

Hots Questions and Narrative Writing Ability of Lower Primary Pupils in a Vernacular School

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Abstract

Narrative writing is a skill given emphasis by the Ministry of Education (MoE) through the specific Content Standards (CS) and Learning Standards (LS) stipulated in the Curriculum Standard and Assessment Document (DSKP) and aligned to the Common European Framework of References (CEFR) scales. However, lower primary pupils; particularly in urban areas still struggle to produce narrative writings that show quality. This paper presents and discusses an Exploratory Case Study on the use of Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) questions to improve pupils' narrative writing skills. The study involved 6 purposively chosen lower primary pupils in a vernacular school in Sarawak. Data were collected through classroom interactions, WhatsApp interviews and document analysis. This was to ensure the validity and reliability of the data. Findings of the students' interview responses indicated that they felt the HOTS questions helped improve their narrative writing as evident in the analysis of their writing tests. Discussions on the findings imply pedagogical, theoretical and policy implications relevant to the Malaysian education and students aspirations outlined in the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025. Meanwhile, areas for further research can focus on the effectiveness of HOTS on improving other language skills and competency.

Keywords: narrative writing, HOTS questions, vernacular school, lower primary, learning standards

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Malaysia's declining performance in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) up till 2011 brought to light the need to streamline and overhaul the Malaysian education system. Upon this foundation came the Malaysian Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013-2025 which stipulates that by the end of the schooling education, every student needs to attain six key attributes to be globally competitive; namely knowledge, thinking skills, leadership skills, bilingual proficiency, ethics, and spirituality and also national identity. Hence, the MEB specifies 11 shifts to transform the current education system. The aim is to guide policy makers and educators to be aware of the goals of education in Malaysia in producing the human capital or future generation of leaders that are able to compete at the global level and who possess the necessary skills to face the challenges of the future.

Thinking skills and bilingual proficiency are two of the attributes that set the premise of the study presented and discussed in this paper - on the use of Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) questions in improving pupils' narrative writing skills. In line with the student aspiration of possessing thinking skills, the Ministry of Education has conducted many programmes and taken many initiatives to improve students' HOTS. This is also highlighted in other aspects of the MEB where the Ministry aims to increase the number of HOTS questions to at least 40% by 2016 in public examinations such as the UPSR which is the primary school assessment. In line with this, teachers have had to incorporate activities that inculcate HOTS. By pushing for the incorporation of thinking skills in the teaching and learning process, learners are expected to acquire the higher cognitive skills of Bloom's Taxonomy; namely the analysing, evaluating and creating thinking skills. This is clearly stated in the MEB that "...every child will master a range of important cognitive skills, including critical thinking, reasoning, creative thinking and innovation..." (Ministry of Education Malaysia 2013: E-7).

Meanwhile, bilingual proficiency means that “every child will be, at minimum, operationally proficient in Bahasa Malaysia as the national language and language of unity, and in English as the international language of communication” (Ministry of Education Malaysia 2013: E-10). Proficiency in both languages involves all the four skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing. In any languages, writing is found as one of the most difficult skills for learners to acquire (Rahmawati et al., 2019; Sianturi et al., 2020). Nevertheless, it is a skill that is vital for learners to achieve success in life (Warwryk-Epp, et al., 2004; Nair & Liang 2018); even more in Malaysia’s education system as it is an exam oriented system.

1.2 Importance of Writing

Writing is a critical skill required for individuals to communicate with one another and also to enhance opportunities to excel in life (Kamariah et al., 2018) through the cultivation of one’s ability to think and develop ideas (Trisnadewi, 2021). This explains why narrative writing is a skill given emphasis by the Ministry of Education (MoE) through the Standard Curriculum and Assessment Document (DSKP).

