The Impact of Brainstorming on Lower-Proficiency Learners' Expository Essay Writing in ESL Classrooms

E. M. A. N. Ekanayake ✉

SLIIT Kandy Uni, Pallekale, Sri Lanka

Abstract

Writing skills remain crucial for upper-secondary students in Sri Lanka's English education system. This study investigated the effectiveness of brainstorming strategies in improving expository essay writing among lower-proficient learners. Forty Advanced Level Arts students from a public school in Kandy district, initially assessed at CEFR A1 level, participated in a one-month intervention implementing brainstorming techniques. Data collection employed both quantitative and qualitative methods. SPSS software analyzed pre-test and post-test scores, while semi-structured interviews with five randomly selected participants provided qualitative insights. The results demonstrated significant improvement in writing performance following the brainstorming intervention. Qualitative findings revealed enhanced motivation, increased interest in writing tasks, improved logical organization, richer content generation, and greater writing confidence. This study significantly contributes evidence supporting brainstorming as an effective prewriting strategy for lower-proficient learners, suggesting that structured prewriting techniques can significantly improve upper-secondary students' writing capabilities in English Language Teaching contexts.

Keywords: Brainstorming, Poor writing, Effective technique, Learner development.

Introduction

This chapter provides an introduction to the thesis which supports understanding the practice of brainstorming and writing ability when learning in ESL (English as a Second Language) setting. Section 1.2 of this chapter discusses the background of the study and section 1.3 is focused on the statement of the problem. Next, section 1.4 presents the research questions while the purpose of the study is discussed in section 1.5. Moreover, section 1.6 uncovers the significance of the study while, 1.7 provides an overview for the dissertation and final section 1.8 provides the conclusion to this chapter.

Background of the Study

English, established in Sri Lanka since 1796 (Heart, 2005), serves as a second language and plays a crucial role in education and career opportunities. Following the 1997 educational reforms and the 1999 mandate making English compulsory at the A/L examination, its significance has only increased. Subsequent national policies, including the 2009 National Education Policy, have continued to emphasise the importance of English as a link language for national integration and global competitiveness, further solidifying its role in the education system.

Among the four language skills, writing presents challenges. Richards and Renandya (2002) identify it as the most difficult skill for foreign language learners, while Angelo (1980) emphasises its role in critical thinking. Writing involves complex processes beyond mere word combination, requiring learners to effectively communicate their thoughts to readers (Hyland, 2003).

In the Sri Lankan context, Perera and Fernando (2017) confirms that public examination results reveal consistently weak writing skills. The researcher's analysis of upper-secondary level composition papers showed students struggling with idea generation, coherence, and logical sequencing. Students particularly struggle with pre-writing idea generation and paragraph organisation.

To address these challenges, brainstorming, first introduced by Osborn (1953) in "Applied Imagination," offers a promising solution. This study focuses on validating brainstorming as an effective pre-writing strategy for improving expository essay writing among lower-proficiency upper-secondary ESL learners, particularly given essays' importance in assessment. While the efficacy of brainstorming is supported by global ELT research, its application within the specific socio-educational context of Sri Lankan upper-secondary government schools, particularly for lower-proficiency learners focusing on expository essays, remains underexplored. This study aims to bridge this gap by investigating the localised impact of this global technique.

Limitation

Complying with the background of the study and problem identification, it is impossible for the researcher to investigate all factors determining the writing skill achievement. Thus,

narrowing the scope, the researcher aims to implement a teaching technique in the writing class. This limitation is based on the finding that the writing skills of the upper-secondary level students are relatively low. The selected technique is the use of brainstorming, a technique for teaching students' writing skills while exploring their ideas and thinking to produce satisfactory or perfect English writing. Brainstorming techniques are primarily focused on overcoming challenges related to idea generation and textual organisation. By reducing the cognitive load associated with these initial stages, the technique may also allow learners to allocate more attention to grammatical accuracy during the drafting and revision phases. Furthermore, the technique is tested only with expository essays as the selected sample faces A/L examination in the near future, which consists of an expository essay.

Identification of the Problem

Essays are a critical component of Sri Lankan English language assessments, yet upper-secondary students, particularly those with lower proficiency, consistently underperform. A key contributor to this issue is the prevalent product-oriented approach to teaching writing, which often neglects the pre-writing stage. Consequently, learners lack structured techniques to generate and organise ideas, leading to essays that are poorly developed, incoherent, and demotivating to produce. This study posits that the brainstorming technique, by systematically activating prior knowledge and facilitating idea organisation, can directly address these challenges in expository essay writing, a core requirement of the A/L examination.

Research Questions

1. How does brainstorming impact lower-proficiency-level learners' written performance in relation to expository essay writing?
2. What are the perceptions of students on brainstorming in relation to expository essay writing?

Purpose of the Study

A major reason for the need for the current study to be conducted is due to the poor performance of ESL learners' writing ability and the less attention given to remedying this situation, which is tested throughout their school life. Thus, the brainstorming strategy, which has been largely used in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings, can be employed in the Sri Lankan context by systematising and checking its applicability. Furthermore, the effect of brainstorming on lower-proficiency level learners was not addressed largely by scholars. Henceforth, the study serves as one of the preliminary studies in the Sri Lankan setting to provide a crucial pedagogical implication to the field of English Language Teaching (ELT).

The purpose of this study is twofold: 1) To assess the impact of a structured brainstorming intervention on the expository essay writing performance of lower-proficiency upper-secondary ESL learners, as measured by pre- and post-test scores; and 2) To evaluate learner perceptions regarding the utility and experience of using brainstorming as a pre-writing strategy.

Significance of the Study

The focal point of this study is to examine the impact of brainstorming on lower-proficient students, enabling them to write expository essays more effectively. The findings of this study will set a base for future researchers in the Sri Lankan context to increase learner performance in writing essays by setting a systematic method/strategy to be used with lower-proficiency level learners. Thereby, this could contribute to mapping out the key strategies employed in the brainstorming technique to teach students of all age groups to develop essay writing skills. Moreover, considering the limitations of the current study, future researchers can broaden the scope to examine the efficacy of the brainstorming strategy not only in expository essays but all types of writing. Consequently, the study can contribute to the development of ESL pedagogy and syllabus design in Sri Lanka.

Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter sheds light on the existing literature and insights related to the current study. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the importance of teaching and learning writing, pre-writing, and crucially the effects of brainstorming on L2 writing. It comprises the theoretical framework of the study and examines L2 writing in general, and then about essay writing and specifically about expository essays, as it is a focus of the study. In the next section, teaching L2 writing is given more focus than gradually, Process approach to writing and Pre-writing are discussed with the relevant subtopics. Brainstorming is discussed in detail with subsections, the application of the Brainstorming technique in teaching writing, and limitations of previous studies, with the conclusion of the study.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework underlying this research is the use of schema theory and the constructivist theory, aligning with Osborn (1953)'s brainstorming technique. Osborn invented the process of 'organised ideation' and the participants referred to their attempts as 'brainstorm sessions'. The origin of the process is credited to Hindu teachers in India. Osborn (1948) saw the value in a session that was designed solely to produce a list of ideas. In the idea-generation phase of brainstorming, all suggestions are rewarded as a positive reinforcement; As a result, creativity is not stifled, it is increased. Nothing is criticised or judged, and the objective is to generate many ideas on the specific topic; there is no negative reinforcement. Constructivist theory strongly emphasises learners developing personal meaning through reflection, analysis and the gradual building of layers or of knowledge through conscious and ongoing mental processing (Banu, 2018). The schema theory activates prior knowledge (Rumelhart, 1980). Accordingly, brainstorming is a key method used to support constructivist learning (Banu, 2018). Similarly, Oishi (2015) exemplified that the prior knowledge is brought forth with brainstorming.

Writing in L2

Essay Writing

Essay writing is perceived as an art of creativity and imaginatively putting down one's ideas, feelings and opinions in writing (Ogbu, 2009). As examined by McCloud-Bondoc and Bosse (2011), a paragraph is the building block of essay development and paragraphs provide the structure needed to develop the thesis of a paper. Improving students' essay writing is believed to be one of the most important skills that EFL learners need to develop throughout their schooling (Ibnian, 2011). An essay is defined as a short literary composition on a subject expressing a personal view. The essay consists of the following parts: - The introduction. - The body. - The conclusion. Essays could be classified into four types: the Expository Essay, the Descriptive Essay, the Argumentative Essay, and the Narrative Essay. In the current study, the focus is given to the development of expository essays with the proposed technique.

Expository Essay

Expository writing serves the purpose to inform, and it contains a persuasive element: that is, to convince the reader that it is factual and reliable (Dietsch, 2009). In expository writings, the purpose is stated directly for clarity either in the thesis or topic sentence. (Abdallah, 2015).

The expository essay, or information essay, explains and analyses a specific issue. It requires students to investigate an idea, evaluate evidence, expound on the idea, and set forth an argument concerning that idea. This can be accomplished through comparison and contrast, definition, the analysis of cause and effect, and so on.

Teaching Writing in ESL/EFL

The process of converting insights and notions into a written format is writing. Teaching writing is the process of defining writing strategies and providing knowledge on grammar, and syntax and writing conventions to the learners. Writing is not an easy skill to expertise, since writing becomes a problem for many students, as there are many components to be considered. Furthermore, other important components in writing, such as coherence, cohesion, topic sentence, and supporting detail, should also be addressed. Raimes (1983) stated that the content, the writer's process, audience, purpose, word choice, organisation, mechanics, grammar and syntax are some different elements for creating a clear, smooth and successful piece of writing. Accordingly, L2 teachers need to be cautious in helping learners to be successful writers. Nirmala (2013) explores a number of stages involved in writing as: brainstorming, making notes, planning, writing a draft, editing, producing another draft and proof reading. Accordingly, writing is not a linear process and there are stages involved. It has been identified that more attention to writing in ESL classes is required in order to prepare learners to cope with the communicative demands of real-life situations; thus, it is an interactive activity.

