Teaching and Learning of English Academic Writing in a Public University in Malaysia: A Case Study

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English academic writing is deemed as essential skills to be acquired by students in tertiary education as they are mostly assessed through their proficiency in writing skills. To teach this technical course, ESL lecturers need to possess the required content knowledge and pedagogical skills. However, many ESL/EFL lecturers and students regard academic writing as challenging to teach and learn. This paper aims to discuss the teaching and learning of English academic writing in a public university in Malaysia. Grounded in a small-scale case study, data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGD), and classroom observations with one ESL lecturer and four undergraduate students participated in the study. Data were analysed thematically using thematic analysis where themes and codes were used to explain the findings. Findings revealed that teacher-centered approach with heavy-reliance on textbook teaching was used to teach English academic writing and students learned academic writing by engaging in lots of drills and writing practices. The paper suggests ESL lecturer to adopt traditional teaching approach with process-based approach as a dual approach in teaching English academic writing and modifications and changes should be made to the syllabus of academic writing at tertiary education level.

INTRODUCTION

In the context of tertiary education, academic writing skills are vital for students at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Academic writing is a piece of intellectual writing where writers share and transfer knowledge to their readers (Djatmika et al., 2022). At this level of education, students are expected to produce a piece of academic writing that demonstrate their maturity level and critical thinking skills through their writing by presenting intellectual claims and arguments. For students to produce a good piece of academic writing, it requires good proficiency in the English language, as they

need to utilize correct use of English grammar, use of academic vocabulary, and possess other essential writing skills, such as summarizing and paraphrasing, and knowledge of the topic in the field of study that they are engaged in. In other words, writers need to conform to the conventions of English academic writing. At the same time, students are required to use their knowledge and experience as writers in English to think critically in presenting their ideas by extracting and synthesizing information from reading academic sources, and following the conventions of academic writing, including the use of referencing styles. In short, English academic writing is fundamental for ESL students in the context of tertiary education.

Additionally, having the ability to write academically can aid students in securing academic scholarships and gaining acceptance into specific universities (Ratnawati et al., 2018) as the skills in academic writing is much needed for students' learning and to meet the high demands of learning in the academic community. Moreover, possessing good skills in academic writing can help students in their future careers as writing is a lifelong skill.

In regard to the issues and problems faced by students in their English academic writing, from the review of literature, it is found that the majority of the studies mentioned that students have low proficiency in the English language, and due to this, they are found to produce lots of language errors in their English academic writing. This can be seen in several Arabic studies where they mentioned that students have problems in their English language proficiency. Al-Khatib (2017) in his study has cited several linguistic problems faced by students. Grammatical errors were the obvious mistakes, especially in the use of verb tense, subject-verb agreement, word choice, the use of preposition, as well as in singular and plural forms. These findings on linguistic errors are also found in a study conducted by Al-Mubarak (2017) in Sudan in which students were found to use wrong articles, prepositions, irregular verbs, and verb tense. In a recent study by Zohaid et al., (2021) in Pakistan, they found that majority of the students are weak in terms of organizing their writing, having problems in syntax, and lack vocabulary, which hampers their performance in English academic writing. Other than that, students were also found to have problems with grammatical and lexical features. Additionally, in Duong and Nguyen's (2021) study in Vietnam, they found that students were having difficulties using collocations, and this is due to their limited lexical and collocational knowledge. Consequently, students were found to make errors in verb-noun, noun-noun, adjective-noun, verb-adverb, and adverb-adjective combinations which are related to linguistic errors. Moreover, these students were also found to commit direct translation from their first language.

Meanwhile, teachers and lecturers who teach English academic writing also face several issues and challenges in their teaching. For instance, in a study by Hajan et al., (2019), ESL teachers viewed academic writing as a complex process that requires many skills. Some of the constraints that these teachers face in teaching English academic writing are related to insufficient class time to complete their lectures as teaching writing is a tedious task. Additionally, the attitude and motivation of students in learning English academic writing, the high number of students in a class which makes it difficult to

attend to each student's writing, and insufficient and poor school facilities, especially in the use of technology, hamper the delivery of teaching in the classroom.

Additionally, the lack of teachers' creativity and the sharing of cultures in academic writing is also one of the important issues that need to be highlighted. According to Joshi (2017) in his study in Nepal, the lack of exposure and involvement in academic writing, such as writing term papers, book reviews, and research articles among the ESL lecturers has led them to have a lack of publication opportunities and presenting papers at conferences. Due to this, ESL lecturers were unable to instil the culture and habit of English academic writing practices among the students. In another study at a Philippine university, ESL lecturers were found to conduct their English academic writing classes with unclear lesson instructions and using unfamiliar vocabulary. This consequently has become one of the contributing factors that hampered students' understanding and proficiency in their English academic writing practices (Roxas, 2020).

In reiteration on the importance of English academic writing skills for the students, teaching this demanding skill is considered vital at tertiary level. ESL lecturers need to possess the required content knowledge in English academic writing and pedagogical skills to teach this technical course. However, some previous studies reported that ESL lecturers encountered several challenges in their teaching which was due to insufficient content knowledge and pedagogical skills to teach academic writing (Kamaruddin & Abdullah, 2015). Practically, there is no single teaching approach that is considered the best or ideal for teaching English courses (Caldwell, 2012) and as a result, many ESL lecturers are still struggling to search for most suitable teaching approach to teach academic writing (Mohammadi et al., 2012). Moreover, in relation to the issue of teaching approach, Kwan, and Yunus (2014) believed that educators or language instructors' own incompetency in writing skills also contributes to poor writing skills among the students. They further accentuated that lecturers who have incompetency in English tend to pass down the errors to the students, and consequently, students learn to adopt these errors in their own writing. Therefore, it is crucial for ESL lecturers to continuously enhance and update both of their content knowledge in academic writing as well as their pedagogical skills.

