

Academic Writing among Students Who Are Gifted: Issues, Challenges, and Recommendations

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to examine the issues and challenges related to academic writing among students who are gifted in Malaysia. The methodology involves downloading and analyzing research papers via Google Scholar, ERIC, Academia, ResearchGate, and other websites. Secondary findings indicate that the gifted often experience various writing impediments. First, they may experience a blocked writing gate whereby they display excellent oral skills, but are unable to write their ideas on paper. Second, a mismatch between their motor and mental development may hinder their writing; despite their high verbal ability, they often resist when asked to do academic writing. Third, those who experience a disconnect between advanced vocabulary and writing can often read and eloquently discuss texts, but are unable to produce a written essay at the same level. Fourth, lack of mental maturity and dual and multiple exceptional abilities can impede their writing, which requires motor and cognitive maturity, but some of the gifted are not ready because the information processing segment of their brains is lagging behind their biological age. Fifth, unproductive psychosocial factors may result in writing hindrances among the gifted, such as, rigid thinking, exceptional personal interests, perfectionism, and twice-exceptionality attributes. Sixth, some of the gifted are reluctant to engage in informational text writing, probably because of the lack of emphasis in the curriculum or teacher reluctance to teach it. Lastly, while many of the gifted may start reading early, they lack the cognitive structure and creative infrastructure from which to build, process, and organize their ideas to be put on paper. In light of the secondary findings, several recommendations are made on ways to enhance academic writing among the gifted.

Keywords: academic writing, students who are gifted, issues and challenges, Malaysia.

I. INTRODUCTION

All students, including the gifted, need to develop effective writing skills. However, even the most talented writers are adversely affected by various spelling and conventions (Levin, 2021). It is a misconception that all gifted readers will become effective academic writers; even those who are highly eloquent are often hindered by physical, emotional, or psychomotor factors. While some struggle with perfectionism, others have abundant ideas, but no clear strategies for putting their thoughts into writing. Still others have the impostor syndrome as they erroneously compare themselves against others that leads to feelings of inadequacy. Further, academic writing for the gifted is as affective and psychomotor as it is cognitive; hence, a writing community for the gifted requires more than just pens, clipboards, foolscap paper, or an intelligent terminal. They need a safe place to share their writing that allows them to articulate, solicit feedback, and experience the joy of fostering a responsive readership. The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of the academic writing problems and issues confronting students who are gifted. The methodology involves

downloading and analyzing relevant research papers via Google Scholar, ERIC, Research Gate, and other websites. Lastly, in light of the secondary findings, several recommendations are made on ways to enhance students' academic writing skills.

II. ACADEMIC WRITING PROBLEMS AMONG THE GIFTED

A. Blocked writing gate

One of the most common and misdiagnosed information processing problems among the gifted is a blocked writing gate, which is an energy leak caused by a grapho-motor processing problem or visual/motor integration challenge. It explains why some students can learn their spelling words easily by writing them a few times, while others are unable to transfer them into long-term memory despite writing the same words many times (Craft, 2016). Additionally, while some of the gifted possess excellent reading or oral skills, they are unable to write things down, which causes them great frustration. For example, some may leave letters out of words, while others can dictate elaborate stories, but are unable to compose them in simple sentences on paper. Additionally, their processing glitches often make them feel threatened; hence, they start protesting the minute they are required to express their ideas in black and white. Generally, after some time and exposure, students can think and compose simultaneously as the skill automatically crosses over into their right brain hemisphere. However, for some, this transfer takes a long time to occur; therefore, they have to exert greater energy to concentrate on a writing task than others.

B. Mismatch between motor and mental development

While most of the gifted often examine everything within reach, sail through the science curriculum, ponder over century-old politics, or spout innovative ideas, many seem to struggle with formal academic writing (Butler, 2017). The highly verbal who churn out facts all day long often cower when given a pen and paper to express them. Others may autonomously produce fiction about magical flying dragons from a faraway planet, but are unwilling to engage in any academic writing. Writing is a complex skill that requires not just an agile mind, but also specific mental and psychomotor skills that may lag behind a student's ability to conduct chemistry experiments or evaluate political decisions. While writing can be coached, it seems to develop independently of other cognitive skills. Additionally, it requires complex psychomotor skills, such as, manipulating a writing utensil or keying in data, which take time to mature. Some of the gifted may be deterred by fine motor skills that develop at a typical rate for others; the mismatch between their train of thoughts and the pace of an uncertain hand can be painstakingly enough to make them slump in despair while trying to capture those fleeting ideas.

Butler (2017) added that some of the gifted lack the mental discipline to write academic essays. They are unable to decelerate their rapid thoughts to write them down, mentally process and organize their scattered thoughts to decide what should come first, while disregarding the extraneous. Unfortunately, such mental processing requires a fair amount of executive function that they have not developed yet. Moreover, academic writing is highly structured and prescribed; therefore, the gifted who possess the mental discipline to freely compose stories and other highly imaginary pieces often struggle when it comes to highly conventional writing. Moreover, academic writing is far more formal and laden with bona fide rules, for instance, it requires attention to etiquette, from organization to the selection of reliable and valid sources. For some of the gifted, academic writing is simply not as interesting or free-spirited as creative writing, as it requires following a specific prompt or addressing a topic that is not in their favor.

