

# The Experiences of Majlis Amanah Rakyat (MARA) English Teachers in Teaching Writing for a Dual High-Stakes Examination System at MARA Junior Science College (MRSM) in Tawau Sabah

Nor Hazirah A. Huzaimi, Maslawati Mohamad

Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi, Malaysia

Email: maslawati@ukm.edu.my

**How to cite this paper:** Huzaimi, N. H. A., & Mohamad, M. (2024). The Experiences of Majlis Amanah Rakyat (MARA) English Teachers in Teaching Writing for a Dual High-Stakes Examination System at MARA Junior Science College (MRSM) in Tawau Sabah. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 12, 557-585.

<https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2024.125031>

**Received:** March 26, 2024

**Accepted:** May 28, 2024

**Published:** May 31, 2024

Copyright © 2024 by author(s) and Scientific Research Publishing Inc. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

## Abstract

In Malaysia, English is taught as a second language with attention given to all four language skills, including writing. Teaching English to pupils, particularly non-English speakers, requires proper approaches, practices and sequential learning tasks. As a result, each teacher has his or her challenges in teaching English as a second language, towards improving pupils' writing fluency as well as ensuring pupils' excellence in high-stakes examinations such as SPM and IGCSE. Although many programmes have been concerned with the improvement of writing fluency among secondary school pupils while high-stakes examination has been adopted by education systems in Malaysia due to its practicality, the results, have yet been dismayed. Thus, this paper intends to unveil the emerging challenges faced by English teachers of Majlis Amanah Rakyat (MARA) in Sabah and the approaches used in teaching English specifically towards improving ESL writing fluency in a dual different high-stakes examination according to the Cambridge International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) and the standardised national curriculum. The methodology used was qualitative in the form of semi-structured interviews conducted with the 5 English MARA stakeholders who are currently teaching at MRSM located in Sabah and in-class observation. The limitations of this study are the small range of population, the scope of this study is limited to secondary school teachers teaching English in a dual high-stakes examination context, and the limited literature review on approaches in teaching writing fluency for the IGCSE examination. It is hoped that the findings of this study could help other teachers to have some insights on how to enhance student's writing fluency, particularly for the IGCSE ex-

amination.

## Keywords

English as a Second Language, ESL Classrooms, Writing, Challenges, Approaches, High-Stakes Examination

---

## 1. Introduction

English is introduced as early as the age of 6 at the preschool level in Malaysia's educational context. As a matter of fact, the minimum formal education for Malaysian learners in learning the English language is eleven years excluding preschool level. According to [Darmi and Albion \(2013\)](#), a formal style of English language learning in the Malaysian education system takes place in classrooms. The establishment of English as the second national language in Malaysia has undergone significant transformations, from primary to tertiary education levels. The Ministry of Education has implemented various policies to improve the proficiency of pupils at every level. For instance, the English language is now a compulsory subject at all stages of education, and its teaching emphasises the mastery of specific language skills through rote learning, which is assessed through examinations ([Musa et al., 2012](#); [Supramaniam et al., 2020](#)). Not only that, although English is not compulsory to pass but it is remain as one of the most crucial languages in Malaysia particularly for pupils in primary and secondary levels. In addition, more schools are re-ported to have two different curricula which require the pupils to sit for both high-stakes examinations such as The International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) and the local standardized government certification (Sijil Pendidikan Malaysia). The SPM examination is not solely exam-oriented but it is designed to evaluate pupils' knowledge and confer a certification of completion for secondary education in Malaysia. On the other hand, the IGCSE examination is entirely centred on exams. Despite the differences between the SPM certificate and IGCSE, both exams hold significant importance as the results determine the candidates' future. With either of these certificates, pupils can pursue pre-university or matriculation programs, at private colleges or universities for pre-university studies. However, it is also important to note that only the SPM certificate enables pupils to enroll in Malaysian public education institutions. On the other hand, besides adopting the international and national curriculum, MRSM MARA has its own curriculum comprising three main components. The programmes consist of an academic programme, personality development programme and talent development programme. By integrating this into the standardised school curricula, the MRSM aims to develop a 6th generation of K-economy innovation among the target population and upholds scientific thinking, independence, creativity, trust, and patriotism as its core values. Moreover, MRSM uphold the importance

of producing excellent and holistic pupils with balance academic and well-being which in line with the nation's aspiration. Therefore, being competitive in education is vital in the face of globalization, and it is essential to propel its agenda forward (Supramaniam et al., 2020).

Teaching and learning English as a second language involves developing writing skills which are considered crucial for academic performance (Yusuf et al., 2019). However, writing has always been a challenging area for second-language learners and has been widely researched (Azhari et al., 2022; Amin, 2020). Not only that, writing in a second language is considered as a complex process that involves brainstorming, multiple drafting, feedback practices, revision, and final editing, which later contributing significantly to language acquisition. Despite the challenges in writing process, writing activity allows learners to experiment with words, sentences, and larger chunks of writing to communicate effectively while reinforcing their grammar and vocabulary (Bello, 1997; Azar, 1992). The language proficiency level of a student plays an essential role in the strategies used for writing, among which are planning, translation, restructuring, and backtracking, which have received significant attention (Phuong & Le, 2023). Within the context of sitting for both high-stakes examinations, particularly English writing exams, require pupils not to only understand, but also to comprehend as well as to elaborate based on different texts, formats and time requirements for each part. This will challenge pupils' ability to write and also challenge teachers' capability to teach two different specifications including preparing distinct teaching contents, approaches, and materials for each of the skills.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Challenges in English Language Teaching and Learning

English language teaching and learning has long been a major concern and received enormous attention globally (Chen & Yang, 2017). It has grown significantly since the 1960s as a result of globalisation and the role of English as a universal language around the world has made the teaching and learning process of the language imperative at all levels of schooling (Moses & Mohamad, 2019). In addition, as English is a universal language that is utilised not only at primary and secondary school levels but also at the tertiary level of education, early exposure to English is vital for pupils to acquire the language (Yacob & Yunus, 2019). Moreover, there is no denying the importance of English language education at any stages, which makes it crucial for educators to evaluate, second evaluation, and update their current teaching methods to comply with the most recent teaching standards (Rashid et al., 2022). Also, a teacher must be able to develop and use a variety of instructional strategies that take into account the interests and talents of the pupils as well as their developmental stage (Padmadewi & Artini, 2019). Furthermore, continuous efforts by integrating a variety of teaching methods in the framework of English language teaching and learning

are crucial to fostering autonomous, independent, and dynamic language learners (Hayes & Flower, 2016). Therefore, there are many challenges in English language teaching for English teachers whether in primary or secondary levels and learning challenges for pupils. However, these challenges can be curbed with appropriate and efficient approaches from teachers and curricula.

Regardless of the teaching strategies in ESL, the Ministry of Education (MoE) pointed out that Malaysia's English proficiency among learners seems to have decreased over the years. In addition, according to the annual Education First English Proficiency Index, Malaysia's position declined from 22nd place in 2018 to 26th place in 2019 and yet still behind in place in 2022. In fact, over three hundred pupils in Malaysia do not meet the minimum requirement for secondary school graduates in English proficiency. Sabah region is particularly placed second last at a moderate level of proficiency compared to the other fourteen states in Malaysia. The process of teaching and learning the English language, especially for writing purposes in dual high-stakes examinations can be challenging and daunting. It is found that despite being exposed to the English language as early as age 6 or 7, many Malaysian secondary school ESL learners do not possess adequate skills in writing because their sole exposure to the language is limited to the English language classroom (Heissel et al., 2021). As writing is a complex and continuous process, it causes further difficulties for L2 learners due to sociological, linguistic and cognitive factors (Wern & Rahmat, 2021). To support this argument, Manchón et al. (2023) also stated that pupils prefer their native language, Bahasa Melayu as the only acceptable language.

In addressing this predicament, past studies highlighted the necessity to employ the technique of incorporating real-world examples into the teaching and learning process of the English language as it enables pupils to make connections between what they have learned in class and their experiences outside of the classroom, thus enhancing their interest and engagement in the lesson (Rao, 2019). According to Rahayu and Kala'lembang (2021), it is advantageous for teachers to encourage pupils to feel at ease when they are allowed the liberty to handle, pace, and guide their inquiry. This will later promote the pupils' writing fluency. Therefore, English language teachers must promote a learning environment, especially in learning writing that provides pupils with opportunities to express themselves and exchange ideas in a non-hostile environment, which will thereby hone their thoughts and skills positively (Nelson, 2020).

## **2.2. Secondary School Curriculum and Examinations in Malaysia**

Secondary education in Malaysia is a continuation of primary education. In Malaysia, there are many types of secondary schools which serve different purposes with the target populace such as Government Secondary Schools (SMK), Private Education Institutions (IPS), Vocational Colleges and Technical Institutes, Religious Secondary Schools (SMKA) as well as Royal Military College (MTD). Despite the variation, the government school system is similarly divided into two

levels which are lower secondary education (Form 1 to Form 3) and upper secondary education (Form 4 and Form 5). Generally, secondary school education consists of three distinct mainstreams which are regular academic, religious content or techniques and vocational. Although there are some distinctions between each school in Malaysia, it is still compulsory for all Form 5 pupils to sit for the standardised national public certification, Sijil Pendidikan Malaysia (SPM) based on the national secondary school standard curriculum (KSSM).

