



## PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION OF ESL STUDENT WRITING IN ENGINEERING



 Radina Mohamad  
Deli<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Language and Communication, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak,  
Malaysia  
Email: [mdradina@unimas.my](mailto:mdradina@unimas.my)



### ABSTRACT

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Given the importance of writing skills for communicating messages in the field of engineering, and the seemingly perpetual conflict between novice engineers' poor ability to write and the quality expected by employers, it is worthwhile to investigate student engineers' writing ability or experiences prior to their employment. This study thus aims to investigate English as a Second Language (ESL) students' writing in engineering studies. The objectives of the study are to (1) identify the genres of writing by ESL undergraduates in engineering studies, and (2) analyse students' laboratory reports for 'moves' typically identified in the genre. Students' written scripts were collected from various engineering courses within the mechanical, electrical, and electronic engineering programmes of a Malaysian public university, and identified by genre based on their structure and content. The preliminary finding suggests that the majority of the writings are laboratory and technical reports. Based on a 'move' analysis outlined for student laboratory reports in science and engineering (Parkinson, 2017) a total of 14 laboratory reports was analysed and 5 macro-sections were identified namely introduction, method, result, discussion, and conclusion. This differs from the 6 macro-sections found for engineering in Parkinson (2017) study. Although the number of moves identified was essentially similar, some steps were unavailable in the laboratory reports within these macro-sections. It is believed that findings from this genre-based study can have pedagogical importance in that it may help to enhance the writings of ESL students in engineering studies to reach a standard that may be more aligned to the accepted norms of laboratory report writing.

**Contribution/ Originality:** This study contributes in the existing literature by detailing common 'moves' found in ESL student writing of laboratory reports in the engineering field. Most analyses of moves for similar written genres in the engineering discipline have focused on the writings of native speakers of English.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses some preliminary findings of an on-going project which aims to create two corpora compiling the written discourse of Malaysian student and professional engineers in mechanical, electrical, and electronic engineering. The present study thus aims to provide an insight into the ESL students' writing with a focus on the following objectives: (1) to identify the genres of writing produced by the ESL students in their engineering programmes, and (2) to analyse ESL engineering students' laboratory reports for 'moves' typically