Exploring Academic Writing: The Case for Arcs Theory

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Abstract

The online platform has accelerated the need to add variety to the teaching of academic writing. During face-to-face teaching, writing teachers depended on one-to-one conferencing with writers / groups of writers to check the completion of different stages of the writing tasks; however, online classes are not making the teaching of writing easier than before. This study explores yet another method of teaching writing online using the ARCS theory. This model includes a synthesis of motivational concepts and theories that are clustered into four categories: attention (A), relevance (R), confidence (C), and satisfaction (S). There is a correlation between confidence level and success expectation. That is why providing estimation of probability of the success to learners is important. The last component is (d) satisfaction. There is direct relation between motivation and satisfaction. Learners should be satisfied of what they achieved during the learning process. This study explores one approach to the teaching of writing via online. The writing-related activity is designed to motivate learners to enjoy learning academic writing online. Participants attended a semester of academic writing class via online. At the end of the semester, they responded to the survey to reveal their perception of the online writing course. 62 participants responded to the survey. The survey has 5 sections; section A is the demographic profile, section B is on attention, section C is on relevance, section D is on confidence and section E is on satisfaction. Findings showed that learners were positive about the online writing course due to several reasons. The writing activities helped them focus their (a) attention on graphic organisers and colours. The activities helped them see the (b) relevance of the graphic organisers to help them with the task. Group online activities gave the learners (c) confidence as well as (d) satisfaction towards the completion of the writing task. The findings of this study bear interesting implications towards the teaching of writing online.
Keyword: Academic Writing, Attention, Relevance, Confidence, Satisfaction

Introduction

Writing is the vehicle for communication across all courses and disciplines. Some refer to all the different types of writing done in the university as academic writing. Report writing, thesis writing, assignment writing or even reflective and creative writing in universities written by students to gain academic grades can be considered academic. As such, the

teaching of academic writing in universities is considered important as the skills are needed across the board. Academic writing by itself is not an easy skill to teach or even learn by many.

Online classes are not making the teaching of writing and easier than before. The study by Rahmat & Haron (2021) reported that the fear of writing comes for writing-related environment. The emergence of learning to write online has added an extra writing-related environment. According to Selvaraj & Abdul Aziz (2019) on way to make writing interesting is to scaffolding cooperative learning and teacher and peer feedback. Pats studies have shown that writing is considered difficult because the writer needs to have (a)content, (b)language skills and also (c)writing skills to write well. According to Rahmat (2019), the teaching of writing should focus on what and also how to write.

Just like any other learning process, the use of motivational process can help reduce the fear of writing. Keller (2012) presented the ARCS model (figure 1) that is a motivational design process. The ARCS model, which includes four categories, is both motivational and also teaching model. So, this model can be utilized in college English listening teaching and learning (Zhang, 2015) to discuss how to stimulate the listening motivation and to improve listening proficiency as well as teaching performance.

This model includes a synthesis of motivational concepts and theories that are clustered into four categories: attention (A), relevance (R), confidence (C), and satisfaction (S).

Figure 1- The ARCS Model (Source: Keller, 2012)

There are four components of ARCS model, and stands for (a) Attention, (b)Relevance, (c)Confidence, and (d) Satisfaction. Firstly, (a) attention refers to the learners' interest. It is crucial to get and hold the learners' interests and attention. The second component is (b) relevance. The learning process should show the usefulness of the content so that learners can bridge the gap between content and the real world. The next component is (c) confidence and it focuses on developing success expectation among learners, and success expectation allow learners to control their learning processes. There is a correlation between confidence level and success expectation. That is why providing estimation of probability of the success

to learners is important. The last component is (d) satisfaction. There is direct relation between motivation and satisfaction. Learners should be satisfied of what they achieved during the learning process.

Generally, this study explores one approach to the teaching of writing via online. The writing-related activity is designed to motivate learners to enjoy learning academic writing online. Specifically, this study is done to answer the following questions;

- How is attention given during online writing activities?
- How is relevance portrayed during online writing activities?
- How is confidence portrayed during online writing activities?
- How is satisfaction portrayed during online writing activities?

Literature Review
Introduction
This section discusses issues on teaching academic writing, difficulties in teaching academic writing, online learning and academic writing, past studies, as well as the conceptual framework of the study.

Academic Writing
In the realm of academic writing, there is a difference between (i) the process of writing and (ii) process writing. Firstly, when it comes to the (ii) process of writing, Raimes and Miller-Cochran (2014) said that the (i) process of writing focusses on content, fluency, personal voice and revision. The traditional writing teacher may focus more on the product of the writing rather than the process of writing.

Nevertheless, as an activity, writing usually implies a process. So term (ii) process writing can be seen at the implementation of the process approach to teaching writing in the writing class. . A process approach can be used with any content (e.g. academic, personal, literature). Process writing is, however, more than a writing process approach to teaching writing. The writing process is an activity that broadly comprises the stages of planning, drafting (writing), revising (redrafting) and editing. Process writing, on the other hand, is seen as "a program of instruction which provides students with a series of planned learning experiences to help them to understand the nature of writing at every point" (Seow 2002: 316). In addition, process writing incorporates three other highly important skills: responding (sharing), evaluating and post-writing, which comprises re-reading the text for the logical structures and cohesion, eliminating the redundant text and proofreading for spelling, grammar and vocabulary.

Therefore, according to Carolan & Kyppö (2015), this difference between the process of writing and process writing is what makes teaching writing challenging; both face-to-face and also online.

Difficulties in Teaching Academic Writing
Many writing teachers would agree that teaching academic writing is not an easy task. According to Fadda (2012), writing teachers found that leaners had a variety of problems when it comes to academic writing. Firstly, writers were often found to be unaware of what plague words are and what phrases they should avoid. They may be able to review the grammar in their writing but may not be able to know what or how to repair the mistakes. They also experienced difficulty in using pronouns and maintaining pronoun-antecedent agreement. They often made mistakes with subject-verb agreement. They were reported to

make sentence fragments in their writing. Finally, they experience difficulty to combine sentences in their sentences.