C. Disconnect between advanced vocabulary and writing

Wessling (2018) asserted that, while some of the gifted have sophisticated vocabulary, they may struggle with mental processing and penmanship; the disjoint becomes even more obvious as they become physically more mature. While they can readily read and discuss a text, they are also expected to write an essay at the same level. Unfortunately, some are not mature enough to do any advanced writing that requires higher level thinking due to asynchronous development. Moreover, no amount of pushing can eliminate the issues of asynchronous development; in fact, coercing will worsen their self-esteem. Academic writing never develops from being imposed; students need time to develop their writing fluency to express their preferred things before they can be stipulated to write in accordance to convention and etiquette. Additionally, over-focusing on the lagging area will make them perceive themselves as problematic academic writers; subsequently, they will allow the problem to define them and try to avoid it. For example, the perfectionistic will start to dismiss academic writing since it makes them feel like a failure; subsequently, they may develop a mental block, and once that happens, it will be difficult for them to resume their writing tasks.

D. Lack of mental maturity and dual and multiple exceptional abilities

Some of the gifted appear to be highly mature in outlook; however, only certain parts of their brains are much more advanced beyond their biological age, while the other parts merely show age-appropriate, and sometimes, even lower development. Therefore, they may lack the maturity needed for effective academic writing; even the highly creative may succumb to academic writing because they are not mature enough to process its implications. A student who has previously refused to do any academic writing may suddenly become a young adult who excels in composing academic essays and takes pride in doing so. However, some teachers simply lack the awareness on such a phenomenon or lack the patience to wait for its occurrence (Wessling, 2018).

On the other hand, many students who are gifted are also dual and multiple exceptional; therefore, they often produce inconsistent output due to the demanding nature of academic writing (Potential Plus UK, 2019). While they can readily form letters, it may take them a longer time and more energy compared to peers without any developmental gaps. Some of the gifted may be able to produce a well-constructed paragraph one day, but may struggle to write a simple sentence down the following day. As written expression requires more conscious and deliberate effort, they may have difficulty switching their mindset smoothly and applying their skills consistently and reliably, thus resulting in exasperation compared to their same-age peers. While they have the motivation to comply and are strongly focused during times of peak performance, they are unable to sustain such efforts consistently whilst also contending with the demands of everyday life because logical expression requires intense mental processing. Moreover, they also encounter writing difficulties because expressing ideas is a multifaceted developmental process that involves cognitive, sensory, and psychomotor development.

Additionally, academic writing is heavily influenced by the frontal brain, where executive functions and working memory lie. The gifted who are dual and multiple exceptional often lack the basic executive ability to plan, organize, and perform tasks. They also lack the working memory to remember information and manipulate it in the short run. For example, they may lack the capability to recall facts and organize them in a sequential manner. Others may lack the ability to apply the rules for spelling or organizing information. In brief, lack of executive functioning and working memory often results in emotional distress among some of the the gifted because they are (a) unable to catch up with the rest of the class, (b) being unfairly criticized for being inattentive or indolent, (c) being regarded as untidy or sloppy in their work, (d) lagging behind with their school work, and (e) being detained at school to complete unfinished work (Potential Plus UK, 2019).

E. Unproductive psychosocial and personality factors

Conrad (2022) postulated that some of the gifted experience writing difficulties due to rigid thinking, unique personal interests, perfectionism, and twice-exceptionality. Besides proper executive functioning, academic also requires adherence to conventions, external reviews, and expressed attention to detail; however, some of the gifted may lack such abilities. As aforementioned, their writing skills may not match their thought processes due to asynchronous development, which often causes unpleasant classroom experiences, aggravation, and self-doubt. Additionally, some of the gifted also display writing disabilities that are often linked to poor spelling, handwriting, and difficulty in expressing their thoughts on paper. They may also struggle with writing because of debilitating anxiety, fear of failure, and self-criticism.

Kelly (2024) maintained that there are three major types of unproductive personalities in the writing class. The first type is the verbose or those who struggle to be concise and succinct despite having strong verbal skills. They appear to be very productive, and yet unable to move beyond the first draft for baseline assessment while their peers have finished long ago. The second type of writing personality is the perfectionistic or those who seem to dislike academic writing and experience writer's block all the time. They often lament that they lack the ability and motivation to elaborate on their ideas or that they do not know how to commence. The third type of writing personality is the "voice" or those who are extremely imaginative, select reading materials with state-of-the-art digital devices, and have every intention of emulating their preferred writing mentors. Their primary purpose for writing is to entertain; however, by exclusively focusing on style, they often neglect the plot, main ideas, and other fundamental aspects of academic writing.

