THE EFFECT OF TEACHER SELF-DISCLOSURE IN IMPROVING ESL UNDERGRADUATES' ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAYS

PAUL GNANASELVAM A/L PAKIRNATHAN

UNIVERSITI PENDIDIKAN SULTAN IDRIS

2021

THE EFFECT OF TEACHER SELF-DISCLOSURE IN IMPROVING ESL
UNDERGRADUATES' ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAYS

PAUL GNANASELVAM A/L PAKIRNATHAN

THESIS PRESENTED TO QUALIFY FOR DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

FAKULTI BAHASA DAN KOMUNIKASI
UNIVERSITI PENDIDIKAN SULTAN IDRIS

2021

UPSI/IPS-3/BO 32
Pind : 00 m/s: 1/1

UNIVERSITI PENDIDIKAN SULTAN IDRIS
SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY

Please tick (√)

Project Paper	
Masters by Research	
Master by Mixed Mode	
PhD	✓

INSTITUTE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

DECLARATION OF ORIGINAL WORK

This declaration is made on the 19th day of MAY 2021.

i.   Student's Declaration:

I,   PAUL GNANASELVAM A/L PAKIRNATHAN /P20151000043/ FBK   (PLEASE INDICATE STUDENT'S NAME, MATRIC NO. AND FACULTY) hereby declare that the work entitled   THE EFFECT OF TEACHER SELF-DISCLOSURE IN IMPROVING ESL UNDERGRADUATES' ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAYS   is   my original work. I have not copied from any other students' work or from any other sources except where due reference or acknowledgement is made explicitly in the text, nor has any part been written for me by another person.

Paulgselvam
Signature of the student

ii.   Supervisor's Declaration:

I   ASSOC. PROF. DR. NOR AZMI MOSTAFA   (SUPERVISOR'S NAME) hereby certify that the work entitled   THE EFFECT OF TEACHER SELF-DISCLOSURE IN IMPROVING ESL UNDERGRADUATES' ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAYS

_____(TITLE) was prepared by the above named student, and was submitted to the Institute of Graduate Studies as a * ~~partial~~/full fulfillment for the conferment of   DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY   (PLEASE INDICATE THE DEGREE), and the aforementioned work, to the best of my knowledge, is the said student's work.

19/05/2021
Date

Signature of the Supervisor

UPSI/IPS-3/BO 31
Pind.: 01 m/s:1/1

UNIVERSITI PENDIDIKAN SULTAN IDRIS
SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY

INSTITUT PENGAJIAN SISWAZAH /
INSTITUTE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

BORANG PENGESAHAN PENYERAHAN TESIS/DISERTASI/LAPORAN KERTAS PROJEK
DECLARATION OF THESIS/DISSERTATION/PROJECT PAPER FORM

Tajuk / *Title*: THE EFFECT OF TEACHER SEL-DISCLOSURE IN IMPROVING ESL

UNDERGRADUATES' ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAYS

No. Matrik /*Matric's No.*: P20151000043

Saya / *I* : PAUL GNANASELVAM A/L PAKIRNATHAN

(Nama pelajar / *Student's Name*)

mengaku membenarkan Tesis/~~Disertasi/Laporan Kertas Projek~~ (Kedoktoran/~~Sarjana~~)* ini disimpan di Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (Perpustakaan Tuanku Bainun) dengan syarat-syarat kegunaan seperti berikut:-
acknowledged that Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (Tuanku Bainun Library) reserves the right as follows:-

1. Tesis/~~Disertasi/Laporan Kertas Projek~~ ini adalah hak milik UPSI.
   The thesis is the property of Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris

2. Perpustakaan Tuanku Bainun dibenarkan membuat salinan untuk tujuan rujukan dan penyelidikan.
   Tuanku Bainun Library has the right to make copies for the purpose of reference and research.

3. Perpustakaan dibenarkan membuat salinan Tesis/~~Disertasi~~ ini sebagai bahan pertukaran antara Institusi Pengajian Tinggi.
   The Library has the right to make copies of the thesis for academic exchange.

4. Sila tandakan (√) bagi pilihan kategori di bawah / *Please tick (√) for category below:-*

☐	SULIT/*CONFIDENTIAL*	Mengandungi maklumat yang berdarjah keselamatan atau kepentingan Malaysia seperti yang termaktub dalam Akta Rahsia Rasmi 1972. / *Contains confidential information under the Official Secret Act 1972*
☐	TERHAD/*RESTRICTED*	Mengandungi maklumat terhad yang telah ditentukan oleh organisasi/badan di mana penyelidikan ini dijalankan. / *Contains restircted information as specified by the organization where research was done.*
☑	TIDAK TERHAD / *OPEN ACCESS*	

Paulgselvam

(Tandatangan Pelajar/ Signature)

Tarikh: 19/05/2021

(Tandatangan Penyelia / *Signature of Supervisor*)
& (Nama & Cop Rasmi / *Name & Official Stamp*)

DR. NOR AZMI MOSTAFA
Profesor Madya
Fakulti Bahasa Dan Komunikasi
Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris

Catatan: Jika Tesis/Disertasi ini SULIT @ TERHAD, sila lampirkan surat daripada pihak berkuasa/organisasi berkenaan dengan menyatakan sekali sebab dan tempoh laporan ini perlu dikelaskan sebagai SULIT dan TERHAD.

