

# Discovering Difficulties And Strategies In Malay Essay Writing As A Second Language Among Non-Native Students In Primary School

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## ARTICLE INFO

## ABSTRACT

Writing is widely acknowledged as one of the most challenging skills in elementary school Malay language curriculum for non-native student to master. This research aimed to discover the difficulties of faced by non-native students in primary school and their strategies to cope with their difficulties. A qualitative study was conducted among five primary school teachers who taught Malay Language subject in Sarawak specifically chosen to elicit further information about the difficulties they encountered among non-native students when writing essay in Malay, as well as their strategies for overcoming these hurdles. They were selected through purposive sampling to actively participate in this study. The study involved meticulous conduction through semi-structured interviews, and the data were analysed using thematic analysis with NVivo 12. The results revealed pervasive issues, including (i) lack of vocabulary, (ii) lack of interest in writing (iii) language aspect difficulties and, (iv) difficulty in developing ideas. The strategies to deal with the difficulties that were implemented among non-native students including (i) a variety of instructional methods, (ii) utilize suitable teaching and learning resources and, (iii) incorporate engaging teaching and learning activities. This research was expected to contribute to minimizing the difficulties experienced by students in writing Malay essay through the strategy revealed in this study. Future research could involve designing and implementing intervention studies to assess the effectiveness of specific strategies in enhancing non-native students' writing abilities.

**Keywords** – Essay Writing, Non-native Students, Malay Language, Difficulties, Writing Strategy

## I. INTRODUCTION

Writing, reading, listening and speaking are the four main skills of language in the primary school Malay language curriculum that one should master (Ministry of Education (MOE), 2018). Among these four skills, writing is the considered very challenging and toughest language skills to excel among the non-native students since it prompts intellectual growth (Ahmad Dawiwi & Yamat, 2022). Ahmad Ghulamuddin, Mohd Mohari & Ariffin (2021) and Suastra & Menggo (2020) have provided empirical support for the contention that mastering writing skills presents a significant challenge for students, owing to the cognitive demands inherent in generating and articulating ideas in written form. This observation is further corroborated by Mohammed, Nigusse, Nigussie, & Zenebe (2021), who underscore the necessity for students to possess not only linguistic proficiency but also substantive knowledge to effectively convey compelling ideas. The proficiency in essay writing among students holds pivotal importance, serving as a catalyst for idea generation, fostering effective argumentation, and facilitating the continuous refinement of ideas. Additionally, the process of essay writing imparts valuable skills to students, enabling them to construct well-structured compositions with appropriate organization. Furthermore, as emphasized by Tenggek & Nor Shaid (2023), mastery of essay writing skills

indirectly equips students with the ability to employ correct language usage tailored to the specific requirements of various essay types.

The decline in proficiency among non-native speakers of Malay language is evident, with research utilizing the Malay Language Proficiency Test indicating that as much as 65.2% lack competence in Malay language writing skills (Nahar, 2020). Despite six years of primary schooling, non-native speaker students continue to face challenges in writing in Malay. Therefore, ongoing investigation into this issue aligns with the Second Shift of the Malaysian Education Development Plan (2013-2025), which aims to ensure universal excellence in Malay language proficiency among all ethnic groups in Malaysia. Proficiency in Malay language is fundamental for fostering contemporary Malaysian society, as emphasized by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), notably Goal 4 on Quality Education. Effective communication, critical thinking, and literacy skills nurtured through writing are pivotal for achieving inclusive and equitable education, as outlined in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025. Thus, prioritizing the development of writing skills in educational policies not only promotes holistic citizen growth but also contributes significantly to the attainment of both national and global SDGs.