Subsequently, teaching writing, specifically L2 writing, carries a paramount weight on the teacher to guide the student to achieve his/her highest potential. Moreover, numerous studies have been done to explore learner writing in different contexts. Hedge (1988) explains that writing is resource for thinking, and developing ideas and fleshing them out on paper. Writing requires thinking effectively, using words, improving ideas so on. According to the above idea, if writing is practiced as a process, the learners will have time to reflect on what they have gathered during the pre-writing stage. Accordingly, many researchers bring forth the idea that not everyone can be a perfect writer because it is not just an act of vomiting ideas on paper, but it should be drafted in a structured fashion. This act will be aided by brainstorming about the subject.

Process Approach to Writing

It is crucial to comprehend in the ESL context that what learners first write on paper is not the final product but simply a beginning. Many L2 learners undergo writer's block or lack of ideas to write; learners' often wonder where to start. Thus, this can be overcome if writing is perceived as a process and if the teacher can assist the learner at pre-writing stage with strategies like brainstorming. Hedgcock (2005) stated that there has been an extraordinary shift in ESL writing toward the implementation of the process approach in teaching writing. As claimed by Badger andWhite (2000), the process approach evolved out of the dissatisfaction with traditional product approaches, which was centered upon improving oral patterns and grammatical knowledge and focused on the end product. Brown (2001) withstands the idea that a writer undergoes the thinking process before producing a final piece of writing. More studies have proved the expertise of using the process approach in the classroom to improve the output of the students as it is more learner-centered, recognises the value of developing writing skills and focuses on strategies and processes of writing with their own abilities and potential. Furthermore, writing formulates rather than a linear process, and the process of writing creates its own form and meaning (Chenowith, 1987; Harmer, 2004; Hedge, 1988; Kroll, 1990; Raimes, 1987)). Therefore, Harmer (2004) presented the process of writing as a 'process wheel'. Walvoord and Smith (1982) explain that skilled writers often think new ideas while they engage in the process of writing.

Accordingly, it is a matter of new idea generation apart from what they already possess. Furthermore, they state that learners approach the process of writing on a proactive manner. Similarly, Tompkins (1990) asserts that writers generate ideas and organise the basic structure of the content in the pre-writing stage; also, a reason for the poor performance of writing is because the learners do not plan before writing (Al-Sawalha, 2014). Charney et al. (1995) indicate that writing apprehension can result when students have nothing to write. Agreeing, the inability of ESL learners to express themselves in the target language is caused by the lack of appropriate pre-writing activities. Consequently, it leads to poor English writing proficiency and writing apprehension (Chiang, 2003).

Pre-writing

The pioneering stage to develop a piece of writing according to the process approach is the Pre-writing stage. Especial technicalities can be used in this stage to generate and organise ideas. According to Sun (2009) process approach to teaching writing includes several stages, namely pre-writing or invention activities such as brainstorming. Abedianpour and Omidvari (2018) regarded pre-task in class as motivating learners to write their thoughts which are stimulated and that it aids in reflecting and measuring learner improvements; "optimal pre-writing strategies eliminate confusion and minimise writer's block while actually writing" (Wing, 2009, p.1). Gauntlet (1978) added that "before a student begins writing, a procedure for stimulating thinking must take place; prewriting involves sensing, imagining, and feeling, talking, and writing" (p.29). It is vital that teachers require enhancing flexibility and adopting their instruction to address the needs of the learners. The learners will take time to think about their topic and produce opinions; sometimes, learners are disappointed with lack of ideas in the pre-writing stage.

According to Rimes (1983), the process of writing in the classroom contributes to plan teaching and learning experience while allowing them to figure out the entity of writing at any point. Bai (2013) emphasised the relation of writing strategies including planning, revising and assessing to English language proficiency. There are numerous strategies to trigger opinions about the title and various ways to be closer to the composition with a help of the teacher. One such ideal strategy to be introduced is brainstorming, a revolutionary strategy for opinion generating which is tried and practiced in many areas by specialists. It is appealing to understand that a qualified brainstorming session will lead to well planning. In addition, Tarker and Shamates (1992) define brainstorming as a means to motivate quantity much more than quality, while facilitating the learners to express, collect, interpret their perceptions within a shorter time. Indeed, brainstorming contributes the learners to convey the ideas from the brain to organs and to improve skills.

Brainstorming

Brainstorming strategy has many positive effects on L2 writing. The process of writing involves thoughts. As explained by Utami (2014) and Folse et al. (2010), the natural thinking process can be utilised by gathering the brain's energies into a "storm," and transforming these energies into written words or diagrams that will lead to lively, vibrant writing. According to Blanchard and Root (2003), brainstorming is a quick way to generate many ideas on a subject without worrying about the manner of execute. Similarly, Folse et al. (2010) examined brainstorming as writing down all the thoughts that come to the head, without thinking whether an idea is good or bad. While Ghaith (2002) identifies a similarity of brainstorming to free writing where the learner writes down everything without considering the validity and pinpoints the difference between them as free writing takes on a format of a paragraph, while brainstorming usually results in a list of words and phrases. According to Kelly and Gargagliano (2000), brainstorming does not require writing complete sentences but writing many words or phrases that come into the mind about the topic.

Accordingly, the studies exemplify the worth of the brainstorming strategy. Furthermore, Taula (2016) mentioned that brainstorming is an invaluable process employed by writers at all skill levels, regardless of their experience. Good writing is understood to be not the product of a "genius strike of lightening" but the product of a series of trials and errors, beginning with pre-writing that are generated through brainstorming (Taula, 2016, pp.154- 155). "Brainstorming is not necessarily the ultimate technique for idea generation, yet, it does prove its worth when the goal is to open up a broad spectrum of ideas, and nothing beats a good brainstorming session for creating them" (Brown, 2009, p.79).

The technique facilitates the students to generate ideas effectively by giving them the opportunity to explore their prior knowledge about particular subjects, and also to add new ideas. It would help the students to overcome the problem related to writer's block that is usually faced by students in the early stages of writing.

The Application of Brainstorming Technique in Teaching Writing

Many studies have been conducted in order to prove the effectiveness of incorporating brainstorming in teaching English for L2 learners. There are brainstorming strategies which can be incorporated at the prewriting stage as explained by (Taula, 2016, pp.154-155).

a. Word Map – use circles, etc. to show relation between ideas.
b. List – list any and all ideas/items about your topic.
c. Scratch Outline – briefly highlight the main points of your paper
d. Question and Answer – ask as many questions as you can think of.
e. Free-write – be the creator, not the editor of your work.

Taula (2016) explains the stages involved in brainstorming; first, students brainstorm and note down any ideas connected to the topic. They decide from the brainstormed items which ideas are the most relevant to the topic. Then the students decide which order to put those ideas in. Next, the students prepare the first draft; the focus at this stage is organisation of the piece of writing. This does not mean that grammar and accuracy are not important; it simply means that they are not the focus at this stage. In addition, revision and editing the drafts are initially focused on content, relevance and organisation. The final stage is the production of a finished piece of work. In addition, to raise awareness of the students on the stages of writing, teacher can brainstorm the steps with the students (Taula, 2016, pp.154- 155).

Blanchard and Root (2003) mention the steps of brainstorming: "begin with a broad topic, write down as many as ideas about the topic as you can in five minutes, add more items to your list, group similar items on the list together, cross out items that do not belong" (p.41). Similarly, Oshima and Hogue (1997) propose the rules of brainstorming similar to Blanchard and Root (2003) yet highlighting not to worry about the order of ideas, mechanics, grammar, or spelling and to keep on writing down whatever comes to the mind since it is only brainstorming.

Many writers prefer brainstorming because of its convenience in separating ideas with less effort, and the informal outline can guide the learner in organising their draft. Brainstorming can be done individually or in groups according to teacher's preference based on objectives. Accordingly, in the current study, Taula (2016)'s steps on brainstorming is employed during the treatment period.

Studies Related to Brainstorming

Osborn (1957) initially coined the term brainstorming, which is an approach designed to help the generation of new ideas among a group and verbally express them one at a time.

Subsequently, the effectiveness of this approach has often been questioned (Stroebe & Diehl, 1994) while its constructiveness has been praised by many researchers (Abedianpour & Omidvari, 2011; Khan, 2013; Ibnian , 2011; Manouchehry et al., 2014; Nurhasanah et al., 2015; Taula , 2016; Unina & Bearing, 2016). Bearing (2016) did a study related to brainstorming and student-centered learning in the ESL Classroom, exploring the types of brainstorming activities used and the manner in which it is employed for speaking engagement in Kuching. It was identified using simple word lists, a picture, word mapping are the popular activities in the ESL classroom and revealed that students' and teachers' had positive perceptions on the use of brainstorming activities to promote speaking skills.

The strategy proved to be applicable not only to develop speaking but other skills as well. Richards (1990) revealed that learners who were instructed with brainstorming strategy were more effective in making classifying opinions than others, thus brainstorming can develop the learners' cognitive skill. Alkhatib (2012)'s study also magnified the effect of brainstorming on the problem solving of the L2 learners. Similarly, Al-Mutairi (2015) found that brainstorming aids students in developing creative thinking.

