

## THE ACADEMIC WRITING SUPPORT NEEDS OF UNDERGRADUATES ACROSS DISCIPLINES

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### ABSTRACT

*As Malaysia aims to become a regional educational hub by 2020, the demand for English-medium higher education continues to grow, consequently the need for a better support for ESL students in dealing with the travails of academic writing becomes integral. Academic writing needs vary from one discipline to another and hence it is important to be able to match these needs with the right form of support. This paper investigates the academic writing support needs of undergraduates in relation to their experiences in academic writing in three different disciplines (TESL, Art and Science) of one faculty at a public university. This study reports the findings of qualitative data analysis from a semi structured interview. Transcripts of the interviews were analysed thematically. Findings reveal that undergraduates have little support in their experience of navigating their way through various writing tasks of their disciplines. Findings also show that undergraduates greatly rely on their friends and their lecturers as there is an absence of an academic writing support system. This paper suggests that a structured institution-wide academic writing support in the form of a writing centre may serve as a catalyst in enabling undergraduates to improve their written skills, writing process and writing output.*

Key words: academic writing support, English as a second language (ESL), academic writing in the discipline, needs analysis

### Introduction

Due to the demands of institution recognition and accreditation, universities and other HE institutions around the world are heavily subjected to 'teaching quality audits' by funding bodies (Ken Hyland, 2013). Part of the process is the attention on teaching and learning, consequently, student writing is often a key area being observed (Ken Hyland, 2013). As Malaysia sets its sight to achieve its aspiration in being a regional education hub by 2020, Malaysian universities must take proactive measures in ensuring students' literacy needs are met for them to perform in their studies. This requires them to first, be more readily able to accept and attend to students' varying linguistic proficiency, cultural values and personal experience. Students require time and understanding in order to fit into the academic writing ideals of higher education, which are quite high. Second and most importantly, is to provide them the space for academic literacies growth. Demanding them to conform to the ideals without sufficient support or input would result in failure in academic writing. Hyland (2013) emphasized that a more culturally, socially and linguistically heterogeneous student population would mean that learners bring different identities, understandings and habits of meaning-making to their learning, in extension, academicians can no longer expect students to have the same writing competencies needed to meet the demands of the course.

Previous studies has shown that there has been a major shift in the direction of discussion and research in writing pedagogy in dealing with struggling writers, both in writing-specific classes and in content courses, moving away from dismissing basic writers as unintelligent to an understanding that varied socio-cultural and socio-political factors can limit any student's ability to succeed (L. A. Fernsten and M. Reda, 2011). Turner (2012) recognized that this deficit model for students has deleterious effects on perceptions of the role of EAP practitioners who are viewed as sorting out the problems. Research in academic writing over the recent years has moved away from the deficiency model of students' literacy (Hodgson & Harris, 2012) to a developmental model of supporting students as writers. They argued that while theoretical works has re-conceptualize the 'bad writer' there is a need to radically change concrete teaching practices to cater for the diverse student population. This is congruent to what has been argued by Nightingale (1988, 272) cited in Wellington (2010), that there is a need to 're-conceptualise writing as a complex process which cannot be mastered at an early stage of education and then left to look after itself'.

Looking at the aforementioned researched it is recognised that academic writing is a complex process and that there is a need to for a developmental model for supporting students as writers. While there have been studies which have looked into the matter of academic writing support needs in other countries, however, there is a scarcity of studies done locally in this area. Hence, there is a need to identify the academic writing support needs of students as writers in varying disciplines. Subsequently, the input would allow for more targeted support to be given by the university based on the students' discipline. This study addresses the following research questions (RQ):

1. What are the academic writing supports needed by undergraduates in different discipline?
2. How can the university better provide for an academic writing support to undergraduates, in different discipline?

**Literature Review**

Academic writing existed ever since the seventeenth century, originating from a western historical-cultural model (I. Itua et al, 2012). Following the model, values such as rigidity, structure and definition has long been associated with the language of academic. The values associated with academic writing are a product of the time it was introduced, making it subjected to the factors of change (I. Itua et al, 2012). Klimova (2012) identified that the language of academic style has been challenged lately new research in the field of academic writing. The changes that has taken place is due to the purpose of appealing to a more ‘heterogeneous and diverse audiences and to fulfil as many goals as in feasible in a piece of writing’ (Klimova, 2012). The following table is a comparative summary that shows the characteristics of academic writing that has seen changes based on the review by Klimova, (2012):

Table 1: Changes on the characteristics of academic writing

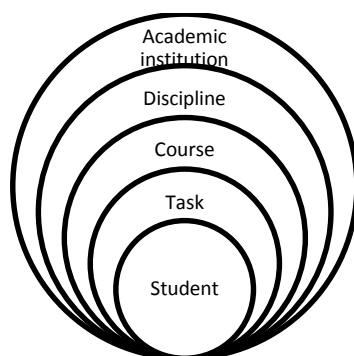
Characteristics of Academic Writing, (Hairston (1998:5))	Changes
<b>A</b> Academic paper, articles and books address some significant content and concentrate on one particular topic	No Changes
<b>B</b> The audience for academic writing is fairly specific	No Changes
<b>C</b> The tone of academic writing is critical and argumentative and integrates extensive reference for support	Complex: yes, but not in its use of the traditional measures (Biber & Gray, 2010)
<b>D</b> Academic writing is dense, structured and utilises a standard referencing system	Explicit: - in specifying the identity of referents: yes - in the expression of logical relations among elements in the text: no (Biber & Gray, 2010)
<b>E</b> Academic papers are written purely in standard English	It does occasionally use ‘spoken’ feature (like first person pronouns), but the grammatical structure of discourse is nominal/phrasal rather than clausal (Biber & Gray, 2010)
<b>F</b> Academic writing is unified	Academic text is hybrid in nature, they do not consist only of one type of style and discourse (Molle & Prior, 2008)
<b>G</b> Good academic writing is economical	Elaborated: -in the use of embedded phrases, especially in noun phrases: yes (Biber & Gray, 2010)

The table shows the changes that have taken place from long held views of the characteristics of academic writing as identified Hairston (1998:5) cited in Klimova, (2012), and the challenged views bought by Biber & Gray, (2010) and Molle & Prior, (2008). The fact that five out of seven of these conventional characteristics of academic writing have been challenged and only two of the characteristics still remain relevant, shows that academic writing is slowly expanding to meet the socio-cultural needs of the current times.

**Academic Writing Support**

Academic writing in tertiary education is conceptualised as more than the process and mechanics of writing. Samraj (2002) cited in W. Zhu (2004) presented a framework that captures ‘the complexity and interaction of various factors influencing the production of texts in university classrooms. He identified five contextual variables: academic institution, discipline, course, task and student. To reflect on the research carried out in this study, the researcher created the following diagram that utilizes the contextual variables identified by Samraj (2002) cited in W. Zhu (2004) to create a visual image of how all the contextual variables are connected.

Figure 1: The context for writing in university framework (Adapted from Samraj (2002) cited in W. Zhu (2004))



To reflect on this framework based on the research carried out for this present study, it can be understood that beginning from the student variable, there is a need to understand and value the fact that each student is uniquely different depending on factors such as their social background and previous education. Next, the task variable is closely related to the course variable, as the task that they engage in depends on which course they are from, this determines the frequency of academic writing activity that they engage with. The discipline variable may determine the types of academic writing products that they have to produce and the style of academic writing conventions they have to follow. Since it is possible to have several disciplines under one faculty, for example in this research there are three disciplines under the same faculty, hence the researcher believes that there should be another variable to add to the framework above, which is the faculty variable. The faculty variable would determine the kind of academic writing support that is available. Lastly, the institution itself, for this current research, the institution has an English-medium policy for the teaching and learning process.