The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) was introduced through the MEB in 2012 and was used as a benchmark to assess the pupils based on 6 bands of proficiency ranging from A1 to C2. At the primary school level, pupils are expected to achieve A2 Mid at the end of the 6-year schooling process. The introduction of CEFR into the English language has brought about some reformation and realignment to the curriculum where listening and speaking have been separated but are now taught as separate skills. In the context of this study, the assessment of writing skills is the Primary School Assessment Test; locally known as Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah (UPSR), which is the public examination at Year or Primary 6. It was found in the 2019 report by the Malaysian Examination Syndicate (MPM) that only 76.6% and 82.24% of pupils from national and national-type or vernacular, schools; respectively, achieved a passing grade. That percentage meant 91,579 year 6 pupils in that year were not able to achieve the minimum passing score and highlights that despite having spent 6 years learning English, learners still struggle to acquire the basics of writing (Shamsulbahri & Aziz, 2020).

In vernacular schools, English becomes the third or fourth language for the learners to learn where English is only afforded 2.5 to 3 hours a week. Ironically, the ‘operationally proficient’ in the English Language requirement is applicable to all students in all school types and yet the amount of learning hours for the language is not the same between national and vernacular type schools. In addition, many parents of learners in the suburban and rural areas do not place as much emphasis on being proficient in English in comparison to schools in big cities such as Kuala Lumpur.

1.3 Writing

Despite English being hailed as the second language of Malaysia, a large number of Malaysians still lack the capability to write in English (Rosli & Maarof 2017) because writing is an act of transforming knowledge into something that can be understood by readers. Writing involves a multifaceted task as learners must produce work that has purpose, audience, clarity, unity and coherence (Sianturi et al., 2020) while also showing that they have a good grasp of vocabulary, spelling and grammar. Meanwhile, effective writing is a skill that is grounded in the cognitive domain which encompasses comprehension, application and the creation of new information, as well as creative vision, problem-solving skills and corrections to achieve the finalized work (Defazio et al., 2010). Hence, writing is a difficult skill that must be taught in the classroom (Swaran et al., 2020) and an appropriate approach must be used to overcome this problem. This makes the teaching of writing challenging as the short amount of classroom time is insufficient as learners need to learn the many aspects involved in the writing process, such as planning the writing, translating, drafting, revising, and editing (Yao, 1997).

As writing encompasses a wide array of cognitive skills, applying HOTS in teaching writing is apt. These processes are reflective of Bloom’s classification of the higher thought processes involving analysing, evaluating and creating (Abu Hassan et al., 2020). Swaran et al. (2020) therefore suggest that students must be taught using the new process approach which will activate their HOTS to produce quality writing. They explain that learners will be able to write better when they possess the skills and knowledge needed to produce ideas which are more critical, creative and analytical in nature, in addition to identifying new and alternative problem-solving strategies

Writing exercises therefore need to be carried out from a young age in order for learners to produce writing that is of a suitable level of proficiency (Moses & Mohamad 2019). Though it seems like a simple skill in primary schools, the lack of competency in writing would continue to higher education level where current studies show that PhD graduates reported academic writing as the main struggle in their studies (Jeyaraj 2020). It is believed that in order to churn out more high-quality university graduates, it is therefore important for learners at a young age to not just acquire but master the writing skill.

1.4 Narrative Writing

Gürler & Yaylacik (2015) state that there are a number of genres that are collectively deemed to be narrative, such as “storytelling, descriptive, enthusiastic, excitatory, epic, instructive, informative, explanatory, controversial, demonstrative, dreaming, talking about the future and humorous expression” (as cited in Ulu 2019). In the context of the *UPSR* examination, learners are required to write narratives that emphasize storytelling which includes characteristics of main individual, location, time, intention and reaction.

Narrative writing is integral for learners as it provides a platform for learners to understand themselves better as they express and explore their opinions in writing. Moses & Mohamad (2019) claim that it is also able to provide therapeutic benefits to aid learners in managing certain aspects of their daily lives which they may not feel comfortable sharing with others. This allows them to use their writing as an outlet for these emotions and decisions. Narrative writing, especially, aids learners in their social development as they must figure out how they want a character to react or respond to a given situation, whether morally acceptable or not.