It can bring to light that brainstorming facilitates learners to improve in many ways and crucially to develop the writing process. Ibnian (2011) has pronounced the positive role of brainstorming in the development of writing. Similarly, Rao (2007) reiterates the positive effect of brainstorming on the writing skills of the learners after investigating, 'The effects of brainstorming strategy instruction on learners' writing performance and perception' with one hundred eighty sophomore students in the foreign languages college. Maghsoudi and Haririan (2013) pointed that brainstorming aids the L2 learners gain more independence and success in writing. Consequently, Brainstorming has been given a pivotal role by many scholars with the development of process writing. Khan (2013) in his study 'Relevance of Brainstorming in an EFL classroom' found that brainstorming is an effective teaching strategy, and it can be easily introduced into language classes and it will be a fun activity for learners. Similarly, Amoush (2015) in his study 'The Impact of Employing Brainstorming Strategy on Improving Writing Performance of English Major Students at Balqa Applied University in Jordan' with eighty tertiary level students and proved that brainstorming as effective on improving writing performance. Additionally, the researcher recommends pedagogical implications for English instructors to employ brainstorming strategy in teaching writing skill and when conducting training courses for the university instructors. Henceforth, many studies reinforce the

effectiveness of the brainstorming strategy. Abedianpour and Omidvari (2011) inspected about 'Brainstorming Strategy and Writing Performance: Effects and Attitudes' with 60 Iranian learners and claimed that brainstorming strategy positively influenced EFL learners' writing performance making them more active and propose that if the strategy is employed systematically, it can improve the achievement of intermediate students' writing performance. Taula (2016) pinpoints the positive effects of Brainstorming on learners. Similarly, Aditiya (2019) identified that brainstorming technique improves the students' ability of writing hortatory exposition text.

Furthermore, studies support the development of essay writing skills with brainstorming. Manouchehry et al. (2014) investigated the effect of two brainstorming strategies on the improvement of Iranian intermediate EFL learners' writing skills and determined the use of heuristic and clustering brainstorming techniques has been effective in improving students' performance in essay writing. Supporting, 'The application of Brainstorming to improve student's writing skill' by Amalia et al. (2015) which was done with four students indicates that brainstorming method had a positive effect on developing essay writing skill, especially with regards to the content, organisation of the content, vocabulary, language use, and the mechanic of language. Furthermore, essay writing can bring to light as an important aspect to gauge writing skills. Besides, Ibnian (2011) in his study about 'Brainstorming and Essay Writing in EFL Class' explored that brainstorming had a positive effect on developing first secondary grade students' essay writing skills in terms of content and organisation, mechanics of writing, language use and skills emerged from creative thinking abilities.

In addition, Utami (2014) in his study on the ability of writing descriptive texts through brainstorming technique found that brainstorming facilitates in generating ideas and organising them into paragraphs. Gultom and Gurning (n.d) explored 'The effect of Brainstorming teaching technique on students' achievement in narrative paragraph', found that use of Brainstorming technique in teaching was effective than that taught by using Lecturing technique and that it effects on students' achievement in writing narrative paragraph. Evidently, as proved by studies; Brainstorming boosts descriptive and narrative writing abilities of students. Mehr et al. (2016) did a study focusing the expository writing; 'The effects of Brainstorming as a pre-writing activity on Iranian EFL learners prompted expository writing'. Henceforth, majority of studies related to brainstorming and writing skill has been conducted in EFL context and similarly the aforementioned study too had been conducted with six intermediate level learners in EFL setting. The study proved that brainstorming positively affected on their writing achievements and had a great impact on the participants' works.

Limitations of Previous Studies and Areas for Future Research

Even though the previously mentioned studies have made significant contributions to the field of L2 writing, they comprise certain limitations. Firstly, most studies have been conducted as cross- sectional studies and none of them were longitudinal studies. Therefore, one needs to conduct more longitudinal research to verify the fact that, there is a long lasting impact on brainstorming in writing performance.

Secondly, most of the studies are done in EFL contexts, and limited studies were identified related to the impact of brainstorming on writing essays or expository essays in ESL context. Henceforth, the current study will shed light on this aspect by contributing a study to the ESL context and specifically to Sri Lankan context.

Another limitation is that, most of the studies aim to find the impact of brainstorming on writing development by using tertiary or intermediate level L2 learners. Thus, there is space to check its applicability among elementary and upper-secondary L2 learners; where the current study will focus on upper-secondary level learners while identifying the gap.

More importantly, either in EFL or ESL the studies related to brainstorming have not broadened the scope to see whether it has an impact on the students who has a lower proficiency level. According to Raimes (1985), accuracy is known to be the center of attention of the students who has a lower-proficiency level. Accordingly, the current research study will focus on the impact of brainstorming on expository essay writing with lower L2 proficiency level students.

Conclusion

This section has presented a review of research studies on L2 writing in relation to the use of brainstorming and the research gaps have been identified and the next section will present details on the research methodology.

Methodology

Introduction

This section provides information regarding the methodology used to conduct the study. According to Creswell (2013), "Research methodology is the philosophical framework within which the research is conducted and the way to systematically solve the research problem" (p.197). To study the impact of brainstorming strategy in writing expository essays by lower-proficient upper-secondary ESL students, the researcher implemented a mixed methods research design. This section discusses about the research design including the research setting and research sampling, data collection instruments, procedure of the study, data analysis procedure and the ethical considerations of the study.

Research Design

The current research can bring to light as a cross-sectional study with a deductive theory approach and the methodological choice is mixed-method simple with an experimental strategy. According to Cresswell et al. (2011), a mixed-method approach provides a better understanding about the research problem. Furthermore, mixed methods give a voice to study participants and ensure that study findings are grounded in participants' experiences. Henceforth, explanatory mix-method design is employed where the quantitative data collection and analysis will be followed-up by qualitative data collection and analysis. Since, the ultimate purpose of the research is to study the impact of brainstorming, an experimental

approach (RQ1) is used. Furthermore, triangulation is achieved by using more than one approach including pre-test, post-test and semi-structured interviews to eliminate the inherent biases (Crump & Logan, 2008). Therefore, the current study includes a treatment period, where the researcher is an observer and a pre-test and a post-test administered by the researcher which will be analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Taula (2016) investigated the impact of brainstorming strategies towards students' using the procedure of a pre-test, treatment, and post test. Accordingly, the mean score of the pre-test were identified as low and two sessions with treatment were conducted followed by the post-test. Henceforth, a similar method is used in the current study where the only difference to be noted is the four sessions in the treatment period. Similarly, Eliwarti (2016) did a study on using brainstorming technique to improve students' ability in writing essays comprised with a procedure of pre-test followed by the treatment and then the post-test was conducted. Therefore, the procedure of the current study can be justified. Finally, semi-structured interviews (RQ2) are conducted in the end which is thematically analysed. Since, the choice of research philosophy is mostly determined by the research problem, the current study is based on the philosophy of pragmatism.
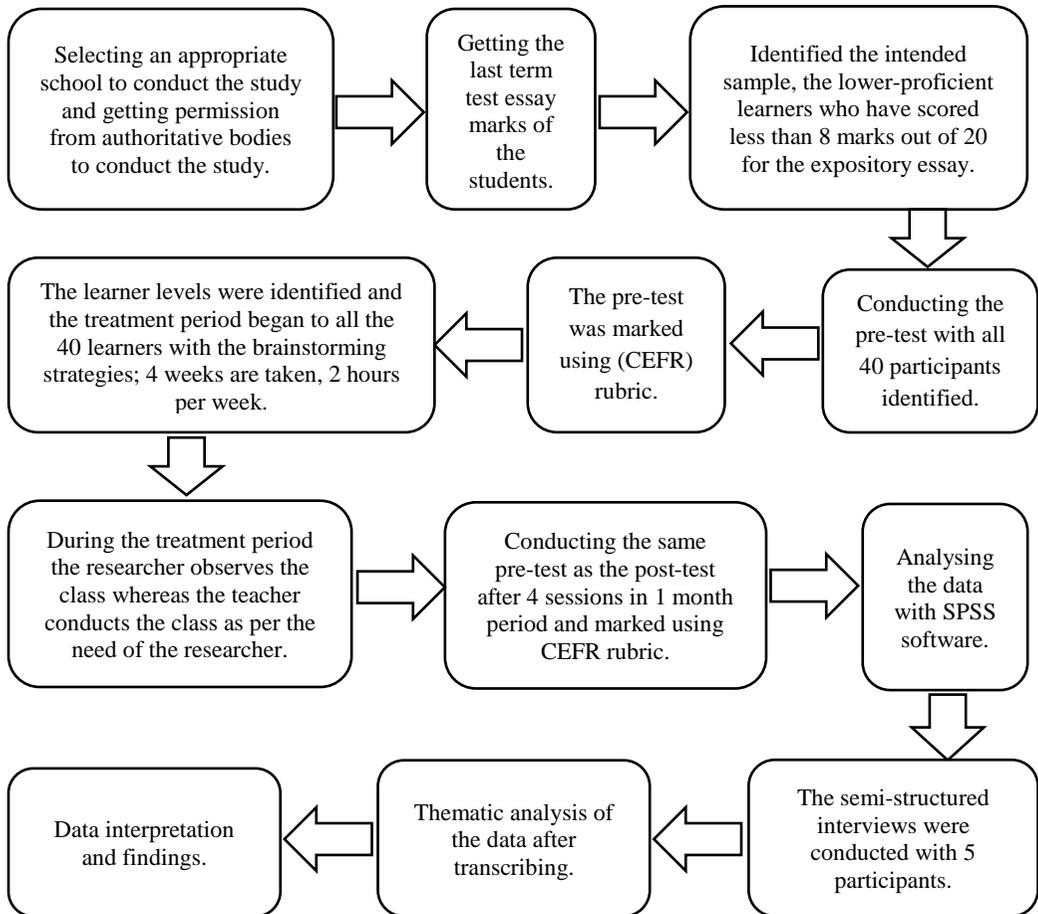
Research Setting

A sample of 40 upper-secondary level students currently studying in Grade 12 at A/Rathnayake Central College, Menikhinna following Arts stream for their A/L examination were taken for the present study. The rationale for choosing grade 12 students: is that they will be writing the A/L General English paper in two years and the paper includes an expository essay. The school is selected as it is a popular sports school in Sri Lanka and many students who do sports are in Arts class and their results for English paper were unsatisfactory. The teacher in-charge of the Arts class was approached in advance to get a profile of all the learners. Consequently, with the objective of controlling the variable, 40 participants were chosen with a purposive sampling method based on their last term-test essay marks; who scored less than 8 marks out of 20, as lower-proficiency level learners of writing in order to investigate the (RQ1). Thus, the proficiency level of the learners is controlled and equal. The sample ranged between age 17 to 18 and their first language (L1) was Sinhala. Thereby, the pre-test was done and marked out of 20 allocating marks according to Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) rubric and consequently, students were given a one-month treatment period which was followed by a post-test. The CEFR rubric was selected for assessment due to its standardized, proficiency-based criteria, which provide an objective and internationally recognised benchmark for evaluating writing skills. This mitigates the potential subjectivity of institution-specific marking schemes and allows for a clearer interpretation of learner progress across defined competency levels (Council of Europe, 2001a). Students follow the state issued English pupils' text book which has essay writing activities but they have not been exposed to the proposed technique of brainstorming before. Hence, the study incorporates the use of brainstorming to find its impact on lower-proficient upper secondary level learners in writing expository essays.

