

# The Use of Consciousness-raising Tasks in Promoting the Correct Use of the Verb “Be” among Students in Vocational Colleges

Sirhajwan Idek

University of MARA Technology, Shah Alam, Malaysia

Lee Lai Fong

University of MARA Technology, Shah Alam, Malaysia

Gurnam Kaur Sidhu

University of MARA Technology, Shah Alam, Malaysia

Teoh Sian Hoon

University of MARA Technology, Shah Alam, Malaysia

**Abstract**—The study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of the classification and hypothesis-building/checking in promoting the learning of the verb “be” in three structures: affirmative, negative and interrogative. The subject comprised 56 ESL students of 17 years old in a vocational college who were assigned into an experimental group and control group. They were given a treatment of six tasks on classification technique and hypothesis-building/checking and the instruments were pre-test/post-test, questionnaire and interviews. The t-test revealed the difference of means in pre-test/post-test scores within the experimental group was significant and the mean difference in gain score was also significant when compared with the control group. The findings from the interview provided explanations how these techniques assisted the learners’ learning and the results from the questionnaire indicated positive opinions of the learners on the use of the techniques in learning the verb “be”.

**Index Terms**—consciousness-raising, verb “be”, classification, hypothesis-building/checking

## I. INTRODUCTION

Since 2011, Malaysia has gradually transformed its vocational and technical education by upgrading vocational and technical schools that were meant for Form 4 and Form 5 students (aged 16-17 years old) to vocational colleges offering four years of diploma courses for students between 16-19 years old (Ministry of Education, 2011; Mohd Fazdly, 2012). The transformation from schools to colleges involves changes in the use of English language syllabus. The syllabus was simplified in order for learners to focus more on learning the language to communicate. This includes the abolishment of the English literature component, the narrowed scope of writing formats and exam-based practices, and the reduction of level of difficulty of English exams (Ministry Education of Malaysia, 2011).

The aim of this transformation is to prepare students from vocational colleges for employment in industries and corporate world (Abdullah Zawawi & Siti Syahirah, 2011). Such transformation indicates the dire need to equip learners with a better grasp of basic grammar for them to be sufficiently proficient in the English Language and therefore, become employable, credentialed and marketable in the real-world. With the introduction of newly modified English syllabus, ongoing assessment and semester-based exam, teachers in vocational colleges need to come up with appropriate teaching methods of English Language. Hence, English teachers in vocational colleges ought to be proactive and innovative in teaching grammar. This is crucial because each vocational college is responsible for developing their own respective module for each subject including English. Teachers might have difficulty in planning and executing appropriate teaching techniques especially when they also face difficulty on how to teach grammar and what structures to be taught (Hawanum, 2004; Vethamani & Umi Kalthom; 2008; Ping, 2012). Therefore, applicable and viable pedagogical techniques in teaching grammar need to be identified and incorporated into ESL lessons in order to meet the newly transformed English language education in vocational colleges in Malaysia.

One of the most fundamental yet the most frequent grammatical structures in English is the verb “be” (British Council, 2013; Surina & Kamaruzaman, 2009; Kolln, 1994) and yet it is the most challenging form for Malaysian students to master. The verb “be” serves various roles: progressive form, passive construction, linking verbs, and tense form (Kolln, 1994) as well as its use in affirmative, negative and interrogative structures (British Council, 2013; TalkEnglish, 2005).

The prevalent issue of Malaysian ESL learners' lack of competence in using the verb "be" is apparent across primary schools, secondary schools, colleges and higher learning institutions. Arshad and Hawanum (2010) implemented a research on Standard 5 students in a Malaysian primary school by studying sentences with the verb "be" that the learners produced and they confirmed that the verb "be" in progressive and copula forms was a major error that ESL learners made. Maros, Tan and Salehuddin (2007) administered error analysis and contrastive analysis on 120 Form 1 students from six rural secondary schools in Malaysia and the result indicated that the verb "be" was one of the three most frequent errors among the students. Saadiyah and Subramanian (2009) conducted error analysis on essays written by 72 Form 4 students and discovered that the usage of the verb "be" such as "is" and "are" were some of the most common mistakes made by learners under subject-verb agreement. Manokaran, Ramalingam and Adriana (2013) conducted a study on the usage of the verb "be" in past tense form on their subjects which comprised Malaysian ESL learners from Form 4, Form 5, and college. They examined each sentence in every essay written by the learners and found that the learners were prone to making more errors in the verb "be" than using it correctly. They categorized the verb "be" errors into seven types: tense shift, agreement, missing auxiliary be, wrong verb form, addition and misformation and misordering. Even in undergraduates' projects, the verb to "be" remains as a common error. Wan Fara Adlina, Wan Mansor and Noraisah Muhari (2010) conducted an error analysis on a multimedia project produced by students from the Faculty of Computer Science, Malaysia University of Technology, Skudai for their English for Academic Communication course. The researchers identified verb to "be" as one of the major errors committed by these students. Generally, Malaysian ESL learners constantly produce errors of using the verb "be" in their writing.

This problem also prevails in ESL learners' speaking skill. Ainon, Mohamed Ismail, Engku Haliza, Isarji, Faridah and Rozina (2013) investigated errors in oral presentations of 32 Malaysian students at a higher learning institution in an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course. They found that the students frequently omitted the verb "be" in their utterances, e.g. "Mary the president of the new company". The lack of competence in this structure has hindered learners from being proficient in using English language accurately in writing and speaking.