Fadda (2012) further suggested that the writing teacher can facilitate the learning of writing by including some steps. First, the teaching could focus on guiding learners to write outlines before even writing the drafts. Next, the teaching of academic writing should include the teaching of each of the three main steps in the writing process such as (i) planning, (ii) writing, and (iii) revision. The writing teacher should also include the teaching of how to review their (the learners) writing before they submit the completed writing task.

So, the teaching and learning of academic writing is already a difficult task in the traditional class, the problem escalates when it is done online. Let's take a look at some of the characteristics of online learning to see how the teaching of academic writing can fit into the online environment.

Online Learning & Academic Writing
There are several criteria to look out for in the teaching and learning online. Anderson (2008) in figure 1, listed four lenses of online learning and they are (a) learner-centred, (b) knowledge-centred, (c) assessment-centred and (d) community-centred. Firstly, when the online class is learner-centred, the teacher creates successful learning environment that helps learners maximise input. Secondly, knowledge-centred contexts are more easily available with the advances of technology as well as internet. Learners are able to gain knowledge from a variety of sources besides in the traditional classroom. Next, online learning needs to cater for both formative and summative assessment. Assessments serve to motivate, inform and provide feedback to learners and teachers on the progress of learning done thus far. Finally, a community-centred learning environment is an important component in the online classrooms. This is because as far as possible, the online classes need to mirror the interactions that the face-to-face classes could offer.
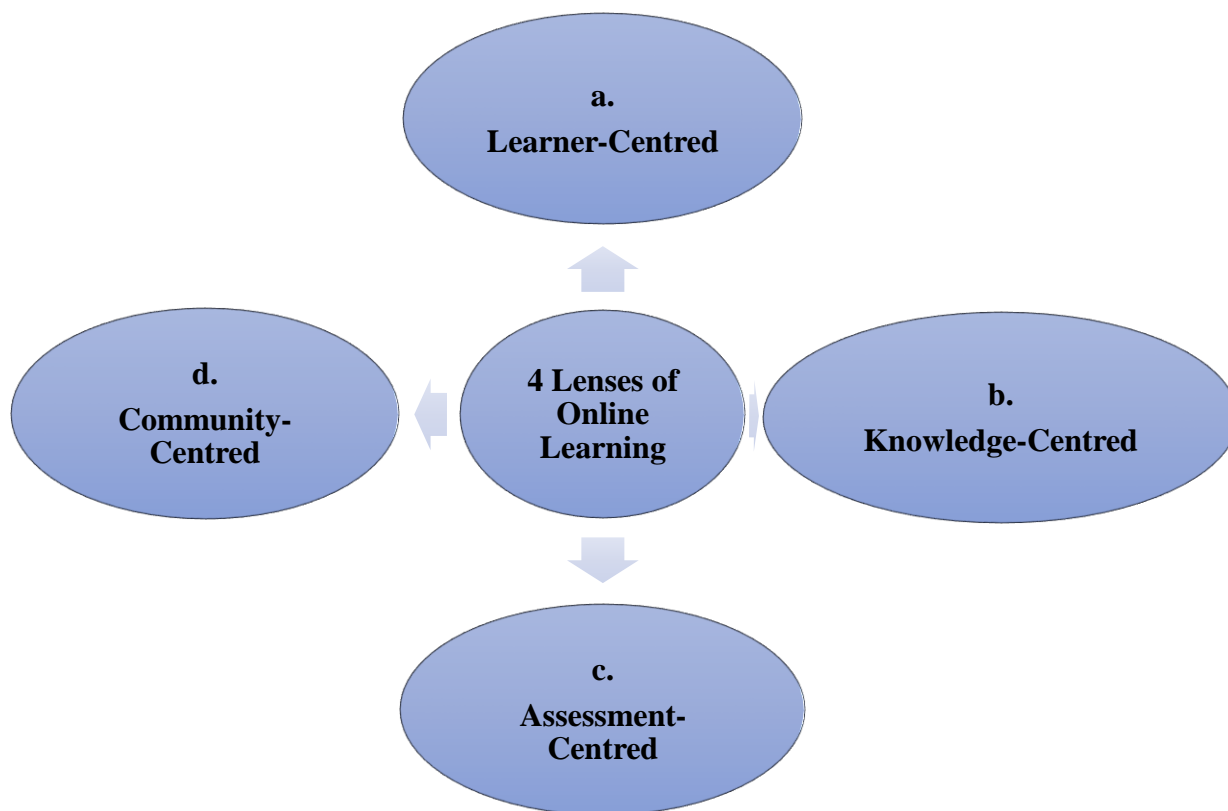
Figure 1: Four Lenses of Online Learning (Source: Anderson,2008)

Hence, in order to teach academic writing online, the teacher needs to take in consideration of all the four lenses of online learning.

Knowledge-Centred & Community- Centred: Selective Attention Writing Method
The selective attention writing method is a concept that focused on the use of colour codes in the ESL academic writing. With reference to figure 2, Rahmat (2018a) suggests that the writing instructor uses the concept of (a) modelling is done by the writing instructor at the beginning of the lesson. Next, (b) the graphic organisers are used in the form of writing templates for the learners. Finally, the templates and colour codes are used as (c) scaffolds to guide the learners to complete their own paragraphs.
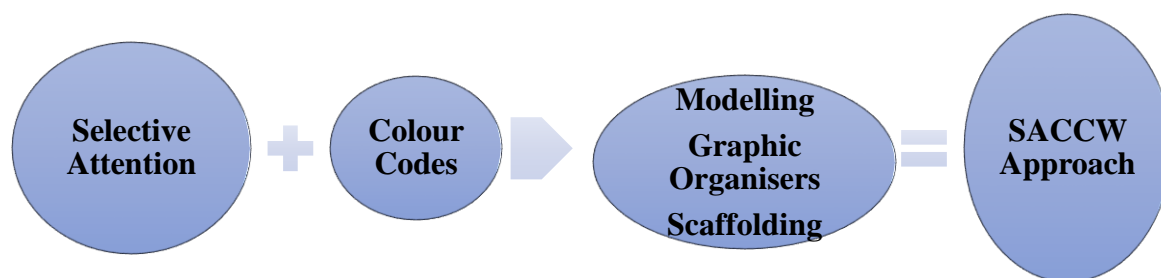
Figure 2- Selective Attention Color Coded Writing Approach (SACCW) (Source: Rahmat, 2018a)

