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Article

Task-supported Language Teaching in Blended Learning: A Quasi-experimental Study on Malaysian ESL Learners' Writing

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Abstract
As blended learning becomes more prevalent in English as a Second Language (henceforth ESL) instruction, identifying pedagogical approaches that balance linguistic support with learner engagement is increasingly important. This quasi-experimental, explanatory sequential mixed-methods study investigated the effectiveness of Task-supported language teaching (henceforth TSLT) in enhancing the writing performance of intermediate ESL learners within a blended learning environment. Over six weeks, 69 participants were assigned to either an experimental group (n = 35) receiving TSLT instruction or a control group (n = 34) receiving Presentation–Practice–Production (henceforth PPP) instruction, both delivered through a blended format. Writing performance was measured through pretest and posttest argumentative essays, which were scored using an analytic rubric. Quantitative results showed significant gains in the TSLT group across all writing domains, particularly in content and vocabulary. During the focus group interview, participants regarded TSLT tasks as structured, meaningful, and engaging. Furthermore, the affordances offered by digital tools in such an environment enable opportunities for timely feedback and revision beyond class time. These findings suggest that blended TSLT may enhance writing performance.

Keywords
Task-supported language teaching, ESL, blended learning, writing performance, peer feedback

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1 Introduction

Writing in a second language (L2) is widely recognised as a complex skill (Asafo-Adjei et al., 2023; Kormos, 2023). Learners have to simultaneously generate, organise ideas and maintain grammatical accuracy in a language they are still acquiring (Chicho, 2022; Sharmin, 2023). Challenges in L2 writing could stem from the persistence of a teacher-centred approach. Persistent challenges faced by L2 writers include difficulties in brainstorming (Baharudin et al., 2023; Huang et al., 2025), maintaining coherence across paragraphs (Hafrison, 2020; S. Li & Akram, 2024), and managing writing-related anxiety (Sabti et al., 2019; Saputra et al., 2021). In this conventional approach, students seldom have autonomy, and this lack of agency further exacerbates this situation because students are passive recipients in such an environment.

In Malaysian ESL contexts, the teacher-centred approach is still common in writing classes (N. Kaur, 2014; Nik Hassim & Hashim, 2024; Thiagarajan & Tan, 2023), with knowledge being passed down in a one-way direction from teacher to student. This often happens at the expense of communicative practices. Another major challenge in ESL writing classrooms is the heavy workload faced by instructors to complete the syllabus and to prepare students for an exam-oriented system. As a result, feedback from teachers is often delayed or inadequate (Gupta et al., 2022; Shen & Bai, 2019; Thiagarajan & Tan, 2023), and the iterative nature of feedback is often disregarded (Bitchener, 2008; Soo, 2023). Consequently, students who receive little iterative feedback have limited opportunities to improve their writing. These ongoing limitations highlight the need for more student-centred pedagogies that can effectively target both the cognitive and affective aspects of L2 writing and provide feedback.

In a teacher-centred approach, writing instruction frequently emphasises the end product over the significant iterative processes like planning, drafting, revising, and editing involved in writing (Hamad et al., 2021; Liang et al., 2025; X. Zhang & McEneaney, 2020; Y. Zhang & Hyland, 2024). It is argued that this conventional approach, which disregards these prominent stages, may result in writing that lacks depth and critical engagement (Baharudin et al., 2023; Bulqiyah et al., 2021; Mansor et al., 2022). These ongoing issues suggest a shift towards student-centred learning. Incorporating process-oriented practice in such an environment may better address the issues and developmental needs inherent in L2 writing.

Within Malaysian higher education, the integration of blended learning (henceforth BL) has been shaped by national policy (the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2015-2025). The national education blueprint encourages the integration of digital tools to enhance instructional delivery across disciplines in the country (Ministry of Education, 2015). BL is frequently regarded as a flexible instructional mode that combines the strengths of online and face-to-face learning, offering opportunities for personalised pacing, collaboration, and extended engagement. However, studies have noted that learner participation in blended contexts may sometimes remain superficial, particularly when online components are not purposefully designed to promote meaningful interaction (Heilporn et al., 2021; Jeffrey et al., 2014). To address such challenges, TSLT may offer a complementary pedagogical approach. By embedding explicit support within communicative tasks, TSLT has the potential to foster more sustained engagement, which may support deeper cognitive involvement and more effective writing development. Despite these affordances, the integration of BL with student-centred approaches, such as TSLT, remains relatively underexamined, particularly in Malaysian ESL writing contexts that continue to reflect teacher-centred norms. In light of this gap, the present study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How does TSLT affect the writing performance of ESL learners?
2. How do learners perceive the TSLT intervention, and in what ways do their views explain the quantitative outcomes?

2 Literature Review

2.1 Teacher-centred writing instruction in ESL classrooms

Although there is a shift towards more communicative teaching methods, many ESL classrooms at the tertiary level still predominantly employ a teacher-centred approach such as PPP. Continued reliance on this approach might stem from the country's exam-oriented educational system, which often emphasises teacher control, rote learning, and outcome-based education system (Abu Bakar et al., 2021; Ern Teh, 2025; Philip et al., 2019). Although policy reforms have directed a more learner-centred approach, structural constraints, such as rigid syllabi and high-stakes assessments, appear to sustain teacher-centred practices. While writing in PPP instruction may aim to promote grammatical accuracy, it may also frame writing as a linear process (Noroozi & Taheri, 2022; Palanisamy & Abdul Aziz, 2021). This focus on accuracy and final products often sidelines essential stages of writing, such as planning, drafting, revising, and editing (Hamad et al., 2021; Liang et al., 2025; X. Zhang & McEneaney, 2020). This emphasis on the final product instead of the process may also restrict students' engagement with writing as a more recursive and communicative process.

Furthermore, although iterative, formative feedback is widely recognised as essential for L2 writing performance, it is often overlooked in such practice (Bitchener, 2008; Soo, 2023; Y. Zhang & Hyland, 2024). Soo (2023) found that ESL learners preferred a combination of verbal and written feedback. On top of that, they also value both immediate clarification and longer-term reference for addressing explicit and implicit knowledge gaps they might have. However, in a teacher-centred classroom, time constraints and a focus on summative assessment often limit the provision of such personalised, process-focused support (Thiagarajan & Tan, 2023). Other studies further emphasise that feedback is most effective when it facilitates revision and is clearly scaffolded. Huisman et al. (2018) highlight the importance of specific, actionable input, particularly in peer and automated systems, but caution that such systems require adequate scaffolding to ensure meaningful uptake. Effective integration of formative feedback can also significantly reduce writing anxiety and encourage ongoing improvements (Huang et al., 2025). However, without systematic feedback, learners often develop a fragmented grasp of writing conventions. These learners may also struggle to engage deeply with cognitive and metalinguistic skills.