F. Reluctance to teach informational text writing

According to Erbasan and Dedeoglu (2023), many of the gifted do not evidence the desired level of writing informational texts. When asked to write one, some seem unable to remember the fundamental informational text features, while others often try to solicit help from peers, or are simply reluctant to write. As aforementioned, the notion that most of the gifted

possess advanced writing skills is a misconception. While they often speedily fill out their workbook exercises or answer textbook questions faster and more accurately than their peers, there is no absolute link between such abilities and academic writing excellence. There are many reasons why some of them are not up to par in terms of informational text writing, for example, it is not given enough emphasis at high schools or junior college, while teachers have the erroneous idea that most students lack the desire to read and summarize informational texts, that it is difficult to source appropriate texts, or that students are not mature enough to paraphrase and summarize informational texts.

G. Lack of structure and creative infrastructure

While many of the gifted start reading books when their same-age peers are still tracing alphabetical letters, they tend to lack the structure and creative infrastructure needed to put ideas in black and white. Their ability to effortlessly absorb everything via visual, auditory, tactile, or olfactory modalities often helps them develop impressive ideologies, extreme sensitivities, or uncanny insights, besides articulating fine details of an experience or topic with advanced vocabulary. However, they often perceive academic writing as an insurmountable task that commands them to place complex thoughts and intense feelings on a written medium. Using accurate grammar, correct spelling words, or concise subject/verb agreement are simply not their forte. They lack the processing structure from which to brainstorm, internalize, and organize their ideas. While they are brilliant and highly motivated to overcome challenges, they lack the creative infrastructure to think outside the box for creative problem-solving (Rockland Parent, 2024).

III. ACADEMIC WRITING CHALLENGES AMONG MALAYSIANS

A. Prewriting difficulties

There is a lack of research on the academic writing issues and challenges faced by the gifted in Malaysia. However, numerous researchers have examined the writing obstacles experienced by school, college, and university students who mostly learn English as a second language. Hiew (2012) found that many Malaysian students require more time to write an essay as they tend to experience difficulty in finding ideas to plan their essay outlines in the prewriting stage. Further, they also require more time in the writing stage because they have to mentally construct sentences in their first language or mother-tongue (L1) before translating it into English. Simultaneously, they often allocate a large amount of time checking unfamiliar English words using a bilingual dictionary or an online translator. Lastly, in the revising stage, they devote a lot of time to ensure that their sentences were grammatically correct and comprehensible, besides ensuring that their ideas, sentences, and paragraphs are coherently and cohesively arranged. Additionally, many first-year university students have difficulty writing academic essays because they are unable to paraphrase accurately, synthesize information, or cite relevant sources because these skills are not covered at secondary school.

B. Negative transfer and grammar parameters

Hui, Ariffin, and Ma'rof (2018) postulated that many students have difficulties in writing English due to negative transfer, which occurs when English learning is influenced by their L1. Interpretation between two vastly different languages often adversely affects English acquisition when students negatively transfer their L1 into English, leading to language mixing, code switching, and other language varieties. For example, students may take pronunciation, vocabulary, or grammar from their L1, and subsequently transferring it into English. Mismatches between L1 and English results in negative transfer, which impedes writing in the second language. Further, errors due to negative transfer can also be due to students directly applying their L1 on English by translating literally or alternating the structure. In addition to errors, negative transfer can also cause underproduction whereby students produce few or no examples of the English structure; or overproduction, whereby they misinterpret English messages when applying their L1 over them. Lastly, the unmarked settings of grammar parameters generally differ between two languages; therefore, the transferring process becomes rather difficult for Malaysian students who have already set their marked settings.

C. Shyness, diffidence, and fear of embarrassment

D'silva (2019) reported shyness, diffidence, and fear of embarrassing themselves tend to hinder Malaysian students in their effort to learn English. Some students seldom speak English for fear of being mocked as westernized, or due to anxiety that people would regard them as "less" Malaysian. These psychosocial barriers, which often cause fear of failure and reticence, tend to make students skip the opportunities to augment their speech and writing skills. Consequently, many students usually let their teacher or classmates do most of the talking, which translates into their inability to develop effective academic writing. Lastly, issues and problems with English acquisition are also linked to uninspiring teaching

materials; English instruction in many schools and institutions of higher learning is still based on a grammar-structured approach that often yields boredom, disinterest, and negligence.

D. Negative attitudes and lack of motivation

Akhtar *et al.* (2019) discovered that many Malaysian students perceive academic writing as a challenging endeavor due to their negative attitudes and lack of motivation to learn English. In addition, some teachers do not allocate sufficient time to provide opportunities for academic writing in class, and consequently, students are unable to develop the language competency needed for effectively academic writing. Therefore, it is not surprising that students often encounter academic writing problems in terms of clarity, coherence, proper grammar usage, and correct application of mechanics, conditionals, and subject-verb agreement. Moreover, students' negative attitudes toward academic writing is mainly due to anxiety, apprehension, lack of confidence, and lack of motivation. Institutional and family background, fear of evaluation and the examination system, as well as religious and cultural values can also influence their written expression. Lastly, traditional teaching methods are a huge obstacle as many teachers are unwilling to adopt more innovative strategies to enhance students' academic writing.