Similarly, knowledge (knowledge-centred) can be selectively taught by the teacher via online through modelling. In addition to that, the best way to teach writing in online mode is by modelling of the correct procedures by the teacher. Learners also learn through modelling when they are given group activities (community-centred) to complete writing tasks. In addition to that, group interaction is also important to enhance learning. According to Rahmat (2018b), learners gain guided participation from their peers through discussions. The interaction allows the exchange of ideas between the expert and the less expert writers.

Learner-Centred: Paying Attention Using Colour
In the online environment, activities that are learner-centred can give learners a sense of learner engagement. The activities using colours codes are done so learners can focus their attention on the task at hand. Colours have long been used to attract attention. According to Dzulkifli and Mustafar (2013), the role played by colour in enhancing attention level is undisputable. Different colours can help to focus , refocus or even look away from the intended object. In addition to that, according to Olurinola and Tayo (2015), colour is a powerful tool, which has many uses in education. It can be used to get attention, enhance clarity, establish a code, label things in nature and differentiate items. Teachers also use various colours to influence learning outcomes. Colour can also help learners improve their learning efficiency, since learners can process colour automatically without requiring conscious process (Chang, Xu, and Watt (2018). So the use of colours can help learners in many ways.

Assessment Centred: Graphic Organisers & Scaffolding
Activities for learning can be fun, but how can the teacher know if the learning has taken place? The use of graphic organisers help teacher to guide the leaners through the process of writing. Chang, Xu, and Watt (2018) felt that graphic organisers can help learning in two ways. One is to support learners to process materials cognitively, and the other is to influence leaners' attitude and motivation effectively In other words, the first function is to influence learners' cognition, and the second function is to influence learners' emotions. After the teacher has role-modelled the writing process, the learners can then depend on the graphic organisers as templates to scaffold new knowledge onto the old knowledge.

Past Studies

Past studies have revealed that both teachers and students face difficulties in academic writing. The study by Hidayati (2018) explored Indonesian teachers' challenges in teaching English writing skill and also looked at the possible solutions to overcome the challenges. 10 English teachers were interviewed from different parts of East Java, Indonesia. They teach in either private or public Junior and Senior High Schools. The instrument used is a structured interview. Findings showed that there are internal and external factors that contribute to the challenges that the teachers faced. The internal factors include linguistic competence, native language interference, motivation and reading habits of the learners. The external factors are the class condition, aids available for teaching writing and the availability of time.

Another study by Fadda (2012) was done to explore the difficulties that King Saud University students encountered when learnt to write academic English. The study was also done differentiate between students' learning needs and objectives. 50 postgraduate students participated in the study. Findings showed that the students faced many difficulties and stresses in their academic writing. They faced difficulty in distinguishing between spoken and written English. They also had difficulty in making the outline before writing a draft. They found it difficult to identify the skills needed for successful writing, and also to avoid plague words and phrases .

Next, The study by Abdul Wahid, et.al (2020) examined engagement methods used in online classrooms. The instrument used was a questionnaire with 24 items.55 students a public university in Malaysia participated in the study. Findings revealed that the learner-to-learner, learner-to-instructor, and learner-to-content engagements are important in the online classroom. Findings also showed that learner-to-instructor engagement plays the most significant role in maintaining students' engagement. The findings of the study could serve as one of the references by educators and even students to improve strategies and performances in online learning

Conceptual Framework

Figure 3 presents the conceptual framework of the study. This study is rooted from Keller's (2012) ARS model. Teaching writing online is done following the ARS model. The first stage is (a)Attention where the learners are taught scaffolding using colour codes. Next, (b) learners are able to see the relevance of the scaffolding by using graphic organisers sucah as mind maps. (c) Confidence is then achieved when learners interact through group work activities. Finally, Learners gain (d) satisfaction when they are able to transfer their knowledge onto the empty graphic organisers to reveal they have understood the flow of activities.
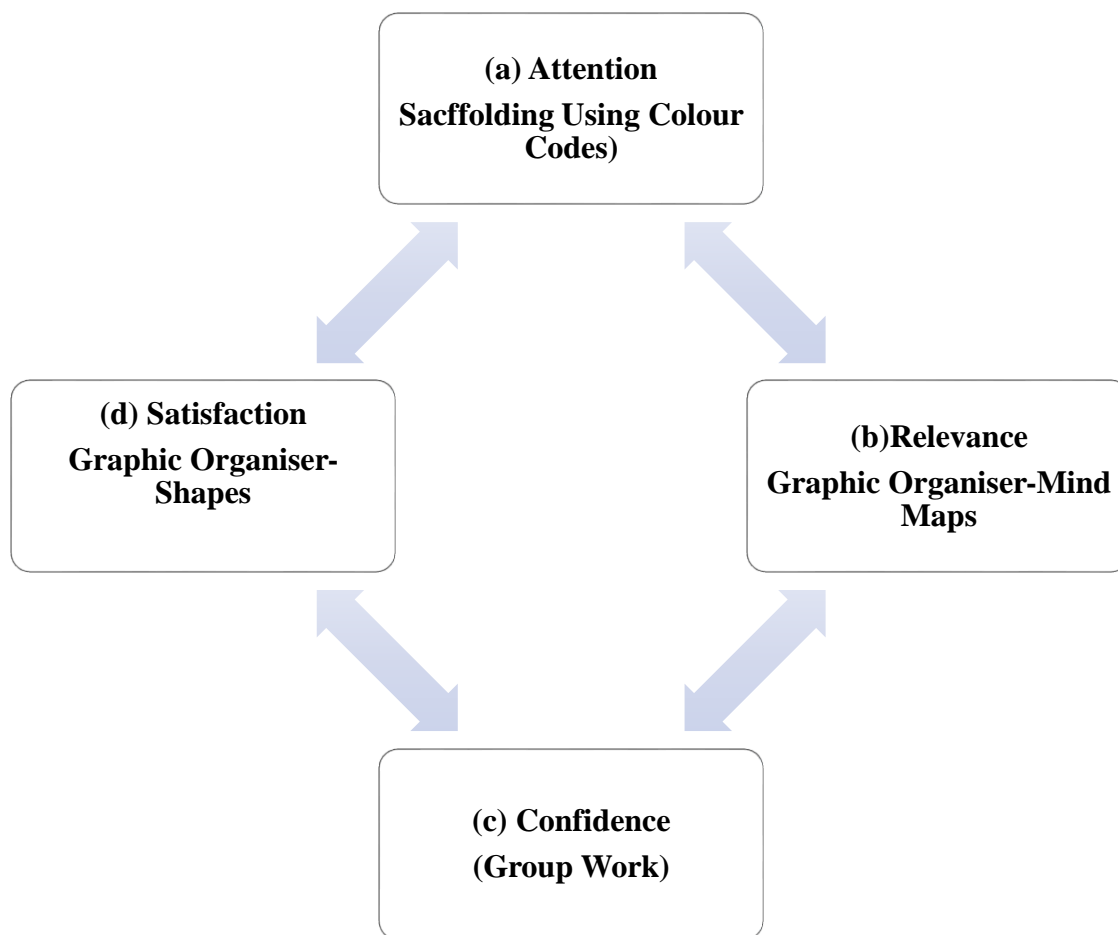
Figure 3-Conceptual Framework of the Study:
Teaching Writing Online using ARS theory