Notes: If the thesis is CONFIDENTAL or RESTRICTED, please attach with the letter from the organization with period and reasons for confidentiality or restriction.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am truly glad that by the LORD God Almighty's grace and strength, I have persevered and live to write the following:

The PhD has not only been a process of honing academic and research skills, but indeed one that has wholesomely inspired a life-long pursuit for learning, and grappling with life-changing events through its myriad of physical, emotional and psychological challenges. It has taught me that aspiration, hard work, persistence and resilience are keys to success in realising one's goals. This thesis has been quite an unimagined feat, made possible by the wonderful people who crisscrossed my path.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Napisah Kepol. There are no words to encapsulate the effect she has had on me. The amount of time spent on discussing, planning, and executing this research; the writing, correcting and editing of this thesis. I am astounded by the patience with which she immersed herself in my study, providing directions, wise words and opening my eyes to the philosophy behind methodology as well as keeping me afloat throughout the ups and downs during my candidature. I will forever miss those lifting conversations that made me realise and see myself as a PhD. I am today a better supervisor, a credible researcher and an informed academic due to the tutelage of Dr. Napisah. A heartfelt appreciation also goes to my co-supervisor, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nor Azmi Mostafa for supporting me throughout my candidature defense, presentation of findings and the final phase of endorsing this thesis.

Secondly, I must thank Dr. Daljeet Singh Sedhu and Dr. S. Maartandan- my closest allies, simply for being the friends I could fall back on for academic, technical and moral support. A sincere appreciation to Emeritus Prof. Dr. Malachi Edwin Vethamani for constantly checking on me and availing the many trips that were a breather. A special shout out goes to the Dean, Dr. Alia Azalea, HOD, Mr. Pong Kok Shiong and Cik Siti Ummaizah, Lecturers, Ms. Joanna Selamat and Ms. Cheng Siew May and undergraduates from the B.A. English Language programme from the Faculty of Arts and Social Science, University Tunku Abdul Rahman (Perak Campus), Subject-Matter-Experts, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Vahid Nemichisalem (University Putra Malaysia), Assoc. Prof. Dr. Too Wei Keong (University of Nottingham) for validating the research instruments. Special mention also goes to Dr. Palani Vel, Dr. Priscilla Moses, Dr. Praveen Balakrishnan Nair, Ms. Ezri Ann Lourdess, Mr. Tan Soon Aun, Dr. Mariann Edwina, Ms. Premila Jeremiah and the late Dr. Teh Chee Seng and Ms. Sim Chia Pow.

Finally, to those who make my world whole and worthy, my late father, Mr. Pakirnathan Manickam, mom, Madam Solosina Retnam, sisters, Grace Chitra, Joyce Sarala, Sheila Ann and brother, Raymond Nathan, brothers in-law Rev. Victor Arputham and Xhuanelado Seeni, and nephews, Ishmaiah Jeevan, Jeremiah Satyam and Joshua Ebenezzar.

Non Desistas Non Exieris!

ABSTRACT

This study was undertaken to find out if teacher self-disclosure could positively effect English as a Second Language (ESL) undergraduate students' writing performance in argumentative essays. Using the mixed-methods intervention design. both quantitative and qualitative data were collected in this study. 75 undergraduates from three tutorial groups from an academic writing course at a Malaysian private institution of higher learning were selected as the experimental and control groups through purposive sampling. The quasi-experimental pre-test-post-test design was employed to collect the undergraduates' scores on argumentative essays while qualitative data were gathered using three methods, which were observation, focus group interview and one-to-one interview. The Pearson product-moment correlation and paired samples t-test were used for quantitative data analysis while thematic analysis was used for qualitative data analysis. The quantitative results indicated a significant difference in the post-test argumentative writing scores obtained between students from the experimental groups, Tl (t= -8.35, p< 0.001) and T2 (t= -9.12, p< 0.001) while there was no significant difference for the control group, T3 (t= -6.92, p> 0.001). The main themes identified from the qualitative data comprising the factors instructional strategies, content building, interpersonal communication strategies and personal traits revealed that teacher self-disclosure was important in improving the ESL undergraduates· argumentative essay writing. While style emerged as the most impacted sub-component of the writing performance, organisation, content. language and task-fulfillment were also positively impacted by teacher self-disclosure. The results of this study suggest that teacher self-disclosure is an effective instructional strategy that can be used in the ESL writing classroom to teach argumentative essays. This study has important implications for affective, instructional and learning strategies in the field of teaching English as a second language.

KESAN PENDEDAHAN KENDIRI PENGAJAR TERHADAP PENULISAN ESEI ARGUMENTATIF DALAM KALANGAN SISWA BAHASA INGGERIS SEBAGAI BAHASA KEDUA

ABSTRAK

Penyelidikan ini bertujuan untuk memahami sama ada pendedahan kendiri pengajar berupaya memberi kesan terhadap prestasi penulisan esei argumentatif dalam kalangan siswa program bahasa lnggeris sebagai bahasa kedua. Kajian ini menggunakan reka bentuk campuran kuantitatif dan kualitatif dengan intervensi bagi tujuan pengumpulan data. Seramai 75 orang siswa daripada tiga kelas tutorial dalam kursus penulisan ilmiah di sebuah institusi pendidikan tinggi swasta di Malaysia telah dipilih sebagai kumpulan experimen dan kawalan melalui teknik persampelan purposif. Kaedah praujian dan pascaujian telah digunakan untuk memperoleh skor siswa dalam esei argumentatif manakala data kualitatif telah dikumpul dengan menggunakan tiga kaedah iaitu kaedah pemerhatian, temu bual kumpulan fokus dan temu bual perseorangan. Ujian statistik korelasi momen produk Pearson dan ujian-t sampel berpasangan digunakan untuk menganalisis data kuantitatif manakala analisis tematik telah digunakan untuk menganalisis data kualitatif. Hasil ujian-t berpasangan menunjukkan perbezaan yang signifikan dalam skor penulisan pascaujian yang diperoleh antara kumpulan eksperimen, Tl ($t= -8.35$, $p< 0.001$) dan T2 ($t= -9.12$, $p< 0.001$), manakala tidak signifikan bagi kumpulan kawalan, T3 ($t= -6.92$, $p> 0.001$). Tema-tema utama yang dihasilkan daripada data kualitatif yang merangkumi faktor-faktor strategi instruksional, pembinaan kandungan, strategi komunikasi interpersonal dan ciri-ciri peribadi menunjukkan bahawa pendedahan kendiri pengajar memberikan kesan dalam memperbaiki skor penulisan esei argumentatif siswa program bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa kedua. Walaupun gaya penulisan muncul sebagai komponen yang paling mempengaruhi prestasi penulisan para siswa, namun pendedahan kendiri pengajar juga memberi kesan positif ke atas organisasi, kandungan, bahasa dan memenuhi keperluan tugasan. Hasil penyelidikan ini mencadangkan bahawa pendedahan kendiri pengajar adalah strategi pengajaran yang berkesan yang boleh digunakan dalam kelas penulisan program bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa kedua untuk mengajar penulisan esei argumentatif. Penyelidikan ini juga memberikan implikasi penting terhadap strategi-strategi afektif, instruksional dan pembelajaran dalam bidang pengajaran penulisan bahasa lnggeris sebagai bahasa kedua.

