

The Effects of ESL Student's Attitude on Academic Writing Apprehensions and Academic Writing Challenges

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Abstract--- *The main purpose of this study is to explore the effects of ESL First year students' attitudes on academic writing, writing apprehensions and challenges of academic writing from Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM). A total number of 27 students were participated in this study. For the data collection, Writing Apprehensions Test (WAT) was developed and adapt from a test designed by (Daly & Miller, 1975). The questionnaire items were divided into three categories, first is on general students' attitude towards academic writing, second focus on students' academic writing apprehension and last academic writing challenges. The outcomes of this study indicate that academic challenges are the main cause for the students to be apprehensive towards writing. In addition, most importantly students' negative attitude towards academic writing results in lack of interest towards academic writing. However, the findings show that most students are aware of the importance of ESL writing and its requirements.*

Keywords--- *Writing Apprehension, Student's Attitude, Academic Writing Challenges, ESL Students.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Academic writing is always considering a difficult and essential skill. According to McLeod, (1987) writing apprehension is an affective factor, generally means a student get experience of nervousness, anxiety and even high apprehension when writing and the feelings often upset his writing process. Daly & Miller, (1975) have introduced writing apprehension as a term. Moreover, they determined writing apprehension as "A subjective complex of attitudinal, emotional, and behavioral interaction which reinforces each other" (Daly, 1978; Daly & Miller, 1975, P. 11). Writing apprehension is considered as a complex term since of the complexity of academic writing. Writing apprehension is a huge challenge for ESL students (Al-Shboul & Huwari, 2015; Graves, 1984). Further, similar current studies investigated the role of apprehension in the context of the present study. WA is a serious disputable challenge which is faced by the most of ESL first year students. Most of ESL students have negative attitude towards academic writing and it is a cause of apprehensions. James et,al (2020) highlighted ESL students apprehension connected to second language learning. Malaysian students of English often repeat similar errors in academic writing. (Hassan, et,al, 2019).

Attitude refers to a predisposition to respond specifically towards an object, situation, or value which is usually accompanied by feelings and emotions (Kratovil & Werner, 1983). ESL students always face academic writing challenges because of their apprehension and negative attitude towards academic writing (Hassan, et.al 2019). Mostly ESL students take writing as an uninteresting and challenging task and hence, they dislike it. Students'

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attitude always affects their academic achievement, especially at first year level essential to perform academic tasks in written form. Students' academic achievement connected to their writing tasks and ESL learning is affected students' external and internal influences. The characteristic of education linguistic, educator, and syllabus are determined as some of the external components in English language learning skills. inner influences such as attitude, apprehension and self-confidence maintain distinguish influence on students 'individual achievement at their academic writing learning (Zefran, 2015). Writing apprehension is the basic cause of academic writing challenges among ESL students (Al-Shboul & Huwari, 2015). This pilot study focused to investigate ESL students' general attitude towards academic writing and apprehensions that cause academic writing challenges among first year students.

Furthermore, just a few studies have discussed writing apprehension among first year students. It could be realized that the prior studies have been done that school students and graduate students. This study highlighted with consideration academic writing apprehension among first year students to fill in this gap. The findings of the preceding studies have reviewed above are frequently reliable. The scholar has noticed that a few studies have focused of academic writing apprehensions but this study identify how negative attitude cause ESL students writing apprehensions. Apprehension always affects ESL students learning process and drive academic writing challenges especially, when first year students join colleges and universities. This study was an attempt to highlight Malaysian ESL students' apprehensions and their academic writing challenges.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the world, ESL students always face English language challenges, especially connected to their academic writing content and development (Osman & Bakar, 2009). The term "writing apprehension" (WA), means tendency of a person to assume or to avoid writing tasks, and was first used by Daly and Miller (1975a). They developed (Daly-Miller Writing Apprehension Test (D-M WAT) as an instrument to measure students' apprehension when writing in their native English language. Daly describes writing apprehension as "the general avoidance of writing situations perceived by individuals to potentially require some amount of writing accompanied by the potential for evaluation of that writing (Daly, 1979, P. 37)". According to Gungle & Taylor, (1989) second language also concerned with writing apprehension and it is connected to students' willingness. In this study, the researcher investigates ESL students' apprehension as a point of concern for examination of students' attitude towards writing and academic writing challenges.