Moreover, being competitive in education is critical in the face of globalisation and in encouraging its agenda forward. Aligning the educational system with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is a crucial part of the Malaysia Education Blueprint, which intends to elevate national educational standards to levels comparable to those established internationally (Zaki & Darmi, 2021). Plus, based on this framework, six reference levels categorise the language proficiency of ESL pupils in terms of their speaking, reading, listening, and writing abilities (Aripin & Yusoff, 2022) which are: Proficient users (levels C1 & C2), Independent users (levels B1 & B2) and Basic users (levels A1 & A2). According to Zaki and Darmi (2021), CEFR offers a thorough explanation of the skills and knowledge that ESL pupils must acquire to enhance communicative competence. On the other hand, the Cambridge IGCSE curriculum is designed to offer “a variety of routes for learners with a wide range of abilities, including those whose first language is not English”. Therefore, both of the examinations have specific requirements, levels of proficiency and require different teaching approaches especially in writing examinations.

In addition, there is an increasing initiative among secondary schools in Malaysia to implement a dual high-stakes examination system. For instance, Maktab Rendah Sains MARA (MRSM or MARA Junior Science College) boarding schools use the KBSM curriculum and MARA special curriculum as the standard curriculum. MRSM offers not one but two strands of examination systems where pupils are required to sit for the IGCSE exam when they are in Form 4 and the SPM exam a year later. Concerning the English examination in Malaysia, this means that the MARA teachers have to teach the Form 4 pupils IGCSE English and Form 4 English syllabus at the same time, and when the pupils move on to Form 5, teachers need to focus on teaching the SPM English formats and contents. Also, this was analysed by Supramaniam and Nazer (2016), where a comparison between the two examination formats and requirements indicated that both examined the writing, reading, listening and speaking skills differently and had varying formats and contents. As a result, teachers will encounter challenges to address two different specifications in one lesson.

## **2.3. Theoretical Framework and Model of Writing**

### **2.3.1. Teaching Pedagogy: Constructivism**

Teaching pedagogy plays a vital role for educators and it does not only encompass techniques and tools but also concepts being used for the total education picture. Constructivism has their origins in the work of Dewey (1925), Bruner

(1961), Vygotsky (2001), and Piaget (1964). This theory was mostly found in psychology and sociology which explains how people acquire knowledge and learn. In line with the way teachers teach and learn to teach, constructivism also represents one of the big notions in education. Moreover, while it is important for teachers to understand constructivism, it is equally important to understand the implications this view of learning has for pupils. According to Piaget (1953) as cited in Khadidja (2020), each student is a unique individual and acts as an active agent who brings with them previous knowledge and background and this affects their ability to acquire as well as to influence others in the group. Based on the four basic characteristics of constructivist learning environments, McCulley (1985) mentioned that these must be considered when implementing constructivist instructional strategies. One of the characteristics is the role of teachers as a facilitator or guide. Moreover, the knowledge and authority will be shared between teachers and pupils as well as learning groups will consist of small numbers of heterogeneous pupils. Constructivist theory could be divided into two, namely Socio constructivist theory and Cognitive constructivist theory.

### **2.3.2. Socio Constructivist and Cognitive Constructivist Theory**

According to Vygotsky (1978) as cited in Smolucha & Smolucha (2022), the development of human beings takes place in social situations. In the realm of educational practice, a crucial aspect that warrants consideration is emotions. Emotions are not only an intrinsic aspect of education, but also closely interrelated with the relational dynamics that exist between educators and learners. Therefore, acknowledging and effectively managing emotions is paramount for creating a conducive learning environment that fosters positive emotional experiences and facilitates optimal learning outcomes. Under the socio-constructivist perspective, a student's emotional state has deep implications towards their learning experience. Within the learning and teaching writing context, a teacher needs to pay close attention to pupils' emotions in order to facilitate the acquiring process (Bembich & Gasperdo, 2022). Vygotsky also suggests that in order to promote a learning context, in which pupils play an active role in learning. This is aligned with Yu et al. (2023) and previous studies where giving feedback is crucial and acts as a dialogue and has been interpreted as a socially mediated activity in ESL teaching and learning.

A cognitive constructivist learning theory is concerned with meaningful learning based on pupils' prior knowledge and learning experiences (Resnick, 1991). This is aligned with Piaget's work that claims humans are better able to understand the information they have constructed by themselves. Moreover, Piaget's Constructivism (1896 to 1980) explains the learning process through schemes (the organisation of information on how things work), and assimilation which is the placing of new information into schemes, as well as accommodation (transforming existing schemes or creating new ones). In line with learning ESL writing skills, a cognitive constructivist learning theory emphasises that learners will take accountability to construct meaning actively through communication

with others or oneself. In addition, the most important goal of constructivist learning theory is to learn to understand (Garrison, 1993). Cognitive constructivist theory is related to the current study because it helps researchers to describe ESL learners as individuals with skills such as creativity and higher-order thinking. This is supported by Wang (2022) where the theory underlines dynamic development between teachers and pupils' relationship thus shaping a better education. Wang (2022) suggests that to improve writing classrooms for ESL pupils, it is important to adopt constructivism. This approach emphasizes that knowledge is constructed by individuals, and as such, it is necessary to create teaching environments that encourage greater student participation in the construction of their academic knowledge.

#### 2.4. Cognitive Model of Writing

Teaching and learning writing in ESL classrooms can be quite daunting and demanding. Moreover, writing can be viewed as a thinking process. In order to produce a well-written text, a writer needs to use mental processes such as brainstorming, planning and organizing along with creativity. Therefore, the cognitive writing model aims to teach pupils to use mental processing in producing a piece of writing (Selvaraj & Aziz, 2019). This specific Cognitive Model was introduced by Flower and Hayes (1981: p. 366) "through observations of pupils' writing and made an effort to "introduce a theory of cognitive processes involved in composing and to lay the groundwork for more detailed study of thinking processes in writing". The four elements highlighted by Flower and Hayes in this theory are "Writers have to go through a process of thinking before writing, a higher-order organizational structure takes place during these procedures, composing involves setting objectives, and authors generate macro and micro-objectives to finish the writing task (Flower & Hayes 1981: p. 366). In short, it focuses exclusively on the mental writing process.

#### 2.5. ESL Writing Fluency

ESL learners whose primary language or languages of the home, are other than English would require additional English language support to develop reading, writing, listening and speaking skills. Compared with other fundamental skills, writing is considered the most difficult skill. Based on past literature, the biggest drawback mentioned is the lack of proficiency in the English language among ESL pupils to complete the writing task assigned (Mohamed et al., 2018). Owing to the fact that learning how to write a coherent, effective text is a difficult and protracted achievement of cognitive development for most ESL learners. Not to mention that ESL learners need to have a great understanding of syntactic and lexical knowledge as well as the ability to structure good sentences in English to produce good writing (Selvaraj & Aziz, 2019). Moreover, writing fluency is also an essential component of developing writing skills and acquiring a language. Writing fluency comprises strategies to use a correct choice of vocabulary, sen-

tence structures and flow of ideas thus improving a writer's quality of writing (Hestad, 2014 as cited in Bilge & Kalenderoğlu, 2022). Plus, this is also supported by Chenoweth and Hayes (2001) as cited in Hudilainen et al. (2019), who defined written fluency as "the rate of production of text" (p. 81). Thus, a non-fluent writer will have problems constructing sentences and producing good written L2 text within a limited amount of time and guidance.

In addition, in the context of Malaysia ESL secondary school learners, writing skills are prioritised in the Malaysia standardised education system besides other fundamental skills. As formulated in Malaysian Education Blueprint (2013-2025), secondary school learners need to be proficient in both Bahasa Melayu and English language covering all of the language aspects including correct use of grammar, punctuation, and spelling (Selvaraj & Aziz, 2019). This is significant, especially in the process of preparing ESL secondary school learners for their year-end high-stakes examination such as the standardised national English exam in Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) or even in the IGCSE English exam which requires a different understanding of the syllabus requirements, test formats and contents. Regardless of all the initiatives taken, writing fluency is still one of the major concerns addressed by ESL stakeholders in Malaysia. Additionally, the inconsistencies and low level of quality of the written text result from a lack of strategies in writing fluency and time constraints during examination. Not to mention that while much research exists on reading fluency, only a small number is about writing fluency (Khidhir & Abbas, 2020). With less understanding of writing fluency for high-stakes examinations, English teachers will have difficulties in finding suitable writing approaches for their pupils especially in secondary levels.

