



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

**FACTORS AFFECTING CREATIVITY IN ENGLISH AS A SECOND  
LANGUAGE TERTIARY STUDENTS' WRITING**

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**By**

**LEE POH LE**

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,  
in Fulfilment of the Requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**August 2005**



To my family and friends who have given me moral support throughout my work  
and all those who value creativity in themselves and in others.



Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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**Chairman: Professor Chan Swee Heng, PhD**

**Faculty: Modern Languages and Communication**

Tertiary student writers, learning English as a second language (ESL), use reading and writing strategies in the process of writing. Does intervention with the explicit teaching about the Top-Level Structure (TLS) benefit these student writers in the use of strategies? This study on 182 ESL tertiary student writers revealed that there was performance gain after intervention with the explicit teaching about the Top-Level Structure (TLS). The performance of 93 (24 male, 69 female) tertiary students in the treatment group was compared with 89 (31 male, 58 female) tertiary students in the control group. The treatment group was explicitly taught about the TLS through the creative problem solving (CPS) approach for ten weeks. In the course of the ten weeks, the treatment group practised using the TLS in their reading and writing tasks; while the control group was not taught to do so.

The result of the post-test means adjusted by pre-test using the ANCOVA showed that there was a significant difference between the two groups, favouring the treatment group. It may be implied that the tertiary student writers in the treatment group had beneficially use the TLS in their writing task, comprising story writing and response writing.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia  
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah.

**FAKTOR-FAKTOR KREATIF YANG MEMBERI KESAN KE ATAS  
PENULISAN PELAJAR-PELAJAR DI PERINGKAT IJAZAH YANG  
BELAJAR BAHASA INGGERIS SEBAGAI BAHASA KEDUA**

Oleh

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**Ogos 2005**

**Pengerusi: Profesor Chan Swee Heng, PhD**

**Fakulti: Bahasa Moden dan Komunikasi**

Pelajar-pelajar penulisan di peringkat ijazah yang belajar Bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa kedua (ESL) menggunakan strategi-strategi dalam proses penulisan. Yang menjadi persoalan di sini ialah, adakah pengajaran struktur peringkat atas (Top-Level Structure – TLS) secara terus dapat memanfaatkan pelajar-pelajar ini? Adakah faktor-faktor seperti daya kreativiti, pandangan diri tentang kreativiti, jantini dan matapelajaran major memberi kesan ke atas penulisan mereka, terutamanya dalam penulisan cerita dan penulisan respon? Kajian ini yang melibatkan 182 pelajar ESL di peringkat ijazah menunjukkan bahawa pengajaran TLS secara terus dapat meningkatkan prestasi mereka dalam penulisan cerita dan respon kepada teks. Prestasi 93 pelajar dalam kumpulan rawatan (yang terdiri daripada 24 pelajar lelaki dan 69 pelajar perempuan) yang diberi pengajaran khas dibandingkan dengan 89 pelajar lain dalam kumpulan kawalan (yang terdiri daripada 31 pelajar lelaki dan 58 pelajar perempuan) yang tidak diberi apa-apa pengajaran. Kumpulan rawatan diajar tentang TLS melalui pendekatan penyelesaian masalah secara kreatif (CPS) selama

sepuluh minggu. Dalam jangkamasa sepuluh minggu tersebut, kumpulan rawatan ini berlatih menggunakan teknik TLS dalam latihan-latihan pembacaan dan penulisan sementara kumpulan kawalan tidak diajar sedemikian.

Keputusan min ujian pos dikawal ujian pra menggunakan teknik ANCOVA menunjukkan terdapat perbezaan yang ketara antara kedua-dua kumpulan ini, di mana kumpulan rawatan menunjukkan keputusan yang lebih cemerlang. Akan tetapi, daya kreativiti, pandangan diri tentang kreativiti, jantina dan matapelajaran major tidak memberi kesan ke atas penulisan mereka. Ini menunjukkan bahawa pelajar-pelajar peringkat ijazah dalam kumpulan rawatan bermanfaat dengan menggunakan TLS dalam penulisan.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Meaning
BB1 241 1	English for Reading and Discussion Skills
CPS	Creative Problem Solving
ESL	English as a Second Language
L2	Second Language
MUET	Malaysian University English Examination
TLS	Top-Level Structure
TTCT	Torrance Test of Creative Thinking
WL	Whole Language