Malaysian ESL learners are not competent in using the verb "be" because the form is absent in their first language and this interferes with their English language learning (Surina and Kamaruzaman, 2009). Besides, their inability to distinguish various forms of the verb "be" (Siti Hamin & Mustafa, 2010; Saadiyah and Subramaniam, 2009) and the tendency to construct wrong hypothesis on grammatical rules (Arshad & Hawanum, 2010) also caused the error in its usage. Thus, Normazidah, Koo and Hazita Azman (2012) claim that Malaysian learners need to be more sensitive of the target form. Radha, Noraini and Krish (2008) state that ESL learners in Malaysia ought to adopt analytical strategies in learning linguistic features. Subramanian and Khan (2013) assert the need for Malaysian ESL students to develop good understanding of functions and meanings of target forms. Azizi, Harison, Zaidah, Ladan, and Noordin (2012) argue that ESL learners must receive sufficient exposure and practice in the language to enable them to internalize grammatical rules and reduce their errors. Therefore, it can be deduced that there is a need to help learners to attain explicit understanding of how the verb "be" is accurately used and how to identify its correct forms and functions in order to enable them to develop their competence in using it properly.

Thus, this paper aims to explore the use of Consciousness-raising (CR) tasks in addressing this issue. CR approach is one of the most viable teaching techniques in developing learners' explicit understanding of linguistic features (Fotos & Ellis, 1991; Fotos, 1994; Sugiharto, 2006; Ming & Nooreiny, 2010; Rasha, 2011; Moradkhan & Sohrabian, 2009; Amirian & Fatemeh, 2012) and it is also suggested by Sirhajwan, Lee and Gurnam based on thesis research of subject-verb agreement among secondary school students (2013), that consciousness-raising tasks are plausible to be conducted in Malaysian ESL classroom to teach grammar.

### **Problem Statement**

Malaysian employees, despite having the required skills in their area of expertise, tend to have poor English proficiency. According to a report released by Prestariang Systems (2011) on a survey conducted on 14 Malaysian industry sectors, 80 percent of Malaysian employers claimed that English language is an important skill that their employees ought to have. However, Malaysian employers considered only 20 percent of Malaysian employees who graduated from universities that were proficient enough to use English at workplace. This is consistent with employers' dissatisfaction on graduates which derived mainly from their low proficiency in English rather than their technical skills. This signifies that mastering technical skills alone is not sufficient especially when their ability to use English is equally crucial. Therefore, vocational colleges, despite having a heavy emphasis on vocational skills, need to adopt an effective method in teaching English in line with the introduction of new ESL syllabus and the need for the teachers to make their own ESL module.

A survey was randomly conducted on workers and employers around the Klang Valley and there were 211 employers and 257 working graduates who responded to the survey. It was revealed that poor English proficiency is one of the main factors that hampered most Malaysian graduates from having better career prospect (Gurcharan Singh & Garib Singh, 2008). In fact, the Human Resources Minister of Malaysia, Datuk Wira Dr Fong Chan Onn asserted on how poor English proficiency had caused 30,000 Malaysian graduates to be underemployed despite their degrees ("30,000 grads in unsuitable jobs", 2005). Chook Yuh Ying, the manager of JobStreet.com, also claimed that Malaysian employers' poor English proficiency is a "worrying trend" based on a survey conducted on 1.5 million workers in Malaysia, Philippines, Indonesia, Singapore, and Thailand (Sen, 2011).

Thus, this research is crucial to address learners' poor proficiency in English especially when the main goal of vocational colleges is to produce quality workers with high level of employability. Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (Ministry of Education, 2012) emphasizes the teaching of English due to the poor standard of English among Malaysian students where only 28% of students attained a minimum credit in English exam of Malaysian Certificate of Education (SPM) against Cambridge 1119 standards in 2011. According to the Malaysian National Graduate Employability Blueprint 2012-2017 (Ministry of Higher Education, 2012), a survey conducted on Malaysian companies also revealed that 55.8 percent of responded companies cited poor command of English as the most common problem that they have with Malaysian graduates who worked for them.

Students' difficulty in mastering English still persists among students in primary schools, secondary schools, colleges and universities (Sahirah & Zaidah, 2004; Maros, et al., 2007; Siti Hamin & Mohd Mustafa, 2010) and this affects their employability as they lack skills to communicate in the language. If there is no research conducted on vocational colleges in identifying how to properly teach English particularly grammar, the students of vocational college will experience similar difficulty of using the language. Even worst, as students of vocational college are trained to enter industrial worlds as skilful employees, their inability to use English proficiently will reduce their employability despite the vocational training they receive. Hence, this research is essential in finding a better way of teaching English grammar on students of vocational colleges.