Studies show that a significant number of Malaysian learners struggle to produce narratives that are of a reasonable quality which necessitates for them to portray an event (Jayavalan & Razali 2018) and learners must use proper syntax, sentence constructions and concepts and should be taught using the process approach which was emphasised in the national English language syllabus (Baharuddin & Mohamad 2020). The process approach involves learners suggesting, classifying ideas, prewriting, outlining, making revision, making amends and assessing. This approach to teaching writing has often been neglected in classrooms in Malaysia due to limitations such as the classroom time available.

1.5 HOTS Questions

Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) is defined as a multidimensional non- algorithmic justification which produces a large number of clarifications about the conception of values, introspection and self-regulation and covers the analysis, evaluation, and creation (Ballakrishnan & Mohamad, 2020). The incorporation of HOTS has been an on-going process and goal of the MoE to produce learners that are capable of competing internationally (Swaran et al. 2020). The teaching of thinking skills is in line with the National Education Philosophy (NEP) which aims to produce learners that are balanced in all aspects (Nadara & Chew, 2018). Also, critical and creative thinking are crucial 21st century learning skills which go hand-in-hand with problem solving and in coming up with original and novel ideas (Musa & Yamat, 2021) and these skills are necessary for future economic success which is the main financial resource for all nations (Jais et al., 2021).

Despite HOTS being given a significant amount of emphasis in the Malaysian education system as stipulated in the Malaysian Education Blueprint, Musa & Yamat (2021) claim that there still exists a significant number of teachers who are unprepared to integrate HOTS into their lessons. The incorporation of high level questioning is claimed by Jais et al. (2021) to aid the learning process and encourage active involvement from the learners which will, then, improve their ability to think critically, which is a core component of HOTS. These skills are also essential for the future work force as critical thinking and creativity are crucial to obtain success in the current global direction and without the inculcation of HOTS in the classroom, learners would struggle with implementing it easily into their daily lives and eventually fail to solve problems, understand, and obtain fresh awareness on learning.

One way to incorporate HOTS into the classroom is by asking HOTS-based questions as these questions can be used by the teacher to maximise the learners’ previous knowledge and to reinforce teacher-taught ideas. Examples of questions that are based in the higher-order thinking skill sphere are questions that analyse by reviewing thoughts, identifying expectations and disagreements, recognising inconsistencies, evaluation through comparison of pros and cons, assessment of criterion, classification, clarification of connotation, making inferences through deductions, searching of indications, explanation and justification of procedure and outcomes, suggesting and supporting with reasons that are able to withstand analytical inspection, asking questions that aim for creation through designs, compositions, adaptations, modifications, reconstruction and creation (Jais et al., 2021).

One such method of incorporating HOTS questioning in the classroom is by employing Philip Cam’s Question Quadrant which he introduced in 2006. The Question Quadrant was developed to catalogue and group questions to better engage learners in philosophical dialogue which eventually leads learners to think at a higher level. Scholl (2010) believes that the questions quadrant is able to improve the learners’ ability to answer questions at increasingly more difficult levels of thought. The fundamentals of the question quadrant include reasoning and conceptual exploration, evaluating as well as concluding, all of which corresponds to the upper levels of Bloom’s Revised Taxonomy of analysing, evaluating, and creating.

1.6 HOTS Questions and Narrative Writing

During a writing task, learners must respond to the topic in order to activate their HOTS which provides them with the ability to reason and the background of the topic based on the context of their daily life (Swaran et al. 2020). Furthermore, learners will become more effective writers once they are proficient enough to “generate ideas critically and analytically” (Swaran et al. 2020) which can be achieved through asking questions which aid pupils in understanding concepts as well as promoting critical and creative thinking. As writing is also viewed by some researchers (Ulu 2019) as a method of inculcating creativity for learners, it is, therefore, crucial that the HOTS creativity skill be incorporated and amalgamated to produce learners who are adept at using HOTS in their lives. Utilisation of questions which were designed with purpose is a key characteristic of effective teaching as learners will be able to form linkages between their previous knowledge and for understanding about their environment (Nappi 2017).