#### ***Institutional Initiative form of Academic Writing Support***

Previous studies have shown that institutional structures around the world tend to include any of four main locations for teaching of writing: i) dedicated writing courses, ii) disciplinary subject courses, iii) English for academic purposes/English for speakers of other languages departments and iv) study skills or writing centers. Ganobcsik-Williams (2004), identified several different types of academic writing provision that has taken place in the UK higher education, among them are:

- i. Dedicated one-to-one tutoring in academic writing
- ii. Study support/study skills tutoring
- iii. Peer tutoring in academic writing
- iv. General writing courses
- v. Teaching writing within subject disciplines
- vi. An academic writing program
- vii. Staff and postgraduate development in teaching academic writing
- viii. Computerized support for student writing

One example of a disciplinary subject course functioning as a form writing support is the research conducted by Baik & Greig (2009), carried out at the University of Melbourne. This mixed method study found that students highly value a discipline-specific approach to language and academic skills support compared to a focus on generic skills of language. The impact of the adjunct English language tutorial program was examined based on the academic performance of first-year Architecture students. The study found that students with regular participation in the content-based ESL program positively performed in their studies and benefit their academic performance outcomes in the subsequent year. Baik & Greig (2009) disclaims that the students' performance can be fully attributed to the program, but the study establishes the fact that the students benefit from a discipline-specific approach to language and academic skill support that is based on the course content and focused on task specific to the discipline of the students. Based on the current review of literatures, it has been found that the most effective, time-tested form of institution-wide provision of academic writing support is writing centres.

#### ***Writing Centre (WC)***

Writing centres have a long history of being an established asset to the university. According to Natalie Adel Honein-Shahadi (2007), there are over 1000 writing centres in North American Universities and around 420 in European Universities (EWCA). There are several key organizations that has helped the writing centre to flourish to what it is now through research and development. First, is 'The Writing Lab Newsletter', was first introduced by Muriel Harris in 1977, it can now be accessed via the web address, <https://writinglabnewsletter.org/>. This online newsletter is published bi-monthly from September to June and offers content such as articles, conference announcements, book reviews, and professional news about writing centres in high schools, college and universities. Second, is *The National Writing Centres Association*, which began in 1982 and later changed it's name as *The International Writing Centres Association*. Among the key journals published on the area of writing centres was *The Journal of Basic Writing*, *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, and *The Writing Centre Journal* (Brandon, 2012). Writing centre functions as part of the institution learning support, hence the services it provides can be made available to all writers, not just for students but also for academicians as well. A writing centre is a physical space available which provides support to the writing needs of students regardless of their proficiency. Moberg, E. (2010) in his study on the best practices and technologies of the

modern college writing centre described several key components commonly found in most writing centre designs, which are; i) the methods employed by the tutors in the sessions, ii) the training of tutors, iii) is the organization of the service, iv) the technologies, v) online writing labs, and vi) a taxonomy for writing tutelage. The concept of the writing centres is that they are focused on improving the writer, not the writing, in which they encourage the process of writing compared to the mechanical elements of proofreading and editing (Norcross, 2011). Functioning within a process-based pedagogy, the service offered is delivered based on tutoring sessions. Each session can range from 15 minutes, 30 minutes to an hour, depending on the needs of the writer and the institution pedagogy.

**Writing Centre Approaches to Writing**

Writing centres are described by Bonnie Devet (2011), as a neutral place or ‘judgement-free zones’, this allows students to freely express to the consultants ‘what teachers of academic writing would never hear’. Based on the practices on writing centres, Bonnie Devet (2011) believed that there is a lot of information about the writing process and the teaching of writing, which could be of benefit to the teachers of academic writing classes. Below are some of the ways to improve the teaching of writing outlined by Bonnie Devet (2011) as informed by peer consultants of a writing centre:

- a) Establishing the value of writing and explaining the purposes for assignments.  
This allows students to understand the educational value of writing.
- b) Use specific, accurate wording on assignment sheets.  
Word choice can eliminate vagueness in the instruction and present clear expectations.
- c) Give the ‘circulation’ of a paper assignment  
This helps students to establish a sense of audience in mind besides their lecturer and determine the discourse style and the medium.
- d) Establishing ‘teacher immediacy’  
This helps to eliminate the ‘fear factor’ and thus establish ‘teacher-students rapport about writing’.

In reviewing the literature on writing centres, it has been found that because the area of writing centre is barren in the Malaysian context, there is only one local writer who has researched in the area on writing centre, she is Prof. Tan Bee Hoon from the Universiti Putra Malaysia. Her studies have provided insights on how the writing centres could possibly gain footing and be practiced in the local context. In one article, she reviewed literatures on the pedagogies and techniques of practiced in writing centres and OWL which have been the key ingredients to the writing centres approach as an effective methodology in teaching and learning writing skills. Among these approaches are:

- i. One to one tutoring
- ii. Peer tutoring
- iii. Student centred pedagogy
- iv. Guided learning and writing
- v. Dialogic pedagogy
- vi. Small group workshops
- vii. Collaborative pedagogy
- viii. Pedagogy of belonging and inclusiveness
- ix. Whole language pedagogy
- x. Online pedagogy for tutoring and writing

Tan Bee Hoon, Emerson & White (2006) found that these methods are more effective compared to the traditional lecture model, because these approaches fall under the categories where there is a higher average retention rate based on the learning pyramid (National Training Laboratories, Institute for Applied Behavioral Sciences, cited in Tan Bee Hoon, Emerson & White, 2006).

Figure 2: Learning Pyramid (Tan Bee Hoon, Emerson & White, 2006)

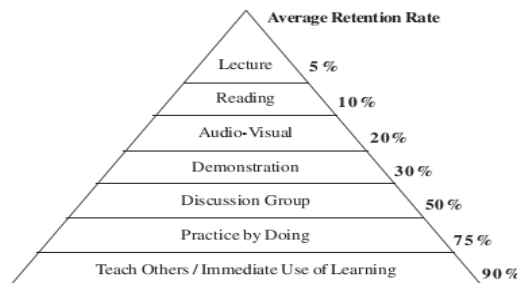


Figure 1: Learning Pyramid

(Source: National Training Laboratories, Institute for Applied Behavioral Sciences, 300N. Lee Street, Suite 300, Alexandria, VA 22314, 1-800-777-5227)

In another study, Tan, B.H. (2011) reviewed the practices of academic writing centres and OWLs of several Asian (Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore and Korea) and European universities in managing their writing centres in order to compare and contrast their practices with the practices of North America. Tan, B.H. (2011) study provides important insights for faculties who are interested in setting up a writing centre and OWL at their own institutions. While she argued that the difference is very relative,

considering that writing centres and OWLS have been made relevant in providing support ESL and EFL learners, among the obvious difference was that Asian and European OWLS can be found to be either monolingual, bilingual or multilingual whereas, the North American OWLS are fully monolingual in English. Other differences include the fact that Asian and European writing centres use d more academicians or faculty members than peer tutors compared to North America. Due to the fact that these writing centres and OWLS are modelled after the North American, and that it is still relatively new in practice, there are difference in terms of content and management as well.