In a teacher-centred approach, knowledge primarily flows from the instructor to the student. This environment often limits learners' autonomy and leads to them becoming disengaged (N. Kaur, 2014; K. L. Li et al., 2018; Nik Hassim & Hashim, 2024; Pek et al., 2019). Even when digital tools are integrated, they are frequently used in ways that bolster the teacher's authority. In writing classrooms dominated by teacher-led instruction, these tools tend to prioritise product-oriented outcomes rather than fostering collaborative practices (Fathi et al., 2021; Valizadeh, 2022). Studies also suggest that student engagement with such digital tools is often superficial, as learners may hide behind the screen while the teacher does most of the talking. In contrast, recent research demonstrates that integrating digital platforms, such as Google Docs, within a collaborative framework can substantially enhance student engagement (Albesher, 2024; Asih et al., 2022; Sri Rahayu et al., 2022; Valizadeh, 2022). By enabling instant feedback from both teachers and peers, these platforms support continuous development in writing skills. Therefore, there is a growing need to examine student-centred approaches that fully leverage the affordances of digital technology. Such approaches hold the potential to provide process-oriented support, which is crucial for advancing ESL writing performance.

2.2 Task-supported language teaching (TSLT)

Task-Supported Language Teaching (TSLT) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) are distinct in their theoretical foundations, syllabus designs, and how they utilise tasks (Ellis, 2024). TBLT is rooted in a cognitive perspective of language acquisition. It encourages incidental acquisition through unfocused,

meaningful tasks that place emphasis on communication and efficacy. In this approach, there is minimal pre-task explicit instruction, and focus on form typically occurs incidentally or in the post-task phase. In contrast, TSLT adopts a skill-learning perspective. It follows a structural syllabus and employs focused tasks aimed at specific language forms. These forms are often introduced through explicit instruction before or during the task, ensuring deliberate attention to targeted features. While TBLT encourages holistic, learner-driven communication, TSLT integrates form-focused instruction within or around tasks. This integration serves to reinforce accuracy and address persistent errors. TBLT places greater emphasis on fluency and natural language use, whereas TSLT prioritises structured practice of specific forms.

Moreover, TSLT is a pragmatic response to the practical challenges in implementing TBLT in Asia (Ellis, 2019; Jung, 2024), especially highlighting the challenges of task engagement (Teng, 2024). These challenges are linked to learners' expectations, proficiency levels, and the systemic constraints within education systems that focus heavily on examinations and traditional teaching methods (Ellis, 2024). While TBLT relies on incidental learning through negotiation of meaning, TSLT emphasises explicit instruction of grammar forms at the beginning of the lesson (i.e. pre-task cycle) (Chen & Dan, 2024). The initial structure is useful for addressing persistent grammatical errors that learners may not overcome through communication-based exposure alone. Consequently, the TSLT approach may be particularly relevant in educational contexts like Malaysia, where curriculum demands and assessment practices put emphasis on both fluency and accuracy. As such, Ellis (2024) contends, a modular curriculum that integrates both task-based and structure-based components may provide a more context-sensitive solution, allowing instruction to toggle flexibly between communicative fluency and accuracy.

Furthermore, TSLT is seen as more compatible with mainstream pedagogical expectations and learning cultures in Asia (East, 2024; Ellis, 2024). This compatibility is relevant as TBLT often avoids direct correction; instead, it draws learners' attention to grammatical issues incidentally. While the TBLT approach may be effective in some educational contexts, it may only work when learners are developmentally ready for the target forms (Ellis, 2024; Long, 2016). In contrast, TSLT allows teachers to explicitly focus on problematic forms during the pre-task or main-task stages. TSLT is able to provide targeted support for learners who might not benefit from incidental exposure alone. This structured input is crucial in contexts where language education is influenced by summative assessment and a preference for accuracy-focused instruction among teachers (Chen & Dan, 2024). By integrating structured input during the pre-task with meaningful task engagement, learners' ability to produce accurate and contextually appropriate language may be enhanced.

In addition, meaningful tasks can play a pivotal role in increasing student participation in the process of digital multimedia composing (see a meta-analysis Ci & Jiang, 2025). A student-centred approach that integrates such tasks can be advantageous in the writing classroom. When learners perceive tasks as relevant and important to their learning, they are more motivated to participate and contribute (Johari et al., 2025; Ma et al., 2025; Nagle, 2021). Since low confidence and anxiety can negatively impact writing performance, embedding writing activities into meaningful tasks may help reduce these affective barriers. Consequently, TSLT offers a practical framework for diverse ESL contexts by delivering targeted linguistic support within meaningful communicative activities, thereby fostering language development and learner confidence.

2.3 Blended learning (BL) in ESL writing instruction

Blended learning (BL), which combines face-to-face and online instruction, has gained increasing prominence in ESL education worldwide, including in Malaysia (Alzoubi, 2024; Jassni et al., 2024; M. Kaur & C Sandaran, 2023). In the Malaysian context, the Education Blueprint 2015-2025 highlights the importance of integrating technology and innovative pedagogical approaches into higher education, including language instruction. This emphasis aligns with the broader transformations associated with Industry 4.0 and Education 4.0 (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2015).

At the tertiary level in Malaysia, BL is increasingly promoted within English Language Teaching (ELT) policy frameworks as a means to foster flexible, interactive, and student-centred learning environments (Anthony et al., 2022; Hassan et al., 2021; Jassni et al., 2024; Ramalingam et al., 2022). Its potential to combine online collaboration with face-to-face teaching and learning may support process-oriented writing instruction by enabling iterative feedback and scaffolded development. However, the extent to which such benefits are realised appears to vary considerably across institutional contexts.

Despite its pedagogical potential, BL also presents challenges. Some studies report that it improves writing performance, motivation, and learner autonomy (Hassan et al., 2021; M. Kaur & C Sandaran, 2023; Wang et al., 2024), while others highlight issues like superficial engagement (Fathi et al., 2021; Rahimi & Fathi, 2022; Valizadeh, 2022). Often, students engage with online components passively. They see online tasks as low-stakes and, as a result, do not fully engage with the interactive or self-directed opportunities that BL is supposed to provide (Fathi et al., 2021; Malissa, 2018; Pham, 2021). Consequently, the effectiveness of BL heavily depends on the quality of course design and the level of institutional support behind it.