Procedure of the Study Figure

Figure 1

The Procedure Used in the Study

```
┌─────────────────────┐     ┌──────────────┐     ┌─────────────────────┐
│ Selecting an        │     │ Getting the  │     │ Identified the      │
│ appropriate school  │ ──▷ │ last term    │ ──▷ │ intended sample,    │
│ to conduct the      │     │ test essay   │     │ the lower-proficient│
│ study and getting   │     │ marks of     │     │ learners who have   │
│ permission from     │     │ the          │     │ scored less than 8  │
│ authoritative bodies│     │ students.    │     │ marks out of 20 for │
│ to conduct the      │     │              │     │ the expository      │
│ study.              │     │              │     │ essay.              │
└─────────────────────┘     └──────────────┘     └─────────────────────┘
```

Selecting an appropriate school to conduct the study and getting permission from authoritative bodies to conduct the study. → Getting the last term test essay marks of the students. → Identified the intended sample, the lower-proficient learners who have scored less than 8 marks out of 20 for the expository essay.

The learner levels were identified and the treatment period began to all the 40 learners with the brainstorming strategies; 4 weeks are taken, 2 hours per week. ← The pre-test was marked using (CEFR) rubric. ← Conducting the pre-test with all 40 participants identified.

During the treatment period the researcher observes the class whereas the teacher conducts the class as per the need of the researcher. → Conducting the same pre-test as the post-test after 4 sessions in 1 month period and marked using CEFR rubric. → Analysing the data with SPSS software.

Data interpretation and findings. ← Thematic analysis of the data after transcribing. ← The semi-structured interviews were conducted with 5 participants.

Data Collection Procedure

The pre-test, post-test and the semi-structured interviews were the instruments that were used to collect data for the study.

The Pre-test and the Post-test

The pre and post tests were used with the sample before and after the treatment period to clearly comprehend the output of the proposed strategy. These expository essay writing tests aimed to evaluate the improvement of ESL upper-secondary lower-proficient learners' writing skills in relation to content and organisation according to CEFR. According to Dimitrov andRumrill (2003), pretest-posttest designs are "widely used in behavioral research, primarily for the purpose of comparing groups or measuring change resulting from experimental

treatments" (p.159). In the pre-test, all 40 students were asked to write an essay titled "The Internet and the Life of teenagers", for mostly to test their level of expository essay writing. The topic was relevant to their level and 45 minutes were given with a word limit of 200 words, similar to their A/L examination. Participants' essays were marked using the CEFR rubric. The post-test, which was done after the treatment period in the fourth week also was similar to the pre-test and the participants were asked to write an essay on the same topic, so the consistency is maintained. The objective of the post- test was to check the participants' improvement in writing expository essays after the intervention of brainstorming technique.

Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain students' perceptions towards the use of brainstorming in improving/hindering their expository essay writing skills. This data collection method offers a flexible way of obtaining information within relative boundaries (Bryman, 2008). Furthermore, Denscombe (2003) and Bryman (2004) mention that the semi-structured interview is a free and flexible method in which the researcher is able to exercise control and guidance. The interviews were conducted face to face by choosing five students randomly after the treatment period. According to Lee et al. (2002), using only a few participants for an interview is recommended for studies that use more than one instrument. The students were interviewed individually and they were given the choice of being interviewed either in L1 or L2. Therefore, they had the freedom to select the language that would be most appropriate to express their opinions most clearly.

Data Analysis Procedure

Pre-test and Post-test

According to Van Esch (2013), the quantitative data analysis of pre-tests and post- tests is done utilising paired sample t-tests in Statistical Analysis Tool SPSS 25 to report "correlations, comparisons of means and statistically significant findings" (p.216). Hence, the marks of the pre-test and post-test were analysed using SPSS to investigate whether brainstorming impact positively for learners in writing expository essays.

Semi Structured Interviews

To analyse semi-structured interviews, this study adopts the method of thematic analysis. First, the interviews were recorded, transcribed using standard verbatim and translated from Sinhala to English (only the interviews which were conducted in L1) to analyse students' responses. Interviews are analysed thematically to account for in-depth narrative descriptions and identification of general themes along with supporting respondent quotes (Van Esch, 2013).

Ethical Considerations

According to Byrne (2001), gaining informed consent is an essential part of all research endeavors that involve human participants to protect human rights of the research participants.

In the current study, prior to the research written consent has been obtained from school principal and the teacher involved and also, informed written consent was obtained from all the students who participated in the research study to assure that their ethics were preserved (Appendix F, G, H and I).

Conclusion

In this section, the research design and the participants of the study were presented. Moreover, this section provided details about the data collection methods, data analysis procedure and ethical considerations of this study. The next section would discuss the findings and discussion.

Findings and Discussion

Introduction

This section aims to shed light upon the data collected through quantitative and qualitative research methods. The data is presented, analysed, described and interpreted in a systematic manner in order to generate the conclusion of the study. The present study uses graphs, charts and tables. Duquia et al. (2014) mention that tables and charts allow the researcher to present a large amount of data efficiently with significant visual appeal by making results more comprehensible and attractive to the reader. The chapter includes the findings of the study in terms of two research instruments: SPSS analysis of the experimental data and the thematic analysis of the semi- structured interviews.

Quantitative Analysis

Demographic Data of the Participants

The demographic data of the participants were analyzed to gain better insights into the composition and the representativeness of the sample with that of the population under the consideration. However, these data were not considered for analysis.
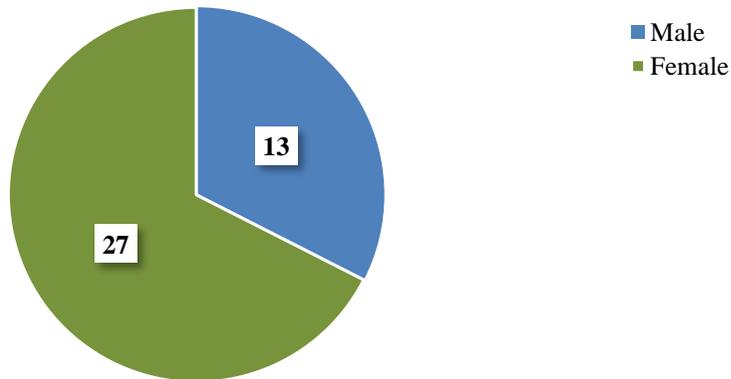
Table 1

Gender of the Participants

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Male	13	32.5	32.5	32.5
Valid	Female	27	67.5	67.5	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Figure 2

Gender of the Participants

As per figure 2 the majority of the sample is observed to be females. However, as the variable of gender is only considered to be a demographic variable and not identified to be a key determinant of the findings of the current study.

Analysis of the Pre-test Marks

All the units of the sample were of the same proficiency level; that is lower-proficient upper-secondary learners who had obtained less than 8 marks out of 20 for their last term-test essay, who were following Arts stream for their A/L. The reasons for the above selection were justified in the preceding chapters. Thus, matching to their proficiency level, the pre-test was conducted and their marks and relevant data are demonstrated statistically in the below table.
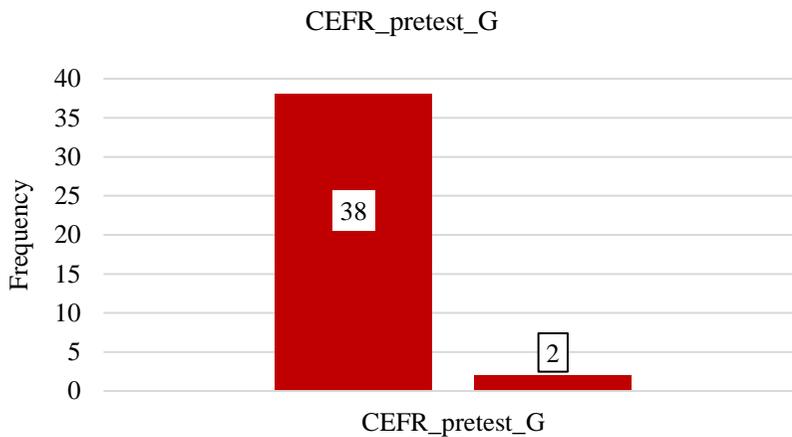
Table 2

Pre-test Statistical Details

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1	1	2.5	2.5	2.5
1	5	12.5	12.5	15.0
2	2	5.0	5.0	20.0
2	6	15.0	15.0	35.0
3	7	17.5	17.5	52.5
4	1	2.5	2.5	55.0
4	10	25.0	25.0	80.0
5	2	5.0	5.0	85.0
5	4	10.0	10.0	95.0
6	1	2.5	2.5	97.5
8	1	2.5	2.5	100.0
Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Table 3

CEFR Grades of the Pre-test

Grades	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
A1	38	95.0	95.0	95.0
A2	2	5.0	5.0	100.0
Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Figure 3

A Bar Chart to Portray CEFR Pre-test Grades

CEFR_pretest_G

As demonstrated in the above tables and figures, the majority of learners that is 38 out of 40 belong to the A1 level acceding to the CEFR rubric; which is 95% of the total population. According to Council of Europe (2001), A1 level is identified as the breakthrough level and defines a basic user. Evidently, the selected sample was lower-proficient learners and they all belong to the same proficiency level and consequently, the objective of the researcher in controlling the variable has righteously achieved.