Methoodology

Research Design

This action research collects data quantitatively. 62 students participated in this study. They are students who enrolled in 2 types of course that required them to complete assignments in the form of academic writing. Learners underwent semester of academic writing course using the online writing-ARS method. At the end of the course, the respond to survey (29 items). The items were adapted from the ARS theory and also the SACCW (Rahmat, 2018a). SPSS analysis revealed a Cronbach alpha of .961 for the survey; thus, revealing a high internal reliability score for the instrument used (table 2).

Table 1- Distribution of items in the survey.

Section	Variable	No of Items
A	Demographic Profile	3
B	Attention	9
C	Relevance	7
D	Confidence	7
E	Satisfaction	6
		29

Table 2- Reliability Statistics

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.961	29

Data collected online via goggle form. Data is analyses using SPSS version 26 to reveal percentage for the demographics and mean for the variables.
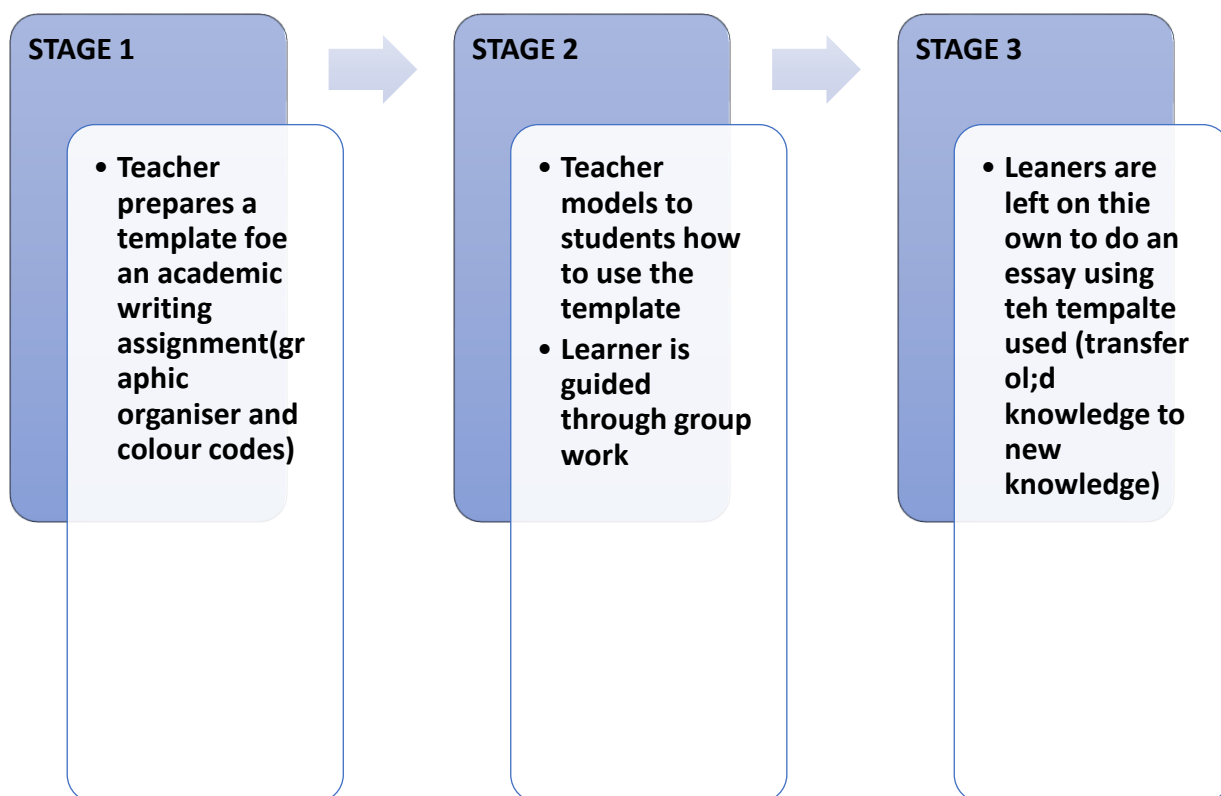
Teaching Method