Although TSLT and BL may initially seem like distinct instructional approaches, their foundational principle may intersect in relevant ways. TSLT provides a structured framework focused on form-sensitive task design, while BL offers flexibility, interactivity, and extended opportunities for feedback. These complementary features suggest the potential value of integrating the two, particularly in writing instruction. However, empirical research on how TSLT might be adapted within BL environments remains limited, especially in ESL contexts. Further investigation is therefore warranted to explore how such integration could support engagement and instructional aims in Malaysian tertiary settings.

3 Methods

3.1 Participants

The study was conducted at a public university in northern Malaysia, and learners study English as a second language. Participants were undergraduate students who met the minimum requirement of Band 4 on the Malaysian University English Test (MUET), equivalent to the Common European Framework for Reference (CEFR) B2 level. The quasi-study involved two intact classes, which were randomly assigned to either the experimental group (n = 35) or the control group (n = 34) using a draw lot technique. To establish baseline equivalence, participants completed a pre-test and a background survey that captured demographic details, years of English learning and prior exposure to task-based instruction.

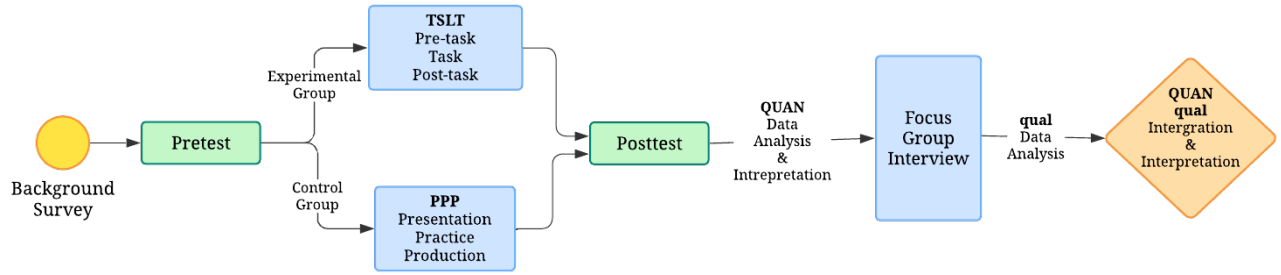
3.2 Design

This study employed a mixed-methods experimental design, specifically a quasi-experimental approach involving two intact classes. An explanatory sequential design was adopted: quantitative (QUAN) data collection and analysis were conducted first, followed by a qualitative (qual) phase (see Figure 1) (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2023). The quantitative phase employed a pretest and posttest design with non-randomised groups to evaluate the effect of a student-centred TSLT approach compared to a teacher-centred PPP approach, both delivered in a blended format. This was followed by focus group interviews with selected experimental participants to explore how the TSLT intervention shaped their writing experiences in a blended learning context.

Quasi-experimental designs are frequently employed in educational research, primarily because conducting randomised controlled trials (RCTs) in actual classroom environments is often unrealistic or even unethical (Erviona, 2021; Gopalan et al., 2020; Ng et al., 2020; Sabri et al., 2023). Researchers rarely have the ability to assign students to specific classes, as doing so could disrupt established administrative systems and raise significant concerns regarding equity and fairness. As a result, they

must rely on existing class structures, making quasi-experimental methods a practical alternative in these contexts (Ng et al., 2020; Sabri et al., 2023). In this study, intact classrooms were assigned by lottery to either the treatment or control group (Ary et al., 2010). Although RTCs were not possible, both groups completed a pretest to establish baseline equivalence to support internal validity. As quasi-experimental designs become more prominent in educational research, it is important to address their inherent limitations. Consequently, in the current study, the same instructor was assigned to both groups to minimise teacher-related bias and to address internal threats (Barrot, 2021; Cohen et al., 2018). Next, the same prompts, assessment rubrics (Jacobs et al, 1981), and testing conditions were used for both the pretest and posttest. Moreover, the intervention was implemented within actual blended learning environments to support ecological validity (Andrade, 2018; Galiñanes Plaza et al., 2019).

Figure 1
Design of the Study



3.3 Instruments

This quasi-experimental study utilised three instruments. The first was a background survey, which collected demographic information alongside questions about participants' English learning history and prior experience with task-based instruction. The second component involved a writing pretest and posttest, both based on TOEFL-style prompts calibrated to the CEFR B2 level, with each prompt aligned to SDG 12. The third instrument was a set of semi-structured interview questions, developed in response to the quantitative findings. These interviews sought to capture participants' perspectives on the student-centred learning experience and their perceptions of their own writing performance within the blended learning environment.

3.4 Procedures

Ethical approval was obtained from the research ethics committees of both the home institution and the host university, and all protocols were followed. Participants gave written informed consent, were informed of their right to withdraw without penalty, and were assured of confidentiality. Before the main intervention, a pilot study with a separate group of B2-level learners evaluated the clarity and cognitive demands of the materials. Initial prompts, which require multiple perspectives and complex solutions, resulted in unfocused writing. Feedback led to revisions into a single-perspective argumentative format, supported by model texts, grammar reference sheets, and peer review rubrics. Following these adjustments, participants completed a background survey on demographics, English learning histories, and prior exposure to various forms of instruction, including task-based methods. They then wrote a timed pretest essay on an SDG 12-related topic at the CEFR B2 level.

The primary intervention was implemented over six weeks, following a pre-task, task, and post-task cycle. The first three weeks were conducted online, while the final three weeks were delivered face-to-face. Each 60-minute session targeted a specific dimension of argumentative writing and involved peer collaboration in fixed groups. During the pre-task phase, learners received structured scaffolding through explicit grammar instruction, model text analysis, and focused activities, distinguishing this

approach from TBLT, which typically emphasises meaning before form. The main task phase involved collaborative group writing using a round-robin technique (see Appendix 1).

All weekly tasks were designed to meet Ellis and Shintani's (2013) four core criteria: they were meaning-focused, incorporated information gaps, encouraged learners to utilise their linguistic resources, and resulted in a tangible communicative outcome. Table 1 provides an overview of the instructional focus, scaffolding strategies, and task design implemented each week. In this structure, each learner was responsible for writing one section of an argumentative essay, including the introduction, body, or conclusion, before passing the document to a peer, who would then continue with the next section. This cycle repeated until the group produced a complete essay draft. The post-task phase included guided peer review, reflection, and revision to consolidate learning. Throughout the intervention, Google Docs was used to facilitate real-time drafting, feedback, and editing, while Google Classroom served as the platform for distributing instructional materials and resources (see Appendix 2).