### Online Writing Labs (OWLS)

The development of technology has allowed the Online Writing Centres, or better known as OWLS to become another medium or platforms for the writing centres besides the physical place. Norcross, (2011) notes that literatures on writing centres has highlighted the growing need to utilize OWLS to promote university writing programs and accommodate to students preference for online learning environments. OWLS function differently depending on it's host universities, some use it as merely a directory website to help students make appointments or update news, some would function as resource site where references can be download and links to useful websites concerning writing or research are available. There are also some which offers virtual tutoring sessions via the internet Moberg, E. (2010). Among the pioneer of the most advanced form of OWL is the Purdue Online Writing Lab. Founded by Dr. Murial Harris and a colleague from Purdue Educational Computing, together they launched the site in 1994, from email server, gopher and website it has since then evolved to a state of the art, stand-alone reference and clearinghouse accessible around the world (Moberg, E., 2010). Online writing labs will continue to be a favourable mode of education as students become more tech savvy. There are several benefits of using OWLS to ESL students According to Tan Bee Hoon, Emerson & White (2006), the online pedagogy is especially useful for ESL students with limited proficiency. This is because it gives them space to voice their opinion through online anonymity and time for them to sort out their thoughts in asking question or participating in discussion. It has also allowed more opportunity for ESL students to engage with native speakers and learn in an authentic environment.

There is a growing awareness for universities to be more proactive in providing support for their students' general academic development, and furthermore it must be relevant to the context of the students' discipline (Erling and Richardson, 2010). This move has brought a need to identify students who need writing development in different aspects of academic writing of a specific academic discipline, using a diagnostic procedure called 'Measuring the Academic Skills of University Students (MASUS), widely used in a number of institution in Australia and other areas (Erling and Richardson, 2010). Hodgson & Harris (2012) argued that a detailed focus on institution and epistemology would benefit pedagogical approaches to the teaching of writing in higher education. Hodgson & Harris (2012) expressed that this can only be achieved through a change in the writing culture of the institution itself. This provision is important not just for the development of writing for students but also for lecturers. In doing so, their study proposed two primary steps, both of which are concerned with demystification: i) Tutors/academicians should be clear about the epistemology of the subject they are teaching; ii) Tutors/academicians could develop a pedagogic practice with regard to essay writing that is more effective than the present system of feedback delivered well after the event.

Ganobcsik-Williams (2004) explained that establishment and existence of this type of provision is limited in a lot of ways, this may be due to funding and policies. Hence, she called for the need for an 'institutional approach' in developing support around writing development such as has been proposed by Lea and Street (1998) theoretical framework. It is believed that compared to viewing a student writing as a private activity, a comprehensive, whole institution provision will foster an open, informed and vibrant culture of writing across the university. Consequently this affects their ability to develop students' writing effectively. The premise of this study is based on the justification and discussion for the concern made from the argument that a whole institution provision would provide a better support for the development of academic writing.

### Methodology

This study investigated the views of both students and academicians from three different disciplines, TESL, Science & Art that exist under the faculty of education. In order to understand the academic writing experience that students in these three disciplines engaged with and the academic writing support used and needed, the qualitative research method was applied. Semi-structured interviews were conducted. In order to obtain the narrative data from the undergraduates and academicians, a typical sample of the purposive sampling was used to identify the sample that was representative of the population undergraduates being studied. A total of 9 students were interviewed. The sample from undergraduates includes: one from the TESL programme (ED220), one from the Art & Design education programme (ED222), one from Physical Education & Health programme (ED226), one undergraduate from Biology (ED227), one undergraduate from Physics (ED228), one undergraduate from Mathematics (ED229) and two undergraduates from Chemistry (ED230). The following names are pseudo-names of the students, meant for references in this study only:

Table 1 Pseudo-names of interview student participants

<b>TESL</b>	1. Talia
<b>Art</b>	2. Adriana
<b>Science</b>	3. Balqis (Biology)
	4. Phoebe (Physics)
	5. Canna (Chemistry)
	6. Carmen (Chemistry)
	7. Puteri (Physical & Health Education)
	8. Mandy (Mathematics)



The homogenous sample of purposive sampling was used to identify the academicians who can provide the qualitative data. For this study, four academicians were chosen to be interviewed as their expertise and experience were deemed to be relevant to this study. The choice of sampling allows the researcher to compare the perceptions of academicians and students on a disciplinary basis. The following names are pseudo-names of the academicians, meant for references in this study only:

Table 2: Pseudo-names of interview academician participants

TESL	1. Dr.Talhah
Art	2. Dr. Andrew
Science	3. Prof. Matthew
	4. Dr. Sabrina

The data obtained were analysed via thematic analysis. Data analysis for narrative data from this study will follow the three steps utilized by Chokwe (2011) as suggested by Vithal and Jansen (2005:28) and Neuman (2006:457) which uses the three types of data encoding: i) open, ii) axial and iii) selective. First, open coding. In open coding the data will be scanned and cleaned. Initial categories for academic writing needs and academic writing support are formed at this stage. This involves reading the data to check for incomplete, inaccurate, inconsistent or irrelevant data and identifying preliminary trends in the scanned data. Second, is axial coding. In axial coding, central phenomena are recognised through the exploration of the interrelationship of categories. This requires the open codes to be organized into more abstract categories through a process of describing comparing and categorising. Third is selective coding. In selective coding, organization and representation of data are formed. This involves organising data in the form of graphs and selected quotations.

### Findings

The findings of this study present undergraduates' academic writing needs from the perspectives of academicians and students. Findings allowed the researcher to better understand the complexities of the academic writing needs and academic writing support phenomena. After having gone through the all the transcription, narrative data analysis, looking at the recurring theme, two dominant themes prevailed. The narrative data has been organized into the following dominant themes: 1) the importance of AW in the discipline), 2) AW support. The first theme answered the first research question, what are the academic writing supports needed by undergraduates in the faculty in the faculty of education, while the second theme answered the second research question; How can the university better provide for an academic writing support to undergraduates in the faculty of education?

#### What are the academic writing supports needed by undergraduates in the faculty of education?

In general all of the academicians interviewed agreed that the academic writing skill is important for their students to develop future educators. This is paramount regardless of the discipline, given that they are from the faculty of Education. In regards to the question of whether students believe academic writing was important to their field of study, findings shows that students understood the function of academic writing, to which they attribute in helping them to complete assignments, conduct research, comprehend class lectures, comprehend the subject matter in depth, and in improving their English language skills. Although most students agree upon the importance of academic writing, however the degree of appreciation placed on the importance of it to their field of study varies from one discipline to another.

#### TESL

The language proficiency expectation in the TESL discipline, begins as early as their entrance, and it is placed high, Dr.Talhah, explains this is because, *'we are training them to be teachers, so they have to have a certain level of language proficiency'*. Dr.Talhah found that although TESL students have learnt about the writing conventions, they do not apply the skills where necessary, at times she finds it necessary to remind them about it. Hence, usually the method she takes in helping students is by giving them suggestion during consultations. Dr.Talhah believed that it is important for TESL students to be able to write in an organized manner for clarity in written assignments and also in expressing themselves. Organization and grammar were two of the aspects that she believed TESL students need to work. Talia, a TESL student describes the steps that she takes when dealing with an academic writing task as follows. At first, she takes note of instructions given, *'what I would do is actually take notes on the specification that they told us and then I would write the things to do and things not to do'*. Thenshe wouldask the lecturers *'some more questions'*, this is to allow the instruction to be *'specific'* so I would understand it'. Afterwards she discusses about it over with her some of her classmates *'to reconfirm the information'*. Lastly, she gets on immediately to search for articles and journals for my references and then when she works on it. TESL student, Talia minors in literature. She shares about the nature academic writing tasks in her field. In literature courses, they are required to do *'a kind of critical and creative thinking kind of thing'*, they would be given a piece of literature, for example *'A doll house'* or *'a canon'*, and they would have to *'argue about the issues and conflict'*. For Education courses, she believes that she learns by *'applying the principles to the situation'*.

