

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF I-THINK MAP IN WRITING DESCRIPTIVE ESSAY

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate either the use of i-Think map during pre-writing stage help in descriptive essay writing. This action research focuses on the effectiveness of i-Think Map in writing descriptive essay. The i-Think map used was a brace map. This action research was conducted on 20 form 1 students from semi-urban secondary school in Rawang, Hulu Selangor. Based on the observation, the students faced difficulties in writing appropriate and organized essay for their examination. I found out that the students are not exposed to the pre-writing activity in their writing class. Thus, I conducted pre-test and post-test with two interventions on the use of brace map for pre-writing activity. Reflective entries also used throughout this research to record students' understanding about the use of brace map in pre-writing activity. The scores for both pre-test and post-test are recorded and compared. Based on the observation, the result shows that their scores for post-test are higher than their pre-test. This implicates that students need to be exposed on pre-writing activity before they write the essay and i-Think map should be utilised to help them in outlining the draft of the essay.

Keywords: pre-writing, descriptive essay, secondary students, i-Think maps

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In most secondary schools, the teaching of writing are more focused on the product rather than the process of the writing. Writing is one of the main skills that the students need to be familiar with throughout their school life. This is because, writing is used in all content area as a way to assess knowledge; therefore, students who do not know how to write correctly are at a huge disadvantages (Graham, Harris, & MacArthur, 2006). The students in this study are having difficulties in writing the essay during examination despite being in the advance class. The main problem that I discovered was that, the students didn't do the pre-writing before they write the essay. Since pre-writing activities are not emphasized during the essay writing, the students are having difficulties in expanding their writing and the organization of the essay is not appropriate. This make the quality of the essay is not up to the standard, especially PT3 standard. Mogahed (2011) stated that pre-writing centres on engaging learners in the writing process and helps them discover what is important or true for them about any subject at any time.

Through the observation on 20 secondary students of form 1, they are having problem with essay organization and lacks of points to develop their sentences.

According to Kuni (2018) she states that there are a few problems in teaching writing. They are interference of native language, English competence and motivation in learning and teaching writing. Learner native language or mother tongue can influence the learners' writing skills. In this context, the students are Malay students and their native language is Malay language. The study has found out the learner native interference contributes a lot to teachers' challenge in teaching writing. They also lack knowledge of appropriate vocabulary that leads to the problem in coming up with words to express their thoughts. According to Mohammad Dayij (2011) he states that most of the students encounter problems regarding their disability to express themselves properly. He also states that some students suffer from inability to link sentences together. This affected their essay writing and their scores are not reaching the targeted mark. This demotivated them in learning writing in English. In fact, some students are not particularly concerned about their writing anymore as they don't find learning writing is importance.

Therefore, i-Think map are one of the ways that can change the students' perspective in learning writing. I-Think map has been introduced by David Hyerle to enhance the students' high order thinking skills. I utilized brace map as a tool for the students to use to write the draft of their descriptive essay. According to Yu Shu Fan, 2016, thinking maps (i-Think maps) are a pattern language. Teacher should use the map to convey, facilitate, and mediate thinking and learning so that every students will becomes more fluent with the map. This means that the students can learn language in a form of mind-mapping. Hence, I introduce brace map to the students to help them in expanding the sentences and organize the essay appropriately.

With this mind, this action research was designed to address two research objectives. First, this study was conducted to investigate the uses of brace map in improving students' score in descriptive essay writing. Next, to find out the students' perspective of using brace map as pre-writing for descriptive essay writing.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Writing skills are an important part of communication. This is eventually derived from the fact that it reinforces grammatical structures, vocabulary and idioms that we have been teaching to our students. Writing should receive more attention in class in order to prepare learners to cope with the communicative demands of real life situations (Muhamad Sidek Said, 2011). In Malaysia secondary schools, writing is one of the skills that will be tested in the examination. 40 marks are allocated to writing test where they have to write an essay and literature component. Malaysian Examination Syndicate (2004) cited by Normah Othman (2006) clarifies that the test are to test students' ability to understand and use the correct grammar, to apply language skills for interpersonal purposes, to apply language skills for informational purposes, and to apply language skills for aesthetic purposes. The students also be able to relate about their lives in their writing. This is supported by O'Melia, (2011) that states "if students are unaware how writing relates to their own lives, and how they are able to benefit from knowledge of written language, they might be less likely to learn." (p 3).

