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Language needs of Malaysian Public Relations Students in ESL Writing

Abstract

In recent years, it is found that most of the Public Relations undergraduates could not produce a decent piece of writing, even though writing is considered one of the most important skills for a communication student. The objectives of the study are to determine the performance and analyse the language needs of Malaysian Public Relations students, as well as to explore their difficulties in ESL writing. This is a mixed method research using embedded design. 45 Public Relations undergraduates were selected through purposive sampling for this study. 45 samples of speech writing and semi-structured interviews were used to gather data. Students writing performance was quantitatively measured using the SPSS while textual and thematic analyses were conducted to explore the types of errors and students and teachers' feedback on Public Relations students' ESL writing. The instruments used are semi-structured interview protocols and content analysis. After collecting and analysing the data, it is found that majority of the students score a below average score of 52.37 in their writing exercise. The results showed that most of the students perform below average score is because of the language needs they have. The language needs for the students are found to be the subject-verb agreement, syntax error, tenses, language used, preposition, mechanics, semantics, conjunction, dangling modifiers and verb consistency. It is also found that the difficulty faced by the students in writing were not only caused by their language needs, but their lack of maturity and content in the writing as well. This study indicates that Malaysian Public Relations students have high language needs. The writing performance of Malaysian Public Relations students are below average, where their language needs are subject-verb agreement, syntax error, tenses, language used, preposition, mechanics, semantics, conjunction, dangling modifiers and verb consistency. Furthermore, students' writings are also lacking in maturity and content.

Keywords: language needs, ESL writing, public relations, mixed method, monitor model

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This chapter introduces the main variables of the research, which are the language needs and ESL writing of Malaysian Public Relations students. It also consists the research background, problem statement, research objectives, research questions, significance of the study, conceptual framework, operational definitions, methodology and limitations of the study.

1.1 Research Background

The English language is universally acknowledged as the lingua franca of the world; hence it is frequently referred as the global language (Darmi, 2013).

The development of a British colonial empire in South-East Asia grew from the work of the British East India Company (EIC)'s administrator, Stamford Raffles (Crystal, 2003). The EIC, also known as the Honourable East India Company and informally as John Company, is a British joint-stock company that was formed in the 1600s to trade in the Indian Ocean region, initially with Mughal India and the East India, and later with Qing China (Britannica, 2018). There were several locations of the EIC centres that had been established in South-East Asia, notably Penang (1786), Singapore (1819), and Malacca (1824). In 1867, the English language was established throughout the region as the medium of law and administration, and was increasingly been used in other contexts such as the daily newspaper that is written in the English language which began its publication in 1845, The Strait Times.

Inevitably, in the British territories in South-East Asia, the English language had become the language of power (Mandal, 2000). The British educational system had been introduced in its territories, which exposed learners to a standard British English model very early on. In 1816, English medium schools with senior teaching staff routinely brought in from Britain had begun in Penang (Crystal, 2003). The very first English language school was founded in 1816, which is the Penang Free School, followed by Malacca High School, St. Xavier's Institution in Penang, King Edward VII School in Taiping, and Anglo Chinese School in Klang. Many of the English language schools were considered as quite prestigious, therefore they were only attended by a tiny percentage of the population. The numbers of students had increased during the nineteenth century when waves of Chinese and Indian migrants entered the region. Then, English language rapidly became the language of professional advancement and the primary literary language due to the increasing population who attended the schools in the nineteenth century. Soon after, higher education through the medium of English language was also introduced, such as University of Malaya which was established in the year 1905 in Kuala Lumpur. Thus, among those who had received an English education and then entered professional society, the English language had become a prestige lingua franca (English Language and its Importance in Malaysia's Growth, 2012).

However, following the independence of Malaysia (1957), the education system was impelled to be established as a unifying force to unite the country's citizen, through economically, socially, and politically developing the nation (Zakaria, 2000). Vernacular schools which the medium of teaching was Mandarin and Tamil were established before the independence of Malaysia. As the role of education is crucial in nation building, a national education system was created by post-independence leaders. Bahasa Malaysia was adopted as

the national language, and by having unity as the main goal, the Education Act 1961 was implemented (Haji Ahmad, 1998). Under the Education Act, Bahasa Malaysia was used as the medium of instruction in the Malaysian education system (Zakaria, 2000). To ensure a gradual transition, the Education Act was executed in phases where it transitioned gradually from the British (English School) type of education to a Malaysian education system. By the end of 1970, except at the primary level, all schools use Bahasa Malaysia as the medium of instruction.

This transition had restricted the role of English language, as Malay-medium education was introduced with English language as an obligatory subject. However, for many speakers, the prestige attached to the English language still exists (Crystal, 2003). Then, the English language became increasingly seen as a second language (L2) of value for international rather than intra-national purposes (Mandal, 2000). L2 is defined as the way of learning a language other than a person's mother tongue, inside or outside of a classroom (Ellis, 2008), while English as a second language (ESL) means the learning of English language as an L2.

All Malaysian students are ESL students, as they communicate primarily in their mother tongue based on their different cultural and ethnic background (Darmi, 2013). As Malaysia is a multicultural country that is made up of three major ethnic groups which are Malay, Chinese, and Indian, the very first language that Malaysian students acquire differ, such as Bahasa Malaysia, Mandarin, Tamil, or different dialects. Although Malaysian students had been learning the English language as an L2 subject, an apparent drop in the Malaysian students' English language proficiency had resulted after the change in the language policy (Siew, 2010). According to the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025, the current education system produces creditably strong Bahasa Malaysia learning outcomes. However, with only 28% of students achieved a minimum credit in the 2011 SPM English paper according to the Cambridge

1119 standards, the operational proficiency in the English language is much lower, even though they had spent as much as 11-13 years learning the English language (6 years in primary school and between 5-7 years in secondary school. This may be due to the fact that the learning of a L2 is difficult (Hiew, 2012), as it is affected by a student's first language in terms of organisation, grammar, vocabulary, language use, content, style, and mechanics (Nation, 2001). This is a problem that will continue to occur when they further their studies in the tertiary level, as the English language is used as the medium of teaching for most universities in Malaysia., such as the Petronas University of Technology, with the university's journal, Platform, with articles published in the English language, and also Tunku Abdul Rahman University which offers an English-medium education to students with an affordable price (Siew, 2010). One of the utmost priorities of the shift of education system made in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 is to boost all students' English language proficiency, due to the fact that since 2006, poor English language proficiency among fresh graduates has been consistently ranked as one of the top five issues faced by Malaysian employers.

One of the most difficult language skills a student can acquire is the writing skill (Nation, 2001)as it demands a great set of skills and methods such as writing readiness and grammatical rules for the student to write proficiently and effectively. Therefore, it is even more difficult for students to be good at writing in the English language without being proficient in the language. When there is a lack of proficiency of a language, there are language needs (Karuthan, 2015). The term language needs describe difficulties across one or many aspects of communication, which includes problems in using a language in terms of words and sentences (What are Speech, Language, and Communication Needs, 2018). Most notably, Malaysian undergraduates are known to be weak in their grammatical, structural, and syntactic error (Wong, Mohd& Thang,

2011) which has resulted in their English language needs and became the reason as to why many of them are unable to write proficiently at a desired level. If students struggle to write in the English language, it is hard for them to express their knowledge and understanding during examinations.

The Public Relations undergraduates in Malaysia are facing the very same problem as well, where their English language writing proficiency is not up to expected level. Public Relations is mostly about effective communication, either it is between an organization and its target audience or between an individual and the audience who they wish to influence(Clark, 2000). Effective communication refers to the process of communication which the transmitted content is received and understood by the receiver in the way it was intended (Brown, 2011). Writing is one of the most important skill to be acquired by Public Relations students in order for them to excel in the field (Wise, 2005), and they must ensure any form of communication is clear, honest, and unambiguous, in order for the messages to be easily understood, as the purpose of professional Public Relations is to create understanding (Baines, 2004). This requires Public Relations undergraduates to have a good English language writing proficiency. Therefore, they have to be aware of their English language needs, and improve it if they wish to excel in the field of Public Relations.

One of the job scopes of a Public Relations practitioner is to reach out to the press to gain media coverage (Frantz, 2018). In order for one to reach out, the practitioner has to write either a pitch letter or media releases. However, the writing quality of Public Relations practitioners in the industry differs very much from the desired expectations (Braun, 2013), which may be due to their English language needs. Throughout the years, there had been much disappointment and criticism, from both scholars and industry professionals, towards the writing proficiency of fresh

graduates from Public Relations courses. Industry professionals were pointing out that the Public Relations fresh graduates are struggling even with the most basic writing skills, where they are unable to produce even a decent piece of writing (Braun, 2013). This has shown that being unable to write proficiently as a Public Relations student has great impact towards the Public Relations undergraduate's career, as he or she will be unable to perform in his or her job.

In order to improve the English language proficiency of Public Relations students, the purpose of this study is to discover the language needs for Malaysian Public Relations students in ESL writing.

1.2 Problem Statement

The English language is known as one of the international languages that should be acquired by everyone (Mohammed, 2015). It has a broader distribution as compared to the any other spoken languages (The Malaysian Times, 2012). English language is an official language of 52 countries and it is widely used for global mediation of knowledge (Muhammad, Almas &Bilai, 2016). English language is the medium of communication used in many companies including those in both the private sector and international business. Meetings, contracts, business documents are all written in English. Therefore, knowing how to speak and write in English is one of the most important and advantageous skills in today's interconnected world (The Malaysian Times, 2012.English is divided into four basic skills, which are listening, speaking, reading and writing. Writing is the most important communication skills among the four basic skills for educational success, but it is also one of the most complex skill to be mastered (Tillema, 2012). Writing in English language can be very difficult, particularly for students who learn the English language as a second language (ESL).

English is considered as a language that is very important in Malaysia, after Bahasa Malaysia (Ganapathi, 2012). In Malaysia's tertiary educational system, the primary language of communication used is the English language(Darmi, 2013). It is also the medium of instructions whereby all lectures, tutorials, assignments, quiz, test, presentations and etc. are conducted using the English language. Since the English language plays a vital role in universities, most of the universities offer English language as one of the compulsory subjects to be taken during the first-year in universities (Adzmi, 2009). English language subjects such as Academic English, Communicative English and English for Business are English subjects that are provided by most of the institutions of higher learning. It is also the compulsory subjects for students pertaining to their courses. Even though English language subjects are taught in institutions, but many of the Malaysian ESL students still view writing in English as a challenging task, whereby most of them could not produce a piece of writing with cohesive, clearly structured sentences, logical and properly organized ideas with a wide range of vocabularies (Muhammad Fareed, 2016).

The problems of ESL student's writing difficulty have become more intense at the tertiary level because the students are expected to write with more maturity ideas to match with their perceived level of intelligence (Ismail, Hussin, & Darus, 2012). According to Saadiyah Darus (2012), being able to write well and cohesive in English is not easy, it requires not only the good linguistic competence and good knowledge about the topic, but also the writing skill and confidence. The problem with Public Relations students is even crucial. Public Relations practitioner is a profession whose job is to communicate and to keep the public and stakeholder informed with accurate information about the organization(Cabot, 2012). A Public Relations practitioner often acts as the spokesperson, representing his or her organization to appear in the mass media or in public. Moreover, when an organization is under crisis or having a problem,

Public Relations practitioner is also responsible to manage and represent the company on behalf of the organization (Putra, 2009). Nowadays, the role of Public Relations is significant in shaping the reputation of the organization (Arif, 2015) . It is involved in various activities such as media campaign and press conference. Hence, the increased role of Public Relations practitioner for all kinds of duties requires a higher qualification individual to fulfil the position(Putra, 2009). Surprisingly, most of the Public Relations practitioner do not come from the academic field of Public Relations. Most of them are promoted by chance (Dolphin, 2002), they are not from Public Relations-related field, nor apply for the position of Public Relations. They are selected and promoted because they are considered to have met the basic requirements of a Public Relations director of the organization. Some of them are from economics background and some are from the tourism field (Putra, 2009).

Since Public Relations are all about communication, Public Relations students are students who major in communication. Writing is considered as one of the core skills that is required by a Public Relations practitioner (Cabot, 2012). Public Relations students are believed to be proficient in their writing skills, as they were trained and taught to write during their education in higher learning institutions. However, in today's situation, professionals from the Public Relations industry point out that Public Relations graduates are lacking in their writing skill. The Public Relations writing of today's industry is in 'bad shape' (Canavor & Meirowitz, 2005). Fresh graduates of Public Relations who enters the industry are unable to write at an appropriate level to meet the expectation of their employers (Lane & Johnston, 2017). Fresh graduates who are entering the practice of Public Relations are the frequently complained by expert Public Relations practitioner about the declining of writing skills (Cole, Hembroff, & Corner, 2009). The quality of the Public Relations writing is getting worse as time goes by. Press

releases, advertisements, brochures, websites and more are costing the companies credibility and revenues (Canavor & Meirowitz, 2005). One of the scholars mentioned that the recent graduates are poorly prepared to handle even the most basic writing challenges such as memos, reports or even a basic email (Cole et al., 2009). Even though classes such as Public Relations Writing and Advanced Public Relations Writing subjects were taught during their tertiary studies, Public Relations students are still weak in their writing. Educators also mentioned that Public Relations undergraduates who are weak on English are often lacking in choice of words, wrong structure of sentence, wrongly usage of preposition, conjunction and transition (Mariadass, 2012).

In Malaysia, there are more than 20,000 university students graduating each year (Leo, 2018). However, the attention is directed to the graduates, where one out of five Bachelor degree holders remain unemployed even after six months from their graduation, and these graduates has made up 35% of those who are unemployed. Among those unemployed, 52% of them are graduates from the course of Arts and Social Science (Leo, 2018). Public Relations is a course that is categorised under the Faculty of Arts and Social Science. The number of unemployed fresh graduates has increased gradually each year, some of the fresh graduates are unable to work on what they were trained to (Sani, 2016).

From a research that was conducted by JobStreet Malaysia in the year 2015, it was found that one of the main reasons fresh graduates are unable to be employed was because of their poor command of English language and poor communication skill (JobStreet, 2015). English is the main language for business communications, but most of the fresh graduates were unable to communicate properly during their interview (Tradmin, 2017). At the end of 2015, around 48% of employers rejected job applications from graduates, due to their poor English language proficiency level. This is a huge issue, for both employers who are trying to hire graduates with

proficient levels in the English language, as well as for fresh graduates who are looking for jobs. Especially in the case of an investor relation officer who needs to communicate frequently with stakeholders from different nationalities, English will be the main language used during communication (Sani, 2016).

Therefore, language needs in Malaysian Public Relations students in writing is needed to identify thoroughly in order to make sure all the Public Relations undergraduates fulfil the basic job requirements as a Public Relations practitioner and to ensure they are able to know their language needs and to improve on it.

1.3 Research Objectives

The general objective of the study is to find out the language needs of Malaysian Public Relations students in their ESL writing performance. Specifically, this study aims to:

1. Determine the performance of Malaysian Public Relations students in ESL writing.
2. Analyse the language needs of Malaysian Public Relations students in ESL writing.
3. Explore Malaysian Public Relations students' difficulties in ESL writing.

1.4 Research Questions

The study aims to answer the research questions below:

1. What is the performance of Malaysian university Public Relations students in ESL writing?
2. What are the language needs of Malaysian Public Relations students in ESL writing?
3. What are the difficulties of Public Relations students in ESL writing?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This research provides an insight and a better understanding towards the impact of how the ESL writing of Malaysian Public Relations students is being affected by their language needs. It provides a contribution that can benefit Public Relations undergraduates, Public Relations educators, and the Industry of Public Relations in Malaysia.

Through this study, Public Relations undergraduates are able to understand what language needs are, and the significance it has on their language proficiency. They will be able to have a better understanding of their own language needs, and to look for ways to improve their language proficiency. Through better understanding in their language needs, they will be able to understand how is their writing for the purpose of Public Relations can be improved. It allows them to pinpoint their flaws in the English language, especially on their writing skills. Only by improving their English proficiency level and writing performance, they are able to meet the expectation of the Public Relations industry. The language proficiency is important for the Public Relations industry, especially in the aspect of writing.

