

## **The Use of T-Meta Strategy to Improve Educational Aspirations of Students in Urban Poor Communities**

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**Abstract:** Educational aspirations play important roles to motivate students in their learning process. Students in urban poor communities need support to improve their educational aspirations. Educational psychologists proposed the importance of providing an opportunity for students to experience success. It is suggested that the use of effective learning strategies would provide those opportunities. A learning module using a metacognitive approach was used as an intervention in the study. The study shows that metacognitive strategies can help students become aware of the learning process and eventually develop the sense of control and feeling of success. A total of eight sessions of intervention program was conducted on 18 students in one poor urban community in Malaysia. This paper reports the participants' educational aspiration before and after the intervention. The results showed traces of elements representing participants' improvement in educational aspiration after the intervention as compared to before the intervention.

**Key words:** metacognitive strategies, educational aspirations, intervention and poor urban.

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### **I. Introduction**

Empowering education is the key in the Malaysia Education Development Plan (PPPM 2013-2023) which was launched to bridge the gap between the education sites by developing infrastructure and educational facilities in rural areas and cities across the country. In addition, it also focuses on increasing the rate of participation and reduces the risk of student dropping out from school. Human capital development, strengthening of National Schools and narrowing the education gap are the key elements in achieving the empowerment of education particularly among the poor students in the city. This effort has become the priority of the Government in improving the quality of national education towards vision 2020. In cases involving the poor in the city, the demanding economic conditions may force the parents to give less priority to their children's education. This situation may result in unsatisfactory performance levels in the community.

Therefore, students in urban poor communities need support to enhance their educational aspirations. A study conducted by the Ministry of Education (2004) found the level of their educational aspirations were at a moderate level. The study involves 1852 students, 220 teachers, and counselors, as well as 65 disciplinary teachers in FELDA schools. The aspects of educational aspirations under review are the aspiration in education, examination results, academic achievement, and up to the stage where the students will pursue their studies.

The findings showed that 47.5% (876 samples) says they strive in simple and moderate education. Based on the above issues, educational psychologists suggest the importance of providing the opportunity for these students to achieve success. Among them is to provide opportunities and conducive environment for teaching and learning as well as guidance through a smart partnership between educational institutions and local communities. The smart partnership can be implemented by using effective learning strategy, which will provide opportunities especially to the poor students in the urban schools. Therefore, in order to assist this group of students, a learning module using metacognitive approach has been developed as an intervention in this study. It is expected that metacognitive strategies can help students realize their learning process and enhance their confidence and educational aspirations especially in writing a good essay.

### **II. T-Meta Strategy**

The T-Meta Strategy is a strategy based on the metacognitive strategy that emphasizes the skills of meta-attention, meta-comprehension, and metacognitive reflection. Meta-attention involves identifying the learning objectives, planning, monitoring the understanding and achieving the learning objectives. The consultation process will help students to plan a strategy in order to achieve their goals until it sets their focus on their own learning activities that are not involved in the planning. The activities involved in meta-attention are; students focus on learning outcomes, the role of students, how to achieve learning outcome and teaching materials as well as, being responsible for what you learn (Woolfolk 2008; Saemah et al. 2010; Shahlan 2012) and consequently improving the educational aspirations of students.

The role of meta-comprehension is to process information in-depth and consciously using the strategy. It involves monitoring and evaluating the understanding through deep methods of processing information and active learning. Metacognitive reflection is the process of remembering and contemplating a learning process. Among the activities involved are recalling the step by step in learning.

In conclusion, this study focuses on the use of metacognitive elements in helping students to produce good and matured essay writing. Teaching and learning strategies have been developed based on the theory of metacognitive through the FCESI techniques (Focus, Consequence, Example, Step, Importance) and CDEAP (Content, Description, Example, Assertion and Proverbs).

### III. Aspiration

Aspiration is a term, which is similar with goals, ambitions, objectives, dreams, plans and desires (McJunkin 2010). Sherwood (1989) also stated that aspirations are the individual's goals that are willing to invest the time and effort to achieve it. Nevertheless, aspiration is a concept that is abstract and difficult to define (Johnson 1992). This is because aspiration has various domains of life such as education, learning, employment, an environment, self-concept, and self-growth. The value of the aspirations whether it is low or high by an individual may or may not be approved by other individuals (Burnell 2003).