#### Science

The science discipline consists of 5 different programs; Physical Health Education (PHE), Physics, Biology, Chemistry and Mathematics. Dr. Sabrina explains that regardless of which science programme they are from, the *'demand of their assignments require that they are proficient to impart their ideas in writing'*. Dr. Sabrina shares that the kind of writing that science students engage in is different from the ones required of in EDU courses, which is social science in nature. Science students deal more with

lab reports which has a style of writing characterised as *'succinct, clear, precise and straight to the point not going around the bush with a lot of references and stuffs like that'*. Writing is a needed skill for science student, she illustrates that in the class she is teaching, 'Introduction to research methodology', the students should be able to *'write to a certain extent that to show that they are able to conduct and report research findings accordingly....'*

Dr. Sabrina shared that her concern stems from the high expectation placed on the university's teacher graduates by the school society. The perception is that universities' graduates are good in English since the medium of instruction is in English. Even though her students are majoring in science education, sometimes, these students would be instructed to teach English at their school based on the fact that they are this university graduate. When that happens, Dr. Sabrina would advise her students to ensure their grammars are in control and to check with the school's head of English department about the curriculum. PHE student, Puteri is aware of the high English language proficiency expectation that society holds upon the university graduates, she explained the pressure:

*'Seriously! If you go to whichever company or place, from their perspective, our university students are students who could speak English well, cause, everyone knows our medium of instruction is in English, right. Some universities, they have it bilingual, so they have a choice, whether to do it in English or BM, but for us, no choice.'*

Science students have been found to engage most commonly with laboratory report, which requires a style of writing that is more direct and does not require referencing. Specifically, for the Biology, Chemistry and Physics courses, the most common kind of academic writing assignments that they engage with is laboratory reports. For every experiment they conduct, there must be a laboratory report. Chemistry student, Carmen says that they commonly do about 2 to 3 reports in a week. Carmen's major is in Chemistry, but she is minoring in Biology. This is different from the style of writing required for in EDU courses. For PHE students, their programme requires them to do more practical than writing. When asked whether there is any difference between the reports for Chemistry and reports for Biology, she says, *'In chemistry, it's more detailed, you can't have even the slightest mistakes, that's how it is in chemistry, even if you missed out on a step, it'll be totally different, this is different from Bio, they only want answers, in the report they only want facts, in chemistry, there's a lot of steps'*. Balqis illustrated how an academician observed Biology students' AE academic writing:

*'So the Dr would usually look at our English, "Okay, that's wrong". A lot of times, she'd say "you friends, a lot of them, their grammar is their only weakness, the rest of the content is okay, it's just that sometimes, not many, quite a few, sometimes, there would be something, hurmmm "What is it that you are trying to say here?", (giggles), "I think what you are trying to do...put that at the end....., try to make it one....this paragraph, like that...."'*

Populations of students in each science programme is small in numbers, hence ever since part 1 they have always had to share an EDU course together with other small classes from other programs such as from the Arts and Math, PHE student and others. Puteri describes this helps *'complete the class quota'* for the course. According to Physics student, Phoebe, besides the ones required in Education courses, their programme does not engage in much writing activities. This is also true for PHE student, Puteri as she claims that *'we do very little writing, cause we do more practical'*. Among the writing activities they engage which ranges from administration for PHE, to learning how to manage students, which are Education courses and how to conduct classes practically. For Puteri, beginning to write is the most difficult step for her. Starting from the first paragraph, she expressed that it is like *"Oh! This is hard, where do I start from? How do I start this assignment?"*. But once, she has begun, she believe it's easier afterwards. Among the types of assignments that they engage in are *'research', 'handwritten journals', 'journal articles', 'journal review or article review about handball'*. She shares that for PHE students, even with academic writing assignments, that engage in more practical than theory.

Biology student, Balqis expressed that while she does believe in the significance of academic writing, however, she finds the Education subjects, EDU coded, because it requires a lot of writing, it can be too overwhelming and also a distraction to her main major, which is Biology. She also explains because of this conflict and the demands of the academic reading and writing of the course, a lot students would find themselves repeating the EDU course. Puteri believes that students would be able to improve their skill if they *'take the opportunity, not being shy about it and not worrying whether they've got it right or wrong and just speak'*. Balqis reports how when an academician emphasizes the importance of grammar and writing, they would be more careful in their writing. She attributes the emphases to the weightage of the subject which has no final examination but requires students to complete a proposal for their AE. While the emphases on aspects of academic writing from lecturers exist, it has been found that there are students who question the relevancy and importance of learning their course in English, as some them believe it to be irrelevant to their future working environment, in school, where most of the teaching and learning would be conducted in the mother tongue, Bahasa Malay (BM).

In the Mathematics programs, students engage with application of Mathematical knowledge and take courses like problem solving in Mathematics, where they learnt about the philosophies of Mathematics. In short, Math students' academic writing mostly deal with calculations and writing. Prof. Matthew describes his math students as more *'quantitative'*, but in academic writing, they have *'to quantify it in writing'*. Prof. Matthew emphasized that in the field of Mathematics, students must be able to communicate every data to be translated into written language for it to have any meaning. Math Student, Mandy describes that most of her assignments involves a lot of group work task, this requires her to have group meetings for division of tasks and discussion. When asked about the nature of academic writing for a Mathematic student, Mandy explains that because their major is Education, hence *'it's a balance between writing and calculations'*. The types of assignments that they have to do are related

to concepts in mathematics, so they do a lot of exercises and presentations. They also learnt how to utilize softwares like 'Microsoft's Excel' and 'GeoGebra' for teaching and learning of Mathematics.

### Art

For Art students, the academician recognized that language is not his students' strength; hence he ensures that his instructions are focused more on content and minimize their written assignments. The most academic writing that they do is for EDU courses, otherwise in the discipline, there is about a balance amount of writing and 'handwork'. Art students' strength is in dealing task that requires creativity, innovation and production. Writing is considered a daunting task of writing for the Art students who much prefers handwork tasks. The Art academician recognizes his students' level, therefore most Art students are advice to take up a project-based AE for their final year, instead of just a write-up AE. Among the academic writing assignments that Art students engage with are research projects, reflective journals and presentations. Dr. Andrew describes his Art students as being good in production, design, innovation. He explains that in the area of 'creative artwork, they are good'. These students can come up with creative projects, conduct research, enter competitions and even win medals for it. However, Dr. Andrew expresses his concerns that 'writing is not their major strength actually'. For Adriana, like her classmates, she finds writing difficult, as describes themselves as 'not really the writing kind of people'..... 'just like to do hand work stuff'. Which is why, Dr. Andrew explains, that he would not allow Art students to do their AE without a project. Like most education students, producing an Academic Exercise (AE), which is a small scale thesis at their final year, is an Art students' biggest challenge. The AE for Art is different in a way because it is a project-based writing. Dr. Andrew explains the nature of project based writing that Art students have to produce and how this differs from the conventional academic writing that other programs produce. Art students are required students to produce an educational Art product. Dr. Andrew describes this product as:

*...the product that the students do is something that must be looked at, a very good product, a very.... What I mean is it can be marketable product and so on, it's not simply a product that you can see in the outside or what, because the product is done by research and we have tested and we try to teach it to the students. I assume that the product has the potential to be market. That's the challenge...for example, they choose one topic courseware, they have to start with the courseware first, and after that they came up with the writing, that's the challenge (for) them.*

Later they would have to present it, get feedback from experts and audience concerning it, and write about it. All of which they must complete within the length span of two semesters, which is a year, beginning from semester 7 until semester 8. In that period of time, students must continuously engage with their supervisors with their development on the project. Then at the end of semester 7, they would have to present their draft of the project to a panel which consists of the lecturers. From there students would receive feedback on their academic writing and be required to make amendments or correction based on the assessment and evaluation. Then later in semester 8, they would have to do a final presentation of their finished product and outcome of their project. Art student, Adriana, shares the process that she takes in dealing with an academic writing task as follows. She takes the time to examine the guidelines given by the lecturer and 'try to understand it'. To ensure that she has the right understanding of it, she would check with the lecturer and ask for clarifications to ensure that she meets the expectations of how the questions should be answered. Adriana confessed that for her, the whole process of writing itself is challenging. Even with all the information at hand, she expressed that it is easier said than done. To have to write long essays that is up to the standard required by the university is a daunting task to her when she does not know how much information is enough and how long the essay should be to be sufficient to meet *the university level (of writing)*.

### How can the university better provide for an academic writing support to undergraduates in the faculty of education?

In answering the research question of how can the university better provide for an academic writing support to undergraduates in the faculty of education under the theme of academic writing support, several sub themes were explored among them are: i) the absence of AW support, ii) support from friends and family, and iii) support from the faculty and university.

#### The Absence of an Academic Writing Support

All of the academicians concurred that there is an absence of academic writing support, whether it be at the faculty level or at the university level. Dr. Talhah claimed that 'there isn't much help (burst of giggles) provided for them, okay, at this point' unless, she points out under the lecturers' initiative, 'see them outside of class' and 'highlight to them'. But at this idea, Dr. Sabrina exclaimed that 'I can't afford to be sitting down. Eventually I'll end up writing for them!'. Prof. Matthew reported that there are no resources offered for the students to improve their writing skills in the faculty, Dr. Sabrina agreed that there is not one at the moment, 'not a structured one'. Prof. Matthew reported it's difficult for students to improve their writing skills when there is no place they can turn to other than what can be taken from their own initiatives:

*There is no place here for anybody who wants to improve their writing skills here. Where are they supposed to go? Outside? Where? Where are they supposed to go? It is always easier said than done, you have to improve yourselves, you need to go outside and learn' Learn? Learn what? Other than reading newspaper, what do you expect them to do? Nothing, you see? (Prof Matthew, Math).*

The general consensus from the academicians was that there is a need for more academic writing support. Academicians expressed very strongly that support should not be in the form of 'examination form' or 'more courses' but it must be 'in such a way in which you can make it seem fun for them to write, right'. At present, the only source of input to academic writing in undergraduate is their BEL courses. However Dr. Sabrina argues that 'BEL, it's report writing and whatever, they are not very specific. Students also find that the BEL courses that they took were ineffective in helping them develop the skills they need. PHE student, Puteri found although they had to take BEL coded courses for two semesters 'it's not really helpful, cause BEL is like, the



first BEL would be report writing, right, it focuses on how to do a report, it's not about grammar or language, the second BEL, was the meeting and it's about how to handle meetings. She argued upon the relevancy of the course especially because for one, 'it's like it's not even necessary to be carried out in English actually, because what it wants is to highlight is just that and not the language. That's it' and also because they believe that it is not applicable to their future working area, at school, cause when we go to schools, we find out that we don't actually use it'.

### Support from Friends & Family

This section describes the role of friends and family as one of the resources for academic writing. The description of friends can be from classmates/course mates, roommates/house mates, faculty mates, seniors/juniors, and even alumni. For Art student, Adriana she would seek her friends to help her brainstorm for ideas. She felt that it is a lot easier to begin writing after a discussion with her friend:

*They would just give me a few words and then from there I would start to elaborate more and more and more cause the more I write, the more it becomes a ....It becomes a lot easier, it's more like you just need a starting point and give you that little push and then from there you just need to write down whatever you think, I find that a lot easier to deal with.*

Phoebe's housemates are also her classmates in class, this makes it helpful for her to discuss with her friends about any assignments. Usually they would 'sit together and see who have starts. She believes it's important to have a friend who has started on the assignment, this would help the rest of them to understand it, as she describes: "Oh! So that's how you do it". When it becomes 'clear' to them, then they would be able to start off writing. Biology student, Balqis also refers to her friends who are both her classmates and house mate for help in writing, she reported how they would help each other out in dealing with academic writing tasks:

*Of course (lah) my friends, same house, same class, all five of us in the house are from the same class, which really helps, so like, (I'd) ask my friends "Wei!, I'm stuck (lah) here, how do you do it?" "Oh! This is like this, like this" "Oh! Okay" Then from there I'd think and get an idea, and then I can start.*

Balqis believes it is important to have friends for discussion especially in her field as she reported that it is difficult to learn science alone. PHE student, Puteri describes that because their faculty is small, it makes it very easy to recognize all the students from Maths, TESL, and Art. Because of this reason, she feels that she has become close and comfortable enough with friends from other programs to be able to ask for their help and they in return do not mind being approached for help. Puteri shared how on one occasion she had received help from TESL students to correct her grammar on her AE proposal, for the 'Introduction to Research Methodology' course. Chemistry student, Carmen would refer to her faculty mates from the sciences; Physics, Biology or even her housemate, from TESL course, to exchange ideas, share opinions or consult a problem in writing, specifically in the area of sentence construction; choice of words, as she felt that she has limited vocabulary. Among the friends she would consult would be her friends who she believes are proficient in English, this includes her TESL friends. Canna felt more comfortable to consult her friends as she believed that those who she usually consults understands and can recognize the area of which she needs help. Math student Mandy seeks her senior's help. Due to the fact that the format for past year exams do not change much, a senior's help in a subject makes a lot of difference. Mandy describes herself as being lucky to have had access to her senior's notes. This is also helped by the fact that the senior is someone who is very organized, this made her study an ease. TESL student, Talia seeks her junior's help. She felt that because, her junior is one semester younger, hence she is not familiar about the assignment. This allows her to have 'a neutral opinion'. She reports that her junior would usually 'read' and 'comment' for any typing error or grammatical error.

