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THE EFFECT OF A GENRE-BASED PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH ON ORANG ASLI STUDENTS' EFL WRITING PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – In the 21st century, the importance of having good English proficiency in Malaysia and globally has impacted educators, especially in terms of their pedagogical practices. Although students are exposed to 11 years of English language instruction in Malaysia, Orang Asli students still possess low English proficiency and poor writing skills. This study aims to determine the extent to which the genre-based pedagogical approach is able to improve Orang Asli students' English as a foreign language (EFL) writing performance and analyse their responses in using the genre-based pedagogical approach as a framework to improve their EFL writing performance.

Methodology – This quasi-experimental study included 78 students from a secondary school in Pahang, Malaysia. Participants were assigned to the experimental and control groups (N=39) to generate students' pretest and posttest scores. Quantitative data from the students' questionnaire were also triangulated with qualitative data from the focus group discussions with the experimental group.

Findings – The approach was effective in improving students' descriptive writing and had a more significant effect than the mainstream process-based approach. Students reacted positively to the approach as they found it useful in improving their writing skills, which correlated with their improved test scores. Therefore, the genre-based pedagogical framework can be further enhanced by incorporating more grammar-related activities to meet the learning needs of Orang Asli students lacking in EFL writing skills.

Significance – The novelty of this study is that the framework has the potential to be implemented in Malaysian secondary schools and other indigenous' educational contexts. Furthermore, this study can be a point of reference to stakeholders, English language teaching (ELT) practitioners and educators in terms of advocating a genre-based pedagogical approach in an EFL context.

Keywords: EFL, Orang Asli, education quality, empowerment, equal opportunities, genre-based pedagogical approach, EFL writing performance.

INTRODUCTION

In the current era, English is used by people worldwide for international communication and business transactions (Crystal, 2003). Therefore, out of the four basic language skills, writing effectively is a valuable asset treasured by companies alike (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2018), considering that information is constantly circulated through documents such as letters, memos and reports.

Although English is not officially recognised as a second language in Malaysia, Baskaran (1988) stated that it is still a strong second language. Therefore, national schools administered by the Malaysian Ministry of Education offer English as a compulsory subject. Students

are taught to read, write, listen, and speak English from Primary Year 1 to Secondary Form 5. Afterwards, they will sit for the Malaysian Certificate of Examination (SPM). Upon graduating secondary school, they are expected to be highly proficient when joining the working sector, as seen in the 2019 Education First English Proficiency Index, where Malaysia was labelled a high proficiency country (Education First, 2019).

However, the reality is that some are still deficient in English even though students have been exposed to 11 years of English language instruction, especially in terms of writing skills (Darmi & Albion, 2013; Yamat et al., 2014). For example, according to the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013–2025, about half of all SPM candidates obtained a failing grade for the Cambridge 1119 writing paper (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). This is especially true for many rural students, including the Orang Asli, who comprise the underrepresented Malaysian indigenous minority.

The Orang Asli is a collective of indigenous tribes residing in West Malaysia, consisting of 18 ethnolinguistic groups with their own mother tongues and cultural practices (Masron et al., 2013). The main groups consist of the Negrito, Senoi, and Proto-Malay tribes. Although native to West Malaysia, these ethnic groups combined represent the minority, forming only 0.55 percent of the entire population in 2018 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2019).

Despite job opportunities and a better quality of life offered in urban areas and permanent settlements by the government, most are reluctant to leave their villages. This is because they are accustomed to being surrounded by nature as their way of life (Aziz & Taha, 2018; Razak, 2019). As a result, these villages have been largely neglected by the government, with some having limited or even no access to basic needs, such as electricity and clean water (Razak, 2019). The Orang Asli also do not have proper access to quality education and the necessary resources for learning, which can hinder their language development (Wreikat et al., 2014) and cause them to become increasingly dependent on their teachers (Yunus & Mat, 2014).

Based on the process-based approach in the national curriculum, students are taught to plan, draft, and edit essays (Curriculum Development Division, 2003; 2018). However, the implementation of

teaching writing in Malaysian secondary schools over the years still resulted in poor writing competencies among Orang Asli students. According to the Malaysian Ministry of Education (2018), their English writing passing rate was lower than the national average. They lacked mastery of words and vocabulary, wrote agrammatical sentences, and had messy and unattractive presentations and generation of ideas in their English essays (Examinations Syndicate, 2019). Kassim and Adnan (2011) and Khan (2017) also confirmed these students' low English literacy levels.

