

Exploring Challenges in Writing Faced by a Year 4 Pupil: A Case Study

Rynna Kho Hui Shing, and Kho Chung Wei

Abstract – Writing skill is a productive skill whereby learners are required to produce the target language in the written form. This language skill is significant since it is used for communication and expressing thoughts. However, many people find writing difficult because it requires a high degree of clarity and conciseness to ensure that the reader understands what is being conveyed in the text. Thus, this study aims to discover the challenges faced by a Year 4 pupil in a Malaysian primary school when writing in English and the factors contributing to the sample's performance in writing skill. The participant of this study was purposely selected based on a set of inclusion criteria that were critical in answering the research objectives. Interviews, observations, and document collection were employed to collect necessary data to fit the purpose of the study. The data gathered were then analysed using two methods, error analysis and thematic analysis, as a means of data triangulation. The findings indicate that the challenges faced by the sample when writing can be categorised in terms of content, vocabulary, mechanic of writing, and syntactical. These challenges can be attributed to several emerging themes, including attitude towards learning English, impact of COVID-19, affective filter, negative classroom behaviours, lack of English language exposure, mother tongue influence and learning preferences. It is hoped that various stakeholders could benefit from this study's discoveries to enhance ESL learners' writing competence.

Keywords – writing skills, Malaysian primary school, challenges, factors

I. INTRODUCTION

The English language is a universal language as it is widely used by people across the globe. Ilyosovna (2020) stated that there are English speakers in most nations, with more than 350 million people using it as their first language (L1) and more than 430 million using it as a second. Having English as a commonly known language helps to overcome the language barrier within a society or even in a broader context. In Malaysia, each one of us is required to learn English as a second language (L2) through formal education. It is a compulsory subject in both primary and secondary education (Khalijah et al., 2018). Throughout the school years, learners must master the four basic English language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Writing skill is a productive skill or sometimes known as active skill whereby learners are required to produce the target language in the written form. When one has mastered the writing ability, one can easily express thoughts, convey information and communicate with others in written form.

However, writing is the most complicated form of expression and is opined as the final skill to be acquired in the English language acquisition (Pitamber, 2019). Due to the complexity of writing, many learners face difficulties writing in English. Thus, the challenges in writing faced by a low proficiency Year 4 pupil and factors influencing writing skill will be explored in depth through a qualitative case study.

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Writing is commonly regarded as the most complex linguistic ability (Pitamber, 2019). It is the hardest skill among the four English language skills as it involves many technical aspects of language, such as grammar, syntax, semantics, and lexical. It also necessitates complex cognitive processes, including planning, translating, and reviewing (Hayes & Flower, 1980). Regardless of degree, discipline, or mode of instruction, most educational systems across the globe view advanced writing proficiency as a crucial means and goal of formal education (White, 1986).

The importance of writing is greatly emphasised as it is a skill needed by people of all ages in their daily lives. It is a form of communication used to express thoughts and convey information. Hence, learners are expected to master writing and other skills at the end of their schooling year. Several previous studies show evidence of English language learners were facing problems and difficulties when writing in English (Aradillos et al., 2023; Febriani, 2022; Dang, 2019; Kabigting et al., 2019; Neda et al., 2012; Nurul et al., 2021). These studies also discovered that learners encounter issues and problems in their writing tasks due to motivation, anxiety, the interference of native language or first language (L1), and lack of ideas.

This qualitative case study was conducted to fill the gap and determine the possible challenges or issues Malaysian primary school pupils face when writing and the factors influencing their writing skill. This paper helped to further support and enhance the findings of research by Nurul et al. (2021). Apart from that, if the learners' writing concerns are not addressed since primary school level, it will inflict more learning problems in subsequent schooling years. By exploring this topic in-depth, teachers and parents can have a better understanding of learners' needs when acquiring English language skills, specifically writing. As the underlying causes of the problems are discovered, the students' writing skills can also be improved.

Rynna Kho Hui Shing, Institut Pendidikan Guru Malaysia
Kampus Batu Lintang, (Email address: rynnakho@gmail.com).
Kho Chung Wei, Institut Pendidikan Guru Malaysia Kampus
Batu Lintang, (Email address: madeline.kho@gmail.com).

III. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS

The main objectives of this study were to determine the challenges faced by a Year 4 pupil with low proficiency when writing in English and the factors that influence the pupil's writing skill. Hence, the research questions can be expressed as below:

1. What are the challenges faced by a Year 4 pupil with low proficiency when writing in English?
2. What are the contributing factors that influence the pupil's writing skill?