E. Difficulty in using the correct tenses

Harun and Abdullah (2020) found that Malaysian students have difficulty in using the correct tenses in English writing, with frequent errors made in the simple past tense. They have problems transforming the verb stem or root word into the verb in the past form because they lack understanding on the rules of regular and irregular verbs. Besides the simple past, punctuation errors are also common among Malaysian students, particularly, correct use of the comma, period, and capitalization. Lastly, vocabulary limitation often hinders them from writing using appropriate words, thus leading them to use alternative (inaccurate) words instead. Additionally, the causes and sources of errors can be both interlingual and intralingual. As second language learners, Malaysian students are exposed to two languages that make them bilingual. While learning English, they tend to mix, combine, misuse, or apply both rules and linguistic comprehension of the two languages into writing. Therefore, interference from their L1 often becomes the root of their writing problems. Lastly, limited exposure to English is another factor that merges the familiar rules of L1 with the new English rules, thus incorrectly binding the two different languages together.

F. Interlingual and intralingual errors and incorrect selection of copula

Harun and Abdullah (2020) asserted that Malaysian students' writing often contain interlingual and intralingual errors. Interlingual errors are related to the first, mother tongue, or native (L1) language, which arise as a result of the students' native practices, namely, patterns, systems, or rules that prevent them from correctly following the patterns and rules of English (second language). In short, interlingual errors are caused by interference or undesirable transfer of L1 upon students' target language (English). On the other hand, intralingual errors are errors within the target language that are free from the influence of L1. These errors do not imitate the L1 structure at all; however, students may try to oversimplify their English usage due to their limited exposure to the language. In such cases, students often try to infer the principles behind given information and may create theories that compare neither to the L1 nor English.

Hong, Hua, and Yang (2020) posited that, while English is taught as a second language in Malaysian schools, many students, especially those from rural areas, have problems using the language correctly as their language proficiency takes on the quality of a foreign language rather than a second language. Their writing is often riddled with various types of errors, including misselection, omission, blends, and overinclusion, which are signs of underlying problems arising from complex language interactions and deviations due to a lack of knowledge. Misselection errors occur when the wrong form of a verb is used in a sentence whereby students' written production reflects the incorrect selection of copula "be" and other wrongly selected verb form. On the other hand, omission errors occur when a word or a linguistic element is omitted in a sentence, which can be identified in the corpus whereby the verb (for example, copula "be" and the main verb) is omitted from the sentence. Blend errors occur when the student is indecisive about determining which linguistic forms to select when using subject-verb agreement (SVA) constructions; this kind of errors are due to the merging of two well-defined forms, which result in inaccurate words. Lastly, overinclusion errors occur when the student adds a redundant word or linguistic element to the verb phrase.

G. Lack of fundamental writing skills

Rashid and Hui (2021) reiterated that academic writing poses a serious challenge to many Malaysian students because it involves several complex processes, including grammatical, rhetorical, intellectual, and evaluative components. Many

students also lack fundamental writing skills, including grammar usage, punctuation, capitalization, spelling, vocabulary, and sentence structure. For example, students who are grammar-challenged often struggle to construct correct phrases. Additionally, many are affected by L1 interference; students whose L1 is Malay, Chinese, or Tamil, often use their first language to interpret and write. The lack of appropriate teaching methods, consultation resources, and relevant subjects also makes it difficult for them to participate in academic writing tasks. It is common for Malaysian students to face the following writing problems: Inadequate organization/illogical sequence, word choice, grammatical errors, spelling, concept confusion, punctuation, and capitalization. Lastly, their academic writing is obstructed by a lack of content diversity, organization connectives, appropriate vocabulary, and proper sentence structures.

H. Language transfer or cross-linguistic influence

Similar to previous researchers, Siddek and Ismail (2021) inferred that narrative writing among Malaysian students is influenced by negative language transfer or cross-linguistic influence, which is defined as the interference of L1 in the second or target language (L2) in which students apply the knowledge from L1 to L2 when using the latter. The three major types of L1 interference in L2 include the transfer of rules, reduction of redundancy, and overgeneralization. Additionally, there are some factors that affect the academic writing among Malaysians, who are usually L2 students. While many teachers attribute writing failure to students' inability to perform, it is also possible that obsolete teaching approaches have a negative impact on their ability to produce good quality writing. For example, the purpose of academic writing will be more meaningful if the teacher selects a topic that is connected to the students' prior knowledge; students who are already familiar with the topic will therefore be able to formulate and surmise the appropriate lexicon to elaborate on the topic.