The study also provides an insight towards Public Relations educators in order to better guide and educate their students. Through understanding the language needs of their student, they are able to come out with a suitable approach to better guide their students. This includes being able to pinpoint the weakness of the students' writing, and provide better feedback and guidance in order for them to improve their writing performance. Before the educators can properly guide their students, it is important for them to understand the concept of language needs in the first place. Only through a clear understanding of the concept as well as the problem that are faced by their students, educators are able to provide the best guidance for them, in order for the student to be more prepared while entering the Public Relations industry.

The study contributes to the Malaysia Public Relations industry by improving the standard of Public Relations graduates in Malaysia. Through improving the language proficiency of Malaysia Public Relations students, it is expected that their writing for Public Relations purpose will be improved as well. With a good language proficiency and quality writing skills, it will serve as an improvement towards the standards of Public Relations graduate in Malaysia. This allows the Public Relations industry to have more quality Public Relations practitioner in the future.

The study also contributes to the Monitor Model that is being used in the research. The Monitor Model is a model consisting of five hypotheses regarding second-language acquisition, especially on the speaking and writing context. However, it is heavily focused only on the context of English writing, instead of writing for the purpose of Public Relations. By conducting the research with this model on Public Relations writing, it gives a better insight as to the function of the model outside of the usual second-language writing context.
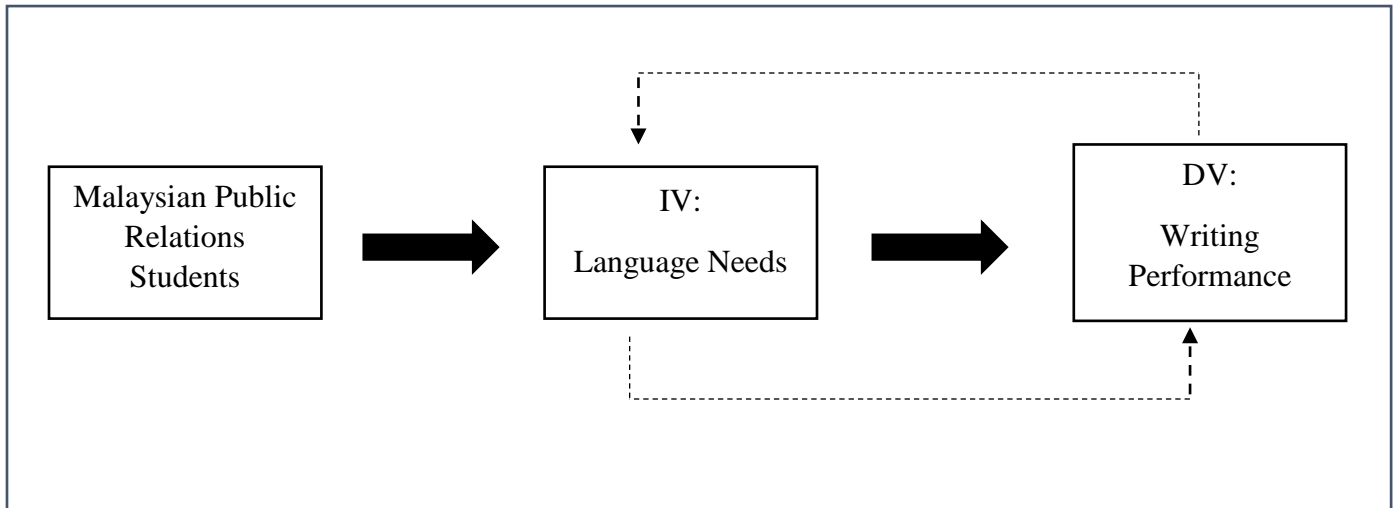
1.6 Conceptual Framework

Figure 1.1. Conceptual Framework

Figure 1.1 is the conceptual framework for this research. It shows the relationship between the independent variable (IV) and the dependent variable (DV). The independent variable in this research is the language needs of the Malaysian public relations students while the dependent variable in this study is writing performance. As writing is one of the important skills to be acquired by the public relations students, it is very crucial to know the factor (language needs) that affecting their writing performance.

This framework explained how language needs will affect the writing of ESL students. It is shown that the language needs are inversely proportional to the writing performance of the Malaysian Public Relations Students. The greater the language needs of Malaysian Public Relations students, the weaker the students in their writing performance on ESL writing, and if the students have less language needs, their writing performance will be better. This is because language needs will hinder the students in writing. When the students have language needs, they are unable to perform in their writing. The students might face problems in their writing, thus,

the writing performance will be lowered. If the problem faced by the students is lesser, hence the writing performance of the students will be better.

1.7 Methodology

This research is a mixed methods research. The sampling method of the study is purposive sampling with a sample size of 45. The techniques used in this research are textual analysis, focus groups interview and in-depth interviews. The instruments used of the research are semi-structured interview protocols and public relations students' writing exercise. Descriptive analysis, textual analysis and thematic analysis are used as the data analysis for this research.

1.8 Operational Definitions

All definitions of key terms used in this research will be described in the section below.

1.8.1 English as Second Language (ESL)

ESL refers to English as a second language. It is a traditional term used to describe the study of the English language by non-native speakers in an English language speaking environment. The English language speaking environment may be a country in which the English language is the mother tongue of the nation, for example The United States of America and Australia, or one in which the English language has an established role (Nordquist, 2018). In Malaysia, English is accorded the status of the second language of the country, with Bahasa Malaysia as the first. Therefore, the English language is a second language for all Malaysian.

1.8.2 Language Needs

The term language needs refer to the need of linguistic resources by L2 learners in order to cope with the forms of communication that they will be involved in successfully (Richterich, 1972). In

this study, the researchers look at the English language needs of Malaysian Public Relations students in ESL writing

1.8.3 Public Relations

Public Relations professionals need to have solid writing skills. They hold the responsibility in developing communication materials intended to influence their key publics' attitudes or behaviours (Roberts, n.d.). Public Relations writing refers to the writing skill of a Public Relations practitioners when developing communication materials, such as press releases, fact sheets, feature articles, social media messages, blog posts, speeches, media pitch letters, statements, and website messages. Public Relations students were taught Public Relations writing in the classroom to develop their professional writing skills before entering the Public Relations field.

1.9 Limitations of the study

The short time allocation for the study is one of the limitations of this study. This research is only conducted across 21 weeks, which is very short as compared to the other studies. As this research is a mixed method research study, the data collection and data analysis process are time consuming. In the future, it is recommended to have longer time allocation in order to have more in depth research on the language needs in ESL writing of Public Relations students.

Another limitation of this study is that it is very hard to find researchers who is really expert in both qualitative and quantitative research. Most of the researcher is only expert in one of the methods, either qualitative or quantitative. Therefore, it is very hard for the researchers of this study to find reference. Future researchers may collaborate with researchers who are expert in mixed method research to get more references.

As this is a mixed method research, the researchers have to be very clear with both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The researchers have to learn a multiple method and be able to know how to mix the methods effectively (Onwuegbuzie, 2013). Therefore, in the future, it will be better if the researchers mastered both qualitative and quantitative methods before deciding to do mixed method research.

Furthermore, researchers of this study did not establish extended relationship with each respondent. This is because the researchers only interviewed around 15selected participants out of the sample size of 45, hence they are unable to establish extended relationship to get more information from the other samples towards the research topic. As the research question 2 (RQ2) is a qualitative method, the researchers only able to understand part of the students' problem. In the future, it is hope that researchers interview more participants in order to build a strong foundation of data towards the research questions.

1.10 Summary

In a summary, this chapter introduces the topic of the research which is the language needs of Malaysia Public Relations student in ESL writing. The background and the problem statements are discussed in order to provide an understanding towards the current situation of the topic, and to provide a justification towards the study. This chapter serve as a foundation for the research to be conducted and analysed in the later chapter. The next chapter will be the review of past literatures conducted that are related to the topic.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter will cover the in-depth understanding of the research topic, The Language Needs of Malaysian Public Relations Students on ESL Writing, through thorough literature review. The research of past studies about language needs and ESL writing conducted by researchers will be thoroughly studied and examined. The acquisition-learning hypothesis from the Input Model by Stephen Krashen will also be studied and used to construct a theoretical framework to serve as a centre of study by relating language needs and ESL writing.

2.1 English as Second Language (ESL) Writing

David, Thang and Azman (2015) stated that Malaysian ESL undergraduates who have low English language proficiency, tends to be lacking in motivation and determination in improving their English language proficiency. A need analysis survey is conducted by the teacher-researcher of Universiti Sains Malaysia to gather information of the language needs of Malaysia ESL undergraduates. The study is conducted on Universiti Sains Malaysia, where first year undergraduates from different field of studies, specifically from Social Sciences, Art & Designs, Humanities, and Computer Sciences were selected as respondents. A total of 138 respondents participated in the research, however, among the 138 questionnaires, collected, only 80 of them were used for the data analysis. The research is conducted through a quantitative approach, with a need analysis questionnaire as the research instrument. The questionnaire focuses on two main area, which are the English language needs of the participants, and the problem and challenges faced by the participants in learning English. The questionnaire consists of sections requiring students to rank their English language competency based on their understanding, and multiple-

choice questions to collect information of students' perspective on their different English language skills. The data analysis shows that more than half of the participants thinks that the most important English language skill is the writing skill. However, at the same time, they also think that the writing skill is the most difficult and challenging skill to be acquired. 94% of the respondents stated that they are not confident in producing a piece of writing using the English language, while 88% of them stated that the problem is due to their lack of vocabulary. The study shows that the language need of Malaysia ESL undergraduates is intense, and they often consider writing as the most difficult and challenging skill to acquire.

Ismail (2012) stated that the inability to write proficiently using the English language by Malaysian undergraduates is a serious matter, as it greatly affects their overall academic performance. Another need analysis is conducted on Malaysian ESL undergraduates at the MARA University of Technology, Johor, in an attempt to come out with a suitable writing module for the undergraduates to improve their ESL writing. The study is conducted on MARA University of Technology, where 60 undergraduates who are in the Part Three (third semester) of their Diploma is selected as participants. These students are those who are taking the BEL 311 English proficiency course, a compulsory English course for MARA University of Technology Diploma undergraduates in order for them to complete their diploma. Furthermore, another four lecturers who are teaching the BEL 311 course for more than five years were selected for an interview for the research. The study uses a mixed method approach of student's survey and lecturer's interview as the research instruments. The survey includes the usage of Likert scale questions and open-ended questions to gather information on the students' perceptions on their ESL writing needs and ESL writing problems. A series of questions were asked during the interview with the lecturers to obtain information regarding the students' ESL writing needs and

the difficulties and challenged faced by the students while producing a piece of English writing. The findings show that both students and lecturers states that students' inability to write well in English is due to the lack of critical thinking while producing a piece of English writing. Most of the students are not intrigued or critical enough in their writing process, which causes their writing to be lacking of in-depth contents. In conclusion, writing modules should include the teaching of critical thinking to ESL students in order to improve the level of proficiency in their ESL writing.

The English grammar is also another aspect that ESL students are having difficulties at when producing a piece of writing using the English language. Mohammed (2014) stated that the level of proficiency of the English language of ESL students are dissatisfactory and falling, throughout the countries that uses English as their second language. There are many reasons as to why this is happening, and one of them is the challenge student faced when learning and comprehending the usage of English grammar. A qualitative study is conducted to examine the usage of conjunctions in ESL writing by ESL students in Nigeria. A group of 20 high school students from the age of 15 to 18 were selected to participate in the study. A short story was read to the group and the students were instructed to construct a plot summary from it. The written text is then evaluated and divided into two groups, highly-rated and lowly-rated ones. Only five written text from each group were selected for the textual analysis, where the conjunctions used by the students were analysed. The study detected the conjunctions errors of students while producing a piece of writing. For example, the usage of the conjunction 'and' is significantly different between the high-rated written text and the low-rated ones. The conjunctions 'and' is highly used by students who are less proficient in the English language, as it is considered as the easiest conjunctions for them. There are many instances where the usage of the conjunctions

'and' is wrong or redundant as well. The study concludes that ESL students in Nigeria is nowhere near the stage in mastering the usage of conjunctions while producing a piece of writings.

2.2 Public Relations Writing

As Public Relations is about the communication process between organizations and the publics, Public Relations undergraduates are taught to communicate effectively with a large amount of audience, using the knowledge of developing effective and appropriate messages, intending to influence the believe and behaviour of their audience (Baines, Egan & Jefkins, 2004). Public Relations undergraduates are generally trained to have good verbal and nonverbal communication skills, and the skill of writing for the purpose of Public Relations, in order to effectively communicate, inform, and persuade their audience.

The Public Relations industry is dissatisfied with the writing performance of Public Relations graduates, as veteran Public Relations practitioners express their dissatisfaction towards Public Relations graduates being unable to write at a desired level. Lane and Johnston (2017) pointed out that the journalism industry does not seems to be facing the same problem, as journalism graduates are able to produce quality writings, even though both disciplines are catered for mass communication. A study is conducted to investigate the difference between the writing courses of Public Relations and journalism. The research is conducted through a qualitative approach, using content analysis as the research instrument. The content analysis consists of qualitative reviews, and is complemented by descriptive qualitative analysis. The sample used for the analysis is made up from 30 writing courses, from both the Public Relations and journalism disciplines, across 18 Universities in Australia. Among the 30 writing courses, exactly half of them are Public Relations writing courses and journalism writing courses. The

data obtained are first coded, where the coding instruments were developed with then intention to identify and categorize data related to the content of the course, the implementation of the course, and the assessment given. The data are then interpreted using thematic analysis, focusing on the three area. The points of comparison between the two writing courses are then identified and compared. The findings show that Millennial Public Relations students are lacking in basic technical writing skills compared to journalism students. The study suggests that due to the fact that the writing foundation of Public Relations students are weak, Public Relations writing courses should focus on developing Public Relations students' basic writing skills first, with a limited genre.

Braun and Thomas (2013) pointed out that in order to improve the writing proficiency of Public Relations undergraduates, the teaching of Public Relations writing courses should be conducted through developing the cognitive process of the students. The study attempts to propose a more effective teaching tool for Public Relations writing courses. It is conducted through the usage of learning logs for Public Relations writing classes, in order to develop the cognitive process of Public Relations students and to improve their writing performance. 60 second-year Public Relations undergraduates from the Mount Royal University in Calgary, Canada were selected as participants for the study. They were instructed to maintain and edit a learning log during their writing course throughout the semester. The maintaining of the learning log includes recording their errors from their evaluated written assessments, recording the corrections they made, and recording the source they used when correcting their errors. At the end of the semester, and in-depth interview is conducted to discover the approach students chose to use the log, and their opinion and feedback towards the effectiveness of the log. The findings of the study show that majority of the students utilize their logs in recording technical items such

as grammar and mechanical issues. The recording of their mistakes allows them to be more aware of their writing performance, and helps them to improve their writing performance. Most of the students reported that the usage of learning logs in class have great values with it, and they might consider using it for other courses as well in the future. The study concludes that the learning log can be an effective teaching tool to improve the cognitive of students for Public Relations classes.

2.3 Language Needs

The word "need" is defined as the requirement of something due to it being essential or necessary towards something. Language needs is a concept that refers to the requirement of linguistic resources, in order for an individual to proficiently cope with the communication process in which they are participating (Akyel & Ozek, 2010). Needs analysis is a crucial tool that helps pinpoint and examine true needs. It helps researchers and educators to develop effective curriculum development as the foundation of language courses on communication needs. (Lepetit & Cichocki 2002).

Akyel and Ozek (2010) conducted a need analysis research to investigate the language needs of university students in Istanbul. The research aims to achieve a better understanding on the language and academic needs of university students of an English medium university in Istanbul, Turkey. A mixed method approach of questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were used as the research instruments. The items implemented in the questionnaires and semi-structured interviews heavily focus on the importance and effective use of language learning strategies. The questionnaires were distributed to a total of 2328 students from six different faculties. Furthermore, a total of 14 university instructors from different faculties were also selected at random to participate for the semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire and semi-

structured interview were both made up of two parts, the first investigating the frequency of students participating in language learning activities, and the second exploring the difficulties and challenges students faced while participating in said activities. The result obtained from the semi-structured interviews is used to complement the findings of the questionnaire. The data collected is analysed using statistical test such as descriptive statistics and multiple response item analysis. The findings show that majority of the students does not take part in any form of English language classes other than those that are compulsory in their course. Both the students and instructors agree that students need to spend more time practicing the usage of English language to improve their English proficiency level. The study shows that instructors primarily consider reading and writing as the most important skill in the English language, while students consider speaking and writing as the most important ones. It also shows that students face difficulties and challenges in all four basic skills of the English language, which are listening, speaking, reading and writing. Only 25% of the students thinks that they are proficient in the usage of English language. The study suggests that to improve their English language, students need to utilize effective learning strategies.

