

## Online Writing Task for Young Learners during Mco: Pupils and Parents Responses

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### Abstract

Malaysia Movement Control Order (MCO) has encouraged the education system to move forward in the Information Communication and Technology (ICT) usage especially to communicate, receive and sending information including tasks among educators and students. However, writing skill task for young learners is not an easy task to be carried out online without a close supervision from the teacher. Writing skills among second language learners require full attention and guidance from the teacher in the classroom especially in term of the teaching and learning of grammar rules. This study focuses on analysing and determining the effectiveness on pupils respond towards a writing task given via online. Parents involvement in guiding their child in completing their task was analysed too. A qualitative research design by using document analysis based on the responses given by twenty randomly chosen 12-year-old pupils and parents in a primary school in Johor, Malaysia were used in this study. Narrative writing analysis were used to explain the outcome. The results given by the pupils to complete the task were excellent. They managed to complete the task within the time frame given. Parents play a major role in guiding their children to use the ICT gadgets such as smartphones, computers and laptops with proper internet connection to complete and submit their task accordingly. It is hope that this paper would encourage educators, parents and pupils to adapt the new norm situation by using ICT especially in writing task that was always and only conducted in the classroom.

**KEYWORDS:** Writing task; parents involvement; ICT usage; educational technology

### INTRODUCTION

Online learning for young learners in Malaysia is still in the early phase of its implementation while the Movement Control Order (MCO) commenced to control the spread of covid-19 disease. The implementation of online learning especially for pupils in primary school is a

new norm of learning in Malaysia education system. The Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE) has struggled to develop and encourage the pupils and teachers to use online learning tools and applications to cater the needs of teaching and learning process in education during the MCO period. In learning English language especially in writing skills, pedagogical skills among teachers to assist the pupils especially young learners is important to ensure the pupils able to understand and develop their ability in writing skills. During the MCO period, parents and family members play a major role in helping the pupils at home to assist in completing the task given by the teacher. On the other hand, the usage of ICT in the teaching and learning process at home should be taken seriously as the usage of ICT plays a major role and impact for teaching and learning process during the MCO period. Therefore, this study developed the responses given by the pupils in the writing task given as well as the responses given by their parents in assisting them in completing the task. Besides that, the effectiveness of using ICT in the teaching and learning process during the MCO period should be taken into consideration.

Writing skill activity has always been conducted in a classroom through a formal teaching and learning lesson as the teacher is responsible to be the main support for the second language young learners. This is important for the pupils improvement and guidance by monitoring their progress over the time (Moon, 2005). It is because of the writing skill is one of the difficult skills that need extra assistance especially for young learners to motivate themselves and learn to write with the correct grammar rules. Generally, the writing skills amongst student are alarmingly weak and substandard. Amongst the issues are from the incompetence in various aspects such as syntax, coherence, content selection and idea expansion (Fareed, et al., 2016). The research gap of this research is most of the studies pertaining on writing skills focus on paper-writing skills and there is a lack of study investigating on the online writing skills.

Parents involvement in assisting their children to complete tasks given by teacher during MCO period is essential as they were the secondary teacher at home. Therefore, interactions among teachers and parents by welcoming parents' enquiries and response of their children is important for their children success (Shim, 2005). The parents' readiness to get involve in the learning process of their children at home is something that can be looked into as they were the main primary teacher during the MCO period at home. Parental involvement in helping their children at home is crucial especially in assisting them to develop their second language acquisition at home.

Besides that, using technology via distance learning throughout the MCO period is another challenge that need to be faced. Lack of digital literacy in using ICT gadgets and application and the ability of the pupils and their family to afford to have any ICT gadgets or internet connectivity need to be considered (Muda, 2020). The digital literacy level among the young learners need to be acknowledge too as the usage of the electronical devices is important in online learning process. These were the challenges that need to be taken into consideration by the teacher to conduct an online class for their pupils especially for writing activity as writing approach is different in term of the end product and process of the skill development.