I. Inappropriate teaching methods

A prominent factor that contributes to students' lack of academic writing skills is inappropriate teaching methods (Siddek & Ismail, 2021). Some students tend to make gross writing errors because teachers do not provide clear instructions and proper guidelines. Others prefer their teachers to use both L1 along with English Language in class, thus reflecting their low level of readiness in accepting English in the writing class; nevertheless, an English class that is conducted bilingually tends to negatively affect students' mastery of narrative writing. Lastly, some students tend to have poor academic writing skills due to the lack of prompt feedback. Some teachers may constantly expect them to master the various aspects of academic writing within a specific length of time, but fail to provide adequate feedback on the written product. Unless they receive constructive feedback on their academic writing, they may continue to apply erroneous rules and concepts without learning from mistakes.

J. Mother tongue, native language or first language (L1) interference

Ibrahim and Othman (2021) highlighted that, in Malaysian public examinations, many less proficient students tend to give very little attempt on the writing component, while some make no attempt at all. They may have the idea on how to respond to the writing task, but experience difficulties in putting the ideas in proper structure. Hence, they often translate the structures from their L1 without realizing that it can entirely contort the meaning. As students who have knowledge of L1 and L2 in their schemata, the dominant language (L1) tends to influence the acquisition of English. Influence of L1 together with limited vocabulary often causes word repetition that further worsens the essay. Additionally, students who lack knowledge in sentence structure often use written phrases that are translated directly from L1, for instance, by replacing words that they think will match the original meaning; however, many words often give a different meaning depending on the context in the sentence.

K. Insufficient implementation of writing

Palanisamy and Aziz (2021) summarized that, although English instruction is compulsory in the Malaysian education system, its implementation is insufficient as the syllabus, teaching methods, and consultation resources are often inadequate to promote academic writing. As mentioned before, many Malaysian students do not receive sufficient exposure and practice to express their ideas clearly in formal writing. Further, many students often show weaknesses in their written work, especially in terms of sentence structures, grammar usage, vocabulary, punctuation, coherence, and cohesion. Other writing difficulties are related to L1 interference, poor reading and proofreading skills, inability to comprehend and conceive ideas, lack of interest and motivation, poor time management, besides lagging mechanical, linguistics, cognitive, and psychomotor development. Lastly, many students also experience writing problems due to the

lack of linguistic proficiency (grammar, syntax, and vocabulary), writing anxiety, insufficient ideas, overgeneralization of subject-verb agreement and tenses, and overdependence on L1.

L. Selective grammar accuracy, L1 use and interference, genre preference

Govindarajoo, Chin, and A. Aziz (2022) found that many Malaysian students have academic writing problems due to four factors. First, they often display selective grammar accuracy awareness. Extrinsically motivated by academic excellence, they will only check grammar accuracy in examinations as they are mostly driven to get high marks. As for homework, many pay little attention to grammar accuracy as it does not really affect their grades. In terms of informal writing, such as sending text messages, chatting online, or posting on social media sites, they focus more on getting their intended messages across, without caring whether their sentences are free from grammatical errors, while claiming that the receivers will comprehend what they are conveying. Second, many Malaysian students rely on their L1 to solve problems; they try to find solutions internally before translating them into English. This technique is often subconsciously used to determine the solutions that require critical thinking and higher order cognitive skills. Third, their grammar accuracy is often influenced by writing genres; many prefer informative writing as they tend to make fewer grammar mistakes because the tenses in informative writing are mostly fixed, unlike narrative writing. Narrative writing, such as composing a story, requires adequate knowledge of accurate use of tenses as stories can be written using a combination of present and past tenses depending on the situation.

Fourth, many students are unable to develop a higher level of English proficiency and competency because they rarely use English outside school and at home. For instance, one of the most prominent errors made by Mandarin-speaking students is the wrong use of tenses. In Mandarin, present and past tenses are used simultaneously in the same paragraph without abiding by any grammar rules. While trying to construct sentences with their intended meaning, many show the lack of awareness on grammar accuracy; hence, they are uncertain of whether to write in present or past tense since verb tenses do not exist in Mandarin. Additionally, Mandarin-speaking students also have difficulty in the use object pronouns since Mandarin has only a few subject pronouns. In contrast, English contains many inflections on pronouns to indicate whether they are the subject or object in a sentence. Moreover, in Mandarin, the plural form of nouns stays the same as singular nouns. Therefore, Mandarin-speaking students tend to make mistakes in plural nouns since they are unaware of the need to add suffixes to the nouns to change them into plural form (Govindarajoo, Chin, & A. Aziz, 2022).