Regarding its content and difficulty level, the national curriculum is geared towards the teaching of English as a second language (ESL), which is not suitable for Orang Asli students. The Orang Asli rarely use English in their daily lives and are categorised as English as a foreign language (EFL) learners (Darus, 2010). When it comes to learning English in the EFL classroom, Orang Asli students are known to be shy and avoid taking the initiative to ask the teacher questions regarding the lesson (Wahab & Mustapha, 2015). The teaching and learning process becomes much more difficult as teachers are neither familiar with the Orang Asli nor adequately trained to deal with the students and lack guidance and support (Mihat, 2015). Students may also find the national curriculum irrelevant since the syllabus does not include much of their heritage, only emphasising "mainstream culture, social, and economic life" (Renganathan, 2016, p. 283).

Factors including poor education infrastructure, low writing proficiency, lack of exposure to the language, and the unsuitability of the syllabus contribute to more significant challenges in learning English with increased learning difficulties (Pawanchik et al., 2010; Renganathan, 2013). According to Mihat (2016), there is a need for a positive pedagogical approach that can fulfil these requirements, prioritise developing learners' confidence (Yamat et al., 2014), and also be culturally responsive (Renganathan, 2013; Thanabalan et al., 2015) in enhancing their writing skills. Given such a situation, a genre-based approach for teaching writing may prove viable in helping Orang Asli students better than the process-based approach currently being taught in Malaysian schools. This is because the genre-based approach treats the writing process as a social and cultural practice that can accommodate linguistically disadvantaged learners (Hasan & Akhand, 2010; Hyland, 2007). Moreover, compared to the process-based approach, the genre-based approach provides more input for

Orang Asli students to acquire written knowledge and initiates them to learn writing skills through collaborative writing and teacher scaffolding.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teaching EFL Writing

Research on foreign language writing initially followed the composition theory and practice on first language writing, but EFL-based studies have gradually formed their own niche and research area. Existing EFL writing approaches consist of product-based, process-based, and genre-based approaches, all of which have been advocated and used to teach the English language (Hyland, 2003; Silva, 1990). Firstly, the product-based approach to writing emphasises the product of writing rather than the process. According to Gabrielatos (2002), “students are encouraged to mimic a model text, usually presented and analysed at an early stage” (p. 5). Silva (1990) stated that in the product-based approach, the product of writing is realised by rhetorical drills, grammar, and sentence structure.

According to Steele (2004), the product-based approach comprises four stages that guide students to mimic model texts. Firstly, the teacher provides model texts and highlights parts of writing (e.g., the concept of thesis statement, topic sentence, organisation). The next step involves isolated, controlled practice of textual features through repetition and drilling. This is followed by a focus on the organisation of ideas. Finally, students use the learnt features to create the product with enough fluency and competency.

Initially, the product-based approach was preferred by teachers due to its efficacy in preparing students for written examinations. Still, some scholars opposed the method as it restricts both the learners’ linguistic and personal potential and ignores the students’ thinking ability such as forming and implementing thoughts through written activities (Cui et al., 2010; Prodromou, 1995). This meant that practitioners who supported the approach believe that organisation and language control are the key elements in creating a successful essay rather than developing written ideas. Furthermore, it was a quintessentially teacher-centred approach as students developed their writing ability

through imitation of input – learners are expected to mimic the pattern for writing provided by the teacher (Badger & White, 2000).

Next, the process-based approach to writing was developed to focus on the process of writing rather than the final product. Hyland (2003) is of the opinion that learners develop their writing skills through a complex and recursive process rather than linear. It encourages students' creativity in writing with enough time and positive feedback. According to Nordin and Mohammad (2006), teachers become facilitators in the writing classroom by guiding students to learn writing, rather than merely teaching them.

Tribble (1996) broke down the entire writing process into five distinct stages. The writing process begins with *pre-writing*, where students engage a topic and brainstorm relevant ideas. This is followed by the *composing* or the drafting stage, where students make a draft based on the generated ideas. The next stage, *revising*, consists of improving students' drafts based on teachers' feedback. Students may need to rearrange points, further develop sentence structures, rectify grammatical errors, or even rewrite certain key ideas. Afterwards, the fourth step involves *editing* or making minor changes to the text and finally *publishing* it as a completed product. Process-based writing also involves taking notes, creating visual aids, reviewing each other's work, and providing feedback and commentary on the final product (Steel, 2004).

Although the process-based approach is employed as the main method of teaching writing to Malaysian secondary students, the reality is that low proficiency students and those from rural schools are still struggling to write proper English texts. This is because the approach is a "highly cognitive, individualist, largely asocial process" (Atkinson, 2003, p. 10), indicating that the writing process does not consider the social aspects of writing. In addition, it fails to address the writing needs of diverse students due to the differences in communicative purpose, audience, and context for learners from different language backgrounds.