## **1.1 Objectives**

1. To analyse the responses given by year 6 pupils based on a writing task given via e-mail or any ICT medium.
2. To identify the parents' involvement in the writing task given to the pupils.
3. To determine the effectiveness of using ICT in completing writing task during MCO.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 English writing skills**

For English language lesson, it is a challenge for the teacher and pupils to use all the four skills, listening, speaking, reading and writing in the online based learning as the young learners need a focused attention from the teacher to guide them learning the skills. In learning language, variety of strategies are used to attract the pupils in the classroom (Gu, Hu & Zhang, 2005). Different strategies may differ according to the pupils ability in learning the language. The ability for the pupils to address their own capability to use English language in their daily life should be taken into consideration (Liu & Brantmeier, 2019). Lack of vocabulary, anxiety in using words and phrases correctly and lack of ideas during writing are main common problems among L2 learners especially young learners (Fareed, Ashraf & Bilal, 2016). The exposure towards the vocabulary should be emphasize among young learners to develop their vocabulary level. They might assess themselves as good learners but a proper guidance from the teacher is important to ensure their progressive language development (Qureshi et al. 2020).

Writing skill is one of the skills that require extra special attention and guidance from the teacher to guide and assist the pupils in learning to write correctly by using correct grammar rules. Teachers may illustrate their effort to help their pupils to create a positive learning language environment in the classroom (Abdul Rahim & Lee, 2017). This includes the usage of various teaching aids to help the young learners to develop their vocabulary as much as they can. In learning writing, young learners need a proper guidance from the teacher as the pupils are not familiar with the vocabulary (Nunan, 2011). Therefore, writing skill is a challenge for the pupils to learn and master it by themselves especially during the MCO period at home. Learning other language as early as primary school may give many challenges especially for L2 young learners. This includes the policy that've been brought by the policy maker to ensure the development of English curriculum in the country (Garton, 2014). However, different background might change the pupils development in learning second language. With the help of their background surrounding, pupils' reliance on the teacher and their tendency to seek help from others can be reduced (Yeung, 2019). Self-encouragement among the pupils as writers would develop their metacognitive ability as a writer.

Learning English for young learners as the second language in Malaysia requires involvement from the family members especially parents in assisting the young learners in using the language at home. Motivation in learning writing at home is essential as the pupils do not have the motivation to learn as same as in the classroom from the teacher (Copland, Garton

&Burns, 2014). Parents play a secondary role as teachers at home. However, not all parents are competence with the language. It is important to maintain the pupils motivation in learning writing skill as they will easily tend to get bored and lose their control of their behaviour. Teachers may know and recognize this behaviour in the classroom but it would be a challenge for the parents to detect their feelings and behaviour at home during their learning time (Moon, 2005). The learners need to be ready to use the online platform as a tool of communication to gain knowledge especially in learning writing. Motivation support for learning online is essential as the learners may get distracted with other things online (Hung, Chou, Chen & Own, 2010). Young learners need to be encouraged through continuous motivation support for them to learn the language (Cameron, 2003).

## **2.2 Parents involvement**

Parents plays an important role in shaping their children for the future. It all starts from home. During the MCO period, parental guidance at home in helping the learning process is in dire need as their children would not be able to go to school to receive their formal education. Therefore, parents are fully responsible to help their children at home to get the education lesson through online learning. Motivation to learn at home is an aspect that need to be taken into consideration. Parental commitment and involvement in their children learning is essential to develop the pupils motivation potential to learn and encouragement in the learning process (Zakaria, Hasim, MohdSalleh&MohdYusoff, 2013). Motivation and support from parents towards their children in learning process at home is important to create a holistic education not only at a formal location such as school. Parenting style at home plays an important role to develop the children potential and ability (Jones, 2018).

The relation between parents, teacher and pupils in developing mutual understanding in learning process is required to ensure the success of the children in learning. The collaboration among parents and teachers are needed to increase the education level among the pupils (LaRocque, Kleiman, & Darling, 2011). Positive achievements among young learners can be attained as active parents involvement at home would create a positive atmosphere to develop pupils ability in learning (Park & Holloway, 2017). Parents behaviour in developing the education influence among their children at home is essential to help the pupils in their learning process. Parents also need to act as a role model in giving good examples and develop a good communication strategy with the teachers at school to develop the pupils learning ability (DePlanty, Coulter-Kern, &Duchane, 2007).