Another problem that can be seen was the students are not exposed to the pre-writing activity which is a very important step in writing essay. Another problem that was faced by the teacher is the students have no motivation in learning to write. The students' lack of vocabulary also make them demotivated to learn writing.

Pre-writing is one of the stages in writing process. This stage helps the students find ideas and arrange them properly (Mogahed, 2013). Pre-writing strategies are used to generate and clarify ideas. Teacher should be aware about the importance of pre-writing strategy can help the students in developing their sentences and organize them neatly. Go (1994) as cited by Mogahed et al. (2013) states that teachers of English as a Second Language can use pre-writing strategies at the early stages of instruction to help the students acquire good language skills. Prewriting activities not only help the students in essay writing but also help the students in understanding the language itself. He states that prewriting involves energizing student participation in thinking, talking, group interaction, and skeletal writing activities that become components of a writing task and it also helps the students to be more confident in themselves as they will build interpersonal, thinking, and planning skills that can be utilized in other fields in prewriting process. Research shows that learners who are encouraged to engage in an array of prewriting experiences prove greater writing achievement than those enjoined to get to work on their writing without this kind of preparation (Cotton as cited in Mogahed et al., 2013).

I-Think map is chosen as pre-writing because it was introduced by Ministry of Education in 2012. Pelan Pembangunan Pendidikan Malaysia (Malaysian Education Development Plan) 2013-2025 (as cited in Aion, Haniff & Goh et al., 2016) emphasizes the concept of higher order thinking skills (HOTS) to encourage and produce the next generation to have critical and creative thinking skills. Therefore, the implementation of i-Think map will help in nurturing the thinking skills among the students in their essay writing.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This research was based on Kemmis and McTaggart Action Research Model, which suggests a four-step of action research: identifying a problem, planning an intervention, implementing intervention and evaluating the outcome (Koshy, 2010). Qualitative data was collected for this study.

This study was conducted in a secondary school located on a township in the district of Rawang, Hulu Selangor. The school comprises the teachers and students that use Malay as their first language. All 20 students that participate in this study are Malay and they hardly use English in their daily conversation. Their English proficiency level are below intermediate referring to their average score in previous examination which is C. I choose these participants because they are convenience group as they are in my class. The students have been informed of the study and they are given a form indicates their willingness to participate in this study. Their name will not be exposed for the confidential purposes.

In the process of the study, three types of assessment tools were used to obtain research data, namely test (pre-test and post-test), interventions and reflective entries at the end of the learning session to record students' understanding.

The pre-test and post-test were marked and the scores were compared. Post-test was conducted after two interventions. The scores were compared using Central mean tendency to see the average score achieved by the students in each test. Reflective entries are analysed using content analysis to look into emerging categories and themes from the reflective entries. Two reflective entries were analysed to look for emerging categories and themes based on students' responses after each intervention.

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings is presented according to the research objectives. The first research objective is to investigate the uses of brace map in improving students' score in descriptive essay writing. In order to achieve this first research objective, the scores from the pre-test and post-test were compared.