A Genre-Based Approach to Writing

Based on the product-based and process-based approaches, the genre-based approach was developed as a writing approach that "focuses on

the understanding and production of selected genres of texts” (Lin, 2006, p. 69). Hasan and Akhand (2010) asserted that the genre-based approach views “writing as a social and cultural practice” (p. 81). Compared to previous EFL writing approaches, it is a relatively new branch of teaching and learning English writing that views “genre as a product in writing” (Dirgeyasa, 2016, p. 47).

According to the British Council (2020), genres consist of different types of spoken or written discourse classified by content, language, purpose, and form. In the context of linguistics, however, the term refers to “a distinctive category of discourse of any type, spoken or written” (Swales, 1990, p. 33), comprising a particular communication event, a specific goal, variants different from its typical features, limitation and rules on its content, form and shape, and a certain discourse community it belongs to. On the other hand, Hyland (2007) viewed it as “abstract, socially recognised ways of using language” (p. 150) created or shaped by the discourse community it belongs to.

Based on the above definitions, it is clear that genre is a class of communication events with specific goals, and social contexts shape its process. In the context of writing, the genre is used to group texts that share a typical linguistic style addressing repetitive events, having a conventional style, certain readers, and a particular purpose (Thoreau, 2006). Various aspects of genres for writing include the purpose of communication, themes, conventions, medium, reader (audience), and writer. Under this definition, text types under the same genre share similar lexical and grammatical features and ultimately the same goal.

For the genre-based approach, language plays an important role in helping learners reach specific goals in context (Hyland, 2004). The teacher provides explicit instruction on text structures and explains why they are written (Hyland, 2007). Hyland (2007) viewed genre-based pedagogy as appropriate for teaching English to non-native speakers as it is “explicit, systematic, needs-based, supportive, empowering, critical, and consciousness-raising” (pp. 10–16).

The main benefit of using the genre-based approach for this study is that it aids low proficiency students in the process of language learning by focusing on linguistic resources rather than writing strategies. This is considering that they are already linguistically disadvantaged,

such as lacking vocabulary and having poor grammar (Hyland, 2007). Furthermore, more emphasis is also placed on promoting their understanding of the genre's purpose of communication and its features at every discourse level (Johns, 1997), thus helping writers become aware of the creation of texts to fulfil social goals under certain situations.

The genre-based approach to writing is represented via Rothery's (1996) Model of the Genre Teaching and Learning Cycle. The first stage, *modelling*, is when the teacher establishes the field by breaking down the model genre text. This is followed by *joint negotiation of text*, in which the teacher creates another model text with students' input and emphasises collaborative writing. Lastly, *independent construction of text* is when the student writes the genre based on what was learnt, with minimal assistance from the teacher. At any point of the cycle, the teacher and students are free to backtrack to reinforce the previous writing stages; thus, the bidirectionality of the relationship between the stages.

Past Studies of Genre-Based Approach

Research on the effectiveness of the genre-based approach for writing has been conducted in EFL classrooms around the world since the inception of genre studies. Past studies have shown the approach to be successful in improving students' writing (Wu, 2017; Wang, 2013; Chaisiri, 2010).

Wu (2017) conducted a quasi-experimental study on 207 students in China to determine its effectiveness on students' argumentative writing for four months. It was found that students improved their overall writing proficiency after the experiment. On the other hand, Wang (2013) did a similar study on 64 students to investigate students' genre awareness and writing competence. The participants were taught to write letters of apology over the course of 16 weeks. Results showed that the approach was useful in helping students develop their writing competence and that it sensitised their genre awareness, improved their holistic writing quality, and enhanced their lexical density. In Thailand, Chaisiri (2010) implemented the approach for teaching writing to 40 students for eight weeks and found that students clearly improved their writing after intervention and reacted positively.

Studies done by Nueva (2016) and Khodabandeh (2014) also suggested that the genre-based approach had a larger impact on students as compared to other existing approaches. Nueva (2016) conducted a quasi-experimental study in the Philippines on 80 students by comparing the genre-based and process-based approaches on students' performance in writing news articles for a semester. Results showed that students who were exposed to genre instruction demonstrated more improvement than the process-based approach. In Iran, Khodabandeh (2014) performed a similar study on 79 students, identifying whether the awareness of the argumentative genre could be achieved by explicit, implicit (control), and no-instruction (self-study) genre approaches. It was found that students who received explicit genre instruction outperformed the other groups.

However, limited studies on the genre-based approach have been done in Malaysia (Dripin, 2010; Yap, 2005). Dripin (2010) carried out qualitative research on upper secondary students who took up the English for Science and Technology (EST) subject to explore the effects of the approach on their report writing skills. Students who received genre instruction wrote better reports and achieved control of the report genre – they explained technical and scientific terms better and provided examples to support their argument. An earlier study by Yap (2005) introduced the genre-based approach to teach explanatory writing to 19 students in a Malaysian secondary school. The approach was found to impact students' writing performance as their scores increased significantly after intervention. They also improved their aspects of generic and information structuring, field focus, addressing formality, and establishing the cause and effect.

