

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 Introduction

There are four main types of writing, namely, narrative, descriptive, expository and argumentative. Narrative writing describes a personal or fictional experience or tells a story based on a real or imagined event. Descriptive writing typically focuses on making the readers see, feel, and hear what we have seen, felt and heard. The main purpose of descriptive writing is to describe an object, person, place, experience, emotion, situation in such a great detail that a picture is formed in the reader's mind. Expository writing conveys messages, instructions, and shares knowledge and understanding on a particular subject. Persuasive writing also referred to as argumentative writing attempts to convince readers through the use of words to adopt and agree a particular point of view or to take a specific action.

The writing convention and format for the four main types of writing are as below.

Table 1.1: Format of Different Types of Writing

Types of Writing	Format
Narrative	The narrative essay format is build on two main principles: <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Narratives are generally written in the first person.</li><li>2. Narratives are often written through the point of view of the author's, thus, the conventions of storytelling are often adopted to get the readers involved.</li></ol>
Descriptive	Follows the standard format of introduction, body and conclusion.
Expository	Expository writing requires careful organization. When writing such essays, the author should always adhere to the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. A clear and specific thesis statement has to be included in</li></ol>

	<p>the introductory paragraph to provide readers with a 'guide' to your argument.</p> <p>2. The supporting paragraphs should correspond with the thesis statement. Each supporting paragraph should have a topic sentence that states the main idea. Ideas should progress logically to make it reader- friendly. Conclusion, the final paragraph, should reiterate the thesis statement and main ideas in a general way. Paraphrasing skills are required to avoid literal repetition. In addition, no new information should be presented.</p>
Argumentative	<p>Elements toward writing a convincing argumentative essay should include</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. There should be a clear thesis statement stating the author's take on the issue.</li> <li>2. The author should make strong and valid arguments to support his assertion.</li> <li>3. Theories, statistics, evidence and examples should be presented to persuade the reader to agree with the author.</li> </ol>

Among all the different types of writing, the argumentative essay is most complex task, as it requires the presence of several skills at the same time. An argumentative essay has to persuade the readers to agree without a doubt with the author's opinion through the power of words. Argumentative writing requires great writing skills along with strong arguments and extensive research work .Before writing an argumentative essay, a proper understanding of the subject is required, and relevant and authentic material should be used to support the author's assertion.

Argumentative writing is difficult for most of the students because it entails a copious amount of research and time. It is not always possible for most of the students to collect material of a notable quality that will assist them in composing an impressive argumentative piece of work. Argumentative writing can be still difficult even after appropriate materials have been collected and all the research work done. If an

argumentative essay lacks strong arguments and sufficient support, it will fail to convince the reader, hence losing the purpose of an argument essay.

According to Jordan (1997), there are five areas which may be slightly more challenging for learners when writing. They are grammar, style, spelling, punctuation and handwriting. Drawing on the work of Jacobs et al. (1981:90) who developed the much lauded 'ESL Composition Profile', the main traits in writing are content, language use, organization, vocabulary and mechanics. Perhaps the difference between the both is one of nomenclature as a closer look at the two sets of categories show more similarities than differences. Both in Jordan and Jacobs et al.'s categories, there is a 'Vocabulary' category. 'Style' in Jordan falls into 'Organization' in Jacobs et al.'s category.. 'Spelling' and 'Punctuation' from Jordan's are in the same category as Jacobs et al.'s 'Mechanic'. Next, 'Language Use' in Jacobs et al.'s is in the same category as 'Grammar' in Jordan's. The difference lies in the presence of a 'Handwriting' category in Jordan's whilst Jacobs et al.'s has a 'Content' category. The table below shows the differences and the similarities between Jordan and Jacob et al.'s.

Table 1.2: Similarities and Differences

<b>Jordan (1997)</b>	<b>Jacob et al. (1981)</b>
Language Use	Grammar
Organization	Style
Mechanics	Spelling
	Punctuation
-Nil-	Handwriting
Vocabulary	Vocabulary
Content	-Nil-

### **1.1 Views on difficulties in writing**

Everyone faces a different challenge in writing, some more than others. Some learners may find grammar as the most problematic area for them while for others it could be vocabulary or even organization. In other words, the difficulties faced in writing may differ from one learner to another.

Not only learners, teachers also have different views on the difficulties in writing. Some teachers may have a completely different viewpoint as to the most problematic areas faced by their learners in writing in English. The problems perceived may differ between teachers and learners. What may not seem as a challenge for a learner may be viewed as a challenge for the teacher. A simple explanation for this contradiction is a learner may not always be

conscious of their problems or errors unless they are directly told. For example, a learner may not be aware that his handwriting may cause the teacher difficulty in understanding his writing. What are learners' perceptions towards problematic areas in writing? What are teachers' perceptions towards problematic areas in writing? It is important to view both parties' perceptions and not only the learner's as a teacher's insight is equally important to further help the learner write better. When learners are not able to identify their own weaknesses, they need the assistance of someone more proficient in the language than they are.

Stevens (1977) adds that possessing the ability to identify and understand learner's difficulties is a necessary condition for becoming an ideal language teacher. If this is indeed true, it would be incumbent upon all teachers to investigate their learners' difficulties so they could aid them and develop themselves as teachers. Stevens further explains that:

The best teachers know their pupils, encourage them, show concern for them, find out their interests, discover their learning preferences, monitor their progress with a sympathetic eye, unravel their difficulties – cherish them as a human being engaged in a collaboration of learning (1980: 28).

However, learners' perceptions of difficulty may not always be the same as the actual or performance difficulty that they encounter. A high level of difficulty may be perceived by learners who have produced minimal errors because they could avoid using items they found difficult. Difficulty is therefore a subjective concept (Corder, 1973).

Grammar is often cited as a huge problem for both teachers and learners. All learners have learnt grammar since primary school. For instance, in the Malaysian education system,

English is taught as a second language in both primary and secondary education. Despite a minimum of 11 years of learning English, Wee et al. still claim, that ‘learners’ proficiency level is still below acceptable level and many have not yet mastered the basic grammatical rules’ (2010: 16). There are maybe some factors that can help learners to improve their grammar such as instilling the culture of reading English language books, watching more English language programs, and listening to English language radio channels. By expanding learners’ exposure of the English language, indirectly learners’ will increase their vocabulary and knowledge of the language.

Alternatively, listening to English songs will also help learners to write better. Through songs, learners are exposed to “authentic” examples of the second language. “Songs automatically put language into a context. “Students will begin to pick up vocabulary and complex expressions they might not otherwise come across” (Farrug, 2008: 3). It is easier for people to “sing language” than to speak and the great thing is songs automatically put language into context. Songs also create a pleasant and positive atmosphere in the classroom because learners equate music with entertainment and fun rather than work and learning. In simpler words, learners are unconsciously or indirectly learning the language.

Songs help not only to increase learners’ level of motivation, but also able to make the learning of new words and structures more natural and long-lasting. Learners will begin to pick up vocabulary and complex expressions they might not otherwise come across. By singing along, learners are naturally acquiring correct pronunciation and the best part is teachers can introduce various aspects of grammar and culture through the use of songs. (Farrug, 2008)

Reading is an activity through which a person's cognitive ability could be further developed. It is the extraction of meaning from printed words. In a study by Carrol (1972) it was discovered that there is a strong relationship between children's exposure to written language and the rate of linguistic development. In a formal classroom situation, all learners are exposed to similar language opportunities and learning conditions, but outside the classroom, each learner has a different amount of contact with the language. Factors such as social background, language background and environment would determine how much contact a learner would have with a particular language. In her study it differs from all the works examined here in that it aims at examining the language activities that the subjects are engaged in outside the formal classroom teaching and the possible effect of these on their written English.

Ting (2011) did a study to explore Taiwanese high school students' English literacy performance, including reading comprehension and writing, as well as their reading awareness and vocabulary competence. The result have showed that proficient students can write better, longer sentences with good vocabulary depending on their reading attitude, reading strategies and reading comprehension. From this research, it is proven that students who do reading can write better than students who do not.

Lack of vocabulary or inappropriate choice of lexical in writing can cause problems too. There must be some ways for learners to enrich their vocabulary so that they can write better. Even renowned writers stumble over words. Some challenges might arise from the similarities between words which make vocabulary as problematic as it can be.

Besides grammar and vocabulary, confusion about the many different styles of writing may also pose a problem for learners .Some examples of writing styles are academic writing

(includes essays, research papers, reports), professional writing (writing for academic or scientific journals, business reports, position papers, policy statements), business writing (includes technical writing, business plan writing, resume writing, letter writing) and many more.

Gere (1985) writes that there are three styles of writing; casual, informal and formal. A formal writing is appropriate for some essays, answers to essay questions, formal reports, and research papers. It uses lexical and structures that rarely appear in conversation, and its sentences are often more elaborate and longer than those of informal writing. Contractions and slang rarely appear in formal English; it uses “refined” language.

Gere (1985) further adds that informal writing is what most educated people use for communicating with people other than personal friends. It is the language of magazines, newspapers, most books, most business letters, and writing intended for general audiences. Informal English adheres to less rigid rules and forms moderation. Sentences vary in length and they often sound more conversational than does the impersonal tone of formal writing.

Casual writing in Gere’s (1985) opinion is tied more closely to the “rules” of specific people, communities, time, place and circumstance. Slang expressions, contractions and nonstandard dialect appear frequently, and often casual writing is incomprehensible to someone not familiar with the context in which the writing is done. “Back in ten” may make no sense to the general reader but it is clear explanation to students who find it tacked on an office door.

Primarily the research is an attempt to bring to surface the learners’ and teachers’ perceptions on the most problematic areas in writing. Next it will go on to analyze the



writings of a group of Malay learners of English in order to investigate the areas which learners perform best and worst in. This will allow the researcher to study the following:

- Learners' versus teachers' perceptions on the problematic areas of writing
- Areas that learners perform best and worst in accordance with the ESL Composition Profile introduced by Jacobs et al. (1981)

## **1.2 Significance of the Study**

To understand learners' and teachers' perceptions of the difficulties of English writing can help both parties to improve their roles. This study will help learners realize the problems they face in writing. For teachers, the findings of this study will increase their awareness of the students' perceptions with regard to problems they face in writing. Together teacher and student will be able to make the learning and teaching experience a more fruitful one. For example, the teacher can give extra attention to these problem areas in class and learners should be more aware of these 'traps' while writing.

## **1.3 Statement of the Problem**

Learners have their own perceptions on the difficulties of writing in English. Some of the difficulties may include grammar, style, spelling, punctuation and handwriting. Apart from students' perception, teachers also form their own perceptions on the difficulties of writing in English that their learners may face. This study will examine the perceptions of both parties. It will identify whether both teachers and learners share the same perceptions as to

the most problematic areas in writing. This study will then go on to identify the areas that learners perform best and worst when writing in English.

#### **1.4 Rationale of the Study**

This study aims to help learners realize and identify the problematic areas in their writing so action can be taken to overcome these weaknesses. Besides students, teachers will also have a better and clearer picture of the problems their students face in writing and should take the necessary measures to address these hitches.

#### **1.5 Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of the research are as follow:

- 1) To investigate the problematic areas of writing faced by students based on Jacobs et al. (1981) ESL Composition Profile.
- 2) To study the students' perceptions regarding the most problematic areas in English writing.
- 3) To study the teachers' perceptions regarding the most problematic areas in English writing.

#### **1.6 Research Questions**

This research work on the learners' and teachers' perceptions on problems in English writing is carried out with three research questions in mind:

- 1) What are the problematic areas of writing faced by students based on the ESL Composition Profile by Jacobs et al. (1981)?
- 2) What are the students' perceptions regarding the most problematic areas in English writing?
- 3) What are the teachers' perceptions regarding the most problematic areas in English writing?

### **1.7 Methodology**

This study mirrors two researches. The first research by Jordan (1997) looks at the writing difficulties of overseas postgraduates attending writing classes at a university in the U.K. The students were asked to comment on their own writing problems using a six-point scale. A similar questionnaire was then given to the instructors to examine if both parties rated similarly. However, the results illustrate a mismatch between students' and instructors' perceptions of the problems associated with students' written work. A more detailed discussion on Jordan's work will be discussed in Chapter 2.

The second study, Jacobs et al. (1981) proposed the concept of ESL Composition Profile as a scoring guide. This tool is a combination of both holistic and analytic approaches towards writing. For the research, Jacobs' scoring guide was used in the research as it is also used by the English teachers (also the subjects in this research).

### **1.8 Limitations of the Study**

The sample of this study is limited as it only involves 60 Malay learners pursuing Diploma of Accounting (2011 intake) and 10 English language lecturers from Universiti Teknologi

MARA, Dungun, Terengganu. The students were asked to write a 250 to 300 word composition in an hour. In addition, this study is conducted only in one respective diploma program to produce results that can be verified its effectiveness when writing English. A larger sample from other courses stands the possibility to result vice versa. Therefore, the findings of this study cannot be generalized and only reflect the participating students and lecturers.

### **1.9 Conclusion**

Students' and teachers' perceptions towards difficulties in English writing play an important role in improving learners' written work. Identifying and understanding learners' difficulties will hopefully provide an insight to language teachers on how to address these issues in the classroom.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

Research in the field of writing has made great progress over the years. Linguists have seemed to develop an inventory of writing strategies and pedagogically use it as a guide in writing to help students improve their writing abilities. This chapter will discuss the features of quality writing, previous researches on students' problems in writing, students' attitudes towards writing, scoring methods and lastly the ESL Composition Profile.

#### **2.2 Quality Writing**

In each piece of writing, a picture is attempted to be painted through the power of words. This picture may tell a story, reveal new information, share opinions, discuss or debate about a topic or an issue depending on the objective of the writing. The objective will then determine the discourse of the writing. Another important element to ensure quality writing is identifying the targeted readers. This tridimensional relationship between the objective of the written work, the reader and the discourse of writing will determine the success of a written work.