1.7 Conceptual Framework

The underpinning theory of this study is Cognitivism as in education, the theory focuses on ones’ ability to think, remember, carry out self-reflection and be motivated to learn (Al-Shammari et al., 2019). Essentially, cognitivism focuses on the goings-on in ones’ brain which influences an individuals’ responses and recognises processes such as thought planning, setting goals, and strategies in organisation. Petersen (2014) opines that cognitivism also embodies a person’s memory, thought, reflection process, abstraction and metacognition, or thinking about thinking, all which are essential to the learning process (as cited in Al-Shammari et al., 2019).

Through cognitivism, learners use writing as a way to express their thoughts and to make connections between what they already know and what they are currently learning in a smooth process when all aspects mentioned above are taken into consideration. This cognitive- based writing approach will emphasise the mental processing of information which, in turn, will guide student learning and expression with new information, experiences, and abilities by enabling learners to frame, outline, map and organise thoughts in a new way. Creative and critical thinking skills are covered in Higher Order Thinking Skills and the application of Higher Order Thinking Skills in pedagogy can improve student achievement (Sopiani et al., 2019). As higher order thinking skills aid learners to think deeply on the topic, it will enable learners to inductively and deductively grasp new knowledge which ranges from simple to sophisticated, and concrete to abstract. Specifically for young learners, they require more assistance in terms of topics that require more abstract thoughts as they are, as yet, unable to fully grasp certain terms and concepts.

Through the accommodation, assimilation and amalgamation in the cognitive thought processes brought about by the use of HOTS questions to relate previous knowledge with new information, learners will be able to produce narrative writing, in short, answers to topics, that can express original ideas and thoughts which shows a multitude of perspectives and concept visualisation.

1.8 Research Questions

This paper aims to answer the following research questions:

1. How does the teaching of narrative writing using HOTS Questions affect pupils’ narrative writing?
2. How do students perceive HOTS questions in improving their narrative writing ability?

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

This study employed an Exploratory Case Study design. It was conducted in a vernacular primary school in Sarawak, Malaysia. The design requires the researcher to first collect qualitative data which allows exploration of a phenomenon and permits researchers to first ascertain measures which are based on solid data obtained from the participants as opposed to beginning research with a pre-determined set of variables (Creswell, 2012).

2.2 Sample

The participants were selected through purposive sampling in which the selection criteria were the participants’ classroom-based assessment results, non-English L1, current learners of the basic English subject and active participants in the online learning sessions. Seven participants fulfilled the criteria. They were given pseudonyms in compliance to ethical research guidelines.

2.3 Instrument

Three research instruments were used in the current study. The first was a formal face-to-face interaction in schools prior to the pandemic movement control order (MCO) and informal interview conducted through WhatsApp during

the MCO. These were to obtain feedback and information from the participants regarding the use of HOTS questions in their narrative writing leaning sessions. Second, writing test from which the students' writings were analysed to determine the changes or improvements in their writings. Third, reflective journal, from which the students perceptions on the use of HOTS questions were captured.

2.4 Data Collection and Analysis

In line with the qualitative approach of this study, the data collection and analysis were conducted concurrently. The data collection procedure began with participants responding to two topics, one without HOTS questions to guide them and one with HOTS questions which were marked based on the marking rubric suggested by Bailey and Brown (1984). This is followed by the researcher keeping in contact with the participants through WhatsApp to obtain their feedback on the use of the HOTS questions and finally, participants were asked to write a reflective journal about their thoughts, opinions, and perceptions regarding the implementation of HOTS questions. As the participants were young learners, they were provided with a set of questions to aid them in the reflective journal writing process.

The data analysis employed was thematic analysis. The themes and codes in the interviews and reflective journal were analysed based on the pre- and post- writing texts produced by the participants of the study and marked based on the marking rubric suggested by Bailey and Brown in 1984. Baharuddin and Mohamad state that there are five aspects of a piece of writing, namely: organisation, sound expansion of ideas and subject, syntax, punctuation, spelling and mechanics and style and quality of expression or vocabulary usage (2020). These are the aspects that are focused on when examiners mark learners' writings; while still maintaining a holistic point-of-view. Responses from the participants were validated by a retired English teacher with over a decade of experience in marking UPSR papers and a chief examiner with 3 years of experience in the role. This was to ensure greater interrater reliability.