Even though the genre-based approach has been tested in Malaysian schools, it has not been applied for Orang Asli students. The lack of literature on the effect of the genre-based writing approach in Orang Asli classrooms clearly shows this study's novelty of implementing the approach for teaching EFL writing. This study also fulfils the fourth Sustainable Development Goal – inclusive and equitable quality education that advocates equal access to all levels of education for indigenous peoples (UN General Assembly, 2015).

METHODOLOGY

Research Objectives

The research objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To determine the extent to which the genre-based pedagogical approach is able to improve Orang Asli students' EFL writing performance.
2. To analyse Orang Asli students' responses when using the genre-based pedagogical approach as a framework to improve their EFL writing performance.

Design

For the first research objective, this study used a quasi-experimental design to collect students' essay scores. In addition, a pretest-posttest design was employed to compare the writing performances of the experimental and control groups before and after the intervention. Finally, quantitative data from the students' questionnaire was also triangulated with the qualitative data from focus group discussions with the experimental group to achieve the second research objective. According to Creswell (2012), triangulation allows for "a more complete understanding of a research problem" (p. 541).

Participants

As Pahang State Education Department recommended, one secondary school in Pahang, Malaysia was selected for this study as it had the highest number of Orang Asli students in the region. Initially, a total of 100 upper secondary students were selected for the study. However, only 78 students fully participated as the rest either dropped out of the study or did not complete the pretest and posttest. The participants were Form 4 students aged 16 at the time of the study and selected from the same cohort of the school.

A quasi-experimental design permitted the division of students based on their respective classrooms so as not to disrupt other ongoing classes. The design was also chosen as writing lessons for this study were conducted during school hours. Using purposive sampling, one Form 4 class was chosen as the experimental group (Class A), and

another class was chosen as the control group (Class B). Both groups were of equal sizes (N=39). Three English language teachers were also selected from the same school, in which two teachers taught the experimental and control groups respectively, and one teacher scored the pretest and posttest essays.

Intervention

The intervention of this study consisted of four 60-minute writing lessons, in which students from the experimental and control groups experienced a total of 240 minutes of writing instruction. For the experimental group, the genre writing instruction was based on genre-based lesson plans adapted from Ahn (2012) and Chaisiri (2010) with further adjustments to suit the English language syllabus for Form 4 students (*DSKP KSSM Bahasa Inggeris Tingkatan 4*). For the control group, the process writing instruction was adapted from writing lessons listed in the same syllabus. Both experimental and control lessons covered the content standards (4.1 and 4.2) and learning standards (4.1.1 to 4.2.4) as stated in the Form 4 writing component (Curriculum Development Division, 2018, p. 34).

Instruments

This study used three instruments, which were the pretest and posttest, questionnaire, and focus group discussion. To answer the first research objective, the pretest and posttest were used to measure students' performance before and after the intervention. The pretest and posttest consisted of an essay question that required students to provide a description of their hometown in 350 words, which was suitable for measuring the variable of the study (i.e., students' writing performance) and fitted the research design. Although students were required to write only one essay in the test, the writing activity was sufficient to ensure students' engagement in the tests. Therefore, it was deemed appropriate for their educational and literacy level (Barkman, 2002).

The questionnaire and focus group discussion were used to gather students' responses after exposure to the genre writing instruction to answer the second research objective. The questionnaire was adapted from Tuan (2011) to elicit students' responses regarding the genre-based approach for learning descriptive writing. The questionnaire

consisted of 18 Likert-scaled items covering the genre-based lessons, in which students could respond on a scale of one (Strongly Agree) to five (Strongly Disagree). For the focus group discussion, students were invited to participate voluntarily. The list of focus group questions was also adapted from Tuan (2011). Each focus group session lasted for 30 minutes and was held in groups of four, excluding the researcher.

Validity and Reliability

Measures were taken to address and rectify the potential threats to the internal validity of a quasi-experiment as listed by Creswell (2012). This was done by selecting participants from the same cohort and school to overcome the threat of history and maturity. There was no threat of regression as no abnormal or extreme scores were obtained in this study.

Prior to the study, the genre lesson plans, questionnaire, and focus group question list were sent to several ESL experts of the research university for content validation. The questionnaire was then pilot tested in a small-scale study, which yielded a Cronbach's alpha reading of 0.935, indicating that the questionnaire was reliable based on the acceptable level of internal consistency.

Procedure

After obtaining permission from the Malaysian Ministry of Education, the Pahang State Education Department and the school principal, an experienced English teacher was trained to use the genre-based approach to teach the experimental group. In contrast, another teacher was selected to teach the process-based approach to the control group. Before the intervention, students were assigned groups and then given a pretest, followed by a posttest at the end of the intervention.