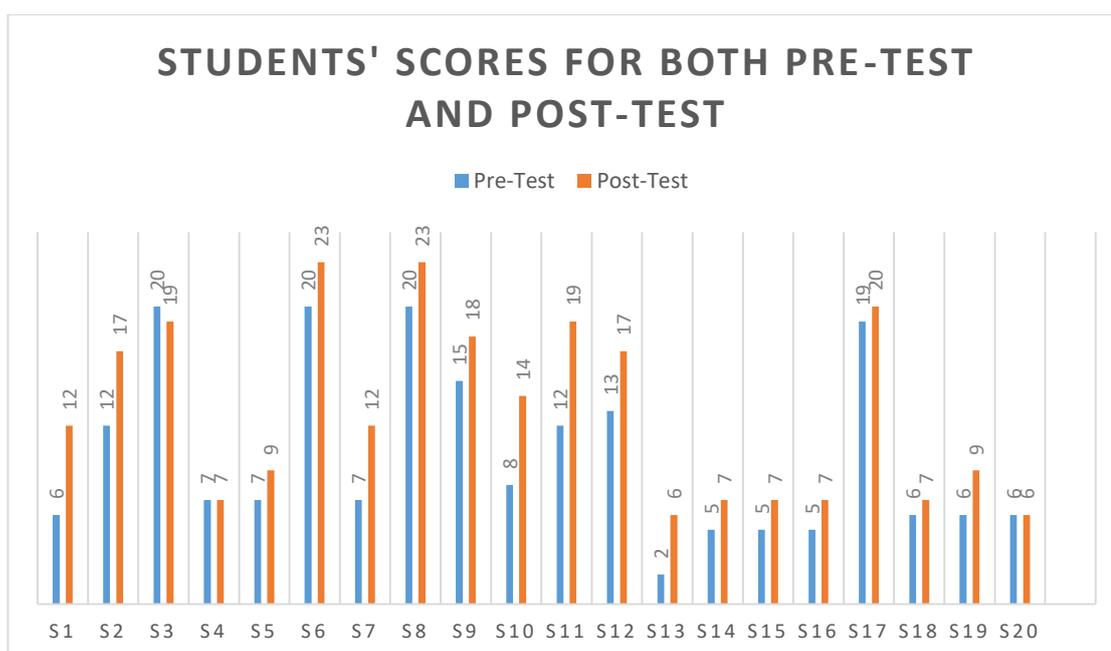


Figure 4.1 Students' Scores for both Pre-Test and Post-Test

Figure 4.1 shows the scores of the students for both pre-test and post-test. From the graph, most students have increase their scores during post-test. Total 17 students have a higher score for post-test compared to their pre-test. Next, only one student, Student 3, got lower score in post-test than pre-test. Meanwhile, there are two students, Student 4 and Student 20 that have the same score for both pre-test and post-test. Based on their score, central mean tendency is used to calculate their average scores for both tests.

(N)	Tests	Mean (M)
20	Pre-Test	10.05
	Post-Test	12.95

Table 4.1 Students average scores for both pre-test and post-test

From the calculation above, it shows that the students' average marks improved from 10.05 to 12.95. The difference between the mean score in the post-test shows a higher rating of 2.90 than the pre-test. This can be conclude that the uses of brace map improved the students' scores in their descriptive essay writing. It also prove that using brace map as pre-writing activity is effective on students' thinking skills in producing a better essay. Similarly, Ainon, Haniff and Goh (2016) also stated that i-Think maps emphasizes the concept of higher order thinking skills (HOTS) to encourage and produce the next generation to have critical and creative thinking skills.

The second research objective is to find out about the students' perspective of using brace map as pre-writing for descriptive essay writing. To achieve this research objective, two reflective entries were analysed to look for emerging categories and themes based on students' responses after each intervention. In the first intervention, the students are given an empty brace map for them to fill in the draft of the essay. In the brace map, there are three spaces for main ideas and each main idea is connected to the subpart for the supporting details and examples. At the end of the lesson, the brace map were collected. The students are asked to give their opinion on the uses of brace map as pre-writing activity. One student shared that he is able to divide the parts according to the main part easily when use brace map. Another student said that she is able to think about the supporting details clearly following the main parts and subparts of the brace map. However, there is one student that cannot improve in developing the supporting details because he didn't understand on how to developing the essay according to the main idea of the essay.