Analysis of the Post-test Marks

Intervention: After the pre-test, the treatment period began which consisted of four sessions of two hours each which went on for a month. Throughout the treatment period, all the 40 learners in the sample were exposed to the new technique of applying brainstorming and students practiced writing during this treatment period with teacher's assistance where the researcher provided lesson plans to the teacher and the researcher acted as an observer during the sessions. The active learner-engagement with writing lessons was notable to the researcher. During the treatment period the current study employed the steps of brainstorming proposed by Taula (2016) which included listing technique. Subsequently, Eliwarti (2016)

found that using brainstorming technique; listing, can improve essay writing skills. Accordingly, brainstorming strategy of listing was given more emphasis.

Post-test: Finally, the same topic which was given at the pre-test was given as the post-test with the ultimate objective of maintaining consistency through the tests, which resulted a significant development as demonstrated in the below tables.

Table 4

Post-test Statistical Details

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
3	1	2.5	2.5	2.5
4	3	7.5	7.5	10.0
5	5	12.5	12.5	22.5
6	9	22.5	22.5	45.0
7	5	12.5	12.5	57.5
8	6	15.0	15.0	72.5
9	4	10.0	10.0	82.5
10	3	7.5	7.5	90.0
12	1	2.5	2.5	92.5
14	1	2.5	2.5	95.0
15	1	2.5	2.5	97.5
18	1	2.5	2.5	100.0
Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Table 5

CEFR Post-test Grades

Grades	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
A1	9	22.5	22.5	22.5
A2	20	50.0	50.0	72.5
B1	8	20.0	20.0	92.5
B2	2	5.0	5.0	97.5
C1	1	2.5	2.5	100.0
Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Figure 4

A Bar Chart to Portray CEFR Post-test Grades

CEFR_posttest_G

■ CEFR_posttest_G
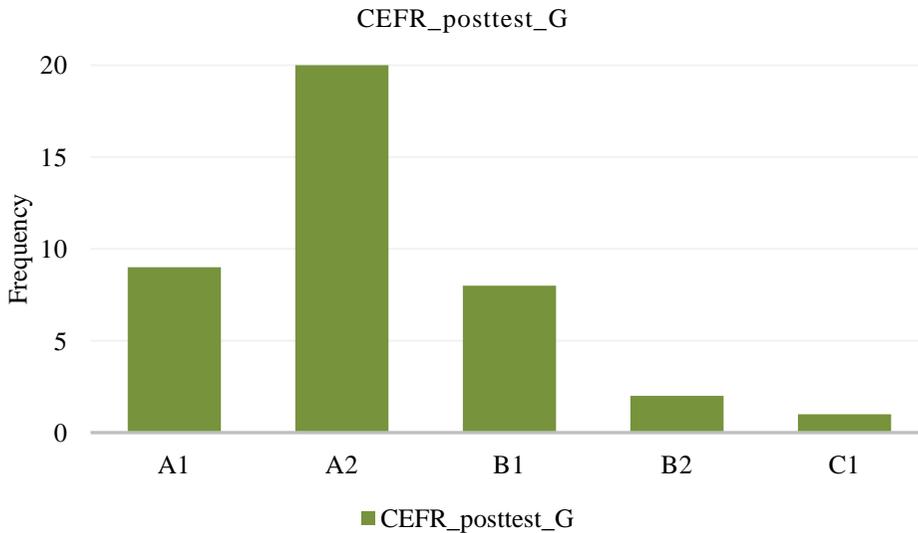
After comparing the tables 2 to 5 valid percent column; post-test indicated a significant improvement percentage wise. Comparatively, the pre-test consisted of 38 A1 level students (95%), this have decreased to nine A1 level learners (22.5%) whereas the two A2 level learners (5%) during the pre-test have increased up to 20(50%). In contrast to the pre-test CEFR grades, B1, B2 and even one student from C1 have emerged as a result of the treatment period; which exhibits an impressive development in post-test marks. Thus, during the pre-test only A1 and A2 level learners' existed proving they are basic users, yet the post-test signified eight B1 learners and two B2 learners proving the emergence of independent users of English and the one C1 user portrayed the emergence of effective operational proficiency level learner. Consequently, the treatment period had positively impacted on almost every learner according to the statistical data.

The Effectiveness of Brainstorming in Writing Expository Essays; Statistical Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test Marks.

The impact of brainstorming on learner improvement is clearly depicted through the marks that the students have obtained in pre and post-tests. Thereby, the sample paired t-test is conducted in order to portray the significance. Notably, when each subject has a pair of measurements, such as a before and after score; a paired t-test aids to determine whether the mean change for these pairs is significantly different from zero (Frost, n.d). This test is an inferential statistics procedure because it uses samples to draw conclusions about populations.

Table 6

Paired Sample Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pretest	3.19	40	1.564	.247
	Posttest	7.55	40	3.071	.486

The output indicates that the mean for the pre-test is 3.19 and for the post-test is 7.55. The average difference between the pre-test and post-test is -4.363. Specifically, the post-test mean is greater than the pre-test mean, which clearly denotes the effectiveness of the proposed strategy. Furthermore, the standard deviation and standard error mean have also increased from pre-test to post-test.

Table 7

Paired Sample Correlation

	N	Correlation	Sig.
Pretest & Posttest	40	.830	.000

When the correlation factor of the two tests is considered, statistically if the correlation is 0.3, it signifies a moderate correlation and if it is greater than 0.8 it symbolises a positive and a strong relationship where as if the correlation is less than 0.1 a weak correlation (The British Academy, n.d). Accordingly, the above tests denote the good or positive association by having a correlation of (0.830).

Table 8

Paired-samples Test

		Paired Differences			95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
		Mean	*Std. Deviation*	*Std. Error Mean*	*Lower*	*Upper*	*T*	*df*	*Sig. (2-tailed)*
Pair 1	Pretest Posttest	*-4.362*	*1.977*	*.313*	*-4.995*	*-3.730*	*-13.953*	*9*	*.000*

Table 9

Pre-test and Post-test Difference

		Pretest	Posttest	Difference
N	Valid	40	40	40
	Missing	0	0	0
Mean		3.19	7.55	4.36
Median		3.00	7.00	4.00
Std. Deviation		1.564	3.071	1.977
Minimum		1	3	2
Maximum		8	18	11

Table 10

Statistical Data of the Pre-test and Post-test

|		Pretest	Posttest
	Valid	40	40
	Missing	0	0
N	Mean	3.19	7.55
	Median	3.00	7.00
	Mode	4	6
Std. Deviation		1.564	3.071
Variance		2.445	9.433
Skewness		316	1.511
Std. Error of Skewness		- 374	- 374
Kurtosis		.041	2.947
Std. Error of Kurtosis		733	733
Minimum		1	3
Maximum		8	18

The above tables exhibit the improvement of learners from the pre-test to post-test with regards to mean, median, mode, standard deviation, variance and kurtosis. Furthermore, it is evident that the minimum mark of the pre-test as '1' where as the minimum mark of the post-test is '3'. Similarly, there is a significant improvement in the maximum mark of the pre-test and post-test as '8' and '18' respectively.

The Graphical Representation of the Significant Improvement

The figure 5 clearly denotes the improvement of learner performance in the post-test compared to the pre-test. The blue line signifies the pre-test performance which is relatively low and the green line shows the pot-test marks which portray a significant development.

Figure 5

A Line Graph to Show the Difference in the Marks
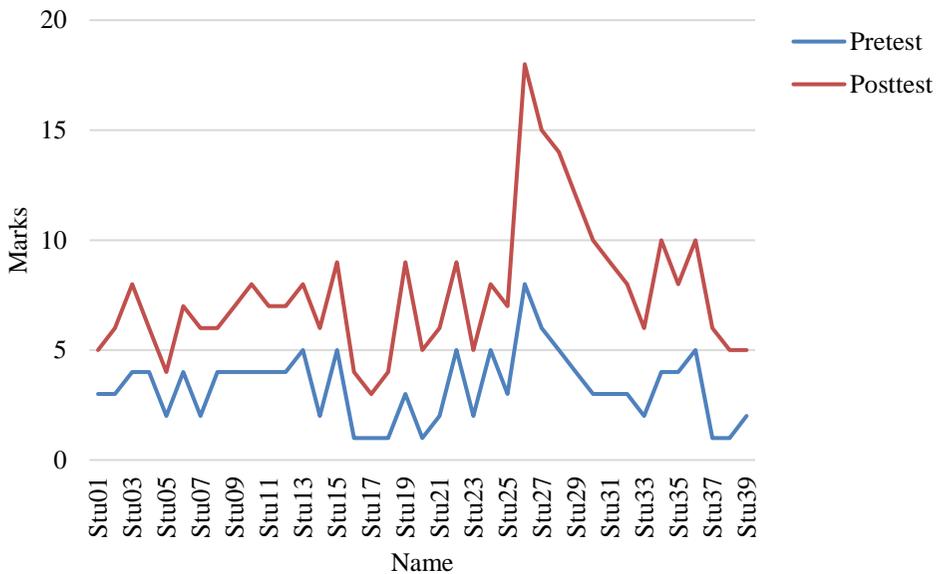
Qualitative Analysis

In order to answer the second research question that is to comprehend the attitudes of learners towards applying brainstorming when writing expository essays in English, semi-structured interviews were conducted and qualitatively analysed. The semi-structured interview consisted of 10 questions in order to address the second research question. A random sample of five students after undergoing the treatment period was taken for the interviews and thereby, five interviews were conducted. Then, they were recorded, and transcribed and translated to analyse their responses. The thematic analysis has been used and the major theme for each question asked by the students in the semi-structured interviews has been identified to analyse their responses. The following are the results derived from the qualitative analysis of the respondents' interview data.