TABLE OF CONTENT

CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ELT   English Language Teaching

ESL   English as Second Language

L2 2nd Language

PTSD   Perceived Teacher's Self-Disclosure

APPENDIX LIST

A   Observation Schedule

B1   Interview Protocol- Tutor

B2   Interview Protocol- Students

C1   General Test

C2   Pre-test

C3   Post-test

C4   Weekly Writing Tasks

D1   Argumentative Writing Assessment Rubrics

D2   Assessment Validation Checklists

E   Transcripts

F   Lesson Plan

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0. Introduction

Being competent in L2 writing skills is an integral part of an undergraduate's university life. However, many ESL undergraduates find that writing is the most difficult skill to master. Numerous studies have been conducted to help overcome ESL undergraduates' poor mastery of the English language especially in writing skills but no solutions avail. This study has been undertaken by the researcher to find out if teacher self-disclosure could have positive effects on impact ESL undergraduates' writing performance. This chapter provides a general introduction to this study and will be presented in 11 sections. The first section begins by introducing ESL writing in Malaysian higher education, followed by the research problem and justification. This is followed by the identification of the study's research objectives, which then leads to the research

questions and hypotheses. The significance of the study is then discussed, followed by the limitations of the study and the conceptual framework that shows the relationship between the variables studied. Important terminologies used in the research are then defined while the following sections underline the outline of the thesis.

1.1. Background of the study

South East Asia, especially Malaysia and Singapore have become the region's biggest international educational hub in the last decade (Manjet, 2015). In the Malaysian higher education, English language proficiency is gaining prominence as a crucial skill that needs to be mastered by undergraduates. From time to time, the importance of writing that encompasses critical thinking skills, sustaining opinions through facts and arguments and synthesising of ideas have been emphasised through various channels such as the government and the Ministry of Education policies, ELT practitioners and researchers alike. ESL proficiency skills, especially the ability to speak and write effectively, are increasingly seen as the crucial factor for the academic success of graduates and mobilizing the nation towards a fully developed nation by 2020.

The English language is the medium of instruction in most universities in Malaysia. As such, students often have to access learning materials in the English language. They also have to read a wide variety of content materials, and produce reports and project works in English. In the teaching and learning of ESL, it is important for students to master the four crucial language skills which are listening, speaking,

reading and writing. In order to equip undergraduates with the required linguistic competence in the English language, most Malaysian universities offer English language courses to their students (Mohammed & Rafik-Galea, 2010).

Upon entering universities, Malaysian students are required to undergo compulsory proficiency courses to enhance their language skills such as the Intensive English programs. These are offered as prerequisite courses before students enroll into discipline-specific English language courses such as the ESP (English for Specific Purpose) or the EAP (English for Academic Purpose). These subjects, for example, Academic Writing or Communication and Study Skills, equip students with the necessary skills needed to handle course and reference materials relevant to the writing conventions of the students' area of study (Wong & Thang, 2008). The EOP courses (English for Occupational Purpose) are then offered to students after they have completed the Intensive English, ESP or EAP subjects. According to Isarji, Amal, Zainab, Engku, Ainon and Faridah (2013), the EOP courses are an initiative of the higher educational institutions in the effort to equip their students with employability skills such as soft-skills, critical thinking and problem solving and effective communication. These courses comprise subjects such a Communicative English, Business English, Technical Writing, Report Writing, Writing for Public Relations, Feature Writing and etc.

Writing, according to Grami (2010) is a complex skill that involves the mental production of thought, discipline and concentration on paper. Therefore, writing is an individual's concerted effort of reproducing selected details and reorganising his or her

own experiences, which are formed by his perceptions, actions and reading (McKay, 1979). In both Malaysian universities and abroad, academic writing courses are offered to teach undergraduates to produce writing that fulfills the required writing norms of the academic fields that they are pursuing. Undergraduates are required to communicate meaningfully with others through writing and engage in higher order learning skills through synthesising, evaluating and validating information, enabling them to present their thoughts and ideas with concrete textual evidence or knowledge.

Apart from the linguistics aspects of writing such as grammar, mechanics, vocabulary, sentence structure, cohesion and coherence, and pre-subscribed reading texts, the academic writing course usually exposes undergraduates to the different genres of essay writing, through the reading and writing of expository texts and essays. One of the most prominent is the argumentative essay.

Argumentative writing is a set of interrelated claims which are supported by facts, true life observations and principles that enforce the arguer's position. Vahid, Masoud, Amirtohid and Seyed, (2015) further explain that writing an argumentation is in fact a process. This process calls for close examination of the claims made, awareness on the availability of support and at the same time acknowledging the possible counterarguments and the readiness to offer rebuttals to prove one's claims. Botley (2014), Ramanathan and Atkinson (1999), Knudson (1998) and Crowhurst (1991), assert that argumentation, especially in the form of writing is a necessary skill that must be taught at all levels of tertiary education. This is important as argumentation inculcates critical and judgmental thinking, link academic knowledge to life purposes

which eventually help undergraduates to participate in disciplinary discourse and social interactions.

