UiTM Students' Writing Needs, Writing Problems, and Language Courses: A Qualitative Systematic Review of Literature Prior to WeCWI's Course Integration

Boon Yih Mah[1], Rushita Ismail[2], Shun Chone Liaw[3], Rasaya Marimuthu[4], Rosmaliza Mohamed[5], and Teck Heng Lim[6]

[1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6] Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Pulau Pinang

Corresponding email: [1]mahboonyih@gmail.com

Article Information	Abstract
	To tackle the Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) students' writing problems besides fulfilling the writing needs of UiTM learners and instructors, web-based instruction (WBI) was proposed as a supplementary instructional tool. A hybrid e-framework namely Web-based Cognitive Writing Instruction (WeCWI) was proposed to be adopted for developing WBI for writing performance and critical thinking enhancements. Before embracing WBI as a supplementary instructional tool of an English course, a qualitative systematic review of literature was conducted on the related studies of UiTM students' writing needs and challenges as well as UiTM English courses. BEL422 Report Writing was identified as the most appropriate course among all the UiTM English courses offered up to 2013 owing to its syllabus, course structure, and assessment components focussing on report writing. Besides, this course was also crucial for the students to acquire their writing competence to communicate effectively in their future workplaces. Thus, BEL422 Report Writing was selected to be integrated with WeCWI for developing and designing a WBI to facilitate the teaching process as well as to enhance the learning outcomes.

INTRODUCTION

The mastery of good writing skill has always been a predicament among Malaysian university students. Despite the awareness of the importance of English language for workplace communication among the undergraduates, the students are yet to perform well in their writing assessments. Based on the performance analysis and the writing challenges prescribed in the system (S), instructor (I), and learner (L) or SIL domains (Mah, Irfan Naufal Umar, & Thomas Chow, 2013) as well as the poor writing skills based on SIL's learner domain (Mah & Khor, 2015), the L2 writing challenges faced by UiTM students fall under seven perspectives including writing complexity, literacy, proficiency, critical thinking, information literacy, interlanguage, and writing anxiety. Consequently, developing a supplementary WBI grounded on a holistic framework to efficiently tackle their writing problems was proposed.

Web-based Cognitive Writing Instruction (WeCWI) is a hybrid e-framework for the development of a web-based instruction (WBI), which contributes towards instructional design (Mah, 2014) and language development

(Mah, 2015). WeCWI's contribution in instructional design is divided into macro and micro perspectives while for language development, it covers linguistic and non-linguistic perspectives. In this study, the researchers employed a qualitative systematic review to analyse the studies on UiTM students' writing needs and problems, as well as the English courses offered by UiTM in 2013 with the objective to select an appropriate English course for WeCWI integration prior the development of WBI.

METHODOLOGY

Systematic review is a scientific investigation process helping researchers to detect the key findings to an identified research scope in a study (Tranfield, Denyer, & Smart, 2003). Hence, a qualitative systematic review was utilised in this research through collecting, sorting, and summarising the results of related main studies without combining them statistically (Ahi & Searcy. 2013; Cook, 1997). All the potentially relevant articles on language studies conducted in UiTM in general and poor writing skills among UiTM students in specific were gathered before interpreting and synthesising the results of their findings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

English has become the medium of instruction (Nor Aslah Adzmi, Samsiah Bidin, Syazliyati Ibrahim, & Kamaruzaman Jusoff, 2009; Rushita Ismail & Muriatul Khusmah Musa, 2006), course references, the most important subject in the curriculum, as well as the mandatory course for all UiTM students (Rushita Ismail & Muriatul Khusmah Musa, 2006). However, most L2 learners in universities are unaware about their writing mistakes. As compared to other language skills, UiTM students are still having problems in writing (Chittra Muthusamy, Faizah Mohamad, Siti Norliana Ghazali, & Angelina Subrayan @ Michael, 2010) though Malaysian students are generally found positive towards learning English language (Asmah Haji Omar, 1992).

UiTM has been practising the traditional teacher-centric way of teaching and learning for decades including textual instructional medium, 'chalk and talk' method, and students-write-and-teacher-correct routine as found by Dzullijah Ibrahim and Peridah Bahari (2005). Their findings were further supported by the poor performance in report writing among the Civil and Electrical Engineering undergraduates from UiTM Penang Branch as reported in the performance analysis of BEL422 Report Writing in January-April 2011 and September 2011-January 2012 (Mah et al., 2013). As reported in Mah and Khor (2015), some of the past studies on the writing predicaments of UiTM students are listed in Table 1 as below.