Besides that, consistent communication among parents and their children at home would create a better learning environment and an active interaction for learning process can be developed and improved (Hilla, Witherspoonb&Bartz, 2016). Clear communication by giving clear information and instructions is important in helping the pupils to learn effectively at home with the guidance from their parents. On the other hand, a strong collaboration between school authorities and parents in ensuring the online learning process take place at home during the MCO is required to ensure the learning take place at home with a minimal observation from the teachers. Relevant information on the pupils involvement in learning at home and parents collaboration with the teachers would give a strong benefit for the pupils achievement (Jeynes, 2018). With the help of the teachers to guide the parents on the learning

process, the pupils would be able to self navigate on their learning process at home especially by using online applications and tools.

### **2.3 ICT usage in education**

Many studies have used Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) as their main strategy to discover the benefits and challenges in learning English. Although by using online learning materials can help the pupils to get authentic materials for their use in the language activities but the challenges in using the technology and online applications need to be considered too (Mudra, 2020). Wheelan (2008) also mentioned the challenges arise from the ICT development and technical support may consume more time than usual. However, as the development of the technology and communication in this era, young learners started to use online applications such as social media application to interact with other people. The usage of online applications and tools for adult learners are beneficial as same as the young learners (Shih, 2011). Those who are capable to afford and utilise the technology would have the advantages from this development. Learning English through online application would develop socialization, information sharing, communication and develop their sense of belonging (Razak, Saeed, & Ahmad, 2013). Social media usage such as facebook could help students to learn writing skills by process as the users would interact, discuss and share their ideas to develop their language (Majid, Stapa&Keong, 2012).

Creative learning environment can be developed via online learning as the pupils can seek for more information and access more language learning applications and websites (Chai, Koh, & Tsai, 2010). Online learning can also improve the quality of learning and teaching among the pupils and teachers. The pupils able to learn and apply new skills online effectively as the pupils able to develop their own materials and tools (Serhan, 2009). They may explore it online and use it in their learning process. The materials selection would suit the pupils need as they need to find something easy for them to accomplish and enjoy at the same time. The use of ICT applications and tools online would help the pupils to learn and understand better by letting them to build their own knowledge through their online experience (Scott, 2002). They may develop their own concepts and definition in learning to gain their understanding about certain matter given.

### **METHODOLOGY**

A qualitative research design by using document analysis were used to collect the information required by the study objectives. The documents include the question and answer scripts given by the teacher, responses given by the pupils via e-mails or any other forms of ICT and whatsapp communication among the parents and teachers to communicate during the MCO period. Internet based data were collected, recorded and analytical method was used to analyse the information (Walliman, 2011). Narrative analysis were conducted to connect the theme and stories given by the informants involved in this study. The data based on the social phenomenon experienced by the informants directly in this study is to understand deeper experience that has been gain by them (Patton, 2014).

Twenty randomly chosen informants of year six pupils with different level of English language acquisition and parents from a primary school in Johor, Malaysia were involved in this study. They were required to complete a writing task given by the teacher based on the

pre-teach lesson that has been conducted before. The question task, answers and responses were given and received through e-mail and whatsapp application. Narrative analysis writing based on the data and information received were conducted to explain the phenomenon happening during the task completion period.

Parents will be informed through the class whatsapp group about the task and the teacher will require the help from the parents to monitor and assist their child at home with the task. Any clarification and help regarding the task, they may approach the teacher for further assistance. The pupils were required to complete and submit the task to the teacher within a week from the task date given.

The materials used in this study comprise of the pupils answer scripts that have been replied via e-mail or any other online applications. Parents and pupils text messages via whatsapp or any other messages medium to communicate with the teacher is also used in this study. All of the documents used in this study has been allowed by the parents and pupils involved. It will only be used as research purposes and every informant name involved were not disclosed as part of the study ethics. The school authority and administrators were also informed about this study and a copy of this study will be given to them as reference.

