2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

Writing has certainly not received due attention by researchers as its sister skill, reading but in the last few decades, researchers have shown a renewed interest in writing and it is now recognised as being equal, or more important than reading (Barrs, 1983). Very often, a person’s writing is used as a gauge of his or her language competency.

Most of the research that forms our current knowledge of composing has been published since 1970. Specialists in composition of the 1960s saw themselves largely as teachers of writing and not as researchers. Nevertheless, their work has effectively contributed to current research, not only in what it tells us about composing but also in the professional agenda it establishes for composition studies. It is important to note that early writing research was largely based on product rather than process. A report published in 1963 entitled Research in Written Composition (cited in Emig, J., 1971), highlighted that educators knew little about how to teach people to write well. What’s more, many knew nothing about how people compose. This report called for more research to be conducted in this area. In paying importance to end based products, many researchers have disregarded a more pertinent aspect which is the
writer himself and what he does. Previous assumptions indicated that writers write in a step-by-step sequential fashion, following rigid prescriptive outlines. King (1978) pointed out that there is an important need to understand the actual process of writing within a broader and more coherent theoretical framework.

However, in the last two decades, writing skill, mainly process oriented in nature has enjoyed a tremendous upsurge of interest. Generally, later writing research has indicated that writing is a complex and recursive process that proceeds in a non-linear fashion. It begins with writers grappling with how to present their ideas in a text, the process of which involves generating new ideas, rejecting, refining and reformulating, re-reading, pausing, rethinking and revising, not in any sequential order.

2.2 The Relationship of L1 Research to L2 Research

It cannot be denied that research in the approaches of teaching L2 writing exist abundantly, supported by readily accessible materials and as such, second language composition is then, well established and much of it follows theory. Nevertheless according to Krapels (1990),

However, L2 composition teaching has generally not been based on theoretically derived insights gained from L2 composition research, because until the 1980s there was not much L2 research to draw upon in building theory or planning classes.
Basing their comments on developments in L1 composition, Zamel (1976) and Raimes (1979) recommended treating L2 writing as a process in the L2 classroom. It is important to note that second language researchers have always found guidance in first language composition research which dates back to the early 1900s (Haynes, 1978). In the middle of the twentieth century, L1 composition research expanded from focusing on studies investigating the effects of some pedagogical treatment on student writers' products to exploration of the act of writing itself. In the United States of America, researchers like Braddock, Jones and Schoer (1963) urged for L1 writing process research. To date, a study by Hillocks (1986) provides an excellent detailed summary of L1 studies through a critical account of research on different types of L1 writers.

In general, second language composition researchers have adopted L1 writing process research designs, and more often than not their findings have concurred with those of their L1 counterparts. According to Zamel (1984), "research into second language composing processes seems to corroborate much of what we have learned from research in first language writing" (cited in Krapels, 1990). According to Krapels (1990), although L1 writing process research has contributed significantly to L2 research, L2 researchers must be cautious not to let L1 studies lead or conclude their investigations of second language writing processes, because the research contexts are not the same.
2.3 Research on the Composing Processes of L1 Writers

As in most other areas of research, writing research leans heavily on L1 research for insights. The work of James Britton and Janet Emig paved way to a more contemporary mode of research in composing. Britton identified three different types of writing. The first type, "poetic" produces literary artifacts, the focus being on language and text. "Expressive", the second type is when the writer writes about a subject and its personal relevance. Here the writer expresses his feelings and the intended readers are himself or maybe a close friend. The last type which is known as "transactional" is where the writer wants to convey information or argue for a position, for a certain targeted audience.