Aspiration has become a goal and motivation for someone to achieve what he or she has learned. Therefore, in the case of the learning situation of poor students in the city, educational aspiration refers to the definition by Uwah et al. (2008) which states that aspirations of early education is the influence of the academic ability of someone who can be achieved. Academic ability means how far the student has mastered the skills taught by the teacher. In the context of this study, aspiration is determined through analysis of the individual's reflection on the writing skills taught as well as the evaluating the essay writing.

#### The T-Meta Intervention Program

The implementation of metacognitive intervention strategies was conducted on 18 students for 8 sessions (4 months). This study uses several techniques of writing essays. Among them are the **FCESI** (Focus, Consequence, Example, Step, Importance) technique to write down the paragraph advances and techniques and **CDEAP** (Content, Description, Example, Assertion, and Proverbs) technique.

Step 1: FCESI (Focus, Consequence, Example, Step, and Importance) technique in writing the introductory paragraph.

This technique requires students to construct the first sentence, which focus on statement (F) in the question. The second sentence is the consequence (C) of the first sentence above. Next, constructing the third sentence by giving examples (E) that can be associated with a statement of the question. The students will then need to construct the fourth sentence, namely the steps (S) and finally the fifth sentence, which includes the importance (I) of the steps in the former statement. Then, the students will write proverbs or use attractive idioms or expressions, which deem appropriate in any of the introductory sentences. If students are able to write sentences that are coherent where the ideas are connected and flow together smoothly, this will undoubtedly lead to an effective introduction as well as fulfilling the requirements of the writing task using the given marking scheme.

Step 2: Elaborating the first main point. Using CDEAP (Content, Description, Example, Assertion and Proverbs) technique.

The CDEAP technique refers to a technique used to develop the content of the essay by using appropriate discourse markers. This mnemonic technique was produced by Shahlan (2011). Students can remember this mnemonic just by using **C**ome **D**ancing **E**very **A**fternoon **P**lease (CDEAP). The description of each mnemonic is: **C** is the content: the content will need to answer questions. Start with... In my opinion, in my point of view,...in reality...it is undeniable that ... **D** is a description: use the WH question Why ... This is because, this is caused by, this is as a result of ... How ... In this regard, in this context, therefore, by doing so. The impact of the...

This has caused the ... The effect of this phenomenon is. .... In line with that...accordingly... further, meanwhile...To express a different opinion ... However, even so, hence ... **E** is an example: Please submit an example using the following words: for example, Let us take a look, let's take this example, such as the ... **A** is Assertion: In conclusion, therefore, it is clear that, as a result of ... **P** is Proverbs: candidates are required to submit a proverb or proverbs for each paragraph. More interestingly is the ability to combine two proverbs. Metacognitive in the implementation of the strategy through teaching and learning and is expected to improve writing skills among students.

Step 3: Repeat step 2 to describe the main content of the next sentences.

Step 4: Making the conclusion. The conclusion must include three aspects: View (V), Suggestions (S) dan Hope (H)

#### **IV. Methodology**

The research design is a survey carried out based on the analysis of documents produced by individual reflective journal writing and writing task. The tasks were analyzed after the pre and post intervention. The participants comprised of 18 students from secondary schools in Malaysian Education System (age between 14 - 16 years old) from poor urban communities and have low academic achievement. Respondents were assigned to all students who participated in academic tutoring class under My Kasih Programme. They were given a task to write an essay and after that, they were asked to do metacognitive reflection explaining step by step how they come up with the essay during the writing process. Data were analyzed using content analysis procedure, the behavior of aspiration and performance. A total of eight intervention sessions in the program was conducted based on the T-Meta strategy module.