Afterwards, a questionnaire was distributed to the experimental group to report their responses, and some students voluntarily participated in focus group discussions. Their experiences and responses regarding the genre-based lessons were then manually transcribed and compiled by the researcher with the help of audio transcription software. The transcription was also later sent to the participants for member-checking, and its accuracy was promptly verified.

Ethical Considerations and Vulnerability

The researchers had ensured that the selected students were not mentally or emotionally affected by the study, as consent to participate was voluntary. Therefore, students were not susceptible to harmful wrongs, exploitation, or threats to their interests or autonomy. Participants who could not cope were eligible to withdraw at any point while the study was being conducted.

Data Analysis

The pretest and posttest manuscripts were graded by the Head of English Language Panel from the selected school who received in-house training to use the Cambridge English Writing Assessment Scale (UCLES, 2014) to assign scores. Then, the pretest and posttest scores were analysed using paired samples t-test, in which t-scores were generated using the Statistical Pack for Social Sciences (SPSS, version 26.0). Finally, using the same software, the questionnaire data were reported via descriptive statistics in percentage and means.

Transcriptions from focus group discussions were coded and interpreted using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis for the qualitative data. The content was familiarised, which generated the initial codes. The themes were searched and reviewed, then defined and named, and finally, the report was produced (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Both quantitative and qualitative data were then triangulated to give credibility to the overall findings. Students' names were also replaced with alphabets (e.g., Student A) to retain anonymity in the reporting section.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Research Objective 1: To determine the extent to which the genre-based pedagogical approach is able to improve Orang Asli students' EFL writing performance

After the intervention, both groups' pretest and posttest scores were compared using paired samples t-test and tabulated according to their respective overall score and sub-scores. The sub-scores represent the aspects based on the Cambridge English Writing Assessment

Scale (UCLES, 2014). The four aspects are *Content*, *Communicative Achievement*, *Organisation*, and *Language*. Table 1 shows the comparison of the pretest and posttest scores of the experimental group.

Table 1

Pretest and Posttest Scores of the Experimental Group

Aspects	Paired Differences		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation			
Overall	2.77	2.67	6.48	38	0.00*
Content	0.54	1.23	2.73	38	0.01*
Communicative Achievement	1.00	0.80	7.86	38	0.00*
Organisation	0.62	0.63	6.07	38	0.00*
Language	0.62	0.75	5.14	38	0.00*

*P<0.05 denotes significance

Based on Table 1, the p-values that were significant ($p < 0.05$) included the overall score and all aspects of *Content*, *Communicative Achievement*, *Organisation*, and *Language*. It is worth noting that the significance for *Content*, while acceptable, was slightly higher than other aspects. This meant that the genre-based approach was effective in improving the overall descriptive writing in the experimental group, specifically their content, communicative achievement, organisation, and language. This finding corroborates with Dripin (2010), who claimed that the genre-based pedagogical approach positively impacted students' EFL writing performance.

Table 2 shows the comparison of the pretest and posttest scores of the control group.

Table 2

Pretest and Posttest Scores of the Control Group

Aspects	Paired Differences		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation			
Overall	1.46	1.67	5.47	38	0.00*
Content	0.31	0.83	2.31	38	0.03*
Communicative Achievement	0.08	0.62	0.77	38	0.45*
Organisation	0.69	0.73	5.91	38	0.00*
Language	0.39	0.49	4.87	38	0.00*

*P<0.05 denotes significance

Based on Table 2, the p-values that were significant ($p < 0.05$) included the overall scores and aspects of *Content*, *Organisation*, and *Language*, but not for *Communicative Achievement*. This meant that the process-based approach was effective in improving the overall descriptive writing in the control group, specifically their content, organisation, and language.

By comparing test scores from both groups, the mean differences from the experimental group were more significant than the control group, except for the aspect of *Organisation*. Therefore, the statistical results suggested that the genre-based approach had a larger effect on students' descriptive writing as compared to the process-based approach, especially in terms of communicative achievement. This finding is aligned with Nueva (2016), whereby students exposed to the genre instruction showed considerable improvement than the process-based approach.

The quantitative findings from the pretest and posttest indicated that the approach was effective in improving students' descriptive writing, especially in terms of the content, communicative achievement,

organisation, and language. Students who were exposed to genre-based instruction achieved positive test scores for the overall text (Mean=2.769, SD=2.670), with significant sub-scores on the aspects of *Content* (Mean=0.538, SD=1.232), *Communicative Achievement* (Mean=1.000, SD=0.795), *Organisation* (Mean=0.615, SD=0.633), and *Language* (Mean=0.615, SD=0.747). This finding is in tandem with past studies (Wu, 2017; Wang, 2013; Dripin, 2010; Yap, 2005) in which the genre-based approach was successful in improving students' writing skills.