2.5 Validity and Reliability

Key to any research is ensuring the validity and reliability of data collected by the researcher. In order to overcome these issues, the trustworthiness and truthfulness of the participants and researcher must be addressed. In this study, the trustworthiness and truthfulness of the participants have been ensured as the researcher had previously built good rapport with the participants during the face-to-face interaction time in April which was suggested by Korstjens & Moser (2018) as prolonged engagement with the participants. The transferability of the data can be determined by ensuring good interpretation and verbatim transcription of the informal interview explained in the discussion to ensure that readers are provided a clear-cut and transparent view of how the data was analysed. Coupled with triangulation of data, which conforms to the reflexivity suggested, through the reflective journal and analysis of the scoring descriptors, the rigour of this study will be enhanced and ensured.

3. Results

This section discusses and reports on the findings of the thematic analysis obtained from the reflective journal, informal interview and scoring descriptors. This section is then discussed based on the research questions posed.

3.1 Thematic Analysis – Level 1

The following subsection will list out evidence obtained from the informal interviews that were conducted through WhatsApp, reflective journal feedback and the scoring descriptors used.

Table 2. Evidence from interviews and journals

Evidence	Theme
“Task 1 is easy because it was my daily routine at home.”	daily routine
“I completed task 1 based on the experience in my life. It is my current activities at home.”	experience
“Task 2 also easy for me to answer since it is my hobby during my evening time with my family.”	hobby
“The questions able to help me is in task 2 about my hobby.”	helpful
“Yes, I like those questions in task 2 next time.”	positive response
“...task 1 is easy because I just need to write about my hobby.”	hobby
“Task 2 was difficult for me. In task 2 I need to imagined and think more about the pictures I chose.”	imagination
“... the question was very helpful for me because it guides me to write more and make me to write better.”	helpful, quality of ideas
“The questions was very useful and a good guidance for me to plan a sentences.”	useful, helpful, planning
“...the questions help me to make a sentence and improve my writing skill.”	improve writing skill
“Task 2 is easier because teacher guide me to complete the task 2...”	guidance
“...the questions are able to help me write more and better.”	expansion of ideas,

	quality of ideas
“Teacher’s questions help me to in prove my writing skill.”	improve writing skill
“The questions for the Task 2 provide me a good guidance.”	good guidance
“I think about Task 1 is my experience because it is true and really.”	experience
“...the questions able to help me write more.”	expansion of ideas
“... the questions helped me to write better.”	quality of ideas
“... I want more questions to help me write.”	positive response
“... the questions help me think about what I going to write.”	HOTS thinking

Table 3. Evidence from Scoring Descriptors

Evidence	Theme
“... sequence is logical”	logical thinking
“... supporting evidence is given for generalisation...”	evaluating ideas
“Adequate title, introduction, and conclusion; body of essay is acceptable...”	concluding
“Essay address the issue but miss some points...”	clarity of purpose
“...some grammar problems don’t influence communication, although reader is aware of them, no fragments or run-on sentences.”	reviewing
“... not wordy; register OK; style fairly concise.”	planning

3.2 Thematic Analysis – Level 2

This subsection categorised the themes identified in the first level of thematic analysis into broader categories. This enabled the researcher to synergise the data obtained from each of the data sources to form linkages between them.

Table 4. Categorisation of Themes

Themes	Category
daily routine	
experience	previous knowledge
hobby	
imagination	
helpful	
positive response	perception/feelings
useful	
good guidance	
quality of ideas	improvement
improve writing skill	
expansion of ideas	
HOTS thinking	
logical thinking	application of HOTS
evaluating ideas	
concluding	
reviewing	
planning	
clarity of purpose	

4. Discussion

4.1 Research Questions 1: How Does the Teaching of Narrative Writing Using HOTS Questions Affect Pupils’ Narrative Writing?

