

# Teaching Essay from the Perspective of Students Expectations

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## Abstract

Students have many expectations towards their teacher during the learning process. This paper explores aspects of students expectations towards essay teaching, seen from the perspectives of three secondary school students. This study adopted the multicase, multisite case study approach. Three form-five students were involved as study participants and were selected through purposeful sampling. A set of unstructured interview protocols was used as a data collection instrument. Data obtained through the unstructured interview protocols were analysed using the thematic approach to construct themes and answer the study questions related to students expectations in learning essay writing. The results showed five aspects of students expectations towards essay writing lessons quality essay teaching, teaching essays in different stages, teaching essay writing through diverse methods, feedback on writing and writing interventions. Overall, teachers should be focused on students expectations to ensure the effectiveness of essay teaching.

**Keywords.** expectation, essay teaching, thematic approach, intervention, teaching effectiveness.

## 1. Introduction

Each country has its distinct education system. According to Batjo and Ambotang (2019), it is difficult to measure the quality of the education system despite the indicators established. In Malaysia, curriculum improvements are continuously implemented to improve the quality of the education system. Its development started with the European-centered Old Secondary School Curriculum (KLSM). It was introduced under the Education Ordinance 1957 after Malaya achieved independence from the British. Subsequently, the New Secondary School Curriculum was introduced in 1983 with several adjustments to create an education system that could fulfil the aspiration to produce citizens that can contribute to nation-building. The Integrated Secondary School Curriculum of (KBSM) was introduced in 1988 as an improved, integrated curriculum in line with the National Education Philosophy (FPK) aspirations.

KBSM was transformed in 2017 when the Curriculum Development Division (BPK) introduced the National Secondary School Standard Curriculum (KSSM), which is deemed more student-centred.

Concerning the matter above, students are the education systems main customers (Hill, 2005). Hence, Similar to the business and service industry, customer satisfaction is important is an important indicator of an education systems success. In the meantime, there are issues related to students poor mastery of writing skills, as discussed by researchers, including (Che Hasan & Abd Rahman, 2011; Jamian, 2011; Jusoh et al., 2013). These studies described that students feel unsatisfied with how they learn essay writing in schools. This is further supported by the analysis of Malay language achievement reported in the last five years of KBSM implementation, which shows an alarming trend with the number of failures still within the boundaries of tens of thousands (Table 1).

Table 1. Number of candidates failing the Malay language at the national level (2016-2020) (Ministry of Education, 2021)

Year	No of Candidates	% Failure	Number of Failures
2016	404, 477	8.0	32, 358
2017	413, 985	6.6	27, 328
2018	390, 708	6.6	25, 787
2019	388, 532	5.8	22, 535
2020	381, 129	6.1	23, 249
Total			131, 252

As shown in the Table 1, 32358 students failed to master the Malay language at the SPM level in 2016. Although this figure dropped to 27 323 in 2017, the number of failures is still within tens of thousands of pupils. The year 2018 saw 25 787 candidates unable to get the minimum grade to pass. In the last two

years, before the KBSM-format SPM assessment was abolished, 22 535 candidates failed the Malay Language paper in 2010. While in 2020, which was deemed the most challenging year following the Covid-19 pandemic, 23249 students obtained a G grade (fail). This shows that within the last five years

of the KBSM-format SPM assessment, 131252 candidates did not pass their Malay Language paper. This does not reflect a high language proficiency among SPM candidates.

Researchers, both local and abroad, have shown interest in studying the teaching of writing skills. Abdullah et al. (2021) found that students weakness in writing essays can be attributed to their lack of mastery of essay topics. Syed Ali and Mahamod (2021) identified limited vocabulary mastery as a major hindrance to students. Another study by Abdullah et al. (2016) found that the students could not generate content, limiting their essay composition. Ghazzoul (2018) observed students inability to write and structure topic sentences guiding the flow of the topic and ideas. This situation causes the paragraph to lack structure and substance, as students are unaware that topic sentences could guide their writing and limit their essays discussion scope. Furthermore, according to Wuwuh Yunhadi (2016), students weakness in essay writing is evident through their use of supporting sentences that are irrelevant to the topic sentences. Mohamad Yuneah et al. (2022) found that students are not able to write cohesive paragraphs.