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

Challenges Faced in Writing

There has been a multitude of studies investigating writing issues among ESL students in both international and local contexts as well as different education levels (primary, secondary & tertiary). A recent study conducted by Mallika et al. (2022) to investigate the common errors made by Malaysian Chinese ESL learners in English writing revealed that tenses, object pronouns, plural nouns, prepositions, auxiliary verbs, and the omission of articles were some of the most frequent errors made by learners. All these mistakes are categorised as grammatical errors. They clarified that the learners' grammatical faults were influenced by the grammar rules of their L1 (Chinese). This shows that the occurrence of transfer from L1 to L2, leads to writing problems (Amanpreet & Mahendran, 2020). The findings of the study made by Siti and Liliati (2021) showed that 27% of the participants made errors in the aspect of subject-verb agreement due to the absence of it in the Malay language (L1). Febriani (2021) reported that the lack of knowledge of English grammar significantly impacted the quality of the writing produced. On the other hand, Nurul et al. (2021) did a similar study and identified six writing difficulties faced by the learners. The difficulties discovered were vocabulary, spelling, grammar, punctuation, rhetorical problems, and L1 interference. The greatest challenge experienced by the participants of the study was vocabulary because they lacked the necessary vocabulary to write. The finding showed that learners tended to replace the words they did not know in English with vocabulary from their L1 with the same meanings. These studies portrayed a similarity in the result whereby the L1 of the learners had greatly influenced their L2 writing experience. This is in agreement with Rahmah et al.'s (2018) statement that L2 learners relied heavily on the linguistic structures of their L1 when attempting to communicate (spoken or written form) in the target language, which frequently resulted in numerous errors.

Another writing issue faced by learners involves a lack of ideas. Febriani (2021) found that learners were concerned about their inability to express their thoughts, emotions, and experiences in writing. It is expected for learners to organise their thoughts in order to write on a particular topic, and to do it in linguistically appropriate ways (Genç-Ersoy & Gol-Dede, 2022). Dang (2019) discovered that 55% of ESL learners did not have

sufficient ideas when writing. Learners struggled to structure their ideas, form them into words, and find the appropriate or correct words to use (Aradillos et al., 2023). Since writing is an ideas-expressing task, it would be difficult for learners to write if they do not have ideas on what to write.

Lastly, spelling is also one of the writing challenges encountered by learners. Dang (2019) found that 32% of her participants made mistakes in terms of spelling. When students were unfamiliar with new words or lack the suitable vocabulary to employ in their writing, they frequently encounter spelling difficulties (Nurul et al., 2021). Moreover, Afrin (2016) asserted that learners have the propensity to spell based on their pronunciation, which leads to misspellings.

Factors Contributing to Writing Performance

Hanna et al. (2018) discovered that learners' lack of motivation has led to writing problems, whereby in the study, 26% of the participants were found to have low motivation. They implied that learners would only be inspired and motivated to write if the writing tasks provided were interesting. Learners' motivation can be increased by allowing them to work together with their friends (Ahmad, 2020). This suggests that teachers should implement cooperative learning in the classroom to promote more interaction among the learners as stated by Nguyen et al. (2021). Besides, Nurul et al. (2021) has mentioned that giving constructive and encouraging comments to learners would increase their motivation and urge them to write more. Moreover, Zafar (2016) implied that positive written feedback can motivate pupils, thus, enhancing their writing abilities.

Apart from that, Kabigting et al. (2020) observed that 82% (27 learners) of their participants had high anxiety in writing. The researchers also reported that more male learners experienced high writing anxiety than female learners. ESL learners might experience anxiety because they were worried about making errors (Febriani, 2022). Learners commonly faced cognitive anxiety because they were anxious about getting negative comments from peers and low marks from the educator (Kurniasih, 2017; Reni et al., 2018). Moreover, learners with limited writing skill and practice were frequently too concerned with the structure (Reni et al., 2018). When learners experience high anxiety, it will impact their writing ability. Hence, a low-anxiety classroom should be introduced by teachers to promote the improvement of writing skill, which is relevant to the Affective Filter Hypothesis by Krashen (1982).

Besides, reading is vital for enhancing the writing skills of learners (Aradillos et al., 2023). The findings indicated that reading various English materials could improve writing ability. The learners in the study regarded reading as a means of overcoming their difficulties with writing in English. Moreover, Dang (2019) claimed that poor reading habits would lead to writing difficulty. Since reading and writing are interdependent, pupils who do not read books and other reading materials will lack the ideas and language necessary for writing (Rachel & Maslawati,

2019).