By conducting this study, the researchers are able to explore the kinds of teaching approach(es) used by ESL lecturer to teach English academic writing and at the same time observing how the students learned academic writing in the classroom. By exploring this phenomenon of teaching and learning English academic writing in real-life context, it allows the researchers to provide in-depth findings what captured the reality of teaching and learning academic writing which then benefit the ESL lecturers in searching for and evaluating their own teaching approach(es). The study will also then provide a glimpse of what are needed in the syllabus of academic writing at tertiary level where curriculum and policy makers need to relook and revisit the syllabus of academic writing where necessary modifications and changes are needed on the syllabus.

Therefore, this study aims to explore teaching and learning approaches (how the ESL lecturer teaches and how the students learn) of English academic writing in a public university in Malaysia. The study aims to uncover the following research questions:

1. How does ESL lecturer teach English academic writing in a public university in Malaysia?

2. How do ESL undergraduate students learn English academic writing in a public university in Malaysia?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Academic writing is academic written documents that are produced by students in the context of academia, where the main purpose of writing is to serve academic purposes. Students are expected to follow certain writing conventions, such as format, style, tone, referencing style, and other academic rules when engaging in academic writing. Ariyanti (2016) defined academic writing as a type of writing where the writer needs to critically plan and organize their writing by providing and presenting evidence of factual data to support their claims and arguments. There are several distinct features of academic writing that make it different from other types of writing. One of the salient features of academic writing is the support of evidence and reasoning from reliable sources of information, and it is structured by adopting a formal writing style in English language. Hence, writing in the academic context, especially writing at tertiary level entails evidence and reasoning to support statements made by the writer. By having factual evidence, the presented arguments will be strengthened as it helps to guide readers through an evidence-based writing rather than relying on the writer's own point of view.

In essence, academic writing is pivotal for both teaching and learning in the contexts of ESL and EFL at the tertiary level. It is an important skill for students to acquire as English is the medium of instruction at most higher learning institutions, particularly in Malaysia. Lahuerta (2017) and McDonough and Crawford (2018) both asserted that academic writing is the language learning tool used to assess students' competency and proficiency in the English language. It is also the main medium of instruction and communication between lecturers and students in their course of teaching and learning. Even though academic writing is seen as an important learning aspect at the tertiary level, both ESL lecturers and students could not escape the demanding aspects in teaching and learning English academic writing. Many of the past studies quoted on the students' perceptions based on the problems and difficulties that they encountered in academic writing, such as having writing issues, grammatical issue, mechanics of writing issue, and lack of vocabulary which can be counted as negative perceptions of academic writing (Budjalemba & Listyani, 2020).

Kostenko and Solohor (2018) found that majority of the undergraduate student participants in their study perceived academic writing in English as difficult, as they had never had any prior experience with writing in the English language during their secondary education. This lack of experience has resulted in several language-related problems in students' English academic writing. Students frequently make grammatical errors, produce awkward sentences due to direct translation from their first language,

make spelling and punctuation errors, use academic vocabulary inappropriately and display a lack of structure in their writing. In a study conducted by Manoli et al., (2019) in Greece, it was discovered that students perceived English academic writing as challenging and complex, largely due to their lack of exposure to the skill during their undergraduate years. Consequently, writing in an academic style in their second language (L2) has become a formidable task for them. As a result of this lack of familiarity, students faced difficulties in acquiring content knowledge related to referencing style which leads to instances of academic plagiarism.

In relation to teaching English academic writing, ESL lecturers have been using different kinds of teaching approaches that are suitable in meeting the students' needs and proficiency levels. Nordin and Mohammad (2017), who conducted a study among tertiary students reported that there was no specific teaching approach that was deemed suitable to be used in teaching ESL students, especially academic writing. As a result, ESL lecturers utilized many different teaching approaches to suit the needs of their students in the classroom. Some of the most popular writing approaches are product approach, process approach, process-genre approach, and collaborative writing.

In essence, Malaysian ESL lecturers are still grappling in searching for a suitable teaching approach to teach academic writing at tertiary level (Rahman, 2017). Most Malaysian ESL lecturers are trained in a product-based approach which focus on the importance of language skills, such as grammar and sentence structure, but lacks focus on content/idea, organization, and other aspects of writing (Chow, 2007). Due to this, it has led to a decline in writing performance among the students as heavy emphasis is given to the structure and forms instead of their creativity in writing (Kee & Razali, 2019). Generally, this approach focuses more on the structure of writing rather than teaching the processes of writing. It can be said that the use of product-based approach in writing classroom does not allow the students to be creative and critical in producing their own piece of writing.

The second approach used by ESL lecturers in teaching writing skills is the process approach. In this approach, students are taught and exposed to the processes of writing starting with pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. Through this approach, students learn the writing processes and this approach could help to improve students' performance in writing if it is well practiced by both the ESL lecturers and the students (Alabere & Shapii, 2019). One of the issues concerning the process approach is that it consumes a lot of time as the ESL lecturers need to devote their time to provide comments and feedback to multiple written drafts before students finally submitted their final written work. This also has become an issue to the ESL lecturers if they have a huge number of students in a class. However, in Malaysian classrooms, this approach is not being applied in most writing classrooms as ESL lecturers faced problems, such as large number of students in a class, lack of time, and packed teaching schedules.

The third teaching approach is process-genre approach. In this teaching approach, students learned the processes of writing to meet the various genres of writing. Students are learned various formats and structure of writing needed for each genre. To ensure the success of utilizing this approach, students need to have knowledge of language

structure, purpose of writing, and functions of each genre. Despite that, some of the limitations of this approach is, it requires careful planning and consuming a lot of time as it requires ESL lecturers to teach the five stages in writing process and the different functions of each genre.