From the students' responses, the second intervention is created and distributed with another descriptive essay. The title of the essay is the benefits of learning a foreign language with another brace map. For the brace map, I added two main parts for introduction and conclusion and I explained on how to construct sentences using Wh questions. The brace maps were collected by the end of the lesson. The respond from the students were recorded in the journal entry. One of the students said that he is not stuck in the middle of writing the essay anymore. Another students said that it is fun drafting the outline using brace map because she can organize her essay appropriately. One students said that she was able to write a long essay for the first time. They said that they will practice writing the pre-writing activity for writing any essay in the future.

This shows that the students give positive responses on the uses of brace map in writing the outline of the essay. it proves that the brace map is effective in helping the students in writing their essay and the students enjoy writing the essay after they prepare the pre-writing. Similarly, Mogahed (2013) he states that pre-writing helps the

students find ideas and arrange them properly. According to Go (1994) as cited in Mogahed (2013) states that pre-writing encourages the students to think critically that become components of a writing task.

In conclusion, brace map is effective in helping the students in producing developed and organized essay.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

This study implicates the teachers and the students. Firstly, the teacher should Teacher should focus in teaching the outline of an essay before get the students to write the essay. This is because, writing outline or pre writing can help them from writer block. This was also had been stated by researchers such as Mogahed (2013) and Kucer (2009). Teacher should not force the students to use bombastic vocabulary and beautiful phrases that they don't understand. Instead, teacher should focused more on teaching them to understand the language first. Teacher should also use i-Think map in teaching the language in general. I-think map is very important in learning. It emphasized the concept of higher level thinking skills (HOTS) to the students. As stated by Hyerle and Alper in a research conducted by Ainon, Haniff and Goh (2016) the ultimate goal of implementing Thinking Maps in English language teaching and learning is to engage the students as a community of learners to use the maps as a true language for communication, enhance their higher order thinking and inculcate the problem solving capacity in their learning the language.

Secondly, this study also implicates the students. The findings of this study have achieved a conclusion where pre-writing activities are important to the students before they write the essay. Students should not rush into their essay writing as the mind is not prepared enough ideas and it will made the essay not well-developed and unorganized. Brace map is one of the i-Think map that is suggested in this study and it proved to be effective in writing the outline during the pre-writing stage. Students should learn more in utilizing all the i-Think maps in their learning as each of them has their own benefits in language learning. I-think map will help the students in thinking critically and prepared themselves for challenges of future work, life and citizenship in the 21st century and beyond.

However, it can be conclude that this study only reflect on the role of the students in writing. To improve this, my suggestion for the future research is to focus on the teacher's role in improving students' writing skills using i-Think map. In this 21st century, one of the roles of the teacher is teacher as the organizer (Nola, 2016). The success of many activities depends on good organization and on the students knowing exactly what they are to do next. Giving instructions is vital in this role as well as setting up activities. In this study, the teacher should also demonstrate how i-think map works as the students have lack of knowledge about it. This also allows the teacher to get involved and engaged with the students.

Another suggestion is to investigate the effect of the teacher's teaching style in motivating the students to write effectively. It has been known that teacher is a pillar of

nation. The teacher, being the focal figure in education must be competent and knowledgeable in order to share it with the students. Helping students understand better in the classroom is one of the main concerns of every teacher. However, the motivation to learn from the teacher is also important. The motivation of the students to write depend on the teacher's teaching style. Some of the students lost interest in the learning because of teacher's teaching style is not suitable for them.

6.0 CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, teacher should consider using i-Think maps as a tools for teaching the language. This will help the students in thinking critically in their learning process. Based on the findings of this study, it is proven that brace map can help in improving students writing skills by using it as pre-writing activity. Teacher plays a crucial role in teaching the students about the importance of pre-writing activity in writing class. It is true that pre-writing is the most important stage in the process of essay writing. By using i-Think map, the students can visualized and think more critically in expanding their ideas for supporting details and examples in an essay. The purpose of this study is to encourage the students in writing the outline of the essay before produce the essay. It is proven that the students are able to write a well-developed and organized essay after they use brace map as their pre-writing activity.

7.0 REFERENCES

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APPENDIX 1

Pre-Test

SECTION D

[30 marks]

Your school is celebrating World Health Day. As a member of the Science Club, you have been asked to write an **article** on healthy lifestyles for the school newsletter.