V. METHOD

A qualitative research methodology is applied for this study. Aspers and Corte (2019) mentioned that qualitative research involves the collection, application, and approaches to various empirical resources. It is exploratory in which it aims to enlighten "how" and "why" a certain phenomenon behaves in a particular way in a given situation (Haradhan, 2018). This qualitative study was conducted through an intrinsic case study method whereby only one sample was involved. The sample of this study, Aina (pseudonym), was selected using purposive sampling, in which the inclusion criteria was established by the researcher. The selection of the sample was based on the recommendation of one of the English teachers at SK G. The characteristics of the sample selected were:

- a. Year 4 pupil
- b. studies in a Malaysian primary school
- c. English is not the L1
- d. has low proficiency in English
- e. tends to make errors when writing
- f. faces challenges when completing written tasks

This method ensures that the research questions can be answered, and the research objectives can be achieved to provide precise results. Next, the data collection method involved interviews, observations, and document collection. The interviews were conducted using semi-structured interview questions with Aina, her mother and her English teacher. Every interview process was audio recorded and then transcribed into written form. Meanwhile, observations were carried out three times. The first observation took place while Aina was completing a writing task prepared by the researcher, the second and the third were conducted during Aina's English class. Two types of observation were employed: naturalistic and participant observation. Apart from that, one of Aina's previous English written homework was also obtained from the English teacher. In this study, different sources of data were collected for data triangulation purposes. After the data collection process, the data were analysed using two types of data analysis methods: error analysis and thematic analysis. Error analysis was made on the documents collected, such as Aina's writing task and previous English homework. Meanwhile, thematic analysis was employed to analyse the interview transcripts and observation field notes.

VI. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Error Analysis

Grammar and Syntax

Based on the error analysis, writing errors in terms of grammar and syntax were identified. One of the errors made by Aina was incomplete sentences, whereby

the sentences she made were only at the phrase level. A phrase in syntax is a set of interrelated words that work together as a single unit inside a sentence. As an example, "at the beach" is a type of prepositional phrase as it consists of a preposition "at", a determiner "the" and an object "beach". Aina's usage of a single phrase in constructing a sentence resulted in an incomplete sentence, as a complete sentence requires both a subject and a predicate to express meaning effectively.

Moreover, the error analysis showed that Aina did not include a subject in her writing. For example, she wrote "is a reden book" without mentioning who was carrying out the action. It can also be seen that she did not include verbs in some of her sentences. For example, "yesterday moring I gellas of water breakfast" can be corrected as "Yesterday morning, I drank a glass of water for breakfast.". By adding the verb "drank", it helps to indicate the action that is done by the subject.

Furthermore, Aina's writing task highlighted tenses errors. Based on the documents, the tasks required her to create sentences in past tense. However, she used present tenses such as "is the packed" and "...I eat". Next, Aina made a grammatical mistake on the word form. She wrote "weather sun" to describe the weather. The word "sun" here is a noun. When describing something, we have to use adjectives. Hence, she was supposed to use the word "sunny" instead of "sun". Moreover, Aina's writing showed that she did not apply correct sentence structure in terms of word order. She did not use the subject-verb-object (SVO) rule of syntax when writing. For example, she wrote "for lunch firs rahas I eat.". The corrected version for this sentence would be "I ate fried rice for lunch.". The corrected version of the sentence is structured according to the SVO rule which enhances the clarity of the sentence.

Mechanic of Writing

Errors on the writing mechanic, including capitalisation, punctuation and spelling errors, were identified in Aina's writing. Masoud and Al-Deen's (2021) study found similar errors made by learners when writing in English. Regarding capitalisation, Aina did not begin most of her sentences with capital letters. She also tended to capitalise letters when not needed, such as, "Boy", "Swam" and "Happy". These examples were common nouns and did not appear at the beginning of the sentence.

Other than that, several punctuation errors were discovered in the documents. However, punctuation errors were not easy to identify as most of Aina's sentences were incomplete along with serious grammar errors. Hence, her train of thoughts were unclear, which impeded the researcher's ability to separate one notion from another. Aina's most common punctuation errors were comma (,) and full stop (.). She omitted the full stop in most of her sentences and continued writing her following sentence without indicating the end of a sentence or notion.

Vocabulary

Based on the error analysis conducted, it was discovered that the written work contained instances of Malay words. This occurrence may be attributed to Aina's native language being Malay. Aina may have lacked in her L2 vocabulary which led to the usage of L1 vocabulary. Some examples of Malay words used by Aina in her written task were “*taman permainan*” (*taman permainan*) and “*gellas*” (*gelas*) which mean playground and glass.

Thematic Analysis

RQ 1: What are the challenges faced by a Year 4 pupil with low proficiency when writing in English?

Lack of Content

When we write, we need ideas to form sentences. However, Aina was unable to express her ideas in written form as the teacher mentioned “...cannot communicate her ideas properly when writing”. Aina's mother further explained that whenever she attempted to communicate in English, she tended to express her thoughts incorrectly. Aina had shown difficulties in producing both spoken and written forms of the English language. Furthermore, Aina portrayed a lack of ideas when she copied the words from the questions into her response without providing further elaboration.