Lehtonen and Karjalainen (2008) stated that individuals have different language needs depending on their purposes of language usage, especially in the workplace context. The language skill and proficiency expected of them often varies depending on their work and purposes. A study is conducted to investigate the language needs of university graduates at their workplace in the perception of their employers. A total of 15 employers who were involved in recruitment or human resources were selected to participate in the research. The participants selected represented different working sectors employing university graduates, such as states offices and universities. The research was conducted at Helsinki, Finland. The interview is used

to pinpoint language-related trends of university graduates at their workplace. The interviews which lasted around one to one and a half hour were recorded and transcribed. The findings of the study show that language skills are crucial in the workplace as perceived by employers. Employers generally consider individuals with university education are generally favoured due to an expectation towards their language proficiency. Job applicants with poor language skills are quick to be eliminated from the list of selection. The language proficiency is so crucial that it can sometimes overweight the skill required for the job itself. The study findings also show that other than the four basic English skills, soft language skills such as fluent presentation and interaction are also greatly sought after, as they greatly affect the communication competency of the individual.

Gedion, Tati and Peter (2016) stated that the syntactic error that occurred constantly in the written composition of Malaysian ESL leaners were caused by the interference of their mother tongue. An error analysis research was conducted by lecturers of Politeknik Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia. The study was conducted on Politeknik Kota Kinabalu, where students who were studying the course Communicative English 1 during their first semester was selected. Fifty ESL leaners from the Diploma of Accountancy programme were selected for the study. The research was conducted through a qualitative approach, where the error analysis is conducted on the descriptive essay composition of the participants. The participants were given a list of topics to choose from for their descriptive essay topic, where they were given 45 minutes to complete the 200 to 250 words essay. In order to ensure the validity of the samples, all the completed samples were hand-collected. Identifications of errors from the writing sample was then conducted and a total of nine different error categories were classified. The result of the analysed data shows that the most common error that was found was verbs associated errors,

with 18.90%, followed by spelling errors, with 11.86%, sentence fragments, with 10.56%, and punctuation errors, 9.93%. The study concluded that the errors made by the students were often caused by the combination of learner's mother tongue or the interference of their first language, together with the incompetency of vocabulary and grammatical utilization.

Giridharan (2012) stated that the lack of competence in academic writing among universities' ESL students greatly affect their academic performance. The research was conducted to identify the gaps in academic writing among universities' ESL students, specifically those pursuing their foundation studies programme. A total of 206 participants selected were from the foundation studies programme of Curtin University, Miri, Malaysia where they are required to enrol in the course Writing and Research Skills 061 Unit. The research was conducted through a qualitative approach, through employing a pragmatic case study approach. The academic writing teaching team identified gaps among the students' writing, through evaluating their essays. Feedbacks were also gathered from the students regarding the challenges that they perceive to face when completing an academic writing task. The analysis of data for the study involved four elements, interpreting the findings collected, coding of findings, organising the data into descriptive themes, and construction and testing possible alternative interpretations of the data collected. The study concluded that by implementing the fundamentals of the English language development into the teaching, integrating vocabulary learning, ESL learners are able to more efficiently develop proficient academic writing skills.

Mah and Gek (2015) stated that even though the importance of the English language has been emphasized from time to time, the students from Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) are constantly facing difficulties in developing a good proficiency on their writing skill. The research was conducted through a qualitative systematic literature review to investigate the writing needs

of UiTM students. The literature reviews focus on the area of poor writing skills from the learner's perspective, which are reading habit, language proficiency, and influence of first language. After the analysis of literatures, the researchers were able to identify seven perspectives of poor writing skills by the students, which are writing complexity, literacy, proficiency, critical thinking, information literacy, interlanguage, and writing anxiety. The result of the research implies that the development of supplementary web-based instruction and a comprehensive framework such as Web-based Cognitive Writing Instruction (WeCWI) is required in coming up with a solution for the problem at hand.

Kho-Yar and Tan (2015) stated that grammar is a crucial aspect in language acquisition, and is considered as the elemental foundation for writing. The research was conducted to investigate the issues in the learning of grammar, and how does the accuracy of grammar affect the reading and writing performance of Malaysian ESL learners. A total of 250 participants were involved in the research, where they were given treatment for their grammar accuracy. All of the participants selected for the study are Form 5 students from Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Seri Balik Pulau, a secondary school from the suburban area of Penang, Malaysia. The students scored between 10 marks to 75 marks for their recent English language examination, placing their English language proficiency from average level to low level. The research was conducted through a mixed method approach, where three instruments were designed for the collection of data. A quasi-experimental research design, consisting of pre-test and post-test of reading comprehension and writing, as well as a set of marking criteria were designed and used as a quantitative approach, while the analysis of past reviews of researchers were also conducted for the qualitative approach for the study. After the test scripts have been collected, it was marked based on the marking criteria designed, where the difference in score between the pre-test and

post-test were identified to evaluate the improvement of the students after the treatment. For the qualitative data analysis, the grammatical errors are categorised and coded in order to identify the type of errors committed by the participants. The study identified two crucial issues about the learning of English grammar in Malaysia. The first one being the interference of mother tongue language system, where the Bahasa Malaysia has a strong influence on English language learning and contributes to many of the errors of grammatical rules. Second, the learning of the English language is considered as a learning of a school subject by the students, but not a skill. This causes the students to acquire the language for the purpose of examination, instead of the utilization in their daily lives.

Hiew (2012) stated that in order to identify the issues that cause low proficiency in the English language among Malaysian students, it is crucial to first understand the students' perception and experience towards their learning environment of the English language. 46 former students of a public secondary school in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia were selected as respondents for the research. The respondents were former students from the first semester to the fifth semester from various course of the public secondary school. The Malaysia University English Test (MUET) scores of the student were recorded from the range of Band 2 to Band 5. The research was conducted through a qualitative approach where the usage of dialogue journal entries was incorporated through the social media Facebook. The respondents reported learning issues that they encounter during their English lessons, their comments on the English language learning and teaching system, and suggestion to improve it. The journal entries were analysed through content analysis divided based on the four language skills, speaking, listening, reading and writing. The classroom observation and suggestions to teachers are also analysed. The study concluded that the learning of the English language is a two-way communication process, where

both the teachers and students have to be committed in order for it to be effective. Through the comments, it is found that teachers should be more initiative in ensuring their teaching plan is effective in delivering the knowledge to the students. The teachers should cater to the different language needs of different students based on their English level. On the other hand, students need to be much more proactive in the effort of improving their English language proficiency.

2.4 Monitor Model

The Monitor Model is a model consisting five hypotheses regarding second-language acquisition. It was developed in the 1970s, by linguist and educational researcher Stephen Krashen. The hypotheses emphasize on the comprehensible input (CI) that is delivered to second language (L2) students. The model states that the understanding of language input in terms of both spoken and written language is the only criteria that improves the language competency, while the output of the language by L2 students does not have a significant impact on their linguistic competency. The second hypothesis of the model is the acquisition-learning hypothesis. This hypothesis claims that there is a significant difference between the acquisition of language and the learning of language. The acquisition of language is interpreted as a subconscious process of language input for the student, while the learning of language is interpreted as a conscious process of language input for the student. The hypothesis greatly claims that the effective improvement of language competency is significantly affected by the acquisition of language, but rarely on the learning of language.

This research is conducted with the support of the Monitor Model, especially on the acquisition-learning hypothesis, whereby the language needs of Malaysian Public Relations undergraduates is intense even though they have been learning the English language as their second language for 11 – 13 years. This is due to the fact that Malaysia undergraduates barely

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communicate using the English language in their daily lives. The usage of English language is only present during in-class activities such as completing assignments or final examinations. This leads to students facing the situation where they are learning language in a conscious process of language input, and is ineffective in improving their language competency.

2.5 Theoretical Framework
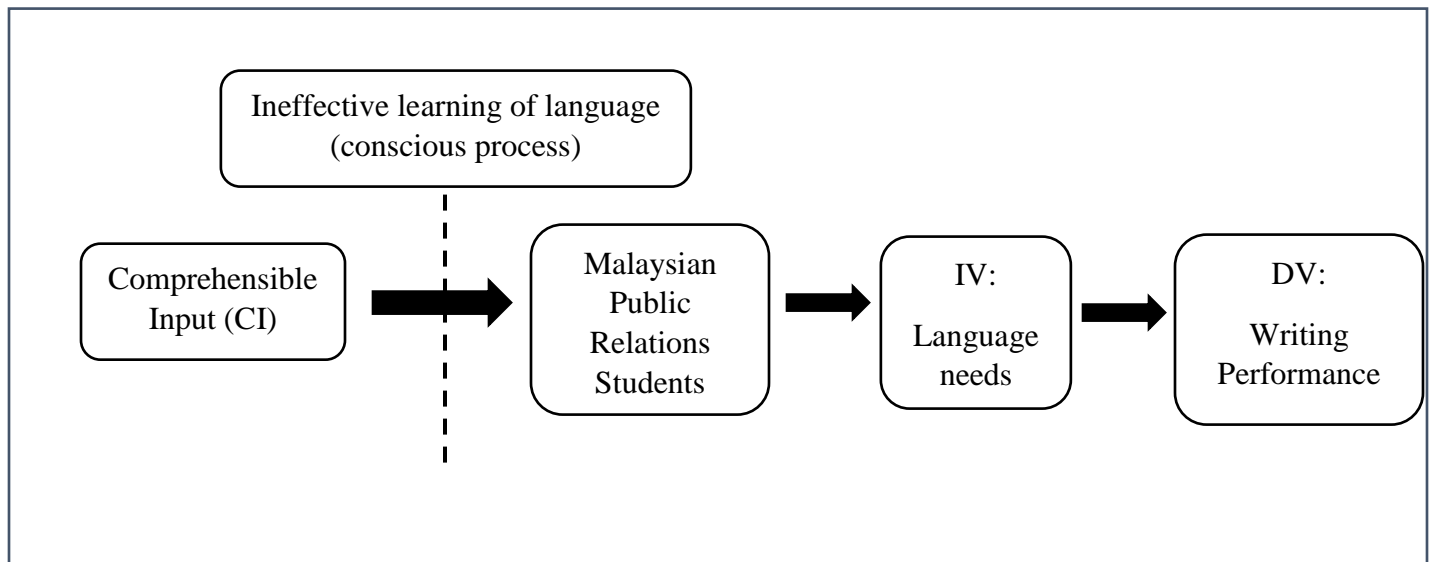
Figure 2.1. Theoretical Framework

Figure 2.1 shows the theoretical framework of the study. The theoretical framework explains how language needs and writing are interrelated. Public Relations students are claimed to be good at writing at all times as writing is one of the acquired skills for a Public Relations practitioner. However, in today's situation, there are many companies that are unsatisfied towards the performance of Public Relations practitioner, whereby they could not even write a proper email or even a speech at the entry level, due to their language needs.

The model claims that language must be practiced regularly through actions such as reading and writing in order for students to excel at the language. It begins with the linguistic knowledge input towards the students, such as the learning of English language through

classroom activities. Public Relations students received the input, but is the knowledge is barely comprehensible. This is due to the fact that they seldom put the knowledge obtained into practises. Students do not write frequently, do not speak during discussion, do not read enough, and barely have any hands-on experience in producing a piece of decent writing. This is as to why Public Relations practitioner are facing with intense language needs. On the other hand, if the students practise writing frequently, their language needs will be significantly less intense. Hence, the model claims that it is important for all the learners to perform what they have learnt during the school in order to understand the knowledge and as well as excel in that particular skill.

2.6 Summary

After thorough research through literature review, a clearer understanding was established towards the variables of language needs and ESL writing. A theoretical framework is also constructed to provide a clearer direction for the study. The next chapter will cover the methodology used for this research.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter describes the methodology undertaken for this research. This study aimed to find out the language needs of Malaysian Public Relations students in ESL writing. This chapter consists of the research design, sampling, research instrument, research procedure and data analysis.

3.1 Research Design

This research is a mixed method research whereby quantitative and qualitative data were collected and used at the same time to determine the language needs of Malaysian Public Relations students in ESL writing. Mixed method research design is a procedure of collecting, analysing and mixing both qualitative and quantitative methods into a single study (Creswell, 2012). It is used to study the same phenomenon.

A single method research provides insufficient results for the researchers. Besides, mixed method research can be used to check whether both qualitative and quantitative research methods towards the same phenomenon have arrived at the same conclusion (Jick, 2013).

The design used in this research is the embedded design. Embedded design is used to collect quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously or parallel but having one data to play the supporting role to the other form of data (Creswell, 2012). In this study, research question one (RQ1) was supported by the data collected from research question two (RQ2). Furthermore, research question two (RQ2) was supported by the data collected from research question three (RQ3), and research question three (RQ3) was supported by the data collected from research

question three (RQ3) itself. Both forms of the data were collected almost at the same time and the secondary data is able to provide additional information to the primary data.

The benefit of using an embedded design is the combination of the advantages of both quantitative and qualitative research method, and one of it is used as the supporting data. Through embedded design, the researchers were able to get a well-covered research as compared to only using single research method. As language needs is something that is very subjective, it is needed to have a detailed description on participants' feeling and experience.

However, the challenges faced using this design is that the researchers have to understand the qualitative and quantitative research method, this is because the study uses both strengths from the research methods to conduct this study. As most of the researchers mastered only one research method, it will be a challenge for them as well. Besides, the researchers have to be clear about intent of secondary data is just for supporting role and additional information and it is not used as primary references.

3.2 Sampling

To best understand the phenomenon of the research, the researchers are required to choose the individuals and sites on purpose and with intention. This helps the researcher to understand in details on the target participants or site.

The sampling use in this research is purposive sampling, whereby the researchers choose the samples intentionally to learn or understand the research topic. As Bachelor of Communications (Hons) Public Relations is offered in Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR) and it is one of the universities that produce most Public Relations students graduating each year, therefore UTAR was chosen as the site of this study .

The researchers requested the consent of the Head of Department of Public Relations on this research and sample, and the Head of Department has identified a tutorial class that taught by the only tutor for both lecture and tutorial class to ensure its consistency and make up a total of 45 students who are currently taking Advanced Public Relations Writing. Advanced Public Relations Writing is a pre-requisite subject for Year 2 students in UTAR whereby the students are supposed to pass Public Relations Writing in order to proceed with Advanced Public Relations Writing. As there is only one class of students who are currently taking Advanced Public Relations Writing, therefore the sample size was 45.

All 45 scripts were used for content analysis method, as for the focus groups interview method, the researchers selected five groups from the tutorial class with five to six members in a group among the 45 samples. Therefore, the focus groups interview involved only around 25 participants. For the in-depth interview method, the researchers requested the Head of Department of Public Relations to inform and acquire consent from the only lecturer who is currently teaching Advanced Public Relations Writing. The lecturer chosen is having at least five years of teaching experience in the subject of Public Relations Writing or Advanced Public Relations Writing. As the researchers are dealing with the ESL writing of Public Relations students, hence it is important for the researchers to interview the only lecturer who is involve in teaching and marking the subject of Advanced Public Relations Writing as he or she is familiar with all the language needs that the Public Relations student are facing.

3.3 Research Instrument

Research instrument is the tools used to collect answers from the sampling to answer and to produce the data needed for the research questions (Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003). The choices of research instruments are supposed to be appropriate for the research objectives and

able to answer the research questions. In this study, the research instruments used for textual analysis, in-depth interviews and focus group are different. The research instruments for each research questions are as follows:

Table 3.1.
Research instruments used for each research questions

Research Questions	Research Instruments
RQ1: What is the performance of Malaysian university Public Relations students in ESL writing?	Speech Writing Pre-existing course writing rubric
RQ2: What are the language needs of Malaysian Public Relations students in ESL writing?	Document Analysis
RQ3: What are the difficulties of Public Relations students in ESL writing?	Semi-structured Interviews

The research instrument used for the research question one (RQ1) is collecting the speeches samples written by the students during their in-class assessment for Advanced Public Relations Writing. Speech is one of the writings that are always needed by Public Relations practitioner. Therefore, it is appropriate for the researchers to analyse the papers in order to know the language needs of the Public Relations students. Even though there are also other choices such as feature writing, public service announcement and etc, but the scope of feature writing and public service announcement is too broad, unlike speeches, it has a specific format on how the students are supposed to write. The researchers also have access to the breakdown of the marks for the speeches. Therefore, it was easy for the researchers to analyse the speech writing.