- Exercise daily
- Get enough sleep
- Eat healthy food

When writing out your **article**:

- You must use the notes given
- Add any other relevant information
- Write in **not less than 150 words**

APPENDIX 2

Post-Test

SECTION D

[30 marks]

Your and your friends just attended a motivational camp at school. As a member of the Adventure Club, you have been asked to write an **article** on the benefits of camping for the school newsletter.

- Learn to be independent
- Release Stress
- Improving cooperation between friends

When writing out your **article**:

- You must use the notes given
- Add any other relevant information
- Write in **not less than 150 words**

APPENDIX 3

Intervention 1 – Question

SECTION D

[30 marks]

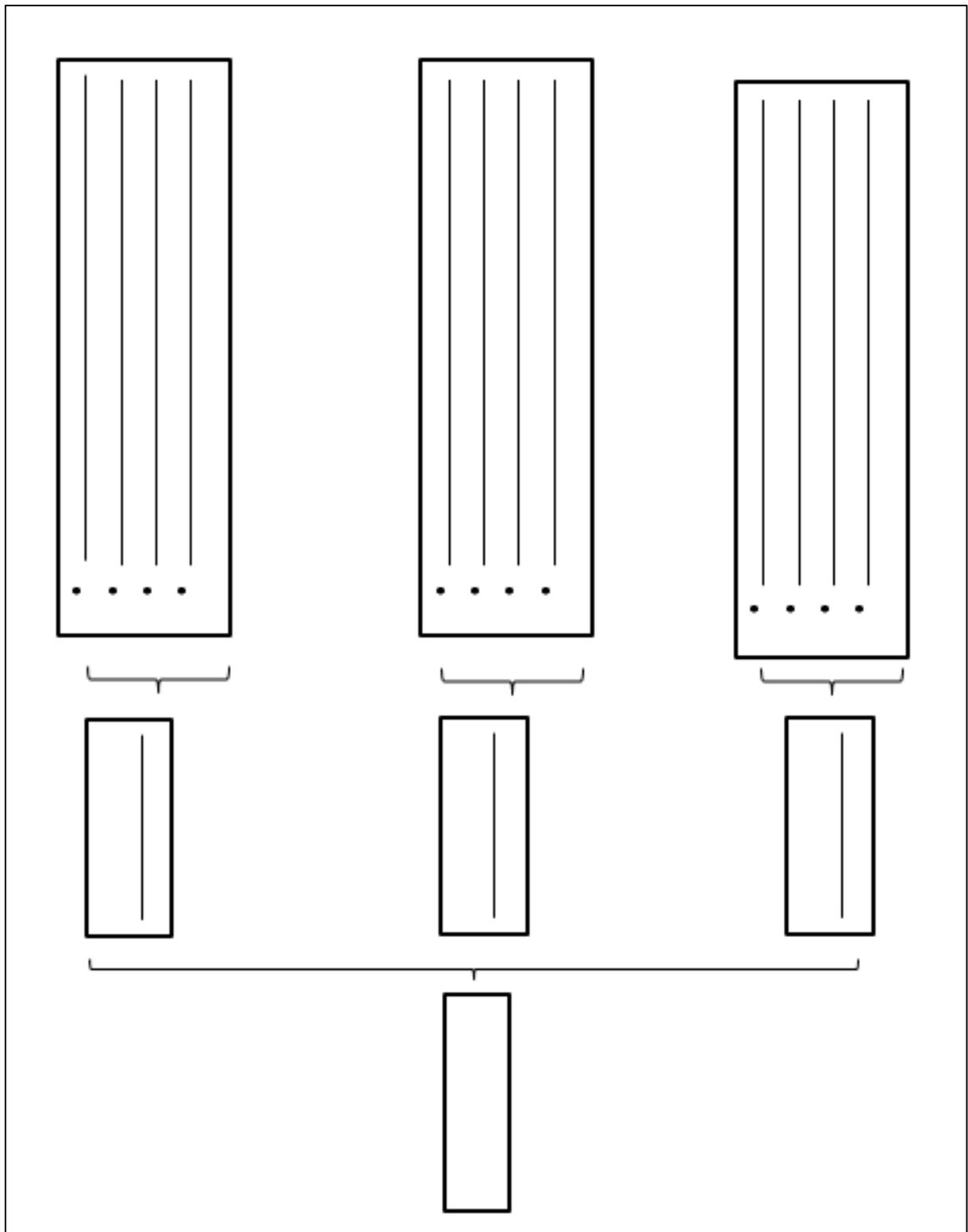
Your and your friends just attended a motivational camp at school. As a member of the Adventure Club, you have been asked to write an **article** on the benefits of camping for the school newsletter.