After completing the intervention, participants undertook a posttest essay using a new prompt related to SDG 12. While the topic differed from the pretest, it was matched in difficulty and aligned with the CEFR B2 level to ensure comparability and minimise recall bias. The same rubric and scoring procedures applied during the pretest were used. Subsequently, semi-structured focus group interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of high, mid, and low-performing participants. The protocol, informed by quantitative findings, explored learners' experiences with task preparation, collaboration, feedback, and digital tools. Interviews were transcribed verbatim, member-checked for accuracy, and analysed to complement the quantitative results.

Table 1
TSLT Intervention: Pre-task and Main Task Details

Week	Focus	Pre-task	Main Task
1	Essay structure & SDG vocabulary	Model analysis, thesis comparison, vocabulary input	Collaborative revision of weak introductions to produce an improved version
2	Body paragraph development	Topic sentence activities, cohesion practice	Round-robin co-writing of body paragraphs with peer negotiation
3	Argument & rebuttal	Modal verbs, persuasive forms, role assignment	Structured debate script construction from pro/con/counter perspectives
4	Introduction writing	Hook writing, thesis sentence activities	Drafting and peer-review of thesis-driven introductions
5	Conclusion writing	Model-matching, coherence checks	Drafting conclusions with group justification of structure and flow
6	Full essay drafting	Outline planning, peer-review checklist	Final draft writing with structured peer-review cycles

3.5 Data analysis

Data analysis followed a sequential protocol aligned with the study's explanatory mixed-methods design. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS Version 29. Inter-rater reliability for the writing scores was **first** assessed using a two-way mixed-effects Intraclass Correlation Coefficient (ICC) with absolute agreement (Koo & Li, 2016). Then, the average scores from three independent raters were computed and used for all subsequent statistical tests. Normality of data distribution was assessed using the Shapiro-Wilk test, supported by visual inspections through box plots (see Figure 2). Depending on the distribution characteristics of each variable, appropriate statistical procedures were applied. Parametric tests, including paired-sample and independent-sample t-tests, were used for normally distributed data.

Non-parametric alternatives, specifically the Wilcoxon signed-rank test and Mann-Whitney U test, were employed for data that did not meet normality assumptions. Effect sizes were calculated using Cohen's d for parametric tests and rank-biserial correlation for non-parametric tests to evaluate the magnitude of observed differences.

To complement the quantitative findings, qualitative data were collected through three semi-structured focus group interviews, each consisting of four to five participants. These interviews aimed to explore how and why the TSLT intervention affected students' writing performance. Participants were asked two guiding questions: (1) *How do you perceive the use of the instructional approach in your writing classroom?* (2) *What factors facilitated or hindered your writing development under this approach, including both task-supported and blended learning features?* The first question probed learners' attitudes toward the use of TSLT within a blended learning environment and how its features may have influenced their writing performance. The second question was designed to identify the specific affordances or challenges associated with using Google Docs and the overall blended format in supporting writing performance. Later, the interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed using Braun & Clarke's (2021) six-phase framework for thematic analysis, incorporating a comparative method that involved open coding, categorisation, and synthesis of themes. An inductive coding approach was applied, with no a priori categories imposed. Two trained experts with over a decade of experience in language teaching and research reviewed the semi-structured interview protocol for both face and content validity. These same experts also reviewed the thematic analysis of the focus group excerpt on a semantic level, coding participant responses and overarching themes.

4 Results

4.1 Research question 1: How does TSLT affect the writing performance of ESL learners?

To investigate the effects of TSLT on the writing performance of ESL learners, this section presents quantitative results from pretest and posttest comparisons between the experimental and control groups. Before conducting statistical analyses, inter-rater reliability was assessed using a two-way mixed-effects Intraclass Correlation Coefficient (ICC) with absolute agreement in SPSS Version 29. As shown in Table 2, results demonstrated excellent agreement among the three raters for both the pretest (ICC = 0.997, 95% CI [0.996, 0.998], $F(68, 136) = 356.03$, $p < .001$) and the posttest (ICC = 0.992, 95% CI [0.989, 0.995], $F(68, 136) = 132.70$, $p < .001$), exceeding the .75 threshold for strong reliability (Koo & Li, 2016). These findings justify the use of averaged rater scores (M = [R1 + R2 + R3]/3) for subsequent analyses.

Table 2
Intraclass Correlation Coefficient (ICC) for Pre-test and Post-test Scores

Measure	ICC	95% CI (Lower - Upper)	$F(68,136)$	p-value
Pre-test (Average Measures)	0.997	0.996 - 0.998	356.034	< .001
Post-test (Average Measures)	0.992	0.989 - 0.995	132.698	< .001

Following the ICC analysis, composite writing scores were screened for normality using the Shapiro-Wilk test in SPSS. Results indicated that total writing scores met the assumption of a normal distribution ($p > .05$), allowing the use of parametric tests to compare mean differences over time and across groups. However, normality was not met for individual components (i.e. content, organisation, vocabulary, language use, mechanics), as Shapiro-Wilk test results yielded p-values < .05. Accordingly, non-parametric tests (Wilcoxon signed-rank for within-group comparisons; Mann-Whitney U for between-

group comparisons) should be applied to component-level scores. Cohen's *d* and rank-biserial correlation were used as effect size measures for parametric and non-parametric analyses, respectively.

As shown in Table 3, baseline equivalence was first confirmed between the experimental and control groups on pretest total writing scores, $t(67) = 0.21$, $p = .832$, $d = 0.05$, 95% CI [−1.75, 2.17]. Following the TSLT intervention, the experimental group demonstrated significant improvement across all five writing components. As presented in Table 4, the total writing score in the treatment group increased from $M = 51.29$ ($SD = 4.15$) to $M = 77.09$ (SD = 7.20), a gain of 25.80 points (95% CI [23.15, 28.45]), representing a large effect. Component-wise improvements in the experimental group were also statistically significant. Content scores increased from $M = 13.05$ ($SD = 2.61$) to $M = 20.20$ ($SD = 3.45$), a mean gain of 7.15 points (95% CI [5.82, 8.48]). Vocabulary rose from $M = 11.43$ ($SD = 1.38$) to $M = 17.10$ ($SD = 1.72$), a gain of 5.67 points (95% CI [4.91, 6.43]). Improvements were also found in Language Use ($M = 18.97$, $SD = 2.64$), Organisation ($M = 16.57$, $SD = 1.23$), and Mechanics ($M = 4.24$, $SD = 0.55$). All Wilcoxon signed-rank tests yielded $p < .001$.