STAGE 1	STAGE 2	STAGE 3
• Teacher prepares a template foe an academic writing assignment(graphic organiser and colour codes)	• Teacher models to students how to use the template • Learner is guided through group work	• Leaners are left on thie own to do an essay using teh tempalte used (transfer ol;d knowledge to new knowledge)

Figure 4- Representation of the Lesson (source: Rahmat, 2018a)

Findings

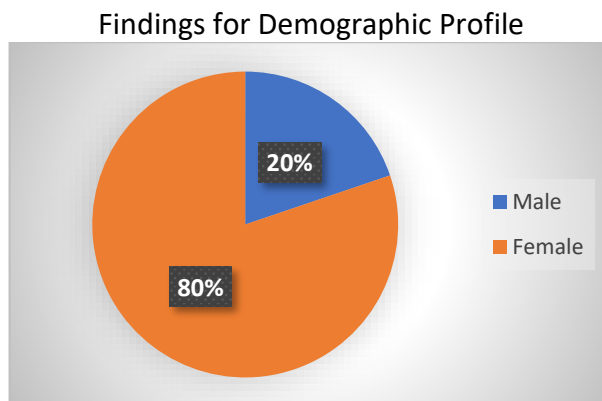Findings for Demographic Profile

Figure 5- Percentage for Gender

Figure 5 shows the percentage for gender. 79% are male, while 21 % are female respondents.
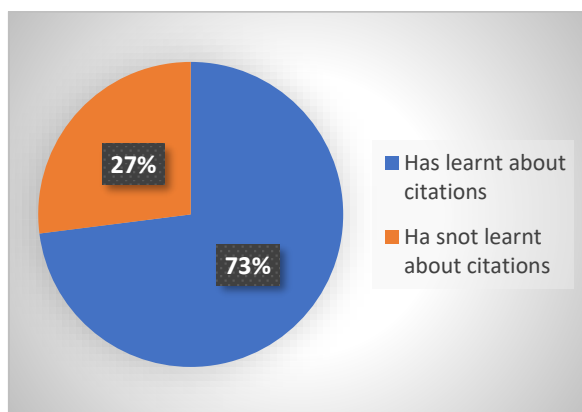

Figure 6- Percentage for Academic Writing

Based on the data in Figure 6, 73% has learnt academic writing with citations and 27% has not learnt academic writing with citations before.
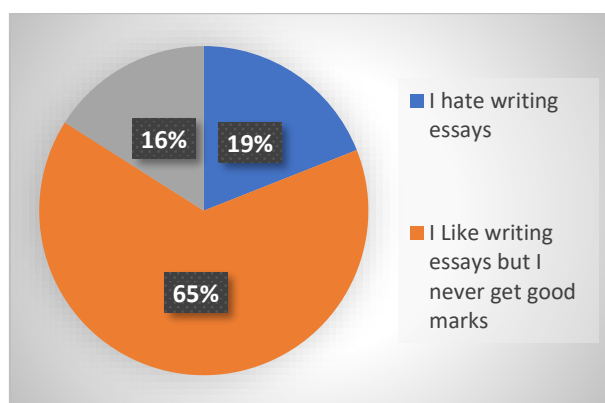

Figure 7- Percentage for Feelings about Essay Writing

Figure 7 shows the percentage for "how learners feel about essay writing". 19% hated writing essays, 65% liked writing essays but never did get good marks. 16% liked writing and usually obtained good marks.

Findings for Attention

This section answers research question 1: How is attention given during online writing activities? In line with the Selective Attention Color Coded Writing Approach (SACCW) by Rahmat (2018a), the use of colour codes helped learners focus their attention at one important element at one time.
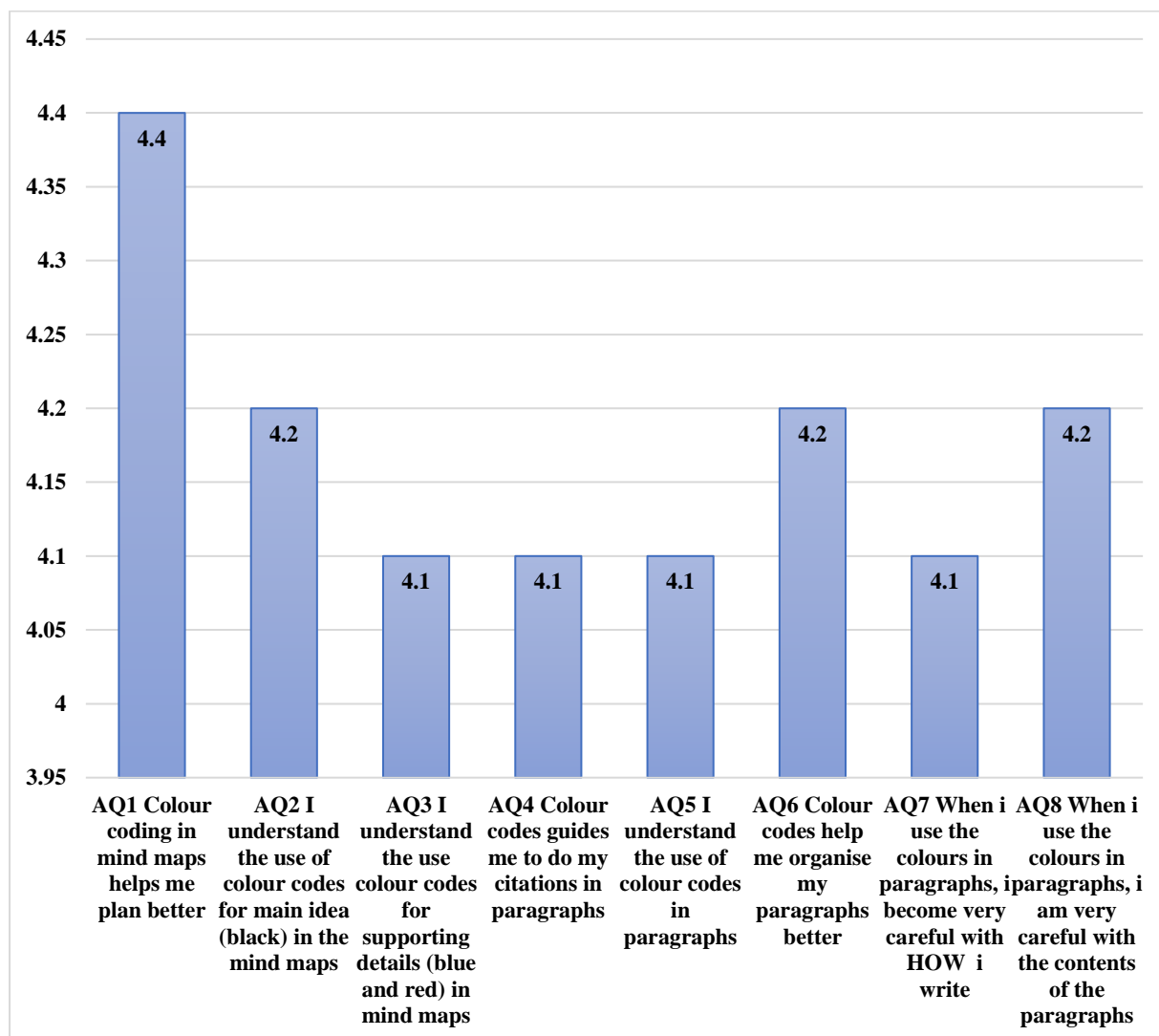