According to McCrimmon (1967), an effective writer will be sensitive to the whole situation in which he is writing, including his audience, and that awareness will help him to shape and clarify his specific purpose. In the first few sentences, the author should outline the main issues raised by the question. This involves identifying the problem or set of problems at the heart of the question, or it may involve pointing to the central importance of one or two concepts, which may be further analyzed in the writing. He also states that a

purposeful writing will point readers in the direction the writer intends to take them. In writing essays, ideas and content must be relevant to the essay topic or title. A well-organized essay will ensure better understanding. Hedge (1988) further elucidates that an effective piece of writing requires a solid fool proof structure. By planning the writing, the writer will be able to take the readers through his work in a logical, progressive way. Each paragraph with a topic sentences which is supported with examples, statistics and logical explanation.

Besides the importance of good and effective paragraphing skills, Watkins et al. (1965) propose to pay heed to the arrangement of words within a sentence. Repetition of words and the use of unclear and inaccurate synonyms will only further weaken a piece of writing, instead use more concrete vocabulary that brings forward the meaning clearly while inserting idioms if necessary.

Watkins et al. firmly believe that a good diction is as important as good grammar but there is more to good diction than acquiring new terms. Greetham who is of the same mind as Watkins et al. adds on that:

The most elusive aspect of normal speech, that's difficult to capture in our written work, is any emphasis we might express through tone or gesture. In a written work, this has to be conveyed through the author's choice of words and phrases, and through sentence rhythm and punctuation (2001:219).

Mechanics and appropriate language use also contribute to quality writing. Being skillful in both these aspects of writing includes the use of correct grammatical items, effective complex construction, logical paragraphing, and legible handwriting among others. Authors

have to be careful as the key to successful writing is not to lose the readers. Greetham (2001: 220) cautions that:

A complex sentence full of multiple clauses is a difficult and perilous terrain for readers to negotiate. Not only are you likely to lose them as they gingerly pick their way through it, but by the time they have reached the end of the sentence, they will have forgotten your original point.

Of course, complex sentences cannot be avoided exclusively. Occasionally, to develop a complex argument, it is impossible to abstain from using a complex sentence structure. But if this is the case, authors should be aware of dangers and make sure the sentence can be negotiated easily, without any danger of confusion, by using logical indicators and the signposts of punctuation to indicate the structure.

In much the same way, the writer should also experiment using different lengths of sentences to achieve different effects. Although shorter sentences are easier to follow and may require less cognitive activity, it is not necessary to make every sentence the same length. Longer sentences tend to be soothing, whereas shorter sentences can tend to be abrupt. Varying the type of sentences will create different effects.

In short, effective or quality writing which has a logical flow of ideas and is cohesive. In other words, it holds together well because there are links between sentences and paragraphs. A cohesive piece of writing is unified as a whole and is easy to read and digest because it uses language effectively to keep the reader 'on track'. This can be achieved through the use of logical indicators, a mix of simple and complex structures, appropriate word choice and punctuation.

### 2.3 Research on Writing

Written work has been referred to as being one of the major causes of concern for students.

To further understand this concern, numerous studies have been conducted over the years.

To cite one, Jordan (1997) looked at the writing difficulties of overseas postgraduates attending writing classes at a university in the United Kingdom. On a six- point scale, ranging from ‘no difficulties’ to ‘a lot of difficulties’, they were asked to rate the problems they face in writing. In a descending order, the results are as below:

Table 2.1: Students’ Difficulties in Writing

Difficulties	Percentage
Vocabulary	62
Style	53
Spelling	41
Grammar	38
Punctuation	18
Handwriting	12

The participants rated vocabulary as their biggest hurdle followed by style and spelling.

Punctuation and handwriting are perceived as minor issues for them.

Jordan (1997) distributed a similar questionnaire to academic staff teaching the postgraduates, to explore their viewpoint on the difficulties they face as readers of their students’ written work. The purpose of this is to validate if students and teachers are of the same mind. The findings of the teachers’ perceived difficulties are as below:



Table 2.2: Teachers' Difficulties in Reading Students' Written Work

Difficulties	Percentage
Style	92
Grammar	77
Vocabulary	70
Handwriting	31
Spelling	23
Punctuation	23

Style is rated considerably higher than other aspects. In the teachers' eye, students' writing style is a huge problem for them. Both parties also have different opinions on grammar. Teachers view grammar as a major problem for students but not vice versa. The findings of this study indicate that what a teacher perceives as a major problem may not always be so for students, and what is perceived as an obstacle for students may not be viewed the same way by the teacher.

The contradiction of findings in Jordan's work is explained by Leki (1990) as a common occurrence inherent in teaching composition. This is due to the fact of teacher's dual identity as reader and evaluator. Hence, classroom evaluation is thus nearly always problematic because the 'audience' is limited to the person (teacher) who also designs, assigns and assesses the writing (Reid & Kroll, 1995:18)

Drawing on the more detailed work of Weir (1988), a survey on writing difficulties among teaching staff and students disclosed that:

Teachers are more concerned with content than with mechanical accuracy features...it is the relevance and adequacy of the subject content, the clarity of the

message and the arrangement and development of written work which clearly stands out the most important criteria in teacher's assessments of written work.

In this connection, it should be noted that teachers are often linguistically unaware, and cannot always distinguish a poorly conceived idea from an idea that is expressed through inadequate English. In other words, teachers may assume that something has been poorly understood when, in fact, it has been understood but badly expressed.

#### **2.4 Research on Writing in Malaysia**

There is an extensive amount of literature on writing, largely focusing on error analysis of English learners in Malaysia. Raminah (1983) who studied essays written by trainee teachers found out that there were 3559 language errors done in writing. Out of ten grammatical errors studied, 77.9 percent language errors were found in sentence structure, word use and conjunctions. The wrong used of words was the highest degree of frequency and the lowest was on the use of conjunctions.

Khatijah (1984) has done a research on syntax mastery among secondary students. Her subjects were 72 students, male and female. These subjects were Malay speakers and non-Malay speaker. The researcher had collected 216 essays which were written by the students. She has discovered that Malay speakers were the students who mastered syntax better than non-Malay speakers. Malay speaker students tend to write longer syntax and with higher complexity of structure.

Jemaah Nazir Sekolah Persekutuan (1993:37) has done a research in order to identify the skill of writing Malay language essays among Form 1 students. The research was only to discover the quality of students essay writing was only at average level. From the research, the students' achievement in content is influenced by these factors:

- a) teacher guided the students in searching for content
- b) discussion in class
- c) discussion in group

Precisely, students who achieved excellent level in writing have enough content, the main ideas are discussed thoroughly and show good knowledge of the title or issue. This achievement is influenced by these factors:

- a) Theme is not expanded in an orderly and balanced manner
- b) Ideas are not logically sequenced
- c) Ideas are not well planned
- d) Students are not sure of main and sub ideas
- e) These are negative so why id it good in organization- rework???

In Nor Riha's (1985) work, she discovered the following weaknesses in students writing:

- a) Lack of topic or understanding of issue
- b) Failure to plan the flow of the contents
- c) Not enough ideas to develop
- d) Weak in language use

In reviewing Riha's (1985) research and comparing it to Yah Awg Nik's study(2010), one can conclude that the findings on students weaknesses in essay writing have not changed

much to date. From Yah Awang Nik study, students were good in Mechanics of writing however have failed to perform in organizing the ideas and to develop good essay contents. These students were also weak in producing variety of vocabulary and had problems in using the correct language use.

Yah Awang Nik (2010) studied the writing performance and problems faced by undergraduates. She used the ESL Composition Profile, developed by Jacob et al. (1981: 90) to rate the students' writing performance. A total of 40 undergraduates, males and females from the matriculation and diploma programs participated in this study. Two independent raters were employed to mark the students' essays. The study revealed that male and female undergraduates scored the highest in 'Mechanics' though with different percentages. The results also showed that both sexes scored the least in their writing performance in the 'Language Use' category. This category includes the mastery of word order, tenses, pronouns, nouns, articles, prepositions, agreement and sentence construction. This study will employ the same scoring tool used in the study above.

In other similar studies on error analysis on the written work of Malaysian ESL students, findings frequently highlight the lack of students' awareness on language use. In a study by Haja Mohideen Mohamad Ali (1991: 56), who studied errors committed by a group of post-secondary students whose mother tongue was Malay reveals a 'high occurrence of errors related to the sequence of tenses and subject-verb agreement'. He attributes the occurrence of these errors to the interference of the subjects' mother tongue.

Maros et al. (2007) studied the written work of a group of rural Malay secondary school students discovered that the three most frequent errors are: 1) the use of articles, 2) subject-verb- agreement, and 3) copula 'be'.

Wee (2009) when studying inter-lingual influence and intra-lingual factors revealed that the English tense system and subject-verb-agreement are the most difficult areas to master for Malay learners due to mother tongue influence and complexities with the English language itself.

From the above researches, we can conclude that language use has plagued most Malaysian students for a very long time. In most researches that study errors or problems in written work, language use or to simply put grammar is often cited as the core issue for students. This problem could be attributed to the Malaysian English syllabus which gives 'greater importance to communicative competence rather than grammatical competence' (Wee, 2009: 350) Therefore, students are constantly struggling to be competent users of the language.

Most of the work cited above looked at errors or problems in writing and the sources of these errors or problems. In my study, I will look at problems in writing from two different viewpoints, the writer (learner) and the reader (teacher). Looking back at Jordan's (1997) study, it is proven that the writer and reader have different perceptions of problems in writing. The written work of 60 students will then be marked using the ESL Composition Profile. Based on the scoring, a list of problem areas will be derived. This list will then be used to confirm the perceptions of teachers and learners of the problems faced in writing. It is important to know if both parties share the same views on writing problems across the

disciplines in the ESL Composition Profile, as the teacher can match the learning needs of the students with the syllabus and thus, the classroom assessment too.

#### **2.4.1 Matching teaching and learning needs**

A study of learners' weaknesses and strengths are important due to its pedagogical significance and its theoretical value in providing a better understanding on the linguistic behavior of the learners. Hence, there is a need to undertake a study on the nature of the errors or problems occurring in specific language situations. In the words of Corder, 'until we are able to give a linguistic explanation of the nature of the learner's errors, we can neither propose pedagogical measures to deal with them nor infer from them the processes of learning (1974: 205).

By studying the problems in second language writing, it will hopefully give teachers an insight what the learners are thinking, guide teachers towards meeting his pedagogical needs, and to correct learners' wrong assumptions while moving closer to the actual system of the target language (Bell, 1981). Errors and problems in mastering a certain skill provide feedback to teachers on the effectiveness of the teaching and materials and procedures. The information derived from any linguistic study conducted on a specific group of learners could serve as the basis of syllabuses design or teaching. This information may not paint a complete picture of the learner's knowledge in the language, but it is the most significant source of information about the extent of his knowledge. This will enable teachers and learners themselves to understand the psychological processes involved in the learning of the language. For instance, if grammar is a troublesome area for Malay learners, this could be due to the influence from their first language, lack of practice or even insufficient

exposure to the target language. Only by studying the source of errors or problems, teachers will be able to match teaching and learning needs of the learners.

Besides looking at perceptions of teachers and students, factors that contribute towards students' attitudes to essay writing should also be taken into consideration.

## **2.5 Factors Contributing To Students' Attitudes towards Essay Writing**

There are several factors that may influence students' attitudes towards essay writing. Most studies provide an account of what writers do when writing. Few studies, however, deal with these issues from the students' point of view, that is, with students' perceptions, experiences and attitudes towards writing. Recently, Johns stresses that 'personal theories' of writing held by teachers and students 'influences how academic literacy are taught and learnt' (1997, as cited in Petric, 2002: 11). A detailed discussion of the factors is outlined below.

### **2.5.1 Feelings**

Many second language learners are frightened and dislike essay writing due to misleading perceptions they have developed in their minds (Flesch, 1972). They often feel afraid and fear criticism on what they have produced in their essays. These feelings are due to their inability to communicate like the native speakers of English and mainly due to little practice in their writing. Thus, they fear their audience may correct or criticize their writing (Rizk, 2003).

### **2.5.2 ‘Writer’s Block’ and ‘Writing Anxiety’**

Many students experience ‘writer’s block’ because they are not interested in writing. Writer’s block is often caused by conflicted feelings. Everyone finds writing a challenge. Many writers, however, compound their problems by employing weak writing strategies. When their methods fail, they give up. Rosenbaum (1982) explains that writer’s block is caused by the feelings of fear of failure, self doubt, and when depression has become severe. Thus, writer’s block can affect and hinder students from writing. These writers often have various negative thoughts about themselves. Buchholz (1983:1) adds “Poll any group and you will likely find that most consider themselves inferior writers. Ask them why. They will tell you that writing just bedevils them. Besides, they say, I’m math oriented. Wasn’t born with the writing gift.”

Writing anxiety’ is found to be another factor which blocks the students from writing. Ryan (2002) and Sherwood (1993) claim that writing anxiety can result from a variety of social and academic factors such as students may worry about their grade in class or the deadline for a paper may be encroaching upon them. Besides that, students tend to be competitive by nature or preoccupied with college life and social issues, or their professor may possibly seem intimidating and relentless. Thus, writing anxiety may cause students to ignore instructor’s feedback on their essay and avoid classes that require writing. Buchholz (1983:1) also reports that this bad experience can cause the students to “become the victim of the writing anxiety syndrome”. Daly (1977) found that people with high levels of writing apprehension tend to be poor writers compared to people with moderate or low levels. Anxiety is a kind of stress. It can either bring success or failure to student’s writing.