Many experimental studies have introduced various methods to overcome students essay writing weaknesses. Studies have evaluated the effectiveness of certain methods on randomly distributed respondents with similar characteristics. Among these are Abdullah et al. (2021), Masri and Mahamod (2020). Many studies have examined the practices in teaching writing skills, specifically essay writing. There is abundant research that aims to improve and enhance essay writing teaching from the perspectives of teachers content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and pedagogical knowledge. These studies include (Md Yatim et al., 2020; Nee & Amran, 2021; Ebrahim et al, 2022).

However, despite the large body of research on essay teaching and learning strategies and methods, essay writing remains an area of concern and has continuously been studied until now. Brophy (2003), Steele (2002) and Wineburg (2007) highlighted the importance of solving this problem by students meeting expectations. Brophy (2003) asserted that pupils believe in teachers and expect quality teaching. Ghani and Williams (2014) opined that the more teachers meet pupils expectations towards teachers teaching practices, the higher the aspirations of the education system can be realised. In Malaysia, there is still little research on students hopes and expectations for teachers teaching practices of Malay language essays. This directly demonstrates the gap in the knowledge of students hope and expectation of essay teaching practices which needs to be thoroughly explored. Therefore, this paper aims to identify students expectations towards teachers essay teaching practices.

## 2. Literature Review

According to Worgan (2013), the Hope theory was

introduced by Rick Snyder (1958). This theory defines hope as ones expectations to achieve a goal. According to Snyder, hope involves three components: goal thinking, pathway and agency. The component of thinking about purpose is the basis of hope. Pathways denote individuals awareness in planning strategies to achieve the goal. In comparison, the agency is the motivation driving individuals actions according to the planned strategy.

Worgan (2013), who examined the work of Brunininks and Malle (1991), claimed that hope is an emotion that arises when the individual focuses on one important thing. This finding contradicts Snyder's Theory, which conceptualises hope as a thought. Similar to Worgan (2013), several other researchers, such as Averill, Catlin, and Chon (1991), also found different findings on hope, leading to the emergence of various concepts of hope from different perspectives. In this regard, it can be asserted that hope is related to thought and emotions.

According to Peterson and Bryon (2008), higher individual expectations increase motivation and strategies to achieve a goal. Furthermore, Davidson et al. (2009) found that individuals with high expectations experience lower stress levels. Bernardo (2010) found that hope expectation positively correlates with goals, strategies and performance, while Worgan (2013) highlighted the importance of understanding expectations to make individuals more open-minded, contribute positively to the environment and reduce the sense of hopelessness.

There is a growing number of studies related to expectations in different fields. Some of these studies are related to students expectations towards teachers teaching (Burt, 1911). A review of students teacher teaching has found that expectations towards students with behavioural issues have lower expectations than normal students. The study concluded that students with behavioural issues have less concern over the effectiveness of teachers teaching practices. On the other hand, a more recent study by Carroll (2003) reported a contrasting finding. It was found that students with behavioural issues put high expectations towards teachers teaching, comparable to those without behavioural issues. This finding is supported by Ebmeier and Good (2009), who found that students with long-term discipline problems still have a high desire for success. In this light, although they have a negative attitude towards school rules, they still expect teachers to implement effective teaching because they want to succeed in learning.