Despite the widely recognized significance of writing skills, a pressing concern persists regarding the considerable difficulty non-native speakers encounter in mastering this aspect, particularly in Malay language acquisition. Proficiency in writing demands a certain level of second language background knowledge, encompassing rhetorical organization, appropriate language usage, and specific lexicon, to effectively engage with readers. Previous research, including studies by Abdul Razak & Said (2023), Ali, Mahamod, & Mis (2022), Nahar (2020), and Ismail & Zakaria (2019), has consistently highlighted the challenges non-native students faced in Malay essay writing tasks due to inadequate writing skill proficiency. Addressing this issue promptly is imperative to provide more effective treatment or intervention during students' formative years, when their capacity for absorption is heightened. Consequently, this paper aims to bridge this gap by examining the writing difficulties encountered by non-native students at the primary school level, along with exploring suitable strategies that can be implemented in the classroom to enhance their essay writing skills.

## II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The main challenge faced by teachers in primary schools is the limited vocabulary usage among non-native students, which significantly impedes their ability to construct grammatically correct sentences and coherent essay structures (Saavedra & Barredo, 2020; Ab Rahman & Zamri, 2019). This deficiency, highlighted by the Ministry of Education (MOE, 2018), leads to unclear and difficult-to-understand written expressions. Additionally, non-native students encounter obstacles in generating and processing ideas for essays, resulting in poorly developed and inadequately written compositions (Ab Rahman & Mahamod, 2019; Ali et al., 2022; Ahmad Ghulamuddin et al., 2021). These essays often lack essential content, exhibit repetition, and contain incomplete sentences, thereby obscuring the intended meaning.

Moreover, non-native students struggle with cohesion and coherence in their essays, as they face difficulties in linking paragraphs and maintaining the flow of ideas (Férez Mora, Coyle, and Solís Becerra, 2021; Ali et al., 2022). This deficiency leads to disjointed essays that fail to address the requirements of the given topic, resulting in a lack of continuity and relevance in their written work. These challenges not only hinder students' academic progress but also impact their ability to effectively communicate ideas through writing.

Therefore, there is an urgent need for targeted interventions to address these issues and enhance non-native students' essay writing skills in primary schools. By addressing vocabulary limitations, improving idea generation and organization, and reinforcing cohesion and coherence, educators can better support students in developing their writing proficiency and academic success. Such interventions should be informed by empirical research and tailored to the specific needs of non-native students, ultimately fostering a more conducive learning environment for language acquisition and literacy development in primary education settings.

## III. LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Writing Skills*

Writing is perceived as a means of communication through which non-native students can express their idea and emotions through a meticulously constructed text (Mohammed et al., 2021). The process of writing and revising as a fundamental principle that provides primary non-native students with the opportunity to develop, elaborate upon, and assert their identities. It is widely acknowledged that writing ranks among the most challenging language skills for learners to master, given its propensity to stimulate intellectual growth (Ali et al., 2022; Ahmad Ghulamuddin et al., 2021; Suastra & Menggo, 2020). Learners encountering difficulties in writing may struggle with various components of the writing process, encompassing aspects such as grammar, conventions, punctuation, capitalization, spelling, and fundamental elements of essay writing (Tenggok & Nor Shaid, 2023). Therefore, writing stands as an essential skill to be mastered, offering undeniable benefits to all Malay language non-native students. Educators across the globe, at all levels of educational institutions, bear the responsibility of designing numerous engaging and purposeful activities aimed at captivating and assessing non-native students in their quest to develop and enhance their writing abilities.

Research on essay writing skills among non-native students has been conducted by numerous researchers both domestically and internationally. In Western countries, studies on essay writing skills among non-native students have been undertaken by Farooqui (2023), Suryanto & Sari, (2021), Fatsah, Ashrafiyany, & Basalama (2020), Saavedra & Barredo (2020). Furthermore, studies focusing on Malay essay writing skills in Malaysia have been conducted by Tenggek, & Nor Shaid (2023), Ali et al. (2022), Nahar (2020).