Attitude is a triode model which base affective, behavior and cognitive. The cognitive component of attitudes refers to the beliefs and thoughts which affect their emotions and feelings. Behavioral component reflects ESL students' attitude affects (Zimbardo & Leippe, 1991: P30). Most ESL students' beliefs that they cannot perform better in writing (Jain, 2014). Attitudes are believed to directly influence behavior. Negative attitude is caused previous writing experiences and it creates apprehension among ESL students. Daly, (1978) notable between anxiety and apprehension. Further, Daly observed apprehension (avoiding of writing conditions) such as one of the tendency beliefs, though nervousness was apparent as the situational sensation. The origins of apprehension could be theorized within two main theoretical frameworks: First, the deficit theory and, second the interference theory. The

Deficit Theory by Spark, et al (2000); Daud (2016) & Horwitz, (2010) claim that apprehension might be the reason of language challenges. It indicates that only unskilled and weak writers could be experienced writing apprehension. Although, the interference theory Beebe & Giles, (1984: P113); Giraldeau & Caraco, (2018: P138) claim that apprehension interferes with advance skill and might be interrelated with lower skills, but it is not limited to any capability level.

The previous researchers point out students' academic writing challenges in their studies that are clarity of writing, coherent (micro and macro level), deficiency of academic writing practice, lack of student motivation, mechanics, mistakes in tenses, S-V agreements, conditionals sentences and additional aspects of writing skill such as appropriate grammar use, spelling, conventions, capitalization, punctuation, and some of the staple and introducing features of writing; Malaysian ESL students' face challenges in academic essay writing tasks, particularly in language use (grammar) and punctuation (Adas & Bakir, 2013; Ghabool & Kashef, 2012; Maarof, Yamat, & Li, 2011). ESL students are faced several challenges in producing a good piece of writing according to these instructions that a writer well recognized the importance of context, lexical, grammatical resources, and sentences structure, organization, cohesion and coherence in paragraphs. According to Tan et al (2017), Huwari & Aziz (2011); Puteh et al (2010), Readman & Maples (2017) R. Akhtar et al (2019) point out that the Malaysian ESL students are feeble in the writing skills and it is necessary to improve their writing skill. They have a limited diversity of vocabulary, poor spelling, weak sentence structure, lack of coherent and essay development challenges. ESL students have lack of knowledge related to the topics; expectations are not too high in understanding of cohesion and coherence. Attitude and apprehension towards language learning are interrelated (Ellis, 1997). Both positive attitude and motivation need to exist in order to develop a successful writing learning experience (Gardner, 1985).

III. METHODOLOGY

The focus of the study is to explore the effects of ESL students' attitude on academic writing apprehensions and academic writing challenges among first year students taking English for specific purpose (2019) from UTM, Johor Branch. This study used quantitative approach. For this study, 27 out of 33 students were participated. The rest six students were absent during data collection. The WAT is equally distributed positive and negative forty close ended items. The data were collected from social sciences male and female students.

3.1 Problem Statement

Many Malaysian students face academic writing language challenges. Most students' attitude towards academic writing is anguish and apprehension. Students are taught to write starting from the school but most of first year students are unable to produce a better piece of academic writing. The main purpose of this study is to investigate students' genuine attitude of writing learning writing challenges, and writing apprehensions in order to come up with the viable measures. This study is important in a sense that it also considers the opinion of the students' academic writing challenges' writing attitude and apprehensions. Previous studies have focused specifically on academic writing teaching methods and teachers' behavior and beliefs. In addition, most of the research have conducted to evaluate students' progress in academic writing and investigate perspective of students but a few studies emphasized on ESL students' attitude towards academic writing, academic writing challenges and academic writing

apprehensions. Hence, the finding of this study would contribute to this specific field of knowledge.

3.2 Objectives

- To investigate the students' attitude towards academic writing.
- To evaluate the effects of writing apprehensions among ESL students.
- To identify students' academic writing challenges.

3.3 Significance of the Study

Many previous studies elaborate positive attitude and interest towards academic writing may enhance students' academic writing skills and performance in their academic achievement (Sullivan 2006; Ismail, et al 2010) Anna Lynn Abu Bakar, 2009). Therefore, it is important to identify the effects of ESL students' attitude towards academic writing and evaluate writing apprehension as well as recognize academic writing challenges especially among first year students. From the findings of this research, it is hoped that, curriculum development and administrators, as well as writing instructors are more aware of the current challenges faced by the students regarding academic writing especially concerning writing attitude and apprehension. Moreover, they would then strive to find viable ways to tackle the writing challenges such as through the implementation of interesting online writing activities into the course. In addition, most previous studies regarding writing apprehension and attitude have been conducted on writing in general (MC leond,1987; Gungle and Taylor,1989; Rankin-Brown,2006). Most of the researchers conducted that highlight on the writing teacher's opinion and perspective but supplementary or exclusively on the students. A few previous studies have focused specifically on academic writing but this study has emphasized especially students 'attitude, academic writing challenges among ESL first year social sciences students. Therefore, the findings of the study would contribute to this specific field of knowledge.