Lastly is the collaborative writing approach where students learned to write with other students during the writing process. Boud and Cohen (2014) accentuated that peer learning in collaborative writing is a form of two-way communication where learning is emphasized between the learners in a simultaneous way. In this approach, students work together with other students or More Knowledgeable Others (MKO) in completing their writing tasks by exchanging ideas from each other during writing. However, one of the main challenges for this approach is the linguistic and knowledge gap between the learners (Che Mat, 2020). With such differences in linguistic and knowledge proficiency, students are prone to face some difficulties, such as miscommunication, inability to exchange ideas while working collaboratively on their writing tasks. This is due to the fact that collaborative writing approach emphasizes students with different proficiency levels working together in their writing tasks. Therefore, ESL lecturers/teachers need to be careful when selecting students of different proficiency levels to form into pairs or group so that the objective of writing collaboratively between the students can be achieved. Out of all these teaching approaches, none of these teaching approaches can be considered as the best or ideal to teach academic writing (Johari, 2018; Too, 2017).

Upon close inspection of the previous studies, the researchers found several gaps that allow the researchers to conduct this study. There are little in-depth studies that focus on teaching academic writing. To be precise, there is lack of studies that focus on teaching approaches used by Malaysian ESL lecturers. Many of the past studies are focusing on the problems faced by students in learning academic writing (see Akhtar et al., 2020; Alabere & Shapii, 2019; Almatarneh et al., 2018; Badiozaman, 2017; Ibrahim et al., 2017; Johari, 2018; Kotamjani & Husin, 2017; Kotamjani et al., 2018; Rahman & Hasan, 2019; Singh, 2016, 2017, 2019). Additionally, most of previous studies are done in the context of international postgraduate students in Malaysian universities (see Almatarneh et al., 2018; Ibrahim et al., 2017; Johari, 2018; Kotamjani & Husin, 2017; Jeyaraj, 2020; Kotamjani et al., 2018; Rahman & Hasan, 2019; Singh, 2016, 2017, 2019). There is lack of studies done among Malaysian undergraduate students on how they learn English academic writing.

Additionally, most of the previous studies are conducted using the quantitative and mixed method research designs (see Akhtar et al., 2020; Alabere & Shapii, 2019; Almatarneh et al., 2018; Badiozaman, 2017; Ibrahim et al., 2017; Kotamjani et al., 2018; Kotamjani & Husin, 2017; Rahman & Hasan, 2019). While these studies have provided great insights into the field of English education and teaching writing, they are not able to provide in-depth information on the teaching and learning academic writing. These studies only rely on survey questionnaires to gather data, and this may not be sufficient to describe the real-life context of the phenomenon of teaching and learning academic writing or to gather the emic perspectives of the participants as compared to what in-depth qualitative studies can yield.

Theoretical Framework

The study is guided by the following theories which are Sociocultural Theory by Vygotsky (1978), Cognitive Process Theory by Flowers and Hayes (1981), and Academic Literacies Model (ALM) by Lea and Street (1998). Figure 1 below illustrates the theoretical underpinnings of the study.
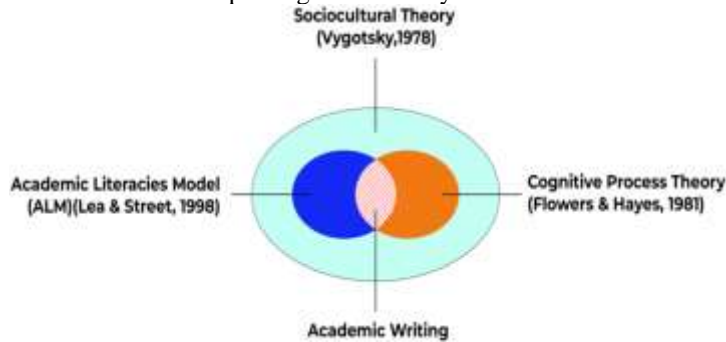

Figure 1
Theoretical Framework of the study

These three theories are used to underpin the study that aims to understand the teaching and learning of English academic writing at higher education institutions. In order to gain insight into the process of teaching and learning academic writing in a higher education context, these three theories are employed to explain the relationship and connections between them.

Proficiency in the English language is considered important for students at the tertiary level, as most of the studies at this stage require a good command of English. Exposure to the English language from young age would significantly benefit students in their studies, especially when combined with an environment that utilizes English such as, their homes, in schools, and in everyday interactions. The extensive exposure to English in students' daily lives, both in school, and at home, would assist them in better understanding their tertiary level studies. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory of language learning (1978) emphasizes the importance of the surrounding/learning environment in influencing how students acquire a language. Given that students in the in Malaysian education context have been introduced to and exposed to the English language since kindergarten, primary school, and secondary school, prior to entering tertiary education, the Sociocultural Theory plays a significant role in justifying and understanding how the learning environment and the experiences of ESL lecturers and students (relevant to the participants in this study) impact their teaching and learning of English academic writing at the tertiary level.

Meanwhile, the Cognitive Process Theory by Flowers and Hayes (1981) would help to justify the process of teaching and learning English academic writing. Since this theory focuses on the processes that a writer goes through in their writing, which relate to their cognitive abilities (i.e., their thought processes), hence it can help to explain and confirm that writing does indeed involve several stages of processes that a writer must

go through in their writing. In this theory, Flowers and Hayes (1981) indicated that writing is a recursive process where a writer will go back and forth in their writing before finalizing it. This means that a writer will go through the processes of writing (i.e., prewriting, drafting, editing, revising, and publishing) which will ultimately require their thought processes. Through this theory, findings of the study reveal that students who learn academic writing through the processes of writing have learned the facets of writing in a much more meaningful way as they learned through the processes of writing based on the given comments by their ESL lecturers.