As undergraduates enter tertiary education, their writing tasks become more demanding as they are required to comprehend a wide array of academic texts, prepare assignments and write research papers. In order to produce written works that are clear, matured, meaningful and coherently expressed with the required academic vocabulary, they need to employ an array of skills such as summarising, synthesising, paraphrasing as well as citing and referencing. In most private institutions of higher learning, the medium of instruction is English. Most Malaysian undergraduates, who predominantly come from the Malay medium national schools are faced with many challenges such as poor grammar, limited vocabulary, word order, transferring of information from L1 to L2 (Chan & Abdullah, 2004), generating ideas, content development, organizing and linking ideas. In fact, Malini, (2008) and Samsiah (2007) have pointed out to the lack in the interconnectedness of undergraduates' to the outside world have also contributed to content that is not critical, interesting and reflective, limiting their abilities to write effective argumentation. Since undergraduates lack reading experience and are not able to see the connection between writing in class and real life situations, and depend on limited prior knowledge, they write argumentations without a clear understanding of topics, weak claims and supports with no mental representation of their world-experiences, often producing work that is unconvincing, shallow and boring.

Self-disclosure is the central element of Irvin Altman and Dalmas Taylor's Social Penetration Theory (1973). Griffin (2010) defines Social Penetration Theory as

"the process of developing deeper intimacy with another person through mutual self-disclosure," (p. 114) while Wheeless and Grotz (1976), Cozby (1973), and Jourard (1971), explain that self-disclosure is the exchange of any messages about the self that a person communicates to one another on the basis of trust and solidarity. The variety of topics (breadth) and the intimate details (depth) of the information shared between two or more individuals determines the nature of social relationships.

As interpersonal communication is the process through which teaching and learning takes place, teachers are often engaged in dialogues with their students. According to Sorenson (1989), teachers spend most of their classroom contact hours by conversing with their students, while teaching, instructing or informing. This interaction builds an ongoing interpersonal relationship between teachers and students alike. For example, teachers may voice out their opinions, emotions or feelings, their experiences or others while explaining course content, important concepts or exemplifications. Thus, teacher self-disclosure is the "teacher statements made in the classroom about oneself that reveals information that would otherwise be inaccessible to students" (Sorenson, 1989, p, 260).

Self-disclosure has been studied across many different disciplines, contexts and discourses such as social-psychology, clinical-psychology, social-communication, inter-cultural sociology, corporate communications and corporate social responsibility, media and corporate transparency, health and insurance, attitudinal and political studies. Thus, instructional communication researchers felt that it is important that teacher self-disclosure be studied in the context of teaching and learning relating to

course content. Teacher self-disclosure, therefore, generally consists of three dimensions (Cayanus & Martin, 2002), namely amount (array of topics and the frequency at which teachers engage these topics during self-disclosures), relevance (relevance of topics disclosed to course content) and negativity (negative statements disclosed about oneself).

Past studies in ESL writing have concentrated on the instructional needs of students learning to write expository texts. Often, they have recommended critical actions on reading and writing at cognitive levels. This study, on the other hand, aims to find out if the socio-communicative factor, teacher self-disclosure, would have a significant effect on ESL undergraduates' writing performance in argumentative essays.

1.2. Problem Statement

One of the utmost priorities of the shift of the education system made in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (MOE, 2012) was to boost students' English language proficiency. However, poor English language proficiency among fresh graduates has been consistently ranked as one of the top five issues faced by Malaysian employers where 35% remain unemployed after six months of graduating, 52% being graduates from the Arts and Social Sciences (Leo, 2018). Most notably, Malaysian undergraduates faced problems in both written and spoken proficiency, lacked criticality, unable to communicate during interviews (Tradmin, 2017) and unable to

competently address job requirements using the English language (JobStreet.com, 2015/12/08).

L2 writing is often perceived as difficult by ESL learners. As such, there exists a scenario where undergraduates often enter universities with limited content knowledge, without writing readiness made worst by a lack of linguistic incompetence. Poor writing performance among Malaysian ESL undergraduates are contributed by many factors. They include a lack of writing readiness among undergraduates (Yah Awang Nik, Azizah & Hasif, 2010), the inability to gauge university expectations (Giridharan, 2012), the difficulty in producing ideas (Hiew, 2012), organization, vocabulary and paraphrasing skills (Ashrafzaedah & Vahid, 2015), difficulties in meaningful application of grammar (Kho-Yar & Tan, 2015), lack of self-efficacy, vocabulary, exposure, social communication and weak syntax (David, Siew & Hazita, 2015), low information literacy, critical thinking abilities, inter-language interference, writing anxiety (Mah & Gek, 2015) and syntactic errors (Gedion, Tati & Peter, 2016).

Similarly, most Malaysian students view argumentative essay writing as daunting and as a result do not show interest in this genre of academic writing (Botley, 2014; Normazidah, Koo & Hazita, 2012; Vahid & Mukundan, 2011; Koo, 2003; Mitchelle & Riddle, 2000). Therefore, many are not aware of the conventions of argumentative writing as well as the nuances expected in developing arguments. They produce writings that are often marred by a lack of quality in the organization, content, style and language conventions presented in their essays. Apart from being unable to establish stance in their arguments, students' argumentative essays lack sufficient

content knowledge, weak thesis statements and supporting details (Maleerat & Sarjit, 2014; Wingate, 2012). ESL undergraduates are also not able to argue, justify, discuss and incorporate reasons, explain and elaborate paragraphs in depth, as well as providing matured, opinionated, and well-positioned claims and support (Botley, 2014; Barnawi, 2011). Students are also generally not able to make clear position statements, defend their positions in argumentative writing, clarify and critically discuss judgments and connect their arguments or opinions to prior experiences and the greater world-view (Liaw, 2007). This may be partly due to the classroom cultures that inhibit students from asking questions, and challenge existing opinions. The researcher had observed that students even resorted to copying ideas suggested in the coursework and examination instructions for brainstorming and expanding their ideas, often producing argumentation essays that are not critical, and without thought autonomy and authorial presence.