Aina's lack of ideas and inability to express ideas had caused lack of content in her writing. By referring to Flower and Hayes' (1980) Cognitive Process Model, there are three processes in writing: planning, translating, and reviewing. The generation of ideas occurs during the planning process; meanwhile, ideas are expressed during the translating process. The thematic analysis indicates that Aina's inadequacy in applying the planning and translating stages of writing had led to lack of content in writing, which subsequently impacted her writing performance. These findings can be supported by Dang (2019) who discovered that most of the ESL learners did not have sufficient ideas when writing. Moreover, Aradillos et al. (2023) found that learners struggled to structure their ideas, form them into words, and find the appropriate or correct words to use. Thus, Aina's lack of content was demonstrated as one of the challenges that she encountered during the writing process.

Mechanic of Writing

Mechanics of writing in this study involved the aspects of punctuation mark, spelling and capitalisation. The occurrence of errors in terms of mechanics of writing was also present in the error analysis. Aina's English teacher mentioned that she was weak in her punctuation. The researcher noted similar evidence during the observation whereby Aina did not use full stop at the end of a sentence. In addition, Aina mentioned that she was unfamiliar with the use of punctuation marks. It was observed that Aina only included full stop when prompted by the researcher. Intan (2015, as cited in Sarif & Hidayati,

2018) defined that punctuation is a collection of standard marks used in writing to clarify meaning and separate sentences, phrases and words. Due to Aina's omission of punctuation marks, her written work lacked clarity and was difficult to interpret.

Next, spelling errors could be identified in the writing produced by Aina. Some of the spelling errors made were “*reden*”, “*wter*”, and “*gellas*”. During the interview session, Aina admitted that she had problem in spelling when writing. Aina's unfamiliarity with the L2 spelling was evident when she spelled the word “*glass*” as “*gellas*” in her writing. The spelling of “*gellas*” in this instance was close to the spelling of “*glass*” in Malay which is “*gelas*”. This indicates that Aina's L1 which is the Malay language had influenced her English spelling. Furthermore, Nurul et al. (2021) mentioned that the spelling of a word in the Malay language corresponds to its pronunciation which causes the learners to frequently spell English words using the same technique. Aina may have applied the same method when spelling the word “*glass*” which led to her spelling error. This evidence showed the occurrence of negative language transfer. Chelster et al. (2021) made similar findings whereby the learner's native language (L1) had influenced the learning and output of the second language (L2). Moreover, this finding can be explained through the Input Hypothesis by Krashen whereby learners tend to substitute L1 rule into the production of L2 if they have not achieved a particular competence in the L2 (Krashen, 1982).

Furthermore, the English teacher mentioned “*capitalisation*” as one of Aina's challenges in writing. However, not much evidence on capitalisation was gathered through thematic analysis. Most of the evidence on capitalisation was identified through error analysis. Overall, it can be deduced that mechanics of writing was one of the writing challenges encountered by Aina.

Lack of Vocabulary

Aina was identified to lack the vocabulary needed when writing. For instance, she did not know the meaning of some simple words from the question such as weekend, weather and park. This impeded her to write the paragraph effectively. Besides, she had a problem with recalling the words in English. For instance, she was unable to state the English words for “*membaca buku*” and “*laut*” when being asked. Moreover, the researcher noted that she also used a Malay word such as “*taman permainan*” in her writing task to replace the English word which is “*playground*”.

Krashen (1982), through his Input hypothesis explained that learners would substitute the rule of L1 into L2 if they have not acquired the specific competence needed to express themselves in L2. This occurrence portrayed that Aina's lack of English vocabulary had led her to utilise her L1 vocabulary in her writing. Rizki et al. (2022) discovered a positive correlation between learners' vocabulary knowledge and writing competence. In their study, learners who had wide vocabulary were able to write well whereas those who had limited vocabulary could not write effectively. In the context of this study, Aina was

unable to write well as she lacked the vocabulary needed to express herself.

Syntax

In the English language, sentence structure and grammar are interdependent. While sentence structure specifies the arrangement of words, phrases, and clauses in a sentence, grammatical rules are necessary for the construction of grammatically correct sentences. The researcher noticed that Aina did not form complete sentences in most parts of her writing. This finding was aligned with the statement given by the English teacher whereby she said that Aina had problems with her sentence structures. Aina had also admitted that she had problems in sentence construction. Moreover, the error analysis had also shown evidence on incorrect sentence structure such as “is a Boy Swam”.

