1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The ability to write involves a lot of processes although much emphasis has been stressed on the product of writing. Up till the 1980s, not many studies have been done on the composing processes of ESL (English as a Second Language) writers. As Krashen puts it, “studies of second language writing are sadly lacking”, (1984, p. 41), with reference to the processes of composing in writing. Nevertheless, extensive research has been done on first language composition and many second language researchers have found direction in them. In the 1980’s however the emergence of theorists like Flower and Hayes (1981), Chelala (1981), Jones (1982), Jacobs (1982), Edelsky, Zamel (1982), Lay (1982), Raimes (1983), Pfinstag (1984), Hildenbrand (1985), Mohan and Lo (1985), Rorschach (1986), Jones and Tetroe (1987), Galvan (1985), Gaskill (1986), Martin-Betancourt (1986), Cumming, Arndt and Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987), Friedlander (1991) and others paved way for further research on the composing processes of ESL writers as a result of a tremendous upsurge of interest.

According to Hairston (1982), writing research and teaching in ESL and English as a Foreign Language (EFI) is in the midst of a ‘paradigm shift’ which
actually refers to change in perspective and instructional practice from product to process. Emphasis on errors, grammar and form are stressed in 'product' while 'process' is a concentration on content, communication, meaning, and creativity (Winfield & Barnes-Felfeli; 1982, Krashen; 1984, Zamel; 1982, 1983, Raimes; 1985).

It can't be denied that there is clearly a dichotomy here whereby some researchers uphold a 'process' approach unimpeded by errors, form and rhetorical concerns while others advocate the need for 'product' before 'process'. However, recent ESL researchers have been more definite of the need to integrate 'process' and 'product' (Raimes, 1985). According to Nathan Dreyden (1989):

"...this seems reasonable as no 'product' can be obtained without 'process' and no 'process' can be acquired without 'product'. 'Product should not be separated from content. In a way, 'process' is 'product' and well executed 'processes' lead to well accomplished 'products'.

On the local front, research on the composing processes are scarce and still at its infancy stage although other aspects of writing especially product based have been researched upon. This include error analysis (Yap;1973, Padmini;1983), syntactic use and control (Ho;1976), effects of different correction procedures on English composition (Wong; 1980) and others. Lee May Eng's (M.Ed dissertation, University Malaya 1989) study on the composing processes of skilled and unskilled undergraduates and Lee Su Kim's (Language Centre, UKM, 1992) study
on two advanced ESL writers are two of the studies which I was able to identify through my search.

In Malaysia itself, many recent efforts by the Ministry of Education are seen as steps to reinstate the English Language to its former status. This includes the re-formatting of the English Language Paper at the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia level where it is now a combination between the former 121 Communication English Language Paper and Cambridge's 1119 English Language Paper. The latest efforts by the ministry are the introduction of the 914 English Language at the Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia (STPM) level and the Malaysian University Entry Test (MUET) which will be made compulsory to all pre-university students in the year 2000. These efforts are being made to improve students' proficiency in all four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. On the writing front, the enhancement of the students' writing ability is now regarded as a crucial aim of language teaching. To accomplish this, teachers need to know how their students compose. The 914 English Language syllabus is to enable students to further develop their language skills, so that they can use the language confidently and effectively for tertiary education and vocational needs, in line with the national Philosophy of Education, which places emphasis on the holistic development of an individual. This is important to prepare them to a more mature and logical thinking. The objectives of the syllabus in writing are to develop the students' ability to use appropriate language to communicate for a wide range of purposes and audience, to organise and structure texts
grammatically, coherently, using suitable vocabulary and an effective style and finally, to formulate and express ideas. With the scarcity of research on the composing processes of ESL writers on the local context, I hope my study will contribute to the obtainable corpus on how writers compose. This study will take both 'process' and 'product' although the emphasis will be more on 'process' as there is a need for research in this area.

1.2 Statements of the Problems

In the Malaysian curriculum, the English Language was only recently introduced in 1997 at the STPM level (equivalent to the A levels) for Arts stream students. Nevertheless, many of these Arts based students have the option of taking English Literature in schools where it is offered. The first batch of students of 914 English Language will be sitting for the exam in 1999. As the subject itself is still at its infancy stage, many schools with form six classes do not offer this subject for there is a lack of teachers. This includes my subject's school, Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Lelaki Methodist Kuala Lumpur (MBSKL). As my subject is a purely Science based student taking Double Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry, I hope this study will give an insight on how a proficient form six Science based student compose with regards to the new 914 English Language writing syllabus.
1.2.1 Research Questions

i) What are the composing processes of a proficient form six ESL student?

ii) What are the pedagogical implications of this study on how writing should be taught in school?