## II. LITERATURE

### A. *The Verb "Be" and Malaysian ESL Learners*

Arshad and Hawanum (2010) argue that the verb "be" is one of the most difficult structures for Malaysian ESL students to acquire and this is due to the different meanings that the verb "be" can express. In their research, they emphasize the three structures of the verb "be": progressive auxiliary, copula be and passive construction. It is claimed that the nearly absent semantic meaning that the verb "be" may carry as progressive auxiliary (She is going to the town) and passive form (The window was smashed) leads to its lack of salience. Therefore, learners might not invest much attention on the structures. As for the verb "be" as a copula, its functions are numerous in expressing locations, characteristics, identification, existence and others. As a result, the structure poses a great demand for learners to understand, remember and apply correctly. Learners also tend to be confused on how to differentiate the diverse forms of the verb "be" (Surina and Kamaruzaman, 2009). Consequently, it becomes very challenging for Malaysian ESL learners to master the target structure as the verb "be" varies with the contexts where it is used, i.e. singular or plural forms, present or past tense, prepositional phrase, interrogative form and any other grammatical structures that exist with it. In addition, the absence of the verb "be" in the learners' native languages also interferes with their learning (Siti Hamin & Mustafa, 2010). This necessitates a plausible and viable teaching technique that can address learners' lack of competence in using the verb "be".

### B. *CR Techniques*

Willis and Willis (1996) list seven main techniques in designing CR tasks: identification, classification, hypothesis building/checking, cross-language exploration, reconstruction/deconstruction, recall and reference training. Crivos and Luchini (2012) studied the use of three techniques (identifying/consolidating, hypothesis building/checking, and reconstruction/deconstruction) through three different tasks respectively which yielded positive results in students' acquisition of tense forms. Moradkhan and Sohrabian (2009) also used a similar technique of recalling rules in communicative CR tasks that resulted in better performance of learners in learning grammar. The method of teaching was through deductive approach where the teacher presented the rules to the learners at the beginning of the lesson.

#### 1. **Classification Technique**

Arshad and Hawanum (2010) propose that teachers need to help students to distinguish the different use of similar forms to express different meanings through comparison and contrast. For instance, teachers can draw students' attention to different use of the verb "be" in the copula "be" and the auxiliary "be" by presenting sentences that illustrate the use of the two forms respectively and the students are required to identify the difference and categorize them accordingly. This method of classification justifies the need to explore classification technique in promoting students' learning of the verb "be".

Fotos and Ellis (1991) utilized classification CR tasks of identifying grammatical and ungrammatical sentences on Japanese EFL college students of Language majors and Business Administration majors and the results indicated the task enhanced their understanding of the target form "dative alternation". Classification technique might assist Malaysian ESL learners to better understand the verb "be" based on several reasons. First, the verb "be" comprises various forms with different functions (Kolln, 1994) and therefore, learners must be able to identify the specific forms of the verb for specific functions. Second, ESL Malaysian learners have difficulty distinguishing the verb "be" and other grammatical structures in English (Arshad & Hawanum, 2010; Saadiyah & Subramaniam, 2009; Surina & Kamaruzaman, 2009) and classifying grammatical structures might facilitate them to be aware of the different variations of the target form.

#### 2. **Hypothesis building/checking**

Students usually have to make, test and confirm their hypothesis in order to learn a target form (Ta Thanh & Nguyen Thi Huong, 2013). Hypothesis building/checking will allow learners to realize the false hypothesis they form and compare it with the correct rules they are supposed to grasp. There is a need for the technique of hypothesis building/checking to be further studied on how it can help learners learn the verb “be”. This hypothesis building/checking technique might assist them to realize their errors and deficiency of knowledge and therefore acquire the correct one.

Rachmawati (2011) proposes the technique of hypothesis building/checking by identifying ungrammatical sentences and providing reasons as to why they are inaccurate. For example, the teacher introduces students to the correct use of comparative adjectives through several sentences and then the teacher presents sentences in which some of them contain grammatical errors on the use of comparative adjectives and asks the students to specifically identify the errors. They are then required to provide explanations on how the target form should be used. Similarly, Wan Nurul Elia (2009) found that weak students managed to improve their accuracy in using article and singular/plural nouns through CR task in which one of the CR techniques that she used was hypothesis building/checking through analysis of errors. Richard (1974) claimed that if learners tend to form wrong hypothesis of how linguistic features work, this leads them into making errors or mistakes in using English. This technique can facilitate learners’ understanding of the target form. Learners tend to form wrong hypothesis of how the verb “be” is used by overreliance on other grammatical rules and being influenced by previously application of a rule (Arshad & Hawanum, 2010). Hence, hypothesis building/checking will enable learners to actively develop accurate understanding of the actual rules.

### *C. Objective*

The aim of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of the two CR techniques, classification and hypothesis-building/checking, in promoting ESL learners’ learning of the target form the verb “be” in three structures: affirmative, negative and interrogative.

### *D. Research Question*

1. Is there a statistical significance of difference in means of scores between pre-test and post-test in Group 1 (Experimental Group) and in Group 2 (Control Group)?
2. Is there a statistical significance of difference in means of gain scores between pre-test and post-test in Group 1 (Experimental Group) in comparison with Group 2 (Control Group)?
3. How does the classification and hypothesis-building/checking techniques help learners to learn the verb “be”?
4. Which structure of the verb “be”: affirmative, negative and interrogative is most effectively learnt through classification and hypothesis-building/checking techniques?

## III. METHODOLOGY

Mixed-methods design was the design used in this study since it encompassed quantitative and qualitative methods (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2012). The quantitative methods consisted of pretest and posttest and Likert-scale structured questionnaire. The qualitative method was also involved through the implementation of interviews.