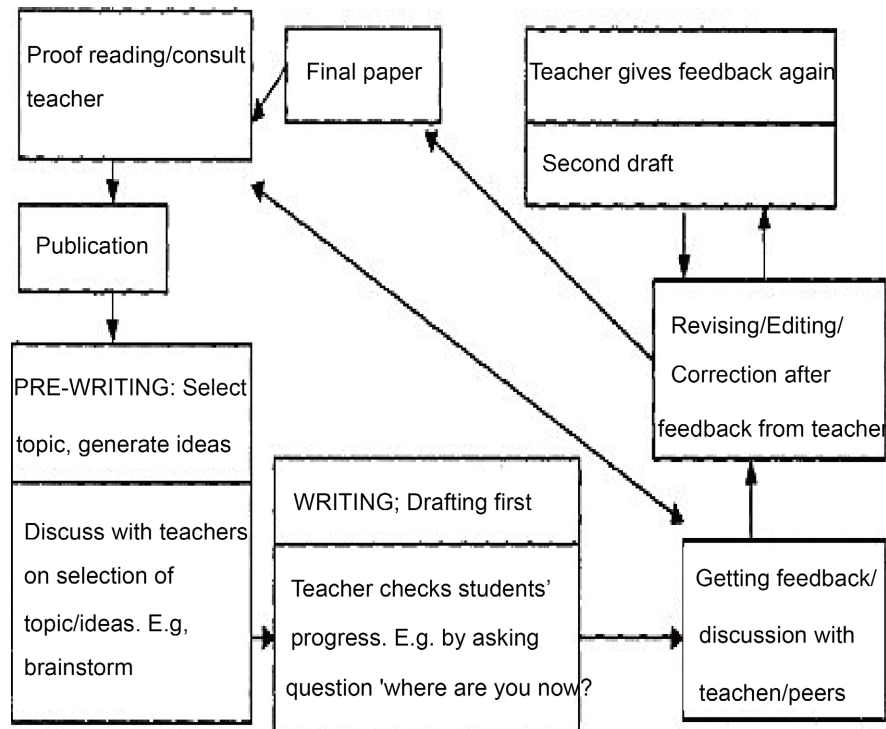
## 2.6. Approaches Associated with Writing Skills in ESL Classrooms

This research aimed to investigate the emerging challenges faced by English teachers of Majlis Amanah Rakyat (MARA) and the approaches used in teaching English writing skills specifically towards improving ESL writing fluency for dual different examinations. Raimes (1993) outlined three fundamental writing approaches. First and foremost, the product approach focuses on the form. The second approach is the process approach, which emphasizes the writer. Next, the genre approach is centred on the reader. Moreover, the process of developing writing strategies involves five recursive stages that writers engage in. These stages are essential in enabling writers to create well-crafted pieces of writing. By iterating through these stages repeatedly, writers can refine and enhance their writing, resulting in a polished final product written document and each stage, the teacher has an active role in facilitating pupils. **Figure 1** below shows the role of teachers in the writing process approach.

## 2.7. Product-Based Approach

Before the development of the writing process was studied, writing was often viewed as a finished product, with an emphasis on the final written piece rather





**Figure 1.** Source: Earle and Zimmerman, 2002.

than the process of composing it. Researchers believed that the most important aspect of good writing was linguistic knowledge, such as vocabulary and grammar, rather than the skill of writing itself. This approach is known as the product or traditional approach to writing, which aims to produce correct text by analyzing discourse into words, sentences, and paragraphs while focusing on syntax, spelling, punctuation, and style. Some researchers still support this approach, which emphasizes vocabulary, syntax, and cohesive devices to create a polished final product. This is aligned with recent studies (Hoque et al., 2020; Jalaluddin, 2019), where the researchers pointed out that pupils will receive instructions emphasising completing the assigned paragraphs and it focuses on very rigid text features of model texts. As a result, pupils in the product approach here become the operators of the learnt language structure and the teachers become the editors or proofreaders.

## 2.8. Process-Based Approach

Several researchers in the late 1970s to 1980s emphasized the process writing approach as the key to second language writing. The approach involves learners focusing on the process of writing rather than just the written product. Furthermore, the writing process consists of three stages: pre-writing, while writing, and post-writing. These stages are interconnected and non-linear, meaning they can overlap and occur repeatedly without a fixed sequence (Onozawa, 2010). This is also supported by Jalaluddin (2019), as the researcher mentioned that the process-based approach tries to establish a supportive environment in which

pupils are active writers in constructing their writing. Within the ESL writing context, ESL teachers help and support learners in generating ideas on the topic during the pre-writing stage. In addition, learners produce and revise drafts of writing, and continue to second drafts in the while-writing stage. Once the writing is complete, the post-writing stage becomes crucial. During this stage, learners focus on refining their pieces by checking for accurate grammar, coherently organizing ideas, and using appropriate vocabulary. Also, the English language syllabus for secondary school pupils in Malaysia incorporates this writing process to improve their writing abilities. According to [Jalaluddin \(2019\)](#) also mentioned that the process approach looks at “how the text is written and how to improve the development of the content and ideas”. Thus, this approach has its own uniqueness and importance in not only guiding but to help pupils’ writing process.

## **2.9. Genre-Based Approach**

In a genre-based approach to writing instruction, the focus is not just on the topic or content of the text, but also on the specific genre or type of writing that is being used. This approach takes into account the writing process, including planning, drafting, revising and editing, as well as the linguistic forms and conventions that are typical of a particular genre. The ultimate goal of this approach is to help writers develop the skills they need to effectively communicate with their intended audience, by being able to use the appropriate language, tone, and structure that is expected within that genre. By emphasizing the communication aspect of writing, this approach encourages writers to think critically about how they can best convey their ideas, beliefs and messages to their readers ([Reid, 1995](#)). According to the analysis of SPM and IGCSE papers by [Supramaniam and Nazer \(2016\)](#), there were common test items in Paper 2 such as information transfer, summary writing and essay writing. This requires pupils to recognise and write suitable answers based on the genre given. According to the latest SPM format, pupils are required to do directed writing and continuous writing in the form of informal email, story, report, article or review. Meanwhile, for IGCSE English essay writing tasks (Exercise 6 and Exercise 7), pupils will be tested on writing appropriately in two different genres: an informal letter and an article for a school magazine. Therefore, this writing approach is significant for ESL pupils when writing in order to be able to select or anticipate appropriate content, language and levels of formality.

## **3. Methodology**

### **3.1. Research Design**

In determining the approach to be taken as the path to fulfil the purpose of this study, it is of great importance to refer to the research questions ([Creswell, 2012](#)). Since this research deals with a constructivist perspective, thus, a qualitative research approach was chosen. In addition, constructivists claimed the truth

is relative and that it is dependent on one's viewpoint (Pilarska, 2021). Also, the main purpose of this study is to investigate the challenges faced by the English teachers of Majlis Amanah Rakyat (MARA) in Sabah and the writing approaches employed specifically towards improving pupils' ESL writing fluency for dual different high-stakes examinations. Therefore, a case study method was adopted. The case study method is a valuable tool that researchers use to examine a situation thoroughly and gain a comprehensive understanding of it. According to Stake (2000), this method involves a process of inquiry about the case that results in a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied. It is particularly useful when the investigator has little control over the event of a contemporary phenomenon with real-life context (Yin, 2014). Moreover, this qualitative case study methodology provides researchers with the necessary tools to study complex phenomena within their specific contexts (Baxter & Jack, 2008). By exploring the details of a particular case, researchers can draw conclusions that are not only relevant to that specific case but also applicable to similar situations elsewhere. By mentioning this, it means that the researcher is finding the best approach for English teachers in MRSM to employ in teaching writing. In line with this particular study, the findings will be helpful for teachers teaching dual high-stakes examinations such as SPM and IGCSE in Malaysia.

### **3.2. Research Participants and Settings**

Purposive sampling has been selected in choosing the participants in this case study. The researcher employs purposive sampling when selecting the research participants. Purposive sampling, often referred to as judgmental, selective, or subjective sampling, entails a set of sampling techniques that depend on the researcher's judgement when it comes to choosing the participants that are to be studied (Thomson & Gunter, 2011). Moreover, this sampling method was chosen due to its adaptability which enables researchers to save time and cost when collecting the data (Berndt, 2020). The participants were selected according to three predetermined criteria which are ESL secondary MARA teachers, teaching in MRSM Sabah, and familiar with writing approaches for dual high-stakes examinations. By considering these criteria, five ESL secondary MARA teachers from the same school were selected to investigate their experiences in teaching ESL writing skills by using writing approaches to enhance pupils' writing fluency. The teachers interviewed revealed that they were aware that IGCSE and SPM English syllabi, examination formats and teaching contents were different. These teachers were considered the most suitable to be interviewed as they fit all of the criteria and possess the schemata needed to provide information in achieving the aims of the study.

### **3.3. Data Collection and Procedures**

#### **3.3.1. Semi-Structured Interview**

This study employed semi-structured interviews in obtaining extensive findings on ESL secondary MARA teachers' challenges and writing approaches speci-

cally towards improving pupils' ESL writing fluency in a dual different high-stakes examination. By using interview methods, researchers can yield rich and detailed pieces of data about people's perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and impressions in their own words (Dilshad & Latif, 2013) which is aligned with the aim of the study. Other than that, some of the interview questions were formulated by the researcher and validated by the expert in the ESL field regarding the content validity of the questions. The interview sessions were conducted in a face-to-face session at the selected school located in Sabah. Also, there are 12 semi-structured interview questions developed aligned with the theories underpinning this study which is the Constructivist Learning Theory. Given that a qualitative methodology seeks to explore a question in depth, the inculcation of the semi-structured interview is deemed suitable for addressing the research questions of this study extensively. Lastly, the face-to-face interview session will be recorded to ensure the validity of the transcription.