The teacher will inform the pupils' parents about the task that will be given of the week.

A writing task were given to the pupils to be completed within a week time. The pupils and parents may update their progress to the teacher.

After a week, the pupils need to submit their task by replying the e-mail or use any ICT application to the teacher.

The teacher will check the student task within a day and give his review about the task submitted.

The teacher gives his feedback and compliment about the task and reply the e-mail to the pupils.

The teacher and parents communicate to get their feedback about the process and challenges during the task given.

Figure 1. The procedure for online writing task during MCO period

Figure 1 shows the procedure and process for online writing task given to the pupils during the MCO period. There were 6 steps for the teacher, pupils and parents to adhere to complete the task according to the time frame given. Clear and simple instructions were given for the pupils to comply in completing the task. The teacher needs to avoid using lengthy, vague and complicated instructions as this would give problem to the pupils to understand and follow the task instructions precisely as there were no face to face interaction like in the classroom. The teacher needs to inform the parents about their involvement in assisting their children to complete the task. Parents need to be well prepared and ready to help their children and at the same time communicate with the teacher regarding the task given. At the end of the task, the teacher and parents would share their opinion together about the process during completing

the task by the pupils. Feedback for each task will be given appropriately to each of the pupils for the answer given. This includes positive feedbacks, way of improvement and recommendations that can be done better by the pupils in the future task.

## RESULTS AND FINDINGS

### 4.1 Responses by pupils

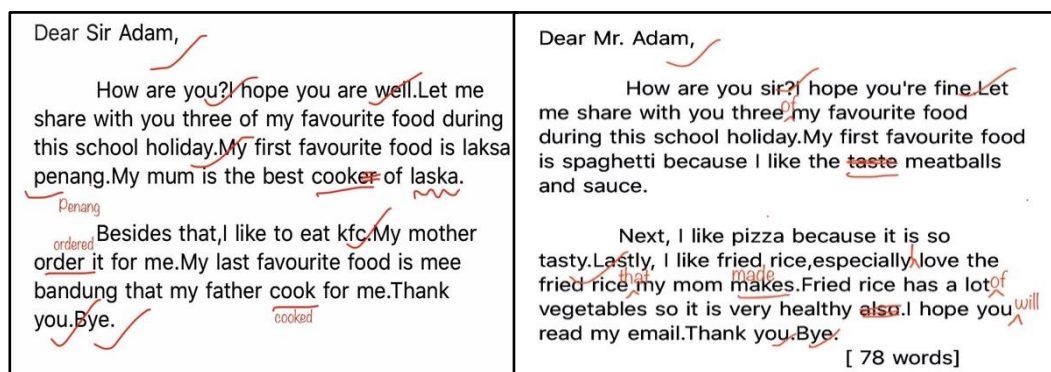
Throughout the task given to the pupils, all 20 pupils were able to complete and submitted the task according to the time frame given which is within a week. They managed to reply the e-mail and use the ICT applications to help them in completing the task. Once the pupils submitted their task, the teacher will check, mark, evaluate and award them with appropriate marks according to the score categories given. The score categories act as a guidance for the teacher and pupils to know their writing level ability as this is a process for them to learn and develop their writing skills. The pupil's answers were categorised into three categories, which is good, satisfactory and weak. It is shown in the table 1 below:

**Table 1:** Pupils marks with score categories

Score Categories	Marks (12 Marks)	Number of pupils
Good	10 – 12	12
Satisfactory	5 – 9	7
Weak	1 – 4	1