### *A. Sample*

The subjects were selected based on convenience sampling (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2012) as they consisted of intact two classes of 28 sophomore students from two different engineering courses: Construction Technology and Electronic Technology at Keningau Vocational College, Sabah. Overall, there were 56 students. The sample was available highly accessible for the researcher to carry out a research which took five consecutive weeks without interrupting their credit hours on various courses and subjects they had to complete.

The average age of the subjects was 17 years which is the same average age for Form 5 students in Malaysian secondary schools. The students enrolled in this college after they completed their Form 3 education in secondary schools. Admittance was based on their performance in the standardized Lower Secondary Assessment (PMR) for Malaysian students. There were 28 students from Construction Technology course. Their PMR results revealed that thirteen of them obtained D, eight scored C, two obtained B and five of them managed to get A in English. For Electronic Technology course which consisted of 28 students, there were six students with grade D in English, thirteen scored C, three managed to get B and six obtained grade A in English in their PMR examination. According to the academic qualifications for Malaysian Technical and Vocational Education (Ministry of Education, 2013), out of the 37 courses offered in vocational colleges across Malaysia, only 25 courses require the students to obtain a minimum grade of D in English to qualify for admittance, eight courses requires the applicants to obtain a minimum C in their English and only 4 courses requires learners to attain minimum English grade of B (Ministry of Education, 2013). However, the minimum qualification varies in some colleges and in the case of Keningau Vocational College, students who obtained D in English were able to enrol in courses that stipulated that the applicants must obtain grade C for English provided that their overall results were sufficiently satisfactory. 16 students in the Construction Technology only managed to get D in their English but they were able to enrol in the course that actually required the students to attain a minimum C in

their English. The standardization of the grade for English subject in vocational colleges allows the results of this study to be generalizable to most students at vocational colleges to a certain extent.

The two classes chosen for this study were assigned into one experimental group and one control group. The class doing Electronic Technology course was labelled as Group 1, the experimental group. The class doing Construction Technology course was labelled as Group 2, the control group. The experimental group was assigned with classification task and hypothesis building/checking task during the course of treatment whereas the control group was assigned with task that included the use of the verb “be” through conventional lessons and less focus on the target form. As for the interviews, five students from Group 1 were randomly selected as the respondents.

### *B. Instrument*

The instruments comprised three methods: pretest/posttest, questionnaire and interview. The pre-test and post-test contain 30 test items where 10 items were allocated for each of the three structures of the verb “be” that were studied in this research: affirmative, negative and interrogative. The test items required the students to construct sentences in accordance with specific structures of the verb “be” that they had to apply in the sentences. The questionnaire contained nine items. Three items focused on investigating the students’ opinions on whether classification technique helped them to learn the affirmative “be”, negative “be” and interrogative “be”. Another three items attempted to explore students’ opinions on whether hypothesis-building/checking technique aided them to understand the verb “be” in the three structures. The last three items identified students’ opinions as to whether providing explanations on the usage of the verb “be” contributed to their learning of the verb “be” in the three forms: affirmative, negative and interrogative. The questionnaire required students to rate their responses based on a likert-scale rating number from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

There were five open-ended questions in the interview. The first three questions explored the respondents’ opinions on whether the CR tasks: classification technique and hypothesis-building/checking technique assisted them to learn the verb “be”. The other two questions explored which structure of the verb “be” that was most effectively learnt through each of these two CR techniques.

### *C. Data Collection*

There were six classification CR tasks and six hypothesis building/checking CR tasks on the verb “be” that were developed for this study. Each CR task focused on the affirmative, the negative and the interrogative forms of the verb “be”. In classification task, learners were required to classify the grammatical and ungrammatical sentences based on the use of the verb “be” for affirmative, negative or interrogative forms. In hypothesis building/checking tasks, the students needed to identify and analyse errors on the use of the verb “be” for the three forms: affirmative, negative and interrogative sentences and explain why the use of the target form was wrong. Each sentence in every task was complemented with a picture which acts as a stimulus for learners to understand the sentence better.

The teacher started the treatment session by introducing the general rule of the verb “be” in accordance with the verb “be” being focused in the task for that lesson: affirmative (Week 2), negative (Week 3) and interrogative forms (Week 4) and demonstrated how it was used through a few examples. The teacher then administered the CR tasks for the experimental group (Group 1) and a comprehension task for the control group (Group 2). The experimental group (Group 1) was assigned with classification tasks in the affirmative, negative and interrogative forms for three weeks (one form for each week). This was followed by hypothesis-building/checking tasks for the same forms after classification tasks were completed. Group 2, the control group, was instructed to answer a set of comprehension questions after the different forms of the verb “be” were taught. After they completed each task, the teacher asked the students to state the rules on the use of the particular form of the verb “be” based on what they had discovered from the tasks. The sequential teaching method was repeated in every treatment session.

The data collection took five weeks to be completed. The course of treatment for each CR task during the study included the explicit instruction at the beginning of the session, the discussion of the answers to the questions together with the teacher and the follow-up tasks where learners were required to state the rules on the forms of the verb “be”. Hence, the entire session was conducted within duration of 60 minutes and it was conducted twice a week with at least one day of interval.

The experiment was conducted in classroom during “free-time” (each course had time allocated for revision) or “relief class” (a period where the assigned subject teacher is not available and another replacement has the freedom to conduct his/her own activities). It is important to take note that classes in vocational colleges start at 7.30 am and finish at 4.30 pm from Monday to Friday. The interview with five students was conducted at Week 5.