### **3.3.2. Document Analysis**

Document analysis is a valuable yet underused approach in qualitative research that has been used for many years (Morgan, 2022). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), the document analysis can consist of texts, visual resources including photographs, video and film as well as visual materials that can be a good and suitable element to support the qualitative analysis. In line with this study, document analysis is conducted by the researcher to provide evidence of the differences between SPM writing exam papers and Cambridge IGCSE writing exam papers. This will be useful for the study to show distinct aspects, requirements, marks as well as elements of SPM and IGCSE writing papers in which the study intends to investigate. Moreover, the analysed and tabulated data would be categorised into codes and themes to investigate the first research questions which is, 'What are the challenges faced by the MRSM English teachers in Sabah specifically in improving pupils' ESL writing fluency in a dual different high-stakes examination?' This instrument is important in focusing exclusively on how texts portray different groups of people and the way they think. In this case, document analysis is a useful approach to show pupils' authentic writing fluency and their ability to answer each high-stakes writing examinations.

### **3.4. Data Analysis**

The data analysis process will comprise a careful analysis and interpretation of the observation guide from the semi-structured interview transcription and document analysis from five pupils of Form 4 classes taught by the five ESL secondary MARA teachers employed in this study. To elaborate, the interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and shared with participants for verification, ensuring the utmost accuracy of the transcription. This step is critical in identifying and rectifying any errors or misconceptions. Following this, a thematic analysis was conducted, which is recognised as a suitable method for comprehending experiences, thoughts, or behaviours present in a data collection (Kiger

& Varpio, 2020). Additionally, the thematic analysis enabled the identification of several themes within the research findings, which were instrumental in answering the research questions and explaining the observed occurrences. Not only that, the data analysis process will be followed by the process of coding the data by the theoretical viewpoints (Miles & Huberman, 1994), whereas in the context of this study, the researcher will refer to the cognitive model of writing by Flower and Hayes (1981) and also the writing approaches employed by the teachers. As for document analysis, the documents that are used in this study are from 5 pupils who are currently in Form 4 focusing on exam writing papers of SPM and IGCSE, which each student comes from different classes.

### 3.5. Reliability and Validity

Maxwell (2021) underlined that the validity of a research instrument is deemed the fundamental concept for all research. This is also supported by a claim that it is essential to ensure the validity and reliability of a research instrument to measure the accuracy and consistency of the research instrument (Mellinger & Hanson, 2020). In ensuring the validity of the instrument for this study, the researcher asked for the expert's opinion on the research instrument. Moreover, two experts reviewed the semi-structured interview on a few aspects namely clarity, redundancy, readability and completeness. Next, an independent inter-observer was called to assist with the observation in order to eliminate the biases in judging the effectiveness of the lessons. Not just that, the validity and reliability of research also depend on the participants' validation and permission. In qualitative research, the process of participants' validation is a crucial step in ensuring the accuracy and credibility of the findings. This process requires the researcher to return to the participants and present them with their interview transcripts or data analysis for them to review. Participants are then allowed to validate, or refute, the researcher's interpretation of the data. This method serves as a form of quality control, as it allows the researcher to identify any errors or misinterpretations in their analysis and make necessary adjustments. According to Harry and Lipsky (2014), the process of participants' validation is a vital step in ensuring the trustworthiness and reliability of the research findings.

## 4. Research Findings

### 4.1. Demographic and Findings

#### 4.1.1. Participants' Teaching Experiences and Teaching Backgrounds

In answering all of the research questions, it is important to note teachers' teaching backgrounds and teachers' experiences in teaching writing in order to relate it with the writing approaches that they used to curb the challenges that they have to encounter in teaching SPM and IGCSE writing.

#### 4.1.2. ESL Teachers' Teaching and Education Backgrounds

The findings obtained from this study highlighted teachers' teaching and education backgrounds consisting of their high-stakes examinations results for

SPM/IELTS/MUET, their opportunities in attending in-service training and number of years working experiences with MARA. The findings gathered from a semi-structured interview found that majority of the participants have been working with MRSM ranging from five to ten years. Moreover, all of the English teachers admitted that they are given the responsibility to teach both high-stake examinations which is SPM and IGCSE. As mentioned by one of the participants (P1), "I've been working here in MRSM for about 5 years as I started to work in 2018 and spend 3 years teaching both SPM and IGCSE". Similarly, (P3) stated that she, "have been working with MRSM for almost 6 years, after graduating under MARA's scholarship and have taught both SPM and IGCSE for about 3 years". In addition, the findings also found that two of the participants have more than seven years of experiences in teaching where (P4) and (P5) expressed that they, "have been working with MRSM for more than 8 years now and have been teaching IGCSE as well as SPM for almost 5 years". However, only one of the participants (P2) have less than 3 years of working experiences, "I have been working under MRSM for almost 2 years and this is the first year I get to teach for IGCSE and SPM" (P2). Based on the findings collected from the semi-structured interview session, it was found that generally, the majority of the participants have obtained excellent results in their own high-stake examinations. According to (P1), "I manage to get A+ for my SPM and distinctions results for my Cambridge Test 1119 (GCE-O) as well as mini-mum requirement of 6.5 to study overseas. Not only that, I obtained B2 High for my MUET and teacher's assessment". Similarly, for (P3) as she mentioned that, "as for my English results, I obtained A for my SPM and 6.5 for IELTS". Meanwhile for two of the participants who have more than six years of teaching experiences, they mentioned that they "obtained A1 or scored with distinction for English subject". As mentioned by (P2) who have less teaching experiences as compared to others, "I scored A for my English subject during SPM and Band 5 for my MUET". In regards with teaching experiences, these MRSM English teachers also share their experiences on the opportunities given to enhance their teaching skills for both high-stake examinations. According to (P1), "I did not receive direct training from MARA itself before becoming a teacher here, but I manage to get myself into the teaching profession from being a substitute teacher under The Ministry of Education (MoE) for 2 years,". He then added that, "however, I have and still receive a lot of training especially in terms of Cambridge IGCSE syllabus, training and seminars organised by MARA and CAIE twice of training after I started working for MRSM".

Not only that, he also mentioned that, "meanwhile for SPM formats, based on previous years, I usually attend in-house training in our school conducted by the head of language department, senior English teachers, even the state department (JPN)". Similarly, (P3) expressed that "I've received adequate training for IGCSE and exposure about SPM examinations as well as mentoring session from MARA". The participant (P3) then added that, "however during my first year of teaching, there is lack of exposure and I have to learn by myself and asking

around”. In addition, (P4) and (P5) expressed that they also “have received adequate training considering the years spend with MRSM and we can always ask for more seminars and training courses if we want to”. Moreover, two of the participants (P4 and P5) also mentioned that they, “still need to learn more about IGCSE format as lately they have changed”. Lastly, the findings also found that one of the participants (P1) have not received adequate exposure and training to teach IGCSE programme since she is a new teacher where she stated that, “I’m a new teacher and I have not yet received any direct training courses for IGCSE. However, I have been to several seminars and get many exposures from in-house training for SPM examination”. Therefore, these results of teachers’ teaching experiences and teachers’ high-stake examination results along with their experiences in training courses will contribute and give impact to their teaching approaches and challenges in teaching writing for both high-stake examinations.

#### **4.2. MRSM English Teachers’ Challenges in Teaching Writing for a Dual High-Stake Examination**

This section presents the findings obtained in answering the first research question, What are the challenges faced by the MRSM English teachers in Sabah specifically in improving pupils’ ESL writing fluency in a dual different high-stakes examination? The findings revealed four teaching challenges being highlighted by the research participants which comprises limited resources of English writing materials, teachers’ unfamiliarity of writing formats and contents, teachers’ motivation, and pupils’ low proficiency level.

#### **4.3. Limited Resources of English Writing Materials**

When the participants were asked about the resources and teaching materials that they used in teaching writing for both of the examinations, the majority commented that they face resource constraints of English writing materials including limited access to technology, shortage of relevant writing materials and insufficient availability of supplementary materials such as practice exams or targeted writing exercises, especially for IGCSE writing examination. For example, one of the interviewees mentioned that he, “have to depend on past years questions from other MRSMs when doing some revision with the pupils in which sometimes the formats changed and outdated for IGCSE, it is somehow toughened the writing lesson” (P1). The participants then added, “we have sufficient relevant resources of SPM writing materials as we always exchange information and teaching materials with other MRSMs”. Talking about this issue, an interviewee also said that, “Textbooks for SPM purposes is somehow useful but IGCSE textbook on the other hand is not really helpful and not suitable for our pupils, which makes the learning difficult” (P3).