Analysis of the Gathered Data from Semi- structured Interview

Seven themes were identified after analysing the answers given by the participants for the semi-structured interviews.

The Less Preference about Writing Skill

When looking over the responses for the first and second questions, it was significant that none of them liked writing skills. The reasons explained were their inability to produce perfect writing and, less marks the students' have obtained for writing tests. Three students clearly mentioned that they don't enjoy writing, because no interactive methods were taught during

the class. Accordingly, it can be exemplified that the reasons for their dislike are based on their inability and the contemporary methods employed by the teachers. Subsequently, when a method like brainstorming is incorporated in classrooms to teach writing skills, students have changed their attitudes and the manner in which their perceptions changed with brainstorming is further elaborated with the rest of the questions.

The Proposed Technique as Motivating and Interesting

In the third question, all the interviewees expressed that they are not satisfied with their last term-test essay marks and everyone conveyed their interest to improve their marks. Thus, it is clear that the treatment period has motivated them to do better. Out of the five students interviewed, the majority revealed that doing brainstorming before writing the final essay made them feel motivated to write the essays. Earlier, during the pre-test, it was significant that the learners were not interested in writing and none of them wrote more than one paragraph, but after brainstorming, they felt motivated to write more. Furthermore, engaging in brainstorming during pre-writing activities motivates them in terms of producing the relevant facts to include in an essay. This finding can be supported by Fawzi and Hussein (2013) study on enhancing students' motivation to write essays through brainstorming, which proved that brainstorming was motivating to students.

"The technique is interesting, so I like to write essays now" (interviewee 2)

"Essay writing became less stressful than earlier and now; I like to write essays more by applying this brainstorming with many topics" (interviewee 3)

"I am lazy to write essays because I don't have facts to write and at the same time I write only one paragraph, but now I have energy to write more" (interviewee 5)

"It really inspired me to write good essays and honestly, engaging in brainstorming before writing essays was a new experience for me. For the first time, I put much effort to write an essay and thought about the given topic a lot" (interviewee 4)

The questions 4, 5 and 6 (Appendix D) were aimed at getting the participants' perspective about brainstorming whether it is beneficial or not and about their feelings when engaging with the technique and the possible advantages that the students have identified. Accordingly, a few themes were identified.

Brainstorming as Beneficial in Developing Writing Skills

Almost everyone expressed that it is beneficial and expressed their willingness to employ the technique in every useful situation.

"I think now I can get more marks in my term-test because essay carries 20-25 marks and now I feel that I can write better due to this technique I learned." (interviewee 2)

"Very useful strategy I feel, and it will help me not only in essay writing but in other types of writings as well" (interviewee 1)

Organise the Essay with an Appropriate Flow

Four interviewees out of the five stated that brainstorming is a good method to organise the ideas. Further, it was mentioned that it aided them in maintaining a good flow throughout their essay. A similar finding was noted by Amalia et al. (2015), which signified an improvement in the written essay in terms of the content, the organisation, vocabulary, language use, and the mechanics of language due to brainstorming. Similarly, Utami (2014) found through his study that the brainstorming technique aids the students to generate ideas and organize them into paragraphs.

"Honestly, I had no idea where to start and what to say inside of an essay, but after learning this technique, now I know how to divide my paragraphs and how to connect ideas" (interviewee 1)

"I learn to arrange my essay with a good flow because of brainstorming" (interviewee 5)

Rich Content

All the interviewees mentioned that their ability to write satisfactory content was achieved through brainstorming. Since content carries a considerable weight in an essay, the student perceptions supported that brainstorming is effective.

"Now, I have lots of data, before starting my essay, and now my content is big because I make every effort to connect all the points I jotted down during brainstorming". (interviewee 2)

"Usually I'm short of facts when I'm given an essay topic. When the topic is given and when the teacher asks for the essay, I have issues with lack of facts and organizing the facts and I feel uncomfortable to handover the essay. But when doing brainstorming it helps me to take time, reflects many ideas and write and it was helpful to me as it builds confidence in me to write a proper essay using the discussed facts" (interviewee 1)

Increased the Confidence

Furthermore, interviewees' attitudes exemplified that brainstorming positively impacts them to complete the essay properly. As discussed earlier, the (interviewee 1) clearly stated that brainstorming helped her build confidence. Further, three other participants mentioned their confidence boost that happened through the proposed technique.

"Sometimes I don't write the name on top of the essays that I write because I feel shy to do that, but now I feel okay to write my name proudly because with this

technique I can write something without leaving the essay with 2-3 sentences".
(interviewee 4)

Brainstorming as a Convenient Method to Employ

The 7th question (Appendix D) was answered by four students as they didn't undergo any difficulty in applying the technique, whereas one stated that it took a lot of time to finish the essay. In the 8th question, the participant who emphasised a difficulty pointed out his own solution as setting a limited time to apply the technique. Four participants stated that they were not afraid that they would run out of time, yet two mentioned that since they took much time with brainstorming, it made them feel that they will run out of time.

"It is a very easy method where we can use a paper and write everything as we wish, so it boosts my strength, and I enjoy the way to do it" (interviewee 3)

The final question (Appendix D) aimed at getting interviewees' overall perspective about brainstorming as satisfied or not and about their suggestions. Accordingly, everyone stated they are highly satisfied, and they suggested their willingness to engage in brainstorming before writing any type of text. They further mentioned their need for the school English teacher to use such techniques in the classroom to strikeout boredom in the classroom and to make essay writing engaging and enjoyable. The aforementioned idea can be backed-up by Khan (2013)'s study, which found brainstorming as an effective teaching and a learning strategy. Furthermore, essay writing is considered to be a difficult skill in the ESL context whereas the perceptions of the participants revealed that practicing to write essays would be easy if a definite strategy like "brainstorming" is practiced during the pre-writing stage. Henceforth, according to the semi-structured interview data, participants revealed that they are satisfied with the treatment and mentioned that they are grateful for the opportunity.

Discussion of Overall Quantitative and Qualitative Data

The Analysis of the Quantitative Data

According to the data analysis discussed above, the students have performed well in the post-test compared to the pre-test marks and their written essays have developed in terms of content and organisation. Hence, it can be stated that there is an impact of brainstorming on lower-proficiency level learners in writing expository essays in ESL context.

Furthermore, the mean of post-test (7.55) compared to the mean of the pre-test (3.19) portrays the positive impact of the strategy. Henceforth, the study conducted by Taula (2016) on the impact of brainstorming strategies towards students had a similar result; that is the mean score of the pre-test exposed the low writing skills in descriptive paragraph, thereby two sessions with treatment were conducted followed by the post-test. The result of post-test based on the mean value showed the increase of students' writing skills which is similar to the current study. Furthermore, Adriani (2016) conducted quantitative research by giving pre-test and post-test and identified the significant influence of using brainstorming technique on the students' writing recount text performance. Similarly, Mardhikaningrum (2016) through his

quantitative data, exposed that there was a statistical difference between the mean scores of the pre-test and the post-test and implies that brainstorming technique is believed to improve the eighth-grade students' writing ability.

The findings of the present study are further supported by Ibnian (2011) who found brainstorming highly contributed in enabling learners to generate ideas and crystallise new thoughts about the raised topics, a fact that positively affected their performance on the post-essay writing test. Bayar et al. (n.d) investigated the effect of prompted expository essays and identified the great impact that brainstorming had on developing learner performance which is similar to the current study's post-test performances. Furthermore, the studies of (Amalia et al., 2015; Bearing et al., 2016; Manouchehry et al., 2014; Taula 2016; Utami 2014)) supports the findings of the current study.

The RQ1 investigated 'how brainstorming impact lower-proficiency level learners' written performance in relation to expository essay writing?' has been answered with the aid of the pre-test and post-test scores with the effect of the intervention period. Thus, the above discussed findings based on SPSS software clearly signify the improvement of students' writings and thereby, it can be restated that the brainstorming strategy positively impacted the lower-proficiency level learners in writing expository essays. Omidvari (2011) had a similar RQ1 and the results of the analysis of covariance showed that the instruction of brainstorming strategy influenced EFL learners' writing performance positively, making them more active. The significant improvement in post-test scores, particularly the emergence of B1, B2, and even one C1 level writer, suggests that brainstorming directly addresses the core deficits of lower-proficiency learners. The technique likely mitigates 'writer's block' by reducing the cognitive load associated with simultaneous idea generation and text production. By separating the ideation phase (brainstorming) from the drafting phase, learners can focus on generating content without the immediate pressure of grammatical accuracy, leading to richer and more organised essays. This aligns with the constructivist principle of building knowledge structures before engaging in complex tasks.