According to McClary (1990:66), “stress can be intense enough to keep the adult student from ever succeeding, or it can be intense enough to motivate exceptional academic accomplishments”. Conversely Sogunro (1998) found out that students’ anxiety can be beneficial to learning because it actually motivates students to pay attention to their writing.

### **2.5.3 Negative Feedback**

Writing can be a struggle for some students just like a visit to the dentist’s office. Students tend to dread essay writing for many reasons. First, they may not like to be forced by their teachers to write down their thoughts on paper on a frequent basis. Secondly, they may dislike the rigid conventions associated with writing. Thirdly, they may get discouraged from the criticisms received from their peers and teachers on their work. Lastly, they tend to dislike finding too many ‘red marks and circles’ on their assignments.

Teachers’ feedback on students’ writing is important in order to overcome the negative attitudes about essay writing. According to Shaughnessy (1977), student writers often think that good writing means correct and error free writing. Here, teachers need to play an important role in explaining and clearing these wrong perceptions among their students.

Teachers’ criticisms can also cause anger and frustration amongst students. Most students do not enjoy their teachers controlling and commenting on their writing. They cannot accept their weaknesses. According to Barnhart (1997), students often had this to say:

I was a narrow-minded person when entering the class. I had my beliefs and I would very seldom listen to anybody else’s. I also had a hard time taking the

criticism and the advice peers had to give me. I like the way my essay was, and I did not want to change anything.

Based on the above statement by Barnhart, Musgrove (1998) adds that students often feel uncomfortable when receiving negative comments about their essays. This situation can hurt their feelings and shape their attitudes.

#### **2.5.4 Influences from Parents and Peers**

Sometimes students just love to write. However they are often distracted by their peers or parents. Instead of giving encouragement, they often discourage. They do not find anything important or interesting about essay writing. Students who love writing need to instill positive attitudes within themselves in order to rid themselves of those negative vibes in order to become successful writers. Flesch (1972:2) says:

Why professional writing? You don't want to be a writer, you're not interested in writing. Only if you learn how to use professional techniques will you be able to improve the writing you have to do for your own purposes. This will mean a basic change in your attitude.

Similar to Flesch , Gibson (2002) also believes that people in general have a great influence on students' writing attitude. According to him, people can influence students by saying "you're wasting your time writing. You'll never be published'. These negative attitudes and influences will dishearten students.

### **2.5.5 Teacher's Role**

Teachers must introduce and use various styles and new approaches in teaching essay writing. The same method of teaching can be boring to students. Different students have different topic areas which interest them. According to a writer in an English Web Project for English 101C (2002), her attitude towards writing depends on what she has to write. If she gets to pick what she can write or is assigned something that she has interest in, she has a positive attitude towards writing. Some of those things would be stories about her family and writing suspense type stories. However, poetry writing and long stories would be viewed negatively.

In the researcher's view, teachers in Malaysia should take into consideration their students' interests although in reality, this may not be entirely possible due to their workloads in school and pressures to hand out passing grades for exams.

Academic writing does set boundaries and limitations. It puts students in an uncomfortable situation. Many times what they want to write is limited by requirements that are either imposed by the teacher or curriculum. In most cases in Malaysia, students with high levels of writing comprehension consider writing to be unrewarding, and they will avoid classes with writing assignments, if possible. From the researcher's experience as an English language teacher, students will excuse themselves from class, go to the toilet frequently, and pretend to be sick or disrupt the class. Teachers should give students freedom and choice to write on whatever types of writing and essay topics that interest them.

The curriculum in Malaysia is examination- oriented; teachers and students have neither freedom nor time to explore language creatively. Teachers are also under pressure to produce excellent students with a string of A's. Hence, teachers more often than not teach

for exams. Students are drilled on potential writing topics and required to memorize vocabulary at times. Thus, they may have negative attitudes towards writing.

Teachers must also be more lenient and careful when marking their students' written work. Students will not be motivated to write in the future if their teachers provide more negative compared to positive ones in their essays. Taking this into account, Limone (2005:1) appeals to teachers to:

Consider the anguished and frustrated student who, when seeing each of his written assignments splattered with red ink, reaches the tragic misconception that "I can't write, so why bother?" This is the most tragic result of our ineffective methods of 'teaching' writing. "Most kids can't write" is our attitude. "I can't write." respond our students.

Dickinson (1992) reminds teachers to give more positive feedback on the students' essays. She says that she always begins by pointing out some good things in students' essays. In contrast to the statement made by Dickinson (1992), Foster (1992) found that providing positive feedback without negative ones in essay writing can form "a fool's paradise of students who love their own writing so much they will be devastated when somebody criticizes it later".

Essay writing needs to be revised carefully. Students must also take teachers' comments positively because Ziv (1982) found that instructors become frustrated when students ignore their comments and suggestions. For instance some students even delete problematic passages rather than trying to revise them. In addition, teachers must stop accusing students of not being good writers. Accusations of laziness, poor motivation, as well as reprehensible attitude are often directed toward deficit writers. The result can be a serious

loss of incentive, a generalised academic disenchantment and demoralisation (Levine, 1998). Teachers have to reconsider their comments written on students' work and improve their teaching styles. If implemented correctly, these initiatives will definitely have positive effects on students' writing performances.

## **2.6 Perceptions towards ESL Writing**

Students usually bring their assumptions and belief about what a writing class should offer and in what way. One of the main objectives of ESL teaching is to provide students with ample opportunities to practice and learn how to write effectively. Hence, students' needs, perceptions and present writing proficiency levels should be sought first in order to tailor a writing syllabus that meet their needs. To achieve this, a needs analysis needs to be done by the teacher.

Tony (1992) did a research on ESL graduate students' perceptions towards writing. The findings showed:

- a) Some students need more time in understanding an L2 writing assignment as compared to L1 writing.
- b) Some students find it difficult to change the planning style (from L1 to L2)
- c) A distinction in a function of writing to unfamiliar audience
- d) Primarily thinking of planning writing in L1
- e) L2 linguistic limitation (vocabulary and grammar)

- f) L1 interference makes L2 writing more focused and time consuming and less fluent and makes the texts produced less sophisticated (simpler words, shorter sentences) and less expressive of the writer's thoughts and intentions.
- g) Differences in word order
- h) Word order in L1 is more flexible
- i) Limited nature of L2 vocabulary makes them unable to express their ideas, feelings and perceptions accurately and precisely
- j) Grammatical problem due to L1 and L2 differences

The suggestions collected from the students towards writing are:

- a) Teachers should spend more time in planning the writing lesson (a flow chart of lesson planning)
- b) Teachers should introduce more of L2 culture – history, customs, habits and literature
- c) Teacher should speak loudly, clearly and repeat important points in classroom
- d) Teachers must pay attention to students individually and raise students interest and maintain a lively classroom atmosphere
- e) Teachers should create an atmosphere of encouragement to help the students do their best and to enjoy writing in English

Writing in their first language is painful for most learners, but when it comes to writing in the second language, the students' pain and hardship triples (Gilmore, 2009). The issue that may arise here is whether second language student writers attempt to think directly through

the second language or through translating from the first language while composing a text. In a study, Wang and Wen (2002, as cited in Sadiq Abdulwahed Ahmed Ismail 2011:76) confirmed that:

The L2 writing process is a bilingual event since the second language writers have two languages (L1 and L2) at their disposal when they are attempting to compose a text in L2. However, the central problem is that it is not clear how the use of L1 is related to the occurrence of different cognitive activities in second language writing, such as planning and generating ideas.

For example, students participated in the study by Sadiq Abdulwahed Ahmed Ismail (2011: 76) ‘use the Arabic language, which is written from right to left with different script. Hence, when trying to use L1 writing strategies, they may need to carry out different cognitive activities to adjust those strategies to the norm of writing in L2. Thus, learners’ L1 experience and knowledge can play a significant role in the development of L2 writing skill’.

Teachers should be sensitive towards students’ needs and difficulties they may face in order for them to have a positive attitude about writing in a second language. Teachers should also try to understand the first language writing strategies that may facilitate or hinder second language writing skills.

## **2.7 Students’ Expectations and Lecturers’ Requirements**

In Barker’s (1999) study, he points out that students often assume that the writing expected from them in schools and universities are similar. However, students are quick to realize by their first semester that they are not adequately prepared for the writing demands required

at university. The subject lecturers do not seem to be aware that writing demands at university are different to those that the students had learned at school and that students have not yet come to terms with the writing skills expected of them.

The students want university lecturers to be more like their teachers in school. They expect university lecturers to provide explicit instruction about requirements of written tasks, feedback on written work and be available for guidance. On the other hand, lecturers expect students to take responsibility for their own learning and be able to write independently without explicit instruction.

The students in Barker's (1999) study did not mention difficulties with surface level features such as correct spelling and sentence structure in either the questionnaires or interview. Perhaps students did not perceive these aspects of writing to be important or challenging for them. The lecturer, however, did express the importance of correctness of surface level features and that students had difficulties in this area. If this had been pointed out to students by way of feedback on written work, the students may not have taken notice.

According to Bickmore-Brand (1998), one of the many problems faced by first year students is learning to recognize and meet their lecturers' expectations in written tasks. Students need to come to terms with differing lecturers' expectations between subjects and often within subjects. Students are often faced with a number of different lecturers for each subject and also different tutors and demonstrators for practical classes and tutorials. Success at university depends largely upon how quickly students adjust to the expectations of their lecturers, tutors and demonstrators. This adjustment is especially important in



relation to writing skills, as writing is the most common medium used to assess students' grasp of the content of their courses.

Nancy (2008) in her research of understanding students' perceptions of difficulty with academic writing found out that students tended to perceive academic writing to be difficult. Ninety-five (95) first year Japanese University students perceived language-related components of academic writing to be more difficult than structure/content-related components. Moreover, it was found that a great number of students expressed a high degree of difficulty with research design.

## **2.8 Inter- rater Reliability**

Wang (2009) studied the rater reliability in scoring composition in the test of English as a foreign language (EFL) and focused on the inter-rater reliability as well as several interactions between raters and the other facets involved (e.g. examinees, rating criteria and rating methods).

In his paper, the methods used to establish High Inter-rater Reliability are as follow:

- a) Setting the standard
- b) Training the scorers
- c) Identifying Candidates by numbers not by name
- d) Setting the Specific Standards before the "Real Scoring"
- e) Sampling by the Chief Examiner or Team Leader
- f) Using "reliability scripts"
- g) Routine double marking

Wang (2009) added that, there are two ways to score written work; holistic scoring and analytic scoring.

### **2.8.1 Holistic Scoring**

Holistic scoring is a type of rating where examiners are asked not to pay too much attention to any one aspect of a candidate's performance, but rather to judge general writing ability rather than to make separate judgments about a candidate's organisation, grammar, spelling, etc. This kind of scoring has the advantage of being very rapid.

Experienced scorers can judge a one-page of writing in just several minutes or even less. As it is possible for each composition to appear just to a certain rater but not others, the examiner's mark may be a highly subjective one. However, if assessment is based on several judgments', the end result is far more reliable than a mark based on a single judgment. Because the inherent unreliability in holistic marking of compositions, it is essential to combine a banding system, or, at least a brief description of the various grades of achievement expected to be attained by the examinees.

### **2.8.2 Analytic Scoring**

Unlike holistic scoring, analytic scoring relies on a rating guide that separates and weighs textual components. Criteria are prioritized before scoring. Thus components such as content, language use and mechanics are preassigned a maximum value with decreasing step scales or bands described within each component. Since most teachers have little opportunity to enlist the services of two or three colleagues in marking compositions, the analytic method analytic scoring is recommended for such purposes.

According to Charney (1985), holistic rating is a quick, impressionistic qualitative procedure for sorting or ranking samples of writing. It is not designed to correct or edit a piece, or to diagnose its weaknesses as the analytic scoring does. Instead, it is a set of procedures for assigning a value to a writing sample according to previously established criteria. To supplement the holistic scoring, teachers then have to provide a written or oral feedback. Without this feedback, the single scoring may not mean much to students as the score does not represent any particular textual component. Students are not informed of their strengths and weaknesses. Constructive feedback is important to all second language learners and young learners especially to support their writing development and nurture their confidence.

## **2.9 The ESL Composition Profile**

Haswell (2007:4) lauds the profile because it is just that – a profile of the student, not a categorization of the student. According to him, it encourages an evaluation that is complex and thorough. For instance, a student can record a high score in content but low in language use – a complexity that befits second language learners who often show uneven writing skills in the second language. This profile contradicts the holistic scoring method which hides this unevenness by assigning a single score.

Since the criteria descriptors are only reminders of larger concepts in composition, a clear understanding of them is imperative for effective use of the profile. The profile represents the key principles of writing – the rules, conventions and guidelines - that writers must observe to create a successful piece of writing. The profile has four levels of competence. The first two levels indicate that successful communication has occurred (although

differing in degree) while the two lower levels suggest there is a communication breakdown of some sort – either partial or completely. The criteria looked at are content, organisation, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics (refer 3.4).

To illustrate, the criteria proposed for a written work to be rated excellent is represented by the “Excellent to Very Good” mastery level. The first criterion is “content” which has the descriptors as knowledgeable, substantive, thorough development of thesis and relevant to the assigned topic. The descriptor “knowledgeable” includes understanding of the subjects and the facts or information used by the writer. While “substantive” means that several points are discussed and there are sufficient details. There is also originality with the concrete details to illustrate, define, compare and contrast factual information supporting the thesis. “Thorough development of thesis” is described as the thesis is expanded sufficiently to convey a sense of completeness and there is a specific method of development like comparison and contrast, illustration, definition, description, example and fact. The writer is also aware of different points of view. The last descriptor “relevant to assigned topic” is described as all information is clearly pertinent to the topic discussed.