Apart from that, the researcher observed that Aina showed unfamiliarity with elements of grammar like pronoun, preposition and tenses when writing. The findings in this research can be supported by the studies made by Alghazo and Alshraideh (2020), Amanpreet and Mahendran (2020), Goldsmith and Sujaritan (2020), as well as Subadrah and Liang (2018) in which they attested that learner constantly portrayed errors in the aspects of grammar and syntax when writing. As Aina displayed various syntax challenges, there was a lack of clarity in Aina's written work. Febriani (2021) reported that the lack of English grammar knowledge had significantly impacted the writing quality of the learners. Hence, the syntax aspect of writing can be inferred as a significant challenge that Aina encountered when doing tasks related to English writing.

RQ 2: What are the contributing factors that influence the pupil's writing skill?

Attitude Towards Learning English

The attitude of learners during the learning process is crucial as it directly impacts their academic achievement and overall performance (Kudo, 1999 as cited in Thuan, 2021). In this study, it is shown that Aina had a positive attitude towards the English language. This phenomenon became evident when the researcher inquired about her perception on the importance of English in her life and the necessity of mastering writing skill, in which she responded, “penting”. Her responses to both questions indicated that she acknowledged the significance of the English language as a global medium of communication and recognised the necessity of attaining proficiency in it, particularly in writing skill. Moreover, the researcher found that Aina liked to learn English because she perceived learning English as something enjoyable and exciting.

Besides, the researcher identified that the sample portrayed a positive attitude towards learning English by showing eagerness in learning English. For example, Aina stated that she would learn English until she could master the writing skill by saying “sampai SPM”. SPM refers to

the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia, the compulsory standardised exam for all Form 5 learners before they finish secondary school. This depicts her determination to be proficient and write well in English. Furthermore, Aina explained that she enjoyed doing the writing task provided by the researcher. She remained positive and wanted to try doing the writing tasks given to her although she displayed various difficulties when completing the task.

Based on the analysis, Aina exhibited a generally positive attitude towards the English language. As per the findings made by Gardner (1985), there is a significant correlation between positive attitudes and motivation, and the achievement of success in SLA. This explains that learners with positive attitudes towards the English language and high motivation tend to succeed in their SLA (Thuan, 2021). However, this assumption does not align with this study's findings because Aina still exhibited poor writing performance despite portraying a positive attitude towards her English language learning. Therefore, in this study, the sample's attitude towards English was not considered as the contributing factor that affected her English writing skill.

Impacts of COVID-19

In 2019, the world faced a critical major outbreak of a virus disease known as Coronavirus or COVID-19. In response to this global pandemic, Malaysia had implemented Movement Control Order (MCO) to curb the spread of the disease. During MCO, educational institutions were mandated to cease operations, leading to the adoption of online learning (Sumitra & Roshan, 2021). This affected Aina a lot in her learning because she was in Year 1 when MCO happened, as expressed by her mother and English teacher. A total of 17 months of school closure had caused Aina to fall behind in lessons because she missed out her Year 1 and Year 2 schooling years and only got to attend school as usual during Year 3. Apart from that, Aina's mother explained that Aina also missed out of school even before MCO at the age of six due to her leg injury. These data showed clear evidence that Aina missed out a lot on early years of school, causing her to lack in many aspects of her English language learning.

Apart from that, traditional face-to-face learning was replaced by online learning, ensuring continuity in the teaching and learning (T&L) process. However, it was thought to be an ineffective mode of learning as mentioned by Aina's mother. The study made by Zulaikha et al. (2021) displayed similar findings whereby the research participants highlighted the lack of effectiveness of online distance learning (ODL) in contrast to traditional face-to-face classroom learning as they believed that online learning failed to foster their intrinsic motivation towards the enjoyment of the learning process. This implies that although online learning has been used as a substitute for conventional learning, it does not guarantee equivalent learning experiences for learners. Besides, Wayan et al. (2023) discovered that online learning deployed during the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in learning loss since learners could not follow learning optimally. This explains

that Aina may have experienced learning loss due to COVID-19, which then impacted her writing performance.

Overall, the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic has had an extensive impact on Aina's educational advancement. Due to a prolonged absence of adequate instructional practises, her English writing proficiency has been adversely affected.

Affective filter

Krashen (1982) posits in his Affective Filter hypothesis that many crucial aspects contributing to learners' performance in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) are closely linked to the student's emotional state which includes confidence, motivation and anxiety. Based on the data collected, Aina had displayed high confidence when writing as she confidently asserted that she was able to do the writing task. This highlights that Aina was confident with her writing ability despite showing low writing performance. Roy's (2018) study found that students' essay writing achievement was highly influenced by their self-confidence. Specifically, individuals who possessed a higher level of confidence demonstrated better results than those who exhibited lower confidence levels. However, Aina exhibited subpar performance in her writing task, as seen by numerous errors, which was in contrast with her apparent confidence in her writing abilities. This illustrates that Aina's writing proficiency was not attributable to her confidence level.