The results also showed that the genre-based approach had a larger effect on students' descriptive writing as compared to the process-based approach, especially in terms of communicative achievement. Students from the experimental group obtained higher test scores than the control group, with the overall mean scores of 2.769 and 1.462, respectively, and *Communicative Achievement* sub-scores of 0.615 and 0.077, respectively. This finding is similar to Nueva (2016) and Khodabandeh (2014). Students exposed to genre-based instruction showed more improvement than those exposed to other approaches, which was the process-based approach for this study. However, the perceived improvement on *Content*, *Organisation*, and *Language* was ruled out as students from the control group also achieved significant sub-scores for these aspects. In fact, the process-based approach did not significantly impact the aspect of *Content* ($p>0.05$).

Research Objective 2: To analyse Orang Asli students' responses of using the genre-based pedagogical approach as a framework to overcome challenges in learning EFL writing

After the posttest, a questionnaire was distributed to the experimental group for students to report their responses and focus group discussions were also held with students from the experimental group. Out of the 39 students, 31 students (79.5%) answered the questionnaire, and 24 students (61.5%) voluntarily participated to share their experiences and responses regarding the genre-based lessons. The reliability of the questionnaire was measured using Cronbach's alpha. The test yielded a positive reading of 0.935, which indicated that the questionnaire was valid and reliable. The response findings are tabulated in Table 3.

Table 3
Responses of Genre-Based Approach

	Item	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)	Mean
1	I can understand the possible contexts of the genre.	12.90	51.61	16.13	9.68	9.68	2.52
2	I can use my background knowledge to understand the genre.	6.45	48.39	22.58	22.58	0.00	2.61
3	I can express my personal opinions towards the genre.	12.90	19.35	51.61	12.90	3.23	2.74
4	I can understand the purposes, audiences, content, and organisation of the genre.	3.23	45.16	41.94	3.23	6.45	2.65
5	I can understand the language of the genre after being taught.	16.13	58.06	22.58	0.00	3.23	2.16
6	I can understand the organisation of the genre after being taught.	12.90	41.94	38.71	6.45	0.00	2.39
7	I am aware that each genre has different writing conventions.	16.13	35.48	45.16	3.23	0.00	2.35
8	I know what to write in my essay after being taught.	19.35	38.71	22.58	19.35	0.00	2.42
9	I know how to write my essay after being taught.	22.58	32.26	35.48	6.45	3.23	2.35
10	Writing many drafts can help improve my own essays.	0.00	54.84	32.26	9.68	3.23	2.61
11	Teacher's feedback helps me with the content of the essay.	25.81	58.06	6.45	9.68	0.00	2.00

(continued)

102	12	My final essay has improved after my teacher's feedback.	9.68	32.26	45.16	6.45	6.45	2.68
	13	Learning writing techniques are necessary and useful to write any text types.	51.61	35.48	6.45	6.45	0.00	1.68
	14	The descriptive genre is good enough for my English level.	9.68	38.71	29.03	19.35	3.23	2.68
	15	I can understand the descriptive genre given.	6.45	41.94	35.48	9.68	6.45	2.68
	16	Knowing descriptive writing makes me want to write more.	6.45	19.35	58.06	12.90	3.23	2.87
	17	I can write better after learning descriptive writing.	6.45	51.61	22.58	16.13	3.23	2.58
	18	I know that the writing style and rules of descriptive writing are different from other genres.	22.58	32.26	29.03	12.90	3.23	2.42

Scale: 1 - Strongly Agree; 2 - Agree; 3 - Neutral, 4 - Disagree, 5 - Strongly Disagree

Table 3 shows students' responses towards the genre-based approach, in which they generally agreed to all statements. For Item 1, a majority of students agreed that they *could understand the possible contexts of the genre* (51.61%), followed by neutral (16.13%), strongly agree (12.90%), and disagree and strongly disagree, respectively (9.68%). Overall, students generally agreed with the statement (Mean=2.52). In the focus group, all 24 students agreed that they were able to understand the possible contexts of the genre. Student A stated that they understood the type, storyline, and mood of the essay. Next, the majority agreed that they *could use their background knowledge to understand the genre* (48.39%), followed by neutral and disagree, respectively (22.58%), and strong agreement (6.45%), with no students who strongly disagreed. Overall, students generally agreed with the statement (Mean=2.61).

For the third item, most students were neutral regarding whether they *could express their personal opinions towards the genre* (51.61%), followed by agree (19.35%), strongly agree and disagree, respectively (12.90%), and strongly disagree (3.23%). Overall, the students generally agreed with the statement (Mean=2.74). This is supported by the focus group, whereby all students agreed that they could express their personal opinions regarding the genre. Student B explained that they “changed a bit on what the teacher has taught”, such as names of people. Three students (12.50%) described their hometown feelings as “enjoyable and fun”.