### ***Difficulties in Malay Essay Writing***

Non-native students encounter several challenges when writing essays in Malay. Linguistic difficulties, including grammar, vocabulary, and syntax, hinder their writing proficiency. Research by Tenggek & Nor Shaid (2023) found that non-native students often struggle with Malay grammar rules, resulting in frequent grammatical errors in their essays. Additionally, vocabulary acquisition poses a significant challenge, with non-native students frequently relying on simplistic language and limited lexical variety (Gopinath, Selvajothi, & Chew Fong Peng, 2024). Therefore, students who are bad in writing skills that generally lack vocabularies and grammar knowledge.

Besides lack of vocabularies and grammatical errors, non-native student has difficulties in the development and organization of the paragraphs because they possess limited knowledge about the topic that they want to write. Ali et al., (2022) reported that the students were not able to generate relevant ideas on the theme of the essay. They also reported interference from student's native tongue as direct translation of expressions in Iban language in their Malay essay writing. While Ab Rahman & Mahamod (2019) observed that the students were unable to come up with an appropriate topic sentence and further logical supporting sentences. To add, Mat & Shaid (2023) in their study on writing problems among minority ethnic students in Sarawak, Malaysia also attributed the language errors included linguistic and cognitive related issues such as grammar, syntax, and inappropriate ideas development. They also reported the problem of punctuation, capitalization, spelling and influence of other languages in their Malay essay writing.

## **IV. METHODOLOGY**

### ***Research Approach***

The researcher used a qualitative approach to conducting the research. A qualitative approach is one of the research types which explores the problem and develops a detailed understanding of central phenomenon (Cresswell, 2016). This statement is in line with the purpose of the study. The purpose of this study is to discover the difficulties and to find out the strategies used by teacher of Malay language subject to deal with the difficulties faced by non-native students in Malay essay writing. In this research, the researcher used descriptive qualitative design because the result is opinions or prospective that are not quantifiable. This statement supported by Lambert and Lambert (2012) that qualitative descriptive research design, which is an approach that focuses on identifying the nature of specific issues or events under study.

### ***Research Design***

In this research, the researcher conducted interviews as a means of gathering data. The reason for using interviews was because the researcher could obtain in-depth information from each participant (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011; Yahaya, Voo, Maakup, & Malek 2020). This research used semi-structured interviews, which were analyzed using the *Nvivo 12* software. For validity and reliability, the interview questions have been reviewed and validated by three experts with expertise and experience in qualitative research especially for non-native students learning Malay as a second language.

### ***Research Participant***

Purposive sampling was employed in this study by selecting participants involved in the teaching and learning of Malay essay writing. Purposive sampling is deemed the most suitable method as participants can provide comprehensive information until saturation is reached (Creswell, 2009; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). For this study, a total of five Malay language teachers in the Kapit, Sarawak were selected as study participants. The selection was based on predetermined criteria, requiring a minimum of five years of experience teaching Malay language, and currently teaching Level 2 classes. In addition, these schools primarily instruct students from the Iban ethnic community who communicate in their mother tongue.

### ***Research Instrument***

The research instrument used in this qualitative study is semi-structured interview protocol. This semi-structured interview protocol is designed for interviews with five Malay language teachers. For validity and reliability, the interview questions have been reviewed and validated by three experts with expertise and experience in qualitative research.

### ***Data Collection Method***

The researcher asked the participants about the criteria required for participation, including a minimum of five years of experience teaching the Malay language and currently teaching Level 2 classes among teachers. Once the teachers had fulfilled the participation criteria, the researcher selected those who met the requirements as

participants. Following this, the researcher sought their willingness to participate, and fortunately, all participants agreed. Subsequently, the researcher arranged agreements and appointments with the participants regarding the date, time, and location for conducting the interviews, which were conducted via *WhatsApp*. The interviews took place at a school and lasted one month to gather data from all participants. The researcher conducted the interviews in Malay as it facilitated communication between the researcher and participants. A cell phone was used to record audio and collect data from the participants, with each interview lasting thirty to forty-five minutes