Plus, another interviewee stated that she is, “trying to get extra materials online for IGCSE but sometimes the sources is unreliable and incomplete,” (P2). These results reveal that the MRSM teachers are challenged with limited availa-

bility of English writing materials particularly for IGCSE which impede their effectiveness in teaching writing. Based on the findings collected from the semi-structured interview session, it was found that generally, the majority of the participants express their concern on limited access to technology when conducting an English writing lesson. As one of the interviewees put it, “teaching writing should be fun and engaging with the help of digital tools but we have little access to technology here,” (P2). Moreover, one of the participants mentioned that her pupils are always eager to learn English especially writing because of the technology tools that she used during the lesson, “they are motivated and driven by the game-based writing lesson but the inadequate internet access here interrupted most of the lesson,” (P1). Not only that, as mentioned by (P3), “most teachers have to buy their own projectors if they wish to teach writing using online platforms, this is due to most projectors here are either unusable or the computer room does not have internet access which limits the lesson to only ‘chalk and talk’”. These results suggest that the scarcity of English writing resources like accessibility to technology and shortage of updated writing materials challenges teachers in teaching writing.

#### **4.4. Teachers’ Familiarity of Writing Formats and Contents**

Based on the semi-structured interview conducted, one of the most frequent challenges that has been faced by the MRSM English teachers is teachers’ unfamiliarity in differentiating both IGCSE and SPM writing formats or marking scheme for both of the high-stakes examinations. One of the research participants, (P1) shared that he, “have some problems especially during the early year as a teacher on how to differentiate between both IGCSE and SPM types and formats of writing”. Adding to that, (P2) also stated that she, “used to have problems with the old IGCSE format and even struggled to teach the differences of requirements needed for SPM and IGCSE writing papers”. Another participant, (P3) also stressed upon this challenge where she mentioned that, “being familiar with the formats of writing is important as I had difficulties in teaching when I was still new to IGCSE writing formats”. This indicates that teachers’ familiarity to differentiate the formats of IGCSE and SPM writing formats is crucial in order to teach English for dual high-stakes examinations. Adding to that, all of the participants mentioned they also have difficulties in marking both examinations papers at first due to unfamiliarity.

One of the teachers, (P1) mentioned that, “to mark IGCSE and SPM exam papers is another obstacle I have to face as a new teacher who is unfamiliar with it”. The participant then added that it gives more challenge for him as there are differences of requirements to look at for the marking scheme between SPM and IGCSE formats including the word limit, vocabulary, communicative achievement, contents and grammatical errors. Another participant (P2) emphasised that, “unfamiliarity makes it difficult for me in understanding the rubric of marking scheme which sometimes made me confused”. Meanwhile, (P3) shared different opinion as she mentioned that it is not difficult to mark the examina-



tion papers but she was challenged when she, “had to figure out the best way to teach pupils on how to score according to the rubric given”. This shows that teachers’ familiarity to mark exam papers is important to teach pupils the writing formats. From this interview, the participants then added that after years of teaching experiences and the implementation of new format, eventually they get more familiar with the requirements which makes them more confident to teach pupils for both high-stakes examinations. As (P1) emphasised, “with the new format now, I feel confident to teach and mark writing for both examinations” and as mentioned by (P2), “I manage to cater to the differences of both formats of writing now”. Similarly, (P3) stated that, as I gained more experiences, I feel better in teaching both formats of IGCSE and SPM now.

Overall, this highlights the importance of teachers’ familiarity on the writing formats, which eventually improve teachers’ understanding and pupils’ writing fluency for both examinations. From the findings obtained through document analysis, the researcher able to identify and analyse the differences between SPM and IGCSE writing papers through documents gathered with the help from the participants’ sample exam papers. Besides, it is notable that different pupils have different ability and proficiency in English, but the researcher found that SPM writing questions tend to give more space and choices for students to write out their ideas by following certain criteria. For example, in SPM sample question (**Figure 1**) unveils one page with three different questions for Part 3.

On the other hand, the new format of IGCSE writing paper will be combined with four reading questions and requires pupils to write two writing (an email as well as to choose between review, article or report) as shown in **Figure 2**. It was mentioned by the participants that this combination of reading and writing carry 60 marks in total. The researcher also found that teachers are having trouble in differentiating the writing approaches for both examinations. This is due to the different marks and requirements as well as both papers used different rubrics to marks both papers (**Figure 3**).

#### 4.5. Teachers’ Motivation

It is also crucial to study teachers’ demotivation as it can have a significant impact on the overall learning environment and the teaching outcomes particularly in teaching writing. Several factors may contribute to MRSM English teachers’ feeling demotivated which includes heavy workload, high expectations in teaching dual high-stakes examinations, inadequate training for IGCSE writing and their proficiency level. According to (P1), “I used to be proficient in all four skills but I’m quite struggling in certain parts now, this somehow demotivates me as a teacher when teaching writing IGCSE”. Not only that, (P2) also mentioned that she, “struggled with the proficiency in teaching IGCSE writing,” and added that she feels demotivated when she, “did not mastered all of the vocabulary and grammar knowledge”. However, (P3) expressed that she, “does not have any problems with English especially writing as I have a strong foundation in English”. Then, she added that “with this strong foundation, I feel motivated to

Part 3

Write an answer to one of the questions 3 - 5 in this part. Write your answer in 200-250 words in an appropriate style on this question paper. Put the question number in the box at the top of the answer space.

Question 3

You see this notice in your school newsletter.

**Articles wanted!**  
Good Personal Hygiene!

- What is personal hygiene?
- Why is it important to take care of your hygiene?
- How to spread awareness about maintaining good hygiene?

Write an article answering these questions.  
The best article will be published in our monthly newsletter.

Write your article.

OR

Question 4

You recently saw this notice on a website.

**Reviews required!**

Have you ever bought food from a fast-food restaurant? Send us your review.  
What did you order? Tell us about the food and the reason you chose it.  
Would you recommend the food to your friends? Why?  
Send us your review  
The best reviews will be published on our website.

Write your review.

OR

Question 5

Your teacher has asked you to write a story to be published in the school magazine. The story must end with the following words:

... *Hanim realised she should have listened to her mother.*

Your story must include:  
an incident that happened.  
how the incident affected her.

Write your story.

**Figure 2.** Sample Part C—SPM writing exam questions.

Exercise 6

Question 17

Your class recently took part in a one-day sports festival for local schools. The organisers want students' opinions about the sports festival, and you have been asked to write a report.

In your report, say what was enjoyable about the sports festival, and suggest how it could be improved.

Here are some comments from students in your class:

It was a chance to meet students from other schools

There weren't many new sports to try.

I learned a lot about fitness.

We spent too much time listening to instructions.

Now write a report for the organisers of the sports festival.

The comments above may give you some ideas, and you should also use some ideas of your own.

Write about 120 to 160 words.

You will receive up to 6 marks for the content of your report and up to 9 marks for the language used.

**Figure 3.** Sample Part B—IGCSE writing exam questions.

teach IGCSE and SPM". These responses indicate that motivation of MRSM English teachers is due to their English proficiency level. Moreover, other findings obtained from the interview session also highlighted the challenges in dealing with the heavy workloads which later impact the teachers' motivation. As mentioned by (P2), "demotivated and burnt out with the heavy workloads and expectations of teaching dual high-stakes examinations,".

The participant then added that, "teaching for SPM and IGCSE is either a make or break, balancing the preparation for two exams with potentially different expectations can be challenging especially for writing". Similarly, (P1) expressed that "as a new teacher, teaching IGCSE is quite daunting and demotivating especially when you failed to deliver a good lesson". Another interviewee (P3) mentioned that, "MRSM English teachers may feel demotivated and overwhelmed by the demands and heavy workloads of preparing pupils for two different high-stakes examinations, each with its own set of requirements". Therefore, the results provide important insights of teachers' demotivation due to heavy workload. One of the participants expressed that, "due to inadequate training in teaching IGCSE writing, I sometimes feel demotivated when conducting the writing lesson," (P2). The participant then elaborated that, "this is demotivating especially when there is little to no guidance on how to teach IGCSE essays during my first year of teaching which later will affect my pupils' marks". Not only that, she later admitted that, "adequate training helps especially for dual high-stakes examination and without it, new teachers will be lost". This highlights the response of teachers' demotivation due to lack of in-training for IGCSE writing especially for new teachers. It is also important to note that teachers require supports to develop better teaching skill particularly in teaching writing for high-stakes examinations.

#### **4.6. Pupils' Proficiency Level**

The findings analysed from the interview session depicts another challenge encountered by MRSM English teachers teaching in dual high-stake examinations which is relating to pupils' proficiency level. A majority of the participants mentioned that pupils have difficulties in constructing simple sentence structures, misunderstanding the content and context of IGCSE writing formats, lack knowledge of vocabulary and irrelevant ideas of writing which later hinder their writing fluency. First of all, one of the participants (P4) express concern in regards of writing fluency among her pupils, "some of these pupils have poor proficiency level which can be seen by difficulties in constructing simple sentence structure and many spelling errors." Similarly, (P1) stated that most of his pupils also have difficulties in constructing sentences, "they make mistakes in complex sentence structures, most of them unable to differentiate the uses of tenses and even articles". Other participants mostly agreed that their pupils are lack of grammar knowledge which later impede the student's writing fluency. As one of the participants (P3) mentioned that, "when they are unable to construct simple

sentences or have any misused of grammar structure, they will not be able to answer the questions correctly”. (P4) further elaborated that most of the pupils who have low proficiency level in English are those who recently transferred from other school during their Form 4, “most of the pupils with poor proficiency level are transferred from other school and it’s a bit late to teach them again about basic grammar”.