In Emig's (1971) classic and insightful study, The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders, twelve eight graders were asked to compose aloud while writing three essays. Emig’s study was the first major study to respond to the shift in composition orientation from product to process. In fact, this study provided much of the impetus for the current direction of research in writing. Through this study, Emig established what has become a landmark and the primary research design for conducting research into the writing process. Her study indicated that twelfth graders compose in two modes; reflexive and extensive. Reflexive writing concerns the writer's feelings and personal experience whereas extensive writing focuses on information to be conveyed to a reader. Both Britton and Emig
established that composing processes vary with the kind of writing that the students are doing. Emig also discovered that composing was a complex and convoluted process of interrelated activities. It was not a sequence of logical steps but rather a messy conglomeration of recursive processes or procedures. Perhaps one of Emig’s most important findings was that writing involved a continuing attempt to discover what it is one wanted to say. It is this act of discovery that Murray (1978,1980) has identified as the main feature of the writing process (cited in Zamel, 1982). Emig’s study most certainly paved way for other researchers to investigate the complexity of the composing processes.

Studies by Mischel (1974) and Stallard (1974) who used high school students as subjects also recalled Emig’s findings. Pianko (1979) who studied the composing processes of college freshman in relation to class status, age and sex concluded that poor writing results from neglecting the recursive quality of the composing processes. Graves (1975), Calkins (1980) and Schwartz (1985) examined the writing processes of children and stressed that successful writing emerges from recursive composing processes. According to Graves, it is pertinent for school not to impede children’s natural desire to write by limiting them with tasks they are not interested in and daunt them with correct corrections.

The importance given to recursiveness in writing encouraged other researchers to investigate the other areas of the composing processes. Sommers (1980) focused on revision and argued that the whole composing process is
actually a process of revision where the writer polishes his style and more importantly, develops his ideas. Unskilled writers do not understand revision and save it for the end of the composing processes and only make small scale changes such as correcting spelling errors. Berkotter (1983) in a separate study on the progress of a single text through multiple revisions supported Sommer’s conclusions.

Perl (1979) gave a new insight on the composing processes of less proficient writers when she studied five unskilled college writers. Through her study, it was found that all the students displayed consistent composing processes, which are prewriting, writing and editing. These were sequential in nature and remained constant throughout different writing tasks. In a related study, Perl (1980), discovered that writers, whether skilled or unskilled, employed retrospective structuring in order to discover: the less skilled viewed composing as “more mechanical and formulaic” with emphasis on correctness and form and were unable to do projective structuring or assuming the role of another reader. These writers paid inordinate importance and time to editing for errors in grammar, spelling and mechanics (Perl, 1979). These findings were confirmed by Sommers (1980) who found that inexperienced writers paid unnecessary attention to form and this constantly interrupted the ongoing process of discovery. Halstead (1975) comments, “the obsession with the final product is what ultimately leads to serious writing block. More importantly, it is a sure way to close off avenues to discovering what it is you have to say” (Zamel, 1982).
2.4 Research on the Composing Processes of L2 Writers

One of the hallmarks of L2 inquiry in the area of composing is by Zamel (1982). He confirmed earlier L1 findings that writing is indeed a process of discovery of meaning, recursive in nature and is not linear. In short, these writers viewed writing as a process of creating meaning. In a subsequent study (1983) on advanced ESL writers, Zamel’s pertinent discovery was that writers interpreted composing as the constant interplay of thinking, writing and rewriting.

Jones (1981) study highlighted that both L1 and L2 writers face similar writing difficulties. In another study, Jones (1982) focused on rhetorical concerns and composing. This study investigated the written products and written processes of two L2 writers, where each writer was distinguished as a “poor” and “good” respectively. His findings showed that writing strategies affected writers’ rhetorical structures. According to Jones, (p. 273, cited in Krapels, 1990,)

“...the poor writer was bound to the text at the expense of ideas, whereas the good writer allowed her ideas to generate the text. The poor writer had never learned how to compose, and this lack of competence in composing, rather than a specific lack in L2 linguistic competence, was the source of her difficulty in L2 writing”.

Chelala (1981) who conducted one of the first second language writing process studies using a case study approach to investigate composing and coherence, identified “effective” and “ineffective” behaviours. Among the “ineffective” writers, the usage of first language for prewriting was prevalent. They also switched back
and forth between the first and second language. However these findings contradict those of later studies which include those of Lay (1981), and Cumming (1987).