3.4 Instruments

Several ESL research studies have practiced the Writing Apprehension Test (WAT) as a research instruments for measuring students' writing apprehension. The Writing Apprehension Test (WAT)is considered to be the primary systematized instrument to measure writing apprehension by (Daly & Miller, 1975). It is frequently used as a research instrument in measuring ESL writing apprehension (hadaway,1987; Elkihatib,1984; headway, 1987; Cheng, et.al, 1999; Masny &Foxall, 1992; Sawyer, 2018; Zarei2019). Nevertheless, various studies Cheng, (2004); McKain, (1992); Engelmann, (1992); Alnufaie & Grenfell, (2013) Hettich, (1994); Crossley, et al (2016) have criticized the WAT for the following reasons. Firstly, WAT was developed originally for native writers, and specific significant aspects of second language might not be measured (Cheng, 2004).Secondly, there were some points highlighted about its validity because it outlines apprehension as a one- dimensional contrast but measures more than

one construct without subscales (McKain, 1992) This study developed WAT into three different sections to preserve its validity. Forty items were equally distributed positive and negative items. Furthermore, the scoring system of Daly and Miller's WAT was used to reduction the prejudice of choice and social attraction. All items were articulated to be directly or indirectly connected to the students' attitude towards academic writing, apprehension and challenges which are related to the general and specific. The rating scale followed the generally used Likert-

scale of five responses: Strongly Disagree=1, Disagree =2, Uncertain=3, Agree= 4 and Strongly Agree=5.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

Quantitative approach was used for the purpose of analyzing the data. Following Creswell (2003) the interpretation of the quantitative five-point Likert scale questionnaire data was collected to evaluate students' apprehensions, academic writing challenges and attitude. The findings of the questionnaire were divided into three sections. The first section is elaborated student's general attitude towards academic writing while the second is targeted specific students' academic writing apprehension and last academic writing challenges. The SPSS Cronbach's Alpha was used to obtain quantitative data results collected by WAT.

4.1 General Attitude towards English Academic Writing

This section describes ESL students' attitude towards academic writing. Table 1 show that students generally accepted the importance of academic writing but they are willing to learn academic writing. One unanticipated finding was highlighted in the second question, once ESL students have shown lack of interest in academic writing. They know the importance of academic writing but they are not willing to learn and improve academic writing skill. Most students with mean 3.1481 accept that they study English for learning purpose but in questions four, six and ten they deny their first statement. Question three "I study English writing test only for exam/assessment test" mean 2.8889 and question ten "I read books on related topic before writing" Mean 2.7037. The result of both questions very close so this study can judge that they are going to discuss only their syllabus books. Seldomly, they search online material and videos for learning purpose however, the observed means difference between negative and positive statements in this study elaborate students state of mind very clearly. The most students find to learn academic writing and overcome their general issues. Students generally show positive attitudes towards academic writing, as most of them agree with a statement about not paying attention to the learning in English class. A small number of the students however admitted they paid attention in class. Most students prefer to discuss their writing with their friends. Students admit that teacher behavior and feedback affect their learning. They admired that teacher motivational words were always helpful in their learning. They realized that writing is very important skill but they study only for exams. This section contains 14 items that are equally distributed in positive and negative attitude and the means 36.8889 with Std. Deviation 3.95487.

Table 1: General Attitude towards English Academic Writing Item Statistics

Scale Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Academic writing is not an important skill for me.	1.9259	1.03500	27
I do not pay much attention in academic writing class.	3.4074	1.27880	27
I study English writing test only for exam/assessment test	2.8889	1.42325	27
I always study English even when i do not have a test/exam.	3.1481	1.37851	27
I like to search online material before writing.	1.5556	.69798	27
Each time that I write and I knew clearly what I want to accomplish.	2.5926	1.30853	27
I watch some videos on related topic before writing.	1.6667	.78446	27
I like to get feedback from my friends on my compositions.	3.0000	1.35873	27
Academic writing is important for success in my career.	2.0741	.87380	27
I read books on related topic before writing.	2.7037	1.17063	27
Discussing my writing with others is an enjoyable experience.	2.5556	1.33973	27
Teacher's assessment of my work often similar to my own evaluation.	2.7778	1.01274	27
Teacher's motivational words are always helpful for me.	3.4074	1.36605	27
Teacher behavior and personality affect my work.	3.1852	1.38778	27