Figure 2

Box Plots of Pretest (left) and Posttest (right) Writing Scores Comparing the Experimental and Control Groups

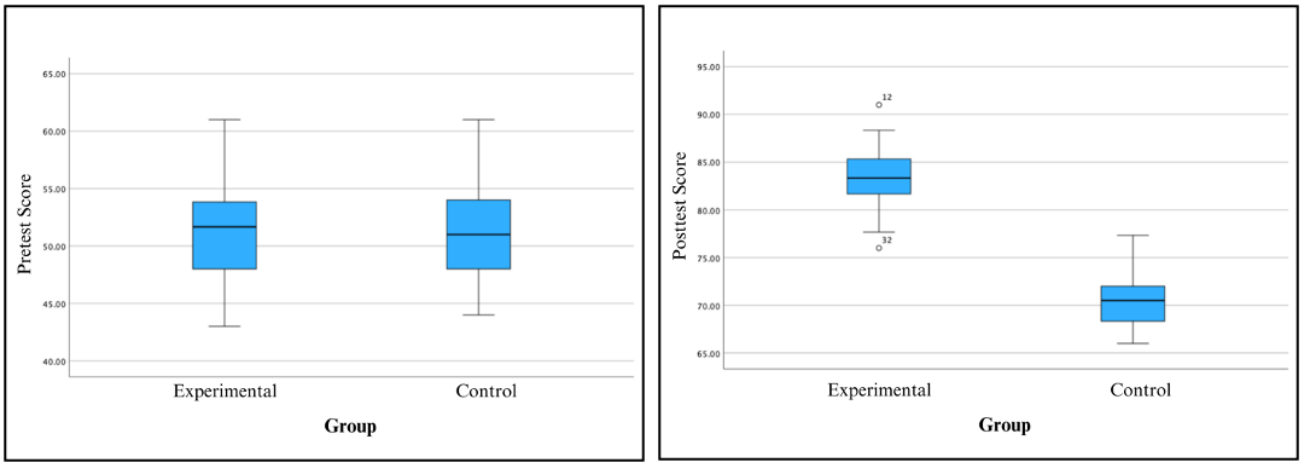


Figure 2 illustrates the upward shift in writing scores among the experimental group from pretest to posttest, further highlighting the differential gains compared to the control group. To further interpret these quantitative results, a follow-up qualitative phase was conducted to explore learners' experiences with the TSLT intervention. Focus group interviews were designed to uncover how students engaged with specific instructional components and how these interactions may have supported their writing development. Thematic findings presented in the next section offer explanatory insight into the mechanisms through which TSLT facilitated the observed improvements.

Table 3

Independent-samples T-test for Pretest and Posttest Writing Scores

Measure	Group	Mean	SD	t	df	p-value (Two-Tailed)	Mean Difference	Effect Size (Cohen's d)
Pre-test Scores	Experimental	51.39	4.44	0.213	67	.832	0.21	0.051
	Control	51.18	3.89					
Post-test Scores	Experimental	83.50	3.34	18.06	67	< .001	13.01	4.35
	Control	70.49	2.59					

Table 4
Pretest and Posttest Results

	Content		Organisation		Vocabulary		Language Use		Mechanics		Overall Score	
	Mean	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**
Pretest												
Treatment	13.05	2.61	11.15	1.36	11.43	1.38	12.84	1.48	2.14	0.39	51.29	4.15
Control	13.02	2.50	11.10	1.40	11.50	1.35	12.79	1.45	2.18	0.42	51.15	4.12
Posttest												
Treatment	20.20	3.45	16.57	1.23	17.10	1.72	18.97	2.64	4.24	0.55	77.09	7.20
Control	17.80	2.90	14.90	1.30	14.90	1.60	16.00	2.20	3.90	0.50	70.50	6.50

4.2 Research question 2: How do learners perceive the TSLT intervention, and in what ways do their views explain the quantitative outcomes?

To explore the mechanisms underpinning the quantitative gains, a follow-up qualitative phase was conducted. Focus group interviews were designed to investigate learners' perceptions of the TSLT intervention, particularly how task design, peer interaction, and the blended format shaped their writing performance.

The initial phase involved detailed line-by-line open coding of participant responses to extract emergent patterns. For instance, excerpts such as *"Now, we do more steps to write better"* and *"Before I write one time and submit. Now I know why need to plan"* were coded as "process awareness" and "task-supported learning value." These excerpts revealed that participants increasingly recognised the significance of having structured writing processes.

Next, excerpts like *"Now, we do something together at the same time, so I have to try harder"* and *"I don't want my part to be the worst in our group essay"* were coded as "peer-driven motivation" and "collaborative accountability." These codes reflected engagement and motivation from collaborative tasks.

Excerpts like *"My friend comment I can understand, so I check his first"* and *"If I don't get what the teacher say, I look at what my friends put,"* showed peer interaction was evident in this student-centred environment. It highlights the importance of peer communication for clearer feedback. These excerpts were put under two categories: "feedback clarity" and "peer reliance."

After open coding, related codes were organised into broader categories such as "perceived value of TSLT tasks," "engagement and motivation," "collaboration and feedback," and "digital scaffolding." These categories were then synthesised into four main themes: (1) Perceived Value of TSLT Tasks, (2) Engagement and Motivation, (3) Collaboration and Feedback, and (4) Role of Digital Tools. The analysis was supported by representative participant excerpts, detailed in Table 5.

4.2.1 Perceived value of TSLT tasks.

Students consistently viewed the TSLT tasks as purposeful and well-structured. Many participants noted that the sequence of activities made it easier to follow lessons and understand expectations. They appreciated how each task targeted a specific aspect of writing and how the progression built on prior work. As S9 observed, *"Every week we do different thing. Different but important for our different parts in essay"* (Group 1). Similarly, S16 explained, *"The activities were related I think. I know what I need*

to do and why we do it, I'm not lost" (Group 2). These statements reflect a perceived coherence and scaffolding in the task design. Other participants also commented on the clarity of task purposes, noting that having step-by-step activities helped them focus more during writing sessions.