According to Afzaal, Siau and Yeoh (2015) and Neo, Neo, Lim, Tan and Kwok (2013), despite technological improvements, teaching and learning in most South East Asian and specifically, Malaysian universities are still teacher-centered, where the teacher delivers content material and fully controls the instructional process. Although many ESL instructional strategies for writing are available, they are not sufficient. Mimi, Nooreiny and Mohamed (2017) had pointed out that Malaysian teachers of ESL writing lack awareness of the many available strategies and their teaching styles are often exam oriented. Low proficiency in English language among Malaysian students is often associated with the teachers' abilities and competencies to teach the English language (Rozana, 2019). Many Malaysian teachers are comfortable using traditional

instructional methods, which often does not comply with the needs of students of today's generation (Rozana, 2019). Nooreiny and Munusamy (2015) interviewed 30 English Language Studies undergraduates from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia to gauge difficulties they faced as ESL learners. The qualitative analysis of their study revealed three themes. First, students had indicated classroom learning as dull as it was mostly lecturer-centered and lecturers depended heavily on power-point presentations. Secondly, the teaching concept focused mainly on lecturers as the source of knowledge, who transferred lessons straight from the curriculum and not from their experiences, knowledge or creativity. Finally, the teaching method had created a passive class environment with no communicative approach in teaching and learning. These difficulties faced by the undergraduates indicate that there is a need to find new ways of improving the ESL instructional practices and strategies in the writing classroom. More robust instructions are needed to create ESL writers who are critical, opinionated and who are able to write not only for classrooms but the professional world at large.

This study therefore, hoped to resolve Malaysian ESL undergraduates' poor writing performance in argumentative essays by exploring teacher self-disclosure in the ESL classroom and examining its effects on undergraduates' argumentative essay writing performance.

1.3. Rationale for the Study

The English language is an international language and the official second language in Malaysia. As globalisation, the Internet, and technology have accelerated the growing influence of the English language, former Malaysian Prime Minister, Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad had consistently urged young Malaysians to master the English language if they did not want to be left behind (Sheith, 2018, Hariati & Lee, 2011).

Despite numerous efforts by the Ministry of Education, policy makers, language agencies and ELT practitioners, the proficiency level among Malaysians, especially students and the working class has deteriorated. The late Chief Minister of Sarawak, Tan Sri Adenan Satem, said that various government policies to improve English proficiency had failed (Yu, 2016). These poor policies, according to him, were in fact reflected in today's undergraduates who "cannot put words into sentences in English," (p, 12). According to Hariati and Lee (2011), the Malaysian Employment Federation Survey revealed that 68% of the companies that took part in the survey prioritised verbal and written communications skills in English in their prospective employees. This is a cause for concern as many fresh graduates have been shunned by their future employees, citing their poor command of written language (Boon, Irfan & Chow, 2013; Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers, 2010). In fact, in a recent survey conducted by JobStreet Malaysia (Ooi, 2016), it was found that 64% of Malaysian undergraduates failed to gain employment due to their poor command of the English language.

Although numerous studies on ESL writing have been done on a cognitive basis which is highly individualised, it is becoming increasingly apparent that L2 writing cannot be taught as an isolated process (Atkinson, 2003; Hyland, 2003). The internet

has globalised the way we think and how we see the world. In fact, globalisation has also influenced us in the way we see ourselves, communicate and react to the immediate environment. Ibtisam (2015), in fact, explains that the teaching of academic writing has changed from the product and process approaches to the genre approach where writing is not only influenced by mere linguistics competence alone, but also by social experiences. Writing, according to this approach, is still seen as a product and the process in which it is produced. However, it also asserts that attention must be given to the differing events in which it is being produced.

In an ESL writing class, where writing is produced as a product of the process approach, teachers teach by imparting feedback to their students and at the same time receive feedback from their students through essay outlines, writing of drafts and scaffolding techniques in the production of essays (Flowers & Hayes, 1981). Feedback is necessary in order to perceive the depth of students' understanding and pointing out errors. This mechanism could only be optimized through effective teachers' interpersonal skills. According to Freire (1990), communication skills in the form of teacher-student dialogues are so central to the teaching and learning process that co-education simply would not occur in its absence. Ramsden (1992), on the other hand, necessitates this need by saying that teachers need to communicate with their students to bridge the gap between the students and their learning process in order to relate theory to practice.

Because the teacher-student relationship is innate to student outcomes, researchers such as Aultman, Williams-Johnson and Schutz (2009), Cayanus and

Martin (2004), Chory and McCroskey, (1999) and Freire (1990) have suggested that teachers' self-disclosure as a proponent of instructional communication needs to be explored to further improve teacher communication with students, instructional strategies, content delivery and the overall classroom climate.

In a small exploratory study conducted by the researcher on 57 undergraduates in a private institution of higher learning in Malaysia (Pakirnathan & Kepol, 2018), the results yielded positive correlations between perceived teacher self-disclosure and the respondents' writing performance, especially in terms of amount and relevance. The respondents had perceived teacher self-disclosure especially positive when teachers were opinionated, clear in their attitudinal dispositions towards current events in campus and community. The respondents were also favorable to teachers' self-disclosures in the form of teachers' personal examples and experiences incorporated into the explanation of concepts and relevance to content. These results show that teacher self-disclosure is worth investigating as a promising teaching and learning variable in the ESL writing classroom. This is important as the mastery in writing skills complements the overall proficiency use of the English language skills of an ESL learner. As other variables had not been controlled in this short preliminary study, more research needs to be systematically conducted to explain the effects of teacher self-disclosure on ESL students' writing performance.