### **Data Analysis Method**

Thematic analysis is used to analyse qualitative data in this study, and data from semi-structured interviews were analysed inductively and deductively. The data were also analysed using NVivo 12 software. The data analysis process commenced with coding the text and assigning labels to the text, followed by coding the text into identified themes (Braun & Clarke, 2009). To ensure the reliability of the findings, peer review was conducted to obtain agreement on the interview data and subsequently the generated themes. Furthermore, Cohen's Kappa analysis involving three experts was carried out to determine the agreement values on the generated themes for data reliability

## **V.RESULT**

### **a. The Difficulties of Non-Native students in Malay Essay Writing**

Based on interviews conducted with participants, several significant themes will be discussed based on teachers' perspectives and ideas. In this part, the researcher discussed those difficulties faced by the non-native students in Malay essay writing, which are then followed by some teachers supporting statements. The analysis of interview transcription data revealed the following themes:

#### **i. Lack of Vocabulary**

Interview findings from teachers revealed that students tend to use their mother tongue and foreign languages in their essay writing, resulting in a lack of vocabulary. This includes the selection of inappropriate words in their essays, causing the content to deviate from the intended topic or question requirements. Furthermore, the lack of vocabulary also impacts the quality of sentences written by students. These findings are elucidated through interview transcripts as follows:

*"Students who read less tend to have a lack of vocabulary, leading them to use their native language in their essays" (Teacher 1).*

*"There is a mixture of their native language vocabulary in their writing" (Teacher 2).*

*"The students have very limited vocabulary and tend to mix their languages, resulting in ungrammatical sentences that are difficult to understand (Teacher 3).*

*"They tend to use their native language, causing the content of the essay to not adhere to the essay topic" (Teacher 4).*

*"It cannot be denied that they always face problems in constructing sentences and selecting inappropriate words, which consequently have an impact on essay writing" (Teacher 5).*

#### **ii. A Lack of Interest in Writing**

The findings of the interviews reveal that students lack interest in essay writing and perceive it as difficult to master. Teachers state that this lack of interest is due to students limited critical thinking abilities and difficulties in constructing sentences and essay formats, which are considered challenging. This statement is based on the interview transcript as follows:

*"The writing of this essay is quite challenging for them and even constructing sentences is not yet proficient. This causes them to appear less interested" (Teacher 1).*

*"They are not interested because the essay writing is difficult in terms of essay format and also constructing sentences" (Teacher 2).*

*"They seem less interested because they don't want to write much even though it's only 120 words" (Teacher 3).*

*"They feel that essay writing is quite difficult, and when they perceive something as difficult, they seem uninterested in doing it" (Teacher 4)*

#### **iii. Inadequate Proficiency in Language Aspects**

The findings from teacher interviews indicate that non-native speakers still have weaknesses in language aspects such as spelling, punctuation, the use of discourse markers, and grammatically correct sentences. Their lack of mastery in these language aspects indirectly affects the outcome of their essay writing. According to teachers, weak proficiency in language aspects like spelling, grammar, and punctuation makes the resulting essays difficult to understand. Additionally, shortcomings in using discourse markers and constructing grammatically correct sentences result in a lack of coherence in essay writing. This statement is supported by

the findings of the interviews as follows:

*“In terms of spelling and punctuation, students are found to make spelling errors and not use proper punctuation” (Teacher 2)*

*“If it is regarding spelling errors, they are indeed frequent. As for the use of discourse markers, sometimes they are not suitable for the context of the sentence” (Teacher 3)*

*“They frequently make spelling errors in Malay words. As for discourse markers, I observe that students still struggle to use them appropriately according to the context of the sentence. In terms of sentence structure, I notice that students have not fully mastered the use of grammatically correct sentences” (Teacher 4).*

*“The use of discourse markers can be considered weak overall, although it may vary depending on the type of essay” (Teacher 5).*