TABLE 1:  
ALLOCATION OF TIME AND ASSIGNMENT OF INSTRUMENT/TREATMENT OF THE RESEARCH

No.	Week	Material	Duration
1	Week 1	Pre-test	30 minutes
2	Week 2	Classification tasks on affirmative “be” 1	60 minutes
		Hypothesis building/checking tasks on affirmative “be” 1	
		Classification tasks on affirmative “be” 2	
		Hypothesis building/checking tasks on affirmative “be” 2	
3	Week 3	Classification tasks on negative “be” 1	60 minutes
		Hypothesis building/checking tasks on negative “be” 1	
		Classification tasks on negative “be” 2	
		Hypothesis building/checking tasks on negative “be” 2	
4	Week 4	Classification tasks on interrogative “be” 1	60 minutes
		Hypothesis building/checking tasks on interrogative “be” 1	
		Classification tasks on interrogative “be” 2	
		Hypothesis building/checking tasks on interrogative “be” 2	
5	Week 5	Post-test	30 minutes
		Questionnaire	15 minutes
		Interview	10 minutes for each respondent (100 minutes)

#### D. Data Analysis

As suggested by Seliger and Shohamy (2008), a paired-sample (dependent) t-test was used to analyse means of the pre-test and post-test scores of the experimental group and the control group. This was crucial in identifying whether there is a statistically significant difference between the means of their scores in the pre-test and the post-test. It was followed by an independent t-test performed on the means of learning gain scores between the experimental group and the control group in order to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference of means of the learning gain scores between the two groups. This was used to answer the first and second research question as to whether there is any significant effect of the classification technique embedded in the CR tasks on the students’ learning of the verb “be”. The means of responses for each item in the Likert scale questionnaire conducted on the treatment group were obtained. The mean responses were assigned to five levels of agreement to obtain students’ opinions on how each technique facilitated their learning of the target form as seen in Table 3.2.

TABLE 3.2:  
THE CATEGORIZATION OF LEVEL OF AGREEMENT THROUGH LIKERT SCALE QUESTIONNAIRE.

Mean level	Level of agreement
4.50 - 5.00	Strongly agree
3.50 - 4.49	Agree
2.50 - 3.49	Neutral
1.50 - 2.49	Disagree
1.00 - 1.49	Strongly disagree

Source: Atef & Munir, 2009; Shams, 2008

As for the findings of the interview, the process of analysis, coding and categorization based on emerging pattern from the students’ responses was carried out to deduce findings pertinent to the research (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2012). The findings from the three interview question were directly used to address the last two research questions on which structure of the verb “be” that was most effectively learnt through these techniques and how these technique helped them to learn the target form.

## IV. RESULTS/FINDINGS

#### A. T-test within Group

A dependent sample t-test was used to identify the significance of difference between the pretest scores and the posttest scores within group for Group 1 (Experimental Group) and Group 2 (Control Group). This was used to answer the first research question.

TABLE 2:  
PAIRED-SAMPLED T-TEST WITHIN GROUP 1 (EXPERIMENTAL GROUP) AND GROUP 2 (CONTROL GROUP).

	Pre-test	Post-test	Mean difference	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Group 1 (Experimental Group)	19.00	20.68	1.68	2.2050	27	.0362
Group 2 (Control Group)	16.32	15.14	1.18	1.3385	27	.1919

\* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level or less

The paired-sampled t-test results displayed in Table 2 indicate that there were increases in scores for both groups in the posttest. Group 1 (Experimental Group) initially obtained a mean score of 19.00 in the pretest and it further improved in the posttest with a mean score of 20.68. Group 2 (Control Group) attained a mean score of 16.32 in the pretest and their scores generally increased in the posttest with a mean score of 15.14. The P value of Group 1 (Experimental Group) was less than 0.05. This implies that the mean differences of increase in scores for Group 1 (Experimental Group) was statistically significant with  $t(27) = 2.2050$ ,  $p = .362$ . The P value of Group 2 (Control Group) was not less than 0.05 and therefore, the mean difference of increase in scores was not statistically significant with  $t(27) = 1.3385$ ,  $p = .1919$ .

#### B. T-test between Groups

Next, the learning gain scores from each individual performance in the pretest and the posttest were obtained and the means of these gain scores were calculated separately based on groups. An independent t-test was conducted on the two means of the learning gain scores obtained from Group 1 (Experimental Group) and Group 2 (Control Group) respectively to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference of means of gain scores between the two groups. This was used to answer the second research question.

TABLE 3:  
T-TEST BETWEEN GROUP 1 (EXPERIMENTAL GROUP) AND GROUP 2 (CONTROL GROUP).

	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Group 1 (Experimental Group)	.93	4.24	2.5931	54	.0122
Group 2 (Control Group)	-2.21	4.81			

\* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level or less

The P value was less than 0.05 as indicated in the Table 3,  $p = .0122$ . Hence, the difference in gain scores between Group 1 (Experimental Group) and Group 2 (Control Group) was statistically significant: Group 1 ( $M = .93$ ,  $SD = 4.24$ ) and Group 2 ( $M = -2.21$ ,  $SD = 4.81$ ), condition ( $t(54) = 2.59$ ,  $p = .0122$ ).