In view of this, since academic writing is mostly used at the tertiary level, it is paramount to understand the kinds of literacies needed, especially for students who are furthering their education at this stage. The Academic Literacies Model (ALM), which was introduced by Lea and Street (1998), explains the concept of academic literacies that surround academia, particularly in higher education institutions. This theory revolves around the three main skills: study skills, socialization skills, and academic literacies which are very much needed by the academic community (i.e., lecturers, researchers, students, and higher education institutions). To teach and learn English academic writing at the tertiary level, both ESL lecturers and students need to have a set of skills to perform in the academic community. Students need to equip themselves not only with writing skills but also with other language skills such as reading, which could help them in their writing. They must have this set of literacies in order to learn. The findings of the study show that students need these literacies as proposed by Lea and Street to learn academic writing in a tertiary context.

METHOD

Research Approach

The study employed a qualitative case study approach where the researchers investigated a real-life context of the teaching and learning English academic writing at a public university in Malaysia. Qualitative research design is chosen as the research design as the design allows the researcher to have in-depth understanding of the participants' experience and the meanings they bring together (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). In using qualitative research design, the researchers employed case study approach in to explore a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Research Setting

The study was conducted at a higher education institution in Malaysia, precisely at one public university named as Public University A (pseudonym). This public university is a branch campus of a public university in Malaysia. This research setting was chosen by the researchers based on several selection criteria which are: (1) offering English academic writing course to undergraduate students during the academic semester 0f 2022/2023 (i.e., when the study was conducted), and (2) use of English language as medium of instruction (MOI) at the institution. Upon conducting research at this research site, a letter of approval and permission was sent to the gatekeeper to obtain permission to collect data.

Research Participants and Sampling Technique

The research participants involved in the study were one ESL lecturer and four undergraduate students who gave their agreement to participate voluntarily in the study. These research participants were selected using purposeful sampling based on predetermined selection criteria. In recruiting the ESL lecturer, the researchers first went to meet the Head of Department and explain the study's objective and asked for recommendations to select the research participants, particularly ESL lecturers who are willing to participate. In doing so, the researchers employed snowball sampling technique where the researchers chose the ESL lecturer through 'contact information' (Noy, 2008). To select the research participants, the researchers used specific selection criteria which are: (1) having a minimum of two years teaching experience at the tertiary level, (2) possessing at least a Master degree in the field of ESL, (3) teaching English academic writing to undergraduate students, and (4) a full-time academician.

Meanwhile, the selection for undergraduate students is based on (1) at least a first-year student, (2) possessing an intermediate level of English proficiency, and (3) learning English academic writing at the time the study was conducted. Table 1 illustrates the participants' demographic details. Upon conducting the interview and FGD sessions, the participants were given informed consent forms for them to indicate their willingness and voluntary participation in the study.

Table 1
Participants' demographic details

Participants	ESL Lecturer	Undergraduate Students
Age	Middle 30s	Early 20s
Gender	Female	2 Males and 2 Females
Educational backgrounds	Master's degree (TESL)	Foundation and Diploma
English language proficiency	Expert	Intermediate
English language status	2nd language	2nd language
Number of spoken languages	2 (i.e., Malay, and English languages)	2 (i.e., Malay, and English languages)
Socioeconomic status	Middle class	Middle class

Research Instruments

The researchers employed semi-structured in-depth interviews, focus group discussion (FGD), and lesson observations to explore the teaching and learning of English academic writing at Public University A. DeMarrais (2004) defined a research interview as a focused in-depth conversation between the researcher and the participants based on the questions related to the study. This was done to gain insights from the ESL lecturer on her selection of teaching approach. Meanwhile, FGD sessions were also carried out with the undergraduate students to generate more ideas and information about how they learn academic writing in the classroom to help provide rich data for the study (Creswell, 2007). In conducting those sessions, the semi-structured questions were used in both interview and FGD sessions with the participants. Prior to conducting the sessions, the questions were first validated by two experts who senior TESL lecturers

are, counterparts of the researchers. The researchers also used interview and FGD protocols with probing questions as guidelines during the sessions.

To further understand the teaching approach used by the ESL lecturer in the classroom, the researchers conducted four times of classroom observations. During the observation session, the researchers played role as non-participant observer to understand the real-life context of the research participants in the phenomenon without making any changes or manipulating the environment (Gay et al., 2012). By conducting observations, the researchers were able to observe how the ESL lecturer taught and how the students learned academic writing in the classroom at Public University A.

Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected during the academic semester of 2022/2023. The number of interviews and FGD sessions conducted with the participants were three times and the lesson observations were conducted four times. This data corpus was collected at the beginning, middle, and end of the study to fully understand the teaching and learning English academic writing at Public University A. Upon receiving permission and approval from the gatekeeper to conduct the study and consent from the participants, the researchers first conducted the lesson observations. The lesson observations were conducted for two hours (according to the lesson's schedule). During the lesson observation, the researchers played the role as non-participant observers where the researchers did not involve directly in the lesson and did not interact or participate during the teaching and learning activities. While conducting the lesson observations, the researchers wrote down field notes containing descriptive and reflective notes in which these notes were later used for triangulation purpose to help strengthen the findings of the study as what Eisner (1991) mentioned, "a confluence of evidence that breeds credibility" (p. 110).