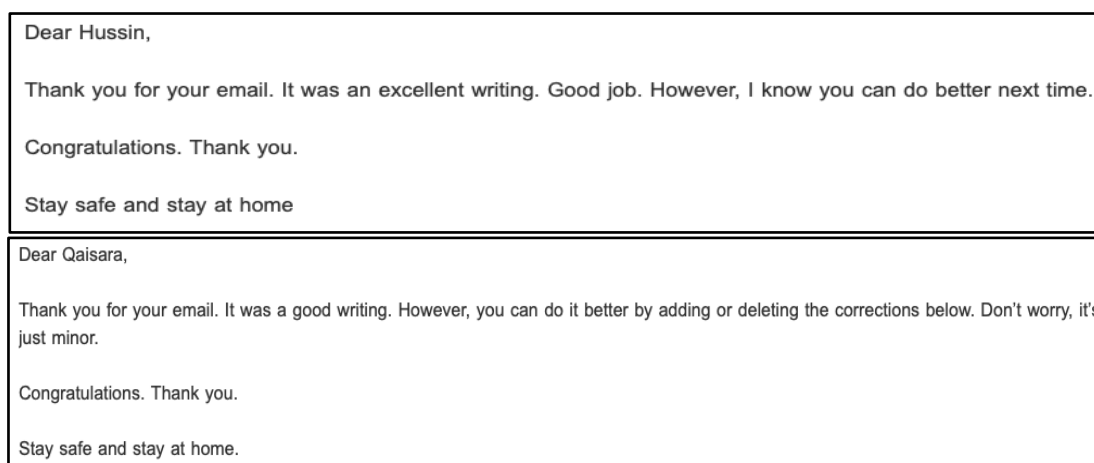
According to table 1, there were 12 pupils who were able to answer the task with a good score. The score indicates that the pupils able to write with very minimal or no errors in their writing. It is an excellent achievement for the pupils to receive the score as the pupils able to answer the task with minimal guidance from the teacher. 7 pupils received satisfactory score as they managed to complete the task properly with several errors. However, there was only 1 pupil who received weak score as the task submitted met the minimal level of the category. It may have frequent errors of grammar and minimal usage of correct vocabulary in the writing script.

<p>Dear Sir Adam,</p> <p>How are you? I hope you are fine. I would like to share you about three favourite food I ate during this holiday. Firstly, I ate Mee Hailam, a Malaysian dish. I enjoy it because it contains delicious ingredients such as meat and gravy.</p> <p>Secondly, I ate some apples. I like it because it keeps my body healthy. Lastly, I ate pancakes with syrup. I like it because it is sweet. That's all and take care. Goodbye.</p> <p>Yours sincerely, Hussin</p>	<p>Dear Sir,</p> <p>How are you. I hope you are fine. Let me share with you my three favourite food. The first food I like to eat is Nasi Lemak. It is Malaysian famous breakfast. I like it because it is mouth-watering.</p> <p>Next, I like to eat grilled salmon. Salmon is good for our health as it contains a lot of nutrient. Finally, I love buttermilk chicken so much. The milky gravy is so yummy.</p> <p>Thank you. Bye.</p>
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**Figure 2.** Example of answer scripts given

As the pupils completed the task, the teacher would go through and check their writing thoroughly and award them the marks accordingly. Positive feedback will be given to all pupils as they managed to complete and submit the task. The pupils seem to be enthusiastic with the feedback that they received online. Although there was no face to face feedback and appraisal like was done in the classroom, written feedback given online can also boost the confidence of the pupils to write even better in the future. As writing is a process of development in learning language, pupils' motivation and interest to learn is important for them to learn the language better.



**Figure 3.** Example of feedback given from the teacher to the pupils

The pupils were excited and eager to complete the task as this was their first time experience to submit any task and having online activity especially during the MCO period. They were happy as the task given online was not difficult and the level of the question difficulty fits their language ability. On the other hand, the teacher needs to understand and think for a suitable way and strategy to tackle the interest of the pupils to learn English online during the MCO period. Although this was their first time participation in the online learning especially by using new and different ICT gadgets and applications, they managed to learn to use the digital devices and applications quickly. However, it is important for the parents to guide and observe their children behaviour and attitude while using the devices and applications.