The Analysis of Qualitative Data

The results of the qualitative analysis can be highlighted with some major points. The most vital implication was that the students were interested and motivated to engage in essay writing due to brainstorming technique. Specifically, the students manifested brainstorming as an effective method to be used in ESL classrooms to improve the writing skills. Many advantages of using brainstorming technique holistically to improve the English proficiency of ESL learners were explored. However, more emphasis was given to its impact on improving the quality of the essays regarding content and structure. Therefore, when considering the overall results, all the respondents have identified brainstorming to be an effective technique in improving expository essay writing.

Therefore, the RQ2; 'what are the perceptions of students on brainstorming in relation to expository essay writing?' has been answered with positive perceptions to conclude the effect of the study. Mardhikaningrum (2016) identified that brainstorming improves the students'

motivation and involvement to build their confidence to generate ideas and facilitates the students to activate their prior knowledge before they practice their writing, which can support the qualitative findings of the current study. Similarly, Virdaus (2019) study also revealed that the brainstorming strategy could improve students' English writing ability and their motivation in writing. Accordingly, the current study also identified that learners' motivation to write is developed through brainstorming.

Therefore, brainstorming is identified as motivating and interesting, which can be supported by (Fawzi & Hussein, 2013; Mardhikaningrum, 2016). Similarly, the themes such as enabling learners to produce rich content, organization were supported by (Amalia, 2015; Utami, 2014). Furthermore, Ibnian (2011)'s study which consisted of a pre and post essay writing and a checklist, indicated that brainstorming technique had a positive effect on the writing skill of EFL students in terms of content and organisation, mechanics of writing, language use and skills emerged from creative thinking abilities.

Conclusion

The contemporary section prioritised on assessing the level of influence of applying brainstorming on writing expository essays by lower-proficient upper secondary ESL learners and thereby concludes on the effectiveness of the proposed strategy on the intended outcomes. The marks obtained by the students for the tests conducted prior and post to the implementation of the brainstorming strategy was utilised for the analysis. The chapter is not only aimed to provide an overview of the effectiveness of the strategy, but also highlights the experiences and insights shared by the students at the time of interviews to provide more grounds for the statistical findings.

The preceding section is intended to provide insights for the readers on the conclusion and on the summary of the findings of the study, while further providing suggestions and recommendations by the author addressing the key findings of the contemporary study.

Conclusion

Introduction

This section discusses about the summary of the main findings of the study, limitations and relevant recommendations that could be adopted further.

Summary of the Main Findings

The study aimed at finding the impact of brainstorming technique on lower proficiency level learners at the upper-secondary level when writing expository essays. Thereby, both quantitative and qualitative data gathered have disclosed the positive effect of the proposed strategy on the intended sample. The quantitative analysis was conducted based on the pre-test followed with a treatment period and then with a post-test. The data obtained through the tests in the form of an essay were marked using the CEFR rubric and thereby, the learner standard was diagnosed based on CEFR levels. Consequently, the mean values and the mode,

median, and standard deviation all proved the fact that the all 40 learners in the sample had improved with regard to post-test performance when compared with the pre-test with a significant mean value change from 3.19 to 7.55. Furthermore, there was a positive correlation of 0.830, which marks a powerful strong association among the tests. The t value was -13.953. This concludes the main finding of the study, which answers RQ1 it exemplifies the impact that brainstorming had in developing learner expository essay writing skills.

Furthermore, the researcher aimed at controlling the variable and therefore the sample of the same proficiency level was taken for the intervention period as one group. Throughout the treatment period, the researcher observed the classroom and was able to identify learner behaviour. During the treatment period, the students were taught different techniques of brainstorming that matched their proficiency level. It was noticeable that learners enjoyed applying brainstorming before writing their final essay draft. During the treatment period the current study employed the steps of brainstorming proposed by Taula (2016).

The qualitative data gathered through the semi- structured interviews concludes that the students had a positive attitude about the brainstorming strategy, answering the second RQ of the study. Moreover, students clearly emphasised their perceptions regarding the proposed strategy as convenient, motivating and interesting, confidence building, aiding in organisation and producing rich content. Accordingly, the interviewees upheld the idea that the technique is beneficial and the learners are fully satisfied with the treatment period. The students further suggested incorporating brainstorming as a pre-writing activity in all sorts of writing activities in their classrooms, as they state it is beneficial to them as they get to recall their memory of what they know, and it aids them in generating new ideas and helps them to eagerly engage in the process of writing.

Implications

As discussed in the preceding chapter, the study manifests that brainstorming positively impacts lower-proficiency level learners in writing expository essays in the ESL classroom. According to the 2017 G.C.E. O/L evaluation report, 74% of students scored below 50 marks for the essay composition in the exam paper and according to the general practice in government schools, no specific strategy is being used to practice essay writing to students in Sri Lanka. The report further states the reason for the particular issue as, "teaching writing as product, where students do not engage in the process of writing. Instead, process writing approach should be introduced to teaching writing which gives pupils more practice in writing techniques such as paragraph building" (p. 28).

The present study portrays the impact of the brainstorming strategy on learner improvement and subsequently suggests that it can be practiced in schools in order to develop students' overall writing performance. Since it is evident that there is a significant difference between the essays written after engaging in brainstorming. Amidianti (2011) suggested that the use of brainstorming should be expanded and both teachers and students' need to concern on ways to develop various brainstorming activities. Similarly, Wambui (2020) stated brainstorming as an effective technique when teaching composition writing to increase learner

achievements and declared to the policy makers and Ministry of Education Kenya to use brainstorming to provoke critical thinking of learners. Moreover, Shufi (2011) suggested that the English teachers to use brainstorming to teach English to the students, especially to teach writing. Furthermore, Khan (2013) examined that brainstorming as an effective teaching strategy, which can be introduced into language classes as a fun activity. Similarly, Virdaus (2019) suggested a brainstorming strategy for teaching English writing.

Moreover, Gurning (n.d) also reiterated that than the lecturing technique, Brainstorming works better with students' writing achievement.

Since the current study recognizes the learner development with lower-proficient learners, brainstorming can be employed by ESL teachers, syllabus designers as a strategy to improve weak students/lower-proficient learners in writing, especially expository essay writing. The findings imply that ESL teachers should integrate brainstorming as a core component of the writing process, not as an optional add-on. To operationalise this, teachers can:

- Lesson Planning- Dedicate specific time in writing lessons for explicit teaching and practice of brainstorming techniques like listing and mind-mapping.
- Classroom Management - Use a combination of individual and group brainstorming to cater to different learner preferences and to maximise idea generation within limited time frames.
- Assessment- Incorporate the quality of brainstorming notes into formative assessment to emphasise the value of the planning process.

Policymakers and syllabus designers are encouraged to include explicit guidelines on pre-writing strategies in teacher instruction manuals and national curricula to ensure systematic implementation across schools. Moreover, rather than just providing a model or assigning the students to write the essays by providing only the topic, it would be more effective if the students were given the chance to engage in brainstorming strategies during pre-writing stage prior to writing the essays.

Limitations of the Study and Recommendations

Acknowledging the findings of the study, this section aims to shed some light on the limitations of the current study and the possible recommendations based on the study. Correspondingly, this section is a pursuit of facilitating some areas for future research studies under the topic.

Firstly, the current study is conducted as one of the preliminary studies in the Sri Lankan context, which suggests the lack of studies related to brainstorming and essay writing in Sri Lanka as well as in the ESL context compared to the EFL. Thus, more studies need to be conducted to affirm the validity.

Since the study has been conducted as a cross-sectional study, more longitudinal research to verify the long-lasting impact of brainstorming on writing performance is needed. The study

ran only for a period of four weeks, the intervention period, so time constraints have been identified as another limitation in the study which can be considered by future researchers.

Another major limitation identified in the study is the limited sample size. The study was limited only to 40 students due to the pandemic situation and the protest prevailed in the country and confined only to one area in the country. If the sample size could be increased and the study could be conducted within a larger population covering a few more areas in the country or the region, the results obtained could be generalised in a broad manner.

The present study is confined only to a government school. So, as another recommendation, the study suggests that future researchers expand the scope of the study to various parts of the country and to Provincial and Private schools as well to get a more generalised analysis.

The current study prioritised the lower-proficient learners at upper-secondary level. Accordingly, in future, more studies can be done to aid lower-proficient learners at different levels, such as elementary, secondary and tertiary, with brainstorming strategies. Furthermore, future researchers could explore whether there is any effect on the learners with the proposed strategy with intermediate and upper-intermediate and advanced proficiency level learners.

Since the objective of the present study is to identify the impact of brainstorming on writing expository essays only; thus, the applicability can be checked in all types of essays as well as with all sorts of writing compositions and going beyond that the future researchers can try the effect of brainstorming with other skills as well.

Conclusion

The section concluded the basic findings of the study with its limitations, implications and recommendations. The present study aims to find the impact of brainstorming on lower-proficient students in writing expository essays in the ESL classrooms. Furthermore, the identification of the impact suggests that the government schools to practice the brainstorming technique at pre-writing stage in order to develop the writing performance of the students who are to participate in G.C.E. A/L examination.

References

Abedianpour, S., & Omidvari, A. (2018). Brainstorming strategy and writing performance: Effects and attitudes. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research, 9*(5), 1084–1094. https://doi.org/10.17507/jltr.0905.24

Aditiya, D. (2019). *The use of brainstorming technique to improve the students' ability of writing hortatory exposition text at SMAN 1 Seputih agung central Lampung* [Unpublished undergraduate thesis]. State Islamic Institute of Metro.

Adriani, S. (2016). *The influence of using brainstorming technique on the students' writing recount text performance at SMAN 1 Punggur central Lampung* [Unpublished undergraduate thesis]. State Islamic College (STAIN) of Jurai Siwo Metro.