Therefore, it is vital for this research to be conducted in order to find new ways to improve the teaching and learning of ESL writing in the Malaysian classroom and offer new insights for ELT instructional strategies through teacher self-disclosure.

1.4. Research Objectives

Generally, this research aimed to study teacher self-disclosure and L2 writing performance of ESL undergraduates. Specifically, the objectives of this research were:

1. Determine whether teacher self-disclosure significantly affects the writing performance of ESL undergraduates in argumentative essays.

2. Explore teacher self-disclosure behaviour in the ESL writing classroom.

1.5. Research Questions

This research aimed to answer the following questions in order to achieve its objectives:

1. Will there be a significant difference between the overall pre-test and post-test scores of ESL undergraduates' argumentative essays after the intervention of teacher self-disclosure?

2. Will there be a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores for organisation, content, style, language, mechanics and task-fulfillment of ESL undergraduates' argumentative essays after the intervention of teacher self-disclosure?

3. What factors are essential for a comprehensive understanding of teacher self-disclosure behaviour in the ESL argumentative writing classroom?

1.6. Research Hypotheses

The independent variable in the quasi-experimental part of this research was teacher self-disclosure and the dependent variable was Malaysian ESL undergraduates' writing performance in argumentative essays. The same hypotheses were applied for both the experimental and control groups. The following hypotheses were formulated for the quantitative phase of this study based on the objectives of the study and the literature review:

H_1: There is a significant difference between the overall pre-test and post-test scores of ESL undergraduates' argumentative essays before and after the intervention of teacher self-disclosure.

H_2: There is a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores for organisation of ESL undergraduates' argumentative essays before and after the intervention of teacher self-disclosure.

H_3: There is a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores for content of ESL undergraduates' argumentative essays after the intervention.

H_4: There is a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores for style of ESL undergraduates' argumentative essays after the intervention.

H_5: There is a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores for language of ESL undergraduates' argumentative essays after the intervention.

H_6: There is a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores for mechanics of ESL undergraduates' argumentative essays after the intervention.

H$_7$: There is a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores for task-fulfillment of ESL undergraduates' argumentative essays after the intervention.

1.7. Significance of Study

Policy makers, administrators and educators need to realise that teaching is not merely methodology, but an effort to create mutual understanding between educators and their students. Teachers are not only completing syllabuses and course content, but rather serve as the imparters of essential concepts about life. The contribution of this study is discussed in terms of theoretical and practical aspects.

Self-disclosure is a communicative behavior that is known to have considerable effect on interpersonal relationships. This study contributes to the theoretical expansion of teacher self-disclosure, especially in the area of ESL writing from a social constructivist perspective, and how teacher self-disclosure serves as a moderating factor in ESL undergraduates' writing performance. Social constructivism underlies the theoretical framework of this study from which teacher self-disclosure, argumentation and ESL writing theories are explained and applied. Using the rationale that knowledge is acquired through social interaction, this study hoped to demonstrate that appropriate teacher self-disclosures could help enrich ESL students' prior knowledge, discourse and contextual experiences and interpretation which are then translated into genre specific academic writing needs of ESL students.

The practical contributions of this study will be discussed in four aspects which are pertinent to education policy makers, education administrators, teachers and students.

One of many objectives in the efforts of improving teacher quality in the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (MOE, 2012) is to train teachers to be better equipped with content knowledge and pedagogical methods, with an emphasis on experimentation and application (p, 111). With globalisation, teachers need the appropriate skills to communicate effectively with their students. Teachers need to be innovative, creative and proactive in molding students who are critical, opinionated and competent. It is important to note that this effort will not be effective without good teacher interpersonal skills.

Educational policy makers could incorporate teacher self-disclosure as a communicative strategy in their training modules, curriculum and pedagogical designs. The teacher outcomes from such training could help teachers to draw linkages between the real world and the scientific world and help students to internalise, explain and apply prior knowledge and newly discovered knowledge to everyday phenomenon.

Teacher self-disclosure as a socio-communicative factor should be included in teacher evaluation systems by educational administrators in both public and private universities. It is found that American universities rely on teacher surveys (98%) to measure the effectiveness of teaching performance of their teachers together with self-evaluation (82%) and peer-review (58%) (Sho, Anderson & Newsome, 2007).Teacher

surveys, according to Whittrock (1986), provide information on students' perceptions on their teachers. This is important as students' feedback provides information on teaching based on their own experiences. This, in turn provides useful information for faculty members to evaluate their own teaching objectives, improve delivery, evaluate content relevance and innovate teaching methodologies (Sidhu, 2003; Eken, 1999). As such, there is a need to incorporate teacher self-disclosure as a component in teacher surveys or course evaluation as practiced by most institutions of higher learning in Malaysia.

Teachers are increasingly becoming the point of reference in many teaching institutions that are moving away from text-book dependency. Text-books, according to Selvaraj, Anbalagan and Azlin (2014), are no longer seen as the "element of knowledge acquisition" (p, 87). Thus, the findings of this study could be used to help ESL teachers to strategize new methods to engage students in the writing classroom. Teacher self-disclosure could also help teachers to effectively deliver course content. As teachers are often the mediating adults (Vygostky, 1978) who facilitate learning, they are important agents who help construct new meanings to students. The teachers' experiences and opinions can be used to understand concepts by ESL students to be used to develop into ideas in their own writings.