M. L1 interference, poor sentence formation, and lack of motivation

Like other researchers, Kasim and Ismail (2023) highlighted three major factors that affect the academic writing among Malaysian students, including L1 interference, lack of vocabulary and accurate sentence structure, and lack of motivation. First, L1, also known as mother tongue, is the language that a person acquires first in life, and uses it most frequently for communication. L1 interference occurs when Malaysians, as second language learners, rely on their L1 and employ their own syntactic knowledge when using English. Prepositions, articles, word form, verb tense, pluralization, concord, and word choice are errors most frequently caused by L1 interference in academic writing. Disparities in phonology, morphology, lexis, and grammatical structures between L1 and English further exacerbate their writing problems. Additionally, difficulties with narrative writing skills often occur because students do not have adequate knowledge of English; therefore, they tend to erroneously translate syntactic rules and morphological patterns from L1 into English. Second, students often struggle to form proper sentences due to their lack of vocabulary and limited knowledge in sentence structures. Low vocabulary levels often hinder their ability to write effectively, thus preventing from producing high quality writing. Moreover, the lack of vocabulary makes it impossible for them to create new sentences correctly, which ultimately hampers their ability to create coherent and thorough paragraphs. Third, many students lack the motivation to expand their English knowledge and skills; hence, they avoid actively participating in the writing process and often find it daunting to attain the desired level of writing proficiency.

IV. WAYS TO IMPROVE ACADEMIC WRITING AMONG THE GIFTED

A. Adapting to students' maturity level

Wessling (2018) elaborated that avid young readers who resist academic writing are simply not ready for it, and pushing them will not help much. Teachers should adapt as much as they can so that, as students' input progresses, their output will develop naturally with maturity. Further, they need to be patient and realize that much of maturity is biological. No matter how advanced some students are intellectually, they are still influenced by biology. In time, their bodies and

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brains will develop, their physiology will mature, and everything will be in better synchrony. Nevertheless, remaining patient and trusting the process is one of the greatest challenges in dealing with the gifted; therefore, teachers need to set their minds on the main goal, which is to produce happy, healthy, productive adults who see the value of academic writing. While waiting for maturity, they can help foster a love of writing by making it so meaningful that most of the gifted will enthuse about it.

B. Focusing on success

To enhance academic writing among the gifted, Wessling (2018) suggested that teachers focus on success and accept the fact that some of their students will take a longer time to function at a higher level; hence, it is fruitless for them to impose the things that students are not ready to do. Instead, they should focus on making them feel successful at the things they can do, then work on improving their lagging skills as best they can. Students are doing fine if they are enjoying the input, while their output is abreast with their biological age. Besides formal writing, there are many ways to engage students with advanced materials without expecting advanced output. For example, if the gifted are reading college-level literature, teachers can (a) conduct frequent verbal discussions about the book, (b) make it social by forming a reading group, (c) organize creative projects (visual art, videos, creative writing, comics) based on the reading material, (d) watch movie adaptations to do comparative analysis, and (e) arrange field trips related to the reading source (Wessling, 2018).

C. Using samples and exemplary papers

Like most individuals, the gifted want to know if there is a good reason for writing a serious academic paper (Fitzhugh, 2019). Teachers can best illustrate the point by showing them some good samples, having them read exemplary papers, and showing them how beneficial academic writing is. To inspire the gifted to produce a scholarly and pertinent paper, they should initially encourage them to research the topic by perusing others' successful work. For example, to motivate students to write a history paper, teachers need to show them how beneficial it can be and get them to read about a specific topic that they find interesting. When students have to extensively read on a certain topic, they will be able to effectively present their knowledge, which in turn will inspire them to reflect about it, and finally, edit and rewrite it to create a better output.

Additionally, the gifted do not require a semester of writing technique instruction to do any outlining, notetaking, endnotes, and bibliography. Most of them are quite capable of asking questions to find out what they need to do when presenting an academic paper. When working with them, teachers should not decide in advance what they are capable of doing. Students should be allowed to choose their own topic, with no specified length; this technique often results in many pertinent but interesting topics. Lastly, teachers who are accustomed to defining assignments in advance might want to use them to assess students' academic efforts and capacities rather than focusing on the final grade (Fitzhugh, 2019).

D. Overcoming a blocked writing gate

Besides compensating for any writing glitch, teachers should also take steps to eliminate a blocked writing gate to promote fluency in the writing process. There are various methods that can be used to correct this processing problem. First, occupational therapists can do specific midline therapies with the students; parents can ask a pediatrician for a referral so that insurance will partially pay for the treatment. Second, teachers can employ a Getman midline exercise that is designed to transfer the entire writing, fine motor, and visual/spatial processing responsibilities to the right brain hemisphere. This practice crosses the brain/body midline, opening up the student's writing gate, thus increasing his or her writing fluency and eliminating reversals (Craft, 2016).