## 4.2 Parents involvement

Parents involvement in learning process especially during the MCO period is important as their role as the connector between the teacher and the pupils. Finding shows that throughout the task period given to the pupils, parents able to assist their children by helping them in few ways. This includes by lending them to use their ICT gadgets to search for information and new vocabulary online, communicate with the teacher and their friends, and submit their task online using an established network connection. Finding in this study shows that all parents involved borrowed their ICT gadgets to their children for them to use it for learning purposes. There were 4 parents who bought new laptops for their children, significantly just for learning purposes during the MCO period. For those who do not have any laptops or home computers, finding shows that 5 of them are using their parents' smartphones to complete the task. Meanwhile, the remaining 11 pupils were able to use their own parents or family members personal laptops or home computers that have been provided.

All parents agreed that a proper established internet network connection is important to ensure the learning process online can be done smoothly. Without a strong and fast internet network connectivity, the pupils would not be able to accomplish the task specially to receive and submit any information regarding the task. On the other hand, parental guidance in using the digital devices and applications is important to prevent their children from using the devices and applications in a wrong way. As technology is getting wider, smarter and faster, the spread of any unusual activity would create negative effects especially to the young children.

Besides that, parents got involved by monitoring their children progress and motivate them to accomplish the task smoothly. Monitoring involves parents to be a part of the learning process by guiding their children to complete the task. However, not all parents are competent and fluent in using English as their first language at home. The usage of their mother tongue at home is the main barrier for the pupils to use and learn English language at home widely. Finding shows that several parents are trying to communicate at home in English in order to develop their skills and confidence in English. They mentioned that this would be a good example for their children to learn English easily. To encourage the pupils to be a good writer, consistent motivation is needed during the process of completing the task. Parents should encourage and support their children to write well and always praise them for little good things that has been done.

**Figure 4.** The interaction between pupils, parents and teacher in completing task

Based on figure 3, the interaction among the pupils, parents and teacher are important to ensure the information given is sufficient and able to keep the motivation support among the pupils throughout the learning process. During the task commencement, parents and pupils were encouraged to contact and interact with the teacher via online to get further information and guidance to complete the task. The teacher would be ready to assist them anytime. However, finding shows that only 2 pupils and parents communicate with the teacher asking for further clarification on the task instructions.

As the teacher investigated, the rest of the pupils able to understand the task instructions clearly and complete the writing task independently or with minimal guidance from their parents. However, the parents still keep their children progress and updates about the task with the teacher via whatsapp group communication. All parents were happy with the strategy used by the teacher to keep on track with the pupils lesson online. The parents expressed their gratitude to the teacher as this would be a challenge for their children to learn online during the MCO period. They were keen to assist their children and gave positive feedbacks during the task given.

#### **4.3 Effectiveness of using ICT in writing task**

As the pupils were still young and all of the them were still do not own any personal electronical devices, the usage of these ICT devices for their personal use is still limited. They were still need to borrow it from their parents or family members. However, with the help of their parents and family members, the pupils able to use any electronical devices with internet connection network to complete their task. The importance of using ICT devices in language learning especially during MCO has brought the attention of the parents to fully utilise the devices for learning purposes for their children. Parents reported that they were happy to help and assist their children in using ICT devices for them to gain knowledge and complete any task during the MCO period. On the other hand, this is the only way for the parents to ensure that the learning process still take place although they were at home.

There were several factors of the effectiveness using ICT in online learning and completing the writing task given that can be seen in this study. The digital literacy level among the pupils are essential to ensure them to be able to use the ICT devices and application appropriately. This can be seen when the pupils able to use the devices smoothly such as laptops, computers and smartphones with the e-mail and Microsoft word application to complete the task. Opening, sending, and attaching files to the e-mail also requires prior knowledge on using e-mail application with a proper internet network connection. The gadgets given to the pupils must be appropriate and useful for them to handle for them to fully utilise it for their learning process.

Exploring websites online is one of the main benefits for the pupils to gain more knowledge on various vocabulary. The pupils can search for more suitable words and vocabulary online by using the search engine online. They may also use the dictionary, thesaurus and other online language applications for them to seek for more information and use it correctly in their writing task. However, the pupils need to know the suitability of the vocabulary used and using grammar rules correctly in the writing task.