Moreover, Ghani and Williams (2014) found four themes related to students expectations towards teachers teaching practices. These themes are, students expect quality teaching, teaching is implemented according to pupils ability, teachers show efforts in teaching, and teachers manage time efficiently and effectively. Ghani and Williams (2014)

detailed the findings under the theme of students expectation of quality teaching, students expect the teacher to state the lessons purpose. The teacher repeats the lessons content, demonstrates real-life examples to make it easier for them to understand the lesson content, and uses teaching aids suitable to the contents. Based on the themes in this study, a conclusion can be made that pupils with a strong drive to succeed expect teachers to implement effective teaching.

Based on the literature review, effective teaching can be defined through various concepts. The Ministry of Education Malaysia, in the Malaysian Educational Quality Standards (MOE, 2010), describes that effective teaching involves planning, lesson implementation and classroom management. Furthermore, Darling-Hammond (2007) describes effective teaching as teachers high competence in the content being taught during the lesson. However, despite the various definitions used to describe the concept of effective teaching, there is still no conclusive measurement for it. (Cochran-Smith, 2008). In this matter, Abrami and D'Apollonia (1991), Cashin and Downey (1992) agreed that Effective teaching has a positive relationship with pupil achievement. In this regard, while students background may affect their achievement, teaching effectiveness should be probed if there is a significant difference between the achievement of weak and excellent students. In this light, Brookover et al. (2008) stated that pupils achievement depends on the schools performance and teaching effectiveness. In this light, Brophy (2003) summarised that an effective lesson occurs when the teacher meets students expectations.

### 3. Methodology

This study explores the aspects of students expectations towards essay teaching from the perspective of three form-five students. This case study is in the form of a multicase-multisite study). Yin (2009) explained that multicase analyses involve more than one unit, while multisite refers to more than one study place. This design helps researchers to dive into the real situation of the phenomena explored in the studied environment (Yin, 2009). The participants were selected randomly through purposeful sampling. The participants can be categorised into excellent, moderate and weak students based on their achievement during their form-four final examination. Involving three students could provide a more comprehensive and reliable insight into students expectations towards essay teaching. The selection of several school categories allows the reports to be written in detail, effectively and meaningfully (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The similarities and differences identified through exploring various cases will allow researchers to analyse and make simultaneous comparisons of constructs linked to students expectations.

Data were collected using an unstructured interview protocol as the instrument. The content of this

unstructured interview protocol consists of three stages: the initial stage, the questioning stage and the final stage. At the initial stage, the participants were briefed on the study purpose and ethics, including the confidentiality of information. At the questioning stage, the researchers focused on questions related to the study objectives. General stimulation was given, and study participants were encouraged to give independent feedback on their expectations towards essay teaching. At the final stage, the researchers expressed gratitude for the participants cooperation and thanked them. The content validity of the study instrument was certified by a Malay language teaching expert. In the meantime, the instruments reliability was determined through an audit trail. The audit trail allows the researchers to explain the data collection and analysis process in detail. This documentation is important in determining the consistency of the interview, transcription and the formation of themes with the study chronology (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The researchers created a file for each study participant to ensure that interview data were analysed in an orderly and reliable manner. The files contain details of the study participants, including their background and contact information. In addition, the researchers labelled each recording and copies of the interview transcripts. This step is important for researchers to organise and reaccess the data. The researchers used Nvivo software to facilitate data management. The researchers provided each study participant with a code name, and each interview file was labelled with interview details, such as the date and time of the interview. Furthermore, systematic data management can facilitate data validation for follow-up interviews. Creswell and Poth (2018) proposed five basic steps, collecting verbal data, reading data, breaking data into specific parts, extracting data and formulating data.

The data were analysed using the thematic approach introduced by Ritchie and Spencer (1994). It comprises several procedures. The process started with reading the interview transcripts repeatedly to obtain important information related to the research questions. Then, the researchers identified the theme to determine the content related to the study objectives and ignored irrelevant content. The researchers then identified the subthemes and linked one theme to another. The next step is presenting the data in diagrams to facilitate the researchers understanding of students expectations towards the teaching of essays.

### 4. Results and Analysis

The following are the findings from the interviews on students expectations towards the teaching of essay writing based on the perspectives of three students.