#### **V. Findings Before the Intervention Process**

Based on the individual metacognitive reflection, we can conclude that the level of student aspirations of the urban poor academic skills that need to be achieved is still showing low levels. The respondents' low levels of aspirations are proven through the analysis of their early written reflections. The findings show that respondents do not know how to produce good writing and this has resulted in low aspiration and motivation to write essays. Most respondents showed that behaviors are not sure, still looking for how to start writing task as well and get the procedures to writing. This is seen through the reflection statements as follows;

...Try to understand the title given and read instructions because we need to understand the title that was given before writing an effective essay and then I will start writing the essay because I already know what is required in the task. I want to know how to write this essay. Try to think of the content for the essay and managed to finish the essay because I use the time carefully (respondent 3)

...After that, I will think for a while on how to start writing the topic sentence. After that, I will start thinking of some points because I want to complete writing the essay. After that, I will think for a while to find ideas to start writing the essay. For a moment, I will think of how I came about choosing those points for the content in order to expand the essay. Trying to find ideas, searching for relevant materials. (respondent 5)

... After I have written the introduction, I immediately wrote the first main point. However, after writing several lines I found the essay that I have written was out of topic or off topic. Consequently, I wrote a new introduction (respondent 10)

...I start thinking of the first main point related to the title or question without drafting anything (respondent 13).

...Then, I understood the meaning and tried to write grammatically correct sentences to strengthen my essay. (respondent 15)

...Subsequently, I will think for a while and plan on how to write the sentences... (respondent 5)

The results show 10 respondents did not stress the importance of writing the outline as the approach in writing the essay. Consequently, they did not elaborate the main points and they only wrote whatever came across their minds without any systematic planning. However, those who wrote the outline gave these responses;

Write the points that I have brainstormed so that I will not forget and outline the points. (respondent 11)

Write the outline to ease the process of writing the essay. (respondent 12)

I will rephrase the title when writing the introduction. (respondent 13)

After that, I will write an outline to ensure that I follow the correct format of essay writing (respondent 15)

After that, I will try to write an essay on a different sheet of paper first (respondent 6)

Based on the answers given by the respondents at the beginning of the evaluation, it was found that the respondents have not mastered procedural knowledge. Some of the introductions that were written did not have the characteristics of effective sentences that will impress the reader namely to focus on the requirements of the question, to state the consequences, to provide examples, to explain the steps and to express the importance of

the points stated in the essay. In other words, FCESI technique (Focus, Consequence, Example, Steps and Importance) are not used in the essay. There are some respondents who did not write the introductory paragraph and instead continue to write the main points only. In other words, all respondents have a low level of aspirations in writing essays. Some examples of the paragraph writing are shown below;

**Essay Question: Parents are people who should be loved. What are some ways you should do to show them that you truly love them?**

Parents are people who should be loved. (F). Without them, we will not exist in this world.(I) (ST3/4).

Some of the things that I should be doing are helping my parents. I should help them to wash the dishes and do the laundry (S) (ST2/1)

Parents are people who are loved by many (F). We really need them irrespective whether it rains or shines (I) (ST2/4)

Parents are very important to the daily lives of children when their children need it (I) (ST3/1)

The things should I should do are to help my parents. The things that I do are such as washing the dishes, hanging out the clothes, washing the clothes and taking care of my siblings (E) (ST2/2).

In this decade, parents are people who are very important in our lives (F). In addition to showing our love to them, we can also show other ways to portray our love to them (E) (ST3/3)

Only one respondent successfully used the techniques of writing by writing the introduction with the emphasis on the characteristics of good introduction in writing.

Parents are noble people (F). They have been taking care of us and shower us with love (E). Their dedication and sacrifice on our behalf can never be fully repaid (I). However, there are many ways for us to prove our love to them (emphasis to the subject) (ST2/5)

Based on several answers of the respondents, we can compare the suggested answers using FCESI technique (Procedural Knowledge);

Parents are people whom we truly love in a family (focus). Without our parents, we would not be in this world (consequence). This is because they give birth to us, shower us with all their love and shape our future (example). We should strive to provide our unconditional love to our parents (steps). Therefore, the practice of the love towards our parents should be instilled in each individual's life so that life will become more meaningful (importance).

Most of the respondents were able to list the ideas or main points, but they could not elaborate the ideas properly. They lack the use of appropriate discourse markers. This can be shown given in the example of the second paragraph (first main point).