This study also contributes by developing a Teacher Self-disclosure Model that fits into the ESL teaching and learning of writing skills. Condensing the findings from the qualitative data of this study, the modal would serve as a guideline for ELT

practitioners and ESL teachers to imbibe effective self-disclosure behaviors in their instructional strategies of the ESL writing courses.

This study would also pave the way for a more humanistic and effective teacher-centric approach to ESL teaching methodology that could be incorporated into the writing classroom. More caring and openness in teacher communication could foster better understanding and approachability from students in and out of the classroom (Knapp, 2008). A positive perception among Malaysian ESL students on their teachers' self-disclosures should encourage more teachers to self-disclose their experiences in connecting their world-views to classroom content and learning. As many language learners are negatively pre-dispositioned towards language learning, this study on teacher self-disclosure can be used as an instructional communicational tool in the ESL classroom to overcome cognitive and affective obstacles faced by students. There is also the potential to use teacher self-disclosure as a psycholinguistic variable in teachers' approaches towards problem-solving, especially in molding the ESL students' affective behaviours towards the course, teacher and learning in general.

Thus, this study will serve as a catalyst to establish teacher self-disclosure as an important instructional tool and research variable in the Malaysian ESL classrooms.

1.8. Conceptual Framework

Krashen's Monitor Model (1981) explains that L2 learners are affected by their affective filters, where they are often faced with psychological and emotional barriers such as attitude, stress, anxiety and self- beliefs. Thus, there is a need to eliminate these factors from hindering their learning process. A conceptual framework, as shown in Figure1.1, was constructed based on the literature review. The independent variable in this study was teacher self-disclosure which consists of the dimensions (Cayanus & Martin, 2002) of amount (topics and frequency of topics of self-disclosure), relevance (relatedness of self-disclosure to course content) and negativity (negative or positive statements about self, revealed through disclosures). The dependent variable in this study was the writing performance of ESL undergraduates in argumentative essays.
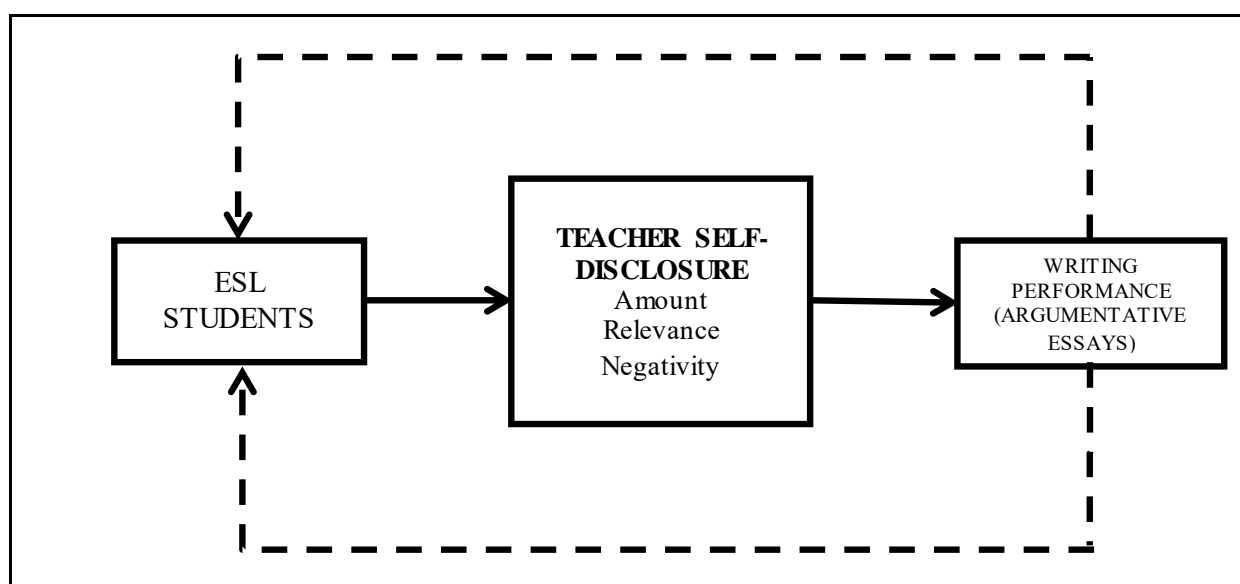

Figure 1.1. Conceptual Framework

Social constructivists point out that learning is the result of social interaction, through which observations are made, interpreted and become meaningful experiences

in the presence of mediating adults. In the classroom, teachers play an important role in providing knowledge, explaining course concepts, bridging new knowledge to prior knowledge and facilitating learning. Since writing is an enactment of experiences of those of the writers and others, it is seen as a socially constructed activity, rather than one that rests on linguistic competence alone (Hyland, 2003). Thus, in this study, teacher self-disclosure was measured to find out if it had a positive effect on the selected Malaysian ESL undergraduates' writing performance in argumentative essays.

1.9. Operational Definition

The operational definitions of the terms used in this study are stated as follows:

1.9.1. Perceived teacher self-disclosure

Allport (1996) defines perception as the way one evaluates or judges others. In the social front, Baron and Byrne (1997) define perception as a social behavior through which we try to learn and understand others. If perceptions were positive, it led to favorable behavioral, cognitive or relational outcomes. Therefore, in this study perceived teacher self–disclosure is the ESL undergraduates' perceptions on the personal information that is disclosed by their teachers in the argumentative writing classroom. Three dimensions make up teacher self-disclosure, amount, relevance and negativity (Cayanus & Martin, 2002).

1.9.1.1. Amount

Amount is the array of categories or topics and the frequency of these topics as self-disclosed by the teacher in the classroom (Cayanus & Martin, 2002). Popular topics include self-disclosures on teacher's educational experiences, work, family, friends, co-workers, hobbies, beliefs and personal problems (Cayanus, 2004a). In this study, the dimension of amount includes the variety of topics that the ESL teacher self–discloses in the argumentative writing classroom.