Fast and clear communication between the teacher, parents and pupils is another factor on effective communication via online although there was no face to face interaction to complete

the task. The instructions given to the pupils were clear and straightforward for them to follow as young learners could not process lengthy and complicated instructions. However, the teacher would always remind the pupils on the task given through their parentswhatsapp group to keep on track on the pupils' progress and monitor their writing process development.

## **DISCUSSION**

Writing task among young learners focused more on the process and the development of the writing process to learn the language. In this study, findings show that the pupils involved were able to complete their writing task with minimal help from their teacher online. They were able to search for information and learn new vocabulary words online with the help of their parents. Serhan (2009) mentioned that the pupils creativity in learning and problem solving can be develop by pupils ability to create their own understanding using the ICT applications and tools. The pupils were able to use the online applications to read and reply the e-mail too. As positive feedbacks were given throughout the task, the pupils felt motivated and encouraged to complete and submit the task (Fareed, et al., 2016). By minimizing criticism towards errors and mistakes, the pupils keen to keep the motivation and therefore the process of learning writing would be easy to be developed by the pupils.

Parents involvement at home during the MCO period is essential as they will act as a secondary teacher at home to guide and assist their children. It is important for them to keep the pupils motivated in completing the task too. Motivation is one of the key factors to ensure the success of education of the children at home as parents parenting style will affect the children learning process (Jones, 2018). Communication plays an important role in ensuring the information given are received well to the recipient. Effective communication among parents and teacher are essential to ensure the task given to the pupils can be completed with the help of their parents (Hilla, Witherspoonb&Bartz, 2016). Therefore, a clear conversation between teachers and parents in deliberating information to the pupils are needed to assist the pupils in completing their task. This would encourage the pupils to be more active in the learning process and improve their academic achievement.

The usage of ICT devices and applications made the pupils work easier to complete the task as it is faster and a better way to gain for more information and knowledge. There are more benefits rather than negative side effects in using ICT applications online (Shih, 2011). Although the parents need to lend them their electronical devices to their children, but it is a way for them to get access for education online. Mudra (2020) has mentioned that the cost to own an electronical device is expensive, thus the support from parents are important in helping the pupils to use their devices. Besides that, the accessibility to the internet network connection is important for the pupils to explore and seek for information online. Technical skills problem may affect the pupils encouragement to use the application and tools online (Wheelan, 2008). The speed of the internet connection is another factor for the pupils to keep their motivation on searching for information online without any disturbance. However, parental guidance is important to watch their behaviour and attitude online. It is important for them in ensuring their children are using the correct and safe sites to explore for information.

Keeping the pupils motivation towards the learning process online too is important for them to gain the knowledge although during the MCO period.

## CONCLUSIONS & SUGGESTIONS

In this study, findings have shown that writing task for young learners during MCO can be conducted online with the help of the parents at home. Online learning would bring a lot of beneficial influence to the pupils especially young learners for them to explore and learn variety of knowledge online faster and better. In learning writing for English language, young learners with second language acquisition would benefit the most as they can learn new vocabulary by exploring various websites and applications online.

Further study could emphasise on other skills such as reading, listening and speaking as all the skills should come together in learning language. Different skills might bring different challenges and outcome. The usage of different electronical devices, communication tools and applications in learning language online could be another way for the teacher to explore learning with their pupils. The influence of using social media such as facebook, twitter, instagram and other social networking sites can be developed too as young learners nowadays are getting used to the social media development.

Parents can act as the main teacher at home to teach and assist their child to learn language by using online tools and applications. Parents may setup a proper study and workplace for them to observe and help their children in learning during this MCO period. Parental guidance and assistance in using the devices and applications are essential to ensure the objectives of the day can be achieved.

It is hope that this study would help the teachers, parents and education community especially those who are learning English as second language to develop more understanding in learning English online and by using high-tech electronical devices. Parents too should be aware of their involvement in helping their children to learn especially at home during the MCO period.

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