Things that I should do to my parents are getting excellent exam result, helping my parents when in trouble and not hurt their feelings. (ST3/4)

I help my parents to clean the house, sweep the floor and hang out the clothes to dry. (ST2/1)

I help my parents to clean the house every day. I sweep the rubbish, mop the house and clean the windows. I spend my free time by helping them to clean the house. (ST2/2)

Some of the things that I do ...one of it is to learn diligently regardless in school or at home so that my our parents effort will not go to waste in raising us to be a useful person (SIT3/1)

Some of the things that I ought to do for my parents are to make them happy because they want their children to live comfortably ...they always say work hard at first, and enjoy the fruits of labour. They want to live comfortably during their old age. (ST3/2)

Things I should do to help parents by helping is when a mother is cooking I will help her to cook mother. During mother's day, I will give a gift in honor of mother's day (ST2/4)

By cleaning the house while they are busy working or earning a living, when we clean the house while they are not at home, it will reduce their burden to do house work when they return home. Indirectly we are able to show our appreciation to them (ST3/3)

Among them are shaking hands and kissing our parents before going to sleep each day. In this way, they will be reminded that they always being loved. This act will also strengthen ties between families (S2/5)

Based on analysis of the respondents' documents, none of the respondents was able to master the ways on how to develop the content of the essay from the main points. Overall, the content of the paragraph writing shows glaring grammatical errors in both words and sentences. Even though the content is relevant, the explanation was unclear as most of the respondents were not able to elaborate on the salient points for the content of the essay. The development of the content was also less interesting, inappropriate paragraphs and not a single discourse marker was used in writing the paragraphs. For example ..., conclusion ..., etc. Therefore, the mean scores obtained for each respondent are as follows;

Table 1. Mean score of the writing essay and level of achievement (n=18)

School Level	Min Score (marks)	N	Level
Lower Secondary School	15.1 /40	12	Weak
Upper Secondary School	51.3 / 100	6	Average

Based on the analysis of the respondents' answers in the preliminary test, it can be concluded that 8 of the lower secondary students were able to achieve satisfactory level of between 9-12 marks from the total score of 40 marks. 3 students achieved high marks with a score of 30 respectively. Meanwhile, one respondent was quite weak with a score of 5 out of 40 marks. This means that the level of achievement of the lower secondary students needs to be upgraded in terms of essay writing skills. For the upper secondary students, 5 respondents performed satisfactorily with scores ranging between 43 – 50 of the total score of 100%. One respondent, however, obtained an excellent mark of 70. Hence, this weakness in writing skills needs to be improved. Therefore, based on the analysis of the results of the preliminary tests brings to the need to device a writing intervention to assist these respondents in achieving a level of excellence in writing.

In conclusion, these urban poor students need a program that can help these students to master the skills of writing. Therefore, the findings of this preliminary study is a starting point to implement T-Meta strategy that can increase the level of aspirations and master a skill of writing among students.

## VI. Findings after the intervention

After eight sessions of coaching, the respondents showed improvement in their writing skills. The respondents successfully use the FCESI technique and produce good introductory paragraphs, which matched the rubrics for writing essays. The desire (aspirations) of the respondents in the ability to produce writing is positive and full of enthusiasm. The respondents also managed to use the techniques learned, especially in writing the introductory paragraph, developing the main ideas and supporting details and making conclusions.

This reflects the aspirations and motivation of respondents who also showed better improvement. Through the analysis of documents of a number of respondents' reflective writing shows that after learning the metacognitive writing strategies, respondents know how to organize ideas, developing the important content, using the appropriate discourse markers and gaining the confidence to write. Hence, it shows an improvement in writing skills, motivation, as well as the aspirations of the students. Students are able to explain vividly and it facilitates the respondents to plan, control and evaluate the results of writing them. The patterns of constructing sentences also show changes by using the FCESI and CDEAP techniques. Individual reflection analysis shows a good perception among respondents to the techniques introduced. This is shown through the responses below;

