process writing had a significant effect on the improvement of the participants' academic writing skills.

Table 12: Paired-samples t-test of the control group

Measure	Test	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Control	Post-Test Pre-Test	69	8.84	14.70	4.99	68	.000

In contrast to the significant improvement of the experimental group in the writing task, as for the control group had no obvious progress in the post-test writing performance. With the mean score of 8.84, the participants scored only slightly higher than the pre-test as shown in Table 12. This result reflected a very minimal increment or difference of scores between the post-test and the pre-test. Even though the mean difference was small but it was statistically significant. This is because the p-value was as low as .000 (p=.000) where p<.005. This result revealed that the techniques of the in situ approach to the English for Academic Reading and Writing course had no significant influence to the progress of the participants' academic writing skills. It was proven that the techniques or approach used in the control classes, the structure of the course and the approach used had not provided opportunities for the participants to develop their writing skills

Table 13: Independent-samples t-test to compare the written assignment final scores

Measure	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Final Essay	Experiment	69	71.75	11.89	8.25	136	.000
	Control	69	58.07	6.98			

In addition to comparing the total scores of the two groups' writing tasks through the pre- and post-tests, the inter-group analysis of the written assignment final product based on which the learners were graded were also investigated for further analysis. The results of the final essay as presented in Table 13 reported that the experimental group made significant improvement in the final essay, with p-value lower than .000 (p<.005). The results in the final essay which were analyzed through pair-samples t-test indicated that the experimental group scored significantly higher than the control group, with the mean score of 71.75 against 58.07 of the control group as shown in Table 13. The experimental group gained 13.38 more than the control group on the final essay. Such a significant difference in the mean was statistically significant because the p-value was as low as .000 (p=.000), as the last column of Table 13 displays. Thus, this provided a significant indication that the learners in the experimental group had made improvements in their final written assignment task through the task-based process writing approach in the English for Academic Reading and Writing course.

In addition to the analyses above, items from the questionnaire were taken as supportive evidence on how task-based process writing approach had affected learners' improvements towards their academic writing skills.

Statement 1: The course has helped me develop the ability to plan my own written assignment

Table 14: Planning own written work

Scale	Experimental	Control
5	29.0%	9.2%
4	58.5%	66.2%
3	12.3%	23.1%
2	0.0%	1.5%
1	0.0%	0.0%

In terms of the ability to plan own written assignment, majority of the participants in the experimental group believed that the course had helped them in developing the ability to plan their own written assignment. The results showed in Table 14 report that 29% strongly agreed and 58.5% agreed to the statement. However, 12.3% of the learners felt uncertain whether the course had helped them develop the skill. On another note, a number of the participants in the control group agreed that with the in situ approach, it had helped them develop their ability to plan their own written assignment (9.2% strongly agreed and 66.2% agreed). Additionally, learners who could not decide were about 23.1% and those who disagreed were 1.5%. Hence, the findings presented in above tables proved that the second objective of the study is achieved. In other words the task-based process writing approach had positive effects upon the improvement of the undergraduate learners' academic writing skills.

The significant gains of the experimental group on their writing performance and written product as proven by the findings above showed that the combination of task-based approach and process writing approach was actually a practice that could put the task-based process writing approach into action. Due to the tasks and processes of writing oriented lessons taught and learned through collaborative and cooperative context, the learners in the experimental group were able to demonstrate better linguistic competence, discourse competence, strategic competence, and non-verbal communicative competence than the control group (Maaruf & Maasum, 2012; Storch, 2011).

The feasible reasons to explain for the significant gains in the experimental group in terms of their improvement in the academic writing performance could be synthesized into the following categories: (1) the improvement of the learners' academic writing performance through meaningful tasks, language input, group and class interaction, and output; (2) the incentive structures of positive reinforcement from the instructor and peers; and (3) the supportive, collaborative, cooperative and communicative learning context.

Based on the findings from the quantitative analysis as well as from the qualitative analysis, all of the tasks are connected to the writing activities, which imply that all of them play a role in the success of the approach to the development of learners' academic writing skills. In other words, they may have a certain degree of influence on the objectives of the task-based process writing approach – to have learners see the beneficial effects of the tasks and writing activities, such as to enhance learners' writing fluency, to build up their confidence as writers by overcoming apprehension towards English academic essays, and also to generate and develop ideas and inner thoughts of the learners. Such influences of the

activities on the benefits of learners' academic writing skills were demonstrated by the fact that the learners in this study attributed their beliefs of the benefits of the task-based process writing approach.

The task-based process writing approach influenced the success of the academic writing, in that learners could accomplish some of the goals of the writing class, such as increasing fluency of their writing and confidence in their English writing. The tasks provided a place for learners to apply their knowledge of English writing, which is especially meaningful for learners who rarely had a chance to express their feelings in the written form of English. Therefore, ungraded writing practice in task-based process writing approach was discovered to be a good way to encourage and motivate learners to develop their academic writing skills in an unthreatening way. A number of recent researchers (Farrell & Tighe-Mooney, 2013; Pour-Mohammadi & Abidin, 2012; Tamponi, 2012) have stated that through increased writing experience, writers may acquire more effective writing strategies and more techniques to refine their writing, and thus writing practice is essential. As shown in the findings, a lot of writing practice provided seemed to be a crucial component for improving the general quality of learners' writing in the task-based process writing classroom.

CONCLUSIONS

The implications of the study should be qualified by the acknowledgement of its limitations. Upon reflections on the present study, there were several limitations coercing the data collected, the methods of analysis and the results of this study. First, this study lasted for only one semester, that is, about four months, and the contact hours were only three hours a week. A longer study would help in providing more information on how the learners involved in this study adapt to process writing pedagogy. A second limitation of the experimentation and procedures developed and investigated here is that the number of learners that participated in the study was comparatively small. The study might have been more powerful in terms of validity, reliability and practicality if more learners had participated. A third limitation in this study had to do with the fact that the learners were not randomly assigned, but self-selected into the experimental grouping. Nevertheless, permitting the learners to choose their preferred mode of instruction and group is more ethical and may have tended to equalize their comfort and motivation in the Task-Based Process Writing Approach class. Last but not least, this study limited its judgment on learners' improvements as writers within the limited time it was carried out. The primary concerns of this study were the change and development on the learners' writing skills as a result of experimenting with task-based process writing approach. Further research on how learners experience their own development as writers and whether they see their experiences in the study as helpful in the writing they are currently doing in their university programs or other courses would be valuable. At the same time, this would expand and enhance the knowledge of the experience of using tasks and process writing pedagogy in teaching academic writing skills.

The most important implication of this study is that teaching is an exploration, and that communication, collaboration and cooperation in the classrooms is the key to learning because it determines how second language learners and the instructors perform. There seems to be a need for familiarizing writing instructors with the ways of exploring the interactional

contexts of their writing classrooms in order to reflect on the effectiveness of their teaching practices. Such reflection means asking what and why questions which give them a certain power over their own teaching. This power may have transformational effects on the way instructors teach because reflection often leads to action, and immediate modification of the teaching practices.

Results indicate that the task-based process writing approach revealed a positive and encouraging effect to the development of second language learner academic writing skills. The current study has also provided further empirical evidence for the value of amalgamated approach, which specifically points at to the task-based process writing approach, to second language learning. It shows that learner-learner interaction while performing tasks provided opportunities for learners to write about and monitor language use. In addition, the current study provides further evidence for the effect of task-based process writing approach on the development second language learners' academic writing skills. The current study also demonstrates that high structural tasks within the phases of writing process support as well as enhance learners' motivation and sense of progress towards improving their academic writing skills.

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