4.2 ESL Student's Apprehension Level of Writing

Regarding research question two, this section has investigated the effects of writing apprehension among the ESL students. Table 2 ranks the scale items in terms of their apprehensions and stress based on the students' attitude to effect learning process. This section contains 13 questions and six questions related their high apprehension level of writing. It also defines how, nervous and stressful emotional feelings are considered in the scale statements such as, item 1 (My mind seems to go blank when I start working on my composition.) is agreed upon by almost all of the participants and some students are neutral because they are not understanding their internal situation and some deny this statement. The next questions related to their stress of writing and confuse situation during writing. Most students have accepted that they faced confuse and stressful situation during writing when they cannot understand the question. Further, they are insured that if they work a lot but they cannot improve their scores. It is argued that when a writer is inhibited by a topic and starts to be abnormally nervous, it might indicate that students' deficiency a pre-writing strategic capability to generate ideas and familiar new topics. Furthermore, item ten, which indicates the high level of apprehensions because students never get the new ideas and they tend to same words, sentences and ideas. Secondly, the medium level of apprehension is found among ESL students when they cannot maintain coherent in their writing and some of them have fear of writing evaluation. ESL students' apprehension level has been evaluated by 13 items. The means of this scale 31.3333 with SD 3.812093 and median 2.3704. The variance scale is 14538.

Table 2: ESL Student's Apprehension Level of Writing Item Statistics

Scale Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
My mind seems to go blank when I start working on my composition.	1.8889	1.12090	27
It is difficult for me to get new ideas for my writing topic.	1.8889	1.18754	27
I don't feel stress when I have to write an academic essay.	2.6667	1.27098	27
I feel stress when I have to write an academic essay.	1.7778	.89156	27
I feel confused when writing my paragraphs.	2.9259	1.23805	27
I never focus on my work when I felt confused.	2.2593	1.12976	27
I have never maintained coherent in writing.	2.3704	1.36292	27
Even when I study a lot, the results of the English test is bad.	2.5926	1.47438	27
I have no fear of my writing being evaluated.	2.5556	1.45002	27
I tend to repeat same sentences, words and ideas.	2.4074	1.50024	27
I feel more satisfied with my writing when i work in a small group.	2.5926	1.04731	27
I feel more satisfied when I work individually.	2.6296	1.04323	27
I never show my work to my friends or class or classmates.	2.7778	1.18754	27

4.3 ESL Student's Academic Writing Challenges

ESL students' academic writing challenges elaborate in table3. It likewise defines how apprehension, anxious, cognition and stressful feelings are measured in the scale statements. For instance, item 11 (Before i start writing, I have spent a lot of time to understand and familiarize myself with the topic.) The basic issue is for ESL students to organize and get new ideas and they take time to familiarize themselves with the topic. Academic writing tasks are always given for specific time and students never manage with in time. Furthermore, Item nine explore (My frequent common mistakes in grammar make my writing skills weak). They make multiple grammatical mistakes which hold their writing and they cannot produce a good piece of writing. The scale of academic writing challenges Mean 33.8148 with standard deviation 4.30596 and median 2.9259. The variance scale is 18.541.

Item Statistics

Scale Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
I enjoy writing academic essays.	2.2593	1.25859	27
I understand how to write sentences using correct tenses.	3.0000	1.24035	27
I think sentence structure is challenge for me in writing.	1.9630	.93978	27
Most of sentences grammatically correct in my essays.	3.8889	1.12090	27
During the writing and drafting stage, I usually do not know how to start writing.	2.2593	1.02254	27
Writing introduction is difficult for me.	2.2593	.85901	27
Writing conclusion is difficult for me.	2.6296	1.07946	27
My frequent common mistakes in grammar make my writing skills weak.	3.0370	1.31505	27
My frequent common mistakes in spelling affect my writing skill.	2.3704	.96668	27
Before I start writing, I have difficulty to understanding the topic of the essay.	2.9259	1.46566	27
Before I start writing, I have spent a lot of time to understand and familiarize myself with the topic.	2.3704	1.11452	27
I have difficulty organizing my ideas in writing.	2.4074	1.08342	27
I have never maintained coherent in writing.	2.4444	1.21950	27

V. CONCLUSION

This quantitative research set out a questionnaire concerning 27 First year students' ESL writing attitude, challenges and apprehensions. The findings of this study presented that most of the students were average in their anxiety and apprehensions to their writing challenges, approximately a third of them were extremely apprehensive. Furthermore, the highly stressful situation when students could not get the idea about topic feel difficulty to generate new ideas, the challenge is limited time and the follow of teacher's expectations. ESL students 'negative attitude toward academic writing, and previous negative experience of writing cause writing apprehension (Al-Shboul & Huwari, 2015). Writing apprehension among ESL students reason writing challenges (Alharbi, 2019). During writing task students cognitive behavior affect their performance. Teacher's evaluation and feedback effect ESL students' attitude and their learning performances (Altukruni, 2019). When instructors understand the stressful situation, their feedback and motivational sentences provide courage to their students. This research, however, does not permit the researcher to elaborate firm conclusions as to whether either teaching approaches or students behavior are directly connected to writing apprehensions. Nevertheless, student's negative attitude generates writing apprehensions and these apprehensions hurdle their learning process and cause writing challenges.

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