Able to write the content effectively and orderly, learn the discourse markers, and learn the techniques in writing the content. Ideas to organize the contents of the essay, writing the content and discourse markers. Put the discourse markers in the essay. Able to overcome my weakness in developing the content. Able to learn a wide range of discourse markers. (PeIT5/1)

It is very useful. Learn to write paragraphs, learn to produce the content, and learn to find important content. Learn what I don't know. Today's activity is very interesting. (PeIT2/1)

How to develop the content. Identify appropriate discourse markers. Learn new things. Write discourse markers, had the appropriate discourse markers and write assertive remarks (PeIT3/3)

I have learned handy techniques to write the content. I got a simple idea to write the content. Help the students to explain the contents of the essay. Identify discourse markers, using mnemonic techniques, how to explain the contents of the essay. I get to know many discourse markers which are useful for future use (PeIT5/3)

It teaches me an easy way to answer the question (PeIT3/4)

Ideas presented are considered to be useful for me because I can use them in the examination. (PeIT3/6)

What is meaningful is to know how to write an essay (PeIT2/1)

The activity of writing the content using techniques that are simple and effective. Learn the techniques to develop the content, writing the content using the techniques being taught, able to learn from mistakes during the examination session (PeIT5/4)

The above statements are further reinforced with the analysis of the quality of the essay writing produced by the respondents. For example, the achievement of the respondents based on the questions asked.

**Generally, the quality of sports in our country has not reached the highest level of pride. Describe the efforts that need to be undertaken so that the quality of sports can be increased.**

Step 1: Developing the introductory paragraph

Sports in our country have not reached a level of pride (F). This has caused our country to be left behind from other countries (C). For example, we could not uphold the good name and image of our country to international levels through sports (E). Therefore, steps should be taken to increase the quality of sports in the country to the international level (S). Hence, we need to give a commitment in improving the quality of sports in our country. (I) (PeIT2/4).

Step 2: The respondents use of the CDEAP (Content, Description, Example, Assertion, and Proverbs) technique to elaborate the ideas they have acquired in writing down the main points also shows good results. This is evident through the analysis of documents answered by the respondents based on their statements as shown below;

Build a sports school (paragraph topic - C), Placing the talented youth in sports. Under the guidance of teachers or trainers who are experienced in competing at international levels (Describing – D). Sports School of Malaysia (CCM) such as Bukit Jalil sports school and Bandar Penawar Sports School (example - E). Construction of a large sports school aims to produce individuals who are talented in certain sports (Assertion – A).

Based on the formula and techniques above, respondents were able to develop the content of one essay as shown below;

Among another initiative is to build a sports school. This is so because the young generation can put their talents in sports and coached by teachers or trainers who are experienced and have competed in competitions at the international level. For example, the Sports Schools Malaysia - Bukit Jalil sports school and Bandar Penawar Sports School. Accordingly, the construction of a sports school plays an important role in producing individuals who are talented in certain sports. (PeIT5/5)

In addition, efforts to improve the quality of the sports is to build a sports school. This is so because a sports school can house the young generation who are talented or gifted in sports. Moreover, the younger generation will be coached exclusively by teachers or trainers who are have experienced competing at the international level. For example the School Sports such as Bukit Jalil sports school and Sports School Bandar Penawar. It is clear that the construction of the sports school takes a big role in producing talented individuals in the fields of certain sports. This is in accordance with the proverb, strike the iron while it's hot. (PeIT5/6)

Apart from that, steps that are needed to be implemented to improve the quality of sports is building a sports school. In this case, the construction of the sports school aims to produce individuals who are talented in certain sports and the positioning of the younger generation who are talented in sports. These students will be under the guidance of teachers or trainers who are experienced in competing at international level..... (PeIT2/3)

Step 3: step 2 is repeated when the content needs to be developed. The result of the analysis produced are as follows;

Point 3: Provide suitable basic sports facilities

Providing suitable basic sports facilities. Accordingly, the existing sports infrastructure must be improved and for those sports facilities that have been damaged must be repaired. For example, a mini sports stadium can be constructed. Indeed, good and well-maintained sports facilities will help athletes improve their ability to compete internationally. (PeIT2/5)