E. Overcoming motor-mental mismatch and unproductive psychosocial factors

Fortunately, those executive function skills for writing start to develop as students become more mature; frustration about the mismatch between the pace of ideas and hand dexterity decrease as they can now decelerate their thoughts to compose or corral them in an outline or mind map. As they get older, the gifted will learn how to vet sources and recognize bias, which are essential skills for effective academic writing. Additionally, they are also more willing to receive feedback and advice while managing critique from teachers and peers with an open mind. Lastly, they will become more invested in academic writing as it finally offers a meaningful purpose, such as, joining early college classes and other writing-intensive courses (Butler, 2017). On the other hand, teachers can help students overcome unproductive psychosocial factors by encouraging them to plan ahead and identify potential missteps and emotional roadblocks to create an action

plan. Lastly, students can also use a rubric that identifies emotional responses that arise from the academic writing process, and then adopt clear techniques to help overcome the negative feelings and attitudes, for example, by using speech-to-text apps, keyboarding, scribes, and dictation interventions (Conrad, 2022).

F. Writing informational texts

Erbasan and Dedeoglu (2023) asserted that teachers should implement an action plan that incorporates biography writing strategies to develop informational text writing skills among the gifted. Besides serving as the framework for constructing texts, these strategies also serve as a guide for non-professional writing, which enables students to gain writing efficacy and develop positive attitudes toward writing. While increasing their motivation for written expression, teachers should praise students for their abundant ideas, while gradually reinforcing quality writing. To help students prioritize ideas during prewriting, they can ask them to outline five most important ideas or events that they should consider, with the aim of helping them become more precise in writing an introductory paragraph with a thesis statement, body paragraphs with proper topic and concluding sentences, and an effective conclusion with implications and recommendations.

G. Implementing the organized approach to learning

According to Kelly (2024), the perfectionistic tend to be concrete-sequential thinkers who are motivated by an organized approach to academic writing, which is a developmental process that requires risking imperfection. Motivated by structure and predictability, these non-risk takers need graphic organizers to prepare ideas without fully expressing them. Teachers can require them to produce an initial draft to help them understand the writing process, while scaffolding the actual writing task by providing topic sentences for them to create supporting ideas. This writing strategy, together with more specific, authentic praise, increases their trust and understanding, while providing some immediate gratification, especially among the perfectionistic.

H. Overcoming mental fog and negative feelings

According to Kelly (2024), to help students overcome their mental fog, teachers should start with a baseline writing sample, score it against a grade-level rubric, and analyze the results to form a plan for instruction. Students who are not meeting the standards or seem to be underperforming will receive special consideration. Nevertheless, teachers should consider not only what is afflicting them and obstructing progress, but also what motivates them as learners and aspiring writers. Since many of the gifted are well aware of their own limitations, they may wallow in self-doubt when faced with writing difficulties. Therefore, teachers should positively reinforce students' every piece of writing with constructive feedback. They should also use every avenue to help them grow during the key developmental phase of their writing by capitalizing on their strengths and interests, while protecting their vulnerabilities as perfectionistic learners.

I. Six strategies to enhance students' writing

Teachers can employ six strategies to help students who struggle with academic writing. First, they should teach prewriting skills, which are rarely innate among many students. Instead of fleshing out and expanding their thoughts for an audience, many prefer condensing their thoughts into the minute pieces. Teachers can encourage them to draw Venn diagrams to compare and contrast, while using thought webs and sandwich-style organizers to distinguish among the introduction, conclusion, from body paragraphs. Second, teachers should offer them opportunities to write, for example, by asking them to perform activities that require constant written expression. For example, students can (1) find pen friends to write them regularly (b) express their thoughts and feelings in a log book, or (3) produce scrapbook stories based on family photographs. The more regularly students write, the more confident they will become with the academic writing process, and the easier it will be for them to organize and express their ideas (Tenney School, 2024).

Third, since many verbally articulate students tend to struggle when it comes to transferring words onto paper, teachers should ask them to read their essays aloud to get a better idea of how their written expression sound for future editing. Students can also write on an audio-recorder, and subsequently transcribe their ideas on paper. Fourth, teachers should find meaningful and engaging topics for students; instead of allowing them to choose from a list with little consideration, they should discuss potential topics with them to determine which will entuse them. Fifth, teachers should offer constructive one-on-one feedback to help students grow as academic writers. They should go over their essays, papers, and other written materials to determine whether the main ideas are vividly stated and well-defined, or if each body paragraph is well-organized with a proper topic sentences, supporting ideas, and a concluding sentence. Lastly, teachers

should encourage students to revise and rewrite by hand; this particular process often makes a significant impact on the way students process the material, especially when it comes to editing. Lastly, manually writing drafts also compels students to slow down and process their thoughts more effectively, which usually results in better quality writing in future drafts (Tenney School, 2024)

A. Increasing students' writing motivation

D'silva (2019) reported that student motivation is crucial in enhancing academic writing. Teachers, similar to stage actors, should ensure that their "audience" enjoy each performance in a productive atmosphere by making their composition class highly interactive and student-centered. Further, they should encourage students to frequently converse in English because oral fluency has a substantial impact on written expression. For example, they can help students improve their written output through rhymes and chants that focus on phonics, besides reinforcing phonic principles and spelling conventions through regular dictation. Speaking, reading, and writing on a regular basis ensure that students will develop a solid foundation for academic writing. Additionally, co-curricular activities, such as, choral speaking, public speaking, drama, singing, and oral presentations should be implemented to encourage students to utilize English outside the classroom. Lastly, they can overcome their shyness in utilizing English through constant contact with the second language via English-themed corridors, speakers' corner, furniture labels, or English Day/Week.