When queried on whether students *could understand the purposes, audiences, content, and organisation of the genre*, the majority agreed (45.16%), followed by neutral (41.94%), strongly disagree (6.45%), and strongly agree (3.23%), with no students who disagreed. Although the students generally agreed with the statement (Mean=2.65), about half from the focus group (54.17%) understood the aspects of the genre, while the remaining (45.83%) understood a little. Students B and C were able to explain the purpose (describe experience and atmosphere), audience (teacher, students, themselves), and content (names of people, hometown). Nine students (37.50%) mentioned that they began their essay by establishing the setting, followed by describing activities such as “planting and fishing” and ending with “feelings of happiness and enjoyment”.

Most students agreed that they *could understand the language of the genre after being taught* (58.06%), followed by neutral (22.58%), strongly agree (16.13%), and strongly disagree (3.23%). Overall, the students generally agreed with the statement (Mean=2.16), which

was mostly supported by the focus group (75.00%). Student C knew that the essay required writing in the past tense and first-person perspective. The remaining quarter (25.00%) who disagreed stated that they “found it hard as [they] did not know how to write in the past tense”. Student D mentioned that they did not know how to conjugate words correctly, such as ‘eat’ becoming ‘ate’.

Furthermore, on whether students *could understand the organisation of the genre after being taught*, students generally agreed to Item 6 (Mean=2.39). Many students agreed (41.94%), followed by neutral (38.71%), strongly disagree (12.90%), and disagree (6.45%), with no students who strongly disagreed. This finding is in tandem with the focus group, whereby four students (16.67%) mentioned that they gave the situation using the phrase ‘holiday start’ at the beginning of the essay. Students A and E said that they “ended [their] essay by stating [their] feelings”.

A majority of the students were neutral on whether they were *aware that each genre had different writing conventions* (45.16%), followed by agree (35.48%), strongly agree (16.13%), and disagree (3.23%), with no students who strongly disagreed. Overall, students generally agreed with the statement (Mean=2.35), similar to the focus group. Although they believed that the vocabulary and language of descriptive writing are similar to other genres, they were able to identify the differences in pattern, format, and language style. Students B and C mentioned that their essays were different from speeches (lack of salutations), reports (lack of date, signature, writer details), e-mails (lack of sender and receiver names), and letters (degree of politeness).

For Item 8, most students agreed that they *knew what to write in their essay after being taught* (38.71%), followed by neutral (22.58%), and strongly agree and disagree, respectively (19.35%), with no students who strongly disagreed. Overall, students generally agreed with the statement (Mean=2.42), with strong support from the focus group. Three students (12.50%) said that they now “knew how to write an essay about [their] hometown and give elaborations”. Moreover, nine students (37.50%) stated that they learnt relevant vocabulary such as the phrase ‘chicken coop’, which the teacher promptly translated and explained.

When asked whether students *knew how to write their essay after being taught*, the majority were neutral (35.48%), followed by agreement (32.26%), strongly agree (22.58%), disagree (6.45%), and strongly disagree (3.23%). The consensus (Mean=2.35) is in line with those of

the focus group (95.83%). Student A stated that he/she “memorised vocabulary [and] content points, and changed them according to [his/her] own view”. In fact, three students (12.50%) stated that they were initially unsure how to write prior to the intervention.

Consequently, students generally agreed that *writing many drafts could help improve their own essays* (Mean=2.61), with most who agreed (54.84%), followed by neutral (32.26%), disagree (9.68%), and strongly disagree (3.23%). Although no students strongly agreed to Item 10, all students from the focus group agreed to the statement and stated that drafting enabled them to practise their writing skills and added knowledge to their ability to write the content and draw up activities. According to Student F, “Drafts helped me improve my language style and understand the meaning,” suggesting that the students’ constant practices enabled them to produce better quality writing over time.

When queried on whether their *teacher’s feedback helped them with the content of the essay*, the students responded with a general agreement (58.06%, Mean=2.00), followed by strong agreement (25.81%), disagreement (9.68%), and neutral (6.45%), with none who strongly disagreed to the statement. The focus group mentioned that the teacher helped them to translate the vocabulary from English to Malay, and also taught one of the weaker students to create sentences. Six students (25.00%) stated that the teacher performed error checking at certain parts of the lesson, and Student D said that “the teacher would ask us to write first, and then she will check for errors”. These practices are factors that motivated the students’ confidence in writing and motivated them to improve their writing skills.