1.3 Definition of Terms

The following terms used in this study need explanation:

i) composing process - refers to all the processes out of which a piece of written work emerges (Bizzell, 1986). It is the complete process and the behaviours that occur from the time the writing task is assigned to the moment when the writer indicates the completion of the task.

ii) pre-drafting - the period between the presentation of the writing task and the moment immediately preceding the writing of the first word of the writer’s initial attempt to produce a draft (Lee, 1989). This allows the writer to organise his essay and present his ideas in a way that allows the readers to see how the parts of the piece of writing fits together coherently. This phase includes outlines, mappings, diagrams, flow-charts, list making and others.

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iii) **drafting** - it refers to the various versions a piece of writing goes through before the writer reaches closure. It is also the preliminary phase of the writing process where the writer produces a draft. It involves successive attempts to say what the writer means and to say it clearly.

iv) **revisions** - a rethinking process about the writer's ideas and how best to convey them. It involves going over what the writer has written and rethinking it with an eye to whether the writer's audience can understand him. Corrections, alterations, additions, deletions and changes are made from the original draft. Revision include *surface level changes* or *form focused* changes that do not affect the information content of the text. It encompasses punctuation, spelling, syntax, usage, grammar, mechanics, format, apostrophes, collocation or lexicon which do not alter meaning of the original text drastically. *Text based changes* on the other hand refer to changes that alter the meaning of the text considerably.

iv) **editing** - changes which are made in the text. It involves writing over, crossing out words, adding words, and others. The checking of words, sentences, appropriateness of words and punctuation are part of editing.

vi) **protocols** - detailed, time ordered record of a subject's writing behaviour, which includes a transcript recording of the writer's
verbalising during composing and the written materials he produces while composing (Flower and Hayes, 1989).

vii) **think alouds / verbal protocols** - oral records of thoughts, provided by subjects when thinking aloud during or immediately after completing a task (Kasper, 1998).

### 1.4 Limitations

In carrying out this research, there were a few limitations. For one, I only limited the subject to one person, my brother and as a result, the results of the study is not generic. I also had only three weeks to observe my brother as I didn’t want to take too much of his time, considering the fact that he will be sitting for the Sijil Tinggi Persekolahana Malaysia (STPM) examination in 1999 and needed the year end holidays to do his revision. The observation and sessions were conducted in my family home and this is not the natural formal setting of the school.

I also determined the writing assignments and as such, did not consider my subject’s interest. My writing assignments were purely based on the 914 English Language writing syllabus which focuses on a range of subject areas of current interest.
The limitations I encountered carries a few implications especially within the local context. For one, there is room for research on a wider age range of subjects as I limited my study only to one subject. The composing processes of adult learners and young children are two areas that can be investigated. Future research could also consider affecting variables like prior knowledge, writer's interest and also the range of target audience.

1.5 Significance of the Study

Through my search, I was only able to locate two main research (Lee, 1989; Lee, 1992) on the composing processes of writers within the local context. Other research done largely concentrated on end product and surface level changes. Some of these works include those on error analysis (Yap;1973, Padmini; 1983), syntactic use and control (Ho:1976), effects of different correction procedures on English composition (Wong: 1992) and others. On the Western context, although there is a significant amount of research on the composing processes of various levels and categories of writers, the findings cannot be used conclusively within the local context as the setting is different. This study hopes to address that problem.

Research has also shown that the stress is on the writer and the process of writing (Wallace, Norris, Burnett, Macrorie, Moffet, Britton and Minnock, 1984). Although surface level changes remain concerns in second language writing, they
no longer take a sole command. Certainly the marriage between process and product is inevitable and that is the core of this research. This research is an attempt to look at the composing processes of a proficient form six ESL writer who is not taking up the 914 English Language for his STPM examination. I also hope that the research can help to gain some insight on how to teach writing for this level of students and indirectly contribute to the Malaysian ESL writing pedagogy.