For TESL student, Talia, seeking their alumni help would be one of their last resort whenever they reach a 'dead end, no one could help us'. When asked to describe how her alumni help her, Talia explained that for her, it meant an opportunity to consult them on how they worked on the task. Out of the 8 respondents interviewed, Physics student, Phoebe was the only one who mentioned consulting a member of her family, her mother for her academic writing task. She explains that 'for fixing grammar and all that, I consult my mom'. However, she only consult for assignments that 'requires a lot of writing which holds a lot of carry marks'. She would usually let her mother have a look for proof reading, but for a 3 page report, she would do it herself. Students commonly uses social networking sites such as 'Facebook' (FB) as the platform to interact with their friends regarding their academic writing assignments. PHE student, Puteri uses the FB chat feature to discuss, edit and transfer her documents with friends. She illustrates her experience:

*Through FB (laughs), we'd sent them the file, 'could you please have a look at this?' Email them the file and chat with them through FB, so if there is anything wrong through email, "Okay, you've got this wrong, this is how you do it" and they would give the correct sentence, "Okay, thank you", and they'd let us know where we did wrong, like that. (Puteri, PHE).*

Both Chemistry student, Carmen and Canna uses the FB to facilitate their academic writing. Canna describes that she uses the FB chat feature to consult her TESL friends who she see is online about her academic writing. Math student, Mandy utilizes the FB group feature as a platform to share questions about anything that she does not know, and then 'those who already know would answer', so the answer would be shared. TESL student, Talia, has a FB group for her class, and a FB group for her batch, this easily allows her to share 'if you have any problem with any assignments or test and then you just want to ask anything, you just post it in the group and then many people would respond'. She shared that the discussions that she has in the group are 'really helpful'.

In general, findings showed that students realised that they should be independent and not reliant on the assistance of the lecturers. Most the students would seek the assistance from their closest friends first regardless whether roommates, course mates, faculty mates or a senior/junior as their first choice of help. For one of the student, it's her mother, since her mother is an English teacher. Seeking their lecturers help, would usually come in as second place. However there are some who would choose to directly ask lecturer for help.

### **Support from Academicians**

This section will discuss about the views that both academicians and students have about the role of academicians in improving academic writing. The role of academicians as a resource was found to exhibit several dominant sub-themes: 1) effective feedback, 2) clear guidelines, 3) clear expectations, 4) approachability and focused attention.

**Effective Feedback** -Students value the input and feedback given by lecturers and hence there are various reasons to why students seek their lecturers' feedback. For PHE student, Puteri, the fact that most of her courses do not have a reference book, means that she has to rely more on the internet as primary resource, lecture slides and lecture notes. She prefers her lecturers to 'straight away give a website that could help'. Art student, Adriana, would seek the feedback from her lecturer to confirm that she has properly understood the instruction given. She takes the time to examine the guidelines given by the lecturer and 'try to understand it'. To ensure that she has the right understanding of it, she would check with the lecturer and ask. Adriana reported that she barely gets feedback on her assignments, but she does not mind it, she expressed that she is just grateful that the assignment is finished. She reported that she does enjoy lecturers' comments, but even if she does not receive one, she felt that she would not remember it by the time the new semester comes in. Math student, Mandy believes that the lecturer is the most important sources for the doing the assignments. Hence, when she gets the assignment, from the lecturer, she believes that the lecturer would 'provide us with the importance things that we must include in our assignments'. She describes her view of her lecturer as 'our important sources so if anything we want, we don't know we must ask them', this is true for Chemistry student, Canna as well. Physics' student, Phoebe would usually meet with her lecturer before submitting her assignment to show her draft.

**Clear Guidelines** - TESL student Talia prefers that the instruction given to be as specific as possible. In order to carefully understand the instruction given by the lecturer when an academic writing task is given, Talia takes note of instructions given, 'on the specification that they told us and then I would write the things to do and things not to do. Then she would ask the lecturers 'some more questions', this is to allow the instruction to be 'specific, so I would understand it'. Biology student, Balqis shared her opinion on some of the way that lecturers can guide students' academic writing. First, is to give writing assignments, with practice, their skill would improve. Second, would be to give 'guidelines for science subject reports', this entails:

*what needs to be written. So from there, we would know what to write, what needs to be noted in our reports'.*

Puteri explains that she does not fully depend on her lecturer for help, she believes that whatever they have done so far is 'sufficient'. Hence, she does not expect her lecturers to correct her grammar or her sentence, when she believes her friends can help her in that area. Shedes however expect the lecturer to provide 'guideline', 'notes' or 'lecture notes' that would allow them to seek for reference. For Physics' student Phoebe, She describes her lecturers help her by not directly giving 'but they guide. She would usually consult her lecturers for 'content, the way of writing or knowing what he (the lecturer) wants'. She describes herself as someone who like to consult lecturers. She shared an experience where she felt somewhat lost without a lecturer's guidance. At the time, she was taking the 'Introduction to Research Methodology' course, and had to basically work on her proposal for AE. But because lecturer had to be away, she reported that, *we had to do it ourselves aahh..so...to me, as someone who like to ask the lecturer, ....it's like "Huh! What do I do?".* When academicians clearly deliver what they expect for students, it makes it easy for students to carry out the academic writing task. PHE student, Puteri shared that one of the best thing about one of her lecturer, was that *'her guidelines are really clear. She makes it really clear for us. till we don't have anything to ask and we know what we need to do next.'*

**Clear Expectations** - Dr. Sabrina, explains that she would outline specifically her expectation on students writing 'with a certain standard', by enforcing a penalty if students fail to observe their grammar. Dr. Sabrina's expectations are:

*at least minimal grammatical mistakes, technical editing, must be correct, but that one I show them, Where to refer to and what not, I do that. But not sitting down and guide them accordingly for word for word.*

She reported that most students find it difficult in 'expressing themselves in writing what is expected to actually fulfil the expectation of the lecturer'. One of the aspects of 'fulfilling the expectation of the lecturer', was found to be in style of writing. Dr. Sabrina explained that because 'different people have different styles' of writing their Academic Exercise (AE), she describes that there has been on occasions where she ended up writing for a student, because she was not satisfied with the style of the student. She did that with the purpose of teaching the students how it should be written. She illustrates her experience:

*I highlight, "you should be doing this", it just doesn't meet up to my standard, rather than I keep on telling this person (but) this person does not understand, hence I end up writing some sections, and hoping that, "okay, this is how you write it", "follow it next time you want to write", and some of them managed to get the point, but those who do not, it's difficult (lah). There are times when you really have to help them with their writing and it ends up it's my work actually, not theirs, or if I really give up, "okay, you just do whatever you wanna do and I'll grade accordingly". Either ....or depends on the....that one depends on a lot of things; mood, you know, your willingness, how many students you have, those things.*

Balqis reported the feedback from her lecturer in class about his expectation on his students' level of grammar.  
*he said "It's okay, I know you are not TESL students, it's still okay, to make mistakes here and there It's okay" He said, he considered it like that.(Balqis, Biology)*

It is apparent that the message that students receive from their academicians are later turned into their belief about their own academic writing ability. This is reflected in the way Science students identify themselves and their language proficiency as well.