#### C. How Classification and Hypothesis-building Techniques Promote Learning

The interview findings for classification technique are as follow: Respondent 1 claimed that “the technique trained us how to state the use of grammar by identifying the wrong and the correct which helped me to understand”. Respondent 2 stated that classification technique helped him to learn the form because it was “based on the pictures that showed whether the subject was singular or plural”. Respondent 2 referred to the CR tasks that focused on affirmative “be” where they had to identify its accuracy or inaccuracy through its use of singular form (is, was) or plural form (are, were). Sentences such as “these cars is manufactured in Detroit only” is identified as wrong due to the use of the singular form of the verb “be” for a plural subject. This is consistent with the response from Respondent 3 that classification technique assisted him to learn “through the pictures which shows number of subject involved which indicates “is” or “are” and the use of “was” or “were” can be identified from the sentence where the time is stated”. The response also indicated that Respondent 3 also referred to the CR tasks focusing on affirmative “be” where the learners had to classify the sentences as wrong or correct based on the accuracy of the use of the verb “be” in accordance with present or past tenses as demonstrated through sentences like “She is born in 1987” is classified as wrong due to the use of the present tense of the verb “be” when past tense form should be used. This is corroborated by Respondent 4 who claimed that such technique “shows us how to differentiate past and present tenses” which likely referred to similar CR tasks focusing on the affirmative “be”. Respondent 5 claimed that “it helps me to identify “is”, “are”, “is not” and “are not”, what is the use of “is” and “are”. Respondent 5 implied that the CR tasks enhanced his ability to distinguish affirmative “be” and negative “be”.

The students’ opinions on hypothesis-building/checking technique were also elicited. Respondent 1 claimed that the technique helped him to learn the target form by “stating and identifying the wrong use of grammar”. Respondent 2 explained that by “identifying and stating the errors or the wrong sentences, we can learn to know which sentence is correct and which sentence is wrong”. Respondent 3 stated that it was “based on what has been taught, we never learnt “not was” because it is wrong, “is not” has been always the correct ones”. Respondent 3 clearly referred to the CR tasks focusing on negative “be” which required them to analyse errors on how the negative auxiliary “not” is positioned in applying negative “be”. For example, the use of negative “be” in sentences like “Mattel not is a mobile phone company” is identified as wrong due to the inaccurate position of the auxiliary “no” which should be placed after the verb “is”. Respondent 4 claimed that the technique “allows us to identify the sentence whether it is in past tense or present tense, it is in singular or plural form”. Respondent 4 referred to the CR tasks focusing on affirmative “be” where they had to take consideration of these grammatical rules (present/past tenses, singular/plural nouns) in identifying the errors in the usage of the affirmative “be”. Respondent 5 stated that “these questions helped me when there were wrong sentences like “there is a necklace on the bed?” (supposed to be in interrogative forms), it is a statement and not a question, so you can identify the right and the wrong”.

#### D. Which Structure Is Most Effectively Learnt through Classification and Hypothesis-building

Table 4 indicates that students in the experimental group generally agreed that classifying the sentences based on grammatical or ungrammatical use of the verb “be” assisted them to learn the target form. The form of affirmative “be” had a mean of 3.54 and SD of 1.10, negative “be” had a mean of 3.58 and SD of 1.13) and interrogative “be” with a mean of 3.92 and SD of 0.74. It is implied that interrogative “be” is the most effectively learnt structure through the classification technique.

TABLE 4:  
STUDENTS’ OPINIONS ON CLASSIFICATION TECHNIQUE IN ASSISTING THEIR LEARNING ON THE VERB “BE”.

Form	Mean	Std. Deviation
Affirmative “be”	3.54	1.10
Negative “be”	3.58	1.13
Interrogative “be”	3.92	0.74

Table 5 denotes that students in the experimental group generally agreed that checking for errors and building hypothesis how the target form is correctly used assisted their learning. Affirmative “be” had a mean of 3.92 and SD of 0.89, negative “be” had a mean of 3.92 and SD of 1.05 and interrogative “be” with a mean of 3.76 and SD of 0.99. It is implied that affirmative “be” and negative “be” are equally the most effectively learnt structures through the hypothesis-building/checking technique.

TABLE 5:  
STUDENTS’ OPINIONS ON HYPOTHESIS BUILDING/CHECKING TECHNIQUE IN ASSISTING THEIR LEARNING ON THE VERB “BE”.

Form	Mean	Std. Deviation
Affirmative “be”	3.92	0.89
Negative “be”	3.92	1.05
Interrogative “be”	3.76	0.99

The findings from the interview indicate various opinions on which form was best learnt through which technique. Respondent 1 claimed that the negative “be” was the most effectively learnt structure through classification technique because “the use of the negative “be” in a sentence is easier to understand and to differentiate between the wrong and the right”. Respondent 1 stated that interrogative “be” is best learnt through hypothesis-building technique because “the use of the form in sentences helped to construct correct questions”. This contradicted with Respondent 2 who stated that the interrogative “be” was best learnt through classification technique because the verb “be” is usually at the earlier parts of sentences” for interrogative “be”. Respondent 2, however, stated that the negative form of “be” was most effectively learnt through hypothesis-building technique because “errors are easier to identify due to the position of the word “not”. For example, “is not” is the correct form whereas “not is” is wrong in applying the negative “be”. Respondent 3 and Respondent 4 both claimed that the affirmative “be” was the most effectively learnt structures among the two techniques because the affirmative “be” is the most basic form to learn. Respondent 5 agreed that the affirmative “be” was best learnt through classification technique because “It’s easier to identify the correct affirmative “be”, it is however confusing to identify correct interrogative “be”. Respondent 5 stated that interrogative “be” was best learnt through hypothesis-building technique because “it helps me to identify the wrong use of interrogative “be” in questions because the position is usually before the subject, as for statement, the position of the verb “be” is usually after the subject”.