This analytic scoring guide is more suitable to evaluate second language learners as compared to holistic scoring as allows teachers to isolate and rate specific textual features. This profile can be used to reflect priorities assigned to specific aspects of written products and writing processes featured in the syllabus (Ferris & Hedgecock 1998:314) Descriptors can be constructed to represent distinct discursive and linguistic objectives (e.g. argumentative structures, the use of logical connectors, complex vocabulary) and weightings for textual components can be varied to channel learners’ efforts toward improving targeted skills (Ferris & Hedgecock, 1998:314). For instance, the teacher can emphasized idea development and fluency by increasing the weighting of content from

40% to 60%, thus reducing the importance of the other criteria. The explicitness of this scoring also offers consistent, explicit feedback as teachers can underline or circle descriptor items that apply to the essay being evaluated. I believe that the ESL Composition Profile allows teachers to match teaching and testing; an advantage and flexibility not offered by the holistic scoring method.

## **2.10 Conclusion**

Furthermore, as reported in Yah Awang Nik (2010), Jacobs et al (1981:97) emphasized that the general procedures for determining good criteria in writing performance are firstly, take two or three minutes to evaluate and read the essay twice. Then, form an overall impression or whether the writer has delivered a clear and complete message. This means that the writer's ideas are readily apparent, appropriately sequenced to fulfill the readers' expectations and adequately developed to convey a complete message. Based on the written work, assign a score for 'content and organization' which most accurately describe the writer's overall effect. Then, the next step is to read the essay again to verify the reader's first impression and evaluate the communicative effort of the writer. The mastery level of vocabulary, language use and mechanics are also determined by referring to the descriptors. This will be further discussed in Chapter 3.

Hedge (1990) states that an effective written work has certain fundamental elements: a high degree of organization in the development of ideas and information, a high degree of accuracy so that there is no ambiguity of meaning, the use of complex grammatical devices for focus and emphasis and a careful choice of vocabulary. She further advocates that grammatical patterns and sentence structures to create a style, which is appropriate to the

topic, are also important for effective writing. Therefore, Jacobs et al. and Hedge are of the same opinion on criteria of good writing.

It is believed that good performance in writing requires several skills such as getting the grammar right, having a wide range of vocabulary, demonstrating a mastery of conventions in mechanics of writing, and being able to construct effective and complex sentences. Last but not least, good and effective writing performance requires the writers to be knowledgeable about the topic assigned to him or her to write.

In a nutshell, besides studying teachers' and students' perceptions on the difficulty in writing, the ESL Composition Profile can be used to confirm these perceptions. The teacher can then take measures to address these problems by matching the syllabus and assessment in the classroom. It is also important for teachers to understand students' attitudes towards writing and factors that may influence or contribute towards students' written work. A good teacher will be able to channel this information to ensure writing lessons meet students' needs, interest and ability

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

This chapter discusses the methodology involved in this research. Among the aspects of discussion are research design, sampling technique, research instruments, pilot test and data analysis.

#### **3.1 Research Design**

Two sets of questionnaires were used to collect data from the respondents; 60 Diploma of Accounting students (2011 Intake) from UITM, Dungun, Terengganu and 10 English Language lecturers. These ten lecturers are the teachers who are in charge of teaching the diploma students. Their teaching experience ranges between 1 to 18 years. The questionnaires used in this study are the ones developed by Jordan (1997).

Students were required to write an English essay in order to collect the data to answer third research question in this study. See Data Analysis 3.7.1 below for details. Students' written work will be rated by two raters using the ESL Composition Profile, developed by Jacobs et al. (1981:90).

#### **3.2 Sampling**

60 Diploma of Accounting students (2011 Intake) from UITM, Dungun, Terengganu were chosen to participate in this study. . These students were selected due to convenience since

their English Language lecturer is a close friend of the researcher. Due to this close relationship and easy access to the participants, interview sessions were easy to arrange.

Of the 60 respondents, there are 43 females and 17 males. They are all aged between 18 to 19 years old. These students are coincidentally all Malays. Ten English Language lecturers from the English Faculty were also asked to answer the questionnaire. These lecturers are asked to rate the problematic areas in writing faced by students to answer the second research question. Of the 10 lecturers, 7 are females and 3 are males. These lecturers have been teaching from 1 to 18 years. Their qualifications range from degree to masters degree. These lecturers are the lecturers who are in charge of teaching English Language to the diploma students. The table below shows the profile of the lecturers:

Table 3.1: Profile of Lecturers

No.	Gender	Age	Qualification	Years of teaching experience
1	F	25	Degree	1
2	F	25	Degree	1
3	F	27	Degree	2
4	F	28	Degree	2
5	F	36	Masters	8
6	F	39	Masters	12
7	F	43	Masters	15
8	M	29	Degree	3
9	M	35	Degree	7
10	M	45	Masters	18



### **3.3 Instrument**

To collect the data, the instruments used are questionnaires for students and teachers, ESL Composition Profile as the scoring guide to mark the English essays and a paper pencil method interview carried out among students and lecturers. About 20 students and 3 lecturers were asked to participate in the interview. The interview was done to seek answers regarding writing from students' and lecturers' point of view. There were 5 questions asked during the interview. These students and lecturers will be asked on the difficulties of writing which include, their perceptions on writing before and after enrolling diploma program. Besides questions on difficulties in writing, they will also name factors which they think will help them in writing. The interview attempts to get a clearer picture of students' problems in writing. The questions were explained thoroughly to avoid any uncertainties.

The student participants were given a questionnaire consisting of three sections; Section A, B and C. In Section A, they were asked to write an argumentative essay. This type of essay is chosen in order it is a common question in their final examination besides the other three types of essays; descriptive, expository and narrative. Another reason for deciding on argumentative writing is because it is the hardest and most challenging essay among all. Argumentative tasks demand a more elaborated content and influences learners to use more advanced vocabulary and grammatical structures as compared to other types of essays (Skehan & Foster, 1999). Thus, it is hoped that an argumentative essay will yield a wider range and equal distribution of all aspects in the ESL Composition Profile.

The title given is 'Many teenagers are involved in various social problems such as illegal racing and drug abuse because they have too much freedom. Do you agree with the statement?' Students were encouraged to write freely and they were given 60 minutes to

complete the writing task. The rationale of choosing the topic is because it is part of the syllabus and the students have gone through the process of finding and analyzing the content of the topic.

The students were asked to write the essay first before the questionnaire. This is to give students sufficient time to focus on writing and also to prevent the questionnaire from 'pressuring' the students'. Letting students rate their writing problems in the beginning will only discourage and distract them from the writing task as they will be reminded of their weaknesses thus, viewing the task negatively. Grabe and Kaplan (1996), emphasizes the importance of having positive attitudes in writing. They recommend that students 'have an open attitude to their academic environment and to sorts of writing tasks they will be asked to perform. With positive attitudes towards writing, it will help the process of writing succeed.

Next, in Section B, there are 13 questions to document demographic data like gender, qualifications, family background, etc (refer appendix). The demographic questions are limited to only those that are important for the analysis. Questions like students' SPM English grades and medium of communication used by students outside the classroom are among the questions asked to give a better understanding of the students' linguistic background.

Lastly in Section C, a questionnaire designed by Jordan (1997) is administered. In the questionnaire, students have to rate the most problematic areas in writing. The areas included in the questionnaire are Grammar, Vocabulary, Style, Spelling, Punctuation and Handwriting. However, for this study, the questionnaire is modified to 7 most problematic

areas where Content of writing is included. Due to the pilot study done, it was shown that content also poses problems for students in writing.

Jordan’s questionnaire originally employs five-point Likert Scale as shown below:

<b>Five-points Likert Scale</b>	<b>Value</b>
Completely Agree	5
Agree	4
Not Sure	3
Disagree	2
Completely Disagree	1

Prior to the actual research, a pilot study was carried out on 15 diploma students and two selected English language lecturers. Both, teacher and students answered the questionnaires. After the pilot study was done, the questionnaire was then modified to a four-point likert scale instead of a five-point likert scale. The ‘Not Sure’ category was removed. The rationale behind this adaptation is because during the pilot study, 8 out of 15 samples chose ‘Not Sure’ for most questions. Hence, no significant data was collected.

For the actual study, the Likert scale used is as below:

<b>Four-point Likert Scale</b>	<b>Value</b>
Completely Agree	4
Agree	3
Disagree	2
Completely Disagree	1

According to Nunan , students’ perceptions are important. He encourages researchers to seek out learners’ perspectives because he argued “no curriculum can claim to be truly learner-centered unless the learner’s subjective needs and perceptions relating to the process of learning are taken into account”(1989:177).

Students’ essays were marked by two raters. The two raters were the English lecturers from the faculty itself. These raters have gone through the inter-rater reliability test (refer 3.4). Raters will use ESL Composition Profile to mark the essays. This profile is a scoring guide developed by Jacob et al. (1981) (refer table 3.2)

Table 3.2: ESL Composition Profile

<b>Formative Multiple Trait Scoring Guide</b>		
Student :		
Date:		
Topic:		
<b>Score</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>Criteria</b>
<b>Content</b>	30 – 27	<b>Excellent to Very Good-</b> *knowledgeable*substantive*thorough development of thesis*relevant to assigned topics*
	26 – 22	<b>Good to Average-</b> *some knowledge of subjects*adequate range*limited development of thesis*mostly relevant to topic but lacks detail*
	21 – 17	<b>Fair to Poor-</b> *limited knowledge of subject*little substance*inadequate development of topic*
	16 – 13	<b>Very Poor-</b> *does not show knowledge of subjects*non-substantive*not-pertinent*OR not enough to evaluate
<b>Organization</b>	20 – 18	<b>Excellent to Very Good-</b> *fluent expression*ideas clearly stated/supported*succinct*well-organized*logical sequencing*cohesive
	17 – 14	<b>Good to Average-</b> *somewhat choppy*loosely organized but main ideas stand out*limited support*logical but

	13 – 10  9 – 7	incomplete sequencing  <b>Fair to Poor</b> -*non-fluent*ideas confused or disconnected*lacks logical sequencing and development  <b>Very Poor</b> -*does not communicate*no organization*OR not enough to evaluate
<b>Vocabulary</b>	20 – 18  17 – 14  13 – 10  9 – 7	<b>Excellent to Very Good</b> -*sophisticated range*effective word/idiom choice and usage*word form mastery*appropriate register  <b>Good to Average</b> -*adequate range*occasional errors of word/idiom form, choice and usage but meaning not obscured  <b>Fair to Poor</b> -*limited range*frequent errors of word/idiom form, choice, usage*meaning confused or obscured  <b>Very Poor</b> -*essentially translation, little knowledge of English vocabulary, idioms, word form*OR not enough to evaluate
<b>Language Use</b>	25 – 22  21 – 18  17 – 11  10 – 5	<b>Excellent to Very Good</b> -*effective complex construction*few errors of agreement, tense, number, word order/function, articles, pronouns, prepositions  <b>Good to Average</b> -*effective but simple constructions*minor problems in complex construction, several errors of agreement, tense, number, word order/function, articles, pronouns, prepositions but meaning seldom obscured  <b>Fair to Poor</b> -*major problems in simple/complex constructions, frequent errors of negation, agreement, tense, number, word order/function, articles, pronouns, prepositions and/or fragments, run-ons, deletions, meaning confused or obscured  <b>Very Poor</b> -*virtually no mastery of sentence construction rules, dominated by errors, does not communicate*OR not enough to evaluate
<b>Mechanics</b>	5  4  3	<b>Excellent to Very Good</b> -*demonstrates mastery of conventions*few errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization and paragraphing  <b>Good to Average</b> -*occasional errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing but meaning not obscured  <b>Fair to Poor</b> -*frequent errors of spelling, punctuation,

	2	capitalization, paragraphing*poor handwriting*meaning confused or obscured  <b>Very Poor</b> -*no mastery of conventions*dominated by errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing*handwriting illegible*OR not enough to evaluate`
<b>TOTAL SCORE:</b>		<b>READER COMMENTS :</b>

Besides the 60 students, 10 English lecturers were also asked to participate in the research. A similar questionnaire was administered except the lecturers did not have to write an essay in section A. Lecturers answered some demographic questions and then rated the most problematic areas in writing faced by students. The data collected will be used to answer the third research question- teachers' perspectives regarding problematic areas in English writing.

A short interview session, a paper pencil method, was carried out to confirm the findings. Twenty students and three lecturers were chosen to participate in the interview session based on the questionnaires. Both lecturers and students were asked 5 questions each. These questions are regarding their views on writing, difficulties encountered and factors affecting the writing performance.

### **3.4 Validity and Reliability**

Two raters were chosen to mark students' writing essays. These raters were the English lecturers from the same faculty. These lecturers have the experience in teaching English at tertiary level for almost 10 to 15 years. They were chose because of the wide experience that they had in marking students' written work. These raters were asked to rate students'

essays using analytic scoring method through ESL Composition Profile. The most important thing, these raters had seated for inter-rater reliability test.

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

The data will be analyzed according to the stated research questions.

#### **3.5.1 First Research Question**

The first research question sought to identify the problematic areas in writing faced by students, ESL Composition Profile, developed by Jacob, the scoring guide was used to mark students' essays. Two raters were chosen to mark and rate the essays. In the scoring guide, each category has their own percentage; Content (30%), organization (20%), vocabulary (20%), language use (25%) and mechanics (5%).

#### **3.5.2 Second Research Question**

The second research question attempts to identify students' perceptions on the problematic areas in English writing. The students will rate the difficulties in writing according to their perceptions by using Jordan's questionnaire. In the questionnaire, there are 7 statements to be rated. The students will rate the 7 statements using a four-point likert scale. Statements which are rated highly by the respondents are considered as problematic areas in writing.

#### **3.5.3 Third Research Question**

Lastly, the third research question which aims to identify teachers' perceptions on the problematic areas in English writing uses the same method used for the second research

question. However, for this question, the focus is to count statements rated the highest and lowest by ten English language lecturers regarding the most problematic areas in English writing faced by their students.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

This chapter discusses the methodology used in the research. The findings of each method used will be presented and analyzed in the next chapter.



## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This chapter presents the data gathered through the collected questionnaires. The data on respondents' demographics is presented at the beginning of the chapter followed by the findings to answer the 3 research questions proposed in chapter 1.

The research attempts to answer three research questions:

- 1) What are the problematic areas of writing faced by students based on the ESL Composition Profile by Jacob et al. (1981)?
- 2) What are the students' perceptions regarding the most problematic areas in English writing?
- 3) What are the teachers' perceptions regarding the most problematic areas in English writing?

To answer the first research question, students' written works were rated using Jacobs's scoring guide, the ESL Composition Profile. There are 5 main components of writing that raters can use in order to rate the students' performance in essay writing, they are content, organization, vocabulary, language use and mechanics (refer 3.3).

To answer the second and third research questions, Jordan's questionnaire was used to gather data on students' and teachers' perceptions. There are 7 categories in Jordan's questionnaire which includes; content, vocabulary, style, spelling, grammar, punctuation and handwriting. The reason for using Jordan's questionnaire was to compare students' and

teachers' perceptions. Students may have different perceptions of what they think as problematic areas when writing. However, teachers' perceptions might differ from the students. Teachers' perceptions are perhaps based on their teaching experience as to problems faced by students when writing an essay.

#### **4.1 Analysis of Demographics**

##### **4.1.2 Students**

The first part of the questionnaire contains items on respondents' background information. It includes items on gender, SPM English language grades, language use outside classroom and personal perceptions towards the English Language.

Information on gender was asked as the norm of a questionnaire in order to start a research. However in this research, gender is not a factor that is studied. Information on students' SPM English grades was gathered in order to relate the students' writing performance in college with their past examination score. The researcher wanted to see whether students' past performance in the English language reflects their performance in college. However these are not the focus of the research and only essay writing is studied in this research. Nevertheless it is assumed that the level of proficiency as well as language use may affect essay writing abilities. Kobayashi & Rinnert (2008) stated in their research that the development of students' L2 writing can be influenced by multiple factors such as L1 writing ability, L2 proficiency and writing experiences in both languages.

Information on language used outside classroom was asked as to see whether language use affects the writing performance or vice versa. In the questionnaire, perceptions towards the

English language were collected in order to confirm the findings in Jordan's questionnaire (refer 4.3.4)

Table 4.1: Gender of Respondents

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
Female	43	71.7
Male	17	28.3
Total	60	100

The gender of respondents above indicates that from the total of 60 respondents, the majority of them are female students, 71.7%. less than 30.0% were males. As mentioned earlier, gender is not a factor that is considered in the research. However, this finding is reflective of students' intake in local university where female students are more than male students.

. Table 4.2: Students' SPM English Language Grades

<b>English Grades</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
A	6	10
A-	7	11.7
B+	14	23.4
B	12	20

B-	4	6.6
C+	4	6.6
C	6	10
D	7	11.7
	<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>

The table above shows the respondents English language grades in the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) examination. 10% of the respondents obtained A, 11.7% of the respondents obtained A-, 23.4% of the respondents obtained B+, 20% of the respondents obtained B, 6.6% of the respondents obtained B- and C+, 10% of the respondents obtained C and 11.7% of the respondents obtained D. Students' SPM English Grades will be compared to students' essay writing grades to provide insights into the problems faced by students in essay writing (refer 4.3.3).

## 4.2 Analysis of Findings

### 4.2.1 Students' Writing Scores

The written work was marked using the ESL Composition Profile. Below are the scores for the individual level.

Table 4.3: Students' Scores in Essay Writing

Category	Score	No. of Students	Level
<b>Content</b>	30 – 27	0	Excellent to Very Good
	26 – 22	11	Good to Average
	21 - 17	31	Fair to Poor
	16 - 13	18	Very Poor
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>60</b>	

<b>Organization</b>	20 – 18	9	Excellent to Very Good
	17 - 14	20	Good to Average
	13 - 10	26	Fair to Poor
	9 – 7	5	Very Poor
	TOTAL	60	
<b>Vocabulary</b>	20 - 18	3	Excellent to Very Good
	17 - 14	24	Good to Average
	13 - 10	28	Fair to Poor
	9 – 7	5	Very Poor
	TOTAL	60	
<b>Language Use</b>	25 - 22	0	Excellent to Very Good
	21 - 18	10	Good to Average
	17 - 11	42	Fair to Poor
	10 - 5	8	Very Poor
	TOTAL	60	
<b>Mechanics</b>	5	0	Excellent to Very Good
	4	50	Good to Average
	3	10	Fair to Poor
	2	0	Very Poor
	TOTAL	60	

In the ‘content’ category, many students scored between 17 – 21 which translates to a ‘Fair to Poor’ band. This indicates that content may be a problem for them. The sub traits of this band represent as having limited knowledge of the subject, little substance and inadequate development of topic. From the students’ essays studied, they had limited ideas and knowledge. The issues that they have discussed were very limited to blaming parents, schools and society for not giving attention to teenagers which have caused them to social problems. These factors are true however there were many other factors were not brought up in their essay such as the influence of technology and media to the children itself which has led them to these problems. Besides the factors that have been discussed in the essays, students have failed to discuss on how important religion education into their essay to support the ideas and content of their essay writing. (Refer 3.3 to see title of essay)

Next, in the ‘organization’ category, 26 of the students, scored 10 – 13 only, which place them also at the level of ‘Fair to Poor’. This shows that a large number of students were not fluent; their ideas were either confusing or disconnected and lack logical sequencing and development.

For ‘Vocabulary’, most students were in the ‘Fair to Poor’ range. They either had frequent errors of word formation, wrong use of idiom or inappropriate word choice. The students were confused with the meaning of word they have used. Some examples that were found in the students’ essay were:

a) *Every teenager is very **useful** one day as they will become a leader for our country.*

This student had used the vocabulary ‘useful’ to show how important a teenager is as the leader in the future.

b) *As teachers, we should not **pressure** our student with homework.*

This student had used ‘pressure’ instead of burden.

Next, in ‘Language Use’, 42 students scored 11 – 17, putting them once again in the ‘Fair to Poor’ level. Majority of the students had major problems in simple/complex constructions, frequent errors of negation, agreement, tense, number, word order/function, articles, pronouns, prepositions and/or fragments, run-ons, deletions and meaning confused or obscured. Some examples from the students’ written work:

a) *All parents always want to be **besides** their kids but they always busy to make money for family, always **go out early and get home late**.*

This student should have used ‘with’ instead of besides, ‘go to work early in the morning’ instead of always go out early and ‘come home late night’ instead of using get home late.

b) *Firstly, I think the parents **responsible to their children are very big** and they should **concern about them** more seriously.*

This student wanted to say how great parents' responsibility towards their children and how they should have be more sensitive and concern about their child.

In 'mechanics', 50 students obtained only 4 marks which represents the 'Good to Average' level. Although students made occasional errors of spelling, in punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing but meaning was not obscured.

In conclusion, students scored poor marks in content, organization, language use and vocabulary. Of all these categories, students scored the worst in Language Use followed by Content, Vocabulary and Organization. Mechanics is the only category students scored exceptionally well. These findings show that students have mastered mechanics of writing maybe from school. However in other categories, students scored lowly. This may be because the expectations for essay writing in school and college are different. In schools, essay writing is not academically assessed like they are in college. For example essay writing only comprise a small section of the English Language examination, whereas in college, all assignments and most exam questions are in the form of essays. In school, essay topics are simpler and more general unlike the writing syllabus in tertiary education. Students are also exposed to a wider range of writing style such as report writing, proposals, research report and academic writing. Furthermore, the essay writing that were administered in this study was an argumentative essay which requires a high level of expertise in writing (refer 3.3).

The table below shows students writing grades and the percentages.

Table 4.4: Students' Writing Grades

<b>Essay Writing Grades</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
A	8	13 %
B	35	58 %
C	13	22 %
D	4	7 %
	<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>

The table above shows the, students' essay writing grades. 8 students or 13% of the students obtained an A in essay writing. The majority of the students 35 students scored a B. Students who obtained C accounted for 22%. A small percentage of students obtained a D. Students' essay writing grades will be discussed in retrospect to their SPM English grades in a later section (refer 4.2.3).



#### 4.2.2 Students' Perceptions

Below are the tables for students' perceptions towards the most problematic areas in essay writing.

Table 4.5: Students' Perceptions

Categories	Number of students rated				
	Completely Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Completely Agree	Total
	1(value)	2(value)	3(value)	4(value)	
<b>Content</b>	1	12	23	24	60
<b>Vocabulary</b>	6	11	25	18	60
<b>Style</b>	0	24	29	7	60
<b>Spelling</b>	6	17	27	10	60
<b>Grammar</b>	1	7	26	26	60
<b>Punctuation</b>	24	15	16	5	60
<b>Handwriting</b>	23	9	23	5	60

From the table above, students' perceptions on the most problematic areas in essay writing are analyzed according to each category. There are seven categories in the questionnaire to be rated from 1(completely disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (agree) and 4(completely agree) as problematic areas in writing (refer 3.4). The categories are Content, Vocabulary, Style, Spelling, Grammar, Punctuation and Handwriting. These data were calculated in

percentage to get the percentage of agreement for each category. Students' perceptions on agree and completely agree were combined to get the total agreement as a whole and then, they were divided to 60 students. These categories were arranged in a descending order as below

Table 4.6: Students' Perceptions

Category	Percentage of Agreement
Grammar	87 %
Content	78 %
Vocabulary	72 %
Spelling	62 %
Style	60 %
Handwriting	47 %
Punctuation	35 %

Grammar scored the highest percentage, 87%. This perception reflects the students' marks in 'Language Use'. (Refer Table 4.3). A high majority of students scored lowly in the written work according to the ESL Composition Profile. 'Language use' and Grammar are similar areas of focus are as simple/complex constructions, agreement, tense, number, word order or function, articles, pronouns, prepositions among others. As mentioned in Chapter 2, and confirmed by previous researched, grammar has always posed as the greatest

challenge for Malaysian students (Yah Awg Nik, 2010; Haja Mohideen Mohamed Ali, 1991; Maros et al., 2007; Wee, 2009).

From the students' written work, below are some errors that were found in their essays:

- a) *The **factors** of freedom in the teenagers life **is comes** from family problems.*
- b) *If they meet the teenagers or students that hangout late at night or hangout at the supermarket with school uniform, they should advise them and if not, the teenagers will free to hangout anytime whether at school time or anytime they want.*

Content was rated as the second most problematic area in writing. This supports the earlier decision to include content in the questionnaire was the right move. This also confirms that content is indeed a problem for students just as indicated in the pilot study. A little more than half of the respondents only managed to obtain 'Fair to Poor' level. Content is a like the center, the heart of the writing. It is the content that makes the writing alive. With good, logical, interesting content, it will attract the readers to read the whole writing. However, to have a good content, a writer should have knowledge on the main issue or writing. These students were weak in providing good content. This may be happened as they did not know much or they could not express their ideas in English.

The third highest problematic area according to the students' perceptions is vocabulary. A great many students' scored 'Good to Average' and 'Fair to Poor'. From the written work, most students are found to make errors as below:

- a) ***Neighbourhood** should play their role on how to overcome the social problem among the teenagers.*

b) *The neighbourhoods also became an importance person as their stay as a community.*

Spelling was rated as the fourth most problematic area in writing. The percentage was 62 %. However, students' perceptions differed from students' scores from the ESL Composition Profile. In their essay, majority of the students obtained 'Good to Average' level. From the students' written work, it was difficult to look for spelling errors as the students tend to use simple vocabulary that they know and have used from school. This is one of the reasons why they can write and spelled correctly. Furthermore, back in school time, these students were used to do dictation in class. This activity was done at least once a week to make sure students can write and spell right.

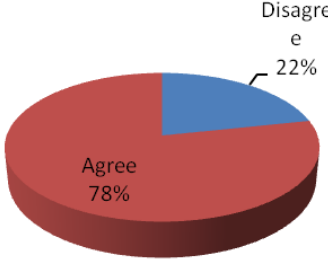
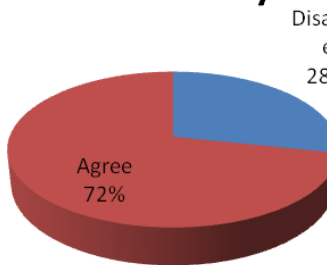
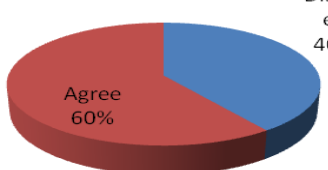
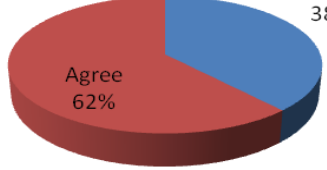
The next problematic area is writing style. Writing style is reflected in 'organization'. Students managed to achieve only 'Fair to Poor' level in this category. Based on the sample essays, some students used inappropriate writing styles. They were unable to differentiate the styles of explaining, persuading, reviewing, analyzing and commenting on points or ideas. These students used improper connotation where they were not supposed to be biased. In a research done by Bitchener and Basturkmen (2006) and Dalsky and Tajino (2007), they also have found out that students experienced problems and difficulties in organizing ideas and arguments, using appropriate styles of writing, and expressing thoughts clearly in English.