B. Adopting the process-based approach

Li and Razali (2019) asserted that a paradigm shift from the product-based approach to a more viable way of academic writing is needed in Malaysian schools. For instance, the process-based approach offers many benefits with its recursive nature; instead of focusing primarily on national examinations by way of the product-based approach, teachers should acknowledge that academic writing is not just to prepare students for examinations, but for life, be it in gainful employment or everyday communication. English proficiency is also one of the national aspirations and goals of the Ministry of Education, which aims not only to promote intellectual excellence among youth, but also help them develop their academic writing skills for career advancement and lifelong learning.

Akhtar *et al.* (2019) recommended that teachers adopt more innovative methods to promote academic writing, such as, task-based learning, blended learning, collaborative, and other cognitive approaches to develop students' written expression. Nevertheless, many Malaysian teachers currently use a combination of traditional teaching and online teaching methods, while some employ more advanced teaching approaches, for example, blended learning, collaborative learning, and brainstorming. Moreover, blended learning and online learning teaching methods are more preferable as they offer students supplementary writing assignments, while task-based and collaborative learning involves them in a broad array of writing activities for extra practice.

C. Emphasizing important linguistic elements

Hong, Hua, and Yang (2020) emphasized that students should be made aware of the importance of learning and acquiring grammar knowledge. Teachers should inform them explicitly about the importance of the subject and verb since these two linguistic elements are the two most essential components in constructing complete and accurate sentences in English. Additionally, teachers should regard grammar errors as a potentially crucial component for understanding the process of academic writing, and adopt a refined list of error descriptions and examples to support English language teaching, especially academic writing; besides, error identification enables them to provide constructive feedback regarding the application of specific grammar rules. Lastly, they should assign revisionary tasks so that students can improve their academic writing by utilizing reference corpus in rectifying their errors.

D. Applying cognitive writing theories

Rashid and Hui (2021) maintained that written output and mental processing are intricately intertwined. Teachers therefore should connect theory and practice to stimulate students' academic writing by first applying cognitive writing theories to identify problems and current practices to improve written outcomes, and subsequently, incorporating the concepts of enthusiasm, engagement, and social influence into the writing process. For instance, they can use mind maps and classroom exercises to help students generate ideas, while establishing positive relationships with students by acknowledging their socioeconomic backgrounds and implementing positive reinforcement to instill favorable attitudes toward academic writing.

E. Adopting an eclectic approach

Palanisamy and Aziz (2021) suggested that certain strategies can help students overcome their academic writing challenges. Teachers should adopt an eclectic approach to teach vocabulary, grammar, and reading innovatively; for example, they can use different writing platforms, including (1) blogs or daily journals to enhance students' reading and writing proficiency, (b) prompt feedback by marking their writing tasks and then asking them to rectify the errors. Further, to help students overcome mental block, teachers should reinforce their notetaking skills to generate creative and imaginative ideas. They should also put more emphasis on pre-writing, which allows students to brainstorm ideas, research the related topics, watch documentaries, or describe pictures on the related topics to generate ideas. On the other hand, students should be given more autonomy and opportunity to select writing topics, and ample time to generate ideas. Lastly, they should be provided with samples or model answers to use as guidance.

F. Exploring alternative approaches through research

Kasim and Ismail (2023) recommended that teachers explore alternative approaches, such as genre-based instruction, to supplement the product and process approaches of academic writing; it can provide them with additional strategies to improve students' academic writing skills and meet their various learning needs. Besides, more research should be conducted to examine the challenges confronted by writing teachers, which may entail addressing individual differences or incorporating digital technology into the academic writing process. Lastly, qualitative research methods, such as interviews and observations, can generate deeper insight into second language teachers' perceptions of writing instruction; greater awareness of teachers' experiences and viewpoints can help trainers and policymakers in promoting instructional approaches that augment students' academic writing skills.

V. CONCLUSION

Secondary research shows that the gifted tend to experience several issues and challenges in academic writing. They include a blocked writing gate, mismatch between motor and cognitive development, disconnect between advanced vocabulary and writing ability, dual and multiple exceptionalities, and lack of writing structure and creative infrastructure. On the other hand, there is a lack of research on the writing issues and challenges faced by Malaysian students who are gifted. Nevertheless, as second language learners of English, they often experience several difficulties in academic writing, which include (a) prewriting impediments, (b) negative linguistic transfer and first language (L1) interference, (c) shyness and diffidence, (d) selective grammar accuracy and genre preference, and (e) negative attitudes, and lack of motivation. To gain greater insight into the academic writing needs of the gifted as well as those of Malaysian students, more empirical research on their perceptions should be conducted.

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