Analysis of the participants’ writing texts, with and without HOTS Questions, found that most of the participants were able to show a marked improvement in their writing ability when HOTS questions were provided. The scores obtained by the participants are as in Table 5 below:

Table 5. Scores obtained by the participants

Participant	Task 1 (without HOTS questions)		Task 2 (with HOTS questions)	
	Marker 1	Marker 2	Marker 1	Marker 2
1	17	15	20	19
2	17	16	11	12
3	7	6	18	18
4	5	5	17	17
5	9	8	13	15
6	10	11	19	18
7	12	11	16	16

Based on Table 5 above, all but 1 participant showed improvement in their writing ability after HOTS questions were introduced to them. This is significant as it proves the effectiveness of HOTS questions in aiding participants to

integrate their previous knowledge into the writing process. Furthermore, Bjorklund and Causey (2017) (as cited in Jais et al., 2021) states that improved scores also signal that there is improved accomplishment. The effectiveness of HOTS questions in improving the writing ability of the participants is supported by express statements from participants, for example participant 6 who stated that the questions were indeed able to improve their writing ability.

“...the questions help me in prove (improve) my writing skill...”

(Participant 6)

“... the questions (were) able to help me write more... (and) better...”

(Participant 5)

In addition, the participants also perceived the questions to be a guide to expand their ideas as well as a scaffold to organise their essays better as noted by some of the respondents:

“...the question(s) was very helpful for me because it guides me to write more and make me to write better...”

(Participant 4)

“... it is good guidance...”

(Participant 5)

“...guide me to complete Task 2 (because) the questions are able to help me...”

(Participant 6)

An outcome of such positive feedback is that the HOTS questions were perceived as having been of aid to the participants rather than a hindrance and this will enable individuals who make use of HOTS questions to be able to write more fluently and on a greater range of topics than without. Moreover, as HOTS questions have been claimed to aid in the understanding of values and self-regulation, the ability of the individuals to express their ideas will be enhanced following the use of the analytical, evaluative and creative abilities attained as discussed by Ballakrishnan and Mohamad (2020).

Some notes were taken by the researcher and the third-party examiner based on general observations of the documents during the document analysis process. Based on the observations, the researcher and examiner found that there was a greater range of sentence structures used in Task 2 as compared to Task 1.

“... wider variety of sentences used in Task 2, more complex sentences and signposting also used throughout...”

(Marker 2)

“...Task 1 employs generally simple and compound sentences with some run-on sentences present...”

(Marker 1)

This could be an effect of the HOTS questions whereby participants engaged knowledge that they had learnt previously in the classroom in order to make sentences more appealing based on the content that was also more varied. This supports the statement made by Musa and Yamat (2021) who claim that the integration of HOTS allows an individual to produce unique and original ideas. This was also shown in the fact that participants were able to write more in-depth responses when the HOTS questions were provided. This allows them to express their opinions in the writing and serves as an outlet for young learners who are beginning to experience their way in the world (Moses & Mohamad 2019).

The implication of this is that individuals who employ HOTS questions will be better able to express their thoughts and opinions as opposed to an individual that does not use HOTS questions in their daily life. This will impede the individual from producing a piece of quality writing as they would be less able to articulate ideas freely from a lack of exposure and experience.

4.2 Research Questions 2: How Do Students Perceive HOTS Questions in Improving Their Narrative Writing Ability?

The second research question touches on the participants' perception of whether or not the HOTS questions were able to help them improve their narrative writing ability. The participants highlighted that the HOTS questions were indeed able to improve their narrative writing ability. Thus, HOTS questions were beneficial in thought-provoking the cognitive processes regarding the topic for the participants. This favourable view of HOTS questions was able to further motivate participants to fully immerse themselves in the tasks assigned. In addition, as participants had experienced with the topics assigned, they were largely engaged in the HOTS questions, and this aided the procedure

in becoming easier thanks to their previous knowledge and possessed schemata. This corroborates the view of Jais et al., (2021) who posit that an enhanced ability to think critically, a key concept of HOTS, enables individuals to be actively involved and incorporate their own personal experiences. This is noted by participants as below:

“Task 1 was easy to me to describe because it was my daily routine... (and is) based on the experiences in my life (and) my current activities at home...”