#### **iv. Ineffective Idea Development**

The findings of the interviews reveal that non-native students face challenges in the generation and developing of ideas. When they are unable to generate ideas effectively, it indirectly affects the outcome of their essay writing. According to the teachers, the students find it is difficult in writing lengthy essays and adhering to question requirements are usually due to their limited ideas. The interview findings with students indicate a tendency to repeat content, lack confidence in presenting ideas, and difficulty in translating ideas into Malay. These findings are elucidated through transcripts of participant interviews as follows:

*“In terms of content, their essays contain a lot of repetition. For example, what was already stated in the first paragraph about the intended message is reiterated in the subsequent paragraphs, resulting in a lack of content development” (Teacher 1).*

*“They still struggle to present ideas or content for a given essay” (Teacher 2).*

The teachers also stated that the weak idea processing is due to students lacking confidence in presenting content. They believe that students are afraid of making mistakes in presenting accurate content. These findings are explained through transcripts of participant interviews as follows:

*“It can be said that the ideas generated are quite limited, and they appear to have less confidence in presenting any idea or content” (Teacher 4).*

*“Their essays lack content entirely because they fear making mistakes and lack confidence in themselves” (Teacher 5).*

Students also find it difficult to articulate ideas in Malay and are more inclined to express ideas in their native language. The difficulty students face in presenting coherent ideas in Malay results in less engaging essay compositions. These findings are elucidated through interview transcripts as follows:

*“They struggle to articulate ideas, especially in Malay, which sometimes leads to direct translations from their native language” (Teacher 1)*

*“The ideas are there, but they are presented in Iban. When they try to translate them into Malay, it becomes one of the issues they encounter” (Teacher 2).*

#### **b. The Strategies for Dealing with the Difficulties of Non-Native Students in Malay Essay Writing**

This research also finds out about some strategies to cope with the difficulties in Malay essay writing among the non-native students. In this part, the researcher will discuss the strategies, which is then followed by supporting statements.

##### **i. Relevant Form of Teaching and Learning in Essay Writing**

The research findings have identified several forms of essay writing instructional methods used to assist non-native speaker students in writing essays more effectively. These methods aim to enhance their proficiency in essay writing and make the instruction more engaging.

##### **Sub theme: Guided Essay Writing**

The research findings indicate that the participants have suggested several forms of essay writing instructional methods that are suitable for the proficiency levels of non-native speaker students, such as guided essay writing, constructing essay frameworks, and gradually progressing essay writing exercises based on students' abilities. The following is an overview of the teachers' comments on the guided essay writing process:

*“I guide them to write guided by the examples I provide” (Teacher 3).*

*“We need something that can be used as a guide for them” (Teacher 4).*

*“I use guided presentation slides or videos on how to create a certain type of composition” (Teacher 5).*

### **Sub theme: Constructing Essay Framework**

In addition, the interview findings reveal that the participant recommend incorporating learning emphasizing the construction of essay frameworks in essay writing instruction. According to the participant, constructing essay frameworks is aimed at facilitating students in presenting and developing the content of their essays effectively. This finding is elucidated through the interview transcripts of the study participants, as follows:

*"Expose them to essay frameworks the steps for writing the introduction, body, and conclusion" (Teacher 2)*

*"You need to provide them with examples and frameworks first." (Teacher 3)*

*"We need to teach from the basics, which is creating an essay outline, so that no important content is overlooked." (Teacher 5)*

### **Sub theme: Essay Writing Exercises According to Students' Progressive Abilities**

Participants also suggest providing exercises that align with students' progressive abilities, moving from easy to more challenging levels. Emphasizing exercises such as progressing from constructing simple sentences to more complex ones, is intended to assist students in producing higher-quality essays. This finding is explained through the interview transcripts of the study participants, as follows:

*"Start by creating simple sentences and use numbers, 1, 2, 3, up to 10 to form sentences. Once their sentences are okay, then we can teach them to write in paragraphs." (Teacher 1).*

*"Construct simple sentences first." (Teacher 2).*

*"Provide exercises such as constructing simple sentences first until they can produce a short composition" (Teacher 3).*

*"If possible, progressively advance the exercises and compositions taught" (Teacher 4).*

## **ii. Relevant of Teaching and Learning Resources**

The interview findings indicate that the teachers have suggested the use of relevant teaching and learning resources for essay writing instruction. The use of suitable teaching and learning resources can capture the interest of non-native speaker students, encouraging them to actively engage and promoting more effective essay writing learning.