#### V. DISCUSSION

The statistical significance of means of gain scores between pretest and posttest of Group 1 (Experimental Group) implies the high probability that the increase in test scores was the results of performing the CR techniques of classification and hypothesis building. This also indicates that the two CR techniques were effective in enhancing the respondents’ knowledge and application of the verb “be” in the three forms: affirmative, negative and interrogative. The statistical significance of means of gain scores between Group 1 (Experimental Group) and Group 2 (Control Group) signifies the probability that the students in Group 1 (Experimental Group) performed better than students in Group 2 (Control Group) due to the usage of the two CR techniques in learning the verb “be” is high. Thus, the use of CR techniques of classification and hypothesis-building in learning the three forms (affirmative, negative and interrogative) of the verb “be” is effective and viable.

Based on the interview of the respondents about how these tasks assisted them in learning the target form, it can be deduced from their responses that classification technique can help students to differentiate singular and plural forms, present tenses and past tenses, and the correct and incorrect use of the verb “be” particularly for affirmative “be” since the CR tasks focusing on this form were more heavily influenced by other grammatical forms than the CR tasks focusing on negative “be” and interrogative “be”. As for hypothesis-building/checking technique, it can be deduced from the students’ responses that hypothesis-building/checking technique can help ESL learners to identify and analyse the wrong use of the target form which then consolidates their knowledge and application of the verb “be”. Both techniques can promote the learning of the verb “be” (affirmative, negative & interrogative) among students.



The results of the questionnaire indicate that the learners had moderate perceptions on which form can be learnt best through these CR techniques. It can be concluded from the students' responses in the interview that classification technique is best used to learn the affirmative verb "be" based on functions or meanings of the affirmative "be" in terms of singular/plural, present/past tense, etc. Hypothesis-building/checking technique is best used to learn the correct position of the verb "be" (before the subject, after the subject, position of negative auxiliary "not" or "no", etc.) in accordance with the form focused on and this is more applicable on the negative "be" and interrogative "be". Therefore, the effectiveness of a form to be learnt through any of these two techniques is subject to which trait of the form that is targeted to be learnt. Classification technique provides a better way of learning affirmative "be" when it involves other grammatical rules such as tenses and singular/plural nouns because it helps learners to distinguish the use of the basic forms of the verb "be" in affirmative sentences. Hypothesis-building/checking technique is more appropriate to be used in learning the negative "be" and interrogative "be" as it assists learners to be aware of how the verb "be" is positioned in interrogative form and where the auxiliary "no" is placed in applying the negative "be". This explains why there is no definite answer on which structure is best learnt through which technique as there were various responses from the subjects.

## VI. IMPLICATION TO RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

The findings of the research indicate how the verb "be" can be plausibly taught better through CR techniques in making sure students can understand the form better. This will help to provide more pathways to teachers on how to teach grammar especially which technique is to be used and what specific form that needs to be focused. It also indicates the need to further explore the use of CR techniques in numerous other grammatical forms that students tend to have difficulties to master.

Since vocational colleges are learning institutions that have been recently transformed from ordinary conventional schools to colleges that emphasize education which prepares students for industrial world and tertiary education at the same time, it is very crucial for the teachers to adopt effective methods in teaching English as proficiency in the language is not just an important requirement for tertiary education but also for the industrial and corporate world. This is also consistent with the need for the English teachers in vocational colleges to design their own ESL modules based on a given syllabus rather than following the secondary schools' modules.

## VII. CONCLUSION

To conclude, CR tasks such as classification and hypothesis-building techniques are effective in promoting the learning of the verb "be" for three forms: affirmative, negative and interrogative among ESL learners. This can help them to be more competent in using the language more accurately in speaking and writing. The techniques are feasible to be used in Malaysian ESL classrooms particularly in vocational colleges in order to help them to be proficient in using the language. This will ensure their employability as graduates of vocational colleges since English proficiency is a highly sought-after skill in the industrialized world. This study can also provide pathways for teachers to effectively teach grammar in their ESL lesson in order to enhance the teaching and learning of English language in vocational colleges.

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**Sirhajwan Idek** was born in 1987, Kota Belud, Sabah, Malaysia. He obtained his degree from University of Mara Technology in B.Ed. (Hons.) TESL in 2011. He is currently pursuing his MEd, (By Research) in the same university. His major field is Teaching English as Second Language (TESL) in secondary education.

While pursuing his study, he is currently working as a full-time English teacher in Keningau Vocational College, Sabah. He has obtained dean's award for every semester during his study in the B.Ed. (Hons.) TESL and attained Vice Chancellor's Award at the end of his study.

He published an article in 2013 that he co-wrote with his supervisors. Sirhajwan, Lee & Gurnam (2013). The Use of Consciousness-Raising Tasks in Learning and Teaching of Subject-Verb Agreement. *English Language Teaching*, 6 (6), 113-122.