(Participant 7)

“...Task 2 was difficult for me... (because) I need to imagined and think more... (but) the question(s) was very helpful... because it guides me to write...”

(Participant 4)

The responses above indicate that the participants opined that those HOTS questions were beneficial to achieve the goal of the task of writing narratively. Being that the participants view HOTS questions as beneficial, this will enable to write better as suggested by Swaran et al. (2020). Other responses related to opinion of HOTS questions and writing are that the questions were useful, helpful, and good guidance as can be seen in the excerpts below:

“The questions(s) was very useful and a good guidance for me to make a sentences.”

(Participant 4)

“...the questions (were) able to help me (to) write more... (and was) good guidance...”

(Participant 5)

“...The questions for Task 2 provide(d) me a good guidance.”

(Participant 6)

“...the questions (were) able to help me ... in task 2...”

(Participant 7)

Based on the responses above, participants were all very positive towards the use of HOTS questions to guide them in their task. This combined with the improved result from Task 2 is evidence that individuals will be able to produce writing of a higher quality when they possess the required skills and content for idea generation in a critical and creative manner. This finding supports the argument by Swaran et al. (2020) where learners are better able to write when they think at a higher level of cognition and incorporate reasoning as well as critical and analytical generation of ideas. Furthermore, when asked if they would want more HOTS questions guidance in future writing tasks, participants also responded positively as shown in the notes below:

“Yes, I (want) questions (like) in Task 2 next time.”

(Participant 7)

“...I (want) more question(s) given to guide me in my writing...”

(Participant 4)

“Yes, I (want) questions like in Task 2 next time to help me write...”

(Participant 5)

With participants being so open to the continued use of HOTS questions in other tasks, it can be concluded that the use of HOTS questions to improve the narrative writing ability was successful and should continue to be utilised in the classroom setting. This will aid the Ministry of Education in their goal of creating learners with the ability to think critically and creatively when and where it counts most and to inculcate HOTS questions into the daily lives of the learners.

Despite learners experiencing some difficulty with the HOTS questions in the beginning, cooperation from the parents and communication between participants and researcher has aided to bridge the gap and show to the participants the possibilities that are open to them should they continue to apply HOTS questions in everything they do. It is, therefore, crucial for learners to repeatedly apply HOTS questions in all aspects of their learning with and without the guidance of the teacher to fully comprehend and become familiar with the entire process. This supports the claim by Nappi (2017) whereby learners who are able to employ HOTS in their daily life will be able to correlate their previous knowledge to their new knowledge. This ensures that there is coherence in the learning process and

learners will not struggle to make connections between what they know and what they are learning.

Besides, this also serves as evidence that HOTS questions are beneficial to other educators and should be employed more widely in the classroom. HOTS questions are not something to be feared and with some old-fashioned hard work and practice, both teacher and learners can grasp the concept behind the use of HOTS questions to enhance the teaching and learning process and improve the overall production of human capital of Malaysia.

The previous paragraphs have discussed the evidence that proves that HOTS-based questions are able to produce positive results and participants felt that they were beneficial to their narrative writing process. With so many positive outcomes from the implementation of HOTS, it is even more crucial for teachers and all levels of educators to inculcate the habit of HOTS into their daily teaching and learning. In doing so, learners will be able to fully utilise and incorporate HOTS into their narrative writing so as to be able to produce a quality piece of writing.

4.3 Implication of the Study

The researcher has studied the effect of HOTS questions on learners' writing skill and while the use of HOTS questions in the learning process is not new, its usage in the field of narrative writing, specifically for young learners, is as yet uncharted territory and is a potential wealth of knowledge to guide other educators to make advances in this field. Despite requiring guidance from more knowledgeable others in the beginning, with consistent use, the application of HOTS questions when writing can become an automated process without guidance from teachers or parents. The findings of the study show that HOTS questions are indeed beneficial and able to improve the narrative writing ability of learners and they should be employed more widely in the teaching of languages, not just in the process of thinking of ideas but also in the organisation and expression of said ideas. In order to achieve this, teachers must be aware of the importance of HOTS questions and be fully committed to incorporating HOTS questions in the classroom.