The speeches are obtained from Public Relations students after they have completed it in their in-class exercise. Before the beginning of in-class exercise, the lecturer went through the format of speech writing in the class. Then, the lecturer did a brain-storming session in order to guide the students to generate more ideas on the given topic. Then, the lecturer explained the task given and the marking rubric as to provide a better understanding for students. The marks collected for the speech writing were converted to 100% and it was graded by using UTAR grading system to determine the performance of the Public Relations students in their writing. UTAR grading system for undergraduates are as follows:

Table 3.2.
Grading system of Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR)

Grades	Marks Obtained
A+	90-100
A	80-89
A-	75-79
B+	70-74
B	65-69
B-	60-64
C+	55-59
C	50-54
F	0-49

For research question two (RQ2), the instrument used is document analysis which is also known as textual analysis whereby after collecting the scripts and the grades are given to the 45 samples, the researchers then analysed the text and identified the common error such as

grammatical error, wrongly used of transition, wrongly use of preposition and conjunction that is done by the students and count the frequency of each errors. This is to analyse the types of errors committed by the students and then discern the language needs of Public Relations students accordingly. The script of the students was label accordingly, from S1 to S45.

For research question three (RQ3), the instrument used is to explore Malaysian Public Relations undergraduates' difficulties in ESL writing through semi structured interviews with open-ended questions. Focus groups are for the students while the in-depth interview is for the lecturer. The reason why the researchers are using both in-depth interview and focus group is because both interviews are targeted to different group of people. Since there is only a lecturer who is teaching Advanced Public Relations Writing, and the lecturer is familiar on the students' language needs, therefore, it is better for the researcher to use in-depth interview to more about the students' language needs. As for focus group, the researchers have targeted 25 students out of the 45 samples who have submitted the scripts. The groups were divided as follow.

Table 3.3.

Labelling of students for focus group interview

	Student 1	Student 2	Student 3	Student 4	Student 5
Focus Group 1	FG1, S1	FG1, S2	FG1, S3	FG1, S4	FG1, S5
Focus Group 2	FG2, S1	FG2, S2	FG2, S3	FG2, S4	FG2, S5
Focus Group 3	FG3, S1	FG3, S2	FG3, S3	FG3, S4	FG3, S5
Focus Group 4	FG4, S1	FG4, S2	FG4, S3	FG4, S4	FG4, S5
Focus Group 5	FG5, S1	FG5, S2	FG5, S3	FG5, S4	FG5, S5

Table 3.4.

Labelling of lecturer for in-depth interview

	Teacher 1
In-depth Interview Session 1	S1, T1

The researchers wanted to find out whether the language needs analysed by the researchers matched with the language needs that told by the participants. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed.

The semi structured, open ended questions for focus groups interview are as such:

1. In your opinion, do you think writing skills is important for a public relations practitioner?

2. What is the biggest challenge you face when writing in English?

3. What aspects of the English language do you think will improve your Public Relations writing skills?

4. What aspect of language do you think your teacher can focus to help you improve your Public Relations writing skills?

The semi-structured, open-ended interview questions for in-depth interview are as follows:

1. Do you think writing is an important skill for Public Relations practitioners?

2. What do you generally think of the Public Relations students' writing skills?

3. What do you think are the specific language needs of Public Relations students when it comes to ESL writing?

4. In your opinion, what aspects of language needs do you think can improve Public Relations students writing skills?

The questions are constructed based on the research question three (RQ3). The researchers wanted to know what are the difficulties faced by the public relations students therefore the

researchers designed the questions to know their language needs in ESL writing. The questions starting from the challenges faced by the students when they are doing ESL writing is to let the students speak on their own language needs, at the same time the researcher referred to the analysis of the frequency counting and to identify whether it matches the answer. Then, the researchers asked on the important aspect that the participants think of and let the researcher knows on the most important aspects that are supposed to teach during the lecture. From there, the researchers found out which are the components that the lecturer is supposed to enhance or repeat a few times during the lecture class.

As for the interview questions for the lecturer, an experienced lecturer provided the researchers with more insight on the language needs of the students. The lecturer shared her experiences on the students that she had taught on their performance in writing.

3.4 Research Procedure

Research procedure is a process where researchers start to conduct the research until they get the answer to the research questions (Arthur & Hancock, 2009). Mixed method research has a complex research procedure as it involved both quantitative and qualitative research method. The research procedure suggested from Creswell for sequential explanatory design are as follows:
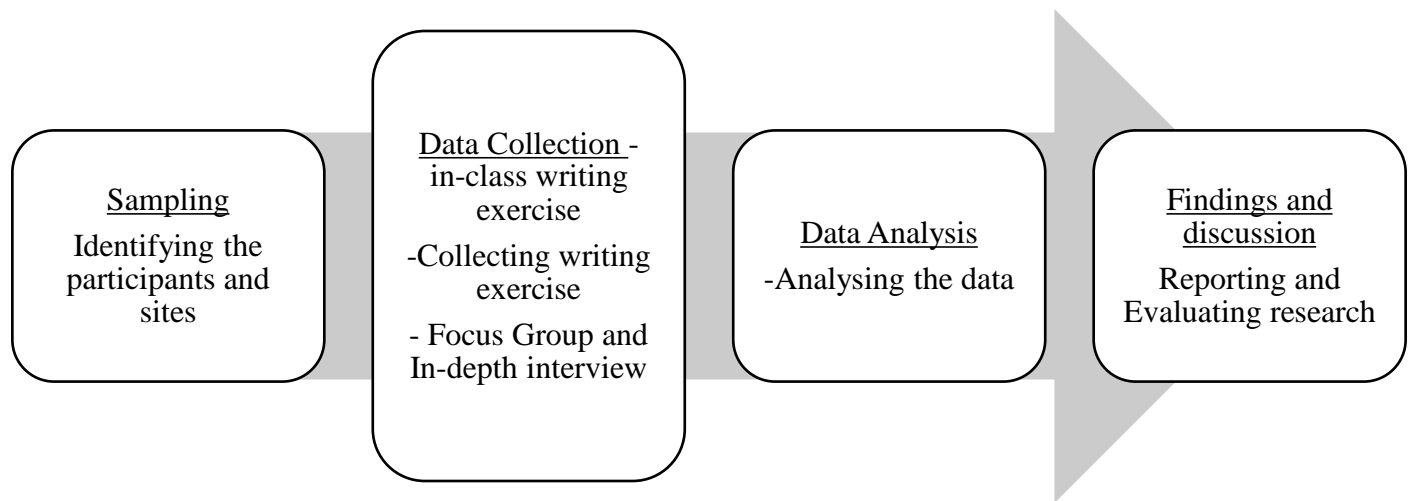
Figure 3.1. Research procedure

The research procedures begin from identifying the participants and sites through purposive sampling. In this research, researchers had selected the sample from the Public Relations students in Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR) who are currently taking the subject Advanced Public Relations Writing, and the sample size for the study is 45 students.

After the researchers obtained the consent from the Head of Department of Public Relations, the researchers started to collect the data through collecting speech writing samples from the students, through focus group interviews and also in-depth interview. Speech writing were collected after the in-class exercise was done and a simple semi-structured interview with open-ended questions was asked during the focus group and in-depth interviews. The data collection took around two weeks to be completed.

After collecting all the data needed, the interviews were transcribed and while the speech writing were marked according to the marking rubrics. Then, a textual analysis and thematic analysis were done with the help of NVIVO and Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS)Version 23 to perform frequency counting to get the percentage and to help on developing the codes, subtheme and theme.

3.5 Data Analysis

For research question one (RQ1), after collecting the speech writing samples, the researchers marked the speech writing according to the marking rubrics and converted the marks into 100%. This is to gauge the overall writing performance of PR students through their writing samples.

The data analysis for research question two (RQ2) is through textual analysis. Textual analysis is where the researchers analyse and interpret a text data and develop their own understanding towards it. The text data includes not only the written form, but also the verbal content or electronic content. Textual analysis focuses on the characteristics of language of the text and analyse the meaning of the content based on the text (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Then, the researchers were able to analyse the text and do a frequency counting on the mistake made by the students. The frequency counting can be done with the help of SPSS Version 23 to get a basic statistic such as which mistake is commonly done by the students, which are the language needs of Malaysian Public Relations students in their writing and so on.

For research question three (RQ3), the researchers used thematic analysis to analyse the answers they obtained from focus group and in-depth interviews. Focus group interviews aims to collect high quality of data towards the research topic and helps to understand the problem from the point of view of the participants (Dilshad & Latif, 2013). In-depth interview is where the researchers conducts an intensive individual interview with a targeted number of respondents to explore and obtain insights on their ideas towards a particular topic (Boyce & Neale, 2006). In-depths interviews are the most appropriate when the researcher wants detailed information about a persons' perspective towards an issue. All the interviews were recorded and transcript after the interview session. Then, a thematic analysis was done for all the transcripts to develop codes, subthemes, and lastly themes for the transcript. The researchers interpreted and categorised the

common codes under the same theme. Each theme had a sub-theme and each sub-theme had a few codes. The researchers identified each of the coding and categorized it under the same sub-theme. The related sub-theme was categorized under a theme. The themes from the thematic analysis were able to answer the research questions while the sub-theme and coding were its elaborations. Thematic analysis was easy with the help of NVIVO Version 12. Table below shows the data analysis associated with the research questions.

According to Brit, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, and Walter (2016), member checks are an effective technique and procedure applied in qualitative research to ensure and establish (the) validity of a researcher's findings by seeking feedback from the participants in response to the raw data originally collected from them. In this study, at the end of the textual and thematic analysis, member checking was conducted in an informal session with the teacher selected in this study. This ensured that the informants' feedback and responses were reliable throughout the researchers' methodology of data collection and analysis, and whether the researchers' data transfers and transcriptions and other information induced from the qualitative analyses were captured accurately and they were credible.

Table 3.5.
Data analysis used for each research questions.

Research Questions	Types of data analysis
RQ1: What is the performance of Malaysian university Public Relations students in ESL writing?	Descriptive Statistics
RQ2: What are the language needs of Malaysian Public Relations students in ESL writing?	Textual Analysis
RQ3: What are the difficulties of Public Relations students in ESL writing?	Thematic Analysis

3.6 Triangulations of data

Triangulation is a technique that uses different sources to come out with the same outcome (Johnson, 2017). It uses multiple sources or multiple research method to reach a mutual understanding and outcome. In this research, the researchers use triangulations in terms of data in order to check the consistency of findings that is got by two different methods. The data found qualitative and quantitative research method. will be matched to come out with one conclusion only.

3.7 Summary

In a nutshell, this research is a mixed method research. The method used are descriptive statistics, textual analysis, focus group and in-depth interview, while the instruments for the methods are collecting the speech samples, focus groups interview and in-depth interviews with semi-structured open-ended interviews questions. The type of sampling used is purposive sampling. The sample size of the research is 45 and are all Public Relations students from Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR). A lecturer was involved in the in-depth interview. Lastly, the collected data were interpreted by using textual analysis and thematic analysis to find out the language needs of Malaysian Public Relations students in ESL writing. In the next chapter, the researchers are going to perform what they have planned earlier, the researchers are going to collect the data through collecting speech samples, focus groups interview and in-depth interviews.

CHAPTER 4

FINDING AND ANALYSIS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the finding and the analysis derived from all the collected data. In order to answer all the research questions of this study, 45 Public Relations undergraduates were selected through purposive sampling for this study. 45 scripts on speech writing were collected and analysed for this study. The data were collected and analysed by using descriptive statistics, textual analysis and thematic analysis with the help of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) Version 23 and NVIVO Version 12. The researchers also interviewed 15 students for focus group interview and one lecturer for in depth interview. This chapter will focus on the presentation of collected data in order to facilitate discussion, recommendations and conclusion in the following chapter.

4.1 Findings

In this study, there are three research questions. Research question one (RQ1) is to determine the performance of Malaysian university Public Relations students in ESL writing. It is measured by using descriptive statistics on the speech writing and pre-existing writing rubric. The research question two (RQ2) is to find out the language needs of Malaysian Public Relations students in ESL writing through document analysis and the research question three (RQ3) is to find out the difficulties of Public Relations students in ESL writing by using the semi-structured interview protocol and analysed using thematic analysis.

4.1.1 Research Question 1

What is the performance of Malaysian university Public Relations students in ESL writing?

Research question 1 (RQ1) is to find out the performance of Malaysian university Public Relations students in ESL writing. 45 scripts are collected from the students who have attended the Advanced Public Relations class and sit for the assessment. Then, the scripts are all marked according to the marking rubrics of speech writing and then converted into the 100% and graded according to UTAR grading system in order to determine the performance of Malaysian Public Relations students in their ESL writing with the help of using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) Version 23. Table 4.1 presents the average marks that students got for the speech writing is only 52.37 (*M=52.377)* marks out of 100 which is C grade.

After analysing the result, the researchers had come to the conclusion that the writing performance of the public relations students are below average which is around 52 out of 100. Most of the students could not perform well in their writing.

Table 4.1.

Descriptive statistic of the students' marks.

		marks
N	Valid	45
	Missing	0
Mean		52.377
Mode		60.0
Minimum		27.5
Maximum		80.0

There are around 14 students (31%) scored a C+ for the written assessment, 11 students (24.6%) scored C, seven (7) students (15.6%) scored B- and six (6) students (13.3%) fail their written assessment. There is only 6.6% of students who obtained an A for the assessment. This shows that most Public Relations students scored at the average of C+. C or B- which is at the range of below average. Table 4.2 presented the frequency and percentage for each grade.

Table 4.2.

The frequency and percentage for each grade

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	A	2	4.4
	A-	1	2.2
	B+	3	6.7
	B	1	2.2
	B-	7	15.6
	C+	14	31
	C	11	24.6
	F	6	13.3
	Total	45	100.0

Table 4.3 presented the breakdown of the marks according to the speech writing marking rubrics. It is shows that most of the students are losing marks in their language part. As the full marks of language is 12 marks, the maximum marks of student are only 8 out of 12, and the lowest mark for language is only 2. In average, the students are only able to score 4 (*M= 4.3778)* marks for their language section. From the table, the researchers were able to conclude that the students perform below average is because of their language problem.

Table 4.3.
Breakdown of the marks according to marking rubrics.

Statistics

		Salutation (2m)	Attention grabber (2m)	Preview (3m)	Organisation (6m)	Content (12m)	Language (12m)	Conclusion (3m)
N	Valid	45	45	45	45	45	45	45
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		1.2667	.8667	1.8667	3.8444	7.6222	4.3778	2.2000
Mode		1.00[a]	.00	3.00	5.00	8.00	5.00	3.00
Minimum		.00	.00	.00	.00	3.00	2.00	.00
Maximum		2.00	2.00	3.00	6.00	12.00	8.00	3.00
Sum		57.00	39.00	84.00	173.00	343.00	197.00	99.00

a. Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown

4.1.2. Research Question 2

What are the language needs of Malaysian Public Relations students in ESL writing?

To answer research question two (RQ 2), the language needs of Malaysian Public Relations students in ESL writing. A textual analysis was conducted to identify the language errors committed by the PR students. The number of errors were then categorized and their occurrences counted as frequencies using the SPSS.

Table 4.4 presented the occurrence of errors found in the scripts of the samples. It is shows that Subject-verb agreement (*M= 7.044*) got the highest number of occurrences, followed by syntax error (M= *4.311),* tenses *(M = 4.111),* language used (*M=3.044*), preposition *(M=1.689*), mechanics (*M=1.333),* semantics *(M=1.289)* and conjunction (M=*1.022).* The lowest number of error occurrence are dangling modifiers and verb consistency.

Table 4.4.

The frequency counting of language needs.

Statistics

		Subject verb agreement	tenses	Verb consistency	conjunction	Language used	preposition	Dangling modifiers	mechanics	semantics	syntax
N	Valid	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		7.044	4.111	.333	1.022	3.044	1.689	.511	1.333	1.289	4.311

4.1.2.1 Subject Verb Agreement

Subject verb agreement is mainly focusing on the usage of singular and plural verb that must agree with subjects in number and person, whether it is first, second or third. There rules in

subject-verb agreement which are a verb agrees with its subject in number. For example: The girl dances and the girls dance. When the subject is singular, there is an 's; in the verb and vice versa.