Figure 8- Mean for Attention

With reference to figure 8 (mean for attention), the highest mean is at 4.4 where learners felt colour codes helped them plan better. Next, 5 items had the same mean of 4.2. learners found that they (i) understood better by using colour codes, organized their paragraphs better, using colour codes made template for contents and also helped them focus on their goals.

Findings for Relevance

This section presents answer to research question 2: How is relevance portrayed during online writing activities? Students saw the relevance of the use of shapes in the essay templates when they began to use the empty template to complete their own task.
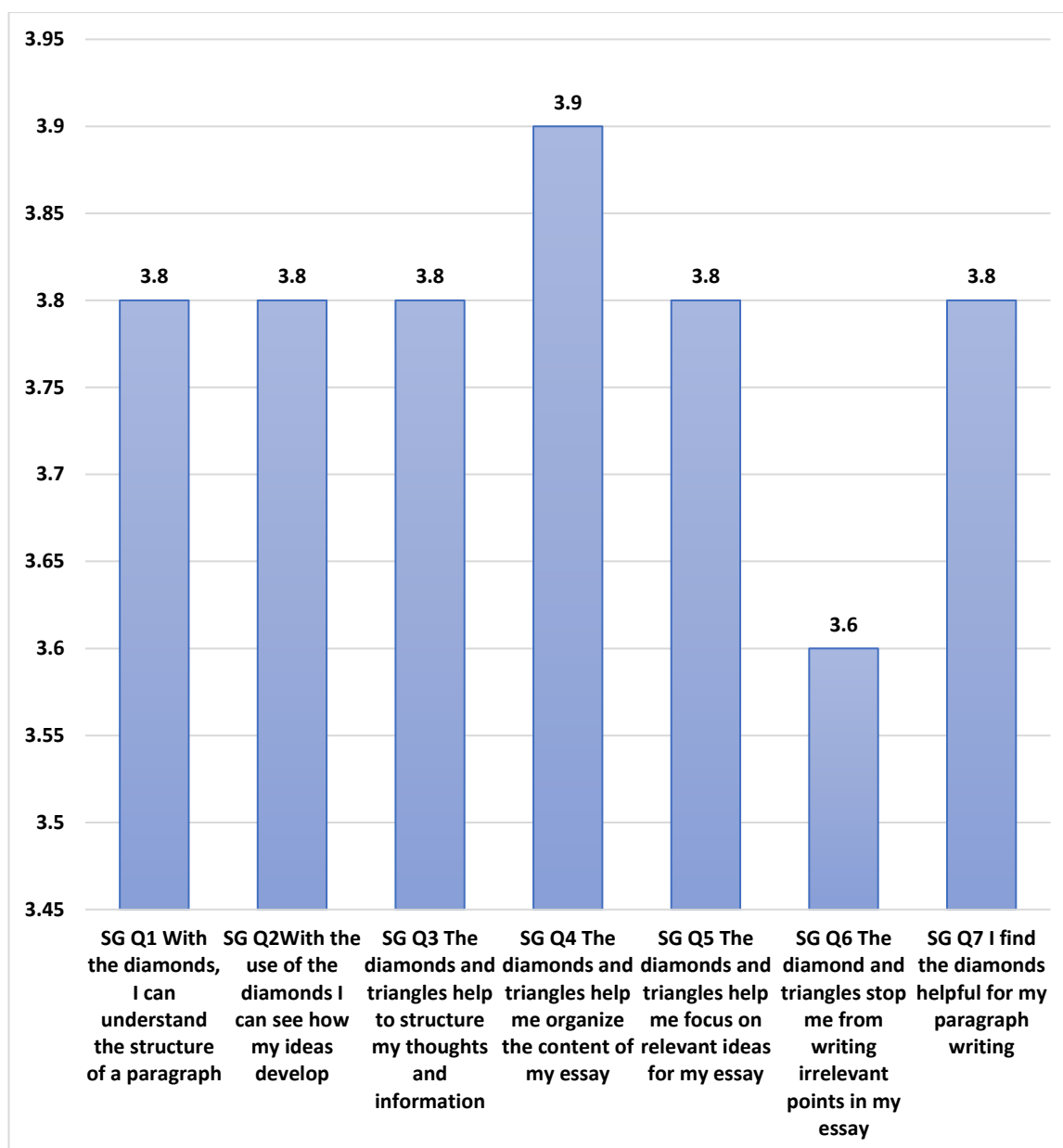
Figure 9-Mean for Relevance

Figure 9 presents the mean scores for relevance. The highest mean (3.9) is for the graphic organisers (diamond and triangles) helping the learners organize the content of the essay. The lowest mean score at 3.6. The learners felt that the graphic organisers did not stop them from writing irrelevant points in the essay. The also (mean=3.8) felt that the graphic organizers helped them understand the structure of the paragraph, helped them see how their ideas developed, helped them structure their thoughts and information, and also helped them focus on relevant ideas.