After conducting each lesson observation (i.e., four times), the researchers then conducted the interview sessions (i.e., three times) with the ESL lecturer. During the first interview session which was done at the beginning of the study, the researchers asked the ESL lecturer on her personal details, educational background, and her past learning experience especially in learning writing skills. The second interview session was conducted in middle of the study where the researchers focused more on the teaching aspects, such as her teaching schedule, teaching load, the teaching approach employed by the ESL lecturer, and how she taught the students. The third interview session was conducted at the end of the study and focused on how the ESL lecturer measured her students' writing performance, how she evaluated her students' writing tasks, the kinds of problems that the students faced in academic writing. All the interview sessions were conducted in English language and were voice-recorded which lasted for about one hour (i.e., each session). The researchers later transcribed verbatim each of the interview session for data analysis.

Meanwhile, the focus group discussion (FGD) with the undergraduate students were also conducted three times by the researchers. The researchers fixed appointments with the students to conduct the FGD sessions where all three sessions were conducted at the institution's library (i.e., discussion room). The first FGD session revolved around the

participants' personal details, such as their educational background, English language proficiency levels, and their aims in learning academic writing. The second FGD session was conducted in the middle of the study where the researchers focused more on how the students learned academic writing and the same focus was continued in the third FGD session. All three sessions of FGD lasted for about one hour and thirty minutes and they were conducted in English language. The sessions were voiced-recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researchers.

Data Analysis

The researchers analyzed the collected data thematically using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006) six steps in thematic analysis. In doing so, all the interview and FGD transcripts were printed out by the researchers to ease the process of data analysis. The researchers first read each of the interview and FGD transcripts for about three to four times in order to immerse themselves into the phenomenon in understanding the teaching and learning academic writing. Then, the researchers created open coding based on the research questions of the study. This was done to develop potential related codes to answer the research questions. The third step employed by the researchers was developing categories to group similar codes. In the fourth step, based on the categories the researchers created tentative themes. These themes were then defined as how it was understood in answering the research questions. The researchers then discussed and finalized the tentative themes in the fifth step and lastly presented the findings of the study by using themes and codes.

FINDINGS

The study was guided by two research objectives which are to explore the teaching approaches used by the ESL lecturer in teaching English academic writing and how ESL undergraduate students learned English academic writing in a public university in Malaysia. Based on the analysis of findings, there were two emerging themes found to explain the teaching approach and how the students learned English academic writing at Public University A. The researchers found that the ESL lecturer employed the *traditional teaching approach of teacher-centered* by emphasizing the use of *textbook teaching*. Meanwhile, the students learned academic writing by engaging in lots of *drills and practices* during the academic writing lessons in the classroom.

Teaching Approach: Teacher-centered Approach with Heavy-Reliance on Textbook Teaching

Based on the interview sessions and classroom observations, it was found that the ESL lecturer at Public University A employed a traditional teaching approach which is the teacher-centered approach in teaching English academic writing. This teacher-centered approach can be defined as a traditional teaching approach where the teacher/lecturer/educator/instructor acts as the main knowledge contributor in the classroom to deliver the contents of the lesson and students are expected to consume the knowledge. During the interview sessions with the ESL lecturer, when the researchers asked about the teaching approach used to teach English academic writing, the ESL lecturer answered,

"The teaching approach that I usually used is the teacher centered, I would say…" (ESL Lecturer – 2md Interview, lines 270, p. 18).

This teaching approach limits the learning interaction between the ESL lecturer and her students in the classroom as the focus is on the lecturer. Based on the classroom observation, there was less interaction between the lecturer and her students. Students were passively acquiring the knowledge while in the classroom. This was also evident during the observations where the lecturer was seen to deliver her lectures in the front of the classroom with less movement to check on each students' learning and students were sitting quietly, passively paying their attention to the lesson. It was only one-way communication in the classroom. Students were very quiet and unresponsive throughout the lesson.

Another aspect of teacher-centered approach was when the ESL lecturer emphasized the importance of memorization in learning English academic writing. The ESL lecturer also revealed and admitted during the interview sessions that she was very much influenced by her past learning experience, especially in adopting her past lecturer's teaching style in teaching English academic writing. Since she was influenced based on her past learning experience, she believed that memorization could assist students in their learning. She recalled her own experience where she learned to memorize the structure of an essay. With such prior knowledge, she carried similar idea into her own lessons where she emphasized that students should memorize certain elements of academic writing, such as the structure, format, use of vocabulary, and other mechanics of writing including the use of punctuations in citation, and references. She asserted that,

"…And then, for me why memorizing is important, is because for example like citation just now. It requires a lot of practice, even until now we are still using it... They must understand that there is certain format that they have to follow, they need to memorize in order to get it right…" (ESL Lecturer – 1st Interview, lines 146-149, p.10)

Based on this excerpt, the ESL lecturer pointed out that memorization was important in learning academic writing. To her, memorizing the format, structure of writing, and punctuations are necessary in academic writing as it helps students to remember the details and technical parts of academic writing.

Additionally, another essence of teacher-centered approach that can be observed in the classroom was heavily reliance on textbook teaching. In a traditional teaching approach, the teacher usually relies on specific teaching material, like a textbook where lessons are focused on the contents, forms, and exercises as prescribed in the textbook. This was evident based on the classroom observations when the ESL lecturer only utilized the textbook throughout her lesson and there was no evidence of other teaching materials used to supplement the process of teaching and learning. The ESL lecturer further asserted that this was her teaching approach as she said,

> *"...even when I teach my own students, I think it is always works when we are using the old method like using textbook and writing it back..." (ESL Lecturer – 1st Interview, lines 123–124, p. 9).*

From this excerpt, the ESL lecturer was very content in using textbook in her teaching and she believed that the method worked best especially when teaching and learning English writing skills. She further asserted on the importance of using textbook by saying,