It has the highest mean value ($M = 7.044$) which is the highest errors that is committed in regards to Subject Verb Agreement. A total of 317.0 errors were found in all the papers. This has formed the highest language needs of Public Relations undergraduate.

This is evidenced by:

Excerpt 1: "The factors *leads* to the incident are poor parenting styles and teenage rebellion" (S20).

Excerpt 2: "The school *are* not connected to the *parent* in reporting the student behaviour and performance" (S33)

Excerpt 3: "When the parents *reacts* aggressively towards the child, the child *become* scared and show *their* frustration to others in the society." (S32)

Subject Verb Agreement contributes to the highest frequency counting for language needs.

4.1.2.2 Syntax Error

Syntax is where most of the students will usually have needs in it. Syntax is all about the structure of the sentence. Syntax is the part of the linguistics that studies the structure and formation of sentences (Rangelova, n.d).

This is shown in the students' essay as below:

Excerpt 1: "Their school teachers need to teach the teenagers not to be *delinquency*." (S43)

Excerpt 2: "School teacher *also is a* role model together with us to reduce the accident." (S45)

Excerpt 3: "It's been a while *since the last time* for me to give a speech." (S30)

Syntax error is the second highest occurrence error made by the students after subject-verb agreement. A mean value of *(M=4.311)* errors is committed in regards to syntax error. This showed that students have problem in forming a correct sentence.

4.1.2.3. Tenses

Tenses is defined as the word that is relating to the time of an action, event or an action (Bauer, 1983). Tenses are divided into three big categories, which are past, present and future tenses (Suwardi, 2010). Each of the tenses work differently and it has the rules by itself. Mistake on verbs usually falls into the category of tenses. This is because tenses are rather confusing and from the three main big categories, it has divided into another few categories.

This is evidenced by the scripts of the students as below:

Excerpt 1: "Thank you for *come*" (S40)

Excerpt 2: "Parents should *educated* their children wisely" (S19)

Excerpt 3: "have medical check-up every year to prevent from any other illness such as cardiovascular disease *attacking*." (S06)

there is a total of 185 errors committed in regards to tenses. An average number of 4 *(M=4.111)* errors is found in the scripts. It is shows that tenses is also one of the contributors to the language needs of the Public Relations students.

4.1.2.4. Language used

Language used is whereby the students has a wrong choice of words in their sentences. Or the sentence seems to be directly translated from Chinese to English. Language used focuses much

on the word than the sentence in order to identify whether the particular choice of word suitable to include in that particular sentence (Aronoff, 2007).

The mistake is presented in the students' essay as below:

Excerpt 1: "intaking of *rubbish food* will not give any slimming effect." (S06)

Excerpt 2: "How to *cut down* obesity?" (S06)

Excerpt 3: "Children should be *grown* with care" (S35)

It was showed that language used have a mean value of (*M=3.044*). As a Malaysian Public Relations students usually has a problem with language used as they do not have a pure English background.

4.1.2.5 Preposition

Preposition is the word to connect the nouns, pronouns or the phrases to the other word within a sentence. Preposition acts to connects all the people, objects time and location of a sentence (Ginger, n.d.). It is normally very short word and is usually placed directly in front of nouns. Examples of preposition are on, under, besides, at, above, across, up. around and etc.

The mistakes are shown in the students' written exercise as follows

Excerpt 1: "who has to responsible *on* this case?" (S31)

Excerpt 2: "Most of the parents did not aware *that* the effect of social media on behaviour." (S30)

The mean value (*M = 1.689*) has committed in regards to preposition. Public Relations students often messed up a few usages of preposition that seems to be similar, and this causes one of the language needs of Malaysian Public Relations students.

4.1.2.6 Mechanics

Mechanics is the mechanism of the language in terms of punctuation, spelling of the word, capitalization, hyphen and dashes, spacing, italics and etc (A.Dutton, 2014). Mechanics are more to the format of the sentence and word.

Common mistake made by the students are on spelling mistake, "probles" "motidied" and "youngersters" are found in the scripts.

Mechanics seems to be the easiest, however there are still many students mistaken in their scripts. Mean value (*M= 1.333)* mistake made by the student in each script.

4.1.2.7 Semantics

Semantics is usually the study of the meaning in language (Szczegielniak, 2009). It can be applied to the entire sentence or to a particularly a single word. In this study, the researchers find out that the students have a difficulty in choosing the suitable words in forming the sentence and the meaning and the structure of the sentence has run out of logic.

This is evidenced by the scripts written by the students:

Excerpt 1: "A very good day to the floor." (S18)

Excerpt 2: "I read the news said that" (S39)

Excerpt 3: "Everything happened in this world must be a reason." (S25)

It is showed that students hardly express themselves using English language and it use the wrong choice of words and the meaning of the sentence seems to be very illogical, an average of 1 mistake with the mean value *(M= 1.289)* is made in every script.

4.1.2.8 Conjunction

Conjunction is a word that connects the elements of a sentence, such as words, phrases or clauses (B.A, 2016). There are three types of conjunction in the grammar rules, which are subordinating conjunctions, coordinating conjunctions and correlative conjunctions. Each of the types of the conjunction used at different time but it was use to connect the elements of the sentence. Examples of conjunctions are after, throughout, and, within, besides, either…but, not only…but also and so on.

The error found in the scripts of the students are as follows:

Excerpt 1: "*not only* on parenting style, the government should give a hand as well." (S24)

Excerpt 2: "for the incident happened on 18th February 2017" (S39).

Excerpt 3: "Parents should not allow the children to eat after 10 o'clock, parents should make them to sleep." (S26)

Mean value (*M=1.022)* is committed in regards to the conjunction. Conjunction is also one of the contributors to the language needs of Malaysian Public Relations students.

4.1.2.9 Dangling Modifiers

Dangling modifiers is usually known as the incomplete sentences whereby the students will leave the sentence hanging. It usually occurs when the subject of the sentence does not occur in the introductory phase. Dangling modifiers are errors that can confuse the readers when they are reading an article without knowing what is the subject.

The is evidenced by:

Excerpt 1: "five years ago, she drove outside." (S38)

Excerpt 2: "The very happy boy ran fast to catch the ball." (S27)

Excerpt 3: "school education will also the place to given the teenagers have concept." (S24)

It is showed that most of the students with basic English understand the rule of forming a sentence. Therefore, it has minimal mistake with a mean value (*M= 0.511*) on dangling modifiers language needs as well.

4.1.2.10. Verb consistency

Verb consistency is referring to keeping the same tense throughout a clause. In the report of intelligent editing (2011), inconsistency in writing has a major impact on readers. There are several categories in consistency which includes hyphenation, capitalization, numbers in sentences, spelling and bullet punctuation.

This is showed in the scripts done by the students:

Excerpt 1: "I have *five* brothers, and *5* of them are lovely." (S05)

Excerpt 2: "Body *check-up* is important for all the citizens, we should have done a body *check up* annually." (S06)

Excerpt 3: "*Colouring* is good for mental health. When the *colors* are attracting, the mood will become good." (S24)

The total of error made in verb consistency is the lowest as compared to the others, only 15 mistakes out of the 45 scripts, it shows that not much students have problems with a mean value of (*M=0.333*).

4.1.3. Research Question 3
What are the difficulties of Public Relations students in ESL writing?

For the research question 3, five focus group interviews that involved 45 Public Relations students, as well as an in-depth interview with a Public Relations teacher were conducted. Themes were induced from the focus group interviews and in-depth interview for the thematic analysis. The themes mainly fall within four main factors, they are the importance of Public Relations writing, the challenges in English writing, the aspects of the English language, and the ways to improve English writing. The four main factors are then divided into sub-themes.
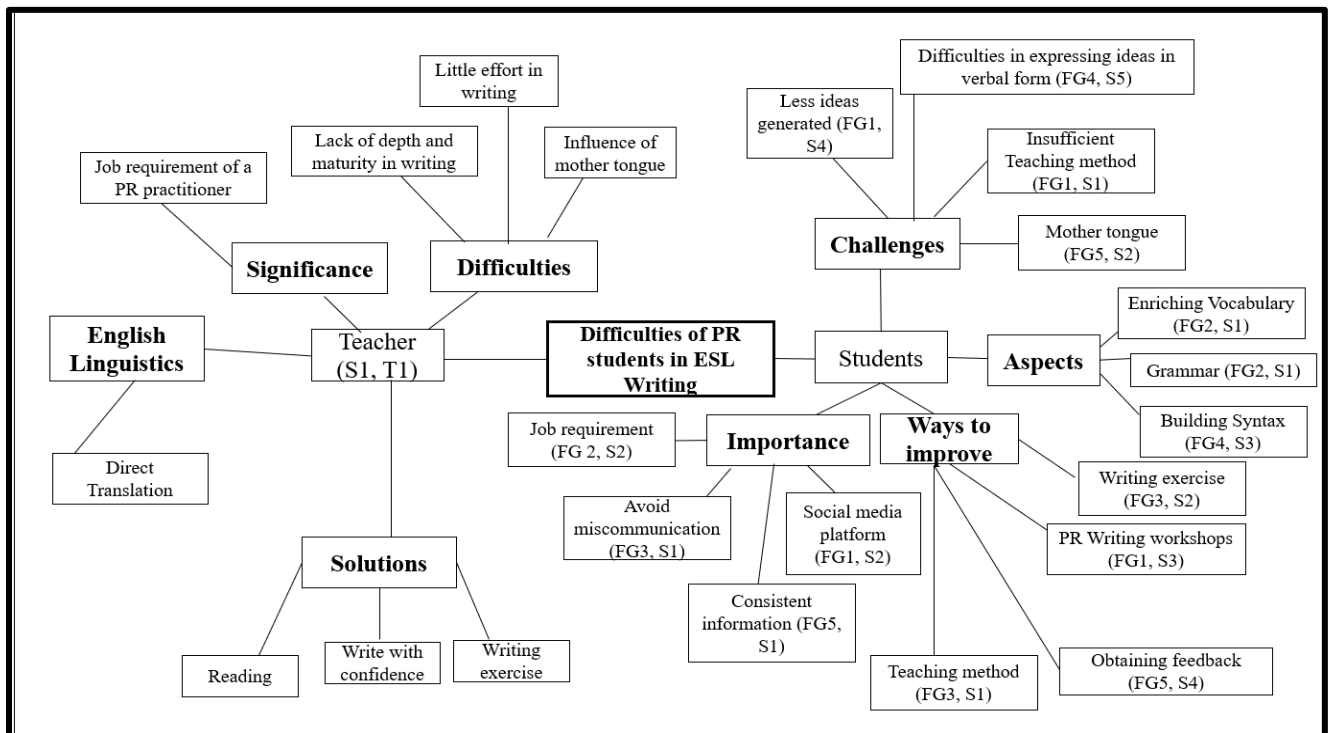

Figure 4.1 The difficulties faced by Public Relations students in ESL writing

4.1.3.1. Importance of Public Relations Writing

It goes without saying that the writing skills is one of the most important skill for a Public Relations practitioner. Most interviewees agree on the fact that the writing skill is important for a Public Relations practitioner due to various reason. The main reason that most interviewees

agree on the fact that writing skills are important for a Public Relations practitioner is because they think that the Public Relations industry will have a high demand and expectation towards the writing skill of Public Relations undergraduate.

The interviewees think that their job as a Public Relations practitioner requires them to produce communication materials such as formal letters, pitch letters, pre and post news release, invitation letters, speech writing and so on. This is evidenced by the excerpt below:

> *Writing skills are really important for a Public Relations practitioner, as we are expected to write a pitch to editors, as well as writing pre and post news release to the press.* (FG2, S2)

The interviewees also mentioned that one of the main job scopes of a Public Relations practitioner is to build and maintain the relationship between an organization and its public. One of the methods to build and maintain a good relationship with the public is to disseminate information that serves the public's interest. A good writing skill is required by the Public Relations practitioner to do so in order to disseminate the information accurately. This is proven by the excerpt below:

> *Public Relations practitioners need to ensure all the information and content are accurately disseminated in the communication process with the publics.* (FG5, S1)

It is also pointed out that if the information disseminated to the public is inaccurate, it might cause a miscommunication between the organization and its public, and it might ruin the reputation of the organization. This is confirmed by the excerpt below:

> *Writing skills are very important because a single mistake is going to ruin everything.* (FG1, S4)

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The Public Relations industry is an everchanging industry that utilize the latest communication technology in order to create a more effective communication process. The social media is regarded as one of the most effective communication channels of the current era, and some interviewees think that a Public Relations practitioner needs to have good writing skills in order to produce good social media content for an organization. This is verified by the excerpt below:

It is very important for Public Relations practitioner to have a good writing skill in social media. As social media is a big communication platform, Public Relations practitioners can use it to attract audiences and create awareness for their organization. (FG1, S2)

Furthermore, the Public Relations teacher who participated in the in-depth interview also supported the point by stating that the aspect of writing is considered one of the key job scopes for a Public Relations practitioner. This is substantiated by the excerpt below:

The aspect of writing is very important in the context of Public Relations, because it is one of the key jobs that Public Relations practitioners do. It is part of the Public Relations practitioners' job to communicate, and the aspect of writing is no doubt an important part of it. Which is why it is definitely a very important thing. (S1, T1)

Overall, most interviewees agree that having a good writing skill is important for a Public Relations practitioner, as the job of a Public Relations practitioner is to communicate with their stakeholders, and a good writing skill is required to produce quality communication materials.

4.1.3.2. Challenges in English Writing

Throughout the years, there has been much disappointment and criticism, from both scholars and industry professionals, towards the writing proficiency of fresh graduates from the Public Relations course. Even though upon agreeing on the fact that having good writing skills are

important for a Public Relations Practitioner, most interviewees admit that they have difficulty when they are writing in English.

One of the interviewees pointed out that the biggest challenge that he faces when writing in English is that he is unable to generate ideas when he is doing format writing, which is a very common type of writing in the context of Public Relations. This is evidenced by the excerpt below:

> *The biggest challenge that I often face when writing in English is when I am required to write letters, my mind will be stuck on what kind of ideas should I use.* (FG1, S4)

There are some interviewees who can generate ideas for their writing, but they have difficulties putting those ideas into words and constructing proper sentences to deliver their ideas or messages. This is proven by the excerpt below:

> *I think the biggest challenge that I face when I am writing in English is, I am unable to construct my messages into words.* (FG4, S5)

Some of the interviewees think that they have difficulty writing in English because the teaching method that was used to educate them in terms of the English language was inefficient. One interviewee pointed out the flaws of English language education in the primary and secondary school. This is confirmed by the excerpt below:

> *When I was in primary or secondary school, my teachers used to encourage us to use bombastic words, because it was fancier. They focus their time on teaching us on using bombastic words instead of correcting our grammar and sentence structure. I had really bad writing skills back then.* (FG1, S1)

Another interviewee pointed out that it is hard for her to improve her English proficiency when studying in the university level. She mentioned that most lecturers do not really point out or correct the mistakes of students in terms of English language. This is verified by the excerpt below:

> *Although I am studying in university now, it seems like no one will help us in correcting our mistakes, even if we did not use the correct grammar. Even after we have submitted our assignments, which contains a lot of grammar mistakes, our lecturers will not correct us or return our assignments to us, so we do not really know our mistakes.* (FG1, S3)

The one difficulty that all interviewees seems to face when they are trying to write in English is the influence of their mother tongue. Malaysians are ESL learners, where the learning of the English language is influenced by their mother tongue to a certain extend. This causes difficulty for students when they are trying to write in English, where they are seen using Bahasa Rojak or direct translation from their mother tongue when writing in English. This is substantiated by the excerpt below:

> *Even though we are speaking in the English language, we often use Bahasa Rojak instead of proper English. When we are using Bahasa Rojak, no one will correct us, and we will not understand the mistakes that we have made.* (FG5, S2)

Furthermore, the Public Relations teacher who participated in the in-depth interview also pointed out that one of the biggest problems with the students' writing is the content of the writing. The writings produced were described as severely lacking in maturity and content, which is a huge contribution towards the lack of quality of the writing produced by the students. This is evidenced by the excerpt below:

It is not only about the language problem, but the lack of depth and maturity in the content as well. This is likely due to the fact that students do not have enough knowledge in producing a piece of good writing. It comes from the fact that most of our students do not read, or do not read enough. (S1, T1)

The Public Relations teacher also mentioned that students tend to put in very little effort when they are producing a piece of writing, where they tend to over rely on the internet as their sources, and do not produce a critical perspective towards the sources obtained. This is proven by the excerpt below:

There is this tendency where students like to Google for information, and they can get a lot of it. The problem is that they do not filter the information obtained. Even if they do not understand it, they just copy and paste from the internet. They tend to produce a piece of writing without looking back at what they wrote, which is a very big problem. (S1, T1)

The Public Relations teacher acknowledged on the fact that having a background that does not communicate in English does contribute to the lack of proficiency in the English language, but she considers it as an excuse from students that have poor English skills. This is confirmed by the excerpt below:

Majority of our students come from a Chinese school background, where they have poor foundations in the English language. However, the problem is students tend to use that as an excuse. If they are willing to work a little bit harder, there would be no doubt that they are able to improve their English skills. (S1, T1)

Even though most Malaysians have been learning the English language for around 11 to 13 years, majority of them still have difficulty when writing in the English language due to various reasons, and they are aware of it.