*.....especially for students besides TESL students (Puteri, PHE)  
Ah! To read a lot of journal, with the problem of our English not being so good compared to TESL students (Mandy, Math)*

This constant comparison results has an effect on their belief about their academic writing, which can be observed from Puteri's report on how reluctant her friends are in participating any student activities that are related to the English language, for example, writing competitions or 'Speaking corner'. One possible reason she cites is to being 'shy'. Another reason she mentioned seems to suggest that because TESL students are the majority population in the faculty, students from other discipline face low self-esteem for any English language related students' activity:

*'the one's (who are) more involved are TESL students, majority of them are TESL students (lah), besides they are the majority, so when it comes to things like this, it's like "let's just leave it to the TESL students',..... "TESL confirm (lah), even if we don't take part, it's confirmed that we'll lose".*

**Approachability & Focused Attention** -Both academicians and students were asked whether they believe focused attention was important for academic writing, the following shows their response. Although Dr. Sabrina felt unsure about how a one to one attention would affect the aspects of writing, however, she does believe that students need more focus on certain aspects of academic writing:

*'how you arrange, how you develop, topic sentence, like supporting sentences, even little things like that which I think some of my students may not be very aware of because they simply write and not necessarily follow that paragraph requirement and what not'.*

For Physics' student Phoebe, she feels blessed to have gotten lecturers who are 'are easy to cooperate with and can help. PHE student Puteri would usually consult her lecturers before she submits her work by submitting a draft through the email. Her lecturers would then point out to areas that need to be improved on and areas that are fine. She illustrates how her lecturers' approachability character helps:

*we feel, there's good rapport, so it's easy to communicate, easy to joke around with him, but the negative is "Mr X, you've gotta be kidding us, please be serious about it", and he doesn't take us seriously either. So... okay. So we're like.....it's okay. But they help out a lot in class. (Puteri, PHE)*

For Art student, Adriana, lecturers are her first choice for consultation, however for this semester, she reported that she 'barely asked for their help', this is because she felt that 'they are kind of scary this semester'. However, based on her previous semester with lecturers, she found that most of her lecturers are very helpful, they would help by:

*they would just give you a little hint of ideas, like they would give an example of how to begin....*

Students understand that sometimes academicians would gauge their effort in seeking for knowledge, hence when approaching their lecturers, they have to be tactful. Biology students, Balqis admit that most of her lecturers are very helpful, she shared her techniques in approaching one of her lecturer:

*Most of the lecturers are a very helpful. If whenever we don't understand something. But for animal physiology, this lecturer, she will never tell you straight to the point, the answer, she would, "You look for yourself, first". So, if we want to get an answer, we'd have to guess, guess a bit...(Biology, Balqis)*

### **Support from the University**

Academicians and Students were asked to describe their opinion of what they think is the role of the faculty in meeting the demands of academic writing. Findings revealed their views concerning the existing form of student support, and elicited suggested form of student support. PHE student, Puteri views that the faculty and the university has done 'quite a lot'. For one, the fact that *the university itself has made English as the main language, that is actually pretty helpful already, if we practice it.* Puteri felt that 'it's a loss' for a student to not be able to acquire the language. The least that they should be able to do when they graduate is to be is 'an English substitute teacher'. She felt that the problem is students are not getting involved in the student activities held by the faculty like 'speaking corner' or writing competitions. She believes until students care to participate, nothing that the faculty do can help them to improve themselves.

Dr. Andrew describes that the department has a responsibility to 'facilitate' students' academic writing as much as they can. Among the things that the department does are; for one, they encourage students to participate in any workshops and if students perceive a need for a certain kind of workshop, they are welcome to suggest to the department. Secondly, Dr. Andrew describes that they would empower the academic supervisor. Dr. Andrew believes that the 'involvement of the lecturer' or the 'academic supervisor' is crucial to ensure the 'successfulness of the students to make sure that the project is done is very important'. Hence, at the Art department level, he does not give room to lecturers to be negligent of their responsibilities, this is to ensure that all the

lecture .know what their students' problem (are), they also have to make sure their students have done the project,.....That's the (only) way to make sure students can complete their Academic Exercise on time.

### **Suggested Form of Academic Writing Support**

Both lecturers and students were asked to suggest a form of academic writing support that they would like to have in the faculty or at the university. Among these suggestion, the most highly suggested form of academic writing support was the writing centre. Many universities around the world have host writing centre as form of support either via face-to-face sessions or online tutorials. Guided by these findings and literature reviews, it is in the researcher's view that the best suggestion of a form of academic writing support system is a writing centre.

While most students have an idea to suggest how they would like to be helped, there were two students were not able to come up with an idea, this seems to suggest that they have never even thought about the idea of having help for academic writing. Among the suggestions, three out of four academicians suggested having a writing centre/writing clinic as an academic writing resource. Meanwhile, students unanimously agreed that the idea of having a writing centre is beneficial. It was found that it is common for Science and Art students to approach their TESL friends for helps proves that, first, there is a demand for help or support, second, because these TESL students are capable of giving help, shows that there is potential for peer tutoring to work as commonly practiced in a writing centre. However the onus remains solely on the TESL students. According to Erling and Richardson (2010), generic or individual initiatives will not provide sufficient solution for a university that has a large population of the students who are deemed in need of academic writing support. Erling and Richardson (2010), highlights that there is a growing recognition for universities to bear the responsibility for their students general academic development, and furthermore it must take place in the context of the students' discipline.

Prof. Matthew, Dr.Talhah and Dr. Sabrina suggests that having a writing clinic would help to improve students' academic writing. Dr.Talhah believed attending a writing clinic could provide students with the necessary instruction and structured method in improving the way they read and write. Dr. Sabrina suggests having writing clinics as a better idea compared to having more specific courses. Dr. Sabrina claims that she has never experienced going to a writing centre, so does not know '*what transpires in writing centres*' but she does understand that the writing centre has people '*guiding and helping*' for '*foreign students and what not*'. She reasons that since '*it works elsewhere*', it could possibly work locally as well. However, her final view is that a writing centre would be something '*good to have. I would say it's good to have*'. Prof. Matthew reported that writing skills is a problem in this country, Malaysia, specifically, in this university, the problem is present across all the faculty. He explained that this could be in the form of a writing centre:

*a centre for them to approach certain people (who will) help them or teach them how to write, not to solve their problem, but help them develop their written skills, I think that is important, which I don't think is happening anywhere here. I cannot see it.*

Prof. Matthew also notes that for a writing centre to be in existence there is a lot to take into considerations:  
*a writing centre, it must be what will be inside the writing centre, if not what is required in the writing centre, not simply just where students get assistance, one to one assistance, or two to one assistance, certainly because right now if students want to improve their language where do they go...outside?*  
(Prof. Matthew, Math).

He believes that having a writing centre in the faculty is 'an excellent idea', he suggest that it could be '*run by students and assisted by lecturers or so called*'. He felt that having a writing centre in the faculty would mean that students would be able to have a place to seek help from when they need it:

*Students can come to the centre to improve not just their writing skills but also their communication skills also. I would to agree to it. So end of the day, you can have one centre for language learning and encompassing a few other things. (Prof. Matthew, Math).*

In regards to the constraints of having a writing centre in the university, Dr.Talhah explained that the idea of setting up a writing clinic had been in discussion about '*a few times*', '*It's just that we are still working it out*'. however due to several constrains it did not materialise. The constraints exist in the form of:

- i) Logistics: Proper place or venue. She also cautioned tp the probabilities of '*will there be people coming in?*'
- ii) Resources: '*who is going to assist the students with their assignments, who's going to provide the help, because the lecturers themselves are kind of tight with the things they need to do. Time and place actually.*'

Dr.Talhah noted that students must make an effort to improve themselves as well, because:  
*if the students refuse to help themselves, it may not work. So even if we set up a writing centre or a writing clinic, if there're no takers, no one comes in to get assistance with their assignments, there is no point in setting up the place either.*

A possible problem which Dr. Sabrina foresees is that our culture does not appreciate things that are free. Writing centres are usually offered for free, '*it's free by right*', but some requires '*minimal payment*' to be made. She added that this is possible on the conditions: '*provided that the students are aware of it and are willing to actually seek (for it)*'. Hence, the choice is up to students, '*whether they are willing to pay or not, if it requires payment*'. Prof. Matthew felt that there is urgency for students to



receive assistance, even if it meant that students would have to pay a certain amount for the service, it would still be worth value. Physics' student, Phoebe however, felt that as long as the service does not require students to pay for it, then most students would definitely go for it.