Next, the English teacher commented that Aina did show motivation during her lesson although it was inconsistent. Apart from that, Aina exhibited signs of fear of making mistakes, as seen by her reluctance to express her thoughts and stuttering when responding to the researchers' inquiries regarding the writing tasks. In this instance, she may hesitate as she was afraid that the answers given by her were incorrect and did not meet the researcher's expectations. Besides, she showed anxiousness as she kept looking at the researcher when spelling the word, she was unsure of. Furthermore, the data gathered revealed that Aina had a lower level of self-efficacy in writing, as evidenced by her refusal to engage in the assigned writing task due to her belief that she lacked the necessary competence to complete it successfully.

Aina's signs of reluctance, anxiousness and low self-efficacy could be attributed to her anxiety when producing the English language. According to Ho (2016, as cited in Demir, 2018), learners who experience elevated levels of anxiety when it comes to writing tend to demonstrate a lower degree of self-efficacy in their writing ability. Consequently, Aina's portrayal of high anxiety and low self-efficacy had led to her low writing performance. Moreover, the depiction of her reluctance and anxiousness when required to perform productive skills is aligned with a study by Norfadhilah (2020), whereby ESL learners felt anxious about making mistakes in speaking and writing. According to Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, learners who experience high anxiety when learning will raise their affective filter, which impedes effective learning. Overall, it can be concluded that Aina's writing competence was primarily affected by the anxiety

that she had in the ESL classroom. However, motivation and confidence factors did not significantly impact the study as Aina showed a high level of self-confidence in her writing and a moderate level of motivation when learning English.

Negative Classroom Behaviours

Negative classroom behaviours appeared to be one of contributing factors that affects Aina's writing skill. The findings highlighted that Aina's lack of attention in her English caused her to be confused during the lesson. For instance, she could not respond correctly to the question posed by the teacher, even though it had just been taught. This shows that Aina was not attentive to the teacher when she was teaching. In addition, her confusion also resulted in lack of involvement as she could not understand the lesson.

Although Aina was found to have a positive attitude towards learning English, she still showed inattentiveness during English class. This may happen because she has problems in maintaining her focus during the lesson. Cicekci and Sadik (2019) explain that students of all levels of education share similar experiences of difficulties concentrating and maintaining attention. In the SLA process, the role of attention is crucial as learners must be engaged to acquire the language (Tg, 2022). According to the Noticing Hypothesis proposed by Richard Schmidt in 1990, learners need to be aware and conscious of the input during the learning process (Schmidt, 1990). Therefore, for learning to occur, learners must maintain focus when learning (Schmidt, 2010). In this study, Aina's lack of attention and focus during the lesson had affected her knowledge in the English language as the input was not registered into her long-term memory. Consequently, she depicted a low proficiency in the language especially in her writing.

Furthermore, Aina's behaviour and personality also leaned towards negative classroom behaviours. Aina showed negative behaviours like being passive, putting her head on the table, and sleepy. Moreover, Aina was slow when doing writing tasks and following instructions. The researcher also observed that Aina had a shy personality which had led to less classroom engagement.

It is evident that the negative classroom behaviours depicted by Aina were all interrelated and had potentially impacted her English language academic performance. As Aina portrayed lack of attention during T&L, her passiveness and slow responses towards the learning acted as her coping mechanism as she could not grasp on what was being taught by the teacher. Moreover, her shyness had also contributed to her less engagement in the classroom as she may not want to attract attention. This statement can be further supported by Soo and Goh's (2013) study whereby the findings revealed that students who exhibited reticence in the ESL classroom tended to be passive during T&L. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that Aina's undesirable behaviours within the ESL classroom may have had an influence on her writing competence.

Lack of English Language Exposure

The exposure of English can occur in various ways, including listening, speaking, reading and writing. Al-Zoubi (2018) explained that exposure to language refers to the interaction that language learners have with the specific language they are trying to acquire. The environment in which English language learners live has a direct impact on the language acquisition process. In this study, the researcher identified that Aina lacked the usage of English at home. Aina's mother mentioned that the English language was only employed when she was angry, which shows the occurrence of code-switching. Code-switching is when individuals transition from one language to another, either verbally or in writing, to accommodate and adapt to a distinct context (Rika & Mashadi, 2021). The evidence showed that Aina employed listening skill at home, but not her speaking skill. The researcher believes that practising receptive skill (listening) alone without engaging the productive skill (speaking) in this context is not enough. It can be inferred that Aina had minimal exposure to the listening skill of the English language and nearly no exposure to the speaking skill at home.