It has been mentioned by numerous researchers that teachers are not prepared to carry out HOTS and are unsure of appropriate strategies to be used in a HOTS classroom. In order to overcome this major issue, action must be taken by the Ministry of Education, State Education Offices, and the District Education Offices to ensure that teachers are given enough support to employ HOTS questions by ensuring that they are equipped to ask HOTS questions but to also employ it in their lives. This can be achieved by providing relevant and sufficient training to teachers who are at the forefront and must be highly familiar to them in order to use HOTS questions appropriately. Teachers should also be provided with relevant resources that will guide the teachers in the application of HOTS in the classroom setting. Besides, professional and expert support can be provided by ensuring teachers have easy access to subject-matter experts.

The findings also can motivate not just learners but educators to incorporate HOTS questions into every aspect of their lessons to fully develop each aspect of the learners' mind. In this way, the automated process can begin and continue to grow in all aspects of life without missing a beat. Therefore, the Ministry of Education can consider inculcating HOTS into all subjects in school, and not just the main subjects such as English, Bahasa Melayu and Science. This can be achieved by slowly rolling out new additions to the syllabus to replace old and outdated content with newer more relevant information which includes tips and tricks to achieve this goal.

Finally, as the national workforce is dependent on new teachers, it is essential for HOTS to be incorporated into the curriculum of teacher-trainees. This will enable the MoE to focus resources on ensuring the older generation of teachers are able to get as much help as needed to learn how to incorporate HOTS questions into their classroom. HOTS should be incorporated both into the main subjects learnt during the teacher-training process to ensure that teachers are already familiar with how to inculcate HOTS into their lessons.

4.4 Recommendations for Future Research

In future research, a larger sample size should be utilised to ensure that the results obtained properly represent the population that is in use in the study. Furthermore, it might be appropriate to suggest that the researcher conduct such research when there is face-to-face interaction between the researcher and participants to ensure that the issue of missing responses does not occur and does not become a major issue in future research.

Besides that, future research can consider conducting the same study on learners of a different proficiency level to determine if HOTS questions are truly useful for learners of all proficiency levels. This will provide the results of the study with greater reliability as there will be a larger source of data with which to broaden the scope of the study and also to be able to make better and more accurate generalisations regarding the results obtained.

Finally, future research can examine the effect of HOTS questions on learners' narrative writing ability over a period

of time, or as a longitudinal study, to determine if incorporating HOTS questions in the classroom will indeed benefit learners in other subjects, in their overall performance, as well as in their daily lives.

4.5 Conclusion

Based on the findings of this research, it can be concluded that Higher Order Thinking Skill (HOTS) questions possess positive effects on improving the narrative writing ability of learners. Furthermore, the use of HOTS questions was indeed able to improve the narrative writing of learners in terms of the quality of the content and also the length of the text produced. In addition, learners also felt that the HOTS questions were beneficial to the overall writing process in that it was able to guide them to think of new ideas that can be related to their previous knowledge which is one of the key concepts of HOTS.

The results of the study have also found that learners are open to the use of HOTS questions in future tasks as they perceive HOTS questions to be beneficial and able to guide them to produce narrative writing which is of higher quality. In addition to this, if learners are familiar with HOTS questions, the process of writing will be made simpler and easier as the organisation of ideas and expression can be improved greatly, through which learners will be able to make it a habit to incorporate and inculcate HOTS into their daily lives. Through this, they will be more capable to higher order thought processes and be more successful in their future endeavours.

By committing to the implementation of HOTS questions in the language classroom, learners will surely be able to reap the rewards of improved creative and critical thinking skills. This will promote the goal of the Malaysian Ministry of Education (MoE) which is to produce human capital that possesses both thinking skills and bilingual proficiency. Achieving this goal will enable Malaysia to become a powerhouse in which future leaders will be able to compete with other first-world nations. In essence, the incorporation of Higher Order Thinking Skills in the classroom must not be put off any longer if Malaysia wishes to become a nation that is able to compete internationally and be world-renown.

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