Handwriting was ranked the sixth, indicating that it was not really a problem to students. The total percentage of students who rated this as a problem is only 47 %. Even though handwriting is not one of the categories in Jacobs et al.'s scoring guide, it was included in

Jordan's questionnaire. The markers who scored the students' work had difficulties in reading students' writing. In my opinion, handwriting is important as it will influence the writer's mood. This may be happen as in this era, students are asked to do their assignments, writing tasks by using computers. It is clear that students today rely heavily on technological resources to complete many academic tasks ,Reimer et al (2009) At this point, students think handwriting is no longer viewed as important. They know that even though their handwriting is poor, they do not worry as the using or computer means less reliance on handwriting. However, it is important to be able to write legibly as proven by teachers' comments on their poor handwriting. They must never forget that back in primary schools, they have been thought to write in neat and legible print. They even had specific book (3 lines book) to practice writing. According to Wood et al (1987) experimental evidence indicates that teaching handwriting in a direct and systematic way during a regular period brings on the greatest legibility in students' handwriting

Punctuation was rated as the least problematic area in writing. Using the ESL Composition Profile, punctuation, which is part of mechanics, scored well overall. Fifty of the respondents are placed at the 'Good to Average' level. From the students' written work, these students tend to use simple basic punctuations like comma, full stop and question marks. They avoided of using other complex punctuations like inverted commas, exclamation marks, colon, semicolon, dashes or quotation marks. Furthermore, these students have been practiced to use learn punctuation since they were in primary schools. In both primary and secondary schools, there are punctuation topics in English syllabuses. Since these students were use to punctuate correctly, they had less problem of punctuation in writing.

Below are the pie charts to show the percentage regarding problematic areas in writing from students' perceptions.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Content</b></p>  <p>A 3D pie chart showing the distribution of responses for 'Content'. The 'Agree' slice is red and represents 78% of the total. The 'Disagree' slice is blue and represents 22% of the total.</p> <table border="1"><thead><tr><th>Response</th><th>Percentage</th></tr></thead><tbody><tr><td>Agree</td><td>78%</td></tr><tr><td>Disagree</td><td>22%</td></tr></tbody></table> <p style="text-align: center;">Pie chart 1: percentages for Content</p>	Response	Percentage	Agree	78%	Disagree	22%	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Vocabulary</b></p>  <p>A 3D pie chart showing the distribution of responses for 'Vocabulary'. The 'Agree' slice is red and represents 72% of the total. The 'Disagree' slice is blue and represents 28% of the total.</p> <table border="1"><thead><tr><th>Response</th><th>Percentage</th></tr></thead><tbody><tr><td>Agree</td><td>72%</td></tr><tr><td>Disagree</td><td>28%</td></tr></tbody></table> <p style="text-align: center;">Pie chart 2: percentages for Vocabulary</p>	Response	Percentage	Agree	72%	Disagree	28%
Response	Percentage												
Agree	78%												
Disagree	22%												
Response	Percentage												
Agree	72%												
Disagree	28%												
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Style</b></p>  <p>A 3D pie chart showing the distribution of responses for 'Style'. The 'Agree' slice is red and represents 60% of the total. The 'Disagree' slice is blue and represents 40% of the total.</p> <table border="1"><thead><tr><th>Response</th><th>Percentage</th></tr></thead><tbody><tr><td>Agree</td><td>60%</td></tr><tr><td>Disagree</td><td>40%</td></tr></tbody></table> <p style="text-align: center;">Pie chart 3: percentages for Style</p>	Response	Percentage	Agree	60%	Disagree	40%	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Spelling</b></p>  <p>A 3D pie chart showing the distribution of responses for 'Spelling'. The 'Agree' slice is red and represents 62% of the total. The 'Disagree' slice is blue and represents 38% of the total.</p> <table border="1"><thead><tr><th>Response</th><th>Percentage</th></tr></thead><tbody><tr><td>Agree</td><td>62%</td></tr><tr><td>Disagree</td><td>38%</td></tr></tbody></table> <p style="text-align: center;">Pie chart 4: percentages for Spelling</p>	Response	Percentage	Agree	62%	Disagree	38%
Response	Percentage												
Agree	60%												
Disagree	40%												
Response	Percentage												
Agree	62%												
Disagree	38%												

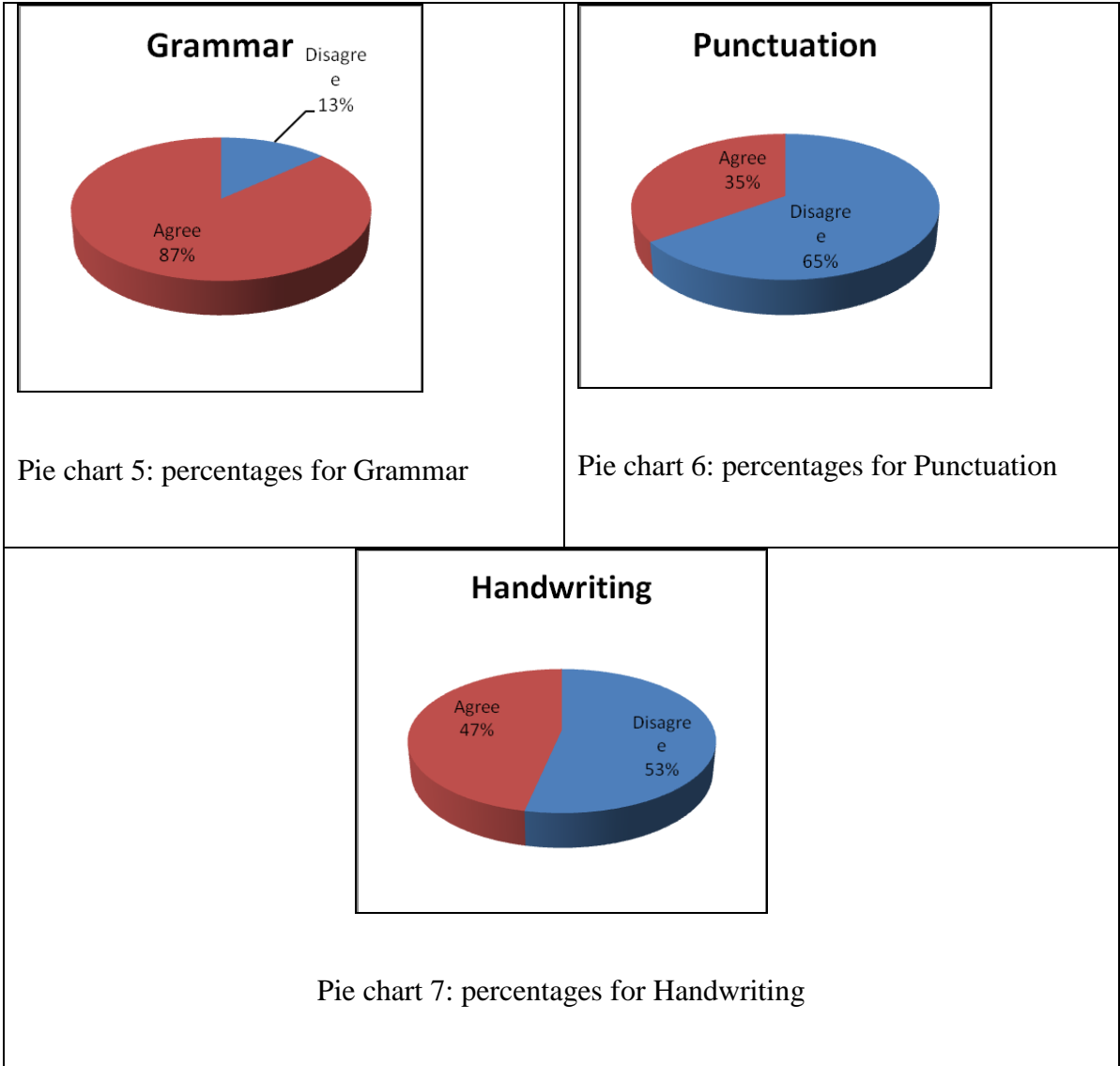


Figure 4.1 Percentages regarding problematic areas in writing from students' perceptions.

**4.2.3 SPM English Grades and Essay Writing Grades**

Below is the table where students' SPM English Grades and Essay writing Grades were compared. The comparison was made to see the students' performance when they were in school and when they enrolled themselves into diploma program, whether or not they have achieved to a better level.

Table 4.7: Students' SPM English Grades Vs Essay Writing Grades

No	SPM English Grades	Essay Writing Grades
1	A	A
2	A	A
3	A	B
4	A	A
5	A	A
6	A	B
7	A-	B
8	A-	B
9	A-	B
10	A-	B
11	A-	B
12	A-	B
13	A-	B
14	B+	B
15	B+	B
16	B+	B
17	B+	B
18	B+	B
19	B+	B
20	B+	B
21	B+	B



22	B+	B
23	B+	B
24	B+	B
25	B+	B
26	B+	B
27	B+	B
28	B	B
29	B	B
30	B	B
31	B	B
32	B	B
33	B	B
34	B	C
35	B	B
36	B	C
37	B	A
38	B	B
39	B	B
40	B-	C
41	B-	A
42	B-	B
43	B-	A
44	C+	C
45	C+	C
46	C+	C
47	C+	C
48	C	C

49	C	C
50	C	C
51	C	B
52	C	C
53	C	A
54	D	D
55	D	D
56	D	C
57	D	D
58	D	B
59	D	D
60	D	C

The table above shows that of the 6 students who obtained A in the SPM English language paper, only 4 of them managed to obtain an A grade in the essay writing based on Jacobs et al.'s ESL Composition Profile. The remaining 2 students obtained a B grade.

All the 14 students with B+ in the SPM English, moved down to a B grade in the essay writing. However, among the 16 students with a B and B- in SPM English grades, 3 students successfully obtained an A, 10 students obtained a B while 3 students only managed to obtain a C grades in essay writing.

Students with C+ and C in SPM mostly obtained a C in their essay writing. Only one student successfully obtained an A in the writing task.

Lastly, students who obtained D in SPM English grades, four of them likewise scored a D in the essay writing while 2 students had C grades and one student obtained a B.

From the findings above, it shows that students' SPM English grades did not reflect students writing performance in college. There were about six students who had poor English grades in SPM however performed well in the writing task. These students were called for an interview to confirm the findings and the factors that have helped them to improve. This will be discussed in section 4.3.5).

Below is the line graph where students' SPM English grades and essay writing scores are compared against for each student.

Figure 4.2: SPM English Grades vs. Students' Essay Scores

#### 4.2.4 Students' SPM English Grades, Language Use outside Classroom and Essay Scores.

Below is the table where students' preferred languages used outside classroom were shown together with their SPM English Grades and Essay Writing Grades. The reason why the preferred languages were asked from the students is to compare whether or not language has any influences towards writing performance.

Table 4.8: Students' SPM English Grades, Language Use outside Classroom and Essay Scores.

No	SPM English Grades	Language Use		Essay Score
		Malay	English & Malay	
1	A	x		A
2	A	x		A
3	A		x	B
4	A	x		A
5	A	x		A
6	A	x		B
7	A-	x		B
8	A-	x		B
9	A-	x		B
10	A-	x		B
11	A-		x	B
12	A-	x		B
13	A-	x		B
14	B+	x		B
15	B+	x		B

16	B+	x		B
17	B+	x		B
18	B+	x		B
19	B+	x		B
20	B+		x	B
21	B+	x		B
22	B+	x		B
23	B+	x		B
24	B+		x	B
25	B+	x		B
26	B+	x		B
27	B+		x	B
28	B	x		B
29	B	x		B
30	B	x		B
31	B		x	B
32	B	x		B
33	B	x		B
34	B	x		C
35	B	x		B
36	B	x		C
37	B	x		A
38	B	x		B
39	B	x		B
40	B-	x		C
41	B-	x		A
42	B-	x		B

43	B-	x		A
44	C+	x		C
45	C+	x		C
46	C+	x		C
47	C+	x		C
48	C	x		C
49	C		x	C
50	C		x	C
51	C	x		B
52	C	x		C
53	C	x		A
54	D	x		D
55	D	x		D
56	D	x		C
57	D	x		D
58	D	x		B
59	D	x		D
60	D	x		C

From the findings above, there were three important findings that can be seen from information on ‘students’ language used outside classroom’.

The first finding is, students with good grades in SPM English chose Malay as their medium of communication outside the classroom and had also obtained good grades in essay writing. It shows that language chosen outside classroom did not have a strong influence on students’ writing performance. Though these students have been using Malay

as their spoken language, they still excelled both in the SPM English language examination and essay writing.

The second finding is students with average grades in SPM English. These students chose both Malay and English when they were asked on language used outside classroom. However, these students did not show improvement in the essay writing scores. This shows that exposure to the English language does not ensure the ability to write well and score in essay writing. So it is not the language used alone that contributes to better writing.

The third finding is that students with poor grades in SPM English, can still score good grades in essay writing even though these students used only Malay as their spoken language. This pattern is similar to the first pattern where students use Malay and yet they obtained good grades in essay writing.

As a conclusion, there is only 8 students out of 60, who use both Malay and English in daily conversation while, a large majority, 87% of the students, use the Malay language only. The findings also show that by merely using the English language outside of classroom does not ensure the ability to write well.

#### **4.2.5 Teachers**

In this section, the teachers' perceptions on the most problematic areas of writing for students will be discussed. The findings for the questionnaire by Jordan will also be tabled in this section. The first part of the questionnaire is on background information. It includes items on gender and years of teaching experience.



Table 4.9: Gender of Respondents

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
Female	7	70
Male	3	30
Total	10	100

Table 4.10: Years of Teaching Experience

<b>Years of Teaching</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
1-5	5	50
6-10	2	20
$\geq 10$	3	30
Total	10	100

The table above shows that 50% of the respondents has been teaching for 1-5 years, 20% of the respondents for 6-10 and 30% has more than 10 years of teaching experience.