4.1.3.3. Aspects of the English Language

As most interviewees are aware of the fact that they have difficulty when writing in English, they are also aware of the fact that they have to improve their English writing skills. Most of them have a general idea on the aspects of the English language that they have difficulty on, and should improve on, in order to improve their English writing skills.

The first aspect of the English language that most interviewees think they should improve on is enriching their vocabulary. Most interviewees think that they have trouble with their usage and choice of words when writing and English, while others think that their vocabulary is limited. This is verified by the excerpt below:

> *I think the problem in my writing skill will be the vocabulary, I always use the same word when writing an article, and it makes the writing less interesting. The word that I use might not be most suitable for the article as well.* (FG2, S1)

The second aspect of the English language that most interviewees think they should improve on is building the syntax. Many of them thinks that they have difficulty in constructing a proper sentence in the English language. Some interviewees are weak on the syntax because the syntax of English language is very different from the syntax of their mother tongue, where it causes a confusion between the two languages. This is substantiated by the excerpt below:

> *The problem with my writing skills will be the structure of the sentence. Our native language is not English, but Mandarin. Most of the time we will directly translate*

Mandarin sentences into English sentences, which causes the structure of the sentence to

be incorrect. (FG4, S3)

One of the interviewees pointed out that she is unfamiliar with the sentence structure of the English language as she rarely reads in English. This is evidenced by the excerpt below:

The biggest problem for me when writing in English will be the sentence structure. This is

because I am not really into reading in English, so I am unfamiliar with the sentence of

the structure of English. (FG1, S2)

The third aspect of the English language that most interviewees think they should improve on is their grammar. Many of them mentioned that they think the English grammar is hard, and it is almost impossible to understand it completely. Many of them mentioned that the grammar aspect that they constantly have problem with is with their tenses. This is proven by the excerpt below:

The problem with my writing skills will be the grammar, especially the tenses. I think that

is the most confusing part of the English grammar. (FG2, S1)

Furthermore, the Public Relations teacher who participated in the in-depth interview commented that the reason students from Chinese background tend to overuse direct translation from their mother tongue is because of their learning habits. Students from Chinese educational background has been trained to memorize things since young, which is why they often make mistakes in their vocabulary, something which they have memorized on. This is proven by the excerpt below:

The typical way of teaching in Chinese schools is they train you to memorize words,

including English words. Even though the students manage to memorize them, they do

not fully understand the meaning of the words, which is why they often have trouble with

their vocabulary and choice of words. (S1, T1)

Overall, most interviewees have a clear understanding on the aspects of the English language that they are weak at, and they have a general idea as to how they can improve on those problems.

4.1.3.4. Ways to Improve English Writing

Besides asking the interviewees regarding the aspect of the English language that they think they should improve on, we also asked for their opinion as to how should teachers help the students in improving their English writing skills in a more effective manner.

Many of the interviewees think that the teachers should be stricter when they are conducting the class. This allows them to focus and learn better towards their English writing. This is confirmed by the excerpt below:

> *I would prefer lecturers to be stricter and more demanding when they are guiding us in our English writing.* (FG3, S1)

Some of them mentioned that they would like the teachers to provide more writing exercises, so that they can practice and improve their writing skills. This is verified by the excerpt below:

> *Lecturers should actually give us more writing practices, in different types of writings, such as press release, newsletters, and so on, so that we familiarize ourselves with it.* (FG3, S2)

Most of the interviewees pointed out that it is important for teachers to correct the mistakes they have made and to provide feedbacks, so that they can have a better understanding as to how they should improve their English writing skills. This is substantiated by the excerpt below:

I think that lecturers should have pointed out our mistakes that we have made in our assignments. They should return our assignments to us so that we can be aware of the mistakes we made and to improve ourselves next time. (FG5, S4)

One of the interviewees suggested that the university should collaborate with Public Relations companies to provide Public Relations writing workshops for the students. This is evidenced by the excerpt below:

In my opinion, I think universities that offer Public Relations courses should collaborate with Public Relations companies to hold Public Relations writing workshops to guide students in improving their Public Relations writing. (FG1, S3)

On the other hand, the Public Relations teacher also gave plenty of advices as to how students can improve their English writing skills. The first advice that was given is to read more. Throughout the in-depth interview, the important and the lack of reading by students were emphasized numerous times. She mentioned that if students were to improve their writing skills, the first step is to read more. This is proven by the excerpt below:

Of course, when you read more it will improve your English writing skills, because over time you will get familiar with the choice of words, sentence structures, and the way people write. It can help you in developing a good writing skill. (S1, T1)

The second advice that was given is to do more writing exercises. She mentioned that one of the most effective way to improve the writing skill is to write more. The writing exercises can be done by referring to writings done by professionals, and to learn from them. This is confirmed by the excerpt below:

If you were in a company, go and read what your supervisors have wrote and sent out before. Refer to their press releases, media kits, learn from it, and practice it yourself. (S1, T1)

The third advice that was given is to write with confidence. She pointed out that one of the reason students rarely write is because they have no confidence in their writing skills. In order to develop a good piece of writing, students have to practice more, and to write with confidence when they are doing so. This is verified by the excerpt below:

Language learning is really about having a thick skin, do not be afraid of being laughed at. You can only improve your language if you are using it, and students are not doing it because they are afraid of being laughed at. Which is why they should develop a thick skin, because at the end of the day, language does not work if you do not use it. (S1, T1)

4.2 Summary
Through this chapter, the researchers have found out that the performance of students are rather below average, and the language needs of the students are subject-verb agreement, syntax error, language used, preposition, mechanics, semantics, conjunction, dangling modifiers and verb consistency. Then, it is found out that the students not only having language needs in their writing, but due to the fact that they are lack of reading, it causes them to have lack of maturity and content in their writing as well. In the next chapter, the researchers were discussed on the research question of the study.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

5.0 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the findings and analysis of the research were presented. This chapter discusses the language needs of Malaysian Public Relations students on ESL writing. The objectives of this study are to determine the performance of Malaysian Public Relations students in ESL writing to analyse the language needs of Malaysian Public Relations students in ESL writing and to explore Malaysian Public Relations students' difficulties in ESL writing. This chapter also consists of the implication of the study, recommendations, limitations, as well as the conclusion for the research.

5.1 Discussion

In this study, the researchers wanted to find out the performance of the Public Relations students in their ESL writing, determine the language needs in their ESL writing and the difficulties faced by them. After getting and analysing the data collected, a few discussions is needed for each research question.

5.1.1 Performance of Malaysian university Public Relations students in ESL writing

Public Relations students are communication students who believed to be proficient in their writing skills, as writing skill is one of the core skills acquire in the Public Relations industry and the undergraduates were trained and taught to write during their education in higher learning institutions. However, the fresh graduates who are entering the practice of Public Relations got complained frequently by the expert Public Relations practitioner about the declining of writing skills (Cole, Hembroff, & Corner, 2009). A study done by Cole, Hembroff & Corner (2009) on the writing performance of the students, they found out that the students scored between 10

marks to 75 marks for their recent English language examination, placing their English language proficiency from average level to low level.

The performance and writing quality of the Public Relations undergraduates who work in the Public Relations field differs very much from the desired expectations (Braun, 2013). Scholars also mentioned that the undergraduates are facing challenges even in writing a basic email or pitch letter to the media. Even though courses were taught during their tertiary education in university, the students still unable to perform when they got out for work.

According to JobStreet report in 2015, it is showed that one of the main reasons fresh graduates are unable to be employed was because of their poor command of English language and poor communication skill (JobStreet, 2015). This has proven in the data for this research. The writing performance of the Public Relations students in ESL writing are rather not encouraging the marks obtained for most of the students are around 60 which is below average, there is only around three (3) students who are able to score an A grade for the exercise. This confirms the past studies done by the scholars on the performance of Malaysian Public Relations students in ESL writing.

5.1.2 Language needs of Malaysian Public Relations students in ESL writing

Language needs is a concept that refers to the requirement of linguistic resources, in order for an individual to proficiently cope with the communication process in which they are participating (Akyel & Ozek, 2010). Akyel & Ozek (2010) did a need analysis and found out that the most common error that was found was verbs associated errors, with 18.90%, followed by spelling errors, with 11.86%, sentence fragments, with 10.56%, and punctuation errors, 9.93%. The study concluded that the errors made by the students were often caused by the combination of learner's

mother tongue or the interference of their first language, together with the incompetency of vocabulary and grammatical utilization.

Based on the document analysis and frequency counting, it is found out that most of the students have problems with subject verb agreement which is confirmed by the past study. According to Muhamad, Asraf and Bilai (2016), students has the highest number of errors in grammar especially in subject verb agreement. Kho-Yar and Tan (2015) also stated that grammar is a crucial aspect in language acquisition, and is considered as the elemental foundation for writing. Therefore, this has confirmed the past studies done by Kho-Yar and Tan (2015).

Besides, Gedion, Tati and Peter (2016) stated that the syntactic error that occurred constantly in the written composition of Malaysian ESL leaners were caused by the interference of their mother tongue. When an ESL student who are not really proficient in English, they will tend to direct translate it from the language they know and they will think that the English is grammatically correct. Therefore, the result found is concurrent with the findings of Gedion, Tati and Peter in 2016.

Based on Dr Ibrahim's (2015) study on the university students' English writing problems, it is confirmed that language used, preposition and mechanics are also one of the language needs of the students facing nowadays. Students are lacking of choice of words to express themselves (Muhammad Fareed, 2016). According to Alfaki (2015), students nowadays are lacking of the knowledge on mechanics. This is because most of the time they tend to forget the forget spelling of the word or uncertain on whether the word should be capitalized. Mechanics seems to be the easiest, but it is still one of the biggest language needs among the others. Punctuation is another category under mechanics which is done wrong by most of the student. The usage of coma, full stop was often being confused by the students.

Even though conjunction, dangling modifiers and verbs consistency are the language needs of the students but it is not as much as the other language needs as the students in university have a basic level of English. Therefore, these language needs are not done as much as the other but in need of improvement in the future. The students have to be more careful in using the correct conjunction, form a proper sentence by following the rules and ensure consistency in the whole article.

5.1.3 Difficulties of Public Relations Students in ESL Writing

Through the focus group and in-depth interviews that were conducted, the main factors that causes the difficulties of Public Relations Students in ESL writing were identified. One of the factors is students face a lot of challenges when they are trying to write in English. This factors extends the understanding of the challenges faced by the Public Relations students which include the inability to generate ideas for the purpose of writing, as well as difficulties of expressing ideas into verbal forms, especially into written forms. Most students have difficulties in writing in English due to their poor proficiency in the English language, where their English language proficiency are heavily influenced by their mother tongue. Their language needs are mainly vocabulary, syntax, tenses, and so on. However, the Public Relations teacher pointed out that the difficulty that student face when writing in English is not purely based on the language, but many other factors as well. It is mentioned that the characteristics of students affect their writing skills as well, students are generally passive and lack in confidence when they are producing a piece of writing, which contributes to the lack of quality in it. It is heavily emphasized that besides the aspects of language, the writing produced by students are severely lacking in maturity and content. This is speculated by the factor that students rarely or never read, as they are unable to develop quality contents for their writing due to the lack of knowledge for it.

Furthermore, it is found that majority of the students are aware of the importance of the writing skill for a Public Relations practitioner, and they should improve their writing skills for it. It is also found that most of the students have a general idea as to how they should improve their writing skills. The Public Relations teacher explains further that one of the ways to improve the writing skill is to be confident with it. It is mentioned that students are generally afraid of being criticized and laughed at, which creates the factor which they do not practice their writings. Through constant practice and feedbacks provided, students can effectively improve their writing skills.

To conclude everything in a nutshell, the performance of Malaysian Public Relations students is C- which is around 52 out of 100. This is much affected by their own language needs which are subject verb agreement, syntax error, tenses, language used, preposition, mechanics, semantics, conjunction, dangling modifiers and verb consistency. After find out the language needs of the students, the researchers also do a focus group interview and in-depth interview to find out the difficulties faced by the Public Relations students and helping them to solve it. This is where the triangulations take place. By confirming the language needs and the difficulties with the students through focus group interview.

5.2 Implication of the study

This section discussed the impact of the research towards Public Relations students, Public Relations educators, the future Public Relations industry as well as the monitor model.

5.2.1 Practical Implications

Through this research, researchers sought to benefit Public Relations students, Public Relations educators, as well as the future Public Relations industry in Malaysia in terms of providing an understanding towards the language needs of Malaysian Public Relations undergraduates in ESL

writing, as well as an insight in improving the English language writing proficiency of Malaysian Public Relations undergraduates.

Through this research, students will have more insight about the complaints that industry professionals had made about the English language writing quality of Malaysian Public Relations fresh graduates, as well as their expected standard towards fresh graduates, and start to take action in working to improve their English language writing proficiency in order to survive and excel in the said industry. According to the data collected, it was shown that Malaysian Public Relations students realised the importance of writing in the Public Relations industry. This is evidenced by the excerpt "I do think that writing skill is very important as it is a pre-requisite for public relations to have good writing skills to pitch to the editors," (FG1, S4). Though they were clear that their English writing proficiency were not up to their preferred standards according to the grades that they were given for their writing assessments, they may not realise that the standard of their writing is way below the expected standard by professionals in the Public Relations industry.

Also, Public Relations undergraduates in Malaysia will be able to understand the concept of language needs as well as identify their very own language needs in ESL writing. There were 10 common mistakes that had been identified by the researchers, and they were arranged in accordance to the frequency of their occurrence which were from the highest to the lowest, with examples provided, from subject verb agreement to consistency. It will be easier for students to improve on their English language writing proficiency when they are clear about what types of mistakes they often make. They can easily identify their language needs from within, then start to work on it in order to improve their English language writing proficiency. This will assist them in getting one step closer in meeting the industry's expectation.

Other than that, students will be able to gather a variety of methods to improve their English language writing proficiency based on the data collected in this research, either from the students' point of view, or the lecturer's point of view. During the in-depth interview, it was mentioned that improving one's English language writing proficiency comes with the student's willingness as well as readiness to learn. This can be evidenced by the excerpt "Because at the end, if you wanted to improve your language, you would find time to learn it," (S1, T1). Therefore, students have to have the right learning attitude if they want to improve their proficiency in English language writing. Other than Public Relations undergraduates, fresh graduates can be benefited by this research as well, as they can find out what they lack in their English language writing, and improve themselves accordingly.

For Public Relations educators in Malaysia, this research will assist them in improvising the way they carry out classroom activities to meet the students' language needs. Educators always seek for ways to help students to improve, and there were often trials and errors until they see improvements in their students. Therefore, this research helps educators to understand the language needs of Malaysian Public Relations students, thus allows them to put more emphasis on the frequent mistakes that students make.

Other than that, Public Relations educators in Malaysia will be able to understand students' mindset on what they think their lecturers or tutors could do to help them improve in their English language writing proficiency. During the in-depth interview that was conducted, it was mentioned that Malaysian students are generally very shy in voicing out their opinions, therefore this research is interesting as lecturers will know what the students actually wants. This can be supported by the excerpt "That's interesting! That's why, maybe there's a disconnection between what we think the students wants and what the students really wants," (S1, T1).