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Preamble

Writing, like reading, is a language skill that has to be learned. Unlike listening and speaking which are natural processes of child development, writing as well as reading need the conscious mastery of linguistic skills. A learner begins by recognizing the sounds represented by the alphabet at pre-school level and progresses through school and college where the learner will learn the skills of using language in interpretation and representation of a multitude of discourse in various genres in communication. To be adept at skills in writing, one also has to be equally adept at skills in reading as well (Torrance, 2004). The reason for this is that reading comes before, during and after the writing process. One cannot produce a text without reading it as writing progresses. As such, the skills required in writing will also incorporate the skills of reading, besides the physical process of putting pen to paper or fingers to keyboard. All these skills require a certain amount of instruction (Hinkle, 2004).

Students receive formal instruction in reading and writing at the introductory level from kindergarten, and gradually progress through primary school level to more complex levels at secondary school and tertiary institution. However, academic investigation in writing revealed writing problems among undergraduates in higher education. Students are found to have a poor command of English, thereby, pointing to the need in improving essay writing skills, spelling and syntax (Lamb, 1994; Hinkle, 2004). This shortcoming cannot be left unchecked, for students would need to write in their work life. Therefore, they need good models of what is wanted in an

essay and intervention on how an essay is written. However, this does not mean that students merely copy texts that their lecturers have given them and turn them in as assignments. If this is done, then, there will not be any growth in knowledge and ideas amongst them. Students must take ownership of their work. They must have the opportunity and the technical know-how to write text creatively and efficiently. They must have the opportunity to develop their own essay topics with new ideas from exploring and understanding the course content they learn. On the other hand, it should be noted that the best professional and academic essays are driven by an array of ideas thoroughly supported by facts, expert information and critical analysis (Hinkle, 2004). All these are made possible by making the correct choice of words relating to the use of correct rhetorical structures.

Research in the interactive process of reading and writing confirmed that, students make use of rhetorical structure in a similar way in both reading and writing (Meyer, 1982; Langer, 1986). The rhetorical structure referred to here is the top-level structure (TLS). TLS binds the thesis idea in expository text of which narrative text such as story and critical text such as response are included. An understanding of the TLS will make understanding and presenting text clearer, thereby carrying the meaning of ideas faster and more effectively. This knowledge of TLS is especially useful to ESL students who may have little experience in reading or writing expository text in English. They can use this TLS construct as a strategy to help them understand relationships among ideas in text as they progress to read or create text with increasing sophistication parallel to their second language competence (Murphy, 1993).

When students reach tertiary level, more writing activities will be required of them. However, writing is closely linked with creativity (Lin, 1998). Therefore, the process of writing is the primary means of fostering creativity in students. Axiomatically, the effective means of teaching writing skills would be the stimulating of creativity and idea generation (Wai, Tse & Tsang, 2003). This view concurs with that of Hayes and Flower (1980) who view the relationship of writing and creativity at multi-levels, among which the writer's memory is of particular importance in idea generation. It is said that the process of writing includes planning, translating and reviewing. When a writer prepares to write; idea generation, organization and goal-setting take place. Language corresponding to the ideas generated and goals set are matched at the translating process. It is the function of idea generation to retrieve information items from memory that are relevant to the writing task. In this framework, creativity reflects the quality of the factors that enable the retrieval of items from memory for idea generation. (Wai, Tse & Tsang, 2003). The better the ability to retrieve ideas from memory, the more ideas will be generated. Thus, the more creative will be the writing. If students have organized their reading information according to the TLS structures, it would be better remembered (Murphy, 1993), therefore, it would be easier for the students to retrieve these information from memory for idea generation (Torrance, M.; Thomas, G. V. & Robinson, E. J., 2000; Galbraith, D. & Torrance, M., 2004).

It can be said that an understanding and the ability to use rhetorical structures such as the TLS would enhance students' writing skill. A text written with well-supported