### **Sub theme: ICT-Infused Resources and Material**

The findings indicate that study participants suggest the use of teaching and learning resources infused with Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) elements and engaging graphics to capture the interest and enthusiasm of students in essay writing. This finding is explained through interview transcripts, as follows:

*"I think ICT is the reason because they are more interested in graphic elements" (Teacher 1).*

*"I believe learning materials that incorporate ICT elements can attract students' interest in the teaching and learning process in the classroom" (Teacher 2).*

*"In terms of materials, I think materials such as the use of videos" (Teacher 3)*

### **Sub theme: Utilization of Engaging Graphics and Printed Materials**

There are also study participants who recommend the use of teaching and learning resources such as diagrams, *i-Think maps*, and printed materials in essay writing instruction. The use of *i-Think maps* and printed materials can assist non-native speaker students in generating and developing ideas more effectively during essay writing instruction. This finding is explained through interview transcripts, as follows:

*"Another interesting component that is needed is an attractive graphic presentation." (Teacher 4)*

*"Mind maps (i-Think) are also necessary, and printed materials too" (Teacher 5).*

## **iii. Relevant of Teaching and Learning Activities**

The interview findings indicate that the participants recommend several essay writing instructional activities that are suitable for capturing students' interest and promoting more effective essay writing learning.

### **Sub theme: Group Activities**

The interview findings from participants indicate that students can master essay writing more effectively through teaching and learning activities such as group activities, discussion activities and presentation activities and, quiz activities. This finding is explained in the interview transcripts with study participants, as follows:

*"The activity that I often engage in is more towards group activities" (Teacher 1).*

*"I always conduct group activities where I combine students with higher levels of mastery or proficiency with students who have intermediate and lower levels of mastery" (Teacher 2).*

*"I conduct group activities for students such as discussions and presentations" (Teacher 3).*

### **Sub theme: Discussion and Presentation Activities**

There are also study participants who suggest incorporating discussion activities and presentation activities to facilitate easier mastery of essay writing. This finding is explained through interview transcripts, as follows:

*“Presentation activity using technological materials” (Teacher 1).*

*“Group learning activities such as discussions, and after the group discussion session, they will present their work or ideas” (Teacher 3).*

*“I feel that discussion activities can attract their interest and help improve their mastery level (Teacher 4).*

*“Work in groups, and they will discuss within the group to exchange their opinions and developing ideas. After they finish in their groups, I will ask them to present the results of their discussion in front of the class” (Teacher 5).*

### **Sub theme: Quiz Activities**

The interview findings indicate that the participants suggest teaching and learning activities such as quiz activities to enhance the vocabulary of non-native speaker students, thereby helping them master essay writing more effectively. Besides, when the students were introduced with the appropriate vocabulary to the topic, they were able to use in their writing with a proper spelling and develop good language aspect. This finding is explained by statement as follows:

*“We can do quiz activities to enhance vocabulary and language aspect such as spelling” (Teacher 1).*

*“Activities involving quizzes can be included to improve their vocabulary in writing aspect” (Teacher 2).*