Apart from that, the lack of English exposure from the aspect of reading can also be identified. The data collected showed that Aina had the habit of reading, however, she preferred reading Malay books more than English. Aina's mother revealed that Aina had English books at home, but the language level of the book was of lower level. Moreover, the mother stated that Aina had less interest towards reading in English and she only liked to watch YouTube videos that are in English. Her disinterest towards reading in English and the lack of reading English materials happened due to her inability to read well in English as mentioned by the English teacher. Due to her limited reading proficiency, she had trouble comprehending the materials, leading her to avoid reading books in English and instead opting for Malay books, which she may find easier to understand the language. Findings by Aradillos et al. (2023), Dang (2019), and Rachel and Maslawati (2019) reported on the significance and roles of reading in the learners' writing skill. Moreover, Arum (2018) revealed that learners' writing performance was affected by their reading habits whereby those who had good reading level were able to write well. However, as Aina did not have a good reading habit, her writing performance was negatively impacted.

In terms of writing aspect, Aina displayed minimal writing practices outside of the ESL classroom. She mentioned that she only did writing tasks in English class and homework given by the teacher. Through the interviews with Aina and her mother, it was found that Aina did not do writing practices on her own initiative. Not only that, but she also expressed her disapproval by immediately saying "no" in a whining manner when the teacher mentioned homework to them. This situation suggests that Aina dislikes doing writing tasks outside of the ESL classroom as she may not like doing tasks independently. From these findings, it suggests that Aina's lack of writing practices may have contributed to her writing challenges. Since writing skill is the most difficult

skill among the four skills (Pitamber, 2019), it is important for Aina to put extra effort in practising writing to increase her writing performance (Parupalli, 2017). This statement can be supported by Swain's (1985) Output Hypothesis whereby it suggests that learners have to actively produce the language through speaking and writing as well as receiving feedback on the clarity of their output in order to improve. Overall, this theme highlighted that Aina had limited exposure to the English language as her usage of English was primarily confined to the ESL classroom which then led to her weak performance in writing.

Mother Tongue Influence

Aina's mother tongue is the Malay language. She stated that she had been growing up using Malay Sarawak language in her daily life. She mentioned that she rarely used L2 to communicate at home except when doing homework with her mother. In this study, there were several impacts of L1 towards the learning of Aina's L2 could be identified. One of them was the use of L1 in L2 writing. For instance, she admitted that she did not know the terms in English when she was doing the writing task which led to the use of Malay vocabulary in the writing such as "gellas". This suggests that when Aina faces difficulty in recalling the vocabulary of the L2, she tends to opt for their L1 as she is more familiar with it. Febriani (2021) discovered that learners tended to replace the words they did not know in English with vocabulary from their L1 with the same meanings. Besides, Aina's L1 had also caused her to have problems in spelling and grammar when writing. Due to the divergence in grammatical rules between Aina's L1 and the L2, errors in L2 production occur.

This shows that the interferences of learners' L1 on their L2 were inevitable. This is in agreement with Rahmah et al.'s (2018) statement that L2 learners relied heavily on the linguistic structures of their L1 when attempting to communicate (spoken or written form) in the target language, which frequently resulted in numerous errors. Krashen (1982), through his Input hypothesis explained that learners would substitute the rule of L1 into L2 if they have not acquired the specific competence needed to express themselves in L2. This occurrence shows the interference of learners' L1 upon the L2 which can be either positive or negative.

Furthermore, the data showed that Aina had a preference towards the Malay language over English. She stated that she liked Malay more because it was easier than English. Moreover, Aina's inclination towards her L1 was apparent as she preferred writing in Malay over English. The evidence presented is reinforced by the comment made by Aina's mother, who expressed that Aina engaged in more Malay writing at home. This indicates Aina's preference for the Malay language, leading to her increased practise in writing using that language. However, writing practices on the L2 were not emphasised enough, resulting in her weak writing performance.

In terms of instructional language, the researcher and the English teacher employed the Malay language when guiding and communicating with Aina. This suggests that using L1 for instructional language may help

learners understand better. All in all, the evidence of this study showed that Aina's L1 had impacted her L2 writing ability as she was more familiar with her L1's rules and vocabulary. Not only that, her preference towards the L1 showed that she was more comfortable in using Malay rather than English resulting in her lack of practice in the L2. Simultaneously, her writing performance in English was affected in which she showed various challenges when writing.

Learning Preferences

The notion of learning preferences encompasses several circumstances that influence how learners perceive, retain, process, and recall information they are attempting to learn (James & Gardner, 1995). Based on the observation during the English lesson, Aina's English teacher had conducted a group work activity for a writing task as a part of her lesson. However, Aina seemed to not enjoy working in a group as she acted passively during the activity. In this study, Aina's passiveness could be attributed to the negative experiences she had with her groupmate because they appeared to be intentionally ignoring her for unclear reasons. As per the findings made by Prathibarani and Parilah (2020), the application of collaborative writing in the ESL classroom enhances the efficacy of the learning process and yields favourable outcomes such as enhanced understanding and improvement in academic performance. Moreover, Rezaei (2017) asserted that group work or collaborative learning managed to motivate learners during T&L process and improve learning experiences. However, the data presented in this study did not suggest similar outcomes on group work in the ESL classroom as Aina did not portray enjoyment. As Aina showed lack of enjoyment in group work for writing tasks, she might not be able to learn effectively, leading to her poor writing performance.

