

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

**PARAGRAPH WRITING BY STUDENTS TAKING THE
MALAYSIAN UNIVERSITY ENGLISH TEST (MUET)
IN A MALAYSIAN SECONDARY SCHOOL**

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**Thesis submitted in part fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
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Faculty of Education

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UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

Candidate's Declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the regulations of Universiti Teknologi MARA. It is original and is the result of my own work, unless otherwise indicated or acknowledged as referenced work. This topic has not been submitted to any other academic institution or non-academic institution for any other degree or qualification.

In the event that my thesis is found to violate the conditions mentioned above, I voluntarily waive the right of conferment of my degree and agree be subjected to the disciplinary rules and regulations of Universiti Teknologi MARA.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the factors affecting paragraph writing among Sixth Form MUET students in SMK Muara Tuang, Kota Samarahan, Sarawak. Writing is a skill that students have to master in order to do well in their studies at colleges or universities. Various variables were identified in order to find the causes of students' poor performance in writing, particularly in paragraph writing, which forms the basis for other writing tasks such as writing essays and reports. These variables include the students' background, interest in learning the English language, attitudes, habits and abilities in both reading and writing. To identify the factors, questionnaires were distributed to 200 Sixth Form students. Apart from that, the students were also required to write a paragraph of 100-150 words, which formed a small corpus that was used to identify the various errors that the students made in their writing. Data collected from both these instruments were analysed in order to determine the factors that affect their paragraph writing. The study revealed that the students did not do well in their writing and the major factors that contributed to their poor performance were: lack of English reading materials especially at home, negative attitude towards reading and writing in English, poor command of grammar and vocabulary, poor skill in generating ideas, writing introductions, topic sentences, supporting details, transitional sentences and concluding sentences. Nevertheless, the students were found to have a good interest in learning English. Therefore, it is vital for all parties, namely, parents and teachers to put a concerted effort in order to improve the students' writing.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the various factors which affect the Malaysian University English Test (MUET) students' ability in paragraph writing, a skill which is crucial for writing good essays in order to achieve good results in the MUET 800/4 Writing Test. It begins with the background of the study, the problem statement, and the purpose the study hopes to achieve. Following these, the significance of the study and the research questions are indicated. Finally, the limitations of the study and definition of terms are established.

1.2. BACKGROUND OF STUDY

The Malaysian University English Test or MUET, introduced in 1999, is a mandatory requirement for admission into public universities in Malaysia. It was introduced with the aim of bringing about a higher level of English proficiency, especially crucial for those entering university. At the time it was introduced, English was not being taught in the sixth form (Lee, 2004). Indeed, as it was meant as one of the prerequisites for university admission, its standard is obviously high. Several studies, for example, Kaur and Nordin (2007) indicated that it was viewed as a big challenge by many students due to the lack of language ability. This implies weaknesses such as limited vocabulary, grammar and language sub-skills, causing a major obstacle to gaining a good band score.

These weaknesses are greatly evident in the MUET 800/4 Writing Test and it is a great cause for concern. Merican (2007) revealed that the major problem faced by the sixth form MUET students is their inability to write well. He found that many MUET candidates found it extremely difficult to string words into a proper sentence.