The majority were neutral on whether their *final essay had improved after their teacher’s feedback* (45.16%), followed by agreement (32.26%), strong agreement (9.68%), and disagreement and strong disagreement, respectively (6.45%). Overall, the students generally agreed to Item 12 (Mean=2.68), and all students from the focus group agreed as well. Student F felt that his/her “essay [was] better than before”, with more content points and higher word count. Five students (20.83%) stated that they could write by themselves now; previously, they consistently made errors in sentences and meanings and also wrote fewer words.

Subsequently, most students agreed that *the descriptive genre was good enough for their English level* (38.71%), followed by neutral (29.03%), disagree (19.35%), strongly agree (9.68%), and strongly disagree (3.23%). Overall, the students generally agreed with the statement (Mean=2.68). Furthermore, the students generally agreed that they *could understand the descriptive genre given* (Mean=2.68), with most who agreed (41.94%), followed by neutral (35.48%), disagree (9.68%), and strongly agree and strongly disagree respectively (6.45%). When asked on whether *knowing descriptive writing made students want to write more*, about half of the respondents were neutral towards Item 16 (58.06%), followed by agree (19.35%), disagree (12.90%), strongly agree (6.45%), and strongly disagree (3.23%). Overall, there was a positive response regarding the statement (Mean=2.87). In this vein, it was evident that the genre-based pedagogy enabled students to understand the language and textual features of the descriptive genre despite their low proficiency level and different language background (Hyland, 2007).

Next on the list, the students mostly agreed that they *wrote better after learning descriptive writing* (51.61%), followed by neutral (22.58%), disagree (16.13%), strongly agree (6.45%), and strongly disagree (3.23%). As such, there is a consensus for Item 17 (Mean=2.58). Lastly, the students generally agreed that they *knew that the writing style and rules of descriptive writing were different from other genres* (Mean=2.42), with most who agreed (32.26%), followed by neutral (29.03%), strongly agreed (22.58%), disagreed (12.90%), and strongly disagreed (3.23%). The mutual agreement on both statements showed that the students understood what was being taught and were aware of the purpose of communication and features (Johns, 1997).

Therefore, the triangulated findings from the questionnaire and focus group discussions indicated that students reacted positively to the genre-based approach. They found it useful in improving their writing skills, which correlated with their improved test scores. Students generally agreed with all questions pertaining to the treatment, with moderate agreement on three focus group questions. This finding is in line with Chaisiri (2010), in which students reacted positively towards the genre-based approach. They also became more confident in their writing skills as they were able to interact with the teacher and actively participate in the writing activities, implying that the pedagogical approach was able to cater to their learning needs

(Mihat, 2016; Wahab & Mustapha, 2015; Yamat et al., 2014). This is further supported by strong agreement on the statement that *learning writing techniques are necessary and useful to write any text types* (Mean=1.68).

However, some students still faced challenges in EFL writing under the genre-based approach. Half of the focus group (50.00%) demonstrated little understanding of the genre's purposes, audiences, content, and organisation when queried on the genre aspects. This might be attributed to the limited exposure to genre-based instruction since students need more time to practise writing and internalise the genre writing techniques. In addition, six students (25.00%) were unable to understand the language of the genre after being taught due to their poor grammar skills. They "found it hard as [they] did not know how to write in the past tense" and were unable to grasp verb conjugation (e.g., 'eat' becomes 'ate'). This finding suggested that more emphasis should be placed on grammar writing for an effective genre-based framework for students who are linguistically disadvantaged (Hyland, 2007).

CONCLUSION

The key findings indicated that the genre-based pedagogical approach was effective in improving EFL Orang Asli students' descriptive writing and had a more significant effect than the process-based approach provided by the mainstream English syllabus. They reacted positively to the approach as they found it useful in improving their writing skills, which correlated with their improved test scores. Although the approach was able to cater to their learning needs in improving their EFL writing (Mihat, 2016; Wahab & Mustapha, 2015; Yamat et al., 2014), some students still faced challenges despite being exposed to genre-based instruction, notably their weakness in content and language.

Therefore, this study recommends that the genre-based pedagogical framework be further improved by incorporating more grammar-related activities to meet the learning needs of Orang Asli students lacking in EFL writing skills (Kassim & Adnan, 2005; Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2018; Khan, 2017). The study is significant to Malaysian secondary schools with Orang Asli students as it has the

potential to be implemented not only for indigenous students but also for those with low English proficiency. In addition, teachers from rural schools can use the framework so that they are better informed of their students' needs and further improve their current teaching methods. However, the limited scope of the targeted descriptive genre suggests that more research needs to be conducted on a variety of text forms (e.g., expository and argumentative writing). This study also recommends future research to include more samples and extend the period of intervention. The novelty of this study is that the framework employed has the potential to be implemented in Malaysian secondary schools and other similar indigenous' educational contexts. Furthermore, this study can be a point of reference to stakeholders, ELT practitioners, and educators advocating the genre-based pedagogical approach in an EFL context.

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