A part from that, the effort which needs to be done is to provide suitable sports facilities. By doing so, the existing sports facilities need to be improved and repaired. The conclusion, building a stadium and a sports court. Indeed, good sports facilities help athletes to increase the ability to compete at the international levels (PeIT2/6)

Step 4: Making the Conclusion

The conclusion should have these points: the Views (V), Suggestions (S) and Hope (H)

...As a conclusion, the achievement in the national sports reflects the quality of commitment of athletes who are involved in sports (V). Therefore, the Government and the community have to work together in enhancing excellence in the quality of national sports (S), so as to promote sports in the country and this will enable them to not only stand tall but also sit low with other world powers (H) (PeIT2/5)

In general, the use of metacognitive teaching strategies and the elements of metacognitive knowledge need to be emphasized. The focus of the activities carried out in this strategy is to plan, to write drafts, to review or change the essay writing process. The implementation of these activities can become apparent when respondents used the FCESI (outline the introduction) and CDEAP (develop topic sentences) techniques.

The use of metacognitive knowledge and cognitive regulations complement each other during the process of teaching and learning writing. This is because metacognitive knowledge such as declarative, procedural and

conditional knowledge are important when students perform their routine or writing assignment (Gagne 1985). The level of students' achievement and aspirations are rising especially their desire to try and be proficient in the use metacognitive strategies based on the techniques that were introduced.

## **VII. Discussion**

The results of this study provides evidence of the lack of metacognitive skills namely declarative knowledge procedural knowledge and conditional knowledge among students in which the skills actually contribute to achievement, aspirations and motivation of students in writing essays. Language educators need to be proficient in teaching these skills. During the writing process, students will receive two types of knowledge of the language they learn (Faerch&Kasper, 1983).

The first one is declarative knowledge whether direct or implied and involves the internalization or absorption of the language rules, such as the definition of the word, terms of grammar and spelling. Second is the procedural knowledge that is generally used implicitly or explicitly (Martha Carr, 2010). The strategies and procedures used in this study will process the information and language skills (e.g. listening, writing and reading). The FCESI and CDEAP technique used the declarative knowledge to answer questions about when and how it is used to develop the content or ideas in writing. This is to strengthen the view of Baker and Brown (1984), which proved that the use of metacognitive strategies allow students to control their development in learning and try to understand something.

All this processes are translated into metacognitive strategies such as focusing on learning, organizing and planning the learning and assessing whether the learning is successful or otherwise. Coordination between consciousness and metacognitive thinking process is according to the view of Piaget (1973) which stated that metacognition can be developed when the child enters the formal operation stage and able to think more than merely abstract thinking. Through metacognitive reflection, it helps the student to remember and contemplate the learning process that is going on. Metacognitive reflection helps students to realize the learning process (Beyer, 1988). In this study, some of the activities involved in the metacognitive reflection process is to evaluate the achievement of metacognitive learning outcomes and learning content (content subjects) and the process of learning how to learn (Saemah et al., 2010).

The practice of metacognitive reflection strategies encourages students to self-reflect. Personal reflection enables students to identify the strength and the weakness of their written assignment and a follow-up action plan to improve the quality of learning. Through personal reflection, students can familiarize themselves by questioning themselves. During the practice of self-reflection, students tend to make up the framework, rebuild the frame, and the new ongoing action plan as recommended by Schon (1983). The techniques used in the metacognitive strategies of students enable students to be more aware of the metacognitive awareness on when, how, and why these techniques are used, consequently enhancing the aspirations of the students to become more successful.

## **VIII. Conclusion**

The use of T-Meta strategies can enhance the aspirations and achievements of students in their writing skills. The technique introduced is very helpful in improving language skills, particularly writing skills. Language educators need to focus on metacognitive elements during the process of teaching and learning the writing skills. The practice of writing metacognitive reflection among the students shall be used in order to enhance the students' capabilities and desire (aspiration) to detect all weaknesses and deficiencies that may arise in the process of writing. Therefore, the use of the T-Meta strategy through the procedures and process of producing the essay allows students to master the writing skills properly and with a higher level of maturity.

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