These results shows that majority of the pupils face problems in organizing or constructing proper essay writing due to lack of grammar knowledge. Adding to that, (P2) also mentioned that some of the pupils have trouble in differentiating the requirements and formats for both IGCSE and SPM writing papers, “they sometimes failed to check the words limitation for IGCSE papers and misunderstand the requirements especially for extended writings section”. According to (P5), “the pupils have problems with creating and organizing their own contents for IGCSE continuous writing because they expect that there will be notes given like in SPM question paper”. Moreover, based on the findings analysed from this study, three of the participants agreed that most of their pupils’ poor proficiency level are due to reliance on Malay language for processing thoughts and ideas. It is important to address this challenge as it will result in poor writing fluency. According to (P1), “my pupils love to translate everything from Bahasa Melayu to English language, not all words can be direct translated”. Another participant (P3) mentioned that, “student like to direct translate certain vocabulary to English then create a sentence from it, which doesn’t make any sense”. Therefore, this finding depicts a crucial need to understand the importance of proficiency level in order to have writing fluency for both high-stakes examination.

#### **4.7. MRSM English Teachers’ Writing Approaches for a Dual High-Stake Examination**

##### **ESL Writing Approaches for a Dual High-Stake Examination**

###### **1) Product-Based Approach**

Based on the semi-structured interview conducted, one of the most frequent writing approaches that has been employed by a majority of the participants is product-based approach or studying a model-texts and duplicating them. According to (P1), “I feel like my pupils write English better when they get sample answers from a given model text”. Not only that, (P1) also expressed that, “for my IGCSE pupils who have low proficiency level, they like this approach because they learn best from copying excellent essay sample”. By showing the sample essay, pupils get to practice and highlight connectors used, study the structure and duplicating them. Additionally, (P4) also mentioned that, “my pupils can get the idea of how to construct sentences by following the formats given by the model text”. Moreover, for the IGCSE pupils particularly, they are exposed to written model texts during pre-writing stage in order for them to get the idea of the structure and when they are ready to write on their own, they will continue writing without the help of the teachers.

As mentioned by (P2), “due to their low proficiency level, I always exposed them to native-like written model texts or materials first rather than asking them to write by using their own ideas”. She then further elaborated, “after they are ready, I will ask them to write on their own. If they are still not ready, I will give more sample of essays as guidance”. This is also implemented by (P3) where she mentioned that it is one of the efficient ways to get the pupils to start writing, “I used to ask IGCSE pupils to write by using their own ideas, it is very time-consuming because they said they don’t have any ideas and unsure of the structure”. Additionally, she stated that, “but after using this approach, the student automatically remembers the structure especially in writing article or review for SPM and IGCSE formats”. These findings presented depict the importance of product-based approach employed by the MRSM English teachers in order to improve pupils’ writing fluency especially in dual high-stakes examinations.

### **2) Genre-Based Approach**

The findings analysed from the interview session depicts a noticeable trend in implementing writing for specific text or genres (genre-based approach) in teaching writing for dual high-stakes examination. A majority of participants mentioned the important notion of knowing the student’s ability in writing before implementing this approach. One of the participants (P3) mentioned that, “once the pupils are ready to write on their own, it’s best to let them explore their own ideas in different target texts such as descriptive essays or argumentative essay.” She then added that, “it is advisable for teachers to guide pupils first by showing differences of genres or formats and allow the pupils to work on their own”. In addition, (P5) stated that, “pupils learn best if you give them “target text” and exchange ideas among their classmates”. This can actually help the pupils to be more comfortable and creative in learning English as they can exchange ideas among their classmates. According to (P5), “my pupils seem comfortable when they can generate and exchange creative ideas with their friends”.

Moreover, (P5) also agreed on this approach as the participants mentioned that, “Pupils are required to do directed writing and continuous writing in Part 2 and Part 3 of SPM writing paper, thus, this approach is suitable especially to teach pupils in recognizing and writing appropriate content, language and targeted genres. Furthermore, as mentioned by three of the participants who employed the idea of genre-based approach, their main reason in adapting this approach is solely for pupils to be able to construct content points and summarize their ideas based on specific genres creatively. This is highlighted by (P2), “pupils not only get to write better content points needed but also they can differentiate the formats between descriptive essays and narrative essays for both SPM and IGCSE exam”. Then, (P2) added that her pupils enjoy learning in a focused and targeted genre. Therefore, the findings depict that English teachers can implement this approach to improve pupils’ writing fluency but only after pupils gained awareness of the differences between IGCSE and SPM writing formats and requirements for each section.

### **3) Process-Based Approach**

The findings obtained also highlighted another writing approach employed by the MRSM English teachers which is process-based approach. However, based on the analysed data, this is the most uncommon approach used and mentioned by the participants. As highlighted by one of the participants, *“it is time consuming since pupils have to do a lot of thinking process...”* (P2). Moreover, (P2) further elaborated that the thinking process could be daunting particularly for low proficiency pupils and these pupils will need a lot of guidance. (P2) highlighted her concern, *“considering the time limitation for English class, it is almost impossible to cater to every student’s needs in the class”*.

However, (P2) asserted that this approach is still usable for both IGCE and SPM examinations due to its practicality. Similarly, other participants also mentioned that, *“this approach will only be suitable for upper form pupils such as Form 5 pupils who are going to sit for their SPM as they are able to produce and revise their own drafts of writing...”* (P5). Then, the participant added, *“this approach requires a lot of supportive environments in the classroom and the post-writing stage is crucial for pupils to refine their pieces of writing”*. Therefore, this finding also highlighted that this approach is the least employed writing approach by the English teachers for that dual high-stakes examinations.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. General Review of the Findings

It is important to note that English teachers in Maktab Rendah Sains Mara (MRSM) in Malaysia, are like other educators worldwide, who face various of challenges particularly when teaching writing for a dual high-stakes examinations such as IGCSE and SPM. Findings obtained from the interview found that majority of the participants encountered resources constraints of English writing materials including limited access to technology, shortage of relevant writing materials and insufficient availability of supplementary materials such as practice exams or targeted writing exercises, especially for IGCSE writing examination which later impede the process of teaching writing. These findings further support the idea of [Peter and Singaravelu \(2021\)](#) that insufficient materials are the major reasons for the ineffective writing among the pupils. This is also supported by a study conducted on English teachers in Indonesia which revealed that external factors include the poor class condition and lack of teaching aids for writing makes it difficult to teach writing (Peter et al. 2021 as cited in [Hidayati, 2018](#)). These results match those observed in earlier studies by [Al Amin Ali \(2017\)](#) which showed the ESL teachers felt that the content and context of the textbook for writing was not attractive and persuasive enough to encourage the teachers also to teach writing. Therefore, this study asserts the crucial need for teachers to have new and sufficient accessibility to supplementary materials especially in teaching IGCSE examination.

Furthermore, it was found that majority of the teacher were challenged by the formats and teaching content as well as marking both high-stake exam classes.

However, after more years of experiences, these MRSM teachers able to overcome the confusion and could differentiate differences in the marking requirements, test formats and contents. This is aligned with a past study which also revealed that ESL teachers need to be familiar with the content and context of both high-stakes examinations to ensure that they can provide a meaningful writing lesson (Supramaniam et al., 2020). In addition, the findings analysed by this study indicate the importance of teachers' familiarity on the writing formats, which will eventually improve teachers' understanding and pupils' writing fluency for both writing examinations. As mentioned by Supramaniam et al. (2020), ESL teachers who are responsible in teaching dual high-stakes examination are required to be updated of changes in materials or format as not doing so will risk their pupils in performing poorly or failing. Thus, being familiar with the content and context of the lesson as a teacher plays a huge role in creating a meaningful English lesson particularly in writing class which it will result in pupils' achievement in writing.

Also, the participants interviewed highlighted that teachers' motivation plays an important role in teaching writing especially in a dual high-stakes examinations. Based on the findings elicited, teachers demotivated when they have to deal with heavy workload as well as high expectations in teaching dual high-stakes examinations. Not only that, the present study revealed inadequate training for IGCSE writing and teachers' proficiency level are also the reasons affecting teachers' motivation in teaching in both dual high-stakes examination. The findings of the current study are consistent with those of Mahmoud Rababah et al. (2018), who found out that when English teachers are highly motivated, this will eventually aid the teachers to carry out the lesson competently. In addition, motivation is viewed as crucial contributor to language achievement (Gardner, 1985 in Seven, 2020). This is supported by Frenzel (2014) who mentioned that teaching emotions is also crucial in order for a teacher to provide the best instruction and interaction with pupils. Previous researchers also found that teachers' teaching emotions can impact the classroom environments thus resulted in the pupils' outcomes (Carmichael et al., 2017 in Parr et al., 2021). Therefore, teachers' motivation plays a huge role in teaching for a dual high-stakes examination system.