TABLE 1
POOR WRITING SKILLS OF UiTM STUDENTS REPORTED IN THE PAST STUDIES

Research Area	Past Studies on Writing in UiTM
Writing module	Affiana Kadriana (2007)
Writing performance	Noriah Ismail et al. (2013); Rahmah Mohd Rashid (1999); Rohayah Nordin and Naginder Kaur Surjit Singh (2003); Surina Nayan (2002); Yah Awg Nik, Rozlan Abdul Rahim, Badariah Sani, & Nor Shidrah Mat Daud (2006)
Writing anxiety	Noorzaina Idris (2009)
Writing apprehension	Nor Shidrah Mat Daud (2003); Noriah Ismail, Suhaidi Elias, Intan Safinas Mohd Ariff Albakri, P Dhayapari Perumal, and Indrani Muthusamy (2010)
Writing process	Nor Shidrah Mat Daud (2005)
Writing needs	Noriah Ismail, Saadiyah Darus and Supyan Hussin (2012); Noriah Ismail, Supyan Hussin, and Saadiyah Darus (2012a, 2012b)
Writing creatively	Chittra Muthusamy et al. (2010)
Teacher written feedback	Noriah Ismail, Sumarni Maulan, and Nor Haniza Hasan (2005, 2008)
Writing attitude and learning problems	Noriah Ismail et al. (2012a, 2012b)
Language skills	Fazdilah Md Kassim (2013)
Writing creatively	Chittra Muthusamy et al. (2010)

Besides the writing problems, Nor Aslah Adzmi et al. (2009); Noriah Ismail et al. (2012); Noriah Ismail et al. (2012a); Rohayah Nordin and Naginder Kaur Surjit Singh (2003) called for concerns on the writing needs of UiTM students beyond the existing writing curriculum. Table 2 highlights the writing needs from both learners' and instructors' perspectives (Mah & Khor, 2015).

TABLE 2
WRITING NEEDS AMONG LEARNERS AND INSTRUCTORS FROM UiTM BRANCHES

Writing Needs	Learners	Instructors	Past Studies
Online writing program that can guide them to be critical in their writing process.	UiTM Johor Branch	.	Noriah Ismail et al. (2012), Noriah Ismail et al. (2012a)
Online-based platform with suitable writing tools, guides, links, and resources.			
Online discussion on writing through blogs and e-forums			
Acquiring good English language proficiency	-	UiTM Kedah Branch	Nor Aslah Adzmi et al. (2009)
Implementation of process writing approach instead of product writing approach to teach writing	-	UiTM Perlis Branch	Rohayah Nordin and Naginder Kaur Surjit Singh (2003)

In addition, self-instructional materials were found imperative to improve UiTM students' performance (Jamilah Karima, Peridah Bahari, & Norhayati Mohammad Noor, 2003). Students could learn better in advanced information and communication technology (ICT) aided environment (Fook & Gurnam Kaur Sidhu, 2009). They were found in favour of using blog and digital forum as learning tools in online writing program. In a study conducted in UiTM Penang Branch about the students' readiness to use web-based resources, the online resources were found capable of providing them with the latest and useful extra information. Based on these web-based resources, lecturers were recommended to provide extra and in depth explanations (Peridah Bahari & Salina Hamed, 2008).

English courses like English for Specific Purposes (ESP), English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) are offered in most of the universities to expose students to a diversity of English language skills apart from what they had learned in their secondary schools. In UiTM, the Department of English Language and Linguistics in Academy of Language Studies is responsible for offering the English language courses at the pre-diploma, diploma, and degree levels (Academy of Language Studies, 2012). Pre-diploma and diploma students in Semester 1, 2, and 3 are enrolled in General English courses while undergraduate students are required to take EAP, ESP, or EOP courses. Several studies conducted on different English courses in UiTM from 2003 till 2012 are summarised in Table 3.