His email address is [sirhaj87@yahoo.com](mailto:sirhaj87@yahoo.com).



**Lee Lai Fong** (Dr) was born in 4/9/1964, Perak, Malaysia. She earned several degrees as the following: PhD (TESL), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (2010), Master in Education (TESL), University Malaya (1993), Diploma in Education (TESL/BM), University Malaya (1989), and Bachelor of Arts (2nd Class Upper Hons) in Psychology, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (1988). Her major of studies is TESL, ESP, Writing, Grammar, and Teacher Education

She is currently working as an ESL lecturer in Faculty of Education, University of Mara Technology, Shah Alam, Malaysia. She has published several works which included as following: Lee Lai Fong. (2010). Revitalising teacher feedback in the ESL writing class and student response through a sociocultural approach. In Faizah Abdul Majid & Izaham Shah Ismail (Eds.), *Readings on ESL reading and writing instruction* (pp.131-156). Shah Alam: Upena. Her main research interest is grammar and writing.

Dr. Fong is a member of several associations related to her field: MELTA, ASIA TEFL. Her email address is [Leela679@salam.uitm.edu.my](mailto:Leela679@salam.uitm.edu.my).



**Gurnam Kaur Sidhu** (PhD) was born in 21/3/1956, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. She earned credible credentials as the following: Doctor of Philosophy (Training, Management & Development-) University of Malaya (2001), Master of Education (TESL) University of Malaya (1996), Bachelor of Arts (Hons) (English Literature) University of Malaya (1983), Teaching Certificate (TESOL) Teacher Training College, Ipoh (Baru), Perak, Malaysia (1979). Her areas of expertise are Teaching and Learning (TESL), Life Long Autonomous Learning and Educational Management & Leadership.

She is a Professor of Teaching and Learning at the Faculty of Education, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM). She joined UiTM in 2004. Prior to that she was attached to the Ministry of Education, Malaysia. At the faculty she is the Coordinator of two (2) Post Graduate Research Programmes - M.Ed. by Research (ED750) and PhD (ED950). She is also the Core Person for the following post graduate courses: Dissertation (M.Ed – Coursework), Communication at the Workplace, Educational Leadership, Instructional Leadership and Action Research. Her research and development interests include Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) and Educational Management & Leadership. She is widely published and has co-authored more than five English Language Textbooks used in Malaysian public schools. Besides that, she also sits on numerous panels for T&L for the Ministry of Education and has presented numerous papers at both local and international conferences.

Dr. Sidhu is a member of several prominent associations pertinent to her career: MELTA (Malaysian English Language Teaching Association), Asia TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language), TOJET (Turkish Online Journal for Educational Technology), NUTP (National Union of the Teaching Profession), MAAU (Malaysian Athletics Amateur Union). She has attained several accomplishments: Panel Member of English Language Experts, under Malaysian Ministry of Education for Majlis Penarafan Standard dan Kualiti Bahasa Inggeris Malaysia (since November 2012), Excellence Service Award (2010), Research Fellow at University of Hertfordshire, United Kingdom (June 2009 – June 2010), Awarded the Setia Sultan Sharafuddin Idris Shah (S.I.S.) Award by His Highness the Sultan of Selangor on the occasion of his 64 Birthday on 12 December 2009, Won 13 Innovation Medals and Awards (4 Gold, 4 Silver and 5 Bronze medals) at various Invention, Innovation & Design (IID) Exhibitions and Competitions

such as Innovation Malaysia Technology Expo 2011, International Invention, Innovation & Technology Exhibition (ITEX) 2010 and IID, UiTM (2008-2011).

Some of her prominent publications are:

Sidhu, G.K. & Kaur, S. (2013). Integrating Creative and Critical Thinking Skills in the Malaysian Children's Contemporary Literature Classroom. In Muhammad KamarulKabilan (Ed.) Pedagogies for Creative & Critical Thinking in ELT. MELTA ELT Series. Kuala Lumpur: August Publishing. (p. 9-46). ISBN 978-983-3317-85-1.

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Sidhu, G.K., Kaur, S. & Chan, Y.F. (2011). Developing Learner Autonomy through the Use of Learning Contracts. Pertanika JSSH, March 2011. Indexed in Scopus Elsevier) and EBSCO.

Her email address is [gurnamsidhu@salam.uitm.edu.my](mailto:gurnamsidhu@salam.uitm.edu.my).



**Teoh Sian Hoon** (Assoc. Prof. Dr) was born in 18/5/1971, Penang, Malaysia. She attained several qualifications: BSc (Science & Computer with Education), 1995, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, MSc (Statistics), 1999, Universiti Sains Malaysia and PhD (IT in Education), 2006, Universiti Sains Malaysia. Her area of expertise is Information Technology, Mathematics & Statistics with Education.

She is a lecturer in Faculty of Education, teaching mathematics, statistics and information technology. Her research interest involved similar field.

Some of her prominent publications are as follows:

Siti Hadiati Nugraini, Koo Ah Choo, Hew Soon Hin, & Teoh Sian Hoon (2013). Impact of E-AV biology website for learning about renewable energy. TOJET: The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology, 12(2), 376-386.

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Her email address is [teohsian@salam.uitm.edu.my](mailto:teohsian@salam.uitm.edu.my).