4.2.2 Engagement and motivation.

Participants contrasted TSLT with their previous experiences of teacher-centred instruction, describing changes in how they approached writing tasks. Rather than working individually and waiting for teacher evaluation, learners reported completing tasks collaboratively with shared objectives. As S14 noted, *"Before this, writing was boring. Just write, submit, and wait for marks. Now, we actually do something together at the same time, so I have to try harder"* (Group 2). Peer accountability was also frequently mentioned. S25 shared, *"We don't want our part to be the worse. Everyone has to contribute because we know other group can also read what we wrote"* (Group 1). These remarks were echoed by other students who described feeling responsible for the overall group performance. In addition to task engagement, several participants mentioned a growing sense of ownership over their work. Some attributed their increased participation to the visibility of group progress and peer contributions, while others indicated that the collaborative nature of the tasks encouraged more active involvement throughout the writing process.

4.2.3 Collaboration and feedback.

Students described valuing the immediacy of feedback provided through Google Docs, noting that both peers and teachers could respond in real time. S2 stated, *"Before, I wait for the teacher to give mark. Now, if I make a mistake, my friends or teacher comment straight away, so I fix asap"* (Group 1). Several participants perceived this immediacy as an improvement over conventional feedback. Participants generally found peer feedback clearer and more actionable. For instance, S11 stated, *"Teacher's feedback is useful, but sometimes I don't understand. My friends comment I can understand"* (Group 3). This suggests that feedback phrased in familiar language contributed to better comprehension. Initial reactions to peer feedback varied. Some students reported feeling defensive, as S18 mentioned: *"When my friends commented I feel defensive but I know if I look at positive side, this is actually for better"* (Group 1). Over time, repeated peer review fostered greater receptivity and encouraged a collaborative approach to improvement. Regular exposure to peer evaluations seems to promote both openness to critique and a shared sense of responsibility for academic progress.

4.2.4 Blended learning and digital tools

Students described the blended learning format as providing extended opportunities for writing beyond class hours. For instance, S21 explained, *"In class, sometimes I don't have ideas. Or sometimes so many ideas I can't decide. But later, when I check Google Docs, I can edit and add more"* (Group 2). This ability to revisit drafts outside the classroom was seen as helpful for refining content and structure at the student's own pace. The shared digital space also enabled learners to view and compare each other's contributions. S7 remarked, *"I like this feature because I can view others' works and learn from their mistakes"* (Group 1), while others noted that access to peer work made the expectations and standards more transparent. Additionally, some students used peer feedback to interpret teacher comments. S12 explained, *"If I don't understand the teacher's comment, I check my friends' feedback"* (Group 2), indicating a layered use of feedback in the digital environment.

Table 5
Summary of Qualitative Themes, Sub-themes, and Representative Quotes from the Focus Group Interview

Major Theme	Sub-theme	Summary of Findings	Students' Quotes
Perceived Value of TSLT Tasks	Positive perceptions of structured task design	Students found TSLT tasks purposeful, well-structured, and more engaging than conventional exercises	• "Every week we do different thing. Different but important for our different parts in essay" (S9, Group 1) • "The activities were related I think. I know what I need to do and why we do it, so I'm not lost." (S16, Group 2)
Engagement and Motivation	Increased interest through task completion	Writing shifted from passive to interactive; tasks fostered sustained effort and peer accountability	• "Before this, writing was boring. Just write, submit, and wait for marks. Now, we actually do something together at the same time, so I have to try harder." (S14, Group 2) • "We don't want our part to be the worse. Everyone has to contribute because we know other group can also read what we wrote." (S25 Group 1)
	Role of group work	Group work cultivated responsibility and mutual encouragement.	• "When I see my friends gets good comments, I also want to do better. I feel motivated." (S8, Group 3) • "Before, I didn't care much about writing, but now I know my group depends our teamwork, so I make sure my part is good." (S32, Group 1)
Collaboration & Peer Feedback	Real-time feedback & awareness	Shared documents enabled instant peer and teacher input, leading to quicker, deeper revisions.	• "Before, I wait for the teacher to give mark. Now, if I make a mistake, my friends or teacher comment straight away, so I fix asap." (S2, Group 1) • "I didn't even know some of my sentences were not okay until my friend pointed it out. (S29, Group 2)
	Confidence in Accepting and Applying Feedback	Peer feedback was more relatable and less intimidating than teacher feedback.	• "Teacher's feedback is useful, but sometimes I don't understand. My friends comment I can understand." (S11, Group 3) • "When my friends commented I feel defensive but I know if I look at positive side, this is actually for better" (S18, Group 1)
Blended Learning & Digital Tools	Flexibility for revising	The blended mode allowed reflective revisions outside class time.	• "In class, sometimes I don't have ideas. Or sometimes so many ideas I can't decide. But later, when I check Google Docs, I can edit and add more." (S21, Group 2) • "I can still check comments after class and improve. (S4, Group 3)
	Visibility & accountability	Shared digital work increased revision time and peer-driven learning.	• "I like this feature because I can view others' works and learn from their mistakes" (S7, Group 1) • "If I don't understand teacher's comment, I check my friends' feedback. (S12, Group 2)

5 Discussion

Writing instruction for ESL learners remains a pedagogical challenge, particularly in contexts where instruction is conventionally teacher-centred and product-oriented. While past research has highlighted the potential of communicative and process-oriented approaches to foster deeper engagement and skill development (Baharudin et al., 2023; Hassan et al., 2021), practical models that integrate structure, collaboration, and flexibility remain underexplored. This study aimed to examine how a task-supported language teaching approach, delivered in a blended format, could support writing development among Malaysian ESL learners.

Following the intervention, improvements were observed across all five assessed writing components, with the most notable gains in content and vocabulary. These findings indicate that students developed a greater ability to elaborate on ideas, expanded their vocabulary range, and improved the overall fluency of their writing (Bulqiyah et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2024). Post-test results further showed that students could articulate ideas more clearly and employ connectors and cohesive devices effectively, resulting in essays that were well-organised and logically sequenced. Such outcomes appear to be linked to the task-supported and scaffolded approach implemented at the start of the intervention, where structured pre-task instruction prepared learners to generate ideas and apply appropriate linguistic forms during task performance.

Another factor that may have contributed to these improvements was the integration of task-based instruction. Rather than relying solely on isolated drills, this approach targeted specific subskills within meaningful activities, providing structured guidance throughout the writing process and fostering collaborative idea generation. Several participants reported greater confidence in their writing and a clearer sense of direction, suggesting that explicit scaffolding can help promote more mindful attention to writing mechanics. They also noted perceived gains in coherence, clarity, and logical organisation, which could be linked to iterative planning, peer interaction, and focused language practice embedded in the lessons.