TABLE 3
STUDIES CONDUCTED ON DIFFERENT UiTM ENGLISH COURSES FROM 2003 TILL 2012

English Courses	Year	Researchers	Studies
BEL 200 Mainstream English 1 (previous code)	2010	Chittra Muthusamy, Faizah Mohamad, Siti Norliana Ghazali, & Angelina Subrayan @ Michael.	Enhancing ESL writing creativity via a literature based language instruction.
BEL 260 Preparatory Course for MUET	2003	Leele Susana Jamian, & Emily Jothee Mathai.	Reading attitudes of UiTM Penang students: an exploratory study.
	2005	Noriah Ismail, Sumarni Maulan, & Nor Haniza Hasan.	The impact of teacher written feedback on students' revised drafts: A study among part 2 Diploma students in UiTM Johor.
	2005	Rasaya Marimuthu, & Elangkeeran Sabapathy	The effects of concept mapping as a cognitive strategy in reading comprehension lessons: An experimental study on a group of BEL 250 students of UiTM Terengganu.
BEL 311 English for Academic Purposes	2009	Mah, B. Y., & Er, A. N.	Writing Web logs in the ESL classroom: A study of student perceptions and the Technology Acceptance Model.

	2010	Cheang, E. K., Mah, B. Y., & Ch'ng, P. E.	Preference of learning style among the diploma students of UiTM Penang: An overview.
	2012	Noriah Ismail, Saadiyah Darus, & Supyan Hussin	ESL tertiary students' writing needs: A framework for a supplementary online writing program.
BEL422 Report Writing	2009	Siti Akmar Abu Samah, Kamaruzaman Jusoff, & Abu Daud Silong	Does spoon-feeding impede independent learning?

English language courses offered in 2013 at UiTM Penang Branch consist of two types: proficiency and specific purpose courses. Students were required to enrol for the general proficiency English courses at the diploma level, such as BEL120, BEL130, BEL260, and BEL311. These were the compulsory subjects and a requisite for graduation. For the degree students, they had to register for ESP courses such as BEL422/420, BEL432, and BEL442 (Academy of Language Studies, 2012).

According to Nor Aslah Adzmi et al. (2009) in the study on the academic English language needs about specific writing skills, most students viewed their performance in writing technical reports as above average, while subject-specialists viewed the students' performance in writing those as below average. It was apparent that the students required more exposure to this type of writing or having more practice. Meanwhile, based on the responses of English language instructors, the existing English Language courses had not contributed much towards enhancing the students' language skills.

In 2013, BEL422 Report Writing was one of the UiTM core English courses at degree level. It carried two credit units with two credit hours. This course introduced the practical aspects of preparing and presenting reports in oral and written forms. Five course outcomes and ten areas of course content were listed in the course syllabus. Based on the course syllabus and course information, students were exposed to writing exercises and classroom activities that were focused on developing a formal report writing style and format throughout the fourteen weeks of the semester (Academy of Language Studies, 2010a, 2010b). Producing a report of 1500-2000 words, oral presentation of the written report, a test, and the attendance were among the course evaluation requirements (Academy of Language Studies, 2010a). The report contributed the highest weighting at 40 percent. The students needed to complete the informational report in groups of three to four (Academy of Language Studies, 2009).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

WeCWI is a theoretical-and-pedagogical-based framework formulated in response to the seven perspectives of poor writing skills among UiTM Penang undergraduates, which comes with its significance in literacy, language, cognitive, and psychological developments. Based on the analysis of the related literature, WeCWI was needed as a WBI framework due to the global impact of the Internet, the positive outcome of web-based writing instruction, and the need for a supplementary online writing programme for UiTM students.

Based on the review of BEL422 Report Writing, some observable setbacks between the course prescription and authentic classroom practices were identified. For instance, there was no prescribed text book for this course but only three recommended text, four references, and four internet sources were provided for the students and instructors as references. All classes were limited to a maximum of 20 students based on the BEL422 Report Writing course syllabus (Academy of Language Studies, 2010b); however, most BEL422 classes had more than 20 students in the real practice.

As process writing approach was prescribed as the method of teaching for BEL422 Report Writing, many instructors had restricted their approaches to teach writing in isolation. Besides, there was no proper channel and well-structured instructional tool to maximise the pedagogical potential of the internet though some web links were recommended for instructors to use as students' online learning activities. Lecturers' guidance and feedback as well as the internet had become the fundamental sources of input for the undergraduates to perform well in this course as there was no prescribed textbook found in this course.

CONCLUSION

As supported by the writing needs of both UiTM learners and instructors as well as the limitations found in the utilisation of web-based resources, a WBI developed by adopting WeCWI as a supplementary instructional tool was recommended to be integrated with BEL422 Report Writing. As compared to other ESP courses offered by UiTM, there was a more immediate need for the students to acquire writing competency in BEL422. Besides, the assessment of writing in this course contributed the most percentage of the overall course assessment. Although ESP courses are not made compulsory to all UiTM students, the command of English competency is essential for workplace communications such as in meetings, oral presentations, report writing, and interviews.

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