- Learn to be independent
- Release Stress
- Improving cooperation between friends

When writing out your **article**:

- You must use the notes given
- Add any other relevant information
- Write in **not less than 150 words**

Intervention 2 – Brace Map



APPENDIX 4

Intervention 2 – Question

SECTION D

[30 marks]

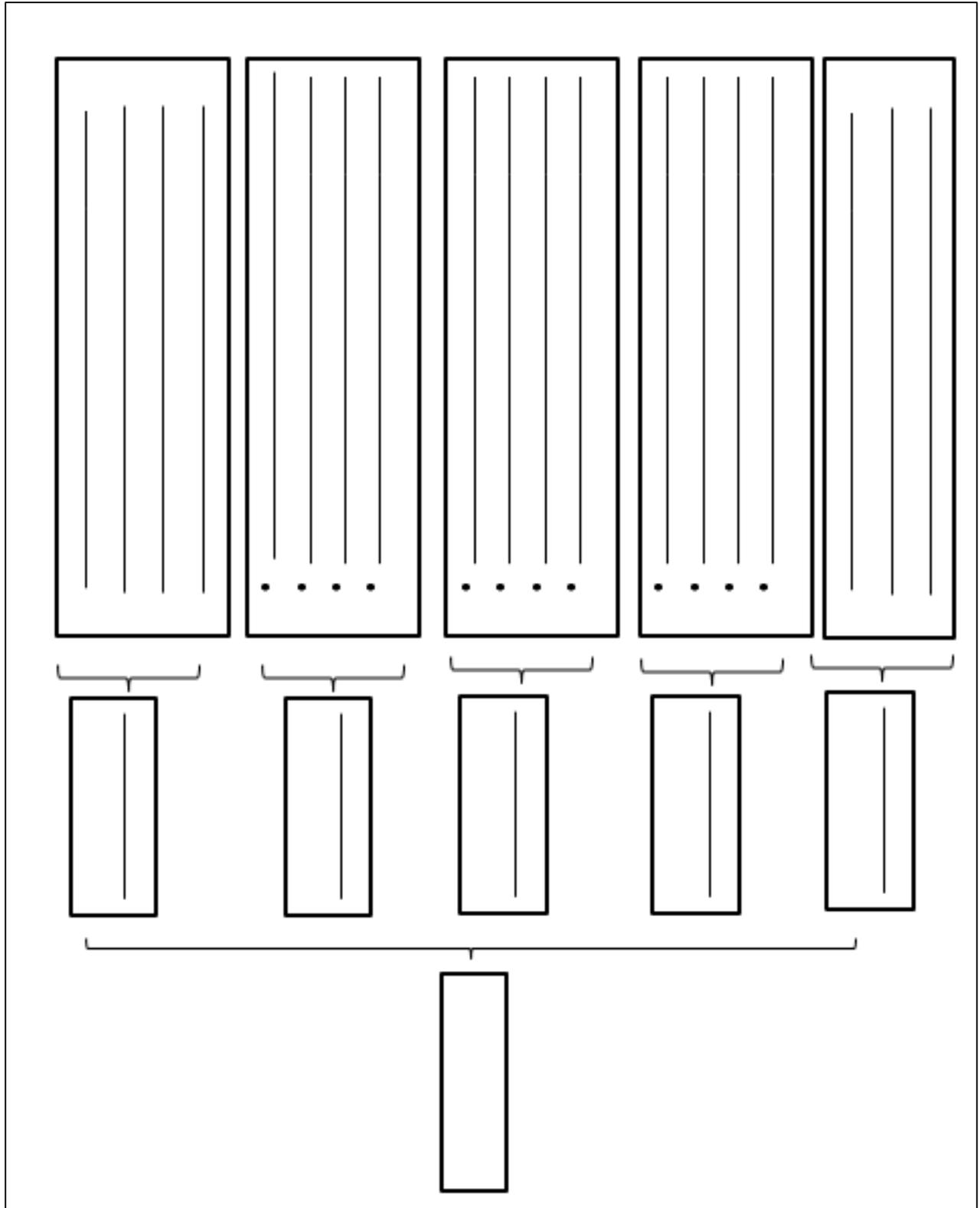
You are the president of the Language Club. You have to give a talk on the benefits of learning a foreign language.