Collaborative writing tasks can shift writing from an individual effort to an interactive process. Working together may also increase peer accountability, as students often remain more focused when aware that their contributions are visible to others. This environment aligns with sociocultural learning theories, which highlight the role of social context and interaction in building knowledge. In practice, collaborative writing goes beyond simply dividing work; it involves negotiation, role management, and active engagement with the team. These processes help develop essential communication and teamwork skills. As students become more familiar with collaborative tools and group dynamics, such skills may gradually be internalised. Over time, this familiarity appears to support sustained improvements in writing quality and discourse, suggesting that the benefits of collaborative writing may extend beyond the immediate task to strengthen overall communicative competence.

In conventional classrooms, students often work independently on assigned sections before combining their parts into a final submission. This process can lack integration, resembling an assembly line in which contributions are pieced together rather than developed collaboratively. In contrast, the approach in the present study encouraged students to co-construct their text in real time. Rather than relying on a cut-and-paste "divide and conquer" method, it promoted group accountability and the shared development of ideas. The blended learning format also allowed students to revisit their work asynchronously, enabling them to refine and expand their drafts over time. Such an iterative process may encourage deeper reflection and support more meaningful revisions.

On top of that, the role of feedback in this context is particularly noteworthy. Consistent with prior studies (Baker, 2016; Elboshi, 2021; Huang et al., 2025; Huisman et al., 2018; Sippel & Martin, 2024), feedback from both instructors and peers supported students in identifying inaccuracies and encouraged deeper reflection on their writing. Notably, several participants reported finding peer feedback more

approachable than instructor input, perhaps due to shared discourse and similar perspectives. Such interaction appeared to reduce defensiveness and foster a more open attitude toward constructive criticism.

Additionally, the two-tiered feedback process, first from peers, then from teachers, enabled students to clarify misunderstandings before refining their written work, promoting an ongoing cycle of improvement rather than treating revision as a one-time task. The blended learning format further enhanced this process by fostering learner autonomy and active engagement. Students valued the flexibility to draft and revise outside scheduled class hours, aligning with prior research highlighting blended learning as a catalyst for deeper reflection and the development of independent learning strategies (Soo, 2023; Wang et al., 2024).

Overall, this integrated approach, combining structured tasks, collaborative engagement, and multi-layered feedback within a blended environment, appears to encourage students to take greater ownership of their progress. In doing so, they position themselves not merely as recipients of instruction but as active contributors to their own development as writers.

6 Conclusion

The findings showed a significant enhancement in students' writing performance. Participants provided positive feedback on the student-centred approach, which combined explicit instruction, collaborative activities, and digital resources. This combination seemed to enhance linguistic accuracy and aspects of writing performance. The results suggest that TSLT offers a promising alternative to more conventional product-oriented writing instruction. Structured task cycles, delivered through blended methods, also seem to increase student motivation, encourage more frequent revisions, and foster a strong sense of ownership over their writing. This approach addresses common gaps observed in conventional writing classrooms.

While the findings are promising, several important limitations must be acknowledged. First, the intervention lasted only six weeks, which limits our ability to determine if the observed improvements can be sustained over time. Additionally, since the study was conducted within a single institution and involved a relatively small group of participants, it becomes difficult to generalise the outcomes to other ESL contexts. Moreover, the quasi-experimental design without random group assignment poses potential concerns regarding internal validity. Thus, even though the outcomes are encouraging, they should be interpreted cautiously, particularly when considering their broader applicability.

Although baseline equivalence was established during the pretest and background survey, pre-existing factors, such as learners' prior exposure to specific instructional approaches or their intrinsic motivation, could have still influenced the results. Therefore, causal claims should be drawn with caution. To strengthen causal inferences, future research could employ randomised controlled trials (RCTs) to improve generalizability. Moreover, comparing fully face-to-face, fully online, and blended TSLT delivery modes could offer deeper insights into the benefits and limitations of each approach.

Looking ahead, future research might delve into how a modular curriculum that integrates both TBLT and TSLT principles can be tailored to fit various educational and cultural contexts throughout Asia. In addressing Ellis's (2024) call for modular task-based and task-supported language teaching, researchers might unveil alternative or perhaps more contextually fitting instructional methods for Asian ESL/EFL environments. Such a curriculum could illustrate whether a modular model offers a sustainable pathway to balancing communicative authenticity with instructional structure across Asia. In sum, these findings endorse the use of TSLT in blended ESL writing instruction. This approach appears to be both pedagogically sound and flexible enough to adapt to unique contexts, providing a promising method to boost learner engagement, autonomy, and writing skills in contemporary classrooms.

Acknowledgement

Throughout the manuscript, AI tools were used only to improve clarity, readability, and grammatical accuracy. They did not contribute to the generation of content, analysis of data, or interpretation of results. The Discussion section had the highest level of refinement, focusing on polishing sentence structure and ensuring a smooth flow for the reader.

Appendix 1

Sample Lesson Plan

Week: Developing Cohesive Body Paragraphs through Collaborative Writing

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

• Identify topic sentences and cohesive devices in model paragraphs

• Apply cohesive devices and paragraph structure in collaborative writing

Materials:

1. Slide deck introducing cohesive devices and paragraph structure.
2. Google Drive folder containing:
   a) Two short articles related to the group's assigned topic.
   b) A Google Doc with a writing prompt and space for paragraph construction.
   c) A cohesion word bank, sample model paragraphs, and a peer-review checklist.

Note: Each group has access to a separate folder tied to their specific topic. Articles and prompts vary between groups to establish an information gap, encouraging students to rely on their group's materials and peer input.

Stage	Time	Activity
Pre-task	**10 mins**	Instructor-led input session introducing paragraph structure and topic sentences. The instructor presents model paragraphs with highlighted elements (e.g., topic sentence, supporting details, concluding sentence) and explains their function and organisation. Materials are also made available via LMS for reference later. Quizizz activity for cohesion. Types of tasks: 1. MCQs on cohesive devices 2. Drag-and-drop for sentence sequencing 3. Matching transitions to their functions (e.g., cause, contrast, addition).
Task briefing	**5 mins**	Task Briefing with slide deck outlining: 1. Round-robin co-writing procedure 2. Roles and rotation rules

Main task **20 mins**

Round-robin co-writing using Google Docs.

Objective: co-construct a coherent and cohesive body paragraph

Task setup:

Each group is assigned a unique prompt related to SDG 12 (e.g., *"Evaluate one key barrier to sustainable consumption in your city"*), along with two short articles relevant to their topic.