Of course, followed by the improvement of the English language writing proficiency of Malaysian Public Relations students, the future of Malaysian Public Relations industry will be benefited with higher quality writings produced by future Malaysian Public Relations graduates. However, this will be a long-term implication as improving one's English language writing proficiency takes a lot of practices, hence a long time.

5.2.2 Theoretical Implications

This research brings up a whole new aspect towards the monitor model that was used to support the research itself. Focused on the second-language acquisition hypothesis, it was mentioned that students can improve only if they incorporate a language in their daily lives and use it constantly, either through speaking or writing. However, the writing that was referred in the monitor model was general writing, there was no focus on any field of writing, such as Public Relations writing. Public Relations writing is different from general writing as there are different formats and formalities. Therefore, based on the monitor model, Public Relations students can improve their English language writing proficiency as long as they practice writing it daily. However, as Public Relations students have to write in the formats and formalities of Public Relations writings, the improvement of their English language writing proficiency in Public Relations writing through constant practice will give an extra insight about the monitor model outside of the usual second-language writing context.

5.4 Recommendations

In terms of improving Malaysian Public Relations students' English language writing proficiency, researchers of this study had put together methods that were provided by the Public Relations students and lecturer who participated in the focus group interviews as well as the in-depth interview.

Realising the fact that they do not like to read, Public Relations students had come up with methods to that they deemed effective to improve their English language writing proficiency. Firstly, students had recommended watching English movies, dramas or English television programs with English subtitles. However, the language used in those media may not always be accurate, and students may be learning the wrong thing if they are not familiar with the language.

Other than that, students had mentioned that listening to English radio stations and news helps them to familiarise with the language. Listening to news that are in English language may help to improve the English writing proficiency of the students as news are told in a more formal way, hence the language used will be more accurate than regular radio content.

Furthermore, some students mentioned that listening to English songs helps them to improve their English language as the lyrics can introduce them to new words. In order to understand the song, students will search for the definitions of the new words, hence broaden their vocabulary. Though students are able to learn new vocabularies from English songs, it may or may not be useful for them in terms of using the words in Public Relations writing.

For Public Relations educators, they should not be discouraged when students show signs of hatred towards writing, as the focus group interview results showed that students actually wanted lecturers to provide more writing activities in class as well as put more force in correcting their mistakes. Therefore, Public Relations educators are suggested to allocate more time for writing practices in class, as well as putting more effort in having discussions about students' mistakes in their writing to improve students' English language writing proficiency.

Other than that, Public Relations educators are recommended to provide more reading materials that are related to Public Relations writing for the students, and force them to read

them by having quizzes about the materials in the following class and allocate coursework marks for the quizzes as that will motivate the students to read the materials, as students had mentioned that they would not read unless they were forced to do so. This is evidenced by the excerpt "I think lecturers should be stricter towards us, like force us if they need to. I have a weird thing that I will only do something when I was forced to do it," (FG1, S1).

Future researchers are recommended to research on the feasibility of the suggested methods in improving students' English language writing proficiency. As mentioned, Malaysian Public Relations students do not like to read, yet reading is said to be the most effective way to improve one's language proficiency in writing according to the lecturer during the in-depth interview. Therefore, research on the feasibility of the alternative methods may open up a whole new world for future Public Relations students who seek to improve their English language writing proficiency after understanding their language needs.

5.3 Limitations of the Study

Researchers of this study had collected the scripts written by Public Relations students who had taken the Advance Public Relations Writing tutorial in the May trimester of 2018, which caused the limited number of scripts collected, as there were only 45 students who had taken the tutorial during that trimester. The lack of scripts collected had caused the lack of data collected, hence the output of the data may not be as wholesome compared to if there were more scripts for the researchers to analyse. Future researchers may choose classes with more students in order to have a larger sample for data collection which will provide a better understanding of the overall problem that students faced as they try to write in the format of Public Relations in the English language.

Due to the fact that researchers were lacking in time during this research, only 25 out of 45 of the sample size were interviewed in the focus group interviews, and only one in-depth interview session had been carried out with one Public Relations lecturer. As the sample size were already small to begin with, the number of interviewees for the focus group interviews were even lesser. There was also a time constraint for researchers to carry out more sessions of in-depth interviews with more lecturers. This has caused a limitation for researchers to collect more data from the rest of the sample size and lecturers to keep track in time. It is highly suggested for future researchers to have more time allocation for the research to establish a more in-depth data output and conclusion.

Other than that, due to the fact that the researchers of this study were all Public Relations students from Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman, there were no language experts (linguists) among the researchers. The lack of knowledge in the English language had caused the researchers to face difficulties such as identifying as well as understanding the types of mistakes that students had made in their scripts. However, the researchers seek help from lecturers in the university who majored in the English language to help in the research, in order to assure the credibility of the research. Future researchers are also suggested to work with linguists to produce a credible research.

5.5 Conclusion

The goals of this study are to determine the performance of the public relations students in their ESL writings, find out the language needs of Malaysian Public Relations students and explore the difficulties faced by the students in their ESL Writing. Based on the textual analysis and five focus group interviews that were conducted, which involves 25 participants, as well as one in-

depth interview session with a Public Relations lecturer, it is found that Malaysian Public Relations students have high language needs.

The writing performance of Public Relations students are rather below average. Public Relations students do not really perform well in their writing even though writing is one of the important skills as a Public Relations undergraduates. Out of the 45 students, only three (3) students are able to perform and got an A in their writing assessment. Most of the students perform below average or even fail their assessment. This situation is crucial and it is in need of a solution in order for the students to perform better in their ESL writing. Writing is an important skill of a public relations students. Therefore, the students have to find out the problem and overcome it in order to enhance their writing performance.

Furthermore, after the data analysis, it is found out that the language needs of students are subject-verb agreement, syntax error, tenses, language used, preposition, mechanics, semantics, conjunction, dangling modifiers and verb consistency. All of this has been proven by the previous literature and this study is to confirm the language needs of the students. Most of the students know what are their language needs and some are still uncertain. Through this study, it is hope that the public relations students are able to identify their own language needs and further improve in it. In order to increase the grade or enhance the writing performance, the lesser the language a student must have. Therefore, the students must be able to minimize mistake done on language to avoid slacking in writing.

Finally, it is found that besides facing great difficulty in writing due to their language needs, students are also having trouble in writing due to their lack of maturity and content in it. This is due to the fact that students do not have the habit of reading or practicing their language skills, not only towards the aspect of writing, but towards the English language as a whole.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Marking Rubrics for Speech Writing

Name: _____

ID: _____

FORMAT	10 marks	Distribution of Marks
	Introduction	
	Salutations	**2**
	Attention getter	**2**
	Preview	**3**
	Conclusion	
	Quick summary of the core messages	**1**
	Call to action	**2**
ORGANIZATION	**6 marks**	
	5-6 marks: A well-developed introduction, body and conclusion; excellent sequencing of ideas; paragraphs are similar in length.	**6**
	3-4 marks: Adequately developed introduction, body and conclusion; satisfactory sequencing of ideas;	

	paragraphs lengths vary. *0-2 marks*: Poorly developed introduction, body and conclusion; weak progression between ideas, paragraphs are choppy and not balanced.	
CONTENT	**12 marks**	
	10- 12 marks: Three or more main points are well developed and directly related to the topic. The supporting details are concrete and relate to the main points. *7-9 marks*: Three or more main points are present but may lack detail and development in one or two, supporting details may not show a strong connection to the main topic. *4-6 marks*: Three or more main points, but all lack	**12**

	development. Supporting details are too simplistic and vaguely supports the main idea.	
	0-2 marks: Brief, poor development of ideas. The main points are not sufficient to support the topic. Supporting details are weak or does not to link to the main points.	
LANGUAGE	**12 marks**	
	10 – 12 marks: smooth transition and cohesive presentation of information, impeccable grammar and appropriate tone of writing used	**12**
	7 – 9 marks: consistent tenses with some minor grammatical mistakes, appropriate tone of writing	

	used	
	4-6 marks: inconsistent tenses with some grammatical mistakes, appropriate tone of writing used	
	0-2 marks: very disjointed writing and no linkage of information with message, many grammatical mistakes, inappropriate tone of writing.	
TOTAL		**40 (Converted to 20%)**

Appendix B: Semi-Structured interview with open-ended questions

<u>**Focus Groups Interview**</u>

Name: _____

ID: _____

Questions	Answers
In your opinion, do you think writing skills is important for a public relations practitioner?	
What is the biggest challenge you face when writing in English?	
What aspects of the English language do you think will improve your Public Relations writing skills?	
What aspect of language do you think your teacher can focus to help you improve your Public Relations writing skills?	

In-Depth Interviews

Name: _____

Questions	Answers
Do you think writing is an important skill for Public Relations practitioners?	
What do you generally think of the Public Relations students' writing skills?	
What do you think are the specific language needs of Public Relations students when it comes to ESL writing?	
In your opinion, what aspects of language needs do you think can improve Public Relations students writing skills?	

Appendix C: Transcript

Focus Group 1 (FG1)

Interviewer: Hi guys, thank you for joining our interview. Arr this is an interview for our FYP which is titled the Language Needs of arr Malaysian PR Students in their Writing Skills. So, the first question that we would like to ask you is in your opinion, do you think writing skill is important for public relations practitioner?

Arr FG1S1, what do you think about this?

FG1S1: In my opinion is that arr as a PR practitioner, writing skill is very important because it is part of the requirement for the companies to hire you to be their PR practitioner and of course arr especially when you need to write those formal letters and then to send to those collaborate partners arr partners that your company is going to be ha.. arr going to have is very important because one single mistake is going to arr ruin everything. That's what I think.

Interviewer: So, you mean that if you make a mistake, they.it might ruin the reputation of the company, is it?

FG1S1: In my opinion, yes.

Interviewer: Oh thank you FG1S1. So what do you think about it FG1S2? Do you think that writing skill is important for public relations practitioner?

FG1S2: Yes, for me, writing skill is really important for PR practitioner, because err as a PR practitioner, it is pre-requisite that they know how to have a good writing skill in arr in writing a pitch to the editor, and then they have to write pre and post news release to..to their…to..to the press, and then umm yeah I think it is very important.

Interviewer: Okay thank you FG1S2. Arr FG1S3 what do you think about this?

FG1S3: I agree with FG1S1 point, arr if a.. I think writing skill is ehh important for PR is because if the grammar arr is very weak or wrongly err maybe will be miscommunication write the pitch letter, email or..or.. in the broad err….Don't know what to say, can I speak in mandarin?

Interviewer: Yes

FG1S3: Just like if you represent your company to discuss about other businesses or writing some letter, it will be not effective and not persuasive, then you cannot successfully get the business and you cannot be a good PR writer.

Interviewer: Arr thank you FG1S3. What bout FG1S4? Do you..what do you think about writing skills for PR practitioner?

FG1S4:   Okay in my opinion, I very agree with ra..FG1S2's point because she mentioned that umm as a PR practitioner, it's very important for you to utilize writing skill to write pre or post media release or even pitch letters to the reporters. But there are something I would like to add on. I think that before the company conduct a media conference, you also have to utilize your writing skill to write invitation letter to the reporters. And then, umm if you want to like umm negotiate something with your collaborators, with your   client you also need to write emails. So, when you're writing..you're writing or drafting an email, its very important for you to have a good writing skill as well. Because a   umm..a write..a good writing skill will somehow like show what's your level. Yeah, that's my opinion.

Interviewer: What about FG1S5, what do you think about it?

FG1S5:   Of course, I think it is very important for public relation..arr..public relations practitioner to have a good writing skills and I'm also umm agree umm agree what they have umm mentioned just now. Umm Besides of writing umm press release or media release all those thing, err pr practitioner they are also err require to umm build a good relationship umm with their collaborators with their stakeholders through social media. In reshe….in recent years, err social media has become a very basic tools for them to communicate and to umm like build a relationship with the collaborators and they may need to use it to disseminate information and also umm to build relationship not only with their collaborators but also the publics. So I think its very important for them to err have a good writing skills.

Interviewer: Thank you FG1S5.

FG1S2:   Because FG1S5 mentioned that social media is a platform for the PR practitioner to build relationship with the customers or their stakeholders, err its very important for them to have a good writing skill in social media as because social media is a big platform, so when a PR practitioner have a good writing skills, they can use it to persuade more and more audiences to maybe notice their company or their organization.

Interviewer: Okay err, thank you everyone. It seems like everyone has a mutual understanding that arr the writing English writing skills is very important for public relations practitioner. And we all agree that it is important for us to have good writing skills so that we can perform when we go out to the industry. But, from what we find out through our study, it seems like most Malaysia undergraduate has very very bad err English writing skills. Err why do you guys think this is the problem? Err in your opinion, what is the biggest challenge that you face when you are writing in English? FG1S1?

FG1S1:   Well the biggest challenge that I often face is I writing in English is that umm many times especially when I need to like write letters of maybe to like write

essay right, so many times I will keep on..my mind will stuck on like how what..what kind of the words that I can use to write in my in the essay or the letters, especially those very bombastic words, because arr many times I also kinda envy those who have a very good english skill, arr their vocabulary is very strong, so yeah so many times I'm kinda like weak in choosing the words that everything, that's what I think.

Interviewer: So, would you agree that your biggest weakness is in terms of vocabulary and arr your choice of word?

FG1S1: Yes

Interviewer: Okay, thank you FG1S1.

FG1S1: No problem.

Interviewer: Arr what about you FG1S2? What do you think about what is the biggest challenge that you face when you're trying to write in English?

FG1S2: Umm for me the biggest challenge will be the sentence structure and the grammar error. Ummm …for err…alright let me…okay…..alright for me the biggest challenge that I face when writing English is err I will face sentence structure problem and grammar error because err for me, I'm not really into reading English novels or err..watch English movie often, so to me to have a good writing skills is kinda a bit hard, so this is one of the biggest challenge for me when I'm writing English.

Interviewer: Okay, err..thank you FG1S2, now what about FG1S3? What do you think about the biggest challenge that you are facing when you are trying to write in English?

FG1S3: I agree with FG1S2 also, because err..erm..i face a bigger challenge umm when I'm writing the English umm..is the I cannot err..think the words of the English umm maybe the sentences or umm and this is because err normally I…don't know what to say…sorry ah..(starts to speak in Chinese) because maybe usually I watch Chinese movie, and I do not often watch English movie so I do not read the subtitles. Maybe when I'm trying to write, I know the point but I cannot translate from Chinese to English, and then maybe I just write in direct translation only. And then I always waste a lot of time in writing and thinking about what words to use, during exams I face time management problem and it made it more difficult for me to write in English.

Interviewer: (Replying in Chinese) err okay, thank you FG1S3. Based on the examples that we got just now, we can see that when you started to speak in English, you had difficulties and can't construct you sentences and can't think of the words. But when you started to speak in Chinese, you could express yourself really well and you had lots of ideas that you wanted to let us know. So we can see that it's not that you do not have ideas, also, it's not that you did not know what to write when

you're trying to write in English, it's just that you did not know how to express yourself in English, do you agree with me?

FG1S3:   (in Chinese) Yes that's true.

Interviewer: (in Chinese) Okay alright, thank you. (In English) Next err we will go to FG1S4, err what do you think is the biggest challenge that you face when you are trying to write in English?

FG1S4:   Thank you Jia Yee. I think that the biggest challenge that I face when I writing English is I sometimes I cannot put what I want to say in words. Means that umm what I try to express I cannot put it in words in terms of grammar, sentence structure and also tenses. Somehow it's word choices. And then I….I personally agree with FG1S1, because last time during our.I think is secondary school, or primary school, my teachers used to ask me to use bombastic words in our essay because they say it will look fancy, but umm..that time their main focus is asking us to use bombastic word instead of correcting our grammar structure and sentence structure, so it turns out to be and then umm.. after few years, I had a really bad writing skills because this is what my taught me back in years so umm, another problem is I think…I think I'm not really good in writing skill because I always, I've always been surrounded by Chinese people, because most of my friends, family, always communicate in Chinese, so umm I have less chance to talk in English unless I speak to my lecturers and speak to me Indian or Malay friends. Or even I went to err..interview. Yeah, so I have very less chance to communicate in English, so umm during my class, umm I think that the teaching skill is also very important, if ..if I want to learn English but the teaching skill of the lecturer is not interesting, umm I think I will not pay attention to it as well. So I think that teaching style is also very important. So yeah, thanks.