Jacobs (1982) pointed out that there were also other factors involved in determining the quality of students' writing in her study of 6 native and 5 non-native speakers and concluded that linguistic competence does not affect composing competence among L2 writers. This was later recalled by Zamel (1982) who found that the competence in the composing process was more pertinent than linguistic competence in the ability to write proficiently in English. Zamel stressed that the end written products would greatly improve when writers understood and experienced composing as a process. In another study in 1983, Zamel divided her subjects into both skilled and unskilled writers and discovered that the skilled writers revised and spend more time on their essays, similar to the writing strategies of L1 writers as described by Pianko (1979) and Sommers (1980). These writers also kept editing to the end. On the other hand, her unskilled writers spent less time revising and concentrated on the smaller parts of their essays and kept editing from the beginning to the end of the whole process.

Heuring (1984) found that differences exist between skilled and unskilled writers with the former employing effective skills, while unskilled writers do not revise effectively, concentrating on surface level changes which do not improve their writings. Raimes's (1985) study on 8 unskilled ESL writers verified
Heuring’s findings. Raimes discovered that her subjects composing competence did not correspond with their linguistic competence, a recurrent finding in L2 research. However, she found that her unskilled writers revised and edited lesser than she had expected. They favoured rereading their writings to enable ideas to develop. This contradicts with Perl’s (1978) and Zamel’s (1983) findings. This shows that L2 writers might not be so concerned with accuracy after all, concentrating more on getting their ideas written down. According to Raimes, her subjects were also more committed to their writing assignments and produced more content. Raimes was among the few researchers who concluded that L1 and L2 writers were different in several aspects although similarities did exist. As such, she advocated the need to adapt rather than adopt wholly L1 writing instruction for L2 writers.

Jones and Tetroe (1987) who studied 6 Spanish speaking L2 writers observed that that there was a great variety in their writings when written in their native language, Spanish. A decrease in performance was obvious when these students attempted their L2 writings. Jones and Tetroe reported that a lack of L2 vocabulary resulted in the usage of first language in composing. This supports Lay’s earlier suggestions that certain aspects of L1 writing process are often reflected in the writer’s L2 writing process. These findings also supported Martin-Betancourt (1986) study on Puerto Rican college students. Nevertheless there were inconsistencies among her subjects for some relied heavily on Spanish, sometimes even including translation in their L2 writing processes while others
only did so on a smaller scale. Gaskill’s (1986) case study on four bilingual undergraduates who wrote both in Spanish and English confirmed earlier findings, here being the writing processes in English resembled those in Spanish. Hall (1987) also found that advanced L2 writers use both L1 and L2 knowledge while revising. Arndt ‘s (1987) study of L1 and L2 writing on 6 Chinese speaking graduate level students, reported that “the composing strategies of each individual writer were found to remain consistent across languages” (p. 257, cited in Krapels, 1990). Arndt findings also noted that it is important for all L2 writers, regardless of their proficiency, to obtain more assistance with the demands of writing-as-text. Cumming (1987) reported that his 6 Francophone Canadian adult subjects tended to use their L1 for generating content for the three writing tasks they were given, which were personal, expository, and academic. Although the inexpert writers consistently used their L1 to generate ideas, expert writers also seemed to be doing so, especially for producing content and checking style. The findings certainly supported the fact that the expert writers the bulk of their thinking in French, a finding contrary to earlier research (Martin-Betancourt; 1986, Gaskill; 1986, and Arndt, 1987). Galvan’s (1985) ethnographic study on ten doctoral students found that his subjects second language writing was largely influenced by both their first and second language thinking and culture.