Additionally, findings for the second research question revealed that there are three writing approaches being highlighted by the research participants in order to improve pupils' writing fluency for high-stakes examinations which comprises of reproduction of writing models (product-based approach), writing for specific text or genres (genre-based approach) and process writing approach. Adding to that, one of the most frequent writing approaches that has been employed by a majority of the participants is product-based approach or studying a model-texts and duplicating them. In line to this study, a similar study was conducted to find the benefits of this approach as according to Tangpermoon as cited in Selvaraj and Aziz (2019), a student will be able to learn correcting vocabulary and creating various sentence patterns which will later improve pupils' gram-

matical awareness. Also, the researcher mentioned the same thing which is product-based approach is the best approach for low achievers in ESL classrooms. Based on the findings collected, it was also found that the least writing approach that the teacher employed is process-based approach. According to Selvaraj and Azizi (2019), process-based approach has its advantages, which is time-consuming as it focuses more on the process instead of the structures and grammatical errors. To support this finding, a similar study reported that process-based approach is more suitable for teaching and improving pupils' writing in tertiary level. Overall, teachers need to know their pupils well in order to cater to pupils' writing proficiency and ability to learn as well as acquiring the writing lesson.

## **5.2. Implications of the Study**

### **5.2.1. English Secondary School Teachers in Dual High-Stakes Examinations**

The findings obtained from this study emphasize the importance of discovering the English teachers' challenges in teaching writing. In Malaysia, writing task is seen as daunting and complex process due to its pre-writing (understanding the question and drafting), while-writing (correcting context and grammatical errors) and post-writing to finalised the writing task. However, this study will help teachers particularly those who are teaching English in secondary schools in Malaysia to identify the suitable writing approaches to be employed and adapted in not only improving pupils' writing but also to improve their grades and achievement in English. Recognizing the challenges of teaching writing provided, English secondary school teachers are encouraged to be familiar with the content before teaching, use suitable approach based on pupils' proficiency levels and their capability to comprehend English. Not only that, teachers are also encouraged to use variety of teaching materials which specifically were geared to improve pupils' writing fluency in a dual high-stakes examination like SPM and IGCSE. Moreover, English teachers teaching in MRSMs are encouraged to try new ways such as interactive activities, drilling writing exercises and IGCSE materials. This way, it gets to help pupils with varying proficiency level to have an effective writing practices rather than just using the textbook. Also, this study emphasizes on the importance of curbing the challenges by using the appropriate approach such as product-based approach. The importance of knowing the best approach will be the best solution in solving all of the challenges. Thus, every teacher is encouraged to know their pupils' proficiency levels as well as to know the differences of each approach and use them correctly in a lesson.

### **5.2.2. Limitations and Recommendations for Future Study**

This study has obtained and given useful information especially for teaching and learning in a dual high-stakes examinations context. However, this study still has some limitations that should be addressed. Firstly, a larger and more diversified participant drawn from various MRSMs and cultural contexts might improve



the study's external validity.

Besides, focusing on pupils' challenges in understanding and improving their writing for examinations would draw a better insight rather than just focusing on teachers' challenges solely. Besides, future study could do a comparative study between MRSMs system and government secondary school system for a better understanding to have a better grasp of the situation. This will allow researchers and Ministry of education to have the best standardised curriculum for every student in Malaysia. Apart from that, the qualitative method of this study might be useful to understand in-depth inquiry but will limit the ability to assess specific outcomes such as percentage of pupils' scores by using different approaches. Therefore, future study could use quantitative approaches needed to provide thorough understanding of this study.

## 6. Summary

To conclude, this study presents the findings, limitations and recommendations of this study to English teachers, future researchers as well as to the Ministry of Education. While this study gives beneficial insights, its shortcomings, such as a limited sample size of participants, the limited literature review on approaches in teaching writing fluency for the IGCSE examination or conducting a quantitative assessment, and opinions obtained from a variety of stakeholders highlight the need for further research. Future research may incorporate more participants from different MRSMs. Thus, it is hoped that the findings of this study could help other teachers to have some insights on how to enhance student's writing fluency, particularly for the IGCSE examination.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

## References

- Al Amin Ali, N. (2017). Efficacy of Explicit Teaching of Lexicographical Skills: The Case of Sudanese English Majors. *International Journal of Research in English Education*, 2, 47-66. <https://doi.org/10.18869/acadpub.ijree.2.3.47>
- Amin, A. M. (2020). *Challenges of Teaching English Writing Skills to Primary Level Pupils*. BRAC University.
- Aripin, M. A., & Yusoff, A. K. (2022). Level One English Language Teachers' Evaluation of the Quality and Suitability of the Super Minds CEFR Textbook for Local Use by Malaysian Pupils. *IJUM Journal of Educational Studies*, 10, 114-140. <https://doi.org/10.31436/ijes.v10i1.435>
- Azar, B. S. (1992). *Fundamentals English Grammar*. Prentice Hall, Inc.
- Azhari, M. A., Amir, N., Othman, S., Mohandas, E. S., Zamani, N. F. M., & Rahmat, N. H. (2022). Analysing Rhetorical Problems in Writing. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 12, 1277-1286.
- Baxter, P., & Jack, S. (2008). Qualitative Case Study Methodology: Study Design and Im-

- plementation for Novice Researchers. *The Qualitative Report*, 13, 544-559.
- Bello, T. (1997). Writing Topics for Adult ESL Students. In *The 31st Annual Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Language Convention* (pp. 1-12). ERIC Digest.
- Bembich, C., & Gasperdo, A. (2022). The Process of Signification of Emotions in a Social-Constructivist Perspective: Implications for Educational Practice. *Giornale Italiano di Educazione alla Salute, Sport e Didattica Inclusive*, 6, 1-12.
- Berndt, A. E. (2020). Sampling Methods. *Journal of Human Lactation*, 36, 224-226. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0890334420906850>
- Bilge, H., & Kalenderoğlu, İ. (2022). The Relationship between Reading Fluency, Writing Fluency, Speaking Fluency, Reading Comprehension, and Vocabulary. *Eğitim ve Bilim-Education and Science*, 47, 25-53.
- Bruner, J. S. (1961). *The Act of Discovery. Understanding Children*.
- Chen, D., & Yang, X. (2017). Improving Active Classroom Participation of ESL Students: Applying Culturally Responsive Teaching Strategies. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 7, 79-86. <https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.0701.10>
- Chukharev-Hudilainen, E., Saricaoglu, A., Torrance, M., & Feng, H. H. (2019). Combined Deployable Keystroke Logging and Eye Tracking for Investigating L2 Writing Fluency. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 41, 583-604. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S027226311900007X>
- Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research*. Pearson Education, Inc.
- Darmi, R., & Albion, P. (2013). English Language in the Malaysian Education System: Its Existence and Implications. In *Proceedings of the 3rd Malaysian Postgraduate Conference (MPC 2013)* (pp. 175-183). University of Southern Queensland.
- Dewey, J. (1925). Experience and Nature. In J. A. Boydston (Ed.), *Later Works* (vol. 1, pp. 230-350). Southern Illinois University Press.
- Dilshad, R. M., & Latif, M. I. (2013). Focus Group Interview as a Tool for Qualitative Research: An Analysis. *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences*, 33, 191-198.
- Flower, L., & Hayes, J. R. (1981). A Cognitive Process Theory of Writing. *College Composition and Communication*, 32, 365-387. <https://doi.org/10.58680/ccc198115885>
- Frenzel, A. C. (2014). Teacher Emotions. In *International Handbook of Emotions in Education* (pp. 494-519). Routledge.
- Garrison, D. R. (1993). A Cognitive Constructivist View of Distance Education: An Analysis of Teaching-Learning Assumptions. *Distance Education*, 14, 199-211. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0158791930140204>
- Harry, B., & Lipsky, M. (2014). Qualitative Research on Special Education Teacher Preparation. In M. McCray, T. Brownell, & B. Lignugaris/Kraft (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on Special Education Teacher Preparation* (pp. 445-460). Routledge.
- Hayes, J. R., & Flower, L. S. (2016). Identifying the Organization of Writing Processes. In *Cognitive Processes in Writing* (pp. 3-30). Routledge.
- Heissel, J. A., Adam, E. K., Doleac, J. L., Figlio, D. N., & Meer, J. (2021). Testing, Stress, and Performance: How Pupils Respond Physiologically to High-Stakes Testing. *Education Finance and Policy*, 16, 183-208. [https://doi.org/10.1162/edfp\\_a\\_00306](https://doi.org/10.1162/edfp_a_00306)
- Hidayati, K. H. (2018). Teaching Writing to EFL Learners: An Investigation of Challenges Confronted by Indonesian Teachers. *Journal of the Association for Arabic and English*, 4, 21-31. <https://doi.org/10.31332/lkw.v4i1.772>
- Hoque, K. E., Bt Kenayathulla, H. B., D/O Subramaniam, M. V., & Islam, R. (2020). Rela-