Findings for Confidence
This section presents answer to research question 3: How is confidence portrayed during online writing activities? Peer interaction in groups help learners to build their confidence in the writing tasks.
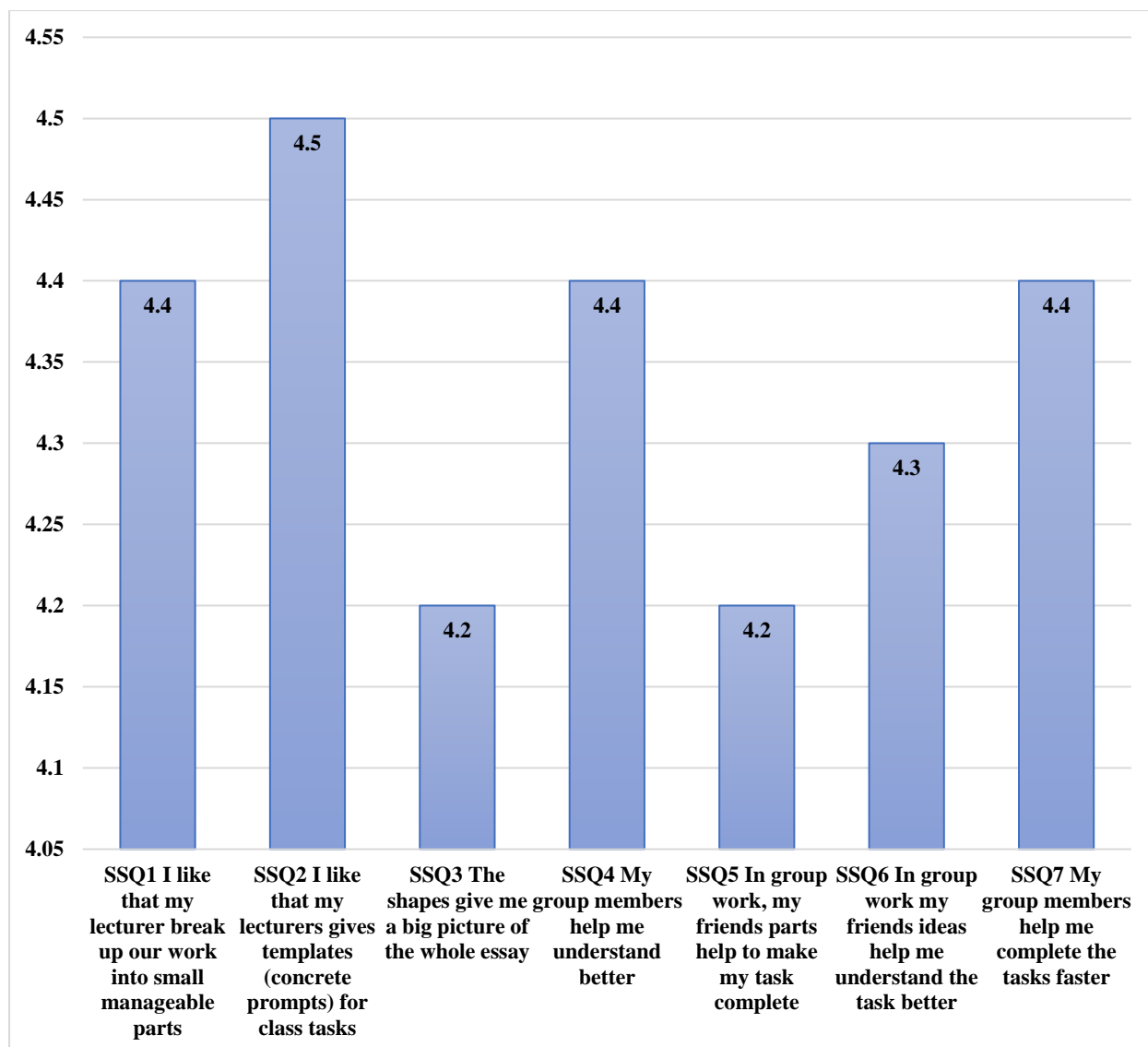
Figure 10- Mean for Confidence

Figure 10 presents the mean score for confidence. The highest mean is 4.5 is for the item where learners liked that their lecturer gave templates (correct prompts) for the class tasks. Next, a few items reported the same mean of 4.4. Learners liked that their lecturer broke up their work into small manageable parts. They also felt that their group members helped them understand better and helped them complete the tasks faster. It is interesting to note that the lowest mean (4.2) where learners gave lowest mean for " my group members parts helped to make my task complete".