Procedure:

1. Students work in groups of 4–5 in breakout rooms using a shared Google Doc.
2. Each student contributes one sentence at a time and rotates every 2–3 minutes.
3. Students are required to integrate supporting details from the two assigned articles.

No	Check List	/
1	A clear and focused topic sentence	
2	At least two supporting details with source reference	
3	Appropriate use of cohesive devices	
4	A concluding sentence	

10 mins

After completing their own body paragraph, each group will be assigned to review another group's draft via Google Docs. Since each group worked with a different SDG 12 sub-topic and set of readings, this review activity naturally introduces an information gap between groups.

Instructions:

1. Open the Google Doc of the assigned group.
2. Switch to Suggesting mode.
3. Leave at least three comments, focusing on:

a) Structure: e.g., "Is the topic sentence clear and connected to the supporting ideas?"
b) Cohesion: e.g., "Are transitions smooth and logical?"
c) Support: e.g., "Are the examples relevant and well-developed?"

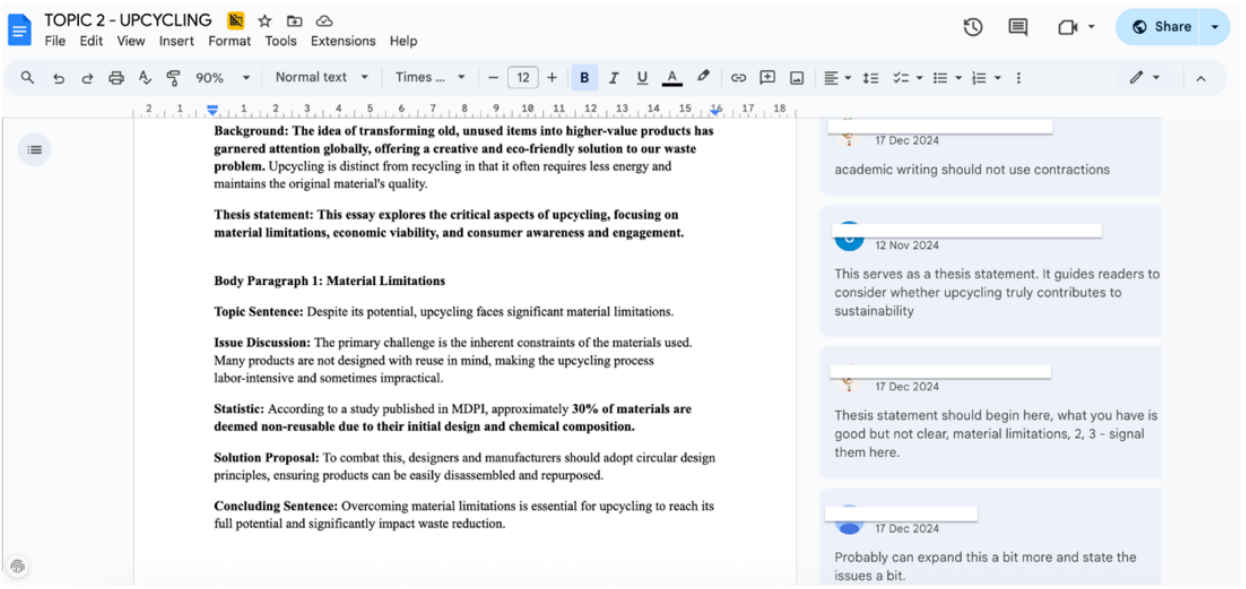
Peer Review Prompts (Checklist-based):

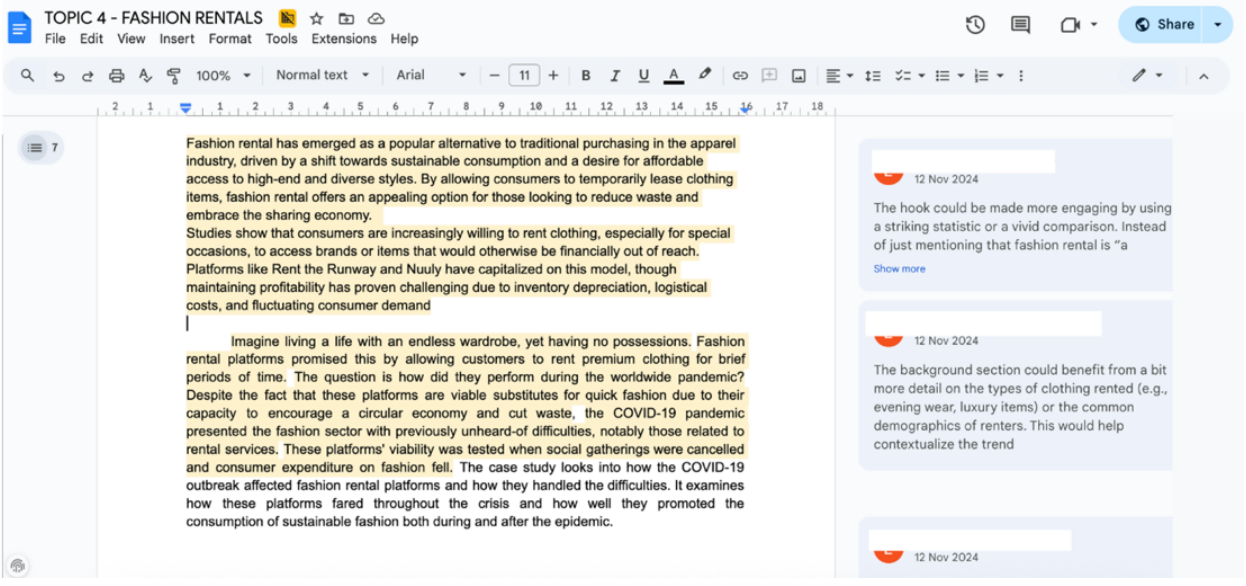
1. Does the topic sentence clearly present the main idea?
2. Are transitions and cohesive devices used effectively?
3. Are supporting details logically ordered and well explained?
4. Does the paragraph flow well as a complete unit?

Post Task	**15 mins**	The instructor rotates through breakout rooms to offer oral feedback on each group's paragraph. Feedback is guided by a rubric snapshot (posted earlier on the LMS), focusing on three core areas: structure, clarity, and cohesion. Example Feedback Prompts: 1. "How does this detail support your main idea?" 2. "What transition could make this connection clearer?" 3. "Does this sentence logically follow the one before it?" The instructor also leaves written suggestions as comments in the group's Google Doc for further reference.

Appendix 2

Main Task - Round-Robin Activity





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