#### 4.2.6 Teachers' Perceptions

Teachers' perceptions regarding problematic areas in writing are as important as students' perceptions. Students must take into consideration what are the teachers' perceptions that they faced in writing. Below are teachers' perceptions:

The table below where teachers' perceptions are shown in total:

Table 4.11: Teachers' Perceptions

Category	Number of Teachers Rated				Total
	Completely Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Completely Agree	
	1(value)	2(value)	3(value)	4(value)	
Grammar	0	0	0	10	10
Vocabulary	0	0	1	9	10
Content	0	3	0	7	10
Spelling	0	3	0	7	10
Handwriting	1	3	0	6	10
Style	5	1	0	4	10
Punctuation	7	0	0	3	10

Table 4.12: Percentage of Agreement

<b>Category</b>	<b>Percentage of Agreement</b>
<b>Grammar</b>	100 %
<b>Vocabulary</b>	90 %
<b>Content</b>	70%
<b>Spelling</b>	70%
<b>Handwriting</b>	60 %
<b>Style</b>	40 %
<b>Punctuation</b>	30 %

The table above shows the teachers' perceptions towards the most problematic areas in essay writing faced by students. Teachers were asked to rate Jordan's (1997) questionnaire in order to get a clear view on which areas in essay writing are the most problematic based on their perceptions. (refer 3.4). Ten teachers have rated the questionnaire and the above table is the ranking from the most problematic areas to the least problematic areas.

From teachers' perceptions, grammar was rated as the most problematic area of writing faced by students. Grammar is rated 100% which means all ten teachers agree grammar poses the most challenge as compared to the other 6 categories. In a research done by Ibrahim (1983) in his paper of analysis of grammatical errors among Arab learners of English as foreign language, the result has shown that there were 345 grammatical errors found in 62 students' written essays. These errors were in prepositions, morphological errors, articles, verbs, active and passive tenses.

Second highest in the ranking is vocabulary where 90% of the teachers perceived it to be problematic. Muncie (2002) stated that students with limited vocabulary are a major

obstacle to students' learning to write in a foreign language. He concluded that vocabulary learning is a vital to the development of ESL writing and that ESL writing instructors need to recognize and encourage vocabulary learning to the students.

Next, the third highest categories in the ranking are content and spelling. These two categories have the same percentage, 70 %. From the essays analyzed, it was found that students were weak in sentence structure, unable to use correct tenses, too many run-on sentences, grammar errors, no discourse markers. In other words, students developed similar ideas using different vocabulary, weak supporting details (examples) and incomplete topic sentences. However, teachers' perceptions on spelling was not reflective as in students' written task, spelling was not a problem according to students' essays scores. However, teachers' perception on spelling is not totally unacceptable, as teachers were observing students in every written task they did in classroom and examinations.

Handwriting is ranked fifth of the most problematic areas faced by students in the teachers' perceptions. This category scored 60%, followed by style 40%. The least problematic area is punctuation. This may be happened as nowadays, students' works are preferred computerized. However, handwriting skill is still important to these students. In Feder (2007) paper, he stated that students with handwriting problems normally have difficulty in keeping up with the written works in school. This will impede their academic progress and lead to lowered self-esteem and behavioral problems.

Teachers' perceptions are reflected in students' essay writing scores. Students scored 'Fair to Poor', in the grammar, vocabulary, content and spelling categories. However for handwriting as in Mechanics of writing, teachers' perception is opposite to that of students'

scores as they had obtained 'Good to Average' scores in this category. This may happen as the students were aware that the written task that had been given to them will be assessed for the purpose of the research. This had eventually affected students' handwriting where the raters found that the handwriting was the least problem in essay writing. As for the teachers, they ranked handwriting as a problematic area as they have been observing their students' handwriting for the whole semester not only at one writing task.

#### **4.2.7 Comparison on Students' and Teachers' Perceptions**

It is important to compare both students' and teachers' perceptions. From the comparison, student will be aware of what are the weaknesses that they faced in writing from their teachers point of view and find ways to improve them. Apart of the students, this comparison will show the teachers what are the students' real fear when they do writing task.

Below is the table comparing both students' and teachers' perceptions:

Table 4.13: Students' Perceptions Vs. Teachers' Perceptions

Category	Number of Students and (Teachers) Rated				Total
	Completely Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Completely Agree	
	1(value)	2(value)	3(value)	4(value)	
<b>Grammar</b>	1 (0)	7 (0)	26 (0)	26 (10)	60 (10)
<b>Vocabulary</b>	6 (0)	11 (0)	25 (1)	18 (9)	60 (10)
<b>Content</b>	1 (0)	12 (3)	23 (0)	24 (7)	60 (10)
<b>Spelling</b>	6 (0)	17 (3)	27 (0)	10 (7)	60 (10)
<b>Handwriting</b>	23 (1)	9 (3)	23 (0)	5 (6)	60 (10)
<b>Style</b>	0 (5)	24 (1)	29 (0)	7 (4)	60 (10)
<b>Punctuation</b>	24 (7)	15 (0)	16 (0)	5 (3)	60 (10)

Table 4.13 shows the comparison between students' and teachers' perceptions towards problematic areas in writing. From the findings above, students' and teachers' believe that grammar is the most problematic area in writing. Of the 60 respondents, 52 of them and all ten teachers share the same perception on grammar. Both parties are agreeable that grammar is primarily the most difficult area to master in writing. In a study done by Saadiyah Darus and Kaladevi (2009), they have analyzed 72 written essays by Form Four students in one semi-urban secondary school. The finding of the study indicated that students generally had problems in applying correct grammatical rules in their writings. Findings of this study imply that students have not yet mastered basic grammatical structures even though they have gone through 10 years of learning English.

Another area where both students and teachers mostly agree on is vocabulary. By having limited vocabulary, students tend to use and repeat the same vocabulary to express the ideas and to develop the content. Some vocabulary that have been used from most of the students were, parents, family, neighbor, take care and important. They have used the same words in every sentence, every paragraph. If they were to have a wider range of vocabulary knowledge, they would have used different words such as, guardian, relatives, society, community, concern and vital. A research done by (Ahmad Mazli Muhammad, 2007; Nambiar, 2007; Zaira Abu Hasan, 2008) they have found out that learners at tertiary education were found to have limited vocabulary knowledge and weak at understanding long sentences or sentences with difficult words.

A large majority of students and teachers too agreed that content could be a problem in writing. Content is rated as problematic as the students have little knowledge on the issue or topic that they are writing. This problem is linked to the students' attitude of not liking to read English materials. Normah (2003) also agreed in her paper that lack of reading texts written in English and lack of interest in learning the English Language were the result of her diagnostic test among her respondents in assessing the students' writing tasks.

In punctuation, students' perceptions reflected in their scores presented through the ESL Composition Profile. They rated punctuation as the least problematic and it was proven as they scored good marks in punctuation. The teachers' perceptions were also accurate as they disagreed that this was a problematic area for students faced in writing.

In the area of spelling, there was a match between the teachers and students ranking. 37 students, majority, had rated that spelling was a problematic area in writing and so were 7 teachers.

In Handwriting, 32 students disagreed that they were having problem with their handwriting, however six teachers thought, reading the students’ essay writing was difficult with their illegible handwriting. In my opinion, both perceptions have been viewed from different perspectives. Students rated not problematic as they normally do and submit they assignments typed written using computers. However, teachers have viewed this from broader perspectives, where they have faced with students’ real handwriting in their test or examination writing tasks.

For writing style, 36 students found it a problem, however, six teachers do not think style is a big issue for students. Most teachers think students are able to adapt to the different writing styles without much problems.

Lastly in punctuation, 39 students and 7 teachers disagreed that it is a major problem in essay writing. These perceptions were reflective of the students’ score, (refer Table 4.3), students scored ‘Good to Average’, in Mechanics of writing.

Below is the table where the comparison between students’ and teachers’ ranking towards the most problematic areas in writing is shown:

Table 4.14: Comparison between Students’ and Teachers’ Ranking of Perceptions

<b>Students</b>		<b>Teachers</b>	
Category	Agreement (%)	Category	Agreement (%)
Grammar	87	Grammar	100
Content	78	Vocabulary	90
Vocabulary	72	Content	70
Spelling	62	Spelling	70



Style	60	Handwriting	60
Handwriting	47	Style	40
Punctuation	35	Punctuation	30

From Table 4.14, it is very clear that students and teachers mutually agree that the top three problematic areas are grammar, content and vocabulary. These three aspects are the main ingredients of quality writing. According to McCrimmon (1967) a writer must know how to write to direct the readers to the issue or main content of the writing. He added that a writer should be aware of the writing process and the audience in order to make sure the objectives of the writing are on the right track. Hedge (1988) agreed that an effective writer should be able to give explanations, examples and statistics in order to show the readers a writing which is logical and progressive.

Watkins (1965) stated that a good diction is as important as grammar. However diction is more important in writing. He concluded that, in writing, if there were too many repetitions of words, using unclear synonyms, it would only make the writing even worse.

For Greetham (2001), mechanics of writing and the language use are as important as others. This is because, if a writer is skillful in these two categories, a writer should be able to write better sentences either simple or complex sentences, good paragraphing and can write in neat legible print.

From the previous studies on quality writing, the conclusion that we can state here are, quality writing needs:

- a) **Ideas those are important and interesting.** Ideas are basically the heart of the piece. It is all about the information that a writer chooses to write and it is all about what the writer is writing.
- b) **Organization that is effective and logical.** Organization refers to the way the writer moves from one idea to the next and the order of ideas.
- c) **Voice that is appropriate and individual.** Voice is how the readers feel when they read it. It is the expression of the writer's personality through words.
- d) **Word Choice that is memorable and specific.** Good writing says the right things using the right words.
- e) **Sentence Fluency that is expressive and smooth.** Fluent sentences are fun to read with expression and easy to understand.
- f) **Conventions those are communicative and correct.** Conventions are the ways we all agree to use punctuation, spelling, grammar, and other things that make writing consistent and easy to read.

Spelling, style, handwriting and punctuation are viewed as minor problems by both, teachers and students. In Yah Awang Nik (2010) paper, she has found out that among all categories, both female and male respondents in her research scored highest in Mechanics. She stated that mechanic is easy to acquire and master as these students were already exposed to it since they were in pre-schools. In pre-schools, students were taught to practice capitalization and copying simple words. Then as they entered primary schools, they learnt to write simple sentences following rules and conventions in writing. Later when they were in secondary schools, they were already mastered and acquired mechanics or conventions in writing. Therefore, it can be concluded that Mechanic is the least problematic area in writing.

#### **4.2.8 Interviews**

##### **a) Interview Session with Students**

Six students were called for an interview session to gather more information about their perceptions towards difficulties in essay writing and factors which have helped them improve in their essay writing at college level. The students who participated in the interview are respondents' no. 37, 41, 43, 51, 53 and 58. Below is the information which was collected using the paper pencil method interview. These students were chosen as they have showed good performance in essay writing. These students had poor grades in SPM English however have shown great improvement when they did essay writing for this research.

Student no.37 who obtained a score of B in the SPM English paper managed to obtain a grade A (82%) in the essay writing. From the interview, he stated that he had problems with vocabulary and agreed that writing in school was easier than in college. He also stated that having a fun learning environment in class has helped him improve. Besides interactive English class, other factors that contributed to his improvement was reading a lot of English materials, watching English programs and listening to English radio stations. The findings in this research shows that mere exposure to the English language does not mean a student can improve in essay writing. Rather, having an environment that promotes learning is an important factor. Unlike the chalk and talk teaching method in schools, the approach in the college was one that was interactive which allowed students to learn while having fun. Such an approach motivates the student to improve himself in the English

language and writing in the English language. In college, English writing is taught differently unlike in schools. In college, students were given opportunities to present their ideas to teacher and friends. From the presentation, the ideas are discussed into details and this is where they can develop the ideas with others. Besides doing presentation, students have ample time from teachers to gather information about the essay that they want to write. They are allowed to source from internet and books to gather information before they start to write. This is good unlike in schools, in previous years, the students were asked to write an essay in classroom itself where they had little source in little time. Furthermore, back in schools, students preferred to just copy the ideas to write from their teachers

Student no.41, who had a B- in the SPM English language paper also scored grade A (80%) in essay writing. This student thought that English sometimes could be easy depending on the topic given to write an essay. She stated that, she also had problem with vocabulary as college writing requires a wider range of vocabulary compared to school. In her case, it was reading widely and constant exposure to the English language that helped her improve not only her writing but also her overall proficiency in the language.

Student no.41 and 43 who both obtained grade A (80%) in essay writing but only had B- in SPM English, agreed that writing is more challenging in college. However to be surrounded with friends who are good in English has helped them improve. In other words, peers play an important role in the learning of English language.

Student no.51, who scored a C in SPM English but, obtained a B (76%) in essay writing said that teacher's role was one of the contributing factors for her improvement. She added that a good and positive teacher, who understands the problems faced by students, is a

teacher that can help students improve. This kind of teachers is passionate about teaching and guiding students. Besides that, she also further added that, students too need to put in the extra effort to improve their writing skills. She stated that by doing a lot of reading and watching English programs students can enhance their vocabulary and improve in grammar.

Student no.53, who only scored a C in SPM but managed to get grade A (80%) in essay writing also agreed that reading is a major factor that helped him to write better. He started off by doing a lot of reading in English to improve himself and since that, he found out that writing is fun. He stated that even though writing in college is more difficult than in school, but a student should never use this as an excuse to fail.

For student no.58, who scored B (65%) in essay but D in SPM English, mentioned that she had difficulties in writing. Her problems are grammar and vocabulary. She stated that, writing is difficult for her as it is not easy for her to express her ideas in English. She said that, writing in her mother tongue is a lot easier than in English. However, besides doing a lot of reading and listening to English radio stations, participating in class discussion has also helped her improved.