Interviewer: Err, thank you FG1S4. It seems like you have a very clear understanding on the challenge that you face when you are trying to write in English. You have given point not only through the aspect of language, like you said you have very bad choice of words or English grammar, but you have also mentioned the external factor in your daily life that causes your English to be less arr..proficient arr..compared to native English speakers.Thank you very much, and now umm FG1S5, what do you think about the biggest challenge that you face when you are trying to write in English?

FG1S5:   Actually I agree with…I agree with FG1S2 and FG1S4, because umm…I've also having grammar problem and also the sentence structure problem. Err..for me I often speak in English compared with writing, even though we are speaking in English language, we often use the Bahasa campur, but not the original English grammar. So err when we are using the Bahasa campur, there's nobody will correct our mistakes umm…nobody help us to correct the grammar mistakes, so we will not realize what mistake that we have actually made while we are

communicating. Although…although now I'm in err..although now I'm studying in uni, err and we are often use English language to communicate with our lecturers or friends, but it seems like nobody will help us to correct the mistakes even though we err..didn't use the correct err grammar, and err..even though we have submitted the assignment, which will have a lot of grammar mistakes, our lecturer will not tell us umm the correct grammar that we should use. And after we submit the assignment, they…they…they never (in Chinese) give it back to us.

Interviewer: Give it back to us.

FG1S5: Yes, they never give it back to us to see what mistake we have made. So that's all.

Interviewer: FG1S5, thank you FG1S5. Arr I like the point that you point out. It's very err…what we agree on, which is the fact that you are trying to say if you..we have made a mistake and nobody point it out towards us, it's very hard for us to improve because we don't really know how to improve and what is our mistake in the first place. Is that true.

FG1S5: Yes, yes.

FG1S1: Umm I'm kinda agree with FG1S5…err what FG1S5 said because..because I…I think it's because of the culture of Malaysia and then we mix up all the languages together and then many people think that as long as that we can understand then it is fine. But especially in school also, because many of them will be using Bahasa campur as well, and sometimes when they err communicate with their lecturers, they will be using Bahasa campur and then the lecturers err..will be like…kinda like fine with it as well, but not until when you communicate with those lecturers that who are strong in English and then their field is like err main in English one arr like English education or write…English writing, so they will..they will like very strict to you, that's what I think.

Inteviewer: Okay err thank you FG1S1. Err..so, it seems like everyone has their own challenge when they're trying to write in English, and most of our challenge can be either similar or different, but we do agree that everyone is facing trouble as Malaysian PR students when we are trying to write in English. So, since we have a problem, we will like to improve our English skills so that can perform well when we go out in the industry. In your opinion, err..how do you think that you can try to improve your English Rang…arr writing skills? What do you think FG1S1?

FG1S1: I personally think that err…in order to improve my writing skills, err..my English arr…English arr..need to be good as well, so sometimes when I'm stuck with the words or don't know what should I write, I will consult my friends or my lecturers about what should I write, especially those arr… because I'm kinda weak in tenses…arr conjunctions and then the choices of words, vocabularies, so umm…I will consult them that…about what are the things that I wanna write arr…about

arr which word to use so that I can write better, and that's what I think that these aspects arr will be the main thing for me to improve my English and writing skills, and I really hope that I can still enhance it better.

Interviewer: Thank you FG1S1, I really liked the things that you said just now. It seems like you have a clear direction on how you would like to improve your English writing skills. Err…what about you FG1S2? How do you think that arr..you should improve your English writing skills?

FG1S2: Okay for me, err…I think that err..this…by that..by that just now I mentioned that I seldom watch English movie and read English novel, therefore I think that it will be good for me to start to watch more English movie and read more English novel to enhance my English profici….proficiency in PR writing skills. And err…moreover I think that read more newspaper is another way to have a good PR writing skill because mostly the English newspaper has good choices of word, and their sentence structure is really good. Therefore this is the point that I think that umm..it will help me to improve the PR writing skill.

Interviewer: Thank you FG1S2, arr…FG1S3, what about you? How do you think you should improve your English writing skill?

FG1S3: okay, (in Chinese) so umm, for me, as I am not so proficient in English, so I may have to read more newspapers, and then read more novels. As novels have a lot of new vocabularies to me, I can learn it from there by checking on the dictionary when I do not understand the words. Also maybe I can listen to more English songs, to understand the lyrics. Then, maybe watch more YouTube English tutorials, then I could maybe gain knowledge from within, at the same time I can do note by myself to reread what I've learnt. That's all I think.

Interviewer: Okay arr..thank you FG1S3. It seems like you have a very clear understanding on the direction that you will like to improve your English language. And I think that's a very good sign, since that you know your own weaknesses, and you have an idea on how to improve them. Err..what about you, FG1S4, arr..in your own opinion, arr..what are the methods that you can use to improve your English writing skills?

FG1S4: Okay, I think I agree with FG1S2. Just now FG1S2 mentioned that we can watch more movies…watch more English movies to improve our writing skills, I personally agree with that. Because as I said just now, I often surrounded by Chinese friend, and then normally when they go for movie, they will go for Chinese movies, sometimes. And then and err..when we go to English movies, we will very..we will pay less notice about the pronunciation and everything because I think we just focus on the storyline. So I think that umm..my method is to watch more movie by myself. And then umm..maybe I can go to some website and some movie platform to watch movie, because I think that the English subtitles will help to improve my grammar, sentence structure and also choice of words. And

then also their speaking style will help to improve my pronunciation, but umm.sometimes, I realize that some of the movies they will use informal words or informal sentence structure to construct their movies, so umm…I think that another effective way is to read newspaper and novel, because compared to movies, newspaper and novels they will use more formal and appropriate ways to construct their sentence and everything. Yeah, and I also think that listening to radio news is also very effective. Yeah, that's my point.

Interviewer: Arr..thank you FG1S4. Arr.. and what about you FG1S5..Arr how do you think that you can improve your English writing skill?

FG1S5:   When I'm watching movie or drama, I will try not to refer to the subtitle from the movie, and..but in the beginning when..we can…in the beginning, we can start to watch drama in arr..English subtitle only, instead of Chinese subtitles because when umm…when we are watching the drama, maybe our listening skill is not that good yet so we can refer to   the err..English subtitle first. If I don't understand the words, I will google the words that umm..I that I…that I don't understand, and after I understand it, I will jot down the words for our future reference. And then, err…besides that, I will force myself to communicate in English with my friends. And throughout this, I find that umm..we all can get to improve our umm English communication skills urr…and learn together while   we are communicating with each other. That's all.

Interviewer: Okay thank you FG1S5. Err..

FG1S4:   I agree with Yucco umm..FG1S5 point, because just now she mentioned that when she notice some unfamiliar word, she will jot it down and search for the meaning in vocabulary (dictionary) or even in Google. I did that as well, because when I watch movies, or I read through newspapers, I will jot down those bombastic words…not to say bombastic no…maybe some unfimi….unfamiliar words that I seldom see, I will jot it down and then search for the meaning in vocabulary (dictionary). I think it will be…it will left a very …er….strong impression in my mind if I search the meaning by myself. Thank you.

Interviewer: Okay thank you FG1S4. Err..just now FG1S5 has mentioned that err relying too much on the English subtitles arr..might not help us improve our English language, and we should try to arr..learn English without the subtitles. Err..what do you think about that FG1S2, since you watch English movies as well.

FG1S2:   For me…urr..when I'm watching a movie normally I will choose to have err..subtitles with it because like for example err..umm..recently I've watched a motivational speaker that named Sandra Ooi, and then err..I found that she often use a lot of bombastic words and her choices of word is very…is very good. Therefore I will…I will …na..I will… usually err…see the subtitle, and then when I don't know the specific word, I will go and Google it, or find it in dictionary, and then therefore I think that by having a subtitle, it will more or less

help me in improve my writ…PR writing skills because I will have the…I have….I will have the initiative to look for the word more than didn't have any subtitle for me, that's all.

Interviewer: Arr..thank you FG1S2. It seems like everyone has a very good idea on how they should improve their English language. Err..as we know, we study in an English environment in a university, and we attend English classes. So, do you think that there is any methods or aspects that our lecturers can do to more effectively improve our English language skills? What do you think about this FG1S1?

FG1S1:   In my opinion is that, I would prefer those lecturers to be more strict towards our writing skills, because arr..as I mentioned that many times I will like..cannot think of the words I will write…maybe I will write wrongly, and then umm…I will just hope that the lecturers will point out what are the problems that uhh..uhh I'm currently facing in my writing skills, and then we shall….uhh…it will be good for me to …those lecturers to let me know …strict like strict maybe like shout at me …saying that oh..you cannot use this use that type of words or your uhh..your grammars got error or something.   Because…uhh I have a very weird feeling is that, when lecturer scold me or very fierce to me uh I will only have the feeling to go and improve, that's what I think. Yeah.

Interviewer: Thank you FG1S1. Ahh what about you FG1S2, how do you think that our lecturer should to improve our English writing in a more effective manner?

FG1S2:   Alright for me, I'll suggest that teachers can conduct activities that requires students to communicate with each other in English, whenever in class, tutorial class or lecture class, and then teachers can also frequent give a platform for the students to have impromptu speech in the class, because this type of forces will more or less help the students to improve their English proficiency. Umm..that's all for me.

Interviewer: Arr thank you FG1S2, what about you FG1S3? How do you think our lecturer should improve our English in a more effective manner?

FG1S3:   (in Chinese) I feel that lecturers can have classes that are less boring, and incorporate interesting slides that will be able to attract the students to focus in class, and then students will jot down anything like grammar if they have any problem. And also during tutorial class, lecturers can provide dictation session for the students to improve their writing skills. And then maybe, the lecturers can have a WhatsApp group that students can directly ask questions regarding English writing in the group, and they can share ideas and correct each other in the group.

Interviewer: Uhh thank you FG1S3. What about you FG1S4, how do you think our lecturer should improve our English in a more effective manner?

FG1S4:   Okay I agree with FG1S1 point that erm.. nowadays lecturer can be more strict and fierce, to like guide our students to write English proficien… in a proficiency

way, and then I also agree with FG1S3 that err.. the teaching style should be more interesting compared to the boring way, they should put more umm interesting slides to let students really want to learn it and with the combination of these two, with the attitude of the lecturers and also the teaching style of the lecturer, I personally think that umm..they can, because I think that in..umm..not to say Malaysia, in UTAR, there are many students in a classroom, and teacher actually cannot concentrate in teaching students one by one, yeah. If they realize the student's mistake, they will just discuss it in a very general way, like what..what's the common mistake that the students did, and they will not just approach them one by one and just explain to them what they actually did wrong. So I think that lecturer maybe can consider to open a writing workshop, or even a like some speaker workshop to improve their English writing skill. Thank you.

Interviewer: okay thank you FG1S4. And..Yucco, what do you think about writing..err..how should lecturers improve our English writing skills.

FG1S5: In my opinion, I think those universities that err..have offer PR courses should err..collaborate with those PR company to hold a workshop for students to improve their writing skills. And other than that, err.. university that having PR courses should provide more writing course for umm.. those students to practice their writing skill, because err communication is very important for err..those PR practitioner and also the students so err…apart from speaking, writing is very important so they have to provide this…they have to provide more writing class for the students to train their writing skills, err..although the practical is arr..important too. And then, umm…I also think that lecturer should have point out our mistakes errr..that our..that we have made in our assignment. They should return our assignment to us so we can check what mistake we have made when …and then we can improve ourself next time.

Interviewer: Okay thank you FG1S5. So I guess the general idea of everyone's is that uhh…we should have more practice, more practice, and more practice to improve our writing skill, arr is that true?

Everyone: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay thank you. Err..this is almost at the end of our interview, uhh…I have one…just one last question. So, my last question towards all of you is I would like to know how often do you all write or read in English? What about you, FG1S1?

FG1S1: Uhh…I often write and read almost like three(3) to four(4) days per week, because uhh..all of the platforms or maybe social medias that I use are all in English language, and then it's already a main thing that I read uhh…and understand about more about English to improve myself and also uhh…I often go and read some novels or journals especially when it comes to assignment, I

will…at the same time I will improve my English by reading all the words that are in the journal or novels, which is a very good way for me to improve it.

Interviewer: Okay uhh…thank you FG1S1. What about you FG1S2? Uhh…how often do you read or write in English?

FG1S2: Okay…uhh…for me I read English like every day because…because we…because we…using the social media right… we will always…we will always like type in English…read in English…because normally social apps like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter they normally post status in English form, and then in writing English, because as a university student, you have to do assignment right, so you're basically writing English every day to complete your assignment. So, that's for me.

Interviewer: Thank you FG1S2, and what about you FG1S3? How often do you read or write in English?

FG1S3: (in Chinese) I read more than I write, just like, when others write to me in English, I will incorporate some Chinese into my English sentences. I know that this is not good, so I'll try to improve by typing more in English and try to correct my grammar mistake, and I'll check the words that I use in dictionary to make sure that it's right before I write it. That's my opinion.

Interviewer: Thank you FG1S3. How about you FG1S4, how often do you read or write in English?

FG1S4: I think I read and write English four(4) to five(5) times a week, because as a university student, like FG1S2 mentioned, we need to do assignment, and then we have a lot of assignments recently, so we have to write assignments, and also we need to read through a lot of journals, articles, books and even news articles everyday, to …in order to complete our assignment, so I think that writing and reading English is already become a part of my life after entering UTAR. Yeah, and sometimes, if I…If I scroll through my social media, and I realize some interesting articles, and then I will also click inside, and then I practice this I think like few times a week also, so yeah. Thanks.

Interviewer: Uhh…thank you FG1S4, what about you FG1S5, how often do you read or write in English?

FG1S5: Uhh…for me I read….I …I read in English almost everyday because umm…because I often check Twitter for those news articles, and they are mostly writing in English. And then..for writing, I will only write when I have assignment to do, so…that's why my writing skill is not that good and…that's all.

Interviewer: Okay thank you FG1S5, one last final thought, Err..most of you have already seen your test result for your Advances PR Writing speech writing, err…do you think

that the marks given to you were appropriate? And do you have any comments to it? Uhh..FG1S1?

FG1S1: I have no comment to the marks I …I got awarded by the teacher because based from my skills and everything, in English, like the grammar and everything, I deserve the marks that I got…err..that I got from lecturer because it's a sign that..err..there's still a lot of improvement that I should have, and….it's a sign of also like to motivate me to improve better and better. That's what I think.

Interviewer: Okay thank you very much FG1S1 for your positive attitude, and what about you FG1S2, do you think that the marks given to you were appropriate? Do you have any comments?

FG1S2: For me, I didn't have any comments because I personally think that the lecturers have given the marks in a suitable manner, because uhh…the lecturers has highlight my grammatical error and sentence structure problem which I think really is one of the…one of the problem that I have…that I am facing now, I have to solve it as soon as possible.

Interviewer: Okay thank you FG1S2, uhh (in Chinese) how about you FG1S3, do you think that the marks that you got during Advanced PR Writing is appropriate? Or do you have any comments about it?

FG1S3: (in Chinese) Actually, I do not have any comments, because my marks were not too low or too high, but I do think that it did not reach the higher quadrant of the marks, so I will try to improve and …start from my grammar mistakes, grammar errors and learn slowly, maybe I'll also write more to improve my writing skills.

Interviewer: Okay, thank you FG1S3, what about you FG1S4? Do you think that the marks awarded to you were appropriate? And do you have any comments?

FG1S4: I think that …okay I think that I deserve the marks because umm…I trust my lecturer's expertise and also his professional, I believe that throughout his evaluation, I…I can see a lot of improvement, and then especially on my grammar, sentence structure and also tenses. The marks can remind me..to like improve my English. It is like FG1S1 said, it is a sign of motivate me to learn more English, and then I think yeah, okay it's great.

Interviewer: Thank you very much FG1S4, and FG1S5, what do you think that the marks awarded to you? Are they appropriate, and do you have any comments to it?

FG1S5: I don't have any comments regarding the marks given by my lecturers, and I think that deserve it ..umm also I appreciate what my lecturer's comments on my assessment, because it helps me to improve in future, and mostly the comments are about the grammar mistakes, so I think there's no problem, no any..uhh…no any comments regarding the marks given.

Interview: Uhh..thank you very much, this would conclude our FYP interview, thank you for all of your time. Thank you.