Majority of the students believe that the writing centre to be beneficial to have in the faculty. TESL student, Talia reported that this would enable to students to have more source of guidance and function as an optional resource besides the lecturers. Physics student, Phoebe believes that having a writing centre would be really helpful for Physics students who she claims have a lot of problem in their writing. PHE student, Puteri, believes that the idea of having is beneficial because when learning with someone who is close to our age, 'who has the same kind of thinking with us', they less likely to feel shy and learning can happen in 'informal' ways:

*'How do I this aahh? I don't get it', and they can respond back in an informal way, so we won't feel the gap, the hurdle and I think that's good. (Puteri, PHE)*

PHE student, Puteri felt that while she is 'not sure about the people who will be giving the help, but for the people who need the help, they will be involved because they want that'. She worries that it might be 'burdensome on their part cause, for example, 'we have a lot of assignments to do'. Biology student, Balqis, reported that she would definitely seek the service of a writing centre. She describes it to liken to having a TESL student as a housemate:

*because if I had a housemate who was from TESL, I'd definitely, everyday 'Eh!, did I write this correctly?'. Of course I would refer to them first before referring to my other friends who are from the same class*

Balqis was surprised to know that writing centres was practiced overseas in English speaking countries. She reported that if they have the need for it, then the more reasons for us to need it:

*Overseas, where they are already good in English, but they still have it, what more us, supposedly we should.*

Both academicians and students were asked to specify what form of help needed from the writing centre. Dr. Sabrina identified that students do not need to be given ideas. She expects students to be facilitated on 'the technicalities of writing', she illustrates:

*the students are the ones who do the work, you know, in terms of formality, in terms of editing and re arrangement should....things like that, the normal, normal, things like that would help them to come out with a good term paper perhaps, a good sound article if it's at masters' level. (Dr. Sabrina, Science).*

TESL student, Talia identified that she would like to seek helps her 'in terms of the format and organization of the assignments'. For formatting, she feels that she does not 'fulfil the criteria set by the APA style'. For organization, she identified that she does not utilize the structure of having 'a main idea, controlling idea supporting details format'. Hence she would be glad if the writing centre could provide feedbacks for her assignments. Math student, Mandy identified data analyses from software such as SPSS as an area which she would like to receive help in. Chemistry student, Canna and Biology student, Balqis, identified grammar as the area they would like to receive help. Balqis reported that she has trouble even with the most basic grammar. Dr. Talhah identified the writing centre as a place where students can 'can always come in and get advice on their assignments.....how to improve the assignments or how to come out with certain assignments that they've been tasked to do. Prof. Matthew describes that he would like to see, the writing centre as a place where students can approach certain people that can help them to write, get assistance whenever his students are facing problem, especially when they are doing their academic project.

## Discussion

Findings suggest that there is a strong relationship between the emphases that academicians put on AW to the students' perception of the importance of AW. The four academicians who were interviewed for this study share several common grounds in explaining their view of undergraduates' academic writing needs. Unanimously, academicians and students agreed upon the importance of academic writing in their discipline. This is motivated by the fact that there is pressure from the expectation of the society on the quality of the university's teacher-graduates given that the university has an English-medium teaching & learning language policy. The more emphases are given, the more attention students put in their AW. When emphasis on academic writing is absent, students perceive it as a message that it is of no importance. The expectations on TESL students' language proficiency are placed even higher and begin as early as their admittance into the program. Academicians reported that they deliver the message of the importance of academic writing in their discipline through their expectations in effort to help students improve their academic writing. Even then, all of the science students claimed that they do very little writing in their programme and that most of the academic writing that they do are for EDU courses. The academicians also reported that while TESL students may know the writing convention well, there are times when they need to be reminded or to be pointed out where such conventions apply for certain types of assignments. It's been found that even the writing style of writing for Education papers can be a bit different from literature papers. In exploring the support from the faculty as a resource, findings revealed their views on the existing form of student support, and also several suggestions from both academicians and students on the type of academic writing support needed. It has been found students value certain qualities in their academicians when seeking help with academic writing; effective feedback, clear guidelines, clear expectations, approachability and focused attention.

Findings showed that there is an absence of a formal, structured form of academic writing support made available by the university or faculty to help students improve their academic writing skills. The fact that students find their BEL courses ineffective



highlights the absence of input students need to deal with the demands of academic writing in their discipline. It seems that students' only reliable form of support for consultation is their friends and academicians. Consequently, students have learnt to rely heavily on friends and academicians, consulting them when necessary. The only forms of support that students have are limited to once a semester events, which are organized by the programmes department. Even then, most of these forms of student support do not have anything to do with academic writing. Even if there are some, it faces a lot of challenges, some of which academicians argued that these forms of student support are irrelevant to their disciplines' nature of academic writing or ineffective in achieving a positive outcome or incomplete in meeting the needs of their students. The language enrichment program for instance, is only limited to TESL students and functions more as a remedial program than a form of resource. Based on the findings presented, and the discussion made, it is believed that having an academic writing centre would function as the best form of academic writing support system.

### Conclusion & Recommendations

This study has several limitations. First, the study was carried out in small scale study, while the academicians and the students whom we interviewed may not be a representative sample from which generalisation can be drawn regarding English-medium, Malaysian public university, however these perspectives on the needs of academic writing and academic writing support contribute important theoretical questions and connections that are worth observing to the local context. Replication studies at a larger scale could enrich the understanding of the writing practices of undergraduates to determine whether similar correlations hold despite institutional settings. It is plausible for some similar experiences to be present at other English-medium universities across different disciplines. Regardless of these limitations, certain important implications for education practices can be drawn from this study. The present study does add value in the field of research concerning academicians' and students' perspective on the writing needs and the writing support needs of undergraduates. This study has expanded on the literature on academic writing needs by providing empirical evidence that supports that the academic writing skills needed for one discipline differs from one to another. All of the above findings may inform the academicians and university administrators for the purpose of supporting students' academic writing in the discipline and increasing their writing competence.

The results of this study contribute to the field of writing in the faculty of education in two ways. First, it offers an extensive data about both academicians and students perception of academic writing needs, thereby encouraging the educators and the university to be more aware and perceptive to the nature of students' academic writing needs in their discipline. Second, the findings proved that there is an absence of academic writing support at the faculty level in dealing with students' writing in the discipline. It has also been found that students' major source of support in dealing with the demands of academic writing academic writing has only been their friends and their lecturers. Students would continually need the skill of writing, even after they have graduated. Their literacies skills are also part of their preparation in entering the work force. Hence, universities need to invest more heavily in the quality of their graduates and not just the quantity. Based on the findings from this study and extensive literature reviews, the researcher proposed that the writing centre, functioning as an academic writing support system can be part of the solution to students' academic writing needs and consequently in empowering them as writers. Future research should look into identifying the instructional needs of students across the discipline in the university level or at higher education in Malaysia level, as a much larger scale research of comparative examination would enable a more nuanced account of the academic writing practice of students in the Malaysian university. This investigation would allow for a much fuller understanding of the instructional practices to academic writing. Students' academic literacy support can be explored and evaluated in a variety of higher education context, to provide pedagogical solutions to current academic writing issues and practices.

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