Moreover, Aina was found to portray interest in drawing when she spent more time drawing than writing when doing the writing task in the class. During the group work activity, she only contributed by decorating the manilla paper with her drawings. Apart from that, Aina's mother mentioned that she preferred listening in English over writing. These findings suggest that Aina had an interest in engaging with visual and auditory materials. However, Aina's English teacher was found to employ the traditional chalk-and-talk method and did not employ engaging materials such as music and pictures during the lesson to cater to the different learning needs of the learners. According to Sternberg (1994), learning style is a favoured approach in utilising one's abilities. Every learner has unique learning styles according to their needs and intelligences. Aina is believed to have visual and auditory learning styles as she showed interest in drawing, listening and watching English videos. Reid (1995, as cited in Hamed and Almabruk, 2021) explained that visual learners learn effectively through their eyes while auditory learners acquire knowledge better through their ears.

When we talk about learning styles, it is vital for us to include the Multiple Intelligences Theory proposed by Howard Gardner in 1983. In the context of this study, Aina leaned more on spatial-visual and musical

intelligence as she liked to do things related to visual and auditory. By understanding learners' learning styles and intelligences, teachers can plan their lesson according to them to ensure the effectiveness of T&L. Teachers must match their teaching style according to the learning styles and intelligences of the learners to ensure that their needs can be fulfilled (Taase et al., 2015). However, in this study, the English teacher did not match her teaching style with Aina's learning style which may be one of the reasons for her weak performance in English writing. Findings made by Hamed and Almabruk (2021) had shown positive impacts on the matching of teaching styles with learners' learning style. Hence, it is recommended that Aina's English teacher incorporates materials related to music and videos in her lesson using technology tools to cater to Aina's intelligences and learning styles.

Other than that, Aina seemed to show constant need for guidance from the teacher, researcher and her sister when involved in writing activity. Aina's teacher and mother asserted that she usually refused to do writing tasks on her own. These findings highlighted that Aina preferred to do her writing task with the presence of other people who are more proficient. According to the Sociocultural Theory of Cognitive Development posited by Vygotsky, scaffolding is the assistance a more knowledgeable other (MKO) provides to help learners go through their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (McLeod, 2023). Vygotsky's concept of the ZPD emphasises the spectrum of tasks that a learner can accomplish with guidance yet lacks the ability to complete autonomously. Individuals that consistently rely on guidance may be working inside their ZPD, wherein the assistance supplied by educators serves as the scaffolding required to effectively accomplish tasks (Burkholder & Peláez, 2000).

However, there are no definitive guidelines on the utilisation of scaffolding which then lead to the generalisation that all kinds of support given to learners are classified as scaffolding (Hammond, 2001; Jacobs, 2001). As mentioned by Verenikina (2008), the concept of scaffolding is frequently misinterpreted as direct instruction. In fact, those two concepts are totally distinct whereby scaffolding entails providing assistance through prompts, hints, and support, whereas direct instruction involves the child becoming passive and blindly receiving the input given. In other words, direct instruction can be perceived as the act of spoon feeding the learner during the T&L process (Dehler & Welsh, 2014). In this present study, it is evident that Aina was constantly expecting help from the MKO whenever she faced difficulties when writing. It is suggested that the MKO in this context may have provided direct instruction or spoon-fed instead of scaffolding Aina. As the pattern continued, Aina failed to do her writing task independently which then hindered her to improve her writing performance.

VII. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study has shed light on the writing challenges and factors affecting the writing skill of a Year 4 pupil in Malaysia. It was shown that the challenges of writing English include lack of content,

mechanics of writing, lack of vocabulary and syntax meanwhile, the factors that affect writing were impact of COVID-19, affective filter, negative classroom behaviours, lack of English exposure, mother tongue influence and learning preferences.

Based on the findings that have been made, stakeholders can analyse and evaluate the most effective approach for enhancing learners' writing competency from an early stage. For example, English teachers should provide a positive and conducive learning environment for learners through the implementation of game-based learning to lower the learners' anxiety level. Apart from that, teachers should take into account different learning styles and intelligences then adapt their teaching styles accordingly to ensure that effective and meaningful learning can take place. Although this study has provided comprehensive findings on the writing challenges faced by a Year 4 pupil (Aina) in a Malaysian primary school and the factors contributing to her writing skill through a case study, it is hoped that other researchers will do a similar study but employing other research design such as survey.

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