Al-khatib, B. (2012). The effect of using brainstorming strategy in developing creative problem solving skills among female students in Princess Alia University College. *American International Journal of Contemporary Research, 2*(10), 47-55.

Al-Mutairi, A. (2015). The effect of using brainstorming strategy in developing creative problem solving skills among male students in Kuwait: A field study on Saud Al-Kharji School in Kuwait City. *Journal of Education and Practice, 6*(3), 135-145.

Al-Sawalha, A. (2014). Potential advantages of process writing for students English language and literature at Jerash University in Jordan. *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature, 2*(6), 41-46.

Amidianti. (2011). *The implementation of brainstorming in teaching English at the first year of senior high school 12 Pekanbaru* [Unpublished undergraduate thesis]. Islamic University of Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau.

Amoush, K. H. (2015). The impact of employing brainstorming strategy on improving writing performance of English major students at Balqa Applied University in Jordan. *Journal of Education and Practice, 6*(35), 88-95.

Badger, R., & White, G. (2000). A process genre approach to teaching writing. *ELT Journal, 54*(2), 153-160. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/54.2.153

Banu. (2018, March 29). Constructivism: A creative method of teaching. *The Progressive Teacher*. http://www.progressiveteacher.in/constructivism-a-creative-method-of-teaching/

Barki, H., & Pinsonneault, A. (2001). Small group brainstorming and idea quality. *Small Group Research, 32*(2), 158-205. https://doi.org/10.1177/104649640103200203

Blanchard, K., & Root, C. (2003). *Ready to write: A first composition text* (3rd ed.). Pearson Education.

Brown, H. D. (2001). *Teaching by principles: An interactive approach to language pedagogy* (2nd ed.). Longman.

Bryman, A. (2008). Of methods and methodology. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal, 3*(2), 159–168. https://doi.org/10.1108/17465640810900568

Byrne, M. (2001). The concept of informed consent in qualitative research. *AORN Journal, 74*(3), 401-403. https://doi.org/10.1016/s0001-2092(06)61798-5

Charney, D., Newman, J. H., & Palmquist, M. (1995). "I'm just no good at writing": Epistemological style and attitudes toward writing. *Written Communication, 12*(3), 298-329. https://doi.org/10.1177/0741088395012003002

Chenoweth, N. A., & Hayes, J. R. (2001). Fluency in writing: Generating text in L1 and L2. *Written Communication, 18*(1), 80-98. https://doi.org/10.1177/0741088301018001004

Chiang, S. (2003). The importance of cohesive conditions to perceptions of writing quality at the early stages of foreign language learning. *System, 31*(4), 471-484. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2003.02.001

Council of Europe. (2001). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*. Cambridge University Press.

Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Crump, B., & Logan, K. (2008). A framework for mixed stakeholders and mixed methods. *The Electronic Journal of Business Research Methods, 6*(1), 21-28.

Department of Examinations. (2012). Reviewing of the performance of school candidates: G.C.E. (O.L.) examination - 2011. Sri Lanka.

Dimitrov, D. M., & Rumrill, P. D. (2003). Pretest-posttest designs and measurement of change. *Work, 20*(2), 159-165.

Duquia, R. P., Bastos, J. L., Bonamigo, R. R., González-Chica, D. A., & Martínez-Mesa, J. (2014). Presenting data in tables and charts. *Anais Brasileiros de Dermatologia, 89*(2), 280–285. https://doi.org/10.1590/abd1806-4841.20143388

Eliwarti. (2016). Using brainstorming technique to improve students' ability in writing essays. *Journal of English Education, 2*(2), 87-99.

Fawzi, M., & Hussein, A. A. (2013). Enhancing students' motivation to write essays through brainstorming: A comparative study. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science, 3*(9), 191-196.

Folse, K. S., Muchmore-Vokoun, A., & Solomon, E. V. (2010). *Great writing 2: Great paragraphs* (3rd ed.). Heinle Cengage Learning.

Frost, J. (n.d.). *Paired t test: Definition & when to use it*. Statistics by Jim. Retrieved October 26, 2025, from https://statisticsbyjim.com/hypothesis-testing/paired-t-test/

Ghaith, G. (2002). *Writing*. Retrieved June 14, 2013, from http://www.uhu.es/antonia.dominguez/virtualwriting/writing.htm

Gultom, E., & Gurning, B. (n.d.). *The effect of brainstorming teaching technique on students' achievement in writing narrative paragraph* [Unpublished thesis]. Universitas Negeri Medan.

Hashempour, Z., Rostampour, M., & Behjat, F. (2015). The effect of brainstorming as a pre-writing strategy on EFL advanced learners' writing ability. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Language Research, 2*(1), 86-99.

Hedge, T. (1988). *Writing*. Oxford University Press.

Hedgcock, J. (2005). Taking stock of research and pedagogy in L2 writing. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning* (pp. 597-613). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Ibnian, S. (2011). Brainstorming and essay writing in EFL class. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies, 1*(3), 263-272. https://doi.org/10.4304/tpls.1.3.263-272

Khan, I. (2013). Relevance of brainstorming in an EFL classroom. *Elixir Social Science, 54*, 12668–12672.

Kroll, B. (Ed.). (1990). *Second language writing: Research insights for the classroom*. Cambridge University Press.

Maghsoudi, M., & Haririan, J. (2013). The impact of brainstorming strategies Iranian EFL learners' writing skill regarding their social class status. *International Journal of Language and Linguistics, 1*(4-1), 60-67. https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ijll.s.20130101.20

Manouchehry, A., Farangi, M. R., Fatemi, M. A., & Qaviketf, F. (2014). The effect of two brainstorming strategies on the improvement of Iranian intermediate EFL learners' writing skill. *International Journal of Language Learning and Applied Linguistics World, 6*(4), 176-187.

Mardhikaningrum, A. R. (2016). *Using the brainstorming technique to improve the eighth grade students' writing ability at SMP N 1 Nanggulan Kulon Progo* [Unpublished undergraduate thesis]. Yogyakarta State University.

Mehr, M., Malayeri, F., & Bayat, A. (2016). The effects of brainstorming as a prewriting activity on Iranian EFL learners prompted expository writing. *International Journal of Educational Investigations, 3*(3), 85-93.

National Education Commission. (2003). *Proposals for a national policy framework on general education in Sri Lanka*. Sri Lanka.

Nurhasanah, B., Martin, R., & Amalia, R. (2015). The application of brainstorming to improve student's writing skill. *The 3rd International Multidisciplinary Conference on Social Sciences*, Bandar Lampung University.

Ogbu, C. (2009). Strategies for effective teaching of essay writing in junior secondary school. *Arts and Social Science Education, 1*(1), 86-91.

Oishi, T. (2015). Applying brainstorming techniques to EFL classroom. *Shohoku College Review, 43*, 121–127.

Osborn, A. F. (1953). *Applied imagination: Principles and procedures of creative problem-solving*. Scribner.

Oshima, A., & Hogue, A. (1997). *Introduction to academic writing* (2nd ed.). Addison Wesley Longman.

Perera, M., & Fernando, S. (2017). *An investigation of problems related to writing in English as a second language* [Paper presentation]. Annual Research Symposium, Faculty of Education, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Raimes, A. (1983). *Techniques in teaching writing*. Oxford University Press.

Raimes, A. (1985). What unskilled ESL students do as they write: A classroom study of composing. *TESOL Quarterly, 19*(2), 229-258. https://doi.org/10.2307/3586828

Rao, Z. (2007). Training in brainstorming and developing writing skills. *ELT Journal, 61*(2), 100-105. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccm002

Richards, J. C. (1990). New trends in the teaching of writing in ESL/EFL. In Z. Wang (Ed.), *ELT in China: Papers presented at the international symposium on teaching English in the Chinese context* (pp. 312-325). Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.

Richards, J. C., & Renandya, W. A. (Eds.). (2002). *Methodology in language teaching: An anthology of current practice*. Cambridge University Press.

Shufi, N. (2011). *Improving class VII -A students' writing achievement by using brainstorming technique at MTSN Jember in the academic year 2010/2011* [Unpublished undergraduate thesis]. Jember University.

Stroebe, W., & Diehl, M. (1994). Why groups are less effective than their members: On productivity losses in idea-generating groups. *European Review of Social Psychology, 5*(1), 271–303. https://doi.org/10.1080/14792779543000084

Suhaimi, S. (2016). Teaching writing skill on recount text based on brainstorming in the classroom. *Ta'dib, 19*(1), 23-38. https://doi.org/10.31958/jt.v19i1.448

Sun, C. (2009). Process approach to teaching writing applied in different teaching models. *English Language Teaching, 2*(1), 150-155.

Taula. (2016). The impact of brainstorming strategies towards students' writing skill. *TEFL Overseas Journal, 2*, 150-156.

The British Academy. (n.d.). *Correlation*. Retrieved October 26, 2025, from https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/documents/3230/Correlation.pdf

Tompkins, G. E. (1990). *Teaching writing: Balancing process and product*. Merrill.

Utami, T. A. A. (2014). *Improving the ability in writing descriptive texts through brainstorming technique for grade VIII students at SMP N 1 Piyungan* [Unpublished undergraduate thesis]. Yogyakarta State University.

Van Esch, P., & Van Esch, L. J. (2013). Justification of a qualitative methodology to investigate the emerging concept: The dimensions of religion as underpinning constructs for mass media social marketing campaigns. *Journal of Business Theory and Practice, 1*(2), 214-243. https://doi.org/10.22158/jbtp.v1n2p214

Virdaus, V. V. (2019). The improvement of English writing and students' motivation through brainstorming. *Media of Teaching Oriented and Children, 3*(1), 15-25.

Wambui, H. K. (2020). *The effect of brainstorming as a pre-writing strategy on Iraqi EFL MA learners' writing ability* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Nairob