> *"...as for now, I do have a textbook that we use in class, and I did actually ask the students to use the textbook and the textbook is the primary source..." (ESL Lecturer – 2nd Interview, lines 288–290, p. 19)*

Based on the above excerpt, the ESL lecturer clearly used and encouraged her students to buy the English academic writing textbook. She even admitted that the textbook is her main teaching material. During the interviews, she confirmed that Public University A uses a standardized textbook for English academic writing. Throughout the interview sessions, the ESL lecturer emphasized that she used the same textbook in her academic writing lessons. To her, it is very convenient to use the textbook as the weekly topics and the contents are designed according to the syllabus of English Academic Writing course at her institution. Moreover, the textbook also contains topical exercises that students can complete after each lesson and it is used as their reference before completing their on-going assessments (i.e., written essays, and article reviews). She further reiterated,

> *"For academic writing, we are using a textbook because we believe that the textbook...actually the textbook is written by academic writing lecturers also. So, the textbook follows all the assessments as well as the Scheme of Work by following the weeks and also chapters that need to be taught to the students..." (ESL Lecturer – 2nd Interview, lines 31-34, p.3)*

The reason for using and relying heavily on the textbook is due to the contents of the textbook that were designed and developed according to the Scheme of Work (SOW) of English academic writing course at Public University A. Moreover, according to her, the textbook itself was written and compiled by all the lecturers who are teaching the course (academic writing). Hence, it is very convenient for her to use the textbook and follow the weekly topics to complete the syllabus. This was also seen during the lesson observations which were conducted four times during the study where she used and relied on the textbook teaching during the entire lesson. Below is a description of one of the lesson observations:

> Lecturer was explaining on the list of references and told students to write them according to alphabetical order. She then suddenly jumped to APA formatting for students' term paper (i.e., one of the on-going assessments) where she showed a sample of student's work in PDF and continued to explain on the abstract, body, and organization. Lecturer also showed example how to use table using APA style of referencing and mentioned that all the information is available in the textbook, and they can refer to it at their own convenience.

> Throughout the lesson, the lecturer kept on mentioning and reminding students to buy the textbook (i.e., this was during earlier of the semester, week 4) to ease their learning in the classroom. On the same note, lecturer also mentioned the importance of having the textbook as their guideline especially when writing for referencing. (1st Classroom Observation Field Notes, 5th November 2022).

During the lesson observations, it was very clear that the lecturer relied 100 percent on the textbook while teaching and the students also referred to the same material. As a result of this traditional teaching approach, the classroom learning environment became very quiet and there was less interaction between the lecturer and the students. It was quite a passive learning environment for a language lesson albeit a writing class.

Students' Learning Approach: Drills and Practices

Another significant evidence of traditional teaching approach is the emphasis on textbook drills and practices. In this case, the students learned academic writing by engaging in lots of drills and practices during the lesson. Their ESL lecturer believed that to be good in academic writing skills, students should engross in writing drills and practices where writing skills are put into practice. Throughout the lesson observations, it was the teaching routine of the ESL lecturer to start her lesson by explaining the contents of the lesson for that day and then proceeded with classroom drills and practices. She mentioned,

> *"So, drills and practices are always important like what I always do with my students, I must ensure that they do the practices, then we will discuss it. It seems like a traditional method, but I always believe that it is the best method because once the topic is taught, then I will ask them to do the practices in the textbook because I am using a textbook…" (ESL Lecturer – 1st Interview, lines 163–167, p. 11–12)*

The ESL lecturer believed that drills and practices are essential for writing skills. In her understanding, to have good skills in writing, students need to practice the skills by doing lots of writing exercises. That was the reason why she relied heavily on the use of the textbook as students could be drilled to complete the topical exercises from the textbook after each of her lecture. In a way, this is practically how the students learned academic writing in the classroom. She further reiterated that,

> *"I explained everything to them, I taught them the lesson on that day, and we moved to the practices…Yes, I think this is the core when it comes to writing, for me. Drills and practices are always the core let say, the cream, when it comes to writing…" (ESL Lecturer – 1st Interview, lines 172–173, p. 12).*

In addition to that, her students also claimed that they learned academic writing by using and rereferring to the textbook throughout the lessons and were asked to complete exercises in the textbook as the contents are based on the weekly topics and syllabus of the course. Two of the students mentioned that,

"Examples of writing exercises would normally come from the textbook...mainly from the textbook because that is our main guideline..." (Student – 1, 2nd FGD, lines 103–104, p. 8)

"We use textbook very extensively when we are doing the exercises..." (Student – 2, 2nd FGD, lines 193, p. 13)

The ESL lecturer also claimed that during drills and practices, she used to check on her students' understanding. This was when she claimed that whenever she had discussions with her students, it helped to determine whether the lesson objectives had been achieved or not based on how well the students responded during the discussion. In a way, the lecturer was checking on her students' understanding of the lesson. This was when she mentioned that,

"Once they have done it, we will discuss it. Only then, I can technically check my students' understanding and I can see which part that they are not clear, or which part they need more explanation and justifications" (ESL Lecturer – 1st Interview, lines 167–169, p. 12).

In summary, the ESL lecturer used traditional teaching approach by employing teacher-centered in her teaching. She was seen to rely on textbook teaching the entire lesson when the study was conducted. In reiteration of that, the undergraduate students at Public University A learned English academic writing by engaging in lots of drills and practices as a result of textbook teaching method employed by their ESL lecturer.