- tionships between Supervision and Teachers' Performance and Attitude in Secondary Schools in Malaysia. *Sage Open*, 10, 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244020925501>
- Jalaluddin, I. (2019). Process Approach in the Teaching of ESL Writing: Teacher's Assistance and Its Practicality in a Real Classroom. *Journal of Research, Policy & Practice of Teachers and Teacher Education*, 9, 66-78. <https://doi.org/10.37134/jrptte.vol9.no2.6.2019>
- Khadidja, K. (2020). Constructivist Theories of Piaget and Vygotsky: Implications for Pedagogical Practices. *Psychological & Educational Studies*, 13, 359-372.
- Khidhir, E. A., & Abbas, N. J. (2020). Strategies of Fostering Writing Skills to Improve EFL Learners' Writing Fluency in Erbil Secondary Schools. *Qalaa Zanist Journal*, 5, 242-279. <https://doi.org/10.25212/lfu.qzj.5.1.10>
- Kiger, M. E., & Varpio, L. (2020). Thematic Analysis of Qualitative Data: AMEE Guide No. 131. *Medical Teacher*, 42, 846-854. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0142159X.2020.1755030>
- Manchón, R. M., McBride, S., Martínez, M. D. M., & Vasylets, O. (2023). Working Memory, L2 Proficiency, and Task Complexity: Independent and Interactive Effects on L2 Written Performance. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 45, 737-764. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263123000141>
- Maxwell, J. A. (2021). Why Qualitative Methods Are Necessary for Generalization. *Qualitative Psychology*, 8, 111-118. <https://doi.org/10.1037/qup0000173>
- McCulley, G. A. (1985). Writing Quality, Coherence, and Cohesion. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 19, 269-282. <https://doi.org/10.58680/rte198515640>
- Mellinger, C. D., & Hanson, T. A. (2020). Methodological Considerations for Survey Research: Validity, Reliability, and Quantitative Analysis. *Linguistica Antverpiensia, New Series-Themes in Translation Studies*, 19, 867-900. <https://doi.org/10.52034/lanstts.v19i0.549>
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation* (4th ed.). Jossey Bass.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative Data Analysis*. SAGE.
- Mohamed, T. N. L. B. T., Rosly, R. B., & Tarmizi, M. L. B. M. (2018). Evaluating English Module: Guidance to Help Develop Ideas for Writing. *European Journal of Education*, 1, 64-68. <https://doi.org/10.26417/ejed.v1i2.p64-68>
- Morgan, H. (2022). Conducting a Qualitative Document Analysis. *The Qualitative Report*, 27, 64-77. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2022.5044>
- Moses, R. N., & Mohamad, M. (2019). Challenges Faced by Pupils and Teachers on Writing Skills in ESL Contexts: A Literature Review. *Creative Education*, 10, 3385-3391. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2019.1013260>
- Musa, N. C., Koo, Y. L., & Azman, H. (2012). Exploring Language Learning and Teaching in Malaysia. *GEMA Online Journal of Language Studies*, 12, 35-50. <http://ejournal.ukm.my/gema/article/view/20/14>
- Nelson, J. (2020). This Was an Easy Assignment: Examining How Pupils Interpret Academic Writing Tasks. In J. R. Hayes, et al. (Eds.), *Reading Empirical Research Studies* (pp. 94-130). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315044620-10>
- Onozawa, C. (2010). A Study of the Process Writing Approach. *Research Note*, 10, 153-163.
- Padmadewi, N. N., & Artini, L. P. (2019). Using Scaffolding Strategies in Teaching Writing for Improving Student Literacy in Primary School Advances in Social Science. *Education and Humanities Research*, 178, 156-160.

- <https://doi.org/10.2991/icoie-18.2019.36>
- Parr, A., Gladstone, J., Rosenzweig, E., & Wang, M. T. (2021). Why Do I Teach? A Mixed-Methods Study of In-Service Teachers' Motivations, Autonomy-Supportive Instruction, and Emotions. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 98, Article ID: 103228. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2020.103228>
- Peter, J., & Singaravelu, G. (2021). Problems in Writing in English among High School Learners. *Aegaum Journal*, 8, 1502-1515.
- Phuong, H. Y., & Le, T. T. (2023). Teaching Beliefs as a Dominant Factor Affecting English Instructors' Choice of Techniques to Teach Young Language Learners. *International Journal of Instruction*, 16, 573-596. <https://doi.org/10.29333/iji.2023.16331a>
- Piaget, J. (1964). Part I: Cognitive Development in Children—Piaget Development and Learning. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*, 2, 176-186. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tea.3660020306>
- Pilarska, J. (2021). The Constructivist Paradigm and Phenomenological Qualitative Research Design. In A. Pabel, J. Pryce, & A. Anderson (Eds.), *Research Paradigm Considerations for Emerging Scholars* (pp. 64-83). Channel View Publications. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781845418281-008>
- Rababah, L. M., Alshehab, M. H., & Melhem, N. Z. B. (2018). Exploring the Factors That Hinder Jordanian Pupils in Developing Creativity in EFL Writing. *International Journal of English and Education (IJEE)*, 7, 161-170.
- Rahayu, W. A., & Kala'lembang, A. (2021). The Relationship between Teachers' Motivation and Pupils' English Communication Skill. *Inovish Journal*, 6, 121-130. <https://doi.org/10.35314/inovish.v6i2.2138>
- Raimes, A. (1993). Out of the Woods: Emerging Traditions in the Teaching of Writing. In S. Silberstein (Ed.), *State of the Art TESOL Essays* (pp. 64-90). TESOL.
- Rao, P. S. (2019). The Importance of Speaking Skills in English Classrooms. *Alford Council of International English & Literature Journal (ACIELJ)*, 2, 6-18.
- Rashid, M. H., Ye, T., Hui, W., Li, W., & Shunting, W. (2022). Analyse and Challenges of Teaching Writing among the English Teachers. *Linguistics and Culture Review*, 6, 199-209. <https://doi.org/10.21744/lingcure.v6nS2.2004>
- Reid, J. M. (1995). *Learning Styles in the ESL/EFL Classroom*. Heinle & Heinle Publishers, International Thomson Publishing Book Distribution Center.
- Resnick, L. B. (1991). Shared Cognition: Thinking as Social Practice. In L. B. Resnick, J. M. Levine, & S. D. Teasley (Eds.), *Perspectives on Socially Shared Cognition* (pp. 1-20). American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/10096-000>
- Selvaraj, M., & Aziz, A. A. (2019). Systematic Review: Approaches in Teaching Writing Skill in ESL Classrooms. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 8, 450-473. <https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARPEd/v8-i4/6564>
- Seven, M. A. (2020). Motivation in Language Learning and Teaching. *African Educational Research Journal*, 8, 62-71.
- Smolucha, L., & Smolucha, F. (2022). Vygotsky's Theory In-Play: Early Childhood Education. In R. Evans, & O. N. Saracho (Eds.), *The Influence of Theorists and Pioneers on Early Childhood Education* (pp. 53-67). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003120216-6>
- Stake, R. E. (2000). Case Studies. In N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp. 435-454). Sage Publications.
- Supramaniam, K., & Mohamad Nazer, A. (2016). Two Rabbits in a Hat: Comparison of SPM English Language and IGCSE English as Second Language High-Stakes Tests. In

- G. de Mello, & M. S. Husin (Eds.), *Proceedings of National Conference of Research on Language Education* (pp. 218-226). Universiti Teknologi MARA.
- Supramaniam, K., Nazer, A. M., & Maaruf, S. Z. (2020). Teachers' Lived-Experience in a Dual High-Stakes Examination System. *The European Journal of Social & Behavioural Sciences*, 29, 154-170. <https://doi.org/10.15405/ejsbs.279>
- Thomson, P., & Gunter, H. (2011). Inside, outside, upside down: The Fluidity of Academic Researcher "Identity" in Working with/in School. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 34, 17-30. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1743727X.2011.552309>
- Vygotsky, L. S. (2021). Early Childhood. In L. S. Vygotsky (Ed.), *L.S. Vygotsky's Pedagogical Works. Volume 2. The Problem of Age* (pp. 153-187). Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-1907-6\\_8](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-1907-6_8)
- Wang, Y. (2022). Research on the Implications of Constructivism to Education. In *2022 8th International Conference on Humanities and Social Science Research (ICHSSR 2022)* (pp. 2793-2797). Atlantis Press. <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.220504.507>
- Wern, T. C., & Rahmat, N. H. (2021). An Investigative Study on the Types and Causes of ESL Writing Anxiety: A Case Study of Learners from a Chinese Independent Middle School. *European Journal of English Language Teaching*, 6, 19-36. <https://doi.org/10.46827/ejel.v6i3.3553>
- Yacob, N. S., & Yunus, M. M. (2019). Pupils' Perspectives on Challenges and Solutions to Learning English in Malaysian ESL Context. *Journal of Language and Communication (JLC)*, 6, 487-496.
- Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case Study Research: Designs and Methods* (5th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Yu, S., Yuan, K., & Wu, P. (2023). Revisiting the Conceptualizations of Feedback in Second Language Writing: A Metaphor Analysis Approach. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 59, Article ID: 100961. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2022.100961>
- Yusuf, Q., Jusoh, Z., & Yusuf, Y. Q. (2019). Cooperative Learning Strategies to Enhance Writing Skills among Second Language Learners. *International Journal of Instruction*, 12, 1399-1412. <https://doi.org/10.29333/iji.2019.12189a>
- Zaki, A. W., & Darmi, R. B. (2021). CEFR: Education towards 21st Century of Learning. Why Matters? *Journal of Social Science and Humanities*, 4, 14-20.