Findings for Satisfaction

This section presents answer to research question 4: How is satisfaction portrayed during online writing activities? Students achieved satisfaction when they were able to transfer the learnt knowledge onto their own task and also made plans to use the templates in their future writing assignments.
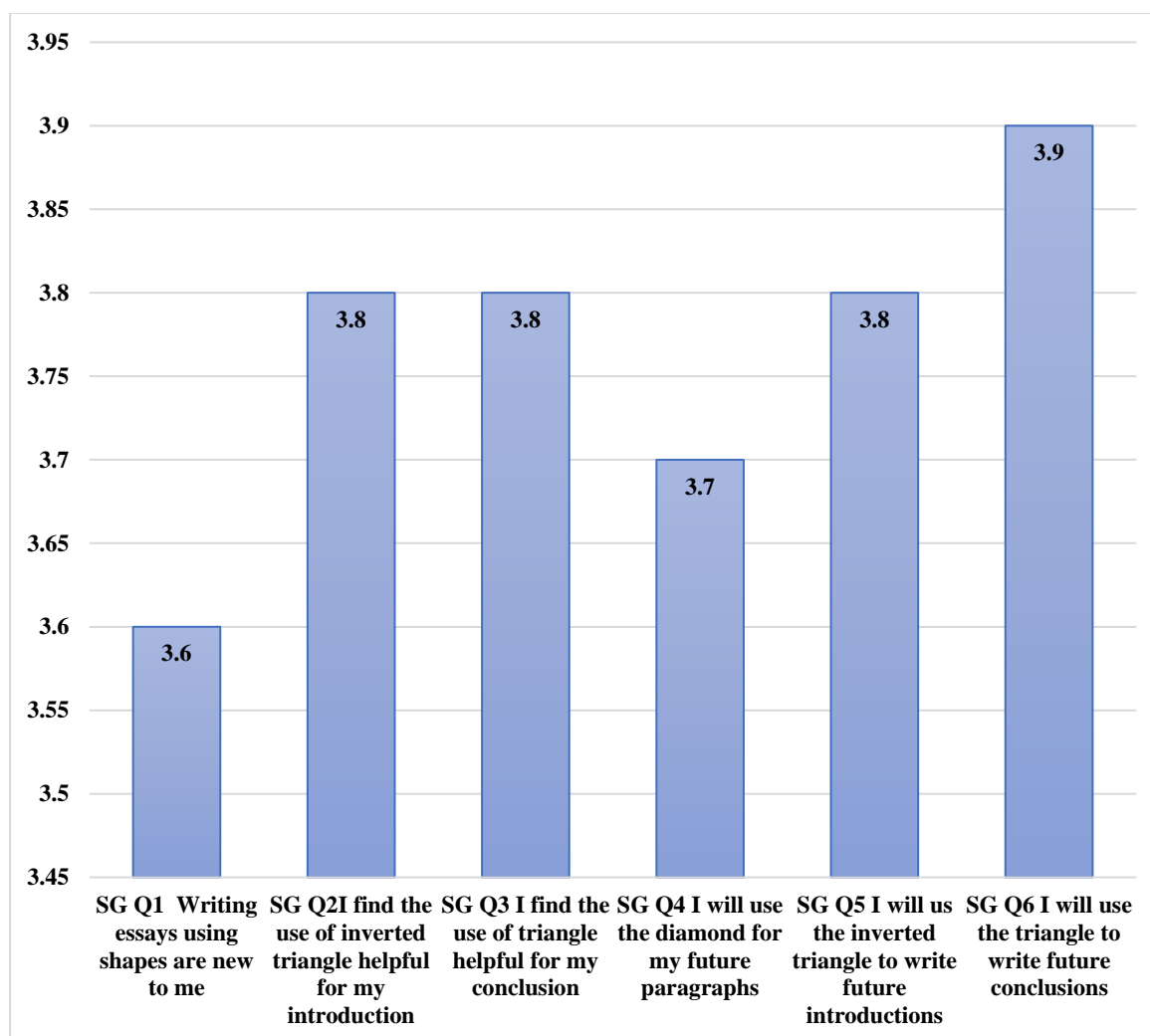
Figure 11- Mean for Satisfaction

Figure 11 reveals the mean score for satisfaction. The highest mean is 3.9 where learners felt that the they would use of the graphic organisers to write future conclusions. Next is the mean of 3.8 and the learners elt that the use of the graphic organisers was helpful for the introduction, and they would use it for their future write-up of conclusion. The lowest mean of 3.6 is for "writing essays using shaped are new to me".

Conclusion

Summary of Findings

When students focussed their attention on colours, they understood the content better, they learnt to plan better and also organised their paragraphs. The colour codes helped them focus on their goals. This is agreed by Dzulkifli and Mustafar (2013) who reported that the role of colours in enhancing learners' is undisputable. Chang, Xu and Watt (2018) also felt that colours help learners process information unconsciously. Next, the new way of writing became relevant to the learners when they found they could use the learnt knowledge to complete their own task.

Learners gained confidence when their task is broken up into small manageable parts. They also felt that their group members helped them understand better and helped them complete the tasks faster. It is interesting to note that the lowest mean where learners gave lowest mean for "my group members parts helped to make my task complete". This could mean that

some group members did not quite do their parts successfully. Finally, learners gain satisfaction when they could complete the task on their own following the given templates.

Table 3- Comparison of total mean Scores

Attention (Scaffolding using Colour Codes)	4.2
Relevance (Graphic Organiser-Mind Map)	3.8
Confidence (Group Work)	4.3
Satisfaction (Graphic Organisers-Shapes)	3.8

Table 3 shows the comparison of total mean scores of (a) attention, (b) relevance, (c) confidence and (d) satisfaction. The highest mean is for confidence. It is interesting to note that learners gained confidence from the online group interaction. This is also reported by Rahmat (2018b) who found that learners gain guided participation form their team members and this help to reduce the stresses of the workload and uncertainty. This shows that engagement matters in online classes, more so in online writing tasks. Next, the second highest total mean is for attention. The lecturers' choice of colours in the templates given to students online helped to make the writing tasks manageable.

Pedagogical Implications and Suggestions for Future Research
Teaching of writing is by itself not an easy task. There are many stages to be taught previously these stages were taught through hand-on classes. Writing teachers needed time for one-to-one conferencing with writers and their members and that used to take up a lot of the class time. The emergence of online mode has made it difficult for one-to-one conferences to be done. As a writing teacher, I used to fear my students would not gain as much writing guidance as they would in face-to-face classes. Online classes require a lot of preparations on the part of the teacher. Online activities require so much more interaction than the face-to-face because information may not be easily /readily understood at one explanation. Graphic organisers, and colours would surely help reduce the complexity (and boredom) of teaching a task that requires may stages to be completed. Future researchers could look into more aspects of writing skill that are more difficult to teach via online. Researchers could interview writing tecahers to gain insights into best practices for teaching academic online.

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