#### 1. Quality essay teaching

The study participants agreed that their highest expectation is on the quality of essay teaching. The

participants expect teachers to teach essays effectively. Specifically, teachers should guide them to write the essay and not leave them without guidance. Their views are as follows:

.. The teacher enters the class and gives us the essay questions. Then tell us to do it without no guidance. We must do it on our own and turn it in even if it is not complete. This kind of teacher makes me hate essays (M1\_1).

During the BM period, the teacher gives us essay-writing exercise training. The teacher usually reads the essay question requirement to the class. Then the teacher asks us to discuss the key points to write. One time during the discussion, we don't know what to discuss. (hehe)... in the end, we didn't write anything (M2\_1).

.. Teacher will give the title of the essay. For the teacher, practice makes perfect. The teacher will give some briefing. I always thought the teacher didn't teach anything during the essay period.. only the smart ones can write, and those who are not smart don't get anything (M3\_1).

## 2. Teaching essays in stages

The participants agreed that the second aspect they expect is for the essay teaching to be carried out in stages. Specifically, the participants stated that essay teaching should be done gradually, such as writing the introduction, the content and the conclusion. Their views are as follows:

I think if we take one day to learn to write one paragraph, it will be ok.. but now the teacher asks us to write a complete essay (M2\_2).

..why can't the teacher shows us one by one. I mean, we learned introduction today. After we are ok with the introduction, the teacher teaches us to write the content paragraph. After that, we learn to write the conclusion. It will not be very stressful (M3\_2)

## 3. Diversifying the essay teaching method

The participants also shared that the third aspect they expect in essay teaching is teachers diverse teaching methods. Specifically, study participants stated that teachers should identify effective essay teaching strategies. The views are as follows:

...The way the teacher teaches essays is boring. She used the same method in Form 4 from the beginning to the end of the year (M1\_3).

..I'm bored with how the teacher teaches. The teacher likes to discuss the essay's contents in groups and then conduct presentations. She doesn't use other techniques (M2\_3)

.. I hope my teacher changes her ways of teaching. If possible, she can occasionally show us examples of the best essays. (M3\_3).

## 4. Feedback on Writing

The study participants agreed that the fourth aspect they expect in essay teaching is teachers providing feedback on their writing to make them more critical. Specifically, study participants noted that feedback is important for them to review and improve their

writing. The views are as follows:

The teacher only ticks and gives score. No comment. If there is an unfinished essay, the teacher just writes please complete (M1\_4)

There are a lot of essay exercises, but there is no feedback. I want to know if my essay is ok or not (M2\_4)

The teacher should respond to the essay because I want to know my weaknesses and strengths (M3\_4).

## 5. Intervention

The participants agreed that intervention is the last aspect they hope for in essay teaching. Specifically, the participants expect teachers to provide intensive exercises, remedial activities, guidance and pieces of advice to improve their achievement in writing. Their views are as follows.

..I don't mind having to stay back for extra classes. But the class should really help me. If it is as boring as the morning class, I won't come..(M1\_5).

..I am ok if the teacher puts me in the remedial group, but the teacher should implement approaches to help me. The teacher may ask other teachers to help if she doesn't know what to do. (M2\_5).

.. Teacher never did remedial after the exam. I hope the teacher conducts a remedial class. (M3\_5).