*“Conduct quizzes that focus on vocabulary” (Teacher 3).*

## **VII. DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study provide important insights into the obstacles that non-native speakers of the Iban ethnic group have when writing Malay essays. Furthermore, educators, particularly those responsible for teaching Malay language subject, might use these findings to improve instructional approaches in Malay essay writing. Teachers can help non-native speakers improve their Malay writing ability by identifying the difficulties and providing appropriate strategies, promoting both academic success and language development. The research finding indicate that non-native students face difficulties in limited range of vocabulary, resulting in essays that may lack depth precision. This limitation hampers their ability to convey ideas and arguments convincingly. The limited vocabulary could obstruct the good quality of the essay since vocabulary has a crucial role in a language learner. This statement is in line with Asep (2014), that a rich vocabulary is fundamental to constructing grammatically correct sentences and is essential to effective writing skills. Iban ethnic students are found to struggle in using Malay vocabulary effectively in essay writing, leading to the production of ungrammatical sentences and content that does not adhere to the essay's topic. Those statement is supported by studies conducted by Ali et al., (2022) and Ahmad Ghulamuddin et al., (2021), which suggest that inappropriate vocabulary selection impacts students' sentences and results in essays that do not meet the topic or question requirements. Therefore, teachers play a crucial role in supporting the vocabulary development of non-native students by implementing various effective teaching and learning strategies in essay writing.

The findings also show that the non-native students faced some disinterest in essay writing due to students limited critical thinking abilities and difficulties in constructing sentences and essay formats. This statement is in line with Srinawati & Alwi (2023), that the limited critical thinking abilities hinder students' capacity to analyse information, synthesise ideas, and develop coherent arguments, all of which are essential skills for effective essay writing. Without the ability to critically evaluate and organise thoughts, students may struggle to articulate their ideas in a structured and logical manner, resulting in frustration and disinterest in writing essays. Additionally, difficulties in constructing sentences and essay formats further compound the problem. Students who struggle with sentence construction may find it challenging to convey their ideas clearly, while those grappling with essay formats may feel overwhelmed by the technical aspects of writing (Ali et al., 2022). Therefore, teachers should be creative in designing effective strategies and techniques for essay writing to engage the interest of non-native students in Malay essay writing.

The findings indicate that the non-native students also often face the difficulties in mastering various aspects of language, including grammar, vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, and discourse markers. Having good ability in the language aspect will lead to producing high-quality essay writing (Mat & Nor Shaid, 2023; Moses & Mohamad, 2019). One of the primary implications of inadequate language aspect proficiency is its impact on students' ability to produce coherent and effective written texts. This statement is supported by Ali et al., (2022), indicating that non-native students with inadequate proficiency in language aspects may struggle to construct grammatically correct sentences, select appropriate vocabulary, and apply punctuation and discourse markers effectively. As a result, their essays may lack clarity, coherence, and cohesion, hindering their communication of ideas and arguments. Teachers should modify their teaching methods to engage students' interest in learning Malay essay writing, especially among Iban ethnic students who are learning Malay as a second language.

The research findings show that non-native students, particularly those from the Iban ethnic group, encounter difficulties in generating and processing essay content effectively. Processing ideas using grammatically correct sentences and engaging language proves to be somewhat difficult for Iban ethnic students. This difficulty is compounded by the complexity and demanding nature of essay writing, which is identified as one of the most intricate language skills to master in the Malay language (Abdullah et al., 2016; Che Zanariah & Fadzillah, 2011). Moreover, Iban ethnic students confront obstacles in refining their ideas into cohesive and engaging essays due to their hesitancy in expressing thoughts in Malay and the influence of their native language, which can disrupt the idea generation process. Previous studies have similarly highlighted such issues in idea generation and processing among students from various ethnic backgrounds, including Chinese students as investigated by Nahar (2020) and Ismail & Zakaria (2019), Bajau ethnic students in Sabah as explored by Ali et al. (2022), and Lun Bawang ethnic students in Sarawak as studied by Ab Rahman & Mahamod (2019). Consequently, educators are encouraged to devise effective methodologies or pedagogical approaches to support non-native students in generating and processing essay ideas or content proficiently.