Lay’s (1981) study on the composing processes of 4 Chinese writers emphasised that these writers read topics, go back and forth through their texts, re-evaluate organisations, change vocabulary and possess different levels of editing.
Although intending to produce L2 compositions, Lay’s subjects included L1 into their L2 composing process. She pointed out that when there was more L1 language switches, the end products were better in quality which encompassed ideas, planning and details. Edelsky (1982) supported Lay’s findings by reinstating that when writing in L2, L2 writers switch back to their first language to recall.

Other recent proponents of the composing processes include Faigley, Macrorie, Coles, and Elbow. With such extensive research on L2 composing processes by researchers based in the West, it is important to have a local pool of findings to add to the field of ESL research within the Malaysian context.

In the local context, only 2 studies were found done in the area of composing processes. The first study was by Lee (1989) on the composing processes of 4 skilled ESL writers. On the other hand, Lee (1992) studied on the composing processes of 2 advanced ESL writers. Lee (1989) discovered that differences exist between skilled and unskilled writers with the former concentrating on rhetorical demands like organisation and expression of ideas, while the latter were more focused with surface level demands like grammar and spelling. The unskilled writers also composed in Bahasa Melayu while the skilled in English. This aspect was another major difference. Nevertheless, Lee (1992) found that advanced ESL writers’ L1 and L2 composing processes are similar. However, a cross-case analysis revealed that writing behaviour between subjects differed, each displaying his or her unique style and idiosyncrasies. Both the
research subjects used information from the brainstorming session, were aware of the topic and audience, spent minimum time on pre-drafting, used similar strategies at the revision stage and resorted to translation from English to Bahasa Melayu.

2.5 Review of Methodology

2.5.1 Thinking Aloud Method

The relationship between language and the mind has been of interest to researchers since the early 1970s, going under the name of psycholinguists. Most prominent in the field of cognition and writing processes are John Hayes and Linda Flowers. They have tried to describe what goes on in the reader’s mind when he or she composes. To do so, they used an experimental procedure known as thinking aloud where the writer is placed in a room with a tape recorder, given an assignment, and directed to say everything that comes to mind he or she writes. After the session is done, the verbal statements from the tape are transcribed into a script like form called a protocol. The protocol is then analysed. Thinking aloud protocols are also sometimes known as verbal protocols. Kormos (1998) described verbal reports as the “subjects’” general verbal descriptions of their cognitive processes and experiences. Thus, this type of verbal reporting is concurrent with the execution of a specific task, and the subjects provide information while it is still available to them which is while it remains in

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the short term memory (STM). According to Ericsson and Simon (1980), think aloud protocols reveals the structure of psychological processes. It also does not change the course and structure of task being studied. Nevertheless, Faigley and Witte (1981) criticised think aloud protocols for it interferes with a writer's normal composing. However according to Ericsson and Simon (1993),

...with regard to think aloud procedures, the participants should attribute primary importance to the performance of the task, not to the verbalisation of their thoughts; researchers can achieve this goal by giving subjects a warm-up task in which it is easy to think aloud. In addition, subjects should be explicitly instructed to verbalise all the thoughts that occur to them while performing the task. To avoid interaction, researchers need to be invisible to the participants and their role should restricted to reminding participants to keep on talking while solving the given problem.

It is important to note that with wide research being conducted on various aspects of information processing and artificial intelligence research, the usage of verbal reports is slowly gaining momentum. As such, according to Kormos (1988, p. 355):

"...the complementary use of verbal reports allows researchers to go beyond the common practice of analysing L2 speakers' competence solely on the basis of performance data, as this research method can help reveal the cognitive and psycholinguistic processes underlying performances."

It cannot be denied that with proper instructions, the usage of verbal protocols can complement various research methods like the production of data elicitation, intuitional data elicitation and methods associated with the social

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The use of verbal reports should be encouraged in research especially those on composing processes as this method gives an insight on the actual cognitive processes of writing and fields of cognitive psychology like decision making and text comprehension. It has been proven that the complementary use of verbal reports has succeeded in yielding indepth data besides the practice of analysing L2 students competence based solely on their performances and end products. Nevertheless verification is also important to ensure reliability.