1.9.1.2. Relevance

Relevance refers to whether or not the teachers' self-disclosure is related to course content (Cayanus & Martin, 2002). Past studies show that relevance is the most influential dimension of teacher self-disclosure. In this study, relevant teacher self-disclosure includes any personal teacher's opinions and experiences that relate to course clarifications, course concepts and connecting classroom learning to real life applications expressed through self-disclosures to the ESL undergraduates in the argumentative writing classroom.

1.9.1.3. Negativity/ Positivity

Also termed as valence, negativity or positivity includes the negative or positive information that teachers reveal about themselves to their students (Lannutti & Strauman, 2006; Cayanus & Martin, 2002).

1.9.2. Writing Performance

There is no particular definition to explain writing performance as it usually carries a wide connotation. For Horwitz (2001), Saito and Samimy (1996) and, MacIntyre and Gardner (1994), writing performance comprises the measures of performance in language classrooms, and may take the form of assignment scores, test scores, or final course grades. In this study, the ESL undergraduates' writing performance refers to the quality of their argumentative writing in the pre-test, post-test and weekly writing tasks as indicated by the scores that they obtain. The quality of writing performance was measured in terms of organisation, content, style, language usage, mechanics and task fulfillment in the product of writing.

1.10. Organisation of Thesis

This thesis is organised as depicted in the Figure 1.2 as follows:
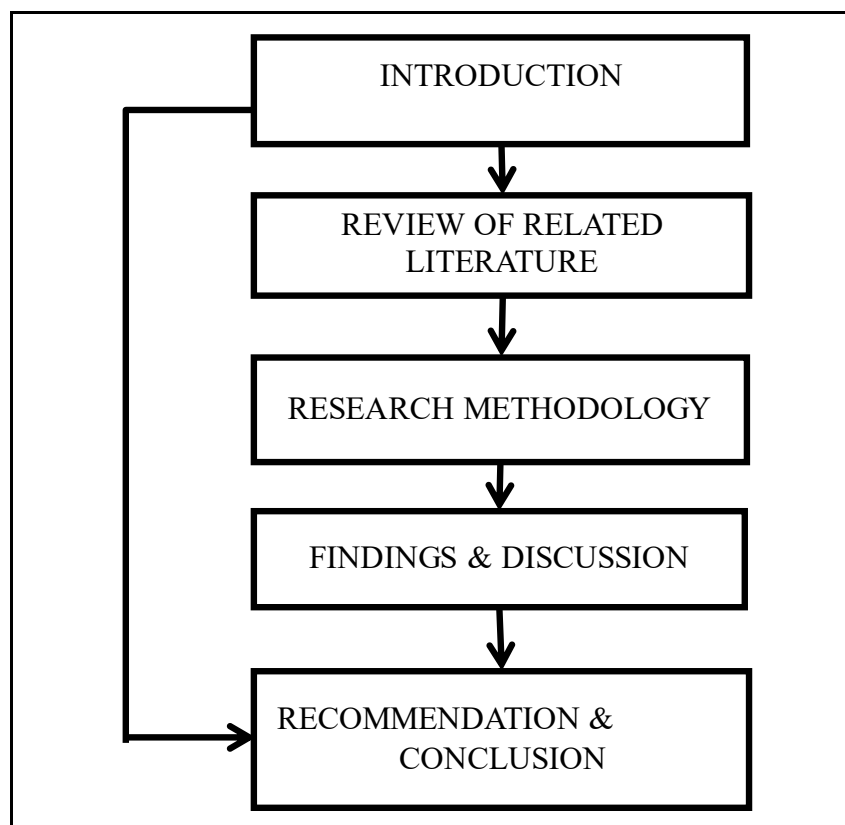
Figure 1.2. Organisation of thesis

This thesis is divided into five chapters.

Chapter One provides an overview of this study by explaining the key aspects of this study which are the roles and status of the English language and ESL writing in the Malaysian higher education system, teacher self-disclosure, academic writing, writing performance and argumentative essay. The chapter then proceeds to provide the research problem, justification for the study, research objectives, research questions, hypotheses, significance and limitations of the study, a brief description of the methodology undertaken, definition of operational terms and the conceptual framework of this study.

Chapter Two includes a review of available literature in instructional communication (teacher self-disclosure), ESL writing performance, content and argumentation. The chapter also draws the theoretical framework of this study from the social constructivist perspective, explaining the role of teacher self-disclosure and ESL writing as a socially constructed activity. In-depth evaluations of previous researches and a comprehensive discussion on the main theories, social constructivism, social penetration theory, classical rhetoric theory and ESL theories on writing and argumentation are also presented.

Chapter Three details the research methodology that was used to operationalise this research. A discussion on the paradigms and methods employed in this study including the mixed methods experimental design for data collection, research instruments which comprise the observation schedule, semi-structured interview protocols, post-test and pre-test task sheets, sampling and sampling procedures, data collection procedure and data analyses methods as well as ethical issues concerning this study are covered.

Chapter Four, presents the findings and discussion from the analysis done on both the qualitative and quantitative data collected. Both qualitative and quantitative results are presented objectively according to the research questions of this study. Figures and tables are employed to summarise, represent and facilitate the understanding of the analyses. Discussion entailed the major findings of the study, their significance and their relation to similar studies.

Chapter Five, presents the conclusions drawn from the data analyses. The chapter then delves on the implications of this study for this field of research, based on theoretical and practical perspectives. Recommendations are given for future undertakings of research in this area. The chapter ends with a conclusion on the overall findings of this study.

1.11. Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the thesis by explaining briefly the background of study, rationale and the research problem. Research objectives and research questions were also provided along with the significance of the study and the limitations, research framework, research design, list of operational terms, followed by a brief description of the organisation of this thesis which contains five chapters. The next chapter will review the existing literature relevant to this research.