Besides, the research findings have provided clear strategies that deal the difficulties of non-native students in the essay writing learning process. The results indicate that Malay language teachers recommend various forms of essay writing pedagogy, such as guided essay writing, essay structure construction, and progressive essay writing exercises tailored to students' abilities developing ideas in writing. Planning the forms of essay writing strategies is a crucial requirement because each non-native speaker student requires a suitable pedagogical strategy to master essay writing effectively especially when developing an idea (Ali et al., 2022). The suggested forms of essay writing pedagogy are also considered effective in providing guidance and enhancing students' ability to progress in essay writing. These findings align with Farooqui (2023) and Rahmayanti, Oka & Putra (2020) that structurally and progressively designed essay writing strategies can lead to students' success in essay writing.

Furthermore, the study findings also indicate that teachers suggest the need for resources and teaching materials that are tailored to the needs of non-native speaker students in essay writing pedagogy. The recommended teaching resources and materials include the use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT), graphic materials, and diagrams that can capture the interest and enhance the motivation of non-native speaker students in essay writing. These findings align with the studies conducted by Muna & Kalam (2021) and Bakthaselman, Hussin & Yue (2022) that effective pedagogy should utilize good and effective teaching resources and materials to capture the interest and enhance the mastery level of students in their learning. Therefore, the use of engaging teaching resources and materials can create an enjoyable learning environment in the classroom, especially for non-native speaker students.

The implementation of essay writing strategies also requires planning pedagogical activities that are suitable for non-native speaker students. This indicates that the designed pedagogical activities should consider the interests and proficiency levels, considering that writing skills are the most challenging to master for students who use Malay as a second language. These findings align with the study conducted by Nahar (2020) that teachers need to plan and align activities to be suitable for the interests and proficiency levels of non-native speaker students in essay writing pedagogy. Additionally, planned pedagogical activities such as group activities, activities involving presentations and learning through ICT and quiz activities can capture the interest of students in language learning, enhance their vocabulary and, consequently, assist non-native speaker students in mastering essay writing better with good language aspect. This aligns with the statements of Bakthaselman, Hussin & Yue (2022) and Alobaid (2020) that the ability to write essays in non-native speaker students can be enhanced through group activities, the use of ICT and quiz activities in their learning

## VIII. LIMITATION AND CONCLUSION

This qualitative study sheds light on the difficulties faced by non-native speakers, particularly Iban ethnic students, in Malay essay writing at the primary school level. Through an analysis of interview data, several key difficulties emerged, including lack of vocabulary, lack of interest in writing, inadequate proficiency in language aspects and ineffective idea development. Besides, this research also finds strategies to cope with the difficulties in Malay essay writing among non-native student. The strategies suggested to deal with the difficulties are relevant form of teaching and learning in essay writing, relevant of teaching and learning resources and relevant of teaching and learning activities. Therefore, the research conclusions and earlier investigations in the area are supported by this study. Besides, the findings of this study are expected can serve as a guide for Malay language teachers in planning the best teaching and learning practices for Malay essay writing specifically tailored to Iban ethnic students.

### Limitation of Study

There are a few limitations of this study. There are a few limitations of this study. The study was conducted in schools that primarily instruct students from the Iban ethnic community on the Malay language subject in essay writing in Sarawak, Malaysia. In the future, it is suggested that more studies should be conducted to identify difficulties and strategies in Malay essay writing among non-native student in primary school in a broader geographical location, diverse learning environment, various race. The number of the participant in the study quite small. Therefore, it is suggested that a bigger sample size should be employed for future study to obtain



richer data for the study. Apart from that, the current study utilized a qualitative approach and data collection was through semi-structure interview. Thus, for future research, it is proposed that quantitative research approach is used as well, which could produce some reliable findings.

### Future Research

The future research in this area could explore effective instructional interventions to support non-native speakers in Malay essay writing. Additionally, collaborative efforts between educators, policymakers, and community stakeholders are essential to develop comprehensive language education initiatives that cater to the diverse linguistic needs of students in multicultural societies like Malaysia. Through concerted efforts, we can work towards enhancing language proficiency, academic achievement, and overall well-being among non-native speakers in primary schools.

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