## 5. Discussion

All three participants successfully presented the findings of a study that described the real context in the classroom against the expectations towards the students in teaching the essay. Researching the themes resulting from the students hopes of teaching essays, these themes match the recommendations of Chall (2007). The student puts hope in the teacher in the learning process. Most researchers agree that the expectations towards pupils represent the needs of pupils that teachers must meet (Carroll, 2003; Good & Beckerman, 2008). Usually, the needs of the students will be discovered through the studies carried out, and the findings are almost the same. Syed Ali and Mahamod (2021) look at the vocabulary aspect, (Abdullah et al., 2016) in turn, found the aspect of generating ideas, while (Abdullah et al., 2021) tracking the grammatical aspects of sentence construction, punctuation aspects and aspects of mastery of the format are among the requirements that teachers should pay attention to. Researchers such as Mohamad Yunehe et al. (2022) in turn, seeing the discourse aspect of the linkage dimension which includes cohesion and coherence is a necessity that should be prioritised in the teaching of teachers. Concerning this matter, Burt (1911), Ghani and Williams (2014) found that the expectations towards pupils are the needs of pupils that teachers need to focus on.

The students expectation for quality essay teaching is in line with Carroll (2003); Good and Beckerman (2008). Both studies found that troubled students still expect teachers to teach efficiently and effectively as other normal pupils. The same goes for the construct

of teaching essay writing in phases that align with the study by Ebmeier and Good (2009), which asserted that teaching should be done according to the students ability. In this line, Ghazali (2008) mentioned that teaching skills in phases are essential as the teaching process should begin with learning the basic elements before venturing into more complex concepts according to students cognitive levels. Furthermore, the students expectation for teachers to diversify their methods for teaching essays is in line with the findings of Ghani and Williams (2014). The study found that students expect the teacher to use interesting and engaging materials and simple language in delivering the content. Students expectation for writing feedback is in line with Douglas and Alexander (2016), Hortono Anwar and Murtinungrum (2019), which found that pupils are looking forward to quick or short-term descriptive feedback that will show their weaknesses and strengths in writing. In addition, students expectations for intervention contradict Brophy's (2003) findings that students expect a structured treatment or intervention to improve their achievement even though it often violates the school rules.

In all, teachers are responsible for equipping students with essay-writing skills. Developing the skills of explaining, summarising, formulating, processing, commenting and editing various forms of writing in a structured manner using the correct, grammatical and compelling language demands teachers to carefully plan their lessons. Teachers should consider students expectations in planning lessons. This refers to structuring lessons and using essay teaching materials that fulfil students expectations, quality essay teaching, teaching essay writing in phases, diversifying essay teaching methods, providing writing feedback and writing interventions to solve students problems in essay writing. It is time for teachers to rise from the slack and realise that students keep high hopes during essay lessons. Teachers ability to perform lessons that meet students expectations will indirectly change their negative perception of essay teaching, end negative writing assessment practices, reduce students anxiety in writing, increase self-confidence and put more effort into producing quality sentences and paragraphs.

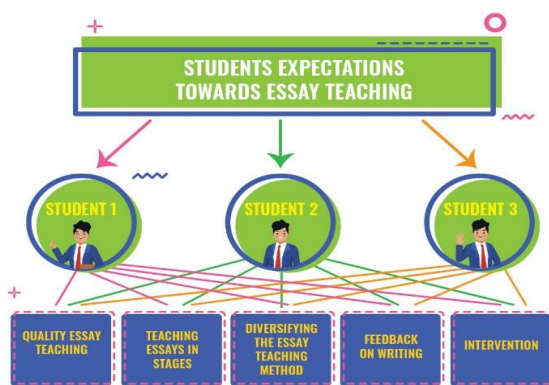


Figure 1. Summary of students expectations towards essay teaching

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper focuses on students expectations towards teachers essay teaching practices. The justification is that students ability to is still questioned despite the many other perspectives that pattern and dominate research related to teaching essays. Therefore, the author proposes that students expectations towards teachers essay teaching practices be used as a new mechanism in teaching essays more innovatively through interesting and authentic materials aids and according to the students level of intelligence, maturity and background. Teachers should avoid giving general and abstract information while teaching essays. Instead, they should consider and understand students expectations towards them. The authors also recommend future studies examining students expectations towards teachers essay teaching practices to involve a larger and more comprehensive sample, representing the expectation of urban, rural mainstream and students with special needs for implementing sustainable writing skills.

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