DISCUSSION

The study was conducted to explore the teaching approaches used by the ESL lecturer in her teaching and how the undergraduate students learned English academic writing at a public university in Malaysia. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, focus group discussion (FGD), and lesson observations with one ESL lecturer and a group of four undergraduate students during the academic semester of 2022/2023. Based on the study's findings, the ESL lecturer employed traditional teaching approach of teacher-centered where she relied heavily on textbook teaching. Due to this, students are not only learning academic writing in a very passive learning environment, but also engrossed in drills and practices. In this traditional approach, the ESL lecturer played the role as information and knowledge provider to the students while in the classroom. In this approach, the lecturer is the centre of learning in the classroom as there is limited of two-way communication between the lecturer and students (Emaliana, 2017).

In response to the findings of the study, one of the characteristics of teacher-centered approach is the use of textbook teaching which was heavily used in the classroom of English academic writing as observed at Public University A. The ESL lecturer was observed to rely heavily on the use of the textbook in her lessons. There were no other supplementary teaching and learning materials used during the lesson. Both the ESL lecturer and the students used and referred to the same textbook throughout the lesson. The ESL lecturer admitted that at Public University A, all lecturers and students are using the same standardized textbook. This textbook is regarded as the main source of teaching and learning in the classroom as it is written and compiled by all the ESL

lecturers who are teaching the course (i.e., English academic writing). This was done to ensure standardization in teaching at the institution. In regard to the use of textbook teaching as found in the study's findings, the use of textbook is regarded as one of the aspects of teacher-centered approach (Acat & Donmez, 2009). Therefore, it can be concluded that ESL lecturer at Public University A employed the traditional teaching approach of teacher-centered in her teaching English academic writing.

On the other hand, the undergraduate students at Public University A learned English academic writing by focusing on drills and practices. They were drilled with topical exercises in every lesson. By engaging in topical exercises in the textbook, the students seemed to be learning academic writing in a rigid manner that focused on correct use of language, structure, and forms. There was limited exposure for the students to utilize their creative and critical thinking skills in planning and writing. This is also reported by Ellis (2009) in which teacher-centered approach stemmed from the behaviorist theory where learning focuses on forms where students are taught to use correct forms of grammar, vocabulary, structure, punctuations, and other mechanics of writing. Due to this, students tend to disregard their creative and critical thinking skills. This is also the case for students at Public University A where they learned academic writing by engaging in drills and practices from the textbook.

As observed in the classroom, due to the traditional teaching approach of teacher-centered, the learning environment became very passive where students became unresponsive throughout the lesson as there was less interaction and lack of two-way communication. The ESL lecturer delivered the lesson in monotonous manner and students were expected to passively receive the contents of the lesson. With such teaching and learning environment, the classroom becomes quiet and limiting students' learning experiences. Students were seen to be engrossed with the practices in the textbook where they completed the practices individually. The findings of the study also support previous study where the use of teacher-centered has restricted the students' creativity in a language classroom (Li, 2016). Additionally, it also limits the lecturer's creativity in delivering the lessons due to heavy reliance on textbook usage. As a result, the teacher/lecturer becomes less innovative in their teaching. This is in tandem with Joshi (2017) as he mentioned that lack of teaching creativity is one of the factors that contribute to the issues of teaching academic writing among ESL practitioners.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the selection of teaching approach does play an integral part in ensuring success in teaching and learning, especially English academic writing, a technical and demanding skill. With students' lack of proficiency in English language, ESL lecturers do not only need to be equipped with ample content knowledge (CK) on academic writing conventions, but also possess essential pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) to teach such a demanding and technical course. With suitable teaching approach, it can bring changes to how students perceive and learn English academic writing, and this will contribute to their overall experience in learning. Therefore, there are several implications towards practice that can be implied from the findings of the study. Firstly, to overcome the boredom of the traditional teaching approach, the researchers suggest

ESL lecturers/teachers/practitioners to integrate the traditional teaching teacher-centered approach with other approaches, like the process-based approach as a dual approach.

These two approaches can be combined, as both are widely used by ESL lecturers in teaching writing, taking into consideration the suitability of the course content, the purposes of writing, students' diverse educational backgrounds, and their differences in proficiency levels. By implementing the process approach within the traditional approach to teaching writing, ESL lecturers at public universities can still incorporate some elements of the process approach. Since the traditional approach relies heavily on drills and writing practices, ESL lecturers can include the elements of revising and editing stages in these drills and practices. Typically, after drills and practice sessions with the students in the traditional approach, ESL lecturers at public universities will conduct whole-classroom discussions. Instead of having an overall discussion with the students, ESL lecturers can adopt one of the elements of the process approach, where comments and feedback are given to students' writing during the revising and editing stages, considering writing as a recursive process. During drills and practices session, these ESL lecturers could also teach the students about the processes of writing, so that students are introduced to and learn the correct processes of writing. By doing so, it can change the overall notion of the traditional drills and practices to one that is more student-centered and collaborative in nature.

Secondly, higher education institutions are encouraged to revise, modify, and update their syllabi for English academic writing courses. The new syllabi and curriculum for these courses should be more comprehensive, incorporating both the traditional and process approaches. The syllabus outline should clearly indicate the various stages of learning, in which students will be taught writing using both the product and process approaches. For instance, one of the stages in the product approach is familiarization, where students learn and become familiar with correct language use, grammar, and vocabulary in writing by studying model essays or sample writing. Through this process, students become aware of the linguistic requirements for writing and practice them by engaging in controlled and guided writing exercises within the product approach. Once students are familiar with the linguistic aspects, they then proceed to prepare their drafts by engaging in the process approach. They can choose to work individually or collaboratively in pairs. After completing their initial drafts, students submit them to their ESL lecturer for comments and feedback. This stage signifies the revision and editing phases of the process approach. By incorporating this dual approach in the syllabus for English academic writing course, ESL lecturers might find it easier to employ a teaching approach that meet the students' learning needs, fulfils the requirements of the syllabus, and ultimately achieves the intended learning outcomes of the course.