From the interviews, this research has found out factors which have helped the students improved in essay writing. Besides reading a lot of English materials, students agreed that by listening to English songs, helps them in improving their writing. Apart from reading and listening to English radio stations, they also agreed that watching English programs on television have taught them to write better too. They tend to learn and correct their English language by listening and observing to the spoken words from radio and televisions. In Rivers (1975) study, he stated that good writing in any language involves knowledge of

convention of written discourse in that culture, and the abilities to choose the precise words that convey one's meaning. He added that knowledge of convention of written discourse mainly comes from reading.

#### **b) Interview Session with Teachers**

After the teachers have rated Jordan's (1997) questionnaire, three teachers were invited to participate in an interview. The teachers were asked about the students' improvement in writing since they first enrolled in the diploma program. Teachers stated that at first they faced many problems with students' writing skills. Students were poor in every aspect of essay writing, more so in grammar. However, after numerous grammar classes and grammar corrections, students slowly progressed and improved.

Teachers were also asked regarding students' participation in class. One teacher said that generally, students were too shy to ask questions. They chose to keep the uncertainties and questions to themselves and in the end; they did poorly in essay writing. She further added that these students may have low self esteem and worry they would be ridiculed by their friends. All the teachers agreed that this may be due to a lack in confidence to speak the language and to be heard in class. In Finch (2001) paper, he suggested language teachers need to offer unconditional trust, which will inspire confidence, motivation, and learning among students.

Teachers were asked about factors that they think would help weak students to improve in essay writing. All three teachers agreed that reading and wide exposure to the language will help students to be more proficient in the language and therefore help them write better. Teachers added that by reading English materials, articles, journals, essays, students will

get better ideas to write and also build on their general knowledge as well as expose them to good writing styles. They will automatically learn and copy how other people write and organize ideas. They will learn new vocabulary and use them in their writing. The teachers too, agreed that these students need to use the language in order to improve in the language.

### **4.3 Conclusion**

This chapter has presented all the findings for the research. These findings are derived from the questionnaires, students' essay writing and information from the interview. From the conclusion of the finding, I have discovered that the students are aware of their weaknesses in essay writing. They know what are the problematic areas in writing they are faced. Teachers also know their students disabilities in essay writing. The awareness that both teachers and students have are good as they can make improvements by putting priorities to their problematic areas. Students should be open-minded and share the difficulties with their teachers and ask for guidance in order to make progress. For teachers, with the excess, they should change their teaching strategies in order to help student. Next chapter will be the conclusion of the research study.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

#### 5.1 Review

To review, the study was based upon three research questions:

- 1) What are the problematic areas of writing faced by students based on the ESL Composition Profile by Jacobs et al. (1981)?
- 2) What are the students' perceptions regarding the most problematic areas in English writing?
- 3) What are the teachers' perceptions regarding the most problematic areas in English writing?

The first research question was discussed in 4.2.1. The findings indicate that students have problems with language use, content, vocabulary and organization in. A large majority did not perform well in language use while nearly half performed badly in the other remaining areas. The only area most students performed well was in mechanics.

The second research question was answered in 4.2.2 and 4.2.5. The analysis indicated that most students perceived grammar to be a huge challenge for them. This reinforces the findings in research question 1, in which; a large majority only performed 'Fair to Poor' in Language Use. Content was their next concern, followed by vocabulary and spelling, organization, punctuation and handwriting in a descending order. Although organization was not perceived as a major problem for many, students did not perform well in that area. The findings from research question 1 indicate that 26 of the 60 respondents only scored 'Fair to Poor' for organization.



Lastly, the third research question was discussed 4.2.6. Interestingly, teachers' perceptions were similar to students. They both viewed grammar, content, spelling and vocabulary as major problems while handwriting, style and punctuation as minor problems. The results from this study provide evidence that students and teachers' perception are in line with students' writing. Areas that are perceived as problems for both teacher and students are reflected in students' work.

## **5.2 Summary of Findings**

The purpose of this study was to determine the most problematic areas in writing. This study involved 60 students and 10 English language teachers from UiTM. Students written work was scored using the ESL Composition Profile (refer Table 3.2). The profile looks at five categories; content, organization, vocabulary, language use and mechanics. Students' achievement in each category was analyzed and a level was determined. There are four levels in each category; Very Poor, Fair to Poor, Good to Average and Excellent to Very Good.

The data showed that majority of the students scored 'Fair to Poor' in all five categories. This level indicates that students are generally weak in writing. Students have not mastered the various writing skills, have limited knowledge of the essay content, lack of ideas and organization and lastly, make many grammatical errors. These students also have a limited range of vocabulary and major problems in writing simple and complex sentence constructions. In the sixth category, mechanics, majority of students obtained the 'Good to Average' level. Although students did commit errors, they were minor and did not impede understanding.

The table below shows only the levels with most students for each category.

Table 5.1: Students' Most Scored Level for each Category

<b>Category</b>	<b>Marks</b>	<b>No. of Students</b>
<b>Content</b>	21 – 17 (Fair to Poor)	31 out of 60
<b>Organization</b>	13 – 10 (Fair to Poor)	26 out of 60
<b>Vocabulary</b>	13 – 10 (Fair to Poor)	28 out of 60
<b>Language Use</b>	17 – 11 (Fair to Poor)	42 out of 60
<b>Mechanics</b>	4 (Good to Average)	50 out of 60

From the findings in the table above, we can conclude that students encounter problems content, organization, vocabulary and language use. Based on the perception questionnaire, similar findings were discovered. Students rated grammar, vocabulary and content as their major problems. These findings are once again confirmed by the teachers who also view these three areas as the most challenging for students. In short, students' written work, students' perceptions and teacher's perceptions are in sync.

### **5.3 Curriculum implications**

If the purpose of writing in schools is to prepare students for tertiary level writing, then the former must closely articulate with the requirements of the latter. Emphasis should be on acquiring more academic writing proficiency over less meaningful correction of surface

errors. Curriculum designers and teachers in school must be well aware of the writing skills required in universities. Only then can teachers equip students with the necessary skills. As the findings of this study indicate students struggle with content, grammar, organisation and vocabulary, measures to address these problems should be taken from school level and not only in universities. The curriculum should progress from school to universities to make the transition easier for students.

Cohesion has often been neglected in language teaching in schools. Teachers and students must understand that a coherent text is more than a series of grammatical sentences lined up one after another; rather they interlace, each sentence building on the preceding ones while at the same time advancing the discourse (Alonso & McCabe, 2003). In schools, cohesion is often overlooked by teachers and students alike. However, in tertiary education, students are expected to develop a well organized and coherent piece of work while utilizing the various transitions to create a 'flow'. This big leap in writing requirement needs to be bridged by closely linking the writing curriculum in schools and universities. Writing syllabus in schools should incorporate cohesive devices, ellipsis, conjunctions and so forth to help students be better prepared for universities.

The results of this study have certain implications to the teaching of writing. Firstly, language teachers should be sensitive, to the fact, that for many learners in Malaysia, English is a second or even foreign language to them. Many of them are only exposed to the language in the classroom, during English lessons. Beyond the classroom, this language bears little or no importance in their daily interaction. Given that, it brings with it a host of associated problems. Their lack of vocabulary and proficiency in the target language makes

writing an excruciating task, and this often discourages them from writing in English. Hence, language teachers should not mistake this for lack of interest in writing, but rather, come up with interesting activities and task that will motivate them to write, and that would increase their confidence in writing in English.

#### **5.4 Pedagogical implications**

There is a clear need to reevaluate and reexamine approaches used in writing class. One way to address students' writing needs is through effective feedback and error correction. Feedback is vital to improve students' writing. Without feedback, students may be unaware of their mistakes and weaknesses.

##### **5.4.1 Effective feedback and Error Correction**

Teachers are supposed to provide adaptive, qualified and motivating support for the individual learner in his learning process. Xu (2008; 41) stresses that 'it is therefore important for teachers to understand that errors, as a natural and indispensable part of the learning process should neither be tolerated or corrected excessively'. Xu further cautions that 'too much tolerance of errors may increase the risk of fossilization in the learners' interlanguage' (41). On the other hand, teachers should not equate all errors with learners' failure to learn. Rigid and immediate correction of every error at the time of production may interfere and alter learners' path of thinking and induce severe psychological frustrations. When correcting students' errors, teachers need to consider whether the errors should be corrected at all, and, if so, why. When students are not able to identify their own errors, assistance from someone more proficient in the language is required (Corder, 1967).

Language teachers identified 3 types of errors that may benefit from correction as oppose to all types of errors. These errors are:

- i. Errors that impair communication significantly;
- ii. Errors that have high stigmatizing effects on listener or reader;
- iii. Errors that occur frequently in students' speech and writing

In this study, errors type 3 commonly found in the sample essays. Based on the findings, students generally perform lowly in content, language use, organization and vocabulary. Below are some suggestions on how the teacher can improve students writing performance:

#### **5.4.2 Suggestions**

a) Written feedback should be coupled with teacher-students conferencing (Fregeau, 1999).

As students may not always understand written feedback, conferencing allows both teacher and student to trace the causes of the problems arising from students' writing and feedback, to develop strategies for improvement. For instance, teachers can take this opportunity to directly gain a deeper understanding of students' work. During these sessions, the teacher may discover that content was inappropriate as students did not understand the writing task, or students were not able to answer the question effectively due to sociocultural differences etc.

b) Teachers should provide grammatical explanations in both oral and written forms of the errors for this will take different learning styles in consideration and provide extra reinforcement.

c) Ample opportunities to practice the language should be provided. Perhaps, students can partake in an oral discussion about the writing question as a pre-writing activity. By

brainstorming and sharing ideas on content with their peers, students will be more confident when writing.

- d) Providing opportunities for extensive reading in the target language could help overcome deficiencies thus providing exposure to the target language. This will also expand students' vocabulary.
- e) When students receive their corrected written work, they may be asked to rewrite them and resubmit in the next class. The few errors that appear in the rewritten compositions are then corrected by supplying the correct form. These correction procedures could improve students' expressions of thought, grammatical accuracy as well as contribute to the increase of word output from the beginning to the end of each semester.
- f) Teachers could provide group feedback by taking several students' work as sample (without highlighting the name of the writers) and discuss with the class the strengths and weaknesses of each piece of work and how to improve them. This will enable students to see elements of a good written work and the not so good ones and reflect on their own written work too. This is particularly helpful for a large class size as the teacher is able to save time by not writing similar comments repeatedly on each piece of work. This way will also enable the teacher to direct the discussion towards content, organization of ideas and language use.

Another more current and interesting way to improve students' writing is through incorporating the use of computers in the classroom.

### **5.4.3 Integrating CALL into the Writing Curriculum**

Computers have been used for instructional purposes since the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, many teachers are still appalled and intimidated to incorporate technology as they fear their position as ‘transmitter of knowledge’. In this technology era, teachers should move away from this misconception and embrace the use of computers to enhance language learning. Below are some approaches to enhance writing development with the aid of computers taken from Cunningham (2000):

i. Guided Writing:

Text repair type exercises may require the student to modify or correct text to address redundancy, misspelling, grammatical error and errors of fact. 'Cloze' type exercises. The marking and moving functions of word processors can be used in exercises that require students to order jumbled text. Such exercises provide practice in the recognition and understanding of the use discourse markers. This will help students organise their writing logically and progressively.

ii. Free Writing:

A number of positive effects are claimed for using word processing in writing. The most obvious point is that drudgery in the revision and refinement of writing is significantly reduced. Students can develop a more positive approach to writing; that writing quality is improved by the increase in the number and complexity of revision operations; that the writer is freer to experiment and think without committing to paper.

iii. Using the Computer as a Stimulus for Writing:

Students tend to be more motivated to write for real reasons - communicating with a friend about a mutual interest, writing to a magazine or for a magazine, preparing information for a bulletin board, taking part in an on-line discussion or debate. In these situations there is a real audience, or readership, and the student writer will take care to address this readership appropriately, attractively or persuasively as the need is perceived.

### **5.5 Future Research**

The findings of a study are said to be reliable if other studies confirm them. Reliability can be achieved through replication by other researchers, either by using the same methodology with different populations or using different methodologies with the same populations. My suggestions for immediate further research are therefore replications of the present study on learners from different linguistic backgrounds. As this study only looked at Malay learners, it would be interesting to see if similar findings are found if this study is conducted on Indians and Chinese learners in Malaysia. As Malaysia is a multicultural country, a typical classroom would have students from all races and ethnic groups. Hence, if a similar pattern is found among all students, regardless of race, it will provide significant information for the teacher. Another suggestion for further research is to use the same methodology but on two different sample groups; first language learners and second language learners to see if there is any differences in problems faced in writing.



## **5.6 Conclusion**

Lecturers and teachers should focus on helping students become aware of how and why they write, and also encourage them to write freely, fluently and well. Next, students should be made aware that writing is an important tool for learning and communicating. Writing is a vital tool in learning for students because when they write they go through or experience the ‘thinking process’ that involves three stages, such as pre-writing (brainstorming), writing and rewriting (revising) and finally editing (proof reading). Therefore, the importance of writing lies in the abilities of the students to develop language skills in terms of fluency, accuracy and appropriateness of meanings and messages. In conclusion, writing is an important tool for students not only in learning but also in communication. Consequently, writing is a major means of learning throughout our education system. Most examinations and tests are assessed on the basis of written performance. Therefore, writing skill is very important for students to acquire and master because they are being assessed by the way they write. Nevertheless, the most important reason for students to acquire good writing skills is to use writing in their creative ways to interact effectively with people and the world around us. Therefore, language teachers and students should seriously collaborate and cooperate to achieve some kind of satisfactory level of writing proficiency that is expected of our students. I believe that language teachers should be aware of our students’ different needs and wants. As a result, teachers need to review and reflect our approach in teaching writing. We may also decide to register or enroll ourselves in a refresher course or a professional development course to keep abreast and meet with the special needs and demands of our students nowadays.