- Can multitask easily
- Improves memory
- Improves mastery of first language

When writing out your **talk**:

- You must use the notes given
- Add any other relevant information
- Write in **not less than 150 words**

Intervention 2 – Brace Map



APPENDIX 5

Reflective Entries – intervention 1

Reflective Entry

Date: 26th September 2018

Class: 1 Ametis

Today I conducted my first intervention for my Final Year Project. The students are given an essay writing question on a talk about the benefits of camping. From the observation of their pre-test, the students are having a problem in developing their ideas in each paragraph. They also confused between the main ideas and supporting details. Most of them produced a short and unorganized essay for their pre-test essay.

I introduced brace map to the students as a tool for them to use during pre-writing activity. I taught them on how to fill in the brace map according to the respective part correctly. The students started to show some eagerness in learning writing. They managed to differentiate between main ideas and supporting details. Their writing became more organized compared to their pre-test.

Before I end the class, I asked about their opinions on the uses of brace map as pre-writing activity. Some students gave me positive responses by stating that they are now know how to separate the main ideas into different paragraph. They also said that it is fun to do pre-writing first before write the real essay as they will not waste time in thinking during the writing process. However, there are some negative responses as well. Some students said that they still don't know how to start the essay as my brace map only consisting of three main parts for each description given in the questions. One of the students said that he still spent a lot of time in thinking the ideas for supporting details for each main ideas.

From these responses, I interpreted them as the brace map is effective to some students and not effective to other students. Therefore, I should improvise the brace map to overcome the problems from my first intervention. As a teacher, I should always aware about the problems that are faced by the students. I should not demotivated from the negative responses, instead, I should be more active in finding the solution about the problems faced by the students.

Reflective Entries – intervention 2

Reflective Entry

Date: 10th October 2018

Class: 1 Ametis

Today I conducted the second intervention for my Final Year Project. From the previous intervention, the students are still having problem in developing their ideas and to begin their essay. For this intervention, I gave them another essay question about the benefits of foreign language with an empty brace map template. This time, I improvised the brace map into five main parts for introduction, three main ideas (body paragraphs) and conclusion. In addition, I also taught them on how to write introduction and developing the ideas. I teach them the questioning technique (Wh question) to develop the points in supporting details.

I collected their works and I can see that most student improve in their writing. The brace map was full with their handwriting. And their essay are longer than their pre-test essay. I asked for their opinion on the revised brace map and the students gave me positive responses. One of them shared that they now know how to develop the points in each paragraph. Another student said that she learned to write a longer essay now. One of them said that he felt that brace map is effective because he can see the relation between main ideas and supporting details clearly and it helps him to focus on his writing. Most of them agreed that by doing pre-writing activity using brace map help them in write better as they were no longer stuck in the middle of their writing.

I interpreted these responses as the students are getting better in their writing. They also overcame the problem of writer block when they planned the draft before writing the essay. I am glad that the students realized about the importance of the pre-writing stage in the writing. Of course there are a few students still struggling in their writing, but they are getting better in their writing skills and I hope they will do the same during post-test.