Based on the findings of the study, the researchers suggest for future research to explore more on the teaching approaches used by ESL lecturers in teaching English academic writing at other types of higher education institutions. This is due to the reason that different institutions, such as public and private universities have different syllabi of academic writing. With such differences, ESL lecturers at different types of institutions

will adopt and employ different types of teaching approaches that suit their students' proficiency levels and needs, to achieve course learning outcomes as well as the fulfilling the course assessments. Additionally, future research should also explore on the kinds of problems faced by ESL lecturers in teaching academic writing. Based on the reviews of literature made by the researchers, there are lack of studies conducted that focus on the problems in teaching academic writing. Hence, more studies on these areas would greatly contribute to the knowledge of academic writing and to the field of ESL and education.

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Appendix A
Semi-structured Interview Questions
First Interview (beginning of the study)
1. Please tell me about yourself, your educational background, and your professional background as an ESL lecturer.
2. How and why did you become an ESL lecturer?
   - How many years of teaching experience do you have specifically at tertiary level?
   - When did you start teaching at tertiary level?
   - What are some of the English language courses you have taught so far?
   - What criteria do you think qualify a person to become a university lecturer?
3. Can you share your experience learning writing when you were a student either in secondary or tertiary level?
   - How was your learning experience back then? Was it satisfactory or was it not?
4. Can you describe how did your teacher or lecturer teach writing in the classroom?
   - At that point of time, what are the benefits that you have gained from the writing lesson?
   - Which areas of writing you were struggling with when you were a student?
   - How did you resolve the difficulties in writing when you were a student?
   - Which areas of writing you have improved from the lessons you went through?
   - Were there many writing exercises or activities provided to you during your writing lesson? Please provide some examples
Second Interview (middle of the study)
1. Please tell me about your teaching load, the course(s) you are currently teaching and for which program (e.g., engineering, business, accounting etc.)

2. What would be your usual teaching routine as an ESL lecturer the moment you enter the classroom?
3. When did you start teaching writing course?
   - Is it at the beginning of your career or just recently?
   - What is the name of the writing course(s) you have taught and how was your teaching experienced?
   - Among the four language skills, which one do you prefer or like to teach and why?
   - What about writing? You don't like to teach writing skills?
   - How do you think writing should be taught in the classroom?
4. How do you teach writing in the classroom?
   - What is your teaching approach for writing?
   - Can you describe the teaching approach that you used when teaching writing?
   - How do you prepare teaching materials for your writing lesson?
   - What are the learning materials that you incorporate in your writing lesson?
   - What are your main concerns when teaching writing in the class?
   - Do you think that your own experience as a student learning writing back then has affected the way you teach writing? Why do you say so?
   - Do you think you have benefit from your past learning experience in writing? Why is that?
   - How do you make sure that your writing lesson meets the various students' proficiency levels?
   - How do you engage your students during writing lesson?
   - Besides achieving the CLO, what other or personal goals do you want your students to achieve from your writing lessons?

Third Interview (at the end of the study)
1. How do you measure your students' writing performance?
   - How do you know whether your students have benefitted or learned something from your writing lesson?
   - How do you help your students to recognize their writing potentials?
   - Which one do you think is important, oral, or written comments and feedback? Why do you think so?
   - How do you provide comments and feedback to your students on their writing tasks?
2. Based on your experience as an ESL lecturer, which areas of academic writing that students have major problems with?
   - Why do you think students have such problems?
   - Do you think students like academic writing?
   - How do you help students to tackle such problems?
   - Can you explain to me on the assessments used for the course?

Appendix B
Focus group discussion (FGD)
First Focus Group Discussion (FGD) (beginning of the study)
1. Please tell me a little bit about yourself.
   - What other academic qualifications do you have? (e.g STPM, Diploma,

Foundation)
- Where did you receive the qualification(s) that you mentioned?
- What are the languages that you use in your everyday communication?
- What language do you use to speak at home with your parents and siblings?
- Do you like English language? Why and why not?
- What kinds of reading materials that you read in English? (e.g English story
  books, magazines, comics etc)
- Why do you think proficiency and knowledge in English language is
  important for a student?
- What do you do to improve your English proficiency?
- What do you hope to achieve from this English course at the end of the semester?

Second Focus Group Discussion (FGD) (middle of the study)
1. Can you describe a typical day in your academic writing lesson?
   - What does your English lecturer do in every academic writing lesson?
   - What are the writing activities or tasks that you do in academic writing lesson?
   - Do you like or enjoy the way your lecturer teaches academic writing? Why is that?
2. How do you learn academic writing in the classroom?
   - How your English lecturer deliver his or her lecture on academic writing?
   - Does your lecturer specify the writing tasks to be completed in the lesson? Please
     give example
   - Is there any specific guideline or instructions that you follow when engaging in
     writing tasks?

Third Focus Group Discussion (FGD) (at the end of the study)
1. Usually, how do you engage in writing tasks? Is it individually, in pairs or in groups?
   - Which one is your preference - to work individually or with other students on your
     writing tasks? Why is that?
   - How was the experience working with other students on writing tasks?
   - Do you find it easy to work on writing tasks with other students? Why is that?
   - What are the benefits that you gained from engaging on the writing tasks with other
     students?
   - What are the learning materials that you lecturer incorporates (use) in your
     academic writing lesson? Please give examples
   - Do you practice academic writing on your own outside of class? Why and why not?
2. In your understanding, what is academic writing?
   - Can you tell what you have learned so far in your academic writing class?
   - Do you see any improvements on your writing skills after taking academic writing
     class? Please give example
   - Why do you think academic writing is challenging to learn and master?
   - So far, do you like academic writing class? Why and why not?